

Charles F. Keyes, Field Notebooks, Thailand
December 1 through December 31, 1963.

Field notes in this document were primarily written in Mahasarakham (Changwat Maha Sarakham), Thailand, although the first and last days of the month were spent in other locations. This document is preceded by field notes written in Mahasarakham in November 1963. This document is followed by notes written in Mahasarakham province in January 1964.

Nôn Sung to Nakhon Phanom

December 1, 1963

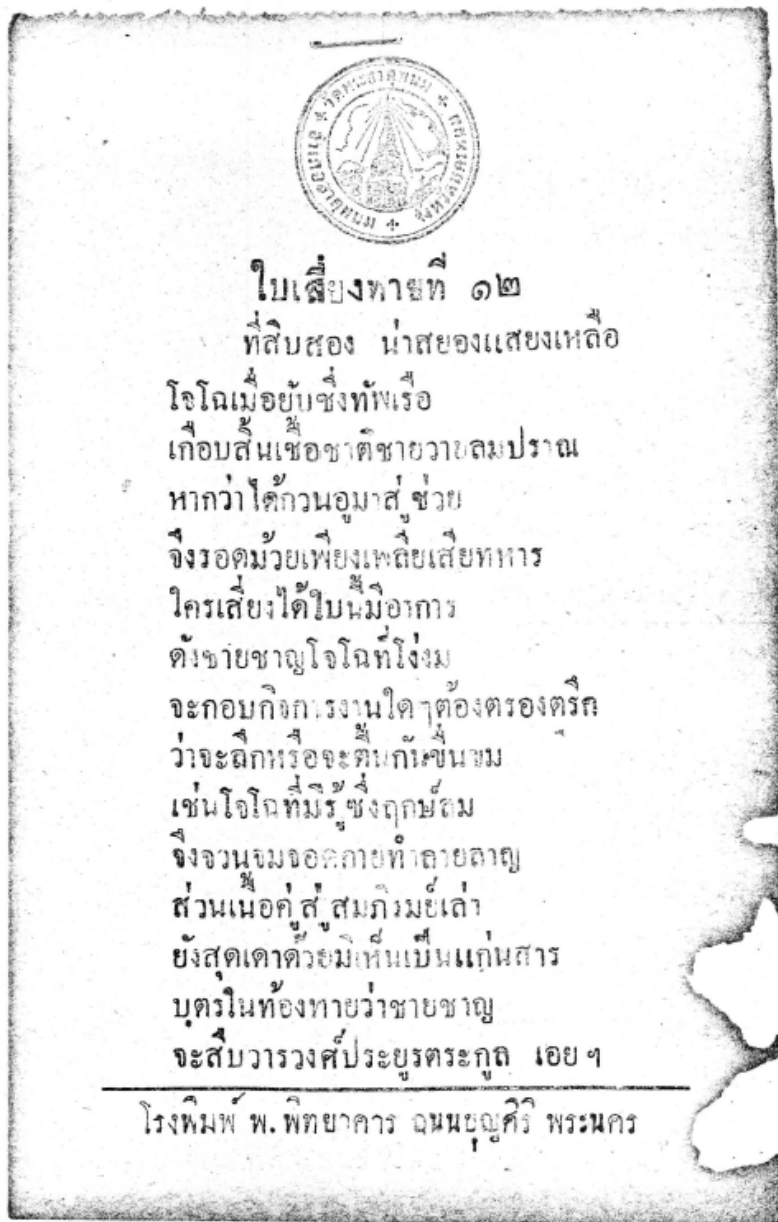
Left Nôn Sung and travelled to Nakhon Phanom. Ratsamī and Sister went with us. Stayed at "Civilized Hotel" Bungalows.

Thāt Phanom and B. Renū Nakhōn

December 2, 1963

Made side trip to Thāt Phanom and B. Renū Nakhōn. Stayed overnight in Nakhon Phanom.

(copy of document follows)



Fortune Slip obtained by 'casting sticks' at wat Thāt Phanom, Č. Nakhon Phanom, 2 December, 1963.

Return to Mahasarakham

December 3, 1963

Returned from Nakhon Phanom across Phuphan Mountains and via Sakhon Nakhon and Kalasin to Mahasarakham.

Today, after better than a week's trip around the N.E., Tom Kirsch went along with Mr. Wichian and me to visit the abbot at Bān Khwaw and there onto BNT.

Religion

We had a very interesting if free-ranging discussion with Phra Khrū Chaī. Some of the points that we covered included the following:

People come to feed the monks at B. Khwaw rather than the monks going around the village to have their bowls filled. The Abbot gave a couple of reasons for this. For one, this means that people only come when they feel that they can afford to feed the monks and not be forced into a somewhat embarrassing position of having to feed them every day or else be publically missed. Also, he said that being fed in the wat, "time is saved".

In discussing the ordination procedure for monks and novices, he said that it is necessary to have at least five priests present at an ordination as witnesses and one of these must be a monk who is qualified to ordain. Only one monk is necessary to ordain a novice, though this monk must also be one who is qualified to ordain. The only exceptions to this are novices who enter the monkhood for a few days or hours to make merit for a recently deceased relative. In that case it is not necessary to have an ordaining monk.

Monks must carry identification cards which attest to their bonafides when travelling. Monks must ask permission of the caw *khōng wat* before they can go to spend a single night or longer away from their home wat.

Monks only "meditate" in *watpā* or when they are wandering "forest" monks. In other words no meditation takes place in the ordinary village wat.

When a monk leaves the monkhood (สึก) he should go ask permission of the ordaining monk. At such a time four priests must be present and then the monk leaving will make a formal request in Pali to return to being a layman.

During lent there was a priest from B. Han who came to live and study at wat B. Khwaw. There is now an older man who used to work for the highway department who was ordained after his retirement and though he originally is from Suraburi, he is now living at wat B. Khwaw.

I asked about who become *dekwat* and the abbot said that there are the following reasons why a boy becomes a *dekwat*:

1. Because their parents want their children to be good and thus send the children to the wat to learn things about Buddhism.
2. Because their parents are poor or because fathers have moved away.
3. Because parents are very busy and can't take care of children.
4. Because they have been sent to study in town and thus become wat in order to have some place to live.

We got into a large discussion about whether Buddhism is as socially oriented as is Christianity. I started the discussion by saying that many Westerners believe that Buddhism only teaches that one should make merit for oneself and thus is anti-social in nature. Mr. Wichian disagreed with this violently. Not only does one make merit by giving things to others and by helping others, but an important part of a *suat* is the *truat nām* when merit made during the service is spread to all living creatures and all *Thewādā*. One of the major teachings of Buddhism is "compassion" and its opposite is *kilet* (กิลิต) which is the bearing of the pain and grief resulting from all the misdeeds and bad things which one has done to others.

Inheritance and Kinship Patterns

Today I was asking Mr. Wichian about inheritance and kinship patterns in the Northeast in order to see if the information which I already had gathered on BNT was specific or general. He gave me the following information and said that it applied not only to Mahasarakham and Roi-et but also to all the Lao People of the N.E.

Inheritance

With regard to inheritance, the ideal pattern and the one which is most often manifest is that daughters inherit all their parents' property and sons will expect nothing except to be helped in raising a bride price. If there is some dispute as to how property should be divided, an old and/or respected relative or friend of the family who is called *thawkāē* (see below) will be chosen by the family to arbitrate the disputes.

When a woman marries, her property becomes the common or joint property with her husband so that inheritance is not in the eyes of Northeasterners from mother to daughter but from parents to daughter. However, a matrilineal principle is used in determining conflicts which might occur.

Thus, if a woman marries and her parents are dead, then her inheritance becomes joint property with her husband. However, if the woman should die and she still has unmarried sister, the property becomes joint property between widowed husband and wife's sister. This is an unstable situation when all parties are relatively young because the unmarried sisters-in-law will marry and the widowed husband will be pushed more or less into the background. Thus, he will marry again or else will return to his parent's home. If a man should marry again, his rights to the property of his former wife will be forfeited. However, if a woman should die and her husband is relatively advanced in years, and there are no unmarried sisters, the man continues to hold the property until his death. In other words, the joint partnership between man and wife continues in principle even though the partner through whom the property has been inherited has died.

I asked Mr. W. why a man is always the head of household even when he is an outsider who has married in. He explained this as because Thai law requires that the head of household be a man (unless there is no man to be). However, I don't think this is the case because from what I have observed, there is no ambiguity about a man inheriting mantle of head of household and it certainly isn't incongruous with the system in which property becomes joint on marriage. At any rate, the titular "head of household" is passed from man to his son-in-law.

This inheritance pattern explains why there is very little registration of land on the part of Northeastern Lao. The law which was made to accord with patterns in the Central Plains or else in accord with the ideals of urbanized Thais never contrary to the patterns of Lao people. That is, the Lao principle is one of inheritance by daughters alone and joint ownership between man and wife. The legal regulations assure a pattern of bilateral inheritance and ownership and/or control by men only.

Analysis

These patterns bring about a continuity of family by means of a modified matrilineal principle. However, N.E. Thai-Lao society could not be classified as a matrilineal society primarily because there are no matrilineal descent groups. Property sales are contracted between men on behalf of families, though women certainly have an influence, informally, to buy and sell property.

Another way in which a matrilineal principle works can be seen in a couple of patterns that exist: marriage tends to be somewhat unstable in that men may go off to work away from the village or simply to find a new wife. Thus, the matrilineal principle provides for a continuity of family in which the male members tend to be somewhat transitory. Also, in the pot village of B. Mô only the women know how to make the pots while the men are in charge of marketing pots. The women thus keep up the continuity of traditions in a situation where men may marry into the village from other villages (following the uxorilocal residence pattern) and also where marriage tends to be somewhat unstable.

Running parallel to the matrilineal principle of inheritance and preservation of family continuity is the patrilineal inheritance of surnames and in some cases the patrilineal inheritance of certain statuses: e.g., in BNT Mr. Tāp inherited his position of *khawcam* from his father and Mr. Phon more or less inherited his position as headman from his father (these, it must be pointed out are very tenuous inheritances). Also, in some cases, men will inherit property from their parents. This is explained as a result of a family being much more wealthy than the family of the bride. Then, in order for a man to retain his socio-economic position, he will inherit land and property from his own family. Thus, if there are no daughters, the sons will also inherit.

Thawkāē (ເຜົ່າແກ່)

Mr. Wichian went on to explain the function and nature of *thawkāē* (ເຜົ່າແກ່) in N.E. Lao life. A *thawkāē* is a respected friend or kinsman who is called in to perform certain functions for a family. The three major functions which Mr. Wichian mentioned were (1) arbitrating inheritance division; (2) acting as a marriage broker; and (3) arbitrating conflicts. There is no tendency for the person who acts in one of these roles to be the same person as the one to act in any other role. In fact the tendency is for the person to be different in each case. The *thawkāē* is chosen anew by the family for each particular need that arises. Thus, there is no continuity of position and certainly this person does not represent a "clan" leader in any sense of the term. Though the headman may be chosen by some people to act as the *thawkāē* in arbitrating conflicts of interest, it does not necessarily follow that he must be chosen to act in such a role and many people would prefer to have someone else act in that role—particularly if it would be expected that the headman might be biased one way or another on the incident in point. Also, if a kinsman

is chosen, he need not be of the same surname nor need he be from one side of the family or the other. If a non-kinsman is chosen, he may be chosen on the basis of high status rather than on the basis of friendship. Thus, Mr. W. said that he could be asked to be *thawkāē*.

Sponsorship of Marriage

Bride price is certainly related to the wealth of the bride's parents because she will inherit the property which the bridegroom will ultimately work and manage. The person in charge of raising the bride price — the *caw phāp* (เจ้าภาพ) for the bridegroom's side—is usually the father of the bridegroom. However, if the father is dead, it will be the mother; if both parents are dead, it will be a brother—preferable elder; and if there are no brothers, but there are sisters, the eldest sister will act in this role.

Mahasarakham

December 5, 1963

Ceremony for King's Birthday

Today was the King's birthday and was also the beginning (in Sarakham) of a fair in celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Red Cross. This fair will continue for 5 days and has its counterpart in every changwat in the country. The fair is being held on the grounds of the Sala Klang and there are pavillions representing the Ministry of Agriculture with displays on fish, animal husbandry, crop raising, etc. as graphic demonstration of how farmers can improve their income; each amphoe with goods and handicrafts from that amphoe on sale; various schools in town such as the Teachers' College; the čhangwat jail also with handicraft items for sale. These pavillions have been constructed in elaborate designs with the Red Cross as their theme. Some of these pavilions also served as "bars" and all but the Ministry of Agriculture one are selling handicraft items such as silk *phāsins* and sarongs, basket work, etc. In addition, there are all the usual things of such a fair: the *mōlammū* cinema, *ramwong* modern style, bars, etc.

As today was the major day all government officials from all over the changwat were supposed to be present. We met the headman of BNT and Mr. Hōm, the Kamnan of T. Khwaw, the headmaster of B. Khwaw, plus all sorts of other people.

At about 11:00 we went upstairs in the Sala Klang and joined with officials in the assembly room who were to participate in the special ceremony for the King's birthday. The

room, other than the chairs, was arranged as follows: towards one end was a picture of the king set on a Buddhist *Tomū*. On the latter were placed *makbeng* and unlit candles, flowers and unlit incense. In front of this was placed a tall cylindrical shaped object wrapped in banana leaves and then the Thai colors and topped by a *bāi si*. In front of the room was a row of priests seated on a platform and provided with various accoutrements. Next to the head priest was a *tomū* with the traditional items and topped by a Buddhist statue.

The ceremony began by everyone standing and facing the picture of the king while the new governor lit the candles and incense on the altar in front of the king's picture. Then the governor was handed a special paper from which he read a formal expression of the desire of the inhabitants of Mahasarakham that the king should continue in good health and that he might have all fortune smile on him. Then the people in the room set down and from the tall cylinder in front of the king's picture, the banana leaves and the colors and the tallest *bāi si* I have ever seen was revealed. Then a man in white robes with traditional Thai shape came up to a microphone placed next to the *bāi si* and began chanting a formal *sūkhwan* ceremony. This man was the official Brahmin (not called Nāi Bram, but simply Bram). This ceremony, it was explained to me by the health officer of the changwat, was a Central Plains or Thai custom and was not a local one. When the *sūkhwan* ceremony was finished, all in the main room formed a circle around the picture. The Brahmin then lit candles which were attached to a special candle holder which lays flat in one's hand. There were three candles on three separate holders. These holders were laid on leaves and were passed from person to person who would circle the candles in front of him three times—making the circular motions by pulling the candles toward him then raising them and pushing them away from him.

When finished with the three circles, he would pass his right hand from left to right over the flames of the candles. This circulation of candles which is one type of *wian thian*, around the room from person to person was done three times. This particular ceremony was supposed to bring health and happiness to the King. The people then sat down and the ceremony was concluded by a chanting by the monks present.

I was struck while attending this ceremony by the status relationships inherent in the whole ceremony for these people who live in the town of Mahasarakham. In the front row on especially comfortable chairs were seated the governor, the assistant governor, their wives, and the wife of the Lord Mayor (and someone else whom I did not recognize). Interestingly, the Lord

Mayor and Mr. Chuen chai were in charge of the ceremony and the latter was a kind of Master of Ceremonies. I wonder if this is because these two are descendants of long-time residents of the town — the Lord Mayor a descendant of the old *caw müang* and Mr. Chüen chai a descendant of one of the first Chinese merchants in town. Certainly these two represent the continuity of the town far more than the governor and assistant governor who were both quite recent arrivals. Also, present in the room were certain interesting people a few merchants including the owner of Suriyan Phanit; *sip-ek plông*, our old landlord — who seems to be present at quite a few such ceremonial occasions. Status differences were symbolized by those who sat inside the room and those who sat outside; by the differences in uniforms and decorations on uniforms.

Thēwārūp at Sala Klang

At the Sala Klang I saw the two *thēwārūp* which had been taken from the *Kū* in B. Khwaw. These definitely are phallic as the statue depicts the divine being seated holding an exaggerated penis.

Yō Village

In the afternoon Tom Kirsch and I visited the Yō village of B. Thā Khōn Yāng which is some 3-4 km. outside of Mahasarakham and is situated on the Chi River. I was particularly interested in having Tom see this village the Yō are supposedly related to the Phūthai. Unfortunately, the man who knows most about the history and customs of the Yō was not present and our guide was not too helpful. At any rate Tom pointed out that there are things within the two *bōt* which do not exist in Phūthai village (nor in Lao villages)--i.e., the special construction fitted in front of the main Buddhist statue (see photographs). Our guide confirmed the story that the *caw müang* had once been resident here and that this was the *müang* of the changwat. He said that the seat of the *caw müang* was later moved to Kantharawichai and subsequently to Mahasarakham. He also substantiated the story that the daughter of an old *caw müang* had been killed by a crocodile at this village. There still remains much to be discovered about this village and its relationship to the history of the changwat and to the movements of the Yō people. Another interesting thing about the wats in this village is that they are similar to the Phūthai wats insofar as there are very few *thāt*. The *thāt* here are of unique designs however. There is also a "cement" wall around the wat in which bones are also interred.

Surin Elephants

On the way back from the Yō village, we met five elephants which were being taken from Surin province where they are raised by Thai-Khmer to That Phanom for the big fair there.

Maharakham

December 6, 1963

In Maharakham.

Ban Nong Tun

December 7, 1963

Informality of Village Priests

Today went on a tour of the fields with the head priest. We met the youngest, priest (the 3rd having already left the monkhood) working in the fields of Mr. Hō at whose house he lives in lay life. His harvesting is strictly forbidden by Buddhist regulation and so when we took a picture of him working, he buttoned up his farmer's clothes so that his priest's underwear would not show. Later, he said that he is planning to leave the monkhood next month and has therefore bought a new set of "civilian" clothes. At the wat we took pictures of the priests both in civies-- fully dressed with wrist watch and hat to cover their shaven heads.

Rice Cycle

Rice harvesting will be completed in the 3rd lunar month and then harvesting will begin. As rice is harvested it is piled up in a special manner so that it will shed water if rain comes in the fields. Near this pile will be the threshing floor and a small temporary house usually built of kenaf stalks is constructed so that someone in the family can remain near the rice day and night to protect the rice from thieves or from someone setting fire to it. I asked if there had ever been a case of thieving or firing in BNT. The answer was no, but everyone fears it. After the rice has been harvested, threshed and placed in a granary, there will be a ceremony called *sūkhwan_khāw* (สู่ขวัญข้าว). Each household will hold this ceremony and it is usually held in the 3rd lunar month.

Death

Nāng Beng (นางเบ้ง) who lives in KW died yesterday and was cremated this morning (before we arrived). It sounds as though she had a stroke because it happened rapidly and she was also paralyzed. Several of her sons and grandsons were "novices for a day" for the funeral. I asked if those who are ordained in such cases as this are always only novices (not priests) no matter their age and the answer was that this was so. I also asked Mr. Ngao who was now head of the household and he immediately answered that it was Nāi Samôn, the son who married the daughter of Nāng Beng last 6th month (a wedding we observed).

Bān Nōng Tūn

December 8, 1963

Miscellaneous

There have been several births recently in the village including one born to Nāng Taē (นางเต้).

Discussed with Mr. Ngao this morning apropos of seeing a *bāisī* ceremony in a *Phūthai* village, what the significance of various elements of the things contained in the *bāisī* tray are. He didn't know.

Went to wat to take pictures of priests. Priests from B. Yāng visiting there. Head priest commented that he liked to wear dark glasses because it made him look like the King when he was ordained.

Clothing and National Influences

I was noting yesterday that women in BNT are very much influenced in matters of dress and adornment by patterns set in Bangkok. Here one rarely sees the hair drawn back in a bun, the traditional *phāsin* and blouse that one sees in Laos and which used to be the style here. Here one sees — among young women and girls — short western style and often permanents (albeit done very badly) in hair. Blouses and even *phāsins* are quite often made of cheap Japanese materials — though *phāsins* are still often of traditional style or styles imported from Chiangmai and the central plains. Older women, however, still retain traditional garb — which is traditional for the N.E. But, even Mr. Ngao says, there is definitely a tendency away from making things to buying things.

Making a water Basket

Mãe Hôh was making water baskets today. The baskets had been woven from bamboo by her son Muan and she says that she is unable to make them herself. She took *nām yāng* -- a sticky sap which has the same name as rubber and mixes it with crushed shell from shell fish. This substance is then rubbed onto the surface of the basket into all the holes by hand. When the basket is dried, it will be completely water-proofed.

Nôi

Nôi was around today — just returning from a *thambun* ceremony in another distant village. He said that he was on his way to harvest rice, and as I know that his father has no rice, I asked him who he was helping. He said that he was helping Nãi Phan (KL). I asked him if it was usual for people to help other people in harvesting and he answered that it was only when a person had a large amount of rice.

He has just "bought" for ฿100 a flintlock, single shot pistol which he got "to protect myself against thieves." This gun takes bullets that cost ฿5 each. This gun is a type which is forbidden to be owned.

Funeral Customs

There is the usual three night "wake" going on at the house of Nāng Beng. This wake is called in Lao *ngān hian dī* (งานเฮียนดี) because in a house where a person has died I hear is the fear that someone else will die, and so to confuse the malevolent spirits, the "wake" is called the "party at the good house."

Bān Nōng Tūn

December 9, 1963

Death of Prime Minister

At about 8:00 last evening we heard on the radio that P.M. Sarit had died at 5:00 in the afternoon. Mr. Ngao said that he was very sorry to hear of his death because Sarit was a Northerner. He also said that Sarit had been interested in development and especially in

developing the N.E. Ngao went on to predict that if Sarit had lived, there would have been electricity throughout the country in a very short time. He returned again to the theme of Sarit's Northeastern origins. He said that of the three men highest in government, one was from the south and one was from the central plains, but Sarit who was the highest of all was from the N.E.

Customs Related to Death

Due to the death of Nāng Beng I have had occasion to gather some data on death customs — especially on a *thambun* for the dead and the collecting of bones from the ashes. The general pattern of death customs for the days between the death and the collecting of bones seems to follow this model:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1st day | (a) Death |
| | (b) Preparation of body and things for funeral (Casket, etc.) |
| | (c) "Ordination" into novicehood of one or more relatives of the deceased |
| | (d) Priests come to house to <i>suat</i> |
| 2nd day | (a) Cremation |
| | (b) After the cremation, the "temporary novices" return to lay life. |
| | (c) In the evening first night of wake is held (<i>ngān hian dī</i>) |
| 3rd day | } Two more nights of the wake. |
| 4th day | |
| 5th day | (a) <i>Thambun</i> for the dead held at the house of the deceased |
| | (b) Ritual collection of bones to place in the wat to await the "placing in <i>thāt</i> " ceremony. |

Customs on Day of Death

I asked Mr. Ngao about what happens from the time that a person dies until the cremation the next day as I haven't had an opportunity to see for myself. He could only give me the briefest sketch as he has not had much experience. He said that the body will be washed (*lāng sop* - ล้างศพ) with coconut water (all ritual bathing with coconut water is done using as yet unripe coconuts) and "fragrant water" (*nām hōm* - น้ำหอม). Also, the body will be laid out with the

palms together on the chest. The monks come and chant in order to remove any misfortune from the house. This *suat* concerns the rebirth of the soul.

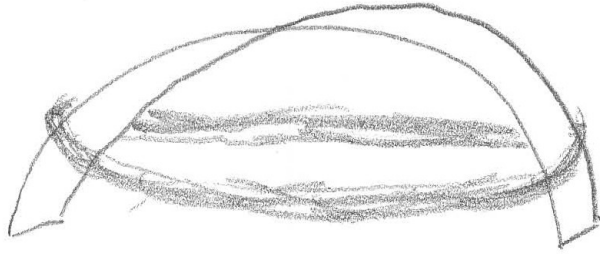
The Wake

I have already described the essentials of the wake previously. However, there is one custom which I have not described. I have noticed in all the cases of wakes that I have been to that the *bāilān* from the wat or some other book alien to the household. This Mr. Ngao explains is because a dead person likes to have *nithān* read to him. Whether in actual fact anyone reads the stories, I am not certain, but I rather doubt it.

Tham bun for the Dead

This morning we went to the house of Nāng Beng for a *tham bun* ceremony. This *tham bun* ceremony is to purge the house of misfortune and to ward off evil and to bring happiness and good health to the other members. The ceremony is organized as follows:

1. A layman takes a water scoop and places in it candles and flowers. Holding this in a "worshipful" position he *khô sin* ("requests the precepts"). The monks will accept the scoop and then will chant the precepts.
2. A layman takes a tray on which is placed the following things: three piles of raw cotton, leaves, strands of cotton thread, candles, "auspicious cotton thread" *fāi mongkhon* (ฝ้ายมงคล) and a dish in which was placed two pieces of charcoal, water, and two sticks crossed at right angles floating on the water (called *mai tinkā* ไม้ตันทกา). This whole tray is called *khāi mongkhon* (ค้ายมงคล) or "auspicious tray". The "auspicious cotton thread" is 3-strand and is wound around a piece of bamboo to form a horseshoe shape



The symbolic number 3 in all cases stands for the 3 "jewels of Buddhism": The Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha. Mr. Ngao wasn't certain about the symbolism of the small dish with the *mai tinkā* and pieces of charcoal.

When the priests have received the คายมงคล, they chant a *suatmon* while holding the string passed from priest to priest (to novice). When finished chanting they take the string and tie it around the house in order to bring the merit and the resulting good fortune to the inhabitants of the household.

When they have finished this, the priests chant (*suat phra hūng*). สวดพระหุง

3. Then food was presented to the priests in the usual manner. When the priests had finished eating, the ghosts present also ate.
4. Following this, a water scoop was taken and into it were placed raw cotton, flowers, and candles. Two other candles were lit and attached to the side of the scoop. This is called คายเทศน์ (*khāi thēt*) and is used to request a "sermon" from the priest. The bowl was held in the "worshipful" position by layman who chanted a request. After the scoop had been accepted by the priests, the candles were blown out and then the head priest read a sermon from a book.
5. After the sermon was finished, a basket full of water was placed in front of the two priests. A bunch of leaves was placed in the basket of water. Then two long candles were handed the priests and lit. The two priests held the candles over the water so that the wax dropped into it and

chanted. In this way they made *nām mon* (น้ำมนตร์). This water was sprinkled around the room on the inhabitants to bring good fortune and health.

6. The ceremony ends with the priests chanting *truat nām* (or *suat nām* as it is also called.)

Collecting of Bones

Following the *tham bun* ceremony, the priests, several relatives of the deceased (including Nāi Samôn who is now head of household), and we went to the cemetery (which is also called *khôk* to collect the bones of Nāng Beng. When we reached the site, the ashes were still smoldering and so the first thing that had to be done was to pour water on the ashes. The ashes were raked around a bit. Then a person came with 3 sticks which had been split in the middle and gave one to each of the two monks and to the novice. They went and with these sticks picked up the most important bones — i.e., the breast bones—and placed them in a bottle. This was all the priests did. Then, everyone else fell to collecting the bones and placing them in a clay pot.

While this was being done, a woman spread out on banana leaves some food (including glutinous rice, chicken *lāp*, sweet potato, peppers, and a few other things) and tobacco to be given to the *phī* of Nāng Beng.

When all the bones had been collected, both the bottle and the pot were placed on the ashes. The bones in the bottle had been washed by pouring plain water over them. Then the priests came and poured both coconut water and *nāmmon* over the bones in both containers. They were followed by other people present continuing the water pouring process.

Then a white cloth was placed over the pot and a rope was tied around the pot to secure the cloth. Then a *bangsakun* was placed on top and a rope of white thread was fastened to it. A post was placed upright near the ashes. Two candles were lit and attached to the post. Then the priests and novices each took hold of the string leading from the pot of bones and then chanted a *suat* for the dead.

When the priests had finished, the pot and bottle full of bones were taken from the ashes and a hole was dug in the ashes. Then the pot of bones was turned upside down in this hole. The post mentioned previously was taken and stabbed through the center of the pot and into the ground ashes. I could not discover — at least no one knew — if there was any symbolism

present in this. Then ashes were raked up over the pot and swept by a leaf broom up around the post and over the pot. What remained was now a pile of ash with a post sticking up in the middle of it. This post now became a *thāt* marking the graves so that no one would use the same place again.

Then the priests chanted again and the ceremonial gathering of bones was over, The bones in the bottle were then taken to be stored in the *bōt* until a propitious time for placing them in a *thāt* in the wat arises.

The Graveyard

Mr. Ngao says that graveyards have been such from the first time they were used for cremation because after that no one would dare use the area for planting or anything else. What an archaeological find some graveyards would be — say the one at Chiang Hian — because of the practice of burying artifacts with the dead.

Attitudes Toward Government and Knowledge of Outside World

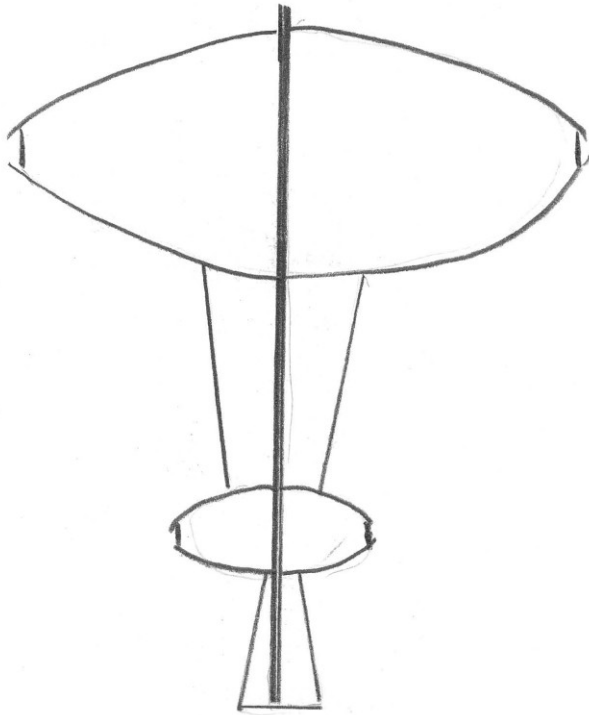
This afternoon the announcement came over the radio that the Defense Minister Thanom Kittakachorn had been appointed by the King to be the new P.M. I asked Mr. Ngao if he thought that Thanom would be as good a P.M. as Sarit had been and he replied that he didn't know because Thanom was not from the N.E. He went on to point out that Phibun had hardly ever visited the N.E. and had never done anything about developing the N.E. whereas Sarit had made many visits up here and had taken a great interest in helping the N.E.

In general reaction of villagers to Sarit's death has been simply the spreading of the word that he is dead and very little beyond that. People generally seem only mildly interested, and I was surprised at how little even Mr. Ngao knew about Sarit. He didn't know anything about his wives, about how many children he had, etc. (though he did know his latest wife's name). This may, however, be simply a function of the paucity of information ever put out through mass media on Sarit's life.

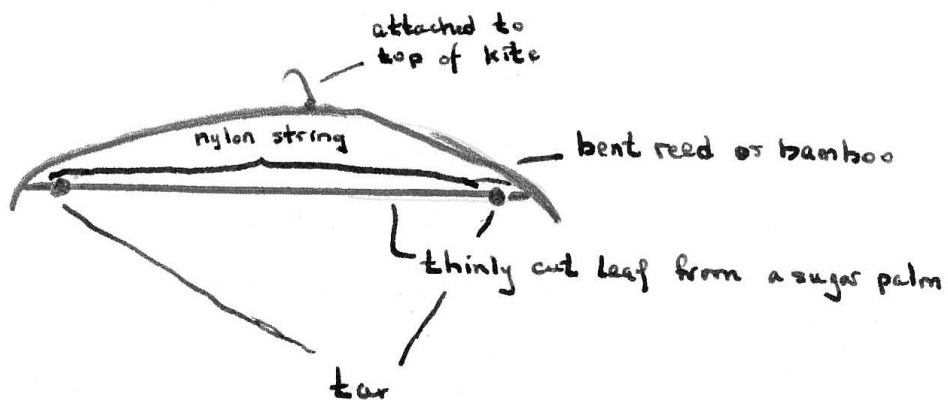
Nin asked tonight who was it who died in America. When I said that it was the President, he asked what disease he died of. Apparently, the thing that has made people most aware of Sarit's death is the fact that there has been no *môlam* on the radio all day today.

Entertainment

The priests and Mr. Ngao are making an especially large kite (at least 9' in height) for our sakes (and for my family when they come). The particular shape they are making is one which is very popular in the N.E. (not a "*cula*" kite).



On top of this kite will be placed a thing called a *sanū* (as on all kites). This thing looks like a bow:



If this instrument is moved rapidly through the wind, the palm leaf will make a deep vibrating sound. Thus when it is placed on top of the kite, the wind and motion of flying the kite will cause it to vibrate.

Miscellaneous Customs

If there is a special *tham bun* ceremony on *wanphra* (such as for a dead person or a *tham bun bān*) others than those directly concerned can still take food to the priests.

I asked Mr. Ngao why he is planning to build a granary while it was still an odd-numbered month and he answered that any time will do for building a granary. It is only house building which must be done in even-numbered days and completed in one day.

Farm Labor

Nōi is helping Nāi Phan harvest rice because he sleeps in the house of Mr. Phan. There is no system of paid labor for harvesting — only ขอมแรง (*khôrāēng*) or ลุงแขก (*long khāēk*) or วรรณ (*wān*) in Lao — in which food and drink is given in repayment for the help of friends and relatives. But for transplanting, people are hired for ฿5/day—if labor is needed. In such cases, the laborer must bring his own food. Only the poorest people hire out. The difference is because harvesting is done very rapidly. In harvesting of kenaf, hiring of labor also. Usual wages 5 sheaves of kenaf harvested: ฿1 or ฿5/day. (Nuan says also hired for ฿3-4/day.)

Wealth and Status Within Village

In response to a question about who was the richest man in the village, Mr. Ngao was hard put to answer and so I began to try different people. First, I asked about Mr. Phon, the head man, and he answered that he certainly isn't wealthy even with his ฿80/month government salary. I said that I thought that he had lots of land, but Mr. Ngao said that he didn't. He said that the land he has is his 1st wife's inheritance. His 1st wife was the sister of Mother Hôm and they had an equal amount of land—and that isn't very much. Mr. Ngao incidentally said that Mr. Phon

is luckier than Mother Hỗm because he has a strong son-in-law to help whereas Mother Hỗm's son-in-law--i.e., himself, doesn't work in the fields.

I then said that I had heard that Mr. Hỗ was a rich man, but Ngao said that though he has lots of land, he has very little money (thus, my question about relative wealth was interpreted in terms of money). We asked about Mr. Sôn because he has a fine house in KNKN, but he says that he used to be poor but had lots of sons who have helped him. I asked about Mr. Lā, the *Nakleng* and he said that at the moment he is quite poor.

Finally, he said that he thought Mr. Sī (สี้) who lives in KV was the richest.

Marriage and Inheritance

The conversation then led into one about inheritance and marriage. He said that Mr. Phon was to be pitied because he had a large number of daughters and thus their inheritance would be small. He said that people prefer to have sons because they are strong helpers and will not take the inheritance. Mr. Phon's daughter, Thō̃ng yū, has reached marriageable age and Mr. Phon says he will get ฿1600 bride price for her. In actual fact he will probably get about ฿600 (according to Mr. Ngao) after all the bargaining has been finished. Mr. Ngao said that girls like to marry for love, their fathers like them to marry someone wealthy who will bring a good bride price and young men like to marry a girl who has a good inheritance. Apparently, according to Ngao it is often the girls who lose out in the deal — particularly in a conflict of interest with their fathers.

Physical attractiveness plays a role in marriage choices. An ugly person with some outstanding physical deformity will find it difficult to find a mate — e.g., Mr. Hỗ's son (who has buck teeth and "likes to be dirty") and the tall sister of Mr. Phā. But beauty isn't everything, for if a beautiful girl comes from a poor family, she will still have a difficult time to get married, e.g., the girl with the illegitimate child by the son of Mr. Tāp.

Bun Cut Prathīp

We also discovered the ceremony of *Bun cut pra thīp* (บุญจุดประทีป) which is held on *wan'ōk phansā* and for two subsequent nights. At this time the priests will make little colored containers with candles which they then take and holding up in a worshipful position will say

that they worship the three jewels of Buddhism and then request the Buddha bring wealth, happiness, freedom from disease, etc. Then they place the containers on top of a banana stalk.

Mr. Ngao's Granary

Mr. Ngao has bought a granary from Bān Dōn Dū. This granary is over a hundred year's old (at least the main frame is) and was torn down intact so that it could be rebuilt here. He paid ฿1,100 for this granary. He also bought a smaller one which he will erect for his mother-in-law.

That one cost ฿500. He bought these granaries from people who are moving away from Bān Dōn Dū. He bought the big granary so that he will be able to buy rice when it is at its cheapest (30-40 st./kg.) and be able to sell it when it is at its highest price.

Attitudes Toward the Headman

There is some feeling in the village that Mr. Phon is not as good a head man as he might be. This is a result of his not knowing quite what to do. He has not pushed for development—roads, etc.—in certain areas where he ought and when it comes to things concerning religion, since he has never been a monk, he is often at a loss as to the right thing to do. On the other hand, his brother Mr. Hōm is much more capable and has taken charge of many things. Mr. Ngao says that many people feel that Mr. Hōm ought to be the next headman and he is very popular. He has been now accorded, *de facto*, the title of *phūchuai* ("assistant") but Mr. Chāi, the 1st assistant headman, is also well liked though probably not as capable as Hōm.

Village Blacksmiths

The three blacksmiths in the village นายตาบ (Mr. Tāp), KY; นายดี (Mr. Dī), KW; นายม้า (Mr. Mā), KY.

Bān Nông Tūn

December 10, 1963

Miscellaneous

This morning several men — relatives of the Ngao-Hōm families — came to help prepare things for erecting the new granary. For their help, they received liquor and food. This group

worked all day on getting the posts ready to use. About 3 p.m. they helped chop down a big sugar palm in the place where the granary will be built. The heart of the sugar palm (ยอดตาล) *yôt tăn*) which is taken from the crown of the tree was chopped out and will be used to make a *kāēng* similar to *kāēng nōmāi*. The very heart we ate and it was a sweet substance similar to artichoke heart. We felt as though we were partaking of a delicacy very few people including Thais (this was the 1st time Mr. Ngao had ever eaten it) have ever tasted.

Băn Nông Tũn

December 12, 1963

Building a New Granary

This morning beginning at about 7 a.m. "friends and relatives" began to come to help build the new granary. Included were people from all khums and even from Băn Dôn Mākya. It was quite something to see these men construct a building without using any of the tools and aids a carpenter in the West would think necessary. For example, they use a rather ingenious level. From the middle of a string held taut by two men between the two points across which one wants the level tested another string with a weight on it is suspended. Then a man pours water on the first string. If the water runs straight down the string with the weight on it (i.e., it does not leave the string at some point on the weighted string) , then the level is correct.

This erection of the granary was an example of ลุงแขก / ขอแรง (*long khāēk/khō rāēng*) or in Lao, ງານ (*wān*). The men who helped were repaid by locally-made rice wine, tobacco and a feast at midday. While the men were working, the females (and a few males who enjoy cooking or who had to kill and clean chickens) made the food. A truly good example of traditional cooperative labor.

Bangkok, Mahasarakham

December 13, 1963 to January 10, 1964

Involved in going to Bangkok to meet Professor Skinner, preparing for parents' visit, taking them around up here and in Bangkok, and in staying a few days in Bangkok.

On the 26th of December my parents, my sister, and my Aunt Vivian spent the day in the village. This was a great day for the village and the villagers went all out to make my family feel at home. We flew the huge kite which Mr. Ngao and the priest had made.

13 December 1963 (Notes added later)

Left for Bangkok

14 Dec.

Bangkok

15 Dec.

Bangkok: Met with Prof. Skinner.

16 Dec.

Bangkok: Met Skinner again.

17 Dec.

MK?

18 Dec.

MK

Maharakham

December 19, 1963

Interview with Bunchuai Attakorn, Lord Mayor, Maharakham

System of government at the time of *caw müang*.

The following information is somewhat uncertain as to dating, and dates need to be clarified, but as I understood Mr. Bunchuai, there was the following system:

I. A system of three levels of *muang*: *ṭēk*, *thō*, *trī*. The latter two were under the former.

However, tributes from all three were sent directly to Bangkok and there seems to have been no real authority exerted over 'the lower level muang by a *müang ēk*. The decision on choosing a new *caw müang* was invested in the king alone, and the *caw müang* of a *müang ēk* had no influence on the decision of the new *caw müang* of a lower muang.

II. In the fifth Reign the *monthon* system was established with two *monthons* in the Northeast: Isan centered on Udorn, and Ubon. Maharakham was in Monthon Isan though I think that it had been in both at one time. With this system, fourth type of *müang* was established – the *müang luang* - in which resided a member of the Thai royal family who served as the overseer for all the *müang* under him.

III. In 2465-2475 a new system of *monthon* was founded in which Roi-et was made a *monthon* and Mahasarakham, Kalasin and Roi Et were placed under Monthon Roi-et.

IV. In 2475 after the *coup d'état* and the overthrow of absolute monarchy a system of changwat and amphoe were established and the system of *caw müang* was eliminated. However, as Bunchuai pointed out, at this time many who were *caw müang* were made governors and *nāi amphoe*.

Bunchuai Attakorn - System of Choosing a New *Caw müang*

The system of choosing a new *caw müang* paralleled the system of choosing a new king. The *kromkammakānmüang* - a sort of *müang* privy council would meet and decide upon a name of a person to recommend to the king. This person could be the brother, the son or even a nephew or son-in-law (often the one and the same - see below), but the preference was for the former two. This name would be sent to the king and would subsequently be confirmed in his position. There were no intervening stages - in other words, *müang* of the lowest rank still sent their names to be confirmed by the king and did not have to pass the inspection of a *caw müang* of a higher rank.

Mahasarakham

The *caw müang* of Mahasarakham had underneath him the *caw müang* of Wapipathum and Kosumphisai. Boribue was not a *müang* as was not Chienyün. Phayakkhaphumphisai was taken from *müang* Surin in 2475 and made an amphoe of Mahasarakham. Kantharawichai was taken from Kalasin in a similar way.

Preferential First Cousin Marriage among Elite

Bunchuai says that there was preferential first cousin marriage for the families of the *caw müang*. There was however no preference for matrilineal or patrilineal, cross or parallel cousins and no prohibitions against any of these.

Tribute and Declaring of Obeissance to King

The tribute which is sent to the King in Bangkok is called in Thai *songsuai* (ส่งส่วย), *songsuaisā?ākron* (ส่งส่วยสาอากร), *khriiangbankān* (เครื่องบรรณาการ). This was sent once a year to the king. Bunchuai says that since Mahasarakham was a poor province it sent no wealth or money (such as Chiangmai which sent gold and teak). The most important element in the tribute from Mahasarakham was a fruit known as *phonrēw* (พลเรือ). Also included were certain other produce which was particularly grown in the area. This tribute was sent during the first five reigns. After that, a sort of monetary tax had to be collected and tribute became in essence a tax.

The *caw müang* originally had to go to BK once or twice a year, but after the fifth reign there was no such requirement. However, upon the death of the old king, the *caw müang* had to go to be present for the coronation of the new king and to swear allegiance (ถือ

น้ำพระพิพัฒน์สัตยา). [Literally "to drink oath at allegiance"]

Markets in Mahasarakham

To the knowledge of Mr. Bunchuai, there had never been a system of periodic (other than daily) markets in the area. The market system which seemed to exist here which he knew about went like this:

- B.E. 2455 The market was transferred from the corner on which Mr. Cheunchai's ancestors had their store to the place where the market now exists. At this time, the fresh market only met for a few hours in the morning, but met daily.
- B.E. 2483 The market (fresh) changed its system to meeting for a few hours in the morning to meeting for a few hours in the morning and for a few hours in the afternoon.
- B.E. 2502 The market (fresh) became an all day affair, though one still can't get things in the afternoon; the market is open all day long.

Mahasarakham, Bangkok

December 20 – 31, 1963

20 Dec.

MK

21 Dec.

MK

22 Dec.

Left MK for Bangkok (Jane in MK).

23 Dec.

Bangkok: Parents, Marilyn, Vivian arrived.

24 Dec.

Traveled with relatives to MK.

25 Dec.

Christmas with family in MK.

26 December 1963

Took family to BNT, return to MK.

27 December 1963

28 Dec.

29 Dec.

30 Dec.

31 Dec.