



CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provides information on Karens in Thailand at large, their origin, population, location and so forth. The following part declares the objectives and hypothesis of this thesis, and research methodology and limitations. A literature review is included.

1.1 Background of the Study

Kunstadter defines an ethnic group as individuals with similar consciousness and mutual interests centered on some shared understandings or common values.¹ Moerman classifies a tribe, as used by anthropologists, in three ways, firstly to stipulate an evolutionary stage, secondly to distinguish one type of society from others, and thirdly to label any population whose members share a common culture.²

As the definition of a tribe fluctuates, consequently Karen have many synonyms in literature.³ Lebar writes that it proceeds from three factors. Firstly, populations of Karen speakers differ not only linguistically but also with respect to religion, economy, and such obvious criteria as details of dress. Secondly, many small groups are known mainly from turn-of-the-century sources that are inadequate, incomplete, and studded with synonyms often of uncertain reference in a variety of transcriptions. Thirdly, Burmese, Siamese, Shan, and to a lesser extent English all apply the term Karen or its equivalent to small groups of Mon-Khmer speakers located in the Shan State, who are quite different linguistically yet show a general cultural similarity to Karens.⁴ Keyes writes, "Following a line of thought pursued by both Barth and by F. K. Lehman, I view ethnic categories as being like roles which are defined within the context of inter-group relations. For Southeast Asian tribal peoples, changes in the political situation can,

¹ Peter Kunstadter, "Ethnic Group, Category, and Identity: Karen in Northern Thailand" in *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*, (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979), p.119.

² Michael Moerman, "Being Lue; Uses and Abuses of Ethnic Identification" in *Essays on the Problem of Tribe in Contemporary Sociopolitical Contexts*, ed. by June Helm, Proceedings of the 1967 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society, (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1967), p.153.

³ Kareang, Kariang, Karieng, Kayin, Yang

⁴ Frank M. Lebar, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia*, (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), p.58.

and have, altered the relationships which these people have with other groups. As the context changes, so do the ethnic categories.”⁵ Kunstadter writes that Karen and non-Karen have generally agreed about the boundaries and identifying features that define “Karen.” This situation, however, may not persist, because the drawing of boundaries is dynamic and responds to change both within the defined group and in external conditions.⁶

Marshall divides Karen tribes into three divisions, according to their language or dialect differences, the Sgaw, the Pwo, and the Bwe Karens.⁷ The Sgaw Karen are found all through the Irrawaddy Delta, from the vicinity of Prome southward, and from the Arracan coast eastward to the neighborhood of Lakong in Siam and southward to the lowest point of the British possessions.⁸ Lebar calls the Sgaw, the Pwo, the Pa-O, and the Kayah as the major Karen groups.⁹

The Karen belong to Sino-Tibetan stock.¹⁰ The name “Karen” is an imperfect transliteration of the Burmese word “Kayin”. It has been thought that this word is derived from the name by which the Red Karen call themselves, “Ka-Ya”.

“Pgha K’Nyaw”, “Pgha” is a general word meaning people. “K’Nyaw” is, according to my informant, composed of two elements: “K’” a prefix often found in the names of tribes in the vicinity of Burma and denoting a tribal group, as “Kachin,” “Kethe,” or “Karok”. “Nyaw” is derived from “Yang,” referred to above. The final nasal “ng” is softened in Karen to the open syllable “aw”. Thus, if this reasoning is correct, “Pgha K’Nyaw” is derived from the ancient “Yang,” is like the source from which the Burmese “Kayin” is derived.¹¹

⁵ Charles F. Keyes, “The Karens in Thai History and the History of the Karens in Thailand” A paper prepared for Symposium “A Pivotal or Marginal People: The Place of the Karens in Southeast Asia” held at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Washington, D.C., March 29, 1971. p.8.

⁶ Peter Kunstadter, 1979, op. cit., p.121.

⁷ Harry Ignatius Marshall, *The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology*, (Ohio: The University at Columbus, 1922), p.1.

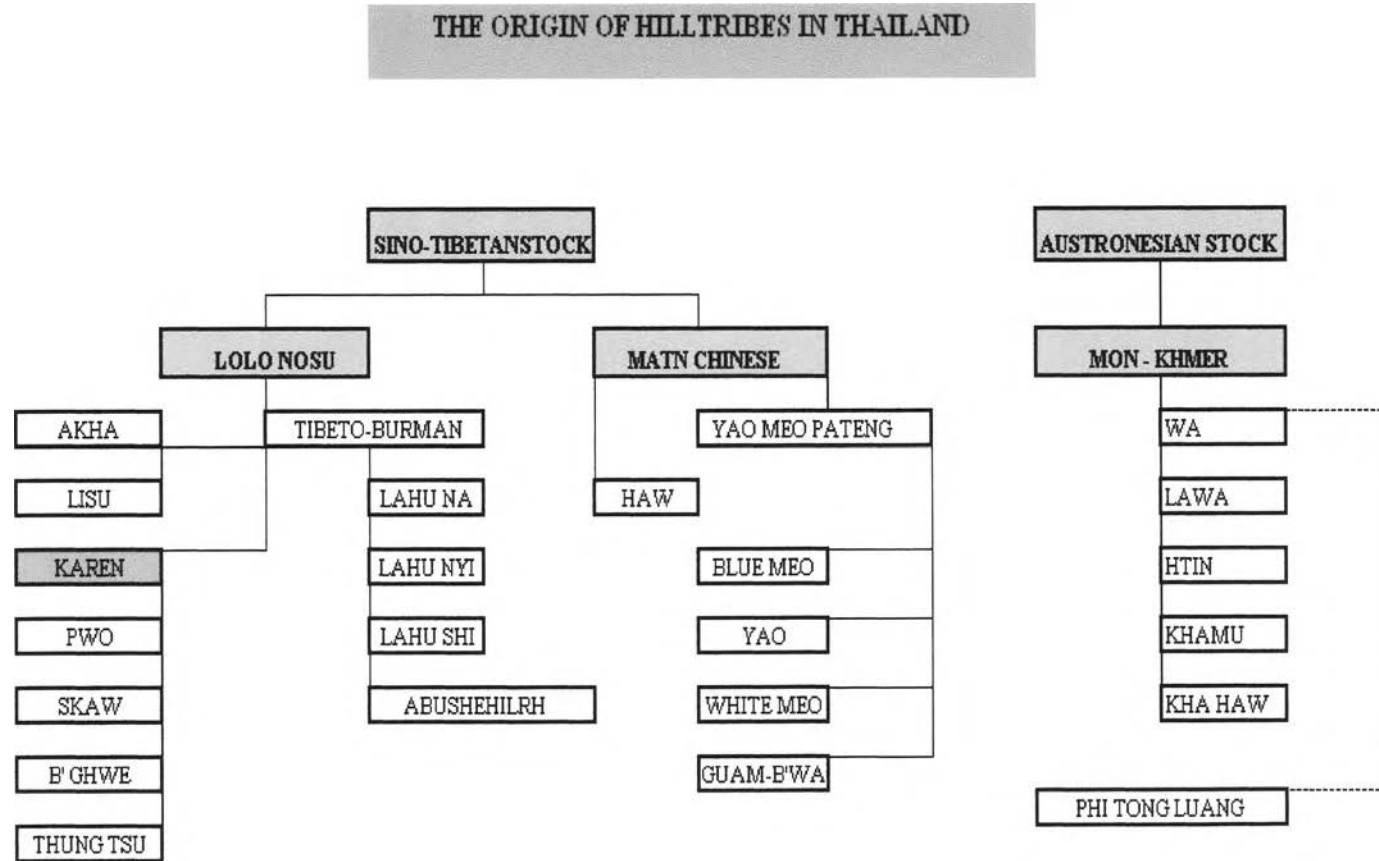
⁸ Ibid., p.1; Frank M. Lebar, op. cit., p.59.

⁹ Ibid., p.58.

¹⁰ Marshall ranks the Karen as Indo-Chinese tribes. Harry Ignatius Marshall, op. cit., p.1. Refer to Figure 1.1.1.

¹¹ Harry Ignatius Marshall, op. cit., pp.6-8; Charles F. Keyes, 1971, op. cit.

Figure 1.1.1: Origin of Hilltribes in Thailand



Source: Bangkok Post, November 20, 1986

There are many Karen subgroups in Burma but only two in Thailand: Sgaw and Pwo with a population of 321,000 or 46% of the total highland ethnic population in 1995 (Hilltribe Welfare Division, 1995).¹²

Some of them, like the Lawa, H'tin and most probably the Karen, have been living in areas now part of the Thai nation state before the Thai speaking ethnic groups immigrated at the beginning of the second millennium.¹³

Table 1.1.1: Demography of Hilltribe People in Thailand, April 2002

| TRIBE | VILLAGE | HOUSEHOLD | POPULATION |
|----------|---------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Karen | 1,925 | 87,793 | 438,450 ¹⁴ |
| Mong | 250 | 19,082 | 151,080 |
| La Hu | 409 | 18,361 | 102,371 |
| Lee Su | 153 | 6,530 | 37,916 |
| Mian | 173 | 6,692 | 44,017 |
| A Kah | 273 | 11,387 | 65,826 |
| Tin | 156 | 8,435 | 42,782 |
| Lua | 65 | 4,178 | 21,794 |
| Ka Mu | 40 | 2,212 | 10,519 |
| Pa Lhong | 7 | 459 | 2,324 |
| Malabe | 2 | 63 | 276 |
| Total | 3,453 | 165,192 | 917,355 |

Source: Tribal Research Institute, Department of Social Development and Welfare

The Karen, today, are facing challenges such as the stagnation of swidden cultivation, the introduction of wet-rice cultivation, the migration of some Karen from the hills to the lowlands, the invasion of a monetary economy, the extension of Thai administration over Karen inhabited areas, and the spread of Buddhist and Christian

¹² Kwanchewan Buadaeng, "The Karen Ancestor Spirits: Cut Off and Bound Up" A paper presented at 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam, 4-8 July, 1999, p. 1.

¹³ Reiner Buergin, "'Hilltribes' and Forests: Minority Policies and Resource Conflicts in Thailand" Socio-Economics of Forest Use in the Tropics and Subtropics (SEFUT) Working Paper No.7, 2000, p.5.

To my query, "did you migrate from Burma?" an interviewee replied, "the realm had not been demarcated yet, then I cannot say it is Burma or Thailand."

¹⁴ According to Buergin, the population of Karen in Thailand is 402,095 as of 1996. Reiner Buergin, *op. cit.*, p.5.

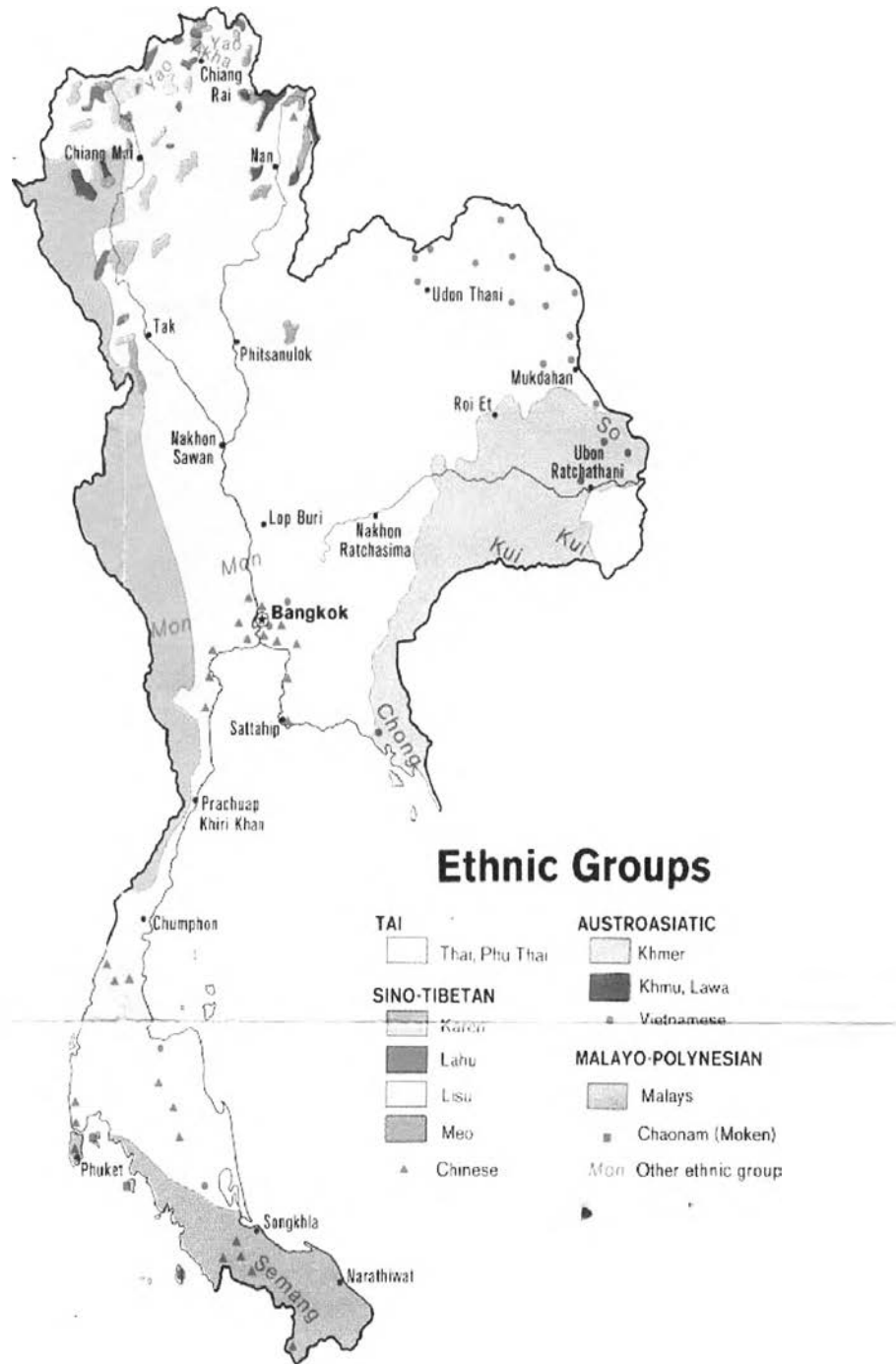
religion. These have resulted in socio-cultural change in Karen society, which can be said that Karen society is transforming from “tribal,” consanguineally based society to a “peasant,” territorially based society.¹⁵ Lehman describes Karen populations as occupying an interstitial position vis-à-vis other village-based agricultural societies, as well as vis-à-vis more powerful, more highly organized societies.¹⁶

Circumstances such as road access to a village and the activities of the Government and NGOs in a village have contributed to the creation of a dual world, a modernized and yet traditional world, where the educated young Karens belong. It is, then, interesting to study contemporary ethnography including the directory of changes, the role of old people and young people in this transitional stage of Karen society.

¹⁵ Shigeru Iijima, “Ethnic Identity and Sociocultural Change Among Sgaw Karen in Northern Thailand” in *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*, (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979), p.115.

¹⁶ F. K. Lehman, “Who Are the Karen, and If So, Why? Karen Ethnohistory and a Formal Theory of Ethnicity” in *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*, (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979), pp.215-253.

Figure 1.1.2: Location Map of Ethnic Minorities in Thailand



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection¹⁷

¹⁷ Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, "Ethnic Groups From Thailand", 1974. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/thailand_1974_ethnic_groups.jpg

1.2 Objective

The objective of this thesis is to analyze and identify the roles of educated young Karens in present-day cultural life of Nong Tao village, Chiang Mai province.

1.3 Hypothesis

Many young Karen from Nong Tao village have been educated under the Thai government system. They know the standard Thai language, and also their rights as Thai citizens. They have connections with other Karen and NGO groups. At the same time, it seems that they have close ties in their own village, between the older and younger generations.

It is, then, interesting to investigate how these young Karen can act as mediators between the government officials and villagers in Nong Tao village. It is also interesting to identify how these young Karen use their knowledge from Thai education in preserving their own culture.

Field research was conducted to collect ethnographic data of Nong Tao village, traditional and changing Karen culture, education of these young people, and the relationship between them and the older and younger generation.

Despite much research conducted on ethnic minorities in Thailand, there has been little focus on the roles of young people. This study will provide a dynamic aspect of Karen culture in northern Thailand.

1.4 Research Methodology

Preliminary survey was conducted at the Tribal Research Center, the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT), Karen Networks for Culture and Environment.

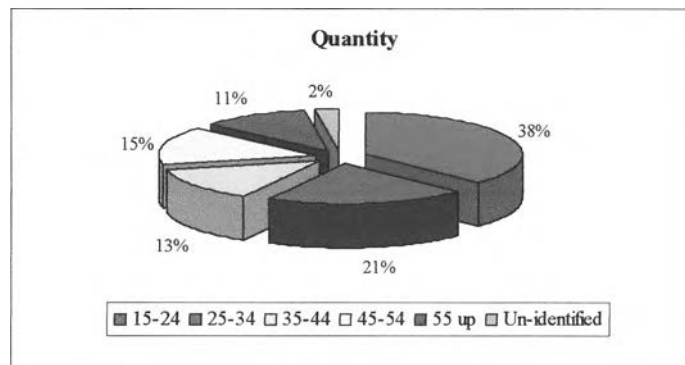
This thesis uses anthropological qualitative research methodology. In order to collect the ethnographic data, a field survey was conducted in Nong Tao village in Mae Win sub-district, Mae Wang district, Chiang Mai province between October 2004 - February 2005. Observation, participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews and questionnaires were the means to collect field information. Personal and group interviews were conducted in order to obtain data on the roles of the educated young Karen. The number and proportion of respondents to the questionnaire are as follows.

Table 1.4.1: Number of Respondents

| DEMOGRAPHY | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| AGE | Quantity | Male | Female | Un-identified | Proportion |
| 0-14 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 15-24 | 63 | 34 | 26 | 3 | 35% |
| 25-34 | 35 | 18 | 14 | 3 | 28% |
| 35-44 | 22 | 9 | 13 | 0 | 22% |
| 45-54 | 26 | 13 | 11 | 2 | 51% |
| 55 up | 19 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 30% |
| No answer | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | - |
| TOTAL | 169 | 83 | 75 | 11 | 23% |

Source: Author

Figure 1.4.1: Proportion of Respondents by Age



Source: Author

169 of the whole of 745, or 23 per cent of the population, were appraised in the village for sampling survey with a questionnaire.¹⁸

Definition of the Term

In this thesis, the words “the educated youth” or “the educated young Karen” mean the ones who have higher education than the primary education in Nong Tao village, since acquiring secondary education or higher level education make them exposed to Thai language, society, and culture, in other words, to the world outside.

¹⁸ Refer to Appendix 1.

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Literature Review on Governmental Policies on Hilltribes

A process of nation-building linking ‘national identity’ to Thai language, Buddhism, and Monarchy had to overcome considerable residence of various ethnic and cultural minority groups. Policies towards these minorities have been, and still are, policies of assimilation, quite frequently resorting to oppression. Until the 1980s, Thai policies towards the ethnic minority groups categorized as ‘hilltribes’ was dominated by concerns about opium cultivation and communist insurgency. By the 1980s, deforestation and control of resources in the uplands became important national issues and the main concerns of ‘hilltribe’ policies. Since the beginning of the 1990s, strategies of territorial, social, and political exclusion towards these ethnic minority groups, increasingly referring to national sentiments and ideologies, are dominating conservation policies and resource conflicts in the uplands of Thailand. State agencies, like the Royal Forest Department and the Military, thereby try to secure and regain positions and power challenged in the controversies on settlement and use rights in national forest reserves during the 1980s and 90s.¹⁹

The ethnic groups of the uplands, mostly living in remote areas, lost their importance for the central state. Most of their settlements, during the first half of the 20th century, were not integrated into the Thai administration system. It was not before the 1950s, that they became of concern for the state authorities again, not least because of international developments and interests.

In 1951 the Ministry of Interior established a ‘Committee for the Welfare of People in Remote Areas’ with the objective to integrate the ethnic minorities of the uplands into the administration system and the Thai nation state.

Since 1955, this became one of the main tasks of the Border Patrol Police (BPP). The BPP had been established in 1953, supported by the United States, in reaction to the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. Until today, besides guarding the borders of Thailand, the BPP is responsible for controlling the minority groups in remote areas. Efforts to integrate them and prevent them from communist influences include the maintenance of basic schools and health stations as well as agricultural consultancy.²⁰

During the 1930s, opium cultivation in Thailand even was promoted by the state

¹⁹ Reiner Buergin, op. cit., p.3.

²⁰ Ibid., p.7.

to counter opium smuggling from Burma, from which the state could not profit.

Since the 1920s, most of the 'western' countries had illegalized opium consumption and in 1946, at the first UN conference on international drug problems, Thailand was attacked for its opium monopoly and cultivation.²¹ Pressure from the dominant northern countries forced the military government in Thailand, which controlled the trade in opium, to prohibit opium cultivation, trade, and consumption.

Therefore, in 1959, the 'Central Hill Tribe Committee' (CHTC) was established in Thailand and, for the first time, a national policy towards the 'hilltribes' was formulated. Responsible authority became the 'Hilltribe Welfare Division' within the Ministry of Interior. Objectives of the policy were 'national security', reflecting fears that communist influences may spread among the ethnic minority groups of the uplands, control and substitution of opium cultivation, as well as the abolition of shifting cultivation.²²

Resettlement and concentration of the 'hilltribe' groups in a few, easily accessible so-called 'Self Help Settlement Projects' was the first strategy pursued, but soon proved to be unrealizable. To study 'the problem', in 1961/62 a first extensive study on the various ethnic minority groups of the uplands was carried out, supported by the UN Narcotics Drugs Division. The results of the study in 1963 led to the establishment of mobile units called 'Hilltribe Development and Welfare Centers' to look after the 'hilltribe' groups, as well as the setting up of the 'Tribal Research Centre' in Chiang Mai in 1964.²³

Due to the wars in neighboring countries and the fight against the Communist Party of Thailand, which had many of its bases in ethnic minority areas, 'hilltribe' policies, from the middle of the 1960s to the middle of the 1970s, were under the primacy of 'national security' concerns, and in the 'battle zones' the military became responsible for the ethnic minority groups.

The policy towards 'hilltribes' was reformulated in 1968, now aiming at the concentration of scattered settlements, resettlement into the lowlands, as well as the creation of confidence and the assimilation into Thai society to secure loyalty towards the state. By way of improving economic conditions, the susceptibility to communist influences was supposed to be diminished. In this context, in 1969, the first 'Royal

²¹ For a more detailed description of the 'opium problem' in Thailand and Southeast Asia, see Bertil Lintner, *Blood Brothers: Crime, Business and Politics in Asia*, (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2002); André and Louis Boucaud, *Burma's Golden Triangle: On the Trail of the Opium Warlords*, (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 1988).

²² Reiner Buergin, op. cit., p.7.

²³ Ibid., p.7-8.

Projects', 'Highland Development Projects' initiated by the King, were established.

In the beginning 1970s, the drug problem had received growing concern on the international level, not least because of the Vietnam War. International and national organizations and governments, for the first time, provided extensive funds to fight drugs, resulting in numerous opium substitution programs and 'Highland Development Projects' in Thailand during the 1970s and 80s.

In 1976, the 'Office of the Narcotics Control Board' (ONCB) was set up to coordinate the various efforts of the Government and bureaucracy to fight opium cultivation in Thailand, which was the issue that by now dominated 'hilltribe' policies.

A revision of the policy towards 'hilltribes' was formulated insofar as they now explicitly were to be supported to become Thai nationals, and the reduction of population growth among the ethnic minority groups of the uplands was included as a new objective.

Until 1982, the activities of the various institutions concerned with 'hilltribes' were rather uncoordinated. To change this situation, in 1982, the 'Committee for the Solution of National Security Problems involving Hilltribes and the Cultivation of Narcotic Crops' was established to coordinate and realize the 'hilltribe' policy designed by the committee.

In principle, the objectives formulated by the committee are official 'hilltribe' policy until today. They comprise the integration of the 'hilltribes' into Thai society, requiring the reorganization of their way of life accordingly (meaning particularly 'anticommunism', giving up shifting cultivation and resettlement into the lowlands), elimination of opium cultivation and consumption, reduction of population growth, and improvement of living standards.²⁴

Before the emergence of Siam as a territorial nation state, the power of the different rulers in the region mainly depended on the amount of subjects they controlled. Control of resources, particularly of the teak forests in northern Thailand, began to play an important role during the early phase of the extension of the Siamese sphere of power, nation-building and modernization. Primarily to secure control over one of the most valuable natural resources, the teak forests, the 'Royal Forest Department' (RFD) was established in 1896, and made responsible for all areas neither cultivated nor claimed by any other person or state authority. At the beginning of the 20th century, about 75 per cent of the total land area fell into this category, by the middle of the century it was still about 60 per cent.

Forest use of local people was widely unrestricted by forest legislation in

²⁴ Reiner Buergin, *op. cit.*, p.8.

Thailand until the middle of the 20th century. Only in the 1960s, a shift in forest policies occurred towards territorial control by way of the demarcation and rapid extension of national forest reserves and protected areas.²⁵

The demarcation of these state forests, implying restrictions on the use of the forests, frequently did not consider existing settlements or local forms of forest use. Quite often, areas declared forest reserves actually already were agricultural or settlement areas. Moreover, this strategy to control forest resources and fight deforestation proved to be rather ineffective. It could not stop rapid deforestation caused by legal and illegal logging, the development of infrastructure projects like roads and dams, and the extension of agricultural areas in the context of a national development policy based on extensive cash cropping for export markets.

By the end of the 1990s, the RFD claims control over almost half of the country's territory, being demarcated as forest reserves and protected areas. But of this area actually only about one third still is forested. The rest mainly is agricultural area, used by about 12 million people who generally do not have secure settlement and use rights for this land.

When, in the beginning 1980s, the failure of the demarcation policy of the Forest Department became obvious, the RFD reacted with a new zoning policy. The areas claimed as forest reserves now were zoned according to different functions related to different objectives and restrictions. In this context the concept of a Protected Area System (PAS) was designed, supposed to comprise more than a quarter of the total land area, in which human settlement and forest use is to be prohibited and resettlement enforced as far as possible.

By the mid 1980s, most of the remaining forest areas in Thailand were to be found in the uplands of the north and west, in the settlement areas of the 'hilltribes'. The most important issues of 'hilltribe' policies throughout the 1960s and 70s, opium cultivation and 'national security', had lost most of their urgency. Now 'forest conservation' became the dominant concern. At the same time, the military assumed a central role for 'hilltribe' policies. In 1986 the 'Center for the Coordination of Hill Tribe Affairs and Eradication of Narcotic Crops' (COHAN) was established. It was presided by the Commander of the Third Army and responsible for the implementation of 'hilltribe' policies, now predominantly a resettlement policy.²⁶

Since the beginning 1980s, 'environmental problems' had received increasing attention internationally and in Thailand, and provided an interesting field of activity for

²⁵ Reiner Buergin, op. cit., p.9.

²⁶ Ibid., p.10.

the growing NGO movement in Thailand. Numerous NGOs, networks, and movements emerged in opposition to the development and environmental policy of the state, specifically in the conflicts on resettlement projects, logging scandals, eucalyptus plantations, and dam projects. As part of a growing civil society they were demanding more political influence, decentralization, and democratization.

In the context of the resistance against resettlement out of forest reserves and reforestation projects with eucalyptus plantations, NGOs, academics, and peasant organizations, at the end of the 1980s, began to develop a community forest concept as an alternative to the forest conservation strategy of the RFD, arguing to give control over local resources mainly to the local communities. In 1990 the process of drafting a Community Forest Bill was started and remains a hot issue of public debate and political conflict until today.

In this ongoing controversy not only conflicting interests of RFD and farmers living in forest reserves clash, but also conflicting conservation ideologies (man and forest can or can not co-exist) and different value priorities (environmental conservation versus social justice), dividing the NGO movement as well as society. In this conflict, RFD and 'dark green', conservation orientated NGOs and academics oppose farmers organizations, 'light green' or people orientated NGOs and socially concerned academics.

More obvious, by now, is that the RFD, after it has largely failed to protect the forests and far reaching concessions regarding the people living in forest reserve areas are inevitable, is trying to secure its interests by pushing ahead with its strategy of exclusion towards the ethnic minority groups of the uplands. The resettlement of about 12 million people living in forest reserves, predominantly ethnic Thai, is politically and practically not feasible. Instead of, the RFD is concentrating on the extension of the Protected Area System and enforced resettlement of people living in protected areas, mainly people of ethnic minority groups. To support this strategy, high government officials as well as dark green NGOs increasingly refer to national and even racist sentiments.²⁷

With the Military the RFD found a receptive partner for their strategy. After the decrease of communism in Thailand and neighboring countries, a failed bloody military coup in 1991/92, and dwindling political influence in the course of democratization, the Military is looking for new grounds of legitimacy and, thereby, has discovered environmental conservation as a new task.²⁸

²⁷ Reiner Buergin, op. cit., p.11.

²⁸ Ibid., pp.11-12.

At the same time the conflicts assume more and more ethnicist traits, aiming at the territorial, social, and political exclusion of the 'hilltribes' in the context of a more or less outspoken, culturally defined Thai nationalism, even among some high government officials. In contrary to the integration policy announced by the Government, the bureaucracy responsible for the naturalization of ethnic minority people is rather reserved and restrictive regarding these groups. Moreover, in the process of granting citizenship discretionary powers of the officials, quite often, seem to be used for personal profit and corruption.²⁹

At the moment, only about 240,000 of the more than 840,000 'hilltribe' people actually do have the status of Thai nationals. Therefore, most of them even cannot refer to the existing legal provisions regarding their settlement and land use rights. Most of them, at best, do have the 'blue ID card' and '*thor ror 13*' residence permits, entitling them to stay in Thailand legally for 5 years and freedom of movement within the district of registration.

The new 'hilltribe' policy, in the context of resource and environmental conflicts since the late 1980s and beginning 90s, increasingly led to resettlements of 'hilltribe' villages as well as restrictions on their traditional land use systems. Since 1998 pressure on the ethnic minority groups in the uplands is growing once more, resulting in arbitrary arrests, forced resettlement, terror and violence.³⁰

In how far the ethnic minority groups, with their organizations and public protests, will be able to support their rights and interests remains to be seen. It may depend to a high degree on their ability to gain recognition as Thai nationals. As such they may find legal grounds for their claims in the new Constitution passed in 1997, granting local people rights over their local resources and cultural self-determination, as well as in a Community Forest Bill in favor of the local people, if the 'peoples version' of the Bill is going to be passed.³¹

²⁹ Reiner Buergin op. cit., p.12.

³⁰ Ibid., pp.12-13.

³¹ Ibid., op. cit., p.15.

1.5.2 Literature Review on Karen Studies

There are two general types of literature I divided on the Karen studies in the two aspects. The first aspect deals with Karen culture, tradition, customs, beliefs and rituals. The second aspect discusses different forces that effect social changes in Karen communities.

Culture, Customs and Beliefs

Marshall's classic study³² describes a wide range of Karen cultural practices and traits in Burma. Among these are Karen clothing and ornaments, social life, religious conceptions, agriculture and other occupations, kinship, mythology and so forth. Lebar's work³³ also deals with the Karen in Thailand and Burma concerning Karen minor groups, history, economy, and social stratification among those things.

Charles F. Keyes discovers that both historical and ethnographic evidence suggest that Karen-speaking people began settling in Thailand in significant numbers only from the end of the 18th century.³⁴

Yoshimatsu³⁵ describes the Sgaw Karen conceptual universe, mythology, and rituals that are the basis of social behavior and govern various communal and individual activities of Karen life.

Iijima writes on the introduction of wet-rice cultivation and its effects. A land-ownership system began to emerge under which wet-rice fields have come under private ownership. A concomitant shift in tenure has also begun in the swidden fields as well. Further, the elaborate cooperative work involving the whole community, which is peculiar to swidden agriculture, began to disappear.

Mohd regards Karen swiddening techniques as successful in maintaining ecological stability. Their insistence on no more than a single cropping season before allowing the land to return to fallow, their special care in controlling fire, their preservation of a number of trees above and inside their swiddens, their care not to break the top soil on steep slopes and their insistence on a lengthy fallow period.

³² Harry Ignatius Marshall, *op. cit.*

³³ Frank M. Lebar, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Charles F. Keyes, *op. cit.*, p.7.

³⁵ Kumiko Yoshimatsu, "The Karen World: The Cosmological and Ritual Belief System of the Sgaw Karen in Northwestern Chiang Mai Province" Final research report presented to the National Research Council of Thailand, 1989.

Social Change

Kunstadter³⁶ observes in comparison with the Lua' that although it is not clear of what the "essence" of Karen self-identity consists, most Karens are determined to maintain their Karen identity, no matter whether they live in hill or valley villages, or even in towns or cities. They recognize Karen identity as something to be preserved, and this may be supported by the missionary interest in maintaining their investment in Karen literacy and Karen identity. Kunstadter writes that the language seems to be the most important criterion.³⁷ In addition, Karen identity seems in no way to be bound to a place of residence. Generalized or transportable spirits are much more important than localized ones.³⁸

Iijima³⁹ treats the persistence and change of ethnic identity among the plain and hill Sgaw Karen villages in Mae Sariang district, Mae Hong Son province. He writes that in the process of social and cultural change of the Karen, religion has played an important role in preserving the sense of ethnic identity. That is, the belief in the ancestor spirit and the practice of rites are significant for the definition of "Karenness" in lowland as well as upland villages. The plains Karen, however, maintain themselves as a "cultural" rather than a "pure-blood" group, in other words, "openness" to the absorption of "foreign elements," to retain their identity in changed circumstances.

According to Buergin, in the 1960s, a shift in forest policies occurred towards territorial control by way of the demarcation and rapid extension of national forest reserves and protected areas, and the forest conservation became the dominant concern of hilltribe policies by the mid 1980s. The demarcation of natural forest reserves, implying restrictions on the use of the forests, frequently does not consider existing settlements or local forms of forest use.

The argument put by Walker is that longstanding encroachment on the forest and fallow domains of Karen communities is less a product of the failure of the state to recognize their ancestral or communal title than it is a product of the instability of a land management system that requires large areas of uncultivated land. The author observes that traditional Karen communal resource management institutions do not

³⁶ Peter Kunstadter, "Socio-cultural Change among Upland Peoples of Thailand: Lua' and Karen – two Modes of Adaptation" in *Proceedings of the VIIth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, 1968, Tokyo and Kyoto, Vol. II, Ethnology*, (Tokyo: Science Council of Japan, 1968).

³⁷ Peter Kunstadter, 1979, op. cit., p.125.

³⁸ Ibid., p.138.

³⁹ Shigeru Iijima, op. cit.

provide a basis for contemporary management of natural resources, especially forest resources in two aspects. Firstly, their land management institutions have been relatively unsuccessful in preventing external encroachment, for example, from Hmong and northern Thai on their own forested domain. Secondly, the author is doubtful that the existence of communal institutions that regulated the selection of areas for swidden cultivation and limited the collection of some types of forest product would develop under pressure of population growth and resource scarcity.⁴⁰ He concludes that there is any basis to the claim that there are well established “traditional” Karen communal resource management institutions that can form the basis for future conservationist initiatives.

Kwanchewan, who carried out field research in Mae Chaem district, Chiang Mai province, says the changes in socio-economic and political context have also influenced the change in the nature of the relationship within household and community. The negotiation of meanings of the religious practices among practitioners and the readjustment of the religious practices occur among people of different types of authorities, gender, age, kin relations, socio-economic status, who are in the complex structure of power relations.⁴¹

Yoshimatsu⁴² conducted research on the religious world of the Sgaw Karen in Me Kha Pu community, Samuang district, western Chiang Mai province. The author illustrates cultural change not only from the religious aspect but from political, economic, and material ones such as, wet-rice cultivation, permanent-field farming, Thai government administration and so forth.

Wongsprasert discusses impact of the Dhammacarik Bhikkhu Programme (DBP) on the hilltribes including the Karen. The author observes that the hill folk are most likely to accept Buddhist teachings, which enable them to escape from traditional obligations and constraints, rather than because it is a superior belief system. Karen, specifically, see it as a chance to gain an elementary education in temple schools due to their poverty.⁴³

Kwanchewan also finds that to identify with one of the mainstream religions,

⁴⁰ For parallel discussion, Mohd, Razha Rashid. “Karen Swiddening Techniques” in *Farmers in the Hills: Upland Peoples of North Thailand*, ed. by Anthony R. Walker. (Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia Press, 1975).

⁴¹ Kwanchewan Buadaeng, 2001, op.cit., p.7.

⁴² Kumiko Yoshimatsu, “The Karen World: The Cosmological and Ritual Belief System of the Sgaw Karen in Northwestern Chiang Mai Province” Final research report presented to the National Research Council of Thailand, 1989.

⁴³ See also, Kwanchewan Buadaeng, “Negotiating Religious Practices in a Changing Sgaw Karen Community in North Thailand” Doctor Thesis, University of Sydney, 2001, p.179.

Christianity or Buddhism, attaches the Karen with the larger society under more centralized institutions which have greater power than the local one.⁴⁴

Bechstedt writes that the basic elements of the Thai national identity are the king, the nation and Buddhism as a state ideology.⁴⁵

There has not been adequate research conducted on the youth in a contemporary Karen community. Chapter 2 will deal with contemporary ethnography of Nong Tao village in Chiang Mai province as a case study.

⁴⁴ Kwanchewan Buadaeng, 1999, op.cit., p.1.

⁴⁵ Hans-Dieter Bechstedt, "Identity and Authority in Thailand" in *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand 1939-1989*, ed. by Craig J. Reynolds. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), p.246. See also, Craig J. Reynolds, "Introduction: National Identity and Its Defenders" and, Sulak Sivaraksa "The Crisis of Siamese Identity", in *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand 1939-1989*, ed. by Craig J. Reynolds, (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002).