

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to understand the transformation of gender roles in resource management of a Karen village in northern Thailand. The objectives of the study are to study external conditions that effect the way of life and resource management; to study the Karen gender role in resource management; and, to study the transformation of gender role and women's adjustment to foster sustainable natural resource management.

The Karen of Ban Dok Dang established their community in 1936. Most of them migrated from Ban Om-long to stay close to their cultivation area. Later, the migrants came from Ban Mae Tho Noi, Ban Om-long Klang and the neighboring Karen villages. Under the changing socio-culture context, there is a process of development in resources management.

The villagers of Ban Dok Dang are practicing subsistent agricultural production for their consumption and self-reliance. They also forage forest products and hunt wild animals for consumption. Furthermore, some of the Karen men go out to work as laborers in logging company all over upper northern Thailand. Their way of life is related to nature and "the Absolute" or "Guardian Spirits" which are expressed through rituals in the production and passage of life. Furthermore, the male "Hif Hkof" is a conductor in the rituals and also a governor of villagers and resource management, while the female Karen arranged food for offering as well as checked the perfection of the rituals.

The resource management is based on their belief and experiences accumulated as "local knowledge or wisdom" relating to practical regulations for utilizing and balancing nature as well as respecting "the guardian spirits" who reside on the watershed. Both Karen men and women have equal roles in resource management. While the women concentrate on upland cultivation, the men concentrate on constructing terraced field.

The Karen resource management at Ban Dok Dang has changed according to the state policy that declares centralized and restricted forest acts, and also sends government officials to control the forest. The policy of the state control over resources in this area started from 2 projects: soil road construction project and pine plantation project to solve opium growing, deforestation, and swidden cultivation problems. The state had promoted and encouraged the highlanders to grow cash crops with modern technology and practicing permanent cultivation.

Once the restriction policy of the state on natural conservation was implemented the declaration of the national park has put strong pressure on the villagers to cease their rotation swidden cultivation system. As a result the villagers are in a disadvantaged position, therefore some of them become involved in

commercial production systems. The commercial production, or cash crop production, absolutely depends on outside factors for instance the means of production, loan and market system. The villagers who can grow cash crops are those who have a large amount of cattle and cultivation fields both; upland and terraced fields. Consequently, the cash crop production causes class differentiation in the community according to the amount of cultivation field, income, and debt. There are 4 sub-class of the villager; rich, middle, poor, and land-less households.

The rich and middle-class households have access and control over their resources because they have their "means of production" such as terraced field, upland field, cattle, and elephants. In the upland field, they decrease rice production, but increase cash crop production, because they think that rice production is less productive than cash cropping. Furthermore, the rich households become "a middleman" between the capitalist and the villagers. These households borrow the money from the capitalist and cooperatives and agricultural bank for social climbing and cash cropping even though they invested highly to meet fluctuation of product price. At the same time, their health and the environment are contaminated from the use of chemical fertilizer and insecticide (Chapter III).

At the same time, the poor and land-less households still make a living traditionally, because they have less access and control over natural resources. Anyway, they utilize and depend on nature according to their belief. Comparatively, their lives are depend less on the outside, unlike the rich and middle-class households. Apart from being the households which are able to maintain the way of life that depends on nature, they also help to maintain the balance of nature. But the policy of restricted forest area declaration over their community in 2002 caused anxiety amongst the poor and landless households, especially women who lost their rights over their resource, which is the only source of their survival. Therefore, they are trying to find out alternative ways for their living, some of them go to work as a laborers in the city, or send their children to the labor market.

Moreover, the cash crop production has caused increasing differentiation of gender roles especially the role of women in rotation swidden cultivation is minimized. The more the Karen men are involved in commercial agriculture, the less the Karen women play a major role in production. Her status becomes inferior to men. The Karen women work harder both in upland and terraced cultivation, especially in the rich and middle-class households. The Karen men have access and control over resources in the households more than the Karen women. For the poor and land-less households both men and women become wage laborers in and outside the community.

In the public sphere, the changing gender roles, transform from men and women having equal roles in domestic and public sphere. Women having more role in domestic sphere and upland cultivation, while men are primarily engaged in cash cropping, and less in domestic sphere. Presently, the women dare to protect their rights to cultivation land, especially upland fields. They attended the meeting with men, and assist men in bargaining with forestry officials regarding the rights to

natural resource management based on local knowledge or wisdom. They claim that local control over resource management can preserve resources sustainably, and at the same time, it does not ignore human being. Furthermore, the villager can participate and manage the resources of the community equally for communal identity and survival. Unfortunately, the state officials ignore this claim and continually declare "preserved forest areas".

Apart from the changing class and gender roles in resource management of Ban Dok Dang some of the villagers converted to Christianity and Buddhism. They harmoniously apply and articulate this "new belief" to the traditional one. On the other hand, the new religion made men become more active and become the performer in the ritual while women become an attendee. Through Christianity women have opportunity in education training to help them to analyse and understand their situation. In terms of education, women are more active, they have more opportunity to leave their village, and this puts women in the disadvantageous position because women are out of their local context. There is no longer any continuity in terms of the mother-daughter relationship, thus no continuity on local knowledge transition. Further more the decreasing women's role in upland cultivation adds disadvantage to women's status in Ban Dok Dang. (Chapter V).

The emergence of a new religion's movement in the village, or through out the world, is a human articulation which uses religious mechanism for adaptation in changing context. This is all for their identity and survival.

State intervention, the encounter of commercial production causes serious affect to the villagers resource management, and other dimensions especially the changing gender roles in resource management. Villagers have reorganized the group and reformulated the regulation of the conservation group based on their traditional values of community integrated with modern patterns of resource management. One example of this is the mountain-water supply ceremony and "Kong Boon Kao" (Rice Donation Merit) (Chapter V), which emphasizes on both conservation and culture value; and tradition pattern and new pattern dimensions. At the same time, in the ceremony, they sum up the results from resource management and development in the past, which, all women and men are aware of to take responsibility in community affairs, especially conservation activities, for the solidarity of the community and balancing relationship between human beings and nature.

At the same time, the villager has to confront the state land control policy. The state intends to declare "Mae Tho National Park" over this and neighboring areas in 2002. From this policy, as well as former forest management policy of the state, the villager is forced to establish "Environment and Nature Conservationist-Village Group" to revise their own knowledge and wisdom and express their ideal of "environmentalism" to the public in reaction to the state policy in resource control and the demarcation of the nation park.

Both men and women are side by side, in operating the natural conservation projects, such as forest fire control and forest firebreak making. Moreover, they establish "village committee" to take responsibility on sustainable resource management with both men and women in the committee. (Chapter V).

6.1 Major Findings of the Study

Based on the results and experiences of this study, there are four major findings.

6.1.1 Presently, the Karen resource management under Thai state policy on restricted forest area, causes the villagers to lose their local knowledge and local control over natural resources. The villagers have to change from traditional practices to the modern law and regulation. The villagers are excluded from cultivating land in upland fields, because of the state demarcation for conservation area. This is a process of declaration of Mae Tho National Park in the year 2002. It causes a serious effect to the villagers, especially the poor and land-less households who lost the power in access and control over natural resources. The loss of their local knowledge in utilizing and keeping the balance of nature resources is related to the production in the upland field which is the only source of their survival.

At the same time, the state policy in controlling over natural resource has caused a changing gender roles in resource management. Women, who practice rotational shifting cultivation, preserve nature and biodiversity with local knowledge. The women play a main role in every step of the upland fields cultivation for their consumption. When the state announced the conservation area in the upland areas which is a cultivated area of the villagers. Villagers, especially women, lost their power in access and control over resources.

The women are responsible for upland fields which have limited area and risk confronting state officers. Some of the villagers are going out to work as wage laborers after cultivation, while the men mainly concentrate, and spend most of the time, involved in the commercial production and don't have time to cultivate in the upland field as in the past.

6.1.2 The cash crop production which was promoted by both capitalist and the state causes class differentiation to the villagers of Ban Dok Dang, because some of them have more access and control over their resources than the others, especially with terraced and upland fields that have irrigation water. They have former capital to invest in cash cropping such as cattle and elephant. The rich and middle class household are therefore growing cash crops.

The villagers of Ban Dok Dang, from the rich and middle class, mostly grow cabbage, tomato, and sweet-bell pepper as cash crops using the resources intensively. This trend leads to unsustainable development. The rich and middle-class households have access to the means of production, they have to use a large amount of money for production. Some of them use their own capital but some of them

borrow from the Chinese traders but they all have to confront price fluctuation. Finally, they are all in debt. Consequently, some of them go to work as wage laborers, both inside and outside community. The poor and land-less households not only cultivate traditionally, but they also go to work as wage laborers after the rice cultivation, as the middle-class households do. This means that in the changing context, the villager is forced to go to the city and works as a wage laborer more and more.

6.1.3 The promotion of cash crop production, and the new technology, causes gender differentiation, because this type of production is appropriated to men. The men can access and control the resources in the domestic sphere at the household level by exercising power in making decisions on financial matters. In the past women and men would consult each other for making a decision on agriculture production and women took care of money. Presently, men play a main role in every step of cash crop cultivation (especially selling and financing management) in keeping and allocating money for the family consumption and debt. Women have less of a role in resource management because they are only involved in a few steps and know very little about family finance and receive only a small amount of the money after paying the debt.

Many of the families who entered commercial production are of the younger generation. The old generation are familiar with subsistence production and they don't like to be involved in cash crop production, while the young people are trying to practice cash crop production as an alternative way to cope with the present situation and to increase their family income. Some of the rich and the middle class households have young men engaged and responsible for household financing and make the decisions in production at the household level. The more Karen men are involved in commercial production, the less the Karen women have a role in decision making and financial matters. The women's status becomes inferior to men.

6.1.4 The adjustment of the villagers of Ban Dok Dang in resource management.

There are several forms of resource management of Ban Dok Dang, both at the household and community level. Some are expressed in the form of belief, traditional practice, or ritual. They villagers organized in a modern form at, namely the *"Nature and Environment Conservationist-village Group"*, to express their identity as "real environmentalism". Both women and men work together in this group. The villagers negotiate with the state forest officers to campaign for their rights over natural resource management. They focus on human being as a center, that can co-exist with nature and relate to nature and spirit. This is the discourse against a main concept of the state policy in resource management. Therefore, in Ban Dok Dang, the villagers are adapting resource management between the traditional and modern mechanism.

From empirical data and information, this phenomenon can be described as that the villager identifies the relationship into two modes of production: one is the

traditional relationship and the other is the capitalist relationship. The traditional relationship is used for subsistence production, the capitalist relationship is used for cash crop production. This means that there are 2 modes of production system in the community. Most of the villagers of Ban Dok Dang have entered both cash crop production and also cultivate a local species for consumption in the upland fields and in the terraced fields. There are 2 systems of production for their survival under the changing of socio-cultural context. The Karen use the exchange of labor for subsistent production and use wage labor for cash crop production. Moreover, while they have to decrease rice cultivation area they also increase the cash crop production area in the upland fields. Some are trying to find out a sustainable way by practicing agro-forestry, integrated farming and practicing traditional belief which emphasizes the relationship of the people, nature and spirit in their production. Every village has its own development which the villagers is adjustment to the existing mode of production for the survival of their family and community.

The relationship among the villagers has not changed much, because the villagers have respectful belief in the absolute beings' which dwell in nature, and human beings, by helping each other such as labor exchange, land distribution and contribution to the poor people and the ritual attendant. Analytically, the kinship system, as well as traditional practice, is still practice in Ban Dok Dang. They also share a spiritual cosmos with their relatives.

6.2 Theoretical Discussions of the Findings

6.2.1 In Thailand, the growth-oriented development, or modernization has been the main stream concept, or theory, of development for a century. However, the concept has been questioned by non-government organizations and some donor agencies since 1970s because such development makes only the minority urban center benefit while the rural majority are still left in poverty. After the economic crash in 1997, the best way of development was seriously questioned in Thailand.

There are three major concepts or theories of development against growth oriented development. These concepts pay too much attention to only a certain aspect of social life at the expense of others. While, the Buddhist approach tends to focus on the individual level in contrast to the collective level as the community approach does, the community rights approach focuses on usufruct right on natural resource management.

However, the villager does not receive or accept all of the development concepts absolutely. In other words, the main stream development concept does not dominate the local concept. Villagers have selected a development concept through their awareness of which concept is most appropriate to their local concept. This has become the so called "integrated concept" emphasize on local control over natural resources. The local control is related to power relations which are against the state power control over the resources; in the case of Ban Dok Dang villagers bargained with the forestry office to protect their rights of local control over natural resource to utilize and conserve in a sustainable way. At the same time, they organized the village

committee comprised of both women and men representatives from each household social-economic category to take part in the committee in managing the Dok Dang village as a whole. This is a specific adjustment of each villager to cope with the changing context for the survival of the family and community.

6.2.2 The use of feminist theory, as presented in western concepts in developing countries especially Thailand, is somewhat problematic. A conceptual framework should be applied and rethought; for instance, domestic and public spheres should not be applied inflexibly. It can be used for analyzing concepts; such as a separated sphere of man and woman in western countries. There is an increasing complexity and adaptability between domestic and public sphere. In the Karen society, the two spheres overlap which men and women play in the community. It is useful to use domestic and public spheres for analyzing the changing of gender roles in the two spheres in the changing context. For instance the Karen women of Ban Dok Dang, can not be viewed as confined in the domestic sphere, because the woman's role is not limited only to the domestic sphere. This is related to the study of Viseth (2000) on the role women in the northern Thailand which found that the marriage system of northern people provided an opportunity for women to perform their role in the public sphere. This means that on the occasion of marriage, both men and women are allowed to perform their role in public sphere (namely communal sphere), because in reality the women do not perform their roles only in the domestic sphere. The women are also involved in cash crop production and involved in women's activities such as, women's saving group and the cooperative store which has benefited their family and community. And present the women of Ban Dok Dang take part side by side with men in bargaining for local rights over natural resources and become members of village committee in managing local resources as well as public affairs.

Moreover, the gender difference, for instance gender roles in domestic and public spheres, does not always mean "inferior" or "inequity". The equity does not mean to decrease the difference. It rather means the acceptance of the difference of both men and women. Furthermore, the view of the Karen women of the studied area is different from the academic's view. They accept the difference of gender roles, but do not think about who works harder or is subordinate or dominate to whom. They rather think that the difference is for supporting each other. This is to emphasize that because of the different experience of the poor Karen women they do not think like the academic or urban middle class women.

6.3 Recommendations of the Study

6.3.1 The villagers of Ban Dok Dang have their own identity and traditional practice on natural resource management. Nowadays, even though some of the villagers change their believe and enter commercial production, they still keep practicing traditional sustainable resource management. Therefore, the future study should focus on how the Karen passes down their traditional belief and cosmology or local knowledge on sustainable resource management to the younger generation.

6.3.2 Nowadays, the villagers of Ban Dok Dang have dual production systems: upland cultivation production and cash crop production. Woman still have access and control over resources on upland cultivation production, but the woman also takes more responsibility on both domestic and cultivation work. The impact on power relationship between man and woman in the process of intense change . In the future, It is very interesting to study how gender roles of resource management are going to change when the state declares "Mae Tho National Park" in 2002.

6.3.3 Even the state policy and national socio-economic development plan emphasizes on human resource management, the RFD officials are still surveying the forest area for the declaration of the national park. The RFD officials are ignoring the right of local control over resources, especially gender roles which are related to natural resource management. Subsequently, the Karen women can not utilize and preserve the balance of nature as they did in the past. The crucial issue is perhaps the recognition of local rights and knowledge in sustainable resource management