

## **Facing Development in the Highlands: A Challenge for Thai Society**

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*“The king accused the gardener of putting poison in the mango. He ordered the gardener be executed...When everyone was quiet the chief minister threw a stone on the spot indicated. A cobra came out of a hole in the ground and bit the stone. The officials killed the snake...So he let the gardener look after the gardens as before.”*

### The Laws of King Mangrai

Since the beginning when they spread out over the alluvial plains of what is now known as Northern Thailand the Tai have had something to do with highlanders if not the highlands<sup>1</sup>. Of course the interrelationship has changed from time to time and with this, reciprocal patterns of understanding. Unfortunately few historical documents are available from earlier periods to provide supporting evidence, but enough has been recorded to allowed us to identify a structural relationship<sup>2</sup>. Tracing the

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1. See Wyatt 1984, Benchaphun Shinawatra 1985, Marlowe 1963.

2. The main sources are the recorded chronicles of the old principalities. This problem has been recently review by N. Tapp. (Tapp, 1986a, 1986b) and C.A. Kammerer, among others Cf. Sao Saimong Mangrai 1981, and the chronicles of Chiang Mai and Nan.

## INTERVENTION

historical evolution of this pattern brings us to a deeper understanding of what has sometimes been described as the emergence of a drastic contemporary situation: a situation in which ideas of modernity mixed with geopolitical ambitions is bringing new populations and cultures into contact with each other followed by a cohort of profound problems. I am not the first to address myself to this situation but a review from a fresh perspective would make a contribution to our understanding of what is happening<sup>3</sup>.

From this point of view I would also argue against the common tendency to view the Hmong as an isolated, autonomous group who traditionally lacked relations with other groups. On the contrary, it is clear ... that they have had long and sustained contacts with the members of other cultures throughout their history. The myth of self-sufficient tribe has been fostered by colonialists and early anthropologists as a useful administrative tool and a pretext for exploiting the people so categorized. But such a view does not do justice to the extensive interdependency which in the past ... characterised the relations between the uplands and lowlands (Tapp: 1986a: 3).

It is not my intention to present a comprehensive review of what has been said and done about what is presently undertaken in the mountains. Other papers in this book focus on these matters and emphasise the ideological and political aspects as well as the more pragmatic strategies one can observe at the empirical level<sup>4</sup>. I want to argue first the underlying objectives, aims and the choices made in research and development are

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3. For the Karen see Renard 1980 and Keynes 1979. For the Hmong see Tapp 1985 and 1986a. For the Akha see Kammerer 1986 Chapter 11 this volume.

4. See Wanat, Chupinit, McKinnon, (this volume).

based on a stereotyped evaluation of the situation and that this has generated problems in the past which remain until today; and second, that these must be seriously confronted with contradictory statements founded on the results of a more scientific, critical and independent perspective. What I propose is not exactly an academic debate, as it concerns a serious issue which sooner or later will become a tremendous challenge. As an example, broad generalisations are used by policy-makers from time to time to reinforce arguments which often seem strangely dislocated from the logical content from which they are drawn and must be taken to mainly reflect political allegiance or loyalties, conflicts of interest, factionalism, business, ideology or whatever...more than comprehensive views centred on the regional specificity of Northern Thailand. The use of environmentalist ideology discussed in this volume by McKinnon is a case in point. This is not to say that the aims, the main objectives and priorities of the Royal Thai Government policy concerning either the highlands or the highlanders has to be criticised as such, from an external point of view, or for that matter reformulated, but rather to point out that the data required to provide an accurate analysis, if an efficient development policy is to be mounted, cannot rely on a collection of raw, unrelated facts and figures. Technology alone is no longer a keyword in this matter. New technologies that are not adopted by those for whom they are supposedly designed have generally failed everywhere.

### **Ethnic identity, minorities, and the historical process**

During the past ten years, social scientists working with the so called hill tribes have been deeply concerned with the problem of ethnic identity as a manifestation of a culturally specific pattern of adaptation<sup>5</sup>. Since the pioneering work of E. Leach *The Political System of Highland Burma*, this problematique has been so well developed as to enter common use and to promote ethnicity as a quasi-official academic categorisation as well as an administrative label regardless of its

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5. For a detailed and comprehensive summary see Conrad Chapter 8 this volume.

relevance. So the structural and critical perspective of Leach's masterpiece is unfortunately, in the case of Northern Thailand, often put aside. To be Karen, to be Hmong, to be Akha...is more or less to be credited with a predictable pattern of behaviour embedded in a stereotyped cultural pattern promoted as an idealised rationalisation which stands in contrast to the dominant society. As a result *chao khao*<sup>6</sup> are seen to oppose the supposed culturally homogeneous dominant society and provide a dissonant presence in the cultural harmony in such a way that emphasizes the modernity of one group against the primitiveness of the other. This comes to be a permanent performance which contains a strong sentiment in the exercise of self-identity founded on language, dress, daily behaviour as well as beliefs, ritual, and *savoir faire*. Even if this is not promoted by the people themselves it becomes part of "their" reluctance to make a choice between total assimilation and "their" ability to determining their own destiny: manifest "otherness" becomes from and outside point of view the prevailing reason advocated to account for problems. The implicit value judgements involved in terms such as "national integration", "land use management", "economic self-sufficiency", "demographic pressure", "social and political integration", to quote some of the problems to which administrators and development agents often refer, makes it necessary that these issues be cast in negative terms such as the "destruction of the environment", "increasing poverty", "dangerous population growth" and "state security" thus opening the door to interpretations which justify the implementation of

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6. The term *chao khao* (ชาวกhao: chaaw khāw) which literally means hill or mountain people has an official connotation. In this respect it is not use to refer to all people living in the mountains. Khon Muang, Hau, Shan and others...are excluded. The concept is restricted to the nine ethnic minorities, that is Karen, Hmong, Lisu, Akha, Lahu, Yao, Kamu, Htin, Lua, even though some of them are no longer mountain dwellers. It is also interesting to note that the Lua play the role of a residual category for the Thai, including people who use the term to distinguish themselves as long as they present characteristics such as customary differences in terms of language, dress, ritual etc...The concept of *chao khao* is a clear example of a normative concept founded on a dogmatic sociology of knowledge. If will be used in this paper accordingly. We have chosen to preserve the usual transliteration.

increasingly radical policies of assimilation.<sup>7</sup> Such a path poses major risks which I will later discuss.

Social scientists who take the risks for granted are as a consequence obliged to take a more defensive position than they might otherwise prefer and are forced, if they are rather conservative, to give priority to empirical and technical aspects of problems or if they are more radical, emphasize cultural aspects. In both cases the holistic and structural approach - the cornerstone of Leach's pioneer methodology - must be put to one side if not out of sight<sup>8</sup>. In a sense the attenuated sociological imagination and the knowledge which it has generated as a reflection on the problematique of cultural identity as the principal preoccupation (with all its contradictory statements) can be observed in the controversial implementation of state development policy if not in the political scene itself.

It is my opinion that until now problems in the highlands have been mainly approached empirically in terms of a technical problematique. "Uncontrolled migration", "increasing demographic density", "shifting cultivation" - if it still exists - "opium cultivation" and so on...are these in fact specific problems which one could expect to be solved by appropriate pragmatic measures or are they fragmented phenomena manifest in the face of a wider and more complex reality? Can we in fact consider problems without relating them to the more profound network of social relationships through which they emerge and in which

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7. Cf. Prapas Charusathira 1967. Also the following.

"The government, therefore, is presented with a series of extremely thorny dilemmas. If it wants to protect the highland watersheds, it will be forced to institute widespread resettlement of hill farmers from such areas, protecting the watersheds thereafter with force, if necessary. In a democratic society, even if vitally necessary, such programs can be hard to push through" (Thailand Development Research Institute 1987).

8. This was already pointed out by Cooper ten years ago when he reviewed problems and prospects of the tribal minorities of Northern Thailand. Cf. Cooper 1979.

## INTERVENTION

they are experienced in a quite specific way? Can we really handle the situation if we do not take into account the objective contradictions which so often appear between the idealistic views promoted and the inherent constraints of the real situation? A policy of cash crop replacement, the promotion of integrated farming systems as well as current policies of education or community development can be successful only if the "target people" really feel as though they are engaged as full participants in the challenges presented. This is exactly what can be observed when looking at the present situation in the highlands even through the shorthand methodology of rapid appraisal. People respond to development policies according to their own understanding rather than to the objective suitability of what is being implemented. Good will and an open mind are pre-requisites, if a reasonable chance for success is to be kept alive. Such participation cannot, of course, be created by force. Experience has already shown that force has a way of producing the very reverse of the desired outcome.

It is quite easy to advance such a provocative and even critical statement but it is not so easy to construct the matter in such a way as to ensure a better outcome. This is a crucial issue and research has something to do with it, not in terms of decision making but to better link it with the major problems faced by *chao khao*. In so far as the implementation of development has always been the result of a kind of political, social and economic compromise, research could help to adjust, if not reformat present policy in such a way as to solve or avoid making further problems. Weaving development as a social network of relationships into a greater potential for economic growth brings me to another observation. If economic change and even social welfare can be planned and implemented in such a way as to produce additional income, better education, efficient health services and so forth, the subsequent inevitable process of social transformation is, generally speaking, unpredictable. This is an extremely important point to keep in mind. How will people respond? How will they organize their own adaptation?

How will they adjust their strategies to the spontaneous pulses in the process of change which affect the environmental, economic and political contexts? Can we expect a homogeneous response secured solely through the processes involved in the transfer of technology? Unfortunately no, and there is still no easy way to do it.

Cultural adaptation and changes in behaviour go side by side with the emergence of latent conflicts, new patterns of self-organization, contradictory values. Praxis and underlying ideologies emerge through a quite complex process deeply embedded not only in cultural consciousness but also in the historical experience which moulds culture<sup>9</sup>.

Success or failure of a development policy has always been dependant on the gap between incentive and response which cannot merely be fill up with empirical or pragmatic guess work. Developers are becoming more and more aware that problems are linked together and every operational project gets a chance to consider this fact. But, in most cases a proper understanding of the manner in which phenomenon are linked eludes us even if it is considered to be relevant. There are two ways of dealing with this methodological preoccupation and two contrasting modalities of intervention present themselves. One is to decide that problems are linked by the obvious fact of the priorities declared in state policy: the government serves its own interests and the subject people simply have to adapt themselves as best they can. The other alternative is to decide that the problems of the people come first and that the state has to adjust its policy to a de facto situation.

Although an argument for participation in development could be relatively easily documented for North Thailand by

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9. Cf. N. Tapp for the case of the Hmong and A. Walker for the Lahu. The present study of N. Kammerer on Christian Akha will provide us with a deeper insight into those problems (personnal communication).

facts gleaned from official declarations and newspaper reports, it is my opinion that the social dynamic simply cannot allow such a radical alternative because of the disruption this would entail. In Thailand especially this would not be permitted even if there is some historical evidence to contradict me. Why? Because the structured opposition I pointed out above is such a widely accepted and coherent view that as an ideological reflection it has become, since the second world war, embedded as an objective *rapport de force* within such a powerful dialectic that it cannot easily be deflected let alone changed<sup>10</sup>. As can be seen in other East and South-East Asian nations this is a phenomenon not unknown to the region<sup>11</sup>. The negative examples of Burma and Sri Lanka are cases in point and help stress the serious nature of the subject matter: this is not an academic question but a real issue. Thailand must be careful the way ethnic minorities perceive the implemented policy if it is to avoid the fate of Burma, Sri Lanka or worse.

An argument on how to manage development problems in the highlands, centred on the dialectic of the relationship between the dominant rice growing lowland society undergoing a process of cultural homogenisation through state formation involving national integration and territorial consolidation in structural opposition to a mosaic of politically acephalous, minority settlements which must be recognized as a *de facto* reality, would still require a lot of explanation.

I don't want to fully argue the point, but let me attempt to develop the concept by discussing a few concrete examples already well documented in this book to see what happens.

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10. I realise that this difficult point needs elaboration. To provide an adequate discussion will bring me into the domain of political science which is beyond my field of competence. However a futuristic analysis of how the political structure of Thailand would respond with contradictory statements to this challenge would provide a basis on which to arrive at a better understanding. This task exceeds the scope of this paper.

11. To limit myself to a Thai source, General Saiyud Kerdphol provides an insightful view of the role of colonialism consistent with the analysis of N.Tapp.

Even if the official policy has been slightly modified from time to time since its inception, as is well documented by Wanat (Chapter 1, this volume), the highland development problem and its correlative, the corrective welfare strategy advised remains the same.

The manner in which problems are classified at an empirical level still clearly reflects the basic understanding set down more than 30 years ago. What C.F. Keynes wrote in the 70's still enjoys wide acceptance because it repeats basic assumptions made about the hill tribe situation. The central place of this in peoples' understanding is a fixed reality quite apart from the dynamic process involved in development implementation.

For the Thai government and its representatives, those who are hill tribes are distinguished by their practice of upland swidden cultivation, by their production of opium, by their low level of economic development relative to the rest of the Thai population, and by their "alien" status as recent, and illegal migrants into Thailand (Keyes, 1979: 13).

The stereotyped view found in early evaluations and subsequent publications persists as the dominant orientation to what can readily be described as a transformation scene. Researchers designing work appropriate to the current situation must assume that a reorientation is necessary and are the first to discover the innate conservatism of established "knowledge".

On the firm foundation of this dogmatic sociology of knowledge, development policy has been conducted on an empirical model according to the accepted classification of problems in terms of their hierarchical priority no matter how they are linked together in reality or how the structure of this linkage is at odds with what developers want to do. Controversial statements and obviously divergent interpretations put about by

agencies who see themselves in competition with each other, emphasise this or that aspect of substantive issues which remind us, if such a reminder is necessary, that development work conducted outside market constraints, the dynamic of economic, political and social macro-structures and international political pressure is inconceivable. What R.C. Cooper wrote in 1979 remains true:

In the past decade, the highlands of Northern Thailand have received an input of cash and development expertise per capita that may be the envy of any farming community anywhere in the world. However, this investment has been guided primarily by consideration of national and international interests and only secondly by consideration of the problems of the tribal and Northern Thai inhabitants (Cooper, 1979: 323).

### **Problem identification**

In many cases I have observed in the mountain area an artificial network of relationships has been progressively substituted for a more natural, outstandingly real one, in order to achieve successful implementation and good results. By this bias the technocratic structure of the state administration and its "bureaucratic, centralised model of development"<sup>12</sup> has been extended to the mountain situation regardless of its sociological specificity.

Nevertheless, we should not blind ourselves to the side effects of its central premise, which is the penetration of a highly centralised bureaucracy to the remotest reaches of the national territory. It has led to high levels of domestic tension, to political disruption and protest, to regional revolts, and ultimately, in our own time, to the

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12. Cf. Riggs, 1967.

weakening of the very state it was intend to support...But what I wish to emphasize here is that we need to be very clear about the need for serious domestic restructuring, and to carry this beyond ethnic Thai to the minority groups who share our national territory. I am talking of a new period of domestic reform and reorganization to meet the challenges of a new period in our history (Saiyud Kerdphol, 1986: 100).

In order to demonstrate the viability of the on-going process of development, management is more and more taking over by superimposing external structures in which action is more directed by their own interests than by proper consideration of the interests of the so called "target population". The centralised structure of decision making and the implicit resultant competition between participating agencies, more often committed to serve the best interests of their superiors - whoever they are rather than the highlanders themselves is clearly a distinguishing characteristic of what is undertaken. Intervention in the field is arbitrary, fragmented, uncoordinated, specified and evaluated according to technical, isolated goals. Those aspects are clearly documented by Chupinit (Chapter 3, this volume). Responsibilities are shared out between the agencies involved through careful negotiations reflecting social status and differing political strengths and alignments. As I mentioned previously this powerful reality "which encapsulates the imagination of planners, field agencies and personnel"<sup>13</sup> is largely determined by the historical confrontation of structures and values inherited from the past with the introduction of ideas about modernity borrowed from the West.

This heavy administrative structure has a natural propensity to develop bureaucratic patterns of interaction as a main paradigm modelled by the inherent patron-client hierarchical model of relationships and the dominant values of status confor-

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13. Cf. Introduction (this volume).

mity, loyalty, *esprit de corps* as determined by the nature of Thai society and culture<sup>14</sup>.

Hill tribe people become more and more excluded and isolated from the resultant process of decision making, even in their own sphere of activity, and they even have no proper way to express their allegiance, loyalty and confidence let alone their own point of view on current policy. In such a context, it could be a problem to bring national unity out of ethnic diversity, an area where "technique" doesn't seem to be so relevant.

Our government, however, is pursuing the phantom of a **technical solution** (emphasis added) to the problems of the North in the belief that some yet-to-be-discovered agricultural innovation will end both the opium culture and the revolt in the hills...What is crucial is participation in the bureaucracy and real power to act as a coherent group in politics. Our failure thus far to recognize these dimensions of the problems is leading ineluctably to a crisis in the hills (Saiyud Kerdphol, 1986: 104).

The articulations of most development projects to the socio-economic reality is achieved by setting up a sophisticated and expensive management system which the people concerned could never handle for their own benefit in a post-project future<sup>15</sup>.

Successful evaluation very often reflects good management rather than real and durable socio-economic results<sup>16</sup>.

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14. Cf. Han Ten Brummelhuis & Kemp, 1984; Klausner, 1981; Yoneo Ishii, 1986.

15. To get a more concrete idea the reader should consult the periodic reports and internal documents of the various development projects.

16. As a matter of fact evaluations are mostly conducted as an internal procedure, within the conceptual framework of the project itself.

The ability to convince people to play the game and support the project becomes the point. Irresistible technical innovations which sometimes have not even been carefully tested are extended in the field with no appropriate evaluation of their economic viability<sup>17</sup>. For what benefit? Each project is promoting its own ideas for its own renown and benefit in the knowledge that:

Another problem involved is the lack of knowledge and skill on appropriate techniques which lowers production as well as destroys natural resources and environment (Department of Public Welfare, 1983: 10).

It is the *chao khao* who take the risk. Acceptance of the transfer of technology appears to be more or less mandatory, a kind of external constraint people have to take into account to please the host state and keep on good terms with the administrative structure. In a way they also hope to secure something for themselves, some advantage from the efficient tools introduced which they could use to improve the productivity of their own genuine agricultural practices<sup>18</sup>.

This process of increasing dependency and precariousness, especially when it goes hand in hand with an objective impoverishment generates sentiments of disillusion, some kind of bitterness and a propensity to explore other channels, to set up alternative strategies of their own. Beside the formal allegiance to the official point of view, a strongly dynamic non-structured economic sector<sup>19</sup> is, as a result, developing its own momentum in an uncontrollable way, sometimes illegally, if not

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17. The model of development goes hand in hand with technocratic management of the "mountain economy." What can be grown will be promoted and this sometimes becomes little more than just a tricky story.

18. That this is a critical problem is unfortunately well documented by the recent events reported in newspapers. Cf. **Bangkok Post**, **The Nation** (September, 1987).

19. Also referred to by economists as the informal sector.

## INTERVENTION

always with negative effects<sup>20</sup>.

As opium poppy cultivation has decreased<sup>21</sup>, illegal traffic in narcotics with bordering countries has grown partly because of increasing demand from the national market. Groups which in the past had no connections in any way with the drug business have now become involved in response to factors which have disrupted the equilibrium of their economy of sufficiency<sup>22</sup>. This doesn't mean that such trafficking is in the hands of *chao khao*. Of course not. Once again they are caught in between as a matter of course rather than by choice. Some traditional opium poppy growers have moved themselves from the productive sector to the distributive one in order to preserve the basic structure of their bi-polar economy under the umbrella of new allegiances and the constraint of new dependencies. As has been said by Merleau Ponty :

There is no absolute innocence nor for that matter, absolute culpability. Any action undertaken in response to a situation is not necessarily chosen freely and for that reason alone we cannot be held to be entirely and solely responsible (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 68. My translation).

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20. As it has often been observed in such a situation, precariousness and mistrust reinforce the process of cultural self-identification as a protection against the dominant culture.

21. In broad terms the production of opium has fallen from an estimated 133 tons/year in 1970 (UN Narcotics Commission) to 34.7 t/y (ONCB). Cf. TRI Internal Document.

22. One problem chosen at random out of many is population pressure on land which can not be solved at all solely by promotion of a cash crop oriented economy in preference to a more suitable, balanced economy which would take into account self sufficiency rice production. The underlying idea-even if not explicitly expressed - is very often the need to recover land for other purposes. Of course - once again - the lack of legal access to land plays a key role. People are reluctant to invest financial profit or labour for permanent changes under such insecure conditions. This slows down the process of transformation and compromises economic success.

The effectiveness of both the policy of poppy growing eradication and cash crop replacement still need to be evaluated according to a more realistic point of view than that provided by current evaluations. In this respect *chao khao* can no longer be held to be the only ones involved with the problem, the only ones responsible. Do traditional cultures and ethnic identity still account for the problem? Is it not better to think that opium is still an objective and efficient “response to scarcity”? When farmers are able to secure suitable agricultural land with legal title I guess that the problem will disappear. The main problem, which has still to be properly evaluated by comparative case studies is the rate of objective dependency on opium production and how far it is affected by various policies of implementation.

Problems in the mountains have mainly been classified in such a way that precludes consultation with *chao khao*. This attitude is justified by the underlying paradigm. To change this point of view and set up some sort of consensus relies on first recognizing the fact that the current situation is the result of a change in the conduct of the relationship between lowlanders and highlanders which more or less acknowledges a kind of implicit “legitimacy” according to their own culture and history. The basic concepts used to understand the reality reflect more the political preoccupation of legitimacy from the point of view of the state rather than a scientific evaluation of what the problems are. One can use such an approach to try to answer the question but how then can the resultant problems be solved?

Problems have mostly been classified and documented in such a way that proper participation by the *chao khao* has been excluded, even thought to be dangerous, unrealistic as well as inefficient. So as a result all problems are subsequently identified according to their purely technical aspect, no matter what the context in which they appear.

A resume of various documents provides an indication

## INTERVENTION

of the thinking involved<sup>23</sup>. *chao khao* by their territorial presence in the mountain area and their culturally oriented mode of existence brings problems to Thai society and the government. To be where they are is the original sin...maintaining a strong ethnic identity and not taking the necessary steps to conform to the dominant culture - that is to speak Thai, to be Buddhist, to secure a proper livelihood results in specific problems. Here the cultural differences must account for problems themselves.

The problems can be classified into two types:  
- problems involved with the hill tribes themselves  
- problems as an impact from the hill tribes' way of maintaining their unique life. (D.P.W., 1983: 9)<sup>24</sup>

This ethnocentric bias in the sociology of knowledge, because it assumes that cultural differences are the founding problem then generates conclusions which tautologically conform to their own premises: problems do not result from an historical process but emerge out of the inherent "nature" of the *chao khao*.

Nobody can contest that the problems so often pointed out in the mountains like deforestation, erosion, demographic pressure, uncontrolled migration...are a concrete reality and to implement an efficient policy according to the national interests is to act in a responsible as well as legitimate manner. But another point. The particular way in which they are enmeshed in the ecological and sociological reality of this specific context is the principal fact that must be taken into account and those who prepare such accounts must ensure that they keep as close as possible to the agreed understanding of empirical reality.

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23. One can expect administrative documents, official declarations as well as political ones if not reports of various development projects to be neutral on this aspect.

24. Such a statement and the way it is developed later on in the report comes close to a socio-biological understanding of what culture is. Cf. Sahlins, 1984.

I believe that a more imaginative and critical perspective which will focus on interdependency and will question the categories currently used will be really helpful to better ascertain the goals. It appears that macro-sociological structures and dynamics play a major role in such a context. It is a challenging field for further research. It is not easy to break away and use a more integrated approach using functional concepts in the place of formal categories which are unsuited to the task of accounting for processes. In a research milieu dominated by grass roots data collection, the results of which are not only used to fill up dogmatic, predetermined categories but also as pragmatic substitutes for proper research, what can investigation add to understanding? What is needed is to define problems clearly enough that investigation will reveal the extent to which they are embedded in a stereotyped, ideological context. This epistemological bias is also reflected in the way the policy itself has been implemented and is currently managed. The identification of problems through formal categories preserve and reinforce a hierarchical distance<sup>25</sup> between *chao khao* and the dominant culture which further validates a mixture of stereotyped judgments and naive evidence as a sort of meta-objectivity the main purpose of which is obviously to construct a good self image for those who devote themselves to the *chao khao*. This normative approach opens the door to an even more pervasive effect which is also well documented by Chupinit (Chapter 3, this volume). Again intervention appears fragmented and directed to serve the best interests of a client other than the highlanders themselves.

**The time will come for a “reappraisal”.**

Clear objectives were formulated from the beginning and have since been firmly established as a pre-requisite for any kind of policy. It's a prerogative of the state whose legitimacy can't be contested at all from an outsiders point of view even if the challenge is mounted on scientific knowledge. But can a political rationality be substituted for a proper understanding of the

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25. Very often expressed and sometimes formulated as an unquestionable feeling of superiority and hierarchical alterity.

## INTERVENTION

reality without causing damage? Objectives are not generated by empirical facts, they are politically oriented. The way delineated objectives can help to solve problems depends on how implementation fits the reality.

A lot has been done to achieve those objectives in a proper way even in some cases with success. The question is not the objectives themselves but how to by-pass the inherent contradictions which emerge when the policy is implemented through a sociology of knowledge which provides an inadequate paradigm, how to stimulate peoples understanding and willingness to incorporate themselves as part of their way of life. To avoid possible misinterpretation of my argument I would now like better to clarify this issue.

As mentioned previously, the cultural diversity and cultural integration of modern Thailand are the result of continuing historical processes which still exercise an influence. As social facts they are dynamic phenomena. Cultural diversity can't be understood outside the referential process of the cultural integration of which it is a part, or against which it reacts. Such a statement emphasizes two relevant factors, adaptability and historical self-consciousness which are often encapsulated in oral traditions and ritual practices<sup>26</sup>.

This is that history that is not always to be read in books or written documents, or even archeological remains, and that the oral legends of the Hmong about their past have much to teach us about **real** history; that is a history which is being lived and felt **now**... Thus one is looking for a new kind of history, not one divided into "true" and

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26. By adaptability I mean the genuine cultural potentiality to adjust strategies to the social economical and political context as was the case during the "Opium Wars" at the end of the last century. By historical self-consciousness I mean both the propensity to take into account and evaluate the present situation as well as what is supposed to have happen in the past based on some consciousness of the "historical" background of cultural identity.

“false”, but one arising from a more phenomenological concern with historical consciousness as it affects current behaviour (Tapp, 1986: 7).

Any policy of national integration which “wishes to enable the Hill tribes to be first class, self-reliant Thai citizens” has to consider the historical basement of cultural identity and the way ethnic minorities entered a process under which they came to be incorporated in a Thai national history and sentiment rather than emphasize marginality as if it was the natural consequence of tradition and cultural diversity.

History reminds us, if necessary, that every nation was build up within a context of cultural diversity. This heterogeneity, when we come to see it as an integral part of our national heritage rather than as a recipe for conflict, can help us reformulate the paradigm and even reinforce national unity through political integration when assimilation is neither desired nor required. One acquires the sentiment of wanting to belong to a nation and one develops loyalty to the state through roles offered to responsible citizens more than by making a virtue of diminishing ethnic identity and promoting assimilation.

The history of this region (South East Asia) suggests that there is only one successful way to bring national unity out of ethnic heterogeneity. The way is not forced assimilation, which only increases tensions. Nor is it isolation and exclusion from the body politic, which thus far has been our attitude towards the peoples on the periphery of our nation. The only method which has worked is a genuine sharing of power and responsibility (Saiyud Kerdphol, 1986: 102).

A national problem for security begins indeed when cultural identity, for one reason or another, becomes the rationale to place oneself outside the process of state integration and to construct a political power base and mount a movement

against national and territorial integration. The modern state must integrate: nationalist ideology makes this imperative. Ethnicity, because it provides a clear basis on which to claim independent legitimacy is, as far as the state is concerned, grounds on which to reject the dominant culture. It is no comfort to know how easily this can emerge as a strong, political, integrative force even if founded on some kind of messianic dream. Then again the contrary is also equally valid or likely. True national unity has always emerged through some kind of cultural syncretism, even where the integrative trends are firmly established in the value system of an historically dominant culture.

The problem of dealing with questions of cultural identity and ethnic minorities are not, in such a perspective, only relevant to academic debate, but careful scientific investigation is not out of place if, to serve the purpose of national development, one wants to avoid serious difficulties in the future. One of the more important issues to be considered in this aspect is the participation of *chao khao* in national development and maintaining national security.

If the tribal minorities are to find a permanent place in Thailand, they must come to terms with the Bangkok Government. Eventually, swidden and opium will have to go. In exchange, the tribes must be guaranteed adequate agricultural resources, given proper land tenure title and be made citizens of Thailand with all the rights and duties that this status implies...

But there are now some sincere and competent people in those agencies most in contact with the tribes... Hopefully this could lead to participation by the tribal minorities in decision-making processes and a meaningful dialogue between interests (Cooper, 1979: 331).

This concluding opinion offered by Cooper ten years ago is clearly the point. After decades of development work it unfortunately seems to remain the essential problem: at least for the highlanders themselves. As a matter of fact, his view that better cooperation would result from a closer relationship is rather optimistic.

There are many reasons why the dynamic of social relationships is regulated - if not totally determined - more by objective structural factors and resultant contradictions than by the good will of competent technocrats. Among these factors centralized bureaucracy<sup>27</sup> is the prevalent structure which regulates the majority/minority interface in all of its aspects. By nature opacity is the rule, but obedience is required. No channels are provided to lodge appeals against policy decisions. Those who are affected by decisions which often appear rather arbitrary, even though they emerge from lengthy and complex procedures that are not always understood, have no recourse to acceptance. Corruption is sometimes better rewarded than loyalty<sup>28</sup>. Instead of increased identification with Thailand through responsible participation such a structure tends to exacerbate tensions rather than inspire the emergence of a balancing counterpoint.

Generally however tribal villages have no channels of appeals against policy decisions made at national level. This lack of dialogue may be a key factor explaining the violence that sometimes erupts between tribesmen and forestry officials and Thai police stationed in tribal areas (Cooper, 1979: 325).

As I emphasised earlier this structural determination is somewhat difficult to correct or modify because it is anchored

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27. Cf. Riggs, 1967.

28. The monetary transactions arranged "informally" from time to time between "new migrants" and "officials" provides an example.

## INTERVENTION

on an historical tradition, justified by a specified sociology of knowledge which emphasises cultural values and full cognizance of this paradigm is a pre-requisite for scientific understanding of the social reality<sup>29</sup>. Although the statement of General Saiyud Kerdphol "The situation is clear: if we do not grant what is only reasonable and just, it will be taken by force of arms" sounds a little radical to someone acquainted with the current situation in Northern Thailand the way he refers to access to citizenship as a key problem is illuminating.

...We must bring a clear understanding of our present options when addressing the question of minority peoples who, for one reason or another, find themselves within our borders...For nomadic minorities, the modalities for a definitive determination of citizenship must be decided immediately. This matter has been in limbo for decades and needs to be resolved promptly. We can hardly ask the nomadic minorities to be loyal to Thailand if we ourselves are unable to make up our minds whether they are citizens or not. In practice, **present procedures are fraught with bureaucratic red tape calculated to alienate precisely those people we are trying to win over.** Whatever procedure is adopted must be simple, free and capable of rapid implementation  
(Saiyud Kerdphol, 1986: 108.) Emphasis added).

Every development policy so far implemented concerning *chao khao* is caught up in this reality. Technical solutions can't be secured outside the social and political context even if they are fully operative. In a later paper, Cooper, provided a comprehensive review of this point.

One form of conservation farming system presently being seriously considered is agrosilviculture...

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29. Cf. McKinnon, 1987.

The problem with agrosilviculture is that tribesmen have no legal right to the land and therefore no right to the trees...Zonal development seems to make the best long term use of resources and to ensure that all interests are met. However, the scheme is not without problems. Development does not take place in a vacuum. Zones are full of people who have already worked out patterns of land tenure and structure of wealth and power. Classifying suitability of land is easy, reallocating land according to the classification could prove to be an impossibility...Unfortunately, many of the proposals for introducing crops are made on a base of inadequate or faulty research (Cooper, 1979: p.330).

This statement still stands. The models of intervention may be more sophisticated but not the way to construct a better understanding of the fundamental problems. What is interesting in fact is not to list again and again, the consequences of the main contradictions one can observe, but recognize that statements with some scientific credibility, those prepared ten years ago still provide an accurate analysis. But why are they ignored? Intervening agencies, development managers and even researchers don't seem to be concerned by the dependency created by technical solutions neither by the political problems this may generate nor the structural matrix so perpetuated. If *chao khao* interests are to be taken into some consideration this would make it necessary to adopt a more efficient approach to research design as well as agree to a more coordinated approach and the organization of a more realistic "tribal" administration. What needs to be done is to promote more studies of majority/minority relations instead of studying the so called "traditional behaviour" of *chao khao* in isolation. This would not be without political implications but it seems a more or less reasonable and necessary step to adjust modes of articulation to the reality. This in fact accounts for the reason why such a reorientation has not been taken into account.

## INTERVENTION

In the final analysis the most important reason to call for a “reappraisal” is the imperative to maintain the predominantly positive attitude of the *chao khao* towards Thailand as a refuge of relative peace and order. Beyond any of the personal reasons that brought them into Thailand, this stands above all: for most it was a choice, the end of long journey begun more than one thousand years ago. In their own view they chose Thailand in the hope that for better or worse it would be their mother country and homeland. The dominant attitude is one of respect and confidence which has been reinforced in a strong and positive way by the protection of His Majesty the King and the patronage of the Royal Family through what is well known as the King’s Project. Evidence that most *chao khao* want to become Thai citizens is that they are well aware of what has already been done for them and don’t question their allegiance to the Nation and to the Royal Thai Government even though they remain officially, for most of them, illegal immigrants. This is a real and positive factor, a success that Thailand can be proud of rather than appear to be insecure and afraid of the likelihood of a challenge being mounted by the *chao khao*. If the legitimacy of the state and current regulations are not really under challenge there is room for confidence in making sweeping changes but if these people are viewed and treated in an arbitrary and sometimes insensitive manner, their lives will become a perplexing if not a frustrating and sad experience.

Is it really true that we are no longer allowed to establish fields? We are so sad. Now we have been living for years in this country which we have come to love as our home. We have never before had quarrels with the Thai and now we have to leave our villages and emigrate in order not to starve. (Statement from an Akha man).

If according to the usual analysis of the situation it seems that the nation is now confronted only with negative consequences stemming from their presence, who knows what kind of benefit *chao khao* will return to Thailand in the future?

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