

The University of Hull

***Cross Border Mobility and Multiple Identity Choices:
The Urban Akha in Chiang Mai, Thailand***

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Doctor of Philosophy
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by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement

List of Illustrations

Chapter 1 Introduction

- (1) **Aim and Field of Investigation.....p.1-28**
- 1. Setting
 - 2. The Mechanism of Trans-National Migration
 - 3. Research Question
 - 4. Outline of the thesis
- (2) **Methodology.....p.31-49**
- 1. Multi-local field sites
 - 2. Positionality of the observer

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

- (1) **The concept of culture and ethnic categorisation...p.51-73**
- (2) **Identity and trans-national mobility.....p.74-87**
- (3) **Identity choices in practice.....p.88-101**

Chapter 3 Intertwining Contextual Influences

- (1) **The Global Context.....p.102-109**
- (2) **The National Setting.....p.110-117**
- (3) **The Regional Influence.....p.118-129**

Chapter 4 Akha Ethnic Category and Identification

(1) Akha Ethnic Category.....p.130-165

1. Ethnicity and the Nation State
2. Ethnographic Sources and the Akha Category
3. Akha as a Trans-national Category

(2) Akha Identification.....p.167-190

1. Self-ascriptive Identification
2. What Does 'Akha Identity' Mean?
3. Genealogical Identification, Sumio
4. Cultural Identification, Akhazang

Chapter 5 Akha Mobility and Practice

(1) Dynamics of the Akha Village.....p.191-208

1. Akha Southward Mobility
2. The Porous Nature of the Akha Village
3. Supra-Village Political Power

(2) Social Networks beyond the Akha Ethnic Boundaries p.210-244

1. Relations with the Dai (Tai) through Polity
2. Relations with the Chinese through Trade

Chapter 6 Thai Development and Social Change

(1) Development and 'Hill Tribes'.....p.245-283

1. 'Hill tribes' as a Category
2. The Image of 'Hill tribes' as a Tourist resource
3. Grass-roots Development Ideology and Identity

(2) Emergence of Differences within ‘Akha’.....p.286-330

1. Thai Schooling and Hierarchy
2. Christianization
3. Gender, Consumption and Choices

Chapter 7 Conclusion.....p.331-339

Appendix.....p.340-342

Bibliography.....p.343-390

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List of Illustrations

Figure

1	Four syncretic dimensions	p.130
2	Illustration of Hani in Chinese historical document	p.166
3	Thai Airway's flight magazine, 'Sawadee'	p.273

Map

1	Research site map Thailand	p.29
2	Distribution of the Akha population and main towns	p.30
3	Geographical feature of the region	p.50
4	Cross Border Trade Routes Map	p.209
5	Upper north Thailand and main roads	p.284
6	Chiang Mai city	p.285

}

Appendix

1	Village Survey	p.340
2	Semi-structured Interview Questions	p.341
3	List of Case Studies	p.342

Chapter 1 Introduction

(1) Aim and Field of Investigation

1. Setting

Increasing number of urban ‘hill tribes’

Over the last twenty years, migration of ‘hill tribes’ into northern towns of Thailand seeking both education and job opportunities has been much in evidence. In particular, the young generation between the ages 15 - 35, is moving down to the lowland towns to seek further education, richer experiences, cash incomes and a better future. It has become much easier for the ‘hill tribes’ to get to the lowlands because of the dramatic improvement in road transport as a result of Thailand’s recent economic development. This together with competition for land, a seductive image of urban life portrayed by the media, recruitment agencies and the requirement of a higher education in order to obtain better paid jobs and better prospects have intensified the desire of the ‘hill tribes’ to stay in the lowland.

According to research by Vatikiotis in 1982, the Akha population in central Chiang Mai was estimated to be 76 (Vatikiotis 1984:200). However, according to my recent field work calculations, it is now estimated to be around 2000 (1996).¹ Dr. Leo Alting von Geusau, a Dutch anthropologist specialising in

¹ Thanks to the help of three Akha friends, we could count 1647 (790 males, 857 females) Akha residing in central Chiang Mai . The survey was conducted in October - November 1996.

Akha studies, living in Chiang Mai for over twenty years, claimed that about one in seven Akha in Thailand no longer live in hill villages.²

Today, a third, urban-based generation has already emerged which has grown up in the city, and they have few opportunities or need to go up to the mountains. The number of the younger generation (between the ages of 15 and 25) who have no experience of working in the rice fields is rapidly increasing. For them, it is sometimes harder to pursue their life in the mountains than in the city.

Urban migration had come to dominate the lives of everyone, not only those who migrated but also the friends and relatives who stayed behind. It has come to constitute an essential economic mainstay, and without its support life would be very difficult in the hill area. After the launch of the reforestation project³, which displaced large numbers of people, increasing numbers headed for the towns, where they worked mainly in the low-paid service sector. More women and young people started moving down and, while temporary and circular migration remained significant, it became steadily more common for people to stay in the lowlands for extended periods and, in some cases, to resettle on a long-term basis. As the reforestation programme grows, it is likely that the number of such urban 'hill tribes' will increase even more in the future.

As we know that we could not count quite a number of Akha, particularly illegal workers, we estimate that the total number was around 2000.

² Amongst the 70,000 in Thailand, 60,000 reside in the villages, 10,000 are out of the villages -- 'Twin Problem belongs to the past' *Bangkok Post* 15 August 1997

³ In 1993, in the celebration of the 50th year of the king's reign, The Royal Forestry Department launched the five-year reforestation project by planting trees, mostly pine (Sturgeon 1997:141).

Nevertheless, there are few studies looking at the issue of urban ‘hill tribes’. Most previous research on ‘hill tribes’ in Thailand was carried out as mountain village case studies. In order to fill in the missing dimension, this study sets out to focus on the urban ‘hill tribes’, with special focus on the Akha in Chiang Mai, the principal urban centre of northern Thailand⁴ (see figure 1: the research site map). It is intended to supplement the existing rural village case studies with urban research in order to understand the dynamics of Akha identity.

Push Factors: Land rights and the Reforestation Project

Several social and economic development projects conducted by government agencies and NGOs were introduced during the 1970s and 1980s. These development projects were aimed at substituting opium cultivation and increasing local incomes by introducing other cash crops such as cabbages and ginger. As a result of these introductions, cultivators shifted from subsistence farming to wage labour,⁵ and an increasing number of highlanders had to purchase staple food, such as rice, from the lowland market. For this reason earning a cash income has become crucial for survival.

Many Akha living on what is officially Royal Forestry Department (RFD) land do not have a regular Thai ID card. Instead, most of them have hill tribe ID cards which do not grant them legal land rights. Technically most hill land is

⁴ According to the Statistical Reports of Chiang Mai province, the population of Chiang Mai district, the central part of Chiang Mai province was 246,892 in 1994.

⁵ This does not imply that the Akha used to enjoy subsistence life in an isolated community. On the contrary, Akha ‘oral texts’ reveal that besides being subsistence agriculturists they were involved in trade and also sold their labour to more powerful, prosperous neighbours. Thus, what I indicate here is the matter of degree. Akha trade with Chinese will be further discussed in Chapter four.

the property of the state. The Royal Forestry Department (RFD) was allocated all 'unoccupied land' in 1898, when the definite boundaries of the Thai nation state were 'mapped', and this included forests occupied by 'hill tribes'.

Since the 1980s, problems of forest destruction began to be recognised by policy-makers, the media and the public. So serious attempts at reorienting forest policy began, with an emphasis on conservation and reforestation. (Lohmann 1996:37, Hayami 1997:561). Parts of the forest where the 'hill tribe' population reside including watershed areas, were classified and defined as wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. In 1985 the National Forest Policy set the goal of making 40 percent of national territory a forest reserve. It was also stated that 15 percent (C zone) would be conservation forest, and 25 percent (E zone) would be economic forests. Then, after the 1988 flood in the south, (It was the year I visited Thailand for the first time) a nation-wide debate culminated in the logging ban of 1989. Then the cabinet decided that the percentages should be upped to 27.5 for conservation forest, and 16.2 for economic forest. (Sturgeon 1997:136) In these designated areas, villagers are not allowed to cut trees without asking permission from the local representative of the RFD. Strictly speaking, they were not allowed to live in these areas. Under the name of reforestation, tighter control of the land by the state has been put in operation and officially the RFD can deport illegal settlers from where they live at any time. Thus, this five-year re-forestation project (1993-1998) in the highland area intensified the sense of insecurity among 'hill tribes'.

Moreover, entrepreneurs and speculators encroached on mountain areas and more recently hill land has been acquired for the development of agricultural plantations, tourist resorts and golf courses. Since most 'hill tribes' have no

legal claim to land or forests, under such intensified pressure on land the 'hill tribe' people had little alternative but to leave, though some stayed to work in the reforestation schemes as wage labourers. Others left and moved to the lowlands to make their own livelihood. As a result of rigid state control of the land strong flows of urban migration are taking place from the forest areas. Considering the extremely tenuous land rights of the 'hill tribes', it makes more sense to move to the city to seek whatever labour and wages are available even at below average rates, especially if they are seeking not just jobs, but also goods, schooling and the openings available only in towns.⁶

Pull factors : the trans-national urban centre, Chiang Mai⁷

The Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986) designated Chiang Mai as the commercial and service centre of North Thailand, with a special emphasis on the promotion of tourism. And so Chiang Mai has rapidly developed to become the main commercial centre of the north, providing jobs and educational advantages for both highlanders and lowlanders. Thus, the recent increasing number of the urban Akha in Chiang Mai stems not only from the push factors at the rural end but also from demand at the urban end.

Hill tribes as tourist resources

The Thai government heavily promotes tourism for the purpose of earning

⁶ See McKinnon & Vienne ed. 1989. *Hill Tribes Today: Problems in Change* Bangkok: White Lotus-Ostrom and Don McCaskill & Ken Kampe ed. 1997. *Development or Domestication?: Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books for the legal status of 'hill tribes' in Thailand and how 'hill tribes' have been systematically exploited and marginalised by the policies of the Thai states.

⁷ According to official statistics the population of Chiang Mai is about 167,000 (1997).

However this census figure does not include the large number of city transients, who do not

foreign exchange⁸. By the 1980s the tourist industry became a significant source of income for the Chiang Mai. The hill tribes, with their colourful and exotic image are crucial resource for a mass tourist market hankering after novelty and excitement. The lure of easy money, in turn, provides a magnet drawing the hill tribes to the cities, whereas previously when the Akha, for instance, visited Chiang Mai and Bangkok it was to trade⁹ or for official reasons, but without the intention of settling down. Now increasingly it is to settle there. Substantial urban migration began in the 1970s when some Akha were brought down to Chiang Mai. In 1971, several Ulo Akha from three villages - Saen Chai, Saen Suk and Pladu -- were inveigled down by a Thai entrepreneur to work as entertainers at the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre where they were presented as 'primitive', 'unspoilt' and 'authentic'. And dance shows were put on to appeal to the tourists. Their relatives, home village neighbours and friends visited them and then were drawn down and eventually stayed there to obtain education and better incomes. Since then, the number of urban Akha in Chiang Mai has increased every year, a process that was further boosted by the rapid economic development of Chiang Mai in the 1980s and the 1990s.

The growing tourist industry and the expansion of the service sector in Thailand attracted not only rural people within Thailand but also cross-border immigration from adjacent countries, especially China and Burma.¹⁰ Although the first

have an official household registration.

⁸ Particularly in the face of the current economic downturn, the Thai authorities are attempting to promote tourism through the 'Amazing Thailand' campaign. (1998)

⁹ According to an informant (male 52) his grandfather, an Akha trader in Sipsongpanna, China, had already visited Chiang Mai and he heard stories about Chiang Mai when he was a small child.

¹⁰ Because Thai authority had tightened control over the trans-national illegal migrants after the

Akha settlement in Thailand might have appeared as early as 1903 as Alting von Geusau (1983:246) notes, however, further settlement took place down the years impelled by adverse political development in their former countries, China, Burma and Laos. The Bennington-Cornell Anthropological Survey conducted in 1963-64 estimated the total Akha population in Thailand as 6,281. Today it has increased to 49,903, according to the 1995 census conducted by the Hill Tribes Research Institute.¹¹ As a result, the Royal Thai Government decided not to ease regulation for the registrations of Thai citizenship because of fear of further migration influxes. For this reason, many 'hill tribes' today remain non-Thai citizens. Some have obtained 'hill tribes ID' but many others remain as 'illegal migrants'. Due to the fact that Chiang Mai development has focused on service and commercial sectors, such urban-directed streams are dominated by females, especially young women between the age of 15-30.¹²

Beyond the rural village case study

The phenomenon of Akha living outside of the 'traditional' hill village has been observed since the 1970s. Hanks and Hanks conducted the Bennington-Cornell Survey of Hill Tribes in Thailand in 1964, 1969 and 1974, and noted that some Akha living near the Chinese market could speak Lahu or Chinese, and were not following any Akha culture. They reflected, 'In these places collective life within the Akha tradition has shrunk to near a minimum while hungry householders struggle to find something to eat. ... These villages seem to

economic depression, many of them have gone away or are in hiding notably. I failed to find some of my urban Akha informants on my latest field trip (June 1998).

¹¹ This official figure does not include the number of 'illegal migrants'.

¹² The labour force in Chiang Mai consists of rural Thai migrants and trans-national migrants. In the case of the Akha it is rather difficult to distinguish between rural-urban migrants and

show symptoms of a more profound and irreversible transformation of the entire uplands in this region.’ (Hanks and Hanks 1975: 75). They also mentioned with regard to their earlier findings, ‘many more uplanders had become at least part-time entrepreneurs’ (Hanks and Hanks 1975:78). Kammerer, who conducted ethnographic research (1979 - 1981) in an Akha village in Chiang Rai province also noted that ‘A small but growing number of Akha live in leaderless hamlets on the outskirts of market towns’ (Kammerer 1986:420).

Despite the fact that urban migration had already started by the 1970s, few anthropological studies picked up on this phenomenon. This seems to reveal a disposition among anthropologists studying ‘hill tribes’ in Thailand to see their task as being to ignore the Diaspora and concentrate instead on gathering information on the home base from the less spoiled villages and record it while it lasts. Thus, it is often the case that their concern is to capture what is left of the ‘tradition’ of these ethnic minorities regarded as vulnerable to modern social change. This tendency often drives them into more and more peripheral areas,¹³ because their intention is to study ‘the other’, which should be as different as possible from the modern, urban, post-industrial, capitalist self. Consequently, the urban ‘hill tribes’ had little appeal for them, and the issue of urban ‘hill tribes’ has hardly been given any attention.¹⁴

trans-national migrants.

¹³ It resembles the attitude of trekking tourists who seek more ‘authentic’, ‘exotic’ tribal cultures.

¹⁴ In the case of African studies, urban migration and urban ‘tribes’ had become a main focus of the anthropologists since 1960s. However, this was not the case among researchers who worked on mainland Southeast Asia.

Urban ‘hill tribes’ and development studies

Most of the existing work on urban ‘hill tribes’ is in the area of development studies. The phenomenon of urban migration has generally been viewed as a part of ‘hill tribe problems’, or as a by product of uneven development. Consequently, the main focus of these studies has been on identifying the problems of adjustment into Thai society, such as drugs and prostitution and the attendant high risk of HIV/AIDS. Such an approach might be conceptualised in terms of the consequences of ‘detrribalisation’, by which commentators mean the falling into disuse of customs, beliefs and practices to which the ‘hill tribe’ migrants adhered in their earlier life. Some tend to see the ‘hill tribes’ staying in urban areas as a problem because of their underlying assumption that ‘hill tribes’ are supposed to stay in the hill area. Others argue that once individuals move to the towns their ethnic bonds became less important and new affiliations take over.

However, as earlier African studies indicate, the ‘detrribalisation’ model was found to be too simplistic to account for the complex issue of identity (cf. Mitchell 1969,1974, Epstein 1969,1978, Cohen 1969,1974). They introduce the view of ethnic identity as a political instrument and question the notion that it is a primordial attachment. It was evident from my observations that the ‘detrribalisation’ processes were not a simple shift from one identity, the Akha to another identity, Thai. Two major problems arising out of this ‘detrribalisation’ model are, firstly, it ignores the pre-existing diversity within the Akha group category and the ambiguous nature of their social boundaries; secondly, it overlooks the changing and multiple dimensions of identity formation.

Complex differences within ‘a group’

Closer investigation shows that the Akha ethnic group is a plurality and quite diverse. In part this stems from history and origins. The Akha are widely scattered across the border area between Southwest China and mainland Southeast Asia. More than half of my urban Akha informants in Chiang Mai came from Burma or China. Some have even lived in three nations -- China, Burma, and Laos -- before coming down to Chiang Mai. Others came straight from the mountain villages with little knowledge of Thai, whereas some had wide experience of living in towns in Burma, Laos and China and displayed extensive knowledge of local languages - Shan, Southern Mandarin, Lahu, and some even spoke English. Some Akha who were born in Thailand, surprisingly, could hardly speak any Thai before coming to Chiang Mai, while some Akha who were born in Burma (or China) could already communicate fluently in Shan (or Dai) and so could adjust to life in Chiang Mai better than the Thai born Akha. Frequently, Akha will set out to differentiate themselves from other Akha. Differences in life experiences, the level of education, religion and so on, can determine power relations among them.

On top of this, there are significant economic differences. Some elite Akha can even afford to tour Europe, while others have no home, no food and are reduced to begging in the street. And, as this study will show, it is not only Thai, but also the elite Akha who could be the exploiters of the poor Akha. One has to be careful not to assume that ethnic identity provides a full explanation to social identity or who stands where in the hierarchy. Other things such as gender, age, class, occupation, religious affiliations etc. are also essential to the development of identity formation.

The problem of a representative cultural homogeneity

On the other hand the 'Thai' are also a heterogeneous group of people, particularly, in the context of north Thailand. Historically there have been continuous Tai migrants from neighbouring countries - Shan state, Burma and Sipsongpanna, China. Movement of peoples has always been a component of everyday life in the border region between China and mainland Southeast Asia for both Akha and Tai people. Cross-border mobility is not purely a modern phenomenon resulting from recent rapid development which has caused uneven economic distribution, but is historically embedded in the region. This movement is still continuing even today. And it can be the case that the Akha can have a better chance of obtaining higher education because of the national hill tribes development project, or support of western missionaries, than these Tai new-comers. In fact, the Tai migrants often face difficulty in claiming their ID as there is no such a category as 'hill tribe ID' for them, as the Akha can obtain. Consequently, it is not uncommon to come across successful educated urban Akha who are much better off than these badly off Tai speaking people. Because of such anomalies the orthodox dichotomy of the powerful Tai majority vs. the exploited Akha must be seen as far too simple to explain the dynamic and complex situation that exists in north Thailand.

Before addressing the research question, how to tackle the multiple and complex nature of Akha identity, let me provide a brief sketch of the current trans-border flows in the region to provide the necessary background.

2. The Mechanism of Trans-National Migrants

In-Flow from Burma and China

During the late 1980s, rapid economic growth resulted in labour shortages in

Thailand. The situation encouraged the migration of low-skilled or unskilled workers from Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Southwest China. The unofficial but widely-cited estimate of the number of unskilled illegal labour migrants in Thailand is one million.¹⁵ Predominantly these migrants are from Burma.¹⁶ According to Porter, in 1993, an estimated 80,000 - 100,000 people from Shan State in northern Burma (total population 1.5 - 1.8 million) had recently worked in or were currently working in Thailand (Porter 1994:70). The Akha represent a significant part of this stream of incoming migrants (Toyota 1998).¹⁷ In fact, more than half the Akha people in Chiang Mai are from Burma and some are from China. During my visit to the Shan State in Burma (February 1998). I found that in every Akha family I visited in Keng Tung (all together 7 families) every one had least one member of the family who had worked in Thailand.

There is a substantial gap between Thailand's immigration laws¹⁸ and what happens in reality. The permeable nature of the Thai geographical borders

¹⁵ A recent study estimated that there is at least 970,000 illegal labour immigrants in Thailand at present (Archavanitkul, Jarusomboon, and Warangrat 1997:16).

¹⁶ At the Mae Sai-Tachileik border crossing, an estimated 2,000 - 5,000 Burmese workers enter Thailand to work during the day and return to Burma when the checkpoint is about to close (Oppenheimer, Bunnag & Stern 1997:17) However, some stay for a few months at a time to work in construction, harvesting or in reforestation projects. Some monks from Burma also stay in Thailand for years.

¹⁷ When the author asked the informants where they are originally came from, one of the common answers was 'Beyond Burma but before China'

¹⁸ In 1996, the Thai Cabinet approved a policy to register illegal labour migrants in Thailand. Employers were required to register their illegal migrant employees between 1 September and 30 November 1996. The cost was 2,500 baht: 500 baht for a health check-up, 1,000 baht for a guarantee payment to the Thai government, and 1,000 baht for a work permit. By the end of the registration process, 293,652 illegal migrants had received their work permits: 256,492 from Burma, 11,594 from Laos, and 25,566 from Cambodia.

allows a large number of migrants to enter illegally. Thousands of undocumented crossings occur daily without visas or border passes. And, when these undocumented flows are considered, the number of the migrants is likely to be much higher than is currently thought.

In 1996 officials at the Immigration office in Mae Sai indicated that during a week-end approximately 200 million baht worth of business would be conducted in Mae Sai (Oppenheimer, Bunnag & Stern 1997:17). A large number of border trading businesses are run by members of ethnic minorities, including the Yunnanese Chinese and Tai Lue.¹⁹ The official figures should be treated with caution as they do not include illegal business, particularly that concerned with methamphetamine ('speed' or *Yaa Baa* in Thai) - an unknown number of production facilities exist in Burma, and Thailand is a major importer of the product.

Type of Employment

Male-dominated occupations include construction²⁰, fishery industry, plantation work, agriculture, brick making, waiting, dish washing, carrying plants, water, ice, cleaning, and orchard work.

¹⁹ See Toyota (2000) 'Cross Border Mobility and Social Networks: Akha Caravan Traders' in Grant Evans et. al.(ed.) *Where China Meets Southeast Asia: Social Change along the Border*. Singapore: Allen & Unwin for an account of current border trade business between ethnic minorities.

²⁰ Some industries rely heavily on migrant labour. For example, in 1996, Thailand hosted the South East Asian Games, and without the use of disciplined illegal Burmese construction workers, the highway and main stadium would not have been completed on time for the opening ceremony.

Female-dominated occupations include service sector jobs; domestic help, prostitution²¹, assisting in shops, restaurants, hotels, resorts or guest houses, manufacturing and assembly line work in labour-intensive factories

Working conditions

Employers prefer illegal labour migrants from neighbouring countries simply because they accept lower wages than Thai citizens. Some restaurant owners in Chiang Mai said that Burmese workers are more disciplined and committed to their jobs than Thai workers and they do not complain about work conditions. Among the Akha in Chiang Mai, it was often said that generally the Akha immigrant workers from Burma are hard working and sometimes economically more motivated than the Akha who were born in Thailand. However, some exploitative employers take advantage of Burmese illegal migrants. For example, according to complaints by my informants, employers may pay less than promised for no reason, or in some cases the employers make arrangements for the local police to arrest the illegal migrants just as wages are due. Many Burmese migrant workers in Chiang Mai do not open bank accounts as they do not trust them and are unfamiliar with the banking system in Thailand.²² Instead, they keep cash in US dollars, or convert their earnings into gold.

Female migrants, especially those working as domestic help, or in small scale

²¹ Several sources suggests that the number of women involved in the commercial sex industry in Thailand is between 250,000 and 500,000. It is estimated that Thailand has a minimum of 60,000 women involved in the sex trade from neighbouring countries. This figure includes ethnic minorities without Thai citizenship along the Thai-Burma border (Archavanitkul & Gertsawang 1997:25).

²² Archavanitkul and Gertsawang (1997:113) also reported that of 95 female migrants only 8

brothels, are particularly vulnerable because they go into work environments where there is great isolation and less chance of establishing networks of information and social support, compared with male migrants who commonly work in groups on construction sites or on the plantations (Lim & Oishi 1996:6). In the course of researching the urban Akha in Chiang Mai, I found it most difficult to discover the details and number of female migrants involved in domestic help²³ or employed in the illegal and informal entertainment business.

Migration Patterns

The temporary and circulatory nature of migration has been pointed out by Singhanetra-Renard who observed rural-urban migration in north Thailand (1981, 1987), as well as the usual problem of the census data which does not capture such movement. (Archavanitkul et al. 1993) This circulatory pattern has been observed in the case of trans-national migrants between China, Burma and Thailand by the author. In the course of my research, I had to keep chasing my subjects through successive occupations and various residences. They did not simply enter and leave different occupations within Thailand but were moving back and forward across the borders with remarkable frequency. Their reasons for changing jobs was not necessarily to obtain a higher income; they sometimes changed jobs because they wanted to experience something different or be with friends in the same workplace. This explanation was common particularly among young female migrants. The fact they tended to work in the informal sector without permanent contract makes circular mobility easier. In such informal occupations, social networks are the main mechanism

used a bank or a postal money order to send remittances.

²³ Burma and China export a great number of female domestic workers (Heyzer & Wee 1993:11).

for finding new jobs. New openings are often 'introduced' by friends, relatives, or acquaintances from the home village. This informal network extends the domain of illegal job hunting, or 'fresh trade'. Hence the recruitment agents are not always unscrupulous strangers but people who are already well known to the migrants.

Women and Employment

Gavin Jones points out that single women comprise over half of the work force in most cities of East and Southeast Asia (Jones 1984:10). Women's access to paid work outside the home widens their options, and provides them with increased autonomy. Increased autonomy expands the openings for them in education and provides a wider choice of marriage partners. However, it does not necessarily guarantee a better life, and it also carries increased risks.

Domestic Help

Since the 1970s working as a domestic help has been the most common first job for many young unmarried Akha women (around the age of 15 - 30).²⁴ Their pay is normally less than what's available in agriculture²⁵, but young girls often prefer to do this work rather than stay in the hill villages. For example an informant said, 'there is no future nor opportunity in the village, but in the city I

²⁴ The wage for domestic helper was much lower in the 1970s and early 80s. An informant received 500 baht after nine months' work (1975), another informant received 200 baht a month (1982).

²⁵ The average wage working in the agricultural sector is between 60 - 100 baht a day whereas domestic helpers normally receive 500-2000 baht a month with food and accommodation provided (1994).

can gain experience and perhaps a better education'.²⁶ Some Akha girls work for Thai or Westerners, and others work for urban Akha. It is common for the established urban Akha to employ young Akha girls as domestic servants, to look after their children or work as shop assistants. Urban Akha often have relatives and friends across the border, and they find employees through the informal social networks. Striking economic differences are evident amongst the urban Akha in Chiang Mai.

Commercial Sex Industry

The idea of making a straight connection between young female illegal migrants and the commercial sex industry is pervasive internationally as well as within Thai society. The sensational, tragic stories of these poor young girls draws the news reporters. But in my view the reputation of north Thailand and its association with prostitution is often exaggerated by the media. It is an undeniable fact that workers involved in the sex industry can obtain an income greater than they could obtain in any other occupation for which they are qualified, and most of the workers enter the sex industry for economic reasons. However, I would like to note that these migrants do not choose their occupation simply in terms of money, and that the commercial sex industry does not wholly represent the employment patterns of young female migrants workers. Although significant numbers of young female migrants are working in brothels, massage parlours, and Karaoke clubs,²⁷ most are neither as ignorant nor innocent as presumed. Through their own social networks, they frequently

²⁶ Various motivations for the mobility will be further discussed in the section, Gender, Consumption and Choices of Chapter six.

²⁷ Chinese speaking tourists (Hong Kong, Taiwan) prefer to visit Karaoke clubs where Chinese speaking girls are working. Thus, there is a special demand for trans-migrants workers in this

exchange stories, rumours and gossips, and they are well informed than the local news paper articles suggest and so they are well aware of the inherent danger and keep away.²⁸

3. Research Question

The problem of a bipolar assimilation model

Skinner (1957) demonstrated the way the Chinese become Thai in a graduated process depending upon ‘the time and intensity’ of their exposure to Thai society and culture (Skinner 1958:234). Although Skinner recognises that the process is gradual and staged through a Sino-Thai continuum, Hill (1998:7) notes this classic model is based on the assumption that ‘a culture’ is a distinct lists of traits associated with a group of people. Skinner’s argument implies that core ‘Chinese-ness’ and ‘Thainess’ consists of distinctive traits and institutions.

Skinner’s assimilation model is basically the same as the conventional model of ‘detrribalization’ which rests on the presumption that associating distinct cultural features with discrete ethnic groups establishes primordial identities. He assumes that ‘Thai culture’ or ‘Chinese culture’ is a substantial entity, hence he ascribes ethnic identity to ‘a culture’. In this way, his conceptualisation fails to capture the dynamics involved, for identification is not a monolith.

Ambiguous ethnic identification, regional context

sector.

²⁸ Special efforts to warn young Akha girls have been made by an Akha woman announcer (52 years old) at a radio station in Chiang Mai since 1980s. This radio programme is widely listened to and participated in by the Akha in China, Burma, Laos and Thailand.

Since Leach's archetypal study, *Political System of Highland Burma* (1954) first raised the question of applying a static notion of ethnic identification between mainland Southeast Asia and Southwest China, a number of studies have questioned the idea of placing rigid boundaries around ethnic categories. Because in the empirical observation they were confronted with the transient and variable character of ethnic group identity and a dynamic social structure. The issue of ethnicity -- how ambiguous, manipulative and situational ethnic boundaries are -- has been very actively discussed.²⁹ F. K. Lehman and many others (cf. Durrenberger 1970, Hanks 1965, Hill 1982, Tapp 1989) have pointed out that ethnic groups are not collections of people who manifest common and distinctive cultural traits. Instead, as they have shown, the dynamics of ethnic identity involves interaction with others and has a mutable and ambiguous quality. Hanks (1965) for example, raised the difficulty to fitting villages into neat ethnic categories in relation to the 'Lahu Shi Hopoe'. He documented the emergence of what he termed a 'new ethnic group'. According to a headman of the village, "it took four generations to make a Lahu Shi Hopoe. In the first generation a Shan living in the mountains, married an Akha woman. Their children, the second generation, married Lahu. In the third generation they (probably the daughters) married Chinese and lived with the Lisu. In the fourth they took Lahu spouses"(Hanks 1965:73). Obviously, ethnic ambivalence and confusion in the region is not at all uncommon. Most ethnographers of the region have noted this and commented on the fuzziness of ethnic affiliations. The implication of this flexibility of ethnic categories needs to be further elaborated in order to establish what 'Akha identity' means.

²⁹ See for example, Barth 1969, Conrad 1989, Dentan 1976, Handelman 1977, Keyes 1976, 1979, 1995, Lehman 1979, Lilly 1990, Mitchell 1974, Moerman 1965, Nagata 1974, Naroll 1968, Okamura 1981, O'Brien 1986

What does 'Akha ethnic identity' mean?

Recognising the fact that the very definition of what constitutes the ethnic identity of the 'Akha' itself seems to be in considerable doubt, we actually have no means of telling whether the 'real' ancestors of the 'Akha' saw themselves as Akha, Tai, Chinese, or as some other group. The existence of the present-day Thai, Chinese and Burmese ethnic categories can give a fallacious fixity to ethnic identities which in fact are historically fluid and may be the product of a process of making and remaking. So too the Akha of today may be the end product of several transformations. It is in this context that historical conscious expression of ethnic distinction needs to be examined.

The main concern here is neither the matter of the historical validity of the legends presented in the Akha 'oral text' nor the historical reliability of the Akha genealogical (patrilineal) name system, but how and what is represented and claimed to be 'Akha' in their conscious memory. What does it mean to present oneself as 'Akha'? Additionally we must ask what the ethnic labels 'Akha' 'Tai' and 'Chinese' really mean. As Tapp, warns, "one can never forget that in dealing with the ethnic categories of 'Chinese', 'Hmong', 'Miao', 'Lolo' and others, one is not necessarily dealing with consistent genetic-linguistic groupings which have remained isomorphic with their ethnic categorisations over historical time"(Tapp 1989:176). The issue of identity needs to be dealt also with the self-ascriptive aspect; how do the Akha define (or justify) their own identification, recalling that their long history of interaction and contact with other groups of people and their awareness of political power of 'Chinese' and 'Tai' states nearby required them to justify their self-conscious identity. This means that, ethnic identity is often more a matter of conscious choice rather than

a reflection of common and distinctive cultural traits shared among the communities.

Previous research on Akha identity studies (cf. Alting von Geusau 1983, Kammerer 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, Tooker 1988, 1992, 1996) all shared the assumption that Akha identity is congruent with 'Akha culture'. Although they were aware of the dynamic nature and adaptability of 'Akha culture', they basically maintain that an integrated Akha cultural system is essential for Akha identity and thus they are preoccupied with identifying (or interpreting) the collective Akha cultural system. What I would like to suggest in my study is an alternative approach to such persistent focus on the 'ethnic group', 'culture' and 'identity'. My starting point is that there is no bounded, consensual, authentic, ahistorical 'Akha culture'. Culture is not a coherent and consensual thing but a dynamic concept, continuously negotiated and in process of transformation. Accordingly, identities are not inherent, bounded or static: they are dynamic, fluid and constructed situationally, in particular places and times. What I am concerned with here is the process of identity formation which takes place not at the unconscious level of psychoanalytical process but in day-to day social interaction.

In pursuit of this argument, the objective of my study is not to examine how 'Akha culture' is deteriorating as a result of the urban migration process. Rather what I intend to show in my study is the process by which symbolic distinctions and alliances are created, affirmed or denied, and the way in which urban Akha identities are selected, ascribed and manipulated in such processes. Recent theoretical developments in anthropology lead us to understand that 'cultures' are not, nor ever were, naturally bounded entities. Identities are a

product of dynamic process whereby the differences are constantly negotiated, thus are continuously changing in response to current socio-political environments. The focus of argument has shifted from 'essential meaning' to 'contested process'. Wright (1998) rightly noted that, "symbols and ideas never acquired a closed or entirely coherent set of meanings: they were polyvalent, fluid and hybridised." (Wright 1998:9). (The more detailed discussion of the theoretical framework will be in Chapter 2.) If we conceptualise culture as 'a contested process of meaning making' as Marry (1997) suggests, in what way could we tackle the ambivalent, dynamic and simultaneously contentious process of identity formation?

Post-modern perspective on identity formation

Post modernism involves the end of the dominance of unitary theories of scientific objectivity. Objective 'truth' has been replaced by an emphasis on the plurality of viewpoints. Post-modern discourses are based on the idea that everyone experiences things differently, and thus, there is no single, objective reality, but a 'partial truth'.

Powerful critiques of the tendency to treat peoples as objects and mystify the differences between them were raised in 1970s. Talal Asad in his study of colonial anthropology, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1973) demonstrated how peoples were lumped together to be put into categories by homogenising and oppressing discourses of 'the other' through western imperialism. On the other hand, Edward Said (1978) in his influential book, *Orientalism* made us aware of the power relation between researchers and the 'object' of research (often between western and non-western) by exoticising the 'East'. Since post-modern anthropologists strongly criticise the ideas of

'objectivity' and 'representation' in the process of cultural knowledge construction, ethnographers are much more conscious of their own assumption and the danger of finding that which they assume to be there. They are also much more aware of the varieties of possible interpretations of cultural phenomena; that there can be no single, true, representative account of a cultural event or a social process. As Kuper notes, 'The ethnographic object is multifaceted, it can only be partially and fleetingly glimpsed from any one perspective.' (Kuper 1996:188) In this sense, the represented object in the text is always politically, historically and socially contingent.

With an acute awareness of the politics of 'representation' and 'objectivity', Foucault suggests an alternative approach by shifting the focus from entity to discourse. In the Foucaudian conception the subject is never 'absolute' but discursively constructed, and thus, post-modern conceptualisation perceives 'culture' and 'identity' as contested processes of meaning making. The point here is that it is crucial to ask the question of who has the power to define the very notion of 'a culture' or 'ethnic category'? Classic anthropologists used to look for and reproduce the essential meaning of the culture of 'other' people: my intention here, however, is not to identify the content of 'a culture', but to examine the way in which such cultures are constructed and by whom they are constructed.

In recent years the concept of 'culture' has gained wide usage in popular expression. Politicians and development agencies have introduced their notions of 'culture' to wider publics. The concept of 'culture' is no longer a patented article for anthropologists but has become a powerful political tool. The discourses of international development agencies, Non-Governmental

Organisations (NGOs), academic as well as non-academic ethnographers, the tourist industry and the mass media are all actively involved in the process of constructing the notion of 'culture'. It should be noted that this cultural concept, which meets with broader public acceptance, is quite different from the concept of culture produced by recent advances in anthropological discussion. While the conventional notion of culture as highly patterned, cohesive and coherent representations is sharply attacked in the recent anthropological literature, at the same time this 'spurious' notion of culture has gained substance through the influence of the above agencies.

My aim is to deconstruct the notion of 'Akha identity' by questioning the notion of 'ethnic category, and by investigating how 'culture' became a significant unit of analysis. Recognising that anthropological representations of culture are never neutral but such knowledge is constructed in power relations, I intend to identify the historical and political process in which the representation of 'Akha culture' to which 'Akha identity' attaches. Parameters of identity are played out at many levels, and are entangled in particular historical trajectories and specific political and social contexts. Thus, I will look at the contemporary on-going situations by which various actors and agencies attempt to make claims for 'Akha identity' and 'Akha culture' by pointing out some of the intertwining individual, national, regional and global dimensions (see Illustration 1).

Moreover, what interests me is that it is not only the outside forces that construct and define the elements of Akha, and, more generally, 'hill tribe' identity, but also the way 'hill tribe' people view themselves. The process of identity construction is dialectic, in other words, people who were categorised as 'hill tribes' are not passively accepting the image attributed to them by outsiders, they

are also interactive agents in their own self-definition. Therefore through accepting, rejecting and selecting from the different discourses the Akha define and redefine their own identity.

What I am uncovering in my thesis is the syncretic nature of the processes of change which results in the construction of hybrid forms of Akha identification. The study, however, has greater significance than just being the study of one specific ethnic group, the North Thailand Akha. The issues raised relate to the problems of ethnic identification more generally. In bringing out the complexities of the particular case-study, the ultimate aim of the thesis is to develop an appropriate methodology and a perspective on the issues of trans-national migration and identity which would have relevance and application elsewhere in the Southeast Asian region and indeed could be drawn on in analysing the dynamics of Sino-Southeast Asian interaction.

4. Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 Introduction

Aim and Field of Investigation

Migration of 'hill tribes' into northern towns of Thailand has been increasing, particularly in the last ten years. The state's stricter land control in the name of the reforestation project is a major contributory factor. On the other hand, Chiang Mai provides both educational and job opportunities for the younger generation of the area. This thesis will focus on the group of people, namely those externally categorised as 'Akha' and/or who claim themselves to be 'Akha'. It looks at their identity construction processes in relation to trans-border

mobility. The research question was set to go beyond the linear adaptation model, from Akha to Thai.

Methodology

Two methodological challenges will be identified. Firstly, how to pin down the mercurial mobility of the target people who live across the village or national borders. Secondly, how to capture the ambiguous nature of a people whose identity is variable and multiple. The implications of the positionality of the observer will also be illustrated.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

The concept of ‘culture’ and ethnic categorisation

The anthropological concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘ethnic category’ as conventional analytical units will be critically examined in order to identify my theoretical standpoint.

Identity and trans-national mobility

The recent theoretical development concerning the issues of identity and Diasporic dispersal will be addressed. Pertinent historical and regional factors will be cited and discussed with this analytical framework.

Identity choices in practice

The conceptual framework necessary to investigate the individual’s experience of network relationships will be discussed.

Chapter 3 Intertwining global, national and regional contexts

Intertwining global, national and regional dimensions will be identified and then the paradoxical effects: while theoretically the concept of ‘culture’ as a unitary entity is deconstructed

Chapter 4 Akha Ethnic Category and Identification

Akha Ethnic Category

The theoretical arguments will be applied to the case of the Akha. The historical and political process of the construction of Akha ethnic classification will be investigated by using Chinese and English language sources covering the Akha in China, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. The changing nature and the political arbitrariness of their ethnic categorisation will be addressed.

Akha Identification

Since identity is a product of the interplay between external and internal forces, self-ascriptive elements acknowledged by earlier Akha researchers will be re-examined in order to complement the first section.

Chapter 5 Akha Mobility and Practice

Dynamics of the Akha Village

The interactions of Akha villages within a specific geographical sphere and the influence of more powerful dominant ethnic groups will be explored. Attention will be paid to the supra-village relations and the porous nature of the Akha village.

Social Networks beyond the Akha Ethnic Boundaries

The politico-historical experiences of the Akha in relation to mobility and their interactions with other groups of people will be examined with special reference to the Tai polity and Chinese trade linkages

Chapter 6 Thai Development and Social Change

Development and 'Hill Tribes'

The implications of shaping the public image of the collective category called 'hill tribes' through national integration, tourist demands, mass media, national and international development policy will be explored.

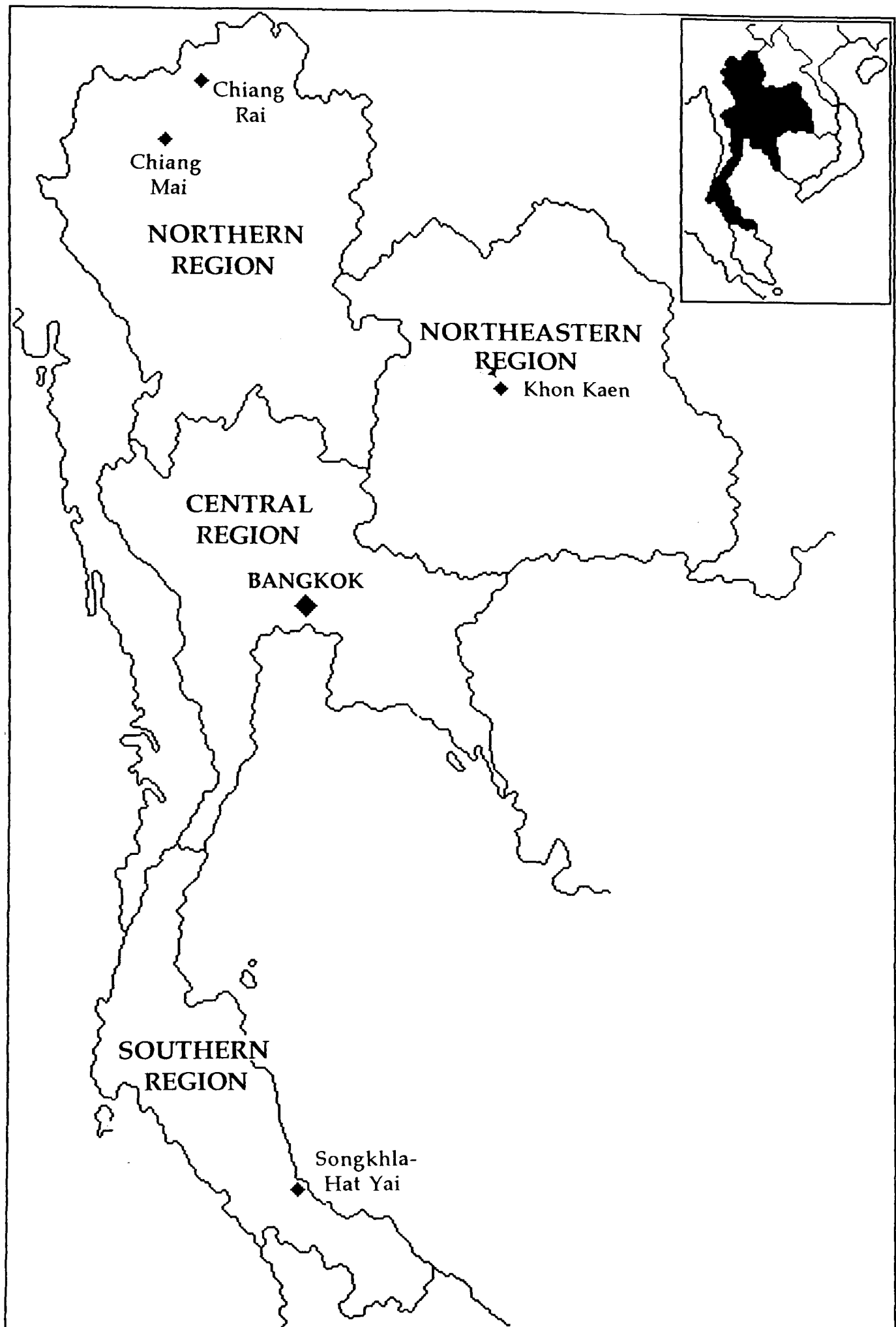
Emergence of Differences within 'Akha'

Through case studies I intend to show how and in which ways individuals' facilitate their own identity by differentiating themselves from others. The difference in educational achievement, religious affiliations, life style and future prospect will be taken into consideration in examining the formation of group identities.

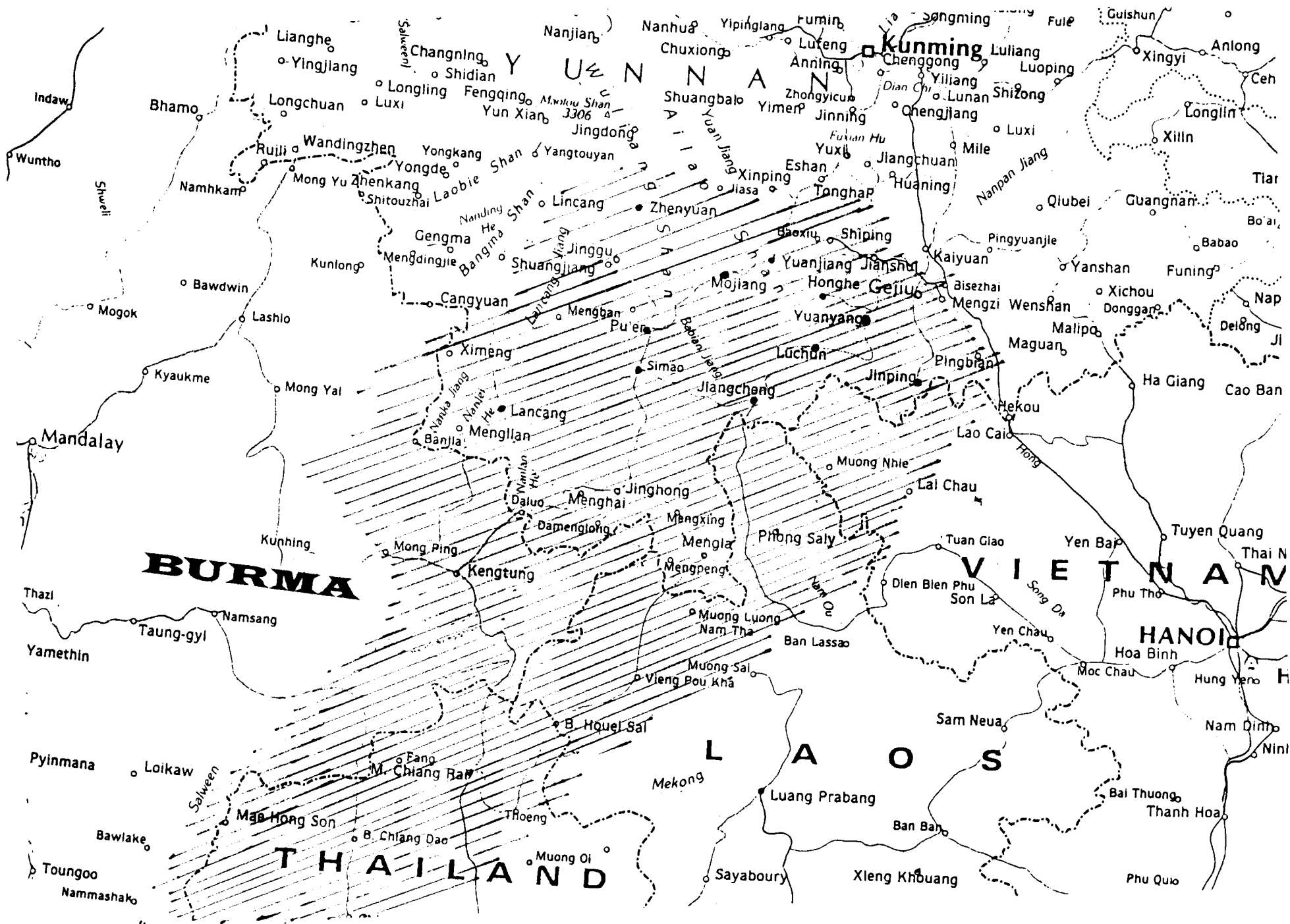
Chapter 7 Conclusion

Methodological difficulties and challenges will be examined. The main findings will be highlighted and the wider implication of the study identified.

Map 1 Research Site Map of Thailand



Map 2 Distribution of the Akha population and main towns



(2) Methodology

There are two main methodological challenges in my study. First, how to pin down the elusive target population. Conventionally, anthropologists used to select a case-study village. Since Malinowski, anthropological disciplinary practices has been identified with a long-term intensive field research at a single village and this has been considered as the professional initiation to becoming a 'real' anthropologist.¹ Thus, social anthropology became defined as the *ethno-graphic* study of small-scale society. A bounded village site has long served as a manageable unit for anthropological research on a monograph-sized sociocultural entity. However, this standard method was not suitable for my research for the objects of my study are ultimately mobile and multiply situated. Hence, my challenge is how to adapt anthropological methods for studying spatially dispersed phenomena by going beyond a single village case study. This requires a fundamental re-evaluation of the idea of 'field site' in the anthropological discipline.

The second methodological challenge is how to grasp the ambiguous and subjective phenomenon of identity. There once was an assumption that an ethnic group possess a cultural identity and that anthropologists could represent the ethnic identity as a collective 'cultural' whole. However, I recognised the problem of representing such collective as 'an average', or 'typical' identity of an ethnic group, because such idea is based on the assumption that the world is

¹ My intensive field research was conducted from July 1994-November 1996, with supplementary research in February, May-June 1997, January-February 1998. The primary data were collected with the five following methods; village survey, semi-structured interview, life history, urban Akha population survey and participant observation.

constituted of separate, unique cultures with distinctive identities. In order to challenge this idea of the collective identity, I focused on individual variations and contradictions instead of the collective consensus. This allowed me to look at the informant not as a cultural 'type' but as a complex, historical active agent and identity as a contingent and malleable process.

Moreover, practices of representation implicate the positions from which we speak or write. There is no point outside from which one can gain a neutral, disinterested perspective -- every view is a view from somewhere. As Clifford (1986) convincingly argued, ethnographic representations are always 'partial truths'. Hence my intention is not to indulge in a fiction of 'scientific' objectivity to represent 'others'. Instead, I acknowledge the importance of the positionality of the observer as I can only speak and write from a specific position. This consideration is crucial in the relationship between the observer and other social agents. Because my own background, characteristics and the wider socio political setting affects how I have been perceived by the informants and the way I have access to the kind of information I could obtain and filter. This requires me to discuss the issue of reflexivity of my own positionality as a researcher.

1. Multi-local field sites

In the face of mobile, changing, global processes, growing numbers of contemporary anthropologists question the old ideas of territorially fixed communities and stable, localised cultures, isolated peoples living in separate worlds. Appadurai (1991) for example, raised the problem:

“As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic ‘projects,’ the ethno in ethnography takes on a slippery, non-localised quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond. The landscapes of group identity -- the ethnoscares -- around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious, or culturally homogeneous... The task of ethnography now becomes the unravelling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world?” (Appadurai 1991:191, 196).

Hastrup & Olwig also are concerned with the fact that “ethnographic monographs...the field work upon which they are based, illustrate some of the limitations inherent in the approach to the study of culture that has been dominant until now” (Hastrup & Olwig 1997:5). Marcus (1995) on the other hand, proposes ‘multi-sited ethnographic research’ --“practice of construction through movement and of tracing within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon” (Marcus 1995:106). He suggested the strategies of following connections, associations, and putative relationships (Marcus 1995:97). The need for an alternative approach to the single village case study has been discussed among post-modern anthropologists at the theoretical level, nevertheless, how to put this theoretical discussion in practice still remains underdeveloped. As Gupta & Ferguson pointed out contemporary anthropologists are confronting the gap between “our ambitious theoretical aspirations and our remarkably unreconstructed methodological habits” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:29). Therefore, I would like to start with the methodological

problems I myself confronted during the fieldwork, and then I indicate the alternative empirical methods which I found useful.

At the start of my field research, I stayed at a hostel for Akha students in Chiang Rai province for six months. This hostel was initially created by a European anthropologist as an institution for raising the socio-cultural awareness of the Akha people and was financed by Dutch sources. Apart from providing accommodation for young Akha who had come to be educated in lowland, the hostel provides a valuable meeting place where Akha from different locations can come together and share experiences, in this way they broaden their comprehension of the problems and issues that affect them as a social group. Through sharing food, living space and leisure time together, I developed contact and deepened rapport with the students staying in the hostel. I also had the opportunity to get to know Akha village school teachers and others who came to the hostel to discuss matters of mutual concern to the Akha and thus began to find ways to relate to the home village communities and to gain access to their social networks. I greatly benefited from this when it came to choosing respondents for the surveys I needed to carry out. From this starting point I organised surveys in 15 villages in the Chiang Rai, Mae Chan, Doi Tung, Mae Sai area, something that would have been impossible without the help and guidance of the people I got to know in the hostel. In some instances I got to visit the village as a part of their community development activities, in other instances I went along with students or acquaintances who were returning to their home village on a family visit for some social or ceremonial event.

The intent behind the visits and surveys was to trace the movements of members of a single village and to piece together a picture of their social networks in

towns. I soon came to realise that I had to look at many villages, for it was soon apparent that no one village could be used as a model for all, for the variations between the villages and the movement patterns emanating from them were considerable. To choose a single case study village would ignore their diversity and imply an untrue homogeneity in the Akha world. The differences are many. In terms of religious affiliation, for example, some villages practise the Akha way of honouring the ancestors, while others have converted to Christian beliefs and practices. But the Christian villages themselves are not uniform. Some are the followers of one brand of Christianity and may be peaceful and harmonious, with few problems and a negligible sex industry, while others are strife torn and driven by division between various Christian sects and bedevilled by many social problems. In terms of the degree of urban migration and development, some were highly exposed to various community development projects and others not. As a result of development, some villages have gained economic prosperity, whereas others have been devastated by problems of drugs and prostitution

In other words, although these people are known by the same ethnic category, labelled, 'the Akha', there are substantial differences among them. In order to observe this, I consciously selected three major Akha sub-groups -- **Ulo Akha**, **Lomi Akha**, and **Pami Akha** for my informants. These sub-group names are often used by outsiders because it is easy to identify them by looking at the shape of the women's head-dress. However, it should be stressed that this commonality does not imply internal group cohesion or boundedness. None the less, this division into sub-groups -- **Ulo**, **Lomi**, **Pami** is a useful device in order to account for the variation of the Akha in Thailand. Their diversified life experiences highlight differences and the way they project themselves. These

sub-group names are recognised by most Akha informants as labels by which they identify themselves.²

Ulo Akha

The first sub-group the *Ulo Akha* is the most populous group in Thailand. *Ulo Akha* were the first Akha migrants into Thailand. In genealogical terms, most of them belong to *Dzjeugh'oe* and *Majeu* clan groups. It is said that the first Akha settlement inside the Thai border was founded in 1903 (Alting von Geusau 1983:246).³ Most previous research in Thailand was conducted among this group. (See Feingold 1976, Alting von Geusau 1983, Kammerer 1986, Hansson 1983, Takemura 1981, Suwa 1992.) *Ulo Akha* are sometimes viewed as a deviant group by the more recent Akha migrants from Burma or China. They say that *Ulo Akha* lie outside the Akha political system⁴ a system which more or less remained until 1949 around the border region of the Shan states of Burma and Sipsongpanna in Yunnan province of China. *Ulo Akha* village life is characterised as egalitarian (Alting von Geusau 1983:266-274, Kammerer 1986). Most *Ulo Akha* informants were born in Thailand and simply moved from their village down to the lowlands and then to Chiang Mai.

²The author is fully aware of its ambiguity and such usage is theoretically misleading. However, it was interesting to find in the course of research that many of the informants have fixed images of these three sub-groups.

³ Whereas an Akha headman from Paya Phai Kao claims that his village has been there since 1887

⁴ Since the Mongols extended their empire by 'using barbarians to control barbarians', the same approach succeeded during the Ming era. An indigenous Akha lord was appointed to govern his own people and resettlement area. His position was given by the Tai king in Yunnan, and was inherited patrilineally.

Both Lomi Akha and Pami Akha have been a part of this political system. (See also footnote 19)

Lomi Akha

Lomi originally indicates the name of a mountain in the region of Keng Tung in the Shan states of Burma and indeed most of the Akha of this subgroup come from that region. The first in-depth ethnographic research of this group was conducted by Deborah Tooker (1988). In genealogical term, as Tooker noted (1988:17-18), the Akha themselves are aware of the contradiction when *Lomi Akha* claim themselves as *Dzjeugh'oe* clan group in order to differentiate themselves from *Ulo Akha* (who also claim themselves to be *Dzjeugh'oe* clan group). Other Akha sometimes called the *Lomi Ubya*, a term referring to the flat silver panels they wear on their head dress (Tooker 1988:18). The term *Ubya* is also used by *Pami Akha* when they refer to themselves. They have lived for centuries in areas where the dominant lowland group was Tai and thus historically their political structure has been deeply influenced by the Tai. Tooker demonstrated that the Akha hierarchy is embedded just as much in their ritual space as it is in that of the lowland polities. Interestingly, this sharply contrasts with the *Ulo Akha* village, considered as egalitarian by Alting von Geusau (1983) and Kammerer (1986). She then suggested applying the same cosmo-political spatial symbols as used in the lowland Tai to explain socio-political system of upland groups with the alternative usage of contextual dimensions, rather than the top-down model (Tooker 1996). Some close associations with the Shan (Tai groups in the Shan states of Burma) were found amongst *Lomi Akha* informants during their life history. Many of the informants had experience of living in Burma before coming to Thailand in the early stages of their life. They are perceived by the other Akha as being 'hard-working', and 'good at carrying tradition'.

Mixed villages of *Ulo* and *Lomi Akha* are frequently found in Thailand.

Sturgeon reported the relationship between *Ulo* and *Lomi* in her field village, *Payapri*, which illustrates a typical example of the power relationship among the Akha. “Up until the early 1970s the *Ulo* villagers managed a large area of swiddens along the local river to the west, but planted each swidden for only a year and then left it to regenerate for at least 13 years. In 1973, when *Lomi Akha* started moving into the village, the *Lomi Akha* organised themselves quickly into teams to open wet rice fields for each household in the valleys around *Payapri*. The *Ulo Akha* of the older village watched for a while, and then start opening paddy fields for themselves. *Ulo Akha* claim that most of the valley land was gone by then.” (Sturgeon 1997:140) Consequently after losing their swidden lands to a recent reforestation project, “while the *Lomi Akha* were earlier able to open more wet rice field, some of the *Ulo Akha* households have no wet rice fields, and are forced to rely more on wage labour to enable them to buy grain.” (Sturgeon 1997:142)

Pami Akha

The *Pami Akha* are the smallest in number. *Pami* indicates the name of a single village near Mae Sai. Because of the economic success of the villagers and relatively higher involvement in trade activity,⁵ *Pami Akha* are influential in spite of the fact that they are the most recent migrants into Thailand. In genealogical terms, many of them belong to *Mopoku* clan group. The villagers originally lived around the border area between Sipsongpanna and Burma before the Chinese revolution in 1949, and some of them fled from China with the Kuomintang. Thus *Pami Akha* are also called *La Beu Akha* (*La Beu* means

⁵ See Mika Toyota “Cross Border Mobility and Social Networks: Akha Caravan Traders” paper presented at the conference ‘South China and Mainland Southeast Asia: Cross Border Relations in the Post-Socialist Age’, December 4-6, 1996, Hong Kong University

Chinese in Akha language)⁶ by other Akha as they are from China and have close associations with the Chinese. However, they call themselves *Ubya Akha*, or sometimes the *Lomi Akha*. Many of the Pami Akha informants could speak Cin-Ho (Yunnanese Chinese) as well as Tai language (Tai-Lue) due to their having lived in China and Burma prior to coming to Thailand. *Pami Akha* used to have a symbolic top political figure, called 'Jawba' a title which remained in his family for nine generations. There are some direct descendants in the Pami village, though they reside in Chiang Mai. According to the informants from China "Jawba has already said that he was a father of all of the Akha except the *Ulo Akha*."⁷ As a result, the *Pami Akha* still look down on the *Ulo Akha* today by saying 'they are lazy, dirty and disorganised, and that they have been in Thailand too long.'

Considering the cultural diversity mentioned above, selecting a single village itself is a conscious choice of anthropologist reflecting a particular intention. Although ethnography often starts from the description of the village itself, inevitably anthropologists had arbitrarily selected a particular village to meet their needs and purposes. Ulf Hannerz notes too that ethnographers are often driven by an obsession with 'the most *other* of others', because "it is more interesting and rewarding to report from the field that things are different there,

⁶ The term La Beu includes Han Chinese, Yunnanese Chinese and Overseas Chinese.

⁷ Quite a few Akha from China attended the funeral of Saje (who died at the age of 87 in June 1997); he used to be a secretary of Jaw Ba, Sipsongpanna in China, and fled into Burma, then Thailand, after the Cultural Revolution (1966-). He stayed in an Akha village near Doi Mae Salong.

Interestingly there were no Ulo Akha participants at the funeral. Alting von Geusau who extensively studied Ulo Akha, reports a legend that the great ruler Jaw Ba was slain with a crossbow by one of the original village leaders because he oppressed his subjects by demanding excessive tribute, such as "nine large cups of ants' tears" and "nine large cups of insects' brains." (Alting von

than to have to say that they are much the same as at home” (Ulf 1997:542). This prioritisation can be problematic. Who is legitimate? What are ‘suitable’ objects and settings to produce anthropological knowledge? The issue of anthropological knowledge construction by representing ‘others’ should be taken into account. (It will be further discussed in the next chapter.)

With whom?

I intentionally focused on the younger generation as the informants for my study, which contrasts with most earlier academic studies of the Akha, where the main informants were specifically the elder generation. The rationale behind choosing senior informants must have been because anthropologists used to regard their task as compiling documentation on disappearing cultures. The previous researchers perceived that knowledge of Akha customs is inherited and kept within the custody of a few experts, generally elderly males. Hence elderly male informants were prioritised in their investigations and little attention was paid to the younger generation, and in particular to females, because they were not seen to be ‘keepers of traditional knowledge’. In contrast with this approach, I included both young and elderly generation among my informants. I took the view that it is not just traditional knowledge that shapes culture and identity, but the active, on-going, interactive experiences of all, including the young, females and all those not traditionally seen as the bearers of culture.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 343 informants who had the experience of living outside of village community. In particular, I looked at Akha migrants, in all 221 females and 122 males (for details, see Appendix 2). The 343 informants were chosen from many different locations around northern

Thailand. I found them through personal contacts, organisations, bars, night-clubs, food stands, construction sites, markets, shops, massage parlours, trekking outfits, and even just on the street. I bought a motorbike in order to travel to remote locations and I sought out the protection of influential individuals who gained for me access to places where outsiders could not normally penetrate and which would otherwise be dangerous. Anyone either claiming themselves to be Akha, or regarded by others as Akha was included in my initial survey. This study covered people from the full age range 20-60. I chose females as well as males, people from all religious persuasions and practices, and people of mutable religious practice. I looked for people with contrasting marriage/family experiences and social achievement. These people were subjected to prolonged and extensive semi-structured interviews. On the basis of this I got a sense of the richness and diversity of the Akha. I then proceeded to examine these diversities through a series of case studies of a smaller number of individuals. The final focus of the investigation was twelve individuals, who were the subject of the detailed case studies. (See Appendix 3).

The problem of urban/rural dichotomy

Another problem I confronted was due to my presumption of a clear boundary between town and village. By looking at the movement of villagers I realised that villagers are highly mobile whereas the village population in statistical terms remains constant, the make up of the village may be changing. As new comers join and other households (or individuals) leave. Moreover, the state of the village is not a strictly rigid geographically bounded administrative unit, but fractious social unit. Its shifting nature continuously forms new branches of Akha villages by which small units grow into larger ones and the large units break down into smaller ones. The conventional analytical assumption -- the

autonomy of the primeval community with clear geographical dichotomy between the origin (village) and the destination (town) would prevent me analysing the dynamism of the field reality. The binary boundary between town and village is a conceptual construct. In reality, the domains of the local village community and that of the urban centre are overlapping and it is difficult to determine where the boundaries of the 'village community' begin and ends. Furthermore, some informants were actually not from the mountain village but from the rural towns in China or Burma, which gives an additional complexity to the situation.

For the reasons above, my exploratory approach, therefore, is to track individuals and the social networks facilitated and organised by them. Instead of selecting a geographical field site, I chased the respective social ties and power relations across geographical/ categorical boundary. I conceived of Chiang Mai as an extended domain of social networks rather than consisting of a clear-cut binary divide between the city and the villages. The field data was mainly collected in Chiang Mai supplemented with occasional visits to the various associated villages of the key informants. Consequently, my field sites encompassed not only Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Bangkok in Thailand but also the Shan state of Burma and Yunnan province of China.⁸

⁸ It was often difficult to trace these individuals. When I looked for them again in order to inquire further information, frequently, they had gone off due to their changing job and address. In this respect, the process of collecting data helped me to recognise the high occupational mobility of the urban Akha in Chiang Mai.

Another difficulty is that many of Akha residents in Chiang Mai are rather invisible not only to the researcher but to the Akha themselves. Even when they were working in the same restaurant, working around the same corner of a street, they sometimes did not know whether s/he is 'Akha' or not, partly because they would not make an effort to get to know each other on the basis of being

2. Positionality of the observer

In the field observation, a researcher acts as the primary 'research instrument' through which all kinds of information and data are filtered. The researcher's own background, characteristics and how the researcher is viewed by the informants needs to be taken into account, because such positionality of the researcher and the relationships with informants may influence the outcome of the study. Thus, as Haraway (1991) argues, the objectivity of the research analysis can be supported only when a scrupulous reflexive context is provided by the observer.

It was in 1987 that I was first engaged with Akha. I was involved in Third World Shop social activities in Tokyo as an undergraduate student, and selling some hill tribe handicrafts from northern Thailand on the campus. The object of this was to develop 'fair trade' between consumers and producers through creating a direct and non-exploitative relationship. It also promoted cultural and political understanding of the producers. It was whilst involved in this cause that I first visited an Akha village in February 1988 in a 'meet the producers' expedition.

Since then, I have visited the same Akha village several times over the five year period, 1988-1993, during which time considerable changes were taking place within the community as a result of Thailand's rapid economic development. On the basis of these early, first-hand observations, I wrote an MA dissertation,

'Akha' unless they had a shared interest and partly because identification of being 'Akha' itself is

*Tourism, Continuity and Change within an Akha Community: Image and Reality.*⁹ Therefore, when I went back again to conduct my PhD fieldwork in 1994, I already knew quite a few individuals and organisations in the area.

During the course of field work, being a Japanese female, with a similar features, and an Akha nose (according to the Akha), I was often thought to be an Akha woman. It started to happen after six months of my field work when my skin got darker. Whether I was perceived as an Akha or Japanese depended on how I dressed and who I was with. In Chiang Mai or Chiang Rai town when I went to have my hair cut or to the market together with informants, the friends of the informant often presumed that I am a sister or a daughter of that informant. In one village, I had always been particularly welcomed by a village headman. One day I found out the reason. After a good feast and a few drinks, the headman suddenly started crying by gazing at my face, because my face reminded him of his daughter. (He sold her to a Taiwanese when she was seventeen years old and she never come back since then. Now he can not even find out whether she is still alive or not.)

Being similar in features to the informants has both advantages and disadvantages to the researcher. The advantage was that I had direct-experience of how others perceive the Akha and what it is like to be an Akha girl. Being perceived as an Akha girl was sometimes an unpleasant experience. For example, when I was staying in an Akha village, a Thai male visitor pointed at me and asked the head of the house in a casual manner, 'She is back from the town, isn't she? how much?'. Obviously, an Akha girl is considered as a

enigmatic especially when mixed-marriage is concerned.

⁹ See also Toyota 1996a

cheap woman sexually available to low-class Thai males. The Akha girls are constantly faced with this image of being an 'available girl' by Thai and the others in everyday life whether in the village or in town. Having similar features to the informants and close to the age group resulted in my sharing the same experiences as the informants.

Whenever I visited a village for the first time I went together with my informants when they went back to their home villages. In this way, villagers presumed that I was either the informant's class mate or work mate from Chiang Mai. I found it easier then to gain better access to the villagers than by visiting by myself. The informants often walked hand in hand with me after we had got to know each other well enough. In the village, it was not only girls but even adult or elderly women who walked hand in hand with me. By touching hands villagers could immediately tell that I am from the city, never had experience of working in the field or hard work. According to elders, it is said that girls hands used to be an important consideration in judging their marriage prospects. If the hands are soft this means she is not hard working. The informants often teased me by saying 'you are lucky, your parents must be rich so that you could afford to become lazy.'

Elder informants normally called me, "Abu" which means 'girl' in Akha. Because they assumed that I was under twenty although my real age was late 20s. Those I had a close relationship with called me, 'Miga' which means 'beloved girl', a name normally given to the youngest daughter. This nickname was chosen as it sounded similar to 'Mika', my Japanese name. Among the younger generation, I was called 'Ayui-Miga' which means 'elder sister Miga'. It is interesting to compare this experience with Kammerer's reflection of her

fieldwork among the Akha informants. Although we were both the same age during the field work, she was called '*Api*', which means 'old women' or 'female elder' in contrast with my familiar designation. This term implies respect towards elderly and she was entitled to join other elders at the feast, whereas I was expected to sit with young girls or sometimes help them in the kitchen. I was not entitled to sit with elders unless they invited me. This different treatment may be due to the height difference: my height of 150 cm (about 5 ft.) was the average height of Akha women whereas Kammerer was taller than any Akha woman or man.

Dialectic field relation between the observer and informants

Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' designate bundles of relations. A 'field' accounts for the multi-dimensional space of position (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:16). It consists of various agents and their different positions anchored in certain forms of power relations. Bourdieu's concept of 'field' provides the useful frame for a relational analysis between the observer and informants.

By looking at the previous literature on Akha studies, one can see that there is a clear difference in the field attitude between Western researchers and Japanese ones. Here I would like to note the implication and the reaction of the informants toward this. It is undeniable that Anthropology is a discipline historically constructed to distinguish West from non-West. Anthropological investigation has been primarily developed by Western researchers to understand the non-western, 'the other', hence, anthropological knowledge has been constituted by Western domination. Consequently, the Western researchers' attitude towards the Akha focused on accounting for 'the other culture'. Thus, they have been describing and making sense of the cultural meanings of the Akha

world. They normally have a conscious or unconscious sense that they are different from 'us'. Their basic attitude is to observe how different they are. For example, Tooker (1992) demonstrates that how the Akha identity system is different from the western notion of identity and she argued how problematic it is to apply western notions of identity to Akha society. In the field of gender studies, both Hanks (1988) and Kammerer (1988) argue that the western feminist universalistic approach, regarding women as opposed and subordinate to men, is not applicable in the case of the Akha by emphasising the important role of women in the Akha cosmological gender system.

On the other hand, Japanese researchers' motivation often stems from the nostalgic inquiry into the origins of Japanese people. There is a sentimental belief among Japanese that the Japanese are originally from Yunnan province of China where the Akha also come from. Thus, Japanese researchers tend to seek for similarities instead of differences.¹⁰ The way Japanese researchers find similarity is equally simplistic as Western researchers finding difference.

However, it is noteworthy that some Akha informants are aware of these different attitudes on the part of previous Western and Japanese researchers and this affects the rapport between informant and researcher. Due to the fact that a Japanese researcher wrote a book about the similarity between the Akha and Japanese, which was translated in Chinese and published in China, the idea of the common origin between Akha and Japanese became well-known (and

¹⁰ The surge of nostalgia for lost origins and looking for the 'similarities' are important drives for non-western anthropologists rather than 'difference' and 'exoticism'. This can also be found in the tourist setting. Different constructions of otherness may be presented to different types of tourists by either emphasising the difference or similarity. The way of responding to meet the

believed) among educated Akha in China and Thailand. Some Akha even purchased this book and are proudly showing it to Japanese visitors. This belief of common origin affected the way they perceived me and the way they projected themselves.

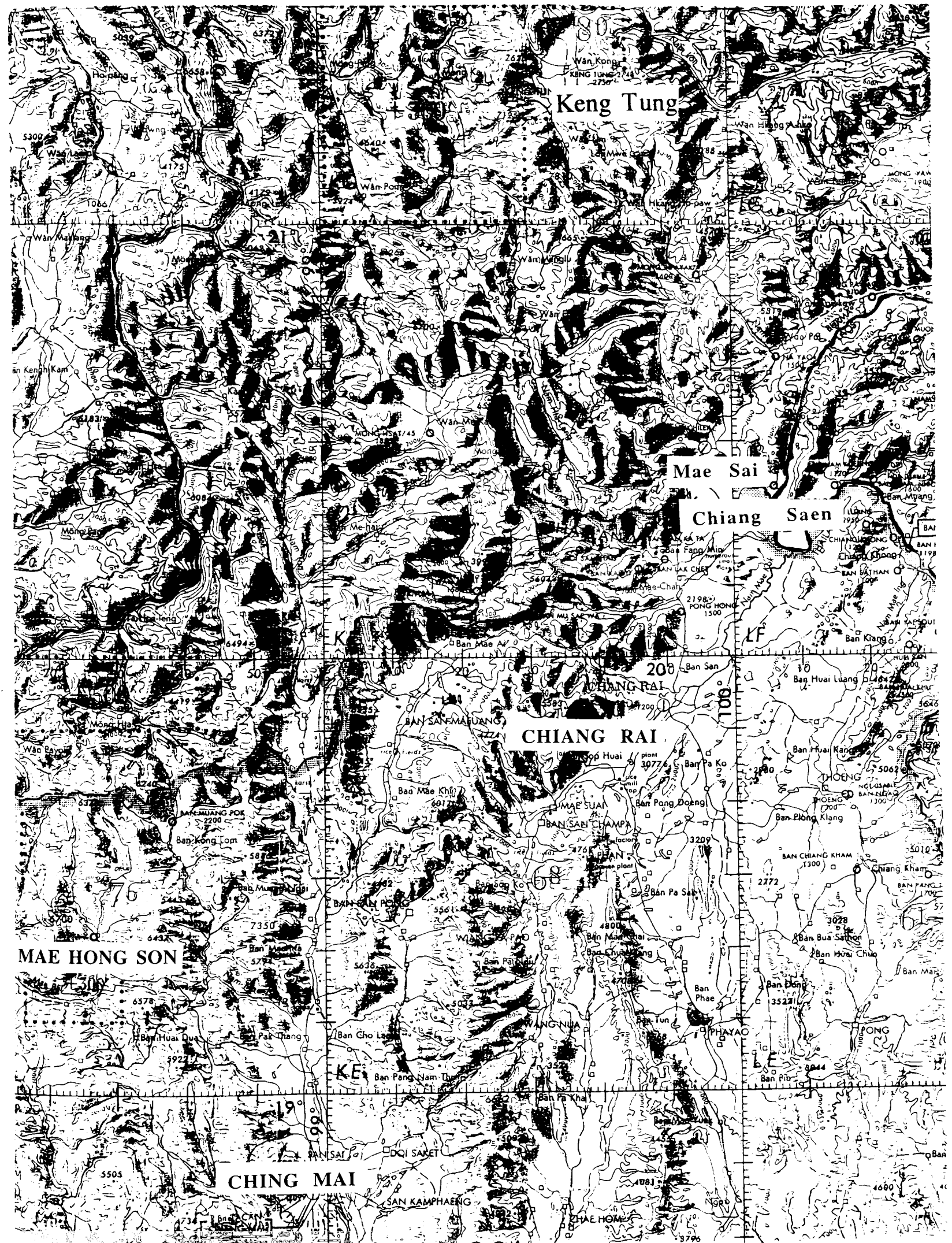
It is not only anthropologists who study the target people in advance, but the informants themselves also already have obtained some definite images and information about the anthropologists or outside visitors through the mass media, gossip, or their own experiences. I often recognised that they were observing me often deeper than I was observing them, and that they commented on me by making comparisons with previous anthropologists. I realised that the field relation between the observer and the informants never exists by itself but is shaped by influences beyond the immediate relationship between observer and informant. Field relations are built in a shared contemporary world.

In my case, a television programme and the image of 'modern women' affected my rapport with informants. Recently, a Japanese television program, 'おしん *Oshin*' had been especially popular in Southeast Asia, including Thailand. It was a life story of an ordinary Japanese woman going through the hardship of her life from 1910s - 1990s. Whatever happened in her life, she never gave up, but patiently and bravely carried on through the difficulty. Many Akha informants watched this programme and they suspected the problems for Akha and Japanese women living in a 'traditional' patrilineal marriage society, being oppressed not only by the husband but also by the mother were similar. The informants were curious to know what the contemporary situation in Japan is like. Young female informants, particularly, found the circumstances between

their life and mine similar, because they were aware that they could not simply repeat the same way of life style as their mother did, and had to struggle to find a new life style to cope with their present situation. More socio-economic and higher educational opportunities were becoming available to the younger generation. This enabled women to become socially and economically independent, instead of having to rely on either parents or husband. When more opportunity is available, they need to know better what they want in their life in order to make a decision. Although the conditions and constraints are different, many of my informants were interested in my future and marriage plans, because they were curious to know how I would manage between the 'traditional' expected Japanese female role and my new life prospect after obtaining higher education overseas. Occasionally, I ended up being interviewed by the informants instead of interviewing them, because they were interested in my future and the strategies for survival as much as I was interested in theirs ¹¹.

¹¹ Semi-structured interview was conducted with 343 informants (male 122, female 221). It covered five main topics: 1. Economic condition and social status 2. Educational background, Motivation 3. Marriage and Family experience 4. Social links and Networks (friend, neighbourhoods, village tie, kinship, work mate, classmate, religious link) 5. Future prospect

Map 3 Geographical feature of the region



Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

(1) The Concept of 'Culture' and Ethnic Categorisation

Until recently there was a pervasive assumption in anthropology that group identity was inextricably linked with a given ethnic category, which in turn represented a specific culture. The notion of 'a culture' as an entity provided the theoretical framework for ethnographic description and cross-cultural analysis in classic anthropology. According to the principle of 'ethnic category' the entire world was segmented into individual cultures. One of the important tasks of anthropologists was seen as being to document, describe and analyse these bounded unique cultural wholes. However, this central analytic concept of 'a culture' has been subject to critical debate in anthropology today.

Eric R. Wolf in his influential book, *Europe and the People Without History*, raised the question, "why do we persist in turning dynamic, interconnected phenomena into static, disconnected things?" (Wolf 1982:4). He asserted that concepts like 'nation', 'society' and 'culture' are misleading because they turned 'a totality of interconnected processes' into things. He urged that the tendency of anthropology to divide its subject matter into distinctive cases, and to picture the world as a set of 'integrated and bounded system', set off against other and consisting of 'internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects,' created a false model of reality. The idea of localised cultures illustrated in the classic 'ethnographic maps,' displayed as spatially distributed ethnic categories, was a convenient fiction.

First of all it should be recognised that the erection of such cultural distinctions and borders was largely a product of the colonial mentality and the imperatives of political control. The ethnic category was produced through the 'retribalization' of the colonial period. Because the notion of separate and distinct cultures had enabled them to carve the world into small units, there was a similar desire to establish clear-cut ethnic categories and therefore create the 'laboratories' of culturally-bounded and orderly field sites (Hastrup & Olwing 1997:2)

It is thus crucial to examine colonial power relations in their historical context in order to understand how cultural categories were created and became recognised over time. A close examination of the political process and its history as embedded in the discipline of anthropology is essential because cultural differences can never be 'given' but are socio-politically constructed. This conceptualisation of the world as a mosaic of separate cultures is what made it possible to bound the ethnographic object and to seek generalisation from a multiplicity of separate cases. The British tradition of social anthropology segregated the world into an array of discrete and comparable 'social systems'. The American anthropological tradition adopted a similar approach, though substituting a term, 'culture'.

Discourse on 'tribal' culture and colonial evolutionism

From the very beginning of the development of the discipline, anthropology had a special interest in the customs and practices of primitive, or preliterate peoples. Anthropologists used to use the term 'tribe' to describe such societies and this is how it appeared in the anthropological literature for a hundred years and more. (Béteille 1998:188) The term 'tribe' represented not only a particular type of

social unity but also a particular stage of evolution. The presumption was that the tribe was an isolated, self-contained society. In the same manner the term 'native' was used by the colonial administrators to describe and to identify non-western people.

In the early 20th century, Tylor (1871) defined the notion of a culture as 'a whole way of life of a group or society'. In his usage, 'culture' is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor 1871:1:1 cited by Wright 1998:8). His definition of a culture was combined with the pervasive idea of evolutionism at that time, that is, 'each of these cultures was at a different stage in the evolution of civilisation or in a progression towards European rationality' (Wright 1998:8). The thinking behind this was the idea of enlightenment and the notion of making the natives civilised. Such intentions were particularly strong among colonial Christian missionaries.

Human rights and Cultural relativism

The colonialist idea of social evolutionism was rejected by the founding father of the discipline of American cultural anthropology, Boas. Boas and his followers understood the anthropological conception of cultures as whole ways of life based especially in values and patterns or codes of comprehension and conduct. They argued that each of these 'ways' of life was more or less unique and thus must be understood in its own terms rather than ethnocentrically (Webster 1995:385).

Both parties — Boas and his followers in the United States; Malinowski and his followers in Britain — argued in favour of cultural relativism, insisting that none

of the 'peoples' in Africa, Asia or the Pacific is 'savage'; each has its own legitimate way of social life and cultural system which should be equally valued. Following this view, the purpose of anthropology moved forwards seeking to understand local people's culture and to speak for them by promoting the perspectives of those who are silenced, and equally to enable the local people to speak and act more effectively for themselves.

In order to resist the idea of the western civilising mission of enlightenment, early anthropologists were inclined to stress the coherence of each individual culture they studied. Although they criticised the colonialist idea of evolutionism, at the same time the early anthropologists shared the same basic notion that the world is comprised of groups of people, and each group forms an integrated unique culture. In other words, the idea of a group of people having a distinctive 'culture' and living in a demarcated society was crucial to both colonial administrative and to anthropological thinking.

) Anthropologists' quest for exoticism, and idealised pasts, in effect created the image of traditional self-contained society, instead of merely representing it, by isolating the people being studied in both time and space. Malinowski typifies this approach in his series of classic Trobriand monographs, where he delineates exoticised primitive life forms in remote parts of the globe. In his own words, "Anthropology, to me at least, was a romantic escape from our over-standardised culture..."(Malinowski 1930:406).

Early anthropologists regarded all humans as equal, and they found its pedagogic mission in the furtherance of respect for 'other cultures' and different cultural values. This led them to argue for the legitimacy of cultural difference, and,

accordingly, for respect for non-western cultures and their values. However, contrary to their intention, they ended up sharing a similar perspective to that of the colonist and the missionary. And so ironically, they reinforced the position of colonialism by measuring, categorising, describing and representing 'the others', whilst thinking that understanding other cultures is the moral and noble goal of anthropology. This is the result of their cultural relativism and comparativism.

Functional approach: culture as an object in the laboratory

In the 1940s, structural functionalist approaches came to prevail in anthropology. This structural functionalist perspective uncritically affirmed the idea of culture in relation to 'self-identity' or essentialism. Thus, they objectified the people under study in terms of cultural categories already defined in the ethnographic convention. In this way, anthropologists came to act as brokers of the 'exotic other' defining off-beat cultures and presenting them in ethnographic forms.

By producing 'other cultures' and stressing their distinctiveness, 'culture' was represented as if it were timeless, unchanging, homogeneous, rigidly demarcated and completely detached from people or social moorings. What this fails to acknowledge is the diversity and changing nature of culture; something that early anthropologists were equally insensitive to. The main trouble with early anthropology was its ideological conception of social structure and culture. The tendency it engendered of viewing the world as a mosaic of cultures persisted from the 1930s until the present day.

Since the 1960s, ethnic movements became a global phenomenon, sensitising anthropologists to the political dimension of cultures. Marxists in particular

claiming to speak for the oppressed, sought to champion their political demands and at the same time push anthropology in a politicised direction (cf. Pels & Nencel 1991). Whilst this may have been reprehensible, Marxists (and feminists too, for that matter) made an important contribution by alerting anthropology to the significance of 'micro' communities, their interconnectedness, and their place within the 'macro' of the global political and economic system (cf. Webster 1995).

In other ways, too, anthropology made much progress, particularly in relation to the meticulous recording and reporting of the ideas and institutions of particular cultures and in representing them through ethnographic writing. Cultural determinism and normative cultural relativism had ascendancy. Cultural Anthropology and universalising theories such as structuralism notwithstanding, anthropologists found it difficult to discuss cross-cultural theory, because, for example, 'religion' means very different things in different cultures; western notions of 'identity' did not coincide with the local concept of 'identity' and so on.

In this context, a seminal break was made by Clifford Geertz in 1973. He compellingly argued that anthropological writings are fictions. His work, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, was based on a Weberian interpretative approach. He stressed the capacity to read and reproduce cultural differences by describing indigenous symbolic systems (Geertz 1973). His idea of culture as text and ethnography as fiction made a great contribution to the reflexive aspect of anthropology. The significance of Geertz's work is not just his eloquent interpretation of culture in his field, Indonesia, but its awareness of the fact that culture is an anthropological construction. He demonstrated that

anthropological inquiry into the meaningful structures of another society is not a straightforward process. It involves a two-level operation, first, observation and then interpretation. Thus, Geertz provided not only an interpretation of cultural meanings but also methodological prescriptions as to how this might be done. He stated that “there is no reason why the conceptual structure of a cultural interpretation should be any less formulable and thus less susceptible to explicit canons of appraisal, than that, say, of a biological observation or a physical experiment” (Geertz 1973:24).

Like Boas, Geertz had stressed cultural ‘otherness’ by creating ‘laboratories’ of the bounded particular locality which sharply contrasts with the notion of ‘Travelling cultures’ raised by James Clifford (1992). Geertz’s interpretation of culture was labelled ‘symbolic anthropology’ as it aimed to make sense of the symbolic meaning of everyday life. With Geertz’s influence, various attempts were made to make some sense of the particular social structure or culture, and articulated by the anthropologists. Geertzian anthropology was interested in how symbols operate as vehicles of ‘culture’. There was, no doubt, a certain diversity in the ways of analysis among different anthropologists. However, all seemed to have shared the idea of viewing a culture as a symbolic system, the property of the other. And their primary focus was on describing, translating or interpreting these ‘other cultures’. “Geertz gave the hitherto elusive concept of culture a relatively fixed locus, and a degree of objectivity, that it did not have before” (Ortner 1984:129). Therefore, the development of Geertz’s idea of ‘a culture’ as forming a system of meaning only reinforced the conventional concept of ‘a culture’ as a separated bounded entity, along with the vision of the world as bundles of segmented pieces of ‘a culture’ divided by the ‘ethnic category’. There was little concern for the politics of culture, the ways in

which symbolic systems were produced and maintained.

A Critique on Anthropological Essentialism

In the seventies conventional anthropology was criticised for treating 'culture' as if it were a set of ideas or meanings which was shared by a whole community of homogeneous individuals. This criticism was born of empirical observation which threw up conflicting data and partly too because conventional anthropology had been sullied by the guilt of colonial association. Talal Asad made an important contribution to the debate.

✧

Asad (1979) criticised British anthropologists for seeking the unique 'authentic culture' of another society in the form of an integrated system of consensual 'essential meanings'. British functionalists who portrayed 'culture' as if it was an object in the laboratory of natural sciences were particularly criticised, because they treated 'culture' as a small scale, self-contained, bounded entity regarding them in the similar manner as one might treat species as having an essence. "Anthropologists have presented the basic social objects as an essential and determinate function...the integrated totality of shared meanings which gives that society its unique identity" (Asad 1979:612). Asad fundamentally questions the principal assumption of the anthropological discipline concerning concepts of society, classification and social structure, rules and social behaviour. He then suggests that the assumption that society is essentially a matter of structures of meaning, and the tendency to see authoritative meanings as an a priori totality which define and reproduce the essential integrity of a given social order, represents an ideological type of anthropology. "More precisely, the basic social object (called society, social structure or social order) which is presented in the discourse of such anthropologists is constructed out of essential human

meanings” (Asad 1979:610). Asad’s questioning of the notion of culture entered into mainstream anthropological debates in the late 1980s and 90s, when it was challenged by the emergent post-modernists.

The post-modernists contribution to the argument was not to focus on what cultural entities are, but on the issue of who defines and represents ‘a culture’ and what agencies are involved in their constructing it. Recognising culture as an historical and political process, some questioned the justification of origins and the idea of defining ‘a culture’. Others pointed out that in this process some individuals tend to be excluded from active participation in culture formation and argued that collective representation can obscure inequalities in social power within a single ethnic category. Concerning the politics of culture, I was inspired by two sub areas in anthropology which were actively involved in the debate and contributed to challenging the orthodox notion of ‘a culture’ as a category. These were anthropologies of tourism and gender theory.

Anthropology of tourism

In the 1980s the notion of ‘a culture’ was challenged in the field of the anthropology of tourism. Robert E. Wood (1980) pointed out the pernicious consequences of tourism in its over-reliance on normative cultural categories based on Western romantic ideals of cultural preservation. “Too much of the literature tries to answer normative questions — is the culture being spoiled, demeaned, etc. — rather than exploring what it is in the lives of the people and the structures of their communities which really changes (Wood 1980:576).” He encapsulated his objection in the billiard ball model: a moving object (tourism) acts upon an inert one (culture), at best through the intermediary of a third object (cultural brokers). The assumption underlying here is that culture is

unitary, passive, and inert.

Instead he suggested, “We must become more sensitive to the cultural strategies people develop to limit, channel, and incorporate the effects of international tourism (Wood 1980:566).” He made the point that normative cultural categories constrain our ability to analyse the precise components of actual cultural change by missing the dynamism of the variety of active responses. Another important point he made is that the way questions are posed in asking whether cultures are spoiled, broken down, demeaned, preserved, etc., betrays a Western ethnocentrism and romanticism in its desire to ‘preserve’ cultures (Wood 1980:564).

International tourism normally takes place in the context of unequal economic power between the host society and guest society. Thus, from the Marxist-influenced world system perspective, host societies are often regarded as ‘victims’ of the modern world capitalist system. Tourism is seen as an exploitative penetration by western capital into less-capitalised host societies. It is undeniable that a significant economic difference exists. However, such a perspective tends to constrain our ability to view the host society as anything other than a passive target. Any close investigation would reveal that “they can not simply be lumped together in the same fixed category of ‘poor exploited people’” (Toyota 1996:227). Host societies are not just passive recipients of outside influences, they consist of actors capable of adjusting and responding to new opportunities and constraints. If we consider the complex implications of social, cultural and political dimensions within a given host society, we can recognise that international tourism provides a new mechanism where ‘a culture’ is contested and created. I will come back to this argument in the next Chapter.

Let me turn now to gender theory.

Gender Theory

While the anthropology of tourism deconstructed the essentialised notion of 'a culture', gender theory fundamentally challenged the homogeneous, universal categories of 'man' and 'woman'. The critical way of examining the category of 'women' seems a useful device for questioning the notion of 'ethnic category' in my study for ethnic categories are also not homogeneous, universal units of identity, as assumed by Boasian anthropologists.

The contribution of Foucault's work in anthropology represents a critical perspective on the historical constitution of knowledge within given cultures. In his influential book, *The History of Sexuality*, he saw historical processes as linked to the relations of power amongst the unequal, from which emerged hierarchies of gender. Scholars researching gender relations in Southeast Asia challenged this Western feminist premise of unequal gender hierarchy as a universal phenomena. They critically examined whether the western notion of gender based on hierarchies and oppositions between culture and nature, public and private, was relevant in the regional context of Southeast Asia, where the relatively high position of women is notable in its history. Historical studies illustrate that there existed mutual responsibility, co-operation and complementarity in relations between male and female. Women, moreover, actively participated in economic and social affairs. Hank's (1988) and Kammerer's (1988) work on the Akha gender system were not exceptions. They elucidated the important role of women in Akha society by looking at the informal sphere, such as kinship and gender relations within the family, rather than the formal sphere of village politics or religious ritual services. In the

course of their argument, they criticised the universalised concept of women's subordination and the western view of a gender-stratified system. They demonstrated that the Akha cosmological male-female relations are complementary rather than oppositional.

Analysis of gender relations in Southeast Asian societies has compelled western feminists to re-examine their assumption of 'women' as an essentialised concept. The framework has shifted from universalised approaches to sexual hierarchy -- male dominance and female subordination -- to more subtle insights into the detailed cultural constructions of gender. As Karim points out, "the Western theme of feminism cannot envisage a situation where male and female relations are managed in a way as flexible and fluid as they are in Southeast Asia" (Karim 1995:17). Moore argued that an investigation into the constructs of 'women' and 'men' was essential, and that these categories should not be assumed. "Biological differences between the sexes", he noted, "tell us nothing about the general social significance of that difference" (Moore 1988:7). The common identity of women as subordinate could not be upheld in the face of a proliferation of cultural, gender, class and race differences. The universal 'sameness' of women was lost (Moore 1988:10). 'Women' as a unitary cultural category had been deconstructed.

On the other hand, interpretative anthropologists handled gender relations as static cultural systems, paying little attention to their changing nature, whereas we need to be sensitive not to overlook differences within the same category constructed by such analytical conceptions as culture, ethnic category, and gender. Differences are also made by personal experience, age, mode of livelihood, health, living conditions, and so on. Moreover, we should not

ignore the fact that these differences have been constructed historically and are liable to change over time. Gender is a process mediated by power relations.

For this reason deconstructing the anthropological concept of gender in relation to power relations deserves special attention. Only after we deconstruct these normative notions of gender as a cultural system can we start analysing the process of the production of difference. What we have to observe is the way in which the difference is produced and maintained, imagined, contested and enforced. It is clear that no single conception of difference (culture, race, ethnic category, gender, class, nation) could divide the world into things. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of the fact that a single conception of difference such as 'ethnic category' also could not divide the world into separate segments. The attributes of 'Thainess' or 'Akhaness' might not coincide exactly to form discrete and exclusive categories; instead they might overlap; they might be differences of degree rather than absolute distinctions. As 'gender category' is subject to change through time, so does 'ethnic category'; and it interrelates with other modes of categorisation such as age, class, gender so that the identity of being 'Akha' will also differ. Thus, it should not be assumed that every Akha shares the same Akha identity, as if there was only one identity. It is not enough to speak simply of the identity of a person as a 'Akha', as if the use of that category is itself sufficient to delineate for us the person's experience. Instead, their identity has to be examined in the particular context, because the distinction between 'Thai' and 'Akha' involves various other elements which were constructed in a specific historical and political context. For this reason, it is imperative for a rounded understanding that identity is variable not single or fixed and may alter situationally and circumstantially.

The critique of ethnographic representation

The appearance of two books - *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer 1986) served to mark a significant new tendency in American anthropology. It was concerned with the role of the anthropologist in the creation of anthropological knowledge. Ethnography, it was argued, was not simply 'writing up' research but also a genre which creates its own authority by rhetorical means (Clifford 1983). 'Text' became the central metaphor of its epistemological reflections. Critiquing the ethnographic text and experimentation with texts to devise new and more justifiable forms of 'writing culture' became hot topics in anthropology. Writing practice had already been recognised as a form of interpretation by Geertz. However, unlike Geertz, much attention was devoted to the question of how the analysis of world history and political economy can be integrated with ethnographic research. Their challenge lay in trying to situate detailed local cultural knowledge in larger political-economical systems. (cf. Marcus 1986). They questioned the interpretative authority of the anthropologist and the focus on writing rather than fieldwork as the domain of knowledge production. Thus, anthropological texts were more about the anthropologists than the people they were studying.

Although the contribution of these books is often regarded as in raising the issues of 'text' and the style of ethnographic writing, I would like to draw on the implications of their argument for the concept of culture. Clifford & Marcus noted that:

Cultures are not 'scientific objects'. Culture and our views of 'it' are produced historically, and are actively contested. ...If 'culture' is not an object to be

described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitely interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal and emergent. Representation and explanation - both by insiders and outsiders - is implicated in this emergence (Clifford & Marcus 1986:18-9) .

Boyer (1994) and Auger (1999) problematised the collective representation of the ethnographic text. They pointed out that the ethnographic tradition of describing cultural groups using ideal knowledge systems is questionable because it relies on abstracting from the cultural system only those elements of it that are consistent with the idealisation. In other words, the ethnographic text constructs an essential system of meanings in its attempt to present the 'authentic' representation of a culture. However, what people actually practise in daily life does not necessarily exhibit the qualities of idealised systems as such. Auger also argues, citing Boyer, that "The typical ethnographic picture of an integrated, coherent, and stable body of knowledge from which appropriate deductions can always be made is therefore not cognitively realistic" (Boyer 1994 cited by Auger 1999:95). The illusion of cultural essentialism was in fact created by the anthropological inclination to symbolic representation of culture.

Since the mid-1980s, 'culture' is no longer perceived as a monolithic and relatively fixed set of shared beliefs and/or symbolic systems. The concept of 'culture' which had long been a central analytical framework in anthropology has been subjected to critical debate. The academic claim for the authority of anthropological knowledge had been founded in an assertion of its 'objective' nature. It is now recognised that all knowledge of culture needs to be contextualised because there is no 'god's-eye view'; every view is a view 'from

somewhere' (Haraway 1991). The central question was the positionality from which anthropological knowledge was constructed; how such culture was made, by whom and for whom?

The theoretical consequence of this question of ethnographic representation is that essential cultural elements were selected and defined by the anthropologists in the ethnographic text. It was anthropologists who were seeking for the unique 'authentic culture' of society in the form of consensual 'essential meaning'. Thus the nature of 'essential meaning' of social object was constituted within the ethnographic texts⁴ themselves. In this way anthropologists defined unique, distinctive cultures. This leads me to argue that cultural essence is not a content but a discourse involving several agencies in society which are continually making claims for 'authentic culture' and competing for its authority. In this regard what anthropologists should address is not the content of culture itself but the way such discourse is produced and presented in particular historical and political circumstances. It has required a fairly fundamental reorientation of the concept of 'culture' in anthropological theory.

Politics of anthropological knowledge

Critical reflection has stimulated an analysis of power relations in anthropological knowledge construction. How was the object of anthropology created? Who constituted 'the other' as other? Who produced the knowledge? By whom was that knowledge validated and disseminated? It is obvious that the process of constituting the anthropological object was a "part of hegemonic discourse characteristic of the West" (Pels & Nencel 1991). The classic anthropological viewpoint that had focused on ethno-cultural groups as primary objects of study

stood accused. Dusenbery concluded in his study that: *Clearly, no bounded, unitary Sikh collectivity exists as a natural fact; it is always an 'imagined community'...it is important in particular socio-historical situations to be sensitive both to the agents who command the power to name and control difference and to the terms under which recognition is extended* (Dusenbery 1997:755).

Traditional anthropological knowledge of cultural representation is thus called into question today, the validity and legitimisation of anthropological 'expertise' doubted. The new work critiqued the normalising and exoticising construction of culture and otherness constitutive of traditional anthropology. It was shown that the integrated boundedness and coherence of 'a culture' was made as a narrative device by anthropologists in traditional ethnographic writing. Despite the fragmentary and divided nature of the empirical world, therefore, anthropologists sought the 'wholeness' of the object, 'a culture', which in turn filtered into their textual accounts of 'the field.' Essentially, anthropological 'cultures' and their boundedness, which 'mapped' cultures onto places and peoples represented a literary fiction as opposed to some sort of natural fact.

In order to overcome the problem of such representation in ethnographic writings, Tedlock (1979) proposed the 'dialogic' way of using language. He focused on the emergent quality of language in which the meaning could be contextual and contested instead of an abstract unitary whole of denotational forms. Following Bakhtin's idea that due to the 'analogic' way of using language, knowledge is accrued, and ethnographic data is represented as a unitary whole, Tedlock suggested anthropological knowledge was best informed and illustrated by the

dialogue between an anthropologist and his informant.¹ This notion was further developed by James Clifford into new paradigms of dialogue, where 'culture' becomes "an open-ended creative dialogue ...of insiders and outsiders, of diverse factions" (cf. Dawson et. al. forthcoming). It is through these dialogues between various discourses that 'culture' obtains substantial meaning. For that reason, what I am concerned with in my study is not to define 'a representative culture' but to explore the contextual procedures whereby these discursive discourses are contested and whereby the meaning of identities is constructed.

Kahn pointed out that "the concept of culture is formally identical to that of race" (1989:21). Neither 'culture' nor 'race' are natural facts, but have their origins in nineteenth century European ideas which sought in various ways to overturn Enlightenment assumptions of a universal human nature by stressing, indeed actually constructing, concepts of human variation. While the definition of the concept of 'race' today contains a caveat, warning the reader against its usefulness as follows; "Race. The common use of the word in English to refer to a group of persons who share common physical characteristics and form a discrete and separate population unit has no scientific validity, since evolutionary theory and physical anthropology have long since demonstrated that there are no fixed or discrete racial groups in human populations..." (Seymour-Smith 1985). On the other hand, the use of the concept of culture is in no way constrained in these standard reference works. Kahn argued that if race cannot be used to demarcate discrete and unchanging groups of human beings, why not the notion of culture as well (Kahn 1989:18-9)?

¹ Said proposed the notion of 'interlocutor' by pointing out that "anthropological representations bear as much on the presenter's world as on who or what is represented" (Said 1989:224).

Following these arguments that view 'others' not as ontologically given but as historically constituted, we need to be critical of the anthropological term 'local point of view'. When 'culture' was regarded as set in bounded and unique wholes which corresponded to distinct and localised social groups, the normative anthropological practice was to see 'a culture' from an internal local point of view by physically situating the anthropologist in that cultural setting. Anthropologists have long prided themselves on their valorisation of the 'local point of view' and on their grasp of local circumstances and local perspectives and had always viewed local people as producers of local knowledge. However, we need to address the issue of how 'local' is conceived and whose terms? One assumption that had been taken for granted is that the anthropologist is Western and 'local' people are non-western. That is why the 'local' point of view approach became meaningful. But what about a Japanese researcher studying Japanese society? Who then defines who is 'local'? Who draws a line between insider and outsider and determines what is a 'local' point of view in socio-cultural terms?

That anthropological discourse has politics should be recognised. The underlying presumption in this local point of view is that they are different from 'us'. The idea is based on 'otherness' by confining the other culture. It is often used to distinguish their traditional exotic societies from our modern ones. When this line of thinking leads into arguments for the preservation of their unique self-contained cultures or accusations such as that of western capitalism encroaching upon 'noble savages', such romanticised perceptions of otherness in fact stems from just another side of the colonial mentality. What we should ask instead is how such local knowledge is being valorised outside the local domain. For this

it is crucial to re-examine the unit of analysis, such as 'a culture', 'ethnic category', 'a local community' which no longer constitutes anthropological objects as natural facts. We need to be aware of the historical construction of anthropological knowledge, who draws the line between 'culture', 'ethnic category', and 'local community'.

With the classic notion of unique cultures being renounced, how can we perceive the identity-formation process taking place among peoples no longer depicted as bounded others? A 'culture' or primordial cultural essence does not serve as a basis for a cultural identity as it has been portrayed in earlier literature. The first step would be to look at the nodal points in the networks of interrelations where mutual construction of identities and differentiation take place. We can observe and compare the respective criteria of validity for differentiation. A fictitious cultural or ethnic category should not impede the open analytic framing of this diverse, complex and dynamic process.

Those employing political economic approaches had been recognising the regional and global forms of connectedness and some scholars such as Wolf (1994), Hannerz (1996), Appadurai (1991) pressed for a new macro theory of cultural forms to replace anthropological ideas of 'culture'. The question of identity and cultural difference within the wider perspective of political-economic processes has recently become popularised in the field of cultural studies. The ideological views denouncing a universal and imperialistic world capitalist system, or suggesting that the diversity inherent of and within local cultures is disappearing in the face of modernity, is too simplistic. As a matter of fact, what we can observe is a domestication and localisation of colonising cultural items. The 'outside forces' are an integral part of the construction and

constitution of the 'inside', the cultural unit itself. Thus, what makes it challenging is that the 'foreign culture' has integrated into familiar local symbols and meanings, even at the most intimate of levels. Such phenomena have been recognised in Hannertz's term 'Creolisation'. The emphasis in their studies, therefore, is on the political, economic and cultural dimensions of the world system framework. Their focus is the dynamic of this totality rather than looking at one of its parts.

Today, it is widely agreed that contemporary fieldwork no longer fits within the conventional model of a study of 'a culture' as a pre-given entity. A widespread sense of crisis in the discipline of anthropology is linked to fundamental challenges to the classic notions of 'a culture' based on an 'ethnic category' and the localised field orientated ethnographic research practice which has long been central to the anthropologist's concern. Contemporary anthropologists can not confine themselves to the conventional idea of 'cultural identity' as an already accomplished entity being practised and represented by a particular 'local' group of people. Instead we have to think of identity as a 'production' which is always in process, as numbers of recent studies have claimed. We need to examine the complex political processes through which options of the identity are imposed, invented, reworked, and transformed. As Hall noted "Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists. It undergoes constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, identities are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. ...identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within..." (Hall 1994:394). He continues, "It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and

absolute return....It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Hall 1994:395).

In fact, the ethnographic situation we see today must always have looked the same as it does now. Some scholars in the 1920s, were aware of culture contact, movement and change. Gerald Camden Wheeler wrote that "...our aim can only be to trace processes of change, not to seek first beginnings...If ethnology is essentially historical in methods, we have to assume a theoretical endless possibility of movement, and of action and reaction, direct or indirect, between culture groups" (1926: xiv cited by Vincent 1991:54). However, because the anthropological frame of mind was restrained by the Malinowskian functionalists' idea, conventional anthropologists sought a small-scale unique structure of a target culture and society which they interpret and describe as if such a cultural entity exists.

Various ways to deal with new identity options which go beyond the boundaries of micro-cosmic study of locally delimited specified populations have been suggested recently. While some scholars in the field of cultural studies attempt to look at large-scale cultural systems by using a new cultural apparatus such as 'popular culture', they can no longer locate themselves within the discipline of anthropology. Others search for a new approach within field anthropology by being open about their positionality and less assertive of their scientific authority. Abu-Lughod (1991) proposes experimentation with narrative ethnographies of the particular by telling stories about particular individuals and families in specific time and space. In my opinion, the most urgent task at the moment is to conduct detailed empirical ethnographic studies to demonstrate the new development of anthropological theories. It is crucial to re-examine key

concepts in anthropology through careful ‘ethnographic studies of the particular’ with reference to local, national and global context.

In this case the starting point would be to examine the politico-historical process whereby the Akha ethnic category was defined, and then to analyse how an Akha ‘culture’ was identified and interpreted both by outsiders and insiders. Sceptical readings of previous ethnographic texts is crucial to understanding that ethnography is a historically situated phenomenon. The ethnographic text must always be associated with the social, political and material circumstances of the writers. The same applies to the present writer. It is also necessary, as Vincent noted, “to address the politics around the writing of the text, the politics of reading the text, and the politics of its reproduction” (Vincent 1991:49). The details of the politico historical process of Akha ethnic category and identification will be examined in Chapter four.

The next step will be to re-examine the concept of ‘spatially localised people’. The ‘placeless’ phenomenon of displaced people with regional and spatial identities should be recognised. It is crucial to examine the associations of place, people, and culture in terms of mobility and inter-ethnic relations. The next section will explore the analytical framework for this non-territorial, fluid trans-national identity.

(2) Identity and Trans-national Mobility

In the former section, I attempted to 'deconstruct'¹ the anthropological normative notion of 'a culture'. I argued that viewing 'a culture' as a thing, a separate integral entity, the property of a spatially localised native people is no longer acceptable. Accordingly, it is fallacious to perceive that ethnic identity is naturally attributed to the bounded local cultural system on the ground of 'ethnic category'. We need to look beyond the boundaries of existing analytical categories. We have recognised that people are no longer tightly placed in particular localities, spatially bounded, or culturally homogeneous. Thus, we need to conceptualise the people as a 'moving target' (Breckenridge and Appadurai 1989:i). The issue of identity process should be analysed within this analytical framework.

Recently, this new approach to theoretical inquiry has urged to pay more attention to the cultural and social significance of moving in space and across communities in the field of anthropology. Appadurai suggests that, "there is an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is now called *detrterritorialization*....ethnic groups...which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities" (Appadurai 1991:192). Malkki observes that "notions of nativeness and native places become very complex as more and more people identify themselves or are categorised in reference to detrterritorialized 'homelands', 'culture', and 'origins'" (Malkki 1997:52). It is crucial to rethink the question of identity in relation to detrterritorialized space. The trans-national as well as inter-national scope and

¹ In Jacques Derrida's term, 'Deconstruction' is a strategy to reveal working hierarchical

ever expanding boundaries of moving people directly challenge the long held correspondence of identity with notions such as 'nation', 'culture' and 'ethnic category'.

Basch, Schiller and Blanc have introduced the concept of the 'deterritorialized nation-state' and developed the concept of 'transnationalism' which they define as, "a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries" (1994:22). There are two main points I found useful in their new analytic framework in order to understand the contemporary situation of Akha trans-national mobility and their identity construction process. First, Basch, Schiller and Blanc view migrants as subjects actively engaged in creating transnational networks rather than as passive victims of macro economic and political forces. Second, they recognise that transmigrants, "engage in complex activities across national borders that create, shape and potentially transform their identities"(Schiller et al. 1992:4), and "how transmigrants use their social relationships and their varying and multiple identities generated from their simultaneous positioning in several social locations both to accommodate to and to resist the difficult circumstances and the dominant ideologies they encounter in their transnational fields" (Schiller et al. 1992:4). This framework challenges prevailing boundary concepts such as the 'ethnic group' who share a common culture and social norms which would have limited the ability of the researcher to observe and analyse the dynamic nature of transmigrants' actions and networks.

This section aims to provide an analytical framework for theorising identity in relation to trans-national mobility. Firstly, I would like to situate the

assumptions, not to 'interpret' the objects.

characteristics of this present trans-migration situation in the historical context. Secondly the historical regional context of trans-national mobility in Southeast Asia and the nature of situational identities of the region will be discussed. Lastly then, the conceptual framework will facilitate an analysis of identity construction in relation to migration processes.

Post-modern phenomena

It might be argued that the characteristic of the post-modern world is that even the most isolated local setting is connected with a wider world of socio-economic processes. Ever-increasing transnational political, economic, and cultural forces traverse and constitute the social lives of people world-wide. As Rapport and Dawson noted, "people make sense to themselves and others by continually moving amongst a global inventory of ideas and modes of expression" (Rapport and Dawson 1998:25). Some post-modern scholars call this phenomenon 'a global village'(cf. Featherstone 1990, Webster 1995:382). When cultural difference is increasingly becoming deterritorialized because of the mass migrations and transnational culture flows, the idea of spatially confined identity and cultural difference is no longer valid. However, such movement is not singular. The situation, where everywhere in the world people are drinking coke, wearing jeans, does not simply imply 'homogenisation' of culture, nor 'westernization' or 'americanization' of the world.

By post-modern phenomena, I refer to the circumstances of an accelerating 'creolization' (Hannerz 1987). We cannot ignore the emergence of a new kind of migrating population whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and ethnic categories. Recent writings have criticised the orthodox endeavour

of searching for identity at its original roots. There is an increasing realisation that movement constitutes a normal condition of life for a great deal of people, far from being an interruption in ordinary, settled life (Appadurai 1988, 1991; Rosaldo 1988; Clifford 1992; Malkki 1992 Olwig 1997:18). Alternatively, as Rapport and Dawson argued, identity construction can more and more be treated as a search. An innovative analytical framework for multi-locale ethnography is urgently needed. (Marcus 1995) As Appadurai (1992) noted, the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, non-localised quality when groups of people migrate, regroup in new locations, deconstruct and reconstruct their histories of origins. Growing research interest emphasises multiple and multi-local identities and the capacity to move fluidly between the boundaries.

In the face of the growth of a world economy, dramatic trans-national social dislocations and the weakening of 'imagined' national frontiers we are now no longer looking for ontological categories, as the bounded is being replaced by the relational and what was once systemic is now mobile. We have to "accept the chaotic and hyper-real character of society" (Larrain 1994:291). Post-modern research should be involved in working on today's world of contested realities, a new array of ambiguities and dilemmas. These metro-mixture are often termed, 'hybrid', 'syncretic', 'melange', 'Creole', 'post-modern' phenomena. As Moore noted, what is new about the post-modern situation is that "centres, borders and margins are no longer fixed locales, and the economy of exchange between centre and periphery is disrupted" (Moore 1996:10). This is the context in which the world-wide intertwined processes of identity politics must be seen.

Is creolization a post-modern phenomenon?

Mobility is a basic feature of social life throughout the world today. However, it is necessary to add that there is nothing historically unique in this situation. Trans-national displacement is not exclusively a 'post modern' phenomenon. The Creole phenomenon was in fact embedded in the Southeast Asian history long before any western influences. As Rafael & Abraham noted, "Yet the diasporic — meant either as a form of consciousness or expression of creolization — is not new. One reason why we sometimes forget this is because we do not often recognize how much recorded histories are wrapped up in a discourse of the sedentary" (Rafael & Abraham 1997:147). Among the Akha, exile and other forms of territorial displacement have been an integral part of their history for centuries. Therefore, it is critical to situate the present migration in the historical context in order to understand the similarities and differences between past and present mobility.

The experience and effects of mobility shape and reshape both collective and individual identities through a long-term process of negotiating difference. Thus, we need to be sensitive to the historical nature of identity construction. Careful thought should be given to the meaning of the history, origin and justification of the identity being projected at present. Only an historical perspective provides a reassuring context for the present situation. That is why I am looking at the Akha urban migration phenomenon not simply as a contemporary issue resulting from recent development, but as a phenomenon already long embedded in their history.

Nostalgic and romanticised views of the preservation of indigenous cultures often lack such an historical perspective. Such views presume that the local people's traditional way of life had been preserved for a long time without radical

change, and that recent social pressures have forced them to face, for the first time, the issue of change, adaptation and cultural contact. However, it is important to note that it is not only western colonisation, or the penetration of the global economy that are the forces of change within local people's lives. In fact, they have been experiencing constant adaptation and cultural contact through their history on a region-wide scale.

As the historians of Southeast Asia have long noted, people had undoubtedly been more mobile than assumed in pre-colonial societies (Reid 1993; Wolters 1982). Notions of ambiguous boundary, centre and periphery in the pre-modern Southeast Asian nation states and power are well known. Thus, it is not surprising to find that their identities have been less fixed than assumed in conventional anthropological accounts. There have been abundant studies on the issue of identity which criticise the static approaches of classical anthropology. In 1954 Leach, in his book, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, directly questioned the orthodox view of social anthropology of that time. Leach argued that the conventional concept of ethnic category based on a set of cultures tends to obscure the social reality and that it is too static for the type of analysis necessary for the case such as the *Kachin* systems.

Leach asked, "Is it legitimate to think of Kachin society as being organised throughout according to one particular set of principles or does this rather vague category include a number of different forms of social organisation?" (Leach 1965:3). Leach did not feel that there were inherent features in either system which would in themselves cause a shift in the direction of the other system, but that one develops into the other in response to external political and economic factors. He realised that, "two groups of people are of different cultures does

not necessarily imply that they belong to two quite different social systems” (Leach 1965:17). Rather they may see themselves as members of more than one “unit” at a time. Therefore, he concluded that, “...it is largely an academic fiction to suppose that in a ‘normal’ ethnographic situation one ordinarily finds distinct ‘tribes’ distributed about the map in orderly fashion with clear-cut boundaries between them” (Leach 1965:290). As stated in the previous section, throughout the 1950s and into the 60s such studies as Leach’s work, were still in the minority within anthropology. Nevertheless, among anthropologists specialising in Southeast Asian region, not a small number of studies were critical of the direct correspondence between ‘ethnic category’ and ‘ethnic identity’.

Moerman’s work (1965), ‘Who are the Lue?’ directly inquired into the confusion in the use of ethnic category in relation to the Lue of Thailand. He noted that ethnicity is not a timeless concept but a process. “Ethnicity is impermanent in that individuals, communities and areas change their identification” (Moerman: 1965:1222). Dentan (1976) also followed Leach’s view that the western model of ‘ethnic unit’ is far too rigid for the Southeast Asian situation. He remarked that, “multi-culturation in Southeast Asia provides many people with a series of identities which they can don and doff as particular interactions dictate” (Dentan 1976:78). He acknowledged the possibility that one person or set of persons might have two ethnic identities and that the ability to switch identities does not seem to be rare in Southeast Asia, particularly among the hill peoples. Thus, in the 1970s, when the assumptions of cultural continuity, and the former anthropological practice in its ethnographic format of basing the classification of the ‘ethnic group’ on a projected specific, timeless ‘culture’ into bounded populations was being criticised, anthropologists working in Southeast Asia

made contributions to the argument on situational ethnicity which became a hot topic of anthropology during the 1970s and 80s.

It is now widely recognised that the same person identifies themselves according to different criteria of relevance in different situations. As Wallman noted, “ethnicity is the process by which ‘their’ difference is used to enhance the sense of ‘us’ for purposes of organisation or identification... Ethnicity is the recognition of significant difference between ‘them’ and ‘us’” (Wallman 1979:3). Identification can only happen at the boundary of ‘us’, in contact or confrontation or by contrast with ‘them’. That means, when the sense of ‘us’ changes, the boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ also shifts. Not only does the boundary shift, but the criteria which mark it change. Therefore, what we have to ask is what factors determine its qualities and variation? It has to be conceived of purely in person-to-person terms, because any person can represent more than one kind of identity. Identification is thus sometimes a matter of manners and masks appropriate to particular times and places. An ethnic identity is not homogeneous nor fixed but depends on the situation. In other words, none of these aspects of social identity, such as Akha, hill tribes, migrant worker, student or daughter defines the whole of an individual. Identification is a fleeting, more or less manipulative process.

The histories of Southeast Asia is made up of migrations, invasions, displacements, and exiling resulting in the frequent shifts of cultural borders, political loyalties, and ethnic identities. There is nothing new about trans-national social spaces and multi-local affiliations. Constant movement of peoples and ideas across the arbitrary limits of state boundary, ethnic category, religious and socio-economic division shaped the Southeast Asia region. The

history of the region reminds us that there is nothing special about the present condition of trans-national displacement of the population. Rather, what we should bear in mind is a historical comparative perspective of the phenomena what is the similarity and what is the difference between the past and the present.

How to look at migration processes and identity?

During the 1970s and early 1980s migration was viewed in terms of lineal and finite movements between a point of origin and a point of destination. The assumption underlying this bipolar framework was that people moved between fundamentally distinct places and conceptualised populations as divided into discrete, tightly bounded groups. This familiar bipolar framework for the analysis of immigrant populations reinforced the paradigms that each discrete 'local' people possess a separate 'own' culture and identity. The treatment of the identity issue in migration studies was reflected within this bipolar framework; that is, abandoning old identities and gradually developing new ones in the course of assimilation.

Early British research in Africa found 'cultural decay' (Schapera 1947) as a result of migration. Thus, colonial administrators tended to equate migration with 'detribalization' and 'demoralisation', in other words, destroying the fabric of tribal society. (cf. Eades 1988) As Mitchell noted (1974:18), conventionally, the behaviour of 'tribal' migrants in towns was conceptualised in terms of 'detribalization', by which commentators meant the falling into disuse of customs, beliefs and practices to which the migrant firmly adhered before he/she came to town. The urban highlanders in Thailand have been studied in terms of this conventional model of 'detribalization' or simplistic notion of 'modernisation' within the bipolar framework that the hill tribes are becoming

Thai through urban migration. Thus, from the states' national integration perspectives, if the assimilation process is smooth, it is considered as successful, if not then it is considered as 'troublesome'. On the other hand, from the NGO's perspective which aims to protect 'traditional' tribal cultures, the national assimilation process is viewed negatively, as it is seen as eroding tribal 'traditional' culture and identity. For example, Hansson, an Akha language and oral texts expert, suggests that Akha ancestor worship is being marginalised as a result of recent social changes (Hansson 1992, 1997). For instance most young urban Akha see more value in Thai language skills and higher Thai educational qualifications than they see in remembering whole chains of ancestral names. Whether we regard the process of 'detrribalization' either positively or negatively, both perspectives are constrained within the bipolar paradigm, with an assumption of 'a culture' ascribed to each discrete identity.

Following the argument from the first section, the intent of my study is to challenge this conventional bipolar analytical framework and the related emphasis on the 'localised' nature of identities. As I mentioned in the methodology section of the previous chapter, the social spaces of migrants transcend the logic of bipolar schemes. The Akha social space or the notion of the community does not necessarily coincide with the assumed model of a discrete bounded community. It seems that multi-local social space cuts across both the boundaries of the nation-states and the ethnic 'category'. Recognising the fact that this constant flow of people back and forth is not a new 'post-modern' phenomenon but a continuous historical process, the analytical approach to the issue of identity in migration studies needs to be reconsidered. Specifically the conventional assumption that any single, bounded and contiguous locality serves its own unique culture and identity has to be critically challenged. Recently, a

growing number of scholars has emphasised trans-local social spaces and a shift in the approach to the issue on 'identity' (e.g. Appadurai 1993, Basch et al. 1993:95-144, Schiller et al. 1992, Schiller & Fouron 1990, Kearney 1991, Nagengast & Kearney 1990, Rouse 1995 and Sutton 1987). These approaches shifted from invariably 'localised' identity to multi-localised and multiple affiliations which have been acquired through migrants' own experiences. The scope of this identity construction process goes beyond the bipolar framework of assimilation from old identity to new identity.

In fact, primordial and essential group identity had already been challenged in the discussion of identity in anthropology when the political and strategic nature of identity was raised in the 1970s and 80s. The instrumental perspective views identity neither as 'growing out' of rooted communities nor as a thing that can be possessed or owned by individual or collective social actors, but instead as instrumental choice designed to serve political and economic interests.

Nevertheless, instrumentalist models often held the assumption that the changing political and economic contexts, particularly in the urban situation, disrupted the 'traditional' identity and therefore they had to pursue their new collective interests. The importance of social structure and culture in explaining differences between groups of migrants was stressed. In the course of their argument they presumed a shared commonality among the group of people and they did not question the way in which people come to recognise their shared common identity. Thus, underlying notions of 'rooted' localities and localised identity had not been fundamentally swept aside. Their approach had been built upon the idea that each society as a discrete and bounded entity had its own separate economy, culture and historical trajectory. Therefore a member of that

society would seek to protect his/her own political and economic interests.

In most of the social sciences, analyses of migrant populations had long been dominated by a static bipolar model. As was evidenced in the previous section, the discipline of anthropology was not an exception. Each population used to be studied in a bounded category, living in a territorial space, bearing a unique culture and identifiable social structure. Even when the global political economy was widely recognised and its influence on the trans-national migrants and the migrants' responses to these forces were discussed, often 'the local' was regarded as a given within the larger national and global politico-economic structure. While the world system theorists see migrants in economic terms, other scholars such as Portes and Bach (1985) and Sassen (1988) acknowledge that a global perspective must include the social, cultural and political dimensions of migrant experiences. Their studies looked at the particular local strategies of survival and cultural practice within the world capitalist system. However, 'the local' was often taken as self-evident, thus not enough attention was paid to how perceptions of 'local community' are discursively constructed.² The argument of trans-national migration studies was often based on the conventional oppositions of local versus global. In their analytical framework, while 'the local' is understood as the original, the natural and the authentic, 'the global' is on the other hand, understood as modern (or post modern), artificially imposed, and inauthentic.³ Accordingly, the issue of identity has been analysed within this opposition, 'local identity' versus 'global identity'. That is, local identity is

² Kemp (1988) argues that the notion of 'village community' in the context of rural Thailand had been imagined and he sees the nostalgic image of 'village community' as a 'seductive mirage'. See also Hirsch 1993 and Rigg 1997. The further implication of 'community development' by national policy will be discussed in the next section.

seen as original, natural, authentic identity rooted in local community, whereas, global identity is seen as supra local, temporal and external.

What I would like to suggest here is a new analytical framework which goes beyond this conventional opposition of local versus global identity, because such a conceptualisation often impels anthropologists nostalgically to search for the 'authentic' local society and culture. What I would like to challenge is such a bounded view of local society and culture to which the local identity had long been ascribed in the field of migration studies.

Instead of assuming that migrants of a particular 'culture' share an original local identity as such, I would like to begin with the supposition that migrants' identities are shaped by their own experiences and the nature of their various social relations. This approach will enable us firstly, to observe the migrant identity in process and secondly, to perceive the difference, such as class, gender, generation etc., within the population labelled as of the same 'ethnic category' or shared 'local community'. And finally and most importantly, it will make it possible to analyse the subjectivity of individual migrants such as attitudes, perceptions and experiences.

The context where identities are constructed is rather complex as migrants' identities are developed from the interplay of multiplex phenomena including personal experiences, structural conditions and the ideology of the wider surrounding society. Moreover, these conditions are often contradictory, fluid and dynamic. The individual migrants are embedded in a wider social field that transcends the geographical borders of nation states, or the boundaries of the 'local community' or ethnic category. The multiple identities of the migrants

³ See Probyn 1990, Young 1990

are created within such a complex expanded web of social relations. Migrants maintain several identities that enable them to link simultaneously to more than one locality and social setting, and they actively manipulate their identities in order to both accommodate and resist their social predicament in small everyday ways. In the next section, the immediate interactions in practice where the urban Akha multiple identities are being negotiated will be explored.

(3) Identity Choices in Practice

In the previous section, I discussed spatially de-territorialized notions of culture and identity and challenged the view of local society as bounded. It was noted that migrants' identities are shaped by their own experiences and the position of these various social relations. The basis for identity formation was seen to derive not from the culturally inherent capital, but from socio-political determinants. I argued that what we need to explore is not the 'authentic' identity which stems from their original community but the process and the situations where the shifting identities are created through interactions within and across presumed boundaries. Following the argument of the previous sections I will look at the immediate interactions at the individual level where the urban Akha's multiple identities are being negotiated. Firstly, Bourdieu's 'practice theory' and the importance of observing micro practices of everyday life is addressed. Secondly, the changing nature of identity choices depending on specific time, place and context will be discussed. Thirdly the various relations of difference and inequality that reconstruct dynamic identity options within a single category, the Akha, will be pointed out. I would like to draw attention to the way in which the matrix of individual identity options are selected and manipulated in the daily reality where the simultaneous nature of the oppression and exploitation are found.

Practice theory

Since Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* was published in English in 1977, there has been growing interest in a practice-oriented approach. He was critical of those who do not work through engagement with actual empirical analysis but instead through abstract arguments with each other. Bourdieu

critically looked at the existing categories of knowledge, and emphasised the need to reconstitute the definition of objects of analysis as a crucial part of each research effort, rather than uncritically accepting the common usage of academic discourse. In order to join theoretical and empirical work in an indissoluble approach to analysis, Bourdieu paid close attention to the little daily routines people enact, such as working, eating, sleeping, and relaxing, as well as the scenarios of etiquette they play out again and again in social interaction. He coined the phrase 'habitus' for such people's almost unconscious daily actions. Habitus represented collectivity of "embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu 1990:56). The 'habitus', is the dynamic intersection of structure and action, society and the individual which enabled Bourdieu to challenge the ubiquitous analytical oppositions such as objectivism/subjectivism, structure/action. A theory of practice was intended to overcome such dichotomies. In Bourdieu's words 'Habitus' is "the strategy generating principle, enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations...a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciation and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified task" (Bourdieu 1977: 72,95). He refused the choice of either of the two separate paradigms, structural theory/practice, endemic to Western thought at that time. Instead he proposed to bridge the gap between objective material, social and cultural structures and the constituting practices and experiences of individuals.

Going beyond the inflexible determinism of classical structuralism, Bourdieu considered individuals' activities as an analytical unit rather than a structural system. He proposed the notion of 'agent' to emphasise the activeness of the

actors. He was aware of linguistic inequality; language use is inseparable from the field of power. Thus, according to Bourdieu, when the communication occurs in practice, the structure of speech is determined not only by language, but also by the social conditions under which agents use language to position themselves in the field. In this way, he recognised the importance of practice as a response to experience, which is by no means merely a passive effect of knowledge based on social rules and cultural norms. His view shifted the focus from 'rule' to 'strategy'.

On the other hand, however, Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' has been criticised for looking at the practice not as an alternative to the study of systems or structures, but as a necessary complement to it. Although Bourdieu paid attention to the process in which 'the system' is produced and reproduced in the practices of ordinary daily living, the constraints and the resources of the system are presumed to be relatively constant for actors in similar positions. He assumed that the actors' pragmatic choice and decision making is coherent, with highly patterned and routinised behaviour. Thus, 'habitus' is creative, but within the limits of its structure based on a practical rationality immanent in a system of social relations and embedded in the individuals. What is missing from such a conception is the crucial insight that an individual's behaviour is often contradictory, elusive and fragmented. In this sense, Bourdieu challenged the neo-Kantian certainties of structuralism, though his concept of habitus owed much to the structuralism of Talcott Parsons where 'the system' determines human actions and the shape of events.

The critical weak point of Bourdieu's notion of rational and systematic actions by the actors is that it did not account for social change, the flux and contradiction.

Bourdieu's theory was criticised because his model of actors was too pragmatic and rational, as it was derived from interest theory (cf. Ortner 1984). While one perspective (interest theory) assumes too much rationality and activeness of the actors, on the other hand, the other perspective (strain theory) emphasises the binds and burdens of the actors. (cf. Ortner 1984) Essentially, however, either theory presumes that the cultural system dictates the behaviour of the actors. Bourdieu presumed that individual behaviours are founded on inherited socio-cultural structures which have been elaborated over generations, through the 'habitus'. Thus, in this regard, Bourdieu's practice theory could not account for the unintended consequence of action and the flux and contradictory behaviour of the actors, because the 'habitus' of each individual is regulated by the probable fate of a collective group of people. 'Habitus' failed to grasp contradictions and fuzziness which pervade the daily actions in practice. In this sense, Bourdieu shared the notion of 'a culture' with Geertz and his followers who elaborated the symbolic cultural mechanisms in ritual practice.

1 Social change does not normally occur as an *intended* consequence of action by the actors. Instead it often comes about as an *unintended* consequence of action by the actors. Michael Foucault eloquently reminds us in this way:

People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does.

(cited by Drefus and Rabinow 1983)

This recognition urged practice theory in anthropology to realise the dynamic relation and inconsistency between individual choices and socio-cultural rules. Therefore, the emphasis has shifted from the assumption of coherent structures and systems to the possibility of acknowledging the multiple, shifting, and competing actions within a single person or a social group. In this regard, the

acceptance of the chaos, fragmentation and contradiction within is a starting point of the post-modern perspective.

Ethnography of the particular

Along with post-structural anthropological theory which emphasises the multiple, crosscutting, and shifting basis of self-representation, Abu-Lughod further developed the theory of practice and suggested 'Ethnographies of the particular'. She was critically aware of the drawback of generalisation, because its nature of timelessness and coherence supported the essentialised notion of 'cultures'. She looked at people, "not as robots programmed with 'cultural rules', but as people going through life agonising over decisions, making mistakes, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragedies and personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of happiness"(1991:158). She argued that, "the effects of extra local and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words."(1991:150) Thus, she emphasised the importance of demonstrating the actual circumstances and detailed histories of individuals and their relationships as 'ethnographies of the particular'. I found her approach useful to demonstrate my case studies because Akha identity choices are construed in relation to people's immediate conditions and everyday existence rather than being attributed to an Akha orthodox socio-cultural system. I now would like to look more closely at the way in which identity choices are constructed in social relations.

With closer focus on particular individuals' changing relationships and the changing nature of their identity choices, it is not difficult to subvert the presumption that a homogeneous and coherent culture possessed by a group of

people determines the individual's behaviour and identity. Identity is not something that the individual actors 'possess', but is instead a transformative experience. It is important to recognise the contingency of continuity in identity. Following Foucault's words, identity must be conceived as the unstable and often unpredictable outcome of experience.

Looking at the relationships involving the individual's rights and obligations outside their village, in each case he/she acts as an individual and not as a representative in any case of either a kinship or local grouping. 'The Akha' are not an organised group to which individuals belong in the sense that membership gives them certain rights and obligations; they are not membership units at all. 'Ethnic group' is simply a category of people. While a group of people might construct a network of inter-connections among themselves, that of itself however, would not necessarily produce internal socio-cultural cohesion or boundedness.

What I would like to focus on is how, in specific situations and moments people negotiate their identity options strategically. Identities are always shaped in specific socio-historical contexts and it is necessary to account for the processes that generate the practice of identity by looking at the specific situation and the composition of different dimensions of individual and collective experience. Concerning the mobile population who develop and maintain multiple social relations which extend beyond ethnic boundaries and national borders, it is not surprising to find that actors develop and maintain multiple social relations by reconstructing identities that connect them to two or more social networks simultaneously. In such cases, we should not overlook internal differentiation. Although they might have been arbitrarily put into the same ethnic category, 'the

Akha', individuals have different life experiences, educational backgrounds and social positioning.

When one attempts to generalise experiences and conversations with a number of specific people in a single ethnic category, one tends to flatten out differences among them and to homogenise them. As Abu-Lughod (1991:153) pointed out, the effort to produce general ethnographic descriptions of people's symbolic cultural system or social behaviour tends to smooth over contradictions, internal differentiation and changing nature. Such erasure of time and conflict within a group made it possible for anthropologists to conceive an ethnic group as a discrete bounded entity which is marked by some degree of cultural and social commonality. Instead of taking such cultural entities for granted, I attempt to explore the dynamic process of identity choices making among the people under study.

Therefore, I reject the presumption that they would share the same identity because they are in the same ethnic category. As discussed in the first section, it is crucial to be aware of the knowledge construction process by which these definitions of ethnic categorisation are being made. In fact, the perceived characteristics of members may or may not coincide with the perception of members of that group. Rather, each of them may have their own notions about categories of identity and their own conceptions of the particular roles and positioning in their respective social networks. The perception of the difference involved here are fluid and relational rather than absolute. Thus, the significance of group identification (or the sense of belonging as a member of group) is subject to change when the social links through occupation (class), religious activities, and school took over some of the function in organising

political and economic social relations. This explains the reason why, in my case study, I have put 'Christian identity' parallel to other identity choices, such as 'Tai', 'Chinese' and 'Akha' identity choices based on ethnic identification. This is because, in my view, identity is a tool used by individuals to differentiate themselves from others, rather than a general attribute of a certain group of people. I have included all of the apparent identity choices available to urban Akha to differentiate themselves from the other.

Difference within

In such a context, the complexity of difference exceeds the binary structure of representation such as between 'the Thai' and 'the Akha'. Jacques Derrida's notion of 'différance', a portmanteau word which contains the sense of 'differ' and 'defer', is a useful tool to challenge the fixed binaries which stabilise meaning and representation. His sense of 'différance' implied not fixed completed meanings, but fluid nature. As Hall put it, "It sets the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the trace of its other meanings" (Hall 1994:397). According to Christopher Norris, the word, 'différance' "remains suspended between the two French verbs, 'to differ' and 'to defer' (postpone), both of which contribute to its textual force, but neither of which can fully capture its meaning" (Norris 1982:32 cited by Hall 1994:397). Derrida's notion of 'différance' showed, "how meaning is never finished or complete, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings" (Hall 1994:397). In this sense, representation of identity is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialised. (Hall 1994:397)

It should be acknowledged that realities are defined in practice, rather than by presumed social structures or the symbolic cultural world view divided into

mutually exclusive ethnic categories. The realities of the daily lives, activities, and social relationships of the people under study make it imperative for us to consider the simultaneous nature of our oppression and exploitation. Difference is a relational concept, and it is pointless to discuss the process of difference-making outside of concrete and specific social relations. Only a synthesis of a number of different factors associated with age, life stage, education level, language ability, life experience, socio-economic status and prestige, occupations, gender, marital status, family situation and support, social networks, religious affiliation and emotional attachments can lead us forward to construct the matrix of Akha people's identity choices. As Moore noted, selection of identity choices is, "something they can do through practice, and is not something they have to be consciously or intellectually aware of" (Moore 1994:60).

Any individual's identity is dependent not simply on his/her ethnic identity as 'the Akha'. Along with age, gender, class etc. the ethnic category is but one of the dimensions of identity which in turn informs the construction and negotiation of status. Identity based on ethnicity provides but one axis in terms of a sense of belonging to a group of people. Ethnic identity is only one among a range of different elements whose intersections determine each individual's identity. All of the other axes contribute to the individual's particular identity and help to shape the way he/she projects his/her self in specific social interactions. Thus, such intersections between these various elements make it impossible to attribute a unitary meaning to the population based simply on the ethnic category 'the Akha'. It would make more sense to think about identity in terms of multiple potentially overlapping axes rather than in terms of exclusive ethnic categories, such as 'Akha, or 'Thai'. I suggest that only in this way can we explore the dynamic processes of legitimisation and authentication of identity choices by the

people under study instead of characterising identity in terms of a pre-established cultural system classified by an ethnic category which was identified by the western academic knowledge hegemony.

Within classical anthropology, ethnic groups had commonly been treated as homogeneous groups, as if each shared some mysterious substance such as Akhaness, which bonds them together to a much greater degree than any other parallel form of social identification. The members of the overall ethnic category, 'the Akha', might have something to be shared, in order to differentiate themselves from another group of people. However, this does not necessarily mean that single representative cultural forms, value and cosmological world view is common to all. Thus, in my study, people's daily actions and behaviours were observed in order to study the tactics and strategy people adopt in practice, instead of viewing the world as a symbolic order constituted with social rules and cultural norms.

1 In terms of the tactics people use in daily practice, the way in which people perceive socio-economic status and prestige to create a sense of difference within the group require special attention. This can be an important incentive to differentiate themselves from the others. There is no doubt that marginalised minority ethnic groups have been oppressed by the majority in the process of development. However, it would be wrong either to categorise these marginalised minorities within a single category as 'oppressed' people, or to explain their exploitation simply as a result of recent nation-state formation or western capital penetration. On the contrary, they had been subjected to politico-economic pressure from dominant neighbours such as the Tai and Chinese for centuries. They had been involved in social relations beyond the

village boundaries and ethnic categories (the details will be discussed in the chapter five). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that those who have access to resources and capability to make use of resources will differentiate themselves from others by utilising the available identity choices such as Christian identity or Chinese identity particularly when an ascribed category such as 'hill tribes' or 'the Akha' acts as a source of 'constraint' on the individual to demote them. Moreover, styles of life are becoming an increasingly important index to signify the difference among hierarchised categorical identities in the urban setting. In this sense, group boundaries are not fixed but shift in relation to a struggle for achievement and prestige. It is an historical product and subject to change, and does not necessarily enclose unique discrete cultural essences permanently.

While contemporary anthropological academic discourse is attempting to deconstruct the ethnic category as a basis of identity, on the other hand, however, ethnic category is still an important form of identification today. On the other hand, as will be discussed in Chapter six, it is often not the most oppressed Akha people but the elite-class Akha who have played key roles in the articulation of Akha ethnic identity. Those involved in the process of reconstruction of Akha 'authentic' ethnic identity are mainly urban Akha who have had better access to important determining variables of power such as education, language ability and socio-economic status. Only those who have privileged access can participate in the process of fixing an Akha 'authentic' culture, such as selecting the Akha ritual reciter who will be recorded in the ethnic museum.

Today as always, the Akha ethnic category is being constructed and reconstructed in varying and sometimes contradictory circumstances. What the

category 'Akha' means should not be assumed, but instead it has to be investigated in the specific context. 'Akha identity' is not a given property of the people who are being classified as 'the Akha' in the ethnic category, but a social apparatus to differentiate themselves from the other in their daily experience of inconsistent situations.

Moreover, there is the important point of the multiple and contradictory nature of subjectivity in relation to identity choices. With Goffman's influence, it was Barth (1969, 1981) who offered, "a model of ethnic and other social identities as somewhat fluid, situationally contingent, and the perpetual subject and object of negotiation" (Jenkins 1996:23). Moore further articulates the issue of subjectivity in the identity construction process. She states, "If we imagine that individuals take up certain subject positions because of the way in which those positions provide pleasure, satisfaction or reward on the individual or personal level, we must also recognise that such individual satisfactions have power and meaning only in the context of various institutionalised discourses and practices, that is in the context of certain sanctioned modes of subjectivity" (Moore 1994:65). She went on to say that, "In this context, fantasy, in the sense of ideas about the kind of person one would like to be and the sort of person one would like to be seen to be by the others, clearly has a role to play. Such myths of identity are linked to fantasies of power and agency in the world" (Moore 1994:66). This implies that the meanings of identity are always subjected to change in relation to the possible options, because any human actor can creatively operate the diverse range of self-images through the contingencies of events and experiences.

On the other hand, however, individual subjective identity is not meaningful in

isolation from social relations with other people, because identity is socially constructed. As Jenkins noted, identity is “the synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others”(Jenkins 1996:20). Here, I would like to make it clear that the identity constructed in the process of negotiation between external and internal factors does not necessarily mean it would eventually establish a distinct and consistent identity based upon the western notion of person and self. There is no single ultimate category to identify oneself. Instead, the identity construction process which I focus on here is an ongoing process of contesting power and available choices that co-exist in the multiple, contradictory contexts of everyday practice. In other words, the various discourses of difference are not always mutually exclusive. Moreover, the meaning of variables which determine identity choices are subject to historical and contextual changes. Therefore, the mutually exclusive nature attributed to the ethnic category, which implies the unitary integral feature of homogeneous entity, fails to account for the mutable and temporary nature of multiple identity choices. It is in this ongoing process of social interaction that individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives, such that identity is subject to change throughout their different life stages. In this regard, what Goffman called ‘impression management strategies’ of representation of self in the construction of social identity become an important element within identity construction process. Because as Jenkins noted, impression management draws our attention to the performative aspect of social identity, and the fact that it is embedded within social practice (Jenkins 1996:22).

In the next chapter I consider the dynamic interplay between the global, national and regional contexts within which the interface between self-image and public image is situated. The aim is to illustrate the contexts in which the hybrid and

heterogeneous nature of identity is constructed today.

Chapter 3 Intertwining Contextual Influences

Current anthropologists are facing a series of apparently contradictory situations. They are theoretically preoccupied with deconstructing the concept of 'a culture', the notion of bounded, localised cultural wholes and are thus challenging the ethnological practice of associating 'culture' with a given unitary group, yet at a practical level, various agencies such as international organisations, national policy makers, the tourist industry, the mass media, as well as local people themselves, are actively involved in constructing and recreating a unique cultural entity on the basis of sharing the 'same' culture, village community, or origin.

What is so paradoxical about the situation today is that traditional anthropological work which focused on the interpretation of coherent cultural Others is much in demand by those various agencies who are looking for 'cultural authority' and 'cultural authenticity' to meet their different needs. While on the one hand anthropologists are critical of the conventional notion of 'a culture', depicted as coherent, timelessness and discrete, at the same time on the other hand, various institutions are encouraging this very idea. As a result, a collective identity ascribed to the concept of 'a culture' based on 'ethnic category' is still very much in existence today and is further intensified by the powerful discourses of 'preserving indigenous culture', or of 'praising local knowledge' at both international and national levels.

The construction process of the 'collective' identity of a particular group is mediated through rather complicated processes. It is no longer a straightforward phenomenon but rather a complex and contested domain, because it is not only external forces and arbitrary labelling by outsiders but also their own

socio-political process of creating a self-image that initiates and drives this process. A collective identity emerges as a product of nation building, and develops as a response to globalization processes. Such processes are further influenced by external forces of 'ethnic category' construction, created by national policy and global demands. At the same time, however, insiders' own visions influence this hegemonic process. The insiders are not simply affected by outsiders schemes of categorisation and discourses of difference, but the specific logic of self-image construction also becomes an agent to reshape personal identity. In this regard, identity can be conceived as a 'meeting point' as Gupta & Ferguson (1997:13) suggested. It should be depicted as an ongoing dialogue between global, national and local processes. The aim of this section is to identify the complex components of intertwining global, national and regional contexts whereby the urban Akha acquire multiple identities.

In the process of collecting 'cultural content', diverse experiences and practices are selected and detached from original temporal occasions. Additional values are attached to the newly constructed enduring culture both by outsiders as well as by insiders. It is this contradictory process that I intend to investigate. Because cultural realities are always produced in specific socio-historical contexts rather than being stable continuing pre-given entities, it is crucial to account for the specific contexts in which the formation of identity is taking place. In this way, I aim not only to deconstruct the normative notion of 'ethnic category' in anthropological theory but also to demonstrate today's complex cultural processes whereby this 'ethnic category,' as an imaginary concept, is given substance at the level of practice.

(1) The Global Context

In relation to the present study, the following two elements need to be taken into consideration in the trans-national socio-political situations and the demands:

- The demands of the international tourist market in seeking exotic or nostalgic images of cultures.
- Increasing international concerns for protecting minority human rights and preserving indigenous cultures.

The demands of tourism

The tourist industry acts as a system producing a representation of ‘a culture’, ‘tradition’ and identities, and which provides an important cross-roads between internal and external perceptions of these concepts. Tourism has become a new cultural institution within Southeast Asian societies. Particularly the ethnic or cultural tourism has increasing emphasised by ASEAN development policies. As Wood (1997) noted, the encounter between tourists and locals is not confined to direct interaction, but is also profoundly structured by a variety of other actors. These include tour operators, tourist advertisers, holiday companies, often local administrators of tourism and all those exoticising local cultures for the sake of commercial gain.

As was discussed in Chapter two, recent anthropological understandings of ‘culture’ has shifted in focus, from condemning the ‘commoditization’ of ethnic culture for the purpose of tourist display to analysing the complex interaction of tourism and other institutions and social processes. Following the realisation that the objectivist image of an unspoilt authentic cultural representation prior to

the impact of tourism is misleading, recent studies are increasingly setting aside simplistic normative questions about whether tourism's effects are beneficial or negative. A number of studies have documented how individuals and the host societies have responded actively to both the constraints and the opportunities brought by tourism (cf. Hitchcock et al. 1993, Wood 1997). With special focus on the study of an Akha community, Toyota (1993, 1996) for instance, demonstrated how different people are affected or involved to different degrees in the process of socio-cultural changes caused by tourism. Gender, age and socio-economic power are central factors conditioning this process.

The impact of tourism becomes further complicated because it plays an integral role in the defining their culture for the local people themselves. Local people are involved in recreating their own images of 'ethnic culture' in the course of interacting with tourists and tourist related agencies. This interaction between tourists and the host is no longer solely confined to direct encounters in the field. It is not only hosts and guests but also various actors who share a common interest in promoting a unique and distinctive people and place that mediate the process of cultural construction in tourist settings. Images of 'ethnic culture,' which serve to meet the tourist's interest in experiencing some form of cultural otherness, as well as cultural similarity, are projected through the tourist industry. Tourism undoubtedly thus becomes an integral component in the way local people view themselves and the way they construct their own image of identity and culture. (This will be dealt with in detail in Chapter five.)

Moreover, the boundary between the host and guest has become ambiguous in today's tourist setting. The local people who had been regarded as 'the indigenous host' also travel internationally and become 'the guest'. In the case

of the Akha, I found that several Akha elite travel to China and interact with the 'local' Akha in China where ethnic tourism is officially promoted to a greater extent than it is in Thailand, due to the difference in state policies toward ethnic minorities. While in Thailand, the tourist image of 'hill tribes' is as 'unspoilt', 'backward', 'noble savage', on the other hand in China, most of the Akha (officially labelled 'Hani' in China) live in officially designated autonomous regions which receive special privileges and benefits as a result of their ethnic status. Even ethnic groups that have largely been assimilated into the Han majority culture retain a desire for 'ethnic status' through recreating 'ethnic culture' in China. Thus, the encounter between the tourists (Thai Akha) and locals (Chinese Akha) has a profound impact on images of Akha identity which have been recreated for the Thai Akha tourists (the details will be explored in Chapter six).

Tourist arts, Trans-national Images

It is ironic to find that Frederik Barth (1969) proposed in his classic ethnic study that, "the critical focus should be "the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses"(Barth 1969:19). However, this 'cultural stuff' can not be neglected when analysing the role of tourism as an agency which constructs contemporary cultural forms. Ethnic representations in commodity form is increasingly consumed by locals as well as by tourists or the state.

The images of hill tribes projected through the tourist industry have a major impact on the way they view themselves. This is particularly applicable to the younger generation who often scarcely had 'Akha cultural experience' during

their growing-up period. Their self-image of Akha culture is often influenced by the international tourist market media, drawing on Akha ethnographic records produced by earlier anthropologists.

Although this image projection is predominantly controlled by outsiders¹, it should be remembered, however, that some Akha are also involved in the image projection process and that their self-image sometimes influences the dynamics of the tourist industry. Numbers of urban Akha are engaged in the tourist business, acting as guides and hill tribe handicraft dealers, for example some elite Akha are even considering making 'a model Akha village' to serve for the tourists (including the Akha from China and Taiwan). In such processes, the Akha are actively involved in recreating self-images of Akha material arts.

This complicated ethnographic situation implies that images play an important role in the reconstruction of identities today. Creation of identity is no longer a purely local process but comes from many places and is often acted upon and altered by external factors. The images and ideas of the collective group of people which have been created by the vehicles of the international tourist industry can become an essential component of ethnic identity projection for both insiders and outsiders. This fuzziness evades simplistic cause and effect analysis. Instead, such trans-local situations require a multiplex analysis of the on-going dialogues between the discursive and montage images of the Akha in the international tourist market and the reaction of the Akha, as well as the other agencies involved in such image manipulation.

¹ See for example, Cohen 1982, 1993 Toyota 1996

International Movements on Preserving Minority Cultures

Another important element which has hardly been paid enough attention is the world-wide movement concerned with preserving indigenous cultures and the impact of this movement on the recreation of 'indigenous cultures' both at local and global levels. The movement for preserving indigenous minority cultures usually views minority cultures as if they are species in the process of becoming exterminated. Almost universally it is assumed that the preservation of an ethnic minority's 'traditional' cultures is a good thing, just as it is seen as good to preserve historic remains. Central to this movement is the nostalgic notion that a culture is a unique primordial possession of a group of people. This is identical with the classical anthropological idea of 'a culture'. So it is that in their approach the dynamic, ever-changing nature of the cultural situation is usually neglected.

What is paradoxical about today's situation is that some young urban indigenous elite are involved in defining their 'traditional culture' along lines of prior European conceptualisations of 'culture' and in so doing are financially aided by international agencies. And thus, the historically and socially diverse Akha population is represented as if it were a single category, while elements of the Akha urban elite vie with each other to present it as such. (This point will be followed up in Chapter six)

Likewise development has been noted in the relation to the aborigines of Australia where the new urban indigenous elite is playing a similar role. Jones and Hill-Burnett (1982:236) pointed out how the urban Aboriginal elite create and define Aborigines in Australian society. "...Aborigines who speak many

different languages and have little in common other than aboriginality and a shared experience of discrimination are attempting to construct a special interest group...under the control of a self-appointed internal elite using English for communication.” In both cases their nostalgia for rurality and politico-economic interest interact to encourage a process of reconstruction of their own ‘traditional culture’. (Again the details of the Akha case will be presented in Chapter six.)

(2) The National Setting

The following three elements need to be taken into consideration in Thai national policy towards the minorities:

- “Hilltribes” as a category enforced by Thai national policy.
- The effects of state schooling and the emergence of an urban elite Akha.
- The concept of ‘community development’ and village community.

Hill tribe category and Thai national policy

The notion of tribe and tribal status is an important aspect of the relations between ethnic categories and state. Webster (1989,1995), who studied the varieties and the logic governing the process of Maori identity construction, argued that ethnic categories are largely a product of colonial administration. Citing the similar case of the aboriginal North American Indians, he insisted that it was the outcome of the colonial struggle and government action that brought about their designation as ‘tribes’. “The more closely one looks at aboriginal North America, the more largely does “our usual concept of tribe...appear to be a White Man’s creation of convenience for talking about Indians, negotiating with them, administering them” (cited by Webster 1995:394).

It was in response to White expectations and power that the political institutions of many bona fide American ‘tribes’ actually emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Clifford 1988:302-3). Obviously following the same mechanism of ‘governmentality’ - in colonial Burma, Laos, Vietnam as well as Thailand and China authorities sought to control and administer the lives of

individuals within collectivities. It was the colonialist concept of territoriality that formed the modern Southeast Asian nation-state. Since the late nineteenth century, numbers of Christian missionaries, British and French explorers and administrators penetrated into the border area between Yunnan province, China and mainland Southeast Asia. Some had done extensive research in order to control and colonise the population of this area. For this reason, they have demarcated peoples in terms of ethnic boundaries, in the same manner as they have designated the geographical boundaries of the area. Until the end of the nineteenth century, some Karen and *Lawa* held tributary relationships with Northern Thai lords and, thereby secured their right to cultivate land in the hills (Keyes 1979:48-50). Some were involved in the rising teak industry as loggers and mahouts, or as forest wardens for Northern Thai royalty (Renard 1980:146). However, after the power of the northern Thai lords was replaced by the officials sent from central administration, such relationships perished.

Despite this, the Thai government remained for the most part uninterested in the hills until the 1950s, and the local hill populations were more or less neglected and allowed to retain their autonomy. It was from the late 1950s, in a climate of fear of communism and with significant financial support from the United States that the Thai government began to take serious steps to deal with the security problems in the hills. Officially, the hill tribes were regarded as troublesome for various reasons --opium cultivation and narcotics traffic, communist guerrilla activities in the border areas, and forest destruction by shifting cultivators (Cooper 1979). In 1955 The US Operations Mission provided support to establish an uplands Thai-language school programme under the Border Patrol Police. This scheme expanded to include social welfare projects in highland villages. The Royal Highland Development Project (the

King's Project) began in the early 1960s, under the terms of the King's 'merciful paternal personality towards the pitiful hill tribes' (Tapp 1989).

The emergence of the dichotomy of We-self and otherness, most explicit in the notion of 'insurgents,' altered the structure of the hill vs. valley conjuncture fundamentally.² The power relation between minority and majority became a determining feature for ethnic stratification, by moulding various highlanders into a single category of '*chaw khaw*' (hill tribes) in categorical opposition to dominant lowlanders. The members of the minority were thus subject to marginalisation in the form of prejudice, discrimination, segregation at the hands of the majority which had greater power over economic, political and social sectors of the society. Ethnic minorities in border areas were placed in an increasingly vulnerable position, to be exploited as such by central administration. The form and context of their ethnic category was determined in a power relation between margin and centre. The category of 'Hill tribes' bound them into backward second class citizenship with unequal access to the means of production, resources and citizen rights in Thailand. After the Thai authority banned opium in 1959, their cross-border trade activities and cross-border mobility, which had long been a daily part of life, were deemed to be associated with drug 'smuggling' and 'illegal migration' were proscribed.

It was in such a context in the 1960s that several American institutions provided considerable financial backing for research on highlanders in Thailand. Other

² It should be noted that the Akha never lived in a self-sufficient and isolated condition but had various interactions with the other ethnic groups. Thus they were well aware of the powerful valley people, and they view their history as constant struggle, which is reflected in their songs and legends. Alting von Geusau (1983) suggests that valley/hill had been a significant axis for Akha

than Bernatzik's study, *Akha and Miao* (originally published in 1947 and an English version 1963), up to this point little was known of the area. At the request of the Thai government, the United Nations assisted in a survey in 1962.³ Thai officials were eager for the help of American anthropologists in surveying the region, identifying the population and ascertaining the relations of the villages to each other, to the Thai lowlanders, and to the government agencies (Hanks 1988:14). The Tribal Research Centre was established in Chiang Mai under Thai Government administration to co-ordinate such research and projects on the hill tribes.

Two classic books were compiled in the 1960s, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (1964), published by the American Human Relations Area Files and *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and nations* (1967), published by Princeton University Press. They are still considered as standard text books for those intending to research the population of the area, basically providing an authorised ethnic category to identify the populations today. The term 'hill tribes', although drawn from western ethnographic writing, serves the interests of the Thai state as a device for categorising and defining peoples such as the Akha as distinctive, lesser and marginal.

National formal schooling

The border region of the national boundary often receives much attention because of transnational security concerns. North Thailand is typically important because

self-identification.

³ See Hans Manndorff 1962. *Report on the Socio-Economic Survey of the hill Tribes in Northern Thailand*. Department of Public Welfare, Ministry of interior. Bangkok: Thailand

of the political tension on the Burmese and Lao frontier. Consequently, although the population of 'hill tribes' in Thailand makes up only 1.3 percent of the national population, they have been the subject of focus by both international and national development organisations. Providing state sponsored school education was considered necessary in order to improve their socio-economic standard of living as well as to promote their sense of belonging to Thai society.

Schooling implicitly promotes urban values. Those with higher education could expect better paid urban jobs when they eventually leave school. This has the overall effect of engendering a generation gap between literate and illiterate Akha people. This educationally determined internal gap must be taken into account to understand power differences within the 'hill tribes'. While the young urban elite gain access to information and resources provided by the Thai authorities, their parents often totally rely on their children as mediators. A shifting power relationship between the younger and older generation is clearly apparent. The power relation is no longer confined within a bipolar framework between majority Thai and minority hill tribes, but has become multi-dimensional.

Moreover, the young generation has developed its self-image and learnt the social roles and the expectations of Thai society in school rather than through interaction with their own parents. This is particularly the case for many young hill tribes, who spend most of their school life away from their parents in student hostels in the lowland. Interaction with classmates and teachers has a much stronger influence on their way of thinking than has interaction with anyone in the home village. Until around the mid-1980s it was rather difficult for development workers to persuade parents to send their children to Thai schools.

The hill tribes' parents preferred their children to remain at home and help with farm work or house-keeping. However, attitudes towards education have changed drastically in the last ten years or so, as people no longer see a bright future as economic prosperity in the villages has diminished. A better education is now seen as the prerequisite for acquiring a higher income and a brighter future. And this has opened the way for urban Akhas to develop networks and relationships in the school environment and work, which then play an important part in their identity construction.

Community Development Perspective

The notion of village community is also controversial issue. On one side western academics begin to question the nature of villages as metaphors of wholeness and coherence, which used to contribute to the perception of communities as bounded and discrete. On the other side, nation states and NGOs perpetuate this notion of bounded and discrete community even further in the process of development.

Recent historical studies prior to the colonial period in Southeast Asian society revealed the fact that inequality and class stratification existed within rural village life because of uneven access to land, social networks and market exchange.⁴ These studies re-assessed the romanticised ideology of traditional rural life often associated with the ideas of egalitarianism, self-sufficiency, and 'shared poverty', which became pervasive following Clifford Geertz's influential book, *Agricultural involution: the processes of ecological change in Indonesia*.

⁴ See Bowie 1992, Toyota 1998 for north and Koizumi 1992 for northeast of rural Thailand.

Kemp (1988) went even further to argue that the 'village' is not a feature of traditional Southeast Asian State systems. He uses the term 'seductive mirage' to account for the notion of 'village community' as a reflection of a nostalgic and sentimental attachment to a glorified past, which is rooted in the late nineteenth century utopian European image of the ideal village. He insisted that the village community is not the continuation of tradition but primarily a unit of local administration for the state. The image of villages today is part of their marginalization within the realm of Thai nation-state. Rigg (1994) also questioned whether the 'village' as a discrete identifiable entity ever existed in Southeast Asia prior to the colonial period. Looking at the historical evidence, he showed how villages were created to facilitate colonial administration and control. In pre-colonial Southeast Asia, land was abundant and the density of the population was so low that the object of direct control of the local ruler was not territory but people (Hall and Whitmore 1976, Wolters 1982, Reid 1988). Obviously, the sense of ownership of territory and the notion of boundaries at that time was considerably different from that of western colonial officials. Thus, it was through colonial influence that a new concept of the 'village' as a bounded territorial entity came into being in Southeast Asia.

And this entity has latterly acquired new significance as a result of re-focusing of development policy as a bottom up process. This approach had been initially embraced by the NGOs in 1990s, supported by international organisations such as UNESCO. The Community Development Perspective idealises traditional rural village life and the related values of being self-reliant, relatively autonomous and enjoying communal support system, in contrast with the anomie of modern urban life. According to Chattip Nartsupha (1986, 1991), one of

Thailand's most influential economists, such a village community is an 'ancient institution', 'naturally' set up by the people (cited by Rigg 1994:124). Thai community development policy tends to address the psychological side of village's primordial unity. What is significant in this discourse is that a sense of village identity has been devised that accords with arbitrarily created administrative territorial boundaries. (The details will be explored in Chapter six.)

'Akha traditional village community' is reconstructed by young urban educated Akha in this context. They try to apply the concept of 'community' learned at Thai school, and promoted by government policy in the context of the Akha village whereas in reality these communities are much more fluid than has been represented. The fact that such an idealised concept of the harmonious, settled village does not usually coincide with reality frustrates the elite urban Akha field workers. Ironically, while today western academics are reassessing the concept of village community and its place in rural life⁵, the local indigenous elite are busily affirming it for the reasons of development policy and out of self-interest.

⁵ See also Hirsh 1993, Kitahara 1996.

(3) The Regional Influences

The following five elements need to be taken into consideration as the characteristics of the border area between China and mainland Southeast Asia:

- The multi-ethnic situation of the region
 - Northern Thai vs. central Bangkok Thai
 - Northern Thai, Shan and Dai shared identity
 - Trade and inter-ethnic marriages
- Chiang Mai as a trans-national tourist and service centre which provides jobs, education and marriage opportunities.
- The impact of the Mekong Basin economic development plan, “Economic Quadrangle”, on cross border mobility between China, Burma, Laos and Thailand
- The emerging significance of China and the Chinese language as an economic opportunity.
- Christianization and its effect on facilitating local elite, cross-border networks and information flows in the region.

Multi-ethnic situation in the region

According to Chananont’s historical study (1986:40), before the construction of a rail line to the north in 1921 it took only about 15 - 17 days to go between Moulmein (Burma) and Chiang Mai, while trade routes between Chiang Mai and Bangkok took 2-3 months. It is evident that northern Thailand and Burma were geographically an intrinsic part of a broad upland zone, whose socio-economic networks extended into South China, North Laos and North Vietnam. By studying the geographical conditions of Southwest China, it is clear that the

Tibetan Plateau must have almost cut off the greater part of Yunnan province from the rest of China. Due to this isolation closer socio-cultural and politico-economic relations were established with the northern part of mainland Southeast Asia. The inhabitants along the Yunnan frontiers used to pay tribute to both the Burmese King and Chinese Emperor, yet were never completely absorbed by the politico-economic system of either power.

The geographical zone connecting Chiang Mai and Bangkok within territorial boundaries is, by contrast, a rather recent invention in history. It was only after the turn of century that the arbitrary political demarcation of the region was created as a result of the emergence of the nation-state. Until then, Chiang Mai experienced little direct influence from the Siamese court of Bangkok. Proximity among Northern Thai, and Tai-speaking peoples in the Shan state of Burma, in the Yunnan province of in China (officially called Dai in China), and in parts of northern Laos was a fact of life. Indicative of this is the fact that the Theravada Buddhism of the upper border region, termed 'Yuan cult', is quite distinct from that found in mainstream Thailand (Keyes 1971:552). The ingredients of the local Buddhism were brought by migrants from China and Burma and blended with other religious practice to form the distinctive Yuan cult. In the eyes of the Siamese rulers in Bangkok in the 19th century, this Yuan Buddhist cult distinguished the northern region from the rest of Thailand.

And just as there is a disparity of religion, so too there is heterogeneity of other kinds within Thailand which undermine the notion of Thais as a united ethnic group. One consequence of this has been the emergence of 'ethno-regional' movements directed against the dominance of Central Thai by Tai-speaking people in the North as well as in the South and Northeast (Keyes 1987). For

example, a programme initiated by the Siamese court to integrate the Yuan cult of the northern region into Siam proper resulted in an uprising of the Shan of the north in 1901 (Keyes 1971:554). Although 'by the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the Thai government had succeeded in replacing the local aristocracy with Thai officials' (Keyes 1971:555), the attachment to northern Thainess was still cherished by northern Thai people in order to retain their distinction from the central Thai. When we investigate the relationship between the Akha and Tai people within the border area, it must be remembered that Thailand as a territorialized nation state and Thailand as a Tai speaking population do not necessarily coincide.⁶

The constant interchanges of the inhabitants of the border region, which includes the contiguous areas of China, Burma, Laos and Thailand, has been a prominent feature of the history of the region. And it is this historical pattern that has shaped Chiang Mai as an ethnically plural society. In his study, *Ethnic Pluralism in the Northern Thai City of Chiang Mai*, Vatikiotis (1984) noted the absence of cultural determinants in the maintenance of ethnic group boundaries. Instead, he observed the dominance of economic considerations rather than cultural determinants as a basis for group cohesion and interaction (1984:196). Furthermore, he noted the frequency with which ethnic divides seem to be criss-crossed in the form of intermarriages, for example Akha women and Yunnanese men, usually impelled by socio-economic considerations on the part of the former (the details will be explored in Chapter five).

Chiang Mai as a trans-national commercial centre

⁶ See Thongchai 1994 for the historical process of creating geographical boundary of Thai nation state.

Thailand's Fifth national economic and social five-year Plan (1982-6) designated Chiang Mai as the commercial and service centre of the upper north of Thailand, with special emphasis on the promotion of tourism. Since then, tourism has become the biggest economic earner of the northern region of Thailand. Chiang Mai city has rapidly developed to become a prominent commercial centre, providing employment for regional highlanders. The number of handicraft stalls owned by highlanders at the well-known tourist shopping area, Night Bazaar has rapidly increased. Some of the highlanders have started working as trekking guides or porters, and have gone on to set up independent trekking businesses. Due to the recruitment demands of the service, commercial and industrial sectors, the number of jobs for unskilled wage labourers, particularly young females, has also grown considerably.⁷ As Helliwell (1993:273) and Jones (1984) noted, the effect of increased incorporation into a world capitalist economy has been to raise the numbers of women employed in the 'public' work force throughout the cities in many parts of Asia. Chiang Mai, the urban centre of north Thailand, is not an exception. In fact women are often preferred in the tourist and service industries, and so the female work force makes a significant contribution to regional economic development.

While tourist development has undoubtedly increased job opportunities, it has to be seen as something of mixed blessing. Set against increase in employment is the fact that outsiders of one kind or another are prominent in determining development and reap the major rewards and the degree of exploitation of the locals.

⁷ See the studies on female employment and urban migration in North Thailand. (Gray, Jennifer 1990 and Singhanetra-Renard & Prabhudhanitisarn 1992)

However, as I have already noted it would be misleading to lump all the ethnic minorities of the region together as 'poor exploited people'. Some of them have bettered themselves significantly and taken advantage of the new economic opportunities associated with tourism. This has created power differences within the hill tribes, and has complicated inter-ethnic relationships and social stratification. Some anthropologists have attempted to provide Marxist explanation of these relationships based on the idea of a powerful majority vs. exploited, oppressed minorities, but the main problem with this kind of analytical framework is that it reduces the diversity and complexity of relationships among the peoples to a single dualistic model. It also ignores the ambiguous and arbitrary border between the minority and majority. The important point here is that 'the Akha' do not constitute a homogenous unitary category, and, therefore the effects of tourist development on them are rather uneven. Age, gender, wealth, language skills, access to education, social networks, information resources, and other factors often determine what the impact of tourism is. Moreover, the single dualistic model fails to take account of the extent to which the Akha themselves oppress other Akha, or collude in the oppression of other Akha by the majority 'other'. And this in turn affects the sense of identity, and can weaken cohesion based on ethnic similarity, leaving people of the same ethnic group of people pitted against each other.

Furthermore, the view of minorities as 'victims of majority oppression' ignores the degree to which minority people are active agents, and are able to manipulate the situation they are faced with. In this sense, a single dualistic view which sees the minority people as victims, itself denigrates the ability of the minority people because such an oversimplified patronising model defines them as

passive.

‘Economic Quadrangle’ Development Plan and its Impact

With China’s ‘open door’ economic policy of recent years, the influence of Yunnan’s economic growth is extending rapidly into cross-border areas, particularly to Thailand. The Asian Development Bank is investing heavily on the development of new infrastructure linking the northern margins of Southeast Asia with the southern perimeter of China. The border region of Thailand, Burma, Laos and Yunnan where the Akha reside has been designated as the ‘Great Mekong Development Area’. Along with the recent involvement of various multi-national investors in this Mekong Basin Growth area, there is a growing concern about the social effects of rapid economic development on the indigenous ethnic minorities.

However, it should be noted this modern economic region corresponds to a considerable degree with much older patterns of economy within the region in which local ethnic minorities featured prominently as traders and merchants. Chiang Mai, the capital city of Lanna Kingdom was known for many centuries as a major point on the much travelled trade route between Yunnan and Moulmein in Burma well before the integration of the modern Thai nation-state in the last century. (cf. Hill 1998:14)

So, to an important extent, trade and commerce have always been a feature of life of this region. For that reason it would be wrong to see the penetration of western commercialism as bringing something fundamentally new or simply portray it as a vehicle for the exploitation of local ethnic minorities. These

ethnic minorities have been active participants in cross-border trading activities for many generations,⁸ as we will see in Chapter five. It would also be misleading to assume that local society has changed from being an 'egalitarian' one to one characterised by an unequal class stratification; from a 'subsistence economy' to a market-oriented economy; and from 'homogeneous' to complex ethnic relations as a result of recent commercial development.

In contrast to nostalgic images of an organic 'community', which has been reinforced by the tourist industry and by the recent movement to preserve 'traditional' culture, considerable economic disparity has, in fact, been for long a distinctive feature of these people. In the case of the Akha, for example, as Alting von Geusau (1983:258) pointed out, the opposition between rich and poor is a recurrent theme in Akha oral texts. There are several Akha love songs comparing instances of Akha poverty with the wealth of the beloved or of others. I agree with Bowie (1992:797-823) when she argues that attempts to romanticise or to glorify the past in order to dramatise the deleterious impact of capitalism reflects a misreading of Akha history.

Economic differentiation amongst the Akha is well established and not to take account of it will make it difficult to understand the foundation of status and prestige among them. Far from their commercial activities and economic differences being a result of latter day capitalist penetration they are embedded in trade and commercial activities that run deep within the local history of the region. Instead, it is vital to know the politico-economic differences within the local population in order to be able to understand the impact of current economic development in the region. As Bowie (1992) suggests, we should not overlook

⁸ See for example, Toyota (forthcoming) for the Akha case

the significance of wealth in the context of poverty, for by no means all the local population have been effected in the same way by recent economic development. Some in fact are in a position to good advantage of the new opportunities that such development brings.

Over time, some have already established ramified cross-border trade networks, which go beyond the confines of the nation states. Their social network system is highly flexible. It is not only large business groups or officials who are in a position to exploit new opportunities in the area, small informal entrepreneurs are also much involved. From field research around the border between Thailand and Burma, it is clear that some Akha entrepreneurs have slipped in to exploit these opportunities by reviving their trade routes between Sipsongpanna and north Thailand (Toyota forthcoming). As alluded to above, it is clear that they are fully utilising their multiple language skills and their extended trade networks which have been developed throughout their lives and across the continent. The Akha social networks and trade activities which go beyond the village or national boundary will be discussed in Chapter five. This provides the backdrop information to analyse the current situation of cross-border social networks in the historical context.

The emergent popularity of China and the Chinese language as an economic opportunity

Although the Akha who are able to take advantage of such new business opportunities are far from representative of the Akha in Thailand, and they are small in number, these Akha from China influence the way in which the Akha in Thailand manipulate their identity. Now that, when association with China and

the Chinese are no longer considered a politico-ideological threat but, instead an economic opportunity, social networks with Chinese and Chinese language skill have become especially critical resources for new economic opportunities and an important means of identity projection.

During field observation, I was most struck by the usage of mobile telephones. In the border zone, where people cannot rely on the formal inter-national communication system or postal system, mobile phones are widely in use. These phones provide the means for rapid communication with cross border inter-ethnic trade partners. Finding Akha elite who can speak four or five different languages is not uncommon. For example, an informant (male, 32) can communicate in Tai Lue, Cin-Ho, Burmese, Standard Thai, Northern Thai, Mandarin, Hokkenese, English and Akha. Another informant (male 38) can communicate in Tai Lue, Cin-Ho, Burmese, Northern Thai and Akha. Though they lack writing and reading skills in these languages, in terms of speaking skills for negotiating with trade partners and for making trade network connections, they are remarkably able independent entrepreneurs.

The Akha from Burma and China had close associations with 'Cin-Ho'. It is obvious from the Akha oral testimony that inter-ethnic marriage between 'Cin Ho' and the Akha takes place. In some cases, it seems that there were strategic elements in choosing such a marriage partner in terms of economic and political gains. And still at present, multi-ethnic marriages among trade partners are not uncommon in the region. Although the ideal is to marry within the Akha ethnic group in order to continue the Akha genealogical kinship system, it was found that actual genealogical practice is quite flexible and practical. Other ethnic groups can join in the Akha genealogy through marriage or adoption, otherwise

the Akha genealogy might be terminated in cases where there is no son in the family.

In addition to former relations with 'Cin Ho' (Yunnanese Chinese) in China, in Burma, and in Thailand, some elite Akha have now established connections with overseas Chinese in Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong - their common language being Chinese. What is evident here is that their social networks, which coincide with Chinese identity, go beyond geographical boundaries, political units, and ethnic categories. These geographically dispersed networks have been constructed along with their movement from China to Thailand and enable them to weave personal social relations into powerful social networks.

Those parents who are involved in trade consider the Chinese language to be vital to their success in expanding their networks of trade partners, and will especially be so for the future generation. Hence, they are very keen to send their children to study Chinese, and then to Taiwan for higher education if they can afford to do so. A few schools in northern Thailand provide Chinese education, and Taiwanese text books are used. Consequently, they try to send their children to these schools. The class starts at 5 P.M. and continues for two or three hours after the Thai school day. Since these schools are often financially supported by Taiwanese, five-year scholarships there is considerable demand for places in them.

Recently, Taiwan has become one of the most popular destinations for migrant workers from Thailand. It is said that those with Chinese language ability gain an advantage. For example, those who can speak a few Chinese dialects can

obtain a passport free of charge from a Taiwanese broker. It is not surprising therefore that they are keen to make the most of their Chinese language skill to advance their economic position. In particular, it represents a remarkable opportunity among the 'hill tribes' in Thailand because they can jump up from the second class citizens in Thai society to being mediators between Taiwanese employers and Thai migrant workers.

Christianization and Cross-Border Networks

The recent success of Taiwanese and Singaporean Christian Churches among the highlanders residing along the borders of Thailand should also be studied in this context. It is an interesting dimension of life among the rapidly growing cohort of Christian highlanders in Thailand today. Previous studies of Christian conversion among Akha have only focused on western missionaries (either Protestants or Catholics). Indeed, a number of foreign missionaries are still

active in the region.⁹ However, there is also a growing number of Asian Christian missionaries in north Thailand. Christianisation no longer always means the penetration of alien Western cultural values, as previously was perceived to be the case. The Chinese Christian church often emphasises the value of filial piety which is easily accepted among those who have no idea where Jesus Christ was born.

Moreover, Chinese churches often provide Chinese language lessons during the evening or at the weekend under the guise of 'Bible study'. For this reason, converting to Christianity provides an opportunity to find a better job and a better life. This is an undeniable motive for conversion, especially among the young generation whose parents cannot afford to send them for private Chinese lessons. Through school or religious activities these children - budding cross-border traders - develop associations with other Chinese-speaking friends. There is no doubt that these social relations will construct the basis for a Chinese identity. It is important to note that Chinese identity and Christian identity in this regard are not mutually exclusive, but overlapping by nature. In my discussion I will identify four different identity choices currently available -- 'Chinese identity', 'Tai identity', 'Christian identity' and 'Akha identity' -- however, that does not mean an individual consistently adheres to a single identity, but instead constantly changes in different situations and at different life stages.

⁹ See Kammerer 1990, 1996

Figure 1 Four Syncretic Dimensions

Immediate interactions of individuals

- Life experiences, life history
- Life stage, age, sex
- Social networks, emotional networks, friendship
- Language ability, education level
- Marriage and family situation, kinship support
- Work experience, socio-economic status
- Religious affiliation

National context

- Minority category of 'hilltribes' enforced by the state policy
- National policy on land rights and ID status
- National integration programme - loyalty to the King and Buddhism
- Tourist development
- National formal schooling
- Mass-media, television and tribal image creation

Regional context

- The historical multi-ethnic situation of the region
- Regional economic development plan called 'Economic Quadrangle' and its impact on cross border mobility between China, Burma, Laos and Thailand
- Chiang Mai as a trans-national urban centre
- The emergent popularity of China and Chinese language as economic opportunities.
- Christian cross-border networks

Global context

- The international tourist market and the pursuit of the exotic.
- Increasing international concern about protecting minority human rights and preserving indigenous cultures
- The recent international development ideology with its emphasis 'local culture'

Chapter 4 Akha Ethnic Categories and Identification

Since the early 1970s, anthropologists have been arguing about how colonial politics affected both the theory and method of ethnography, and have thus critically re-examined the history of anthropology (cf. Asad 1973). The deconstruction of this history, moreover, is related to the broader, cross-disciplinary discourse on post-colonialism in the field of social science. Initially, this work looked at the impact of colonialism on indigenous peoples' culture and society. Their intention was to criticise the parochialism and constraints of Eurocentrism. At the same time, however, their reflexive framework was often informed by a conscious or unconscious nostalgic ideal of searching for exotic others based on clearly bounded ethnic categories. Hence, this approach neglected the fact that indigenous society is not simply a passive target but an active and diverse agent, that is capable of integrating new elements into their socio-cultural world, as has been the case for centuries. In this sense, in spite of their endeavour to challenge western hegemony, such an approach ended up revealing another side of the patronising colonial mind.

In the field of ethnicity studies, on the other hand, particularly among those who have conducted fieldwork around the border between China and mainland Southeast Asia, abundant anthropological research has questioned the assumption of equating 'ethnic identity' with a bounded notion of culture. Ethnographers have pointed out how much ethnic 'groups' in the region have incorporated elements and characteristics of the cultures and languages of other ethnic groups they have been in contact with. Nevertheless, the unit of analysis, based on ethnic category as an internally bounded homogeneous group of

people, has pervasively remained. What is missing here, therefore, is a fundamental challenge to this static notion and perception of 'ethnic category'. There is clearly a need to illustrate how each ethnic category has developed over time and as such in a rather dynamic and contested social context.

The notion of 'deconstruction,' which derived from the work of Jacques Derrida, seems useful in the critique of the ethnographic study of identity formation. Indeed the notion of identity has been theoretically central to the ethnographic representation of ethnic category. My starting point is to question the presumption that the group of people called 'Akha' share the same culture and therefore identity. Because the identity, as discussed in the previous section, does not rest on the simple literal sense of 'residing' in the traditional culture or village community, but is ceaselessly constructed and negotiated in the particular context and social relations which may be evident in different spaces and time. It is crucial, therefore, to examine the process of identity construction from an empirical data.

In a similar manner to the recent development of gender theory, that has questioned the notion of the universal category 'women' and the assumption of underlying commonalities of existence for all women, I would like in this chapter to explore critically the underlying assumption of commonalities among the people classified within the ethnic category 'Akha'. Thus, I conceptualise the term 'Akha' as an imagined classification, rather than a self-evident entity. The aim of the following two chapters is to investigate the construction process by which the ethnic category of 'Akha' is a fiction that has been created and formalised in different levels and forms of discourse. It is important to understand how this collective Akha identity has been generated and reshaped,

as both a reference point for internal group identification and also as an externally-conceived ethnic category level, because identity is a product of the interplay between social categorisation and group identification. This chapter intends to examine the meaning of Akha ethnic categorisation firstly at the political level, then secondly at the self-ascriptive level.

In the first section, I will look at the construction process of ethnic category that is associated with the emergence of the nation-state as a political phenomenon. The ethnic identity ascribed by nation-states does not necessarily represent an intrinsic quality of a group of people. Grouping people and differentiating people is a highly political issue. Ethnic classification in such terms is a reflection of specific needs and demands in the process of state formation. Some previous ethnographic writings will also be reviewed in order to examine how the Akha have been represented and classified in different nation-states. Special attention will be paid to the case of China, as it provides the clearest example of the creation and manipulation of ethnic category in the process of nation building. This section will also provide background information to illustrate how people have been affected and constrained by, and have sometimes utilised, this created category during the course of their trans-national mobility.

In the second section, the way of claiming group identification, the membership of being 'Akha' will be examined. The construction process of ethnic identity is not only expedited by external forces and through arbitrary labelling by outsiders but also by members themselves through the constant redefinition of their self-image. It should be noted that people had been engaged in the process of group construction long before the colonial period or the era of

nation-building. With special reference to two key factors which have been considered as the basis of Akha ethnic identity by previous researchers : a genealogical identity, 'Sumio'; and a cultural identity, 'Akhazang'. I will critically re-examine the validity of these elements as the foundation of the Akha identification. This is also an attempt to explore the role of anthropologists in the politics of knowledge construction. It should be noted that both processes, ethnic categorisation and group identification are dialectic and interface with each other.

(1) Akha Ethnic Categories

1. Ethnic Categories and Nation States

The movement of people across the borders of states has been a common event in Southeast Asian history. Prior to the western colonial period, the density of the population was so low that the object of control by leaders was not territory but people. The power of the lord was defined by the centre not by the territorial boundary. Tambiah named this centre-oriented concept of the state the 'galactic polity' (1977,1985). The borders of the territory were rather ambiguous, not only because it expanded or shrank according to the influence of its sovereignty but also because power over individuals and land were separated. Thus, it was not surprising to find that people in the border regions occasionally paid tribute to both adjoining states or that neighbours were arbitrarily assigned different citizenship. When an English surveyor, James McCarthy, came to Siam in the late nineteenth century, he was puzzled by such a custom; "People who lived in one area might not necessarily belong

to the ruler of that area, although they might still have to pay tax or rent to the lord of that land.”(McCarthy:1895 185-6, 1902:101-102, cited by Thongchai 1994:164).¹

The encounter with territorially-bounded states through western colonial power was at odds with the perceptions and policies of local leaders, whose borders were ‘porous and indistinct’. In the case of Thailand, Thongchai Winichakul (1994) explored the complex process by which the Kingdom of Siam metamorphosed into a modern nation state with definite territorial boundaries determined by modern mapping technology between 1850 and 1910. The principal concern for the western ‘colonial’ authority was to identify the ‘legitimate’ occupants of the nation within a bounded territory, to identify unambiguously who belonged within the state and who did not. Thus, in order to secure its sovereignty, the Siamese kingdom had to utilise the force of modern geographical technology in demarcating its borders based on the western model of the modern state. “Inevitably, the traditional methods of dealing with the borders had to be replaced” (Thongchai 1994:111). Siam located itself between the colonial power of the French and British, and thereby managed to avoid direct colonisation by becoming a ‘buffer-state’; though the modern borders of Thailand were formed as a result. As Leach (1960) noted, colonialism imposed artificial boundaries on mainland Southeast Asian region which encompassed north Thailand, north Laos, north Vietnam, the Shan states of Burma and the Southwest of China, throughout which the Akha were scattered (cf. Tapp 1990).

¹ See also Hall and Whitmore 1976, Heine-Geldern 1956, Wolter 1982 for a detailed discussion of the traditional concept of Southeast Asian statecraft.

Under the new mechanism of control, the overlapping domains at the border were no longer accepted and were arbitrarily divided into clear-cut realms and separable units of space. The processes of mapping altered the fluid and negotiable understanding of boundaries. It was a “shift in the identification and assignment of bondage or allegiance from traditional personal ties to the new geo-body, based either on birthplace or on residence” (Thongchai 1994:165). In so-doing, the legitimacy of power was transposed, from “the labile authority of custom and communal reckoning into the rigid, brittle logic of the document and the archive” (Rouse 1995:368). Since the modern nations had to consist of a set of sharply identified populations, the registration of households throughout the country took place. The authorities became obsessed with classifying people.

What is interesting in this process is the ways in which such an imprinted spatial reality had an impact on the notion of sovereignty among the Siamese elite, and changed the discourse of sovereignty; “...the geo-body had set the direction and established the foundation for the new classification of people” (Thongchai 1994:165). As Thongchai (1994) also pointed out, along with the historical process of delimiting the boundary of the Thai nation-state, the boundary of the metaphysical notion of ‘Thainess’ as a collective identity was also arbitrarily created. The impact was not simply on the geographical domain but also the socio-political domain. It was this new system of identification that made people ‘Siamese’ by promoting a powerful sense of national identity. In the same manner, the population within the national boundary, however marginal they were, also had to be classified with a clear identification. The definition of ethnic category was presumed to be a rest on

distinctive linguistic and cultural characteristics.

Today it is well recognised among anthropologists that ethnicity is an ever-changing process; nevertheless, such collectivities of groups of people identified with ethnic classification was a fundamental part of the ideology of the formation of the modern nation state, and thus, regardless of whether there was a concrete socio-cultural basis or not, this ethnic classification system became politically indispensable in modern history. Such arbitrary categorisation constrained the population, particularly when the issue involved legal matters such as citizenship identification and land rights. The case of the Akha in Thailand in this regard will be further explored in Chapter six.

Considering the relationship between state formation and the notion of 'ethnic group', the case of China presents an interesting example of the embedded ideology of 'ethnic group' in the process of nation-state building. A clear-cut set of 'scientific' criteria upon which to classify and justify an ethnic group was developed in China (cf. Wu 1990). The notion of ethnic group, 'min-zu' did not exist in Chinese until the late nineteenth century. Of course the individual Chinese characters, '民' and '族' did exist before; however, the notion of 'min-zu' as an instrument of nation-building was only created when 孫文 (Sun Wen) promoted the Chinese Revolution policy in 1905 (橫山 1997:176). According to Chinese scholars (金 1981:41-43, 黃 1995:2-3), the term 'min-zu (民族)' had been constructed in the process of integration of western thought after the Meiji Restoration (1868) in Japan, and its concept was brought to China when Sun Wen returned from Japan to China.

Prior to the building of a 'modern nation', throughout its long history the Chinese feudal monarchy had organised a centre-oriented power configuration with quasi-independent territories in the marginal areas with minority chiefs (cf. 横山 1997:177). This basic configuration of the Chinese dynasty resembled a centre-oriented 'galactic polity' of the traditional statecraft in Southeast Asia, in the way that the boundaries of the territory as well as the membership were rather 'porous and indistinct'. The emperor represented the highest centre, and its influence expanded like ripples in water spreading its power to the surrounding area. The closer to the centre, the stronger was the influence of the ruling polity (cf. Hall and Whitmore 1976, Wolter 1982). The porous edge of this power was called the 'frontier' and every Chinese dynasty paid attention to the potentiality to expand its frontier. The official documents which describe frontier people date back over 2,000 years to the Han dynasty. The Han Chinese frequently referred to the marginal areas, using the term, 「夷」 indicating 'backward' (away from civilisation). The policy of 「似夷制夷」 (it literally means use barbarians to control barbarians) has been central to governing the frontier people since the Han dynasty. There was a clear class hierarchy between the Han Chinese and the non-Han Chinese in successive Chinese dynasties. Obviously, non-Han Chinese were ascribed lower status than the Han Chinese. Han Chinese dynasties granted titles to local chiefdoms in the frontier area until the Yuan conquest in the thirteenth century. (cf. Hill 1982, 横山 1997:177)

The system of 'tu-si (土司)' (it literally means local official), of controlling

frontiers indirectly by awarding the position to the chief of the non-Han Chinese in the marginal areas, was established during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644)(cf. Hill 1982:76-83). According to Mackerras (1994:24-25) Chinese historians have claimed that the essence of this system was that “politically the central feudal ruling classes used the old aristocratic elements among the minority nationalities to enforce their rule, while economically they allowed the original mode of production to persist and collected taxes through the agency of the local aristocracy”. During the late Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasty, as Mackerras noted, the ‘tu-si’ system was replaced by a new system called ‘*gai-tu-gui-liu* (改土歸流)’(it literally means removing local indigenous officials and appointing formal member of the bureaucracy) in which Han officials were directly appointed by the central government on a temporary basis and were able to control the local minority aristocracies (Mackerras 1994:25). This system thus formally brought these areas into the realm of the Chinese state. However, although Yunnan was officially incorporated into the regular provincial administration, the border regions of the Southeast were not fully integrated, the ‘tu-si’ system of having tribute relations with the Chinese dynasty was retained. In case of Hani, according to a Chinese historian (personal conversation with 史軍超), it is said that by the Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644) Han Chinese dynasty took indirect control of Hani population through the heredity ‘tu-si’ system by appointing a Hani leader. This hereditary system continued until the Republic Era. During the Qing dynasty, with tighter controls over Barbarian rulers, more Chinese officials were sent to the frontier area. Such historical processes reveals that the Han-Chinese were integrated with the frontier people over time, and that after a while some Akha children might be adopted by Han Chinese or Han Chinese might have

identified themselves as a member of the Akha through mix-marriage.

Some powerful families of the Phami Akha in Thailand claimed that they were close descendants of the '*Jaw Ba*' aristocracy which was a part of the Chinese 'tu-si' system. As I mentioned earlier, the secretary of '*Jaw Ba*', who died at the age of 87 in an Akha village near Doi Mae Salong in June 1997, and other aristocracy families around him fled into Burma, and later into Thailand when the cultural revolution started in 1966. The informants who attended his funeral ceremony (include the Akha from Sipsongpanna) confirmed that the '*Jaw Ba*' system changed radically after 1949, but lasted until the cultural revolution started. When people of high rank were severely attacked, '*Jaw Ba*' was put into prison. According to an informant (female 68), "if he is still alive, he would be over 90 years old by now."

The population in marginal areas who did not understand Chinese civilisation had been considered 'barbarian'. However, such identifications between Han-Chinese and non Han Chinese were not defined by their clear boundaries but by their core values and literate ability, thus identity was transferable (cf. 横山 1997). Therefore it was not surprising to find cases where a person was originally from a so-called 'barbarian' area, but once he had become well acquainted with Confucian philosophy, Chinese language and literature, he would consider himself to be a member of Chinese civilisation, Han Chinese, and others would also regard him in this way.²

On the other hand, it is also recorded that during the fifteenth and sixteenth

² See the details of such a case in Yokoyama 1997

centuries, some Chinese missions or settlers in Yunnan province became members of the local minority groups they lived with (Zhu 1983:7). Tapp also noted the Creole nature of ethnic minorities in China, “..the descendants of Han settlers were frequently adopted into minority groups, sometimes founding new lineages and clans through intermarriage, as occurred with a number of Miao clans” (Tapp 1995:209). Therefore, it is obvious that although some terms to describe various non-Chinese ‘ethnic groups’ can be found in Chinese historical documents, the boundary between such ethnic groups was rather ambiguous and officials did not intend to fix a sharp border between them until the formation of People’s Republic of China. (Further details of the Akha case, and the Creole nature of the Akha genealogical system, will be presented in the next section of Chapter four; the inter-ethnic relations with Chinese will be examined in Chapter four).

In 1922 at the Second Congress, the ideology of egalitarianism and autonomy among all ethnic groups, ‘min-zu (民族)’ was introduced following the Soviet model. At that time, ideology was still at an idealistic stage supported by an urban elite who had little knowledge of minority conditions in the frontier regions. Through the Long March of the 1930s “the Chinese communists traversed some of the minority territories and experienced the reality of minority conditions” (Hsieh 1986:6). This ideology of nation-building based on ‘min-zu (民族)’ was then revised and put into practice by the Chinese Communist Party after 1949. The definition of ‘min-zu (民族)’ was based on the ideas of Stalin; that is, every ‘min-zu (民族)’ shares four elements of commonality - “a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make up that finds expression in a common culture”

(Stalin 1953/II: 294 cited by Hsieh 1986:4). However, at the same time, all must share the unity of the motherland with the Han Chinese, and the rights of self-determination and the right to secede from China was prohibited.

This radically transformed the former malleable concept of ethnic groups into officially created groups of people clearly divided from one and another. The policy was called 『民族識別工作』 (it literally means policy of distinguishing ethnic groups) and a series of projects to classify and acknowledge ‘min-zu (民族)’ was organised by both officials and academic specialists in the 1950s. The principal idea of nation-building in China is that the nation consists of various ‘min-zu’ including the majority Han Chinese. Thus, Chinese policies toward the ‘min-zu’ takes place within the context of the definition of Chinese state formation. Under the Communist ideology, ethnic categorisation and differentiation was a political issue not in terms of enabling the local population to obtain equality and autonomy among the collective ethnic groups but in a sense that enabled the state to control the minority autonomous regions. This highly political-administrative organisation of ethnic groups, ‘min-zu,’ is translated as ‘nationality’ in English. From now on I will use the term ‘nationality’ to indicate this Chinese classification of ethnic categories in order to differentiate this concept from the more general and singular use of ‘ethnic group’.

The first important task of the Chinese government was to have an accurate reckoning of the population composition of the each administrative district. In 1953, the first extensive population survey of China was conducted. Following the China’s ‘nationalities’ policy, particularly article 51, the precise

figure of the population based on 'nationality' was required, as the number of local administrative seats in the House reflected the proportion of the population of the represented region.

"According to Article 51: Regional autonomy shall be exercised in areas where national minorities are concentrated, and various kinds of autonomy organisations of the different nationalities shall be set up according to the size of the respective populations and regions. In places where different nationalities live together and in the autonomous areas of the national minorities, the different nationalities shall each have an appropriate number of representatives in the local organs of political power" (cited by Hsieh 1986:7).

Because the boundaries of group affiliation were porous and indistinct, the process of identifying and approving the official number of minority groups was highly complex and contested. First of all, the government asked the population to identify themselves with ethnic names. Based on self-declarations, "over 400 ethnic groups made a claim with the authorities seeking recognition as 'minority nationalities'" (Wu 1990:2) by 1955. Yunnan province whose border is adjacent to Vietnam, Laos and Burma "accounted for more than 260 self-proclaimed" (Fei 1981:64 cited by Wu 1990:2) ethnic minority names during the registration process. The process of classifying over 400 ethnic groups and validating official 'minority nationalities' was the second step. "In the two years between 1956 and 1958, about 700 scholars, officials and college students participated in a nation-wide ethnographic and linguistic survey" (Wu 1990:2). It is important to note the role of Chinese ethnographers and academics in terms of the politics of knowledge construction. It was these official academics of minority affairs that were in the position of defining the boundaries of ethnic group and culture in the administrative process. Their

contributions had a powerful influence on the political outcome. In this sense, in the context of China, ethnic minority studies was directly connected with political power.

This administration process forced each individual to choose and decide which officially approved nationality he/she belonged to. Thus, claiming ethnic identity was a highly complex political issue not only at the administrative level but also at the level of the individual. The populations which had been living in urban areas for generations found it particularly difficult to identify themselves as Han-Chinese or non-Han Chinese. Some may have had to trace historical documents dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644) in order to identify the origin of their locality. Or others with 'mixed' ancestors had to decide where to set a priority. In such cases, the selection of ethnic identification was highly dependent on how the individuals recognised themselves rather than Stalin's 'scientific' ideological criteria of four elements - language, territory, economics and culture.³

As a result of this contested process of negotiation and manipulation, involving various ethnic groups, officials and Chinese academics, in 1964, the official number of approved nationalities was fifty three. It is interesting to note that according to Chinese official statistics, in 1954 when thirty-eight nationalities were approved, ethnic minorities consisted of 5.9 per cent of the total population at that time. Then, in 1964, when fifty three nationalities were authorised, an increase of fifteen ethnic groups, the percentage of ethnic

³ It is reported that during the 1930's in Yunnan Province in China the Chinese immigrants became landlords, traders, employees of the local chiefs and bandits (T'ao 1943 cited by Wu 1989).

minorities in the population decreased to 5.8 per cent. This figure may indicate the negative attitude towards minority nationalities at that time. Although the Chinese Communist Party emphasised equal and autonomous status for the ethnic minorities, in practice, being Chinese was generally considered as socially and politically more advantageous than being an ethnic minority, or 'barbarian'.

Thus, if people had a choice of identification between Han Chinese and ethnic minority, Han Chinese might have been chosen. As Hsieh noted, the ultimate goal of the communist party was to "reach a stage where there are no language barriers nor nationality differences" (The State Commission of Nationality Affairs 1979:64 cited by Hsieh 1986:4). Greater emphasis was placed on the national integration of China based on communist ideology rather than advocating local ethnic minorities' interests. As a result, the communist ideology did not change the long established hierarchical conception of centre-oriented power configuration between the Han Chinese and the population at the 'frontier'.

Furthermore, the basic idea behind the policy on religion by the Chinese Communist Party was "to help the people extricate themselves from religious superstitions" (Li Wei-han 1981:565 cited by Hsieh 1986:5). Many of the minorities' religious practices were considered as 'superstitions' and were officially prohibited. "In the late 1950s, many millions of Han were resettled on state farms in minority areas to pioneer virgin land and reclaim forested and desert areas" (Tapp 1995:210). From an official point of view, it was a way to correct gross population imbalances and disparities of wealth between the more highly developed eastern coastal provinces and the underdeveloped areas

of the western region, including the Yunnan province. Economic policies such as land reform were carried out through negotiation with the old aristocracy of the minorities in Yunnan province. Chinese official sources refer to the Hani and Dai communities as 'successful cases,' unlike the Yi and Tibetans who had rebelliously attempted to resist the power and demands of the centre (Ma Yin et al. 1989:29-30).

A series of wars and upheavals following official demands to change their way of life drove the population in the marginal areas southwards into Burma, Laos and Thailand. Akha informants who moved from China to Thailand mentioned how destructive and aggressive the demands of the communist officials were. On some occasions they burned ceremonial material goods to liberate them from their 'evil superstitions', at other times the government soldiers pillaged and ransacked the Akha villages, accusing them of supposedly helping Kuomintang soldiers. In such cases, ethnic minority populations did not have a choice but to move en masse into Burma, Laos, Vietnam or Thailand. Some of the ethnic minorities who had served Kuomintang soldiers had also been pushed out of China along with 国民党(Kuomintang soldiers) into the border areas.

During the cultural revolution (1966-76) communist interference in the affairs of ethnic minorities simply increased. Great numbers of ethnic minority people moved south to avoid the catastrophic communist presence. The massive relocation of both the Han Chinese population into every corner of the Chinese socialist state and of the minority population from remote, mountainous forested zones to more 'secure' valleys forced everyone in China to go through tremendous upheaval in the process of 'unification'. "Many more millions of

high school students and graduates were dispatched from the cities to the countryside and minority areas “(Tapp 1995:210). The minority policy, the ideology of equal status or autonomy during this period was effectively in abeyance. In other words, they had to suffer from this hysterical experience equally with the Han Chinese. No matter how one may have identified himself, willingly or unwilling, none could escape from the radical change of the ‘Four Old Things’ (old thinking, culture, customs, and habits). What was tragic during the cultural revolution was that every aspect of the daily life of the minority population was considered as an impediment and was attacked not only by Han Chinese officials but also by the younger generation of Akha themselves. As a result, minority languages, customs, festivals and material culture were heavily confronted and destroyed, and thus a whole generation has grown up deprived of their cultural heritage. In this way this historical juncture forced ethnic minorities to become members of the Chinese Communist party. It is ironical that this generation, which had been heavily involved in confronting and destroying the ‘Four Old Things’ at that time, are now in their 50s and paradoxically are now actively involved in the reconstruction of ‘ethnic minority culture’ in China today. An official academic Hani researcher (male 53), who identified himself as a Hani national, revealed his life story. He confessed that he had denounced his own father caused his death during that time (personal conversation). This kind of bitter experience of the past might be one of the strong incentives for reviving ‘ethnic minority traditional culture’ among Chinese minority nationality academics today.

Following the ‘Open Door’ Policy of 1979, the 1982 Constitution paid special attention to the issue of minority nationalities. Although a system of regional autonomy for minority nationalities had already been institutionalised since

1954 as an ideology, however, in reality the priority had been the unification of the entire Communist country as I have discussed. So it was only after 1982, when the Chinese government no longer envisaged a threat of separation of the autonomous regions after years of integration efforts, that a system of exercising equal autonomy for minority nationalities as a part of the state's administrative hierarchy was put into practice.⁴ The section entitled, 'The Organs of Self-government of National Autonomous Areas' received special attention as a result of the new policy.

"Article 114 states that *the administrative head of an autonomous region, prefecture, or county shall be a member of the nationality*. Article 118 states that *the organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas shall independently arrange and administer local economic development under the guidance of state plans*. Article 119 states that *the organs of self-government shall independently administer cultural affairs in their separate areas, protecting and preserving the cultural heritage while striving for development and prosperity*." (Hsieh 1986:8)

The Law on Regional Autonomy for Minority Nationalities (Min-zu) was issued in May 1984, and implemented in October 1984. Special budgets were allocated to the ethnic minority autonomous regions to carry out improvements in health, education and economic development. According to the Hani officials in the Hongue Hani autonomous county⁵, it was part of a

⁴ The borders of autonomous areas have sometimes been arbitrarily in an effort to place them more firmly under state control (Tapp 1995:213).

⁵ The interview was conducted during the visit to Hongue Hani autonomous county in September 1996.

modernisation policy to improve the income and standard of living of the peripheral areas. The new policy paid special attention to the ethnic minorities by providing some special privileges, on the basis of their status as 'ethnic minorities,' in autonomous areas. For instance, the one-child policy was not as strictly applied in the ethnic minority areas as the Han Chinese areas, and minority couples were allowed to have two or three children. Moreover, special advantages in education and job opportunities were provided for ethnic minorities. Special privileges were granted to minorities to participate in state development projects. The principles of the new minority policy provided equal opportunities for all ethnic groups, and are sometimes viewed even today as a case of reverse discrimination by the Han Chinese who reside in minority autonomous areas. For example, an informant (a Han Chinese student in Hani and Yi autonomous county) complained that the minimum requirement for the entrance examination to colleges and universities for the students of minority origin is lower than for the Han Chinese students.

As a result, it is interesting to note that some of those who previously claimed to be Han-Chinese transferred their identification into the 'ethnic minority nationality' category.⁶ It is clear if we compare the population growth rate between 1964 census and 1982 census. The census showed that whilst the

⁶ The transformation of identification from Han Chinese to ethnic minority was found not only at the individual level but also at the whole county and district levels. For example, the group called, Bai considered themselves ethnic Chinese and enjoyed treatment as such until very recently. Yet, today, they claim to be an ethnic minority so as to enjoy the benefits of ethnic minority policy on the basis of slender evidence. They are now officially recognised as the second largest ethnic minority in Yunnan province. See Wu 1989, 1990 for more details. Because of an alarming increase in the number of minority nationalities, claiming for such status began to be rejected after 1986. (Tapp 1995:208)

minority population had increased by 68.41 per cent, the Han Chinese population had increased by only 43.82 percent (cf. Tapp 1995:208). In the case of the Hani population, the population growth rate between 1964 and 1982 was 59.34 per cent.⁷ It is said that “generally the children of mixed marriages between Han and minority members choose (or have chosen for them) minority rather than Han status. There are even attempts to register Han children illegally as members of national minorities” (Tapp 1995:207). A similar situation was found in Thailand during the course of my fieldwork at the border between Thailand and Burma. It seems that certain people from China, who knew nothing of the minority language, were applying for ‘hill tribe’ identification. According to an Akha informant (male 32), it is better for them to disguise their identification in Thailand than to proclaim themselves as Chinese or Shan, regardless of the negative image of ethnic minorities in Thailand. The practical advantages of ‘ethnic minority’ identification are felt to be sufficiently attractive to outweigh the benefits of being a member of the dominant majority. It is interesting to observe such a manipulation of formal ethnic identification varying according to changes in state policy.

The shift of ethnic identification from Han Chinese to ethnic minority occurred not only among the population in the rural areas who preferred to have more than one child to support their agricultural work. This change of status was also found among the urban elite of the ethnic minorities who are already deeply versed in the Han Chinese material life style and intellectual knowledge, such as art, literature, philosophy, etc. It is interesting to note that recent Chinese

⁷ According to the official population census, Hani population was 481,220 (1953) 628,727 (1964) 1,059,404 (1982) 1,253,952 (1990).

academic studies of ethnic minorities are undertaken by such people.⁸ As mentioned earlier, the mainstay of Chinese specialising in ethnic minority studies is the generation who experienced the cultural revolution. It is through these people that the meaning of respective ethnic minority cultures has been reinterpreted and justified. Under the new policy, ethnic minority festivals and religious ceremonies are officially sanctioned and sponsored. Only officially approved songs, dances and other material cultures based on the officially recognised fifty three ethnic minority categories can become the objects for preserving and reviving ethnic minority culture. In such endeavours, it seems a paradox, but their knowledge of Chinese literature, art, philosophy are indispensable resources in their reconstruction of 'minority culture'.

Along with recent changes in terms of the open economic policy, China has started to pay special attention to the tourism industry. Following the focus in the 7th five-year national development plan (1985-90) on improving the transportation infrastructure in the tourist areas, the year 1992 was designated 'Chinese Friendship Tourism Year', with a particular emphasis being placed on 249 official tourist spots and fourteen tourism theme tours.⁹ Some of the theme tours extend over minority nationality autonomous areas. Recent development stresses the ethnic minorities as a tourist resources, and one of the theme tours particularly focuses on 'ethnic minority tourism'. Although it is called 'minority', the total population of ethnic minority people in China was over 80 million in 1990, thus 'ethnic minority tourism' in China is potentially a

⁸ This was observed by the author by visiting academic institutes on ethnic minorities in China and by attending Second International Hani/Akha Conference held in Chiang Mai, 1996.

⁹ The amount of foreign earnings from tourism increased fifteen times from 2600 million US dollar (1978) to 3.95 billion US dollar (1992) (Kan 1996: 169).

considerable business. Such economic potential attracts the regional minority nationality governments because it requires relatively small investment and it generates job opportunities for the local ethnic minority population in the service sector. There are two forms of ethnic tourism, one relates to ethnic minority village tours¹⁰, the other is establishing ethnic village parks including ethnic restaurants, ethnic museums, ethnic performances at culture centres, etc. This is where the entity of ethnic minority culture based on arbitrary created ethnic categories is further formalised, fixed and performed. The officially acceptable 'unique' 'authentic' culture of respective minority nationalities is reconstructed and simultaneously integrated into national culture in the process and context of tourist development.

The contradictory situation we can observe today is that while Chinese policy is now trying to promote the diversity of the minority cultures by the clear demarcation of officially fixed ethnic boundaries, in effect, this effort results in promoting the unification of culture under a single approved ethnic category. While the ethnographic reality is rather ambiguous and inconsistent, such a process of unification denies the diversity and difference which exists within a single 'category', and the ways in which the 'authentic' authority represented by a single ethnic category is contested. For example, promoting the usage of minority nationality languages in education and administrative work in the autonomous regions results in developing written manuscripts and standardising the respective languages. Promoting the preservation of the cultural heritage leads into competition to select the most authentic unique dances, songs, music, etc. of the respective minority nationality. Such

¹⁰ In some cases villages were simply opened up, but in other cases local villages themselves were

processes of construction of official ethnographic knowledge involve the intertwining power relations at the administrative level, academic level, and village level. When the sub-groups within the single category vary extensively, such as in the case of Hani, there are inevitably arguments about authenticity and validity of respective categories, although these were invented and imagined in the first place.

This section has looked at the historical process whereby the ethnic category was arbitrarily created at the formal, institutional level. My aim here was not simply to point out the arbitrariness of ethnic category. Rather, the interesting contemporary phenomenon that I am looking at is the way in which the substantial entity attributed to such a fictitious category is constructed and reconstructed through the process of nation-building. Moreover, such created distinctions are perpetuated through tourism and indigenous cultural preservation movements associated with global processes. Special reference was made to Chinese minority policy because the majority of those categorised as the Akha reside in China and it thus provides a clear example of the political construction of an ethnic category. Other socialist countries, such as Laos and Vietnam, also followed a similar process of ethnic categorisation as China.

2. Ethnographic Resources and Akha Categorisation

In this section, the diversity and difference within the single category 'Akha', will be explored by looking at some ethnographic sources and the ethnic minority policy of respective nation-states. It is intended to demonstrate how

artificially created for the purpose of tourism.

the various ethnic groups are artificially assembled into a single ethnic category which as such tends to disguise the differences within.

China

There are abundant terms to indicate the group of people who had been put into the Akha category. Over the years, and today still, they have been identified by numerous ethnonyms. According to the documents recorded by the early western visitors to Yunnan province in China, Clark (1894) observed the group of people such as ‘He Wuni (黑窩尼)’, ‘Ah K’a’(阿·), ‘K’Ts’ong(苦葱)’, ‘Ru Pi(糯比)’, ‘Wu Ni(窩尼)’, ‘Ko Heh(·黑)’, ‘Si Mo(酒摩)’ as the ancestors of the Akha. Meanwhile, Davis (1909) noted that , 窩尼(Wo-Ni) is the generic term defined by the Chinese to indicate the group of people who speak Lolo (Tibeto-Burman) in the southern Yunnan province, which include the k’a-to, pu-to, pi-o, ro-pi, and others. This category sometimes (not always) includes the Akha of that area.

In China, the category **Hani** was officially approved in 1954 (Moseley 1973:73-4). It refers to several other ethnic groups as well as the Akha. According to Chinese minority social history research documents (1986), there are eleven different sub-groups; 哈尼(Hani), 豪尼(Haoni), 多尼(Duoni), 海尼(Haini), 和尼(Heni), 雅尼(Yani), 卞別(Kabie), 卞多(Kaduo), 碧約(Biyue), 哦(O), 阿木(Amu). Combined with western resources, Olson (1998:135) identified seventeen Hani subgroups; Baihong, Biyue, Getsuo, Asiluma, Doni, Emu, Lau, Lomai, Soni, Haoni, Puli, Tyitso, Akho, Nuquay, Eni (Kaduo, Kado), Jen G’we, and Hteu La. He then noted that “Their

differences from one another are significant enough to cause many anthropologists to classify the Hani subgroups as distinct ethnic groups in their own right” (Olson 1998:135).

People calling themselves Akha residing around the Sipsongpanna area had officially been approved as ‘Aini’ in 1953 (胡鴻章 1993:151). The reason for using the term ‘Aini’ instead of ‘Akha’ was because, according to Chinese academics, the affix ‘kha’ is related to the ancient Tai word meaning ‘slave’ (陳觀勝・庄孔韶 1984). In the early stage the ‘Aini’ in the Sipsongpanna area and the ‘Hani’ in the Hongue area had been categorised as a separate ethnic minority. Although the ‘Hani’ and ‘Aini’ are linguistically only barely mutually intelligible to one another,¹¹ and methods of agricultural practice are quite different: the ‘Hani’ practice terraced field cultivation while that of ‘Aini’ is shifting cultivation, ‘Aini’ is now considered as a part of ‘Hani’ nationality, because they share the same ancestor figure, Sumio (The genealogical justification for Akha identity will be further discussed in the following section).

According to the Chinese official ‘Aini’ ethnographic studies (cf. 楊忠明 1992), the term ‘Aini’ indicates the collective peoples including sub-groups such as Djeugh’oe, Djedjo, Djubya, Muta, Jima, Maren, Akeu, etc. Every group shares the same ancestor, Sumio, however it does not necessarily mean that their languages are intelligible to each other. Moreover, being the

¹¹ It was interesting to observe that among the population termed ‘Hani’ at present they had to use Han Chinese for mutual communication.

descendants of the Sumio does not guarantee the sense of solidarity among the descendants' groups. (稻村 1996:12) In fact, such a sense of collectivity hardly existed among them before being lumped together officially in a single category in 1950s. On the contrary, there have been constant conflicts between two large sub groups, Djeugh'oe and Djedjo. It is said that while inter-ethnic marriage with Chinese, Tai or Lahu was allowed, it was prohibited between Djeugh'oe and Djedjo (楊万智 1990:29, 稻村 1996:12). It seems that such antagonism between sub-groups continued up to the present. During the course of fieldwork in Thailand, it was found that though they are categorised under the single category, 'Akha', they occasionally made efforts to differentiate themselves from others among themselves. It was particularly apparent between Ulo Akha and Phami Akha. At the funeral of *Saje* (died at the age of 87 in June 1997), who was claimed to be a secretary of *Jaw Ba*, a supra village political power in Sipsongpanna in China (the detail of supra village political power will be discussed in the Chapter five) while quite a few Akha from Sipsongpanna, China came to attend the funeral, there were no Ulo Akha participants. One of the Phami Akha participant (male 52) explained that '*Jaw Ba* also did not like Ulo Akha and did not consider them as his people'.

According to the linguistic classification, the Hani language falls into part of the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family, and scholars place it within the Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burmese cluster. In the process of ethnic identification policy, extensive language investigation teams were launched in 1956 (費孝通 1988). At that time, there were sixty-four ethnic groups in terms of self-appointed names and eighty-eight ethnic groups in terms of non self-appointed names within the Yi language group (費孝通 1988:184). It is known that making

the distinction among the Yi language group and classifying them into the ethnic categories had been the most difficult one within the ethnic minority population in Yunnan province. (cf. 費孝通 1988:184, 稻村 1996:5-6, 松本 1995) The population of Yi language group was divided into officially approved ethnic minority categories such as 'Yi', 'Hani', 'Lisu' 'Lahu' and 'Nashi' etc. which are used in the present day. The Hani language is now officially divided into three regional directs - Ha-Ai, Bi-Kaw and Hao-Bai.

According to the official census, the Hani population in China increased from 1,058,836 (1982) to 1,253,952 (1990), making it the third largest minority nationality in Yunnan Province. A Chinese Hani researcher at the Yunnan Academy of Social Science estimated that the total population of Hani, including those in Burma (380,000), Laos (70,000), Thailand (50,000) and Vietnam (60,000) would have been 1,820,000 in 1996. The vast majority of Hani reside in the far south-eastern corner of Yunnan province, between the Mengle and the Ailao mountain ranges. "More particularly, Hani can be found in Honghe, Yuanyang, Luchun and Jinping counties in Honghe Hani-Yi Autonomous Prefecture; Mojiang Hani Autonomous County; Jiangcheng Hani-Yi Autonomous County; Lancang Lahu Autonomous County; Puer and Zhenyuan counties in Simao Prefecture; Menghai, Jinghong, and Mengla counties in Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture; and in Yuanjiang Hani-Hi-Dai and Xinping Yi-Dai Autonomous counties in the Yuxi Prefecture"(Olson 1998:135). (please refer to the map of Yunnan Province in China)

Successive Chinese dynasties occasionally sent missions to the marginal areas to record the social practices of the peripheral populations. A Hani (Akha) researcher claimed that one of the earliest descriptions of Hani (Akha) were

found in an official document, 『新唐書』 during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). (personal conversation with 史軍超) Within Chinese academia (cf. 毛佑全 · 李期博 1989), the terms Heyis, Hemans, Henis, Hinis, Wonis, Wunis, Wumans and Ahnis as well as their self-designations, Kaduo, Aini, Haoni, Biyue, and Byues, in the Chinese historical documents are claimed to be the ancestors of the Hani ethnic minority. Chinese historians claim that during the Nanzhao Kingdom in the eighth century, the population documented as the ‘Henis’ is considered to be the ancestors of Hani. Then in the twelfth century, the population, termed ‘Hezis’ conquered by the Mongols were considered as the Hani ancestors (cf. Alting von Geusau forthcoming). However, these accounts made by Chinese historians should be critically examined because the population referred to by such terms in historical documents does not necessarily coincide with the population we designate within the ethnic category of Hani (or Akha) today because, as I have discussed, ethnic categorical classification is a highly political and historical product. Thus, what can only be said is that the term 『夷』 indicates a non-Chinese ‘barbarian’ in Chinese characters, and that some size of population, include Tibetan Burmese Yi language groups who were classified as non-Chinese from the perspective of the Chinese authorities did exist in Yunnan province at that time.

Burma

In the case of Burma it was during the British colonial period that the population under its control was divided by ethnic category. The ethnic labels applied to the Akha of Burma by colonial officials are less perplexing than those applied to the Akha (Hani) of China by Chinese officials. While they are sometimes called Kaw in the published English-language literature on Burma (Khin Maung

Nyunt 1969; Scott 1906:100; Telford 1937), their name for themselves is transliterated as Akha, Ahka, Akka, or Aka (Kammerer 1986:79). Prior to the independence of Burma, Akha were reported only in the trans-Salween region, that is, east of the Salween River (Scott 1906:100; 1932:268). While Woodthorpe (1897:28), Davies (1909), and Lo Ch'ang Pei (1945:358) observe that Akha were numerous in eastern Keng Tung. Although the British gained control of all lowland Burma by 1886, it took troops several years to 'pacify' the Shan chiefdom. The 1901 census lists an Akha (including both Akha and Ako) population of 21,175 (India, Census Commissioner 1901:275), then 32,925 (1911), 34,265 (1921) and 40,405 (1931). Enriquez (1981[1933]:68), a British colonial officer, reported in 1933 that "Akha and their cousins the Musho [Lahu], are the most numerous of the hill races in Burma's Keng Tung State." Enriquez (1981[1933]:81), also acknowledged that the census figures "regarding the wild tribes are in most cases an underestimate".

Most of the Akha in Burma live in Shan state¹². It is interesting to note that an early western visitor, Carey (1899:383) classed Akha with the Shan, claiming them to be "descendants of a subjugated race who have lost their original language, though they still retain many customs which differ in toto from those of their conquerors" (cited by Kammerer 1986:77). This indicates the fact that the Akha had a long established close relationship with the Shan in Burma at that time. Khin Maung Nyunt (1969:28) locates the Akha in the trans-Salween area around Keng Tung. During the field trip to Shan state in Burma, a close affinity between the Akha and Dai people was observed by the author. (The inter ethnic relation between the Akha and Tai (Shan) will be further explored in

¹² Lewis and Lewis (1984:204) estimated the Akha population as 180,000, whereas a Chinese

Chapter five.)

Laos and Vietnam

In the case of Laos and Vietnam it was during the French colonial period that the population was divided by ethnic category. According to early French observers, in 1902 Lefevre-Pontalis asserted that the Ou-Nhis (Woni/Hani) of Yunnan must be connected with the Kha groups of northern Indochina. In 1924, Roux (1924:373) uses the term Akha as well as Kha Ko and estimated that 4,500 Akha live in Phongsaly. Dussault (1924:32) noted that “in Tonkin at the frontier with Yunnan, live the Kha Kho of whom we will see numerous kinds in Laos” (translated by Kammerer 1986:81-82). Then in a later passage, he equates these Kha Kho with the Akha:

“We arrive at a group of Kha with more interesting costumes. This is the Kha Kho group already encountered in Tonkin at the Yunnanese frontier, and which overflows the right bank of the Mekong fairly far into Burma. Neighbouring Chinese call them A-Kha[Akha]” (Dussault 1924:36-37 translated by Kammerer 1986:82). In 1938, Halpern (1961:25) gives 3,423 as the Akha population of Houa Khong. He (1961:47) identifies the Akha as a sub-group of the Musso (the Shan and Northern Thai use this term to indicate Lahu) based on linguistic categorisation, as both Lahu and Akha were classified as the Southern Lolo branch of the Tibeto-Burman language (Benedict 1972:8).

The Akha population of the Lao People's Democratic Republic is concentrated near the borders with Vietnam, Yunnan, and Burma's Keng Tung State in the two north-western provinces: Phongsaly and Houa Khong (formerly Haut Mekhong, sometimes referred to as Nam Tha). Vuong Hoang Tuyen's article

(1973) locates Hani along North Vietnam's border with Yunnan to the west of the Red River, and at Lao Cai and to the north of Lai Chau (Kammerer 1986:81).

Thailand

According to an Akha who is working at a NGO (the Association for Akha Education and Culture in Chiang Rai) it is claimed there are eight different Akha sub-groups in Thailand. The three major groups are Ulo, Lomi and Pami. There are also five other minor sub-groups; Pya (who call themselves Ulo), Naka (from the village of Naka in Burma), Upi (who wear the same traditional costume as the Lomi), A-Keu (related to the Shan, their women wear a turban style head dress),¹³ and A-Jaw(similar to the Ulo).¹⁴

In the academic discourse, Feingold (1976) states that the sub-groups refer to a patrisib (lineage) cluster, while Kammerer and Lewis states that it refers to a dialect group. Tooker noted that "The Akha tend to think of social groupings either in terms of place (especially village) name or in terms of kinship groupings, the largest being the named lineage. Thus there is no accurate indigenous term for those groupings I have called 'sub group'. This accounts for the inconsistency in the terms applied to them by the Akha" (Tooker 1988:16). She continued that "sub tribes are not strictly descent groups or lineage clusters, although certain lineage tend to be found more in one sub tribe than the other" (Tooker 1988:17).

¹³Some informants think that the A-Keu Akha are related to Yunnanese Chinese

¹⁴ This information was provided by Akha informants working at the Association for Akha Education and Culture, Chiang Rai, Thailand. I stayed at the student hostel organised by this organisation for over six months during my course of fieldwork in 1994-5.

Three elements are used to distinguish sub-groups among the Akha both by outsiders and by themselves: firstly, geographical location (name of place or mountain nearby); secondly, the shape of women's head dress; thirdly, genealogical terms. However, it is incorrect to perceive these sub-groups as socio-cultural collectivities with clearly bounded discrete characteristics, because they often overlap with each other, and individual members disagree with each other on the way distinctions are identified. Three main Akha sub-groups are distinguished by women's head dress for the outsider's convenience. However, recently, the Akha prefer to use the term Ulo, Loimi, Phami as they found it more accurate than the genealogical terms, "djedjo", and "djegho" and they found it easier to explain to outsiders about their variations among themselves, particularly in the tourist settings where the focus is on material culture.

3. Akha as a trans-national category

As discussed in the previous section, officially recognised minority nationalities receive special advantages in China such as educational opportunity, leniency in the application of birth-control policy or particular official positions exclusively allocated to minority nationalities, particularly within officially designated autonomous regions in China. Thus, even the Han Chinese were seeking minority identification by changing their status from Chinese to minority nationality in order to receive these benefits not held by the Han majority. Moreover, it is understandable to find the manipulation of identity from one minority nationality to another larger and more powerful minority nationality to enjoy better political power, for example from the Hani (the third largest

minority nationality in Yunnan) to Yi (the largest minority nationality in Yunnan province). It should be noted that such manipulation of identity is not confined only to China but is being practised in the neighbour countries.

The population who are categorised as, or claim to be the Akha (Hani in China), are scattered through five modern nation-states — China, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam — and are categorised and treated differently according to the respective national policies. They have close association with related people across the borders which made them vulnerable as well as valuable. Some Akha (particularly those who have experience of living in different nation states) are well aware of the politics of identification. They are not simply passively entrapped into the ethnic classification attributed by the officials, but some of them are capable of responding to the situation by manipulating their identification in relation to their political and economic interests as I will demonstrate in Chapter six.

When the Chinese Communists came to demolish the local 'tu-si' system in 1950s in the border areas of Yunnan province, a great wave of minority migrants moved down south to, Laos, Vietnam and Burma. At that time, due to their information networks through cross border trade, some of them were aware of the fact that in Laos and Vietnam the members of ethnic minorities have occupied positions of political power and prestige in the colonial period and after, and this was also the case in Burma before 1962. It is known among the Akha that presently one high ranking military official in Laos is Akha.

The situation of the Akha ethnic minorities in Thailand was markedly different from that in any of the other neighbouring states. They were categorised within the collective boundary of 'hill tribes' by the Thai nation state with automatic indication of second class citizen with the Akha being considered as the lowest category among the hill tribes. This resulted in some of the Akha identifying themselves as Chinese migrants instead of Akha in order to escape from the negative connotation of Akha identification in Thailand.

(The case of Thailand in Chapter six will discuss the discourse on the collective category of 'hill tribes' in development policy, mass media and tourist settings.)

Interestingly, however, in recent times the situation has been changing. Along with China's open economic policy and the revitalisation of the tourist industry in the Mekong Basin region, and the global trend of preserving indigenous culture, minority status has gained additional value nowadays. An elite Akha informant pointed out that some Chinese migrants seek 'hill tribe' status in Thailand in order to obtain jobs in Taiwan. The informant himself possesses three passports, Chinese, Burmese and Thai, which enable him to enjoy smooth progress when he crosses the borders. With frequent travel between China and Thailand, some of the Akha have started seeking solidarity between the Akha to support their economic and political interests. They are exchanging the idea of ethnic tourism as a source of income, and revitalising cross-border networks for border trade business. It is noteworthy that in such a process, the politically arbitrary category 'Akha' is beginning to acquire substantial meaning as a trans-national category.

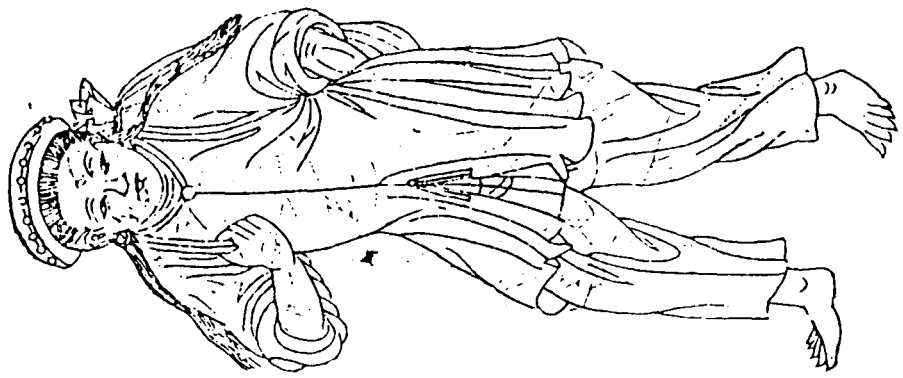
To sum up, discourses of 'other' and authoritative accounts are no longer the privilege of western colonial powers. Local states are the principal agent of

identifying the official category, such as 'hill tribes' in Thailand or 'nationality' (means ethnic minority) in China. The public images through media and national development projects are grounded on this official category of identification, nevertheless, official categorisation does not necessarily coincide with their self-ascriptive identification, as seen in the case of claiming for Tai identity or Chinese identity in Thailand to avoid the attributed disadvantage or on the contrary, to claim for advantages attributed to ethnic minority, as in the case of China.

Figure 2 Illustration of Hani in Chinese historical document

八三三

元江等府窩泥蠻婦



窩泥本和泥蠻之裔南詔蒙氏置威遠睽稱
 和泥為因遠部明置元江府東至元江南至
 車里西至威遠北至思陀皆和泥種今雲南
 臨安景東鎮元元江五府皆有之其人居深
 山中性樸魯面黧黑編麥稽為帽以火草布
 及麻布為衣男女皆短衫長袴耕山牧豕納
 糧賦常入市貿易亦有與齊民雜處村寨者
 其俗女適人必以藤束膝垂為別娶婦數年無

八三三

(2) Akha Identification

1. Self-Ascriptive Identification

In the previous section, I looked at the external construction process of Akha ethnic category as a political instrument. However, identity construction process is not a phenomenon only associated with the emergence of the nation-state, or external political forces. Ethnic identity is the product of the interplay of internal and external factors. Thus, it may be sensible to examine the internal construction process of the Akha identification here to supplement the earlier discussion. Only these complementary aspects will give the full picture of the Akha identity construction process.

It was Moerman (1965) who first turned anthropological attention to native definitions of group affiliation. He aimed to discover criteria for group self-identification, which feature as locally significant for purposes of assigning an ethnic label. After Fredrik Barth (1969) raised the issue of the subjective process of group identification in which people use ethnic labels to define themselves and their interaction with others in his classic book, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, the issue of ethnic identity has moved into the centre stage of social anthropology. Barth's significant contribution was that his subjective perspective on ethnic category made us aware of the problem of the unit, the named ethnic entities which have been accepted. He emphasised the importance of an ascriptive perspective, the perception of the identification by the actors themselves. According to Barth, ethnicity is a continuing ascription which classifies a person in terms of his most general and most inclusive identity. Of great significance in this self-ascription is the maintenance of boundaries:

boundaries (between ethnic groups) which exist in spite of contact and social interaction among groups which explain how the boundary-maintaining mechanisms continue to operate.

However, those situations described by Barth where long-established conventions provide the basis for stable interaction between groups across well-defined ethnic boundaries and ethnic groups only persist as significant units. Barth's notion of boundedness suggests a rather rigid relatively impermeable barrier between one group and another which is easily controlled or maintained. His concept can not explain the possibility of ambivalent ethnic identity under the situation such as people like Akha in a constant process of mobility, closely related with neighbour ethnic groups. After field research among Akha in 1970s, Feingold already noted that 'Ethnicity can no longer be dismissed as a simple, consistent and constant co-occurrence of a given set of linguistic and non-linguistic cultural traits' (Feingold 1976:84). Barth's weak point is that he did not ask the question as to how these perceptions are shaped, instead he assumed that the shared experiences of the members of the group were sufficient and argued on the basis of shared understandings. As Epstein (1978:96) argued, where there is a high degree of cultural hybridisation we need to look more closely at the nature of ethnic identity.

Barth himself did not look closely at the nature of ethnic identity nor did he demonstrate how it was constructed. Nevertheless, a numbers of studies stimulated by Barth have challenged the once prevalent Geertz (1963)'s view of ethnic identity as the affective potency of primordial attachments: a deep-seated need for rooted-ness which gives rise to communal sentiments that generate ethnic groupings. There has been a concentration of interest especially in the

highly multi-ethnic mosaic between mainland Southeast Asia and Southwest China where researches have focused on the ethnic boundaries construction process. As a result, few would now assume that ethnic identity is an inherent bounded phenomenon. It is now the general consensus among anthropologists that what we have to explore is the process by which ethnic identification is symbolically constructed, selected and ascribed through the dialogue between the self-image of a group of people of themselves and other's perceptions.

The issue of ethnic identity has been among the primary foci of past Akha studies in north Thailand. Two key elements have been recognised by previous Akha researchers (Geusau, Feingold, Kammerer, Tooker etc.) as a base for the Akha identity. One is the idea that they are the descendants of a common ancestor figure called Sumio and they claim themselves to be a part of a single lineage based on the Akha Patrilineal name. The other is the idea of cultural coherence centred on Akhazang, 'a coherent, cosmologically-grounded cultural system' (Kammerer 1986:396). The perspective that identity reflects the extent to which particular customs continue to be followed underlies the assumption that the persistence of custom holds the key to the persistence of Akha identity. Thus, the passing of 'traditional' customs is considered as a sign of losing identity.

However, it is theoretically misleading to set the shared common customs as the basis of Akha ethnic identity, because it leads us to conceive Akha as an ethnic category, rigidly persisting with a sets of distinctive self-contained customs, language, religious practice etc. Thus, what I would like to explore here is not which authentic Akha customs have deteriorated or transformed in the process of urban migration. The focus of the argument should not be about essential

attributes but the way in which people claim their identification and justify their group affiliation by manipulating their understanding of such customs. Before critical investigation on the two elements, genealogical identification, 'Sumio' and cultural identification, 'Akhazang', let me clarify the definition of Akha identity in my argument.

2. What does Akha identity mean?

western notion of self vs. socio-centric self

Within the Western intellectual tradition self-identity tends to be conceptualised as an individuated being, separate from both the social and natural world (Harris 1989, Morris 1991). It has been widely described as individuated, separated and self-sufficient, and as involving a dualistic metaphysic. According to Mauss (1979), it is only with the coming of Christianity that the true metaphysical foundations of the person as a moral subject became fully established. Mauss then concludes that the conception of the person as an individuated self, an autonomous human subject, is a notion that has historically developed in the western Christian context.

On the other hand, there are also critiques of such a limited notion of self-concept, the western biased ego-centrism as an identity foundation. Many scholars have stressed that the self is essentially constituted within a social context (Morris 1994:13). The relational perspective is not new. It can be traced back to Durkheim and Marx. Karl Marx wrote in *Die Grundrisse* (1971:77) that 'Society does not consist of individuals; it expresses the sum of connections and relationships in which individuals find themselves' (cited by Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:16). Both Durkheim and Marx see self and

society as co-existent , and dialectically inter-dependent.

As Morris (1994) noted, it is important then to recognise that the term person can be used to refer to three quite distinct conceptions; first, the people as physical (or biological) human beings, second, the person as a social being, third, the person as a psychological individual self, which has been a central topic in the field of western philosophy and psychology. As with ego identity in Erik Erikson's conception, ethnic identity formation also involves the interplay of internal and external variables as these operate within a given social environment. In this regard, Epstein regards a process in which ethnic identity is generated as a psycho-social process (Epstein 1978). My concept of identity needs to be separated from a psychological field ego at a sub-conscious level. It is an essentially socio-centric conception of the self, which situates the individual in a web of social relationships.

Anthropologists have long been attempting to prove that a particular society has a distinctive indigenous notion of self and identity different from the western concept of the person. For example, Geertz stressed the social nature of the person based on an understanding of him in the context of Balinese culture. He recalls that "I have been concerned ...with attempting to determine how the people who live there define themselves as persons, what goes into the idea they have of what a self, Javanese, Balinese, or Moroccan style, is." (Geertz 1993:58) First of all, he sets the western conception of identity aside, then, he observes their experiences within the framework of their own idea of what selfhood is. However, his strategy does not follow the idea of 'native point of view' established by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, that is, imagining himself as someone else, such as a Balinese peasant. Instead, his focus of analysis was

ethnographic interpretation by searching out and analysing the symbolic forms (Geertz 1993:58). When the concern comes to complex issues such as identity, Geertz's hermeneutic approach was appealing to the ethnographers who doubted the idealistic approach that the way to comprehend the people under study is to behave, think and perceive as they do. Geertz searched for meanings-and-symbols by looking for the general form of their identity and the vehicles in which that form is embodied. He sees this intellectual exercise of understanding the representative form of natives' identity as similar to "grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke - or, ..reading a poem" (Geertz 1993:70).

Geertz attempted to diversify the notion of self cross-culturally by arguing against the western notion of self-identity, which defined the self according to a fixed, single meaning. He and his followers' identity discourses are motivated by the critics of western hegemonic notion of self. They aimed to challenge the pervasive western notion of identity by illustrating different sets of identity configurations. For instance, Geertz demonstrated that among the Balinese self-perception changes reflexively depending on the context and power interrelations, and that they define themselves reflexively according to relations with others. Identity has been seen as essentially socio-centric, as oriented towards significant others, and as involving self-development within a social context. Multiple ways of presenting self along the different situations is more important than adhering to a single identity in the face of actual interaction.

In a similar way Tooker pointed out the problems of applying the conventional western notion of identity to the Akha case. She observed that the notion of person in Akha society is a locus of cosmological activities rather than a centre of

self-definition. She demonstrated in her study (1988) that how the person, household and village linked to the Akha world view, in her words, 'orienting schemes'. She conceptualised identity in relation to the Akha cosmic principles, the collective representation of the Akha. Tooker (1992:799-819) believes that switching identities occurs because their ethno-religious identity is not an internalised notion but that differentiation is made purely on the external plane.

Her insight casts doubt on the assumption that persons are necessarily conceived of as a bounded entity with fixed essences. It questions the western biased assumption that an essence at the core of the person is the locus of identity, which exists prior to the person's insertion into a social matrix. Where aspects of identity are thought to be fluid and changeable, social practice of representing own self is significantly different from where the internalised persistent self-identity is stressed. I agree with her idea of conceiving identity not as a concept but as an apparatus. Another important point she had raised was to question the continuity and coherence of the identity which is presumed to be persistent once identity had been established. She noted the discursive and practical nature of identity drawing on the Akha case, and the possibility of switching identities in the course of life.

These contributions challenged the idea common in western social science and philosophy that the person is to be understood as an entity which presupposes some kind of core essence. They demonstrated that the self has little meaning outside social contexts. Identity is the way in which one situates the self in society, a configuration of role obligations with significant others. Since identity is a social product, it can have little meaning outside these respective social contexts. Particularly, in the Southeast Asian context, the Leach

argument that ethnic identity is fluid, subtle and ambiguous was confirmed.

However, while it appears to challenge dominant western knowledge, paradoxically, it actually serves to reproduce the same line of western hegemony of knowledge construction by designating the collective representation of the non-western others. They define, collect and map the cultures different from western one by imposing their formulation of the 'Others'. Of course, no anthropologists any longer use the old idiom of 'primitive', however, it seems that they have not fully abandoned the colonial notion that the indigenous inhabitants are intrinsically different from people in western society. Peoples are thus regarded like species, as the bearers of distinct modes of character, systems of meaning forms of identity.

The critical weak point of interpretative anthropology is that, following the Boasian tradition of cultural relativism, it portrays culture as essentially cognitive in nature and expressed in symbols. They presume that each group of people has an internally ordered distinct mode of identity and that these people reside in a pristine, encapsulated local village community isolated from the contemporary world. By the way of describing the cultural variation of identity, peoples are depicted in a homogeneous, holistic way. In this way, the cultural relativist view reinforces the idea that there are clearly bounded separable cultures attributable to every ethnic group. Thus, two key elements for Akha identity were identified in unitary and essential term. Moreover, ethnographic knowledge enhanced the authenticity and credibility of such essentialised cultures.

As was discussed in the previous section, it is misleading to make a comparative

study between the different cultures as if 'a culture' is a mutually exclusive entity. Such functional ethnographies ignore the fact that peoples under study are connected with the wider world and they are well aware of various socio-political forces which sweep across the categorical boundaries. People who are arbitrarily categorised as 'Akha' exist, but it does not necessarily mean that the Akha identity is primordially attributed to these people naturally and that every Akha shares the same orthodox identity model. We have to challenge the pervasive notion of a single, undisputed and fixed ethnic category as the core of the identity by looking beyond the borders of notionally bounded societies.

In order to go beyond such a collective cultural relativist view which assumes clear-cut cultural boundaries, it is crucial to recognise the variation and contradiction among the people within the same category. Ethnographic collective representations need to be re-examined at the individual level. By focusing at the individual level, we can recognise the internal contradictions and the important fact that none of us has just a single identity as a member of an ethnic group. Each of us carries simultaneously a range of identities, just as each of us occupies a number of status positions and plays a variety of roles in social relations. In this sense there are no clear-cut category between being Akha and being Thai. Ethnic boundaries are overlapping, thus several sets of ascriptive loyalties make for multiple identities. It is possible that they can take both roles simultaneously in daily life. Identity is essentially the result of synthesis. It represents the process by which the person seeks to integrate his various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences. Identity is fundamentally a tool to differentiate oneself from the others in particular contexts. Therefore, the self-images which make up identification are often not rational nor coherent but discursive and contradictory.

Identification had been considered as the process of assigning persons to groups both subjective and objective, by self and others, and whose meaning and shape are subject to change with the contingencies of history and circumstance. There is no single criteria to define membership, but a variety of possible diacritics are provided by the contradictory and competing discourses. The criteria is produced and reproduced in social practice and it varies in different social contexts. In the following sections, I would like to examine such contradictory and competing discourses as to the criteria for Akha identification by demonstrating two key elements — genealogical kinship system and an Akha cultural system, termed Akhazang. My attempt here is not to criticise the validity of Akha identification but to understand how ‘Akha identity’ as a symbolic fiction becomes a substantial reality in the justification process.

3. Genealogical Identification - Sumio

Classic anthropology assumed that people can be classified into mutually exclusive bounded groups according to socio-cultural differences based on putative shared ancestry. An ideology of the commonness of origins has been considered one of the important criteria. One of key element identified as a foundation of Akha identity is a belief that all the Akha are descendants of a single ancestor figure, the first humanbeing, *Sumio*. The Akha patrilineal naming system enables them to trace their own ancestors over fifty generations by a specific way of remembering. This unique patrilineal kinship system especially intrigued ethnographers, and they identified it as a foundation of Akha ethnic identity. Because, through patrilineal descent system, each Akha is bound to other Akha past and present, near and distant, Paul Lewis, an

American missionary who wrote the first extensive ethnographic monograph on the Akha, *Ethnographic Notes on the Akha of Burma* (1969-1970), designated the central theme of the Akha culture as 'desire for continuity' (Lewis and Lewis 1984:10). And the perpetuation of lineage. (Lewis 1969:36, Hanks 1969:7). In this section, some general understandings of the Akha genealogical identification made by previous researchers will be reviewed first in order to examine them against the following contradictory explanations.

The early anthropologists were intrigued by the Akha oral memory of their genealogical system (called 'tsui' in Akha language). The reason the early anthropologists focused on elderly men as their key informants was because the Akha elderly men were able to trace their ancestor's names back to 50 - 80 generations. When Akha repeat their genealogy, they usually begin with their common progenitor's name, *Sumio*. After *Sumio* they continue repeating the names of all of their male ancestors in a direct line, down to the last male to have died. Thus, the Akha was identified as a group of people who considered themselves as descendants of a single figure *Sumio*. Early Akha ethnography say that "Akha believe themselves to be descendants of a single apical ancestor, *Mmang'ah*, below whom there were nine generations of spirits before the first man, *Sumio*, appeared" and that Akhas see life as a perpetuation of a great lineage, because through his or her genealogical name, every Akha is linked to the chain of ancestors stretching to *Sumio*, the first human being of the Akha ancestor. (Lewis 1969:36, Hanks 1969:7)

Contrary to *Akhazang*, Akha way of life, which restricts knowledge to a few experts, this patrilineal system is used equally among all Akha males regardless of personal qualities, place of residence and so forth. Takemura (1981) points

out that the Akha patrilineal naming system includes everyone. The Akha geneological tree has various branches (depending on one's clan), but all Akha are equally part of their own naming systems. It is not a property of the kindred group and used to justify hierarchy as is the case among the Kachin, Lolo and Moso. Thus, Takemura regards the Akha patrilineal naming system as containing the symbolic meanings of self-identification. However, it should be noted that the patrilineal naming system is not unique to the Akha, but is a common system in the region, including Hmong, Chinese etc. (cf. Tapp 1989:171).

Repeating their genealogy is a sacred thing to Akha, and is normally done only at the times of rites of passage, such as marriage, funeral or in a crisis situation. The ones who have gone before are honoured as ancestors. Someday the present generation will join them, at which time generations still unborn will honour and feed them in exchange for help and succour. It is said that Akha will go back to join the ancestor village after death. The path of the ancestors leads through history from China down to Thailand; the path to the ancestors leads after death from Thailand up to China.

Nine times a year offerings are made to the ancestors. Ancestral offerings (*a poe law-eu*) are made by each household. The ancestors are expected to assure the present generation sufficient rice, the main staple foods of the Akha. That is why offering 'holy' rice to the ancestral altar (*a poe paw law*) is important for each household. While some ethnographers are intrigued by sacred symbolic rituals related to rice and ancestors, on the other hand, Alting von Geusau conceives the conduct of nine offerings as ancestor service rather than ancestor worship, because ancestors are not treated like gods. Instead what is valued is the

knowledge and experience they can learn from these ancestors.

The significance of Akha marriage and reproduction can be understood in relation to genealogical continuity. As Lewis noted, what marriage means for the Akha is primarily, "to contribute to the continuation of this eternal lineage. Therefore, the death of a first-born infant is regarded as a threat to the family line and special precautions must be taken. In addition to all of the usual rituals observed at funeral rites, the infant is dressed in white for burial, and all of the clothing is turned inside out"(Lewis 1978:42).

When a son marries, a 'little house' (*nym za*) is built for the couple near the 'main house' (*nym ma*). Only after a couple has had a child of its own, may they request permission to have their own ancestral altar and establish their own household. A ritual is held which culminates in the departing family receiving a part of the ancestral altar for their new home. On the other hand, if there has been no pregnancy in the first a few years of marriage, it is common either for the girl to 'run away' or for the husband to 'send her away'. Then, both of them would remarry rather quickly. Here divorce is considered as a necessity and is rather frequent among the Akha, because the main function of the wife is to provide her husband with offspring. Thus, inability to have children is a serious pressure for Akha, engendering psychological feelings of inadequacy and guilt, especially when there is no male child. When the wife fails to provide a son the husband is entitled to take a 'minor wife' under the agreement with the first wife, or they may adopt a child from other couples if they can afford to. This obsession with having a son results in the high ratio of sons

compared to daughters in China among the Hani nationality.¹

When a father dies and leaves no males in the household, it is known as a 'non-son death' (*Shm byeh*) (Lewis 1969:505). This type of death is greatly feared by the Akha.

When the body of that man is taken out to be buried, the 'ancestral altar' must also be taken out and thrown away in the jungle, since there is no male left to make the appropriate offerings to it. This part of the line has been broken.

When the ancestral altar is discarded in the jungle, the person carrying it says something like this, 'Well, you did not take care of your line. Now it is cut off.

There is no one to make offerings to you.' An informant (male 48) told me that the reason for his Christian conversion was because he did not have a son in the family. He had three daughters but no son. He said, 'It would have been a problem after my death as nobody would take care of my ancestors including myself. But now I have converted to a Christian, I do not have to worry about it. Being a Christian, I can go to heaven even though I do not have a son'.

(The details of Christianization and its implication on identity will be further discussed in Chapter six.)

According to Lewis's ethnography, Akhas believe that the main reason for sterility is adultery on the part of the woman. If she allows some other man to interfere in the process of procreation of her husband's offspring, the ancestors will be angry, and will 'block the channels'. If a woman committed adultery, Akhas will have to perform a ceremony, in which they ask the ancestors to

¹ One child policy means that the preference is to have a son rather than a daughter. Some daughters were not officially recognised and became illegal exploited labour migrants in Burma and Thailand.

forgive her and 'open the channels', because a proper channelled fertility is essential to the order and continuity of both family and community. When the couples with children divorce, children must stay with their father's side. This discourages a mother from divorcing because she may lose her children.

Contradictory discourses and explanations

So far, I looked at the basic idea of Akha genealogical system and its implications. From now on, I would like to examine the validity of this genealogical identification as an Akha collective ethnic identity by looking at the ambiguous and contradictory discourse. Three main points will be identified. I would like to recall, however, that my aim here is not simply to point out the arbitrariness of identification, but to understand the process by which such manipulation of identification is carried out not only by outside forces but also by the people categorised as Akha themselves.

The first problem is the validity of *Sumio* as a single common ancestor of the Akha. The point here is the way of asking the question of the Akha informants. If ethnographers ask them who their common ancestor is, with the assumption that the Akha share a single ancestor, then their answer will be *Sumio*. But if ethnographers ask them who *Sumio* is, then they explain that he is not only the ancestor of the Akha but the ancestor of all human beings. Moreover, the Akha are believed to be but one of many sub-branches from *Sumio*, although this clan identification is not always definite but being manipulated. For example, if a potential couple are from the same clan, they are not supposed to share any common male ancestor for the previous seven generations. Such marriage is not considered desirable, however, even if they do, it is still possible to get married by going through a special ritual to 'separate the sub-clans' (Lewis

1969:313-14). Therefore it is not surprising to find the individuals shifting their clan identification. For example, it is known that a man who participated in the people's congress in Sipsonpanna in 1953 as a representative of Aini nationality shifted his clan from *Djedjo* to *Djeugh'oe* to gain greater prestige. (cf. 民族問題五種叢書1982:100)

The second point is the validity of the people who claim to belong to the Akha genealogical system. In practice, outsiders can become a part of Akha genealogical system by marriage or adoption.¹ For example, when a Lahu or Chinese man marries with an Akha woman, he can become Akha by living in an Akha village after a ceremony. According to Alting von Geusau (a personal conversation), a Dutch anthropologist married with an Akha woman, if they had a son, could attach his name to the Akha genealogical system and start a new clan. In this sense, the Akha genealogical system can be described as 'universalistic' as noted by Feingold (1976:88) because anyone can become a member of the Akha genealogical system by adding his name below that of a specified ancestor, *Tang Pang* and thereby becoming a part of the Akha genealogical links to become an Akha. Thus, it is not surprising to find that some are aware of the Creole nature of their ancestry. For example, an informant, he identified himself as *Akeu Akha* claimed that his ancestor used to be of the Tai speaking people.² Alting von Geusau's also noted this Creole nature of the Akha genealogical system (Alting von Geusau forthcoming³). It seems evident that there are a group of people who now claim themselves as Akha but at the same time they are aware that they used to claim themselves as

² The interview was conducted at an village in Burma near Mae Sai in April 1996.

³ He identified *Akeu-Akha* as descendants of poor, marginalised Yunnanese Chinese, not Tai speaking people.

members of other ethnic groups.

It is said the Akha do not hesitate on ethnic grounds to welcome strangers or adopt children of other tribes (Lewis 1969). The main reason Akhas have for adopting children is to have a son to whom they can hand over their ancestral altar (Hanks 1969:5). When they adopt a child they change his or her name to the patronymic linkage system characteristic of the Tibeto-Burman language, whereby the second syllable in the father's name becomes the first syllable in the name of the child. In this way they can avoid 'non-son death' (*Shm byeh*). If a boy from an other ethnic groups were adopted by the Akha couple, he will be considered as 'Akha', and thus entitled to continue their ancestral altar. Another reason for adopting is to have more workers. In the case of adopting children simply to become servants in the house, the name is not changed.

On the other hand, an Akha can also become a non-Akha by marriage, adoption, or simply by living in a non-Akha village. Some Akhas sell their children to more affluent Akhas, or to other ethnic groups - Lisu, Yao or Yunnanese Chinese. In some cases, the father sells his daughter to raise money, then redeems her after a few years. Those adopted children who grow up among Lisu, Yao or Yunnanese Chinese are considered as 'non-Akha' in spite of the fact that s/he can still speak Akha and both of their natal parents are Akhas.⁴

Marriage for the Akha is to protect the fertility of the genealogical line. However, it does not necessarily mean the line is exclusively related by birth. For example, when a woman is pregnant, she will be urged to get married

⁴ As discussed in Chapter one, this fuzziness of identification made it difficult to identify 'Akha informants' for my study.

because giving a birth without having a husband is not desirable. On that occasion, whether that baby belongs to her husband or not is not a big issue as long as he agrees to the situation. No matter whose baby it actually is, he or she will be treated as a child of that couple, and as such is entitled to continue the patrilineal genealogical line. Hence, it is clear that the Akha genealogical identification is not purely biological but its validity is justified through the ceremonial procedure.

As I mentioned earlier, a relatively high rate of divorce is found among the Akha.⁵ When a woman divorces, she must remarry as soon as possible, preferably within a few days, because as a result of her first marriage she was already cut off from her parents, and therefore no longer a member of her natal family. Likewise, when a woman's husband dies, she will be treated in a similar manner. Very little time normally elapses before her remarriage, especially if she has not reached the age of thirty-five or forty. In any case she must not return to stay with her parents, (strictly speaking, she can visit her parents only up to three nights and then must leave). She has to find a new relationship or new place to live as quickly as possible. In some cases, a new husband might discover that she is already pregnant before coming to him, but this is not necessarily considered undesirable because she can still contribute to the new husband's genealogical line. In some cases, a married woman may have to settle for second best and become a minor wife, though this is something she would prefer not to have to do. Or in other cases, when they refuse an unwanted marriage they may go to the lowland or to the city to look for a job and

⁵ According to Lewis's data in 1974, out of forty six married couples in a village, thirteen had been divorced once, and four had been divorced twice. Moreover, one man, at that time unmarried, had been divorced five times. (Lewis 1978:61)

remain unmarried by choice. (Further details of gender related mobility factors and its implication on identity formation will be discussed in Chapter six.)

It is clear from the evidence above that those who belong to the Akha genealogical lineage system are not exclusively Akha in a sense of being blood relations. In fact, their ancestors also include people from Tai, Chinese, and Lahu ethnic groups. This findings coincide with those gathered by Tapp among the Hmong people. Tapp came across several clans “which had been formed within the previous sixty years, from the marriage of Hmong women with Chinese who had settled in Hmong villages”(Tapp 1989:169). I will leave further discussion of the detailed practice of the inter-ethnic marriage and relations to chapter five. The point here is that the Akha genealogical system is rather flexible, nevertheless, this genealogical system is manipulated as the determining factor of Akha identification.

Under the Chinese ideological prescription of nationality which required that they share four elements of commonality - a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make up that finds expression in a common culture, it was claimed that, commonality of genealogy, a common ancestor figure, *Sumio* was conclusive evidence to put a particular population into the same category. By this logic, the ‘Aini’ nationality, recognised in 1953 was put into the ‘Hani’ category, although ‘Aini’ who reside in the east side around Sipsongpanna area and the ‘Hani’ who reside on the west side around Honghe area differ considerably in terms of language and agricultural practices.

What was interesting to find was that the Akha themselves are well aware of this

ambiguity and manipulation of their patrilineal kinship system. Their explanations chop and change, and so confuses the observer. But this is simply because it is not the solid and cohesive thing that the observer tends to expect, but a fiction which is open to interpretation in order to meet the needs of a particular context. Furthermore, the networks of this system go beyond village-ties and distance, so providing supra-local integration and social links which transcend territorial boundaries as well as ethnic categorical boundaries. For instance, it was found that their networking system was also applied in the urban setting of Chiang Mai. For example, an Akha woman who ran a successful business was supported by all sorts of kinship members derived from her several marriages with Tai, Burmese, Chinese, and Akha together with various adopted children from China, Burma and Thailand. (In all she had married five times.)

4. Cultural identification - Akha zang

Western Anthropologists' discourse on Akhazang

Another key element identified as a foundation of Akha ethnic identity by previous researchers is '*Akhazang*' (Alting von Geusau 1983, Kammerer 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990 Tooker 1988, 1992). This term was first translated by a missionary (Lewis 1969-7, 1989) as 'religion, customs, a way of doing things'. Since Alting von Geusau (1983)'s influential work, '*Dialectics of Akhazang*' Akhazang has been identified as an Akha cultural system, and a foundation of Akha identity. Following that successive ethnographers starting point was to articulate the notion of Akhazang, conceiving of it as symbolising 'Akha culture'.

Initially, their interpretation of Akhazang was developed in a critique of the missionary interpretation of *Akhazang* as 'religion'. Alting von Geusau, a Dutch anthropologist (1983) who was originally himself a catholic priest in Italy, denied that *Akhazang* was a religion in the western sense. He noted the practical and pragmatic nature of *Akhazang* which makes no distinction between the sacred and secular and concludes that it "is an authorised Akha cultural system developed by a succession of sixty-four generations of patrilineal ancestors during their long journey from the Tibetan borderlands into China, Burma and Thailand" (Alting von Geusau 1983:249). Alting von Geusau at the same time pointed to the dynamic nature of *Akhazang* and how it adapted to changing surroundings.

Equally an American anthropologist, Kammerer takes the same view she does "not gloss zang as 'religion'" (Kammerer 1986:67). Instead she understands *zang* as "behavioural rules, including ritual procedures, and as orally transmitted ceremonial texts"(Kammerer 1986:67). She conceives of it as "a Maussian total social fact rather than a discrete institutional realm" (Kammerer 1986:67). Then she identifies it as a customary set of laws including proper and improper behaviour for both ritual and non-ritual contexts. She uses the term law because as Lewis noted, "To be an Akha is to uphold the prescriptions for action which constitute Akha customs" (Lewis 1969-70:24), and Akha also define themselves on the basis of their adherence to a specific set of 'Customs'(Zang). She notes that, "Akha-ness depends upon shared descent from an apical forebear and common Customs inherited from the ancestors" (Kammerer 1986:384). Early British colonial administrators also used the term 'law' to describe the Akhazang in Burma. (Scott and Hardiman 1900:693) Presumably, it was

based on the same reason as Kammerer's understanding.

Another American anthropologist, Tooker, objects to the missionary view of *Zang* as 'religion' because it is not something to 'believe in' as in the western notion, but something to 'carry' by using the verb 'to-eh' in Akha language which can be used as in the phrase 'to carry a load'. Tooker states that "If you do not carry *Akhazang*, you are not permitted to live in an Akha village. If you do not live in an Akha village, you cannot, for the most part, carry *Akhazang*, since the proper structure is not there" (Tooker 1988:38). She identifies the most important thing for Akha identity is *zang*, which means something like 'way of life', 'way of doing things', 'tradition', or 'customs' (Tooker 1988:37-39).

To sum up, therefore, the emerging consensus is that *Akhazang* is not equivalent to the western notion of 'law' or 'religion' but is a symbolic fiction which has become a substantial reality and is regarded as the foundation of Akha identity in the Akha ethnographic discourses. The term 'Akhazang' can not be found in the Akha oral text⁶, but this term and its meaning was constructed through anthropologists' discourses. Those who discard their *Akhazang* are no longer fully Akha in the eyes of anthropologists who search for the symbolic meaning of 'Akhazang'. Such a view point prevented them from working with urban Akha in town, although the urban migration phenomenon had already started in the 1970s.

Discursive discourse at practice levels

⁶ See Lewis and Mah Po Gu Law Gaw 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 李期博 1990, 史軍超 1986, 稻村 1997: 7

While at the ideological collective level, *Akhazang* is a shared property of Akha people, on the other hand at the practice level, this Akha customary knowledge, 'the dense and highly formalised traditional system prescribing the Akha way of life' (Alting von Geusau 1983:249), is inherited and kept only by a few experts called *Pima*. *Akhazang* is not public shared knowledge among the Akha, but is restricted to a few members as private property in the form of memory. Nevertheless, when *Akhazang* is conceived as the Akha cultural system, the *Pima*'s private knowledge is transformed to Akha shared collective knowledge.

✱

The Akha are aware of the fact that their customs vary depending on who the village priest is. When I was taking a detailed note of the procedures of ritual process, they often advised me: 'Remember, if you go to a different village they might practice in a different way'. Inamura (1997) recalls, he was also told by informants during his field work among the Akha in Sipsongpanna that 'You should not expect that all the Akha practise in exactly the same manner, that is why there are so many Akha customs and to understand Akha customs are difficult'. *Akhazang* is carried out within the village unit level. For example, the starting date of an annual ceremony differs between villages. A particular ritual may be performed differently by members of one named lineage compared to members of another. This is one of the reasons why ethnographers adhere to a single village case study to avoid contradiction. In practice, there is no common consensus as to which *Akhazang* is right, 'purest' or 'authentic', no authorised *Akhazang* as such. Nevertheless, today's global forces, such as tourism and preservation of indigenous cultures demands the representation of Akha culture as of one kind. In the process of its standardisation, the variations of *Akhazang* are decontextualised and recorded. (The details of

power politics of this cultural process will be further discussed in Chapter six.)

Finally, it should be noted that the term *Zang* is a general term. A common expression about *zang* is 'Everyone has their own *zang*'.⁷ Akha accept and are tolerant of variations in customs, at either the ethnic or the inter-ethnic level, since they assume that customs at all levels are legitimated in the same manner whatever that is, as long as it were being handed down from generation to generation. Paradoxically, while western anthropologists are mostly agreed that *Akhazang* is not 'religion', the Akha themselves have begun to use the term *Zang* to imply 'religion'. This is particularly so among Christian educated Akha who use the word *Akhazang* to differentiate from *Jesus zang*. They use the verb 'believe' instead of 'carry' to express their religious attachment. Moreover, there is obviously a hierarchical difference when they compare *Akhazang* and *Jesus zang*, the former implies 'backward', 'primitive', 'indigenous' and the latter implies 'civilised', 'advanced', and 'modern'. It is important to note that such implications were not simply forced by outsiders, but applied by the Akha as a means of self-ascriptive identification to differentiate themselves from others. (The details of Christian identity will be further discussed in the Chapter six.)

⁷ See also Tooker 1992:804 for the Akha folk tale about *Zang*

Chapter 5 Akha Mobility and Practice

The previous chapter looked at the arbitrariness of the ethnic category from ideological perspectives, firstly from the political viewpoint as an administrative unit, and secondly from the self-ascriptive aspect. The arbitrariness of the identification of the ethnic category and the contradictory nature of the discourse underpinning it were pointed out. It was not intended to imply that there used to be an 'authentic' 'pure' Akha identity before such manipulation. Instead my aim was to demonstrate that whatever the ideology or discourse indicates, at the practical level there have always been continuous interactions and relationships among the people involved. Following this argument, the objective of this chapter is to explore the fluidity of cultural boundaries in social life from the point of views of mobility and inter-ethnic relations.

The population which is identified as Akha at present are widely scattered along the border areas between Southwest China and Mainland Southeast Asia, extending from the Yunnan province of China to the north through eastern Burma, northern Laos, and north-western Vietnam into northern Thailand. (See figure *Distribution of the Akha population*) Akha do not inhabit a continuous swath of territory, instead their villages are interspersed with those of other ethnic groups such as Lahu, Lisu, Yao, Yunnanese Chinese, Tai Lue and so on. Such a mosaic of ethnic settlements along the border areas between Southwest China and Mainland Southeast Asia has allowed them to experience a complex inter-ethnic relationship with other groups, socially, culturally and politically for centuries. Interaction in every area of life, such as labour exchange, trade activities and mixed-marriage has been constant.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the Akha language has been modified a great deal over time. This is due to the fact that the Akha have migrated through several places and have mixed with other ethnic groups along their migration route. Some vocabulary has been borrowed from other languages such as Chinese, Burmese, and the Tai¹. There are also numerous Lahu and Tai (or Shan in Burma) loan-words and some loan-words from Yunnanese Chinese in Akha language. Not surprisingly, many Akha are multi-lingual. When Akha reside close to other ethnic groups - such as Hmong, Lahu, Lisu, Yunnanese Chinese, or Tai, the Akha are usually able to understand their languages, whereas, these peoples do not seem to learn Akha.² As Bradley noted, perhaps a fifth of the Akha have some knowledge of Lahu (Bradley 1997:113). The result of my semi-structured interview also revealed the fact that most Akha in Chiang Mai have some knowledge of Yunnanese Chinese (Southern Mandarin) and/ or Tai before they move down to the city.

Despite this, my observers seem to assume that the Akha live in near isolation from the rest of the world. In the 1960s, reports on the hill tribes in Thailand identified the Akha as the most isolated of them all. A western missionary, Gordon Young reported that “The Akha represent one of the least-contacted hill tribes, and are among the most backward and primitive people to be found in Thailand today” (Young 1966:8). A western researcher Kickert observed that “the Akhas are content in their comparative isolation” (Kickert 1969:40).

¹ I am using ‘Tai’ here to indicate people and the language spoken along the borderlandShan state of Burma and Sipsongpanna, Yunnan province of China in order to distinguish between Thai as citizenship and Thai as the language of Thailand.

² Some Akha informants explain the Akha’s minority hardship history as the reason for being

In 1970s and 80s some detailed ethnographic research were conducted among the Akha villages. The Akha village was still seen as the basic political and social unit in the Akha life with the individual households being the primary units within it (Lewis 1969-70, Alting von Geusau 1983, Tooker 1988) and each village as a moveable microcosm ordained by customs (Kammerer 1986:385). Although Alting von Geusau, Kammerer and Tooker were aware that Akha customs reflected their relationship with extra-village non-Akha, and Kammerer noted that there were two concepts of territory: each village as a 'moveable microcosm' and each village as situated within a specific geographical sphere that includes more powerful ethnic groups (Kammerer 1986:401). Nevertheless, they all believed that Akha identity was linked to the village, and the village was conceived as the place where the Akha cultural system is perpetuated. Kammerer regarded the village as the basic unit. In her words: "Although some assistance can be expected from neighbours, the strongest expectations arise among close patrilineal kin and affinity. Thus, differential lineage affiliation and dissimilar networks of alliance serve as centrifugal pulls within a village community" (Kammerer 1986:386). The conclusion of their studies pictures the Akha as living in an integrated cosmological order in a unitary community³ because they focused on the individual rural village as their research site, little attention was paid to Akha life beyond the village boundary.⁴

multi-lingua franca.

³ Because the date of the ceremony or the procedure of customs differ from village to village. A detail ethnographic research had to choose one particular village.

⁴ Besides the recognition that each Akha is bound to other Akha villages near and distant, past and present through patrilineal descent and asymmetric alliances. See the detailed discussion in the Chapter 3 section 2.

For this reason I will explore interactions beyond the village boundary and to gather the historical evidence of Akha relations with other groups and social networks. It has to be recognised that inter ethnic relations did not start only in urban settings, but before migration to the cities inter-ethnic relations had already been an essential component of everyday rural existence. In fact, Akha villages had always been intermixed with villages of other ethnic groups. Each village is situated within a specific geographical sphere consisting of relations with neighbouring villages and with more powerful ethnic groups. Today's inter-ethnic relations among the urban Akha should be understood in the historical context of their mobility and tradition of complex interactions with other ethnic groups.

In the first section which deals with the dynamics of the Akha village, I will examine the idea of the Akha village from a 'processual' viewpoint⁵. It will look at the village in dynamic interaction rather than as a self-sufficient cosmologically integrated entity. Firstly, in order to situate the Akha village in the world of interconnectedness, external influences on the village are examined, including those emanating from across the borders. Secondly, internal factors which initiate mobility and the fluid nature of village organisation will be drawn out. Thirdly, political factors which transcend the village unit will be explored. This discussion then will lead into Chapter six, which deals with contested discourses on the concept of the 'village' in relation to its identity, involving the views of academics, development policy, demands of tourism, NGOs etc. in the context of Thailand as a whole.

⁵ 'Processual viewpoint' indicates the complex dynamics in the dimension of time and space. This term implies rejection of the notion of the village as a coherent, self-contained, homogeneous model.

In the second section, inter-ethnic interactions will be explored, particularly with Tai (Dai), Yunnanese Chinese and other ethnic minorities who are categorised as 'hill tribes' by the Thai government. The reason for Akha mobility has often been associated with their life of shifting cultivation, which many Akha practised in the past. As a consequence, irregular individual levels of mobility for social and political reasons — such as trade activities, labour exchange, marriage and removal from the village, have rarely been given proper attention. It is crucial to look at the various individual levels of mobility in order to understand the complex inter-ethnic relations which take place primarily at the collective but at the individual level.

(1) Dynamics of the Akha Village

1. Akha southward mobility

That Akha mobility is tied to the practice of shifting cultivation is well known.⁶ When land is plentiful they prefer to plant in a rotating pattern with an eight to ten years fallow period. When an area becomes overpopulated, they simply move on, either as a family or as a whole village. The commonest reason for mobility is the search for new land. Nutrition is a constant problem. Akha often do not have enough rice to eat, and have to raise other crops such as corn, potatoes, tea etc. both for their own consumption and for sale. Those living near the forest gather other edible plants, fruits and forest products to supplement their diet and

⁶ By its very nature shifting cultivation is considered to be well integrated into the ecology of the

for sale. Without major supplements from labour exchange with near-by villages and the sale of products to them, their agriculture production has never been sufficient to provide them with subsistence (Hanks 1975).

Moving away from oppressive power has also been an integral part of Akha history (cf. Kammerer 1986, Alting von Geusau 1983). Hanks (1984) has called this 'heritage of defeat'. It is well known that the Akha as shifting cultivators relocate their villages in rotation, but also the renewal of the village site may take place because of some unfortunate experience at the existing site (Lewis 1969-70). They used to move their village a few hundred meters away from the old site by saying, "in a fixed setting life is threatened with decay". Although each Akha village has been seen as 'a moveable microcosm' (Kammerer 1986, Tooker 1988), it is not true that the village always moves in its entirety to a completely new site or joins another village. The Akha village is not a permanent solidarity. Frequently, a portion of a village will split off because of overcrowding and/or internal conflict (Lewis 1969-70). Each villager is free to move to a better place, and is not constrained to stay in the same place or with the community. It is common to find that a few households depart and move to another village, or sometimes try to establish a new village of their own. And then villagers from other villages join in to form a new settlement. Sometimes, these can be very small, may be as few as only four households. Not all the Akha necessarily live in an established village, called *Phu* in Akha language, where anthropological single village case studies have been usually conducted. The dynamic nature of the Akha village mobility as a continuous process by which small units grow into larger ones and the larger units dissolve into smaller ones is critical to understanding Akha dynamic

natural environment. However, it can only support low densities of population.

mobility. Through such a process, Akha villages have been interspersed in an extended region from Southwest of China to mainland Southeast Asia.⁷

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Muslim rebellion (1855-1873) affected the whole of southern China, and large numbers of the Akha together with other ethnic groups in this area, such as Lahu, Hmong, Dai, and Yunnanese Chinese migrated southward across the border into the Shan state in Burma and then into the northern part of Thailand (cf. Forbes 1987, Hill 1983:125, Dellinger 1969:108). "By migrating southward in Yunnan through the early nineteenth century, Akha kept a step or two ahead of imperial Chinese armies. In the Shan states they seem to have lived without confrontation, at least from the 1850s when they helped repel the Siamese attacks on Kengtung (Scott and Hardiman 1900-1: 591 cited by Hanks 1984:96)." And ever since, there has been a constant flow of people from China into Burma, some then penetrating into Thailand. On the basis of genealogies and oral histories, Alting von Geusau claimed that the first Akha settlement inside the Thai border was probably found in 1903 (Alting 1983:246)⁸. This accords with the report of Davies (1909:362), an early Western observer of highlanders in Yunnan, who asserted that as of 1909 there were "A-k'as[Akha] stretching down even into northern Siam [Thailand]" (Kammerer 1986:73). As of 1924 Graham (1924:143) estimates that not more than two thousand Akha resided in

⁷ It is believed that the Akha had their own independent kingdom around the source of the Tai-Hua-Sui River in Tibet and were pushed down by other ethnic groups to settle in the mountainous area in the northwest and southwest of Yunnan province in China. This accords with the linguistic assumption that Tibetan-Burmese speakers moved into southwest China from the area to the north, now Szechwan and Kansu Provinces (Alting 1983:245).

⁸ An Akha headman from Paya Phai Kao claims that his village has been there since 1887, when the Akha refugees arrived in Thailand and joined the Akha settlements already there. (Anderson

Thailand's northern hills.

After the Chinese Communists occupied Yunnan Province in 1949, a great flood of hill people came down into Keng Tung State in Burma. As already noted in Chapter four, although ideological minority nationality policies existed, what they had to face in reality was the imperious interference from the Chinese communist army and the frequent robbery of the Kuomintang army. In order to escape from such insecure conditions and the battle between the two armies, many of Akha moved further down to Laos and Thailand. Some escapees stopped their journey near Mt. Loimi (at the foot of which is Ken Tung) where a large populations of Akha people are found to this day. Some of the Akhas stopped and settled in northern Laos, while some of them reached Thailand. Despite the efflux to Thailand, Burma's Akha population remains large not only because of natural growth, but also because of continuous population influx from China.

At the same time the Akha population in Thailand has rapidly increased. Small communities of Akha were already living in Thailand before these migration movements. The size of the settlements varied from anything from four households to one hundred households. Some of the Akha refugees joined other ethnic groups such as Lahu, Lisu, Hmong and Cin-Haw (Yunnanese Chinese).⁹ It is important to note that contrary to the stereotypical Akha village where membership consists only of Akha, in fact many Akha live in mixed villages. Although anthropologists usually avoid mixed villages for their case

1993:30)

⁹ There are quite a few Akha in Chiang Mai who can speak various languages because of close affiliations when they were growing up. In some cases, they were adopted by the other ethnic

study, the number of such heterogeneous types of village needs to be recognised (I will come back to this point later).

Although population censuses are not entirely accurate on account of the constant illegal cross-border movements of the population as well as the ambiguity of Akha identification, it shows a general trend towards population increase. Three surveys of the ethnic groups living north of the Kok River in Chiang Rai Province were made by Lucien M. Jane R. Hanks in 1964, and 1974. According to a survey in 1964, the predominant Akha tribe had fifty villages (Hanks 1984). Over a ten year period (1964-1974) the Akha population in the area investigated by Hanks et al. increased from 6,196 to 10,547 (Hanks 1975:85). As of mid 1977, there were about 14,000 Akhas living in some 117 villages in Thailand (Lewis:1978). A 1979 census places the population at 18,863 in 136 villages in Thailand's northern provinces of Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Lampang, and Phrae (Sanit and Lewis 1979:50). As of mid-1983, Lewis and Lewis judged the population to have increased to 24,000 (Lewis 1984). The latest Thai official census (1995) counted the total Akha population in Thailand as 49,903 living in 256 villages.¹⁰

On account of the government's administrative requirements and because of land shortage, Akha are no longer allowed to move around. They are forced to stay in a given area, and to be affiliated with a village, an administrative unit. This means they are no longer able to escape the problems of external political forces, disease, crop failures, or population increase by moving on. To have to remain

groups.

¹⁰ Alting von Geusau, a Dutch anthropologist specialise in the Akha, estimated (1997) that the Akha population in Thailand is 70,000 (60,000 resides in the villages, 10,000 do not)

in the same place is a radical change for the Akha, because Akha life traditionally has been one of constant moving and relocating. In the past mobility was their one solution to the problem of pressure, but now, they find themselves with no place to move in the hills, consequently, they tend to migrate to the lowlands. This movement is accelerated by displacement though lowland Thai moving up into the highland homeland, and by reforestation projects which squeeze them out of the hill forest area. Thus, today as in the past, they are influenced in their mobility by the politico-economic pressures of more powerful neighbours.

2. The Porous Nature of the Akha Village

It is important to appreciate that mobility takes place not only at the collective level, but also at the individual level. The focus on the individual level is crucial to get beyond the assumption that all the population categorised as Akha share the same mobility experience. Various individual factors such as gender, age and power differences may produce diverse patterns of movement. Here, the reason for moving out of the village due to internal politico-economic struggles and the porous nature of village membership will be addressed. A study of such practice will help to illuminate the current patterns of trans-national mobility, which will be followed up in the following section.

This section also questions the assumption that the Akha village can be treated a self-sufficient coherent whole. Similar to the question related over the idea of a shared 'culture' as the unit of study, I question the idea of the 'village' as the unit of study, and the boundaries of the 'village' as a definer of the social unit. My view, following the argument in Chapter Two, is that anthropologists' quest for the cohesive cultural or social system leads them to the false conception of the

village as a culturally or socially integrated whole, and induces them to interpret their findings in ways that the village as a functional totality. As I have mentioned earlier in the methodology section of Chapter One, I myself also looked for my own 'appropriate' case study village. But during the process of selecting the village, I came to question my own assumption of the Akha village as an distinct social unit, and the concomitant idea that it was a clear-cut territorial unit,— an integrated cosmological entity, as been suggested in previous ethnographic writings.

The period I started my fieldwork coincided with the epoch-making economic boom in Thailand, hence which induced a constant in-flow of people at the border. The economic boom of that time was supported by influxes of cheap Burmese migrant labour coming in illegally. This phenomenon enabled me to observe the way individuals or households move and settle down in the new places and the way the established village welcomes the newcomer.

The notion of the village is critically important not only in terms of methodology but also in terms of theory. If there is no grand concept of the village as an integrated consistent entity, there is also no explanatory logical spatial locality which one can reliably identify as a foundation of identity. The theoretical concept of the village community as a functional, coherent totality seems no longer to have much plausibility. My challenge is to conceive the village not as a cohesive movable microcosm, but as a transforming, fluid entity with no distinct boundary.

My field study led me to deal with the village as a porous unit with a fluctuating and changing composition. In contrast with ethnographic descriptions on the

Akha village as a solid, self-contained, eternal phenomenon (cf. Lewis 1969-70, Kammerer 1986, Tooker 1988), in reality, the composition of the Akha village frequently changes. Villagers are not constrained to stay in the same village but may depart to look for work or a better place to settle. When I asked newcomers to the village the reason why they had moved in, often the answer was, "more people in this village, more fun and lively". It seems that their preference is living in more populous villages. Often they had already been to the village on some kind of errand or as traders, or when visiting relatives or attending marriage ceremonies or on a courtship trip.

When Akha boys reach adolescence, they are encouraged to travel to gain experience and to help them to grow-up. A courtship trip during the dry season after harvesting used to be a common practice. Although this trip, *Mida ga i-eu*, literally mean 'a trip to look for a wife' (*Mida* single women *ga* to look for *i-eu* to travel), it was also considered as a opportunity to learn social courtesy and the knowledge to help them become adult males. Such trips usually consist of a group (the least 3, the most 8) of boys between 14 - 22 years old accompanied by a married man (between 30 -40 years old) from the same village. The trip normally lasts 3 - 10 days and involves visiting different villages.

After coming back from these trips, if they prefer somewhere else to their own village, they talk about it within the household and as a result agree to move elsewhere. When this happens normally they would be welcomed by the headman unless they were a thief or a criminal when they would be refused entry. Because more populous village headman tend to gain more respect, a headman prides himself on the increasing number of households in his village. A charismatic character is often attributed to a well known big village headman, and

the villagers will follow him by his personal qualities. It might be argued that this role resembles that of kingship in the pre-nation-state, where there is no clearly demarcated territory, and “borders [are] porous and indistinct, and sovereignties fade imperceptibly into one another” (Anderson 1991:19). When the number in the village dwindles this is seen as reflections of the decline of the headman’s power and sometimes is regarded as a loss of face. And so in a sense the power of the headman is contingent on the mobility of the villagers.

On the other hand, however, an overcrowded village can be problematic. When a conflict among the villagers arises, they tend to avoid heated arguments simply by leaving. They would say, “different people have different ways of doing things, it is natural that people will disagree with each other. We go this way, and they can go another way.” Normally, households with deviant idea will find it best to depart to a new village or else to form a village of their own rather than enter into a confrontation.. In this way, peaceful relationships between original village and new village can be kept without having much tension. And they can grow a new settlement by welcoming new comers from other villages.

In this process of enlarging and sub-dividing villages, it is not surprising that some villages become inter-ethnic. Some Akha villagers start living in villages of other ethnic groups and vice versa some other ethnic groups live in the Akha villages. Some households have not much choice but to move for survival, whilst other households can afford to move for social advancement. In this sense, spatial mobility is associated with the individual’s social advancement today as in the past. By focusing on this porous membership, one can see that the ‘village’ not only functions as a means of encapsulating its membership but

also as a means of linking different villages and even transcending the boundaries of the 'ethnic category'.

3. Supra village political power

Another thing that made me sceptical about conceiving the village as the ultimate unit and microcosm of Akha society is the existence of political integration above the village level. Recent detailed ethnographic studies of Akha in Burma and Thailand (Lewis 1969-70, Alting von Geusau 1983) provides evidence of supra-village political organisation only at the level of legend. For example, Lewis (1969-70:117-8) reports that according to Akha legend "Jaw Bah" the great ruler appointed the nine successors of the original village founder-leaders; elsewhere he reports that "Jaw Bah" was himself one of nine. On the other hand, Alting von Geusau (1983:261) noted that "He was like a 'king'". Although "Jaw Bah" was acknowledged by the Akha as a ruler, present-day village founder-leaders are successors to those who, according to this well-known tale, revolted against his unjust rule. Then, both authors concluded that this ruler was slain with a crossbow by one of the original Village Founder-Leaders because he oppressed his subjects (Alting 1983:261; Lewis 1969-70:40-44). Because there was no indication of supra-village political power in their field site, they identified the Akha political organisation as being 'egalitarian' (Alting von Geusau 1983, Kammerer 1986). However, Tooker (1988) notes that a supra-village political organisation could be found among the Akha in Laos in the 1920s (Roux and Tran 1954). "Roux was a French commandant of the 5e Territoire at Phong-Saly. He claims that the Nu Quay Akha who lived close to Phong-Saly, had a supra-village head called *sam-p'a* who operated separately from the French and Laotian administrative systems. Serious offences that could not be decided at

the level of village by the *cho-ma (dzoma)* or village council of elders were brought to him. In addition, he collected corvee and taxes, and could call a meeting of *cho-ma (dzoma)* from different villages. He also apparently appointed the *cho-ma (dzoma)* with the consent of the villagers. There was a separate figure at the village level called *nang-o* who dealt with the French and Laotian administration. The term *sam-p'a* as cited by Roux and Tran comes from the term for Shan princes (*saohpa* - See Leach 1954:34) and is related to the Thai terms *cao* ('lord') and *caofa* ('lord of the sky')" (Tooker 1988:13-14).

In her field site, Tooker observes the similarity⁴ of 'village schematic replication' between Akha and lowland Thai. Her focus in her Ph.D. study is to demonstrate the collective representation patterns which reflect spatial, hierarchical and value orientation of the Akha. She interprets this centre-oriented (as opposed to bounded) spatialisation of power as follows (Tooker 1988:40);

m (sky)

mitsha (earth)

mixhang (country, region)

phu (village)

pha (patrilineal 'sub-lineage', the exogamous unit)

zoq (household, family)

Her findings accord with my observation of the Akha in Sipsongpanna in a sense that they share the similarity with the Tai ethnic group because they had an established affiliation with the Tai-Lue. They acknowledge '*Jaw Ba*' as the supra village leader of the Akha, and whose title was hereditary appointed by the chief of the Tai Lue. It seems that although an egalitarian ethos did exist in the

village, people were aware of being a part of a hierarchical system under the control of a more powerful group. Inamura (1995:133) also notes from his fieldwork among the Akha in Sipsongpanna that “ They recognised the two different types of village headman, one is called ‘*Jaw-Ba*’ who is the lowest rank of the Tai-Lue hierarchical system, the other is called ‘*Dzoe-ma*’ who is believed to be a head of the Akha egalitarian village system.”

By looking at the similarities between the Akha and lowland Tai in terms of orienting schemes, named ‘galactic polity’ by Tambiah, Tooker claims that, contrary to the findings of previous researchers, and in sharp contradiction to their way of viewing the Akha political organisation, Akha cosmic polity is hierarchical. She made an interesting contribution by applying the model of ‘Mandala polity’ which used to define the polity of lowland dominant political groups in Southeast Asia into upland ‘periphery’ people. An interesting point she made is that she looked at a village not as fixed territory but as an ‘orienting scheme’ for tapping cosmic potency which is “manipulable, and certainly not tied to notions of territory” (Tooker 1996:353). In this way, she opens up the possibility of shifting the boundary of the village. Another important point she makes is by looking at the Akha village not as a self-sufficient relatively egalitarian society, but as a product of interrelationship with other societies, and as part of a larger political-economic system.

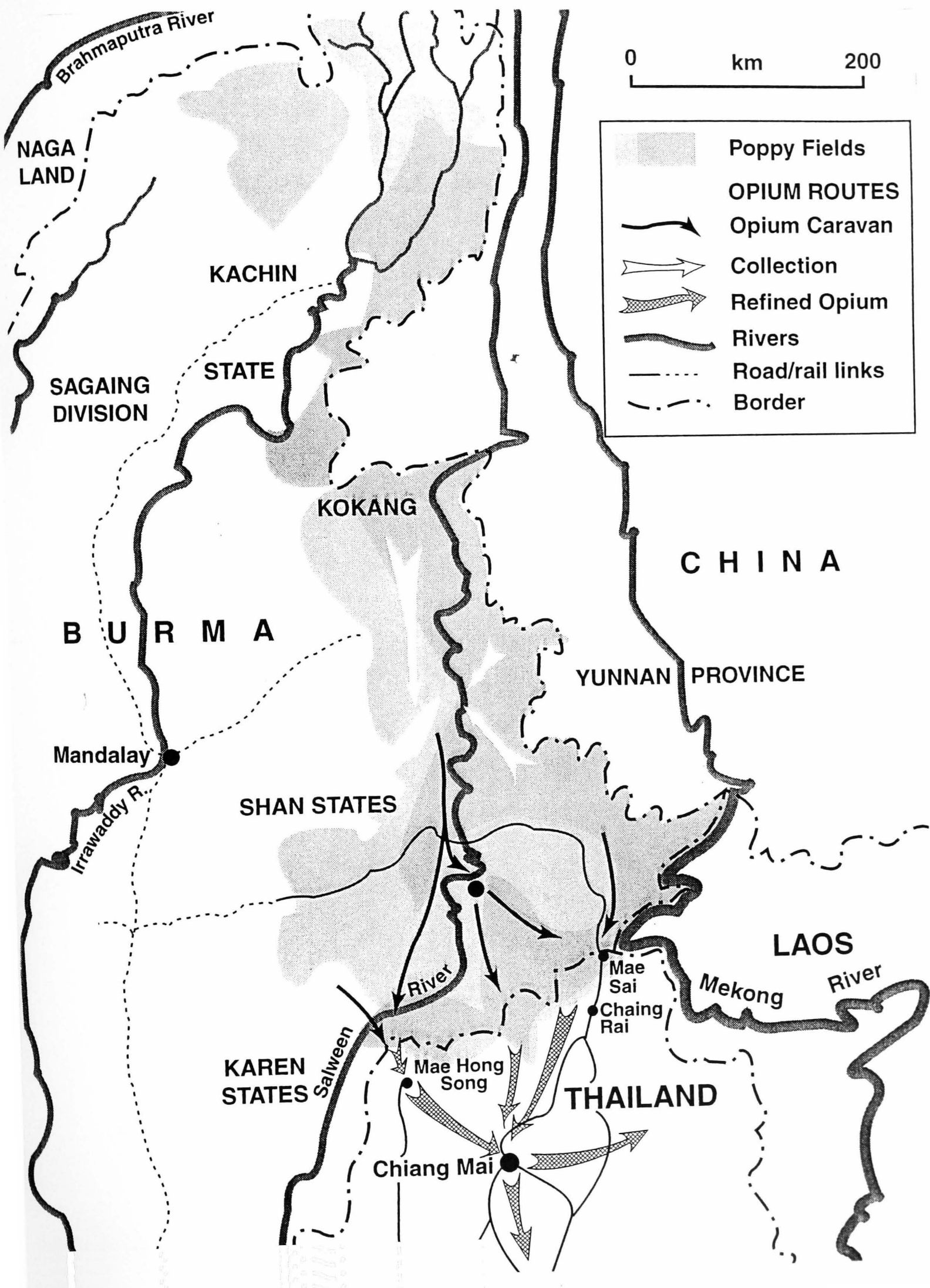
Tooker acknowledges a link between Tai and the Akha in terms of the set of spatial codes of the hierarchical scheme, and suggests the three dimensions of the contextual frame — the village, the household and the individual — to “provide a more complex understanding of indigenous conceptions than what had previously been offered in interpretative and structural approaches which

emphasise the symbolic meaning of the signs based on a single cultural system” (Tooker 1996:353). Her aim was to portray a symbolic interpretation of such spatial coding in the case of Akha society, by disclaiming the conventional ‘centre vs. periphery’ framework. And she contested the evolutionist approach with its simple linearity — kin-based to more complex functionally differentiated society. In her words, “the Akha are not just a rung of replication of the sacred center of the kingdom, as would be expected in a standard Mandala model of polity,” (Tooker 1996:352) but “hierarchy is embedded just as much in their ritual space as it is in that of the lowland polities” (Tooker 1996:350). Thus, in her endeavour to systematically demonstrate the Akha symbolic model of spatial power, she draw both Akha and Thai society as if a concrete whole by focusing on the ‘similarity’ instead of the ‘difference’. She had the same assumption as the previous anthropologists had, that is, each ethnic group possess distinctive ‘cosmological order’. Her study was based on the idea that the Akha as a geographical, political, religious and ethnic entity exists. But while she acknowledges the interaction among the different ethnic groups she does not fundamentally question the ethnic category itself. Therefore, her discourse led to the conclusion that the village is the domain where the order of Akhazang is maintained and the Akha purity of its identity is perpetuated. She conceived ‘village’ where Akha identity is linked to, by saying, “If you do not live in an Akha village, you cannot, for the most part, ‘carry’ zang” (Tooker 1988:38). When she conducted her fieldwork (1982-85), the urban migration phenomenon was already recognisable, and many Akha no longer lived in the ‘traditional’ village, nevertheless, she confined her discussion of the Akha identity only to those who remained part of village life.

The challenge of my study is to question the underlying presumption that each

society (often classified by ethnic category) possesses a uniquely distinctive model of a cultural system or a spatial cosmological order and that 'village' is the place to observe such a model. From my point of view, I regard the similarities of the polity of the highland Akha and lowland Thai as evidence of historical interactions between the two and dynamic development. Thus, I conceptualised the 'village' not an entity but a process. Therefore, what we have to try to do is not to make sense of the order of such an entity by making comparison between the western and non-western (or between the dominant and the periphery), claiming either 'differences' or the 'similarities', but instead, to examine the process whereby such a notion of the 'village' is constructed and reconstructed through discursive power and discourses involving academics, media, development policy and tourist demands. It is through such discourses that the meaning of 'Akha village' in association with 'Akha identity' is created, and gains substance just like 'Akha culture' in association with 'Akha identity' does. The details of the contested discourse on Thailand's 'village community' will be further explored in Chapter Six.

Map 4 Cross Border Trade Routes (made by Noel Mitchel)



(2) Social Networks beyond the Akha Ethnic Boundaries

Following on from the previous section which pointed out the porous nature of Akha ethnic boundaries from the geographical perspective, this section will further explore the porous nature of Akha ethnic boundaries by looking at their experience of inter-ethnic interaction, historically and now. The Akha are known for not possessing an indigenous writing script, nonetheless, an extended body of oral myths and poems has been highly developed (cf. Hanson 1983, 1997 and Alting von Geusau 1983). These oral texts which are transmitted by *Phima* who are trained to specialise in remembering the heritage, intrigued anthropologists because they were considered as basic to Akha integration and unity in spite of being intermingled with other ethnic groups for centuries (cf. Alting von Geusau 1983, Kammerer 1996, Tooker 1988). However, following my theoretical argument, what I am going to pay attention to here is not the historically persistent integrity of Akha cultural system, nor the Akha's distinctive historical record, but the way in which they have interacted with other ethnic groups, how they conceived their difference and power relation with others and the way in which individuals transfer their ethnic affiliation. My intention is not to assess the factual validity of these texts. Instead I look upon these 'oral texts' as discourses among the Akha, shedding light on how they understand themselves, their history, their basic attitudes towards the other ethnic groups and their perceptions of power differences between groups.

With reference to migration history, two main 'oral texts' were translated by Shi Junchao (史軍超 1986) from the Hani at the Hongue county, by Ahai and Liuquia (阿海 1992) from the Aini at the Sipsongpanna area. These texts

contain the Akha's historical experience of socio-cultural relations with other ethnic groups acquired during migrations. Although the texts also refer to Mon-Khmer people and others, in this section I will have to limit myself to the group of people with direct relevance to my case study, that is, Tai (Dai), Yunnanese Chinese and other ethnic minorities who are classified as 'hilltribes' by the Thai government.

In order to study the way in which individuals change their ethnic affiliation, the importance of paying attention to the almost-random nature of individual mobility as opposed to patterned collective movements⁴ was pointed out in the previous section. Developing this, various factors affecting individual mobility, such as trade activities, labour exchange, inter ethnic marriages will now be investigated.

1. Relations with the Dai (Tai) through Polity

Tai speaking people are called '*Bitsm*' or '*Atsm*' in Akha and are most frequently mentioned in the Akha oral texts. They have lived in close proximity to Akha settlements either in Yunnan province, China, Shan State, Burma or north Thailand in the past as well as at present. According to Alting von Geusau (1983), the Akha claim to have been the original inhabitants of the villages of Sipsongpanna but were displaced by the Tai Lue. Chinese oral texts (史軍超 1986) also mentioned that, '*Bitsm*' came up to the fertile land where Akha people used to live and occupied the land which led to armed confrontation. Because the Akha lost the war they had to move further into the mountains. Since then the Akha have been confined to the hills whereas Tai speaking people occupy the better lowlands. As, Alting von Geusau (1983) put it the Tai speaking people

are “the main immediate cause of marginalization into the mountains and resulted in the development of a discourse of dichotomy between the upper slope Akha and down slope Tai speaking people in the oral texts. Alting von Geusau (1983) further mentioned that when some Tai Lue were themselves displaced by Han, they took refuge among the Akha and attached themselves as a part of the Akha patrilineal lineage so as to join Akha society. The following oral text translated by Hansson (1997:148) revealed the close association between Akha and Tai speaking people and indicates their inter-ethnic marriage;

I didn't see the eagle which grabbed the chicken

I didn't see it perch on a branch high up in a tree upstream

but I know that a big chicken has disappeared from below the Shan house

I didn't see the tiger dragging the buffalo away

I didn't see it roaming on the outskirts of the Shan house

but I know that a buffalo cow with long horns has disappeared from the front of the Shan house

My Shan friends on the lowland, I will call on them for a meal

I am not leaving the Shans down slope

but leaving the first girl I have loved

she is beautiful like the spotted neck dove

I am not leaving the Araw people up slope

but leaving the last girl I have loved, soft like a cicada

A girl who wants to get married where she can live comfortably

*a girl who wants to get married with a Shan down slope
you will get carried away by the river (and get drowned if you marry
a Shan)*

For hundreds of years, Tai speaking people ruled Sipsongpanna, Yunnan Province where the Akha in Burma and Thailand originally come from. The population called Akha in Sipsongpanna was under the control of Tai Lue Kingdom (cf. 稻村 1996:11, 阿海 1992). There was a strict hierarchy of social class in this Kingdom. "Sipsongpanna was divided into thirty Meng (an administrative unit, analogous to a district), with 2,000 to 3,000 households (more than 10,000 people) in each Meng. The ruler of the Meng was called a Zhaomeng" (Cai Kui 1997:162-163, Yunnan Institute of History 1983). The king of the Tai Lue gave a title to the chief of other ethnic groups under his control, following the Chinese idea that 'the Barbarians in the frontier areas were better ruled by the Barbarians themselves'. Thus, as was discussed in the previous section it is not surprising to find that the Akha power configuration principle resembles that of the Tai valley chiefdom. Moreover, it is interesting to find that some of the early western explorers (cf. Carer 1899, Garnier 1885) classified the Akha with Shan.

The chief, called 車羅 (che-luo)¹, received the title chief from the ruler of Tai Lue Kingdom and control over the area where the 'Aini' reside in Sipsongpanna. The hereditary title lasted for nine generations until the 1950s (cf. 民族問題五

¹ It is said that although he claims himself to be a Djeugh'oe subgroup, the largest clan, in fact, he was from Djedjo subgroup, the second largest clan. No matter whatever the fact is, what is interesting here is that we can observe another identification manipulation due to gain the prestige.

種叢書 1982:100, 楊忠明 1992:64). It is said that when the Sipsongpanna autonomous county was officially approved by the Chinese Communist government in 1953, 車羅 (che-luo) participated in the People Congress as a representative of 'Aini' (Mosley 1973:66, 稻村 1996:11). As was discussed in Chapter four, because the Chinese state wanted to bring the province of Yunnan more firmly under central control, thousands of Han Chinese were brought into Sipsongpanna from other parts of China. As a result the Tai speaking population went from being a strong majority to a minority of the total population in Sipsongpanna by the late 1950s. At present, among fourteen minority ethnic groups (nationality) Dai² (Tai speaking group) are the largest ethnic group, comprising one third of the total population in Sipsongpanna and another one third of the total population are Han Chinese settlers.

One of the Akha ceremonies which makes offerings to the owners of the land and the water is called *Misang Laweu* in Akha. According to Alting (1983:251) this performance indicates the Akha acknowledgement of the dominant valley-dwellers' control over the land. Lewis (1969-70:256-257) reports that Akha in Burma acknowledge that this rite was borrowed from the Shan some two generations ago. Kammerer (1986:400) also noted that "features of the ceremony are similar to two Shan rituals: the rite for spirits of valleys and hill fields, and the rite for the ruler of the country. Elements of the offering to Lords of Land and Water such as popped rice, burning candles, and white umbrellas are clearly Shan (-Buddhist)". An informant (male 56) in Shan state in Burma explained to me why this ceremony is conducted in the Tai way, including *awai*. According to him it is said that if they entered a particular

² The term, 'Dai' is officially used to indicate Tai speaking ethnic group in China.

territory, for example where Shan used to live, then the spirits of the land know the Shan language better than they know Akha, thus it is more reasonable to do the offering in the Shan rather than the Akha way. This demonstrates an interesting instance of the porous nature of ethnic boundaries between the Akha and Tai speaking people. Although, the Akha ethnographers might describe this as an Akha ceremony, it is not something purely 'authentic' Akha but a product of long established interactions with the other group of people around them.

This porous nature of memberships occurs not only between Akha and Tai speaking peoples, but also between Tai speaking people and the Chinese. For example, Hill (1982) documents cases of Shan (Tai speaking people) in the Tengchong area of Burma who consistently adopted Chinese surnames and burial practices from the sixteenth century onward. Particularly when the 'tu-si' system was established at the periphery of China including Sipsongpanna, China during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, through the medium of the 'tu-si' system, Tai speaking local administrators adopted Han surnames and received their official titles from the Imperial court. As mentioned earlier (in Chapter four, section one), a new system called '*gaitu guiliu*' replaced the 'tu-si' system whereby Han officials were appointed to control the local minority elite. Consequently, Sinicisation resulted in the border area, with increasing inter-ethnic marriages between local women (both Tai speaking people and Akha) and Han officials. After some generations of inter-ethnic marriages, it is difficult to distinguish who is local and who is Han Chinese, particularly because, as I mentioned earlier, distinctions between Han Chinese and non-Han Chinese were not products of birth but centred on their core values, thus were transferable. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that

some of the Han Chinese origins might claim to be local, and on the other hand some of local origin might claim to be Han Chinese. This ambiguous nature of ethnic identification existed up until 1949. And why it was a problem when people were required to identify themselves with a clear label based on the ideology of 民族 (min-zu) after the formation of the People's Republic of China.

The Shan state of Burma where the majority of the population is Shan (Tai speaking people) had close links with Sipsongpanna geographically and historically. Thus it was interesting to observe during my field work that the Akha in Shan state had much closer relations with Tai speaking people through inter-ethnic marriage and adoptions than was the case in Thailand. The ambiguous nature of ethnic boundaries between them was fortified by sharing dates back to their shared experiences during the southward migration from China. Consequently, many Akha informants from Burma could speak Tai and were familiar with Tai customs before coming down to Thailand. This regional context is an important element to be taken into consideration for understanding the adaptation process of the Akha in Chiang Mai. The process becomes complex because Tai (implies Tai speaking people) and Thai (implies Thai nation state) do not necessarily coincide. Thus, in the following case study I use the word, 'Tai' to refer to any people who speak a language belonging to the Tai family, instead of 'Thai' which refers to the people designated citizens of the modern Thai nation state. This regional background and its implications will lead into the further discussion on the way Tai identities in Thailand are manipulated.

Case Study: Tai Identity

(female, 33)

Born in Keng Tung Burma, this informant lost her father when she was a baby. She was the fifth child in a family of fifteen brothers and sisters. Because of their poverty, at the age of 10 she was adopted by a Yunnanese Chinese family, which meant she had to work for them as a housemaid free of charge. She was unhappy with her situation and ran away after a few years. Then she found a job making dolls. She was one of four young girls employed by a Tai Lue family. They were provided with food and accommodation. In return, the girls did housework in addition to doll making. She thought that the Tai Lue manager was a gentle person as he sometimes provided them with clothes. However, "life was very dull and their wage was extremely low." So, at the age of 17, with her friends she crossed the border to look for a better job in Thailand.

At first she stayed in Mae Sai for four years. She tried various jobs; selling drinks on the street, washing and ironing clothes, selling miscellaneous goods in a shop, making handicrafts. Thanks to her language ability - being able to speak Tai-Lue which is similar to the northern Thai dialect and Yunnanese Chinese, she could manage to find jobs without being badly exploited. This contrasts with other young Akha women born in Thailand but unable to speak Thai who are often cheated by harsh employment agencies which look for unworldly young girls. It is interesting to note that she felt uneasy at being categorised as 'Chao Khao (Hill tribes) in Thai society, because in her understanding, her parents and probably her grandparents were also born in Keng Tung, the urban centre of Shan state, Burma. Thus, she had never

associated herself with 'mountain' people but felt much closer to the lowland Shan (Tai speaking people).

She worked from 5 a.m. till 12:30 p.m. every day for four years. She only had a few clothes, but tried to accumulate as much money as possible because she had a dream of having her own handicraft shop in Chiang Mai. She recalls that she was able to endure such a tough life because she had no place to go back to. In 1984, she came to Chiang Mai, and opened a stall selling handicrafts at the night bazaar. Some Tai Lue friends helped her to find Tai Lue antique handicrafts from Laos. As the tourist industry in Chiang Mai expanded in the mid 1980s her business prospered.

Her working partner, a northern Thai man (35), claims that his grandparents are Tai Lue from Burma. He worked in Bangkok for three years, but came back to stay in Chiang Mai, where he felt much more at home speaking in the northern Thai dialect. Indeed their common language is a northern Thai dialect. Although, her real mother tongue is Akha, after she left her family she has been using Tai Lue language so much that she thinks 'it is also my mother tongue'. In spite of the fact that many of the Lomi Akha from Burma are Christian, in her case, due to her experience of staying with a Tai Lue family, she is more familiar with Northern Thai Buddhism, Yuan cult.³ This familiarity with Tai language and religion helped her to accommodate to life in Chiang Mai.

As the service industry developed in the 1990s in Thailand, the number of

³ The Northern Thai experienced little direct influence from the Siamese court of Bangkok until nearly the end of 19th century. The local version of Theravada Buddhism, Yuan cult is found among Tai-speaking peoples in Shan state in Burma, northern Laos, southern China and northern

domestic tourists has increased. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand in Chiang Mai the number of tourists in Northern Thailand in 1994 was 865,144 foreigners and 1,321,164 Thai. As tourist related investment was encouraged, Bangkok financial capital encroached into the tourist industries in Chiang Mai. In consequence, local small scale tourist businesses were squeezed. Both my informant and her northern Thai partner complained, "Bangkok people are rich but arrogant. They built a big shopping complex. Now the tourists like to buy things from there. They do not buy from us any longer. Moreover, they tried to remove our shops for their own sake." In this situation, 'our' indicates the local small scale traders including both hilltribes and northern Thai in opposition to Bangkok central forces.

2. Relations with the Chinese⁴ through Trade

Interactive relations between different groups of people occurred not only through the political administrative system, but also through day-to-day trade and commerce. Trade and commerce elucidates the actual dimensions of cross-ethnic relations within the ethnic mosaic of this region. Nevertheless previous researchers tended to view the Akha as subsistence farmers⁵, and the ideology

Thailand. (Keyes 1971:552)

⁴ The nationalist rhetoric of the People's Republic of China relates 'Han Chinese' to the people whose history and traditions can be traced back to the Han dynasty (BC202 - AD220). On the other hand, the Thai state sometimes treats Yunnanese Chinese, *Cin Ho*, as another northern 'Hill tribes', nevertheless in an urban setting like Chiang Mai, Yunnanese often identify themselves as 'Chinese'. Here I am including both categories.

⁵ See for example, Tooker 1988, Walker 1975

and ritual practices associated with this pursuit absorbed anthropologists⁶. Consequently, little attention was paid to their non-farm activities, with very few studies focusing on the trade and commerce activities of the Akha.⁷ The purpose of this section is to show how identities and multi-ethnic relations, particularly with Chinese were manipulated within the context of the trade and commercial activities between them and the Akha.

There is no doubt that agricultural activities are a prominent part of life among the Akha and that their ritual practices follow the agricultural cycle. Yet the Akha have always been aware of other economic possibilities, because agriculture did not always supply enough food. Food shortages are nothing new and the fear of hunger is endemic. It was often the case in the past that, in order to survive, the villagers had to trade. Indeed, the Akha have been trading for centuries, sometimes with socially divisive consequences.⁸ As Alting von Geusau (1983:258) points out, opposition between rich and poor is an often repeated theme in Akha oral texts. There are several Akha love songs describing the singer's poverty, as compared with the wealth of the beloved or others. The degree economic differentiation among the Akha and its implications should not be underestimated, as it helps to reveal the meanings of status and prestige in

⁶ For example, Kammerer noted, in her most recent article (1998:669), "to understand the ritual system that was then my primary interest."

⁷ Alting von Geusau (1983) pointed out the Akha's hundreds of years of involvement in market system. Among the studies on the trade and commerce activities of the highlanders in Thailand, there are two articles on the Lahu by Sanit Wongspraser (1975, 1983). There are also remarkable works on Cin-Ho Caravan Traders in this region (see for example Forbes (1987), Hill (1982, 1998).

⁸ Another common practice among the Akha was to sell their labour to more powerful, prosperous, neighbours.

their society.⁹ It is also important to appreciate that commercialism and economic differences among the Akha are not a product of the penetration of western capitalism, but are embedded in experiences that run deep within Akha history, including interactive relations with Chinese traders. In pursuit of this argument, I agree with Bowie (1992:797-823) that to romanticise or to glorify the past in order to dramatise the deleterious impact of capitalism underestimates the imperative facets of their own history.

Evidences from oral texts and historical documents

Akha 'oral texts' (translated by 史軍超 1986) reveals that the Akha had been associated with different ethnic groups and learned practical wisdom from them through trading interaction. Though it is difficult to identify the exact period of time from the oral record, it is clearly stated that there were many traders in an Akha village, the Chinese prominently featuring. Yunnanese Chinese mule caravan traders came regularly to exchange silk thread, gold and silver for Akha rice wine and white cotton. They also associated with Tai cattle caravan traders from the lowlands to the south. This oral text also describes how they learned to organise markets from the other ethnic groups. Moreover, it contains the story of inter-ethnic marriages between Yunnanese Chinese traders and Akha women, and how they lived together. Although it can not be proved to what extent these are historical facts, it is apparent that these tales of their ancestors' trading and commercial activities have been cherished and memorised by Akha oral text reciters for centuries. According to Hansson, the Chinese are mentioned in terms of being "many, rich, knowledgeable, or as traders"

⁹ The other elements which differentiate power stratification would be: age, sex, the level of knowledge or education, access to property or natural resources, information, valued social

(Hansson 1997:147)

Although, horse caravan trade by minorities is sparsely documented in Chinese official documents, a Hani researcher, 史軍超 claimed that study of Chinese historical sources showed that the Akha had been involved in horse caravan trading since the 8th century, during the Tang Dynasty.¹⁰ However, this statement should be questioned because as has been argued, ethnic categorisation is less clear cut than is assumed. It can not therefore be assumed that the group of 'barbarians' identified by Chinese officials during the Tang dynasty (618-907) and the people who at present claim themselves 'Akha' are precisely the same ethnic group. Nevertheless, it can definitely be said that for centuries people at the periphery had developed inter-ethnic relations through trade and commerce activities.

After the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644) when the Imperial Government's priority was to develop maritime commerce to the West, it seems that Yunnan routes remained in use in the lower Mekong region, because goods traded in the Shan states of Burma, in northern Laos, and in northern Vietnam still had to be carried by horse and boat. Opium trade, which played a significant role regional trade has retained its basic spatial patterns¹¹ (Toyota forthcoming). Earlier western observers noted the Akha's involvement in trade activities in the border area, and there are records of Akha visitors to the Keng Tung city bazaar (Cushing

connections, etc.

¹⁰ See for example 『新唐書』

¹¹ Along the routes of horse caravan trading, water routes were taken wherever possible. Thus the four rivers which connect South China with Mainland Southeast Asia - the Red River, the Mekong River, the Salween River, and the Irrawaddy River - were intertwined with the main trade routes.

1870:39,51,53,58; McLeod 1869-70:675). Cochrane observed a market in Keng Tung, the biggest city in the Shan state of Burma on a market-day, “Here is a group of Shans, Chinese, Was, Akhas, Lahus, and others, all talking glibly in the Shan language, the language of social and commercial intercourse between the different races of that region. This has been going on for decades and probably for several centuries (Cochrane 1915:92-93).”

Looking at historical materials written by scholars (Forbes 1987, Hill 1982) and late nineteenth century British travellers (Scott 1932), the numbers of Cin-Ho caravan trains which have been reported give us an impression that long-distance caravan trading around this region was dominated by Cin-Ho (Yunnanese Chinese). However, it does not necessarily mean that other ethnic groups were excluded from these activities. In fact the components of these trade systems were multi-ethnic groups of people. The term a Cin-Ho caravan train simply means that the chief was Cin-Ho; the rest of the members could have been from any other ethnic group. This multi-ethnic make-up of caravan traders almost certainly helped in expanding their trade networks and broadening their language range. Recent observation of Akha entrepreneurs in the Mekong Basin Growth Area confirmed to me that they are highly flexible and hungry to utilise any social networks. (I will exemplify the case study later.)

When examining which set of cultural elements are the ones used to define membership of a group, it is clear that kinship is one such criterion. Kinship is, however, not the sole criterion. Close residence, shared experiences, proximate age, and potential profit can all provide bonds as strong as

genealogical proximity.¹² For example, to call someone *A-nyi* (younger brother), or *A-yui* (older sister) in the Akha language means that the relationship can be more intimate, closer and more demanding than the kinship term itself implies. Though it does not necessarily coincide with a purely genealogical meaning.

During field observations, I sometimes come across situations where some *Ubya Akha* traders felt much closer affinity with *Cin-Ho*, who can be potential trade partners, than *Ulo Akha*, who are not likely to be trade partners. *Ubya Akha* and '*Cin-Ho*' were sometimes calling each other 'brother'. They explained their behaviour in this way. "*Cin-Ho* are from the South of China. We *Ubya Akha* are also from the south of China. The origin of our ancestors is the same anyway." Moreover, they reasoned that I was also one of them, by saying "a Japanese is also of the same origin a long time ago." This kind of attitude shows that at the end of a day, what counts most seems a shared political economic and social interest rather than some fictional ethnic category. There is not much difference between their claim that the Akha ethnic group shares a common ancestor and their claim of brotherhood with the '*Cin-Ho*'. Claiming brotherhood with 'Chinese' by a member of the indigenous minority and the Creole nature of 'Chinese' identity has already noted by several scholars (cf. Schafer 1967, Hsu 1949, Hill 1982, Tapp 1989).

The early ethnographer T'ao notes how the Chinese become members of an ethnic minority in 1930s. "A Chinese man arrives in a minority region, becomes an itinerant trader; and after toiling on the road among local villages and market

¹² This observation was made by the author on the basis of a semi-structured questionnaire on social networks administered to 343 informants and on the basis of the participant observation.

towns saves enough money to settle down. He either purchases a piece of land or opens a shop at a market town; and this small merchant or landlord acquires a native woman to become his wife. When he prospers and his family grows, he will send one of his mixed sons or grandsons to a school in the regional capital, or even the capital city of Yunnan, to acquire proper Chinese education and eventually to become an official. The idea is that this son, if successful, would carry on the 'honourable' Chinese-ness of his family, while the other sons who stay at home may eventually become natives." (T'ao 1943:29 cited by Wu 1989:20)

The process of inter-ethnic Creolisation was never a one-way process: Han Chinese migrated to the south from the north to settle down among minority 'natives'. At the same time, as Hill pointed out, members of indigenous minorities, especially in lowland areas, also became 'Chinese'. "Thus, many of the 'Chinese' in this area were not descendants, in the biological sense, of northern Han-Chinese, rather, they had adopted the Chinese role when it had become advantageous to do so" (Hill 1982:79). Involvement with trade and commerce provides an inducement to take the 'Chinese' role.

Akha mule caravan traders

Akha trade relations, with the 'Cin-Ho' (Yunnanese Chinese), Tai Yai, Tai Lue and other ethnic groups were detected in the course of my research.¹³ Prior to the Chinese Revolution in 1949, the Akha traders' caravan routes went over

¹³ This data was collected during the course of field research. Findings are based on in-depth interviews with nine key informants (6 male, 3 female). I have selected these nine key informants out of the 343 informants with whom I have conducted semi-structured interviews. The informants include the Akha from Hongue and Sipsongpanna area of China, Keng Tung in Burma

mountains as well as along and across rivers, such as the Red River from the Honghe area, the Mekong River from Sipsongpanna, or the Irrawaddy River (see Figure 4). The routes were quite extensive, leading to northern Vietnam, some reaching as far as Hanoi; to Louang Phrabang, Xiengkhoang, Phongsali in Laos; to Keng Tung, Mandalay, Rangoon in Burma; and to Mae Sai and Chiang Mai in northern Thailand (see Figure 5). Some even extended as far as Taiwan and Hong Kong.

According to a key informant (male 51) whose grandfather used to be a well-known caravan chief in the Honghe area, the south-eastern part of Yunnan province whose border connects with Laos and Vietnam, declares that Akha involvement in horse caravan trading was the greatest of all the ethnic minorities. In the Honghe area the majority of the population had been Hani and Yi people and at present it is designated as an autonomous county.

The Akha horse caravan trains usually consisted of 300 - 400 horses, and of around twenty persons per 100 horses. The size of the caravan was seldom fewer than one hundred horses, because all long-distance caravan routes traversed densely-forested mountainous areas, where there was a constant danger of encountering wild animals and bandits. The main items traded were: cotton, cloth, dye, farm implements, forest products, opium,¹⁴ tobacco,¹⁵

as well as the Akha reside Mae Salong, Mae Sai and Chiang Mai..

¹⁴ Via Shanghai, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Hanoi, it was sold to Europe, until the Chinese government banned its trade in 1949.

¹⁵ Tobacco was produced both in Southeast China and Mainland Southeast Asia, Burma, Laos, and Vietnam. It was valued because of its different harvest time between South China and North Mainland Southeast Asia.

salt,¹⁶ Yunnanese tea,¹⁷ silver,¹⁸ tin and decorated Chinese shoes for women. These small beautifully embroidered shoes from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) were valued by the Chinese female immigrants who practised 'foot-binding' in Laos and Vietnam. They believed that if the Chinese shoes were put on after death, the soul could go back 'home'. They often viewed themselves as 'sojourners' abroad with the intention of returning 'home' some day.

According to Bernatik's investigation on his expedition in 1936-37 (Bernatzik 1970:568-578), he saw the Akha selling opium, cotton, pepper, pigs and forest products such as honey and the wax of wild bees at Shan market. And in exchange, they were buying salt, betel, pepper and silver ornaments. He observed that a principal article of trade of the Akha was raw cotton, and sturdy standing-baskets, and that they also bred buffaloes exclusively for sale to the Lao. Looking at their successful trade activities, he stated that "next to the Lisu, the Akha are among the richest of the mountain tribes" (Bernatzik 1970:572). He came across Akha villages whose inhabitants neglected agriculture completely in favour of the cultivation of poppies; "They were devoting themselves entirely to the smuggling of opium, exchanging the drug for food with the neighbouring Lahu, and so lived incomparably better than their fellow tribesmen who had remained faithful to agriculture" (Bernatzik 1970:523). Interestingly, he also noted that the Akha were familiar with weights and balances such as those used

¹⁶ Produced at Simao, and valued especially in inland Vietnam, Laos, and Burma.

¹⁷ One of the famous Pu-erh teas from the southern Yunnan frontier, called "Akha tea". It is considered a first class quality tea. There are no other minority groups in Yunnan after which a tea has been named.

¹⁸ It was highly prized not only for its ornamental and cash value, but also for its cultural significance. A piece of silver was often put in the mouth of a dead person as it was believed this would enable him to have enough money to spend in heaven.

by the Chinese. He saw a special cotton weighing-machine being used by them. For measuring maize and rice they used a sort of measuring basket, and for measuring liquids they used bottles, which they bought from the Lao or Shan. But the Akha had their own terms for the same of the measure.

Horse caravans were well organised; division of labour and status stratification were rigidly defined. The caravans had a chief leader, who often gave the caravan its name. There was also a sub-leader, a chef, a military officer, watch guards, and porters. A chef was needed because they normally had to carry food to support the members of the caravan. Some of the horses were therefore not carrying trade items but food supplies such as oil, dried meat, salt and rice. The military officers carried guns made in the UK, continental Europe and China. Guards normally followed at the back of the horse caravan. Porters were not allowed to ride on the horses and the speed of the caravan was thus set at walking pace.

According to Reid (1993:57), 'a hardy Shan porter could carry 36 kg about 24 km a day'. The Han Chinese or the 'Cin-Ho' (Yunnanese Chinese) were often the ones that took the initiative to do caravan trading. If the caravan chief was a 'Cin-Ho', then the caravan train was identified as such, without implying that all its members were also 'Cin-Ho'.¹⁹ A few prestigious chief leaders were also Akha who had become independent enough to organise their own horse caravans after years of experience as members of caravans.

In contrast with the ox traders in northern Thailand horse caravan trading among

¹⁹ Forbes and Hall also argue the possibility of many other Yunnanese being involved in the trade as entrepreneurs, horse-boys and porters (Forbes 1987:25-6, Hall 1982:114-5).

the Akha was considered a profession rather than a part-time or seasonal job. According to Chuuchat, most of the ox-traders were peasants and after harvesting their fields they worked as traders for about 6-7 months during the dry season. Their trading activity was thus rather limited. They also "did not dare to expand their business into other towns and the business could not be different from their ancestors" (Chuusit Chuuchat 1981:1-2).

By contrast, horse caravan trading expanded across borders and has also created trade specialists, making reciprocal exchangers into trade dealers, gaining profit from transit trade margins. Some Akha caravan traders in Burma shifted the means of transportation from horses to trucks after they obtained second-hand automobiles from the American Army. This made it possible to trade more efficiently between Ken Tung, Mandalay and Rangoon.

Each horse caravan had specialised routes and areas. One informant, a 51 year old man, for example, told me about his grandfather in the Honghe area, who specialised in trading in Laos and Vietnam under the French colonial regime. He often brought home French goods, such as soap, matches, flashlights, and sweet candy, which were obtained from Hanoi. Another informant (male, 52 years old) told me about his father, an Akha from the Sipsongpanna area, the south-western part of Yunnan Province, who specialised on the route, Kunming - Simao - Jinghong - Menghai - Ken Tung - Mae Sai. His father's caravan had a clash with the British Army in Burma and he died around 1942-1943.

It is interesting to note that horse caravans played a prominent role as a means of communication, as there were no established postal systems in these cross-border areas. Both merchandise and information were exchanged at the market

centres.²⁰ The traders were esteemed by the home villagers not only because they possessed uncommon items and were economically well-off but also because they brought news and information from afar. Thus, men involved in trading were generally viewed as prosperous and sophisticated, having knowledge of different cultures. According to a 53 year old female informant whose father and husband were traders, the traders' wives stayed behind in the village, raising children while the husband travelled for a few months. She often had no idea when he would return home, and normally he would spend more time travelling than being at home. If the husband had a good position in the horse caravan, the wife did not have to work as a farmer as she could afford to buy whatever she needed.

Traders' offspring had more opportunities for formal education, not only because of the father's wealth, but also because of the extensive social networks and access to information. This was particularly true in China. Needless to say, people with higher education have better access to higher positions in society. In this respect, trade and commerce activities were influential not only economically, but also socially and politically. Relatively few studies investigate the details of non-farm economic activities in agrarian society, as non-farm activities tend to be viewed as external rather than as an intrinsic part of peasant life. However, it is obvious that horse caravan trading made substantial contributions not only to the economic but also political dimensions of ethnic relations by establishing inter-ethnic social networks which transcend the ethnic category.²¹

²⁰ It was literally called 'Horse station' in Chinese. The trade partners were Hani, Yi, Tai, Haw, Han etc. Yunnanese Chinese was mainly spoken among them.

²¹ My research findings contradict the statement, "While the Akha have traditionally been involved

Relations with the KMT

Through trade and commerce the Akha established close contact with the Yunnanese Chinese (often former KMT soldiers) living in their vicinity. Inter-ethnic marriage between minority women (including Akha) and local Chinese soldiers was common practice. Some young Akha men also served as paramilitary men with the KMT in China. According to Sturgeon (1997), “from about 1938 to 1950 KMT troops were based in Mongsong. Older villagers describe these years as the hardest in their lives, as the troops confiscated all their grain and livestock, and forced villagers to carry bullets and grain for them to another post in Burma (Sturgeon 1997:137).”

After the defeat of the Nationalist Chinese by the Communists in 1949, a number of KMT armies retreated into the Shan State of Burma in 1950 with their Akha wives and stayed there (Mote 1967:516-8, Geddes 1967:577). At that time, KMT soldiers still hoped to defeat the Communist armies, hence, “many Yunnanese Chinese soldiers married local girls,... and the armies recruited local men including Lahu, Lisu, Wa men to replenish their ranks” (Bradley 1997:115). Although, Bradley does not talk about the Akha, it is evident from my field research that some Akha women also married KMT soldiers and some Akha men were hired by KMT soldiers at that time. Although Sturgeon echoes the Chinese communist line that the Akha was liberated by the People’s Liberation Army by saying “The Akha again became forced labourers and in some cases prisoners of the KMT until the arrival of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in

in the market economy, ...They lacked a class of middlemen and traders” (Alting von Geusau 1983:265) It is probably because his research was conducted only among **Ulo Akha** in Thailand, whereas my informants included **Ubya Akha** in Thailand and Burma as well as **Hani/ Akha** in

1950" (Sturgeon 1997:137), according to my informants some Akha had close links with KMT army at the border area in Burma and they stayed together until the attack by the PLA army from China, which forced them over into the border area between Burma and Thailand.

These KMT soldiers were supposed to leave Burma in the mid-1950s according to a UN-brokered agreement (McCoy 1972). Following a further defeat by the Chinese Communist who crossed into Burma in 1962, the KMT army under the command of General Tuan Shi-wen were pushed back into the border area between Thailand and Burma. They entered into trade with those living along the opium trade routes buying rice, pigs and vegetables from them. They also hired Akha as wage labour, and KMT soldiers took Akha wives (see also Hanks 1988:13). Some Akha fled up the Mae Kok River together with KMT soldiers, where boats awaited army personnel. About ten-thousand soldiers were airlifted to Taiwan, including a small number of the minority wives and other local soldiers recruited after 1950. According to an Akha informant (male 53) who had fled together with KMT soldiers at that time, there is at present a group of Akha women living in Tao Yen, in Taiwan, together with evacuated soldiers. He himself had visited them during his trip to Taiwan. This close contact between Akha and Taiwanese has historical roots in that they fled from China together. Their intense shared experience developed bonds between them, irrespective of ethnicity.

Those who remained in the area moved south towards the Thai border and continued their close association with local minority groups include Lahu, Lisu, and Akha and other Tai speaking people. In 1960s, official Thai policy was to

integrate the border communities of Mae Salong and Ban Hin Taek where KMT soldier resided into the fold of the administrative organisation of the Thai state (Wijeyewardene 1995:117). Consonant with their pro-US anti-Communist stance the Thai government indirectly supported KMT soldiers in Thailand. During that time the Akha learnt Chinese at the village school, tutored by KMT soldiers using text books from Taiwan. Some minority children learnt their Chinese there and some gained scholarships for further study in Taiwan. Some elite Akha who are now actively involved in commerce between Taiwan and Thailand are products of these schools. After the mid-1970s when the Thai government was no longer in favour with the KMT, their shared sense of alienation from the Thai government further fortified the relationship amongst those who had fled together into Thailand, including the Yunnanese Chinese, Tai speaking people, and highlanders such as the Akha. One segment of the Akha population, however, has very close and continuing contact with the KMT. As was noted by Hanks in 1975, "There are scattered pockets of Akha settlement which manage to survive on the outskirts of Yunnanese villages and towns within Thailand" (Hanks and Hanks 1975). Although they mention that "many of them are opium addicts, who have become virtual slaves of the Yunnanese, since they re-paid for their work in opium" (Hanks and Hanks 1975), my investigation, on the contrary, found that some have had considerable success in Mae Sai. The recent regional economic development of the Greater Mekong region following China's 'open economic policy' enabled them to re-establish links with their home in China as well as Taiwan. They consider that being multi-lingual is crucial to their ability to enhance their trade networks. And so, they are in a better position in terms of facility in Chinese than are the local Thai from its point of view of seizing new opportunities. This background information of the historical relationship between the Akha and Chinese through

trading is provided to help make it clear why some Akha claim Chinese identity.

Chinese identity and Akha traders at the Mekong region

In the context of Thai society, the category of 'hill tribes' is considered a low class social group. The Akha, particularly, tend to be viewed as the lowest even among the hill tribes. As a result, I came across the situation where elite Akha were reluctant to be put into the same category as 'the Akha hill tribes'. They prefer to differentiate themselves from the so called 'Akha category'.

All of the Akha who reside in Thailand at present originated in the Yunnan province, China, however, some sub-groups associate themselves more strongly with their Chinese origins than others, as noted in the previous section. When the *Pami Akha* want to differentiate themselves from the *Ulo Akha*, the majority Akha group in Thailand, one choice available is to project themselves as being of Chinese descent. With the growing prestige of China, not now as a political threat but as a great economic opportunity, they enjoy presenting their Chinese origins. Looking at some elite Akha's daily activity and life ceremonies such as marriages and funerals, it is impossible to distinguish them from those of the overseas Chinese. Moreover they are carrying business name cards with Chinese characters on the back. This is also an indication of 'status'.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find that some *Pami Akha* feel a closer affinity with the Yunnanese Chinese, Overseas Chinese or Taiwanese as potential trade partners than with the *Ulo Akha*. Among the informant's family, the second brother married a Yunnanese Chinese, the fourth brother married an Overseas Chinese (潮中), the seventh sister married an Overseas Chinese (客家), and my informant married a Taiwanese. These inter-ethnic marriages indeed

strengthened their cross-border social networks.(See details for Case Study)

With China's 'open door economic policy' of the last few years, the influence of Yunnan's economic growth is extending rapidly into cross-border areas, particularly to Thailand. Moreover, the border region of Thailand, Burma, Laos and Yunnan where the Akha reside has been designated as the 'Great Mekong Development Area' and the Asian Development Bank is promoting huge investment in infrastructure. Along with the recent involvement of various multi-national investors in this region, there is a growing concern about the social effects of rapid economic development on the local ethnic minorities.

The general discourse often sympathises with local residents viewing such people as exploited poor ethnic minorities. However, I would like to propose that it is too simplistic to apply the dichotomy of powerful majority and vulnerable minority in this context. It should be remembered that these ethnic minorities have been active participants in cross-border trading activities for centuries as we have seen in the former section. Over time, they have already established cross-border trade networks, which go beyond the rigid political boundaries of nation states. Their social network system is highly flexible. Thus my suggestion is that this informal network system might be more able to adjust to the current situation than a first glance might suggest, and that it might be misleading to lump all the local ethnic minorities together as victims of development.

It is not only large business groups which are in the position of exploiting new opportunities in the area, small unofficial entrepreneurs also feature prominently. Field research around the border between Thailand and Burma shows that some

Akha entrepreneurs have slipped in to exploit these opportunities by reviving their trading routes between Sipsongpanna and north Thailand. They are fully utilising their multiple language skills and their extended trade networks, developed throughout their lives and across the continent over the many years.

Of course, the Akha who are able to take advantage of such new business opportunities are far from representative of the Akha generally in Thailand. Due to being exposed to the rapid deterioration of their environment and to the considerable political and economic pressures, the majority are, in fact, in a fairly destitute and depressed condition.²² Drug addiction among the highlanders has recently grown at the alarming rate. The recent replacement of smoking opium with injecting heroin and taking amphetamines is causing even more serious damage to the health of community. Prostitution is not uncommon among young Akha girls from broken families.

However, on the other hand, though small in number (and with hardly any attention paid to them by previous researchers), there are also some remarkably successful Akha entrepreneurs in Thailand. Here I would like to present some evidence of how the Akha traders are retracing their trade routes.

First of all, they have transformed their means of transportation from horse caravans to ships and trucks. As soon as the Mekong river routes between Jinghong, China and Chiang Saen, Thailand had opened, they started trading along these routes. Because they have passed through the Mekong River in fleeing from China to Thailand, they were fully aware of the significance of the

²² See for example the situation of the Akha in Thailand, Alting von Geusau 1992, Hanson 1992, Kammerer 1989, and see also the situation of the Akha in China, Henin 1996.

Mekong river as a trade and transportation route, it takes two days from Jing Hong to Chiang Saen.

The ships carry cargo to Chiang Saen, which is then sent on to Mae Sai, Chiang Mai and Bangkok by truck. The ships then pick up cargo for the return leg, which takes three days from Chiang Saen to Jing Hong, and this cargo in turn is trucked on to Kunming. When the river is high, they use 40 - 60 tonne ships, and when the river is low, they use twenty tonne ships. They employ eight ships altogether, going back and forth on the Mekong river about 4 - 10 times a month.

They deal with varied merchandise because they operate a carrier agency, and act as brokers to connecting local enterprises in China and Thailand. The main merchandise observed during field observations in 1996 is as follows, although, I suspect it may be changing: from China to Thailand — apples, pears, fireworks, plastic toys, dolls, telephones, blankets, lighters, silk, personal organisers, chestnuts, nylon stockings, garlic. From Thailand to China — biscuits (Imperial, Nissin, Euro), tinned fruits (Malee), dried beef, instant noodles (Mama), Thai fragrant rice, fresh lichee, palm oil, rubber, rubber sandals.

During the field observation, I was most impressed by the use of mobile telephones. Under conditions where they can not rely on the formal communication system or postal system, mobile phones have become a crucial link between the traders. The trade partners close affinity with 'Cin-Ho' and Tai Lue has also been observed. It is obvious from the Akha 'oral text' that inter-ethnic marriage between 'Cin Ho' or Tai Lue and Akha traders takes

place.²³ In some cases, it seems that there were strategic considerations in choosing such marriage partners. Indeed, multi-ethnic marriage among trade partners is not an uncommon phenomenon both in Thailand and in China.

Although the ideal is to marry within the Akha ethnic group to continue the genealogical kinship system, what happens in actual practice is rather different from what is supposed to occur. In the case of Akha men, the Akha male often gets married more than once in his life. Particularly among traders, it is not unusual to find individuals who have married in China, Burma and then in Thailand along the trading route. For example, the father of an informant (male 44) has married seven times (twice in China, four times in Burma, once in Thailand), and the informant himself has married three times (once in Burma, once in Mae Sai, once in Chiang Mai).

In the case of Akha women, the possibility of marriage with a trader (Cin-Ho, Tai-Lue) has been also available. In spite of an ideal preference for marrying with other Akha, it was not uncommon to marry with traders, who tend to be viewed as a good catch. In their words, "the traders eat rice with meat and fish while the poor eat rice with salt." Since marriage was a matter of practical survival rather than a question of love and romance for the young Akha girls, there was often no alternative but to choose the more affluent suitor. The first priority was escape from poverty and hunger.

Cross-ethnic marriage associated with mobility is a key arena in which identities are refined, redefined and transformed. Mixed-marriage in which the Akha women marry not only Yunnanese Chinese but also Tai, Lahu and Lisu and

²³ Shi 1986

move into their village have been fairly frequent. Although an ideal assumption is a single village consists with a single sub tribe and endogamous, in practice, it is not uncommon to find mixed villages. It is not surprising therefore to find that considerable numbers of people who were not officially counted as 'pure' Akha, but somewhat related with the Akha. The contemporary situation of mix-marriage associated with urban migration will be investigated in the next chapter.

Chiang Mai residents tend to perceive migrants from the hills as typically living in slums, crammed into cubby holes with their extended family or home villagers, employed on low wages and a prey to drug related problems. However, contrary to these presumptions, these stereotypes are not always the case. With closer investigation, a striking economic difference between rich and poor Akha can be identified. Here is an example of how successful some Akha are.

Case Study: A Successful Cross Border Akha Trader

(male 32)

This informant's father was born in Sipsongpanna in China and was a trader. His father married seven times, having two wives in China and five wives in Burma. After 1949, the family moved to Burma then in 1971 they settled down in Keng Tung. His mother was a second wife from China. He knew nothing about agriculture because his family moved down to Keng Tung, a town in the Shan states of Burma, when he was six years old, since then all of his family were involved in trade. His father bought a truck from the American army in the Shan States and extended the family business into a region including

Rangoon, Mandalay in Burma, North Thailand and the Yunnan Province of China. The main trading partners were Yunnanese Chinese, Akha and Tai Lue. By the time he moved to Thailand in 1977, he could already speak Akha, Yunnanese Chinese, Tai Lue and Burmese. While he was completing high school he also went to a Chinese school supported by the Taiwanese. Then, when he graduated from high school, he went to Taiwan for a seven-year period to study Mandarin, Hokkien, English and Business Studies. After that he went to Australia for two years of work experience as well as to study English. While he was working in Australia he encountered discrimination on account of being Asian. "No matter how much money you have, they discriminate against you." In contrast, he regards Thailand as a good place because material wealth determines social position rather than race or colour. In his words, "In Thailand no matter who you are or where you are from, as long as you have money, you have power."

Also in Thailand, he is in a good position to exploit the advantages of his marginal ethnic status. Indeed the economically successful Akha often organise their own business networks not only with the lowland Thai but also with traders from China, Burma, Laos, Taiwan and Singapore, utilising their extensive linguistic ability and their social networks which have been developed through their migrant history. My informant now has three passports — Chinese, Burmese, and Thai and this greatly facilitate his supranational business activity. As he went on to say "The Akha has no nation, we have no place to be, but at the same time it means we can be anywhere."

In addition to former relations with Tai Lue, 'Cin Ho' (Yunnanese Chinese) in China, in Burma, and in Thailand, his family have now established connections

with overseas Chinese in Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong - their common language being Chinese. Thus;

The eldest sister (50)* married with Akha (in China)

The eldest brother (47) married with Cin-Ho

The second brother (44) married with Akha (in Burma)

The third brother (40) married with Tai chuu (in Thailand)

The second sister (36) married with Akha (in Thailand)

Himself (32) married with Taiwanese

The third sister (30) married with Hakka (in China)

The youngest sister (25) single graduate from the university in Bangkok and working there.

*() indicates age

What is evident from here is that this family has established kinship networks which coincide with trade networks and go beyond geographical boundaries, political units, and ethnic categories. These geographically dispersed networks have been constructed in the course of their movement from China to Thailand. They have thus capitalised on their nomadic experience to weave personal social relations into powerful trade networks.

They also use this to acquire other identities and to blur their 'Akhaness'. For while the category 'hill tribes' is considered a low class social group in Thai society, and has its image of being 'backward people', the Akha are such as the lowest of the low. Understandably, many Akha traders are hence reluctant to be considered 'Akha'. The Akha elite, who stand out because of economic success or higher education, prefer to differentiate themselves. One option is to identify themselves as Chinese traders.

This phenomenon is to some extent a result of recent changes in China. China is no longer the ideological threat that it used to be, and it is now generally viewed as a place of economic opportunity. Consequently, the prestige of Chinese within Thai society is rising.²⁴ In the past, people of Chinese origin were discouraged from projecting their Chinese origins in order to encourage their integration into Thai society. This is, however, no longer an issue as their descendants have already been assimilated into the Thai society. They are not 'sojourners' any longer, but 'settlers'. So today, a Chinese identity does not constitute something alien, indeed it has a positive connotation among the Thai middle class. The Akha therefore often categorise themselves as descendants of Chinese traders, using occupational identity to replace their ethnic group identity.

And with the growing prestige of Chinese in the post-socialist age, Akha traders accentuate their identity as Chinese traders, by for example, burying their parents in the Chinese way, praying for business success as the overseas Chinese do, carrying business name cards with Chinese characters on the back, and so on. At first glance it is impossible to distinguish them from other Chinese traders. In any case it should be remembered that such an attempt is pointless, since ethnic identification is an ever-changing historical and political process and the clear-cut ethnic group boundaries imagined by early academics do not exist in real life. Fluency in Chinese language, a shared sense of Chinese origins and, most importantly, their common interest in goods and services construct their new identity and interest group affiliation.

²⁴ See for example Vatikiotis 1996.

Looking at this present situation, it is not too difficult to imagine that the Akha traders who were working with Cin-Ho traders in the past might have identified themselves as Cin-Ho, or behaved as Cin-Ho. Thus to the outsider, they might have looked like 'Cin-Ho' traders. Sir J. G. Scott, who became Superintendent for the northern and later the southern Shan States of Burma observed that Chinese and Akha mix together freely, and that it was quite common to find half-a-dozen Chinese with Akha wives living in an Akha village. There are also villages entirely of mixed Akha-Chinese (Scott, J. George 1932:274). Thus, in such cases, there might have been no way, and no need, to distinguish between the 'real' Cin-Ho and the others.

Contrary to the presumption that the Akha used to live in egalitarian autonomous societies with little heed to the state-imposed administrative boundaries, these Chinese Akha seem highly aware of such existing political boundaries through their experience of living in the different states - China, Burma, Laos, Thailand. They learn how to escape or even how to take advantage of such boundaries.

To sum up, this chapter has argued that the dynamics of multi-ethnic social relations and inter relationships that go beyond the village boundary are not merely to identify a neglected area of inquiry, but represents a fundamental challenge to the conventional anthropological approach which has portrayed the people within the village as unique integrated cultural wholes. As explained in the methodology section of Chapter one, it seems to me necessary to look at movement, connections and interactions across a broader space in order to identify elements that a close study of one village by itself would miss.

I have also been concerned to challenge the view that negative feature of Akha

life associated with commercialism and modernity are latter-day products of western capitalism. On the contrary, trade and commerce and adaptation to the outside world have been features of Akha experience for centuries. Indeed the Akha have long been used to having to adjust and adapt to a external pressures, to the point of manipulating their very own identity.

Finally, I tried to show that it is necessary to see 'Akha identity' as a process rather than as a inherited entity. The following chapter will demonstrate how social identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within the power relations of the Thai nation state.

Chapter 6 Thai Development and Social Change

Chapters four and five accounted for the politico-historical context in which 'the Akha' ethnic category and group identification are manipulated both at the ideological and everyday level. I have attempted to 'deconstruct' the notion of Akha culture and Akha identity by demonstrating the process by which they are created and their inner complexities. Instead of contrasting the situation between rural and urban, my aim is to show today's urban Akha in Chiang Mai not as special cases radically different from their rural predecessors, but as closely linked.

Although my observation focused on and started with the urban situation, it is not my intention to see the manipulation of identities as uniquely urban or 'modern'. Rather, I critically challenge the very framework of a rural/urban dichotomy, because such an approach reinforces the classic idea of seeing the traditional rural past as somewhat 'pure' and 'authentic', whereas the modern urban present is 'spoiled' and 'westernised'. As discussed in the Chapter two, theoretically it is recognised that conceptualising 'rural' and 'urban' with clear boundaries between them is not accurate. Instead, the urban realm should be understood as an extension of the rural realm, without sharp distinctions between them.

I argue that manipulation of identities has long been practised, and at present the domain of social networks and mobility is simply an extension of this. Likewise, my intention is to deny that Akha society has moved from a rural 'egalitarian' condition to that of an urban 'class stratified state', or from a

traditional 'subsistence economy' to a modern 'market-oriented one'. As already indicated in the previous chapter, the Akha have long been involved in trade and commercial activities and class stratification did exist.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the recent progress towards closer national integration and the effects of rapid economic growth provide a much greater degree of social stratification than used to be the case. Today's new social stratification arises through some Akha having better access to economic opportunities, formal education, language skills and social networks than others. The aim of this section is to demonstrate the way they facilitate their identity in their particular context. It is a negotiation process in which 'Akha culture' as an imagined category has become a substantial entity to which 'Akha identity' is ascribed in their various discourses. As argued in the theoretical chapter, identity is a continual synthesis of an internal self-image and the external public image offered by others. In order to illustrate the dialectic of the construction of identity between external ethnic categorisation and internal group identification, I will look at the implications of officially being lumped as 'Akha' together with other highlanders categorised as 'hilltribes' by the Thai government. The way in which the category of 'hilltribes' is constructed through national development policy, and through images produced by the media and Thai tourism will be examined.

It will also be shown that in this process, despite the fact that the academic argument problematised the rural/urban analytical framework, ironically, on the other hand, the policy of the Thai government reinforced the discourse on rural/urban dichotomy and the distinction between highlanders and lowlanders by creating the category of 'hill tribes'. In this way, the nominal Akha

category is obliged to create substantial 'Akha culture' to which Akha identity is affiliated.

The implication of grass-roots development ideology to Akha identity formulation will be examined. I intend to explain the implications of the ideology of grass-roots development and the preservation of 'indigenous culture'. I will address the involvement of the international agencies, academics and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) supported by the international crusade for the preservation of indigenous culture and local knowledge. The way in which 'local culture' as the 'root of identity' is created through these ideologies will be examined. I will discuss the way a purportedly representative Akha culture is being manufactured in the process of defining and recording what is authentically Akha. I will also demonstrate how the urban Akha elite fits into the picture.

The second section looks at the issue of the Akha claiming differences within the 'Akha' on the basis of Thai schooling, religious affiliation, consumption and gender. It will demonstrate the way in which people who had been categorised as 'Akha' themselves claim differences and form group identities which transcend the normative ethnic category.

(1) Development and 'hill tribes'

1. 'hill tribes' as a Category

First of all, I am going to examine the way in which the category of 'hill tribes' was constructed in order to secure a territorially-bounded modern Thai nation state. The term 'hill tribes' reveals the nature of relations between the state and the peripheral population because it reflects a strategy of controlling people in order to promote the idea of the modern nation state. Thai government policies concerning 'hill tribes' (*Chao khao* in Thai) can only be traced back to 1952 (Kachadpai & Porntipa 1988:51). Following the emergence of Communist China after the revolution in 1949 and its efforts to push its ideology towards adjoining countries such as Vietnam, Laos and Burma, the Thai government became increasingly concerned about the political security of its own state.

In former times, although the state was aware of the existence of the peripheral people of the border area, officially little attention was paid to them. That does not mean the peripheral people had no contact with lowland Tai speaking people, on the contrary, they had long established relations as was discussed in the previous chapter. For example, it is known that Karen had a tributary relationship with the lowland rulers in the North, and under the protection of the Princes of Chiang Mai (Keyes 1979, Marlowe 1969:2), while the Lua or Lawa were formally integrated into northern states, and permitted to take control over their own land by the northern lords (Kunstadter 1986:137). It is apparent from this that prior to the emergence of the Thai nation state, peripheral peoples

had non-official and official relations with the lowland and sometimes were an integral part of the pre-modern polities.

It is important to recognise the different nature of sovereignty in the pre-modern state from that of the modern nation state. In the pre-modern state, the focus was the people, not the territorial entity. Thus, at the overlapping margins of Siam and its adjacent kingdoms, multiple loyalties to several overlords of the peripheral minorities was common and was accepted by the ruling state (Winichakul 1994:97). As noted previously, loyalty at the border area had always been fluid and fluctuating according to shifts in power. Through the tributary relationship the peripheral population was linked with the major lowland kingdom in a loose, symbiotic relationship (Keyes 1979, Lehman 1979). The experience historically was of multiple power situations and overlapping claims, rather than clearly demarcated territorial sovereignties.

Moreover, it is obvious that among these peoples there was day to day trade and commerce and that inter-ethnic marriage took place between them and Tai speaking population. It is also obvious from Renard's (1980:146) account that there were labour exchanges between them. Some Karen were involved in the teak industry organised by Northern Thai royalty. In this sense, neither ethnic borders nor geographical boundaries had ever been definite. It is reasonable to suppose that some so-called 'hill' people might not have actually lived in the hill area, possibly for generations.

However, at the turn of the century, when the geographically demarcated Thai modern nation state was being created, such ambiguity was no longer allowed. Every person residing within the territory of the Thai kingdom had to be clearly

defined according to this European idea of ethnic categorisation. When members of the Bangkok elite went to the periphery to survey the local population, they classified them as 'Khon pa' (the wild people) who lived far away from the '*muang* (the centre)'. As Winichakul (1993:11-14) noted '*Khon pa*' was portrayed by the Bangkok elite as sharing nothing with their fellow Thai, and were depicted as strange, filthy and uncivilised people in contrast to the Thai. (The realm of '*pa*' implies the dangerous 'wild frontier'.) In the process of creating 'Thainess' the dichotomy of *muang/pa* was constructed and became a useful tool to segregate the Thai from the 'wild others'. The making of a clear geographical boundary around the nation state repudiated the ambiguous buffer zone and this also affected the way both Thai as well as non-Thai people saw themselves in relation to each other. This clearly bounded new identification system in turn reflects the bounded dichotomy between highlanders and lowlanders.

The Siam Society set out ethnographic and linguistic researchers in 1920 to study the non-Thai ethnic minorities in Thailand and the results of this were published in the *Journal of the Siam Society* (Likhit 1978:64 cited by Launagransn 1997:10). It seems that an evolutionary theory served as the basis of the distinction between *muang* and *pa* at that time. Thus, *pa* represents the historical past of the *muang*, and were represented as 'backward' people, and thus an object of contempt to the Bangkok elite. In the past, when the number of *Khon pa* was fairly insignificant, the Thai central government was politically fairly indifferent to *Khon Pa* (wild people). They were looked down upon as people of the forest, 'uncivilised', 'strange' and 'wild'. However the recent trend towards increased environmental concern has radically changed this perception. (I will come back to this point in the next

section to discuss the implications of this change.)

It was not until the 1950s that the population of the northern periphery became the focus of political concern for the Thai government (Kammerer 1988, Tapp 1989). Now the *Khon pa* were seen as a threat to Thai nationhood. The category of '*Chao khao*' ('hill tribes') was invented in order to identify the marginal mountain people at the edge of the Thai nation state and so the idea of the 'hill tribes problem' from the perspective of border security was born. Following the emergence of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, and the associated Indochina conflict, the Thai government under the influence of the US became increasingly concerned about communism encroaching across the border.

The Border Patrol Police (BPP) was established in 1953. Then in 1955 the US Operations Mission (USOM) came into being to provide significant financial support to establish an uplands Thai-language school programme run by the Border Patrol Police. Through this programme some from the 'hill tribes' were trained as village guards to form border security volunteer teams in conjunction with the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) (Tapp 1989:32, 1990:154). According to Lewis, "In January 1975, there are thirty Akha men who received training to serve as paramilitary assistants to the Border Patrol Police serving in their area"(Lewis 1978:37). As part of these programmes, photographs of the Thai King were distributed to the border villages and didactic speeches on Thai nationalism were delivered in order to raise awareness among the 'hill tribes'(Kunstadter 1967). When the Central Hill Tribe Committee (CHTC) was established in 1959 (Wanat 1989:229), this uplands Thai-language school programme was expanded to include social

welfare projects. It is interesting to note the importance of the Thai King in these 'hill tribe' projects as a symbol of national integration, because the loyalty to the King meant the loyalty to the Thai nation. The Thai King thus became a bridge to consolidate 'hill tribes' within the Thai nation state. As Tapp (1989;1990) noted, the most main point of the Royal Highland Development Project was to win the hearts and minds of the 'hill tribes'. Therefore, the Thai King's personal patronage was emphasised through nation-wide media, while the 'hill tribes' were projected as innocent, helpless, pitiful people in need of Royal protection.

In 1959 the official identification -- 'hill tribes' -- was established. Since then 'Akha' has been officially categorised as one of six major 'hill tribes' including Karen, Hmong, Yao, Lahu, Lisu and Akha in Thailand.¹ According to McKinnon (1989:307), the term *Chao khao* ('hill tribes') was derived from a British colonial term used in Burma where highlanders were called 'hill tribes'. Thai official terminology translated this English term, 'hill tribes' into Thai 'Chao khao' (hill people) to indicate the non-Thai speaking people of the periphery who had yet to be assimilated into Thai society. Although there are some other ethnic groups living in the hill areas, such as Yunnanese Chinese (Cin Ho) and Shan (Tai speaking people from Shan state of Burma) they were not included in the category of 'hill tribes'. The term 'hill tribes' intensified the notion of Hill / Valley of non-Thai / Thai dichotomy based on Pa/Muang ideology. Nation building demarcated rigid geographical territoriality based on nationhood in a context where historically ethnic identities had been ambiguous and porous.

¹ According to Vienne, the concept of 'Hill tribes' indicates nine ethnic minorities include Kamu,

After the western notion of 'them' and 'us' was applied colonially, the notions of Pa / Muang, Hill / Valley, were presented as dichotomised categories. In this way, in the process confirming the boundary of the integrated Thai nation state, the category of 'hill tribes' came about. It is this Western notion of a bounded territorial nation-state that initiated the need to secure national integration and territorial consolidation through the assimilation of peripheral peoples. Therefore, transferable reciprocal flexibility can no longer be allowed in the dichotomised notion between 'hill tribes'(non-Thai) / Thai. It should be noted that the impact of the transformation of the political boundary from its former ambiguous, porous nature to a distinctive delimited territoriality are twofold: first, when the territorial border was fixed the practice of moving back and forth across the borders became 'problematic' from the government's perspective of sovereignty; second, the borders of identification were also rigidly fixed and every individual expected to identify him/herself with one nation-state. To and fro mobility across the ethnic boundaries is no longer accepted.

In the 1960s several American institutions provided significant financial support for research into 'hill tribes' in Thailand. Agar (1980:55) revealed that there were close contacts between various senior American anthropologists and the US Defence Department. There was evidence of the Department of Defence's Advanced Research Projects Agency and the American Institute for Research hiring anthropologists as consultants and advisers for their research in Thailand (Wakin 1992:5-7). The Tribal Research Centre was established in Chiang Mai to co-ordinate research on the 'hill tribes' under the oversight of western

anthropologists. The Sydney-based Australian anthropologist, W.R. Geddes was appointed in 1964 to offer guidance on the organisation of the Centre and the planning of its research. Another Australian anthropologist, Peter Hinton, took over Geddes's position. Their involvement was supported by Australian funds through the aid programme of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (Geddes 1983). Both Geddes and Hinton were opposed to the political involvement with the US security and military interest, nevertheless, their accumulated data and knowledge were utilised to counter Communist subversion of the 'hill tribes'.²

At the request of the Thai government, the United Nations assisted the Socio-Economic Survey of the 'hill tribes' in Northern Thailand in 1962. This survey was initiated by an Australian anthropologist, Hans Mannorff. Another well-known example of US donor research was conducted by Cornell University for the USAID in north Thailand in 1963. This was specially designed to assist Thai and US officials in formulating 'hill tribes' development policies (Hanks et. al. 1964). Thai officials encouraged western academics to study the peripheral region and to identify the population. Their endeavours bore fruit in the form of two classic books, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (1964) and *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations* (1967). Still today these are considered canonical works on the peoples and ethnicity of the region. It should be noted that in these works not only does the research rely heavily on western academics,³ but the very concepts

² This incident raised the deep ethical issue of anthropologists involvement with the state intervention and development planning. See Wakin (1992) for further detail of this 'Thailand Controversy'.

³ Sudusta (1993:329) notes that "Reports concerning tribal communities of Northern Thailand

employed in ethnic categorisation were constructed on the basis of western structuralistic thinking about ethnography. In other words, there can be politics in the process of constructing ethnic categories. This is self-evident in the case of Communist countries such China where anthropologists had to work within the limitation of state ideology and neutral anthropology was not possible. In the case of Thailand, on the other hand, the role of politics and ideology are not as visible, nevertheless, there is undeniable western influence in the way anthropology was applied.

The number included as 'hill tribes' amounts to only one percent of the total Thai population, nevertheless, they were paid enormous attention both at the international and national level because of what is seen as the 'hill tribes problem'. Three major issues were identified as constituting the 'problem'. First, 'illegal migration', second, the issue of 'opium production', third, their activity as 'forest destroyers'. This 'hill tribes problem' has often been discussed from the perspective of development policy in the literature (Cooper 1979, McKinnon & Bhruksasri 1983, McKinnon & Vienne 1989, Tapp 1990). Instead of reiterating their findings, I will focus on the implications of three issues particularly in terms of image construction and discourses, which will lead into further discussion in the next section of this Chapter.

First of all, the shifting character of the 'hill tribes' life style was seen as problematic and cross-border mobility was considered as 'illegal activity'. In order to control the movement of 'hill tribes' by stabilising residency and

and contiguous areas provided ethnographic data not only for scientific purposes but also produced information for the military and the government." See Erik Wakin's work (1992) for further details.

encouraging sedentary agriculture, the Land Settlement Project (*Nikhom*) was set-up. Although the project itself had failed due to poor conditions for cultivation, the underlying idea of fixing people to a place continues to feature as an aim. In other words, the mobile, porous nature of the Akha village is no longer accepted, and is being replaced by the idea of the permanent village. Such a 'village' would provide not only a useful unit as an administrative hamlet but also the basis for a localised village identity. When the 'community development' policy is implemented in the hill area, this new notion of 'village identity' is particularly enforced. In that process a romanticised 'traditional' rural village is recreated by emphasising its egalitarian, self-sufficient and co-operate nature.

Secondly, the image of the 'opium producer' became problematic particularly after the Sarit government banned opium trading in 1959 because of US pressure. Until then, opium production had been a significant source of income for the Thai nation state. According to Supaporn Jarunpattana (1979:39-42), it was in the reign of King Mongkut (1851-1868) that opium revenue by tax-farmers and the Royal Opium Monopoly was set up (Supaporn Jarunpattana 1979:39-42 cited by Launagamsri 1997:23). After that opium trading was operated as a legal government monopoly, which cut down on the profits of the opium trading on the black market (McCoy 1973:66-67). The Thai government derived considerable profit from opium trading and this explains why the Thai government did not ban the sale and consumption of opium until 1959 despite occasional international pressure.⁴

⁴ "In 1909, the Thai government received a letter from the Chairman of the Anti-Opium League of China asking for co-operation to end opium cultivation in the area along the Chinese-Thai borders. This request was ignored by the Thai government (Supaporn Jarunpattana 1979:184

However, political considerations in 1950s after the emergence of communism in neighbouring countries forced the Thai government to change its policy on opium trading. After 1959 cross-border opium trading was condemned as 'smuggling' and made 'illegal'. Development projects were then introduced which aimed to replace opium with cash crops, with significant support from international agencies, including the United Nations and the United States, and this stimulated substantial cash flows into Thailand, with the Thai government seeking to take maximum benefit from the international aid agencies.

During the series of 'anti-narcotic' campaigns organised by the government, 'hill tribes' was targeted as a 'problem people' who produce opium. This ignored the fact that, as Tapp pointed out (1989:36), there were also an increased incidence of landless northern Thai peasants moving up into the hill area and cultivating opium poppies in the late twentieth century, an awkward fact that was conveniently ignored by the government. Because the opium poppy is cultivated in the peripheral hill area, 'hill tribes' were made the scapegoat for all such illegal activities.⁵

The third image of 'hill tribes' as 'forest destroyers' derives from the practice of shifting cultivation. Viewing shifting cultivation as a dangerous form of agriculture owed much to international opinion, for it was not until the emergence of international prejudice against shifting cultivation in the 1950s and

cited by Launagramsri 1997:24).

⁵ A survey team from the United Nations measured and mapped out the areas under opium poppy cultivation in Thailand and revealed that opium production was reduced from 17,920 hectare (145 tons) during 1965-66 to 1,792 hectare (12,09 tons) during 1993-94 (The Report of Opium Survey

1960s that this practice was perceived as a problem. In fact, as Kunstadter (1978:3) notes, shifting cultivation used to be practised by both Thai and hill people in the lowlands as well as in the highlands of the region. Along with the international aid flow in Thailand, international organisations such as FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) sent their missions to Thailand to evaluate the situation in relation to natural resources in the region. As Launagramsn (1997:31) points out, the FAO suggested that “shifting cultivation created harmful effects on the inventory of trees in the forest and caused ecological destruction”.

Shifting agriculture has become the most menacing land use problem of the tropical world. Over the centuries it has destroyed and degraded millions of hectares of forests and forests soils. Today it is a major obstacle to the development of many countries and to efforts to increase the food supply of the tropics. During recent years new influences have heightened its destructiveness and diminished its ability to support dependent populations. Social and economic evaluations, together with population increases, rapid means of transportation and nationalism, have disastrously altered its ancestral pattern. Governments whose people depend in large part shifting agriculture face the need to find remedial measures before further damage is done to forests and soils and before the inability of shifting agriculture to produce sufficient food precipitates a political crisis (FAO 1967 cited by Launagramsn 1997:30).

Since then shifting cultivation has been viewed as a destructive and harmful mode of cultivation, and thereafter the 'hill tribes' were blamed for destroying the natural resources of the country. As Launagransn noted the Royal Forest Department (RFD) follows FAO's guidelines and in its policy relies heavily on their recommendations (Launagransn 1997:32). The FAO's evaluation justified the Hill tribe resettlement project which aimed to remove them from the forest area. Recently, however, the view of the 'hill tribes' as 'forest destroyer' was questioned from an NGOs perspective which supports local approaches to natural resource management.

In sum, the category of 'hill tribes' was created in a particular political circumstance in Thailand in the 1950s. In accord with government aims and objectives of tackling the three major 'hill tribes problems', the image of 'hill tribes' were constructed negatively, as 'illegal migrants', 'opium producer', and 'forest destroyers'. Now I would like to look at another important field, tourism, which has contributed to shaping and reshaping the image of 'hill tribes' not only through the agency of outsiders, but also by the 'hill tribe' people themselves.

2. The Image of 'hill tribes' as a Tourist Resource

Tourism has long been recognised as a potential source of cash by the private sector in Thailand. Since the Fourth National Development Plan (1977-1981) tourism has been important in reducing the Thai balance of trade deficit. Since the government assigned to tourism the role of a 'development tool' (Hitchcock et al. 1993), tourist policy has favoured large scale enterprise on the basis of private investment to improve infrastructure such as roads, water and power supply, big hotels, resorts, golf course and airports. In contrast smaller scale enterprises such as trekking, operating guest houses, and the Night Bazaar were insignificant from the government's view, which basically took a 'laissez-faire' attitude unless security concerns were involved. This left some room for informal, localised, small entrepreneurs to take the initiative to develop a 'hill tribes' related tourist industry without too much interference from the government. Trekking tourist agencies in Chiang Mai, for example, have grown from around twenty in 1977 (Cohen 1982:240-1) to more than 200 in 1992 (Toyota 1993:42). Most of the trekking tourism agencies were organised by local small northern Thai entrepreneurs outside the control of government. As Cohen (1982) argues, trekking has initially developed as a marginal occupation because of its scale. These agencies are in a less powerful position in the tourist industry than the bigger concerns because they deal only with 'backpacker' tourists with low-budgets.

The desire of tourist trekkers is usually to escape from every-day 'modern' 'commercialised' life to experience 'traditional' 'unspoilt' 'timeless' hill tribe life (Toyota 1996). In order to meet these expectations, as Cohen points out 'hill tribes' are being stereotyped as 'unchanging primitives', 'untouched by

civilisation, 'remote and unspoiled' and 'almost unknown' (Cohen 1993).

Come and experience these amazing people. Primitive hill tribe villages that are totally untouched and in their natural surroundings. See their culture and live among them in their timelessness. We will take you into the jungle away from the normal trekking areas, to the world of the black Musur and Karen people...(Cohen 1989:39)

It was not until the 'Visit Thailand Year' in 1987 that 'hill tribes' were recognised as a tourist resource by the government. Since then 'ethnic tourism', which focuses on 'the cultural practices which define a unique ethnicity' (Wood 1984:361) has become one of main themes in ASEAN countries, and the Thai government also includes 'ethnic tourism' in their tourism promotion policy. As a result, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) started using the image of 'exotic' 'colourful people' on official posters. And, for instance, articles on tribal life and artefacts have been published in the Thai Airway's flight magazine, *Sawadee* to promote the diversity of cultures in Thailand (See figure 3). The Fifth five-year Plan (1982-6) designated Chiang Mai as the commercial and service centre of the upper north of Thailand, with special emphasis on the promotion of tourism. Since then, Chiang Mai city has rapidly developed to become a prominent tourist centre.

According to TAT statistics in 1992, among the total of 562,000 foreign tourists visiting the Northern Region of Thailand, 62,210 went on a trekking tour.⁶

⁶ According to Putsatee's research, it is estimated that around 150,000 trekking tourists come to

As the number of tourists grows, competition among the local trekking agency becomes fierce, hence, they have started offering the optional 'adventurous' experience to tourists, such as smoking opium, arranging massage services, or even sexual services with 'hill tribes' girls in order to attract more clients. When this kind of trekking agency became known internationally and was seen to present security problems, the Thai government began to take a more active role in policing the trekking industry.

In fact the Thai government began taking steps in 1977, after the coup of the previous October, whose main aim was to prevent the student leaders who had fled to the jungle in the north from organising an anti-government insurrection, using jungle tourism for concealment (Cohen 1982:255-6, Toyota 1993:36-7). At that time, the authorities regarded the 'hill tribes' as a source of political insecurity rather than a potential tourist resource, and so, their measures were directed at limiting freedom of movement in the jungle and controlling the trekking guide industry. Even after official recognition of the importance of 'ethnic tourism' in Thai tourism strategy, the basic attitude of the government towards trekking tourism remained. The 'Tourism Business and Guide Act' promulgated in 1992 is a reflection of the government's view that trekking tourism is a troublesome marginal occupation in the tourist industry.

The distinction between highlanders and lowlanders which was created in the process of modern Thai nation building was thus further intensified through tourist development. Ethnic and cultural tourism often promotes the idea of a clear boundary between groups of people, emphasising their cultural uniqueness and distinctiveness. In the case of Thailand, the government's

focus has been on creating 'Thainess', a 'Thai culture' centred on strengthening Thai national identity. Instead of embracing ethnic diversity for tourist purposes, the drive to make a clear distinction between the lowland and the highland was exaggerated. 'Hill tribes' are projected as 'non-Thai' ethnic minorities on the periphery. It is paradoxical that while the official Thai approach to 'hill tribe tourism' is to see it as a means of integrating and gradually assimilating the hill population into Thai society, on the other hand, the desire of the tourists is to experience the authentic non-Thai 'other'. Consequently, the image of 'hill tribes' as non-Thai 'exotic others' further accentuates the difference between lowland Thai and upland non-Thai.

Interestingly, while the Thai government has been rather reluctant to view the 'hill tribes' as a tourist resource, on the other hand, local entrepreneurs has been quick to see the potential in them for the mass recreational quest for exoticism. In 1971, several Ulo Akha from three villages - Saen Chai, Saen Suk and Pladu - were brought to Chiang Mai by local Thais to work as entertainers at the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre where stereotyped images of the 'primitive', 'unspoilt' and 'authentic' were projected to serve tourist desires. This local entrepreneur picked up the idea of the 'primitive' dance show when he saw this being done for the tourists in Hawaii. Since then, the residential area next to the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre has become a meeting point for urban Akha and visitors from the uplands, and more and more 'hill tribe' people have moved to settle there⁷.

⁷ Some evidence of occasional visits by Akha to Chiang Mai and Bangkok in the 1960s has been given by my informants, but the purpose then was trade or official errands, without any intention of settling in the cities. According to an informant (male 52) his grandfather, a trader, had frequently travelled between Sipsongpanna (China) and Chiang Mai.

The image of the 'hill tribes' as a colourful, exotic, opium poppy-cultivating ethnic minority has provided business opportunities not only for local Thai but also for entrepreneurial 'hill tribes' themselves. Tapp noted this in his study of the 'Hmong' (1990). "The greatest internal changes of the Hmong community, its social organisation and economic structure, have, in fact, taken place not in response to official development projects, but largely as a result of individual initiatives and factors beyond official control" (Tapp 1990:162).

By the mid 1970s some Akha had begun selling handicrafts on a small scale at the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre. In 1975, an Akha woman opened the first stall selling handicrafts to the tourists at the famous Chiang Mai tourist spot, the Night Bazaar. Since then several Akha women have gradually followed this first woman trader, and the Night Bazaar became an important meeting spot for the urban Akha and visitors. During the 1970s and early 80s the majority of the tourists were westerners and selling 'hill tribe' handicraft used to be good business, and provided the means for urban Akha women to become financially independent.

Of course not everyone was successful, but some Akha made a fortune and were consequently able to diversify into new businesses, such as restaurants and massage parlours. Some of them started working as trekking guides or porters, and even organised independent trekking agencies by themselves, taking advantage of their language skills and networks. Those establishing trekking tour agencies are not only aware of exoticism as a tourist resource, but are sensitive to the demands of different categories of tourists. Thus, as I will demonstrate the details later, different constructions of 'otherness' as well as

'sameness' are presented to different types of tourists - Western, Chinese and Japanese. The issue of the different selection of 'otherness' (or 'sameness') affects the way they represent and reconstruct their ethnic identity and culture. This is a field of study worth exploring in its empirical details.

In the process of social interaction with tourists, the Akha have become acutely aware of what the international tourist trade wants. In some cases, they recognise that projecting themselves as 'hill tribes' can gain extra value among handicraft dealers and gives extra credibility to their products and artefacts. Some change their clothes into colourful costumes at the Night Bazaar to attract tourists; the same is true of many trekking guides, and of women working at night clubs. As well as playing on the image of the exoticism of the 'hill tribes' for westerners, the Akha in dealing with Chinese visitors in particular are able to make use of their linguistic skill to make contact and entertain them.

As Wood noted, the dominant motivation among those visiting ASEAN countries is to experience the 'local culture' (Wood 1980:573). Accordingly, the northern Thai regional government is sponsoring the creation of an 'ethnic museum' in Chiang Rai province. In order to meet tourist demands, they are trying to identify the 'traditional' life-style of the ethnic minorities and seeking to preserve these to pull tourists in. The contact zone between tourists and the hosts is no longer simply through direct encounter, but through images, ideas and representations in commodity form created by the purveyors of the international tourist industry. To attract tourists, the supply of non-academic popular ethnography material has greatly increased and is now widely produced. At the same time those categorised as 'hill tribes' having easy access to such literature, photos, postcards, tourist art etc., have begun to play up to the

stereotype, so that their commodity image is internalised and lived out. This in turn has a bearing on the way they see themselves.

Back in the 1970s most of the tourists in Chiang Mai were foreigners and tourism was seen in terms of 'westernization'. However, in 1990s the rise in the number of domestic tourists has infused a new agenda. It is said that these days some 60 percent of tourists who visit Chiang Mai, the capital of the north region, are Thai. Moreover, the flows of intra-regional tourists from neighbouring Asian countries has also greatly increased. So it is no longer a case of hill tribes presenting themselves simply as tourist exotica and objects of otherness but of responding to the hankering of non-western tourists impelled by a surge of nostalgia for lost origins, looking for 'similarities' instead of 'differences'. It is important to recognise this development, because, as discussed earlier in the theoretical chapter, identities are the outcomes of the 'dialogic interaction' between the external projected image and the internal self-image, and thus, different expectations may bring different consequences. In other words, the implication of different tourist demands will result in different ways of projecting the 'hill tribe' people's own images, and contribute to different processes of self-imaging.

Today's complicated ethnographic situation means that while the notion of 'a culture' as a unit of homogeneous bounded entity is fundamentally questioned in the anthropological literature, on the other hand, tourism reinforces the appearance of such a phenomenon. The process of representing, negotiating and defining cultural markers of identity is complex. Culture and identity do not operate within a normative dichotomy of the 'genuine' and the 'invented', rather as King noted, "they are products of strategic interactions, of people

using cultural resources in the context of a complex mix of cultural interpretations vying for prominence, realness, and authenticity” (King 1999:193). ‘Authenticity’ is not a substantial quality handed down from the past, but rather something that is assigned in the present.

In this regard, the role of the Akha themselves as active agents in shaping an ‘Akha culture’ and an ‘Akha identity’ should not be overlooked. Moreover, the blurring of who constitutes the ‘outsider’ (tourist) or ‘insider’ (host) needs to be recognised. A further twist is the fact that the Akha themselves are becoming tourists and travelling abroad. Popular destinations are Taiwan and China where elite Akha have established customers through trade or have acquaintances through historical connections. In the course of interviews I found out that successful Akha entrepreneurs have travelled as far as Europe and the United States. Some have visited ‘ethnic cultural shows’, ‘ethnic villages’, and ethnic museums during their trips. Such experiences have made the elite Akha aware and proud of their ethnic uniqueness. And, when they encounter the situation of ethnic tourism in China, where the ethnic minority is powerfully manifesting its status and culture, they can not but reconsider their situation in Thailand, and it encourages them to become active in reconstructing Akha identity and material arts. Here is an example of Akha involvement in reshaping ‘Akha culture’ by creating a model Akha village.

Case Study: Akha Ethnic Village Project

(male 52)

"In the near future, the majority of Akha who seek for the future will move down to the lowland area. Only the illegal drug addicts and those who are incapable of adjusting themselves to the current situation will remain in the inaccessible mountain area." Being a headman of the village for more than ten years, the informant is sharply aware of changing circumstances, and thinking ahead to the future. "As a responsible village headman I have to plan for the future generation." As a remarkably successful entrepreneur, he accumulated enough money to purchase an extent of land to run a lychee orchard in the border area. In the last five years or so, he has been involved in devoting a part of his land to create Akha villages where the Akha can legally settle down in the lowlands without being 'illegal migrants'. "There were three important elements that I had to consider upon developing the new villages in the lowland area; first, water and electricity system, second, legal land right, and third, education." It is noteworthy that the relocation project, (removing hill population from hill area to lowland area) is not only initiated by the Thai government, the local village leaders are also motivated to take part for reasons of future survival.

What is different from the government initiated relocation project is that his plan is not simply providing Akha people a space to settle down but also combining the idea of creating an 'ethnic village' at the same time. His recent visit to an 'ethnic village' in China gave him the idea of making one in Thailand. "I am planning to create an 'Akha model village' where visitors can observe the Akha traditional way of life and enjoy Akha ceremonies." Having visited sixteen different countries, he is well aware of the value of 'preserving Akha culture'. "As you know, when overseas visitors come to see the Akha way of life, it is difficult to find it. Because villagers had to struggle for their survival, they can

not afford to remain in the traditional way of life. I am going to create an Akha model village where visitors can watch and experience the Akha way of life. In the future, Mika, you will not have to struggle to go to mountain villages. Instead I will invite you to my model village where visitors can stay and observe the Akha life”.

Furthermore, the target population of his project is not only tourists or anthropologists but for the Akha future generation. “I want to make a model village which the future Akha generation can be proud of....a village with good electricity, water system, education in a beautiful natural setting, where both outside visitors and the Akha future generation can enjoy the Akha festivals such as the New Year or Swing ceremony.” “I am having a meeting with villagers to select the main ceremonies and fixing the date so that people from the city or abroad can plan to come back for the festival and they do not have to miss it. It is important to provide opportunities to enjoy Akha festival for the future generation.”

From observing ethnic tourism in 1970s and 1980s, it was reported by Cohen (1982) and Toyota (1993) that trekking tourism had not been initiated by highlanders themselves, nor do the villagers have much of a say in its organisation or in the direction or regulation of its development (Toyota 1993:41). And it is still true that ‘hill tribe’ tourism in Thailand is largely driven by outsider demands and images. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the new trend in the late 1990s whereby some urban elite ‘hill tribe’ are also involved in the ethnic tourism business and in constructing their cultural image in their own way. Tourism provides an important arena for modifying

and reconstructing 'a culture'. (This issue of representation of 'a culture' will be followed up with the theoretical discussion on politics of culture.)

Another interesting implication of tourist development is that tourism has generated economic differences among the Akha themselves and become a new source in inter group rivalry and status competition. The assumed power relationship between the powerful majority Thai and the exploited minority Akha needs to be further examined, because some Akha are in better position to exploit the Akha even than the Thai. Economic differences affect the relative position of the interacting groups, and thus contributes to the continual reconstruction of identities and relations. As the following case demonstrates, the ethnic group boundary is not functionally integrated, boundaries among ethnic groups are at best partial. Social advancement mobility takes place across both geographical boundaries and ethnic boundaries. (This issue of power and differentiation among the 'Akha' in the process of urban migration will be further explored in the next section.)

**Case Study: Yunnanese Chinese/Akha Handicraft Trader
(female 45)**

Yunnanese Chinese established the Wieng Ping Bazaar where small scale 'hill tribes' handicraft stalls were opened in the early stage of tourist development in Chiang Mai. It is now replaced by the New Night Bazaar. The connection between 'Hill tribe' entrepreneurs and Yunnanese traders has been established through the handicraft tourist business.

The informant is (Female 45) one of the well established handicraft traders. When she identifies herself she stresses her Chinese origin in order avoid being put in the same category as the 'hill tribes'. Her intention is to differentiate herself from Akha newcomers who are relatively poor and are associated with negative images. She talks about common origins and associated 'cultural tradition' patrilineal family relationships - which she shares with the Chinese, in contrast to the matrilineal kinship system of northern Thailand. And by projecting herself as 'Chinese' she implies that she is a diligent small scale entrepreneur.

By background she had a close association with the Yunnanese Chinese (according to her, her father was a Chinese but she hardly met him). Her facility with the Chinese language provides opportunities for her to become a mediator between the communities. Along with the growing tourist industry in Thailand, she started to trade antique handicrafts. She bought antique handicrafts from Burma, China and Laos and sold them in Thailand. By the 1990s, her business had expanded, and she now runs a small shop at the weekend market in Bangkok where she deals mainly with wholesale overseas dealers. She frequently travels between China, Burma and Thailand (Mae Sai, Chiang Mai and Bangkok). Her overland connections between Northern Thailand, the Eastern Shan State in Burma, and Chinese border towns in Yunnan have been developed by her desire to extend her trading network.

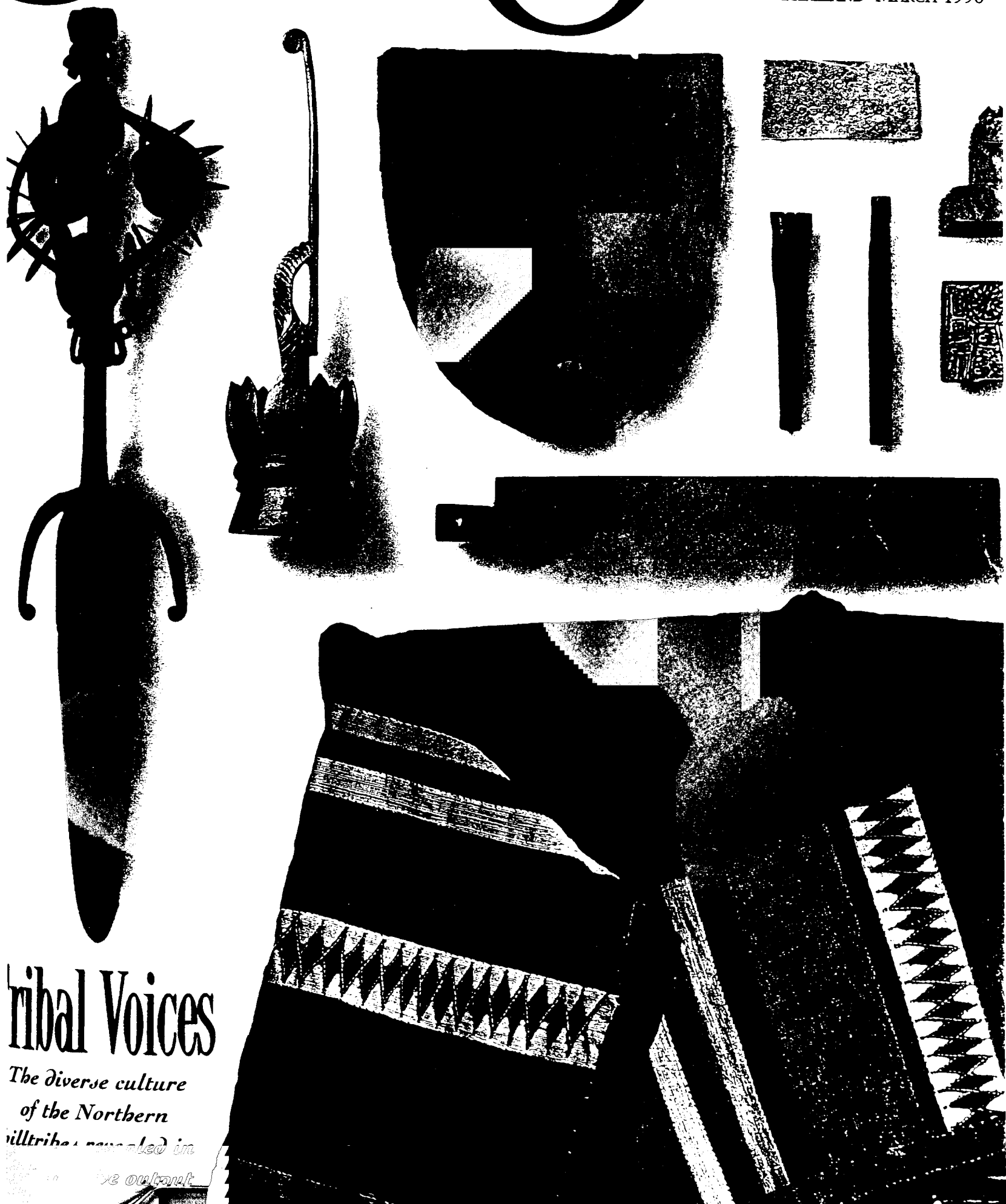
Besides the handicraft business, she is involved in finding jobs for Akha girls in Chinese-run enterprises with connection to Taiwanese firms, or Taiwanese 'offshore' operations in Bangkok. She gains extra income from this. She

perceives Akha girls as cheap labour in the international labour market.

SAVASDEE

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THE BEST OF THAILAND MARCH 1998



Tribal Voices

The diverse culture
of the Northern
hilltribes revealed in
the artwork

3. Grass-roots Development Ideology and Identity

New trends in development theory

Recent critics of top-down development policy with the inherent weaknesses of models that derived from the Western experience (McGee 1995:200 cited by Parnwell 1999:87) advocate a more localised and contextualised approach.

The problem is that, within the orthodox framework, theorists and experts tend to be too far removed from the 'real world' of development. As a counter to this, Brohman argues the need for development workers to become more open to difference and to be willing and able to learn from other societies and cultures, to take an interest in local knowledge and cultural practices, and to use these as the basis for redefining their development approaches

(Parnwell 1999:85)

In order to pursue a more effective approach to rural development, a 'Grass-roots' or 'Bottom-up' approach has been embraced not only by NGOs but also in government development policies and by international development agencies. This new development viewpoint critically look at the imposition of Western values and knowledge construction. It is a challenge to "the hegemonic privileging of Western knowledge in the field of development asserting 'the value of alternative experiences of and ways of knowing' (Crush 1995:4 cited by Parnwell 1999:87).

The new trend praises 'cultural sensitivity'. 'Local culture' and 'local knowledge' become valuable for quality development planning. For those western development scholars seeking alternatives to existing development

paradigms 'local knowledge' is the vehicle for challenging and transforming western hegemony. For example, Chamber insists that it is crucial that scientists and technicians come to accept that local people, and the poor in particular, should have a prominent voice in development plans and activities that affect their futures (Chamber 1996). This development discussion is going along with post-modern currents which reject western hegemony and accept the need for different voices.

The adoption of bottom-up participation as opposed to top-down development approaches has opened up challenging opportunities for anthropologists to become involved in development (Sillitoe 1998:223). It is increasingly recognised by development workers that effective development projects can only be undertaken with some better understanding and appreciation of local knowledge and practices: thus, the demand for helpful anthropological insights to guide more efficient development project is increasing. For, indeed, many anthropologists involved in the field of development have long been critical of the western hegemony in development theory and have been stressing the importance of local knowledge in the particular contexts and of its use in development (cf. Hobart 1993). However, anthropologists' involvement in promoting 'local culture' in the field of development is controversial, because some post-modern anthropologists are critical of what they see as naive cultural relativism in the anthropological discipline, while others encourage culturally appropriate (or sensitive) approaches in new development trends by promoting the classic cultural relativism perspective.

In what ways could theoretical perspectives in anthropology be applied to the field of development? This is one of the issues I will take up in this section.

My purpose here is not to discuss whether this 'grass-root' ideology is applied effectively or not, but to discuss the implication of such 'grass-root' ideology which reinforces or constructs the uniqueness of rural culture through official and non official actions. The implications of recent advances in anthropology, the critique of the notion of 'a culture' have not yet been fully explored in the field of development. What seems to be lacking is the contextual understanding of who has the power to designate 'local knowledge', or more precisely, how 'local knowledge' is constructed. I will examine the way the ideology of development can become a powerful agent in the field of identity construction at the local level.

Community Development in Thailand

Since the 1980s, Thailand has seen a rise in civic activities, emphasising the importance of local communities, their potential and self-reliance based on local wisdom, and employing a bottom-up approach. A locally informed perspective on development--the ideology of 'self-help', 'participation', 'self-reliance', 'empowerment' was adopted not only by NGOs but also by National Economic and Social Development policies from the Fifth (1981-86) plan (Rigg 1991:199). The sixth plan (1987-1991) followed a similar ideology by stressing the need "to give greater responsibilities and power to those at the local level"(Rigg 1991:200) with reference to 'grass-roots' development policies. Of course, whether this ideology is effectively put into practice or not is another matter, for various restrictions and constraints, such as paternalistic hierarchical control in the decision making process, have been identified. (cf. Rigg 1991) Yet, "the *Wattanatham Chumchon*, (Community Culture Development Perspective) ideology, 'Western-style grass-roots development approach' (Rigg 1991:206) is officially recognised in Thailand.

Romanticised 'rural life'

As Rigg (1993) notes, grass-roots development ideology is infused with a romantic view of the past and an idealisation of rural life. It "presents the traditional village as being egalitarian, co-operative (community-oriented) peaceful, self-reliant and moral"(Rigg 1993:1711). Romanticising 'rural life' implies seeing rural as 'moral', simple, and unaffected, in contrast with the city which is 'immoral', wicked, commercialised, inauthentic. This attitude is supported by an anti-capitalist outlook on the part of intellectual development thinkers, who have adopted a visceral rejection of present-day western society. For instance, Nartsupha (1991) sees the village as an idyllic community, with villagers displaying characteristics such as honesty and generosity. This perspective of praising the 'rural life' leads to looking on 'hill tribes' staying in the town as 'problem'. The underlying assumption is 'hill tribes' are supposed to stay in their rural setting up in the mountain. Young females who work in the town are automatically included in this negative view. Such discourse has the effect of encouraging further distinction between uplanders, 'hill tribes' and lowlanders, 'Thai'.

Rural-urban dichotomy

This rather polarised view of rural/urban dichotomy, however, is now being questioned at the empirical level. For example, McGee (1995) and Rattansi (1997) found that the supposed clear distinction between rural and urban activities is breaking down much more quickly than was the case in the West. Hence, they contend, the conceptual framework of rural/urban dichotomy has become less appropriate. McGee then suggests that "we should be less concerned with the contrast between rural and urban ...but focus instead on the

interactions within “(McGee 1995:205 cited by Parnwell 1998). This new perspective challenges the long-established core-periphery binary. Nevertheless, territorial crossover between rural and urban is perceived as the current phenomenon. In other words, it implies the assumption of continuous territorialised occupancy over the generations.

Although, development scholars tend to treat the city as a product of capitalism or an alien imposition and the ‘real’ Southeast Asia as ‘rural’, the city is as native to Southeast Asia as it is to anywhere. As the regional historian, O’Connor points out, Southeast Asian region “has known cities for millennia, where even remote people have shaped themselves to or against urban rule... Southeast Asia’s cities are indigenous in origin” (O’Connor 1995:30, 44). Indeed, the city might be seen as providing an extension to rural life in terms of function and meaning. Yet, the romanticised notion of countryside, and bias against the city leads to misrepresentation. As noted earlier, anthropologists, for example, used to isolate the village from the city, seeing the village as having more ‘authentic culture’ than the city. Since Malinowski, a traditional concern of anthropological description and analysis has focused mainly on a single village where ‘pure’ ‘local knowledge’ is presumed to be produced. Thus, local knowledge appears to contribute to the accumulation of ‘authentic’ ethnographic documentation. A notion of ‘local knowledge’ derived from authentic rural life still remains as it is centrally important to the legitimacy of the alternative ‘grass-roots’ development strategy.

Culturally sensitive?

Another important aspect of recent development ideologies is ‘cultural sensitivity’. The recent shift of development towards emphasising grass-roots

creativity, self management and empowerment of local people owes much to international agencies such as UNESCO. UNESCO's report, *Our Creative Diversity* (1995) marks the culmination of the UN decade for culture and development (Wright 1998:12). The report defines culture as 'the total and distinctive way of life of a people or a society' (UNESCO 1995:21). It claims that the world is made up of discrete 'cultures' and the neglect of 'culture' has caused development efforts to fail (UNESCO 1995:7).

The Community Development Perspective conceived 'Culture' as 'the roots' and a source of inspiration for the villagers to "rediscover their identity, their self-confidence, and their power." (Hewison 1993:1703). In their view the local cultural system consists of traditional knowledge and local wisdom and is seen as the basis of village life. The development perspective based upon consideration for local culture sounds so convincing that few criticise it. It might also be said that such a culturalist framework is often permeated with moral sentiments. In all, the normative anthropological idea of 'a culture' and cultural relativism view are playing major roles in shaping how culture is understood and so also shapes the basis of today's world-wide policy on culture and development.

The problem is that this approach has a tendency to stress culture as a fixed determinant with an emphasis on passivity and homogeneity. It fails to conceptualise 'culture' as a process or acknowledge its problematic nature. It is important to realise that 'tradition' is always an invention of the present and of those who have the power and means of representing it. Thus, we need to question in each particular situation: who decides what is a 'traditional value'? who identifies what is the 'real' traditional culture? who states what local

knowledge is? who identifies it as 'local knowledge'? The issue of the power paradigm has to be addressed: whose knowledge is privileged? Why is some knowledge more privileged than others? In this regard, as Rigg aptly remarks, "...it might be more accurately portrayed as an elitist reinterpretation of that (externally perceived) culture...." (Rigg 1991:204).

An informant (male 30), young educated Akha with a university degree who studied the course on 'community development' and was involved in NGO project, described how difficult it is to apply the Community Development approach to Akha villagers. "It is not easy to explain the co-operative concept of 'community' to the villagers, because they never learnt it at school. I personally think that community development is an excellent idea, but in practice applying it to Akha villages is very difficult, because they have to be educated first. Teaching takes time. The villagers are poor. They are worried about day-by-day survival. So they can not be bothered about 'community' or 'culture'".

Ideology of preservation of 'indigenous culture'

In a similar manner to the ideology of grass-roots development, as B  teille noted recently, the idea of preserving indigenous culture has acquired a certain moral charge and expresses political correctness (B  teille 1998:190). Politically conscious contemporary anthropologists speak more and more about the 'cultural survival' of 'indigenous people', because the risk of extinction of 'indigenous culture' through globalisation provides them with ideological ammunition.

In their discourse 'indigenous culture' is regarded as if it is a natural species

which is in danger of extinction. While claiming to speak on behalf of 'indigenous people' they actually import and apply the expectations of the outside world about cultural preservation of 'otherness' which is based on naive cultural relativism. 'Indigenous culture' implies 'cultural consensus', sharedness and cohesiveness. In this regard the attributed meaning of 'indigenous people' coincides with the old usage of 'tribe' or 'native'. The notion of 'indigenous culture' needs to break away from this rigid conception of culture.

For these reasons I see the need to search for new ways of accounting for culture in terms of the power paradigm of representation. Cultural representation is not a timeless entity but an ever-changing discourse which can best be explicated by situating it in its political and historical contexts. The task of preserving 'indigenous culture' tends to be seen as modern (a reaction to excessive development and globalisation) and an urgent task. However, as shown in Chapter five, there never has been a distinctive cultural boundary between ethnic groups in the past or at present. The distinctiveness of the tribal habitat may appear striking at first glance and must have appeared more so in the eyes of the western observer, but closer examination reveals complexities, ambiguities and arbitrariness of ethnic identification.

Community Development Facilitator

When development projects are implemented, as Rigg observed "it was the development worker himself who identified the problem and then conceived, organised and managed the projects" (Rigg 1991:203). Thongyou (1986) also argues that well intended development workers are middle-class, centrally educated people whose thinking is quite different to that of the people they work with. It is clear from looking at the manner in which relationships between

villagers and facilitators are likely to evolve in the context of rural Thailand that local knowledge/culture is actually externally perceived and imposed; and some might argue that outsiders misconceive the 'real' cultural picture of the local village. This perspective is based on the assumption that there is a 'real/authentic' culture in the village community. However, if we take into consideration the fact that 'village' is, in practice, an artificial product of administrative conventions, 'articulated' by the state, it is then evident that the problem is not which one is 'real' and which is 'false'. Rather it is more useful to look at the 'local community' not as the origin of 'authentic culture' but as a 'contact zone', a process where contested discourses create the representative 'local culture'.

Standardising cultural representation ignores variations, and forces heterogeneous elements into a contrived uniformity. This is how Akha culture is presented by international agencies and the Thai state. Ironically, at the same time that the cultural diversity of Thai society as a whole is being celebrated, the Akha are being presented as an undifferentiated, homogeneous indigenous people.

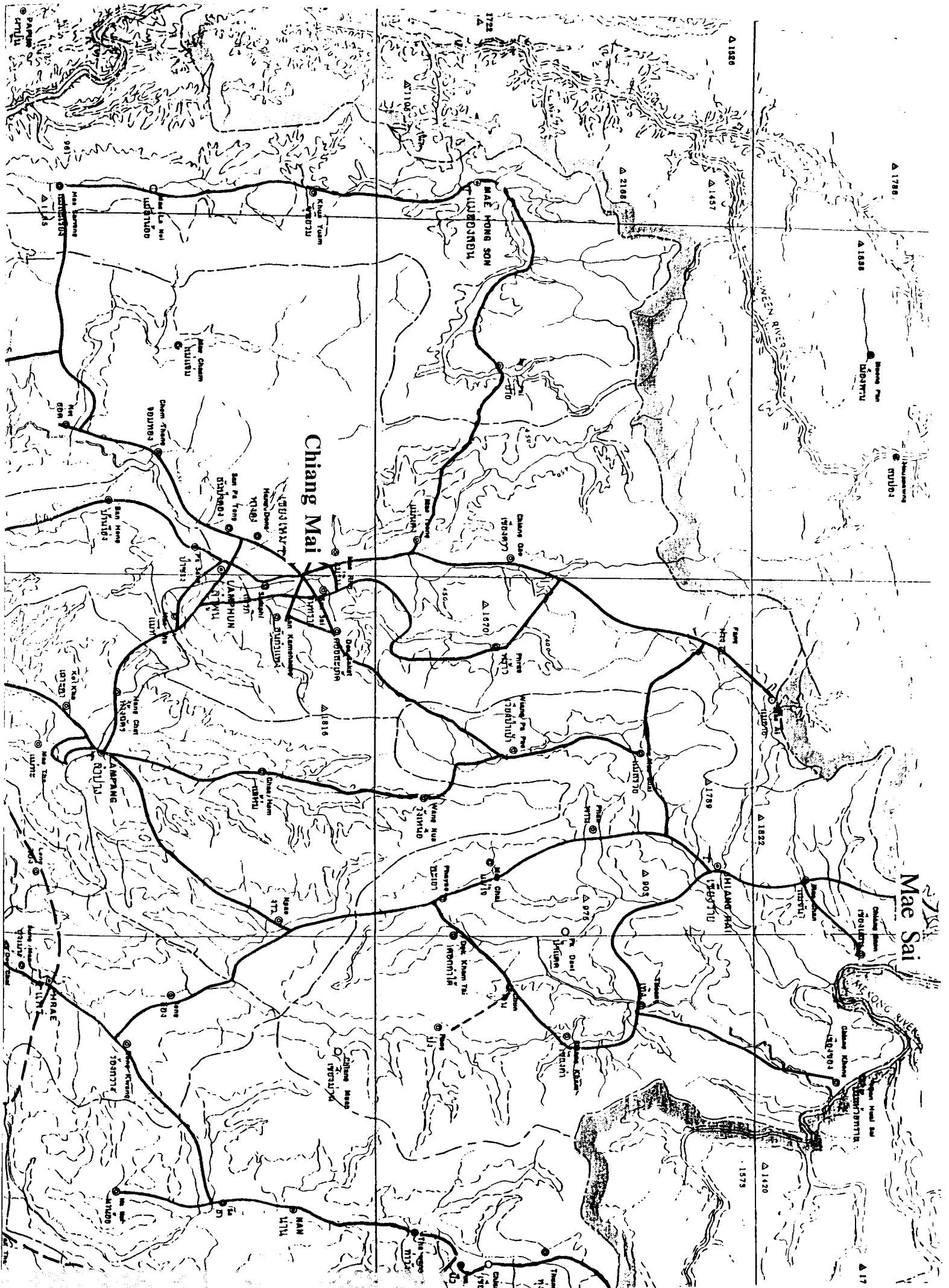
Reshaping Akha Identity

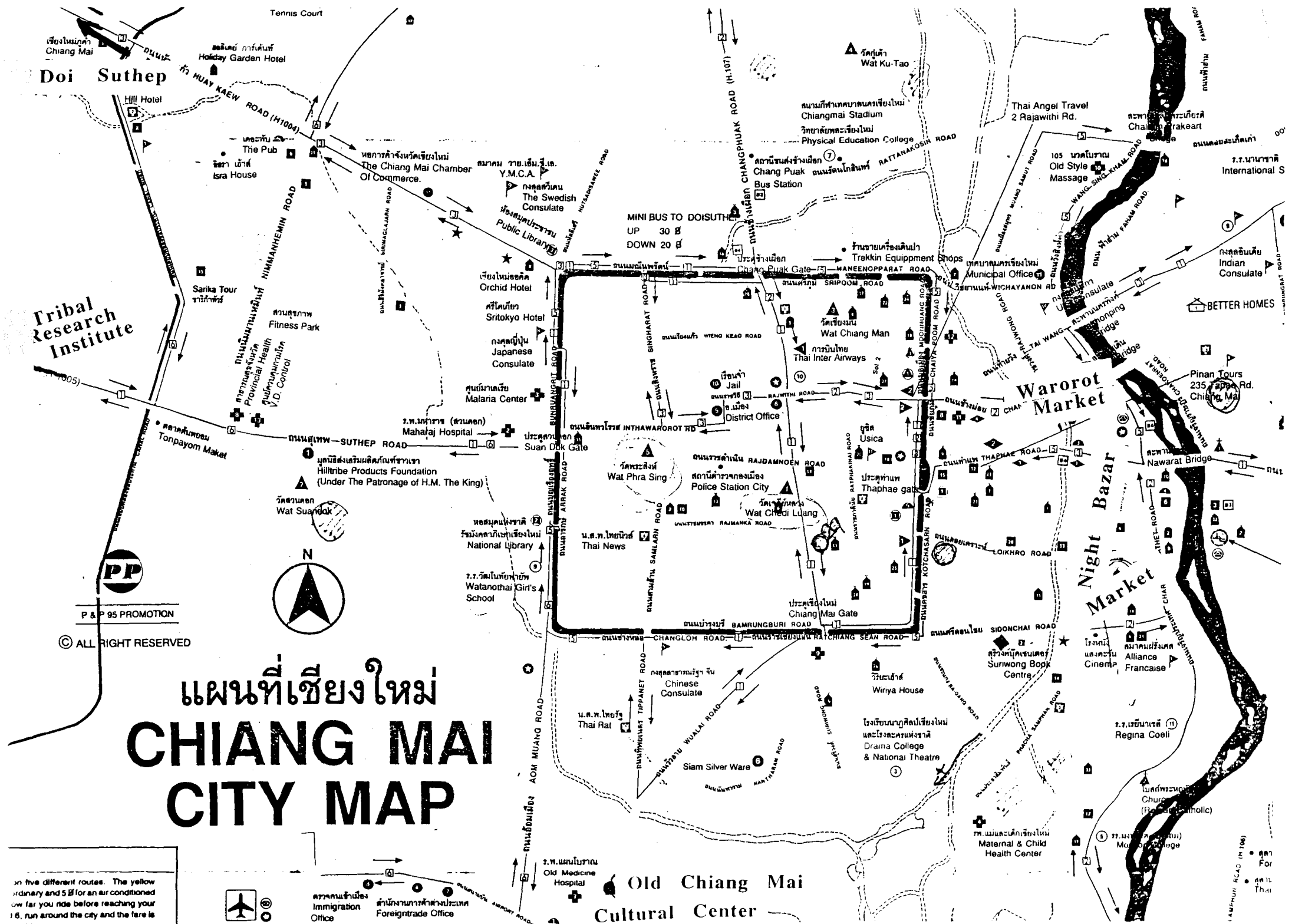
It is in this context that the Akha themselves are taking the part of a local discursive agency. What is 'authentic' local wisdom/culture is interpreted by the young educated Akha. Urban elite Akha are in the position of recording, and creating the self-image of 'traditional' Akha culture. Some are working for the project of preservation of indigenous cultures supported by international Non-Governmental Organisations and others are working for the hilltribes museum project supported by the Thai government. In their work they have

learnt to objectify some selected elements of life as 'a culture' and use them as a resource in negotiation with government and international agencies. Their task is to collect 'authentic' cultural materials before they vanish. In such a process 'Akha' may be presented as a homogeneous and bounded group or a kind of shared interest group. This is the paradoxical situation that when the ethnic boundaries are more blurred than ever, the Akha's cultural distinctiveness is produced and intensified through tourism, government policy and the international movement for the preservation of indigenous culture. In this process, they are recording culture as a fixed object of the past, separated out from everyday existence. This process of seeking and selecting the representative features of culture sometimes involves power friction within the group.⁸ In such a documenting process, actual variations within an ethnic group are rejected, and competition for possession of the 'authentic Akha traditional culture' emerges.

The relationship between cultural knowledge and power differences within the local community demands closer investigation because indigenous knowledge is not homogeneous but can differ from one interest group to another. Hence, it is crucial to look at power relations within the community and at the process of local knowledge/culture formation.

⁸ Political competition over claims to 'authenticity' was evident among various Hani/Akha participants from China, Burma and Thailand at the International Hani/Akha Studies Conference 12-18 May 1996 in Chiang Mai, Thailand





Map 6 Chiang Mai City Map

(2) Emergence of differences within the 'Akha'

In the process of examining the construction of the category 'hill tribes' in the course of Thailand's development, it was noted that the state has not been the only agency involved in shaping the idea of 'hill tribes'. Various other agencies, including the people who had been categorised as 'hill tribes' themselves also participate in shaping that identity. Before I attempt to inquire into the dynamics of the process whereby the meaning of 'hill tribes' has been established, I must draw attention to the emergent power differences within the 'hill tribes' people, especially the 'Akha'.⁴ In this section I will focus particularly on the role of the Thai educational system and on Christianization as agencies in formulating the concept of 'being Akha'. The education system creates a gap between literate and illiterate, 'elite' and others among the Akha. Christianization creates not only a distinction between Christian Akha and non-Christian Akha at the individual level, but also creates a competition at the institutional level. I will also look at the importance of consumption and life style in the situation of contemporary identity formation, for possession of consumer goods, such as televisions, refrigerators, motor bikes, mobile phones etc. are perceived as markers of success and signify advancement placing one above those who do not have these things.

As has been argued, identity formation is complex, shifting, relational and multiplex. It is fallacious to explain self-identity only in terms of ethnic category. Self-identity is also closely connected to social roles and factors relating to gender, class, occupation, educational achievement, age, locality and political and religious affiliation. The emergent difference within a single category of 'Akha' in terms of class, gender, educational skills, age, and

religious affiliations will be explored in this section.

1. Thai Schooling and hierarchy

Since the first Constitution of modern Thailand in 1932, the primary objective of the national education system of Thailand has been, and continues to be, to prepare children throughout the country to become members of the Thai nation state (Manich Jumsai 1958:52). As Keyes noted, “the village school has played [an important role] in preparing villagers to accept a subordinate position in the centralized bureaucratic world of the Thai nation-state”(Keyes 1991:89). According to Keyes’ observation, made in the central Thai village of Bang Chan in the early 1950s, the village teachers were using texts containing such “newly written aphorisms...as ‘buy Thai goods; love Thailand and love to be a Thai; live a Thai life, speak Thai, and esteem Thai culture.’” (Keyes 1991:112). Besides learning the standard Thai language, the students were taught the three pillars of the Thai nation -- the interrelatedness of the monarchy, the nation, and the religion (Ishii 1991). It is through school education that students learn to honour the present king and queen. Moreover, as Keyes pointed out, “Students are also instructed in national history, a history that links the present nation with the reigns of past kings of the reigning Chakri dynasty, and underplays or ignores the divergent pasts of the different peoples now living within Thailand” (Keyes 1991:116). As a result, being able to recognise and pay appropriate respect to the monarchy and loyalty toward the Thai nation state is regarded as one of the most important indicators of being an ‘educated’ Thai citizen.

It is interesting to note that the reason for lack of enthusiasm toward formal education among the north-eastern villagers in the 1950s, was similar to the 'indifference' found in 1960s and 1970s among the 'hill tribe' villagers. It was because "the knowledge gained from attending a state-sponsored school had little relevance to the world in which they lived" (Hanks 1960:25-6, see also Keyes 1991:98). According to an experienced NGO worker in the highland area, until around the mid-1980s it was rather difficult for development workers to persuade parents to send their children to Thai schools. The 'hill tribes' education programme faced difficulty not only in instructing 'hill tribes' children in standard Thai, but in persuading the parents to send their children to school, because children were regarded as important workers in the family and expected to assist the parents by looking after younger siblings, and by doing agricultural or domestic work. Thus the parents often preferred their children to support them rather than send them to 'school', which they thought of little practical value.

However, such attitudes have gradually changed in the last twenty years, due to the poor prospects of the upland farming on account of soil erosion, land shortage, and land controls associated with reforestation. By the late 1990s, when I was conducting my field work (1994-97), most of the parents, if they could afford it, were eager to send their children to obtain formal education. Because the parents no longer see a bright future in farming, they are aware that it is crucial for their children to get a Thai formal education in order to find a better job and improve their prospects. At least six years of elementary education are needed to secure a job in town. It is clear from my survey that evening adult education courses are popular among the Chiang Mai 'hill tribes'.

Many of the interviewees mentioned that their reason for coming down to Chiang Mai was to go to school. What is especially remarkable in Chiang Mai is the availability of night schools, which allows them to work in the daytime. Most come to school to acquire a certificate, so as to get a better paid job. Thus, normally, they try to finish their education as quickly as possible, up to P6 (elementary school 6th grade) level then on to M3 (secondary school 3rd grade) level.

For example, an informant (female 31) said she could hardly speak a word of Thai when she went to a government funded sewing course for hill tribes in Mae Chan at the age of fourteen. When she was seventeen years old (1982) she was asked to come down to Chiang Mai to do domestic work. The wage was 200 Baht a month. In spite of the fact that she remembers being unable to speak Thai and feeling unhappy, as well as enduring low wages, it was her own decision to come down to Chiang Mai. She said, "staying in the village has no future, nothing. But if I come to the city, it is up to me whether I have a future or not. It is entirely up to me." She worked hard. She studied from P1 - P4 (primary education from the first year to fourth year) in a year, from P 5 - M 3 (primary fifth year and sixth year and secondary education from the first year to the third year) in three years at the adult school. When another informant (male 41) came to Chiang Mai at the age of 24, he had only basic Thai, which he had learnt from a Western Missionary when working as his assistant. At first, he lived with an American missionary family in Chiang Mai, and during that time he went to adult school to study from P1 to M3 level (normally it will take nine years to finish) in five years (1980-1985).

Besides adult education or night school, there are special institutions which

provide accommodation, food and education for highlanders in Thailand - Buddhist temples and student hostels supported by Christian missionaries, NGOs etc. The recent rapid increase in conversions to 'Buddhism' and 'Christianity' among the young generation needs to be understood in this context, as these institutions grant 'hill tribes' children educational opportunities.

The Buddhist Missionary Programme

Along with various governmental efforts to incorporate 'hill tribes' into the Thai nation state, the tribal welfare division of the Department of Public Welfare of the Ministry of Interior launched the *thammacarik* programme in 1965 with financial support from the Asia Foundation. It was a joint venture of the Sangha (Buddhist monastic Order) and Thai government officials to convert 'Hill tribes' to Buddhism. The purpose of the programme was to strengthen sentimental ties between Thai and 'hill tribes' and to cement the loyalty of the 'hill tribes' to the nation through the development of belief in Buddhism (Keyes 1971:562, Suksamran 1977:105). "According to Pradit Disawat, the head of the division, the propagation of Buddhism among the different tribal groups would be likely to advance administrative and development goals among the tribal people because the integration of our people into a large community depends upon the ties of custom and religion." (Tambiah 1976:435). It is important to note that the foundation of the programme was not simply a religious matter, but combined with the ideology of loyalty to the Thai nation state after the Sangha Administration Act of 1963, which reinforced state control of the clergy (cf. Tapp 1989:85). Since Buddhism is a national religion supported by the monarchy and is closely associated with the legitimisation of the Thai nation state, Buddhist monks have played a crucial role in Thai nation building (cf. Suksamran 1977). The *Thammacarik* programme can be seen as part of the

design to strengthen political integration through Buddhism. In particular it was a part of a national integration programme concerned with national security of the border area. It was organised by the Department of Public Welfare, and involved monks accompanying government officials “to propagate Buddhism to the ‘heathen’”(Tambiah 1976:445). Therefore it is not surprising to find, as some elderly villagers recall, that missionary monks confronted the ‘hill tribes’ in a fundamentally authoritative and patronising manner, like the ‘civilised’ agents from dominant societies do towards the ‘uncivilised’ ‘aboriginal’. Consequently, most of the previous studies on Thammacarik programme raised doubts about the real effectiveness of the programme (cf. Keyes 1971, Tambiah 1976:434-471, Suksamran 1977:101-108, Tapp 1989:85-91, Wongsprasert 1988:126-137). Keyes emphasises the lack of communication between the monks and ‘hill tribes’ as the reasons for the poor achievement of the programme. On the other hand, Tapp documented the case of someone who was ordained “explicitly in order to be able to learn how to read and write in Thai”(Tapp 1989:86). My findings from interviewing male Akha interviewees corresponds with Tapp’s observation. The demand for Thai education is stronger compared to ten years ago when Tapp made his observation, and to study Thai language became the primary motivation for conversion. For example, an informant (male 26) said, ‘I came to Chiang Mai for the first time at the age of ten with my cousin to learn Thai at the temple in Chiang Mai... I decided to come because I wanted to see Chiang Mai...At that time, my father was dead and we were rather poor but I was still too young to earn money. So, my mother was happy because it was a good deal -- free accommodation, free food and free education and this was her solution to worrying about how to feed me’. According to Wongsprasert who works at the Tribal Research Institute, between 1966 and 1983 “over one-third of the total tribal population” (Wongsprasert 1988:127)

received Thai education through this *Thammacarik* programme.

“In 1970, Her Royal Highness the Princess Mother laid the foundation stone for the Monk and Novice Training Centre”(Wongsprasert 1988:126). The Educational Training Centre for *Thammacarik* programme was established at *Wat Srisoda* situated at the foot of *Doi Suthep* in Chiang Mai in 1972 and it became the regional centre of the *Thammacarik* programme. The educational function of the programme as a temple school has been strengthened in the 1990s. By the time I conducted my field research on this programme in 1997, the initial three-storied building was extended into a series of new school buildings and the accommodation was impressively finished. This temple school accommodates 400 ‘hill tribes’ male children between the age 10 - 18 years old, offering a range of fourteen subjects (including technical education) up to University level, free of charge. About ten out of sixty-four teachers at the school are graduates of this programme. The children have twenty days holiday per year if they want to visit their parents.¹ This temple school is now well known among the ‘hill tribes’ and frequently visited by their parents, relatives and village friends, living in Chiang Mai or elsewhere. Thus, the recruitment mediator is not necessarily an official from Bangkok, as documented by Keyes in the 1960s, but may be a senior fellow of their acquaintance. According to the monks working for the programme, the only concern today seems not how to find applicants, but how to accommodate all the applicants for the next year, as their number is almost beyond its capacity, although they are still extending capacity to accommodate another 800 children (including girls) in *Meejo* district.²

¹ They do not have classes on Saturday and Sunday, but they are supposed to stay within the school.

² According to a monk, it costs 3000-4000 baht/child per year. Thai government supports 50% of the cost. During my occasional visits to this temple during the fieldwork (1997), I heard some

Learning hierarchy through Buddhism

When 'hill tribes' children enter this programme, what they were taught first of all, is how to behave in relation to the hierarchical order and the appropriate manner in which students should interact with teachers and seniors. This is similar to what Keyes pointed out in the case of popular education in the village schools. He put these relationships between teachers and villagers as "the essential elements of national culture (which) make it possible to act appropriately within the world of the Thai state." (Keyes 1991:90). He then noted that, "the proposed world of the village school thus continues to prepare children to accept the political and economic inequalities of the state-oriented world of modern Thailand"(Keyes 1991:122). Keyes further noted that "When a monk-teacher asserted his authority, (in the traditional temple education in the rural Thailand) the students were subordinated to a representative of religion; when a modern teacher asserts his or her authority, the students are subordinated to a representative of the state"(Keyes 1991:109). In the case of the Thammacarik programme, although it is taking place in a temple, a religious space, however, the hierarchical order represents the Thai nation state. This is where they learn (or are forced to recognise) that they are categorised as 'hill tribes' by the Thai government as a 'second class citizen', nevertheless, through the mercy of the Thai King and Queen, they were granted the special opportunity for education to become a 'good' Thai citizen. They learned about the government's concern for the 'hill tribes problems' and about the rationale of 'hill tribes' development projects.

local Thai complaining about this special treatment of hill tribes children as 'discrimination' against 'Thai' people. According to him, his family is as poor as 'hill tribes', and he would not be able to afford to send his son to go to school beyond compulsory school, yet, his son would not

The implications of this acknowledgement of the hierarchy and the clear power difference between 'Thai' and 'non-Thai' can give rise to two responses. One is to become a mediator between the Thai officials and other 'uneducated' fellows; in other words, to become 'elite' hill tribes, the class that goes in between. Since the sense of superior or inferior is a relative term, they would be positioned as 'inferior' compared to 'Thai', but simultaneously, they could feel 'superior' in relation to other 'uneducated' 'hill tribes'. Thus, a sense of being a member of the 'elite' (educated = beyond 'hill tribes') emerges. Another response was to find a solution by making another choice such as 'Christian identity' or 'Chinese identity' in order to get out of the stigma of 'backwardness' which has been attached to the "hill tribes" category in Thai society. It was interesting to find that many presently 'educated' Christian Akha used to study in the temple in the early stages of their life, and gained contempt for Buddhist hierarchy, which they saw as representing the hierarchical order of the Thai nation state. In order to escape their appointed status as second-class citizen, some converted to Christianity. Here is an example of someone who stayed in temple to gain education, then converted to Christianity later.

Case Study: From Buddhist to Christian

(male 28)

This informant was ordained as a Buddhist monk for four years when he was a child to obtain primary education, after a young Thai Buddhist monk came to his

be accepted in this special programme because the priority is 'hill tribes'.

village through the *Thammacarik* programme. At that time there was tension in his home because his father's second wife did not get on well with his mother (the first wife) and he was not particularly happy being at home, therefore he welcomed the idea of studying Thai in the town. He was a serious hard-working boy and did well in his studies. He enjoyed meditation, as it helped relax him. However, he was not really happy because he was sensitive to the way other Thai looked down on him. Before going down to town, he never paid attention to whether he was Akha, Thai or whatever; however, being in the temple, he had to face a situation where an image of the hill tribes and the Akha was already defined by the Thailand's hill tribes development policy as inferior, second-class citizens. Thus during that time, he inevitably became aware of the power relations between the Thai and the hill tribes, and reflectively, he developed many friendships with other hill tribe boys, but had few Thai friends. He thinks that it was good experience to learn not only the Thai language, but also to learn how to behave in Thai society, which has a strict pecking order. In his words, 'Never talk back to the senior', 'Smile even when you are angry', 'Show respect to the senior, no matter if you have respect or not'. He acknowledges these social skills are necessary for living in Thai society. It is interesting to note that he did not particularly enjoy the hierarchical order himself, but at the same time, in my observation, he demands such 'appropriate' manners from his juniors in personal interaction, because he sees it as an 'appropriate manner' for educated people in a Thai setting. He expects respect from the villagers who have not been 'educated'.

After he completed his secondary level education, he went back to his village to help his parents. He worked in the fields near his village, owned by Thai farmers. The wage was only 60 baht a day. After two years, he decided to go

down to town to look for a better paid job. He worked for a bakery where accommodation and food were provided, earning 80 baht a day. After a while he become bored with this job as it was so routine. Then he worked at a restaurant washing dishes for a daytime job (2500 baht a month), and as a parking guard (1500 baht a month). Most of his work-mates were young hill tribe men like himself, and the manager was a Thai. Thus the power relation between the Thai, as employers, and hill tribes, as employees, became embedded in his mind and his Akha identity was strengthened. During that time, he started going to an Akha church³ on Sunday with his work mate (an Akha male). The initial reason was "I had a problem with my health which even a medical doctor in town could not cure. My friend told me if I become a Christian, I will get better, so I become Christian."

He made good friends within the Akha Christian network, and met an Akha Christian girl from Burma. Under her influence he recently decided to become a Christian. According to him, the reason for this choice is as follows: he already knew for a long time that he had to find an alternative to the Akha way of life because continuing the Akha way is no longer practical. In his words "It takes too much time and it costs too much money". He originally had tried to understand Buddhism while he was a novice. However, he could not help but feel competitive with Thai people as they generally disdain hilltribes. He had self-respect, and did not feel comfortable in adhering to the Thai Buddhist

³ The Akha church, where the preaching is conducted by the Akha in the Akha language, is a unique place to help strengthen the bonds of common ethnic solidarity. Since the sermon is conducted in the Akha language by the Akha, the participants are exclusively Akha people. This is a place where over 100 Akha, born both in Thailand and Burma, assemble every Sunday. Most of the participants are youths. It sometimes provides opportunities for youngsters to meet their future spouses.

hierarchy, although he liked some Buddhist ideas such as meditation. Therefore, he saw Christianity as a compromise. He explained, "If I took the Akha or Buddhist way you will have to worry about being poor. With my parents being old, I have to worry about whether I have enough money to do a proper funeral ceremony. In Akha ways, it is important to sacrifice a buffalo for the funeral. But when my grandmother died, our family did not have enough money and had to sacrifice a pig instead. Other villagers pointed at us saying 'why do you sacrifice a pig? A misfortune might come because you did not satisfy your ancestor.' But in the Christian way we do not have to worry or to feel ashamed of being poor." He added, "We have to develop our villages and people so that the Thai do not look down on us. Christians help us to develop our villages and help us to go to school. We Akha people have to help each other to improve our standard of living."

After acquiring socio-economic status, some successful urban Akha, who have often spent the least time in the home village, occasionally project their Akha identity. Here is such an example of the new urban elite Akha. Their nostalgia for rurality and politico-economic interest play a critical role in the process of reconstruction of their own image of 'traditional culture'.

Case Study: Urban Elite Akha identity

(male 30)

This informant (male 30) is the youngest son (the ninth) in his family. Since his village was part of a Thai education project set up by the border patrol police

in the 1970s, he had access to Thai education. With the support of his older brothers and sisters, his family could afford to send him to school. He finished his elementary schooling in the village, then went down to Chiang Rai for secondary school. He was such a diligent student that he also won a place to go to University in Bangkok to study law after he completed high school in Chiang Mai. After having finished the degree, he started working as a bank clerk. Like many of the young Akha generation, he spent most of his adolescence away from his village because the distance between the home and school or work place was too great to commute daily. Thus he could only see his parents during the school holidays. He married a Lahu woman (26) who is working at a hospital in Bangkok. They knew each other since high school in Chiang Mai. She started working in Bangkok after she studied nursing at a college in Chiang Mai.

A 'proper' Akha marriage ceremony was held in his village. The sacrificial pig was over 150 kg. According to the villagers, "It is the best of all in the last thirty years." The groom explained the reason why he held his marriage in the Akha way. Since he studied human rights at University, he is well aware of the international movement to preserve indigenous cultures. He thought it important to record these Akha customs before they die out. Thus he had asked his sister (31), who used to work as a trekking tour guide, to take many photographs of the whole ceremony. She also thought that his idea was good as she can also use these photographs to present an exotic Akha culture to the tourists. He said, "in fact, I hardly know about the Akha culture, so this is a good occasion." His house is one of the most affluent houses in the village, a solid modern two-floor building, therefore on the day of the wedding the decoration of the house could be seen by all the villagers. Whereas some of the older people were paid to perform the marriage ceremony, the other villagers did

not join the ceremony. One of the villagers told me on the way to work at the nearby garlic plantation owned by a lowland Thai, "They are rich so that they can afford the Akha way. We are poor, we do it the simpler and cheaper Christian way. We can not even afford to attend the ceremony because we need to earn money everyday. If we do not go to work we can not receive 60 Bahts" The groom might not have intended, his marriage to be perceived by some of the villagers as a symbol of wealth.

The participants in this event consisted of urban Akha who came back to the village for a few days to attend the ceremony and some old people who were paid to conduct the 'authentic' Akha ritual. Thus at some stages of the service, when the old people were chanting ritual songs which lasted for a few hours, the young generation became bored as they could not understand them, and started watching television. The noise of the television and the laughter of the young generation from the first floor was more powerful than the chanting by the old people on the second floor; nevertheless, the groom did not mind as his ceremony was "successfully documented" in order to project the 'unique' Akha identity among his educated friends.

2. Christianization

It was reported by an American Christian missionary, Gordon Young (1966) that there were no Christian Akha in Thailand until the early 1960s. Christian Baptist missionaries used to bemoan their lack of success in converting the Akha. Paul Lewis, an American Baptist missionary, who translated the Bible into Akha language, said in his book (1984) that the key theme of Akha culture is continuity. Anthropological researchers also noted the Akha strength of attachment to the traditional way of life. For example, Hanks (1964, 1969) observed in 1960s that the Akha are the strongest among the hill tribes.⁴

However, recently, and especially over the past ten years, a rapid increase in the number of Christian Akha is notable. An experienced British Missionary working among the hilltribes in north Thailand pointed out in interview that “the Akha seems most vulnerable to the recent change.” It is now said that over 34 % of the total Akha population in Thailand has officially converted to Christianity.⁵ Among the urban Akha, it is estimated from my survey that more than half of the Akha might be Christian.⁶

Reasons for the Conversion

⁴ These works reinforce the image of the Akha as ‘backward’ and ‘traditional’. However, it does not necessarily mean that the Akha has lived a self-sufficient isolated life as discussed in the Chapter three.

⁵ According to the Overseas Missionary Fellow in Chiang Mai, over 17,000 out of 50,000 Akha are Christian, and there are about 210 village churches. Sometimes a few different sects of Christian churches exist in a single village. (interviewed May 1998)

⁶ This estimation was made based on the semi-structured interview conducted with 343 urban Akha informants (1995-1996).

It was pointed out by Kammerer(1990, 1996) that the most common reason for adopting Christianity among the Akha is as a means of relieving themselves of the economic burden of Akha ritual obligation. Often the reasons for converting were their inability to keep up with the social requirements of *Akhaang*, and the loss or lack of knowledge of the *Akhaang*.⁷ It was regarded as a negative form of escapism, rather than a positive embracing of alternatives. Christianisation took place not only at the individual level in town to obtain educational advantage, but also at the village level, the phenomenon of whole village conversion has not been uncommon. For example, an informant (female, 21) who works in Chiang Mai was surprised to see that all the people in her village had converted to Christianity.⁸ She said “nobody was Christian in this village just three months ago, when I came back last time. But now you can find two churches in the village and everyone is Christian.” The house warming ceremony she was attending was conducted by a young Burmese Christian Akha. He started coming to this village once a week to preach in Akha in the last two months. He has a wife and a child on the Burmese side, but three days a week, he comes to the Thai side. He said, “in the future, I want to move to Thailand with my family, because in Thailand Akha villages lack Akha preachers. We are providing training for young people to teach the Bible by giving scholarships for further study. Thailand has money and they can build churches, but there are not enough Akha preachers.” He is a well-educated (he finished college in Burma) well-mannered and energetic young man and it was not too difficult for him to gain respect from the villagers. After the ceremony, my informant from Chiang Mai asked her mother whether she understood his prayers. She answered “not at all, all I know is to say ‘Amen’

⁷ See Kammerer 1990,1996, Tooker 1992:806

⁸ The author has also visited this village twice with her to observe the change in 1995.

at the end. But it does not matter. Everyone is the same. We are happy that he came around for our house-warming, otherwise we could not carry out any proper ceremony. Now no one in the village can conduct a ceremony in the proper Akha way. So we had been in trouble. But after he came, we do not have to worry any more. He knows that we are poor, so he introduced to us the cheaper alternative way.”

This explanation is similar to what Tapp found among the Hmong in his study. Both cases show the reason for conversion is often practical. Tapp reported that, “Txoov, a young man recently returned to the village from Laos, where he had been educated, was a Christian, and had new ideas for development and change. His proposal was that the entire village should convert to Christianity, for the very practical reason that they would then no longer have to sacrifice pigs and chickens in shamanic curing rituals, which the villagers could not afford, ...and these animals could then be reared commercially”(Tapp 1990:163-4). Then he concluded that, “the point of interest here is that all the impetus and plans for change emanated entirely from the villagers themselves, in the light of constraints experienced by them on their current economic practices” (Tapp 1990:165). It is important to note that this phenomenon should not be interpreted as suggesting that these people are not ‘religious’ because they can convert to a different religion out of calculation. An informant (male 38) who sent two of his daughters to student hostels supported by a Christian institution said, “When they are in the lowland they behave as Christians, they know exactly what they have to do. But when they come back home in the village, they are not Christian, they are my daughters, so I teach them the Akha way. They are clever enough to behave appropriately in both places.”

At this point, the argument about the meaning of Akha identity in Chapter four should be recalled. Both Kammerer and Tooker denied the missionary interpretation of '*zang*' as 'religion, but argued it was 'a way of life'. As Tooker (1992:799-819) pointed out, switching identities occurs because '*Akha~~z~~ang*' is not an internalised notion, but takes an exteriorised form, and she called attention to the problems of applying internalised notions of identity to the Akha case. As already noted, '*zang*' is not something to 'believe in' but something to 'carry', and when choices other than Akha *zang* are available, it was observed that they prefer to carry a proper *zang* no matter what it is, rather than carry the *Akha~~z~~ang* improperly. It is in this sense that Kammerer (1990:287-8) suggested, Akha Christianity is best characterised as a replacement: Christian customs substitute for traditional customs, as most converted Akha were simply seeking a cheaper and easier substitute for their own tradition by discarding the heavy burden of Akha customs.⁹

However, regarding Christian conversion as an easier substitute is not sufficient to account for the situation, because in some other cases the Akha choose Christianity as a positive alternative. Missionaries are often involved in development projects in the village, building kindergartens, schools, or by providing grants for education, or a health service. Thus, the villagers often

⁹Akha folk tales explain why Akha have to carry more *zang* (customs) than the others: when people of all kinds went to the dwelling place of the Creator to receive customs, all except the Akha carried a loosely woven basket. Since the Akha went with a tightly woven sack of the sort used to carry rice grain home from the fields, on the way back home the Akha did not lose a single piece of customs, whereas the others customs fell through the holes in the others' baskets. That is why the Akha customs are many and heavy while the others are few and light. Towards the Akha who carry such heavy burden of customs, Christianity invites them to throw them away by referring to the verse from Matthew 11: 28 'All people tired from carrying the heavy load on their backs, come

accept Christian penetration in return for improving their standard of living. Christianity is also seen as a symbol of 'advancement', and a way to get away from the stereotyped image of a 'backward' people that the Thais have saddled them with. When discourse created a hierarchical order between 'Akhazang' as 'backward', 'primitive', and 'Christian' as 'advanced', 'global', Christian conversion was no longer simply 'a replacement' as the two options are not even but one is claimed to be superior to the other.

Due to the missionary's idea of "bringing tribal and other ethnic groups from the darkness of demon worship into the light of Jesus' teaching" (Kammerer 1996:330), when the Akha claim to become Christian Akha as opposed to non-Christian, this also implies, as taught by missionaries, these Christian Akha have developed and become educated enough to join the realm of 'civilisation'. Such a view encourages them to look down on the non-Christian Akha, calling them "old-fashioned" and "stupid". Previous researchers observed that the Akha have a cultural relativist view towards differences between people, without any judgement or exclusiveness (Feingold 1976, Kammerer 1986). According to them, it is clear from Akha folk tales that the Akha are aware of the fact that they are surrounded by numerous other ethnic groups and know of many different types of *zang* (ways of life) besides their own. The Akha used to accept these differences without judging which is superior or inferior. Nonetheless, today there are frictions and tensions between the Christian Akha and the non-Christian Akha. The relativeness or ambiguity of the difference is no longer accepted, now they tend to choose positions exclusively.

Furthermore, the institutionalised idea of grouping Christians not only distinguishes between 'Christian' and 'non Christian' but even within the 'Christian Akha' population. Different attitudes and approaches towards Christian conversion are found within various Christian institutions. For example, three daughters of a man who was a priest in their home village were sent to the lowlands for education through Christian organisations. It turned out that each of his daughters joined a different church; the first daughter joined a special sect run by Americans; the second daughter an organisation run by Koreans, the third daughter a Roman Catholic organisation run by Italians. Strict regulations of the Christian institutions prevented the three daughters visiting each other while they grew up. Thus these three daughters did not have a chance to develop close bonds between them. At present, all of them are living in Chiang Mai, however they hardly meet each other. Their father is puzzled, saying 'I thought all Christians were same, but it is not so. My daughters have got an education but we have lost our family ties'.

Christian Cross-Border Networks

Contrary to the divisive example above, Christianity can also help establish trans-border connections among the Akha in Thailand, Burma and China. As the case study of whole village conversion showed, increasing numbers of Akha Christians are from Burma and China. And the Christian church has been the main focus for ongoing transnational contacts among the Akha. A similar situation among the Lahu and Lisu had been observed by Bradley (1997:112). This is due to political changes in China in 1950s, which forced the China Inland Mission, which had worked among the ethnic minority in China from the beginning of the century, to move south to Burma, then to Thailand. This process of movement made connections across the borders. This institute is

now called the Overseas Mission Fellowship and had been working extensively with 'hill tribes' in Thailand. The mission has trained some 'hill tribes' to take a leadership role and organise themselves to spread Christianity. Now it is these local leaders who are taking the initiative in linking the Christian Akha across the borders. Some of the Christian leaders are well informed by the missionaries about the distribution of the 'ethnic category' along the borders of China, Burma and Thailand, and they are eager to establish informal cross-border networks. Organising Christian transnational networks helps strengthen solidarity among the Akha. This helps internalise the imagined 'ethnic category' and formalise it among their people today. Contrary to the general view of Christian conversion as spoiling Akha ethnic identity, Christian affiliation is an important means of instituting trans-national Akha networks.

It should be noted that some of those who have travelled across the border as Christian local leaders showed a strong desire to write the story or history of the Akha of different countries. A Christian Akha informant (male 29) said, "I was born in Burma. Since I was a child, I have always wanted to go far away to experience new places. It is lucky that as a missionary I have been to many Akha villages in China, Burma and Thailand. I like travelling because I enjoy meeting people and talking with them and I can learn a lot from them. I am hoping to get a Christian scholarship to study in Bangkok. If I do, I will have time to sit and I want to write the story of Akha life in different countries. While I was visiting different villages, elderly people told me many different folk tales. I want to write them down to make a story book. ...The Bible is clever as you can learn stories from thousands years ago. If I write a story book people can read it even thousands years after my death."

Christian elite Akha are a potentially powerful group in terms of constructing 'Akha culture', because they are often ambitious, innovative and have a writing script¹⁰ developed by western missionaries. This aspect of Christian conversion has been rather overlooked by the observers due to the conventional view of Christianity as an alien western cultural system. Two elements of the Akha are in competition to write the story of the Akha people, one is supported by the Christian missionary movement, the other by the international movement for the preservation of indigenous culture.

Chinese Christians

While Christianity can provide psychological support for those who come from broken families, on the other hand, others feel anxious about abandoning their ancestors upon conversion. The recent success of Taiwanese Christian Churches among the highlanders residing along the borders of Thailand can be understood in this context. Previous studies of Christian conversion among Akha have only focused on western missionaries (either Protestants or Catholics), and a number of foreign missionaries are still active in the region.¹¹ However, there is also a growing number of Asian Christian missionaries in north Thailand. Thus, Christianisation does not always mean the penetration of alien Western cultural values as used to be the case. Now that various Christian agencies are working in north Thailand today, the different contexts and agencies will be taken into account in order to assess their influence.

¹⁰ There are three well-known Akha writing scripts; first one was developed by Paul Lewis, a Protestant missionary who also compiled an Akha dictionary. The second one was developed in the Hani/Akha autonomous county initiated by ethnic minority Chinese policy. And the third one was developed by NGOs in Thailand, supported by Dutch anthropologists.

¹¹ See Kammerer 1990, 1996

In terms of wider politico-economic environments, an interesting phenomenon today is the growing prestige of the Chinese within Thai society. In the past, people of Chinese origin were discouraged from projecting their Chinese identity in order to speed up their integration into Thai society. However, as mentioned earlier, this is no longer an issue in the present post-socialist age. On the contrary, China is regarded as a land of great economic opportunity and so the popularity of studying Chinese has greatly increased. Moreover, the popularity of Christian conversion initiated by Chinese should be understood in this context.

Those parents who are involved in trade considered that knowledge of Chinese is vital for traders wanting to expand their networks of trade partners, and will be especially so for the future generation. At present, Taiwan is one of the most popular destinations for migrant workers from Thailand, including the 'hill tribes'. According to an informant (male, 23), it costs 75,000 Baht to arrange work in Taiwan, and obviously those having facility with the language have an advantage. The informant's friend who can speak a few Chinese dialects obtained a Thai passport free of charge from a Taiwanese broker. Understandably, therefore, the parents are very keen to send their children to study Chinese if they can afford it.

According to a village headman (male, 52), who invited a Taiwanese church to his village, "The Taiwanese understand our worship of ancestors. They teach the ethic of filial piety. They are more or less like us and they do not look down on us. They also teach us Chinese." Taiwanese churches often provide Chinese language lessons during the evening or at the weekend under the guise of 'Bible Study'. Hence, converting to Christianity provides an opportunity to

find a better job and a better life. This is an undeniable motive for conversion, especially among the young generation whose parents can not afford to send them for private Chinese lessons. The primary reason for Christian conversion in this case is to achieve social or economic advantage. Through school or religious activities, these children develop associations with other Chinese-speaking friends. There is no doubt that these relations will be the basis for social networks where they will establish their sense of belonging and construct their identity.

Case Study: Chinese/Christian identity

(female 23)

She spent her childhood away from her parents at the student hostel organised by a Christian institution. She had a few relatives in Chiang Mai while she was at school and became Christian in the wake of her senior relatives. She now recalls that the Christian church taught her morality, what is bad what is good, and how to be a good person. It was useful particularly when she felt lonely and helpless as it taught her that, even though she could not see him, God is always with you to support you. She also liked the idea that God loves everyone equally no matter whether they are 'Thai' or 'hill tribes'. She had close Chinese friends and Thai friends but not many 'hill tribes' friends simply because the tuition fee of her private mission school was so high that there were hardly any 'hill tribes' children in that school. Her brother went to Taiwan to study Chinese after he finished high school in Thailand, and she too was thinking of going to Taiwan for further study. But at that time Taiwan had a bad reputation for encouraging Thai prostitution, so she decided to go to

Singapore instead to study Chinese and English. When she was in Singapore she introduced herself as 'Chinese' to her new friends. Most of her friends in Singapore were Chinese Malaysian or Japanese. During her stay in Singapore, she had plastic surgery to make her single eyelid into a double. She learned how to dress up as a 'modern city girl'. She had a few Japanese friends and learned from their fashion magazines. She was rather popular among friends and kept herself busy going shopping or to night clubs. After coming back from Singapore, she got involved in a small trading business, together with a Thai boy friend. Although he is not Christian, she thinks that it does not matter as long as she can share the same 'life style'. She knows that her father wants her to find a Chinese or Japanese husband rather than Thai husband, as Thai husbands tend to rely on a wife's economic capacity. But she wants to find her own husband through romantic love, not through her father. She agrees with her father that she does not want to marry an 'Akha', as she does not want to accept 'polygamy' which she thinks 'old fashioned'.

The difference in educational level, age, class, language skills and its implications for identity formation were examined. The following section will explore further the motivation and implications of the urban migration process with special focus on the gender and urban consumption. I will continue to look at the every day strategies which are essential to fashioning identity by differentiating oneself from others.

3. Gender, Consumption and Choices

From the earliest stage of urban migration among the Akha, it was discovered that female migrants exceed males in number. According to a survey conducted by Vatikiotis in 1982, males constituted 35 % and females 65 % of the Akha in Chiang Mai. He explained this in terms of the social conditions in the hills across the borders: those who migrated into Thailand found it difficult to settle in the hills, for Akha women it was often a choice between complying with an undesirable marriage with an Akha husband or moving down to the cities.¹² Although domestic roles attributed to women in the family often restrict the mobility of women, he pointed out that the gender related socio-cultural taboo in Akha society becomes a push factor that encourages Akha females to migrate. The high incidence of Akha women in Chiang Mai contrasts with the case of Karen women who have rarely been seen outside their traditional village until quite recently.¹³ It is interesting to note that although there are social norms to restrict women's mobility in both Akha and Karen society, Karen women have remained rurally located while in the case of the Akha these social norms and constraints have turned out to be push factors in women's urban migration.

The phenomenon of young female Akha urban migration needs to be examined in the context of recent international economic demands, particularly with its focus on gender. A number of recent migration studies indicate that a continuing characteristic of the Thai migration pattern is the large proportion of female migrants. Thai economic development which promoted urban-focused export-led development is considered as one of the causes. This high

¹² Vatikiotis (1984) conducted the survey as a part of his Ph.D research.

percentage of young female migrants is partly because of Thailand adapting its socio-economic strategy to the demands of the world market, as the economies of ASEAN regions have become enmeshed in the international division of labour. Due to the recruitment demands of the service sector and commercial industries the number of unskilled wage labourers, particularly young females, has grown.¹⁴ Accordingly, Thai development policies focused on tourism and export manufacturing created demand for a certain type of labour. Young females are preferred to men as being cheaper to employ, more obedient, and they are thought to be more suitable to repetitive tasks. The politico-economic demands of Chiang Mai, the prominent urban centre in north Thailand, presents major pull factors for incoming migrants. The majority of young female Akha migrants are involved in a narrow range of low-paid manufacturing and service-sector employment in Chiang Mai.

The victimhood of young female migrants has been the dominant motif in the literature on women and economic development in Thailand.¹⁵ While they might be in a relatively disadvantaged position in a socio-economic system in being ethnic minorities as well as female, viewing them as a 'victim' or 'passive objects of oppression' neglects the fact that they are active agents in terms of constructing social networks and indeed their own identity at the everyday level. I would like to argue that this macro viewpoint of confining female migrants as a victim of economic development is not sufficient to account for the complex of power dynamics associated with urban mobility at the 'practice' level. Because it misses internal tensions and different entanglements of each context and

¹³ See Hayami 1998

¹⁴ See the studies on female employment and urban migration in North Thailand. (Gray, Jennifer 1990 and Singhanetra-Renard & Prabhudhanitisarn 1992)

circumstances people are involved in. It is important to explore not only the particular economic constraints and gender-related expectations, but also the opportunities and choices available to young female migrants.

Mobility is not simply change between locations, but it also associated with the anticipation of social mobility. Moving to the towns provides wider and better opportunities for employment and education, as well as choice of marriage partners than that is available in their home villages or towns. Mobility is a strategy to maximise whatever opportunities are available to them. Moreover, through mobility they acquire status and identity by altering their own self images.

Cities are perceived as the centre of development and change and city life as a 'modern' liberation from the drudgery and social constraints of rural life particularly for young female migrants. With women's increasing access to modern education and occupations, there is a tendency among the urban educated to look down on those who only stay in the countryside as ignorant and backward, in contrast with sophisticated and progressive townsfolk. In this sense, the experience of urban life becomes an important issue in differentiating urban Akha from rural Akha. Contemporary urban gender images associated with life style and consumption provide a new force to reflect one's own self-image with power and prestige.¹⁵ The pulling power of an urban life style and consumption culture presented by the media drives aspirations towards individual upward mobility and is a substantial force in fashioning identity.

¹⁵ Recent literature criticises such views; see for example Mills 1997, Askew 1998.

¹⁶ Moore (1994:66) also argues by using the term, 'fantasies of identities', which play a significant role in the way individuals confront and potentially transform existing social discourse about

Akha men in 'public' spheres and women in 'domestic' ones?

Previous studies have pointed out that sexual stratification and the relative ranking of men and women was of central concern in the Akha sociocultural system. The Akha gender system was conceived as a primary basis for understanding Akha society, as it serves the fundamental cosmological order of society itself (Hanks 1988, Kammerer 1988). Hanks (1988) presented the practical and ritual division of gender roles with special focus upon women's capacities and responsibilities. It was a reflection of the feminist anthropologist's trend at that time, as they sought to build or reform social life in line with 'women's culture'. Kammerer (1988) noted a meticulous sexual division of labour and sphere in Akha society, both at the levels of daily life and in ritual, and accounted for the dynamic Akha gender asymmetry - neither sex being higher or lower in relation to annual ritual ceremonies.

With reference to the Akha folk story of fetching a spirit-wife, Kammerer argued that the role of Akha women can only be completed by becoming a wife. From this story Kammerer (1988:33-51) explains the boundary of the domains between human beings and spirit as well as the domain between male and female. She tells the story of fetching a spirit-wife as follows;

Long ago when the sky and earth first appeared and human beings were first born, the Originator (A poe mi-yeh) asked an Akha man if he wished to marry. "Ah, I do want to marry. How should I go about?" he replied. Following the Originator's instructions, he walked into the forest on a path until he reached a large vine and then

called three times. A spirit-woman (sometimes described as half-tiger, half-spirit) emerged from the woods. No clothes concealed the thick matted fur that covered her body. Her fangs long, her fingernails like sickles, and her toenails like hoes, the promised bride walked noisily onto the path. To make a skirt for her, the Akha man cut open the bottom of a rice sack. He then covered the spirit-woman's head with his shoulder bag. Together they returned to the village where, after their marriage, the spirit-wife killed and ate her husband, the first Akha man to marry.

The spirit-woman desired another man in the village and wished to marry him. He refused saying "I would not marry you. You eat people. I would not dare marry you!" She told him not to be afraid and assured him that she would not eat him. Then the spirit-woman urged her prospective second husband to strike off her fangs and to cut off her claws. She told him that they could marry and live together without her biting him to death if he built a wall within the house separating her side from his. The husband struck off her fangs, cut off her claws, and built the dividing wall as bidden.

After the couple began living together as husband and wife, the woman's spirit relatives descended from the forest into the village in search for her. Once they learned that she was well and residing in the village, they went back to their forest abode. But distrusting what they had been told on their first visit, her parents came back down to the village to inquire a second time. Upon being told that their daughter was not dead, they returned once more to the forest.

To prevent a third visit, the human husband built a gate at the edge of the village and placed a carved wooden man and a carved wooden woman beside it. He did so to ensure that, should his wife's spirit parents come again in search of their daughter, they would descend only as far as the gate. Upon seeing the coupled figures, they would realise that their daughter was indeed alive and conjugally united with her husband and would then return to the forest without entering the village. Thereafter the spirit-wife was an Akha woman.

The focus of these studies reflects the theoretical development of gender studies within anthropology. Both Hanks and Kammerer's studies set their argument within a cosmological value system that implies their acceptance of the existence of a bounded integral cultural system. Gender studies at that time began to reassess the pervasive western feminist idea of women's subordinate status to men by providing evidence of equally 'high' status of women in non-western society. The question of what it means to be powerful and to have a higher cultural value in the socio-cultural context in the society being studied was posed. As a result, a number of studies stressed the need to look at questions of status and the exercise of power in the context of particular cultural and social settings. And they attempted to illustrate the cosmological interpretation of a gender system of a particular culture so as to demonstrate the limitations of the single unitary ideology of 'the subordination of women'. Following this trend in gender studies, earlier studies on the Akha gender system stressed the complementarity of women's and men's social roles in Akha cosmology. In this way, by 'describing' or 'explaining' the differences between men and women, the gender system used to be conceptualised as a symbolic form of relationship between men and women.

Gender not as Cultural determinants but as a Dynamic Process

Cultural determinants analysis has a tendency to stress cultural integration, viewing gender as a system. The problem of previous studies, so called 'gender symbolism' (Wazir 1995:13) is that both Hanks and Kammerer more or less treat the symbolic Akha gender system as if it exists by itself, by separating this Akha society from the influences and changes with relation to the world around. Within classical anthropology, there was a considerable emphasis on generalisations regarding culture and social organisation in ethnic terms. And such symbolic analysis of gender relations was restricted within the structuralist framework of a cultural system. The underlying assumptions of this framework imply a local consensus regarding world view and social relations. Thus, it tends to overlook variability, heterogeneity, contradiction, relativity, and changes over time.

The gender system, however, needs to be understood as an ever-changing process mediated by power relations, that is, experienced and reproduced through everyday practice. I agree with Ong that "a new direction for the anthropology of gender should include both the transformation of gender system and of gendered subjectivity in the process of social changes." (Ong 1989:301). As I argued in the previous chapters, it is theoretically misleading to conceive the Akha gender system as a static, integral, cultural system, or as a coherent symbolic order, to which the Akha identity had often been attributed. Instead, the Akha gender system should be understood as a complex and dynamic process in relation to geographical mobility and inter-ethnic relations. Thus, the focus of my study is to demonstrate how symbolic Akha gender meanings and power relations are operating strategically as reactions to critical changes

happening in their everyday life.

It is common among Akha households to put more emphasis on advancing the careers of sons over those of daughters. As a result, sons are more likely to receive further education than daughters, and consequently sons join the work force at a later age than do daughters. Daughters are expected to contribute financial support for the schooling of their younger siblings, particularly their brothers. Typically the expectation is that the daughters will go out of the village to work at a relatively young age. As Phongpaichit (1982) in her study on Thai massage girls identified, their reasons for going to the towns is economic pressure and a sense of a daughter's obligation. It is certainly true in the Akha case that strong fidelity to parents is often expressed by the informants. However, the motivation for the migration cannot be explained simply in economic terms or cultural expectation, compensating considerations are the greater freedom and opportunities they enjoy in the towns.

Case Study: Seeking for Self-autonomy

(female 21)

An informant (female 21) told me why she ran away from her village. Her father had recently become a drug addict, and she felt upset when she saw him beating her mother because she did not give him all her wage - 60 Baht a day. He wanted money for his drugs whereas her mother tried to keep the money for food and education for the children. If she stayed with her parents, she had to give the money she earned to her father, which he would use to buy drugs. She felt sorry for her mother, but she decided to leave home, so she could use all

the money for her own future. 'If I stayed at home, I can never get a opportunity for further education, whereas in Chiang Mai, I can go to adult school in the evening after work.' 'After I accumulate enough money, I want to buy a sewing machine. My dream is to have my own shop.' The most common dream among urban young female is to become a small independent entrepreneur, such as owning a restaurant, a cloth shop, or to become a hair dresser.¹⁷ This informant's dream is one such example. 'I never liked working in the fields; it is dirty and tedious. Although the wages are as low as an agricultural labour, I much prefer to work as a shop assistant in town. I do not want my skin to get dark like my mother's from working outside. Dark skin is not beautiful. My mother's life is so pitiful. I want my life to be better than hers.' The informant is hoping to bring her younger sister down to live with her in Chiang Mai when her sister finishes elementary school in the village.

The phenomenon of young female urban migration is often viewed negatively because it increases the risk of HIV infection. (Kammerer et al 1995:60). Although the idea of making a straight connection between young female migrants and the commercial sex industry is pervasive internationally, as well as within Thai society, it is too simplistic to associate the young urban female 'hill tribe' with prostitution just because a cash market exists in which sex for money is available in the towns. The sensational, tragic stories of poor young girls intrigues news reporters and the association of hill tribes with prostitution is often exaggerated by the mass media. The commercial sex industry does not wholly represent the only employment of young female migrant workers.¹⁸ And

¹⁷ This finding is based on semi-structured interviews during my field research.

¹⁸ It is true though significant numbers of young female migrants from Burma and China are

indeed, as some informants suggested, staying in the village leads to a higher risk of HIV infection. According to an informant (female 23) her friend married an Akha man who became heroin addicted and used to share needles with other villagers. Eventually he was infected with HIV and then infected his wife and her friend. So the informant thinks that if she had stayed in her village, she would have married an Akha like her friend did, and maybe ended up with the same consequences.

Since the 1970s, working as a domestic maid has been the most common first job for young unmarried Akha women. There were probably less than 50 Akha individuals residing in Chiang Mai at that time, mostly young females or girls working either as entertainers or as domestic maids for Thais, Chinese, and Westerners. The income of a domestic maid is normally no more than the income available in the agricultural sector. Young girls, however, often prefer to take these opportunities rather than stay in the hill villages, saying 'there is no future nor opportunity in the village, but in the city I can gain new experience and perhaps a better future'.

Today, it is common for the established urban Akha to employ young Akha girls as domestic maids whose responsibilities include child care, looking after house work and often working as a shop assistant. Urban Akha usually have relatives and friends across the border areas, and they find employees through such informal social networks. Striking economic differences were apparent amongst the urban Akha in Chiang Mai.

Case Study: From Employee to Employer

(female 37)

An informant (female 37), who has lived in Chiang Mai since 1976, once worked as a domestic maid in Bangkok when she was 15 years old, now is an employer of a domestic maid after establishing herself in Chiang Mai. She left her village when she was 14 years old, and studied for a year in Chiang Rai at an adult education programme organised by the Thai government. At that time, her Thai was still rather basic. One year later, she was employed by a Thai official as a domestic maid. She worked for a Thai family in Bangkok for 9 months, then decided to resign, as she wanted to go to school. She received only 500 Baht after 9 months full-time work. She did not go back to her village but stayed in Chiang Mai for her further education where her older sister who had married a westerner also resided. 'During the 1970s and early 80s the majority of the tourists used to be westerners and if you could speak English, selling 'hill tribe' handicrafts was pretty good business.' The informant learnt to speak English by helping her sister selling handicrafts to tourists. In her late 20s, the informant was married to an affluent retired English man who is interested in 'indigenous people'. He and his wife (the informant) are living comfortably as a couple in Chiang Mai where they employ a young female Akha domestic maid. She occasionally visits her village with her husband's Land Rover and stays at the resort hotel nearby. 'It's a hassle going up in the village. So dusty and dirty. Every time I come back from the village I am infected with some kind of virus. My body can no longer cope with such an environment.'

Among the Akha, whose kinship is strongly patrilineal, the parents' expectations of their son and their daughter are different. Women are expected to perpetuate the male line of the family by giving birth to sons. This is the reason why polygamy was practised among them. As mentioned earlier, an Akha husband is entitled to have a second wife if the first wife can not have a son, for without a male child, patrilineal ancestor worship can not be continued.¹⁹

Despite the ideological emphasis on fertility and the cosmological value of femininity²⁰, in reality women are often constrained by their marriage. For example, as noted already, if a wife cannot bear children, the husband can legitimately marry a second wife, and if an Akha woman comes back to her parent's house after divorce, she is allowed to stay only a few days, and must remarry another man immediately. This practice encouraged urban migration of Akha women during the 1970s, and in the 1980s of those who wished to avoid unwanted marriages

Case Study: Searching for a New Life

(female 44)

According to an informant (female 44), she married an Akha man for the first time when she was still a teenager. Unfortunately, the marriage was a disaster. When he got drunk he became violent. Even though her husband beat her she was not supposed to beat him back. According to Akha norms, the wife cannot beat the husband. If she does, the husband can officially divorce her. On the

¹⁹ Some Akha decided to convert to Christianity because they had only daughters.

²⁰ See for example Kammerer 1988

other hand, a husband beating his wife is accepted. When this woman could not stand her married life anymore, she ran away and went back to her native village. Since she was not pregnant the husband's family did not care too much about her disappearance. On the other hand, she was no longer a full member of her native village and she was not entitled to participate in the village ceremony. Instead she had to stay outside of the village when village ceremonies were taking place. Moreover, according to Akha custom divorced women have to remarry within four days. She was not even entitled to stay in her house to soothe her broken heart. A group of Thai officials (Border Patrol Police) visited her village: they were looking for young female domestic maids. She had never been to Chiang Mai before but she decided to give it a try. It looked like a better option than marrying another Akha man. After she started earning a stable income, she brought her two younger sisters down to Chiang Mai and supported their education. 'Akha women in the village used to have little choice. They were expected to help their mother when they were young. Parents prefer to keep their daughters in the house rather than sending them to school. Since daughters were expected to get married around the age of 15 - 18, they were expected to be devoted to their parents before marriage. Akha women used to have limited experience working in the fields, coming back home and taking care of a husband and children.'

She continued "the life in Chiang Mai was not easy, sometimes very hard, but at least we have more freedom and choices. Once you see the big world you can not go back."

She chuckled, recalling that she wore blue jeans when she visited her village after working in Chiang Mai. No village girl wore blue jeans at that time and the villagers were surprised at the sight of urban style. Both of her younger

sisters have married with German tourists while they were working as tour guides. But the informant is still single as she had such a bad experience when she was young that she does not want to get married ever again. In her own words, “ I had enough of being oppressed by men” She made her own decision to become neither a wife nor mother.

**Case Study: A Rejection to the Cultural Norms of Polygamy
(female 26)**

An informant (female 26) was born as a first child. Because her mother could not get pregnant again for several years, the father decided to take a second wife. The second wife soon had two sons and the father cherished his sons. But the father and the second wife did not like his daughter (the informant) and treated her as if she was a domestic servant. After her mother (the first wife) died, the father sometimes physically abused her. Thanks to her brothers, she survived. One day her brother found out that her father had sold her to an agency, so he helped her secretly run away from the village. Since then she has been in Chiang Mai. Her brothers now working in Bangkok contact her once in a while, but she can never go back home and indeed she never wants to go back. She has converted to Christianity partly because she needed some psychological support and partly because she was attracted by western style. ‘In the church, there is a western couple, they do not mind kissing in public. I like the way they show affection openly to each other. You can see ‘love’ and ‘respect’ between wife and husband. I prefer western customers to Thai customers because western customers treat me as a dignified human being. My dream is

to find a western husband and live abroad. I would like to live in a monogamous society. In fact, I prefer older man because they tend to be more gentle, faithful and richer. Thus, the marriage would be more stable.'

Marriages arranged by their parents, relatives or friends used to be quite common among the Akha. Recently, private agencies have been established to arrange marriages through the highly developed international networks involving not only Thai but also Japanese, Taiwanese and Westerners. Demand for young 'hill tribe' girls is high. In some ways, these vulnerable girls are preferred because they are perceived as the makings of a faithful wife, being 'submissive' and 'practical'. Although the Thai authorities attempt to limit permanent settlement of illegal migrants, it is common for female migrants to marry Thai citizens to obtain permanent residence.

A Thai man (42) married to an Akha girl (19) said, 'It is not easy to find Thai women who want to marry me because I am not rich. But she is happy with what I have. She is more mature than other Thai girls of her age because she had been looking after herself since she lost her parents when she was young. She is hardworking. She works in the day time and she goes to school in the evening.' A Japanese man (62) married to an Akha woman (29) said, 'After retirement I decided to enjoy a quiet simple rural life. As you know, Japan is too expensive so I came to Thailand. I have been working hard for many years and never had time to enjoy family life. Now I am looking forward to having my own child. I decided to marry a 'hill tribe' girl because they are accustomed to a simple life style and their faces are similar to Japanese.'

At the supply side, the parents encourage their daughters to marry an affluent suitor instead of a poor Akha man. They acknowledge that economic concerns in assessing suitable mates for marriage are crucial to securing their own life and a future for their descendants. Thus, it is not uncommon to find parents persuading their daughters to marry a well-off non-Akha man even if he is older than the parents themselves.²¹ An informant (female 21) confessed why she ran away from her village to hide herself in Chiang Mai with her friend: “My father arranged my marriage to a Japanese man, but I did not want to get married to a man I had never met before. He has already received money from the agency. So I ran away from home because I was afraid to be sent to Japan.”

While young female migrants are in high demand and urban Akha girls often prefer to marry non-Akha, in contrast, the demand for male migrants is rather low. Uneducated boys with no prospect of economic security are facing serious problems finding a wife. An informant (male 22) grumbled, ‘Nowadays, women are looking for a man with a car. What about me who does not even have a motorbike?!’ Such distressful prospects and the loss of self-esteem cause ever-increasing drug problems, particularly among the discouraged young generation.

Compared to other town’s people, he felt himself to be undereducated and a social failure. Competition for success is a critical issue not only in town but also in the village back home. The indication is whether the parents can sent

²¹Some young Akha girls in Chiang Mai also said that they would prefer to marry well-off elderly non-Akha men to enjoy the security of marriage than to marry a poor young Akha man and suffer the economic hardship. Mixed marriage for young Akha girls’ with much older non-Akha men is frequent. The most extreme case to be found in Chiang Mai was a 16 year-old Akha girl married

their children to further education or not, which material goods (such as television, refrigerator, motorbike or car etc.) the household possess, and whether the family can re-build a solid modern house or not. Jealousy among the villagers can be acute.

While young Akha men are in little demand on the marriage market, they would prefer to marry Akha women because such a union allows them to feel superior to their wives. Here is a case of a young man who spent some time in Chiang Mai and who is hoping to go back to his natal village and marry a village Akha woman.

**Case Study: Prospects of Returning to the home village
(male 24)**

At the age of seven, the informant (male 24) came down to the lowland and stayed in the student hostel to go to school. Then he came to Chiang Mai for high school education. Since he finished high school, he has been working at one of the most trendy discos in Chiang Mai. "When I finished high school, my parents wanted me to come back to help develop their orchard, but I wanted to gain experience by staying in Chiang Mai at that time." "I worked hard in order to buy my clothes, a cassette tape recorder, bike, television and refrigerator etc. Then, I realised that the desire for consumption does not stop. If I bought a CD player, I would want CDs and then my desire would be for a camera, a car, computer, etc. It is endless. Because money would never be enough, no matter how much you earn, I am tired of it." "These days I am also

bored with the life in Chiang Mai. Disco and night life can be exciting for the first time, but if you work there everyday you do not feel like going to disco any longer.”

He has a few western friends who are interested in visiting ‘hill tribe’ villages and took them to his village several times. “I think the mountain village is not a bad place. In fact, it could be quite pleasant.” “In the future I would like to go back to my home village and establish a simple and natural guest house for visitors from abroad. I would marry a village Akha woman and enjoy a modest and quiet life. My dream is to organise trekking tours to enjoy the natural surroundings and get away from this urban life style.” “It is funny, isn’t it. *Farang* (westerners) are seeking for ‘tribal’ life style and we are seeking for *Farang* life style. I realised that it is important to be satisfied with what you have.” The informant is a stylish urban boy and speaks perfect standard Thai and some English. At first glance no one would assume that he is a ‘hill tribe’ boy. “People are preoccupied with making money in Chiang Mai they are only interested in showing off what they have achieved. But when can we gain satisfaction? Can we acquire inner peace? I do not think so because it is an endless game. I do not like the hectic urban life.” The informant shares the idea with his western friends (trekking tourists) who seek for a simple natural life style. “I would like to marry to a simple village girl. I do not want to marry an urban girl. They might be pretty but demanding. I like rural life style. I think it is pity that ‘Akha traditional life’ is vanishing.” It should be noted that his parents own some property in the village, orchard field and have a solid built house, which provides economic security and status in the village. And such conditions enable him to make a choice of going back home. It was interesting to observe that he differentiates himself from other urban Akha by

identifying with western 'naturalists'.

To summarise, the case studies examined the differences within the Akha group by looking at the way in which individuals are making identity choices with reference to education gender, class, age, religious affiliation, life experience and aspiration.

The motivation behind the migrants' mobility is not only economic. They are also looking for new experiences and alternative opportunities for their future. The desire of the young generation to leave home to work elsewhere means that they may spend their adolescent years living far from their family, socio-cultural norms and constraints. This involves changes in socio-cultural attitudes and perceptions concerning the roles and value of the migrants in the family and society.

The relationship between social expectation related to gender roles and individual personal identity is entirely contingent. Identity is not only attributed to cultural roles but relates to gender, class, occupation, locality, nationality and political and religious affiliations in daily life. Since identity construction is a complex, shifting, relational and multiplex continuing process, it is inclined to shift through life. Therefore it requires caution to explain the migrants behaviour and pattern based on the cultural determinants.

This discussion of plurality within the 'Akha' was intended to serve as a backdrop for the theoretical discussion on the power paradigm of cultural representation. It is not only outsiders who play a role but also the new young

urban Thai-educated Akha who can make a livelihood out of being active cultural agents. These cultural agents are reinforcing the normative notion of culture as something integrated and cohesive, whereas the simultaneous thrust of anthropology is to present culture as something differentiated, varied and plural - even as a Creolised syncretic process.

The purpose of Chapter six was not to argue how Akha cultural elements are distorted as a result of social change and development but rather to uncover the power paradigm of discourses on 'Akha identity'. It was intended to investigate the different forms of discourse, how and by whom such category, image and difference are defined, fashioned, and distributed at the intertwining individual, national, regional and global dimensions.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

(1) Methodological issue

In the previous literature on Akha studies, Akha identity has tended to be viewed as being based on ethnic group affiliation. Consequently, things such as shared descent and cultural practices have been regarded as the defining elements of it. My study, however, aimed to illustrate the syncretic nature of the processes of change which have resulted in Akha identity assuming hybrid forms. The thesis tackled the problem of the conventional approach of representing Akha collective identity by demonstrating the variability and heterogeneity of the self-imaging process. In order to go beyond a collective approach, the basic anthropological concepts of 'culture' and 'ethnic category' were fundamentally questioned and the vacuous notion of 'identity' based on localised culture or society was deconstructed.

The concept of 'culture' and 'ethnic category' have long served as a unit of analysis in anthropology. High-status individuals (usually elderly males) used to be regarded as 'cultural experts' serving their 'authentic' culture. In contrast, I acknowledged the diversity of the experience and desires of individual informants and pictured them as the main acting units. Hence, attention was paid not only to the elderly but also to the younger generation.

Alternative approach to the linear models of assimilation

My concern has been to suggest an alternative approach to the linear models of assimilation which enable us to recognise the variation and dynamics of the

identity construction process and to explore the factors that have shaped the differences in social life. Since ethnic identities are not fixed entities opposed to one another by fixed internal structures and external boundaries drawn from ethnic categorisation, the normative linear model which assumes shifting from one set of identity to another --from the Akha to Thai -- is, it was argued, the wrong way to explain the complexity of identity manifestation. Instead, as was shown in the case studies, the informants manipulate the various identities available to them, such as Christian, Tai (or Thai), Chinese, and Akha. For this reason I employed a spider's web model which enabled me to conceive individuals as agencies and to focus on their social relations and networks.

The alternative approach I offered involved tracing individuals who have moved across the territorial boundary of nation states, across rural/urban dichotomies, as well as over ethnic divides, because it is at the level of the individual, that identity formulation and manipulation takes place, and group interest comes into existence. This approach enabled me to investigate the dynamism of varied social roles and relations of the individual and the way they entered into a multi-layered grouping which was organised around shared or overlapping commitments and concerns. I found social network analysis useful, as it places the focus on the way individuals manipulate their roles rather than the other way round.

Difficulties in observing subjective experience of identity construction

Each individual has different experiences, and even the same experience may result in different meanings for different people. This in consequence may lead to rather different ways of constructing identity. It is the individual's subjective

experience that constructs and transforms the identity. Foucault reminded us of the fact that experience is neither true nor false but always a fiction. In his word, “[it] exists only after it has been made, not before; it isn’t something that is ‘true’ but it has been a reality” (Foucault 1991:36). In this regard subjective perception is an important determinant in shaping and projecting one’s own identity.

The methodological challenge here is how to observe and analyse the way people actually perceive their often conflicting identities and the way they use these identities. Among anthropologists, Epstein is a pioneer who looked closely at the nature of psycho-social identity formation. He understood that the roots of ethnic identity are laid down in the experiences of childhood, and believed that emotional experiences can be a potent force in later life. Following his idea, I conducted life history interviews with specially chosen informants. Particular attention was paid to the key events in their lives and in their social networks which could affect their identity construction process. My focus was not on a psychological analysis of the latent ‘self’ or ‘ego’ construction but on the conscious manifestation of grouping or differentiating one’s self from others in the social milieu. In other words, since ethnic labelling and self-identification depend on a notion of ‘otherness’, my concern here is not only what the Akha think about themselves but also includes how non-Akha see the Akha and their interactions in response to others’ (non-Akha’s) recognition. The identity formulation process takes shape in these manipulations and in their aspirations for how people should see them. Moreover, choice of identity is not only governed by rational calculation such as political or economic motivation, but also there is an emotional charge. Hence, I included the observable emotional expression of the informants.

(2) Findings

Subjective and objective elements

Identity is a product of dialectic synthesis involving an (internal) creation of a self-image and the (external) labelling offered by others. My intention was neither to make a general picture of 'Akha identity' nor to psycho-analyse the 'self'. Rather, I aimed to combine the linkage between collective forms of ethnic identification and the process through which people shape themselves into distinctive individuals. The interplay between subjective factors (self-ascriptive determinants and the way they perceive themselves), and objective factors (socio-political settings and external perceptions of category and images forced upon them) were examined. It was argued that while the process of identity formation always involves a measure of choice, it does not mean that identity is 'freely' chosen. Instead identities are constrained and determined by intertwining subjective and objective factors.

Shifting nature of identity

One can not determine identity in absolute terms, because the strategies of identity manipulation are shifting, and multiple. There can even be contradictory discourses within the same strategy. Identity is created through interactive symbolic processes of dialogue between subjective determinants and objective elements. Different experiences of individuals and various socio-political factors influence their choice of identities. The informants continuously reconstruct their identity at the individual level in response to their subjective experiences and immediate socio-political settings. Hence, identity is inclined to change at different life stages. In this way new groupings come into

being by crossing the dividing lines of geographic domains and ethnic categorisation. Such contingent selections of identities are not just the result of urban migration, but have always been exercised, for the Akha have never been isolated but rather enjoyed close interaction with neighbouring groups and have been influenced by the socio-economic polity of the region.

The intertwining contexts

This also means that the durability and stability of their identity are open to contestation and reformation. Identity construction processes are entangled in particular historical trajectories and specific political and social contexts. Today's contradictory way of representing identities can only properly be understood by empirical inquiry. Parameters of identity are played out on multiple levels. Four different levels of synchronic contexts were identified in this study: first, the immediate interactions of individuals; second, the historical characteristics of the region; third, the influences of the modern nation-state policy towards the minorities; fourth, the wider global socio-political situation and its demands.

Who or what shapes 'Akha identity'?

The purpose of my study was neither to speak out for the oppressed minority nor to interpret and represent collective 'Akha identity'. My focus was on the issue of the politics of knowledge construction. Hence, I pinpointed various agents and institutions involved in the contested process of defining and making claims for 'Akha identity', from colonial administrators to local government policy makers, the tourist industry, academic and non-academic ethnographers, international agencies, non governmental agencies (NGOs), and also the people categorised as 'Akha' themselves. Contesting multiple voices and the

heterogeneity of the mechanism of dialogical knowledge construction were investigated.

The strategic exercise of powers

Case studies demonstrated the constantly negotiated processes by which individuals as agency attribute, abandon, select and 'perform' their multiple identities. Identity appears to come into being in the instance when individuals are persuaded of the need to confirm a sense of either inclusiveness or exclusiveness. It is a way of making the boundaries of difference: identity is the presentation of oneself in relationship to others. Hence there must always be two or more groups (or individuals) to be defined against each other.

The informants constructed the discourse of their identities as a way of coping with problems arising from their position, or to demonstrate their ability to differentiate themselves from the other. The combinations of different levels of access to social relations, information, networks, sense of belonging, the diversity of experiences (education, occupation, religious affiliation), status and the achievement of visible material life constitute the power relations that permeate the social realms. Class consciousness was more significant than it initially appeared. The respective context of the changing power relationships generates complex identity projection. While the urban Akha differentiate themselves from the rural Akha, at the same time it is often the elite urban Akha who are in the position to define collective Akha identity in the national or international arena. The identity construction process is not monolithic but multi-faceted.

Although this thesis has looked specifically at the single ethnic group called

'Akha', the issue of multiple identity choices in relation to cross-border migration has wider implications in the contemporary ethnographic situation where the global level of interactions and mobility are ever intensified. The intention of my study was not only to deconstruct the anthropological analytical units — 'culture' and 'ethnic category' — I intended also to explore the contradictory situations where 'ethnic category' and 'culture' while being fictive entities nevertheless have a substantial impact on contemporary identity construction. Why are the concepts of 'culture' and 'ethnic category' as units of analysis still or even more powerful and pervasive than ever today? It was aimed to elucidate the mechanism whereby individual identities are formed through processes of exclusion and othering that categorical identity is premised on. In other words, failure to distinguish individual identity from collective ethnic identity would contribute little to understanding today's complex ethnographic reality.

(3) **Wider implication of the thesis**

Beyond Cultural relativism and advocacy

The wider implication of the thesis is to apply the recent post-modern development of anthropological notion of 'culture', 'identity', and 'locality' to the field of development. Recently greater attention has been paid to indigenous knowledge systems, particularly by western development scholars, aiming to rebuild development theory and praxis around indigenous concepts and practices. It is widely agreed in development circles that it is necessary to appreciate something about local perspectives. However, it is potentially dangerous to praise this contemporary trend which emphasises diversity, the primacy of localised experience and 'local culture' without closer investigation. My

argument here is that this alternative approach also rests on notions of 'culture', 'ethnic identity' and 'community', which, I argue, are on conceptually rather shaky ground.

Recently, both international and national development agencies have embraced new agendas for development programmes, stressing the self-reliance, participation and empowerment of local people. Social anthropologists today are expected to play an important role in this overseas development agenda. For instance, some anthropologists have been involved with the activities organised by Survival International and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. Others find their mission by claiming to 'speak' out on behalf of the 'local people' they study. The point is, however, whether the anthropologists can contribute their knowledge meaningfully to the development effort.

As Gardner & Lewis noted "The anthropologists, particularly those with liberal or anti-imperialist views, tend to view local, non-western culture as something to preserved, almost at all costs, against the ravages of colonialism." (Gardner & Lewis 1996:29). This cultural relativism can be traced back to the 1920s to one of the father-figures of the anthropological discipline, Radcliffe-Brown, who placed much emphasis on the importance of anthropology in producing better cultural understanding between different societies (cf. Kuper 1996:35-65). As a result, anthropology has always emphasised the importance of recognising local values and views from a cultural relativist perspective. Nevertheless what anthropologists have not tended to acknowledge till recently is that cultural knowledge can be politicised, and that anthropological representations are never neutral but embedded in power relations. An analytical framework which goes

beyond the conventional cultural relativism perspective is needed. My thesis fundamentally questioned the analytical unit of 'culture', 'ethnic identity' and 'community' and this enabled me to analyse the dynamics of the identity construction process across the boundary of ethnic category and nation-states. This approach might be applicable not only to the Akha, but also in any instance where identity is complex, changeable and multi-dimensional.

Until quite recently, the research on highlanders in Thailand was restricted to single village case studies within the national boundary. This was partly because of political constraints on research work in the neighbouring countries, Laos, Burma and China. Conducting field research used to be almost impossible. However, along with the Mekong Inter-Regional Development Project, these countries started adopting a relatively open policy, particularly towards tourist development in the mid-1990s. This enabled me to enter these countries as a tourist to conduct multi-sited field work. In order to understand the target population whose historical experience has been as trans-national migrants, it is crucial to conduct cross-national field research especially nowadays when they are more mobile than at any time in recent years. My work is a small start in the development of multi-site case studies, but much more extensive multi-site field research is required for a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of this region.

Appendix 1

Village Survey

- 1. Name of the village
- 2. Location, the way to go to lowland towns
- 3. Who set up the village? When? Where did he come from?
- 4. Brief history of the village, religious practice
- 5. The number of household, population (male/ female/ total)
- 6. Who are away from the village?
- 7. The purpose of living away from the village (education/ work)
- 8. Who support education? (private/ government/ missionary/ NGOs/ Temple/ others)
- 9. What kind of jobs are available for the villagers? (construction/ hotel and restaurant/ shop/ sexual service/ government work/ others)
- 10. Who is in Abroad? Where? Why?

	In		Out		
age	male	female	male	female	Total
0 - 5					
6 - 10					
11 - 15					
16 - 20					
21 - 25					
26 - 30					
31 - 35					
36 - 40					
41 - 45					
46 over					
Total					

Appendix 2

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Personal details

age, sex, affiliation, occupation, marriage, family situation, reason for living in town, duration of living in town, residence elsewhere

2. Economic Conditions

earnings, job experiences, living conditions, possessions (television, moterbike, car, house, land etc.)

3. Educational background

education level, language skill, educational aspirations

4. Social Networks (friendship, neighbourhoods, village ties, kinship, workmates, classmate, religious links)

With whom do you spend time with? Who do you consider as your best friends?

Why? How did you get to know them? What kind of problems have you faced? Who did you ask for help?

5. Future Prospects

Where do you wish to live?, What is your dream? Who do you wish to marry? What do you want to give to your children? What do you want to avoid?

Appendix 3

Case Studies (5 male, 7 female)

1. Tai identity (female 33)	p.217
2. A successful Cross Border Akha Trader (male 32)	p.239
3. Akha Ethnic Village Project (male 52)	p.267
4. Yunanese Chinese/Akha Handicraft Trader (female 45)	p.270
5. From Buddhist to Christian (male 28)	p.294
6. Urban elite Akha identity (male 30)	p.297
7. Chinese/Christian identity (female 23)	p.309
8. Seeking for Self-autonomy (female 21)	p.318
9. From an employee to an employer (female 37)	p.321
10. Searching for a new life (female 44)	p.322
11. Rejection of the cultural norm of polygamy (female 26)	p.324
12. Prospect of returning to home village (male 24)	p.327

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