Structural Assimilation and the Consensus: Clearing Grounds on which to Rearrange our Thoughts

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> *...It is enough to observe that actual men do not* ***behave:*** *they* ***act*** *with an idea in their heads, perhaps that of conforming to custom. Man acts as a function of what he thinks, and while he has up to a certain point the ability to arrange his own thoughts in his own way, to construct new categories, he does so starting from the categories which are given by society; their link with language should be a sufficient reminder of this.*
> (Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* 1970:6)

Contemporary Thai policy towards highlanders is not the product of current scientific knowledge, it is largely formed out of an older cultural and historical position informed by modern ideas about what constitutes progress, development and national territory. This consensus is part of a broader socio-political structure which has enabled the Thai state to internationalize its economy while promoting a hierarchical and technocratic ideology of modernization which is not too much at odds with the past. It is as a microcosm of this construction that development intervention in the highlands precludes careful scientific consideration and qualitative evaluations of specific environmental and social conditions and commits national and foreign development agencies to activities which by default, primarily

serve to ensure their own survival. The technical bias of development keeps government activities within what I will attempt to identify as a domain of structural assimilation.

In using this term, "structural assimilation", I wish to draw a distinction between stated policy and affective action: between what is said and what is done.

As outlined in the discussion of policy in the first chapter of this volume, a liberal and humane policy is aimed at integrating highlanders into the mainstream of national life, as speakers of Thai willing to abide by Thai law and subject to all other conditions accepted by the community. Then as first class, self-reliant people they will be granted citizenship. From this it is generally understood that they will be able to practise their own religions, customs and retain their own languages for as long as they find it rewarding to do so. In this sense integration does not mean that they must involuntarily reject their identity as members of minority cultures but rather that they will adopt an additional range of knowledge, skills and loyalties which will enable them to better adapt their lives to the way life is lived on the lowlands.

It is my impression that this process is well under way. Highland communities have been greatly assisted to acquire these qualifications and have spontaneously accepted these ground rules. Their continuing survival has come to depend on increasing participation in the national economy and cooperating with government officials, both of which require them to speak Thai. The profound affection and regard in which they hold the Royal Family implicitly states a loyalty which leaves little doubt about where their genuine interests and sympathies lie.

The beliefs and actions of those engaged in planning and carrying out this integration are, however, inconsistent with the policy itself. The more deeply structured configuration of practi-

cal and urgent interests, such as the elimination of opium production, environmental protection and maintenance of security, have a far greater impact, and combined with the contemporary state of knowledge form an affective mode of intervention which overrides the stated policy.

The matters which best illustrate this problem are to be found in popular opinion and received knowledge which does not seriously challenged a paradigm which places highlanders in a marginalised and subordinate position in relation to the mainstream of Thai society. This deeply structured consensus is reinforced by law, which makes it difficult for highlanders to secure official recognition as residents and the documentation this requires such as identification cards, citizenship and so forth as well as legal land rights. Strictly speaking, in a purely formal sense, most highlanders have no right to occupy the land they cultivate and as long as they are seen as interlopers who lie outside the law there is little incentive to prepare a substantial reinterpretion of their position. As a consequence, most scientific work on the highlands tends to preclude full consideration of the highlanders position in favour of a conformist view, consistent with the law rather than the reality of what can be seen in the field or what can be gleaned from scientific literature. The point is that a more cautious and disciplined approach might raise serious doubts about what passes for information. It is from such a careful point of view that this paper has been written as an attempt to better align both stated and affective policy with the scientific facts about the highlands and their inhabitants.

My discussion is limited to a review of current popular knowledge and more substantial information that appears to both reflect and strongly influence official thinking on policy matters. The Chapter first addresses the matter of widely shared opinions about the highlanders as a subordinate group within an established social hierarchy and the idea of "consensus" developed by Vienne in Chapter 2 of this volume. As a geographer I have documented questions concerning the urgency

of the ecological problem in the highlands more thoroughly. In the interests of keeping the text to a reasonable length not all of the issues raised are discussed in the same detail. The discussion focuses principally on empirical data including a brief comment on the role played by foreign funded development projects in supporting the current paradigmatic structure. The Chapter concludes with reference to observations made by General Saiyud Kerdphol on the issue of "enforced assimilation" and how the largely unintended consequences of this may lead to disaster (Saiyud, 1986: 102; Saiyud, **Bangkok Post** 4 January, 1976: 9-10)

Ideology and knowledge

In Bangkok society any mention of the words "hill tribes" is sure to elicit a confident response. Academics, teachers, business people, civil servants, everybody who is anybody knows something about the highlanders. They are an object of pity, people whose poverty qualifies them as a suitable target for charity. They are a tourist attraction for an industry which has come to contribute a major part of foreign earnings to the national economy. Then again they are also seen to be dangerous. They practice slash and burn cultivation, destroy the forest, spoil the environment, endanger the watershed, grow opium, migrate from place to place and constitute a security problem. Depending on who is speaking, mention may be made of how certain groups practise "free love", never wash and live a terribly primitive life and must therefore be enlightened by development aid, or how their rapidly increasing mumbers must be checked: according to a prominent official to "really end this hill tribe problem, they must be sterilized by force" (**Siam Rath** 27 February, 1987).

Thailand is, as General Saiyud has pointed out, a society with a tolerant pluralist tradition (Saiyud, 1986: 97-111) but the extent to which this tradition is extended to highlanders is clearly in doubt. The newspaper statement quoted above poses a profound ethical question for social science. Just as the medical

profession is expected to do something about illness and disease, and architects and engineers are expected to design buildings and other structures that will not pose a hazard to those who use them, social scientists have a professional responsibility to point out how an impoverished sociology of knowledge is likely to lead to social and political problems which might otherwise be avoided.

Calling Names

As language presents us with the problem, the relevant nomenclature is as good a place to start as any. In Thailand highlanders are known as *"chao khao"*. Literally translated this means hill or mountain people but the English colonial practise in Burma was to call highlanders "hill tribes" and this subsequently came into general use and is now the standard translation. Unfortunately, today the word "tribal" conjures up a picture of primitive and backward people who live outside the state system.

It is misleading to call highlanders "tribal". Mountain people who are said to belong to set ethno-linguistic, cultural groups neither occupy or lay claim to coherent territories nor act as if they belonged to independent political communities. Their long standing relationship with lowland peoples, mediated through trade and tribute in historical systems of interaction so well described for neighbouring Burma by Leach (1954), should long ago have put to rest the idea of a tribal identity formed in isolation and fixed and frozen for all time (Conrad Chapter 8).

As to their supposed primitive and backward state, in a scientific sense their culture or language is no more or less complex or sophisticated than that of any other in the world. The term is pejorative, misleading but so firmly established in daily speech that mention of "hill tribes" leaves no doubt about who is being named. The title of this book acknowledges this reality. Even where both editors deny the descriptive validity of the term, in contradistinction, they also acknowledge its place in everyday language.

A name is more than a label. The contradiction embedded and obscured in the title points out the difficulty. What happens when we extend our consideration to the use of language? What sort of reality does language convey? If highlanders are thought of as "tribal" and found to be poor and living in houses constructed of bamboo and grass thatching, does it then become possible to treat such people in a manner considered to be consistent with their ascribed identity? Regretably a recent involuntary relocation reveals a distressing historical coincidence between the past and the present. After several hill tribe villages had been cleared of residents, an official, faced with the task of defending the use of a practice established in the last century of "firing villages... to show a claim of ownership" (Anon., 1895; 58), claimed that houses were not burnt down because what the people "lived in could not be called houses but only huts" (**Bangkok Post** 15 October, 1987: 5).

Such a comment, offered partly as an explanation of an action indistinguishable from the burning of Ban Mae Khum, Chiang Rai, by Siamese officials in 1889 is disturbing in its implications (Anon., 1895: 58). Such a statement identifies, after 98 years of modernization, a remarkably intact and unaltered attitude, the survival of a social distance, the existence of a class distinction and a belief that those who have no legal rights or social position can be treated in an arbitrary manner. The evidence of language, what is spoken spontaneously, cannot be ignored as an idea that was just plucked out of the air. In these post-Freudian days we must admit that the origins of any such statement lie deeply embedded in both the mind and the cultural ideology of the speaker.

The extent to which historical coincidence and manifestation of the subconscious can be used to reflect on the state-of-knowledge on the highlands and highlanders is another question. Conscious deliberations fall into a quite different category of thinking which lends itself to much more careful management and discipline.

Scientific method is the most systematic and careful way of assembling knowledge. If science plays a role in policy formation, can we then expect to entirely escape subjective psychological or socio-political influences on our thinking? History tells us that this is to expect too much. What we choose as individuals to investigate scientifically is already limited, for the average researcher in any society, to a range of options considered to be useful by those in positions of authority. If the sociological imagination of decision makers is limited to the domain of their principal administrative concerns, and/or research is structured into a belief system that demands conformity or reassurance and does not welcome any challenges, the pressure to conform to opinions generated as a function of received knowledge is quite strong. If scientific research is dismissed as academic and rated below that of opinions expressed by social superiors, then under such an ideological regime, government personnel must be under severe constraints to behave as expected rather than act as they think fit. Are not researchers caught in such a conservative milieu forced to choose self-censorship to survive?

But the commentary runs ahead of the evidence. What reasons are there for maintaining that the observations offered as examples of misinformation are actually wrong? Some matters such as nomadism and "free love" can be challenged at a relatively high level of confidence and, in the context of this essay, put aside. Other issues such as population increase, security, opium production, slash and burn agriculture, deforestation, and land degradation which are invoked in support of a wide range of views in opposition to highlander interests warrant, closer examination.

Nomads

In strictly scientific terms the people farming in the hill country of the North are not nomads; they do not circulate between set destinations and if by nomadic or semi-nomadic commentators mean that they migrate frequently, what does this mean? That they migrate more frequently than Thai farmers who

occupy a similarly marginal ecological niche or that they move their households more often than a North American executive, a Thai civil servant appointed up country as a provincial governor, district officer or public prosecutor? On both counts comparative research would most probably document that highlanders are no more or less sedentary than any of these people whose occupations makes it necessary for them to move from time to time. Only the social status of their role, like the difference between a bus driver and an airline pilot makes it acceptable to draw a distinction. Hill tribes migrate: public officials are transferred.

When we search the literature for sociological explanations as to why people move and how this fits into an intelligent strategy of survival, we are likely to be disappointed. Here we run into another problem, how social research is conducted. Quantitative, empirical research which starts with the idea that migration is, ipso facto, a problem that only needs to be documented, adds little or nothing to our understanding. The most recent study that I was able to locate employed very sophisticated statistical methodology in which amongst many other things we are told that according to a regression model the frequency of Hmong migration based on the "number of times in memory that a family head has moved from place to place" is "-.01930 (standard error) .12733 " (Benchavan, 1987: 459) but in the absence of any discussion of the cultural context, what have we been told? Such a writer will go on to assert, tautologically, that migration remains a problem because the authority of the consensus demands it.

"Free-love"

No scientific, anthropological work prepared by a professional social scientist documents or identifies the existence of any such practice in the highlands of North Thailand. Courting is a highly socialized procedure in all communities and subject to an etiquette of reasonable behaviour and strong social mores.

To impose a western concept of the sexual act, performed with no further expectations or obligations, as if it had no indigenous social significance is quite misleading. Such observations say more about the nature of the unconscious projections of the minds of those who venture them than about the behaviour of those to whom they are ascribed. The exotic and the erotic should not be confused.

Population Increase

The unavailability of reliable demographic data collected for a large population has been a serious impediment to demographic knowledge. Although this lacuna is currently being corrected with a comprehensive population survey, widely held beliefs centred on the role played by high birth rates being a major contributing factor to rapid population growth are already so firmly entrenched that they are difficult to reform or place in a more enlightened context. Reference solely to figures, a characteristic of the literature on this specialised subject, does not help although no intelligent discussion can ignore them. The results of early research, such as that carried out by L. and J. Hanks as part of the influential Bennington-Cornell Survey (1964, 1969), provided an estimate of natural population increase amongst the Akha of 6.2 percent per annum (Lewis, 1973: 4). This is far and away the most extravagant claim made by any social scientists and there is reason to believe that their data, collected under difficult circumstances, must be treated with caution. More recent studies report rates of natural increase much lower than this. Sanit, working with a small Lahu population, reports approximately three percent (Sanit, 1977). As for the Karen, who make up approximately 50 percent of highlanders, Kunstadter reports that dependable studies show them to be increasing at a similar rate (Kunstadter et. al., 1987b: 19). The highest figures that can be credited to a reliable researcher are those presented by Kunstadter for the Hmong, 4.34 percent (Kunstadter, 1983:24).

In a recent survey of a highland population of 400,914 conducted by the Task Force on Hill Tribes and Minority Groups, Ministry of Education, the highest natural increase recorded for

any highland group is once again given for the Hmong, 4.3 percent. The remainder indicate the danger of venturing a general figure: Mien, 3.5; Akha, 3.1; Khamu, 2.7; Lua, 2.5; Karen, 1.9; Htin, 1.1 (Prachuap et. al., 1987: 4). It appears that the Hmong rate of increase is consistently higher than that reported for other minority groups but this figure cannot be used as typical of the hill tribe population as a whole.

Several observations need to be made. First, that it is simply not realistic to extrapolate a general figure for the natural increase of population in any one district or for any specific population and apply it to highlanders as a whole. Not only do cultural attitudes play an important part in natural population increase but local variations in living conditions must also be taken into account. The extremely low figure for the Htin is a case in point. Whether the figure is correct or not, it clearly does not lend itself to wider use. It is also misleading to apply a high of 4. + percent, which on the basis of inadequate current information appears to hold for the Hmong, to the highland population as a whole. Until it is proven to be wrong, a more realistic figure for natural population increase in the highlands must stand at three percent. This is so close to the rate of increase in materially poorer, more traditional, lowland communities as not to warrant special comment. As it stands, natural annual population increase in the highlands must be placed against high mortality rates, especially amongst infants, a relatively low life-expectancy and endemic poverty. The most effective prophylactic in family planning is prosperity plus the move away from production systems with a high dependence on manual labour.

Another aspect of population increase owing to both natural increase and migration, which is often quoted as a fact against the hill tribes, is the spectre of over-population. Neo-Malthusian ideas relating to a notional man: land ratio are used to explain the felling of forest, shortening of fallow cycles and general pressure on the land leading to land degradation. Proper investigation of the matter must include consideration of both

administrative intervention, which prevents highland farmers from clearing suitable land by placing it beyond their reach in national parks and wildlife reserves, and also the spread of commercial cropping, which introduces a new idea of maximizing use of labour and capital. The overall situation of the communities for which data is collected must be considered before adequate explanations of what is happening can be advanced.

Security

Compared with the situation ten years ago, there appear to be few reasons for promoting a concern for security. Highlanders are anxious to acquire citizenship. The activities of development projects may have made few inroads into the endemic poverty of the highlanders but road construction, the extension of health services, education and the presence of an increased number of government officials have made highlanders very much aware of the power of the state and the authority of the administration. They are willing to cooperate. There is no active insurgency which constitutes a threat to the safety of Thailand. Highlanders have nothing to gain by challenging the over-whelming superiority of the Royal Armed Forces. If they were to be badly treated under policies of repatriation and programmes of relocation, they might in desperation feel compelled to retaliate. Such a reaction, though, would surely be self-destructive since they would certainly be defeated. The disruption caused by any such armed protest would certainly constitute a security crisis.

Opium

For various reasons efforts to suppress cultivation of the opium poppy have been remarkably successful. Overall production is down from the high of the late 60s of approximately 150 tons to just under 26 tons in the last season (1986/87). The proportion of highlander households growing opium has dropped from 45 percent to 20-25 percent. It is not yet clear how many of these growers may only be producing enough for themselves or a highly localised market. Opium cultivation is no longer an activity restricted to ethnic minorities. Northern

Thai now form the largest group of farmers cultivating the opium poppy in the Mae Chaem District of Chiang Mai.

It is my subjective impression, based on many visits made to a considerable number of villages in the years 1975-78 and between 1986-88, that decreased production appears to have been achieved alongside growing addiction rates among highlanders, at a rate consistent with their increasing poverty. Anthropologists in the field privately report alarming rates of heroin addiction amongst highlanders.

What Thailand produces is of little relevance to the international market. Ann Wrobleski, the US Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Matters was recently reported as saying the "opium production had almost doubled in Laos during the past year to 700 tons of the heroin-base from 400 tons" (**The Nation** April 14, 1988: 3). Although the actual figure is most probably well below this (regional experts estimate about 70 tons) it is still high but not as high as production in the Shan States where estimates vary between 200 and 1,000 tons. Thailand is already a net importer and there appears to be no purely clinical answer to the problem of addiction. Dick Mann, a veteran of crop substitution projects has said that, "in five years opium production could drop to 'maybe five tons, maybe six tons,' being grown for local consumption." He went on to say,

> Thailand was already a net importer of opium and heroin since it had some 40,000 addicts, each consuming about one kilogramme of opium a year, or a total of about 44 tons (**Bangkok Post** 13 November, 1987: 4).

Given this qualified success and the declining number of growers, why the continuing ease with which hill tribes are stereotyped as opium growers?

As noted in a recently reprinted book on opium use in Britain in the last century, "Opiates still have particular symbolic meaning for national activity and international crusade..." (Berridge & Edwards, 1987: 239-240). The fact that Thailand is the only country in the region prepared to host what can loosely be described as foreign-funded opium crop replacement projects ensures that the public will be constantly reminded. As has been rather cynically pointed out by Chao Tzang Yawnghwe (Eugene Thaike)

> I sometimes wonder whether the opium problem has not become a goose that lays golden eggs... enriching, on one hand, the drug syndicates and the traffickers and on the other providing multinational and international bureaucracies with more jobs, funds and good living (Thaike, 1987: 268).

Swiddening

"Slash and burn" is another name given to shifting cultivation or swiddening. For a wide variety of reasons-such as the spread of commercial farming, increased pressure on land, administrative intervention which has limited access to virgin forest-fewer than half of all highlanders are still able to practise such farming (Fig.1) According to estimates made by Sanit Wongsprasert for the province of Chiang Mai, "shifting cultivation is practised by only three percent of the highland population; land rotation, 70 percent of the population; and crop rotation by 27 percent" (Sanit, 1986, personal communication). Chantaboon Sutthi also provides a discussion of the extent to which other farming systems have come into use (Chantaboon, Chapter 4).

Forest Destruction

To witness the destruction of forest is a distressing experience (Plate 37)and there are good ecological and economic reasons why the government must take steps to put a stop to wholesale felling. However, to answer the question, "Who is

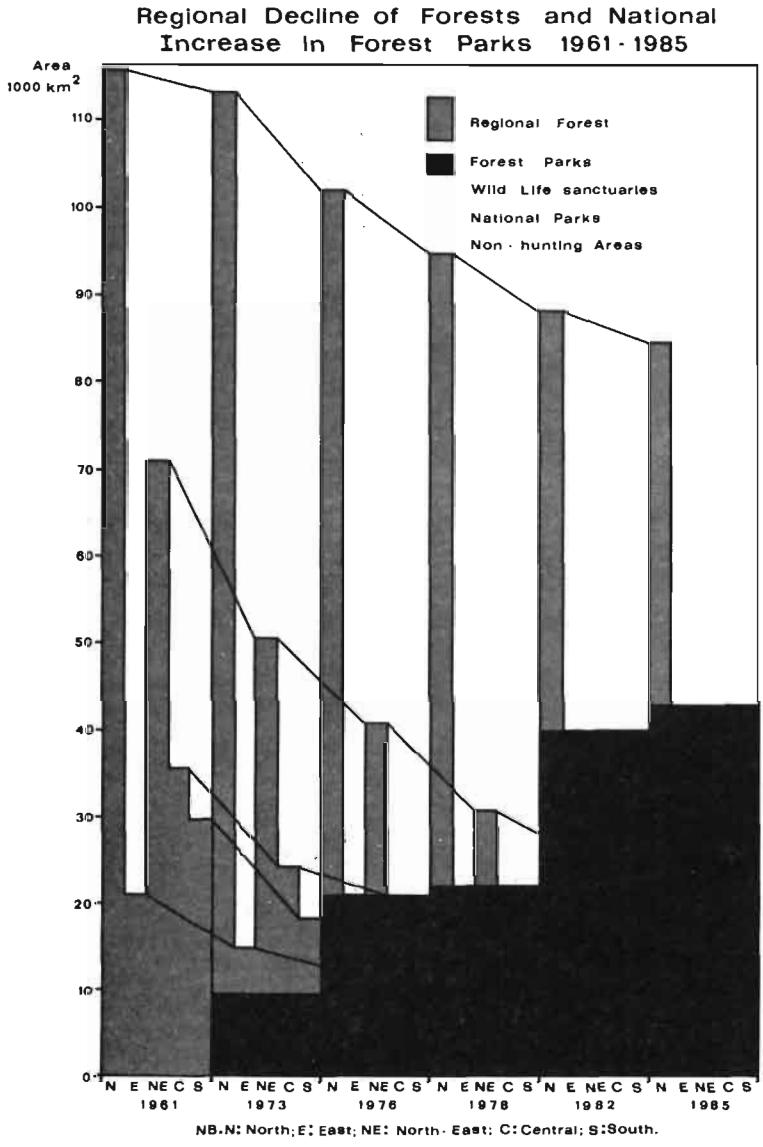

Fig. 1

Source : Anat, 1987

responsible?" it is necessary to be objective and point out that most of the destruction has been carried out not by highlanders but lowland settlers. As the forests have declined the role of timber merchants has become more apparent.

Between 1978 and 1982, more forest was felled in the province of Nan than in any other area in the North, some 152,600 ha. (Suree, 1986: 9). E.C. Chapman who was working there at the beginning of this period credited this to the fact that Nan was a,

> "poverty corner" of Northern Thailand, with more than 50 percent of farm holdings under 6.0 rai (just under 1 hectare) are mean rice production per farm holding of 1,715 kg which was the lowest for all 23 provinces in northern and northeastern Thailand, despite rice yields per rai much above the average for the kingdom. That the situation has certainly deteriorated considerably since 1963 is reflected in the steady expansion of swiddening, as farmers endeavour to compensate for the relatively static situation in wet-rice cultivation...In an extensive sample survey of villages made in B.E. 2509 (1966) made by the Department of Land Development, it was found that four-fifths of rural households had swiddens, usually to supplement their rice production from irrigated fields (Chapman, 1973: 223).

Chupinit Kesmanee of the Tribal Research Institute has gone so far as to point out that on the basis of available information it is "possible to argue that 'because of the hilltribes, the Northern region has more forests left than the other regions' " (Chupinit, 1987: 28)

This rather enigmatic statement is best explained with reference to Figure 1 showing the Regional Decline of Forests and the National Increase in Forest Parks. The Figure shows that before any National Parks were declared (1961) the North had the largest area covered by forest (approximately 115,000 km^2 followed by the Northeast (approximately 71,000 km^2). In the twelve years between 1961 and 1973 the northern forests declined by at most 3 percent (some 2,500 km^2) and the forested area in the Northeast by nearly 30 percent (21,000 km^2). Since 1973 the clearing of the northern forest by the gradual settlement of perhaps four million thai farmers followed the same pattern observed in areas further to the south like Pichit, which had been cleared much earlier. In Kamphaeng Phet, in the lower North, forest destruction was particularly severe. In the Northeast, over the brief period between 1973 and 1976 more than half the forest remaining in 1972 was cut down. In the North, where a similar area of forest was cleared the rate of destruction remained relatively low (8 percent). In subsequent years up until 1982, by which time most forested land in the Northeast suitable for arable farming had been cleared, the total area of forest felled annually exceeded that of the North. Chupinit's remark serves to draw attention to a fact that is often overlooked in the concern to name "outsiders", highlanders, as being responsible for the destruction of Thailand's forests.

Another aspect of forestry interest in the highlands shown in Figure 1 is the recent rapid increase of areas declared special parks, Wild Life Sanctuaries, National Parks and Non-Hunting Areas. I do not wish to question the long term ecological objectives behind this but the added weight this gives to the authority of the Royal Forestry Department should also be noted for the way in which it limits access to land. Highlander population growth and continuing immigration are often presented as sole reasons for land shortage in the highlands. Such observations need to also take into account how administrative intervention has exacerbated this problem. Highland farmers, whatever their ethno-linguistic affiliation, are caught in a scissors movement: over-intensive use of fragile upland soils leads to a likely

adverse environmental impact but the farmers have nowhere to go because access to alternative sites has been blocked by administrative and legislative intervention.

A further reason for the recent decline of forests is the rapid rate at which commercial farming has grown in the highlands under the sponsorship of prominent traders, mostly well-placed people who can secure the administrative and political support necessary to move in settlers, clear the land and grow crops for which the big man knows there is a ready market. This is widespread but I will restrict myself to one example from Mae Chaem. In 1988 a local politician settled over 100 families mostly Thai but including some 30 Hmong households who cleared over 5000 rai of forest. It is extremely difficult for the government to maintain any credibility in this matter when those who are seen to be authorities, themselves abuse their power.

Land degradation

The first words in a book on land degradation recently prepared by Blaikie and Brookfield states that "Land degradation should by definition be a social problem. Purely environmental processes such as leaching and erosion occur with or without human interference, but for these processes to be described as 'degradation' implies social criteria which relate land to its actual or possible uses" (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987: 1). Any statement about land degradation is then a comment which is based on a distinction between processes and perturbations known to occur in nature and those changes which are a direct result of human intervention. Any investigation of land degradation must then be established by reference to our scientific understanding of what natural processes are at work.

In Thailand the issue of environmental degradation attributed to highlanders focuses on forest destruction. In a recent publication prepared by the Thailand Development Research Institute this is said to result in

> denuding important watershed areas. Forest reserves, which are protected for conservation purposes, are continually encroached. Soil erosion increases, as does sedimentation in rivers which originate in the highland areas, promoting downstream flooding and, by accelerating run-off, aggravating drought problems in the dry season (Anat et. al. 1987: 80).

In the light of the Blaikie and Brookfield position, we must be cautious in our approach to statements which maintain that, "If (the Royal Thai Government) wants to protect the highland watersheds, it will be forced to institute widespread resettlement of hill farmers from (the highlands), protecting the watersheds thereafter with force, if necessary" (Anat et. al., 1987: 80). Deciding what the ecological imperatives of such a situation are then becomes much more than an academic matter. If the experts like Dr. Anat et. al. are correct, and that the national watershed is in immediate danger, a case can be made out for urgent intervention "with force if necessary" but if this is not the case then there is time for more accommodating long term plans to be drawn up.

When we turn to the appropriate experts for guidance any hope for a clear and unequivocal answer to what is true and what is false soon eludes us. In a recent publication of the Environment and Policy Institute, East-West Center, D.S. Cassells, M.Bonell, L.S. Hamilton and D.A. Gilmour all known for their work in forestry felt it necessary to repeat observations made in other publications that,

> Perceptions of the impacts of development activities on the hydrological behavior of tropical forest lands are frequently based on myths, misinterpretations, misinformation, and misunderstanding that recently characterized the perceptions that many forest managers held about the hydrological

> behavior of forests in the humid latitudes (Hamilton, 1983 & 1984 quoted by Cassells et. al., 1987: 32).

Some of the myths they address enjoy a wide following in Thailand. On the popular proposition that the felling of the forest reduces rainfall the Thailand Development Research Institute publication notes that,

> By maintaining the humidity in the atmosphere, forests probably increase the amount of rainfall, though to degrees which vary from place to place and which are not yet predictable (Anat et. al. 1987: 93)

This cautious statement is much more confidently countered by Cassells and his colleagues with reference to Lee, one of the most widely quoted authorities on forest hydrology.

> The natural coincidence of forest cover and higher precipitation has undoubtedly caused, or at least reinforced, the popular notion that forests increase or "attract" rain and other precipitation forms. Acceptance of the forest as a causal factor leads naturally to the conclusion that forest cutting will reduce precipitation, or that afforestation will increase it; this conclusion played a major role in the development of forest policy in the United States and elsewhere and is still the basis of considerable concern among environmentalists. Objectively, however, the arguments in favor of a positive forest influence are severely weakened when the alleged mechanisms for the influence are critically examined. (Lee, 1980: 101, quoted by Cassells et. al., 1987: 30).

A leading Thai forestry researcher Dr.Suree Bhumibhamon appears to cautiously agree with this position when he noted in a recent publication that "There has been no significant

change (in the amount of water vapour carried into the atmosphere) in northern Thailand during the past decade (Suree, 1986: 67). The period during which the forest has been felled at a higher rate than ever before.

On the subject of the belief that floods are more likely to occur if the forest is removed, accepted knowledge in Thailand has it,

> ...that forest cover alleviates flooding in the rainy season by holding back some water and returning some to the atmosphere through evaporation and transpiration. Precipitation is also increased in mountain forest through condensation on leaf and twig surfaces. Forest cover holds rainwater and may facilitate recharge of underground aquifers which supply water after the rainy season. Forested watersheds provide water of higher quality for household use and aquatic life than do deforested watersheds. In these ways, the benefits of nature conservation reach virtually everyone in the kingdom (Anat et. al., 1987: 93).

There can be little doubt that a higher quality of water is discharged from forested watersheds. Unfortunately this benefit is restricted to those few fortunate people who live immediately below forested areas. The authority of established "knowledge" (or is it myth?) is particularly strong. Without offering any proof or documentation Dr.Suree Bhumibhamon asserts that,

> Deforestation has promoted flooding in the rainy season, as caused by watershed degradation and is directly related to the surface run-off problem and soil erosion. In the deforested areas, soil moisture dries up in the summer and thus causes drought in the summer (Suree, 1986: 72).

On the substance of the preceding statements Cassells et. al. quote Lee again,

> The popular notion that forests tend to "retard and lower flood crests and prolong flow in low-water periods"... was still in vogue amongst foresters until the middle of the current century. It is true to a degree, that forests "lower flood crests", but some of the largest floods on record have occurred in forest drainages...The attractive notion that the existence of forest cover will "prolong increased flow in low water periods is clearly false". (Quoted by Cassells et. al 1987: 43).

In the course of their review they note that in fact "planting trees in non-forested catchments will tend to decrease the water yield" (Cassells et.al., 1987: 50). The argument that the presence of trees (any sort of trees) is absolutely necessary to maintain good watershed characteristics is difficult to maintain with reference to total water yield. In fact in countries like New Zealand, granted under quite different climatic conditions, trees are planted to reduce soil moisture because figuratively speaking, they pump water into the atmosphere (Hathaway, 1986: 39).

Soil erosion

In the highlands, as for Thailand as a whole, soil erosion is clearly a problem that cannot be contested (Anat et.al., 1987: 38-39; also see Plate 91). In the upper North studies of upland areas, old alluvial terraces and fans with relatively acid soils and on slopes greater than five percent, cleared of forest by Thai farmers practising shifting cultivation, soil loss has been measured at 16 tons per rai (approximately 96 tons per hectare) (Marston, 1984; noted by Anat et.al., 1987: 38), some 20 times above recommended tolerable soil loss. Chomchan and Panichapong (1986) report that soil loss in the Ping and Nan river basins averages about two to ten tons per rai per year and estimate that "If land use changes from forest to row crop cultivation without

soil and water conservation measures, soil loss will increase about 6 to 10 times" (Chomchan and Panichapong, 1986 quoted by Anat et. al., 1987: 38).

These general estimates of erosion are one thing and clearly indicate that there is a problem. Specific studies provide another perspective. If a reliable figure is to be obtained for erosion directly attributable to farming activities, many factors must be taken into account: farming system, cultivation method, conservation practices, soil type, slope, aspect and so forth and as Sangha Sabhasri notes, "Erosion occurs every year no matter whether the forest is disturbed or undisturbed. This is a natural phenomenon in any forest community" (Sangha, 1987: 170).

Scientific measurements prepared from an analysis of fan deposits under Lua swiddens at Pa Pae carried out by Paul Zinke, Sanga Sabhasri and Peter Kunstadter led them to conclude that "an approximation of the depth of erosion may be 1.15 mm per 10 years, or 11.5 cm per millennium" (1987: 153). Tolerable losses. Then again, estimates based on data gathered for one year (1968-69) by Sanga Sabhasri for the same area using a different method averaged between 10.33 mm and 12.02 mm (1978: 169). The methods alone produced estimates that differ by a factor of 10. In other words erosion calculated from fan deposits was 10 percent of that estimated from a stake-out method.

Highlanders know that if they seriously mismanage the land they will be the first to suffer the conseqences. Their cultures are ecologically informed and have ensured their survival over millennia. This is not to say that the relatively stable agricultural system of the Karen and Lua is easily replicable, that their cyclical swiddening method is not susceptible to population pressures, that the introduction of commercial crops has not impact, that the situation at Pa Pae is the same today as it was in 1968-69 when the study under discussion was carried out but it is worth remembering that over half of the total number of highlanders

draw their agricultural wisdom from this tradition. An impartial reassessment of the traditional agricultural knowledge of all farmers in the highlands would go a long way towards correcting the negative impression harboured by most government officials. Perhaps then, rather than stereotyping highlanders as ignorant spoilers of the environment, they could be seen to be doing their best to come to terms with an increasingly difficult situation and in most cases, doing so in a sensible manner.

The case needs to be balanced. It is not possible to argue that there is no problem at all. If for the moment we put aside considerations critical of the methods used to obtain estimates of soil loss, those readily available show that in many areas erosion rates run at unacceptably high levels. Micro-studies in which sedimentation tanks have been constructed directly beneath farmers fields show high rates of soil loss. In the Mae Sa watershed just north of Chiang Mai, Sheng measured soil loss from control plots at 24.1 metric tonnes per hectare (t/ha) (Sheng, 1979:60). Recent work carried out by an Australian consultancy group with an interest in promoting their work in the highlands, monitored over a single cropping season, a loss of 45 t/ha from fields cultivated under "traditional methods" (Hoey, 1987: 10). Sheng recorded a dry soil loss of 12.3 t/ha from bench terraces (Sheng, 1979: 60) while the Australian's working in a different area produced a figure for the same method of conservation farming of 1.7 t/ha (Hoey et al, 1987: 10).

It is interesting to compare Sheng's findings with Hoey's because the exercise illustrates the difficulty of comparing different sites for the same season but in different years. The absence of detailed descriptions of exactly what kind of "traditional" farming was being used and using results gathered over a relatively short study period does not inspire a high level of confidence. The added eccentricity presented by researchers who make use of different methods of measurement and present data at different levels of generalization also adds another difficulty.

Given these difficulties in getting a clear picture of what is happening, it appears that not all the news concerning highland farming methods is bad. Neither the worst predictions for likely soil loss given above by Marston (96t/ha) nor the pessimistic estimates provided by Chomchan and Panchapong (120-600t/ha) have been measured in or recorded for the highlands. If it holds up to the scrutiny of wider testing, the remarkably low loss of soil from fields contoured with grass strips (1.3t/ha), a strategy, indentified by an Australian team of consultants and now being promoted by the Thai-German Programme has provided support for the opinion that permanent cropping may be possible (Hoey et al, 1987: 10) but as discussed below, there are good reasons to be cautious about the unintended implications of such claims.

Sedimentation

Sediments originating in the highlands and entering water ways as distinct from those entering at lower elevations is another issue that is more difficult to document with the opinions of experts. The problem is to find studies of a relevant scale which address the issue on an appropriate regional level.

The measure of interest to us here is the amount of turbidity and sediment per unit of water being carried in streams out of the highlands. In a normal stream profile the amount of material carried in suspension down water courses should be higher in the mountains where the water runs faster and lower on the plains where it slows and can no longer carry heavier debris. If highlanders make a significant contribution to the sedimentation of Thailand's major rivers, it can be expected that higher than normal loads are being carried in mountain streams. In fact the only reliable case study carried out in the North with which I am familiar shows that the "normal" pattern was, under land use disturbances current in 1979 clearly inverted. The sedimentation load carried by the Mae Ping was found to be much higher than that of a typical tributary.

In 1979, T.C. Sheng the technical officer in watershed management and conservation farming referred to above and employed by the UNDP/FAO as an expert on the Mae Sa Integrated Watershed and Forest Land Use Project presented the results of a five year study of the principal waterways in the Mae Sa catchment just 20 kilometers or so north of Chiang Mai town. The area was originally chosen as a sub-catchment typical of the region and one of the principal objectives of the undertaking was to attempt to identify a development model for the relatively newly formed Watershed Division of the Royal Forestry Department. His preliminary results indicated "that the Mae Ping Basin has very serious erosion problems and the Mae Sa is probably better than the average watershed in the region. However this merits more detailed study and investigation" (Sheng, 1979: 68).

The upper reaches of the catchment was farmed by Hmong highlanders. Beneath them were to be found northern Thai farmers who maintained irrigated rice fields and on the margins of the forest, cleared swidden fields for upland crops. When the study was conducted, the government had put though 143 kilometers of mostly unsurfaced roads.

His principal findings of interest to us here were as follows,

1) The sediment load carried in the Mae Ping river (the main river which runs through Chiang Mai) is higher than that carried in the Mae Sa river (Sheng, 1979: 68).
2) Government road building activities alone accounted for 30 percent of erosion in the Mae Sa catchment (Sheng, 1979: 52).
3) Turbidity in the Mae Sa Mai stream in a subcatchment worked by Hmong swiddeners was less than that found in the Mae Sa river (Sheng, 1979: 68).

Several observations can be made on the basis of his findings.

First, if the Mae Sa sub-catchment watershed area is typical of the upper North, the higher turbidity of the Mae Nam Ping clearly indicates that erosion and other earth moving activities which contributed to this load originate at elevations below the highlands and that hill tribe farmers cannot be held to be responsible for aggradation of this major waterway.

Second, that badly formed highland roads built by the government may well be responsible for a large proportion of the total amount of debris entering streams in the highlands (Plate 90).

Third, erosion from land worked by highland swiddeners does not enter water courses with the frequency that is widely assumed. The relationship between erosion measured immediately below fields and sediments entering streams has yet to be established.

The study of land degradation in the highlands requires reference to far more work than that on which I have reported in this brief survey and serious readers engaged in research on the matter would be well advised to consult literature on the region other than that which I have quoted (Benchaphun, 1985; Gibson, 1983: 318-385).

It appears that enough critical and informed opinions have been published which raise serious scientific questions about whether highlander farming activities pose an urgent ecological threat to the lowlands. The facts about hydrological deterioration and land degradation have yet to be established.

Land Classification

It is on the basis of this less than satisfactory information base that the Office of the National Environment Board has prepared a watershed classification for the North. Under this project all major catchments have been zoned into six categories, class A1, B1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. According to the director of the Watershed Management Division, Mr.Preecha Ob-eye,

> Class A1 is the existing forested areas on the most steep slopes on the upper part of the basin and this class is considered as the most important part of the watershed area. The government, by decision of the cabinet, has declared this class as the protected area, all kind of development activity will not be allowed....our target area for forest protection is the area of class 1A (Preecha to McKinnon, 7 August, 1980 (sic 1987).

As land classes have been mapped at a scale of 1: 50,000 the areas identified as A1 are very generalized and encompass a considerable number of highland communities including Karen who have farmed some of this land for many generations. As it stands, under current policy, it is the government's intention to involuntarily resettle all occupants of these areas under a strategy outlined in Appendix V.

Resettlement

If implemented, the policy will make it necessary to move a considerable number of people. Given current provisions, there is little hope that they will be adequately resettled. A study of the relocation of 5557 highlanders from Khlong Lan National Park (Kampaeng Phet, 1986) lists the following short comings: advanced warning was given; the costs of moving were largely borne by those relocated; resettlement sites were inadequate; subsistence support for villagers (food, water and shelter) did not approach the standard of what they had lost; and that it created internal refugees some of whom tore up their Thai ident-

ity papers so they could enter Ban Kae refugee Camp in Chiang Kham (Chupinit, 1987: 37-38). Between 15 April and July, 1986 the number of highlanders registered as evacuees declined from 5,087 to 3,701 people (Chupinit, 1987; 10).

Specific studies are available. Eudey (Chapter 10) provides a case study of Ban Huai Yew Yee and Chupinit Kasmanee provides interviews with farmers from six villages in Kampaeng Phet (Chupinit, 1987: 13-25). The field visit I made to a resettled village in Kampaeng Phet left me with little reason for optimism. Yao informants for whom settlement arrangements were made by the authorities had little for which they could be thankful.

Why this get-tough policy?

If natural population increase is not too rapid, if opium production is falling, if there is no urgent ecological or security crisis looming, why is the government apparently launching a stronger policy? Why is it that intervention threatens to become tougher than actual conditions appear to justify? From this review of the current state-of-knowledge, much that is widely accepted as "facts" about the highlands and highlanders is open to question. As far as policy is influenced by research and surveys, it appears that Thailand is not being well served by scientists, engineers and other technicians working in the hills. Is this the case or does the inverse apply? Is Thailand served all too well by the experts at its command, both foreigners and nationals who see that their best interests are more easily secured if they conform to an unsatisfactory state-of-knowledge rather than if they challenge it?

Before we can broach such contentious question, a normal perspective needs to be established. Scientific information only rarely plays an important and discrete part in policy formation. Policy is formed by politicians and administrators who consider interests and information presented as a consensus

and allocate funds for research and development along lines which they believe will, for the greater good, be most effective. Such is the normal hierarchical arrangement of government decision making. Professional scientists, researchers, engineers and technicians, however, do not only play a passive role in such a configuration. Rather than just applying their skills to tasks defined by others, it is part of their responsibility to raise questions, exercise an independent set of skills and identify work which will generate a better understanding of phenomenon.

To make such an abstract statement of principle is one thing, to act on it in a concrete and objective situation is quite another. To transcend the tension, the opposition which exists between the citizen who would prefer to thrive and needs to survive in a specific set of work relationships on which society is built *and* to act as a professional scientist and exercise his intellectual responsibilities is far from easy. In a society in which critical thinking is not always acceptable, where the sociology of knowledge is focused on a technical role, where people lack confidence to exercise independent judgement which requires that they deviate from officially proscribed guidelines, the space left for lateral thinking is seriously limited. If those who deviate too far from their expected role experience difficulty in securing funding or finding employment, the matter is no longer just imagined. The practical and pragmatic response is simply to avoid issues, opinions and matters considered to be contentious by those who control the purse strings. In such a conservative milieu the tendency is for those employed within it to act as savants, to confine themselves to officially condoned activities and avenues of research within the existing framework of knowledge and intellectual paradigms, to conform to the consensus: in such cases everybody loses. If the consensus is not challenged decision makers also remain trapped in what may be described as a kind of involutionary state of mind. Then administrators respond to calls for action (because they, unlike researchers, must act rather than investigate) and *"act with an idea in their head"* that may be at odds with reality. What is seen to be necessary to undertake, because the information

on which this imperative is based precludes the possibility of a broad, objective and scientific understanding, must be increasingly undertaken by force.

That such a situation has come about is partly a legacy of decisions made in the very early days of modernization. As Dr.Anan Ganjanapan observes in his comprehensive review of the history of anthropology in Thailand, when the country opened itself to new academic disciplines, subjects such as sociology and anthropology which encompass the potential for a broad, interdisciplinary research, because they "did not provide conceptual tools of direct relevance to administration were not acceptable" (Anan, 1986: 68). The small group of administrators and intellectuals who decided what should be taught "were not interested in understanding the people and societies that would participate in development...(because they were)...confident of the effectiveness of the established mode of administration which had been practised for a very long time ...(and as a consequence)...gave their attention only to technical and applied science to secure the advantages this knowledge provided to western administrative and economic systems" (Anan, 1986: 68)

As Dr. Anan might well agree, this legacy does not provide a completely satisfactory explanation to the problem identified here. Dr.Chayan Watanaphuti, also on the faculty of Chiang Mai University, points out that in the field of social science, "most of the research (in the highlands) has been carried out by expatriates" (Chayan, 1987: 5) who are not subject to the same constraints placed upon their Thai colleagues. The current unsatisfactory state-of-knowledge on the highlands and highlanders is not the specific product of a Thai consensus but a function of a wider issue in which foreign researchers, engineers, technicians and project administrators must accept a large part of the responsibility. But to return to the tough questions posed at the beginning of this section, does the focus on individuals provide a way of understanding the matter? Many foreign researchers who have enjoyed the privilege of working in

Thailand have prepared and/or published critical and informed commentaries. (Bo Gua, 1975; Cooper, 1979; Gia Yia Lee, 1982; Kammerer, 1987; Radley, 1986; Tapp, 1985 & 1986; Walker, 1979-80). The attempt to generate an explanation solely with reference to ethical shortcomings (i.e. Chambers, 1985;Kerr, 1984) cannot be sustained. We must look elsewhere.

Pejorative influence of foreign intervention

A much more difficult problem emerges which cannot be resolved solely with reference to either the state of scientific knowledge in Thailand or the individual professional responsibility of national and international researchers. Foreign geopolitical intervention has had a profound impact on policy formation.

A proper analysis would require a full historical discussion of the nature of western intervention in Thailand and the manner in which this has been managed. Such a task is well beyond the scope of this paper. To arbitrarily state a starting point marked by the French withdrawal from Indochina (1954) and the engagement of American military interests begins to tell a story. In recent years the surveillance and development effort focused on the task of eliminating the production of opium has taken centre stage. Both military and "development" interests placed a heavy emphasis on dealing with highlanders as if they were less than full human beings who could therefore be manipulated at will and cajoled into doing whatever outsiders thought best. Unfortunately this reinforced

> the dialectic of the relationship between dominant rice growing lowland society undergoing a process of cultural homogenisation through state formation involving opposition to a mosaic of politically acephalous, minority settlements which must be recognized as a de facto reality (Vienne, Chapter 2).

Foreign intervention emphasized the structural opposition between lowlanders and highlanders in a manner which suited

the former but worked to the disadvantage of the latter. This dialectic lies at the very heart of the sociology of knowledge concerning the highlanders and presents the most profound obstacle to the construction of a proper scientific understanding of the situation.

This experience of deleterious foreign intervention on the drug issue alone has not been restricted to Thailand. In his book ***Poppies, Pipes and People***, the medical anthropologist Westermeyer documents the empirical reality for neighbouring Laos. Peter G. Bourne's Foreword to the same work states the case succinctly.

> Perhaps the most important lessons from this study relate to the remarkably adverse impact of various foreign policy decisions made in the United States that were based in part on misinformation and misunderstanding, geared toward dealing with the drug problem as it affected Americans, and had very little regard for the impact they might have in Laos (Peter G. Bourne in Westermeyer, 1982: xv).

It appears that little has changed since the decade in which Westermeyer carried out his study (1965-1975). The Americans have been joined by a host of western, industrialized nations whose failure to deal with their drug problem at home has led to a major, technocratic effort in Thailand to end the cultivation of opium. Conceived as a police and military problem, rationalized in part as development aid, built on an inadequate understanding of the highland situation this effort has exacerbated an already difficult and tense situation and pushed the Thai government into precipitative action.

From the very start strategic and military interests have exercised a great deal of influence. Thailand has a highly differen-

tiated economy, a literate and skilled work force and spends a larger proportion of total public expenditure on education (25.35 percent) than any of 30 other countries in the Far East (FEER, 1987: 8-9), plus a form of parliamentary democracy. However, agencies run on other than democratic principles still exercise a great deal of influence. The Armed Forces still claim 32.43 percent of public expenditure (FEER, 1987: 8-9) and their authority is reflected in the composition of government.

It is not surprising that the international concern for narcotics production has become aligned with the type of operational efficiency associated with military competence. The recent decision to give authority to the Third Army to set up an administrative centre for hill tribes and minorities in the upper North clearly has antecedents. Current preparation of a new master plan "which de-emphasizes control on narcotics cultivation and focuses more on improving living conditions of hilltribe people and environmental conservation" (**The Nation** 28 November, 1987: 1) does not, under the current state-of-knowledge, promise any liberalisation of the style of intervention.

Although still under discussion, it appears that under this plan two national committees will be set up under the existing Committee for Solving National Security Problems Related to Hill Tribes and Narcotics Cultivation. The new coordinating subcommittee is likely, for the first time, to be headed by the secretary general of the National Security Council and a fund-seeking subcommittee is to be headed by the general secretary of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board.

Structural assimilation

The foregoing description of professional ethical and institutionalized security, narcotics and ecological interests provides a perspective on policy formation which makes it easier to understand the constraints placed on research and development work in the highlands. A brief review of some aspects of

foreign assistance illustrates the product of this configuration. The concern of the state and international development agencies provide the most authoritative vehicle on which the current consensus is carried. As shown above, the principal objective of policy has always reiterated the principle that the hill tribes are to be integrated into the state as first class, self reliant citizens but the way both national and international concerns come together precludes the need to take highlander interests into account. Amongst officials, the absence of both a good understanding of highlander cultures (their separate identity is often treated as an obstacle to becoming Thai, because citizenship is perceived to be more than a legal matter) and any authoritative acknowledgement of their social, political and agricultural management systems is taken to mean that there are too few reasons for the government to go out of its way to accommodate highlanders within a policy of integration: integration becomes rhetoric in the face of structural assimilation, what Vienne has called "a process of cultural homogenisation through state formation" (Vienne, Chapter 2).

Foreign Assistance and Highlanders

Foreign assistance is provided for a wide range of activities undertaken by the Royal Thai Government. This effort, as stated above,is primarily aimed at eliminating the growing and trading of opium and ranges from the welfare work of the Norwegian government funded Church Aid to the police suppression activities conducted as a joint operation between the Royal Thai Government and the United States, with personnel assigned from the Central Intelligence Agency, The Drug Enforcement Agency and the State Department coordinated by the Narcotics Assistance Unit (NAU) headquartered in the US Embassy, Bangkok.

The representative sample of foreign funded development projects listed in Table 1 address a broad set of socio-economic issues and the magnitude of their investment alone indicates the

strength of their position. Figure 2 locates the areas in which some of these bigger projects work.

Table 1

Project Partly Funded by Foreign Donors Listed by ONCB as Primarily Committed to Opium Crop Replacement (August, 1986)

Name	Number villages	Pop. served	Thai budget (US$)	Financial support (US$)
Thai-German (1981-1994)	135	22,092	1,182,665.5	6,121,058
Thai-Norwegian (1985-89)	43	7,250	1,612,162.5	5,600,000
USA-NAU * (1981-1986)	129	16,512	1,012,188	4,004,702
Doi Pae Per UN Agencies ** (1986-1991)	141	14,122	1,082,195.5	1,852,000
Sam Mun Canada & Sweden (1987-1991)	56	9,574	not available	2,000,000
Doi Vieng Pha Italy (1987-1991)	88	12,919	not available	2,000,000
TOTAL	592	77,969	4,889,211.5	21,577,760

NB. * US Narcotics Assistance Unit.
** UNDP, UNFDAC, UNFAO, UNICEF
An updated assessment (November, 1988) of the total foreign funds currently committed under the management of all the agencies engaged in the highlands (excluding the King's Project) provides a figure of US$ 83 million.

Source: Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) and Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (DTEC). Paper on "Arrangements for Solving the Problem of Opium Production", presented to the ***Seminar on Suppression and Control of Hill Tribe Intrusion into and Destruction of the Forest,*** 15-16 August, 1986: 1-15. The updated figure was compiled from project documents and a wide variety of sources. Although it is not an official estimate it is reasonably accurate.

Although Table 1 ignores the multitude of small government and non-government projects recently added to the list (those located at Pha Mon and Doi Tung), it should be noted that in a directory of development activities prepared by the Department of Public Welfare some 3,947 projects operating in nine provinces were listed as serving 1,298 villages (Department of Public Welfare, 1983). Neither the scale nor the quality of intervention can be measured solely by a review of the foreign contribution.

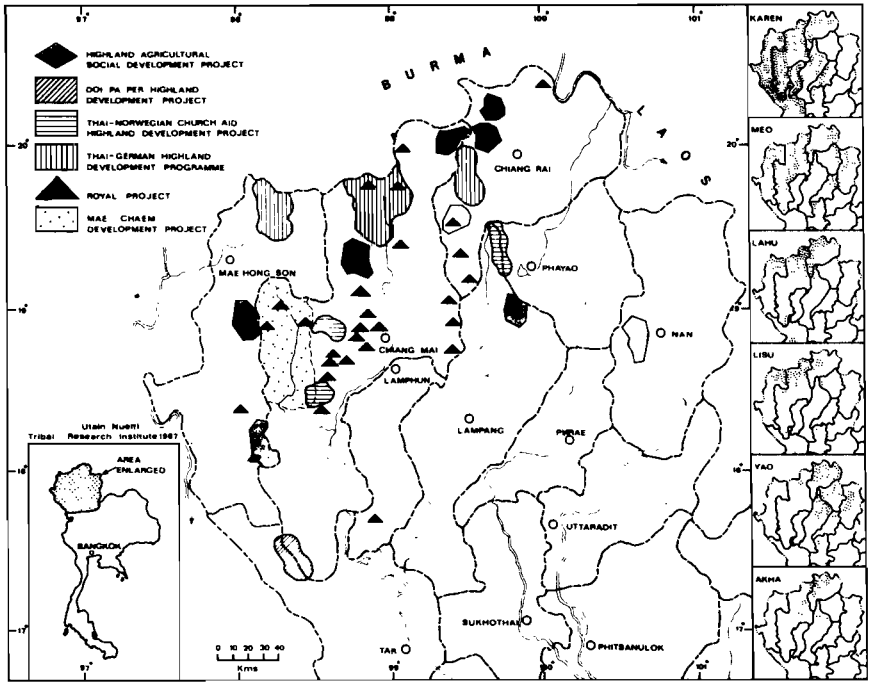

Fig. 2

Clearly, the larger share of the funding is provided by foreign donors but as agencies working with the Thai civil authorities, they have a responsibility to fit their activities as much as possible within the framework of national planning and policy guidelines. Through their institutional affiliation with the ONCB, it is assumed that opium production remains the underlying concern.

This is not, however, a role in which many foreign development workers like to see themselves. Most believe they are engaged in a humanitarian undertaking designed to improve the living conditions of the mountain people and few project documents make explicit reference to the task of eliminating opium production. The Thai-German Highland Development Programme, for instance, does not identify this as a high priority in their project documents. The Project prefers to be seen in a helping role, assisting in the extension of government services with roads, water supply and buildings, strengthening associated medical, agricultural and administrative skills. Projects like the unlisted Highland Agricultural and Social Development Project, working with the Department of Public Welfare, serviced by a team of bilaterally funded Australian agricultural consultants and until recently funded by the World Bank has long been guided by policy in which matters of welfare and agricultural production predominate. The information booklet of the unlisted Mae Chaem project attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives and funded by a USAID grant of 9.2 million US dollars also makes no mention of opium crop replacement.

The subjective humanitarian preoccupations of project personnel are genuine but it would be naive to assume that their best intentions either enable or encourage them to extend their activities beyond the structural limitations placed upon them by the current state-of-knowledge and the way in which this consensus is institutionalized. They are primarily committed to servicing a technical-managerial and planning function and as outsiders they see it as their job to work within this reality. The value they

place on local knowledge, their knowledge of the people with whom they work, does not extend much beyond rhetoric. As technicians and managers, they believe they can find answers to problems of agricultural production which are quite independent of indigenous systems and where they want cooperation from villagers they know this can be secured with incentives and/or the willingness of highlanders to demonstrate their support for the government. They employ those whose technical expertise can be relied upon and whose professional discipline and commitment to the enterprise will not cause embarrassment. They have been known to divest themselves of experts whose local knowledge leads them to question the efficacy of field strategies.

Although the greatest contribution made to change has been in the field of agricultural extension, project work has been effective on a wide front. Projects have put considerable effort into training government officers to undertake work in agriculture; built schools, health stations, water systems; set up revolving banks which make fertilizer and other agricultural inputs available as well as rice banks to provide a source of food to households whose rice consumption needs periodically exceed supplies. They also help out with marketing to the extent that in many villages production is heavily subsidized and farmers are dependent upon continuing project support. The decline in the production of opium which can be measured as a success by outsiders is a profound source of concern to those who are no longer able to grow it. Such farmers are rarely better off as a result of cooperating with the government. The social impact experienced by the Lisu and described by Hutheesing as a "loss of repute" (Hutheesing, 1987) is one aspect of this. The Hmong farmers who have spontaneously and successfully adapted their agricultural activities to the market economy, who use tractors and the like, provide another example. They have attracted serious criticism from leading civil servants for their destruction of the environment. This then provides an argument with which to justify relocation (Vithoon Chapter 13).

Given that foreign donors are inclined to view their contributions to the development effort as part of the war against poverty, one would expect that the poor and most needy would figure high on the list of beneficiaries. This is clearly not the case. The Karen who form the largest and most deprived group, who have not ever been heavily involved in opium production, are not well serviced by the bigger foreign donors (see Fig.2). A count of smaller projects carried out as part of a survey conducted by the Office of Special Activities, Ministry of Education, showed that Shan and displaced Burmese top a list of recipients on which the Karen score lowest of all (Prachuap et.al., 1987: 13).

State formation, citizenship and land rights

The political impact of development work has been most profound. Foreign funds have enabled the state to administratively pioneer remote areas by extending a wide range of government services. The infrastructure of roads and services has enabled highlanders not only to gain access to medical centres, schools and markets on which to both sell produce and purchase manufactured goods but also greatly enhanced their awareness of the authority of the Thai administrative system. The investment provided by foreign donors must be seen as a contribution to state formation.

The effect this has had on indigenous social structures, agricultural and land tenure systems has largely been ignored: increased socio-economic participation and integration has not been accompanied by positive political incorporation within the state structure. For highlanders this is not an abstract matter of principle; political integration means simply legally documented acknowledgment of their presence, as citizens with legal title to land. In the absence of any real power to transcend this situation, cooperation with the government on both ceremonial occasions and with approved projects, remains, apart from a polite subservience, the only avenue in which they can demonstrate their loyalty. The tension and concern this generates in

highland communities is manifest in an anxious willingness to go along with what is asked of them even where they are not convinced that cooperation will materially improve their situation.

Foreign project and civil servant development specialists perceive the social and political realities of highland communities as lying outside their responsibility if not their understanding but the issue of citizenship and land titles is not an issue of which they are unaware. What have they done about it? Unfortunately the short answer is "very little". A fair and longer answer makes it necessary to briefly review the situation.

To secure title to land the farmer must be a citizen. To obtain citizenship he must live in a dwelling registered with the local authority. The householder must be able to establish that he was born and reached maturity in Thailand, and be able to secure the support of a government official from the Ministry of the Interior, military or some other reputable agency, must have lived in one place for at least five years and not have a security or criminal record. As long as the individual entered Thailand before 1975 (if they entered from Laos) and 1976 (if they entered from Burma) they can then become citizens.

The record for registration and granting of citizenship for that proportion of the population which falls under the direct supervision of the Department of Public Welfare indicates that delays are endemic. Of the total 278,858 people under DPW administration (1985) the following had secured the following documentation.

Document	**Number of People**	**Percent of Total**
ID cards	67,663	24%
House Registration	166,759	60%
Citizenship	157,431	56%

As the granting of citizenship was made a policy objective in 1974, the Ministry of Interior cannot claim to have made a seriously concerted effort to provide highlanders with proper documentation.

The vast majority of highlanders occupy land illegally and work it under either customary land tenure or informal rights of purchase. Under customary tenure, the land must be worked continually. Unless periodically cultivated, this right lapses and the land can be claimed and used by another cultivator. Depending both on how local rights of usufruct are defined and whether the original claimant is still in residence, a fee may be paid to secure the transfer. Land which has been purchased as distinct from that relinquished for a fee, appears to provide for outright ownership. A fully monetized system of land transfers operates on what can be called a black market. It exists outside the law but is fully acknowledged in contemporary local practice. The system, as a rational accommodation to their situation, appears to work quite well.

In strictly legal terms this means that the rightful owner of the land, the state, as represented by the Royal Forestry Department can impinge on the land occupied and worked by highlanders, carry out reforestation work or establish boundaries on the land worked by highland famers and evict them at will. Title to land is an important issue in establishing farmer security. Even though adequate provisions is made in law to allow farmers to secure land under Article 16 of the National Reserved Forests Act (1964) and special arrangements can be made to implement this Act by Cabinet resolution (as in the case of the Mae Chaem Project, 11 May, 1982) little has been done to legalize the highland farmers position.

Figures collected in the recent survey carried out by the special Task Force of the Ministry of Education are instructive.

> Of the 75,632 families surveyed, 68.93% still have no legal right to the land they work, while 11.01% possess a document showing legal ownership. The remaining 20.06% did not understand land ownership under the law (Prachuap et.al., 1987: 7).

These two profound issues of citizenship and secure land tenure are matters of vital concern to highlanders and yet most development projects have done little or nothing to use their bargaining position to help farmers secured proper documentation. Where the bigger highland projects as official undertakings have promoted coffee plantations, village woodlots as a source of firewood and encouraged farmers to build bench terraces, practise a form of rotational farming on stable holdings divided by contour grass strips, there can be little doubt that the work has been carried out by farmers on the understanding that they will retain the product of their labour. Yet, the legal status of their holdings remains in doubt.

Any foreign donor seriously concerned for the welfare of highlanders would be well advised to negotiate mandatory legal acknowledgment for the farmers they are supposed to help before they commence work. Such an agreement should include citizenship and the granting of land rights to those who follow conservation recommendations. Without this assurance, the farmers with whom they are working may well be subject to resettlement or repatriation and the development effort lost altogether.

Although donors may be reluctant to enter into what is a political domain, this is a matter which cannot be ignored as a peripheral issue. The USAID funded Mae Chaem Project has been particularly active in this respect and the concessions they have won from the Royal Forestry Department could well serve as a model for other projects, which have largely failed to face up to the problem. From the outset.

> the Mae Chaem Watershed Development Project made the issuance of Land Use Certificates a condition precedent to project implementation...Fulfillment of this condition required nearly two years and required a decision by the Cabinet, resulting in the first and only time that official

> permission has been given for people anywhere in Thailand to reside and farm within a national forest preserve (sic) (Kampe, 1986: 1).

Although the size of the holdings recognised by the titles is inadequate (average 2.25 rai),

> These (Type I land use Certificates) entitle the holder to reside and farm the prescribed plot(s) of land for a period of 5 years, provided they meet the conditions stated therein (e.g. land can not be sold, opium can not be grown, no adjacent lands can be farmed). This document...gives the bearer the "privilege" to use up to 6 acres of land (Kampe, 1986: 2).

By the end of 1986, some 3,464 people were scheduled to hold 4,203 certificates which would give them legal access to 3,774 acres. The original objective set by the project was to issue 4,000 titles and the fact that they have succeeded in securing more than this in such a sensitive and highly politicised area where other projects have barely got off the ground is worthy of the highest praise. The fact that the project document was drafted by two consultants with considerable experience in highland villages is also worthy of note.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions

This success raises another more general question which reflects on the manner in which projects are drawn up and the way they adjust their activities to limitations imposed by the configuration of the consensus. As long as project experts design field strategies primarily to fit within the information and structural constraints placed upon them, rather than attempting to develop a scientific understanding of the objective enviromental, social and economic situation, they remain in danger of promoting extension models which may build in too many compromises to survive the withdrawal of project support. Liberal and humane intent is no substitute for hard thinking.

Project planners faced with a stituation in which they are aware that the position of farmers is being questioned, that plans are afoot to relocate communities, may in their efforts to secure a place for their clients, actually expose them to considerable risk. Take for example the issue of optimum or viable farm size.

Highlanders traditionally practise an extensive form of arable farming. This is particularly well adapted to fragile mountain soils. On a farm of 50 rai, depending on the size of the household, only 10 to 20 rai may be under cultivation at any one time. Fields are usually scattered and cultivated in rotation. This not only enables them to grow their household crops and market needs on the most suitable land available but also fallow land when, either weeding becomes a problem, or the availability of plant nutrients falls below acceptable levels. The fact that most fields are small, even where formed on relatively steep slopes, ensures that erosion is kept to a minimum. In long settled highland villages like the Mien village of Pha Dua, Mae Chan, because farmers know that they cannot extend their holdings, they have evolved in negotiation with local, resident government officials, not only a quite satisfactory if entirely illegal system of land tenure but also an environmentally informed system of land use which includes a woodlot on steep sloping land in close proximity to the village from which they can gather bamboo shoots, take bamboo for building and collect firewood. The practical incentive this provides for limiting family size, diversifying economic activities and promoting education as a necessary prerequisite to more successful integration for the next generation provides an example of adaptation worthy of study.

The project approach outlined in several documents is quite different (Hoey, et.al.,1987; Schubert et.al.,1986; Salzer, 1987) and from a critical point of view personnel may be considered as sociologically naive as they are confident of technical solutions. This is not to say that they are unaware of the political

attitudes founded on the current state-of-knowledge. They know what concerns the government, the large amount of land under periodic cultivation, the clearing of further forest and plans to relocate and consolidate villages and establish pine plantations. Rather than challenge the consensus, they argue an adaptive case, that permanent cultivation on the highlands is possible on small permanent holdings (18 rai). The underlying assumption postulates a view that if the system can be shown to work, this will provide a technical argument in favour of allowing highlanders to remain in the highlands.

However technically correct and demonstratively practical under project guidance, farmers may lose long term flexibility and in the absence of project patronage, maintenance of conservation measures such as grass strips, may well prove to be impractical. Consolidating holdings to fit a Royal Forestry Department preference that highland farmers be concentrated into smaller areas could well result in further marginalization of their position as well as increased pressure on land in areas of resettlement leading to the higher rates of erosion that the system is designed to avoid. As noted by Dr.Benchaphun Shinawatra, following a review of research undertaken by Thai scientists, the use of intensive, modern agricultural practices, in the absence of proper conservation measures, poses a greater potential erosion hazard than traditional methods of farming (Benchaphun, 1985: 125).

Foreign projects prefer technical solutions which enable them to bypass complex structural problems because this also enables them to acknowledge the consensus and meet government expectations consistent with development ideology and avoid coming inside the highlanders situation. However as Peter Kunstadter, the eminent anthropoligist who has worked in the mountains of north Thailand for more than 20 years, recently stated,

> By now we should have learned from numerous examples that there is no **magic bullet** of technolo-

> gy so cleverly designed that it has only desirable, expected and immediately recognized consequences...In engineering as in medicine, our intervention usually carries unintended and undesired side effects, including implications for cultural values" (Kunstadter, 1987a: 10).

The job of identifying an optimum size for farms is extremely difficult. In a highly dynamic milieu such as the highlands where sensitive political issues complicate the matter even further, one of the first steps must be to evaluate project suggestions against indigenous systems and here the absence of relevant and reliable information on an appropriate scale makes it necessary to mount special research designed to investigate the problem. Land use studies currently being conducted by the Tribal Research Institute have been designed to clarify the matter but unfortunately events have a way of running ahead of research. To fulfill the expectations of the sociology of knowledge within which they work, development projects and organizations like UNFDAC must be seen to be doing something. Identifying plausible undertakings, securing funding and, in negotiation with the government, assigning responsibility to implementing agencies. When expenditure runs ahead of understanding, project work can be expected to become increasingly concerned with internally generated rather externally checked strategies. The end result may culminate in the physical integration of the highlands under central government but what will be the social and political costs of this if, in the process, highlanders become even more seriously disadvantaged and possibly alienated? This is a real challenge.

The current state-of-knowledge on the highlands and about the highlanders, the manner in which this serves as a basis for action, the way in which this is institutionalized within both the administrative system and the type of strategies undertaken by development projects can only be seen, if it is to be properly examined, as structural assimilation. The consensus appears to

serve neither the best interests of Thailand nor the highlanders. As has been pointed out from a contemporary historical perspective by General Saiyud Kerdphol,

> ...we should not blind ourselves to the side-effects of (the state's) central premise, which is the penetration of a highly centralized 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 weakening of the very state it was intended to support. When applied to non-Thai areas such as those occupied by hilltribes in the North, the policy has triggered a disastrous tribal revolt...
>
> The history of this region suggests that there is only one successful way to bring national unity out of the 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, 1986: 101-102).

Assimilation is not a systematically elaborated policy and the structural assimilation named here is not a secret agenda, drawn up in some geopolitical think-tank hidden away in a bureaucratic bunker. This Chapter has been written as an attempt to identify as a social fact and a problem for research, the political aspect of the consensus that can only be dealt with if it is named and brought into language. The discussion represents a preliminary attempt to construct a new category, a different way of looking at the situation so that those charged with the responsibility for reseach and planning or in a position to influence the future of the nation can arrange their thoughts in a rational

and scientific way, consciously using categories given by society: categories which include all those who make up the multi-ethnic society which is modern Thailand.

What is new is not necessarily best or most appropriate. To succeed, intervention in the highlands need not depend on the deliberate introduction of new technology, new crops and new forms of credit and marketing; the response which follows the building of roads and the manner in which this allows farmers access to new economic opportunities, better medical care and education is enough to ensure that integration will take place spontaneously. What matters is the way in which the situation is interpreted and the categories imposed, for this will determine what information will be taken into account and what activities will be given priority. If poorly informed, critical attitudes are constantly imposed, which preclude the possibility of a better understanding of the manner in which highlanders are rapidly adapting to national life, and categories of concern continue to focus on disembodied aspects and muddled interpretations of issues like opium production, security and land degradation, serious obstacles will remain on the path to integration. Under such conditions, highlanders will be subject to the increasing suspicion, dislocation and alienation which accompany structural assimilation as a policy by default. If a humane paradigm is chosen, current trends towards spontaneous integration will be assessed to provide a basis on which the full advantage of the social, political and economic impact of this can be secured and with highlander citizenship and land rights assured, the remaining issues will, with cooperation and trust, be relatively easy to resolve.

The hard issue is what should come first: "hill tribe problems" as this term is currently understood or the problems faced by the highlanders? To me there appears to be no choice at all. The most important information we have about the highlands is that these lands are occupied by minority peoples. This fact should take priority over all other considerations. These are the grounds on which I believe we should rearrange our thoughts.

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