Chapter 1

Introduction

This book concerns a generation of economic, social, and cultural changes on a former Philippine land frontier. More particularly, it examines the evolution of new economic strategies, the advent of novel forms of household organization, and the emergence of new ideas about social hierarchy and personal worth in a onetime frontier community presently caught up in an array of postfrontier transitions: from short-fallow shifting cultivation to intensive, permanent field agriculture; from a relatively egalitarian social order to a more socially differentiated one; and from individual identification with a local, parochial culture to identification with a more cosmopolitan national culture. Hence it is a book about what anthropologists, in what now seems like another era, once called “becoming modern.” Indeed, a local version of this same phrase, “agamodernize kami ren,” often figures, sometimes ironically and sometimes not, in the reflections of local residents themselves on the changes that have transformed their community.

The nature of this transformation is not in fact easily captured by a single word or phrase, although some version of it is presently unfolding throughout much of rural Southeast Asia. Only by attending to this transformation locale by locale can we satisfactorily grasp what life in the “new” rural Southeast Asia is really like. It is my contention in this book that in the particular locale considered here, despite some hardships and uncertainties, this new life offers substantial and broadly accessible opportunities for household prosperity and personal fulfillment. By probing here both the nature of these new opportunities and the sorts of adjustments that households and individuals make in response to them, I aim both to lay out some of the breadth and depth of rural change in the region and to expose to clearer view some of the local-level wellsprings of this change.

The book is based on two extended and detailed studies I conducted in the community approximately twenty years apart, the first during 1970–1972 and the second during 1988–1995. This time spread enabled me to become
reacquainted with people I first knew as young children now as married men and women, heading households of their own. Men I had once known as boys, whose own fathers had once “slashed and burned,” now met as farmers to discuss such matters as whether the biological pest controls promoted by the City Agricultural Office could effectively replace chemical pesticides. Women I had once known as girls, whose own mothers’ places in life involved considerable productive work but was very much in the home, now moved and worked comfortably outside of it. And I came to know both boys and girls again as fathers and mothers, who continued to speak to their parents in Cuyonon but who today spoke to their own children in Tagalog or English.

The circumstances of this research project and the unique data that have resulted provide a strategic opportunity to rethink the nature of change in contemporary rural Southeast Asian societies. In one sense, I simply hoped to answer the question of whether one particular community’s “honeymoon” with a relatively egalitarian, resource-rich frontier is now over, or is the new good too, and for whom? But this book is premised on the belief that the existing models of agrarian transformation that we as social scientists bring to bear on such questions will remain inadequate until they simultaneously address the community, the household, and the individual—all arguably vital components of a satisfactory understanding of change in rural Southeast Asia and yet all deeply problematic as units of analysis. Thus, at a more general level, I also aim to point the way toward a more holistic anthropology of change and toward a more comprehensive understanding of change in rural Southeast Asia.

These considerations led me to frame my research and, later, the writing of this book around three broad concerns: one ethnographic, one theoretical, and one methodological. Ethnographically, I describe a community of intensive cultivators-in-the-making and attempt to capture the various economic, social, and cultural dimensions of an important intergenerational process whereby a frontier community becomes a more established community.1 Theoretically, my concern is with the nature of social differentiation in small-holder farming communities in general and, more particularly, in mixed-farming communities with extensive market involvements and abundant nonagricultural employment opportunities that relate to their locations in zones of intense rural-urban interaction. And methodologically, I explore dilemmas associated with the study of local social systems in analytical isolation from the larger systems in which they are embedded, dilemmas made more acute in today’s world by the ambiguous nature of “local system” boundaries and associated uncertainties about where local agency can most profitably be ascribed.

The manner in which I have pursued these concerns here was inevitably shaped not only by my prior field research in San Jose but by the conclusions
I reached in an earlier book in which that research culminated (Eder 1982). There I reconstructed the historical circumstances surrounding San Jose’s frontier settlement and early growth under conditions of relative equality of opportunity. My explanatory goal was to understand the emergence and subsequent institutionalization of social inequality within a generation of migrant farmers who arrived on a land-rich frontier with seemingly equal starting points, and I examined in some detail the experiences of eight such self-made migrants—some conspicuous successes, others conspicuous failures. Comparing and evaluating the causes of success and failure of these and other pioneers, I argued that the origins of inequality in San Jose depended less on the individuals’ times of arrival, amounts of starting capital, or other such factors than it did on personal differences. Social inequality, for the most part, had its basis in a level of motivation and in a kind of on-the-job competence that some men and women brought to the frontier and others did not.

The balance of my earlier study concerned the emergent system of social inequality and how it came to operate locally to influence and determine behavior at increasingly disparate positions within the community status order. An array of economic, social structural, and attitudinal circumstances helped keep rich farmers rich and poor farmers poor, in the short run, and made it likely that the then present generation of parents would transmit existing inequalities to their children. Perhaps the greatest continuity of this volume with my first study lies in my enduring desire to attend to the individual and to the diversity of human capabilities and aspirations that I believe must be reckoned with in any satisfactory social scientific account of change.

**Ethnographic Aims**

Recent decades, it seems, have not been kind to Philippine anthropology, or at least not to those anthropologists seeking order or direction in Philippine studies. Ethnographically, for those, like myself, who are broadly ecological in orientation, studies of the peoples and cultures of the archipelago had long been cast in a lowland peoples versus upland peoples mold. Whatever else their subject matter, these ethnographies typically concerned either one of the irrigated rice-growing, Hispanized “peasant” peoples inhabiting the coastal plains and interior valleys or one of the hunter-gatherer or shifting cultivator “tribal” peoples inhabiting mountainous interior regions. Such studies thus fit comfortably with wider hill-valley cultural ecological understandings about the human landscape of island (and mainland) Southeast Asia. They also implied a relatively straightforward agenda for additional research: to continue such studies, on one or the other side of the lowland-upland divide, and hence to address the remaining and substantial gaps in the ethnographic knowledge of Philippine peoples.
These gaps remain to the present. Recent research has been stimulating but eclectic. While this work has been more theoretically informed than in the past, in diverse ways that reflect the current pluralism in anthropological theory, much of it has not been focused specifically on a named ethnolinguistic group or a “people.” At the same time, there has been growing discomfort in anthropology with the notion, long a cornerstone of the lowland-upland cultural distinction in Southeast Asian studies, that some kinds of people have been more isolated from outside influences than other kinds of people. Further, in Philippine studies, there has been growing appreciation of the historically and culturally constructed nature of the distinction between lowland peoples and upland peoples (Gibson 1986: 15–17). All of this has been healthy for Philippine anthropology, but it has made the ethnographic landscape of the Philippines appear more chaotic than ever, for there is little agreement about where to seek the conceptual order in this landscape.

Meanwhile, in recent decades, millions of lowland Filipinos have poured into upland regions throughout the archipelago, driven by lack of economic opportunity in the densely settled lowlands. Today as many as one-third of all Filipinos may inhabit the uplands, broadly defined, with a wide range of still poorly understood consequences for the indigenous peoples who traditionally inhabited many of these regions but who now often find themselves in the minority. At the same time, in the lowlands, the sorts of rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migrations that have long been a characteristic feature of Philippine life at both the regional and national levels remain common. The outcome of these various population movements for the nation as a whole has been a highly interdigitated and interdependent human landscape, in which traditional anthropological associations of particular cultures with particular ecological adaptations or geographical heartlands seem increasingly irrelevant to an on-the-ground understanding of contemporary rural Philippine economy and society.

These considerations have led me to frame the ethnographic goals of this book around the notion that San Jose represents a frequently encountered kind of community in the contemporary Philippines, spontaneously settled on a onetime forest frontier, shallow in history but richly varied in agricultural ecology and cultural tradition. To my ethnographic exploration I bring several perspectives. In ecological perspective, I hope to capture the transition from a pioneer system of shifting cultivation aimed at new lands clearance to a postfrontier, settled upland agriculture. I particularly want to attend to two postfrontier agricultural systems, vegetable gardening and tree farming, that are comparatively unstudied in the Philippines but that have contributed much to community prosperity.
At the same time, the market-driven processes of agricultural intensification responsible for the emergence of such specializations raise crucial concerns about sustainable upland resource management that merit close attention. Elsewhere in the Philippines and throughout Southeast Asia, the susceptibility of upland agricultural systems of all kinds to erosion and fertility degradation has contributed to numerous local ecological crises, both in the uplands themselves and in adjacent lowlands (Hefner 1990:16–17; Lewis 1992). Is San Jose’s own brief agricultural history another instance of this discouraging phenomenon, or does it offer some lessons about an alternative and more sustainable future?

From a related socioeconomic perspective, my descriptive aim is to address the simple but important question of how broadly or narrowly the benefits of development were being shared, both across the social order of San Jose and over time, as the community filled up and its residents settled down. In these regards my study articulates with a rich tradition of lowland village studies and restudies in the Philippines, focused in good part on the problematics of social differentiation and economic well-being, seen over time (see Muijzenberg 1997). Here lies another crucial concern, familiar to the numerous government and private agencies presently working with the nation’s indigenous and migrant uplanders, about the economic viability of it all. Can sufficient numbers of people make adequate livings in the evolving economic landscape, without further violence to the environment?

This last matter appears to merit particular attention in San Jose, as a former frontier community, because studies of the filling in of land frontiers have often had a pessimistic Malthusian tone. Life may be pretty good for the moment, but demographic and economic realities will soon bring the honeymoon to an end (e.g., Krinks 1974; Margolis 1973). My own view of new land settlement and rural development in the Philippines, derived from observations in San Jose and other frontier areas, has been consistently more optimistic. Hence I have long wondered about the degree to which the pessimism of other studies was warranted by actual data about changes. Perhaps it merely reflected a model of change that failed to attend to the characteristic “occupational multiplicity” of contemporary rural society and otherwise took an insufficiently broad view of the Philippine countryside (see Rutten 1993:3).

Finally, in cultural perspective, I aim to contribute to Philippine ethnography by portraying in some detail the lifeways and aspirations of the members of the San Jose community. Herein lies something of a dilemma. On the one hand, there has been little ethnographic work of any sort on lowland or Hispanized people in recent years (important exceptions include Cannell 1999; Dumont 1992; Nadeau 1995; Pertierra 1988; Rutten 1993; and Zialcita 1989) and almost nothing at all on such geographically restricted
and numerically small ethnic groups as the Cuyonon, the Hispanized folk
responsible for San Jose’s founding and early development. Some of the dis-
tinctive and endearing cultural traditions that Cuyonon once pursued on
their small home island of Cuyo figured in my own earlier study of the pio-
neer settlement of San Jose (Eder 1982:30–45). Here I hope again to repre-
sent something of Cuyonon culture and people, now seen through the lens of
their contemporary way of life on Palawan. On the other hand and as noted
above, I also hope to rise above a simplistic one people–one place view of the
ethnolinguistic map of the Philippines and portray a contemporary, post-
frontier community in all of its cultural diversity. Thus I also aim to repre-
sent the “culture” of San Jose, and in a way that goes beyond a simplistic
formulation of Cuyonon traditions versus outsider traditions to address the
manner in which meaning and identity are currently being negotiated and
renegotiated within the community by residents of all kinds.

I have attempted to resolve this dilemma by doing something of each,
perhaps not always successfully. But by focusing below on local concerns
about community identity and on the ways that households and individuals
experience and respond to social differentiation, I believe that I have found
a useful way to frame the issues. Notions about sense of place, family stand-
ing, honor, and what it means to be a good and worthwhile person are com-
mon cultural preoccupations of Filipinos of all kinds—and these notions,
too, are undergoing change.

Theoretical Issues

How best to theorize social change in contemporary Third World agrarian
communities and societies continues to perplex social scientists. The analy-
ysis of class relationships has been social science’s most powerful tool for this
purpose, but class analysis continues to suffer from conceptual uncertainties
about the nature of class and its relationships to more general processes of
social differentiation and about how the role of class in social and political
life differs from that of religion, ethnicity, or political ideology (Hefner
1990:19). In addition to such conceptual problems, a significant difficulty
for the empirically inclined is that particular cases of contemporary com-
community and household change can appear so refractory to class analysis as
to render any such effort of dubious utility. Certainly it would be difficult
to represent San Jose’s socioeconomic structure in terms of class categories.
The multiplicity of on- and off-farm economic activities in the community
is such that many residents enter into a variety of different economic rela-
tionships at the same time, making impossible the demarcation and juxta-
position of clear-cut collectivities of households standing in some type of
stable relationship with one another, or with the means of production, over
time. Empirical complexities of this sort have been widely noted in rural Asian communities (e.g., Kerkvliet 1990:75–77; van Schendel 1981:37n, 293; see Roseberry 1983:71).

Since I do not intend to enter any debates about the nature of peasants, simple commodity producers, and the like (see, for example, Friedmann 1980; Kahn 1982; and Smith 1984), I will not attempt to characterize San Jose residents in terms of one or another of these theoretically loaded categories. For purposes of my own analysis, these residents—at least those who engage in agriculture—are mostly smallholding intensive cultivators, producing some of their own food but primarily food to sell; supplying labor primarily from their own households but also hiring some; and possessing heritable rights to their resources (see Netting 1989:1). San Jose’s cultivators hence resemble Llambi’s “small modern farmers” (1988), petty capitalist producers wholly embedded in various market structures who work their own farms by combining domestic labor and some hiring of additional labor and who experience—or attempt to experience—capital accumulation. (Aguilar similarly argues that Philippine agriculture is capitalist, even in its small-scale “peasant” rice-farming sector; see Aguilar 1989).

In the broadest terms, my own theoretical interest in this volume concerns a phenomenon sometimes phrased as the “persistence of the middle peasant” (see, for example, Hefner 1990:154) and with what goes on, in effect, when the many rather than the few are able to swim rather than sink. The tenacity of family-farming households in agrarian economies experiencing capitalist penetration has long figured in a debate about the ultimate consequences of such penetration for agrarian social structure. On the one hand are those who have argued that, while various forces may work to speed or delay the process, the most likely long-term outcome of the capitalization of agriculture is still that envisioned by Lenin: polarization of the countryside into two opposing classes, capitalist farmers and landless laborers, linked by wage relations (Bartra 1974; de Janvry 1981). On the other hand are those who claim that, at least under some conditions, capitalist farming can stimulate small-scale entrepreneurship and socioeconomic differentiation, with the attendant persistence of small family farms (Goodman and Redclift 1982:109–112; Maclachlan 1987:16–23).

Both sides agree that small farmers do in fact persist in some contemporary capitalist settings. For such persistence, two sorts of explanations are conventionally offered. The first sort cite some countervailing contextual circumstance as blocking proletarianization of the labor force, thereby mitigating any capitalist threats to family farming. Such mitigating circumstances have been said to include state policies (Fegan 1989), the technological aspects of particular agricultural systems (Bray 1983), the proximity of
urban markets (Goodman and Redclift 1982), and the availability of supplementary off-farm employment opportunities (Bhaduri et al. 1986; Gladwin and Zabawa 1987). The second sort of explanation emphasizes characteristics of the farmers themselves, most notably the organization and Chayanovian calculus of the peasant household, often said to make small farmers particularly efficient or resilient, or even to provide them a competitive advantage against large, capitalist farms (e.g., Hopkins 1987; Netting 1989; Reinhardt and Barlett 1989).

Whether any such factors will ultimately prove sufficient to prevent the demise of small family farms remains to be seen. Meanwhile, to the degree that the issue can be regarded as an empirical one, there is evidence to support both sides. No resolution appears imminent, however, in part because of the shaky empirical foundations of many case studies (Hart et al. 1989:3); in part because of the uncertain relevance of case studies, however sound empirically, to testing global propositions about agrarian change in whole societies (Kahn 1983; White 1989); and in part because of problems with the testability of the propositions themselves—for example, lack of clarity about their boundedness in time and space or even about the actual terms of discourse (Deere 1987:3).

Indeed, the juxtaposition of the notions of “proletarianization” of the labor force and “persistence” of family or “peasant” farming is itself problematic. The basic concept of proletarianization concerns the shift from self-employment and individual control over resources to wage employment (see, for example, Feldman and McCarthy 1987:545), not the shift from agricultural to nonagricultural employment or lifeways per se. Because the shift to wage employment has historically often entailed marginalization and suffering, this too is a major concern in the literature on proletarianization (see, for example, Aguilar 1989:57–58). Both of these concerns are visible in such contemporary definitions of proletarianization as “the process of the loss of the means of production by small producers, craftsmen, peasants and traders and their consequent impoverishment” (Wilczynski 1981:467).

In the study of rural Asian societies, it is in the context of growing reliance on nonagricultural employment among previously self-sufficient, full-time farmers that the concept of proletarianization usually figures in the analysis of social change. Indeed, the term appears to have become a kind of shorthand for any kind of occupational movement away from full-time farming (e.g., Huang 1985:17; Rahman 1988; Scott 1985:68, 124). Proletarianization, however, is an immensely varied and poorly understood phenomenon (Munslow and Finch 1984:1) that is not simply mutually exclusive with the persistence of peasant farming. This observation is not new; Kautsky, for example, also recognized that complex and even con-
flicting processes of agrarian change may operate simultaneously (1899). Part of the issue is methodological. The desire to simplify complex situations in Asia, for example, has led many observers to select restrictive analytical approaches, enabling them, in effect, to find either proletarianization or persistence, depending on the selection made (White 1989:28). More than analytical focus is at stake, however; because farm households often participate in multiple class relations, many Third World agrarianists simultaneously display both peasant and proletarian characteristics (see, for example, Deere 1987; de Janvry and Vandeman 1987; and Roseberry 1989:191). Attention to such complexities in Asian settings is visible in recent ethnographic and historical studies by Kerkvliet (1990), Huang (1990), and Wong (1987).

Nevertheless, discussion of social differentiation in Asia still often continues in either/or—Lenin versus Chayanov—terms. Writing of Latin America, Roseberry recently observed that “our understandings of peasants within contemporary . . . capitalist societies are still framed in much the same terms that were used in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Russia” (1989:177). The same has been true of studies of Asian capitalist societies. Recent analyses of agrarian change in Bangladesh (Rahman 1986), Malaysia (Scott 1985), and Taiwan (Greenhalgh 1985), for example, are all framed more or less in terms of persistence versus proletarianization.

The safest (and most useful) conclusion for the moment is that the local dynamics of agrarian change and differentiation are immensely variable, reflecting often unique combinations of complex and even conflicting processes (White 1989:28). Most observers today would also agree with Bernstein that “the internal class differentiation of the peasantry is not a necessary condition nor effect of the intensification of commodity relations—this will depend upon the concrete conditions in which intensification occurs” (1979:431; see also Deere 1987). Realistically, then, the best that most individual studies can do is to illuminate some aspects of differentiation processes (White 1989:29), while recognizing that these processes unfold within local communities that vary widely in ecology, history, and urban proximity.

My concern in this volume, however, is not so much with the conditions under which differentiation is marked by the persistence of family-farming households; these vary widely, have been abundantly studied, and are difficult to generalize about. Rather, I shall examine what it is about household organization (households being, in some views, the crucial level of analysis) that makes such persistence possible. One ready answer is that households are extremely flexible adaptive units (e.g., Wilk 1991a). But the notion that households “adapt,” once an inspired insight, has become a truism—and
hence no longer a satisfying explanation. Hence my principal theoretical ambition is to take a closer look at this alleged household adaptive process and determine what it is, precisely, that “adapts” and how.

Such a look will in turn require close attention to the notion of “household strategy.” This notion has held much recent appeal in anthropology, but household strategy research has also come in for considerable criticism. Flawed assumptions and methodological problems limit, as Wolf says, the approach’s field of empirical vision in research (1992:17), criticisms to which I return shortly. First, however, I want to emphasize that San Jose is an opportune setting to explore questions about household strategies critically, because the idea that households do, or at least should, have some sort of economic plan of action for the future is an important local notion. Such plans usually are referred to by the Cuyonon term “plano,” but the English term “strategy” is also employed. This observation does not prove that household strategies actually do exist, and local residents can misuse the term just as social scientists have. But these circumstances provide an opportunity, pursued in Chapter 5, to investigate the question; just when is it appropriate to speak of households as having “strategies”?

It is characteristic of many contemporary San Jose household strategies that they entail a combination of agricultural and nonagricultural activities or otherwise involve household labor deployed on several fronts, giving rise to multiple and complex relationships with the means of production. This often-noted phenomenon in rural Asian societies is usually theorized under the concept of “semiproletarianization” (e.g., Banzon-Bautista 1984; Huang 1985). This concept has proven useful to students of Latin American peasantry (e.g., de Janvry 1981) to relate part-time rural labor migration to the development of urban capitalism, but little is known about the role or behavior of semiproletarians in rural social systems in Latin America or elsewhere (Cancian 1992:77). Hence a final theoretical aim of this study is to help clarify this notion.

I shall argue that part-time or “supplementary” farming can be a fairly stable adaptation in its own right, rendering the processual implication that semiproletarians are inexorably “in transition” to a wage-working lifeway as unwarranted. I also aim to explore the implications of this ubiquitous part-farmer, part-wage worker occupational mix for identity and meaning within the community itself. There the main threat to a family’s welfare is seen less as proletarianization than as pauperization (Hefner 1990), and semiproletarianization may itself be a household strategy not to confront capitalism or merely to ensure household survival, but for household prosperity. Farming households with wage-earning members may only be “part-time farmers,” but by farming only part-time such households remove themselves from the
agrarian nexus and may create a different, and potentially more remunerative, set of production activities (Hopkins 1987:168).

**Methodological Concerns**

The smallholding farmers, fisherfolk, and wage earners who compose the population of San Jose—and much of the human landscape of Southeast Asia—are also householders, groups of individuals living together under a common roof and sharing a variety of daily tasks. In recent years there has been considerable anthropological enthusiasm for the study of households, both on the grounds that they are interesting entities in their own right and in the belief that such study may provide the key to articulating individual and wider system levels of analysis. Situated between rational actor or psychological approaches on the one hand and structural determinism on the other, household-based approaches offer to mediate disparate but equally important levels of analysis in a way that privileges the decisions and actions of people (Davidson 1991:14; Wilk 1991a:31; Wolf 1992:13).

But the recent emergence in anthropology of something akin to “household studies” (Netting, Wilk, and Arnould 1984; Wilk 1989) has also helped demonstrate that these ubiquitous social units must not be reified or taken for granted if anthropologists are to understand how households generate and respond to wider patterns of economic and social change (Durrenberger and Tannenbaum 1992:86). Instead, we must pay careful attention to what goes on inside of households, examining in the process how such crucial variables as age, gender, authority, and principles of behavior influence the interests and activities of individual members—interests and activities that may sometimes conflict (Barlett 1989; Wilk 1991b). It has also become clear that as households move through different stages of the domestic cycle, individual interests and activities often do diverge. This finding has led some to conclude that households have less of the corporate character traditionally attributed to them (Laslett 1984) and others to worry that, for the purposes of the study of social differentiation, the household is an “extremely problematic concept” (White 1989:22).

How such matters are reflected in the behavior of households in San Jose will be considered in some detail in Chapter 5, although I otherwise treat households as relatively unproblematic entities. There remains, after all, considerable agreement about the nature of households in general: they characteristically engage in some combination of production, distribution (sharing, consumption, and so forth), biological and social reproduction, transmission of property, and coresidence (Netting 1993:59). True, the variety of specific morphological forms that households may assume complicates matters of definition. In the Philippines, for example, households may be composed of nuclear
or extended families, they may be male-headed or female-headed, and so on. But the shared, quasi-corporate nature of a household's characteristic activities is the diacritical feature. The family household, according to Netting:

mobilizes and allocates the labor and manages the resources of the smallholding: the household is the key productive unit. Though household members may also carry on individual agricultural production or have nonfarm occupations, they generally contribute to the farm enterprise in material ways and derive a part of their consumption from pooled household subsistence production and income. (1993:100–101)

These same attributes also help account for the broad acceptance of the household as the most appropriate unit for the study of socioeconomic differences and changes, in general (Netting 1989), in the Philippines, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Kerkvliet 1990:63; Wolf 1992). Indeed, calling attention to the “remarkable congruence” between the social organization of family households and the practice of smallholder farming, Netting argues that the same sorts of contingencies that drive agricultural intensification also make the household a more central social institution than ever (1993:60–61, 101). Certainly this “congruence,” and the complex web of interrelationships between households and agrarian change that it entails, has stimulated much productive research in Southeast Asia (Hart 1986; Hart, Turton, and White 1989; White 1976; Wong 1987).

Such research has been powerfully influenced by the fact that households in the region are characteristically composed of families—in the case of San Jose and many other Philippine locales, nuclear families. The kinship and family systems that predominate in the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia differ significantly from those in East Asia and South Asia, particularly with regard to bilateral inheritance, nuclear family structure, and the status accorded to women (Wolf 1992:56). The familial nature of households in San Jose, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, has important implications for the ways households function as productive enterprises. According to Netting: “The key relationships that order the social world of the family—parent/child, older/younger, female/male, brother/sister—simultaneously both structure social and moral expectations and provide a conduit for environmental knowledge, task skills, and modes of labor organization” (1993:63).

Viewing the farm household simultaneously as an enduring social group and as a productive enterprise has led to much stimulating comparative research on how households work in different cultural settings (e.g., Huang 1985, 1990; Netting 1981; Wilk 1991a). It has also led to needed critical reexamination of some of the assumptions that have guided research about how such households work. Particularly relevant to the case material below
are several strands of this reexamination, all loosely addressed to the notion
that households have identifiable livelihood “strategies.” One principal crit-
icism of previous household strategy research is that it has shown an uncrit-
ical tendency to merge analytically the individual and the household, thereby
treating both the household itself and the individuals within it as identical
and interchangeable units (Wolf 1991:14). But, as Wolf observes, households
do not decide things, people within households do—and, more particularly,
certain people as opposed to others. More often than not, household decision
making involves complex processes of domination and resistance between
genders and generations, and at the very least, it cannot simply be assumed
that the interests of the household head are the same as those of less empow-

In a related vein, in previous research on household strategies, the indi-
vidual orchestrating the strategy is often assumed to be a male, a sexual bias
scarcely appropriate to research on rural household organization in
Southeast Asia (Wolf 1991:33). A further and equally unfortunate tendency
has been to extrapolate household strategies from observations of completed
actions rather than from consultations with individual household members
about their own reasons for their behavior. These are all important concerns,
and while some are difficult to attend to empirically, I have attempted to
come to terms with them as much as possible in my own discussion of house-
hold strategies in Chapter 5.

Two final points. First, in emphasizing the importance of household
organization, it is not my intention to slight the crucial influence of class
location on household histories and livelihood strategies. Conceptual prob-
lems and empirical complexities notwithstanding, the importance of class to
an understanding of household economic decision making in agrarian soci-
eties is well established, both in Southeast Asia (Hart, Turton, and White
1989; Scott 1985) and in general (Davidson 1991; Deere 1990). The
processes I wish to understand here, however, intersect with class and also
help account for variation in household livelihood strategies (see Netting
1993:189–231). I return to these matters in chapters 4 and 5, but my basic
point is that it is important to recognize the pluralistic influence of class and
to attend to its real-world interactions with other household and extra-
household structures of influence on actors’ interests (Hefner 1990:25–26).
My focus on household organization and the variety of influences on it also
reflects my desire to give methodological preference to the sorts of factors
that San Jose residents themselves emphasize in discussions about how and
why second-generation households vary. I do so not because the views of
local residents should be accepted uncritically but because I believe they have
important insights to offer about the issues in question.
Second, I do not use the term “household strategy” to imply the necessary presence of neatly planned and rationally implemented behavior by members of a household group. For this latter phenomenon I shall instead reserve the narrower, local notion, discussed above, of a household plano—for if it is true that many households do not actually strategize or plan for the future, others indeed do make such plans. As I shall show, these differences and the reasons for them perplex local residents as well as anthropologists. For the moment, however, I shall employ the term “household strategy” more simply, as a broad and convenient rubric to refer to the varying economic activities of households, deliberately planned or not, as their members respond to the changing circumstances around them (Clay and Schwarzweller 1991:5–6).4