

Chapter 4

Interview Findings - Chaiyaphum Village

Chaiyaphum Village was established sometime between 1814 and 1819. Local chronicles record that the village was started in "approximately" 1814, when two low-ranking Lao officials and one commoner successful brought a group of villagers from Wiang Chan (Rawat, 1986: 1). Term, in his history of the entire Isan region, writes that in 1819, Chaiyaphum's (the provincial capital) leader, Jao Paw Praya Lae arrived, followed by 700 men (and their families), who settled in numerous areas within and surrounding the present day capital, including the area that is now Chaiyaphum Village (1987: 17). These first groups to Chaiyaphum arrived under the auspices of Wiang Chan, sending back in kind taxes of one wa (2 meters) of white cloth per adult male (Ibid). In 1822, Jao Paw Praya Lae then chose to send tributes to Siam rather than Wiang Chan because Wiang Chan had become a vassal state of Siam" (Ibid: 18).

The population that settled what is now Chaiyaphum Village (eight kilometers outside the provincial capital) were originally 4 kilometers further down, north of a

large pond. They settled in a low-lying area, which flooded every year. Measurements to avoid this by moving to an elevated area adjacent to the pond also failed, because the lands that were elevated were limited and not spacious enough for living. They were forced to seek a new area with a sufficient water reservoir, which they found at the present day Chaiyaphum Village site. The area was slightly elevated, did not flood, and was spacious enough for a comfortable settlement. Their settlement was made official by the establishment of the name "Chaiyaphum Village", after the name of the new water reservoir (Rawat, 1986: 1).

This chapter presents a summary of interview data gradually collected in Chaiyaphum and Bangkok over a 16 month period, though a significant portion was gathered in two months (May-June 1998) with the aid of an interpreter.

Migration Process

While the original founders were from Wiang Chan, many subsequent groups arrived via points in Isan. Groups arrived made up of family units of sedentary agriculturalists, looking for newer, safer, and more comfortable places to provide subsistence for their families.

They came from all over, however the name Ubol Rachathani as a place of origination came up frequently. Some speculated that their ancestors were kindred, or their ancestors' kindred were kindred, because families upon leaving their old homes would almost always know where they were headed. As sedentary agriculturalists, it was essential to know if the new place would be suitable and welcoming for their production objectives. Families needed secure areas (i.e. no war) with an abundance of workable land, either to be self-pioneered as in the early days, or to be purchased. They were setting out of major migration expeditions, dragging their families deep into the wilderness for weeks. They had to feel confident that their efforts would be worth it.

Families relied on word of mouth, from visiting members of their kindred, and through acquaintances. Those who would return, to visit and encourage their kindred, would describe both the new settlement as well as the route to reach it. One 73 year old woman who came from Ubol with her mother when she was 14, explained her experience:

We were so poor, no land, no father, no family. Relatives and people we knew heard that it was good in Chaiyaphum. They said it was easy to find food. So we came. We share-cropped 9-10 rai of land from

an acquaintance, and would give her half of our harvest.

Earlier migrants from Ubol (the most frequently named place of origin among Chaiyaphum Village families interviewed) may have come for economic reasons, too, but many also told their descendants stories about migration for safety and security. They sought places that were safe, secure, as well as economically viable (if possible). It was perhaps the result of both the Siamese military invasions of Champasak (as well as Wiang Chan and Luang Prabang, though Champasak was perhaps more relevant considering its close proximity to Ubol), and the subsequent emergent conflicts over areas in Isan that led to areas particularly close to Lao to be of significance to both the Siamese and the Lao, who each wanted it for their own. Grandparents and parents told stories to older villagers about people coming to take over lands in Ubol, not by simply forcing villagers to leave, but threatening their lives and their families lives as well. Families then fled as far and as fast as they could, to the most highly recommended destination, usually with some of their kindred. A 52 year old woman, who was raised by her grandmother, recalls this aspect of her grandparent's precarious migration:

My grandfather came from somewhere in Lao. He arrived in Ubol, met my grandmother, and they left as a family for Chaiyaphum. They traveled at night to avoid being seen by people. They stayed away from cities with people who would see them. They hid in the forests and in caves during the day. They carried baskets of glutinous rice around their necks and when they were hungry, they would put the rice in their mouths while walking. That is how they ate their meals.

For over a century, these migrating sedentary agriculturalists, whose socio-economy was based on glutinous rice production, came to an area still overwhelmed by thick forests. Land, especially forest land, was not scarce, and so many families, not foreseeing future scarcities (the possibility appeared light years away), would only claim as much land as they presently needed, and little more. The idea of clearing so much forest seemed an impossibility.

Other families, however, particularly towards the early part of the 20th century, did realize land would soon be scarce (while not in actual clearing and cultivation, in property ownership, at least) and did their best to claim an abundance of it for future opportunities and generations. It was bought and sold cheaply and regularly, however, because so much of it was still forest land. An 88 year old man, who inherited much of his property, but claimed to have self-pioneered some of it while he was in his early teens (with his

natal family), described how relatives and acquaintances convinced him to sell some of his property:

I had 89 rai of land, a lot of it forest...I wasn't able to clear it all, and many people would come and ask me to give or sell them some land that I wasn't using. I felt so guilty and ashamed for keeping land that I wasn't using, that other people would use, that I would sell. If it was a sibling, who cleared some of my land, I would give it to them for free.

During the days of self-pioneering, land was acquired by simply laying down stakes to mark territory. Once a piece of land could no longer be pioneered, it was distributed through inheritance, purchase, and rental. The primary method of distribution was through inheritance, because family's always gave something of what they had to at least their female children (and in many cases, the male children as well).

Land was distributed for production purposes to children generally at marriage, or after separation of households. It may have officially belonged to the parents until death, but was used and operated on as if it belonged to the receiving child's new household. A 70 year old female explains land inheritance differences between genders in her own family:

In the past, parents gave land to their daughters. Sons would leave and get new land from their wives. My husband's mother gave him one mother water buffalo. I was the only daughter, and while my brother's did receive some property, I got the most...60-70 rai.

Residence was matrilocal. Households generally lived on the same compound as the wife's parents, and their proximity encouraged more sharing of labor and food. However, families did not operate as a single, communal household. They were separate. They performed the bulk of their activities separately and considered things like their housing structures private property.

Based on my interviews, I was able to come up with the following criteria for a family, or household unit in Chaiyaphum Village:

1. They must live in the same housing structure.
2. They share their production and consumption as one unit, not on a piecemeal basis, or in exceptional situations.

Occasionally also, strangers will join the family household and participate fully in the production and consumption processes as primary members. Some are absorbed into the family unit with full rights as a family member, treated as if it is their own home, while others never reach this point. In the case of these strangers, then, it is the level of "acceptance" by pre-existing family members that determine whether they are a part of the unit, an indicator of which could be whether consumption is distributed based on wants and needs or on

a quantifiable, piecemeal basis. This latter person, not accepted into the family unit, was called "pu asai", or 'person staying (living)' in a place or with a family.

The Rice Production Process

The rice production process was made up of resources (land, labor, technology) and activities (clearing, plowing, sowing, harvesting). It was an important feature of organization in the economy, shaping and being shaped by relationships of production.

After land was acquired (claimed or purchased), the first general activity to be performed was the clearing. Hanks in his literature on Bang Chan may have described a romantic process of slash and burn clearing, but families in Chaiyaphum Village assured me there was nothing romantic at all about the task. It was arduous, burdensome, in words Chayanov would have used, "irksome" and "drudging". It required intensive amounts of excessive strength, taking three strong men an average of five to six days per rai, and at least ten days if they dug out the tree stumps, too. For this reason of excessive labor inputs alone, men were usually in charge of clearing. Women who were strong enough and were needed (for example, in families with too few working members), would also assist, but the significant point of

distinction in the task was that it was done by members of the family unit and of the family unit only.

Inquiries into why this was a family unit only task, rather than a project to be helped out with using the labor of members of the family's kindred, resulted in three main reasons. First, it was not a "time crunch" task. There was usually no time rush, no real reason to ask people to come and help. For example, in rice harvesting, the rice crop had to be cut before the grains dried out. Because of this "rush", many families were inclined to seek assistance during the harvest season. Clearing, on the other hand, was generally done during the three month down period of farm activity, and as a single rai took only a quarter of one month, families had the time to do it alone. Second, every family had their own work to do. While the down periods generally offered more spare time, families were usually very busy trying to meet their subsistence needs with supplementary foods, fish, crops, roots, etc. Informants told me that droughts would come and destroy the entire crop every three to five years. Some families were hit worse than others, but in general, down periods were often times to not sit back, relax, and repair tools, but to intensify production of other things in order to supplement their

grain or make up for a shortage and lack thereof. Families did not want to take up the time of their friends and relatives, especially with such a difficult task. Finally, land clearing, of all of their production activities, benefited only one family and added tremendous value to pieces of property. For example, an 85 year old informant reported that between 45 to 50 years ago, he purchased two pieces of land: seven rai of cleared land, for 1400 baht, and 20 rai of woods, for 400 baht. Land clearing was the process that transformed basically unusable and for a while, overabundant, forestland into workable cultivation areas. Families would not ask others to help them make these "investments" into their own property, especially as it was their own responsibility.

Because of the irksomeness of the task, families only cleared as much as they had to and were capable of. When it was necessary, they would increase their rate of exploitation, in order to make ends meet. Most families thought about survival on a day to day basis, however. There was little forethought into storing for the future, mainly because they dealt in raw consumption commodities that lost its value over time. For example, families

would eat rice that was three years old, but it was not comparable in taste to rice that was freshly harvested.

Water Buffaloes as Draft Animals

The water buffalo was a critical tool in the rice production process for a long time. Informants over the age of 80 remember the use of draft animals during their childhood. Many households eventually owned their own water buffaloes which were used in numerous aspects of the production process. The most important use was in plowing and harrowing. They were never used in threshing, and oxen were used in long distance traveling and in transport.

Men were in charge of driving the buffaloes in plowing and harrowing, in general because of the excessive strength required. Women could help, if they were strong enough, though this was not customary. Once again, families relied on their own labor inputs. Only those who had very large holdings would recruit outside help, and these would often be hired laborers. Most families did it themselves, however.

Taking care of the buffaloes was a family effort, as well. While men were in charge of operating them in the fields, children took care of them, providing them with shade and enough hay and water to consume. They gained

the responsibility generally by the time they were eight years old. It operated on a cyclical basis. Other children would move onto heavier farm tasks, younger children would move up into the position with age. This was not divided along gender lines. About 75 years old, children began attending some primary school. This transformed the pattern only minimally. During the weekdays they would get some assistance from their parents, but during some weekdays, all weekends, and school holidays, they would continue with these chores. A 52 year old woman, the second oldest child, remembers taking care of water buffaloes when she was a small girl:

My older sister already finished school [fourth grade] and was working on the farm with our parents. I helped take care of the water buffaloes. We had four buffaloes. I made sure they didn't eat the rice, that they had enough water. Around six or seven PM, I would bring them home, riding on the back of my favorite one. When it rained, I built small shelters. Sometimes I tied them up while we waited under a tree for the rain to stop. Parents farmed. Children were the main ones who took care of the buffaloes.

Methods of Rice Cultivation

Over 90 years ago, the population in Chaiyaphum Village was already using all three methods of rice farming: 1) Dry cultivation using the dibble stick, and 2) paddy cultivation through broadcasting 3) and transplanting. Each method refers to both the planting

method (boring holes with the dibble stick, scattering seeds as in broadcasting, and transplanting sprouts) as well as the type of terrain to be exploited. The dibble stick method was used in areas with the highest elevation, which could not be flooded. Transplant farming was in the mid-level areas, while broadcasting was done in the areas with the lowest elevation. Families relied mainly on their own labor.

Many postulated that the dibble stick method came first, because it was the simplest in technology and procedure. Farmers would take dibble sticks and dip them into the ground to make holes. They would then drop between four to seeds per hole. If they dropped in too many, and all of the seeds grew into sprouts, they would die from overpopulation in an area with modest nutrients.

If a tract of land was recently cleared, farmers would drop in some seeds prior to the first rains, in the fertile and soft soil. Otherwise, the ground was rock solid and impossible to penetrate before the rains came to soften them. Rain would pour down either in late May or early June.

In the other two methods, broadcast and transplant, farmers would also wait for the first rains, in order to

plow. Once the plow was invented, areas that were planted with a dibble stick were also plowed.

Some confusion may arise after reading Hank's delineation of periods of time for each rice planting method in Bang Chan. In Chaiyaphum Village, all three methods were employed simultaneously, though no one can tell for sure which came first. In Chaiyaphum Village, the method was selected mainly based on the terrain. While Hanks also found that each method was complementary to different types of population settlements and pressures, Chaiyaphum Village farmers found all three methods suitable to an entire range of population levels.

The Dibble Stick method, the only dry cultivation method, was planted in areas too elevated to flood. The two paddy methods were used in low-lying areas, with decisions on planting method being based on both the terrain and the personal preference of the cultivator. Generally speaking, broadcasting was used in the lowest-lying fields, while transplanting was used in low to mid lying fields.

In the dibble stick method, farmers selected fast growing, light varieties of rice, because the elevated areas were not subject to flooding. Additionally, the dry fields would become parched after an extended period

of time so the rice had to mature quickly in order for the crop to survive until harvest time. The primary type of light rice used was "field rice".

Elevated areas were not ideal land plots. However, once good land became scarce, families had to settle for what they could get. Those with less elevated (but still high) areas tended to have more success during dry years. Others with the highest plots complained of frequently "planting for nothing" and throwing away entire rice crops year after year because of a lack of adequate rainfall to nourish their high planting areas.

Dibble stick farming was a family effort. Parents and older children would work together planting the seeds. There was little preparation for dibble stick farming. Families would not soak the seeds overnight, because if they sprouted too quickly from the intense exposure and moist ground once planted, and the rains did not continue to come, the crop could not survive. A 46 year old woman described her participation in dibble stick farming:

I used to help my grandfather plant the rice seeds. We used a stick and would bore holes into the ground. We made the holes in straight lines, even rows, so when it was time to harvest, it was easier. The problem wasn't with the way we planted the rice, but with the type of field we had. Our land was high and couldn't hold water. So we lost a lot of rice that way, just threw it away when it dried out.

The two paddy methods, of broadcasting and transplanting, survived more often than dibble stick crops, because they relied on their flooded fields to provide constant nourishment. Farmers selected their method based on terrain and preference. Broadcasting was a lot easier to plant, but much more difficult to harvest. Seeds using the broadcast method required at most an overnight soak, while seeds using the transplant method had to be soaked and propagated over several days before initial broadcast sowing and later transplanting. In the broadcast method, the criterion for deciding whether or not to soak overnight was the same as that of the dibble stick method. Basically: If fields were moist, the seeds were soaked overnight to encourage rapid sprouting. If the fields were dry, they would not soak them for fear that small buds produced once the seeds were in the ground would die from lack of nourishment.

During the flooded portions of the cultivation process, broadcasted fields were generally the lower-lying and as a consequence, the most flooded. Sprouts from heavy seeds used in broadcasting would buoy to the top and survive in deep floods for over ten days. Transplanted fields would flood but never to that extent, so farmers selected medium weight seeds.

The primary varieties used in broadcasting included heavy types of non-glutinous rice, which were able to float and survive for over a week. These varieties, as called by the local population, were Da Haeng (Dry Eye), Pinkaew, Kon Sawan (from Amphur Kon Sawan, Chaiyaphum), Pukieo (from Amphur Pukieo, Chaiyaphum), and Boondakay (Crocodile Crop).

Maintenance of these fields was minimal. The crop could survive floods, and weeds, early on in the season, were ignored and allowed to fester so long as they did not reach disruptive proportions. In general, broadcasted fields reaped lower yields than transplanted fields. But some who broadcasted were able to outwit these odds, through increasing the maintenance and care of their broadcasted fields. A 37 year old man reports on the broadcasting activities of a kindred family:

My wife's sister's family was very perfectionist with their broadcasted fields. They would pick every weed, every stray grass. Nothing was left in their perfect fields. They broadcasted ten rai, and everyday, would work on little patches of land. Their broadcasted yields were even higher than some people's transplanted fields.

One major difference between broadcasting and transplanting was in its labor division. While those broadcasting did not have too many gender specific tasks, other than plowing which the men almost always did,

transplant farmers constantly broke up the work along gender lines. While men plowed, women prepared the seedbeds. Both sowed the sprouts initially, by broadcast, and then men removed the more mature sprouts from the ground to be transplanted. This was because the task was arduous, taking tremendous amounts of consistent strength.

Light to medium varieties of rice seed were used in transplant farming. Basically, the higher the terrain, the lighter the seed used. The main light rice was "Daw" (short term), which was nonglutinous. Primary medium glutinous varieties included G.K. 6, G.K. 8. (both glutinous), and "Large Sticky Rice", while nonglutinous varieties included Kee Dohng and Homme Dohng (a variation of Jasmine rice).

Highly cooperative family labor was the only kind used in all three types of planting. A 70 year old woman described the cooperation between she and her 80 year old husband, while their children were very young:

He and I would leave for the fields very early. I would carry the children while he carried the food, cooking pots. In the evening, I carried the children and the empty food containers, while he carried the firewood to bring home.

Rice planting, field preparation, and cultivation maintenance was a family effort, which benefited the

entire family unit. Fathers cleared and plowed the fields to plant seeds to grow rice for the entire family to consume. Mothers prepared seedbeds, all working aged members planted and transplanted. Children who were old enough took care of the water buffaloes. The goal by all members was to produce rice for the entire family to consume. Other activities, cooking, cleaning, even collecting water, was performed by all members though women, the elderly, and children made up the bulk of it. Family units were discrete, too, because while others, particularly the kindred, assisted occasionally, it was a supplement to family production activities.

The Harvest Period

The harvest period was the one time when kindred-based working groups were significant in family production activities. Varieties of rice crops, selected to some extent because of the uneven terrain between family units, staggered rice harvest times. This gave families with pockets of time (a commodity not found during the planting season) to help their kindred. But help only came when it was called for, and those with small plots and sufficient working members, or who were too proud, would not ask for help.

Most families fell into this category of not asking for help. The work groups, it appears, evolved over time as more land in the population became cleared and cultivated. While informants had large holdings, as reflected in the above data sheet, their holdings were made up mostly of woods. Families also claimed that water tended to stay in the fields longer, so they could take their time in harvesting (perhaps a direct relationship to the amount of forests surrounding their rice fields). Contract labor was rarely considered, except by those with significant holdings and a lack of kin relations. 60 years ago, it cost two and a half baht for one day of contract labor (10 selerng). Between 45 and 50 years ago, it cost five baht. It wasn't worth the money.

The range of responses on questions about harvest assistance reflect the variety of relationships found within the population. Some had many people come to help. For example, an 80 year old man had between 10 to 20 people every year, made up mostly of consanguines to his wife, but also of affines and neighborhood friends. Another, a 75 year old woman, claims that no one came to help her. She and her husband tried to manage things on their own, resisting the temptation to call for

assistance. They couldn't afford contract help either. But they were usually not able to harvest all of their rice on time, and much of their crop would dry out (the grains would fall). Many families took as long as entire month harvesting their crop on their own. They took their time in plowing and planting, as well as in harvesting. One 57 year old man would spray his crop with water during the month it took he and his wife to harvest their fields.

A 64 year old woman said it was important to maintain steady relations all year long, and that was why some families had more people to call on:

I give fruit and fish to relatives and friends all year long. Because I have it and I want to share with them. But I also give it because I hope they will share with me and help me when I need it.

For those who did involve their kindred in their harvest activities, the first to be called on were those who lived around them (though because of matrilineal residence patterns, next door neighbors were often adult siblings with their affines). It was these people whom they saw most often, sharing fresh vegetables and fish, cooked meals, and company in the evenings. It was natural to help each other out during the harvest period, with no feeling of superiority and inferiority, patron and client.

The activities that work groups were called upon the most were: harvesting, transporting, and threshing. While harvesting and transporting was the same in Chaiyaphum Village as most other places described in the literature, its process of threshing appeared to be one with some differences. Rather than use buffaloes or people to trample the kernels off the stalks, cultivators did not trample the crop at all. They used large, hand-held clamps made of two arm length poles cobbled together. Using much the same philosophy as a pair of barbecue tongs, cultivators would grab a bundle using the clamps and then proceed to beat it against the ground. This tool was called a "rice beating stick". Informants offered that earlier versions of this tool was probably a single stick beat against the bundles knocking the grains loose.

Threshing was done by men, while women removed extra kernels left behind, using a knife. It took four people to thresh 100 pip in one day (1 pip = between 6 to 7 kilos), which was enough rice for a three person family to consume for an entire year. More prosperous families had up to 100 pip of rice, which took about 20 people to thresh.

Harvests were then divided into rice for consumption

and rice for sale. Glutinous rice was consumed and never sold. Non-glutinous rice was generally sold and only consumed when there was not enough glutinous rice to last the year.

Rice for consumption was home milled in foot-operated mortar and pestle sets, though they speculated that hand held mortar and pestles were used over 90 years ago. This task was regularly done by family members throughout the year, though during the off seasons, they tended to mill in advance for future consumption ease. When machine-run mills came into the community, there was a social bias against those who used the machines. They were seen as lazy. Labor was the free commodity, where families were more willing to exploit their own labor rather than expend capital when it wasn't necessary. More rice grain was produced from home mills, too.

There were social relations which were expressed during milling, as well. A 57 year old woman told me about courting in the evenings, with young men who would come to help her mill:

In the evenings, while the girls would come out and mill, groups of young men would appear from out of nowhere to help us mill. We hadn't seen them all day but just as we were alone outside milling, they showed up. My younger sisters loved it when they would come, because then they didn't have to help.

A 46 year old woman remembers sleeping outside in a tightly knit makeshift shelter of bamboo, which was so warm during the cold season, they didn't need blankets. She and her siblings and close friends would gather in there during some evenings and take turns milling rice. They would mill all night, sleeping and rotating shifts. This reflected the relationships formed by young girls in the family, socially based but expressed in production activities that would benefit their families.

Rice for sale was distributed to a number of outlets. Travelling Thai merchants from Bua Yai (Nakorn Rachasima), would come, as well as Chinese merchants. Wandering families (many from Ubol) arriving after the season came willing to work for rice, and were enlisted in activities in exchange for rice. Many families from Chaiyaphum Village also brought their rice to sell in Chinese mills in the capital town. Prices were very low, particularly with comparison to the amount of labor involved. As recently as 40 years ago, families would sell 1 kilo of unmilled rice for 50 satang.

The Family Cycle

Families produced rice and inherited land on a cyclical basis. In production, parents and older children worked the land while younger children took care of water

buffaloes. The oldest family members who could not work on the fields anymore worked around the house, cooking, cleaning, repairing small things, and making things like string from bamboo to tie bundles of rice during the harvest. Once the younger children got older, they too worked on the land, while the next generation moved up into water buffalo rearing.

Other Production Activities

Numerous other production activities were necessary to supplement the staple grain of rice. Work in such activities tended to intensify during the off-season (rice) and during low periods such as the 90 plus days of waiting for the rice crop to mature. These activities were mostly centered on land husbandry, though families also gathered forest produce and caught fish.

The following is an extensive listing of field crops that were cultivated in addition to rice: jute, cassava, pepper, garlic, cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, and beans. The following were grown in plantations: banana, coconut, mango, sapodilla, longan, custard apple, willow, mulberry, jackfruit, and papaya. These crops were grown for home consumption, or for use-value trades in the marketplace. Families tended to sell jute and cassava in particular, with merchants for jute coming directly to

the village annually. Cotton (bushes) was grown to produce cloth to both wear and to sell. Cloth merchants, all Chinese, also arrived in the village annually, paying 20 baht per wa (two meters) for an average annual income of 200 baht per year. Money was spent on family necessities, such as fish sauce, pots, extra clothing, tool replacement, land purchases, etc. Even though women were the only ones producing cloth, they spent the money on the entire family unit.

Families also caught fish to maintain their diets. They caught fish in numerous water supplies, including lakes, streams, and rice fields. Close to the harvest season, the muddy rice fields would dry, leaving masses of fish wriggling in the low-lying muck, concentrated in small areas with water. Up to 30 years ago, there was such an abundance of fish in the rice fields that farmers were not concerned about whose lake or rice field or stream the fish were plucked from. Fish hadn't yet become a market commodity, either, which also contributed to their carefree attitude towards its collection.

Collected vegetables were given the same consideration. Grown in such wild abundance, families frequently distributed their gatherings to the kindred. Plantation crops were also shared, though it was admitted

by most that consanguines would receive more than affines and other kindred.

Crafts were also produced. Unlike vegetables and fish, they were not shared. They had use value in trading, and took much human initiative and labor to produce. This was the same attitude towards rice. Families produced for their own household, and would only share freely with close kindred during times of disaster and then only as an aid, not a complete support. There was never such a thing as too much rice. Families needed as much of it as they could get and could use all of it, for subsistence, trading, and insurance for the future. Crafts held a similar, though less important, function. Families made cloth, spun silk, and produced baskets. One family made pottery for sale, which had value in the past. Families could always use cloth for clothing, and for use as blankets, and for sale. Unlike fresh fruits and fish, these things did not lose their value upon long term storage and thus was both a subsistence product as well as a tradable commodity.

Traditionally, women produced all of the cotton and silk, with the help of young girls. Between the ages of 12 and 15, most young girls already knew the fundamentals of weaving. Every aspect of the cloth production process

was taught to them over the period of their lifetimes, through observation of their mothers and little chores they were allowed to perform. Female family members grew the cotton bushes for cotton, and mulberry trees to feed silk worms. The cotton was processed through a series of handmade and handheld implements, including a crank (similar to the "clothes wringer" described by Curtis that tore the lint leaving behind the seed). The silk process required boiling the silk worms while extracting their cocoons. The fine silk thread was then spun repeatedly until it became finer. Dyes were made by hand, using natural products, such as tree barks and dead animal shells, as well as vegetables.

Once markets in the provincial town expanded, about forty years ago, families began bringing small numbers of produce to sell. There was no transportation to and from the town, so they walked with their wares. It was a good eight kilometers through rugged cart paths and sandy roads. Many carried their produce in baskets suspended by a pole slung over their shoulders. Markets were not that significant, however. The buyers were other producers and the small amount of nonpeasants living and working in the town. A 71 year old woman grew things like custard apples and bananas, and brought fish that

she caught, to sell in the market, making a total of 200 baht per year.

Over 70 years ago, a water buffalo trade from Chiayaphum Village to Lopburi flourished. Families reported that fathers and husbands would leave annually to walk water buffaloes down to Lopburi for sale. It was a way to make extra money, to supplement bad harvests. Groups of men only, generally over the age of 35, would travel in groups of five to six, to Lopburi by foot. Prior to their departure, they would purchase buffaloes from Chaiyaphum and surrounding villages. With only themselves, the buffaloes, and between one to two cow-drawn wagons, which they would fill with glutinous rice and fermented fish for their own consumption, the men would set off on the 15 day plus journey by foot (over one month round trip), through cart paths and rugged roads. Their route was: Muang Chaiyaphum (the capital town and later city), Chaturat, Ban Suang, Petch, Lopburi. It was an arduous journey. The men always returned malnourished and exhausted. They braved the wilderness and survival of constant traveling. My second oldest informant, an 85 year old man, said that when he was 16, his father died on one of the water buffalo trading trips. Economically, however, the trip was

worthwhile to them. As their labor was the one resource of which they were willing to increase the rate of exploitation almost infinitely if necessary, a comparatively large sum of currency in the hand was worth the exhaustive, treacherous journey. Thirty years ago, they would profit about 1000-2000 baht between the entire group, which they would split amongst themselves.

Migrant work, which is so common today with the Isan population, was a rare occurrence prior to 30 years ago. Only the poorest families would send their children (15 years old) to work as servants in wealthy households in Bangkok and large provincial towns. Wages forty years ago were approximately 50 to 100 baht per month, with parents usually claiming wages at least one year in advance. Those who did not claim wages in advance, particularly the case of adult children or spouses working in cities, would send as much of their wages back as they could afford. If the worker did not have enough to send back, he or she would borrow from friends to send money back home. It was the case, as described by Shanin in his theories of peasantry, of one person in town, the rest in the fields. The person in town was a contributor to the family unit's production goals, and in turn would bring rice from home to consume in the towns.

These extra production activities were intensified during years of catastrophe. Every three to five years, floods would come and destroy some of the rice fields. People accepted gifts from their kindred, and while catastrophes did not affect everyone equally, everyone was affected. It was rare for a family during these years to have any surplus at all to share with kindred, even if they wanted to. So families responded by working harder. They made more cloth to sell to the Chinese merchants and planted more cash crops. Many looked for odd jobs, selling ice cream or working on construction in the town. One man raised elephants at an adjacent village, which were trained to move lumber and transport things.

Wealth and Social Differentials

Wealth and social differentials existed in the population. There were always village leaders and village followers. In the very beginning, during the initial migration from Wiang Chan to Chaiayphum Village, three men are named in the village record as leading the population to its present day site. Two were referred to by their official title of "kun", which was a mark of social distinction. Even though the population walked through the jungle to reach their new destination, they

were sedentary agriculturalists with long histories in sedentary living. They moved as families, discrete but with close relationships to others. Their uniform poverty and common pattern of subsistence united them, but in all groups where resources could be accumulated unevenly over time, wealth and social differentials were positively present. Social differentials could have existed among the population from its days in Wiang Chan and Ubol, etc.

Those who were headmen were considered socially superior, even though they often enjoyed good relations with families in the community. Those who were kamnan (commune leaders), and their families, were considered untouchable. Once education became available, social gaps widened between those who were highly educated and those who were not. Even though those with education were also peasant farmers, most took up occupations, frequently as teachers, and their professional status carried into their social relations with other families.

Most families only sent their children to school for up to the available four years. It was free, and more or less mandatory. They saw, however, that it was irrelevant to the production of subsistence.

As recently as the 1940's, families did not want their children to be teachers. Children who grew up to be teachers did not help their parents in the fields. They had less time to work before marriage, and would only participate in farm activities on a time availability basis (i.e. during breaks from school). One teacher, aged 68, explains why her parents sent her to school:

My parents made clay pots. Back then, they had value. They collected money and spent it on education for some of us. Out of nine children, five became teachers, while four were farmers and plantation growers. They wanted us to have education, because my father thought farming was too difficult. He thought if we could do something else besides farming to support ourselves, our lives would be more comfortable. Most people didn't want to lose the farm labor, though, so they didn't send their kids to school.

All families, however, were interested in the welfare of their children. Those without resources would try to align their children with wealthier spouses. Many respected elders participated in the arrangement of marriage. No one was forced to marry, though some people were highly encouraged to, particularly if it would be economically beneficial to their welfare. When children were married, while a social connection developed with the new in-laws, there was no merger of family units. Every household was separate, even the new one (even

though newly-weds remained in the wife's natal household until the couple was able to support itself). A 73 year old woman from Ubol told of her "matched" marriage:

I had no father. I had no land. I had no siblings. My life was like a maw lum song [traditional bard music]. A older woman from Chaiyaphum Village, who was known for introducing many young couples, found my husband for me. He wasn't the best, but he had land. And he could take care of me. I needed someone to take care of me.

Before marriage, the bride's family would set a bride price to be met by the groom's family. Poor families with little productive resources to offer their new son-in-laws would generally set lower bride prices. Prices in general ranged from reasonable to ridiculous. One family described an outrageous bride price demand, in which to meet, they had to sell all of their draft animals and nearly all of their surplus rice. Occasionally, families would ask for resources such as land, too, which would legally belong to the parents but would often be used for the newly-wed children. The following page features a data chart reflecting the monetary component of bride prices in Chaiyaphum Village.

In addition to producing extra for obligations such as bride prices, families also produced more than their own consumption needs year in and year out to build up their store of merit. Ceremonies large and small were

held, in honor of marriages, ordinations, and less festive occasions, such as memorial services and cremations. Wealthier families sponsored larger gatherings, however the disparity in ceremonial output was not equal, when looked at on the margin. Because while many poor families sacrificed dietary needs, future production potential, and present production resources (for example, selling their draft animals), wealthier families tended to give only as much as would not hurt them, which of course seemed more generous because the raw amount was large than poor families. Many older women offered alms to the monks daily. In terms of ceremonies, wealthier families hosted larger affairs.

Wealth, according to a 54 year old male informant, developed because of two reasons: land legacies and strong work ethic. In the beginning, everyone was uniformly poor. Land was there for the taking, but required enormous labor inputs to make it usable in cultivation. Family labor was the source of almost all labor inputs. Technology was little more than sharp knives, and tubes of bamboo stuffed with cotton and rubbed with flint (to make fires). Those who were wise enough (or ambitious enough) to claim large land plots, for future clearing and cultivation, had something to

pass down to future generations. However, without a strong work ethic to clear and cultivate these tracts, the holdings were without value. When asked about the applicability of Chayanov's theory, that wealth differentials in peasant societies with land scarcity were minimal, because family holdings expanded and contracted with changes in status of the family unit (newly-wed, many children, adult children in separate households, etc), interviewees responded that it was incorrect. While family land holdings definitely underwent changes, wealth differentials still existed between families because the amount of holdings that families had initially differed. Some families claimed large parcels, others only took what they needed for the present moment.

Land was distributed from parents to children at marriage (though not yet officially inherited). Daughters often received more than sons because sons were given bride prices to pay their bride's families, as well as productive resources such as water buffaloes (often the mother buffalo). When a daughter and her husband were given a piece of property, so long as the couple was together, it belonged to both of them. But if the union were to divide, it became the property of the daughter

and her family. Likewise, if a couple purchased a piece of land together, if he left the union, he usually left the land behind (though once again, this may have more to do with residence pattern).

Families in Chaiyaphum Village were discrete units of production and consumption that were socially connected to other families in the community. Families worked towards common production goals, and contributed as fully as possible to all production activities. The bulk of their activities centered on land husbandry, though family members also found forest products, caught fish, marketed, and accepted wage labor positions. The bulk of all proceeds however went towards the subsistence needs of the entire family unit.

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