

REVIEW ARTICLES

THE NORTHEASTERN THAI VILLAGE: STABLE ORDER AND CHANGING WORLD*

Prajuab Thirabutana, *Little Things* (Sydney and London: Collins, 1971). William J. Klausner, *Reflections in a Log Pond: Collected Writings* (Bangkok: Suksit Siam, 1972).

Introduction

Although the two books under review are different in type, Prajuab Thirabutana's book being an autobiographical novel and William Klausner's a collection of essays, both share a common objective, viz., the portrayal of village life in northeastern Thailand. Both authors have strong roots in the rural world of one part of the Northeast, that of villages near Ubon city. Prajuab grew up in a village in Ubon province and still lives in the provincial capital. William Klausner first came to the village of Nong Khon, the Log Pond Village, as an anthropologist interested in studying village life. Although he began as a rank outsider, encountered many problems, which he describes in his introduction, in accommodating to village life, he eventually became a son-in-law of Nong Khon Village.

The portrait of the northeastern Thai village which both authors portray contrasts sharply with the picture which has emerged from studies of rural society in Central Thailand. The northeastern village is a highly integrated community in which villagers find a stable and reassuring order. More precisely, this is the way the village has been until recently. In this connection, Prajuab's and Klausner's books provide something of a contrast.

Prajuab traces, in her novel, the life of a girl named Larn. Beginning with Larn's childhood in a village near Ubon prior to World War II, she follows her as she leaves the village for further education in the city and then as she returns to the village as a school teacher. She ends, having come full circle, with Larn married to another village school teacher and expecting her first child. Klausner, who originally studied Nong Khon in the late 1950's, begins with several essays on the structures and values which hold the northeastern community together.

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Again, like Prajuab, Klausner follows the life of the village—in his case, more abstractly—through a period of time. However, unlike Prajuab who found the village able to reassimilate even those who had been away for prolonged periods in the city, Klausner sees the village as being increasingly subjected to a number of forces which have already or are beginning to unsettle traditional patterns of village life.

In this review I should like to draw on information presented by Klausner and Prajuab in order to sketch a picture of the northeastern village first as a stable world and then as a world in the process of change. The stability of village society is to be found in the culture of the villagers—that is, in the symbolic formulations or conceptions whereby villagers invest their experiences with meaning and determine what is the 'ideal' mode of behavior. That villagers do not always follow such 'ideals', as Klausner demonstrates in his essays on "The Ideal Villager: A Portrait" and "Sex and Morality in a Northeastern Thai Village: Ideal and Practice", does not necessarily diminish their cultural importance. Cultural elements or formulations cease to have significance only when they are replaced by other cultural elements or formulations. Such replacements, it must be quickly added, occur usually, if not invariably, after a period of time when social behavior is so at variance with the aspect of culture which is supposed to inform such behavior as to leave people very uncomfortable or unsettled.

In the following discussion of stability and change in the northeastern village, I shall have occasion to refer to my own researches in the community of Ban Nong Tyn in Mahasarakham Province. Like Klausner, I first began my researches as an anthropologist, having lived in the village for a period of 18 months in 1962-1964. I have also had the opportunity to follow the village through time through periodic visits to the community during the past decade.

For the sake of convenience, I have regularized all transliterations of northeastern Thai words used in this essay, taking as my system of transliteration a modification of one which I have employed for the dialect in the central part of the region, I have checked Thai spellings of all words, when listed, in the *Phatcananukrom phak isan-phak klang* (พจนานุกรมภาคอีสาน-ภาคกลาง) ['Northeastern Thai-Central Thai Dictionary'] (Bangkok, 1972).

The Village as a Stable Order

1.

When one thinks of village life in Thailand, whether in the North-east or elsewhere, one most readily thinks of life dominated by rice agriculture. In the northeastern community, exigencies of rice cultivation—of *hetna* (เขตนา) —determines the basic outlines of the work cycle of villagers.

In most northeastern villages, only one crop of rice is planted per year. The village of Nong Khon, described by Klausner, is very exceptional, then, in that some of its inhabitants have traditionally planted two and sometimes three crops of rice per year. A second crop of wet rice is planted by Nong Khon villagers in fields, called *na saeng* (นา แสง), which are located in ponds:

These ponds are a special landscape feature of this area. Water remaining from the rainy season in these depressions located on relatively low land is sufficient for the planting of this crop. (Klausner, p. 27)

Moreover, a smaller number of Nong Khon villagers also plant dry rice in upland fields—*na hai* (นาไร่), and, thus, reap a third rice crop (pp. 29-30). Such intensive rice cultivation still produces no surplus of rice:

Despite the fact that rice is being harvested at various times of the year, the fact remains that there is often a shortage of rice, at least in the villagers' terms, during the months of July, August, September and October. (p. 34)

Such shortages are a common experience of many villagers in the north-east.

Other productive activities are accommodated to the cultivation of rice. Every household will also raise a few animals, the most important of which are the buffaloes used for plowing and harrowing, will grow a few garden crops, will hunt game and gather various products in the woods, will fish in the ponds, streams, and rivers, and will produce most of the utensils and clothing which they need. In addition, some villagers may engage in some specialized craft such as the making of ox-carts or the carving of images and other decorations used in the temple.

While villagers produce almost all that they consume and consume almost all that they produce, every northeastern village has long produced some sort of surplus. In the case of both Nong Khon and the village depicted by Prajuab, salt was produced in quantities beyond the needs of the families that produced it by processing open salt pits (Klausner, p. 34; Prajuab, p. 42). The villagers of Nong Khon also produced lime from the ashes of shells of freshwater animals.

[V] illagers need lime, not only for betel nut chewing, but also for making the indigo dye used in their clothing. (Klausner, p. 35)

Prajuab tells of villagers going to the woods

to dig special kinds of bulbs, cut certain twigs or pick some fruits to make good smelling spices, drugs or poisons for destroying insect pests on the farm. These things, if they could get a lot of them, they could also sell. (p. 37)

In the recent past, Ban Nong Tụn villagers used to collect wild cardamom and sticklac from the woods to sell or to use as tax payments. Craft specialists also sell their products or use them in bartering for wanted items.

A small surplus which could be used in kind or transformed into cash for trading has always been a necessity for northeastern villagers. There are certain things (such as the metal for tools) which they cannot produce themselves and thus must be obtained through trade. They have also always paid some sort of tax, although it is only recently that rent has emerged as a significant type of expenditure and even still only for a small minority of villagers in the region. Finally, and most importantly, villagers have needed a surplus in order to be able to 'make merit' (*ao bun* or *het bun* เอาบุญ, เฮตบุญ) and to feed the household and village spirits (*liang phi* เลี้ยงผี).

Even in the past, some individual villagers or village families produced a surplus beyond that needed for essential goods not produced locally, for taxes, and for ceremonial uses. Such villagers were under strong pressure to share their wealth with those less fortunate.

The ideal villager should have a "wide" or generous heart. If one has a surplus, one is expected, within limits, to share with those less fortunate. (Klausner, pp. 54-5)

Prajuab also provides examples of villagers abiding by the value of having a 'generous heart'—*cai kuang* (ใจกว้าง). In talking of period when many villagers were unable to obtain meat, she writes :

The well-to-do persons in the village would sometimes buy a cow or a pig to slaughter and would share the meat among the poorer people. (p. 41)

A gain, she has Larn's father explain to her mother why, poor as he was, he had lent money to some friends :

"Well, Ee-nang's Mother, did you forget that when you were sick after bearing Ee-nang we had no money left at all and we had to borrow it from our friends to live upon until we could sell our rice. This is the same, if they didn't need it they wouldn't borrow it. If they have bad luck in their crop they can't pay it back, but when they have money they will certainly pay us back; you know that as well, don't you? We must not be selfish. we can't live alone; we must depend on each other; sometimes their turn; sometimes our turn." (p. 47)

The value being generous, on having a 'wide heart', is the major theme of the Buddhist text with which all northeastern villagers from early youth on are intimately familiar—viz., the Vessantara-jātaka. The 'Great Life' story of the penultimate existence of the Buddha before he became the Buddha is told in full at the annual festival of the *bun pha wet* (บุญพระเวส). Sections of the story are also very often the subjects of sermons given at other times of the year and the whole story is not uncommonly dramatized by folk opera troupes (*mō lam mu* หมอลำมู).

The emphasis on sharing wealth in accord with the value on generosity has sometimes been seen as retarding economic development in the villages since it is claimed to inhibit accumulation of capital. However, even in traditional times, northeastern villagers had a type of 'capitalist' who was accorded positive recognition in village culture. The man who was successful in trade—and particularly in the trade of cattle and buffaloes—was accorded a unique title, that of *hōi* (ฮ้อย). The status

of *hət* is but one of a number of statuses which can be achieved by villagers, or, more correctly, by village men. In the essay on "The Ideal Villager: A Portrait", Klausner touches on several of these: the novice, the monk, the ex-novice, the ex-monk, and the possessor of specialist knowledge (p. 54). In Ban Nong Tụn, informants said that one should attempt to achieve such statuses in accord with one's merit. That is depending upon one's karmic heritage from a previous existence, one is able to achieve certain desirable goals in this life. Herein is almost a Protestant notion of attempting to acquire the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace.

In northeastern village society, the value on generosity does not conflict with the value on achievement. Rather, the former tempers the latter, deterring villagers from trampling down others in their quest for higher status. Conversely, only those who are successful in achieving a surplus of wealth are able to be generous to those less fortunate.

2.

Regardless of whether a man achieves some significant status or not as an adult, he will pass through a number of changes in state in the course of his life, each of which is ritually marked. Women also pass through such changes, although they are less frequent and somewhat different to those of men. For both men and women, important changes include birth, marriage (Prajub, pp. 140-141), moving into a new house (Klausner, pp. 23-24), and death (Prajub, pp. 144-7; Klausner, pp. 11-13). In addition, men who move in or out of the village may also have the change ritually accented. Most important of all for men is the transition from lay to clerical status, from being a householder to being a member of the Buddhist Sangha, at least temporarily.

For all transitions save death, the relevant ritual is the 'calling of the life essence'—*su khuan* (สุขวัญ). The *khuan*, the vital force which animates man, can be dislodged when one passes through a transition from one state to another. Thus, on the occasion of such a transition, a specialist known as the 'Brahmin'—*nai pham* (นายพาม)—or *mə su khuan* (หมอสุขวัญ) must be called in to perform the *su khuan* ceremony,

thereby securing the vital essence to the individual. The same ceremony is performed when a person falls seriously ill and after he has recovered from illness.

When a family moves into a new house and if a household is plagued by ill fortune, they may sponsor a 'merit-making for the household' (*ao bun hian* ๑๐๑ ๒๒๒ ๓๓๓) as well as a *su khuan* ceremony. At this ceremony the following events occur :

There is the late afternoon chanting of the monks and the early morning feasting at which time the monks chant again and tie a sacred thread about the house. This thread symbolizes the boundary of Buddha's protection, and the words of His teaching and blessing that the monks chant are concentrated within this area. . . [T]he villagers feel the evil spirits will be afraid to cross such a formidable boundary. (Klausner, p. 23)

At death, *su khuan* ceremonies are superfluous as the vital spirit has departed the body. Funerary rites make use of predominantly Buddhist symbols and are dedicated to ensuring that the spirit of the deceased has a satisfactory rebirth rather than becoming a ghost (Klausner, pp. 11, 12-13; Prajuab, pp. 144-147).

Villagers recognize a sharp difference between the statuses of women and men: those of the former being relegated primarily to the domestic sphere while those of the latter being found primarily upon the wider stage of village society. The only major exception to this generalization is the role of the 'spirit medium' (*mq phi fa* หมอผีฟ้า) which is most often played by women. While in trance, spirit mediums serve as the instruments or ancestral and village spirits (Prajuab, pp. 38-9). Even within the domestic group, there is a marked sexual division of labor; Prajuab found this division to be far more significant in the Northeast than in central Thailand (pp. 129-130).

Domestic groups in northeastern villages have a 'matrilineal' flavor. At marriage, it is normative for a man to take up residence in the household of his wife. The couple continues living with the wife's parents until they have had a child or until the wife's sister is about to marry. No more than two married couples ever live under the same

roof. On moving out of the wife's parent's household, a couple will most usually set up a new household within the compound of the wife's parents or on land belonging to the wife's parents. The couple will continue to cooperate in certain circumstances, both economic and ritual, with those living in the parental household and those living in similarly formed sister households. Ritual cooperation involves making joint offerings to a common ancestral spirit at reliquaries which are located in the precincts of the *wat* or Buddhist temple.

Klausner suggests that matrilineal 'clans' also exist. In these, a man who "is the most respected elder within the group" will hold the status of *cao khot* (เจ้าโคตร) and will act "as adviser and arbitrator in matters concerning blood relations" (p. 57). This status is not known in Ban Nong Tụn and its existence in Nong Khon may bespeak a higher degree of kin group solidarity than was the case in Ban Nong Tụn. In Nong Tụn, the death of a surviving parent led immediately to the final division of the parental estate and to the fissioning of the kin group.

Outside of the domestic group, villagers relate as friends or as status-holders within one of the village institutions—the shrine of the village spirits, the *wat*, the school, and the local village government. As to friendship, Prajuab mentions a ceremony of *phuk siao* (ผูกเสี่ยว) in which Larn, as a young adult newly returned to the village after becoming a teacher, was 'bound' to her closest friend (p. 86).

Every northeastern village will have a shrine to the guardian spirit of the village who is designated as 'paternal grandfather-maternal grandfather spirit' (*phi puta* ผีปู่ตา) (Klausner, p. 23; Prajuab, pp. 35, 47, 53). One village man, known as the *khao cam* (เข่าจ้ำ) serves as the officiant in the cult of the *puta* spirit (Prajuab, pp. 34-5). An annual propitiation of the *puta* spirit is held in which every household in the village is supposed to contribute offerings. Similar propitiation rites are held if the village is afflicted by an epidemic, a disastrous flood or drought, or some such calamity. The spirit also has an important role, in at least some villages, in the *bun bang fai* (บุญบังไฟ) ceremony in which the divinities are notified by skyrocketers that it is time to send the rains;

The skyrockets are brought by the male villagers to the village spirit's residence along with an abundant supply of whiskey. The skyrockets are brought as a form of reverence and after some liquor is placed aside for the spirit, the men drink up and dance merrily around the spirit's residence. (Klausner, p. 15; cf. Prajuab, p. 51)

Prajuab also notes that "if the rain stopped or came less than usual people would go to pray to the [*puta*] spirits and promise to give them so and so in return" (p. 53). The making of a vow at the shrine of the *puta* spirit is also sometimes engaged in by an individual spirit who is about to undertake some risky endeavor (Prajuab, pp. 34-5).

In addition to the shrine of the *phi puta*, northeastern villages also have another shrine called the *byban* (บ่อบ้าน) or 'navel of the village' shrine. The spirits who inhabit this shrine are known as the 'village spirits' (*phi ban* บ้าน). The cult of the *phi ban* is not as elaborate as the cult of the *phi puta*. The only occasion on which these spirits are propitiated is at an annual ceremony known as *liang phi ban* (เลี้ยงบ้าน). At this ceremony, spirit mediums (*mə phi fa* หมอผีฟ้า), who in the case mentioned by Prajuab were women (pp. 38-9), become the mouthpieces for the spirits who tell "about what the people should do and should not do" (Prajuab, p. 38).

The dominant institution of the village, both physically and socially, is the *wat* (วัด) which contains the major images of the Buddha, the residences for the members of the Sangha, the hall in which monastic ceremonies can take place, and the *sala* (ศาลา) or pavillion in which major Buddhist ceremonies take place. Until recently, the *sala wat* also often doubled as the school (Prajuab, p. 15), a physical reminder that in the past the *wat* was also the school, and the monks, the teachers. In addition, the *wat* in the northeastern village contains the reliquaries (*that* ธาตุ) in which are enshrined the ashes of any villager who reached mature adulthood and did not die an unusual death. Given that these reliquaries are the foci of ancestral cults, the *wat* also serves symbolically to unite all the kin groups within a community. Finally, the *wat* also is the repository for utensils which are used communally and/or which are too expensive to be owned by individual families;

The Wat was the centre of us all, it was the only place in our village that had the complete set of carpentry tools and plates and dishes. When we wanted to use those things we just went to borrow from the monks. (Prajub, p. 106)

The *wat* serves as the locus for the cycle of ceremonies which are known as *bun* (บุญ) and at which villagers seek to acquire merit through the offering of alms to the resident clergy, the members of the Sangha, through listening to the preaching of the Dharma, and through following the precepts of the Buddha. The acquisition of merit is believed to result in the attainment of a better life.

[The villager's] present actions are directed towards bettering his merit position so as to achieve a better life both now and in future existences. The fact that the villagers believe actions in this life do affect one's position in the present life should be stressed... A better life is defined by the villager in worldly terms which have little relevance to the Buddhist ideal of extinction of desire and craving. (Klausner, pp. 74-5).

Ideally every man should spend at least a *lenten* period in the monkhood; even more ideal is that he should have been both a novice and a monk. However, this ideal has never been realized by all villagers in the Northeast. In the village of Ban Nong Tyn where I worked in 1962-1964, a little over 60% of eligible males had been monks. In every village in the Northeast, there is a significant minority of adult men who have never passed through the normative rite of passage involving a period spent in the yellow robes.

Those who enter the Sangha in the village *wat* should, again ideally, work to achieve the successive grades recognized in the northeastern tradition. The Sangha itself is divided basically into 'monks'—*pha* (พระ)—and novices—*cua* (ภิกษุ). Monks are further graded according to the number of times they have been honored with a ritual bathing—*hot pha* (หัตถ์พระ)—by their lay followers, a ceremony performed when monks have won the respect and admiration of villagers. On leaving the Sangha, a man carries with him a title indicating the rank he held when in the Order. The following is the most complete list I have been able to obtain of the clerical statuses together with a list of titles carried by laymen who had once held these statuses;

Ritual conferring Status	Clerical Status	Lay Title of Man Who Formerly Held the Clerical Status
Ordination into the novitiate	<i>cua</i> (กัว)	<i>siang</i> (เซียง)
Ordination into the monkhood	<i>pha</i> (พระ) <i>caohua</i> (เจ้าหัว)	<i>thit</i> (ทิด)
First <i>hot nam</i>	<i>somdet</i> (สมเด็จ) <i>phasa</i> (พระชา)	<i>can</i> (จารย์)
Second <i>hot nam</i>	<i>atchanja sa</i> (อาชญา ชา) <i>nja sa</i> (ญา ชา)	<i>can sa</i> (จารย์ ชา)
Third <i>hot nam</i>	<i>atchanja khu</i> (อาชญาครุ) <i>nja khu</i> (ญา ครุ)	<i>can khu</i> (จารย์ ครุ)
Fourth <i>hot nam</i>	<i>atchanja than</i> (อาชญา ท่าน) <i>nja than</i> (ญา ท่าน)	<i>can than</i> (จารย์ ท่าน)

For at least the past 60-70 years, the local system of graded clerical statuses has co-existed with another system which was created in the national Thai Sangha. Today local monks in northeastern Thailand may also be known as *pha khu* (พระครู), indicating that the monk has a status conferred by the king or a high Sangha official. He may also be known as *pha maha* (พระมหา), indicating that he has successfully passed the first stage, at least, of Pali studies. On leaving the monkhood a former *pha khu* will be called *can khu*, and a former *pha maha* will be called a *maha*.

From amongst the laymen who have served as monks one, an older man with a number of years of service in the monkhood behind him, will serve as the layleader, the *thanjok* (ทาจก), and several others in the village may be recognized as lay stewards or *salawat* (สารวัตร). The monkhood also serves as the context in which other important village statuses are achieved. This set of statuses, all of which carry the title *mq* (หม่อ), are allocated to those who have acquired a specialized knowledge of herbal medicine, of methods for combatting evil influences (eg., bad 'fate', evil spirits, etc.), of methods for making love magic (*sane* เสน่ห์), of methods for 'calling the *khuan*', etc. In sum, entrance into the Sangha provides access to a majority of those statuses which are deemed important within village society.

The monkhood can also serve to provide access to statuses which lie outside of the village. A boy who is ordained as a novice in a village temple may be sent by his abbot to live in a *wat* in a town where opportunities for clerical education are better. From there, he may be sent on to a *wat* in Bangkok in order to further his education. As Klausner indicates, this pattern of mobility of northeastern villagers through the Sangha has existed for sometime:

For many decades the northeastern priests have been migrating to Bangkok...The principal motivation for emigrating to Bangkok was the availability of reknowned religious teachers and general educational opportunities which were noticeably lacking in the northeast. Coming from a very religious but a very poor area, the northeastern priests tended to work very hard and rose up to positions of prestige in the religious hierarchy. Those who, after a few years or more, left the priesthood, found that, because of the contacts they had made, they could get good jobs in the capital and other city centers. (Klausner, p. 98)

Indeed, northeasterners have come to have a near monopoly on this channel of social mobility. This is illustrated by the fact that "the composition of the student body of the two Buddhist universities...is drawn predominantly from the northeastern provinces" (Klausner, p. 93).

Yet, for all the prestige and importance attached to the monkhood, village monks do not always live up to the ideals of their discipline.

[T]he bad persons always find ways to get their own way in spite of strict rules. So if they want to sleep most of the time, pretending they are studying the lessons, nobody calls them up or forces them to work when they are at home. (Prajub, p. 74)

Some monks become reknowned for rather unorthodox abilities such as being able to forecast lottery numbers (Prajub, pp. 125, 135). And, some monks are recognized as *hua pho* (ห้วฟอ), that is men "who previously have been married and have either left their families to take the robes or who are widowers" (Klausner, p. 83). Such monks, who are the subject of "seemingly unending tales" told "in earthy and often Rabelaisian terms", find it difficult to cast aside the emotional and material attachments of family life (*loc. cit.*).

The school has been a separate institution from the *wat* in northeastern villages only since the 1930's. There still remain indications that the school has not been fully integrated into village life. For example, when Larn asked her mother if she could go to school, Prajuab has her mother reply :

We are farmers and you are a girl : your duty when you are grown is to take care of the children and the house and planting rice. What do you want to learn how to read and write for? (p. 14)

From my own work, as well as from other studies of village literacy made in the 1960's, there is evidence to support Larn's mother's attitude. By the time village women have reached adulthood, most have lost effective literacy since there is no use to which they can put this skill within the village.

This negative feature notwithstanding, the school has succeeded in opening up new vistas for village children. From a sociological point of view, it is significant that when village children enter the school, they are given formal school names (Prajuab, pp. 28, 30). The school attempts, and to a great extent succeeds, in implanting in villagers a strong sense of citizenship, a sense of being a subject of the King of Thailand. In addition, the village school opens up another avenue of social mobility. To follow this path, however, can be painful as Larn, the heroine in Prajuab's story, discovers.

Until the recent program whereby the number of grades in village schools have been increased in some areas to seven, the village child who wished to go beyond the fourth grade would have to leave the village. At 11, Larn was placed with a family in town whom her father knew. The treatment she received at the hands of this family, and particularly at the hands of her surrogate mother, almost made Larn turn away from her studies in order to return home. "They were kind to me the whole six years but it was a cold kindness" (p. 85). Being treated as a servant to whom little affection is shown is not an uncommon experience for many northeastern village children who have gone to live with a 'relative' or a monk in a town.

Larn's case is exceptional, however, in that until recently very few children have followed the route open to them through the school. Klausner reports that in 1957 he found that "only two boys in the village had gone to the provincial capital for further schooling beyond the primary level" (p. 118). In 1963 in Ban Nong Tūn, a village of somewhat over 700 people, I also found only two boys studying beyond the fourth grade. Klausner finds that the pattern has now changed: "Today, it is not uncommon for young boys not only to study in Ubon town but also to continue their studies in Bangkok." (p. 118)

Political leadership in the village is yet another form of achieved status. In Ban Nong Tūn, two such statuses carried titles: *phunjaiban* (ผู้ใหญ่บ้าน) or 'headman' and *phusui phunjaiban* (ผู้ช่วยผู้ใหญ่บ้าน), 'assistant headman'. In addition, a number of other villagers are recognized as being 'elders' *phunjai* (ผู้เฒ่า) who could be called in for consultation by the headman in some situations. While these statuses are quite old, the terms for 'headman' and 'assistant headman' are relatively recent, having been introduced by the Thai government in the early part of the twentieth century.

Klausner discusses the qualities which a man should possess if he is to qualify for one of these statuses. First he must be male and he must have seniority (p. 57), although this latter criterion should be qualified noting that men over 60 normally do not take an active role in village government. In addition, a man should have proved himself by having first achieved one or more of the other valued village statuses: (a) ex-novice or ex-monk (Klausner, p. 54) (b) "an authority on traditional village customs and Brahmanic and animistic rituals" (Klausner, p. 54), i.e., a *mō*, (c) a skilled trader or *hōi*, and/or (d) the *khao cam* or intermediary between the village and the *puta* spirit.

In addition to having proved oneself, a man who achieves a village leadership role should also ideally abide by the most important values of village society (Klausner, pp. 54-57). These include having a "cool heart" (see below), being generous, showing respect for parents, elders, and the monks, observing village customs, rituals, etc., showing "an interest and open curiosity in the affairs of others" (p. 56). and "being ready to amuse

and to have fun" (p. 57). Having presented the portrait of the "ideal villager", Klausner then notes that the man who openly flaunts his disregard for these values may also achieve power :

Power and authority, of either a formal or informal variety, does not always rest with those who are highest on the scale of village prestige and respect, e.g., the village *nakleng* (hooligan) who bullies and takes advantage of other villagers [may also attain power]. (p. 54)

In Ban Nong Tun, one such man who was known for his hot temper (he had shot several people and was thought to have killed one man), his running of the local illegal lottery (which constantly led him to be ungenerous in villager's eyes), and his organization of slaughtering of horses for meat (which was both illegal and against village custom) was definitely one of the informal leaders of the village. The values and structures of village society produce their own contradictions which must then be recognized : the man who hoards his wealth in order to invest it rather than distributing it to the poor; the monk (*hua pho*) who seeks ways to satisfy his appetite for good food and sex; the 'strong man' who openly flaunts the values of village society.

In the elections held for choosing village headman, a 'strong man' may be chosen instead of an 'ideal villager'. In the village described by Prajuab, the man chosen appeared to be of the latter type (p. 86). This was also true in Ban Nong Tun. However, in a village near to Ban Nong Tun, a notorious and greatly feared 'strong man' has been the headman for over two decades.

Prior to the end of the 19th-century, the leaders of northeastern villagers deal with officials of the local *cao muang* (เจ้าเมือง), or 'lords', rather than with officials of the central Thai government. These lords were replaced by Thai officials following the implementations of reforms in provincial administration initiated under King Chulalongkorn and effected in the Northeast by about 1910-1915. Under the new system, village headmen were made agents of the national government in the village. They had to be responsive to *kamnan* (กำนัน), that is to men who were also village headmen but who had been given jurisdiction over a number of

villages, and, more importantly, to the *nai amphoe* (นายอำเภอ) or district officer who was the most powerful local Thai official. Other officials of the Thai government also came to play roles in village affairs in ways that had not been true of officials of the *cao mưang*. Before World War II, the most common official seen in northeastern villages was the policeman. Since the War, and particularly since the 1950's, officials charged with implementing community-level development programs have become constant visitors to northeastern villages.

For the most part, northeastern villagers have not found these contacts with Thai officials to be very pleasant ones. To villagers, the police unnecessarily attempt to implement laws which are contradictory to village custom. For example, Prajuab relates an incident, immediately recognizable to any northeastern villager, in which a villager was arrested for brewing liquor :

Uncle Sorn was fined almost all the money he had and the sad thing was it was the money he was saving for ordaining his son next month. That was why he went to make liquor which was for serving to the guests who would attend the ordaining celebrations. (p. 23)

District officials and community development workers are not uncommonly seen as exploiting the villagers, 'eating the country'—*kin mưang* (กินเมือง) in order to better themselves :

Giving was our North-easterner's habit...And this turned out bad for us in one way. Some of the government people took advantage of this by making it clear by their tactful speaking that we should give them our things. They thought our things had no valuation because we made them ourselves and did not pay to have them.

"I'm going to Nong Hi village today," he who worked in Community Development would say.

"Good, bring back some chicken, will you?" his wife would say. If he went to another village she would ask him to bring eggs, coconut, molasses, and so on according to what they were going to have in each village.

When he went home he would tell his friends that we gave him those things without asking for. That meant we respected him so much. If this happened often it became a burden for us. It made us feel very bitter. (pp. 116-117)

It is exactly this behavior that Klausner cautions rural workers to avoid in order to get along with villagers and to be able to win their help in effecting useful changes (p. 127).

While officials of the Thai government have not won any great affection from villagers, the King and Queen are greatly revered by the rural people of the Northeast. Prajuab describes a visit of the King and Queen to the area :

"How handsome and pretty they are and they acted as if we are their relatives; I even heard him call the old women who sat beside me 'grandmother'. They are very, very kind," Father said...We could not help comparing them with some of the government people who came to our village." (p. 116)

Prajuab also suggests that some Members of Parliament, when they have existed, were considered by villagers to have a genuine interest in villagers even though they were rather crude in the types of inducements they used to win votes (p. 107). I found a similar attitude among villagers in Ban Nong Tyn. However, Ban Nong Tyn villagers also felt that Members of Parliament had very little power to effect anything for the good of villagers.

3.

While there are strong mechanisms which serve to promote social solidarity within the village community, there are occasions when a villager may commit an act which offends others or transgresses village custom and/or national law. Insofar as possible, the offended party on such occasions attempts to maintain a "cool heart", that is, according to Klausner, the villager attempts to avoid expressing "anger, displeasure, criticism and the like" (p. 45). This is to say, villagers place as great a

value on the preservation of village harmony as they do upon personal satisfaction resulting from direct reaction to an offensive or anti-social act.

While the value of having a "cool heart" is functional in a small community where people live cheek by jowl and where economic interdependence is essential, Klausner is quite correct in pointing out that "similar economic subsistence conditions in other village societies have, in certain instances, led to different patterns of behavior" (p. 46). One should, I suggest, look to the religious beliefs derived from Buddhism and held by northeastern villagers for the grounding of this value (cf. Klausner, p. 46). In Buddhist terms, extreme expression of emotion is a form of 'impurity' (*kilet* *กิเลส*) which should be purged from one's behavior.

Although maintaining a "cool heart" is ideal, villagers do not always avoid action which seeks to rectify or punish those who have committed offense or anti-social acts. There are a number of indirect approaches which villagers may employ in reacting to such acts. One of these, which Klausner calls "projected villification" (p. 49), involves making public the fault committed by castigating someone else or an animal for the offensive act.

The individual who has been antagonized, insulted or hurt in some manner does not express his displeasure directly but turns it towards another object. (Klausner, p. 49)

Such expression of displeasure is most usually done when the offending party is within earshot.

Prajuab provides an example of the use of a variation on the indirect approach in resolving a conflict. Larn, at about age 7, accidentally revealed to a policeman that Uncle Sorn, the next-door neighbor, was brewing moonshine. Uncle Sorn was arrested and had to pay a stiff fine. When Larn arrived home after the incident, her mother began to inflict a punishment by striking her with a fishing rod.

And while she was hitting me she shouted, "You bad girl, why did you come to be born by me? Why didn't you come to

be born by the dog, that should be your place. You have a bad mouth, you have dog behaviour..."...She struck the stick vigorously but she made the end of it hit the floor; only the upperpart near the handle lay on me. I knew now that Mother did not hate me. The sound of the stick hitting the floor, her loud scolding and emphasising voice and my screaming made the scene sound horrible...Aunt Gaeo (Uncle Sorn's wife) who lived in the next house called to Mother loudly "That's enough, that's enough". (p. 23)

However, Larn's mother refused to stop and so Aunt Gaeo came over and brought the semi-mock punishment to an end.

Klausner gives almost the total reverse of this incident in an example of yet another way in which indirect methods are used to resolve a conflict:

One of the most infamous of such measures [of indirect conflict resolution] in village society is to surreptitiously place home-made liquor in someone's garden and then anonymously advise the police that a certain villager has been making illicit liquor. (p. 49)

The police, in northeastern Thai village society, assume a role not totally dissimilar to that of the spirits.

Witchcraft and sorcery are rather marginal methods for effecting conflict resolution in an indirect way. Klausner mentions that "vestiges of fear of poisoning and coming under the influence of spells and charms still remain" (p. 60). Similarly, I found in my own inquiries in Ban Nong Tun that while villagers knew of 'sorcery'—*kansapsaeng* (การสาป), they did not know of anyone who practiced it. This finding contrasted sharply with the not inconsiderable evidence of sorcery which I found in Mae Sariang in northwestern Thailand where I also carried out research. In Mae Sariang, it was not uncommon for a woman who wished to eliminate a competitor for the affections of a particular man to employ a sorcerer. The northern Thai in Mae Sariang also claimed that the Karen tribal people employed sorcery in matters of economic

conflict and the Karen made the same claim about the northern Thai. One northern Thai man who died in 1968 during the period of my research was thought by some to have died as the consequence of Karen sorcery.

In northeastern Thailand, the closest approximation to a 'witch' is a person who is possessed of the dreaded *phipop* (ผีปอบ). The *phipop*, to which Klausner makes brief reference (p. 22), is a type of spirit which feeds on the vital organs of human beings. To do so, it must first have a human host. Such hosts may be totally involuntary, having fallen victim to a wandering spirit. On the other hand, the capacity for being a host may be inherited or it may be acquired, I was told, by a sorcerer through the use of relevant spells. A person possessed of a *phipop* will show certain outward signs of possession, such as extraordinary strength and/or the commission of acts of violence against friends and relatives. Unless exorcised, the *phipop* will eventually consume the vital organs of the host, causing him to die. Villagers in Ban Nong Tụn knew of only one recent case of *phipop* possession, one in which the host received the spirit involuntarily. The man was cured eventually by an exorcist, although people remained somewhat wary of him.

Anti-social acts may bring retribution by various of the spirits recognized by villagers. Klausner says that if a couple engage in pre-marital sexual intercourse, they cause offense not only to their parents but also to the guardian spirit of the village:

If such pre-marital activity is discovered, village sanctions immediately come into play. Heavy fines are levied in the name of the village spirit who must be placated as it has been offended by such improper behavior. (Klausner, p. 61)

This example suggests that, in the past, the *khao cam* who is the intermediary between villagers and the village spirit probably played an important role in conflict resolution by levying fines for a wide variety of acts which were offensive to the spirit. Klausner also says that the *cao khot*, or senior elder in a matrilineal kin group, played a similar role in cases where acts were offensive to the ancestral spirit (p. 57). Today, both the *khao cam* and the *cao khot* do not have much role in bringing about conflict resolution.

Klausner reports another form of resolving conflicts which also involves supernatural beings and which also appears to have practically disappeared from northeastern village society. A person who has been robbed may strongly suspect some particular fellow villager of having committed the theft. He may then openly confront the suspected person and ask him to go through the ceremony of 'taking an oath'—*saban* (สับัน)—before the devas in order to prove his innocence :

[A] person is asked to swear before the angels who are called down from the heavens as witnesses that he did not commit an act of which he has been accused. If he lies, it is believed he will then become sick or die, the angels punishing him for lies. (p. 47).

The request that such an oath be made in public results in a stigma being attached to the accused whether or not he agrees to comply with the request. He could turn down the request, but this would be tantamount to an admission of guilt. Given the consequences of the request and given the normative value against such public confrontations, the accuser is likely to be very certain that the accused has in fact committed the theft.

Despite the value of having a "cool heart" and despite the possibility of using a number of indirect methods of resolving conflicts, northeastern villagers still do have open confrontations. Prajuab tells of how school children who have fallen out with each other will engage in an "angry ceremony during which they swear to be eternal enemies.

They twisted each other's thumbs. And Jai spread out her palm and the girl snapped on the middle of it. Jai did the same to her. (p. 28)

After performing this ceremony with one girl, Larn was advised that

"...From now on you must not talk to her. If anything happens that you have to speak to her, don't call her by name, call her 'Fire'. If she touches any of your things you must act as if it has caught fire : blow it off and say "Fire ! Fire ! understand ?" (p. 29)

Such 'permanent' enmity passes quickly with children and there is no equivalent act for adults.

Within the family, conflicts are most likely to arise between a man and his parents-in-law or potential parents-in-law and between a husband and wife. In all cases, such conflicts can be resolved by performing the ceremony of *khô khama* or *khô somma* (ໂຮ່ໂຮມ, ໂຮ່ສອມ) in which the offending party prostrates himself before the offended and asks for forgiveness while offering incense and flowers. In Ban Nong Tyn, I observed this ritual in a case when a young couple took up living together without benefit of a wedding ceremony. After having gained the approval of the girl's parents to consider themselves married, the couple performed *khô khama* before the wife's parents. Significantly, they did not do the same before the husband's parents. Klausner also says that a wife is expected to *khô khama* to her husband at least once a year.

[The wife] will beg forgiveness of her husband for her wrongs she may have committed during the past year. She will bow before the husband's feet with incense and flowers in her upraised hands. (Klausner, p. 55)

Villagers in Ban Nong Tyn told me that this annual prostration of a wife before her husband used to be performed in the past but that it no longer is. Ban Nong Tyn villagers also refer to the placing of a lighted stick on the pyre of a deceased friend or relative as an act of *khô khama*. One is supposed to 'beg forgiveness' from the deceased for all offenses one has committed against him during his lifetime. The underlying meaning of *khô khama* would appear to be a ritual rectification of offenses which might cause a spirit to be wrathful.

Monks may be sought out for resolving conflicts; however, they are more likely to concern themselves with the consequences of an open breach than with the causes of the breach:

The bhikkhus endeavor to have the contending parties agree to an equitable solution and above all to "cool their hot hearts". (Klausner, p. 69)

I would also add that in many northeastern villages, there is no older monk who could command sufficient respect to serve as a mediator in a dispute.

While villagers may delay in making a case public owing to their desire to maintain harmonious relations, they still do bring cases of property destruction, theft, alienation of affection, and other intra-village conflicts for resolution. Prajuab describes what might happen in such cases:

The chief would call the respectable people and the defendant to come. He would try the witnesses on both sides. Then the chief would consult with those respectable people, if the majority agreed what to do or fine, the chief would give that judgment. If the plaintiff and the defendant were satisfied with the judgment the case was ended. If any of them were not satisfied, the chief would send them to the [*kamnan*]. If they were not content with the [*kamnan's*] judgment, they had to go to the chief of the [*amphoe*], and he would try to find a compromise for the case. If still he could not end the case they had to go to the Court of Justice, the Appeal Court and the Supreme Court of Appeal respectively. If the case was serious it went straight to the chief of the [*amphoe*]. (p. 89)

While theoretically villagers could follow the route described by Prajuab, most would prefer not to bring cases before officials of the central government whether such officials be in the district (*amphoe*) office or in the courts. They fear, with justification, that the costs in bribes and in bureaucratic browbeating will not justify the ends sought.

In sum, villagers in northeastern Thailand attempt to avoid open conflict even when cause has been given. If the cause is too great, they then make use of a number of mechanisms available at the village level to bring about a satisfactory resolution of the conflict. Only in rare instances will villagers attempt to make use of the mechanisms created and supported by Thai law and located outside of the village to effect a resolution of a conflict to which they are a party.

Changing Village Society and Culture in the Northeast

From both books, one gains the strong impression that major changes in northeastern villages began after World War II. Prajuab clearly looks back to her pre-war childhood as a time when village society was not quite the same as it is today. Klausner pinpoints the beginning of change more precisely:

[F]ollowing a proper breathing space after World War II, Thailand with aid and loans from both the U.S. and international organizations started on a variety of development programs. Private business firms sprouted up or expanded. Demands for cheap labor grew and the relatively depressed northeastern area was the obvious source for such a labor force. (p. 99)

The changes which he discusses in the essay on "The World and Nong Khon: Continuity and Change" have occurred mainly as a consequence of increasing cash income brought into the villages by young men and women who have gone to work temporarily in Bangkok and other economic centers. This argument, which if one restates it in terms of the impact of a market economy on the villages in order to accommodate expansion of such cash-cropping as the raising of kenaf, is one which is widely shared by both Thai and Western observers of northeastern village society. I would suggest, however, that the argument is only partially true, that it takes too narrow a view of change. My position is that while economically the greatest changes in northeastern village society have occurred since World War II, other highly significant changes began as early as the turn of the century if not slightly earlier.

While villages in central Thailand underwent a major economic transformation at the end of the 19th-century when they shifted from production primarily for home consumption to production (of rice) primarily for the market, the northeastern village did not undergo such a transformation until after World War II. By then, a sufficient infrastructure in the form of railines and roads had been created to permit easy transport of goods and people to Bangkok from many parts of the Northeast. As Klausner correctly observes, Bangkok, and to a lesser extent a few other centers in central and southern Thailand, began to boom in the 1950's—a boom which has only recently showed signs of cresting. Whereas in previous times the demand for labor had been met by migrant Chinese, this was not possible after World War II when migration of Chinese was reduced to practically nothing. The new demand for labor was met, again as Klausner notes, primarily by northeastern villagers. A few northeasterners had travelled to Bangkok for work

previously, but after World War II they came in immense numbers. In a survey which I made in Ban Nong Tụn in 1963 I found that over 70% of the men between the ages of 20 and 40 had worked in Bangkok and/or other economic centers for at least three months. While the migration of women from Ban Nong Tụn was much smaller, they comprised and still comprise a significant proportion of the migrants from other north-eastern villages (Klausner, p. 105).

Even into the 1960's most of the migrants returned to their villages to settle after a period of work outside. However, a pattern has begun to develop whereby many migrants do not return. Klausner feels that this pattern of permanent migration has increased the burden of work on those who have remained (p. 105). If one takes into account the major population growth of the region in the past 50 years (from about 2 million to over 10 million), one must question this conclusion. The pressures for arable land have been so great for some time as to stimulate some villagers, such as those described by Prajuab (pp. 122-128) to seek new farmland outside of the region. Permanent migration to the cities, I suspect, has not been nearly sufficient to lead to any significant reduction of pressures on the land much less to cause actual hardship in family labor forces. On the contrary, permanent migration may be seen as a function, in part, of over-population relative to cultivatable land.

For Nong Khon villagers the major source of cash income appears to be the remittances which migrants to the city send or bring home (Klausner, p. 115). For other parts of the Northeast, however, income from cash-cropping is certainly equal to, if not greater than, remittances from migrants as a source of cash for villagers. The most important such crop, and the crop with which the Northeast is now associated, is kenaf. In addition, there have been significant increases in parts of the region in other types of cash crops—e.g., cotton and maize—and in raising animals for market—ducks, pigs, and cattle—over the past twenty years. While northeastern villages still organize production primarily for home consumption rather than for the market, there has been a marked shift towards a market orientation.

The new patterns of migration, the shift towards a market orientation in production, and the consequent increase in cash income have led to some important changes in village life. In the following, I have attempted to bring together some of the changes discussed by Klausner with some which I have observed.

1. It is now common for most young men, and in some villages young women as well, to spend a period of several months to several years working in Bangkok or some other economic center before returning to settle down in the village.

The social life of village youth has begun to alter accordingly. The average length of time which young men spend in the monkhood has become shorter. The age of marriage would appear to be rising. The ability of villagers to speak, read, and write Thai has increased significantly. Some young people return with skills and/or capital which they could not have obtained in the village. Such skills and capital permit these young people to establish themselves in occupations in the villages other than that of farmer.

As of yet the behavioral change has yet to be accorded cultural recognition. It will be interesting to see if experience as a temporary migrant is eventually recongized as being one way in which a man can prove himself. The fact that young women also serve as temporary migrants and also often do the same unskilled jobs that men do may militate against such cultural recognition.

2. More goods and services are now paid for in cash than in kind.

Until recently villagers almost never bought food. Now, almost every villager spends some money on food, usually for cheap sweets which have little, if any, food value. In addition, most villagers will buy food when they have to serve a large number of guests at a wedding or some other life crisis ceremony. Some villagers have almost completely stopped making cloth and buy all the clothing needed. Villagers also buy tin roofing and some also buy the posts and boards used in building houses. The purchase of lumber and construction materials is likely to increase given the efforts to enforce the legal prohibition against cutting trees in the woods.

Cash has assumed an increased importance in merit-making as compared with the use of produce and volunteered labor. In Ban Nong Tun, for example, a group of villagers working in Bangkok sponsored a *thot kathin* (ทอดกฐิน) ceremony at the village *wat* for several successive years in order to make possible the construction of a new residence for the clergy.

Cash has also become important for paying for medicines and medical services. This is true not only of modern medicines and medical services but also of herbal medicines and the services of such traditional practitioners as spirit mediums and the 'callers' of *khuan*.

Again, the changes following from the increased use of cash have not, insofar as I can judge, been associated with concomitant cultural changes. Such changes may occur in the relative importance of certain types of merit-making. Also, I would expect that the successful competition of modern medicines will lead, eventually, to the disappearance of some types of traditional practices.

3. New occupations have emerged and increased specialization has occurred in the villages.

There is today scarcely a village of any size in the Northeast which does not have its own power rice mill. Such mills have been bought by temporary migrants who have saved the necessary capital while working in Bangkok, by village school teachers, and by some relatively wealthy farmers. Only rarely have such mills been established by outsiders, including outsiders who are ethnically different. The small village mills have seriously challenged traditional milling done with foot-powered mortar and pestle and they have cut into the business of the large commercial rice mills located in the towns. Sewing machines are used by some who have set themselves up as part-time or full-time seamstresses and tailors in the villages. The demand for goods manufactured outside of the village has led to the proliferation of small shopkeepers, many of whom are full-time. In Nong Khon and other villages there are now hairdressers, usually part-time, who attempt to help village maidens approximate urban styles. In Ban Nong Tun, one man

has purchased a truck which he uses to transport village produce to the market; he is unusual but not exceptional. In a few places, farmers have abandoned rice cultivation in favor of full-time cultivation of such other crops as maize from which they obtain a higher cash yield than is necessary for purchasing the amount of rice they normally would have produced for home consumption.

The diversification and increased occupational specialization of northeastern villagers has led to some cultural change. The category of *hqi*, traditionally applied to traders in cattle, has now been applied, in Ban Nong Tyn at least, to the successful shopkeeper cum rice miller. This suggests that the achievement of village-valued status through demonstration of prowess in acquiring wealth is becoming more important in village eyes.

4. Technological changes have occurred in agriculture and in animal husbandry.

Although Klausner asserted that there had been little technological change in agriculture (p. 117), some changes have actually begun to take place. In Ban Nong Tyn by 1972 there had been nearly wholesale adoption of the miracle rice strain RD-2 and of the chemical fertilizers which are necessary to make these strains most effective. Tractors, while still few, are no longer a rare sight along the roads in the Northeast. Some better strains of cattle and swine have been interbred with local cattle and pigs. In Ban Nong Tyn, one of the prize sires of local pigs in 1962-1964 was a Duroc Jersey and another man owned a 'Brahma' bull which had actually been bred from cattle imported from the United States. It is my strong impression that villagers will adopt technological innovations if they feel that they will genuinely profit in doing so and will not be in danger of lacking sufficient rice, clothes, and housing.

Culturally, agriculture and animal husbandry are probably still thought of by most northeastern villagers in traditional terms. However, the behavioral changes cannot but lead to new conceptions of the agricultural cycle and of what are meaningful products in the new future.

The above discussion of economic changes in northeastern villages is hardly complete. However, the general point that behavioral changes in the economic sphere have far outstripped changes in the cultural ideas regarding production, occupations, trade, etc. finds strong support in those examples which have been adduced. Cultural change has occurred in northeastern village, however, following changes in other than the economic sphere.

In the late 19th-century, the Sangha of northeastern Thailand was incorporated into the Thai national Sangha led by a Supreme Patriarch appointed by the Thai monarch. Subsequently, criteria derived from the Thai Sangha for determining distinctions within the Order were incorporated into the system of distinctions already employed by northeastern villagers. While the strong motivation to achieve within the Sangha remained, it now finds expression not only in the attainment of locally-important Sangha statuses but also in the attainment of scholastic honors, rank, and office within the national Sangha.

The integration of village government into the Thai national system of local administration which occurred in the early part of the 20th-century led to several cultural changes. One was a deemphasis of village custom in resolving conflicts in favor of national law interpreted mainly by village headmen. Herein may lie the reason for why supernatural sanctions against offending acts are less important now than they appear to have been in the past. Whatever the reason, secular power as vested in both the local village leaders and in government officials has increased at the expense of power believed to be vested in various spirits. A second consequence of provincial administrative reforms has been the slow usurpation of power over village affairs from villagers by Thai government officials. In sum the cultural conception of where lies the power to influence the lives of villagers changed radically following the introduction of a centralized system of governmental administration in Thailand.

The implementation of the law on compulsory education which resulted in government schools being established in northeastern villages mainly in the 1930's led to yet another set of changes. One of the most important of these was the separation of education from the functions

performed by the Sangha. In the past, villagers studied in the *wat* under the monks in order to learn not only the sacred literature (or that portion which was deemed important for village society) but also to learn many of the skills necessary for community life. While this function has not entirely disappeared, a new conception of education, namely that it should bring a sense of belonging to the Thai nation and should provide the tool of literacy in Thai in order to perform roles within the larger national society, emerged following the establishment of government schools. Today, while some monks are still thought of as 'teachers', many teachers are not now monks. The school also offer villagers access to an alternative way of life. Klausner notes that while in 1957 few students from Nong Khon went beyond the 4th grade, by 1972 villagers pursuing further education were not uncommon:

Today, it is not uncommon for young boys not only to study in Ubon town but also to continue their studies in Bangkok... Village parents are increasingly conscious of the value of education if one is to achieve power and wealth. (p. 118)

In 1963 there were only two villagers from Ban Nong Tyn studying outside the village. By 1973, there were about 20. Ban Nong Tyn and Nong Khon are not atypical of villages in the Northeast; today, the world of villagers is not limited to the village.

In sum, the northeastern village is culturally a very different place today than it was a century ago or even 50 years ago. However, not all of the cultural changes which have occurred can be traced to the intrusion of a market economy, a process which I have noted occurred in a significant sense only since the 1950's. Many of the most important changes can be traced to a 'revolution from above' created by Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn and implemented by their advisors and successors. This revolution brought significant changes to the cultural conceptions of villagers regarding religion, power, and education.

In his "Afterword" Klausner makes a plea for more research on northeastern village society. Yet, it is not merely more research which is needed for, in fact, troops of researchers, both Thai and Western (mainly American) paraded from village to village during the 1960's.

Despite the quantities of data which were generated, the need identified by Klausner still remains a real one. Little of the research of the 1960's penetrated beyond the superficial level of 'socioeconomic characteristics of village life'. In contrast, both Prajuab and Klausner have given us insights into what life in the northeastern community mean for those who live there. It is these insights which make both books valuable to the scholar and which indeed provide the stimulus, hoped for by Klausner, for further, and more penetrating, research.

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