Chapter V
The Economy of Palokhi: Subsistence in a Regional Context

The Palokhi Karen are best regarded as subsistence-oriented or, to use Penny’s term (1969:152), “subsistence-minded” producers. They are subsistence-oriented rather than pure subsistence cultivators in the sense that virtually all productive activity, agricultural as well as non-agricultural, is directed towards the satisfaction of basic food requirements. Of these requirements, the consumption of rice is by far the most important as it is their staple food.

The economy of Palokhi consists of two sectors: an agricultural sector which is based on swiddening and wet-rice cultivation, and a cash or market economy which links Palokhi with other communities in the Pa Pae hills and the lowlands of Chiang Mai. Although the cash sector is not directly concerned with agricultural production, it is nonetheless as important as the agricultural sector in enabling the Palokhi Karen to meet their rice requirements. The reason, as I noted in the introductory chapter, is that agricultural production in Palokhi fails to satisfy these requirements and that the cash sector provides a cash income, from various activities, which allows the Palokhi Karen to purchase rice from stores in Northern Thai settlements to make up the deficits incurred in their dual system of swiddening and wet-rice cultivation.

Notwithstanding this, the Palokhi Karen by and large regard swiddening as the dominant mode of agricultural production in their lives, although they are fully aware that wet-rice cultivation is more productive than swiddening, and that they are dependent on an external, market economy for rice to make up shortfalls in their own agricultural system. This view of swiddening, as I show in the next chapter, is very much an ideological one based on their historical experience. The Palokhi Karen say that the Karen have always practised swiddening and that wet-rice agriculture is but a recent development. Indeed, the relationship between these two systems of rice agriculture is expressed in terms of a metaphor of siblingship: “the swidden is the elder sibling, the wet-rice field is the younger sibling” (hy’ kae’ wae, chi’ kae’ py).¹

Although there is an implicit identification of swiddening rice with the Karen as a people, in an ethnohistorical sense, in the way that the Palokhi Karen express these matters, they are really talking about a development in their known history which is ultimately based on Karen migration and occupation of the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area or, as in some instances, other areas prior to settling in the area. This is because virtually all Karen communities in the area and,
indeed, elsewhere so far as I have been able to ascertain, have taken up wet-rice agriculture within living memory, or one generation ago. The only exception appears to be the Huai Dua Karen whose agricultural system rests almost exclusively on wet-rice cultivation; but even they acknowledge that this has come about gradually from a time when their parents or grand-parents practised swiddening.

The perception of swiddening as a dominant form of agriculture, at least in Palokhi, is also related to the fact that the religious life of the Palokhi Karen continues to revolve around swidden agriculture, although some swidden rites have been transferred to wet-rice fields along with some wet-rice agricultural rituals which have been adopted from the Northern Thai. Thus, the annual ceremonial cycle in Palokhi remains oriented about rites associated with the growth cycle of swidden rice despite the fact that the agricultural sector is based on the two systems of rice cultivation. The on-going cultivation of swiddens has, in other words, ensured the persistence of religious conceptions and a ritual life which continue to structure the way in which swidden agriculture is perceived. This perception, regardless of the economic realities in Palokhi is an important one. It accounts for, amongst other things, attitudes towards “work” and “wage labour” between which the Palokhi Karen make a certain distinction, and a sense that they live in an agricultural and social context of their own in which their relations with their neighbours, however much determined by economic necessity, are nevertheless peripheral to an essentially “Karen” way of life.

In this chapter, I show how rice production fails to meet the needs of the Palokhi Karen and how they make up their rice deficits by recourse to a cash economy. Because of limitations of space, and because there are general similarities between the agricultural system of the Palokhi Karen and those of other Karen described in existing studies (Hinton [1975], Hamilton [1976], Kunstadter [1978], Madha [1980]) which make an extended description somewhat unnecessary — at least as far as my major argument is concerned — I shall confine my discussion of subsistence agriculture to the following: an overview of the cycle of agricultural activities in Palokhi; land use in swidden and wet-rice cultivation; and an analysis of swidden and wet-rice production in relation to consumption requirements. Further details (for example, perceptions of the nature of work and wage work, the technical aspects of swiddening and wet-rice cultivation, the terminology of wet-rice cultivation in Palokhi Karen which actually consists of Karen-Northern Thai macaronics, and a list of crops grown in Palokhi swiddens) may be found in Appendices C, D, E, and F (see also Rajah [1983]).

In this chapter, however, I also take the opportunity to discuss the relationship between land use, the inheritance of wet-rice fields, and the role of
men in these areas because this is of some importance to my argument regarding
the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen and religion and ritual activities in
which men are dominant as managers of the “symbolic capital” of the community.

My discussion of the cash sector, especially the part played by tea and miang
(fermented tea) in the economic system of the Palokhi Karen is rather more
extensive as this is an aspect of Karen economic systems which has not been
documented before. A fuller discussion of the cash sector is also necessary as I
wish to draw out rather more clearly than I have done in Chapter I, the ways in
which the Palokhi Karen are integrated into a larger economic system through
their need for rice from external sources.

I leave to the next chapter a discussion of the rites of swidden cultivation
which form the major component of the ceremonial system in the community,
a system which sustains in large part the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen.

The Agricultural Calendar

The rice cultivated in Palokhi swiddens and wet-rice fields grows and matures
at different rates because of the different water regimes in these two systems of
cultivation. Since the growth cycle of swidden rice is not dependent on the
accumulation of water in fields, but on sufficient moisture for seed germination
and growth, it is of course planted earlier in the wet season, that is April-May,
whereas wet-rice is transplanted only in July. The overall agricultural calendar,
however, is based on the longer growth cycle of swidden rice within which the
shorter growth cycle of wet-rice is articulated. The year itself has three main
seasons — a cool dry season lasting from November to February, a hot dry season
which extends from March to April, and a wet season brought about by the
south-west monsoons from April or May to October.

The wet season is clearly the most important in swidden cultivation as the
rains are necessary for the germination and growth of rice and other crops. The
swidden cycle is consequently oriented around this season. Wet-rice cultivation
on the other hand, is less dependent on week-by-week rainfall in the wet season,
but nevertheless it is not as independent of rainfall as it is in the Chiang Mai
plains where extensive irrigation systems fed from up stream storages help to
offset the effect of dry spells in the May-October rainy season. At Palokhi,
irrigation for wet-rice cultivation is only feasible later in the rainy season
(June-July) when the Huai Thung Choa increases in volume. This and the climatic
changes in the region also explains why only an annual crop of wet-rice is
possible in Palokhi. The occurrence of the wet season, its variable beginning
and end is thus the single most important factor in structuring agricultural
activities in Palokhi. It also influences the growth cycle of another economically
important crop, tea (Camellia sinensis), which the Palokhi Karen pick and sell
in order to obtain money with which to buy rice to make up shortfalls in their
harvests. Tea cropping, however, is subordinate to the cultivation of rice and I therefore leave discussion of it to later in this chapter.

The cultivation of rice in swiddens and wet-rice fields entails several activities, for example the preparation of fields, planting (and transplanting in the case of wet-rice), weeding, reaping, threshing, and storing of the harvest in each agricultural season. A summary of these activities in the agricultural calendar of Palokhi, approximated to the solar calendar, may be found in Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1, while more detailed descriptions may be found in Appendices D, E, and F.

Table 5.1. The Calendar of Agricultural Activities in Palokhi (1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Karen Month</th>
<th>Activities in Swidden Cultivation</th>
<th>Activities in Wet-rice Cultivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>La Talae*</td>
<td>Transporting and storing of harvest</td>
<td>Transporting and storing of harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6 Jan – 4 Feb)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>La Thi Phae’</td>
<td>Clearing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The month of clearing”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5 Feb – 5 Mar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>La Thi Khu’</td>
<td>Clearing, building fire-breaks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The month of felling”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6 Mar – 4 Apr)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>La Soe’</td>
<td>Burning, building field-huts, planting, fencing, setting traps</td>
<td>Opening new terraces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5 Apr – 3 May)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>La De’ Nja</td>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>Planting of dry-bed nurseries, building dams, flooding of fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The frog, fish month”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4 May – 2 Jun)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>La Nwi</td>
<td>Weeding, collecting cultigens</td>
<td>Repairing bunds, ploughing, harrowing, transplanting seedlings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The seventh month”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3 Jun – 1 Jul)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>La Xau’</td>
<td>Weeding, collecting cultigens</td>
<td>Repairing bunds, ploughing, harrowing, transplanting seedlings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The eighth month”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2 Jul – 31 Jul)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>La Ku’</td>
<td>Weeding, collecting</td>
<td>Weeding terraces maintaining irrigation canals and water sluices in terraces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1 Aug – 29 Aug)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>La Ci My</td>
<td>Collecting cultigens</td>
<td>Weeding terraces, maintaining irrigation canals and water sluices in terraces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The month of little rain”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30 Aug – 28 Sep)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>La Ci Cha</td>
<td>Reaping, stooking</td>
<td>Breaching dams, draining fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The month of few stars”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(29 Sep – 27 Oct)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>La Nau</td>
<td>Threshing</td>
<td>Reaping, stooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The month of weeds”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28 Oct – 25 Nov)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>La Ply</td>
<td>Transporting and storing of harvest</td>
<td>Threshing, transporting and storing of harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The month of the dead”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27 Nov – 25 Dec)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These month names were not given any meanings by the Palokhi Karen.

While the agricultural cycle is dependent on seasonal changes, the calendrical system of the Palokhi Karen itself reflects the importance of swiddening in the past and in their present life. There are also certain significant features about the system and associated beliefs which play a role in determining the availability of labour for agricultural activities in Palokhi. Although the full workings of
the Palokhi calendar are still unclear to me, it is nevertheless possible to pick out aspects of the system which are relevant to this discussion.²

Figure 5.1 The Cycle of Agricultural Activities in Palokhi
The calendar is a lunar one and the lunar year (ni) is divided into twelve months or “moons” (la). Each month is reckoned from when the new moon appears, which is spoken of as “the rising of the new moon” (thau la sau), to when there is no moon which is called “the moon dies” (la si). The month is divided into two halves, corresponding to the waxing and waning phases of the moon, which are marked by the full moon (la pghe) and no moon (la si). In the first half, the moon is thought to “rise” (thau) while in the second half it is thought to “descend” (lau). These two terms, thau and lau, which reflect the cyclic nature of the moon’s appearance provide a good indication of how time is conceived of in Palokhi Karen thought, with agricultural processes as a central consideration.

In various agricultural rituals (see Chapter VI), the cyclic nature of agricultural seasons is implicitly described in terms of metaphors of “rising” and “descending”. The transition between the old and new agricultural seasons (between wet-rice harvesting in November-January and swidden planting in April-May) is also described in these terms: this transition, which is marked by the rites of the New Year, is called “the descent of the land” (kau lau we) and “the rising of the new year” (thau ni sau). Although these expressions do not constitute symmetrically paired oppositions, it is significant that the transition from one year to another should be described in terms of two different processes, one of which is seen as a descent while the other is seen as an ascent, or a rising. The first expression has to do with a belief that the land itself “rises” towards the end of the rainy season along with the rice crop. As we have already seen (Chapter III), the growth of the rice crop is in fact described by the same term, thau, which is an idiom central to “marriage” and the attainment of adult or reproductive status.

It is clear that in Palokhi usage (and perhaps more generally among the Karen) “rising” is a powerful metaphor with wide applications, all of which are concerned with process or development. After the rainy season, the land “descends”. The “rising of the new year”, however, parallels the description of the waxing moon, but it is significant that the year is never spoken of as “dying” unlike the moon. The Karen use of thau and lau in describing temporal phenomena points to a conceptualisation of time in terms of dynamic rather than static oppositions. It indicates that (similar to the Head Rite) agricultural seasons, as they are conceived of by the Palokhi Karen, repeat themselves in their constituent features and succeed one another through a renewal according to what might best be described as an idiom of natural “organic” rhythms rather than as a simple return to a previous state.

The waxing and waning phases of the moon are again divided in half by the quarter phases of the moon, called la dau’pha’. The Palokhi Karen believe that work — which refers essentially to agricultural work — should not be done on
la si, la pghe, and la dau’pha’. The prohibition on work is, however, by far the more important on la si and la pghe than on la dau’pha. The reason is that the Palokhi Karen have acquired from the Northern Thai the idea that the eighth and fifteenth days of the two phases of the lunar month (pet kham) are Buddhist holy days (wan sin), when in fact their own tradition recognises the fifteenth days as significant days through the prohibition on work. The ban on work on the eighth days, therefore, is derived from the Northern Thai. Although this is given some cognisance, the ban on work on the eighth days is not rigidly adhered to, and it explains why the Palokhi Karen (who are not Buddhist in any real sense of the term) do not observe it. The prohibition on work which is more strictly observed on la si and la pghe is important is determining the amount of labour time available in Palokhi: it means that in each agricultural year, at least 24 days (that is, almost one lunar month) are not given to agricultural work.

Very generally, bans on work in Palokhi appear to be part of the process of the symbolic management of time associated with ritual transformations in individual statuses or social states. For example, when a man and woman marry, they may not work for three days after the completion of their marriage ceremonies. Divorced couples are also not supposed to work for one day after the final ‘au’ ma xae’ which dissolves their marriage, while households which perform the ritual in the normal course of events do not work on the day or days when the ritual is held. Similarly, when a child is born in the village, all work ceases on that day (Chapter VI, pp. 395–6). Bans on work are thus integral to the way in which time is organised and structured in Palokhi. The bans on work on la si and la pghe are, similarly, a part of this process. Indeed, there could be no more suitable way of representing time in Palokhi. Work is something that is done “all the time” in the agricultural cycle and its prohibition, particularly when it is enjoined upon all members of the community, could not be more experientially disjunctive of the flow of time and life. The existence of this prohibition at those points of the lunar cycle — the very means by which time is measured — when the moon’s phases undergo a change, and the absence of any ritual activity whatsoever (unlike those I have mentioned) suggest that it is indeed a key feature in the representation of time in Palokhi.

I turn now to a brief discussion of the months in the Palokhi calendar in order to show that it is essentially based on the swidden cycle, even though individual households depend heavily on wet-rice cultivation and their earnings from wage labour outside the village.

The first month of the year is called La Talae but the Palokhi Karen were unable to provide a meaning for this month name. Marshall (1922:49–50), who records a similar name (Th’ Le), says that it means “the searching month, when the villagers hunt for a new village site”. This, however, cannot be the meaning in Palokhi, although the Palokhi Karen do indeed begin their preparations for
house-building in this month which corresponds approximately to January. The second and third months, however, offer positive evidence that the calendar is associated with the round of swiddening activities. According to the Palokhi Karen, the second month, La Thi Phae’, is “the month of clearing” (which Marshall also claims is the meaning of this month), while the third is called La Khu’ which means “the month of chopping” or “the month of felling”. These two months correspond roughly to February and March when the Palokhi Karen do, in fact, commence clearing their swiddens. The remaining months of the year do not, however, pertain to swiddening activities and appear to describe seasonal phenomena. The month La De’ Nja (May-June), for instance, is said to be “the frog, fish month” because they abound at this time of the year, following the onset of the rains which usually appear in mid-April. Marshall, however, who gives the same month name says that it means “the lily month, when the wild lilies bloom” but this is a meaning which the Palokhi Karen do not appear to have any knowledge of. The months which fall roughly in September and October are named La Ci My and La Ci Cha and are said to mean “the month of little rain” and “the month of few stars” respectively. The latter has the same meaning as that given by Marshall, while the former according to Marshall means “the month of a little sunshine, when after the heaviest rain there is a little fair weather”. “Little sun” is, in fact, the literal meaning of the month name, but the Palokhi rendering of this name derives from a folk etymology relying upon the expression for rain my kho chu, which means “the sky (literally, “the sun’s head”) rains”. La Nau (October-November) contains an oblique reference to the final stages in the cycle of swidden cultivation, according to Palokhi explanations; it means “the month of weeds” which begin to appear in swiddens once the rice has been reaped.

**Swidden Agriculture: Land Use**

The systems of land use and rights in the Karen communities described by Kunstigter (1978), Hinton (1975) and Madha (1980) all share certain common features. The most important are fallow cycles, ranging from four to ten years (or slightly more), which are closely observed, and usufructuary rights to swiddens and fallow swiddens which are inalienable and inheritable but which may be voluntarily transferred from an owner (or household head) to another household by surrendering the rights, or by sale. Both these features are essentially mechanisms which regulate access to forest resources for swiddening purposes in conditions which are characterised by ecological deterioration as a result of population increases.

In Palokhi, however, neither of these features exist as part of a system of land use and rights regulating access to forests and swidden land. Because of the generally stable ecological conditions in the Huai Thung Choa valley and the relative abundance of forests, there are few, if any, ecological constraints
which would demand some form of regulation of access to resources. Furthermore, although the population of Palokhi has increased steadily since the founding of the settlement, population growth has yet to reach a level where the resources of the Huai Thung Choa valley would be inadequate for the swiddening needs of the Palokhi Karen. Another reason why ecological conditions have tended to remain favourable and, indeed, improve over the last ten years (Prayad and Chapman [1983]), is because the Palokhi Karen have diversified their resource base by taking up wet-rice cultivation thus reducing pressure on the forests of the Huai Thung Choa valley as a resource for swidden cultivation. All these factors explain the absence of institutionalised regulation of access to land for swiddening in the form of a thorough-going system of land use and rights in Palokhi. I might add, however, that the Palokhi Karen are not altogether unfamiliar with land use-rights systems having themselves migrated to Palokhi from areas where there were shortages of swiddening land, as I noted in Chapter II.

Swidden sites are selected freely by individual households — except when, of course, households may have decided to swidden a particular area without knowing that some other household had already chosen the same location. This, however, is a very rare occurrence because households in Palokhi are usually well-informed about such matters. Information about site selection is not made known through formal or institutionalised means such as “meetings of elders” and so on; it is made known in the course of conversation in the day or, more usually, in the evenings after meals when the Palokhi Karen visit one another for pleasure and to organise labour for some task or other. Where use rights are concerned, households retain residual rights to swiddens which they have cultivated before but this takes the form of having access to some of the cultigens which continue to grow when the swiddens are left fallow and it is an access that is by no means restricted to others in most instances. Because swidden land is readily available, households for all practical purposes do not hold on to usufructuary rights to fallow swiddens.

The existence of ample forest reserves for swiddening in the Huai Thung Choa valley has two important implications for an understanding of swidden production in Palokhi. First, the fallow periods of cultivated land are very long. Many households in Palokhi have never returned to swiddens which they previously cultivated. In some cases, a few households have cultivated land previously swiddened by other households, but this has been the exception rather than the rule. The shortest fallow period in these isolated cases, reported by the Palokhi Karen, is twelve years. In one highly exceptional case, one household (H2) cultivated a swidden in 1981 which it had cultivated in 1980 although the members of the household were fully aware of the fact that the rice harvest in 1981 would be drastically smaller than that in 1980. The reason why they did so was because they had considerable surpluses from the 1980 harvest.
and wished to take advantage of this by committing a greater proportion of their labour to opening up an additional plot of rice terraces. They expected that the previous year’s surpluses and the harvest from the additional plot would offset the decline in swidden production for the year which, as it turned out, proved to be the case.

The second important implication is that shortfalls in rice production in Palokhi are not associated with poor swiddening conditions in the form of short fallow cycles along with low levels of organic fertilisers which are the result of burning regenerated forest cover with a low biomass. The shortfalls are associated with insufficient domestic supplies of labour for a more extensive cultivation of rice to meet the needs of a relatively larger non-economically active population. In short, rice deficits in swidden (and wet-rice) cultivation are related to the generally high dependency ratios of households resulting from the fairly rapid increase in the population of Palokhi since it was first settled.

**Wet-rice Agriculture: Land Use, Inheritance, and the “Management” of Agricultural Land**

The history of wet-rice agriculture in Palokhi, although a short one, is nonetheless interesting from several points of view. Palokhi Karen entry into wet-rice cultivation may be regarded as pioneer activity of sorts because they had not practised this system of rice cultivation before, although they were not unfamiliar with the general techniques and principles of the system, having come from villages which in some cases did have such a system of cultivation. The acquisition of wet-rice terraces, by the Palokhi Karen, was not always by means of clearing the vegetation which had grown over the fields abandoned by the Hmong. In certain instances, the Palokhi Karen actually purchased the fields, fully or partially cleared by Northern Thai who had preceded them or from Karen who had done so but who could not cultivate all the plots of terraces which they had laid claim to. Entry into wet-rice cultivation has also meant the development of new systems of land use and tenure which are significantly different from that in swidden agriculture. It has also resulted in the gradual evolution of an inheritance system which is still in the process of working itself out, with the death of a few men who initially laid claim to the Hmong terraces. Wet-rice cultivation has also led to an elaboration of the ritual life of the Palokhi Karen, as I noted before, and this has taken the form of adapting some swidden rituals to the wet-rice cycle, and adopting some Northern Thai rituals wholesale along with some agricultural techniques learnt from the Northern Thai.
Land use

The history of wet-rice cultivation in Palokhi is best traced through an examination of the ways in which the abandoned Hmong terraces have been acquired and brought under cultivation as well as the numerous transactions in these terraces that have taken place.

The original means by which these terraces were reclaimed for cultivation involved clearing the secondary growth in the fields, burning the slashed vegetation after it had dried, and hoeing out the terraces again. It is a method which the Palokhi Karen still use in opening up new terraces. Because the terraces were cut before, the work of reclamation is less onerous than the opening up of terraces from the forest which some Palokhi households are, in fact, now doing as the last Hmong terraces have all been reclaimed. As the accompanying table (Table 5.2) shows, the Palokhi Karen were preceded by two Northern Thai households and one Burmese household in the reclamation of the wet-rice plots. Subsequent in-migration of Karen and the departure of the Northern Thai and Burmese households changed the pattern of land acquisition somewhat with the Karen either reclaiming the Hmong terraces or purchasing them.\(^3\) Purchases have been made from those who had opened up the terraces (partially or fully) for cultivation or, as it happened in some cases, from those who laid claim to plots of land but did not clear these plots for cultivation. The Palokhi Karen who purchased wet-rice fields have done so either from non-Karen who had preceded them in the Huai Thung Choa valley, or from Karen who for one reason or another left Palokhi after reclaiming, or purchasing, plots of wet-rice fields. The nature of purchases of wet-rice fields have consisted of various arrangements ranging from straightforward cash payments to payments in kind (notably in buffaloes, the largest form of capital in Palokhi after, of course, wet-rice fields) which are essentially exchange transactions, to share-cropping, that is, rice payments, or a combination of share-cropping and cash payments. As the details of the various forms of land acquisition for the purpose of wet-rice farming are presented in the table, I shall therefore confine my discussion here to drawing out the more significant aspects of the process as it has taken place in Palokhi.
Table 5.2. Land Transactions in Palokhi (c. 1950–1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plot</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nature of Transactions and Principals</th>
<th>Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>c.1950</td>
<td>Di Wo(NT) reclaimed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Di Wo(NT) sold to Lauj</td>
<td>Half-share of first year’s harvest + Bht 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>c.1951</td>
<td>Mauchwaelu(B) reclaimed partially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Mauchwaelu(B) sold to Lauj 1 buffalo (NA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Lauj reclaimed further</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Lauj sold to Kasa 1 buffalo (Bht 1,500)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Kasa sold to Di Bht 1,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Di opened</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Taa ‘Yyng(NT) reclaimed partially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Taa ‘Yyng(NT) left unused</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Taa ‘Yyng(NT) sold to Liam</td>
<td>Half-share of first year’s harvest + Bht 640</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Liam opened</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Lu Sa reclaimed partially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Lu Sa sold to Kasa Bht 1,200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Kasa died; inherited by ‘Ae’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Nila Phy reclaimed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Nila Phy sold to Puu Taa(NT) 4 taaj unhusked rice + Bht 200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Puu Taa(NT) sold to Chwi’ 2 buffaloes (Bht 3,000)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1974–77</td>
<td>Chwi’ leased to Taaj(NT) As payment for re-building an irrigation system (including a wooden aqueduct) for the field</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Chwi’ leased to Soet(NT) Share-cropping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Chwi’ let out to step-son (Chi’) Share in harvest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Chwi’ leased to Duang 50 pip unhusked rice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Chwi’ leased to Nae’ Kha 50 pip unhusked rice Chwi’ died; plot inherited by wife and son in Huai Dua and made over to Nae’ Kha Exchanged for a plot owned by Nae’ Kha in Huai Dua</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Tamu’ reclaimed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>c.1950</td>
<td>NT reclaimed partially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>NT abandoned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Mauchwaeuli(B) reclaimed partially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Mauchwaeuli(B) sold to Thi Pghe Bht 1,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Thi Pghe died; inherited by wife and children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1979–81</td>
<td>Leased to Taan(NT) Bht 1,200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980–81</td>
<td>Taan(NT) sub-let to Chwi Bht 800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Lu Sa reclaimed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Lu Sa died; inherited by wife and children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Taa ‘Yyng(NT) claimed; “sold” to Toeloe Bht 60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Taa ‘Yyng(NT) sold to Puu Taa(NT) NA  Share-cropping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1972–79</td>
<td>Puu Taa(NT) leased to various NT Bht 20,000 — inclusive of price of miang gardens and a house also purchased by Kino</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Puu Taa(NT) sold to Kino Share-cropping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Chi’ claimed; “sold” to Toeloe Bht 60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Chi’ sold to NT Bht 800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>NT sold to La Zi Bht 3,025</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Chwi’ reclaimed partially</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Chwi’ sold to Duang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K1</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Duang opened</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Chi’ claimed; sold to Su Ghau</td>
<td>Bht 1,600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Chi’ claimed; sold to Thi’</td>
<td>Bht 1,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Chi’ claimed; acquired by Thaun(NT)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Nae’ Kha opened</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Duang claimed</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Duang relinquished claim; turned over Nil to Pi No’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is given in Thai units of measurement, that is, raj (1 raj = 0.16 ha), and the figures were obtained from the present owners of the fields. The figures in this column tally with those stated in receipts held by the owners for a tax (phasii bamrung thaung thii 6) paid by them (see text). These are estimates declared by the owners themselves as no cadastral surveys were conducted by the Department of Lands. More accurate measurements of the areas of these plots are given in Table 5.3 of this chapter where I discuss returns to land and labour in Palokhi.

The initials in brackets after the names that appear in this column indicate non-Karen owners: NT — Northern Thai; B — Burmese. All last named owners are Palokhi Karen with the exception of Kino, a Karen merchant resident in the large Northern Thai settlement of Ban Pa Pae, and Thaun, a Northern Thai living in the village of Ban Mae Lao.

As discussed in Chapter IV, there are various share-cropping arrangements which are recognised by the Palokhi Karen and they are derived from the Northern Thai. The cash transactions are given according to their value when the transactions took place. The money value of buffaloes (in brackets), however, are given in terms of 1980–81 prices prevailing in Palokhi and Northern Thai villages in the area which would be, roughly, twice that in the years 1965–68. The rice measures taaj and pip, are Northern Thai units which the Palokhi Karen have adopted from the Northern Thai. A taaj is a jute sack (also known as kasaub) and 1 taaj is equivalent to 6 pip (which is otherwise called taang). In the highlands of Northern Thailand, 1 pip or taang is, usually, equivalent to 22 litres rather than 20 litres as in the lowlands (Thannarong, et al., n.d.). The pip or taang actually refers to the large tins in which kerosene is commercially sold. It is now not uncommon, however, to find pip or taang defined in terms of 20 litres. In the Pa Pae hills area and the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area a pip is generally equivalent to 22 litres.
Figure 5.2 Sketch map showing Palokhi Karen Wet-rice Fields and Swiddens (1981) in the Huai Thung Choa Valley nearest the village

Note: About one third of the area used for swiddens lay further from the village.
Perhaps the most immediately obvious features of the general pattern of land acquisition in Palokhi are the increase in ownership of fields by the Karen, and the recurrent presence of Northern Thai in reclaiming and cultivating fields. It is clear that as the Karen migrated into the Huai Thung Choa valley, they actively opened up wet-rice fields in the area. This, however, was a gradual process in which the fields (where they were reclaimed or purchased, partially cleared, by the Karen) were brought under cultivation through small increments, during which time swidden cultivation was also practised just as it is up the present time. It should also be noted that not all the fields that were brought under cultivation in this manner were abandoned Hmong wet-rice fields; plots B1, C1, J, L, M, N, O and P were all cleared from the forest along the banks of the Huai Thung Choa. In other words, wet-rice cultivation through the years has now reached a stage when wholly new wet-rice terraces are being cut, and it is a process that will continue into the future as several households owning these new plots intend to do so in order to enlarge their fields. It may be noted, too, that in some instances, Karen families on moving into the area tended to “over claim” fields by acquiring more than they could cultivate with their domestic supplies of labour. As we have seen (Chapter II), most of the families that migrated to Palokhi, especially in the early part of the settlement’s history, were all young families with high dependency ratios. This was the case, for example, with plot B purchased by Lauy from Mauchwaelu in 1953. This also happened with plots B and D where D was worked, while B was left virtually uncultivated. The same happened in the case of plots E and K although under slightly different circumstances. Chwi’ acquired these plots when he was married to ‘Ae’ who owned D which was one of the largest plots in Palokhi, and which was able to support them to a large extent. The ownership of wet-rice fields by women is highly exceptional in the village (for reasons which I discuss later) and this was the only case. The plot was inherited by ‘Ae’ when her first husband, Kasa, died (see p. 344, n. 11). As can be seen, these “excess” plots were eventually disposed of by sale (the normal pattern of land transfers involving Karen principals) with Lauy selling plot B to Kasa, and Kasa selling it subsequently to Di, while Chwi’ sold plot K to Duang.

The transactions involving plot E, however, are unusual in that they entailed lease which is not typical of Palokhi land transactions in general. This was because of Chwi’’s special situation. As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, Chwi’ and ‘Ae’ were divorced in 1976. By that time, Chwi’ had already leased out the plot to Taay for the period 1974–77 having found the labour commitments in ‘Ae’’s field too great to allow him to also cultivate plot E as well. Although this is an exceptional occurrence in Palokhi, nevertheless, it indicates that it is only those households which already own sufficient wet-rice fields which can acquire more. When Chwi’ left Palokhi for Huai Dua after the divorce, he
continued to lease out the field as an absentee landlord as a means of obtaining
rice to supplement the rice from a wet-rice field which he acquired there.

The transactions involving plots J, L, M and N however, do not represent
“over claiming”. They were all schemes thought up by Chi’ (the son of ‘Ae’)
who was an opium addict, to obtain money in order to support his habit. None
of these plots were actually cleared for cultivation at the time of sale. They were
merely claimed by Chi’ who then sold them off when other Karen arrived in
Palokhi and wanted to acquire wet-rice fields.

Nevertheless, this reveals an important aspect of land acquisition in Palokhi
which characterises the acquisition of land by other Karen in Palokhi: the fact
of claim immediately confers rights to fields.

This explains why Su Ghau and Thi’, for instance, who were vaguely aware
that they were probably being taken advantage of, nevertheless, parted with
their money. The only case of a dispute over land in Palokhi, however, concerns
plot J. According to Toeloe, Chi’ agreed to sell the plot to him for Bht 60, but
Chi’ claimed that he was only renting it out to Toeloe. Toeloe did pay Chi’ the
money, and opened up a small part of the plot for cultivation. A few years later,
however, Chi’ arranged to sell the plot to a Northern Thai of his own accord.
When Toeloe learned of this, he attempted to stop the sale of the plot but the
Northern Thai was not prepared to forego the use of the land. Eventually, the
Northern Thai paid the money to Toeloe instead of Chi’ and the matter was left
at that. Where plot N is concerned, however, Thaun a Northern Thai from the
village of Ban Mae Lao was not convinced that Chi’ had any rights to the plot
at all, despite Chi’”s insistence to the contrary. After several attempts to induce
Thaun to pay him something for the plot, Chi’ eventually gave up all hope of
obtaining money from Thaun, who began cultivating the plot in 1981.

The Northern Thai (and Burmese) presence in the Huai Thung Choa valley
is to be explained, according to Palokhi Karen accounts, by the fact that they,
like the Palokhi Karen, were attracted by the prospects of acquiring wet-rice
fields with the advantage of bringing them under cultivation with relatively
low inputs of labour. Yet, the Northern Thai presence has not been a permanent
one. With the exception of the two Northern Thai and Burmese cultivators who
were actually resident in the area in the early fifties, all the Northern Thai who
owned, or leased, wet-rice fields in Palokhi (that is, from 1968 onwards) only
stayed to cultivate these fields during the wet season. So while they were
interested in cultivating the wet-rice fields in Palokhi, nevertheless they were
not interested in settling in the area, preferring to remain in their own settlements
(Ban Pha Taek and Ban Mae Lao) along the Mae Malai-Pai road and cultivating
these fields on a part-time basis. With the exception of Taan, who owned a small
plot of terraces in Ban Tung Choa (the Northern Thai village nearest Palokhi),
and Puu Taa a merchant in the village of Ban Mae Lao, all the other Northern Thai are said by the Palokhi Karen to have been landless in their own settlements.

Why, then, did they not settle in the Huai Thung Choa valley? I doubt very much if the reason is that they were displaced and later pre-empted by Karen in-migration as Karen movement into the area was in small numbers and then again only gradually, as I have shown in Chapter II. The reason is most likely to be found in Northern Thai attitudes towards the habitation of forests and nature. The Northern Thai, as Davis explains (1984:79–85), view the forest as being outside of “civilisation”, the epitome of which is the city, an extremely important feature in their cultural topography. In between are human settlements which are regarded as being more, or less, civilised according to their proximity to cities or roads which are the evidence of civilisation. In these terms, the Huai Thung Choa, at least from its middle section upwards, would most certainly be beyond the pale as far as the Northern Thai are concerned and it would account for their reluctance to settle in the area.

Nonetheless the Northern Thai presence in the valley is significant because it provides some indication of what socio-economic conditions were probably like in Northern Thai communities in the wider area. The fact that most of them who acquired land were landless suggests that even in their own communities resources were relatively scarce. By this, I am not however referring to a scarcity resulting from environmental deterioration.

Although some Northern Thai in the area do practise swiddening (for example, around Mae Lao), most of them seem to prefer wet-rice cultivation. In the Pa Pae hills, however, land suitable for such cultivation occurs in small pockets in little stream valleys such as the Huai Thung Choa. With the gradual increase in Northern Thai populations in the area, as a result of upland migration and natural growth, and with the Karen, and even Hmong in some cases (see Cooper [1984:77]), turning increasingly to wet-rice cultivation, there can be little doubt that land for wet-rice cultivation was gradually becoming scarce from the Northern Thai point of view. It is altogether likely that the number of Northern Thai not engaged in rice cultivation has been increasing despite the fact that the Northern Thai have migrated upland in order to seek out opportunities for wet-rice farming. A good indication of the availability of Northern Thai for labour employment may be seen in Kunzel’s study (1983) which shows relatively large numbers of Northern Thai being employed by units of the Royal Forestry Department compared to the Karen and Lisu in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area. Similar reasons very probably account for the recurrent presence of the Northern Thai in the Huai Thung Choa valley: apart from cultural attitudes which would explain why they did not (and still do not) settle there, their off-and-on presence is related to alternative economic opportunities.
elsewhere, even before the units of the Royal Forestry Department offered employment for the surplus labour in Northern Thai settlements.

There is one other point to note about the presence of Northern Thai in the Huai Thung Choa valley. Northern Thai contribution to the development of Karen wet-rice farming systems in the form of irrigation technology has been widely reported (see, for example, Iijima [1979:104]; Hinton [1975:122]), although in at least one case the Lua’ have also assisted in the process (Kunstadter [1978:92]). In Palokhi, however, this has not been strictly the case because when the Palokhi Karen arrived and began to cultivate wet-rice fields, they were already familiar with the methods of irrigating wet-rice fields by building dams, irrigation canals, and so on. In a more general, historical sense however there is no doubt that the original source of this technology has been the Northern Thai. The terminology of wet-rice cultivation in Palokhi is essentially Northern Thai (see Appendix F), as is the case with the Pwo Karen studied by Hinton.

An important feature of the various transactions that have taken place from 1950–81 is the increasing costs of wet-rice fields. Although the increases have not been regular, the general trend has been for the price of wet-rice fields to increase over time. There are two reasons for this. First, the increases, and their irregularity, reflect the cost of labour in bringing the fields under cultivation through reclamation. Thus, the prices of fields have increased as the fields were progressively cleared. In other words, the fields have become more valuable according to the amount of labour put in to make them cultivable. The second reason has to do, of course, with general inflationary trends in the wider economy particularly with the construction of the Mae Taeng-Pai road which reached Ban Mae Lao in 1980.

It is also worth noting, in connection with the terms of transactions, that cash payments have played a part from the time when the first Karen settlers arrived, with the exception of the payments in rice and buffaloes. The significance of this is clear: the Palokhi Karen are no strangers to a cash economy and were able to raise to some extent the cash necessary to purchase land from their Northern Thai, Burmese and, subsequently, Karen predecessors. The cash payments, however, were rarely made in one transfer. In most cases, payments were made in instalments because insufficient cash was available. Indeed, the sharecropping arrangements that also include cash payments, and the payments in the form of buffaloes, all represent negotiated settlements because of insufficient cash. So, although the Palokhi Karen were no strangers to a cash economy they, nevertheless, lacked large supplies of cash to handle transactions which require it. This is still a feature of the economy of Palokhi.

This brings us to a consideration of land tenure and ownership in Palokhi. We have seen that ownership in its most general sense is established by the mere fact of claim. The claim to land for wet-rice cultivation is essentially no different
from the claim to land for swiddening. As far as the Palokhi Karen are concerned, claims to land confer full rights of ownership and disposal as long as one wishes to use the land.\textsuperscript{7} There is, however, one obvious difference between ownership of land for swiddening and land for wet-rice cultivation. While land, in general, is a “free good” in both cases, the ownership of swiddens is relinquished after cultivation because of the availability of forests for further cultivation (see also Grandstaff [1976:157]), whereas this is not the case with land for wet-rice cultivation because the land may be re-used continuously, so to speak.

From a Palokhi perspective, we might say that the ownership of wet-rice land is the possession of usufructuary rights held in perpetuity as it were. From this point of view, however, the ownership of land for wet-rice cultivation is clearly an important one in terms of the ownership of personal property which is the only other kind of ownership recognised in Palokhi and this is the reason why land is transacted in the way it is, that is, by being bought and sold. When such land is claimed, cleared and cultivated it is withdrawn from the pool of land available to others in the community “permanently” unlike swiddening land which is withdrawn only for a year although, effectively, this would be for as long as it takes for the forest to regenerate sufficiently for swiddening to be viable again. In principle, therefore, ownership in a Karen context means absolute rights of use which may be voluntarily deferred, transferred or relinquished and it underlies all forms of land rights and tenure whether this concerns access to swiddens in ecologically degraded areas, ecologically favourable areas (such as the Huai Thung Choa valley), or wet-rice fields.

Legally, however, the Palokhi Karen do not in fact own or even possess their wet-rice fields. Under the Land Code which came into effect on 1 December 1954, with the Promulgation of Land Code Act B.E. 2947, a distinction now exists between land ownership and land possession.\textsuperscript{8} The former is recognised by a document of title (\textit{canood}) which includes a land title deed with a map, a pre-emption title deed, and a pre-emption certificate (\textit{baj caung}). Land possession, on the other hand, is recognised by the pre-emption certificate which is an “authorization of temporary occupation of land”. There is also a “certificate of use” in addition to these two documents which is merely a document by a “competent official certifying that land has already been put to use”. The Palokhi Karen possess none of these certificates or documents. All that they have are receipts acknowledging that they have paid a tax, the \textit{phasii bamrung thaungthii 6} which is a “tax for maintaining the upkeep of a locality no. 6”, similar to a conservancy fee. It does not specify the nature of the land or the use to which it is put.\textsuperscript{9} The tax is assessed at Bht 5 per \textit{raj} and was first levied in 1977 when officials from the Mae Taeng District Office came to Pa Pae to register people in the area for the purposes of issuing them with identity cards. As far as the Palokhi Karen are concerned, however, they believe that the tax is paid
specifically for their wet-rice fields. Indeed, some of them believe that these receipts, which they are instructed to “keep safely”, indicate that they own their fields. Others, however, are vaguely aware that the receipts do not do this but they believe that eventually they will be given documents which will certify ownership of their fields.

Although they are ignorant of the complexities surrounding the legal ownership of land, nevertheless, the Palokhi Karen are conscious of the importance of having their rights to wet-rice fields officially recognised and they are very conscientious indeed when it comes to paying the tax. They are also extremely concerned about having any land transfers officially witnessed. Given, however, the fact that in the eyes of the law they are only occupants of land who do not even possess pre-emption certificates or certificates of use, this means that the land transfers and transactions in Palokhi have no legal status whatsoever. Nevertheless, they make attempts to obtain “official recognition” of their land transactions by having the kamnan (the officially recognised headman of a cluster of villages) of Ban Mae Lao write up, on a sheet of exercise-book paper, a statement to the effect that a certain plot of terraces has been sold by one person to another (identified by name) at a certain price or according to certain terms, and which the kamnan himself witnesses by appending his signature along with that of two other witnesses. The Palokhi Karen themselves place their thumb-prints on the paper. These pieces of paper are kept as carefully as the tax receipts.

There is one further point to note about the ownership of wet-rice fields in Palokhi. With the exception of ‘Ae’, they are all “owned” by men. The explanation for this is that as men have opened up these fields for cultivation they, therefore, own it although of course the crops are shared by the household and in this sense the fields may be said to belong to all members of the household. There, however, other reasons why wet-rice fields are seen to be essentially owned by men. Although most tasks in wet-rice farming are not marked by a sexual division of labour, as in swiddening, nevertheless the areas where such a division is far more conspicuous than in swiddening are tasks such as ploughing, harrowing and the construction and maintenance of irrigation systems. Furthermore, the performance of rituals — as in swiddens — is very much the prerogative of men. The identification of men as the owners of wet-rice fields in Palokhi is, therefore, very marked at the present time.

It follows from the foregoing that, in Palokhi, inheritance is an issue which has no legal status in the sense that it is not legally documented, nor does it follow Thai law. The inheritance of wet-rice fields — to the extent that it may be said to follow any semblance of formulable rules — is based on traditional custom and precedents set in longer established villages but, as I noted earlier, it is an issue that is still in the process of working itself out.
Inheritance

According to the Palokhi Karen, inheritable property, that is, wet-rice fields, buffaloes and cattle, should be equally shared by the surviving spouse and children of a person when he, or she, dies. This, at any rate is the theory in Palokhi, and it is a rule or custom that is reported for other Karen as well (see, for example, Hinton [1975:62–3]; Madha [1980:68]; but cf. Hamilton [1976:61]). In practice, however, there is considerable ambiguity surrounding what the Palokhi Karen actually do, suggesting that the “rule” which they enunciate is very much an ideal one. To understand why this is so, it should be noted that traditionally the Karen probably did not have immovable property that could be inherited in the first place, although they may have had livestock. Most property was, and still is, property for personal use, for example, bush knives, smoking pipes, muzzle-loading guns, looms, sling bags, silver bangles and earrings, and so on. In Palokhi custom as with that of other Karen, such personal effects are buried (or burnt in some other communities) along with the body on the person’s death. In other words, such property was not inherited.

In Palokhi, they do admit however that objects such as silver ornaments and Northern Thai muzzle-loaders (which are superior in construction and beauty to those made by the Karen) are too valuable to be destroyed in this way (cf. Hinton [1975:63]). What is usually done in such cases is that all the objects which are supposed to be buried with the corpse are taken along with the corpse to the burial ground; the objects which are regarded as being too valuable to be interred are then deposited just outside the ground while the body and other objects are buried. The next day, the objects are retrieved and they may then be shared by the spouse and children of the deceased.

It will be noted that most of these objects are sex specific, for example, guns, bangles, earrings, and so forth and they are, therefore, taken by wives or husbands, sons or daughters, accordingly. Alternatively they may be sold off and the proceeds divided among the inheritors. This underlies the elaboration to the rule that if non-partible property such as cattle, buffaloes and land cannot be shared equally, then they may be sold off and the money divided equally among the inheritors. In practice, however, a variety of arrangements may be entered into which allow inheritors to have a share in their inheritance without resorting to sale, namely, agistment of livestock, and sharecropping of wet-rice fields. These arrangements are, of course, conditional on practical considerations such as willingness to assume the responsibility of rearing the livestock, residence which would make cultivating the fields feasible and worthwhile, and so on.

These arrangements are all entirely sensible, rational and pragmatic given that the rule of inheritance, as an ideal, attempts to ensure an equal distribution of property and it is wholly consistent with, as Hinton has noted, the fundamentally egalitarian ethos of Karen societies. The problem about inheritance
in Palokhi, however, is not what is (said should be) done to effect an equitable settlement among inheritors. The problem is what actually happens to land, specifically wet-rice fields, when a man dies and is survived by a wife and children, because it appears — from the three instances of inheritance that have occurred in Palokhi — that wives “inherit” but do not “own” such fields (see also Stern [1965]). Although I have been using the term “inheritance” thus far, I wish to make the suggestion at this point that it is not, perhaps, very useful in describing what seem to be fluid, or variable, sociological arrangements pertaining to the transmission and sharing of property rights where wet-rice fields are concerned. This will be self-evident from the three cases of inheritance that I consider now.

The first case of a death involving the transfer of property (Plot H) occurred when Lu Sa died in 1977. He was survived by a wife and five adult children. Of these children, two sons were resident in Palokhi with their mother, while the other children (two daughters and a son) were resident elsewhere. All of the children were said to have a share in the plot of terraces which Lu Sa had opened up, as did their mother. The plot was cultivated by Can Ta’ and La who were resident in Palokhi. Their siblings resident elsewhere retained their rights to the plot but at no point in time did they exercise them, nor did they ask that they be paid money as part of the share from Can Ta’, La, or their mother. Neither were share-cropping arrangements entered into. The plot was left as it was and cultivated by Can Ta’ and La, although in the end Can Ta’ became the principal cultivator because La lost interest in working the wet-rice field. According to Can Ta’, the field belonged to all of them, but clearly the field was being worked for the members of the household resident in Palokhi. For all practical purposes, however, Can Ta’ made all the decisions concerning the field. In terms of domestic arrangements and household economics, all of this makes sense. The point to note, however, is that Can Ta’ was the de facto “owner” and that his mother had little, or no, say in the use of the land. Undoubtedly, if his other siblings had wished to obtain their share of the plot, arrangements would have been made as I have already described so that this could be effected. This was not the case, however, because the plot was a small one and it was felt that the needs of the household left in Palokhi were great enough that they should continue to cultivate it for themselves. Besides, it would also have been difficult for Can Ta’ (let alone La, who was an opium addict) to raise the money to buy his other siblings out.

The second instance of inheritance in Palokhi occurred with the death of Thi Pghe in 1978. He was survived by his wife, his three children (the eldest of whom was sixteen years old), and his wife’s father Rae’, the ritual specialist in Palokhi. It was felt that Chi Choe, the eldest son, was still not old enough to work the field and, therefore, the land was leased out to Taan, a Northern Thai from Ban Thung Choa. Rae’ himself was too old to work the field, but in any
case there was no doubt that he did not have any rights to the land. Nonetheless, he was responsible, in the main, for making the decision to lease out the field, although this was done in consultation with two other older men in the village who, along with Rae’, usually officiated at various agricultural rituals, that is, Su Ghau and, of course, the headman Tamu’. Here, again, the role of Thi Pghe’s wife, was marginal. Chi Choe’s younger brother and sister were far too young to merit consideration insofar as working the field was concerned, although their rights to the land, as well as that of their mother, were acknowledged.

The third case of inheritance arose with the death of Chwi’ who had gone to live in Huai Dua after his divorce as discussed earlier. The circumstances pertaining to the land transactions of plot E are outlined in Table 5.2 and I shall therefore mention only those aspects of this case which show something of how this property was disposed of.

In Huai Dua, Chwi’ left behind a wife and a three year old son. They were said to own his fields at his death. As Nae’ Kha wished to make an exchange of fields, Su Ghau was sent to Huai Dua to arrange the transaction. This transaction is very revealing indeed of how surviving wives may “inherit” land from their husbands but not “own” it. It was decided by the elders in Huai Dua that as Chwi”s son was far too young to work the field, and as it would be a very long time before he would be able to do so, short term arrangements such as leasing out the land (as in Chi Choe’s case) were impracticable. Chwi”s plot in Palokhi was exchanged for Nae’ Kha’s plot in Huai Dua, and this latter plot was eventually sold off and the money handed to Chwi”s wife. She was, of course, consulted in these matters.

These three cases do not, however, cover the range of possibilities in inheritance which can be generated by the kinship system of the Palokhi Karen and concomitant residential patterns described in Chapter III. They have also occurred at a relatively early stage in the history of Palokhi when marriage, residence and death have yet to throw up these possibilities as real issues which the Palokhi Karen have to consider in deciding how to apply their rule on inheritance. For instance, in none of these cases is to be found a situation where there is a married daughter and her husband resident in the household of the dead person. Given the workings of the kinship system, and the norm that married daughters and their husbands stay in the parental house in succession, this is obviously a situation that will arise eventually in the future. This sort of situation, according to the Palokhi Karen, is not very different from those I have already described. The only difference would be the presence of a son-in-law who would, then, be able to cultivate the field if he and his wife wish to do so, and if the wife’s siblings are agreeable. As far as ensuring equitable shares in the land is concerned, the elaboration to the inheritance rule would still hold. Competing claims to cultivate the field may, of course, arise if there is a brother.
or brother-in-law also resident in the village, but this would have to be decided upon through negotiations and pragmatic considerations. Accommodations, therefore, can always be worked out. Indeed, such accommodations or arrangements may be worked out before the death of the owner of the field — not necessarily deliberately with a view to settling the issue of inheritance, but because of the exigencies of household members’ life circumstances.

A good example of this may be seen in the case of Lauj and plot A. Lauj has two daughters, both of whom are married and live in Palokhi with their husbands, and an unmarried son also resident in the village. Lauj himself stopped working his field for several years because of his age and addiction to opium. When his first daughter married Nu’, the field was worked by Nu’ and Chae Wo, the son, and the crop was shared by all members of the household. When his second daughter married Ci, Nu’ and his first daughter set up house of their own and cultivated swiddens, although Nu’ continued to contribute his labour to the cultivation of the wet-rice field which was then cultivated by Ci and Chae Wo. Lauj however continued to perform the agricultural rituals associated with the cultivation of the field.

When Lauj’s wife died, the house was destroyed, and Ci and his wife built their own house, while Lauj and Chae Wo built a small hut for themselves. The field was, at this time, still cultivated by Ci and Chae Wo, but Nu’ began to assume a more dominant role in its cultivation as Ci and Chae Wo gradually became addicted to opium in turn. The year after Lauj’s wife died, Nu’ built a larger house into which Lauj and Chae Wo moved as well, and from that time onwards Nu’ took over the cultivation of the field, although Lauj still performed the necessary rites. Ci, on the other hand, did not cultivate a swidden or wet-rice field (although he assisted Nu’ occasionally) and supported his family and habit almost entirely through wage labour. In 1980–1, it was evident that Nu’ was, for all practical purposes, the “owner” of the field. There can be no doubt that this succession of events and the accompanying arrangements in residence and household economics will greatly influence the inheritance of Lauj’s field; it is almost certain that Nu’ will take over the field through his wife’s claim in the field.

Although these arrangements have been conditioned by the fact that three out of four men are opium addicts, nevertheless one significant feature relevant to inheritance issues clearly emerges: household composition and the presence of a man — whether he is a son or son-in-law — are extremely important in the development of conditions which would need to be taken into account in inheritance, because the cultivation of fields, where the Palokhi Karen are concerned, is dependent on a man.
The Role of Men as Managers of Land

Notwithstanding the particular circumstances of the four cases above, and the variability in arrangements that attended the three instances of inheritance, there is one prominent feature about inheritance in Palokhi: the relationship between men and land is all important, and it affects the application of the rule on inheritance in two ways. First, it is men who determine what is done with land, as in ritual life. Second, the presence of a man among inheritors who may cultivate the land is an important factor in determining the outcome of how land is disposed of under the terms that guide the application of the inheritance rule. These are the fundamental aspects of inheritance in Palokhi, regardless of the workings of the kinship system and associated residential patterns. Thus, while we may expect different outcomes in how land is finally disposed of, that is, according to whether or not there are resident sons and daughters, or married daughters and sons-in-law, and how sharing arrangements or sales of shares are worked out, the common denominator in the final analysis is the presence of a man who, then, becomes the de facto owner. The reason (as I discuss below) is that men are necessary for the ritual management of cultivated land.

Looked at in this light, perhaps it does not matter very much whether the transmission of land, or rights to land is talked about in terms of “inheritance” or “ownership” or not at all, in so far as individuals are concerned. It would be more accurate to speak of the “ownership” by households (that is, domestic groups), and where the death of a man occurs, a re-allocation of shares or rights to land must take place because a man is required to cultivate the land. Given the sociology of agricultural production and domestic arrangements, such a re-allocation would in general result in another household assuming the “ownership” of the land through the share of one person whether that person is a son, a daughter, or even a wife — but only if she has a son, or son-in-law, resident with her who could undertake the cultivation of the field. To put this another way, households “own” land, and “ownership” is transmitted through individuals, male or female, by their rights or shares in the land, to the new households that are formed at the death of men in the original households. But, in all cases, men are the “managers” (which women never are or can be) of the land, whether they happen to be sons or sons-in-law.

The importance of men in conditioning the outcome of the inheritance of land undoubtedly lies in certain conceptualisations of sex roles and gender relations integral to the ideology of agricultural production, which is itself an essential part of the ideology of Palokhi Karen religion. In wet-rice agriculture, the construction of irrigation systems, and ploughing, harrowing and smoothening wet-rice fields — all of which require the driving of buffaloes — are seen as distinctly male tasks and these tasks are, needless to say, fundamental to wet-rice cultivation. While women may assist in clearing or repairing irrigation
canals, they never construct dams (the completion of which requires the performance of a ritual by the men who constructed it and share in its use) and it is inconceivable in Palokhi that women may drive buffaloes in order to plough, harrow and level wet-rice fields. Furthermore, with only one exception (which I discuss in the following chapter), all agricultural rituals are performed by men.

As we have also seen elsewhere, only men (the village elders and the headman) perform the Head Rite (talykho) which is specifically concerned with territorial spirits, and the tutelary spirit of the domain — the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. They are also the ones who attempt to impose the rules of marriage and officiate at marriage ceremonies. As I have shown however, an important part of the symbolic and ideological significance of marriage in Palokhi consists of the ritual management of “heat” and the infertility of land in the form of “hot” land. Land, in other words, is an essential feature or aspect of the “symbolic capital” of the Palokhi Karen. The inheritance of wet-rice fields in Palokhi, therefore, is not only concerned with the transmission of land for agricultural purposes to surviving kin. It is also concerned with religion and the dominance of men in the ritual life of the community, both of which are inseparable from agricultural production in the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen.

This, I might add, is one justification for a view which I expressed in Chapter I: that swidden agriculture has exerted a “priority” through which wet-rice agriculture has been subsumed within an existing ideological system. To the extent that wet-rice agriculture is a later historical development, where the Palokhi Karen are concerned, the ideological relationship between men and land embedded in the inheritance of wet-rice fields may be taken as a structural extension of a pre-existing relationship into a new form of land use.

**Rice Production and Consumption Requirements**

In Table 5.3 may be found data on land use, rice production, and consumption requirements in Palokhi. The data on the size of swiddens were obtained by a method commonly known as the field-book-and-compass-traverse method, while the size of wet-rice fields were determined through the use of aerial photographs. The data on rice production and consumption are based on reported figures and are given in litres.
Table 5.3. Rice Production and Consumption in Palokhi (1980–81)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household No.</th>
<th>Household Size</th>
<th>Swiddens Production*</th>
<th>Wet-rice Fields Production*</th>
<th>Total Production</th>
<th>Consumption Requirements</th>
<th>Surpluses/Deficits**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Glutinous (litres)</td>
<td>Non-glutinous (litres)</td>
<td>Glutinous (litres)</td>
<td>Non-glutinous (litres)</td>
<td>Glutinous (litres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>7,700</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1,760</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H11a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H11b</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H13a</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H13b</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9.43</td>
<td>15,840</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1,760</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Production of rice from swiddens and wet-rice fields are given in litres of unmilled rice.

** Total production is given in litres of milled rice. The conversion factors for non-glutinous and glutinous rice, unmilled to milled, are 0.55 and 0.44 respectively. These factors were obtained from a series of samples based on rice milling for household consumption in Palokhi. The sampling was conducted in the middle of 1981.

In Palokhi, all deficits are made up through the purchase of glutinous rice. Thus, the figures in brackets indicate deficits in non-glutinous rice from under or non-production of rice, while the deficits in glutinous rice show the actual amounts of glutinous rice required to meet consumption requirements. Where H4 is concerned, although non-glutinous rice production was insufficient to meet its needs, glutinous rice production was sufficient to make up the resulting deficit with a small surplus, hence the surplus of 7 litres.
The Palokhi Karen invariably measure their rice harvests in swiddens and wet-rice fields, using as their standard unit of measurement a 22 litre kerosene tin called a pip. It is a measure which they have adopted from the Northern Thai. The estimates of the size of harvests brought in by households are generally reliable, although the Palokhi Karen usually round off their reported figures to the nearest 10 pip. The annual consumption requirements of households in Table 5.3 are based on the amounts of rice required per day, as reported by each household. As far as domestic consumption requirements are concerned, the amounts required by households per day tend to be constant, unless there are visitors or when there are village celebrations. The figures on annual rice consumption requirements do not take into account the extra demand for rice on these occasions.

In the table, rice production from swiddens and wet-rice fields is given in litres of unmilled rice, while total production is given in litres of milled rice, in order to render the table a little more concise, and for purposes of comparison with consumption requirements. The conversion factors for glutinous and ordinary rice (unmilled to milled, by volume) are 0.55 and 0.44 respectively. These factors were obtained from a series of samples based on rice milling (or husking) for household consumption. The method of milling in Palokhi, which is employed by all rice-growing households, consists of pounding rice in a foot-powered mortar. The consumption requirements of households are given in litres of milled ordinary rice, which is generally consumed in preference to glutinous rice. Glutinous rice is usually used for making liquor and rice cakes on ceremonial occasions and households will only eat this kind of rice on occasion, for variety, or when their stocks of ordinary rice are exhausted.

Rice surpluses and deficits are also given in milled rice. The crucial data in the table, for this analysis of rice production and consumption in Palokhi, are the data on rice deficits, expressed as deficits in glutinous rice, experienced by individual households. All surpluses are given in litres of glutinous and non-glutinous rice where applicable. The deficits in non-glutinous rice (in brackets) have, however, been converted to deficits in glutinous rice which are the key indicators of the extent to which households are dependent on an external economy for their rice to make up their deficits. The reason is that the Palokhi Karen invariably buy glutinous rice from shops in Northern Thai settlements as this is cheaper. It is also, generally, rice that is more commonly available as it is the preferred form of rice among the Northern Thai in these settlements who also purchase it to meet their own requirements. The deficits in ordinary rice have been converted into deficits in glutinous rice for each deficit household in the table. The conversions were arrived at on the basis of reported figures on how much glutinous rice would be required for each household’s daily requirements if there was no ordinary rice. For those households which did not produce any rice at all, the glutinous rice deficits represent absolute rice...
requirements for the year. For those households which cultivated one or both
types of rice, the deficits in glutinous rice represent glutinous rice requirements
only after their stocks of ordinary and glutinous rice were used to meet their
consumption needs.

I have already noted in the previous chapter that there is no redistributive
system as such in Palokhi where rice from surplus households may be channelled
to households with deficits. It may also be pointed out here that in Palokhi, the
Karen generally do not make it a practice to buy or sell rice which they produce
themselves, although occasionally rice may be exchanged for some commodity
or other.\textsuperscript{14} Such transactions are limited in nature and are resorted to when
there may be a lack of ready cash. Furthermore, rice is usually only exchanged
in this way by households with rice surpluses so that the initiative and
willingness to utilise rice in this manner lies with them. As most goods in these
transactions are available through easily accessible sources (within or around
Palokhi, and in shops in Northern Thai settlements), the use of rice in such
exchange transactions is the exception rather than the rule. Within Palokhi,
therefore, rice is only circulated or “redistributed” in very small amounts.
Accordingly, deficit households can only obtain rice from external sources,
namely, shops in nearby Northern Thai settlements such as Ban Mae Lao and
Ban Pa Pae.

As may be seen from Table 5.3, total consumption requirements, in Palokhi,
in non-glutinous rice was 28,470 litres, while total production, also in
non-glutinous rice, was 23,890 litres, thus giving an overall shortage of rice
amounting to 4,580 litres or 16 per cent of consumption requirements. The deficit
would in fact have been somewhat less, as some households could make up part
if not all of their shortages with the glutinous rice they grew. The actual rice
deficits in Palokhi are best indicated by the amounts of glutinous rice which
deficit households have to purchase. As shown in the table, the total glutinous
rice requirements of all 10 deficit households in 1981 was 10,919 litres. At the
prevailing price of glutinous rice in Northern Thai shops in the area, which was
4.5 Baht per litre in 1981, these requirements represented a total cost of Bht
49,135.5 to the households concerned.

There was no evidence in 1981 to indicate that any of the households were
eating considerably less rice than they required daily, at least in general, although
there were occasions when a few households (notably H5, H10, H13a, and H13b)
reduced their consumption by having two meals a day (rather than three which
is the norm in Palokhi) as and when it became necessary. Despite the straitened
circumstances which these households occasionally faced, this indicates that the
Palokhi Karen were generally able to meet their rice deficits through purchases
of rice. It is probable that the amounts of rice purchased were greater than the
estimates of the deficits given in Table 5.3. The reason is that these estimates
represent basic consumption requirements, and do not take into account the fact that some of these deficit households were under some obligation to make rice liquor and rice cakes on various occasions, as well as to feed visitors and helpers in their fields. Nevertheless, the estimates of rice deficits in terms of glutinous rice will be sufficient to show the extent to which the Palokhi Karen as a whole depend on external sources for rice to meet their consumption requirements.

Subsistence in a Regional Context: Miang, Tea, and the Cash Sector of the Palokhi Economy

From a general historical perspective, it would appear that the Karen have been associated with a cash economy in one form or another for a long time, and with trade relationships (which need not necessarily have depended on the use of money) with neighbouring communities for even longer. For instance, some Palokhi households possess objects of considerable antiquity (see Chapter VII) not manufactured by the Karen themselves, and this alone suggests that some form of trade existed in the past in which the Karen were involved. While most accounts of Northern Thailand and Burma, written by British colonial administrators, from the latter part of the last century have tended to depict Karen communities as self-contained, isolated societies, nevertheless there are scanty but suggestive reports of Karen involvement in economic exchanges with their neighbours. In a description of Mae Sariang in the 1880’s, for example, Hallett (1890:40–1) says that most of the elephants employed in the teak industry there were rented out by the Karen to foresters. Bock, on the other hand, noticed on his journey north of Phetchaburi in the 1870’s, that “the Karen used to come down to buy rice” (1884:87). Evidence still to be found in the present, of Karen involvement in a cash economy or trading networks, in past times may be seen in British Indian Empire rupees and annas that are worn by Karen women to this day as ornaments—either intact as pendants or necklaces, or as earrings and bangles beaten from the silver rupees.

Contemporary research, however, very clearly indicates the existence of a cash component in the subsistence economies of various Karen communities, but the extent and characteristics of this component vary markedly from community to community. The accounts themselves show considerable differences in the attention given to the details of the operation of this component in Karen subsistence systems. The differences in scale, configurations, and importance of the cash component in the subsistence economies of the Karen reported on appear to be the result of a variety of factors: proximity to neighbouring communities, especially Northern Thai, the size of rice deficits incurred in the agricultural sector, the availability of alternative means for making up such deficits, internal demands for commodities ranging from “necessities” to “luxury goods”, and the extent of opium addiction and associated indebtedness in these Karen communities. Hinton (1975:211–30), for instance,
describes what amounts to a complex cash sector involving capital accumulation
in the form of rearing buffaloes and cattle, and the realisation of profits through
the sale of the livestock to Northern Thai, occasional wage labour in Mae Sariang,
the renting out of elephants to Thai and Chinese timber contractors, and the sale
of forest products. Interestingly enough, Hinton says that rice purchases were
small with rice deficits being managed (by those households which suffered them)
through the supplementation of rice with maize for domestic consumption.
Kunstadter (1978:116–20), on the other hand, says that most of the money in
circulation among the Karen (and Lua’) came from the lowlands through wage
labour. Agricultural land, however, was mortgaged for rice (or, sometimes, cash)
in some cases in order to meet consumption demands that could not be met by
domestic agricultural production. No less interesting is the fact that most
mortgages were held by the Karen from the Lua’, because the Karen were
comparatively better off as they had only small deficits in agricultural production
and, then too, these deficits were experienced by only a few households. Where
the purchase of commodities is concerned, this was confined to obtaining a few
manufactured necessities and luxury items. Hamilton, however, describes in
greater detail a more thorough-going participation of Karen in what he calls a
“bazaar economy” or “market economy” (1976:184ff.). He does say that this
economy has always seen Karen participation and that this has grown increasingly
in recent times because of the inability of the Karen subsistence system to meet
rice consumption requirements as a result of population increase and a
commensurate reduction in the availability of agricultural land. Madha’s account
of the workings of the cash sector among the Karen he studied (1980:160ff.) is
essentially similar to that by Hamilton. It is clear from both these accounts of
Karen subsistence economies that the use of money dominates in the functioning
of the cash sector. In contrast to these two descriptions, Cohen’s analysis of
Karen indebtedness (1984) shows that opium is widely used as a means of paying
for Karen labour in Hmong opium fields, and that opium and rice constitute a
major part of the structure of credit arrangements and indebtedness between the
Karen and Northern Thai, Shan and Chinese merchants in Karen communities.

Regardless of the extent to which the Karen may have been engaged in a cash
economy and trade in past times, it is wholly evident from recent descriptions
of Karen subsistence systems that the Karen are very much a part of a cash
economy involving economic relations with their neighbours, particularly the
Northern Thai; but their participation, and the operation of the cash economies
that they are involved in, exhibit considerable variation in the kinds of
arrangements which make up this sector of their subsistence systems.

The cash sector in the subsistence economy of Palokhi represents yet another
variation in the set of possible economic arrangements and relations, and it is
further evidence of the diversity in the symbiotic ties which may exist between
the Karen and their Northern Thai neighbours. There is, however, one significant
difference between the cash sector in Palokhi and those of the other Karen communities, and it is one which reflects a regional (though by no means a thorough-going) differentiation, or specialisation, of economic systems in which the Northern Thai dominate. This lies in the miang (or steamed fermented tea) industry which the Palokhi Karen are a part of, and which does not appear to play an important role in the subsistence economies of the Karen found to the west in Mae Hong Sorn (Hinton [1975], Kunstadter [1978], Madha [1980]), Hod (Hamilton [1976]) or just south-west of the city of Chiang Mai (Cohen [1984]).

This regional difference in the prominence of miang as an economically important crop is, very probably, not of recent provenance although it may be noted that even in Chiang Mai itself the importance of the crop varies (see, for example, Van Roy [1971] and Wijeyewardene [1971]). While the tea plant (Camellia sinensis) is to be found over most of Northern Thailand, it is noteworthy that its economic significance was not commented upon by early travellers such as Hallett, whereas McCarthy (1900:62) who observed its presence in its wild state everywhere in the north was, nevertheless, struck by the extensive miang gardens on the slopes of Doi Suthep close to Chiang Mai. More recent studies, however, show very conclusively the considerable importance of the crop in Chiang Dao involving Northern Thai, Hmong and Lahu (Van Roy [1971], Keen [1978]) not only in the miang industry but in the tea (that is, dry-leaf) industry as well (see also Pendleton [1963:40]) which appears to have been started in the 1950’s as a deliberate Thai entrepreneurial attempt to break into the Bangkok-based Chinese monopoly of the tea trade in Thailand (Van Roy [1971 158–81]). Although these studies have focussed on Chiang Dao, it would seem from the accounts of some Northern Thai, and Palokhi Karen, that the Pa Pae hills area has been part of a miang network (Durrenberger [1974]) leading down to Mae Malai, in Mae Taeng, for some time. And, as with Chiang Dao, the Pa Pae area has been drawn within the ambit of the Chiang Mai-based Raming Tea Company, the largest manufacturer of this kind of tea in Thailand (Donner [1978: 714]), which has plantations in Mae Taeng.

Although a part of the miang and tea industry centred at Mae Taeng, the Palokhi Karen and the Northern Thai in the Pa Pae hills are only linked with the industry indirectly, that is, through miang merchants and tea buyers. Where the Palokhi economy is specifically concerned, this association is nevertheless a very important one because it provides a considerable income for the Palokhi Karen with which rice purchases may be made when their own stocks of rice are low or exhausted. Apart from miang and tea related activities, however, there is a wide range of income generating activities which the Palokhi Karen engage in — within Palokhi itself, as well as outside in Northern Thai settlements, Lisu villages and units of the Royal Forestry Department in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa watershed. Similarly, the Palokhi Karen also purchase a diversity of commodities, other than rice, from one another in Palokhi and in
these other places. The range and diversity of transactions in the cash sector of Palokhi’s subsistence economy defy easy classification or categorisation because they are numerous and involve small sums of money at any point in time, and often they are made on the basis of ad hoc needs and opportunities.

I should also point out that an important feature of the cash sector in the economy of Palokhi is the autonomy of households and it is this very autonomy which integrates the “internal” economy of Palokhi with the wider economy. The reason is that all transactions which occur in the cash sector of the economy are undertaken by households acting on their own as units of production and consumption, and by individuals. Palokhi, as a village or community, does not act as a corporate group in the economic relations which exist between it and other communities. This, of course, follows from the nature of social organisation in Palokhi and the way that production and consumption is organised according to households. The integration of the subsistence economy of Palokhi with the wider economy, thus, lies in the cash flows generated by non-agricultural production within, and outside, Palokhi through income earning activities, as well as concomitant expenditures on various commodities, and to some extent services, within Palokhi and elsewhere, by households.

In the rest of this section, I present an outline of the more significant features of the cash sector in Palokhi according to general patterns of income earning activities and expenditures.

**Income Earning Activities**

The most important external sources of income, for the Palokhi Karen, lie in activities associated with the *miang* and tea industries which constitute an integrated, complex, structure not characteristic of other income earning activities undertaken by the Palokhi Karen. Despite the general decline of the *miang* economy in Northern Thailand (Keen [1978:267]; Thannarong, pers. comm.) in recent times, this economy nevertheless continues to provide the Palokhi Karen with the greater part of their income obtained from related activities followed, secondarily, by the income derived from the sale of the crop specifically for use in the tea industry. In Palokhi, *miang* and tea cropping are the major form of subsistence production, second only to the cultivation of rice, in terms of the amount of labour expended and rice obtained (through the cash nexus) from this expenditure of labour. As a type of cash cropping integral to the subsistence system of the Palokhi Karen, it is thus extremely important indeed to the way in which subsistence requirements are met in Palokhi. And, as this particular pattern in Karen subsistence economies, in general, has not been hitherto described, it is therefore worthwhile for comparative purposes to examine, in some detail, the functions of this aspect of the subsistence system in Palokhi.
In Northern Thailand, the growth cycle of the miang or tea plant is, as I have noted before, influenced to some extent by the occurrence of the wet season which, in turn, affects when the leaves of the plant may be harvested. In the traditional miang cropping cycle, leaf-picking takes place four times a year but the duration of cropping at each time, or season, varies because of the effect that the wet season has on the rate of regeneration of new leaf.

In a typical cycle, which Van Roy describes (1971:94), the first harvest (called muuj) takes place in December. This harvest season lasts only for about two weeks, but it provides leaf which is highly prized in miang processing. The second cropping season (hua pii) takes place from March to April, after new leaves have grown during the cool dry and then hot dry seasons. After another month for further growth to occur, comes the third cropping season (klaang) which lasts from approximately July to August. The fourth season (sauj) occurs from about September-October to November. The third and fourth seasons are usually not well separated because during the wet season leaf growth is fairly rapid. These four cropping seasons are to be found in the Pa Pae hills where they are generally closely observed by the Northern Thai involved in the miang economy but they are not as closely followed by the Palokhi Karen for the simple reason that this miang cropping cycle is largely in conflict with the two growth cycles of rice in swidden and wet-rice cultivation. In December, for instance, the Palokhi Karen are still engaged in harvesting and storing their rice from swiddens and wet-rice fields. And, again, in March and April, they are busy clearing, burning and planting their swiddens, while from May to July they are involved in the preparation of their wet-rice terraces and the planting of wet-rice. Even in the klaang and sauj seasons (July to November) a conflict exists because of the need to weed swiddens leading up to the time when the first harvesting of rice must be carried out; but during this period, the stocks of rice in Palokhi have already begun to run down (if they have not been exhausted) and the Palokhi Karen are faced with the competing demands for labour in weeding their swiddens to ensure satisfactory rice harvests and in obtaining rice for the satisfaction of their immediate needs. There is, in fact, hardly an option in this and the Palokhi Karen thus give greater priority to the latter and unreservedly take advantage of the opportunities offered in the klaang and sauj seasons. Many households, however, attempt to anticipate this problem in the allocation of their domestic supplies of labour by working in the hua pii season in between attending to the tasks in swidden and wet-rice cultivation. But, when the harvest season is in full-swing in their swiddens and wet-rice fields, there is a total halt on miang and tea associated activities.

The structure and organisation of the miang economy in the Pa Pae hills is probably similar to that described by Van Roy and Keen especially around the Northern Thai settlements of Ban Pa Pae and Ban Pha Daeng where miang merchants or wholesalers are to be found in the area. Further upland, around
the Pang Luang, however, conditions are a little different. In the two Northern Thai settlements nearest Palokhi, that is, Ban Tung Choa and Ban Mae Lao, and Toelokhi (the closest Karen village) as well as Palokhi itself, the Northern Thai and Karen own miang or tea gardens and are, therefore, independent producers of the leaf. In the Northern Thai villages, however, some miang processing is done but not in the two Karen villages except for domestic consumption. The Northern Thai sell both raw leaf and processed miang to a Yunnanese Chinese wholesaler (who is also a buyer of leaf for the tea industry) based at Ban Pha Daeng. The Karen, on the other hand, sell only the raw leaf which is also bought by the same wholesaler for processing into miang or for resale to the Raming Tea Company. The Palokhi Karen (and, for that matter, the Toelokhi Karen) generally do not sell their raw leaf to the Northern Thai miang producers in Ban Mae Lao although they do work for them in related activities. This is because the Northern Thai producers lack large supplies of cash, or stocks of rice, to pay for the leaf. The Northern Thai at Ban Mae Lao do not act as intermediaries between the Palokhi Karen and the Pha Daeng wholesaler because the wholesaler comes up to Ban Mae Lao to buy the miang and raw leaf directly from both the Northern Thai and Karen. The Palokhi Karen and, very probably, most of the Northern Thai in Ban Thung Choa and Ban Mae Lao, therefore, are not bound into the socio-economic relationships characteristic of the “entourage” or pau liang, that is, patron-client, systems which Van Roy (1971:101ff.) and Keen (1978:257–8) — following Hanks (1966:55–63) — see as the principal institutional framework of the miang economy of Chiang Dao. There is also no system of renting gardens from miang wholesalers or merchants, with rents being paid in miang, nor is there a cycle of credit and indebtedness (but see below) carried over from year to year — at least as far as the Palokhi Karen in general are concerned. Another related difference is that the raw leaf is sold to the Pha Daeng merchant by the Palokhi Karen, and most Northern Thai growers in Ban Thung Choa and Ban Mae Lao, according to weight rather than bundles (kam) which is the normal practice in Chiang Dao, and payments are usually made in cash, although rice payments may also be made depending on whether or not this is specifically asked for.

The selling and buying of miang and raw leaf is held in Ban Mae Lao and payments are made immediately by the Pha Daeng merchant. During the klaang and sauj seasons, the merchant comes to Ban Mae Lao almost everyday, but generally the frequency of his buying trips depends on the intensity of picking through the hua pii to sauj seasons. The price paid by the merchant for raw leaf is the same whether it is sold by Northern Thai or Karen but they vary depending on the quality of the leaf and the end use of the leaf, that is, as miang or as tea. In April of 1981 (that is, towards the end of the hua pii season), when several Palokhi households picked and sold leaf from their gardens after planting their swiddens, the price of raw leaf for miang was Bht 2 per kilogram.
the klaang and sauj seasons, however, the price increased by as much as two and a half times, with the leaf being bought at the rate of Bht 4.5 and Bht 5 per kilogram, the difference depending on whether the leaf was bought at Ban Mae Lao itself, or Ban Thung Choa which was closer to Palokhi. The Bht 0.5, thus, was a reflection of transportation costs incurred by the Pha Daeng wholesaler. Leaf for tea, however, commands a much lower price but the price is stable throughout the year. In 1981, this was Bht 1.5 per kilogram. Despite the growing tea industry in Chiang Dao and Mae Taeng, the reason why the raw leaf for this industry does not command premium prices in the Pa Pae hills is that the leaf here is used as “filler” for the better quality leaf from the tea plantations in Chiang Dao and Mae Taeng in blending. This kind of leaf is, in fact, called “old tea” or “old leaf” (saa kae or baj kae in Ban Mae Lao and Ban Thung Choa, and la pgha in Palokhi) and it is not used in miang processing. Nevertheless, the fact that it is purchased and used in the tea industry means that the Northern Thai and Karen have an additional source of income from their gardens which has, to some extent, offset the progressive loss in incomes resulting from a gradually declining miang industry.

Where the Palokhi Karen are specifically concerned, the urgency of the need for rice during the growing season of rice in their swiddens and terraces, and the considerable importance of the miang and tea industries in enabling them to meet this need, may be gauged from the fact that a large proportion — if not all — of the income derived from the sale of raw leaf, each time, is immediately converted into rice at the point of sale, that is, at Mae Lao. As soon as they are paid for their leaf, they purchase rice from either of the two Northern Thai shops in the village.

However, not all of the income earned by the Palokhi Karen outside of Palokhi, in miang and tea related activities, comes from the sale of leaf. The Palokhi Karen also earn money from wage labour for the Northern Thai in clearing miang gardens, chopping firewood which is required in the process of steaming miang and portage because some Northern Thai own miang gardens near Palokhi. There is a regular demand for Karen labour, especially in the klaang and sauj seasons, in Northern Thai settlements because there is a shortage of young adult males to perform the heavier tasks associated with the cropping of miang.

Notwithstanding the lack of any demographic data on the Northern Thai in the area, it seems clear that this shortage of young men in Northern Thai settlements has been due to their migration as a result of two principal factors. The first is the activities and projects (for example, road construction, house-building, reforestation, the growing of pine and coffee seedlings, horticulture of ornamental flowers, and so forth) of the Royal Forestry Department’s Watershed Unit which have created opportunities for employment within the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area well away from these
Northern Thai settlements (Kunzel [1983], n.d.). The second, paradoxically, is highland-lowland or, more specifically, urban migration representing a reversal of the trend which originally brought the Northern Thai to the Pa Pae hills. This has undoubtedly been caused by the construction of the Mae Malai-Pai all-weather road which began in 1979 and reached Ban Mae Lao in 1980–81. The construction of the road itself provided employment opportunities in the labour gangs working on the road for young men in the area. The most significant effects of the road, however, were the vastly increased ease and frequency of communications and transportation between the highlands and lowlands, and their lower costs. When the road reached Ban Pa Pae, for instance, there were at least five privately operated “four wheelers” (sii lau, that is, modified pick-up trucks with a roof and two, or sometimes three, rows of benches) making daily runs between Mae Malai (in Mae Taeng) and Ban Pa Pae, which was extended to Ban Mae Lao as construction of the road progressed. The one-way fare between Ban Pa Pae and Mae Malai was Bht 15 in 1981, and Bht 20 between Ban Mae Lao and Mae Malai. In mid–1981, even before road construction had reached Pai, a twice daily privately operated bus service was started, plying between Pai and Chiang Mai (though less regularly in the wet season) charging Bht 20 for a one way fare.21 Thus, while young Northern Thai men have found employment opportunities else-where away from their villages, similar opportunities have opened up in these villages for the Palokhi Karen.

The average wage rate for manual labour prevailing in Northern Thai settlements (and in units and sections of the Royal Forestry Department) in 1981 was Bht 30 per day for men, and Bht 25 per day for women. These rates applied to the Karen as well, but it may be noted here that Palokhi women do not go out to do wage work in Northern Thai villages. The work of clearing miang gardens, however, commanded higher rates (Bht 40 per day) because it is hard work and it also requires a great deal of care in order not to damage the miang bushes as the undergrowth is slashed away.

Within Palokhi, however, miang and tea is picked and sold on a household basis (from household owned gardens which average 2 raj in size) similar to the organisation of rice production in the village. Nevertheless, in 1981, a form of employment by one household of other Karen in Palokhi was organised because of the special circumstances of the household. This is so exceptional that it deserves some comment.

It is unusual on two counts. First, the Palokhi Karen as a rule do not work for one another for remuneration of any kind and this, I think, is to be explained by the egalitarian nature of their society in which the asymmetric social relations implicit in the structure of wage work would be a contradiction or inconsistency. Wage work would also highlight differentials in wealth which are usually played down in the community. Second, the employment of several people by this
This household was one of the two which had moved to Palokhi in 1980 after working for several years in the Flower Plantation of the Royal Forestry Department’s Watershed Unit. The plot of terraces which the household had opened in 1980 was still too small to meet the rice needs of the household by a very large margin and so La Zi, the head of the household, decided to organise miang picking on as large a scale as possible not only as an attempt to make up the household’s very considerable rice shortage in 1981 (which was evident even when the 1980 harvest was brought in), but also with the hope of making some profit as well. As the household did not own a miang garden, La Zi therefore rented two gardens (totalling approximately 5 raj) from Kino the Karen merchant in Ban Pa Pae (which the latter had bought from Puu Taa along with plot I, noted earlier); the rent was set at a flat fee of Bht 1,500 payable at the end of the year. Given the conditions of the miang and tea economy in the area, that is, generally stable, if low, prices and direct access to a buyer, the viability and success of the enterprise obviously hinged upon the volume of leaf sales that could be attained which depended, in turn, on the availability of extra-household labour for leaf-picking, especially as the household’s own supply of labour was made up of La Zi and his thirteen year old son, his wife being for all practical purposes house-bound as she was nursing a child she had given birth to in that year. Although most of the households in Palokhi had their own gardens to crop, La Zi was nonetheless able to “employ” several people in his enterprise because of the additional income that thus became available through working for him. It is worth noting that this was not regarded as “wage work” but as “help” — an indication of how the inconsistency between the asymmetry of wage labour relations and the ethos of egalitarian social relations may be overcome by semantics. The inconsistency, or contradiction, was perhaps not as great as we might imagine it to be because the wage work arrangements could hardly be said to constitute institutionalised relationships. Nor were there credit arrangements (or indebtedness) as payments for the leaf picked by La Zi’s Karen “employees” were made immediately the leaf was sold at Ban Mae Lao or Ban Tung Choa. This, of course, was only possible because the Pha Daeng merchant made spot payments for the miang and tea leaf sold at these two villages.

It is worth noting that the system of payments for the work done in this enterprise was essentially similar to that of the Northern Thai. La Zi’s “workers” (who included his sister and, occasionally, some of her children) were paid according to the amount of leaf that they brought in, namely, Bht 2 per kilogram. The leaf was miang as this fetched a higher selling price than leaf for tea. Towards the end of the klaang season, however, rice payments were made in addition to cash at an appropriate exchange rate according to the price of milled glutinous rice (in the Ban Mae Lao shops) which varied between Bht 99 and Bht...
110 per taang of broken rice, the cheapest kind available in these shops. Rice payments, however, were usually made in smaller quantities, that is, litres (of which there are 22 to a taang in the highlands), and the corresponding prices were Bht 4.5 and Bht 5 per litre.

Given the clear comparative advantage of picking and selling leaf directly to the Pha Daeng merchant, we may well ask the question why the Karen worked for La Zi. The reason is that even if they had wished to pick and sell more leaf, they could not do so because of the small size of their own gardens (for those who owned them) and to increase the area of their gardens would have required additional expenditures of labour in clearing these gardens to begin with. From their point of view then, the work for La Zi was supplementary to cropping their own gardens.

I should also point out here that there was, in fact, one household in Palokhi which was employed in miang picking virtually throughout the whole of the klaang and sauj seasons by a Northern Thai to whom they were indebted from the previous year (1980) for rice that they had obtained on credit. This was H5 the household whose head, Thi Phehe, had died in 1978 and which rented out plot G because the eldest son Chi Choe was still not old enough to cultivate the wet-rice field. The debt was paid gradually (but not completely even by January 1982) in the form of miang leaf picked in the gardens of the Northern Thai, Thaun, near Palokhi calculated at the rate of Bht 2 per kilogram, the standard rate paid for leaf-picking by owners of miang gardens as was the case with La Zi’s enterprise. This, however, was an exceptional case of indebtedness associated with miang cropping in Palokhi.

Apart from miang and tea related activities, however, the Palokhi Karen also earn a substantial cash income (though not as much) from external sources through other economic activities. Unlike the sale of leaf, or miang connected wage labour, these activities are not linked with the wider economy of the Pa Pae hills in a systematic manner. These activities are diverse and they are performed on an ad hoc basis as, and when, the opportunities for them arise and, of course, when the Karen themselves are able to take advantage of these opportunities. The income earning activities are, very broadly, wage labour, and the sale of goods, livestock and services.

The main forms of wage work in 1981 were clearing of compounds and house-building for the Northern Thai of Ban Mae Lao, clearing of miang gardens, chopping of firewood (for miang steaming) in various Northern Thai settlements, planting, harvesting and portage work for the Karen merchant from Pa Pae during these two seasons when he came to stay and overseer the cultivation of his wet-rice field by a share-cropper, portage work for some Northern Thai engaged in collecting rattan from the forests around Palokhi, and carrying stores for a section of the Royal Forestry Department’s Watershed Unit.
The goods sold by the Palokhi Karen included forest products and certain items made by a few households in the village. There were only three types of forest products which were of any economic significance for the Palokhi Karen in 1981. These were pine wood (Pinus kesiya) and the bark of two trees, known by their Northern Thai names, kaj and kae (Ternstroemia spp. and Combretum spp. respectively). The sale of pine wood constituted the most important source of income of these three forest products. Indeed, a large part of the cash income of households with no wet-rice fields and only small swiddens, and households with opium addicts, was derived from this source. The reason is that the demand for pine wood (as fire starters and torches) in Northern Thai villages where the people have no access to pine trees is generally consistent throughout the year. The Palokhi Karen also use the pine wood for these two purposes and they obtain the wood by chopping mature pine trees (which are found in stands in parts of the forest around Palokhi) and then chopping up the felled trees into large splinters for use whenever their supplies in their homes run out. The pine wood is sold at a price of Bht 2 per kilogram in Ban Thung Choa and Ban Mae Lao when the wood is fresh, but the price drops to Bht 1.5 per kilogram if the trees have been left on the ground for some time because the inflammable resin dries up to some extent under these conditions. The bark of Ternstroemia and Combretum are sold to a Northern Thai in Mae Lao and another Northern Thai in Ban Mae Lak. According to the buyer in Mae Lao (who purchased only Ternstroemia), the two kinds of bark are resold in Pai for the manufacture of incense sticks. The selling price of Ternstroemia bark was Bht 4 per kilogram and that of Combretum, Bht 1.5 per kilogram.

One other source of income, though an irregular one, obtained from the exploitation of the forests around Palokhi is the sale of barking deer (Cervulus muntjac) meat which is highly esteemed by both the Palokhi Karen and Northern Thai. Hunting of the deer is done individually, or in pairs, at night with muzzle-loading caplock guns and the aid of modified flashlights bound to the head (somewhat like miners’ head-lamps) and operated by a rudimentary switch device strapped to the waist. If the game is brought in by a pair of hunters, it is shared between the two of them regardless of who actually shot the deer. Households which bring in barking deer usually cook as much of it as possible, and sell the rest of the meat, organs and entrails to other households and in the two Northern Thai settlements. In Palokhi, prime meat is sold between Bht 30 to Bht 40 per kilogram, as in the Northern Thai villages. Most households in Palokhi, however, would buy cheaper cuts. When the meat is sold in the Northern Thai villages, usually a whole haunch is taken for sale at a price varying between Bht 100 to Bht 120 and it may be bought by one household or by several who then divide the meat amongst themselves.

The sale of livestock also provides an occasional source of income for the Palokhi Karen. The most commonly sold livestock are chickens and pigs which
Northern Thai from the two nearby villages, workers from sections of the Watershed Unit, and Lisu from Ban Lum come to buy in Palokhi. The Northern Thai villagers and forestry workers usually buy chickens and pigs to rear, while the Lisu buy mainly chickens for certain curing rites which are said to require large numbers of chicken offerings. Some Palokhi households also obtained an income in 1981 from the sale of cattle and buffaloes reared on agistment and the buyers of these animals were either Karen or Northern Thai.

The manufactured articles sold by the Palokhi Karen were essentially of two kinds. The first was winnowing trays which one household made in 1981 specifically for sale to Northern Thai and Karen in other villages as a means of obtaining some extra cash for purchasing mainly “luxury” goods as the rice obtained from its wet-rice field was almost sufficient for the needs of the household. The second was muzzle-loading caplock guns and associated repairs and blacksmithing work. One household (H13a) specialised in this and, in fact, gunsmithing and black-smithing was the economic mainstay of this household. Toeloe, the head of the household enjoyed a considerable reputation for the guns he made and his customers were Palokhi and other Karen, as well as Northern Thai from various villages in the area. The household cultivated swiddens but these were invariably small because their domestic supply of labour was limited to Toeloe’s wife, Gwa Chi’ his daughter, and Cha Pghe his fourteen year old son. This was augmented when his son and family came to live in Palokhi, but only to a limited extent as this son was more interested in opening up wet-rice fields to support his own family. Despite the lucrative business of making and repairing guns and iron tools, the income thus obtained failed to enable the household to successfully supplement the rice from its swiddens because Toeloe was an opium addict and a large proportion of this income was spent on opium. Indeed, in several instances, he was in fact paid in opium. The price of a gun varied between Bht 100 and Bht 120 (if cash payments were made) depending on the length and thickness of the iron barrels. Payments could also be made in kind in the form of barrels where a buyer would bring in two barrels (which are actually common plumbing pipes about a metre in length) purchased at Ban Pa Pae; one of the pipes would be turned into a gun, while Toeloe would keep the other to be used later as a barrel or a source of iron in repair work, or for turning into bush knives, sickles, and so on. Repair work, on the other hand, was charged lower rates depending on the nature of the repairs involved. The replacement of a hammer, for instance, cost only Bht 15, but the total replacement of the trigger mechanisms would cost Bht 30 or Bht 40 depending on whether some of the old parts could be refashioned or re-used. The sale of services by Palokhi Karen was confined to two people, Rae’ the ritual specialist and Chi’ the tattooist (whose services were much sought after by the Karen in the area) who also claimed to be a ritual expert of sorts. Their clients were Northern Thai and Karen (from Palokhi and elsewhere) but their earnings were irregular throughout 1981.
As I have noted in the foregoing description of the various forms of income earned from external sources, the Palokhi Karen also do earn cash (or rice) incomes within the village as well. It follows from this that if households earn incomes in this way, then these incomes at the same time represent expenditures on the part of other households. The array of goods (but not services) bought and sold in Palokhi are, however, more limited than that in the transactions between Palokhi and other communities because a number of items which some households sell to people from other communities are either available to all (for example, pine wood) or are, in any case, owned by households (for example, livestock). Those items which are transacted generally represent items which are manufactured through a specialisation of labour in Palokhi, specifically, guns and iron tools made by Toeloe, or various commodities “retailed” by some household or other which happens to have a stock of these commodities purchased from stores in Northern Thai villages or from Karen from elsewhere, which other households lack at a particular point in time and are, for one reason or another, unable to go and purchase them outside Palokhi. Ritual services and tattooing also represent a form of specialised “production” from this point of view, and are similarly sought after, when illness strikes, and are likewise paid for.

It is, however, worth noting that in the early months of 1981 (approximately January to March), the two households which settled in Palokhi (from the Flower Plantation), “set up shop”, as it were, and earned some money from other households in Palokhi by selling on a small scale various goods which were, nevertheless, obtainable in Ban Mae Lao. When these two households moved to Palokhi, they brought with them considerable stocks of rice (which was not sold) as well as tinned food, biscuits and preserved fish and shrimp paste. They were primarily for their own use, but because they existed in Palokhi, several households purchased these items from these two households. Their profit margins were very small, but the two heads of these households (La Zi and Thi’) were encouraged enough to purchase, in bulk, more of such items at Ban Pa Pae (for which they got discounts) and which they continued to sell in Palokhi. This, however, was discontinued when the need for cash to buy rice became more urgent. It is interesting to note that this set an example which another household followed on two occasions in the year. This household, and Thi’ as well, purchased large stocks of corn whisky in anticipation of a marriage between a man in Palokhi and a woman in Pong Thong and the round of rites protecting swiddens (bghau hy’) in the growing season of swidden rice. The profit margins in this enterprise were very good indeed by Palokhi standards, but it also involved considerable effort as well. The corn whisky was purchased from a Lahu—the only Lahu in the area whose sole activity was manufacturing the whisky—in Mae Muang Luang at a price of Bht 11 per 375 ml. bottle and sold in Palokhi at Bht 18 per bottle.
Expenditures

From the foregoing, it should be evident that households in Palokhi are quite firmly linked to an “external” cash economy which provides them with various sources of income. The Palokhi Karen, however, also purchase many items outside Palokhi, mainly in the Northern Thai settlements of Ban Mae Lao and Ban Pa Pae. The largest expenditures incurred by households, on any single item, are rice purchases. These purchases by households with rice deficits, as I have shown, lie in the region of approximately Bht 49,135. All rice is purchased in stores and not from Northern Thai cultivators of rice. The reason for this is that the Northern Thai themselves are not self-sufficient in rice and therefore do not have surpluses which the Palokhi Karen may buy. Thus, all the rice that goes into making up the shortages of rice in swidden and wet-rice cultivation in Palokhi (and, for that matter, in Ban Tung Choa and Ban Mae Lao) comes from the Chiang Mai plains. As the rice from the lowlands is made available in the Pa Pae hills by store-keepers and merchants in Pa Pae and Mae Lao, their role in the integration of what, for convenience, we may call the highland and lowland economies of the region is, therefore, a significant one.

In Pa Pae, there are three main stores, and in Mae Lao there are two stores which sell rice. All these stores or shops operate in very much the same manner and the principal store in Mae Lao may be taken as being representative of their functions as far as the Palokhi Karen are concerned. The store is owned by a Northern Thai family but it is, effectively, run by the eldest daughter in the family. The family migrated upland to Mae Lao from Mae Rim in the plains in 1967 to join some relatives who had moved to Mae Lao earlier. The family did not acquire wet-rice fields but went directly into merchandising on a small scale. The store holds stocks of a large variety of goods typical of bigger stores in the rural areas. All the stocks are purchased in Chiang Mai from two markets, Wororot Market and Lam Yai Market. The rice which the Palokhi Karen buy at the shop comes from Chiang Mai where it is bought in bulk, that is, jute sacks (kasaub or taaj); in 1981, rice bought by the store) cost Bht 430 per sack. Although Wilaj, the daughter, occasionally made buying trips to Chiang Mai, most of the goods from Chiang Mai were usually brought in by sii lau operators who were “entrusted to do the buying” (faak syy) though, in fact, this arrangement amounted to hiring the services of these operators. The rice that was bought in Chiang Mai in this manner was transported to Mae Lao at a cost of Bht 30 per sack and the total cost of a sack of rice to the store was, therefore, Bht 460. In Mae Lao, the rice is sold, as I have mentioned earlier, in smaller measures or units, namely, taang or litres. In these smaller units, the price of rice was set by the store at Bht 120 per taang, and given that there are 6 taang to a sack, the profit on one sack of rice was thus Bht 260. These rates and profit margins apply generally to all the shops in the area, although the retail price of rice in Ban Pa Pae was slightly lower than in Mae Lao. From the point of view
of the Palokhi Karen there is, however, little advantage in buying rice in Pa Pae because they have to pay Bht 10 for a return trip by sii lau as it is too far away for them to walk there.

Besides rice, the Palokhi Karen also purchase a range of goods which may be roughly categorised as food and non-food items. Most of the food items are items which are not available in Palokhi swiddens, for example, shrimp paste, pork crackle, dried, salted and occasionally fresh fish, sardines, noodles and biscuits and sundry confections much favoured Palokhi children and which parents rarely fail to indulge them with. Some food items which are grown in Palokhi swiddens are, nevertheless, purchased because supplies have run out, for example, chillies, eggplant, and tomatoes. Tobacco is also bought frequently although this is grown in swiddens but the amount thus obtained never meets the demand for it in Palokhi.

Non-food items include batteries (for flashlights and radios which some households possess), clothes, plastic sheets, cotton yarn (because cotton is not grown in Palokhi swiddens), needles, thread, footwear, kerosene (for lighters which are also purchased along with flints), bush knives, sickles, ploughshares, caps and lead shot (for the caplock guns), sulphur and potassium chlorate (for making gunpowder with domestically produced charcoal), aluminium buckets or pails, plastic scoops, enamelled metal dishes, and so on. Some of these items, particularly food, are also bought from a woman from Ban Thung Choa who regularly makes trips to Palokhi to sell her wares. An important aspect of the purchase of non-food items is that many of these items can by no means be regarded as necessities since the Palokhi Karen could easily produce them using wood and bamboo (for example, domestic utensils and houseware). They are, nevertheless, purchased for their “aesthetic” or “luxury” value and this suggests that insofar as these items are concerned, their supply in Northern Thai shops creates their own demand.

One important category of purchases in terms of the proportion of domestic income spent by a few households is opium and items related to its consumption, namely, oil or candles which are needed to warm up the opium preparatory to smoking, and aspirin powder (known by the Thai term, jaa kae puat, “pain relievers”) which is used to “cut”, or dilute, the opium in order to stretch out consumption of the drug as much as for the analgesic properties of the patent medicine. Opium is purchased from a variety of sources: Wilaj’s shop (which obtains the opium from Lisu growers further up the Mae Malai-Pai road), the Lisu of Ban Lum or Mae Muang Luang, and other Karen who obtain it from these, or other similar, sources. The opium is usually sold in its smallest commercial unit called tua in Northern Thai (meaning “body” and also a classifier for animals) which is equivalent to the weight of an old sataang called sataang daeng (“red sataang”) which is now no longer in circulation. The weight of the
The Economy of Palokhi: Subsistence in a Regional Context

...coin is approximately 4.8 grammes. Half units, however, are also sold and purchased. The price of opium in 1981 remained stable at Bht 40 but fell to Bht 30 per tua in January-February 1982 when the harvest season began. Palokhi Karen opium addicts tend to buy opium in small quantities because they lack enough ready cash to buy the drug, but as with many other commodities, the purchases are generally regular and frequent.25

Household Economics in Palokhi: Some Examples

The considerable importance of the cash sector in the economy of Palokhi in enabling the Palokhi Karen to meet most if not all of their rice needs is best illustrated by household budgets. An examination of household budgets also serves to show the importance of the miang and tea industries in the cash sector and, more generally, the degree to which Palokhi is integrated in a regional economy. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 illustrate this in the case of seven households in Palokhi on the basis of aggregate data on incomes and expenditures for 1981 (but see also Appendix H).

Overall, it should be clear from the examples of household budgets presented in these tables that the Palokhi economy is highly monetised. While the cash sector is essential to the way in which the Palokhi Karen attempt to make up shortfalls in the agricultural system, it also allows them to acquire a great many commodities which they do not produce. In order to make use of the cash sector in this way, the Palokhi Karen are obliged to offer products to which they have access as well as their own labour. Despite the economic symbiosis between Palokhi and the external economy with which it is linked, the Palokhi Karen nevertheless are not locked into structured socio-economic relationships with the Northern Thai and others who also participate in this larger economy.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that there is a regional context to the subsistence economy of Palokhi and that the Palokhi Karen are firmly linked to this larger economy through economic necessity, namely, the need for rice to make up deficits experienced in their own agricultural system. Although significantly dependent on a regional economy in order to meet their subsistence needs, the Palokhi Karen nevertheless maintain an autonomy in their community life for they cannot by any means be regarded as being structurally integrated into the larger social (and political) system which is dominated by the Northern Thai (and Thai) and which is, in this broader context, part of the regional economy.

In examining the economic system of the Palokhi Karen, I have also sought to show that even in their dual system of agriculture there are certain features (for example, land use, the inheritance of wet-rice fields, and the management of land) which possess cultural significance understandable only in terms of what I have called their cultural ideology. In the next chapter, I consider other
aspects of the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen as it relates to agriculture, namely, the ceremonial cycle in the community which is based essentially on the rites of swiddening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Miang and Tea Related Activities</th>
<th>Wage Labour</th>
<th>Sales Income</th>
<th>Total Income Earned</th>
<th>Gross Income (in Baht) per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wages Earned (In and Outside Palokhi)</td>
<td>Income from Sale of Leaf</td>
<td>Wages Earned</td>
<td>Sale of Food, Goods, Services, Livestock, Poultry, Ritual Services, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cash (Baht)</td>
<td>Rice (Baht)</td>
<td>Cash (Baht)</td>
<td>Rice (Baht)</td>
<td>Cash (Baht)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1a</td>
<td>218.0</td>
<td>108.0 [24.0]</td>
<td>1,164.2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b</td>
<td>203.0</td>
<td>45.0 [10.0]</td>
<td>947.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>351.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>465.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>323.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>1,891.0</td>
<td>242.25 [56.5]</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>662.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>1,315.0</td>
<td>537.75 [119.5]</td>
<td>219.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>219.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4,433.5</td>
<td>2,704.5 [601.0]</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H13b</td>
<td>798.5</td>
<td>166.5 [37.0]</td>
<td>153.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>398.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rice incomes are given in terms of their cash value, that is, in Baht; the figures in brackets show their corresponding amounts in litres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Wages</th>
<th>Rice (Baht)</th>
<th>Cash (Baht)</th>
<th>Rice Cash (Baht)</th>
<th>Opium Cash (Baht)</th>
<th>Rice (Baht)</th>
<th>Rent Cash (Baht)</th>
<th>Transport Cash (Baht)</th>
<th>Taxes Cash (Baht)</th>
<th>Total Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a</td>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1,150.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,359.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2,554.5</td>
<td>NA [44.0]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1B</td>
<td></td>
<td>NA [35.0]</td>
<td>1,248.5</td>
<td>10.0 [0.25]</td>
<td>3,713.75</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>3,850.75</td>
<td>NA [14.0]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>NA [14.0]</td>
<td>420.0 [89.0]</td>
<td>5.0 [0.125]</td>
<td>3,694.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>180.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4,324.0</td>
<td>NA [4.0]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>NA [4.0]</td>
<td>403.5 [82.0]</td>
<td>5.0 [0.125]</td>
<td>1,325.5</td>
<td>99.0 [22.0]</td>
<td>227.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>1,986.0</td>
<td>NA [99.0]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td></td>
<td>NA [11.0]</td>
<td>1,478.25 [328.0]</td>
<td>165.0 [4.0]</td>
<td>2,673.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,500.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>6,906.0</td>
<td>1,478.25 [328.0]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>943.0</td>
<td>1,478.25 [328.0]</td>
<td>1,527.5 [313.0]</td>
<td>165.0 [4.0]</td>
<td>2,673.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,500.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>6,906.0</td>
<td>1,478.25 [328.0]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H13b</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>666.0 [167.0]</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>165.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>841.0</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*In this column, rice wages are given in terms of their cash value while the actual amounts of rice are given in brackets in litres. Where the rice used was glutinous rice purchased from shops in Northern Thai settlements, I have taken the cash value of such rice to be 4.5 baht per litre, the prevailing price in the Pa Pae hills area. I have not, however, indicated the cash value of rice wages where the rice used was rice grown in Palokhi. The reason is that as the Palokhi Karen generally do not buy or sell their own rice, it is therefore difficult to impute a cash value to the rice. In 1981, wage work was mainly done by a young girl (an only daughter) to earn some money and rice to support her sick mother. Her work consisted primarily of milling rice for some of the wealthier households in Palokhi (for example, H1a, H1b, H2, and H3) as well as child-minding. The work that she did was hardly essential to these households as they could quite easily do it themselves. Her employment, therefore, was motivated by a charitable concern for her and her mother’s welfare. When her mother died in April, she was fostered out to a Northern Thai family in Ban Mae Lao, as I have noted before (Chapter III, p. 196, n. 23). She was paid rice wages in the form of milled non-glutinous rice grown by these households.*

**In this table, the expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.**

***In this table, the expenditures on opium are given in Baht while the quantities of opium are given in tua in brackets. The purchases shown in the table are small and were bought essentially for medicinal purposes. The do not represent purchases by addicts (whose households are not reflected in the table) which were substantial but proved difficult to determine or estimate.*

---

*Total expenditures are given here as cash expenditures on purchases including rice, and expenditures in which rice has been used as a medium of exchange. In the case of cash expenditures, I have also indicated in brackets the actual sums of money spent on the purchase of rice. Where rice expenditures are concerned, these are indicated in terms of their Baht values where applicable while the actual amounts of rice are given in brackets.*

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.**

---

*The data for H13b in this table are not as reliable as those for other households and this explains to some extent why its expenditures appear somewhat small in comparison. It should be noted, however, that H13b shared a number of economic functions with H13a (as discussed in Chapter IV, pp. 205–10) and several items (for example, tobacco) were obtained from the parental household without having to buy them from other households. As I have also pointed out, H13a and H13b were relatively poor and this also explains the lower levels of expenditures of the household in this table.*

---

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.**

---

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.***

---

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.****

---

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.*****

---

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.******

---

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.*******

---

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.*********

---

*The expenditures on rice are given in terms of their cash values, that is in Baht; the figures in brackets show the actual amounts of rice purchased in litres.**********
ENDNOTES

1 In most, if not all accounts, of Karen agricultural systems characterised by a dual system of swidden and wet-rice cultivation, wet-rice agriculture is supplementary to swiddening and has come about as a later development. Hinton does however offer the suggestion (1973:249) that the Karen in the Mae Sariang area may have been wet-rice cultivators in Burma but on migrating into Northern Thailand (to escape Burmese oppression in the last century) took up swiddening because there was a shortage of land for wet-rice farming. Hinton acknowledges that this is speculative, however, because there is insufficient data from Burma to substantiate this. Grandstaff (1976:162, n. 7) argues against this and says that there was in fact no shortage of land for wet-rice agriculture in Northern Thailand because of low population densities in the region in the last century. I think Grandstaff is correct in this because there is sufficient evidence to show that Northern Thai populations were indeed small in the last century and that it is only within the last one hundred years or so that population growth has increased tremendously making land for wet-rice cultivation a scarce resource (see, for example, Wijeyewardene, in press). Further evidence may also be found in the nature of warfare in Northern Thailand and Burma where local populations in conquered territories were forcibly relocated in plains areas in order to cultivate rice to support urban populations — the “put vegetables in baskets, people in cities” formula [Kraisri [1965:6–9]). This has been the case with at least one Karen community still to be found in Hang Dong whose ancestors were taken prisoner in Burma and resettled there [Renard [1980:132]].

2 I cannot, unfortunately, present a detailed description of how the calendrical system operates in Palokhi because of insufficient data. Although I have, for instance, a full list of the names of months in the Palokhi calendar, the Palokhi Karen were unable to supply the meanings of some month names. It is interesting to note, however, that there is a fair degree of concordance in month names between the Palokhi calendar and the list of months (in Sgaw Karen) supplied by Marshall (1922:49–50) and Iijima (1970:15–6). Only Marshall offers the meanings of month names (some of which I discuss in this chapter) but they do not all agree with those in Palokhi that are available to me. The following is a list of month names (approximated to the solar calendar) as they are found in Palokhi, and as they have been recorded by Marshall and Iijima.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The calendar in Palokhi</th>
<th>The calendar according to Marshall</th>
<th>The calendar according to Iijima</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>La Tale</td>
<td>Th’ le</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>La Thi Phae’</td>
<td>Hte ku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>La Khu</td>
<td>Thwe Kaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>La Soe</td>
<td>La khli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>La De’ Nja</td>
<td>De nya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>La Nwi</td>
<td>La nwi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>La Xau’</td>
<td>La xo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>La Ku’</td>
<td>La hku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>La Ci My</td>
<td>Hsi mu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>La Ci Cha</td>
<td>Hsi hsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>La Nau</td>
<td>La naw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>La Ply</td>
<td>La plu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the exception of the two months, Thwe kaw and La hkli given by Marshall and the omission of two months by Iijima, the general agreement in months names is remarkable. The current “official” Karen calendar, that is, the calendar published by the Karen National Union in Karen State of Burma or Kawthoolei, as they call it, is identical to Marshall’s calendar. Month names, particularly in lunar calendars, can be useful in helping to ascertain how such calendars may be brought into phase with the solar, or sidereal, year (apart from other means such as observations of stellar shifts) as they may indicate a relationship between months and regularly occurring seasonal phenomena (see, for example, Fox [1979]). Often, the months may be named to coincide with such phenomena. In Palokhi, some of the months which are named after seasonally occurring phenomena, are slightly out of phase with these phenomena and there is no indication that the months are named, or that the calendar is adjusted specifically to coincide with such phenomena as a means by which the lunar calendar is phased in with the solar calendar, each year. Where Palokhi is concerned, the question of how the calendar is adjusted
to the solar or sidereal year is, obviously, an important one as this has a direct bearing on when decisions are made to clear, burn and plant swiddens before the onset of the rainy season which is a regularly occurring annual phenomenon. I do not know how this is done, but it is likely that it involves observations on the movements of the stars. In a rite that is performed on the first day of planting (which I discuss in the next chapter), for instance, the position of the Great Bear or Big Dipper (Cha Koecchau, literally, the “Elephant Stars”) is taken into account. No one could explain the significance of the star in this ritual. Marshall (1922:53) however says that it indicates north for the Karen. Whether or not this is important in the calendrical system of the Palokhi Karen is not clear to me. It may be noted that for the Northern Thai the commencement of the agricultural season in April (which is roughly when the Palokhi Karen plant their swiddens) is indicated by a shift in the sun from the sign of Pisces to Aries (Davis [1984:99]). A problem related to the question of how the lunar year is brought into phase with the solar or sidereal year is, of course, intercalation. Intercalation itself is simple enough as all it entails is the addition of an extra month at appropriate intervals, and it is possessed by most if not all lunar calendrical systems. The real problem, however, lies in determining when this is to be done and this depends on the considerations that I have mentioned above. However, I failed to obtain any information on this in Palokhi. In the official Karen calendar of the Karen National Union, intercalation is done by means of repeating the month of Ci My and the two months are designated “First Ci My” and “Second Ci My”. 1980 was an intercalary year in this official calendar. This calendar, however, should not be regarded as being necessarily representative of traditional Karen calendrical reckoning and calculations. Marshall, in his description of the Karen calendar, found it impossible to determine how intercalation was arrived at by the Karen.

3 From the table, it will be noticed that the years in which wet-rice fields were acquired by some households do not correspond with the years in which they settled in Palokhi as described in Chapter II. The reason for this is that some households acquired the fields before actually settling in Palokhi, and some after doing so.

4 I use the term “ownership” here only in its most general sense. I discuss in more detail, later, the issues involved in the ownership of wet-rice fields in Palokhi according to Karen ideas and the legal status of such ownership as it is defined in Thai law.

5 Neither of these men were strangers to Palokhi when they arrived and, indeed, as with all other settlers they frequently visited Palokhi before settling in. They undoubtedly knew of the circumstances surrounding the “sale” of plot J (as I discuss shortly) or, if they did not they would certainly have had some idea that all was not right. On the other hand, they could not be sure (in each case) that Chi’ might not have gone ahead and actually cleared and cultivated these plots. They could, of course, have claimed and cleared other areas (if their doubts had been strong enough) but what mitigated against this was the advantageous locations of the fields concerned. They are all situated near the village below the three dams erected by other cultivators and this offered the benefit of sharing the dams with the other cultivators, and shorter irrigation canals to construct — both of which, obviously, represent lower labour requirements in making these plots cultivable.

6 This is also a good instance to show how tensions are managed in Palokhi. I have already mentioned that there is no council of elders, or any institutionalised mechanism to resolve problematic issues of mutual or common interest in Palokhi. The Palokhi Karen, instead tend to avoid such issues in public confrontations or, for that matter, in private between aggrieved parties. The resentments and grievances, however, eventually surface in the form of gossip. Even in this, they do not appear overtly and the mechanics are very subtle. A person may allude to an incident in a vague manner, or mention a detail which is unattributable to anyone, and round it all off by saying “but I don’t know”. The message, nonetheless, is communicated however unclear. It does mean, however, that as far as others are concerned, there is very little to go on by way of ascertainable facts so village opinion can never be mustered to a point where grievances eventually break out into the open. It also explains, partly, why there are no effective forms of social control in Palokhi. Within the confines of their homes, however, people are less constrained about discussing the iniquities of others (imagined or real). This was how I was, finally, able to obtain something of the background to the transactions in which Chi’ was involved — from Mi’ Zo, Toeloe’s eleven year old son when no one else was prepared to say anything about these transactions beyond vague and mystifying remarks.

7 In Palokhi, the term for “owner” is koe’ca, that is, “lord” and it is the same term used to refer to tutelary spirits of domains, as we have seen in Chapter II.

A summary of relevant aspects of the Land Code and its implications for swiddening communities in Thailand may be found in a very useful paper by Justice (now Chief Justice) Sophon Ratanakhon (1978). The descriptions of the various certificates which I discuss here are taken from Section 1 of the Land Code.
Code. From the Code, it would seem that Thai concepts of land use (on the basis of which it was drawn up) are not unlike those of the Palokhi Karen, at least in their fundamentals. The ranking of certificates which make distinctions among kinds of possession (as against ownership), despite the legal terminology, is clearly concerned with use rights. The Palokhi Karen and the Northern Thai with whom they have had dealings over land, appear to share similar ideas about the ownership of land and the transactions that I have described are all regarded as *bona fide* ones by both the Palokhi Karen and the Northern Thai.

9 One household, however, has a certificate called *sau khau* which is lowest in the series of graded documents which are taken into account in the recognition of possession of land.

10 Under Section 41 of the Code, possessory rights (that is, as certified by the *baj caung*) to land may be inherited.

11 I cannot resist making the observation that if “all men are equal in the eyes of the law”, as Dicey once expressed it, then in Palokhi as far as the rule on inheritance goes, all men and women are equal — except when they are wives or unmarried women. Dicey’s axiom in its literal sense is probably more true in Palokhi. As I go on to argue later, the key feature of inheritance in Palokhi is whether or not there is a *man* present who can control, or manage, that is, cultivate inherited wet-rice fields. From the table of land transactions, however, it will be seen that there is in fact one woman, ‘A’, who does own a plot of terraces by way of inheritance. In this case, she came to own the field although she did have a son (Chi’) because he only came to live in Palokhi sometime after her husband had died.

12 In the case of ‘A’, the field was cultivated by her husband Chwi’ and Sa Pac’, and her son Chi’. Where the rituals entailed in the cultivation of the plot are concerned, they were performed by Chwi’, and after their divorce, by her son. Her Yunnanese Chinese husband, Sa Pac’, did not perform these rituals in any real sense because he did not know the prayers associated with them.

13 Gender marking of work with buffaloes is also to be seen in a “wrist-tying” ritual conducted for buffaloes at the end of the planting season in wet-rice fields. It is a ritual that the Karen have very probably borrowed from the Northern Thai and the officiants are all *men*. In this ritual, it is actually the horns of the buffaloes that are tied with lengths of cotton yarn. This sort of gender marking is, in fact, to be found in Northern Thai agricultural communities as well (Davis [1984:152]), and it is interesting to note that in at least one such community, the symbolic reversal of sex roles — in certain rites which are held in relation to “matrilineal cults” — is expressed through the idiom of agricultural tasks and buffaloes. Potter (1976:145) says that in these rites, women act out ploughing with a man playing the part of a buffalo, and that a woman even mounts the man from the rear, suggesting that he is being “impregnated” by her. Although I cannot go into a discussion of this here, I suggest that the point is not “impregnation” as Potter seems to think but, rather, *agentivity* of the male in sexual intercourse which provides another idiom by which the reversal of roles is expressed, and which is conflated with the symbolism of buffaloes and ploughing. I do not wish to imply by these observations that the predominant role of men in wet-rice agriculture in Palokhi is, therefore, the consequence of the adoption of wet-rice agriculture from the Northern Thai. If men appear to dominate wet-rice cultivation in certain tasks which entail the use of buffaloes and so on, it is because their dominant role in swiddening (in the form of appropriating land from territorial spirits, and so forth) has been extended into wet-rice cultivation which has permitted a more marked expression of this role.

14 As I show later (pp. 337–42), cash transactions are certainly not uncommon in Palokhi; indeed, there is great deal of buying and selling that goes on in Palokhi. Rice, especially rice that is cultivated by households in Palokhi, rarely features in these kinds of transactions within the community. The Palokhi Karen give eminently pragmatic reasons why rice is not sold as a commodity in the community. They say that households with surpluses do not sell their rice because they can never be certain that forthcoming harvests would be sufficient for their needs, and that therefore the rice should be kept to meet contingencies. They also say, however, that if they did not have enough rice, they would be embarrassed or ashamed (*mae’ chgha’*) to approach those with surpluses to sell rice. It is, however, the attitude that is intriguing. Part of the reason is that while they may indeed be embarrassed to approach households with surpluses to sell their rice, they are also at the same time concerned that they do not want to embarrass those with surpluses by placing them in a position of having to refuse to sell rice. These attitudes, I would argue, are reflective of a certain symbolic value or ideological weight that is placed on rice cultivated in Palokhi which makes it an essentially “non-transactable” commodity. Or, to borrow a term from marxist anthropology, rice is “fetishised” in the community.

15 Around 1975, the selling price of raw leaf was approximately Bht 8 to Bht 10 per kilogram, according to the Palokhi Karen. The price in 1980–1 was about half this.
In Ban Pa Pae, there were at least two Northern Thai merchants or wholesalers, and the Karen merchant mentioned earlier. In Ban Pha Daeng, there were two merchants — one a Northern Thai and the other a Yunnanese Chinese. Their participation in the miang economy appears to be only one of a number of activities that they are involved in some, for example, were also shopkeepers. In a socio-economic study of the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa river system Thannarong et al. estimate that 3.9 per cent of the 254 Karen, Lisu and Northern Thai households (that is, 10) were engaged in miang production. Almost all these households were Northern Thai. Although the study does not bring this out, there can be no doubt that a far greater number of households in the watershed are also involved in the miang economy, if not as producers, then most certainly as occasional pickers and sellers of raw leaf for these 10 households, similar to the Palokhi Karen. Durrenberger (1974), in his short paper on economic networks and interrelationships in the area (based on his 1968–70 fieldwork on the Lisu at Ban Lum, now the site of the headquarters of the Royal Forestry Department’s Watershed Unit) notes the importance of miang in the area. He says specifically that the Karen of Huai Pha Chao, that is, Huai Phra Chao (the Karen village nearest Ban Lum) produced miang which was also produced in Ban Pa Pae.

In Palokhi, nine households owned miang or tea gardens and the mean size of these gardens was 1.9 raj. Most of these gardens were cleared from the forest for cropping, but some were sold to other Karen who migrated to Palokhi later in the history of the settlement. The ownership of these gardens is, in its principles, no different from that of wet-rice fields. The size of these gardens is not a reliable means of gauging their productivity, nor is it particularly useful for a description of how the Palokhi Karen crop the leaf. Some gardens have more, and some less, miang bushes. Furthermore, when the Palokhi Karen clear the undergrowth in their gardens, preparatory to picking the leaf, they may in fact clear more or less than the stated areas of these gardens. Those households which do not own gardens will often simply clear a part of the forest where miang bushes may be found in order to pick the leaf to sell, if they need money to buy rice. For these reasons, I therefore have not attempted to present a record of the ownership of these gardens and related transactions (since 1960) as I have done for wet-rice fields, nor do I give a breakdown of the areas of miang gardens owned by households in Palokhi.

The Palokhi Karen produce miang for domestic consumption by the steaming method similar to that of the Northern Thai. Unlike the Northern Thai, however, they also drink tea as strong infusions with rock salt, especially after evening meals. The consumption of tea in this manner is greater than the fermented product. The tea is usually black tea, although some green tea (from the fermented leaf) is also prepared.

The Northern Thai, by and large, and the Palokhi Karen are really in much the same position when it comes to miang and tea cropping. The Northern Thai, however, do employ the Palokhi Karen in certain tasks connected with miang and I discuss this later as well as the reasons for this.

While not denying that the socio-economic relationships, which Van Roy describes, may be found in Chiang Dao and elsewhere in Northern Thailand, Wijeyewardene (1971) has, however, questioned Van Roy’s use of the term pau liang to describe a “politico-economic role”, that is, as an equivalent of the sociological concept “patron”. Wijeyewardene suggests that the term is probably best viewed as one of address and a part of the complex of systems of address in Northern Thai society (see also Wijeyewardene [1968]). The evidence from Palokhi does, I think, lend some support to Wijeyewardene’s interpretation of the use of the term pau liang. Any Northern Thai term which the Palokhi Karen use undoubtedly reflects its use in an essentially Northern Thai context and may be taken as a reasonably reliable indicator of the Northern Thai use of the term. It is indeed the case that the Palokhi Karen address the Pha Daeng merchant by the term pau liang, but when they reported their sales of leaf to me, he was usually referred to as “the Cin Hau”, that is, “the Yunnanese Chinese”.

Even before the all-weather road was constructed, there was motorised traffic between Chiang Mai, Mae Malai, and Pai (see also Durrenberger [1974]) and there can be no doubt that the road has been an important part of the economic networks linking Pai and Chiang Mai, with the larger Northern Thai settlements in the area, such as Ban Pa Pae, acting as nodes in these networks for some time.

Combretum quadrangulare is a host for the stick lac insect (Pendleton [1963:221]), but as the bark of Combretum collected in Palokhi does not have lac secretions, the bark is clearly not collected for lac.

The stores all stock similar kinds of goods in general, but the two largest shops in Pa Pae (run by a Shan and a Yunnanese Chinese) have a greater variety. The stores in Mae Lao do not have the sort of creditor-debtor relationships with the Karen as described by Cohen (1984).

According to the Palokhi Karen, the price of opium in 1979 was about Bht 50 per tua. Cooper (1984:155) reports that the price of opium in Homges per sataang measure (that is, tua) in 1974 was Bht 6 in February, Bht 15 in November, Bht 20 in mid-December, and Bht 10 in February 1975.
There was one exception to this in 1981 when Chi’ and two Karen elephant drivers from Mae Rim (who had come to Pa Pae to do logging work) devised a scheme to buy a large quantity of opium in Mae Hong Sorn for their own use as well as to earn money by selling the opium. This was an exception to the general pattern of opium purchases by the Palokhi Karen, but because it involved a considerable sum of money by Palokhi standards, some details of the scheme are worth noting here. One of the elephant drivers, Wa’, knew of a Hmong village in Mae Hong Sorn where opium could be bought at a price of Bht 10 per tua. Initially, he and Chi’ had agreed to go to Mae Hong Sorn to look for a certain type of dye (which Wa’ knew could be found there and which was not available in Palokhi) for a particular tattoo which he wanted done by Chi’. Chi’ had, in fact, a reputation for tattooing and the esoteric ritual knowledge associated with it. As they were going to Mae Hong Sorn for the dye, they also decided to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain the cheap opium and hence the scheme. Chi’, however, had no money and Wa’ therefore agreed to lend him some for the venture. As they conceived the plan originally, they had grandiose ideas of carrying out the project with a working capital of Bht 4,000 but eventually this was brought down to Bht 2,000 after incurring the expenses of travelling to Mae Hong Sorn by road. In Mae Hong Sorn, Chi’ was able to earn about Bht 800 from tattooing alone, and he used this money to purchase the dye which cost him Bht 500. At the Hmong village, they bought Bht 2,000 worth of opium (that is, 200 tua or, approximately, 960 grammes) and they returned to Palokhi through forest tracks, passing various Karen villages, some three weeks later from the day they left (7 June). The market value of this amount of opium in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Tung Choa watershed, at 1981 prices, was Bht 8,000. Wa’ and Chi’, however, sold 125 tua (840 grammes) for Bht 7,000 in one sale to a Northern Thai in Ban Tung Choa keeping the rest of the opium for their own use and for smaller sales. The Bht 5,000 profit was shared between the two of them. Chi’, of course, had to repay the Bht 1,000 loan, but he was still left with Bht 1,500. His fee for tattooing Wa’ with the dye (which gave birth to the whole enterprise) was Bht 200.