

Independent Study : Integration Policy for the Hilltribes

**and Tribal Identity : A Political
Culture Approach**

Author : Mr. Phimon Saengswang

M.A. (Political Science) : Politics and Government

Examining Committee

Assoc. Prof. Dr. M.L. Bhansoon Ladavalaya **Chairman**

Assoc. Prof. Somsak Keawkingkeo **Member**

Lecturer Dr. Tanun Anumanrajadhon **Member**

Abstract

Thai Government has begun to launch the development of hilltribes population since 1952. The nature of providing assistance and promotion has been improved through times to be in line with circumstance and facts of the hilltribes. The last modification was made by the Cabinet decision on **July 5, 1976** resulting in the so-called **Integration Policy** which was set out to be used with the hilltribes. This policy is regarded as the **Prime Policy** for development and providing welfare for the hilltribes. Major goals of the policy emphasize that all hilltribes become good Thai citizen and are self-dependent.

The objective of this independent study is to find out a clue to hilltribe development work resulting from the integration policy. How appropriate with traditional society of the hilltribes that the core organizations, as specified by the policy, conduct the tangible conservation development? This study, therefore, sets out a concrete conceptual framework and follows by collecting and analyzing opinions of samples which were limited to ritual elites of the hilltribes. The samples were not included the community leaders who were elected or appointed by governmental organization. The focus stresses on three issues; the role of ritual elites in the tribal cultural context, opinions of ritual elites towards government officials, and the meaning of being a Thai citizen according to the opinions of ritual elites.

Number of ritual elites that are included in samples of this study comprises of 229 people. They are Hmong, Yao, Lahu, Lisu, and Akha who presently live in villages of the Chiang Rai Hilltribe Development and Welfare Centre, Department of Public Welfare, Ministry of Interior. The Centre is a major organization that is responsible for carrying out the above-mentioned policy. There are four positions of the hilltribe ritual elites; (1) the senior groups, (2) the spirit specialists, the magical spelling persons, and the herbalists, (3) the ritual specialists, and (4) the non-formal village heads.

The study found out that all groups of ritual elites have power in governing their communities, notably in the groups of spirit specialists and ritual specialists. They have high potential and influence in controlling societal mechanism in their communities to operate naturally. Holding of ritual elites positions has been inherited through family or awareness of the desire of the super natural power, and they should be willingly accepted by the mass of their society. The government officials do not have power or share in appointing these positions and should leave it be according to their tribal cultural traits.

Ritual elite samples accept status and role of government official in the aspect that they represent power of state. The relationship between ritual elites and government officials follows the patronage system. Each parts, however, remains conceptual conflict. Although the conflict exists, the ritual elites are obliged to reckoned with the status of governmental officials.

Being a Thai citizen, according to ritual elites, means a tangible legal qualification or a necessary condition required for Thai society in general. Being a Thai means showing a respect to the King, knowing of the Prime minister, ordaining to the Buddhist monk or novice, participating in special activities. i.e, voting for the members of parliament, engaging in hilltribe sport or hilltribe beauty contest,

holding of citizen identification card, marrying to lowlander, and settling in Thailand which is the most important qualification.

The attachment of settlement is a crucial factor in building perception of " Thai citizen " for the hilltribes which is a tangible factor reckoned by law. However, " being a hilltribe " is an abstract factor holding the hilltribes' perception together which is the tribal culture or hilltribe folk wisdom. Development for the hilltribe to be as the Thais, in abstract, can be conducted through the development of political culture process that converts conceptual differences into political uniqueness; and through the assimilation of hilltribe economic equilibrium which is changed according to the dynamic stream of the core society.