

Chapter 5

Analysis

The research objective of this thesis was to investigate the validity of Kemp's claim that the Thai peasant family was not an intrinsically discrete and internally solid group. Chaiyaphum Village, in the Isan region, was selected as the primary field site, and was considered in light of volumes of family-centered and family-related economic studies conducted by Thailand village scholars during the past five decades. Kemp's argument is as follows:

1. The Thai peasant family was not internally cohesive, lacking formal organization principles to guide it. It was a coalition, then, of individuals, with ego, not family, based relationships with those in other families.
2. Production resources, such as land, belonged to individuals, not families. Likewise, taxes were paid by individuals, not families.
3. The group was, in contrast to other Asian families, not a fixed corporation (with regards to membership), nor was it a permanent land holding system.

4. The state, in Kemp's words, was responsible for the "delineation, even in some senses, the 'creation' of the household as a source of labour...", etc.

My hypothesis stated that contrary to Kemp's arguments, the rural Thai peasant family, in the case of a Chaiyaphum Village in Isan, was an internally cohesive unit of production, with formal organizing principles, and whose ego-based economic relationships, by way of the ripple effect in any interrelated and integrated unit, affects the entire family group (in terms of collective productive inputs and outputs). Likewise, while I agreed with Kemp that the village was not a central organizing unit of production (because I hypothesized that the family was the central organizing unit), close social relations between families connected the village, in terms of production and distribution, and in this sense, made it a loosely but definitely interrelated system of mostly self-sufficient family groups both living and making a living together.

On the basis of the following findings, I accept my hypothesis that the rural Thai family, based on my research in Chaiyaphum Village, was a unit with formal organizational principles which directed its economic production processes. Second, I also accept that social

relations in production, while secondary in production activities, were significant and affected the family.

The Thai Peasant Family

Before addressing these points, I attempted to define the Thai peasant family, using mainly interview notes. First, the Thai peasant family was, as Hanks correctly argued, a household unit, its underlying features being that it produced and consumed as a household unit. In my interviews, I found that the family unit was a discrete and comprehensive one, working mostly together but sometimes separately, for a common goal of family production and consumption resources.

Discretion was present when a child left the household, usually at marriage or a few years thereafter. This child with spouse formed a completely separate family unit (except in cases where they remained as a part of the natal household indefinitely). Production and consumption activities were then performed primarily by this new family unit, and aided secondarily by former family members, friends, etc.

This counters Kemp's argument that, when compared in particular to the Japanese family, which was one of fixed, discretion in its membership, the Thai family was not one of such discretion. My discussions in Chaiyaphum

Village revealed however that the Isan peasant family unit was a discrete one which had fixed membership into only one unit at a time. Transitions into separate households was not much different from membership changes in Japanese families, which Kemp claims was discrete on the basis that a woman married, she left her natal household. The same parallel of changing family membership with household separation was found in Thai peasant families, making them by Kemp's own standards discrete units with no more "instability" in membership than the Japanese family which Kemp finds as stable during its membership changes and transitions.

General Questions Posed

In order to objectively assess the significance and internal structure of the rural Thai peasant family as an economic unit, with particular emphasis on the Isan family and a Chaiyaphum Village, the following nine questions were posed to serve as a guide to economic organization and activities:

1. Who controlled the land?
2. How did a family member get access to land?
3. Who planted what?
4. How was family labor allocated/distributed?
5. Who worked for whom? When? How?

6. Was there a difference between affinal and consanguineal relations?
7. How was wealth accumulated?
8. How did wealth differentials affect family relations?
9. What were the productive cycles and did they affect family relations?

These questions were answered based on my interviews in Chaiyaphum Village.

1. Who controlled the land?

The literature writes that before 1908, the State, under the Sakdina System, had notional control over all of the land. In Chaiyaphum Village, however, no one seemed even aware of this notional control. Sending in tributes to the state was normal. There was a lot of danger in their migration from parts of Lao, Ubol, and other Lao border areas. Families were aware of the larger powers surrounding them, and to send in tributes to one state or to another was seen simply as protection against military and other attacks from above.

With land, they took full advantage of the sprawling wilderness before them, and claimed it to their heart's content. Many elders passed on stories to their descendants about Lao border areas, where militia and

powerful officials would try to take over lands. There was the concept of property rights, but families were aware of these rights being within a greater system of military (and state) control, based on their historical experience as the victims of warfare between states.

Since arriving in Chaiyaphum Village, families were the controllers of land. It was initially self-pioneered, and then passed on to or purchased by subsequent generations. There was no headman, commune leader, district officer, or central government representative who came to their village claiming land or dictating production activities.

Kemp argues that land belonged to individuals, not families. While the family's head generally had final say on almost all household affairs, including production resources such as land holdings, the land was, in practice, claimed by and treated as if it were the resource of the entire family. So long as an individual was a part of the family unit, this individual could work pieces of this land for mutual family consumption goals.

Adult children may refer to pieces of property from their natal household as "my father's land" or "my mother's land", showing the origin of the property. The reason these adult children didn't refer to it as their

own land was they were no longer a part of the family units, had separated into new households, and as such, were no longer automatically privy to these particular pieces of land. Likewise, joining a new, pre-existing family unit entitled individuals communal access to that new pre-existing family unit's land, in order to help meet production goals of the family. On the issue of land being considered "my mother's" as opposed to "my father's", the distinction in practice was not there. Mothers' didn't seek official permission from fathers' to use their land. While married, they more often referred to it and always used it as if it was "our" land.

2. How does a family member get access to land?

While kindred, other community members, and community outsiders, could access land through purchase, rental, or by sharecropping, family members inherited.

Parents divided their land to be used by their adult children, once they separated into new households. Once parents passed away, the land was then officially the property of their children (and generally no sooner). Land was divided amongst children of both genders, though not always evenly. Some parents gave their daughters more than their sons, expecting their sons to marry into

land. They would offer them productive resources, like draft animals (usually a mother water buffalo) instead. Daughters received more land, and the youngest daughter, if she remained in the natal household even after marriage in order to take care of her parents, often received the most land resources, as well as the natal household's plantations and housing structure.

In the case of siblings, land would be purchased more often than given away. The exception was that wooded lots, if overabundant to the owner, could become the property of a sibling if the sibling was able to clear the plot.

3. Who plants what?

All families in Chaiyaphum Village, regardless of professional affiliation (teachers) and power bases (headmen, significant and wealthier elders), were rice farmers. Nonglutinous rice was the staple grain grown mainly for family consumption. Rice was produced by the family unit, not individuals. Family members did not separate resources, such as land, labor, or tools, nor did they quantify who contributed to what. It was seen as the product of the entire family unit, towards a singular family goal.

Families also produced a myriad of other crops and vegetation, in fields and plantations. Once again, this was done by the family unit, primarily for direct home consumption or use, and occasionally, as in the case of crops such as cassava and jute, for trade or sale in the market (but use values, not profits).

4. How was family labor allocated/distributed?

Unpaid family labor was the primary force behind family farm rice production activities. Tasks ranged from having no division of labor to somewhat discrete (though entirely flexible) divisions along gender lines and age grades. Family labor was divided along these lines, on the basis of ability, availability. Tasks which had little to no labor division included sowing seeds (using the dibble stick and broadcast methods), pulling weeds, and maintaining fields, and harvesting the crop at the end of the season. In much the same fashion as peasants observed by economic anthropologists in other places, individual members of the family unit often participated in almost every aspect of the entire rice production process.

Tasks that were divided were organized on the basis of ability and availability. Those relegated to the men

included clearing, plowing, and harrowing the fields, removing sprouts to be transplanted, and threshing and winnowing rice. These activities required excessive strength. While the men were busy with these tasks, women engaged in complementary activities. They prepared seedbeds and transplanted sprouts more often than men (because men were busy doing other things), and they cut loose extra grains left behind after the threshing process. The women, as well as older children (usually female) and the elderly tended to household maintenance, including child rearing, cooking, and cleaning. Children were responsible for taking care of the water buffaloes and their younger siblings.

While labor division existed, the whole was a system of overlap and flexibility. Women who were strong enough and in families with few working members would help clear, plow, and thresh. Men with extra time and the impetus would help with the transplanting (of rice sprouts) and cooking and cleaning in the house. Children were assigned responsibilities on a family cycle basis. Those who were at least seven or eight and were not ready to work on the farm would raise water buffaloes. By 15 or 16, they worked full-time on the farm, while a younger sibling took over their chores in caring for the family's

buffaloes. Once children began attending primary school, parents and older children took up some of their responsibilities during the school week.

It was a system of mutual cooperation and support. Families worked together towards the smooth functioning of their production processes, in order to reach the singular goal of meeting the subsistence needs of every family member.

5. Who worked for whom? When? How?

This question refers to social relations of production between families and individuals. While the bulk of the labor required for production of rice was completed using just family labor, there were many occasions when families called on others to assist. There were two types of recruitment: the reciprocal recruitment, between kindred, and the either economically coerced or wage based recruitment. Of the two, the reciprocal recruitment was the most common.

Most families explained that they did not want to bother other families with their production tasks. Families cultivating over ten rai of land without an excess of working family members would often recruit additional laborers to assist in a variety of production

activities. Those with less rai occasionally received help, too.

The primary non-family labor resource was the kindred, which included adult siblings with their affines, consanguines, and neighborhood friends. The kindred contributed consistently and significantly to the individual family production process. Proximity was one factor determining kindred relations for those who were not related by blood or marriage.

Members of a family's kindred were recruited during various production periods, most notably the harvest season. They would cut, transport, thresh, and winnow rice. With milling, efforts were continuous throughout the year. Families milled the bulk of their rice themselves, using older children, often daughters, who were strong enough to operate the heavy foot-pedal mortar and pestle set. If older daughters were milling, young men from the village would come to help, as a socially permissible way to spend time with them.

Other rice cultivation tasks, except among large land holders cultivating large areas, were done with only family labor. Very few requested assistance in transplanting. None asked for help in land clearing,

plowing, and harrowing (though draft animals and tools were lent).

Most families would only cultivate areas off of which they could reasonably subsist and of which could handle the necessary productive maintenance. They did not wish to disturb their social relations excessively. These was a mutual feeling of respect and consideration within kindred groups, and with the overall cultural or family value of not burdening others with individual family production problems and activities. One family's production activities was one family's concern, even though the kindred would often assist and do as much as they was needed, to express the sincerity of their friendship.

Assistance between all families, was recruited, not offered. In order to receive help in production, families had to ask. There was no social sanction requiring people to assist, though those wishing to maintain close social ties would almost always oblige requests. Assistance was given both as economic protection and as a culturally rooted act of kindness and good feelings between families.

6. Was there a difference between affinal and consanguineal relations?

Differences between affines and consanguines were manifested in production recruitment, resource allocation, and the distribution of production yields. The result, however, made these differences irrelevant. Families were such cohesive and cooperative units that any small interaction that affected one member (one part), in turn would affect the whole.

In production recruitment, while proximity played an important role in kindred formation, it was not rigidly restricted. Consanguines living in other parts of the community would still be called upon when needed to assist in family production activities, while the consanguine's affines (also, in some cases, the family's affines) would not necessarily be recruited.

Production resources, such as land holdings and draft animals, were also only given to consanguines, generally only the family's children. The children would undoubtedly share these resources with their families, their parent's new affines, which would thus blur the significance of the line of distinction between the family's affines and consanguines. However, if the family unit were to dissolve prematurely, for example,

through divorce, the land or the production resources of draft animals, etc., would be considered the consanguine's property, not the affine's.

Product distribution was also something more often connected to consanguines. While families were generous with distributing food to friends and affines, they admitted giving more crops, more foraged roots and vegetables, more fruit, and more fish to their consanguines.

However, differentiation between consanguines and affines in terms of relations with family units, was irrelevant in their results. When one member of the family unit was recruited as labor by his or her consanguines, the other family members in the unit were affected. They went without extra labor assistance for one day, and benefited from the maintenance of close relations by that one person's labor fulfillment. In turn, this entire family unit may benefit in the future by calling upon members of that person's consanguines to assist in their own family's labor needs. Second, the entire family unit had full access to the newly acquired land and draft animals, regardless of who secured the acquisition. Finally, in the case of distribution of products, the consanguines would accept the gifts on

behalf of his or her entire family unit. No family member would accept gifts of food products to use individually.

7. How was wealth accumulated?

Wealth in Chaiyaphum Village was defined as possessing substantial production resources: land, the ability to secure labor, and draft animals. From the initial settlement period to approximately 75 to 90 years ago, land was readily available to anyone willing to lay down stakes and claim it. However, the prospect of claiming and clearing large amounts of thick forests using only family labor and sharp knives appeared daunting and excessive. Many families claimed only as much as they needed, and could physically handle. And as land was in such overabundance, either for self pioneering and later for cheap purchase, very few foresaw a future scarcity that would drive prices up and make inheritance of what was then valueless land the prime source of wealth.

Securing sufficient labor resources was also important, to add use value to the family's land holdings. Inheriting large tracts of land, but having insufficient numbers of workers in the family, or an

inability to recruit extra help throughout the entire production process, meant nothing in terms of wealth accumulation. Family members had to be both diligent in their own work and able to maintain social relations, of mutual reciprocity or positive reciprocity (power over other individuals), in production.

Technology included access and ownership of draft animals, which were critical in rice production. Families with enough draft animals, laborers, and land holdings were able to produce large surpluses, making them better prepared to survive poor agricultural seasons and allowing them to reasonably expect successful reproduction of their activities year after year.

8. How did wealth differentials affect family relations?

Families with large land holdings and production surpluses were in the position to offer loans and land rentals. This enabled them to economically dominate those who were in need of these things. During aspects of these families' own production activities, they were able to recruit labor, on a non-reciprocal, non-kindred basis.

These relations were asymmetrical, tending to be less closeness between these families of varying wealth levels. Additionally, because large land holders were so

busy with their enormous production projects, they seldom had the spare time to participate on a mutually reciprocal basis in production activities with other families, which was one of the ties that bound families together.

9. What were the productive cycles and did they affect social relations?

The rice cultivation cycle, while not directly determining social relations, had an affect on the maintenance and the expression of them. They may have had an influence on the overall form, function, and content of the relationships, without necessarily determining them.

An approximation of the cycle in Chaiyaphum Village is as follows:

- A. If land needed to be cleared, it would be done in April or some time when family labor was available full-time.
- B. In late May or early June, after the first rains softened the ground, families would then plow and harrow their fields.

- C. If they were broadcasting or using the dibble stick method, they would plant immediately with little preparation of seeds.
- D. If they were transplanting, after the seedbeds were ready, they would broadcast the sprouts, then transplant them as they matured (in roughly one month).
- E. There was then an interim period, where they maintained their fields through weeding. Broadcasters tended to omit this process.
- F. Within three to five months after the crop was sown, it would be ready for harvest. Harvest times varied considerably, both within family plots and between family plots, depending on the type of rice seed selected (light, medium, heavy).
- G. After the harvest season, families would spend the next four to five months looking for other forms of food to supplement their rice, as well as other production activities, including crop cultivation, crafts, and seasonal wage work.

In the first task, of land clearing, families never asked for assistance. They would increase their rate of self-exploitation in order to clear enough area, if it

was available, to provide subsistence for the family unit. Following the land clearing process was plowing, harrowing, and sowing. Once again, families invested their own labor inputs, without asking for help. Because all families were up against the same time constraints, of planting at a time most suited to take advantage of the rainy season, families felt compelled not to bother others who were already equally busy. In transplanting, it was not unheard of for families to call on their kindred to assist, but this was only if particular kindred families had already finished their transplanting or had the time otherwise.

Following this first phase of intensive labor inputs, there was a low period, where families would invest more time in finding immediate subsistence satisfaction. They often foraged for food, caught fish, produced crafts for trade or sale (for use values), or cultivated plantations and other crops in fields that were unused in rice cultivation. In food foraging and fishing, individual family members frequently went with their ego-based kindred relations. While they worked together and helped each other, they did not function as a communal production and consumption group. Each person brought his or her own basket or net and while sharing,

in aftermath, wasn't unknown, with many immediately after being invited to consume products together, the bulk of the finds were distributed to the family unit, regardless of who participated in the work efforts.

The next phase in the cycle was the harvest season. Families with enough labor resources and time to harvest on their own did so. Those who needed extra help, or had extra time to help others, exchanged labor. Because harvest times were staggered (on the basis of different rice weights and types, and with this on the basis of land levels), many families were afforded the time to participate in communal work efforts for other families. This, as opposed to the social groups that would forage or fish together but separately, constituted real communal parties because they were contributing to one common production goal: the production activity of one family unit. In the social foraging and fishing endeavors, they would informally segregate their finds and bring them home to their own individual family units. Once the harvest season was over, the rice cultivation process complete, families would once again break into ego-based social groups, as well as produce crafts and grow crops with members of their family unit.

The cultivation process, or production cycle, along with cultural values, dictated the form and function of social relations of production. The staggered harvest season and the non-staggered planting season reveal the effect production particulars had on reciprocity of labor and on doing things within the discrete family unit. Down periods in the production season gave ego-based friendships time to strengthen, because there was no major family-based task to dominate. These friendships were able to carry through during the production process, as members of a family's kindred were derived from these ego-based friendships. While the existence of these relations evolved out of non-economic parameters, likewise were they further shaped and maintained through opportunities made available by the cycle.

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