

## Chapter II

# Settlement History, Headmanship, and the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land

Of the eight Karen villages in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area, Palokhi (first settled in 1953) is the most recently established Karen community in the area while the oldest, at Huai Dua and Mae Muang Luang (see Figure 1.1), have been in existence for about one hundred years. Although the history of Palokhi as a settlement is a comparatively short one as far as Karen communities in the immediate area are concerned, it has nevertheless been an eventful one. The village has undergone four changes of location and two successions of headmen. It has also grown considerably as a consequence of steady in-migration and natural increase.

The history of Palokhi forms an important background for the rest of this study. It reveals how a pioneer Karen settlement has been able to establish its viability and consolidate its existence as a result of a variety of factors which include favourable ecological conditions and the advantages of being linked with an economic network which covers the Pa Pae hills and spreads to the plains of Chiang Mai. The changes in location and headmen also highlight some significant aspects of what is entailed by settlement, not only as a process, but a state of **being a community** according to Karen ideas and experience. This concerns the relationships between the people in the community, the headman, and the tutelary spirit of the domain known to the Karen as the “Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land”.

In this chapter, I examine both these sets of issues in the history of Palokhi and set out the basic elements of the ethnography of the community which appears in the chapters that follow.

### Toponym, Village, and Domain

The general term for village, in the dialect of Sgaw Karen spoken in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa basin is **zi**. The term refers essentially to a group of dwellings while a single house, on the other hand, is known as **doe**.<sup>1</sup> In this sense of a human habitation, **zi** therefore also describes what we might call a village “community”. In the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area, all eight **zi** are known by toponyms whose invariant feature is the suffix **khi** which means “headwaters” or the upper reaches of streams. Indeed, this is an almost universal feature in the naming of Karen villages in general.<sup>2</sup> The principal topographical referent in village names is, thus, the upper section of streams.

However, the toponyms of villages imply rather more than the fact that villages are, generally, situated near the headwaters of streams which often, though not always, give their names to villages as well. They also imply, more broadly, the geographical area within which these streams are found, that is, stream valleys which are roughly bounded by their surrounding mountains, hills or ridges which act as natural lines of demarcation between communities inhabiting contiguous stream valleys.<sup>3</sup> This pattern in the distribution of Karen settlements in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa river system is immediately apparent from any topographical map of the area. Such an area, conceived of as being roughly circumscribed by prominent natural features, is known as a **kau**. The term, however, is not simply geographical or topographical in its meaning. It also connotes the idea of an area of land which a community lives off, as well as in. Equally important is the fact that each **kau** is also believed to have its own principal tutelary spirit, the **Thi Koe'ca**, **Kau Koe'ca** or Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. **Kau**, therefore, are distinct territories or domains with a religious aspect and they are closely bound up with the identities of villages and their modes of subsistence.

The name "Palokhi", thus, refers to a particular Karen village situated near the headwaters of a stream which lies within a domain with its own territorial spirit. The toponym, however, is not a true Karen term. Its etymon is **pang luang** ("almost great"), the name of a Northern Thai village (Ban Pang Luang) which is one of three which make up the larger settlement of Ban Mae Lao, as it has come to be known, further downstream. Because Sgaw Karen lacks final consonants, other than the glottal stop, and diphthongs (as well as a distinction between long and short vowels), there is a tendency for Northern Thai final consonants to be elided and diphthongs to be approximated by either Sgaw Karen vowels or a modification of their phonological shapes, by Karen speakers of Northern Thai. Thus, **pang luang** has become **pa lau** and hence the name of the village: **Palaukhi**.

The Northern Thai name of the stream is, in fact, Huai Thung Choa which is one of the two major tributaries of the Mae Lao, the other being Huai Non. The reason why the Huai Thung Choa is generally known to the Karen as "Pang Luang" is because they have taken the name of the village, which is one of the oldest Northern Thai villages in this particular area, to be the name of the stream in the way that they themselves often name their villages. Indeed, it is not unusual by any means for Northern Thai villages to be named after streams and rivers, but in this instance it happened not to be the case. The names of other Karen villages in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area are derived, similarly, from Northern Thai names or terms. Thus, for example, we find villages called "Maulaukhi" (Mae Muang Luang) and "Hedoekhi" (Huai Dua) from the Northern Thai names of a river and a stream, "Khusakhi" (Khun Sa) from the

Northern Thai name for a peak, and so on. The only exception to this is “Toeloekhi” (Pong Thong) which is, possibly, a Karen eponym.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth noting here that the derivation of Karen toponyms from Northern Thai is a conspicuous feature in the naming of a great many Karen villages throughout Northern Thailand and its significance is clear.<sup>5</sup> Where these toponyms are found to contain Northern Thai names or terms, we may be certain that the Karen have migrated to areas already inhabited by Northern Thai or which were, at the very least, known and named by the Northern Thai before the Karen arrived. This, undoubtedly, has been the case in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valley system and, probably, most if not all of the Pa Pae area.

As I have noted before, the two oldest Karen villages at Mae Muang Luang and Huai Dua were established approximately one hundred years ago and this is worth a brief comparison with the ages of some Karen villages to the west, in Mae Hong Son, in order to place Karen migration into the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area within its wider context. Kunstadter, for example, reports that Karen from Burma first settled in the Mae Sariang area some one hundred and twenty years ago (1979: 127–29) while Hinton places the migration of Pwo Karen into the Omkoi area at around one hundred and fifty years ago (1975:25). Elsewhere in Chiang Mai, Mischung estimates that the Karen around Chom Thong first arrived about eighty-five years ago (1980:16).

It is clear, therefore, that the eastward migration of the Karen from Burma has had a long, if variable, history. Nevertheless, the general trends are there and the approximate ages of the villages at Mae Muang Luang and Huai Dua are consistent with these trends. The more easterly position of the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa drainage system which straddles the provincial borders of Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son, suggests however that the fore-runners of the Karen communities in the area probably left Burma much earlier than those of the communities now found in Mae Hong Son. Most, if not all, Karen in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area in fact claim that they have always lived there, while those who do not have moved in from a southerly direction. It is also significant that the men and women of 50 or 60 years from these two villages, with whom I have spoken, have no recollection of any connection with Burma in their own generation or that of their parents.<sup>6</sup> It is impossible, therefore, to reconstruct anything of the circumstances surrounding the founding of these older Karen villages in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area. It may be noted, however, that at the latitude of the area, the Karen approach the marchlands of their eastward migration (Kunstadter, pers. comm.); but, as the map **Distribution of Major Highland Ethnic Group Village Settlements** prepared by the Tribal Research Centre, Chiang Mai, in 1978 (and also to be found as a supplement to MacKinnon and Wanat [1983]) shows, elsewhere the

frontiers of Karen expansion lie well to the east in Chiang Rai and, indeed, Karen communities may also be found in the provinces of Lampang and even Phrae.

The more recent history of Palokhi, however, assures a reasonable degree of accuracy in oral histories which provides for a better understanding of the circumstances, motivations, events and related processes which have led to the establishment and consolidation of the village as a community in its own right, along with the older communities in the watershed.

## Settlement History

Karen settlement in the Huai Thung Choa valley first began in 1953 and it is a process that has continued at different times and in varying numbers right up to the present, that is, 1981. In all cases, the settlers who now make up the community of Palokhi cite two principal reasons for moving into the valley: first, the favourable ecological conditions in the valley which offered ample opportunities for more productive swiddening for these migrant families who also report coming from villages where there was a shortage of land for swidden cultivation; second, the considerable attraction of reclaiming abandoned Hmong wet-rice fields requiring lower labour inputs to bring them under cultivation than would have been the case if new terraces were opened up along the banks of the Huai Thung Choa. In short, the reasons for Karen occupation of the Huai Thung Choa valley have been a combination of ecological and demographic factors. From a general perspective, this is consistent with prevailing conditions in the highlands of Northern Thailand now well-recognised in various studies. However, perhaps for reasons of historical accident, the Huai Thung Choa valley represents rather different conditions in microcosm which the Karen have recognised and have proceeded to take advantage of.

Unlikely though it may seem on the basis of popular stereotypes about Hmong cultivation systems, the existence of these abandoned Hmong wet-rice fields must be accepted as fact rather than the product of some fanciful speculation on the part of the Palokhi Karen. Some of the Northern Thai from Ban Mae Lao (now living in Ban Thung Choa) confirm that these fields were opened up by the Hmong who subsequently left the valley some years before the last war.<sup>7</sup> Both the Karen and Northern Thai also agree that the Hmong migrated to Khun Sa in the vicinity of the Karen village of the same name mentioned earlier.<sup>8</sup> I might also add that in the time that elapsed between the departure of the Hmong and the arrival of the first Karen settlers, two Northern Thai from nearby villages and a Burmese from Pai, to the northwest near the Thai-Burmese border, in fact came to the Huai Thung Choa valley primarily to cultivate these abandoned Hmong terraces. However, as I discuss the relations between the Karen and their immediate predecessors in some detail within the specific context of the acquisition of these fields and Karen entry into wet-rice cultivation in Chapter

V, I shall not therefore deal with the presence of the Northern Thai and Burmese any further. They, in any case, eventually left the Huai Thung Choa valley as the Palokhi Karen established themselves there.

In Table 2.1, I have summarised the history of Karen settlement in Palokhi according to the years in which families first arrived and some salient demographic indicators, namely, household size, number of dependents, the ages of spouses, and the residential and migration histories of these households prior to settling in the Huai Thung Choa valley. The small population of Palokhi does not allow for any meaningful statistical tests of significance for trends and characteristics on the basis of the values of the variables represented by these indicators. Nevertheless, they are useful for drawing a rough socio-demographic profile of these families which migrated to the Huai Thung Choa valley as they describe the particular characteristics of individual households which nonetheless share some important features in common, as I discuss below. There is one other consideration which has been an important factor in the migration of families to the Huai Thung Choa valley, and this is the genealogical relationships between families — relationships which have been cited by some Palokhi households as a reason, though by no means the most important, for migrating to the Huai Thung Choa valley.<sup>9</sup>

From Table 2.1, it can be seen that Karen settlement in the Huai Thung Choa valley has been distributed somewhat irregularly over time with the arrivals of the first families concentrated in 1953 and two families following in 1954, after which there is a more even spread of families migrating in subsequent years broken by three time gaps, the first of which was relatively long (1955–60) while the other two were comparatively short (1969–71 and 1975–78). The characteristics of the five families in 1953 and the two families in 1954 are worth noting for not only do they reveal something of the conditions which have led to their migration and those under which they have had to establish themselves, but they also foreshadow the conditions and circumstances of the families which came later in several important respects.

**Table 2.1. Karen Settlement in the Huai Thung Choa Valley**

Year	Household*	Household Size	Number of Dependents	Age of Husband	Age of Wife	Mean Age of Spouses	Residential and Migration History***
1953	H16 <sup>+</sup>	3	-	NA	NA	NA	Pong Thong (20)
	H9 <sup>+</sup>	6	4	47	49	48	Khun Sa (38); Pong Thong(4)
	H14 <sup>+</sup>	5	3	33	28	30.5	Khun Sa(1); Pong Thong(4)
	H5 <sup>+</sup>	3	1	31	18	29	Huai Khon Kha(4); Mae Maeng(1); Pang Ung(2); Pong Ma Kwaeng(1)
	H4	3	1	NA	NA	NA	Huai Dua(?)
1954	H1 <sup>+</sup>	3	1	33	27	30	Huai Dua(1)
	H5 <sup>+</sup>	3	1	58	51	54.5	Khun Mae Poeng(7); Huai Pong Faw(1); Huai Sai Luang(11); Huai Khon Kha(4); Mae Maeng(1); Pang Ung(2); Pong Ma Kwaeng(1)
	H2	4	2	45	31	36.5	Huai Sai Luang(2); Pang Ung(3)
1962	H11b	2	-	25	18	21.5	Mae Mong(1)
	H12	8	5	NA	33	NA	Maukhakhi(?); Pong Ma Kham(?); Mae Mong(?)
1963	H11a	3	-	NA	44	NA	Mae Lao(?); Huai Khon Kha(2); Pang Ung(4); Mae Poeng(2); Huai Sai Luang(2); Huai Khon Kha(2); Mae Poeng(3); Pang Ung(4)
1968	H13 <sup>+</sup>	7	5	41	36	38.5	Mae Tho(2)
1971	H3	8	5	34	NA	NA	Pang Ung(3); Mae Lak(9)
1974	H4	5	3	52	40	46	Mae Lak(9)
1979	H8	7	4	30	35	32.5	Huai Hia(4); Mae Lak(4); Huai Mao(2); Plaeng Dauk(3)
	H6	6	3	30	29	30.5	Mae Lak(3); Huai Mao(2); Plaeng Dauk(3)
	H7	4	2	30	24	27	

\*The composition of households has, of course, changed since they first arrived in the Huai Thung Choa valley as a result of natural increase, death, reconstitution through in-marriage and fission through out-marriage. However, to facilitate cross-references in this thesis, I have retained the system of coding households which I have employed on the basis of genealogical proximity and shared economic functions in 1980-1. To indicate that these households are not necessarily constituted by the same personnel in 1981, I have marked them with the “+” symbol. Thus, H1<sup>+</sup> has become H1a and H1b, H5<sup>+</sup> and H5<sup>+</sup> have become H5, and so on. The household HA no longer exists in Palokhi in any form. Little is known of its past history. This table indicates only initial (or first-time) migration to Palokhi; it does not include the remigration of some households back to Palokhi after temporary residence elsewhere.

\*\* Dependents include children below the age of fourteen and adults above the age of sixty.

\*\*\* Residential and migration history, here, refers to previous residence and migration from the time when spouses were first married leading up to residence in Palokhi. This does not include the migration of husbands as a consequence of the custom of uxorial residence at marriage (see text and Chapter III). The figures contained in brackets indicate the length of time, in years, that couples have been resident in a particular village or locality. All place names are Northern Thai with the exception of Maukhakhi, a Karen toponym and village name, the Northern Thai derivative of which I have been unable to ascertain. The periods of residence in this column, as with the ages of spouses at the time of settling in the Huai Thung Choa valley, are essentially estimates which I have arrived at from the oral histories of the individuals concerned who were still living in Palokhi at the time of my field work. The time estimates of informants themselves, especially older men and women, are generally unreliable. However, such inaccuracies can usually be reduced to a large extent and, indeed, eliminated in some cases, where there is sufficient independent corroborative evidence which may allow dates or time frames to be established with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Furthermore, while the recollections of individuals may not be reliable in establishing durations in individual life histories, the reproductive histories of women, on the other hand, may be reconstructed in most cases with remarkable clarity. The reason for this is that even though women may not necessarily be able to state what the ages of their children may be, nevertheless, they are almost always able to recall intervals between the births of children and this, coupled with their recollections of where their children were born, considerably assists the reconstruction of residential and migration histories. The histories of younger couples are, of course, far more accurate than those of older men and women.

One important feature of these founding families and those which migrated to the Huai Thung Choa valley later is that they are relatively young (though there are a number of older families), but not immediately post-marital (except for H1<sup>+</sup>, H2 and H11b), as indicated by the clustering of the mean ages of spouses around 30 years. This, very generally, agrees with the number of dependent children that they have although the correspondence is not altogether regular. In some cases (H5<sup>+</sup>, H5<sup>++</sup>, H4, H8 and H6) the dependents were, or included, an aged parent of one or the other of the spouses in the household. Under normal circumstances, we would expect the mean ages of spouses to show a regular correspondence with the length of time that they have been married (that is, within a given cohort) and the number of children that they have, in any given population. In Table 2.1, the duration of marriages of spouses may be determined by the total number of years they have been resident elsewhere prior to migrating to Palokhi, and simple inspection will show that when they are matched against the number of children, by households, there is a considerable degree of variation amongst these three indicators or variables. There are two main reasons for this. First, the irregularities, especially those between durations of marriages and the mean ages of spouses (which exhibit a wide range in general as a result of large discrepancies in the ages of some spouses), take on a larger significance than would otherwise be the case if the population were larger. Second, the high infant mortality rates of some households have resulted in their having less children than they would have had under normal circumstances. Nevertheless, the clustering of the mean ages of spouses around the 30-year mark is significant, at least sociologically, because it means that they had not exhausted their reproductive potential at the time they settled in Palokhi. Thus, in the course of their residence in Palokhi, most households have continued to increase in size, and this has contributed to the expansion of the settlement as I show in Table 2.2. This clustering is also significant from another point of view: it indicates that while couples were relatively young when they migrated to Palokhi, nonetheless, they were not newly married (except for H1<sup>+</sup>, and H2) with an even greater reproductive potential. Consequently, although the size of households and the community has increased with further births (accentuated by in-migration and off-set to some extent by out-migration), this has not occurred at an excessively high rate — with the result that there has been a net increase in the dependency ratio of the community from 42 per cent in 1953–54 to close to 55 per cent in 1980–81.<sup>10</sup> In Table 2.3 may be found some relevant demographic data on the population of Palokhi in 1981.

**Table 2.2. Demographic Changes in Palokhi 1953–1981\***

	1953–1960	1961–1970	1971–1980	1981
Base population	–	31	66	109
In-migration	28	31	46	8
Out-migration	–	4	31	3
Births	6	23	41	4
Deaths: Children	2	8	5	–
Adults	1	7	8	2
Total	3	15	13	2
Total population	31	66	109	116

\* The Northern Thai and Burmese who preceded the first Karen settlers in the Huai Thung Choa valley are not included in this table, hence the zero base population for 1953. The present population of Palokhi is now, however, composed entirely of Karen. There is a Khamu' man (originally born in Laos) who came to Palokhi in 1972 and became a dependent of H2, and a Yunnanese Chinese deserter from a Kuomintang garrison in Chiang Rai who came to Palokhi in 1975 and eventually married 'Ae' of H11a. Both men were unequivocally regarded as members of the community although they were not Karen and for this reason I have included them here. I have, however, excluded two Northern Thai brothers and a Karen who own wet-rice fields and *miang* gardens in the Huai Thung Choa valley because they were permanently resident in Ban Mae Lao and Ban Pa Pae respectively. They, in fact, had houses near Palokhi in which they stayed during the planting and harvesting seasons, for wet-rice, but they were not regarded by the Palokhi Karen as being a part of Palokhi.

Although the increase in dependency ratios has not been excessively high, it is high nevertheless as are the dependency ratios themselves. These ratios represent important constraints on subsistence production as I discuss in some detail in Chapter V. However, suffice it to say that the reclamation of the abandoned Hmong wet-rice fields (which were an important reason for migrating to the Huai Thung Choa) could only be carried out gradually because of limited domestic supplies of labour. These families, on first settling in Palokhi, thus, practised swiddening in the initial years of their residence in the Huai Thung Choa valley and slowly embarked upon wet-rice agriculture as the Hmong terraces were slowly recovered for cultivation. Wet-rice cultivation, however, did not replace swiddening for most of these families have all continued with a dual system of swiddening and wet-rice cultivation up to the present time, with new terraces being opened up as the Hmong terraces have all been fully reclaimed. The exceptions to this general pattern were H6, H7 and H16 which migrated to Palokhi after working as wage labourers in the Flower Plantation (Plaeng Dauk) of the Royal Forestry Department's Watershed Development Unit and took up wet-rice cultivation without swiddening when they first arrived.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 2.3. The Population of Palokhi by Age and Sex in 1981**

Age Group	Males	Females
0 – 10	21	20
11 – 20	10	16
21 – 30	8	6
31 – 40	7	4
41 – 50	4	3
51 – 60	4	4
61 – 70	2	3
71 – 80	1	1
81 and above	1	1
Total	58	58

For some families, kinship has been an important consideration in migrating to Palokhi. These households are related by primary kin relations, that is, parent-child and sibling ties or step-sibling ties which, for all practical purposes, are equivalent to true sibling ties. However, these ties also include affinal relations, specifically, parent-in-law and son-in-law or brother-in-law relationships. These ties, from the perspective of the rationale adduced by some Palokhi Karen for migrating to the Huai Thung Choa valley, that is, to be with kin for mutual aid in agricultural production, are probably as important if not more so than the primary kin relations existing between these families. The reason for this is that given the general rule on uxori-local residence at marriage which the Palokhi Karen observe (see Chapter III), male affinal relationships tend to take on a considerable degree of importance in the management of labour by related households in the heavier tasks associated with agricultural production (see also Chapter IV). Thus, for example, H5<sup>+</sup> and H1<sup>+</sup> are related by the fact that the head of H5<sup>+</sup>, Thi Pghe, was the younger brother of Tamu', the head of H1<sup>+</sup>. H5<sup>++</sup>, on the other hand, is related to H5<sup>+</sup> by virtue of the fact that Rae', the head of H5<sup>++</sup>, is the father-in-law of Thi Pghe. It is worth noting here that the dependent of H5<sup>+</sup> was the father of Thi Pghe and Tamu'.

It is clear from this example that despite the rule on uxori-local residence at marriage which the Palokhi Karen share with other Karen, the exigencies of household members' life circumstances can result in modifications to the rule, usually after an initial period of such residence. Under the rule, Thi Pghe and his wife should, in fact, have been residing with Rae' (H5<sup>++</sup>).

But as he had an aged father, Thi Pghe set up house independently after a nominal period of uxori-local residence in order to look after his father because his brother, Tamu', had gone to live with his wife's family in Huai Dua, leaving no one to support their father.<sup>12</sup> In any event, both brothers decided to settle in the Huai Thung Choa valley and as they did so, one consequence was that H5<sup>++</sup> also migrated as well. H5<sup>++</sup> had, as a dependent, Rae's aged mother-in-law, but what is significant in Rae's decision was his relatively advanced age and that of his wife. In their case, they decided to settle in the Huai Thung Choa valley to be with their daughter, Do' Kwi, and her husband Thi Pghe, in order that the burden of agricultural cultivation could be shared with H5<sup>+</sup>.

A similar reason underlies the migration of H11a and H11b, where H11a was the original parental household. The step-sibling relationships between H4 and H8, likewise, were a factor in their migration to the Huai Thung Choa valley in 1974. In the same manner, the joint migrations of H6 and H7 from the time when they were co-resident in Mae Lak until they settled in Palokhi were influenced by the fact that the two households are related by parent-child, sibling and male affinal ties where La Zi, the head of H6, is the brother-in-law of Thi', the head of H7 and brother of La Zi's wife, with Thi's old mother being resident in H6.

It is clear that these kinship relations have been an important consideration in the migration of various related families to Palokhi because of the perception, at least at the actual time of migration, that mutual assistance could be rendered by kin within these limited ranges in agricultural tasks. There can be no doubt, of course, that sentimental attachments and affective considerations have also played a part. However, as I noted before, the composition of households in Palokhi has changed with time and this has been accompanied, in several cases, by a realignment of these relationships between households in the management of labour in subsistence production and, indeed, even the degree of importance placed on sentimental attachments.

These changes, clearly, are the concomitants of the developmental cycle of domestic groups in which uxori-local residence at marriage plays a part, insofar as the Karen are concerned. A contributory factor to these changes has been the very growth of Palokhi where the range of people, kin and non-kin, with whom the members of a particular household may choose to work has increased considerably. Thus, as I discuss in the next two chapters, while kinship is important in several respects, we find that at the present time (that is, 1981) a great deal of the arrangements in co-operative labour exchanges for example are not, in fact, necessarily dependent on kinship relationships in Palokhi.

Another noteworthy feature about Karen migration to the Huai Thung Choa valley is a distinct pattern in the migration histories of families. This pattern is related to the distribution of Karen and non-Karen populations (specifically, Northern Thai) within and outside the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa

river system. From Table 2.1 and Figure 1.1, it will be noticed that, generally, those families with a low incidence of migration and change in post-marital residence all came from villages within the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area, namely, the villages of Khun Sa, Huai Dua and Pong Thong. There were, of course, some exceptions to this where after a short period of post-marital residence in these villages, married couples moved on to Palokhi. Nevertheless, the households with long or short periods of residence in these villages within the area migrated to Palokhi in the space of a few years of one another. The generally stable residential histories of some of these families suggest that ecological and demographic conditions in Khun Sa, Huai Dua and Pong Thong were, by and large, stable until approximately thirty years ago at which time the only viable means of gaining access to resources for subsistence cultivation was migration to the Huai Thung Choa valley.

“Stable”, however, is a relative term. Of these three villages, Khun Sa and Huai Dua are, on the basis of present-day observations, more hard-pressed in terms of population relative to land available for swiddening purposes but Huai Dua has the advantage of lying in an alluvial plain eminently suitable for wet-rice cultivation. Pong Thong, on the other hand, lies within a very small stream valley which has just sufficient resources for both systems of cultivation and its population. The families with unstable residential histories, however, were all resident in villages situated outside the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area, with several families having been resident in the same villages at different times, or with some overlap in durations of residence. Their relatively high frequencies of migration are indicative of comparatively unstable ecological and demographic conditions in the areas where they were previously resident. Indeed, in all cases, the changes in residence are consistent with their explanations for these changes, that is, the search for new swiddening areas.<sup>13</sup>

The difference in conditions obtaining within and without the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa drainage system is intriguing and requires some explanation. Although there is insufficient documentation on the areas lying outside the drainage system, some general observations and an examination of topographical maps of these areas indicate that they are far more densely populated by Northern Thai settlements than is the case in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valley system. In the areas outside the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valley system where the Karen households were previously resident (southeast and south of the river system on either side of the Mae Malai-Pai road), a great many Northern Thai settlements are distributed in a linear pattern along the road, but they are also to be found along many stream valleys on the eastern side of the road at elevations which are lower than those of the hills, ridges and stream valleys of the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area. Interspersed among these Northern Thai settlements are to be found Karen settlements.

On the basis of the distribution of Northern Thai and non-Northern Thai (that is, principally Karen) settlements within and outside the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area, it is reasonable to assume that the difference in ecological conditions existing in these areas has been the outcome of differentials in demographic pressure on available resources. That is, outside the valley system this has been caused by a larger, more mixed population (predominantly Northern Thai) per unit area of land. The presence of the Northern Thai in these areas has very likely been due to a history of upland migration (going back at least sixty years ago judging by the oral histories of some Northern Thai now resident in Ban Mae Lao and Ban Thung Choa) whilst the pressure on natural resources in these areas is probably to be explained by the natural increase in both the Northern Thai and non-Northern Thai populations, of which the Karen are the majority.

The migration of Northern Thai from plains areas to the foothills of highland areas in Northern Thailand has undoubtedly occurred as Chapman (1967) has shown and it is almost certainly true that they are continuing to move further upslope according to local circumstances (Chapman, pers. comm.) Indeed, the general northward and upslope movement of Karen into the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valleys mentioned before may well be indicative of a much broader trend, not only of Karen but of Northern Thai communities as well, in response to population increase. The high rates of natural increase of Karen populations, on the other hand, are now well-documented by Kunstadter (1972, 1983).

Within the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valley system, in-migration by Karen has so far not been accompanied by a similar movement of Northern Thai on the same scale. The residential histories of the Karen families from Huai Dua, Khun Sa and Pong Thong, together with existing distributions of Northern Thai communities in the watershed, (for example, at Pong Sa Nua and Pong Sa Tai) suggest that Karen resettlement has been the consequence of natural increases in mainly Karen populations over a long period of time. To the extent that other communities have affected the movement of Karen locally, only the small Northern Thai and Lisu populations inhabiting the Mae Muang Luang valley have been involved.<sup>14</sup> Within the valley, especially around Khun Sa, Huai Dua and Mae Muang Luang, other factors were probably operative as well. Pressure on resources in the past (and the present) were in all likelihood compounded by the ecologically deleterious effects of opium cultivation practised by the Hmong around Khun Sa, and the Lisu around Huai Dua and Mae Muang Luang. Where Huai Dua is specifically concerned, the shortage of swidden land has also undoubtedly been due to the fact that tracts of land were, and still are, occupied by pine trees (*Pinus kesiya*) which the Karen quite rightly regard as being unsuitable for swiddening. Nevertheless, they protect these trees in order to use

the resinous, inflammable wood as firestarters and torches.<sup>15</sup> Since 1975, the area under pine trees has increased significantly as a result of reforestation by the Royal Forestry Department.

The overall consequence of these various conditions and developments has been that those Karen who have been long-term residents within the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area, as well as those approaching it from outside, have sought to take advantage of the opportunities now only to be found in small forested pockets within the Pa Pae hills, such as the Huai Thung Choa valley.

## **Headmanship and The Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land**

In its twenty-eight year history between 1953 and 1981, Palokhi experienced a change in headmen and four changes in the actual physical location of the settlement in the Huai Thung Choa valley. These changes are related in part, and they provide an important indication of the kinds of issues which are regarded as significant in the way in which a community is constituted according to Karen ideas.

The institution of headmanship in Karen communities has its roots in ideas and concepts in the non-Christian, non-Buddhist religious tradition of the Karen. Where it has been associated with some form of political or politico-religious organisation, this has been the result of the influence of ideas derived from Buddhist religious traditions and millenarian movements (or, for that matter, from Christian religious ideas) occasionally melded with, amongst others, the Karen notion of *pgho*, that is, religious power or “charisma” (Keyes [1977b:54–5]). In other words, political organisation and political leadership are not a primary part of indigenous Karen traditions and social organisation. On the other hand, headmen of Karen communities who are appointees of the Thai bureaucracy may in some cases be recognised as such within the community, and according to indigenous Karen ideas about headmanship.

In Palokhi, headmanship falls well within traditional definitions of the position, without political or politico-religious implications and without bureaucratic responsibilities. Headmanship, in Palokhi, is essentially a religious office which others (for example, Lewis and Lewis [1984:86]; Hinton [1975:41]) have described in terms of the role and functions of “village priest”. It does not carry with it jural authority of any significance except in matters, such as the enforcement of customary rules on marriage (which I discuss in the next chapter), where the headman does attempt to apply his authority. Even in such matters, however, attempts to exercise what may be regarded as a form of jural authority — although moral or religious authority would be a better term — are ultimately based on the belief that these matters do, indeed, have religious and ritual significance. In these matters, the headman does not act alone but with four older men in the community who are known as “old hearts” (*sa’ pgha*) or

“elders”. Hinton (1975: 42–3) has described this collection of men, including the headman or “village priest”, by the term “council of elders”. The term suggests an institutionalised, formal group which, at least in the context of Palokhi, is inappropriate. While it is true that these men do get together to discuss matters of communal interest, more often than not such discussions take place in piecemeal fashion with two or three of the four men taking part at a time. These discussions may occur at any place or time, though usually it is in the headman’s house, after evening meals when the Palokhi Karen visit one another for pleasure, or for some business at hand such as recruiting labour for agricultural work on the next day. Such visits frequently involve both pleasure and business.

Through these back and forth discussions over a period of time (which depends on the urgency of the matter at hand), a “consensus” is arrived at. But, as Mischung has astutely observed (1980:34–5) such “consensus” is not necessarily the outcome of an unanimity or majority of opinion; frequently, it is the product of being able to “speak well” with a demonstrable knowledge of traditional Karen axioms and proverbs applied to the matter at hand which sways the opinions of others.<sup>16</sup> Mischung’s observations are almost wholly applicable to Palokhi.

The important point to note, however, is that there is a certain degree of egalitarianism in which all of these men, including the headman, may express their opinions, and that these processes involve **men** who are generally, or relatively **old** (but cf. Mischung [1980:33]). That is to say, the “jural” process involves gender considerations and some form of age-grading or, in other words, principles based on natural differences which are employed to effect a form of social differentiation (see, for example, La Fontaine [1978:1ff.]).

Where Palokhi is specifically concerned, the pre-eminence of men in this regard is related to their dominance in agricultural and ritual matters, which are a major concern in the lives of the Palokhi Karen as I discuss below and in other chapters, whereas the generally old — or older — age of men who participate in such matters is related to a more universal phenomenon, namely, experience and knowledge which accrue with time. Even this, however, has a particular implication in Palokhi where, very generally, it is related to the notion of precedence which is an important consideration in religious and ritual concerns. While this explains the “jural” process in Palokhi (to the extent that such a process may be said to exist), nevertheless, these considerations do not account for the nature of headmanship, because the role and functions of the headman are primarily ritual and religious in substance.

Perhaps the most important consideration in Karen headmanship is precedence in residence which involves establishing a ritual relationship with the tutelary spirit of the domain, the **Thi Koe’ca**, **Kau Koe’ca** or Lord of the Water, Lord

of the Land. This relationship consists of the annual propitiation of the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. It is regarded as a necessary condition not only in the opening up of a settlement but also in the on-going process of inhabiting a particular *kau*. Thus, the first headman (*zi kho*, literally, “village head”) of Palokhi was Lauj (H9<sup>+</sup>) who was the first to settle in the Huai Thung Choa valley in 1953, and who was the first to propitiate the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land of the stream valley.

The village was initially situated towards the upper section of the stream where Lauj had built his house and was joined by the various families which settled shortly afterwards (see Figure 5.2, p. 275). After approximately one and a half years there, Lauj decided to move the site of the village further downstream to a more favourable location because it was felt that the initial site of the village was too damp and cold due to its proximity to the stream. In 1958 or 1959 the village was moved yet again, this time because pigs from the village tended to forage in the swiddens which were being opened up on the northern slopes of the stream valley and, thus, lay close to the village itself. After three years (that is, in 1960) in this new location, the village was rebuilt in its immediately previous location. The reason for this move, according to the Palokhi Karen, was that several children had died in the new location and this was taken as an indication that the villagers had somehow incurred the displeasure of the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, although no specific reasons were given for this. The Palokhi Karen also claim that even after the change in village site, children continued to die, but it is not clear from their accounts as to the nature of the causes of these children’s death. An examination of the life histories of households indicates, that a number of children had indeed died during this time although the number does not appear unusually large in comparison to child mortalities in previous years.

What emerges clearly, however, is that in shifting their village site within its first ten years, the Palokhi Karen obviously attached considerable significance to the children’s deaths, leading in 1964 to a decision by three households (H5<sup>+</sup>, H1<sup>+</sup> and HA) to hive off and settle in a new location. This happened to be the site of an old swidden that had been cultivated several years before by a Northern Thai from Ban Mae Lao. They were joined subsequently by H5<sup>++</sup> and other households, and the village remained in this location.

This last change in the site of the village was significant because it resulted in a change of headmen. It highlights an important aspect of village organisation in general as well as the crucial nature of the relationship between headman and the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, as a basis for the existence of the community in particular. It demonstrates that despite the interdependence of households as a community — which is conspicuous, for example, in the co-operative labour exchanges that take place in agricultural activities and which

is ritually marked in the rites of the New Year, as I discuss in Chapter IV — they are, nonetheless, essentially autonomous units within the community. This is to be seen in the independent decisions taken by the three households to resettle themselves in 1964 and those of the households which followed subsequently.

The resettlement of the three families clearly shows the importance of the relationship between headmen and the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. Where it is felt that this relationship has not been sufficiently or successfully established (and, perhaps, even abrogated by the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land), it can lead to the dissolution of the community, at least as it was previously constituted. When the three families moved to the present site of Palokhi, Thi Pghe (H5<sup>+</sup>), Tamu' (H1<sup>+</sup>) and Chwi' (HA) jointly assumed responsibility for propitiating the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, through an annually held rite called the Head Rite (**Talykho**) because they had simultaneously settled in the new location. In the time that Chwi' was still resident in Palokhi (that is, up to 1974) and Thi Pghe was still alive (until his death in 1978), none of these three men was regarded as headman over the other two, although some of the Palokhi Karen say that Tamu' was more or less so by virtue of the fact that he was the oldest of the three men, which is an indication of the importance placed on age as a criterion in determining precedence in Palokhi.

The overall ambiguity as to which of the three men was headman in the ten years after Palokhi was relocated in 1964 underlies the importance placed on precedence. The fact that the three men had established themselves in the new site of the village at the same time meant that none had clear-cut precedence. Instead, for ten years until 1974 (when Chwi' left Palokhi) the three men were the ritual leaders of the new settlement which they had established and to which the other households came. Although Thi Pghe, Tamu', and Chwi' decided to form their own settlement as a result of the deaths of the children, the ultimate reason for leaving the village of which Lauj was still headman was that they felt Lauj was no longer able to maintain the ritual relationship with the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land.<sup>17</sup>

This very clearly demonstrates that, conceptually, the legitimation of headmanship in Palokhi rests on the successful maintenance of this relationship with the tutelary spirit of the domain. In effect, then, the legitimacy of Lauj's role as headman which rested on his ability to propitiate successfully the tutelary spirit of the domain was called into question. According to Nae' Kha, Tamu's son, there were also misgivings in the early 1960's about Lauj's effectiveness as headman because of his growing addiction to opium. It is evident, however, that these three families were not the only ones to doubt Lauj's abilities, for they were soon followed by other households. When they did so, Lauj could no longer claim to be headman of the village since most of the village had, for all practical purposes, left him. He and his family, in fact, finally moved to join the others

in the present location of Palokhi where he had no part to play in the Head Rite. As an elder, however, he was required to participate in some of the communal rites performed in Palokhi.

For Palokhi, as a Karen community, the overall significance of the headman is that he acts essentially as a mediator between the community and the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. Individual households do, in fact, perform rituals which are directed at the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land as the tutelary spirit of the domain, but these rituals (although propitiatory in content) are primarily **agricultural** rituals unlike the Head Rite which is performed only by the headman (or co-founders of a settlement) and which is specifically conducted with the aim of propitiating the tutelary spirit of the domain in order to ensure favourable conditions and a harmonious state of affairs for the community.<sup>18</sup> In terms of the **logic** of the cycle of ritual activities in Palokhi, (which are predominantly agrarian rites), all else follows from the Head Rite which is consistent with the notion of precedence that underlies the role of headman. It is only because the headman performs the Head Rite that other households may then perform their own agricultural rituals. In other words, the Head Rite is a precondition for agricultural cultivation of land in the **kau**, or domain; subsequently, households may perform their own propitiations of the tutelary spirit of the domain as part of the cycle of agrarian rites in Palokhi.

The importance of the headman and the Head Rite, in this respect, is clearly to be seen in the way that both are described by the term **kho** or “head” which not only implies superordination but also connotes, in more general applications of the term, the idea of temporal priority as well, in the sense of “that which comes first”. The first libations of rice liquor in the ritual propitiations of the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, for example, are called **khwae’ si’ ‘a’ kho** as opposed to the last libations which are called **khwae’ si’ ‘a’ da’** whilst in another context — the production of rice or maize liquor — prime liquor, which is the first distillate, is called **si’ kho thi’** (literally, “liquor of the head water” or, as we might say it, of the “first water”). Similarly, rice that is first harvested and eaten (in a ritual which I discuss in Chapter VI) is called **by kho**, “head rice” (or “first rice”). All of these terms with **kho** imply precedence or priority of one kind or another and, in the context of headmanship and the Head Rite, it is the fact of precedence that gives headmanship its mediatory significance.

Precedence, however, is not the only important principle in the ritual or symbolic relationships between the headman, the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, and the community. The other equally important principle is **continuity** of these relationships which is, of course, the corollary of precedence. This was, undoubtedly, implicit in the reasons for the last resettlement (1964) of the Palokhi Karen although they themselves expressed these reasons merely in terms of Lauj’s inability to propitiate successfully the tutelary spirit of the

domain. Before the deaths of the children (and, perhaps, Lauj's increasing addiction to opium) the Palokhi Karen did in fact remain together as a community, with Lauj as the headman, on the assumption that he was able to maintain the relationship with the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. But then events caused his efficacy as headman to be questioned, at least as the Palokhi Karen viewed it.

The principle of continuity in the relationships between headman (or headmen), the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, and the community as a whole is probably best illustrated at Palokhi by the fact that the Head Rite must be performed **annually**. This renews the relationship between the headman (and his co-founders) with the tutelary spirit of the domain, and that between the community and the spirit of the domain through the intercessionary role of the headman. This renewal, or continuity, is re-affirmed by the genealogically-based succession to headmanship and the duty and obligation to perform the Head Rite on the part of the male descendants of Tamu' and his co-founders.

## **Headmanship and Succession**

As I describe, in some detail, the Head Rite and its key features in the next section of this chapter, I shall therefore consider first the question of succession, and its implications for the continuity of the ritual relationships between headman, community, and the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land in Palokhi.

In Palokhi, Tamu' is now regarded as the headman of Palokhi and, as one of the original founders of the village at its present site, he continues to perform the Head Rite which he first performed in 1964 with Thi Pghe and Chwi'. When Thi Pghe died in 1978, his eldest son Chi Choe (then sixteen years old) was required to participate in the rite in Thi Pghe's place. Chwi', on the other hand, who had migrated to Huai Dua in 1974, returned to Palokhi each year to perform the rite until his death in 1980. Tamu''s only son, Nae' Kha, was also included in the ritual when he returned to Palokhi after a few years of residence in Huai Dua where he went to marry. Nae' Kha's return was dictated by, amongst other considerations, the expectation that he would succeed Tamu' as headman in Palokhi. It is worth noting that Chwi' had a one year old son in Huai Dua (where he went to marry again) at the time of his death, but the son — quite apart from his age — was not considered to have any rights or responsibilities to the performance of the Head Rite because he was born in Huai Dua and not Palokhi.

Although there are two issues involved in the question of succession (succession to headmanship and succession to participation in the Head Rite), the rule is the same in both cases, namely, affiliation through the male line and primogeniture. This kind of succession to headmanship (or office of "village priest") in Karen communities is a well-established ethnographic fact noted by

Hinton (1975:41–2), Kunstadter (1979:130), Mischung (1980:33) and Madha (1980:61). Palokhi is, therefore, no exception in this regard. On the other hand, the importance of co-founders in association with headmen, thus far, has not been reported in existing accounts of the Karen. Nonetheless, the general principle of succession whether it be to headmanship or participation in the Head Rite is clear. However, insufficient attention has been given to the importance of the idea of **continuity of ritual relationships** entailed by this rule of succession.

Expressed more generally, there are two considerations involved here: succession on the basis of genealogical relationships, and the symbolic significance attached to these relationships and/or succession.

It is clear that the cognatic kinship systems of Sgaw and Pwo Karen societies do not preclude certain forms of social organisation (constituted for ritual purposes) whose principle of recruitment is based on maternal affiliation or, in some instances, what may be regarded as matrilineal descent properly known. On the other hand, succession to headmanship and participation in the Head Rite is based on affiliation through the male line. Except for the “matrilineal cults” of the Sgaw and Pwo Karen which I have briefly reviewed elsewhere (1984; see also Cohen and Wijeyewardene [1984a:252]), I hesitate to use the terms “matrilineal” and “patrilineal” in describing these principles of recruitment and succession (in the context of Palokhi) although Hinton and Madha have, in fact, used the term “patrilineal” with regard to succession to headmanship. The reason is that the construct “descent” is implicated in the use of these terms which, in my view, is not justified by the data from Palokhi. As Cohen and Wijeyewardene point out in their general introduction to the volume **Spirit Cults and the Position of Women in Northern Thailand** (1984), the application of the term “matrilineal” necessarily implies, according to traditional anthropological usage which restricts “descent” to a minimal three-generation span, at least recognition of a line of predecessors traceable to a common apical ancestress, and some ideology of matriliney. The same conditions would, of course, apply to the term “patrilineal” as well. In the absence of such recognition and ideology, only successive affiliation may be said to exist.

In Palokhi neither of these conditions apply to the domestic ritual called ‘**au ma xae**’ (see Appendix A) which, though similar in several respects to the matrilineal spirit cults found in some Sgaw and Pwo communities, differs from these cults on these very grounds. Nor do these conditions apply to succession to headmanship and participation in the Head Rite. Hence, my use of the term “affiliation”. I might add, in this connection, that individual genealogies in Palokhi are very frequently shallow with a **maximum** range of three ascending generations (see next chapter). This and the fact that descent is never traced to an apical ancestor or ancestress, as well as the absence of any discernible unilineal

ideology, make the use of the neutral term “affiliation” (qualified appropriately) necessary if a better understanding of social arrangements in Palokhi is to be gained. As I discuss kinship and the domestic ritual ‘**au’ ma xae**, more fully in the following chapter and Appendix A, I shall therefore now consider the question of succession to headmanship and participation in the Head Rite according to these two principles of affiliation and the notion of continuity in ritual relationships as they are to be found in Palokhi.

Succession to any office or role is a matter of considerable importance in most societies and where this is effected by genealogical principles, as distinct from other means, there are only two fundamentally logical alternatives for doing so, namely, through patrilineal or matrilineal principles — or, in Palokhi, by affiliation through males or females as I prefer to call it. There may also exist variations of these principles where there is some other contingent factor such as residence which acts to modify them which is not uncommon in the case of cognatic systems. The view that I take of these principles or, more generally, of cognatic kinship, in approaching the various aspects of social organisation in Palokhi is that they do not necessarily operate **independently** in determining the particular configurations that characterise various forms of social organisation in Palokhi. More specifically, the view that I take is that these configurations are the result of the **application** of genealogical reckonings guided by **non-genealogical** considerations, that is, by ideological considerations (as defined before) and the attribution of particular meanings to kinship relationships. In Palokhi, one such range of meanings is that which is attached to one of the more important aspects, if not the most important aspect, of kinship: sexual difference.

Thus, in the case of Palokhi, succession to headmanship and participation in the performance of the Head Rite, pose two different, but related, questions: why succession and why **male** succession? The answer to the more general question of succession, in Palokhi, has to do with the idea of continuity of ritual relationships, as I have already suggested, which informs most matters of ritual significance or religious importance of which the association between the headman, the community and the tutelary spirit of the domain is but one. The evidence for this lies, therefore, in the general characteristics of ritual performances and religious beliefs in Palokhi rather than the succession to headmanship and participation in the Head Rite (as well as its annual performance) alone.

The concern for continuity is evident more widely in the “connecting up of generations” in a variety of ritual contexts. For example, in the domestic ritual of ‘**au’ ma xae**, the Palokhi Karen are concerned with the maintenance of generational lines in the pigs and chickens that are consumed in this ritual. Furthermore, they say that all ‘**au’ ma xae** rituals must be conducted in the

**same way** in their details as when it was **first** conducted by a married couple. Continuity is also to be found in the cultivation of a special crop of rice, called the “Old Mother Rice” (**By Mo Pgha**) which is grown successively in each agricultural season for ritual purposes from its own seed (see Chapter VI).

Taken together, the undoubted concern with establishing continuity of ritual relationships in one form or another in these various ritual practices, including the succession to headmanship and participation in the Head Rite, indicate that continuity is an important aspect of the religious conceptions of the Palokhi Karen. It is significant, however, that it is expressed primarily in generational terms. The implication of this is that succession or continuity is conceived of as a process of affiliation, or association, through successive steps of biological reproduction rather than strict genealogical lineality. However, when the matter is brought to their attention, the Palokhi Karen are of course quite able to see that this can be represented as a “line”. The important point to note, nevertheless, is that they do not have cultural categories for “lineage”, “descent” (or “descent group”) or, for that matter, “line” applied specifically in a genealogical context. This is strong evidence for the absence of any concept of genealogical lineality as such.

**Male** succession, on the other hand, has to do with a more general characteristic of ritual activities in Palokhi: the domination of men in the ritual life of the community. It is also related to the fact that despite the minimal sexual division of labour in agricultural activities, men are the decision-makers. Indeed, as I show in Chapter V, they are essential as managers of land, which is by no means irrelevant to ritual matters; an important part of the “management” of land in fact entails the performance of a series of agricultural rituals throughout the year which constitutes the annual ritual cycle in Palokhi. The dominance of men in the ritual life of the community is, thus, intimately linked with agricultural cultivation or, more generally, with the use of land within the **kau**. Male succession to headmanship and participation in the Head Rite, therefore, are part of a complex of conceptual associations or ideas which link men, land, agriculture and ritual activities together.

## The Head Rite

The Head Rite, (**Talykho**), was, after 1980, performed by Tamu’, his son Nae’ Kha, and Thi Pghé’s son, Chi Choe. It is held in May (or La De’ Nja’, the “frog, fish month” as it is known in Palokhi) which is the month when it was originally performed in 1964 by Tamu’ and his co-founders, Thi Pghé and Chwi’. The agricultural season in Palokhi, in fact, commences in January-February when swiddens are first cleared in Palokhi and when the rites of the New Year (**kau lau wae** or **thau ni sau**) which symbolically mark the transition from the old season to the new are held. Thus, the performance of the Head Rite does not actually precede the commencement of the agricultural season in each year. The

reason why the rite is held in May, rather than before the beginning of the agricultural season in Palokhi, is that it was first conducted by Tamu', Thi Pghe and Chwi' in this month after they had completed building their houses when they first established their settlement.

The performance of the rite itself is exclusive: when it was first, and subsequently, performed, it was conducted by Tamu' and his co-founders whilst at the present time only Tamu', Nae' Kha and Chi Choe participate in the rite. No other villager was, or is, permitted to attend the rite or even to witness it.<sup>19</sup> This restriction applied to all "outsiders" as well and the description of the Head Rite that follows is based on an account provided by Chi Choe immediately after the rite was held.

As with a great many rituals in Palokhi, the Head Rite is simple, comprising three characteristic features: offerings of food and rice liquor, commensalism, and prayers distinguished by semantic parallelism.<sup>20</sup> Another feature which the rite shares in common with agricultural rituals in Palokhi, as against rites of curing or healing individuals, is that it is proleptic in orientation and aoristic in form: it is directed towards the future as a renewal of the past. It seeks to obtain, through the propitiation of the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, auspicious and harmonious conditions for the well-being of the community as a whole and the successful cultivation of rice and other crops on which the community depends. In more general terms, the rite may well be regarded as a renewal of the compact between the headman and his co-founders (or their descendants) with the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, through which these conditions are obtained.

In the Head Rite described by Chi Choe (performed in the evening of 28 May 1981), various offerings were first prepared by Tamu' (and his wife) in his house, which included two stews made from a cock and a hen, roasted popped rice, six wax candles (a pair for each of the participants) and a bottle of rice liquor distilled by Tamu''s wife and daughter.<sup>21</sup> The rite itself was performed at the base of a tall tree (**se mi**, a species of **Eugenia**) located approximately three hundred metres east of the boundaries of the village along the ridge where the village is situated. There is no particular significance attaching to the species of the tree, but the presence of the tree is undoubtedly of some importance in the performance of the ritual.<sup>22</sup> The tree is said to "belong to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land" (**Thi Koe'ca, Kau Koe'ca 'a' se**) but the real significance of the tree is that it is a medium of communication or mediatory ritual device, which may be inferred from the only other ritual in Palokhi which employs trees. Without going into the details of this other ritual, suffice it to say that this ritual is designed to recall the souls (**kau' koela**) of old people. It is said that "the trees can see faraway" and, thus, assist in calling back the souls of old people which are believed to wander (or be enticed to do so by spirits, **tamyxa**)

further afield than those of younger people.<sup>23</sup> In the same manner, the tree in the Head Rite is a medium by which access is gained to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. The offerings are laid out on a woven bamboo mat which is placed at the foot of the tree, and the three participants (with Tamu' as officiant) squat around the mat.

As recounted by Chi Choe, the ritual commences with Tamu' making offerings or libations of rice liquor (the *khwaé' si' 'a' kho* or "first libations of liquor") to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. The libations are made by dripping the liquor from a cup, using the fingers with the cup tilted at a slight angle, onto the base of the tree. As this is done, the following invocation and prayer is recited by Tamu':

Sa, Palokhi 'a' Koe'ca, Palauklo' 'a' Koe'ca	O, Lord of the headwaters of Pang Luang, Lord of Pang Luang stream
Mauliang 'a' Koe'ca, Tung Cau' 'a' Koe'ca	Lord of Mauliang, Lord of Tung Choa (stream)
Maungau' 'a' Koe'ca, Maulaukhi 'a' Koe'ca	Lord of Maungau', Lord of the headwaters of Mae Muang Luang
Hedoeklo' 'a' Koe'ca, Lekoepau 'a' Koe'ca	Lord of Huai Dua stream, Lord of the Shining Cliff
Ha' 'i, hae kwa pgha	Come here, watch over the people
Dau' phau'khwa, dau' phau'my	Together the women, together the men
Dau' bau', dau' pgha	Together the children (literally, "the plump"), together the old
Dau' tapho, dau' taxa	Together the children, together the animals
Ta 'a' 'oe' 'a' sau hae, toe' ghe	That which is inauspicious (literally, "dirty") that comes again (literally, "anew"), it is not good
Kwa di' 'a' ghe, kwa di' 'a' gwa	Watch over well (literally, "good" or "beautiful"), watch over purely (literally, "white")
He di' 'a' loe', 'a' cau	Giving everything, giving (?) completely
'I pgha, kwa pgha kau' gha	Here (are) the people, watch over each person
Khaenjakhau, poe' koe' ly 'a' na dau'	Next year, we will propitiate (literally, "rear" and feed") you together again
Kwa gha ghe ghe	Watch over the people well

The prayer is a simple one and its intentions are fully and clearly expressed. It is worth noting, however, that although the ritual is directed towards the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land of Palokhi, nonetheless the tutelary spirits of other domains and prominent topographical features are included in this prayer.

They are all seen as being essentially similar and there is no implication that one is superordinate to the others, apart from the priority accorded to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land of Palokhi. This spirit is addressed before all others. While this is to be expected, given that the Palokhi Karen inhabit the stream valley or **kau** known to them as the Pang Luang, and the importance placed on precedence in ritual matters as I have already noted before, the inclusion of tutelary spirits of other domains and prominent topographical features is of some importance in the conceptions held by the Palokhi Karen about the relationships amongst these tutelary spirits and the domains that they are believed to preside over. Perhaps the most important consideration is that the Palokhi Karen (and the Karen elsewhere in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area) attribute a symbolic significance to prominent natural features which include those that define **kau**. Thus, while Palokhi, Huai Dua and Mae Muang Luang (and, possibly, Mauliang and Maungau) are recognised as domains in their own right, Lekoepau is also given recognition because it is a prominent natural feature near the headwaters of the Mae Muang Luang with a tutelary spirit of its own. The same reason underlies the references to the tutelary spirits of Huai Dua and Mae Muang Luang. Mae Muang Luang originates from the highest hills in the watershed, while Huai Dua which is a tributary of Mae Muang Luang in its lower section, flows through a valley bottom dominated by the hills from which Mae Muang Luang has its source. The inclusion of the tutelary spirits of Mauliang and Maungau are, however, problematic. They are not identifiable in the topography of the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valley system, but it is entirely possible that they refer to places which were, in the distant past, important in similar prayers which have been passed on from generation to generation. That such prayers have an old provenance, is unquestionable. In the prayers that Lauy used to recite, for instance, the tutelary spirit of Chiang Dao (which none of the Palokhi Karen have been to) was invoked as was the “Lord of Great Silver, Lord of Long Silver” (**Ce’ Do’ ‘a’ Koe’ca, Ce’ Thu ‘a’ Koe’ca**). The latter is based on a historical knowledge which has not been wholly lost in Palokhi; it contains an implicit reference to the silver bar coinages of Northern Thai principalities first minted some four hundred years ago but which remained in circulation for some time after (see, for example, Oliver [1978:96]).

In terms of the rituals performed at the present time, however, one important feature of the prayer is the formula “watch over well, watch over purely” (**kwa di’ ‘a’ ghe, kwa di’ ‘a’ gwa**) which recurs consistently in agricultural ritual texts. **Di’** is a particle indicating continuing action (equivalent to the present continuous tense), whilst **ghe** and **gwa** which mean “good” or “beautiful” and

“white” (in their literal senses), respectively, are best translated as “auspicious and harmonious” through their parallel juxta-position. These terms represent the conditions which are, ultimately, being sought after in the Head Rite and the various agricultural rituals performed in Palokhi.

Another important theme which appears in the Head Rite and agricultural rituals is the creation or induction of a “cool” state which is believed to be essential for the successful cultivation of crops and, more generally, for the well-being of the community. It is a state implied by the conditions represented by the terms **ghe** and **gwa** but is ritually produced by sprinkling lustral water which may simply be ordinary water, or water with acacia pods (**pychi sa**) and it is a practice that the Palokhi Karen share with their Northern Thai neighbours (see also Davis [1984:106–7]).

For auspicious and harmonious conditions to prevail, the Palokhi Karen believe that the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, and the land itself must be “cool”. In the same way, the successful growth of the rice crop depends on the production of a “cool” state in the crop while auspicious and harmonious conditions for and in marriages are thought to be brought about by “cooling” the bride and groom which is an important part of marriage ceremonies (see Chapter III). In all cases, the application of lustral water is required. Thus, in the Head Rite, after the first libations of liquor have been offered to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, lustral water is sprinkled onto the “head” of the spirit although this is in fact done at the base of the tree. The head, generally, is the focus of these applications of water because it is believed to be the most important part of the body, containing the principal soul (called the **koela kho thi**) of a person.<sup>24</sup> The following short prayer accompanies the lustrations to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land:

Pghi noe' kho	Sprinkling your head
Pghi khy	Sprinkling cool
Pghi ba' na	Sprinkling directly onto you <sup>25</sup>
Kwa pgha ghe ghe	Watch over the people well

After the completion of these lustrations, the food offerings are then made to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. This consists of placing some rice onto a banana leaf followed by the beaks, claws, wing tips, intestines and livers of each fowl. These parts represent the whole fowls offered to the spirit which is then invited to partake of the offerings. The invitation simply consists of asking the spirit to “come and eat, come and drink” followed by a repetition of the prayer said at the first libations of liquor.

Divination is then carried out to establish whether or not the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land has eaten the offerings. This consists of tearing up three

leaves, taken from any nearby bush or tree, in random fashion and then counting the number of pairs which the torn pieces make up. If there is a full set of pairs, whether odd or even in number, it is deemed that the spirit has consumed the food offerings, after which the three participants in the rite then eat the main portions of rice and chicken. The divination is important because it determines if the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land has **accepted** the offerings and thereby renewed the compact, as it were, with the headman and his co-participants in the rite.

The other important aspect of this part of the rite, also present in the first libations, is commensalism. In the first libations, after the liquor has been offered to the spirit, the headman takes a sip of the liquor remaining in the cup and then passes the cup to Nae' Kha and Chi Choe who do likewise. Thereafter, they may then drink freely of the liquor leaving, however, enough for the last libations which are performed after the eating of the food. The principle of commensalism in the drinking of liquor at the first and last libations and the eating of food is the same and it expresses ritual and social relationships at two levels. First, there is in one sense a commensalism with the spirit which is given precedence in drinking and eating and this is symbolic of its superior ritual position. Second, the commensalism of the participants expresses their own communality and, indeed, equality as supplicants of the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. It is worth noting, here, that this is perhaps the single most pervasive aspect of ritual performances in Palokhi — the expression of social and ritual relationships, specifically the solidarity and egalitarian nature of relationships amongst co-participants in communal rituals, through commensalism in the drinking of liquor or the eating of food. The Head Rite ends with the last libations which are made after the three participants have finished eating the meal of rice and chicken stew.

With the completion of the Head Rite at the base of the tree outside the village, a subsidiary rite is performed in Tamu's house which brings together all the members of the community in a ritual similar in principle to the Head Rite. The structure of the ritual is identical to that of the Head Rite, the only difference being that food is not offered to the spirit or eaten by the congregation of villagers assembled in the headman's house. The fact that it is performed after the Head Rite, however, points unequivocally to the intercessionary nature of the Head Rite and the role of the headman for it is only after the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land has been propitiated by the headman that the rest of the community may then participate in this more generalised ritual which further propitiates the spirit.

Although the ritual is considered by the villagers to be a village-wide performance, open to all Palokhi Karen adults to participate, what happens in practice is that men usually assemble in Tamu's house for the ritual. The reason

for this is partly pragmatic because not everyone in the village can be accommodated in the house, but the more important reason is that men enjoy precedence in ritual matters.

The ritual commences with the first libations of liquor to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land which, in these circumstances, is performed by Tamu' and other older men in the village, the "old hearts". The libations are made at the walls of the house where these men happen to be closest (usually near the hearth where they often sit together with Tamu'), that is, directed away from the other villagers. The prayers which accompany the first libations are essentially similar to those said by Tamu' in the Head Rite and I shall not, therefore, describe them here. When these prayers are completed, each of the officiants sips from the cup of liquor from which the libations were made. The cups are then passed back and forth amongst the officiants until all have sipped from the various cups. If there is any liquor left in these cups, they are then passed on to the rest of the congregation who do likewise. When these first cups have been consumed, they are refilled by Tamu' or his son and then redistributed amongst the members of the assembly. The drinking continues in this way until it is judged that there is just sufficient liquor for the last libations at which time the cups which have been passed around are returned to Tamu' or his son to refill. They are then given to the officiants again to perform the last libations. When the final libations are completed, the liquor remaining in the cups is once again shared by the officiants and the people present. This time, however, concerted efforts are made to ensure that **everyone** takes a sip from **all** the cups. The cups, therefore, are passed to and fro with each person raising the cups to his mouth such that the liquor merely touches his lips before they are passed around yet again. The reason why such care is taken in the sharing of liquor at this time is that the Palokhi Karen believe it is an auspicious sign if there is still some liquor remaining in the cups even after everyone has sipped from them. What this means, however, is that everyone in the entire congregation makes a **conscious** effort to produce this result. It is almost as if the entire ritual and its key symbolic aspects have become sharply focussed in its last stages where the Palokhi Karen **act out** their communality and solidarity through the, now, deliberate sharing of liquor.

It is, I think, clear that the sequel to the Head Rite is primarily concerned with the "community" of the Palokhi Karen although it is expressed within the context of a more general propitiation of the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. It does, however, follow logically from the earlier performance of the Head Rite, and the two rituals express in symbolic terms the ritual and social relationships which are believed to be the essential basis of being a community according to ideas in the religion of the Palokhi Karen. The annual performance of these two rituals, and the succession to headmanship and participation in the

Head Rite, on the other hand, indicate that an equally important aspect of being a community lies in continuity of these relationships.

In this chapter, I have attempted to set out the history of Palokhi as a settlement in the Huai Thung Choa valley with particular emphasis on family residential histories, the ecological context of the establishment of the village, and the ritual relationships between the headman, co-founders of the village, the community, and the tutelary spirit of the domain. An important consideration in the establishment of Palokhi has been, and still is, the continuity of these ritual relationships.

This description of settlement history and the relationship between the headman and the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land thus serves to introduce contemporary issues in the ethnography of the Palokhi Karen which I present and discuss in the chapters that follow. I begin with aspects of the kinship system, domestic social organisation and ritual in Palokhi.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> One aspect of Karen villages and dwellings which has received some attention in previous studies of the Karen is the question of villages consisting of a long-house (Marshall [1922:56]; Iijima [1979:101–2]; Hamilton [1976:247, n. 3]). Hamilton is correct in saying that *zi* and *doe'* which now refer to "village" and "house" may have described, in the past, "long-house" and "apartment" but his suggestion that this confirms the existence of long-houses as a form which Karen villages traditionally took in the past is untenable. The suggestion is unsupportable because the terms only indicate that different house forms may be described in similar ways. The linguistic evidence alone offers no indication of which form was historically prior. Following Marshall, Iijima suggests that long-houses were built as a defensive measure against slave raids by the Kayah who often preyed on the Karen. The disappearance of Karen long-houses in present times, therefore, may well be the outcome of the fact that Kayah slave raids eventually ceased in the last century as a result of their pacification by the British in Burma, and various agreements between the British and Northern Thai princes and, subsequently, the Bangkok government which dealt with, amongst other issues, the question of slave raiding and the sale of slaves across the Thai-Burmese border (see Renard [1980:135ff.]). It may well be, therefore, that the traditional form of Karen villages was a clustering of separate houses until Kayah slave raids made the construction of long-houses a necessity. The Karen in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valley system have no recollection of villages which took the form of long-houses although in Palokhi an attenuated long-house was in fact built primarily out of ritual considerations as I discuss in Chapter III.

<sup>2</sup> Karen villages may, however, also be named with streams (*klo'*) and plains (*tha*) as their topographical referents (see, for example, Marlowe [1969:53] and Mischung [1980:13]) but the referent "head-waters" is, by far, the most common in the naming of Karen villages.

<sup>3</sup> See also Mischung (1980:13) and Marlowe (1969:68) for a similar discussion of the definition of *kau* in topographical terms. While Marlowe has probably been the first to remark on this fact, Mischung's discussion is the more detailed of the two.

<sup>4</sup> The derivation of Karen village names from Northern Thai names for rivers and streams is an extremely common phenomenon particularly with villages situated further east of the border between Thailand and Burma. The villages listed by Marlowe (1969:68), for example, are almost without exception based on Northern Thai names. Eponymous Karen village names are highly uncommon, but this has been reported by Madha (1980:25).

<sup>5</sup> Apart from Marlowe's work (1969), this is also apparent from the names of Karen villages studied, or reported on, by Hinton (1975), Kunstadter (1979), Iijima (1979), Hamilton (1976), Madha (1980) and Mischung (1980).

<sup>6</sup> This is, to some extent, confirmed by Dr Ronald Renard (pers. comm.) who has worked on the history of Karen-T'ai (that is, Thai) relations and who, in the course of his researches, briefly explored the area south of the Pa Pae hills in Mae Taeng. Dr Renard's informants were of the view that their ancestors

may have left Burma perhaps more than 100 years ago, stopping somewhere in-between before arriving in Mae Taeng. In collecting genealogies in Palokhi, I was able to establish that only one person (within the range of recountable genealogical relations) had any connection with Burma and this existed merely by virtue of the fact that this person, Lae Bghe (now dead), had visited and stayed for some time in a Kayah village in Burma though the circumstances surrounding this were wholly obscure. The name, Lae Bghe, was in fact the consequence of this sojourn with the Kayah; it means, literally, “went to the Kayah” where *lae* means “to go” and *bghe* is the Sgaw Karen term for the Kayah. While this throws hardly any light on the Burma connections of the Karen in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area, if indeed they exist at all, it is extremely important from the point of view of the system of naming individuals in Palokhi, and I shall deal with this in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>7</sup> There is, however, evidence to suggest that the Huai Thung Choa was, in the distant past, in fact occupied by Lua’ although this has little relevance to present conditions. In the course of opening up new wet-rice terraces (as opposed to the Hmong terraces which have been reclaimed) along the banks of the Huai Thung Choa, the Palokhi Karen have unearthed tobacco pipes and pots which are distinctively Lua’ in design suggesting an earlier Lua’ presence. That this must have been in the distant past is suggested, on the other hand, by the fact that these discoveries frequently occur together with ash layers (probably laid down by the burning of swiddens) several centimetres beneath the present surface of the earth in the areas where these terraces are being cut.

<sup>8</sup> The Khun Sa Hmong have, in fact, been investigated by Cooper (1984) but Cooper makes no mention of Hmong from the Huai Thung Choa valley. Cooper’s research which was conducted in 1972–74 shows quite clearly that the Hmong now inhabiting the area came from elsewhere, south of Khun Sa, beginning in 1952 (1984:77–82); he also states that some of the Hmong now at Khun Sa migrated to the area because they were interested in opening up wet-rice fields. Cooper, however, does not indicate whether these fields existed prior to the migration of these Hmong or whether they were first opened up by them. The northward migration of these Hmong, however, is interesting because it suggests, along with the northward migrations of the Karen, I have mentioned earlier, that this is a general trend. The conclusion that must be drawn from this is that demographic pressure, perhaps with a concomitant deterioration in ecological conditions, was building up in the foothills in the area south of the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa valley system, that is, in Tambon Sopoeng before the 1950’s. Nevertheless, we are still left with the problem of explaining what happened to the Hmong from the Huai Thung Choa valley who are said to have gone to Khun Sa. The Palokhi Karen and Northern Thai in Ban Mae Lao and Ban Thung Choa claim as well that the Hmong who inhabited the Huai Thung Choa cultivated opium and this is, to a large extent, corroborated by the existence of broad swathes of *Imperata* or cogon grass on the slopes of Doi Mae Ya (that is, Mae Ya mountain). *Imperata*, as it is now commonly recognised, is the most characteristic form of succession in areas which have been under opium swiddening regimes because the intensive weeding necessary for the successful cultivation of opium permits only the establishment of more tenacious species such as *Imperata* once opium swiddens are left fallow. In view of this, the only plausible explanation must be that the Hmong left the Huai Thung Choa for two reasons: first, because their opium swiddens became unproductive; second, because alternative swidden sites on the Mae Ya were out of reach as a result of a sedentary existence imposed by the need to remain close to their wet-rice fields. Thus, once available resources for opium cultivation were exhausted under these circumstances, the Hmong probably migrated to Khun Sa where, as Cooper shows, conditions were suitable for a similar dual system of opium and wet-rice cultivation. These Hmong may then have departed from Khun Sa yet again for perhaps similar reasons.

<sup>9</sup> I discuss this in more detail in Chapter IV where I present several case studies of households or domestic groups to illustrate general features in the domestic organisation of production and consumption in Palokhi. Here it may be noted that while most Palokhi households are related to one another by primary or collateral kin links, the emphasis or weight placed on these links varies from one case to another especially in the context of the organisation of economic activities.

<sup>10</sup> Dependency ratios are given by the proportion of dependents to the total population (in this case that of households) expressed in percentage terms. Dependents are defined as those under the age of fourteen and over the age of sixty. Thus, the dependents of these various households include not only young children but old people as well.

<sup>11</sup> H16 was, of course, one of the first migrant families in the Huai Thung Choa. It consisted initially of a middle-aged couple and their only daughter. They were later joined by Chwi who married the daughter. When the parents of the daughter died, the couple decided to move to Plaeng Dauk (the Flower Plantation of the Royal Forestry Department’s Watershed Development Unit) to become wage labourers. The reason why these families, upon migrating (or remigrating) to Palokhi, did not embark

on swidden cultivation was that they did not have sufficient supplies of domestic labour to manage both systems of rice cultivation.

<sup>12</sup> I discuss in more detail, in Chapter III, the kinship system in Palokhi and the place that uxori-local residence at marriage has within this system. I wish to stress here, however, that the “rule” is not quite so thorough-going as the term “rule” suggests or implies. It is quite subject to modification as with other “rules” (such as those on marriage) according to the exigencies and pragmatics of the life circumstances of the Palokhi Karen. I might add, in this regard, that they are equally amenable to manipulation — within limits — according to the idiosyncracies of individuals as I also discuss in the context of violations of marriage rules in Chapter III.

<sup>13</sup> I might add here that much the same pattern is to be found in the migration and residential histories of these individuals who came from outside the watershed before they were married and still part of their parental households. In one case (H5<sup>11</sup>), which is interesting from an economic perspective, the household spent three to four years (1923–27) picking *miang* (tea which is fermented and eaten as a relish and stimulant) as its sole subsistence occupation. Although this was the only case which I recorded in Palokhi, it suggests that the tea industry south of the Pa Pae hills may have been economically important to the Karen (apart from the Northern Thai) many years ago. This is a subject which I take up from the point of view of present-day economics in Palokhi, in Chapters V.

<sup>14</sup> This has changed in recent years as a result of the presence of the Royal Forestry Department’s Watershed Development Unit. The Unit, which has several sub-units including the Flower Plantation mentioned earlier, has had to recruit large numbers of Northern Thai from settlements outside the watershed to work in its various reforestation projects because labour from the Karen and Lisu settlements in the watershed is only seasonally available. See Kunzel (1983) for a detailed account of this aspect of the Unit’s operations in the Mae Muang Luang-Huai Thung Choa area.

<sup>15</sup> The reason why land dominated by coniferous species is generally unsuitable for swiddening is that these species have a lower biomass than land cover containing a mix of species such as may be found in Tropical Evergreen, Dry Dipterocarp and Mixed Deciduous forests all of which occur in Northern Thailand at various elevations. Karen recognition of this fact is undoubtedly based on a long history of swidden cultivation, but the Palokhi Karen also point to the generally thin, dry layer of pine needles on the ground as evidence that such areas are unsuitable for swiddening compared to other forested areas which have a more mixed and thicker layer of litter. The Karen are, of course, entirely correct in their assessment.

<sup>16</sup> Palokhi Karen axioms and proverbs almost invariably consist of a couplet distinguished by semantic parallelism which is also a feature of their ritual texts. The essence of these axioms and proverbs is their ambiguity. While ambiguity is, indeed, a feature of a great many traditions of proverbs and sayings in the sense that they may be interpreted either positively or negatively (see, for example, Milner [1969] and a comment by Wijeyewardene [1974:101–2]), Palokhi Karen proverbs, on the other hand, frequently attempt to capture the paradoxes, contradictions, and dilemmas of life and human situations which, it might be said, also form the basis of much of their humour which thrives on such ironies. They are, therefore, really vehicles for expressing opinions which are formed by other considerations and interests. I should, perhaps, add that if or when the Palokhi *sa’ pgha* expressed their opinions through their virtuosity in handling proverbs and axioms, both were probably lost on Tamu’, the headman of Palokhi, who was partially deaf in both ears.

<sup>17</sup> This history of the events and considerations which led to the eventual resettlement of Palokhi in its present location is based on accounts provided by Nae’ Kha (Tamu’s son) and Rae’. The principal actors in this particular scenario in the history of Palokhi, that is, Tamu’, Chwi’ and Lauy, were all unwilling to discuss these developments.

<sup>18</sup> The ideal of a harmonious state of affairs, much valued by the Palokhi Karen, is also consistently re-iterated in their agricultural ritual texts (see Chapter VI). Mischung (1980:30) also states that the role of the headman is to establish such a state of affairs for the community. It is interesting to note, as well, that Lewis and Lewis (1984:10, 96) in their excellent compilation of broad, general facts on six ethnic minority groups in the “Golden Triangle” (accompanied by remarkable photographs of their material culture and artefacts) for a general, non-academic audience, have used the term “harmony” in an attempt to capture the ethos of Karen societies.

<sup>19</sup> In the Karen settlement of Mae Muang Luang on which I have some, but admittedly scanty, data, the Head Rite is performed by the headman with the participation of all male heads of households. In Mae Muang Luang, the rite is held once every three years and each household contributes to the cost of purchasing a large pig which is sacrificed to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land of Mae Muang Luang. In another ritual which is said to have been performed when landslips occurred around a large

cliff consisting of felspathic rock, called Lekoepau (the “Shining Cliff”), a buffalo was offered as a propitiatory offering to the “Lord of the Shining Cliff” which was also paid for by contributions from all households in Mae Muang Luang, because the cliff lies within the domain of Mae Muang Luang. This ritual is no longer performed in the present because it is believed that the Lord of Lekoepau has been appeased after the two ritual offerings.

<sup>20</sup> Semantic parallelism in Karen ritual texts has not been particularly commented upon although its existence is recognised. It is usually referred to by the term “couplets” (Marshall [1922:177ff.]; Mischung [1980:34, 111ff.]). Mischung does remark on the fact that this is a feature of Karen prayers and poetry in discussing the appellation given to the tutelary spirit of the domain, that is, the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. He takes the view that the primary meaning of the term is that the spirit is the tutelary spirit of land while the reference to “water” in the term for the spirit is, essentially, the product of a device in oral literature. It is clear, however, from Palokhi ritual texts that the elements which make up the dyadic sets in the semantic parallelism of these texts are not without intrinsic meaning. That is to say, they are not merely verbal embellishments though aesthetic considerations are nevertheless important. Furthermore, the occurrence of elements in dyadic sets and their parallel juxtapositions, with their primary meanings, produce what might best be called “semantic agglutination”, expressing meanings otherwise inexpressible by these terms individually or by their mere juxtaposition through grammatical conjunctions. Thus, as it seems to me, translating the term “Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land” to mean that the spirit is the spirit of land is to restrict the meaning of the term without giving sufficient consideration to the way in which semantic fields are enlarged in the form that Karen oral literature and ritual texts take. Although this may appear to be a relatively trivial problem of translation, nevertheless, it is of some consequence for our understanding of the significance of certain dyadic sets which recur frequently in **different** ritual contexts, one of which is **ghe** and **gwa** which I discuss shortly in this chapter. This suggests that the enlarged semantic fields of these dyadic sets may contain hierarchies of meaning which, in turn, have implications for an understanding of religious conceptions and ritual activities as they are cognitively organised. In other societies, such as the Rotinese as Fox has amply demonstrated (1971, 1974, 1975, 1983), these implications extend to the very nature of systems of social classification. In the case of the term “Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land”, it is probably a mistake to see it in terms of a simple opposition between “land” and “water” (that is, **kau** and **thi**). The reason is that “land” is an encompassing category within which “water” (that is, streams and rivers) is to be found; thus, while the term recognises the difference in the properties of these two categories (undoubtedly based on an appreciation of their importance in agriculture), it also places, as it were, “water” within “land”, so that the term “Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land” really means “Lord of ‘land in which there is water’”. The term “domain”, therefore, seems far more preferable as a short-hand term for translating this rather unwieldy phrase. It also has the advantage, first, of conveying the idea that **kau** also contain human habitations and, second, of having a certain degree of latitude in translating **kau** which, for many Karen along the Thai-Burmese border has now taken a distinct political meaning, namely, “state”. The independent state which the Karen National Union and Karen National Liberation Army have been attempting to establish (since 1948) through insurgency is known as “Kawthoolei”, that is, **kau Ou le**, the “Land of Lilies” (Thra Pu Tamoo, pers. comm.).

<sup>21</sup> According to Palokhi Karen custom, the liquor prepared for this and other ritual occasions (such as marriage ceremonies) must be prepared within the same month when these rituals take place. There is another custom, and belief, that the yeast needed to prepare the rice liquor should be made by **unmarried** women. Although the preparation of liquor may be done by married women, the production of the yeast has to be done by unmarried women who should not be observed doing so, or else the yeast will not rise. According to the Palokhi Karen, the yeast “becomes shy” or “becomes ashamed” (**mae’ chgha’**) and the rice-and-water substrate of the yeast will not, therefore, ferment to produce the liquor. The yeast in this particular ritual was, in fact, purchased from a Northern Thai in Ban Thung Choa.

<sup>22</sup> Iijima (1979:113–4) has reported the use of **Eugenia** leaves in a ritual performed by the Sgaw Karen whom he studied but it is likely that the use of **Eugenia** leaves which he describes is the product of Northern Thai or Shan Buddhist practices. In Palokhi, however, the presence of the **Eugenia** tree is not related to Buddhist or syncretised Buddhist ritual practices. Many Karen communities in Mae Hong Son which have come under Buddhist influence erect an altar in their houses which they then decorate with **Eugenia** leaves, but this is a practice which is not found in Palokhi or, for that matter, in other Karen settlements in the Mae Muang Luang–Huai Thung Choa basin.

<sup>23</sup> Soul calling rituals, in Palokhi, are categorised according to what may best be described as a very general age-grading system, which makes distinctions between infants and children, adults, and old people. In the rite of calling back the souls of old people, a nail is truck into the tree and a thread is tied to the nail and laid over a tray laden with food which is supposed to entice the wandering souls

of old people to return to their bodies. The thread is considered to be the route which these souls take on their return; but it is essentially an extension of the tree directed towards the offerings and, hence, the person concerned.

<sup>24</sup> Note again the occurrence of the term **kho** in the way that this soul is described. The evidence for this soul, which is adduced by the Palokhi Karen, is the palpitating fontanelles of infants in whom the cranial sutures have not yet grown together and calcified. The soul is regarded as being so important that when children have their heads shaved to de-louse them, a tuft of hair is left to “protect” the **koela kho thi**. Similar to the Northern Thai and many other societies in Northern Thailand, the Palokhi Karen believe that an individual possesses several souls. The number varies from informant to informant, and from place to place amongst the Karen (Kunstadter, pers. comm.). In Palokhi, the range is usually between thirty-three and thirty-seven and they correspond to parts of the body. The variation in the number of souls seems to be related to the fact of whether or not informants are willing to enumerate parts of the genitalia when they enumerate parts of the body which are attributed with souls. The Palokhi Karen are generally extremely reluctant or embarrassed to talk about matters pertaining to sexual intercourse and sexual functions, yet at the same time they do have a small corpus of what we might call “obscenities” in English which are sexually based and which, as I found, it was not impossible to obtain information on. The difference is probably to be explained by a difference in social and linguistic contexts, a discussion of which need not detain us here.

<sup>25</sup> **Ba**’ (with the same tonal value) has two meanings: “to affect” and “correct”. In Sgaw Karen, this tone may be called a low falling tone. **Ba**, that is, without a final glottal stop with a mid-level tone, on the other hand, means “to believe”, “to worship” to “to pray to” but it means more than what is implied by these terms. The Palokhi Karen themselves translate the term by the Northern Thai **thya** which, as Davis has pointed out (1984:17), is best rendered as “to abide by”. In this particular prayer (as with some other ritual texts which I discuss in Chapter VI), there is a strong likelihood that tonal values and the presence or absence of the glottal stop are being “played” with on the basis of the phonological similarities of these two terms as is sometimes the case with Northern Thai terms (Davis [1984:156, 164]). The result is a composition of **meaning** which is arrived at, at least in the context of ritual texts, through a certain degree of inarticulation not otherwise possible if terms were clearly and unambiguously articulated. It is also possible that where ritual texts are generally accessible to everyone, as it is in Malay communities for instance, ritual language may in fact be **mystified** for a number of reasons through improper articulation (Endicott [1970:20]; Rajah [1975:11, 80–1]). Perhaps the most important reason is to maintain the esoteric nature of ritual language. In Palokhi, ritual texts and language are available to anyone although their recitations are essentially individual performances, as I discuss in Chapter VI. Thus, in transcribing and translating this particular text with the assistance of Chi Choe, I was told that it means **Tamu**’ was “cooling” the tutelary spirit of the domain according to what was ritually “correct”, that it also meant the lustral water was “touching” (that is, in contact with) the spirit, and that **Tamu**’ was “worshipping” the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land.