

CHAPTER IV

GENDER ROLES AND RESOURCE MANGEMENT AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

In the upper natural of Thailand, the ethnic groups, such as the Karen in this research, manage their natural resources to support human existence for thousand years. These ethnic groups lead their life by depending on natural resources, especially soil, water and forest, as well as bio-diversity.

Ethnic communities manage natural resource based on their wisdom. This is not a merely management of the use of natural resources, but there are also dimensions that give value and meaning to activities or management based on local knowledge. We can see this from their spirituality expressed through their rituals that give emphasis on the inter-relationship between human beings, nature and the Absolute placing Human at the center.

This chapter describes natural resource management at community level in Ban Dok Dang by starting with: (1) indigenous wisdom as an exhibition of knowledge applied in various aspects of daily life (part of which have already been described in Chapter 1 and 2); (2) belief and natural resource management, which will discuss customs and traditions related to natural resource management in details, in order to help the reader to truly see and understand the belief that the villagers practice in their life; and (3) resource management in modern pattern, which is an analysis of adaptation of the villagers in the present age.

4.1 Local Knowledge in Natural Resource Management

The way of life in Ban Dok Dang from past to present depends very much on nature. Human being depend on nature and use it for their livelihood, but also maintain a natural balance. This resource management comes from indigenous wisdom accumulated experience and transmtion to younger generations. This resource management is dynamic and always adjusts to social context in time period.

The wisdom of natural resource management includes many aspects. Villagers of Ban Dok Dang depend on indigenous wisdom about natural resource management to survive. This chapter discusses many aspects of this wisdom in the context of natural resource management.

4.1.1 Types of the Soil

Talking about soil, the villagers have thorough knowledge that there are several types of soil and each type is appropriate for either upland farming, wet rice cultivation, orchard cultivation or other types of farming practice. In addition, the villagers also look at the condition of the soil and decide on what type of plants or vegetable to grow as shown in the following examples.

1) “*Hau hko nya*” (decomposed soil) is a type of fertile soil that is loose, blackish with rich nutrients and is good for all types of plants (it is characteristic of soil in bamboo forest). This type of soil can be found on highland where there is tropical moist forest.

2) “*Hau hko mai wa*” (white sandy soil) is a type of soil mixed with white sand with nutrients appropriate for crops like groundnut.

3) “*Hau hko shau shei swi*” (loose soil) is a type of soil that does not stick together like decomposed soil and has less nutrients than decomposed soil. It is good for some crops, such as taro, sweet potato. If it is planned for other crops, farmers have to apply some fertiliser. This type of soil can be found in deciduous forest.

4) “*Hau hko ke*” (clay, mud), this type of soil is sticky and is rich in nutrients. It is good for crops that require much water, such as rice, betel, and so on. We can find this kind of soil in rice field, near ponds, streams and tarns or catchment.

5) “*Hau hko bnau*” (anthill soil) is a type of soil found near anthill. This type of protruded soil is good for chillies and potato.

6) “*Hau hko leu bau bau kel*” (stony soil) is a type of soil that is mixed with stones, gravel and sand. It is poor soil and cannot be used with any crop.

7) “*Hau hko hti ni hti*” (soil near ponds) is a type of soil that holds water and is good for sugarcane and crops that consume much water.

Most of the above mentioned types of soil are found on upland, which is the land of women. Therefore, women have more wisdom in their use and management of upland fields than men do of this soil types. However, while men work on highland to grow cash crops and rice fields divided as rice field in woodland and upland rice field, or rice field in a plain and terrace rice field, they have more wisdom in using and managing cash crops than women do.

4.1.2 Upland Farm

The wife of “*Hif hko*” explained indigenous wisdom in cultivating upland rice and seeds collecting that:

“In growing upland rice, there are several varieties that villagers like to grow. They are sticky rice and white rice. In addition, there is seed collection for these villagers to grow in a plot allocated specifically for seeds. Normally, they will arrange this plot on the highest level or on the top of the mountain for 1-2 rais. At the time of harvesting, they will collect seeds for the next season; the surplus will be kept for domestic consumption. The lower terrace is allocated for sticky rice, about one-fourth or half of a rai for domestic consumption and preparation of dessert for use in rituals. The remaining area is allocated for general varieties that the villagers choose to grow. Most chosen varieties will yield palatable and soft grain. The popular variety is bu’mu’, which is a native rice variety”.

Mu'ka' added that they allocate plots of upland farm for each rice variety. Farming for domestic consumption is done on the upper part of the farm, down in the middle part sticky rice, and other varieties grown in the remaining lowest part of the farm to avoid cross breeding. This is because in upland farming, some grain sown in the pit is not covered and when it rains the uncovered seeds can be washed away and mixed with other varieties, leading to hybridization. The popular varieties are *bu'mu'*, *bu'mu' pho*, *bu'wa*, *bu'su*, and *bu'poloh*, since these varieties give good yield and the grain is of good quality and tasty.

In harvesting, villagers will separate sticky rice from other rice. Harvesting of different varieties is also be done separately since they are able to observe the difference of each variety easier and can use the produce more conveniently. This process of upland rice cultivation mentioned above is an indigenous wisdom that women villagers inherit more than men do.

4.1.3 Herbs

Hpati Panu told a story on an aspect of indigenous wisdom of resource management of Ban Dok Dang villagers, which is so satisfying that they still practice it today. It is villagers knowledge about health and herbs that is directly related to nature, the "Absolute" and fellow human beings. If a villager is sick, the villagers will go to see a traditional healer to try their luck with chicken bone or rice grain to find the cause of the sickness based on a relationship of that person. If there is any wrong doing, a ritual of apology and reconciliation will be offered. At the same time, villagers use herbs to cure that sickness. Normally, women are skilful in this area because they have knowledge about forest, which is full of plants and herbs. They learn this knowledge from their mothers, fathers and the elders in the village.

The midwife represents an essential wisdom carried by women. An example of this is "*Muka*" who is 75 and the wife of an assistant of "*Hif hko*" when the village was established. *Muka* is knowledgeable and a specialist on seeds and midwifery. She has helped deliver babies in the village for over 20 years and also her own three daughters with her husband as an assistant. Her personality is of tranquillity, hospitality and a smiling face.

Muka learned this knowledge from an elderly midwife who asked her to help deliver a baby. At that time, five women went to learn this knowledge, but in the end, *Muka* was the only one who inherited midwifery. Therefore, she has intensive and extensive knowledge about herbs and very often she went into a forest opposite her house and sometimes she walked into the deep forest to collect herbs for her own use to treat her children and grand children as well as others. She is very old and she collect just enough herbs for use. She does not keep the herbs for long term use. Therefore, this practice of herb collecting helps conserve trees in the forest.

At present, there are five midwives in Ban Dok Dang. Some villagers still depend on service of these midwives in delivering babies. Traditional midwives offer prayer to spirits when they are going to deliver babies. Those who are

Christians will also offer prayer to God to ask for blessings of safety and good health of both the mother and baby. In the case of abnormal delivery, they will ask for help from “Sala”¹, normally men, to say magic words and sprinkle holy water for easy delivery. After delivery, she takes good care of both the mother and the baby. These midwives will visit the mothers to see if they follow traditions and customs for abundant blessings and good health.

For gratuity of these midwives, the mother will bring turmeric juice, acacia, sarong and a necklace and give these items to the midwife as a sign of gratitude and respect. If there is a use of magic words, the gratuity will be cash from 30 to 70 Baht including turmeric juice and acacia. However, at present, there are health stations and hospitals so villagers prefer to deliver babies there, because some women sometimes have to do caesarean delivery. Also, at present, there is a road to this village making travel to the health station or hospital convenient. If they have more children, a doctor or nurse will often give advise to them to be sterilised.

4.1.4 Forest

Ban Dok Dang divides its community forest into four kinds for different purposes. The forest area between Ban Dok Dang and Ban Kong Roi, with a distance of 3 kilometres, is a deciduous forest, or called in the language of Karen, “*Kauj Bgei*”. The forest between Ban Dok Dang and Ban Mae Tho Noi, is a distance of 2.5 kilometres, is a tropical moist forest or called in Karen “*K’ne*”. In addition, forest area between “*Kauj Bgei*” and “*K’ne*” forests is further divided as forest called in Karen “*Kauj Bgei Hho*”, which is a deciduous forest used for farming at the beginning, and later is used for cash crop production and rice culture. It is a forest full of *Dipterocarpaceae* and *Shorea*.

In addition, there is also a forest called “*Hpaiv hkof*”. It is a grove with not many trees but they are hard woods. The soil in this area is mixed with stones, gravel and sand. It is laterite and is not good for cultivation of any crop. The soil in “*kauj Bgei*” forest is good for highland farming and vegetable cultivation. Wild products, such as mushrooms and bamboo will grow on this soil. For tropical moist forest called “*K’ne*”, it is a forest area good for farming. Karen also divide this forest area into three sub-groups.

1) “*K’ne mjuj*” is a watershed, which is a very dense forest full of trees. It is classified according to modern science as hill evergreen forest. The soil in this forest area is moist with dense epiphytes and forest floor.

2) “*K’ne hkauf htiv*” or cloud forest. It does not have many trees. It is a spacious forest of tall trees with temperate and humid climate throughout the year. This type of forest is good for highland rice culture.

3) *K’ne hpa* or mixed forest, which is spacious forest with tall trees. It is a forest area that villager prefer to do highland rice culture (Prasert, 1997:54).

¹ “Sala” is a term Karen call a specialist in any particular field, such as fortune telling Sala with chicken bone, or delivery Sala, and so on.

In the past, forest resource management was closely related to traditional belief or tradition that was the mode of farming of the community. It conforms to their universal classification and management. Later, community resource management began to change as it increasingly adopted commercial farming. Villagers expanded their farmland to grow more cash crops. Recently, state agencies came in to control and conduct a survey on forest areas, which it is most likely they will classify forest areas into three categories, namely conserved forest, economic forest and community forest. Inevitably, the occurrence of struggle for power in management of local resources between the state and local community arises. Women came to fight with the men in this struggle as it affects women as much as men. In Ban Dok Dang, several women from all categories of households, who had never attended outside-public sphere, attended meetings to listen to explanations and argue with state officials on the use and management of natural resources in their area. This indicates that their roles in household and community are directly affected by state policy.

4.1.5 Water

Water resource management in Ban Dok Dang is a management of water resource that is closely related to forest. Water can be classified into the following three categories.

"Hti pe htau" (water from hold) is an area where water runs out from a hold or watershed. Villagers believe that the area is a dwelling place of *"Na hti"*, a spirit who is the owner of the water. It is also a sacred place that they respect and hold it as a restricted area which no one is allowed to use the water or that particular area. Whoever offends this regulation will dissatisfy *"Na hti"*, and will be punished with sickness.

"Hti gi tau" (spring) is an area where water constantly runs out from the ground, normally in a thick forest where there are many large trees. The villagers believe that there is *"Nathi"*, spirit who is the owner of and protects the water.

"Hti klo" (stream) is a headwater that flows down to a brook or river. Ban Dok Dang has Dok Dang brook running through the village and Mae Tho and Mae Om-long rivers passing rice field of the villagers. They have built up earth embankment system to draw water into farmland, which is called "traditional irrigation system" (Muang Fai). This is mainly the work of men who contribute their labour to erect the embankment and draw water into rice fields. At the same time, rivers and brooks are also the source of fish, shrimp, shellfish and other aquatic life. Both women and men will help collect food from this source without paying cash to buy it. However, the stock of aquatic life in the brook is diminishing.

A well has been dug near Dok Dang brook when the village was first established in this village for domestic consumption. Later, villager population increased and water in the well was insufficient to meet the demand thus there was shortage of water. Therefore, two more wells have been dug in the village. The responsibility of getting water for domestic consumption is the role of women, girls and boys. At present, the villagers do not like to drink well water as before, because

there is a tap water system connected from a mountain delivering water to the village to replace the dried-up village wells.

Water system management in Ban Dok Dang is related to gender role, in that it is arranged according to the work that each person does. For example, water management in farmland, such as rice field, cash crops plots and upland farms, is the role of men, who take care of it for personal and community use. Water for drinking and domestic consumption is the role of women to manage. When necessary women and men can replace one another.

In sum, natural resource management in Ban Dok Dang has undergone change when indigenous wisdom of the community, its traditional belief with customs and traditions, are intervened by state policies aiming at controlling natural resource management through laws and forestry officials. This has clearly yielded effects on gender role in resource management.

Looking at the reality, in Karen society and cultures they hold that all natural resources are the common asset of the community that every villager has the right to use and protect. They have traditional customs they follow throughout the ages by dividing the areas into parts that they can use as restricted area, which is closely related to their belief in the spirits protecting those resources.

Regarding individual household farmland, women inherit both upland and rice fields. When the rights of possession or ownership in farmland are in the hands of the state, the power and rights to possession that used to belong to women are taken over, which affects all villagers in the community. They have lost their power and rights to possess farmland they inherited from their ancestors. This situation creates insecurity for the community to make its living when depending on natural resources that are controlled by the state.

4.2 Traditional Belief and Natural Resource Management

Ban Dok Dang is a village where the majority of villagers still hold their traditional beliefs with strict practice and rituals related to and conforming to their belief in "*Taj Tti Taj Tau*", as well as their respect in nature and values given to human beings. This belief is closely related to, and binds the way of life, of Karen. They have basic traditions to foster relationship among families, kins and community, which are the source of good relationships and help promote unity in the community. Conserving nature is a way of life of villagers of Ban Dok Dang.

This thesis will present rituals that display power relationship between human beings and human beings, (both women and men), and between human beings and nature in resource management.

4.2.1 Rituals in the Life Cycle

Different ethnic groups around the world, have rites of passage, and rituals, expressing the relationships between nature and human beings, between human being and human beings, and humans with the "Absolute". The Karen have several rituals in their life cycle, from womb to tomb, that express this power relationship.

1. Birth Ritual is an essential custom of the villagers at both the household and community level. If a child is born in the community, villagers in all households will stop their work to congratulate the family and to welcome the new born baby, which is a sign of honour given to the new member of the community. A birth of a child does not merely concern one particular family, but it is an affair of the whole community, and is also a relationship with nature. When a child is born, the parents put the boys and girls umbilical cord in a bamboo tube and tie it to a tree, since it is believed that the spirit of the child will dwell in the tree, and it is thus forbidden to fell the tree. Trees around Ban Dok Dang are bound with spirits of individual villagers. This "*Debo Forest*" represents an intelligent way in which villagers conserve trees and effectively manage their natural resources.

In the birth ritual, there is wrist tying, which is a symbol of formal welcome of the new born as a new member of the family, kin and community. Wrist tying is a gesture that the child is entrusted with roles, functions and responsibilities to the community. The entrusted roles and functions for girls are different from those of the boys.

The birth ritual is, therefore, very meaningful for Karen as it gives values to people, related to nature, or related to the community in a harmonious manner. Villagers of Ban Dok Dang still practice this ritual strictly. Christians, also maintain relationship with nature by continuing this tradition. Both traditional belief and Christian Karen, Put the girls and boys child's umbilical cord under a staircase or a tree, which is a practice of traditional belief that the spirit is at home or in community where that person was born. At the same time, the family, with a new member, will grow a personal tree for that child, which reinforces the community to conserve of nature.

The ritual of tying the umbilical cord to a tree is gender specific. The girl's cord is place with female cloth, cooking tools and household items. The boy's cord is placed with agricultural and defense tools such knives, sickle, and gun Thus at birth, the gender role is determined by the community during the ritual. However, in Ban Dok Dang, the location of placing the umbilical cord is not dependent on gender.¹

¹ There is an on going academic discussion about whether the placement of the umbilical cord is related to gender in Karen communities. In some Karen communities, the placement of the umbilical cord is determined by gender. In these communities, the boy's cord is tied to a tree where as the girls is put under the staircase. This is an example of a gender construct in some Karen societies. The boy is considered to be in the community thus his cord is placed in forest, but the girl is thought to stay in the household so hers is placed below the stairs. This practice need further study in gender relations, as it has not been thoroughly researched in this thesis.

2. Marriage Ritual is a very important ritual. Karen believe that this a ritual is performed once in life according to the practice of monogamy. The Karen also believe that a married life is a perfect life (Chumpol, 1993: 60). Karen are afraid of being single, which can be seen in the community of Ban Dok Dang, only a few people do not get married, possibly due to their health problems or disability from birth.

Marriage will start when a man and a woman love and agree to marry one another, or elders both male and female will arrange a marriage, with consent of the man and a woman. Then, the woman's side will start the talk and propose a marriage to a man by sending elder people to see the man's side to arrange for a date to distil whisky to be used in the wedding. Then, they will also find a good day for the wedding.

The whole ritual of marriage will be prepared by the woman's side. There is the slaughter of pigs or cattle to prepare a reception meal for the whole village. After marriage, the man moves to live with the woman. If the bride and the groom are from different villages, the groom comes to perform the ritual at the house of the bride. He comes with the elders and other villagers. Upon arriving at the village, there will be a drinking ceremony prepared by the bride. Then, the groom enters the house of the bride. Before going up to the house, the bride and the groom have to lay their feet on a stone, then the mother or the elder sister of the bride washes their feet to welcome the bride and the groom and wish them eternal love.

Then, the elder man prays for the "Absolute" to grant blessings upon the bride and the groom, after which there is a reception for all the guests(both male and female). Later, all the guests join in singing. The groom stays at the bride house for two days, after which the couple returns to his village with the elder people and the bridesmaids to build up a relationship with the family and relatives of the groom. The couple also stay at the house of the parents of the groom for three days. Then, the couple goes back to the bride's house and stays there for 1-3 years, after which they build their own house. If the bride is the youngest daughter, the couple will live with her parents for life.

During the wedding, drinking of whisky is the first activity, which is a culture to express unity and close relationship. The host and the guests sit in a circle to drink, small or large depending on the number of friends of the bride and groom. They drink from the same cup and there is a recital of "*U tah*" (folksong) and talk while the elders explain the meaning of marriage that needs love and sharing of happiness and sorrow, forgiveness and mutual care.

This ritual is very meaningful for the life of young people and family. At the same time, Karen take this ritual as a communal event. All villagers will stop their work to take part in the wedding because all households in the community will distil whisky and bring to the house of the bride and groom. Some bring rice, melon

or vegetable and help receive guests and visitors coming from other communities treating them as their own relatives. At the same time, it is also a mutual renewal of relationship with the "Absolute".

As a result of the marriage and emergence of a new family, both man and woman will take part in resource management at the household and community level. At the household level, they start by inheriting assets from their parents, from the woman's or man's side. Both the husband and wife manage farmland, no matter they or their parents own it. In the community of Ban Dok Dang, most married men will come to stay at the women's houses. Therefore, men come to farm on women's land and the production process and the use of natural resources is similar with other Karen community in general. Namely, upland farming belongs to women and rice field belong to men. However, these are not rigid definition.

We can see that the ritual of Karen marriage is the starting point where a man and a woman will take part in natural resource management at the household level. When the new family becomes a formal member of the community, it will also take part at the community level. They might take part in resource management of soil, water and forest with indigenous wisdom or their traditional customs. They might also become members of community environment committee; which is predominately men. At present, more women are becoming members of this committee.

3. Ritual in Time of Sickness is a ritual that villagers strictly observe when there is a sickness in members of their families or kin. It is a ritual that expresses what the sick or his/her kinsfolk, does something wrong or offends the relationship with nature, the "Absolute" and fellow human beings. If this relationship was broken by any wrongdoing, it is necessary to offer a ritual of reconciliation to nature, human beings and the "Absolute" by telling fortune with chicken bone or rice grain (Domatoff, 1976). Men are knowledgeable and skilful in fortune telling and magic words. This ritual is offered to cure the sickness and to check the relationship. Magic words known by all in the village are the magic words to treat sickness, in delivering babies, to stop bleeding, in mistaken eating and to prevent from disturbance of devils. A specialist, called *Sala*, will say these magic words and give turmeric juice and acacia for the sick to drink, or apply on the painful spot, sprinkle on the sick, or give to the sick to bathe in.

In Ban Dok Dang, the specialist in fortune telling and treating sickness with magic words or offering ritual can be the same or different person. At present, there are two *Salas* who offer ritual to cure the sick in the village. When there are sick people in the village, they will come to *Sala* to ask for treatment and offer turmeric and acacia juice and a jar (two bottles) of whisky as gratuity. Most of those who go to see *Sala* are villagers who still practice traditional beliefs. New generation will go to health station or hospital, which is about 4-60 kilometres from the village.

Hpati, one of the *Sala* said that sickness in the modern day is strange. It is a chronic sickness and most villagers have headaches or muscular pain, which was not

found in the past. Sometimes, the sick take medicines or injections, but do not get better. Some villages viewed this symptom as a consequence of chemical fertilisers and pesticides that they applied intensively. However, when a villager is sick and he/she offers a ritual of wrist tying to ask for forgiveness and blessings from the "Absolute", he/she will feel comfortable again.

Hpati added that the practice of fortune telling among the villagers did not decrease considerably, since those who practice traditional belief and Christianity still come to see village fortune tellers to consult their luck and get traditional treatment. New generations also come. It is, however, worrisome if the village is more modern, there will be radical change from the traditional way of life to modern comfortable living, and there will be ignorance of rituals focussing on relationship of human being with the nature and the "Absolute".

4. Funeral Ritual is an important ritual of human being due to loss of a member of family or kin or community. Karen believe that human beings do not belong to the earth. The way of life of Karen is of simplicity and reciprocity, so that when they die they will be happy. If anyone who exploits others dies, he/she will have to find refuge or will not be in peace.

When anyone dies, the villagers stop their work and visit the family to express their condolences. The host will bath the body of the dead with acacia juice and place the body at an open veranda and then place a coin on each eye, on a chest and on the lips of the body. After that, the children and grand children pour water over the heads of the guests and visitors to ask forgiveness for any mistake the dead had committed against them. Then, they wrap the body with a mattress and light the candles and place them at the head and feet to be the guiding light. In addition, the relatives cover the body with clothes of hang them on branches to seek peace. Clothes and personal belongings of the dead are placed aside so that the dead can take them along to the next world and will not be lacking. At night, there is singing of *U tah*; most of the singers and musicians are young people in the village and from outside.

The funeral ritual is an opportunity for young people to meet one another and it is the place they will meet their future partners. They sing the *U tah* for three nights. On the last night before the burial, there is a prayer to exorcise spirits out of the village. On the next morning, the body is then taken to a cemetery. While walking to the cemetery, the villagers not make loud noise. Upon arriving at the cemetery, the villagers fell down trees in the cemetery to build a platform to put the body in. Then, there is a ritual of bidding farewell to the soul and bury or cremate the body in the cemetery. After the burial or cremation, the villagers return to the village. On the funeral day, no one is allowed to leave the village until the ritual is completed.

The death of a villager is the affair of the whole community since the villagers hold that it is a loss of a family member and labour. If the dead is the head of the family it creates great difficulty for the remaining family, because making a living will be more difficult. If the dead is a mother or a wife, those who practice

traditional beliefs will burn down the house or remove the kitchen and kill all her “pigs and chicken”, because Karen believe that a house and domestic animals belong to the woman or the housewife since she is the caretaker. When the owner dies, the animals and the house should be with their owner.

Apart from stop working, villagers of every household will go to the funeral ceremony and contribute rice, money or materials for use in the ceremony as well as animal to the relatives of the dead as a sharing or a symbol of condolences to the family, this is a sign of close relationship practised by the Karen.

The villagers of Ban Dok Dang still realise the significance of ongoing practice of traditional belief. However, the practice has undergone some changes after the entry of Christianity. The funeral ritual can be offered in a Christian style. There is a common prayer and a Requiem Mass for the dead so that he/she who was a convert will rest in peace in the hands of God according to Christian faith. After the ceremony, the body is taken to a cemetery near the cemetery of those who practice traditional belief. This Christian ceremony is also a restricted area.

Every year there is a day of remembrance of the dead for the Christian. Christian villagers will go and clean the cemetery and have a common prayer in memory of the souls. This is different from those who practice traditional belief who offer a memory ritual at the home of the dead without going to the cemetery because it is a restricted area. They only go to the cemetery to clear a space when there is a dead villager and when they take the body to the cemetery for burial or cremation. We can see that though the rituals are different, they have a common basic practice of conservation and management of natural resources.

In short, the rituals of the villagers from womb to tomb are the expressions of belief plus the goal of conservation and management of natural resources, which the Karen have been practising for a long time. They are also dynamic practices because there is modification of tactics to respond to the current social context. Yet, the rituals also help foster new meaning of the offering of rituals to practice their belief. There is a transmission of indigenous wisdom in resource management based on their belief, which is not stagnant but always adapting.

4.2.2 Rituals Related to Nature

In a cycle of one year, especially in cultivation season, Karen will celebrate many rituals to express their respect to the “Absolute”. This section will explain the following rituals.

1. **New Year Ritual:** *Hifh kof Paya* (male) explains that before starting farming, the Karen offer a ritual of *Nif sau hkof*, or a “Ritual of New Year”, which would fall in February or before the forthcoming cultivation season. The male *Hifh kof* is the conductor of the ceremony while the women arrange food for offering. *Hifh kof Paya* told about the significance of *Nif sau hkof* is to inform and request for permission from the spirits of land, road, mountain, forest, soil, water and all living

creatures, as well as the spirit of the nature and human beings. It is also to ask for their protection of nature, especially soil, water and forest, and grant blessings on all villagers who will do the cultivation in the following year. Human beings and animals are asked for good health and a good life, as well as receive a good yield from farming.

On this occasion, *Hifh kof* will discuss with (male and female) villagers about farming in the following year, where farming will be done and how, because there are some restrictions and regulations on farming that the villagers have to observe, which are derived from the belief and indigenous wisdom of the villagers. They will also discuss reciprocal labour practice or "*Ma dao Ma ga*" in the community and among communities, like the community of Ban Dok Dang and Mae Tho and Om-long communities. These people belong to the same kins. The essence of this ritual is a renewal and affirmation of relationship of human being and human beings at household and community level, which also reflects relationship with the nature and the "Absolute" based on the way of life and mode of production.

Concerning *Nif sau hko* ritual, *Hifh kof* will set an appropriate day and time and inform all villagers in the community. Housewives of all families each make a jar of whisky on the eve of the ritual day. They also prepare a pair of chickens and another jar of whisky as well as preparing rice called *Mei toj hpix* (favored sticky rice) made from sticky rice mixed with black sesame and banana filled wrapped with banana leaf.

On the *Nif sau hkof* day, the villagers will wake up early (around 3-4 in the morning). Both women and men help prepare materials for the rituals, such as warming whisky, prepare *Mei toj hpix*, slaughter chicken and put the offerings in a basket made by the villagers themselves. They also prepare clothes for their parents, a bottle of concentrated whisky, chicken, rice and *Mei jok hpix*, farm implements, knife, sickle and musical instruments, drums, cymbals and gong. Each of these implements is meaningful to the life that expresses the way of living, existence and happiness. On this day, the community will slaughter a large animal, such as pig or cow or buffalo, as seen appropriate. All villagers will have a share of this meat. It is taken as an offering at the community level.

On this occasion *Nif sau hkof* started from the household of *Hifh kof* who gave an offering (slaughtered animal for offering) to the spirits (of land and road) that the villagers asked for blessings for members of the family and community. Then, *Hifh kof* ties the wrist of his family members. All family members take part in this activity, otherwise the ritual will not be complete. While tying a wrist, *Hifh kof* give blessing to his family members with good health and unified love and occupation of all family members. After tying the wrist, *Hifh kof* pours whisky and hands it to all family members to drink from the same cup until the bottle is finished. All family members including children and adults, women and men, drink this whisky. After drinking, they share the meal.

Hifh kof strikes a gong or beat a drum to inform the villagers that he has finished the wrist-tying activity. Then, each family offers a ritual to boost morale or call upon a spirit of his family. On that day, *Hifh kof* visits all houses in the community to give blessing on New Year or new life in this year, which is the start of a new cultivation season. They drink and discuss their farming activity and resource management. The celebrants will be the controllers and caretakers of the resources. (Domatoff, 1976:315)

The ritual of *Nif sau hkof* lasts 1-3 days, depending on members of the group who profess traditional belief for whom *Hifh kof* is responsible for offering the ritual. On this day, members of all families stop their work and take part in all stages of the activity, starting from early morning until evening. On this occasion, all households prepare food and whisky to receive their relatives and friends who take part in the ritual, or just visit them. They recite *U tah*, strike gongs and beat drums in a joyful manner.

Nif sau khof is then complete and during this ritual all quarreling is banned. If there is any death of a human being or animal, such as a pig prepared for the offering or a cow or a buffalo dies suddenly without any prior sign of disease, or in case guests finish concentrated whisky before the host, the villagers will take that *Nif sau hkof* as incomplete. If such an event occurs, the elders will meet to fix a new date for *Nif sau hkof*.

Given a possibility of mishaps in the ritual, since there is only one *Hifh kof* who observes complex ritual stages, and there are many members, the villagers appoint *Hifh kof* an assistant who will work with *Hifh kof* in every stage to make the ritual complete.

After completely offering *Nif sau hkof*, the *Hifh kof* is the first one to start tilling the land and the villagers go to help him. Then, members in the community also start to work on their farm. Before farming, an auspicious time is fixed. Before farming, the farmers have to ask permission from the land spirit, or *Hti k'ca kau k'ca*, and erect a small shrine for the spirits of land, water, forest and all creatures to dwell, because they will farm the land which is the dwelling place of the spirits.

Regarding Christianity and resource management, the Christians pattern of production of is adapted to conform to Christian teachings based on traditional customs. We can see this in the farmland of Christian Karen. They make a cross instead of a spirit house as a sign of asking permission from the "Absolute" or spirits of land and ask for blessings for healthy life and good yield.

In addition, there are fewer rituals in the production process of Christian Karen. They offer prayer and thanksgiving to God, or the "Absolute," rather than to *Taj Thi Taj Tau*. If they have committed mistakes to nature of fellow human beings, which is a mistake to God, they will go to a priest to ask for a Sacrament of Confession of Reconciliation to purify their souls and renew relationship with nature and fellow human beings. Practically, some village still practice both Christian

traditions and traditional beliefs by joining their relatives and neighbours in the community in various rituals, such as a ritual of offering to the spirit of tap water, the spirit of traditional irrigation system and rituals for each kind of forest, and so on. This is an adaptation of the villagers in resource management to conform to their belief and real life.

2. Ritual of Offering to the Spirit of Traditional Irrigation System is done before rice cultivation to inform the spirit of water, (*Hti K'ca kao k'ca*) that they will start rice cultivation and ask for blessing that they will get good yield in the cultivation, enough for domestic consumption and receiving visitors. They also ask blessing for family members. The male head of family, who has terraced field, conducts the ritual while the housewife arranges food for offering. Ban Dok Dang will give rituals of offering to about 15 traditional irrigation canals, both smaller ones from which 4-5 households are using the same water to larger one from which 10-12 households are using the same water, and large ones constructed in Om-long and Mae Tho brooks.

According to the belief of the villagers, offering ritual is given in two ways. The groups practising traditional belief will organise a ritual of offering to the spirit of water, land and forest near the irrigation canal. Christians will not give offering to the spirit at the irrigation canal, but will offer a common prayer at home with family members and they will slaughter pig and chicken as offerings to God since they believe that God is the Creator of all, including land, water, forest and all creatures in the world including human beings.

The ritual of offering to the spirit of irrigation canals, according to their traditional belief, starts with households using the same canal. They will discuss with one another to set the time for offering to the spirit, which is the beginning of rice cultivation. Each family prepares various materials for the offering. All households prepare a bottle of whisky. If they use chicken as the offering, all households bring along a pair of chicken. If they decide to use pig, all household work together to find a pig. They also need to prepare betel nut, cigarettes, yeast, whisky, incense stick and water for the ritual.

The offering to the spirit of Om-long irrigation canal is done at the spot villagers constructed a dam to draw water into their rice fields. Male villagers mutually built a shrine to give offering to the spirit, which is built on 6 bamboo poles, three on each side. There are two main poles higher than the others for a roof. The roof is covered by leafs and decorated with flowers all around the shrine. After building, the living male elder, who is the first farmer, or the eldest son who is the heir of the elder, will be the celebrants. He puts betel nut, cigarettes, yeast, whisky, water and incense sticks in the shrine. Then, he puts chicken or pig at the side of the shrine and prays. Then, they kill the animal as an offering and use its blood to spread on the poles of the shrine and pour in the shrine to offer to the spirit of water. Then, they pray again to invite *Thi k'ca kho k'ca* to receive the offering and ask the spirit to dwell in water and land to grant plenty water to feed rice plants and other vegetable to

grow well and give good yield so that their families will have enough to eat with some surplus to treat their neighbours and visitors.

After prayer, the villages start to prepare food by cutting out all internal organs of the offering animals into small pieces and boil them to be offered at the shrine. When the food is cooked, the elder pours out the concentrated whisky and all drink it, women and men, children and adults. This ritual is a sign of unity and a collective use of water in cultivation. After drinking concentrated whisky, they start to eat their meal together, which is the time villagers talk about their cultivation and management of water in rice field of each household, in the household and community. After the meal, they pour the remaining whisky from all bottles brought to the ritual and all finish the whisky to conclude the ritual. Then, all go back home to rest. On the following day, the villagers start cultivation, such as ploughing and sowing.

There is still reciprocal labour in rice cultivation at Ban Dok Dang and neighbouring villages. They spend three weeks to one month to do transplanting because reciprocal practice requires exchange of labour. People are tired in the evening and sometimes the family heads or some young men stay overnight at the rice field or 3-5 days a time, while the housewives stay home to take care of their children and domestic work, as well as coming to help in farming occasionally. Family heads and housewives of some households stay overnight at the rice fields and leave their grown up children with their grandparents and relatives at home.

Villagers tell of their way of life in the past with great joy, since there was water and rain during cultivation season to feed their rice field, which will give yield to feed villagers. Although the brook is not large, it can feed a hundred of people in the village. They affirm that the spirits had power to support nature and human life. However, they said this year the level of water was lower than the previous years. Furthermore, there was no rain. Therefore, they were not sure if they could grow enough rice for their domestic consumption. They only hope they would get enough yield.

The belief, or ritual offerings, are real activities for the Karen. There is an interesting case told by a villager who has seen an event which happened to the family of a widow who practised traditional belief. While in the village, the researcher heard that a housewife was ill and went to visit her. Many villagers also visited her. Her neighbours called her youngest daughter who was living in Chiang Mai to come back and take care of her sick mother. The daughter came back to see her mother, who was not getting any better. On the same day, one of the two cows of the family of her eldest daughter died in the forest, and another one died under her house.

The villagers started to search for causes of such event. In the end, the villagers came to the conclusion that her family did not offer a ritual to the spirit of irrigation canal at the time she should have done. Therefore, she and the animals faced problems and met with ill fortune. Human sickness is explained as a consequence of incorrect relationship with nature and ignorance of traditions and

customs (Domatoff, 1976:314). The informant added that the ritual had to be started all over again. They had to prepare whisky again and the pig prepared for this purpose could not be used for the ritual. They had to find a new pig.

This event was interpreted in various ways according to the idea and attitudes of different groups of people. Those who practice traditional belief gave a reason that this family did not observe a tradition of offering to the spirit of irrigation canal. Christians looked at this event as a health problem of *Mu ka*. The cows died of disease since it was raining every day. Some said the cows ate pesticides farmers sprayed on their tomato.

We can see that villagers of Ban Dok Dang still try to maintain their close relationship with nature and the "Absolute" dwelling in nature and all living creatures related to human beings as shown in the above case. Their expression through the ritual of offering to the spirit of irrigation canal is to recall the values of water that nourishes nature, land and forest. It also nourishes human life. In the ritual of offering to the spirit of water, the villagers discuss how to take care of irrigation canal, as well as management of water in field areas of each household. Water management is based on their beliefs and rituals as an expression their wisdom. They renew this meaning regularly every year. In addition, they also pass this belief to new generation and is still practised until today.

4.3 New Pattern of Resource Management

The current situation of Ban Dok Dang such as the environmental degradation and state intervention by the declaration of the national park, have had serious effect to the villagers. The villagers somehow still try to maintain their traditional values and attempted to reproduce their local knowledge in resource management supported by outside agency. The villagers organized a social movement and initiated activities in resource management in a new pattern by maintaining their traditional belief and value as resistance to state encroachment. They also try to maintain their integrity and a Karen identity in resource management.

4.3.1 Mountain Tap Water Project

Ban Dok Dang is located far away from a big river. When newly settled, villagers depended on well water which was plentiful for over 20 years. From 1975 onward, water started to gradually dry up and was very critical in 1978 when there was a serious shortage of water. Some villagers criticised that a road constructed through watershed has dried up the water source. Some believed that the spirit of water had gone away and dried up the water. Even the well once full of water throughout the year also dried up, but all villagers saw that it was a big problem and it was urgently necessary to address it.

The elders started to talk and consider the issue from their belief in relationship with the "Absolute", which is the starting point of relationship in collective activities or rituals. They discussed if they had made any mistakes in

celebrating the ritual of New Year or *Nif sau hko*, or if there was any villager has celebrated the ritual improperly. In the end, they concluded that if someone did not do it properly they had to celebrate the ritual all over again.

When considering the relationship between human beings and human beings, and human being with nature, the elders started look at young men and women. Did they not commit adultery? Who offended nature, such as using a dog to till the field, or took out skin of a frog to dry and told everyone that he would use it, and so on. Then, the elders looked at young men and women and adults, adults and adults to see if anyone were engaged in quarrels. Have they offered a ritual of reconciliation? If not, they had to offer this ritual first.

However, the elders had an impression that they started to have less relationship with nature. Therefore, they suggested reviving a ritual of offering to the spirit of water, which is a ritual of apology, in order to revive the relationship, as well as reconcile with nature and the "Absolute".

However, some villagers started to look at the changing conditions. They looked at a shortage of water as a result of house construction by the villagers and logging at the watershed area, as well as the increase of population and animals, ect. They believed that these were the cause of water shortage. Therefore, the community went to the district office to seek assistance. They have lodged the case at the district office and received a budget to dig two wells 8 and 12 metres deep, but they still did not get much water. Shortage of water for consumption remained a serious their problem and posed great difficulty for children and women whose task was to draw water for domestic consumption.

Due to shortage of water, villagers had to compete for water. Some had to get to the well at 2 or 3 in the morning to draw water. Whoever woke up earlier would get clean water and those who went there late would not. Those who woke the latest would not get any water. This led to quarrels among the children. Sometimes, the quarrel among the children affected adults and some families had to move out to other villages.

Therefore, the elders discussed impacts of the water shortage is that:

"We are sick and suffered from malnutrition, have diarrhoea, are affected by fire. If we have water, we could grow vegetables, raise pigs, ducks, chicken, cows and buffaloes with good feed. Drinking unclean water creates gallstones. The serious danger is that in summer if a fire breaks out, it could burn down the whole village because the roofs are covered with dry grass".

They discussed some problems that should be urgently tackled first by starting with growing trees in the watershed area. They grew wild banana or any other trees that could help maintain watershed, as well as digging a pond to keep rainwater. These could help lighten some problems, but the main cause was beyond

their capacity to address, an initiative for mountain tap water project to draw water from a big river into the village, which would require the installation of a pipeline across several mountains 4 kilometres from the village with uncertainty of water availability.

School teachers worked with the villagers and district officials to conduct a survey of waterways and found that water can not be drawn. If they really wanted to do it, the budget would be very high (more than ten thousand Baht). This made the villagers hopeless. However, they had written a project proposal and submitted it to members of the Parliament and members of provincial administrative council. They thought when these people came in for their election campaign, they promised to help the villagers. However, they did not get an answer from anyone, except two aluminium tanks from the district given to the village school to keep rainwater, but this could not solve the problem of water.

In 1983, the villagers discussed the issue and agreed to submit the project for mountain tap water to Diocesan Social Action Centre of Chiang Mai, which is a Catholic organisation. Before doing that, they had to conduct a survey to make sure that water would come. After the survey, the villagers were confident that water could come from several channels.

However, in submitting the project to the Diocesan Social Action Centre, there was a condition that there must be a local contribution from the villagers. About half of them were willing to contribute, but the rest were not sure they wanted to give their contribution and wanted to wait until after the water came. The confident group told the unconfident group that if water did not come, all the contributions would be returned. Later, there was a discussion amongst the confident group that they could start the operation, although the ratio of the confident to unconfident groups were about 50-50. They made a decision to submit the project in 1985 with a committee of 6 members, comprising 3 confident and 3 unconfident members. The committee members could help one another, including contribution to the project. Finally, the project received financial support in 1985.

The village of Ban Dok Dang has solved the problem of drinking water in the village by adapting their traditional cultures with modern technology. In 1986, they had implemented a mountain tap water project in the village with financial support from the Diocesan Social Centre. There is one "organic intellectual", or grassroots philosopher named *Hpati Cauni Odocau* (then working with the Diocesan Social Action Centre) and experienced villagers in the community to demonstrate how to install mountain tap water system. The mountain tap water system had to be connected into the village and cross four mountains before entering the village. They used tap to draw water along the levels of the mountain to prove the feasibility as well as explaining the wisdom and science to the villagers.

When the villagers saw that it was feasible, they agreed to start the project on mountain tap water system. When this project was completed, they were very happy that they could draw water from the mountain to use in the whole village,

replacing the dried up wells. All households using water from mountain tap water system are members of the water users' group and the member has to pay a membership fee of 30 Baht per year, which is used to maintain the system. This water system could also be developed for use in agriculture.

After completing the mountain tap water system, the villagers offered a ritual to the spirit of tap water to give thanks to *Taj Thi Taj Tau* (the "Absolute") and *Hti k'ca kau k'ca* (the spirits of water, land and forest) who grant them water. At the same time, it was a ritual of apology to the spirits of nature for any offence they have committed in implementing this tap water project. This ritual was offered with the belief that they respect nature, land, water and forest that are protected by spirits. In the past, Karen would offer a ritual to the spirit of watershed. When they changed to mountain tap water, they continue to pay respect to the spirits. They realised that it is necessary to offer a ritual. Furthermore, the ritual also helps promote unity in the villagers and transmit the belief and traditional practice.

On the eve of the ritual, male village representatives go out to the watershed area where they offer the ritual, which the villagers call "water coming out of the hole" and is 4 kilometres from the village. The villagers go out to clean the area. At the same time, all households spend four days to ferment rice with yeast as material for making whisky, which is done by virgins. And one day prior to the day of the ritual, all households will distil whisky, which is done by housewives or daughters. This whisky is used in a ritual to be offered to the spirit of tap water and to treat their guests at home.

On the day of the ritual, the villagers will wake up early morning to prepare food and do daily domestic work. Both women and men help one another. Women select a good chicken and at least one bottle of whisky to be used in a ritual to the spirit of tap water. In addition, they also bring along kitchen utensils to prepare food and packs of cooked rice. Then, each household goes to the ritual site. Some households can send at least one representative per household, either a woman or a man. Some can walk from Ban Dok Dang, some ask for a ride in cars owned by villagers, which are parked in the forest before the passengers travel on foot for one kilometre.

This ritual is offered every year in April. The ritual will start around 10 in the morning with *Hif hkof*, or a male representative, as a celebrant with a bottle of whisky and two chickens (a rooster and a hen) as offerings in the ritual. Each household brings along a chicken and a bottle of whisky (The Protestants do not bring along whisky because there is a restriction on drinking). These are put together and whisky is placed under the shrine built with bamboo.

During the ritual, all participants drink whisky and eat their meal together. If there is food left from the ritual, they do not take it back home because they believe that if they do, the ritual will not be complete. Food that is offered to the "spirit" is kept at the ritual site so that the "spirit" will receive the offering. This ritual is offered to the spirit of tap water and ends around 2 in the afternoon. Then, the villagers began

to go back to their village and talk with one another and laughter and singing of *U tah* on their way back home. Some women can stop on the way to collect vegetables on the roadside to eat and for animal feed. All of them are happy that they have taken part in the ritual. When, they come back to their village, they visit different homes, drink whisky and talk with one another from one house to another for the whole day, and continue at night.

The ritual of offering to the spirit of tap water is not only merely a ritual of belief, but also has practiced applications requiring into the certain steps in preparation, fixing appropriate time for the ritual. Before the ritual, the villagers prepare the ritual area and there is a meeting to evaluate the use of water in the previous year to see what problems or obstacles need to be tackled. There is consultation and suggestions as well as organising people to take care of water. Each year, two households will take turns to take care of the mountain tap water. Each household contributes 2 baskets of rice as a contribution. However, at present, youth groups of the village take care of the village tap water. Rice contributed to youth group used to raise chickens for the group. Therefore, we can see that the ritual of offering to the spirit of tap water also has a dimension of water resource management of the village.

In addition, the ritual of offering to the spirit of tap water is also an integration of a tradition and ideology of power related to their belief in the spirits dwelling in nature and watershed forest, and new patterns of activities. The implementation of mountain tap water has received a new meaning through traditional ritual of the villagers in water resource management that is related to land, forest and all living creatures, including human beings. It is also an opportunity for the villagers, women, men, children and adults to revive the rituals and meaning. The elders or senior people, give explanation and advice, as well as affirming the meaning of the ritual, which is an affirmation of unity in community and a process of transmitting belief and wisdom of the community in resource management.

4.3.2 Organisation of a Rice Fund

Amidst ecosystem disruption caused by destruction of the nature, especially forest, the villagers faced a problem of water shortage. In addition, they do not have enough farmland, such as limited rice field and cash crop plots; therefore, the yield was not sufficient for domestic consumption throughout the year. The shortage of rice for domestic consumption has been a longstanding problem of the villagers, with a different degree of seriousness depending on agricultural inputs and yield they get in each year.

However, application for financial support to the mountain tap water from Diocesan Social Action Centre involved certain conditions. The villagers had to give contribution to the project per their ability, which could be materials, labour or cash. In this regard, the villagers agreed to contribute labour and rice grain as the sign of their participation in the project. When the mountain tap water system was completed, the villagers had gathered rice and discussed with the Diocesan Social

Action Centre to use rice they had collected as local contribution from the villagers to set up a village *rice group*, or generally called *rice bank*. Both man and woman from all categories socio-economic of households help each other to operate this activity.

This activity was meant to address the problem of insufficient rice of the villagers and to give loans to those who do not have enough rice to borrow in rotation per their need. The loan charges an interest, in rice or cash, at the rate of 2 baskets of rice interest for ten baskets of rice loan. The villagers have mobilised rice from the villagers plus the rice contributed by the Diocesan Social Action Centre to set up as the central rice reserve.

If we look at rice group management of the villagers of Ban Dok Dang, which also provides loan in rice, we can see that it is the same as a capitalist method of charging interest and they are used to borrow from outside and have to pay interest. However, this rice group had an idea different from the capitalist system; mutual aid. The repayment of two additional baskets of rice will be used as a revolving fund to help all those in the village who do not have enough rice. They take this practice as a transmission of an ideology of mutual sharing in time of crisis and great difficulty of the community, with a committee comprised of villagers in charge of the operation. At the same time, they have shared their rice to set up a rice bank of Ban Huay Hoi in Sanpatong district, which is an extension of the rice merit fund in the network of Karen communities.

In 1993, the rice bank had to stop its operation because there was not enough rice to meet the need of the villagers who could not repay rice in time. This is because they had a problem of lean grain. The main cause was artificial rain when rice was flowering. However, the villagers revived the operation of rice bank again in 1994 and continue until today.

Furthermore, the villagers have discussed with the Diocesan Social Action Centre about crisis and changes taking place, be they the problem of shortage of rice and the adoption of capitalist pattern of production. In particular, the good relationship of community members, which was once characterised by mutual aid, is more and more influenced by commercial production. As a result, everything needs cash. Vested interest is hidden under fraternity. Though assistance to widows and orphans still exists, it is with greater difficulty. Therefore, the villagers mutually decided to revive the value and practice of fraternity amidst the capitalist economy to foster mutual sharing among the community members. They also decided to set up a rice merit fund to maintain the values of sharing, especially to the less-fortunate.

When considering the Karen belief about rice, the ritual of rice merit fund is a revival of an ideology related to rice giving itself up so that others may have life. Rice dies three times. In the first death, rice dies when the grain decomposes so that a rice plant will grow up from it. In the second death, when rice is harvested, its straw and stem serves as animal feed and nutrient for other plants. In the third death, the pounding of the grain and the cooking to be food nourishing human beings.

This sacrifice of rice gives life to human beings. It is a giving of life and religious values. When human beings eat rice, sharing is the religious value. In the operation of the rice merit fund, the villagers pool their rice together from inside and outside the community. Both human beings and rice come together. It is a gathering of human and rice spirits, since the villagers believe that in both human beings and rice there is "spirit" as the essence of life, which is the power in organisation to solve the problem of rice, and can be extended to activities in the environment.

The concept and practice that conformed to the way of life of Karen in the past have changed when human beings adopted a capitalist mode of production based on competition and individualistic vested interest. It is also a type of production that exploits human beings and nature. It has great influence on the life of Karen at present. The operation of this rice merit fund is a concept and practice to fight against capitalist system penetrating into the life of Karen at household and community level. This concept is affirmed every year by organising a rice merit fund as part of the network of Karen rice merit fund.

Karen believe that rice is an essential factor for human life, since it nourishes life. Therefore, they have so many legends and "tah" (folk poetry) related to rice. In the conceptual understanding and belief of Karen, rice is not merely material serving as food, but rice has life and gives life. For example, a single rice grain grown into the ground can grow up as a new rice plant, which will then flower and shoot out panicles full of grains and can nourish human life. A Karen legend tells that rice has its spirit coming from the "Absolute", or *Taj hti taj tau*. The legend goes:

"Once upon a time, rice and money quarrelled as to who would be the master of human beings. In the end, rice lost because human beings prefer money. Therefore, rice went to hide in a cave and caused rice to disappear so human beings did not have rice to eat and they had to find something to eat. But they were not full like eating rice. Then, human beings asked a kind of bird to bring rice out of the cave so that they would have rice to eat again. They promised the bird that if it brought out the rice, they would feed the bird, and when rice is ripe in harvest season, they would allow bird to eat the grain. Therefore, the bird went into the cave and brought out the rice to human beings. The bird was small and could take out a small volume of rice per trip and the cave opening opened at intervals. Therefore, the bird had to wait for the opening to fly in and out of the cave. It flew several trips to carry the rice out, but it made a mistake and its neck was pressed by the cave opening and became disabled. We can clearly see that this kind of bird is different from other birds as its stomach is at its occiput". This legend is told in the following "tah" folk poem(Thaworn 1997).

*Large rice grain is under the water.
 Big rice barn is under the water.
 Looking for it in a day but can not find.
 Looking for it for two days but still cannot find.
 Transform into a bird.
 Taking rice back from underwater.*

Karen see that rice is essential to human life from womb to tomb. When human beings think that money is more important than rice that nourish life, a problem of shortage occurred, which affected the belief in a relationship with the nature and the "Absolute" when human beings ignore this reciprocal or interdependent relationship.

The above legend is similar to several legends of lowland people on rice that talk about rice that gives life to human beings in the world (Aiern 1994, quoted in Ariya 1999:59-63). There is a legend telling that rice was a female angel descending from heaven. The grain was as big as an ash pumpkin and human beings did not have to grow or harvest. Rice would fall down from mountain to human beings and they only had to prepare a barn to receive it. When rice was falling down, human beings waited to collect rice and store it in their barn. It was like this for a long time. One day, human beings started to become selfish and competed against one another. Whoever was faster, they could collect more rice and who were slow were able to collect less rice. A widow waited to collect rice, but she was too slow and could not compete against others. Therefore, she was upset and stepped on and broke the rice grain into small grains as it is today.

Lowland people also have legends telling that rice has life or a spirit that gives life to human beings who eat it. The elders and parents will keep telling this legend to their children while growing and eating rice. They always tell that,

"Rice was a goddess. The rice we eat was a goddess who descended from heaven to dwell in human world. The time came when she was coming to dwell in human world, she saw that human beings had a difficult life and lacked food to eat. So, she told 'Siva', the Supreme God, that she was sympathetic to human cause and would like to devote herself to feed human beings. 'Siva' responded to her request by chopping her body up and threw the pieces of her body to human world. Her pieces have become rice grain to feed human beings until today. So, every time we eat rice we have to be grateful to it as the goddess sacrificed herself to become rice to feed human beings."

This is a belief held through generations and there is an explanation of the meaning of rice with spirit or soul. When farmers grow or harvest rice, they offer a ritual of inviting the spirit of rice, or "grandma of rice spirit". The villagers give values to the rice for its 9 benefits, which are called 9 rice grains.

- A rice grain is kept for domestic consumption.*
- A rice grain is kept for help relatives and neighbours and making merit.*
- A rice grain is kept to exchange for ornaments and money.*
- A rice grain is kept for helping the begging poor.*
- A rice grain is kept to support sons to get ordination and stay in monastery.*
- A rice grain is kept to support the coming of millenarian God (fraternal society).*
- A rice grain is kept for selling in market and exchange for other consumer goods.*
- A rice grain is kept to build city wall (build security of community).*
- A rice grain is kept for charity (to make merit).*

The legends of both Karen on rice and lowland people are affirmed in rice donation activity organised by Buddhists and a rice merit fund of Christians, which explain that rice has a spirit, life and values. When we eat rice, we also eat values. Human life must hold on morality, which is expressed in their daily practice. In the rice merit fund activity of Christians, the death of Jesus brings salvation to humanity, liberated from sins to new life. It is comparative to the value of death of rice. The sacrifice of rice gives life to human beings. Therefore, when we eat rice, which gives itself up for us, we have to eat its values as well and we have to express these values in our daily life.

The activity on rice merit fund is to pool rice together for sharing with those who do not have enough to eat and extend this sharing to other communities. The rice merit fund of Ban Dok Dang was started in 1997 with 350 members. It could mobilise 86,478 Baht in cash and 322 baskets of rice grain. These resources were allocated in the following ways.

Activities in the Village

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| - Welfare for widow and orphans | 5,700 Baht
70 baskets of rice |
| - A revolving fund of Ban Dok Dang | 24,423 Baht |
| - Contribution to a fund of a conservation forum of Ban Dok Dang | 3,000 Baht |
| - Contribution to fence repair of Ban Dok Dang School | 5,000 Baht |
| - Contribution to building of a conference room | 5,000 Baht |
| - Contribution to a rice bank of Ban Dok Dang | 200 baskets of rice |

Extension to Other Villages

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| - Contribution to Maepon childcare centre | 30 baskets of rice |
| - Urgent assistance in case of a fire in Ban Pongsamit village | 3,000 Baht |
| - Contribution to a regional fund of Chiang Mai zone | 13,000 Baht |
| - Contribution to a long-term fund (at regional level) | 6,000 Baht |

The Rice Merit Fund has developed into a network with a committee at the village level. There are also representatives appointed to a regional committee on Karen Rice Merit Fund, which is divided into two zones (Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Sorn). The network of rice merit fund has been extended to environmental dimension in both zones. It implemented activities based on traditional belief in resource management. It has also co-ordinated with non-government organisations and state agencies as earlier mentioned.

The rice merit fund of Ban Dok Dang is related to management of natural resources and environment. Rice that they have eaten and made merit together are grown in farmland and highland in forest area, depending on water from the brooks and rainwater, as well as diverse nature that nourish the rice plants. Therefore, the caretaking of rice should also extend to the issue of nature and environment and human beings, as well as villagers traditional beliefs who see human beings in close relationship with nature and the "Absolute".

The belief of the villagers is closely related to nature and the "Absolute", such as the spirit of water, the spirit of forest and mountains, the spirit protecting land and all living creatures, based on a good relationship of mutual respect with ongoing transmission of this value and belief. Karen transmitted this concept of conservation of nature to their younger generations in the following "tah".

*Our ancestors in the past,
Trees going to die they could save,
Maintain and replant trees,
Grow Bo and Banyan trees,
Stream will dry up,
Drying stream will be saved,
Conserve in a proper way,*

*Our ancestors in the past,
Trees going to die they could save,
Conserve and replant,
Birds will come build their nest,
Land will lose,
Losing land will be conserved,
Not long the village will prosper.*

4.3.3 Community Organisation of a New Model for Resource Management

The community has organised informally to implement activities based on their traditional beliefs. It has also implemented newly initiated activities in the community to respond to the reality of situation and society in each era, such as the group of housewives (as described earlier). There is also an organisation to conserve natural resources based on indigenous wisdom of the villagers and practical regulations. This is in reaction to the state policy which prohibited the people to cultivate their own land. It has set up a community organisation as an adaptation of villagers in collaboration with various groups and organisations to maintain its existence in the present day society. This newly initiated organization is established by modern-educated men with support from an outside agency such as DISAC-CM. Later, the women become more involved in these organizations. At present, some women have become the leader of these organizations. This part will present groups and organizations directly related to resource management in the community.

1. Youth Group

Youth group takes part actively in natural resource management in the community. *Le Po*, a member of the youth group who is 23 years old, is a young man who had an opportunity to get his education with support from his family and a scholarship from outside until he finished his education in agriculture at Sanpatong. At present, he is studying agriculture at Ratchapat Institute of Chiang Mai. *Le Po* is active in youth activities. He initiated a chicken raising and fish raising projects in his community as common activities of the youth group and to earn some income for the group and its members. The villagers come to buy chicken from the group throughout the year for their rituals or food during cultivation season. It is also the same for fish. At present, fish is very scarce in the brooks near the village. Traders from Hod District come to sell fish and other food items in the village at higher prices. Young people initiated fish raising project as a source of protein for the villagers.

Youth group of Ban Dok Dang has 32 members male 20 and 12 female. It is a very active group in the struggle and demanding recognition environmental issues. *Hti Ka]'loo*, a former youth member of Ban Dok Dang, finished his master degree in Social Apostolate from the Philippines and is presently working with the Diocesan Social Action Centre, told us a story that:

"Youth group has formed new generations. The first is the generation of Hpati, who is now about 48-50 years old and first organised the youth group in 1975. It is the group that protested against reforestation program of the Department of Forestry, which planted trees on farmland of the villagers. Young people and the villagers mutually grew native trees around their village. Though the youth group was not organised formally at the beginning, it has formed new generations of young people. Senior youth would persuade young people to join the youth group. They visited young people at their homes to talk with them in all matters, as well as teasing like young people and groups activities, village problems and farming."

At present, school classes are also involved in the youth group activities. Seven young women and men in the village are studying at high school level in non-formal education. They go to class as a group every Saturday at Ban Giewlom, 30 kilometres from the village. In rainy season, travelling is very difficult and they inform their teachers of this difficulty. Young boys go by motorbike to report on behalf of the others and fetch lessons for their fellow young in the village to study.

At present, the youth group is responsible for mountain tap water system of Ban Dok Dang. They take turns to monitor the tap water system of the village if it is in good condition. If there are any problem of dirty water or clogged tap, or there is any information or complaint made by villagers, the youth group will go to help solve the problem.

Concerning the role in resource management of community, many members of the youth group are also members of the village committee, such as chairperson and secretary of the village committee of Ban Dok Dang, members of administration, environment, development and defence departments, and so on. Youth members who are on village committees are all men because men have more chance to attend training, it is more convenient for them to work for the village because they do not have to take care of domestic work. At present, there are so many training programs often organised by state agencies and non-government organisations related to village management. Normally, it is men who attended these training sessions. Young women are active in implementation of activities and meetings. Only a few young women share their ideas in the meeting, but they take part and have more roles when they become housewives, because of a current attitude that young Karen women should be quiet, tidy and primarily take care of domestic work. Any young woman talking too much and going out of their home very often will be seen as behaving improperly as women.

From the experience in working with young Karen women, the researcher can conclude that young Karen women at present dare to express their ideas more than before because they have education and experience in contacting outsiders. Moreover, their mannerism is still under the supervision of their parents and neighbours in the community.

However, some young people in the community of Ban Dok Dang go to work in Chiang Mai to find jobs and many of them take this opportunity to continue their education. However, these young people have a closed relationship with their village. At the beginning, they might want to take part in a wrist-tying ritual of the family at New Year or a ritual of the sick where all family members have to be present. At present, families holding traditional belief have chosen dates convenient for most of their children to take part in rituals.

Interviews show that most young people come back home four times a year on average. Some come back home every month, but some only once or every two years because of low income and it is difficult to ask for leave. For example a 25 years old man describes:

"I have to persevere because I bought a motorbike on instalments", "I have worked for eight years in six urban gas stations and could buy a motorcycle as my asset. I did not have any savings. While working in the city, I have gained much experience and learned what is good and bad. Sometimes I had a joyful life. Instant noodle was my staple food. When I paid off all instalments, I returned home. I want to stay home, though it is hard work, but I do not have to be an employee. It is a free life. But, at present one needs cash to pay for daily expenses. Cash crop cultivation involves high risk. Now, I have to think how I will live my life."

Twenty young people staying in the city got organised. Apart from organising study sessions on social aspect, they also analyse situation in local community, village and urban life. Each one saves 30 Baht per month. This savings is for activities and meetings and serves as a revolving fund to provide loan in time of urgent need, such as sickness, tuition fee, paying off loan when there is financial problem, as well as to contribute to village activities, and so on.

2. Establishment of a Village Committee

Lessons learned from past community development helped the villagers to reflect on potentials of community members in developing strong community. They worked with education community members who are able to analyse causes of problems affecting the community, and mutually identify common solutions. They realised that only a community can solve its own problems. Therefore, they decided to form a village committee in close collaboration with related agencies to develop their village in all aspects. The structure of the village committee of Ban Dok Dang and its plan of activities are listed below.

1. Education department
2. Religion and culture department
3. Defence department
4. Environment department
5. Development department
6. Public relations department

This village committee of Ban Dok Dang has organised educational process and prepared for a formation of village committee by studying and analysing situation of the community in all its dimensions. They have selected their representatives to be in the village committee, which comprised village representatives from all economic status. Also important is that there are more women members in this village committee, which in the past no women had an opportunity to take part. This committee takes action discusses. In reaction to the affect of the change on their current situation with a serious affected to the villager and how they can maintain their integrity as Karen community.

4.4 Conclusion

Resource management at the community level in Ban Dok Dang is based on relationship of human beings with nature, and the belief in the "Absolute" dwelling in nature. It is this value that gives life to human beings and nature. Both women and men in the community have indigenous knowledge about resource management, which is closely related to the life cycle of human beings from womb to tomb. It is related to nature, land, water, forest and biodiversity, based on a management system with an ultimate goal of conserving and managing natural resources. This knowledge has been practiced from the past untill present. Although this knowledge is decreasing, the villagers still practice it for expressing their belief and conservation and management of natural resources. This is a dynamic practice because there is

modification of tactics to respond to the current social context through their local knowledge

Natural resource management is traditionally expressed in rituals to pay respect to the "Absolute" dwelling in nature and human beings, such as the ritual of *Nif sau hko* on New Year and a ritual offered to the spirit of irrigation canal. It is an affirmation of the value of nature to human beings who have to foster good and reciprocal relationships, leading to forms for discussion and sharing of ideas on resource management. In the ritual, the males are from rich and middle class families are the leader while females from all types of households are arrange the food for offering. For the Buddhism and Christianity woman of each category household have become an attendee while the men have a major role in the ritual. At the same time the new beliefs are also strengthening womens ability in understanding the social situation and organizing womens movement in the community to foster their capacity in the present day.

In new models of natural resource management, the villagers have integrated traditional beliefs of the community into the new pattern of resource management. An example of this is the mountain tap water project and rice donation merit fund. These activities, including the conservation and management of natural resources, are a reaction of the villagers' resistance to the state encroachment over the resource policy which prohibits the people to cultivated on their own land. The villagers set up social movement in the community as an adaptation in collaboration with various groups and organisations to maintain its existence in the present day society. This newly initiated organization is established by the modern-educated with support from outside agencies such as DISAC-CM. At present, the women are more involved in these organizations and some of the women have become the leader of these organizations. They have the dimension of values inherited from the past, which give new meaning and practice in the present age. At the same time, they have drawn lessons on resource management and development in the past. This was helped the villagers to be responsible for their own community and pushed them to set up a village committee comprising village representatives of both women and men from rich, middle class and poor households in developing their village in a holistic manner, In the end, this will strengthen their community and maintain balance of nature.