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## *Departure*

### *The Road to Bang Chan*

Go any day in Bangkok to that great intersection of streets and canals called the Water Gate (Pratū Nām). There the locks hold the fresh water of a vast network of up-country canals and prevent it from pouring out into the tidal canals of Bangkok. Buildings stand between the waterways and the streets and can be entered from either side. Within them big and little vendors sell anything that anyone will buy: golden buckles, squid, Thermos bottles, melons. These days most customers thread their way from the street among rows of country women sitting on their heels next to baskets of prickly durians. A few years ago people were found mainly on the canal side. One then saw the cluster of boats for hire, family skiffs, and slow tubby grain boats scurrying to make way when the steam passenger launch approached from Bāngkapi canal, its decks bristling with eager disembarkers. Today more people take the bus on their way to and from the countryside.

Red, blue, green, and white buses park in tired rows along the curb, and those who cannot read the signs on the front must ask some driver lounging on a passenger's bench which bus goes north to Minburī. The dark glasses hiding his eyes make it difficult to judge whether he really knows; if not, the boy ticket taker polishing the hood of another bus may know. The bus is just leaving, so we dash for the rear step, where hands stretch out to help us climb aboard.

We add to the lurching crowd of passengers. Two boys standing next to a deeply tanned woman reach for a handhold to avoid being thrown into a basket of chickens. Instead they bump against an elderly man wearing a worn brown felt hat of European style. His toes are slightly protected by his canvas shoes, but unguarded bare

feet extend from the khaki pants of the man sitting next to him. Between shoes, bare feet, sacks, and baskets the youthful ticket taker picks his way skillfully to collect his fares. Like a drillmaster, he whistles "Go!" to the driver after each stop. Those who climb aboard seem grateful for the breeze that blows through the open sides.

Houses thin out, and along the shaded highway the bus picks up speed, dodging perilously around pushcarts and bicycles and oncoming trucks. Inside the woman's basket, the chickens begin to stir and cluck, attracting the gaze of a bobbed-haired girl who was leaning quietly against her seated father. The ticket taker relaxes against the back of the driver's seat and makes a bantering remark to his colleague. His ease is suddenly broken by a woman's call to stop the bus. She and an adolescent boy clamber over baskets, laps, and feet to the exit. The bus pauses a minute while the ticket taker mounts to the roof and hands a bicycle to the waiting boy. Another shrill whistling starts the bus off again.

After the man with the European hat swings down in front of a glistening temple near the southeast corner of Don Myang airport, the bus turns east onto a branch road. Dyked *padi* fields extend on both sides to island-like clusters of trees and beyond to other clusters stretching toward the horizon. Green shoots of transplanted rice stand above a glistening carpet of water. Children with blue school uniforms file along the dykes toward some farmhouse in one of the clusters. A group of highway workers pauses from digging with mattocks to exchange a passing shout and laugh with the bus driver. Occasionally we pass a raw, mounded road leading to a new house with stucco trim; the residents commute daily to the city. The newly planted trees, the glistening automobile, and the urban clothes have not yet quite blended with the country scene.

An hour's ride has brought us some thirty kilometers to a row of open-fronted stores and a small rice mill at the broad bridge across Bang Chan canal. Here the bus pauses for us to descend, and then is off. The noises of the countryside rush to fill the silence left by a roaring motor. Somewhere a paddle dropped in the bottom of a boat pierces the stillness. A white egret circles to a landing on a distant dyke. Nearby a second one settles, and both stand motionless on their long legs.

Over a plank across a watery ditch we move to the stores. In a café two chess players and several kibitzers look up from their game to

watch us approach. The stocky, white-haired proprietor smiles and asks what we have brought him from Bangkok. We reply that the zookeeper would not let us bring him that tiger today because another man asked for it earlier. The proprietor laughs at the excuse and moves to hold the sampan near the little dock so that we may climb aboard.

We paddle under the highway bridge in a northerly direction along the watercourse winding past teak-paneled houses set back among the trees. Wading in the shallow brown water along the ill-defined bank, a black-haired girl plunges a basket cone into the muddy bottom and reaches through the open top to catch a darting fish. A naked toddler stands on the bank watching her. The schoolteacher on his way home drives his skiff swiftly along and greets us with a brief question. "We are going to the temple," we reply before he is out of earshot. Next we pass the schoolhouse, whose long, flat roof sits like a lid on an empty container; the flagpole stands naked in the vacant school yard. On the veranda of a pile house opposite the school an old woman plaits a mat while her grandchildren play tag among the posts beneath the house. The acrid odor of chicken dung blows by as our boat passes.

We disembark at the temple. Before our eyes appear the customary features of a country temple compound: the sanctuary (*bōt*) where priests make their devotions, the congregating hall (*wihān*) where villagers listen to sermons, the cremation platform, the monks' quarters, all set about a court facing the canal. Rather than bearing an air of tidy sanctity, the compound seems neglected. Though the gilded cosmic serpent gleams on top of the congregating hall, built by village contributions in the 1930s, the weathered boards in the building point to the beginnings of decay. Even on the fifty-year-old sanctuary the ceramic decor is defaced, and surrounding columns lurch as if disarranged by some destructive demon. Mangy dogs sniff in the refuse under houses. Across the weed-filled courtyard, a cluster of temple boys pauses from swimming to watch us. We call to ask for the abbot or head priest, and a boy with dripping shorts runs along the walk to show the way. We pause in a musty passage between two buildings, and the boy disappears into a doorway through which a softly chanted prayer reaches our ears. In a moment the boy is back with news that the head priest has not yet returned from Bangkok but is expected back before sundown.

Seeing a group of yellow-robed priests sitting cross-legged on a veranda, we make obeisance. They reply to our salutation with cordial smiles; one politely asks if we intend to spend the night in Bang Chan. "Just visiting for the day," we reply.

Back at the edge of the canal we pass a shelter where an elderly woman is lighting a fire to begin the evening meal for three men who lie in faded clothes napping on the plank floor. The temple houses and feeds them remnants of the food received by the priests. If Buddhism offers a theme of preservation, it consists in giving to sustain life. Otherwise no one gains merit by holding back decay from material things.

From the temple the canal leads our boat under a rickety footbridge past a row of closely spaced dwellings. In one a young woman, working at a sewing machine, modestly continues her work as if we were not there. Tall trees arch over the canal, and the monsoon is a refreshing breeze. A man, chopping bits from a chunk of wood, pauses to call out, "The water is rising well! I have finished transplanting all my fields and the two additional ones I rented this year. This is a good time to visit, if you want, for I'll have time to talk. Farther up the canal you'll see my son cutting grass for the buffalo."

Beyond the grove we are again in the open fields. The water stands clear and warm, a few inches deep, around the precisely planted rows of rice shoots. The farmer's son can be seen clipping grass along a dyke. The canal continues on past farther groves and farther farmhouses. In the remote distance a single blue hill rises from the plain and above it floats a towering thundercloud.

### *The Community*

This is Bang Chan, whose households and fields merge with neighboring communities as do the turgid waters of the canals. We might paddle for days through the network of waterways in Thailand's central plain and still feel ourselves in Bang Chan. The succession of rice fields, shaded wooden houses, and thatched huts is punctuated by occasional open-sided stores, temples, and schools. Bang Chan's school and temple roofs are distinctive, however, and stand as beacons for those returning homeward from their journeys. The country people who call Bang Chan home are those who send their children to the local school or who visit the temple on holidays.

Of course, a few farmers who live only some minutes away from the temple prefer occasionally to take their bowls of food and their flowers an hour's boat trip to Ku temple or in the other direction to Bam Phen temple. In Bang Chan the headmen of the hamlets (*mūbān*) can tell the approximate geographical boundaries of their jurisdictions; at least they claim to know who lives where. A dozen or so hamlets are grouped into a commune (*tambon*) under a chief (*kamnan*), who is elected by the hamlet headmen from among themselves. In fact, the name Bang Chan stands officially for a commune rather than for the community of a school and a temple. On some maps the name also appears as Bang Chan Canal Village or Bān Khlāung Bāng Chan (L. M. Hanks 1972:7). People living on the west side of Bang Chan canal live officially in commune Kannā Jāō, while those on the east live in commune Bang Chan. If they must visit the district offices (*amphōe*), the west siders go a half day's journey to Bāngkapi, while the east siders go three or four miles to Minburī. There they go on official business to pay taxes, register births, vote in elections, and collect salaries if they work for the government. If occasionally they transfer land or must defend their rights at law, the district offices may also provide these facilities.

To discover what was going on in this village community, the research group established geographical boundaries for its work, somewhat less arbitrary than the government's administrative boundaries. Bang Chan, for purposes of research, became in 1948 the 1,600 people in the seven hamlets in the neighborhood of the temple and the nearby school: hamlets 5, 6, 7, and 8 in Kannā Jāō commune and 4, 5, and 6 in Bang Chan commune. Probably 95 percent of the children at the school came from this area and 90 percent of the regular worshipers at the temple. The area of the community is shaped more like a pronged fork than a circle, for the homes of the inhabitants cluster along branching canals in a northerly direction. To the south, outside of Bang Chan, a predominantly Moslem hamlet performs its devotions at its own local *surao*, so called because it is too small and flimsy a structure to be dignified by the name *masjid*. This hamlet also maintains a vernacular school where after regular school hours children learn to read scripture in Arabic. A few households of the faithful lie scattered about in Bang Chan as well, where they live amicably enough among Buddhists.

Beginning in 1949 three censuses, at intervals of four years, were

taken in the seven hamlets that we call Bang Chan. Each enumeration was conducted by a different set of workers, and not all data are strictly comparable. Definition of residence, for instance, varied, so that a son who worked for a season in Bangkok may have been counted in one census and omitted in another. Thus Tables 1 and 2 must be regarded as involving approximations, particularly where differences are small or trends inconsistent.

The apparent stability of our census figures disguises a flux of population in this area. Janlekha (1957:29) found that by 1953, 38 (13 percent) of the 288 households present in 1949 (excluding the temple) had disappeared and 48 (17 percent) had been added. Of the 38 that disappeared, 11 disintegrated or merged with other households after a death or some other social disturbance. Twenty-seven households (9 percent) moved away from the community. This loss to the community grows in significance in Janlekha's sample of 104 farming households, where 26 (25 percent) disappeared between 1949 and 1953 (*ibid.*: 78). The movement seems to have abated somewhat between 1953 and 1957, when 23 moved into the community and 24 (8 percent) disappeared.

While we lack exact annual figures for comparison, the average rate of migration for the period we have covered varies between 2 and 6 percent per year. Although the lower limit may be small, the upper limit suggests a rather large, restless, and mobile segment of the population. This we might expect in an urban community but not in one where more than 85 percent of the households work in agriculture, where more than 70 percent are farm operators, and where less than 15 percent are laborers without landholdings (*ibid.*: 45). Such a migration rate might also be expected where the land is mainly

*Table 1.* Summary of demographic data from three research censuses of Bang Chan

| Demographic data  | 1949  | 1953  | 1957  |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| Total population  | 1,608 | 1,696 | 1,771 |
| Population density per square mile                            | 320   | 340   | 352   |
| Sex ratio (males to 100 females)                              | 107.2 | 102.3 | 95.7  |
| Crude estimated annual birthrate                              | 20.3  | 24.9  | 20.0  |
| Fertility ratio   | 428   | 525   | 368   |
| Households  | 288   | 298   | 297   |
| Average number of persons per household<br>(excluding temple) | 5.5   | 5.6   | 5.9   |

Table 2. Age and sex data from three research censuses of Bang Chan

| Age                 | 1949 |        |       |      | 1953 |        |       |      | 1957 |        |       |      |
|---------------------|------|--------|-------|------|------|--------|-------|------|------|--------|-------|------|
|                     | Male | Female | Total | %    | Male | Female | Total | %    | Male | Female | Total | %    |
| 0-4                 | 78   | 85     | 163   | 10   | 116  | 103    | 219   | 13   | 87   | 90     | 177   | 10   |
| 5-9                 | 108  | 101    | 209   | 13   | 100  | 105    | 205   | 12   | 87   | 123    | 210   | 12   |
| 10-14               | 98   | 109    | 207   | 13   | 118  | 103    | 221   | 13   | 86   | 92     | 178   | 10   |
| Total ages<br>0-14  | 284  | 295    | 579   | 36%  | 334  | 311    | 645   | 38%  | 260  | 305    | 565   | 32%  |
| 15-19               | 109  | 84     | 193   | 12   | 83   | 97     | 180   | 11   | 94   | 123    | 217   | 12   |
| 20-24               | 93   | 77     | 170   | 11   | 92   | 72     | 164   | 10   | 107  | 88     | 195   | 11   |
| 25-29               | 58   | 57     | 115   | 7    | 60   | 74     | 134   | 8    | 80   | 80     | 160   | 9    |
| 30-34               | 52   | 44     | 96    | 6    | 46   | 51     | 97    | 6    | 62   | 67     | 129   | 7    |
| 35-39               | 45   | 50     | 95    | 6    | 37   | 43     | 80    | 5    | 41   | 49     | 90    | 5    |
| 40-44               | 47   | 35     | 82    | 5    | 42   | 45     | 87    | 5    | 46   | 44     | 90    | 5    |
| 45-49               | 44   | 34     | 78    | 5    | 43   | 35     | 78    | 4    | 41   | 30     | 71    | 4    |
| 50-54               | 28   | 31     | 59    | 4    | 35   | 28     | 63    | 3    | 40   | 30     | 70    | 4    |
| Total ages<br>15-54 | 476  | 412    | 888   | 56%  | 438  | 445    | 883   | 52%  | 511  | 511    | 1,022 | 57%  |
| 55-59               | 23   | 27     | 50    | 3    | 27   | 29     | 56    | 3    | 25   | 31     | 56    | 3    |
| 60-64               | 22   | 15     | 37    | 2    | 27   | 24     | 51    | 3    | 29   | 28     | 57    | 3    |
| 65-69               | 14   | 8      | 22    | 1    | 15   | 11     | 26    | 2    | 18   | 14     | 32    | 2    |
| 70-74               | 8    | 8      | 16    | 1    | 9    | 6      | 15    | 1    | 12   | 9      | 21    | 2    |
| 75-79               | 2    | 7      | 9     | 1    | 6    | 7      | 13    | 1    | 8    | 3      | 11    | 1    |
| 80-84               | 3    | 4      | 7     | 0    | 2    | 5      | 7     | 0    | 3    | 4      | 7     | 0    |
| Total ages<br>55-84 | 72   | 69     | 141   | 8%   | 86   | 82     | 168   | 10%  | 95   | 89     | 184   | 11%  |
| Total<br>population | 832  | 776    | 1,608 | 100% | 858  | 838    | 1,696 | 100% | 866  | 905    | 1,771 | 100% |

worked by tenants. Here only 30 percent of the land is operated by tenants, who constitute 38 percent of the farm operator households. Of the remaining 62 percent of farm householders, 22 percent work their own land exclusively, while 40 percent rent some portion of the land in addition to their own holdings (*ibid.*: 57). Two-thirds of this population own land.

The changes in residence and occupation between 1948 and 1953 have been analyzed by Janlekha (1957: 90-92). He points to an occupational group of marginal farmers and farm laborers as the main source of these changes (*ibid.*: 44-46). They are found living in little thatched dwellings interspersed with the paneled teak houses of the more prosperous. We judge that during the years 1953 to 1957 fewer variations in the fortunes of such people cast them out of the village and brought others like them to their places in Bang Chan.



Yet always the people on these lower levels of the economic scale are shifting and changing their residences or their means of livelihood or both.

*The Cornell Thailand Project*

Field research in Bang Chan began in 1948 as an initial phase of the Cornell Thailand Project. This project, in turn, was part of a larger Cornell University program of comparative studies of cultural change which had been inaugurated in 1947. The program offered instruction and training on the campus and in the field on the problems of changing cultural behavior in nonindustrialized societies; but as a necessary concomitant, at a period before Point IV or other large-scale government or private technical-aid programs had been organized, the Cornell program also provided for a coordinated investigation of the tide of modern technological and other cultural influences, indigenous and foreign, flooding into village communities of such regions as Thailand, India, Peru, and the American Southwest. Separate studies in these and other widely scattered areas not only would provide discrete descriptions of the cultural life of local communities in the context of their differently developing regions, but would also focus on a common problem: How may the ramifying influences of the present, most of them stemming ultimately from the Atlantic civilization, affect the future of peasant communities and of the agrarian societies of which they are a neglected part?

After initial field investigations, staff members of the Cornell Thailand, India, Peru, and Navaho projects worked together in a series of seminars dealing with the problems of cultural transfer, cultural continuity, and cultural change. Cases were collected and analyzed for their relevance to the problems of facilitating the introduction of agricultural, industrial, medical, and other innovations into areas where such technologies were wanted but were deficient by modern standards (Spicer 1952). Training and research seminars in cultural anthropology were conducted among the various cultures of the American Southwest for American and foreign social science students and those trained in technological or natural science fields (Bunker and Adair 1959). Common reference points and strategies were developed for the cross-cultural study of change (Goodenough 1963) and programs of experimental intervention were proposed for

the areas with which we were concerned (Smith 1951, 1955). A manual for field workers was prepared in order to guide program participants in the common problems of observing and recording cultural change (Leighton and Sharp 1952).

In 1948, with the aid of the Thai Ministry of Agriculture, Sharp had visited many village communities in the economically important rice-producing central plain between Ayutthayā and the Gulf of Siam. It became clear that, given the information, resources, and background data available at the time, a large-scale survey meeting scientific sampling and other statistical criteria could not be successfully undertaken. Under these conditions, Sharp decided that the changing behavior of rural Thai could best be studied in selected rural communities viewed in relation to their surrounding areas and the national society. For his own work, he wished to find a village engaged primarily in commercial rice cultivation which was predominantly and actively Buddhist and which would be increasingly subject to influences from the capital, Bangkok, which for over a century and a half had been a principal channel for the introduction and transmission to the Thai people of new techniques, forms of social organization, and ideas. Bang Chan seemed to meet these criteria and, in addition, to promise excellent cooperation on the part of both farmers and officials of the region, a promise that was fully realized.

With the assistance of Kamol Janlekha, the first Thai trained in agricultural economics, the study of Bang Chan began in September 1948. At the same time, the Cornell Thailand Project was able to provide financial and other support to John deYoung and Singto Metah for a comparative study of the northern village of San Pong, near Chiangmai.

Rice produced by the farmers of Bang Chan and San Pong which was not locally consumed was then being purchased by the Thai government at its own price for resale as a form of indirect taxation of the producer; yet no Thai official knew what it cost a farm family to produce a ton of padi, or unhusked rice (Silcock 1970). Except for Janlekha, there were no agricultural economists in Thailand, and few economists of any kind, to work on rural development problems. Indeed, before 1948 no one had conducted long-term detailed research in any single Thai farming community. This does not mean that valuable data on various aspects of Thai culture were not

available. For nearly fifty years the pages of the *Journal of the Siam Society* had presented learned observations on folklore, history, numismatics, the arts, and other topics, contributed by eminent Thai and foreign scholars. Ten generations of Catholic missionaries and four Protestant generations had produced extensive accounts of Thai life. Travelers' observations in Thai or Western and Chinese languages had yielded further descriptions of the Thai cultural scene, as had the memoirs and records of diplomats and merchants. The Thai government had even employed two foreigners in the early 1930s to conduct rural economic surveys of the country. But Westerners who through command of the language had access to documentary material in Thai were rare; and Thai scholars were few and overmodest. All of these ante bellum writers, with their varied skills and interests, contributed significant data for those seeking to know how Thai behaved and why; but following the Pacific war of 1941–1945, a need for studies of village communities and of their relations to their regions and to the larger polity and society of Thailand became only too evident.

In Bang Chan, with the cordial help of the villagers, almost a year was devoted to the gathering of basic information by the first two investigators, Sharp and Janlekha, who were joined in midcourse for five months by Metah from the north when deYoung left San Pong. From time to time Thai government officials and students visited Bang Chan and some participated for short periods in certain aspects of the field research. A village schoolmaster, Khru Jāud, kept a diary in which he recorded local events from an inside view as he experienced them or heard of them. Paddling up and down the several miles of village canals, the interviewers talked informally with villagers, listened as villagers talked with each other, observed and took part in daily activities, collected copious genealogies, and completed schedules for a sample of over a hundred farm households to provide information on the technology and economics of rice production and distribution and related activities. Many of the findings of this first year of work were published (see Sharp 1967).

In 1952 a new phase of multiple studies began in Bang Chan as Sharp introduced to the community several more specialists and students, Lucien and Jane Hanks among them. Also in Bangkok and elsewhere in the country, students associated with the Cornell Thailand Project had embarked on a series of studies that would help

place Bang Chan in a setting of other villages, other ethnic groups, and the nation at large. However rice farmers may have been affected by these contacts, Thai village and related studies proliferated and perhaps profited as a beginning was made and reports on the work of the project were prepared for publication. Articles, monographs, and doctoral dissertations dealt from a local or national point of view with such topics as national economic policy, government, social organization, education, religion, health, nutrition, child welfare, personality, and history; neighboring and distant village communities were studied for comparison and contrast, and studies of ethnic minorities, including the Thai-Islam and the ubiquitous Chinese were produced (Sharp 1967).

In a large and diversified storage compartment for unpublished material on Bang Chan lay our notes for a book on social change. We used the 1948–1949 study as a base for viewing the new that was appearing monthly in the community. This base served admirably in handling certain economic or technological subjects. Sharp could vouch for the number of new radios, electric generators, fiberglass taxi boats with outboard motors, and home enterprises; similarly government services formerly unavailable could be charted as they appeared during the period of observation. Some changes in consumer habits lent themselves to such quantifying treatment; and there were other areas of life in which change could be documented.

But there were also important aspects of Bang Chan cultural behavior in which the presence or absence of change was difficult or impossible to identify in a short time. How could it be determined whether or not there was an increasing secularization of life or an increasing differentiation between the religious and the secular; or whether there were changes in the internal power structure of the village, or in family structure and kin relations? As Sharp worked through the genealogies obtained in 1949, changes in kinship organization failed to appear, but it could not be determined whether or not crucial data were missing. In dealing with education, Hanks found himself unable to detect much more than incidental change in Bang Chan's primary school without tracing education back at least as far as 1935, when the central government first erected a school building. A search for changes in the temple took one back even further, for in 1901 certain priests of the local temple began serving as teachers in a nationally organized education system. Gradually the dates of refer-

ence receded backward from 1949 to 1892, the year in which the Bang Chan temple was first founded. From this point, an attempt to add a few more decades to the village history seemed well worth the effort, and we resolved to trace Bang Chan as far back in time as possible. Sharp's data from 1949 suggested that we might have to go back at least a century. A return to the village in 1957 for further historical data supplied many missing items and a fairly continuous history that dates back to the 1840s and 1850s, when the first settlement occurred on the present site of Bang Chan.

### *The Destination*

The venture upon which we embark in this study is to be called *social history*. The label best fits our plan to consider miscellaneous actions, happenings, or events in a temporal sequence. A broader frame might masquerade as the "evolution" of Bang Chan, but with less than twelve decades in the record the label becomes absurd. Were there a central character or even a central theme, continuity might suffice to dub this a biography of Bang Chan, but the implication of a structured maturation misrepresents this amorphous community. History presumes a less artful approach and the freedom to be discontinuous.

The continuities and regularities of an individual's life history, the patterned growth or development of a biography, are implicit in the folk-urban model, which sees the cities of agrarian societies growing out of tribal or peasant villages and continuing to be nourished by their surrounding rural countrysides. This scheme, which sees an urban type of civilization born from a folk culture, hardly applies in our case. Bang Chan is the unwanted child of Bangkok, not its rustic parent. Secondary urbanization, some aspects of the great and little tradition, the urbanizing spread of progress (Redfield 1962:326–356) approximate the Thai scene well enough; and Bang Chan inhabitants are peasants according to most of Redfield's definitions (1956:27–34). However, the polarity between the city and the village becomes in the central rice plain of Thailand a flow between Bangkok and Bang Chan. Having come from the city, the residents fish for a while, then grow rice, then grow it commercially in response to urban demand, and eventually return to the city as it engulfs them, having entered and then retired from peasantry. Occupations change continuously: so when people fish, we call them fishermen; when they grow rice,

farmers; when they keep stores, storekeepers; and when they move to Bangkok, or Bangkok moves to them, they are city folk again. The patterns offered by the folk-urban schema furnish only limited aid to understanding, while history allows our data more freedom to show the shape of local change.

Calling our venture *social history* also raises problems, for historians pride themselves on the scrupulous use of documents. Bang Chan has few, and most of them were never consulted. A visit to the district office in Minburī revealed a thousand neatly tied bundles of yellowing land deeds. In the deeds were listed changes of ownership that had long been forgotten in Bang Chan, but more serious for our study were the transfers of ownership that were acknowledged in Bang Chan but unrecorded at the district office. Some land disputes and criminal actions reached the district courts, and the court record might have offered interesting data that witnesses in Bang Chan had forgotten; but we lacked the clerical staff of translators to deal with these records. The notebooks of hamlet headmen helped us begin our census counts but were often unreliable on births and deaths and who lived where. Aside from the notebooks of a few traditional doctors or curers (*māu*), documents were hard to find, even though many people were literate. In that community the written word was not important. Farmers never drew up agreements that determined a continuous, inescapable obligation. People contracted with each other, but the agreement needed constant mutual effort and care to keep it alive. When a party to an agreement failed to meet its implicit or explicit terms, the agreement ended. It was unwise to contract with untrustworthy persons. Bang Chan's past could not be traced through the contents of mildewed envelopes in musty storage chests. It had to be found, if at all, in the spoken word.

For precedent to call our study history, perhaps we must turn back to such primitive practitioners as Herodotus. They, too, accepted stories by witnesses and by witnesses of witnesses, using their best judgment to validate a statement, but often being unable to affirm or deny its accuracy. When finished with this gathering of tales, they wrote what they had learned about the attributes of a given people or event. This was history, and we too shall tell what we have learned from the stories told to us by our village friends about Bang Chan's past.

At best, however, this guise fits the modern social scientist awk-

wardly. In the classical accounts of foreign peoples certain naïvetés inevitably appear, for those historians spoke a foreign language, if at all, with a heavy Greek accent. When identical words appeared in their own and another language, they were unaware that the meaning might have changed. When made aware, rather than recognize a variant usage, they condemned the barbarian stupidity. Idioms were rarely understood in their efforts to make literal translations. They thought always in their mother tongues. Their accounts would fail to meet the standards of a world better skilled in empathy, semantics, and linguistics.

Today our account of what happened poses other problems. While we have become accustomed to cognates and idioms, much still resists translation. Two languages may offer no exact equivalents, and approximate substitution rubs away the richness of the original. Thus we might translate the Near East tabu on eating pork into a fear of disease; something of the horror is captured, but the overtone of nauseous contamination is missed. More context is needed to make the word as well as the custom meaningful. So the ethnographer does not translate but seeks to convey the world together with something of the language that goes with it. Then the untranslatable becomes understood without need for translation.

Yet the problem of balancing the equation has only shifted. The ethnographer still must address his audience, which now expects to be transposed vicariously. He wears a mask that enables him to perceive a world through the eyes of an alien people. Through the mouth of the mask come familiar words describing what he sees. He begins with curious tales of the rice goddess and her pregnancy, which produces rice; he tells of disease caused by spirit possession and its cure by exorcism. All this is accepted well enough, but when he says these foreigners live only in the present and have no history, the audience grows restless. Someone shouts into the ears of his mask, "Why, they must have history! Everybody has history. They have culture inherited from their parents and grandparents, don't they? Ask them whether they do the same things as their parents."

Through the mask the ethnographer replies, "Yes, they say they do many things in the same way their parents do. Other things they do quite differently. They say it depends."

"That proves it," asserts the skeptic. "They have continuity with the past just as we ourselves cannot escape our forebears."



Then the ethnographer adds, "They say, though, that they pick what they wish from the past, learning only that. Parents do not give them anything automatically. They have to ask parents for what they wish. The elder generation gives only upon request. If no one asks for this or that, it simply disappears and is forgotten."

The skeptic is still dissatisfied. "They just don't realize what they have received from their past. Ask them about their language, their agricultural rites. They didn't even notice these things."

"They admit having the same language as their parents," the ethnographer reports. "They learned it from their parents before they could really choose. It was useful so they kept on speaking it. If they moved to another country, it would not be useful. They would have to learn another. As for agricultural rites, no one bothers to learn about them unless he needs them for farming."

The skeptic, however, remains unconvinced, still muttering, "Whether they know it or not, they have continuity with the past. So they have history."

In such a dialogue, we return to the same ontological problems that the classical historians faced. While they assured skeptical audiences that distant people were human beings with barbarian attributes, so we seek to make clear that Bang Chan farmers can be rational, normal human beings and still have no history. How can we and the classical historian convince an audience?

The chief differences lie in the paradoxes and conflicts that result from our urge for empathy. Before their audiences the classical historians did not worry about misjudging an alien people or failing to convey some subtle meaning. If Herodotus reported that the Massegetae drank blood, anyone in Greece knew they were ignorant barbarians. That ended the matter. Today the ethnographer presumes that all people act as normally and rationally as any other. His experience from living months or years with a people convinces him. As for the Massegetae, our contemporaries would be constrained to explain perhaps that these people considered blood a source of needed vitality, or that blood substituted for scarce water. He excuses their distasteful customs by showing their utility. When people lack history, the ethnographer assumes the normality of this lack. However, he stands between the contradictions of two worlds with rational people in both. When he writes a history of a people without history he has imposed a judgment of his own culture on the scene,



which he thus distorts as much as when he offers a poor translation of a phrase.

While one people may feel as confident of the existence of history as of the existence of their own minds and bodies, this does not guarantee its reality. History, like demonology and witchcraft, can never be demonstrated to another people unprepared to admit its existence. The proofs serve to convince only those already convinced. He who habitually thinks with another set of symbols cannot communicate. In this sense history is a "collective idea" of certain peoples. An ethnographer with doubts about the existence of history is not acting in good faith when he frames his observations of society as history.

Another may argue that the existence of history is irrelevant. Nevertheless, its presence as a collective idea may influence reactions to the new as well as to the old. Bang Chan farmers may establish the uniqueness of their generation by selecting only what they "wish" from the coffers of the older generation. This may give them greater flexibility in meeting the new than is given to other people who sense the past pressing heavily upon their shoulders. At least, here is a hypothesis to be tested, even if many years lie ahead in Bang Chan and elsewhere before the test can be made.

These unanswered and perhaps unanswerable questions indicate our timidity and self-consciousness in this undertaking. The classic historians, however, furnish us with bracing examples of dauntlessness. Their travels along unguarded routes took a great deal more courage than an hour's bus ride to Bang Chan. Their innocent judgments rendered their work no less valuable. Our last count of historians done away with by their critics shows the number to be small. So we approach twelve decades of Bang Chan aware that time and history may exist only in the heads of some men, and may be dim or absent in other heads. Nonetheless, we shall impose on our findings our own chronological ordering along with our assumptions of temporal flow from past to present. If the remainder of our judgments be made as innocently as those of the classical historians, we shall have at least described what appeared to happen.