

Charles F. Keyes, Field Notebooks, Thailand

November 1 through November 30, 1963.

Field notes in this document were primarily written in Mahasarakham (Changwat Maha Sarakham), Thailand. Some notes were written in Mukdaharn (now Changwat Mukdahan) and other locations in the NE of Thailand. This document is preceded by field notes written in Mahasarakham in October 1963. This document is followed by notes written in December 1963.

Bān Nōng Tūn

November 1, 1963

Liang phra by a Family

This morning being *wan phra*, Jane went with Nuan and Duan (as representatives of two families) to *liang phra*. When they reached the wat, there were very few people. Food was carried on trays. At the *kuthi* the rice was divided into three parts: (1) the biggest portion, of course, was reserved for putting in the *bāt* of the monks; (2) a small portion was placed in what looks like an upturned basket, or stool, and this was for the *phīlōk* (ผีหลอก); and (3) some was kept to be placed in the *thāt* of some ancestors after the priest had finished.

As there were no men present at the wat, the "precepts" (*sin*) could not be "requested" and only the *hai phon* and *truat nām* were chanted by the priests. When the priests had eaten and finished chanting, the plates (empty) were returned to the donors and they went to place food on the *thāt*. There was no sermon.

In this case, the *thāt* on which Nuan and Duan (as representatives of their families) and Jane placed offerings included Mother Hōm's younger sister (น้องสาวแม่), Mother Hōm's younger brother (น้องชายแม่), Mother Hōm's parents — single *thāt* (พ่อยาย and แม่ยาย), plus on two other *thāt* of "just other people." There is no *thāt* for Mother Hōm's husband. Apparently, not the same *thāt* are given food each time, and it should be enquired as to what *thāt* are so honored and when are some and when other.

In Nuan's two families — her mother's and husband's — both make a point of feeding the priests only on *wan phra* unless there is some special occasion.

To Mahasarakham

Lōi krathong

This evening we went to a *Lōi krathong* in Mahasarakham. At this festival, a contest was held between various schools to make the prettiest float. Present were officials from the town government and priest to judge the results. It is interesting that this ceremony which is so important in the Central Plains is hardly celebrated in villages in the N.E. However, I think that it is not indigenous but is an import from the C.P. At the ceremony several young N.E.'ers were insistent on pointing out that this was a "Buddhist" custom.

Children

I have noticed that children often have a topknot — a puff of hair in the foreskull which is called *ñó:m* (Lao). I have sometimes wondered if this is associated with the tonsure ceremony that used to be held in the C.P. I asked Nin about this and he said that this is just the style for children. Also, have noticed that some young children have heads completely shaved, and some have full heads of hair.

Monks

The priests went by today on their way to bathe in the *huai*.

Weaning

I asked Mr. Ngao how old children are usually when they are weaned. He discussed this subject with a man and woman both of whom have had children. The consensus was that usually a child is weaned when a new child is born. However, if there is no child, then it may not be weaned until it is 5 or 6 years old. However, a usual age for weaning is about 3. There doesn't seem to be any compulsion about weaning except if a new child comes. A child is simply given the breast until he no longer wants it.

Linguistic Indicatives of Age Status

In Lao infant children from birth to a few years in age are called *dek nōi*. According to Mother Hôm, people can begin using the word *māē* (112') for women when a woman is 30 years old. After marriage and having infant children, old women are called *māē yai*.

Mahasarakham

November 2 - 3, 1963

2 November 1963

Mahasarakham (Notes added later.)

3 Nov.

MK.

Mahasarakham

November 3, 1963

Today, Jane and I were out to the Teacher's College where Jane had a lesson from Mrs. Cheunphit on Thai cooking and I had a long talk with Mrs. Cheunphit's husband. He is a descendent of the old *caw muang* of Kalasin and knows quite a bit about local customs and history. I was asking him about what language he uses normally, and he said that he is completely bilingual in Thai and Lao but personally uses Lao *en famille*. However, he said that many officials like to use Thai in the family so that the children will grow up speaking correct Thai.

This little fact made me realize that there are two basic types of officials in the Northeast: (1) indigenous and (2) non-indigenous (sent usually from Bangkok). The former are again divisible into two varieties: (a) those descended from the old nobility and bureaucratic families and (b) those from village or near-village backgrounds who have recently moved upward socially. Of these groups, (1b) retain the most Lao customs and are more Lao than Thai. They are usually only in the lower echelons of the bureaucracy (Mr. Wichian would be one of the higher up of this type). (2) are the most Thai and with very little knowledge of Lao ways and practices. They are usually high echelon officials and upper middle echelon - the governor, the Nai Amphoe, etc. Finally, (1a) are in between being bilingual and to more extent bicultural with a tendency towards the Thai. This group is also found among the middle and upper echelon officials - the Lord Mayor, Mrs. Cheunphit's husband, etc. Some like the Lord Mayor's brothers, Bunchana, and Bunthin, enter into the national elite.

Bān Nông Tūn

November 5, 1963

Religion

I asked Mr. Ngao today if there is any set program for feeding the priests—i.e., is there an arrangement whereby some people (or *khum*) is in charge of feeding the priests on particular days. He replied that there was no plan. Who then feeds the priests if no one comes?, I asked. He

said that the parents go every day to feed the priests or at least to make certain that they are fed. Usually, older people are more likely to feed the priests.

Personal Ornamentation

Village women wear earrings made of gold and shaped as follows:



I have noticed that gold or silver bracelets and anklets are sometimes worn by infant children but rarely by anyone else.

Harvesting

Mr. Ngao said that the main crop of rice is called *khāw yai*. This rice, according to Mr. Phon, is harvested in the 1st month of the lunar calendar. There is a faster growing rice which is currently being harvested by some people. This rice doesn't have as high a yield as the slower maturing rice. Ngao stressed that those who are now harvesting are those who are especially in need of food—who *'ot māk*. Ngao added that Mr. Hô who currently has lots of rice will not begin harvesting until January or February when the ears are fuller. The early rice called *khāw dō*(Lao).

Mr. Ngao said that there are no ceremonies at first harvest — no "first fruits" ceremonies. No feeding of field spirits. When the harvest is complete, then will be a *liang phī* ceremony.

Black rice is grown in very small quantities (about 1-2 *thangs*) and is used only for making *khanom*.

Language

Mother Hôm was pointing out that in B. Khôk Nôi, they say *māyūtia* instead of *māyūtua*. She pointed this out as something very amusing that the dialect there was a bit different.

Maharakham

November 6-7, 1963

6 November 1963

To Maharakham

7 November, 1963

Maharakham

Temporary Migration

In analyzing the effects of personal experience in work in major urban centers on the village's relationships to the national society, it is not necessary to have any more structured interviewing with those who have participated in periodic urban employment. I already have information on who has worked, where they have worked, for how long a period they have worked, and at what they were employed. For the content of this experience, I need only consult my notes on unstructured interviewing (with such people as Mr. Som and Mr. Phā). Also, should use Textor's From Peasant to Pedicab Driver for a greater elaboration of the Northeasterner's experience in Bangkok than I could get in interviewing those who are now in the village.

There seems to be several types of "effects" which the periodic work abroad has on the individual.

(1) The person views it as a "sowing of wild oats" period - an opportunity to have a big blow out before returning to the village to get married and settle down in the traditional patterns.

Such a person would make no effort to save any money, but would spend it mostly on *sanuk* activities: girls, drinking, cinema, etc. These people return to the village after having an insight into the sparkle and glamour of the big city. Mostly, they feel that they do not want to return to the city because life there is too hectic, too expensive, too impersonal. There are a few, however, like Mr. Pha who is thoroughly enchanted with big city life that he is bored with the staid and traditional patterns of the village. He prefers the impersonality of the big city where he can go out with any number of girls without scandal of the village and be a "playboy" if only a minor scale.

It should be pointed out that this first type, in both of the subtypes, applies only to men.
(2) This person views the urban experiences as one in which he can acquire more capital than he could ever have staying in the village. Again there are two subtypes: The first is one who has very little property and capital goods within the village and therefore feels that he must earn

money outside the village in order to supplement his meager income within the village setting. Mr. Som is typical of this subtype in that he spends half the year in Bangkok and half the year in BNT.

The second subtype is the one who wishes to gain enough capital to break the traditional bounds of being a rice farmer, but who nonetheless wishes to still reside within the Northeastern village tradition. Mr. Ngao would be a good example of this type. It should be pointed out that this subtype is rare because the motivation for breaking ones traditional role is lacking in most cases. In fact, it would be considered almost un-Thai (or un-Lao) to be motivated by such desires as they are considered by the Thai and Thai-Lao to be typical of Chinese and Vietnamese but not of ones own. Again this type in both of its subtypes applies only to men.

(3) Finally, there are those who consider that living in the urban environment provided them with an opportunity for social mobility- This type considers that urban residence will be a permanent thing and they are willing to sever ties with the village. For men, this type appears only rarely as most men who go out of the village for urban employment will ultimately return to the village. The women who leave the village are almost always of this type, however. The reason for this, it seems to me, is that for the woman to leave the village at all is already a major step along the way towards severing relations with the village. Thus, once this step has been made, there is less motivation to return to the village. Secondly, in the traditional setting, women are more likely to marry downwards socially. This follows because the women are the inheritors of property and therefore a man with less property is desirous of marrying a woman who will inherit a good property. Thus, women at the lower end of the social ladder are in danger not of remaining spinsters but of having a mate who is not necessarily the most desirable to her socially. Therefore, such women may consider that taking urban employment will increase their chances of finding a better mate. And if she does marry outside the village into the urban setting, the pattern of matrilocal residence is less likely to hold - particularly if she will inherit very little property anyway.

What then do these three types imply for the relationship between the village and the national society? For those who have taken urban employment and then returned to the village on a permanent or semi-permanent basis (types Ia, and IIa and IIb), they will bring back impressions of the urban environment which they will be able to broadcast throughout the village. These impressions have the following effects: (1) they reinforce the pattern of periodic

migration among young people (particularly among young men) who feel that they too would like their go at employment in an urban center. (2) They give the villagers an opportunity to compare urban life with village life and further to give them an opportunity to compare village life with urban Thai life and urban Lao life. (3) They increase the knowledge which the villagers have of events in the national centers of Bangkok and Vientiane and to a lesser extent urban centers in town of Northeast Thailand.

To examine this connection between nation and village in terms of our communication model, we can say that individuals who go to work in urban centers provide a "personal channel" between village and nation. These individuals go to urban centers - usually those which are capitals of either Thailand or Laos and then come back to village to carry information about these urban centers to those still in the village. The channels, in this case, have a "semantic noise" which is caused by the limitations on the experience of the individual - in other words these individuals are only going to experience certain facets of urban and national life and found in the national capitals. "Semantic noise" also occurs in the interpretations given on these impressions by the individual himself. Maybe, I am wrong; maybe the first type "semantic noise" isn't really a "channel noise" at all because it occurs before the information really enters the channel. However, though these biases exist, it should be pointed out that these biases in themselves are structured and therefore can be analyzed as though they are not random. The structuring comes about for several reasons: (1) As there is a pattern of periodic migration to urban centers, those who now go to the urban centers usually follow the same patterns. There are admittedly several patterns to follow dependent upon what sort of employment the individual wishes to follow. However these different employments are a function of the "northeastern contacts" which already exist. Very few Northeasterners strike out on their own, but usually follow the trade which others from their own community or nearby communities have already followed. This appears in my data on what jobs were followed by people from the village. The type of job is roughly limited by whether the individual plans to spend only a part of the year in the urban center or whether he will be willing to spend one or more years without break. Those who only spend a part of the year in the city will usually end up in some non-skilled job like construction (streets in Bangkok are full of these Northeasterners who are down for a short time) or cutting firewood (a job usually followed by those who go to Vientiane). Those who are willing to spend a longer period of time find jobs of a semi-skilled and occasionally skilled

nature. These people work at factory work (such as a Chinese biscuit company) or driving vehicles, etc.

Because of these structured nature of types of employment, because of the structured nature of types of personal contacts in the urban environment (usually the individual associates only with Northeasterners from near his own community), the types of impressions brought back to the village are likely to be similar for those given the limited social world in which he operates.

Also, the interpretations on the impressions of those working in the urban centers are likely to be similar because the basic background of all going to the urban center is the same. Thus, though the "information" transmitted along this "personal channel" is subject to the limitations of the sources of information and to the "Semantic noise" of personal interpretations, both these factors are to some extent predictable variables.

Daily Life Activities in a Thai-Lao Village

4:30 - 5:30 A.M.

Arise. The time of arising depends on the season. In the hot season, the people may arise earlier, whereas in the cold season when the temperature may be in the mid 50's or 60's in the morning hours from 4-6, people may wait to arise until later. Bathing.

5:30 - 7:30 A.M.

Rice milling by the women. This is done traditionally by using the mortar and pestle, but some will bring their rice to the rice mill for milling. The women also will get the fire going as soon as they finish milling (or if their daughters are milling, will get the fire going at the same time) - At this time they will make the food for the priests (if any is to be made) for monks' food must always be freshly prepared and the food is used both for the morning and noon meals. Usually, this means only the cooking of rice, for rarely is any *kap khaw* other than *kāēw* (a mixture of fermented fish and peppers with possibly some lemon added) for the first two meals of the day. Neither of these meals will be eaten hot.

Also at this time, the pigs, chickens, and ducks will be fed.

In my experience, the men really don't do too much during this period unless it is harrowing or plowing time when they like to be in the fields in the cool of the morning when the

sun is not beating down upon them directly. The same is true during planting time when both men and women will go to the field at this time.

7:30 - 10:00 A.M.

Begin economic activities of the day. This will mean working in the fields if it is during times when such work is demanded. Other times of the year, the men will begin working on bamboo matting, basketry, blacksmithing, repairing of equipment, etc. The women will, if not working in the fields, be engaged in something to do with cloth making (spinning, ginning, weaving, etc.) or else will be out in the forests or fields gathering small animals (insects, frogs, small fish) leaves, firewood, or mushrooms. Children in about the 7-15 age group will first take the bigger animals out to pasture and then will eat breakfast on their own and then go off to school at 8-9.

10:00 - 10:30 A.M.

Breakfast. If the family is working in the fields, or the men have gone fishing, they will take their food with them. Often the family will eat both breakfast and lunch in different places and at different times – the children before they go to school, the women and younger children and older girls at home, and the older boys and men where they are fishing.

10:30 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.

Continuation of economic activities by the men, women and older siblings. School children are free from 11:30 - 12:30 during which they will eat lunch. The younger children will be free to play either in the place where their parents are or amongst themselves. Sometimes baths are taken at this time.

2:00 - 3:00 P.M.

Lunch for the majority of the family (wherever they are - that is wherever the economic activities has them). Also, this is sort of a rest period and I have often found people resting in their houses, in their field houses, or in shaded areas during this the hottest part of the day.

3:00 - 6:00 P.M.

Completion of economic activities for the majority of the family. The men will come home from fishing, or will go out and carry back the firewood which is too heavy for their wives to carry. The women will cease their cloth-making or work in the fields. School children are free from school at 3:30 and will then go out about 5:00 to bring the animals back from pasturing. Young women and older girls will go to fetch water at this time and everyone will bathe.

6:00 -7:30 P.M.

During this time the women will prepare food. Any extra rice that is needed will be milled. The men generally take it easy during this time and may drink *sātō* or sit around conversing with their friends.

7:30 – 8:00 P.M.

The whole family will sit down together for a meal.

8:00 P.M. - 10:00 P.M.

This is the time for entertainment. It is the time when the young swains go out to serenade their girl friends or go to listen to *mōlammū* on the radio. It is the time when the men will gamble or will drink more if they are heavy drinkers. It is the time when any special entertainment is held. Some economic activities may be engaged in - such as weaving of nets, the repair of equipment, etc. - but except for those few who have pressure lamps, the light simply isn't good enough for such work. The older members of the family and the youngest usually go to bed between 8:30 and 9. By 10 there is hardly a noise to hear in the village other than the dogs, the birds, and the cattle.

NOTE: In reality it is very hard to write a schedule for daily activities for a Thai-Lao village for several reasons: (1) in the minds of the villagers themselves there is no pressure to stick to an exacting schedule. Flexibility of schedule, freedom to determine what one wishes to do at a time when one wishes to do it, is a feature which villagers point out when contrasting their lives with lives of people in the towns. (2) The schedule varies according to the time of the year both because of the differences in economic activities during different parts of the year and because of

the climatic conditions which vary from season to season. (3) There are in reality different schedules followed according to whether one is a married man with a family, a young man, woman (young or old), a school child, a young child, to say nothing of being a priest which I haven't even tried to take into account. Nonetheless, the above schedule tries to indicate in general terms the way in which villagers in a Thai-Lao divide up their activities in daily life.

KIN-ROLE RELATIONSHIPS IN A THAI-LAO VILLAGE

A.1. Parent-child; child-parent

In general, the parent-child; child-parent relationships are characterized by warmth in the early years of a child's life and emphasis on independence after this initial stage. It is a cliché that "Thai love children", but this is true in a general sense. In the village, one finds that all adults are friendly toward children, but often, the parents are no warmer than any random individual in the village. After the first, few years, children are turned over to elder siblings for supervision and this relationship tends to usurp many of the characteristics thought to be inherent in the parent-child, child-parent relationships in America. Parents are quite willing, and often do "give their children away" to grandparents, to childless relatives, to uncle and aunts for rearing if they feel that they have too many children or there is some job or opportunity which necessitates the parents leaving the village. Thus, in general, the real or potential possibility of the child being raised by other than his own parents, the extension of parental affection throughout a wider number of adults, and the fact that authority and example often rests in elder siblings rather than in the parents makes for greater independence of the child from the parents at an earlier stage than in Western culture. Inversely, these same characteristics means that the parents can free themselves of parental responsibility if something arise which means breaking up the family.

The father-son, son-father relationships are in part characterized by the father being a teacher of traditional patterns and the son being the student of these same patterns. However, such a relationship is broadened beyond the strictly father-son, son-father roles. For example, in fishing, there is most usually a group of men who will be fishing in a specific hole at one time. A son thus is not strictly in the charge of the parent and may learn the fishing role by observing any adult male present. Similarly, for other things such as bamboo wall weaving, for basket making, etc. In fact, a father may prefer that his son observe someone who is more competent at these tasks he himself is. However, in economic terms, the son must be an assistant to his father. Thus,

if he actually participates in fishing, it will be with his father similarly for activities connected with rice growing, and any other economic activities.

A son has a responsibility to learn the economic skills which contribute to the well-being to the family, and it is to his father that he will first turn for example and for teaching. Similarly, the father has a responsibility to impart these skills.

Though the son will eventually marry out of his own family and go to live with his wife's parents and become a part of that economic unit, it is the duty of the father to teach his son well so that he may prove to be an asset to the family of his wife and therefore enhance the possibilities of a successful and satisfactory marriage.

The father-daughter, daughter-father relationships are very similar to that of employer-servant, servant-employer. A daughter has a responsibility to see after her father's well-being and must help her mother in providing food, clothing, etc. for her father. In later life, at least the last daughter will have the responsibility looking after her father in his old age. In return, the father has a responsibility to take care of his daughter's inheritance (for they will inherit the land and property) and to see that each of his daughters get a just inheritance. In a sense, the father looks at his daughter as the recipient of the family unit, the continuity of the family.

In turn, the daughter views her father as the "temporary" protector and utilize of the family property which will eventually become hers, though then superintended by her husband.

Mahasarakham, Bān Nōng Tūn

November 8 - 9, 1963

8 November 1963 (Notes added later.)

Mahasarakham: Tom Kirsch & friends from B. Nōng Sūg arrive.

9 November 1963

MK: Took Tom to visit BNT & *Kū*

Bān Nōng Tūn

November 10, 1963

For the past two and a half days, Tom Kirsch and some Thai friends of his from his Phū Thai village. Yesterday Tom and I came to BNT. There were a number of miscellaneous things that I found out.

On our tour of the village we saw some people harvesting *khāw dō* in Khum Lao. Tom noted that in his village regular rice harvesting has been underway for two or more weeks and that the rice looked fuller in his village.

We ran into a number of people seated in the open space in front of the barber's house. Included amongst them was a man from the Highway Department Camp in Bān Khwaw. He was acting as a *môdū*, using a book published in Bangkok. Also, the head teacher from Bān Mī was over with some books on astrology. It seems that he is a *môdu* also. Mr. Thōng Duan, this teacher, comes from Nongkhai and has many relatives who live in Laos.

Monday (*wan lāēm 10_Kham, dūan 12*) is to be a day of marriages. Included will be the son of Mr. Sôn in KNKN.

We learned that today the Lord Mayor of Mahasarakham will go make an ordinary *thambun* in Bān Dōn Dū where he will present a *thammat* — a place where a priest gives his sermons.

Kathin:

In discussing *kathin* with Mr. Thōng Duan, he said that the *cunla kathin* (จูลกฐิน) is known in Lao as *kathin lāēn* (กฐิน เล่น) Last evening in discussing this "little *kathin*" with Mr.

Chunchai, he said that this ceremony used to be more popular than now and was usually held on the last day of the *kathin* period. In this ceremony only robes are given as the *kathin* gifts and are ginned from raw cotton, spun, woven and dyed all in one day. Mr. Ngao said that young boys (*phū bāw*) liked to torment and tease the girls who were making the cloth in order to keep them from completing the robes on time.

Mr. Chunchai emphasized that the robes are the only proper *kathin* gifts and that everything else is *boriwān*. He had never heard of *mai thāw lek* and thought that it was Northeastern. He also had no other explanation for the "brooms" other than they were "for the priests to sweep the wat" and were an old local custom. He said that the period of *kathin* — the 30 days following *ōk phansā* — is called หมัดเขตกฐิน (*mot khēt kathin*).

Lōi krathong

I asked Mr. Chunchai if *Lōi krathong* is traditional in the Northeast and in Laos. He answered that it wasn't, but that there is a Lao ceremony similar to it called *cut prathīp* (จุดประทิว : *cut* - 'to light'(fire); *prathīp* - 'lamp'). The "lamps" were prepared by first staking an oil by squashing kapok seeds in a cotton gin and then placing this oil in the shells of a local woody fruit. The oil was set on fire and the "lamps" were floated. He said that this custom was held in olden times, but is not much held now.

Lōi krathong has only had this name (and presumably this form) in the Chakri era. Before then it was known as *ngān noppamāt* (งานนพมาศ).

Calendar

In Thai even-numbered months are called *düan khū* and odd-numbered months are called *düan khī* (เดือนคู่; เดือนคี่).

Kū

Yesterday, I took Tom Kirsch to visit BNT and the *Kū* and I began to think about Cambodian (Khmer) influences which still persist in this culture. It seems to me that the ceremony held annually might be of this order. I am led to this hypothesis on the basis of several things I have observed:

- 1) At the *Kū* there are two bases for Siva lingams.
- 2) The two *thēwarūp* found at the K: both appear to have phallic overtones.
- 3) The ceremony held at the *Kū* is similar to the *bōngfai* ceremony in that the concerns seem to be with the "worshipping" of the gods (especially by sending up rockets) in order that they will send water for the benefit of the crops. In addition the dancing and the by-play at the ceremony is definitely of a sexual nature.

From the first two of these I would hazard a guess that the *Kū* was dedicated to Siva and that the emphasis of the shrine was on fertility. From the third point, it is obvious that the rite now held annually before the beginning of the rainy season (and rice planting) is also a fertility rite. Thus, my hypothesis is that the annual festival at the *Kū* is directly descendent from annual

fertility rites held in Khmer times at the Kū and that some of the practices now in current observance are similar to the types of things that occurred in Khmer times.

This led me on to think that the *bôngfai* ceremony itself is most likely originally a Khmer rite but now which has Lao interpretations. One reason for this idea, other than the above remarks is that the legend of the origin of the *bôngfai* ceremony (the story of Pha Daeng Nang Ai), mention is made of the "towns" of Chiang Hian and Si Kaew. The first of these is now a village in Tambon Khwaw, Mahasarakham and the second is a village in Roi-et. Both of these "towns" I would guess were formerly Khmer outposts.

In order to get more evidence of this sort of thing, I would examine Cambodian materials to see if there is anything of the sort of ceremony like the *bôngfai* still celebrated there. I should also read the *môlam* play on the legend of the origin of the *bôngfai*.

Bān Nōng Tūn

November 11, 1963

Kān Cut Prathīp

I mentioned the *cut prathīp* which I had heard about from Mr. Chunchai to Mr. Ngao today and he said that these existed even today and had been made at the time of 'ōk *phansā* priests. Apparently, they weren't quite the same as what Mr. Chunchai had described.

Villagers' Attitudes Towards That Phanom

Tom's visit has given rise to considerable discussion about visiting *that phanom*. Mr. Ngao is trying to organize a group to go *wai thāt* (ไหว้ธาตุ) at the big ceremony in the 3rd Lunar Month. Apparently, from the discussion at the house of Mr. Sôn this morning, no one from BNT has gone before, though everyone knew of the large festival held there. Mr. Ngao said that he has heard people say that before the *thāt* was built, people used to come to the kū in B. Khwaw for the big ceremony, but he wasn't certain whether this was true or not.

Wedding

Today is an auspicious day (*wan lāēm 10 kham, duan 12*) for marriages and there were two people from BNT (both from KNKN) who got married (both to people in B. Yang). The information on these weddings is as follows:

I. Bridē Nāng Mī Sētraksā (นางมี เสรษรักษา) from KNKN age 22

Groom: นายพูน (Nāi Phun) from B. Yāng บ. ยาง age 23

Bride price: ฿576

II. Groom: Nāi Chū Sētraksā (นายชู เสรษรักษา) from KNKN age 26

Bridē Nāng Thōngsai (นางทองใส) B. Yāng age 20

Bride Price: ฿526

We attended the wedding of Nāi Chū - one of the twin sons of Nāi Sôn Sētraksā. This young man has been married before and has a child by his first wife. We asked Mr. Ngao why he broke up with his first wife. He answered that he wasn't certain but that he had heard the Chū liked to have intercourse 5-6 times a night and his wife thought that this was a little excessive. Mr. Ngao also said that he heard that the new wife, though never married before, was pretty free with her charms. She apparently got pregnant once and took some kind of medicine to induce abortion.

At the house of Mr. Sôn, we were given a breakfast of *lāp wua* (both *dīp* and *suk*) and *kāēng kai*. Mr. Ngao was keeping the records of how much each person was donating. I noticed that there were fewer guests than usual. Mr. Ngao explained this as because Nāi Chū had been married before. At a wedding here only people who are invited by the host go to a wedding. This was symbolized by Mr. Sôn's special invitation for us. Each guest, however, has an obligation to give a monetary gift—either outright or at one of the two *sūkhwan* ceremonies that are held in conjunction with the marriage. The size of the gift will depend on one's status vis-a-vis the persons getting married. If one is a close friend or relative, then more money is given. The usual donation is one or two baht. The highest donations will come from the immediate families of the bride and groom.

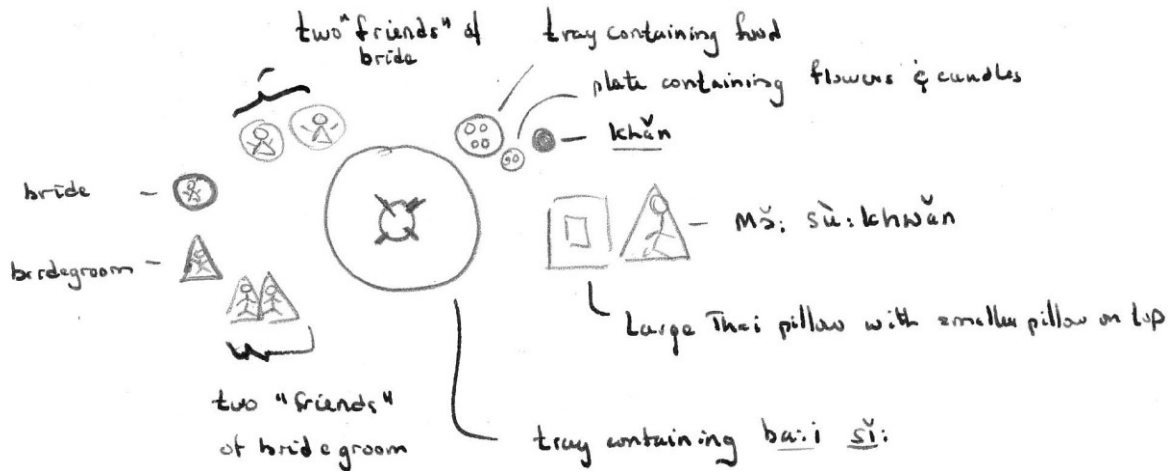
In this case because there were only two weddings in the village, the brother (twin) and a close friend of the groom went and bought beef for the food.

There had been a *sūkhwan nôl* ceremony at the house of Mr. Sôn before we arrived. The pattern of the ceremony was the same as described before, but I will again put down some details which I observed.

Mô_sīhā was the *môsūkhwan* in charge of supervising this wedding. When the party was ready to make the procession to B. Yāng, he had Nāi Chū crouch at the bottom of the stairs of his house. He held flowers and candles in a worshipping position (the *wai* position) and repeated after the shaman in formal language, concerning respect for his family, etc. Then he *wai*ed the house and turned around and *wai*ed his father who was standing behind him. Then he placed the flowers and candles on a lower rung of the stairway. Then the procession made its way to B. Yāng and the bride's house. There, a similar ceremony was repeated at the bottom of the stairs. Then the bridegroom stood on the banana leaf and stone on which he was to have his feet washed. *Môsīhā* gave him some injunctions of some kind and then a woman came and washed his feet.

The physical properties of the *sūkhwan* ceremony included the following. On a white piece of cloth was placed a circular stand (about 4" in height), a large cushion with a small cushion on top of it, a tray of food, a plate containing candles and flowers tied together, and a water scoop. On the tray was placed another white piece of cloth and on top of this was placed a large *khan* probably made of brass. Inside the *khan* were placed 4 small *bāi sī* made of banana leaves and flowers, leaves around the outside, homemade candles, skeins of cotton thread, a hard boiled chicken egg, a ball of cooked glutinous rice, and a bottle partially filled with *sātō*. In the lip of the bottle was placed the ingredients for a chew of betel, rolled up in a leaf and two flowers.

The arrangement of participants and properties is indicated by the following diagram:



First, in the ceremony, two long homemade candles were lit and attached to the *bāi sī* container. Then, the *mô sūkhwan* started to chant some Pali Buddhist phrases. The participants, the bride and groom and their two friends each placed the tips of their right hands on the tray holding the *bāisi*. The hands were palm down. The bride and groom both had white cloths over their shoulders, and all the other participants had cloths over their shoulders. During this chanting a skein of string (white cotton) into which had been tied a *khawtôm* and a baht note was tied to the arm of the *môsukhwan*. This Mr. Ngao explains as something the *caw phāp* must do for the *môsuat*.

Two older women also with white cloth over their shoulder came up and sat behind the bride and groom. They periodically wiped the faces of the bride and groom free of perspiration.

After one section of chanting was done, the *mô* took the bottle of *sātō* and poured some liquor into a *khan*. The participants changed hand positions by turning palms upward—this time male's left hand and female's right. The *mô* then took two flowers and while continuing chanting stirred these flowers in the liquor and sprinkled the liquid on the upturned palms. The egg, rice, and two skeins of cotton were taken by another person from the *bāi sī* tray. On the hand of the groom was laid the rice, egg, and a baht note. A skein of cotton was laid across the wrist of both bride and groom.

When the *mô* stopped chanting, people came up and tied the *phūk khāēn*. Then the egg was taken and broken open and a piece was taken from it and handed to one of the women. The woman took some of the cooked rice and made two balls of egg and rice and placed them in the bride and groom's mouths.

When the tying of the string was finished, then the *bāi sī* tray and the pillows were removed. The *mô* set the tray with candles and flowers on the floor and the bride and groom *krap*-ed touching the tray with outstretched hands in prayer position. Also, on this tray were the things from the lip of the liquor bottle. The *mô* chanted and then the ceremony was over.

Then the bridegroom was led to be shown the bridal chamber by his mother-in-law. This was followed by much laughter.

In this description I have omitted mention and description of the *sūkhwan nôi*, of the items making up the things carried in the wedding procession, the *thao kâē*, the presentation of the bride price, and the incident at the entrance of the bride's house. I might add that Mr. Tāp was the *thao kâē*. The bride price money was carried in a *khan* which had tobacco and betel wrapped in a white cloth.

After the marriage ceremony was over, the bridegroom returned to his original home. He will return in the evening, in time to eat dinner with his new wife. Mr. Ngao says that the custom at this time is for the bride and groom to eat their dinner separated from the rest of the family in front of the door to the bridal chamber.

Bān Nōng Tūn

November 12, 1963

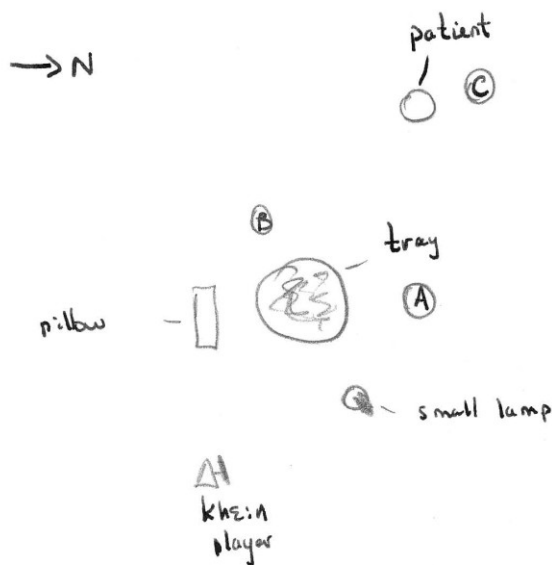
A Spirit Trance

Last evening Nin came over to borrow the *khāēn* in order to go play *lamphī fā* (ลำผีฟ้า). I accompanied him to the house of Nāi Lāē Cantharuang where this event was to take place. It seems that the wife of Nāi Lāē has been ill for a long time and has returned recently from two months in the hospital. However, she is still ill, so the family called in some *môphīfā* — a person or persons who by means of music, singing, etc. can go into a trance and be possessed by an ancestral spirit of the sick person. The idea is that the person has been made ill by the same spirit in order to indicate its need of being given something from the real world. It is the purpose of the *môphīfā* to discover what this need is so that it can be provided and the person will become well.

The main *môphīfā* is Nāng Pū (นางปู) who is the wife of Nāi Sōn (KY). She had two assistants: Nāng Khon (นางขน) the wife of Mr. Tāp in KY and Nāng Phrom (นางพรหม) the wife of

Nāi Dī (KW). I believe that the assistants are called *Nāng thiam phī fā* (นางเทียมผีฟ้า). I shall hereafter refer to these three people as A (Nāng Pū), B (Nāng Khon), and C (Nāng Phrom).

In the middle of the room near the sick person was placed a tray/stand (like the one used to hold the *bāisi* yesterday at the wedding). As it was dark, I could not make out all that was on the tray, but there were at least the following: cloth, silk *phākhawmā*, money, hard boiled chicken's egg, cooked glutinous rice, uncooked rice, rolled cigarettes, chews of betel, flowers, candles. Behind the tray was a pillow. The participants first arranged themselves this way:



All were facing the tray and all the participants were kneeling (except Nin who was sitting in ordinary position.). Nin started playing the *khāēn* and A and B then paid their obeisances to the tray by lifting their hands to the *wai* position in front of their chests and then dropping their hands down on the floor (reminiscent of the *krap* done in front of priests). This was done three times. Then A began "singing" in the style of *lamkhlōn* or *lam mū* — I could not follow this at all. During the course of her singing, she would sometimes hold her left hand (in this case with the cloth which she had draped over her shoulders in the hand) to her left ear. I am not certain that this is significant but it was repeated by both A and B during the course of the ceremony. Occasionally, she would repeat the "worship" with her hands: *wai* position, palms on the floor — but only once at a time. Other times she kept her hands in the *wai* position and they would sometimes shake violently.

She finished this. The position of the participants was shifted so that the patient and C moved up much closer to the tray. When they had thus moved up, A took a *khan* and B, C and

patient bowed to the floor, fingers touching the *khan* in which were placed chews of betel, while A repeated some formula. Then A began to dance (in traditional Thai style — with emphasis on movement of hands) and concurrently singing. While she was doing this, C and the patient had their hands in a *wai* position. Sometimes, C would make the obeisance — *wai* and palms on to the floor — and then clap twice. The patient first followed this lead, and then began doing the same thing at her own discretion — sometimes without clapping.

While A was dancing, she would occasionally get the shakes throughout her body. After she had danced for a while, she sat down (and chewed betel) and B took over her dancing and singing. She did the same things as A (including the shaking), but occasionally would go over to C or the patient and clap her hands in their face. After B had done this for a while and had had some shakes, C stood up, hands hard against her thighs, and started swaying on her feet. Then she would get violent shakes.

During the course of this A would speak with both B and C and it was apparently during this time that the spirit possession took place and A was able to discover what was required.

Then, abruptly, all sat down. A and B each tied a string around the wrist of the patient and the ceremony was over. The things were taken from the tray and the money was kept by the *mô*. The spirits had asked for 4 cigarettes, desserts, and some other things.

Nin says that possession takes place as indicated by the shaking. Ngao says that this ceremony is Brahmin in practice and origin. He also said that some people believe in its efficacy while others don't. He also said that most people don't like to have their *khāēn* played for *lamphīfā* because, they say, the *khāēn* won't be as good afterwards.

Religious Practitioners

In the village there are quite a number of people who have some knowledge and skill in non-Buddhist magico-religious customs. With the help of Mr. Ngao I compiled the following list of mediums, shamans, etc.:

1. *Mô suat* (หมอสวด):

This practitioner is also known as *môsukhwan* (T) (หมอสุขขวัญ) and *nāi phrom* (นายพรหมณ์). The main duty of this person is officiate at *sūkhwan* or *bāisī* rites. These rites are

undoubtedly of Hindu origin. Nāi Sīhā (KY) is the leading practitioner and Nāi Bunsī (KL) and Nāi Sōn Sētraksā (KNKN) are learning. Nāi Sōn says that he is not yet able to officiate, but Mr. Ngao says he can.

2. Môphīfā (หมอผีฟ้า):

Despite Mr. Ngao's statements, this is most certainly an animist medium. The three practitioners are Nāng Pū (นางปู่) of KY (wife of Mr. Sōn) who is the leading practitioner, Nāng Khon (นางขน) KY (wife of Mr. Tāp), and Nāng Phrom (นางพรหม) of KW (wife of Mr. Dī).

Although all these practitioners are women, Mr. Ngao says that they may be men.

3. Khawcam (เข้าจ้ำ):

This is another animist role and is currently filled by Mr. Tāp (KY). I have already described the characteristics of this role, previously.

4. Môtham (หมอธรรม)

I know very little about this role as I have never seen it practiced, but from what Mr. Ngao says, this individual uses sacred Buddhist words and incantations to cure diseases caused by malevolent *phī* and to kill *phī* who have entered person's body (see below). In BNT Nāi Sāēn (นายแสน) in KL is somewhat skilled in this role, but only in a limited way. A man in B. Nōng Kung is a môtham yai — a person well known for his practice of this role.

5. Môkan phī (หมอกันผี):

This is another animistic role. The only thing I have heard about this role is that the person helps protect a new-born infant from malevolent *phī*. The limited practitioner of this role in BNT is Nāi Dī (นายดี) in KW.

6. Môdū (หมอดู):

This role is best translated as "seer" or "fortune teller." The customs are based on basically Hindu teachings, with some Chinese customs thrown in. There is a wealth of written literature on this practice. In BNT Nāi Sīhā (KY) is the main practitioner and Nāi Nū (นายหนู) who lives across from us is apparently skilled in a limited way.

7. Mô siang không (หมอเสีขงข่อง):

Of this role I know nothing but that it exists. Nāi Sīhā (KY) again is the person who is the practitioner.

Animistic Beliefs

There is a belief that some type of *phī* will possess a man and eat blood because the *phī* is "hungry." This is called *phī pōp* (ผีปอบ) or *phī sing* (ผีสิง). When a man is possessed, he will act crazily and do all sorts of things and will eventually die unless a *môtham* kills the *phī*. Several people died recently in a nearby village. It was first thought that they had been killed, but no wounds were found — it was then decided that they had been killed by *phī pōp*. Also, the huge fat man whom we saw at the wedding yesterday had once been possessed by a *phī pōp*. He would go around banging on people's doors at night and people were frightened. He was finally cured, at a cost of B 1,200, by having a *môtham* kill the *phī pōp*.

Innovation

People have taken to buying nylon thread instead of using cotton thread for making fish netting because it is much stronger. This, despite the fact that nylon thread is considerably more expensive.

Sports Day

Yesterday, at the school we heard the children singing to the accompaniment of drum and "bell" made from a thick metal cylinder. The purpose of this cacophony—accompanied by unrhythmical clapping — was as practice for a "Sports Day" to be held at Bān Khwaw on 22

November. Tambon Khwaw will compete against Tambon Kāē Dam. Today the students were practicing various sports.

Marital Strife

Last night, this morning and occasionally throughout the day Nuan has broken out sobbing. Apparently there is some sort of strife between her and Ngao. It all began when Nuan made a *faux pas* by offending some business associate while Mr. Ngao was away. In contrast to her sobbings, his voice has been quiet but uncompromising.

Pai Thiaw Sāw

Nin said yesterday that it is alright for men to go *pai thiaw sāw* (L) after they are married if they don't speak with the girls (except at fairs and other major festivities). Only unmarried girls will be given such attention, however. Nonetheless, very few men do go.

Busses and Lorries

Of the two regular bus-lorries that go and come through the village, the smaller one originates in B. Nōng Phibān in T. Nōng Kung and the other, the larger, originates in B. Nōng Sāēng near Wapipathum. In addition to these vehicles one also sees on the roads, lorries going to buy and transport kenaf, kapok, and the like, occasionally officials' cars (Nai Amphoe, Malaria Control, etc.), "Taxi", etc.

Bān Nōng Tūn

November 13, 1963

Customs Related to Birth

Last night discussed with Mr. Ngao concerning birth customs. When a woman begins to have labor pains, she will send for a mid-wife called *māē tam cāē* (แม่ตำแจ) in Lao. This woman used to be *māē suai* who died the day the army came to distribute things at the school. The mid-wife helps the laborer by pushing down on the stomach in order to help force the baby out. When the baby has been delivered, the umbilical cord (สายห้ *sāi hāē*) will be cut by a metal spoon. It used to be cut by a bamboo knife, but now they use a sharp metal spoon. The afterbirth is burnt in a fire made at the bottom of the stairs. Once burnt, it is covered with dirt at the same place.

Shortly after birth, a *môkanphī* will come and make a fire around the house to protect the child against malevolent *phī*.

The "lying by the fire" (ខ្យង់ ្រៃ *yū fai*) is practiced extensively in the village. For a first birth, a woman will lay by the fire for as much as 12 days. During this time she will be allowed to eat only salt and hot water. This practice is followed "to stop the bleeding" and even Mr. Ngao was a little incredulous that there has never been a custom like this in the West. After the 1st birth, the woman will "lie by the fire" for fewer days depending on how soon she feels well.

"School names" are often given to children by teachers when the child enters school.

Mr. Ngao and Politics

Also, last night we discussed political personalities a bit. I asked Mr. Ngao if he thought people were glad that Phibun was gone. He said that many people were still "thinking about" Phibun and that he was well liked. It was Police Gen. Phao whom people didn't like.

Mr. Ngao said that he had heard on the radio that Cambodia was thinking of becoming Communist (Norodom Sihanouk has recently announced that if relations between Cambodia and its neighbors, Cambodia would kick out all foreign Western aid and invite the Chinese communists to come in). This led to a general discussion of communism. He feels that it would be hard for a Buddhist country to become communist because communists don't "respect" Buddhism. He also showed some basic understanding of communism. He asked if it were true whether in communist countries that the government owns all the land and the people just work on it. I answered that this was true and he replied that this was not a good practice. Then he asked if the "Free World" (an expression he has picked up) had more countries than the communists. I explained that there were three types of countries in the world: free, communist, and neutral. He asked which countries were neutralist. I told him India, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Laos among others. He noted that he did not know that Laos was neutralist.

Jane asked him if he learned most of what he knew from the radio and he answered that he did. He said that most other people didn't really listen to the news and even if they did often exaggerated the stories. As an example of this, he said that the other day he overheard the headman talking something like this: "The President of South Vietnam whose name I can't remember has been sick for a long time and was taken to the hospital by the army." This incident occurred shortly after the *coup d'etat* in V.N. and Mr. Ngao said that if he hadn't been present

everyone would have been misled. Another example of this misinterpreting of the news came the other day at Mr. Sōn's when I overheard several men talking about some new incident in Vientiane. The story that they had (elaborated on by several people) was that heavy fighting had broken out in Vientiane—and the Buddhist monks had all escaped across to Nongkhai.

I think, however, that it is no exaggeration to say that Mr. Ngao is the limiting case (upper limit) of knowledge about national politics and world events.

Radios and "Keeping Up with the Thapsuri's"

There are several new radios in the village. In KW Nang Deng recently bought one and now Nāi Dī has bought one. Mr. Ngao is rather amused at this situation. He says that when one person buys one, then other people have to buy one also to prove that the other person is not "harder" (แข็งกว่า) than they are. He deplors this keeping up with one's neighbors because it leads to buying unpractical things like a radio (he considers his own radio good for business, but has considered selling it). This at least illustrates some concern with social status in the village. The reason that people are able to buy things at the present time is because they have just sold their kenaf and then some people have a little ready cash.

Health

Also, discussed with Mr. Ngao last night the large open ulcer which Mr. Ngao's elder sister's child has on his bum. It seems that Khrū Sunit had come out and given an injection of some sort of antibiotics, but this had not helped (and may even have aggravated the situation). Both Jane and I commented on how bad the sore looked and said that the child should be taken to the hospital. Mr. Ngao agreed and said that he had encouraged his sister to go to the hospital. He also said that khrū Sanit had volunteered to have mother and child stay at his home in town in order to go to the hospital. Mr. Ngao said that he didn't understand why they didn't go to the hospital because husband had just made quite a bit of money from selling kenaf.

[Following note added, 7 December, 1963 –Jane]

In the end they did go to the hospital because the child developed pains in the leg. It turned out that the development of the sore was due to an improper injection given by Khrū Sanit. Fortunately, the difficulty was caught in time and the child is now well and back in the village.

A Gambling Game

Last night Mr. Ngao described to me what is one of the most popular gambling games in the village. Four tamarind seeds are taken and on each one side is painted white, thus, each has one side black, and one side white. Then, these 4 seeds are placed in a tin and shaken up and thrown on to the ground. People bet on whether the results will be "even" or "odd" depending on number of white appearing (I don't quite understand this as there are 5 possibilities on any one throw).

To a Slaughter

At about 11 this morning Mr. Ngao and I went on a little walk. We ended up going out to the fields behind KY. The road that lead out past the shrine of *pūtā* used to be used as the main road to the highway. After spending some time in a field house —*thiang nā*— we witnessed the slaughter and butchering of a calf. This calf was worth B400 and that was what the major portion of the meat was sold for. There was no special reason why this calf was killed today — occasionally meat is butchered merely for sale and for local consumption. The skin of the calf will be sold in town to a tanning factory.

Mahasarakham

November 14 - 19, 1963

14 November 1963 (Notes added later.)

To Mahasarakham

15 Nov.

MK.

16 Nov.

MK.

17 Nov.

MK.

18 Nov.

MK.

19 Nov.

MK.

Impact of Mass Communications Media upon a Northeastern Thai Village

During the past year, I have been engaged in carrying out research in a village in Changwat Mahasarakham in the middle of Northeast Thailand. In order to better understand the process of social change and to ascertain the ways in which the village is drawn into the national social system, I have attempted to gather some information on the impact of mass communication media upon the people in this village. Some of these data have been gathered through survey techniques, some through interviewing, both structured and unstructured, and some simply through my own observations as a member of the community over a comparatively long period of time. Using the results of all these techniques, I hope that I might be able to sketch a picture of what effect mass communications media have had on the village.

[Here give a short description of BNT - population size, etc.]

It doesn't take living in a village for any long period of time to recognize that the radio is an important medium of mass communication in the village. And it doesn't take one long to find out that it is about the only medium. The only other mass communication media which play any role at all are the cinema and periodicals - both of which compared to the radio are almost negligible. Let us deal with these latter two first.

I. Periodical Reading

In the year in which we have been in the village, I have many newspapers other than the ones which we ourselves have carried into the village. A few people, such as the shop owner and the headman and a few others who make regular trips to Mahasarakham or Roi-et occasionally will see a newspaper, but there is no one who makes a regular habit of reading newspapers. There are two obvious reasons for this: (1) limited distribution of newspapers and (2) lack of sufficient motivation on the part of the villagers to want to read them, all the newspapers in Mahasarakham are Bangkok newspapers as there is no local publication such as the "Lottery Papers" published every five days in places such as Korat. If such a local paper did exist, it might meet with greater enthusiasm from the village, though even that is doubtful.

The paucity of newspaper reading in the village, however, does not imply the lack of interest in the printed word. In fact, I have been most startled, coming with the expectation that I

did that such a village would be at most half-literate and not interested in written materials. During the SEATO exercises in June of this year, the American Army visited the village and distributed a few things including a newspaper presentation of the activities of SEATO. These publications were eagerly sought after by the villagers, and still decorate the walls of many a house. The occasional copies of the USIS publication in Thai which find their way to the public in the village (the school receives copies, but the headmaster keeps them to himself) are pawed over with great interest - but probably more for the pictures than for the content. The only publications which are read with great interest are the scripts to the Northeastern Folk Opera – *môlammū*. These scripts are laboriously copied out so that the scripts can be given circulation among all those people who participate in one or the other of the two amateur troupes which exist in the village.

In summary then, the impact of periodicals in any of their form have as yet had little impact on the village (I have purposely, of course, ignored any discussion of school books). The only books or periodicals in which the villagers would invest their money voluntarily are the *môlam* scripts.

Mahasarakham

November 20 - 22, 1963

20 November 1963 (Notes added later.)

Mahasarakham

21 Nov.

MK

22 Nov.

To village, stopping on way for Sports' Day in B. Khwaw.

Bān Khwaw

November 23, 1963

Sports Day

Yesterday, was Sports Day in Bān Khwaw in which teams from every school in T. Khwaw competed with students from B. Khô k Nô:i. Each team wore identifying T-shirts and had special flags and decorated stands (made by themselves) and some musical instruments to help in cheering. This event is held every year.

Headmaster of Pot Village

Talked with headmaster of B. Môt school. He was a teacher in BNT 2491-97. He said that when he was in BNT, there were more students then than there are now. I asked him why he thought there were fewer now and he answered that people have migrated away. The reason for this migration is that land is not very good in BNT.

He says that all pot makers — such as there are in B. Môt — came originally from Korat and he says that they still have Korat accents. There are other such villages spread throughout the NE — all originating from Korat.

Community Development (CD) Committee in BNT

I had originally thought that there was no C.D. committee in BNT, but I now discover that there has been one since the 5th month of last year. I asked Mr. Wichian how this committee was chosen and he said that the people voted them into office. Mr. Phon was naturally everyone's first choice. The committee includes the following nine people

นายพร ทัพสุริย์	(Mr. Phon Thapsuri) - Headman (KW)
นายพมมา เศรษฐรักษา	(Phonmā Sētraksā) - Mr. W. says he is chairman (KNKN)
นายตาบ สมพิทักษ์	(Mr. Tāp Somphithak) - (KY)
นายโฮม ทัพสุริย์	(Mr. Hōm Thapsuri) - (KY)
นายชาย สมพิทักษ์	(Mr. Chāi Somphithak) - Asst. Headman (KY)
นายพัน ทัพสุริย์	(Mr. Phan Thapsuri) - (KL)
นายสม ทัพสุริย์	(Mr. Som Thapsuri) - (KNKN)
นายลา ทัพสุริย์	(Mr. Lā Thapsuri) - (KL)
นายสอน เศรษฐรักษา	(Sôn Sētraksā) - (KNKN)

Kantharawichai, Mahasarakham, Ubon

November 24, 25, 26, 1963

24 November 1963 (Notes added later.)

Visit to Khrū Bun Thiang's family in Kantharawichai

25 Nov. 1963

Mahasarakham.

26 Nov. 1963

Begin trip around Northeast. Travel from MK to Ubon via bus. overnight in Ubon.

Mukdaharn

November 27, 1963

Yesterday, we began our "Grand Tour" of Northeast Thailand – and as Jane pointed out, this tour has certain resemblances with the tours of 17th-18th Cent. in that the roads are somewhat comparable to the old Post Roads of Europe. Certainly, my seat feels as if we have been riding in a carriage and four for the last two days. We left Mahasarakham at 8:30 in the morning and travelled on the Sarakham-Ubon bus. The first 50 kilometers to Roi-et were on a metalled road, but except for this section and about the last 30 kilometers of the 222 kilometer trip, we travelled pretty much on rough, washboard highway. The countryside - particularly that of the middle part of the trip, was very flat and made us realize how intraversable and inhospitable this land is and has been through history. Our trip was broken about halfway at Yasothon - that historic city of the Northeast's Laotian past. We arrived in Ubon at 3:00 in the afternoon.

We had been recommended to go to the Nakhon Luang (นครหลวง - "Royal City") Hotel as being one of the better ones in Ubon. To me, the experience of staying in this hotel was one of the more traumatic in my brief travel experiences. The first thing that happened was that our bag was rushed upstairs (in true Italian style before I had an opportunity to consult at the desk) and to the "best" room in the place. After discovering that we were to be charged B80 /night for this haven of luxury, we explained, in Thai, that we had had friends stay here before and knew that there were rooms for no more than B30 / night. We were then shown to the room next door which, except for having one bed instead of two (and a double bed at that) and being slightly smaller, was no different than the first. Our palatial room consisted of high ceilings painted along with the concrete walls in the dingiest green I have ever seen. The bed had a single sheet, no blankets and no pillow cases (a sight that brought visions of all the previous clientele who might

have used the same pillows). But really what made the delight of the hotel was the ability one had to hear conversation in neighboring rooms. It seems that our neighbors were a few American soldiers and Thai girls. The snatches of conversation in mid-afternoon that we caught went something like this: "A Number 1 Phūying". "If I don't like her can I send her back?" "O.K., honey, take off your clothes." "Come on take them off," etc. Later at night we overheard the soldiers returning from their encounters with local whiskey and beer. Ah, memories of days in the fraternity in college – such comparable language. A deep depression sat in on me because of our surroundings - a depression which later in the evening turned into an almost irresistible desire to escape by sleep.

We wandered a bit about the town of Ubon - at least the main shopping area. The town has an older appearance than Korat and the streets are not straight but wander a bit with widenings and narrowings that make them like European towns. We happened to see a USIS office and went into read the newspapers concerning President Kennedy's death. The Thai chap in charge here recommended a place to eat across the street - a place whose *kuai tiaw* can at least be suggested to others.

In our brief wanderings around the town, we ran into a bookstore which had in stock many of the Northeastern books from Khon Kaen. I gorged myself in a buying spree of those books - an event which did much to assuage my feeling of depression over the hotel.

We couldn't help feeling a bit lost and not really enjoying ourselves in a town where we knew no one - where we had no guide to the major points of interest. Both Jane and I agree that travelling for the single sake of seeing new places is barren and unrewarding. As we wandered around the town, we saw people with whom conversation could only have brought interesting reports, but except for a few brief occasions contact was never made and we wandered alone and unnoticed except as foreign exhibits. The few moments where this changed was when we walked into the USIS office and later into the Vietnamese (South) Information Centre. The man in charge here first took us to be French from Pakse. We learned that he was from Saigon and lived in Thailand fifteen years. He was well aware of what his counterparts in the North Vietnamese Red Cross.

This morning we left our den of iniquity and took a *samlor* to the bus stop. As so often happens in Thailand, our *samlor* driver became very interested in us and kept a running

conversation all the way to the bus stop. We left about 9:30 in the morning from Ubon and much to my surprise, the first 55 or so kilometers were metalled. The first town we reached was an amphoe center called *muang sām sip* (ม่วงสามสิบ). A strange name as *muang* means violet and *sām sip* means 30. As we entered this town, I noticed a set of *baisēmā* gathered together and surrounded by a fence.

We proceeded on from this town to that of Amnat Charoen (อำนาจเจริญ) which lies at the cross roads. We stopped here for about 40 minutes and ate a lunch of barbecued chicken (bought there) and some rolls which we had brought from Ubon. We had cokes in a little restaurant which had Catholic pictures on the wall (most likely Vietnamese or possibly Chinese) and in which all the waitresses were dressed in black. A blind troubadour played the *phin* and sang *môlam* at the bus.

Though our first few kilometers had been on good road, the road for the rest of the way was on washboard which threw up masses of dust.

Most of the passengers got off at a junction to a town with the name of *lengnokkathā* (เล็งนกต). We then reached the community of Nikhom (นิคม) at which there was a road block - why, I never quite figured out. This town is said to be inhabited by Vietnamese.

We arrived in Mukdaharn at about 2:00 and on our way to the hotel in a *samlor* ran across Tom having "his ears lowered" in a local male beauty parlor. - to call them barbershops would be a travesty for it would represent only about a 10th of what is done. The hotel we are staying in is an extremely happy contrast to the one in Ubon (and only B10 more - B40). It is a relatively new hotel of a modified Chinese and European model which incorporates the best of a small town Italian good hostelry with certain Chinese-Thai characteristics. There is a balcony that runs around the hotel outside our second story window and from this balcony we look down into a courtyard which is most European looking indeed.

The hotel possesses the happy name of *banthom kasem* (บรรทมเกษม) which is a glorified word for "happy rest". And given that we have a room completely shielded from what goes on in adjoining rooms, I believe that indeed we shall have a happy rest.

As soon as Tom had returned from the barbershop and his two female friends from his village had found us after our bath, we went downstairs for a welcome beer. We then began to make a tour of one of the nicest provincial towns I have seen in the N.E. We first went down to the wharf where we got our first view of the Mekhong - and most impressive it was as we stood looking across the river to Suvannakhet, Laos. My greatest desire at the moment was to cross that river, but Tom had reservations about visa problems. We then visited the large wat on the shore which was a very pretty temple, but which is hard in description to describe from any other wat of the same size that I have seen. The monk that showed us around the *bōt* spoke only Lao - though educated Lao - and it appears that this wat draws monks from the left bank. There were many monks living in the *bōt*.

We also saw the house which the present Prime Minister built for his foster father. This huge modernistic structure would not look very much out of place in Bangkok, but among the brown village shanties around it, the blue and glass-walled structure was most striking. We then walked out to a forest

wat where we saw the *chedi* erected for the mother of the Prime Minister.

In the evening after a big and rather expensive Chinese dinner, we all went to the cinema. The Thai movie was typical: Entangled love affairs; numerous subplots, lots of tears and reconciliations. The major difference was that it was a talky picture (and thus more boring) and there was very little melodramatic action.

Mukdaharn

November 28, 1963

This morning Jane and I wandered about the town while Tom and the daughter of the household at which we are presently staying, went to buy needed things. Mukdaharn has a quite different complexion from towns of similar sizes in the interior of the N.E. The large Vietnamese population is manifest in the innumerable Vietnamese hats (worn also in this area by the Thai), a Vietnamese Information Center, Vietnamese sausage, shops in which Vietnamese music was coming over the wireless. One is also aware of the left bank as one sees Lao women in their traditional *phasins* and hair taken back in buns, as one buys a loaf of French bread wrapped in a scrap of a month old French newspaper, as one examines the bottle after bottle of Parisienne scent in the shops (apparently though the Customs officials are sticky about liquor and cigarettes, they are not as concerned with scent). The Chinese influence is also apparent in a very handsome

Chinese shrine in mid-town. The architecture of the buildings also shows a different influence in that the cream stucco is as much in place in southern Europe (and one should point out in Southern France) as it is in this oriental setting. It would be a pleasant town to spend a week in if one were looking for a quiet picturesque community in a foreign clime.

At noon, we went to the bus stop to catch the bus-lorry that was supposed to leave at 12:30 for the village where Tom has been living. Of course, something was wrong with the vehicle and so at 3:15 we finally left town. The first large village we reached along the way was most unusual in that it has a very large market and is mostly inhabited by Vietnamese (what a fascinating place to make a study). The road to this point had been reasonable in that it had been recently graded by the Highway Department. However, from here on, the road got increasingly worse and it is easy to understand why Tom made this trip as few times as possible.

Six kilometers further on we reached the village of Nān Thiang which is now the Amphoe Centre. It seems that in the former amphoe centre of Kham Cha-ee, malaria is endemic and the District Officer got tired of catching it. Thus, they moved these offices to Nān Thiang which is about 15 kilometers from Kham Cha-ee.

Halfway to Kham Cha-ee we got stuck in a stream bed. Fortunately, however, after all of us had got off, the bus-lorry was able to make it up the opposite shore. There were a few doubtful moments, however, when the vehicle stalled and didn't look as though it would begin again. Finally, at 7 p.m we arrived in B. Non Sun and we were immediately taken to the house of the house where Tom has lived - the house of headmaster. This house was a real revelation to us.

The first thing was its size. Folding doors like are on all the stores in Thailand opened on to a huge room which was furnished with a few tables, a few straightback chairs and assorted other things. On being taken upstairs, we found the same big room as below except that it was divided in half by a wall. Sleeping quarters were separated off by curtaining. The second thing was that the whole place was made of teak and that the teak floors were in a state of high polish and, we were told, were kept this way by daily polishing.

The household normally consisted of Headmaster Sāi, four of his seven children, his wife, and a servant who had especially been hired to take care of Tom - and for the past year Tom has also been a member. Sāi presents a striking contrast to his daughter Ratsame who had been with us since Mukdaharn and who had visited us in Mahasarakham. Sāi was a small - no taller than 5' - wirey man who betrayed all obvious uncertainty about his foreign guests. His

hospitality was counterpointed by a fear that things would not be done properly for our sakes. His nervousness was present in his furtive eyes and in his inability to sit down and converse with us for a long time. His daughter, on the other hand, was obviously the mistress of the situation. Though also short, she is more plump, and is quite self-possessed. Immediately on entering the house, she began bustling around to arrange for supper and to see that things were made comfortable. She took Jane upstairs and arranged for her to take the ubiquitous bath post haste.

When we first arrived, the lighting was all by rather decorative looking kerosene lamps whose soft light helped create just the proper atmosphere for our arrival in such a setting. Later, when I returned downstairs after changing and a bath, a pressure lamp had been placed overhead.

Dinner consisted of Central Thai style food (using meat and other ingredients which Ratsame had bought in the Mukdaharn market this morning) with white rice. Only the four of us - Tom, Jane, Ratsame, and me – ate together. All others had already eaten or ate separately. While we were eating a number of villagers - most of whom were friends of the family wandered in to view the new arrivals. Some stayed to play gin rummy which they call "Dummy".

The evening ended with a glass of Thai whisky - a tradition which Tom had instituted on arrival in the village.

B. Nông Sūg

November 29, 1963

Last night was quite chilly and we were glad for the heavy Chinese blanket with which we had been provided. Our morning bathing experiences were public as a result of another custom Tom had – inadvertently - begun.

Nôn Sūn

November 30, 1963

In Nôn Sūn, Tom's farewell party.