

FROM THE HUMAN BODY TO THE HUMANIZED SPACE

The system of reference and representation of space in two villages of Northeast Thailand

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Abstract

The system of references on which the representation of the village space is built among the Isan people from the Northeast of Thailand is examined in the following article in two cases and through the analysis of the conceptual pattern *hwa* (head)/*tiin* (feet). Applied to the different scales of the village space (house, rice-barn, neighborhood, village, territory, paddy-plots), this conceptual pattern defines the structural homology that the Isan people establish between the body, the social corps, the housing unit and rice. Moreover, it points out the limits of the humanized space and the modes of organization within itself. Finally it brings to the fore the close relationship set up between the rice-growing farmer and his main crop: rice.

Résumé

Le système de références qui fonde la représentation de l'espace villageois chez les Isan du Nord-Est de la Thaïlande est appréhendé, dans cet article, à partir de deux cas concrets et à travers l'analyse du schéma conceptuel *hwa* (tête)/*tiin* (pieds). Transposé aux différentes échelles de l'espace villageois (maison, grenier à riz, groupe de voisinage, village, terroir, parcelle de rizière), ce schéma conceptuel traduit le rapport d'homologie structurale que les Isan établissent entre corps humain, "corps social", unité d'habitat et riz. Il précise d'autre part les limites de l'espace humanisé et les modalités d'organisation en son sein. Enfin, il met clairement en évidence le lien étroit qui unit le riziculteur isan à la principale plante qu'il cultive.

Introduction

The research which S. CHARPENTIER and P. CLEMENT have devoted to the organization of rural habitat in the areas of Vientiane and Louang Prabang during the last few years brings a fundamental contribution to the study of an aspect of Lao culture so far neglected.¹ However, their work, while fur-

nishing useful details on the way Lao people conceive and organize their habitat, gives only a partial account of the system of references based on the opposition between *hwa* and *tiin* (the head and the feet), yet this system plays a very important role in the mode of symbolic structuration of space characteristic of Lao society. On the basis of ethnographic data collected in two villages of Northeast Thailand, located in the same rice-growing plain but differing in many ways, the present paper examines the role played by this system of references in the definition of space and in the organization of social entities which occupy it. To achieve such a goal we intend not only to

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give an account of the sphere of application of the system but also of the typical features of both villages which condition its functioning and lastly of the variations which affect its symbolic and ideological contents, in accordance to the scales on which it operates.

Location, genesis and development of both villages

Ban Amphawan and Ban Han are located in the province of Khon Kaen, in the heart of the northeastern region of Thailand known as *phak Isan*. Like the whole area, those two communities are peopled by Lao who call themselves Thai Isan when they want to affirm their nationality and Lao Isan when they want to underline their ethnic affiliation. Separated by 80 km of tar road and 10 km of dirt road, the two villages differ from each other, both by certain features of their ecosystem and by the distance separating them from the town of Khon Kaen, which functions simultaneously as the principal town and administrative capital of the Northeast.

Of the two villages, Ban Amphawan is the better integrated into the market economy by reason of its suburban location, since it is just 13 km from Khon Kaen and 3 km from the main Khon Kaen-Udon Thai highway on the one hand, and, on the other, by its place within the irrigated area of Nong Wai. Indeed, the development of this area has deeply changed the environment and oriented the village economy towards an intensive rice-growing culture and a complementary one of vegetable-gardening whose products are sold in the Khon Kaen market.

Situated 70 km from town, Ban Han is less under the influence of the state bureaucratic structures than the first village and depends for its supply of manufactured goods as well as for the marketing of its agricultural products on small country towns, of which the nearest, Phu Wieng, is 6 km. from the village. On the other hand and from an ecological point of view, Ban Han is more representative than Ban Amphawan of the typical situation of most of the villages of the Northeast: its rice-fields are spread out over either fairly fertile soils or bad ones and are tributary to the very irregular regime of rains which characterizes the region. These hardly favorable pedological and climatic conditions create very appreciable variations in rice yields from one year to the other and even from one farm to another. In order to compensate for this situation, the inhabitants of Ban Han diversify their agricultural production by breeding buffaloes and by employing extensive methods of dry cultivation on land gained from the forest (kenaf, cassava, sugar cane).

If the comparison of the two villages, based on geographical and ecological parameters, testifies to contrasting situations, the available historical information concerned with them reinforces that contrast and furnishes elements of interpretation pertinent to both their size and present settlement configuration.

Ban Amphawan was created in 1918 by a group of families which came from the province of Mahasarakham. The aridity of the soil as well as the demographic pressure in their former village prompted them to emigrate to the province of Khon Kaen. There, some 700 meters south of Ban Khok, where they had relatives, they cleared a tongue of land overlooking the alluvial plain. At the time of their immigration the inhabitants of Ban Khok, beyond the site chosen, had already taken hold of the majority of the fertile lands least exposed to the inundations of the water courses lining the northern and eastern edges of the village. Consequently, the founders of Ban Amphawan and their descendants, joined by young couples from Ban Khok or from distant villages, had to clear parts of the forest or develop the unexploited swampy areas. This fragmentary method of space colonization led to the present territorial situation of Ban Amphawan: a village whose cultivated lands are interspersed, that is, enclosed, in certain places within those of an ancient community (*fig. 1, p. 80*).

Such a parcelling is not reproduced at the village agglomeration level, as is generally the case in the Northeast, to the extent that we are in the presence of a grouped settlement which has developed from east to west starting from the Buddhist pagoda built just after the first settlers had come.² In 1985 the 124 households (773 inhabitants) composing Ban Amphawan were distributed into two almost equal groups living on either side of the main road, this latter being intersected in the middle by a short lane, thus dividing the village into four sections (*fig. 2, p. 66*). On both ends of this central road are located the two highest institutions of the village, the *wad baan2* (the village monastery) to the east and the school to the west.³ Apart from these institutions, the political and spiritual unity of the village is symbolized at its centre, first, by a *saala kaang baan2* (the village public hall), which is used mainly for the preparation of Buddhist festivals, and secondly, by a *bùù baan2* (lit. "village navel") represented by a set of seven phallic stakes driven into the ground. The *bùù baan2* is considered by the villagers to be a symbol of fertility as well as an instrument of protection (*khOOng haksaa*) against evil spirits. It assumes the same functions as the tutelary guardian, the *phii taa puu baan2* (lit. "the village maternal and paternal grandfathers' spirit") whose cult, rejected by the founding families in the name of Buddhism, has never been practised in Ban Amphawan.⁴ Apart from its own *wad baan2* belonging to the Mahanikai sect, since 1976 the village has shared with the neighbouring localities a *wad paa1* (monastery of the forest) owned by the Thammayut sect.⁵ It is situated in a woody area on the outskirts of the village. Being oriented towards the practice of meditation, it hardly serves as the centre of community religious activities.

Linear in shape, Ban Amphawan presents the characteristics of a street-village. Its small size favours the cohesion of the community, illustrated by the absence of a political role conferred on its eight official quarters (*kum1*) by the participation of the whole community in the decisions taken by the head of the village, and finally by everybody's cooperation during festivals or during the undertaking of public works. In this village the common good prevails over antagonisms which put

the descendants of the first settlers, the majority of whom live in the eastern part of the village, in opposition to those more recently settled, who live in the western part and wish to abolish the monopoly of political power that the former have held since the village was established.

The village of Ban Han was founded in 1907 (one decade before Ban Amphawan) by families from Ban Rua, a neighbouring village situated two kilometers to the west, who wished to live close to their rice-fields. The site chosen by these families is an extension of the medium terrace which overhangs the inferior terrace to the west, the north and the east. Those areas were cleared first and developed into rice-fields; then with the community growing and the village opening itself to the market economy, thanks to the building in 1965 of a trail practicable all year round, the colonization of space was amplified and new lands were turned into fields of dry cultivation, yet keeping the unity of the village territory unchanged (fig.3, p.81).

If compared to the fragmented territory of Ban Amphawan, that of Ban Han is compact; inversely, however, the growth of its agglomeration shows less cohesion. Indeed, after a normal development from the *wad baan2* to the southeast, Ban Han presents a bipolarisation since 1945, with an initial population pocket in the southeast and another expanding in the northwest. This bipolarity was the result of a scandal which still affects village unity today. In 1940 a monk from the *wad baan2* was accused of having committed adultery. This transgression of one of the most fundamental monastic rules had important repercussions on the community's life: first it led to the breaking up of the village, the guilty monk and some of his relatives leaving it to build a new village, more to the east. Secondly, it brought discredit on the Mahanikai sect, which led to the building of a *wad paa1* 300 meters northwest of the village and occupied by the Thammayut sect.

The creation of this new pagoda crystallized the internal tensions born of the scandal and split the village into two factions, one supporting the *wad paa1*, the other remaining faithful to the *wad baan2*. This factionalism remained inscribed on the organization of space up to the middle of the 50's. Then, due to the growth of population, the intermediary zone demarcating the eastern and western quarters began to be progressively peopled by members of both factions. Finally, with empty space becoming scarce, since 1978 young couples have settled down on public land to the southeast, 100m from the village. This hamlet was called Ban Han Noi ("the smaller Ban Han") in contradistinction to the main part of the village, henceforth called Ban Han Yai ("the greater Ban Han").

Except for the recent hamlet of Ban Han Noi, the village is clustered along the trail linking up the principal town of the district, Phu Wieng, with the villages of the hinterland. If Ban Han Noi, in its present phase of growth, has all the features of a street village, Ban Han Yai is one which is as wide as it is long. This part of the village is crisscrossed by a network of lanes; the principal ones, of almost equal length, intersect at right angles (fig. 4, p. 66). In 1985 the village of Ban Han counted 224 households (1,119 inhabitants) divided into 8 *kum1* (quar-

ters), each one represented in the village committee. Due to the important size of the community and its factionalism arising out of the competition between the Mahanikai and Thammayut monasteries, these *kum1*, in contrast to those of Ban Amphawan, play a fundamental role in the village administration. Indeed, it is on this level that public meetings are held and where the villagers mobilize themselves for collective works. It is uniquely the dispersion of the kindred within the network of village relations and the spatial imbrication of these networks which maintain in this community a minimum of cohesion. A very significant hint of the very small integration of the village is the absence of a public meeting hall or of a *büü baan2* in its centre and the unequal distribution through space of its main institutions. Thus, both the *wad baan2* and the school are located in the southeastern part of the village, very close to the nucleus of the primitive settlement, whereas the *wad paa1*, the point of articulation with the neighbouring communities who equally frequent it, is situated in the western border of the village territory, in a woody zone. If we take into account the competition between both pagodas and the absence of *büü baan2*, the spiritual unity of this community is based on the cult of the guardian spirit of the village, whose altar (*hOO taa puu baan2*), as is often the case in the Northeast of Thailand and Laos,⁶ is situated between the settlement and the rice fields in on a wooded area, in this instance to the south of the school.

This aperçu of the present situation and the historical evolution of both villages present many differences between them. Ban Amphawan and Ban Han are distinguished from each other by the distance separating them from the nearest town, by certain features of their ecosystem, their history, their degree of social cohesion and the configuration of their habitat. The consequence of such distinctive features relative to the way the inhabitants perceive their space will be examined in the following pages.

The human body as system of reference

The human body, in the context of social relations, forms above all a highly hierarchicalized unit with at its top the head (*hwa*) and at the bottom of the statutory scale, the feet (*tiin*). The Isan ideology stresses the inequality in ranks of the various parts of the body by prohibiting the proximity and *a fortiori* the contact of various bodily elements when persons face to face have the same or almost the same social rank. In daily life this ideology is expressed by the prohibition, generally respected, not to step over anyone, and not to walk around a person lying down, as well as not to remain standing nor to point one's feet in the direction of an interlocutor, adopting one or the other of these two positions. The relation of avoidance which must exist especially between head and feet is expressed by the following proverb: *tiin yaan2 hwa* ("the feet abhor the head")

If the postural combination of various parts of the body which are similar in nature expresses the equivalence of rank of the persons in contact (head to head, bust to bust...), the

combination of elements of different nature, on the contrary, stresses inequality of status, dependence and submission to a superior.

In daily life this type of hierarchical relationship is rendered in many ways: for example, passing by an elder or a man, the younger or the woman bows the head; at the pagoda the faithful prostrate themselves three times at the beginning and at the end of each rite to express their respectful submission to the Buddha, and the corps of seated monks dominates that of the laity. The Isan thus look upon the body and its various postural combinations as one of the privileged signifiers of individual status within the context of a highly hierarchical conception of social organization already found among the Thai as well as Lao people.

Both head and feet are situated at opposite ends of the hierarchical unit represented for the Isan people by the human body. Their symbolical association not only signifies the integration into one entity of all the elements found between these extremities, but it establishes also the limits, maximal and minimal, within which these elements situate themselves. The first elements of a symbolical nature which have just been drawn to the fore, however, should not hide the other connotations of the dichotomy *hwa/tiin*. Indeed, the head is not only the part of the body which has the highest social status but it is also the most intimate part of the individual. It symbolizes a person's spiritual integrity and the unity of his soul (*khwan*) made up of 32 elements, each of which is associated with a different part of the body. The absolute interdiction for the Isan people of touching someone's head without his consent translates these notions to the extent that the transgression of such a prohibition would undermine that which is to the person the most intimate and specific. As opposed to the head which represents the spiritual integrity of the individual, the following developments will show that the feet symbolise the opening to the outside world and to others.

The house in a restricted sense: the bedrooms

The opposition head/feet occurs at two levels of the Isan house insofar as it accepts two definitions, a restricted one and a wider one. In its restricted sense, the word *hùuàn* (house) only applies to the part of the domestic space covered by a double-sloping roof. For instance, the Isan talk about a twin-house (*hùuàn fEEd*) in the case of a house having a double roof of this type. Here, the simplest and most common architectural form on which we will focus our attention has only one double-sloping roof over the bedroom. In this type the domestic parts devoted to service, living and reception are covered with one or more single-sloping roofs adjoining the previous one (fig. 5). Thus, the pair head/feet is embodied by the first two posts driven into the earth when the *hùuàn* is erected. Both posts limit the bedroom area laterally and form an axis perpendicular to the ridge of the house (fig. 6). The first post to be

erected is called *sao hEEk* ("first post"). For the villagers it represents the feet of the house. The second post is called *sao khwan* ("soul post"). It represents the head. It is interesting to note that the head, which, on the level of the human body, symbolizes the integrity of the soul, is assimilated to it on the level of the space designated for rest.

In the bedrooms the individuals have to adopt a sleeping position which must conform with the position of the "body" of the house.⁷ Accordingly, the sleeper's head must be oriented towards the file of posts which represents the head of the house, and his feet towards those symbolizing that body's extremity (fig. 6). In short, the sleeper's body must conform to the mould of the house. No breach of the rule has been observed in the two villages. According to the informants, its transgression disrupts the equilibrium of the house and would create disorder in the domestic group.

While standing respectively for the head and the feet of the house, the pair *sao khwan/sao hEEk* covers a certain number of their binary oppositions. At the ritual of the erection of the posts, a *sai*, a fish trap and also a typical male tool, is tied to the *sao hEEk*, whereas a *kwak*, a wooden reel used to spin silk or cotton and a female tool, is tied to the *sao khwan*. The fact that man is represented by the first post to be erected on the ground stresses his pre-eminence within an ideology that confers upon him a higher status than that of woman. However, his assimilation to the feet of the house, which everyone knows is of an inferior status, has something to do with his typical mobility, on the one hand, and on the other with the Lao cognatic system of kinship, of which the uxorilocal tendency is one of the main features.

Among the Lao or the Isan the opportunities to move about freely inside or outside the village are much more numerous for men than for women. For instance, they must take the initiative to court young ladies and to pay them visits for the purpose. When a marriage is concluded, most of the time it is up to them to move. Their ordination as monk or novice, a necessary step in their education, offers them specific opportunities for travel, as does an eventual tour of duty in the army for national service. Men move more frequently than women, and sometimes for quite a long time and far away, to transact business or to fulfill a contractual job. Before getting married they have to raise the amount of the bride price and afterwards improve the family's income. Once they have reached the status of head of a household, they participate in public affairs and thus become the official link between the household and the collectivity. This mobility is justified by the tradition of *pai thiew* (to go for a walk, to travel). All this makes a man a connecting link between the inside and the outside, between the family and the society. This role is reinforced by his status of husband or son-in-law. By leaving his parents to come and live with his wife's family, the man is integrated into the social unit embodied by this family, but to a certain extent he remains a stranger. Thus he is banned from his parents-in-law's bedroom, as well as from the protection of the *phii sùua* (the tutelary spirit of the lineage) which his wife and children enjoy. Moreover, the external origin of the son-in-law and his mobility, potential causes

of a breakup of the marriage, arouse the suspicion of the parents-in-law and engender tensions within the household, especially at the beginning of the union, tensions which are a favourite theme of Isan proverbs. As an adjunct added to or removed through marriage from the social body constituted by the household, as a mobile element and link with the outside, but also as a potential agent of instability, man is opposed to woman, for she represents the continuity of the kin group as well as the stability and integrity of the family unit. Since the head symbolizes the unity of the soul on the scale of the human body, it is thus not surprising to find again the assimilation woman-head-soul in the symbolism linked with the *sao khwan*.

Both the man's role of serving as a link with the outside and the family integrity symbolized by the woman are equally conveyed through the binary oppositions public/private and open/closed expressed by the position of the *sao hEEk* and *sao khwan*. Although the resting place, marked off laterally by the two posts, has a private aspect compared to the rest of the house, attested particularly by the fact that it is impossible for a stranger to enter it without permission, this space is itself divided symbolically into open/closed and public/private space. The first of these zones is situated immediately next to the row of posts including the *sao khwan*. This row of posts, which symbolizes the head and soul of the house, supports a wall which has small windows in it; these are closed most of the time. The closing of the back of the house, as well as the prohibition against walking along the row of posts which supports it, endows this zone with a private nature. In contrast, the second zone is defined as a place where people are to move along into the resting place. It runs along the row of posts with the *sao hEEk* which symbolizes the feet of the house. This row supports the enclosure isolating the bedrooms from the veranda. Since the latter is used as a sitting room and a reception hall for guests, this row of posts including the *sao hEEk* serves as a point of articulation between the private and public parts of the house, in the same manner as man on the social level and the feet on the bodily level serve as links between the inside and the outside or between the self and the other.

It is noteworthy that through the various notions of "private" and "closed" associated with the "soul post," and thus to woman, we can relate the family integrity she represents with notions of intimacy and withdrawal into oneself, which are two means, among others, to preserve this integrity. *Figure 7* re-groups the various binary oppositions that have just been drawn and which cover, on the level of the resting space, *sao hEEk* and *sao khwan*.

The house in its larger sense

If, for the Isan, the word *hùuàn* in its narrow sense applies only to the bedroom, in its common definition and widest sense it includes the various areas assigned to reception and service. From thence the conceptual scheme head/feet is extended from the two rows of posts which delimit the bedrooms to the corresponding façades or the intermediary en-

sure. The back wall marked by the *sao khwan* is called *hwa hùuàn* ("head of the house"). As we have seen previously, this latter is safeguarded from external curiosity and thus preserves family intimacy within the bedrooms. It is entirely opposed to the front wall corresponding to the veranda, and thus to the reception hall. This wall, called *tiin hùuàn* ("feet of the house"), is situated in the extension of the *sao hEEk*. It is wide open to the outside and it is generally on the side of this area that the ladder leading to the house is found. In comparison with the opposition head/feet characteristic of the front and the back of the house, the connotation of the gabled walls is neutral, for they are both called: *hnaa2 hùuàn* ("the faces of the house") (*fig. 8*).

So we find again, in the game of back and front walls, the pair head/feet, private/public, and closed/open, and it can extend to another pair, the withdrawal into oneself/opening onto the world, that has already been observed at the level of the sacred posts. The inventory would have been complete if the dichotomy man/woman had not been omitted. The identification of that dichotomy with the pair *sao khwan/sao hEEk* delimiting the bedrooms, makes the *hùuàn*, in its restricted sense, a place which is a symbol of the unity and the continuity of the kin group.

The rice barn

The conceptual pattern head/feet also applies to the gabled walls of the rice barn. In this case it implies the opposition closed/open except for the social symbols which contain the oppositions man/woman, public/private, opening onto the world/withdrawal into oneself. Thus, the back of the barn, named *hwa lao* ("head of the barn"), is opposed to the front, where the entrance is, which is called *tiin lao* ("feet of the barn"). Both walls are known as *hnaa2 lao* ("faces of the barn") by analogy with the "faces" of the house standing for its gabled walls (*fig. 9*).

We should not be surprised at the absence of social symbols attached to the conceptual pattern when it is applied to the rice barn. Indeed, the rice barn is similar to a human dwelling as it is built on piles and has a double sloping roof as well as an access ladder. Indeed, the rice stocked there is endowed with a soul and is an exception in the vegetable kingdom. However, even if to a certain extent it is "humanized," the rice is not endowed with all the features of a social unit conferred on man. For instance, the structure in which it is stored has neither a *sao khwan* nor *sao hEEk* which would stand for the male and female principles on which the life and the reproduction of the family unit are based. The rice does not form any group of this kind which would justify in its space the dichotomy private/public or withdrawal into oneself/opening onto the world. It is a passive whole made of identical elements which depends on men for its reproduction, its distribution and its transformation. Its dependence endows it with a status inferior to that of men which is expressed by the inability to build its shelter—the rice barn—on the side of the human house, that is to say on its "head."

The sleepers' orientation and neighbourhood relations

We have shown that the sleepers' bodies, in the bedrooms, have to adopt a position similar to that of the body of the house. Any breach of this principle breaks the balance of the house and might disturb the social relations within the household. This kind of association between identical elements, that is to say of similar nature and status, is to be taken as a rule within the domestic space, between the people sleeping in the bedrooms and those sleeping on the veranda, and on the outside between the fronts and the sleepers of the neighbouring houses.

In the house, the family members or visitors sleeping on the veranda can position themselves according to an axis at right angles with the bodies of those in the bedrooms, as long as their heads are not oriented westwards, which is the direction of the dead. They can also sleep feet to feet with these people. But they cannot place their head in the direction of the other sleepers' feet. Although in theory it is tolerated that persons of inferior rank may adopt such a position towards persons of higher rank in order to emphasize their submission (children towards parents, novices towards monks, for example), canvasses of each family in both villages mention no breach of this principle.

The principle of the association of elements of the same kind works not only within the domestic space but also on the outside, as long as it implies the concordance "heads" to the back of the neighbouring houses or "feet" symbolized by the fronts. According to the same principle the bodies of the people sleeping in the bedrooms of the neighbouring houses must adopt a bodily position head to head, feet to feet (*fig. 10*)⁸. In practice this rule is respected by 82% of the houses in Ban Amphawan and 83% in Ban Han. The principal exceptions apply to a number of neighbouring houses related to each other by kinship. In their case the "head" of the house of the younger kin is always situated in the direction of the "feet" of the house of the elder, thus underlining the former's inferior status compared to the latter. Such hierarchical relations are permitted since although they are in two different houses, these people are assimilated to the parts of a unique body whose head stands for the eldest and the feet for the youngest.

If this kind of relation is established between non-kin neighbouring houses, the Isan consider that it endangers the occupants' integrity and may provoke social conflicts. Such a fear is congruent with the structural homology that the members of this society establish between the human and "social" body and with the Buddhist rule of *karma* along with the theory of reincarnation. Indeed, if a human being, according to his own fate, grows up, evolves and can be carried by someone else to be born again under another form, he cannot, in contrast, integrate into his being elements belonging to another *karma*. Consequently, as the union of two unrelated human bodies is against nature, the households which represent two different social bodies cannot combine to form another one.

Following the same logic, the building materials of both houses cannot be used together to erect a third. As soon as any relation of order can be established between neighbouring houses with no parental links, the institution of an egalitarian relation expressed by the homology of fronts becomes necessary. This need acquires the force of law, all the more so as it corresponds to a will, commonly agreed, to put the relations between the households on an equal footing. This will is clearly expressed by the households which, while neighbours, are related by kinship. Indeed, most of these households, instead of putting to the fore an organic link arranging them inevitably in a hierarchical relation, prefer to occult on the space organization level the existence of such a link and set up a relation of equality between them, by the play of concordance of the walls of their dwellings.

The village

By transposing the application of the opposition head/feet to the domestic space, to the family occupying it, and to the rice barn, the Isan postulate a relation of structural homology between these entities and the human body. According to this logic and the way they apprehend their bodies, they establish an organic and hierarchical link between the components of these entities. We noticed that such a link could be extended to neighborhood relations as soon as a consensus is reached by kin families. The opposition head/feet also operates on the level of the territory controlled by the village community; it puts together into one "body" the village, which stands for the head, and the rice fields representing the feet. The village stands for its head only if this notion is applied, according to a system of equivalence, to its extremities.

Ban Amphawan, with the houses distributed on both sides of a central route and extended in length rather than width, presents a linear configuration. In this case the only extremities to be taken into account and to be called "head of the village" (*hwa baan2*) are those limiting the main street. The two main institutions of the village correspond to both heads, as the pagoda (*wad baan2*) is situated in the eastern extremity whereas the school is in the western one. Half way between these two heads is a central zone whose limits are not well defined and which is called *kaang baan2* ("village center"). It is situated at approximately the crossing of the two main streets running through the agglomeration, enclosing equally the *biùù baan2* and the *saalaa kaang baan2*, two of the sacred places of the village. Finally, the lateral limits of the village are called "sides" (*khaang 2*) (*fig. 2, p.66*), terms one uses to designate both sides of the human body. Although certain antagonisms related to who controls political power exist between the eastern and western parts of Ban Amphawan, the relative cohesion of the community is reflected through the consensus which unifies its members around the symbolic representation of the inhabited space. Thus, a person living in the eastern part who wished to go to the western extremity will say "*pai hwa baan2*" (I'm going to the head of the village), the same expression that someone from

the western part of the village uses when going to the eastern extremity.

Speaking of the way the villagers represent their community space in Ban Han, it is convenient to distinguish Ban Han Yai, the main part of the agglomeration, from Ban Han Noi, created on its fringe. Ban Han Yai has certainly developed extending from east to west as well as towards the north and south. The majority of its inhabitants look upon the agglomeration as a square the four sides of which are equal from a symbolic point of view. Consequently they use the expression "head of the village" for the eastern, western, northern and southern extremities of the settled area. Thus, the expression *khaang2 baan2* ("side of the village") current in Ban Amphawan would be inappropriate. On the other hand, just as in the other village, the system of reference used includes a center, *kaang baan2*, situated approximately in the middle of the settlement. The contours of this center are no better defined than in Ban Amphawan nor is it characterized by any institution (fig. 4).

When the inhabitants of Ban Han Yai go to Ban Han Noi, they indicate their intention by naming this hamlet as they would another village. The reverse is true concerning the people of Ban Han Noi when they go to the main agglomeration. Although it is just 50 m from Ban Han Yai and is totally dependent on it from an institutional point of view, this hamlet is excluded from the "body" represented by the village and its territory in the villagers' eyes. From such an observation one can conclude that the settlement cluster is at the very foundation of the homology that the Isan establish between the human body and the household, the kindred or the village community. Ban Han Noi is thus in a marginal position in relation to the rest of the village. This marginal status is manifested on various occasions, notably during the agrarian rites celebrated in honor of the guardian spirit of the village. Before the initial ploughing and at the moment of the rice harvest, the whole community makes offerings to the guardian spirit. In principle the *cam*, who is the villagers' intercessor with the divinity, gathers all the offerings to present them afterwards. All the households of Ban Han Yai bring their offerings to the *cam*'s house, except for the people of Ban Han Noi, who gather theirs at the *kum1* representative's home. The latter joins the *cam* for the ritual offertory.

Although the eighteen houses that had been registered in 1985 in Ban Han Noi are organized according to a linear axis comparable to that of Ban Amphawan, its inhabitants do not use the same expression *hwa baan2* to indicate its extremities. As is the case for other quarters of the village, when they go to one of its extremities they use as the point of reference to indicate their destination the name of the head of household where they are going. The fact that they do not use a system of reference based on the idea of a body which both symbolizes the autonomy and the unity of the community is here again indicative of the marginal status of Ban Han Noi, a quarter separated from the village on a conceptual level but dependent on it on an institutional level. When moving within Ban Han Yai the people of this *kum1* adopt the system of reference in use in the main agglomeration to designate its extremities, and we

may guess that they will apply it to their own quarter the day when, being sufficiently developed, it attains the administrative status of a village.

Ban Han, with its large size and its two factions, each supporting a different sect, presents a low level of social cohesion. This lack of cohesion is particularly illustrated by the absence of unanimity showed by the villagers in the way they conceive of the occupied space. Indeed, the people living in the southeastern part of the main settlement, which is also the earliest and is closest to the three great institutions, the Mahanikai pagoda, the school and the guardian spirit altar, take as their base the historical primacy of their area and perhaps the proximity of the institutions which embody this primacy to claim exclusively the status of "head of the village," a claim which at the same time puts into question the principle of symmetry endowing the same status to the various extremities of the village. They are trying to introduce, in their favor, a hierarchical model which would confer on them a higher rank than the western part of the village, a later settlement that they call *thaay2 baan2* ("the rear of the village") (fig. 4).

From assertion to denial of the hierarchical model

In the Northeast, the opposition head/rear (*hwa/ thaay2*) is applied to rivers and it determines the direction of the current, downstream being called *hwa nam2* ("head of the water") and upstream ("rear of the water"). When applied to the village space, this opposition seems to show by analogy the direction of its development, the head of the population stream being symbolized by the oldest settlement and the rear by the most recent one.

We can go further in asserting that the main street connecting these two settlements is similar to a river. Indeed, unlike the alleys and paths crossing the village, it cannot be trespassed upon by the limits of the *kum1* (figs. 2 and 4). On this level we find the rule prohibiting Lao riverside villages from crossing the river.

The dichotomy head/rear is also known in Ban Amphawan. As in the other village, the residents make a distinction between the early nucleus of population marked by the *wad baan2* and the western part, more recently populated. However, both villages are distinct by the fact that in Ban Amphawan such a dichotomy is of a historical order, whereas in Ban Han a part of the population uses it to enter into rivalry with the pair head/head, a concurrence which, instead of organizing the village into a hierarchy, defines a relation of equality between its various extremities. Although radically opposed from an ideological point of view, both pairs are inscribed within a wider system of references which endows the inhabited space with a center and integrates in the same body this space as well as the surrounding rice fields figuring as its feet.

The center as a point of reference, absent in the previous scales, invites comments. First, let us note that underlying it is the opposition center/periphery; second, that this latter opposition applied to the village and its surrounding rice fields has more pertinence; and third, that unlike a human body, a house or a rice barn, the conceptual scheme head/feet no longer operates on such a frame—that is, between two points of reference situated at the opposite ends of an oriented axis—but on a frame of two zones, the one enclosed within the other. Let us note, on the other hand, that in conformity with an egalitarian ideology which supports the pair head/head, the notion of a center finds an obvious political justification in the need to define a gathering place for the community which favours neither part of the village.

The inscription of the pairs such as head/rear and head/head within a more general system of references, and their ability to be commuted, obviously raises the question of the causal link uniting them. Two hypotheses are suggested. The first one sees in the opposition head/rear the substitution, on the village level, of the conceptual scheme head/feet applied to the human body, the house or the rice barn. Indeed, as does this latter, it places the eastern and western parts of the village opposite each other and defines an oriented line through this opposition. In order to underline the egalitarian status of the social units forming the village community, the asymmetric relation which coordinates the two extremities of the east-west axis would be suppressed in the political representation of space and replaced by the symmetrical relation head/head. Ban Amphawan, which has developed in only one direction, illustrates the simplest two-headed model, its lateral extremities or "sides" not being considered significant on account of the short distance separating them. On the contrary, since the settlement in Ban Han has developed in many directions, the obligation to take into account its lateral extremities would imply the definition of a new axis, perpendicular to the first, which would justify the existence of four heads.

If the first hypothesis has the merit of tackling the problem of the passage of an axis to a space defined by one or several non-oriented axes, it nevertheless has the major handicap of excluding the pairs head/rear and head/head from the system of references head/feet within which these are inscribed. It is the consideration of the features of this system which constitutes the point of our second hypothesis. This latter excludes all causal links between the hierarchical and equalitarian models of spatial organization. Transposing the symmetrical link head/head, related to the inhabited space, into the system of references which unites in one body the village and its rice fields, it disengages a symmetrical relation feet/feet of the same kind as the previous one, but which functions this time between rice fields situated on opposite sides of the village. It no longer sees in these symmetrical relations, applied to the village and the rice fields, the will to apply the conceptual scheme head/feet as a pair of elements as was the case on the previous levels, but as two wholes, each composed of multiple units judged equivalents. Such wholes would be determined by their extremities, and the use of the same term to designate these would signify

the identity of their components. Pursuant to this hypothesis, the number of extremities attributed to each whole would depend on the interpretation given to its shape, following a classificatory logic limited to the opposition line/surface. For ensembles whose units are arranged in lines, as is the case with Ban Amphawan, the system would identify two extremities; and for spread wholes, as is the case with the rice fields of both villages or with Ban Han, it would identify at least four extremities.

This second hypothesis seems to us more satisfactory than the previous to the extent that it considers the various aspects of the system head/feet and convincingly demonstrates that, on the scales of the village and of the rice fields, it no longer puts extreme points into play but rather the unities which these extremities delimit, the englobing one being then used to define the englobed. If we now focus the analysis on the symbolism associated to the model head/rear, we notice that through it there operate various binary oppositions already familiar to us in the study of domestic space. As we have seen, the head stands for the individual's or the house's integrity whereas the feet stand for its opening towards the exterior. The rear of the village partly symbolizes this opening as it is theoretically populated with the most recent families who have come in from the outside and who are still not fully integrated into the community. By contrast, the "head" of the village is the symbol of unity and continuity. Indeed, its history merges into that of the village, its inhabitants are supposed to be better integrated into the community and it has within its premises the pagoda, the centre of religious activities. Considering this logic, the hierarchical vision which the inhabitants of Ban Han have of the village space has nothing in it that is illegitimate. It is only contrary to the values of equality and solidarity that the majority of the population of this village put forward when they use a system of reference based on relations of equivalence.

The equality of the members of the community extolled by the ideology and signified by the equivalence of the extremities of the village as well as by the homology of the walls of neighbouring houses is obviously destined to counterbalance the socio-economic and status-based differences separating the households in a manner to establish cooperation and solidarity among them of such a nature as to reinforce the cohesion of the village. This equalitarian tendency of ideology contrasts with the inequality of rank always stressed among the Isan, the Lao, and the Thai between monks and laity or, in the domestic unit, between parents and children, father-in-law and son-in-law, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, elder and younger siblings, man and woman.

The study of neighborhood relations showed that the merging of two unrelated households into one body was firmly rejected by the Isan, for it is incompatible with the law of *karma* and the reincarnation cycle. However, such a merging seems to be allowed on the village level as a whole, since the households are regrouped into a single entity wherein they symbolize the head, or the head and the rear, according to their position and to the system of reference used. In fact, the idea of a merging or a regrouping is rejected by the Isan when it would

lead to the creation of a body of the same species as those which gave birth to it (two human bodies cannot give birth to a third, two houses cannot be divided up to form a new one...). Nevertheless, the Isan freely permit various similar entities to merge into one of a *different kind* for as long as such a process would not put their existence and integrity into jeopardy. Such is the case with individuals of domestic groups—of the households which form the village community. We are face to face with an integrative system that testifies to a strong will of belonging among the members of the collectivity.

Although the parts of the human body and the elements of the entities conceived according to this model are governed by hierarchical relations, there is no contradiction whatsoever with an egalitarian ideology underlying the system of reference very frequently used at the village level, since the households inscribe themselves within a single and same part of the village "body," namely, the head. It is between this head and the space representing the feet that we can detect the existence of a hierarchical bond. Indeed, the organic link which the Isan conceive as existing between the village community and the fields it cultivates cannot be dissociated from a hierarchical principle which accords to men a status superior to that of the plants they grow. This difference of rank has been illustrated by the inferior status of the rice barn compared to that of the house; it is illustrated as well in the religious domain by the supremacy of the village guardian spirit over the protective spirits of the rice fields (*phii naa*). On the occasion of the agrarian rites preceding the first ploughing and the harvest, he is the first spirit that the villagers invoke and thank for its protection.

The cultivated area

In the Northeast of Thailand we find clustered rural settlements, and the villages are normally separated from the cultivated lands. The latter can be grouped into two main categories defined by the type of culture for which they are used. The first category comprises the rice fields (*naa*). They are constructed around the village site and are the subjects of the most elaborate and durable improvement works such as the leveling of the areas put into cultivation, the building and repair of dikes restraining the water, or possibly the construction of an irrigation system. As for the second category, called *swan*,¹⁰ it covers the whole gamut of the various dry cultures. It is a varied whole, for these cultures go from small vegetable gardens to the industrial cultivation of kenaf, cassava or sugarcane, passing through farms and orchards. If, on the one hand, the vegetable gardens, the orchards, and the farms occupy small plots of land within the village, or are scattered among the rice fields near water sources, on the other hand the fields devoted to industrial cultivation, which occupy the most important areas, are located on the outskirts of the village, between the rice fields and the forest (*paa1*). As these cultures are often temporary, the management of these fields is not comparable with that of the rice fields. In their case, clearing and weeding constitute the essential part of the preliminary work and the

soil is not leveled off, or only very superficially. Because of their position on the outskirts, as well as their limited level of improvement and temporary cultivation, these fields form an intermediary zone between the human and natural environments.¹¹

If we take into account the immediate peripheral position of the rice fields in relation to the village, they are included in the expression *tiin baan2* ("feet of the village"). Thus, the other fields are excluded from the notion of "body" through which the village people express their unity and the indissociable link existing between them and their land. This exclusion is reinforced by the presence of protective spirits both at the village and rice-field levels and by their absence at the dry field and forest levels, this last zone being the favourite domain of the bad spirits. The village and the rice field are thus distinct from the peripheral zones of dry farming and the forest, thanks to the spiritual protection of which they are the object. Protected by man thanks to the devotion he renders to the guardian spirits, but also transformed in a way by his action, the village and the rice fields, by their contours, mark the limits of what can be conveniently called *humanized space*, the only one taken into account by the conceptual dichotomy *hwa/tiin*.

Many reasons can be put forward to justify the privileged status conferred on the rice fields. On the one hand, as all over South Asia, rice is the cultivated plant closest to man, as it occupies a central part in his diet. In the case of the Isan communities studied, the proximity of the village and the rice fields expresses this close association. On the other hand, and in direct relation to its fundamental alimentary role, rice is the only vegetal element upon which a soul is conferred, and, by this fact, has a spiritual existence. Finally, as we have already pointed out at several points in this paper, the rice fields are the objects of the most durable and complex development works. Thus, the farmers devote to them an important part of their time and labor, an investment justified once more by the place rice occupies in the Isan diet. Let us note that in the dyadic relation head/feet, as it functions between the village and the rice fields, we can see some of the binary oppositions already underlined in the study of the human body, the house, and the rice barn, or in that of the agglomeration. Indeed, as in the previous levels, the head, here represented by the village, can be defined as the centre of the humanized space and the symbol of its integrity, since through the relationships maintained by the villagers, it represents the basis of the unity and of the continuity of the body which forms this humanized space. In opposition and in conformity to the role symbolically assigned to the feet, the rice fields put themselves in a peripheral position and thus in a position of access to the outside, whether this outside corresponds to the rice fields of another village or to the nonhumanized space represented by the dry fields and the forest.

The rice fields

The distinction that can be established between *naa* (rice fields) and *swan* (dry farming fields), whether or not they

belong to the humanized space defined by the conceptual scheme *hwa/tiin*, is reinforced by the possibility of transposing this pattern to the rice fields and by the impossibility of such a transposition to dry farming fields. At the rice field level, the opposition head/feet merges into one body the parcel of reference symbolizing the head, and the surrounding plots, standing for the feet. The relationship existing between the piece of land where the speaker is and those neighbouring it is similar to that existing between the village and the rice fields. Indeed, it is a hierarchical connection which puts the reference plot of land above the ones around it, whether or not they belong to the same farm or to the same village. Moreover, as the village occupies a central position in the humanized space, being the symbol of its unity and continuity, in the same manner the plot of land has a central position for its owner as it embodies the integrity and the continuity of the household through the rice grown on it. In this position it opposes itself to the surrounding lands, parcels which are thus peripheral, serving as an opening onto the outside and to other people, an order of relation similar to that existing between the rice fields and the village. The structural homology set up by the Isan between the village settlement and the rice fields even goes further, since the reference system used at the level of the parcels is not determined by their own shape, but depends on that of the village.

Thus, in Ban Amphawan, except for the square parcels whose four extremities marked by the dykes are called *hwa naa* ("head of the rice fields") (fig. 11, p. 83), the other parcels, whatever their configuration (trapezoidal or rectangular), and in conformity to the linear structure of the village, are endowed with two heads, which correspond to the two most distant extremities of the plot. The other extremities are named *khaang 2 naa* ("side of the rice field") as are their analogues on the village level, called *khaang 2 baan 2* ("side of the village") (fig. 11). The same phenomenon operates in Ban Han, a village whose shape is viewed by most of its inhabitants as a square whose four sides are of equal status. Indeed, all the parcels of this village, whatever their configuration (rectangle, square or trapezoid) are conceived as having four heads, each one corresponding to each extremity (fig. 11). It is interesting to note that in Ban Amphawan as in Ban Han, the central zone of each plot is called *kaang naa* ("middle of the rice field"), in accordance with the model used at the village level.

Thus, whether we situate ourselves in the one or the other community, the parcels of rice field are intimately identified with the village, whose model of social organization they reproduce on a smaller scale. They form a kind of miniature village, whose elements would not be the households and individuals regrouped, but the rice plants and the grains they bear. As regards the equality of these latter elements, translated in symbolical terms by the equivalent status conferred on the extremities of the space they occupy, it is meant to favour their harmonious and unitarian development just as in the case of the groups who form the village community. To disregard the status conferred on the extremities of the parcel is to risk breaking the balance and the harmony sought after. Consequently, in Ban Amphawan, the owners of square parcels pre-

fer a four-headed system to the two-headed system which is that of their village. The four headed system is a much better translation of the equidistance and of the statutory equivalence of the parcel's four sides.

Conclusions

The conceptual scheme *hwa/tiin* (head/feet) and the notions of body and being related to it seem to retain a central place in the Isan system of space representation as it functions on the level of both villages. Indeed, this model is used as a reference system at every level of the habitat: the house, the rice barn, the neighbourhood group, the village and the rice fields. It marks not only the symbolic boundaries of the humanized space, but, within it, it also defines the various entities conceived according to the human model and shows the precise modalities of their organization. These entities are of different natures. On the one hand, social groups (household, kindred, village community) are delimited through the application of the conceptual scheme to their habitat (house, compound, village); on the other hand, the pair *hwa/tiin* applies once again to its "habitat," symbolized either by the rice field or by the rice barn. Finally, the Isan farmer and this plant closely associated with him are merged into one body represented by the space on which they are inscribed. This scheme not only defines entities of different natures but it establishes between them, by successive imbrications, organic links, symbols of their solidarity and unity.

The pair *hwa/tiin* also translates the modalities of the organization of the "bodies," which it defines by specifying two kinds of relations, each of them applied at a different level of the village space. Through the inequality of status that the Isan confer on the head and the feet, they express an internal hierarchy of the social or spatial entities on which this model applies. Thus, the house, the rice barn, or the village territory present themselves as hierarchical unities in the same way that the domestic group and the kindred are placed on the social scale. The inequality of status illustrated by the head and the feet in their dyadic relation corresponds to complementary functions known to each of these parts of the body. Thus, the head represents the individual's integrity as well as his unity and his specificity, whereas the feet stand for the opening onto the outside, the links with others and society. According to the levels to which the conceptual model *hwa/tiin*, is applied, these symbolic functions are expressed by the following binary oppositions: open/closed, private/public, withdrawal into oneself/opening to the other, or center/periphery. The internal hierarchical relations of the "bodies," defined by the model *hwa/tiin*, is opposed to the egalitarian links set up between some of these entities. Indeed, as the former, operating on a vertical logic, establish an organic link between elements of different nature, function and rank, the latter, following a horizontal logic, set up bonds between bodies of the same nature, function, and, consequently, rank. This last bond works within the rice field, the neighbourhood group, and the village, although hierarchical

links can be substituted, in a marginal way, between related houses or, in reference to the model *hwa/thaay2*, between the old and the new quarters of the village.

At the levels where the pair *hwa/tiin* operates, it signifies either the equality of status of the rice plants, the houses, or of the domestic groups. This equality is rendered by the association of extremities of the same kind, whether it deals with extremities of the sleepers' bodies, the walls of the dwellings, the rows of posts delimiting the bedrooms, or those of the village and of the rice fields. At these various levels, the association of homologous elements symbolizes the relational equilibrium of the bodies in contact, balance which for the Isan is one of the primary conditions of the harmonious and unitary development of these bodies.

In delimiting the contours of the social groups forming the community as well as the principles by which they are organized and articulated with one another, the conceptual scheme *hwa/tiin* offers a grid particularly interesting for the comprehension of Isan village society. Moreover, it underlines the very strong links unifying the Isan farmer with the terri-

tory he cultivates and with rice, the principal plant he grows there. Indeed, we are struck by the close identification between rice and man. Like him, rice is endowed with a soul, is under the protection of guardian spirits and, from a symbolic point of view, the rice barn and the rice field duplicate in miniature the house and the village. It is thus not surprising that it is the only one included in the definition of humanized space.

As noted, Ban Amphawan and Ban Han present certain differences due to their distances from the town, to features of their ecosystem, their degree of social cohesion, and to the shapes of their settlements and territories. Of these variables, only the shape of the village and its degree of social cohesion are taken into account in the system of representations based on the opposition *hwa/tiin*. These parameters do not put into question the functioning of the system but adapt it to different realities. Present in two villages eighty kilometers apart, this symbolic system seems to have a more general application and can be extended to all the villages of the *phak isan*. In fact, the hypothesis can be put forward that it also works among the Lao villages on the left bank of the Mekong, to whom the Isan attach themselves culturally.

ENDNOTES

I wish to acknowledge the help rendered by N. FORMOSO and E. T. MAGANNON in this translation.

The transcription of the place names into Roman characters follows the usage of the Thai administration; that of ethnic groups corresponds to standard usage. The system of transliteration of Isan terms conforms with that recommended by M. REINHORN for the Lao language, except that the pronounced vowels which are not indicated by Thai printing are put into brackets: e. g., *sw (a) n*. The aspirated consonants are written with an 'h' after k, t, p; with an 'h' before n, m, l. The consonants k, t, p have three forms: one normal k, one high aspirated kh, one low aspirated kh. The consonants s and f have two forms: one normal s and f, one low s and f. The consonant h has two forms, both aspirated: one high h, one low h. The n indicates the 'gn' in initial and the 'n' in final. The '9' indicates the glottal stop.

The long vowels are repeated, e.g., aa. The O and E indicate an 'open' o and e. The vowel 'ù' indicates the y of the I.P.A. The figures 1 and 2 written after the words indicate the accent, '1' a rising accent, '2' a low and modulated accent.

1. See S. CHARPENTIER and P. CLEMENT, 1974, 1978, 1982.

2. The development of the village from East to West has been noted in other villages of Northeastern Thailand (S. TULYASUCH, 1982: 63) and seems to correspond to the mode of development from upstream to downstream characterizing waterside villages in the Vientiane Plain (S. CHARPENTIER and P. CLEMENT, 1974: 173), the symbolic value attached to the east or to upstream being superior to that of the west or downstream among the Lao. It thus emphasizes the pre-eminence of the old families over the newly arrived or that of the old couples over the young ones.

3. Closely identified with the community, of which it represents the main pole of spiritual life, the first institution is also the main training centre for traditional knowledge. So, it plays a different role from the school, which is one of the government's main agents on the local level as well as a factor of modernity owing to the content and finality of its teaching. For more information concerning the traditional role of the *wad* in Lao culture, see G. CONDOMINAS (1968: 88-109) or M. ZAGO (1972: 51, 355-361); on the role of the *wad* and the school in the Lao rural community, see CH. TAILLARD (1974: 91-108).

4. CH. F. KEYES (1966: 61) defines the *bùù baan2* as: "The zero milestone of the village." In the locality of Mahasarakham province that he has studied, this sanctuary was located near the pagoda and was composed of three sculpted posts planted on a mound. There is no incompatibility between the *bùù baan*

and the *hOO taa puu1 baan2* in so far as both institutions can coexist within the same village, as was the case for the village studied by CH. F. KEYES. The *bùù baan2* is also called *hlak baan2* (pillar of the village) and we cannot fail to correlate this institution with the *lak müong* of the Thai principality and kingdom described by DANG NGHIEM VAN (1971: 216), referred to by G. CONDOMINAS (1980: 287). However, unlike the *lak müong*, which is merged with the *phi müong*, the territorial spirit, the *hlak baan2* is associated with the Buddhist religion in Northeastern Thailand and is therefore clearly distinguished from the tutelary spirit of the village. In Ban Amphawa the *bùù baan2* assumes the same functions as the *taa puu1 baan2* in other villages. In the sixth lunar month, for the *bun bOOng fai* (the rocket festival), and in the twelfth, for the religious festival called *bun khao2 hmao2* (the green rice festival), the people from Ban Amphawan gather before him for a ritual associated with the monks. The rite takes place in the *saalaa kaang baan2*. The offerings are placed at the foot of the post; meanwhile the monks, settled a few meters away, recite prayers to resacralize the collective talisman which in the villagers' eyes represents the *bùù baan2*. Unlike the offerings made to the *taa puu1 baan2*, those to the *bùù baan2* do not contain any food and are of the same kind as the presents usually offered to the monks as a sign of respect or thanksgiving. They consist of pairs of candles and banana leaves on top of which are stuck flowers (*Khan hmaak beng*). The previous ritual is related to the rites in

honour of the *taa puu1 baan*, inasmuch as it takes place during the same period of the year, before the initial ploughing and harvest, and, in addition, its purpose is to obtain the protection of a divine power so as to procure good harvests. The difference between the two rites is the fact that for the one, the Buddha's protection is required, the monks serving as mediators, whereas for the second, the village guardian spirit is called through a particular intercessor, the *cam*.

5. Since the XIX century and the reforms of King Mongkut (1851-1868), Theravadin Buddhism has been propagated in Thailand by two rival sects, the Mahanikai and the Thammayut. Without giving a detailed analysis of their differences, it is important to note that the latter, created by King Mongkut and since then supported by the royal family, claims a more severe discipline than the former and that their divergent views of interpreting the Buddhist canons is remarkably reflected on a spatial level. Indeed, in the rural areas, the Thammayut monasteries are preferably built withdrawn from the lay community; thus the name of *wad paa1* (monastery of the forest) given to them as opposed to the *wad baan2* (monastery of the village) of the Mahanikai sect. For further information on the place occupied by both sects in Thai Buddhism, see A. TH. KIRSCH (1978: 52-65) or S.J. TAM-BIAH (1984: 159, 191).

6. According to G. CONDOMINAS (1975: 257-258), this position is justified

by the symbolic functions assigned to the tutelary spirit (*phii baan2* in Laos) and which distinguish it from the functions of the pagoda: "The vat represents the Buddhist principles which govern men directly, whereas ho phi ban represents the land on which the village is established and from which the villagers obtain their food and principal resources." CH. F. KEYES (1966: 60) gives convergent information on the position of the *hOO taa puu1 baan2* in relation to the Isan village he has studied.

7. This rule is also applied by the Lao people in the provinces of Vientiane and Louang Prabang, as noted by S. CHARPENTIER and P. CLEMENT (1978: 59-60).

8. This principle of façade homology has also been observed in Laos, in the provinces of Vientiane and Louang Prabang, by S. CHARPENTIER and P. CLEMENT (1978: 61).

9. L. MOGENET (1972: 178) also noted the presence of a symbolic centre marked by a pillar, *lak*, in some Lao villages in the province of Louang Prabang.

10. This typology excludes the *hai1* (fields of slash and burn culture). Indeed, this type of culture has not been practiced in the two villages for several generations.

11. This organization of the cultivated area conforms with that observed in Laos by CH. TAILLARD (1977: 85).

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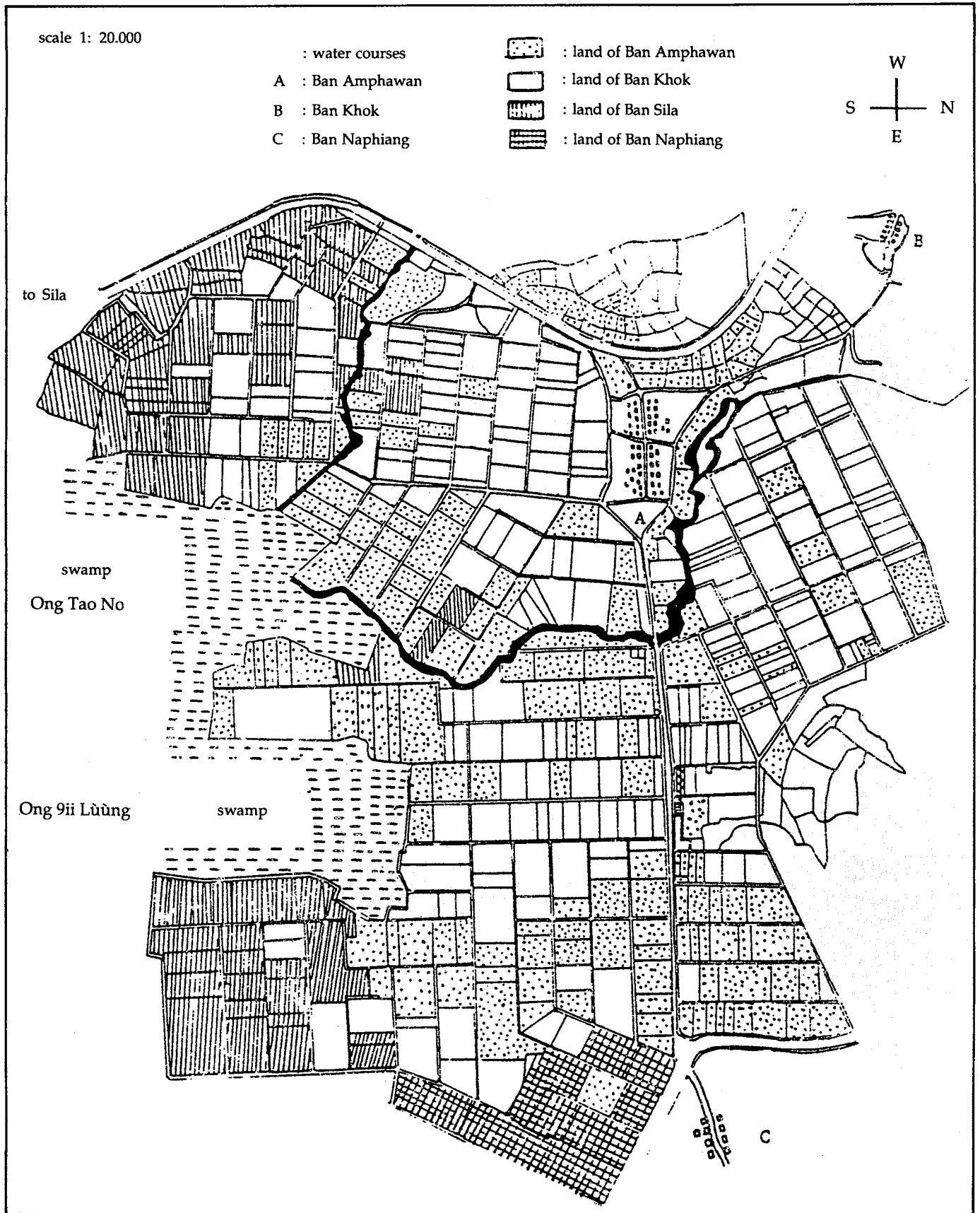


Fig. 1: The territory of Ban Amphawan

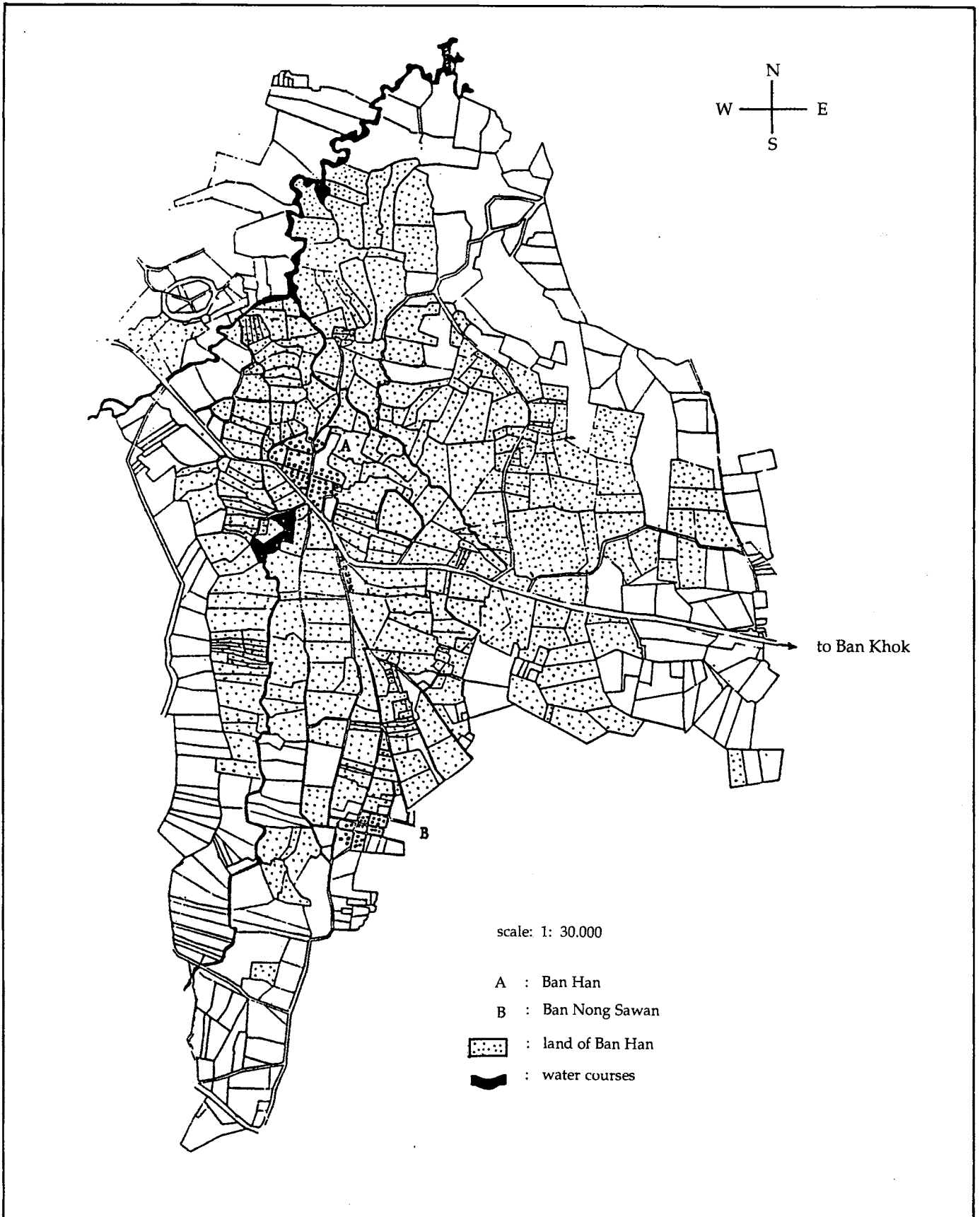


Fig. 3: The territory of Ban Han

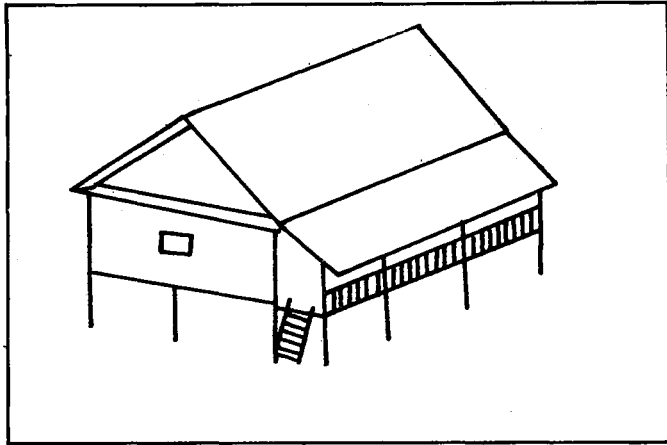


Fig. 5 The commonest architectural form in the two villages.

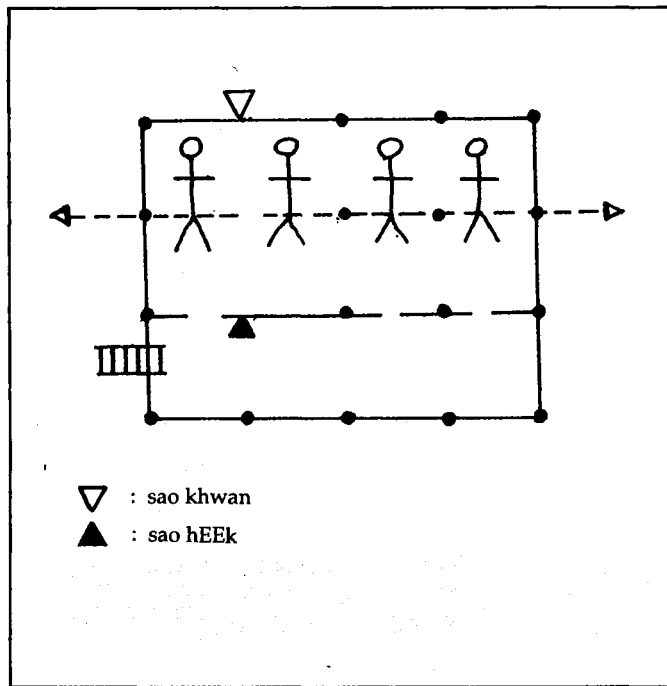


Fig. 6 The position of posts and sleepers in bedrooms.

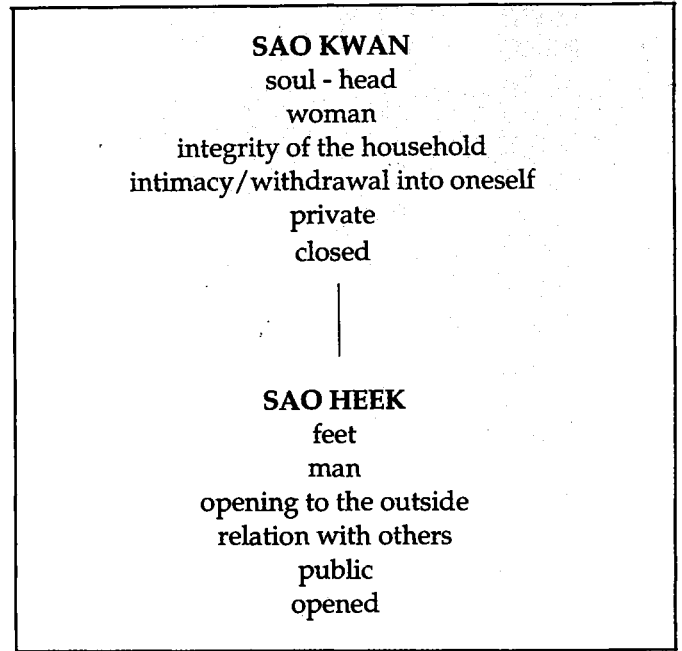


Fig. 7. Symbols associated with the sao khwan and sao hEEK.

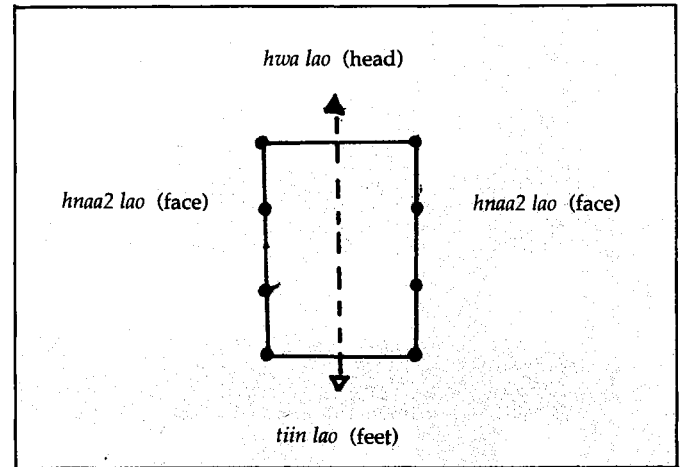


Fig. 9 The façades of a rice barn.

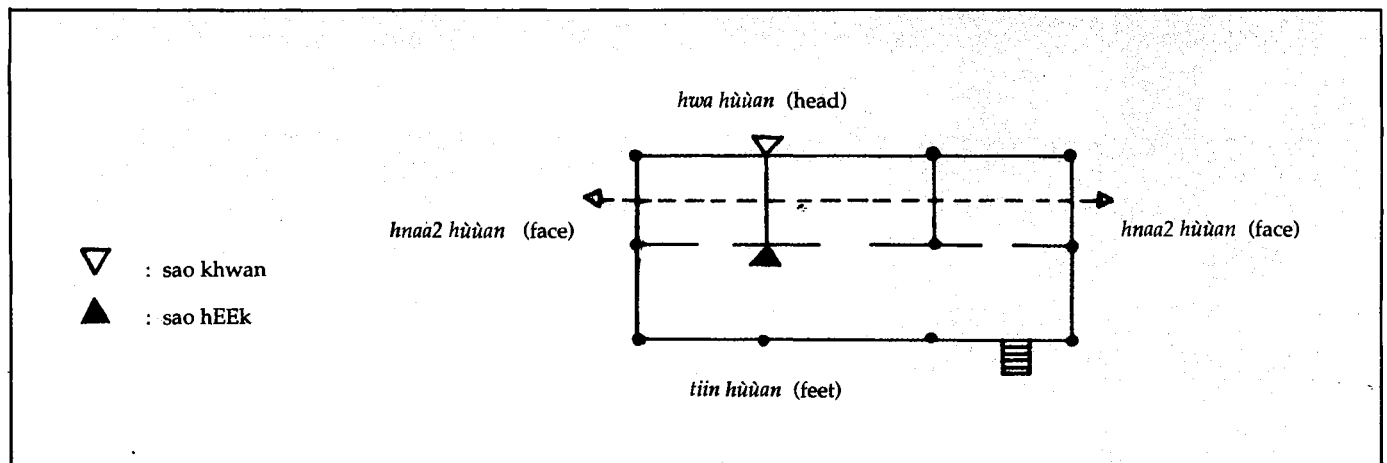


Fig. 8 The façades of a house

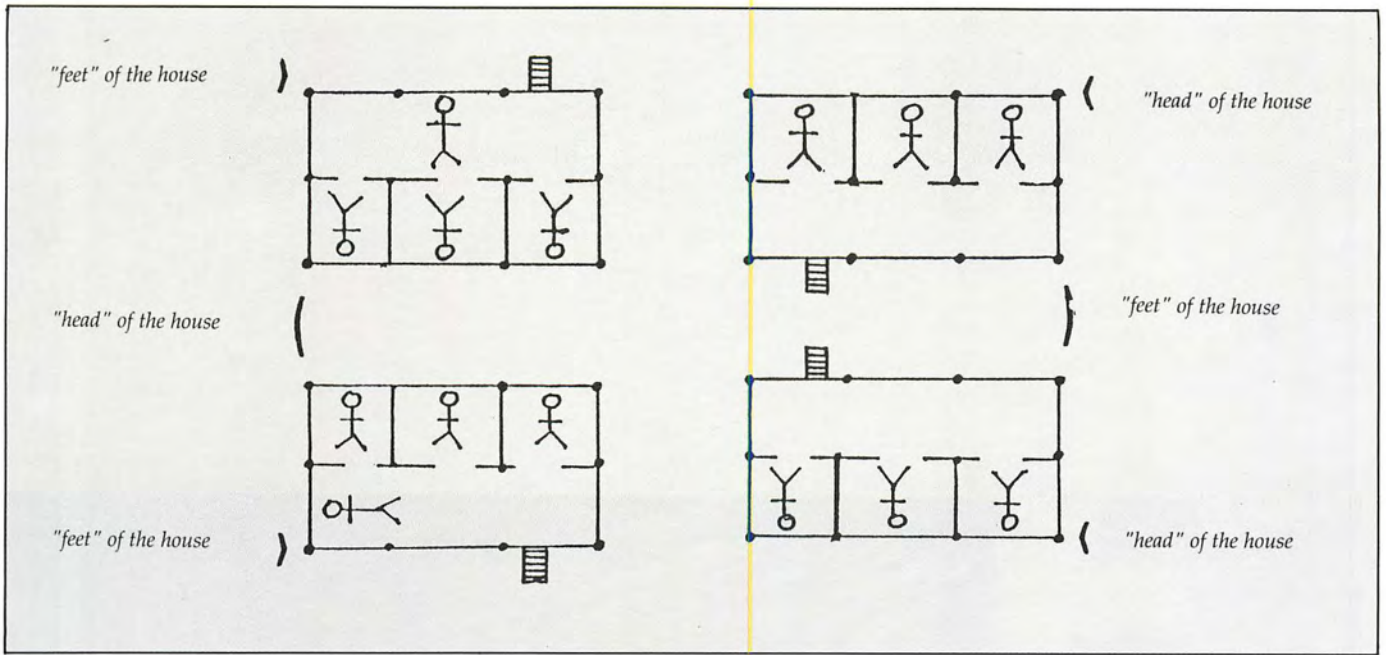


Fig. 10 Neighbourhood and positions of sleepers which are allowed.

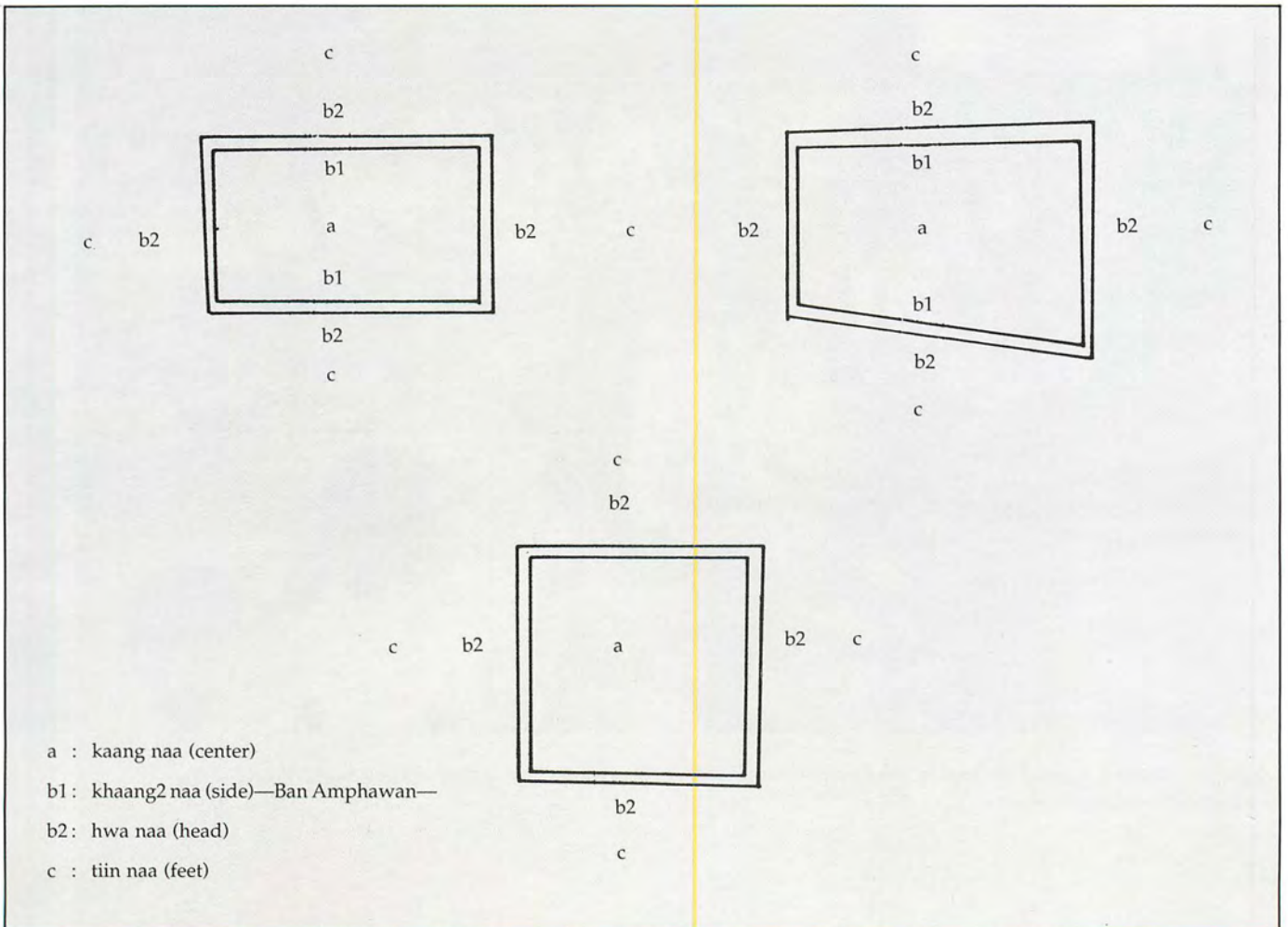


Fig. 11 The system of references applied to rice fields.