



UNIVERSITY OF AGDER

From Isolation to Integration

A case study of the Akha hill tribe people
in the Chiang Rai province of northern Thailand,
with a special focus on religious aspects

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This master's thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

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Abstract

Many societies are today challenged because of migratory movements. Diversity of cultural, social and religious traditions may create conflicts of interests and authorities are forced to develop comprehensive integration policies. Thailand has experienced an influx of migrants from neighbouring countries during the last decades. Many of these migrants are disadvantaged tribal people, wanting to integrate into their new home country. This study has been focusing on the integration process for Akha hill tribe people in the province of Chiang Rai in northern Thailand. The main objectives have been to look into socio-political and religious factors that affect the integration process for the minority Akha hill tribe people into the majority Thai society.

Authorities in Thailand are conducting a typical assimilative integration policy, meaning that the focus is on how the migratory tribal people have to adapt to the existing majority society. The ambition from the Thai Government may be seen as creating a cultural homogenous nation, that expect migratory tribal people to give up their distinctive culture and traditions (IOM, 2011:131).

The findings from this study revealed that there are important political factors that complicate and hinder a good integration process for tribal people into the Thai society. These are especially issues related to citizenship and legal rights. Secondly, the study found a lack of acceptance and a high degree of prejudices from ethnic Thai people towards tribal people in Thailand. The reasons for this were mostly connected to social and cultural factors both in the major Thai society and in the minor tribal societies. Finally, the study revealed that religious factors also have had and still have great impacts on the integration process. Practicing tribal religion and not the dominant Buddhist religion creates fractions between ethnic Thai people and tribal people. Christian activities have amongst other given many tribal children the opportunity to obtain good education, which in this study was found to be a key factor for acceptance and enhanced integration of tribal people into the Thai society.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CPT	Chapter
CSNSPIHTCNC	Committee for the Solution of National Security Problems Involving Hill Tribes and the Cultivation of Narcotic Crops
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMPECT	Inter Mountain People Education and Culture in Thailand
IOM	International Organisation of Migration
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MPCD/SEAMP	The Mountain Peoples' Culture and Development Project/Southeast Asian Mountain Peoples (for Culture and Development)
NCHT	National Committee for the Hill Tribes
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
THB	Thai Baht
TRI	Tribal Research Institute
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN	United Nations

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Migration makes great impacts on civilizations around the world (IOM, 2011:v). Societies are challenged in many areas and effective and comprehensive migration policies are required to accommodate these challenges. This phenomenon is highly relevant in Thailand that has experienced an influx of migrants from neighbouring countries. Many of these migrants are groups of disadvantaged tribal people, wanting to integrate in their new home country.

Integration into the Thai society may be seen as a key factor to secure social and economic development for migratory tribal peoples in Thailand. Over the last centuries migratory hill tribe peoples have entered the country, some of them predating the presently dominant Thai people (IWGIA, 2002:272). During the last decades, many groups have come to Thailand from neighbouring countries, mainly because of political and socio-economic problems in the immigrants' home countries. Today, the Government of Thailand recognizes nine of these different ethnic minority groups (UN, 2008:25). They have been given different names, such as “highlanders”, “tribal people” or “hill tribe people”, and they are all internationally formally recognized as indigenous people (UN, 2008:25). However, the Government has until date rejected to accept the hill tribe peoples in Thailand as indigenous peoples. According to the Government the hill tribe people in Thailand “are not considered to be minorities or indigenous peoples but as Thais who are able to enjoy fundamental rights and are protected by the laws of the Kingdom as any other Thai citizen” (UNHCR, 1992 in IWGIA, 2008:444). In this study, the term hill tribe people will be used, even though some of the people now live in the lowlands. The nine different groups of hill tribe people are diverse in important aspects like language, culture, religion and traditions and hence cannot be treated as one group by the Thai authorities. The migration has caused great challenges for the Government in how to deal with the new inhabitants of the country, including political, social and environmental issues. For the hill tribe peoples, lack of security and civil rights are some of the main challenges (UNDP, 2010:75).

Most of the hill tribe groups live in rural areas of northern Thailand.

Traditionally, most of them have been migratory people, but have recently settled down in permanent villages. The isolated villages which formerly were not accessible for vehicles hardly exist anymore. Most hill tribe people have now get used to the idea of being a part of Thai society. It



Photo 1: Akha village (Photo: Knut Inge Bergem)

is no longer possible to choose to live outside the organised Thai society, in isolated villages and communities. Thai Government has decided that all hill tribe people have to adapt and integrate into the Thai society. However, the integration may take different forms. One option is to encourage them to stay in their own traditional villages, mostly in mountain areas, and provide their communities with what is needed for a social and economic development. Another option is to request them to leave their traditional lifestyle in their home villages in the highlands and integrate them fully in to the Thai communities in the lowlands. Regardless which model is being used there are a lot of challenges with the process of integration of hill tribe people in Thailand.

The target group for this study is the Akha hill tribe people, from now on called only the Akha people, in northern Thailand. Their countries of origin are Tibet and China, but large groups of the people are now also to be found in Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Akha people have for centuries practised their own culture and religion, characterized by strong connections to nature and ancestors. These traditions deviate considerably from Thai traditions and culture, and create challenges in the integration processes. A significant



Photo 2: Akha grandmother and grandchild (Manit Wandee, 2011)

challenge for Akha communities and for hill tribe communities in general in Thailand, is the question of citizenship. A large number of hill tribe people struggle to be recognized as legal inhabitants of Thailand since they have no citizenship. Lack of citizenship causes limitations to important rights connected to legal rights and access to the judicial system. Also important services such as education and health are

limited, and there are restrictions for activities such as transport, work and land-use (UNDP, 2010:75-76). The current status may contribute to the high unemployment rates and poverty situation, and affect Thai citizens' attitude to the people and the processes of creating social and economic development for hill tribe people.

The Akha culture is today threatened of being diluted or even eliminated in Thailand (UNESCO, 2011). Lack of knowledge and respect for indigenous culture and religion by the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may be important reasons for this situation. On the other hand, lack of knowledge among the Akha people about their obligations and necessary adjustments to the Thai society may also contribute to a tension in the integration process with ordinary Thai people and hinder a common understanding and acceptance of their distinctive culture and traditions. The impetus for this research is to examine factors related to the Akha people's integration into the Thai society, and how these factors affect their social and economic livelihood. It is of particular interest to reveal if religious activities have an impact on the integration process.

1.2 Area of study

The area of study for this research lays within the province of Chiang Rai that is the northernmost province of Thailand. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy and is the only country in Southeast Asia that has never been colonized by a European power. The country has today a population of around 67 million people (World Bank, 2013). Thailand shares borders with Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia. The north, northeast, southeast and central regions of Thailand have a climate with three distinct seasons: rainy, from June to October; cool, from November to February; and hot and sunny weather from March to May. The southern region has a tropical rainforest climate, where March and April normally are the driest months (United Nations Thailand, 2013).

Thailand is aiming to achieve the global Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in advance of 2015. The country has lately experienced an overall economic progress. However, there are still great challenges regarding issues like environmental degradation, poverty and health (UNDP, 2006:2). Areas in north and northeast are considered to be the most critical situated in this regard.

The Tribal Research Institute (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c: 1) estimated in year 2000 that ten different tribal groups existed in Thailand. These groups were dispersed in several thousand villages with a total population close to one million people. The estimation of the number of Akha people in Thailand is according to the Tribal Research Institute (2002) less than one hundred thousand. Hill tribe people differ substantially from Thai people in terms of language, culture, history and religion. Because of these differences Thai authorities have had great challenges in how to treat them and how to integrate them in to the Thai society. Efforts have been made, but still there are great differences between hill tribe people and ordinary ethnic Thai citizens.

1.3 Research objectives

There are two main objectives in this study that are closely linked together. The first objective is to analyse how socio-political and religious conditions in Thailand may facilitate or hinder integration and social and economic development for the Akha people into the Thai society. The second objective is to analyse how original Akha culture and religion can be an opportunity or a constraint for Akha integration into the Thai society.

Important factors that affect Akha people's life situation are closely connected to political, economic, social, ecological and cultural conditions. Some of these conditions will in this study be elucidated in the light of integration challenges for the minority Akha people into the majority Thai society. A special focus will be given to indicators related to religion.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions that now will be presented are composed on the basis of the research objectives. The two main research questions correspond directly with the research objectives, while the sub-questions are composed to attain the information needed.

Main research questions:

How may socio-political and religious conditions in the Thai society affect integration for Akha hill tribe people in the Chiang Rai province of northern Thailand?

How may original Akha culture and religion affect integration for Akha hill tribe people into the Thai society?

Sub-questions:

How do political, social, and cultural conditions in Thailand affect the life situation for the Akha hill tribe people?

What characterizes Akha culture and religion and how do they affect the life situation for the Akha hill tribe people?

How have Buddhism and Christianity affected integration of Akha hill tribe people into the Thai society?

1.5 Methodology in brief

To conduct this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used, with emphasize on qualitative methods. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been obtained both from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Akha communities, and with key informants from development organisations, foundations and public offices. This data collection has revealed useful information for a deep understanding of life conditions for Akha people. Data from secondary sources have been gathered from literature and official statistics. This data has been helpful in the process of getting a wider understanding of the life conditions for Akha people – from outside sources. The framework for this study will be a case study design, which fits well as this study is concerned with an in-depth elucidation of a particular situation (Bryman, 2008:54). The literature review has revealed a lack of existing research related to religious factors role in the integration process. This fact is vouching for an inductive approach for the relationship between theory and research and has consequently been employed. Chapter 4 will give a detailed presentation of the methodology.

1.6 Thesis outline

The thesis is organised in seven (7) chapters. Chapter 1 gives background information about the study, research objectives, research questions and a brief review of the methodology. Chapter 2 gives a contextual overview of Thailand. Chapter 3 presents a literature review of the topics of the study, and the theoretical framework. Chapter 4 describes thoroughly the different types of methods that were chosen for this study. Chapter 5 presents the empirical findings from the research. Chapter 6 analyses the empirical findings. In Chapter 7 I draw some main conclusions from this study.

2 Contextual overview

The area of study for this research lies within the Chiang Rai province of northern Thailand. The official name of the country is the Kingdom of Thailand.

2.1 Geography

The country is part of the Indochina peninsula and is bordered by Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. In the south, it is also bordering the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that has never been colonized by a European power. However, during the late part of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, Thailand had to hand over land to neighbouring countries to prevent conflicts and secure independence. The total area of Thailand decreased in that period of time with around 456,000 square kilometres (Wyatt 2003:192) to present 513,120 square kilometres. Out of this area, 510,890 sq. km is land and 2,230 sq. km is water. The lowest point in Thailand is at sea level and the highest point is Doi Inthanon in the Chiang Mai province, 2,576 meters above sea level.

2.2 Population

According to official statistics, Thailand had in 2012 a population of nearly 67 million people (World Bank, 2013). The composition of the people are 75% Thai, 14% Chinese and 11% others (CIA, 2012). Regarding religion, 94,6% are recognized to be Buddhists, 4,6% Muslims, 0,7% Christians and 0,1% others (Harvard, 2007). Life expectancy at birth is 74 years (World Bank, 2013b) and the literacy rate is 92.6% (CIA, 2013). More than 97% of the population in Thailand have access to clean water and sanitation (World Bank, 2013a).



Figure 1: Map of Thailand (DCC, 2013)

2.3 Governance

Thailand is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. The prime minister is elected from the House of Representatives and is the leader of the administration (Thailandtoday, 2011). The Government's policies have three main objectives:

“First, to bring about a strong and balanced economic structure for the country, as an important basis for sustainable growth.

Second, to bring about a Thai society that is reconciled, based on the rule of law

which meets the international standard, whereby all Thais are treated equally.

Third, to prepare Thailand for the arrival of the ASEAN Community in 2015, by strengthening the country in the economic, social, cultural, political and security aspects” (Thailandtoday, 2011a)



Figure 2: Flag of Thailand (MOW, 2013)

Thailand is administered through 76 provinces and one special administrative area representing the capital Bangkok. Each of the provinces is divided into districts, each district into sub-districts and each sub-district into villages. The leader of a village is called Headman.

Corruption is regarded as a serious problem in Thailand and may hinder poor people in being treated fear and get access to the political arena (UNDP, 2012 and many of the respondents). Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranked Thailand number 78 among 178 countries with a score of 3.5 (UNDP, 2012).

2.4 Economy

Thailand has lately experienced an overall economic progress. One of the main reasons for this progress is a strong export industry, which account for around 75 % of GDP (World Bank, 2013c). The exports consist primarily of agricultural products, machinery, electronic components, and jewellery (CIA, 2012). All though Thailand is considered to be one of the premier tourist destinations of the world, tourism provides only around 7% of GDP (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013). A serious flooding in the most important industrials areas of Thailand in the end of 2011 made severe damage to the manufacturing sectors. However, the sector expects to recover soon and the Government estimates the economy to grow significantly in 2012 (World Bank, 2013a). Thailand was recently (2011) upgraded from a lower-middle economy to an upper-middle economy (World Bank, 2013b). A recent report from the World Bank (2013b), states that GNP in Thailand for 2012 was \$366.0 billion. Even though Thailand has succeeded economically, there are still great challenges regarding issues like environmental degradation, poverty and health (UNDP, 2006:2). Areas in north and northeast are considered to be the most critical situated in this regard. The poverty rate has been reduced from 21 percent in 2000 to 7.75% in 2010, which constitutes a number of around 5.2 million people (UNDP, 2012). 88% of these poor people are living in rural areas (World Bank, 2013a). Thailand is still regarded as a developing country, but is aiming to achieve the global Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in advance of 2015.

2.4.1 Level of inequality

Despite the recent economic progress, Thailand may still be considered a very unequal and non-egalitarian society. In fact, this inequality has increased in Thailand lately, and might have contributed to the growing political conflicts (UNDP, 2010:78). People with low average income constitute a significant number in Thailand and have been an important target group for politicians. According to the Gini¹ coefficient, a measurement of income equality, where 0 represents perfect equality and 100 implies perfect inequality, Thailand gets the score at around 40 (World Bank, 2013a & Trading Economics, 2013). As a comparison, Norway gets the score of 25 and the United States of America 38 (OECD, 2011). Statistics shows that income and development have a deep influence in how people are voting during elections, and focus on inequality has consequently got more attention (UNDP, 2010:78).

One of the main reasons for the inequality is connected to education (UNDP, 2010:80). Access to quality education has in Thailand been uneven for generations. Politicians have used their power to distribute more funds to the richer provinces and subsidizing tertiary education over primary (UNDP, 2010:80). Consequently, most people with higher education come from central areas. This is preventing an evenly representation of people in politics. A report from UNDP (2010:80) concludes that: “Thailand’s parliamentary democracy does not do a good job of providing representation for large groups of the population”. UNDP statistic shows that Thailand has higher inequality among households than neighbouring countries. Even if plans have been made to combat the inequality, the condition is persistent. The report from UNDP (2010:80) asserts that powerful forces that do not share interest in equality may have contributed to the slow improvement process.

Another important reason for this persistent situation of the inequality could probably be found in culture and religion. The hierarchical structure in Thailand is very strong and involves all parts of the society. Political power is connected to certain people with certain names, and is very difficult to access by ordinary people. The common attitude among people is to accept the level at which you are born and not involve in political activities which will expose yourself. Regarding religion, an important doctrine from Theravada Buddhism is about reincarnation. According to the teaching, your life condition and prosperity in this life is deeply connected to your former life. Such belief may make it easier to accept current life conditions and restrain from efforts to change the path.

2.5 Migration in Thailand

Thailand has in recent years experienced an increase in international migration. This migration has been both outbound and inbound, and it is possible to look at Thailand as a region migration hub in South-East Asia (IOM, 2011:v). The migrating from Thailand to countries in Asia and the Middle East with stronger economies than Thailand involves a significant number of people. The main reason for the migration is for people to obtain higher

¹ “Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or, in some cases, consumption) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Lorenz curve plots the cumulative percentages of total income received against the cumulative number of recipients, starting with the poorest individual or household. The Gini index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and a hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. Thus a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality” (Trading Economics, 2013).

salaries then possible at home. However, the number of deployed workers abroad has declined from a top in 1995 (202,000 persons) to 143,795 persons in 2010 (IOM, 2011:1). The decline of migrating Thai people happens probably because of better job opportunities in Thailand.

As a consequence of better job opportunities for Thai people inside the borders of Thailand, another migration has expanded, namely internal movements and resettlements. Most of the migrations go from rural areas in the north and northeast to urban areas around Bangkok, as both educated and low-skilled workers get better job opportunities in central areas (IOM, 2011:58). For low-skilled people work in factories, building industries and in the tourist industry give a more predictive income than seasonal work in rural areas in the north and northeast. Well-educated people, wanting to make a career or utilize their education, also normally have to settle down in Central areas. Almost all main offices for national and international companies, as well as Government departments, are located around the area of Bangkok.

Both international and internal migration creates huge benefits for the migrants' families. Due to higher income migrants are able to send home remittance that improve living conditions and alleviate poverty for their families (IOM, 2011:58). The remittance is used for meeting daily expenses, investments in farms and sending children to school (IOM, 2011:58). According to research (Boonyamanond and Punpuing, 2009; Paris, et.al.2009, and Guest, 1998, in IOM, 2011:58), internal remittance is more likely to decrease inequality in local communities than external remittance. The main reason for this is that international migration is easier to select for relatively wealthy and skilled people in the population, while the internal remittance come from a broader range of households (Piriyakul, 2006 in IOM, 2011:58).

It may be asserted that internal movements do not create challenges at the same level as external migration. However, the cultural distinctions between the four different parts of Thailand are significant (UNDP, 2010:80). The four parts are named Central, Isan (North East), North and South. The official language in Thailand is Central Thai, which is taught in public schools throughout the country. However, the three other regions have their own language, their own history, local food and special traditions. People coming from these regions may experience discrimination from local people in central areas, especially related to cultural and socio-economic factors (UNDP, 2010:80). Consequently, even internal migration in Thailand creates challenges to manage and solve.

Even if internal migration forms the leading population movements in Thailand, the number of migrants to Thailand is significant, and much higher than the number of migrants from Thailand. One reason for this development is that the Government of Thailand internationally has actively promoted Thailand as a country of possibilities both for business and pleasure. More than 100.000 highly skilled workers from all over the world were granted work permits in 2009 (IOM, 2011:2). However, the great majority of migrants in Thailand are low-wage workers from neighbouring countries. In 2008 the Government amended The Alien Employment Act to regulate the employment of low-skilled workers. The regulations in this Act give consideration for national security, protecting work for Thai persons, and prioritising of growth and development for the country (IOM, 2011:xii). The number of migrants to Thailand is currently estimated to be more than three million people. Such high numbers create great challenges in migration management, from housing and social issues, to dignity and human rights. However, Thailand has presently not composed a comprehensive policy that gives proper consideration for migration workers. The main reason for this is that the Thai Government considers all migration as temporarily (IOM, 2011:4). Consequently, most

work permits in Thailand are only valid for one year and has to be renewed accordingly. Nevertheless, a survey conducted in 2008 (IOM, 2011:4) showed that a great number of people migrating to Thailand had no intention of returning to their home countries voluntarily.

UNDP (2010:74) has categorised international long-term migrants to Thailand without clear citizenship in four different groups: Illegal and semi-legal labour migrants, stateless persons, displaced persons and long-standing residents without full citizenship. Even though the government has encouraged all workers to register, an estimated number of one million people have refrained from doing so (IOM, 2011:xiii). Not registered workers have limited access to justice and social services and are vulnerable for abuse and exploitation. The Government of Thailand expects as earlier mentioned that all migrants are temporarily in Thailand and eventually will return home. As a consequence of this view, no integration policies for this group are required. However, some important efforts have been made to integrate migrant minority people into the Thai society. Nationality Acts, Civil Registration Acts, Immigration Acts and a Cabinet Resolution from 2005 are all initiatives that entitle some long-term migrants to obtain status of legal migrants and their children born in Thailand to obtain status as Thai citizens (IOM, 2011:xv and 134). However, the policies do not involve integration for all migrants and some of the resolutions apply primarily for ethnic minority people in the highland of northern Thailand.

2.5.1 Ethnic Minority Groups within Thailand

Thailand has for the last decades experienced immigration of hill tribe people coming over the border from neighbouring countries. This relocation has occurred mostly as a result of political and socio-economic problems in the immigrants' home countries (IOM, 2011:132). Originally, most of the migrants came from southwest and south-central China, first settling in Myanmar and Laos, before moving into Thailand (Lewis, 1984:204). The Tribal Research Institute estimated in 2000 that ten different tribal groups existed in Thailand, occupying around 3,492 villages with a total population of 866,749 (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c: 1). However, Thai Government recognizes only nine of these indigenous groups (UN, 2008:25). These groups are Karen, Hmong, Lahu, Lisu, Mien, Akha, Lua, Thin, and Kham, that altogether make up approximately 1,4% of Thailand's total population (Tribal Research Institute, 2002). The official survey from 2002 concluded that the actual number of people from these groups were 923,257 (IWGIA, 2002:315 in UN, 2008:25 and IWGIA, 2008:304). However, many other groups of indigenous hill tribes are living in Thailand and many of them without identity card or citizenship. The number of indigenous hill tribe peoples in Thailand is therefore probably much higher than the official statistic shows, but no one knows the exact number. Most of these peoples have in the past been self-sufficient farmers, residing in isolated communities in rural areas. Still most of their villages are located in these rural areas.

Due to social and cultural differences, Thai authorities have had great challenges in how to treat these groups and how to tackle their integration into the Thai society. Although strong efforts have been made, there are still great differences between hill tribe people and ordinary Thai citizens. Improved infrastructure and compulsory education are two important reasons for the recent changes in the life situation for tribal people. Although the socio-economic situation of hill tribe people has improved, they are still considered as vulnerable and disadvantaged groups within Thai-society. Lack of Thai citizenship is seen as one of the main obstacles for an improved and more sustainable development among the hill tribe peoples (FAO, 2002). MPCD/SEAMP have pointed out that a large number of hill tribe people are

lacking Thai identity cards, hence being denied access to important benefits like education, land use and health (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c: 3). This fact is confirmed by the Inter Mountain People Education and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT), claiming that there are approximately 900,000 hill tribe people who are functionally stateless because of this (UNESCO, 2011:14-15). UNESCO emphasizes that

“The future of cultural and even physical survival of hill tribe communities in Thailand depends on recognition and enforcement of their rights to belong to the country” (UNESCO, 2011:15).

Lack of citizenship also involves restrictions from authorities regarding travelling outside their own living area, including travel to find work. This has been an important reason for the extensive poverty found among hill tribe people. The poverty is increasing, leading to miseries such as hunger, health problems, prostitution, drug use and even suicide. Furthermore, many Thai people have a depreciatory view on hill tribe people, seeing them as second-class people (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c: 3)

A report from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations Regional Office for the Asia and the Pacific asserts that the hill tribe groups in Thailand lack the means to cope with the rapid changes in the society. This creates problems in areas such as agriculture, employment and socio-cultural values (FAO, 2002:v). From being only dependent on agriculture and handicraft production, with no proper education, there is now a pressure to migrate to urban areas for education and work. FAO emphasises that the pressure for modernization and urbanization is leading to problems such as prostitution, drug addiction and HIV/AIDS (FAO, 2002:viii).

2.5.2 Akha hill tribe people



Photo 3: Three generations of Akha people (Manit Wandee, 2011)

This study will focus on the situation for the Akha hill tribe people, which is the fourth largest minority group in Thailand. South East Asian Mountain Peoples' for Culture and Development (MPCD/SEAMP) has through their web pages provided in-depth background materials to gain a close understanding for Akha history, culture and religion (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002). This was done through cooperation with the Tribal Research Institute (TRI), situated at the grounds of Chiang Mai University (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c: 1).

Originally the Akha people lived in Tibet and the Yunnan province in China. Still, the majority of the Akha people live in these areas, but large groups started migrating southwards hundreds of years ago, mostly because of political and socio-economic problems in their home countries. Groups of Akha people settled down in Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos, and are still living there. Other groups continued to move southwards and ended up in northern Thailand. The total estimated population number of Akha people, including the closely related group of Hani living in these countries, range from between 1.5 to 2.3 million people. According to the last official census from the Tribal Research Institute, Thailand had an estimated number of 65,826 Akha people in 2002 (Tribal Research Institute, 2002). However, information from Akha Hill Tribe Museum in Chiang Rai and managers from local foundations estimate the number to be more than 70,000, and probably more than 100,000. The main reason for the unclear number is that Thai authorities only recognise registered persons. Large numbers of Akha people have not registered themselves to Thai authorities and have no identification cards; hence they are missing in official lists.

The first known Akha-village in Thailand was established in the Chiang Rai province in the beginning of 19th century. Since that time, most migrating Akha people have settled down in this province and an estimation of 90% of the Akha people in Thailand are still living there (Lewis, 1984:204 and Tribal Research Institute, 2002).

The Akha people consist of six different groups, where three of them are presently located in Thailand. These groups are U-lo Akha, Loimi Akha and Phami Akha. There are some varieties in language, culture, traditions and clothing between the different groups. Originally, the Akha people were forest dwellers and are recognised for their special knowledge about herbs. They are also known for their governing structure. The main principles for the governing structure were to make peace and harmony in the village (respondent 3). Every conflict was tried locally, where a council existing of older men found appropriate solutions. Normally the offending party had to pay a fine to the community and kill an animal that had to be prepared and served to everyone in the village. Through this system, the fine benefitted the whole community and even contributed to peace and harmony (respondent 3). Now, this governing structure has been replaced by the juridical system in the Thai society.



Photo 4: Akha women (Photo: Knut Inge Bergem)

Their language is part of the Tibeto-Burmese family and is still the main language in their villages and in their communication with each other (Lewis, 1984:9). The Akha people have originally no written language; hence their rich heritages of history, traditions, religion and knowledge have been transferred orally. Their history exceeds 2700 years and each family have to know their ancestral lineage (respondent 3). The older generations of Akha people are able to recite the names of all of their ancestors, back to the beginning of the first Akha man (Lewis, 1984:204). Dr. Paul Lewis, an American linguist and anthropologist, developed an Akha alphabet and written script based on roman characters around 20 years ago. After that, three more written scripts have been made from different persons (respondent 3), making some confusion among Akha people about which characters to learn. Today, the written Akha language is known only among a small group of Akha people. However, much of Akha heritage is now written down in their own different language scripts.

3 Literature review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter starts with a review of the literature for this master thesis. After presenting the literature review, the theoretical framework will be drawn, for analysing the findings from my fieldwork.

3.1 Literature review

The literature review is divided into three parts. The first part deals with literature related to concepts and approaches concerned with integration of minority migratory people into majority societies. A small section is devoted to special challenges connected to indigenous people, since the primary group for this study may be considered both as migratory and indigenous. The second part reviews relevant literature of the study area, Thailand, with a special focus on Akha people. Finally, the review will look into different religions and their practises that influence current life conditions for Akha people.

3.1.1 Concepts and approaches of Integration

In our globalised world, migration is an increasing phenomenon both inside and between countries. Such migrations create numerous challenges both for the host countries and for the migratory groups. Variation in cultural, social and religious traditions and customs may produce enrichment in a society, but it may also generate conflicts and create great challenges. It can be argued that it is necessary for a society to make some consideration and adjustments to secure evolvement and protection for both the existing society and for its migratory people. The authorities are responsible for legislation, social policies, inclusion and recognition of the migrators. On the other hand, the migrators are responsible for their own actions and for adjustments to their new society. During the last decades, many different concepts and approaches of integration have been suggested, worked out and applied. In this study I have chosen to divide the approaches in two groups, based on dominating approaches that is found in modern discourses of integration debate (OECD, 2003:8). The first group is called "Models of Assimilation" and the second is called "Models of Appreciation". By Models of Assimilation is meant concepts and approaches of integration that have most of the focus on the migratory people and how they have to adapt to existing society. The Models of Appreciation leans towards societies that have equal focus on responsibility for both authorities and migrants in an integration process.

Models of Assimilation

The models of Assimilation emphasize that the concepts and approaches of integration have to keep most of the focus on the migratory people and how they have to adapt to existing majority societies (IOM, 2011:131). The models are based on societies that have homogeneous culture and set of values that from authority's point of view are not desirable to change. If citizenship is given, it is expected from authorities that every person makes a binding agreement with the state to adjust to the common nation based values and rights (OECD, 2003:8). One model belonging to the assimilation approach gives migrant people some of the rights as for ordinary citizens, however deny them others. An actual example for this attitude is states that give migratory people access to labour market, but exclude the same people from civic and political participation (OECD, 2003:8). Consequently, migrant people will lack many of the benefits of ordinary citizens, such as security and legal status.

According to models of assimilation, minority migratory people are expected to change their lifestyle and behaviour, and adjust and assimilate to the majority society (IOM, 2011:131). Furthermore, there is limited or no room for minority people to perform their ethnic, cultural and religious practises.

Critics to the models of assimilation assert that no society has a monolithic culture and a homogenous social order (OECD, 2003:4). There will always be possible to find different lifestyles, values and religions in a defined area. Consequently, it will be difficult to define exactly what the migrants are supposed to assimilate to. This aspect is certainly relevant in societies that proclaim to have an established democracy where principles such as freedom of speech, organising and religion are recognised. However, societies with strong leaders and governance may still have their focus on preserving the culture, values and religion of the majority, and have minimal tolerance for making changes to satisfy small groups of migratory people. Religion may in this respect work as a good example to identify the complexity of the model of assimilation. Religious practice can for most people not be contained in the private sphere, but have to be performed in a public sphere. Consequently, it may be impossible to fully adapt into a society that do not share or accept practices of other religions than their own.

There may be good reasons for trying to protect a society from uprooting and destroying the values which have been embedded in the society for generations. However, denying migrant people the possibility to be fully members of a society could have consequences no one would gain from. Research shows that “many migrants, some after decades of settlement, suffer economic and social disadvantages, are excluded from civic and political participation and face discrimination, racism and xenophobia” (OECD, 2003:3). Experiences show that such politics may lead to polarisation in the society, leaving migrant people in isolation, segregated from the majority people. Furthermore, this may lead to marginalisation of migratory people and using them as scapegoats in times with natural or financial setbacks. As an example, during the current financial crisis in Europe migratory people have been blamed to be the reason for the high unemployment rates (International Labour Office, 2009:2). Generally, in times when social welfare is threatened because of economical reasons, migrants often are blamed from the public (OECD, 2003:3).

Models of Appreciation

In this study I have chosen to define approaches used in societies that emphasise equal responsibility and obligation for both authorities and migrants in an integration process for models of Appreciation. Countries that go for such models are often democracies that openly accept the presence of different ethnic and racial groups, and regulate their integration politics through adequate management strategies (OECD, 2003:9). Most countries following such strategies do not recognise fully rights for minority migrants. However, they emphasise pragmatic management programs between people of different ethnic and racial background living in the same communities (OECD, 2003:9). In this regard, legislation of anti-discrimination is a vital part of the strategy. Through this legislation, possibilities open up for minority migrant people to participate in political discussions and to get access to full civil and political rights. Countries following the models of appreciation emphasise on “promoting equality in all spheres, while enabling the exercise of different cultural practices” (OECD, 2003:9). Furthermore, they stress the importance of information and communication to develop understanding and acceptance between ethnic groups. Research shows that societies in Europe following this strategy create environments that have little tension between people belonging to different ethnic groups (OECD, 2003:9). Moreover, research shows that these

minority migratory people look at themselves as fully members of their new country, even if they are belonging to an ethnical group.

It can be argued that Models of Appreciation promote inclusion of minority people into majority societies better than Models of Assimilation. Fundamental in such integration processes is the issue of equality. This means that differences in culture and religion among minority migratory people have to be accepted from the majority people (IOM, 2011:131). To secure equality it is crucial that legislation and integration policies emphasise such attitudes. However, cultural and religious practices among migratory people, which are conflicting with values in the majority society such as domestic violence and discrimination of women, cannot be accepted. Democratic societies are committed to principles about human rights and cannot encourage any activities that violate these rights. The emphasis is on encouraging and stimulating equality in all groups of citizens, and at the same time supporting the exercise of different cultural practices.

Multicultural integration policies are crucial to get a better understanding between different groups in a population. Additionally, it is important to achieve interaction, harmonisation, and recognition between different ethnical groups in a society. However, many countries have recently experienced increasing scepticism to multicultural integration policies, mainly because of terror attacks and riots triggered by cultural and religious conflicts (OECD, 2003:7). Such conflicts are difficult to erase, and has to be recognised in a multicultural approach. Plurality and diversity will certainly always exist in and between ethnical groups in a society, and in a Model of Appreciation, a multicultural approach is seen as a key factor to establish sustainable societies that emphasise cohesion and harmonisation.

Other terms that are vital in management strategies for models of assimilation are participation, interaction and inclusion. These terms are conditionally based on societies that are willing to assimilate knowledge and experience from migratory people. Therefore, these terms are seen as appropriate primarily in societies with open democracies, which have a high tolerance of diversity of views, needs and values. In societies with limited or no wishes to make changes, such terms will discourage migratory people in involving in activities connected to the local community, municipality or the state. If the circumstances are open for involvement and changes, participation from migratory people will be seen as a key factor in order to succeed with integration. Integration is best apprehended in a two-way process, with an appropriate interaction between migrants and the receiving society (OECD, 2003:5). However, even if integration is seen as a reciprocal process between the host society and minority, each host society has to develop its own practices based on economic, social and cultural characteristics. In the end, participation and interaction in all these practices will probably give the best result.

3.1.2 Indigenous challenges and strategies – special conditions and concerns

In some countries the migratory people are also ethnic minorities or indigenous people. Under these circumstances special condition and concerns often apply. Normally the term indigenous people are used for people who have occupied their land since time immemorial (Maybury-Lewis, 1997:7). However, according to Marsden (1991:24), the term can also be used for people who are marginal in their states, are dispossessed or are part of threatened minorities. Indigenous people are also often tribal, meaning “they belong to small-scale

preindustrial societies that live in comparative isolation and manage their own affairs without the centralized authority of a state” (Maybury-Lewis, 1997:54).

Indigenous people often meet challenges connected to neighbouring dominant cultures. These challenges are often associated with the dominant cultures demand for homogenizing the processes of modernization. This is in turn threatening the existence of the marginal peoples distinctive culture and life style (Marsden, 1991:24). Marsden asserts that monolithic forces guide modern development strategies to a homogenization of world cultures, which constrains the variety of cultures. He argues that strategies focusing on participation, self-reliance and dialogue are important to make sustainable development for indigenous people (Marsden, 1991:31). In his opinion, “people will be more responsive if they are central to the design and implementation of programmes that affect them and if they have made some investment or commitment to them” (Marsden, 1991:22).

Indigenous people should have the opportunity to be responsible for their own resources and gain control in the struggle for self-reliant development (Marsden, 1991:23). Local knowledge should also be recognised and accepted in the work of finding sustainable strategies. The focus ought to be on building local resources, knowledge and people, even if there may have different opinions about what is most efficient, effective and economic favourable (Marsden, 1991:34). Indigenous creativity and knowledge should be encouraged since it has its strengths closed connected to local political and cultural context (Briggs, 2005: 109).

Briggs argues that generally “people are very open to new ideas and change providing they make economic sense and are culturally acceptable” (Briggs, 2005:108). Furthermore, he argues that often the indigenous knowledge is “fluid and constantly changing, reflecting renegotiations between people and their environments” (Sillitoe, 1998 in Briggs, 2005:108).

In Asia, most countries have indigenous people. According to a special report from Human Rights Council in United Nations (UN, 2007) the situation for indigenous people in Asia is alarming. The report refers to severe breakage of human rights for indigenous people in most of the countries and denotes a lack of will from authorities to implement strategies to solve the problems. Examples of concerns from the report are discrimination and victimizing of their origin and identities, exclusion from full political participation, violation, and lack of basic rights such as education and health. The report also shows that they are marginalised regarding national development efforts and that there is a lack of regional initiatives to promote understanding and solutions for their situation. The report asserts that indigenous people in Asia are among the most discriminated in the countries where they live (UN, 2007:4-5).

In 2007 the General Assembly of United Nations managed to agree on a declaration on the rights of Indigenous people, called United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (UN, 2007). The declaration describes the individual and collective rights of indigenous people, including their rights to practice their culture, religion, and language (UN, 2007: Article 11, 12 and 13). It further ratifies indigenous people’s right to have a nationality, to have education in their own language, to have access to employment and labour law, and to have the right to both traditional and modern health service (UN, 2007: Article 6, 14, 17 and 24). UNDRIP also emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions of governance and protection of their own special relationship to their land. The declaration prohibits discrimination against indigenous people and promotes full and effective participation in all matters that concern them, and their right

to remain distinct and follow their own visions of economic and social development (UN, 2007). Maybury-Lewis asserted years ago that a declaration like this would “entail a rethinking and reorganization of most states in the world, as well as a rethinking of the ways in which economic activities are organized within them” (Maybury-Lewis 1997:56-57). Thailand was among the countries that ratified UNDRIP in 2007. However, since Thai Government still rejects seeing hill tribe people in Thailand as indigenous, the agreements from the articles have not been accomplished for these groups. According to Thai Government the hill tribe people in Thailand “are not considered to be minorities or indigenous peoples but as Thais who are able to enjoy fundamental rights and are protected by the laws of the Kingdom as any other Thai citizen” (UNHCR, 1992 in IWGIA, 2008). According to International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA, 2013), hill tribe people in Thailand and their neighbouring countries should be entitled to be recognized as indigenous people and obtained the rights from UNDRIP.

3.2 Thailand

There are some important factors that have contributed heavily in changing living conditions for the Akha people in Thailand over the last decades. These are socio-political and religious factors. Socio-political factors in this study include changes in political, social, and cultural characters. Every government has a fundamental influence in how their particular minority people are treated. Thailand is no exception. Laws and approaches from the Thai Government, especially assigned to affect the life situation for tribal people, have been implemented and some of these effects will be treated in this section. Because of the extensive topic to cover, this study will limit the area to be about socio-political aspects. These aspects will in this chapter be elucidated in the light of integration challenges for Akha people.

3.2.1 Political

One important political factor that needs to be covered is pressure from other countries (China, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia) that affected tribal people to migrate to Thailand in the first place. This includes persecution and discrimination of tribal people in their home-based countries. However, this will not be thoroughly processed in this study. More relevant for this study is looking at political factors that come from legislation and regulations made from the Thai Government. These factors are often executed, implemented and organised in cooperation with governmental – and non-governmental organisations and are processes to secure, develop and integrate tribal people into the Thai society. Another purpose is to control their activities, culture and religion.

Development programs

The Thai constitution is common for all inhabitants of Thailand. There are no laws that apply only for minority people to protect their distinctive character of language, culture and traditions. The Thai Government has during the last decades introduced several initiatives to deal with challenges connected to tribal people in Thailand, including Cabinet resolutions and Development plans (FAO, 2002:vii). In 1951 the first governmental initiative was taken to provide better welfare for tribal people, and in 1959 the Government established the National Committee for the Hill Tribes (NCHT) (FAO, 2002:5). This committee later changed name to the “Committee for the Solution of National Security Problems Involving Hill Tribes and the Cultivation of Narcotic Crops” (CSNSPIHTCNC), indicating a negative attitude from the Government to the hill tribe people. Many of the Government ministries have been involved in supporting hill tribe communities and it may be argued that the Government has done great

efforts in trying to integrate tribal people in the Thai society and to uniform them into Thai culture and traditions (FAO, 2002:5). The political initiatives have resulted in great changes in life conditions for tribal people in most areas of northern Thailand. Many of these changes have come through implementation of development programs from governmental – and non-governmental organisations. Some of the objectives that have driven these programs (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c) are to:

- Stabilize the type of residence patterns, changing from provisional to permanent villages
- Secure the livelihoods of tribal people
- Discourage and eventually replace opium production
- Discourage and stop deforestation
- Encourage tribal people to participate as citizens in the national life of Thailand

The main effort to stabilize the residence pattern has been done through developing and improving infrastructure. Roads have been built to most of the villages that have resulted in better access to them.

Education

To improve life conditions and secure livelihood for tribal people, Thai Government has introduced free and compulsory education for all Thai citizens and established many local schools in rural areas (FAO, 2002:8). The education system in Thailand is based on three types of education: formal, non-formal and informal (FAO, 2002:7). The formal education is following the normal progress for children. The non-formal plan gives more flexibility to age groups and correspond the needs of individual groups of students. Informal education is based on self-studies and is available for all age groups.

Unfortunately, it seems that there is still a long way to go before the quality of education in schools in rural areas is as good as in central areas. This situation is primarily connected to political decisions (UNDP, 2010:80) and has led to Thailand being known as one of the most unequal countries in Southeast Asia. As emphasised from UNDP (2010:80), a representation from more groups of the population in politics is required to develop the democracy in Thailand.

Thai citizenship

UNDP (2010:74) points out that the least secure people in Thailand are those without citizenship. The estimation of this group of people is 3.5 million. Many of these people also lack identification cards, which mean they have no birth certificate or documents proving who they are. There are four different segments of people within this group: ethnic minorities, migrant workers, stateless people and displaced persons (UNDP, 2010:74-75). Tribal people are included in all these groups. There are no certain numbers for how many tribal persons that have got Thai citizenship, but probably the number is around 50 % (IOM, 2011:138).

Lack of citizenship includes limitation of movements, which complicates the possibility to get work (IOM, 2011:141). People without citizenship are also unprotected by the Thai labour law, and are therefore vulnerable to exploitation. Frequently, Thai employers are giving these people low salaries and no rights to complain on work conditions. Often employers even keep their passports and work permits (IOM, 2011:141) to gain full control over their activities. According to Thai law, migrant people have to stay with their first employer. If they quit, they have only one week to find a new employer or they have to leave the country (IOM, 2011:141).

Thai law makes a distinction between citizenship and Thai nationals (IOM, 2011:135). Even if people get citizenship they are not entitled to receive all the rights that belong to Thai nationals. This distinction between people began in the late 1800s and was introduced to build a mono-ethnic nation-state (IOM, 2011:136). Originally, Thailand consisted of different ethnic groups. Many of these groups were in the process recognized as Thai nationals and included in the building of the new modern nation state. The first law was initiated in 1911 to clarify and recognize which group of people that was entitled to be Thai nationals. The principles used for this recognition were *jus sanguinis* (by parentage), *jus sol* (by birthplace) and *jus domicile* (by residence) (IOM, 2011:136). Several laws have since that time been introduced to make distinction between Thai citizens and Thai nationals with the purpose of favouring the Thai nationals. Whereas citizenship gives the right to stay in the country, to get education, to own property and to work, it does not give equal rights to i.e. public services, freedom of movement and participation in politics (IOM, 2011:135). The distinction between Thai nationality and Thai citizens creates a persons legal relationship with the State, (IOM, 2011:136).

3.2.2 Social

Hierarchy in the Thai society

Thailand has an extensive hierarchic system that is deeply rooted in the Thai society. The system permeates all parts of the society and creates huge class distinctions (UNDP, 2010:78). The hierarchic system was introduced and implemented by king Borommatrailokanat (1448-88) that issued a law that delineated a complex hierarchic society. The structure was based on land ownership that gave the system the name of *sakdi na* – “field power”. The law gave everyone a number of units and placed all citizens within the country in a ranking position based on number of *sakdi na*. The individual position and status formed the connection to civil and criminal law. For instance, a crime against someone ranked higher than one’s own position, was assessed as a more serious insult than a crime against anyone ranked lower. The reason for the law was to “regulate natural human inequality for the sake of the proper functioning of the social order” (Wyatt, 2003:62). Even if the law was abolished after four hundred years, the hierarchic system is still very much engraved in the Thai society today (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 2003:27). Power and wealth are the most important criteria in the ranking, but education, age, surname and merits are also important measures. On top of the hierarchy are the King and the Royal family, followed by a small elite group and senior levels of the Army, the Bankers, and the Civil Servants. At the lowest part of the hierarchy are the farmers and labourers who make up sixty to seventy percent of the population (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 2003:28). Even below this group in the social hierarchy, the tribal people are to be found (many of the respondents). The positions in the hierarchy are very much established and accepted among Thai people. Reasons for this are some principles that are engraved in people. One important concept is connected to karma (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 2003:28-29) and the teaching that your position in life is connected to your former life. Your previous life decides your contemporary life. A good former life therefore leads to a good present-day life, and vice versa. Believing in the karma makes it natural to accept your own position and inequity in society.

3.2.3 Cultural

The present generation of Thais consider Thailand to be an ethnically homogenous nation (IOM, 2011:76 and 131). The main reason for this stand is that Thailand during many years has practised an integration policy for minority migrants that emphasises an assimilative

approach. This approach has been stressed from all levels of authorities in Thailand and hence been adapted among its citizens. This assimilative approach underlines that it is expected from permanent migrants to Thailand to adapt to Thai culture and put aside original language and culture (IOM, 2011:131).

3.3 Religions in Thailand

The constitution of Thailand does not designate a state religion, even though Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist country. According to national statistics, 94.6% of the population are Buddhists, 4.6% are Muslims, 0.7% are Christians and 0.1% belong to other religion (CIA, 2012). However, these numbers might not be accurate. There are NGOs, academicians, and religious groups claiming that between 85 – 90 percent belongs to Theravada Buddhism and between 5 – 15 percent are Muslims (International Religious Freedom Report, 2009). In addition to these two major religions, there are groups of animist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, and Taoist. The constitution emphasises that there is religious freedom in the country and that all citizens may practise the religion they desire (International Religious Freedom Report, 2009 and Harvard, 2007). The King of Thailand is the only exception from this religious freedom, hence is obliged to be a Buddhist. At the same time the King of Thailand is the protector of religious freedom (Thai Constitutions, 2007:5) and is respected and honoured in all different religious groups.

In the continuation of this chapter I will firstly present some historical facts about Buddhism in Thailand including some important aspects of Buddhism that is relevant in connection with understanding the situation for Akha people. Then, I will introduce essential doctrines and beliefs from the Akha religion. Finally, I will look into the introduction of Christianity in Thailand and present some impacts from Christian activities.

3.3.1 Buddhism in Thailand

Brief history

No one knows the exact history of the origin of the Thai-people. Probably the Thai culture as known today has evolved from an interaction between Thai people migrating from south China and local indigenous people, evolving over a period of more than one thousand years (Wyatt, 2003:1 and Gustafson, 1970:18). Quite possibly, the Thai people from China brought Buddhism to Thailand. This tradition of Buddhism was called Mahayana Buddhism (Gustafson, 1970:25 in DeNeui, 2002:5 and Harvard, 2007). On their way to Thailand the migrating people were influenced by animistic traditions and practices from Mon-Khmer people (HRAF, 1956:26 in DeNeui, 2002:5). Animism² is an important and widespread tradition and belief system.

After establishing the Sukhothai Kingdom in 1238, the Thai kings started to invite Buddhist missionaries from Sri Lanka to Thailand in order to establish another variety of Buddhism, called Theravada. Soon Theravada Buddhism became the official religion in Thailand. Historically, King Rama Khamhaeng (1283-1317 AD) made it the official religion. However, the King and the people also continued to practise animistic religions. On top of that,

² The belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and frequently, to manipulate their power (Van Rheenen, 1991:19 in DeNeui, 2002:6).

Brahmanistic rituals from Indian Hinduism were transferred to Thailand and distinctly affected the people's way of practising their religion (DeNeui, 2002:5). Today, these conglomerates of religions constitute Buddhism in Thailand, which may be labelled Thai Folk Buddhism (DeNeui, 2002:6). The syncretism³ found in practised Thai Folk Buddhism has been challenging for scholars to map and understand (Thai Buddhism, 2002). However, it does not seem to worry ordinary Thai people. With their pragmatic view on religion, the thinking is that whatever works for them is practised (DeNeui, 2002:6).

Manifestations of the different religions are highly visible around the country. Numerous Temples show the close connection to Theravada Buddhism, and Buddhist monks are visible in the temple areas and also walking along the streets. The celebrations of holydays in Thailand are also obvious evidences for the close connection to Theravada Buddhism. All official buildings and most hotels and businesses and many private homes throughout Thailand, have spirit houses in front of their buildings. This has nothing to do with Theravada Buddhism, but is a tradition incorporated from animistic religions.

The use of spirit houses is mainly a way of honouring ones ancestors, but also to please spirits of people who used to live on a property. Offerings essentially consisting of food and drinks are given regularly to make the spirits happy. In return it is believed that the spirits will give good luck for the people in the house, their work and their business. Every village in Thailand also have their own spirit house that is maintained on behalf of all the inhabitants in the area (Globerove, 2010).

To further underline how concerned Thai Buddhist people are with spirits and chasing good luck, the faith and extensive use of amulets and tattoos are good examples. For most Thai people wearing amulets are primarily not for fashion and decoration, but primarily for protecting themselves against evil spirits and dangers (CNN, 2009). It is believed that wearing the right amulets will help the faithful carrier to become rich, healthy and successful. Selling amulets is good business in Thailand. Famous monks are "working" with the amulets to bring the spirits in to them and give them higher effect and higher value.

Tattoos have much of the same function as amulets; to protect the carrier from evil spirits and dangers, and to bring luck. Consequently, tattoos are very often formed as religious symbols. To understand the significance of these symbols for Thai people, the Minister of Culture in Thailand publicly criticized the use of tattoos with religious objects among foreigners. He asserted that such actions were inappropriate according to Thai tradition and culture and that it also may affect the faith of people toward religions (ASIAN, 2011).

Thai people in general are extremely superstitious and afraid of ghosts and spirits. Even though most comedies and movies in Thailand contain ghosts – and Thais like to watch them and laugh – in reality they are very scared of them. As a curiosity it can be mentioned that it is unthinkable for a Thai to stay alone over night at a hospital. The reason is that since a lot of people have died there, the hospitals are full of ghosts (respondent 5).

The kings have always had a great influence on people's mind-set in Thailand. They have had a high standing in the society and have united the people. The position has been like this for generations. The present King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and many kings before him, has served

³ "The amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013)

as a Buddhist monk. Due to this act he has given a strong and important example for others to follow. However, even if the kings have belonged to the Buddhism, they have continued to practice animistic religion, involving devoting to local spirits (Gustavson 1970:25 in DeNeui 2002:5). It is possible to assert that Buddhism is deeply embedded in the Thai society and among the Thai people.

Today, most Thai men spend a period of their lives in a Temple – serving as monks. The main reasons for staying in a Temple are for training in practicing Buddhism, but also for doing merits (Payutto, 2003). Visiting a Temple to do merit and ask for advice from monks is seen as an important act for every Buddhist. The main purpose of the merit is not primarily for profiting people living today, but to gain benefits for future reincarnation or give benefits for people who are already dead (DeNeui, 2002:8).

Even if Thailand has no state religion, the influence from Buddhism throughout the educational system is substantial. All public schools start every day with the children lining up for paying respect to the King, the Kingdom of Thailand and to Buddhism. Together with the Temples, the public schools are the place where the Buddhist teaching takes place. Monks are often seen in the premises of the schools and have an important role during ceremonies. Monks are also attending private ceremonies like opening of buildings, weddings and funerals. Temples and monks are also being used to community building and education centres in rural areas, where the emphasis is on teaching language and religion.

Buddhist Teaching

The Buddhists do not have a theology and a practise they agree on. The main reason for this is that they do not have one text that is approved by all practioners, like the Bible or the Koran. However, most Buddhist agrees on the life of Buddha and his fundamental teaching about the four noble truths, five moral laws, ten karmas, and reincarnation (Cioccolanti, 2007:37). For this study it is not essential to go deeper into this teaching. The important aspect is that Thai Folk Buddhism is deeply rooted in the Thai society and that it is expected that all Thai people should follow the rules of the fundamental teaching of Buddha and participate in Buddhist ceremonies conducted in private homes, working places and communities.

3.3.2 Akha indigenous religion

Akha people have no word for “Religion”. However, the Akha people have a religious philosophy called the “Akha Way” or “Akhazangr”. Akhazangr permeates every aspect of their lives, including all their traditions and ceremonies, and what they believe in (Lewis, 1984:222). Since Akha had no written language, Akhazangr has orally been handed over from generation to generation, from parents to children. Akhazangr describes in detail Akha culture and includes characteristics of practise life at all levels (Geusau, 1992 in MPCD/SEAMP, 2002:1). This includes arrangements about laws and regulations, traditional knowledge about flora and fauna, cultivation of their fields, hunting, cutting down forests and growing rice. It also includes manner about how to treat people and how to perform ceremonies (Geusau, 1992:146). Akhazangr has laws and rites for most human activities, even for sickness and death (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002a). Akha people traditionally believed that good health and luck in life would happen to people who diligently follow Akhazangr (Lewis, 1984:237).

God and Heaven

The Akha religion is monotheistic in the sense that they believe that a great powerful God, “Apoe Miyeh”, created man and the earth (Lewis, 1984:222 and Akha Heritage Foundation,

2012). The followers of Akha religion believe that “Apoe Miyeh” still is active and has his power. Through his power the crops will grow and the people can live safely. They try not to insult “Apoe Miyeh” in any way. After death they believe that everybody is going to God’s land, where they will meet all their relatives. For some people there is a complicated way to God’s land. This includes people who have died a violent death, people who did not have anyone to care for them and children who died before they were born or shortly after. These groups of people are believed to have to stay in two different villages, outside God’s land, before they can enter it. Sometimes a purification ceremony for the body also has to be performed (Lewis, 1984:237). Acting bad or being a bad person does not disqualify anyone from entering God’s land (Akha Heritage Foundation, 1991).

Ancestor and Spirits

Ancestors and Spirits play an important role in Akhazangr. Akha people see themselves as a part of the chain between the ancestors and the progenies, and the relationship has to be looked after. Through regular offerings they are taking care of each other: the offerings “feed” the ancestors so they in turn will “feed” or care for the family” (Lewis, 1984:222). Normally, the offering consists of food and drinks, forming a meal that the family and their ancestors can join together. There are twelve mandatory times for offerings, where New Year, the village sawing ceremony, rice planting and rice harvest are the most important.

The relationship with unseen spirit forces also has to be cared for. Originally, human beings and these spirits lived together in harmony. According to Akha myth, conflicts arouse between the parties and they agreed on separating. People should live in the villages and spirits in the jungle. A village gate should divide the areas between the parts. These gates are still used and regarded as sacred and are replaced every year. If they are touched by anyone, the offenders are fined and a special offering is needed to purify the gates. Akha people may also feel vulnerable when entering the jungle, because it is the domain of the spirits.

Akhazangr divides between “inside spirits” and “outside spirits”. Inside spirits may haunt people and lead to affliction. Ceremonies advised by a ”specialist”⁴ then have to be performed to please the spirits. Outside spirits are often connected to trees, rocks and water. They are harmless for people if nothing wrong is done to the objects (Lewis, 1984:226). However, fear is present for many Akha people, and ceremonies and offerings are performed in order to protect their families and communities from the anger of restless ancestors and spirits. Every village has connections with a “specialist” that has the knowledge to communicate, consult and deal with the spirits. They are paid with food and money for their services (Lewis, 1984:227).

Even though it may seem that offerings made by people belonging to Thai Folk Buddhists and Akha religion have much in common, there are different ideologies. Buddhists are giving gifts to monks or temples to receive advantages primarily for the next life. However, offerings from persons belonging to Akha religion are given to gain favour from the spirits in present life, and often to take away an affliction caused by a spirit because of an offence committed (Tambiah, 1970:270 in DeNeui, 2002:8).

⁴ There is no satisfactory English translation for this position in the Akha culture. There are two different types of specialists that have learned how to consult with the spirits and manipulate them to some extent. The first, called *pi ma*, is always a male. He chants incantation and makes offerings to the spirits. The second type of specialist, either male or female, is a *shaman*, chosen by the spirits and given special powers to communicate with them. The main function of a shaman is that of healing (Lewis 1984:227).

3.3.3 Christianity in Thailand

Brief history

Today, large group of Akha people in Thailand have converted to Christianity. The first Christian missionaries entered Thailand in 1518. Thailand accepted Westerners coming for trade and mission until the end of next century. After that, in a period of about 100 years, Thailand was closed for European people. In 1780 the borders reopened for Westerners and missionaries started entering the country again. Few Thai people converted to Christianity, but the contribution of modern scientific knowledge and western medicine was significant (Youth With A Mission International, 2013). Christian Churches in Thailand did not begin to grow noteworthy until the 1970s. Today, Thai Government limits the number of foreign missionaries that are allowed to work in the country, and recognizes only five Christian organisations. These umbrella organisations are The Catholic Mission of Bangkok (Roman Catholic), The Church of Christ in Thailand (Protestant), The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (Protestant), Saha Christchak (Baptist) and The Seventh-day Adventist. Even though the number of foreign missionaries and Christian organisations are restricted, unregistered religious organisations and missionaries are allowed to work freely (Youth With A Mission International, 2013). Albeit hard efforts by Christian missionaries during many years, they have not succeeded much in converting ordinary Thai Buddhist people to Christianity. However, they have had more progress among tribal people in the north. Today, a significant number of the around 0,7% Christians in Thailand belong to tribal people living in the north of Thailand (Harvard, 2007).

Paul H. DeNeui (2002:8) asserts that the main reason for lack of success in converting Thai people to Christianity was the method being used. Western missionaries tend to use a western rationalist approach instead of make consideration about people's wishes and needs. Doctrines are important in a Western mind, and answers on questions starting with "why" are essential to try to find answers to. For a Buddhist a set of practices (rites, chants, symbolism of Buddhism) is more important than answers to questions about origin of the universe, demons, mankind or karma. The emphasis is more on death and next life then on what is happening in this life (DeNeui, 2002:8).

Christianity and the Missionaries influence in Akha communities

When it comes to Akha people and Akha religion, it may be argued that the Akha people are more concerned with issues about here and now than Thai Buddhists (DeNeui 2002:8). Akha religion is also more concerned about aspects of a powerful God and heaven, then Thai Buddhists. These aspects from Akha religion are corresponding with important aspect in Christian faith, hence it may be easier to grasp the Christian gospel for people belonging to Akha religion then to Buddhism. Consequently, missionaries' work led to an understanding of the new religion and a converting of many Akha people to Christianity. In Thailand today, there are probably more people from Akha people belonging to Christianity than to the Akha traditional religion or to Buddhism (respondent 3).

Christian missionaries from many different countries and denominations have been working with converting Akha people from their traditional religion to Christianity. According to some scholars (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c:13 and MPCD/SEAMP, 2002b: 4), some of the methods that have been used and are being used may be criticised. They claim that uneducated people have been persuaded and lured to convert to Christianity through promises of a better future, prosperity, development, free education for their children, scholarship for children and

citizenship. They also assert that missionaries have threatened them with hell for not following their teaching about Christianity. Others claim that converting to Christianity has led to moral uprooting among Akha people, followed by prostitution and introduction of HIV and AIDS (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c:13). The reason for this negative effect is said to be that traditional Akha moral laws and penalties are much stricter than Christian moral and the central teaching of forgiveness.

Another reason for Akha people to leave their strong culture and religion for a Western religion are of economical character. Expensive and complicated rituals, including sacrificing of animals, made it difficult for poor people to accomplish the ceremonies (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002:13). Even shortage of pigs and chickens to do the offerings demanded from Akhazangr came up as a significant problem (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002:16). Since Christianity does not involve such heavy and difficult economic burdens, it is for that reason seen as a more suitable religion for some Akha people.

In many Akha villages there are characteristic symbols of the arrival of different Christian denominations and the lack of cooperation between them. Small villages consisting of less than 30 families might have two or even three different church buildings – belonging to different denominations. Consequently, the influx from missionaries has led to conflicts and separation between families and neighbours (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c). On the other hand, Christian churches and organisations, have strongly contributed to develop villages and to educate people. This education includes both practical knowledge about issues such as health, agriculture, and sanitation, but also theoretical teaching about common knowledge and how to read and write (respondents 3).

Christian missionaries have also composed an Akha alphabet and made it possible for Akha people to write down their traditions and wisdom. The written language has helped the older generation in teaching the younger generations to pursue Akha culture. The Bible is also now translated into Akha language, and makes it easier for missionaries to teach the Christian gospel. However, many missionaries have been considering animism as a lower form of religion (DeNeui, 2002:7) and have through this view done wrong to their culture and traditions. Consequently, Christian missionaries have been accused of destroying Akha culture and religion (MPCD/SEAMP, 2002c).

3.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the view that a conglomerate of factors is important for a successful integration process. In this specific context I will consider these factors connected to opportunities and constraints regarding the integration of the minority Akha people into the Thai society. The integration is crucial for Akha people's social and economic development.

The model for the theoretical framework is formed as a pyramid. The reason for this choice is that the factors connected to the integration process are closely linked together and are building on each other. However, these factors follow in different orders, depending on which groups to embrace. Thai authorities, civil society, non-governmental organizations and Akha people are all groups that may be included in a integration process, thus be a part of this model. In this model Thai authorities must be responsible for the steps that form the content in the pyramid to secure good **integration** for Akha people into the Thai society. The top of the pyramid is acceptance. The model shows that acceptance of Akha people from Thai authorities is the starting point for their participation in the Thai society. Through **participation** they may contribute in making changes in the Thai society all the way to laws and legislations.

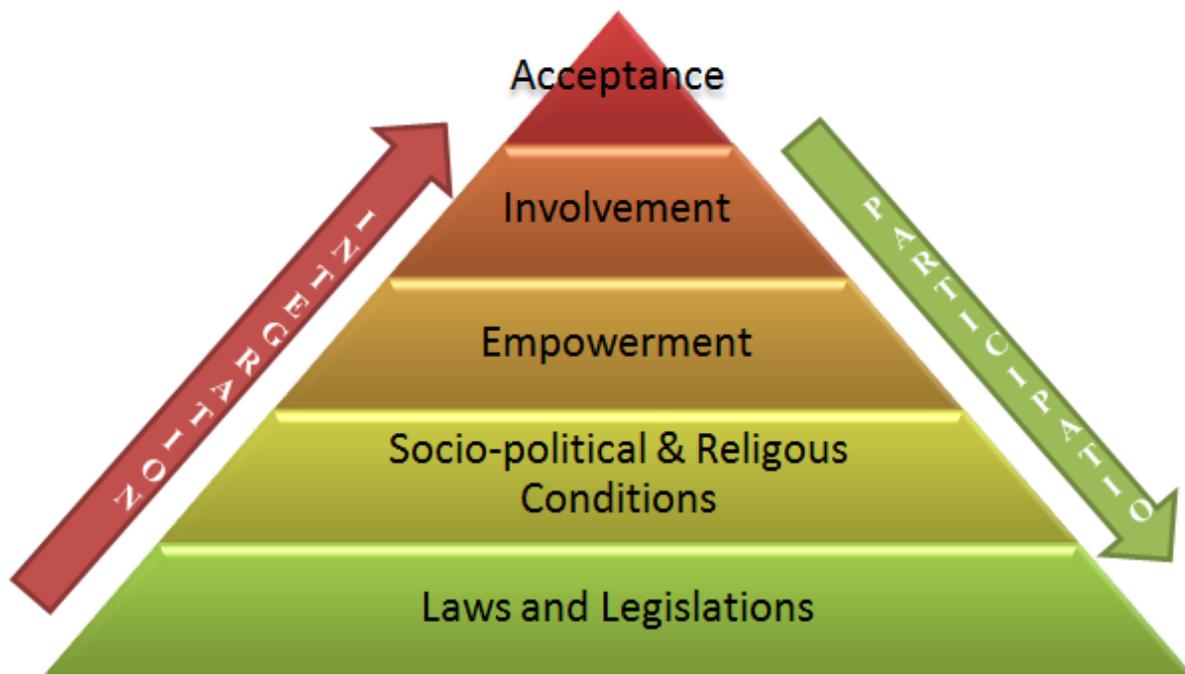


Figure 3: Model of Theoretical Framework

Laws and legislations

Laws and legislations must be seen as the two most important factors forming the platform for a successful integration process. Relevant aspects regarding these topics are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.2.1 and under Political factors in Chapter 5.1.1.

Socio-political and religious factors

The emphasis in this study is on socio-political and religious factors. Socio-political conditions, explained by political, economic, social and cultural factors, are normally recognised as important factors in any integration process and are often well elucidated. Religious factors, however, have been less prioritized and have scarcely been examined and explained. In this model, all steps are considered crucial to secure a comprehensive integration process. An important premise of this present study is that personal faith and religious activities and practises affect people's attitudes and behaviours, and that it is important to study and document these processes (Bistandsaktuelt, 2010, ACT, 2008, Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, 2010). A well-functioning integration process should be attentive to local people's faith and religious practises as this may result in a higher motivation and participation and thereby achieve better results than approaches which do not take these factors into consideration. The theoretical framework is based on the importance of socio-political and religious factors and the importance for authorities to arrange these factors so that a feasible integration for minority people into majority society is facilitated.

Empowerment

In an integration process of indigenous tribal people into a majority society, there will certainly be issues that may create conflicts between the migrants and the authorities. Migrant tribal people naturally want the opportunity to create environments where they can protect, conserve and maintain their specific indigenous heritage, such as culture, language, and religion. Authorities, however, will often be more concerned with protecting existing culture and society than arrange for what they may consider to be unfamiliar and strange form of expressions. Consequently, there will be many issues for authorities to consider when creating their integration policies. The political management might in this regard profit from giving consideration and respect to indigenous peoples distinctive characteristics. Empowerment for Akha people is regarded to be an expected consequence from acceptable laws and legislation in combination with good socio-political and religious conditions. Empowerment is also an important and necessary mechanism for migratory people to develop interests in the integration process.

Indigenous people, on the other hand, have to take responsibility for their own actions and involve themselves in all levels of the majority society. Without a successful integration in the Thai society, there is a risk for indigenous tribal people to loose their heritage and roots, and at the same time remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Without a proper integration tribal people will most certainly continue to struggle with poverty, unemployment and other problems raised by FAO (2002:viii).

Involvement

On the basis of adequate laws and legislation, reasonable socio-political and religious conditions and enforced empowerment, Thai authorities may foster involvement from tribal people.

Acceptance

Decent and engaged involvement from representative Akha people may change Thai people's attitudes toward tribal people and view on integration. Acceptance is a key word in this concern. Other attitudes that are important and may be achieved in this integration process both among people in the majority society and the migrant minority people are respect, equality and consideration.

Participation

Participation from Akha people in the Thai society may be seen as a key factor for developing a good integration process. This theoretical model assesses that acceptance of Akha people from Thai authorities and ethnic Thai people are necessary. Acceptance will lead to increased involvement in the Thai society. Empowerment may be deduced from suitable laws and legislation in combination with acceptable socio-political and religious conditions. Empowerment for Akha people can also be achieved from acceptance and increased involvement. Through empowerment, Akha people may be enabled to affect socio-political and religious conditions, and finally laws and legislation.

The theoretical framework for this research is consequently concerned with efforts from both the majority society and the minority people to build a feasible integration strategy that secures a social and economic development for Akha people.

4 Methodology

This chapter describes the different types of methods that were chosen for this research. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is a brief discussion about using quantitative or qualitative methods, while the second part describes the different methods that are chosen to form the methodology, and the reasons for the choices. It also includes procedures for data collection, analysis, process of findings and the most important challenges and limitations connected to the chosen methods.

4.1 General methodology discussion

In this section I will briefly discuss the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods that are used in social studies and look at the strengths and weaknesses connected to each of them.

To accomplish this study it has been essential to assess different approaches since different methods may lead to different findings. There is an on-going debate about advantages and disadvantages in using qualitative versus quantitative research methods in social sciences and which one of them that are best suited for each study. Silverman (2001:25) emphasizes that research engaged in exploring people's lives, history and everyday behaviour favour the use of a qualitative method. Bryman (2008:385) is in support of this view when pointing out that qualitative research is concerned with seeing the situation through the eyes of the people being studied. However, critics towards qualitative research emphasize that the method might be too subjective, especially when relationships between researcher and subjects are established through the most common data collecting methods such as interviews, participant observations and focus groups. Based on this, some scholars even conclude that the qualitative method is non-scientific and therefore invalid (Berg, 1998:2). Berg states that undoubtedly some qualitative studies are conducted inadequately, but underlines that this is not a legitimate reason to disqualify qualitative methods. He emphasises that qualitative and quantitative methods may supplement each other. As quantitative research is concerned with measurements and numbers, qualitative research refers to "the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things" (Berg, 1998:3).

Some scholars criticize qualitative methods for lack of transparency, especially connected to procedures for sampling and analysis (Bryman, 2008:392). According to Bryman (2008:392), these charges are no longer valid since qualitative researchers have already addressed the accusations of lack of transparency. A more proper criticism of qualitative research may be that a qualitative study is very hard to replicate. Each study is affected and coloured by the researcher own opinions and values, and the interpretation of the data is therefore in risk of subjective leanings (Bryman, 2008:391). This, and the lack of standard procedures, makes qualitative research is difficult (Bryman 2008:391).

On the other hand, critics of quantitative research argue that it is not possible for social science to be truly objective, since the social world consists of human beings that are interpreting their surroundings (Bryman, 2008:159). Hence social sciences need other research methods than natural sciences, because the social reality "*has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it*" (Schutz, 1962:59 in Bryman, 2008:16). Another critic against quantitative research is that the amount of trust in their methods may cause them to lose connection with the respondents' everyday life (Bryman, 2008:159). As an example, self-completion questionnaires may in some studies be

used in a way where researchers have little control over whether the respondents understand the questions as intended. Additionally, Blumer (1956:685) underpins the possibility for misinterpretation of relationship between variables when people's social setting is omitted. Nonetheless, quantitative research is often regarded as more objective than qualitative research, and provides therefore important contributions in understanding the social world.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, often referred to as mixed methods, may be considered as a possibility to a capitalization of strengths and an offsetting of weaknesses. However, Bryman (2008:603) emphasizes that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods may provoke some controversies, and challenge the validity of the findings. There are scholars claiming that the two methods are incompatible since they are based on different epistemological principles; where quantitative has positivism and qualitative leans towards interpretivism (Bryman, 2008:606). On the other hand, Bryman (2008:606) refers to a technical version of the discourse, stating that the two strategies are highly compatible, hence feasible and desirable.

The research approach proposed in this paper supports the view that the qualitative and quantitative research strategies are compatible and complementing each other. This research therefore uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative method. The combinations of the two methods were assessed to create an enhanced credibility for the findings of the research, which is outlined by Bryman (2008:620). This choice was seen as useful in this research because of the complexity of respondents and stakeholders involved in the case. Firstly, different categories of respondents were to be heard, both Thai citizens and Akha people, to get their opinion in aspects such as view on integration of minority people in the society, how aware they are of equality, if they have registered any changes in recent times and how improvements can be made. These issues correspond directly with the main research questions and the first sub-question (Cpt 1.4). In Chapter 4.2.2, I describe how I have used both qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain their opinions. These groups were interviewed about how Akha culture and religion affect life situation, acceptance and integration into the Thai society. The issues correspond with the second main research question and the second sub-question. Next, representatives from local authorities, and key persons from NGO's were asked about their experience in working with Akha people and about information regarding governmental efforts. They were interviewed about socio-political conditions in the Thai society, Akha culture and religion and influence from Buddhism and Christianity. They were also asked about how these conditions affect the life conditions and integration for Akha people. These issues correspond with both main research questions and all three sub-questions. Only qualitative methods were used to obtain information from these sources.

As already described, the nature of this research considers both qualitative and quantitative methods to be highly relevant and emphasizes that a combination of the two methods is needed to achieve the best end result. Quantitative methods may reveal relationship between important variables to secure that adequate information is obtained. This data may be difficult to get only from using qualitative methods. For instance if there is a close relationship between age and view on egalitarianism, this could be difficult to reveal in qualitative research, hence some data might be omitted. On the other hand, if using only quantitative method, findings from in-depth interviews and focus groups will be missing. This could be information such as cultural, religious and local circumstances that effect people's life. These factors have to be considered important in exploring different opinions on integration. Consequently, only use of quantitative method in this research is considered insufficient.

4.2 Applied Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to conduct this study, with emphasize on qualitative methods. Data from both primary and secondary sources has been elaborated. Data from secondary sources has been gathered from literature and official statistics, and primary data have been obtained from interviews in Akha communities and with key informants and stakeholders from development actors and public offices. The literature review has revealed a lack of existing research related to the importance of religious factors in the integration debate. This fact is vouching for an inductive approach for the relationship between theory and research and will consequently be employed.

This section will continue to describe the methodology and specific methods that are chosen for this study. It also explains the procedures of sampling, data collection and data analysis that are used. Finally, it will account for some limitations and challenges concerning the used methods.

4.2.1 Research design

According to Bryman (2004:33) there are five main types of research design: Experimental design, cross-sectional or survey design, longitudinal design, case study design, and comparative design. As a framework for this research a case study design was chosen. This design is appropriate when researchers are concerned with in-depth elucidation of a situation (Bryman, 2008:54). A case study design will in this research help to carefully explore the livelihoods for the Akha people and their opinions about integration challenges in Thailand. It will also reveal some viewpoints from ethnic Thai people who are responsible for businesses in the province of Chiang Rai. These opinions and viewpoints correspond with the main research questions (Cpt 1.4). A case study design does not need a theory testing or a specific hypothesis. This research was conducted through first gathering information and after that forming a theory.

4.2.2 Data collection methods

The most common methods in quantitative research are structured interviews and questionnaires. Qualitative research favour more unstructured interviewing methods, observations and focus groups. In this section I will present the methods I used when conducting this study.

Interviews

All the interviews in this study were conducted personally. In some cases the interviewees did not speak English or Thai, only Akha language. In those situations three persons were present the whole time during the interviews; the interviewee, the interpreter and I. When interviewing people in Akha villages, Akha students and Thai business managers, questionnaires were used. A sample of the correct questionnaire was handed out to let the interviewee read the questions themselves. Thereafter the interviewee answered each and every question while the interpreter and I were present. This was done to secure that all the questions were understood correctly and that the forms were filled out properly. Some of the interviewees were illiterate, hence the interpreter helped to fill out the answers.

Some of the questions in the questionnaire were the same for all the three categories. The reason for this choice was to have the possibilities to classify and compare the answers between the groups, and use quantitative methods to find good outcomes. Several of the

questions gave alternatives for the interviewees to choose from. Some of the questions in the questionnaire had a qualitative character and some had a quantitative character. This approach secured the use of quantitative methods in the findings. The combination of qualitative and quantitative questions in the same questionnaire worked satisfactory. This method was more time-consuming than letting each person fill out their own questionnaire, since I had to be present at all time. However, I assessed this method to gather the best and most precise information for the study because of the possibilities to get close to the interviewees.

Even if the people in Akha villages, Akha students and Thai business managers received questionnaires with some closed questions, the interview could be characterized as semi-structured interviews. The main reason for this argument is that some of the questions were open-ended and led to follow-up questions and a dialogue. An open-ended question means that the respondents may reply in whatever way they want (Bryman, 2008:231). This semi-structured interview method combines the possibilities for the interviewees to respond freely, while also fulfilling my requirements of having specific questions answered (Bryman, 2008:438). Since some of the questions in this research are considered sensitive, open-ended questions were used to secure a passable dialogue, hence this method gives room for explanatory responses. As open questions may lead to long answers, it is of great importance to provide a suitable schedule for the interviews (Bryman, 2008:438). Semi-structured interviews also give the researcher the option to use follow-up questions to enhance the possibilities of illuminating more angles of incidences. However, answers to follow-up questions may lead in different directions and be hard to summarize. Some of the interviewees were not familiar with interviews and faced the situation deviant. This might have affected the answers given. Bryman (2008:466) emphasises that in depth interviews may reveal issues that only can be found when asking follow-up questions. In this study it was of great importance to have the possibility to follow-up questions, to secure that all of them was correctly understood and to get supplementary information about interviews prospective on all the issues raised.

Participant observation

One of the categories interviewed for this study was students from the Akha hill tribe. The main reason for this choice was to reveal any differences in opinions between the older and younger generation of Akha people. Very few students live in the rural villages in the mountains because of the long distance to high schools, vocational schools, colleges and universities. The best place to meet students was at children's homes, managed by non-governmental foundations. In one of these children's homes a participant observation was used before conducting the individual interviews with the students. The children's home that was chosen lies in the outskirts of Chiang Rai city and is home for around 80 children and youths from different hill tribes, but mainly from the Akha hill tribe. During the last decade I have been visiting this home every year. Because of my many visits to this children's home and my relationship to the children and management, it was easy to get contact with the children and explain the intension for my visit and for my study. Bryman (2008:465-466) points out that participant observation is in general valuable to increase the researcher's understanding of people's way of living and the reason behind their thoughts and behaviour. Presence and involvement in daily life tasks and activities may also create trust and gain access to deviant and hidden activities. My use of participant observation increased the ability in conducting the semi-structured and in-depth interviews among the students. Participant observation may give a feeling of invading people's privacy, hence affect the way they behave and give answers. Despite this risk, participant observation was in this research most certainly contributing with valuable information to the study about reasons for their behaviour

and their answers. The students at the children's home did not seem to feel embarrassed of living at the premises of the foundation instead of in their homes in their villages. On the contrary, they spoke openly about their background and expressed gratitude about having the possibility to live in a safe environment. During my stay at the children's home, I participated in most of their activities. I also visited them at their school to observe their behaviour with their peers.

Focus group

To collect data from another category, I chose to use focus groups. Focus group discussions (FGD) emphasize interaction between participants' opinions while the interviewer has the role of a moderator (Bryman, 2008:475). This technique is relevant for this study because it allows people to probe and argue for each other's stances, and provoke interesting views and opinions between them. The method was used in only one of the Akha villages because of practical reasons. In two of the villages it was not possible to gather enough people to form a proper focus group. Since the dialogue was in Akha language, the interpreter had to translate everything in to English, causing a lot of small breaks in the discussion. Following such debates that may occur in a focus group, researchers may achieve a wider understanding of what people actually think (Bryman, 2008:475). A disadvantage of this method is that the researchers have less control over the progress, where dominant persons may limit others opinions or provoke "right" answers. Being aware of this possibility of dominant persons, the focus group in the Akha village was governed in a way that everyone could express their opinions and no one was able to dominant the group. The discussion in the focus group gave valuable information about the life in the village, about reasons for converting to Christianity, for consequences of the converting and for challenges for Akha people to integrate into the Thai society. Taking notes during the discussion was a great challenge, especially when people were talking over each other. Depending on the discussion being translated by the interpreter made the use of the method even more challenging. Transcription of the notes was also difficult and time consuming, and had to be done immediately after ending of the focus group to secure that all information were processed correctly.

4.2.3 Sampling

The composition of samples is of great importance to secure a reliable and valid end result. Inadequate respondents may provide incorrect findings and affect the outcome. For this study it was essential to select representative Akha villages and to find an appropriate selection of residents for interviewing in those villages. Akha people are spread over a large geographical area and it was necessary to make choices for which categories of respondents to involve in the study. For instance, diverse Akha communities have had different development regarding religion and it was important to make a decision about which categories of respondents to select. Most of the Akha villages in Thailand have converted to Christianity, but still there are some villages that keep to the traditional Akha religion. In pluralistic cultures like the Akha culture, it is often normal that every inhabitants of the village follows the choices made by the Headman. That means that if the Headman converts to a new religion, everyone else in the village often follows him. In some of the villages different religions existed side by side. In this study I wanted to see if there were any differences in view between the religions when it came to integration. To gather this information representatives for the different religious groups were interviewed. Three Akha villages in the Chiang Rai province were chosen, after consulting a local Akha that was familiar with the area and that had been working to improve life conditions for Akha people for many years. From each of the villages people were selected from criteria's such as age, gender and denomination. In the first Akha village I

chose to make interviews, all the people had converted to Christianity. The second one was a mix of Akha people belonging to Akha religion, Christianity and Buddhism. In the third village all the interviewees were involved with only Akha religion. All the interviews from these villages were conducted with questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Most of the interviews were conducted in their homes, but in one village it was more convenient to find a proper meeting place because a focus group were formed after the individual interviews were finished.

The study soon revealed that Akha integration into the Thai society was an essential issue. Interviewing different age groups were assessed as important to reveal if there were different perceptions of integration between the younger and older generation in the Akha group. For this reason, also young people in the main sample interviews had to be included. Since, however, most of the older children and youth from the villages were staying at hostels or children's homes closer to schools in central areas, it was natural to visit one of the children's homes to do a participant observation and make interviews with some of the students there. Opinions of the students were considered as important to provide significant information about possible divergent points of view between the older and younger generation of Akha people. Akha students coming from two different children homes, going to vocational schools and a university were selected. Both boys and girls were selected to take part in the study. From one of the children's homes the interviews were conducted at a café in Chiang Rai city centre. For the other group the interviews were conducted at the premises for the home, combined with a participant observation.

Most of the questions from the questionnaires were the same for the students as for the adults, but some questions were omitted and others added to make an adequate form. All of the interviews were conducted in the same way as for the adults, meaning it was a combination of filling out a questionnaire and doing a semi-structured interview at the same time.

To reveal any discrepancies between Akha people and ethnic Thai people, some Thai businesses were chosen to see if the perceptions from ethnic Thai people were congruent with the view of Akha people. Thai businesses in the central area of Chiang Rai city centre were chosen. Some challenges connected to these interviews will be described in the next section.

4.2.4 Data collection

The period of mid November to mid December 2011 was used for a preliminary study. At that time I was in Chiang Rai preparing the research. Different people engaged with hill tribe people were enquired about my study and gave me some advice and suggestions for the fieldwork. Intentionally only Akha people were supposed to be interviewed, because the study was about their life situation and their experience with the Thai society. However, my findings in the preliminary study were that other categories of respondents were important to interview to make a broader picture of the situation. Among these other respondents were managers from foundations for children, managers at Thai businesses, local headmen and people engaged in improving life conditions for hill tribe people. During the period of the preliminary study, different questionnaires were prepared and customized to the different target groups. The questionnaires were pre-tested with one Akha woman, a Thai businessman and two children at one of the children's homes. During the pre-testing it became clear that some modifications had to be done to clarify some of the questions regarding religion, equality and view of integration. The main problem was to clarify the word "integration".

There is no exact translation of that word in Thai or Akha languages, and it was therefore important to explain the meaning correctly.

The main data collection was carried out from the beginning of January to the end of February 2012. The first interviews were conducted with people engaged in improving hill tribe people's life conditions. The managing director at Chiang Rai hill tribe museum gave basic and useful information about the history of hill tribe people and about what were, in his opinion the greatest challenges for hill tribe people today. After that, several managers at foundations where Akha children lived were interviewed and gave a broader picture of the situation. Included in this category of respondents were people from the Akha hill tribe, ethnic Thai people and one person from United States of America. They were interviewed to get their opinions about the possibilities for tribal people to integrate into the Thai society and which challenges they saw as crucial. Religious issues were also discussed, together with Akha culture, language and traditions.

One Headman in a local Thai village, which recently had experienced an influx of Akha people, was interviewed about his opinion about his new neighbours. Finally, a well-educated Akha woman was interviewed. She was born in a poor animist family, but raised at a children's home where she became a Christian. She did well at school and had finished bachelor and master degree from universities in Thailand and had graduated from a university in United States of America with a PhD in justice. She was now working for Thailand Department of Justice in Bangkok, where also the interview was done

The first interviews including questionnaires were conducted in a village called Huaysan, in sub-district Maelao, in the province of Chiang Rai. This is a Christian Akha village 30 km from the centre of Chiang Rai city. This village was one of the oldest Akha villages in Thailand. Only adult persons were interviewed. All of them had converted from Akha religion to Christianity during their lifetime. The interviews were conducted with a combination of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. When all of the interviews were carried out, a focus group for the same people were established. Most of the interviews were carried out in Akha language and with interpreter. The interpreter was fluent in Akha, Thai and English languages.

The second round of interviews was conducted in a village called Pamee, in sub-district Maechan, in the province of Chiang Rai. This is an Animist village, 50 km from the centre of Chiang Rai city. In the village it was a few families that recently had converted to Buddhism or Christianity. Only adult persons were interviewed and all of the interviews were conducted in their homes. The interviewing was a combination of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were carried out using the Akha language and with interpreter.

The third part of the study was done in a village called Maedtoe, in sub-district Maechan, in the province of Chiang Rai. This is an Animist village, 80 km from the centre of Chiang Rai city where all the inhabitants belonged to Akha religion. Only adult persons were interviewed and also in this case all of the interviews were conducted in their homes. The interviewing followed the same standard as for the other villages, a combination of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The same interpreter was used in this village.

After finishing the interviews in the Akha villages, I started to interview the younger Akha people. I stayed approximately two weeks in one of the children's home to do observations. Six of the students from this children's home were interviewed by filling out the

questionnaires in addition to using semi-structured interviews. Most of the interviews I conducted myself using Thai language. One of the staff that could communicate in both Thai and English was present to help me with the interviewing if some of the questions had to be explained more properly for the students. None of the students were able to communicate in English. The interviews with students from the other children's home were conducted at a café in Chiang Rai city centre. There were six students present and the same procedure was used in this case. I conducted the interviews myself and had an assistant that could help with language barriers. All of the twelve students were born in rural Akha villages, but were raised in Christian foundations where they also were given education. Some of the students were orphanages.

After finishing the interviews with the Akha people, I started to interview managers in Thai businesses. The main reason for interviewing these people was to get a view on the perception of ethnic Thai peoples opinion on tribal people, about equality and their possibilities to integrate fully in the Thai society. Different work places were chosen, all of them employing local staff from Chiang Rai. Some of the businesses needed staff with proper education. The smallest business had five employees and the largest one around 300. I got some help to find the first businesses from one manager at a children's home. He followed me around and introduced me to some of the managers at some businesses. After that the Thai business managers recommended other businesses for me, using the "snow-ball" method. All the interviews were conducted with use of a combination of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted using Thai and English, depending on the interviewee's language skills. Most of the managers for Thai businesses that I visited were sceptic about being interviewed since they did not want to be identified in the study. None of them had any experience of being interviewed as part of a study before, and questions were asked about my connection to authorities. I had to underline that no names of interviewees were mentioned in the study and that everyone could feel safe for not being recognized in any documents that I would produce. When the manager from the foundation followed me around and introduced me for the businesses, I was easier accepted then when I went around by myself. The manager was a male, Thai person, and not belonging to any of the tribes. It was important not to bring any Akha persons along to the interviews with Thai business people, as I assumed this might have coloured the answers from the interviews.

I made different questionnaires for the different categories of respondents. One sample was made for the Akha adults, another one for Akha students, and a third one for Thai businesses. Some of the questions were the same, about religion, equality and integration. The Thai businesses were asked about tribal people in general, not only Akha people. The main reason for this was that there are several hill tribes in the Chiang Rai province. The questionnaires for all the interviews (Appendix 2,3 and 4) were exploring information about personal background, view on religion, and perception of integration and equality. All the questionnaires were translated from English to Thai before conducting the interviews.

The Akha research assistant was present during all resident interviews with Akha people. For each interview, I introduced myself in English, and my research assistant translated to the Akha language. The interviewees were told that they did not have to answer all the questions if they felt uncomfortable or was unsure. It was a great advantage that the research assistant was fluent in Thai, Akha and English languages, hence could explain about the research and topics in the local language. The assistant translated every sentence in the interviews to English, and gave me the possibility to follow up questions. No one of the interviewees was skilled in the English language and only a few were skilled in Thai.

4.2.5 Data analysis

Data found from the literature review, interviews, focus group and participant observation were properly systemized and analysed to achieve a good end result. Regarding analysing existing literature on the topic, reliability and validity of the documents was important to explore properly. Articles and research regarding religion and integration are in great risk of being coloured from authors' own affection. The same goes for literature provided from religious organisations and foundations that are in a position where they have to defend their presence and work methods. Consequently, the literatures have a risk of being biased and have to be critically reviewed. My own background with a master in Theology was useful in the understanding of the literature connected to religion, because of my experience with different religious scriptures.

Data received from semi-structured interviews was transcribed from notes. A voice tape was not used during the interviews as I assessed it was sufficient to make notes. A summary of each interview was made, including details of time, place and notable issues. Data received from the interviews was further transcribed and coded. The transcribing was a very time-consuming task, especially for the interviews conducted in Akha language because of the language barrier. The interpreter was involved in this process to secure a right understanding of the answers, even if everything was translated during the interviews.

Transcription from the focus group was done immediately after the session ended. The main reasons for this was that I needed help from my interpreter to clarify some of the comments from the participants and to secure that my notes were correctly understood. Many of the participants used a lot of time to probe and argue for their stances so it was a challenge to make correct notes.

During the period of participant observation field notes were taken. These notes were compared to data collected from interviews and the literature review. Coding was used to process all information received with the use of Microsoft Excel.

The questionnaires that were gathered from all the interviewees contained important information that had to be thoroughly analysed. Bryman (2008:314) is emphasizing the importance of deciding what techniques that are intended to be used at an early stage in the research process. The main reason for this is that variables and techniques have to be adapted to each other. Different variables apply to different techniques. For this research it was of great interest to explore if there were correlations between factors like age, gender and education level in one hand and view on integration on the other hand.

It was important to prepare data analysis and reports. For these purposes Microsoft Excel was used. A coding manual was formed to describe the data that "includes all the possible categories for each dimension being coded" (Bryman, 2008:283). All together 54 interviews were conducted (Appendix 1), one participant observation was done and one focus group was accomplished.

4.2.6 Challenges, limitations, and ethics

Challenges

There were certainly great challenges conducting this study, most of them connected to culture and language barriers. Overall cultural and linguistic differences between interviewees and the interviewer might have fostered a plethora of complicated hinders in the research process. However, the local female Akha interpreter that I used helped me a great deal and avoided any heavy complications. There is also a possibility that her presence may have coloured some of the answers given from the Akha people. Firstly, a woman in the Akha culture is not equal with men. When interviewing older Akha men, this could have made some reservations for the willingness to answer personal questions. On the other hand she was well known in the villages and respected for her work for Akha communities. For these reasons I consider the Akha men comfortable enough to give honest answers. There is nevertheless a possibility that she wanted her fellow Akha people to give answers that gave me a positive impression and since I was totally depending on her language skills, I had to trust her translation of what was being said. Another issue was more directly related to her limitation in the English language and thus the possibility for unintended wrong translation. Finally, the concepts of integration and equality seemed to be difficult for her to fully comprehend, translate and properly explain. Consequently, I used a lot of time and words to clarify the concepts for her. Since Thai and Akha language have no words that directly correspond with the western concept of integration and equality, there is a possibility that there have been some misunderstandings.

As a westerner, it was important that she introduced me in a proper way and recommended me as a serious researcher. My Thai language skills might have been a reason for gaining trust from the interviewees. However, language and cultural differences may in some situations have given reasons for wrong interpretations of the situation.

My own background with a master in Theology and also working as a Lutheran reverend may have influenced this study. Especially aspects about Buddhism and Akha religion are in danger of being coloured by my education and work experience. However, I have been aware of this challenge and therefore done my best not to let my background influence my study in a negative way.

Before starting the interviews I was concerned about the Akha people not finding any interest for my topics and for my study, and that it would be challenging to find someone willing to be interviewed. Even though most of the interviewees had hectic days with work and studies, I experienced that many of them were interested in the topics and engaged during the interviews.

Some practical challenges during the conducting of the interviews and collecting of data were the communication, transportation and the distances to the rural villages. In some of the rural areas there were limited connection for cell phones and only a few persons in the villages had their own cell phone. The result was that in several occasions we could not get in contact with the interviewees on appointed day and the visits had to be rescheduled. These interruptions affected the time frame and delayed the collection of the data. Because of the long distances and the bad standard of the roads to the rural villages, it was important to be certain that people were available for visits before we started the excursion. For the transportation one of the foundations had lend me a four wheel driven car which was necessary to use in order to reach the rural villages.

Another challenge was of linguistic art. The Akha language is totally different from other languages and was until recently a purely oral language. Having a native Akha speaking interpreter was therefore crucial.

Limitations

A possible limitation for the study was to make the interviewees want to talk about sensible topics related to the interviews. Questions about religion and integration may be assessed as personal, and might be difficult to talk candidly about. Their own knowledge about religious doctrines was also limited and could make them feel uncomfortable in the discourse. The Thai society has restrictions about criticising the King, religion, Government and authorities. This fact votes for not giving honest answers, because of danger of being punished. The interviews sometimes also included questions about diseases, drug use and trafficking, which also may delimit their wish to open up. Consequently, I tried to earn their trust and form the questions in the semi-structured interviews in a way that they felt comfortable to give honest and straightforward answers.

In addition there were limitations with the time frame. Ideally more focus group discussions could have been conducted to enhance different opinions among the Akha people. It was difficult to arrange proper categories of respondents because of high season for agricultural work, where most of the adult people were engaged. Even though appointments were made in advance, the focus groups could not be arranged in two of the villages. However, individual interviews in all the villages revealed agreements about most of the issues that were discussed in the focus group that was accomplished. Regarding participant observation the same limitation applied. The study may have gained from conducting more participant observations, but the time limitation made it difficult to carry through.

Ethics

Diener and Crandal (1978 in Bryman, 2008:118) have identified four main areas of ethical considerations, which were followed in this study. The first one is related to harm to participants, including “*physical harm; harm to participants’ development; loss of self-esteem; stress; and ‘inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts’*” (Diener and Crandal in Bryman, 2008:118). Small communities like the Akha villages may make it hard to protect interviewees from being identified in the published research, hence it was important to show carefulness in the execution of interviews and observations, and strive to let the interviewees remain confidential and anonymous. In this research drug use, violence and trafficking was possible to detect or register from interviews and observations.

The next ethical consideration was concerning consent. Bryman (2008:121) is emphasizing the importance of giving potential participants as much information as possible about the research, so that they can make their own decision about their participation. This aspect was highly relevant for this research. Furthermore, the decision about participating in the research had to be granted from the village leader, on behalf of all inhabitants. It was therefore of great importance that he was well informed about all aspects of the research.

The third ethical aspect that had to be considered was the invasion of privacy. This issue is as Bryman underpins close linked to the issue of consent (Bryman, 2008:123). Again, this was a highly relevant aspect, involving questions about faith, family background and view on integration. It was therefore of great importance that the participants were confident with my presence and that they were voluntarily involved.

The last issue is related to deception. To comply with this point I made sure that the participant knew what the research was about. Because of culture and language barriers there was a risk of misunderstandings. However, my own interests and engagement for years in supporting children from Akha families could be confirmed from the interpreter and managers from foundations. This was clearly seen as important in creating trust and confidence about my good intention of the study.

5 Empirical findings – changes over the last decades

The impetus for this research was to examine important factors related to the Akha people's integration into the Thai society, and how these factors affected their social and economic livelihood. Of particular interest was to reveal if religious conditions had any significant impact on the integration process.

In this chapter the empirical findings from the research are presented. The results are organised around the two sub-objectives of the research, as presented in Chapter 2: socio-political aspects and religious aspects. The findings presented in this section are from document reviews and from interviews with an official from the Department of Justice in Bangkok, the Director at Akha hill tribe museum in Chiang Rai, a local Headman in Chiang Rai, Thai business managers, local pastors for Christian churches, managers for foundations running children's homes, Akha students and Akha residents in the researched area.

5.1 Socio-political aspects

In the literature review I pointed out several socio-political factors in Thailand that have contributed to changes in living conditions for Akha people and that affect their integration into the Thai society. In this section I will elaborate on these results with the empirical findings from this study.

5.1.1 Political

Permanent settlements

As described in the literature review (Cpt 3.2.1), there have been many political initiatives from the Thai Government to change living conditions for tribal people. One of the main objectives for the authorities has been to stabilize the residence patterns, changing from provisional to permanent villages. This has been done through developing and improving the infrastructure. Roads, accessible for normal cars, have been built to many of the villages. Some of the villages have also been supplied with public electricity and water systems. Still there are many villages that are only accessible by four wheeled driven cars or motorcycles. These places have often neither public electricity nor safe water systems. However, most of the villages have some access to electricity through solar panels, often donated from NGO's (many of the respondents). Supply of electricity and water systems have been established without costs for the inhabitants, but the running costs have to be covered from each private household (many of the respondents). Access to electricity is mainly used for light and television. Meeting the "outside world" through advertisement and movies from television has created a need for enhanced life conditions through purchasing products. Lack of capital for these new needs has tempted many hill tribe people to get access to money through illegal activities or abusing or selling their children (many of the respondents).

Education

As emphasized in the literature review, Thai Government has introduced free and compulsory education for all Thai citizens. This initiative has undoubtedly increased the knowledge among tribal people. However, the interviewees pointed to the fact that many tribal villages do not have their own schools. Consequently, many children either have to travel long distances for going to schools or applying to stay at boarding schools or hostels in central areas in the lowland. The interviewees also revealed that many of the local schools lacked

competent teachers and that the quality of the education was poor. Almost all educated teachers are ethnic Thai people and have little or no interest of staying up in the mountains to teach tribal children (many of the respondents). The education at the public schools is free, but parents have to pay for transportation, activities, school uniforms and books.

Evidently the support from development programs has affected the lifestyle of Akha people and their life situation has changed substantially since the immigration to Thailand over the last decades. Facing the modern world has led to great challenges for Akha communities in organising their life. All of the interviewees pointed out that a higher education level and skills for the younger generations have given great challenges for the Akha people. The older generation have no or very limited education. The majority (figure 4) of the older Akha people that were interviewed in the villages informed that they had no education at all and had never had the opportunity to go to school. Consequently, they lack all the formal education that is given in schools. One of the main challenges in that respect, is the lack of Thai language skills, both written and orally.

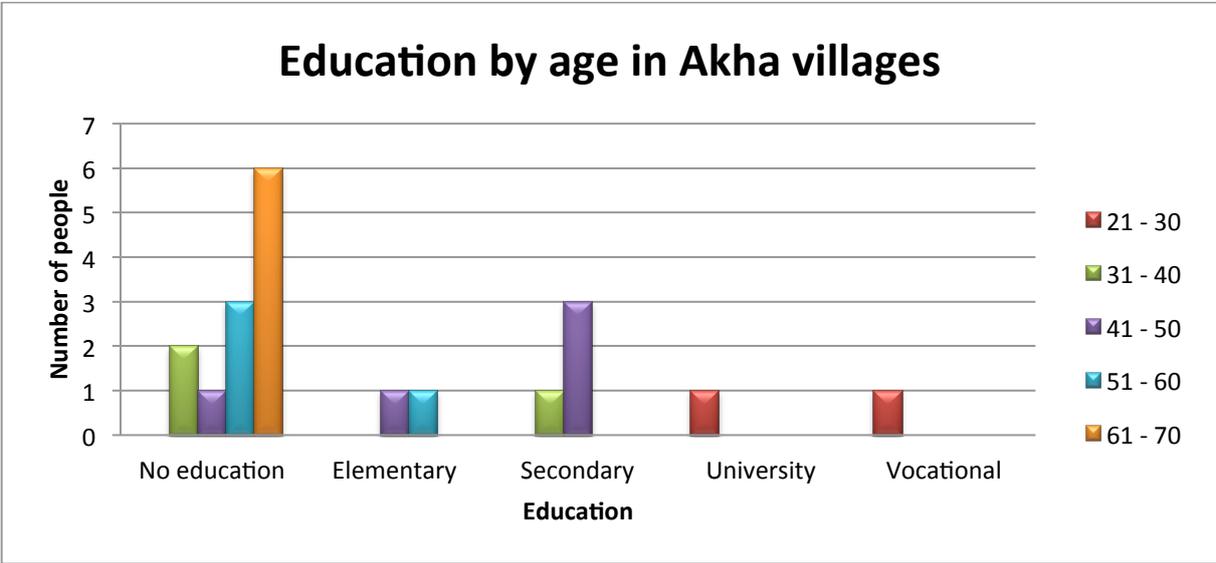


Figure 4

Only a few of the older interviewees were able to communicate in Thai. The lack of proper Thai language skills has great consequences also for their social life. Little contact with other Thai people is one of the obvious results. Many people from the Akha adult respondents (figure 5) answered that they had no Thai friends at all.

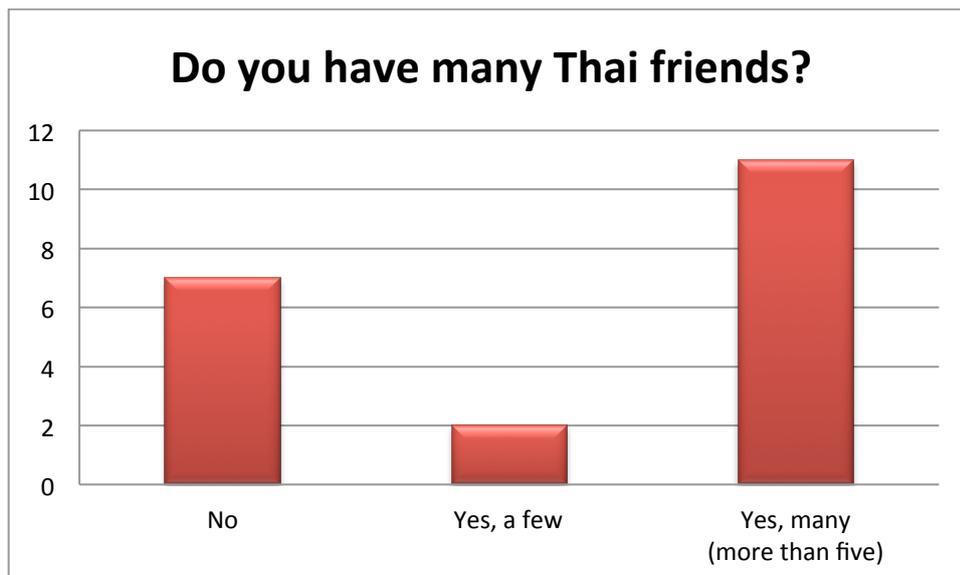


Figure 5

This category of interviewees stated that they therefore most of the time were staying in their villages. Other reasons for this isolation from Thai community, is lack of financial resources to travel and lack of citizenship. Another vital consequence for lacking Thai language skills is ability to acquire information from the society and interact with local authorities. Several interviewees pointed out that there had been many examples for Akha people being exploited of Thai people because they did not understand the customs and laws for Thailand. As an example Akha people had been persuaded and forced to sell land to Thai people for less than the value of the land (many of the respondents).

Most of the younger generation of Akha people has education from public schools and fairly good skills in written and oral Thai language. However, many of the Akha villages are situated far from these public schools so that children do not get access to education. Poverty and lack of capital and vehicles to bring the children to schools are other reasons for keeping the children at home. The children who get the opportunity to go to school are often bilingual. Still, no schools are teaching Akha language for the children and in most of the public schools it is prohibited to speak Akha and to practice Akha culture and traditions. The emphasis in schools is on Thai language, Thai culture and Buddhism. The influence from the Thai society on culture and religion is therefore massive on Akha children.

Headmen in the villages

Every village in Thailand has a Headman, or for very small villages – a Headman assistant. The holder of the position is a governmental official who is the village's direct contact with the Sub-district. The Headman is responsible for keeping records of all inhabitants in the village and for reporting any irregularities to the authorities. The Headman has to be consulted from the residents in the village in many circumstances such as conflicts between neighbours, applications for citizenship, building permits, developments projects etc. (respondent 9). As a part of the development programs and to get a better control with tribal villages, the Thai Government has recently started to appoint the Headman in every hill tribe village (respondent 3). Traditionally, this position was hold by a senior member of the village, in cooperation with a council. Main criteria's for being given this position was then "age and wisdom" (respondent 3). However, the Thai Government now demands that the position is hold by a person that has education and is fluent in the Thai language. The Government also

started to provide a decent salary for this position. The headmen’s normally have monthly meetings with Thai authorities, and some interviewees indicated that headmen sometimes are more loyal to the Government than to the people in the villages.

Thai citizenship

In the literature review I referred to UNDP (2010:74) that claimed that the least secure people in Thailand are those without citizenship. Lack of citizenship involves a lot of serious consequences. People without citizenship lack the rights to services such as education and health. This means that Thai Government does not financially support non-citizen children going to school. Interviewees revealed however, that some local authorities are positive and willing to accept these children in schools, provided that parents, foundations or hostels pay a school fee for them. Nevertheless, even with a formal education, people without citizenship cannot get a certificate for completed education. At hospitals and when visiting medical clinics, people without citizenship have to pay substantially more, which again is a frequently used reason not to visit a doctor (many of the respondents).

Lack of citizenship and identification cards may also complicate the situation of getting proper work. Most employers will not hire people without work permission, something that leads to unemployment and poverty for many Akha people without citizenship. All of the business managers that were interviewed pointed out that they would not employ people without proper identifications card. They were afraid of getting problems with Thai authorities because of lack of work permits for the employees. All the interviewees among adult people pointed to the importance of citizenship for tribal people, even if most of the Akha respondents already had received their citizenship (figure 6).

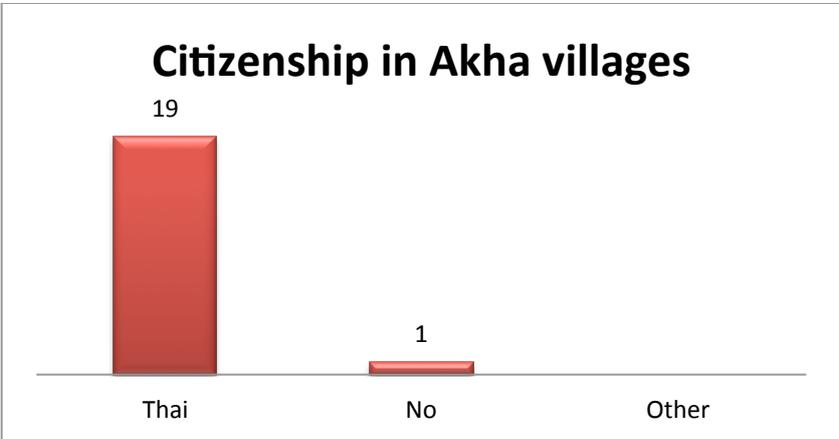


Figure 6

Most of the business managers also pointed out that even if the tribal people had received citizenship they assessed that it would make complications to employ them in their businesses (figure 7). They were afraid of getting problems with the employees connected to several factors. A detailed list of the answers is presented under (figure 8).

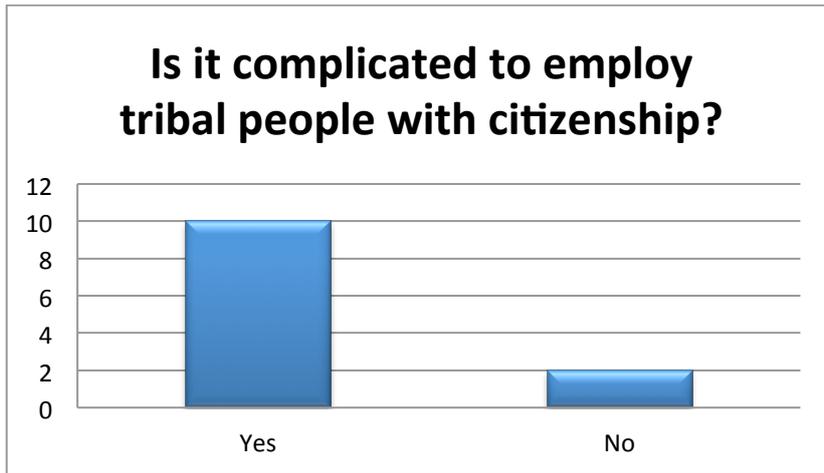


Figure 7

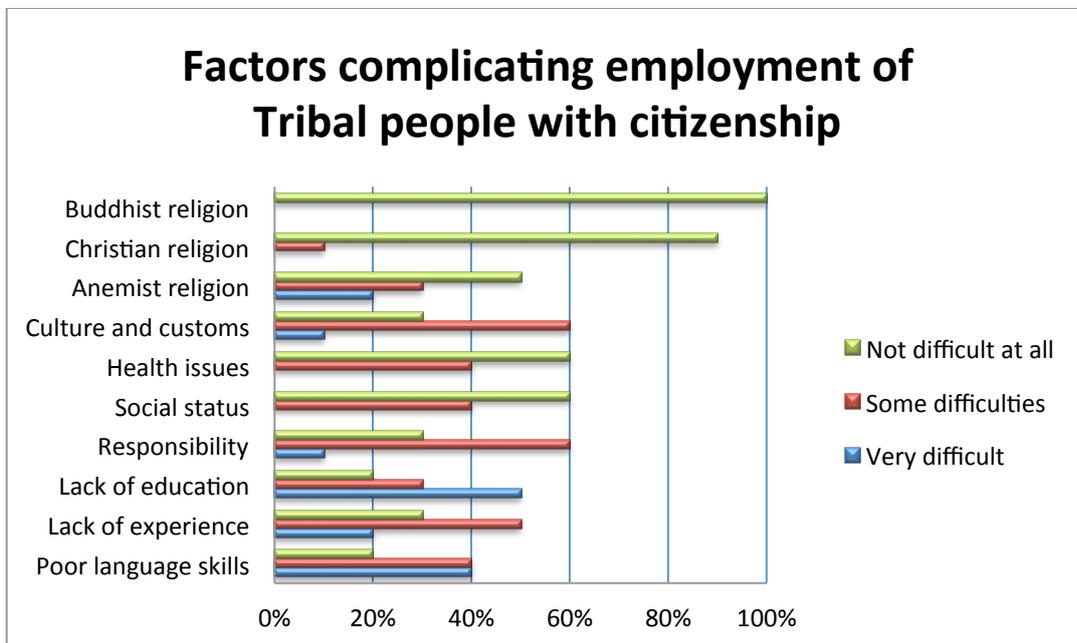


Figure 8

Despite of the lack of citizenship, identification cards or work permits, many Akha people choose to stay in Thailand trying to find work (many of the Akha respondents). As one of the interviewees explained: “Many Akha people with no rights in Thailand choose to stay here because they have no other alternatives. They have no place to go to – no home and no work opportunities elsewhere” (respondent 16). Illegally stay in Thailand may lead to prosecution and jail.

One group that may suffer from this situation, are children from illegal migrants (IOM, 2011:17). One foundation manager portrayed this situation in his foundation: “Many of the children are left behind by their parents who have escaped from authorities or ended up in prison because of illegal activity” (respondent 3). Thailand has ratified human rights, including the right for children to health and education. Still many children from illegal migrants among Akha people do not get this opportunity (respondent 3 and 6).

Most of the older generation of Akha people are married and have children that live in Thailand. Children born in Thailand from parents without citizenship are treated as aliens from Thai authorities. However, if they are registered at a hospital and have a birth certificate, they may be granted a ID-number that give them access to health – and education services. For adult people ID-card or foreign passports may give work permit and access to the work marked. This practise corresponds with practises from other countries emphasising the assimilation method in the integration policies.

Without citizenship, tribal people are excluded from owning their own land. Large areas of land in northern Thailand are not registered by authorities (respondent 3). Consequently, it is impossible to prove who is the right owner of the land. Often Thai authorities accept people as right owners of land if they can prove that they have lived on and cultivated the land for the last 20 years. However, if you are not a Thai citizen you cannot be the legal owner of the land, even if you can prove that you have possessed the land for many years. On top of that, Thai authorities have during the last decade's confiscated land from tribal people and denied them to continue cultivating their land. Some respondents expressed a deep concern for the situation, stating that Thai authorities ruined Akha people's basis of existence. The consequences of this policy from Thai Government are increased poverty and increased illegal activities. The illegal activities are often connected to the opium industry, which can be seen by the number of Akha (and other hill tribe) people that now serve time in prison after being caught by police or military (many of the Akha respondents).

The distinction between Thai citizens and Thai nationals that was described in the literature review, has highly affected tribal people in Thailand and given them limited rights in the society. For instance, for a man to be eligible to get a high public position or be a politician, one requirement is to have served in the army (respondent 6 and 7). Very few Akha people have so far had this opportunity. A reason for this is a general lack of confidence from Thai authorities regarding their connection to communist groups and illegal cultivation of opium (respondents 6 and 7). This situation may also have affected their development.

Lately, however, several of the plans for national economic and social development have been directed on hill tribes and how to improve their quality of life (FAO, 2002:6). Focus has been on unequal distribution of wealth and development in Thailand and on aiming to level out the differences. A step in the wrong direction though, is that the Tribal Research Institute (TRI) – the only research centre in Thailand with updated knowledge about hill tribe people – was closed down in 2002. The reason for this action was that the Government defined that problems connected with hill tribe people in Thailand had diminished (Kwanchewan, 2006:359). According to Kwanchewan, this was a highly controversial decision (2006:359). TRI produced valuable research, surveys and reports regarding contemporary challenges for hill tribe people and was used as a recourse centre for Thai Government, scholars, students and non-governmental organisations. Neither human resources nor other recourses from the Institute were transferred properly over to other organisations or institutes when it was closed down. According to the Thai Government, the hill tribes were already well integrated in the Thai society (Kwanchewan, 2006:380).

5.1.2 Social

Hierarchy in the Thai society

According to the hierarchic system described in the literature review (Cpt 3.2.2), ethnic Thai people often look at themselves as superior to tribal people. Their position as poor migrant

people, often illiterate and performing a “strange and lower” culture than Thai people, is giving them a very low social status. As one of the respondent stated: “I feel that ethnic Thai people have no respect for me because I am Akha, and often they use bad and lower words when they are talking to me” (respondent 19). Tribal people have often been blamed to invade and steal the land in the hills, where lowland people were not interested to live (respondent 3). Some of the ethnic Thai respondents expressed that they looked at tribal people as a lower class than ethnic Thai people. “Tribal people are not welcome to settle down in my village”, a Thai Headman announced (respondent 9). “They cannot share our customs and traditions, and do not fit in with ethnic Thai people”. The Thai Headman revealed a clear view on distance between ethnic Thai people and tribal people, and stated that tribal people belonged to a lower class than ethnic Thai people.

Tribal people have in their home villages received a lot of help from the Thai Government, GO’s and NGO’s to develop their communities and societies. However, many ethnic Thai people are criticising development programs and development organisations for helping poor tribal people more than poor Thai people, asserting that tribal people have evolved to be lazy and demanding because of all support that is given for free (many of the respondents). All in all there seems to be many issues for ethnic Thai people to keep distance to tribal people and to complicate their integration into the Thai society.

Equality and discrimination

Most of the older generation of Akha people in the study stated that they felt equal to ethnic Thai people. They pointed to the importance of education and openness in the society for this reason. Even though they said they felt equal to ethnic Thai people, the majority also emphasised that there were complications of different characters for Akha people being employed in Thai businesses. Issues like citizenship, work permits, language skills, lack of work experience, social status and religion were all factors that were mentioned (figure 5). The majority pointed out that being a Christian Akha could give complications in relation to engagement for a Thai company. During the focus group, they were also critical to some actions taken from the Government that in their opinion discriminated Akha people. “Their (Thai Government) confiscating of land areas that we have cultivated for many years and their restrictions for travelling for people without citizenship, is not acceptable”, one of the interviewee said. “This would never have happened if we were ethnic Thais” (respondent 17).

The Akha students that were interviewed shared the opinion with the older generation on the question of equality to ethnic Thai people. At the same time, all of them pointed out that there were factors that complicated the life as student, being Akha at a Thai university. As an example, one of the interviews pointed out: “I often hear negative comments from ethnic Thai people about our dirty villages, simple lifestyle and laziness” (respondent 34). Citizenship, language and religion were the factors that most of the students pointed to that made complications at universities and colleges (figure 9).

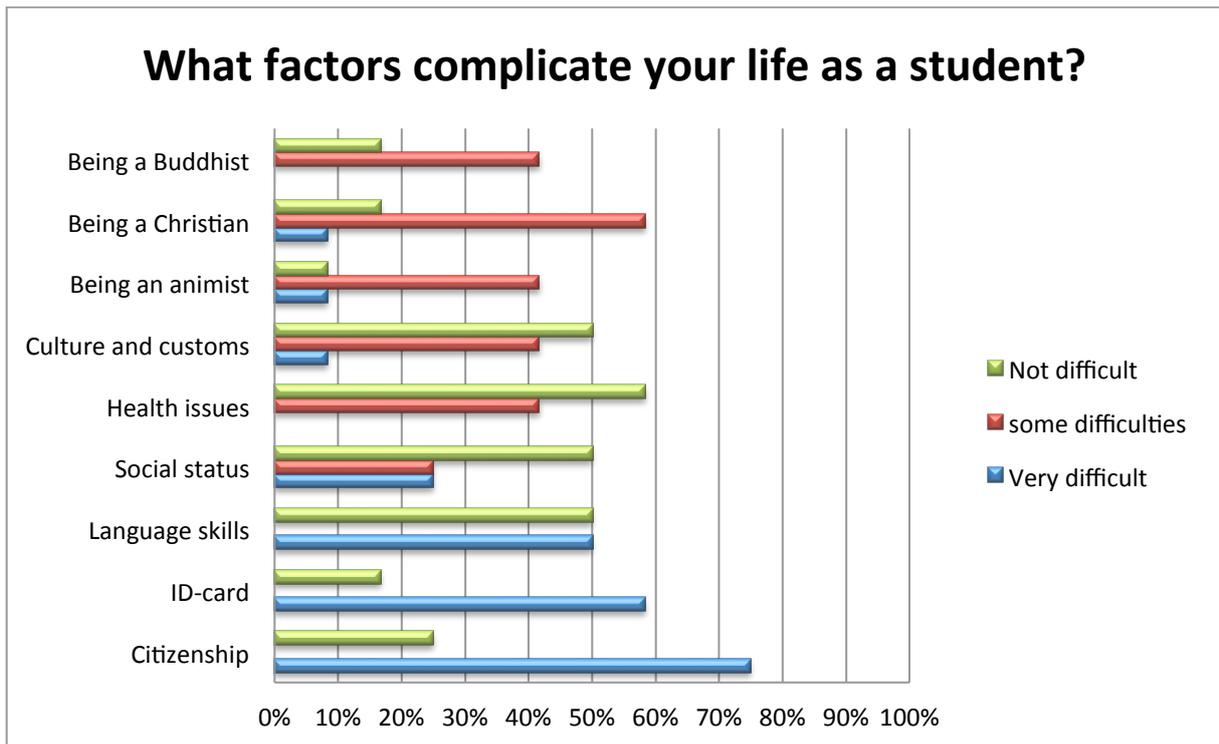


Figure 9

Half of the Akha students group told that they had experienced discrimination from both fellow students and from teachers at schools (Figure 10). Examples from these discriminations were patronizing comments from fellow students about their lousy food, being dirty and having less intelligence than Thai people. One of the female students said that “I often get comments about my background and about Akha peoples lower intelligence. Sometimes it is difficult to fight such comments and often I get quiet and do not participate in discussions because I’m afraid of more offensive comments” (respondent 38).

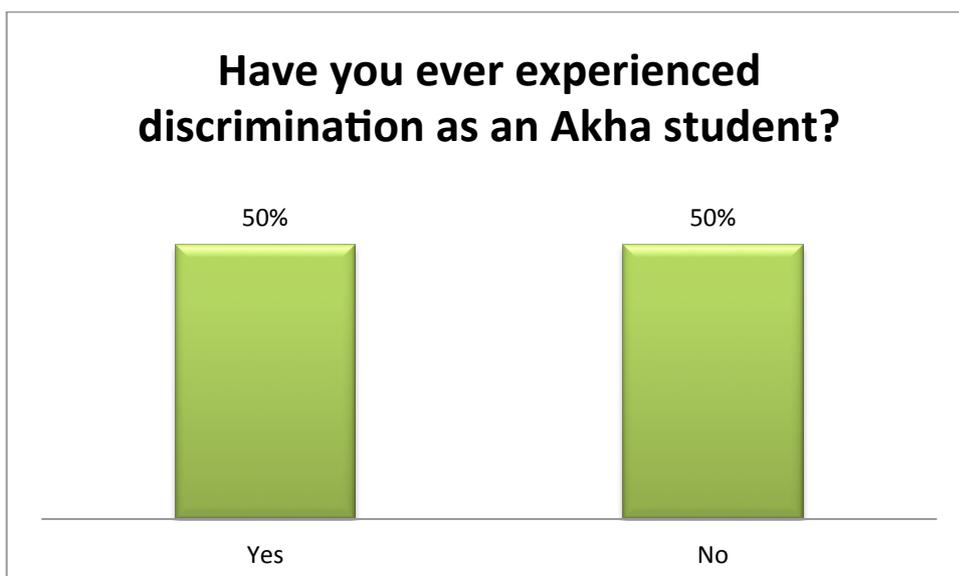


Figure 10

Some of the Akha students also told about discrimination from police and other Thai authorities when they were attending public offices. “I always have to wait in the line longer than Thai people when the officers discover that I am Akha”, one of the male students said (respondent 41). Some of the students said that they have changed their family name to hinder fellow Thai students, their teachers and officers to recognize their background. Akha surnames are easily recognizable for all Thai people. Only by appearance it may be difficult to identify Akha people from ethnic Thai people. On the question of behaviour, the Akha students answered that they tried to blend in with Thai students, and not talking about their heritage as tribal people. Other comments from fellow students and teacher were related to their religion and lack of respect for Buddhism at school. Every school day starts with a gathering for all the students, where they have to pay respect to the King and to the flag. After that they have to listen to the teaching of Buddha and pray. Most of the Akha students come from a Christian background and do not believe in praying to Buddha. Even if they behaved calm and showed respect for fellow students’ belief, they often received critical and offending remarks at school for their Christian attitude. “You are not a real Thai when you don’t participate in the respect of Buddhism”, is a common comment from fellow students (respondent 39). However, all of them had experienced a great positive change of acceptance in Thailand over the last 10 years. All of them had many Thai friends, but at the same time they did not speak much about their heritage.

5.1.3 Cultural

Homogeneity

In the literature review, I pointed to the fact that the present generation of Thais consider Thailand to be an ethnically homogenous nation (IOM, 2011:76 and 131, Cpt 3.2.3). However, many of the interviewees pointed to a number of differences in important aspects such as language, food, culture, traditions and religion. One of the interviewees said: “Even if I now manage to speak good Thai, I often miss out of conversations with Thai people because they use their northern language” (respondent 21). She told that she in many situations felt embarrassed for not being able to participate in discussions when ethnic Thai people were talking in their native northern language that is different from Thai language.

Traditions, heritage and language

The men in Akha communities are dominant and superior to women (many of the Akha respondents). This attitude is expressed through many situations and arrangements in the Akha communities. One example is domestic violence towards women that is very common in the villages (many of the Akha respondents). Another example is that women cannot be a member of the community committee or hold a position as the Headman of the village. Women can also only participate in religious activities in the Akha religion, but never have a leading role. One of the female Akha interviewees said that “I’m now considering to convert from Akha religion to Christianity because of the view on women. My husband is dead, and I have no longer any male relatives that can do the offering to the spirits for me” (respondent 28).

Traditionally boys are given more education than girls among Akha people (many of the Akha respondents). Girls are expected to marry at an early age and take care of the house, children and family. The students told that in their families there is still domestic violence after converting to Christianity. The major change in recent time is the possibility for girls to get proper education. However, it is still expected for not married girls to take advice from their parents – even as adults (many of the Akha respondents).

Children and parents

An important part of Akha culture is the respect for forefathers and parents. Younger people are not allowed to give advices to elder persons, but have to follow their orders in every aspect. Because of lack of education and information about the modern world, many adult Akha people do not understand the importance of education (many of the Akha respondents). They are more concerned with their own current life situation and strive for regular income and daily food. Many of them lack the prospect of future income and a better life through higher education. However, according to Akha culture the children have to obey their parents even though they may have diverse wishes for higher education. The findings from the interviews with the Akha students revealed that only a minority of them had been encouraged from their parents to study (figure 11). Half of the student respondents stated that foundations, in the statistics represented by “Pastor”, was the only part that had given them such encouragement. Only a few of the students gave themselves credits for being students.

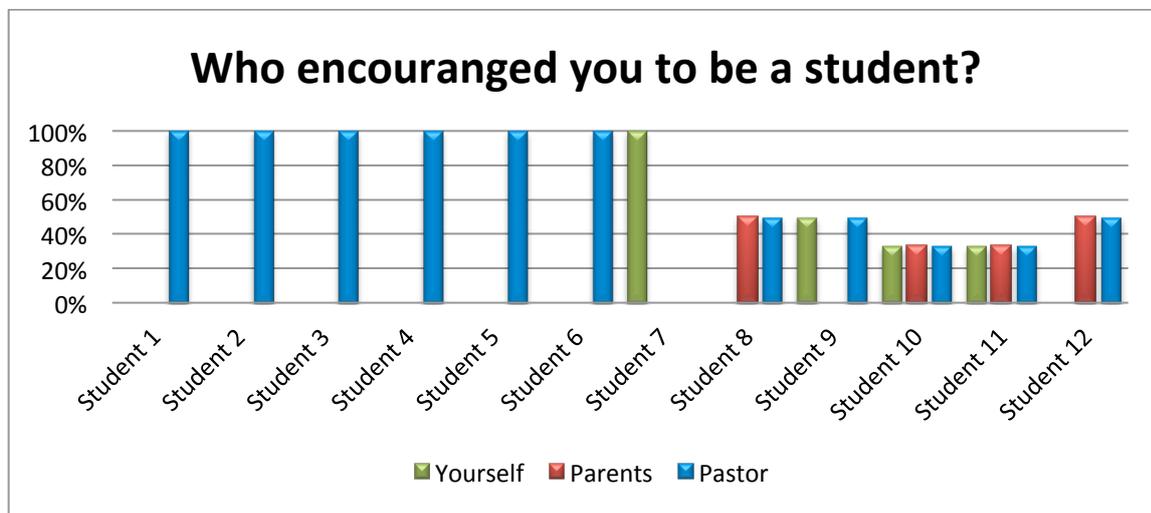


Figure 11

Interviews with foundation staff told that one of the main challenges for them was to convince parents to let the children fulfil their education. “When the children are old enough to be useful at home or to find work in the community, often Akha parents command their children to start working and start providing money for their parents” (respondent 7). “Also, many of the girls that stay in the villages get married in an early age, and have children. Often they marry at the age of 13 – 14 years old, and they lose the possibility to continue education” (respondent 7). Among most ethnic Thai people, education for their children is highly valued and prioritized (many of the respondents).

Tourist impact – an example

One of my interviewees told me how her village had tried to utilize tourism (respondent 33). The inhabitants made arrangements for visitors to come to visit the village, and they received income from selling handmade crafts. Tour operators found interest in the project and brought tourist to the village, so they could learn more about the Akha culture and look at their original houses and simple lifestyle. The project went well, and the income was soon enough to provide work for many of the inhabitants. After a period of time they could afford to improve and upgrade their houses and living facilities. Their original, simple bamboo houses were upgraded to concrete homes, with proper roofs. This was a great step forward for the

inhabitants, since they were no longer migratory people, and the village was intended to be permanent at that place. After a short time however, tour operators stopped coming with tourists. The reason was that tourists were not interested in visiting and take pictures of villages that no longer had the original, poor living conditions. Consequently, the inhabitants lost their income and had to look for work elsewhere.

Although tourism in general is seen as a valuable source of income for Akha people, this is an example of how tourism can even hinder development in Akha villages.

Money

For hundreds of years Akha communities were only relying on the nature for survival. They were self-reliant and self-sufficient in anything they needed. The elderly from the interviewees told that the communities were characterized by openness, including societies, participation, helping each other, caring and no suffering. Like one of the interviewees said: “No one had fences around their houses since there was nothing to protect against” (respondent 11). During the last decades, this situation has changed dramatically according to many of the interviewees. The main reason for this change is a closer connection with Thai society – and deriving from that – the introduction of money. The money led to a desire of getting easier access to cities in the lowland to buy new and modern products and commodities. People started longing to experience life outside the village and work in the mountain was no longer enough to cover the newly created needs. The need for money to buy food, fuel, school equipment and for increasing quality of life, have changed people’s way of thinking and acting. A number of Akha people have sold their land to rich people from the cities (respondent 3) and not only to use the money for necessities. Many have also been tempted to get easy money in hand instead of thinking long term. The money has in many occasions been used to buy vehicles for getting easier access to central areas. “They often ignore that the vehicles need service and gas. When they sell their land, they are so focused on getting the short quick cash that they forget that they need the land to grow food and in that way get a longer term income” (respondent 3). Another reason why Akha people (and Thai people in general) are so focused on buying cars and other modern commodities is that possessing expensive items gives respect from the other people in the village. This respect is often more important than the reasoning behind where the money is coming from or the necessity of the purchase (respondents 3). The people in the villages have experienced that new owners build fences around their purchased land, hindering the local people to use the land for planting food, collecting wood, for hunting or just for walking. Many of the people who have sold their land have been forced to change from being independent or self-employed workers to being employed as farmers for the new owners of the land – to a small amount of salary (respondent 3). Many of the respondents told that lack of education and knowledge about Thai law was the main reasons for the village people to be easy targets for people trying to exploit them. Altogether, interviewees asserted that the environment among people in the villages had changed dramatically. The once caring society had now changed to an environment where everyone only was interested in caring for oneself (many of the Akha respondents).

5.2 Religion - Perceptions of religion and faith

In this section I will present findings regarding religious aspects, and to what extent religion is affecting integration and social and economic livelihood for Akha people. Three religions will be discussed: Buddhism, Akha religion and Christianity. These religions include most Akha people living in Thailand today. The findings from the study show that the issues regarding

religion are intertwined between the three religions. However, I will try to divide the findings between the religions. Firstly, the influence and expectations from Thai Buddhist society to tribal people will be covered. Secondly, aspects from the Akha religion will be revealed. Finally, some important factors from activities from Christian missionaries, churches and Faith-based organisations will be elucidated. This study will try to assess any possible negative or positive consequences connected to the different religions regarding integration and development for Akha people.

5.2.1 Buddhism – status and influence

“To be Thai is to be a Buddhist”. This is a saying in Thailand that is well known by people and seriously meant. As I have pointed out in the literature review, Buddhism is involved in all parts of life for Thai people. Firstly, Buddhism has been verified and upheld from the King of Thailand for hundreds of years. His person and position is highly admired, and for centennials people have paid him respect, and given him love and obedience. Secondly, Buddhism has been transferred from generation to generation for hundreds of years and has through that a unique position among most Thai people. Thirdly, Buddhism is daily taught and respected in all public schools in Thailand, and there is a close cooperation and involvement from Buddhist monks at school ceremonies. Finally, ceremonies and merits are very important activities for most Thai people: Temples are regularly visited, monks are used as advisers and ceremonial leaders, and spirit houses and temples are used for merits.

In Thailand children are taught to believe everything that a superior tells them, and after that it is supposed to be held as the gospel truth (many of the respondents). Moreover, a teacher or adult does not allow Thai children to question anything that is told them (many of the respondents).

5.2.2 Akha religion – status and influence

In chapter 3 (3.3.2) this study explained how the Akhazangr deals with the total lifestyle prescribed in the oral tradition of the Akha culture, including religious issues. Akhazangr still runs strong among older generations of Akha people and especially in Akha villages that practise Akha religion today (many of the Akha adult respondents). The younger generation of Akha people, however, do not have the same knowledge and interest in Akhazangr and its teaching (many of the Akha respondents). The practise of Akha religion combines ancestor worship with a strong spiritual relationship with the land. It is also deeply tied to people’s reason of existence and connects the family and village close together. One of the interviewees told that Akha religion is so focused on the relationship between people and spirits, that if someone in the village convert to another religion they have to move out of the village to avoid destroying this relationship. “When my family converted to Christianity, we had to leave almost everything we owned behind and we had to start all over again alone. Our family and friends in the village wouldn’t have anything to do with us anymore and they were certain that we would be punished hard from the spirits” (respondent 11). In one of the interviewee’s village, three families that recently had converted to Christianity were forced to build new homes outside the village gate, to satisfy both people and spirits. This attitude and practise was confirmed from other interviewees in another village. Many of the interviewees had converted to Christianity themselves and had to leave their villages where they had lived all their lives.

However, despite the risks and sacrifices, many of the interviewees among Akha adult people had chosen to leave their original religion and their original village with it. The most important reasons for leaving ancestor worship and Akha religion were said to be ethical and economic factors. One of the interviewees pointed to the birth of his twins. “When my wife gave birth to our twins, we were told that we had to kill our children by stuffing glowing coals into their mouths” (respondent 13). According to Akha religion giving birth to twins is seen as a punishment for an action or for bad behaviour. To please the spirits both children have to be killed and the parents with rest of the family are banished from the village to the forest. My interviewee said: “We did not want to kill our children. We wanted them to live” (respondent 13). Consequently they were forced to leave their religion and their village, and they converted to Christianity. Many of the interviewees pointed to the fear from punishment from ancestors for the reason to leave the religion. Another reason that was used for leaving the Akha religion was the great expenses connected to do penance, such as offering animals like chickens, dogs and buffalos. Offering of animals to the spirits and ancestors are important rituals in Akha religion. There are 12 different ceremonies yearly that claim animal offers. Additionally, sickness and accidents are connected to bad behaviour and need to be resolved by getting advice from the “spirit priest” in the village. The solution is to pay money for penance to please the spirits. The penalty amounts to pay are often significant. As an example, one of the interviewees had to pay THB 20,000 after an accident to please the spirits (respondent 26). Naturally he did not have the money and had to borrow it, which put him in an utterly difficult life situation. One of the Akha students told that her father recently and unexpectedly died, and that her mother had to borrow more than THB 100,000 to fulfil her requirements to Akha religion and people (respondent 33). A normal daily income among Akha people is between 100 – 300 THB (many of the Akha respondents).

The ceremonies and penance are seen as heavy burdens for poor people and may prevent involved Akha people from economic development. Additionally, the Akha religion is not on the list of supported religions in Thailand and hence not protected by the law and the King. For this reason Akha religion is not entitled to any financial funding from the Government (International Religious Freedom Report, 2009 and respondent 3).

5.2.3 Christianity – status and influence

One of the main findings in this study is that activities from Christianity have had a crucial influence on living conditions and development for the Akha people in Thailand. Firstly, missionaries have spent a considerable amount of time and money, especially during the last 50 years, establishing churches and converting Akha people to Christianity in their own villages. Secondly, Faith-based organisations, foundations and churches from many countries around the world have started working with Akha people, to convert them to Christianity and help them out of poverty. These organisations have been engaged in many different areas, such as hostels for children, agriculture, community planning, health and sanitation. Many of these activities have happened in cooperation with governmental organisations.

It may be asserted that missionaries working in Thailand with converting Akha people from Akha religion to Christianity have had great accomplishments. Churches are visible in almost every village, and may be seen as symbols of success. Several villages have in fact more than one church, even if the village only consist of a small number of families. The reason for this is rivalry between Christian missionaries from different denominations, where each church had a desire for building their own churches instead of cooperating with the existing one (many of the Akha adult respondents). These actions had according to several of the interviewees resulted in conflicts and competition between members of the villages. For

instance, if one church received more funding than another and provided more benefits to its members, this could lead to jealousy and motivate people to change their membership. Some people from the interviews were very critical to several of the methods being used by the missionaries and stated that this is violence against uneducated people (respondents 1, 2 and 5). According to these interviewees, some of the methods included promises of a better future, prosperity, development, free education and scholarship for their children, and help in getting citizenship. All of these benefits were presented as achievable under the condition of converting to Christianity and to their specific denomination. According to some interviewees many Akha families had converted to Christianity to receive the advantages proclaimed by the missionaries (respondents 1, 2 and 5). However, some of the pastors being interviewed claimed that their mother churches had provided help to almost all the Akha villages, regardless of religion. Nonetheless, they admitted that villages converting to their denomination had received more help than villages not willing to convert (respondents 3, 6, and 7).

The argument of fear has according to several of the interviewees often been used in the effort of converting Akha people to Christianity. The preaching from the missionaries expressed that punishment for not being Christian is hell and the award for Christians is heaven. However, all of the Christian Akha adult people that were interviewed asserted that they did not feel any pressure from missionaries to convert to Christianity. They had converted voluntarily and claimed that their life conditions had improved after changing religion. Moreover, they all asserted that after converting to Christianity they gained more acceptances from the Thai society.

Children's homes

As earlier mentioned, Christian Faith-based organisations and churches from many countries around the world have started working with Akha people. One of the main activities has been to establish children's homes or hostels for disadvantaged children from tribal people through charity organisations or foundations. Through these hostels children get shelter and food and are provided with all necessities for life. They also get the possibility to go to public schools, and continue with higher education. Some of the respondents were very critical to these activities and said that many charity organisations established hostels not only to take care of children, but for personal benefits. "Many of the hostels are not open for the public and visitors, and they may abuse the children physically and psychologically. As long as words like trafficking, drugs, orphans and HIV/AIDS are used, it is easy to get donation from other countries" (respondent 2). The interviewees told that often there are few orphans in these hostels. Most of the children have parents in the villages, but are separated from them when arriving to the children's homes. Here, children are converted to Christianity, baptized and turned away from their parents' lifestyle, culture, language and religion (respondent 1).

There are however several factors that motivate Akha people for sending their children to these foundations. Firstly, there is the issue of education. Many villages do not have schools and those who have are often in bad condition, have lack of equipment or lack of skilled teachers. Also, there is an economical aspect attached. Some of the families have many children and are happy about not having to feed them all. Free living and education for their children may be a great temptation for poor people. The findings from the interviews with the Akha students revealed that all the students received financial support from foundations, in the statistics represented by "Pastor" (figure 12). Half of the students got all their support from foundations. In the other half most of the students also received support from their

parents. Only a minority of the students stated that they contributed themselves with income from work.

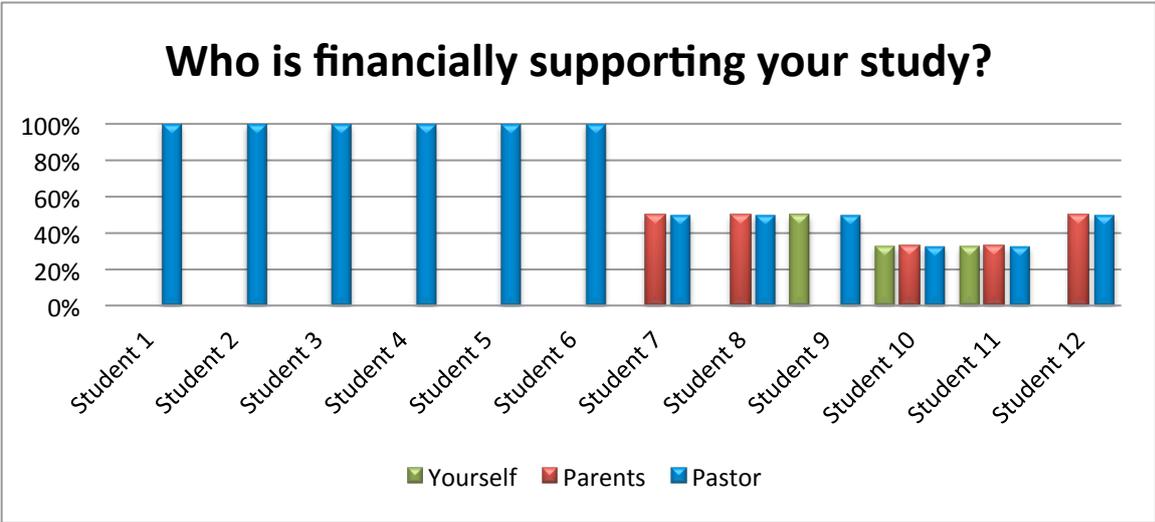


Figure 12

As a paradox there are also negative consequences for this education development. When finished studying, the students cannot get a job in their villages. There is no work to offer educated people, except from farming or as teachers at a local school. In other words, what once was an intention from faith-based organisations to develop the communities through children’s education does not always seem to be the reality. Most educated children want to stay in central areas where they can find proper work. Many of the students that were interviewed had no intention to settle down in their home villages up in the mountains. One of them said: “If I have to move back to my village, I have to do farming and live a very simple life. I would rather have a good education, get a proper work in the city and have a home with nice facilities” (respondent 37). In addition to finding work, all of the students pointed to better lifestyle, entertainment and facilities in the lowland. Most of them still had proper Akha language skills for communication, but not for participating in cultural activities. On the question of marriage, all of them were open to get married to non-Akha people. At the same time they were concerned about teaching their children Akha language. When asked about the criterions for a future spouse, the one thing that was crucial for all the students except for one was that he/she had to be a Christian. They focused on the importance of sharing the same belief system, and that their spouse for that reason not could belong to the Akha religion or Buddhism.

6 Analysis

In this chapter the empirical findings are discussed and analysed in the light of the literature review, the theoretical framework and the empirical findings. The discussion is divided in two main parts, corresponding with the research objectives presented in chapter 1. In the first part I will discuss the integration of Akha people into Thai society in the light of the literature review from chapter 3.1, chapter 3.2 and empirical findings from chapter 5.1 regarding socio-political aspects. In the second part, integration is discussed in the light of religious aspects presented in chapter 3.3 and chapter 5.2.

6.1 Integration in relation to socio-political factors

Permanent settlements

The infrastructure for many of the Akha villages has during the last decades undergone a high degree of development. When the provisional villages were established, the access for vehicles and people was very limited. The governmental initiatives for building or developing roads may be seen in relation to the establishment of the NCHT and CSNSPIHTCNC (Cpt 3.2.1), and the requirements and needs for Thai authorities to get control over hill tribe people. When the Government has provided new roads to hill tribe villages, this has led to better access for Government officials and military to control the villages and the inhabitants' activities. It has also led authorities from Thai Government to take possession over land that have been cultivated and used by hill tribe people for generations. These conflicts of interests have in some cases made a tense atmosphere between local people and Thai authorities.

On the other hand, better access to the villages has also opened up important and positive aspects for Akha people. Improved roads have given Akha people broader contact with the lowland and better possibilities for inhabitants to travel outside the villages, like visiting hospitals, finding work outside the villages and for children to go to school. As a result of the permanent settlements, many of the inhabitants also have made great efforts in improving their quality of houses.

In addition to improved roads, Thai Government has also provided many of the villages with public water systems and electricity. This has been feasible because of the permanent settlements. Electricity and clean and sufficient water supply, has for many hill tribe people led to an enhanced life situation. The electricity and water supply have given them possibility to increase their crops and get better income. It has also improved their health conditions and secured their livelihood. As an example, access to radio and television have given valuable information about Thai society and how to improve agriculture systems, health situations and life conditions. Unfortunately, access to electricity also has had one major negative consequence, which is the duty to pay electricity bills. Several of the interviewees pointed out that hill tribe people were not used to pay bills regularly, and many of them were not able to pay for their own use, hence came in a difficult economic situation. However, everyone underlined that access to electricity was a privilege that they highly appreciated. Also the access to radio and television has given some negative effects for hill tribe people. Because of lack of knowledge about the outside world, television programs have made confusions about the world: What is real and what is fiction? From an isolated lifestyle, media has invaded their world and among others created new needs for products to improve their life situation. Requirement for fresh capital has increased illegal activities, especially related to drugs. Many

have ended up in prison after being caught by police or military. This has again led to a difficult and dangerous life situation for their children, who lose their guardians and protectors.

Other negative aspects with improved infrastructure, is that their villages have been accessible also for people with bad intentions – that want to take advantage of tribal peoples lack of knowledge about the outside world. Prostitution and sale of children is one important example. For instance, local people have been promised higher education and decent work for their children in the lowland. Instead of a promising future, the children have ended up as prostitutes or cheap labours at factories. This situation has had severe negative effects for tribal people. Prostitution has led to serious health problems, even introducing HIV and AIDS to the villages. When the infected children have been sent back home, they have infected other members of their villages and without knowledge and medicine many tribal people have met an early death. Children's departures from the villages have also made a distance and separation from parents and local communities, resulting in children losing knowledge about local culture, traditions and language (many of the respondents).

Education

The literature and empirical findings revealed great efforts from the Thai Government to improve the life situation for tribal people in Thailand. The main objectives of development programs were described in chapter 5.1 and many of the improvements presented thoroughly. Some of the most important initiatives made from Thai authorities to develop tribal communities and integrate the people into the Thai society might be the plan for giving education to all and to encourage tribal people to participate as citizens in the national life of Thailand.

The education programs implemented from the Thai Government has most certainly contributed to an increased integration of tribal people into the Thai society. Sufficient knowledge about language, history and culture is crucial to obtain a close connection to a nation. Unfortunately, it seems to still be a long way to go before the quality of education in schools in rural areas is as good as in central areas. This situation is primarily connected to political decisions (UNDP, 2010:80) and has led to Thailand being known as one of the most inequality countries in Southeast Asia. Still, the possibility for tribal people to go to school, even in rural areas up in the mountains, gives hope for an enhanced development for future generations. Unfortunately, the number of schools is not sufficient, and many parents seek other solutions for their children to attend to schools (Cpt 5.1.1). The alternatives for most parents are boarding schools or hostels, where the children stay most of the year. This situation leads to distance and separation from parents and local community and risk children to lose knowledge about local culture, traditions and language. The huge challenge for Thai Government now seems to be to increase the quality in rural schools. Higher quality in the education and increased knowledge among tribal students are crucial to give tribal children the possibility to higher education. Furthermore, higher education gives opportunities for better work opportunities, higher positions and more influence in the Thai society. As emphasised from UNDP (2010:80) a representation from more groups of the population in politics is required to develop the democracy in Thailand. Lack of higher education among tribal people will probably hinder the "voices" from tribal people in the politics and delay the integration process into the Thai society. A general financial support for all tribal children to complete basic education might be necessary to provide. Even if the education at public schools are free, many poor tribal families are not in a situation where they can afford to cover the expenses connected to transportations, school-activities, uniforms and books (Cpt

5.1.1). Consequently, many of the parents choose to keep their children at home, helping their families with agricultural work instead of getting an education.

Expanded financial support to gifted students to accomplish higher education may increase the reputation for tribal people, give them more influence in the society and increase the acceptance and recognition among ethnic Thai people. As revealed from the findings (Cpt 5.1.2) there are still severe prejudices among ethnic Thai people that have to be addressed. Many of the Akha students had experienced discrimination and patronizing comments at school and an increased and higher education among tribal people may be a key solution to reduce this attitude from ethnic Thai people. Without such change of attitude from ethnic Thai people it is difficult to see how a successful integration process for Akha people into the Thai society can take place.

Headmen in the villages

As described in the findings (Cpt 5.1.1), Thai Government has recently started appointing a Headman in every hill tribe village. Traditionally, this position was held by a senior member of the village, but because of communication challenges Thai authorities have decided that it has to be a person that has education and is fluent in the Thai language. From the older Akha generation, there is no one that meets these criteria. Consequently, younger members of the villages have been interested in the position and in some cases they have been appointed to the position from government officials. These circumstances have been subject to disturbance in many Akha communities and caused personal conflicts. Forcing such new systems into old societies show a lack of understanding and respect for existent cultures and traditions. Consequently, these changes lead to annoyance and frustration in Akha communities, and may also reduce the feeling of trust and confidence to Thai authorities. It is easy to see how this scepticism to Thai Government can be a hinder for a successful integration process.

Thai citizenship

Akha people may be seen as one homogenous group from Thai authorities and ethnic Thai people (Cpt 3.2.3). However, they have entered Thailand in different periods of time and are consequently being treated differently from Thai authorities regarding laws and legislations. Many of them have already received legal citizenship and have almost the same rights as ethnic Thais. However, the distinction Thai law makes between Thai citizens and Thai nationals (Cpt 3.2.1) causes complications for the Akha people. Even if citizenship is obtained, people may not have the same rights as Thai nationals. This is hindering Akha people from feeling equal to ethnic Thai people. It may also obstruct an acceptance from Thai people and affect their attitude towards tribal people, knowing that the law does not recognize migrants as fully members of the Thai society. The distinction between Thai citizens and Thai nationals is hence a hinder for a full integration of Akha people in the Thai society.

In practical life, there are many challenges for Akha people to be fully integrated in the Thai society and to feel equal with Thai people even if they have obtained citizenship. An example used in the findings (Cpt 5.1.1) was the challenge for Akha people of getting a high position as an official. Restrictions about work possibilities and participation in political activities may hinder Akha people to engage and involve in the society.

Many Akha people from the older generation have great problems of fulfilling Thai authority's demands of adapting to Thai culture and values. The main reason for this is lack of Thai language skills, and thus problems to understand the regulations, codes and culture in the society. Lack of language skills may also prevent them from socialising with ethnic Thai

people and learn about their culture and values. In addition, almost no one over 50 years of age has education at all and the only work experience they have is doing agriculture work at home. This fact makes it even harder to find work outside the village and participate in the Thai society. So even if they are entitled to participate in the Thai society, there are many reasons why they are prevented from doing so. This is further complicating the integration process.

Other groups of Akha people have not received Thai citizenship, and are holding either identification cards, other passports or have no ID-card at all. All these groups have limited rights in the Thai society. This corresponds with the assimilation view in Thailand described in chapter 3 treating most migrant people as temporarily living in Thailand. However, most Akha people have no intention of leaving Thailand voluntarily (many of the Akha respondents). Many of them have already stayed in the country for many years and are permanently established in their villages or in the lowland. This fact creates great challenges for Akha people regarding integration. They have limited rights for education and limited rights for work. The exploitation revealed in the findings (Cpt 3) come from inadequate legislation for rights and protection of migrant workers, and should be possible to adjust. If there is political will, it might be possible to find solutions for protecting migrant workers from exploitation. For instance, the law stating that migrant people have to stay with their first employer or having to find a new within one week if they leave (IOM, 2011:141 and Cpt 3.2.1), is very hard to follow. With limited relations and normally little work experience it is very difficult to find new work within one week. Consequently, many migrants choose to stay with their employer even if they are being treated badly. However, many Akha people in this category choose to leave their employer and stay illegally in Thailand (many of the Akha respondents). In such cases, they have no legal rights and may end in jail if police or immigration officers catch them. The main reason why many people choose this risk is that they have no home or work opportunities to go back to in their originally home country (many of the Akha respondents).

As pointed out in the findings (Cpt 5.1.1), children from illegally migrants are in a special difficult situation and have few or no possibilities to acquire ID-card in Thailand. Even if Thailand has ratified human rights, including the right for children to health and education, in practise this is not the situation. Many children from illegal migrants among Akha people do not get this opportunity. They might not be accepted at local schools and if they need health care they have to pay a very high fee (respondent 6). Consequently, these children are especially vulnerable in the Thai society today. If they do not get a proper education, the work opportunities for the future are very limited and the possibilities for being exploited are considerable. Disadvantaged Akha children constitute an important group of people that suffer because of current integration policies in Thailand.

Hierarchy in the Thai society

To provide an enhanced integration for Akha people, acknowledgment of a multicultural society must be accepted by ethnic Thai people. However, such acceptance inevitably has to be induced from the top of the hierarchic system. As described in the literature review (Cpt 3.2.2) and the findings (Cpt 5.1.2), the hierarchic system is still very strong in Thailand. At the bottom of the system are tribal people. It may be argued that Thai Government has stimulated to a negative view on tribal people when they since the 1950's in public documents and development programs have been talking about how to solve the hill tribe "problems" (Cpt 3.2.1) These problems have been connected to communism activities, deforestation, opium cultivation, and polluting of watersheds (IWGIA, 2008b: 303). As long as the

legislation hinders migrant people to achieve full rights in Thailand, and official integration strategies demands limitations and demarcations of different cultures, it will continue to be difficult for Akha people to be accepted among ethnic Thai people. An assimilation approach grounded in the society may also prevent Thai people from showing any concern for Akha language and culture.

Equality and discrimination

The study revealed some different opinions between the older and younger generation of Akha people on the view on equality. The majority of the older generation clearly stated that they felt equal to ethnic Thai people. However, this answer may have been coloured from their own holding of Thai citizenship. It may also be seen in connection to their lack of Thai language skills and limited contact with ethnic Thai people and Thai society. The interviews and focus group was marked by many critical comments about a difficult life situation for Akha people in Thailand. Many of the issues that were addressed blamed authorities for discriminating tribal people.

The findings showed that a majority of the Akha students that was interviewed felt equal to ethnic Thai people. Half of the student group had experienced discrimination in schools and from officials. All of them were fluent in Thai and had many ethnic Thai friends. It may be asserted that despite governmental programs of integrating tribal people into the Thai public schools system and into the Thai community, the Government has not succeeded in removing prejudices (IOM, 2011:135 and Cpt 5.1.2).

Homogeneity

As discussed in chapter 3.1.1, an assimilative approach to integration may be considered relevant when a society is seen as homogenous. The literature review also revealed that the present generation of Thais consider Thailand to be an ethnically homogenous nation (Cpt 3.2.3). However, the findings from this study show that there are some significant differences between ethnic Thai people depending on which area of the country they are from (Cpt 5.1.3). Consequently the Thai society cannot be seen as homogenous society. This will result in great difficulties for the migrants since they do not know exactly what to assimilate to. For a fully integration in the local society migrants may have to adapt to different languages, cultures and traditions depending on which part of Thailand they chose for their place of living. Akha people have over a number of years been exposed to these challenges. Through Thailand's official view on integration they are expected to assimilate to central Thai language, and culture and values taught in public schools. However, because they primarily have settled down in the northern provinces of Thailand, according to local expectations they are also expected to adapt and assimilate to northern Thai language and lifestyle in order to be fully integrated in the society where they live. Then, regardless of which area they live in, according to the current assimilation approach they are expected to give up their native language, their culture, their traditions and their religion. Akha people have a lot of pride in their heritage and roots and many of them find it difficult to sacrifice this inheritance in order to become integrated to the Thai society. Consequently, the findings in this study imply that the assimilation approach executed by the Thai Government is hindering a good integration process for Akha people into the Thai society.

Migration

Many laws and regulations have during the last century been introduced to secure and support a uniformed nation, and to assure that the same values and culture should apply for all people throughout the country. As described in chapter 3.2.1, originally Thailand consisted of

different ethnic groups that were united to Thai nationals during the first part of last century. Since the beginning of this process, Thai authorities have succeeded in uniting and forming the Thai society (IOM, 2011:131). However, migration in Thailand is on-going and significant, and there are many challenges for the authorities to deal with to secure a feasible implementation and accomplishment of the integration management policies. This occurs for Akha people as well.

The literature review revealed that the attitude from Thai Government to tribal people might have contributed to a lack of acceptance among ethnic Thai people to the new migrants. Even name of governmental committees have suggested that tribal people constitutes both a national security problem and a problem with producing drugs. This negative view from the Thai Government has most certainly affected ordinary Thai peoples reserved view on tribal people. According to the Thai Government, the hill tribes had already been well integrated in the Thai society (Kwanchewan, 2006:380). One consequent of this view was the termination of TRI. Considering current challenges and problems for hill tribe people in Thailand, the termination of TRI may be seen as hasty act from the authorities. Kwanchewan (2006:380) goes even further in his criticism of the decision, claiming that “hill tribe problems” were closely connected to communist operations and opium cultivation and that this was the real concern for the Thai Government. When these problems were solved, hill tribe problems were reduced to being only a problem about disadvantaged people, and did not deserve the same attention and resources from the Government.

Traditions, heritage and language

Languages barriers may hinder a good integration process and create a lot of cultural misunderstandings. The Akha language is originally without a written language. There is a long history of handing over tradition and knowledge orally. Many of these traditions are connected to religion and to the Akhazangr, which was presented in chapter 3. There are today several issues that endanger these old traditions. Firstly, most Akha people in Thailand have converted to Christianity. Many missionaries and pastors have taught the Christian gospel in a way that condemn much of the Akha culture and forced the converted Akha people to forget and renounce everything connected to their old religion and culture. Secondly, children going to public schools are deeply influenced by Buddhist teaching and the importance of paying respect and obey the commandments of Buddha. These commandments are often in great conflict with the traditions from the Akhazangr. Another thing endangering the old traditions is that Akha children are often also denied to speak their mother language at school. In areas where these children have to go to boarding schools, they will often lose their skills in their own mother tongue and are no longer familiar with their tribes' old traditions. Consequently, they are drifting away from their cultural heritage with religion, culture and knowledge about nature (agriculture and medicine). Traditional songs and lyrics are also often forgotten and are no longer familiar for the young generation. Several of the Akha respondents expressed concern for the younger generation loosing knowledge about Akha traditions. The common attitude was that if Akha children understand the importance of their traditions, then they would continue these traditions when they become adults. If the children lose the traditions, then the tradition will be lost forever. The children are the key to the future of Akha tradition and should be taught thoroughly about the traditions of their ancestors. However, the young generation seems to be more interested in getting included in the Thai society and to become Thai citizens. As proper examples, almost all of the Akha students planned to stay in central areas after finishing their studies. All of them also pointed out that they had no particular interest in finding a spouse from their own tribal background. However, they wanted their children to have basic skills in the Akha

language to make it possible for them to communicate with their Akha grandparents and older relatives.

Children and parents

With the introduction of proper education for children one unexpected consequence has erupted. The respect and obedience for the parents and older persons has decreased (many of the Akha respondents). An important part of Akha culture is the respect for forefathers and parents, as described in the findings (Cpt 5.1.3). Younger people are not allowed to give advice to elder persons and have to follow their orders. Now, younger persons often have more education and skills than their parents, and are also more updated on what is happening in the world. All news on television and in newspapers is in Thai language and can only be achieved from understanding the language. Most of the adult Akha people have limited literate skills in the Thai language. Some of them can speak and understand Thai, but very few can read and write the language. Consequently, younger people possess more information and knowledge than the older generation, and are more competent to assess the whole picture of a situation and more competent to make good decisions. Examples of situations where such information are valuable can be purchasing or sale of properties, legal rights, health issues and getting citizenship. Because of lack of education and information about the modern world, many adult Akha people do not understand the importance of education (Cpt 5.1.3). Consequently many of them demand their children to quit from school and start working to support their family. Many of them lack the prospect of future income and a prosperous life through higher education. However, according to Akha culture the children have to obey their parents even though they may have wishes for higher education. This situation is in deep contrast to ethnic Thai people that assess education for their children as very important and give it an exceedingly high priority. Some Akha people have also opened their eyes for the importance of education, but are often in a financial position that hinders them from sending their children to good schools and higher education.

Participation

One of the main objectives from development programs in Thailand has been to encourage tribal people to participate as citizens in the national life of Thailand (Cpt 3.2.1). This might be seen as an attempt to modify the view on Thailand having only an assimilation approach to integration and also emphasising an appreciation approach. An appreciation approach is in this study (Cpt 3.1) described as a method concerned with equal responsibility for both authorities and migrants for a successful integration. When development programs emphasise tribal people to participate in the national life of Thailand, the incentive is decent and respectable. However, there are several aspects that conflict with this attitude. Many of these aspects have been elucidated already such as the situation of citizenship and legal rights. As presented in the findings (Cpt 5.1.1), only Thai citizens have the legal right to own land, even if you can prove that you have possessed and cultivated the land for many years. In addition Thai authorities have started to confiscate land from tribal people and denying them to continue cultivating their land. This fact may vote for a divergence from development programs encouraging tribal people to participate as citizens in the national life of Thailand. Instead, this attitude from Thai authorities has created anger and frustration among tribal people, and ruined peoples basis of existence. Another element that hinders the requested participation in the Thai society is their status of not legal citizens or legal citizens with limited rights. Many Akha people are prohibited from electing and being employed by governmental organisations. Finally, expecting Akha people to give up their proud culture, language and religion do not encourage them to participate in the public arena.

6.2 Integration in relation to religious factors

Buddhism

As described in the empirical findings (Cpt 5.2.1), Buddhism is the major religion in Thailand and is deeply rooted in the society. Buddhism distinguishes most homes in Thailand. It also distinguishes most working places, and it gives unity and cohesion between employer and employees, and between employees. Everyone knows what is expected from each other regarding values, lifestyle and worshiping. Consequently, to invite people that are followers of other religions to join the fellowship may create uncertainty and ambiguity among workers, especially when Buddhist ceremonies are performed. It is common knowledge that most tribal people belong to other religions than Buddhism. Accordingly, tribal people may experience severe difficulties getting work in a Thai business because of their performance of other religions. As earlier mentioned, in public schools non-Buddhist students are patronised and criticized by fellow students and teachers for not participating in Buddhist activities and having “wrong” faith. Through these experiences, tribal children are being prepared for future challenges regarding religion, learning what kind of conflict they may meet in the Thai society because of their faith. The interviews with the Thai businesses alluded clearly that religion was important when employing new staff. However, most of the respondents expressed more scepticism towards tribal religions than Christianity, mainly because of the ancestor worshiping. Thailand has freedom of religion, however it may be asserted that not being a Buddhist could complicate and hinder people from being employed in Thai businesses. Consequently, since most of Akha people practise Christianity or Akha religion, religious aspect may be seen as an important factor affecting their social and economic livelihood, and their integration.

In reference to the findings (Cpt 5.2.1), children in Thailand are taught to accept and obey orders and instructions given by superiors. Considering the importance of teaching at schools and the many hours spend there for children, the influence from Buddhism is significant. Still, from an integration point of view, it could also be seen as an advantage for Akha children to be familiar with the values and teaching in Buddhism, even if they belong to another religion.

Akha religion

Even if Akhazangr (Cpt 3.3.2) is still strong among older generations of Akha people, the teaching from Christian missionaries and Thai Folk Buddhism at public schools has significantly reduced the position and knowledge of Akhazangr for the younger generation. Since many of the children stay at children’s homes and hostels, they are not present in their homes and cannot participate in traditional ceremonies in the villages. As a result, they lose the knowledge about Akhazangr and feel a distance to Akha culture, its traditions and religion.

The serious consequences involved with leaving Akha religion was presented in the findings (Cpt 5.1.2). Converting to a new religion and being forced to leave one’s home village creates a lot of serious difficulties for involved people and their families. Firstly they are expelled from social, cultural and religious relations with family, relatives, friends and the Headman. Secondly, they lose respect from their local community, they lose their properties and they have to make new settlement for their own costs. The consequences of converting from Akha religion are huge and the personal sacrifices may cause a serious setback in their economic situation.

Economic heavy burden from practicing the Akha religion was underlined from many of the Akha adult respondents, and may be seen as an important reason for people following the religion to struggle with social and economic development. This may also be seen as a reason for not being able to afford participating in the lowland society among ethnic Thai people. Moreover, almost all Thai business people expressed themselves clearly about scepticism to tribal people performing their indigenous religion. Consequently, it may be argued that Akha people who choose to continue practicing their Akha religion may experience difficulties in being accepted among Thai business owners and among ethnic Thai staff. This may in turn hinder employment in Thai businesses, affect their economic development and delay integration into the Thai majority society.

Christianity

There is no doubt that Christian missionaries, churches and Faith-based organisations have contributed to a change in life for many Akha people. Some critical voices asserted that missionaries have used unethical methods trying to convert Akha people to Christianity (Cpt 5.1.3). One of the methods included the argument of fear for ending up in hell. However, fear is something that is well known among followers of Akha religion. Fear is affecting much of life in the Akha religion, from birth to death. Most situations in life are centred on punishment and awards from spirits (Cpt 3.3.2). As an example, accidents are believed to arise because of bad behaviour from people involved. The same goes for bad crops, twins, sickness and poverty. On the other hand, the argument of unethical methods being used in converting Akha people seems to be valid. Many of the benefits that were promised from missionaries about a prosperous future if they converted to Christianity must be seen as substitute reasons and motivations for changing religion.

Despite possible unethical methods used to convert Akha people to Christianity, many of the respondents had a view that Christian Akha villages had a better development than traditional Akha villages. The main reasons for this stand were firstly, that it in fact is expensive to follow all demands from the Akhazangr, including performing all necessary ceremonies. Additionally, missionaries and their associated churches have financially supported development projects in villages that were willing to convert to Christianity. As an example that happened during the fieldwork of this study, all families in one of the poor Akha villages were promised to receive support for school expenses for their children. The only demand was that they had to convert to Christianity and be member of the church. When visiting the village, ten out of around fifty families had joined the church and received support for their children. Every day a minivan came to pick up only the children from the families that were members of the church. Consequently, influence from religion may deeply affect people's development. Giving children a possibility to go to school, may lead to higher education and better work opportunities, hence, secure the livelihood for the family and contribute to a better integration into the majority Thai society. In mentioned example, a Christian foundation was told about the selective support in the Akha village. The Foundation responded instantly and gave the rest of the children the same support, without any demands to their families. This example shows that there are different approaches and attitudes for helping poor people between Christian groups.

Through Christian activities many Akha villages have received financial support to develop their facilities and enhanced their living conditions. They have also received help to develop their agriculture systems and increased their crops. Converting to Christianity has also given many Akha people an improved economic situation because they do not longer have expenses connected to ceremonies and pennants in the Akha religion. Furthermore, Akha children have

received free and good primary and secondary education through staying at children's homes and hostels ran by Christian Faith-based organisations. This education would have been difficult to achieve from living in the villages. Through the activities from Faith-based organisations, many Akha children also have got the chance to go to college, vocational schools and universities. For most Akha people this had not been possible without help from Christian missionaries, churches and Faith-based organisations. Consequently, Christianity may be seen as one of the most important contributor to improve the life conditions of Akha people and to integrate them into the Thai majority society.

7 Conclusion

In our globalised world many societies are challenged because of migratory movements. Diversity of cultural, social and religious traditions may be appraised as both enrichment and threats for societies and authorities to deal with. There will always be challenges connected to migration and to develop comprehensive integration policies. Normally authorities make more consideration for the majority society than for the minority migratory groups of people. According to a report from OECD (2003:3) “many migrants, some after decades of settlement, suffer economic and social disadvantages, are excluded from civic and political participation and face discrimination, racism and xenophobia”. This view corresponds with findings from the situation among indigenous people in Asia (UN, 2007) that refers to severe breakage of human rights in most of the countries and denotes a lack of will from authorities to implement strategies to solve the problems.

Thailand has experienced an influx of migrants from neighbouring countries during the last decades. Many of these migrants are disadvantaged tribal people, wanting to integrate into their new home country. However, Thailand is conducting a typical assimilative integration policy, meaning that the authorities keep most of the focus on the migratory people and how they have to adapt to the existing majority society. The ambition from the Thai Government may be seen as creating a cultural homogenous nation, that assumes that migratory tribal people will give up their distinctive culture and traditions (IOM, 2011:131).

In a hierarchic society like Thailand, the attitude of the ethnic Thai people towards migrant people will in a great deal be reflected from the attitude of the King and the Thai Government. Consequently, it is of great importance that legislation and arrangements for tribal people in Thailand give acceptance for their presence and equality to ethnic Thai people. However, the findings from this study show that there are several political factors that complicate and hinder a good integration process for tribal people, such as lack of citizenship and many civil rights. Even if the Thai Government has introduced development programs to improve tribal people's living conditions, it may be argued that the attitude towards tribal people still lacks equality before the law.

Socially and culturally the findings from this study revealed a lack of acceptance and high extent of prejudices towards the Akha people in Chiang Rai. The lack of tolerance from ethnic Thai people was primarily connected to a negative view on Akha people's performing of culture, traditions and religion that were considered to be inferior to Thai culture. Moreover, an attitude that appraised Akha people as secondary to ethnic Thai people was also revealed. However, many ethnic Thai people expressed that tribal people now was more accepted in the society than before and pointed to improved education as the main reason for this change. Nonetheless, the study revealed a lack of interest from ethnic Thai people to improve their knowledge about the Akha people and to socialize with them. A lack of concern and consideration for their difficult life situation was also revealed and may be seen in coherence with the Buddhist view on life and reincarnation.

This study had a special focus on how religious factors might affect the integration process for Akha people into the Thai majority society. The findings revealed that the impact from religions was considerable. Firstly, a great majority of ethnic Thai people belong to Buddhism that deeply distinguishes private homes, working places and public rooms. The religion unifies and makes strong cohesion between employees, and prevents workers with other

religions to be invited into the fellowship. Consequently, religion may contribute to hinder working possibilities and a good integration process for Akha people into the Thai society.

Secondly, practising Akha religion includes economic heavy burdens when performing necessary ceremonies and pennants to please spirits. This situation affect Akha people's possibility to invest in developing their own communities and participating in social life among ethnic Thai people in the lowland. Furthermore, Akha people practising Akha religion may risk meeting scepticism and rejection from Thai employers when applying for work. The study revealed a low tolerance and acceptance of Akha religion among Thai business managers hence might be a hinder for work opportunities and accordingly integration.

Finally, activities from Christian missionaries, churches and Faith-based organisations have deeply affected the living conditions for Akha people. Through considerable financial support, foremost directed to people converting to Christianity, Akha people have got the possibility to develop their villages to a higher standard. Their economic situation has improved when converting to Christianity and being released from all expenses connected to the Akha religion. Christianity is also more accepted among ethnic Thai people and is not accompanied with the same prejudices as the Akha religion. However, the main contribution from Christianity in the integration process for Akha people may be helping the Akha children to get proper education. All the interviewees in this study emphasised that enhanced education was the key issue to improve the life conditions and integration process for the minority Akha people into the Thai majority society. Higher education level, and enhanced knowledge about the Thai society, may contribute to improved participation from Akha people in political discourse, hence affect their integration process in Thailand. Integration is best apprehended in a two-way process, with an appropriate interaction between migrants and the receiving society (OECD, 2003:5).

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Overview of respondents

List of respondents

	Gender	Age group	Religion	Citizenship	Education level	Position
1	M	40 - 50	Christian	Fillipine	University	Manager
2	M	30 - 40	Christian	USA	University	Foundation manager
3	M	40 - 50	Christian	Thai	University	Foundation manager
4	F	30 - 40	Christian	Thai	University	Foundation manager
5	M	50 - 60	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Foundation manager
6	M	50 - 60	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Foundation manager
7	M	20 - 30	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Foundation manager
8	M	40 - 50	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Foundation manager
9	M	40 - 50	Buddhist	Thai	Secondary	Headman
10	F	30 - 40	Christian	Thai	University	Lawyer
11	F	60 - 70	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
12	M	60 - 70	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
13	M	60 - 70	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
14	M	60 - 70	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
15	M	50 - 60	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
16	M	60 - 70	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
17	M	60 - 70	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
18	M	40 - 50	Christian	Thai	Elementary	Akha adult
19	M	50 - 60	Christian	Thai	Elementary	Akha adult
20	F	30 - 40	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
21	F	50 - 60	Christian	No	No	Akha adult
22	F	20 - 30	Christian	Thai	University	Akha adult
23	F	20 - 30	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha adult
24	M	40 - 50	Christian	Thai	No	Akha adult
25	M	40 - 50	Buddhist	Thai	Secondary	Akha adult
26	M	40 - 50	Akha religion	Thai	Secondary	Akha adult
27	M	40 - 50	Akha religion	Thai	Secondary	Akha adult
28	F	50 - 60	Akha religion	Thai	No	Akha adult
29	M	30 - 40	Akha religion	Thai	Secondary	Akha adult
30	F	30 - 40	Akha religion	Thai	No	Akha adult
31	M	17 - 19	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student

32	F	17 - 19	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
33	F	20 - 30	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
34	F	17 - 19	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
35	M	20 - 30	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
36	F	20 - 30	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
37	F	20 - 30	Christian	Thai	University	Akha student
38	F	20 - 30	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
39	M	30 - 40	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
40	M	17 - 19	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
41	M	20 - 30	Christian	No	University	Akha student
42	F	17 - 19	Christian	Thai	Vocational	Akha student
43	M		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
44	F		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
45	F		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
46	M		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
47	M		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
48	M		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
49	F		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
50	F		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
51	M		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
52	F		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
53	M		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager
54	M		Buddhist	Thai		Thai business manager

Appendix 2

Questionnaire Akha adult

SURVEY

Integration of Akha people in Thai society

Please circle around your answer

Example:

No

Yes

And write on the dotted lines when applicable

Gender Male Female

Age 11-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70

Religion Christian Buddhist Animist Other

Citizenship Thai No Other

ID-card Green Pink Blue

Education

No Elementary Secondary University Vocational

Work

Employed Self-employed Unemployed Retired

1. Do you have any work experience for a Thai company?

No Yes

2. If yes, what kind of experience?

.....
.....

3. If yes, did you experience any challenges being an Akha working in a Thai company?

.....
.....

No

Yes

19. Why or why not?

.....
.....

20. How do you as Akha experience acceptance in the Thai society today, compared to other Thai people?

Equal

Not equal

21. If not equal, what are the differences in your opinion?

.....
.....

22. Do you consider that there is more acceptance for Akha people in the Thai society today, than 20 years ago?

No, the same

Yes, to a great extent

Yes, to a small extent

23. If yes, what do you think are the main reasons for this change?

.....
.....

24. Do you have any ethnic Thai friends?

No

Yes, a few (1-5)

Yes, many (more than 5)

Appendix 3

Questionnaire Akha students

SURVEY

Integration of Akha people in Thai society – Akha student

Please circle around your answer

Example: No Yes

And write on the dotted lines when applicable

Gender Male Female

Age 17-19 20-22 23-25 26-28 More then 28

Religion Christian Buddhist Animist Other

Citizenship Thai Other No

ID-card Green Pink Blue

Education

University Vocational

1. Who are the most important persons encouraging you to be a student?

Yourself Parents Relatives Friends Pastor Other

2. Who is financial supporting your studies?

Yourself Parents Relatives Friend Pastor Other

3. In your opinion, are there any factors that complicate your life as a student, being Akha at a Thai university/college?

No Yes

4. If yes, which factors do you consider difficult? (Please make an X for your answer)

	Very difficult	Some difficulties	Not difficult at all
Citizenship			
ID-card			

Language			
Social status			
Health issues			
Culture and customs			
Lack of ethnic Thai contacts			
Religion			
d) If Animist			
e) If Christian			
f) If Buddhist			
Other			

5. If being an Animist or a Christian as a student is difficult, what are the main issues?

.....
.....

6. In your opinion, are there any challenges not being a Buddhist as a student?

No Yes

7. If yes, which challenges do you see?

.....
.....

8. How do you as Akha experience acceptance among fellow Thai students?

Equal Not equal

9. If not equal, what are the differences in your opinion?

.....
.....

Appendix 4

Questionnaire Thai businesses

SURVEY

Integration of Tribal people in Thai society

Please circle around your answer

Example:

No

Yes

And write on the dotted lines when applicable

Gender Male Female

Age 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70

Religion Buddhist Christian Animist Other

1. What kind of business are you working for/do you own?

.....

2. How many employees do you have in your company?

1-5 6-10 11-20 21-30 More than 30

3. What position do you have?

.....

4. Does your business require education from employees?

No Yes Yes, some positions

5. If yes, on which level?

Secondary school High school Vocational University

6. What is the most common way to employ staff?

By recommendation By advertisement Other

7. What is the most important criterion for appointing new staff?

Recommendation Education Experience Other

8. May people without citizenship, ID-card or work permit be employed in your company?

No Yes

9. Are there any Tribal people employed in your company?

No Yes

10. In your opinion, are there any factors that complicate to employ Tribal people (with Thai citizenship or work permit) in your company?

No Yes

11. If yes, which factors do you consider difficult? (Please make an X for your answer)

	Very difficult	Some difficulties	Not difficult at all
Poor language skills			
Lack of experience			
Lack of education			
Responsibility			
Social status			
Health issues			
Culture and customs			
Religion			
a) If Animist			
b) If Christian			
c) If Buddhist			
Other			

12. If there are difficulties being an Animist or a Christian in your company, what are the main issues in your opinion?

.....
.....

13. In your opinion, are there any challenges not being a Buddhist in your company?

No Yes

14. If yes, which challenges?

.....
.....

15. How do you assess acceptance of Tribal people in the Thai society today, compared to ethnic Thai people?

Equal Not equal

16. If not equal, what are the differences in your opinion?

.....
.....

17. Do you consider that there is more acceptance for Tribal people in the Thai society today, than 20 years ago?

No, the same Yes, to a great extent Yes, to a small extent

18. If yes, what do you think are the main reasons for this change?

.....
.....

19. Do you have any Tribal friends?

No Yes, a few (1-5) Yes, many (more than 5)