

**FEASTING AMONG THE AKHA OF NORTHERN THAILAND:  
AN ETHNOARCHAEOLOGICAL CASE STUDY**

by

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS**

In the Department

of

Archaeology

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**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**  
August 1998

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## Abstract

Feasting is an activity which has in recent years become of great interest to many archaeologists. It may have played an important role in the transformation of egalitarian societies into stratified societies in prehistory, as well as in the original domestication of plants and animals. However, there is very little information available on feasts which suit the specific needs of archaeologists, and there is no clear way to test archaeologically some of the theories which have been proposed regarding the function of feasts in prehistoric societies. This thesis is an exploratory case study, and my main goals were to: 1) define the range and parameters of feasting activity, 2) study the relationship between economy, politics, and feasting, and 3) to study the material culture of feasting.

My research is on the feasting of the Akha of Thailand, in the villages of Mae Salep and Sam Soong. My methodology consisted of participant observation and household interviews. The research consisted of four main sections: 1) I gathered information on as many feasting events as was possible; 2) I documented the inequalities in wealth, social power, and social status, and correlated them with feasting frequency and ownership of feasting paraphernalia; 3) I analyzed the constraints on surplus production; and 4) I analyzed the material culture of feasts, especially in regards to animal use, vessel use, and refuse production and disposal.

My basic findings were that there are fairly large inequalities in wealth and power which are most easily seen at the lineage level. Individuals and lineage groups use feasting to accomplish social goals. The two main goals are the creation of a life crisis support group network, and the acquisition of labour and social status. Lastly, I found that the size and number of serving and cooking vessels, as well as the use of delicacies and the ownership of domestic animals, is indicative of feasting activity. Furthermore, the degree of ownership of these items is represented in the refuse associated with particular households.

## Acknowledgments

As always with a project of this size and duration, there are a number of people who contributed their time and effort. First and foremost, my biggest debt of gratitude is to my host families in the villages of Mae Salep and Sam Soong, without their kindness and generosity, none of this work would have been possible.

In terms of guidance and support within the country of Thailand, I could not have had a better mentor and care-taker than Ralanna Maneeprasert of the Tribal Research Institute at Chiang Mai University. Her constant support and advice was invaluable. The entire staff of the Tribal Research Institute in fact, too numerous to name, all offered me their most kind support, for which I am very grateful.

In terms of monetary support, my first field season was funded by an academic travel grant which was generously given to me by the Canadian Council of Southeast Asian Studies. The second season of study was funded, indirectly through the Department of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University, by a research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada that was awarded to my senior supervisor Dr. Brian Hayden.

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# Chapter 1

## Rationale and Methodology

### *Introduction*

My work with the Akha was an exploratory study of the role of feasting within their society. The following thesis is a cumulative exposition of data that were gathered during three and a half months of fieldwork conducted in the North of Thailand on two separate excursions in 1996 and 1997. Because of my archaeological perspective, I favoured a cultural ecological approach (see, Bates and Plogg 1991; Steward 1972, 1977) in the analysis of the data.

### *Rationale*

Let us begin by answering the most obvious question: Why would archaeologists want to study modern-day feasts? The answer is, because the sharing of food is a universal human method of communicating social and personal messages. In this sense, feasting serves to shape social thought and opinion, and is therefore a factor in the maintenance and evolution of social structure (Bender 1979; Hayden 1991; Kirsch 1973). For the purpose of this study, I define a feast as any special or ritualized meal shared by two or more people. Feasts are different from ordinary, day-to-day, food consumption events in that the people participating in them see the meal as being one facet of a

greater social event. These events can range from large scale funerals and weddings to small scale nuclear family religious rituals.

The fact that food, its preparation, distribution, and consumption, is so laden with social significance makes it an ideal medium by which people may influence the emotions and opinions of others. Nick Fiddes (1991: 30) notes that: "Our attitudes to different foods are conditioned by associations which we invest in them and we learn these from the day we are born." Furthermore: "We feed not only our appetite by also our desire to belong. Foods express social values, and by consuming them we acknowledge a shared set of meanings. Their rejection can therefore signal dissent -- whether by infants, religious sects, or even at the Boston Tea Party" (Fiddes 1991: 34).

The organized sharing of food is one of the attributes that truly sets humans apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. Unfortunately, because of the mundane nature of everyday food preparation and consumption, we as social scientists, for the most part, have overlooked the role that food sharing plays in the creation and maintenance of the basic social fabric of culture. Instead, we have tended to focus our attention upon more overt and colourful manifestations of social structure, such as ideology systems and political structures. Many ethnographic studies have shown that feasting in non-monetary societies is an important avenue for individuals and allied groups to advance their social and political goals (e.g., Hayden and Maneeprasert 1995, 1996; Kirsch 1973; Leach 1954), and as archaeologists we are now beginning to realize how important a role feasting may have played in the dynamics of social change in the past (see, Bender 1979; Blitz 1993; Dietler 1990; Hayden 1990, 1992b, 1996; Wiessner 1998)

The sharing of food is an age old form of "social technology" (Hayden 1990: 31) used by individuals and groups to accomplish very real and tangible social goals: a strategy used by people, both consciously and unconsciously, to make changes or to maintain a status quo in their social environment. These goals can be as simple as a request to... 'be my friend', or as grandiose as a political ploy to foster allegiances in an attempt to gain power.

One of the more significant of the social transformations in which feasting has been implicated is the original domestication of plants and animals (see, Bender 1987; Hayden 1990, 1992b, 1995b, 1996). The logic behind Hayden's (1990) theory proceeds as follows: during the Mesolithic the advent of new food procurement technology (e.g., nets, traps), processing methods (e.g., grinding stones, blades, microliths), and storage technology (e.g., smoking), allowed for certain groups of complex hunter-gatherers to produce, for possibly the first time in history, a significant and dependable food surplus from hunting and gathering. Ambitious individuals who were able to gain control of this surplus (a form of capital) might then have been able to use it, through the medium of competitive feasts, to centralize their sociopolitical power.

Power centralization can be accomplished, as is evident in the ethnographic record, by many methods (Allen 1984; Blumberg 1978; Hayden 1995a; Rappaport 1968). These include such things as debt fostering (both in terms of obligatory reciprocation of food and gifts, and through loans to feast givers); wealth advertisement; and making claims to resources through spiritual sanction in the context of a grandiose feasts.

Hayden (1990) then argues that these individuals, or "Aggrandizers" (Hayden 1995a: 15), in an effort to continually increase the prestige scale of their feasts, would coerce members of their households to cultivate wild food delicacies and tend captured wild animals. Wild plants which have been tended and weeded will grow larger than average, and wild animals which are penned and fed will accumulate a higher than normal fat content (Hayden 1992b, 1995b). These cultivated wild foods, because of the extra labour invested in them, and their impressive size, would entitle the feast host to an even greater amount of prestige, and consequently increase his social standing and influence. As this process continued through time, in a circular fashion, plants and animals eventually became domesticated through constant human tending and intervention.

One of the attractions of this theory is that it explains why prehistoric hunter-gatherers would choose to invest the inordinate amount of labour in cultivating wild species when it would have been more cost efficient to continue gathering plants growing wild. The extra labour invested in cultivating wild plants imbued them with more social worth during feasts. Hayden's theory also explains why many of the early domesticates were nonessential foods such as chili peppers and gourds, and is in accordance with other theories which suppose that the initial domestication of grains was initiated in order to produce alcoholic beverages.

One of the problems encountered when trying to archaeologically test some of the ideas presented above is the fact that there has been no comprehensive research on feasting in and of itself as a pan human social phenomenon. Archaeologists are simply at a loss for what

to look for in their assemblages, and they lack the ethnographic data which could be used to help analyze the evidence of feasting that they do discover. There are studies which deal with feasting in a given social context, political feasting in the Philippines (e.g., Gibson 1970; Junker 1998; Voss 1987) or in New Guinea (e.g., Meggit 1974; Rappaport 1968) for example, but no work done on feasting in a general sense. Furthermore, from an archaeological point of view, even the scant literature on culturally specific feasting practices is of little help because ethnologists seldom make observations of the material culture. The data presented here are intended to be a small contribution towards remedying that situation.

### ***Methodology***

Given the above rationale for the initiation of this project, the objectives of my research were to:

- 1) Define the range of feast variations in Akha society.
- 2) Study the way in which economic surplus is used, in the context of the feast, to achieve socioeconomic goals, and hence initiate socioeconomic change.
- 3) Look for archaeological indicators of feasting activity.
- 4) Do a case study to document in detail how the practice of feasting affects things such as political power, wealth acquisition, labour mobilization, residence patterns, corporate group cohesion, and social change in general.

The reason that the Akha of Thailand were chosen as the subject of this study is because they are still a relatively traditional people and

because feasts play a very important and prominent role in their society and politics (Hayden 1995; Lewis 1969, 1970; Kammerer 1986;). Because of this, it was possible to witness a relatively large number of feasts in the short period of time that I was able to spend in the field. Furthermore, the fact that the Akha are still, for the most part, a subsistence level horticultural society, with relatively little dependence upon external cash economies, made them ideal candidates for a study of how a traditional people can convert their food surpluses into social capital through the sponsoring of feasts.

There were three main research methods that I employed: participant observations at feasts, observation of material items and refuse in households, and household interviews. I conducted research over two field seasons: three and a half months in 1996, and five months in 1997. With the aid of translators (one a Thai and one an Akha), I lived with Akha families in two different villages: four months in Mae Salep and two weeks in Sam Soong. The remainder of my time was spent visiting other Hilltribe villages (Hmong, Lahu, and Akha) for comparative purposes, and in conducting literature research and private interviews with Hilltribe specialists at the University of Chiang Mai in Chiang Mai city.

My general methodology of study at feasts was to remain as inconspicuous as possible while still recording all of the details of the event. Some of my data came in the form of items which I could record directly myself, such as the number of people in attendance, butchering patterns, the number and style of vessels, and the use of space. Other kinds of data, such as the emic rationale behind the event, the expense to the family involved, and the personal details of the guests in

attendance, I had to gather through questioning various people in attendance at the feast. Overall, this method worked quite well. A large part of this study is concerned with material culture and I was able to record the pertinent data myself, thus maximizing its veracity. In regards to questioning the people in attendance, this too was fairly straightforward. It is quite natural in Akha society to discuss the expense and other details of feasts because feasts are very important social events and everybody naturally has an interest in them. Furthermore, the Akha are quite proud of their ancient and often complicated traditions, and it seems logical to them that a foreigner would want to inquire about their customs in detail.

The only topic that I ever found people reticent to discuss was disputes within the village. This is quite understandable considering the fact disputes are central features of political power, and that gossip in a small community can be a very damaging thing. People are wary of spreading negative information regarding others. Consequently, the one subject which may be under-represented in this study is the degree and frequency of conflicts within the village. I was able to record several cases of grievances and litigations, but I suspect that many more were kept hidden from me.

The household interviews also went quite well and I am very confident about the quality of the data acquired in this way. In the village of Mae Salep I was able to interview 91% of the households, and in Sam Soong 100%. I used a questionnaire, but I would also follow up on any pertinent tangents which were raised in the course of the interview. In cases where people held special positions in the village, such as a ritual expert, I would supplement the questionnaire with

questions relating to their field of expertise. The interviews generally took between one and two hours to complete, and I would compensate the interviewee for lost time with gifts of food.

My questionnaire was divided into three main topics: 1) information about the demographics of the particular family (i.e., number of family members, ages, emigration history); 2) economic information (i.e., number of animals owned and sold in the past two years, amount of land farmed); and 3) feast information (i.e., which feasts they attended, which they hosted, which events merit a feast, costs). I further supplemented this data by mapping the house and recording all of the objects within it, such as cooking pots, serving vessels, trophy bones, and prestige items.

Of course, there is always the possibility of misinformation being given during interviews. Some of the steps I took to compensate for this were to double check data (such as number of animals owned) when it was possible for me to see for myself. I would also seek to confirm data given at one interview by cross referencing it at a second interview. For instance, if person X told me that he went to a certain wedding in a neighbouring village and later person Y told me that he went to that same wedding, then I would ask Y if X was also there. It was not possible for me to confirm the information given in regards to the amount of land that each family owned. However, by the end of the study it became apparent which households were wealthy and which were poor, and in almost all cases the amount of land that each family claimed to own seemed to conform to their level of wealth. Furthermore, the figures that I was given for the amount of land owned

roughly match the range of figures which other ethnographers have recorded for the Hilltribes (see, Schubert et al 1986: 53).

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Background and Discussion

The Akha are a 'transegalitarian' society (Hayden and Maneeprasert 1995, 1996; Lewis 1969, 1970). By this I mean that although they (as individuals) profess to value the ideals of egalitarianism, personal self-autonomy, and a democratic decision making process, in actuality there are sizable differences in wealth and power between individuals and family groups (Alting von Gesau 1983: 20; Hayden 1998: 4; Schubert et al 1986: 55). These material resource and social power inequities result in the emergence of subtle social class distinctions, and in this sense, transegalitarianism is a form of incipient authoritarianism. However, the nature of the resource base of many traditional transegalitarian societies (which will be discussed presently) generally does not allow social class distinctions to develop fully, and there are many instances, of which Leach's (1956) study of the Kachin is the seminal example, where there is actually a regression towards greater social equality and individual self-autonomy. Most of the ethnographic literature that deals with feasting, however (e.g., Junker 1998; Gibson 1970), concerns transegalitarian societies which have much higher degrees of class development, power centralization, and wealth inequity than the Akha.

The literature would seem to indicate that feasting in truly egalitarian hunting and gathering societies appears to function mainly as a social strategy which fosters *intra*-group solidarity and *inter*-group

alliance maintenance (Hayden 1995a). Although individuals profit by being part of groups that sponsor feasts, and each person probably considers the relative benefits to him or herself in deciding how to participate in feasts, the idea of the individual as *principal motivator and benefactor* is not as prevalent as in the feasting practices of more complex, and less egalitarian, societies. In egalitarian societies there are no 'Aggrandizers' (Hayden 1990), there is only the nuclear family and the band. The Akha, I believe, in some ways, offer a good example of egalitarian-like feasting practices. By this I mean that the overall feasting complex functions, for the most part, to foster solidarity and alliance but that its greater diversity of form reflects the greater complexity and inequality of the Hilltribe's socioeconomic world as compared to that of simple hunters and gatherers.

It must be remembered that Hilltribe swidden horticulture allows for a greater population density than hunting and gathering and consequently presents new organizational challenges. Their villages can have up to several hundred people in residence and are consequently segmented into various allied internal sub-groups. In Akha society the prime sub-group dividing line seems to be lineage/clan membership. Clans are patrilineally related families living in separate communities, while lineages are patrilineally related families (smaller segments of clans) living in the same community (Hayden 1996: 10). Because the ownership of swidden fields was only temporary, and families had to eventually move on once the land lost its fertility, the long term (multi-generational) monopolization of arable land by one allied-group was not possible. Furthermore, because of the availability of new land (in past traditional times) socially weaker and dominated groups always had the

option of moving out of a village and farming in a new locale.

Consequently, the formation of a wealthy land owning gentry class was not possible, no one could count on long term economic security, and even mere economic survival was a precarious thing for every family. However, rich families always had advantages in pioneering new village locations (Cooper 1984: 125).

There are many ways in which a drastic change of fortune can occur. The literature makes ample reference to bandits and armies robbing whole villages (i.e., Lewis 1969: 121; Kammerer 1986: 89), and I have testimony from Akha elders regarding famines in the past. For instance, some of the richest families in Sam Soong village lost almost all of their pigs to disease in the past two years: one family lost nearly 80 pigs. The point is that to some degree the nature of the Akha resource base is similar to that of a hunting and gathering people's resource base: it is highly fluctuating, to some degree unpredictable, and not strictly nucleated. In other ways it is similar to the resource base of more complex societies: it is labour intensive; increased extraction labour does not necessarily make resources vulnerable to overexploitation but can increase total output; the economy allows for the production of occasional surpluses; not all land is of the same quality; and land that is cultivated is effectively private property.

From the field data collected, which will be presented in detail in later sections, it is clear that to cope with these unique resource qualities, the Akha use a mixture of simple hunter-gatherer and complex-society social strategies (or feasting techniques). The typically simple hunter-gatherer problems (the precariousness and fluctuations of the food supply) are dealt with by alliance formation and mutual

assistance created in part by feasting *within the clan and lineage, and to some extent the village*. Feasting creates and maintains a social support network, a security net which people can fall back on in times of subsistence or political crisis (Kammerer 1986; Kirsch 1973: 44). There is little or no aggrandizing or competitive behaviour at these feasts. Some examples of intralineage solidarity feasts are the 12 annual family ancestor offerings, the sickness curing feasts, and baby naming feasts.

The typically complex-society problems, the competition for labour, land, and political control in general, are dealt with to a great extent by feasting *between the clan and lineages* (i.e., feasts which foster alliances between groups such as weddings, or which are grandiose enough to validate a claim to power such as funerals). These larger feasts serve to advertise the wealth and productivity of the host lineages, and this in turn increases their chances of acquiring good wives from prosperous and powerful families for their sons, and of encouraging other, more distantly related, clan members to move to their village. These kinds of feasts exhibit some mildly aggrandizing attributes (such as many food delicacies, displays of wealth, much alcohol, and narcotics) and have the emic purpose of being impressive. The more ostentatious Akha funeral feasts, for example, fall into this category.

It is more appropriate to conceptualize the above division of feasting activity -- hunter-gather type solidarity feasting and complex-society competitive feasting -- as a spectrum, rather than as two 'categories', of feasting activity. They are not mutually exclusive divisions. A wedding feast, for example, will tend to be promotional, and therefore competitive, in nature but will also always foster a

certain degree of intraclan solidarity and alliance enhancement. A poor family's wedding will emphasize intraclan solidarity (most guests being from within the lineage) while a rich family's wedding will emphasize the promotional aspects (many guests being from other lineages). That is why it is so difficult to create feasting classification categories based on function alone: although each feast category may share a structural homogeneity (e.g., all weddings have a certain prescribed ordering of ritual and food consumption), most feasts have a variety of functions which are manifested to varying degrees. The degree to which any function is made manifest, whether it be social bonding, wealth advertisement, or out-right debt fostering, is contingent upon many factors. The primary factor seems to be the host's wealth and relative sociopolitical position and ambitions.

I would like to propose that in Akha society socioeconomic inequities, competition, and aggrandizing behaviour emerge primarily among the lineages as a whole, rather than among individuals, and that this, more than anything, serves to define transegalitarianism in the Akha case. Individual households in Akha society, even if they are rich, do not become socially dominant in the way that individual households become dominant in more complex transegalitarian or stratified societies where power is more easily centralized. Particular lineages, on the other hand, can and do become socially dominant. This is why I feel that for the purposes of this study the lineages and clans are much more fruitful units of analysis than the individual or household. Furthermore, many analytical problems arise at the individual level of analysis. For example: I have found that a relatively poor man in a dominant clan may own more feasting paraphernalia (pots and vessels)

than a richer man in an minor clan simply because he has more feasting obligations within his very active clan; the senior member of a lineage will own a disproportionate amount of feasting paraphernalia which is not necessarily contingent upon his wealth or power but on the fact that he is the focal point of the feasting activity within his lineage.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Ethnographic Background**

The Akha (also known as Kaw or E-Kaw) are an ethnic minority living in the northern mountainous regions of mainland Southeast Asia. Although their exact population is not known, it is generally believed that they number somewhere around 500,000 individuals (Tribal Research Institute 1995). Although the vast majority of Akha live in Yunnan Province, China, significant numbers have been migrating southward for the past century or more, and many now live in Kentung State, Myanmar, Northern Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. In addition to those who call themselves Akha, there is a closely related ethnic group in China known as the Hani who number approximately one million. They are all members of the Lolo branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group, and it is believed that they (along with most of the other Hilltribes) originated from the Tibetan plateau and have slowly been migrating east and south towards their present homeland (Kammerer 1986; Lewis 1969). The exact date of the Akha's first entry into Thailand is not known, but it is believed to be as recent as the late 1800's (Hayden and Maneprasert 1995; Kammerer 1986: 24). Today, there is a constant influx of minority groups fleeing into Thailand away from the fighting in Burma between the Burmese government forces and ethnic Hilltribe separatists.

Most of the Akha in Thailand still prefer to live on mountain slopes at approximately 1000 m elevation. The first area that they settled in was just north of the Mae Kok river, however, due to

population pressure and Thai settlement policies, many have since migrated out of the Mae Kok basin. Today, Akha are found in six provinces: Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Tak, Kamphang Phet, Lampang, and Phrae. Most Akha in Thailand still live in Chiang Rai province, and their total population is in excess of 48, 468 people living in 258 villages (Tribal Research Institute 1995).

Traditionally, the Akha are shifting cultivators. They grow dry swidden rice (occasionally wet paddy rice), corn, ginger, peppers, peanuts, and a variety of other vegetables for consumption and sale. Recently, due to Thai governmental efforts to halt migration and to eradicate opium production, many Akha now tend sustainable fruit orchards, tea plantations, and cabbage farms. Crop production is often inadequate for consumption needs (Schubert et al 1986: xxi), and the people supplement their diet by gathering wild plants and hunting. This is not as common as it was in the past. They also raise domestic animals for use in their many sacrifices and ceremonies, as well as for sale. These include several varieties of fowl (chicken, duck, turkey), as well as, cattle, water buffalo, pigs, goats, and dogs.

Each Akha village is, traditionally, an independent political unit, made up of members of at least three patrilineal clans (Lewis 1992: 208). The salient social unit is the extended family, with the oldest male in each family acting as the head of that family. He functions as family priest in regular offerings made to the ancestors. Elders of the patrilineal clans mediate all relationships concerning kinship ties, marriage, residential patterns, and rights of succession (Tribal Research Institute 1995). The vast majority of Akha marriages are monogamous, however there is no prohibition against a man taking two or more wives. They are

patrilocal, after marriage the new bride moves into her father-in-law's house.

The Akha are pantheists who place great emphasis upon ancestor worship, spirit placation, and rice fertility rituals. Each Akha village is centered around the home of a ceremonial headman, or Village Priest, known as the *Dzuma*. Lewis (1969) uses the gloss 'Village Priest' to describe the *Dzuma's* position, but I prefer to use Kammerer's (1986) gloss of 'Village Founder-Leader'. I prefer Kammerer's title because I feel that it better describes the way that the Akha themselves view this position: i.e., the Village Founder-Leader was one of the first settlers of a village (or his descendant) and he leads the people in village wide religious events. Furthermore, the title 'Village Priest' connotes a distinction between secular and sacred which really does not exist in the Akha political sphere.

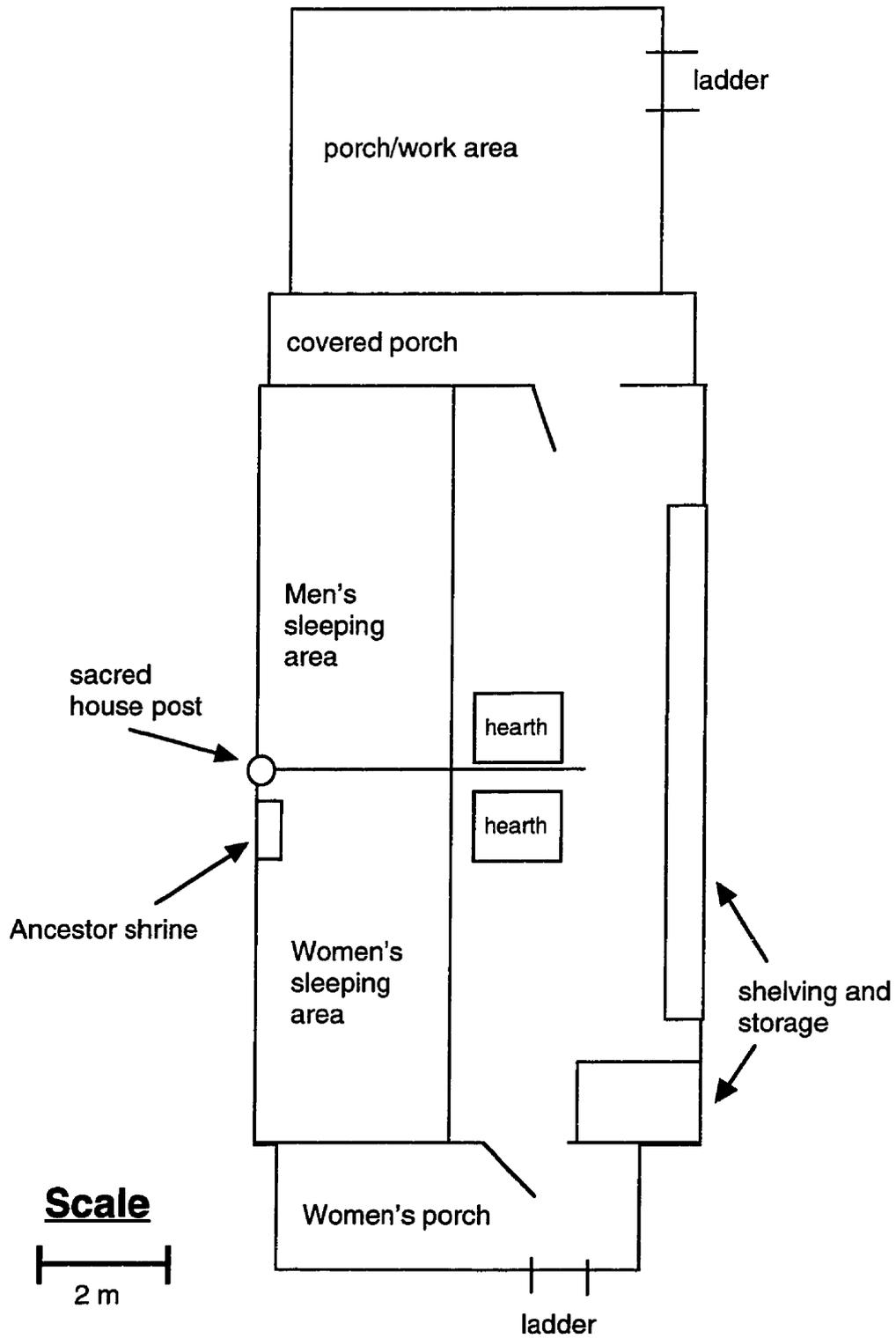
All villages also have a less important 'political' headman who tends to deal with more secular village-wide issues, his position needs to be ratified by the Thai authorities. Most larger villages will also have one or more ritual specialists known as *Bu Moe* or *Pima* (the later being a higher grade of the same position) Lewis (1969) calls these men 'Spirit Priests' but, once again, I prefer Kammerer's (1986) use of the label 'Reciter'. I prefer Kammerer's title because these men work their 'magic' by reciting genealogies and history stories. They work with individuals (as opposed to the whole village) in times of sickness, death, and other such matters which the people feel the spirits are responsible for (Lewis 1969, 1970; Kammerer 1986). The Akha also have Shamans, who are usually female. They perform similar tasks as the Reciter, but rather than being ritual incantation specialists, Shamans communicate

to the spirits by going into a trance. Shamans have no recognized place in the Akha political hierarchy, though they are often fairly respected individuals (Lewis 1969: 284).

An Akha village can be identified by the ceremonial gate which is on the main path to the village; the ring of forest which is maintained around the settlement; and the giant tripod swing situated high up on the ridge which is used in an annual harvest festival. Traditional Akha houses are built with six planted wooden posts, a thatched roof, and bamboo walls and floor. There are no windows, and the roof is quite large, coming way down to almost the base of the wall. If they can, they prefer to build the entire house on stilts, and to use the covered area beneath for storage and a stable for the animals. Sometimes they build half the house on the upper slope of the mountain, and leave the down slope side slightly elevated.

The interior of a home is divided into two halves by a head height partition: one half for the men, the other for women. Each side has its own hearth, situated just to one side of the partition, as well as its own exterior porch. Guests are entertained in the men's half. The ancestor altar is hung on the central house post on the women's side of the house. This is the most sacred part of the home. The head of the house sleeps with his head near this post, while on the other side of the partition, underneath the altar, his wife sleeps with her head near the post. Map 3-1, below, is a representation of a typical traditional Akha raised house, however, it is becoming increasingly common for people to build their homes on the ground using cement cinderblocks.

**Map 3-1: Akha Raised House**



In regards to dress, Akha women are quite spectacular. The headdress is the most distinctive part of their costume, and there are three main varieties. The Akha group which this study is based on wear a style known as *Loi Mi Sha*. It consists of a tight fitting bonnet covered in silver hemispheres, an embossed silver (or tin) plate which is worn vertically on the back of the head, and an assortment of silver coins, baubles, and beads hanging down in front. These headdresses can weigh in excess of 2 kg, and are a major repository of a family's surplus wealth. Women also wear a short indigo skirt hung low on the hips which stops just above intricately embroidered leggings, and a halter-top style bodice (more often a T-shirt today) covered with a short jacket. Akha men's clothing is less elaborate, the traditional items usually consisting of loose fitting high-cut trousers, a short jacket, and a turban for formal occasions. Many young Akha men in Thailand today wear Western style clothing bought in Thai market towns, however, the traditional dress is still very strongly adhered to by the women.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Akha Political Structure**

#### *Introduction*

Because feasting and politics are so intertwined in Akha society, it is impossible to understand one without having a knowledge of the other (Hayden and Maneprasert 1995). All official political meetings take place in a feasting context. Furthermore, powerful people in Akha villages are expected to host large and frequent feasts (Lewis 1969). In the following section I will attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the Akha's political system.

The largest polity in traditional Akha society is the village. The typical village consists of 20 to 60 households representing three to five clans. The village political structure is three tiered. The most basic authoritarian unit is the father/senior male of the nuclear family. An Akha household could be as small as a husband, wife, and children, or could be as large as husband, several wives, married children, grandchildren, grandparents, aunts, uncles, single cousins, and others. The next recognizable level of authority, and probably the most powerful, is the male lineage head. A lineage head is the eldest male of a group of patrilineally related nuclear families. For example, if five adult brothers and their families all lived in the same village and their father and paternal uncles were deceased, then the eldest of the brothers is the head of that lineage. The third and final level of political

authority consists of all of the most senior males and the several village officials: the Village Founder-Leader, the Ritual Reciter and the Ceremonial Blacksmith. In order to be recognized as an independent village with territorial rights, an Akha village must have all three of these officials.

*The Village Founder-Leader: 'Dzuma'*

The Village Founder-Leader's position is permanent, and in most cases hereditary, but is contingent upon the consensus of the village elders. When a new village is being constructed the elders must choose a Village Founder-Leader from amongst themselves, or else bring in a suitable candidate from another village. Once an established village has a Village Founder-Leader, his position is usually passed on to one of his sons as it is felt that the son would have received the required training and experience. The candidate must fulfill certain criteria. For instance, he must have a good knowledge of Akha religious custom and ritual (though he counts on his fellow elders for advice in these matters); he must be a 'holy' man, which means that his family must have been 'pure' for at least the past seven generations (no one must have died a violent death, no deformed children); he must be at least middle-aged as he is expected to lead a subdued lifestyle, be mature, and not become arrogant (Lewis 1969: 191-200). When the village elders choose a Village Founder-Leader, they must be unanimous in their choice, if not, then the dissenters are expected to leave the village (Lewis 1969: 191-200).

Often the man chosen to be [Village Founder-Leader] is reluctant, and may say he does not want to serve. This may just be coyness in some cases, but I believe that from what [my informant] said, he was really afraid to take on such a high and important position. However, the elders will usually prevail upon the person if he is reluctant, and make promises of how they will help, etc. When it is a matter of calling a person from another village to serve, they will have to promise paddy, money, and other material benefits to talk them into doing it (Lewis 1969: 121, brackets added).

After the new Village Founder-Leader is chosen there is an ordination ceremony and feast. Ideally, his house is the first to be built and the rest of the village is centered around it. This ordination ceremony is always accompanied by a feast at which all of the elders of the new village must be present: "This was a public acknowledgment that they were behind this man as their new village priest" (Lewis 1969: 124).

It is also at this time that the assistant Village Founder-Leaders are ordained. There can be as many assistants as is felt is necessary, although two is considered the optimum (Lewis 1969: 191-200). There is another set of ceremonies and feasts/sacrifices of chickens at the assistants respective homes. The Village Founder-Leader blesses the assistants and promises to share with them any of the wild game tribute that he receives. Then they all proceed to feast on the chicken, accompanied by quite a bit of drinking: "They were not hungry, since they had just had a feast. But they must all touch some of the food to their lips, at least. 'We must carry out the custom whether we are hungry or not'" (Lewis 1969: 127).

The Village Founder-Leader and his assistants are now officially ordained, but this is not yet the end of his feasting obligations. Seven days after his ordination, the new Village Founder-Leader must kill a pig that the villagers have paid for and then divide the meat in

accordance with the amount of money that each family contributed towards the purchase of the pig. This is called the 'moving into the village ceremony', and is performed only if nothing bad (such as a death) has occurred up until that point in time. Still later, when one cycle of days (13 days) has passed from the day of the ordination, the Village Founder-Leader must kill yet another pig in his house. If all goes well for the first cycle of days, this is seen to be a good omen for the future religious potency of the new Village Founder-Leader.

"The [Village Founder-Leader] is fully responsible for the health, welfare and religious life of the whole village. This includes livestock, the rice crop year by year, the water source not going dry, and everything else that has to do in any way with that village." (Lewis 1969: 128, brackets added). Although the spiritual responsibilities of the Village Founder-Leader are quite numerous (i.e., ensuring prosperity through the proper enactment of rituals), his power in the village can actually be quite limited, the real power resting in allied groups of elder lineage heads.

Although the Village Founder-Leader does arbitrate disputes and impose fines, he does not do so alone. Rather, he does so in consultation with other male elders; his decision legitimizes the consensus reached. It is his duty to follow customs; he cannot impose his individual will upon villagers in his care (Kammerer 1986: 93).

The Village Founder-Leader's ceremonial roles and responsibilities, as well as the economic remuneration he can expect, are quite well defined. His responsibilities include the following (as related by Lewis 1969: 191-200):

1) Ceremonies: He must lead the four village wide ceremonies.

These are the purification of the water source and rice seed; renewal of

the village gate; rebuilding of the village swing; and the offering to lords and rulers of earth and water. There are also a series of ceremonies concerning the agricultural cycle, as well as others concerning epidemic illness for which he is responsible.

2) Sacred Places: He must care for the six sacred places. These are the primary village gate, the secondary village gate, the village swing, the village water source, the graveyard, and the offering site to the 'lords and rulers of earth and water'.

3) Birth: He can give magical aid in times of birthing difficulties.

4) Death: He must supervise the preparation of the body and coffin. In the case of a 'bad' death (e.g., drowning or murder) he must perform the proper ceremonies.

5) Village matters: People moving into or out of the village must perform a ceremony at his house. He keeps the tally of services or money that people donate to the village.

6) Fines: He will fine villagers, and visitors, for religious infractions against the sacred places in the village (these often cover, or at least go towards, the cost of the animals needed for purification ceremonies). He also determines the fine for adultery. There are also other religious taboos the breaking of which may require a fine. For a first offense, these fines are generally no more than a bottle of whiskey to be poured out for the elders (a humiliating experience), but if the taboo is continually disregarded the fines will get stiffer until the point where the Village Founder-Leader may force the person to leave the village. Lewis (1969: 134) has documented two such cases in Burma.

The economic remuneration of the Village Founder-Leader would probably vary by region. Lewis (1969: 138) has documented that in

Burma the Village Founder-Leader is entitled to the right foreleg of big game animals that are caught by the villagers, and he and his assistants share the right foreleg of any pig killed for a wedding. He and his helpers also get one-third of all religious fines. The judges in the case get one-third of what is left of the fine, while the remaining two thirds go to the village fund. He gets four old coins (US\$8.50 in 1969) when he purifies the water sources, and 30 pyas (roughly six cents in 1969) whenever he must hold a village protection ceremony. He is invited to all of the feasts within the village and to many feasts in other villages. Finally, the villagers give to him the 'first fruits' of their paddy rice, fruit, and vegetables, and receive a blessing back in return.

The [Village Founder-Leader] is a stabilizing agent in the local Akha village, as well as in Akha society as a whole. They tend to be the 'ideal men' among the Akhas, and are greatly respected. Their role and function are such that they are absolutely essential to the well-being and progress of the village (Lewis 1969: 141, brackets added).

The sociopolitical world of Thailand in the 1990's is quite different from the world that Lewis knew in Burma of the 1960's. It is still not clearly understood what the exact role the Village Founder-Leader plays in contemporary Akha society. As the village priest he is the spiritual leader of the people and the nominal administrative head of the 'council' of elders. The Village Founder-Leader in my study village of Mae Salep was highly respected, and highly influential, but I am not sure how much of this respect had to do with the fact that he was the Village Founder-Leader, and how much of it had to do with the fact that he was about the oldest man in the village and, most importantly, the head of the dominant Latche clan. The Village Founder-Leader of Sam Soong village, by contrast, was part of a minor clan, and his power and

respect in the village seemed to be at a relatively low level. There were two or three other assistant Village Founder-Leaders in Sam Soong which seemed to diffuse the main Village Founder-Leader's relative respect and influence.

Traditionally, the Akha also have a village headman (who I will discuss in detail in a later section), and he is nominated by consensus of the elders and operates in a more political sphere as compared to the Village Founder-Leader. He is especially important in terms of relations with national and provincial governments and other people outside of the village. Lewis (1969: 225) describes the headman's function in Burma as very much of a strong arm. It was his role to use physical force if it ever became necessary, and in general to mediate in all ugly and contentious matters that did not have an overtly religious nature. For example:

The Akhas also gamble with domino-like cubes (pa-i di-eu) during the new year's season. The [Village Founder-Leader] must be the first to throw.... After that he does not play with them anymore. If there is trouble, as there often is because of the drinking, the village headman (bu seh) has to arbitrate. He will ask how much money they started out with, and then try to work out what each one owes each other. Sometimes they have to take it all the way to the court (Lewis 1969: 216, brackets added).

The Village Founder-Leader is systematically excused from all events which might produce conflict (Kammerer 1986: 145), as in the example above (which was also documented by Kammerer 1986: 149) where the Village Founder-Leader is obligated to throw the first New Year's gambling dominoes but then leaves because once everyone gets drunk there is invariably fighting. It was felt that the holiness of the Village Founder-Leader (which is a village resource) should be spared from this, but I also suspect, based on my observations, that it was very

important to try to maintain the impartiality of the Village Founder-Leader. He is the embodiment of the united village, and in order for him to fulfill the requirements of his position, it is necessary that he at least maintain the appearance of functioning above and beyond the dictates of clan loyalties.

The Village Founder-Leader seems to function as a catalyst for village cohesion. "When the Akhas carry out their religious duties, it seems to bring them a certain feeling of security through conformity to the religion handed down by their ancestors" (Lewis 1969: 96). By participating in the maintenance of the traditional elements of the Village Founder-Leader's household, villagers are communicating their cooperative intentions towards each other. The Village Founder-Leader is the embodiment of tradition and as such represents continuity and village cohesiveness. Kammerer (1986: 96) agrees with this view, and in reference to the obligatory wild game foreleg 'tribute' that the Village Founder-Leader receives she states that:

In the Akha case, the right foreleg of 'big game' given to the Village Founder-Leader cannot be viewed as tribute. Rather, it implies recognition that the Village Founder-Leader represents the community vis-a-vis the spirits of the land.

Based on my interviews and observations, it would seem that the Akha conceive of the time and economic surplus that they contribute to the Village Founder-Leader's household as a kind of insurance policy or savings account: the idea being that in times of misfortune they expect the rest of the villagers, and the Village Founder-Leader, to help as much as they can. In times of crisis, people turn first to their extended family; if this fails, they will turn to their fellow clan members; as a last

resort they will appeal for assistance from the Village Founder-Leader as representative of the village.

All the annual village-wide solidarity feasts are centered around the Village Founder-Leader's household. The Village Founder-Leader's role and power may have varied throughout time and space according to the dictates of personality and economic contingency, but I still believe that the inherent social function of his position as 'father of the village' is to create and maintain a level of social organization of the third order: the first being the family with the father at the head, the second being the lineage with the eldest male at the head, and the third being the village elders with the founding family of the Village Founder-Leader at the head.

I am not claiming that the Village Founder-Leader does not ever utilize his quasi-heredity position for personal economic gain, or to be more specific, that the Village Founder-Leader's clan does not utilize his position for their overall economic gain. There are definite material and economic advantages in assuming the role of Village Founder-Leader, and it would be to any villager's advantage to court the favour of the Village Founder-Leader. It is he who often has the final word in regards to issues such as debt arbitration and monetary penalties to both secular and religious infractions. Inviting the Village Founder-Leader to feasts and bestowing him with gifts is certainly an avenue that most villagers use to gain his favour and respect. However, it should be kept in mind that the self-serving actions of the Village Founder-Leader are highly constrained by the requirements of his primary social function without which his role would have no meaning and probably cease to exist. His role as mediator and village organizer

must to some degree be seen as superseding his lower order clan allegiances. Furthermore, it must also be kept in mind how the other villagers view his role, what they expect out of him, and how they perceive their own role in the feasting complex which surrounds the Village Founder-Leader.

***Ritual Reciter: 'Bumoe or Pima'***

There are two types of Reciters, the more senior and more respected *Pima*, and the more junior *Bumoe*. These men function as intermediaries with the spirit world, and deal with spiritual matters/issues on an individual and household level. It is not essential for an Akha village to have one of these men (women are not permitted to fulfill this role), and in fact each Reciter usually services several different villages. However, he is almost always a highly respected and influential individual in whichever village that he resides.

The Reciter is knowledgeable in the ceremonies which are necessary to placate the spirits. He performs spiritual healing and acts of divination. He is also the person responsible for the rituals involved in the funeral rite. It is through the chanting of special incantations and the arrangement of special ritual items that the Reciter communicates with the spirits. There is some disagreement in the literature over how a man can become a Reciter. Lewis (1969: 144) feels that one can become a Reciter either through a 'calling', i.e., a series of special circumstances which indicates to the person and the village elders that he is marked by the spirits, or through becoming the pupil of an established priest. Kammerer (1986:101) is of the opinion that only

through arduous training can a person become a Reciter, and then only through the recognition of his teacher.

According to Lewis (1969:145), who witnessed an ordination of a Reciter in Burma, a man must give a feast to the elders, offering a chicken and a pig, before he is formally recognized as a Reciter. It is also at this feast that he receives his special paraphernalia. These consist of a small ceremonial knife and shoulder bag, a spear with a wooden handle (for buffalo sacrifices), and a 'hat' made out of a single piece of sheet metal of the same design as Chinese rain-hats.

Today, the Reciter does not usually get 'paid' for his services, but occasionally he will receive gifts from satisfied clients. When a high ranking Reciter performs the arduous funeral ceremony where buffaloes are sacrificed, he is given gifts of silver in the form of rings and spoons. Often, several Reciters and their assistants are required for such a long and protracted ceremony (Kammerer 1986). The most regular form of remuneration is in the form of meat which he receives at the feasts which almost always are an integral part of his rituals. He, in fact, decides how many sacrifices the spirits require to be placated, so in some ways he can maximize the amount of meat (pay) that he receives;

...one thing they are entitled to is the section of meat in the animal that is sacrificed that is between the point where the knife jabs into the animal (when it is a pig or dog) to the third rib. Therefore, when the Reciter stabs the animal, he stabs it as high up on the neck as he possibly can, so that he will get more meat (Lewis 1969:150).

Formerly, there were rich benefits for Reciters and there was much competition for all of the positions.

The life of a Reciter differs more from that of his fellow villagers than does that of any other functionary; his job most

closely approaches being a full-time specialization. In general, even a young Reciter spends few days, if any, working in his family's fields. He usually remains within the community where his expertise and services are available to his neighbours. Should the labor of members of a Reciter's household not yield sufficient rice to feed the family, other villagers would probably contribute rice from their granaries to prevent the Reciter from seeking a more hospitable community. Like other functionaries, a Reciter is accorded respect (Kammerer 1986: 102)

Today, however, there are far fewer benefits and consequently very few new candidates for positions (Alting von Geusau 1983).

### *The Blacksmith: 'Baji'*

In the past, the Blacksmith would have been a very important man in an Akha village. He would produce the tools and weapons that the people needed to survive. It was customary for villagers to work in the fields of the Blacksmith in order to pay for his services (Lewis 1969; 342). Other times he was paid indirectly by all of the villagers donating a few days labour to his fields. Kammerer (1986: 99) reports that it is tradition that on the morning that a Blacksmith makes repairs to a family's tools he is given a feast by that household.

Today, because of imported Thai tools, the role of the blacksmith has been reduced to its ceremonial minimum. Nonetheless, because of his 'holiness' and ritual knowledge he still tends to be a respected and influential man in village politics. In actuality the Akha feel that the blacksmith is spiritually superior to the Reciter "because the Reciter requires a ceremonial knife and spear forged by the Blacksmith" (Kammerer 1986: 100). He has few ritual obligations, but these few include making an annual offering to the spirits of his 'skill' and helping the Village Founder-Leader perform some of the village-wide

ceremonies. The position and knowledge is generally passed on from father to son, but anyone can become a blacksmith if they so choose. However, only one Blacksmith at any given time is felt to be responsible for the village-wide ceremonial duties.

### *The Elders*

The real administrative authority in Akha villages rests in the hands of the village elders: the paternal heads of each extended family. There is a great respect for age in Akha culture, and there is also a great respect for wealth: thus, the most powerful people are wealthy elders. From an emic perspective, wealth is thought to come from blessings given by the ancestors for being a good person. The power and influence that the wealthy yield through secular means such as the ownership of land, labour, and investment capital, is augmented by the respect they receive because they are seen as being spiritually "potent" (Kirsch 1973: 25). It is the consensus of the elders, along with the ratification of the Village Founder-Leader, that makes a decision final. Each elder has a varying degree of influence and respect which he can use to shape this consensus. Allied groups of elders tend to form and these alliances tend to follow along clan lines. As a consequence, power blocks emerge. In Mae Salep for example, because the majority of households were of the Latche clan, the Latche elders dominated village politics.

The elders have considerable power. It is they who choose the other village officials, including the Village Founder-Leader and the headman. They levy fines against individuals who have committed

legal infractions. It is the elders who negotiate in conflicts that cannot be settled at the household level: for example, the extent to which a crop was damaged by a grazing buffalo and how much of it would have to be replaced by the animal's owner. Therefore, junior members are dependent on elders to represent their interests in the community.

I once asked my closest and most straightforward informant about how disputes were settled in the village, he replied: "Whoever has the most friends wins." A classic example of this form of dispute resolution is the case of one of the poorer families in Mae Salep village. This particular family had no other lineage relations in the village, and they were also Christian (thus excluding themselves from most of the traditional feasting complex). When the time came to build a new school, and since all of the flat land around the village was under cultivation, the villagers had to decide whose land to appropriate. In the end, it was this poor Christian family who lost most of their best land to the new school project. They did not legally own their land, but many people in the village do not legally own their land. It was the village consensus that the school should be put in that location, and this poor, unsupported family was powerless to stop it. They are still quite bitter and resentful about their loss. Interestingly, most of the best land surrounding the school, which is even closer to the main road (apparently one of the prime factors in deciding the school's location) is owned by one of the richest men in the village who also belongs to the dominant Latche clan.

Theoretically, based on information from my interviews, elder men always have an open invitation to attend any feasts held in the village. It is through feasting the elders that young men can

demonstrate their worth and overall success to their fellow clan members, and demonstrate their support of the elders and the rest of their support network. Being generous to the elders (but also to everyone in general) is a highly respected personal characteristic. It is by feasting the elders that people hope to gain favour and the continued support of their fellow lineage and clan members. Consequently, the elders attend a great many feasts.

Whenever a person butchers an animal in order to sell the meat, he is obligated to host the elders in a feast. Although technically all the elders are equally welcome at all feasting events, it has been my observation that elders only attend the feasts of families who they are close to, either through relation or friendship. In Mae Salep for example, the Latche elders and the Labu elders almost always attended each other's minor feasts, but elders from the other minor clans tended to only attend larger village-wide feasting events.

### *The Headman: Bu Seh*

The Headman is a secular official in Akha villages who acts both as policeman and a representative to the outside world. He is chosen by the elders (though sometimes there are formal elections) and his position is ratified by the Thai authorities. The greatest prerequisite for this position is a fluency in Thai language, consequently most headmen tend to be of the younger generation who have had formal schooling. The headman has a committee of 12 assistants who are chosen by him and the elders, and these assistants generally seem to be representatives of the various lineage groups in the village. This non-

partisan representation allows for the poor Christian families to have their needs serviced.

The Headman acts as an intermediary between the village and the Thai government: for example, he helps the villagers attain citizenship, and communicates instructions regarding the maintenance of the school. He has the right to fine and punish local infractions of the secular law but he must consult with the elders first. He is not legally obligated to listen to the elders in the performance of his duties, however, he realizes that no one in the village would respect his will alone, and he himself has great respect for the elders of his village. It has been my experience that the headman serves to reinforce the power blocks in the village which have already been established through lineage relations: he is, after all, chosen by the elders. In Mae Salep, for example, the headman is, and always has been, the son of one of the rich and socially dominant Latche families (actually, he refers to himself as an "assistant headman" because he is only responsible for his home village of Mae Salep. The real 'head man' is a Yao and he is responsible for the supervision of several villages).

My research indicates that the Headman does not play any significant role in the feasting complex. He seldom ever attended feasts, and he is a young man whom people really do not offer any deference too. I believe that most people realize that he is just an extension of the will of the elders, and if anyone wanted to gain favour in the village by hosting a feast they would have to do it through the elders and not their nominal representative the headman.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Constraints on Surplus Production**

#### *Introduction*

Feasting is the give away, usually on a large scale, of a group's economic surplus. The manner and degree of surplus expenditure is a crucial variable in my approach to the study of feasting dynamics in Akha culture. I make the assumption that people do not simply squander the product of years of labour on feasts which are only meant to be frivolous entertainment events, rather, I contend that they host feasts for very practical, adaptive, and self-serving reasons. Consequently, it is essential to understand how and why people convert surplus economic capital, in the form of food and drink, into social capital, in the form of social status and political influence. In this sense, I see feasting as a form of investment.

Capitalist banking systems and institutionalized insurance allow for individuals in modern societies to use their economic surplus, through monetary investment, to increase their overall level of wealth; to continually gain a larger and larger share of the surplus production of other people; and to secure their future against unforeseen calamities and misfortunes. People in traditional societies however, lacking banking and investment institutions, attempt to attain these same goals (i.e., a higher standard of living and future security) by investing their economic surplus in 'social institutions'. A shared set of values, norms,

and sense of responsibility, allow for this social investment system to function (Tai Landa 1994).

One of the key variables in the institution of feasting is the manner and degree of surplus wealth production. Without surplus there would be no feasts of significant size. Without the potential to increase and secure surplus production there would be little incentive to sponsor feasts. The questions arise: why doesn't the system spiral increasingly higher? Why doesn't the centralization of power proceed until an autocratic political system is attained by the most powerful and successful individuals? What stops competitive feasting, and all of its attendant displays of prestigious aggrandizement, from reaching excessive levels. The answer to these questions is that there is a limit to the amount of surplus which can be produced. The following section examines in detail the factors that limit the amount of surplus which is able to be produced in Akha society.

### *Economic Background*

Although the Akha hold egalitarianism as a high ideal, meaning that they boast of self-autonomy and never make claims to 'higher-than-others' status, in actuality there are large differences in wealth and power between both individuals and lineages (Alting von Gesau 1983; Clarke 1998; Falvey 1977; Hayden 1998). I have noted large inequalities in wealth in my main study villages of Mae Salep and Sam Soong (for example, see table 5-1 below), which I will present in detail in a later section, but Falvey (1977) has documented a similar situation in a large survey of the general region. Medium to large sized domestic

animals constitute *the* major form of wealth in tribal Southeast Asia (Hayden 1998: 4), but Falvey (1977: 27-36, 39) has documented that among the Hilltribes in general, only 30-50 % of households in most communities owned stock. Stock owners were more wealthy than non-stock owners, and 30% of the village herds were generally owned by a single household, usually that of the village headman or other influential person.

Table 5-1: Comparison of Richest and Poorest Households in Mae Salep Village

<u>Rich Men</u>	<u>House Size (m<sup>2</sup>)</u>	<u>Land (m<sup>2</sup>)</u>	<u># Buffaloes</u>	<u>Animal Sales in Past 2 Years</u>
Latche, (A)	121.1	60, 800	12	US\$ 340.00
Latche, (B)	236.25	84, 800	0	US\$ 3,680.00
Latche, (C)	175	43, 200	19	US\$ 4,504.00
<u>Poor Men</u>				
Latche, (X)	34.8	20, 800	0	0
Labu, (Y)	70	12, 800	0	0
Latche, (Z)	77	11, 200	0	0

Note: The reason that Latche B has no buffaloes is because he sold his entire of herd of eighteen the previous year.

Today in Thailand, these wealth differences seem to be growing larger because the people have been permanently settled. Cooper (1984) has noted a similar phenomenon among the Hmong of Thailand. Those lineages that were the first settlers in a region usually legally

own their land, and it is of good quality (land quality varies greatly in mountainous regions), while more recent immigrants will only have squatters rights on marginal land because they have not been able to attain full citizenship. Even in more traditional circumstances, those who were the last to move to villages had to accept less desirable lands also (Coopper 1984).

The scarcity of land, and the apparent increase in overall poverty, has forced many young people to search for work in the city. It also has made it increasingly more difficult to practice the traditional Akha religion because people can no longer afford the expense of constant animal sacrifices; it is only recently that missionaries have had success in converting the Akha to Christianity. Wealth is as important for social success in Akha society as it is in any other society. In Akha society, however, it is through feasting that wealth is transformed into social and political power.

On one level, lineages that have solidarity enhancing feasts for themselves (such as Curing and Butcher's feasts) are more tightly knit and consequently are able to function more successfully as cooperative units. This cooperation, in turn, facilitates greater political support for their members; 'high quality' (as opposed to minimal commitment) labour exchange; and a greater dependability of the crisis support network. On another level, lineages that are able to engage in economic success promotional feasts (such as large funerals and New House feasts), are able to draw new desirable (healthy, hardworking) members into their alliance group and to incur social obligations for other members of the community. Advertising economic success encourages hard working women from influential families to marry into

one's household; it encourages people in the village to listen to your opinions; and it creates a status name within the over-all region.

It is difficult to say exactly what the traditional constraints on surplus production and wealth acquisition were for the Akha in the past. However, for today's Akha the central problem is clear, it is the availability of land. Traditionally the Akha were transhumant swidden horticulturists in mid elevation mountainous regions, moving their village and fields every decade or so as the land became increasingly sterile from swidden cultivation (Lewis 1969; 220). Akha families were fairly mobile, either moving with their village or else splintering and moving to the villages of relatives. The typical Akha person could expect to make about three major moves in his or her lifetime, with seven moves being the maximum documented (Kammerer 1986: 125). Today, however, the people are forced by the Thai government to be sedentary and the issue of legal ownership of land has now come to be of central importance. Land ownership is related to the issue of Thai citizenship: a non-citizen cannot legally own land, and Hilltribe people are often not granted full citizenship. Some families have managed to become citizens, and thus to buy land, invest in cash cropping and animal herds, and have prospered; others have not been so fortunate. Regardless of citizenship, land is now in very short supply and this is the central constraint on surplus production today. In the not too distant past, however, when land was relatively plentiful, the major constraint on surplus production would have been the amount and quality of available labour. Alting von Geusau (1983) agrees:

Although egalitarian organization is deeply rooted in the traditions and the way of life of the Akha, differences between rich and poor

seem to have built up easily. They were based not on differences in access to forest, but on differences in labour force, the number of people working in the fields, and how hard they work (Alting Von Geusau 1983:271).

The maintenance of wealth in Hilltribe societies is a precarious thing (Alting Von Geusau 1983; Lewis 1969, 1970; Kammerer 1986), which is probably why individual households pool resources and risks as part of larger lineages and clans. Economic surpluses are generally stored in two forms: silver jewelery and livestock. Precious metals and animals are easily converted to money or food in times of necessity. Fortunes can fluctuate greatly. For instance, land productivity may suddenly and drastically decline; diseases can strike crops, animals, and family members (labourers); bandits sometimes rob villages. Maneeprasert (personal communication) has documented a 30% reduction in crop yields in Akha villages during bad agricultural seasons. Visitpanich and Falvey (1980: 264) have noted that epidemic diseases (especially swine fever) which decimate pig herds occur with an average frequency of 1.6 years and have a mean mortality rate of 74%.

The labour force available can change significantly during "the developmental cycle in domestic groups" (Goody 1971), so the fortunes of a household may vary considerably over time. Even given many hands in the fields, a family may experience want: rainfall can be insufficient, fire can destroy the rice granary, domestic animals can die, and silver can be stolen. From the Akha point of view, such occurrences are not a matter of chance or luck; rather, they are evidence of lack of "blessing" just as is the absence of children to labor in the family fields. (Kammerer 1986: 89).

An excellent and typical example of this fall in fortune is the story of one of the elders in my study village of Mae Salep. He grew up in Burma where he became a relatively rich man. He was eventually

forced to flee the fighting in Burma and immigrated to Thailand with what little of his wealth he could transport. He became prosperous in Thailand for most of his life but had descended into lower-income status (not true poverty) in his old age. He had significant cattle and buffalo herds at one time, he used to buy six buffalo and ten cows at a time. Today, however, he has had to sell the last of his herds in order to buy rice and to pay his debts. His cows were producing no healthy young, and his buffalo were diseased. He could not even keep a few cows because it was too difficult to supervise them (he probably did not have any young members of his household available to keep the animals from damaging the villager's crops). Furthermore, his crops and pig herds did very poorly for several years (probably pushing him into debt). Last year his son planted cabbages but no one bought them; his family planted 600-700 kg of ginger but the entire crop died of disease. One of his sons is in jail for assault/attempted murder because the family could not raise the necessary bribe to give to the arresting officer. This elder used to perform many ceremonies in order to solicit luck. This would have further reduced his herds. He claims to have given many buffalo at his parents funeral and cannot understand why he did not receive any merit for it. He does not know why he had such a "lack of blessing".

I would like to go into some detail on the topic of animal husbandry because it is central in understanding differences in wealth and the production of surpluses for use in feasting (Hayden 1998; Falvey 1977). There are often 'hidden' costs to raising animals which are not apparent to the observer at first glance: for example, the fact that pig food must be grown and cooked to raise pigs at a rapid rate

means that someone has to be able to collect that much more fuel for the fire and spend time and effort growing or gathering the food.

There are different requirements for the raising of pigs as compared to cattle and buffalo, and first I would like to address the specifics of pig husbandry.

### *Pig Husbandry*

Practically every family engages in pig raising to some extent, the only ones lacking pigs are the truly poverty stricken (often opium addicts) or the Christian converts. The following description of one man's pig raising practices is fairly typical and representative of Akha pig husbandry in my study villages overall.

My informant is a 'middle-income' man in his mid 40's. He owns five pigs which average about 60 cm in length. Once a day he feeds the pigs a mixture of corn and papaya, which has to be bought or grown and cooked. Sometimes the pigs are fed banana stalks which his wife collects. The pigs do not forage in the forest (although allowing pigs to forage in the forest is more common in some other villages). He always keeps one particular sow to continue his herd, however, if one of his parents should die then he, along with the rest of his siblings, would have to butcher this main sow at the parent's funeral. It takes one year to raise a good size pig (about 30 kg) to be able to sell it for meat. A full grown pig is worth about 2000 Baht (US\$75.00). Once it is older than a year, the pig ceases to grow in size but does put on weight in fat. The more corn the animal is fed, the more fat it will become. Usually pigs

give birth twice a year, sometimes five times in two years. A sow will give birth to between five and twelve piglets.

Visitpanich and Falvey (1980: 263) claim that by feeding each pig about 0.5 kg of corn each day for 3-6 months (during periods of surplus), a pig will attain 60 kg in a year, versus only 30 kg without food supplements. They further state that the amount given generally increases to 2-3 kg per day during the month before slaughtering. This leads to the conclusion, that Hayden (1998) also draws, that economically viable pig husbandry is very dependent upon the amount of surplus grain that a family can produce. In turn, surplus grain production is contingent upon access to enough high quality land; the availability of hardworking labourers; and the relative skill of the farmer.

My interviews and observations have lead me to believe that there are three main reasons why people generally do not have large pig herds: 1) some of the piglets almost always die, and disease among full grown pigs is also quite common, 2) they have many ceremonies in which small pigs are sacrificed, and 3) they do not have the land and/or labour to grow the necessary surplus food.

### ***Bovine Husbandry***

Cattle and water buffalo are expensive animals, and they are generally owned only by those Akha who have a certain amount of wealth. These animals play a prominent role in the feasting complex, particularly at funerals and village-wide feasts, but because of their expense, they are only used at the most important feasts (which is

fairly seldom), and now are generally raised for profit. It is difficult to speculate about traditional Akha bovine husbandry in the past when there was ample land available. Today, however, the land shortage in the mountains of Thailand, along with forced permanent settlement, has greatly affected Akha animal husbandry and agricultural practices.

In general, cattle can graze in the forest but buffaloes cannot because they knock down newly planted trees, which is an offense that can result in a substantial fine from Thai forestry officials. For most villages there is no one special grazing area that everyone uses (although I have heard stories of giant corral areas being used in the past). Instead, each family takes its herds to graze in different small communal areas around the village: these can be areas such as fallow fields or the grass growing along the side of a road. Very little feed or fodder is given to cattle and they are essentially expected to fend for themselves (Hayden 1998: 6). The children in the family are usually responsible for driving and supervising the grazing herds. Speaking of the Akha in Burma Lewis states that:

It is usually the children of the village who herd the animals. For this reason Akha parents often are unhappy to see schools started in their villages which will 'deprive them of herders'. When children do go to school, others in the household (including the man of the house) will have to take turns herding. Often they will have 'servant-slaves' (za ka) whom they support (as children of very poor families or destitute widows), and they will make them the herders (Lewis 1969: 560)

If a family owns both cattle *and* buffalo then sometimes they will have to herd them separately because the buffalo will exclude the cows from the good grazing spots, consequently it is occasionally necessary to have two people to supervise the herds (Lewis 1969: 559).

The people try to obtain as many cows as they can though sometimes they might limit the number of buffaloes because it is too difficult to keep them out of the fields (Lewis 1969: 560). One rich family that I interviewed had to make crop damage repayments six times in one year. An adult cow is sold for 7-10,000 Baht (US\$250.00 to US\$400.00). An adult buffalo, with 'big and beautiful horns', is worth 13-14000 Baht (\$US500.00 to US\$550.00). These initial start up costs, although they may appear low, are often much too high for many families to afford (Falvey 1977: 89; Schubert et al. 1986: 96), especially when one considers that returns from cattle investment cannot be expected until several years after the initial purchase. "Because of the substantial start up costs, most cattle raising is begun by inheritance or adjustment (the loaning of animals to others to take care of in exchange for a share of the resulting offspring)" (Hayden 1998: 8).

In regards to animal theft, Lewis (1969: 559) makes note that in the central area of Kentung State, Burma, the Akha use the term 'herd' (bo-eu) for supervising cattle, while in the north the term 'guard' (lo-eu) is used. This is apparently because sometimes if a farmer is in financial duress he will try to steal someone else's cow or buffalo. Although I have never documented any cases of cattle theft in Thailand, I have on several occasions been told that a family suspects that its missing pig, or pigs, have been stolen.

There are a number of reasons why an Akha farmer may feel that it is necessary to destroy an animal, and thus cull his own herds. The Akha have very strict regulations on animals which they consider 'unnatural' and therefore must not be raised in an Akha village (Lewis 1969: 552). Lewis (1969: 552-555) has noted several occasions when

an animal must be killed because they are considered unnatural 'animal rejects'. These regulations usually have to do with usual numbers of young being born (i.e., a cow with multiple calves, or a pig with only one or two piglets); animals who give birth in unusual places; and animals with unexplainable diseases or injuries.

Finally, there are some occasions (much more rare today) when a domestic animal is killed by a wild animal. Interestingly, there are special traditions regarding the use of meat from animals that have been killed or wounded (Lewis 1969: 552-555), and to me, they illustrate the value and importance of meat in Akha society:

- 1) If a tiger or leopard should kill any domestic animal then the owner must divide the remaining meat up into two equal halves. One half is considered 'bad' meat and is sold to the villagers very cheaply. The other half is considered 'good' meat and can be sold at regular prices or can be consumed by the owner.
- 2) If an animal is injured by a predator or through an accident but does not get well, they must kill it and consider the meat as above but with one exception. The animal is likewise cut in half, but the 'bad' meat is sold for half the going rate (a much larger sum than in the previous example), and the 'good' meat is sold for the regular price or else eaten by the owner. "Sometimes when an owner finds his animal dead in the jungle, he will stab it several times and say he saw it badly wounded, so he went ahead and killed it - so he can get more money. This often leads to arguments" (Lewis 1969: 558).

### *Summary of Animal Production Constraints*

In summary, my research indicates that the major constraints on the production of pigs in Akha society are:

- 1) the lack of land to grow feed;
- 2) high stock mortality rate due to disease; and
- 3) constant sacrificial requirements.

There are also, lesser, but nonetheless existent constraining factors. These include:

- 1) individual lack of skill at farming;
- 2) insufficient labour for tending stock and growing or collecting feed;
- 3) lack of the social power to access prime land and labour; and
- 4) lack of initiative because of substance abuse or disinterest in politics.

The constraints on the production of surplus cattle and buffalo are:

- 1) the unavailability of grazing land;
- 2) high cost of initial start up capital, and the risk of loss of investment from disease, accident, and theft;
- 3) lack of capital to cover, and social power to defend against, crop damage payments and litigations;
- 4) long waiting time for investment return; and
- 5) lack of initiative because of substance abuse or disinterest in politics.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Types of Akha Feasts**

#### *Introduction*

Akha life is simply rife with feasting. There is no significant secular or religious event which is not accompanied by a feast of some kind. For example, the Akha hold feasts for various kinds of purifications, curings, butchering, moving, divorces, menopause, field ceremonies, initiations of all offices, and gratitude feasts for elders and the special spirits of the village officials. In the following discussion I will present, in detail, as many of those feasts as I was able to attain information on, either through participant observation, personal interviews, or the ethnographic literature. This list is not exhaustive, but it does include all of the major, the most common, and the most socially significant feasts that the Akha have. Table 6-1 (below) delineates the number and types of feasts that I was able to participate in personally, all other feast descriptions presented in this chapter are compilations from various ethnographic sources.

First I would like to present some background on the manner in which Akha feasts unfold. Most feasts take place in a single home. There is always at least one kind of animal killed for the event, the most common being a pig. The men and women eat separately in their respective halves of the house. Young men do most cooking, except for

Table 6-1: Number of Feasts Types Attended

<u>Feast Type</u>	<u>Mae Salep</u>	<u>Sam Soong</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>Village</u>	<u>Village</u>	<u>Villages</u>	
Ancestor	1	1	1	3
Baby Name	1	0	0	1
Workman's	2	1	0	3
Butcher's	2	0	0	2
Curing	4	0	0	4
'Annuals'	0	0	0	0
Wedding	2	0	0	2
New House	2	0	1	3
White Skirt	0	0	0	0
Guest	2	1	0	3
Funeral	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>				<b>21</b>

the rice, and the middle aged men will usually act as servers. The elders, both men and women, are seated on the raised part of the floor which is normally used as a sleeping area. The most prestigious spot is directly beside the central house post, the one on which the ancestor shrine is hung. If the Village Founder-Leader is in attendance, he will automatically be given this spot. All of the other elders will seat themselves relative to the Village Founder-Leader based on their ages, the oldest, or most respected, elders sitting beside the Village Founder-Leader. All of the younger men in attendance will sit together at other tables, and there are sometimes enough younger women in attendance

to merit a second or third female table other than the one set up for the elder-women. Usually, however, most women will only loiter around the periphery of the event, or else eat in the kitchen with the young male cooks.

Once the food is prepared, it is common to bring it out from the kitchen, or from the women's half of the house, where it was cooked, and to place it all in the main dining area. The middle-aged men will then place bowls of food, starting with the elders, on each table. They will never let these bowls go empty, and will continue topping them up throughout the duration of the feast. The large low tables that the Akha use will often have banana leaves placed on them to make them appear more formal. At feasts, the rice baskets which people share always come a bit late in the meal (normally a meal begins with rice): this is to allow people to eat more of the meat. Rice baskets are placed on the floor between every two guests, and the people eat the rice in handfuls while they take portions of meat and vegetable food from common serving bowls in the middle of the table using chopsticks. Bones and scraps are tossed indiscriminately to the dogs which are always hovering near by.

Rice whiskey is served at almost every feast. It is usually the elder males who get the most drunk. Sometimes, at some of the bigger events, candies and cigarettes will also be handed out at the end of the meal. There are also certain foods which, although they can be consumed in daily fare, are seldom seen outside of a feasting context. The first and foremost of these is large quantities of meat. People generally subsist on a vegetable diet, but at a feast, most of the food will consist of the sacrificial animal prepared in a variety of ways. In

other words, the majority of what one consumes at a feast is meat, although there is a fairly large selection of dishes. Usually, if a pig is killed, there will be two kinds of pork stir-fry, one dish of minced raw pork with ginger and chilies, a pork soup, baked brain, and bits of pork roasted over the fire. Pork is the most common feasting food, but chickens are also used quite frequently. Other kinds of animals that the Akha feast upon include cattle, water buffalo, dogs, goats, ducks, and occasionally wild pig or deer. It is also very common to have three or four kinds of wild and domesticated raw vegetables arranged around the table for the guests to eat. Other specialty foods include a wide variety of chili and peanut sauces which are quite time consuming to prepare.

### ***Feast Classification System***

The following model of the feasts which I have documented in Akha society (see Fig. 6-1 below) is a graphical representation of some of the theoretical ideas regarding the two levels of feasting activity -- huntergatherer type solidarity feasting and complex-society type competitive feasting -- that I had proposed in my introductory section on 'Theoretical Considerations.' The model is not meant to be an interpretive or analytical tool, but rather, it simply illustrates the principle behind the classification of the feasts which will be presented in this chapter.

In Figure 6-1, the various social occasions which involve some sort of feast have been arranged in order of *degree of attendance by persons related to the host*. Starting in the center and moving outwards, in each

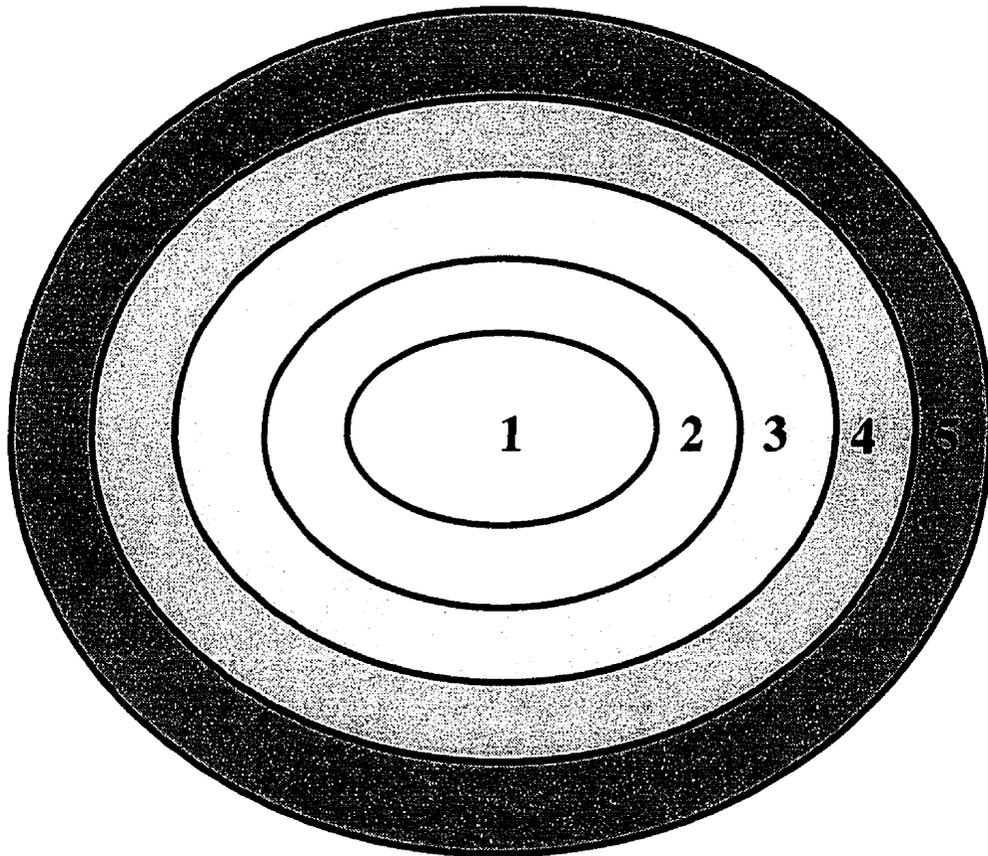
consecutive ring, more and more of the host family's support group is in attendance: for instance, the feasts in the center are attended by only the nuclear family; the second ring feasts are attended by the nuclear family + extended family; the third ring the nuclear family + extended family + village community, etc.). This concentric circle format was chosen for two reasons: 1) It was intended to mimic the structure of the support network; the support one could expect decreases as one moves out from the center (the nuclear family) into the periphery (the greater lineage and clan), and 2) I wanted to avoid some of the pitfalls of functionally based feasting categories by emphasizing the *magnitude of expression* of certain attributes (i.e., prestige goods, narcotics, conspicuous waste) rather than their *presence or absence*. Thus, I have attempted to illustrate how those feasts which occur closer to the center of the diagram tend to emphasize solidarity type feasting while those towards the periphery may tend to facilitate more competitive and aggrandizing purposes.

At the center are the 12 annual ancestor offerings and the baby naming ceremony.

Next comes the 'Butcher's feast given to the elders, the 'Curing' feast given to ailing or otherwise troubled people, and the 'Workmen's' feast given to the people who help with some kind of large project. Theoretically, these feasts in the second ring are open to all senior members of the various clans and administrative officials, but my experience has been that they are attended mostly by the host's own lineage members and a few other closely allied friendly lineage members.

The third ring contains the annual village-wide feasts: 'New

**Figure 6-1: Akha Feasting Model**



**Type of Feast**

1. Ancestor Offerings, Baby Naming
2. Butcher's Feast, Curing Feast, Workmen's Feast
3. Gate Rebuilding, Swinging Festival, New Year, Yo la la, Offering to the Lords of Earth and Water, Protection Feasts, Purifying Feasts, Feast for a Fine, Village Path Repair
4. New House Feasts, Wedding Feast, White-Skirted Woman's Feast, Guest feast
5. Funeral Feast

Year's,' 'Gate Rebuilding', 'Swinging Event'; 'Yo la la', and the 'Offering to the Lords of Earth and Water', as well as four other feasts which are held for the benefit of the village as a whole: Protection Feasts, Purifying Feasts, Feasts which the elders force a person to give as a punishment or fine for breaking the law, and Feasts which the Village Founder-Leader hosts when the villagers make repairs on the village pathways. Although I have never attended any of the types of feasts included in this third ring, my interviews have lead me to believe that for the annual village wide feasts there is a certain amount of village wide activity that practically everyone engages in, followed by a time when most people feast with their nuclear families while the elders feast with the Village Founder-Leader. Those feasts which are given as a fine, if they are small, are attended by the elders of the village though they are intended as a public function. If the fine is severe enough, then the subsequent feast will be attended by the entire community.

The fourth ring contains Wedding feasts, 'New House Ceremony' feasts, 'White-Skirted Woman's' initiation feasts (a ceremony to initiate a senior female into a new religious role), and Guest reception feasts. The size of these feasts, and therefore their attendance, depends of the wealth of the host. Ideally, these events are attended by most people in the village (with the exception of the bride's family at wedding feasts, and guest reception feasts) and by some friends, family, and sometimes Thai officials who live in other villages. In many cases, printed invitations to these events are sent out, even though most people are non-literate.

The fifth and final ring consists of the 'Funeral' feast, by far the biggest and most socially important of all Akha feasts, possibly because

these events signal the potential rupture of socioeconomic ties (based largely on personal relationships with the deceased), and people are especially anxious to reaffirm some of these. Ideally, these events are attended by many clan members, and nonclan members, from distant locales.

Interestingly, although these feasts are arranged to illustrate how the host family's support group attendance increases in each consecutive ring, there are also a number of other feasting attributes which correlate with this order. Starting from the center and moving outwards the feasts become:

- 1) Attended by more, and more genetically distant, relatives;
- 2) Larger in terms of overall attendance;
- 3) Held less frequently (excepting the annual village feasts);
- 4) Attended by people who reside farther away;
- 5) More costly; and
- 6) More extravagant in terms of delicacies, dress, music, advertisement, and overall formality.

The preceding data suggests that feast quality (i.e., expensive, overtly public, or modest and subdued) is a function of the distance of the guests (both genetically, geographically, and physically) from the host. Greater, more intense, and more symbolic measures are required to communicate 'a social message' to people who are 'farther apart'.

Akha feasting does not function solely to create and maintain a security net for times of *subsistence* crisis. Part of that 'support network' also involves support from friends and family in times of *political* and legal dispute, and when launching new economic or other projects. It is a form of networking that can allow a host to make and

maintain contacts with traders, specialists, and lowlander (Thai) authorities that in many ways can prove to be useful or profitable in a wide range of conditions.

By utilizing some of the potentially grandiose feast forms (i.e., weddings, funerals) it is possible for a man and his lineage supporters to make a name for themselves and to win support within his extended clan, as well as to promote the name of his clan in general. Although it is often said that in Hilltribe society the village and its headman are the largest autonomous political entity, one must not forget, as Kammerer (1986: 263) has shrewdly pointed out, that the totality of the relationships among the clans is the supra-regional political structure. As an 'institution' (for lack of a better word) it has no head nor any ongoing agenda, but clan structure nonetheless does 'govern' the actions of individuals. When marriage choices are made, the prosperity/strength of the potential mate's entire lineage and clan, not just their nuclear family, is evaluated. It is in a person's best interest to support and promote his clan, and it is in the clan's best interest to support its key (elder) members.

This clan cohesion is illustrated quite clearly in the very expensive funerals that senior clan members will sometimes receive. Clan members sometimes come from distant villages and donate money towards the funeral expenses if the dead senior clan member's family is not able to afford a particularly lavish funeral. There is no direct personal gain to the donor. For instance, back in the donor's home village he is not necessarily going to get a lower fine if he makes some legal transgression; he is not necessarily going to avoid paying crop damages or acquire his village's support in any political matter. He may

not even receive any prestige for his donation at the time of the funeral. His clan, on the other hand, will be sending out a clear message that they are a strong, prosperous, and cohesive organization, and the donor's fellow villagers will certainly receive this message upon his return. Large scale funeral feasting, both from a regional and a village perspective, is characterized by elements of aggrandizement that take place not so much between individuals, as it does in more stratified societies, but between lineages and clans.

***The First Ring:***

***Ancestor Offerings, Baby Naming***

Ancestor Offerings

These 12 annual offerings are in many ways central to both the Akha feasting complex in general and the culture overall. They are the key factor in the Akha religion/social code known as *Akhazan*, translated roughly as 'proper way of doing things' (Alting von Geusau 1983). According to the Akha themselves (Tooker 1992: 33) to "carry" *Akhazan* is what defines an Akha person, not race, language, nor dress. People who convert to Christianity, for example, are no longer considered to be fully Akha. Ancestor offerings are scheduled at specific periods during the year and some of them, during New Years and the rice harvest for example, are accompanied by large scale village-wide feasting (Lewis 1969: 213).

Without getting into the complexities of the Akha belief system, it can loosely be defined as a mixture of ancestor worship, animism, and a rice fertility cult (Lewis 1969). The nuclear family ceremonially giving

food to its ancestors illustrates, to me, a world-view in which food, and the giving of food, is a thing which binds the family, both past and present, together. From an emic perspective, the Akha are trying to ensure their ancestors support and benevolence by feeding them. All members of the family, which is the main cooperative unit of production, participate in this event. It serves to define them as a social unit, the most basic corporate group. All married sons, for example, will return to help their father perform the ritual until such time as they are 'well established' themselves and begin to function as their own production unit, at which time the father will give the son his own ancestor shrine. This is a symbolic act, but there have been cases (Kammerer 1986: 245) where a father might withhold the donation of a shrine in hopes of applying pressure on the son(s) to maintain their labour obligations to him, and also to re-affirm the authority of the lineage heads in all realms.

While in the field I was able to witness only three ancestor offerings. This dearth of observations on ancestor offerings is due to the fact that most offerings are scheduled around the agricultural high points of the year and I was there during the low seasons. The event I witnessed in Sam Soong village was complicated by the fact that the family was also having a fairly large workmen's feasts for the men of the village who had just done some major repairs on the owner's roof.

The ceremony was very brief. It began by a chicken being killed and cooked in the women's half of the house in front of the ancestor shrine. The father did all of the butchering and preparations. When this was done he set up a miniature table, approximately 30 cm in diameter, and set it in front of the ancestor shrine which is always

attached to the main house post in the women's half of the house. On the table he put the offering: some chicken, whiskey, tea, and holy rice (i.e., rice that has come from the first harvest and has not been handled by any ritually unclean person). Whiskey, tea, rice, and pork or chicken are common to all ceremonial procedures. Once this was done, while on his knees and using both of his hands, he ate some of each of the food. Next he gave some to his wife and then his daughter who both received their portions with both hands while down on their knees.

### Baby Naming Feast

This is a very simple ceremony. Because the Akha are ancestor worshipers, and they are non-literate, they have a special method of naming people which facilitates the memorization of genealogies. Every Akha has a two syllable name. The first part of the child's name is the same as the last part of the fathers name, this is true for both boys and girls. So, for example, a typical genealogy might go: A-ga, son of Ga-bu, son of Bu-seh, son of Seh-ja, etc..

When an Akha women realizes that she is pregnant she will set aside a rooster to be killed the day of the birth. This rooster must be old enough to crow by that time (Lewis 1970: 704). On the day of the birth the father of the child will kill this rooster by striking it on the head with a stick. For the naming ceremony that I witnessed, the father's mother gave him precise instructions on how to butcher the bird into specific sections. When all was ready, the new mother, the midwife, and the father sat around a table which was set up just inside the women's half of the house. On the table were dishes of holy rice, chicken, tea, and liquor. The people who participated each took a bit of

food, and the mother touched a bit of food to the baby's lips. Next the woman in charge, who is usually the father's mother, tied a string around the wrist of the baby and told him his new name. If the baby does not cry excessively, either at the time of naming or for the first week of life, then they feel that he or she is happy with that name and it becomes official. In everyday life people generally do not use these proper names. It is much more common to hear people addressed by kin terms (e.g., 'younger-sibling' or 'mother's-sister') or nicknames.

According to Lewis (1969: 360-365) there are two other feasts which are related to birth. The first is actually a combination of a gratitude feast and curing feast. If a child reaches adulthood and the woman who acted as the midwife at their birth becomes ill, then that child (who is now an adult) is obligated to hold a ceremonial feast at the midwife's home (Lewis 1969: 360). They must sacrifice a chicken or pig, and perform a ceremony with holy rice, meat, three rice balls, broken rice, an egg, a cup of liquor, and a cup of tea.

The second feast relating to birth is one that the new mother must perform. One cycle of thirteen days after the birth of the baby she goes to the house of her husband's paternal uncle or older brother. There, she will give a chicken for a feast and the male relative will give his blessing to the baby by tying a string around its wrist. This ceremony ends the period on time when the new mother and child are not allowed to visit anyone else's home (Lewis 1969: 389).

*The Second Ring:*

*Workmen's, Butcher's, and Curing feasts*

The Workmen's Feast

Let us begin with the Workmen's and Butcher's feasts as these events are similar in that they are purely secular in nature, having no ceremony involved. The Workmen's feast, as the name suggests, is a feast that a host gives to the men who help him with, usually, a building project. In a way it is a form of payment, but that is a very shallow interpretation of the event. The actual value of the meal to the guest is probably somewhere around US\$2 or less, about half the amount of the average day's wages for an agricultural worker. Besides the fun of the evening's party, the real gain to the labourer is the obligation that the host now has to help him in his time of need. These work groups, for the most part, consist of related kin and close family friends. This is similar to the labour exchange network which is needed during certain phases of the agricultural year. I suspect that if an individual does not have enough close kin in the village to accomplish some necessary building project then the other men in the village will still come out to help until there is a large enough contingent to accomplish the task.

During my field work I witnessed three such events, one of which (the building of the Village Founder-Leader's new house), dragged on sporadically for weeks. There was always ample whiskey, and dog seemed to be a popular dish. The choice of dog was most likely due to the fact that it is a much appreciated meat thought to provide energy for the hard physical work involved, but not considered appropriate food at sacred-type feasts. As most people usually do not have much

meat in their daily diet, even a little bit of meat after a hard day's work would be considered a treat.

There is no speech making, nor does anyone ever seem to stand out from the crowd for any reason. There are no cigarettes or candy given out. As usual, a number of the village elder males often show up. All elders are equally welcome theoretically, but my observations indicate that only related or otherwise closely attached elders tend to participate. In one instance, a work feast in Sam Soong, there seemed to be a fairly even representation of all of the families in the village, but this was to be expected considering that the village is so small (23 households) and the work required quite a few men.

#### Butcher's Feast

Butcher's feasts are much smaller events. The main guests are the elder men of the village. However, once again, it has been my observation that only those old men who are of the host's lineage, or a closely allied lineage, will attend. Butcher's feasts take place when a man slaughters a pig (presumably a cow or a buffalo as well, though I have never heard of such an event) in order to sell the meat for a profit. He is traditionally obligated to host the village elders to a feast. I believe that the butcher usually keeps the head (the brain is a delicacy) and a few choice cuts for this purpose. I was able to witness two such events, both in Mae Salep village.

It has been suggested (Hayden and Maneprasert 1995: 10) that these feasts may be an avenue for ambitious individuals to court the favour of the elders of the village, and thus actively seek to improve their relative social position within the community. I do not believe

this to be exactly the case. First of all, it seems that only those elders who are already 'on your side', those that are related to you, are in attendance. I do not believe that the Village Founder-Leader (or his representative), who is obligated to attend everyone's sacred type feasts (e.g., curing, wedding), bothers to go to all these secular butchering feasts, though he and the other administrators are always invited. For example, the two butchering feasts that I witnessed in Mae Salep were both sponsored by middle-aged men of the Latche clan. As will be discussed in the Chapter 7, the Latche clan is the dominant clan in Mae Salep village, and they have close ties with the second most powerful clan, the Labu's. In Mae Salep there are 13 men who are considered elders: 6 are Latche, 3 are Labu, 2 are Weisue, 1 is Biache, and 1 is Pyumia. At the first Butchering feast that I attended there were 8 elders present: 6 were from the Latche clan (including the Village Founder-Leader), and 2 were from the Labu clan. At the second Butchering feast there were 7 elders present: 5 from the Latche clan and 2 from the Labu.

At these Butcher's feasts there was never even a hint of aggrandizement in terms of fancy serving vessels, cigarettes, or candy. In both events that I attended the host played almost no part, and in fact was very inconspicuous. The hosts even ate with the women and male cooks, away from the main group of people. They had nothing to say to the assembly, and as often as not, did not even get to serve the elder men, which is a very honourable and symbolic function.

Modest, self-effacing behaviour by the host is a common characteristic of all Akha feasts. It is one of the most basic social mechanisms that 'egalitarian' peoples can use to minimize the creation

of resentment and animosity in the village. It is probably a reminder that no matter how rich and benevolent the host might be on the day of the feast, his fortunes may change and he is always going to need the support of his peers. Although feast hosts are not trying to be overtly impressive, it must be admitted that just the hosting of a meat feast is an impressive act in and of itself.

If one was to interpret Butcher's feasts as having a social function, I would have to argue that they serve as general lineage meetings. On the basis of actual behaviour, they appear to be solidarity events which reinforce the support network at the lineage level. It was only at these events, for example, that I ever saw the old men sit around afterwards for an extended period of time and have long drawn out, and sometimes heated, discussions. Lending support to this idea is the case of one minor Latche family who had recently moved to Mae Salep village. Although they are of the dominant Latche clan, they are not a part of any lineage within Mae Salep. This young, middle income, family owns a disproportionately large amount of feasting paraphernalia and hosts more than the average amount of lineage level feasts: these being Butcher's and Curing feasts. I believe that this is a conscious attempt by the new family to ensure the support of their fellow clan members who, although obligated by tradition to support fellow clan members, might not be especially inclined to help out people to whom they are not directly related and do not know very well.

### Curing Feasts

The last form of feast which I believe operates at the lineage level is the Curing feast. In actuality, there are several forms that this feast

can take, depending on the nature of the illness. The most common, however, is a Curing feast for general health and well-being, and it usually is held for a young child or an elder. This feast culminates with the tying of a string around the 'patient's' wrist by the elders (a very common practice throughout mainland Southeast Asia). I have only ever seen this ceremony performed for small children who did not appear to be ill, but this seemed to present no logical problems to the family involved because I think that they conceived of it as a kind of a 'spiritual booster-shot.'

This quasi-religious event is the hardest to analyze because it involves several different social factors. It requires not only some reason, usually ambiguous, for the family to want to have one of these ceremonies, but also the services of a Reciter; the attendance of a number of elder males to tie a string around the sick person's wrist; and the agreement of close lineage members to respect a number of taboos associated with the curing ritual. I was able to attend four such events, all performed by the same Reciter from Mae Salep.

These events, although loaded with ceremony, are not very elaborate in nature. There is no aggrandizement involved, no delicacies are handed out (other than the requisite meat and alcohol), and there is no excessive formality. There are usually around fifteen people in attendance at these feasts. The Reciter begins early in the day and spends a certain amount of time, which varies but is usually several hours, chanting over a rice winnowing tray which contains portions of rice, whiskey, tea, and meat. He sits in the women's half of the house facing the corner underneath the family ancestor shrine. Ill health is believed to be caused by spirits devouring the patient's soul in the

'spirit world', and the Reciter must travel there and ask the spirits what type of meat they would like to eat instead of the soul. He devines how many and what type of animals the spirits require to be appeased and then makes the necessary sacrifices. Two pigs and two chickens of opposite sex is generally considered the maximum amount. At the end of the meal all of the elders tie a string around the sick person's wrist, and if it is a child, then they will also tie a string around the mother's wrist.

Lewis (1969) has also documented several different curing feasts which are performed to cure various specific kinds of illnesses. Epilepsy is very much feared by the Akha because they believe that it is a form of possession which is contagious. In Burma, Lewis (1969: 80-86) claims that the ritual for the curing of epilepsy is as follows. First, several of the elders take the patient down to the nearest stream or river. They wade out up to their waist and the patient is made to remove all of their clothes and allow them to float away downstream. Next they bring the patient up into the forest where other men have cut a hole through a large tree and the patient is made to pass through the hole. At a nearby temporary shelter there are new clothes waiting for the patient, and after dressing they return to the river where the Reciter sacrifices a pig, a goat, and two chickens. After the patient leaves to go home the elders have a feast down by the river. They will then carry the meat back to the village and have another feast in their homes (Lewis 1969: 81).

In Burma, if a community member goes insane in an Akha village and becomes out of control, the villagers will sometimes put them in a specially constructed bamboo cage (Lewis 1969: 295). They will leave

them in it until they can free themselves because it is felt by this time they have regained some of their faculties. There are also offerings that the Reciter can make to cure this insanity, and they must include a brown goat, many pigs, several chickens, and various other offerings which are deemed appropriate.

The Akha hold a reverence of termite mounds, they believe that they have spirit owners, and if there are any mounds around their fields then they must perform special appeasement rituals. If someone falls ill and it is known that they have had some recent dealings with a termite hill, for instance clearing a new field near one, then the Reciter may feel that it was the spirit owner of the mound that is inflicting the illness. If so, then the Reciter will go down to the mound and perform a special ceremony. He will sacrifice one rooster and one hen and eat them at the termite mound. He also offers a bamboo container full of fermented rice, an egg, some liquor, and a small amount of silver. While he is doing all of this he calls out to the spirit and asks that it stop afflicting the patient, he reiterates all the offerings that he has made: he says things like 'I have given you chicken, I have given you rice, I have given you silver, I have given you gold, you should be satisfied,...'. Even though they do not offer gold, because "We Akha do not have any gold", they claim to make the offering because apparently the spirits can be fooled about things like this (Lewis 1969: 86).

There are also many specific kinds of Curing feasts related to giving birth. If a woman is having a difficult and protracted labour the Akha believe it is because a spirit is hungry and is holding the baby back. Sometimes they administer herbal remedies containing a variety of ingredients ranging from dried human placenta to the grindings from

lightening bolts (stone-age hand axes). Other times they will attempt to ease the birth by having the Village Founder-Leader perform certain curative rites, such as whistling to the baby, or draping his jacket over the mother and asking for the baby to come out and try to grow up into the jacket of a respected elder. If they feel that it is appropriate they will call a Reciter or a Shaman to divine what types of animals that they might sacrifice in order to appease the offending spirit. The sacrifice usually consists of chickens or pigs, and depending on the nature of the spirit (an inside or outside spirit) the feast may be held in the house or outside nearby (Lewis 1969: 360). If the medical aid is successful, then one month after the birth the mother and child will present the Reciter or Shaman with a small amount of money, will have a chicken feast for them, and tie a string around their wrists (1969: 368).

Sometimes, if the placenta is too long in dropping out, then the Reciter may also sacrifice a chicken or a pig (Lewis 1969: 357). Similarly, if there is a miscarriage then the Reciter will sacrifice a chicken and tie a string around the woman's wrist (Lewis 1969: 352). When a family has had a problem with too many stillborns or infants who die, which is fairly common due to the fact that pregnant women are expected to work right up until the end of term, then the elders may suggest that they sacrifice a pig instead of a chicken after their next birth (Lewis 1969: 368).

Like the Butcher's and Workmen's feast, Curing feasts are attended by members of one's own lineage and closely allied lineages. They are essentially a lineage event and as such serve to reinforce and maintain the social security net. For example, in Mae Salep I attended two curing feasts, one was sponsored by a young man of the Labu clan,

and the other by an elder of the Latche clan. At the Labu feast, 4 elders were in attendance: 3 were Labu and 1 was Latche. At the Latche elder's Curing feast there were 7 elders in attendance: 5 were Latche and 2 were Labu.

However, the fact that the chanting of lengthy oral histories and genealogies (Kammerer 1986: 206; Lewis 1969: 351) is a definitive part of the standard 'Spiritual-Booster-Shot' type Curing feast, pushes this type of feast a little into the realm of the greater village-wide support network. Much like the village-wide feasts, which I will discuss in the next section, it seems that publicly demonstrating one's adherence to and respect for the Akha social conventions, while at the same time making an economic sacrifice, sends out a message of solidarity to the other members of the community. Even though attendance is limited to lineage members and friends, the fact that the event took place is common public knowledge throughout the village.

At first glance these Curing feasts may also appear to be a form of child growth/promotion feast in which a certain amount of wealth is expended on the child in order to invest him or her with more social standing and economic worth. My research indicates that this is not the case. For one thing, almost all people have between one and three of these feasts, if they are not very poor, in the life of each child. There is no impetus to spend more on one's own child than somebody else spent on theirs. Furthermore, my experience, and Kammerer's (1986: 212) as well, has shown that the richer the host is, the smaller the animals, and therefore the feast, will be. For example, the richest and arguably the most powerful man in Mae Salep village had a Curing feast for his grandson and it involved only a tiny pig and a chicken, while a very

poor family living on the outskirts of the Thai market town Mae Salong were obliged to sacrifice two medium sized pigs and two chickens. It is conceivable that a rich senior (in terms of his age) member of a clan would try to minimize his expenditures on intraclan obligatory feasting events (like butchering and curing) because he has pinnacled within his own clan. Neither his wealth nor age being contingent upon the fervent support of his lineage, he may choose to focus more of his wealth on interclan events like weddings, New House feasts, and funerals, versus lower eschalon individuals whom often want to impress lineage members with their worth in hoping for political and economic support.

This variability in the number and size of the animal sacrifices required to perform this curing ritual properly also has a great deal to do, I believe, with the wishes of the Reciter involved. He is the one who knows what 'the spirits' require to be appeased, and he also gets a portion of the meat to take home as payment for his services. In Mae Salep, the Reciter was a well respected and relatively influential man whose favour it would be beneficial to court. However, it was of no benefit to the family in Mae Salong to court his favour since he could offer them no support within their own village, and the only elders that showed up appeared to be relatives. These disenfranchised Akha, those living outside of traditional Akha villages in impoverished hamlets surrounding Thai market towns, have lost many of their diverse and complicated traditions which serve to define them (in their culture's eyes) as Akha. They have a great deal to gain by trying to maintain a foothold within the traditional Akha culture/society in general: the macro support group. Employing a relatively renowned ritual specialist

to chant out Akha history and genealogies over your child would communicate that desire throughout the immediate region.

Hayden and Maneeprasert (1996) have also documented a variant of the Curing feast which they call a Gratitude feast. "While curing ceremonies tend to emphasize children and young adults (although not restricted to them), Gratitude feasts are only for lineage elders (men or women) who are not feeling well or who have problems. Gratitude feasts are only given by junior individuals to senior individuals (e.g., younger brothers to older brothers or children to parents, not vice versa)" (Hayden and Maneeprasert 1996: 16).

One interesting fact about the Gratitude feast is that the services of a Reciter are not required, though they may be requested. Because of the prestige gained by hosting this feast, and because of the public presentation of gifts which sometimes takes place at them, Hayden and Maneeprasert (1996) feel that Gratitude feasts serve to promote the status and relative influence of the family or lineage segment involved. However, they also add that the purported goal of the feast is to create a safety-net for members of the family and promote desirable social relations in general. The emphasis on family cohesion during the Gratitude feast is illustrated by the condition that a grandchild must have been born into the family before this feast can be given, thus assuring the viability of the lineage.

Hayden and Maneeprasert (1995: 30-31) documented the specifics of a Gratitude feast which they were able to attend. At this event, a married daughter returned home to give a feast to her elderly mother. In attendance were members of the mother's household, close lineage families, and village officials together with *some* elders and their

wives: in total 31 adults and 9 children. The daughter supplied a small pig (about 45 cm long) and rice whiskey, while the mother supplied the rice and vegetables. The daughter not only made verbal expressions of gratitude towards her mother, but she also presented her with money (approximately US\$25). Hayden and Maneeprasert believe that gratitude feasts such as this serve two practical purposes:

First, they consolidate relationships between families. However, because these are not necessarily reciprocal, they may be viewed as asymmetrical solicitations of support. In the case of gratitude feasts given to wealthy (and especially older) individuals, this is entirely understandable, and perhaps should even be considered as a distinctive type of feast. Second, gratitude feasts have the practical effect of augmenting both the giver and receiver's families in the publicly recognized informal ranking of community power networks (usually euphemistically referred to as "prestige", "status", or "honor") (Hayden and Maneeprasert 1995: 31).

### ***The Third Ring:***

#### ***Annual Village Feasts, Purifications, Protection Ceremonies, Feasts as Fines, Village Path Repairs***

Although I have never had the opportunity to attend any of the three annual village-wide celebrations, they are fairly well documented in the ethnographic literature (e.g., Lewis 1969, 1970; Lewis and Lewis 1984; Kammerer 1986), and I have been able to question informants about some of the general details of these events.

### **New Year's Feast**

New Year's feasting takes place, as the name implies, at the end of the Akha traditional calendar, and lasts for four days sometime near the

end of December. The entire celebration is part of one of the 12 annual family ancestor offerings. It is a fairly boisterous celebration and the young boys of the village run around spinning home-made tops and generally make a ruckus; there is some organized singing and dancing; and gambling with dominos is a popular pastime. There is also a great deal of visiting back and forth (Lewis 1969: 213). Coloured eggs are also a popular fare for this season, and the event is usually referred to as the Red Egg New Year. Lewis (1969:213- 216) describes the events centered around each of the four days of New Year, which I will relate below:

The celebration must begin on a 'buffalo day' (one of the 13 days of the week), and on this first day everyone kills a hen in their own home and offers it to the ancestors. On the second day everyone must observe ceremonial abstinence. This includes abstaining not only from sexual intercourse, but also from doing anything to their hair, gathering firewood, pounding paddy, digging a hole, going hunting, gathering mushrooms, or going to their fields. On the third day they make further offerings to the ancestors privately in their own homes. Before the sun rises they offer a dish with three rice cakes, a dish with 'holy rice', and a dish with tea.

After sunrise the whole village kills one or two buffaloes (depending on the number of village residents) and at least one pig. They divide the meat amongst the villagers, depending upon how much of a share each household initially paid for. Then each family cooks a large amount of the meat because visitors come from other villages. The visitors will be fed in various homes of friends and family throughout the village, and given lots of liquor to drink. They feel that

it is one of their important customs to make and drink lots of liquor at New Year's time.

Lewis (1969) has observed a system of village fund debt reckoning, using notched sticks, which takes place at New Year's time for the Akha of Burma, and he describes it thus:

On this day the men also go to the [Village Founder-Leader's] house to figure what each man owes for the past year to the village fund, so that the village can pay whatever debts it might have incurred, and everyone be squared away. This is called 'jaw pa-eu'. Since they are illiterate, this is what they do. Each man prepares a board, or a length of bamboo (ya jaw seh teu). Then he splits it and leaves half of it at the home of the village priest. They keep the other half in their home.

When a man gives a chicken, or travels for the village or donates labor, he takes his half of 'stick' to the [Village Founder-Leader's] house. The [Village Founder-Leader] finds the matching board, and puts them together. Then he cuts a notch so that it is in both boards. On the front of the board he makes a mark for each day the person has traveled on village business, and for each one-tenth of a viss of chicken he has given (a viss is about equal to 3.6 pounds). On the back of the board he makes a notch for each one-half viss of chicken the man gives.

Even though they have boards to guide them, since the men have been drinking pretty heavily they often get into fights and brawls doing this 'checking the sticks'. They ask those who are not drunk to keep such brawls down (Lewis 1969: 214, square brackets added).

The fourth day is once again a day of ceremonial abstinence. All of the paraphernalia connected with the worshipping of the ancestors is put away on this day.

### Gate Rebuilding Feast

The annual village gate rebuilding consists of the construction of a new ceremonial gate which is placed on the main path into the village (although there may be other gates on lesser paths). These gates function as a dividing line between the village/human domain and the spirit/forest domain. This is a ceremony that people take fairly

seriously, and there are many taboos associated with this gate. Its maintenance is seen to be necessary for keeping the spirits out of the village and thus avoiding sickness and general misfortune. It is a symbolic defense system, and wooden artifacts, talismans, and human sculptures representing the original Akha ancestors, are put on this gate. It may be that the gate, a uniquely Akha item, is a holdover from an earlier time when actual walls and gates were necessary for village protection, but this is of course pure speculation. Only the men are allowed to be involved in this process. The Village Founder-Leader is the central figure in this affair and he is assisted by most of the elders (though I do not know if all the elders participate), and several young men who do most of the manual labour. The Village Founder-Leader must be the first to dig the hole for the new gate, but once he begins it anyone else can take over and finish. Some of my informants say that a pig is sacrificed and eaten on the spot, while others have told me that one rooster and one hen are killed and eaten at the Village Founder-Leader's house. This ceremony and feast seem to function as a village solidarity event, and a formal meeting event for the village elders.

### Swinging Feast

The annual Swinging ceremony is a festival-like event that lasts for four days in August. It is sometimes referred to as the 'Women's New Year', and is also one of the 12 annual ancestor offerings ceremonies. It has some religious overtones, a kind of 'spring fertility' period when people hope to ensure the continuity of good fortune by maintaining the tradition of the swinging ceremony (Lewis 1969: 234). A tripod swing and rope is constructed at some high point in the village

in a place where the shadow of a house will not fall upon it. One buffalo and many pigs (depending on the size of the village) are killed if possible, and people go to eat in their own homes. According to Lewis (1969: 234-239) the annual swinging event progresses in the following manner.

The first day must be a 'buffalo' day (according to the traditional calendar), and each house kills a hen and makes an offering to the ancestors sometime in the middle of the day. On the second day the village swing is erected. This begins after breakfast when all of the men congregate at the upper end of the village where the old swing is located. All men must attend under threat of being fined money or liquor. Those who are ill, or whose wives are pregnant or have given birth to 'human rejects' (i.e., twins or deformed children) are excused. The Village Founder-Leader sends the young men out into the jungle to cut four new poles which are about 20 feet long. They use a large vine for the swing and suspend it over the crossed posts. While the young men are getting the new posts the elders are pulling out the old ones

The new swing can be in the exact same spot or they can change it slightly, however, at least one 'side' (two holes on either side) must remain the same as the year before. If new holes are dug, then the Village Founder-Leader must start them. They sometimes will want to change the position of the swing if the construction of a new house that year has cast a shadow on the old swing. Furthermore, when they are digging the new holes they cannot allow their shadow to fall into the hole. When or if they dig new holes for the village swing, the Village Founder-Leader will pretend to throw three pinches from an uncooked egg which he has in a bowl into each hole. Afterwards he or one of his

sons will take the egg home to eat. The Village Founder-Leader will then scrape three slivers of 'holy silver' (i.e., silver is not in coin form) into the hole. Finally, the other men present lift the new pole up and the Village Founder-Leader will guide it into the hole.

Once the poles are fixed at the top, a cross bar is set, and the vine swing is strung over the cross bar. The swing is now ready, but first the Village Founder-Leader must take three blades of grass, three leaves from a wild raspberry bush, and three very small stones and bind them together. This package is then put on the swing and swung out, it is said to give 'ma M dah dah lah', the mythical originator of the swing, the deference of the first ride. Next it is the Village Founder-Leader's turn to swing. While he is swinging most of the villagers are there, with the exception of married women who are pregnant or pre-menopausal. As he swings he says, "Last year at this time I didn't know whether I'd see a new year or not, but here I are again happily swinging this year too. This past year I had rice cakes three times (referring to three important ancestor offerings), and here I am now swinging. Last year I didn't know whether I'd have rice this year or not, but I sure do." (Lewis 1969: 237). After the Village Founder-Leader is finished, anyone who feels like it can ride on the swing with the exception of women who are menstruating, pregnant, or have recently given birth.

The people can only swing while ceremonial abstinence is in effect. If someone mischievous should get caught swinging out of season they will be fined a bottle of liquor to be drunk by the elders. If they are repeat offenders they may be fined substantial amounts of money or else forced to give a big pig (which I suspect the Village Founder-Leader and elders would either consume or sell, although

Lewis does not say what happens to pigs taken as fines). If the swing's poles begin to sprout new growth this is considered a bad omen and the villagers will sacrifice a pig. If someone falls off the swing and dies then the entire village must relocate. If an animal should knock the swing askew or topple it over it is considered a sign from the spirits and all of the villagers contribute to the price of a pig in order to have a sacrifice.

Early in the morning on the third day of the swinging festival, each in their own homes, they perform their ancestor offering. They offer rice cakes. The village also kills a buffalo (anyone can do the actual stabbing) and the meat is divided according to how much of a share each family purchased. People who live nearby are invited and fed in the various homes. On the fourth and final day they observe ceremonial abstinence and put away all of the paraphernalia connected with the ancestor shrine.

Because there is no one primary host for these feasting events it cannot be claimed that they are feasts which some individual uses to accomplish some sort of social or political goal. It is possible that there is some competition between the middle aged men as to who gets to eat with or serve the elders. However, the most that any rich and influential man may hope for is to move into the ranks of the elders at an earlier age than he might otherwise be entitled to do (say mid forties).

It seems fairly clear that these events function as a solidarity reinforcing institution, both for all the elders in the village (representing all households and lineage segments in a community), and for members within various households in the village as a whole. It

brings the village together and gives people the opportunity to express the fact that they are in the village support group and that they can expect all of the benefits therein (e.g., by sharing the buffalo and having fun together). Practically everyone participates in these events with the exception of some of the Christian converts. Christians have opted out of the village network and have formed their own cooperative group centered around their parish, consequently they do not feel obliged to join in any of the traditional celebrations.

As I alluded to in the discussion of Curing feasts, it is important to maintain a public image of social conformity. An Akha is as an Akha does. Various conflicting religious and ethical opinions are easily tolerated, but conformity to the traditional acts of religious conviction are mandatory. They believe that the specific actions involved in properly placating the spirits literally cause the spirits (in a very empirical sense) to behave in certain ways: 'Belief', in the Western religious sense, has little to do with it (Tooker 1992: 14). It is held that individuals who do not observe customs threaten to bring down misfortune on the entire village, not just themselves. That is why villagers can be fined or punished for not performing certain rituals or for breaking Akha taboos. It is also why Christians are traditionally not allowed to live in an Akha village.

Hayden (1998 personal communication) feels that this enforced conformity is a relatively transparent strategy of control perpetrated by transegalitarian aggrandizers. To me, it also illustrates the Akha's highly developed group mentality, the strong pressures to adhere to the traditional support network, and the role that public ceremony plays as a symbol of allegiance. The adaptive value of apparently capricious

rules is probably to differentiate the group from others and to create solidarity. The prevalence of feasting in Akha culture is, I believe, to a large degree the result of this social requisite for public demonstrations of solidarity at several levels, especially during transitional points in their lives (i.e., birth, illness, house moving, marriage, divorce, menopause, death). To phrase this in Akha religious terms as told to Lewis (1969) in Burma: 'The spirits only know what people know'. If, for example, two people were caught having sex in the paddy house, great misfortune would befall the family and community if the Village Founder-Leader were not to fine them and perform the proper purification ceremonies. But, if nobody ever found out about the couple having sex, then the spirits would not know either and so no misfortune would befall them.

### Yo la la

A fourth annual village feast that the Akha engage in called *Yo la la*, and it is essentially a pay back feast that the Village Founder-Leader gives to the village. The emic rationale for this feasting event is that it is held to pay thanks to the Village Founder-Leader's personal supernatural spirit. For this feast he will raise and sacrifice one large pig. Although I have never witnessed this event, Hayden and Maneprasert (1995) have documented that this is an 'open house' event and functions to foster and create solidarity between the elders of the various lineages. Elders eat inside of the Village Founder-Leader's house, other people are served outside. It is also a way for the Village Founder-Leader to reinforce and revalidate his claim to special status.

It is a common phenomena throughout Southeast Asia for village leaders to hold regular feasts in order to validate their positions (See, Kirsch 1978; Leach 1956; Lefevre 1995). The adaptive value of annual feasts such as *Yo la la* is probably that they give an opportunity to village leaders to sponsor more feasts than other individuals in the community, although emically they are considered a responsibility of village leaders.

In the Akha case, annual open house events at the Village Founder-Leader's house also serve as official political meetings for the elders of the village. It is probably at these events that elders subtly vie for position amongst themselves (through competing for honourable seating locations for example), and it is also at these events that they can solidify the unspoken alliances that they have made amongst themselves.

#### Offering to the Lords of Earth and Water

The offering to the Lords of Earth and Water is the final annual feast which has been documented among the Akha (Hayden and Maneprasert 1995; Lewis 1969). This religious event is performed at the village water source by the Village Founder-Leader and the village elders. A chicken or small pig is sacrificed at the water source, usually a spring above the village, and the Village Founder-Leader begs for blessings from the great spirits of the Earth and Water. The meal of pork or chicken is cooked and consumed on the spot. Lewis (1969: 310) feels that this ceremony, as he witnessed it in Burma, was of Shan origins.

It would seem that this event, once again, serves to reinforce village solidarity, and to strengthen the bonds that various elders have formed amongst themselves. It is a public demonstration of a shared set of values and a shared set of environmental worries, personified in the form of earth and water spirits. The offering serves to publicize the fact that the villagers are all dependent on each other for support because environmental calamities may strike at any time.

Although specific data on attendance at this offering does not exist, I would suspect that, much like the Gate Rebuilding ceremony, all of the elders who are eligible will attend the ceremony if they can.

### Purification Feasts

There are many types of feasts and ceremonies which are performed to purify a person or a place which has been considered to have become somehow spiritually sullied. Although some of these ceremonies are small scale and only include the nuclear family, the majority of them are village wide purification projects. A very common example would be if someone did something to defile the holy places around the village for which the Village Founder-Leader is responsible : the village gates, swing, watersource, and graveyard. If an infraction is committed against any of these places then the Village Founder-Leader will fine the culprit the cost of performing the purification ceremony.

The most grave of all Akha spiritual misfortunes which necessitates the performance of a purification ceremony is the birth of 'human rejects' in the village. Twins are the most common form of human rejects, but any babies born with a birth defect also fall into this category. These babies are supposed to be suffocated at birth. It is

thought that only one soul can be created at a time, so in the case of twins, only one of the babies is a human and the other is a soulless demon, and because parents do not know which is which, they must kill both. This event, if not handled properly, is thought to have the potential to bring down terrible misfortune on the entire village. Even after the appropriate actions have been taken, the father is excluded from partaking in village rituals for the rest of his life, and is essentially excluded from all village politics. He is forever unclean and is thought to have committed some grave secret sin. I have found that people fear human rejects so much that they are afraid to even discuss the topic.

According to Lewis (1969: 98, 369-379), among the Akha of Burma, a family which has had a birth of twins must flee into the jungle with one or two elders to a very remote spot. Once there, they will unceremoniously bury the dead babies, don clothes of rags or leaves, and build a small shelter entwined with magic vines. Whilst they leave the village no one dares to look at them, and the Village Founder-Leader will call out the bad news and tell everyone to maintain ceremonial abstinence for three days (no going to the fields, having sex, or even fetching water on the first day). While the couple is gone, the rest of the villagers will burn down their house, sometimes the Reciter who has come to perform the purification ceremonies will be able to claim some of their goods. He will also be given all of the silver bracelets and bangles that the family owns. The families of the afflicted couple will arrange for the appropriate sacrificial animals to be provided and these include a minimum of nine pigs, nine dogs, and nine chickens. While this is taking place the elders will encircle the entire village with a 'magic' vine.

The couple returns to the village in anywhere from between three and twelve days. There are restrictions placed upon them which last for one year. The wife may not wear her headdress (a great shame); they may not talk to anyone except for a few select elders (and then only in regards to ritual matters); they must not visit nor have visitors; must not go to anyone else's village; and they may not have sex. News of this misfortune spreads around the region and no one will visit the village for at least one month. After that, the first visitor to the village must be given a pork feast, which is considered the 'opening of the village' feast.

Exactly one year after the birth of human rejects (as well as after a 'terrible' death) the family must perform another series of sacrifices which will officially end the period of taboos. A Reciter is called, and in the house of the afflicted couple, he will kill a pig and two chickens (one rooster and one hen), and place them in front of the ancestor altar while reciting incantations. The meat is then cooked and served to the Reciter and village elders. Next, the Reciter goes outside of the couple's house and there he will sacrifice a male goat and a sow. He has these cooked, and in the meantime his assistant will prepare a winnowing tray containing cooked sticky rice, a mixture of goat meat and pork, liquor, tea, and water. He then offers portions of this food to the gods of the East and the West, begging that this tragedy never occur again (Lewis 1969: 492-493).

Adultery is also a very common cause of spiritual fouling which calls for a purification feast. Lewis (1969: 198-100) describes the process of adultery purification as follows. Aside from the monetary fines involved, ceremonies must be conducted to ensure that the woman

does not become sterile and her rice crop fail. The Akha see the adulterous married woman as having committed a grave sin, but the offending male as having done a minor wrong. The sacrifice consists of four pigs and four chickens of opposite sex (i.e., two male and two female pigs, two male and two female chickens) given to both the inside and outside spirits. The family prepares a pre-ceremonial feast for the Reciter and the elders of the village. The Reciter begins his incantations around eight a.m. and finishes around noon. He will sacrifice the animals and present them to the ancestor shrine while begging the ancestors to be benevolent. He is given four ribs of the pig to take home as payment, and then he and the elders have a pork feast.

Later, around dusk, the Reciter will perform another sacrifice, only this time to the outside spirits. Under the eaves of the house he will offer a pig, a dog, two chickens of opposite sex from the pig and dog, plus two more chickens. He performs incantations for two hours, the theme of which is that the couple not die a terrible death, nor have a shortened life span. Once this is done he must go directly home, his assistants will bring his portion of the sacrifice to his house. The next day there will be a final offering, and a chicken will be killed, to go along with the left-over pork. This feast is also given to the Reciter and elders. When this is done they will pronounce a blessing on the couple and the matter is considered over.

### Protection Feasts

The final category of feasts that, for the most part, are concerned with community affairs are those which have to do with protecting the village against a catastrophe that is seen to be immanent. These feasts

probably function to relieve stress, and to solidify community bonds. Hayden (1998 personal communication) feels that these events are a pretext for aggrandizers to increase surplus production and their control over it. For the most part, these feasts are rare occurrences, but Lewis (1969) has documented several examples; they are as follows.

There are certain things that animals would not normally do which are considered bad omens: for example if a dog or cow somehow manages to climb up onto the roof of a house. Any animal that does this must be killed immediately. Those people who are not in the clan of the owners of the animal may eat the animal, but only in a specially designated spot outside of the village. The Reciter will then have to perform a ceremony and sacrifice two pigs, one dog, and five chickens (Lewis 1969: 88).

Crop damage from disease and insects is a constant worry to the hill tribes. If someone finds a particular kind of black caterpillar with a red head in their paddy field then the village must hold a feast to appease the owner spirit of the insect. They say that this caterpillar can destroy the entire crop virtually overnight. A pig is sacrificed and the whole village feasts (Lewis 1969: 111).

The Akha also have a method of protecting themselves from disease epidemics such as smallpox. If the epidemic is a long way off, then they will offer a chicken and hold a special ceremony. If the disease has spread to nearby villages then they kill a large black dog and put its skin with the head attached on the village gate in a way to make it look like it is snarling. Some people say it is permissible to eat the meat from this dog, while others feel that it is forbidden (Lewis 1969: 112).

### The Feast as a Fine

Occasionally feasts are used as a form of punishment in Akha society. This is not as common today as it was in the past. Although these feasts are given by a particular families, I consider these feasts existing in the realm of the greater community support network. This is because the people who decide that the feast must be given are the village elders acting in the name of the community, and the goal of the feast is to ensure conformity to village morals and norms. Once again, much like protection feasts, feast fines may be seen as a way for village aggrandizers to increase their control over the surplus available in the community (Hayden 1998 personal communication).

Forcing a 'criminal' to host a feast for the elders is usually a last resort measure, something that is done to repeat offenders. It is a way of shaming them. For example, a man who repeatedly beats his wife too severely, even after being warned by the elders, may be forced to give a feast to the elders.

The Akha believe in a graded form of punishment. If a man is caught stealing a cow, he must return it plus one extra. If it happens again he must return two extra. If he continues to persist in his thieving ways they will also force him to host a feast, sometimes insisting that he use his main sow (a big economic set back) (Lewis 1970: 670).

Sometimes, however, a crime has a requisite feast as punishment: such as adultery, or the defiling of village holy places. Lewis (1970: 666) has documented a case of adultery in Burma. In this case a single man was caught having sex with a married woman. As a matter of

course, the woman was divorced and automatically had to marry her lover. This also meant that she would lose custody of her children if she had any. It is thought that the woman committed a terrible crime but that what the man did 'was not so bad'. The new couple were fined 90 old coins (US\$191 in 1966). Of this, 45 had to go to the aggrieved husband, 15 to the Village Founder-Leader, 15 to the Headman, and 15 to the village fund. The feast required two pigs. The first had to have a girth of 1 m, and the second of at least 75 cm. The second pig was killed by being stabbed through a leaf, and it was supposed to signify the taboo relationship that the two men involved are now in. They are never again allowed to speak with one another directly.

Lewis (1970: 676) has also noted that it is Akha custom to punish with an obligatory feast those people who do not fulfill their commitments to the village. For example, if the whole village has agreed not to make fields or gather firewood in certain areas, and someone does it anyway, then it is considered that they have committed an offense against the community, and must therefore give a feast to the community.

### Path Repair Feast

One final feast which operates at the village solidarity level was documented by Hayden and Maneprasert in 1995. The Path Repair feast is a special kind of village-wide work feast. Occasionally, the paths, or other public structures, in and around the village need to be repaired. The Village Founder-Leader will organize the event and host the participants to a worker's feast at his home. It is not known exactly what number of animals are sacrificed, but I would hazard to guess that

at least one large pig would be necessary, and possibly some dogs may also be killed.

The Village Founder-Leader pays for the animals out of the village fund with which he is entrusted. Although this feast is hosted by the Village Founder-Leader, it does not seem to be an event which is centered around the aggrandizement of the community leader's household. Instead, I would argue that this feast is an example of a solidarity and cooperation enhancement event. The people who participate in the feast are not receiving the benevolent offerings of their leader, they have worked hard for the food that they receive. The receipt of food at the end of the day is probably not the reason why most people would choose to participate in the event. As stated in the section of Workmen's feasts, the average labourer could expect to earn twice the value of the meal in an average day's work. It is important for all individuals in the village to remain on good terms with the community at large, and helping with community oriented projects is a good way of doing just that.

### ***The Fourth Ring:***

#### ***Weddings, New House Feasts, and Guest Feasts***

##### **The Wedding Feast**

With weddings and New House feasts we begin to move into a mode of feasting which functions as an articulation point between the various clans. Although the large majority of the participants at any one of these feasts will be from the host's clan, more of an effort is

made to invite distant relatives who perhaps might live in other villages and important nonclan network members from within and without the village. As some of the people who attend these feasts are less familiar to the host, the general tone of the event is a little more formal than some of the other feasts that have been discussed thus far. Along with this formality also comes a certain amount of eagerness to be impressive, openly generous and benevolent: as if to impress the more peripheral network members with the desirability of maintaining or enhancing their links with the network. Even though it is still relatively subdued, there are hints of aggrandizement which begin to emerge at these events.

During my stay in Mae Salep, I was able to attend the main parts of two such weddings, and both were very similar in form and content. One of these weddings was for the son of the village Reciter. This was a proudly traditional family of about average wealth. They were of the Labu clan, which is closely allied to, yet numerically and influentially subservient to, the dominant Latche clan. The celebration took place in the home of the father and lasted for three days, during which time a very large pig (approximately 1 m long) was completely consumed. Because of the duration of the event it is hard to estimate attendance, but it was probably somewhere around 75 different people who came and went. Not everybody participated in the full three days.

To begin with, on the day previous to the main celebration there was a small private feast at the bride's house. According to Lewis (1969: 325), the Akha of Burma perform this ceremony by having the bride and the groom sit together on the women's side of the house. The two of them boil an egg, and then while sitting on stools beside each

other near the fireplace, they pass the egg around each other three times. The boy, who is seated on the right, first takes the egg in his right hand and passes it behind his back to the girl, who takes it in her left hand behind her back, and brings it around front and hands it to the boy, who then passes it around behind her again. After doing this three times, they must each eat a little of the egg. The next step is for a young relative to cook a chicken which the bride and groom, and only they, must eat. This is called 'the meal of joining'. After the chicken has been eaten the girl puts on her headdress and they are now considered officially married. It is not considered important to attend this ceremony, there are usually only a few elders there to give instructions, and most of the people in the household will instead busy themselves with preparing for the forthcoming feast.

Although there was no public witnessing of the two people 'tying the knot', and no one ever stood up to make a speech, the feast itself was considered public notification of the union. During the feast there was little formal ceremony. There were several different occasions when the bride and groom sat around a table on the women's half of the house and ceremonially ate bits of pork and rice with whiskey and tea. The bride played a very minor role, spending most of the time hiding her head underneath a jacket (a symbol of her shyness at moving into a new home). At one point some married women took her out to the back of the house to adorn her in the full silver headdress plate which is the symbol of a married woman. The groom was a bit more public, often serving people, including the elders whom he would normally be too young to serve. Sometimes the groom went around the house and shared drinks of whiskey with various guests as a form of begging for

blessing, and it is also at this time when people may make cash donations/gifts to the newlyweds.

For many hours on the first and second day there was an incessant chanting of the same verse of music, mostly by the same man, over a loud speaker system which had been set up for just this purpose. The highlight of the feast was when soot was rubbed on the groom's face, the sexes divided into their respective halves of the house, and there was a rice-ball throwing free-for-all. Soon after, the bride and groom were hurriedly ushered outside, down the platform ladder, and into the pig pen which was under the raised house. At this point, with the help of an assistant, they held up a woven mat as a shield and people, mostly children, began to throw dung and old food at them. This only lasted for a few moments but a few of the youths carried it on amongst themselves, chasing each other around.

There were several things that made this feast different from the ones which I have discussed so far. Firstly, the public broadcasting was something new. It was the first time that I ever saw the villagers try to publicly advertise or promote something. There was not only ample whiskey, as there always is, but excessive amounts of whiskey. It was traditional to buy a bottle's worth (out of the big jugs they had) and to 'pour whiskey' for everyone in a loose order of age/importance rank. This began with the old men, then the old women and then, if there was any left, more casually around the young men's table. There were many more delicacies at the wedding: a very hard to make peanut-pepper sauce, soda pop, beer, candies, canned milk, and packets of cigarettes, and betel making paraphernalia arranged on a decorative tray. There were very popular gambling sessions with a great deal of

money changing hands. The last evening had many of the groom's young friends show up and dance to recorded Thai pop music. Finally, late in the first evening when most people were gone there was some opium smoking.

Accompanying this new show of boisterous hospitality, benevolent excess, and obvious plenty, were some important changes in the type of guests in attendance. There were not only Labu and Latche elders in attendance, as was usual in some of the smaller feasts, but also two elders from different clans: in total there were 5 Latche, 3 Labu, 1 Biache, and 1 visiting elder whose clan I do not know. Even my presence, which usually caused a certain air of awkwardness at the smaller feasts, did not seem to make an impression. It seemed much more appropriate that I should be there. Lastly, there was a group of Thai administrators and teachers from the nearby government school.

These Thai men, who were not very well liked, were in attendance because they hold quite a bit of power over the villager's lives. They did not mingle much with the Akha, but rather sat in their own group, ate their food, and got excessively drunk, as if it was their entitlement. The Akha realize that these men, like most Asians, look down on them because of the Akha's impoverishment. However, it was important to stay on the school director's good side because he had the power to sign official documents, and this is especially important because the Akha occupy a sort of bureaucratic gray zone in regards to issues of citizenship.

How do these observations of the wedding fit into my scheme of feasting articulating with the greater (i.e., extralinear) support network? The subdued, yet none-the-less present, air of robust generosity is

indicative of the fact that the host family was conscious of the evaluations being made of its fitness by a large contingent of people with whom they do not have an extremely close personal relationship. As a host, one would know that a cousin, for example, would think of one as an estimable person, but how would one convince a new daughter-in-law's out of town uncle of that fact? Or the Thai school director? Food giving and generous hospitality are traditional techniques, and these traits are best exhibited through the modest bestowal of good and plentiful food. Although I have emphasized solidarity reinforcement as the key factor in the on-going maintenance of the social support network, it must also be kept in mind that advertising lineage success and power also creates social support. Furthermore, active lineage promotion may also lead to competition between lineages.

Lewis (1969) has documented several other varieties of feasts which are associated with Akha marriages in Burma. Some of these feasts are very small scale and might be more appropriately classified under my sections on First and Second Ring Feasts, however, because these feasts are only relevant in the context of marriage I will discuss them here.

Sometimes a family may choose to give their departing daughter a dowry, although this is not very common (Lewis 1969: 320). This usually consists of a set of clothes, silver ornaments, a small hoe, a machete, sticky rice, a chicken egg, a pig's head, and general things needed to set up new home. If they do decide to give this dowry then the family will "...make a big occasion out of it...[and] after the feast, while the parents are 'filling the carrying basket', one of the elders will

repeat a poetic chant, in which he will tell about the girl who is going to get married. It will cover the time from her birth to the present, and will extol all her virtues" (Lewis 1969: 323). This is clearly a case of lineage aggrandizement.

Unlike some of the other Hilltribes (the Hmong, Yao, and Lisu), the Akha do not have a system of bride prices (Clarke 1998). This gives young couples a fair amount of freedom in regards to choosing a marriage partner. The lack of bride prices among the Akha has probably also affected their feasting practices. Because bride prices are usually negotiable, it is in a family's best interest to actively seek to increase its social status. In this way, they can expect to receive higher bride prices for their daughters, and possibly be able to negotiate lower bride prices for their sons. Hosting large and impressive feasts is probably the main strategy used to increase social status, and groups who do use bride prices will often have large, impressive, and expensive weddings in order to publicly revalidate their claim to social status and distinction. This system also encourages the unions of rich and powerful families, and hence the creation of quasi classes. Bride price systems also allow for rich and powerful individuals within a community to increase their control over their fellow villagers, essentially disenfranchising them, by acting as loan brokers to young men who cannot afford to pay bride prices (Hayden 1996: 23), as is common in Africa (Meillassoux 1981; La Fontaine 1985: 143-5, 153-5) and in Indonesia (Sandarupa 1996). The fact that the Akha do not have a system of bride prices is probably a reflection of their overall lack of surplus wealth, as compared to some of the other Hilltribes, and it also explains why some of their feasts are not as grandiose as they could be.

Continuing with some of wedding associated feasts that Lewis (1969: 320-331) has documented, he also states that when the new bride arrives at her new home, her mother-in-law will give her a boiled egg as a sign of acceptance. Conversely, after the couple have been married, the new husband or wife (couples generally do not travel together) must give a small feast during their first visit back to the bride's family. They will bring a chicken that has never laid an egg and a bottle of liquor. The newlywed will then prepare a meal consisting of one whole boiled chicken, a dish of tea, a dish of liquor, a dish of boiled egg, and a dish with five rice balls (two white, three dark). They will then tie a string around the wrists of the bride's parents (Lewis 1969: 324).

There is an optional feast that they may choose to sponsor which is related to the one just presented. If they so choose the couple can drive a 'big pig' to the wife's parents village. The parents match this pig with one of their own. The groom gives his in-laws some money. After the feast the groom takes home the head of the pig that his in-laws donated and gives a feast to the elders of his own village. This is all considered payment for the milk that the wife drank as an infant (Lewis 1969: 326).

Sometimes a couple who would normally be in what is considered an incestuous relationship can perform a ceremony to make marriage permissible. The ability to perform this rite probably depends on the political influence of the husband's clan or lineage within the village (i.e., on its feasting ability and wealth) (Hayden 1998 personal communication). Normally a man may not marry into his own subclan, a woman is considered part of his subclan if they share a common

ancestor within the last seven generations. To get around this they have what is called a 'break the relationship feast'. Essentially, the young man is announcing his break from his lineage and telling them he is now no longer a part of the family. He will no longer worship at the family ancestor shrine, and will have to set up one of his own. This decision is usually frowned upon. To do this he first must butcher a pig and give a feast for the entire village. He gives 8 old coins (US\$17 in 1969, a fairly substantial sum) to his paternal male relatives, excluding his brothers. Lastly he makes the announcement of his separation during the feast (Lewis 1969: 316).

According to Lewis (1969: 339) special ceremonies are necessary in order for a widow to remarry. The new husband must sacrifice a dog and a chicken, and give some money to the Reciter in order for him to perform the incantations. This is to ensure the health of the new husband because the spirit of the previous husband may be malevolent towards him. If the previous husband died what is considered a 'terrible' death, such as drowning or being killed violently, then they must sacrifice a goat, a chicken, and pay a larger amount of money.

Although it is not considered appropriate, sometimes people who are divorced will decide to remarry (Lewis 1969: 340). If this is the case then there are three types of fines which must be paid. First, the man must offer the biggest pig in the village, regardless of price, at a feast for the whole community. Secondly he must pay a fine of 45 old coins (US\$95 in 1966) to the village fund. Later he must pay a second type of fine to the village of 22.5 old coins (US\$48 in 1966), and then pay her male relatives 11.25 old coins (US\$24 in 1966). These fines total US\$167, which is a very substantial sum.

### The New House Feast

The traditional feast for the inauguration of a new home is in many ways similar to the wedding feast. However, it appears that some New House feasts are much more blatantly promotional in nature, and consequently have many of the elements of the wedding feast writ large. I was able to attend three New House feasts during my field work, although I believe that the first two may have both been a little atypical. The first atypical feast was by a prosperous Christian Akha who built his new home on the main road just outside of Mae Salep proper, and the second was for the new home of Mae Salep's Village Founder-Leader.

I say the Christian feast was atypical because much of the social emic rationale for these feasts has to do with the act of moving the family's ancestor shrine into a new house in a befitting manner. The Christian man however, even though he still ran a relatively traditional household, made no pretense that the feast had any religious significance. It is an illuminating fact that this feast is one of the traditional forms that Christianized Akha cling to, not feeling particularly inclined to participate in village feasts, curing feasts, or elaborate weddings feasts. It seems apparent that New House feasts, irrespective of their emic justification, provide real practical benefits as aggrandizing events which have social consequences warranting the substantial investment required.

The Christian feast had around 300 people in attendance and the host rented tables, chairs, and canopies from a nearby Thai town and set them up around his large cinderblock house. Guests consumed, or were offered, a small cow, a large pig, and about a dozen chickens.

There were excessive amounts of delicacy foods ranging from seafood to expensive Thai whiskey. Like the wedding, they had a loud speaker set up to make announcements, although this was hardly necessary given the size of the gathering. I did not see any speech-making or other attention drawing acts, but the host did situate himself in an expensive wooden chair in the center of his house while smoking a big water pipe (i.e., he was conspicuous). Invitations were printed up and circulated throughout the area. There was a register book and a small fee was collected to off-set some of the expense.

A crew of about ten local women were hired to do the cooking and dish washing. This was odd considering that cooking, except for rice, is a male activity in Akha culture. The cooks and assistants worked in the household's small kitchen which was set off just to the side of the house (an architectural innovation) and they had to set up an auxiliary makeshift lean-to kitchen beside the primary kitchen's window so that, if it was necessary, they could pass things back and forth. This second kitchen was taken down after about a week and on close inspection no less than 22 different kinds of food and narcotic (i.e., cigarettes, cigars, and whiskey) remains were found in the rectangular area, as well as the ash from the brazier (the list of food remains is provided in the chapter on 'Archaeological Indicators'). The constant dish washing also took place around this general vicinity, all of which was generally out of sight of the seated guests. Many cooking utensils were required and the host borrowed these from the nearby school.

It was difficult to evaluate the attendance for various reasons. First of all, the Labu wedding at the Reciter's house, which I have discussed above, took place on the same day and drew most of the

village elders to it. The wealthy Christian man was also of the Labu clan and this caused a bit of tension. Secondly, I was not that familiar with the people who lived outside of the core of the traditional village. Most of the local Christians did attend, they are generally the poorer people and it must have been quite exciting to have such a rich and benevolent compatriot. Most notably, there were quite a few Thais in attendance, the most significant personage being the man responsible for forestry-related matters. The most often cited reason for not being able to farm more land is that it was illegal to cut down any more trees. A man in charge of forest-related matters could be a very powerful ally to a farmer. Overall, the intent of the feast seemed to be to gain far reaching social contacts and support for the wealthy farmer.

The Village Founder Leader's New House feast was hard to evaluate for various other reasons. This is in part due to the fact that, as stated earlier, I still do not clearly understand the exact role that he plays in contemporary Akha society. The Village Founder Leader in Mae Salep is highly respected, though I am not sure how much of this respect has to do with the fact that he is the Village Founder Leader and how much of it has to do with the fact that he is about the oldest man in the village and, most importantly, the head of the dominant Latche clan.

The Village Founder-Leader's New House feast must be evaluated along many more dimensions than that of an ordinary person's New House feast. The feast that I attended was not as big as it was promoted to be. It lasted for one afternoon and evening and had about 70 guests. They sacrificed one very fat pig (50-60 kg and 18 months old) which the elderly Village Founder-Leader himself had been tending and fattening that entire year in expectation of the move. No cattle or

buffalo were sacrificed, as had been advertised. There were very few people in attendance who were not from the village, and the Christian segment of the community was conspicuously absent: a blatant symbol of their disassociation with the traditional community.

The afternoon was rife with ceremony regarding the transfer of the Village Founder-Leader's ancestor altar. This New House feast was laden with village-wide religious significance. The other prominent members of his clan (though not directly related) played a major role in setting up the apparatus, and preparing the ceremonial meal of chicken, rice, tea, whiskey, and the very important boiled egg. Bits of this food were given to various people in attendance that afternoon including myself. At the feast there was ample whiskey but it was not excessive. There were no cigarettes given out but there were cookies for the children. The Village Founder-Leader himself played a fairly minor and inconspicuous role in the whole affair except when he was slaughtering the animals. Overall this particular New House feast was not extremely extravagant but it was very merry.

It seems that the villagers in general took pride in the event, more so than the Village Founder-Leader's family, as it was a reflection of their village in general. The Village Founder-Leader's fellow clan members were obviously the main participants and they showed the most enthusiasm. 9 out of the 13 elder males in the village attended: 5 Latches, 2 Labus, 1 Biache, and 1 Pyumyia. Although there may have been some undercurrents of political agendas, this was not the dominating theme of the event. The Village Founder-Leader's position, theoretically, is based on being one of the initial settlers in a village. His position is then considered to be hereditary. The current Village

Founder-Leader in question, however, was brought in after the original Village Founder-Leader's wife gave birth to twins, a grave social taboo which effectively excluded him from ever again performing any ceremonial/religious functions. This new Village Founder-Leader's position is not contingent upon the consensus of the villagers. However, for him to function effectively in his position, and to maximize all the inherent socioeconomic benefits of his position, then he and his family must be seen as powerful, successful, and well supported by his clan. In other words, he must maintain the respect of his fellow clan members and their allies. I do not know if his position could ever be usurped by another man whose clan rose to prominence, but I suspect (based on my observations in Sam Soong village) that if such a man existed then he and his clan would just come to dominate village politics and reduce the role of the Village Founder-Leader to its bare religious minimum. If this were not possible, then the village would segment.

So, this particular New House feast is actually a feast hybrid. For the most part it operated at the village-wide support network level, as a village solidarity feast, like the 'Second ring' New Year's or Gate Rebuilding feasts. However, it also had strong elements of competition/promotion at the clan level, much like the 'Third ring' Wedding feasts. Finally, it had a significant role in forming impressions about the regional political situation of Mae Salep village and the Latche clan, like the 'Fifth ring' funeral feasts.

The fact that this event functioned in the villagers eyes as reinforcement of the village and clan support network is illustrated by one significant anecdote. After the meal, but at the height of attendance, a man whom I had never seen, came in carrying a sick child

looking quite distraught. It turned out that this was a Latche who had earlier converted to Christianity. The Latches are zealous traditionalists and had always maintained that there were no Christian members of their clan, so this man was a bit of an embarrassment. Because of his poverty and the illness of his child he had asked for help from his clan members before but had received a cold shoulder. It was emphasized that this was a difficult decision to make because even though he was Christian the man was always the first to come out and help at clan projects, events, and feasts. By remaking his request at the Village Founder-Leader's feast he was appealing to clan solidarity in a very powerful and public way. He got the help that he wanted, which turned out to be a traditional form of placating the spirits performed by one of the elders. I do not know if this ceremonial acquiescence resulted in any more concrete assistance in the form of food, clothing, or money.

One final New House feast that I attend was in the village of Pai Ya Pai, and it was hosted by a member of the Latche clan, a nephew of my host in Mae Salep. I attended this feast with a contingent of Latche' clan representatives from Mae Salep. For the most part this feast followed the typical pattern of the New House feasts discussed above. It was large and lavish, with excessive amounts of whiskey and meat. At this feast they served duck and goat as well as the usual pork.

There were two things that were particularly interesting about this feast. The first thing was that the only non-Latche man to join my contingent from Mae Salep was the Christian man from the Labu clan who hosted the lavish New House feast discussed above. It was strange for a Latche family living in Pai Ya Pai to invite a man who was both Christian and a non-clan member, but apparently he was either now

considered a man of repute, or else they felt obligated to have him as a guest because possibly he may have previously hosted some of their lineage members. This is an excellent example of status building and reciprocal feasting at the regional level.

The second thing of note was that the host gave us a great deal of meat to take back to Mae Salep. Each of the elders that attended got some meat to take home, but I also brought meat back for some of the lineage heads who were not able to attend. This meat redistribution sent out a clear message of both clan solidarity in that the host was still paying his respects to his relatives, and he was also advertising his wealth and benevolence. I do not know if a reciprocal return was then required of the people from Mae Salep, nor if this was a payback for a previous meat gift. However, it is interesting to note that at least one of the Latche lineage heads who did not bother to attend the feast had my translator write a letter stating his regret at not being able to attend. In retrospect, I suspect that he included some money with this letter as a contribution towards the cost of the feast (a practice I have heard of) and that this was a form of payment for the pork which was later delivered.

#### White-Skirted Woman's Feast

The initiation of a woman into the ceremonial role of the 'White-Skirted Woman' (Kammerer's label, 1986) is an important part of Akha religious life. Lewis (1970: 729) refers to this ceremony as the 'post-menopause' ceremony, although this is only an ideal, and pre-menopausal women sometimes assume this role. The performance of the White-Skirted woman initiation ceremony is a way for a family to

increase the 'luck-blessing' that it receives from the ancestors, but from a more social perspective, it functions to reinforce the alliance which was made between the wife's family and the husband's family:

The fertility of a woman and of her rice depend in part on "blessing" from her husband's ancestors. Yet this fertility also requires blessing from her brother. Without that blessing, there would be neither sons to continue her husband's patriline nor rice to feed her husband's ancestors at annual offerings. Thus, the continuity of a man's patriline depends not only on his own ancestors but also on his wife's natal kin, that is, his wife-givers (who in turn depend upon blessing from their own ancestors) (Kammerer 1986: 306).

The relatives of the woman to be initiated have pivotal roles to play in the ceremony.

The elaborate and costly feasts which a family must perform to have one of its members initiated into the role of White-Skirted woman are blatantly promotional in nature. Only a fairly wealthy family can afford such a ceremony, and once they have had it they receive a great amount of prestige for it. Much like a funeral feast, there is silver given to the ritual specialists who preside over the event, and sometimes a buffalo is slaughtered to feed the numerous people from other villages who are in attendance. Furthermore, Kammerer (1986: 308) claims that it is the husband who usually decides to have his wife initiated. Once initiated, these women move up the scale in village importance, and probably begin to have more of a voice in political issues.

A woman must have at least one living son to become a White-Skirted woman (Kammerer 1986: 306). Only the eldest female in a household can assume this role. Furthermore, her mother-in-law (not her own mother) must have been a White-Skirted woman. This is further emphasizes the fact that this ceremony functions to cement marriage alliances. Not every family, however, who is eligible to

perform this ceremony chooses to do so. Lewis (1970: 737) estimates that in a large village two or three of these ceremonies take place a year, while in a small village, maybe only one every two or three years. After her initiation the White-Skirted woman will be responsible for performing her family's ancestor offerings (as opposed to her husband), and she will also have to perform elaborate versions of the yearly rice fertility ceremonies which take place in the family's fields: these are 'paddy planting', 'getting the new rice', and 'opening the paddy house' (Lewis 1970: 730; Kammerer 1986: 306).

There is some contradiction in the literature in regards to the ceremony involved in becoming a White-Skirted woman. Kammerer's (1986) recounting of the ritual in Thailand involves far fewer sacrifices than does Lewis' (1970) recounting for the Akha in Burma. This is probably due to the fact that the Akha in Thailand today seem to lead a more impoverished life, with restricted access to land, than their Burmese counterparts did a few generations ago. For the rest of this section, I will relate Lewis's (1970: 729-745) recounting of the ceremonies involved because I feel that, firstly, it is of a more traditional practice, and secondly, because it has been my experience that the Akha generally prefer to sacrifice as many animals as is economically feasible when it comes to important 'life-stage' ceremonies.

According to Lewis (1970: 729-745), the initiation of the White-Skirted woman consists of two separate ceremonies, the first involves the woman herself, while the second involves her last born son:

1. Ceremony for the Woman: A Reciter must be called to perform the ceremonies, even if the woman's husband is a Reciter himself, he is

not allowed to perform the rites. The Reciter is welcomed with a preceremony feast, after which he begins his incantations inside of the house in front of the ancestor altar. He will sacrifice one pig and one chicken of opposite sex.

The next morning, the woman dons her white skirt and she will make about forty bamboo containers of fermented rice. Next, members of her family bring in fifteen chickens, which must be unblemished, and these will be put in a cage overnight. The following morning they have another preceremonial feast for the Reciter after which he will sacrifice the chickens. His helpers will prepare a winnowing tray with rice balls, broken rice with an egg in it, holy rice, liquor, tea, salt water, onion, and uncooked rice. The bodies of the fifteen chickens are laid beside the tray.

At this time a large castrated boar, or sometimes a buffalo, is usually killed to feed the visitors who have come from other villages to witness the ceremony. When all is ready, the Reciter and the woman both sit in front of the ancestor altar, and he will chant incantations for three hours. During the chanting the Reciter will cut feathers from the chickens and throw them in the fire, his assistants will remove one wing from each bird. Then the Reciter, the Village Founder-Leader, the elders, and some men who have been designated fictive maternal uncles (much like in the funeral ceremony) will eat a feast. After the meal, the table is taken away, and the 'important ones' are each handed a dish containing parts of the fifteen chickens: the liver, the breast, and any other part (the Reciter will also get meat from the head). Each man holds their bowl in both hands while the Reciter says some incantations regarding prosperity for the family. All of the meat then gets dumped

into a pot and the initiate woman and her husband (or son if the husband is dead) eat it all.

The next step is for the family to serve tea and for the initiate to 'beg blessing' from those present. This actually entails giving gifts to those who attended. The woman will have her children dress the Reciter who performed the ceremony in a new pair of leggings, a new coat, a new turban, and at least one silver ring, although some claim that it should be three silver rings (if the family is wealthy they will also give a new jacket and pants). They also give a silver ring to the Village Founder-Leader and to the three men playing the part of 'maternal uncle'.

The new White-Skirted woman will next prepare the basket of food that the Reciter gets to take home, and this consists of the wings and half-carcasses of the fifteen sacrificial chickens. Then, the White Skirted woman once again begs for blessing, this time she gives money and liquor. After bringing the basket of food to the Reciter's home, they return to the woman's house where another chicken, which was sacrificed along with the original fifteen and put aside, is then cooked and offered to the ancestors. By this time it is ten or eleven at night, and the White-Skirted woman is now allowed to go and relieve herself and to change into her everyday clothes.

The next morning there is another chicken sacrifice and the Reciter and the Village Founder-Leader will plant bamboo containers of fermented rice in the hearth ash, thus ceremonially drinking with the ancestors, and beg them for blessing. The initiation is now officially ended, but the family of the new White-Skirted woman must observe ceremonial abstinence for one week.

Some White-Skirted women follow a custom which demands that when her next 'good' day arrives within the cycle of days (or at least some time in the following three years), that she must host a pork feast for the Reciter and elders of the village. All White-Skirted women must offer one pig a year for three years at one of the three rice paddy ceremonies mentioned above. For three years after that she must offer a duck, and for three years after that a chicken. If the husband of a White-Skirted woman dies she should not remarry, but if she does then her new husband must give the cost of the 'White-Skirted Woman' initiation ceremony back to the woman's children.

2. Ceremony for the Last Born Son: This ceremony is preferably performed sometime before this son gets married. It is not clear what the exact function of this feast is (emically it is a purification ritual), but it appears to be used as an opportunity to extend the number of days that the family can host a feast, thus increasing the expense and prestige factor. It requires that they prepare three sows, two boars, three roosters, and two hens. A Reciter must sacrifice these animals to the ancestors. Each animal has a specific spiritual function: the two sows are intended to 'open the path of luck-blessing', one boar each is intended for the (dead) mother and grandmother of the new White-Skirted woman. "Of course there have to be other animals killed to feed the visiting [Village Founder-Leader] and other important elders from nearby villages. They must kill one large pig for this, or maybe a buffalo" (Lewis 1970: 739, brackets added).

The actual ceremony consists of the Reciter, along with last born son, offering a chicken to the ancestors. This includes the usual ritual foods such as rice balls, egg, tea, and liquor. While the pork or buffalo is

being cooked, the son, a 'maternal uncle', and some of the elders go outside. The maternal uncle has a slingshot, and he shoots three clay balls, one east, west, and straight up. This is a cleansing act. He then 'carries' the son back into the house. The White-Skirted woman then calls down further blessing by taking the egg from the ancestor offering and giving the Reciter some, as well as her son, and the various elders in attendance.

Next, the White-Skirted woman puts the following on the table: rice balls, sticky rice, and a little left-over egg. The elders eat these things first. "Then they have a rice and curry feast, following which they drink liquor like mad "(Lewis 1970: 743). Seven special dishes are then prepared and put on the rice table, each containing specific parts of the animals intended for specific participants in the ritual. The dishes are lifted, and the Reciter begins an incantation session which lasts for a hour. All of these dishes are eventually brought, in a specific order, over to the White-Skirted woman on the women's half of the house. They are dumped into a pot and she, her husband, and sons, must eat all of the meat.

Tea and fresh meat are set out for the assembled elders. The newly 'cleansed' son of the White-Skirted woman will then come over and beg for blessing by giving the Reciter liquor to drink, and a new set of clothes. At the very least, they must give him an embossed silver ring, a pair of cloth shoes, leggings, and a turban. The Village Founder Leader and the three 'maternal uncles' also receive a silver ring and a turban. Meat is then packed for the Reciter to take home, a chicken is offered to the ancestors, and they have one more regular meal before the Reciter returns home. The next day the Reciter returns for one

more final chicken offering. Now that the ceremony is ended, the family has a set of week long taboos that is similar to the ones that they had when the woman took the White-Skirted woman's initiation.

### Guest feast

A special meal given to a newly arrived guest is probably one of the most common feasts in the world. The Akha, like people everywhere, want to make any special guest which visits their home feel welcome and appreciated. To accomplish this, they will often display great hospitality, and will prepare an especially appetizing meal for their guest. Usually, what makes this meal special is that it will contain at least one meat dish: either the family will kill a chicken or else go to a friend or relative's house who is in possession of some pork.

Even if a guest has only dropped by for a brief visit, most Akha families will insist that they drink some tea or whiskey. It is quite rude to leave an Akha home without at least drinking a little tea. This emphasizes the fact that among the Akha food and its consumption are highly symbolic. In this case, the Akha family is trying to communicate their desire to be appreciated as benevolent people who are good to associate with, but they are also looking for a sign from their guest that he or she has recognized and accepted the family's attempt at social bonding.

*The Fifth Ring:*

*The Funeral Feast*

The funeral feast is, by far, the grandest of all Akha feasts, and arguably is imbued with the most social significance. In actuality, it is not one single feast, but a series of many feasts which can stretch out over a period of up to a year (Lewis 1969: 407-515). There is, however, one especially prominent feast which is held at the time of burial. Unfortunately, I have never attended an Akha funeral, and although there is a relatively extensive description of them in the ethnographic literature (Hayden and Maneprasert 1995; Lewis 1969; Kammerer 1986), for my purposes, there are still many large gaps in the available data.

Most notably, it is still not clear what the exact level of extravagance and promotion reached at these feasts is, but it seems fairly certain that families try to hold the largest funeral feasts that they possibly can. The most important funeral feasts are very large in terms of attendance, and consequently there are many animals slaughtered (up to seven water buffalo), but I am not sure how expensive these funerals actually are; exactly who bears the greatest financial burden in hosting them; nor how much effort is actively put into aggrandizing the host lineage or clan. I suspect that not only would emphasis be placed upon prestige items and delicacies, such as the silver ornaments given to the presiding ritual specialist, but also that this feast would operate much like a clan solidarity feast writ large: much like a grandiose curing feast which is more formal because of the social distance between the participants, and weighted more heavily on

the side of clan competitive aggrandizement. Excessive whiskey consumption, for example, is not considered appropriate at funerals. I think that the people are so proud in emphasizing the number of buffalo which are killed at these events (which they often do) because it is a reflection of *attendance* as much as it is expense. Meat is never wasted and I do not think that more animals would be killed than could be consumed or given away (meat is taken home by many of the guests).

We can say that great social importance is given to the funeral event. Very rich individuals will have feasts with several buffaloes slaughtered and hundreds (perhaps thousands) of people in attendance. Poor people generally only have a meal for as many people as it takes to make the coffin and prepare the body.

Because of the large attendance, these events certainly operate as the maximum extension of any one family's, and any lineage's, support group. Most of the people who attend a funeral will be clan members, but I am sure many non-related people often show up. Funerals, however, supersede this simple support network function and enter into the realm of politics. It should be remembered that the extended clan power structure *is* the regional power structure (Kammerer 1986: 154). There can be little doubt that a huge funeral event for any person will serve to emphasize the success, power, and support of his or her family to the rest of his village. News of the demonstration of a certain lineage's, and therefore clan's, power will diffuse throughout the region. I have on several occasions seen people display on their walls pink invitation cards to feasts in other villages that they did not even bother to go to. They nonetheless liked the idea that they were invited.

Hayden and Maneprasert (1995: 28) documented some of the details of an Akha funeral feast which took place in my main study village of Mae Salep one year before my arrival. It was a funeral for the wife of the Village Founder-Leader, it was sponsored by her son, and was quite grand in scale. At this feast 5 buffalo and numerous pigs were sacrificed, and the total cost of the event was US\$1,200. Hayden and Maneprasert (1995: 28) feel that the reason such a costly and lavish feast was sponsored is because the host (the middle-aged son of the current Village Founder-Leader) is trying to ensure his ascendancy to the role of Village Founder-Leader once his father dies. Hayden and Maneprasert also believe that funeral feasts in general are used as criterion for political advancement and succession as decided by the elders: "That is, the amount expended by a prospective headman on his parent's funerals (and the manner in which the funeral feast is handled) are used by elders and others as measures of economic success (indicative of one's knowledge of, ability in, and commitment to the existing economic and political system). These funeral feasts are also barometers of the magnitude of lineage (and other) support networks, of the ability to function at large public feasts, and of the willingness to serve as headman" (Hayden and Maneprasert 1995: 28).

There is one final distinction which I would like to make in regards to extravagant funerals. It is not always the immediate family who bears the cost of the funeral. According to my interviews, sometimes the guests, both those who come from the same village and those who come from other villages, pay a great deal of money to participate in these events, although the amount varies. Some people may choose to donate only US\$2, while others will give US\$25 or more.

In these cases, I would think that the prestige for the event is meant to be placed upon the clan or lineage as a whole. It shows how much they respect the elders (leaders), and the power structure they represent, as well as how cohesive and rich that clan is. Occasionally, if a family is very rich, it will bear the entire cost of the funeral. In this case I would imagine that the family itself is more concerned with its own prestige, and that this act of generosity is meant to have political ramifications within the host's own village as well as within their clan in general.

Lewis (1969: 407-515) feels that the Akha funeral rite can be broken down into four distinct sections:

The first is the preparation of the body and coffin, in which the [Village Founder-Leader] is the coordinator and leader. The second is when the [Reciter] comes and officiates at various sacrifices and spirit incantations. This may be several months after the first section. The third is the actual burial, which is in the hands of the village elders. The [Village Founder-Leader] and [Reciter] must not even attend this part. The fourth section consists of the post-burial ceremonies which the family observes (Lewis 1969: 408-409, brackets added).

The following is a relation of some of the practices that Lewis (1969: 407-515) observed for a typical Akha funeral in Burma, with special emphasis placed on matters regarding feasting and sacrificial animals:

The Akha have a special fear and reverence for a corpse. They believe that if the proper rites are performed during burial then the spirit of the deceased will become a benevolent spirit who will aid them in the future. Conversely, if something goes awry in the funeral proceedings, then that spirit will instead become malevolent. For the most part the burial of elder males and females is identical.

SECTION 1 -- Preparation of the body and coffin, consists of twenty six separate steps:

1. Washing of the body.
2. Washing of the burial clothes.
3. Clothe the corpse: All except three pieces of silver are removed from female's headdress'.
4. Tie the thumbs and big toes: The wealthy use silk thread.
5. Recount the genealogy.
6. Put silver in the mouth.
7. Wrap the shroud: the body is placed in the corner on the men's side of the house.
8. Cover with silk cloth: A blanket will do in absence of silk.
9. Tying of the head.
10. Burning the chicken: A member of the household ceremonially kills a chicken, singes it, and hangs it in a basket over the corpse. It will later be put on top of the grave.
11. Purifying life ceremony: They ceremonially kill three chickens, one of which must be of the opposite sex from the other two. The Village Founder-Leader officiates this ceremony. They prepare a chicken curry, and then prepare five dishes on the rice table near the corpse: cooked sticky rice, uncooked rice, liquor, tea mixed with ginger, and water. The Village Founder-Leader then throws bits of food on the corpse as an offering and asks that the impure acts that the person committed in life be nullified in his or her death.
12. Purifying death ceremony: Next they kill a hen, singe it, and while plucking it, throw the feathers in the fire. Half of the chicken is strung up above the corpse, while the other half is made into a curry which the elders feast on. Once again they offer some to the corpse. From now on

all who eat in that house will spill a little food on the table before they begin to dine.

13. Repair the ax: The blacksmith must 'fix up' the ax used to cut down the tree required for the coffin. The spouse will send it to him in a dish which also contains salt, uncooked rice, ginger root, and an egg. He takes the food as payment. As further payment, the blacksmith will get a rib from a buffalo they will offer on the day of the burial.

14. Vigil: The Village Founder-Leader will tell the villagers that they should have one person from each household sit with the deceased person's family all night. The family must feed them and give them liquor. They will stay with the family each night until the corpse has been buried. During this time they gamble, play games, and sing. Lewis goes into detail regarding a certain type of singing that they do called ' a ci ceu-eu':

Usually they sing it to the people from other villages, welcoming them. The theme is:

"We don't have anything to feed you, but come sit down and have some tea to drink and food to eat. We have only one village priest, but he can't do all that is needed. Let's get ten village priests, and collectively do the customs. Only one spirit priest won't be able to repeat spirit incantations enough. Let's have ten spirit priests gather here and repeat spirit incantations."

Though they say they have nothing to feed them, they have mounds of food. This is to belittle their efforts. When they sing of needing ten village priests and ten spirit priests it is an indication that they believe this elder who has died is tremendously important. (Lewis 1969: 424).

15. Coffin preparation feast: This is done the day after the person has died. If the family is poor they will just serve tea. If they have a feast they must kill at least one castrated boar, but often if there are many people in attendance they will kill a buffalo too. The Village Founder-Leader and elders all attend this feast as do all of those who will help to

make the coffin. Three ribs from the back of the pig will be cut and hung over the body with the chickens from the day before and will also be left on top of the grave.

16. Go cut the coffin: A respected elder must go with the party to take the first blow. They bring a measuring stick which is the length of the corpse, and to it they tie a chick. They also bring a small pig in a basket, one egg, one banana leaf with cooked rice in it, and one cowry shell.

17. Choosing the tree: They make a niche and put the cowry shell into it. The chosen elder must take the first blow.

18. The tree falls: If the tree falls in a way that is within certain traditional guidelines, they kill the pig they brought and have a meal.

19. Cutting the coffin: They begin on the first day but must return the following day to finish. The elder who took the first blow ceremonially placates the spirit of the tree by killing the chick that they brought along on the first day, as well as offering the rice and egg.

20. Carrying the coffin home.

21. The welcome back: The men carrying the coffin are greeted by the spouse of the deceased at the village gate and are ritually thanked and given liquor to drink.

22. Feeding the coffin: The Village Founder-Leader takes a rice table on top of which is one dish of rice and meat, one dish of liquor, and one dish of tea, and sets it near the coffin. He places bits of each of the three offerings on the coffin using three separate sets of chopsticks. The Village Founder-Leader then goes to the porch and ceremonially calls out an announcement to come and feast. The entire village comes, and the household must offer at least a pig, but would kill a buffalo if

they were wealthy. Sometimes they kill a total of six or seven pigs and buffaloes during this time just to feed the people that come. Lewis' (1969: 435) informants told him that they would judge that when the family offered two buffaloes for an elder who had died, it would take another four or five buffaloes to feed the people who come. The total cost would be around U\$3,000-4,000 in 1966. This is the end of this day of the funeral.

23. The group eats a feast: The next morning some minor improvements are made to the coffin. If there is no spirit incantations planned for that day, then some men will go to dig the grave. Two pigs must be killed for this feast: one provided by the family and one provided by the village. The meat from the two pigs is kept separate, and is cooked in different pots. After a ceremonial feeding of the corpse from the pig provided by the family, they all feast.

24. Digging the grave: They must always dig it ahead of the day of burial.

25. Put in coffin, and wipe away tears: They bring the coffin in the house and put the body into it.

26. New home ceremony: Either an elder of the Village Founder-Leader kills a pig. They offer it to the corpse and ask it to be happy in its new home (i.e., the coffin).

Everything is now finished in the first section. Before the family calls the [Reciter], they and the relatives must get enough rice, pigs, chickens, and buffaloes for the rest of the burial ceremonies. [My informant] told of how his father died when it was rice planting time. They did not bury him until they had harvested that crop, since they could not get the necessary food together before that. This is fairly common with elders. They sometimes wait almost a year. (Lewis 1969: 438, brackets added)

SECTION 2 -- 'Reciter officiates', consists of sixteen separate steps:

1. Ceremonial feast: The first action that the Reciter will take upon arrival is to repeat spirit incantations to the family's ancestor shrine. This is accompanied by a feast at which food is once again given to the corpse.
2. Death ceremony: Outside the house, the Reciter makes an offering to the great ancestor 'To ma' and to the deceased consisting of liquor, tea, and tobacco.
3. Prevention of terrible death spirits: On the porch of the deceased's house, the Reciter repeats incantations to the spirits of terrible death, asking them to stay away. His offering consists of sweet potato, banana, and three dishes of different wild plants.
4. Freeing the hen: The family of the dead person gives the Reciter a rooster (which he gets to keep), and they also provide a hen which is to be let loose in the house. They will never eat this hen.
5. Seeking a sign: This is a way to ask the dead person who has died to send back all of the help that they can to the family. The Reciter kills a pig and a rooster underneath the house by the main post, and has his assistants prepare dishes of liquor, tea, cooked sticky rice, and uncooked rice. He will then set up a special assemblage consisting of an egg with a thread tied around it in a mound of ash underneath the house. After the burial they will check the egg for a sign from the deceased.
6. Coffin satisfaction ceremony: The Reciter next returns to the house and says special incantations to the body in the coffin, asking it to be satisfied. When he is finished, he kills two chickens (one rooster and

one hen) and he, the Village Founder-Leader, and the rest of the elders feast on them.

7. Spirit incantation for the dead: By this time it is the evening of the first day that the Reciter arrived. Beginning at around eight in the evening he will begin incantations and continue until around four or five the next morning. He will then repeat spirit incantations that day and night, and the next day and night. The following day after offering the buffalo, the body will be buried. The Reciter is expected to not make any errors in the incantations, if he does the family can fine him. He is not allowed to eat or sleep during this time, and if he stops to take a drink or to smoke some opium or tobacco, then one of his assistants must continue with the incantations in his absence. The incantations are descriptions of the person's life, and instructions on how to get to the afterlife. While this is taking place, the buffaloes to be sacrificed must be tethered outside the house. If there are two buffaloes (some say three) then there must also be a stallion there with a riding saddle and bridle on it.

8. Pork feast: Just before dawn when the Reciter finishes the incantations, he and his helpers will kill a small pig, which is provided by the household. This is breakfast.

9. Cut the post: Men not closely related to the deceased go into the forest to select a very specific type of tree to make the post to which the sacrificial buffalo(es) will be tethered. It is planted very deep, it is a bad omen if the buffalo should tear it out, and while they are planting it the spouse of the deceased offers an egg and rice to the hole.

10. Prosperity incantation: That day and night the Reciter does incantations referring to the livestock of the family. He asks for them to

flourish, and he also tells the soul of the deceased how difficult it was for the family to attain the required offerings. They often exaggerate this greatly.

11. Pork feast: This is the same as number 8 above.

12. Final incantation: The incantations are similar to those already explained. These ones begin at noon, and go late into the evening.

13. Calling the maternal uncles: During this night the maternal uncles of the deceased (or their fictive surrogates) are brought to the house of the deceased to give gifts of a rooster and a goat. They have a special small feast just for these men.

14. Outside feast: At about the same time that the 'calling of the maternal uncles' is taking place, sometime before sunrise, another household in the village who is not related to the deceased must have a feast for him or her. The members of the deceased's family are in attendance, and before they eat they all must spill some food as an offering for the deceased.

15. Pork feast: This is the same as number 8 and 11 above.

16. Offering of the buffalo: The Reciter makes an offering of uncooked rice to the tethered buffalo(es). He stabs them with his ceremonial spear which is used only for this purpose. When the buffalo is dead they wash it. Next, they pour unprocessed rice paddy over the head and neck of the buffalo, until they are covered, including the horns. After some incantations by the Reciter, they skin the buffalo and butcher the carcass. The Reciter is entitled to all of the meat and bones from the ribs to the shoulders of the buffalo. The rest of the meat is divided among the non-relatives of the deceased. After bringing some prepared meat into the house they have more incantations and

offerings at the family's ancestor shrine. After this the Reciter and the elders have a special meal of the buffalo meat (they are usually full by this point so they often just touch the food to their lips). Then they have one more final meal with the deceased, and this consists of a rooster or a hen. It is cooked differently from other chickens, and it is considered a 'meal of separation' (much like a divorce) in which the spouse and other family members tell the deceased that they are now permanently separated and that they do not want to see them again.

SECTION 3 -- The actual burial, consists of twenty different steps:

1. Dividing the house: This is the ritual that they perform while they are taking the coffin out of the house.
2. Discard things of death: When an elder dies, a group of men will follow the coffin carrying the bed on which he/she died, as well as the games and such that they used during the death vigil.
3. Burn the clothes: Someone sets alight an old garment belonging to the deceased and, following the funeral procession, throws it away in the same area as the bed and games have been thrown.
4. Lower the coffin
5. Fill in the dirt
6. Open the ears: They plant the vine that they used to lower the coffin into the grave into a shallow hole. Then some of the men who lowered the coffin pull it out and say 'Let the ears be opened'.
7. Sprinkle chili powder: Sometimes they do this, it is to stop 'vampires' from digging up the body.

8. Leaving goods on grave: Personal items of the deceased are left. One of these items must be ritually broken.
9. Fix shoulder bag: A brand new shoulder bag is made and left standing upright on a stick over the grave. In it are cooked rice, rice balls (three of them being black), five eggs and some powdered rice, a small chicken boiled whole, one egg in a leaf, three lengths of sugar cane, three sweet potatoes, and three bananas. The one egg in the leaf is for the deceased to eat on they way, the five eggs and rice are for him or her to give to the ancestors. They also leave the three pieces of meat which were left hanging over the coffin on the grave: these were the burned chicken, the half hen, and the three ribs from the back of the boar they killed just before going to cut the coffin.
10. Leaving stick flowers: Sticks shaved to look like flowers are left on the grave.
11. Tying a dog: If the deceased was a male who was a great hunter, they will sometimes tie his, or another dog, to a stake at the grave site and leave it there to die. It is thought that the dog will help lead the man to the afterlife and to attack spirits which might harm him on the way.
12. Tying a horse: If the deceased was a male and had two or more buffaloes sacrificed to him, then they would also have a stallion tethered with the buffalo (mentioned in section 2 number 7). In some regions this horse is brought to the grave and is released, any non-relative who catches it may keep it. In other areas, the son of the deceased may keep the horse and use it only as a pack animal. If he has to ask for help in looking for the horse, then he must offer his helpers a pork feast.

13. Return to village

14. Follow-me-not ceremony: On the path homewards the person leading the procession makes three piles out of thatch, sticks, and magic vine, and steps over it. Each person in the procession does likewise. This is to stop the spirit of the dead from trying to follow them home.

15. Washing up: Men in procession wash their hands and feet at the home of the deceased before returning home themselves.

16. Uncovering the sign: The Reciter uncovers the assemblage discussed in section 2, number 5, which has been placed under the house. For this the Reciter sacrifices a rooster which the family eats, and each of the deceased's sons who has his own home will have a rooster feast. They make more offerings and incantations to the deceased and then look for signs of future prosperity or tragedy in the ashes which were left underneath the house.

17. Spirit incantation for the 'a g'oe': After they are finished below the house, the Reciter sacrifices the rooster, pig, and goat that the maternal uncles had brought over the night before.

18. Drama of separation: This is an important ceremony which the people believe will stop the spirit of the deceased from returning and bothering them in their dreams, it is to make sure that they know that they are dead. It is a reenactment of a mythical 'meal of separation' that people and spirits had many generations ago. Preferably, the uncle by marriage, or the husband of an older sister of the deceased takes on the role of the 'Spirits'. There is a certain ceremonial way that he must enter the house, carrying a machete with the blade turned up over his shoulder, and he will bring with him a shoulder bag containing a boiled egg, a small boiled chicken, and a rice cake. The spouse of the deceased

prepares an identical meal. Each of the two 'actors' in the drama eats the meal ceremonially near the spot where the coffin was kept. While each is doing this they must not interact, such as talk or exchange glances in any way. The man playing the Spirits must discard a piece of firewood on his way out of the house

19. Opening the 'haw yeh': On the day after the burial, the Reciter goes to the basket which was placed under the ancestor shrine on the day that the buffalo(es) was sacrificed and uncovers it. The food inside is now considered ancestor offering food, and he performs just such an offering. While sitting around the rice table, the Reciter offers bits of this food to various people in attendance, from whom he receives money as payment. The spouse of the deceased will then do exactly the same thing, and collect about as much money as the Reciter did. This is seen as going towards defraying the cost of the sacrifices.

20. Final Feast: At this point in the funeral most of the visitors to the village have returned home. However, the Reciter is expected to stay for this last feast. The name of the feast indicates that it is the end of the 'hardships', and consequently much drinking goes on.

SECTION 4 -- The post burial rites, consist of 2 separate steps:

1. Divide the field: One day after the burial, the close relatives of the deceased will partition off a tiny piece of land in their paddy field which is reserved for the use of the deceased.
2. Chicken Feast: The day after the family 'divides the field' they have a small chicken sacrifice which is the official end to the funeral rites. They can now return to work in their fields.

Although the above related four section outline is the basic plan that most Akha follow in Burma, as related by Lewis (1969), he also mentions two interesting variations the Akha of northern Kentung state perform. The second variation is especially germane to this research project because it is an obvious example of conspicuous wealth display.

Variation 1: Outside the house of the deceased, the Reciter will offer a special male goat, and will repeat spirit incantations: the theme of the incantations is a request to the spirits not to come back and haunt the living.

Variation 2: In the same spot outside of the house, just after the above mentioned goat is sacrificed, they next offer a buffalo (if they have one) or at least a pig. "This is to ensure much 'luck blessing' for the family. While offering either the pig or buffalo and then feasting the people who have come, the family will often bring out whatever silver they have, put it on the uncovered porch (gui ga) to 'show God' (a poe mi yeh). This silver is usually the silver lumps (maw seu pyu k'o) they have." (Lewis 1969: 478).

Although the funeral is now over, this does not end the family's feasting obligations. They are now in the official period of mourning, and this lasts for exactly one year. During this year, there are certain restrictions on the members of the family, the most notable of which is that the sons of the deceased may not go hunting large game for that period (they believe that the soul of the one who died sometimes comes back as a large animal). There are two feasts/ceremonies which must be performed during this period:

Mourning feast 1: One cycle of days (thirteen days) after the burial, they will call back the same Reciter who officiated at the funeral.

The family provides one goat, one pig, and one chicken. After ceremonially killing these animals, the Reciter will put them on the path, just inside the village gateway. He then repeats spirit incantations over the carcasses, the theme of which is begging the deceased not to call any of the family members to come and join him or her. The Village Founder-Leader and the elders join the Reciter in this. When they are done, they take the animals back to the house of a non-relative and feast on them (Lewis 1969: 479-480).

Mourning feast 2: Exactly one year after the funeral of an elder who had had a buffalo sacrifice, they will once again call back the same Reciter who officiated at the burial. For this ceremony, the family will provide one boar, one sow, a rooster, and a hen. After killing the animals, the Reciter takes the branch of a special tree and washes it with liquor. After repeating incantations, he will put the branch in the roofing above the ancestor altar and leave it there to rot. The theme of the incantations is to ask the spirit to come down and look after the children, to guard the house, etc.. It takes six or seven hours to repeat these incantations. It is of note that this is the first time that ceremonies have been held to ask the spirit to come to the family, rather than as previously, to stay away from the family. The official period of mourning is now ended, and all of the restrictions placed on the family are now lifted (Lewis 1969: 483).

### *Summary*

This chapter is a descriptive catalogue of Akha feasts, and the feasts included in it have been organized based on general levels of

support group inclusivity. The number and degree of attendance at feasts by members of the host's network of affines and political superiors is especially relevant to the study of Akha feasting. This is because the creation of a network of friends and supporters is a key strategy that the Akha use to cope with the precariousness and fluctuations in their resources base. I have also attempted to show that besides life crisis support group creation and maintenance, some types of feasts function as an avenue for wealth/success promotion and lineage aggrandizement, and are therefore arenas for competition for political power and influence.

Many factors determine whether or not a feast functions as primarily an event which encourages intra-group solidarity or inter-group competition. In general, it can be said that the larger and more costlier a feast is, the more it promotes the wealth and success of the host. Larger feasts often have more delicacies and alcohol, and occasionally, such as at funerals and New House feasts, guests receive meat to bring home. However, sometimes the costs of larger feasts are defered by donations from guests and relations. For example, it is customary to make donations at funerals, weddings, and New House feasts. I still do not know exactly how much of the feast costs are covered by donations, but a conservative estimate would be %30-%40.

Certain types of feasts, such as family ancestor offerings and baby namings, function very much as a nuclear family solidarity enhancing event. Feasts such as the Butcher's, Workmen's, and Curing rites, encourage lineage solidarity and cooperation. Village-wide annual feasts, such as New Years, the Swinging Festival, Yo La La, Gate Rebuilding, and the Offering to the Lords of Earth and Water, are both

village solidarity events and opportunities for elders to assert and gage their relative positions. Some feast types, such as weddings, New House feasts, and White Skirted Woman's feasts, are able to facilitate more promotional intentions, but also always engender lineage solidarity. Finally, the funeral feast is potentially the largest and most grandiose of all Akha feasts. If the host so chooses, or is able to afford it, a funeral feast can be a venue for household, lineage, and even clan promotion and agrandizement. Funeral feasts, and other large feasts, if they are promotional in intent, are used by people in power, and the community in general, to gage the relative social ranking which should be accorded to the host, and to evaluate the degree of cooperation and support which the host can summon from his network of relations and affines.

Table 6-2: Feast Attribute Summary no. 1.

Note: 'l' stands for 'large', 'm' for medium, 's' for small, and 'w' stands for wok, 'p' stands for pot. For example: 2 lw = 2 large woks.

<b>Feast</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Serving Vessels</b>	<b>Cooking Vessels</b>	<b>Number of Animals</b>
<i>Ancestor</i>	1-9	5	1 sp	1 chicken
<i>Naming</i>	3 to 6	5	1 sp	1 chicken
<i>Guest</i>	3 to 10	5 to 10	1 sw, 1 sp	At least 1 chicken
<i>Curing</i>	10 to 40	8 to 30	2 mw, 2 sp, 2 mp	1 or 2 pigs, or chickens
<i>Butcher's</i>	5 to 15	5 to 10	2 mw, 2 sp, 2 mp	Portion of pig
<i>Workmen's</i>	5 to 20	5 to 15	1 mw, 2 mp	At least 1 dog 1 pig
<i>Gate Rebuild</i>	Elders	?	?	1 pig and chicken
<i>Swinging</i>	Every family	?	?	1 pig or buffalo
<i>New Years</i>	Every Family	?	?	1 pig
<i>Yo la la</i>	?	?	?	1 pig
<i>Earth/Water</i>	Elders	?	?	?
<i>Purification</i>	?Village	?	?	From very few, to up to 10 pigs, 9 dogs , 11 chickens
<i>Protection</i>	?Village	?	?	1 chicken to 1 pig
<i>Path Repair</i>	Work group	?	?	? 1 pig

<i>Penalty</i>	?Village	?	?	1 pig
<i>Wedding</i>	20 to 250	15 to 200	2 lw, 2 lp, 3 mp	1 or 2 pigs, maybe 1 cow
<i>New House</i>	20 to 250	20 to 200	2 lw, 2 lp, 3 mp	1 or 2 pigs, maybe cow, goat, chickens
<i>White-Skirt</i>	?Very Many	?	? Many large ones	10 pigs, 24 chickens, maybe buffalo
<i>Funeral</i>	20 to 1000	20 to 750	? Many large ones	From 1 pig up to 5 buffalo and several pigs

Table 6-3: Feast Attribute Summary no. 2.

<b>Feast</b>	<b>Invited Group</b>	<b>Ceremony</b>	<b>Village Leaders</b>	<b>Expense</b>
<i>Ancestor</i>	Nuclear family	YES	NO	< US\$5
<i>Naming</i>	Nuclear family	YES	NO	< US\$5
<i>Guest</i>	Nuclear family and guest	NO	NO	< US\$10
<i>Curing</i>	Lineage	YES	MAYBE	US\$5-\$50
<i>Butcher's</i>	Lineage	NO	MAYBE	< US\$25

<i>Workmen's</i>	Lineage/village	NO	MAYBE	US\$5-\$30
<i>Gate Rebuild</i>	Village	YES	YES	< US\$ 20
<i>Swinging</i>	Village	YES	YES	US\$5-\$20
<i>New Years</i>	Village	YES	YES	US\$5-\$75
<i>Yo la la</i>	Village	YES	YES	US\$50-\$200
<i>Earth/Water</i>	Elders	YES	YES	< US\$20
<i>Purification</i>	Village or household	YES	YES	US\$10-\$300
<i>Protection</i>	Village	YES	YES	US\$10-\$50
<i>Path Repair</i>	Work group	NO	YES	< US\$20
<i>Penalty</i>	Elders/village	NO	YES	US\$5-\$200
<i>Wedding</i>	Village/clan /lineage	YES	PROBABLY	US\$30-\$500
<i>New House</i>	Extended clan	YES	PROBABLY	US\$30-\$500
<i>White-Skirt</i>	Extended clan	YES	PROBABLY	US\$300-\$400
<i>Funeral</i>	Extended clan	YES	PROBABLY	US\$50-\$2000

## **Chapter 7**

### **Case Study 1- Mae Salep Village**

#### ***Introduction***

During my stays in the North of Thailand I lived in Mae Salep village for just over eleven weeks and in Sam Soong village for just over two weeks. Before I present the data regarding each of these villages I would like to give a description of their political and social backdrop, and to make clear some of the ways that the data has been structured and otherwise organized.

#### ***The Demography and Feasting Materials***

The village of Mae Salep consists of 55 households. I was able to do extended interviews with 48 of these. Of the 7 households that I missed, 3 were away out of the village, working, or in jail. The other 4 were just seldom at home and I was not able to locate them for an interview. I did, however, get everyone's family name (clan) and religion. It was a fairly comprehensive sample: 91% of the households were interviewed.

There were six clans represented by more than one family in the core village of Mae Salep: Latche, Labu, Weiseu, Biache, Pyumia, and Yelum. Three more clans had single families, all of them

Table 7-1: Mae Salep Village Demography

<u>Clan</u>	<u># of Families</u>	<u># Xian Family</u>	<u># of Persons</u>
Latche	13	0	96
Labu	8	2	48
Biache	3	0	22
Weisue	6	6	42
Pyumia	3	3	22
Yelum	3	1	17
Ayuet	1	0	8
Aiyur	1	1	3
Cheumuer	1	1	7
Jehspng	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>267</b>

Christian: Chumuer, Ayuet, and Ayuir. One final family was a Lahu (another hill tribe) Christian missionary and his wife. The majority of the population were of the Latche clan, while the Yelums and Pyumias constituted only a few families. For my analysis I have excluded the Christian households. They present too many confounding variables because they do not fully uphold the traditional feasting complex and they operate economically separately from the rest of the village. For the most part, this exclusion has not presented any problems. The entire Weisue clan is Christian and most of the Pyumias and Yelums, and almost all of these Christians live in one separate and peripheral section of the village.

Because the Latche clan has a large majority in the village they tend to dominate village politics. The most important man in the village is the elderly Village Founder-Leader who is a Latche. However, the other two existing ceremonial positions are held by members of other clans: the Reciter is a Labu, and the Blacksmith is a Biache.

There is also an official headman and his assistants who are recognized by the Thai authorities. The current headman is a young member of one of the rich Latche families, as have been the past few headmen. His position is filled by village consensus and is contingent upon the approval of the Thai authorities. Approval, of him and his council of assistants, is essentially based on their fluency in Thai and their ability to go down to some sort of administration headquarters and fulfill office duty requirements. Some of his assistants are from very poor Christian families who normally would be powerless in village politics. This young headman and committee are not especially involved in the feasting complex, as are the more traditional village leaders. People do not seem to make an effort to court his favour by inviting him to feasts or by giving him any special honour while there, nor does he bother to host many feasts. In fact, his household is one of the most poorly equipped in this regard. His father's household, on the contrary, is highly equipped and well integrated into the feasting complex.

Although this is a nominally egalitarian society, it is interesting to note the unequal distribution of wealth and material goods in general. The basic pattern which emerges is that the Latche clan owns a disproportionate amount of the land and expensive (large) animals. Interestingly, although they own a proportionate amount of everyday items and animals (e.g., chickens and small tables), they own a disproportionate amount of items which are specifically associated with feasting (e.g., buffalo and big tables).

Readers should make note of the fact that the Latches make up 57% of the non-Christian village population, yet they own 71% of the

land, and 86% of the buffaloes, cows, and horses (see figs. 7-1 to -4 below).

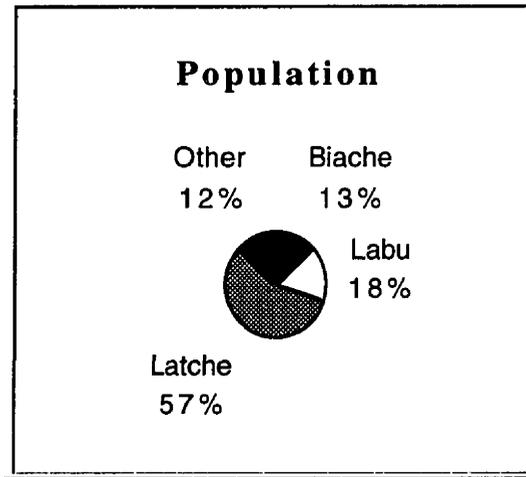


Fig. 7-1: Pie graph showing the percentage that each clan comprises of Mae Salep village.

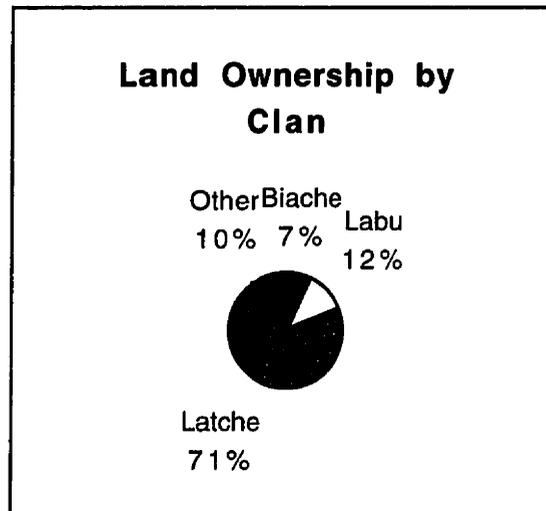


Fig. 7-2: Pie graph showing the percentage of land that each clan owns in Mae Salep village.

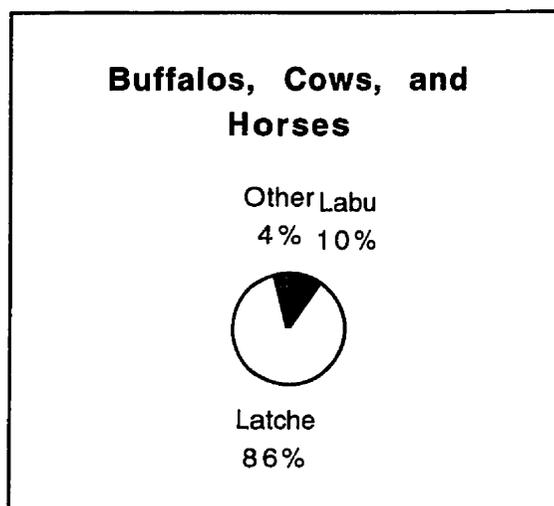


Fig. 7-3: Pie graph showing the percentage of ownership of buffaloes, cows, and horses each clan owns in Mae Salep village.

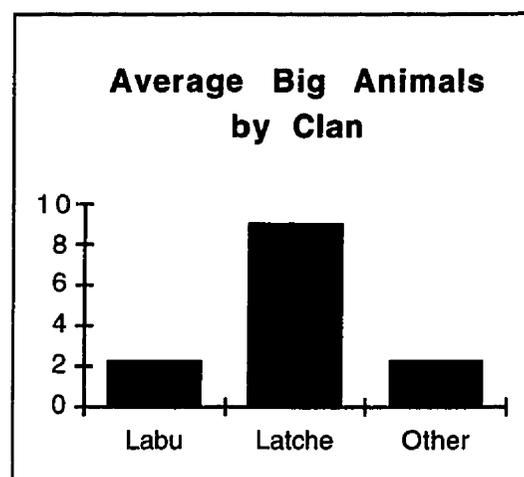


Fig. 7-4: Bar graph showing the average number of large domestic animals owned by members of the Latche, Labu, and other Mae Salep village clans.

These socioeconomic inequalities were to a large degree produced and maintained, I believe, by the cooperation and social cohesion of the Latche clan. They have a very active intraclan feasting complex which is the outward manifestation of this cooperation: the grease that allows

the engine to run. The success of some of the rich Latche households (no doubt touted in some of the lavish weddings and New House feasts that they had) has caused both the immigration of distant relatives into the village and the retention of young family members who might otherwise move away. In this fashion, they maintain their numbers and consequently their social dominance. They also seem to have close feasting and social ties with the next most populous clan, the Labus. This, I am sure, helps to promote village harmony in a situation which is ripe for conflict. It is important to maintain this harmony because I think that all the villagers are well aware that their traditional 'stay-or-go' option does not exist anymore in modern day Thailand.

The Latche clan's high degree of feasting activity is reflected in some of the material items that they possess which are specific to feasting. While the Latche clan is more or less at par with the other clans in terms of owning food consumption items which have an 'everyday' use, such as plates, bowls, glasses, and tables in general, Latche households have a disproportionate amount of the feasting-specific items such as big woks and very large tables (see figs. 7-5 to 7-8 below). 'Big woks' are greater than 40 cm in diameter, while 'big tables' are, roughly speaking, greater than 60 cm in diameter. It has been my experience that these larger woks and tables are only ever used in a feasting context, although some of the other Hilltribes sometimes use large woks to cook pig food in.

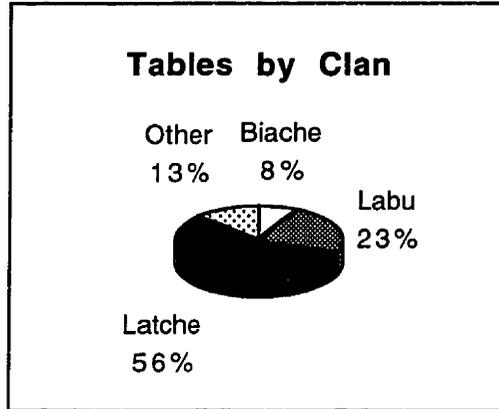


Fig. 7-5: Pie graph showing the percentage of dining tables in Mae Salep village that each clan owns

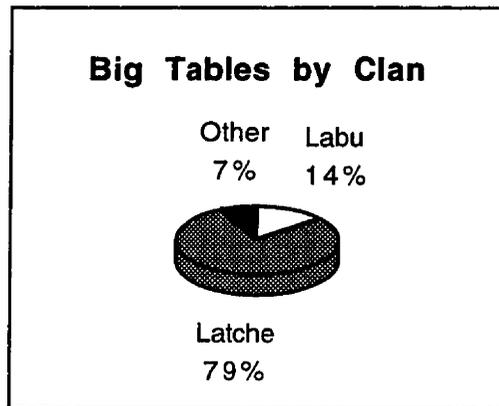


Fig. 7-6: Pie graph showing the percentage of the over-sized dining tables in Mae Salep village that each clan owns.

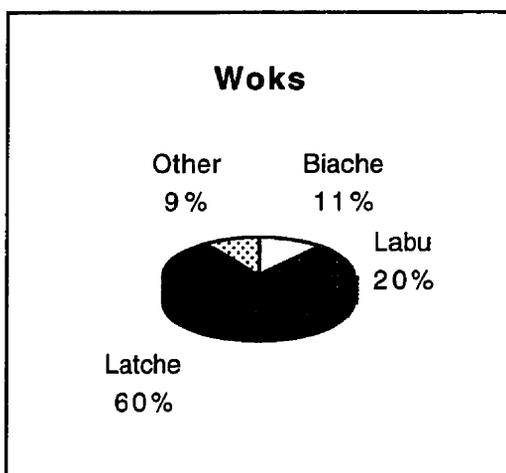


Fig. 7-7: Pie graph showing the percentage of the woks in Mae Salep village that each clan owns.

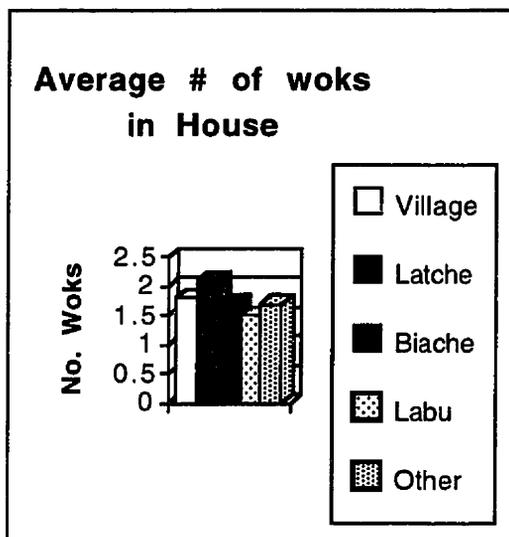


Fig. 7-8: Bar graph showing the average number of woks that a household owns in each clan of Mae Salep village.

So, the Latches have more woks and bigger woks than the other clans. Very large woks are exclusively feasting related, at least in Mae Salep. Figure 7-9 illustrates the 'cumulative wok diameter averages' of each clan and of the village as a whole. A cumulative wok diameter

(C.W.D.) is the sum of the diameters of all the woks found in a house: e.g., a household with three 25 cm woks would have a C.W.D. of 75 cm. The 'average cumulative wok diameter' is arrived at by dividing the sum of all the C.W.D.s of people from a certain clan by the number of households in that clan: e.g., if clan X was comprised of only two households, one with a C.W.D. of 50 cm and the other with a C.W.D. of 100 cm, then the average C.W.D. of clan X would be 75 cm. Households in the Biache clan, for example, have an average cumulative wok diameter of 45 cm. This means that, ideally, the average Biache household would probably have either one 45 cm wok, or else, one 20 cm wok and one 25 cm wok.

The cumulative wok diameter is a reflection of how much potential 'cooking surface' that a family has and, consequently, how great an amount of food it could possibly cook at any one time. In general, a high C.W.D. is an indicator that a family owns one or more very large woks, not that it owns several small woks. This is because, for day-to-day cooking, most families use only one wok at a time on a single heat source. Woks get bigger (and heat sources get more numerous) when the volume of food which needs to be cooked increases, as at feasts. One or two 25 cm to 35 cm woks are usually sufficient for the daily cooking needs of the average Akha family. Woks of a diameter of greater than 50 cm tend to be purely feasting related.

There is a fair degree of variability in the wok/pot assemblage when viewed from a clan perspective, but there is an even greater

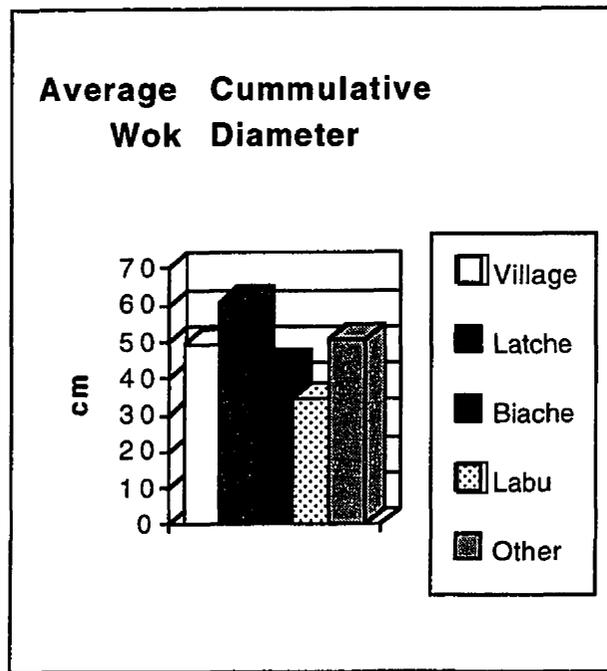


Fig. 7-9: Bar graph showing the average cumulative wok diameter for households in each clan of Mae Salep village

variability when one examines some of the extreme individual cases. For example, the wok diameter average (average wok size) and the cumulative wok diameter average (explained above) of Mae Salep village, the Latche clan, and the family of the rich Aboe Pisa Latche are contrasted in figure 7-10.

Since availability of labour is probably the single most important factor in acquiring and maintaining wealth for the Akha (Alting Von Geseu 1983), rich households like Aboe Pisa Latche's are almost by definition very populous. He has 23 members in his household while the average family would have somewhere around 9. Because the wealthy have larger families to feed on a daily basis,

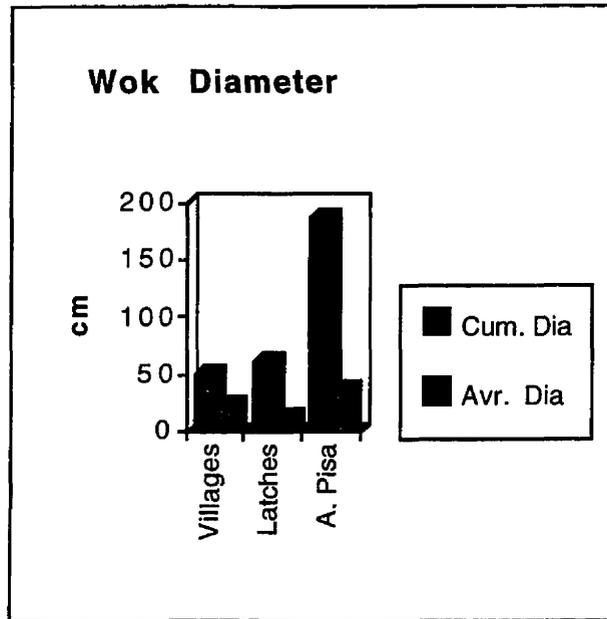


Fig. 7-10: Bar graph comparing the average wok diameters and the average cumulative wok diameters of Mae Salep village, the Latche' clan, and the wealthiest man in the Latche clan, Aboe Pisa Latche

Note: A. Pisa's Cumulative wok measurement in figure 7-10 is a real number, not an average.

one would expect them to have slightly more woks and slightly larger woks than other smaller families. However, as the reader can see in figure 7-10, Aboe Pisa Latche has a far higher Cumulative wok diameter average than one would expect. His family is approximately two and a half times larger than the average Akha family, but (at 186 cm) he owns four times as much wok cooking surface as the average villager (at 47 cm). It seems fairly evident that the reason Aboe Pisa Latche owns such an excessive amount of cook-ware is because 1) he is highly active in the overall Akha feasting complex, 2) when he does host feasts they tend to be larger than the average.

This observation lends credence to the conclusion that feasting is a method that wealthy households use to acquire their labour force and to otherwise manipulate the sociopolitical sphere to their advantage. I contend that certain types of large feasts (e.g., Funerals and New House feasts) are held for purposes of wealth promotion. These feasts serve to enlarge and maintain the host's labour force by enticing good, hard working women from influential families into marriage, as well as by encouraging other clan members to emigrate into the host's village. Furthermore, feasts of all kinds, whether large and promotional or small and solidarity enhancing, tend to lead to greater sociopolitical influence within the village community. This influence is garnered by: 1) pandering to village administrators and other powerful individuals (elders), and 2) gaining public respect for being a generous person. Sociopolitical influence is important for producing and protecting wealth because it increases a household's chances that disputes over property and legal infractions (such as crop damage repayment) are settled in their favour. Wealth redistribution also serves to minimize the resentment of the rich by the poor, and lineages that regularly hold solidarity enhancing events probably cooperate more easily and fully, thus increasing productivity and maximizing the social security-net benefits.

If the Mae Salep woks were considered as part of an archaeological assemblage then I would find that the Latches, who do most of the feasting and occupy a spatially discrete section of the village, would have more and bigger woks than the rest of the village. Aboe Pisa Latche, who regularly engages in big style feasting, and dumps all his refuse around his household complex, would have an even

more disproportionate number of woks and other feasting paraphernalia.

Essentially, the data indicates that there are "Big Pots for Big Shots" (Blitz 1989), and 'more woks for more big shots'. Senior members in all the clans have a large amount of feasting paraphernalia because they are the pinnacle of the lineage based feasting complex. The few rich men in the village however (i.e., Pisa and Piyi Latche), although they are considered elders, are certainly not the most senior in age but they are none-the-less very well equipped for feasting.

Large *pots*, on the other hand, are sometimes used by poor families to cook pig food, and as an archaeological indicator of feasting activity this might present some problems: i.e., confusing a farming implement (the pig pot) with a social activity indicator (the feast pot). However, when one evaluates the assemblage as a whole it can be seen that families who do a lot of feasting will have *several* big pots and woks. As already noted, woks seem to be used exclusively for feasting. Each square on the following correlation charts (figs. 7-11 to 7-13) represents one particular family.

Fig. 7-11 shows that there is a fairly strong correlation between the ownership of pots (or several large ones) and the ownership of woks (or several large ones). Figure 7-12, although the correlation appears weak because several squares in the centre of the spread are actually overlapping cases, shows that people with bigger pots tend to own bigger woks. In figure 7-12, even with the overlapping cases deminishing the apparent correlation, the  $r^2 = 0.4$ . Figure 7-13, again with some overlapping cases, shows that people who own a lot of

plates/bowls will also tend to own a lot of drinking glasses. The  $r^2$  value for the correlation in figure 7-13 is also 0.4.

The Akha eat their meals in a way that is quite different from that of people of European descent. First of all, no one has individual plates or bowls to eat from. They squat or sit on the floor, and in between every two people is a basket of rice from which they both

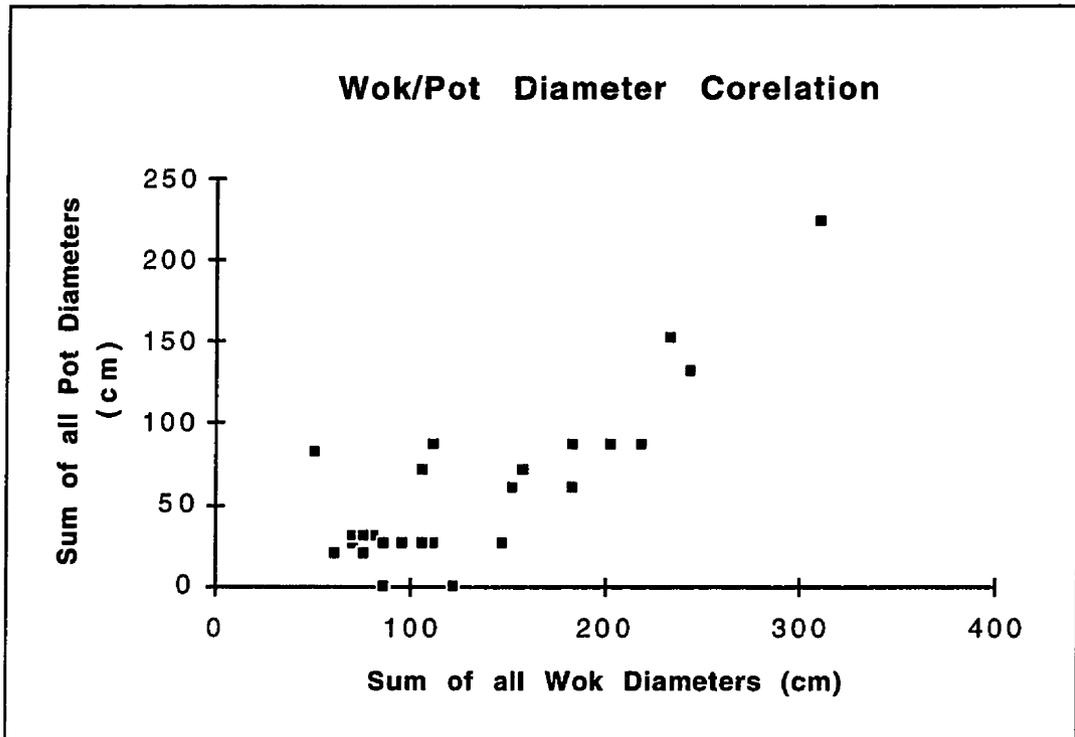


Fig. 7-11: Scattergram illustrating the positive correlation between the ownership of many large cooking pots and the ownership of many large woks by households in Mae Salep village.

share. People eat their rice by the handful and everyone uses chopsticks to take portions of food from communal serving vessels on the table. There is usually only one bowl/plate of each kind of dish served. If the table is large, say for a feast or a big family, then two or

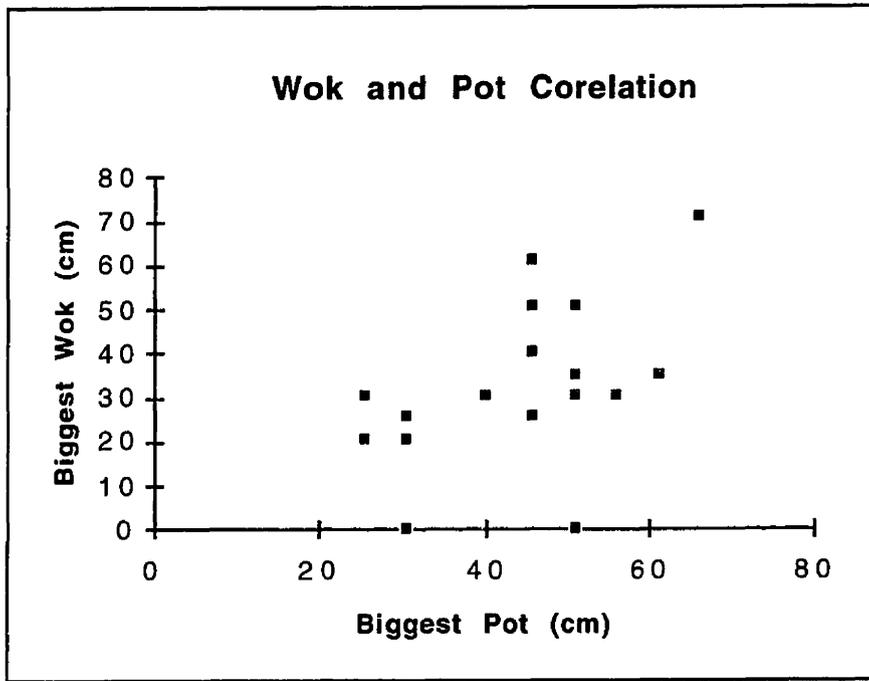


Fig. 7-12: Scattergram illustrating the positive correlation between the ownership of large cooking pots and the ownership of large woks by households in Mae Salep village.

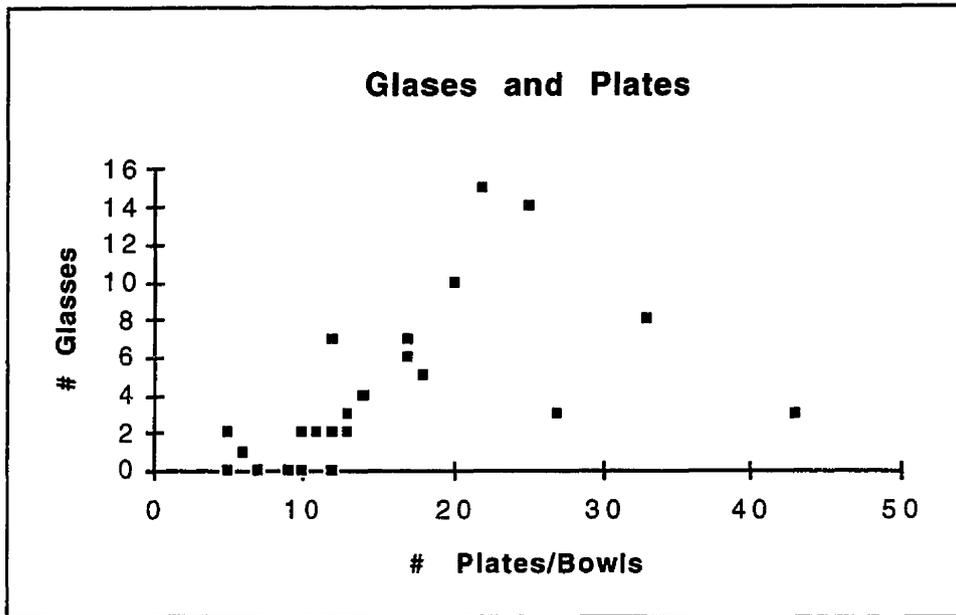


Fig. 7-13: Scattergram illustrating the positive correlation between the ownership of large numbers of drinking glasses and the ownership of large numbers of plates and bowls by households in Mae Salep village.

more vessels of the same type of food will be arranged around the table to make access easier. Some families have a glass of water or tea for each individual during a daily meal, but it is more common not to drink during the meal and then for everyone to take a drink from the communal water-pot. At feasts everyone has his or her own glass, usually for whiskey drinking. Daily fare usually consists of two or three different vegetable dishes with occasional meat, both domestic and wild. Feasts always have meat and generally have five or six different varieties of dishes, as well as condiment sauces and raw vegetables on the side. Men and women eat separately: this is always the case at feasts and generally the case for regular meals. At regular meals, the men usually eat first and then the women will come later to eat what food remains at the table. At feasts men and women always eat simultaneously.

These consumption patterns lend some particular insight into data which was presented in figures 7-11 to 7-13. First of all, for purposes of daily meals a household generally needs no more than about ten bowls/plates: one or two for each food item served (plus a few extra), not one for each person eating. One or two drinking glasses is usually sufficient for daily use, and a couple of cooking vessels are generally all that is necessary. When it comes to feasting, however, vessel usage patterns are quite different. A feast host needs more and bigger cooking vessels to cook larger amounts and more varieties of food. Because men and women eat simultaneously at feasts, twice as many serving vessels are required. The generally large number of people who attend feasts will obviously increase the number of vessels needed, but the fact that the tables are much larger means that each

variety of food will be placed in several dishes so that everyone sitting around the table will be able to reach them. Finally, because everyone is drinking tea and/or whiskey during the meal (as opposed to taking a drink when finished eating), a greater number of drinking glasses is required. These observations tell us that the number of cooking, serving and drinking vessels required for daily consumption is actually quite low, and that the only reason for a family to have an excessive number of these items is for feasting purposes. They also draw attention to the point that different consumption patterns is one characteristic that define a feast as an event which is different from the ordinary, and it is not just *what* is served that makes a feast a feast, but also how it is served. I will expand on this point in the last section on 'Archaeological Indicators'.

Most families only own one or two woks, but pots are much more numerous. Because of their numbers, it was possible to do some simple analysis of the overall pot assemblage and some interesting facts emerged. I attempted the same analysis on the wok distributions but am more wary of the results because of the much smaller sample size.

The following, figures 7-14 to 7-19, are ogive charts. They are graphic representations of the cumulative frequencies of a certain variable, in this case, pot and wok diameter categories. For any value along the horizontal axis the corresponding point on the vertical axis shows how many are less than or equal to that value. For example, figure 7-14 illustrates the size distribution of the 120 pots which were recorded in Mae Salep village. The reader can see that the median (the halfway point) of the distribution is the 25 cm diameter category. This means that 50% of the cooking pots in Mae Salep are between 15 cm

and 25 cm in diameter while the other half are between 30 cm and 65 cm in diameter. The third quartile for figure 7-14 falls on the 30 cm category. This means that 75% of the cooking pots in Mae Salep are between 15 cm and 30 cm in diameter, while only 25% are greater than 30 cm in diameter. The shape of the curve betrays the nature of the distribution of the variable. The curve will always run upwards. Large differences in consecutive class frequencies will produce a steep section of curve whereas small steady increases will result in a flat curve.

It is to be expected that the curve will be steep in the beginning and flatten out greatly past the middle. This is because the pots and woks which are most numerous, being used for everyday food

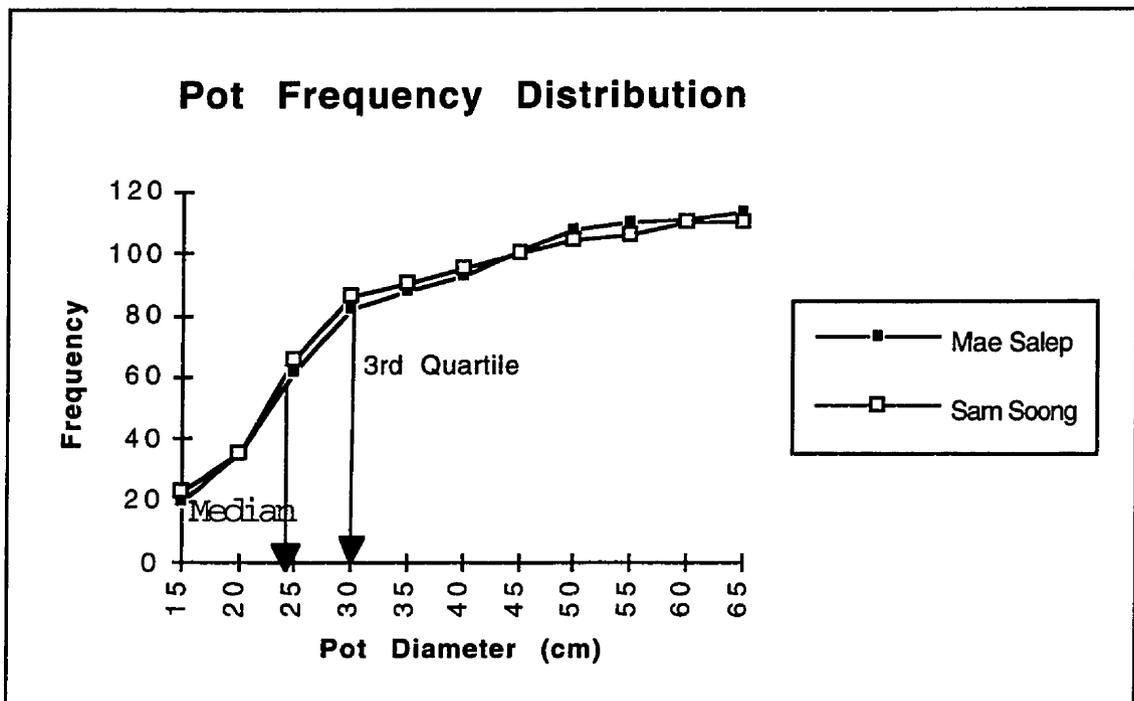


Fig. 7-14: Cumulative line graph illustrating the high degree of similarity between the number and size of cooking pots in Mae Salep and Sam Soong villages.

preparation, are in the 15 cm to 30 cm range, while very large pots and woks are more rare. In fact this is what we discover when we analyze the village distribution as a whole. The shape of the village-curve is a good base from which to observe and compare the variability in the distribution-curves of the various clans and individuals. I am confident about the meaningfulness of the over-all village distribution, in part, because of the very close resemblance between the distribution curves of Mae Salep village and Sam Soong village. There is a certain functional causality at work here, dictated by the practical realities of cooking for the average Akha family.

What I discovered in Mae Salep is, as I expected, that the Latche clan's pot and wok distributions are markedly different from the rest of the village (see Fig. 7-16). There is an advantage to viewing the data in this way. The means, medians, and modes of each clan's pot/wok assemblage distribution have surprisingly little variation. However, the shape of the cumulative frequency curve for pot/wok size categories shows very marked and informative patterning. It indicates that a larger proportion of the Latche's and rich individual's pot and wok assemblages are at the top of the size range. It is generally the lineage head who owns the largest pots and woks because their households are the focal point of intralineage feasting events. However, wealthy households, such as Aboe Pisa Latche's, will have several large pots and woks because their wealth enables them to host larger-than-average feasts. The Village Founder-Leader, because of his religious and political feasting obligations, also owns pots and woks at the top of the size class.

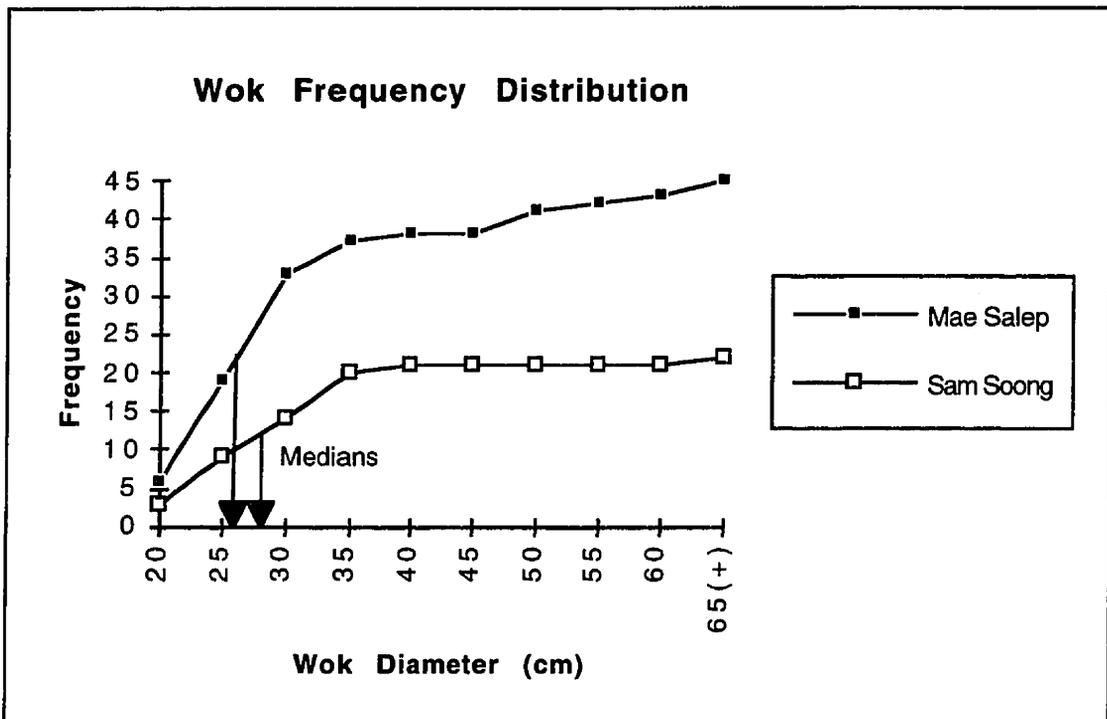


Fig. 7-15: Cumulative line graph illustrating the high degree of similarity between the number and size of woks in Mae Salep and Sam Soong villages.

If I remove the Latche clan, and thus improve the focus of the measurement on the remaining three clans, I can even see in the shape of the curve that the slight predominance in feasting activity that the Labu clan has in comparison to the other minor clans, as indicated in my interviews and observations, is reflected in their cooking vessel assemblage (see fig. 7-17).

When I compare the shape of the distribution curve of a rich man like Aboe Pisa with a 'middle class' man like Logo, and contrast these with the village average, both the preponderance of Pisa's many and large pots, and the uniqueness of his personal assemblage becomes apparent (see fig. 7-18 below).

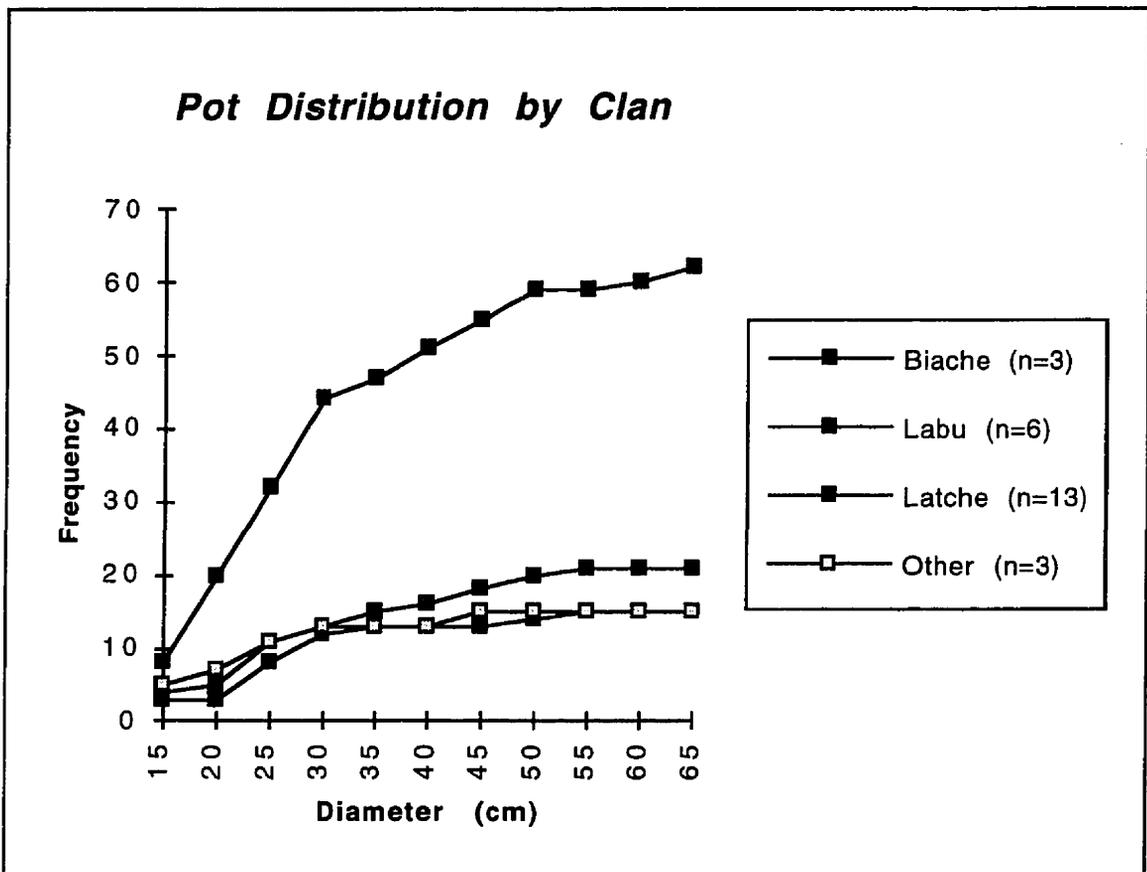


Fig. 7-16: Cumulative line graph illustrating the differences between the size and number of woks owned by each clan in Mae Salep village.

So, in the case of Mae Salep it is reasonable to say that there is a quantifiable correlation between the wealth/social position of the various clans, lineages, and individuals, and the amount and kind of feasting that they engage in. Furthermore, this correlation can be seen in the archaeologically significant material culture: i.e., objects and patterns that could survive the test of time. The question that I now must answer is: do these objects and patterns which I observed in the daily life of the people translate directly into the archaeological record - i.e., in their garbage and abandoned house-sites.

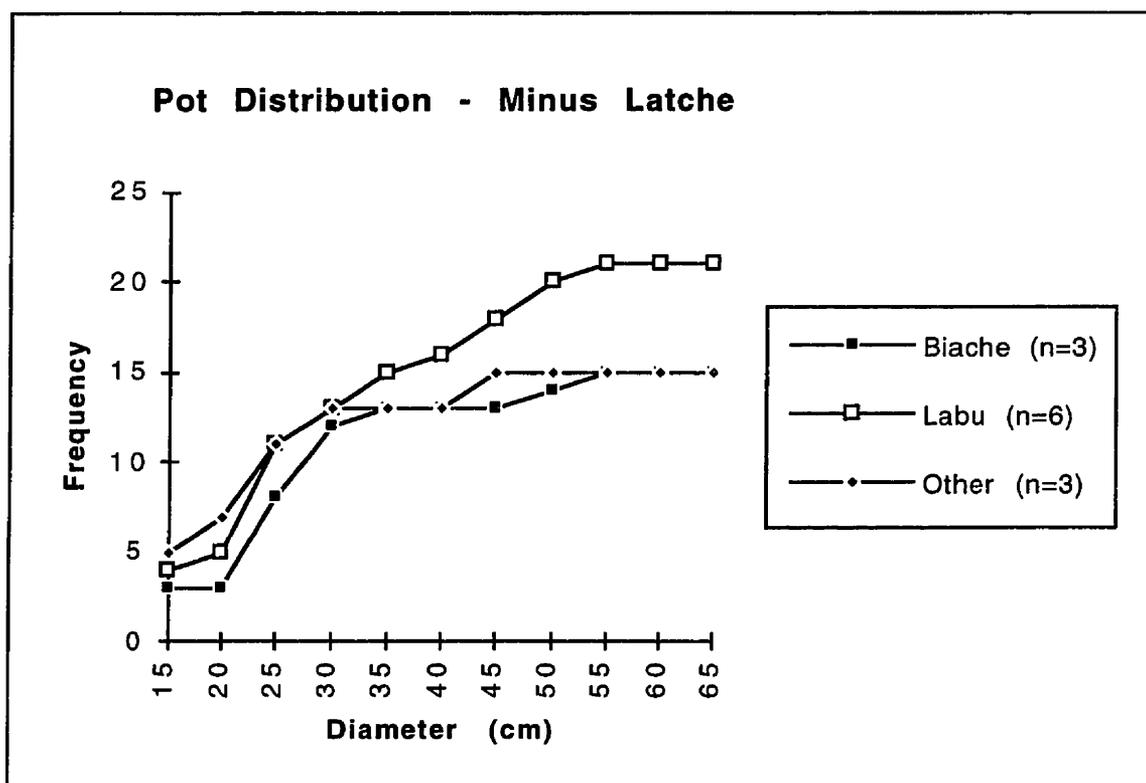


Fig. 7-17: Cumulative line graph illustrating the slightly greater number of cooking pots that the Labu clan owns as compared to the other minor clans

I am lucky in that the clans, for the most part, each occupy spatially discrete segments of the village and that they have their own midden areas surrounding their household compounds. Because of this I was able to search the refuse areas and count the number of ceramics (these being broken plates, bowls, and small blue and white Chinese style whiskey cups) that I found, and to associate these shards with a specific family. I was not able to discover any discarded woks or pots. I found that there was a correlation between the number of ceramics that a clan throws away and the number that it owns, but the very large number of ceramics that the Latche clan owns was not strongly

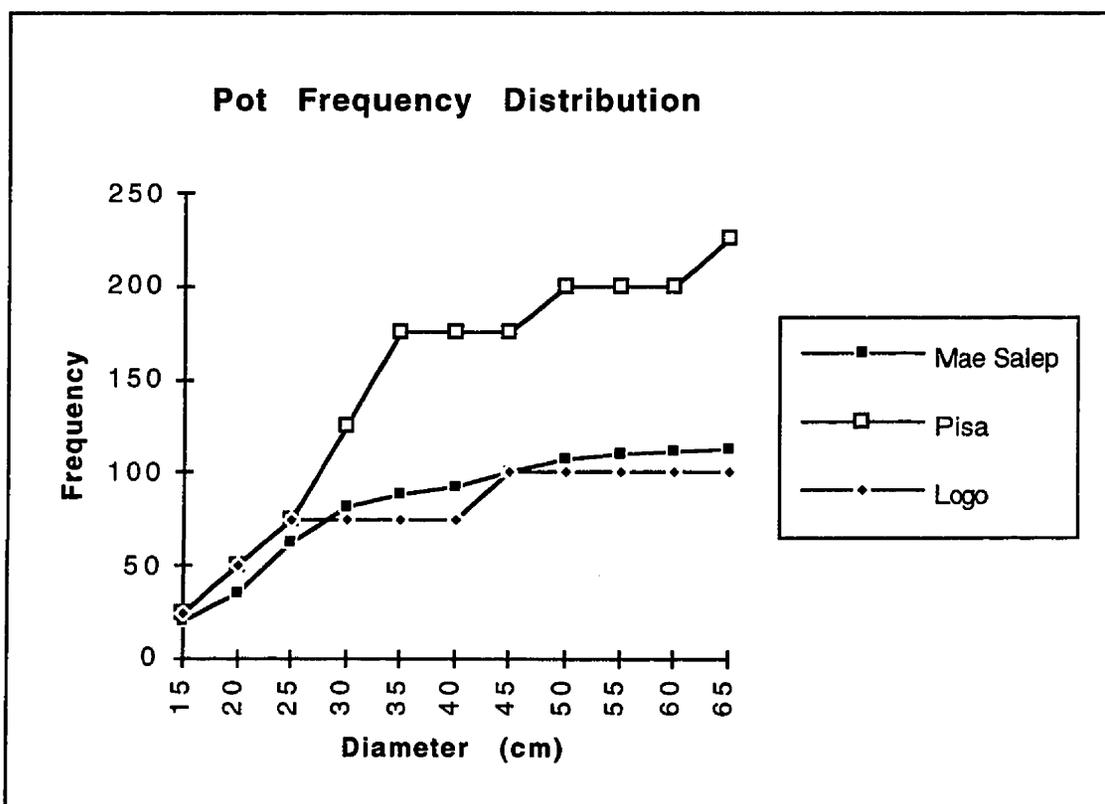


Fig. 7-18: Cumulative line graph illustrating the larger number of very large feasting related cooking pots that the rich man Aboe Pisa owns as compared to a 'middle-class' man like Logo or to the village average.

reflected in the correlation. This was in part due to the anomalous fact that the Reciter (a Labu) had very large amount of ceramics in his refuse, probably because of his ceremonial functions. Also, to use a slightly different perspective, there was a correspondence between the percentage of all the ceramics that a clan owned, compared to the village total, and the percentage of all ceramics in the refuse that a clan generated (see fig. 7-20 below).

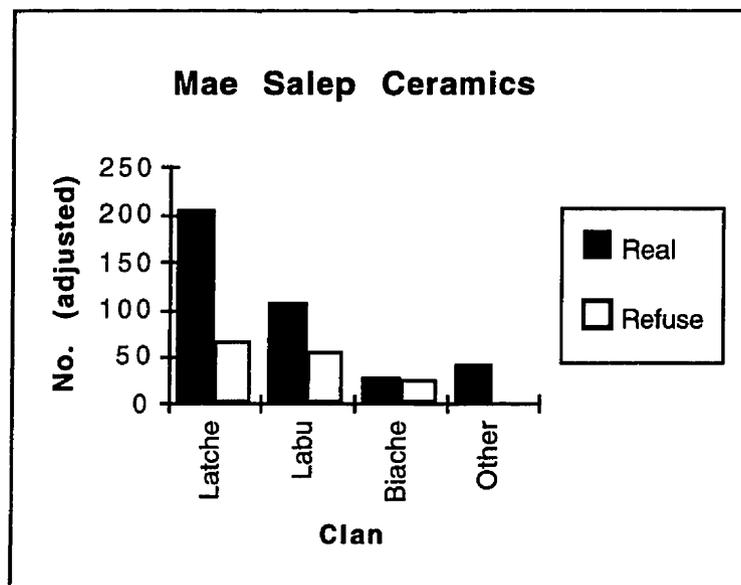


Fig. 7-19: Bar graph comparing the number of ceramic serving vessels that each clan owns and how many pieces were found in their refuse middens

This may all sound a bit like stating the obvious: i.e., people with more of something throw more of that thing away. However, what is at issue here is artifact preservation and archaeological representation. It can now be said that in Mae Salep the socioeconomic inequalities which are facilitated and mirrored by the feasting paraphernalia will be represented in the archaeological record. Certainly the degree of variation between households can be measured and must be meaningful in describing levels of inequality. Furthermore, as archaeologists, it may even be possible to evaluate the various *degrees* of socioeconomic inequity and support-networking going on by comparing feasting activity (represented by the amount of feasting utilitarian items) with the degree of extralocal

Note: Because the number of ceramics recovered was so small, I increased their number/magnitude (multiplied them by 25) in Fig. 7-19 so that the relative relationships could be observed. The figures for the 'Real', or in other words currently in use ceramics, are correct.

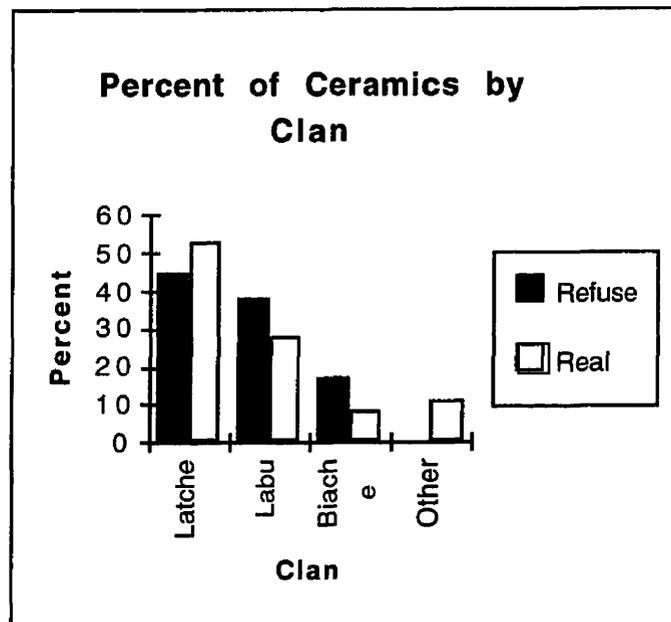


Fig. 7-20: Bar graph comparing the percentage of ceramic serving vessels in Mae Salep that each clan owned with the percentage of the discarded broken serving vessels in clan refuse in Mae Salep.

participation (represented by the amount of prestige feasting items).

Finally, I would like to address the issue of participation in various kinds of feasts that the Akha have. The following line graph represents the percentages of the households in each clan that engage in a certain type of feasting. The feast types are arranged in order based on some of the ideas that I presented in the previous theory section. The feasts have been arranged in order of increasing participation by larger and larger portions of a person's support network: from the nuclear family's ancestor offerings to the regional clan's funerals. It is important to note two things about my data arrangement: 1) the

village-wide feasts (New Year's, Gate Rebuilding, and Swinging) have been omitted; and 2) the first three feasts (Ancestor Offerings, Curings, and Butcher's) are feast types that the interviewees host themselves, while the last three (New Houses, Weddings, and Funerals) are feast types that the interviewees *attend in other villages*. The reason for these distinctions is that I was interested in the issues of commitment to, and emphasis on, the various forms of feasts in the Akha feasting complex. Given a certain amount of choice of action, what were people likely to do? Participation in the village-wide feasts was always 100%, probably because these required only as much commitment as a family was willing to make and because there was considerable social pressure to participate. It was also my experience that when it came to Wedding, New House, and Funeral feasts within one's home village (at least in Mae Salep and Sam Soong villages) practically everybody in the village participated. Participation in these feasts requires little effort or commitments and there are many "free" advantages that do not entail reciprocal obligations. Traveling a long and difficult distance to participate in the feasting at other villages, however, requires quite a bit of time, energy, resources, and motivation. The decision to make the effort to participate in these distant feasts, I believe, is made because individuals feel that they will benefit in some manner by their attendance.

What I discovered was the opposite of what I expected. I knew that the Latches were generally rich and socially dominant; that they often had feasts, inviting people from other villages; and that many of the rich Latches hosted traders and travelers (myself included) in their homes. I expected them to participate actively in the feasting of the

greater region. The minor clans, on the other hand, were socially/politically less secure within their own village, and I expected them to be actively engaging in intra-village feasting in order to improve their lot and ensure support within the immediate village network. What I discovered was totally opposite (see Fig. 7-21).

The Latches were not very active in extralocal feasting while the other clans put great emphasis on it. I can speculate that this is because the Latches are so overwhelmingly socially dominant that the other minor clans felt that they could not even hope to compete successfully, so instead they placed emphasis on maintaining a support network outside of the village, especially important if they had to move out of the village to another. It was already apparent that the Latches placed a lot of emphasis on intra-clan feasting, probably for reasons of group cohesion and power jockeying within the clan. The fact that they had very little interest in participating in feasts outside of the village may indicate that they felt very secure in their present situation, and that they were ready to place more emphasis on trying to get other people to come to their village instead.

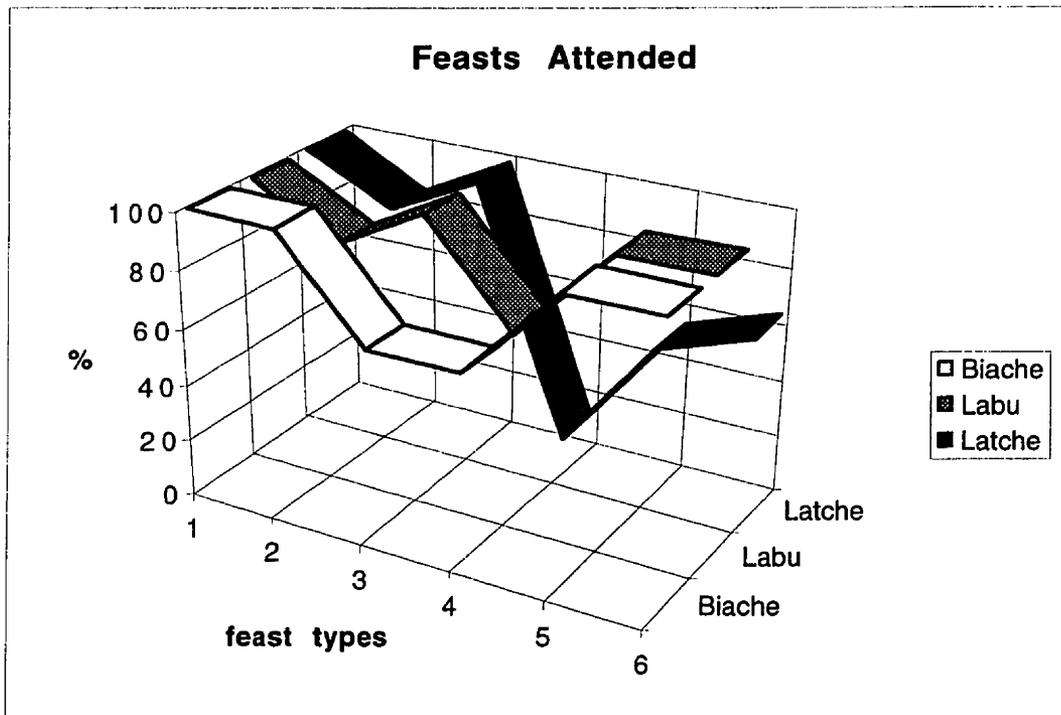


Fig. 7-21: Three dimensional line graph comparing the percentages of certain types of feasts that members of each major clan chose to hold (in the case of feast types one through three -- Ancestor worshipping, Curing, and Butcher's feasts) or feast types that they chose to attend in other villages (in the case of feast types four through six - New House, Wedding, and Funeral feasts).

First Row - Latche  
 Second Row - Labu  
 Third Row - Biache

<i>1-Ancestor</i>	<i>2-Curing</i>	<i>3-Butchers</i>	<i>4-New House</i>	<i>5-Wedding</i>	<i>6-Funeral</i>
100%	84.60%	100%	14.30%	55.60%	66.70%
100%	83.30%	100%	66.70%	100%	100%
100%	100%	66.70%	66.70%	100%	100%

### ***Chart Data Summary Tables***

Below is a summary in tabular form of most of the data which has previously been presented in graph form. The categories are for the most part self evident, however, I would like to explain that the symbol 'XXXX' in a column means that the figure for that category was so small that I grouped it in with 'Other'.

Table 7-2: Land and Animal Ownership.

<u>Clan</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Land Owned</u>	<u>Big Animals</u>
Latche	57%	71%	86%
Labu	18%	12%	10%
Biache	13%	7%	XXXX
Other	12%	10%	4%

Table 7-3: Feast Paraphernalia Ownership

<u>Clan</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Tables</u>	<u>Big Tables</u>	<u>Woks</u>
Latche	57%	56%	79%	60%
Labu	18%	23%	14%	20%
Biache	13%	8%	XXXX	11%
Other	12%	13%	7%	9%

Table 7-4: Average Number of Big Animals and Woks in Each Clan

<u>Clan</u>	<u>Big Animals</u>	<u># Woks</u>	<u>CWD</u>
Latche	9	2.1	62 cm
Labu	2	1.5	33 cm
Biache	2	1.7	43 cm
Other	2	1.7	51 cm

Note: 'Big animals' refers to buffaloes, cattle, and horses. CWD stands for 'cumulative wok diameter', this is the mean of the sum of all wok diameters in a household.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Case Study 2 - Sam Soong Village**

#### *Introduction*

My second study village was Sam Soong, located very near the Thai town of Mae Salong. It is in many ways more traditional than Mae Salep: it has no roads leading to it; no electricity; no Thai style housing; and no cash cropping. It is a small village, I spent just over two weeks there, and managed to do a 100% sampling of the households. Sam Soong's socioeconomic make-up is fairly distinct from that of Mae Salep, but I do find many similarities in the feasting complex.

#### *The Demography and Feasting Materials of Sam Soong*

Sam Soong is actually a small and recently constructed 'splinter' village approximately eleven years old. In the nearby parent village there was much contention between the Christians and the Traditionalists, but because of Thai administrative authority it was impossible for the Traditionalists to force the Christians to leave. So instead, the Traditionalists moved out and set up Sam Soong village. I suspect that a few other Traditionalist families from other regions may have emigrated to Sam Soong as well, and the overall effect is that there is a fairly weak sense of community cohesion and historic continuity (Maneeprasert, personal communication). This situation has also

resulted in there being an overly large number of clans represented in this small village: 9 different clans make up 24 households. I suspect that this lineage diversity may cause a certain amount of organizational difficulty. Traditionally Akha villages have three to five clans represented, even in fairly sizable communities (Kammerer 1986: 75). See the demographic graph below:

Table 8-1: The Demography of Sam Soong Village

<u>Clan</u>	<u># Households</u>	<u># Individuals</u>
Biache	6	23
Bionleh	5	50
Cheurmuer	2	11
Muernleh	3	13
Pyumyia	4	24
Other	4	23
<b>Totals</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>144</b>

Unlike the Latches of Mae Salep, there is no one clan that is essentially in control of the village, but there is one economically dominant clan, the Bionlehs. The Village Founder-Leader appears to hold very little real power: he is of a minor clan; has no sons (a great social misfortune, although he lives with an adopted nephew); and has two assistants who seem to hold varying degrees of influence depending upon whom one asks. Because no one in the village speaks fluent Thai there is no headman, and all outside administrative functions seem to be centered around the schoolhouse. The closest thing that the villagers have to a headman is the son of one of the rich Bionleh families. He was entrusted with the money from certain forestry fines, and he seemed to

be familiar with such issues as the requirements for having electricity supplied to the village and other such administrative matters.

Land seems to be in especially short supply around Sam Soong. Nobody grows any cash crops such as ginger or tea, instead they stick to the essentials: rice, corn, and peanuts. In the nearby town of Mae Salong there is a large ethnic Chinese community which owns much of the land around the general region and I am not sure how this affects the Akha land supply. I do know, however, that the Akha often go to work in the fields of the Chinese and that some families in Sam Soong tend Chinese cattle and buffalo for a share of animal sale profits. This can at times be a substantial amount of money.

Once again, as a measure of socioeconomic inequality, I shall contrast the percentage of the population that each clan represents with the percentage of land, animals, and other material items that it owns. Figure 8-1 shows that the largest clan, the Bionlehs, make up 34% of the population. However, the Bionlehs only own 23% of the animals in the village (see Figure 8-2).

The data presented in figure 8-2, however, are slightly misleading because the Bionlehs own a larger proportion of the big expensive animals (buffalo, cows, and horses) and a smaller proportion of lesser animals (pigs, chickens and dogs). The Bionleh clan owns 58% of the buffalo (see Fig. 8-3 below).

The Bionlehs also own 50% of the cows, not including cows owned by the local Chinese farmers which the Akha may take care of. The Pyumyia clan owns the other 50%. The Bionleh clan owns only 19% of the pigs (see Fig. 8-4), and 19% of the chickens (see Fig. 8-5).

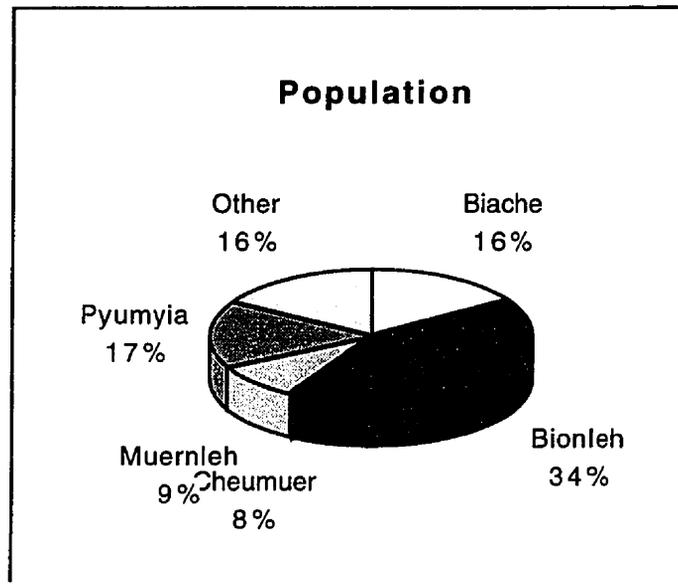


Fig. 8-1: Pie graph showing the percentage of the population that each clan in Sam Soong village comprises.

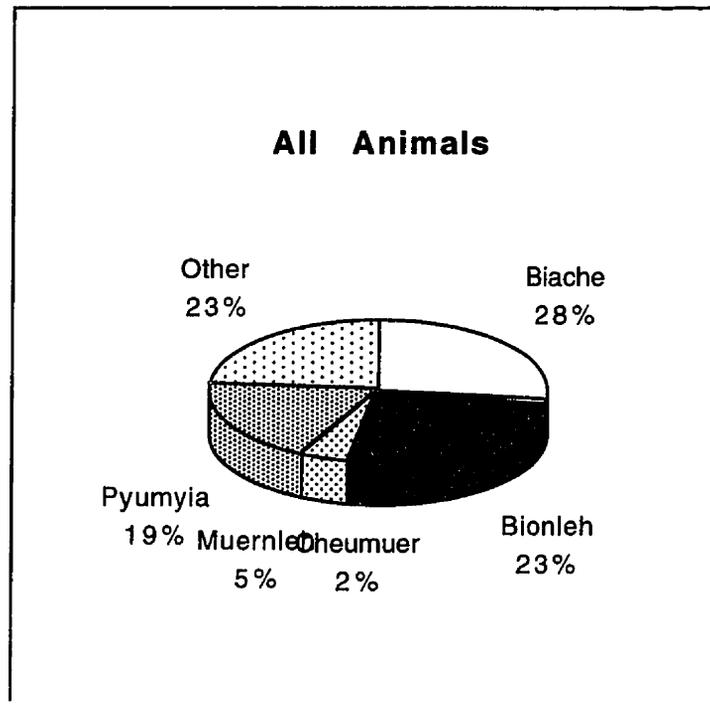


Fig. 8-2: Pie graph showing the percentage of the total animal population in Sam Soong village that each clan owns.

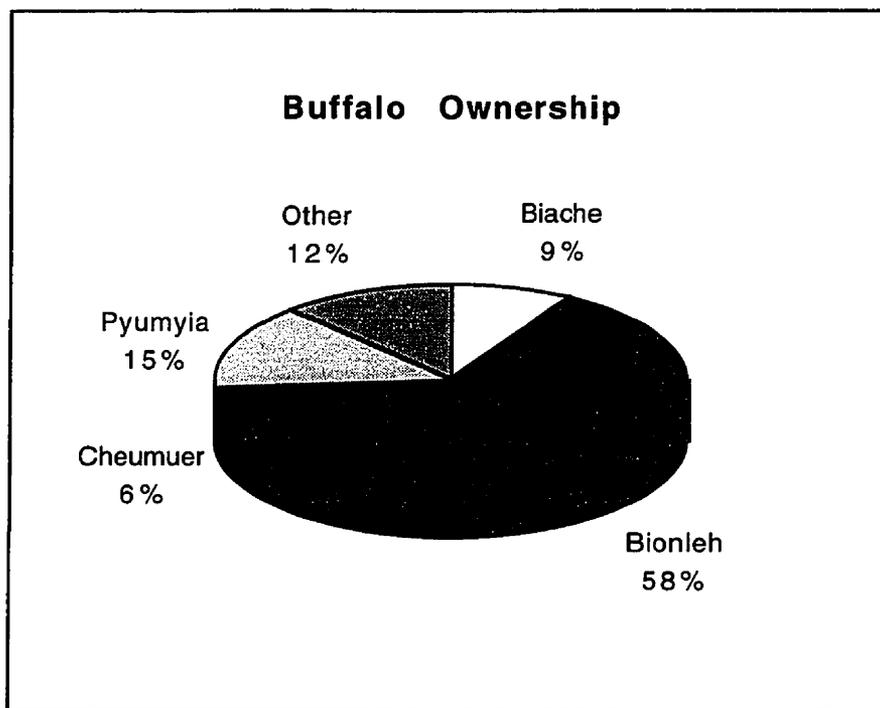


Fig. 8-3: Pie graph showing the percentage of the total buffalo population of Sam Soong village that each clan owns.

Once again, these figures are slightly misleading. The Bionlehs do own an undersized proportion of the pig population, but that is because in the past year there was a pig epidemic and the Bionlehs lost many more pigs than the other clans. This is illustrated in the cumulative graph below (see Fig. 8-6). The higher degree of loss by the Bionlehs was probably due to the fact that their pigs were densely populated. This epidemic is a graphic example of the precariousness of the Akha food supply.

It is a very important thing to own many pigs and chickens. Although these animals comprise most of the household meat supply, along with some wild game, meat is not a major part of the daily diet. Rather, owning many pigs and chickens is essential for participating in

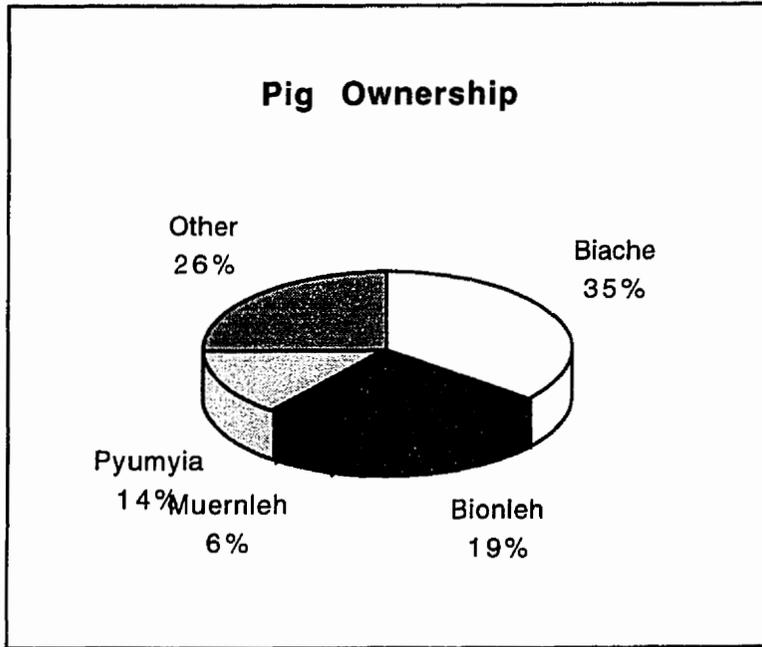


Fig. 8-4: Pie graph showing the percentage of the total pig population of Sam Soong village that each clan owns.

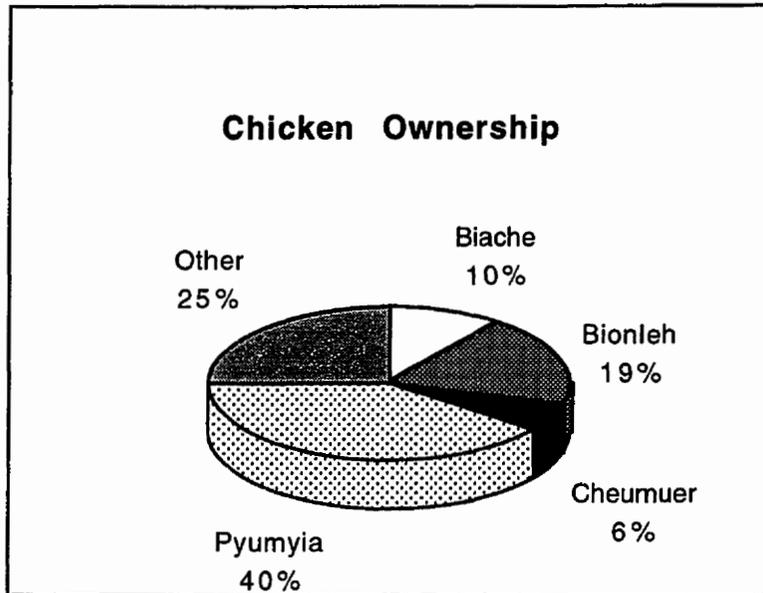


Fig. 8-5: Pie graph showing the percentage of the total chicken population of Sam Soong village that each clan owns.

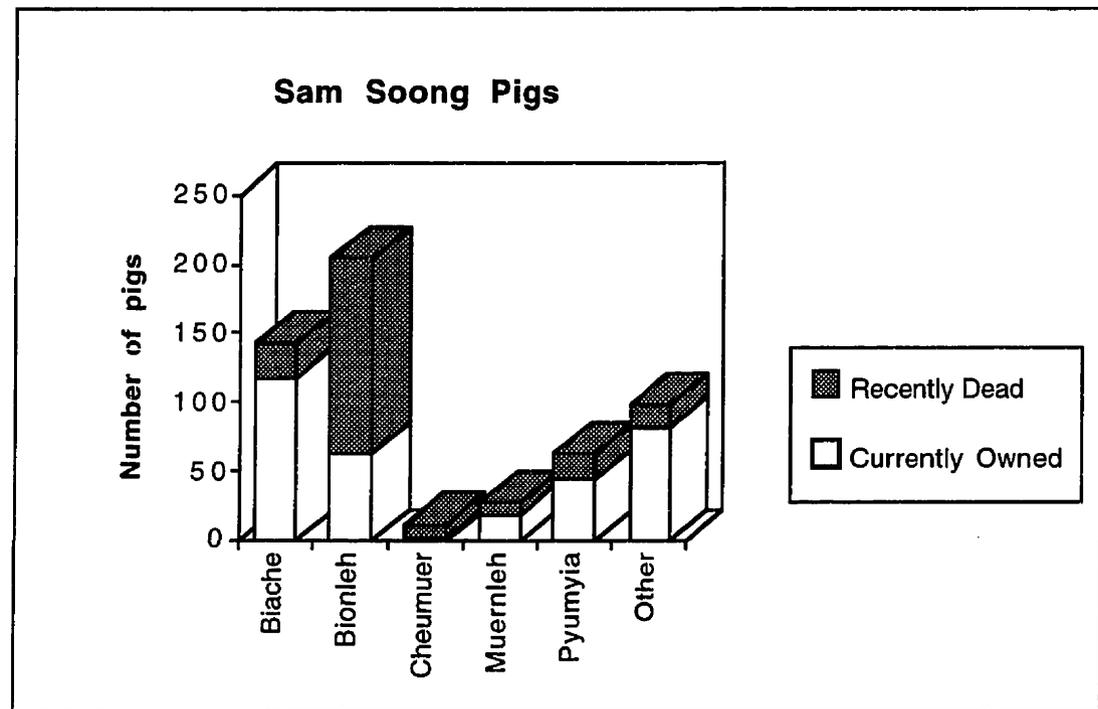


Fig. 8-6: Compound bar graph illustrating the number of pigs that each clan in Sam Soong village owns, and how many of those pigs have recently died of disease.

the traditional feasting complex. Feasts are very numerous and are given high social import. Pigs are also a source of wealth because of their retail value, but not nearly as important in this way as are buffalo and cows. Although these large bovines do play a role in the feasting complex, primarily at funerals and village-wide feasts, I would argue that their main social/economic value lies in their ability to be used to store surplus wealth. Falvey (1977) and Hayden (1998) also share this opinion. Once one has enough chickens and pigs to meet consumption requirements, it is economically wiser to invest time and labour into raising the larger animals because these animals have a higher profit margin and can be used for social and political brokering on a much larger scale. The following graph illustrates quite clearly how much

more money the Bionleh clan has made compared to the others in the past two years (see Fig. 8-7 below).

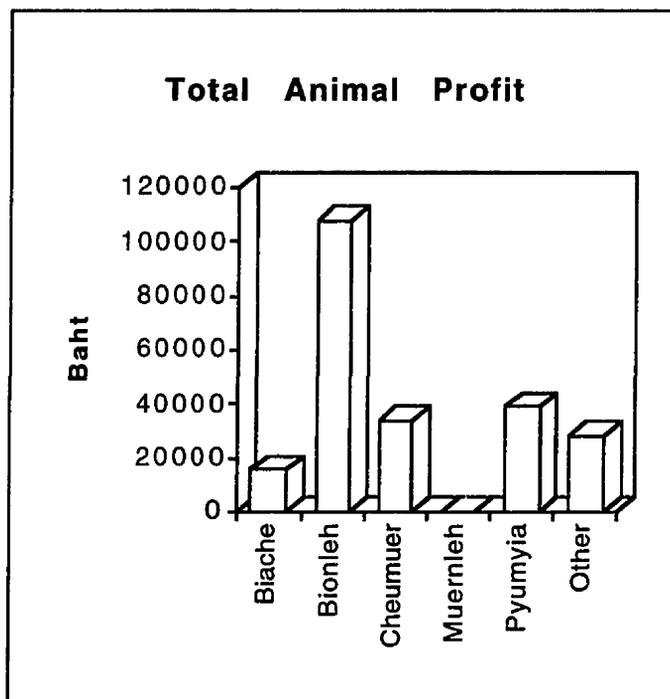


Fig. 8-7: Bar graph showing the amount of profit that each clan has earned through animal sales in the past two years (note, 25 Thai Baht was equal to US\$1.00)

Furthermore, although the Bionlehs own fewer pigs per capita than the other clans, they are making more money with their pig sales (see Fig 8-8). This is probably because they are growing larger pigs possibly for the sole purpose of selling them.

The wealth of the Bionleh clan, and the generally large size of their family groups, is reflected in the large size of their homes (see Fig. 8-9).

The figures concerning the ownership of land are not quite as accurate as they could be (see Figs. 8-10 and 8-11). The following graph will show that the Bionlehs own less land than would be expected

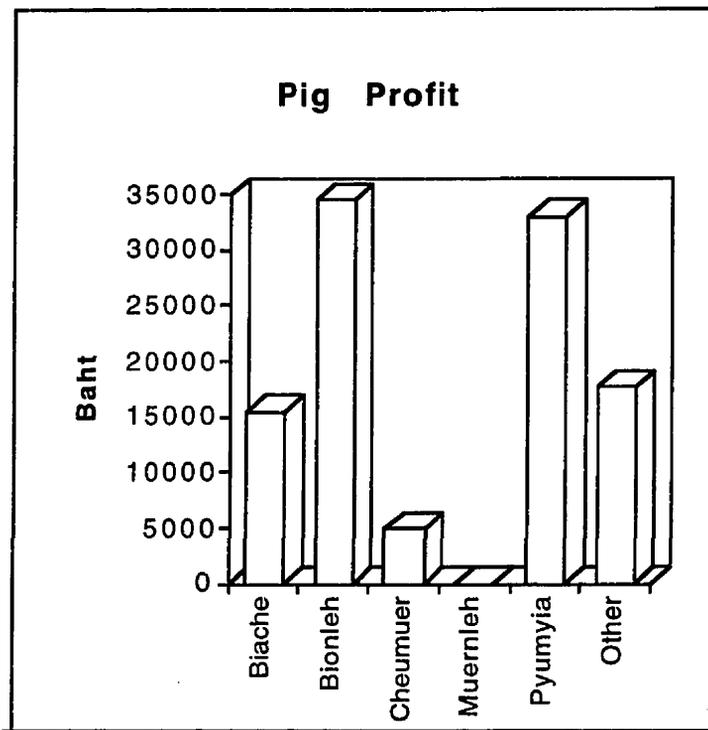


Fig. 8-8: Bar graph showing the amount of profit in pig sales in the past two years (25 Thai Baht was equal to U\$1.00)

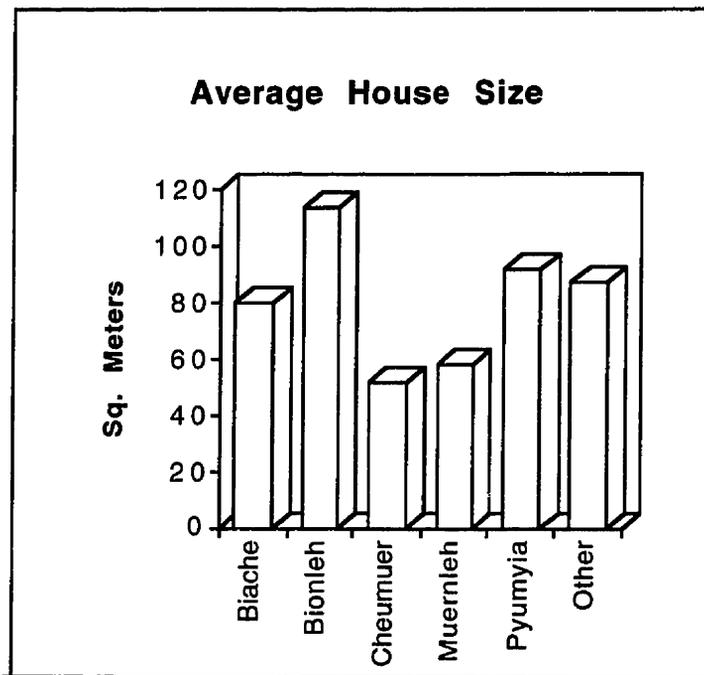


Fig. 8-9: Bar graph showing the average house size of each clan in Sam Soong village.

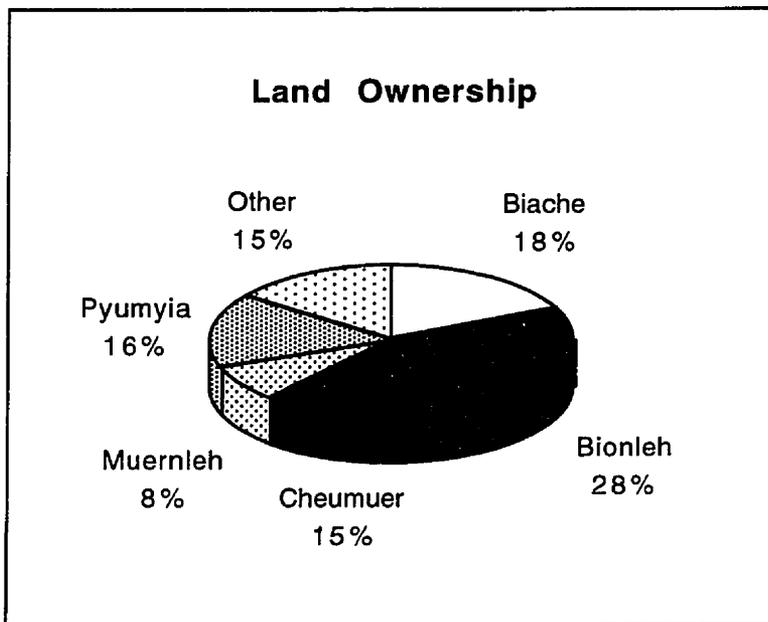


Fig. 8-10: Pie graph showing the percentage of the total owned farmland that belongs to each clan in Sam Soong village.

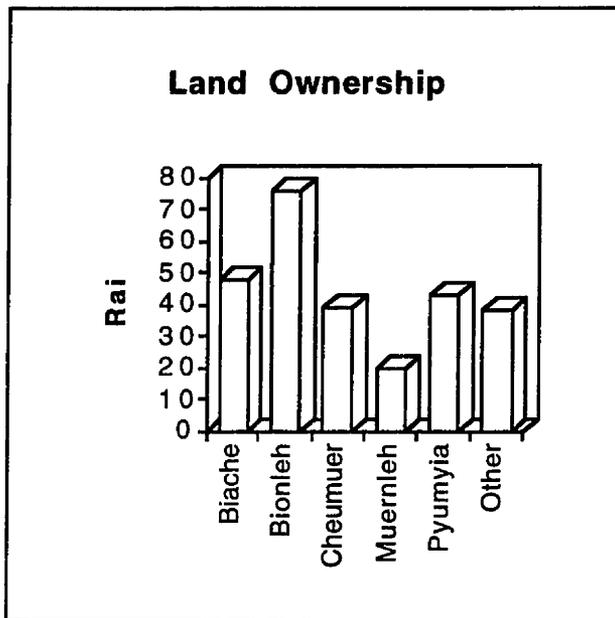


Fig. 8-11: Bar graph showing the amount of land owned by each clan in Sam Soong village (note, one Rai equals 1600m<sup>2</sup>).

(given their percentage of the population), however, I am missing information for one of the richest men in the village who is a Bionleh. Even a modest estimate of his land holdings would put the Bionleh clan in a position of greater proportionate land ownership.

A slightly different perspective on land ownership is provided by the issue of 'land productivity.' The following three charts (Figs. 8-12 to 8-14) are illustrations of the 'mean fertility ratio' of the land belonging to each clan. Put simply, the fertility ratio is how many units are harvested (be they grains, bags, or sacks) for every unit that is planted. For example, the mean fertility ratio for the Biache's corn fields is 70, while for the Muernleh's it is 35. This means that, on average, for every kernel of corn that a Biache plants he can expect to harvest 70, while for every kernel that a Muernleh plants he can expect to harvest only 35.

This ratio is really a measurement of two distinct factors: the actual fertility of the land, and the amount and quality of labour put into farming. Notice that in all cases the Bionlehs are in the top two of the fertility rankings, and I suspect that the reason that the Pyumyias are so far ahead in the Rice category is because the Village Founder-Leader is a Pyumyia. It is culturally important that the Village Founder-Leader have a bountiful rice harvest, and it could be that he gets some extra help from the villagers (although this was not the case in Mae Salep). In fact the Village Founder-Leader was the only person to have a rice surplus and he was the person whom I bought my rice from while living in the village.

The data presented in figures 8-12 to 8-14 are based on the harvest from the past two planting seasons. Land fertility does vary

greatly over time, and there may be other factors effecting the crop fertility of the various clans in Sam Soong village, however, the current, short term, productivity of each clan's land is nonetheless a meaningful and important factor in evaluating the differences between the various clans.

Now that I have examined the socioeconomic make-up of Sam Soong village, I would like to turn to how these conditions are reflected in the material culture and the feasting complex. Once again, as was the

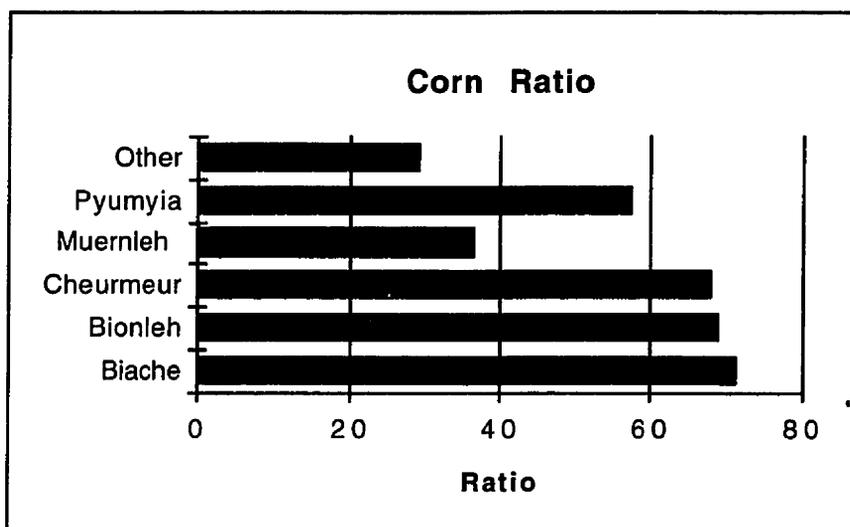


Fig. 8-12: Bar graph illustrating the relative fertility of land owned by each clan by showing the ratio of corn planted to corn harvested.

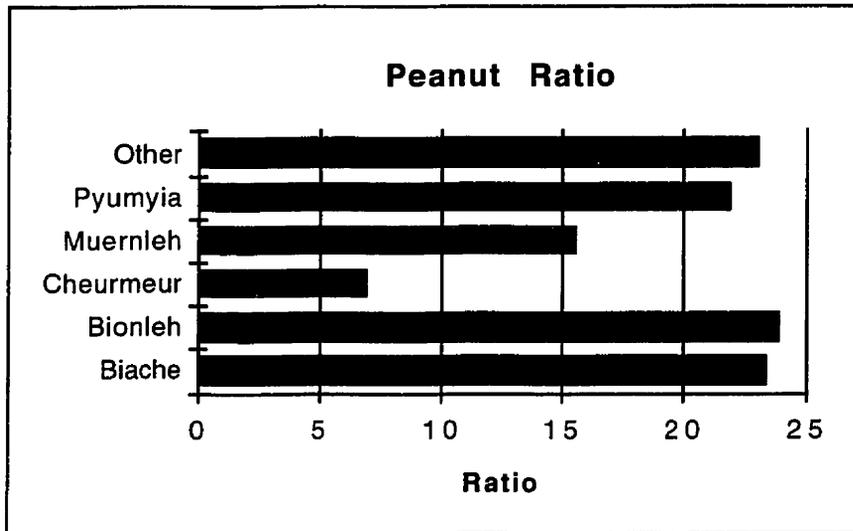


Fig. 8-13: Bar graph illustrating the relative fertility of land owned by each clan by showing the ratio of peanuts planted to peanuts harvested.

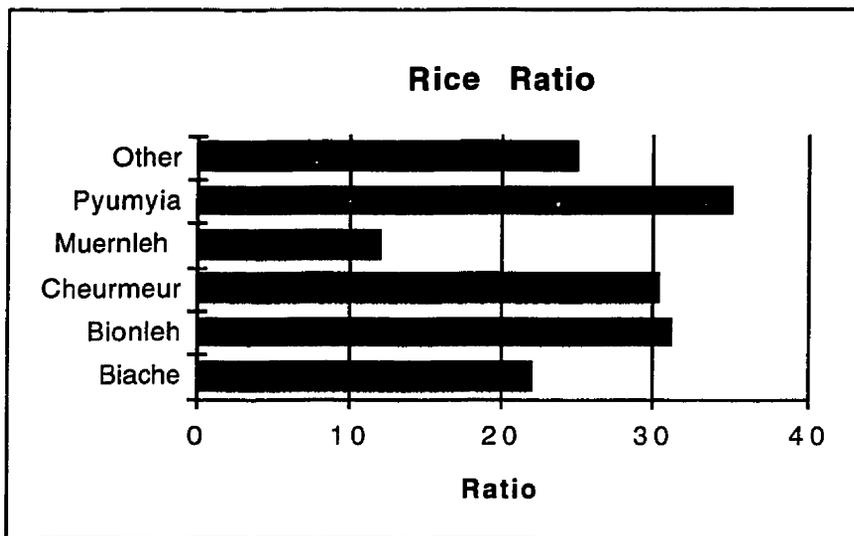


Fig. 8-14: Bar graph illustrating the relative fertility of land owned by each clan by showing the ratio of rice planted to rice harvested.

case for the Latches of Mae Salep, the reader can see that the Bionlehs have a proportionate, or slightly less than proportionate, percentage of 'everyday' food consumption items relative to their population: for example, medium sized tables and kettles (see Figs 8-15 and 8-16 below). Yet the Bionlehs have a much higher proportion of feasting related objects such as large oversized dinning tables and tea trays (see Figs. 8-17 and 8-18 below).

It was initially conjectured that the small blue ceramic 'whiskey' cup which one quite often sees at Akha feasts would be an excellent measure of feasting activity. However, my data shows that this hypothesis is a little misdirected. These little blue cups are not very common items, maybe because they are expensive, but I did not find that they were associated with rich people or their feasts. Rather,

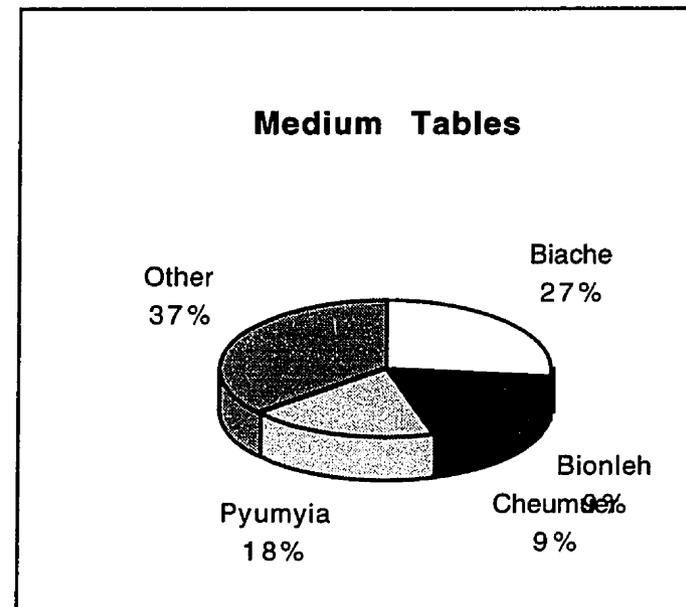


Fig. 8-15: Pie Chart showing the percentage of medium sized tables that each clan owns in Sam Soong village.

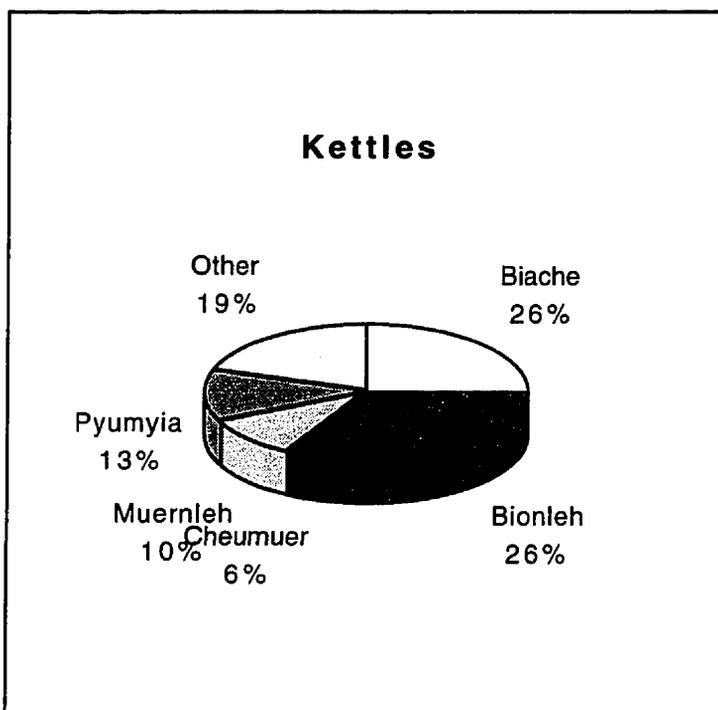


Fig. 8-16: Pie Chart showing the percentage of kettles that each clan owns in Sam Soong village.

it seems more appropriate to classify these cups as ceremonial paraphernalia (although they may have an everyday usage). Hence, it is more likely, because of their ceremonial duties, that a Reciter (as in Mae Salep) or a Village Founder-Leader (as in Sam Soong) would possess many of these cups. Since Akha ceremonial drinking is almost inevitably associated with feasting, then so too are these cups (see Fig. 8-19).

Other archaeologically significant feasting indicators are trophy bones and horns. These are bones or horns from feasting animals which are kept and put on display somewhere in the home. The people themselves sometimes have a hard time articulating the rationale

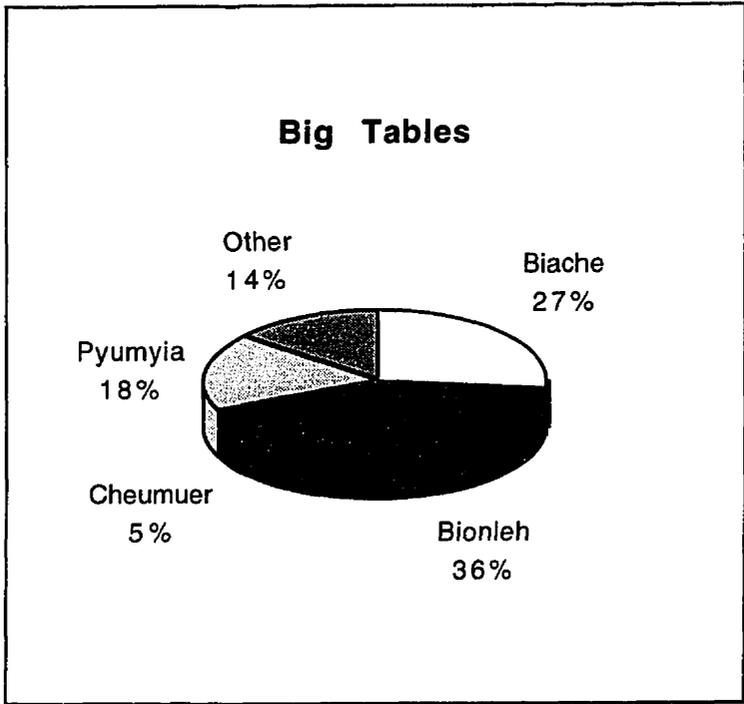


Fig. 8-17: Pie Chart showing the percentage of large sized tables that each clan owns in Sam Soong village.

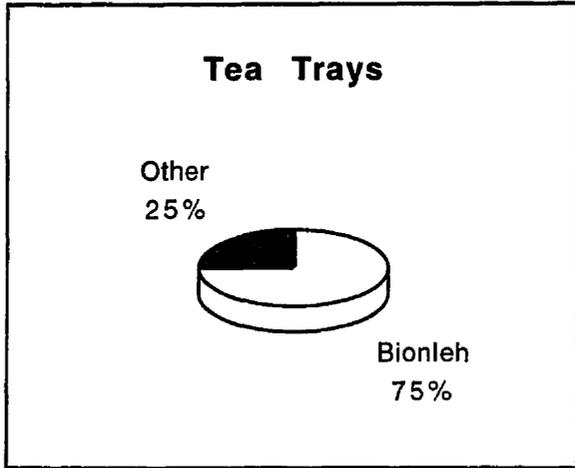


Fig. 8-18: Pie Chart showing the percentage of tea trays that each clan owns in Sam Soong village.

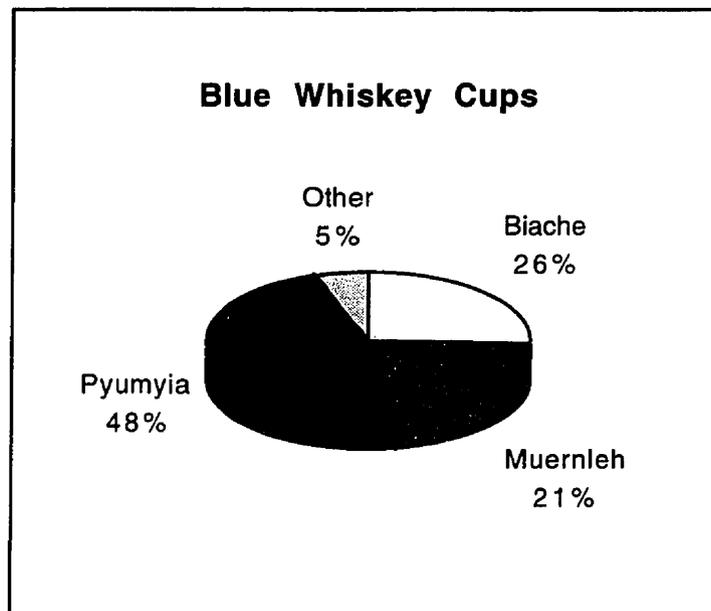


Fig. 8-19: Pie Chart showing the percentage of blue whiskey cups that each clan owns in Sam Soong village.

behind this practice but it seems to be both a prideful display of success and also a reminder of past bounty and favour of the ancestor spirits. This is a fairly common practice but it is not always associated with wealth, as one might suspect. In fact it is probably more common to see bones on display in a 'middle-class' home rather than a rich man's home. One exception to this is the cases of the Village Founder-Leader. He is expected by custom to display these objects. For instance, the Village Founder-Leader of Mae Salep had a rack of 22 wild pig scapulae which he had to display because they were given to him as 'foreleg tribute', and the Village Founder-Leader of Sam Soong displayed six sets of water buffalo horns from previous village-wide ceremonies. As is illustrated in the graph below (Fig. 8-20), the practice of displaying feasting trophies varies from clan to clan so much that in some clans everyone does it while in others no one does. However, from a village-

wide perspective, in terms of overall archaeological significance, the important thing is that at some level people are using these displays to communicate economic success.

Now I shall proceed to examine the cooking vessel assemblage. One interesting fact concerning the cooking vessels in Sam Soong was that there was a dearth of woks. Most families cooked with pots. There were, of course, some woks, but the only family to own one of the big 60 cm+ woks was the richest Bionleh family (my host). Because of the small numbers involved an ogive graph of the wok distribution is not meaningful. I could, however, do a pot distribution and what I found was that the three richest clans in the village (the Bionlehs, Biaches, and Pyumyias) all have characteristically steep curves, while the three

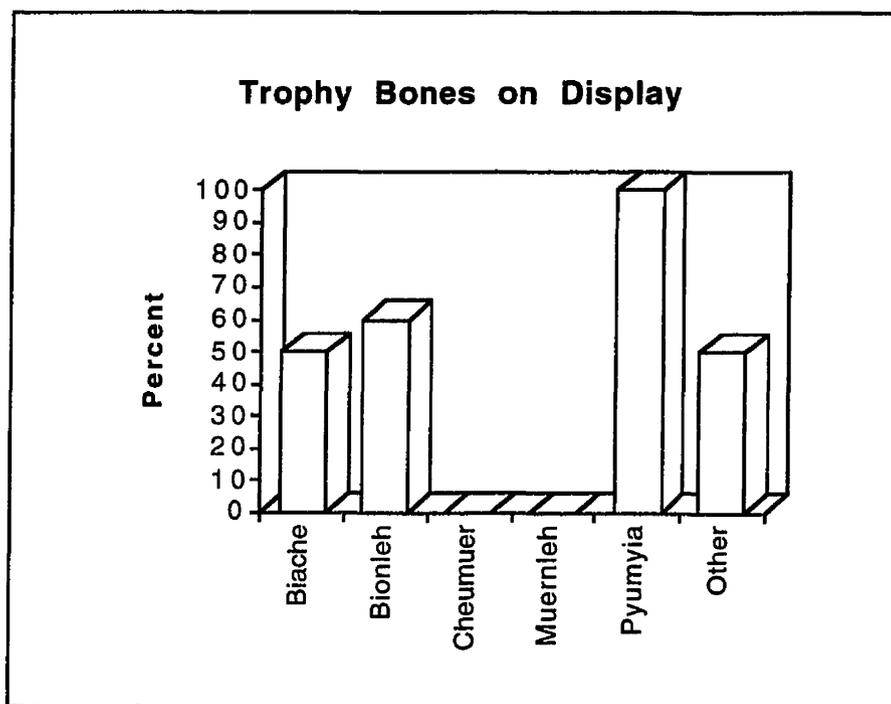


Fig. 8-20: Bar graph showing the percentage of the members of each clan in Sam Soong village which has trophy bones or horns on display in their homes.

remaining poorer clans have a flat curve. Put simply, what this means is that the richer clans have more pots of a smaller size than the poorer clans do, and that the rich clans have a few very large pots which the poorer clans lack altogether (see Fig. 8-21).

Perhaps a more archaeological relevant cooking vessel category is that of the 'largest vessel present'. Not only is it easier to isolate and contextualize the largest vessels present on a site, but the larger vessels are also more indicative of feasting activity simply because of their sheer size. What the following graphs of the cooking vessel assemblage

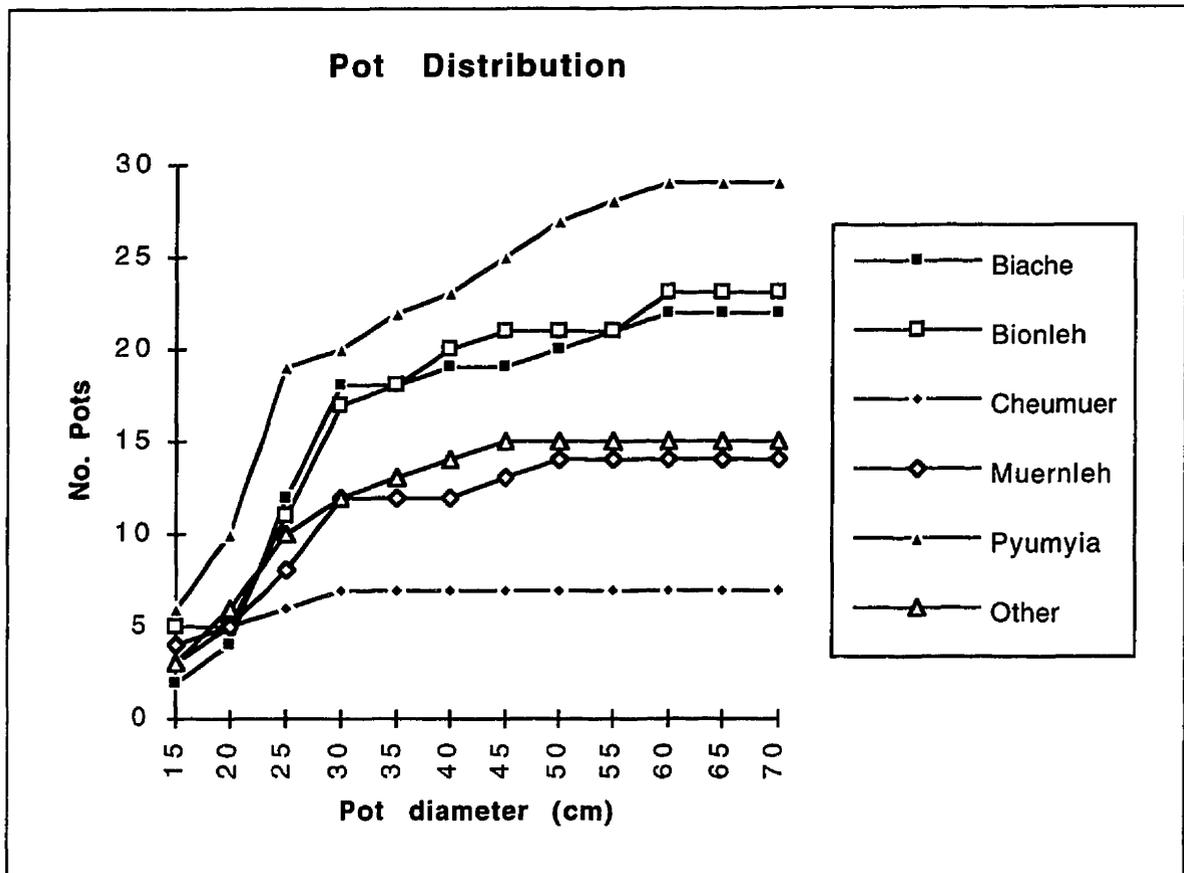


Fig. 8-21: Line graph illustrating the shape of the cooking pot diameter-class distribution for Sam Soong village.

from Sam Soong illustrate is that the richer and more powerful clans do have the largest vessels. In terms of pots, the three most powerful clans, the Bionlehs, Biaches, and Pyumyias, all tend to hover around the top end (see Figs. 8-22 and 8-23). For large wok ownership, those exclusively associated with feasting, the reader can see that the dominant Bionleh clan far out-strips the other clans (see Figs. 8-24 and 8-25):

The refuse deposits at Sam Soong were considerably smaller than those at Mae Salep. The two main reasons for this are: 1) that there is far more wealth, and hence disposable items, in Mae Salep; and 2) there is a road into Mae Salep which enables goods to be brought in by truck. Regardless of the small amount of refuse in the village I was still able to undertake a refuse/ceramic study. The association between the amount of ceramics owned and the amount of ceramics discarded

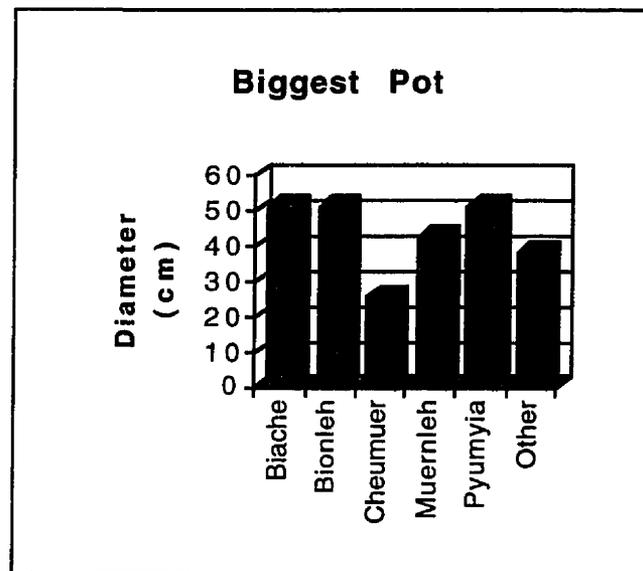


Fig. 8-22: Bar graph showing the size of the biggest pot owned by any member of each clan in Sam Soong village.

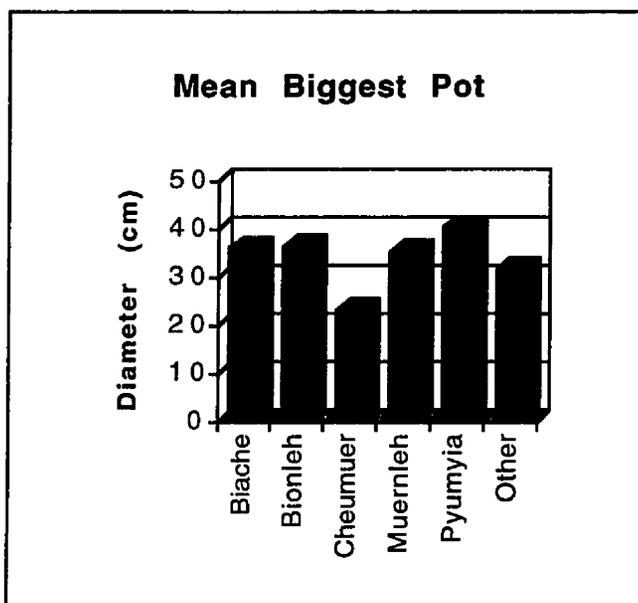


Fig. 8-23: Bar graph showing the mean of all the largest pots owned by each family in a given clan in Sam Soong village.

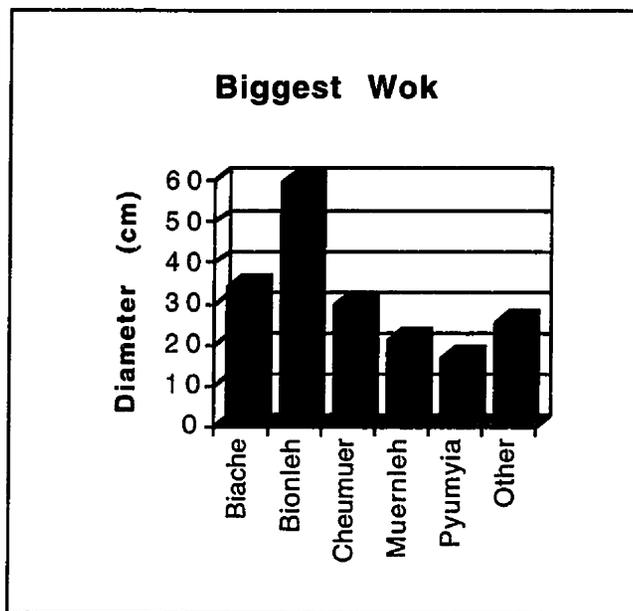


Fig. 8-24: Bar graph showing the biggest wok owned within each of the clans in Sam Soong village.

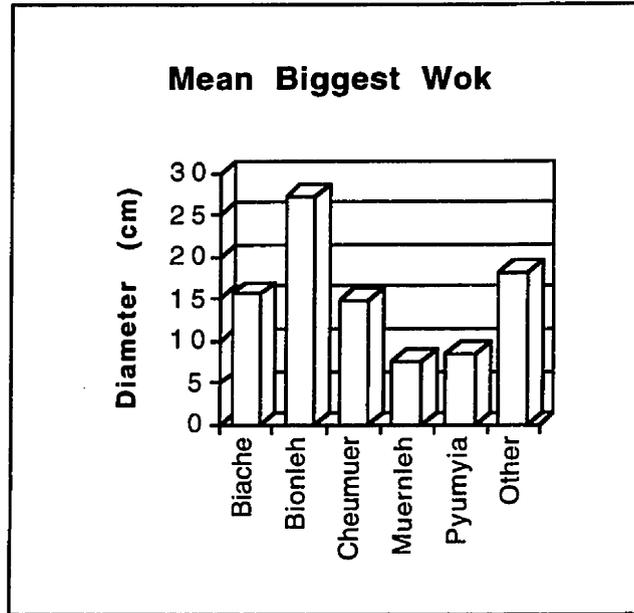


Fig. 8-25: Bar graph showing the mean of the biggest woks owned by each household within each of the clans in Sam Soong village.

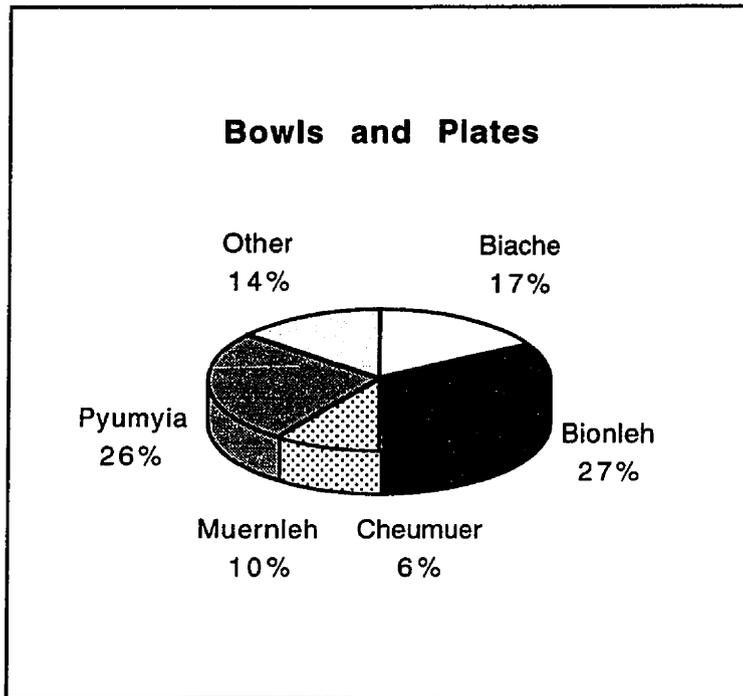


Fig. 8-26: Pie graph showing the percentage of the bowls and plates in Sam Soong village that each clan owns.

was not as strong as was the case in Mae Salep. The basic trend, however, is still evident. The richest clan (the Bionlehs) *owns* a large proportion of the village's serving vessels and consequently they also *dispose* of a large proportion of those vessels (see Figs. 8-26 and 8-27).

Lastly, I will look at the kinds of feasts that each clan tends to engage in. The graph below is structured in the same way as its counterpart is in the previous section on Mae Salep village (see Fig. 8-28). The feast types, numbering from one to six, are ordered consecutively by increasing levels of inclusivity. Numbers one to three (Ancestor Worshipping, Curing, and Butchering feasts) are feasts that

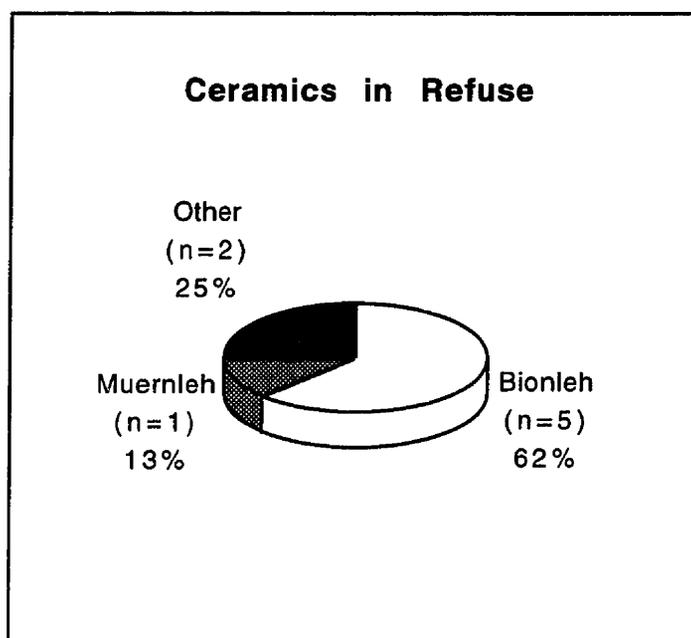


Fig. 8-27: Pie graph showing the percentage of ceramics found in the refuse middens of Sam Soong village that each clan owned.

the villagers host themselves, while numbers four to six (New House, Wedding, and Funeral Feasts) are feasts which they attend at other villages.

The attendance patterns for the Bionlehs, as the dominant clan in Sam Soong, is exactly the opposite as it was for the Latches in Mae Salep. The Latches neglected feasting outside of their home village and

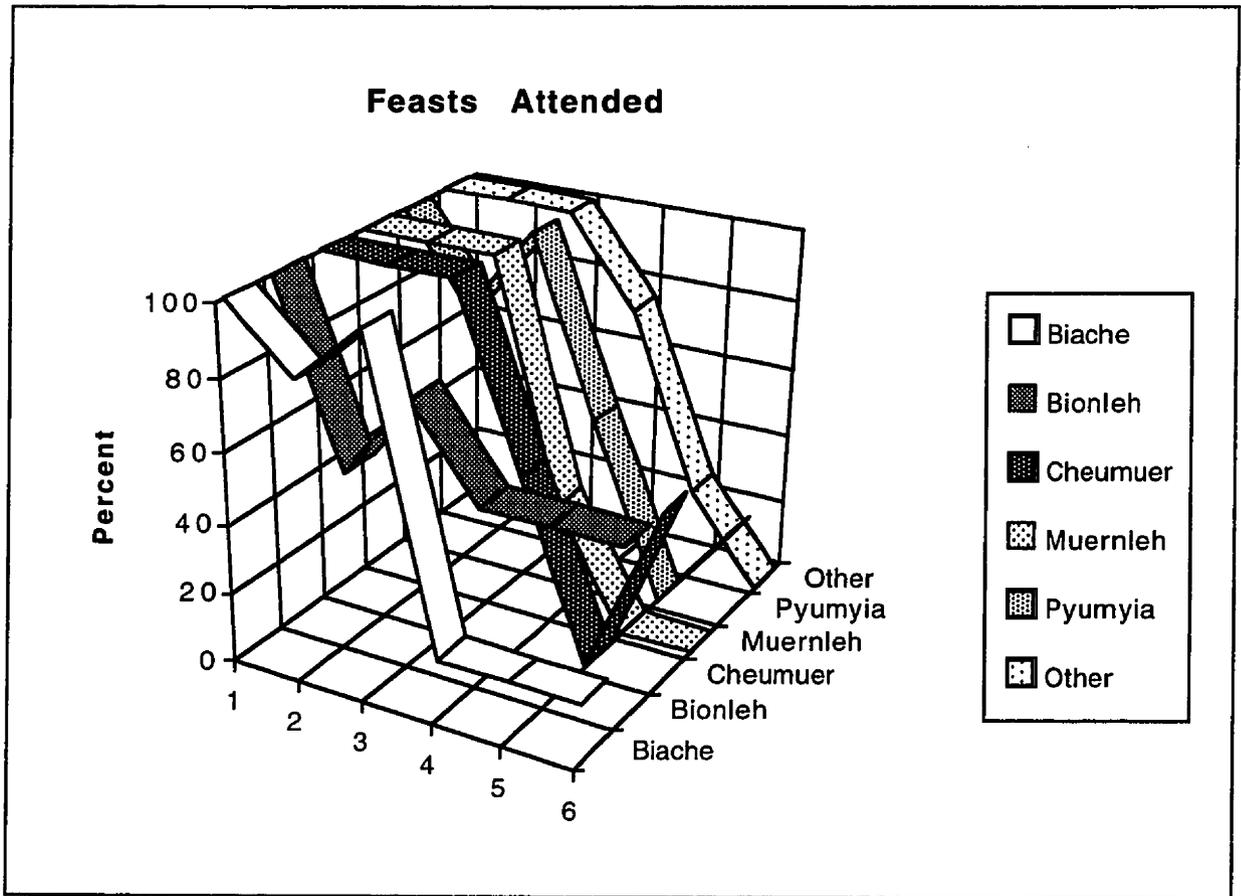


Fig. 8-27: Three dimensional line graph comparing the percentages of certain types of feasts that members of each clan choose to hold (in the case of feast types one through three -- Ancestor worshipping, Curing, and Butcher's feasts) or feast types that they choose to attend in other villages (in the case of feast types four through six -- New House, Wedding, and Funeral feasts)

instead tended to focus on interclan feasting back at home, while the other minor Mae Salep clans put great importance on participating in extralocal feasting. The Bionlehs of Sam Soong, on the other hand, participate less in intravillage feasts and more in extralocal feasts as compared to the other clans. I can only speculate that this may be because the clan diversity within the village makes it difficult to centralize social control by using the feasting complex. Hence, it is much more pragmatic for the Bionlehs to use their wealth to gain recognition in the greater region. For example, the fact that they are a rich, comfortable, and well known family was the determining factor resulting in my staying with them, which in turn earned them a fair amount of money.

### *Table Summary of Chart Data*

Below, the data from this chapter is compiled in tabular form. The meaning of the symbol 'XXXX' is the same as previously explained in Chapter 7.

Table 8-2: Population and animal ownership.

<u>Clan</u>	<u>Vil. Pop.</u>	<u>All Animals</u>	<u>Buffalo</u>	<u>Cattle</u>	<u>Pigs</u>	<u>Chicken</u>
Bionleh	34%	23%	58%	50%	19%	19%
Pyumyia	17%	19%	15%	50%	14%	40%
Biache	16%	28%	9%	0	35%	10%

Muernleh	16%	5%	XXXX	0	6%	XXXX
Chumuer	8%	2%	6%	0	XXXX	6%
Other	16%	23%	12%	0	26%	25%

Table 8-3: Feast Paraphernalia Ownership

<u>Clan</u>	<u>Med. Tables</u>	<u>Big Tables</u>	<u>Kettles</u>	<u>Tea Trays</u>	<u>Whiskey Cups</u>
Bionleh	9%	36%	26%	75%	26%
Pyumyia	18%	18%	13%	XXXX	48%
Biache	27%	27%	20%	XXXX	26%
Muernleh	XXXX	XXXX	10%	XXXX	XXXX
Chumuer	9%	5%	6%	XXXX	XXXX
Other	37%	14%	19%	25%	5%

Table 8-4: Pot and Wok Data

<u>Clan</u>	<u>Biggest Pot</u>	<u>Mean Biggest Pot</u>	<u>Biggest Wok</u>	<u>Mean Biggest Wok</u>
Bionleh	50 cm	36 cm	60 cm	29 cm
Pyumyia	50 cm	40 cm	17 cm	8 cm
Biache	50 cm	36 cm	34 cm	16 cm
Muernleh	43 cm	35 cm	21 cm	7 cm
Chumuer	25 cm	24 cm	30 cm	15 cm
Other	38 cm	32 cm	25 cm	16 cm

Note: 'Biggest pot' refers to the single biggest pot owned by any household within the clan. 'Mean biggest pot' refers to the mean of all of the biggest pots owned by each family.

Table 8-5: Animal Sale Data

<u>Clan</u>	<u>Village Population.</u>	<u>Total Animal Sale Profit</u>	<u>Pig Sale Profit</u>	<u>Percentage of Pigs Owned</u>
Bionleh	34%	Bht 107, 000	Bht 34, 000	19%
Pyumyia	17%	Bht 40, 000	Bht 33, 000	14%
Biache	16%	Bht 12, 000	Bht 16, 000	35%
Muernleh	16%	0	0	6%
Chumuer	8%	Bht 32, 000	Bht 5,000	XXXX
Other	16%	Bht 25, 000	Bht 17,000	26%

## Chapter 9

### Archaeological Indicators of Feasting Activity

I have alluded to many archaeological correlates to feasting activity in the preceding discussions, but I would now like to present them in a more direct and concise form. Although the following observations were made in a culturally specific context, and no ethnoarchaeological generalization can ever be considered a cross-cultural archaeological truism, these observations have been formulated in a manner which, for the most part, is based on the practical prerequisites for feeding large groups of people all at one time. They are not intended to be a 'checklist' of evidence that archaeologists may consult when they find matching data at their sites, but rather, it is hoped that they will provide insights that will help archaeologists explain hitherto unexplained phenomenon, as well as being complementary to other data that are used in a archaeological analysis of feasting. Some of the following ideas are based on trends in the statistical analysis, but many are also based on personal impressions and experience as an excavator.

#### Cooking Vessels

The size and number of cooking vessels can be used as a measure of feasting activity. Vessels greater a certain size are really only practical to use when one is cooking for very large numbers of people and large volumes of food must be produced. Furthermore, daily meals

generally consist of a maximum of two to three dishes (excluding rice) while it is not uncommon for feasts to contain five to ten different dishes. In order to be able to prepare such a wide variety of dishes all at once, several cooking vessels are necessary for each one. The average Akha household consists of approximately ten people, and a family will usually provide for its daily cooking needs with one or two woks of around 30 cm in diameter, three or four pots ranging from 15 cm to 30 cm in diameter, and one large pot around 50 cm in diameter to cook food for the pigs in. In all cases, any household that exceeded this average norm in the cooking vessel assemblage did so because they owned, or borrowed, vessels for feasting purposes. In some instances this deviation from the norm was extremely evident, as in the case of Aboe Pisa Latche (previously presented in Chapter 7), whose large number of sizable woks had a cumulative diameter of 187 cm as compared to village average of 50 cm, or his clan's average of 61 cm (see Fig. 9-1 below)

It may be argued that not all large cooking vessels are necessarily used to prepare food. This is true: For example, I have seen Akha villages which are major tea producers, and they used large woks to dry the tea. Also, many societies use large vessels in order to prepare various alcoholic beverages. However, this still does not negate the fact that large and copious cooking vessels are a requisite of feasting activity. Furthermore, many other large scale production efforts, such as producing alcohol, in societies with low levels of trade are undertaken with the end goal of feasting in mind. Lastly, in regards to transegalitarian societies, the differences between the cooking vessel assemblages among households is indicative of the magnitude of

difference in wealth, whether they are using those pots to host feasts or not.

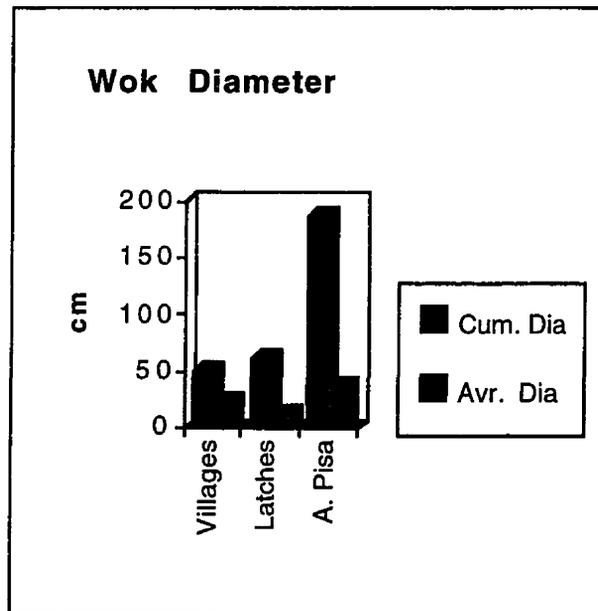


Fig. 9-1: Bar graph comparing the average wok diameters and the average cumulative wok diameters of Mae Salep village, the Latche' clan, and the wealthiest man in the Latche clan, Aboe Pisa Latche

Note: A. Pisa's Cumulative wok measurement in figure 9-1 is an actual figure not an average.

### Serving Vessels

The relative amount of serving vessels per household (or other corporate group) may be indicative of feasting. It would seem obvious that everyone would have a functional minimum of these items, but families with excessive amounts must use them for some purpose. In some societies, special elaborate serving vessels have a specific feasting function, however, this was not the case for the Akha. The only factor which is indicative of feasting for the Akha case, in terms of serving vessels, is their number.

An average Akha family may own ten to fifteen serving bowls and plates, one to ten drinking glasses, and four or six rice baskets. For some of the larger feasts hundreds of these vessels are required. Not only are more vessels required because of the greater attendance, but also because of the larger variety of food and drink available. As previously mentioned, the Akha do not have individual serving plates. Consequently, each kind of dish requires its own bowl, and because the tables are generally larger at feasts, sometimes several bowls of the same dish are placed on the table in order to make access to them easier for everyone.

No one ever owns the hundreds of vessels needed for the very large feasts, instead they borrow what they needed from their relatives. However, those households which engage in regular small scale feasting always own an adequate number of serving vessels for these events, and this is always in excess of the village average.

As previously demonstrated in Chapter 7, the dominant clan of Mae Salep village, Latche, owns a disproportionate amount of food serving vessels relative to their population, and this disproportion is represented in their middens which are household specific. These middens and their ceramic contents are certainly archaeologically recognizable.

### Trophy Bones

Very often after a feast, the host will save the jaw or horns of the animal to put on display. It must be remembered that meat is not a daily component of the diet, and the offering of an expensive animal for sacrifice is reason enough to gain prestige. This is especially true for

buffalo horns, as the sacrifice of one or more buffalo at a funeral is a very auspicious event. Much more common however, is the display of pig mandibles: some homes can have as many as twenty displayed on the wall. One specific example of trophy display concerns the collection of scapulae from wild game that the Village Founder-Leader has received in the form of foreleg tribute. The Village Founder-Leader of Mae Salep has twenty four of these on display in his home. I was informed that when the people move on to a new village that they just discard these bones.

Although the presence or absence of trophy bones and horns is not necessarily indicative of the magnitude of feasting activity, as is illustrated in the case of Sam Soong village, trophy bones and horns are nonetheless a material facet of feasting activity which could become part of the archaeological record. If an archaeologist were to discover a large deposit of horns or mandibles, he or she could use that data to strengthen their argument for the presence of feasting activity at that site, however, there is always the possibility that these bones and/or horns were accumulated for other purposes.

### Hearths

The relative size and number of hearths is also fairly indicative of feasting. Families which were active participants in traditional feasting often had large kitchens with extra hearth-rings and braziers. It was often necessary to expand the area of the hearth for a feast. In the case of the Akha, very traditional homes with the division between male and female halves had discrete ash dumps for each hearth in the home. This is because women and men maintain their own hearth, and both

men and woman have a separate entrance to the house: each would dump the ash outside of their respective entrances.

Some of the larger homes, especially the more modern ones built on the ground, are built with excessively large kitchens. The reason for this becomes obvious when they host a feast and it can be seen how the kitchen soon fills up with several new hearths and workers preparing food. The addition of extra hearths is related to the necessity to prepare several dishes at the same time, and the functional requirements of cooking with extremely large vessels. However, this may prove difficult to recognize archaeologically because hearths are multipurpose, and it would be very difficult to distinguish whether or not large or multiple hearths were being used at the same time (such as at a feast) or if they were each being used at different times for various purposes.

### Temporary Kitchens

The construction of temporary kitchens may also be archaeologically recognizable, especially if the temporary kitchen was erected on the same spot on several different occasions. Examination of Akha temporary kitchens has revealed that a shallow trench is dug to secure the bamboo and rattan walls, but the best archaeological indicator is the large variety of food remains, most of which are delicacies, found inside the kitchen area. These temporary kitchens would only be needed for very large feasts. Their construction is sometimes necessary if the existing kitchen is not large enough to facilitate the feasting preparation. In the Akha case, and I would suspect in most other cases, temporary, or extra kitchens, are added on

to original permanent kitchens. This was because most of the implements needed for cooking could be shared between the two, and also because the preparations are easier to coordinate that way.

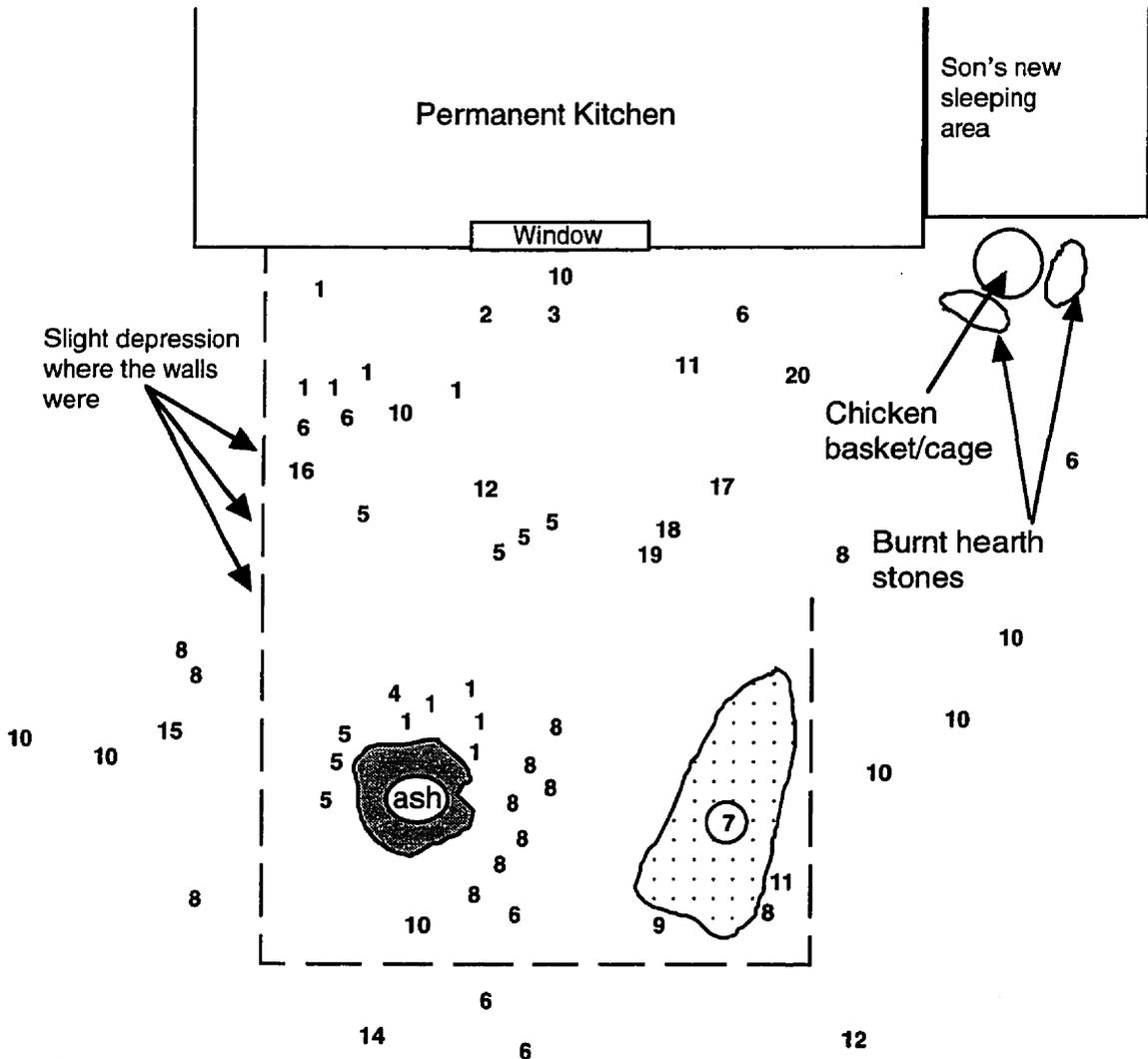
Below (Map 9-1) is an example of the remains of a temporary kitchen after a New House feast at Mae Salep. There was a huge variety of food remains concentrated in this area along with ash from the brazier.

### Garbage Fires

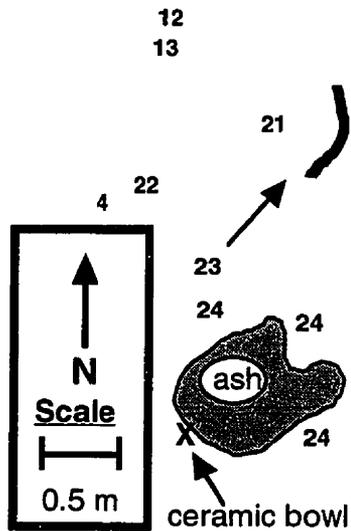
Garbage fires with many feasting remains in them were very indicative of feasting in the Akha case. Normally, small bits of refuse are just tossed away indiscriminately, or swept through the space in the floor boards. Large amounts of trash are tossed away, downslope, from the house into a toft. There were only two occasions which seem to merit the effort of making a garbage fire. One was the production of a large amount of waste product from some kind of plant processing activity: husking corn for example. These types of garbage fires, because of the singularity of their contents, produced a very homogeneous type of ash. The second occasion where a garbage fire was necessary was after a large feast, and their ash always contained a very large variety of contents: from bone and food remains, to whiskey bottles and broken ceramics. Garbage fires were always lit outside, in front of the house.

Unfortunately, feasting related garbage fires will probably prove to be very difficult to recognize archaeologically. Continuous dumping of food processing residue would eventually result in the creation of a

**Map 9-1: Temporary Kitchen Remains**



<b>Legend</b>	
1. peanut shell	13. bean
2. cigar butt	14. yam fragment (?)
3. sugar cane fragment	15. tooth fragment
4. edible snail (shell)	16. tamarine seed
5. garlic	17. lime rind
6. cigarette butt	18. watermelon seed
7. pieces of taro	19. sunflower seed
8. tamarine rind	20. ginger
9. candy wrapper	21. mango seed
10. orange rind	22. pig skull fragment
11. lemon grass	23. cow rib
12. chilli pepper	24. chicken feathers



heterogeneous midden deposit probably not clearly distinct from where the remains of feasts were burned. However, it may be possible to distinguish midden deposits which were created in a feasting context if the middens were associated with an area or compound which could function as a feasting area, and if the contents of the midden were somehow distinct from other middens associated directly with specific households.

### Faunal Remains

In and of themselves, the remains of any domestic animal in Southeast Asian tribes, is evidence for feasting. Animals were only consumed in feast contexts, traditionally. The Akha predilection for completely dicing up their meat, bones and all, created some problems in terms of the analysis of faunal remains. Pigs and chickens are almost completely consumed. The people chew and swallow the well cooked bones, and those that they can not manage to ingest are inevitably eaten by the numerous dogs and pigs which are always at hand. This consumption pattern of course must change when people are eating large animals such as cows or water buffaloes. Although I have never had the opportunity to witness a water buffalo being butchered, I am sure that they would not have attempted to completely dice up and eat such large thick bones.

The remains of a small cow which was eaten at a New House feast provided some minor insight into large mammal taphonomic processes. It was only at these large feasts that an entire animal was ever eaten all at once and in one spot. Consequently, these are the only times when the complete skeletal remains of an animal are ever deposited all in one

dumpsite. In all other Akha cases, and I suspect in many tribal societies everywhere, portions of butchered animals are distributed among friends and family members throughout the village. Consequently, the bones get deposited in different toft areas throughout the village.

It is possible that the Akha might choose to butcher and preserve (i.e., smoke or salt) a large animal, and then deposit its bones all in one dumpsite, but I have never seen this done, although Lewis (1969: 243) claims that in Burma they salt and dry large game animals. The practical necessity of immediate consumption aside, it also serves a greater social function to divide the meat. In one instance, a family caught a gopher and rather than just eating the small animal they divided it up in to quarter sections and spread them around to their relatives in the village.

Butchering patterns may lend us a little archaeological insight. Almost every time an animal other than a chicken or dog is killed (some pigs are butchered for sale), it is for some sort of ceremonial purpose and a feast is involved. In that sense the animal is considered a sacrifice. Sometimes ceremonial chickens are dismembered in special patterns which may vary from the every day butchering patterns, but the larger animals appear to be consistently butchered in the most practical and economic manner. However, one of the characteristics of ritual and ceremony is repetition, or patterning. As archaeologists it may be possible to discern these patterns (although it would admittedly be extremely difficult).

In the Akha case, this repetition and pattern takes the form of a concept of animal symmetry. Ideally, in a feast if one is going to use

two chickens then they should both be of opposite sex. If one kills a pig then one should also kill a chicken. If one kills two pigs they should be of opposite sex, and one should also kill two chickens of opposite sex, etc.

Finally, faunal remains in human graves have sometimes been cited as evidence of feasting (e.g., Gorman 1991). In the Akha case, this seems to hold true. According to Lewis (1969: 407-515) at different points in the funeral, feasting food is offered to the deceased, and some sacrificed animals are hung over the coffin. These are subsequently buried with the body.

## Chapter 10

### Summary

This thesis has examined how the Akha use their economic surpluses to host feasts in order to accomplish social goals. The nature of the Akha's resource base, and the amount of surplus they are able to extract from it, greatly affect the shape and form of the feasts that they have. Their variety of mountain slope horticulture allows for small and occasional surpluses, but it is also prone to shortfalls in the form of crop failure, animal epidemics, environmental catastrophes, and diminishing soil fertility.

There are several constraints on the amount of surplus which the Akha can produce, and hence there is a limit to the amount of future economic security which they can expect to have. Today, the shortage of arable farm land is the prime constraint on surplus production: farmers usually do not have enough land to produce surplus food, and this restricts their ability to maintain large and profitable pig herds. Endemic animal diseases are also a constant drain on production ability. Cattle and buffalo are important items of storable wealth, but most families do not have the capital to make the initial investment to begin a herd. Furthermore, the shortage of land, and the density of farm fields around villages today, make it increasingly harder for herders to find suitable pasture land without risking doing damage to someone's crops.

To cope with these social and environmental circumstances, the Akha rely heavily on cooperative support group networks which they fall back upon in times of crises, the most overt cooperative group being the lineage. They also seek to secure themselves from future economic misfortune by amassing storable wealth in the form of livestock and precious metals, as well as by securing sociopolitical power. Social power and influence enable individuals and households to make their future more secure in several ways: 1) it allows them to increase their farm's productive output by drawing towards their household healthy and hardworking labourers; 2) it allows them to protect themselves against unjust (and sometimes justified) litigations within their community; and 3) it gives them a higher chance of success when they try to muster community support for work projects which are beneficial to them, and when they must compete with other families for choice farming and pasture land.

Feasts are so prevalent and important in Akha society because they serve very practical economic purposes. Feasting helps to create and maintain the life crisis support group network that is absolutely necessary to any Akha household's long time security. Constant and regular feasting between friends, households, and lineages, creates a high degree of solidarity as well as a complex system of reciprocal debts. People do not keep strict debt records, but rather, the rationale behind the generosity of feasting is that if a person always shares and distributes his food when he has a surplus, then it is only logical that he might expect donations of food and support when he is suffering a shortage.

Large scale feasting also serves to create and maintain sociopolitical power. Feasts provide a venue for households to advertise their success. Publicizing wealth and success creates respect and deference within Akha communities, and in turn, community respect gives a household a stronger voice in village politics. Success advertisement also encourages hard working individuals to marry into a family, as well as encouraging that family's relatives to move to their community, and garners active support from lineage members and allies in all spheres. The resulting larger cooperative labour pools, are able to produce larger amounts of surplus, and thus generate wealth. However, as is clear from chapter six, maintaining these social political, and economic networks via feasting is very costly and time-consuming. Therefore, many poor families, given the opportunity in modern economies, now are opting out of the feasting complex, as reflected by conversion to Christianity.

In regards to the field data that was gathered in the villages of Mae Salep and Sam Soong, I would like to reiterate four of my major findings:

- 1) lineages are the major functioning corporate group;
- 2) lineages and individual households that are wealthy sponsor more feasts of all varieties: both small scale solidarity enhancing events and large scale promotional events;
- 3) Wealthy and/or socially important households own more feasting paraphernalia than poorer less influential households; and
- 4) Feasting paraphernalia, in the form of large cooking vessels and large numbers of serving vessels, are represented in the archaeological record through deposition in the tofts surrounding their owner's house.

Overall, my research in Thailand has lead me to conclude that feasting in Akha society is used:

- 1) as a means of converting surplus economic capital into social capital;
- 2) by family groups to attract and hold high quality labourers;
- 3) by individuals to gain acceptance in life crises support networks;
- 4) as a way for allied groups of people to constantly reiterate their mutual respect and commitment; and
- 5) by powerful individuals and groups as a way of exerting social controls (e.g., feasts as fines, feasts which purify taboo transgressions), and as a way of keeping the powerless and disenfranchised from gaining social status, rank, and influence which might threaten the relative rank of those already in a position of power.

The archaeological study of feasting is still in its infancy, and there is wide range of possible avenues of future research. My research was an exploratory case study, and there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done on the feasting of the Thai Hilltribes.

One of the main assumptions of my research has been that feasting form is directly related the economics involving the production of surplus. The relationship between modes production and feast size, frequency, and function, is a key issue in study of feasts, and it must be tested and explored completely. Consequently, I feel that it would be very enlightening to do a study, similar to the one just presented, of a traditional society with a resource base different from that of the Hilltribes, one that is capable of producing higher levels of surplus: possibly a group in Papua New Guinea or Indonesia. It would be interesting to see if higher levels of surplus necessarily result in larger, more expensive, and more grandiose feasts, and if so, whether these

feasts result in more specialized feasting paraphernalia and higher levels of power centralization and disenfranchisement.

## Appendix

Table A - House size and Population: Mae Salep

<u>Clan</u>	<u># of Persons</u>	<u>House Size meters Sq.</u>	<u>Mean Space Per Person</u>
Latche	96	1355.15	14.12
Labu	48	723.59	15.07
Biache	22	325.5	14.79
Weisue	42	557.45	13.27
Pyumia	22	301.25	13.69
Yelum	17	262	15.41
Ayuet	8	88	11
Aiyur	3	35	11.66
Cheumuer	7	73.5	10.5
Jehspng	2	77	38.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>3798.44</b>	

Mean village space per person =14.23 m<sup>2</sup>

Table B - Economic data: Mae Salep

<u>Clan</u>	<u>Animal Sale in Thai Baht</u>	<u># of Fields</u>	<u># of Rai</u>	<u>Missing Cases: Unknown Rai</u>
Latche	250100	43	287	1
Labu	41200	16	76	1
Biache	1450	7	30	1
Weisue	31200	17	108	0
Pyumia	10400	9	33	1
Yelum	3500	9	55	1
Ayuet	9000	2	?	1
Aiyur	0	1	6	0
Cheumuer	0	1	?	1
Jehspng	1300	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>361200</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>7</b>

Note: At the time of research, the exchange rate was 25 Thai Baht for U\$1.00.

Table C - Data on Pig, Chicken, and Dog Ownership: Mae Salep

<i>Clan</i>	<i># pigs</i>	<i># chickens</i>	<i># dogs</i>
Latche	90	143	27
Labu	69	34	8
Biache	21	32	2
Weisue	29	84	11
Pyumia	20	4	5
Yelum	14	52	2
Ayuet	8	40	0
Aiyur	0	0	0
Cheumuer	5	2	0
Jehspng	5	50	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>55</b>

Table D - Data on Buffalo, Cow, and Horse Ownership: Mae Salep

<i>Clan</i>	<i># buffalo</i>	<i># cows</i>	<i># horses</i>
Latche	33	78	7
Labu	0	11	4
Biache	5	0	0
Weisue	3	0	0
Pyumia	0	0	3
Yelum	0	0	1
Ayuet	0	0	0
Aiyur	0	0	0
Cheumuer	0	0	0
Jehspng	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>15</b>

Total Animals = 902

Table E - Family Purchases: Mae Salep

<i>Clan</i>	<i># of Families</i>	<i>Rice: Sack/month</i>	<i>Meat: Bht/month</i>	<i>Whiskey: Bht/Month</i>	<i>Missing Cases</i>
Latche	13	13.84	3690	870	R2, M3, W3
Labu	8	9.42	1859.7	630	W1
Biache	3	3.5	680	20	M1, W2
Weisue	6	7	700	240	M1, W1
Pyumia	3	3.75	800	200	M1, W1
Yelum	3	2.75	950	10	0
Ayuet	1	1	200	0	0
Aiyur	1	0.3	300	0	0
Cheumuer	1	2	?	?	M1, W1
Jehspng	1	?	?	0	R1, M1
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>43.56</b>	<b>9179.7</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>20</b>

Note: - In the missing cases column, R, M, and W stand for Rice, Meat and Whiskey, while the numbers indicate the total number of cases missing for that category

- The rice column represents how many sacks of unhusked rice that the clan buys per month.

- The meat and whiskey columns indicates how much money the clan spends on each of these items per month.

- At time of research, U\$1.00 = 25 Thai Baht.

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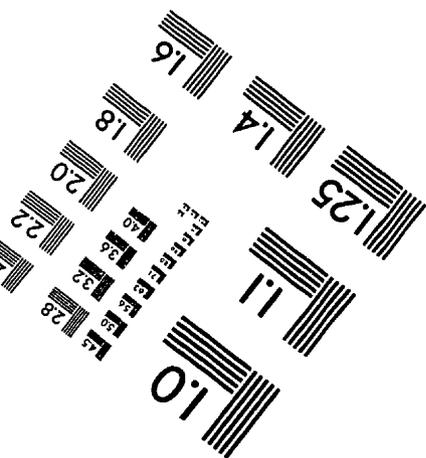
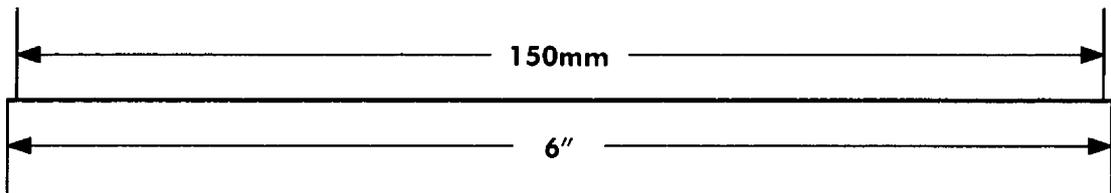
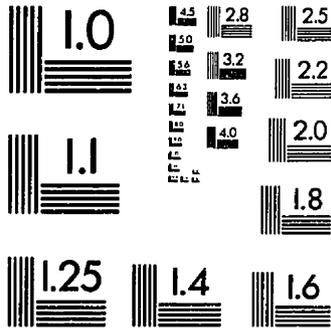
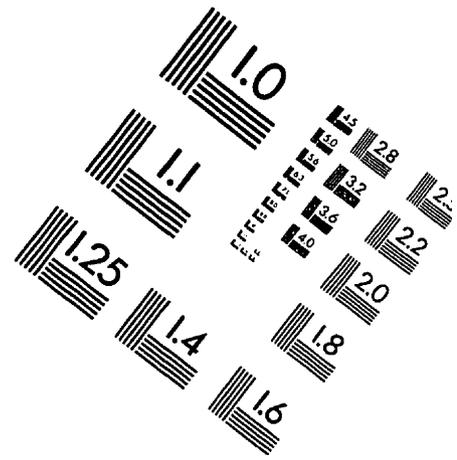
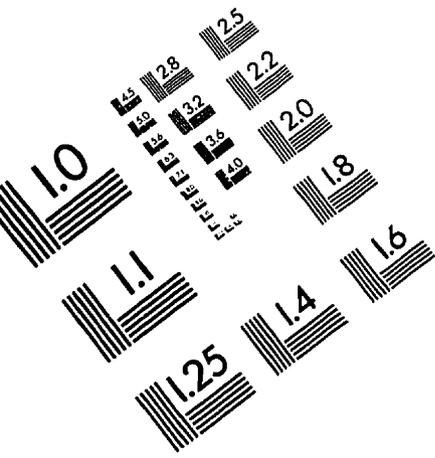
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