

**COMMUNITY AND IDENTITIES: THE POLITICS OF PLACE
OF THE LISU IN NORTHERN THAILAND**

JOSEPH R. RICKSON

**MASTER OF ARTS
IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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10 MAY 2005

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[I]n the lives of individuals, just as in society at large, the profoundest change can take place within a very reduced time frame. When we least expect it, life sets a challenge to test our courage and our willingness to change; at such a moment, there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or in saying that we are not yet ready. The challenge will not wait. Life does not look back.

(Paulo Coelho 2001:ix-x)

It may seem strange to some that these acknowledgements were one of the first parts of this thesis that I pondered. Now, I find myself at the completion of this phase in my life looking back to thank those people who without their support and encouragement this work would not have *started*. In the summer of 1998/99 in Australia, I was an undergraduate trying to finish as quickly as I could to begin my travels. I took take a summer course, a foreign language, the only classes left open were Vietnamese and Thai. As fate would have it, Vietnamese class was full, and as a result I have been studying, living and working in Thailand for the past six years. Small, seemingly insignificant decisions that we make every day can have a profound impact on our lives. Interactions with people from many different countries and cultures, and the experiences and events I have had and been a part of along the way, have significantly influenced my life and way of thinking.

I was privileged to have the constant encouragement, support and love of my family and friends although thousands of kilometers away for the past six years, we became closer in many ways. I would like to express my gratitude to Ajarn Panida Sinsuwan and her family, who have become like my own family here in Thailand, for I truly believe it was their support, understanding and genuine concern that made me want to stay in Thailand for so many years. My close friend Sukit Kanjina encouraged me to enroll for a Master's program and always pushed me to read more. I remember late at night he would show up at my apartment with a stack of articles in his hands and test me on their contents the next day, his focus and determination I would like to think rubbed off on me.

Working in the field of development I began at a non-governmental organization, the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture Association of Thailand (IMPECT), where I first began work with highland peoples of northern Thailand. Piya Sansee helped me to greater understand issues of development in Thailand and first introduced me to the Lisu. Wiwat Tamee instilled in me the ability to see things from a different perspective and to think out complex problems logically, along with others such as Sakda Saenme and Phriwan Sewalee.

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Joseph R. Rickson

