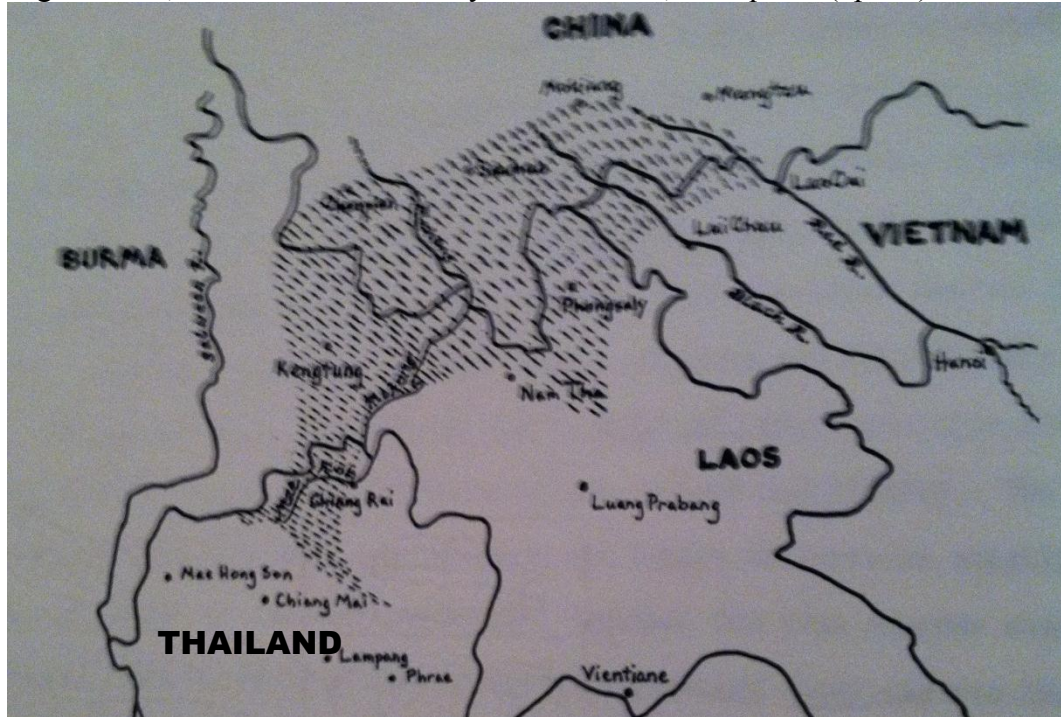


## 1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Akha (other names used: Ahka, Aini, Aka, Ak'a, Ekaw, Ikaw, Ikor, Kaw, Kha Ko, Khako, Khao Kha Ko, Ko, and Yani); a Sino-Tibetan language

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): ahk

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): "They live...between 19 and 24 degrees North, 99 and 105 degrees East, an area of about 500 by 600 km or 30,000 sq km" (3p123).



(2p85)

1.4 Brief history: "The indigenous oral tradition recounts their southward migration across numerous rivers. Scholars concur with the Akha view that they originated in China. They disagree, however, about whether the original homeland was the Tibetan borderlands or farther south and east in Yunnan Province, the northern most residence of present-day Akha. The existence of established relations with the Shan prince of Kengtung indicates that Akha were ensconced in eastern Burma by the 1860s and perhaps earlier. They first entered Thailand from Burma at the turn of this century" (1p12-13). "In Yunnan [a Chinese province], apparently, the Akha prospered for centuries...But the verses go on to describe a 'big burning' – a time of disasters when the Akha were forced to seek refuge in the thickly wooded uplands...Some genealogical litanies go back to the names of the chiefs who ruled the Akha before they were forced to take refuge in the mountains, and thus reveal that the flight of the Akha took place some 30 generations – perhaps 700 years – ago. That would put it in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the Mongol hordes...crushed the Lolo state" (4p22-3). "The Chinese annals relate that when the armies of Kublai Khan invaded, several tribal tu'ssu, in particular the Hani or He-man [the Chinese term for Akha] offered prolonged resistance" (3p130).

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: "Both Protestant and Catholic missionaries have been active among Akha and have won converts, who typically live apart from traditionalists in Christian villages" (1p16). "Their creeds and rituals – all that has been called their 'animism,' including ancestor-service – have been distorted and vilified quite strongly by outsiders, especially the Christian missions...[There is a trend] of absorption and

abolition. This trend basically does not believe that mountain minority people have a culture or an 'intangible spiritual and cultural heritage.'...Historically, most majority class systems of the area have placed the mountain minority people at the bottom of their systems as slaves...In a way, even more dangerous for the intangible spiritual heritage of mountain minority peoples, have been the Christian missions and especially the fundamentalists. Starting from the presupposition that the intangible spiritual and culture heritage, as present in the Akhazong, was inspired by the devil, missionaries asked the Akha and other mountain peoples to throw away their ancestor-service and zang and to be saved through baptism" (6p240-1).

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): "Indeed, for an outsider, just walking in these hills is exhausting...[T]he everyday reality of their mountainous environment is deeply implanted in the Akha language itself. Their expression for 'Good-bye' is 'Let me go up'; 'Go up carefully' is the standard reply" (4p30). The natural vegetation is tropical rainforest.

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: "Census data are inadequate and unreliable, but experts estimate a total of more than 430,000: some 150,000 in China, 180,000 in Myanmar, 59,000 in Laos, 10,000 in Vietnam, and 34,541 in Thailand (1988)" (1p12).

## **2. Economy**

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): "The staple of the Akha diet is rice...Vegetables, including pumpkins, beans, and greens, are planted in rice fields; maize, chilies, soybeans, and cotton are grown in other fields...Gathering of wild fruits, mushrooms, and other edible plants contributes to the food supply" (1p15).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: "Game, such as wild boar, deer, bamboo gopher, and jungle fowl, is not as plentiful as in the past...Fishing is done with traps and nets. Pigs, chickens, ducks, goats, cattle, and water buffalo are raised" (1p15).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Every village has a full-time blacksmith who forges machetes, knives, and axes. Crossbows are the traditional long-distance weapon.

2.4 Food storage: "Newly threshed rice that has been spread on a mat to dry in the December sun is carried round to the granary in front of the house. From there, the women of the household will fetch a fresh supply each morning" (4p41). The granary is "a small hut within the family compound, located just a few steps from the house" (4p50).

2.5 Sexual division of production: "Hunting is symbolically and in practice a male endeavor; rice cultivation is done by both sexes, though symbolically it is a female activity. Weaving, dyeing, and sewing are also female activities; in certain ritual contexts, this domain contrasts with the male domain of hunting. Preparing rice is women's work, but men often cook, especially meat for feasts. This sexual division of labor is enshrined in the Akha religion" (1p15). "In Akha society, there used to be a sexual division of domains, but it was balanced and complementary...[T]he Akha gender system shifts with changes in context, for example, depending on which social ritual is occurring, so as to give prominence to men at certain times and prominence to women at others" (5p230).

2.6 Land tenure: "[Rice is] cultivated by the slash-and-burn (shifting or swidden) method...Slash-and-burn fields are held in usufruct, that is, while in use; a family's claim to a plot ceases when it is left fallow to allow the forest to regenerate. Irrigated rice fields, on the other hand, are the property of their preparer and can be sold" (1p15). "[Slash-and-burn] requires a period of twelve to fourteen years of fallow for these fields to recover fertility sufficiently for them to be planted again. Thus, even small communities of highlanders require very large amounts of land to produce sufficient rice to feed their inhabitants year by year"

(5p229). “Finally, we turned up an even narrower trail, which rose steeply then emerged from the forest alongside one of the fields in which the Akha grew their rice – just one crop per year, since the autumn monsoon provides the only irrigation. The steep hillside had recently been cleared and blackened tree stumps rose out of the ground at odd intervals” (4p27-30).

2.7 Ceramics: Ceramics are not used; instead, the Akha construct baskets from bamboo (2).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: “But men and women eat separately; Abaw Baw Soe’s wife remained at the other end of the house behind the partition; and when I asked about her, I was told, ‘She’s not hungry,’ although in fact she was then munching something.” Once the men finished eating, “A small boy came in from the women’s area and removed the table, dishes and all, to their side of the house... The food left in the dishes went towards [the women’s] own meal” (4p33).

2.9 Food taboos: “One [injunction] is against eating the meat of a pig or dog that has disrupted the cosmic order by giving birth to too few offspring. The meat of such a sow or bitch belonging to a wife-giver may not be eaten by a wife-taker. Another is that wife-takers are not permitted to eat the meat of a dog that defiled the house of a wife-giver by climbing on the roof. Thirdly, wife-takers may not eat the ‘outside meat’ from a ritual sponsored by their wife-givers... Outside meat is from animals sacrificed [outside]. Fourthly, a cock that figures in the initiation of a white-skirted woman may not be taken by a wife-taker. Fifth and finally, the boiled egg offered to the spirit of bad deaths during an inside ceremony may not be eaten by a wife-taker... Behavior prohibited to wife-takers is also prohibited to patrilineal kin” (2p217-8).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? No information found.

### **3. Anthropometry**

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): I could find no exact numbers, but source 4 says the average male is short.

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): No information found.

### **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

4.1 Age at menarche (f): No information found

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): No information found.

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): I did not find exact numbers, but “contributing to the multiplication of families” is highly valued (2p148).

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): “If a woman gives birth twice between one New Year’s Festival and the next, the second child is considered a twin to the first,” which is very bad luck. “To avoid such a calamity, a husband and wife expecting a child within a year of their last will ‘chase/drive’ the change to the next year... It is in fact quite rare for a couple to have to hasten the arrival of the new year not only because husband and wife must abstain from sexual intercourse for five months after the birth of a child but also because breast-feeding suppresses a mother’s fertility. Indeed, I was told that only a woman whose child died shortly after birth would ever expect a second child before the next New Year’s festival” (2p261-2).

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): “Akha traditionally marry in their teens or early twenties” (1p13).

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: “Either spouse can initiate divorce. Before children are born, this is common; afterwards, women are constrained by the fact that children remain with the ex-husband” (1p14). “Among Akha, divorce always creates formal ruptures in the bonds between, on the one hand, the ex-husband and members of his patrilineal family, and,

on the other hand, his ex-wife and her natal patrilineal family” (2p199). “An Akha woman who leaves her husband returns to her natal household as a proper member of no lineage. She belongs neither to her natal household nor to her husband’s lineage with which she has broken her tie. Although her brothers accept her return and usually support her in the divorce proceedings, she is not permitted to remain long in the house. Her brother greatly fears that she will die under his roof and thereby bring a curse down upon him and his descendants. If she does not wish to return to her husband, she must quickly marry someone else” (2p350).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Very few men have more than one wife (4p80).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: “Most, but not all, the men I interviewed in Mountain Village had each received something from his father or brother(s) when he moved into a house of his own. What and how much is given to a departing son seems to depend on the family’s wealth and on the warmth of affection” (2p145-6). Soon after her marriage, a woman returns to her parents’ home. “The daughter, who arrives empty-handed, leaves with a woman’s yoked carrying basket containing a hoe and a knife provided by her natal family. These three items are the minimal gift; other things, such as a sleeping mat, may also be given. If the marriage is village exogamous, the new wife must take a cock with her to her parents’ house...The basket, hoe, and knife received by every bride are used in daily tasks such as fetching firewood or water and in agricultural work for the patrilineal family into which she has married” (2p190). “They give only minimal bridewealth. An Akha man whose marriage is village exogamous must give his bride’s parents 10 baht (approximately \$.50); a man whose marriage is village endogamous, on the other hand, must give 10 baht to the village founder-leader of his community. In either case, this sum is called the ‘price for stealing a wife.’...It is certainly of no economic significance. Each Akha marriage does, however, entail a continuing relationship between wife-givers and wife-takers of another kind best characterized not as political or economic but as religio-cosmological. This continuing relationship is connected to yearly ancestor offerings and to rice rituals” (2p350-1).

4.9 Inheritance patterns: “Whichever son remains in the parental household eventually inherits the house and its contents as well as the domestic animals. To my knowledge, no rules stipulate what, if anything, should be given to a married son who leaves the main house” (2p145).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: “Akhazang demands that parents should sleep apart, the father with the unmarried sons on his side of the partition, the mother with the unmarried daughters on the other...During the early years of marriage, while a man is still living in his father’s household, he and his wife will have a small sleeping house to themselves in the family compound. But, later, when they have their own household, conjugal relations may be a delicate and difficult matter to arrange in a dwelling where 8 or 10 people sleep every night” (4p52).

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: No information found.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Females travel to the home of their husbands; it is preferable for females to marry males in different villages, but they can marry males in their own village (2p169).

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized? Paternity is not partible.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”): “[T]he giving of life is in no sense devalued. In fact, it is highly valued” (2p359).

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: No information found.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): “According to Akha, ‘It is not permissible to exchange a wife for a sister’... In answer to my questions about why marriages of this type are not allowed, Akha explained that if there is a divorce, the relationship with the mother’s brother is severed.” There is asymmetrical alliance, where a family might exchange a female one generation and receive a female in return in the next generation, but two females may not be exchanged in the same generation. Marriage is also forbidden to women born into one’s natal patriline, so marriage to father’s sister’s daughter and sister’s daughter is not allowed, although this rule is occasionally broken. “Marriage with the genealogical matrilineal cross-cousin is forbidden... Here too divorce results in the much feared taboo relationship with the mother’s brother,” who plays a crucial role in assisting his sister and her offspring. “A wife does not by definition come from a wife-giving group, but the group from which a wife comes is by definition a wife-giving group. Finally, ‘it is not permissible for the children of sisters to marry’... Only negative rules have been described [regarding marriage], since there are no positive rules. The Akha marriage system rests not upon a prescription but upon a proscription, namely, the stricture against restricted exchange” (2p198-212).

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No information found.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: It is briefly mentioned that “the village founder-leader adjudicates intravillage disputes and fines those who transgress customs, for example, adulterers” (2p90-1).

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Her husband’s patriline

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: No information found.

4.22 Evidence for couvades: It was not mentioned, but, based on descriptions of pregnancy and labor, I believe not (4p128).

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): None found

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? “Akha readily enumerate rules prohibiting particular behavior by a wife-taker towards a wife-giver.” Here, wife-taker includes a man’s parents and siblings, and wife-giver includes his wife’s parents and siblings. “First, one is not permitted to serve as assistant at a wife-giver’s wedding. Second one is also no permitted to take the rib (or ribs) during a wife-giver’s wedding. Third, customs prohibit a wife-taker from wearing the ceremonial knife at a rite sponsored by his wife-giver” (2p217). Husbands are not allowed to say their wife’s names (2p377).

4.24 Joking relationships? Joking relationships are not encouraged. “‘Before something embarrassing, put a wall,’ runs an Akha proverb; ‘before a mouth that is laughing, put a hand’” (4p52).

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: “While it is true that the name of an Akha father usually overlaps with the name of his son, it is equally true that his name usually overlaps with that of his daughter. Women’s names are never preserved in genealogies; nonetheless, a daughter is linked to the father and his patriline through her name in exactly the same manner as a son... Mapped onto the universal genealogy of Akha are numerous named lineages... Akha lineages never die; ‘the decease of individual members makes no difference to the collective existence of the aggregate body...’ A child is named by its father unless the father is dead, in which case it is named by the mother’s brother (2p127-138).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: “‘It is not permissible to marry within one’s lineage.’ This maxim notwithstanding, the exogamous unit is the unnamed sub-lineage rather than the named

lineage...To identify the unnamed sub-lineage of a particular person, Akha say 'X's sub-lineage,' where X might be, on the one hand, a senior or other well-known male member of that sub-lineage living in the village or in a nearby village or, on the other hand, a male member who lives in a distant community but is known to those addressed" (2p138).

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? There is. The bride is sequestered the evening before in a house belonging to close patrilineal kin of the groom. On the day of the wedding, she dresses in a new set of clothes made by a female from the groom's household. She removes her hat, which rarely happens in public, and replaces it with a blue square of fabric. Once she is dressed, an old man beats on the roof of the house and makes the cry used for chasing around domestic animals. "The bride rushes from the porch into the women's half of the house. There she sits 'embarrassed' with eyes downcast on a waiting stool...Beside her, the groom sits facing the hearth on a second stool. Each cups hands at their side adjacent their new spouse. A boiled egg is put by the assistant into the groom's cupped hands. He passes this egg into his bride's hands; she returns it into his. According to Akha, it is not permissible to drop the egg...After the egg is moved back and forth three times, the assistant retrieves, cracks, and peels it. A little cooked egg is rubbed by the assistant first on the lips of the husband, then on the lips of the wife. A bamboo liquor tube is planted in the hearth, and a chick is killed. The chick, after being singed and plucked is put on top of" a cup with rice, salt, and ginger. "The cup's contents are then dropped into a pot of water...After the meat is cooked, a piece of liver, a hunk of meat, and the lower portion of a leg are put into a cup...Bride and groom move their stools apart so that the table can be placed between them. Using his hands, the groom eats pure rice, meat, liquor, and tea; using chopsticks, he eats from the central bowl. The bride then follows his example." This process is about incorporating the new wife into her husband's kin group. "For the wedding feast, a pig, which is as large and fat as possible, is then killed...As soon as the pig is dead, the bride replaces the blue square with her high hat, and her transformation into a wife is then complete...Once the liver's forecast is deciphered, liquor is served to the assistant first, followed by the male elders. Then the pig is butchered and cooked...Before the men in the next room raise their liquor cups, they make certain that the women have preceded them...Following the feast, nine cups of pork are prepared" and distributed to certain relations. "The bride sits under a blanket, a sheet of plastic, or a woven mat facing the downslope wall; the groom sits uncovered facing the opposite direction." Cooked rice is scattered as men begin the wedding chanting. "The men continue to chant for an hour or so. Meanwhile, those who throw rice at someone of the opposite sex are jestingly accused of desiring their target...All the people present merrily scatter rice balls because, in the words of a male elder, 'everyone wishes to have a little of the blessing'...By the time the chanting of the 'Text of the Wedding Place' is completed, most of the crowd has dispersed...All members of the groom's sub-lineage in the village must observe ceremonial abstinence on the next day, which is called 'new wife rest day'...Abstinence involves refraining from sexual intercourse and from work in the fields...Early on this day, before the morning meal, the new wife must perform 'learning to carry bamboo water vessels on her back.'" The wife fetches water in three vessels that represent two sons and a daughter, asking for many children, "especially many sons, for herself and her husband. Later that morning, male and female elders are called to the house for the bride and groom for a meal." There is another feast in the afternoon. "After this feast, the groom must perform the 'begging for blessing' with the help of a young man," in which he offers pork meat and fat to various relatives and honored guests. "Late on the second day of the wedding, the bride and groom are fed a bit of another boiled egg...Members of the bride's natal patrilineal family, who are excluded from the first two

days of the wedding, are visited the following day provided that they live in the same village as the groom...For Akha, a daughter in some sense, at least, dies to her natal family upon marriage” (2p169-190).

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? “Each child is given a genealogical name, in which the last syllable of the father’s name is typically taken as the first syllable and second syllable is added. Called the Tibetan-Burman genealogical patronymic system, this pattern is a mnemonic device that both memorializes the father and conjoins father and child. It is said that a man should know his patrilineal genealogy back some sixty generation to the named spirits who preceded the first man. Every Akha belongs to a named patrilineage” (1p13). “A child is given a genealogical name shortly after birth, thereby becoming a full-fledged human being. If an unnamed baby dies, it is simply left in the forest; only someone who has been named can be buried in a coffin the village graveyard” (2p128). “Clan names are personal, genealogical, names, and not totemic or animal names...Some of the older, more prestigious clan names...go back 30-45 generations to a founding ancestor, others 15-25 generations or fewer, as a result of fission in the clan. All Akha genealogical names go back to an apical ancestor and common founder of all Akha...tribal groups...For the older clans, this is 55-60 generations ago” (3p127). “While it is true that the name of an Akha father usually overlaps with the name of his son, it is equally true that his name usually overlaps with that of his daughter” (2p127).

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?): “There is a certain ambivalence concerning whether or not village exogamy or village endogamy is preferable. For example, it is said that a young woman who marries outside her natal community is ‘valuable.’ Similarly, a young man who fetches a wife from a distant village is considered ‘valuable.’ And yet a number of teenage girls in Mountain Village told me that they would prefer to remain there after marriage to be near their parents and their brothers. Several courting-age boys echoed their sentiments when they judged it to be ‘good’ for a girl to marry in her natal village” (2p169).

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? “In general, young people are free to choose their own spouse, although parental approval should be obtained” (1p13).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: None found.

### **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: Warfare appears to be nonexistent. “According to the Akhazang, a man should die in his own bed” (4p57).

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: There are bandits who live in the mountains and prey on travelers (4p102). Tigers are another cause of violent death (4p24). I found no mention of in-group killing.

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Bandits were the only violent source of out-group killing that I found.

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): “The Akha have never been loath to learn from their neighbors. Indeed, the ritual texts suggest that they were taught by the mountain Khmer, another wandering tribe, to build their houses, to embroider patterns on their clothes by the Shan, and to grow tobacco by the Chinese” (4p27).

4.18 Cannibalism? None reported

## **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: “Villages ranging in size from over two hundred to less than ten houses have been reported” (1p13).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): There is no mobility.

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): “Although the Akha oral tradition speaks of princes and city-states, indigenous supra local political organization is absent. A settlement cannot be founded without a village leader, whose house is the first built. Ascension to this office, which is often hereditary, must be ratified by male elders... Whereas the traditional village leader is responsible for internal affairs, the village headman is responsible for external relations. Contemporary village headmen are part of the modern national administrative system” (1p14-5). “Akha villages have two leaders: the buseh and the dzoema or headman. The dzoema is responsible for the smooth running of the village; he ensures that streets are cleaned, quarrels are resolved, and the money for communal purposes is collected. He is a man of great importance and is considered to embody the spiritual well-being of the village. But, because of this symbolic role, he must be shielded from the dangers of the outside world. It is, therefore, the buseh who conducts all the external affairs of the village... In effect, he is a buffer between the government and dzoema” (4p27). The dzoema’s “authority and influence in the village are considerable, but they are based chiefly upon his personal qualities and his knowledge of Akhazang, rather than upon his position. A council of elders – the men of 45 or 50 or over – meets to make day-to-day decisions affecting the village... If an important crisis occurs – an epidemic, for example, a serious fire or an attack by bandits – all the heads of families gather to agree on a course of action” (4p54).

5.4 Post marital residence: “At marriage, a woman leaves her father’s patrilineal kinship units to join those of her husband. Initial post-marital residence is patrivirilocal; that is, the wife joins her husband, who lives with his father or elder brother. Since only one married couple is permitted to live in a single house, a newly married couple often lives in an adjacent hut, taking meals in the main house. After he has children a married man may move out of his father’s house. This household becomes an independent patrilineal family only when it installs its own ancestor altar” (1p13-4).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): “A stylized wooden figure of a man stands near one of the two symbolic gateways on the main paths... The gates – seven-foot free-standing uprights that support an ornamented crossbeam – mark the dividing line between the village and hazardous world outside. The two figures guard against evil forces and, as well as the gates, are renewed each year” (4p48).

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex): “Wild animals [especially tigers] are not the only threat: bandits, warriors, and dangerous invisible forces also lurked in the jungle. So alarming was the outside world that Akha women did not travel unnecessarily, but devoted themselves to domestic tasks and left the forests to the men. As the proverb puts it, ‘A woman deals with what is between the house and the rice bin; a man deals with what is between other villages and ours’” (4p24). “The thousands of lines of oral history enshrining Akha traditions and customs in poetry not only lay down specific tasks for each sex but also divide the world into male and female zones, beginning with the partition of each house into men’s and women’s side. While the village as a whole, the forest and the trails and places to which they lead are male territory, females confine their attention to the house, its immediate surroundings and the fields. The men usually cook the meat dishes for a meal, and may occasionally help out with such domestic chores as sweeping the floors and feeding the animals, but the women run the household, getting



up first each morning to make sure it is well stocked with essentials: water, rice, firewood, and fodder for the livestock. Each stage in the preparation and cooking of rice is the women's domain, as is everything to do with cloth – from growing and picking cotton to embroidering and mending garments. Only very young girls are free to play all day... 'Seven years pass; she can learn to break firewood. Eight years pass, she can learn to fetch water,' runs an Akha text. Before a girl reaches her teens, she will be working in the fields" (4p34).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: A woman's brothers are very important to her and her children (4).

5.8 Village and house organization: "A traditional community is characterized by two wooden gateways, one up slope and one down slope, flanked by carved female and male figures. These gates mark the division between the 'inside,' the domain of human beings and domesticated animals, and the 'outside,' the domain of spirits and wild animals. Also distinctive is a tall four-posted village swing, used in an annual ancestor offering related to the fertility of rice... Houses are sometimes scattered on a slope, but are often built on either side of a ridge with an open avenue in the middle. Smaller paths connect fenced family compounds, which contain a house and rice granary, and, in the case of an extended family, may also include one or more huts for younger couples. Traditionally constructed of logs, bamboo, and thatch, dwellings are of two types: 'low house,' built on the ground, and 'high house,' built on stilts. Akha are known for the internal division of their houses into a female side and a male side" (1p13).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): "Because the rice fields are more than an hour's walk from their owners' villages, field huts provide temporary shelter during planting and harvesting" (4p30). "Just one house is sufficient for a patrilineal family containing only one married couple. If a family has two married couples, the younger couple lives either in a small house near the main house or in a separate house outside the compound. Only by installing an ancestor bamboo section can the inhabitant of a separate house establish an independent patrilineal family of their own" (2p144).

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? They sleep on "soft bark-fiber bed rolls on the bamboo floor" of their homes (4p52).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: "Lacking stratified social classes, Akha society is egalitarian. Ties of patrilineal kinship and marriage alliance form the fabric of society, binding Akha within and between communities. Relative age is important in social organization; older persons are accorded respect. The village is a fundamental social unit whose members enact agricultural and other rituals in consort" (1p14).

5.12 Trade: "Although primarily subsistence rice cultivators, Akha have long been involved in cash cropping and trade. In the last century, cotton and opium poppies were the principal cash crops" (1p15). "Akha women grow cotton that they trade to Lu women, who then weave narrow bands that are exchanged back to the Akha" (5p148). "Iron and salt – indispensable commodities that the Akha have always had to purchase from the lowland people" (4p24).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? They are referred to as egalitarian. "In a settled community, the position of dzoema will often pass from father to son, but when a new village is to be founded, the elders will select by mutual agreement from among their number (4p54). "The labor force available can change significantly during the 'developmental cycle in domestic groups,' so the fortunes of a household may vary considerably over time... From the Akha point of view, such occurrences are not a matter of chance or luck, rather they are evidence of 'blessing.' To say that village life is egalitarian is, of course, not to say that inequality is entirely absent or that there are no established social roles. For the most part, such differences

notwithstanding, the lives of those who occupy the important offices in Akha society differ little from those of their neighbors” (2p89).

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: “[Other anthropologists who study the Akha] impressed one crucial fact upon me: that Akhazang, the Akha Way, is not a static system. It makes many precise, minute demands; but in new circumstances, new procedures are devised” (4p27). “For the Akha, there is no real distinction between the level of ritual or prescribed behavior and the level of secular daily life. They consider human activity to be intimately interrelated with the surrounding work, and their prime concern is that all such activities should be performed in the right way, at the right time, and in the right place, so as to harmonize properly with the nature of the universe and avoid disturbing its existing delicate balance” (4p51).

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): “No village is without a founder-leader except briefly during the interim between the death of one office-holder and the installation of his successor...Akha often claim he ‘is the most important.’ Beyond founding villages, he is responsible for initiating yearly household-based ancestor offerings and for officiating at annual communal rites...In addition to the village founder-leader, there are also four assistant founder-leaders...In ritual texts, the strongman is named immediately after the founder-leader. I was told that such men are ‘fighters’ or ‘people who wage war’ against non-Akha...Alting [another anthropologist studying the Akha] believes that ‘the emphasis was more on organizing defense of a village against invaders than on actively offensive warfare.’...Following the strongman, the blacksmith appears in ritual texts. When I asked about the order, I was informed that ‘if there are no strongmen in the village, the blacksmith cannot forge large pieces of iron.’...The position of blacksmith is restricted to men and is not automatically hereditary...Blacksmiths are essential to every Akha household because they fashion the bush knives, tips for dibble sticks, hoes, and even sickles necessary for clearing or cultivating fields...The blacksmith has precedence over the fourth and final male functionary mentioned in ritual texts, ‘because the reciter requires a ceremonial knife and spear forged by the blacksmith.’...[R]ecitation of the ritual texts of the oral tradition is the essence of the office...The position of reciter is achieved rather than inherited...Only a ‘clean’ man who has the intelligence and perseverance required to memorize the vast corpus of ritual chants can attain the office...If a village has no resident reciter, a household calls one from another community, usually a nearby settlement, when wishing to sponsor a ceremony with recitations...In Thailand today, the headman of an Akha village is a functionary in the national governmental system.” Communities cannot be built without a “white-skirted woman” who “links annual ancestor offerings and yearly rice rituals...Although she has no official say in village decision-making, her position is respected, and she may exert substantial influence behind the scenes, especially if she has a strong personality and has reached a venerable age...Unlike other positions, the role of Shaman is open to both men and women. The shaman ‘dies’ and travels in trance – Akha recognize that false claimants only fake trance but true shamans enter trance – to the world of the ancestors to seek aid in finding lost souls of the sick or in identifying the agents causing illness and the types of rituals needed to appease them...A shaman is chosen by the spirits. The choice is often signaled by a period of illness which does not end until the individual access to the spirits’ wishes and becomes a shaman. There exists a certain tension between shamans and reciters...One reciter told me emphatically that reciters and other male practitioners are more powerful than shamans...Nobody ever

affirmed that a shaman is essential to a village. Many communities, including Mountain Village, do not have a resident shaman” (2p90-118).

6.2 Stimulants: “Deeply-stained teeth and gums betray this man’s predilection for chewing betel nuts – a habit common among Akha adults of both sexes. The betel nut, fruit of the areca palm, is a mild intoxicant. It also has anaesthetic qualities and is used to relieve toothache” (4p18).

There appears to be a stereotype that many Akha use opium extensively, but this is not true.

“According to the villagers, smoking opium is considered the habit of a retired old man who is beyond the age of 50. They continued, ‘When people reach this age, aches and pain associated with old age are relieved by smoking opium, so they smoke opium to make themselves feel better. Therefore old men smoking opium is accepted, although, for the young men, it is considered a shameful thing to do...[I]t suggests a prevalent response to economic stress rather than being an integral part of traditional culture’” (5p229).

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): “The Akha year is divided into the people’s season (dry) and the spirits’ season (wet). During the latter, spirits wander into the village, so they must be driven out as part of a yearly ancestor offering...The annual ritual cycle consists of nine or twelve ancestor offerings, rice rituals, and other rites, such as the building of the village gates. Family ancestor offerings are made in the women’s side of the house, whereas hunting ceremonies are held on the men’s side. Life-cycle rites include birth rituals, weddings, and funerals. There are also curing and corrective ceremonies of numerous sorts, such as soul calling” (1p16). “Any death that occurs outside the village, especially if it involves violence” is a “terrible death” (4p57). “Like many agriculturalists, Akha have an annual cycle of rites which regulates labor in the fields and contributes to the fruitfulness of that labor. The fecundity of the fields depends not only on rice rituals but also upon ancestor offerings and what can be called community ceremonies. Rites of these three types are interwoven in a fixed sequence through the two seasons of the Akha year” (2p252). “New Year’s festival is followed in April by another four-day ritual in which two ancestor offerings said to have been separated by eight to ten days up to about twenty years ago are now conjoined. It is held after all the fields to be planted during the next season have been cleared by felling trees and removing brush, and it may precede the day of ceremonial abstinence after these fields have been burned...The hunting success ceremony...contains the annual rite by blacksmiths and by reciters to honor their paraphernalia (miniature bellows and tools in the case of blacksmiths; ceremonial knives and spears in the case of reciters) as well as a feast by village founder-leaders and assistant village founder-leaders to honor their predecessors...The transition from the dry season to the rainy season is effected through the rice planting ancestor offering in early May. A pre-dawn ceremony called ‘Purifying the water source’ enacted the next day by the village founder-leader and two or three other clean male elders has two purposes: first to cleanse or purify the creator’s water source and second to cleanse or purify rice seeds belonging to the village founder-leader...These purified rice seeds are used later that same day for the ceremonial first planting...From the beginning of the wet season to the return to the dry season is precisely eleven cycles of days, that is, eleven Akha twelve-day weeks. This period is punctuated by a sequence of three ancestor offerings leading to a fourth that marks the commencement of the dry season. In late August or early September, ideally nine cycles of days after the rice planting ancestor offering, usually on a Buffalo Day, a four-day ancestor offering begins,” called the Swinging Ceremony. “The structure of this four-day ceremony parallels that of the New Year’s Festival...Both rites include a communal pig divide and the possibility of graded changes in clothing by young women approaching marriage. Unlike its pair, however, the swinging ceremony is dominated not by boys spinning tops but by

women and girls riding the village swing... One cycle of days after the swinging ceremony is a two-day ancestor offering, which includes a meal for the original nine village founder-leaders... On the sheep day following this ceremony, the rite of chicken plucking is performed. For this one-day ancestor offering, at three places in the house feathers from the fowl, which in this case must be a cock, are plucked three times from the three spots doused with water prior to the sacrifice... One cycle of days after the September offering is the ancestor offering that ushers in the dry season," called the rice flowering, which "is appropriate because it is held as the heavy heads of paddy ripen and turn gold." On the second day of Rice Flowering, "the third annual meal in honor the original village founder-leaders is held. Also on this day, a man from each household in a community fashions two wooden spears... These mock weapons are then ready to be used in 'driving/chasing with spears' to evict spirits from the village. Young boys carrying the decorated spears charge through the houses of the community... When the boys have wearied of the sport..., each young boy drives one of his spears into the ground on either side of the path immediately inside the gateway. Spirits, who are thought to visit the community during the rainy season, are thereby driven with spears back into the forest, their proper abode... In late November or early December is" the plucking rice ears ceremony, which is "both an ancestor offering and a rice ritual... It is performed by each patrilineal family on its own auspicious day. In pre-dawn darkness, a man walks to his family's field containing the rice owner's house and from the area near that house cuts three ripe stalks of glutinous rice... The final annual ancestor offering is the Lift New Rice Liquor Offering held after all the family's rice has been threshed... Three new bamboo liquor tubes, which contain liquor base made from a mixture of new rice and yeast, must be prepared... Not long after this offering the cycle commences again with the New Year's festival" (2p261-8).

6.4 Other rituals: "Game have spirit-owners, honored in hunting rites. People and rice have souls, whose flight causes disease" (1p16). "Rice is under the care of the Rice Owner... Each ritually independent household must construct a house for its Rice Owner in at least one of its rice fields prior to the first planting... Once the [wet] season has begun, a structure is built in the rear of each ritually independent family compound for its Rice Owner to serve as an intermediate dwelling place between the field and house... Immediately after the rainy season commences with the Rice Planting Ancestor Offering, the sequence of yearly rice rituals begins... In the field, the village founder-leader sacrifices a hen or a cock for the Rice Owner and places the opened packet of fermented sticky rice upslope from the Rice Owner's house as an offering to the ancestor... Thereafter every other patrilineal family in the community performs first planting on its own good day... To ensure a healthy and abundant crop, the Rice Owner's Offering is enacted by each patrilineal family independently while the rice is growing... First a cock and then a hen are sacrificed. The cock's tail feathers are charred; just as at first planting, the wafting odor is considered an offering to the Rice Owner so that the crop will mature and be plentiful. After the hen is killed, its neck is squeezed until blood flows... In the next ritual in the series, the Rice Owner is called back from the field to the structure specially built that day in the house yard. This can be done only after all the threshed rice from the field with the Rice Owner's house has been carried back to the village and deposited in the family's granary... After the New Year's festival has occurred, the final rice ritual is performed... between the middle of January and early March... Recently harvested rice seeds are hung in a container from the structure in the house yard. These unhusked seeds are purified by being fed pure rice and a boiled egg." There are two other rituals: catching grubs and catching grasshoppers, which are intended to improve the harvest the following year (2p268-274).

6.5 Myths (Creation): “In Akha mythology, everyone and everything, both human and spirit, is descended from the great ancestor, A-poe-mi-yeh. Originally, humans and spirits lived together in the same houses in the Ancestral Village, but humans slept at night and spirits slept during the daytime. Later, conflicts arose between humans and spirits, each of whom took advantage of their waking hours to steal from the other. Finally, they agreed to split up and live in separate worlds. Humans, who had the first choice, came to this world. The spirits had no choice but to retire to the spirit world, a place that is a mirror image of the human world. It has its night during the human world’s day and its long rainy season during the human world’s sunny months. The spirits came to love the rain, so now they come to the human world during the rainy months – between May and October – and plague the people with disease” (4p26). Legends on the creation of their culture: ““Our ancestor Gu-la moved south to Djm-pyu; our ancestor A-gaw moved to a place where the land was flat; our ancestor Mo-dzo moved to a place with many trees; our ancestor Man-dzan went to live at a place with many stones,’ and so on” (4p22).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): “Villagers make chopsticks and other utensils out of bamboo. Baskets of many types are woven from bamboo or rattan. Until recently, most clothing was made from home-spun cotton, dyed with indigo. Patterns of embroidery and applique adorning men’s and women’s jackets are distinctive of Akha subgroups, as are the stunning women’s hats – embellished with silver ornaments, beads, and monkey fur – for which Akha are famous” (1p15).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: “Offerings to patrilineal ancestors are made by a male family member unless the senior woman has undergone a special initiation, which makes her responsible for annual rice rituals as well” (1p16).

6.8 Missionary effect: In Burma/Myanmar, “many have become Christian, chiefly Catholic, especially the more urbanized” (3p125). I could not find specific numbers, but missionaries have been active among the Akha.

6.9 RCR revival: Traditional practices were mostly extant in the ethnographies I read from the 1980s, so there was no need for revival at that point.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: “Funeral ceremonies are different for adults survived by at least one son than for adults without male issue or children. Only the former become ancestors and receive offerings after their deaths. Husband and wife become ancestors together in his patriline...Akha bury rather than cremate their dead” (1p16).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No.

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No.

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): “The Akha also believe that every significant element in their world – such as people, rice, money, animals, trees, streams, guns – has an indwelling essence which they treat as if it had a personal existence...The Akha do not worship the ancestors; but any who fail to pay due reverence would not be showing proper respect to tradition, and ill-fortune would certainly be in store. By caring for their ancestors – whom they invite to appear at intervals during the year to receive ceremonial offerings of food and drink – the Akha tend and maintain the continuity of the generations, and help to ensure the survival of Akhazang” (4p26-7).

## **7. Adornment**

7.1 Body paint: Not used.

7.2 Piercings: Not used.

7.3 Haircut: Men keep their hair about ½ to 2 inches long (4). The only mention found of women cutting their hair was during their marriage ceremony (2p171-2).

7.4 Scarification: Not used.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): “The most conspicuous feature of an Akha woman’s costume is, of course, the covering for her head. Like their patterned jackets, the decoration of the women’s headdresses reflect various local differences of style (the Loimi type being the most elaborate). Akha women adopt the ornate and extremely becoming bamboo-and-silver headdresses, called ‘pointed hats’, only as they approach the age for marriage. Before that, a girl wears a simple hat – a blue cotton bonnet, decorated at first only with a few coins or cowrie shells, but progressively embellished throughout her childhood with more ornaments. The additions that a girl makes to the decorations are part of a series of changes she makes to her clothing as she grows up – putting on a bodice, then a belt, and finally replacing her bonnet with a pointed hat. These changes may be made on two days of the year only, at the celebrations to mark the New Year in December and at a big festival in August” (4p99-100). “Akha women traditionally wear their finery all day long, even when they are working hard in the fields or the forest” (4p36). “When she has attached the decorations that are lying beside her – silver discs and coins, and a string of dyed chicken feathers – she will place the ensemble in position over circlets of beads and silver coins already on her head. Women rarely remove their headdress except for cleaning” (4p38).

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Both men and women wear embroidered jackets every day, and there is no ritual adornment.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Women wear elaborate headpieces and skirts, while men wear loose pants (4).

7.8 Missionary effect: People that have converted to Christianity live separately from other Akha (1p16).

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Not necessary.

## **8. Kinship systems**

8.1 Sibling classification system: Brother and sister relationships are maintained throughout life (2).

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Polygyny is rare and polyandry does not happen, so there is no sororate or levirate.

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): As stated in the marriage section above, people are not supposed to marry the children of their siblings.

## **9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

-I have cited sources as they are written, which has led to discrepancy in terms used. Dzoema in one source is the same as the founder-leader in another source. A buseh is the same as a headman, who often becomes a reciter when he is forced to retire at the age of 60 (2p110).

-“The dzoema should not come from a family afflicted by moral scandal or other irregularities, among which the Akha count the births of twins or deformed children. They consider all such births against the natural order, and the babies are suffocated at once. This attitude towards twins has much to do with the enormous burden they put on a mother who, in a community that always hovers at a subsistence level, has to go on working in the fields to survive. But it is also part of the larger beliefs by which the Akha make sense of the world. For them, the human

world of the village must be kept separate from the forest world of animals and spirits. Single births characterize human life and multiple births belong to animal life” (4p56-7).

-“That gender is not only elaborated but also organizationally significant among Akha is evident to any outsider. Every house is divided into two rooms, one for men and the other for women. Paralleling this division is that between forest and village. The association of men with hunting and women with rice evident in the order of the Akha house and village is echoed elsewhere... These associations are also evoked in the Akha seasons: the year, like the house, is divided into two parts, one aligned with men and the other with women... The differentiation of men and women is emphasized in everyday as well as ritual contexts: when a man and woman meet on a path, the man should pass on the upslope side and the woman on the downslope side... The association of male with up and female with down is found in the gender of the spirit owners of sky and earth: sky was formed by a male and earth was formed by a female... Male and female appear to be complementary but significant asymmetries emerge. Right, which is associated with men, is considered to be stronger than left, which is associated with women. And up is generally more highly evaluated than down. Furthermore, although men and women are necessarily paired in the Akha world and both sons and daughters are desired, sons are more desired than daughters” (2p354-5).

-Every village has a large swing that is built each year for the Swinging Ceremony in August. “Once the dzoema has inaugurated proceedings by taking a ride on the swing, nearly everyone who wants to can follow suit to signal his or her good fortune that day” (4p156).

### **Numbered references**

1. Bisht, N. S., & Bankoti, T. (2004). *Encyclopaedia of the South East Asian ethnography: Global vision*.
2. Kammerer, C. A. (1986). *Gateway to the Akha world: kinship, ritual, and community among highlanders of Thailand*. Ph. D. Dissertation. University of Chicago.
3. Turton, A. (2000). *Civility and savagery: social identity in Tai States*: Routledge.
4. Grunfeld, F. V. (1982). *Wayfarers of the Thai forest: the Akha*: Silver Burdett Press.
5. Parnwell, M. J. (1996). *Uneven development in Thailand*: Avebury.
6. Goudineau, Y. (2003). *Laos and ethnic minority cultures: promoting heritage*: Unesco.