

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JEF-13

150 Soi 20 Sukhumvit Road
Bangkok 11, Thailand
August 31, 1974

Opium Growers and Rice Growers -- Part Two

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

As I suggested at the close of my last letter, technology is only half or less of the answer to the multiple problems of the hills. There must also be a new political relationship between the upland and lowland peoples. This is so for at least three reasons.

First, adoption of any new technology that results in sedentary agriculture implies security of land tenure, but that can only come about if the tribal peoples acquire the rights of citizenship, since noncitizens cannot own land in Thailand. Second, eliciting the cooperation of the hilltribes is going to require better treatment by the Thai than they are generally getting now. While one might argue that a lot of the bad treatment comes from bad attitudes, it is also pretty certain that Thai behavior would change, though maybe not Thai attitudes, if the hilltribes had some political power to wield against the abuses that are committed against them now. (I'll mention some of these below.) Third, opening up the hills is going to require a lot of resources. This raises the question of who is going to commit these resources, and while this might appear to be an economic question, it is really a political one of the most fundamental kind. While there are many foreign agencies with an interest in the hills, there is going to have to be a major commitment from the Thai no matter what, both in money and in governmental support of various kinds. A number of foreigners expressed to me the fear that the local authorities -- Thai in Thailand, Lao in Laos -- may not have sufficient interest to carry through once the foreign component wanes.

And, indeed, why should they? That is the important question. Presumably the Thai political system exists to serve the Thai, and the Lao system the Lao. By the logic of each, it would not serve the interests of a band of foreigners on its fringes. Perhaps altruism? Men have certainly been known to perform magnificent acts of self-sacrifice. Experience tells us, though, that where powerful interests dictate a contrary course, altruistic urges flag. Furthermore, whatever may be the case in the West, here the impulse to do good for one's fellow man regardless of his background or station in life is notably weak -- a fact which has had much to do with putting the hilltribes, until quite recently, under the care of foreign missions of various kinds. Rather, one takes care of one's own. The Thai feel little affinity for the upland peoples (that's being polite), with three exceptions: first, there is some consciousness of common origin with the Shan, a member of the same ethno-linguistic group as the Thai; second, there is a certain chicness in using hill-tribe wearing apparel, and I suppose that rubs off on attitudes somehow; and third, there is of course an important segment of the Thai elites -- starting with the Royal Family -- which has a real commitment to the uplanders.

Jeffrey Race is an Institute Fellow studying how the institutions of the past influence people's behavior toward one another today. His current area of interest is Southeast Asia.

How about fear? Mightn't the resources be committed out of concern over what would happen (revolt, flooding) if they were not? That is also a possibility, and in fact seems to account for a good bit of the Thai participation in hill programs thus far. But there are two problems with the fear motivation: one may not fear soon enough or intelligently enough to do the right thing; and one's solutions hardly take into account the interests of the other fellow. In the Thai case, the likely outcome would be one favoring the Thai, or more precisely, the Thai bureaucracy, at the expense of the hilltribes.

As I have suggested previously, there is no future in a solution which does not evoke the willing cooperation of the hill peoples. This has been widely realized, but execution is a matter of degree. The more cooperation, the better the chances of success, and the less likelihood of backsliding. And the best solution for all, I believe, would be a political structure in which there were some system of accountability such that Thai decision makers would have an incentive to take the interests of the hill peoples into account -- and not just in the sense that they would fear continued uprising if they didn't. This is a rather tall order on behalf of the hill peoples, though, since such an idyllic political structure hardly exists on behalf of the ordinary Thai citizen. Yet even though the most difficult, it would be the most rewarding.

I think I can justify my belief by pointing to the differing experiences of a number of countries in the region. Examination reveals three types: those where the majority group accepted the upland minority with open arms; those where the country was colonized by a European power; and those where neither was true. In the first category I would place the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In both these countries the minorities enjoy legal rights, are represented in the highest councils of government, and have autonomous or semi-autonomous regions. Developmental programs have proceeded very well in this context, with consideration for the interests of both sides. (It is only reasonable to suppose that there has been some leaning toward the interests of the majority group, Chinese or Vietnamese.)

The second type consists of those countries that were colonized. The colonizers generally protected the uplanders against the claims of the majority lowland culture; they invariably provided higher education to the tribal peoples and often recognized local leaders, local legal systems, and a degree of autonomy. I would include here Laos, Burma, and Vietnam (thus overlapping, in the latter, part of the first category where the post-colonial elites had an integrative, but not assimilative, policy toward the uplanders). Such countries have often had great difficulties in the post-colonial period, since the colonists produced highly educated tribal leaders whose claims on behalf of their own peoples were not accepted by the lowlanders. The result has been revolution: in Burma virtually since the day of independence from the British to the present; and in southern Vietnam in the late 50's and in 1964.

Thailand I would put in a third category, which is like neither of the above and in a sense worse than both. Thailand was never colonized, and so there have been no powerful local protectors to defend the tribal peoples here against the Thai, or to develop educated tribal leaders. Thus the hilltribes enjoy none of the legal rights and privileges which their brothers did in British-occupied Burma or French-occupied Vietnam (the rescinding of which by the Burmans and the Saigon Vietnamese led to the revolts in their respective countries). This does not mean that there

ought to be no "hill tribe problem" in Thailand. It has just meant that the difficulties have arisen later and in somewhat different form. It has made them more difficult to solve too, because there is no precedent of legal rights and privileges to go back to. Thus while the Saigon Vietnamese did not want to restore most of their pre-Independence rights to the Montagnards (as the hill tribes are called in Vietnam), they at least knew this was what had to be done to end the 1964 revolt. Thai officials, however, pursue the phantom of a "technical solution" to the problems of the North. There may well be some officials who are aware of the political demands of the situation, whom I have not met. I can say for certain, though, that of ten Vietnamese officials, all ten would be intensely aware of the political dimension to Montagnard-Vietnamese relations, even though they might not be happy about it. I do not mean here just citizenship, in the sense of a few hill tribe voters sprinkled in among an enormous number of Thai, voting in an election which may not decide anything anyway due to the overarching power of the bureaucracy. Some Thai officials do speak of citizenship, after all. What I mean is real power to act in their own areas as a coherent group. It is the recognition of this dimension which appears absent in Thailand.

Well, I have given you a lot of generalities. Let me move on to some of the specifics that we learned on our venture through the North of Thailand and into Laos. The first person we visited to talk about the politics of the area was the Reverend Rupert Nelson, an agricultural missionary with the Board of International Ministries of the American Baptist Churches/USA. Reverend Nelson lives in the large mission compound behind Prince Royal's College in Chiangmai. He has worked with the Karen and Lahu tribes for the last eleven years in Nan, Chiangrai and Chiangmai provinces. We also talked with the Reverend Paul Lewis, a colleague of Nelson's, who spent many years in Burma before moving to Thailand about a decade ago. I am enclosing one of Lewis's own newsletters describing life in an Akha hill village. I believe you will find this of great interest and very helpful in understanding what day-to-day existence is like for the people I am speaking of.

Both Nelson and Lewis agreed on the importance of citizenship as a significant first step: it is essential to land ownership, and it entitles one to the basic political rights which serve to minimize (but not eliminate, even in the case of low-status Thai) exploitation by corrupt and/or abusive local officials. It is also important for many little things, like getting into secondary school, or even getting a driver's license. Furthermore, without citizenship, you may not get "full service" from law enforcement agencies, one of the commonest complaints of the tribal peoples. To give an example, let me quote from an interview with Thom Nittikorn in Ronin, July 1974. Thom is a Karen, now a lawyer and living in Chiangmai. (More on him shortly.)

RONIN: Did you have any other problems [beside military registration]?

THOM: Yes, after finishing school, someone stole my elephant; it just disappeared. I told the police that it had been lost but it transpired that the thief was a Thai who owned a small lumber company and, as such, was known to the Thai police. The police, therefore, were unwilling to help track down the elephant. In the end I myself checked carefully and searched all over the place; eventually I blocked my elephant in the Chiangmai area and got it back myself. But after that experience, I became very suspicious of the Thai police. Indeed, I still am.

Citizenship is a complicated issue, because in principle it is easy to acquire.

One need only fulfill the requirements, which are: 1. to be born of parents legally resident in Thailand, and 2. to have one's birth registered. In practice, however, these simple requirements are full of troubles for the hill tribes. Most have in fact been born in Thailand, but in a village two or three days' walk from a road. Registration is hence full of difficulties. Perhaps establish some kind of local registrar? But the Thai political system does not extend to the hill tribes . . . A vicious circle, as you see.

There are other peculiarities. If one is not a citizen, one is not called upon to defend the country. That's fair, and the Thai bureaucracy does not call unregistered people (i.e. noncitizens, those without the ID card) to perform military service. But without either a discharge or an exemption certificate for military service, one cannot get a driver's license. On the facing page I am including a newspaper article of a few days ago on this very dilemma.

As far as land goes, the uplanders now have, in effect, usufruct of the hills without legal title. In principle, it would take citizenship (the ID card) to have ownership, but it is not an issue in the hills since no one can own the land: it is all reserved forest. It starts to become an issue when uplanders move down into the valleys to begin farming. Thai farmers frequently make a claim to the land which the uplanders have been operating, and their claim is honored by virtue of their citizenship. Hard feelings naturally ensue. The whole matter is an explosive problem anyway, because of the exhaustion of the land and resulting migrations of both Thai and uplanders. Even without the legal complications, troubles would be occurring because of the population growth.

Rupert Nelson mentioned a couple of cases he is familiar with where the Thai government recognizes Karen village headmen -- though significantly, the Karen are viewed as less "tribal" than some of the other tribes because they follow wet-rice culture in many places. This is about as far as political integration goes. At any higher levels, for example district officer, one must be a civil servant and hence a citizen, and also meet the educational qualifications.

This brings us to perhaps the greatest disadvantage of the hill tribes in Thailand: their lack of education. With education, they could move to take advantage of better technologies. With educated leaders, they could move against the political disabilities which condemn them to backwardness in other respects.

The situation here is in marked contrast to that in Burma, Laos, or Vietnam, where very significant numbers of tribal individuals have a higher education, and can deal with the representatives of the lowland culture on an equal basis. Paul Lewis mentioned that in his area of Burma alone there were eight Lahu doctors and a number of Karen barristers. In southern Vietnam there are also highly educated Montagnards; a Montagnard is Minister of Montagnard Affairs; there are Montagnards in the National Assembly and also serving as district and province chiefs.

In Thailand, by contrast, there are practically no people of tribal origin with higher education. The actual numbers have never been compiled (this says something about interest in the subject), but I can give you some impressionistic data:

1. Among the Meo; during interviewing in 1970 I met the person with the highest education from this tribe -- the fifth grade.
2. Among the Karen: there is one college graduate (probably the only one in the whole country from all the tribes); that is Thom, mentioned above, who received a law degree from Thammasat University.

A DRIVING BUSINESS FINANCED BY POPPIES

Veera Prateepchaikul meets the Meo with two cars but no driving licence



FOR the ordinary man to own two cars or more is quite normal in Bangkok, but a 29-year-old Meo tribesman possessing two brand-new Japanese pick-ups for his minibus service in Chiang Mai is something different.

We saw him, Mr Sua sae Praw, a native of Ban Mae Sawa, Tambon Mae Nachorn, Mae Cham District, clad in his typical black hill-

tribe costume and with a hat picking up passengers in one of his new pick-ups in Chiang Mai, last week.

After a brief chat, we got acquainted with one another. Sua has a wife and eight children to take care of. He said he had just bought the two pick-up trucks for about 180,000 baht.

"Where did you get the money from?" we asked in astonishment.

"Well, from selling opium," Sua said innocently, adding that he usually went back to his village to plant poppies when the planting season came around.

His customers were usually Chinese Haws who came to pick up the opium at his village where they haggled over a good deal.

"Don't you know that it is illegal?" we asked. The Meo tribes-

man said he knew about it "but our villagers in Ban Mae Nachorn know nothing about growing other crops, only poppy cultivation and because the way to the village is very rugged, the authorities never set foot in there."

Sua said he is worried because the police in Chiang Mai won't grant him a driving licence, though he has the cars and is 100 per

cent Thai. "The police simply say I have no military registration card and, therefore, I can't have a licence.

However, Sua said he still had hopes of obtaining one from Nan Province because the military registration rule did not apply there.

The Meo tribesman said he hoped one day to stop planting poppies entirely and make his living from driving.

Nelson thinks that altogether there may be 25 or 35 graduates of Teacher's Training Colleges of tribal origin. (This is a level above high school but below college.) Significantly, almost all of the education of the tribal peoples has come about through missionary support. It is very encouraging, though, that this is changing, since within the last several years there has been a major expansion of opportunity for tribal students, both at the elementary level and above. This has come about partly through financial support for tribal students from the Thai government, and partly through exemptions from entrance examinations for tribal students at certain institutions. Thus there is now some prospect that within another decade or so, Thailand may have as many educated hilltribesmen as Vietnam did in, say, 1940. This is certainly good for the hilltribes, but everyone should realize that it is going to mean more open conflict, as the newly educated tribesmen begin to make demands on the Thai on behalf of their own people.

Some Laotian Perspectives

We flew from Chiangmai to Vientiane aboard an ancient Royal Air Lao DC-3. The plane gives some sense of how far out one is on the fringes of "civilization": at Chiangmai Airport the door wouldn't close, and the attendants were still trying to shut it as we taxied down the runway; and once successfully airborne, we encountered a thunderstorm, during which the roof of the craft leaked on the passengers.

In Vientiane we were met by our good friends the Myers, whom we have known since the Vietnam days of 1968 when Bob, an American Foreign Service Officer, was advisor to the Minister of Montagnard Affairs in Saigon. Through subsequent assignments in Washington and now Laos Bob has kept in touch with uplander/lowlander relations in the region. His remarkable wife Margery, who acquired an MD degree while bearing three children, does volunteer work in a local hospital. Through their assistance we were able to see a lot of people in a short time. We learned a considerable amount about how the situation differs just across the Mekong — demographically, politically, and in attitudes and perceptions of what is important.

We might start with the fact that, as a consequence of the French presence, the uplanders are unequivocally citizens; they form also a much larger proportion of the population of Laos than of Thailand -- perhaps one-third or even one-half (there has never been a census, so no one knows). At the same time, there is also a much lower population density in the hills and, indeed, in the country as a whole, compared to Thailand.

There are some obvious examples of the higher political standing of the hill tribes in Laos. While in Thailand it would be unusual for a tribesman to be even a private in the military (and in practice impossible to be an officer), in Laos there is a Meo three-star general -- Vang Pao, famous for leading the CIA's "secret army" against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. Touby Lyfong, formerly known as the "king of the Meo," is the deputy minister of the Post and Telegraph, while another civil servant of tribal origin is chef de cabinet of the Interior Ministry. A Meo, Yang Dao, has recently returned from France with a PhD in agricultural economics; he serves with the Commissariat of Plan and is a member of the Joint Political Consultative Council, a high-level organ set up to carry out the coalition agreement.

While comparative statistics between Laos and Thailand are impossible to get in this regard, we can still draw some general conclusions. The people I spoke to could number among their acquaintances several PhD's of tribal origin (like Yang Dao) and many MA's. One person guessed that there may be altogether 50 or so col-

lege graduates among the hill tribes in Laos, mostly educated in France, but some in the USA, Australia, and Thailand. The head of the Human Resources office of USAID was good enough to check his list of Lao sent abroad by AID for education (mostly in Thailand); of the 150-odd people on the list, 33 were recognizable by their names as Meo. Most of these were for technical training of some kind below the college level. Even so, this rough comparison gives some idea of the startling difference in educational opportunity for tribesmen as between Laos and Thailand. The difference is all the more astonishing in view of the general backwardness of Laos in comparison to Thailand, on just about every scale including education (even for ethnic Lao).

The result of citizenship and higher educational achievement is that there are tribesmen at all levels of the Lao government, who are in a position to urge the interests of their kinsmen on the ethnic Lao, and who have the technical ability to design programs intelligently and, perhaps, to carry them out. I don't want to overstate the case: skilled people of any background or training are extremely limited in number in Laos. But, in comparison with Thailand, Laos is overflowing with highly educated citizens of tribal origin. So, to the extent that problems exist in the hills, Laos is in a better position to tackle them.

I would like to carry this point further, to mention an area on which I have only the most fragmentary information. One of the people I spoke to was familiar with the situation of the Meo in Xieng Khouang Province adjacent to the DRV. Here, he said, the local administration (which is under the effective sovereignty of North Vietnam) is almost entirely in the hands of the Meo. I know from other sources that tribal peoples are represented effectively at the top levels too, a policy of the Vietnamese communists going back to the early 1940's, when it was urgently necessary to ensure that the uplanders supported the war of independence against the French. The Vietnamese have even set up functioning cooperatives among the uplanders, which illustrates, I believe, what can be accomplished if the lowland elites are willing to follow a determined and conscious policy of setting up a political infrastructure among the uplanders.

Curiously, although Laos may be in a better position to tackle problems in the hills than Thailand, the perception of the problems just isn't there. This is so partly for reasons of the war and partly for technical reasons of lower population density in the hills. At present the hill tribes in Laos are not pressing on the capacity of the land to produce enough to eat with the existing swidden technology, as are their brothers in Thailand. Closer to Vientiane there are some difficulties in areas which are crammed with tribal refugees, but this will resolve itself if they can move back to their home areas in the wake of the settlement between the warring factions. There is similarly not much worry about flooding in the valleys due to denudation of the forest.

There is one major area of concern, and that is opium culture, but the concern lies largely among foreigners. Many Lao generals and their friends have made millions of dollars from the opium trade, and some, like General Ouan Rathikone, have been quite open about their participation. There is some research going on in Laos into alternatives to opium culture, much along the lines of the studies across the Mekong in Thailand. For example, experimentation is being carried forward on mushrooms, orchard crops (fruits and nuts), coffee, legumes, and cattle. It is interesting to recall that in the days of the French, Laos was cattle country -- herds of thousands roamed the Bolovens Plateau, and were driven over the mountains to be sold in the markets of Hanoi and Saigon.

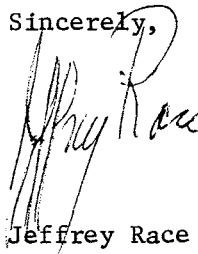
I also ran across a couple of things which were not being studied in Thailand:

1. Chinese medicinal plants: ginseng (up to \$20 per root -- used as an aphrodisiac); san-si and kek-huai, both general conditioners;
2. essential oil plants, like lemon grass; the problem is lack of processing facilities;
3. silkworm farming: labor intensive, it seems to work well on a pilot scale; one problem is the Meo don't like worms, but another tribe, the Black Thai, have no objection to handling them (see my letter JEF-3 on silkworm culture in Thailand);
4. stick-lac: an insect which grows on pigeon pea trees, it is scraped off and sold to be processed into lac and then lacquer; the pigeon peas can be made into animal feed, in desperately short supply in Laos.

Though some of these look quite promising, the concern was expressed to me a number of times that once the foreign presence diminishes, which is bound to happen very soon, the Lao will not be able to pick up the burden: the Lao Extension Service is inadequate to support even existing programs. An example is cattle-raising, which under the French used to be a big operation. It is beyond the technical ability of the hill tribes, though; if new breeds of stock were introduced, they would just die from lack of care, as has happened with imported swine. So the introduction of a new technology would be for nothing without increased Lao concern, but generally speaking, the Lao feel even less concern than the Thai (whose commitment is doubted in some quarters) and the Thai really are threatened by what is going on in their hills. So we come to the ironical conclusion that although the Lao are better prepared politically to ~~solve~~ problems in the hills, they don't see the problems as very pressing; while the Thai, who really do have serious problems which are acutely felt by some, are poorly equipped institutionally to deal with them. Still, the lessons are there to be drawn for any willing to look. I feel that creative statesmanship could go a long way in Thailand to remove the institutional handicaps, and get Thailand off the dead end road of the "technical solution" to the problems of the North.

Unfortunately our trip was too brief for me to have a chance to visit any locations up in the hills, but I'm including photographs borrowed from a report titled "Progress Report on the USAID/Laos Royal Lao Government Project for Opium Poppy Crop Substitution in Houa Khong Province." I hope you will find them and the comments interesting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey Race', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jeffrey Race



Aerial view of Crop Introduction Center showing intercropping of field crops
and long-term tree crops

The report explains:

"The 'Crop Introduction Center' is located at Ban Phou Pha Daeng, a White Meo village at an elevation of 3,000 feet. The center provides facilities and land for test plantings of new crops. The center and its operation are intentionally simple and unsophisticated. This is in keeping with available resources, transportation and manpower. . . . The work of the center can best be described as verification/propagation-test plantings of crops to verify adaptability and eventual propagation and distribution of suitable planting material to hilltribe villages. Laborers are recruited from different tribes and learn on an 'apprentice basis.' More formal training will be initiated later. For most crops/ideas, work is just beginning."

Among the things they are testing:

Avocado, cardamom, Chinese chestnut, coffee, cumquat, custard apple, durian, fig, grape, grapefruit, guava, jackfruit, jujube, lemon, lime, litchee, longan, mandarin, mango, mangosteen, pear, peach, pomelo, rambutan, roseapple, sapodilla, sweet orange, tangerine and tea.



The above photo shows a woman from the Yao tribe with two buffalo provided in support of a resettlement village called Nakong. These Yao tribespeople originally grew opium but showed an interest in rice cultivation. They were hence moved to a lowland site of approximately 450 acres where they could carry on wet-rice cultivation.

I discussed, in connection with the Thai plans for the hills, the difficulties with resettlement projects, one such difficulty being the costs. I was not able to get figures on costs in Thailand, but this report is good enough to include figures. Costs, for land clearing and preparation, water system and school construction, and various kinds of support, come to about \$50,000 exclusive of salaries and transportation. Since it had a population of 570 at the time of the move, I estimate costs to be \$100 per person for this village. This at least gives an order of magnitude for the costs of this approach.

by Paul Lewis

15 March 1974

For you to understand the present economic orientation of the typical Akha living in northern Thailand, imagine that you were an Akha for one full day. This may be difficult for you to do, but it will be one of the most effective ways to get a meaningful understanding of their current economic life.

If you were a typical Akha, you would get up before day-break. There is so much to do just to maintain sufficient food, clothing and shelter that you must get an early start. You would not own a watch, of course, and probably could not tell time if you did, since you would never have had a chance to attend school. Crowing roosters are an effective alarm clock, however.

Making your bed would not take long. You would have slept on a crude mat beaten from the bark of a jungle tree. A thin blanket to ward off the chill of the mountain nights would have been your only cover. Just roll these up and leave them on the bamboo floor near the wall. Your bedroom is then transformed into your livingroom.

You would not have to change clothes when you get up, since the homespun clothes that you wear daily you also sleep in. If you are an Akha woman, the intricate, and very attractive headress with silver, feather, and fur ornaments that you wear all day, you would continue to wear at night.

The Akha house you live in is simply constructed of bamboo walls and floors, with a thatch grass roof. The few wooden posts and beams would have been hacked by hand out of the dwindling number of trees surrounding the village. There would not be a nail used in constructing your house.

Your house plan is simple: the men's side, with both a covered and uncovered porch outside of it, forms one-half of the house. The women's side, without the uncovered porch, makes up the other half of the house. On the women's side, very close to the dividing wall and near the "mother house-post," the precious ancestor altar is kept, along with its ritual paraphernalia.

You rise in the dark, and using small splinters of pitchpine you get fires started in the two main fireplaces. The fireplace on the women's side of the house is where the rice is cooked, while curry is cooked on the one in the men's side. The fires will give a bit of light in both rooms, and take some of the chill off the mountain air.

If you happen to be a young Akha girl, you will be roused out of bed early to pound rice for the day. You repeatedly step on one end of the rice pounder, and then release it so that the other end crashes down into the unhusked rice. This gradually knocks off the husks from the kernels of rice. You next winnow it, after which it can be soaked and cooked.

Young children will be sent to bring in firewood. Others will take bamboo and gourd water containers to the spring in which they carry back water for the household needs. Everyone learns not to waste a drop of this precious commodity which has been carried up a steep and often slippery trail.

When the morning meal is ready, a small rataan table is set up, and the family members squat around it to eat. Rice is the main food at every meal. It is slightly reddish in color, and has a delicious taste. The rice is put in several wicker rice baskets, and placed on the floor around the table. The curries, salt and chili are put on the table. Each person wads up a fistful of rice, and while eating from it with one hand, uses the other hand to bring chili and whatever curry there is to his mouth with chopsticks.

If it is a work day, and not a day of "ceremonial abstinence," you and most of the family will prepare to go out to the mountain fields after the morning rice meal. Usually the head of the household will tell you what to do that day - although he will not go along.

As the family members trudge out over steep, winding paths, the women and girls spin thread from rolls of cotton which they prepared the night before. Boys have their slingshots ready to shoot at birds and squirrels in the jungle. If there are older boys or young men in the group, they may have a crossbow, or even a flintlock gun for larger game. Hunting is the Akha's favorite diversion, and they are very good at it.

Since rice is the "staff of life" to Akhas, most of their working time is spent in the mountain rice fields. The actual work of cutting down the trees where the field is to be made is done by the men, usually in January and February. Then in late March or early April, when the leaves are very dry, the fields are burned off, which spreads a layer of fertile ash on the mountain side.

Apart from the physical exertion involved in your rice field is the constant concern: will there be a bad omen which will mean that we must abandon our field? No Akha would

dream of continuing to work a rice field in which he saw a slow loris or a barking deer. Such "bad omens" would be sent, they feel, as a warning from the ancestors not to make fields there, so whatever had been done would be abandoned.

About the time the monsoon rains begin to break in May, the whole household will be involved in planting, and later weeding, the precious rice crop. Some corn will have been planted before the rice, and other crops may be planted later. Your very survival, however, is dependent upon the rice crop, so most of the labor and ritual are concerned with the rice. When the rice harvest is brought in, everyone pitches in with a supreme effort. The special ceremony which follows the last load of rice being brought in from the field is a joyous occasion for each household - especially if they know there will be enough rice to eat for the coming year!

If there is an opium addict in the household in which you live during your day as an Akha (and the chances are there will be at least one), you will probably find that he will not go out to the field to work. The addict will stay at home near his pallet and opium lamp. He will do odd jobs around the house, and will help feed the chickens and pigs (if you are lucky enough to have any at your house - not all Akhas are so lucky).

Akhas who are sick will often go to the field in spite of their illness, since there is always so much work to be done. Those who are too sick to get up remain in their home, and are usually treated with various Akha medicines. However, if the sickness is attributed to the fact that their soul has left their body, a special ceremony will be arranged to have the soul called back. Of some vicious spirit, or perhaps a weretiger has entered the body, then these will be driven out by various types of incantations and magical means.

A favorite medicine is opium, especially for the many who suffer from tuberculosis. It both suppresses the cough, and makes the patient feel better. Many Akha become addicted to opium from starting to use it as a medicine or pain killer.

At noon, those working in the field will find a shady spot in which to eat their lunch, or will go to their field hut if they are working near it. Lunch consists of some rice left over from the morning meal, wrapped in a banana leaf, and carried to the field. There may be only salt and chili pepper to eat with it, or perhaps you can find some type of green in the jungle to boil up as a curry. During the noon break, the women and girls may find a few minutes in which they can do some sewing on their elaborate outfits.

Following lunch, work is resumed in the fields on the steep mountains, literally eeking out a living from land which

never should have been stripped of its jungle cover. The young people will half shout, half sing in an Akha style of yodel. Some of these songs are courting songs, some just for fun. All have a haunting beauty.

In the evening, worn out from hoeing and weeding, you return to your village carrying firewood or something else with you. No trip can be wasted by going back empty-handed. Back in your village, which will average 18 households, you will head for your home. If you left an opium addict there to "guard the place," you will instinctively look around to see what household items might be missing - since the constant temptation for the addict is to exchange anything of value he can get his hands on for opium.

The evening meal is prepared and eaten in much the same way as the morning meal. Following the meal, the rataan table is removed, and the household dogs are allowed to come in and gobble down what spilled on the floor - the Akha version of the cordless sweeper. The women of the household will sweep the floor, which is not too difficult since there are some fairly wide cracks in the split bamboo floor which allows any food particles left to drop through to the hungry chickens waiting below.

After the evening meal, the men usually gather in some elder's house, or go to the house of the headman. Matters of political and economic interest will be discussed well into the night. Perhaps a villager has just learned that seven of his buffaloes have been stolen that day, or perhaps there has been an Akha murdered in a nearby village. Problems related to government restrictions on the felling of trees (which blocks the only economy they know) are discussed heatedly. Frustrations over not know/Thai, the official /ing language of the country, will be expressed in various ways. If there is a government school in the village, the chances are that the teacher will teach only two or three days each month. This and similar irritations will be discussed.

If the next day is to be one of religious ceremony, the men may gather that night in the house of the "religious headman" (dzoe, ma). He, as the "father of the village," has awesome ritual responsibilities, and is considered the most important man of the village. If the rice crop is threatened by insect or disease, he will lead in rituals which (hopefully) will save their crop.

While the elders discuss these weighty matters, the unmarried young people of the village gather up near the spirit gate and village swing, where they have a "courting area." Perhaps some young men from another village are visiting tonight, looking for brides. Each group will sing and dance

alternately. From time to time a young man may persuade a young lady to accompany him into the jungle, where the courting process will continue more privately.

If you are an Akha woman, nights will find you doing various jobs about the house. As you work friends may drop in to discuss the day's happenings. The conversation often turns to one's children. If you are a typical Akha woman, you may have had as many as eight to twelve pregnancies - although there will probably not be more than four to eight living children now.

If you wonder when there is time to do some washing, you must remember that this is a luxury seldom enjoyed by Akhas. From time to time you may have a chance to bathe in the communal bathing area, usually located in a small stream below the village.

Between about 10 PM and midnight, the Akha village will gradually settle down. The pigs will be grunting from time to time in their pens under the house - where they are kept so that wild animals cannot get to them. The shouts, laughter and crying of children tends to die away as tiredness finally drives them one by one to their sleeping mat. Opium addicts are having their final pipe before going to sleep. As village sounds diminish, the sounds of the surrounding jungle can be heard more clearly. In some seasons cicadas will lull you to sleep with their vibrating, almost metallic sound. During the dry season you may hear the crackling of distant jungle fires.

Perhaps there is an old granny shaman half-sing^{ing}/ half-chanting in a nearby house. There is a very sick person in that home, and the granny shaman, through means of this chant, is making her way from the village into the mythical world of the spirits. She is trying to find which spirit holds the soul of the sick person. She will use various ploys to regain that soul and bring it back to the body of the sick person, so that health will be restored. This may go on until nearly sunrise.

Throughout the village, fires are gradually allowed to die out. You, with each member of the family, roll out your sleeping mat, unfold your thin blanket, and settle down for another night's rest. Apart from the sheer exhaustion you experience from your work, your energy is sapped by hook worm which you and almost all other Akhas have. Besides that, you live in constant fear of vicious spirits lurking about the village, although you have confidence that your ancestors will help you if you call on them for aid.

There are certain things you will not have to worry about the day you are an Akha, however, such as: telephone calls (no phones), getting your children ready for school (no school), buying gasoline (no car), or cleaning your bathroom (one cannot clean the whole jungle very well!)

This gives you a very rough idea of what some half million Akhas living in the People's Republic of China, Burma, Thailand, Laos and North Vietnam spend their "typical" day. In spite of some rather dramatic changes (especially in the People's Republic of China), the basic economic condition of Akhas is bleak. The main reasons for this seem to be: lack of education, overpopulation, poor health, and opium addiction.

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Received in New York October 11, 1974