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Ideological Practice in Peasant Rebellions: Siam at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

SHIGEHARU TANABE

National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka

This paper is an attempt to deal with the formulation of an oppositional ideology, challenging the existing social order, within peasant rebellions which erupted in specific regions of South East Asia. The primary intention of the discussion is to propose an adequate theoretical framework for the analysis of the complex entity of peasant ideology as a concrete social force, which is most clearly observable in the course of rebellions. It is argued that neither the crude economic interpretation nor the conventional symbolic analysis underlying much social anthropological tradition can explain the emergence of critical consciousness and oppositional ideology which envisages the structural change of a society. Instead, an analytical concept of ideological practice is developed—an intermediary concept linking social being in specific relations of production with social consciousness—based on an examination of some notable premisses of Bloch [1977], Alavi [1973], Thompson [1969, 1977] and others. In this theoretical connection, the concept of hegemony inspired by Gramsci also proves valuable in answering the question of how the aroused peasants are able to articulate, through ideological practice, their economic struggles with their cultural and moral creativity.

The arguments put forward in the first two sections aim to contribute to theoretical issues concerning the consciousness and ideology of peasantry, which have long remained rather underdeveloped, particularly within social anthropology. In subsequent sections, arguments are developed and tested in empirical cases of peasant rebellions which flared up on the peripheries of Siam (Thailand) around the turn of the twentieth century. Focusing on peasant rebellions which broke out in the northern and northeastern peripheries, under the encroaching centralized Siamese administration, the third section demonstrates some prominent aspects of legitimizing notions formulated by the rebels through their own ideological practices. These include popular ideas inspired by the millenarian element in Theravada Buddhism, and its associated ritual radicalism; retrospective aspects of peasant notions in relation to the collapsing patron-client relationship; and the popular expression of ethnic consciousness, often derived from the historical memory of ethnic oppression. In the fourth section, these aspects of peasant ideas and ideological practices are illustrated from the author's research into the case of the Chiang Mai rebellion of 1889–90. [HEGEMONY, IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE, RITUAL DISCOURSE, PEASANT REBELLIONS, THAILAND]

IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Whenever an anthropological study is seriously concerned with rebellions and revolutions in a society, it encounters the question of how the actors formulate their own ideologies, the most expressive product of their consciousness, which enable them to participate in such political upheavals. In South East Asia, where the peasants, the majority of the population, have a long and glorious tradition of rebellion and revolution throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, the question is coming to be of increasing significance for social scientists. In addition to the accumulation of empirical studies on peasant rebellion, contemporary social science has, in recent years, acquired conceptual frameworks for analysing peasant actions and ideologies in situations of crisis.

One notable idea, proposed by Scott, is the notion of the 'moral economy of the peasant',¹⁾ which emphasizes legitimizing ideas of the peasantry, primarily those originating in the crises of subsistence economies under colonial rule [SCOTT 1976]. Another is that presented by King [1973] and Ramsay [1979], who apply the sociological concept of 'relative deprivation' affecting possessions, status, and behaviour, but also having other effects at a cultural level. The latter, rather residual category is sometimes called 'loss of self-identity' [KING 1978: 148], or 'cultural alienation' [STURTEVANT 1969: 29]. We find two major difficulties in these attempts when dealing with the creation of peasant ideologies for social protest. First, their interpretations tend to dissolve peasant action and their underlying ideologies into a material base. Sometimes this is done without any consideration of the structural location of the peasant economy in relation to the development of capitalism. Secondly, they frequently fail to consider the origin of ideological formation and its relevance to economic discourse, thereby leaving ambiguous the ritual discourse inherent in peasant actions. With the notable exceptions of Scott's recent attempts to explore these problems [SCOTT 1977, 1980], these theses fail to overcome the theoretical conflict between economism and simplistic cultural interpretation.

The problem is a social anthropological one in that social actions and their ideological relevance to peasant rebellions are deeply involved in the complex structure of organizations and institutions of peasantries. In treating quite a wide range

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- 1) The concept of moral economy has also been operationalized in the analysis of urban classes involved in food riots in eighteenth-century England [THOMPSON 1971: 76-136]. For recent debates on the concept, see King [1978], Popkin [1979], and Moise [1982].

of theoretical issues within social anthropology, our major concern is with conceptual frameworks for understanding ideologies which challenge the existing social system, and which are often expressed dramatically in peasant revolts. The question may eventually arise as to whether or not anthropological theories are prepared for the explanation of social change which has occurred, and is occurring, in the peasantries of the Third World.

It is notable that conventional anthropological works concerned with this problem interpret consciousness, or cognition, as a product derived from society itself, thereby dismissing its relationship with nature. The social origin and determination of consciousness have been emphasized in many modern anthropological works following the Durkheimian legacy and Radcliffe-Brown's concept of social structure. This tradition, which stresses culturally specific systems of cognition on the grounds that different societies have different ideas, leads to the production of a functional model of social structure in which oppositional consciousness and total negation of the system could not exist.

Even anthropologists of later generations, such as Gluckman and Firth, are not completely free of this theoretical constraint. Gluckman, and some of his followers, who have been concerned to develop a conflict theory, tend to emphasize ritual aspects of social conflict and their cathartic functions for the maintenance of social cohesion²⁾ [GLUCKMAN 1956: 133–135, 164]. Firth's sociological solution goes beyond this. His concept of 'social organization', as distinguished from the notion of a more pervasive and persistent 'social structure' in a society, denotes a pattern of individual behaviour and decision-making within a range of alternatives. Within this dual framework, his concept of 'social organization' 'does emphasize that social action is expressed through individual action, and that this expression allows alternative procedures' [FIRTH 1964: 63, emphasis in original]. The problem here is that he fails to elucidate the way in which this alternative social action and consciousness arises. The fields of choice and decision are still to be moulded within the context of 'social structure'. In Firth's thesis, therefore, peasant actions and consciousness, which often lead to a total breakdown of an existing social structure and the creation of a new one, remain unsolved.

Leach's problematic is more complex. The theoretical riddle, most explicitly postulated in *Political Systems of Highland Burma* [LEACH 1954], is clearly expressed by Bloch:

[Leach] suggests that we should have three levels, not two: 1) a level of shared meanings common throughout the area he studied; 2) a level of rules which are not necessarily consistent one with another and which are chosen *ad hoc* by the actors in terms of the third level, 3) a level of enlightened self-interest very similar to Firth's 'social organisation' [BLOCH 1977: 280].

Our concern is with the third of these levels and its relationship to the others. Indi-

2) For further discussion on the inadequacy of self-stabilizing models in social anthropology and social history, see Hobsbawm [1972: 265–283], Friedman [1974: 444–469], and Thompson [1977: 247–266].

vidual Kachins of Highland Burma could act, within their own interests and morality, to adopt and manipulate alternatives provided by social reality. These individual and collective actions were undertaken in a field where 'the reality situation is in most cases full of inconsistencies; and it is precisely these inconsistencies which can provide us with an understanding of the processes of social change' [LEACH 1954: 8]. These processes then only become fully intelligible in his model scheme in which, in political terms, real Kachin communities oscillate between two polar concepts: *gumlao* democracy and Shan autocracy [LEACH 1954: 9].

For this analytical framework to work effectively in the empirical case of the Kachin Hills area, where profound cultural divergence is found, Leach has to raise a rationalistic notion of 'ritual language' which conveys concepts and categories common throughout the area. With the thesis that the term 'ritual' should be regarded as the communicative aspect of culturally defined behaviours, shared meanings eventually define the political and ideological integrity of the varied Kachin communities [LEACH 1954: 101–102]. This very assumption of communicative ritual language, then, implies that individual and collective actions become confined to the shared concepts and categories prevailing within the existing political and ideological order. This means that no concept or category is allowed to emerge from a reality outside that order. It is thus precisely his rationalistic formulation of 'ritual language' which leads to the breakdown of his attempt to understand social change.³⁾

Our brief survey reveals that theoretical formulations in conventional anthropological literature have often failed to tackle the origin and formation of consciousness which is opposed to apparently authoritative and legitimized ideas within a society. This theoretical inadequacy seems to stem from a sociological tradition, in which the concept of social determination of consciousness is tacitly approved.⁴⁾ This tradition has, through the analytical process of 'structuralism', become vital to various forms of 'symbolic analysis'. Most explicitly in the theory of Lévi-Strauss, they seek the internal logic of symbolic systems and classifications, and at best try to reduce existing social relationships to such an immanent structure [BOURDIEU 1979: 77–79; TAUSSIG 1980: 9]. The theoretical difficulty shared by most symbolic analyses is that they tend to dismiss the instrumentality of those symbolic systems, and their effects for the reproduction of dominant ideological order in a society.⁵⁾ This is also the case with Leach's notion of a 'grammar of ritual action', which has no room for the creation of oppositional consciousness. Thus, they fail to detect the ground from which new symbols and their productive activity could possibly emerge in opposition to dominant systems.

3) This theoretical weakness is amplified in Leach [1976]; for similar arguments, see Asad [1979: 613–616].

4) An example of this approach is the relative deprivation theory as applied to social movements. See, for example, Aberle [1962: 209–214], Worsley [1970: 330–331], Allan [1974: 296–311], and Wallis [1975: 360–363].

5) 'It is as structured and structuring instruments of communication and knowledge that "symbolic systems" fulfil their political function as instruments of domination (or, more precisely, of legitimation of domination)' [BOURDIEU 1979: 80].

What is left unsolved in anthropological discourse concerning the analysis of consciousness and ideology is the question of where oppositional consciousness emerges, and how its expression is linked to social relations, forming oppositional ideologies which can be mobilized in social protests. We shall start with the first of these questions, on the determination of oppositional consciousness, and with the epistemological proposition that 'active' consciousness should be understood in the form of ideological practice. The second question will be discussed in the following section in relation to the concept of hegemony.

Bloch [1977] has suggested a possible solution to the epistemological problem of consciousness.⁶⁾ One of Bloch's crucial arguments sets out to repudiate conventional Marxian usage of the 'superstructure/base (infrastructure)' metaphor, wherein the superstructure is determined by the material base, or the latter is autonomously constructed in terms of the economic rationale. The difficulties in the dual level analysis, shared by structural Marxian formulations and by conventional anthropological frameworks, are overcome through the proposition of different cognitive systems, which allow for two kinds of communication at different moments in a social reality. Bloch maintains that the anthropological concept of social structure, as formulated by Radcliffe-Brown, referring to specific and culturally varied systems of meanings and rules, is essentially derived from a cognitive system based on formalized ritual communication for certain moments in a social reality. To construct a social theory from a set of culturally specific systems of meaning and classification, as anthropological tradition has often done and in an exaggerated way, is misleading because it consequently eliminates many more universal concepts found in daily life, such as labour processes and social relations of production. It also eliminates notions of durational time, as Geertz [1973] did in his theory of static and cyclical time for the Balinese. And yet a non-ritual and more nature-constrained cognitive system stemming from the other source of consciousness in normal communication is the dominant factor in practical activities in any society. Bloch's argument indicates that the material base, largely constrained by nature in many pre-capitalist societies, has its own cognitive system of consciousness, which could give rise to criticism and disorganization of the reified system, or 'social structures', built up through ritual communication. The dialectical tension between the two cognitive systems is expressed by Bloch as follows:

People may be extensively mystified by the static and organic imaginary models of their society which gain a shadow phenomenological reality in ritual communication; but they also have available to them another source of concepts, the use of which can lead to the realisation of exploitation and its challenge [BLOCH 1977: 287].

Bloch certainly succeeds in suggesting the different origins of consciousness and the possibility of creating new concepts among actors. However, his stress on the role of the nature-constrained cognitive system tends to overlook the possibility of active consciousness arising from contradictions within the context of ritual com-

6) See also Bloch [1974, 1975, 1984].

munication. In many cases of peasant rebellions in South East Asia and elsewhere, millenarian surges and their eschatological ideas are generated precisely on the terrain of symbolic struggle in ritual communication. Millenarianism and other magical ideas represent, in many cases, the most radical expression of counter-consciousness against the symbolic system moulded in a ruling ideology [WORSLEY 1970: 234; BOURDIEU 1979: 79–80], and are not simply attributable to an economic and nature-constrained discourse. Thus, what remains ambiguous in Bloch's formulation of the 'dichotomous origins of consciousness' is the emergence of critical and oppositional consciousness within the apparently unchallengeable superstructure, and its relationship with ordinary and non-ritual communication.

The problem may be elucidated through empirical cases of peasant rebellions. Peasant social protests in South East Asia under colonial rule are generally characterized by two phases of ideological development; the first phase, ameliorative demands for the alleviation of specific grievances, is transformed, whether spontaneously or under external leadership, into the second phase, a holistic and revolutionary struggle against colonial rule or the domestic ruling classes. The aim of this is to organize a world where all burdens are to be abolished. This is the case in the Saya San rebellion of lower Burma in 1930, the Nghe An Soviet movement in Vietnam in 1929, and the Sakdal revolt of central Luzon in 1935 [see, for example, Benda 1965: 420–434]. It is also the case in the peasant radicalism in colonial Java in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [SARTONO 1972: 71–125; 1973]; and in a series of peasant revolts in Siam at the turn of the century, which we shall examine later.

The ameliorative struggle is not necessarily in advance of the holistic upheaval; they may, in many cases, be fused together in particular political processes. However, what should be noted here is the fact that in this century, peasant actors are faced with organizing their ideological struggle on both ameliorative and holistic levels. The peasants' emerging consciousness leads to protest against, say, a heavy tax burden, but often leaps rapidly to the idea of total liberation of the human race. Their political consciousness oscillates, as Hobsbawm puts it, between two extremes, 'the microcosm and the macrocosm', 'the parish pump and the universe' [HOBSBAWM 1973: 8]. This very aspect of peasant radicalism indicates the different sources of peasant consciousness: namely nature-constrained, ordinary communication, and ritual communication. In actual processes of peasant social protests, however, consciousness derived from the different sources of communication becomes integrated to form an ideology as a concrete entity of social consciousness. What we always encounter at critical phases of peasant rebellions is a strenuous and painstaking process in which the peasants try to articulate their economic struggle with the language of symbolic struggle stemming from a rejection of ruling ideology in ritual communication.

PEASANT IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE AND HEGEMONY

The question of the significance of this articulation of peasants' experiences at

times of crisis still remains open in most anthropological literature, with some notable exceptions such as Bourdieu [1977], Taussig [1980] and Brow [1981: 703–718]. To attain an adequate theoretical solution to the problem, we may need to return to Marx's concept of 'practice', which is the mediator between an external, objective reality and consciousness. For Marx, the concept of practice signifies not only man's intentional activity, but it is also intended to include all aspects of active expression in his life, which should finally be expressed as revolutionary practice [MARX 1968]. This theoretical emphasis on 'practice' to link consciousness with reality is sustained throughout the Marxian philosophical tradition, notably by Lukács [1971: 200–203, 262–263].

In Lukács, however, the concrete forms of practice in historical processes tend to be minimized by an overemphasis on the role of an ascribed class consciousness which is to be achieved by the proletariat. Within the notion of 'false consciousness', the empirical consciousness and concrete practices of the proletariat are always limited, because of the falsity of the conception of the world which is imposed on them by the reification of commodities in capitalist societies. Lukács is thus unable to account for the sociological aspects of a consciousness which is expressed and transmitted through various forms of proletarian practices. This is often not systematic but more creative. Lukács's theory of class consciousness is also seriously limited if we are dealing with intermediate classes, including the peasantry. His frame of reference is primarily concerned with the two polarized, and pure forms of class consciousness in capitalist society; hegemonic bourgeois consciousness and ascribed proletarian consciousness [LUKÁCS 1971: 59–61]. The class consciousness of the peasants is seen by Lukács as an ambiguous and changeable one often borrowed from other classes, and therefore it is totally eliminated from his analytical framework leaving no room for the possibility of a class alliance, or the idea that peasants could unite with the proletariat [MCDONOUGH 1977: 40; RUDÉ 1980: 22].

Lukács's theory of practice, with its concepts of polarized forms of class consciousness and 'false consciousness', necessarily fails to detect concrete forms of peasant social consciousness, which may ostensibly be both ambiguous and changeable. And yet it is precisely the complex, inconsistent, contradictory and non-systematic constitution of consciousness, observable in the course of peasant rebellions and in everyday life, which must be conceptualized to make possible an investigation of peasant consciousness. The concept of practice is therefore to be preferred on the grounds that ideology, as the most expressive product of peasant consciousness, is always socially active and materializes through individual and collective practices, often characterized by inconsistency, contradictions and ambivalence, concomitant with the social life of peasants. Our theoretical premisses must be able to tackle the empirical consciousness and concrete practices of peasants which Lukács dismissed theoretically.

In contrast to Lukács, Gramsci's insight into the concept of ideology goes far beyond the conventional Western Marxian tradition, in which Marx's ideological terrain of superstructure has often been treated as epiphenomenal or false. In order

to restore a fuller concept of ideology, Gramsci stressed the practical and concrete reality of ideologies which ‘“organize” human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.’ [GRAMSCI 1971: 377]. For Gramsci, ideology always contributes to form subjects, who are not originally present in a ‘society’, or ‘historical bloc’, but are created as the effect of ideological relations in the society in which people are involved [MOUFFE 1979: 186]. Thus subjectivity can be achieved only through ideological practices operating within the matrix of ideological relations in a society.

Gramsci, following Marx, also laid emphasis on the effectiveness of ‘popular beliefs’ which have been formulated among the people in the ideological field. This seems to be particularly relevant to the anthropological argument about the relationship between ideologies and material forces.

It is worth recalling the frequent affirmation made by Marx on the ‘solidity of popular beliefs’ as a necessary element of a specific situation. What he says more or less is ‘when this way of conceiving things has the force of popular beliefs’, etc. Another proposition of Marx is that a popular conviction often has the same energy as a material force or something of the kind, which is extremely significant [GRAMSCI 1971: 377].

Yet Gramsci’s analytical line is not restricted to recognizing ‘popular beliefs’ and the popular expression of ‘common sense’ among workers and peasants, but proceeds to analyse, and overcome, the underlying contradiction and spontaneity of their consciousness.⁷⁾ Mass peasant antagonism against officialdom (‘the only form in which the State is perceived’) in southern Italy and Sicily, of which Gramsci had firsthand experience, is seen as ‘generic hatred’, ‘not to be taken as evidence of class consciousness—merely as the first glimmer of such consciousness, in other words, merely as the basic negative, polemical attitude’ [GRAMSCI 1971].

The problem facing Gramsci in political terms is how to transform, through the intermediary of ideological practice, such a concrete but contradictory and spontaneous consciousness into class consciousness embedded in revolutionary subjectivity. For Gramsci, one of the solutions to this problem is to link the different interests and beliefs of the peasantry and other social groups by creating not only economic and political unity but, more significantly, intellectual and moral unity under a fundamental class (the proletariat or the bourgeoisie in his context). The parochial and spontaneous consciousness, which varies from group to group, can attain a higher level of synthesis only through associating political domination and leadership with cultural and moral leadership which draw on both popular beliefs and consciousness. This articulation of the two aspects of political momentum and leadership is called, in Gramsci’s central concept, ‘hegemony’; we shall return to this later in relation to its application to peasant ideological practice.

We have seen how Marx’s initial proposal, linking consciousness and reality through the intermediary of ‘practice’, has been developed, particularly by Gramsci, who made operational the concept of ideology, and in so doing, suggested a practical

7) For a dialectical treatment of the notion of ‘the popular’, see Hall [1981: 227–240].

way in which the popular beliefs and consciousness of various social groups, such as the peasantry, could perform their historical roles under a newly created hegemony, which is a complex unity, in cultural and moral, as well as political and economic terms. However, even though Gramsci was able to develop this general perspective, the internal mechanisms by which a peasantry comes to form its own consciousness still remain to be discovered. Our problem then, once again, is how the ideological practice of a peasantry is linked to the process of the formation of its own consciousness, which is then capable of challenging political, cultural, and ideological manipulation by the ruling classes.

One of the long sustained assumptions about peasants' political attitudes, particularly within orthodox Marxian tradition, is that derived from Marx's famous statements on the nineteenth-century French peasantry, notably in the frequently quoted passages about the inability of smallholding peasants to be of any political significance, as they had no effective class consciousness even though they formed a class in terms of economic and cultural conditions [MARX 1968: 170-171]. A number of scholars, including Lukács, have repeated Marx's descriptive statements in order to emphasize the ineffectiveness of peasant class consciousness compared with proletarian class consciousness. We should, however, bear in mind that Marx's passages refer to a specific conjuncture of the French peasantry in the nineteenth century, and therefore should not be taken as an analytical framework for other societies without critical examination. Conversely, as pointed out by many later scholars including Hobsbawm [1971: 9-10; 1973: 5-7], Mészáros [1971: 85-87], Shanin [1971: 255-262], Alavi [1973: 29], Mintz [1974: 291-325], and Brow [1981: 704-705], Marx's specific and conjectural view of the French peasantry should be examined in the light of his concept of the movement from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself. We are concerned here with the transformation from a class with a vague common consciousness (based on similar means of production, namely peasant technology and socio-economic conditions), to a class with a clearly defined class consciousness, which can thereby unite the various groups of the peasantry in terms of cultural and moral leadership as well as in political action.

A possible approach to the problem of this transformation is to detect, historically, the changing process of peasant ideological practices—for example, attitudes towards landlords and officials, traditional values embodied in rituals, and various forms of resistance—in relation to existing forms of social organization. The transformation can be understood, in historical and sociological terms, as follows:

The historical processes by which a class-in-itself is transformed into a class-for-itself are complex and are mediated by a variety of factors, including influences of pre-existing forms of social organization and institutions which embody primordial loyalties, such as those of kinship or ethnic identity etc. etc.; this is especially true in peasant societies...Questions therefore arise about the conditions in which the peasant is obliged to submit, as well as those about conditions in which he has the ability to rebel [ALAVI 1973: 29].

The analysis of forms of social organizations in themselves is not of primary concern

here; they are of relevance only if we consider the conditions and processes in which incompatible values and goals become manifest in struggles between competing social groups or classes, which may result in the structural change of a society. The class consciousness of a peasantry can materialize out of the mobilization of a wide range of ideological practices which deepen the incompatibilities within existing social relations. In other words, class consciousness emerges, not as a simple reflection of social relations and alignments of a society, but as the result of ideological practice which always appears as a form of struggle [BROW 1981: 714].

A further dimension of class consciousness is explored by Thompson, who lays stress on 'experience' and 'culture' in the wide sense of the content of social relations. A crucial passage, which seems to have a significant theoretical relevance to the peasantries of South East Asia, runs as follows:

The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not. We can see a *logic* in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predicate any *law*. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way [THOMPSON 1969: 10, emphases in original].

Thompson's concept of 'experience' is quite unique in British 'culturalism', and denotes the immediate experience of individuals and groups imposed on them inevitably and uncontrollably by disciplined external forces such as those in the capitalist mode of production.⁸⁾ The class consciousness of peasants, or any social group, is, however, relatively free from experience moulded in the social relations of production. The class consciousness and even the class itself are, to a great extent, a cultural product, not directly derived from the experience. Within Thompson's framework, therefore, a crude theory of reflection is rejected, and, in turn, greater emphasis is laid on the cultural content of social relations, rather than on the social relations themselves. Therefore, for Thompson, class consciousness is to be achieved within the cultural context of social life, in struggling over traditions, value systems and ideas etc.⁹⁾ Here the social historian's view of class consciousness immediately relates to Gramsci's analytical framework of cultural and moral unity and leadership which we discussed earlier.

From the preceding discussion it becomes clear that the class consciousness of peasants can be formed historically only through their ideological practices which are directed, consciously or unconsciously, towards a conflict of interests and values

8) The concept of 'experience' is argued even more explicitly in his criticism of Althusser's epistemology [THOMPSON 1978: 199–201]. See also Johnson [1979: 222–224] and Anderson [1980: 25–28].

9) Thompson also stresses the historicity of class consciousness; it can be comprehended only in historical time [THOMPSON: 1969: 11, 939].

between classes based on existing primordial loyalties in a society. This historical and sociological process is structurally linked to ideological practices carried out within the cultural context, where battles are taking place over ritual symbols, value systems and ideas. These two aspects of class consciousness then coincide with Gramsci's political moments in the formation of hegemony.

In dealing with ideological practice within peasant rebellions and in everyday struggles, the concept of hegemony appears to be effective in both sectors of society: the hegemonic unity of political and economic domination, and cultural and moral leadership by the ruling classes, is challenged in turn by an oppositional one. Within an agrarian society, the oppressed groups, agricultural labourers (rural proletarians) and smallholders can develop their own counter-hegemony through creative mobilization of new symbols, and a critical reinterpretation of cultural and moral standards which have hitherto been ordered by the ruling classes. This is, of course, necessarily accompanied by a wide range of political and economic activities resisting the ruling classes who had used coercion and violence to maintain their dominating position. Manipulation of consent and the exercise of coercion are crucial weapons on any ideological battle field. It can be said that the formative process of peasant class consciousness is indeed the process of hegemony itself.

IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE WITHIN PEASANT REBELLIONS IN SIAM

The peasant rebellions which broke out in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Thailand invariably grew out of a long period of economic struggle prior to any decisive uprising, the ultimate form of peasant politics.¹⁰ Peripheral capitalism, a particular form of the capitalist mode of production, became established after the disorganization of the peasant subsistence economy by a centralized administration, then steadily proceeded to affect every aspect of social life in the countryside, including the peripheries such as the northern and northeastern regions.

At this time, the peasant technology inherent in the production process of a basically rice growing, subsistence economy—for example: risk divergence in farming techniques, risk aversion in the sharecropping system, food-gathering activities in time of famine etc.—was fully mobilized to combat deteriorating conditions. De-

10) Major peasant rebellions during this period include the Chiang Mai rebellion (1889–90) and the Phrae rebellion (1902) in the North; and the 'Holy Men' (*phumibun*) rebellion (1901–2) in the North East. Detailed historical accounts and analyses of the latter two are given in Damrong [1962: 283–302], Brailey [1968], Toem [1970: Vol. 2, 559–587], Bantorn [1971: 84–97], Phaithun [1974: 147–200], Tej [1977: 151–154; 1981: 15–56], Ramsay [1979: 283–297]. The 'Holy Men' rebellion in Nong Makkaeo, Loei province of the North East (1923) is discussed in Chatthip and Pranut [1980] and Chatthip *et al.* [1980: 249–275]. For references on the Chiang Mai rebellion see note 20. I have had no access to one recent work: Anne Koch, 'Collective Protest Movements in Siam between 1850–1930: The Significance of Ideology', MA Thesis, The Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. Peasant rebellions and their millenarian background in the Ayutthaya period are discussed in Warunee and Anchalee [1976: 52–70] and Charnvit [1979: 53–86].

fensive practices, such as the flight of peasants to less oppressive areas in order to free themselves from various kinds of tax burden, were the first glimmer of social protest against the ruling classes.¹¹⁾ Defensive practices, and various forms of petition for a reduction of the tax burden, sometimes escalated rapidly into armed uprisings which aimed to overthrow the agents of the central government and its power structure. In many cases, the final leap towards a bloody showdown was, in political and economic terms, often triggered by an excessive tax burden, and particularly cruel aggression of tax-farmers against peasants who could not afford to pay.

Throughout these economic processes, from the protective mechanisms underlying subsistence economy to the final military upheaval, we can trace the legitimizing notions of peasants in their ideological practices. Scott's concept of 'moral economy' is certainly justifiable for economic and political discourse among subsistence peasantries, but what we wish to stress here is the significance of the way in which the actors in rebellions pursue and develop legitimizing notions in cultural and moral discourse.

The first aspect of peasant legitimizing notions is linked to their religious background. Most peasant rebellions which broke out at the turn of the century had their main religious basis in the millenarian elements underlying Buddhism, rather than in the orthodoxy of Theravada Buddhism, the hegemonic state religion established through the centralizing reformation of the *sangha* (Buddhist church) in the same period.¹²⁾ Hegemonic Buddhism has been able to manipulate popular consent to the karmic order of the world through a highly organized system at all social levels, and it has succeeded in fostering the popular belief that salvation comes in the other world in accordance with the individual accumulation of merit (*bun*) in this world. The manipulation of consent is continually activated by ritual communication between monks and laymen centring on the Buddhist temple (*wat*), the ideological power station.

Contrary to this cultural and moral control by the hegemonic apparatus of Buddhism, oppositional ideological practice is, in many cases of peasant revolt, founded on heterodox Buddhist tradition, the millenarian expectation of a Buddhist Messiah, or Phra Si Ariya Maitreya (the future Buddha). In its eschatological view, Buddhist millenarianism envisages an immediate salvation by the Messiah, and the coming of a new era to be established in this world, through collective sentiment and behaviour. In some cases, where the millenarian tradition based on the Buddhist

11) Similar processes of peasant social protest in other South East Asian countries during the pre-colonial and colonial periods are minutely illustrated in Scott [1977: 35-90] and Adas [1981: 217-247].

12) For detailed discussion of the millenarian elements in Thai Theravada Buddhism, see Ishii [1975a: 121-126] and Keyes [1977: 285-290]. The political integration of the Buddhist *sangha* at the turn of the century is discussed in Ishii [1968: 864-871; 1975b: 145-167], Keyes [1971: 551-567], and Somboon [1977: 29-45]. The recent politicization of hegemonic Buddhism and its ideological implications are exemplified in Turton [1976: 281, 291; 1978: 127-128].

Messiah is not locally apparent, indigenous supernaturalism (*saiyasat*) and magic (*akhom*), which produce miraculous acts and secret martial knowledge and skills, have performed a similar role. The critical expression of peasant consciousness when confronted with a political and economic crisis has often developed through such ideological channels. As Keyes has perceptively suggested, Buddhist millenarian movements and their associated ritual radicalism are derived directly from the critical situation of political power [KEYES 1977: 284–285]. The concept of immediate and total liberation in a new era, and the miracles and secret lore which are seen as instruments to achieve it, are all forged in the cultural and moral struggle of oppressed peasants.

The second aspect of peasant legitimizing notions is concerned with the revival of values attached to the disappearing 'patron-client' relationship. The patron-client tie, which prevailed before the turn of the century, is largely characterized by the exploitative exchange of labour, goods, protection and generosity etc. between individuals of different status. These exchange relations constituted a crucial element in the social organization of *sakdina* society, which is often regarded as feudal.¹³⁾ At a local level, particularly in such peripheral regions as the North and North East, petty officials such as the village headmen, who were subordinates of higher noble officials or royalty, were able to extract labour and deliveries of products from their client peasants through the patron-client tie. The ideological legitimation of the patron-client tie, really based on subordination to a superior through an unequal exchange, is that reciprocity is achieved in the protection and generosity given to the inferior clients. With the relationship of domination masked by the co-operative spirit and egalitarianism prevalent between peasants in village communities, the patron-client tie has long been sustained in many aspects of peasant life, and provided a certain protective function against outside forces.

However, the establishment of a centralized government policy, particularly where it was the necessary response to emerging peripheral capitalism as in the setting up of a provincial administration, brought about changes in the existing patron-client relationship and its values. The dismantling of the existing local power structure by the central government led to the reduction of revenue and status among the various ranks of officials who had previously held power. Many cases of peasant revolt in this period involve petty local officials, who suffered from just such a hardship, and who allied themselves with the peasants who were suffering under new types of political and economic coercion exercised by the central government. In the course of the rebellions, the actors, including discontented petty officials, tended to expect the restoration of the disappearing patron-client tie, which was seen as

13) The basic notion of patron-client relationships after erosion of reciprocity is lucidly discussed in Wolf [1968: 16] and Alavi [1973: 54]. Also relevant in the South East Asian context are Scott [1972: 91–113], Scott and Kerkvliet [1973: 241–268] and Tanabe [1981: 403–469]. For historical accounts of the relationship under the *sakdina* system before the late nineteenth century, see Akin [1969]. To avoid unnecessary theoretical complexity, we have ignored the overall question and debate over modes of production.

better than the direct taxation and violent exploitation which had been introduced. This retrospective aspect of peasant ideological practice is often seen in the fact that most revolts saw their enemy as the central government and its agents, and not the local former ruling classes.

The retrospective aspect implicit in most rebellions in Siam has tended to cause a theoretical confusion in recent studies such as those by Tej [1977: 151-157] and Ramsay [1979: 289-290, 293]. Ramsay's interpretation is that the primary goal of what he calls 'reactionary' peasant revolts in northern Siam was to reverse modernization and to restore the pre-existing value system and the lost patron-client relationship. This view, which rather narrowly focuses on the problem of political process only within the scope of modernization, fails to detect the underlying ideological intentions of the actors. It should be particularly stressed that, contrary to such a view, the retrospective aspect of peasant practice is not simply 'reactionary' but is really a militant reinterpretation of currently existing ideology available to the peasant masses. We should here bear in mind that, given little external influence toward revolutionary thought, the peasants were pursuing old values which were outwardly 'reactionary' but were to be converted into a tactical weapon by, and in the course of, the protest movements themselves. It was, at least to some extent, tactically effective in fighting back against the hegemonic ideology of modernization under encroaching peripheral capitalism. The retrospective aspect of ideological practice should be understood in the dialectical context of the actors striving to recover and reformulate the interpretations of their living experiences [RIVERA 1982: 5].

The third aspect of cultural discourse is the problem of ethnic consciousness involved in peasant rebellions. It is a profoundly important element in provinces far from the centre. These peripheral provinces, such as Chiang Mai and Phrae in the North, and Ubon, Surin, Mahasarakham, and Roi Et etc. in the North East, were inhabited by various Tai ethnic groups such as Shan, Khoen and Lao (Thai-Lao). These groups had different cultures from the Siamese living in the political and economic centre of the Chao Phraya river basin. Most ethnic groups involved in the rebellions had undergone experiences of forced migration, as war captives, from their homelands such as Sipsong Panna (Yunnan) and the Shan States (Burma) to the North, and the trans-Mekong region in Laos to the North East. The ancestors of these groups were subsequently forced to settle in the remote provinces as a productive labour force for the local ruling classes.

The existence of the ethnic minorities in the periphery, and their collective memory of oppression, contributed to a form of ethnic consciousness containing a collective identity and historical continuity which could be mobilized in protesting against suppression. In some recorded cases of peasant revolt, the popular expression of ethnic consciousness was neither explicit nor straightforward. In the North East, some Lao peasants share the historical memory of the humiliating defeat of the Lao Prince Cao Anu by the Siamese king during the Vientiane revolt in 1828. These peasants frequently expressed their antagonism to Siamese rule through the idea, expressed in verse, of the revival of Vientiane [CHATTHIP and PRANUT 1980: 2-3], and

sometimes the rebels declared that their explicit aim was to establish an ideal kingdom independent from Siamese and French colonial power [PHAITHUN 1974: 172-173]. The Khoen rebels in the North, whose homeland was in the Shan States (Burma), were continually reminded, in the songs and stories of their elders, of their ethnic origin and of the great hardships of their forced migration in the early nineteenth century. The

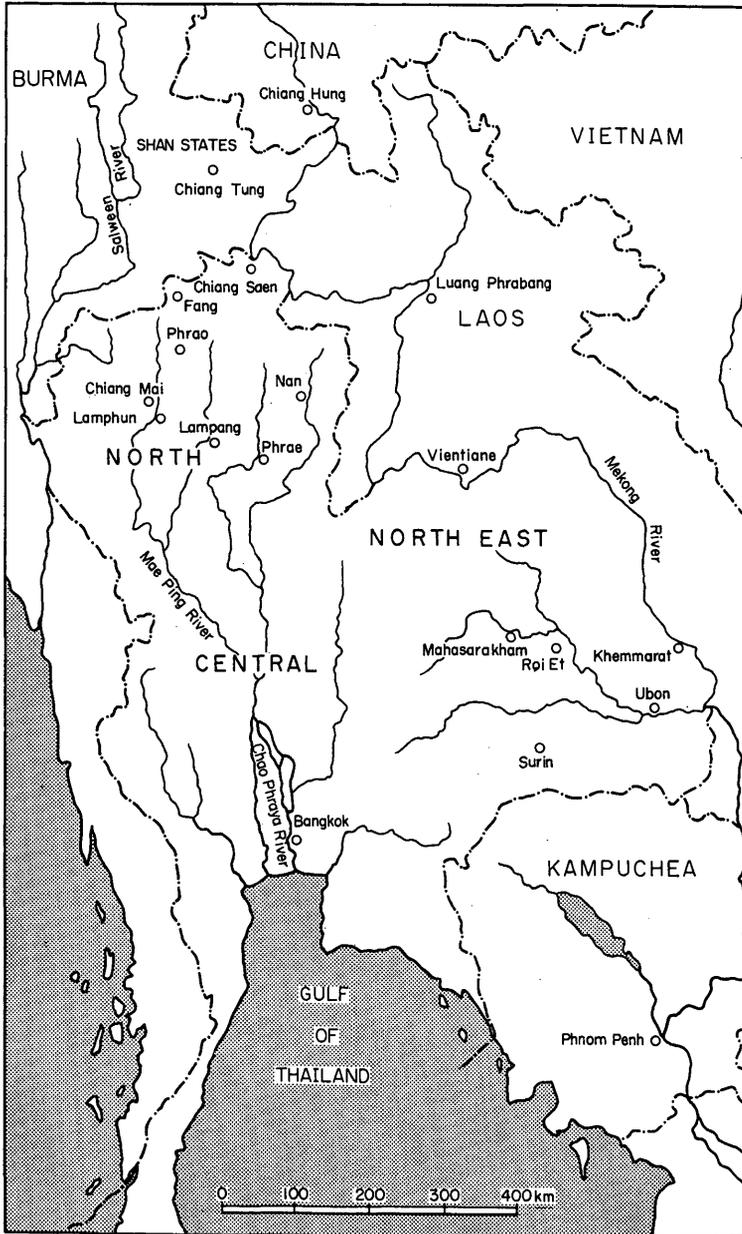


Figure 1. General Map of Thailand

oral tradition of folktales and verses adopted by rebellious peasants can be seen as an ideological means both to create and express ethnic consciousness, often implying a moral judgement on oppressive forces. For the peasants to legitimize their present position, the crucial task is not to give a historiographical account of the past, but to make a critical reinterpretation of the past in terms of their own moral and cultural references, so as to gain an ideological advantage over the ruling sectors.¹⁴⁾ Expressing their ethnic consciousness in such a way represents a most creative ideological practice in the long path of symbolic struggle towards their own hegemony.

In the preceding sections, we have attempted to reveal the emergence of critical and oppositional consciousness in peasantries with special reference to epistemological theories recently developed within modern social anthropology. Our discussions then proceeded to explore those aspects of peasants' ideological practice through which they are able to express their own consciousness in order to struggle with oppressive forces on the battlefields of politico-economic domination and of moral and cultural manipulation. The former problematics of the origins of cognition and consciousness are closely linked with the question of ideological practices at work in the course of peasant rebellions. We have suggested that Bloch's argument, which distinguishes two processes in the formation of consciousness and cognition stemming from two different sources of communication, is generally applicable to the development of class consciousness in peasantries and to peasant struggles towards a new hegemonic synthesis. However, Bloch's assumption that the concepts of criticism and challenge could not derive from the shadowy phenomenological reality of ritual communication is challenged by the historical experience of peasants on the battlefields of ritual communication and ideological practice.

We shall now proceed with an empirical investigation of ideological practices and legitimizing notions among Thai peasants in a rebellion which broke out in Chiang Mai in 1889.

THE CHIANG MAI REBELLION OF 1889-1890

The Setting of the Uprising

Chiang Mai province together with eight other provinces constitutes the present region of northern Thailand. This region corresponds approximately to the domain of the Lannathai kingdom which was established in the late thirteenth century and lasted—though under Burmese sovereignty from *ca.* 1556-1763—until the Siamese annexation which began to take effect in 1874. From the late eighteenth century, after freeing themselves from Burmese overrule, the ruling social classes formed five major tributary states in alliance with Bangkok under the sovereignty of the Chiang Mai court.¹⁵⁾ The ruling classes in these states were represented by the ruling prince

14) The dialectic of historical memory is most explicitly presented by Benjamin [1969: 253-264]. Recent anthropological exploration of this field can be found in Taussig [1980] and Rivera [1982].

15) These Lannathai tributary states were Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae and Nan.

(*cao müang*), a small number of high-ranking hereditary *cao* who constituted the ruling body of the state (*khao sanam luang*), and lesser *cao* and petty officials who were directly in charge of mobilizing and exploiting the free peasantry (*phrai*) and dependent peoples (*kha*). The ruling classes were known generically as *caonai*, and individual *caonai* had *phrai* and sometimes *kha* under their supervision through the patron-client tie.¹⁶⁾

The economic condition of the free peasantry in Chiang Mai, as in other Lannathai states until the turn of the century, is generally characterized by subsistence production chiefly dependent on rice growing. Even within the strong orientation towards a subsistence economy, there can be seen small-scale production of local products depending on the area; these include areca nut, betel pepper (*Piper betle*), tobacco, fermented tea leaves, liquor, ivory, beeswax and other forest products with economic and ritual values [TURTON 1976: 272]. Political and economic domination by the ruling classes were exercised on the peasantry in terms of the subsistence economy. Labour conscription (*ngan luang*), the most basic form of exploitation of labour-power, was levied annually on the peasantry by the *caonai* through the network of their patron-client ties. Those peasants who lived in marginal areas, or who had access to resources other than rice, were required to make tribute (*suai*) of such products as mentioned above in lieu of corvée obligation. Around 1900, these two major forms of exploitation and expropriation, which had been sustained for many centuries, were increasingly giving way to various taxes in cash including a poll tax. Accordingly, the advance of direct administration by the Siamese government accelerated the penetration of the money economy.

The overall structural changes in political economy and peasant life in the Lannathai states were accompanied by the rise of peripheral capitalism in Siam to the south, with its administrative core area in the Chao Phraya delta region. As in most South and South East Asian colonial countries, peripheral capitalism in Siam was established with structural linkages to metropolitan capitalism in Europe, which transformed the old production system into a rice export economy, and created a market for colonial imports [ALAVI 1982]. There was a striking concentration on rice monoculture for exports, and an increase in imports of industrial goods from the metropolis.¹⁷⁾ This economic process led to the destruction of the existing peasant subsistence economy in the countryside, which simultaneously required an effective political solution to reorganize social relations long sustained within the local power structure. For the Siamese government the establishment of a centralized provincial administration was a crucial task, necessary on the one hand to enlarge the influence

16) Detailed historical descriptions of the traditional Lannathai polity in relation to the class situation and Siamese annexation can be found in Hallett [1890: 131–132], LeMay [1926], Ramsay [1971], Calavan [1974, 1980: 73–89] and Tej [1977]. Detailed accounts in Thai, based on archival sources and fieldwork, are given in Arunrat [1976] and Chusit [1980].

17) The basic arguments relating to economic processes under peripheral capitalism are given in Chatthip and Suthy [1978: 1–52]; see also Elliot [1978].

of peripheral capitalism, and on the other hand to cope with the increasingly strained relations with colonial powers, particularly over the border regions. The Lannathai states were one such critical region, where the government launched an aggressive programme of change from the 1870s.

The first remarkable movement by the government towards the Lannathai states commenced with the appointment of a Siamese commissioner (*khaluang*), supported by the army, at the Chiang Mai court in 1874. This was followed during the subsequent two decades by the establishment of a permanent commissioner (*khaluang pracam huamüang*), and later a high commissioner (*khaluang yai*), at Chiang Mai to strengthen the government's control in political, financial and judicial administration throughout the Lannathai states, by undermining the traditional polity of the northern *caonai*. The process of collapsing the local power structure culminated in the abolition of the *corvée* system and the substitution of a poll tax at 4 baht per year in 1904. The process was virtually completed by about 1915 [TEJ 1977: 160].

The system of provincial administration thus imposed on the region was indeed skilfully designed, allowing the princes and high-ranking *caonai* to remain as the native but nominal symbol among the peasantry for a certain period; the princes' power and patronage, however, became greatly restricted.¹⁸⁾ Accordingly, lesser *cao* and petty officials gradually lost their position and their patron-client ties with high-ranking *caonai*. In addition to this reduction in political status, they increasingly suffered from reduction in income. The introduction of various taxes in cash, collected mainly by Chinese tax-collectors, eliminated petty officials from the collection of traditional taxes, including tributes, from which they had been able to take a share [RAMSAY 1979: 288-289]. The abolition of *corvée* conscription, which had also provided a share of the exploited labour to the lesser *caonai* through the patron-client networks, marked the final phase in the disorganization of Lannathai political institutions. In this way, through the fusion of political and economic power, the legacy of pre-capitalist social relations was ultimately destroyed in the course of Siamese aggression over several decades.

Political aggression against the Lannathai states was accompanied by various financial reforms appropriate to the ascendance of peripheral capitalism. The government's attempt at economic exploitation was initially directed, during the 1870s, to the forest concessions which had already been monopolized by the princes who had contracted with the British colonial power in Burma. The government began to take a considerable share of the timber tax [TEJ 1977: 70]. This marked the beginning of significant extraction, by both the traditional ruling classes and the government, of natural resources authentically belonging to peasants and their communities. However, the contest for the forest concessions seems to have had rather little impact, at least during these periods, on the majority of peasant producers concentrated in the rice-growing valleys.

18) A number of *cao* were eliminated from the court by the establishment of a new system of government called *khao sanam luang lae hok tamnaeng* (the royal government and the six ministers) in 1884 [TEJ 1977: 65; RAMSAY 1979: 288].

On the other hand, the exploitation of the peasantry was greatly increased during the 1870s and 1880s by the introduction of various commodity taxes which had to be paid in cash, including taxes on liquor brewing, slaughtering of pigs, sticklac, hides, ivory, tobacco, siri leaf, areca palm, betel pepper, coconut palm, and other cash crops [BRAILEY 1968: 214–217; TEJ 1977: 65–66; RAMSAY 1979: 288]. The commodity taxes levied on cash crops and other products, which comprised nearly half of the total revenue in most Lannathai states,¹⁹⁾ were formerly levied only on products for sale, and were paid to tax-collectors when they were to be sold. From the 1880s, however, these commodity taxes came to be imposed on every tree or crop planted, regardless of whether it was to be sold or consumed in the household. Moreover, the tax-farming system (*phasi pramun*), in which the government appointed as tax-farmers (*cao phasi*) those who submitted the largest bid for a particular tax (almost invariably Chinese), was applied increasingly to the commodity taxes in order to achieve efficiency in tax collection [M 58/98]. Thus, the newly introduced taxation hit the peasantry hard, particularly those who were producing the so-called cash crops for their own consumption, or for sporadic and small-scale sale within the subsistence economy. It should be noted here that the shift to cash payment for most commodity taxes imposed an almost intolerable burden on the subsistence peasantry, where the money economy had hitherto been extremely limited. The method of cash payment, accompanied by violent coercion by Chinese tax-farmers, became a new form of economic coercion exercised by the ruling classes under the Siamese provincial administration.

Under the political and economic circumstances we have briefly sketched above, a peasant rebellion broke out in the villages of Sansai district, Chiang Mai province, in September 1889.²⁰⁾ It came to an end abruptly with its cruel suppression by the government, although the aftermath lasted into the following year. The villages primarily involved in the revolt were Còm and Kòk, approximately 12–25 km from Chiang Mai city to the northeast. These two villages contained a considerable number of Khoen people who were descendants of war captives from the Chiang Tung (Kengtung) region in the British Shan States, Burma. Villages in the area were under the supervision of *khwaen* or village headmen, who were resident petty officials with official titles such as *phaya*, *thao*, *saen*, and were responsible for every aspect of village administration including tax collection for the senior *caonai* resident in Chiang Mai city.

The peasants in these villages grew rice primarily for their own consumption under relatively favourable physical conditions, with a fairly stable water supply from the artificial irrigation systems maintained and repaired annually by their own labour. However, they had to collect yams (*klipi*), and other root crops and edible plants in

19) The importance of commodity taxes in the revenue of the Lannathai states is shown in [M 58/88].

20) Detailed studies on the Chiang Mai rebellion, or the Phaya Phap rebellion, include Brailey [1968: 339–358], Chusit [1979: 24–34], Ramsay [1979: 283–297], Wanlapha [1980: 59–71], and Sratsawadi [1982]. A brief description is also contained in Tej [1977: 66].

the forests nearby, as the threat of severe famine occurred almost every five years.²¹⁾ In addition to rice-growing, the small-scale production of areca palm, betel pepper and coconut palm had long been prevalent among peasant households in the Sansai area. They were produced basically for domestic consumption, but in particular the areca nut products—*mak hpi* (strings of dried areca nut cut with shell attached) and *mak spi* (sliced and dried areca nut)—were sold, though on quite a small scale and sporadically, to traders from Chiang Mai city and in local marketplaces. As for the land tenure situation within these villages, the large-scale landlord-tenant relationship seems to have been almost absent, and social stratification between peasant households in terms of land tenure was not marked, as a considerable amount of land to be claimed for cultivation still existed, at least around the turn of the century. In short, the economic conditions in these villages around the time of the peasant uprising, as in most parts of the Chiang Mai basin, were still basically oriented towards subsistence, and the penetration of a money economy under peripheral capitalism was still in its early stage.

The Events of the Uprising

Around August 1889, quite a wide range of protest movements occurred among the peasants in most parts of the Chiang Mai basin, against the collection of the newly introduced commodity taxes on areca palm, coconut palm and betel pepper. Nqi Wong, a Chinese tax-farmer, contracted with the Chiang Mai court, under the supervision of the Siamese commissioner, to collect these taxes at 41,000 rupees,²²⁾ and sent his followers to every village in Chiang Mai to collect the taxes. The new form of taxation imposed on peasant producers required them to pay from about 10 to as much as 200 rupees per household, and caused serious hardships. The tax-collectors oppressively ordered the petty officials, such as village headmen, to handcuff and fetter those who could not afford to pay the taxes in cash. Several village headmen were then sent to make a protest to an official at the Chiang Mai court, against unfair and forcible actions of the tax-collectors [M 58/1].

Meanwhile, on 3 September, five peasants, including one old woman, were arrested, handcuffed and fettered by a group of armed tax-collectors in front of the house of Phaya Cincai, headman of Cqm. It should be noted that these peasants were arrested despite the fact that they had made a request for permission to make payment in areca nut instead of cash [FO 69/133; M 58/98]. In some villages the request to pay in oxen and buffalo in lieu of cash was also rejected by the tax-collectors.²³⁾ The arrested peasants were ordered to be exposed to the sun and rain for several days.

On 4 September, immediately after the first arrest, five petty officials in the area

21) Interview with Phra Khammun at Wat San Pasak, Tambon Nngng Cqm, Sansai district, Chiang Mai province, 9 January 1982.

22) One rupee was approximately equivalent to 0.8 baht.

23) Interview with Mr. Luang Hong, Tambon Sansai Luang, Sansai district, Chiang Mai province, 10 January 1982.

launched a protest to the Prince of Chiang Mai against the tax-collectors' violent treatment. Subsequently on 5 September, petty officials and the kinsmen of those arrested brought a suit to the Ministry of the Treasury at the Chiang Mai court against Nqi Wong and his followers. On 6 September, an official of the Ministry issued a summons against the tax-farmer to present his followers before the judge, but the tax-farmer rejected the summons. The officials then submitted the case to Phraya Mahathep, the Siamese commissioner, for consideration on 7 September. Meanwhile, protest movements against the tax-collection grew rapidly stronger in Kqk village, Sansai district, and Mae Khü village, San Kamphaeng district. The peasants and petty officials in these two villages also took a similar protest to the Ministry, accusing the tax-farmer and his followers of having unfairly arrested the poor peasants [M 58/1; M 58/98]. According to interviews conducted by the author, similar disputes between tax-collectors and peasants were not confined to the areas mentioned above, which included a considerable Khoen population, but probably became endemic in areas of relatively advanced agricultural production, including such present districts as Hang Dong, Mae Rim, Dqi Saket and San Kamphaeng, along both sides of the Mae Ping river.²⁴⁾

While the petition was being made and other ameliorative actions taken, a popular attack on the oppressive forces was initiated by the peasants in Cqm and Kqk villages. Phaya Phap (often called by his Siamese title of Phraya Prapsongkham), who was a petty official resident in Kqk village, held a rally on 8 September of approximately 300 villagers, including some village headmen, to impeach the tax-collectors for their oppression. Phaya Phap then sent two of his followers, with about 50 men, to liberate those who had been arrested and held at Phaya Cincai's residence since 3 September [M 58/98]. On 10 September, Nqi Wong the tax-farmer, dispatched a report of the event to the Siamese commissioner, saying that Phaya Phap was inducing the peasants to make threats against the officially approved tax-collection. Upon receiving the report from the commissioner and high-ranking officials of Chiang Mai court, Prince Sonabandit, a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn, who had been sent to Chiang Mai to take control over all the Lannathai states, began to prepare his troops [M 58/98].

On 11 September, a week after the first arrest, Phaya Phap seems to have wondered whether or not he should send his own petition to the Prince of Chiang Mai, his most respected patron, but eventually he decided instead to resist the new taxation and oppressive forces to the utmost. He then took the oath of resistance with his kinsman Phaya Ratanakhuha,²⁵⁾ by the act of drinking sacred water, and issued a written appeal to a number of other village headmen. The village headmen, and peasants who assembled at the rally, all drank the water of allegiance, and two monks performed a ritual of exorcism, in which the magical water (*nam mon*) produced by the

24) Interviews with Phra Khammun and Mr. Sing Panthanon, Tambon Müang Len, Sansai district, Chiang Mai province, 9, 11 January 1982.

25) Phaya Ratanakhuha was a Khoen resident in the present Tambon Müang Len, Sansai district, Chiang Mai province.

monks was sprinkled on, and drunk by the congregation. After a feast which lasted several days, they elected four persons to be *cao*, or the leaders of the resistance group: Phaya Phap, Phaya Ratanakhuha, Phaya Chomphu and Phaya Cincai, according to a Siamese government record [M 58/98]. All were petty officials resident in the villages and all were Khoen in ethnic origin.

With respect to the ideological practices of Phaya Phap, who performed a crucial role in the revolt, we need here to mention his official career and his ritual radicalism. Phaya Phap (Phraya Prapsongkhrām) is a royally bestowed title in Lannathai given to petty officials acting as village headmen, combining *Phaya*, the title or rank proper, with an honorific name: *Phap* (*Prapsongkhrām*). His original given name was Techa, and he was often referred to as Nan Techa, the title of *Nan* being given to those who have previously been ordained as a Buddhist monk. Later, he came to be called officially Ai Nan Techa: the pejorative term of address *Ai* often being used for a criminal after the defeat of an uprising [M 58/103]. Phaya Phap, who was born in Kḥk, seems to have become a client of a high-ranking *cao* in the Chiang Mai court, and at one time had been appointed as a commander in wars against the Khoen²⁶⁾ and other peoples along the border between Chiang Mai and the British Shan States. The name *Prapsongkhrām* literally means: (one who) suppresses (the enemy in a) war, a vanquisher. At the same time, he was to a certain extent a well-to-do peasant producer, cultivating a paddy field of some ten *rai* (1.6 ha) with his family and some followers.²⁷⁾ With his steadfast loyalty to the Chiang Mai court, Phaya Phap seems to have remained always in an intermediary position between the ruling classes and the peasantry within the Lannathai traditional political organization.

Despite increasing political and economic domination by the Siamese government, Phaya Phap attempted to maintain the then disappearing patron-client tie by the act of rejecting taxation imposed by the Siamese government and by accumulating peasant followers. A few years before the uprising, he had received the title of *Phaya* from the Prince of Chiang Mai, thinking that he would have under his supervision 300 peasants totally exempt from any taxation, in return for volunteering them for military service in the future to the *caonai* at the Chiang Mai court [M 58/105]. We should note here that Phaya Phap was an intermediary between the ruling classes and the oppressed peasantry, at least in the sense of class experience. In addition, his experiences accumulated in military expeditions and other activities outside rural life could, in turn, provide the peasant masses with a wide range of ideas and a level of cognition which would rarely have been available to ordinary peasants.

Another aspect of Phaya Phap's ideological practice is concerned with his unusual capability in supernaturalism and military lore, particularly the ritual of bathing in sacred water (*ap namya*), which was believed to provide miraculous invulnerability against any enemy's attack. Preparing for the final uprising, he promoted this

26) The Khoen are a Tai ethnic group living in the Southern Shan States with its centre at Chiang Tung. See Dodd [1923: 200–217].

27) Interviews with Phra Khammun and Mr. Pan Kao, Tambon Nḥng Cḥm, Sansai district, Chiang Mai province, 9, 11 January 1982.

ritual practice among the rebellious peasants, particularly intensively after they had taken the mass oath of resistance. He produced the sacred water in a big earthen jar containing water and also iron, copper, chopped and dried sedges (*wan*) etc., by chanting spells over it at his house. The sacred water, in a jar with a rattan sling, was set on a wooden tower, which had a ladder made from seven swords, and was built under a bo tree (*ton pho*, *Ficus religiosa*) in the fields. At a signal from the gong at Wat Famui, the Buddhist temple of Kòk village which was located close to the ritual place, a great number of peasants participated in the ritual of the sacred water, each one climbing up the tower to bathe, and descending by the sword ladder to demonstrate their newly gained protection against weapons. Together with other military training related to supernatural lore, the ritual of bathing in sacred water was carried out enthusiastically under Phaya Phap's ritual supervision. This enthusiasm remained critically high among several hundred peasants during the few days immediately before the uprising, according to the author's interviews with peasants in present-day Nòng Còm village, Sansai district.²⁸⁾

While little information about the ritual of bathing in sacred water is given in the government's official records, they invariably stress Phaya Phap's stupid behaviour in inducing the peasant masses to criminal actions [M 58/1; M 58/98; M 58/103; M 58/105]. Nonetheless, we have other sources, in popular historical memory, for the ritual practices conducted before the final confrontation. Among Lannathai people, those who have supernatural lore, like Phaya Phap, are called *khon kham* (invulnerable person), or more generally *khon keng* (expert). Like *phuwiset* (person with extraordinary power) among the Lao in the North East and Siamese in the central region, *khon kham* are often able to gain popular respect and become political leaders among peasants in times of crisis, due to their extraordinary capability which is believed to be attributable to a great accumulation of merit.²⁹⁾ This is also the case with Phaya Phap, who succeeded in transforming the supernatural lore into a tactical weapon in the rebellion, through this means of ritual communication concentrated in the act of bathing in sacred water. We can maintain, therefore, that this ritual radicalism, which stressed a powerful instrumentality in opposition to the predominant Buddhist ethic of future salvation, seems to have contributed to the practical momentum necessary in the revolutionary transition from a subordinate and acquiescent peasantry towards actively motivated subjects.

Meanwhile, after the mass oath and the election of the four *cao* or leaders of the resistance group, the peasants surged towards the final uprising in a fever of ritual enthusiasm. After 11 September, growing numbers of peasants joined the resistance

28) Interviews with Phra Kammun, Mr. Luang Hong, and Phrakhrū Buntha Panraso at Wat Si Saimun, Tambon Nòng Còm, Sansai district, Chiang Mai province, 9, 10 January 1982.

29) Keyes argues that these person with extraordinary powers are often found in other Buddhist and Buddhist-influenced societies, but only a few ever attain any prominent role in collective movements [KEYES 1977: 289]. I wish to thank Acan Arunrat Wichiankhiao and Acan Chusit Chuchat for drawing my attention to the concept of *khon kham* in the Lannathai context.

group, and the headmen and petty officials and villagers of Mae Khü and other villages intended to join Phaya Phap [M 58/1]. On 17 September, Phaya Phap, who had already received a summons to come to the Siamese commissioner's office, sent a letter addressed to the Prince of Chiang Mai, which was ultimately forwarded to the Siamese commissioner, saying that he was intending to rally the people only against the tax-farmer's violent aggression, and not to rebel against the state of Chiang Mai [M 58/1]. On the next day, 18 September, the Siamese commissioner decided to crush the rebels by mobilizing an army of more than 10,000 troops, already assembled from Lampang and Lamphun in addition to troops already in Chiang Mai.

At the same time, the rebels had begun to see their enemy more precisely as the Siamese ruling classes, sometimes called 'the southerners' (the Siamese from the central plain), and the Chinese, mainly tax-farmers and their followers. The target of the uprising was thus set as follows:

Phraya Prapsongkhram [Phaya Phap] and Phraya Ratanakhuha ordered the rebels to march on Chiang Mai city on 18th, 19th or 20th September, Ratanakosin Era 108 [1889 A.D.] at 6 o'clock in the morning....They were ordered to wipe out the Siamese and Chinese and burn down every building along the banks of the Mae Ping river [M 58/98].

From the latter sentence we may certainly infer that the rebels' attack was to be made against the residences of Siamese officials, Chinese traders and Western trading firms, which at the time almost invariably occupied the banks of the Mae Ping river. It should be noted that the old residential area of the Lannathai *caonai* within the city moat, some distance away from the Mae Ping, was excluded from the targets of attack. Other than this explicit expression of the rebels' military target, we can obtain little direct evidence of the real goal of the peasant revolt from the official records. However, the author's interviews, conducted in Nong Còm village, indicate that the uprising probably intended to establish a new government of Chiang Mai in order to emancipate the people from the evils of the oppressive Siamese state apparatus, and the various forms of hardship it imposed.³⁰⁾ Among the leaders of the uprising and peasants, the expectation of radical social change seems to have been prevalent, though without any concrete political programme.

Before the target date for the armed uprising, the peasant army headquarters, which was probably set up at Wat Famui, divided the troops into seven brigades, according to the geographical distribution of villages, and their possible approaches in a march on Chiang Mai city [M 58/98]. The peasant troops, amounting to more than 1,200 or perhaps as many as 2,000 to 3,000 people,³¹⁾ were to be mobilized from

30) Interviews with Phra Khammun and Phrakhrü Buntha Panraso, 9 January 1982. Archer, the acting British Vice-Consul at Chiang Mai, wrote as follows: 'The Siamese and Chinese were to be exterminated, but the Lao chiefs [Lannathai *caonai*] were not to be molested, if they offered no resistance. Phya Pap [Phaya Phap] was to become ruler and assume the title of *Chaofa*, leaving, however, to the other chiefs their titles. All taxation would be abolished and Chiengmai would become independent of Bangkok' [FO 69/133].

31) Archer estimated the number of the rebels as follows: 'The disaffected really

all over the Chiang Mai basin, not only from the three villages mentioned earlier (see Figure 2). This means that the conditions for the rebellion was ripening in quite a wide area, and underground networks of rebellious messages were already in existence. From the headquarters, four Buddhist monks were sent out to Chiang Mai city, in charge of scouting out the likely actions of the *caonai* [M 58/98]. In addition to this, it is a marked feature of the revolt that quite a large number of Buddhist monks participated and played a prominent part in the course of the uprising.

On 20 September, the rebel leaders received reports from the monks that the *caonai* were concentrating about 1,000 troops, and were ready to arrest Phaya Phap. Upon hearing this, they struck the gong, to signal the start of the uprising. Gongs were struck in village after village, relaying the message of a decisive uprising even to remote villages. The peasants rushed to Phaya Phap's house and Wat Famui temple. On the same day, Prince Sonabandit dispatched a large number of troops, probably more than 5,000 men, under the command of three high-ranking *caonai* of the Chiang Mai court, in various directions to suppress the rebel troops. With superior arms, including Gatling guns, the government troops succeeded in crushing the rebels outside the city area without any decisive battle. Numerous peasants and their leaders, including Phaya Ratanakhuha and Phaya Cincai, were arrested, but Phaya Phap and his family were just able to escape to Chiang Tung in the Shan States, via the border town of Chiang Saen.

The military defeat of the insurgent peasants was followed by a series of cruel retaliations against them. Thirteen of the principal leaders, including Phaya Ratanakhuha, Phaya Cincai, various petty officials, monks and former monks were sentenced to death, and finally executed, after being flogged and pilloried for three days as a warning to the public, in March 1890 [M 58/1; M 58/98; M 58/103]. About fifteen other men were sentenced to flogging and imprisonment for various terms. According to interviews, all property including houses, compounds and paddy fields belonging to the peasant leaders in the revolt were confiscated, and large numbers of peasants and their families were confined within the Chiang Mai court as slaves (*khi kha*).³²⁾

The aftermath of the peasant rebellion lasted into the following year. Phaya Phap and his fellow peasants succeeded in regrouping rebel troops in the Chiang Tung area, the homeland of the Khoen people, early in 1890. The newly formed troops seem to have consisted mainly of Khoen peasants,³³⁾ who joined in Chiang Tung or elsewhere in the border areas. The political and military activities of Phaya Phap after he fled into Chiang Tung are rather shrouded in obscurity. However, the

numbered about 12,000 able-bodied men, and their districts were not confined to the east side of the river, but extended both directly North and South of the City, while they had many partisans in the city itself' [FO 69/133].

32) Interviews with Phra Khammun and Mr. Luang Hong, 9, 10 January 1982.

33) The Siamese government's official records often mentioned Ngiao peasants. This indicated that the government used the ethnic category of Ngiao for both the Khoen inhabiting the east side of the Salween river and the Ngiao (or Western Shan) on the west side. For ethnographical accounts of Khoen and Ngiao, see Dodd [1923: 200-229].

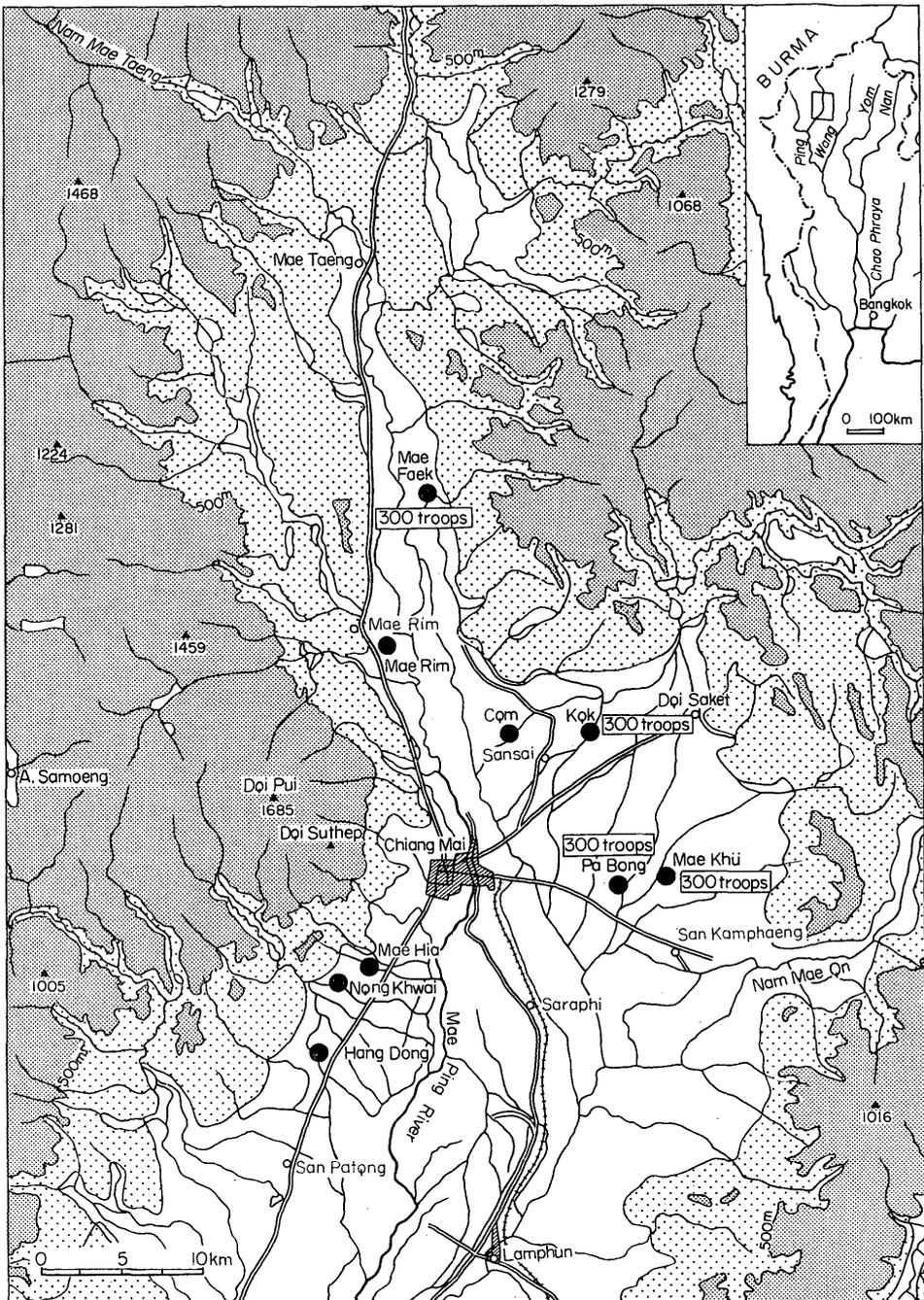


Figure 2. Peasant Troops in the Chiang Mai Rebellion
 Source: National Archives, Bangkok [M 58/98].

government's official records often suggest that he secured the political and financial support of the Prince of Chiang Tung in organizing a military expedition to Chiang Mai [M 58/103; M 58/105]. Lack of access to the documents from the Chiang Tung side and the practical restrictions of anthropological fieldwork have made it difficult for us to attempt to uncover historical evidence, in any concrete form, concerning the relationship between the rebel troops and Chiang Tung. However, we can hardly neglect their ethnic consciousness of being Khoen, and their historical memory of the humiliating forced migration from their homeland.

The forced migrations are said to have occurred several times after Prince Kawila (Phraao Boromarachathibodi of Chiang Mai, who ruled 1781–1815) ordered military expeditions to Chiang Tung and adjacent areas, in the final drive against the Burmese at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Khoen peasants and other ethnic groups were brought as war booty to the Chiang Mai court, and sent to settle, and augment the state's productive forces, in the then sparsely populated areas of the Chiang Mai basin. With the prevailing condition of relatively low man/land ratios, the ultimate goal of traditional wars undertaken between ruling classes in pre-capitalist social formations was directly focused on such an exchange of rural populations.³⁴ The peasants and their leaders who had performed decisive roles in the uprising of the previous years were descendants of the Khoen in the two villages of Còm and Kòk, though a considerable number of Yuan, the majority of the Lannathai population, obviously also took an active part in the movement. Among the Khoen peasants at least, old songs and verses recollecting life in the original villages in the Chiang Tung area and the sufferings by the Khoen people down to the present were chanted at village assemblies before the uprising, according to the peasants in the present Nộng Còm village. We should note here that Khoen ethnicity itself was not the issue, but rather it was the historical memory of ethnic oppression which most likely served to organize peasant consciousness, in a new struggle in which ethnicity could be transformed into class consciousness.

To return to the narrative, Phaya Phap's troops, probably supported by Chiang Tung to a certain extent, liberated Fang, a border town 150 km north of Chiang Mai city, by February or early March 1890. The rumour spread that the rebel troops were on the way to capture Chiang Mai city, and wipe out the Siamese (the southerners) and those northern *caonai* who had sided with the former [M 58/103]. However, the rebel forces seem to have had little effect, probably because they had already lost their political and military base in Chiang Mai. A rebel troop of about 300 to 400 men marched from Fang to Phrao, north east of Chiang Mai city, and were finally destroyed by government forces, numbering about 700–1,000 men, on 17 March. Rebel casualties were heavy, and Phaya Phap fled back to Chiang Tung [FO 28/200; M 58/103].

The peasant rebellion which broke out in late September 1889, presented a great threat to the ruling classes for six months and was ultimately crushed by the over-

34) For the sociological implications of traditional wars in Lannathai, see Krairisri [1965: 201–203].

whelming armed forces of the Lannathai *caonai* under Siamese aggressive power. Throughout the rebellion, the Lannathai *caonai*, the diminished former rulers who still maintained patron-client relations with rebel leaders, never stood by the peasants but went over to the enemy. Hence we cannot say that the rebels failed to mobilize the *caonai* politically to their side in the course of rebellion. Our interpretation is rather that the peasants, once aroused, were from the outset sufficiently radical, in political terms, to go beyond the existing polity. This is indicated in their decision to launch an all-out armed uprising against Siamese oppressive power, without any consideration being given to the expected political manoeuvrings of the *caonai* at the Chiang Mai court. The patron-client ties were consciously preserved *among* the rebels, particularly between the leaders and the ordinary peasants, for the practical purpose of strengthening military solidarity. The rebels' illusory expectation of continued patron-client ties with the *caonai* headed by the Prince of Chiang Mai disappeared in the momentum of the uprising.

The peasant uprising was an ultimate form of ideological practice, which transcended the critical and complex conjuncture and the peasantry's subordination to the coercive domination and cultural manipulation of the ruling classes. This radical tradition was to be followed in a series of peasant rebellions among the northern and northeastern peasants against the Siamese central government during the early decades of the twentieth century.

CONCLUSIONS

We started this paper with the question of how the actors in peasant rebellions can express their social consciousness and crystallize their ideas into an oppositional ideology which challenges the ruling classes. This led us to explore theoretical premisses in modern social anthropology concerned with the origin and determination of critical consciousness and concepts in relation to the existing social order. Unlike the conventional theoretical traditions of crude functionalism and structuralism, Bloch's recent contributions are able to elucidate epistemologically the dichotomous nature of cognitive systems stemming respectively from ritual and non-ritual, or nature-constrained sources of communication. However, his stress on the role of the non-ritual cognitive system as the source of critical concepts tends to overlook the complexity of the process of formation of critical consciousness, in which ritual discourse is of great significance, as is also the language of economic struggle.

This theoretical inadequacy can be overcome in the concept of ideological practice as the concrete process of peasant critical consciousness. However, we should recognize theoretically, as well as from our field experiences, that peasants' ideological practices are often manifestly contradictory, and not fully articulated but deeply imbued with their own cultural and moral relevance. The significance of cultural and moral expressions in peasant actions is posited on the premiss that while the class consciousness of the peasantry is predicated primarily on class experience, it is materialized in cultural terms, in other words, through mainly ritual communication.

We can, therefore, maintain that in the course of rebellions peasants' ideological practice presents its ultimate and most acute form, in their attempts to articulate non-ritual or economic discourse with the language for ritual and symbolic struggle.

Our theoretical framework for dealing with ideological practice in peasant rebellions can be further strengthened by Gramsci's concept of hegemony. The strategic unity of economic and political, and of cultural and moral struggle is essential for any social forces in the achievement of hegemony, and crucially significant in the course of peasant rebellions. Two prevailing lines of analysis, crude economism and static cultural interpretation including structuralist symbolic analysis, are both misleading: the former unable to do justice to peasant struggles centred on symbols in ritual communication, often resorting to the ideas of 'modernization'; the latter failing to articulate this symbolic communication with the reality embedded in relations of production, instead limiting its potential analytical power to the drawing up of a symbolic structure [HALL 1977: 28]. The theoretical and methodological intention underlying this paper is to go beyond the limitations of these prevailing theoretical developments. The peasant rebellions which erupted throughout the colonial and post-colonial eras in South East Asia show us in condensed form the formation of new ideological practices within struggles which are at the same time both political and economic, and cultural and moral, in a movement towards the peasants' own hegemony.

The empirical instances which we analysed in terms of our theoretical framework were mainly taken from the Chiang Mai rebellion, which broke out against the northern ruling classes under Siamese overlordship in the late nineteenth century. From the viewpoint of political economy, the revolt was a radical and manifest attack by the peasant masses, the first in modern Thai history, against the ruling classes: the Siamese government and the declining Lannathai *caonai*, during the transition towards peripheral capitalism. The most fierce and cruel oppression imposed on the subsistence peasantry was brought about by the introduction of a new taxation system. In addition to tax-farming, which was often accompanied by violent force, the newly adopted method of cash payment had particularly far-reaching destructive effects, leading to the eventual collapse of the peasant subsistence economy. The petty officials, who were also deeply involved in this process, thereby lost their previous means of exploitation.

Confronted with such drastic changes, forced on them by the advance of centralized Siamese administration, the peasants' consciousness was acutely active in pursuit of their legitimate claims to livelihood. The initial moment of their ideological practice was ameliorative action in a series of economic struggles, including petitions to their former patrons, who were losing political significance. Together with the 'moral economy' traditionally practised among the subsistence peasantry, a wide range of forms of economic resistance against tax-collection and corvée conscription was practised throughout the countryside. The long path of peasant struggles prior to the final uprising was primarily focused on economic and non-ritual discourse, in response to straightforward domination by the oppressive forces. However, peasant

ideological practices remained parochial and often isolated due to the restricted experience of village life.

The crucial problem confronting the rebels was how to transcend the contradiction and weakness involved in parochial and spontaneous consciousness on the terrain of economic and non-ritual discourse. The Chiang Mai rebellion crashed through the problem, and reached its culmination by various forms of ideological struggle on a newly created terrain.

First, the rebel peasants decided on a decisive uprising against the entire power structure of oppressive forces, taking as their direct enemy the Siamese government; and in so doing, they eventually negated the values attached to the patron-client relationship sustained between them and the *caonai* for many centuries. On this strategic point, the Chiang Mai rebellion must be remembered as the first attempt in modern Thai history at a frontal attack on the ruling classes. Although it ended tragically, in its time it represented the most far-reaching development of peasant ideological practice yet created.

Secondly, the rebel peasants were able to formulate their legitimizing ideas in the context of indigenous supernaturalism. The ritual of bathing in sacred water, and associated supernatural lore, provided an instrumentality through which the insurgent peasants could enhance their solidarity, and make the leap towards ideas of total liberation. This ritual radicalism, with its ideas of imminent and this-worldly liberation, as in millenarian surges, was not necessarily contradictory of popular Buddhism, in which magic and supernatural practices are allowed to co-exist. And yet it could serve in direct opposition to the hegemonic state religion which manipulated popular consent through its other-worldly doctrine and ritual practices.

Thirdly, the ethnic consciousness of being Khoen was effectively mobilized to inspire their uprising. Historical memory of ethnic oppression exercised by the Lannathai ruling classes, reinterpreting past experiences undergone by the Khoen peasantry, provided rich sources of legitimacy. However, by confronting totally the ruling classes, and their violent apparatuses of domination, in the course of the uprising, the still parochial consciousness of ethnicity had to be transformed into a more universal category of class consciousness. We can detect within the Chiang Mai rebellion only a glimpse of a departure from ethnic consciousness to a more articulated peasant class consciousness.

The Chiang Mai rebellion is a most profound instance of struggle in which peasants were able to organize their ideological practices in the direction of their own hegemony. This failed revolution must be remembered for their heroic achievements.

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