

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

In northwestern Thailand, the ethnic minority highlanders have generally been forced to adjust themselves to changing requirements, due to the limited natural resources available to them, various internal innate socio-cultural conditions, and a range of external forces. In their farming practices, highland farmers have had to continuously search for the optimum trade-off point for each of their villages between the modern competitive market-economy agriculture and traditional local self-efficiency agriculture. Based on this background, this study focuses on (1) the impacts of national and regional development policies upon local agricultural shifts and (2) highlanders' choices under limited resource availability and alternatives in agricultural activities.

This study has opted to focus the scope of the above issues by selecting a Pwo Karen community consisting of the two different administrative villages of Ban Mae Chang and Ban Dong Luang both of which are located in Mae Sariang district of Mae Hong Son province. Within this setting, this study primarily investigates the highlanders' decision-making attitudes toward their farming activities and their adaptation to the changing agricultural scheme. I examine the situation in the major part (village) of Ban Mae Chang,¹ as the primary study, an exploration of the major part (village) of Ban Dong Luang² situation for purposes of comparative analysis.

1.2 Problem Statement

The enlarging global economy and increasing concerns for conservation under national policy have pressured the highlanders to change their traditional ways in various

¹ As explained later, the village of Ban Mae Chang consists of two parts; its major part (*i.e.*, central village or mother village) and its satellite part (*i.e.*, satellite village), Ban Mae Chang Bon.

² The satellite village of Ban Dong Luang is Ban Dong Noi.

aspects. As environmental concerns have increased, the highlanders' practice of shifting cultivation has become perceived as destructive to natural resources. However, it is not only external factors pushing highlanders' life to change, but also internal demands of population growth at the community level due to the modernization process. In this context, it is noteworthy that the cultivation of cabbage as a cash crop has been introduced and promoted by several development projects to the ethnic group villages in the northern highland region since the 1970s. This trend was especially noticeable in the 1980s, when global environmental concerns grew wider and denser.

It has been over a decade since cabbage cultivation was introduced as a cash crop to bring economic growth to the highland communities in Mae Sariang district. Since the latter half of the 1980s, the villagers of Pwo Karen in this area were engaged in cabbage cultivation as daily labourers for the *Hmong* people (another of the ethnic groups in northern Thailand) who rented land from the Karen, and it was through this means that the Karen farmers learned how to grow the crop (Kwanchewan 1988:103, and interview). After the promotion of cabbage cultivation, the mountain road from the above villages has been partially paved (two 100m segments) for transporting the products to the nearby Route 108 junction and trading point Mae Ho. As a result, some Karen villagers have made relatively large profits through this new type of agriculture.

During the period from the late 1960s to the middle of the 1970s, the subsistence life of Pwo Karen in Ban Dong Luang, including nearby Karen communities, in which my field-study site Ban Mae Chang is located, was studied in detail by Hinton (1975, 1978). During the past three to four decades, the agricultural situation in Ban Dong Luang has dramatically changed from self-sufficient subsistence farming to commercial-based agriculture with mixed cultivation of cabbage and dry rice. Nonetheless, the agricultural development in the village remains somewhat unstable due to the drastic fluctuation of cabbage prices and decreased productivity of dry rice (interview on August 17th 2002).

Along with this tendency in the region, the villagers of Ban Mae Chang have maintained swidden cultivation as their first priority, while introducing new technology to

some extent. At the same time, the community has been facing new agricultural options such as the cultivation of cabbage and other crops recommended by agricultural agents and experts from outside the village.

In fact, as cabbage cultivation progressed, it has been blamed for soil erosion and water pollution from chemicals, such as fertilizer used to increase agricultural productivity and the economic benefits (Kanok and Benjavan 1994:32, 59, 64). Because of the use of large amounts of chemical pesticides for cash crops over the past decades, some highland communities have started to experience serious negative effects in their health and natural surroundings. In addition to this, unfortunately, the soil to which the chemicals have been applied cannot avoid becoming weakened and sterile.

With this background in mind, the sustainability of agricultural production and the adverse effects of modernized living for highland farmers will be discussed over various points in this thesis. The highland production system has become more complicated; agricultural choices and decisions made cannot simply be classified as choices between subsistence-farming or cash-cropping. I would like to pursue my investigation of these issues in as comprehensive a manner as possible. In order to appropriately understand and describe the highland farmers' actual adaptive manner towards agricultural transformation, this study will discuss the following question: What are the villagers' adaptive strategies, based on their perceptions and values, towards agricultural transformation and towards the direction of their community development in future?

1.3 Research Objectives

In order to understand the dynamics of swidden cultivation practiced by highland farmers, I intend to carry out the following two tasks:

- (1) To investigate the impact of cash-crop promotion upon the swidden practice by ethnic minority groups in northern Thailand, and
- (2) To examine possible recommendations of practical alternative agricultural activities for the upland swiddeners, in accordance with the present market economy.

1.4 Literature Review

The literature review of this research can be divided into three associated spheres of: 1) Pwo Karen people in northern Thailand, 2) shifting cultivation practice in the highland community, and 3) agricultural transformation and the decision-making process for changes in the swidden community.

1.4.1 Pwo Karen People in Northern Thailand

1.4.1.1 General Information on Karen

The Karen are the largest ethnic minority group in Thailand. Their population is reported total 438,450 (Tribal Research Institute 2002), living in the vicinity of the border with Burma (in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Tak, Kanchanaburi and Phrachuap Khiri Khan provinces). Karen people are scattered around not only in the border but also in some other provinces (such as Lampang, Lamphun, Sukhothai, Phrae, Kamphaeng Phet, Phetchaburi, Uthaithani, Suphanburi and Ratchaburi) in north and central Thailand (Tribal Research Institute 1986:7-8). The Karen (so-called in English), who are called “*Kariang*” in the central Thai language, and “*Yang*” in the northern Thai language, are divided into four major subgroups: (1) Skaw Karen or White Karen who call themselves *Pg’a Kanyaw*, (2) Pwo Karen who call themselves *Phlong*, (3) *Pa-O* or *Taongthu*, and (4) *Bwe* or *Kayah* or Red Karen (Tribal Research Institute 1986:8, Lewis 1984:70). The Karen people primarily reside in Thailand and Burma. Their language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan linguistic group, borrowing words widely from Burmese, Mon, Shan and Tai depending on where they live (Lewis 1984:70).

The major subgroups of Karen in Thailand are Skaw and Pwo, with a total population of approximately 246,000, about 20% of whom were Pwo Karen in the middle of the 1980s (*ibid.*). Most of the Pwo Karen in Thailand can be found in the area stretching from Mae Sariang in Mae Hong Son province through to Hod in Chiang Mai province and in Lamphun province; other pockets of Pwo Karen people can be found in

Tak and Kanchanaburi provinces. The Skaw groups are predominant throughout the rest of the Karen areas. It is certain that Karen people in Thailand came from Burma, where they had lived for centuries, although they hardly remember where they are originally from (*ibid.*, Hinton 1975:17). Research into their origination reports that the Karen arose in Mongolia (B.C. 2617), and moved down through East Turkistan (B.C. 2013), Tibet (B.C. 1864), Yunnan in China (B.C. 1385), and reached the region of Southeast Asia (Po 1928 and KNU 1973, cited from Fink 1994:4, 50). It was in the 18th century that the Karen began to make their way across the Salween River from Burma into Thailand, which can be verified by some Karen still living in Mae Hong Son province, who can calculate the time of the first wave of the Karen settlers into the area (Lewis 1984:70).

1.4.1.2 Pwo Karen People in Mae Sariang and Modernization

During the second half of the 18th century and the early years of the 19th century, the Karen communities along the eastern border of Burma were caught up in the conflict and turmoil between the Burmese and Thai armies. Renard (1980:132; cited from Kwanchewan 1988:27) reports that Phya Kawila, who totally liberated Lanna Thai (the present northern Thai region) from Burma in 1774, resettled the Pwo Karen in the Chiang Mai and Lamphun regions around two hundred years ago (Kwanchewan 1988:27, 74-75, Hinton 1975:17), implying that the Pwo Karen have resided longer in northern Thailand than the Skaw Karen. The Karen in that period had established special relationships with the *Yuan* people who were dominant at the time in the northern Thai region by paying an annual tribute to them (Kunstadter 1969:69, Mischung 1980:20; cited from Kwanchewan 1988:77).

The Pwo Karen villagers of Ban Mae Chang in Mae Sariang region are said to be the descendants of the people who first settled there about 150 years ago (around the time which Hinton studied in the end of 1960s), after fleeing from Burma before the armies of King Aluangpaya, who made war against the Siamese (Hinton 1975:25). The Pwo Karen people in the village have had only slight contact with their relatives in Burma, and therefore are neither familiar with the major events of the past centuries nor significantly

affected by the British rule, nor WWII (*ibid.*). Although their background history seems to have been relatively peaceful as compared with other Karen groups such as those in Burma, the sentiments which were shaped by the long era of discord through their migration across the Salween River are embedded in their collective memory. Hinton (1975:26) notes the symbolic attitudes of suspicion and distrust that the Pwo Karen people hold towards the powerful outsiders, regarding themselves as “orphans” in tales repeatedly told during their leisure and relaxation time. In their folklore, most of which Hinton collected in Ban Dong Luang, which is one of the neighbouring Pwo Karen villages to Ban Mae Chang, they identify themselves as like the orphan who has no home they can call their own, and are deprived and insecure.

Until the end of 1960s, the Pwo Karen groups in Mae Sariang were politically and socio-economically isolated, and they had little regular contact with outsiders (Hinton 1986:159). On the one hand, nevertheless, this isolation status was never absolute. The Pwo Karen in the deep forest had made several kinds of relationship with other neighbouring linguistic groups by intermarriage, trading and attending ceremonies at the Buddhist temples in town (*ibid.*). As one of the self-identification by the Pwo Karen among the same ethnic group, the Pwo Karen regard themselves as the early civilized people, and describe themselves as *Yang Ban* (town Karen), distinct from the Skaw Karen as *Yang Pa*, which means “Forest Karen (Kwanchewan 1988:82-83),” or “Jungle Karen (Stern 1974:64)” (interviewed in February 2003) in Yuan dialect.

Under the movement of modernization in Thailand, the political and socio-economical isolation of the Pwo Karen has been changed by a number of projects, which have imposed the national development scheme on the highland regions. With the arrival of officials and workers for development projects in highland villages and the outsiders’ critiques of local villagers as backward, the highlanders began to experience their marginal status in the Thai nation-states (Fink 1994:5). According to a previous report, the Skaw Karen appear in the town as those who have relatively diligent and flexible attitudes towards changing circumstances, whereas the Pwo Karen in town are regarded as impoverished, incapable and primitively stubborn by the outsiders (Kunstadter 1970,

cited from Stern 1979:65). This newly emerging perspective of Pwo Karen under the development discourse has been also experienced in the Pwo Karen communities of Mae Sariang in this study.

The discordant relationship between the highlanders and outside mission of development programs can be symbolically seen in the educational sphere. Ban Mae Chang is reported in official records around the 1980s as follows: “The Pwo Karen are underdeveloped. They do not accept any sector of development which is introduced and supported by the government. The school is also affected by this Pwo Karen nature. The cooperation given to the school is so little that the rate of absence among the students is high (Kwanchewan 1988:106).” The teachers in the village were struggling to deal with the school children, who were described as disobedient, and always resist, saying *me la bare*, meaning uncomfortable, whenever a teacher orders them to do things they do not like to do (*ibid.*). For the school teachers’ eyes at that moment, the village children were perceived as being spoiled, never being trained nor punished by the adults. However, all these discords come from the ignorance of the locality and their lifestyle in which the children usually learn a great deal in their own way from their living surroundings. For the villagers, the elders hold concerns about compulsory education, fearing that their children will be deprived of their community (Kwanchewan 1988:107). A Pwo Karen principle of education is that “we never, and, should not punish, hit, nor scold children (interview with Mr. Ton, Mr. Sonsa, and Mr. Say on August 15th 2002).” Thus, the Pwo Karen adults in the study from the 1980s were sometimes reluctant to send their children to school, because the school teachers severely disciplined their kids in different ways from them. Meanwhile, as family members of households in swidden societies, children are expected to help the family both inside the household and outside in the field, meaning that school attendance tends to be unstable, especially during the busiest farming seasons. Most over ten-year-old children are regarded as important labour to help in the fields (Hinton 1975:147), which does not allow them to go to study in school during the busiest agricultural season (Kwanchewan 1988:106, and interview with the school teachers in 2003).

Although Hinton states that the Pwo Karen people generally “saw no advantages in having a large family for economic reasons” (Hinton 1975:72), only dry farming in swidden actually requires intensive labour to secure food-security. The highland economic conditions in general have been deteriorating and disadvantageous in both subsistence farming and cash cropping under the tendencies of increasing population and declining productivity shown through the investigation of Lua’ and Karen villages (Kunstadter and Chapman 1978:16-23). The former issue of population growth in the highland shows the condition of integral swiddeners, who maintain shifting cultivation as their way of life, is in a vicious circle in which population growth cannot be avoided because it is desirable for their production system to be sustained by much labour work. Under the system of swidden farming, some household heads want to increase their economic productivity by enlarging the amount of land they can appropriate and use. Because a great amount of labour work has already been invested, even though the available land for them is limited, they still desire to have the largest possible number of children as potential labour. The motivation for large families will persist in shifting cultivation communities as long as the form of agriculture practiced is labour-intensive, as contrasted with the capital or energy intensive-methods (Kunstadter and Chapman 1978:17). While economic status had progressed mainly in some parts of the lowland areas, it had rather forcible impacts on the highland region, together with the wave of population growth that was encroaching on mountain territory with domestic migration from the lowlands as a consequence of the irrigated-land shortage in the plain. The highlanders had been forced out of their villages to look for wage labour to supplement their subsistence farming (Kunstadter and Chapman 1978:16-23).

1.4.2 Shifting Cultivation Practice in the Highland Community

1.4.2.1 The Meaning of Shifting Cultivation with “Local Technical Knowledge”

³ In this regard of “economic reason,” Hinton (1975: 72) refers that the Pwo Karen do not need to care of payment or receiving bribe price due to the matrilineage or matrilineal social system.

When the term “swidden” is mentioned in the context of Thailand, it mainly refers to “dry” or “upland” rice cultivation which can be clearly differentiated from “wet,” “lowland,” or “paddy” rice farming conducted by the lowland-Thai people (Judd 1977:137). “Swidden agriculture” is defined, according to Conklin’s explanation (1957:1; cited from Judd 1977:138), as “discontinuous cropping of particular fields which are slash-cleared and burned for one or more year’s crops, and then allowed to lie fallow and return to natural vegetation for at least several years before being used again (*ibid.*)” This farming system can be furthermore divided into two categories; (1) the “partial system,” which is mainly aimed at economic interests through such activities as cash cropping, and (2) the “integral system,” which carries a holistic socio-function stemming from a rather traditional, year-round, community-based, and ritually self-contained life style. With regard to the latter “integral” system, it is worth emphasizing that “swidden farming” is part of a “socio-cultural matrix” which is composed of other social, economic and cultural systems.

In the past, especially after the modern ideology of conservation emerged, shifting cultivators and their farming system have been blamed for conducting destructive activities in the forests. Recent studies show that much of the debate on shifting cultivation has been misdirected, and that it is not necessarily unreasonable to clear the land by slash-and-burn techniques, but that, rather, this does actively reestablish the forest resources. Shifting cultivation is a complex agriculture system in the sense that it operates in a well-adapted manner under severe conditions that require in-depth knowledge of the tropical environment and a high degree of managerial skills to be successful. This new viewpoint on shifting cultivation has been reinforced by the failure of agricultural development projects in the tropics. Given the environmental peculiarity of the tropic region, it is hardly adoptive to intensify the agricultural production system as in other more moderate-climate regions. The knowledge and experiences of shifting cultivators who have adopted the farming methods to sustain their livelihood for a long time proves, to a significant extent, the validity and efficiency of traditional agricultural methods in the tropical climate (Warner 1991:2).

“Local technical knowledge (LTK)” refers to practical knowledge of the environment and procurement strategies based on intimate experiences accumulated over many generations (Bodley 1976:48; cited from Warner 1991:2). It is important for us to understand what shifting cultivators know about the environment. What is more significant, however, is that we have to go beyond categories such as how “this knowledge is used by the farmer” to develop procurement strategies that provide them with nutritional security. Besides, the “decision making sequence” to determine what agricultural activities to carry out and when to do so not only depends on the environmental knowledge but also on the physical and customary constraints in swiddening society (Ellen 1982; cited from *ibid.*). By organizing the use of LTK with these constraints, swidders make decisions and create a viable food production system in a dynamic way.

With this perception of “the farmer as a decision maker,” who utilizes his or her available “biologic and economic resources” to make decisions for “the achievement of agricultural production and maintaining soil fertility,” there has been growing consensus that the current “agroecosystem (agricultural production as a component of the larger “natural” ecosystem)” is dynamic and responsive, rather than static and inflexible (Benneh 1972:245; cited from *ibid.*). As the interactions of the human-beings and their culture with the ecosystem create changes, these changes in turn will encourage other changes to be generated, as new decisions are usually made after the reappraisal of the resources. This view of a dynamic mechanism with its complex feedback provides us with a better understanding of how swidders integrate the natural environment and the agricultural system to maintain the meaningful agricultural production (Gladwin 1983, Olafson 1983, Warner 1981, Benneh 1972; cited from *ibid.*). The agroecosystem approach intends to integrate “the multiplicity of factors affecting cropping systems” (Gliessman 1985:18; cited from Warner 1991:9) into a comprehensive agro-space paradigm, which underlines that the swidden/fallow system is a part of an overall subsistence strategy which should flexibly respond to the social, economic or natural environment changes (Gliessman 1985 cited from *ibid.*).

Reflecting this dynamic view, a more recent definition of shifting cultivation has been developed: “a strategy of resource management in which fields are shifted in order to exploit the energy and nutrient capital of the natural vegetation-soil complex of the future site” (McGrath 1987:223; cited from *ibid.*). Its emphasis on the resource management strategy and agroecosystem dynamics make shifting cultivation “neither a static nor necessarily stable system of agriculture” but one that is flexible in response to change (*ibid.*).

1.4.2.2 Issues of “Population Growth” and “Environmental Degradation”

Due to the vigorous farming activities such as slash-and-burn, shifting cultivation is perceived by the general public as cultivation that is destructive to the environment. Until the Logging Ban was enacted in 1989, teak had been popularly logged as a valuable source of revenue, and the highlanders had been frequently suspected to be destroyers of teak reserves. In general, teak does not grow in the area above about 700 m elevation where most highlanders practice swidden agriculture. The highlanders, *i.e.* integral swiddeners, prefer conducting their farming in the Evergreen Forest where greater biomass, faster regeneration with numerous species diversity, and relatively richer moisture can be expected to produce better yields for cropping a field several years in a row or to allow them to return to it after a relatively short regeneration (fallow) period (Grandstaff 1980:4). As previously mentioned, the elevation of Mixed Deciduous Forests in which teak can easily grow has been increasingly swiddened by lowlanders under the heavy pressure of economic development. It is such unlicensed commercial enterprises, aiming at profit, that bear responsibility for much teak loss in northern Thailand, as well as for environmental degradation resulting from unplanned logging practices.

There is another powerful narrative about the highland issue: that the growing population among integral swiddeners would result in ecological cataclysm. This is discussed in the so-called “ecological catastrophe argument,” envisaging the following “before and after” pictures. Population growth in mountain areas would lead to the

increased swiddening which decreases the natural rejuvenation ability of soil and forest, and consequently causes flood and drought, and finally results in a famine, bringing about the dangerous collapse of the lowland civilization. Grandstaff (1980:5) emphasizes that the two important facets of this environment catastrophe debate should be carefully analysed; (1) the “deductive” facet involving the concept of “carrying capacity” in swidden agriculture, (2) the “inductive” facet involving the historical lessons of past catastrophes. Regarding the former facet, it is important to consider the possible directions of “development” in the swidden system in such a way that the carrying capacity issue should be relieved by the introduction of a number of alternative approaches before the carrying capacity would be exceeded. With regard to the latter, we can also realize the existence of more crucial aspects of “ecological catastrophe” concerns if the historical lessons were analytically reflected by it. There is no evidence that the traditional manner of integral swidders has ever caused such a desperate catastrophe, but rather there exists a good deal of evidence that the modern methods of agricultural and forestry utilization promoted through industrialization and urbanization have induced more serious disasters (Grandstaff 1980:6).

1.4.2.3 Forestry Policies Based on “Scientific Forestry” Discourse

1.4.2.3.1 Discourse of Conservationism and Development: “*rai lu’an loy*”

During modernization, the national park system began to be recognized as an ideal institutional embodiment of modern civilization. Meanwhile, the exploitation and destruction of natural resources in the forest has been perceived as destructive activities for the country. Since 1958, when the state initiated legislation concerning the national parks, Thailand’s Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act and the National Park Act were enacted in 1960 and 1961 respectively by following the basic guideline and concepts of the national parks in the United States. This legislation induced a new form of centrally planned resource control, which influences almost all kinds of agricultural activities, and all forest land is classified into several categories of importance and mapped into detailed zones to meet the distinctive conservation purposes of that

legislation. (Pinkaw 1999:40).

In this process, within the framework of the discourse of conservationism, the highland field *rai* has become regarded as *rai lu'an loy* meaning shifting, ungovernable, and unstable cultivation with negative connotations toward this particular farming system, in which slash-and-burn methods are used by the non-Tai ethnic highlanders. The term *rai lu'an loy* has been representing a new discourse entailing suppressive measures for the purpose of agricultural development in which the state aims to transform directionless and disordered modes of cultivation with the notions of several forms of 'scientific knowledge,' *i.e.* 'scientific forestry,' assigned to be used as the indicators of forest degradation (Pinkaw 1999:41).

1.4.2.3.2 Reconstruction of Shifting Cultivation: “*rai mun wian*”

In 1992, the National Forestry policy was implemented to protect 15 to 25 percent of the total land area of Thailand. In northern Thailand alone, 1,760, 000 hectares of land classified as national forest reserves were subjoined to 40 national parks, most of which were inhabited by ethnic highlanders, obliged to relocate because of their practice of *rai lu'an loy*. In 1994, as one of the cases, eight ethnic minority communities were evicted from Doi Luang National Park and resettled on forest reserve land in Ban Pha Chor sub district, Lampang province (Pinkaw 1999:42).

Through their oppression by these environmental policies, the highlanders have learned to overcome the state's coercive control and have invented a new counter-discourse, so-called *rai mun wian*. This counter-discourse of shifting cultivation supported by the local NGOs and concerned academics has developed since the early 1990s (Pinkaw 1999:43). The term *rai mun wian* directly means rotational agriculture, and refers to an agricultural system practiced by Karen and Lua which is pattern of time while fallow lands have returned to forests (Prasert 1998; cited from Pinkaw 1999:43). The essence of *rai mun wian* interconnects with local livelihood, local wisdom, rituals, and gender relation within the local communities (Waraluck 1997; cited from *ibid.*). The local discourse of *rai mun wian* represents their principle of a local knowledge system in

which a diversity of plant species in both cultivated swidden and fallow fields have been preserved through continuous local agricultural practice and deference to nature.

1.4.2.3.3 “Counter-Discourse” as “New Strategy” by Local People

The concept and principle of *rai mun wian* has been offered to other highland communities and been adopted as a communicative device in conversation between the local people and outside forestry officials, as well as the NGOs. In 1997, for instance, with the help of staff from the Northern Development Foundation and the Centre for Ethnicity and Development, a “land-use map and topographical model” were made by the people of Mae Ning Nai to bound the village’s community forest and to plot cultivation areas, including fallow lands. By using the map and the new discourse of *rai mun wian*, the Mae Ning Nai Karen were able to invalidate the conventional prejudiced discourse of *rai lu’an loy* in the negotiation with the Watershed Conservation Unit (Pinkaw 1999:44).

The local discourse of *rai mun wian* has certainly opened negotiating space for the highlanders to improve the upland situation. However, the situation has not so favourably progressed with regards to the legal treatment for the life and rights of highlanders. On top of that, there is evidence that, as several studies in the past few years have indicated, the swidden agriculture has dramatically declined and increasingly has been replaced by a permanent agriculture within which *rai mun wian* is only partially adopted. One of the major reasons is the lack of legal recognition in forestry policies of the customary rights of highlanders in the mountainous area, which inevitably leads to the reduction of fallow periods and scale of swidden farming (*ibid.*).

The NGOs and intellectuals are often criticized for tending to idealize the local reality as the counterargument to policies as follows: “The current discourse of *rai mun wian*, while operating as a counter-conservation ideology in assertion of customary land tenure, has not yet been able to capture the complexities of changing swidden agricultural systems. However, this deficiency should not be simply taken as a romanticizing view by NGOs toward ‘local knowledge’ (*ibid.*)” The discourse of *rai mun wian* should be recognized as a reflection of the “politically strategic position” in which the local people

use the instrument of demystification rather than that of exemplification in actual local life. The response by these marginalized people against the state intervention in swidden practice can be seen as “counter-hegemony,” within which many forms of opposition and struggle are operating as indicative features of the limited and imperfect nature of the domination itself (Williams 1977; cited from Pinkaew 1999:46). The counter-discourse of *rai mun wian* has emerged as a “strategic tool” from such limitation for contesting to the conservationism by the dominant power (Pinkaew 1999:46).

1.4.3 Agricultural Transformation and the Decision-making Process

1.4.3.1 Changes of Agriculture and Peasant Economy in the Highland Area

The concern about traditional highland farming as a danger to national security led to government efforts with international support to eradicate opium cropping by replacing traditional farming with permanent cash cropping. This led to the forcible restriction against the shifting cultivation and support for the resettlement of the highlanders from the conservation areas. In terms of political administration, this policy has so far seemed to gain support from the mainstream, however, viable solutions to the problem are hardly in sight. Besides, many development policies have, unfortunately, proved to be inefficient in improving the overall situation, because the alternatives offered by the policies were often neither feasible nor attractive enough to be adopted by a large number of farmers on a sustainable basis, nor did they provide for adequate local solutions for the highlanders to adjust to the changes (Salzer 1993:3).

Kanok and Benjavan (1994) present the changing situation of swidden agriculture in several communities, and the corresponding changes in their natural resource management both of which have been influenced by national policies. They report two cases of Karen villages in Mae Hong Son province and how they have adapted to the market economy in different ways (Kanok and Benjavan 1994:54-66, 79-86). One is Mae Rid Pagae, which is inhabited by Skaw Karen and located in Mae Ho sub-district of Mae Sariang district in Mae Hong Son province. This village was able to adopt well to the cash cropping of cabbage in a period around the survey year of 1993, with assistance

by the Thai-Australia Highland Agricultural and Social Development Project (TA-HASD, from 1989). At that time, the village households were generally able to produce enough rice for their own annual consumption requirement (Kanok and Benjavan 1994:64). According to the survey in 1993, approximately 90 percent of the Skaw Karen people in the village were involved in cabbage cultivation. In the context of how the cash crops such as cabbage and bell pepper were introduced, the role of ‘buyers’ was significant (Kanok and Benjavan 1994:55). A contrasting case is that of Tissa, which is inhabited by Karen people and located in Sob Moei district of Mae Hong Son province, and which is one of the areas where the Thai/UN Pae Por Project was carried out. Tissa had received very little outside assistance before the Pae Por Project was introduced, and practiced rotational shifting agriculture, mainly relying on upland rice in subsistence cultivation. The construction of a road to the community, in fact, had not been designed as of the survey period in 1994 (Kanok and Benjavan 1994:81), when the villagers were making their living by selling chillies and non-timber forest products. For these commodities, while some villagers obtained relatively easy access to the market, many found the market largely inaccessible.

1.4.3.2 Highland Peasants in Marketing

Although we cannot see the ultimate outcome of the villagers’ lives in Mae Rid Pagae where the people adopted extensive cabbage cropping in the beginning of 1990s, the peasant societies in the highland area were increasing their involvement in the market economy in different ways and at different paces. In addition to the significance of ‘paved roads’ to the market, it is obvious that the small and large ‘buyers’ through whom the upland farmers make their linkage to the market have been the most effective in bringing market information accompanied with innovative technology to the highland area. It should be, therefore, worthwhile to investigate how peasants participate in the trading and processing of their products, and what role their activities play in the development of local economy, as well as how the systems change in response to technological innovation in agriculture and improvements in transportation and

communication. Whereas “peasants” were commonly considered by some economists to be “isolated from markets and that they allocate resources mainly for subsistence, without regard to price signals (Wharton 1969; Nakajima 1986; cited from Hayami and Kawagoe 1993:3),” this view is not adequate in the Southeast Asian context, since the penetration of the market economy into peasant life seems to have advanced earlier and more thoroughly in the Third World than in Europe and Japan, where they evolved in an autonomous process of specialization and division of labour (Hayami and Kawagoe 1993:2-3, 5-6).

In order to adequately analyse the peasant economy, it is necessary to reassess the belief of the “moral economists,” who assume that “social relations in precapitalist peasant communities are geared for securing minimum subsistence for all community members. With the intrusion of the market economy, the communities’ moral principle of securing minimum subsistence is replaced by personal profit maximization (*ibid.*)” In terms of the peculiar circumstances in Southeast Asia which included the effects of colonialism, it is clear that “the peasants stripped of protection of traditional village institutions and patron-client bounds, and faced with subsistence crisis feel ill-treated and eventually rise in revolt” under the market system, which was more severely imposed on peasants’ life here than in other so-called “developed” countries (*ibid.*). However, as the “political economy” approach argues, it is neither enough nor appropriate to understand the peasant economy from the standpoint that the “precapitalist peasant community is oriented to protect the poor (*ibid.*)” The social institutions of the traditional village, with its patron-client relationship, was rather to the disadvantage of the poor, who were heavily affected and exploited. In this view, the market system is beneficial to a majority of the peasants to the extent that it emancipates them from the dominance of village elites and enables them to engage in transactions based on their own calculations (*ibid.*).

It is popularly believed that peasants are always passive or vulnerable to market forces, and have neither desire nor ability to participate in commercial activities and the use of new technology. It is also widely thought that the peasants are merely exploited through the marketing process, in which the middlemen belong to a social group

alienated from the peasantry. However, as the case of Karen people in Mae Rid Pagae implies (Kanok and Benjavan 1994:55), many local traders and manufacturers today are rooted in peasant communities (Hayami and Kawagoe 1993:11). In this regard, it is rather relevant to investigate the peasant cash cropping from the standpoint of “how efficiently the marketing system supports the growth in farm production and income by channelling appropriate market information to peasant producers (Hayami and Kawagoe 1993:15).”

1.4.3.3 The Introduction of New Technology to Peasant Farming

As a case study, the social consequences of technological innovation and the process of choice-decision made by the peasant farmers on the alternative new technological applications, have been investigated by Moerman (1968) for the northern Thai village of Ban Ping. His study reports that tractor agriculture was introduced in Ban Ping in 1960, and induced numerous and complex effects in the community. When he returned five years later, however, the villagers had already given up the use of tractors in the field. He points out that, in the flow of changing agricultural methods in the community, we can see a mechanism of decision-making by the peasants in Ban Ping, and thus that the authoritative anthropological concept of “the peasant” is not necessarily appropriate for the study of the choice-decision made by the peasant. He also argues that the association and interaction between the local context of behaviour and the field data in the peasant community is more crucial when we want to examine the mechanism of the villagers’ agricultural method choice, since this is usually formed in the community institutions and, in turn, shows one of the most tangible “social implications” of northern Thai agriculture (Moerman 1968:19-20).

In order to attain the analytic meta-cultural definition of “peasantness,” the functional concept of “*dependent incompleteness*” should be seen as a continuum from the tribal to national level under the “superior centers of control,” market, priest, or capitals. On top of that, what should be focused on in development is the perspectives owned by peasants; “the motivational and attitudinal variables as they affect the

productive and developmental processes --- farmers' goals of production, the nature of farmers' decision making processes, and the influences and patterns of diffusion and adoption of practices and enterprises (Wharton 1965:7, 19, 60; cited from Moerman 1968:20-21).” The villagers make use of the environmental relationships they perceive together with the relevant rules of their society in order to farm to gain the maximum outcomes. The utilization of innovative technology by farmers makes sense since they are making judicious use of previously successful means, what is called “everyday rationality (Garfinkel 1962:305-308; Schutz 1953; cited from Moerman 1968:27).”

Their rice farming behaviour can be regarded as “the result of decisions made by villagers in accordance with the information and values they have (Moerman 1968:26).” However, it is a common, yet quite mistaken, notion to think that peasants' “decision-making and technology are traditional and arational (Wharton 1965:13; cited from Moerman 1968:27).” When the outsiders observe the practice of the peasant, they tend to look at it through the anthropologist's construct of the “cultural dope” (Garfinkel 1964:244; cited from *ibid.*), rather frequently losing the more important view of tangible facts. Moerman points out that “(w)hen we believe that farming behavior is determined by a homogeneous entity called culture which men cannot escape, ‘culture’ is deemed as if the mere word explained behavior (Moerman 1968:28).” What is recommended as an approach to examining farming behaviour is the understanding that in order “to introduce an innovation successfully, it is wise to recognize and to analyse the rationality of those who have rejected it (*ibid.*)”

Rice farming requires villagers, in various occasions, to make decisions about numerous alternatives. There are usually two types of major decisions for them to make: (1) plough versus tractor, which refers to the traditional subsistence farming and (2) glutinous versus ordinary rice, which implies the level of cash income resources in the market. What they choose among the various alternatives will bring them very different relations with the outside world, especially with its centres of market economy under which they attempt to maximize their cash income by more actively utilizing vast fields that are difficult to clear by hand and with animal ploughing. In order to cope with the

natural environment of their fields, in which ploughing the soil is a heavy and painful job, as a matter of fact, the Ban Ping people introduced the new technology of the tractor in 1960 (Moerman 1968:42-43).

1.4.3.4 Peasants' Criteria for Changes

Peasant perspectives of agricultural technology choice can be considered as being composed of such factors as natural environment, social organization, and ideology, and can be analysed through the understanding of their recognition of costs, incentives, and rewards (Moerman 1968:141-142). The introduction of the new technology of tractor-ploughing changed the “social relations” in the village which had been based on rice and on the expressions in terms of rice in the community. Work, which was previously depicted as “lots of people, lot of fun” in the field, came to be depicted as an “individual task” deprived from the collective enjoyment existing in the work space before (Moerman 1968:67). The people began to treat their fellows as they would do so to strangers. After the introduction of the tractor, “price” and “profit” became their major standard for crop selection. “Cash” became a basic component of production. “Work” became distinct from “fun,” and was oriented more exclusively toward the rewarded completion of particular tasks. Before those changes took place, although the physical condition of the fields required the introduction of the new technology, the social organization of the village could not afford to own it; no individual was wealthy enough to buy a tractor, and no community institution allowed them to buy it for the collective use because of the concern or fear of disputes among the community members (Moerman 1968:69-70). These changes mean that the life and farming in the community has become more “commercial,” and less “self-sufficient.” Such labels can be delineated only through detailed description of the curious constancy which underlies village life and provides villagers with the stable framework within which they make revolutionary technological decisions. The land has always been “something with a price,” so that the abundance and acquisition of the land affect the dependence of the community upon commercialization. Such changes indicate the interplay between “commerce and kinship

as principles for determining social relationships and suggests the future courses of rental price, source of tenants, and economic stratification (Moerman 1968:114-115).”

As a farmer, each villager wants to farm in such a way that he can gain the most rice yield. In light of this, there are several shortcomings as well as compensating advantages in the introduction of tractor ploughing. The villagers knew the low yield by tractor-ploughing compared with the traditional ploughing, but they regarded the new method as a “windfall” from “lazy” work. Hiring tractors, together with the risk of a possible bad harvest, is expensive and makes the tractor-based agriculture pay less dividends (Moerman 1968:157-158). However, no matter how much they may complain about the high risk and low return, those who farm on topographically difficult land for ploughing have no choice but to hire tractors and broadcasters. The farmers have their own recognition of labour productivity in their agriculture. First, although the tractor is a labour-saving device from the macroeconomic standpoint which supports Boserup’s suggestion (1965:53; cited from Moerman 1968:183), the willingness and diligence coming from the villagers are more a matter of _ Lue pride in hard work and self-sufficiency and of the incentives furnished by the institutions of ‘selling rice’ and private (*lor*k) land _ rather than it is a response to _ the compulsion of increasing population or the compulsion of a social hierarchy (Moerman 1968:183). _ Second, the villagers’ evaluation of labour productivity is more subjective. If some farmers reject the tractor-farming method, it does not necessarily mean the productivity by tractor-introduction is less, but rather it often means the tractor-farming is inadequate for the villagers’ value of “joy of working,” so that the apparent productivity gain by the technology would something turn out to be “not worth” for them (Moerman 1968:184).

Five years after the adoption of tractor farming, they quit the use of tractors and went back to traditional farming. The reason was that the villagers no longer needed the tractor because the land was levelled and therefore the physical difficulty in ploughing was solved by the tractor technology. The villagers had perceived that broadcasting farming was “a source of reduced yield” and hiring a tractor was an “uncomfortable expense” so that it was quite natural for them to change the method as soon as the

environmental conditions were improved by the tractors. The “native’s perspective” and “cognition of his technological system” are represented in this return to the traditional agriculture. This point would never be seen if we stuck to the view that the “tractor (functions) solely as a laborsaving device.” The “culture” in the peasant community consists not only of customs and artifacts, but also of the “criteria,” and rules for “their application,” which account for the native’s ability to produce, recognize, and interpret culturally appropriate behaviour (Moerman 1968:185).

1.4.3.5 The Value and Security of the Peasants

Tractor cultivation seemed to enable the village people to grow cash crops, such as ordinary rice, just for commercial purposes. As to the district government policy to encourage cash cropping, however, the villagers were reluctant to follow the district policy because; (1) they have less knowledge of the market economy and (2) subsistence is still their first priority. They would not grow wet rice or other cash crops (e.g. peanuts) without assistance of securing enough glutinous rice for their consumption, and reliable information of the future rice price (Moerman 1968:69).

Epstein (1962; cited from Moerman 1968:186) argues that not all economic development is economic change by suggesting a distinction between “unilinear change,” in which the same old things are done somewhat differently, and “non-unilinear,” or “real” change (Moerman 1968:187). Moerman says that “decision-making models, however imperfectly fashioned, have utility, for they permit one to assert that basic cultural change consists of changes in the ways in which people view their activities and, most critically, of changes in the goals for which decisions are made, in the criteria by which they are made, and in the kinds of evidence taken into account in making them (*ibid*).” Changes in rules and criteria for decision-making by people are changes in how people perceive and assess their world (*ibid*). On the one hand, it would be correct to say that “most farmers in poor agricultural communities are too small and too isolated to undertake a search for new agricultural factors (Schultz 1964:174; cited from Moerman 1968:188).” On the other hand, it is true that such farmers are nonetheless often quite

able to access the advantages of the new factors when these are used by larger farmers with whom they can identify, and to understand reasonable recommendations made by salesman and middleman (Moerman 1968:188).

For the villagers, although they sometimes mourn the loss of joy in festive work and berate the hectic pace of modern life, with selfish neighbours and arrogant officials, they perceive the “commercialization as a change in degree, not in kind (Moerman 1966).”

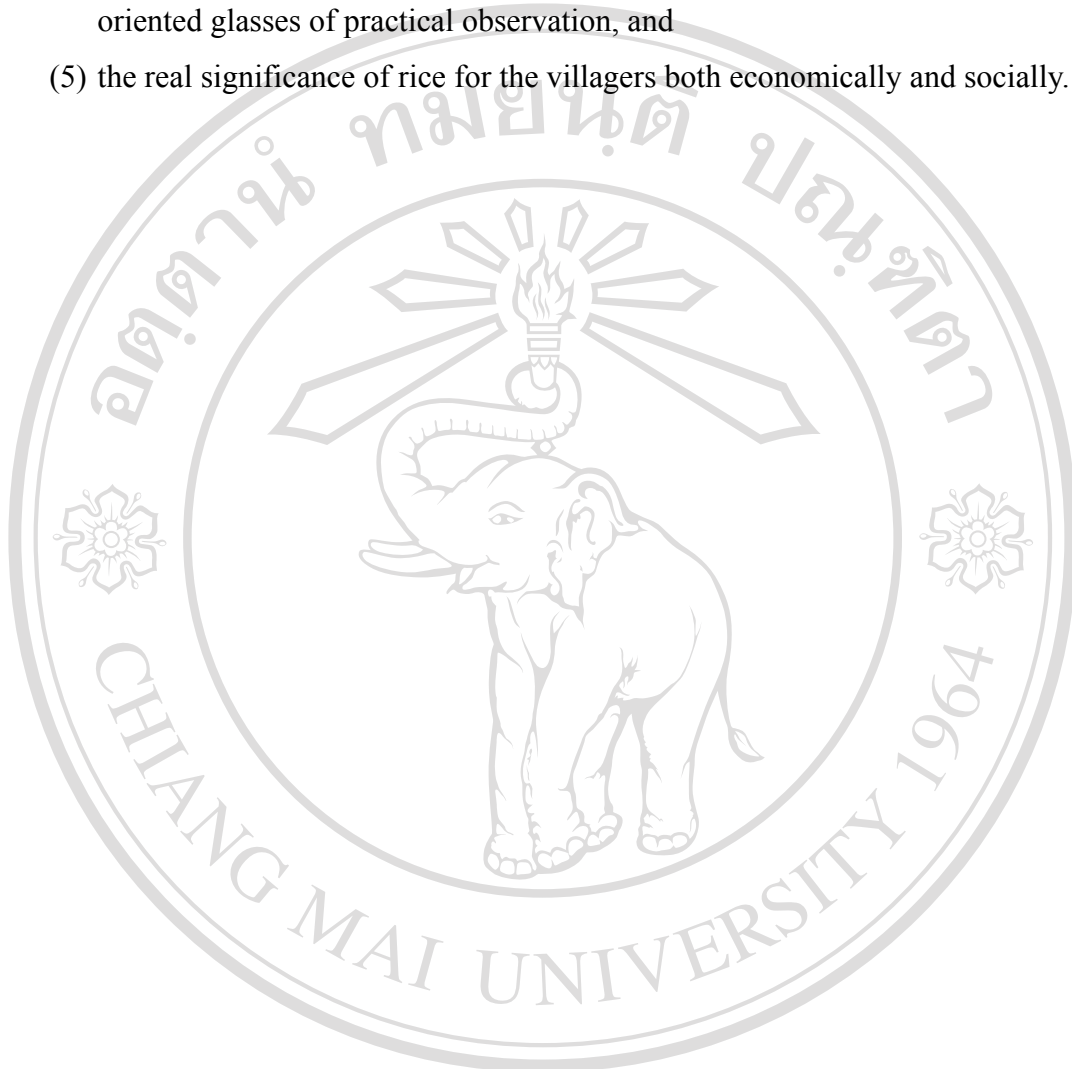
1.4.3.6 Possible Applications for My Fieldwork

I have learned to what extent and how “rice” is “a way of life” for the village community in the case study by Moerman. This insight can be applied to my study of a highland village, where “rice” is the main component of every meal and the object of most labour. However, the situation of rice productivity in the highland Pwo Karen villages are, in fact, struggling to secure daily rice for themselves. Some of the villagers have already changed their farming strategy from farming of dry-rice to only irrigated-wet-rice or cabbage to obtain cash to buy daily rice.

In light of the aforementioned, not only in this section but also in the previous sections, the following points proved useful when I carried out my fieldwork in Ban Mae Chang:

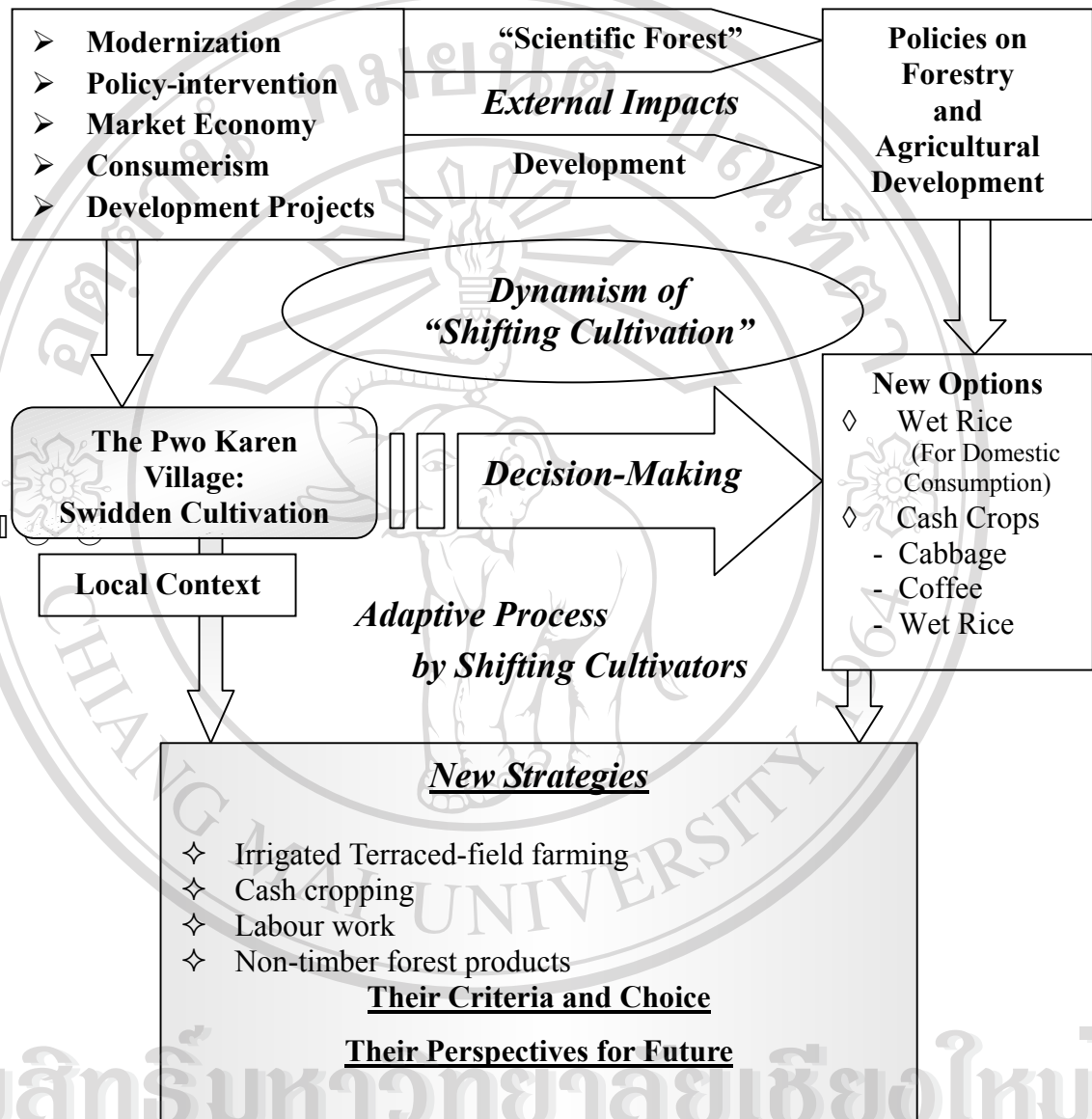
- (1) the effective way to enhance the ability of village people to monitor the market and technological innovation necessary for better income from agricultural activities,
- (2) the existence or non-existence of the trend that farming has become “more commercial” and “less self-sufficient” recently and, if so, to what extent,
- (3) the distinction and similarity between economic development and economic change (or unilinear change and non-unilinear change),
- (4) the basic phenomena for which we need to amalgamate into a reasonable synthesis
[1] the researcher’s views obtained through the traditional glasses of authoritative

- anthropological concepts or constructs, and [2] those obtained through the evidence-oriented glasses of practical observation, and
- (5) the real significance of rice for the villagers both economically and socially.



ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่
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Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Sustainable Community Development ??

1.5 My Involvement in the Pwo Karen Community

1.5.1 First and Second Visits to Ban Mae Chang: Preliminary Field Surveys

I first visited Ban Mae Chang in the rainy season as a member of a collaborative NGO group composed of three NGOs⁴ on August 31st – September 1st, 2001. The purpose for the group to visit Ban Mae Chang was to discuss our forthcoming NGO programme to be carried out in the village around a half year later. By that time in the village, various other NGO programmes had already been well facilitated by the then school principal, who had keen to introduce external supports into the village to improve school facilities and educational environments. At that time, the direct interaction of myself with the Pwo Karen villagers was very slight, mainly just through the school teachers.

In the morning walk inside their residential area during my first stay in Ban Mae Chang, all the sights of housing, livestock, and the appearance of female religious head sitting on the veranda attracted my research interests. I was also impressed with the scenery of the wide mountain side on which elaborately arranged land-usage patterns were seen in a distant view from the rough mountain road along which I was walking. With these personal feeling and impressions in my mind, I was inclined to study the agricultural production system of Ban Mae Chang.

My second visit to the village was during the dry season from the end of February to the middle of March 2002, as a participant of a formal NGO programme⁵ which intended to help the village construct a new school building. At this second stay in Ban Mae Chang, I stayed there for three weeks as a coordinator of the programme and a fieldwork researcher as well. On this occasion, I could obtain good preliminary

⁴ The group was a collaborative team of members from the three NGOs: Gakushuin University's GONGOVA (Gakushuin Overseas NGO Volunteer Activity Programme, Tokyo Japan), Chiang Mai University's TWT (Thai Woman of Tomorrow Project, Chiang Mai, Thailand), and local NGO of MHEIP (Mae Hong Son Hilltribe Extension and Improvement Programme, Mae Hong Son, Thailand). The total number of the team members was seven including myself who participated in the team from the GONGOVA.

⁵ This programme is the 2002-version of the NGO programme called GONGOVA which started in 1997 and referred to as The Sixth Gakushuin Overseas NGO Volunteer Activity Programme (GONGOVA2002).

information on the village through getting acquainted with some villagers. It was also during this stay that I was introduced by school teachers to the village school children and youths as a Japanese graduate student studying at Chiang Mai University. Before sunset in the evening after the work, the youths of Ban Mae Chang and Japanese students participating our NGO programme got together to exchange languages of *Plong* (Pwo Karen), Central Thai and Japanese. Because of the influence of one young cheerful female teacher who showed a strong interest in linguistic exchanges among us, the school children, even an infant under six years old, learned some of the basic Japanese words for greetings and used them whenever they met us in the village. Some of the youth who were eager to learn Japanese, emphasized the sound analogy between the Plong and Japanese languages.

1.5.2 Third Visit to Ban Mae Chang and Afterward: Closer Relation with Villagers

After the first and second visits to Ban Mae Chang, I have made a series of field surveys in my research site for my study. More precisely, I visited Ban Mae Chang with the local NGO persons in the month of June, August, and December of 2002 respectively, as well as in January and February-March⁶ of 2003. For my field survey, I visited Ban Dong Luang too when I did field surveys in Ban Mae Chang in August and December of 2002 as well as in January of 2003.

In most of these surveys from my third visit to Ban Mae Chang in June, 2002, several young Pwo Karen villagers in their twenties helped me collect data and translated interviews from the Pwo Karen language to Central Thai language. For the agricultural, economic and political aspects, I had to rely on the English language by the help of a person from the local NGO. This local NGO person coming from Mae Hong Son can manage well not only English but also Northern Thai dialect and Tai Yai language in addition to his mother language, Thai. He did not only assist me in translation, but also

⁶ For the stay of this three weeks period, I participated the GONGOVA2003 which the local NGO person were also participated.

played an important role as a reliable informant throughout a series of almost all of my field surveys to provide me with the information about local contexts. He always made efforts to devise better ways for assisting my fieldworks by releasing the linguistic barricades confronting me.

During the fieldworks in the rainy season of June and August, 2002, I stayed with my research colleagues in the hut. This hut had been built apart from the residential area of the village to accommodate the participants of the NGO activities in the village. In June of 2002, I had a chance to observe the conditions of swidden farming in which various *catch* crops⁷ were planted together with dry rice, and also watched closely the villagers weeding their swiddens in the rain. In August of the same year, when heading to Ban Mae Chang along the mountain road from Mae Ho by a small 4WD truck, we encountered a car which was driven by a cabbage middleman from Mae Sariang, stuck in the muddy road in front of us. As a natural consequence, our car could not travel ahead furthermore from that point because we could not overtake the middleman's car on the narrow and muddy road. I experienced a two-hour walk at night along the muddy and slippery road up to the village, with several villagers who helped me carry my 20 kg fieldwork luggage. During this fieldwork, I fortunately learned quite a lot about the procedures of cabbage cultivation to get new knowledge on the cabbage cultivation as well as on the middlemen of the cabbage, through my own direct observation of the swidden in Ban Mae Chang and through the interviews with Ban Dong Luang villagers.

At the fieldworks in both Ban Mae Chang and Ban Dong Luang in December of 2002 and January of 2003, I did socio-economic surveys with the help of the two Pwo Karen assistants in their early twenties and the local NGO persons. Based on the information I had collected at this field survey, I divided the households into four income classes as well as into two rice-sufficient and insufficient categories, in order to

⁷ A catch crop is a crop grown between two crops in ordinary sequence in time, between two rows of a main crop, or as a substitute for a chief crop which has failed in production. Catch crops grown in the swiddens by the Pwo Karen in my research site are, for example, maize, taro, a kind of yam, pumpkin, bean, sesame, chilli, cucumber and other green vegetables.

investigate different adaptive manners⁸ in agricultural transformation among the villagers. During the first part of the dry season before the new year of 2003, I interviewed several households about their life histories, practices of and perspectives on farming, and processes of decision-making. In my field survey towards the end of January in 2003, I stayed at a house located inside the residential area of Ban Mae Chang for the first time, followed by my stay in Ban Dong Luang. In that occasion, I could interact with the villagers more actively than before by, for example, chatting with girls who came to see me at the place where I was staying, and helping ladies with their weaving work before dark and eating rice with them after the task. Through such leisurely time with the villagers and through my research interviews, I learned both formal and informal aspects of their social life. For example, some backgrounds of the specific relationships among villagers, which I had never imagined before, came to my knowledge, including the subjects of adultery, abortion, and divorce among the villagers, which the villagers would regard as loathsome and cause misfortune to the community. This information of gossip and scandal including the sorrow of the villagers I heard, were brought into its climax when a big sacrifice of buffalo took place for the traditional New Year Ceremony in Ban Mae Chang which I witnessed at the end of January 2003.

From the end of February to the middle of March at 2003, the NGO group of Japanese university students participating the GONGOVA2003, came to Ban Mae Chang to construct toilets and water supply systems in the village. By this time, I had been able to establish rather close relationships with villagers and had gained better insights into the community as compared with one year before. I enjoyed the precious opportunity of being involved in the medical-support activities under the instruction of a Japanese medical doctor during this period. This opportunity enhanced my perspectives on the villagers' life from a fresh angle of medical care. Observations and experiences I had during this final fieldwork of mine for the study of my thesis, offered me a good number of implications on the development scheme in the highland region, especially in terms of

⁸ Different adaptive manners among different income classes and among different categories of rice-sufficiency and insufficiency.

the relationship between Pwo Karen and outsiders. On this occasion, I was participating the NGO programme as a researcher as well as an assistant to the director of the NGO programme simultaneously. Filling these two roles, I not only worked as a coordinator for the programme, but also located myself within the interactions among different entities: Pwo Karen people, Japanese students, Thai students from Chiang Mai University who joined the programme, the outside officials⁹ who visited to stay with us in Ban Mae Chang.

1.5.3 Perceptions of Villagers towards Me

My existence in the village must have been an object of curiosity for the villagers in both Ban Mae Chang and Ban Dong Luang since I am an Asian from Japan who has a similar complexion and physical structure to the Karen, but who is not so good in Thai. On the other hand, nearly all the time in the village during my fieldwork, I was always with the local NGO persons and often with my Japanese research colleagues. This means that I was in some ways distanced from the villagers. As long as I belonged to the NGO programmes' side, I was always aware that it was not so easy for me to frankly interview with them on the issues of how the villagers perceive the development programmes.

In fact, many of the villagers patiently tried to listen to me, to understand what I said and to respond to me when I questioned them in my interviews. It was probably due to their warm-hearted considerations towards me with compassion for me who could not speak in Thai fluently, and due to their subjective expectation towards me as a member of the NGO group which is favourably disposed to the village. As I got more acquainted to them, some of the elder females in the village talked to me in their language though I knew only a few words for greetings. Almost whenever I appeared, in their eyes, not to understand what they said to me, these were often persons who voluntarily taught me the meanings in the Northern dialect or Central Thai.

Those who can speak in Thai often asked me about Japan; about the general life, food, agriculture and economy of Japan as well as about my family and myself. It was

⁹ One of them was a Skaw Karen origin, while another official was a lowland Thai.

when we were chatting about Japan during a break of my interviews with some economically rich villagers on the topic of cabbage cultivation, that a male villager who was in his thirties started to tell me a story he had heard from his parents in his childhood. According to him, the people around Mae Sariang city took care of Japanese soldiers who were escaping with their bare lives from their desperate defeat in the Imphal-military operations forward the end of the WWII, and who were passing through the Mae Sariang area. After we finished a conversation on this subject, I gradually resumed my interview questions to the villagers, “Why and how did you decide to grow cabbage?” Instead of answering to me, one of them asked me, “Well, why do you study for the master degree at the university now?” He went on to say, “It is because you want to enjoy a better life, isn’t it? Our motivation for cabbage cultivation is the same as yours. We just want to enjoy a more comfortable life than before.”¹⁰ The above two subjects of our conversation exchanged between the villagers and me, enabled me to see in a new light, the villagers’ perceptions extended towards me as a researcher who was conducting her study in the village for her own sake, and the identity of myself as a Japanese who takes upon myself the responsibility of not forgetting that we are indebted to the local people in Mae Sariang for their good conducts toward Japanese people about sixty years ago.

1.5.4 Perceptions of Outsiders of the Village towards the Pwo Karen

In February of 2003, a group of fifteen Japanese university students came to Ban Mae Chang accompanied by several local NGO workers from Mae Hong Son. The students are those who voluntarily participated the NGO programme of the GONGOVA2003, at their own expenses, to offer their labour for the socio-economic development project for the village. It is my understanding that their participation to the GONGOVA programme must have been a pleasant period for each of the Japanese students to stay and work in Ban Mae Chang and to see and know the villagers’ life and customs by their own eyes directly.

¹⁰ It would be nothing wrong for the villagers to say like this toward me who, as perhaps recognized by villagers, suddenly came into their village lives, persistently asked many things about them, and took the information back to the city to write a paper about them.

The eight Thai university students studying at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Chiang Mai University came to the village to join the GONGOVA camp in the second half of the programme. They too were, like Japanese students, willing to contribute the village development of Ban Mae Chang.

Interestingly enough, there existed differences in attitudes towards the Pwo Karen villagers between the Thai and Japanese students. For example, while a Pwo Karen school girl and a Japanese student enjoyed the conversation with interpretation offered by a Thai student, the Pwo girl asked the Japanese student, “Can your brothers and sisters in Japan all speak Japanese?” The Thai student just laughed it off and said to the Japanese student, “She asked such a strange question to you.” The Japanese student, who has the lineage of an ethnic minority group in Japan sensitively reacted to what the Thai student mentioned to her. Meanwhile, between the Thai and Japanese students there were several occasions for them to exchange songs in the camp. One day, the Thai students proposed to sing a northern Thai song with Japanese students, and taught the song to the Japanese members. The song describes the poor material status of the highlanders, explicitly emphasizing the situation of “but, they have just warm heart.” Some of the Japanese students questioned themselves “How can we sing such a song in front of the villagers?”

On other day, some of the Thai students attempted to tell villagers, “Why do more villagers not come to help the work by Japanese students? They are working for this village.” This idea seems to have been influenced by the notion of “local people’s participation” as a derivative of a theoretical concept of “development based on the local components” which the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences perhaps have learned in the classroom. As a matter of fact, it was in the beginning of the farming period in the village. The villagers therefore were awfully busy in preparing for slashing their swiddens. For the Japanese students, it seemed to me that, perhaps because of their lack of experiences, they did not matter whether the villagers joined the work or not. They just enjoyed their new experiences in the highland village. For the Thai students, it was important to carry out the NGO work to be “in success” by inciting villagers’ cooperation in the work, but took no account of the specific condition of locality in the season. The

above-mentioned different attitudes and perspectives between the Thai and Japanese students would suggest the difference in the recognition of the prerequisite conditions for the local development.

During this period, several officials came to visit our NGO camp in Ban Mae Chang, from the Hill Tribe and Welfare Development Centre at Mae Ho and other regional organizations. Among them, there was an official from an organization on education affairs who was a Skaw Karen origin. He said to me that the Pwo Karen people in the region are “not interested in education at all although they have the same chances to receive the education as Skaw Karen” (interview on 22nd February 2003). This Skaw Karen official insisted on the tendency of stubbornness and conservativeness of the Pwo Karen to the government projects for development projects, especially in terms of the educational programme.

Around one week after the GONGOVA2003 was over, I again visited Ban Mae Chang with a group of American students (22nd March 2003).¹¹ Four tour-guides came along with us to take care of our stay in the village. When we arrived at the village, one of us asked a villager who serves as *O. Bo. To*.¹² to give a small talk on Ban Mae Chang to the American students. Although the *O. Bo. To*. man was familiar with me since I had made friendship with him before then, facing to other white persons and several outsiders, he seemed to be embarrassed with what to say. Then, one of the young tour-guides arrogantly told him to state “welcome greetings” for our group. After that I had several chances to talk with the tour-guide, and heard him saying that the highland villagers “have no sense of sociability” so that they should be “taught how to speak.” Besides, according to him, the standard of living in the highland is in anywhere “underdeveloped and poor,” and he went on stating “see, only one television in the school.”

It is not my intention here to draw any general conclusion from the above-

¹¹ In my final leg of fieldwork, I visited Ban Mae Chang with a study-group of American students from Payap University in Chiang Mai, as an assistant to Dr. Kwanchewan Buadaeng (Social Research Institute of Chiang Mai University) on 22nd to 23rd March 2003.

¹² Tambon (Sub-district) Administration Organization (*ongkon borihan tambon*).

mentioned attitudes of the outside-of-the-village people towards the Pwo Karen people and highlanders. The more or less similar attitudes are observed in the society of my mother country, Japan, too. Actually, my intention is to briefly show several examples to indicate the existence of different recognitions and attitudes towards the Pwo Karen people, among the Thai people outside the village whom I met at the NGO camp in Ban Mae Chang. Such a situation would imply that, when I would like to carry out a field survey appropriately in highlander villages, it is among important preconditions that those whom I ask for assistance in my research site possess rather neutral recognition toward the highlanders, and an objective approach to the issues.

1.5.5 Analytical and Methodological Approaches

The investigation carried out in this thesis employs the analytical and methodological approaches as follows depending on primary purposes of each chapters and sections. The analytical approach relies upon the following ways for analysis.

- (1) Descriptive theoretical analysis
- (2) Descriptive empirical analysis
- (3) Qualitative empirical analysis
- (4) Quantitative empirical analysis

The methodological approach carries the following channels.

- (1) Review of previous researches,
- (2) Integration of related theories I have learned in the study courses at the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University,
- (3) Conduct of field surveys in my research site composed of Ban Mae Chang and Ban Dong Luang in Mae Sariang district, Mae Hong Son province, Thailand,
- (4) Examination and analysis of qualitative and quantitative information collected through my field surveys, and
- (5) Synthesis of outcomes obtained through the above four channels.

The above approaches would be useful for pursuing my thesis study to investigate how the local people in the highland region react and adapt themselves to the changing agricultural production system under inevitable internal external shifting forces upon them.

1.6 Structure of This Thesis

This M.A. thesis consists of six chapters whose brief contents are respectively described as follows.

CHAPTER I: Background and objectives of this research with relevant literature reviews, overview of the local contexts in reference to the related conceptual framework, research approaches and structure of this thesis.

CHAPTER II: Transformation processes of the highland swidden society in northern Thailand which is conceptualized by interweaving the issues of population growth and market economy in conjunction with the local situation under the arguments on development and modernization theories as fundamental rationale of this thesis, and policy pressures contributing to the changes.

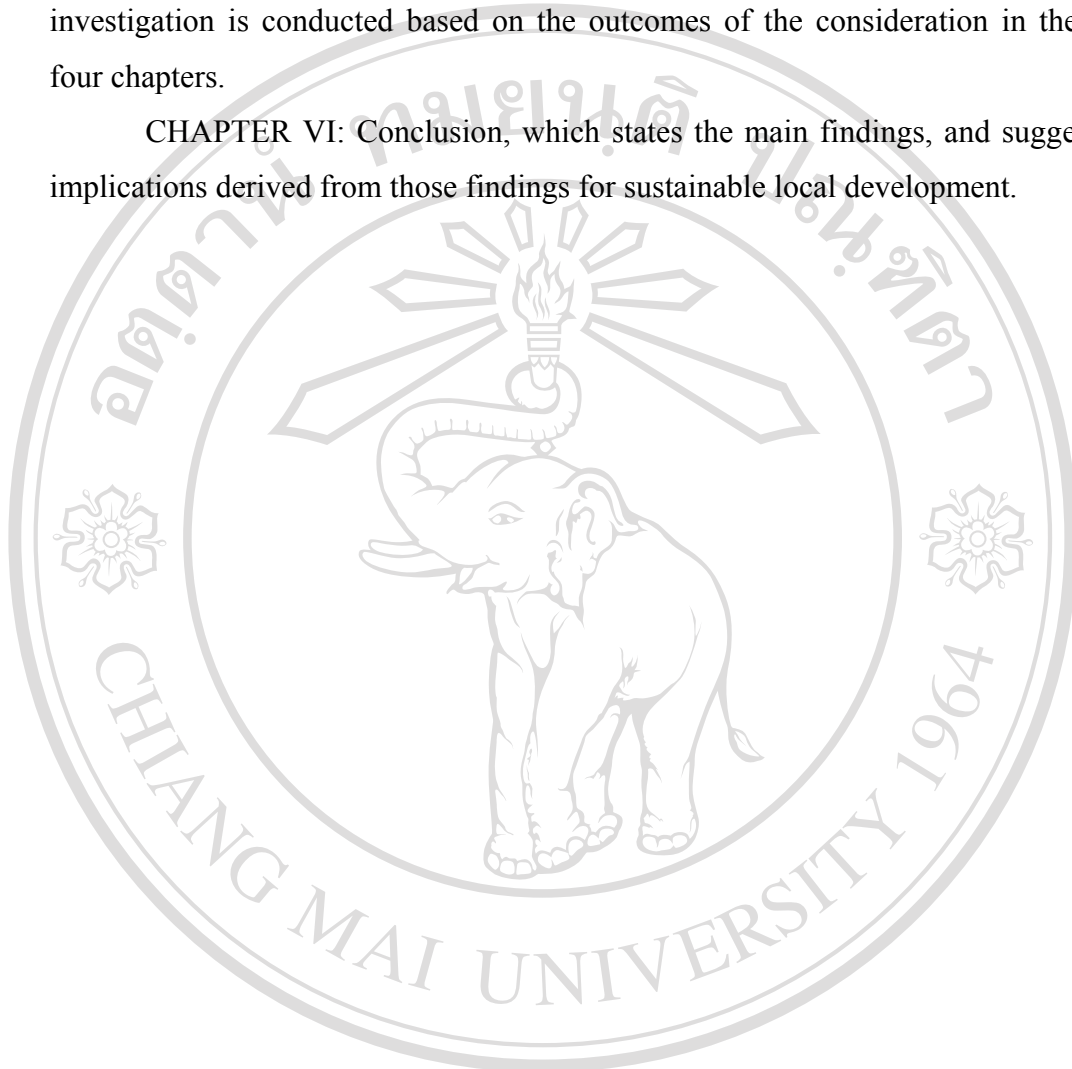
CHAPTER III: Local contexts, physical conditions of the locality, and chronological historical incidents of the research sites. The characteristics of the research sites are presented in conjunction with the social organization and belief system, socio-economic context, and intra-extra ethnic relationship.

CHAPTER IV: The dynamism of shifting cultivation in the research site for the analysis of the major issues in their agricultural production system. The processes of agricultural change are delineated, by applying referential comparative study between the two spatially adjacent Pwo Karen communities each of which has different faces in the introduction of cash-cropping.

CHAPTER V: Investigation of the highlanders' decision-making processes and

adaptive manners in the transformation of their agricultural production system. This investigation is conducted based on the outcomes of the consideration in the previous four chapters.

CHAPTER VI: Conclusion, which states the main findings, and suggests policy implications derived from those findings for sustainable local development.



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