

# Chapter I

## Introduction

This study is concerned with how a small Karen community of 20 households, in the highlands of Northern Thailand, maintains its cultural identity in the context of a predominantly Northern Thai socio-economic environment and a slowly growing presence of the administrative apparatus of the larger polity of Thailand.

The nature of the economic relations between this Karen community, Palokhi, and its Northern Thai neighbours and its contacts with Thai government agencies raises an important issue. Palokhi is, quite evidently, integrated at various levels into this wider socio-economic and political system. Yet, the Palokhi Karen offer every indication of having what can only be described as a distinctive identity in their individual and community life which reflects little of this integration.

The identity of the Palokhi Karen in this sense is most evident in their language, religion, and ritual life which distinguish them from the Northern Thai. Although Palokhi Karen adults and many older children speak the Northern Thai dialect, **kham myang**, which they invariably use in their dealings with the Northern Thai, their ability falls short of that of the Northern Thai due to phonological interference.<sup>1</sup> In such interactive situations, they are immediately distinguished not only as non-Northern Thai but, indeed, as **Karen**. More importantly, within the community itself the dialect of Sgaw Karen which they speak is the medium by which social and cultural meanings are expressed beyond the mundane day-to-day communicative function of language and speech. While this holds true for perhaps every aspect of life in the community, it is decidedly marked in their religion and ritual for two reasons: first, the language or dialect is integral to the representation of symbolic meanings in their distinctive non-Christian, non-Buddhist religion and ritual practices; second, religion and ritual encompass virtually every aspect of social life in Palokhi but not beyond.

The religious system of the Palokhi Karen is central to the construction of a particular form of social reality which reflects little of the socio-economic and political realities outside the community. Furthermore, although there are some similarities between Palokhi Karen ritual practices and those of the Northern Thai, there is one major difference: the Palokhi Karen cannot be said to be Buddhist by any means. At the level of this general distinction, the difference not only means that to be non-Buddhist is also to be non-Northern Thai; it implies that the meanings contained in Palokhi Karen religion and ritual, as well as the social reality that they sustain, are indeed autonomous to the extent that they

are not shared with the Northern Thai. In other words, this religion and ritual life, as well as the social reality they maintain, are particular to the Palokhi Karen.

From a sociological perspective, what is significant is that their integration in a larger socio-economic and political system has not resulted in social and cultural changes which would make them indistinguishable from the Northern Thai. In short, the Palokhi Karen possess a social and cultural identity which is quite unambiguously their own.

This poses a key issue which forms the focus of this study: given the larger circumstances of the community life of the Palokhi Karen, what is the nature of this identity and how is it maintained?

## **The Problem: Ethnic Identity, Cultural Distinctiveness and Religion**

The question of the nature and maintenance of identity in non-Buddhist, non-Christian Karen communities is an important one for several reasons. Despite the long history of Karen studies, it is a phenomenon that is not well understood; it is only comparatively recently that the beginnings towards its understanding have been made with reassessments of studies on the Karen.<sup>2</sup>

The question raises several related issues, analytical and ethnographic, of some complexity. These issues involve the relation between ethnicity, or ethnic identity, and cultural distinctiveness or, as I would put it, the "identity of a culture". Quite simply, the relation concerns the correspondence between processes: the construction and maintenance of identity in the context of **intergroup** relations, and the constituted distinctiveness (or identity) and continuity of a culture within a group, to the extent that it assumes a separate identity **vis-a-vis** other groups. They also involve religion which, together with language, appear to be important variables in Karen community life and identity. For instance, although the Karen have various religious traditions, nevertheless, it appears that they are undeniably Karen in one way or another. The diversity, or eclecticism, of Karen religious beliefs is very much taken for granted; yet, it is remarkable that very little detailed information is available on the religious systems of Karen communities, especially those which are non-Buddhist and non-Christian.

In the contemporary literature on the Karen, these issues are most clearly to be seen in two key essays by Keyes and Lehman in the volume **Ethnic Adaptation and Identity**, edited by Keyes (1979), which is specifically concerned with "The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma".

In his introductory essay, Keyes examines the relationship between cultural distinctiveness, ethnic identity and structural oppositions between groups by which ethnic boundaries may come into being.

Keyes takes the view, the utility of which is well established in studies of ethnicity, that ethnicity is an emergent phenomenon (see, for example, Mitchell 1974) in the context of intergroup relations. However, Keyes argues, *contra* Barth (1969), that rather than culture which acts to define ethnic groups, it is ethnic identity which provides the defining cultural characteristic of ethnic groups (1979a:4). He also adds that the cultural expressions or symbolic formulations of ethnic identity may be found in, for example, myth, religious beliefs, ritual, folk history, folklore and art. By this, I take it that ethnicity provides the **context** within which these “expressions” or “formulations” assume a distinctiveness as diacritica of an ethnic identity. This is a view which is expressed more succinctly in another paper where he outlines a theoretical approach to ethnic change: “An ethnic identity thus becomes a personal identity after an individual appropriates it from a cultural source, that is, from the public display and traffic in symbols” (1981:10).

Keyes also goes on to point out that while “the cultural distinctiveness an ethnic identity provides is a necessary condition for the existence of an ethnic group, it is not a sufficient condition” (1979a:4). The other condition without which an ethnic group cannot be said to exist is the “structural opposition” between groups in terms of which there is a structural differentiation in the competition for scarce resources such that members of the same group share a “common interest situation” as well as a “common cultural identity”. The resources in question may take a variety of forms, for example, productive resources, access to power or the reproductive capacities of women, and so forth. Accordingly, ethnic identification and adaptation (or change) also involves the element of relative advantage in the membership of groups. Keyes concludes with the observation that any examination of ethnic group relations should therefore treat both the cultural definition of groups and the structural oppositions between groups as problematical (1979a:8).

While there undoubtedly have been movements between Karen and other non-Karen ethnic groups (see, for example, Wijeyewardene, *in press*), the fact that there are Karen who remain quite unambiguously Karen would, thus, indicate that it is advantageous for them to do so. This in itself is entirely possible as part of the dynamics of ethnicity. Or, as Wijeyewardene also points out — in discussing Karen political strategies in the context of the Theravada Buddhist states of Thailand and Burma — “distinctiveness is sometimes more important than assimilation”. Lehman has provided an answer as to why distinctiveness might be preferable to assimilation where the Karen are concerned. He says:

Karen might just as well have become, and in fact many are, Buddhists, but it is clear that their interests do not lie that way. For that way their choice is to try to acculturate to the Burmans, which would mean, given their relatively backward and remote habitat, being predictably poor Burmans and thus relative

failures at the very levels of aspiration they would be adopting. In fact it can be argued that one of the very reasons for an historical and continued Karen identity is that peoples in relatively poor areas are often better off in their own eyes if they maintain cultural styles and aspirations distinct from those of their richer neighbours. (1979:248).

This, I suggest is precisely the case with, for example, the Palokhi Karen. In the context of their particular circumstances, it is advantageous for them to “make use” of the economic opportunities in a larger Northern Thai milieu while at the same time remaining separate. Indeed, I would further suggest that this very separation provides, “in their own eyes”, the assurance of a certain degree of independence from the very socio-economic system that they are linked with. At this cognitive level it is the belief in their own distinctiveness which is important in the positive value placed on a Karen identity. The point to note, however, is that at this level they are predisposed towards a certain view because they are “Karen”. There is, in other words, a certain tautology in Lehman’s observations. I shall return to this later.

This brings us to further considerations in the relationship between the cultural distinctiveness and ethnic identity of the Karen, namely, change, the role of religion, and the status of an indigenous Karen religious tradition. In his discussion of this aspect of Karen ethnic identity, Keyes considers various examples most of which are drawn from the work of others. They are presented to illustrate the principle that in intergroup situations, it is the cultural belief held by the Karen themselves about what makes them distinctive that is relevant to the definition of Karen identity (1979a:10-3). His observations about religion, however, reveal what is the most outstanding gap in the ethnography of the Karen.

At the beginning of his introduction, Keyes quotes a short passage by Father Vincentius Sangermano written at the end of the eighteenth century dealing with Karen living amongst the Burmese and Mon. In this passage, Sangermano observes that the Karen still retain their language, dress and so on and “what is more remarkable, they have a different religion” (Sangermano, quoted in Keyes 1979a:1). Commenting on the relationship between religion and Karen ethnic identity, Keyes says:

... unlike Father Sangermano in the eighteenth century, those who have studied the Karen in Thailand have not found that the Karen associate their identity with a distinctive religion. Rather, Karen follow a number of different religions while still remaining Karen: traditional forms of spirit and ancestor worship, a tattooing cult (*cekosi*), several varieties of millennialism (cf. Stern 1968), Christianity, and different types of Buddhism. That there is no single Karen religion does not make religion irrelevant to our considerations; quite the contrary .... However, for the

moment, it is worth noting that few, if any, local groups of Karen in Thailand hold that particular religious forms distinguish Karen from non-Karen. (1979a:12).

Whether or not the Karen claim that a certain religion distinguishes Karen from non-Karen is not quite the issue, though it is interesting that it has not emerged in the ethnography of the Karen. It may be language or some other feature; it is only the **belief**, or claim, that some cultural feature or other **is so** that is relevant to actor-definitions of ethnic identity.

The main difficulty here is the lack of documentation, in contemporary studies, on a distinctive Karen religion (which Sangermano found so remarkable in his time) as well as the status of the “different religions” which Keyes refers to. This has led Hinton to state, quite categorically, that “There is no distinctive Karen religion” on the grounds that, in the region, “religions are very fluid” and that the Karen are “eclectic in religious matters” (1983:161-2). Although Hinton’s general observations about religion in Northern Thailand are correct, his conclusion is precipitate. Where the Karen are concerned, to take religion as a world religion, a syncretic mix of a world religion with spirit beliefs, or a hodge-podge of various spirit beliefs is to miss the point in many respects. The point is whether or not there is, among the Karen communities which do not espouse Christianity or Buddhism in one form or another, a religious **system**.<sup>3</sup> The issue is, admittedly, problematic in the border areas of Thailand and Burma where a great many Karen communities have been exposed to Buddhism and Christianity. Nevertheless, the likely existence of what might be regarded as an indigenous Karen religious tradition should not be overlooked.

On the basis of a 1977 survey by the Tribal Research Centre (Chiang Mai), Kunstadter (1983:25) indicates that 42.9 per cent of the Sgaw Karen surveyed were “animists”, 38.4 per cent were Buddhists, 18.3 per cent were Christian while 0.2 per cent were Muslims and another 0.2 per cent belonged to other, unclassified religions. In the case of Pwo Karen, 37.2 per cent were “animists”, 61.1 per cent were Buddhists and 1.7 per cent were Christian. Too great a reliance should not be placed on these statistics, but I refer to them to point out that, even as rough approximations, they indicate the existence of a substantial number of Karen who do not see themselves as being Christian or Buddhist. This, of course, raises the obvious question of what is the nature of their “animistic” religion?

Christianity and Buddhism (whatever their forms including syncretic Karen millennial cults) are quite obviously religious traditions which the Karen have **adopted** and have the status of religions amongst the Karen, but they immediately beg the question of what sort of religion existed prior to Karen conversion. “Spirit and ancestor worship” and the “tattooing cult”, on the other hand, are problematic issues in the Karen ethnography. Though “spirit and

ancestor worship” are undoubtedly part of Karen religious traditions, they are aspects of the religious life of the Karen which suffer from several misconceptions. As I have shown elsewhere (1984), the so-called “ancestor worship” is a variable phenomenon and its significance differs, in all likelihood, from community to community. It cannot be construed to be a religion in itself, though in some cases it may be regarded as a cult. As for the “tattooing cult”, little enough is known about it, and to regard it as a religion would be a hasty and premature conclusion indeed.<sup>4</sup>

The central problem as I see it here, however, is the question of religious conversion and whether anything may be said about the sociological relationship between, if not an identifiable then, at least, a posited “Karen religion” and Karen identity.

This is an issue which is implied in Lehman’s discussion of Karen conversion to Christianity and why it may be advantageous for the Karen to do so rather than to convert to Christianity. He is, in fact, concerned with the relationship between cultural change and change in ethnic identity in general. Taking religious conversion to Christianity as a case in point, his conclusion is that cultural change expressed as religious conversion is nothing short of a change in ethnic identity:

The answer in recent times seems to have been both to maintain their separateness and to identify with a modern social and religious system, that is, to identify with Christianity, even while not necessarily adopting Christianity wholesale.

... I have to make it as clear as I can that, as this last observation about religion shows, cultural change itself, especially insofar as it is determined by intergroup relations, amounts precisely to a change in ethnicity, an alternation in identity. This is too frequently not understood. I will even go so far as to assert that the tendency for Karen, Sgaw, and Pwo in particular to develop millennial and messianic cults that seem to change their religion almost totally is exactly this, an alternation in ethnic identity in response to changing intergroup relations. (Lehman 1979:248).

There are two points in these observations which warrant serious consideration.

First, these examples of religious, cultural, and ethnic change, when placed in their historical context, have the following implications: providing that intergroup relations do not change, Karen cultural distinctiveness or identity is directly related to an indigenous, non-Christian, non-Buddhist religion; furthermore, assuming again that intergroup relations do not change, the maintenance of Karen cultural identity is directly related to continuity of such a Karen religion. Although Lehman does not discuss the nature of indigenous Karen religion, it is quite clear that he implicitly acknowledges it must exist.

More generally, it is also apparent that he sees religion as a critical aspect in cultural distinctiveness or identity. This is a point which I take up again later.

Second, religion is **implicated** in cultural change as part of the modification of ethnic identity in the context of changing intergroup relations. The central issue is the relationship between religious, cultural and ethnic change.

The point, I suggest, may be expressed more generally, if somewhat simplistically, in another way. Karen ethnic identity however it may be defined or arrived at as a consequence of processes in intergroup relations has to do with cultural distinctiveness or identity as it is constituted within the community. Or, to paraphrase Keyes' observations noted earlier: ethnic identities are appropriated from cultural sources (which, I would add, are themselves part of the lived experience of the community) to become personal and hence group identities. Furthermore, change in one means a change in the other. This is the critical issue in the relationship between ethnic identity and cultural identity and, I suggest, it constitutes the thrust of Lehman's remarks. But, Lehman also emphasises the role of religion.

The importance that Lehman gives to religion is worth noting. Although cultural distinctiveness or identity may be associated with any feature or sets of features, religious systems are important for many reasons in various societies. However their general social and cultural significance, to take one anthropological definition of religion as a **cultural system**, is that they are "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 1966: 4). Whatever else religion may entail, it clearly involves cognitive processes where, as Geertz and Geertz have said (in another context), "a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing" (1964). It is for this reason that if the Karen place a positive value on their identity in relation to others, it is tautological, as I noted before. However, given the importance of religion in predisposing individuals in a society towards particular ways of looking at things, including themselves and others, it does mean that a great deal of their culture and their behaviour may be understood by investigating their religion in its own right. Religious systems, however, are also important for another reason. They possess considerable symbolic content; they are part of the "traffic in symbols" which are the means by which ethnic identities may be appropriated from cultural sources.

In reviewing the discussions of Karen identity by Keyes and Lehman, what I wish to stress is that, first, it is essential to make a distinction between ethnic identity and cultural identity and, second, it is necessary to establish the relationship between ethnic identity, cultural identity, and religion which is clearly an important factor in the maintenance or change of these identities.

Where ethnic identity, cultural identity and religion are concerned, cultural distinctiveness is necessary to ethnic identity but ethnicity itself is an emergent phenomenon in the context of intergroup relations. Furthermore, cultural identity is closely associated with religion in cognitive and experiential terms, and religious change amounts to cultural change which may be taken as a response to changing intergroup relations. There is, in other words, a dialectical relationship between ethnic identity and cultural identity in which religion is an operative factor.

The general observations, and these points in particular, made by Keyes and Lehman are instructive. But, they raise two major problems.

First, current understandings of what might be regarded as the non-Buddhist, non-Christian religious tradition of the Karen are limited indeed because little is known about it. Accordingly, although the dynamics of ethnic **adaptation** are clear enough, the relationship between a Karen religion, a Karen cultural identity and their continuity are still a problematic issue in the case of non-Christian, non-Buddhist Karen who possess an unambiguous Karen ethnic identity. The fact of the matter, quite simply, is that we really do not know enough about it.

This thesis is an attempt to explore precisely this issue on the basis of the ethnography of the Palokhi Karen.

I propose to deal with this in terms of the following question: how do the Palokhi Karen maintain their cultural identity, given that they have a religion which is distinctively their own, in the context of fundamental economic relations which extend beyond their own domain of life and control, and an awareness of their incorporation within a larger polity?

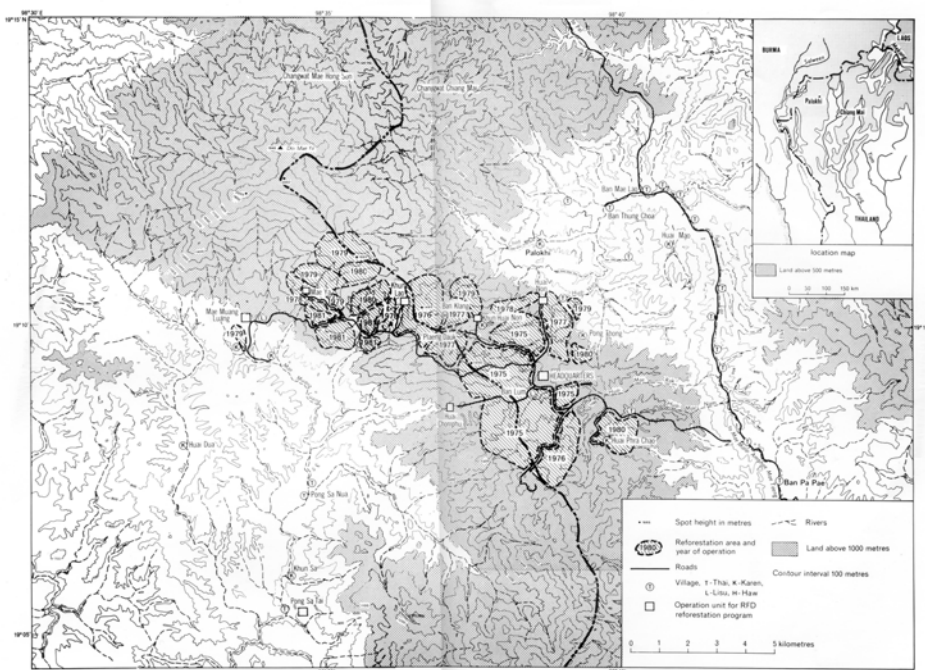
Following Keyes and Lehman, I accept that ethnicity in general is constructed as part of the process of intergroup relations. I also take the view that religion is essential to a cultural identity and, hence, an ethnic identity. In the case of the Palokhi Karen, I begin with the assumption that they possess a distinctive religion of their own and take the relationship between this religion and cultural identity as the central concern of this study. I have not attempted to substantiate my claims about what constitutes the religion of the Karen in general and the Palokhi Karen in particular; the rest of this thesis will be evidence and justification enough for my assertion.

The second problem, a more general one, which arises from Keyes' and Lehman's observations is this: if Karen ethnic identity is an emergent or situational phenomenon, and if at the level of the actors themselves ethnic groups are defined by some set of "cultural traits" (Lehman 1979: 235, 247) or "commonsense constructs" (Mitchell 1974:22-4), what then is it that is "Karen" about these instances of ethnic adaptation? To take one example if, as Lehman

argues, religious and cultural change amount to a change in ethnicity, in what way or ways are Christian, Buddhist and “animist” Karen “Karen”? The problem is, ultimately, an analytical one, namely, that if we take ethnicity too far as an analytical concept, what we are left with is a much too relativistic notion of ethnic identity in which the only irreducible element is the cultural distinctiveness of this identity. The answer to this question, I suggest, can only be arrived at through an answer to the first question and I, therefore, take up this issue at the end of this study.

In the rest of this chapter, I set out the general geographical and economic context of Palokhi and show briefly why the Palokhi Karen may be regarded as having, quite unambiguously, a Karen ethnic identity. I also set out an interpretative framework and argument which underlies my analysis of religion and the maintenance of cultural identity in Palokhi which forms the principal concern of the rest of this study.

**FIGURE 1 The Location of Palokhi in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa Area, Amphoe Mae Taeng, Changwat Chiang Mai**



Note: This map is based on one published for the United Nations University-Chiang Mai University Joint Research Project on Highland-Lowland Interactive Systems (Chapman 1983: 319).

## Palokhi: The Geographical and Economic Context

Palokhi is situated some 90 kilometers north-west of the provincial capital of Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand (Figure 1.1). The village lies in a generally

hilly area which, in this thesis, I call the Pa Pae hills after the largest Northern Thai settlement in the area.<sup>5</sup> The Pa Pae hills, which are generally above 700 metres in elevation, are part of a larger area of hill country which forms the eastern edges of the Doi Inthanon mountain range stretching from North to South. Through this area, there is a road which begins at Mae Malai in Amphur Mae Taeng and leads up to Pai in the province of Mae Hong Sorn. Palokhi is situated several kilometres off this road within an inter-montane valley system which forms the drainage of the Mae Muang Luang, a river, and several streams. The largest stream is the Huai Thung Choa by which Palokhi is located.<sup>6</sup>

The Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa drainage system is essentially an area of dissected hill country with a central ridge over 1,000 m which rises to approximately 2,000 m. Above 1,000 m, the landscape is marked by the extensive presence of *Imperata cylindrica*. Since 1975, reforestation programmes of the Royal Forestry Department have resulted in the overplanting of much of this grassland with *Pinus kesiya*, an indigenous species of pine. Below 1,000 m, however, land cover consists of multi-storeyed evergreen forest and woodland.

The Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa basin has a total area of 220 km<sup>2</sup>. In 1979–80, it had a total population of 1,438 of which 976 were Karen, 247 Northern Thai, 169 Lisu and 46 Yunnanese Chinese living in 23 settlements distributed throughout the area. Of these 23 settlements, 14 were Karen, 6 Northern Thai, 2 Lisu and 1 Yunnanese Chinese (Thannarong *et al.*, n.d.).<sup>7</sup> Population density in the area was, therefore, 6.5 per km<sup>2</sup>. Compared to other highland areas in Northern Thailand, the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area is relatively unpopulated and there is a high proportion of forest and woodland even in the vicinity of Karen villages (Chapman 1983:322). As Chapman also notes, overall there is little pressure on the Karen swidden system and Northern Thai farming activities in the area. This general observation is true for the Palokhi Karen and Northern Thai within the Huai Thung Choa valley. The Palokhi Karen occupy the middle section of the valley while the Northern Thai (at Ban Mae Lao and Ban Thung Choa) inhabit the lower end near the Mae Malai-Pai road at the confluence of Huai Thung Choa and Mae Lao. Given the distribution of population in the Huai Thung Choa valley and a general separation of areas of exploitation for subsistence purposes between the Karen and Northern Thai, there is little competition for natural resources in the valley.

There is also a Royal Forestry Department Watershed Development Unit headquarters which is located next to the Lisu village of Ban Lum. Scattered throughout the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area are several sub-units of the Watershed Development Unit at Ban Lum which are engaged in various activities and projects such as reforestation, as well as a Flower Plantation which is engaged in ornamental flower horticulture for a crop replacement programme. These activities have had a direct impact on some of the settlements in the Mae

Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa basin but Palokhi has only been indirectly exposed to them thus far.<sup>8</sup> Where the Palokhi Karen are concerned, these sub-units offer opportunities for wage work which they take advantage of from time to time.

Palokhi, at the time of my fieldwork (1980–1982), varied between 18 and 20 households with a corresponding population of 109 and 116. Its closest neighbours, approximately 2 kilometres away downslope the Huai Thung Choa, are two Northern Thai settlements — Ban Thung Choa and Ban Mae Lao. The contact between the Palokhi Karen and Ban Mae Lao is, by far, the more important although it is further away than Ban Thung Choa. The reason is that Ban Mae Lao, which lies next to the Mae Malai-Pai road, functions as an important node in the network of economic linkages in this particular part of the Pa Pae hills. The reasons for these contacts are, therefore, primarily economic.

The principal features of the economic linkages between Palokhi and Ban Mae Lao, as well as some other Northern Thai settlements (including Ban Thung Choa) may be summed up quite simply as follows. In broad general terms, the subsistence economy of Palokhi consists of a dual system of cultivation based on swiddening and wet-rice agriculture. The Palokhi Karen, however, are not self-sufficient in rice production and they therefore purchase rice in Ban Mae Lao and, to some extent, in Ban Pa Pae.

In 1980–81, for example, there was an overall deficit in agricultural production which amounted to 16 per cent of total consumption requirements. This could only be met by recourse to external sources of rice by various means.<sup>9</sup> If this deficit is translated into expenditures on husked glutinous rice (which is what the Palokhi Karen purchase in Ban Mae Lao and Ban Pa Pae) at the 1981 price of Bht 4.5 per litre in the Pa Pae hills, it amounts to the very considerable sum of Bht 49,135.5. These aggregate figures serve to indicate the extent to which 10 out of the 18 households in Palokhi are dependent on external sources for their rice requirements.

In order to purchase the rice they need, the Palokhi Karen require cash. This they earn primarily through the sale of tea leaves (*Camellia sinensis*) for the dry leaf and **miang** (fermented tea) industries, wage labour in related activities and, secondarily, from the sale of forest products, and services. The rice which the Palokhi Karen purchase is not, in fact, surplus rice grown by the Northern Thai in the Pa Pae hills; it comes from the markets of Chiang Mai and is sold by shop-keepers in Northern Thai settlements such as Ban Mae Lao and Ban Pa Pae.<sup>10</sup>

The tea and **miang** industries, based in Mae Taeng, are therefore of considerable importance to the Palokhi Karen. What is noteworthy about Palokhi Karen involvement in these industries (especially the **miang** industry), as I show

later in this study, is that there is a marked absence of institutionalised credit arrangements and on-going indebtedness on the part of the Palokhi Karen. This also holds true of the relationship between them and the shop-keepers in Ban Mae Lao and Ban Pa Pae from whom they buy rice and other commodities. In other words, although the Palokhi Karen are dependent on these external sources for rice, they are not locked into institutionalised or rigidly defined external socio-economic relationships.

This too is a feature of the wage work undertaken by the Palokhi Karen in Northern Thai settlements in connection with the tea and **miang** economy. The work consists essentially of clearing tea gardens, chopping firewood for steaming **miang**, and portage. It is obtained on an **ad hoc** basis and employer-worker relationships, correspondingly, last only for the duration of the work with wages generally being paid at its conclusion.

For all practical purposes, the Palokhi Karen are therefore dependent to a significant extent on an external, regional economy in order to meet their consumption requirements in rice. It is a relationship which rests essentially on an important function characteristic of Northern Thai settlements situated along the Mae Malai-Pai road in the Pa Pae hills, that is, their role as conduits for exchanges and transactions in a regional economic network which links the Pa Pae hills with the lowlands of Chiang Mai.

The point I wish to stress here is that although the Palokhi Karen are integrated into a network of local and regional economic linkages through the necessity of obtaining rice and the need for cash to purchase it, they are not bound in structured socio-economic relationships.

Apart from being integrated within the larger economic system of the region, Palokhi has relatively recently experienced greater and more regular contact with agencies of the Thai government in the form of the Provincial Government's District Office at Mae Taeng and, of course, the Royal Forestry Department.

In 1975, for example, the Pa Pae area was given **tambon** (sub-district) status whereas it had previously been part of **tambon** Sopoeng. A registration exercise, for the purposes of issuing official documents such as identity cards (**bat pracam tua**) and household registration certificates (**baj thabian baan**), was also conducted in the same year. All households in Palokhi were registered and most adult males now possess identity cards. One result of this extension of the District Office's administration into the area has been that the Palokhi Karen are required to register births, deaths and children when they reach 18 years of age for identity cards. Another consequence has been that they have to pay a tax for the upkeep of the locality (**phasii bamrung thaung thii 6**). The tax is collected annually by the **kamnan** (the head of a cluster of villages by government appointment), a Northern Thai, living at Ban Mae Lao. The Palokhi Karen have difficulty in comprehending the rationale of these administrative measures, but

they are conscientious in observing them and to this extent they have already accepted the reality of an external authority which impinges on their lives. They also do not fully understand the nature of the tax. There is a general misapprehension that it is related to the ownership of wet-rice fields and that it implies a certain official recognition of their rights to these fields which is one reason why they are concerned to pay their dues.

The significance of this establishment of District Office administration in the area is that the Palokhi Karen acknowledge the authority of government agencies. They are also fully conscious of being part of a larger polity though they do not quite grasp the implications of this fact in terms of their rights and obligations.

The presence of the Royal Forestry Department in the Huai Thung Choa area has also impressed upon the Palokhi Karen that they are not an isolated, independent community. This is particularly evident where their farming activities are concerned. For example, officials of the Royal Forestry Department have visited them occasionally bearing the message that swiddening should be limited or curtailed because of its deleterious effects on forest cover. They tend to ignore such exhortations but they are, at the same time, apprehensive that in so doing they may incur penalties although they are quite unable to specify the nature of these penalties. It may be noted that the Royal Forestry Department's officials do not, in fact, attempt to coerce the Palokhi Karen into abandoning swiddening through specific or even vague threats of punishment. Their belief that they will be penalised should be understood in terms of reactions to institutional authorities with functions which are not fully comprehended but which are regarded as having considerable power to affect their lives.

The presence of the Royal Forestry Department is also important from another point of view. It has provided various opportunities for work which the Karen have taken advantage of on a short term basis. This has taken the form of very short term wage work such as clearing *Imperata* grasslands for reforestation to earn some cash as well as longer term employment in order to save money to buy wet-rice fields prior to settling in Palokhi.

It is indeed true that the Palokhi Karen (and for that matter other Karen in the area) and the Northern Thai see each other as being culturally different. In the wider context of the Pa Pae hills area, it is also true that there is competition between Karen and Northern Thai for land due to upland migration of Northern Thai. This is part of a more general trend in Northern Thailand which Chapman (1967) has described. In the specific context of the Huai Thung Choa valley, this competition for productive resources is reflected only to a limited extent. It is confined to access to wild tea bushes growing in the forest between Palokhi and the two Northern Thai settlements, rather than farming areas because the Northern Thai prefer to cultivate wet-rice fields (and sometimes swiddens) near their villages. The competition is also limited because of low population densities

and a general separation of their respective areas of exploitation for subsistence purposes. However, it exists to the extent that where the Northern Thai utilise the forest between Palokhi and Ban Thung Choa and Ban Mae Lao the Palokhi Karen are therefore pre-empted from picking the tea bushes in the area. Most Palokhi Karen tea gardens are, thus, to be found around the village and on the western slopes of the Huai Thung Choa valley near the village. Nevertheless, neither the Palokhi Karen nor the Northern Thai regard this as a source of potential conflict.

The most important feature of the relations between the Palokhi Karen and Northern Thai, however, is the **dependence** of the Palokhi Karen on an external economy that is at their point of contact dominated by the Northern Thai who act as middle-men or as employers in wage work. This may well be regarded as a very specific kind of “structural differentiation”, though not necessarily in Keyes’ sense. By this I mean a distinct separation of economic arrangements between the Northern Thai and the Palokhi Karen which is mediated only through direct cash transactions in, for example, seller-buyer and employer-worker relationships.

In terms of the principles underlying ethnic adaptation discussed by Keyes, it could be argued that it would, perhaps, be to the advantage of the Palokhi Karen who are significantly dependent on this economy to “become Northern Thai” and, therefore, compete on a more equal basis for the resources that they are dependent on by necessity. The agricultural systems of the Palokhi Karen and Northern Thai are not radically different and, indeed, the Northern Thai themselves often do not produce enough rice for their needs. However, they have access to a wider economy which offers greater opportunities by which their rice deficits may be made up. One of these opportunities consists of acting as middle-men between the Palokhi Karen and other Northern Thai and Chinese merchants who are further links in the chain of economic networks stretching up to Pai and down to Mae Taeng. It is thus conceivable that it would be advantageous for the Palokhi Karen to integrate themselves more fully into such a system, by “becoming Northern Thai” and availing themselves of the opportunities which are open to the Northern Thai.

The same might also be said of the relations between the Palokhi Karen and the Thai bureaucracy. The Palokhi Karen actually do recognise quite clearly that when it comes to dealing with officials of the Mae Taeng District Office, for example, they are less able to do so compared to the Northern Thai. And they are aware that the difference lies in the fact that the Northern Thai are more informed about the workings of the Thai bureaucracy. Nevertheless, this does not prevent them from also viewing the matter in terms of ethnic affiliation and its attendant advantages or disadvantages. In addition to this, the Palokhi Karen occasionally complain that while some Northern Thai cultivate swiddens, officials

of the Royal Forestry Department appear to be less concerned about it whereas they themselves are told to limit their cultivation of swiddens. The insinuation in these complaints is that the Northern Thai are privileged in some sort of way because they are Northern Thai.

Yet, the fact of the matter is that notwithstanding their dependence on the Northern Thai dominated local economy for rice to make up their deficits and other commodities, and whatever advantages they may attribute to being Northern Thai in dealing with the Thai bureaucracy, the Palokhi Karen present every semblance of having a life and identity of their own. Indeed, it is probable that **even if** they could “become Northern Thai”, they would not wish to do so. Although they are quite able to see that they are dependent on external sources for rice to make up their deficits up to a certain extent, this does not go beyond a pragmatic assessment of economic realities. It is an economic fact which has little impact on their consciousness or sense of being a community to themselves.

In their view one of the more discernible features of life in Northern Thai communities (such as Ban Mae Lao and Ban Pa Pae) is the proximity to figures of authority and exposure to official demands. For example, although the Palokhi Karen are conscientious about paying their taxes, they do not seek out the **kamnan** at Ban Mae Lao to hand over the money. Instead they wait for him to come around before they part with their money. This is reflective of a more general feeling that if they establish regular contacts with the **kamnan**, they would become more open to other official intrusions through the person of the **kamnan**.

Another example of how they view the Northern Thai and life in Northern Thai settlements is an attitude that there is total exposure to Northern Thai (in general) who cannot be trusted at best, and who are dangerous at worst. This is reflected most clearly in the constant fear that the Northern Thai will steal their cattle or buffaloes. It may also be seen in the way they explained, without hesitation, the six Northern Thai homicides in the Pa Pae area in 1980–81, in the following terms: “because the Northern Thai are like that”.

In terms of their own perceptions, the Palokhi Karen thus have good reasons for remaining unambiguously Karen in the context of their relations with the Northern Thai. At this cognitive level it is the belief in their own distinctiveness which is important in the positive value placed on a Karen identity. The Palokhi Karen, in short, possess a very definite “Karen” **ethnic** identity. But what, then, of their cultural identity?

## **The Argument: Religion, Ideology, and the Maintenance of Cultural Identity**

The major argument in this study is that the maintenance of the cultural identity of the Palokhi Karen depends on the perpetuation of a “cultural

ideology” which is reproduced in and by their religious system and their system of subsistence agriculture. By this, I mean that the subsistence agricultural system in Palokhi, which only partially sustains the community, is nevertheless sufficient and necessary for the maintenance of a cultural order which provides it with its essential identity. More specifically, it is the rites associated with swidden cultivation, integral to the ritual life of the community, together with other aspects of the religion of the Palokhi Karen, which form the key elements in the construction of a social and cultural order that is unequivocally Karen.

On the other hand, this social and cultural order is at the same time expressed, asserted and re-affirmed through the performance of rituals and other social institutions such as marriage and domestic organisation. This social and cultural order which constitutes the social reality of the Palokhi Karen, thus, exists in a dialectical relationship with their religion and ritual practices. But, their religion and ritual practices are grounded on their system of subsistence agriculture. To put it another way, the religious life of the Palokhi Karen only has meaning, or “makes sense”, in relation to their system of swiddening and to some extent wet-rice agriculture. Without their agricultural system, their religion would hold little meaning.

## Religion and Ritual

My view of religion is essentially similar to that of Geertz’s, referred to earlier. While religion may be a matter of belief and a system which provides a moral order for the Palokhi Karen themselves, it is for all that a system of symbolic representations. It is thus made up of cultural categories, concepts and ideas. Accordingly, whatever else religion may involve, it also consists of conceptual associations which represent some underlying schemata of cognition or, in other words, models. While I would not claim that there is, necessarily, a **single** cognitive model in Palokhi Karen religion, an important aspect of my argument consists in demonstrating that there is, at least, a **dominant** (or primary) model. This, I call a “procreative model of society” in the religion of the Palokhi Karen. As I attempt to show, the procreative model of society in Palokhi is based on a very fundamental difference, namely, the difference between male and female. This is a model which is identifiable in symbolic representations in the domain of kinship and marriage. It is also to be found in agrarian rites: two key swidden rituals are also based on this fundamental difference between male and female and their **conjunction**.

Furthermore, I suggest that there are other identifiable models and their significance can only be understood in terms of the dominant model. For example, I attempt to show that the linguistic system of sex and gender differentiation in Palokhi contains an essential distinction between non-fecundable and fecundable human females. This is related to the system of kin terms and a naming system, both of which mark out the conjugal bond and the continuity of generations.

The cultural significance of these systems (or the models in these systems) lies in their relation to the dominant model.

Religion, however, has its behavioural aspects. One of these is, of course, ritual. I therefore take ritual to be the expressive, practical activity characteristic of religion. However, I do not necessarily accept that ritual is behaviour or activity which only takes place in a context which would be conventionally recognised as “religious”. This is a view that is by no means new in anthropology. Leach (1964:12-3), for instance, has suggested that actions may be placed on a continuum with the purely technical at one extreme and the highly sacred at the other, and that most actions would fall in between with their significance being drawn partly upon both. It is a view of behaviour which has considerable utility because it enlarges the analytical base on which meaningful interpretations may be made.

To give one example, which is an important one in the ethnography of the Palokhi Karen, consider eating. The consumption of food is, at one level, a technical act in the sense that it serves the function of nutrition. On the other hand, it is at other levels, a highly symbolic act involving commensalism in ritual situations. Indeed, it would appear that this very basic human activity is employed (as it is with many other societies) to express symbolically the nature of social relations in domestic social organisation, community organisation, as well as various ritual relationships. Depending on context, one important feature of eating as a ritual act is that it may be “transformative” in Kapferer’s sense (1979:3-19), as well as being “constitutive” as I call it.

Between the strictly functional and the highly symbolic, eating is also part of day-to-day domestic activity in the sense of a non-reflective routine. Nevertheless, it occurs in situations which are very much social and domestic. It is part of my argument that at this level of routine activity, eating and commensalism is also symbolic; it is a **practical** ritual in which the principal aspect is the “constitutive”.

There is one further aspect to ritual which I wish to touch on briefly. In Palokhi, ritual activity involves both verbal and non-verbal performances often in conjunction. Thus, by ritual I also mean those aspects of behaviour (in “religious” contexts) in which the use of language is a “performative” in Austin’s sense (1962) and as Tambiah (1968, 1979) has elucidated it.

## Ideology

I also argue that in terms of the more general relationship between economy, social organisation and the social and cultural order of the Palokhi Karen, their dependence on external sources for rice represents a paradox. This dependence does not significantly alter the social cultural order which provides the Palokhi Karen with their particular sense of identity. On the contrary, it helps to sustain

this order; it enables the community to meet its subsistence requirements, but because they have an on-going system of subsistence agriculture which is intimately linked to their religion, the reality of the social and cultural order in Palokhi remains undisturbed. The reason for this lies in what we might call the “unassailable” character of their cultural ideology — at least as it has remained up to the present time.

At the heart of the maintenance of their social and cultural order is this cultural ideology, built up of symbolic representations, which links agricultural production to social processes. As a working definition, which forms part of the interpretative framework on which my argument is based, I take cultural ideology to be the structured relations between symbolic representations, social organisation and agricultural production in Palokhi.

The concept of “cultural ideology”, as I use it, ultimately comes from Althusser’s treatment of ideology. Ideology, according to Althusser,

is a matter of the **lived** relation between men and their world. This relation ... is not a simple relation but a relation between relations, a second degree relation. In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an “**imaginary**”, “**lived**” relation. (1969:233).

The important aspect of Althusser’s definition, as I see it, is the attention it gives to ideology as a “relation between relations” and the distinction between the relations in the objective (“real”) conditions of existence and these relations as they are **thought** (“imaginary”) and experienced (“lived”).<sup>11</sup> It is not a simple distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. Rather, ideology is the “second degree” relation between the relations which are established in thought, and as they are lived, about objective conditions.

Thus, in the case of Palokhi Karen religion the cognitive models which I depict are, as I would call it, first degree relations established in thought. It is the relations between models, however, that constitute a cultural ideology. To take one example, there is in Palokhi a dominant “procreative model of society”, as I call it, which exists in the domain of social organisation and the domain of agriculture. It is the relation between them (or the extension of the model from society to cultivation) which constitutes part of the cultural ideology in Palokhi.

Following Yao (1983:22), I do not make a distinction between “ideology” (conventionally understood in its “political” sense) and “cultural ideology”. The reason is that “ideology” is, as Yao observes, by its very nature “cultural” because it is **constituted by culture**.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, I find it convenient on occasion to use the term “ideology” as it is conventionally understood. I use the

term in this sense to describe, for example, the way in which the headman and elders in Palokhi are impelled to “enforce” certain marriage rules (see below). The different senses in which I use the term will be apparent from their contexts.

Here, I wish to deal very briefly with what I termed the “unassailable” character of the cultural ideology in Palokhi up to the present time. By this, I do not mean to imply that the ideology is incapable of change but, rather, that given the particular configuration of “objective conditions” in the history of the Palokhi Karen, the cultural ideology has not only remained the same but has been extended to include certain changes in these conditions. One important example, which I shall not be able to discuss in any detail later because of limitations of space, is the cycle of wet-rice agricultural rituals in Palokhi. The Palokhi Karen have not only adopted wet-rice agriculture from the Northern Thai, but they have also adopted some Northern Thai agricultural rituals as well. Nevertheless, both have been subsumed within an existing form of social organisation and agricultural production, namely swidden cultivation, and a cycle of swidden rites. In other words, the pre-existing system of agriculture has exerted a “priority” which has enabled the Palokhi Karen to include wet-rice agriculture and accompanying Northern Thai agricultural rituals within their ideological system without any substantial change in the system.

## The Maintenance of Cultural Identity

An important part of my argument also rests on showing that the perpetuation of the cultural ideology in Palokhi depends on the performance of various rituals at domestic and communal levels, and a concern with the continuity of ritual relationships. Central to this is the role of the headman of the community and other males in senior generations who are the religious functionaries in all important communal rituals, including marriage ceremonies. Their role may otherwise be described as the ritual management of reproduction in younger generations and agricultural production in Palokhi. In this respect, Palokhi resembles a great many other societies in which age and sex act as **natural** principles of social differentiation (La Fontaine 1978). In Palokhi, however, the role of the headman and males in senior generations is best understood in the following terms: as religious functionaries whose positions are defined according to these principles, these men are the managers of the “symbolic capital” of the community.

The nature of headmanship and the position of males in senior generations cannot be usefully considered in terms of “political leadership” or “political organisation”. It is best considered in terms of the exercise of moral and jural authority. If, however, “political” is taken in the sense of “acting to influence the actions of others” then, to take the example of the enforcement of marriage rules, it may be regarded as such. It is important to realise that, in this particular sense, the “political” aspect of authority in Palokhi is that the headman and

older men act to influence others on the basis of the “moods and motivations” generated by the symbolic system rather than the cultural ideology itself. To this extent their actions would be “ideological” as conventionally understood. It is, however, in these kinds of actions, including their officiation of important rituals — in short, the management of the “symbolic capital” of the community — that the system of symbolic representations is regenerated and the cultural ideology perpetuated.

It is, therefore, through these relationships between agriculture, religion, social organisation, the authority of males in older generations and their central role in the religious life of the community, that the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen is perpetuated in highly symbolic, as well as “practical”, ritual activity. It is the reproduction of this ideological system, in these ways, that enables the Palokhi Karen to maintain their distinctive identity. For, it pre-empts the emergence of significantly different ways of seeing things which could conceivably lead the Palokhi Karen to view themselves as being anything other than what they regard themselves to be.

The argument is presented in the following chapters through a close examination and analysis of a series of data from Palokhi.

I begin, in Chapter II, with a description of Palokhi’s history as a settlement and an examination of the institution of headmanship. This entails an examination of Palokhi Karen ideas about what it means to be a community, the importance of continuity in the ritual relationship between the headman and the tutelary spirit of the domain (the “Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land”). I also introduce the concepts of “heat” and “cooling” which are important in Palokhi Karen ideas about harmony in the on-going existence of the village as a community.

In Chapter III, I discuss kinship and domestic social organisation in order to draw out the ideology of kinship and marriage as a central aspect of the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen. The chapter is essentially concerned with an explication of a “procreative model of society” in Palokhi. This requires an extensive examination of kinship terminology, the system for naming individuals, the system of sex and gender differentiation, and dress and colour symbolism. It also entails a further analysis of the concepts of “heat” and “cooling” and the role of the headman and village elders in the maintenance of the symbolic and ideological significance of marriage. Following from this, I discuss the sociology of household formation and fission, relating the ideology of kinship to social organisation in Palokhi.

Chapter IV is concerned with rather more general issues in Palokhi social organisation, namely, the role of kinship in relation to patterns of household production and consumption. Here, I also explore the symbolic aspects of the consumption of food which are related to the ideology of kinship and the household as the basic unit of production and consumption in Palokhi. The

symbolism of eating is integral to the representation of social relations in the routine consumption of food as well as in ritual contexts which include domestic rites and agricultural rituals.

Chapter V is mainly given to a consideration of the subsistence economy of the Palokhi Karen. In this chapter, I discuss in some detail swidden and wet-rice cultivation in order to show the extent to which agricultural cultivation fails to meet the consumption requirements of the Palokhi Karen. This is followed by a description of the ways in which rice deficits are made up in the cash sector. Overall, the chapter attempts to show how the Palokhi Karen are integrated into a larger socio-economic environment and how they utilise it according to their own needs. The chapter, however, also contains a discussion of an important aspect of the sociology of agricultural cultivation: the crucial role of men in the ownership and inheritance of wet-rice fields which, I argue, is an important aspect of the relationship between social organisation and agriculture. As such, it forms an integral part of the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen.

I further explore the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen in relation to agriculture in Chapter VI through an examination of the cycle of swidden rites in Palokhi which are integral to the religious life of the Palokhi Karen. In this chapter, I describe and analyse several key rituals. Among the many symbolic representations contained in these rituals, perhaps the most significant for an understanding of the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen are the ritual practices associated with “heat” and “cooling” and certain symbolic expressions related to marriage and commensalism. This chapter, thus, sets out the “procreative model of society”, discussed earlier in Chapter III, in the context of swidden cultivation.

In the final chapter, I draw together the main threads of the argument contained in my examination of the ethnographic data from Palokhi and return to a consideration of cultural identity and its maintenance in Palokhi. I discuss this in relation to the ethnic identity of the Palokhi Karen and examine the general implications for an understanding of Karen ethnic identity with reference to other Christian and Buddhist Karen groups.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The general familiarity of the Karen (especially men) with the Northern Thai dialect is itself a good indication of the contacts between Karen and Northern Thai. Some interesting observations on Karen competence in Northern Thai may be found in Grandstaff (1976:287–94).

<sup>2</sup> The Karen are by no means new to ethnological and anthropological study. Studies of the Karen began well over a hundred years ago and the development of trends in Karen studies, since then, may well be described in terms of a shift of interest from ethnology to ecology, economy and ethnicity. The earliest accounts on the Karen come mainly from missionary sources, for example, Cross (1853–54), Mason (1865, 1866, 1868) and Gilmore (1911) amongst others. A list of these earlier publications may be found in the bibliography to the study by Marshall (1922), also a missionary, whose work is perhaps the most informative. Early works on the Karen were also published by British colonial administrators in Burma such as Smeaton (1887) and Scott (1922). I might also add that because of some of these and

other sources, the Karen have featured (though not in any particularly significant way) in some of the classic works in ethnology and anthropology. References to the Karen may be found in, for example, Morgan (1871:441–7), Frazer (1919:138) and Levi-Strauss (1969:41). Contemporary academic interest in the Karen was foreshadowed by two dissertations written in the early part of this century (Heald 1900; Lewis 1924), including Marshall's monograph. These were followed by yet another dissertation (Truxton 1958). All of these studies, however, were by missionaries which followed the tradition set by the earlier missionaries working in Burma. Since then, the Karen have been the subject of several contemporary anthropological studies. These studies reflect broader trends in anthropology since the 1960s up to the present time. The parallel trends were, first, social and ethnic change following Leach's work on the Kachin beginning with Kunstadter's series of papers (1967, 1969 amongst others) and culminating in a collection of papers on Karen ethnic adaptation edited by Keyes (1979). The other trend was problem-oriented approaches in anthropology arising from the interest in development problems, anthropology as an applied discipline, and socio-economic change. Where the Karen are concerned, these approaches were manifest in studies dealing with cultivation systems, population growth and problems of natural resource management (for example, Kunstadter 1969, Hinton 1975, Grandstaff 1976, Madha 1980). There have also been other studies which deal with other aspects of Karen history, society and culture, for example, Keyes (1979b) and Renard (1980) on the history of the Karen, Somphob (1975) on Karen medicine, Mischung (1980) on religion, and Hamilton's rather more general study which also emphasises change (1976). If Karennic speaking groups, other than the Sgaw and Pwo, are also taken into account, it would be necessary to include Lehman's work on the Kayah (1967) and Hackett's dissertation on the Pa-O or Thauungu (1953). This review of work on the Karen is not, by any means, exhaustive.

<sup>3</sup> The question, in other words, is whether or not religion in Karen communities possesses an internal coherence in relation to social organisation, political institutions and other aspects of social life, and whether or not a logical structure may be discerned in it.

<sup>4</sup> See Keyes (1979a:21). There are also other problems in understanding the nature of Karen religious traditions. Keyes has pointed out elsewhere (1977b:52) that the interpretation of Karen myths has been coloured by the fact that they were first recorded by American Baptist missionaries. Keyes presents an alternative interpretation of some of these myths which is by far the most consistent with what we know of other aspects of life of the Karen. It is worth noting that missionary interpretations of Karen myths, and some of the early ethnological speculations about the origins of the Karen, have found their way into contemporary Karen theories of racial origins and ethnicity. I discuss this in an unpublished paper (1985, but see Chapter VII, pp. 451–5) in relation to the Karen separatist movement in Burma. I should also point out here that the Palokhi Karen have very few myths; the little they have bear hardly any resemblance to the myths documented by the American Baptist missionaries. They are rather like just-so stories which appear to have little relevance to their religious system.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use the place name Pa Pae to refer to the Northern Thai settlement Ban Pa Pae, the **tambon** which has the same name and of which it is a part, as well as the general area which I call the Pa Pae hills. Kunstadter has written on **The People of Pa Pae** (in Mae Sariang) which, in 1979, was due to be published as Monograph No. 2 of the Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum (Keyes 1979:261). Unfortunately, I have not been able to refer to this work and all references to Pa Pae in this study therefore pertain to the area of my fieldwork. Pa Pae is, in fact, a fairly common place name in Northern Thailand. It is very often used to designate places or settlements which lie at the fringes of uninhabited areas or forests well away from major human habitations (Wijeyewardene, pers. comm.).

<sup>6</sup> A brief but informative description of the geography of the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa basin may be found in Chapman (1983). In the existing literature on the area (most of which are reports and papers from the United Nations University-Chiang Mai University Joint Research Project on Highland-Lowland Interactive System with the participation of the Royal Forestry Department of Thailand), the area is known as the "Huai Thung Choa Project Area". This designation does not reflect the full extent of the area, hence my use of the term "Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area". The official designation comes from the fact that when the Watershed Development Unit of the Royal Forestry Department first began their operations in the area, it was initially intended that it would be based in the Huai Thung Choa valley on the basis of a first reconnaissance. Subsequent reconnaissance established that a site deeper within the area (at Ban Lum near a Lisu village) was more suitable where the unit headquarters was in fact built. The name "Huai Thung Choa", however, remained and was applied to the area under its purview and has been used for all subsequent projects carried out. The area has also been designated a "King's Royal Hilltribe Development Project Area".

<sup>7</sup> The survey by Thannarong, Benchaphun and Prasert was conducted to establish base-line socio-economic data on the communities inhabiting the area as part of the United Nations University-Chiang Mai University Joint Research Project. It will be noticed that the number of settlements, especially Karen, shown in Figure 1.1 does not tally with the number given by Thannarong et al. The reason for this discrepancy is that whereas the map in Figure 1.1 (source: Chapman 1983:319) shows only villages which have been independently established by the Karen, Lisu, etc. themselves, the survey by Thannarong et al. includes not only these villages but clusters of mainly Karen households (classified as villages) doing full-time wage work, attached to operational units of the Royal Forestry Department's Watershed Development Unit in the area.

<sup>8</sup> Several published papers now exist on the conditions in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valley system and the impact of the presence of the Royal Forestry Department in the area. See, for example, Chapman (1983), Hurni (1979,1982), Hurni and Sompote (1983), and Kunzel (1983, n.d.) amongst others. Kunzel (1983) deals specifically with the impact of the Royal Forestry Department's presence on wage work patterns among the Karen, Lisu and Northern Thai inhabitants in the area.

<sup>9</sup> I discuss the subsistence system of the Palokhi Karen in more detail in Chapter V. In Palokhi, ordinary rice is preferred to glutinous rice for daily consumption. Glutinous rice is usually grown in small amounts for making rice liquor and certain kinds of cakes which are eaten on ceremonial occasions such as the rites of the New Year. When the Palokhi Karen purchase rice from shops in Northern Thai settlements to meet their consumption requirements, they buy the glutinous variety because it is cheaper. It is also the main form of rice available because the Northern Thai themselves grow it in preference to ordinary or non-glutinous rice.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting also that the province of Chiang Mai is a net importer of rice because rice production even in the high-productivity rice-farming areas of the province is insufficient to meet the needs of a rapidly increasing population (Wijeyewardene, pers. comm.).

<sup>11</sup> To discuss this further would require far more space than is possible here and it would be a digression into issues which are far removed from my present concerns. Most of these issues, including reviews of earlier marxist anthropological works, may be found in Kahn and Llobera (1981) who suggest that marxist approaches in anthropology are far from consolidated and may very well be heading towards an "unavoidable fragmentation". However, I should perhaps add that one reason why the data from Palokhi will not sustain a marxist analysis is simply that the conceptual tools of such an analysis are in considerable disarray. One such tool which has been used in diverse ways in marxist anthropological analyses is the concept of "mode of production" which is perhaps far more important, analytically, than "ideology". The subsistence system of Palokhi would require yet another idiosyncratic (or highly specific) definition of "mode of production" which would only bear out what now appears to be all too true: that there are as many marxist anthropologies as there are marxist anthropologists! The same, of course, might be said of other theoretical orientations in anthropology. I should, however, make it quite plain that I am not interested here in theories. My concern is with an interpretative framework which will permit a sociologically reasonable, or even commonsense, understanding of what happens in Palokhi. Thus, I have no hesitation in attempting a working definition of "cultural ideology", derived from Althusser's formulation, because the formulation is indeed a useful one in a general sense. This is necessary because along with marxist uses and understandings of the term "ideology", the term is also used a great deal in anthropology with notorious imprecision. Despite Althusser's theoretical intentions, his definition is general enough to be used, or applied, without necessarily implying the analysis he advocates.

<sup>12</sup> Cultural ideology, then, as Yao points out would be "political" in Barthes' (1972) sense of the "political uses" of culture. For another earlier view of ideology and culture which emphasises the importance of symbolic representations, see Geertz on "Ideology as a Cultural System" (1973).