

SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF AGING IN  
BUDDHIST NORTHERN THAILAND

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Data on old people living in a lower class Chiangmai neighborhood revealed they possessed considerable alienation and resentment towards younger age groups and general society. The basis of the resentment in the eyes of the old stemmed from the shortcomings of the younger age groups in not living up to the traditional system of inter-generational reciprocities. Buddhist merit-transfer' is a central part of these reciprocities. The response of these urban old people was to alter the Buddhist rebirth notion so as to fit a basic power quest. In effect, elderly informants in this narrow survey hoped to overcome the negative social and religious circumstances of growing old in a rapidly changing city by striving to die a good death and be reborn back into the world of humans in a better position.

The power quest of these alienated elderly is placed within the perspective of the life cycle. Earlier phases of life, particularly young and middle-aged adulthood with their intersexual antagonisms, are presented to highlight the basic cultural orientation to power that pervades Northern Thai life. Spirit ritual and Buddhist belief are depicted as useful means for enabling men and women, at all stages of life, to adjust their existence-to changing social situations. The special

beliefs surrounding death and rebirth suggest a power-oriented approach to death and dying that deserves further investigation.

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BY

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THESIS

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## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Objectives

This thesis is a description and analysis of certain general features of adulthood and old age in Chiangmai city, Northern Thailand. My primary object is to demonstrate that elderly Northern Thai use the temple and ideology of rebirth as instruments of power which they apply in their response to death in order to overcome the negative social and religious circumstances of growing old in a rapidly changing city.

The old people that I studied and came to know were for the most part poor -by local city standards. The average monthly income for the majority of households in Chedi Lane, the fictitious name I use for the neighborhood I lived in, was under 1,000 baht (\$50.00 U.S.). Living on such an income, in the midst of the moderate inflation that beset Chiangmai in the early 1970s, was difficult at best. Because of the economic hardships and various social pressures that I discuss throughout the dissertation, the old people of Chedi Lane were distinctive for the strong sense of alienation they expressed toward their families, younger age groups, and society in general. I do not claim, therefore, that the old people of Chedi Lane are representative of Northern Thai old people, nor even urban Northern Thai old people; they do represent, however, the adaptations of a small group of Northern Thai elderly under the conditions of economic strain and rapid urban change.



A major part of the difficulties facing the old people of Chedi Lane was the inconsistency they experienced between the customary expectations of inter-generational reciprocity and obligations, and the failure of this ideology to become actualized under the social and economic conditions of Chedi Lane. The elderly responded to these disappointments by withdrawing from household and neighborhood concerns and engrossing themselves in the activities of the local temple. Resentment came to occupy a key place in their attitudes and thoughts about other groups as well as their own predicament.

In response to their general situation, the elderly of Chedi Lane gravitated towards a theory of rebirth which, although common among Theravada Buddhist populations (Obeyesekere, 1968), diverged from canonical orthodoxy. In Chapter Seven I analyze the local theory of rebirth these alienated elderly espouse, and relate it to their views of death. A primary consideration is to trace how their interpretation of Buddhist rebirth leads them to view death as a means to solve many immediate problems in their social situation.

The power quest of the elderly, elaborated under the idiom of Buddhist rebirth, although surprising at first glance to westerners, gains plausibility and facticity by being embedded in a basic Northern Thai orientation to power. Chapters Three and Four illustrate this orientation at another age phase by a descriptive analysis of the antagonisms between the sexes, and

how the resolution of these tensions through the use of spirit ritual and religious symbol throws new light on Northern Thai social organization.

The chapters, taken all together, represent a first sketch of adulthood and old age among one narrow segment of Northern Thai society. Despite the skewing and "noise" created by local economic and social conditions, the broad division of life into activity, struggling and seeking that makes up early adulthood, and the quest for peace, death without fear, and a better rebirth that constitute old age, should be interpreted as a general theme of Northern Thai culture. It is their culturally patterned aptitude towards power, however, that make these lower class old people particularly fascinating and worthy of careful scrutiny.

## 1.2 Review of the Literature

A first consideration is to place my findings in the context of the literature on Northern Thailand. Because the social experience of aging is directly influenced by family, kinship, and community organization, naturally these domains must be carefully examined. Research on these topics in Northern Thailand over the last twenty-five years, however, has created a complex, if not baffling, picture. It is my task, therefore, to review the research literature and attempt to reach some sort of balanced view of Northern Thai social organization that helps us to develop a socio-cultural perspective on the life cycle. This will then be used to pursue the

narrower goal mentioned above. I conclude this chapter by proposing a more inclusive and flexible analytical framework be used to account for the complexities in the Northern Thai data.

The primary inconsistencies in the literature on Northern Thailand stem from the varying treatment of two major problems: the relationship of Buddhism to the local spirit cults, and the argument over female-centered versus male-centered social structures. I will assess each contribution to the research on Northern Thailand with these problems in mind.

Ruth Benedict wrote a highly influential essay on the Thai in 1943. Although she never visited Thailand, she was able to sift through and inter-relate various second-hand reports on daily life, values, folklore, character traits, and institutions. The end result was the first major anthropological synthesis of materials in the, at that time, modest field of Thai studies. Many of her findings dealt specifically with the Northern Thai.

Benedict, in her usual clear-headed fashion, was able to isolate and place at center-stage a series of "Thai characteristics." For instance, she early remarked upon the Thai's "deep-seated capacity to make this life a thing to be freely and simply enjoyed" (p. 33). This love of life, light heartedness, and quest for enjoyment had a particular appeal for Benedict, especially in light of what she presumed was a system counter to these life-asserting impulses, i.e., the Buddhist doctrine. She concluded that Thai temperament had

affected the local interpretation of Buddhist doctrine. The latter had been re-modeled and transformed to fit the day-to-day needs and ethos of the Thai peasant. This view was similar to Weber's classic hypothesis (1958) which more recently Spiro (1967; 1970) has utilized to organize his monumental, two volume treatment of Burmese religion. It implies that temperament and individual psychology are powerful, ever-present forces with which religious doctrine must contend--and usually at the expense of doctrine. My qualifications to this approach, especially when seen against the data on doctrine, beliefs and the social situations of the elderly, will be made apparent.

In her synthesis of Thai materials, Benedict perceived Buddhism and spirit or phi worship as separated from one another. Buddhist practices centered around public merit-making feasts, grand calendrical rites, and the concerns of the overall village and society. Spirit worship, on the other hand, was more domestic and individual, involving private acts of propitiation. Benedict did not suggest a connection between Thai personality and the role of spirit worship, a point Spiro (1967) strongly stressed for the Burmese; however, she did mention the important role that women played in spirit possession and trance cults in Northern Thailand, a matter I pursue in Chapter Four.

One of Benedict's most important contributions was her treatment of male dominance and the dynamics of male-female relations. She selected the kite-flying game as symbolic of the male-female contest.

The game well symbolizes the relation of men and women. Men are not doubtful of their masculinity--which is here symbolized in the kites size and shape and activity. Men mark their kites with their insignia or name and may have three or four at hand to continue the game if one falls or is damaged. The object of the game is to keep a "wife" within their orbit and both male and female Uflying"; if "he" falls, it is the woman's fault, and "she" has won.

But attacking her too closely--perhaps it would be fair to say dominating her or possessing her, in the European sense--would mean, in the kite game, falling to the ground and being defeated.

(1943:43)

These remarks, with their heavy note of male dominance, are clearly more relevant to Central Thailand than Northern Thailand, where women have traditionally held more equality vis-a-vis men, especially in the household (Dodd, 1923; Freeman, 1910). By phrasing the dynamics between men and women in terms of a contest or game, however, Benedict laid her finger upon a prime feature of domestic social relations: men and women indulging in persistent, culturally patterned negotiations over power and authority. This tension between the sexes is especially pertinent to the data I present on young and middle-aged couples in Chedi Lane.

By way of summary, Benedict left a number of deep impressions upon Thai studies. She first of all reiterated several character traits such as the love of enjoyment (sanuk) and the "cool heart" (chai yen) that researchers found relevant for understanding Thai responses and behavior. In reconciling these traits with the formal nature and deferential demands of stratified society, she talked of the "two worlds"; that the Thai adult

oscillated between: one structured, requiring deference, obeisance, and piety; the other egalitarian, requiring wit, cleverness, and, if necessary, guile. She made little contribution to our understanding of Buddhism and the spirit cults, but did suggest that sex roles, because of the overt gamesmanship, deserved special attention.

In 1955 de Young published a manuscript based on field data collected in a number of villages in the Mae Rim district of Northern Thailand. By this time, research anthropologists, such as the Cornell group under Lauriston Sharp in Central Thailand, had been influenced by Embree's article, "Thailand: A Loosely Structured Social System" (1950). In his treatment of the Northern Thai family de Young maintains it was not "strict and authoritarian" as in China or Japan; instead,

The Thai family pattern can best be described as a loosely woven structure with which considerable variation of individual behavior is permitted. This looseness of structure is evidenced also in the larger kinship groups: relatives tend to cooperate with each other in planting and harvesting work parties, but even in a relatively small village blood-relationship lines do not have the importance that they do in other areas of southeast Asia.

(1955:25)

This is clearly a paraphrase of Embree. As we shall see, however, recent work has strongly challenged the view of Northern Thai family and kinship as being loosely structured.

First, however, we should note that de Young observed an interesting bias in the inheritance ideology. "The custom of one married daughter remaining in the house of her parents and inheriting the family house is . . . widespread throughout the

north" (p . 23). He related this to a postulated strong matri local residence rule that had operated in the past but was no longer applied consistently in the present. Once again, field workers in the 1970s, such as Davis, would argue that a vital matriloca l residence rule is operating in Northern Thailand.

Probably one of de Young's most perceptive observations was with regard to the Northern Thai woman.

The social position of the Thai peasant woman is powerful: she has long had a voice in village governmental affairs; she often represents her household at village meetings when her husband cannot attend; she almost always does the buying and selling in the local markets. (It is so unusual for a Thai male to do this that it elicits comment if he does.) Through their marketing activities Thai farm women produce a sizeable portion of the family cash income, and they not only handle the household money, but usually act as the family treasurer and hold the purse strings. Control of family finances by women is possibly even stronger in urban regions where a money economy is more intimately involved, but in village life, also, money brought into the household by farming is usually disbursed by the wife, and if she does not actually control the expenditure of the family income, she always has an important voice in the decision concerning its use. (1955:24)

de Young was one of the first to pinpoint both the domestic and extra-domestic functions and activities of the Northern Thai woman. Her key role in contributing to the household budget, especially through selling, and her authority as a decision\_ maker and keeper of the purse have been repeatedly confirmed by later researchers. His mention of the urban setting as possibly increasing female domestic authority is interesting, especially in the light of the strong position I observed among female informants in the lower-class homes of Chedi Lane.

In regard to religion, de Young provided a fairly extensive treatment of Buddhist belief and practices with a particular focus on the Buddhist temple and the monastic routine. He claimed there was a "close inter-relationship of Buddhism and animistic practices," and that Buddhist rituals were "interlaced with elements of animism" (p. 146). He did not attempt to explain this inter-relationship, however, and concluded by pointing out the attempts by high Buddhist authorities to eradicate spirit belief.

In his treatment of religion and the life cycle, de Young repeatedly emphasized the piety of the old people and their conscientious association with the temple. He also remarked that, "Of the three great crises of a Thai peasant's life--birth, marriage, and death--the village is most vitally concerned with death. . . . The elaborate ceremonies held at this time can be accomplished only by group activity" (p. 74). As this study proceeds, one task I face is to explain how the mortuary cult is organized, and why it has become the most sumptuous ritual in Northern Thai life.

In 1960, the first intensive study of a single Northern Thai village appeared: Konrad Kingshill's *Ku Daeng, The Red Tomb*. As we shall see, Sulamith and Jack Potter of the University of California-Berkeley eventually decided to re-study and extend the ethnographic coverage of this same village in 1972.<sup>1</sup> A number of problems and divergences have resulted from this second look, which along with other recent studies,



forces us to re-evaluate critically our approach to Northern Thai social organization. First, however, a brief review of Kingshill.

Before beginning his study, Kingshill had a firm control of both the Central and Northern Thai dialects, and had spent three years living and teaching in Northern Thailand. Kingshill's study was a direct extension of the Cornell University survey focused on Central Thailand. In this study on the Chiangmai plain, the emphasis was to be placed on "the role of the Buddhist temple and the priesthood in the community, since village life in Northern Thailand is influenced considerably by the religious activities of the population."

Living up to these expectations, Kingshill discovered and described a very pious Northern Thai village. At the time of the study in 1953, the people of Ku Daeng appear to have been strongly influenced by its local priesthood and its lay temple committee under the direction of a very active temple leader. Innumerable village-wide and intra-village ceremonies were being held, all of which required large numbers of people, a remarkable spirit of giving, and a deep sincerity regarding Buddhist values. Kingshill was greatly struck by the religious events in this community. The strongest portions of his book are devoted to describing the operation of the temple, local Buddhist beliefs, ritual organization, contents of sermons, the quality and fervor of merit-making, and all with one aim--to reveal the intensity of Buddhist doctrine, belief, and practice in a representative Northern Thai village.

One secondary result is that Kingshill found only a meager amount of spirit worship in the village. For example, while discussing differences in religious participation as between the sexes he declared:

. . . there are today in the vicinity of Ku Daeng no women active in such religious or semireligious practices as propitiation of spirits or traditional healing processes. (1960:74)

Nevertheless, in the section entitled "Non-Buddhist Religious Expression," Kingshill mentions a modest ceremony performed once a year at the "two spirit houses" of the village. A woman medium was possessed by the guardian village spirit, she danced, and the spirit promised to cure the illnesses of a few individuals who made special requests. Kingshill claimed, however, that most people came "merely for the sake of entertainment" (p. 181), that the head priest was unmusical about the entire affair, and the temple leader denounced the ceremony as a "great deception of the people." Kingshill's position regarding Buddhism and spirit worship is clear:

I would classify the villagers of Ku Daeng first as Buddhists. A Buddhist temple lies at the center of village life, a Buddhist priesthood fulfils the function of religious leadership, and the villagers are part of the national ecclesiastical organization of the established Buddhist Church. (p. 179)

To understand the full significance of Kingshill's remarks regarding the ascendancy of Buddhist practices, we need to skip ahead for a moment and consider Sulamith Potter's study (1975) of this same village.

Potter's focus and research topic was, first of all, entirely different from Kingshill's. She investigated the social organization of family life with a particular emphasis on the structural role of women. In the process, she developed a clear picture of the relevance of general spirit worship, and especially "spirits which belong to matriline" (p. 102). Hardly a word is mentioned about Buddhist practices in this short treatise. Needless to say, Potter's unit of analysis--one extended family, one courtyard--is narrow in scope, providing good depth of analysis into family living. The view we get of Ku Daeng in 1971, however, is remarkably divergent from Kingshill's of 1953. Ku Daeng was still Buddhist in 1971, but the tone and ambience had changed. Community life had obviously taken a turn towards isolation and atomism. Extended families and small household coalitions formed the dominant social motif. Individual and domestic spirit worship were emergent, in contrast to Kingshill's observations; and, indeed, the northern and southern halves of the village had split into opposing factions (p. 69). Potter mentions few public ceremonies at the temple, and, in fact, views the temple as promoting individualism.

Each family member experiences the temple differently and is a different kind of actor within the multiplicity of social forms and experiences which the temple offers. '(p. 69)

Therefore, we end up with two studies, completely different in scope and research aim, and separated by twenty years. Changes should naturally be expected over such a time interval

and the interests of the researchers alone would account for many of the contrasts. Nevertheless, Kingshill was overwhelmed by concrete, heavily-attended, visually and audially expressive Buddhist rituals, which he amply photographed. And there was obviously a continual stream of such rituals throughout the year. Potter, on the other hand, encountered factions and individualism. The most important events were taking place behind fenced and hedged compounds, and she ably described the most prominent components of village society—small extended family units and households. What is at the root of these discrepancies?

Despite their many built-in methodological differences, I believe the two descriptions have pinpointed a village social system at two alternate phases of religious and political integration. I also believe that the broad unification of households into community-wide Buddhist ceremonies (Ku Daeng, 1953) versus the fissioning of village society into atomistic spirit cults (Ku Daeng, 1971) has a deep history in the Chiangmai valley. But what were the factors affecting Kingshill's pious and unified Ku Daeng?

To begin with, Ku Daeng had an amazing temple leader in 1953. He was poet, polyglot, moneylender, healer, fireworks maker, government official, and fervent Buddhist. He was even able to organize two hundred villagers on a trek to the North of Chiangmai city in an attempt to acquire new lands to cultivate. And this hint of activism is not inappropriate given the mood of Northern Thailand at that time.

In the early 1950s, Northern Thailand was still charged with the spirit and charisma of the famous Lamphun monk, KubaSiVichai (cremated in 1946). Over the years, this man had re-kindled the vitality of the Northern Thai church, or Yuan sect (see Keyes, 1971; Sanguan Chotisukarat, 1963), involving himself in perennial conflicts with the central ecclesiastical authorities in Bangkok, but gaining immense local popularity among the northerners. During Kingshill's study, therefore, Northern Thailand was actually in the midst of a general Buddhist revival. This was strongly reinforced by the approach of the 2500th year (1957) since Buddha's birth, since such anniversaries are known to evoke strong revitalization sentiments (cf. Coedes, 1957). Ku Daeng was only ten kilometers or so from both Lamphun and Chiangmai city, and, in one respect, Kingshill was recording the enthusiastic village expression of a regional, quasi-millenarian movement centered on KubaSiVichai, his followers, and the great anniversary. The lay temple leader was inspired by the ethos of the times, and along with the village monks, novices, and lay disciples was able to maintain a high level of religious participation and zeal among the villagers. Under such conditions, Buddhist ideology, symbolism, and ritual modes of public merit-sharing predominated. Community involvement was high and village allegiance was pronounced. The entire configuration of the village was drawn to the vortex of the temple and the authoritative institutions supported these, such as the monkhood and

--

the male-centered, age-graded temple committee. Spirit worship persisted under these conditions (Kingshill, p. 180), but was low-keyed, modest, and effectively subordinated to the Buddhist institutions and expressive forms. This is why Kingshill did not encounter the female-controlled, atomistic spirit cults that Potter saw. In 1953 they were overshadowed, diminished, and perhaps often postponed in lieu of the prominence of the Buddhist calendrical observances, and the many village-wide merit-making rites. Our analyses must be able to capture and account for these types of historical factors (see Plath, 1974; Kiefer, 1974) and associated structural oscillations (Leach, 1954). As we shall see, just such an approach is needed to account for the amazing complexity within the urban neighborhood of Northern Thailand I studied. But first, some brief additional observations of Kingshill.

Like de Young, Kingshill was obviously impressed with the Buddhist mortuary cult. A number of pages are spent describing the washing of the corpse, the assembling of the coffin, flags, cloth, lamp, and various foods and accoutrements the phi, or spirit, takes with it on its important and difficult journey after death. Kingshill also gave the first detailed account of a prolonged sickness and the arrangements that were made for a dying man. This was highly suggestive for my own research on aging, and led me to pursue a description of the culturally standardized mode of death preparation that exists in Northern Thailand.

In the 1960s, Wijeyewardene became the next researcher to do fieldwork in a Northern Thai village. By 1967, various conclusions were emerging about Northern Thai peasant social organization, and Wijeyewardene synthesized these, along with data drawn from greater Thailand, into a short article. I will restrict my comments to his Northern Thai materials.

Wijeyewardene concluded that the Northern Thai village did not have unilineal descent groups, nor classes, nor corporate land-owning kin groups of any kind. The northern region was characterized as supporting small landholdings and high agricultural yields. In South Village, Wijeyewardene's own research site, a high degree of landlessness was discovered—43% in 1964, and up to 50% in 1966. He claimed that the Northern Thai tendency towards uxori-local residence had been modified in the village by the increasing shortage of usable land. Wijeyewardene maintained, moreover, that there was a strong "pragmatic character" to the rural Thai social system which created a "flexibility and vagueness of the rules." The latter was reflected in a "fluidity of residence patterns. . . relative informality of marriage and frequency of divorce" (1967: 69) The image of a loosely structured social system once again began to dominate the literature. Wijeyewardene felt, however, that important organizational forms were to be found in the irrigation groups, the patron-client relationships, and the "compound group," the latter being a focus that Kaufman (1960) among others had suggested in his work in central Thailand.

Wijeyewardene claimed that although spirit worship in Northern Thailand was territorial, individual and domestic protective spirits were "inherited in the female line."

Later, he would elaborate further:

The startling fact, sociologically, about these ancestor spirits is that they are matrilineal. In theory the senior female member of the matriline is the custodian of the spirits and she alone is entitled to the shrines. The empirical evidence is that lines are extremely shallow--seldom deeper than three generations--but within the limited depth, lines tend to restrict themselves to a single pair of shrines. My evidence is that the cult lines adhere strongly to the matrilineal rule, but conversation with other field workers in Northern Thailand suggests that in larger and more politically and economically diverse villages the cult groups are less strictly matrilineal, and in important groups cult leadership is likely to be usurped by males. For my purposes it is fortunate that my experience was of groups with minimal political activity. (1970:253)

As we shall observe, a new group of field workers would arrive shortly thereafter and take great interest in the question of matrilineality and ancestor cults. A set of bold and perplexing propositions would be applied to Northern Thai social organization. Before proceeding to that sticky problem, however, we need to examine another thrust that began to appear among social scientists studying Thai society.

As previously mentioned, Embree's notion of the "loosely structured social system" had already made a great impact, especially on American scholars (see Evers, 1969). The Cornell team at Bang Chan was particularly affected; however, just as we saw with Wijeyewardene, researchers were consciously attempting to discover principles of order and process other than those



of classic kin group structure. As Cunningham put it, the overall response was to place "an accent upon exchange and dyadic relationships as underlying principles governing relationships in the absence of more formal (or 'tight') organization or in the presence of structural 'looseness'" (1969: 109) .

In Professor Lucien Hanks' mind, moreover, one set of dyadic relationships strongly in need of study were those surrounding the ubiquitous patron and his "entourage" of clients (Hanks, 1966). This was seconded by Wijeyewardene:

Patron-client relationships. . . were part of the traditional Thai system, and there is evidence to show that these are still widespread in a different form. In rural areas the clustering of clients around a patron does not perhaps create a large or formally organized association, but. . . (it is) essential to the social system as a whole. (1967:116; also consult Moerman, 1968)

Regarding the traditional Thai feudal system, Akin (1969) astutely observed the importance of prestations and giving in the formation of clientships.

To become a client of a prince as well as the king, one was said to thawai tua, i.e., "to offer oneself" to him. The process always involved gift-giving. Thai tradition was that one should never go to see a phu yai (superior) empty-handed. One must always take something as a gift. (1969: 94)

In this earlier period the relationships formed by such acts of giving seemed relatively unambiguous, and status distinctions were more highly formalized.

In Thai society during the Early Bangkok period, statuses were finely graded by the assignment of a certain number of sakdina (dignity marks) to each

person in the system. The respect relationship of phu yai (superior), phu n9i (inferior), depended to a large extent on the amount of the sakdina each person possessed. (1969:91)

And finally, the reciprocity embedded in the traditional patron client relationship had been given a linguistic codification.

Clientship was supported by the operation of a dominant value katanyu-katawethI, to remember what another had done for one, and try to do something in return. This concept may be differently expressed by the use of the term bun khun (merit owed another for having helped one) . (p . 9 4 )

I catalogue these quotes from Akin for one reason. The new emphasis on patron-client relationships and the traditional feudal premises underlying such hierarchical social forms would drastically change our view of Northern Thai social organization. Two studies subsequently emerged on Northern Thailand that directly addressed patron-client dyads and aristocrat-commoner relationships. I refer to the work of Van Roy and K. Calavan, respectively.

Van Roy followed through on Hanks' lead by studying up land Thai tea-growers in Northern Thailand (1971). His focus was the patron, or P9 lIang, and his clientships. <sup>His</sup> theoretical approach was that of a substantivist economist. He perceived the P9 lIang as an entrepreneur socially embedded within traditional values and norms of reciprocity. He referred to this as "entourage analysis" and made it appear that by emphasizing these substantive aspects to Thai economic behavior he was cutting through the haze of the "loose structure" hypothesis.

To begin with, Van Roy felt that the study of Thai social relationships outside of the lowlands, in the relatively remote and stern environment of the Northern hills, provided a special vantage point for studying Northern Thai social relationships. Because his tea cultivators were dealing in a nonstaple product their relationships outside of the household, especially their valley contacts, were crucial and thus easily observed, so he claimed. In fact, he maintained that the conditions and exigencies of upland tea growing made "the institutional underpinnings of Thai peasant economy stand out in stark reality" (1971:114). What were these underpinnings? The "entourage" which combined a number of traditional notions just outlined by Akin along with certain modern adaptations.

The entourage is an informal organization in which each participant contributes and receives on a voluntary basis, sharing in the advantages of participating, yet occupying a unique position in a hierarchy of superior-inferior connections. Two structural elements characterize the entourage: reciprocity and hierarchy. . . .

Entourages interlock to form a network of patronclient relationships running from the bottom of the Thai hierarchy to the top. Patrons are clients to their superiors. Clients ordinarily act as patrons to those below. Thus, the Thai social structure is a pyramid of linked entourages. (Van Roy, 1971:115)

This view of Northern Thai social organization emphasizes male-centeredness. The links between males are of supreme importance. Women are hardly mentioned in Van Roy's analysis of the entourage, and the impression is left that they, too, may participate-in the idiom of clienthood "within households" (1971:114)

Closely associated with this male-orientation is the notion of hierarchy. From top to bottom, Thai society is depicted as engulfed by patron-client relationships. The entourage becomes the "institutional foundation of indigenous Thai. . . economy, society, and polity. . ." (1971:114). In all likelihood, Van Roy has somewhat overstated his case; however, he did draw attention to a number of organizational principles and features of Northern Thai socio-economic life that had gone, if not unreported, at least, under-emphasized.

However, Van Roy had worked primarily in the hills among a special type of Northern Thai settler and cultivator. One might interpose that the upland grower's insecurity and basic dependence on the distant valley market system--both for selling and shipping their nonstaple tea and for buying subsistence goods--conditioned them to attempt to stabilize and regulate network relationships, particularly with middlemen. A prominent patron-client system, therefore, developed to cope with the insecurities of upland horticulture.' In fact, one might suggest that upland tea-producers may be more "patron-prone" than lowland subsistence agriculturalists. Consequently, there is still little concrete evidence to back up Van Roy's and Hanks' proposition that something like a P9 liang or patron plus-entourage model operated extensively throughout all of lowland Thai society. Furthermore, for Northern Thailand no one had ever actually traced back and clearly described the historical and feudal antecedents to present-day hierarchical social relationships such as Akin (1968) had done for the

Bangkok Period (also Quaritch Wales, 1934). Certainly no one had attempted to glean such details from the available evidence on feudal Chiangmai and then determine how these affected, and possibly still influence, a present-day lowland village.

All of this changed with the research of K. Calavan. Influenced by the growing interest in the formal principles of the ideal Hindu-Buddhist social order and their application to modern social life (Lehman, 1966; 1971; Gould, 1963; 1970; and Hanks, 1962), Calavan set out to find a village that had been deeply involved in the feudal experiment. She eventually discovered a village once occupied by a powerful aristocrat, Cao Mahawong, from 1870 to 1921, and whose aristocratic descendants still maintained a formidable presence in the village.

It was incidentally only seven kilometers from the KingshillPotter village of Ku Daeng.

Calavan had clear purposes in mind. She wished to describe at first hand the concrete forms of interaction, deference, and etiquette that characterized the relationships between local aristocrats (chao) and commoners (phai). In her findings she particularly highlighted how status distinctions were unambiguous and clearly recognized in village interactional settings; how aristocrat-commoner interpersonal bonds were underwritten by detailed, long-term obligations and commitments for both parties; and how role behaviors were strongly constrained by a heritage of social conventions of great sumptuary complexity.

She in effect discovered a new dimension to Northern Thai village social organization. At least in some villages in the Chiangmai valley, a large segment of social relations could in no way be characterized as loosely structured. Moreover, she had a deeper aim. Following a proposition originally introduced by Lehman (1971; also see Cunningham, 1969) she attempted to link the categories of social stratification (in fact, a system of estates technically) present in this Northern Thai village to the traditional Buddhist ideal of social order and to the "highly ordered Indian socio-legal systems" from which the former derived much of its inspiration and detail. The importance of this attempt can only be properly appreciated by reviewing the circumstances under which Lehman's proposition arose.

After Embree's article, a series of researchers, each in his own way, began to add to the list of features that were thought to be inherent in the "loose structure" concept (Phillips, 1967; Piker, 1968, 1969; Evers, 1969; Kirsch, 1969). Calavan has conveniently summarized these features:

. . . uncertainty about which individuals are in which status positions, lack of long-term individual commitment to role relationships, a high rate of social mobility, and lack of regard for behavior constraints in role relationships.  
(1974:16)

On the other hand, a few scholars like Lehman were beginning to pay more attention to Thailand's lengthy social history, complex status codes, and traditional political institutions

(Quaritch Wales, 1934; Akin, 1969; Punyodyana, 1969; Riggs, 1966). A debate was in the developing. It came down to this.

From reading Quaritch Wales (1931; 1965), Akin (1969) or Jones (1971) it becomes obvious that in the past, and in many sectors of the present-day society, there existed detailed social codes for organizing interpersonal relations, and conventions that overtly symbolized status considerations in interaction. Observations by trained social scientists, however, were fairly much in agreement, nonetheless, that the previously mentioned features of "looseness" did indeed characterize much of Thai social behavior. How do we account for the seeming disparity between traditional code and contemporary behavior?

Lehman (1971) suggested that any discussion of "structure" in Thai social relations was most usefully approached from a cognitive point of view, especially as opposed to a classic British social structural point of view. Thus, the traditional Thai status ideology was highly structured and acted as a cognitive reference for assigning grammatical meaning to, particularly, inter-status social behavior. At this juncture, Lehman was clearly injecting into the "loose structure" debate the cognitivist's view that the link between cultural rule and social action is an interpretative relationship. He would end up talking in terms of a highly structured code and a "relative looseness of . . . social behaviors" (1971:232). The structural functional approach wherein social action was governed by

normative expectations, functional requisites, and social rule-as-social sanction had been challenged within Thai studies--and primarily by documentation of an enormous volume of "violations" of normative expectations. However, if the social rules embodied in the Thai status ideology were not viewed as norms, in the usual sense, but as composing a reference system similar to a grammar, then there were fewer "violations" and more improvisation, even when this improvisation mostly involved avoiding instances where the elaborate rules of the social code could be applied. From this point of view, loose behavior was, in fact, improvised avoidance. But what were the specific conditions under which actors felt compelled to continually improvise plans to systematically avoid the status ideology?

Hanks (1962) and Lehman (1971) provided a fascinating answer to which Cunningham (1969) is also favorably inclined. They have argued that between the elaborate socio-legal codes of Indian derivation and the practical activity systems of Thai life there have intervened a series of historical and demographic conditions, as seen in the incessant wars with neighboring principalities primarily to obtain manpower and population. Lehman sees the situation as follows:

. . . in countries like Burma and Thailand history and demography conspired to produce a situation combining relatively considerable de facto possibilities for social and geographical mobility with the existence of Indian-derived social conventions of great sumptuary-status complexity, heavily ritualized in principle. It is not therefore surprising that people might in general believe social relations must involve



one in highly particularized obligations, and at the same time be substantially unable to find out exactly what those obligations might be in any given case. . . .

Social relations are in such a situation problematical and almost dangerous, something to be got out of by whatever conventions can be established for 'systematic withdrawal.

Thai actors share an insecurity, therefore, based on the fact that they realize extremely elaborate rules and obligations lie in wait, so to speak, for the parties to relationships. In many contexts, however, they are not precisely sure just what those obligations are. They have responded, on the one hand, with methods of systematic withdrawal that have become objectified in the observations and writings of the "loose structure" advocates. Equally important, however, is that Thai actors are also known to pursue eagerly dependent relationships under certain conditions (see Akin, 1969; Van Roy, 1971; Moerman, 1968; Calavan, 1974) and readily to invoke and claim for themselves the extensive rights and obligations that the status code legitimates. We therefore face the problem of determining under what circumstances, and in response to what specific and general conditions, a social actor will choose a particular form of improvisation with reference to the status code, i.e., commitment or avoidance behavior. As we shall see later on, this has important bearing on the social adaptation of the elderly.

Calavan went on to attempt to establish a methodology for assessing such conditions. She associates "loose" versus "tight" structured behavior, and "pure" charisma versus

"routinized" charisma, with general conditions of stability and instability within society. By "pure" charisma she referred to the principle whereby "those individuals who can demonstrate their extraordinary administrative or military competence should assume authority positions" (1974:17). It is thus achieved, not inherited, and transitory, going to the grave with its possessor. "Routinized" charisma is inherited and associated with the view that "extraordinary abilities or effectiveness were linked with birth in the higher estates such as the aristocracy" (1974:18).

She concluded that the traditional social organization of the Thai kingdoms alternated between a rigid estate system characterized by authority positions being controlled by the principle of "routinized" charisma, on the one hand, and a "loosely regulated system" in which authority positions were obtained by pure charisma, on the other.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the latter she states,

During unstable conditions such as time of . warfare, the system of fixed points of reference broke down with more effective persons, whether of high or low birth, assuming control on the basis of the principle of pure charisma. (1974: 20)

Throughout history, Northern Thai society and particular villages as well should therefore be viewed as dynamic entities, continually undergoing modifications. Periods of stability were characterized by hierarchy, fixed points of reference, and a vital estate system. Relationships were skewed towards

aristocratic-commoner commitments and reciprocities. Large numbers of individuals found it economically, politically, and socially practical and advantageous to engage the status ideology with its catalogue of two-way constraints between superior and inferior rather than avoid it. As Akin demonstrates, the modern entourage descends from the entourages of nai (aristocrats) in the estate system; both, incidentally, are based on male links.

On the other hand, during unstable periods the practical basis of the intricate status ideology gave way. There were usurpers. Populations became scattered, and obligations confused. Charlatans arose, and trust in the system eroded. Under such conditions, it is expectable that individuals improvised means for systematically withdrawing from status relations. Escaping into the woods during frontier times, using calculated avoidance procedures in later time. Their behavior was "loose," highly idiosyncratic in style, because the standards of the status ideology had become blurred, potentially dangerous, and one's purposes were best served by wit, and, if need be, guile.

So far so good. A more flexible model is beginning to emerge that inter-relates history, stability, alternate forms of authority, and the "loose" versus "tight" conceptualizations. In concluding her introductory comments, however, Calavan interjects a comment that appears unwarranted. I quote,

. . . it is believed that in Northern Thailand specifically "tight" structure and "routinized"

charisma have predominated throughout the historic period beginning in the 1770s. (1974:21)

This statement first of all does not concur with what is known about the problems of reconstruction and re-population during the 18th and 19th centuries following the withdrawal of the Burmese (see Wyatt, 1973:349; Chiangmai Chronicle, Book VII, VIII). Nor is it consistent with the general disruptions brought about by the undermining of local aristocratic authority by the Bangkok powers. More specifically, it does not take into account the fuller ethnographic picture we now have of village Northern Thailand. What we need to keep in mind is that Calavan's village is in many ways unusual. Most Northern Thai villages were without a resident aristocrat (chao) throughout their history, and even those villages that possessed a chao often experienced severe fluctuations in their systems of local authority.

Leaving these matters aside, the importance of her contribution is that it has radically changed our estimate of the range of variation within Northern Thai village social organization. We are sensitized to look at villages experiencing varying systemic states and types of socio-political integration. Cunningham's advice to first of all "delineate significant variations in local areas" is most apropos (1969:113).

Before Calavan's study, for example, it remained undemonstrated that the estate system had ever been part of village social organization. It was commented upon in chronicles and

historical writings, but how it actually operated, what the premises were of aristocratic identity and aristocratic-commoner agreements, and how village life was affected by the social mechanisms of the khum (aristocrat's compound) and traditional obligations--these were new data Calavan provided. She furthermore took pains to demonstrate that the estate categories and the status ideology had adaptive significance within the modern administrative and political context. "Modified feudalism" was the term she used to describe the selective incorporation of traditional and modern elements in the present day village social ideology.

The importance of all this is that we now have descriptions covering a range of Northern Thai village social structures. Besides Calavan's traditional estate-oriented village, we have recent reports on three other villages that strongly contrast with Calavan's. We may wish to call them "loosely regulated systems" as opposed to the rigid estate system, but there is more to these villages than the historical absence of the estate system, and the avoidance of the status ideology: they in fact actively employ a unilineal descent idiom that has led to a number of bold statements calling for a "new look" at Northern Thai social organization. For this topic, I turn to the work of Turton (1972), Davis (1973; 1975; 1974) and Potter (1975) .

### 1.3 Northern Thai Matriliney: A Critique

Among the various students of Northern Thai society that preceded me in the field, Turton (1972) and Davis (1973) had published the most provocative proposition regarding Northern Thai social organization. The former claimed the Northern Thai possessed "matrilineal descent groups," and Davis in his analysis referred to a "matriclan organization" (1973: 53; 1974). Both men worked in villages. My analysis, based on urban ethnographic evidence, diverges from their interpretations. I contend that Turton<sup>3</sup> has erred in trying to elevate a female-linked and female-dominated domestic spirit cult to the status of a matrilineal lineage system. The error stems from a misapprehension of the use of unilineal descent constructs (Scheffler, 1966), on the one hand, and an underestimation of the role of the Northern Thai household as a critical activity system and structural universe sufficient unto itself. Most of my criticisms are based upon Turton's own village-derived data.

This segment of the introduction is devoted, therefore, to an assessment of Turton's matrilineal descent group hypothesis, seeking to evaluate the adequacy of his lineage model in accounting for the specifics of local social organization. In Chapter Three I turn to my own urban data and adduce a more complex analytical framework that aims to integrate the Turton-Davis-Potter findings with those of Van Roy and Calavan.<sup>4</sup> The necessity of doing this arises because the

neighborhood I studied, a very complex entity, exhibited aspects relevant to both types of findings.

### 1.3.1 The Matrilineal Descent Group Proposition

It must always be specified in what way the group is a descent group, i.e., how a descent construct or descent-phrased rule relates to it. We should also remember that the classification of groups on the grounds of their descent ideologies is not on a par with classification of them on "functional" or "operational" grounds, as, e.g., political, economic, or religious groups. (Scheffler, 1966:546)

Clearly, the first task is to determine how Turton is using the term "matrilineal descent group." He claims he is providing a description of observed behavior and of meanings consciously held by members of the community (1972:217). He thus ignores the distinction that Scheffler is trying to establish and, in fact, conducts his analysis so as to leave undefined the terms "descent group," "matrilineage," and "lineage cult."

The aim of this section, therefore, is twofold. We need to decide with what degree of accuracy the sociological entities that Turton encountered in this Northern Thai village can be labelled "descent groups" by any acceptable definition of that term; and, second, we must determine if "matrilineal" is the analytically precise term for specifying the organizational idiom and descent-phrased rule that informs the Northern Thai spirit cult.

### 1.3.2 Distribution of Descent Groups

Out of the 180 households he studied, Turton discovered <sup>1</sup> sixty-seven distinct "descent groups." He admits this is a large number. The median size of the descent group was four member households, and rarely did he find a descent group with more than ten locally clustered households. There was a notable lack of depth to the groups with "a modal depth of four (generations) with three living generations" (1972:219). Genealogical connections were always to a set of recently deceased sisters, and never to a single apical ancestor.

Turton described the structure of the descent group as follows:

There is a spirit lodged in a shrine which is located in a house site containing a house known as the "original" or "stem" house (huan kao) in which lives a female member of the senior generation who is both lineage head and ritual officiant; focussed on this person, spirit, and these structures is a localized group of matrilineally related households, a core of which is topographically contiguous, who say of themselves that they are "of the same spirit" (phI draw kan). (1972:220)

Besides the conspicuously large number of groups, their geographical distribution revealed a high degree of localization. Thirty-three groups had their ritual focus in the immediate village cluster (population 3,000). They in turn were composed of 218 member households, of which all but eighteen were located in the village cluster. Sixteen of the latter eighteen households, moreover, were within the small irrigated valley Turton studied. Few societies, even those with a stronger unilineal idiom than the Northern Thai, possess such a high degree of overlap between descent group and local



group (see Evans-Pritchard, 1940; I. M. Lewis, 1965; Ross, 1973) Consequently, some suspicion about the type of groups .. we are dealing with may be in order. Has Turton, for instance, a clear notion of the difference between localized descent groups and descent-phrased local groups (Goodenough, 1970; Scheffler, 1966; Keesing, 1975)? I will return to this point.

### 1.3.3 Descent Group Membership

If Turton was unimpressed by the tightly clustered distribution of the groups, he did experience consternation trying to establish the criteria for entitlement to membership in the descent group. His initial statement, "all people necessarily belong to one of (the) shallow matrilineages" (1972:220) appears unwarranted. Women, for example, possess a much clearer basis for entitlement than men. The former are members by virtue of female links to the original set of sisters. Women outside of this genealogical continuum, migrant women or virilocally residing wives, can "buy entry" into the ritual group of their husband's mother or employer's wife. The one unambiguous rule of spirit cult membership, however, is that a woman may never belong to more than one ritual group..

"The incorporation of men is more complicated" (1972:220).. Indeed, the relationship of males to the spirit ritual cult is the most anomalous feature of Turton's analysis. For instance, at marriage the small payment the groom presents to his bride's household is interpreted as "buying entry" into the wife's matrilineal descent group. Thereafter, however, the ambiguity

surrounding the incorporation of affinal males becomes glaring. In particular, many males among Turton's villagers never \_d "count themselves" as members of a ritual cult whether that of their wife, mother\_ or sister. Women were the ones who considered certain males as falling under the protective influence of their spirits. Men, consequently, could and did belong to more than one "descent group." One prestigious male, in fact, according to Turton was simultaneously claimed by three separate women (a wife and two sisters) each with her own distinct ritual cult (1972:223). Despite Turton's claim\_ males appear in the light of such examples less as descent group members and more as clients of female-controlled ritual coalitions.

Affinal males, moreover, remained permanently outside the negative sanctions (i.e., illness-producing powers) of the ancestral spirits of their wives. This was vividly illustrated in cases where a man, upon feeling his wife's spirits too severe in their punishments, would burn down the spirit shrine or shoot into it with a shot-gun (p. 221). But Turton did mention cases where an affinal male assumed imoortant ritual duties in his wife's ritual cult. Here again, however, at closer inspection Turton's remarks reveal that such duties were only assumed in situations where the wife had previous ritual entitlements, and was incapacitated by illness or had died, and where the husband remained living in the same house in which the wife had propitiated her spirits. Turton insists this illustrates extreme "incorporation" of the affinal male (p. 221). Because

the husband's duties are the specific duties his wife once assumed, however, and clearly not of the nature of a general entitlement, such a husband resembles a proxy more than an incorporated affine.

If the husband's relationship to the wife's spirit cult is ambiguous, we might therefore expect strong links between males and their maternal groups; however, this is not the case. In fact, the adult male's relationship to his maternal ritual group is even less straightforward than the problem of affinal "incorporation." Turton is forced, for example, to present eight cases that cover the situations in which sons were specifically included in their maternal group (p. 222; 223) . All of the examples are exceptions! Once again, they entail either situations where titular females were absent, where a man's wife does not have her own spirits, <sup>5</sup> where a man is widowed or divorced, or where as previously mentioned a prestigious male was co-opted by his mother or sister as a status ploy.

One conclusion seems unavoidable. Females possess direct and unambiguous ritual entitlements. Males, on the other hand, whether affinals or consanguineals, have an unclear, if not, peripheral relationship to the spirit cult. If we are dealing with matrilineal descent groups, therefore, Turton's data reveal they are only partly constituted (i.e., overwhelmingly female in their membership). The data point to the fact that the constitution of these groups was not only affected by a

unilineal idiom (female links) but by a unisexual idiom as well (females only). The latter is particularly evident in the priority and exclusiveness granted to females in the form of ritual entitlements. A look at the distribution of authority and some facts regarding succession to ritual statuses is appropriate here.

#### 1.3.4 Authority and Succession

An analysis of authoritative roles within the spirit cult unveils further questions regarding Turton's framework. For example, it is usually assumed that "positions of highest authority within the matrilineal descent group will . . . be vested in statuses occupied by men" (Schneider, 1961:6). Out of twenty-eight groups that Turton studied, however, the "stem" or "root" person (kao phi), and what Turton equates with "lineage elder," was a female of the senior generation in twenty-two cases. The other six cases were males: two cases of husbands succeeding wives, two sons succeeding mothers, and two brothers succeeding sisters. Females, therefore, clearly dominated as "lineage elders." All six of the male succession cases, moreover, were, according to Turton himself, examples of irregular succession with men, in the absence of entitled women, performing "a holding operation to ensure continuity and to avoid upsetting existing authority relations" (p. 223; 224). Following Turton's own analysis, the Northern Thai place women in higher authority statuses than men within their descent

men in the matrilineal descent group, we check whether Turton has not actually confused levels of analysis. For instance, a ritual cult established at the domestic level and culturally assigned to females and their symbolic sphere is one thing. If we attempt to stretch this domestic form out over the broader jural-political domain, however, we create a distortion. In effect, females in domestic positions of control over ritual become "lineage elders," or as in control of "lineages."

Immediately the problem of female authority vis-a-vis male authority is raised. \*We should be cautious, therefore, lest under Turton's guidance we may not actually be perceiving a domestic ritual cult as a jural-political entity. Male and female positions of authority have become points of contrast only because we have mixed levels, i.e., mixed the domestic with the jural-political.

#### 1.3.5 Ritual, Marriage, and Social Control

The spirit cult embodies only a modest number of ceremonials each year. The most significant ritual is the one conducted after ploughing has begun. This is the main sacrificial rite for the ancestor spirits, and Turton describes the attendance as follows: "the sacrifice is made in the stem house and is attended by all of the group and some or all of their unmarried children of both sexes. Affines and married consanguineal males may attend but seldom do" (1972:226). Once again, a coterie of females predominates.

The role of the ancestor spirits in the regulation of marriage is equally an affair directed toward women, and the control of their activities. After declaring the descent group is not exogamous, Turton proceeds to delineate the key role of the spirits as guardians of the chastity and fertility of the females of the group. If during a verandah courtship, for example, a boy touches a girl or steps over the threshold into the main bedroom of her parent's house, the girl's spirits are offended. A modest sacrifice must be made. In the event of marriage, a larger sum of money is demanded. In the concrete context of the domicile, prosperity and fertility are culturally assigned concerns and ritual obligations of females. The special relationship that women possess to fertility derives, moreover, from their genealogical links to the ancestors. This relationship involves both positive and negative effects as illustrated in the sanctions of the ancestor spirits.

"The lineage spirits punish. . . (and) have a preference for women, especially marriageable girls" (1972:235). This punishment is usually in the form of sickness. Turton, however, noted that males as a class were seldom affected by ancestor spirits, and instead incurred the frequent wrath of forest spirits (the forest being a cultural domain of males). Women were the ones who experienced the brunt of "lineage spirit" possession episodes, mainly for laxity in performing rituals or for sexual peccadillos. As Turton informs us,

cases of sickness were more likely to be divined as the result of the anger of the lineage spirit at the misbehavior of the young. In such cases all the unmarried nubile girls of the lineage had to undergo a ritual ordeal conducted by a diviner who might be of the group or not. Each had to produce a chicken's egg; these the diviner broke open, declaring the owner of the firstone opened and found to be fertilized as the guilty party. Girls were said greatly to have feared this ordeal and to have used protective magic which involved spells and rubbing the egg on the genitalia, a belief also held to explain failure to detect women known to have offended. (1972: 233)

The| ancestor| spirits,| therefore, |are mostly | concerned with|  
 women, their| fertility |and the proper| exercise of their | sexu-  
 ality. |When the ancestor| spirits| are v|ronged the | group--and|

here we mean females with ritual entitlement--act corporately by means of a sacrifice to correct the wrong. The sanctioning power of the spirits does not blanket an entire lineage population, therefore, but focuses on a discrete segment of genealogically linked women, and especially young women. And this qualification justifies pausing for a moment to consider what type of ancestor worship we are dealing with among the Northern Thai.

### 1.3.6 The Northern Thai Ancestor Cult

Although the subject is complex, and at the risk of over-simplification, we might distinguish two forms of influence that ancestors may exert on their descendants.<sup>7</sup> One form is found in the classic ancestor systems of the Chinese (Freedman, 1958; 1967; Wolf, 1974; Ahern, 1973) and various African groups (Fortes, 1943; 1970). This type locates the ancestors either in

a category of structurally significant kin or as recently deceased "immediate jural superiors," or both (Freedman, 1967: 91) . Such ancestors remain intimately bound up with the decisions and activities of their living descendants. Their influence stems from the fact they "collectively embody the dignity and the authority of the groups over which they preside" (Freedman, 1967:86); they thereby come to "constitute the ultimate tribunal, the final authority in matters of life and death" (Fortes, 1970:179). Research on such systems has emphasized the intimate connection between ancestor worship and the attainment of jural authority in the family and lineage through succession, inheritance, and ritual entitlement. 'pietas,,8 or filial piety, becomes the crucial sentiment girding such societies. Ancestors are foci of the social structure, therefore, with profound and extensive links to the ongoing social group. Following this line of descriptive analysis, Turton claims the Northern Thai ancestors, although in many ways unusual, basically conform to this classic ancestor model (1972:241-242).

In contrast, I wish to propose that the Northern Thai materials constitute a second type of ancestor cult. To elucidate this type I need to adduce some of my own field data. In the Northern Thai variant, the influence and power of the ancestors to control the behavior of descendants is restricted to one particular domain--that of fertility, and especially human reproduction in its female connection. Ancestors under this arrangement are not extensions of the social system in the



sense of jurally and structurally important deceased kinsmen. They instead derive their influence from their key position within a system of human cyclical reincarnation whose organization is at the domestic level. To illustrate, urban informants explained human conception as resulting from equal biological contributions of the husband and wife, plus a third rebirth principle. Davis' village informants interpreted the rebirth or reincarnation principle as being the winyan (consciousness or soul) of a deceased kinsmen, two to one in favor of a deceased relative of the wife over that of the husband (19.73). Thus, reincarnation was believed to occur within the bilateral kindred, but with a definite skewing toward matrilateral relatives. In contradistinction to Turton (p. 220), when Northern Thai women refer to each other as phI dIaw kan (of the same spirits) they are not merely expressing membership in some form of descent-phrased group. They are instead acknowledging their sharing of a portion of ancestrally-transmitted, genetic-cum-transmigration essence. Around this core of women assembles a matrilaterally-skewed kindred, that includes both live and unnamed dead members, the latter supplying the majority of the "souls" for new babies, as well as overseeing the sexual conduct of cult members, especially nubile girls.

The Northern Thai marriage ceremony, consequently, is not, for example, concerned with allowing an affinal male to gain entry into the matrilineage of his wife. Its primary intention is to obtain permission for a male to enter (symbolically represented as "breaking down a fence") a jurally bounded field of

female fertility, i.e., the set of genealogically linked women of the cult. Permission must be obtained from the guardian ancestors of the domestic cult. Marriage is called sia phi (to contaminate or separate the spirit). My understanding of Northern Thai meanings here is that the cyclical reincarnation of a deceased kinsmen is to be initiated by means of male entry, pregnancy, and par <sup>u</sup>rl l<sup>o</sup>ne A symbolic fine must be made by the intruding male, just as he will, after the ceremony, symbolically repair the compound fence that he has reputedly broken down. Marriage in Northern Thailand, consequently, does not concern "incorporation" into a matrilineage with the customary authority negotiations between affinal and consanguineal males {Schneider and Gough, 1961}.<sup>10</sup> It is foremost a transaction between male and female and their respective cultural, jural, and symbolic spheres.

The Northern Thai ancestors, consequently, must be viewed as jurally and instrumentally confined to the domestic domain with its fertility and prosperity concerns. To insist on placing these ancestors as foci of the broader jural-political domain with extensive links to a wide spectrum of extra domestic institutions and activities invokes a fruitless search for corroborating evidence. Turton is guilty of such an error. He identified the Northern Thai domestic spirits with the much more powerful ancestor cult or type such as found among certain African groups. There exists, however, an unavoidable difference between the two. This difference concerns death.

For example, among the Tallensi, the ancestors are not only closely associated with death but, in fact,

Every normal death is their (the ancestor's) doing. The deceased is said to have been slain or to have been summoned by them, and it is always in retribution for neglect of ritual service demanded by them or breach of promises made on duty owed to them. (Fortes, 1970:179)

In contrast, the Northern Thai ancestors cause sickness but never death (Turton, 1972:233), and usually for sexual offenses committed by women of the cult. Indeed, they are not even informed of a descendant's death (p. 228), and must be strictly segregated from mortuary proceedings. I take this as evidence of the restricted nature of the Northern Thai ancestor cult. It is operative only in the realm of procreation and never death. Why this is so can be partially explained by the fact that in the last analysis Buddhism is concerned with release from life, and only contingently concerned with rebirth. From the canonical point of view, birth is only a residual fact stemming from unexpiated demerit, whilst birth as a positive fact, so to say, is to be governed by contingent entities, e.g., spirits.

In re-tracing Turton's line of reasoning, it appears that once in the field he was surprised (p. 218) to discover a series of discrete ritual cults focused on a form of ancestor spirit and organized upon a descent-phrased rule. The combination of ancestor cult, uxori-local residence, and a unilineal descent construct led him to think in terms of the classic model of ancestor worship. To his credit, however, he made a conscious

effort to distinguish the Northern Thai ancestor cult from those cults traditionally found associated with lineage systems--he specifically mentions Fortes', Goody, and Freedman. His main error came, however, when he failed to distinguish just how the matri-phrased descent rule was operating. In other words, Turton reasoned in the tradition of Rivers (see Scheffler, 1966) that unilineal descent constructs are only used to form descent groups. He, therefore, had to find descent groups appended to the ritual cults. And here Turton's frustrations begin. The Northern Thai ritual cults were singularly uncooperative at being elevated to the level of matrilineal descent groups.<sup>x.</sup> This has been already illustrated in the particular problems of unisexual entitlement criteria, large numbers, male non-involvement or clientship roles, restricted ancestral authority, and limited jural and ritual emphasis.

In contrast, it must be stated that the sole purpose of the matri-phrased descent rule<sup>11</sup> is to identify the spirit fertility connections and ancestral ritual obligations of a shallow set of genealogically linked females. It does not operate as an organizational idiom in<sup>ft{...</sup> the formation of descent groups. It, in fact, expressly excludes adult males and is<sup>12</sup> concerned solely with the ritual duties surrounding the prosperity and procreativity of discrete, female-linked household coalitions.

Turton's analysis, therefore, falls under the weight of a series of anomalies, many of which he himself has meticulously

provided. The presence of matrilineal descent groups in Northern Thailand is a fiction arising from Turton's misapprehension of the use of descent-constructs, and his loyalty to a model of lineage organization and ancestor worship which urged attention away from the most significant area of analysis --the domestic domain.

In another village study, S. Potter (1975) has looked at the domestic domain, especially the specific activities of one extended family in one compound. Potter claimed she had discovered a novel twist on a classic theme regarding female and male structural roles in family social organization. In her description of the Northern Thai family she states,

The Northern Thai family is ordered in a delicate and complex way, based on a sort of dynamic interplay which exists when relationships between women define the social structure and determine which relationships between men shall be important, while at the same time the social status of men is higher, and the formal authority is theirs. Authority is passed from man to man, but by virtue of relationships to a line of women: it is passed affinally, from father-in-law to son-in-law.  
(1975:23)

Potter claims that this constitutes a "conceptually female-centered family system" (p. 1), and by this she means that female consanguineal links make it female-centered. She never claims females have authority. Males do in all cases. However, unrelated males do become linked by marrying consanguineally related women; and this sets up a novel situation in Potter's estimation:

In this system, it is not women who can be thought of as being passed around from consanguineal group to consanguineal group. Instead of "the blueprint of a mechanism which 'pumps' women out of their consanguineous families to redistribute them in affinal groups. . . ." (Levi-Strauss, 1953:546), I am describing a system in which the people who are redistributed in affinal groups are men. The structural significant people are female, not male. (1954: 24)

From the preceding criticisms it is obvious that if the Northern Thai spirit cults are clearly not descent groups, then the revision of Levi-Strauss' theory is unnecessary. As we shall see, moreover, in Northern Thai society women (the fecundity of women and their domestic services) are circulated amongst genealogically linked sets of males in the aristocratic political domain.

In locating her study within the context of the literature on Northern Thailand, Potter praises Turton for identifying "a system of matrilineal descent groups and associated cults." She then immediately adds, however, "such cults were also independently discovered at approximately the same time by Richard Davis, Jack Potter and the present author" (p. 18). She therefore suggests that the term "matrilineal descent group" is acceptable to her. However, she never uses it herself and instead prefers to talk about "cult groups" and "matrilines" (p. 103).

Moreover, in discussing the spirits of the matriline she states: "the spirits are greatly concerned with the sexual behavior of daughters of the matriline" (p. 104). Once again,

the focus on female fertility. She also takes issue with a statement of Turton's to the effect that men were the authoritative interpreters for determining who within the group had offended the spirits. Potter replies, "this is not true of Chiangmai village (Ku Daeng) where women are ritual interpreters of ancestral spirits" (p. 20). Hence, female ritual authority. She also stated that women were the actual ritual officiants as well. For instance, in referring to the annual spirit ceremony, she writes,

The ceremony is held at the "old-established house" where the spirits live, and it is conducted by an hereditary mistress of ceremonies. The mistress of ceremonies is a senior woman in the group of matriline members. Usually her mother held the position before her. (1975:105)

So Potter too makes no mention of men being critically involved in any aspect of the ancestral spirit ceremony in her village. She also adds, "as far as I have been able to observe, the mother's brother is not of structural importance to a Northern Thai male" (p. 24). Hence, her tacit rejection of matrilineal descent group." Finally, she consciously distinguishes the Northern Thai system from "matriliny" proper, on the grounds that the latter in actuality is male-centered, apparently referring to the usual prominence of the mother's brother sister's son relationship in such systems.

In Potter's opinion, Turton was more concerned with the actions and behaviors of men than women, and although he raised the important issue of the relationship of the descent group to economic life (again Potter accepts the concept of

descent group with no apparent justification) he was never able to resolve it adequately. His importance for Potter lies in the "suggestions" he introduced, and in his "recognition . . . of the ancestral spirit groups" (p. 21).

Next, Potter reviews Davis' research in Northern Thailand which appeared in a single article she had access to at that time. Although Davis placed substantial emphasis on the matrilineal residence rule and the dominance of "female ties" in Northern Thai social structure, Potter contends his analysis suffered from remaining "in the male-centered mode of social thinking." Specifically, Davis referred to the "shabby quality" of the ritual knowledge that women possessed, and to Northern Thai mythology which revealed a basic concern with resolving "potential conflicts between female affines" (p. 22). Potter finds Davis' statement "baffling." From her point of view, female affines are kept separated by the operation of the matrilineal residence rule. It is usually male affines who encounter strains and conflicts with one another.

The structural dominance of the father-in-law over the household of the son-in-law is the rule in Ku Daeng, and an integral part of the system according to which authority is inherited affinally.  
(Potter, 1975:37)

In the next chapter, I will discuss aspects of the urban residential system and the complex social forms that obtain in the neighborhood I studied. As we shall see, in this setting it is possible to discuss social arrangements wherein the residence rule keeps female affines apart, as Potter found



in Ku Daeng, and another system where distinct socio\_ritual categories of wives are brought together, as for instance in the traditional aristocrat's compound (khum) and among certain successful P9 IIang (patrons). Hence, Potter's clusters of consanguineal females and affinally-related males, on the one hand, and Van Roy and Calavan's powerful aristocrats and patrons surrounded by "entourages" that include the logistical conflicts of female affines on the other, may not be incongruent if we are willing to think in terms of more than one social model.

Potter's contribution is that she has taken Northern Thai studies past the stage of vague references to female authority, and specifically isolated the critical structural role of women within a complex family system. We must remember, however, that Potter is generalizing from one extended family in one compound. Surely, she and her husband have other corroborating examples, but there is a tendency nonetheless in Turton, Davis, and Potter to talk about Northern Thai village social structure as if it were a uniform system. <thou>Van Roy also fell prey to this, as did Calavan, at least in her historical analysis.

One further point, Potter includes only one small comment regarding Kingshill's previous study of Ku Daeng: .'. . Since Kingshill's primary interest is religious life, his data on the family are sketchy" (p. 5). But Kingshill lived with a family for a year, spoke good Northern Thai, and as we saw, he claimed he did not encounter frequent spirit ceremonies in the village. Since Potter strongly emphasizes that "kin group membership is

symbolized by membership in the spirit cults" (p. 23), one must ask whether in times of low-keyed or postponed spirit ritual we are dealing with the same type of kinship structure? None of the researchers of the ancestral spirit cult have ever provided any function that the ritual-based kin group performs other than spirit propitiation. And we know that the frequency, consistency, choice of auspicious dates, and intensity of the spirit rituals vary widely from household to household and come under the influence of innumerable contingencies, i.e., births, illnesses, fluctuating prosperity, fissioning within the group, demographic decline, etc. Once again, Ku Daeng in 1953 and Ku Daeng in 1971 from the viewpoint of social structure may have been very different villages.

Moreover, seven kilometers down the road from Potter's female-centered domiciles was Calavan's male-centered, estate oriented village. To argue that one of these villages is more representative than the other is to deny the most prominent feature of the Chiangmai valley--its indomitable complexity and variation.

If we look squarely at this complexity, we find we are dealing with a system that contains rules that permit deep transformations of structural forms, i.e., they allow us to go from Calavan's estate village to Potter's female-centered compound units (cf. Leach, 1954; Lehman, 1967). I believe the rise in prominence of the female-dominated spirit cult is an expression of an alternative model to the estate or P9 liang system. The

former falls somewhere within the bounds of a "loosely regulated system." How such transformations take place, what specific processes and contingencies are involved that bring about the emergence of one model of social organization over the other--these questions I attempt to answer partially in the next chapter.

This lengthy and at times digressive search for the principles behind the social arrangements of the Northern Thai is undertaken for one reason. Old age and the aging process are the specific concerns of this thesis. Because the greater part of the life cycle is spent as an active adult, however, it is only logical that the transition from vigorous adulthood into old age remains a critical juncture. Active adulthood, therefore, must be the point of departure of this study. It is the prior state in light of which the transition to old age takes on its particular structure and tone. What views men and women have of themselves, however, cannot be understood unless we come to grips with Northern Thai social structure, especially its relationship to spirit ritual and Buddhist belief.

In the urban Northern Thai neighborhood of Chedi Lane, I will argue that the inter-sexual antagonisms of active adulthood, and the inter-generational antagonisms that surface in old age, are resolved by the use of similar ritual and ideological means. Therefore, unless we know what Northern Thai sex roles and age roles are, and how the Northern Thai view

themselves as persons, we cannot adequately comprehend the overall cultural structure of the life cycle. More specifically, we cannot understand the self-images that old people apply to the project of aging and death.

## Footnotes

1Kingshill actually resided in Ku Daeng in 1953-54; therefore, approximately twenty years-separate the two studies.

2Here I am distinguishing "class," as a reference group

system based on income and wealth, from "estate," by which I mean quasi-corporate statuses, in principle governed by sumptuary laws and regulations.

3I restrict my comments to Turton because he has presented

the most detailed and challenging exposition. Later, I will incorporate and criticize some of S. Potter's views regarding family structure and the structural position of women in Northern Thai social organization. 4Moerman (1967; 1968) has provided data on patron-client relations and could be associated with Van Roy and Calavan in a tangential way. By dividing the research into two types of findings, I am not suggesting that "camps" exist, only that similarities bring them together.

5Turton previously claimed that a woman must buy entry

into her husband's mother's group if she was without her own spirits. Here he has the husband buying entry. Pages 220 and 222 of his article are somewhat contradictory therefore.

6

It should be noted that Turton does not supply the Northern Thai term for "ritual officiant"; nor did this researcher encounter a specific term for such a role with reference to the phi pu ja cult. I did encounter the term khon yang, but used-only-rn connection with the ritual officiant of the phi mot system, a distinct type of domestic cult.

7Sahlins (1968:106) has provided the suggestions for such

8I quote Fortes: "(I am calling pietas) that complex of a distinction, reverent regard, moral norms, ritual observance and maternal duty in the relationship between parent and child, more particularly of son to father, both during the lifetime and after the death of the parent. . . II (1970: 182) .

9Among Northern Thai folk beliefs there is a rebirth

reincarnation system operating that may become highly elliptical. Turton (1972:251), for instance, received testimony that a grandson could be a reincarnated grandfather. I received similar testimony in the city.

10It is to be noted that Turton never once mentions any difficulties between husband and wife's brother. In his study of matrilineal descent groups there is, in fact, only one brief allusion to the normally crucial role of the "mother's brother" (p. '243). He similarly avoids any discussion of the adjustment of in-marrying affines vis-a-vis one another in the matrilineal descent group (cf. Schneider, 1961:20). Potter (1975), in contrast, strongly emphasizes male affine relations, while explicitly underlining the negligible role of the mother's brother.

11On a moderate note, the relationship of the descent construct to the group may be specified as a "matri-phrased rule," thus, "matri-phrased ritual cult." This is following Scheffler's terminology (1966). "Matri" is justified because both male and female children are included in their mother's cult. On the other hand, we might argue the unisexual organizational idiom of the domestic cult justifies the term "gynolineal ritual cult" with males assigned clientship positions.

12Male exclusion is poignantly illustrated from my own field notes in the cliché ph\_ch\_i mai mI phI, "men do not have spirits"; or, again, ph\_chai mai fQn, "men do not dance" [in the dance and trance associated ancestor cults]. Among the latter, I specifically refer to the phi mot and phi meng cults found in Chiangmai city. --- --- --

## CHAPTER TWO

## THE SETTING

## 2.1

General Background

Before going to Chiangmai I stayed a brief time in Phitsanulok, a town in central Thailand that I had lived in previously while serving in the Peace Corps (1965-1967). Shortly before I left Phitsanulok an old teacher friend of mine told me that if I wanted to study Buddhism and elderly people I could not have made a better choice than Chiangmai. There in the north, he said, people still held to the teachings of the Buddha with great devotion, and the Northern Thai spirit of giving and sharing was unmatched throughout Thailand.

He warned me, however, that the local staple in the north, sticky rice, would be best avoided if I expected to get any serious work accomplished. He contended that sticky rice made one lazy and docile in contrast to fluffy rice, the invigorating Central Thai staple.

In a similar fashion, I discovered that the Northern Thai possessed a number of stereotypes about the Central Thai, such as the latter being materialistic and keenly political. The feelings behind these stereotypes should not be under-rated. For instance, a large number of my Northern Thai informants told me they refused to attend the annual Loi Kratong festival (1972) because they knew there would be many Central Thai attending. For days after the festival, Northern Thai alluded to the reputed

hustling, seductions, and general rowdiness that the southerners introduced to the once beautiful Northern Thai ceremony. The openness that traditionally marked all Northern Thai institutions has begun to shift to a concern for boundaries and the preservation of "pure" Northern Thai cultural forms.

Not unexpectedly, therefore, within the educated Northern Thai community there has appeared a stream of books, pamphlets, and articles at the bookstores whose aim is to explain and interpret Northern Thai cultural institutions and customs to outsiders, particularly the Central Thai.

I have mentioned these inter-ethnic and regional stereotypes because my first two years in Thailand were spent to the south of Chiangmai in the central region. And during the eighteen months I spent in Chiangmai, especially during the earlier period, I was amazed at the pre-formed opinions and attitudes I had about the people I was to study. The only tangible evidence that I overcame these earlier attitudes was that at the end of my work in Chiangmai I found myself in basic agreement with the Northern Thai views and stereotypes regarding the Central Thai.

Chiangmai's sense of regional identity and cultural distinctiveness, moreover, is clearly linked to its geographical remoteness. Once north of Phitsanulok the vast rolling plains end and the gradual ascent into the wooded hills begins. Older missionary residents of Chiangmai are fond of noting that the railroad linking the north to the south was only completed at the turn of the century. And one should remember that in 1867 it



took the first missionary, Dr. McGilvary, three months going by land and riverboat to reach Chiangmai from Bangkok. It still takes sixteen hours by train or bus.

As might be expected, in the past a dutiful civil servant could only view an administrative tour that took him 450 miles north from Bangkok as a form of banishment. On the other side of the coin, Chiangmai still receives political fugitives, impudent journalists, student radicals, and errant intellectuals who appreciate the distance from Bangkok.

Chiangmai's sense of distinctiveness and self-sufficiency was reinforced by a highly productive wet-rice agricultural

regime. Although torrential floods are always a hazard in the mountainous north, an intricate and ancient system of dykes and irrigation canals have maintained Chiangmai as a vital agricultural area. These technological and environmental features have accounted for the valley's ability to underwrite a long series of socio-cultural experiments. They also explain why Chiangmai was able to remain a robust independent kingdom for over two hundred years (1296 A.D. - 1558 A.D.)

## 2.2 The Fieldwork Context

The setting for my field study was a small lower class neighborhood within the walled sector of old Chiangmai. As mentioned, I use the fictitious name "Chedi Lane" when referring to this neighborhood. By lower class, I refer to the real income of the people in Chedi Lane. Thus, following Weber I define their class situation as,

...the typical chance for a supply of goods, external living conditions, and personal life experiences, insofar as this chance is determined by the amount and kind of power, or lack of such, to dispose of goods or skills for the sake of income in a given economic order. (1971:181)

Among fifty-eight households that reported their incomes to me, the average monthly income was 1527 baht or \$74.49 u.s. (at 20.50 baht to the dollar). Sixty-four percent of these households, however, reported incomes at 1000 baht or below (\$50.00 U.S.), the lowest being 325 baht (\$15.85 U.S.). Among twenty-one cases of independent retired persons, moreover, the average monthly income was 716 baht (\$34.93 U.S.). Any family living in Chiangmai city in 1972 and making less than 1000 baht a month suffered hardships. Although I could obtain no statistics on income levels for Chiangmai city, those households in my survey that had incomes of less than 1000 baht exhibited features of what I call the lower class (small houses, few material items, low education, low-paying and low prestige jobs, etc.). Many elderly residents of Chedi Lanep therefore, with incomes of approximately 700 baht were in the lower class.

Although out of a sample of eighty-seven households, seventy five owned their own house, the value of the average house was quite modest, being in the range of from 1000 to 3000 baht (\$50.00 to \$150.00 U.S.). And in sixteen cases, although the parties owned their own house, they rented the lot it was located on. There were twelve families that rented both their house and the lot; the average monthly rent being 225 baht (\$10.97 U.S.), which by city standards was a very low monthly rent.

I have divided the households in my survey into roughly three economic levels: the lower economic level (1000 baht income or below per month); the middle level (2000 to 6000 baht per month); and the upper level (10,000 baht and above per month, or roughly \$500.00 U.S.). External living conditions, education, consumption items, and life style features correlate with these levels. Sixty-four percent of my sample, therefore, falls in the lower economic category, or lower class, if you will. There were twelve households at the middle level with combined incomes between 2000 and 6000 baht and one successful businessman, the lone upper level case, who made over 10,000 baht a month. These levels are merely included to help elucidate my survey data; and the percentages are in no sense representative of Chiangmai city, or of the area of town I studied.

The house lots in my area of town were in general small, giving the neighborhood the impression of being snug and compact with high fences and cozy lanes. Large areas to the south and west were still uninhabited, however, and vacant lots abounded.

After I was able to rent a comfortable, two-storey wooden house for 500 baht per month (\$25.00 U.S.), I began the painfully self-conscious task of trying to meet my neighbors. Although cordial, I found that most of the people were generally somewhat suspicious, and my speaking Central Thai instead of the local Northern Thai dialect did not help matters. Some persons asked me directly if I was associated with the municipal authorities or the government. My early survey questions and census work

exacerbated these concerns somewhat and various households had to be passed up and approached later after the residents had been assured no repercussions befell those who had already cooperated with me.

My assistant, a twenty-six year old woman who had previously worked with a foreign anthropologist in a village setting in Northern Thailand, also found a strong contrast between the attitudes and degree of approachability of these urban dwellers and those of the villagers she had interviewed. Eventually, however, contacts were made, trust and friendships developed, and the place began to feel like home. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that throughout my entire stay in the neighborhood I experienced a definite sense of atomism within the community. Over the months close friends and neighbors agreed there was something isolated about the pattern of household life in Chedi Lane. For example, neighbors did not frequently socialize and share in each others personal lives, and kindred rituals, in contrast to the village setting, were seldom opened up to the neighborhood.

The occupational structure of Chedi Lane also reflected the income levels and style of life. There were carpenters, sign-painters, laborers, pedicab drivers, taxi drivers, clay stove-makers, sawmill workers, tailors, mechanics, watchmen, miners, and lacquer-ware makers. A few men worked as teachers, clerks, and policemen, while women were vigorously involved in petty selling (sweets, fruits, flowers, toys, and cosmetics) in

the neighborhood, and some major selling at the Chiangmai Gate market (produce, meat, fish, curry paste). They also made dresses, uniforms, skirts and blouses, and took in wash and mended. A few worked as nurses, teachers, and clerks. Further more, in sixty-four per cent of the households on my survey either the present occupants or a relative had lived there less than twenty years. In eight per cent of the cases either they or a parent had lived in the neighborhood for over twenty years; and twenty-eight per cent could trace their residence back over thirty or forty years.

In the minds of the residents a number of obvious focal points were used to locate their neighborhood with reference to other neighborhoods within Chiangmai city. First, the neighborhood was bounded by five Buddhist temples. Often when describing where they lived, or when giving directions to a taxi driver, a local temple would be used as a marker. All residents of Chiangmai are familiar with the sacred topography of the major temples, and although there are no formal parish boundaries, the temples were used to mark off neighborhoods and sections of town. And like residents everywhere, major markets and large buildings are also used in this way.

Within the neighborhood, the choice of a temple of worship was usually governed by proximity, although the reputation of the priests was also a factor. Residents, however, were in the habit of frequenting a number of different temples on merit making occasions and so there was no concept of exclusive

membership at a particular temple, although one was usually attended more than others.

The second major node was the Chiangmai Gate market. Situated to the south, this market served as a collection and redistribution point for agricultural products coming from the southern parts of the Chiangmai valley. It also served to dispense manufactured items and non-regional produce from Chiangmai city to the towns and villages in the south valley. A counterpart of the Chiangmai Gate market was the White Elephant market across town to the north.

In my choice of a field work setting, moreover, I particularly wanted to stay within the city of Chiangmai. This decision was prompted by the knowledge that Buddhist polities like Chiangmai were traditionally organized at the center, around a king, court, and royal temple. Villages and hill settlements were outlying units, partially autonomous, but primarily satellites that orbited the main political and religious system traditionally focused on the king and dramatized in the style and symbols of court life. Chiangmai had not had a true king since 1558 A.D., however, and its last imitations of majesty ended in 1932 with the termination of Absolute Monarchy in Bangkok. Chiangmai city, moreover, had undergone an immense amount of social and commercial change since World War II. Even in the brief span of six years since my last visit to the city (1966), I was amazed at how much the outward, physical aspects of the town had changed. New buildings, signboards, and shops had sprouted up, the impression all

intensified by the hubbub and cacaphony of motorized traffic. In 1966 there was still an up-country pace and settled attitude about Chiangmai. In 1972 the tempo had been severely altered. There was a briskness at intersections, down the aisles of markets, and at the afternoon movie matinee. An impatience had replaced the settled, easy-going attitude. Moreover, within twenty-five years Chiangmai had doubled its population (from 38,211 in 1947 to 89,272 persons in 1971).

Given such changes, I could not avoid asking myself what relevance did the traditional lay-out and centralized organization of Chiangmai have? The true center of Chiangmai (a legitimate king) had been lost centuries ago. There was no royal court, and only remnants of an aristocratic class. The neighborhood of Chedi Lane, moreover, with its Hondas, radios, and televisions exhibited a massive amount of social change. Modern work, bureaucracy and commercialism had indeed affected the symbolic fabric of Northern Thai social life. The history of Chiangmai, in addition, reveals a long chain of disturbances and unrest. For example, in looking at the history of Chiangmai a not uncommon pattern of events can be discerned (Wood, 1924; LeMay, 1964). First, there was the heroic founding of the kingdom, followed by early growth and struggle, eventuating in a period of efflorescence, and then terminating in defeat, and the sounding of the death knell for Northern Thai independence. The Burmese conquered the Northern Thai in 1558 and they were succeeded by the Bangkok rulers in the late 18th century.

Beginning in 1558, therefore, Chiangmai received a series of blows that deeply affected her overall cultural and political integrity. The initial, and most deadly, blow was to lose her independence and become intermittently a vassal of the Burmese. Following upon this was more than two centuries of occupation, revolts, fighting, sacking, and at times, the complete de-population of the immediate environs of the town. The 19th century was spent mostly in repopulating and reconstructing the town under southern Thai supervision. Although Chiangmai always remained the second largest town of Thailand, up until World War II Chiangmai's progress and re-development was slow. Throughout the 20th century, moreover, we get the growth of bureaucratic structures, and the steady extension of Bangkok power and authority. World War II was a hiatus, and we still await a good study assessing the effects of the Japanese occupation on Thailand at the national and regional levels. After the War we get the beginnings of commercialization culminating in the Vietnam War boom in the 1960s. I sketch this history for one reason. Given the amazing changes and transformations which resulted in the modification of the traditional symbolic universe of Chiangmai, one question clearly emerges for this study: how do Buddhist belief and practice, which inspired the symbols and principles of old Chiangmai, affect and influence the life of the modern-day urban dweller? I maintain part of the answer lies in understanding how the Northern Thai use their beliefs and ritual



practices in adapting to the series of problems that spread across the life cycle.

## CHAPTER THREE

## PATRONS, AFFINES, AND SPIRIT CULTS

## 3.1 Introduction

From the Introduction it is apparent that the diversity of Northern Thai institutions poses special problems for the student of social organization. In effect, anthropological field investigators, working independently of one another, have presented us with a remarkable array of diverse household and family types. Thus, in the Northern Thai villages reported on so far we have encountered male-centered aristocratic compounds (Calavan, 1974); configurations of nuclear and extended families plus kindreds (Wijeyewardene, 1967; Moerman, 1969); affinal households linked to ritual matrilineal (Potter, 1975); nuclear and extended families with strong extra-domestic, community level loyalties (Kingshill, 1960); and, the previously critiqued notion of matrilineal lineages (Turton, 1972) and matriclans (Davis, 197-3). Logically, the next step in Northern Thai studies is to provide an adequate account of how, and under what conditions, these local institutional arrangements emerge as adaptive units, and what interrelations exist among these units.

A second task is to link specific features of local social organization and social process to the broader symbolic universe of religious belief and ritual action. Thus, although area specialists are unanimous in acknowledging the paramount influence of Buddhist belief and practice upon Northern Thai

society, we still lack a perspective and factual basis for assessing how the relationships between religious action and socio-economic position, religious action and sex position, and religious action and age position are constituted, and di\_lectically interpenetrate one another, in the empirical contexts of Northern Thai social life.

Therefore, the goal of this chapter is twofold. It attempts to render a preliminary framework for how we might go about organizing the diversity of Northern Thai domestic institutions, followed by an effort to establish linkages between specific domestic forms and the types of ritual systems and ideologies associated with them. Throughout my analysis, moreover, I make generalizations about one urban neighborhood in Chiangmai city; nevertheless, because of its social and economic complexity I am led to believe that it contains examples of a wide range of family and household adaptations that fairly well encompasses the major institutional arrangements that have been reported on in Northern Thailand.

The peculiar challenge of working in a complex urban setting, however, is that when we try to envision the total set of institutional arrangements plus the total architecture of the Northern Thai symbolic universe, our grasp of the facts seems more and more tenuous, the project becomes too large, and our confidence in our methodology often wavers. This reaction is considerably modulated, however, if we have access to an analytical framework that allows us to move through a wide spectrum of empirical

contexts while still being able to illuminate the conjunction between activity and thought, or institutional adaptations and ideology, among local actors. I believe this is achieved by maintaining a commitment to the methodology of the sociology of knowledge, on the one hand, and by combining this with a developmental perspective of the human life cycle, on the other.

For example, the sociology of knowledge is grounded in the proposition that as the social position and circumstances surrounding a person change, a corresponding change in his interests, perceptions, ideas, and values is to be expected.

In the words of DeGre,

Ideas and idea-structures are treated as symbolic adjustments made to the world of experience by individuals within and conditioned by social situations. The sociology of knowledge looks upon these thoughtproducts as different possible ways through which thinking beings interpret, control or attempt to know reality, and adjust their existence to the flux of phenomena in which they participate. (1943:108)

What I try to demonstrate in this chapter is that a good deal of insight can be had into Northern Thai culture and social organization if we view religious belief and ritual action as symbolic adjustments to the flux of social situations generated by the conditions of urban household life. This does not rule out the fact that these symbolic adjustments may also serve psychological needs (Spiro, 1970) and provide cognitive orientations (Tambiah, 1969). However, an emphasis upon social factors and social process and their relation to idea-structures and symbols does permit a more confident approach to two major types

of complexity I encountered in Northern Thai society: the diversity of domestic adaptive units, on the one hand, and the diversity of circumstances and ideology that define the age phases of the human life cycle, on the other. Hence, the trajectory of maturity and aging, by its nature, pulls the individual through an ever-changing series of social situations. My primary concern throughout this dissertation is to demonstrate that the Northern Thai in his attempt to interpret, control and adjust his existence to these social situations primarily relies upon ritual and religious ideology. Thus, as the social conditions change, for instance, from those of middle age to those of old age, we discover a change in belief orientation and ritual involvement. Northern Thai remain Buddhists throughout their lives, but they actively relate to different parts of the total system as they encounter different social experiences at different points in their lives. My task is to pinpoint what segment of ideas out of the totality of Buddhist doctrine and local spirit ideology becomes highlighted in individual belief at what age phase and under what specific social conditions. Such an approach is an attempt to use the diverse frames of social and ideological facts that constitute the age phases of the life cycle to establish a vantage point for comprehending adult identity change in Northern Thailand. We begin with the active phase of adult life and three brief case examples.

### 3.2 Case One: A Lower Class Woman And Her Household

Kongkeo claimed her husband drank a lot. He could often be found on the front porch in a half-stupor or napping. Because of the drinking, lack of a steady job, and continual bickering they finally separated. In 1961 he returned to his village in Saraphi district, and she was left with five children, none above the age of fifteen. She raised chickens, took in washing, mended, and made children's school uniforms to get by. Four years later, her eldest daughter married and the young groom moved into Kongkeo's modest but well-kept house. Things began to change. Her daughter learned dress-making, and her son-in-law, working as a sign painter, began adding his income to the household budget as was the custom for sons\_in-law who lived in the house of their wives' parents. The combined incomes moved them above the margin of bare subsistence. Kongkeo's two matrilineal female cousins, both married to pedicab drivers and living in the same block, began to attend ritual ceremonies to phI pu ja at Kongkeo's house. Being the oldest female relative of the little group, she was called khon kao (the central or stem person of the spirit cult).

Later, a second daughter married and the first daughter's family moved out and built a small house next door. The newlyweds moved in after the groom performed a small ceremony to the ancestor spirits officiated over by Kongkeo. This son-in-law also peddled a pedicab and his earnings, although modest, went directly to his wife, who gave them to Kongkeo. The women spent a good deal of

time together. During the afternoons, for example, one would often find one of the cousins sitting on Kongkeo's porch chatting, sometimes helping with the sewing of school uniforms.

Seven years after he left, Kongkeo's husband suddenly returned. She refused to see him and warned him not to set foot in the house. Local gossip claims she shouted him down the lane a number of times. He eventually obtained permission, however, from his daughter next door to live in her house in return for contributing to her household budget. The daughter convinced Kongkeo that although living close-by she would seldom see her estranged husband because "he worked days and slept in the evenings." Kongkeo thought it all right, but urged her daughter to make sure her father paid his own way. The daughter now claims her father, like her husband, falls under the protective influence of her spirits.

Kongkeo is therefore the main link in a chain of consanguineally related women. They each run their own household but share in ritual arrangements with some cooperation in subsistence tasks. They are the core of the domestic system. All of the men are engaged in low-paying occupations, reside uxorilocally, and donate their incomes to their wives, who control the purse. Spirit ritual is prominent and serves to highlight female ties, female solidarity, and the symbolism of female domestic authority.

### 3.3 Case Two: A Successful Male Entrepreneur

Mr. Thepchai first migrated from his village in Maetaeng to the town of Fang, then to Chiangmai city. As a novice during

his youth, he learned to read the ancient Northern Thai script (kam bolan), and later developed an interest in folk medicine and studied at Wat Nanthram temple. He claims expertise in herbal medicine, acupuncture (fang khem), magical formulas, and the meditative sciences. For the last ten years he has plied his trade back and forth from Chiangmai city to the towns of Mae Sariang and Maehongson, selling medicine and curing. He owns houses now both in Chiangmai and in Mae Sariang, and neighbors refer to him as prosperous.

Five years ago Thepchai's younger brother and sister and their families followed him to Chiangmai. With his help, they have built small houses close by. Thepchai's first wife died, but a daughter from that marriage lives next door with her husband. Thepchai's second wife often travels with him on his healing tours.

In April (1973) Thepchai interrupted his work to return to Chiangmai to perform a ritual to phI ku, the spirits of the teachers and curers from whom Thepchai has received his specialized knowledge and healing power. Thepchai's wife, daughter, and many members of his personal kindred attended the ceremony at his house. Thepchai's second wife claims she "has no ancestral spirits." His daughter, moreover, claims that since her mother's death she no longer feels close (klai chit) to the members of her mother's spirit cult.' Instead, she believes (tue) in the efficacious power of her father's phI ku. Next year (1974)



Thepchai plans to build a larger house in Chiangmai, and he has taken on an apprentice--assistant who wants to learn the techniques of herbal medicine.

Thepchai is the center of a small but impressive social universe. He activates and sustains both a kindred and a domestic ritual cult that is distinct from the matri-phrased varieties more usually found in Chedi Lanef. As he continues to prosper, his kinship links, networks, and burgeoning client ships will condition him toward a classic pattern of male centered authority.

#### 3.4 Case Three: A Husband and Wife Team

My next door neighbor, Mr. Suthep, retired from his post at the prison and received a substantial pension (50,000 baht or \$2,500 U.S.) in one lump sum. Both he and his wife inherited modest pieces of residential property which they rent out; and their two eldest daughters, one a twenty-five year old teacher, the other a twenty-two year old secretary, are both unmarried and contribute to the household budget. Throughout their married life, moreover, Duean, Suthep's wife, has run a small store and snack shop which supplemented Suthep's income, and now Suthep himself spends a good deal of time tending the shop. Suthep and his wife are very close and view each other as equals and confidants. Their household, which I refer to frequently throughout the dissertation, is a cooperative venture.

These three case examples represent the three major types of domestic arrangements found in Chedi Lane. With Thepchai,

the traditional healer, we get a glimpse of the dominant male and the male-centered social world and ideology of expectations he was establishing. Thepchai's success as an herbalist and medical entrepreneur underwrote a domestic experiment that placed him at the center of a circle of relatives, friends, clients and associates. Part of his kindred formed around him in dependent roles, and the spirits of the women associated with him were played down or relinquished. As we shall see, such a configuration is most clearly exemplified in modern day Chiangmai in the role of the P9 liang, or patron, and the male oriented Buddhist model of the "six directions," to be explained subsequently.

With Kongkeo and her drunken husband we encounter the matri-phrased ritual cult (phI puja) under the conditions of poverty and male ineffectiveness. Kongkeo's husband could not hold a steady job, and the husbands of her female relatives were all in low-paying occupations. The women of these households by sewing school uniforms, raising chickens and selling small commodities were placed at the center of their respective subsistence units. In the absence of economically effective males, female genealogical links and ritual activities came into distinct prominence.

The third domestic form was that of the retired prison employee, Suthep, and his busy wife, Duean, who as husband and wife were near parity in their socio-economic effectiveness. The Northern Thai ideology of male dominance held sway but it was

greatly tempered and played down. Duean maintained her links to other female ritual cult members, however, the style of spirit worship was low-keyed and lacking in intensity. With Suthep and Duean the contest between male and female was played down, while, interestingly enough, rivalry with other household units in the neighborhood was played up. These considerations lead to a preliminary formulation.

### 1.5 Chedi Lane Social Organization

I suggest that Northern Thai domestic relations, especially those between the sexes, may hold the key to understanding local social organization and the diversity of ritual forms found in Chedi Lane. As a field worker I eventually discovered that the major task in studying any particular household was to determine if the relationships activated within the household, and between it and other social units, were skewed with reference to a male centered configuration, or female ritual cult, or neither--as in the affinal household of Suthep" and Duean. Determining subsistence practices and income levels was a helpful first step.

For instance, the prominence of the matri-phrased spirit cult groups in Chedi Lane was primarily due to the occupational structure and socio-economic level of the neighborhood. As mentioned previously, men on my survey worked as laborers, carriers, pedicab drivers, mechanics, watchmen, etc. There were only a scattered few policemen, teachers, and clerks. Most of these jobs were low on the payscale, intermittent, and many

involved travel. Women, therefore, had to supplement the domestic purse, and in cases of male absenteeism or desertion, they often became the main providers.

In Northern Thailand, selling is a primary female occupation. A boy who likes to sell things, for instance, is chided for being a potential katoe, or transvestite. Women manned all the tiny stands and shops in the neighborhood as well as the grand tables and stalls at the bustling Chiangmai Gate market. With the exception of the Chinese-operated commercial store and various specialized items, women monopolized most niches of retail selling.

Home industries were also important female specialties. Flowers prized for their fragrance were grown in small plots around the house and sold by young girls on the street. Delicious candies and puddings of every texture and taste were made in large tubs, put up as cup-cakes, or cooled in flat pans, sliced, and sold at the market or in front of the house. The banana with its numerous varieties in Southeast Asia was dried, fried, baked, or pulverized into ice cream and popsicles. Newspapers and old school examinations were collected, clipped, pasted, and re-cycled as paperbags. Dresses, blouses, skirts, and pants were made, and ceaselessly mended.

The women of Chedi Lane often hired out as part-time and full-time domestic help. Their hands were rough and strong from washing, ironing, cleaning, and scrubbing. In short, women were highly visible in Chedi Lane in and out of the house.

Generally speaking, they were equals with men in basic subsistence, when not in fact the mainstays of the domestic enterprise. Because of their hard work, sense of equality, and overall activities, the women of Chedi Lane were more impressive than the men. They also verbalized the tension between themselves and men, and I have used these cliches and attitudes to organize my analysis of the Northern Thai household. Admittedly, there are biases in these lower class data; however, as with Benedict's kite-flying analysis and other cultural materials we will examine, male and female do symbolize active social oppositions in the eyes of the Northern Thai at various levels of socio-economic functioning. Let us investigate in more detail how the matri-phrased spirit cult operated within the lives of the women and men of this complex neighborhood.

Of the three named varieties of such cults in Chiangmai city--phI puja (ancestral spirits of a set of matrilineally related women) phI mot (matri-phrased spirits of the nantsn2) and phI meng (ancestral spirits of the Mon peoples)--Chedi Lane contained a large number of discrete phI puja cults and one relatively large phI mot cult.

As previously described, the phI puja cult is constituted by a consanguineal core of postpartum women who perceive themselves as descendants of the same ancestral spirits. These female consanguineal relationships may or may not be activated to form a line of females who share ritual obligations to the

ancestor spirits. Two important factors contribute to the activation of any particular line of females and the formation of a spirit cult. These are the post-nuptial residence rule and the inheritance system, operating in combination.

For example, various students of Northern Thailand have reported an uxori-local or matrilo-cal residence practice (de Young, 1955; Wijeyewardene, 1967; Turton, 1972; Davis, 1973; Potter, 1975). It is usually stated in terms of the husband's behavior, i.e., he goes to live with his wife's parents, either in or near their house. In reviewing my urban data, however, I found it more profitable to phrase the residence rule in negative terms (where women should not live) rather than positive terms (where men or the new couple should live). It was also illuminating to think in terms of spirits and where they should be located vis-\_-vis other spirits rather than merely observe humans. For example, the main injunction among my informants was to protect the integrity of the ancestral fertility spirits of married, consanguineally related women. This meant that two married women from different spirit cults should not live under the same roof, nor ideally in the same compound. Consanguineal clusters of married women and their shared ancestral spirits were ideally to be kept together and spatially separated from other such clusters. Spirit-spacing, as the underlying principle of the Northern Thai residential system, was achieved by having men move upon marriage and woman stay put. And this was made practicable by the traditional inheritance system.

For instance, although inheritance is bilateral in Northern Thailand (except the parent's house and residential plot which the youngest daughter usually inherits), male offspring are traditionally expected to sell their rights in their parent's estate to their sisters and brothers-in-law (Potter, 1975:23). They in turn expect to receive land through their wife's inheritance, or from their wife's parents, or by buying from their out-marrying wife's brothers. As Potter (1975:37) has noted, this establishes the father-in-law/son in-law relationship as the axis of hierarchical male statuses in the household and compound, and the line through which domestic authority passes. At this level male affines are related to one another via women, and the latter garner an important structural and mediating role in the domestic enterprise.

We should note, however, that establishing a series of female-linked households or active spirit cult group relies heavily on the operation of both the spirit-spacing principle (women staying put after marriage) and the inheritance decisions of out-marrying consanguineal males. It is instructive to observe what happens to the matri-phrased spirit cult when one or both of the latter subsystems are altered. I illustrate with an example from Chedi Lane.

In Diagram One, Mrs. Kam (1), Mr. Urn (2), and Mr. Tao (3) inherited a good-size compound tract from their mother, Mrs. Tip. The usual practice would have been for the (4).

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Households At Band C are located on the same fenced compound.



brothers, (2) and (3), to sell their portion to Kam (1) and her in-marrying husband (5). However, both brothers despaired of trying to find wives who had holdings which they could buy into comparable to their own inheritance. Consequently, neither of them sold their inherited portions or moved off the compound at the time of marriage. Instead, they had their wives move in and reside virilocally. The spirit spacing principle was therefore violated or bypassed. Here we have an economic consideration (protecting one's inheritance) affecting the residence choice of consanguineal males. This decision in turn affected the performance of female spirit ritual. The following configuration resulted.

Tao's wife, Can (6), now deceased, was very active in her spirit cult although all rituals were held at the house of Phimphan, her older sister (8) who lived in another neighborhood. Can did, however, keep flowers and joss-sticks for her spirits in her own house. Ph9n (7), another in-marrying female, was not active in her own spirit cult, but assisted Kam (1), her sister-in-law, with her spirit cult. The latter (1) had received the spirits of her mother, Mrs. Tip (4), along with her house and the status of kao phi, or senior officiating female cult member. Kam (1) is a very mild natured woman, however, and she claims she was never very close to Can (6), her deceased sister-in-law who remained active in her own cult.

Both brothers claimed that men are not involved with spirits (phu chai mai kiaw phi) and that spirits are primarily women's business (pen rueang khQng phuyIng).

The ideal residence system, therefore, had been interrupted by the inheritance decisions of the two brothers. In this example, only Kam (1) acted in a traditional fashion by keeping her mother's spirit cult intact and having her husband marry in and inherit his authority affinally from his father-in-law. As mentioned, the brothers did not move out and their in-marrying wives presented a potential conflict over maintaining proper spacing among ancestral spirits and their matrilineally related clusters of women. Avoidance patterns were established in two ways.

Ph9n (7) relinquished her ties to her own spirit cult and participated, in a secondary fashion, in the cult of her resident sister-in-law. No mention was made of her "buying into" her sister's cult as Turton has described (1972). The other sister-in-law, Can (6), while alive, remained active in her own cult yet never held propitiations in her own house, but always at her sister's house across town.

Therefore, in this configuration women are related to one another via males, and household authority was inherited from father to son in two cases, and from father-in-law to son-in-law in only one case. The spirit cult affiliations of women revealed respect for spirit-spacing and considerable flexibility, while a piece of residential property was at the heart of the domestic arrangement, strongly influencing decision making. A clear line of genealogically-linked females did not emerge in the compound although spirit ritual did persist in a modified form.

This type of complex arrangement and series of negotiations is not at all uncommon in Chedi Lane. It reveals that the matri-phrased spirit cult is a subsystem that does indeed supply input into the social organization of the family and household. However, very definitely the spirit cult matriline is strongly influenced by other subsystems. Any particular surface outcome, therefore, is a result of the decisions and multiple factors that interconnect the subsystems of ritual cult, residence, and inheritance. I believe it is unrealistic to argue abstractly the prepotent influence of one subsystem over the others, as Davis (1973) generally does for the uxori local residence rule, and Potter (1975) does for the spirit cult matriline.

Therefore, within the urban setting because the matri-phrased spirit cult showed remarkable flexibility and sensitivity to various situational factors, it was virtually impossible to identify fixed membership criteria or inflexible rules of succession and fission. The main difference between my urban data and that of Turton (1972), Davis (1973; 1974), and Potter (1975) revolves upon the voluntary nature of the spirit cult with regard to affiliation, residence, and participation. The spirit cult also served, in its ritual dimension, important communicative functions between males and females.

For instance, in Chedi Lane, belonging to a spirit cult could be expressed in two ways: in the statement phi dIaw kan (of the same spirit) 1 and tue phi puja. The latter statement was most often used. Tue means to believe in, to respect, to

hold in high esteem and celebrate (McFarland, 1969:389).

Thus, tue phI puja means to believe in, respect, and observe the rituals for the domestic ancestor spirits. In Northern Thai, however, the verb tue carries the meaning of choice or voluntariness. One can, for example, tue the domestic spirits, or the spirits of one's teachers, or anyone of many mighty protective spirits (phI ahak). The point I wish to make is that belief and spirit worship cannot be divorced from the motivation, calculations, and social situation of the believer.

For example, Northern Thai pay respect to a number of spirits at different levels of influence. They also frequently change their affiliations with particular spirits. The matri-phrased spirit cult is somewhat more sharply delineated because of its association with female genealogical links and the uxorilocal residence rule. Nevertheless, it too should be perceived within the broader voluntary system of spirit belief and worship. This might be more easily achieved by considering the relationship of the ancestor spirit cult to the male centered household system.

For example, the three subsystems previously outlined (the shallow matri-phrased ritual cult, the inheritance custom, and the residence or spirit-spacing rule) all tend in the direction of breaking down the community into discrete clusters of female-linked households. Each cluster has distinct ancestor spirits guarding fertility, sexual conduct, and health, especially that of children and women of child-bearing age.

Therefore, one major outcome of the phi puja cult is to create atomistic clusters of households. There are, of course, higher level spirits (suea ban), but they operate to distinguish boundaries of neighborhoods and villages. And so with the kingdom level spirits (suea rnueang), which primarily function to establish geo-political regions of princely influence. In this view, spirits and their jurisdictions (people and land) exemplify divisions, the pull of locality, and social atomism. Much of what I have said about spirit belief has been suggested in the works of Mendelson and Shorto.

My aim is to apply the notion of overcoming individuation and division in the spirit-spaced social world to the present treatment of the politics of domestic organization in Chedi Lane. For example, if the matri-phrased spirit cult tends in the direction of atomism and discrete household clusters, it is not surprising to find the social correlates of Buddhist symbols and meanings tending in the direction of social integration and the unification of divisions and oppositions. The Buddhist piety felt in the unified village of Ku Daeng in 1953 (Kingshill, 1960) as opposed to the atomistic configuration of discrete spirit-spaced compounds in 1972 (Potter, 1975) was our first look at how such forces operate, in this case in an historical perspective. However, we can also see these two principles at work in the negotiations between males and females in neighborhoods such as Chedi Lane. Take, for instance, the case of Prathan, one of the wealthiest men in Chedi Lane.

Prathan was born in a village in Sanpat9ng district. His father held the position of village headman for many years and is now the esteemed abbot at the local village temple. Prathan is of medium height, slim, and very intense. He excelled at school and his father was able to scrape together enough money to send him to study at Prince Royal's College secondary school in Chiangmai city. He was studious but impatient. He admits he was probably lucky to graduate at all.

After completing his school work, he made a long and eventful trip to Bangkok. World War II had just ended and Bangkok was in turmoil and excitement. Prathan had many jobs: printer's assistant, bus boy, nightwatchman, and part-time tutor. His main preoccupation was to watch and observe. He became convinced that strong, active men who seized the situation, made decisions, and stuck to them were the ones who succeeded. Many personalities passed under his scrutiny during those days and few significant details were missed. He returned to Northern Thailand with confidence, plans, and a bursting desire to get ahead.

At this point in his life, prathan claims he never drank, gambled, or chased women. There was no time. His days were long and busy. He devoted most of his time to managing a small family farm with land given him by his father. However, he also bought, stored, and sold rice, lent money, taught school, experimented with gardens, and made local rice-brew. He was

ambitious and made enemies. He admits it was only because of his father's prestige and intervention that someone did not shoot him during those days. He became accustomed to carrying a .38 caliber Smith and Wesson pistol--a habit, he claims, he only broke a few years ago.

In the 1960's his luck changed. Mr. A, one of the wealthiest men in Northern Thailand, took notice of Prathan during an elaborate business transaction involving many parties. After this encounter, prathan's network of friends and contacts greatly expanded. He began buying and selling garlic and purchasing and renting land for growing lamyai (longan) fruit trees. He became a client of Mr. A's and a patron for many men beneath himself. Contacts with old school mates from Prince Royal's College served him well in the city, and he eventually bought a house there in 1965. A car accident crushed his right hand, but he refused to see a doctor for fear the hand would be amputated. To this day he proudly ends the story of his accident by waving the frozen fingers of his right hand saying, "See, they're still there."

Moreover, between 1948 and 1960 he had three successive wives. As he states, he couldn't get along with them so it ended. He has lived with his fourth wife for over ten years. They have three children. prathan's circle of friends and associates gradually expanded to include government officials, police, businessmen, shopowners, school officials, and the monastic community. With this came a change in the quality of

his social relationships. Streams of people from the village and the city now enter his compound asking for aid, advice, mediation, and adversary support. He lends money, gets village lads into city schools, builds houses, puts men to work, pays doctor's bills, and gets people out of jail. However, one dominant feature of Prathan's compound is the almost total absence of spirit ritual and the heavy emphasis upon Buddhist piety, respect for Buddhist learning, and participation in Buddhist ritual, particularly the sponsoring of novice ordinations. Now, most persons refer to Prathan as nai (meaning, sir, or aristocrat in the earlier feudal days) or P9 (father) or P9 IIang (father who supports). He is well known, respected, and has begun to moderate his active pace somewhat. Rumor also has it he has established a minor wife (mia n9i) on another compound.

In Northern Thailand, males such as Prathan who have succeeded in a particular competitive arena (trade, skill services, local manufacturing, fruit gardening, business, professions, bureaucracy) tend to portray themselves in ways that adapt aspects of traditional social ideology to the conditions of the modern city. These include: the construction of a large house in a spacious compound; the recruitment of dependent individuals and families as resident domestic labor; the practice of dispersed polygyny with minor wives, or mia n9i, domiciled in other places; the sponsoring of ordinations for junior generation males, or the P9 9k/luk kaeo system, a



traditional device for creating enduring patron-client dyads; the private support and patronage of local monks and magico religious specialists (see Keyes, 1971); and finally the careful maintenance of networks and brokerage relations that extended above to key persons of influence and power, and below to a broad base of lower class clients, employees, and associates.

In the Northern Thai language, powerful men who become the patrons of a number of subordinate persons are called P9 liang. I observed that such men usually strove to recapitulate as many as possible of the social features and emblems previously mentioned. The emergence and eventual wide-spread significance of the P9 liang role in Northern Thai domestic and political economy, furthermore, can only be properly understood when seen as an outgrowth of the social changes and legal reforms that altered the jural bases of the traditional feudal order in the early years of the 20th century.

In brief, the socio-legal (Calavan, 1974), administrative and religious changes (Keyes, 1971) that attended the early decades of the 20th century in Northern Thailand particularly affected the traditional feudal modes of allocating labor, land, and wealth throughout society. The P9 liang was a response to these changes, representing a mobility role model for non-aristocratic males as they adjusted to newly emerging opportunity structure. I focus on this role because it provides a special blend of traditional social ideas

and values along with modern adaptive techniques (e.g., the use of networks based on market and bureaucratic relationships as opposed to estate categories, the manipulation of kindreds to serve mobility goals, etc.). It is indeed a link between feudal institutions and symbols, on the one hand, and the modern exigencies of a bureaucratic capitalist setting on the other.

As we can see, male identity in Northern Thailand is closely associated with center-oriented symbolism. Thus, from the male's point of view when he marries he begins to construct a social world around himself, viewing his wife and children as subordinate to himself. At the middle economic level the male identity quest usually stops here and does not extend to trying to obtain more than one wife, although an uxori-locally residing daughter and her family from the father's point of view, does extend his circle of social influence. At higher economic levels, among men such as Prathan, the male identity quest often leads to attempts to acquire control over more than one line of females. This is the male power idiom at the heart of polygyny and a better perspective, incidentally, for assessing the political significance of the traditional royal harem. However, as in the case of Prathan, women and their children are only one means, although a culturally indispensable one, for defining a male ego as central. Clients, junior kin, and all the various subordinates in an entourage perform similar social and symbolic functions.

The main point is that during active adulthood the male identity quest, and the male-centered ideology of Buddhism, proceed in the direction of social enterprises that draw discrete categories of persons into higher integrations. The challenge facing the male in his identity quest is to arrange his intimate social world so that he is defined as the center of the enterprise. The higher up in the socio-political order we climb the more powerful and elaborate are the configurations of persons and symbols that integrate around particular male egos, culminating, in this Hindu-Buddhist part of the world, in the institution of kingship.

At the domestic level, however, the male, in order to hold his central position, must contend, first of all, with female power. In effect, the Northern Thai male must subordinate his wife to himself and control the procreative power she possesses, which is symbolically associated with her ancestral spirits. The outcome of this challenge is problematical. For example, males can never achieve household authority by raw force. Stable authority is only obtained by negotiating women and their spirit-governed fertility powers into subordinate, cooperative positions (recall Benedict's kite-flying image). The male does this by invoking the integrating canopy of Buddhist symbols and male-oriented ideology. As we saw with Prathan, male-centered compounds are invariably Buddhist in ethos and ritual action. Thus, successful men use Buddhist symbols and ideology at this stage of their lives to communicate to their women, family and associates that the hierarchy they

are maintaining in their immediate social world is grounded and legitimated by the vast design of the Buddhist universe. Buddhist ideology and ritual, in contrast to the atomized matri-phased cult, links the individual household to the broader realm of neighborhood, village, and the intra-societal units that integrate at the regional and kingdom levels of society. In the next chapter we will trace out how these hierarchical structures of Northern Thai society are realized in ritual action.

In the preceding analysis I have viewed Buddhist ideology and ritual as a symbolic adjustment that emerges especially among successful males and the immediate social world they attempt to maintain around themselves. Again, I do not deny the other important functions that Buddhist ideology serves, such as the affective and cognitive ones that other scholars have emphasized in their research. What I am interested in pursuing is how certain idea-structures become pinned to certain social configurations, and how ideas, in this case religious, are conditioned by and in turn influence the social contexts in which they occur.

It is revealing, moreover, to observe those instances in which males are not able to obtain full control of their households, or those in which males capitulate entirely to female authority, and the types of symbolic adjustments that occur.

It is important, moreover, to observe those instances in which males are not able to obtain full control of their own households, or those in which males capitulate entirely to female authority, and the types of symbolic adjustments that occur.

As Potter has shown, most men at middle economic levels marry into households as sons-in-law and therefore must wait a number of years before taking over authority from their fathers-in-law. However, the relations between husband and wife in the middle level domestic arrangement are also distinct from the type of dominance that successful males maintain. In the middle level households the subsistence allocations of the wife usually operated on a par with, and were complementary to, the male's enterprise. This greatly altered the quality of the relationship between the sexes. Such households, moreover, were common in Chedi Lane and extremely durable because they were able to tap both male advantages in the broader socio-political realm, and the wife's advantages in the local world of the matri-phrased cult group, neighborhood selling networks, and the matrilaterally skewed kindred. Households of this type were also observed to be somewhat preoccupied with mobility aspirations.

For example, in order to conduct savings and investment schemes, the need to abridge many obligations within the overlapping kindreds of the husband and wife was necessary. A case in point, my next door neighbor, Suthep, the retired prison

employee. One afternoon Suthep was joined by his nephew who had once been quite close to his uncle. They sat and chatted and the nephew recalled stories and events that evoked the warmth and intimacy they once shared. Uncle Suthep then began talking about the upcoming ritual that his wife was having, the problems of being retired, concerns about his daughters, and his advancing age. The nephew eventually asked for a loan of one thousand baht. Suthep complained of the various requests he has had for money recently, and the troublesome ritual expenses of his wife. He finally gave his nephew a much smaller amount than requested.

In a similar manner, burdensome requests from the wife's kin are often denied on the grounds that the husband's dominant commitments to kin, friends, clients, and associates preclude the possibility of providing help to her side of the family. Any deep antagonisms within the shallow spirit cult which results from such refusals are ultimately resolved by an easily invoked principle of fission.

Usually the female ritual cult at this middle economic level was composed of only households capable of reciprocating, often possessing similar size inherited estates, and sharing the same mobility ambitions. Husbands in such households disavowed much of the male-centered ideology mainly because in the early phase of their marriage they had been under the authority of their fathers-in-law. Later on, moreover, the male-centered symbols were played down for fear they would

invite untimely pressure and requests from kin, friends and clients. In these households the marriage bond was firm and stable, and the father-in-law to son-in-law relationship was the axis of male authority as Potter (1975) has pointed out. I therefore prefer to call these "affinal households" (Gonzalez, 1969:4) because husband-wife, primarily, and father-in-law/son-in-law, secondarily, were the most significant relationships.

In this middle range household, husband and wife cooperated and conspired to advance their household's position within the community. They were mobility-oriented and viewed their household and family as being somewhat in competition with others in the neighborhood. These latter often included kin as commonly as non-kin. The crucial genealogical links among females and the uxorilocal rule and customary inheritance practices made the structural position of women important. However, males in such households are hardworking and responsible as husbands and fathers which led to a delicate interplay among the elements of male-female authority. The affinal household that I discuss is simply the urban version of Potter's "conceptually female-centered" family system. In this type of household there is little skewing toward a male or female configuration and conjugal relations come closest to being truly egalitarian. The ritual life of such households reflects this.

For instance, women in such households activate their links with matrilineally related women and perform rituals to phI puja (ancestors). However, their ritual performances are modest and played-down in comparison to the rituals of women like Kongkeo (Case One). The menfolk, on the other hand, prescribe to a moderate interest in Buddhism and may have a religious book or two on the verandah shelf near the Buddha image or picture. As mentioned, however, men at this level do not invoke and manipulate the male-oriented Buddhist symbols and ideology like their more successful male counterparts. Buddhist piety has a place in the middle level household, but it is unostentatious and subdued in its ritual expression. Thus, at this socio-economic level a fine balance between the two domains of male and female influence, power, and authority is maintained, and reflected in the idea-structures of moderate Buddhist piety and moderate spirit ritual.

In contrast to the above social configuration many males in the lower class households of Chedi Lane marry into families that lack a male head, and being poor themselves could not muster the means to assume control of their wife's household. Such lower class households are distinguished by the presence of authoritative women. The earlier description of Kongkeo and her drunken husband and the female matriline she established is a suitable example of the type of enterprise I am addressing.

In this third type of household the male head is economically ineffective and either frequently or permanently absent.



This created two responses within my survey. One, the formation of atomistic, matrifocal households constituted by mother-child links with tenuous exchanges among neighbors and the mother's dispersed kindred. Second, women genealogically linked via the matri-phrased rule would form a ritual coalition of households. I repeat, however, that each individual household performed its domestic functions separately, and only cooperated over small loans of money, tending children, caring for and visiting the sick, emotional support, and occasional joint homecraft and selling ventures. The dominant function was ritual. On the other hand, once emergent this expression of the matri-phrased spirit cult revealed various social possibilities.

For example, as mentioned, the spirit cult served as the focus for a kindred, substantial segments of which were kept continually activated by the frequent occurrence of rituals and the anticipation and continuous planning of rituals. Centered on a core of female-managed and female-linked households, the circle of kin that radiated outwards contained households often dispersed throughout greater Northern Thailand. In contrast, many lower class males mainly because of job pressures and the uxori-local residence practice were seldom the focus of a vigorous personal kindred.

Moreover, the key female household heads in such a strengthened cult monopolized domestic income through selling, home industries, and services as previously described. Under

such conditions, female links and female solidarity predominated. I also recorded a sardonic, denigrative ideology among these women directed against males generally, and the husband-father role specifically.<sup>4</sup> In its simplest form these women called down the males in their immediate social world for not living up to their obligations as husbands and fathers. Related to their cynical attitudes towards males and their bristling independence was the great emphasis placed upon spirit ritual. In these cases I am sure I am close to the facts in claiming that women are using spirit ritual as a form of normative communication to express and legitimate female authority in their households, while simultaneously publicly chiding and humiliating the males in their midst for having failed to live up to their expectations as husbands and fathers. Thus, whether the matri-phrased links among women are activated or not, and if so, to what degree they inform intra-household relations depends on other factors, especially those stemming from male economic activities.

### 3.6 Conclusion

My approach to Northern Thai social organization can now be stated in a more succinct manner. First of all, three distinct domestic configurations and associated ritual systems were identified in Chedi Lane. The large compound of prathan was male-dominated and canopied by center-oriented Buddhist symbols. Although prathan's compound was the only one of its kind in the lower class neighborhood of Chedi Lane, it did serve

as a good example of how a successful Northern Thai male attempts to establish and present himself to local society. At the middle economic level my next door neighbors cooperated in an arrangement in which both husband and wife contributed equally to the subsistence project, and ritual expression remained balanced between Buddhist symbols and spirit propitiation. A third type of configuration featured female dominance with significant males either absent or grossly ineffective as providers. Spirit ritual legitimated female control and expressed the prominence of the female matriline in the absence of any capable male personalities and symbolism.

These three configurations reveal that domestic institutional arrangements vary in structure at different levels of socio-economic adaptation. At these different levels, moreover, authority and dominance between husband and wife undergo important modifications which become reflected in the different ideas, symbols, and forms of ritual expression. Thus, at the heart of Northern Thai domestic organization there exists a basic tension between the sexes. Northern Thai males, in this traditional Theravada Buddhist setting, are presented with a clearly formulated identity project, or quest, expressed in the "six directions" model.<sup>5</sup> To observe males competing at higher and higher levels of socio-economic effectiveness is to observe the particular configurations of persons and symbols that males draw upon to integrate themselves at ever deeper levels of centrality. The more persons surrounding the Northern

Thai male and dependent upon him, the more complete and center-oriented is his identity. It is in the practical project of the male identity quest that we find the integrative principle of Buddhism confronting the atomistic tendencies of female spirit worship. The male quest for centrality begins in the humble neighborhoods and remote villages, proceeds through ever larger and more powerful entourages, and culminates in the quintessence of maleness, power, and centeredness, the Buddhist king.

The symbolic means used by males to legitimate their identity project and immediate social situation find their locus in Buddhist values and meanings. From the sociological perspective, therefore, we observe males in active secular adulthood relating to Buddhist doctrine through channels of social circumstance. Buddhist values and meanings are invoked to enable males to adjust to and maintain the social situations in which they find themselves. The more powerful they become the more necessary it is to organize the diversity of persons and social categories in their midst along lines of subordination. These efforts by males affect wives, children, and kin, as much as non-kin, clients and political categories of persons.

The individual male, however, is not alone in his identity quest, but faces external competition in the form of other males, and internal opposition in the form of significant females. Indeed, the female identity quest has historically received its impulse and design as a countervailing force to the male quest

and the latter's shields of Buddhist symbolism and legitimations. Female identity is closely associated with fertility, maternity (Hanks, 1963), and the maintenance of durable domestic enterprises. As we have seen, spirit ritual is the paramount media of the female domain and the means whereby women work out their identity quest as they contend with significant males and local circumstances. Spirit ritual is the female complement to the Buddhist paraphernalia of the male and represents the language women adopt for organizing and solidifying their activities and expressing their prerogatives in a culturally coherent fashion. At the lower economic levels, spirit ritual signals the critical fact that significant males are failing in their responsibilities as husbands and fathers, and full female authority must now be introduced to salvage the domestic enterprises.

I am suggesting, therefore, that at one level the matri-phrased spirit cult is best viewed as an adaptive response to a special set of conditions, primary among which is the absence of an effective male ego. Indeed, it was clearly observed in my sample that the more prominent the matri-phrased ritual cult, the less prominent was the role of male household head, and conversely. It is accurate I believe from a system's point of view to perceive robust female spirit ritual as a crisis signal that the domestic enterprise is on the threshold of collapse, and that women need to take over the ineffective males in their midst. The result is an atomistic cluster of

households, dominated by a ritual matriline, featuring women in key positions of authority. Therefore, the forms of ritual action in both the male-centered compound and the female centered ritual matriline share a similar function: they are symbolic statements that provide public readings on the state of affairs between the sexes in the respective household.

In my analysis I have had to create an alignment between males and Buddhist symbolism, on the one hand, and females and spirit symbolism, on the other. Such a proposition appears in neither of the two major anthropological works on Theravada Buddhism--Spiro (1970) and Tambiah (1969). Spiro is primarily concerned with showing the importance of psychological press for comprehending which segments of Buddhist doctrine become actively instituted into local belief. In the process he plays down sex, age and social differences, and plays up common human psychological needs and their constraining effect on local religious belief. Tambiah is concerned to do away with the clumsy image of Buddhism and spirit belief as being layered one upon the other as the outcome of some analytically sterile historical process. He sets himself the task of determining the underlying unity of Buddhist and animist elements within a cognitive structural framework that claims to mirror local belief. One author perceives Buddhism as being fragmented at the ideological level into two or three Buddhisms (Spiro, 1970), but unified at the level of the individual because of the press of universal human psychological functions. The other magnifies

the structural inter-relations and unity of the total system of doctrine, myth and ritual, but leaves us with only a macro view of village society and religious action. My analysis begins with the micro-analysis of the social situations in which men and women in active adulthood find themselves, and attempts to trace corollaries between these situations and types of belief and ritual action that become activated. In the process I have had to picture religious belief and ritual action in their functions as symbolic adjustments and forms of legitimation that actors manipulate. When viewed as serving communicative functions, belief and ritual can be seen as adapted to oppositions and tensions that emerge between the sexes in the context of the dynamics of household life. Whereas at the macro-level, I would agree with Tambiah and assert that spirit worship is not opposed to Buddhism, at the micro-level of male-female interaction and household dynamics I would assert, however, that on occasion female spirit ritual especially at lower economic levels is anti-male. Thus, as we have seen, women in their attempts to adjust their existence to the conditions of poverty and male ineffectiveness utilize spirit ritual as a form of symbolic communication. At this level, female spirit ritual is in opposition to Buddhist symbols, not because of the Buddhist content per se, but because of the way males wield Buddhist symbols and ideas to justify their dominance of domestic enterprises. At the lower economic levels, however, the male-oriented Buddhist ideology does not mesh with the fact

of male ineffectiveness, and women respond to this incongruity by substituting for the integrative symbols of the male quest the household-bound symbolism of spirit worship.

In the introduction to this chapter, however, it was mentioned that besides the diversity in domestic arrangements stemming from socio-economic factors another source of complexity derived from the social and ideological factors that define the age phases of the life cycle. In the next chapter I turn to these considerations.



## Footnotes

1As a folk medical practitioner, Thepchai is somewhat unique in his role as ritual officiant of a set of domestic spirits. Most successful males, in contrast, leave the domain of domestic spirit ritual to their wives. He does, however, illustrate well the patri-centric forces that effective males engender. He was also called P9 lIang, a term which apparently has customary associations with traditional doctors as well as meaning "patron" in a more general sense.

2The only background information I obtained on the phi

mot came from an old woman who said either the Burmese or the Shan sold them to the Northern Thai.

3Moerman (1966a) has provided a description of how this system operates within the context of village social structure. His exposition is basically applicable to the urban setting with a few modifications. These I will discuss in Chapter Four. Also see Kingshill, 1960.

4Lower class females in my survey would discuss male

temperament and character usually in negative terms and often with stinging cliches. Marjorie Muecke (personal communication) made a similar observation in another neighborhood in Chiangmai. Males, on the other hand, were somewhat indifferent about female characterology, and if anything, indulged in global remarks about their general inferiority to males.

5I first heard of the six direction model by listening to a monk describe the six axes of the householder's social world over a Lamphun radio broadcast received in Chiangmai city (1973). Later, the model was pointed out to me in the religious manual, Nawakowat, a book provided me by a resident of Chedi Lane. The model consists of six lines radiating out from the man to his teachers, parents, family, friends, etc. Each line therefore represents a set of rights and duties the male shares with significant others, both superiors and inferiors.

## CHAPTER FOUR

ACTIVE ADULTHOOD AND THE  
SYMBOLISM OF SEX ROLES

In the last chapter my aim was to provide a synchronic picture of the types of domestic organizations found in Chedi Lane. The negotiations between husbands and wives were analyzed under a political idiom that had tendencies in three general directions: the male-centered compound, the female centered ritual matriline, and the balanced affinal household. Associated with each of these arrangements were distinct types of ritual and ideology.

In the present chapter I attempt to provide a deeper analysis of Northern Thai sexual symbolism and relate it to the identity quests of males and females viewed from a development;perspective. The chapter begins with a normative description of sexual symbolism, followed by a discussion of the social relations between the sexes in a lower class neighborhood. However, this time the aim is to throw light on how inter-sexual relations change during two pre-elderly adult age phases, and thereby condition modifications of the normative symbolism.

## 4.1 Male-Female Symbolism: The Normative System

In the historical elaboration of Northern Thai culture, the symbols, male and female, have come to represent the powerful uivisive tensions that define all sensate life, on the one hand, and the potent unities these antagonistic forces participate in for temporary spans of time.

A simple recipe can help us begin to circumscribe the core meanings and nuances that imbue the reciprocal concepts of male and female. Female is fertility; fertility is inherently fragile; and fragility is ultimately protected by enclosing, binding, isolating, keeping within, inside, not allowing to roam.

Earth, rice, and fish all have specific goddesses in Northern Thailand: Nang Thoranee, Mae Kosok, and Lady Thokthang, respectively. Nang Thoranee and Mae Kosok are central figures in two separate ritual configurations. Nang Thoranee by representing earth and the watery possibilities supporting its fertility achieves cosmic status in the key symbol of thao tang s1. The ritual configuration surrounding Mae Kosok (the Rice goddess) is highly illuminating for what it reveals about female symbolism and the problematic nature of fertility.

Both Sanguan (1969a) and Richard Davis (1973) have described aspects of this ritual complex. Briefly, the rice planting ritual (haek na) dedicated to Mae Kosok (the rice spirit) is organized so as to replicate on the field of the cultivator the forces in the universe whose cooperation leads to abundant yields. A meter-square plot of land is isolated, a tiny shrine is built for the goddess to enter, and nine shoots of rice are then planted in the square. At each corner of the plot a "hawk eye" symbol (ta laeo) is implanted, and a sacred thread is wound clockwise around the full square. In general, the ta laeo consists of a bamboo stick at the top of which is

attached a hexagonally-shaped, planar maze of bamboo splints. This is the 'eye.' It confuses, and hence wards off, spirits.

Next a large "hawk eye" whose long limbs have dangling fishes is ceremoniously raised and left on the rice field throughout the entire growing period. A myth associates the

"hawk eye" with keeping forest animals out of domesticated areas.

The ta laeo is also an emblem used by owners, and traditionally aristocrats, for signalling pre-emptive rights to a territory and the natural and supernatural entities therein (see Anuman Rajadhon, 1968:339; Calavan, 1974).

The ta laeo in Northern Thailand is the Intakila pillar which in myth has nine traditional Lawa families displaced at the cardinal directions. I only add that on June 20th, 1973,

during the sueb chata rite for the city, ten small ta laeo were taken and placed at the ten entrance points of the traditional walled city. Sand pagodas with one hundred and eight flags were also built at these points.

Mae Kosok is conceived of as having a soul or khuan (khwan, Central Thai) that is easily given to flight. A loud noise during the growing period may ruin a crop by startling

Mae Kosok so that her khuan departs. Threshing, storage, and distributing rice are fraught with taboos, lest during these activities the rice be mishandled and lose its essence as a staple (Nimmanahaeminda, 1966). It is worth mentioning

that the granary (l<sub>1</sub>ng khaw), the well (nan b9), the rice pounder (krok m9ng) and the hearth (taw fai) are all viewed as female

essentials, and to be utilized by females only. VITi th regard to the loss of khuan' and the recalling of khuan, the rites for rice follow the basic paradigm for recalling the khuan of children, buffalo, and boats (consult Tarnbiah, 1969). These rites are usually performed by the elders.

To sum up, the fertility of rice as symbolized by Mae Kosok is highly fragile. The ta laeo, or male principle, protects the fragile soul essence of rice by enclosing, isolating, and shielding it from undomesticated, outside forces and creatures. A perfect extension of the notion of guarding the rice soul by binding with a sacred string can be seen in the propitiation of the ancestors, phi pu\_. In Chedi Lane on the day of the rite to specific ancestor spirits, women and unmarried children of the small cult gather inside the house. Men are not in attendance. A sacred string, sai sin (a string that is blessed and infused with the power of a recited paritta, or power-harnessing word) is tied around the entire compound while the doors and windows of the house are shut. PhI pu ja are then petitioned to grant the household health, prosperity and morale, and to keep out illness and evil.

We begin to get the clear impression of female being associated with inside--indispensable, but delicate. In contrast, male is associated with outside. Male is potency, but a potency that needs to be continually domesticated, and this is done in two ways: by carefully controlling its access to female fertility and by subordinating it to Buddhist principles.

Consequently, as we see in the ritual surrounding rice cultivation, female is delicate, while male is bold, unruly, and potentially destructive--best glimpsed in the cultural image of the nakleng (local ruffian, brawler, peasant hero) and the slang term, suea (tiger) which is a ruffian and more, i.e., a man capable of homicide. To complete our review of sexual symbols and the world-view they reflect, I turn to courting customs and house symbolism.

#### 4.1.1 Courting Customs and House Symbolism: Inside - Outside

The courting custom known as aeo sao, "going out and visiting the girls," has all but died out in the city. The norms, cliches, and flirting styles that accompanied this custom, however, are still employed to guide and inspire lovers and potential spouses. Today in many rural villages such as Hua Rin village, Sanpatong district (a village I visited on a number of occasions), young marriageable men spruce up, wait until dark, and then carouse usually in small groups looking for girls to visit and chat with (u saw). Parents of marriageable girls will follow the custom of retiring early to their sleeping room, permitting the girls to sit on the outer verandah and chat with the boys (u baw). Soft serenading and clever banter punctuate the night and express for this ethnographer one of the most charming aspects of Northern Thai culture.

The freedom to accept, reject, and toy with overtures from young men shows that girls have considerable freedom when it comes to choosing a mate. The authority of the parents, however,

and through them the spirit ancestors, is never absent, and can be seen in a number of fairly strict rules governing verandah courtships.

For example, after proper coaxing and importuning, a young man may obtain permission from the girl to join her up on the verandah. There they can chat and sing and possibly exchange fruits or sweets. The boy is never allowed to touch the girl, however, or to enter the doorway into the house proper. If he does touch the girl it is known as phit phi or to have "wronged the spirits." The spirits are phI pu ja, and retribution for this offense is usually made in the form of money. Naturally the girl has to inform on the boy to begin with, and even then the parents of the girl decide whether this is truly a case of phit phI, and if so, what amount the retribution should be. The politics of chastity and courtship are complex.

Elderly informants told me, however, that in the past they conducted verandah courtships for one, two, and sometimes three years. In the early period of courtship a young man would not dare touch the girl," and the ancestor spirits were viewed in older times as vengeful when it came to taking liberties with the girls of the household. For a young man to step past the doorway leading into the house, and especially to go into the main sleeping room of the parents (where the shelf for the spirits is located), was an ultimate taboo. To this day, in the city, such an act is viewed as a shocking intrusion. In actuality it seldom occurs.

The sleeping arrangements within the household, and the symbolic boundaries separating unrelated males from the interior of the house, reveal a number of important features about Northern Thai sexual symbolism. In the main sleeping room are to be found the parents and very young children. Often on the other side of the same room, or in the immediately adjoining room, are found the sleeping places of the unmarried daughters. Everyone sleeps with their heads facing the shelf of the spirit ancestors, which is either on the north or east wall or close to the northeast corner. Unmarried sons who have passed puberty sleep in the room closest to the verandah and often out on the verandah during the hot season. Visiting guests usually sleep in the room with the unmarried males. It is worth noting at this point that Buddha images and various other religious paraphernalia such as books containing yan yantras, Pali; (astrological and magical designs) and written examples of power-harnessing words (katha) are all kept on a shelf on the verandah. These religious objects are the acknowledged domain of males (cf. de Young, 1955), just as the custodians of phI pu ja are females. The categories, outside and inside, male and female, are critical for understanding the social symbolism of the Northern Thai house.

When a young man has courted a young woman and has privately gained her acceptance to become his wife, moreover, he deliberately sets out to "wrong the spirits," or phit phI. This often involves more than a token hug, and the young couple then



announce to the parents what has transpired, and that they wish to marry. Sanguan refers to this deliberate act of initiating the marriage proceedings by "touching" the girl, offending the spirit ancestors, and paying the fine as sai ao (1969a:81) .

In the rural area the young groom is referred to as the "work buffalo" and it is his duty to repair a symbolic fence surrounding the girls' parents' compound that he is reputed to have knocked down in the act of phit phi (see Davis, 1973). As previously referred to, the idea of a male coming from the outside and knocking down a fence that bounds a field of fertility (girl inside the house) that the ancestor spirits guard is a perfect illustration of the inside-outside female male distinction.

Another illustration is the post-partum ritual called yu duean or yu yen (to keep for a month; to keep cool). For a male infant, the mother stays in isolation on a restricted diet and close to a cluster of hot stones for 28 days. For a female child, the period is longer, usually 30 or 31 days because, it is explained, the female infant should become attached to the house and especially its interior. The traditional uxori-local residence rule reinforces this idea of female interiority and permanency.

Finally, permit me to outline a few pertinent features that were revealed at the house construction and house entering ritual before we summarize male-female symbolism.

#### 4.1.2 House Construction and Ritual

We have already observed the sexual symbolism of the Northern Thai house during courting: the inner sleeping room versus the outer verandah. In constructing a house, moreover, a large number of rules and proscriptions must be followed to insure a wholesome and prosperous dwelling unit.

To begin with, almost every act connected with the construction of the house is regulated by the calendar of us months and days and the associated <sup>1 2</sup> d tauspicio lrec lons. Thus, in what direction the houseposts are to be laid before placing them in the holes, and in what direction the earth from the post holes is to be piled, vary according to the month and day.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes, it is instructive that two posts, sao mongkon (auspicious post) and sao nang (female post) respectively were used to establish the basic framework. Traditionally a small rite is first held for phaya nag (Naga), or luang in Northern Thai, who is respected as the lord of the earth.<sup>4</sup> At each corner of the proposed house site a small hole is dug approximately six to eight inches deep and the same in width. Rice, bananas, and sweets are placed in each hole and phaya nag is invited to come and receive the offerings. Usually a short katha or power-harnessing series of verses are recited by an chan, or man of magico-religious knowledge.

The next part of the ceremony involves the laying out of the small, square banana leaf containers (saduang) filled with rice, fish, and sweets. Five of these are used. One is placed at each corner of the house and one at the center. The purpose

of the saduang and the holy words (katha) is to remove evil influences, disharmony, and impurities from the area of the proposed house. Later, the saduang are floated down a stream or river, thus expelling the evil influences. After this the male post is raised at a point east or north and then the female post facing south or west. It must be hypothesized that house construction is a microcosmic reproduction of the creation of the kingdom and cosmos. However, what does it reveal about male-female symbolism, and the inside-outside distinction?

The Northern Thai house is cosmologically centered on the male post. The latter forms the axis mundi. Engulfing the male shaft is the enclosed female field of domestic fertility.

I am persuaded to associate the female post with Mt. Doi Kham (southwest of Chiangma city) because of the latter's identification as the house of the matri-phrased ancestors phi pu ja, and its deep legendary connection with Queen Camatevi's birth and early youth (Chronicle of the Relics of Doi Kham).

The male post, moreover, establishes the household as a legitimate unit within the mueang, or jural-political domain, just as the female post locates the permanent, stationary field of human fertility upon which social reproduction is guaranteed. Female is natal and pre-natal in this system, and the matri-phrased idiom accentuates this principle in genealogical space (cf. Loeffler, 1968, for Southeast Asian variations). And the infant girl's khuan or soul essence must be encouraged to uphold

the inside. Thenceforth, all matters concerning the health and vitality of members of the household are placed in the hands of female spirit propitiators. In sum, the domestic cultus is interior and female dominated, while the jural political status of the household is secured externally by the ppkua, or male household head, often having been a monk in his youth, thus symbolizing post-mortem rebirth goals. There is no contradiction here between male and female domain.

Allow me to summarize some of the meanings in Northern Thai sexual symbolism that we have so far discussed.

Male	Female
outside	inside
active potency	passive fertility
Indra (Protector of Buddhism)	Nang Thoranee, Mae Kosok, Lady Thorthang
sky, bird	earth, rice, fish
work buffalo, fence-breaker	bounded field of fertility
jural-political	domestic (granary, well, hearth, rice pounder)
male post: north & east	female post: south & west
outer verandah	inner sleeping room
exterior Buddhist shelf	interior spirit shelf
monkhood	matri-phrased spirit cult
death and postmortem	birth and pre-natal

In the normative schema of Northern Thai symbolism two features stand out: male is dominant over female, and Buddhist symbols integrate and over-arch to form a unified system with spirit cult symbols. At this level of analysis, Northern Thai belief, ritual and symbolism appear to conform to the type of logically consistent religious structure that Tambiah (1970) has described for Northeastern Thailand. Let me state at this juncture, however, that I am not convinced the most compelling dimension of Northern Thai symbolism is to be found in its internal logic as a cultural code. I do not deny that at the macro-level of the Buddhist symbolic universe Northern Thai symbols and ritual forms are arrayed in a logically coherent manner, and reflect the subordination of spirit ritual and belief to the hierarchy of Buddhist doctrine and institutions. In studying household life and husband-wife relations under different conditions, however, I discovered that the poses between male and female were not rigid or fixed. In fact, considerable variation was observed in sex role behavior and symbolism at different age phases and under differing socio-economic conditions. Thus, when seen in its application to the micro\_contexts of household life and inter-sexual tensions, the normative arrangement of symbolic elements previously described undergoes a number of modifications. The ethnographic facts I collected prove, for instance, that male is not always dominant over female.

with regard to Buddhism, however, regardless of the age phase or economic level of my informants, they would always claim they were first of all Buddhists. In Chedi Lane, however, one is likely to enter a household where the paramount social reality revolves around women, spirit worship, and attendance at exuberant dance and trance ceremonies. Let me state forthrightly that I do not imply that these households are less Buddhist, or anti-Buddhist, or whatever--surely by now it is clear that Buddhism and spirit worship are in no way contradictory at the level of Buddhist doctrine (Spiro, 1970) . I do mean to imply, however, that as ideological phenomena, symbolism and belief are always closely linked to social situations, and adjustments between the two realms are continually occurring. Let me illustrate this interdependence between social situation and idea-structure or symbolism, so as to gain a deeper comprehension of how Northern Thai resolve their inter-sexual antagonisms in active adulthood.

#### 4.2 Male-Female Symbolism: The Dramaturgical View

Our review of Northern Thai sexual symbolism clearly assigned the interior of the house and much of its functional paraphernalia to the female, while regulating the external jural-political domain to the male. This is a normative depiction of sexual symbolism at a fairly generalized level of relevance. In studying how sexual symbolism relates to more immediate social contexts we should not be surprised to find that as the social circumstances of men and women change,

we also observe re-arrangements in symbolic forms. And in a more dynamic sense we find men and women manipulating symbols to legitimate claims to authority and power. Once again my emphasis is on the relation of ideological phenomena to concrete aspects of everyday living, in this instance, the relation of age-related interpersonal changes and socio-economic conditions to the normative scheme of sexual symbolism.

In the following section I attempt to trace the broad changes in interpersonal dramaturgy that occur between husband and wife at different age phases and relate these to the three levels of socio-economic adaptation outlined in Chapter Three. My primary intent is to show that the symbols, standards, and usages that form the ideology of sex roles, and prescribe normative conduct between husband and wife, are subject to the flux of socio-economic circumstances and age changes. This is most clearly expressed in the oscillations in interpersonal dramaturgy among conjugal pairs as they move into middle age. In contrast to the last chapter, therefore, the focus is on the self displays and the systems of numerous action performed by husband and wife toward one another viewed as their relationship proceeds through time. The perspective I present on sex roles is obviously a construction of events and phases that I have pieced together based on life histories and by watching and interviewing individuals at different points in the life cycle and at different positions in the social order. It is, therefore, provisional in nature.

#### 4.2.1 The Lower Economic Level

In the case of lower class matrifocal families in Chedi Lane, the usual pattern was for a young man to marry a girl and either live neolocally from the start, or move into the house dominated by the wife's mother. In the neolocal cases, the household appeared strongly affected by subsistence concerns on the one hand, and the young husband's identity quest, on the other. In the uxorilocal cases, the son-in-law usually deferred to the authority of his mother-in-law and her matrilineal ritual cult associations, and adopted an un-assuming manner. In such matrifocal households, however, the sons-in-law usually only accepted the arrangement for temporary periods of time. It is in the neolocal cases that we can observe the clearest expressions of the male-dominated dramaturgy that permeated the husband-wife relationship at the young adult age phase.

My association with young lower class neolocal couples revealed them to be rough in emotional tone, receiving their basic ambience from the rather harsh, insecure world of the struggling male and his mobility aspirations. These young men ordered their wives about and claimed many privileges that even upper class males would never attempt. The young wives were generally willing to tolerate and accept their husband's domineering attitude and behavior, and, in fact, appeared fascinated by the husband's intensity and confidence. In my observations at this age phase and under these conditions, males generally vacillated between displaying themselves as



peacocks or tyrants in front of their wives, and women were attentive and receptive to the male displays, while coy and demure in their own responses.

Thus, although the young male was still far from obtaining the economic and political capital needed to establish an authentic male-centered compound, the general effect of his narcissism and willingness to act out an elaborate male-centered social reality was to foist a male-centered reality upon his nuclear household. The passivity of the young lower class wife at this stage is crucial, and not, I suspect, unrelated to her neolocal predicament which dissociates her from the matrilineal ritual cult. However, attitudes regarding beauty, vanity and pregnancy also played a part.

For instance, while trying to obtain information on ideas and attitudes about aging, I was particularly struck by the comments of young mothers in Chedi Lane. In an almost unanimous fashion young mothers insist, *mi luk laea, kae laeo*, "I'm old already, I've had a child." Lower class women clearly felt that you lose your beauty and nubility after having a child. Males strongly reinforce this attitude and link it to a folk theory of hormones and sexual intercourse. Thus, during intercourse males are believed to receive hormones from the lubricants and walls of the vagina that go directly into their penises. Child-bearing diminishes the quantity and quality of hormones in the women's vagina, thus child-bearing uses up a woman, making her 'old.' This theory is frequently

used by middle-aged men (that period in a man's life when he especially needs a boost of hormones, so it is claimed) to rationalize affairs with younger women.

Moreover, the young wives keep close to the household, manage its needs and demands, and nurture its young children. Whereas young husbands often sleep away overnight seeking work and adventure, the wife seldom does (Muecke, personal communication) . The young husband was therefore preoccupied and intense at this stage, while confidently assuming that the entire neolocal enterprise revolved around him even though he had little to do with its management or the socialization of the children. He expected deference from his wife, and grew even more arrogant and distant from her after she had a child. She was then a mother, sexually used, and unlikely to leave him for another man.

The main preoccupation of the young male, how\_ever, was in achieving success in some niche in society. Few schemes were turned down if they showed the least bit of promise. Ideas had to be tried. A wanderlust and restlessness were apparent among lower class men as they joked and argued and practiced boxing in front of the noodle shops. Some said to learn English would make you a lot of money, others dreamed of playing in a good band, becoming a great boxer, learning mechanics, or marrying a good last name (e.g., Na chlangmai, an aristocratic surname).

From the young men I met in Northern Thailand, especially at the village and lower class level, there was usually a note of desperation about them, as though a definite time limit were set within which they had to get some results or give up the struggle. In the biographies I obtained on these men the period of the twenties and early thirties was usually a period of frustration, instability and a frenetic moving about from job to job, place to place. At this age phase, lower class men were more likely to have trouble with their family, get divorced, and go to jail than at any other time in their lives. The women involved with them usually suffered.

At the lower economic level therefore women often experience a deep crisis at an early point in their lives, stemming primarily from the unresolved identity quests of the men they marry. The crisis frequently takes the form of being abandoned by their husbands which perforce causes the young mother to be thrown back on her own resources to try and pull herself and her children through a very difficult set of circumstances. As we have seen, this situation sets the stage for the important role that the matri-phrased ritual cult assumed in the lives of poor women. However, from a sex role perspective we find lower class women adjusting to poverty and unsupportive men by becoming independent and adopting authoritative roles in the household at a relatively young age (late twenties, early thirties), thus reorganizing their domestic world and personal identity along assertive, matrifocal lines.

The effect of these adjustments has a strong bearing on how lower class women and men experience and behave in middle age. In contrast to the normative symbolism presented in the first part of this chapter, sex roles and sex ethos were observed to undergo considerable modification under the conditions of middle age. I am referring to the period in the domestic cycle when the last child had either married or was considered an adult. Women in my survey at all economic levels averaged fifty-two years of age at the marriage of the last child. This is a multiply significant period in the domestic cycle. It is during this period when the replacement phase commences, when ritual officiant roles are assumed by women, when dam hua rites (water-pouring rites of respect between generations) are received, and general eldership status attained. The burdens of child-rearing are past for the female, and the male is attempting to lessen his work load and possibly retire.

Of relevance at this period is that lower class males in their late forties and fifties acted tired and weary, somewhat like veterans of past arenas and contests who had decided there was not much more worth saying. They became decidedly taciturn and remote during middle age and old age, and much of this response stemmed from the fact that they had capitulated to female authority and assertiveness after failing to succeed in their occupations and identity quest. Lower class women, in contrast, because of the adjustments in early adulthood to poverty and ineffective males conduct themselves in middle age

in a distinct manner. For instance, many of the powerful spirit mediumship roles in Chiangmai city are, in fact, filled by women from the lower economic level. Take the case of Mrs. T.

At the beginning of her marriage, Mrs. T claims they were poor, but both she and her husband were willing to work and indeed accepted all types of employment to get by. She felt they would have succeeded as a family, however her husband died suddenly when she was in her late twenties, leaving her with a small daughter. Life was miserable once again. She was poor and began suffering from headaches, vomiting, and sleeplessness. Her relatives helped her, especially her sister, and she was able to make ends meet. Her symptoms, however, persisted and doctors and medicines were no help. Finally, she was told a famous <sup>y</sup>chào, or spirit of an important deceased personage, was trying to enter her. She eventually conceded, became the spirit's "ridden horse" (ma khI), and her physical ailments subsided.

Later, other important spirits came and possessed her. She was sought out by neighbors and townspeople who wished the intervention and aid of the spirits. Once successful as a spirit medium (hao nai) her original matri-phrased ancestor spirits became subordinated to the powerful tutelary spirits that possessed her. Nevertheless, the ancestor spirits were never forgotten. They were simply viewed as occupying a lower, more personal level than the mighty spirit lords that she entered in trance.

Because she is entered by imposing male spirit 'personalities' her expressive behavior, voice, and comportment are decidedly masculine. Whether in or out of trance (e.g., whether talking as herself or serving as the talking medium of a spirit) she is a forceful, direct person. She has developed a truly remarkable chain of clients among middle and upper class women (and some men) who seek her services. She also holds claim to a long list of spirit mediums throughout Northern Thailand who have received their esoteric lore and legitimacy from this famous medium. As her prestige and wealth increased the women of her phi pu ja cult have taken great interest in her and often help her in staging the impressive dance and trance ceremonies (yok khu).

Thus, lower class women experience an identity crisis much earlier than other women, stemming from their economic situation and ineffective husbands. They assert themselves much earlier on in life, consequently, through spirit ritual and authoritative roles in the household. Middle age for these women is distinct from other women in that the assertiveness and confidence they have acquired predisposes them to seek out powerful extra-domestic roles, as spirit mediums. Because lower class males either desert them or accept subordinate roles after the initial marriage period, lower class females are forced to confirm a new identity often before reaching middle age. As mentioned, they do this by utilizing the organizational linkages of the matri-phrased cult and the expressive media of spirit

ritual. Lower class women, therefore, experience an oscillation in sex roles and sex ethos much earlier on in the life cycle than, as we shall see, women at other economic levels.

Lower class males, particularly those residing neolocally, attempt a histrionic display in the early period of marriage, but then either settle down to a more balanced household existence and form a cooperative relationship with their wives, or leave and continually move about for the early period of adulthood. By middle age (roughly the forties) many lower class males appeared to have quit the game of competition and identity quest, and return from their roaming about to become quiet, unassuming figures in matrifocal households.

#### 4.2.2 The Middle Economic Level

At the middle level, or affinal household, we find a somewhat different patterning. First, in those situations where the young husband moves into a household dominated by wife's parents, and father-in-law especially, much of his married life is lived out under the authority of his in-laws. In the city, however, employment demands and housing conditions often make it impractical to maintain the uxorilocal residence practice.

Nevertheless, at the middle economic level, even when residing neolocally, the sense of cooperation and egalitarianism between husband and wife disincline the young husband to indulge in dramatic interpersonal displays. Even so, men in middle level households do indulge in a minor amount of male dominance and

peacock behavior in early adulthood, often linked to some form of athletic prowess. .Their performances are always tempered, however, by the important functions their wives perform in the household enterprise, and their concerns about respectability in the eyes of the neighborhood.

In middle age, men such as my next door neighbor become more passive, but do not indulge in the type of severe withdrawal that lower class males exhibited. Women at the middle level, however, did become interested in spirit ritual and often attended the yok khu ceremonies held by professional spirit mediums. Consider the case of Malini.

Malini is a broad-faced, broad-shouldered, husky woman of fifty-four. All of her children are married except one boy and girl, both in their early twenties. Malini's cousin, or luk phu phi (in this case, mother's older. sister's daughter) is the officiant of the ritual cult, but she and Malini both share most of the duties and are viewed as co-principals. Malini is now very active around the neighborhood, helping at the temple and local fairs, and occasionally attending the yok khu or dance and trance ceremonies held by spirit mediums in the city. At these ceremonies, Malini has not yet danced (i.e., undergone possession), but assists her female friend who has been experiencing possession by the spirits for about two years. Malini takes and smokes cigarettes from the spirit possessing her friend, and drinks some rice wine. The yok khu ceremonies last all day, involve hundreds of people, predominantly middle-aged women, and are a dizzying experience given



the intense combination of xylophones, drums, bright colors, and bacchanalia. Malini returns from these ceremonies usually in a loud and festive mood with alcohol and cigarettes on her breath. She barges into the house, usually followed by one or two friends, and fills the air with anecdotes and stories about the day's ceremony.

Manat, her husband in his late fifties, usually sits out on the porch or can be found back by the small garden patch. His great interest now revolves around his grand children and tending and pruning the vegetation on the compound. He is called "uncle" (lung), and people can always expect a pleasant greeting and a short chat. Uncle Manat seldom mentions his wife's comings and going, nor is he in any way threatened by her exuberance. He appears fascinated by her stories and activities. Malini claims the center of stage in the household, particularly on festival days, and lung is a primary spectator, especially from Malini's point of view.

Women at the middle economic level seem to be responding to the loss of household duties that attend this phase of the domestic cycle. Their children are grown, many have moved away pursuing jobs, education, and mobility schemes, and their husbands are growing more and more passive and demure. A vacuum is experienced at this phase and middle level women fill it up in a culturally standardized way, by moderately involving themselves in spirit rituals.

#### 4.2.3 The Upper Economic Level

My data on upper level couples (bureaucrats, professionals, and P9 IIang like Prathan) are meager and uneven. In my observations, however, males at this level do not withdraw from the field of action or become noticeably passive in their comportment, although the pace is somewhat lessened. Because they are able to maintain their male-centered domestic arrangement, and because their power and wealth is probably at its highest point in their lives, upper level middle aged men, if anything, exhibit a fresh narcissism and more cultivated hedonism. Younger women become particularly important in their lives. The response of upper level wives, seeing their husbands risking reputation and large sums of money on younger women, is abrupt and frenetic. In ChIangmai city, besides the cadres of young women at all economic levels seeking spirit and magical help to obtain suitable mates, the majority of women who patronize the <sup>v -</sup>chao nai (professional female spirit mediums usually of lower class origins) are upper class women undergoing marital crises in middle age. Consider the case of Porn.

In her twenties, Porn married a handsome young police lieutenant who has advanced himself steadily over the years in the police bureaucracy. They have three children and Porn claims she has been happy throughout most of her marriage. She is still quite beautiful in her mid-forties, well-dressed and vivacious. However, according to her reports her husband has taken to running around with younger women on his frequent

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out-of-town trips. She claims he spends little time with her and fears now he might possibly leave her. I met her after she had been seeing Mrs. T, the spirit medium, who was counseling her and helping her to secretly influence her husband to remain interested in her. More recently, Pom had begun to attend yok khu ceremonies in which she undergoes possession and dances for long hours to the frantic music. Under trance, the spirit who most frequently enters her is that of a young girl, seven or eight years of age, and Pom pouts and giggles and scampers about to everyone's delight. The ceremonies bolster her morale and she appears to be gaining more control over herself while at the same time becoming more detached and removed from her husband's chicanery. Her husband, she claims, is embarrassed by her involvement with such an eccentric element of society and wants her to stop participating at the dance and trance ceremonies. Again, I interpret pronounced spirit ritual on the part of women as a form of normative communication that attempts to constrain and direct the behavior of errant and ineffectives males in their midst. Spirit ritual functions therefore to express female frustration and anxiety vis-a-vis significant males in culturally accepted ways. This happens at lower economic levels, as we have seen, where it provides the additional means of publically announcing a change in the distribution of authority between the sexes in the household. At the upper economic level, it is a means I suspect whereby the middle-aged woman can combat their realistic fears

that a younger woman might steal her husband. Spirit ritual becomes a technique for controlling males as well as providing, apparently, an important vent for psychological tension.

Another middle-aged woman, Mrs. P, represents a somewhat different situation but with similar dynamics.

Marrying in her early twenties, Mrs. P fell in love and remained devoted to her husband until his untimely death in the early 1970s. His important position with the railroad plus his shrewd business dealings enabled PiS husband to accumulate a sizeable amount of urban property and wealth. P now lives on a large landscaped compound that contains her own house plus two houses she rents out. PiS husband was shot to death while negotiating an involved business deal with a number of important personalities from Bangkok. The bizarre circumstances surrounding her husband's death, her prolonged grief, and the fact her children all live in Bangkok led P to eventually seek out a <sup>v</sup>chao nai for guidance and support. Mrs. P now has become greatly attached to her <sup>v</sup>chao nai, follows her to distant towns for yok khu ceremonies, and lavishes large sums of money on her. Through the close relationship with her spirit medium, which has romantic overtones, she has regained a sense of composure, and although she does not experience possession herself, she thrills to the excitement and liberality of yok khu ceremonies and the attention that her spirit medium pays her.

#### 4.3 Inter-Sexual Dramaturgy in Active Adulthood

With regard to the advent of identity problems and marital crises, there is no denying that considerable differences exist among husband-wife pairs at different socioeconomic levels. Nevertheless, when we adopt the framework of developmental change in adulthood, two broad age phases appear that point to an underlying similarity among male and female age cohorts.

To wit, most Northern Thai men during early adulthood make some minimal gesture toward peacock display and the male centered model. Involvement in sports--soccer, basketball, boxing--at the secondary school level is a primary arena for working out these early attempts at identity construction and maintenance. After the exuberance and fantasies of young adulthood, however, males at different economic levels experience quite different opportunity structures and obstacles in their identity quests. Lower class males spend themselves and their energies in a relatively short, desperate search for success at some type of work and monetary gain. Failing at this, they usually fall into a deep passivity by middle age.

Upper level males appear to be alternately pampered and disciplined and inducted into prolonged educational and political careers. Having been taught to cultivate confidence, poise, and assertiveness they utilize these traits throughout life in fashioning and maintaining a successful male identity. In middle age, far from withdrawing, they appear overcome by a

deeper, more cultivated sense of hedonism which involves them in entanglements with young minor wives and chains of lovers.

The middle level male falls somewhere between the two previously outlined career trajectories. While they do not succumb to the desperate search, and equally abrupt surrender of goals of the lower class male, they neither can assume the program of life chances and consequential persona of the upper level male. Many of these men come from poor families, and seek athletic reputations as youth, but after marrying balance their lives by seeking sound employment and cultivating relatively egalitarian relationships with their wives. Having lived their adult lives in a modest and industrious manner, they behave somewhat more passively in middle age, but not withdrawn to the degree of lower class males, nor indulgent to the degree of upper class males.

Nonetheless, from the perspective of inter-sexual relations, young adulthood is male-focused in Northern Thailand. Among themselves, and particularly in front of women, the general theme is for young men to appear clever, assertive, dazzling and confident. Young women respond with favorable glances, smiles, if not heartfelt infatuation. The Northern Thai woman at this age phase is not a dupe, by any means, as courting dialogues reveal; however, her pose is that of observer, defender of her body, and passive complement to the assertive young male. These are the elements of the inter sexual dramaturgy of young adulthood and early marriage. At

the level of symbolism and attitude it conforms quite closely to the normative scheme of sexual symbolism. As we have seen, however, the normative view of symbolism becomes greatly modified when placed within the framework of developmental change in adulthood.

Thus, although lower class women accept the histrionics and peacock displays of their husband in the early period of marriage, it is not too long afterwards that they usually experience an identity crisis caused by the failure of their husbands to gain adequate employment and provide for their families. Whereas their husbands are obsessed with an elaborate, although brief, identity quest, lower class women are distinctive at this age for their stoicism, lack of vanity, and devotion to their children. They have none of the distractions and obsessions that young men have which can be accounted for in large part by the built-in identity that motherhood affords (J. Hanks, 1963). Because their men, either abandon them, or leave and return to accept subordinate roles in the household, lower class women are urged to confirm a new identity and much less passive social persona often before reaching middle age (roughly the forties),. They do this by arranging their household along a matrifocal dimension, activating the organizational linkages of the matri-phrased cult, and invoking the communicative symbols of spirit ritual. After experiencing this oscillation in sex role and sex ethos at a relatively early age,

these women are prime candidates for the extra-domestic spirit mediumship roles in Chiangmai city. I will return to this role shortly.

Middle level women experience a similar type of identity crisis, less intense and at a later age (roughly the forties and fifties) but nonetheless forceful enough to alter the normative scheme of sex role expectations. Having cooperated with their husbands in the joint management of their households, they appear to experience middle age as a hiatus. The busy period of raising children and trying to augment the family's income has tapered off considerably. Their children have grown up and often moved away, and their husbands have grown more passive. They respond by engaging in the female controlled spirit rituals in the neighborhood. On these occasions they smoke, drink, dance, and holler, indulging in forms of exhibitionism never dared in their younger days. Younger women at a yok khu ceremony, in fact, hold their babies and draw near to watch the older women dance and perform. They express amazement and disbelief at the carrying-on of the older women, and will cringe in embarrassment and run away laughing if beckoned to dance.,

The upper level wives may experience the deepest form of identity crisis and disillusionment of any category of persons I observed. Most of their lives are spent catering to a self centered male, although they naturally have enjoyed the compensations of respect and wealth that come with their



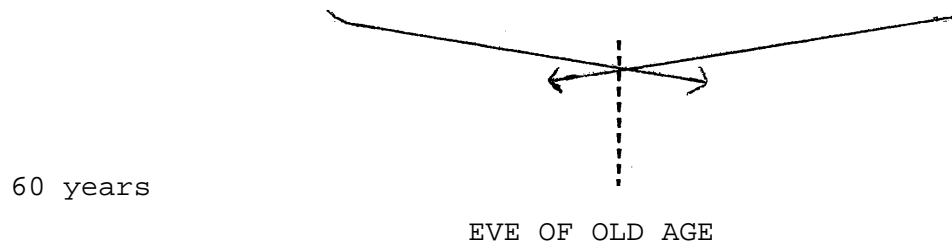
husband's position. Middle age, however, poses both a hiatus caused by the loss of child-rearing roles, and a realistic threat in the form of abandonment by their husbands for younger women. The combined effect of these forces urges these women to seek help and solace from the spirit mediums who help them cope with their identity crisis. Indeed the behavior and comportment of these women at trance ceremonies was the most frenetic and intense of all the participants. Ironically, the solutions they seek involve them in intimate ways with women at economic levels with which they hitherto had had little contact.

In sum, middle age in Northern Thailand, discounting the behavior of the upper level male, is female-focused. In front of their men, and particularly among themselves in the context of spirit ceremony, the general theme is for middle aged women to be assertive, expressive and hedonistic. Middle aged men respond with fascination and curiosity, yet are content to leave the field of expressive display to their exhibitionistic wives. The latter appeared unburdened and zestful, intent upon pursuing a flurry of activities that will yield some basic overt affirmation of their identity and social situation.

Thus, taken in its normative version the scheme of sexual symbolism presented in the early part of this chapter is inadequate for interpreting the changes in inter-sexual relations across adulthood. Without including a dialectical dimension to sex role and sex ethos within the developmental

framework of adulthood, we fail to account for the changing dramaturgy and expressive poses of males and females at the respective age phases. It is during middle age that the oscillation in attitude, ethos, and expressive activity proceed full tilt for Northern Thai males and females. Middle-aged women appear as if overcome by new energies. Their primary direction is out, out to the markets, the temple, visits to friends, and heavy attendance at fairs, ceremonies, and spirit rituals. Moreover, the ethos of middle-aged women in general is noteworthy, especially for its close similarities to the young male ethos. Both are assertive, self-possessed, and keenly interested in power. The young male by desiring to fashion a six direction universe around himself; the middle aged female by gaining access to various forms of spirit power--in a modest fashion, by managing the matri-phrased domestic cult; in a bold fashion, by undergoing trance and possession by a powerful tutelary spirit.

Equally remarkable are the similarities in young female ethos and middle-aged male ethos. Both are passive, both are spectators, and both appear fascinated by their exhibitionistic partners. Whether there are definable permutations in the system of emotions that enrich and deplete male-female relationships in Northern Thailand is beyond the reach of these sparse data. I am convinced, however, that something like a massive oscillation in male-female roles and ethos does occur between young adulthood and middle age. Allow me to diagram this process of change.



#### 4.4 Conclusion

Household life and inter-sexual tensions in Chedi Lane produced a special perspective on Northern Thai symbolism and ritual. Previous studies have primarily emphasized the macro-level unity of Buddhist and spirit cult symbolic forms within a logically consistent religious structure (cf. Tambiah, 1970) . without denying the general accuracy of such an approach, the data on husband-wife pairs at the immediate level of household life revealed that Northern Thai sexual symbolism and sex identity, when viewed in a diachronic perspective, were seen to undergo modification.

In particular males in their forties and fifties, especially lower class males, generally referred to the world of action and exertion with words connoting considerable ennui. A taciturn

mood seemed to set in. Women, in contrast, appeared zestful, oftentimes obsessive, as if overcome by new energies and goals. As mentioned previously, many of them at this age plunged headlong into the thrall of trance and possession as a means of adjusting to their changing social situations.

I wish to draw attention to the simple, but often overlooked, fact that symbols are used to express changes in social situations and power relations. Thus, when women leave the house and pursue extra-domestic ritual roles in middle age, they realize that public display and penetration into the broader region of neighborhood and city life are the customary prerogatives of males. On closer inspection, however, we observe they are the customary prerogatives of young males (by personal insistence) and powerful males (by fiat). In other words, peacock behavior and entrance into the neighborhood and broader contexts of city life represent prerogatives which individuals lay claim to when wishing to assert themselves with reference to significant others and general society. Young men claim them wishing to assert control over their wives and to fashion an ego-oriented social world. Upper level males claim them to express control over their wives as well as over a wide array of clients and associates. However, lower class young women claim them also when expressing female authority and matrifocality in the absence of effective males. And upper level women become exhibitionistic and publically assertive at spirit rituals when wishing to influence neglectful husbands.

In turn, individuals avoid these prerogatives when they believe they should defer to the rights and claims of significant others. Thus, young women avoid them since young men usually pre-empt the stage, while middle level couples both avoid histrionic displays, believing them inappropriate in light of the egalitarian nature of their relationship. Lower class men, as we have seen, eventually dispense with peacock behavior, especially when they can no longer justify these prerogatives in the face of their own shortcomings, and the economic effectiveness of their wives.

The main point I wish to stress is that Northern Thai are aware of the fact that inter-sexual relations at all age levels are susceptible to a deep-seated compulsiveness. Adulthood, as we have seen, is, in fact, characterized by men and women, at different stages in life and responding to varying socio-economic conditions, claiming prerogatives vis-a-vis one another, and acting out these rights and privileges in publically expressive ways.

However, although inter-sexual relations represent a key dimension of Northern Thai life (a horizontal and problematical dimension, if you will), there is a second dimension that bears heavily on our treatment of old age. These are the vertical relationships that constitute age roles, intergenerational relations, and the status system. Embedded as they are in notions of hierarchy, we are not surprised to

discover that Buddhist symbols, ritual and ideology play a paramount role in providing content for these relationships.

## Footnotes

ln keeping with these notions, women were described as being of feint heart (chaT\_n). Their spirit essence (khuan) was more tenuously attached\_han that of males (see Hanks, 19631 for Central Thai parallels). This provided the folk psychological explanation of why women were possessed by spirits more easily, and why as children they were more docile and easier to raise than headstrong male children.

2My information on these matters comes from Mr. Charan,

a retired school teacher and practicing carpenter in Chedi Lane. He claims only a portion of the customary guidelines are followed today, but most people admit they are still important.

3  
Consult Sanguan (1969a:40-49) for an excellent description of this rite.

4The Naga, or serpent, who resides in the watery layer beneath the earth is male in Northern Thai conceptualization. There are nagi (female serpents from the same region) appearing in some myths, oftentimes having offspring via human fertilization. However, I have found no exegesis in Northern Thailand of the relationship between the female Nang Thoranee and the male Naga.

5  
It should also be noted that phi pu ja appear as serpents in a number of myths (cf. Chronicle of the elics of Doi Kham).

## CHAPTER FIVE

MERIT, CONTINUITY, AND THE  
GENERATIONAL SYSTEM

Northern Thai culture is distinctive for having elaborated a system of social hierarchy and inter-generational reciprocities that are crucially important for analyzing age roles and the relations between age groups. The basis of this system rests upon the theory of merit-transfer which I will analyze along with a discussion of the important role played by the kindred in its ritual activities. Following this I examine two key rituals which illuminate inter-generational reciprocities, and conclude by commenting on the position of the generations within the traditional system of Buddhist social hierarchy.

## 5.1 Merit and Merit-Transfer

Northern Thai, like other Theravada Buddhist populations, believe that human suffering is caused by demeritorious acts or sins (bab) performed in past lives. One's predicament in life, for instance, whether one is rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, happily young or miserably old, is believed to result from the ineluctible law of karma (kam, Northern Thai; the law of moral causation). Overcoming suffering is attained by achieving a good rebirth which in turn entails piling up merit (bun, Northern Thai). Merit, therefore, leads to new birth and one's course through samsara (transmigration); ultimate salvation from suffering, on the other hand, consists of going beyond



rebirth and merit, thus attaining cessation or Nibbana (Nirvana) . Nibbanic ideals, however, as Spiro (1970) has demonstrated, are seldom sought after by lay Buddhists. Instead, lay devotees, particularly in later life, are observed to obey the precepts and eagerly store up merit in an attempt to achieve a better existence in the next life (Leach, 1962:96).

In orthodox Theravada Buddhism the merit accruing from good acts goes only to the individual who performs the acts. In various societies, however, such as Ceylon (Obeyesekere, 1968), Burma (Spiro, 1970), and Thailand, including Northern Thailand, the belief exists that individuals can transfer merit to the deceased (ancestors) to enhance their salvation prospects, as well as to senior generational kin (about to become ancestors). Transfers of merit from the young to the old at the ordination and mortuary rituals represent critical acts of reciprocity between the generations. In the next section I describe the ordination rite along with the ritual obligations that seniors have towards juniors in other ceremonies.

Merit-making and merit-transfer, however, must be associated with a proper social context in order that the merit is properly validated. Thus, to be socially respectful of monks and older persons is to make merit; not to return a respectful salutation (wai) to an old person is to incur demerit. The importance of seeking out, and maintaining, proper contexts for merit-making

become a crucial concern of the elderly of Chedi Lane, which we will review in the next chapter.

The ideology of merit, moreover, demands that it be shared and not hoarded.<sup>1</sup> The greater the number of people attending a ceremony, therefore, the greater the bounty of merit for all to share in. Trying to hoard merit for oneself, in fact, leads to its dissipation, according to local belief. The effect of this notion of sharing, as we shall see, bears an important influence on the alienated elderly, keeping them from wishing to sever all ties with on-going society.

## 5.2 The Kindred

The occasions for observing merit-transfer and intergenerational reciprocities occur during the ritual activities of the kindred. In Northern Thai the network of bilateral kin which centers around a particular individual and includes affines is labelled *lukphuphiphūn*. In neighborhoods like Chedi Lane a plethora of bilateral kin were seldom available. Many families had very narrow range kindreds to work with, and so often attempted to substitute for actual kin by drawing on socially close persons, such as neighbors, friends, and associates from work. All in all, there were few heavily attended rituals in the households of Chedi Lane. Although Northern Thai customarily extend fictive kin terms to a wide assortment of persons, Chedi Lane residents appeared hampered by the modest size of the networks of kin and friends they could summon. Moerman, in contrast, was struck by the large

number of kin a villager had to draw upon, and what factors influenced the whittling down of the bilateral possibilities to an effective kindred base. Among men, having served together as monks in the temple was a prime factor, as was close residence, proximate age, and common experience (1966a: 159). In my observations in the city the problem of a plethora of kin only affected long-established, prosperous families and certain prolific families. The average family in Chedi Lane, on the other hand, suffered from too few kin and socially close persons to act as witnesses to rituals.

The kindreds of children, moreover, were modified somewhat by the tendency towards uxori-local residence which accompanied the matri-phrased ritual cult. In practical terms, this meant that the child often lived amongst and knew more kin on his mother's side than on his father's. When matrifocal households were formed the same skewing of the kindred occurred.

As stated in Chapter Three, in many instances it might be more accurate to view the lukphuphIphunpng as forming around the unit of women who refer to themselves as phi draw kan, or of the same spirit cult (see R. Keesing, 1975, for information on lineage-based kindreds). In these instances, the sibling order among the older females of the cult determined whose daughter would inherit the spirits and the ritual officiant role. Knowing, therefore, who was lukphuphI (older sister's daughter or granddaughter) and who was lukphun9ng (younger sister's daughter or granddaug\_ter) was critical. It was within such

discussions, incidentally, that I heard these terms most frequently applied.

Because of the large number of contingencies involved we are best advised to view individual kindreds as complex, flexible entities, especially under the conditions of economic and social change that beset Chedi Lane. The function of the *ki\_dred* within the ideology of inter-generational reciprocities can now be discussed.

The transfer of merit from one generation to the next represents the strongest set of reciprocities in Northern Thai social life. Reciprocity is usually discussed in terms of child-parent obligations; however, when actually observed, such as at an ordination or funeral, the broader generational nature of the exchange is clearly evident. This means that the most important group with which one shares merit-transfer obligations is not the family but the kindred-based grouping called *luk huphIphun9ng*. Although kindreds were small and often matrilaterally skewed in Chedi Lane, the idea of merit-transfer between the generations was strong, particularly in the minds of the senior generation. From the bilateral circle of kin (including selected friends and neighbors) are drawn the group that participate in, and stand witness to, important life crisis events and status passages, such as birth, novice ordination, marriage, confirmation of eldership status, and death. This is the group of face-to-face kin, and fictive kin, among which merit-obligations are shared, and proper merit status

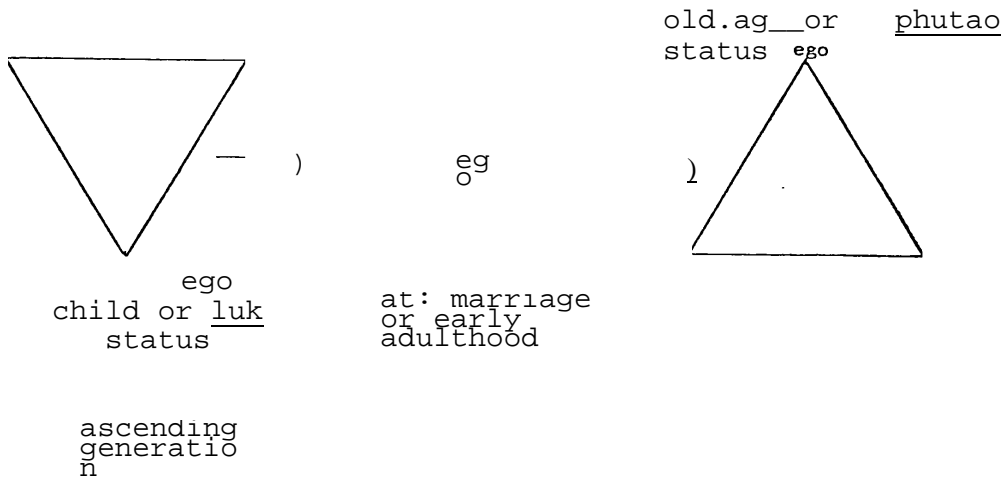
between adjacent generational classes is validated. The rituals of the kindred provide the opportunities for the face-to-face confrontation and validation of the generational classes, therefore, while the bonds between the generations are grounded in the theory of merit-transfer.

The kindred also possesses a temporal dimension that coincides with the individual's status career. For example, in Diagram 2 I have traced the transformations in kindred shape and structure as the individual proceeds through the life cycle. The diagram is simple, illustrating only gross configurations an ideal kindred assumes at three milestones in the life of the individual: birth, ordination or marriage, and old age, or phutao status.

One structural dimension immediately catches our attention. At birth and for the early years, all bilateral kin share the fact they are senior in age, if not in generation to the child. One has few if any younger relatives; thus, the child's early experience of kin terms is dominated by terms for seniors.

By the time one reaches the late teens or early twenties, ideally there are more lateral relatives, or "siblings" (phin9ng) than younger generational members or senior generational members in the average kindred. This is the period when one's confirmation as an adult commences. Certain males of appropriate age in one's kindred are ordained into the monkhood. The ordination, which I will examine in detail shortly, represents the formation of a generational class of juniors (luk Ian) who

DIAGRAM  
TWO



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KINDRED - S P A P E AND  
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will make strategic merit prestations to a generational class of seniors (phutao). It is not necessary that all young males be ordained, just as it is not necessary for all middle aged individuals to act as the specific sponsor of an ordination. However, all young men and women are acknowledged and benefit when one of their cousins or age peers represents the luklan class at an ordination. In the same vein, almost all middle-aged adults have attended one or more ordinations within their lukphuphiphunng at which time they stood in the senior generational ranks, and thereby claimed eldership status.

Finally, at the opposite end of the life cycle we have the reverse of the childhood experience. For example, a male in his fifties and sometimes sixties is usually given the kin term pp (father) or lung (uncle) by relatives and non-relatives alike. In his early sixties or thereabouts, however, the status transition from P9 to ui (grandparent, elder) takes place. There is no formal rite of passage, merely a subtle shift in address terminology. This creates various social and psychologic&l responses among individuals which we will examine in Chapter Six. The point to be stressed here is that ui status brings with it the sociological inverse of luk (or child) status. In old age most of the members of one's kindred are younger than oneself and receive junior terms of address and reference. The further into senescence a man proceeds the fewer people he has that he can call phi (older sibling) and rarely is there anyone in a higher generation. In fact, the last years of ui

status usually entail calling all but a few remaining souls  
 luklan (children-grandchildren) until one is truly "grand  
 fathering," in address terms at least, the whole kindred and  
 neighborhood. The social world of the very old lacks almost  
 all laterality by being canalized into a vertical or genera-  
 tional experience.

The shape of the kindred in Northern Thailand, therefore,  
 is conceived of, and actually segments in visual terms at life  
 crisis rituals, along generational lines. One spends most of  
 one's ritual life transferring merit to seniors within the  
 lukphuphiphun<sup>9</sup>ng and local community of worshipers. However,  
 with the sponsorship of ordinations and the receiving of  
 darn hua from one's children and junior kindred members, the  
 changing age structure of the kindred has begun to direct the  
 flow of merit to one's own generational class. Under ideal  
 conditions this is an important moment in one's life and in  
 the generational cycling of the kindred.

From the individual's point of view, this moment in middle  
 age means that he will continue to make merit prestations to  
 his parents, if alive, and to the ascending generation of  
 ancestors. This is done usually by the construction of hedi sai  
 (symbolic sand pagodas) and the performance of darn hua (water  
 pouring rites for elders). Because of his age, however, the  
 individual has now begun to have merit also transferred to him  
 self from the descending generation. This is usually done by  
 sponsoring an ordination, or contributing to the sponsorship of



one, and by receiving dam hua from junior kindred members.

This creates a coupling of the three generations within a continuous flow of merit, stabilizing the group and the individual on the life-death-rebirth course.

We have here an assortment of people each involved at a unique point in their respective life careers, just as we have an array of households each at its own idiosyncratic point in the domestic cycle. The importance of the merit status system is that through it the multiplicity of life cycles and domestic cycles contained in the kindred-based grouping is systematically coordinated by the division of the group into two generational classes. The latter allow for the establishment of a broader community of worshipers than just the family or kindred. Thus, Buddhist rituals are open, any individual with the proper intentions can participate because the sharing of merit, as we remember, creates more merit.

So the evolving nature of the kindred has been seized upon to coordinate a number of processual aspects of Northern Thai social and ritual life. From one point of view, the kindred can be seen to contextualize various significant points on the life cycle course (i .,e., ordination, dam hua, funeral). From this point of view it is the social expression of individual age and generational changes. From another point of view, the kindred coordinates the myriad particular:fof the domestic cycle into a smoothly operating system of linked generational pre stations. It is therefore instrumental in the maintenance of

continuity, a theme with deep ramifications among Buddhists and one which we will explore more fully in a subsequent section.

### 5.3 The Dam Hua Ceremony

Dam hua reveals more about filial piety, generational obligations, and socio-ritual hierarchy than any other ceremonial in Northern Thailand. It consists of younger or junior members (luk Ian) bringing gifts (shirt, blouse, pants, cloth, or fruit, etc.) to a respected senior member (phutao), usually of one's family, kindred, or neighborhood. The gifts communicate deference and respect and the senior person replies with a blessing (phpn). Following this, some sacral water (somb9i) is sprinkled (dam) on the elder's head or hands symbolizing the younger person's atonement for any offenses committed against that elder specifically, and the class of seniors in general.

Dam hua is a modest yet complicated rite that parallels the gadaw (kan tau)'of the Burmese and Shan (Lehman, personal communication) . We find it in the Northern Thai region, but not in the Central Thai region. What is involved in dam hua is the establishment of the conditions under which merit can be generated and shared. In this regard, any possible offence to an elder is a failure to validate the status and merit of that elder. The elder is then, to that extent, denied his or her proper merit; and this redounds upon the young because they were to share in that merit themselves. Therefore, at certain times of the year the young must attempt to recoup any lost

merit to the elder in order, in turn, to have back some of it by sharing. They do this by "begging pardon" in the dam hua rite, and the elder responds by giving a blessing. Young people gain merit by validating the greater status/merit of their elders. It is in itself meritorious to respect the social order which accounts for why the governor of Chiangmai province also receives dam hua.

In 1973 during the New Year's festival, the grown children, their spouses, and their offspring came to dam hua at the houses of the aging siblings in the compound behind my house. The young group went to each of the three houses, performed dam hua which took about twenty minutes or so, and afterwards went to dam hua the highly respected elderly abbot at one of the local temples. The old people were greatly pleased by the gesture itself, the attention, and the gifts. They referred to the event throughout the year, and noted who, within their field of kin and neighbors, came to dam hua.

On the other side of the neighborhood, a good number of relatives and neighbors had gathered at the house of ui Sikeo, age eighty-six. ui is a charming, graceful lady with warm sensitive eyes. Her reputation as a devout Buddhist is unmatched in the neighborhood. Besides frequent donations to the monks and sleeping at the temple during Lent on holy days (wan sin), she also recited her one hundred and eight beads each day, and tried to practice meditation in the early mornings or evenings. She is considered an asika, or pious laywoman who keeps the full eight precepts (sin baet).

A number of people, crouched in the deferential position, filed into her son's living room to perform dam hua for Ui Sikeo, receive a blessing, and make merit. The first gesture was to give a traditional wai by clasping the hands high up under one's chin or at one's forehead. Juniors initiate the wai with seniors, lay with monks, young with old, and lower status with higher status. The senior person returns the gesture but with hands held in a lower position, visibly expressing the assymetry in the relationship. Honks accept the wai but do not return it. The deepest form of wai or krap is given the Buddha image and, until recently, royalty. Without going into an extended analysis, the wai is only granted those people socially superior and therefore of higher status and merit. In situations such as Ui Sikeo's dam hua, or when layman meets monk, the gesture is completely unself conscious. The wai only becomes self-conscious in confusing or horizontal status situations. After receiving the gifts, ui recited a fine blessing which she wrote herself. <sup>It is</sup> significant, that individuals other than immediate kin and close neighbors sought out ui to perform dam hua.

At an even higher but still local level of renown were three individuals of great age and respect in Chedi Lane. They received the largest number of dam hua. These were the aging head abbot previously mentioned (Mrs.) ui C and (Mrs.) ui B. The abbot was a sagacious man in his seventies with a reputation for giving good sermons and maintaining high standards

of Vi nay a (the 227 rules of conduct of monks) at his temple. The elderly women provided a good illustration of the elevation in status that women can obtain within a religious framework which doctrinally places them in a lower and ambiguous moral category. ui C was a pious laywoman in her eighties, and Ui B was an eighty-three year old, highly religious woman who also served as the senior-most female of an extensive phi mot spirit cult. <sup>2</sup>

These three persons were recognized in the neighborhood as the most deserving local representatives in the age and respect system. It is noteworthy that they were selected because of their behavior and conduct over the years. Simply being well along in years was not enough to warrant receiving the many dam hua prestations that these three garnered. All three possessed piety, virtue, and some knowledge, which were instrumental for achieving their reputations. The young people, moreover, gained merit by performing dam hua for these old persons.

Chedi \_ane did have a few highly respected old people who received wide respect and dam hua prestations. On the other hand, a dilemma arose, for many old people in Chedi Lane in that they did not receive dam hua from younger kin, often because the latter were living away, but in many instances because their children were neglectful and preoccupied with other matters. This critical dilemma will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The dam hua rite, moreover, is also performed at the city and regional level. Calavan, drawing on information from Prani has given the following account:

Prani (1963:Vol. II, 106-114) reports that every year on the New Year day (songkan) Cao Luang (king of Chiangmai) was carried on a palanquin, with a number of players of gongs and drums alongside and his symbolic umbrella (sab phaton) carried over him, through the main streets of Chlangmai city. His aides and other people would sprinkle water (dam hua) on him, and he would be given a ceremonial bath in the Mae Ping river. Today a very large public ceremony is held for the provincial governor. (1974: 344)

Regrettably, the actual itinerary of the king was not specified. This must be important because it invariably took the form of a circumbulation around the city, setting out the boundaries, and touching and attempting to ritually integrate a series of sacred nodes.

Archaimbault (1971) describes a similar ambulatory rite performed for the Laotian prince of Basac. This water sprinkling rite was conducted within a complex of ceremonies performed at New Year's which aim to strengthen the kingdom, re-create the land, and regenerate time. The prince's role centers on being "purified" through a series of water-showerings culminating in a ritual ablution, all of which is strongly reminiscent of the dam hua ceremony and New Year's festival in Chiangmai.

The Chiangmai dam hua is first of all associated with the general water-throwing activities (song nam) during the three day interval of the New Year ceremony. Sanguan informs us that

New Year's was traditionally celebrated in Northern Thailand in April, the first Thai solar month, on the 13th day. In 1889, the date for reckoning New Year's was changed by the Central Thai administration to January First, so as to conform with the world-wide celebration of this day.

During the New Year celebration the first objects to receive a showering are the palladia of the city embodied in the sacred Buddha images referred to as *ku ban ku mueang* (preceptor of the city; preceptor of the realm). These images are *Fha Singh*, *Fha Keo Kaw*, and *Fha Sedangkomani*. The next objects to receive water-showering are the relic pagodas (*pha cedi*) distributed throughout the city and countryside, and the sacred gate post or *Sao Intakila*. Outside of the city other villages and towns perform similar water-showering ceremonies at their local Buddha images and reliquaries (Sanguan, 1969:18). Again the use of Buddha images as protective symbols and rain-making devices is integral to the Buddhist theory of mind, and possibly more easily comprehended by examining the principles upon which images are manufactured.

[In making a Buddha image] the main motive is to produce a miraculous device. In order to inherit some fraction of, the infinite power the Buddha himself possessed, an image must trace its lineage back to one or another of the (legendary) likenesses of him made by some artist, human or divine, who knew him personally. (Griswold, 1952: 97) .

Image-builders often used "trance techniques" to lay hold of and consummate such perfection in their images (cf. Quaritch Wales, 1973:151). And anyone familiar with Northern Thai

history realizes the great importance attached to Buddha images, i.e., wars have been fought over them (see Wood, 1924) .

Moreover, elaborating on the relationship between bone relics and fertility, Yalman has written:

It is well known that all the most important shrines in Ceylon contain one or another of Buddha's "relics." These are the dhatu, 'small pieces of bone-like seeds' (informant) which remained behind after the Buddha was cremated. The relics are thought to be powerful (saraya). The tooth relic in Kandy produces rain when shaken. All relics increase the fertility of the lands around them. (1962:321)

Dam hua is intimately connected with a set of concerns and ritual actions taken with reference to obtaining fertility and prosperity during the period beginning at official New Year's (January 1) and extending for some months afterwards.

The New Year festival, of course, is crowded with numerous events besides dam hua. There is the setting free of birds and fish which leads to the avoidance of premature death and a long and happy life. In Chedi Lane there were sermons at the temple, ,house-entering rites, and ordinations. Rich ceremonial foods and colorful sweets were abundantly prepared, and there was the usual frolicking and exuberance, and usually some violence. Sanguan describes the middle day of the three day

festival

as the most auspicious day of the year (wan phaya wan, the Supreme Day). On this day, after people perform dam\_hua for elderly relatives in the family and kindred, and usually for a neighborhood abbot, they then visit other renowned abbots



and temples in their area. Processions are formed, the mood is joyous and childlike, and two processions passing one another on their way to the temple gleefully douse each other with water. The more playful throwing of water at New Year's is termed hot nam pi mai (literally, New Year's water-throwing). Often trips to distant temples are combined with visits to relatives living in those areas. Individuals sometimes do not return from their wandering for several days.

The main point to stress is that the series of dam hua rites combine an active festival life with a clear outline of hierarchical levels within society. The most visible nodes are the dam hua for the governor of the province, followed by the renowned relic pagodas with their selected monks, and then the village and local temples and abbots, finally reaching down to the dam hua for the elderly in one's neighborhood, kindred, and family. This hierarchical scheme is one of the most tangible perceptions Northern Thais have about society.

The reliquaries (thedi) , moreover, have their own special pattern. The most concentrated relics and august tumuli are located at the very center of the city and ancient kingdom. From there they extend their moral and life-renewing power out to the hinterland. Village temples and relics of course reflect and retain perfection and power in their own right. Moreover, associated with each temple and reliquary are individuals distinguished by their age, virtue, and knowledge of the Buddhist doctrine. These include primarily holy monks and pious elderly

laypeople. They are selected out as key ceremonial foci. During the three day New Year festival the accumulated offenses that have spoiled the ideal order (codified in the term, *khuet*, for the more drastic offenses) and spoiled the proper respect among seniors and juniors are begged pardon for by *dam hua*.

Two patterns are outlined, therefore, on the social and ritual landscape: the sacred geography of the relic pagodas, and the respect categories distinguishing monk from layperson, young from old, and high from low in the social order. Once this scheme of status oppositions is again validated through ritual acts of obeisance at New Year's, social order is re established, the continuity of merit-transfer is ensured, and time is regenerated. Thus, food can be cooked again on the last day of the New Year rite (wan pak pi); merit and culture continue.

#### 5.4 *Buat Luk Kaeo*, The Novice Ordination

In Northern Thailand, it is much more common for young boys to be ordained as novices at the age of fourteen or fifteen years of age than to go into the monkhood at twenty (de Young, 1955; King'shill, 1960; t.10erman, 1967). In this section, I specifically avoid treating the *buat luk kaeo* as an intimate event in the life cycle of the young male, but instead use the organization and exchanges within the ceremony to reveal additional information about the ideology of generational obligations.

Before becoming a novice a boy customarily spends a short time informally learning about the rules and type of life at the monastery. In the city because the temple has few serious connections with education or literacy as it did in traditional times the temple appears to hold less attractions for young boys. In the few cases I had knowledge of, it seemed that the boy had less to do with initiating the idea of becoming a novice than the adults around him did. This of course may be true of *buat luk kaeo* in general. Regardless of who initiates the idea, however, once a young boy decides to become a novice he must first of all obtain a sponsor, or sponsors, and the necessary cooperation for the lavish festivities that attend the ceremony. These can be quite expensive. In Chedi Lane my neighbors claimed it is customary that the sponsor be someone other than the boy's father, although the father is entitled to act as sponsor. *9k* means to leave, to emerge, to go out. The sponsor is expected to take in the young man after he leaves *(pk)* the order of monks, and thus serves as his surrogate father, or *pp* *pk*.

The motivations of a young boy to become a novice are usually spoken of in terms of filial piety and expressed in the terms *bun khun*. A *bun khun* is established with anyone who does you an important favor or aids you at a critical period in life (see Akin, 1969; 1975). One has a *bun khun* especially with one's parents and teachers, and also a boss or political

superior if he has helped you at an important juncture. The intense dependence that farmers have with their draft animals is referred to as bun khun.

The desire to repay one's parents for caring for you (liang) , when a dependent child, is strong. My data are limited, however, as to what percentage of boys become novices in the urban setting; for Chedi Lane the percentage is low based on the few instances of ordination I observed in a one year period. The notion of bun khun was widely shared nonetheless in Chedi Lane. This extends to girls as well as boys; in fact, I noticed a number of instances where female teenagers experienced strong feelings of guilt and obligation towards their parents. Possibly because they did not have a suitable public ceremony such as ordination, girls often manifested unresolved feelings of indebtedness and responsibility towards their parents. These feelings may of course be a spin-off from the traditional residence practice (uxorilocal) which required a girl to bring in a husband, presumably an agreeable one, to live in her parent's compound. In any case, Northern Thai boys with the idea that they are fulfilling the obligations of bun khun still can, be found spending one or more years in an urban temple. Poorer neighborhoods like Chedi Lane supply only a few novices to the local temple, even during Buddhist Lent when most ordinations are usually held.

The motivations of parents and middle-aged individuals in sponsoring ordinations are a little more complex. Informants

usually replied that ordinations brought much merit to the parents and the sponsors. The generational prestations at such ceremonies, however, also provided a clear set of emblems for declaring mature adult standing in the community. Middle age in Northern Thailand is surely the control and command phase of life. The most important positions in business, manufacturing, government bureaucracy, education, and management are occupied by middle-aged men and women. This is that lengthy phase in which one is usually referred to as pp (father) or lung (uncle) and prior to ui or grandparent status which, as we shall see, has certain denigrative connotations in this agrarian-based society. One means of claiming mature adult standing, or active elder status, if you will, is by publicly sponsoring or cooperating in the sponsorship of ordinations. Therefore, conjoined to the religious aspects of sponsorship is the matter of status confirmation as an active elder.

An ordination is a traditional public rite, however, that strongly discourages private desires whether they stem from the status ambitions of the sponsor or the merit desires of the private family. This relates to the essential nature of merit (bun) which, as we have noted, mitigates against a narrow, tight-fisted approach to its acquisition. The yield of merit in any Buddhist ritual is by definition a direct result of the intentions associated with, as well as the intensity of, giving and sharing. Merit is the one unlimited good in Northern Thai conceptualizations and stands in strong contrast to the picayune calculations of price and profit that

permeate much of Northern Thai conversation. The more giving, or the more people sharing, the greater the abundance and yield of merit. The local adaptation of this principle is to have another man serve as the sponsor of the ordination, thus broadening the field of actors and the yield of merit. It should be noted, however, that according to custom an abundance of merit still flows directly to the mother by the symbolic act of the son's renunciation of mundane life. A similar transfer goes to the father when the son (ideally) becomes ordained as a monk at twenty years of age.

Another adaptation relates to the sharing of ritual expenses and associated merit-benefits by a large group of relatives, friends, and neighbors. Once again, there is a negative response to hoarding merit by the private family. So expenses must be shared and the sentiments should be in the direction of giving and openness versus tight-fisted greed. The pattern of participation of the larger group is of primary interest especially because of the use of age and generational factors as organizing principles.

For example, ideally various individuals become actively involved in the preparations for the ordination ceremony. Rice, tobacco, fruit, betel nut, packets of fermented tea (miang) , and money are donated by a wide range of people both within and outside the overlapping kindreds of the boy's parents. The shape and size of the young boy's kindred is, of course, dependent on the economic level and type of domestic situation he participates in. While attending an ordination

the relationships of at least some of the people will begin to emerge slowly for the ethnographer. One feature indeed stands out. The active organizers of the ritual are of the parent's generation or older. They arrive, work, share the expenses, and expect to gain merit. They view the young initiate as representing the ideal of filial piety. In their eyes, the lad is truly a son of all the families involved, and they, the broad class of seniors who will benefit from his ritual withdrawal from the world. This can be especially seen in the proud and exuberant ordination procession from the house of the boy, or his sponsor's house, to the temple, with the male elders leading, followed by elderly females and adults.

At any particular ordination rite, the assembly of relatives and friends can be seen to divide into two broad ritual classes: the senior or parental generation who are the sponsors, and the junior generation represented in the pious and stoic, although brightly clad, young initiate. The reciprocal exchanges between these two generational classes is crucial for all Buddhist rituals (Tambiah, 1968). It is the secular counterpart of the monk-lay system of reciprocities. Indeed, it is the expression at the local, face-to-face level of the primary moral sentiments of society. The parents by procreating, feeding, and caring for the youngster throughout his childhood can now expect merit to be transferred from the child to them according to the norms of bun khun. These junior generational acts of merit-transfer begin at the ordination

ceremony but continue in the form of dam hua rites throughout the elder's lifetime, culminating in the large merit-transfer at the mortuary cult.

#### 5.4.1 Ordination and the Continuity of Merit-Transfer

Sponsorship of an ordination has been traditionally described as the second most important merit-making act one can perform (Tambiah, 1969:147). No one, however, has ever explained why so much merit becomes available during this particular rite. For instance, the term for novice in Northern Thai is luk kaeo, "crystal child," "diamond child," or bejeweled child." This is in contrast to the Central Thai, Northeastern Thai and Lao term, nak, or naga, the serpent symbol, which has engendered a good amount of interpretive analysis (see Tambiah, 1969; Lehman, 1972b). Sanguan (1969) admits he is not sure what the term luk kaeo signifies, but he speculates it may have associations with the Triple Gem of the Buddha, Dhamma (law) and Sangha (order of monks). I would suggest we moderate the exegesis of novice symbolism and accept luk kaeo as meaning roughly, "precious child," or child possessing great perfection and concentrated purity. The intensity of the merit yielded at the ordination ceremony in this view stems from the purity of the novice. For the novice represents the paying back for parental care, and, thus, the validation by a new adult of the status oppositions (phutao, elder; and, luklan, junior) which, along', guarantee merit and social order. Ordination is of singular importance, therefore, because it represents the



continuity of merit-transfer. Obviously, the postponement or low frequency of novice ordination rites would pose a grave threat to pious Buddhists. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is precisely the situation in Chedi Lane, to which old people most emphatically respond.

Ordination, moreover, seems to have played an important role in the traditional Northern Thai version of circulating birth and death. To understand this complicated system, it is important to note, first, that merit is never directly exchanged between two generations, nor for that matter between any two categories of persons, such as monk and lay. Instead, in the secular realm, it is indirectly circulated across a series of generations with each generation making prestations to the generation above, extending for a period even after the older generation dies off. In Northern Thailand this system did not evolve into a classic ancestor cult because of the operation of a theory of ethicized reincarnation. Herewith, some further elaboration.

After death a person's winyan (Pali, consciousness; "soul" in a less orthodox Buddhist variant, Tambiah, 1969:54) is

believed

to make a difficult journey to the spirit world (mueang phi) located in a mountain, generally identified with Mount

Chiangdao however, Mount Doi Kham and Mount Doi Suthep figure in some versions. Merit prestations by the surviving generation

to the dead person's winyan or phi (spirit) are meant to help it accomplish its journey and have a happy rebirth in the world of

.. 3  
splrlts. The general view is that it takes seven days to the

spirit world, the usual length of the mortuary proceedings, and the phi resides comfortably there for a short period and then is reborn again in the world of humans. Urban informants were reluctant to speculate about the exact fate of any particular individual, claiming this falls under the complicated law of kam, or karma. More traditional villagers have been known to modify the indeterminacy of rebirth, however, by employing techniques to divine the operation of the reincarnation process.

For instance, an elliptical theory of reincarnation has been reported in a number of Northern Thai villages (Davis, 1973; Turton, 1972; Sanguan, 1969), in which it is feasible for a specific member two or three generations ascending, say a grandmother or great-grandfather, to die and have his or her winyan transferred into the foetus of a cognate couple of the junior generation. A spirit medium in Chedi Lane claimed that in the past even in the city, it was common practice to mark the corpse with a piece of charcoal on some part of the body and then carefully check new-born infants within the kindred to see if any "birth-marks" (or rebirth-marks, if you will) resembled the charcoal marks (see Milne, 1924:289, for a similar practice among the Buddhist Palaung). Davis, moreover, describes a diviner's use of a tripartite circle (probably one of the many yantras, yan, or magical-astrological devices of the Northern Thai; see de Young, 1955) for determining whether a village child is a reincarnated kinsperson from the mother's or father's side.

...a circle should be drawn into three segments. The diviner counts around the circle until he reaches the number of days of the waning or waning lunar phase on which he is consulted. If his finger lands on the lowest segment, someone on the neonate's father's side has been reborn; if on either of the two upper thirds of the circle, a matrilineal ancestor has been reincarnated. (1973:60-61)

Davis then goes on to explain the tendency towards matrilineal reincarnations in terms of Northern Thai ritual matriliney (matri-phased spirit cult) and the matrilineal residence rule. For further data on transmigration I refer the reader to Mendelson (1961:63) and the elaborate cycles of reincarnations Burmese wizards (weikzas) lay claim to.

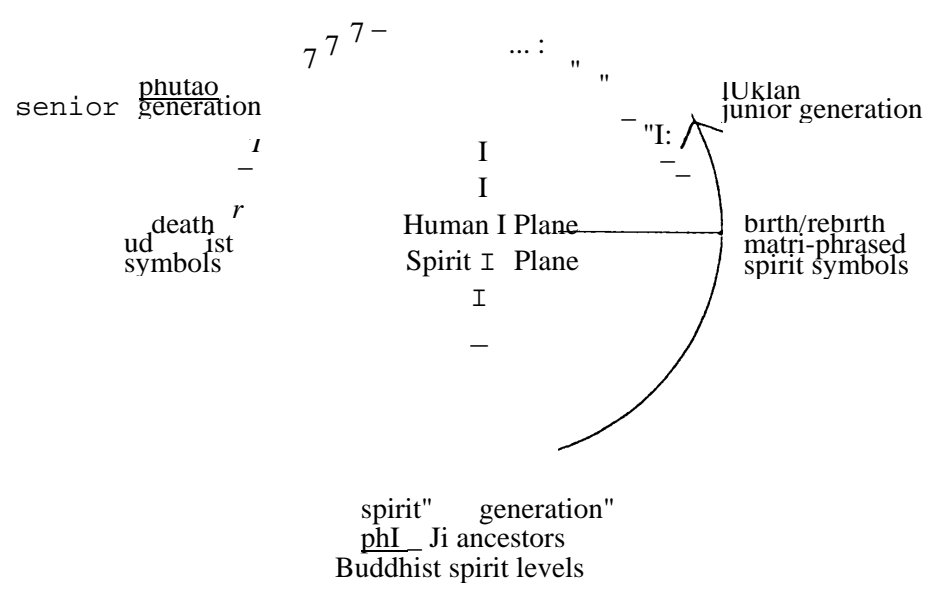
These village data, I believe, point to a traditional theory of reincarnation and continuity much more immediate and tangible than usually recognized. The death and passage of an individual of phutao status is to this day even in the city conceptualized as the soul (phi) going to the spirit world of the ancestors for a short period and then being reborn into the world of humans. As mentioned, however, traditional Northern Thai believe that neonates are drawn from the repository of souls at muean phi, and that the selected soul is usually that of a deceased ancestor of the bilateral kindred. Neonates, according to Sanguan (1971:144), originate from three parts: twenty-one guna (Sanskrit, "qualities") from the father, twelve guna from the mother, and a third reincarnation or rebirth principle. Davis' informants believed the soul of a deceased member of the kindred made up the third principle,

and was selected by the special spirits, pu thaen ja thaen (1973) . Urban informants, I should add, believed the father and mother contributed equal parts to the constitution of the foetus; and pu thaen and ja thaen were only mentioned in association with origin myths.

If in the traditional view the souls of new babies are drawn from the souls of deceased members of the kindred, then the kindred should be viewed as a cyclical system of live and dead members divided into generational classes, with deceased ancestors constituting what we might call a "spirit generation" (phIpuj a) Diagram 3 illustrates this system. Merit-transfer from one generation to the next operates the system, aiding the above generation with their rebirth goals. Merit, however, cannot be generated at the spirit plane so the "spirit generation" must rely on humans for merit. Because the status oppositions of young and old are contained within the kindred, and because souls are reincarnated within the kindred in the traditional view, the Northern Thai appear to have adapted the Buddhist notion of countless lives and deaths through samsara (transmigration) to a dynamically cycling kindred structure. This is, at least, one interpretation of the available evidence on traditional belief.

Traditional Northern Thai, therefore, must have viewed their merit as circulating. In short, children of the kindred, by being born, or reborn to be more accurate, bring with them a portion of the merit that was previously transferred from the

DIAGRAM  
THREE



rebirth course  
 direction of merit-transfer  
 note I spirits cannot generate nor transfer merit to others.  
 They rely solely upon the living for transfers of merit.

human plane to the spirit of a deceased ancestor by the surviving family and kin. It is not, however, until the novice's ordination that we observe recognition of the continuity of merit-transfer. In a more precise sense, the novice's ordination yields great merit because it represents both the re-cycling of the merit that accompanied the funeral and spirit existence of the class of deceased phutao, and the public emergence of a fresh junior generation which once again heralds the new prestations of merit that guarantee continuity and social order.

What these facts lead to is this: Merit is not merely an intangible quality associated with certain remote rebirth aspirations, and wholesome states of mind, for the Northern Thai. Merit, instead, must be seen as nothing less than the primary agent of progress and advance through samsara. By the "united merit of all sentient existence" (Hardy, 1880:63) the sun and the moon were created. Indeed, the genesis of the universe was the result of an act derived from a manifold arrangement of merit. This phrase, "united merit" and "united karma" appear over and over in the Buddhist theory of the rising and falling of, galactic systems and world orders. In a moment we will observe the same propositions in the myths surrounding the founding of Northern Thailand.

The problematic nature of perenniality, the spectre of famine, drought, and ruin, moreover, owe their origin to qualities arising among men that are opposed to giving, sharing,

and obeisance, i.e., greed, desire, and pride. These latter qualities interfere with the prestations between the generations, they destroy the respect upon which hierarchy is based, and they corrupt the intentions of the worshipers, and thus limit the flow of merit. The operation of society and the very cosmos is thereby threatened because it is constituted by the flow of merit. Depression, calamity, and war are direct results of low morality and the rude consciousness levels of the populace during uninspired eras. Over and over again in the myths it is only by making merit, only by following the five and eight precepts of the Buddha that the kingdom is renewed. More immediately, elderly informants in Chedi Lane were convinced Chiangmai has fallen on bad times since KubaSiVichai's death (1938). They await another charismatic monk to renew the ethical life of the Northerners.

The deeper premises of the Northern Thai system reveal an ontology based on ethical impulses. The cosmos is not run by the gods (although local belief posits they may influence its operation on occasion), nor by sacrificial action, but by men and women upholding morality in society. Thus, we might distinguish this system from Eliade's "archaic ontology." In the latter system things come into being to the degree that they conform to and recapitulate a primal myth or primal act

of creation. In the Buddhism of Northern Thailand the imperial conditions, or fate, surrounding any being (man, animal) is determined by the ethical actions of past lives, thus

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Obeyesekere's notion of "ethicized reincarnation," and the complex operation of the law of dependent origination. The more perfect a being the greater the degree that that being has conformed to the heroic ethical mode of Gautama Buddha in their previous existences. Generations and social order are integral parts of the ethical mode. Merit-transfer or merit flow across the generations amounts to the constitution of a certain transcendent order (orderliness) that puts society in harmony and consonance with Dharma (the universal principle of order) and only thus is progress toward Nibbana possible. This, at least, roughly mirrors traditional local belief.

In the application of these ideas to Chedi Lane in 1972 a number of changes have occurred. First, urban informants do not believe that kindred members die and are reborn within the kindred. This is an important change in belief and must be assessed in light of the heavy strain placed upon kindred networks in the urban environment. Informants did state that fortunate individuals were reborn at a higher strata of wealth and power in the human world.

Next, people in Chedi Lane did monitor everyday gestures, city morale, the respect shown seniors, the tone of temple life, the interest in making merit, and used these things to gauge the level of morality of Chiangmai and what was in store for the city. As we shall see, the level of morality in Chedi Lane was viewed as particularly low, causing resentment especially among older people who needed merit for their next



rebirth. The generational system of merit-transfer, moreover, was embedded in a broader socio-political edifice which can be glimpsed in traditional times. My reason for including these details is because so many of the physical symbols of this tradition still exist in the city and act as didactic stimuli for pious laypeople.

#### 5.5 The Intakila Pillar and the Thirty-Two Unit Scheme

In Pali, khila means post or stake; Indakhila refers to a threshold post before a city gate or door step. In Chiangmai city, the Intakila is an octogonally shaped, brick and mortar pillar standing approximately a meter in height. The pillar is set upon an octogonal stone slab base, and setting atop the pillar is an image of the Standing Buddha, facing east, and referred to as Fha Ham Man (the Forbidder of Evil) or alternatively, Fha Intakila. This entire assembly is enclosed by a small building with four gabled doorways embracing the four cardinal directions. When the main eastern door is open, which is only during the Saw Intakila ceremony in June, the Standing Buddha peers over the shoulders of two ferocious kumphan (gumbhana in Pali) guardians that rear up next to the outer temple wall. A short distance south and east of the city pillar monument stands one of the most majestic rubber trees in Northern Thailand. On the northeast corner of the monument building are images of an elephant in a small house, and a lion. On the southwest corner is an image of a moustachioed hermit, and a tiger set in a small house. It is of interest to note

that ceremonies to a set of lions and a white elephant located at the northern gate of the town have been described by Wijeyewardene (1970).

The Intakila pillar was moved by King Kawila in 1800 A.D. to its present location at Wat Chedi<sup>v</sup> Luang temple. Although the Intakila is a gate pillar, it is treated as if it were a true city pillar. It is said to lie at the navel of the kingdom (sadue|mueang); and it is one of the most revered objects of the Northern Thai. <sup>Th</sup> <sub>e</sub> two kumphan statues that guard it still inspire fear in the hearts of Chedi Lane residents. In one version the Intakila is described as the locus of the combined spirit or consciousness (winyan) of all Northern Thai, past and present (Sanguan, 1969:25).

One informant volunteered that there was believed to be a tunnel underneath the pillar that leads directly to Mount Chiangdao, the great meeting place and abode of all Northern Thai spirits.<sup>4</sup> From there it is claimed the tunnel extends to Kengtung in the Shan States of Burma. Another informant stated that, if an evil man goes inside the Intakila enclosure he will not return. Women, in conformity with general Buddhist notions of sacral boundaries, are not allowed inside the enclosure. Finally, it is an extremely calamitous act, referred to as khuet, to pull a corpse in front of the two kumphan at the Intakila pillar.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the history of the Intakila pillar, we have mention of it in the 15th century chronicles and there is

reason to believe it extends further back than this. For example, Kunstadter (1965:26) reports the Lawa claim to have built the temple of Chedi Luang and to have made sacrifices to the Intakila pillar when, as they claim, they occupied and controlled the Chiangmai plain. This is pertinent especially in light of the continuing discussion about the aboriginal Mon-Khmer speaking groups and the possibility of contact between the Lawa and a form of Indian Buddhism before the Tai emerged politically (see Swearer, 1974). The myth surrounding the Intakila pillar contains many suggestive details that throw light on the Northern Thai concepts of power, order, and continuity.

In the Chronicle of Suwanna Karndeng (Notton, 1926), a lengthy series of difficulties plagues the young kingdom destined to become Chiangmai, or Lanna Thai, as it was called. The early troubles generally surround the contest with nature for survival. One part tells of the discovery of seven clusters of lotus flowers on a pond that embodies the mythical discovery of rice, and especially wet-rice technology. A hermit interprets the lotus clusters as proof that a great civilization will be founded on this spot. However, its rice production and harvests will be clearly subject to ups and downs. At first, one year of agricultural toil will give seven years of abundant rice harvests. Then one year of toil yields only six years of rice, then five, then four, and so on, until the process descends to the extreme conditions of requiring labor six times a year to obtain one year's harvest. Thereupon, the myth reports,

the process reverses itself until one year of toil yields one harvest of rice, then two harvests, and so on, up to seven yields again. The process is then repeated. This, the hermit proclaimed, is ordained by the chata of the kingdom (pali, jata; form; concentrated life-essence).<sup>6</sup>

Following the booms and busts of rice cultivation, there were also social problems afflicting the early kingdom, the retelling of which usually provided a moral lesson. One particular segment describes the fall and demise of the kingdom over a case of filial disrespect.

As it was recorded (Notton, 1926), there was a woman called Nang Vidhava who was widowed during the reign of Phaja Munindapijja and whose son became unruly. When she went to take a new husband, the seventeen year old son rebelled and hit his mother and the older man who would be her suitor. Thereafter, the son beat his mother every day. Suvanna Khamdeng, the guardian spirit, wishing to call attention to this unnatural house, made it smoke at night and spout flames in the daytime. A hermit finally took notice of these strange manifestations.

However, when the hermit questioned the mother about the lack of respect, she pleaded she was helpless, and so the hermit took the case to the king. The court ministers were the first to be informed, and they were horrified. The king, however, found the case amusing and ordered the boy not to be harmed or punished. Did he not only hurt his parents and no one else? The minister out of fear acquiesced. The hermit interpreted the poor judgment of the king and the loss of filial

piety and generational respect as the cause of future calamity. Shortly thereafter, a flood deluged the kingdom and only a small group who fled with the hermit to the hills were saved. Afterwards there were times of peace and times of trouble.

The introduction of the Intakila pillar came during a period when the Lawa and Thai supposedly had lived together in prosperity for some time. Mention is made of the Lawa previously having received a well of gold, a well of silver, and a well of gems from Indra. Nine wealthy Lawa families were stationed in the city at the four cardinal directions, the four sub-cardinal directions, and a central place. This incidentally is the first suggestion of a nine-unit political system in Northern Thailand.

Because of the wealth of the Lawa and Thai, however, their fame spread and greedy tribes came to capture the gold and gems. A hermit went to Indra and advised him of the imminent attack upon the Thai and Lawa. Indra thereupon sent two giant kqrnphan to fetch the Intakila pillar from Tawatissa heaven and take it in chains to the altar of the Lawa and Thai, where each day offerings were to be made to it. When the enemies came to the town they were miraculously changed into friendly merchants. Everyone, Lawa, Thai, and foreigner, were instructed that if their intentions were good, if they were men of virtue, then they could make offerings at the pillar and receive gems, gold, and silver. Indra further declared to

the Lawa and Thai that if they observed the five and eight precepts, that is, if they converted to the law of the Buddha, they would have peace and prosperity in their land. The Lawa and Thai took up the practice of the precepts and a period of peace ensued.

Later, however, through neglect, weakened belief, and moral laxity, "the world grew worse." The grounds of the Intakila pillar became strewn with dirt and garbage. The kumphan greatly annoyed took the "column Intakila made of precious stones back to its former site, in the heaven Tavatimsa." The town and hinterlands became barren of gems and precious metals, the travelling merchants became disappointed, and low and unprosperous period ensued.

To conclude the myth, the real Intakila column was supposed to be returned by Indra, but the people led by a hermit who received instructions from Indra made a replica of the pillar with the following characteristics. Five metal cauldrons were to be cast having walls eight inches thick and a diameter of five cubits., A hole was dug and the cauldrons were stacked one on top of the other in the hole reaching to ground level. Inside of the cauldrons were placed clay figures of the one hundred and one men and women of the different countries, along with figures of animals from these countries.? After these preparations were made, the myth claims that Indra decided to return the real Intakila after all. This Intakila had the form of a plover's egg. And the Thai and Lawa have made offerings to the column and the kumphan ever since.

The myths and legends, therefore, associate the Intakila column with both protection from external evils, such as warring tribes, and the assurance of internal well-being, prosperity, and riches. The column clearly symbolized the cult of Indra (especially in his role as defender and disseminator of the Doctrine) and the basic link between Buddhist piety and environmental vitality.

We also know that King Tiloka used the Intakila column and its enclosure to hold meetings and conduct matters of state (Sanguan, 1969). It therefore served as his adamant throne whose eight directions projected his hegemony out to the hinterlands. Regarding Northern Thai kingship, few adequate descriptions have come to light. This probably reflects the immense amount of translation work still needed, and the fact that full legitimate kingship ceased with the conquest of the Burmese in 1558 A.D. Thereafter, Chiangmai had only princes and chieftains at the pinnacle of power who were forced to swear fealty to first the Burmese then the Central Thai King.

All evidence, however, points to the fact that independent Chiangmai (1296-1558 A.D.) possessed a dharmarajika form of kingship in contrast, to the Khmer and Hindu-inspired devarajika form. The latter involved the idea that during the coronation the princely candidate is reborn a deity and thus rules as a divine monarch (see Hocart, 1970; Quaritch Wales, 1931). The former concept is unique among the early Theravada Buddhist polities of Sukothai; Chiangmai, Phayao, and Pagan. In effect,

the king never claimed divine status, but viewed himself as wielder and defender of the Buddha's law (Tambiah, 1975). What radiated out from the adamant throne, therefore, was not the deified aspect of the king's persona, but the unwavering and indomitable rays of the Law. This at least in principle was the organization of kingship. However, based on royal funerary practices that have been described for Northern Thailand, it is likely that beliefs regarding kingship varied and that if not deified while on earth the king was believed after death to attain bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be) status (Quaritch Wales, 1974).

My task now is briefly to review how the king, nobles, monkhood, and citizenry ritually sought to attain continuity and prosperity for the kingdom. The role of various supernaturals will be outlined, the ritual topography specified as accurately as possible, and the function of powerful words to remove *khuet* (disorder, disharmony, pollution) will be described.

#### 5.5.1 Khaw'Intakila

The ceremony to "enter the Intakila column" or Khaw Intakila-is to be performed each year between the 13th day of the waning moon of the 8th lunar month (roughly May) and the 8th day of the waxing moon of the 9th month (roughly June). In 1973, I attended the first day of the ceremony on May 27th, which was sponsored by the municipal authorities. The doors to the Intakhila had been opened after a brief *thao tangsi*



ceremony (propitiating the four Lokapalas, Indra, and Nang Thoranee) had been held in the early morning. Inside the enclosure, a cord had been tied around the base of the Intakila column and a pink sash was hanging down from one corner. At the foot of the column and Buddha image were large baskets of unhusked rice; small baskets of husked rice; stalks of bananas; large trays with betel preparations; large bottles of rice alcohol; red and white sheets of cloth; small wrapped flowers; candles; coconuts; bags of beans; some tall paper tiered umbrellas, white, green, yellow, and red; and some long and short flags. An attendant claimed that traditionally two elephants would be brought to the temple grounds—one of unruly temperament, the other tame. The latter was considered auspicious and during the ceremony was tethered with a rope and led around the city.

Most importantly, it was claimed that in older times the traditional singers (s\_phun) and the spear dancers (h9k fQn) would be ordered from all over the kingdom to come and perform and propitiate the major guardian spirits (cen ban, cen mueang). Sanguan (1969) reports that if these performers refused they would never be allowed to perform again anywhere in the kingdom. I suggest the stringent treatment accorded the singers and dancers has a relation to political allegiance and loyalty. It appears likely that the princes and chieftains of an outlying area each had their own guardian spirit, relic pagoda, contingent of armed men, and a rustic version of a palace (khum).

Each prince would also have a singing and dancing troupe for magico-ritual performances for the guardian spirits of their locale (see Seidenfaden, 1967:45). Therefore, when the king ordered the singing and dance troupes to come to the Khaw Intakila ceremony and propitiate the cen mueang, or guardians of the entire kingdom, he was claiming submission of all the spirits and chieftains to the central pillar--the point at which was established his power to rule over all spirits and men in the name of Buddha and his law. Ritual attendance therefore was a demonstration of loyalty.

Moreover, in the traditional ceremony a great offering of food was collected by going to each house with a huge bamboo basket. This food was offered to the guardian spirits and the kumphan who guarded the column. All the food left over was eaten by the people on the ceremonial grounds, but none was to be taken home.

Following this offering, the famed spirit mediums would appear and the major guardians of the kingdom hao luang kamdeng and chao luang kam khiaw would enter them. Thereupon, the officials and ministers asked the spirits what was in store for the kingdom. Will there be sufficient rain, rice, and fish? Or will there be misfortune, calamity, and ruin? If it was discovered that the future of the kingdom contained unhappiness and trouble, a special ceremony was held to avert the misfortune. It was called sueb chata. However, first a

ceremony to Pu Sae<sup>-</sup> and Ja Sae (the guardian spirits of  
 Northern Thailand) -- was held at Mount Doi Kham (see Nimmana  
 haeminda, 1967). 9

### 5.5.2 Sueb Chata

In a passage from his book *Thai Customs of the North*, 1969, Sanguan has described the ceremony, *sueb chata*. One passage which is based on a translation of an ancient text greatly illuminates the politico-religious structure of Chiangmai during the Golden Age (1455-1565 A.D.). The description provided comes from the reign of King Muang Keo who was the immediate successor of Tiloka. It is safe to assume, however, because of the lengthy citations that Tiloka receives in the *Jinakalamalini* and other chronicles that he was responsible for establishing the politico-ritual system that Muang Keo inherited.

The *sueb chata* ceremony was performed at various levels from the kingdom down to the village (mu) and even for the individual (*pukhon*) (Kingshill, 1960; Sanguan, 1969). The purpose of the ceremony was to extend the life of the city (o ayu), guaranteeing its prosperity by driving out the evil, disorder, and disharmony in the kingdom, in the village, and individual. At one level the ceremony is organized on the basis of a belief that by making offerings to the guardian spirits and following the tenets of spirit ritual to the letter the spirits will grant abundance, prosperity, and specific wishes. It therefore fits the classic ritual exchange of

"devotion for mercy, service for boons" between men and gods (cf. Wadley, 1975:87). The mention of ritual exactness, more over, suggests the puristic tendencies of Brahmin sacrifices. We do know incidentally that the Lawa claim to have sacrificed buffaloes at the Intakila column (Kunstadter, 1965). Also a buffalo was customarily sacrificed up to fifty years ago at the alter to Mengrai in the center of the city (see Nimmana haeminda, 1966). Moreover, five villages around Mae Hia still sacrifice a buffalo at the Mt. Doi Kham ceremony to Pu Sae and Ja Sae. Thus, some form of sacrificial system such as we find associated with various Mon-Khmer language groups (see Izikowitz, 1942; Hutchinson, 1951) and Tibeto-Burman tribes predated and probably formed part of the sueb chata rite of Chiangmai.

The first phase of the ceremony was directed to propitiating the various guardian spirits of the realm. The propitiations for each spirit and sacred node were conducted by a princely officiant associated with that spirit and political division of the kingdom. Based on an ancient text written on bark leaves (from the shrub *Strebus asper*) in the Northern Thai script and originally translated by Khamfu Khanunkeo of Mae Rim, we have been provided a list of the spirits, sacred nodes, regalia, and the name of the ritual officiant at each point on the ritual itinerary. This list was for the year 1495 A.D. and under King Muang Keo. We have reason to suspect that each king replaced older or disloyal princes and

appointed new princes and ministers at the beginning of each reign (see Mendelson, 1963:285-6). Locality and gate spirits were also changed and substituted by the king, usually by the grim method of burying an individual alive under a gate or rampart so that his angered spirit would vengefully defend that spot. As in Burma with their nat (Spiro, 1967), most of the hao nai (princely hero spirits) of Northern Thailand have tragedy and sadness mixed into their legendary lives.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, a second phase of the ceremony closely conjoined to the topography of spirit nodes was a Buddhist image and a cedi or reliquary cult. Thus, traditionally each locale was characterized by a major guardian spirit, a reigning prince (chao nai), and a sacred Buddhist reliquary and power-emitting Buddha image. These latter will be specified during the second phase of sueb chata.

Because the sueb chata for the mueang must be done at various selected places within the same day, the ritual items were prepared in advance. The idea of strengthening and tightening the connections of the center with its radius of sacred nodes was 'very important. The following items were made ready in the traditional ceremony: puffed rice; flowers; joss-sticks; a white cloth; a red cloth; 31,300 cowie shells; betel ingredients for 1,300 quids; unhusked rice; husked rice; bananas; sugar cane; three small victory flags and a large victory flag; new mats for sitting and serving; new clay pots; trays for flowers and joss sticks; cups and spoons; wooden

tables; and fish and water life (crab, shrimp, clams, and small fish) that were set free in the water.

Once the paraphernalia and food were prepared, the ceremony began in earnest. The basis of the ceremony was a procession of dignitaries circumambulating the city. They proceeded to each designated node and made offerings to the spirit guardians and potent regalia at those places.

The first node on the ritual itinerary was the klang wi<sup>ng</sup> Chiangmai (town center), the area at the center of the kingdom, and in 1495 A.D. it was propitiated by Saen Dong Daeng who was also delegated the responsibility of organizing and synchronizing the overall ceremony. We can only assume that klang wiang refers to a cluster of elements and entities at the center of the kingdom such as the central temple, or royal reliquary (Cedi Luang) , the Intakila pillar and the giant rubber tree.

The second node on the itinerary marked the offerings to the protective spirits at Doi Luang<sup>ng</sup> Chiangdao or Mt. Chiangdao. This mountain, functioned then and now in many ways similar to the descriptions we have of Mt. Popa in Burma and Mt. Kapong at Sukothai. The off\_ciant in care of Mt. Chiangdao was Saen Non. As previously mentioned, Mt. Chiangdao was the great meeting hall of all the major spirits of Northern Thailand and the home of the famous civilizing hero and chief protector of Chiangmai, Suwanna Kamdeng. The latter is credited with having brought Buddh<sup>sm</sup> to Northern Thailand and converted the

aboriginal Lawa to the new faith. To this day Mt. Chiangdao occupies a very strong position in the religious life of the Northern Thais. For instance, in Chedi Lane no spirit medium would conduct seance on Wednesday afternoon because all the major spirits were convening at Mt. Chiangdao at that time.

The third node of the ceremony was that for the guardian spirit Mengrai, then officiated over by Saen Sa-Lie As founder and first king of Chiangmai, and because of his violent death, Memgrai has been made a special protector of the realm.

A fourth offering was made to the eight mighty stone elephants that encircled the royal reliquary (Cedi Luang). Suan Hae Fai Kwa was the officiant.

The fifth node was the Intakila pillar, described as being located at the "Navel Temple" of the kingdom and officiated over by Saen Nang Sue Saen Caek.

Subsequently, I will merely list the remaining spirit entities that were propitiated and the names of the ritual officiants.

No.6. < The craftsmen (painters?) were the officiants for<sup>I</sup> the two kumphan (giants) that guard the Intakila pl are<sup>II</sup> the  
Nos. 7 & 8. The, artisans of the "left" and "right" were the officiants of the two white elephant statues at the head of the town (north) or the White Elephant Gate.

No.9. The heads of the households (P9 kua) were the officiants at the offerings to the Ping River spirits.

No. 10. Nai Tala Mon Ma is the officiant of the offerings to the great rubber tree at the center of town.

No. 11. The aristocrats or wealthy persons were the officiants at the navel center of the town (sadue mueang).

No. 12. The common people worship the guardians of the four directions for which there are four spirit houses and a special place to worship Indra.

No. 13. Muen Cit was the head of the offerings to the retainers of the kingdom (boriwan mueang) at Suand9k Gate in the west.

No. 14. The swordsmen (puak dap) worshipped the "age" and "durability" of the kingdom (auy mueang) at caeng hua rin to the northwest.

No. 15. The aristocrats and worthy worshipped the det mueang ("flame, heat, fire, light, splendor, majesty, glory" McFarland, 1969:333) at another White Elephant gate to the east (not in existence today).

No. 16. Saen Muang worshipped the si mueang, the auspiciousness" beauty, and prosperity of the kingdom at Caeng Si Phum, the northeast corner.

No. 17. Saen Daw worshipped the mun mueang or four ramparts of the city.

No. 18. Saen Khwan worshipped the Usaha mueang, the persistence, exertion, and perseverance of the kingdom at the southeast corner (caeng kadam).



No. 19. Phaya Samlan worshipped the marana mueang (marana - the act of dying; death; passing away; cessation; McFarland, 1969:623), thus, the spirit of death at Chiangmai Gate and Saenprung Gate in the south.

No. 20. Phaya Dek Chai, the prince(s) or heir of the king (?) worshipped the kankini mueang (kankini--misfortune, ill-luck, catastrophe, the goddess of adversity, McFarland, 1969:98), thus the spirit of adversity at caeng ku rueang on the southwest corner.

No. 21. Dawi and Kham B\_cai worshipped the heavenly spirits, Surakido, who guarded the white elephant gate to the east (present day Tapae Gate).

No. 22. Dawaw and the gate-builders worshipped the Tewabut (male heavenly spirit) named Kaiphumo who guarded the Chiangmai Gate and the Suanprung Gate in the south.

No. 23. D9na Luang worshipped the spirit Surachado, the guardian of the Suand\_k Gate in the west.

No. 24. Nai Kwan and Suanphit worshipped the spirit Khanrakido who guarded the White Elephant Gate in the north.

These were the points listed on the itinerary of sacred nodes of the kingdom., We should note that if we treat the eight elephants of No.4 separately as well as the four guardian spirits of No. 12 the combined total would be  $24 + 8 + 4$  or 36. One justification for doing this is that in the immediately following ceremony there were thirty-seven groups of monks located about the city collectively chanting

(suat monkon) and vitalizing the sacred string reputedly tied around the entire city. In the previous ritual, however, we should note that the kingdom was treated as a vital organism with various dynamic characteristics such as its age, its heat and fire, its exertion, perseverance, adversity, and death. Behind these vital attributes were designated spirit guardians, who so long as they were propitiated and not forgotten, activated and saw to the operation (or containment) of that particular function and attribute by propitiating them all in one day, in one grand synchronized circumambulation.

We may also assume that the division of ritual labor exposed the political differentiation of the kingdom. The names of the ritual officiants were the names of the key princes, aristocrats, and perhaps artisan guilds, that composed the hierarchies of allotted power beneath the king. At one time they may have possessed a territorial basis, as the singing and dance troupe prescriptions implied. We are dealing, therefore, with a ritual topography of roughly 32-37 nodes, manned and operated by an identical number of political components and positions. The full organization of this system, however, must include, the Buddhist component or second phase of *sueb chata*.

Sanguan (1969:57) states that monks from all of the major temples would be contacted to participate in the second phase. These included, especially, Wat ChIangman, Wat ChIang Yuen, and other auspicious temples. Moreover, the most sacred Buddha

images, i.e., the crystal Buddha (Pha Kaeo Kao or Pha Sedangkhomani) of Wat Chiangman, would be taken out and placed in procession. A sacred string would be tied about it and then passed into the hands of small groups of holy monks who held the cord and chanted suttas. First, there were three bundles (puk) of suttas chanted at Wat Chiangyuen. Second, three bundles of suttas written on bark leaves chanted at Wat Duang Di. Third, one bundle chanted at Wat Chai Fha. Fourth, one bundle chanted at Wat Fha Singh. Fifth, one bundle chanted at Wat Chai Sathan. Sixth, one bundle chanted at Wat Chotikaram.

Sanguan (1967:57) then explains that the monks at each of these temples were to chant in unison (tet phram kan) when the sacred Buddha image was at the center of the kingdom (nai wela diaw thi manatop klang wIang). As we saw earlier, the manatop (mandap, Pali) referred to the four-domed building housing the Intakila pillar. After these chants were completed, the Buddha image was to be taken to twenty-seven other temples and reliquaries\_ and the sacred cord was to be stretched to unite all of the sacred nodes on the itinerary (Sanguan, 1969:57). Chanting was to be conducted at all of the temples contacted. Accompanying the chanting was water-sprinkling. The rite concluded with a holy and melodious talk, which if heard by the participants caused happiness and calmness of heart. If we add the six major temples to the twenty-seven minor temples we end up with thirty-three. In the spirit propitiation portion

we reached the numbers 32-37, depending on how the spirit entities are counted. It can be noted, therefore, that Chiangmai possessed a formalized spirit pantheon and reliquary-temple cult based on the thirty-two unit scheme.

This differentiates Chiangmai from the Thai kingdom of Ayuthia and presumably Sukotai; and reveals its similarities to early pegu and Burmese Pagan among others (see Shorto, 1963; 1967; and Mendelson, 1961).

In the Chiangmai sueb chata, the aim was to rid the kingdom of evil and disharmony (khuet). This was pursued by spirit propitiation at the vital nodes of the kingdom, followed by a grand circumambulation of the Buddha image palladia accompanied by stretching a sacred string around the entire city. The spirit powers were thereby subordinated and brought in to strengthen the kingdom. The string, moreover, began at the center and was fastened to thirty-three sacred relic depositories and temples in the city. At these places, the most pious monks and meditators held the string and charged it with energy and endurance through their power-harnessing words (suatmon). If this description is correct we can picture monks stationed at thirty-three locations, chanting in unison, and holding a string of moral energy which charged the center and its component parts. Again, surrounding an entity with the power of the scripture by the use of a blessed string is protective and fertilizing.

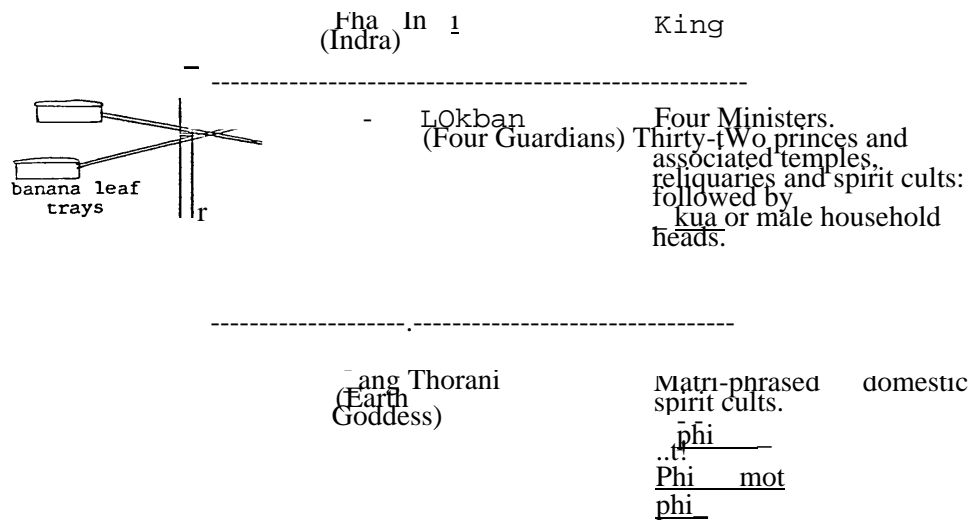
By way of summary let us pause and attempt to assess what manner of system we are dealing with here and how it relates to the previous sections on generations, kindreds, and continuity.

The significance of confirming the thirty-two unit scheme for Chiangmai is that it establishes the cosmological design behind the organization of the traditional polity. For Chiangmai we end up with an ordinating symbol and configuration which to this day is still represented at all Northern Thai rituals, i.e., the thao tang si, or symbol of the four quarters of the world and their guardians. Diagram 4 presents the components of this model.

To guarantee continuity for the kingdom the foregoing hierarchy must be validated in the social and ritual domains. The primary ritual that addresses this hierarchy is dam hua. As we have noted, dam hua prestations begin in the household, kindred, and neighborhood and extended up through the various respect positions of pious elderly, local abbot, local prince, and finally ,king in traditional times, or governor in modern times. The entire system is grounded in the transfer of merit up through the oppositions of the age status, generational, and official rank systems. Merit as we have seen was the active agent of progress and advance past the negative pull of bap kam (bad karma).

In the next chapter, we will see that the details and organization of traditional Chiangmai, while important for helping us to understand the ideology of merit and inter-generational

- DIAGRAM  
FOUR



Thao Tang S1  
Symbol of the Four Quarters

Traditional Socio  
political Hierarchy

reciprocities, do not, in themselves, provide an accurate description of inter-generational relations in modern day Chiangmai city. The latter has undergone massive changes since World War II and these have had a strong effect upon social life. As we shall see, it is with reference to the traditional ideology of merit and inter-generational reciprocities, nevertheless, that contemporary elderly define their situation and interpret the changes taking place in their social world.

## Footnotes

1 Merit-making, of course, becomes intermeshed with obligations and the running dialogue of reciprocities that relatives and neighbors share. For instance, it is frequently heard that "they came and made merit (ma tham bun) at our ritual, so we'll go and make merit at theirs" (i.e., according to local norms of reciprocity we should attend their ceremony).

2 Ui B may be something of an exception because of the

extensive domestic cult she headed. My data on the phi mot ancestor cult, however, are fragmentary. This cult and its matri-phrased genealogical links appeared much deeper than the relatively shallow phi puja cults. I counted eleven households who claimed they worshipped the ancestral spirits whose cult head was ui B. Therefore, this large number of households performing dam hua for Ui B could make her appear as piously renowned as the abbot and ui C when in fact she may merely have had a more dense and localized universe of kin than most old people.

3 Turton (1972) insists that his villagers do not use the

term winyan, nor understand its significance. Among urban Northern Thais and villagers of Hua Rin, Sanpatong District, the word is known and used frequently.

4 The importance of tunnels that link religio-political

centers in Northern Thailand has not received adequate attention. Besides the Intakila-Mt. Chiangdao tunnel, the Damman Fha Doi Kham or Chronicle of the Doi Kham Relics, states that th\_re was a cave-tunnel from Chomthong, a district in southwest Chiangmai province, to Mt. Doi Kham, and from there to the temple Umong in Chiangmai (cf. Section 3, "Khun Phaen and Doi Kham") .

5 As we ,gain more and more clarity regarding the

cosmologically-inspired use of space, direction, and solar and lunar forms of reckoning in Chiangmai's ground plan, it will be of interest to note that the Burmese in a vicious attempt to de-sacralize and de-cosmologize Chiangmai used corpses and inverted - funeral processions as their chief weapon (Ban Phisom, 1969:103) .

6 This is a key word for understanding the general Buddhist approach to continuity and prosperity I have stressed. McFarland (p. 292) defines chata as an adjective meaning "born, produced, caused, arisen." This would identify it with jata (Pali), one of the twelve links in the law of dependent origination. Chata, or that which arises, is produced, etc., when mentioned with reference to a person or kingdom implies merit and the working of Karma.



7Animal effigies are quite common to Thai ritual and symbolism. Coedes (1957), in his synopsis of the Traiphumikatha mentions in his coverage of the modes of generation (birth) and types of rebirth, a lengthy description of animal births and remarkable animal races. Quartich Wales (1931) noted the frequent appearance of animal effigies at royal cremations.

8This is the only time I have heard mention of Chao Luan Kam Khiaw. Chao Luan Kamdeng is the famed civilizing hero of the Northern Thai closely associated with the establishment of Buddhism, the founding of the kingdom, and the guardianship of the mueang. He is the local version of Indra and lives at Mt. Chiangdao, which is parallel to the Burmese sacred mountain min mahagirI.

9There are various sacred mountains surrounding Chiangmai.

Mt. Kham, or Doi Kham is the sanctuary of the Lawa spirits pu Sae, Ja Sae (Notton, 1923; Nimannahaeminda, 1967). Mt. Doi Suthep is reputed to have been the home of an early Lawa megalithic cultural complex with numerous chieftain burials but particularly the haunt of the spirit Suthep. Needless to say, the hagiography of Mt. Chiangdao as well as the other sacred mountains is in need of careful research and elucidation.

I refer the reader to Shorto (1967:135) and Mendelson (1963) for the association of violent death and attainment of guardian spirit-hood.

11AS mentioned these two stone figures are among the most

fearsome entities in present-day Chiangmai. Corpses or funeral processions are never allowed to pass in front of them.

## CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL CONTEXTS AND ADAPTATIONS  
OF THE ELDERLY

## 6.1 Introduction

One guiding idea in my treatment of aging in the Northern Thai context is to determine whether there are similarities between how the sexes resolve their antagonisms in active adulthood, on the one hand, and how old people resolve their conflicts and tensions with younger persons, on the other. Pursuing this question implies that I am attempting to isolate a method that Northern Thai use when they necessarily must change their identity to adapt to new situations. As we have seen, Chedi Lane women use spirit ritual as a form of normative communication to constrain men who are lax or neglectful in their relations with their wives and families. In the process, women are able to adjust their family enterprise and alter their own identity accordingly. In a similar fashion, old people, as we shall see in this Chapter, encounter circumstances and conditions in the city that deny them the respect, security, and religious context for merit-making that was traditionally granted the old. It is revealing to observe how older persons respond to these conditions and, in particular, what ideas and ritual means they call upon to adjust their existence to the negative circumstances of growing old in a lower class urban context. In the process I believe we gain insight into the basic cultural orientation

to power that stimulates Northern Thai in old age as well as in active adulthood.

## 6.2 Address Terms, Grandchildren and Gossiping

My Northern Thai urban informants were in the main ambivalent about what age constituted the prime of life. Early adulthood was generally prized for its health, beauty, and stamina; however, it was also denigrated as a period of relative powerlessness and economic struggling. Most of my informants agreed that the period of life from roughly thirty five to fifty years of age was the most comfortable. It was during this period, they claimed, that one's health is good, one's wealth and salary are at their highest, children are less a burden, and one's status and prestige as an adult and elder are confirmed. It is also during this period that it is finally possible to build and live in a new house.

Following upon the relatively comfortable phase of middle age, however, came the period when the physical symptoms of aging began to appear. Young and old alike despised the wrinkling, greying, baldness, loss of strength, and poor eye sight and hearing that they generally associated with growing old. For example, during interviews many aging men, in particular, tended to dwell on physical changes, loss of sensory acuity, and lowered energy levels. They commented on how they must look to other people, and the things that they heard people say about old people. They appeared to verbalize their

body monitoring and concern with self-image more than women, and were more likely to dwell on and be bitter about the physical difficulties of old age. Much of this resulted from their continually comparing their present physical state with early periods in their life. Younger persons were also quite explicit about their attitude towards the physical deterioration that attends aging. The loss of beauty and exuberance was viewed as especially painful and sad.

with the onset of the physical symptoms of old age, moreover, there began a period when the use of address terminology was unclear. For example, whether to apply lung (uncle) or ui (grandfather) when greeting an older man depended on how old the addressor calculated the age of the man. ui signifies a person of the senior generational class, one who is retired from work and shows signs of advanced age. The term itself is respectful on the age status ladder, yet at the same time many complained that it robbed the individual of the control and command aspects of adult identity. The dissatisfaction with this term was seen in the reluctance that many of my informants had accepting the shift from the term p9 (father) to ui (grandfather). Women also preferred mae (mother) to ui. Thus, to presumptuously or inappropriately apply the term is embarrassing, if not insulting. If confused, younger people simply waited to hear how close kinsmen addressed an older person rather than risk a faux pax.

The tension accompanying the shift from P9 or mae (father or mother) to ui stems from the problem of change in generational authority within the developmental cycle of the domestic group. For example, in one case I observed a quarrel between an in-resident married daughter and her aging parents. The issue centered around the daughter taking in a young male relative to help around the house while he attended school in the city. She did so without consulting her aging parents, however, and they interpreted this as a challenge to their authority. At the heart of the argument was the deeper issue of who ran the household. It is noteworthy that although in their late sixties these parents were not called ui. In effect, the change from authoritative adult to dependent adult was still being negotiated in the household and the daughter acted presumptuously. Thus, within the context of the household the ui label implied respected, but dependent old person. It was a label most individuals accepted 'with a sense of inevitability, but only when the time was ripe.

One persistent response of married informants when questioned about their relationships with their aging parents concerned the problem, of grandchildren. I restrict my comments to the three-generational extended families 'in which the generations lived together on a day-to-day basis in a household or compound context. Parents claimed that grandparents interfered with the disciplining and basic socialization of their grandchildren. Among the more extreme remarks, younger parents

felt that their elderly parents loved their grandchildren more than their own children (i.e., the informants, themselves) . For example, it was often stated that grandparents objected to all forms of punishment for their grandchildren and took steps to stop it. The disciplining parents pointed out that young children quickly picked up on this and mischievously used it to full advantage. Elderly grandparents replied that they spent a good deal of time around the young children, knew their feelings, and did not believe they were being raised properly. They also considered that their own suggestions and solutions were being ignored, and that the modern generation was deviating from the customary way of doing things.

Throughout my stay I received a number of reports of piques resulting from the problem of authority between the generations over the exigencies of raising youngsters. Old people interpreted the issue as an example of not being listened to and the erosion of personal authority. Young people saw it as over-extended authority and interference on the part of the older generation. Again the main issue was who represented the authoritative generation.

A second reaction that younger relatives had towards aging parents or kin focused upon family secrets and the flow of communication in and out of the house. In Chedi Lane, younger couples, especially those at the middle level, appeared quite sensitive about their relationships to, and image in the eyes

of, other households in the neighborhood. In this context, younger adults often felt that older persons were indiscrete about discussing sensitive details of family life with outsiders. This tendency to gossip freely among old people, they claimed, frequently caused them considerable embarrassment among their peers.

Old people, in turn, replied that younger people were unduly concerned about their social standing and too distrustful of their own neighborhood community. In their estimation, people deep down really could not care less about the price of a radio or the profits from a day of selling. Losing face (sia na) had become over-dramatized, or so the older people claimed.

In those cases where an old person was accused of being gabby and indiscrete, it was interesting to discover that that old person was usually somewhat removed from the decision making and general control of the household. Many of their anecdotes and stories revealed a note of resentment and hurt feelings stemming from their peripheral position in the household. Most of these old people, incidentally, were called upon by their close kin.

As the gossiping problem suggests, old people were sometimes considered indiscrete and busybodies. This annoyed older people, however, because these traits had become permanently embedded in the negative part of the stereotype of the old identity. Other aspects included situational jokes about

poor eyesight, poor hearing, compulsive merit-making donations', and the proverbial aging man flustered by the pretty young girl. A whole genre of jokes, including a comic strip in the local newspaper, centers on bald-headed lung (uncle) and his daily foibles. Many of these jokes are hilarious by local standards but they strike squarely at the age bigotry in Northern Thai urban society, and the tendency for younger age groups to deny responsible adult status to the elderly. At the interpersonal level this is exhibited by younger people treating an aged person as though they do not understand what is going on, humoring the old person, or employing any of the general tactics that are used with children. When asked about the quality of interaction with younger persons, elderly informants were highly sensitive to these techniques that were applied to them.

Old age as an integral part of human existence, moreover, receives considerable attention within Buddhist thought and practice. One frequently used phrase "koet, kae, cee., dai"

(born, grow, old, suffer, and die) links old age to the inevitable wheel of suffering that characterizes the Buddhist view of human life. A typical passage in the scriptures reads,

So it is Ananda. Old age is by nature inherent in youth, sickness in health, and death in life. Having so said, the Happy One as Teacher added this:

Shame on thee,  
                   miserable age!  
 Age that maketh colour  
                           fade! The pleasing image of a man By age  
 is trampled down.



Old age and the loss of vigor and beauty evoke strong reactions and are often used by Northern Thai monks in their sermons to highlight the illusions of everyday life. Ui identity, as well as the Northern Thai perspective on the life cycle, are undoubtedly colored by the negative valuation placed upon old age by Buddhism. Thus, Northern Thai expectations about old age are tempered by the image of suffering and pain that Buddhist symbolism and thought keeps before the eyes of its followers.

### 6.3 The Ambivalence of ui Status

As we have seen in the foregoing sections, old age, despite its positive characterization in Buddhist ritual and notions of hierarchy, carries with it many negative elements in the Northern Thai urban setting. The problem can be illustrated in the following way. The term ui, or aged grand parent, can obtain great satisfaction for an elderly person on certain occasions. For example, as senior person in the family and kindred, I have seen an entire room of close relatives rise and respectfully acknowledge an ui, leading him or her to the privileged seat near the center or head of the ritual gathering. Old people are deeply moved by these gestures and beam with approval as they review their posterity all assembled in one room.

As we saw in the previous chapter, moreover, the elderly stage of life is embedded in important inter-generational

reciprocities. Old people perform important invigorative rites (hiak khuan; khwan, in Central Thai) for the younger generation, such as at marriages, children's illnesses, entering a new house, and monks going into Lenten retreat. Young people reciprocate by going into the monkhood, performing dam hua, and managing the mortuary rites for the elders.

I observed that aging Northern Thai, nevertheless, resented the loss of autonomy in their own household, and tended to avoid the ui label as long as possible, while often encountering difficulties with their grown children over the socialization of grandchildren. Adjacent generational relations, therefore, had their share of tension and conflict in Northern Thailand. The general notions and stereotypes about aging and old people at the level of everyday life, moreover, revealed that Northern Thai, probably because of their agrarian values, despise the physical symptoms of aging and express this in the humorous jokes about growing old. Even on ritual occasions in the immediate context of the family and kindred, all it takes to alter the image of the respected elder is a few instances such as the young person who raises his voice for all old, people, or that humoring tone of voice that often permeates the treatment of an ui, or the barely concealed petty conspiracies that families formulate to keep ui out of the way. Thus, the identity ui, symbolizing as it does the transition to semi- or complete dependency status within the household, easily becomes demeaning and oppressive

in many contexts. As such, the ui identity is both positive and negative and the responses of individuals to this ambivalence surrounding old age become a crucial factor for understanding the world of the elderly in this urban setting.

#### 6.4 Social Situations of the Elderly

In my survey of old people living in Chedi Lane, a considerable amount of negative commentary regarding their situation in the household and neighborhood was recorded. Obviously the cases I have chosen contain biases. As previously mentioned, Chedi Lane was one of the poorer sections of Chiangmai city and the relationships between young and old were certainly affected by these local conditions. Other parts of Chiangmai city might reveal a much different picture of age group relations, as I am sure the village setting would. Nevertheless, I found the elderly of Chedi Lane highly sensitive to the type and quality of respect they received in the household and local neighborhood settings such as at the noodle shop, store, cock-fight, and market. Their responses and adaptations are therefore representative of Northern Thai old people under the less than ideal conditions of urban lower class life.

##### Case 1: The Gregarious ui Ban

ui Ban is in his late sixties and up until two years ago served on the neighborhood temple committee. He is solidly built, well-fed, still quite physically agile, alert, and almost

completely bald. He is also a congenial, affable old man who delights the people he meets on his daily walks with a broad natural smile. His wife is less gregarious and owing to leg problems spends most of her time in the house. A young nephew lives with them and attends secondary school. ui ban prides himself on keeping a little money aside which he lends at reasonable interests to friends and associates. Besides the economic payoffs and basic stimulation that ui Ban enjoys from such petty transactions, he also at anyone time has a small coterie of debtors who view him not as an old man but as a man they owe money to.

In his social dealings with younger people, moreover, he portrayed a fine example of charm and affability tempered by a subtle detachment. Thus ui chatted with many people during the course of a day but he never belabors a topic or over extends a conversation. He also sets himself a simple number of tasks and errands to do each day 'and sticks to his schedule. By appearing busy and mildly preoccupied, he never imposed himself, overs\_ayed a welcome, or allowed people to take him for granted. By these means, he was very attractive to many people who greeted his arrival positively, knowing he would have some information to pass on, and that his sojourn would be brief.

ui Ban also took the initiative in certain contexts, and by doing so turned potentially awkward situations to his favor. Once a group of older teenage boys were guffawing and play boxing in front of ui Ban's regular snack and noodle stand next

to the ethnographer's house. Already committed in his path to the snack stand, ui walked straight into the boisterous young group and asked, "Grandsons, when will Chiangmai ever have another good football (soccer) team?" Before the answers had hardly begun, ui already had one of the young men fetching him a match for his tobacco. The setting was calmed, the boys strolled away, and Ui enjoyed his usual share of friendly conversation and attention.

At the municipal offices I have seen Ui Ban, rather than join one of the long queues, walk straight up to the busy clerk and ask confidently, "Son, where could an old man rest his aching legs around here?" Usually he was shown to a seat or chair and before long his business was taken care of. If the response was cold, he simply left and came back another day.

ui Ban, on the other hand, is considerably more gregarious than most individuals his age. Much of this I'm sure has to do with his superb health. However, he does show that the demeaning aspects of the aged identity can be counteracted if careful timing and intelligent use of the dynamics of social settings and relationships are employed. He was one of the most popular elderly personalities, I knew and observed. He had a definite style which of course he had cultivated all his life. I felt his social success as an old man came in being cheerful and even-keeled, not becoming overly sensitive to the realities of growing old, and always under-playing his role unless it was fully necessary to take the initiative. Apart from people who

owed him money, many people frequently sought out ui Ban at his house for a chat, to tell about a recent event, or maybe to get some advice.

Case Two: Two Elderly Widows

. ui Pon is an eighty year old widow who lives alone in a house next to her married son and his family. Her husband, who died twenty years ago, was a carpenter and built the house her son now lives in. ui hi <sup>I</sup>~~rif!~~ It? self used to sell miang (fermented tea leaves), khi-yo (long Northern Thai cigars) and khaw wan (sweet rice). When her last son married he brought his wife to live in what was at that time Viis house. However, ui complains that when she used to come back from the temple the house was always noisy because of her three grandchildren. Often she was not able to sleep in the daytime and this bothered her. Her son, respecting her situation, built another house next door in which ui now lives. Although she has trouble finding a child to run errands, because all of her son's children are in school, she prefers the new arrangement. "It's better <sup><</sup> this way. I like it quiet and my daughter-in-law makes food in the evening and I go there to eat. I hardly do anything myself anymore. I clean up the yard a little, cut some pieces of small wood for my daughter-in-law, but don't worry about my house. Living alone it doesn't get too dirty, and I don't care if it is liab lc;>i (neat, proper/smooth)."

ui Kaeo, another aging widow, has experienced a somewhat more difficult set of circumstances. Living with her daughter, who mothers a sprawling, rambunctious brood of children, ui was described as "never at home." In my mind I pictured an aging .truant flitting about town, too busy to spend time with her grandchildren. When I met ui Kaeo, however, it was with a slow and laborious shuffle that she made her way to the temple and visits to friends on her daily tours. When interviewed she claimed her daughter used her, and if she remained home they would have her drawing water all day long--meaning being treated like a servant. The clamor of children and an insensitive daughter drove her to seek peace and quiet away from her compound. Being widowed, and basically shy in temperament, her daughter's family overwhelmed her and robbed her of peace and respect.

#### Case Three: An Elderly Sibling Compound

This elderly sibling compound was remarked on in Chapter Three when discussing inheritance and the spirit cult.

<sup>i</sup>  
Mr. Chuen is seventy-three, widowed, and has a forty year old single daughter who lives with him. Next door in the same spacious compound is his sixty-seven year old brother, the latter's fifty year old wife, and her twenty year old son from a previous marriage. The third house on the compound belongs to the sister, Mrs. Bang, age sixty-four, the ritual officiant of the domestic cult who lives with and takes care of the three

children, ages fourteen to six, of her deceased son. The mother of these children (Ui's daughter-in-law) lives in Mae Sariang and brings charcoal, rice, and money to ui on her twice-monthly trips to Chiangmai.

These three older siblings may have the ideal setting. They are economically independent, each owning their respective portions of the compound and their own houses--except Mrs. Bang who sold her portion to her brothers. They are all in reasonably good health, enjoy each other's company, and are surrounded by a full family and kindred who fill up the compound on ritual occasions, such as dam hua and at New Years. On the other hand, there is no loss of autonomy in their day-to-day life as in the case of ui Porn. The issue of autonomy, however, was a key theme of this little gerontocracy not too long ago.

As Mr. Chuen and his daughter explained, he and his brother and sister have had their troubles with the larger family. A basic dilemma emerged over the continual requests for money and loans from children, grandchildren, nephews, and nieces. Often these requests were for pursuing educational, business, and training opportunities. It was often very difficult and troublesome to refuse requests, or to help and then be blamed for not helping enough. Inheritance was another matter, and a considerable amount of intrigue, maneuvering, and in-fighting among kindred members surrounded the inheritance of the large compound. Finally, the issue of who would inherit what reached a high point of consternation for all parties involved, and



Mr. Chuen declared an end to all discussions regarding inheritance in the presence of the phutao (old people). Some lesser properties on the outskirts of town that were owned by the siblings were transmitted to their heirs at this time. However, the residential compound remained in the names of the two aging brothers.

The moderately well-off siblings, therefore, faced a different situation from that of the preceding two examples. The siblings have had to create a sort of compound sanctuary for themselves in order to avoid the disruptions and bickering of younger relatives. During my residence, things were fairly well under control but it was only because Mr. Chuen had put his foot down and forced his children and relatives to respect the peace of the older people. His younger daughter claims this was awkward for him to do, being a gentle, soft-spoken man who basically liked his family very much. Now, most of their time was spent snoozing, or chatting under the house, or buying an occasional lottery ticket and watching for the Tuesday edition of the newspaper and the lottery results.

Case Four: Uncle Sin, The Vagabond

Uncle Sin, age seventy-two, lives at Chiangmai's only old folk's home. His situation can only be understood by briefly reviewing his life. The following is a verbatim translation of his autobiography.

I was born in Bangkok, I don't remember the year, I think it was the year of the snake. I can't read or write, but I can write my name. Now, I'm over seventy, maybe seventy-one or seventy-two. I'm seventy-two. My mother died when I was eight, she was thirty. My mother was kind. I left home when I was eleven or twelve to roam around. I had the idea to roam around to go everywhere. I like to roam around. I would make contact with all kinds of people and I was afraid to go home, afraid my father would hit me. But I went back to him. He didn't hit me. He raised me and took care of me for awhile. My mother was only sick for a few days before she died.

I had four brothers, they're all dead now. But I liked to travel. I saw the Chinese parade once in the street, weaving like a snake, a dragon, I was twelve and I followed the parade. I stayed with them for a few days and then sold little things at the theater. Around the old theaters small boys could sleep and sell things in the daytime. There were four or five of us. Then I went to Lopburi and stayed not too many days. I stayed with Khun Pichit and he boiled rice and gave it to us to eat. I was fifteen. Then I slept under the vaudeville stage for a few nights and they took me with them and we travelled all over. I stayed with these people, the Likay players, but I never learned how to perform because I was too young. We went to a village, Ban Mi, I don't remember the province. But I was tired of living with them. So I roamed around. Then I helped wash clothes, I was sixteen. But I got tired of that so I went to Paknampo where all the rivers come together. I cleaned streets there. I never went back home after this, just roamed around. I didn't miss him (father). Then I cut wood in the forest. Made enough to eat and live. But I escaped again, and moved on. That was the hardest job I had. I always moved on. I thought that way. After that I got chosen to work as a wage-laborer, I drew water and helped make cloth. I was in Sanbao and I asked the owner for some money, extra money, but the head of the house refused so I walked out, ran away again. I had a lot of women then, young girls all the time.

So I went to Kangpangpet; I was seventeen or eighteen. That time I didn't do anything I just had fun. I stayed with a big man, he was a very important man. He had a title. I stayed two

years or three. Then I was twenty-one and I became a policeman. I was drafted by the government, but they made me a policeman in Bangkok. I had a gun and a uniform. We didn't have hats though in those days. I did that for two years then I got out, my time was up and I worked for the city cleaning up and emptying trash.

In those days we didn't even make eight baht, but five baht a day or three baht. It was enough so you could eat though. But I got out of that, it wasn't good. Then I sold sweets. "Khanom

mue. . eh! " Khanom mue. . eh!" that's how I did it. My father died during that time, and I helped with the funeral - I was twenty-five.

From then on I went around, "khanom mue..eh!!I I could make three baht a day profit, not enough, but sufficient to live and eat.

I would get up at three or four in the morning and buy the sweets and sit at the intersection by the market and ask people if they wanted any sweets. It was a little money.

I would finish by noon and go home and sleep.

In the evening I would roam around, see the girls, maybe go to a movie, have some fun, you know.

I never married. That was no problem. When I was forty years old I went to Tak and worked for the city cleaning streets. I did that for twelve years. I don't have any children and I don't regret that. Now they send me here to

this home for old people. Before I came here I sold ice-cream for four years. "Ice cream, ice cream" and the little kids would buy it. Now I'm at the end, this is the last place. Sometimes it's fun, sometimes not. I can still get around, go out, look around town. I can still walk, I see the/cockfights on Sunday. I wear red on Sundays, the people here, the old people, and that fat lady who runs the place, they say I'm crazy. Huh! But this is the end, it's all over here. I won't go anywhere else. I went to Bangkok last year, but I won't go again. I'm too lazy to go. I like clothes, crazy clothes. I wear black and white on usual days, and then bright red on Sundays. The young girls like it too. They say, "uncle, uncle" very softly. I like the young girls. They don't come here, I see them on the streets.

If I die I'll die here. I'm not afraid, if you die, you go. I never went to the temple, only when I was very small. The monk comes here on Sundays but I don't like to sit like all the

others and listen. I get bored. I like to go out on Sunday anyway. I don't have any good knowledge, I don't know about a next life. Maybe, maybe not, huh? But it's four thirty and if I don't get in the food room fast the others will eat it all up.

I don't have any close friends here. If you're close, you fight. Years ago I had a lot of "eating friends," they stay with you if you have something to drink or eat. "Die friends" I never had. And the kids of my brothers, I miss them a little, but they never respected me much, and I don't care for them much. I never had any big problems in life, the worst thing is being here, but I can still go out and roam around, so this is a good place for me.

Uncle Sin is an eccentric by Northern Thai standards. His life story told as an old man is an odd curio, a tale of roaming, extreme independence, and irresponsibility. He fits well, although with considerable exaggeration, the career of the lower class male seeking work and adventure during early adulthood. Uncle Sin's distinction is that he never stopped, -howeve\_ and carried his carefree lifestyle into old age and the Chiangmai old folk's home. Now a minor dispute has evolved between two factions of old people at the home: those who deppise Uncle Sin for his audacity and clowning and think he'is crazy (pen ba), and those who admire his boldness and parodying of ' Northern Thai age roles and age expectations. Indeed, Uncle Sin abhors the hierarchy and pretensions of Thai life, and refuses to conform to what he considers spurious standards. Throughout his life he has always been able to leave where his eccentricity got him in trouble. Now, although old age makes it impossible for him to leave, he still refuses to accept the norms imposed by others.

Case Five: ui Sikeo, A Pious Laywoman

Ui Sikeo is the eighty-six year old devout Buddhist laywoman that we described receiving dam hua (water pouring) rites in Chapter Five. ui had ten children with her husband, a retired policeman, who died ten years ago. After his death, Ui, at her son's insistence, moved in with him and his wife.

ui frequently attends the local temple where her sons were ordained, and spends her evenings at home meditating. She is greatly respected not only by her family but by many members of the community. Her daily life is serene and generally untroubled. She remarked to me that she particularly dislikes noisy places and busy streets.

ui spends a considerable amount of the money she obtained from selling her house on merit-making activities and gifts to the monks. Although they would not interfere, her sons do comment upon her generous gifts. ui realizes that her sons perceive her merit-making gifts as diminishing her savings, which will eventually become their inheritance. This does not stop her from making gifts to the monks, but it does make her a bit uneasy about discussing merit-making activities around her children.

Case Six: An Independent Cou

ui Tawi, seventy-three years old, and his wife, Ui Kiankam, eighty years old, until recently lived alone in their modest house.

Forty-three years earlier Vi Tawi inherited a house from his parents which he sold to purchase his present house. In those days he worked mostly as a street cleaner, but was still able to purchase other urban property. He now has three houses that he rents out for 150,185 and 200 baht a month, respectively.

Tawi suffers from diabetes, and both he and his wife are weak and experience some difficulty getting about. They have stopped attending the local temple this year because they are too weak. Recently, they have rented out two rooms in their house for a reasonable amount so that they will have someone around to help with chores and shopping. Their biggest fear is that they will lose their independence. Tawi said that to go to the old folks home would embarrass his children by making it look like they were not taking care of their parents. One of Kiankam's sons from a previous marriage did come and live with them, but the arrangement proved unsatisfactory. Although advanced in years and in poor health, Tawi and Kiankam have insisted on maintaining their autonomy of their household. Tawi's investments, and his refusal to grant any inheritance to his children, make this solution possible.

Case Seven: The Energetic Mr. Kao

Mr. Kao, unlike most of my male informants who desired an early retirement (somewhere in their mid to late forties), remained busy working as a carpenter up to sixty years of age.

At sixty-seven he was lean, muscular, and still bore a close cropped hair-cut from his military days. He at present resided at the old folks home, the same institution where the eccentric Uncle Sin resides. For a full four to six hours in the morning and in the evening Kao travelled about on foot selling lottery tickets. He had no desire to live with his family who he claimed treated him "like a decrepit old man." He finds his accommodations at the home satisfactory, but condemns his aged peers at the home for "giving up years ago" and cooperating in the process of making themselves invalids. He rarely talks to them, and believes Uncle Sin is insane. He can usually be seen briskly walking his rounds selling lottery tickets. Admirable in his determination, he may have been one of the loneliest individuals I interviewed. He represents an extreme response to the social ambiguity that entraps many individuals on entering old age.

#### 6.5 Elderly Northern Thai and the Tactic of Improvised Avoidance

These are only some of the many examples one might discover of how individuals come to grips with the social predicament -of growing old. I believe they demonstrate that old people respond similar to other individuals who face an ambiguous status and unsatisfactory social conditions. Some, like the gregarious ui Ban, are more artful than others and keep the interpersonal pay-offs tipped in their direction. However, even he must spend considerable effort obtaining the type of basic social

acceptance in public settings that once was naturally and effortlessly granted him. The end result is that he pays much more attention to what he previously would have dismissed as the petty details of interaction. His style and success are based on the art of selectivity, understatement, and charm.

Ui Kaeo, the second widow, was more representative of the taken-for-granted old person who experiences a concrete negativism and loss of esteem in her social situation. Being widowed, mild-mannered, and overwhelmed by younger folks on the compound were prime factors in her loss of privacy and respect. She responded by dramatically avoiding her compound and thereby restricting the interaction with her relatives at least for part of the day. Although the latter perform dam hua for UiKaeoat New Year's, their general treatment of her left her feeling resentful and troubled. Once again, however, we find steps being taken to improvise a viable social life in which the negative situation (the compound) is avoided and positive settings are sought out.

In the case of three siblings, it was demonstrated that even economically independent old people with a stable status in their family and kin networks experience problems with autonomy and personal privacy. Because they were old and nearing death a number of the potential heirs felt rightfully entitled to know the inheritance decisions that were to be implemented. In actuality, many decisions had not been made, time passed, and bickering broke out among the impatient younger



relatives. In the process, the old people's compound became the focus of bad feelings and ill-will until ui Chuen put his foot down and ordered an end to the pestering and bickering. The compound is now peaceful but the relatives are kept more or less at a distance. They send gifts, make short visits, attend dam hua rites, but have learned to respect the old people and their peace.

Many features about the life of Uncle Sin, the eccentric vagabond, deserve comment; however, as a stranger I was interested mainly in how his defiance of age and status constraints highlighted most clearly the influence of these normative expectations on behavior. In his case he was stubborn enough to oppose the pressure to conform. In the process, however, he uncovered for me many of the hidden attitudes and tacit understandings that the young have about the old, and the old have about themselves. His primary technique was to go his own way, wear bright exaggerated clothes, say what he felt, and not stay anywhere too long so as to avoid the flak his non-conformity invariably aroused. The old folks home, like old age itself, bothered him because it symbolized the loss of the ability to roam and walk away from that which did not suit him.

The other cases reveal similar tensions in the lives of old people. Ui Sikeo is pious and respected, but even so must face some minor discord from her sons about her lavish gifts to the temple. Mr. Tawi and his wife are hardly able

to get about, yet they fear the loss of independence and distrust their children and close kin. Finally, Mr. Kao earnestly walks the rounds of his lottery ticket route insisting on maintaining his self-respect, even when it means a life of extreme alienation from family and aged peers alike.

One unifying proposition for all of these old people is that a calculus of avoidance behavior is applied by them to accommodate to the social changes and predicaments that come with old age. All have adjusted to the contingencies of their social situation in different ways, but all share a general strategy of selective participation in social situations. Different degrees and types of improvised avoidance are used for those situations they do not want to participate in. Following Embree, Philips (1967) was the first to record in detail how such avoidance techniques, and the presumed personality features that condition them, operated within Thai village social life. Although helpful, I have had to reject the application of Philips' framework to my elderly data on two grounds.,

First, avoidance behavior need not be linked to any presumed personality traits in order to be explained. Aspects of class, power, status, and maximization of values that make up the content of social interaction are sufficient in themselves to explain why and when individuals might wish to avoid certain encounters. In the case of old people, moreover, the use of psychological and developmental variables to explain social

behavior has proven to be much more complex and difficult than previously assumed (I refer the reader to the disengagement theory and debate; see Cumming and Henry, 1961; Clark, 1967).

Second, avoidance as an interpersonal tactic is only one side of the adaptations of the elderly. While Northern Thai elderly indeed avoid situations that generate low satisfaction, they also actively seek out situations, for example Buddhist rituals, which guarantee positive interpersonal pay-offs for them. To emphasize avoidance as the primary, or only, behavioral pattern would misconstrue and drastically oversimplify the social behavior of old people. Avoidance behavior is pronounced among the elderly of Chedi Lane not because of any presumed personality variable, but because they face concrete negative situations that they prefer to avoid.

Thus, societies such as Northern Thailand that possess highly specific devices for establishing status differences invariably possess a set of counter-devices for systematically avoiding status entailments where the pay-offs to the actor are questionable. Knowing when to avoid the status code and its obligations and when to engage it are part of the Northern Thai interpersonal repertoire. For example, old people engage in the customary code during inter-generational merit-making occasions because they are sure the interpersonal yields and prestige are in their favor. They thus spend a good deal of time maneuvering to maintain or increase the number of contexts and moments in which their elderly status is perceived as

positive and unambiguous, and avoiding those in which it is not. I reiterate that in their selective social participation Northern Thai old people are not evincing any unique distancing that requires us to presume underlying senescent personality changes. They are merely making use of a calculus of avoidance and commitment behavior which Northern Thai and Thai are known to use, particularly when confronted by ambiguous status situations.

#### 6. Inter-generational Ritual in a Lower Class Neighborhood

As we saw in Chapter Five, Northern Thai society possesses an elaborate ideology of inter-generational reciprocities. Briefly, junior generations (luk Ian) perform ritual services for, and transfer merit to, the senior generation (phutao) at ordinations, at mortuary proceedings, and during such occasional rites as dam hua. The elderly in turn not only raise and feed the younger generation in childhood but perform reciprocal services for the young in the series of life crisis rituals (hiak khuan) which induct junior kin into important adult statuses. However, whether the generational ideology is actually instituted into a particular segment of society, and the degree to which it is instituted, are empirical matters. In Chedi Lane, for example, a number of factors operate against the fulfillment of traditional inter-generational expectations in ritual life. These factors will be outlined along with the reactions and adaptations of the elderly to local circumstances.

We have already discussed how in neighborhoods like Chedi Lane the kindred oftentimes remains shallow and limited in size because of migration and employment demands. Relatives become scattered and the number of kin an individual can effectively call upon is considerably reduced. Thus, families in Chedi Lane, in contrast to some rural villages (Moerman, 1966), many times had too few close kin to summon for important merit-transfer and life cycle rituals, such as ordination. It should be remembered that the greater the number of people attending a merit-transfer ritual, the greater the amount of merit released. In the absence of close kin, Northern Thai normally fill in with socially close persons, such as neighbors, who act as fictive kin. The morale of the - immediate neighborhood, as previously mentioned, was low, however, with unrelated households keeping pretty much to themselves. The end result was that merit-transfer and life cycle rituals, the face-to-face forms of inter-generational reciprocity, were greatly reduced in pomp and attendance among the households of Chedi Lane. In the case of old people, this meant they had fewer opportunities in which they could receive merit-transfer from junior kin and provide services as ritual officiants for the younger generation. Since both of these are major means of obtaining merit and confirming one's elderly status vis-a-vis junior kin, the old people of Chedi Lane were at a distinct disadvantage in the realm of ritual.

Another set of changes that affects the traditional role of the elderly concerns the novice ordination ritual whose details and symbolism we discussed in Chapter Five. As pointed out previously, ordination is the principal ritual among Northern Thai for confirming merit-status as an elder. Developments within the secular educational system, however, have greatly altered the relationship that young boys have to the temple and to the institution of novicehood. As one woman puts it:

In the old days the mother and father would go to the temple and the children would follow. The monk was respected because he taught and showed the way for the children to follow. Now the boys are not interested in the temple, only in studying at school. The little boys used to always stay at the temple with the monk, now they stay at home and go to school.

In the past novice ordination was a part of a long process of education that young boys obtained from the temple and the monks. The contemporary temple, however, performs few pedagogic services for young people, since these services have been turned over to the secular educational authorities. Although novice ordinations are still held in Chiangmai city, I noticed very few of them in Chedi Lane during the year of my stay. Those I did observe in the city were, incidentally, usually among middle, and especially, upper level families. This makes sense in light of the heavy expenses involved, and the fact that a young boy and his family would seek as "a sponsor a responsible man of some means. Such men were scarce in Chedi Lane. It may be that poor families, even in traditional times,

never performed novice ordinations to the extent that richer families did. Elderly people claim there were more ordinations in the past; however, it is not clear whether this means at all economic levels or not. At any rate, the rise in prestige of secular education combined with the economic limitations on Chedi Lane families made novice ordination, and the merit-transfer and inter-generational reciprocities it confirmed, a somewhat rare occurrence.

Gift-giving to obtain merit was another source of conflict between the generations. As described earlier, much of Northern Thai religious action is dominated by the giving of gifts to the monk and temple. These gifts range from daily rice donations to relatively expensive manufactured gifts purchased at one of the Chiangmai stores. Northern Thailand in 1973, like the rest of the country, had been seriously hit by the post-Vietnam war inflation that especially affected poor families in the city. As one woman explains,

In the old times, my father and mother and the four children could buy enough to eat, firewood, everything, for thirty satang (roughly two cents U.S.). Now ten baht a day is not enough. It's terrible. In the old days one grapefruit was two satang (less than a penny U.S.). A big fish was six satang (less than a penny U.S.). Dried beef, one satang, and it would last you three days. Now, five baht's worth (twenty-five cents U.S.) won't even last you through the day.

Ten years ago my kids went to school and had only one notebook a piece. That was enough. They had a little chalkboard and chalk, and they could use it over and over, finish, and pass it on to their younger brothers and sisters. Now, one paper notebook lasts them a month, and they can't use it again.

Food and school expenses are just two examples of the overall economic crunch that was affecting families in Chedi Lane in 1973. Alongside of the inflation, moreover, was a new wave of consumerism that had spread throughout the city. More motorcycles, radios, T.V.s, wristwatches, jewel\_ry, tools, engines, and gadgets were on display in the stores than ever before. It is not an exaggeration to say that Northern Thai, and especially the younger people, were swayed immensely by the new commodity culture. Whereas traditionally Northern Thai women would save to buy a silver belt, many women on my survey mentioned a wristwatch or T.V. Men talked about automobiles and motorcycles.

The new commodity culture extended its appeal primarily to younger people. Never before had Northern Thai so many things to spend their money on. Older people, on the other hand, for reasons to be discussed, were less affected by the consumerism. Their inclinations went in a diametrically opposed direction, toward the traditional idiom of giving to the monks to make merit. As---wesaw with the pious laywoman, ---UiBikeo, moreover-'ra ,conflict> emerged between the young and the old over how money was to be spent. The young did not openly repudiate the giving of gifts to the temple, but they more and more prefer to spend their money on modern commodities. Gift-giving on the part of the elderly was nonetheless criticized by younger people, especially if they saw it draining the



family budget or diminishing their potential inheritance. For instance, it is customary that after bequeathing one's house and property to one's children the old person would place all financial matters as well in the hands of their children. If any money is needed by the old person they simply go and ask their in-resident daughter or son for the amount. Giving small gifts to the temple would fall under this category. If the son or daughter thought the gift giving was becoming immoderate, however, they would say so, and attempt to influence the old person to decrease the volume of giving. In many instances, what the old person thought a reasonable level of gift-giving and what the younger person thought reasonable often did not coincide. This issue created a number of disagreements, and old people discussed among themselves the danger of relinquishing one's purse to young people, awe-struck by so many modern commodities.

In the remarks of one elderly woman,

Young people do not have a good attitude about making-merit. If their friend gives them four or five baht, say for a funeral, they will return that amount to their friend when the time arises. If their friend doesn't give them anything, then they don't give anything to their friend. But, you see, if a person is hai bun (a meritorious person) he will make-merit without regard to what the other person does. Before we used to say, Lamphun (a city nineteen kilometers from Chiangmai) is the city of beautiful people, Lamphang is the city of fierce people, and Chiangmai is the city of compassionate people possessing great merit. Now, when I look at our young people I'm not so sure about Chiangmai.

Gift-giving occupies a key place in the religious behavior of old people, and in the past younger kin cooperated, or at least did not actively interfere with these pursuits. The explosion of consumerism and advertising, however, has greatly affected the value system of young people. They appear less interested in spending money on merit-making activities, and define these as preoccupations of the old. The effect of these changes is that conflicts result between the generations over how money is to be spent, and resentment erupts on both sides. Old people feel that younger people want too much. Mr. M. age sixty-three, puts it this way:

Children today only think about the future, they never remember the past. So they forget what their fathers did for them. I didn't read or go to school when I was a boy, so I'm stupid;

but-I sent my kids to school so they would be smarter than their father.

In the old days you used to buy things in the market and carry them home on the balance pole and it would hurt. Now you buy everything in little packages. You go to the market with your wallet and a paper bag. Buy things, fill the bag then come home and eat it. When you're finished you just throw it all away. These are the times of packaged rice. In the old days when you made sticky rice you had to get the wood and everything, then go and collect the vegetables for curry. Everyone had to help, it was a big thing. Now people don't prepare rice at home, they buy it already made from the market. In the old days, fish paste (plaIa), pepper and salt, and we could make a meal. Now a meal is a complicated thing, you have to use monosodium glutamate, something salty, spicy, sweet, and sour at every meal, or no one is pleased. They say it's not delicious enough. These are the modern times, children don't know the past.

At the heart of Mr. M's comments is the feeling, widely shared by elderly Northern Thai, that the young are desiring too much, too fast. In the past, life was simple as were the meals, and the family worked together. The young people of today, though, look too much to the future, to an idealized situation of having many material things, and they are forgetting the past and their obligations to their families and parents.

Indeed, many older persons are frankly worried about how far their children's heads have been turned by the new gadgets and styles. One means of expressing this takes the form of warnings and threats to grown children.

Whoever does not think about their mother and father are terrible. Those that don't take care of their parents will not have enough to eat. Those that don't take care of their parents will not be rich. Those that support and take care of their mother and father will surely be rich. Whoever doesn't take care of their parents will have no one to take care of them when they get old, and will fall into hell. When you are young it's easy to go after the money and gold, like when the water is up it is easy to collect. But when you're old, it's not so easy. Besides young people live in their parents' house while growing up so they should take care of them when they're old. (

Interestingly enough, the woman who made this comment lives with her aged and infirm husband and a servant, supplied her by her son, who is a teacher at Chiangmai University. Her personal situation, therefore, is relatively comfortable and secure. The didactic clichés and the hammering away at the obligations children have to parents exemplify, however, how old people in Chedi Lane have become anxious about these themes.

Behind the anxieties about generational relations was a broader concern among the elderly that the city itself was experiencing many changes for the worse. Mr. Wibun, age sixty-eight, was born in Pichit in Central Thailand, but has lived and worked in low-level bureaucratic posts in the North for over thirty years. Wibun believes that age groups, peer groups, and cliques, are much more evident in Chiangmai than they were previously.

In the past we didn't have the wai run (peer groups) like they do now. Then people were peaceful, respectful and fair. Seldom did anyone bother anyone else. But now, look, all the children play in groups; the school has different cliques; the schools are against each other\_ and the politicians are the same way. It's difficult to follow the news today unless you \_now what groups are involved. Everything is either mu (small political unit; Akin, 1975) puak (group) or\_ana (party or administrative unit). Everyone is in a group or clique and against the other groups and cliques. In my day they didn't have so much trouble. Each person thought of his family first, and worked to help his family. There's not much helping of one another now. The only people who still make merit are us old people. You don't have many young people at the Wat (temple) .

Wibun has observed a series of changes in Chiangmai that has moved people away from family values and notions of goodwill and good-heartedness. Chiangmai city has begun to fission into countless competing groups at all levels of society. Everyone belongs to a group, whether it be a secondary school. clique or a municipal bureaucratic faction; and the groups are pitted one against the other. In his remarks, and Wibun represents a wide segment of older Chiangmai residents, he is

calling attention to a process of change that substitutes peer and age group loyalties for family and kin loyalties. The brunt of these observations cannot be fully appreciated, however, unless we consider briefly the socio-biographical situation of present-day old people and the local myth that has been built up around the memory of the famous monk, KubaSiVichai.

In the minds of those Chiangmai residents who lived through the days of Kuba's revivalism of Buddhist values and practices, a number of features are interwoven to form a myth about the man and the era (roughly from 1930-1960). It is significant that older persons who lived through that era now reinvoke this part of their biography when they go to measure the state of affairs in present-day Chiangmai. The myth of KubaSiVichai, therefore, has more to it than a mere reference to the "good old days" for old people; it constitutes the central part of what I call an ideology of resentment that they use in response to the failure of present-day society to live up to the traditional system of values which granted old people respect and prestige. This is how Mae Nu, age fifty eight, remembers KubaSiVichai.

Today if you have a lot of children, six liters of rice a day isn't enough. Like the house behind us. They have ten children and they're both about thirty-five, but she works and he sells medicine out in the country, all around, and they still don't make enough. So what are you gQing to dQ? But it was different in the time of KubaSiVichai. He was a nak bun (a monk who possessed merit and occasional/great acts of merit-making). If he came to .ii' temple and stayed; all of the people would cooperate to construct new buildings.

Before Kuba came, Wat Suand9k lay deserted for twenty years. No monks, just the Buddha image and a wihan (Pali, vihara; in Thai, the main worship hall of a temple-monastery) with only two posts. It was very dilapidated.

There were a lot of priests who wanted to build and make Suand9k better, but none of them could do it or get the support to do it. Then, Kuba came and he meditated, and not long after the temple was rebuilt. Young and old people and children alike would each carry a stone, some a bucket of sand, and they would wash them because they were for the temple. Others brought wood, dirt, cement, everything that was needed. Thousands of people helped, and nothing was bought, all was given.

Kuba had many, many students and disciples and they took the cement and gravel and built the base to the buildings. And things were cheap and good. We all grew our own vegetables and fruit. And the people would buy a lot to give to the monks, and the Chinese got rich. Selling was good, and things were cheap. Noodles were five satang (less than a penny U.S.), a Likay show (folk drama-musical) was five satang, and the magic show was the same.

Kuba didn't help the people, and he had extraordinary powers and the people helped themselves. Through him they built Wat Suand9k, Wat SiSoda, and the long road up the mountain of Suthep (Doi Suthep). People were good and made merit in those days. But once Kuba died everything began to change. People's hearts changed. Kuba knew this would happen when he predicted, "the roads will have no one walking on them; the rice will have no one to eat it."

This means that the roads will be so cluttered with cars and trucks that people cannot walk. And that people will eat so many other foods in the daytime that in the evening they will be full, and there will be no one to eat the staple, rice. (Author's note: While Nu was making these comments other people who were listening felt that Kuba in this statement was predicting prosperity, not calamity.)

We have no priests like Kuba anymore. They're all gone. But we old people still worship the image of Kaba, see I have one/these on the altar.

Mae Nu's vision of Kuba and his era is representative of how old people conceive of that part of Chiangmai's past. When Kuba was alive economic conditions were good, and people cooperated and gave gifts at large public ceremonies. Nothing was bought, it was given, and there was goodwill for all. There was a definite sense of community, and differences among people were played down. Everyone acted the same and there was great sensitivity and respect for each person, especially the elders.

That era died with Kuba, however. After his death people reverted to thinking only of themselves, or their group; and winning at the expense of others began to pollute the affairs of people once again. Giving gifts has almost ceased except among the old, and people run after things, buying things, not stopping to reflect whether this is something truly needed or not. Old people equate the selfishness and ego-centric pursuits as not simply related to difficult economic circumstances, but as actually causing them. Thus, when people were good hearted and made merit, the city prospered; when they stopped giving, the city fell upon bad times. Low morality and decline in piety antedate economic decline for Buddhist Northerners.

Elderly Buddhists invariably point to the disposition of the people as the source from which good times or bad times flow. Prices rise, groups clash, rituals are not held, the old are forgotten, and crime flourishes because people have strayed from the teachings of the Buddha. Primary among these teachings,

according to local interpretation, is the necessity of giving freely in order to place the giver beyond any idea of self gain or reciprocity. In the next section I examine how old people, because they focus so intently on the moral intentions of persons, come to blame the young and general society for what is happening in their lives as old people. The form that this resentment assumes is one of stern Buddhist condemnation of various features of modern life.

#### 6.7 Resentment and Belief Among the Aged of Chedi Lane

From the preceding sections we can see how the elderly of Chedi Lane have personally experienced in their own lives a highly unified and pious Chiangmai under KubaSiVichai, the charismatic monk, and then narrow, divided, and commercial Chiangmai of the present era. Their response to contemporary conditions has taken two forms: first, they heavily criticize the present style of life, as we have seen, and hark back to the pious, more enlightened, although idealized, times of KubaSiVichai, and, second, they withdraw to the temple as to a sanctuary, a last bulwark of civilized Buddhist living, and use it to screen out the harsh materialism and insensitivity of present-day Chiangmai.

#### 6.h.1 Merit and a Properly Validated Social Order

Besides the primary sources of merit derived from giving gifts to the monks, elders rely on merit\_transfer from junior



generations at ordination rites, dam hua, mortuary feasts, and when they become deceased ancestors. As we saw in Chapter Five in the analysis of dam hua, the sharing of merit cannot take place unless the social and merit status of the elders is validated. Any offense, therefore, such as failing to respect an older person, neglecting him, or causing him hurt feelings, must be expiated before merit can be made in the ceremony. A key part of dam hua is when the younger kin come and beg pardon, and ask forgiveness, from the older person, by pouring water to cool the latter. Once the proper respect has been regained, merit can be shared, symbolized in the old person giving a blessing to the young. As mentioned previously, the generations need one another: merit exists for a person only in a validated social order, one which possesses generational respect and harmony.

With this principle in mind the dilemma of Chedi Lane old people becomes apparent. In their day-to-day interactions, the elderly often commented on the lack of respect, rudeness and insensitivity of the young. Various adaptations, as we saw, are devised by old people to avoid unsatisfactory interpersonal contexts. Behind the rudeness and social rebuffs, however, lies a religious problem. In a rude context not only social face, but religious merit as well is lost (Obeyesekere, 1968: 30) Many of the old people of Chedi Lane realize that merit cannot be obtained in their present social situation, in fact, demerit may accrue from living in a society characterized

by anomie. These old people, therefore, by not having their social status validated publicly are being denied their proper merit. The only alternative open to them is to withdraw from secular contexts, as much as possible, and station themselves in the one remaining religious context where their merit can be protected and bolstered by giving and meditating, i.e., the temple.

Old people realize that not all segments of society are like Chedi Lane, nor was the past as unsettled and chaotic as the present day. Again, the era of KubaSiVichai is pointed to as a time when Chiangmai was most orderly, when the consciousness of the people was highest, and when people had the opportunity to make great merit. Old people use the heyday of Kuba's Chiangmai to express their resentment of present-day realities. Today the streets and neighborhoods are unruly and the old people go to the temple for refuge.

#### 6.7.2 The Temple and the Household

The Northern Thai temple has received comment from various observers (Hutchinson, 1951; Griswald, 1957; Moerman, 1966; Kingshill, 1960; de Young, 1955). The picture we receive is that of an institution fully integrated into Northern Thai life, so present as to be taken for granted, so a part of man's world that it is identified with civilization itself. The temple influences the individual at all stages of life, but as we might expect, a small, modest neighborhood temple in a rapidly changing city serves some more than others.

Old people view the temple as a dense repository of knowledge or ultimate wisdom, tangibly expressed in the moral example of the monk and the vault of scriptural treasures (h9 tipidok) located on the temple grounds. Molded into the images and statuary is an ethos and edification that strongly contrasts with everyday life. During the monk's retreat on the fortnightly wan sin, or precept day, elderly men and women take a grass mat, a small pillow, and a bag of betel, tobacco, and necessities and go to the temple to spend the night. In the local temple of Chedi Lane men line their mats along the roofed walkway on the side wall, and the women congregate in another area closer to the entrance gate. To keep out the sun and for reasons of modesty, broad woven mats are hung up around the women's section. Both men and women wear white shirts and blouses, and large round trays are filled with decorative flowers and incense which each individual kneels and offers in front of the main Buddha image of the wihan. The rest of their time is spent observing the eight precepts which include taking no solid food after 12:00 noon and listening to sermons and chanting by the monks. The mood is tranquil, time is relaxed, and movement is slow and easeful. Old people are greatly comforted and renewed by these nights at the temple. There is a repetitive, reaffirming, substantial solace to them.

Any ordinary day will find a few young novices in the yard chatting and giggling or running little errands for the senior monk. Some women may be bringing food or cleaning the eating

utensils; and a small group of elderly will usually be found sitting in the shadows of the wihan, or on its steps, talking or quietly passing the time in silence. Old people say the neighborhood temple is relaxed and unfettered. They personally know the few people who visit regularly and there are no persons selling things. On occasion a family will arrive and quietly perform dam hua with the monk for a deceased loved one. Old people believe they can participate in these sentiments and make merit with the small family. They see the temple as the context for pious gifts, respect, and the type of merit-making activity that general society, and young people in particula\_have forsaken. Thus, in the lower class neighborhoods, like Chedi Lane, the temple is a sanctuary for old people. Within its wall, and under the guidance of the monk, their disappointments and alienation are incorporated into their beliefs about Buddhism and their relationship to general society and the younger generations.

From the perspective of the temple-oriented elderly, the household (huean) is the domain of the family, children, subsistence struggling, and male-female antagonisms. It is a germinal field for intense feelings and, at times, boisterous activities. Old people conceive of it as hot, bustling, noisy, often enjoyable, but just as often agitated. They contrast the household with their need for ngiab (quiet) and sagnop (peace) and their irritation and dislike for things yung (bustling, bothersome, confusing). Because of the age mixtures, personalities, and general hubbub, life in the household and

neighborhood was often bothersome and uneven. Old people in my survey verbally denigrated and wished to avoid the uncomely, boisterous side of neighborhood life. They consciously cultivated new sensibilities and were particularly critical of occasions involving pettiness, bickering, and arguments among young persons.

Behind these new sensibilities was the gradually strengthening critique of general society, especially the tempo and moral decline of city life. The ultimate criticism was that the neighborhood was no longer a conducive setting for merit-making activities between the generations. This stimulated the belief that family and household were to be separated from the monk and life at the temple. The former represented the compulsive politics of the sexes and subsistence demands; preoccupations that the old previously indulged in)but which were now the concerns of their children and grandchildren. The old, more than ever, as death drew near, needed to make merit, and the temple in their minds was the only remaining setting in which to do so. They, thus, talked about a major division between their past life and imbroglios, and their new life and preoccupations, now that they were old. The ey distinction in their minds was the growing oppos\_tion between two institutions --the household (huan) and the temple (wat)--and the two worlds these entail.

The monk's role is dramatically different from that of lay people. His quest is to overcome demerit by renouncing

the world and pursuing the disciplined techniques which lead to salvation, such as following the 227 precepts and meditating. His existence at the temple represents a higher mode of discipline than that of the layman, even the pious elderly. He does have parish duties, however, such as giving sermons, officiating at mortuary proceedings, and conducting community wide ceremonies.

I wish to point out, however, that the monks most listened to are older religious specialists who have read, meditated, and practiced sermonizing for some years. Their perspective is much closer to the doctrinal position than most of the lay people who frequent the temple. Most old people, moreover, who come to the temple late in life with little background in normative or scriptural Buddhism tend to perceive the temple and monks in very tangible personal terms, as having direct relevance to their troubles and immediate predicament.

They first of all realize their position with reference to the monks is one of inferiority. The monks are following a higher path, one they themselves feel they could never follow. As Obeyesekere (1968) has noted, the ultimate goal of Buddhism (Nirvana) is one which most common people feel is unattainable, and I would include here the elderly of Chedi Lane. The average person's goal is 'kammatic' to use Spiro's (1970) anglicized term; instead of Nirvana or cessation, the goal is a better rebirth and some alleviation of their present suffering. The course which this practical goal of the urban elderly takes is

often indistinguishable from a basic power quest with magical overtones. In short, many old people I interviewed at the temple harbored contempt for present-day society, their lowly position within the new scheme of consumer values, and their neglectful children. Their resentment of the younger age groups led them to a deeper conversion to Buddhist principles and a deeper involvement with the temple; but in my estimation this conversion was unsophisticated by doctrinal standards, especially in its tendency to formulate an ideological response whose structure and purpose clearly alleviated, and simultaneously avenged the aged of the hurts and disappointments they received from society. Let us examine this conversion and local ideology of the aged in the lower class neighborhood of Chedi Lane. I present the testimony of Thpng, age seventy, and Khamp, age sixty-three, two women who became devout meditators late in life.

### 6.7.3 Two Pious Laywomen

Khamp: I am from Lampang. I have been here at this temple for over a year, and I was a chi (nun or pious laywoman) in Lampang for a year. No one has followed me here, I stay alone.

Thpng: I have been a chi (nun) for eighteen years. Here in Chiangmai and in Ch9mth9ng. In the morning we get up at 4:00 A.M. and meditate. It's very quiet then. At 6:00 A.M. we make food for ourselves. If you live as we do, you have to take care of yourself. We don't need or want help from anyone else; but if there are outsiders who come to worship here we are pleased that they come. We have a little money to buy necessities (betel, cigarettes, a few sweets), it comes from the contributions people make.

Khambp: The two of us made this house (a small raised bamboo house, approximately 8' by 8'). Two carpenters helped us but we did most of it. Th9ng is seventy years old, I am sixty-three.

Th9ng: Now I'm not so well. I'm sick a lot and have fevers. I spent three months in the hospital last year. I had an operation on my neck. Here we eat only one meal in the morning and have fruit in the afternoon.

Khambp: I have five children. They live all over the place. Very far away. But three sons live fairly close. My two daughters got married and followed their husbands to the northeast. But even my sons, oh, very seldom do they come to visit me. They are following their own lives, doing what they want to do. I'm not concerned anymore. I'm not concerned. If you live the way we do you don't have children and they don't have a mother. That's the way it is. I have no kin. It's up to my relatives, my children. If they miss me, okay, if they don't, it doesn't matter. I will just go on living like this until I die. But I'm not lonely. Living like this you don't have any trouble, no worries, you're not anxious about all the usual things. No more struggling. Living like this is better than living with your children. It's five times better (said in unison by Khamb9 and Th9ngl).

Th9ng: If you live like this and meditate it makes your heart and mind (citcaj) brighter. Your heart is much better living this way than with your children. If you live with your children, they give you food, draw the water for you to bathe, everything, very good. But still you're not happy. It's always bothersome to live with your family.

Khamb9: In the morning, during the day, and in the evening, your heart is not right when with your family. But when you come and live like this, oh, you can sleep when you want to and no one bothers you, and you can do what you want.

Th9ng: Here you don't let your heart miss your children, or your grandchildren. You don't let yourself think about being rich or wanting after things. This way you are happy. It's like, when you are born you come alone, when you die you will go alone. So in your heart you understand not to worry about anything anymore.



Khambp: We should only ask to be born once. And we should ask to die just once. We shouldn't ask to be born again, if we come again it means unhappiness. Once is enough.

Thpng: I have been sick. But if you conduct yourself like we do, if you meditate in the morning, don't worry about the world and your children, then if your body has a disease or becomes ill, no matter, your heart and mind are not sick. We have separated the two. Other people if they are sick in their body, then they are sick in their heart too. But our life is like that of the monk even if we are of a different sex. We have the heart of the monk or we couldn't live like this. No matter what is happening to our body, our heart is not the same.

Khambp: To meditate is to reflect very seriously. We are able to think very directly. We can concentrate. We come to firmly realize that our body, our things, our children, our grandchildren, these we no longer have. But it's difficult to do, you know. If you can do it, however, you are at peace, happy, really. And if you do these things correctly, and if you have peace and quiet, sometimes two or three days you don't even eat and you are full. Your heart is full and your body is not hungry. Every day we eat just one meal, and if we don't eat fruit, we don't miss it. I can't explain it; your heart is simply full.

Khamb9: In the past if I did something I would want others to know. But now, what we do we only know ourselves. We don't need others to tell us. There a\_e very few women who lead a life like this.

Thpng: Here the spirit of worship is very good. It's very quiet and the teaching is very direct. Here they teach from the heart, the words have meaning. We study with the monk, once every seven days. He teaches us not to be attached to our children and grandchildren. Not to depend on them or worry about them. He teaches us not to remain attached to our homes and our past life. He talks about Nirvana. He teaches us to make our hearts have the good arom (stateJmood, or attitude; McFarland, 1969: 994). If you learn to meditate and do it well then you can do anything and have full happiness.

Khambp: There are a lot of chi like us but they do not all believe to the same degree, the same depth. Many of them haven't re\_lly finished with the world (yang mai mot thang lok). Many are still attached to the world, but we are no longer involved. We have left the world (9k lok). Our bodies have left and our heart and mina-have left. It's difficult you know, I thought about becoming a chi for three years before I entered the wat (temple) At first when I thought about it, I wondered now I'm old and what can I depend on. If we didn't think to make merit, and to come and meditate and to enter into concentration then in the next life we would be poor for s\_re, or be born an animal or a preta (Sanskrit: tali, peta: a small-mouthed, large-bellied spirit continually hungry).

Thpng: Yes, I'm tired of it. When you look at the world what do you see? You see people killing each other, robbing and mugging each other. Everyone wanting something. But here you are not in all of that. Here it is peaceful. If you follow the path of the Buddha you can escape from the world of trouble.

Khambp: When you come in you shave your head and eyebrows and bring nothing with you. You give everything to your children and grandchildren: your clothes, the house, the land. You don't have any vanity here, you forget about trying to be beautiful. You are not a woman here. We don't think of being men and women. We are away from all of that. In the world it's different, you're a man and a woman, distinct. Here you don't have the figures of men and women, we dress the same. And we don't have names. All of that goes with a different world, the world we left.

Khambp: When I think of my past life I'm bored and full. All of the fretting (cukcik) and trifles and annoyances that went with the old life makes me unhappy. Money was a bother, never having all you needed was a bother; now I don't have it, so I don't use it, so I don't miss it. I don't have delicious food, so I don't eat it. So if I die, I'm not going to miss life.

Thpng: It all depends on your merit, your meditating. Meditating you gain a lot of merit. This is all that counts. If we didn't have a lot of merit then all of our things would be lost or stolen; so if they came to take our things they would not because they would see that we thambun mak (make great merit) and they would respect us and leave us alone.

Khambp: I pity and feel compassion for my children. They still have their unhappiness owing to their karma. So I pity their life. I should feel sorry that I don't live with them, but I don't. I just wonder when they will be able to come and live as we do. Then their life will not be so unhappy, because life has a better taste to it living like this.

Thpng: My children told me to follow my own heart, but they didn't like it when I left to go live at the temple. But I had to. Some didn't want me to leave but I had had enough. I was full, I was bored. Just really tired of living like that. It's hard to explain. I used to practice concentrating even when I stayed with my children and grandchildren. In the daytime I would work, and in the evening I would meditate, make my heart at peace. But here the business of the world is not so loud, it's softer. When I saw the suffering of the world, some of my children didn't want me to leave, but some understood and said it was okay.

(Question: At what time in your life were you happiest?)

(In unison): Now, now! This is the time we have most happiness. Khambp: When I was a child all I wanted was pretty clothes and some money to spend. . I wanted to be beautiful, and have a family, and have a sweetheart. But now I don't want anything. The fly comes and keeps lighting on your arm and you're irritated. I'm tired of the tedious old things to do with wanting.

Khambp: When I became a chi my children didn't know, I didn't tell them. When I was staying with them I would go to sleep at night and wake up in the morning and heart and soul would be at the temple. My spirit came here on its own. I don't know how to say it. I can't live anywhere else but here. When I worked I would think about the temple.

That's how it was and that's how I came to stay here. All of the things I once thought beautiful were no longer beautiful. Now these simple clothes I wear seem more beautiful. It's beautiful to me.

Th9ng: Young women become chi for a short time. Their bodies leave the world but not their hearts. They don't really become chi. Their hearts are not ready to give it all up. They still want too many things. When they hear about the Winter Fair they want to go to it. If they are young, they may come because of a broken heart, but they are young and when they leave here they will get married. You have to be older, have many years behind you and experience before you can really understand this life. (pause) We don't worry about our worldly fate. We don't have the sueb chata; we don't have the khuan (soul-calling rites) here. We just have (kam) karma. Karma can be compared to, like before we were young but now time has passed and we are old. You cannot escape from being old, and you cannot escape from your karma. When you have reached a state or time it is because of karma. When you are sick, you are sick. When you have reached the time of old age, you are in it. When it comes time to die, then you yourself must die. But if your heart is prepared none of this is important. You'll see, and that's all there is to it.

Thpng is the older of the two meditators and has been living at one temple or another for over eighteen years. Because of her experience she is more advanced than Khambp, who has looked to her for advice and guidance for the past six years. Both of these women had families of their own before taking up the way of life of chi; both of them talked of the conflicts they experienced, but Khambp more <sup>so</sup> and more intensely. Neither of them I would depict as miserably unhappy when they lived with their families, but each in her own way experienced a very definite alienation and uncomf<sup>o</sup>rtableness. Khamb9, especially, talked about her neglectful

children, how they had dispersed and more or less abandoned her to follow their own lives. Her bitterness was more visible than Th9ng's, whose years of meditating had tempered, and possibly removed, her animosities toward her family.

The decision to become a chi is not typical for elderly Northern Thai women; nor is the decision to re-enter the monkhood for older men. Both practices do occur; however; and more significantly, old people speak with great admiration about those older people who have the will to undertake them. As we saw in Chapter Five, it frequently occurs that a lay person will gain a reputation for piety that equals that of the holiest local monk, and exceeds that of many less pious monks. Individual effort determines one's reputation, and old people are fond of repeating news and stories of hermit monks, such as those who live around Mount ChIangdao and exhibit strong ascetic qualities and alleged supernatural powers. KubaSiVichai fit well the model of the ascetic who in his denial of the world obtained great powers with which to change the world. ,Mystic power, or power gained through following the precepts, poses a particular fascination for elderly temple-goers.

Khamb9, for example, in her desire to resolve the disappointment she experienced with her family, chose to come and live as a chi and apprentice herself to the monk. Although her decision was atypical, it does reveal a principal method that old people perceive as an appropriate solution to problems:

withdraw to the temple, immerse one's self in its interiority, so as to acquire the means to overcome one's troubles in the eternal world. Khamb\_'s troubles were familial, however, and it's instructive how forcefully the ascetic, celibate monk .j enjoins her and Th\_ng to put their children and families behind them. It should be noted that from the doctrinal point of view, one's involvement in the mundane world is a sign of attachment and a form of sin (Obeyesekere, 1968:20). The flux of social life creates cravings which produce suffering, and in turn, karma (volitional actions). The monk is prescribing to Th9ng and Khamb9 a regimen of asceticism that all earnest humans must follow if they are to overcome future suffering. KhanW9 treats this advice, however, as a direct means to solve her immediate difficulties with her family.

The radical message to abridge one's family obligations is usually only undertaken by monks pursuing the ascetic ideal, and, it should be noted, usually for only temporary periods of time. Here we have two aging laywomen, however, who after experiencing family difficulties have taken up the radical homeless quest. The point I inject is that lower class urban old people with but slight orientation and knowledge of Buddhist doctrine were the one's who praised Khamb9 and Th9ng for their determination and bold withdrawal. The coterie of old people I came to rely on as an ethnographer viewed the temple, not as a place to pursue mystical goals, but as a practical place to gain power in order to work out personal problems.

This pragmatic use of the temple reveals a basic feature about aging in Northern Thailand, what I refer to as a religiously sanct-ioned power quest. Old people were resentful of the disrespect and lowly social position they received in Chedi Lane. This became magnified by the failure of younger kin to adequately validate the status of the old so that merit-making declined. The old responded by withdrawing to the temple, and carrying with them a deep alienation from present-day society. They ardently separated the world of the young with its hunger for commodities, sexual tensions, struggling and insensitivity, to the world of the old and the temple. It is not inappropriate to say I found many old people somewhat elitist and snobbish in their attitudes toward the young. The latter were too much in the world, too much taken by its appearances, and ignorant of deeper values. The old, however, felt that they were in touch with the authentic elements of Chiangmai Buddhist tradition; and by frequenting the temple they were using this context to effect changes in their lives. At this point, it may be helpful to summarize the contrastive elements in the local ideology of the aged.

young	old
household	temple
family	homeless
sexual antagonisms	asexual peace
materialism	moderate asceticism
<u>khuan</u> rites, astrology, spirit propitiation	karma
contemporary Chiangmai	KubaSiVichai's tradi- ditional ChIangmai

A critical distinction must be made, however. By with drawing, at least mentally, to the temple and stepping outside of society, old people are following the traditional model of the monk. Monks vary enormously, however, with regard to their knowledge of the doctrine and level of disciplined living. Those truly struggling to become arahant (saints ready for Nibbana) realize they must overcome all attachments to society, and eventually renounce power and merit themselves, in order to break out of the cycle of rebirth and struggling (samsara). Many less sophisticated monks, however, construe their liminal position at the temple as a means of attaining power which they can exercise within society (magic, or reincarnation in a better position in society). And here is where the elderly of Chedi Lane, and the local institutions they rely upon, are seen to transform their resentment of general society into a power quest which strongly affects how they view death.



## 6.8 Rebirth as a Power Strategy

From the doctrinal point of view, an individual's rebirth is strictly determined by karma. There is an unknown and unknowable aspect about the workings of karma, however, that affects how old persons perceive p\_' their next birth station. Obeyesekere writes:

Even more important is the fact that karma, as a theory of causation, is psychologically indeterminate. The past determines the present which (combined with the past) determines the future. Although the individual knows that the good which he does in his present lifetime will be rewarded in a future lifetime, he has no idea how his future will be related to his present existence. (1968: 21)

As we have seen, Northern Thai take certain steps to reduce the indeterminacy of rebirth possibilities, such as marking the corpse and then looking for similar "birth marks" on babies, or using a mantra to determine if a child is a re-incarnated ancestor from the mother's or father's side. In other words, they attempt to overcome the uncertainty of karma by disregarding the complex afterworlds of Buddhism in which a person could be reborn, and focusing on rebirth in the immediate world of humans (Tambiah, 1968; makes a similar observation for the Northeastern Thai).

In a similar manner, old people in Chedi Lane, when questioned about what manner of rebirth they wished for, invariably talked of being born as a rich or powerful human. Rebirth was viewed in very tangible terms; it was a means to obtain a better position within the society before them.

Thus, despite their negative statements and abhorrence of the materialism and insensitivity of society, in the final instance, old people did not wish for a restructuring of the social system, nor a utopian afterlife, nor Nirvana, but a better position within their present, although misguided, society. By visualizing their rebirth in terms of concrete advantages in the human world, they reduced considerably the psychological indeterminacy of the law of karma. By modifying the notion of rebirth to relate almost solely to the world of man, they gained an ideological weapon with which to combat the negative social experiences of growing old in a neighborhood like Chedi Lane. In sum, their resentment led them to leave society, at least mentally, and engage the temple; however, because their resentment was directed against a specific group (the young) and a specific society, their, ideational response was, as might be expected, strongly related to these tangible others. Rebirth, as an aspect of their Buddhist belief, was removed from the doctrinal level of the time-stretched journey through sam\_ara to Nirvana, and placed squarely within their practical, short-term efforts to come to grips with the discomforts and suffering in their immediate situation.

Moreover, in spite of their naive use of Buddhist notions, old people do gravitate towards portions of the doctrine which are usually thought to be beyond the grasp or abilities of ordinary lay people. For instance, although like Spiro's Burmese villagers, Northern Thai old people disavow any

pretensions about Nirvana as a desired goal and substitute a better rebirth instead, they do perceive the law of karma in a unique manner. As the two women meditators revealed previously, the temple does not concern itself over khuan rites, astrology, and spirit-worship. Old people view these as peculiar concerns of the young, and disdainfully point out they are unsound according to Buddhist principles. Thus, you cannot believe in the, karma as the universal law of the universe that determines man's existence, and simultaneously believe in spirits who can, by bargaining (bon) with them, change an individual's existence. I view the elderly's commitment to the karma principle, however, less as an example of religious sophistication, and more as a product of the ideational response and counter-system of values they devise to separate themselves from general society and the young. In effect, they berate the young for resorting to spirit worship and astrology as a means to know and influence their present circumstances. Logically, such beliefs contradict the universe ,law of karma, and the elderly | point this out. That the old themselves| resorted to | such practices| when they were young J.S never mentioned; nor the fact that their| notion of rebirth, which serves relatively narrow socio-psychological needs of requital, is equally lacking from a doctrinal point of view.

The beliefs of the elderly of Chedi Lane)therefore) possess a number of contradictions and anomalies. It would be hard to account for the many radical elements in their beliefs,

such as their anti-family notions and belief in karma, without considering the social conditions in which these beliefs take shape, and to which they are a response. The unique construal of rebirth as a means of power to re-enter society in a better position is the most dramatic illustration of the influence of the sociological factor upon belief.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## DEATH, REBIRTH GOALS AND THE FUNERAL CULT

In this section my aim is to reveal the thread of continuity that links the temple-orientation, extensive preparations, and rebirth strategy of the elderly to the practical efforts taken by all concerned as the death of an old person becomes imminent. First, however, let us look at the inappropriate death.

## 8.1 Tai Hong: The Bad Death

To die violently, in childbirth, or before one's years and in troubled circumstances is to tai hong to die improperly, inauspiciously. Such deaths are greatly feared and regarded as ultimately contaminating. Even the corpse of a person who has died a decent death may be contaminating if mishandled, for example, taken across a bridge, or past a forked road-acts which lead to khuet or pollution (Sanguan, 1969:348). And we are reminded that the Burmese are said to have led corpses around the city in deliberately inauspicious circumambulations in an attempt to de-cosmologize and de-moralize Chiangmai (Ban Phisom, 1969:103). Consequently, the contaminating influences of a corpse of an inauspicious death are perceived as darkly potent. Informants claim that such a corpse is oftentimes not even kept in the house overnight, but taken directly to the temple. And if the tragedy has occurred outside the village or neighborhood, the corpse should be taken

to the temple and not brought home. They are to be buried with only a perfunctory ritual, and exhumed a year or so later, after the earth had absorbed the contamination. Only at that time can they be given the appropriate Buddhist ceremony and cremation.<sup>2</sup>

To tai hong was said to cause the winyan of that person to be sent spinning and whirling in a haze of torturous circling (won wian) in-between death and rebirth. The winY-an was referred to as unable to rise, to ascend, to take flight, and be reborn. It was ensnared in a hiatic expanse of karma (huang haeng kam) that has various associations with water. Thus, for instance, women who die in childbirth must wait in between lives and search for fish in a large lake (Sanguan, 1969: 297) The term huang is often combined to refer to an expanse of water, a sea, or ocean (cf. McFarland, 1969:923). Moreover, to die suddenly and tragically was conceptualized by Northern Thai informants as going off without the proper necessities, and especially the food that one's relatives normally provided. The only way to aid the ensnared winyan of the tai hong victims and offset the inauspiciousness surrounding such a death was to send merit by having the baj khaw sang, or ordination of a young relative. Sanguan (1969:228) adds that Northern Thai refer to this ordination as buat cung and it is to be held on the morning that the corpse (sop) is led or pulled (cung) to the distant burial cremation ground (bachaa).

Moreover, there are a number of devices utilized to separate the normal corpse and its contaminating aspects from the world of the living. For example, a water jar (m9 nam) is symbolically thrown and broken; a magical line or boundary is scratched on the road (khit Ion tang) where the corpse has already passed to seal off its access to the human world; and the relatives are enjoined not to tarry at the cremation place or look back at the grave (mai hai liaw lang). In villages a talaeo is placed at the door of the house upon returning to keep out the spirit of the deceased. However, as we saw previously, the methods of extrication become more pronounced in the case of a woman dying in childbirth at which time her vengeful intentions and vindictiveness towards her husband must be strongly guarded against. Northern Thais believe that tai phai, or to die in childbirth, is a grave misfortune requiring various ritual countermeasures. In the case of both mother and infant dying, the foetus must be removed before the corpse of the mother can be buried. Informants claimed the winy an of the deceased mother-wife is likely to become a phI phai and especially attack the husband. This is why the nullifying and decontaminating process of burial is prescribed instead of cremation. The body is usually exhumed at a subsequent time, however, and given a cremation and Buddhist rites of fortification.

Sanguan (1969:239) has reported that a special rite was traditionally performed to sever (tat) the relationship between

the husband and dead wife. The wrists of the husband were tied with a string which was then tied around the wrist of the dead spouse. A magico-religious specialist (m9 sayasat) would pronounce the sacred words (wet mon) and use a special knife to cut the string binding the two parties. Traditionally, the husband was to run immediately from the house to the temple, and not to return or look back. That evening he was to sleep at the temple for fear phi mia, the spirit of the wife, would come and attack him. Moreover, the husband is usually required to become ordained as a monk for three to seven days or longer (cf. Potter, 1975, for an instance of such widower behavior). It is believed that not to buat or become ordained at this time will lead to the husband's going crazy (pen ba). It is interesting to speculate that by dying a wife symbolically gives permission for her husband to enter orders. I myself have no evidence, however, that merit redounds to a dead wife from a widower's ordination.

## 7.2 The Good Death

In contrast to tai hong is the normal death or death by regular illness or old age. Northern Thai stress that this occurs at the completion of a full life (sin ayut khai).<sup>An</sup> auspicious death begins long before the event of death itself, and entails the lengthy preparations and changes in life style and outlook that we described as the culture of old age. The closing out of life in Chedi Lane was seen to be heavily imbued



with resentment and bad feelings on the part of the elderly. This I attribute to the peculiar conditions of the neighborhood and the strain those placed on generational relationships. Other neighborhoods and village settings, in which generational position and merit status are accorded more respect, should, I suspect, reveal less alienation on the part of the old.

A good death requires certain standard procedures, however, no matter what the social situation of the old person happens to be. One practice that diverges from Buddhist orthodoxy (Obeyesekere, 1968:26) employs the monk in the role of death bed guide. As in Burma (Spiro, 1970:248), Northern Thai monks always attempt to reply to death-bed requests as promptly as possible. Their main intention is to be with the person in his last moments to allay fears, edify the surroundings, and help fasten the mind of the dying person on the Buddha, the Dhamma (law) and the Sangha (monastic order). These three words may be whispered in the dying person's ear if he or she cannot repeat them after the monk. Auspicious words (*wet mon*) and power-harnessing words (*parit*) are chanted by the monks and believed to fortify the individual as he encounters death. If the person was able to avoid expressions of fear, did not cry out, and was not distracted by emotional reactions of relatives, he was said to have had a good death. The psychological control of the dying person is linked to beliefs about rebirth that will be discussed in section 8.5.

The monk provides a "field of merit" in which the individual will die. According to the norms of a good death,

members of a person's family and kindred should also be present to properly validate the merit status of the elder. Again, without a properly validated context, merit cannot be generated or transferred. At the death scene, and the subsequent funeral, the junior generation (luk Iān) initiate the very important transfer of merit to the winyan of the deceased elder (phutao). This is done by close kin giving gifts and pouring water (dam hua) at the temple on the seventh, fortyninth or fiftieth, and one hundredth days after death. Individuals and families also, of course, performed these rites spontaneously at various times for years later.

The younger kin of the dying elder are to assume the merit-obligations that aid the individual during the seven day period between death and rebirth. This was the length of time it took to arrive at mueang phi (spirit kingdom) which some informants identified with Mt. ChIangdao, north of ChIangmai city. The dying person and his family hope that by a good death scene and conscientious acts of merit-transfer the elderly parent or relative would be happily reborn for a time at one of the spirit levels and then as a rich human. This close cooperation between the generations is, however, the ideal; from what we have observed of Chedi Lane and the conflicts between the generations, we might wonder how the normative prescriptions of the good death are fulfilled under these conditions.

### 7.3 Attachment Between the Generations

In the first place, the preoccupation with and many hours spent at the temple have a secondary effect of which the elderly are not unaware. The elderly primarily use the temple to guarantee a proper context for merit accumulation, and to ostensibly shield themselves from the materialism and brashness of modern life. Their presence at the temple, however, signals that they have accepted the fact of their agedness, and are now in possession of certain attitudes and ideas about dying which become communicated to their family and kin.

The effect of the message, "Vi now spends all of his or her time at the temple," is that it focuses attention upon the old person and forces younger kin to rethink their responsibilities toward the elder. There is a manipulative aspect to withdrawing to the temple which serves to initiate various groping attempts to bring the family and kindred closer together around an Vi.

Participating at the temple, gaining respect as a pious lay person, and making friends among one's aged peers, moreover, go to create a network of friends and respectful associates that substitute for one's own kin, when these are not available or not motivated to ritually attend an elder. Here the generational basis of Buddhist ritual, instead of a strict kinship basis, is of value to the aged.

Illness is another means for creating social integration between the generations (Clark, 1959:198). Mr. N, for example,

seldom saw his children or felt close to his family and kindred until he lost his eyesight. Living with his ailing wife up until his own illness, he represented one of the more disgruntled and verbal old persons in Chedi Lane. Towards the end of my fieldwork, however, Mr. N lost complete use of his one eye and partial use of the other. Upon hearing the news, however, his son returned from the Northeast and was making plans to move to Chiangmai to be close to his ailing parents.

Another case, Mr. M, age sixty-five, claims that his wife, children and all his brothers and sisters had died. He and his one close relative, a nephew who was a dentist by profession, disliked one another and seldom spoke until M had his heart attack. His nephew visited him frequently at the hospital, brought him soup, and helped him with his living arrangements after he recovered from the attack. Now their relationship is much improved.

A serious or terminal illness draws younger kin to an old person's side even more effectively. In the partial observations I made of a number of seriously sick old people, a wide network of relatives and friends were contacted. Relatives often travelled long distances and devoted considerable effort to respond to the crisis. There were strong feelings about not abandoning the person during the dying and postmortem period, and any requests made at this time by the dying person were seldom refused. Once alerted to the

predicament of an ailing elder, all families, even quite poor ones, expressed a willingness to use whatever means available to prolong the life of the sick person. Illness among individuals in Chedi Lane usually led to consultation with a modern doctor. All households on my survey were familiar with and positively impressed by the facilities at Suandpk Hospital. Various private clinics and McCormick missionary hospital were also mentioned on questionnaires. A serious illness, however, usually involved searching out a number of different types of "doctors," including traditional doctors (mp boran).

When an elderly person is truly overcome by the stages of an illness, however, and all remedies have proved ineffective, family members have been known to make offerings at the temple so that the sick person would die peacefully and suffer no more pain and discomfort. The point of crisis and no escape from death was called vipak (vipaka, the operation of moral causation; Stcherbatsky, 1961:27). As we have noted it was extremely important to have a monk present during this final period. The house and neighboring houses remained hushed during this period; and in one case a sick elderly woman was moved out to the larger room where close relatives, many of whom had travelled long distances, had silently entered and sat lining the walls. Small children and crying babies were kept outside, and one young man stood out on the lane quietly informing passer-bys and neighbors what was transpiring.

Thus, as we can see, illness, the dying vigil, and the earlier attention that merit-making and temple involvement creates for the old person, all play a part in re-establishing reciprocities between the generations. This is particularly important in neighborhoods like Chedi Lane in which the division between the old and the young has widened in recent years.

When we compare the highly organized manner in which to die with the accidental death, the untimely death, or the victimized death (tai hong), several points are raised. Above all the local Buddhist notions surrounding a good death require that a person have a social context in which his merit status is clearly recognized. The monk's presence announces the piety and good intentions of the dying person, but because of the strong belief in merit-transfer, the junior generations (luk Ian) must also be present to guarantee the lengthy transfers of merit will be conducted now and after the elder's death.

A good death also requires sufficient time to accumulate merit and prepare an attitude. Old people consciously consider the amount of merit they can accumulate in their final days or years, which, by local interpretation, they believe offsets the sin and demerit they have accrued during the earlier periods of their lives.

Because of the usual distress and possible pain that surrounds the later stages of an illness, monks advised the pious not to wait till the final period to try and put one's affairs in order. Death by violence or in childbirth give the

individual no time to prepare. The individual is convulsed by terror and confusion, his thoughts are scattered. Obviously, the setting is inappropriate and above all distracting and perturbing. In place of a merit field is the aura of tragedy, heaving emotions, and distressed strangers and relatives. In place of the sacred words are the clamor, broken sounds, and cacophony of shock and terror. No assembly of elements could be more inauspicious as a preface for death. The consciousness of the victim is spinning, swimming, scattered, and uncentered. Tai hong is the raw and rude entry into the rebirth process, a display of cosmological misfortune and kam (bad karma).

In a strict sense, the concept of tai hong is outside of and apart from Buddhist notions. Even amongst Southeast Asian animists the "bad death" (see Lehman, 1963, on 'sar") is one where the soul is un-ready, perhaps away from the body, and therefore not subject to the rites that send it to the land of the dead; and so it just wanpers about, a malignant ghost. The Northern Thai tai hong, however, is clearly accommodated to, and integrated with, the local ideology of a Buddhist death.

#### 7.4 Rebirth Strategy and the : Psychology of Dying

As previously mentioned, old persons when interviewed claimed they wished to be reborn as rich and powerful humans. Women on my survey, incidentally, did not state, as many

observers have reported, that they wished to be reborn as men (see J. R. Hanks, 1963:76, for a similar observation). In my analysis I have linked the rebirth goals of Chedi Lane elderly to the resentment they feel toward kin and neighbors in their immediate social world. Although they overcome many of their harsh feelings towards the junior generations and reunite with them, at least when nearing death, the theme of resentment and the desire to change their predicament via a better rebirth remain to the end. I analyze this as their ability to forego repressing their feelings of alienation, and vengefulness, if you will, by accommodating them to, and acting them out within, the local system of religious thought and action. Thus, because they interpret death as a means to correct the negative imbalances in their lives, their preparations for dying are preparations for resolving their social and personal problems. Through their beliefs, Northern Thai elderly, therefore, on the eve of death, have direct access to a power scheme.

A key part of this power scheme involves the local version of the psychology of dying. As we mentioned earlier, the Northern Thai, like other Theravada Buddhist populations, have assimilated many elements to their beliefs and practices that are not part of canonical orthodoxy. The concept of merit transfer from one person or group to another is one of these; as is the idea of the monk reciting holy words (parit) at the death bed to fortify the dying. Another interpretation of



doctrine that relates to the Northern Thai rebirth strategy is the belief that one's last thought before dying will influence one's rebirth. In other words, in the hands of the unsophisticated it becomes the idea that one's last thoughts become one's next existence. To negate one's present circumstances and dwell on happy circumstances in which riches and power are inherited is a proper mode of dying. This, I am fairly sure, represents the approach to dying that the elderly of Chedi Lane upheld.

Local monks also possessed similar versions of dying. Thus, it was asserted that the consciousness that one takes with him into the death moment is equated with the rebirth station that inexorably ensues after death. The goal of controlling one's death means dying while one's consciousness is located at an interior level of trance, or jhana. This point or level of jhanic absorption is the vehicle by which one transits to a higher rebirth station. The average non-meditator relies upon the power of accrued merit to yield a felicitous state of mind while undergoing the transition. If, in fact, one's psychological state or consciousness at the moment of death is the seed bed for rebirth actualization at one of the higher spheres of existence, then one's psychological predisposition while dying is in fact a display of cosmological predisposition. The death scene and mode of dying at least mirror at what level of power the consciousness of the dying person was maintaining itself. Thai Buddhists validate this

proposition by the degree of sumptuousness and respect with which they adorn the mortuary proceedings, and by their desire to mimic this pious mode of dying (see Griswold, 1961).

Northern Thai in their beliefs about death and dying, therefore, depart from doctrine in a number of ways. Canonically, one's next existence does not, in fact, depend on one's mental state at death, but on such things as what demerit one must still expiate. Northern Thai in their local beliefs, however, maintain that merit made at the end of life obviates the need to suffer vip aka of demerit (the operation of the moral law of dependent origination). They use the notion of merit overcoming demerit to avoid, I suspect, the psychological repugnance of having to suffer for one's demerit. They use the notion of one's final thoughts as determining one's next existence, I suspect, to overcome the psychological indeterminacy of kam (karma). One's rebirth in the strict canonical sense, we remember, is indeterminate and unknowable (Obeyesekere, 1968) . Northern Thai old people make rebirth more determinate by linking it to the belief that their last thought will become their existence in the next life. Control over one's mind at the moment of death is best established by meditating and developing concentration. Few old people in Chedi Lane, with the exception of the two chI, practiced meditation, however; instead they placed their trust in the belief tham dI dai dr, tham ch\_a dai ch\_a, or "do good and receive good, do evil and receive evil." This in turn led to the emphasis on pious

activities and gift-giving as means to gain merit which would result in beneficial effects, such as a wholesome state of mind at death.

The preparation for death thus centered on daily perambulations to the temple, listening to sermons, attendance at all major ceremonies, gift-giving, and closer observance of the precepts. All of these gained merit for the individual. Old people believed they had to work for a good death, that it would not simply and effortlessly come to them. Old women would often make flowers, or small objects to sell, and then using the money to buy gifts for the monks at the temple. The volume of gift-giving on the part of the elderly is truly astounding! In many instances it consumed their lives. As mentioned, younger relatives often criticized them for spending too much. Listening to sermons is another activity to which they are devoted. Many informants acknowledge they do not understand all of the sermons, particularly when they are delivered in Central Thai. Nevertheless, it is believed that listening or merely hearing the words gains merit and is edifying (cf. Kingshill, 1960; Tambiah, 1968).

Old people, therefore, become actively engaged in a very serious type of work. Indeed, in my field experience this had the result of making elderly persons, unless handicapped by disease or physical immobility, appear busy and preoccupied. Repetition figured prominently in their busy routine. The sermons drone on the clichés of merit-making are repeated over

and over; and the footpaths from home to the temple are trod day after day, and I add, with much determination and a tireless spirit. The function of this repetition in gesture and thought is difficult to locate precisely. It appears to have something to do with substantiating a sense of order and elementary rhythm in the face of a major test or trial coming up.

The elements in the behavior of Northern Thai old people that we have reviewed combine to form a pattern that anthropologists have observed time and again in their field researches --the pattern of status transition. I suggest that the central conception of merit, the goal of a better rebirth, the belief in "do good, receive good," the immense amount of gift-giving, and the energetic level of work and repetition of gestures are all by way of preparation. What transpires in the lives of the pious elderly is a fundamental change in viewpoint. To wit, the temple as a context for the preparation for death encapsulates the pious elderly individual within the psychology of status transition. It thereby serves both as a sanctuary that shields them from a rapidly changing materialistic society, on the one hand, and an initiatory, liminal context for pursuing a power-oriented accommodation to death on the other. A major part of the psychology of status transition is to provide a frame of mind whereby the old person-temple frequenter comes to share in the belief that although life as an old person is suffering and insult, he does have access to the critical means to change his situation.

Old age, however, is surely as complex and variegated as any other age phase, and I was continually reminded while in the field how wide and diverse the range of adaptations and responses were among my informants in Chedi Lane and elsewhere. However, we have already noted that old age created a generally negative social situation for most of the elderly of Chedi Lane. This led to their formulating various types of commitment and avoidance procedures in their interpersonal lives. Related to these interpersonal experiences we also saw a sense of opposition developing between the active world and the world of the temple and asceticism (lokutarra). Inherent in this opposition was the conclusion among a majority of individuals interviewed that life in the household was inappropriate for them at this stage in their lives. They preferred the temple with its peaceful ambience and moral symbols to the heat and liveliness of the household.

Moreover, it was observed that the temple was not simply peace and passivity for old people. In fact, the more the individual entered into the merit-better rebirth quest, the more active and devoted he or she became to giving gifts to the monks, cleaning the temple grounds, assisting with the preparations, and attending temple ceremonies. This work I equate with the type of rigorous effort and training that precedes general initiatory events and status transitions. These activities greatly preoccupied old people and drew their attention away from the details and disappointments of household

life. It gave them direction and made them appear busy and purposive.

The needed vantage point for overcoming a negative social situation and the consternation and anxieties regarding death was obtained by stepping outside of the ordinary social living. In the Northern Thai tradition this was the realm of the world renouncing monk and the anonymous gift. Again, this whole process of elderly adaptation drew its organization and reality from the ethicized reincarnation theme of Buddhism.

The demeanor that old people assumed, as we might expect, was closely related in detail and mannerism to the composure and stylized aloofness of the Buddhist monk. This demeanor varied immensely from one old person to another, but if and when they embraced the values of the temple, their piety resembled the majestic piety of the monks and the Buddha they imitated. The elements and factors that urged the old person in the direction of the temple and its attitude of piety have been reviewed. One final point is to underline the significance of the pious demeanor of the elderly within the full arc of events, desires, and struggles that formed the trajectory of the life course.

In the life histories I obtained from old people, the events of childhood and active adulthood were discussed frankly and more or less objectively. I discovered little need on their part to undertake a prolonged and serious "life review" such as Butler (1963) has observed among elderly westerners.

Nor did I note any strong urge among older informants to confess the past as though to purge it of incoherence. There was some reverie and joy and fun in retelling certain stories, but there was very little concern among my elderly informants for personal legacy and memorializing. A primary impression I received was that they viewed the life they had spent as not necessarily containing some ultimate meaning or significance in itself. There was a lack of pressure and intensity on these matters, and if anything the past was mildly denigrated as inextricably enmeshed in the fetters of everyday attachments. The source of their detachment from personal biography I believe stems, once again, from the rebirth ideology of Buddhism. The belief in rebirth has the effect on old people of relaxing their assessment of their past lives, not feeling they have to over-invest it with expectations and strenuous ideals. This was revealed in the unhistrionic life histories I collected, and the generally unmusic.al attitudes toward the past among the elderly. However, it did not relax the individual's relation to the power quest that we have identified as the goal of the aged in Chedi Lane.

## 7.5

### The Mortuary Journey

As soon as the person has died, a customary wail or keen is sent out by the relatives. It appears a major function is to notify kin and neighbors that the sick person has passed on, following the law of karma. In the village drums are sounded at the temple for long periods of time to inform the gods that

a winyan has departed (Kingshill, 1960:158). Following this the corpse is bathed (ap nam sop) and Northern Thais pointed out that this washing ceremony was much more thorough than the Central Thai "nominal washing." The water used was first boiled, then allowed to cool. Some informants stated this was symbolic of birth, life, and death. The corpse was then dressed and face powder applied. A string is tied around the feet; one around the waist or hands; and one around the neck. The period from the moment of death until the cremation was called khap naw, or the time of decay which is comparable to Hertz's period of provisional burial (Hertz, 1960).

Next, a coffin (long) must be purchased; however, in the case of pious old persons often these matters have been pre arranged and paid for before their death. Some individuals order special personalized coffins. Wijeyewardene (1967) noted the existence of funeral organizations in village Northern Thailand, however none of my informants in Chedi Lane made mention of such organizations. Financing the ngan sop (funeral) came from the family and kindred in Chedi Lane. The corpse is placed on a stretcher made of three planks called hang bai (cf. Sanguan, 1969:218). The individuals who help with preparing the corpse are referred to as sala in Northern Thai.

A flame or lamp is lit and placed at the head of the corpse. This is to symbolize concentration of mind-spirit, and it is called fai yam. It is only extinguished after it has been taken to the cemetery and used to ignite the long gunpowder wick of



the funeral pyre. A major symbol at all Northern Thai funerals is the three-tailed flag which represents the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

Two other small flags (tung lek, tung t9ng) supposedly made of iron and gold must also be supplied. Regarding these flags, Kingshill (1960:159) recorded the story of the black smith who died and took the form of a lizard. To be released from this fate an iron and gold flag were made by a girl and the blacksmith was reborn in the other world. A remark by Legge also is helpful.

Yama (yom in Thai) was originally the Aryan god of the dead. . . . The Yama of the texts is the "regent of the Narokas" residing south of Jambudvipa, outside the Chakravala . . . in a palace built of brass and iron. (1965:90-91)

Consequently, the Northern Thai metal flags may be homage paid to yom so as to safely pass out of his region and reach mueang phi.

Throughout the entire period of the laying out of the corpse, usually not more than three nights in the city, the house is referred to as huan yen, or the cool house. Thao

Abhay informs us that the Laotians refer to it as huan di, the "good house" (1959:144). And Sanguan (1969:215) Nhouy

reports that in Lamphun, Northern Thailand, it is called b9i phi dai, or the merit ceremony for the spirit of the dead.

At the first funeral vigil I attended it was pointed out to me that young boys and girls had begun to chat and flirt (u kani u saw) . My reaction was one of dismay, and I wondered why no one stopped the young people. It was later brought home

to me that groups of flirting young people and gambling and a number of games were necessary events at a Northern Thai funeral. Men played cards, and drank, a music band played on, young people chatted, and giggled, and the lights stayed on all night at the huan yen. All of this of course was done after the monks had finished chanting suttas and returned to the temple and the old people had retired.

A popular comment is that the games, music, and mundane activities are to keep the spirit of the deceased from returning and terrifying people. Kingshill (1960:164) does not accept this explanation but fails to supply an alternative. I suggest two possible interpretations. First, the appropriate death episode as we have seen intimately involved the living family and kindred in the event of death itself. At no other time is the world of the living brought so close to the precipice of death. Possibly the flirting, sexuality, drinking, music, and gambling was a vital statement of boundaries-protecting the mundane world, if you will, from being engulfed by the pull of death. Statements such as not looking into the eyes of the corpse for fear you will lose to death come from individuals, especially those who must handle the corpse.

Northern Thais, moreover, closely relate sexual intercourse or conception (sia phi) and cremation (pao phi; pao sop) within their calculations of auspicious times and directions.. For example, great care must be exercised to avoid improper days for the cremation. A yam or "watch table" (cf. Kingshill, 1960:

164) is used to choose the day, and a monk, or pu acan (informed layman) makes the calculation.

Sanguan (1969:227) states that since early times Northern Thais believe:

wan kaw kc;ng be;> di sIa phi, wan yi bao bpdi paw

than, or "on the 9th day it is bad to conceive, on the 2nd day it is bad to burn charcoal," i.e., cremate. And it is also forbidden to take a corpse out on the 9th day of the waning moon, or as it is said, "the 10th day of the waning moon is bad for entering, the 9th day is bad for leaving"--meaning conception, or coming into the human plane, and cremation, or leaving the human plane, respectively. The myth behind these proscriptions has been translated by Maha Khamfu Khanun Keo. I present an abbreviated and unpolished English translation.

The 9th day of the waning moon is a day of ubat (or khuet), i.e., calamity, misfortune. It was on this day that 9 persons died together. The myth goes as follows.

There was a woman of great sexual charm who had seven husbands at one time. However, all seven were amazingly similar in appearance, including the fact they were all bald. One day the woman went to fetch some firewood. The seven husbands thereupon went out to find some food to eat. They happened upon some mushrooms and made a meal of them. Little did they know the mushrooms were poison and moments later they all were dead.

Upon returning the woman saw all seven husbands lying dead by the hearth. She buried the deadly mushrooms and then set out a plan to cremate her seven husbands. Her main concern was to spend as little as possible on the undertakers and details. The woman found an undertaker who she paid 20 tamlue (?); however, the undertaker had to promise that the corpse of her husband would not return to her house. This he promised, wondering of course what this could mean.

The undertaker took the corpse of the husband, noting he was bald, and buried it at the burial ground. While thus preoccupied, the wife dragged the corpse of husband number two onto the porch. When the undertaker returned for his payment, she informed him that her husband had returned. The undertaker noted the bald corpse. This time she suggested he bury him in a different spot. Each time that he returned, however, there was a bald corpse on the woman's porch. Finally, after six frustrating burials, the wife suggested he cremate this corpse (i.e., number seven) and this the undertaker did and so was paid.

However, in the same area was a bald-headed man who that day decided to burn wood and make charcoal. He went to the forest and after he finished, he loaded the charcoal on a balance pole and started to make his way home. As it happened, however, the undertaker saw the sooty bald man and he became enraged to the dismay of the charcoal carrier. Anger led to words and fighting and both ended up falling in the charcoal fire and dying. That day nine persons in all died. It was a wan ubat (calamitous day). and thus arose the saying "on the 9th day it is no good to pao phi (cremate the dead person), on the second day (following?) it is no good to burn charcoal."

Northern Thai have clear ideas about coming into and leaving the world, and the lengthy periods of time these processes take. Buddhists believe it takes hundreds and thousands of years to be born as a human. Once attaining the human level, however, Northern Thai interpretation appears to hold winy an in a system of close cyclical transmigrations roughly bounded by the kindred and divided into generations. Leaving the world invokes the mortuary cult, which in the case of royalty or a holy monk may take years (i.e., KubaSiVichai's corpse was kept from 1938 to 1946 before being cremated; cf. Keyes, 1971).

Ordinary persons, however, usually restrict the time period from three to seven days. I was not able to work out the full details of the coordination of births and deaths within Northern Thai cosmology. Even the limited data already presented, however, reveal the systematic adjustments made among mortuary practice, rebirth and cosmology.

Before the corpse is taken out on the chosen day to be cremated, other preparations must be made. A special sack of food (tung khaw) is indispensable for the journey between worlds. Most informants perceived the tung khaw or rice sack as a symbol of nurturance and protective care that the surviving relatives will maintain for the wandering phi of the deceased. Once again, to die tragically is to go off without the blessing and protection of one's kin and family. One is launched on a difficult journey without food.

In traditional times, mian (a snack made of fermented tea leaves) and other food was placed in the corpse's mouth. Even today the proverbial coin for payment when passing over an expanse of water is placed in its mouth. When taking the corpse out of the house various devices are employed. Older informants claimed a wall was sometimes removed, or three boards in the floor. A special ladder was built over the normal ladder, or the normal ladder was turned upside down. As mentioned earlier, a water pot was customarily broken. None of my informants conceptualized the spirit of the corpse as exiting via the house post (symbolic axis mundi).

Residents of Chedi Lane used the crematory grounds on the southwest edge of municipal Chiangmai. The southern flank of the city contained two cremation grounds that I know of, and corpses from within the ancient walled section of town were always taken out through the southwest Suanprung Gate. We are reminded the northeast corner of Chiangmai houses the guardian spirit of the city. The procession, moreover, was not allowed to pass in front of the two kumphans guarding the Intakila pillar, nor to cross over a bridge that spans water, nor to dally at three and four-way intersections. Such behavior is ubat or khuet and leads to ruin and calamity (cip hai).

The coffin was enclosed in a specially built prasat ("a mansion; a palace; a temple; a building inhabited by a king; McFarland, 1969:508) made of light wood, sometimes bamboo, and colored paper. The design varied but the general image was of a splne or miniature gilded mountain, i.e., Mount Meru. These could be ordered from a specialist or a relative who was handy with wood and tools could volunteer to construct it. Mortuary prasat range from the poor peasant's bamboo frame with a few humble ribbons of paper to the magnificent gem-studded, gold encasements of princes which ride upon hug\_ dhamma ships to the cremation grounds. Such a graduated series of prasat illustrates the proposition that mortuary episodes are displays of social and cosmological position. A king because of his high station, wealth and power, has revealed his proximity to the center of the entire cosmos. Upon death this position was

recognized by an appropriate social response and display of august symbols and paraphernalia. Because one's cosmological position is in effect power, the essence or distillation of the prince's power, his bone-relics, were to be carefully preserved and re-invested into the mind-power economy of the kingdom, that is, placed at its heart under a stupa (ku or Chedi) , thereby contributing to the source of rain, fertility, and continuity.

Pious kings and abbots were believed so holy that upon death they entered Nirvana. During the temporary internment of kings it is not incorrect to view the kingdom as most heavily cosmologized. A magnificent Meru was constructed on the Thai crematory grounds (Quaritch Wales, 1931) and high and low alike came and witnessed the vivid outlines of their symbolic universe. The mortuary episode, therefore, confirmed the organization and operation of the universe.

The social and prestige aspects of the mortuary feast did have an effect on the elderly of Chedi Lane. As Simmons notes,

Not infrequently the occasion and manner of a man's death have been regarded by both himself and his contemporaries as much more significant than the fact of death itself. (1945:224-225)

In Chedi Lane old people discussed in great detail the numbers of peoples, kinds of food, and attention provided a deceased elderly age mate. Besides the religious motives for having younger generations and kin represented at the funeral, the prestige of having large numbers of people paying their last respects also appeared to greatly please old people.

N9an sop (funerals) also provide opportunities to make merit in great amounts. Informants identified the merit generating power of the mortuary cult with their own efforts to help the deceased obtain a good rebirth--thus by giving money and sending merit they made merit for themselves. Also in the case of sumptuous proceedings such as those held for a monk or rich man, the deceased was believed to possess immense merit which common people could participate in.

Furthermore, in parts of Northern Thailand, the Shan States, and Burma, a special ceremony was performed for a holy monk called poi 19, in Shan, and lak prasat in Northern Thai. Professor Keyes has provided an excellent descriptive analysis of this rite, referred to as the "tug-of-war for merit" (Keyes, 1975; also consult Seidenfaden, 1967:42; and Scott, 1910).

Briefly, a grandiose 25 foot high prasat (catafalque) was constructed for the monk's coffin and dragged to the cremation grounds. In the center of the cremation grounds four tall poles were raised and a square monk's cloth (pha ciwon or pha phidan) was stretched across to form a canopy. We are reminded of the pha ciwon stretched over the head of the victim possessed by phi phai and held by four chanting monks in the khuan calling ceremony. The basic theme of lak prasat focuses on the long, thick ropes attached to both sides of the prasat of the deceased. The people in attendance were urged to go to either end and grab the rope. When a good number of people were on both sides the tug-of-war over the monk's coffin began. This



was done several times on several different days. Keyes (1975: 57) interprets the tug-of-war over the prasat as drawing out as much merit as possible, and as symbolizing the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, especially as reflected in the east-west axis of the tugging. It might also be suggested that it exhibits the canonical lesson of the need to overcome attachment and the truth that attachment is suffering. The rite is a didactic drama illustrating the desire to hold onto the loved one (attachment) versus the need to let go (the higher truth). The east-west axis is, of course, the conventional axis for coming into and leaving the world.

At the end of the ceremony the prasat is pulled to the center of the four poles. When it is finally burned, after being ignited by a long, sizzling gunpowder wick, everyone watches to see if the leaping flames will ignite the pha ciwon stretched high above. If they do and the pha ciwon burned this meant the winyan of the monk was pure and ascendant. If we reflect back a moment and realize the effort, exertion, and endurance that the lone meditative monk must summon as he "burns away" his demerit through concentration, and overcomes his attachments, a tug-of-war and leapin\_ flame become appropriate symbols.

In the modest funerals of Chedi Lane, however, only faint reflections of this august imagery were found. Family, kin, and neighbors would donate food and money for the feasting of the guests. And everyone cooperated over making and serving

the food, obtaining a prasat, hiring a band, and requesting use of the crematorium.

On the day that the corpse was to be cremated, a grandson or young boy or two of the kindred would have their head and eyebrows shaved and be ordained as nen (novice), usually however merely until the cremation was over. The term for this, as mentioned, was *buat cung*, or to be ordained and pull the prasat of the coffin of a deceased senior kinsman, a fitting expression of inter-generational reciprocity.

The last rite performed at the house before going to the crematory grounds was the feeding of the monks. This was done rather perfunctorily at the cremation I attended. A short sermon was given after the meal by the monk. The procession itself consisted of the local monks and young novices who held onto a string attached to the corpse. The *suttas* and *parittas* they had been chanting were thereby still fortifying the *winyan* of the deceased. In front of the monks was a group of older men. Behind the truck carrying the coffin were women and children. Another truck transported the funeral band playing loud festive music.

At the crematory, the coffin was taken off the truck and circumambulated three times in a counter clockwise direction around the tall crematory building. Three pieces of monk's cloth (*bang sakun*) were set on the coffin. Once placed inside, the cloths were taken away, the lid of the coffin was removed, and close relatives poured coconut water on the face of the

corpse. Individuals showed some hesitation with this gesture, and women covered their noses and mouths with handkerchiefs. Each person who attended the cremation was given a small chip of sandalwood with a ribbon on it. Everyone then filed past for the last time and added their chip of wood to the larger pieces beneath the corpse. Following this a young man stood up on the bed of the funeral truck and threw tiny packets of coins wrapped in banana-leaf. These were said to be auspicious and would make everyone who caught one rich. The explanation I received was that wealth and prosperity befall those luk Ian (junior generations) who do not forget to pay obeisance and send merit to their deceased parents and relatives. In the village, the funeral pyre is lit by a long, heavily-charged gunpowder fuse. A monk lights the fuse, and Kingshill reports that rockets were sometimes attached at the end of the fuse which then shot into and ignited the pyre. After finishing with the cremation (few people stayed and watched by the way), the members of the huan yen were adamant about not going back to the crematory grounds or dwelling on the events of the day. Individuals also made buckets of nam sombpi (fragrant water) and sprinkled their face with it upon returning home. Lights will be kept on for days afterwards at night, and close relatives and friends will stay over sometimes for up to a week.

The day following the cremation, a family member or two will return with a monk and search through the ashes for bone fragments. This was called kep at. Although I never observed

the custom it was said that a figure of a person was sketched in the ashes and bones. This figure was aligned so that the head faced to the west, the land of the dead. That figure was then erased, and a monk would draw another with the head facing east, the direction of birth, origin, and new sun.

Following this, pieces of bone were collected by the relatives and placed in a container or clay jar. Few people are wealthy enough to have a stupa built at a temple over the bones; however, wealthy people and famous monks have this done for them. Individuals in Chedi Lane took the at to the river and along the bank built a small sand pagoda (chedi sai) over the bones. When the river rose the sand pagoda and bones were swept away. Sanguan reports that individuals occasionally pulverized the bones, mixed them with gunpowder, and then made rockets which they fired into the atmosphere.

After the cremation has been completed, dam hua rites were performed by the close relatives on the 7th, 50th, and 100th day. These rites were aimed at sending merit to the winjan of the deceased. Not all informants were willing to speculate, but some maintained it took the winyan seven days to reach mueang phi, or the spirit world. We are reminded that the Tibetan Bardo Thedel, or plane between lives, is forty-nine days (Evans-Wentz, 1960), and that the parinibbana of the Buddha entailed seven episodes stretching over seven weeks or forty nine days.

Footnotes

.<sup>1</sup> Consult Nash, 1965:151, and the inauspicious death or "green death" for Burmese parallels.

2Nimmanahaeminda (1966) reminds us that Northern Thais up to fifty years ago buried their dead. Only royalty, monks, and the wealthy were cremated.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## CONCLUSION

The data on adults and old people, and the method of analysis I employed, can now be summarized. In my observations of husband-wife pairs in Chedi Lane, I was struck by the verbalized antagonisms in their relationships, and the overt gamesmanship that infused their behavior. In my analysis I fastened on these features of interaction and then turned to studying symbolism and ritual. It was in the observation of rituals among alienated lower class women that I became convinced that they used ritual to manipulate errant lower class males, or when this became futile, to publically confirm their households as female-headed. The necessity of women using ritual as a means of communication stems from, I suspect, the highly male-centered ideology of Buddhism that canopies Northern Thai life and which stifles direct female expressions of power.

Difficulties over power and authority between the sexes had been commented upon for other areas, especially in New Guinea (Meggitt, 1964; Langness, 1967) and Africa (Netting, 1969); and Benedict (1952) had observed standardized antagonisms between the sexes for the Thai. I felt I was on confident ground therefore in the analysis of inter-sexual antagonisms during the adult active years. The dynamics and exuberance of active adulthood in the city led me to suspect that old people

may indeed wish to separate themselves from such entanglements. Much of my data pointed to this, in fact, and in the first draft of my dissertation I relied heavily on a simple dichotomy between active, inter-sexually competitive adult life and passive, accommodating old age.

My field notes, however, contained a great number of negative comments and criticisms on the part of elderly informants. It was not, until I read DeGre (1942), Schutz (1970), and Berger and Luckmann (1966), however, that I decided to focus directly on the resentment of my lower class elderly informants. This led me to re-evaluate the relations between the generations, and include as primary evidence the antagonisms between old and young that indeed predominated in the lower class neighborhood. Once expressed in this way, I was able to ask whether there were similarities between how male and female resolve their antagonisms in active adulthood, and how individuals in old age resolve their antagonisms with the young? In seeking to answer this question within the context of Chedi Lane data, I was able to see the basic power quest behind the behaviors of old people.

In effect, the barrage of disappointments the elderly faced was responded to with both ideas and action. Through the notion that merit cannot be generated and conserved in secular society, under the present declining conditions, the aged justified their preoccupations with the temple, and simultaneously morally indicated their contemporary milieu.

By linking khuan-calling rites with the greed and materialism of the young, and the principle of karma with true Buddhist piety, they placed themselves above the young and what they considered to be a deteriorating city culture. And through the notion of rebirth they were able to view death as a morally negotiable event, or instrument, if you will, which if properly accommodated to, prepared for (merit accumulation), and socially validated (presence of junior generations and monk) led to the realization of a better next life. But where? In one of the Buddhist heavens? My data show they primarily sought rebirth or re-entry back into the world of humans at a more advantageous level of wealth and power (see Tambiah, 1968, and Obeyesekere, 1968, for similar observations on other lay Buddhists). The over-riding goal of old age for Northern Thai is located in their overt quest for power: power to nullify the effects of neglectful children; power to place themselves above an insensitive society; and power to overcome the disease of old age. This direct access to ritual and religious instruments of power must be highlighted for the Northern Thai (and similar Theravadin societies I should imagine). We see varieties of it among alienated lower class women and their resort to spirit ritual; successful males and their manipulation of Buddhist symbols; and, indeed, among the respectful elderly in their temple-oriented death preparations.

In the case of the elderly, aging in Northern Thailand takes on a much different tone and direction than it does for,



say, u.s. old people. In many respects, the u.s. elderly as analyzed by Clark and Anderson (1967) appeared to adapt and cope by making the necessary internal and external accommodations to their social situation. When placed against the Northern Thai elderly of Chedi Lane, however, it is difficult not to see the u.s. subjects as passive, if not somewhat overaccommodating to their productivity-oriented general society. Northern Thai old people came to grips with their predicament much more directly. Under the Buddhist idiom of merit and reincarnation they were able to establish a counter-ideology to the materialism of the young and general society. The temple established a social basis for this counter-ideology and a context in which the elderly could act out their resentment and alienation.

The use of ritual and religious belief as symbolic means to effect changes, and accommodate adjustments, in the individual's life has received but little attention in studies of Theravada Buddhist societies. Spiro's monumental work on Burmese Buddhism and supernaturalism masterfully traces the important psychological functions served by religious belief, ritual and symbolism. Nevertheless, the psychological component of religious belief can be over-stressed; there are many facets of behavior it simply does not adequately explain. For example, the manipulation of spirit ritual by women amidst the practical difficulties of household life and marriage must surely be granted just as important a methodological place as equating

spirit worship with the id, and Buddhism with the super-ego (Spiro, 1967:263).

The data on old people from Chedi Lane must be supplemented by other data from different socio-economic levels and geographical contexts. These latter should reveal a range of different mental attitudes, perspectives, and levels of alienation among the elderly. One key task of any study, however, will be to determine whether old people are granted respect and status in conformity with the traditional ideology, or whether they must struggle for respect and the validation of their merit status as in Chedi Lane.

The special attitude that elderly Northern Thai have towards death should also be considered from within a broader comparative psychology of death and dying. Those societies that attach a power and prestige idiom to death and the mortuary cult, for instance, should effect different psychological predispositions among the aged and dying than those societies that do not attach such an idiom.

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APPENDIX 1

DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD TYPES  
IN A CHIANGMAI NEIGHBORHOOD



Distribution of Household Types in a  
Chiangmai Neighborhood

I. Nuclear and Skeletal Nuclear <u>Types</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
A. Husband-wife plus children	43
B. Husband plus wife	7
C. Mother plus children	14
D. Father plus children	1
E. Single member household	3
II. Extended Household Type	
A. Husband plus wife plus children plus wife's mother	5
B. Husband plus wife plus children plus wife's father	1
C. Husband plus wife plus children plus husband's mother	1
D. Husband plus wife plus daughter plus daughter's spouse plus child	2
E. Husband plus wife plus son plus child plus son's spouse plus child plus	1
F. Husband plus wife plus wife's sibling	3
G. Husband plus wife plus child plus husband's sibling	1
H. Husband plus wife plus daughter's child	1
I. Husband plus wife plus son's child	2
J. Grandmother plus children of daughter	1
K. I	
L. Grandmother plus children of son	1
M. Greatgrandparents plus greatgrandchildren (via daughter and granddaughter)	1
Husband plus wife plus children plus wife's mother's sister	1
Total	89

APPENDIX 2

METHODS

## Methods

A household survey was administered to more than one hundred houses in the immediate area of Chedi Lane. From this original number, ninety households were chosen and a more detailed questionnaire was given (in spoken form) by myself and my assistant.

The sample of households was non-random and a deliberate attempt was made to include a broad range of socio-economic types of households. In the final instance, however, a high percentage of the households in the neighborhood were of the middle and lower economic level as defined in Chapter Two. By class I am referring to a family's economic position vis-a-vis other families and neighborhoods in Chiangmai city. As mentioned, I developed no precise objective standards for analyzing class. I also deliberately sought out elderly residents in various types of domestic settings. For comparative purposes, a series of interviews and biographical sketches were obtained from the government-operated old folks home.

## Survey Questionnaire

Because of the length of the questionnaire<sup>I</sup> it took two and sometimes three sessions to complete. General questions included: number of household members, names, ages, sex, place of birth, and family and kin relationships. Sleeping patterns emerged as more significant than eating patterns for

analyzing household composition, but even sleeping patterns had to be scrutinized and observed over time. Each household was then coded following Romney's notational system (1968) which allowed for easy cross-indexing of many important factors.

Other questions of a general nature included: years of residence in present location, recent and remote migration history, intra-city changes of residence, ethnicity, languages spoken and written, level of educational attainment for all members of the house, property ownership, temple of worship, markets most frequented, health services and types of health practitioners utilized, and finally a brief list of material items and house construction materials was made for each household.

#### Rapport

Most of the people in the neighborhood were initially quite suspicious about why a foreigner was interested in these questions. A neighbor suggested that I should obtain a letter from a government official of some sort stating that I was doing research for a university in the United States. I eventually obtained a letter of introduction from a high municipal official (whose son was coincidentally studying anthropology in the Philippines!), and much of the suspicion was thereby allayed. However, the letter itself was the source of new difficulties when rumors began to spread that I was

working for the municipal authorities. I am quite confident that a number of individuals never overcame their suspicions about me.

Nevertheless, over a period of time and by simply living in the neighborhood, remaining open to people for discussions and clarifications, and maintaining a consistency in my daily behavior and work, enough rapport was established with enough families to carry on the research. I should note that my elderly informants were the least suspicious of my motives, and greatly aided me in the task of explaining my presence and intentions to the more skeptical younger age groups.

#### Genealogies

Once these initial, basic data questionnaires were completed, I began taking genealogies. The information obtained from the genealogies was very useful for cross-checking data received on the questionnaires as well as mapping the underlying kin networks that inter-linked families and households in the neighborhood. As most fieldworkers soon realize, genealogies start people talking about other people and this is always a source of productive leads. Once again, elderly informants were much less concerned about the possible repercussions of providing information and talked openly and candidly about family and community matters. Elderly informants were also invaluable for filling out the more remote details of genealogies.

### Questionnaires as Interview Guides

As the fieldwork progressed, other questionnaires were fashioned to cover particular domains of social, cultural, and religious life. However, I used these questionnaires as nets, so to speak, to dredge up points and topics around which interviews could be organized. Hence, I found questionnaires very useful as long as I was willing to relinquish my categories and interests in favor of the categories and areas of interest that my informants suggested. These often emerged when informants had difficulty answering my contrived questions.

All of my questions were orally presented to informants and then answers and replies were written down on the questionnaire sheet by my assistant. The entire proceedings were also tape-recorded. Obviously, to use such a method a very careful and sensitive reading of the questionnaires must be given with an assistant present to clarify idioms and colloquialisms as well as help with nuances of meaning and, often, the underlying drift of the conversation. This brings up the matter of the field language.

### Research Language

My use and reliance upon questionnaires in the early period of fieldwork was directly related to my lack of facility in the Northern Thai language. My assistant's primary responsibility during the entire fieldwork period was to translate between Northern Thai into Central Thai, the latter being the language

of my basic competence. Only towards the end of the field period was I able to follow general conversations in kam mueang; but even then I continued to speak in Central Thai.

Northern Thai and Central Thai are sometimes considered dialects of one another, but Central Thais themselves have considerable difficulty in learning Northern Thai.

#### Key Informants

As the 'research gained more focus, especially in regards to describing the behavior, ideas, and attitudes of old folks, I came to rely on a number of key informants. As pointed out in the thesis, my elderly informants lived in a predominantly lower class neighborhood and many of them evinced a sense of alienation and resentment toward younger people and general society. I have focused on these alienated elderly in my dissertation stressing their responses and adaptations to their overall predicament. They are but a segment of the Northern Thai elderly population, however, and must not be seen as typical of old people in Chiangmai city or Northern Thailand.

## VITA

William Phillip Delaney was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 21, 1942. He attended St. Philip Neri elementary school and Laboure High School in north St. Louis. His undergraduate work with a major in philosophy was completed at Rockhurst College, Kansas City, Missouri, in 1964. From 1965 to 1967 he served in Central Thailand with the Peace Corps as an English teacher and school-builder. He has served on the faculty of anthropology at the University of Illinois-Urbana (1975) and Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin (1976-1977). He is presently (1977) a research fellow in the Medical Anthropology Program at the University of California, San Francisco.