

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION

**Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC)
and
Research and Training Center for
Religio-Cultural Communities (RTRC)
Chiang Mai**

Since 1975 to The Present

April 2019

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Communities (RTRC) Chiang Mai

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FOREWORD

As development in Thai society evolved over the past decades, the emergence of the “Religio-Cultural Approach” that was formulated by the Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC) Chiang Mai during the period 1976 to 1980 has showed how indigenous knowledge, local wisdom and community experience can contribute to sustainable development of the poor and vulnerable communities in Thailand. This approach was first discussed during a National-level Seminar on “Community Culture and Development” organised by the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD) held at the Sawankarnivat Centre, Samut Prakarn in 1981. Participants included NGOs, academics, Christian priests, religious communities, Buddhist monks and others.

In 1982 an “Internal Evaluation of DISAC-Chiang Mai” was conducted which helped to sharpen the worldview, vision, perspective and framework of development work of DISAC Chiang Mai. A total of 18 key questions were discussed during this evaluation – which, among others, asked “Who develops whom?” The findings and conclusions of this internal evaluation pointed out that the development process in Thailand and the approach and mind-set of development workers must adopt a “paradigm shift” in order to engage with the philosophy and wisdom of the local people and be adaptive and responsive to ongoing social change in Thai society.

Meanwhile, at the global level, following Vatican II in 1965, a number of key documents were published – including “*Guadium et Spes*” (1965) and “*Populorum Progressio*” (1967) – which announced a new mission for the Church in the world today based on an inclusive approach to evangelisation and an option for the poor. In 1970, the Priests Institute for Social Action” (PISA) of the Asian Catholic Church organised a Seminar in Hong Kong on the role of religions and development. The Chiang Mai diocese of Thailand sent Fr. Micro Trusagnach – a Betharam priest – to attend this seminar. On his return, Fr. Trusagnach set up the first-ever Credit Union group at the Sacred Heart Church in Chiang Mai.

Over the years, this paradigm shift led us to adopt the community culture-based approach in our work which resulted in the “Religio-Cultural Approach”. This enriched our engagement with indigenous and hill tribe communities in Northern Thailand during the 10 years – 1982 to 1993.

1993 was another landmark in the history of DISAC Chiang Mai when an “External Evaluation” was conducted by CEBEMO (the Dutch development agency) and involved a team of Thai and foreign experts. The main findings from this external evaluation was that it validated the Religio-Cultural Approach as the key force in our development work that addresses the everyday challenges faced by the grassroots communities. It also recommended that we extend our work with communities to include, among others, personal development at different levels; training of “organic intellectuals” environment and integrated agriculture; and especially the construction of local theology – a spiritual dimension of this approach. In the following years, this was carried out to achieve the goal of total human development in all aspects: human to human; human and all creations; and human with the Supreme – which became the essential foundation of sacred and sustainable development.

The “Religio-Cultural Approach” also had wider impact on Thai society. It was reflected in the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan of the Royal Government of Thailand in 1997 and in subsequent five-year plans.¹

Within the Church, on the 50th anniversary of “Populorum Progressio” in 2017, the Vatican also set up the “Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development” which was consistent with our Religio-Cultural Approach.

¹ See: Sinichi, Shigetomi, July 2013/2556 Development and Institutionalization of Communitarian Thought in Thailand pp. 8-10); UNDP, 2007/2550 - Sufficiency Economy of Human Development Report, p.35; and Naksupa, Chatthip, 2012/2555 - Community Cultural Approach in Thai Society.

This Historical Documentation of DISAC/RTRC work over the last 40 years is a synthesis of our holistic approach and development experiences. It will set a new direction for work in the future based on our grassroots experiences and lessons learnt working among the marginalised indigenous and hill tribe communities. This documentation has been an action-reflection-contemplation process. More than 40 years of our work demonstrates that the impact of the Religio-Cultural Approach is supporting peoples' integral development at the grassroots level. This approach and experience can be beneficial to the church and society in Thailand and elsewhere in responding to the rapidly changing social context in our societies.

Pope Francis has said “*We are not living an era of change but a change of era*”. In “*Laudato Si*” Pope Francis clearly stated that sustainable development must be based on the vision of the grassroots, especially local, indigenous, marginalised groups who live everywhere in the world. Therefore, this “change of era” must include all aspects of peoples' development: vision, mission, work process, personal and community development, organic intellectuals and community workers at all levels.

We hope this Historical Documentation will guide the future direction and work of RTRC in Thailand and can be shared with others in the Church and civil society in other countries. We thank the wide range of people who participated in this process and may God always bless you all.

Fr Niphot Thianwiharn
Director
Research and Training Center for Religio-Cultural Community (RTRC)
Chiang Mai

March 2019

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In addition, senior village leaders and “Organic Intellectuals” alumni from the various hilltribe communities and villages in Northern Thailand shared their stories and life experiences which have also been included in this publication.

The International Advisory Team of the Asian School of Wisdom (ASW) including Dr. Nadarajah Manickam (Institute of Humanities and Compassion Studies, Xavier University, Bhuvaneshwar, India); Fr. Jojo M. Fung S.J. (Jesuit Companions in Indigenous Ministry under JCAP and the Institute of Spirituality & Sustainability, Loyola School of Theology, Manila, The Philippines; Fr. Larry Radice, Maryknoll priest (Dali, Yunan, China); Mr. Charles Bertille (former Vice-President of Fondacio International and Asian Coordinator) and Dr. Victor Karunan (Visiting Professor – MA/PhD in Development Studies – Chulalongkorn University; Social Policy and Development – Thammasat University, and Human Rights and Peace Studies – Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand) provided useful advice and comments on earlier drafts of this publication.

A special note of thanks and appreciation to Fr. Niphot Thianwiwan who was the inspiration and mentor for this historical documentation and research project. A special thanks also to Dr. Sunthorn Wongjomporn for the photos included in this publication.

SECTION 1:

INTRODUCTION

I first met Fr. Niphot Thianwihan in 1980 when I was then Asian Secretary of the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS-Asia) based in Hong Kong. We invited Fr. Niphot as a Resource Person for a Southeast Asia Workshop on Education in Penang, Malaysia. Since then I have had numerous occasions to engage with him and his team of dedicated staff at the Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC) Chiang Mai for workshops, exposure programmes and personal reflection and consultations. It was during this period of the early 1980s that I was also first exposed to the work of DISAC Chiang Mai among the Karen hill tribes in Northern Thailand and participated in many reflection sessions with “Organic Intellectuals” (OI’s), community leaders, women’s groups, youth, as well as rituals and cultural ceremonies.

In 1993-1994 I was approached by CEBEMO (Catholic Development Agency in the Netherlands) to lead a team of experts to undertake an “External Evaluation of DISAC Chiang Mai”. This evaluation was a great learning experience of the range of activities and initiatives undertaken by DISAC Chiang Mai and the deep impact it

had on the lives of hill tribes and lowland poor communities in Northern Thailand. This was followed in 1995-1996 by the “Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation” (PME) Project which was a global research of indigenous concepts, frameworks, tools and methods of PME used by grassroot communities in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The PME Project was supported by a Consortium of German donor agencies – MISEROER, Bread for the World, and EZE, and I undertook the research for the countries of India, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines in the Asia region. This research was of great benefit to DISAC Chiang Mai, not only to document their creative and indigenous PME methods and tools, but also to learn from the experiences from other countries in the region.

Over the years, DISAC Chiang Mai evolved as one of the most dedicated and consistent grassroots organizations working with the Karen and other hill tribe communities in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son and lowland poor communities in Phayao, among others. The richness of its experiences and lessons learnt, resulted in its transition into the Research and Training Centre for Religio-Cultural Communities (RTRC) in mid-1980s.

The initial idea of undertaking a Historical Documentation of the four decades of work and experiences of DISAC Chiang Mai and RTRC was discussed with Fr. Niphot and his team at RTRC in Chiang Mai in January 2018. There was a strong feeling among the RTRC team as well as others who have been associated with DISAC Chiang Mai and RTRC over these decades, that we need to document this rich history, lessons learnt not only as evidence of impact and change in the lives of the poor; but also to transmit this knowledge and experiences to the hill tribe youth and the younger generation to motivate them to follow the footsteps of their elders and community leaders.

I feel privileged and humbled to lead a team of dedicated staff and researchers to undertake this Historical Documentation of DISAC/ RTRC. The study process lasted from February to December 2018 which involved desk study of documents/materials (in Thai and English)

accumulated over the years on the work of DISAC Chiang Mai and RTRC; field-visits and interviews and focus group discussions with organic intellectuals, village leaders, young people and others; consultation and feedback from friends and associates of DISAC/RTRC and a Stakeholders Consultation held in July 2018.

This, therefore, is a record of history of the dedication, commitment and contribution of Fr. Niphot and his team to development work among the poor and the marginalised in Northern Thailand. It is also a documentation of evidence and lessons learnt in the process to inform and enhance our understanding of what change means in the lives of the poor and how local wisdom, indigenous knowledge and practices can be used as a powerful force for community solidarity and action for sustainable development.

This then is a historical process documentation of the development work undertaken by the Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC) Chiang Mai and the Research and Training Centre for Religio-Cultural Communities (RTRC) from 1975 to the present. RTRC grew out of DISAC Chiang Mai in 1983 to build on the work done earlier by DISAC Chiang Mai among the Catholic and poor communities in Northern Thailand.

DISAC Chiang Mai has been involved in development work among the hill tribes since 1965 in the four provinces in Northern Thailand – Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Rai and Phayao. Between 1975 and 1983, DISAC Chiang Mai was a member of the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD) which comprises of 10 DISAC's spread all over Thailand.

The history of the work during the past four decades can be broadly divided into five main periods as follows:

- (a) Starting years (1931-1959) with the work of the Mission Etrangers de Paris missionaries (MEP) and some Thai priests to build schools and provide relief work for poor among the hill tribes and lowland Thai communities.

- (b) Work among the Karen hill tribes (1959-1970) by the Betharam Fathers who followed the work of the MEP missionaries and established first contact with the Karen, Lahu and Akha hill tribes. They used the “holistic approach” in development work – evangelisation, education, improving living conditions, healthcare, and setting up of self-help communities, and
- (c) Community organisations (1975 to 1995) setup with support from the Betharam Fathers – credit unions, youth groups, teachers groups, etc.
- (d) Rice-merit ceremony, water spirit and religio-cultural approaches and development interventions among hill tribe and lowland poor communities in Northern Thailand (1995 to the present)
- (e) Regional exchanges, trainings, formations on the religio-cultural approach and development work of DISAC/RTRC with academics, civil society, religious groups and lay organisations in other neighbouring countries (Myanmar, Lao PDR, Vietnam, etc.) (2005 to the present)

In 1981-1982 DISAC Chiang Mai undertook a major “critical and comprehensive internal review” of its development work. Hence, the “religio-cultural approach” was adopted as the main thrust/vision (shifting paradigm) of DISAC Chiang Mai’s development work for the future, and the decision made to set up the “Research and Training Centre for Religio-Cultural Communities” (RTRC) in 1983.

In 1993, CEBEMO (the Dutch catholic development agency in the Netherlands) commissioned an External Evaluation of the work of DISAC Chiang Mai, in collaboration with the Asia Partnership for Human Development (APHD) in Hong Kong. The evaluation was carried out by a group of international and local experts and

recommended, among others, that DISAC Chiang Mai to build on the excellent work done over the past decades and expand its work in areas related to organisational development, environment, sustainable agriculture, rice theology, partnerships with civil society and academics, trainings and exchange programmes, etc.

Over the last 25 years (from 1993 to the present) DISAC Chiang Mai and RTRC continued the development work among the hill tribe and lowland communities in Northern Thailand, with increasing focus on training/capacity development of staff, lay leaders, village leaders (*“organic intellectuals”*); providing formation for catechists and lay leaders from Lao PDR, Myanmar, Justice and Peace workers network in Asia Pacific and exchange/exposure programmes for catholic leaders/farmers from Korea – members of the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements (FIMARC), among others.

In January 2018, it was decided to undertake a historical process documentation of the past decades of work of DISAC Chiang Mai in order to establish the future vision, strategies and work of RTRC for the next 10 years. A major inspiration for this historical documentation was Pope Francis’ new encyclicals – *“Evangelii Gaudium”* and *“Laudato Si”* – which has provided the new vision and mission for Church in Thailand to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth. This new vision/mission will be the guiding principle for RTRC’s future work for promoting *“integral human development”* among the hill tribes and lowland poor communities in Northern Thailand.

The main purpose of this historical documentation of work of DISAC/RTRC are the following:

- (a) To document the development approach, experiences and lessons learnt over the past 50 years in development work among hill tribes and lowland communities in Northern Thailand
- (b) To highlight key achievements, lessons learnt and major challenges faced in development work

- (c) To share the historical documentation with leaders and community members among the hill tribes and lowland communities, academics, Church and NGO partners and other stakeholders, so that the memory and lessons learnt can be passed on to the next generation of young people
- (d) To inform and guide the development of a futuristic 10-year Strategic Plan of development work for RTRC moving forward in the coming years.

Victor P. Karunan, Ph.D.
Bangkok
April 2019

SECTION 2:

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT – CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN NORTHERN THAILAND

2.1 Northern Thailand Society

The Northern region of Thailand comprises of the Upper North and the Lower North. The Upper North is mainly mountainous comprising of 5.2 million rai, or, 8 per cent of the total area which is lowland; 18.9 million rai, or, 29.6 per cent is upland; and 39.8 million rai, or, 62.4 per cent is highlands. Starting from the 1970s the Thai government instituted regional development plans in Northern Thailand - a Northern Regional Plan was proposed in 1973 which included the promotion of agro-industries, urban growth centres, industrial estates and tourism in line with Thailand's National Development Plans. In the 1980s, the regional plan was intensified with



Upper North Map of Thailand (Source: Google Map)

export-oriented industrial estates, such as clothing and jewellery (Chiang Mai); pottery, agricultural machinery (Lampang); and agro-industries (Nakhon Sawan, Phitsanulok and Phrae).

Chiang Mai province experienced a major transformation in the 1980s when the Government developed infrastructure and expanded educational institutions to stimulate economic growth in the region. With the rapid expansion of urbanisation and un-planned land use, much of the fertile lowland was transformed for non-agricultural purposes – viz, housing, factories, tourist resorts and golf courses. Pressures on land and agriculture intensified during this period with the dominance of the market-oriented economy and increasing competition over the rich productive resources in Northern Thailand (land, water, forest, etc.) resulting in conflicts between villagers and politicians, military, bureaucrats and business interests. Tensions also

intensified between landowners (mostly small-scale cultivators) and tenants on high rents for land and buffalos, and small-scale cultivators competing with middle-men and agribusiness companies for low prices for their agricultural products. This resulted in a shift from small-scale sufficient economy and traditional agriculture based on staple crops, to expanding cash crops and contract farming across most of Northern Thailand.

The experience of villagers in Northern Thailand over the past decades of market-led development led by the State and business/commercial interests has been marked by tensions and conflict over natural resources. While villagers have generally satisfied with their material needs and benefitted from social services – especially health and education – they have increasingly come under pressure from vested interests from the outside. They realised they could no longer live as in the past; nor rush to embrace an uncertain future.²

Over the years, Thailand's development model based on its National Economic and Social Development Plans has brought about major changes in the economic infrastructure and markets for agriculture and industry in all the provinces of Northern Thailand. However, following the 1997 "Asian economic crisis", there was serious re-thinking of this model of capitalist development based on free-trade and liberalisation linked to world trade. This led to increasing focus on self-reliance and self-sufficiency initiated by the "Self-Sufficiency Economic Philosophy" of the late King Bhumiphol Adulyadej. This approach, among others, placed emphasis in reinforcing the "values of the people" and tapping "local wisdom" to contribute to economic and social wellbeing of the people. This approach which was adopted by Government policy and implemented all over the country, was conducive for the expansion of the "religio-cultural approach" of DISAC based on its work among the hilltribe and lowland communities in the three provinces of Northern Thailand. In many ways, DISAC's was already pioneering the religio-cultural approach to development for a

² Quinn, Rapin (1997), pp.32-33, 62-64 and 224.

decade earlier in its work among the communities and increasingly influencing and finding recognition among church organisations (CCTD) and other NGOs and civil society organisations in Northern Thailand based on this approach.

Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand

Hill tribe (Chao Khao) is a term used in Thailand for all the various ethnic groups who mostly inhabit the high mountainous Northern and Western regions of the country, including both sides of the border between Northern Thailand, Lao PDR and Burma (Myanmar). Currently “highland Thai” is a more recent term also used to designate the people living in the mountainous areas. The Tribal Research Institute in Chiang Mai recognizes 10 different hill tribes in Thailand. Most are groups that have migrated into Thailand in the last 200 years from China, Tibet, Myanmar and Laos. The major tribes are



Karen young girls in Mae Hong Son (2016)

the Karen (also known as Kariang, Yang), Hmong (Meo, Miao), Mien (Yao), Lahu (Mussur), Akha (Kaw), and Lisu (Lisaw) – each with their own distinct language, culture and traditions. The Karen hill tribes are the largest among the ethnic minority groups in Northern Thailand. In the 1990s it was estimated that about three to five million Karen were living in the mountainous border region of Thailand and Burma/Myanmar. Of these, some 290,000 live in Thailand.³

The hill-dwelling peoples have traditionally been primarily subsistence farmers' who use slash-and-burn agricultural techniques to farm their heavily forested communities. Popular perceptions that slash and burn practices are environmentally destructive, government concerns over borderland security, and population pressure has caused the government to forcibly relocate many hill tribe peoples. Traditionally, hill tribes were also a migratory people, leaving land as it became depleted of natural resources or when trouble arose. A 2013 article in Bangkok Post said that *"Nearly a million hill peoples and forest dwellers are still treated as outsiders—criminals even, since most live in protected forests. Viewed as national security threats, hundreds of thousands of them are refused citizenship although many are natives to the land"*.

Until the 1970s, the Thai central government tended to regard the hill tribe groups chiefly as opium cultivators engaged in illegal activities. Since that time the highland minorities, through their own efforts and government-organized crop substitution projects, have become involved in the legal market economy of the country. The Thai government has made an effort to bring the hill tribe groups into the mainstream by giving them access to decent medical care and educating them in Nikorn or settlement schools. The government, the United Nations and various aid organizations have working hard to replace opium as their major source of income, by encouraging the hill tribes to grow other cash crops such as coffee or beans, and finding markets for their colourful and distinctive crafts, jewellery and textiles.

³ Bell, Mathew (1994), p.8.



Akha people in Chiang Rai (1975)

Many hill tribe villages now have electricity, cell phones, and decent roads. Some have paved roads with storm drains. Television antennas and satellite dishes have sprouted from some huts. Children in the hill tribe schools are taught Thai, some English and their native language. Still many hill tribe members, refugees and migrants are undocumented and have no legal status. Many are taken advantage of by human traffickers who force them into prostitution or slave labor.

The Royal Project is an initiative of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej to help develop highlands in northern Thailand on a sustainable basis. It has gained recognition worldwide for its success in eradicating opium poppies and improving the well-being of the people. The Royal Project involves the growing of a wide variety of cash crops, especially temperate plants, to replace opium cultivation, improve the living conditions of hill tribe people, and eliminate the slash-and-burn technique of clearing land. It began operations in 1969 and has

now expanded significantly, with more than 100,000 people benefiting from it. The program began in the late 1960s, when His Majesty stayed at the royal palace in Chiang Mai Province, and visited and talked to hill tribe villagers living in the mountainous area about their needs.

2.2 Christians in Northern Thailand



Bishop Lucia Lacos, first Catholic Bishop of Chiang Mai diocese with lowland Christians, 1952



Fr. Pedei Bido, Betharam Father with Karen Christians at Maepon Center, 1972

Christianity was first introduced to Thailand by the European missionaries. Christians are only 1.2% of the national population, which is predominantly Buddhist. They are numerically and organizationally concentrated more heavily in the North, where they make up an estimated 16% of some lowland districts (e.g., Chomthong, Chiang Mai) and up to very high percentages in tribal districts (e.g., Mae Sariang, Mae Hong Son).

In the 1550s the Portuguese mercenaries and their chaplain arrived in Ayutthaya. By 1660, the Vicariate Apostolic of Siam was established under the leadership particularly of Portuguese and French fathers. Protestants appeared in the new capital of Bangkok in 1828 through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions representative, Karl Gützlaff followed by Rev. Jesse Cass Well and Dr. Dan Beach Bradley. These two both switched affiliations to the American

Missionary Association (AMA) in 1848 over their support for the Finney revival emphasis on “perfectionism” that the Congregationalist parent organization found unorthodox, effectively ending the work of the ABCFM in Siam.

The American Baptists arrived in Thailand in 1833 and American Presbyterians in 1840. Daniel McGilvary and William Clifton Dodd were important names in the formation of the Church in Lanna Kingdom of Northern Thailand. Burmese Karen evangelists and Dr. John Sung of China were part of the early evangelistic efforts to Thailand up until World War II. Other waves of European and American Protestant missions to Thailand included the Christian and Missionary Alliance in the 1930s and then again after World War II. Korean and other Asian missionaries came in increasing numbers from the 1970s through the 1990s, such Dr. Kosuke Koyama of Japan.

The Laos Mission founded its first church - Chiang Mai Church - now known simply as First Church, Chiang Mai, in 1868. After a brief period of evangelistic success, the mission underwent a time of persecution in 1869, during which two converts were martyred. This persecution was abated in 1878 by the “Edict of Religious Toleration”. Parishes and congregations experienced sporadic numerical growth. The activities of missionaries were predominantly in itinerant preaching, medical institutions and educational facilities as well as the introduction of technologies, methodologies and institutional cultures which have been generally well received by the Thai people. They were occasionally able to mobilize large numbers of Thai helpers. Since World War II, control of Christian organizations was slowly turned over to Thai Christians and the institutions integrated as private institutions in an increasingly centralized Thailand.

Christians have made and continue to make substantial contributions to health care and education in Thailand. Facilities such as Saint Louis Hospital, Bangkok Mission Hospital, Camillian Hospital, Bangkok Christian Hospital were once considered to be among the best in the country. Major Christian schools dot the map of Thailand.

European and American missionaries introduced the printing press, western surgery, smallpox vaccinations, taught foreign languages and wrote linguistic dictionaries. Thai and Western Christians in the past 50 years, especially those in the Church of Christ in Thailand denomination, have been heavily engaged in administrative reform of church organizations, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, social development projects, enculturation or adaptation of the Gospel for Thai culture and have been active in providing leadership in the Thai democracy movement, refugee relief, and improving the status of women, the handicapped and children.

The earliest Roman Catholic missionaries in Siam were Friar Jeronimo da Cruz and Sebastião da Canto, both Dominicans, who came in 1567. They were killed by the Burmese in 1569. Later, the Franciscans and Jesuits arrived. The 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were marked by alternating periods of toleration and persecution of missionaries by the Siamese rulers.

By the beginning of the 20th century, there were about 23,000 Catholic adherents, 55 churches and chapels, representatives of monastic orders, and social and educational institutions (orphanages, schools and a seminary and college). Many Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in the first half of the 20th century. Thailand now has about 292,000 Catholics. On October 22, 1989, the catechist Philip Siphong Onphitak and six companions (nuns and laymen), who had been executed by Thai police during the Franco-Thai War of 1940 on the suspicion that they were French spies, were beatified as the Martyrs of Thailand.

Among the Roman Catholic orders present in the country are the Salesians, Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, Redemptorists, Camillian Fathers, Brothers of St. Gabriel, De La Salle Brothers, Jesuits, Franciscans, Sisters of Charity of St. Paul, Good Shepherd Sisters, Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Marist Brothers, Marist Fathers, SVD, Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Carmelite Missionaries, Congregation of the Mission; Sisters of the Franciscan of the Immaculate Conception, Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

There are several Protestant umbrella organizations. The oldest of them is Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) formed in the mid-1930s. It consists of Thai, Chinese, Karen, and English-speaking congregations. It is a member of the World Council of Churches and has about 60,000 members. One of the largest Protestant associations is the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand. Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists are recognized by local authorities as separate Protestant denominations and organized under the same umbrella group. The Gospel Church Foundation of Thailand, also known as the TCMA (Thai Christian and Missionary Alliance) is part of the worldwide body of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Among the other Protestant groups represented in Thailand are Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostal, Charismatic Christians and the Anglican Church in Thailand – which is a deanery of the Diocese of Singapore, itself part of the larger Church of the Province of Southeast Asia. Thailand has seen a recent increase of evangelical Christian ministries operating throughout the country. There are many foreign missionaries and residents who are establishing churches and prayer groups throughout Thailand. One of the largest, Youth with a Mission, currently has over 200 full-time foreign staff and over 100 Thai staff, ministering in 20 locations. Another evangelistic missionary organization, OMF International, has an outreach to place Christian teachers in the Kingdom's schools.

The first entry of Christians in Northern Thailand was initiated by the Protestants – from the Church of Christ Foundation (CCF) in Thailand and the American Baptist Mission – whose missionaries started work in this region over 150 years ago. The Protestants established the first-ever private University in Thailand – Payap University – in 1974, as well as clinics and hospitals among the hill tribe communities.⁴ The Catholics were later entrants and established the Catholic dioceses in eight provinces in Northern Thailand – viz, Mae Hong Son, Phrae, Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Phayao, Nan, Lampang and

⁴ Webb, R.A.F. – *K'La and the Catholics of Chiang Mai – Village Development in the Northwest of Thailand, Northern Territory University, Australia, (n.d.), p.81.*



Karen Catholics in Mae Hong Son 1972

Lamphun. In the 1990s the total Catholic population in these provinces amounted to approx.. 20,000 (0.4%) of the total population. The CCF believed that the livelihood of rural people would be disrupted by the form of “development” led by urban élites as had happened in many Western countries. The CCF, therefore, set up the Rural Life Department (RLD) in 1943 to organise farmer interest groups in Chiang Mai and Nan provinces and to train them how to manage their own cooperative group activities.

In 1951, the Chiang Mai Catholic Church extended its work with Northern Thais to include Karen minority groups. The missionary activities included education, health, rural settlement for the landless and the promotion of agricultural occupations.

The Church’s approach to help the poor began to shift from welfare handouts to urging the people to form their own interest groups and to become involved in development activities.

The first entry of the Catholics in Northern Thailand was the *Congregation Missions Etrangères de Paris* (MEP Fathers) who arrived

in 1931 and set up missions in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Lamphun. They were very keen to work among the hill tribe communities whose indigenous beliefs provided a fertile ground for missionary activities.⁵ In 1949-1950 the Betharam Fathers arrived in Northern Thailand having been forced to leave China under the new Communist Government and settled in Mae Hong Son. In 1972 the priests of the Rome-based *Pontifical Institute for Missions* (PIME Fathers) began to work among the Lahu hill tribes with their centre in Lampang. In addition, the Spanish Order of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary (*Marina Sisters*) started work in Chiang Mai provinces in 1965. Their work was mainly focused on young girls in Chiang Mai diocese and Mae Hong Son who were lured to the sex industry in Bangkok. The Catholic Sisters provided them with training in personal hygiene, sewing and weaving, etc. in order to provide them local employment opportunities to earn livelihood.⁶

The Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD) was established in 1958 (registered only in 1973). It placed its emphasis on human development guided by Pope Paul VI's Encyclical in 1967 and sought to counterbalance the materialistic orientation created by the growth economy and its proponents. Moreover, a group within the CCTD adopted the "Theology of Liberation" (*Thewasat haengkan plodploi*) used a "conscientisation" (*kan pluk jitsamnuk*) approach as a means to convince ordinary people to participate in their community activities and decide by themselves what was good for them. However, development workers, at that time, had little experience in working with people at the community level in accordance with a human development concept rather than using a welfare handout approach.



CCTD logo 1975

⁵ For a more detailed history of Christianity among the Karen hill tribes and the Church in Chiang Mai Diocese – see Sangkusolnaiphasutha, Boonlert (2008), pp.38-79.

⁶ Webb, Op cit, p.81.

2.3 Hill tribe Rituals, Culture and Mythology

Traditional religion is the basis of the Karen hill tribes' culture and way of life. It defines their basic orientation to a unitary spiritual and physical world. For them, Christianity and Buddhism have often proved complimentary to this traditional way of life.

In the mythology of the hill tribe communities in Northern Thailand, there is the concept of the “*Supreme Being*” (*Ta Thi Ta Tau*) – the creator of earth, stars and mountains. In addition, there is “junior spirits” for water, trees, forest, rice and all living beings of nature.⁷ Karen society has evolved a ritual system to which great importance is traditionally attached and is regularly performed in the course of the life cycle of the people.



**Holistic worldview of the
Karen people
(Wongjomporn 2008)**

Generally there are six major sacred rituals performed by the Karen hill tribes during the year. The overall purpose of these rituals are to: honor, give thanks, give offerings to the Creator or God in nature, trees, rivers, mountains, etc.; to honor and support a person or group's transition through the traditional rite of passage (birth, adolescence, death, marriage, birthdays, etc.); to honor a person or group's transition through various life stages (illness, graduation, divorce, retirement, new career, etc.); to honor and give thanks or to participate in the life circles of nature and the cosmos (seasonal changes, full moons, planting and harvesting time, etc.).

The six major sacred rituals include the following:

- (a) *Ancestors-Community Ritual*: performed in January and followed by a traditional New Year ritual based on the ritual cycle of the Karen hill tribes in February each year.

⁷ Ibid, p. 83.



Water ritual ceremony in Dok Daeng village 2016

- (b) *Upland field-running Water Ritual*: is performed during April and May
- (c) *Irrigation Canal for Farming Ritual*: performed during May and June, or the beginning of the rainy season before planting
- (d) *Paddy (wet rice) Field and Community Ritual*: performed during July and August
- (e) *Individual-family ritual*: performed two months before the harvest and other activities related to production.
- (f) *Rice harvest and Production Ritual*: performed during the months of November and December each year.⁸

⁸ Wongjomporn, Sunthorn (2008), p.11.



Paddy ritual in Dok Daeng village 2013

The Karen hill tribes also possess a deep sense of “space” and “placement” where they live. They believe they live in a place or on a land where their ancestors have been buried generations upon generations. Thus the ancestors’ spirits exist and circulate in these sacred spaces. Hence, as their children, they have a sacred mission to protect and care for the space and the land on which they live.

Below is an example of a Karen chant which describes the deep sense of space and place⁹:

<i>P' of hif le mojdeilau</i>	<i>The village we live in was settled by our mothers</i>
<i>P' of hif le pa deilau</i>	<i>The village we live in was set up by our fathers</i>
<i>Sav swisaf le mojsooflauz</i>	<i>The pamelos trees were planted by our mothers</i>
<i>Mav nyaisaf le pa sooflau</i>	<i>The orange trees were planted by our fathers</i>
<i>P 'auf k'tau auf k'tau</i>	<i>We eat from them and take care of them</i>
<i>Koov auf pgaz lei tuj lei tau</i>	<i>They feed us for the rest of our lives from generation to generation</i>

⁹ Ibid, p.36.

SECTION 3:

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT – DISAC Chiang Mai

Marina's sister has been involved in vocational training among hill tribes young girls since 1965, followed by DISAC-CM involved in development work among hill tribes since 1975 in three provinces and over 284 villages in northern Thailand – Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son and Phayao.

This included over 24,000 Karen people in over 10 percent of the total village of 2,200 hill tribe villages in northern Thailand. After more than 40 years of Christian missionary activities among the hill tribes, there are 68,975 Catholics with 15,080 catechumens (2017).

The highland ethnic minorities – also known as hill tribes (*“chao khao”* – in Thai) live mostly in the provinces of Northern Thailand bordering Myanmar (Burma) and China. The main hill tribes include the Karen, Akha, Lisu and the Hmong. According to a September 1988 survey, nine officially listed tribal groups lived in 21 provinces with a total population of about 530,299 people. According to government



DISAC-Chiang Mai Staff training 1993

statistic surveyed 2004, there are estimated number of hill tribe people in 21 provinces about 1,000,000 population. The hill tribe population make up approximately 1 per cent of the total population of Thailand.¹⁰

Fr. Niphot Thianwihan, a diocesan catholic priest had been the Director of DISAC Chiang Mai since its inception. Fr. Niphot came from a farmer's family in Phayao province and was trained for 4 years at INODEP (Ecumenical Institute for the Development of Peoples) in Paris. He was also actively involved with the International Movement of Catholic Students – Asia Pacific (IMCS-Asia Pacific) in the 1980s. During the INODEP training and his work with IMCS he was influenced by the “Theology of Liberation”¹¹ and Paulo Freire’s “conscientization” approach to community development. This formation greatly influenced his conceptualisation of the “community culture” (*watthanatham chumchon*) approach to development work which was implemented by

¹⁰ Karunan, Victor – PME Dialogue Process – Southeast Asia Partner Report 1 – *Diocesan Social Action Centre Chiang Mai (DISAC-Chiang Mai)*, Bangkok, April 1995, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ Scannone, Juan Carlos S.J. (2016), *Theological Studies*, Vol.77 (1), pp.118-135.

DISAC Chiang Mai and greatly influenced the CCTD network and other grassroots NGOs in Thailand during the 1980s. This approach recognised the relationship between people, livelihoods and environment, between people and their spiritual beliefs, and its potential to be mobilised for people-centred development.¹²

DISAC Chiang Mai was a member of the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD) which comprises of 10 DISAC's spread all over Thailand. The vision and mission of CCTD is defined as the *“religio-cultural approach” which aims to social action defined as “social action is primarily human development, both with regard to the quality of life and the condition of livelihood in accordance with human dignity, and the methodology for the attainment of that goal which must be in accord with the religious belief and the culture of the community”*.¹³

The history of DISAC Chiang Mai's work in Northern Thailand can be broadly divided into three main periods as follows:

- (a) Starting years (1931-1959) with the work of the Mission Etrangers de Paris missionaries (MEP) to build schools and provide relief work for poor communities among the hill tribes
- (b) Work among the Karen hill tribes (1959-1970) by the Betharam Fathers who followed the work of the MEP missionaries and established first contact with the Karen hill tribes. They used the “holistic approach” in development work – evangelisation, education, improving living conditions, healthcare, and setting up of self-help communities, and
- (c) Community organisations (1975 to 1995) setup with support from the Betharam Fathers – credit unions, youth groups, teachers groups, etc.

¹² Quinn, Rapin (1997), pp.106-107.

¹³ Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD) – *Three Year Plan of Action: 1993-1995*, Bangkok, p.22.



Community Revolving Fund ceremony, Phayao, 1988

DISAC Chiang Mai was formally established in 1975 and developed its work based on this past history and the foundations laid by the MEP and the Betharam Fathers. At the same time initial work began with refugees from Laos and ethnic groups from Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son and among the Karen hilltribes. Later, DISAC Chiang Mai started work among the native peoples in the districts of Mae Rim, Chomgthong and Chiang Dao in Chiang Mai province and Phayao in Chiang Rai province.

In 1983 DISAC Chiang Mai undertook a major “critical and comprehensive review/assessment” of its development work. The final meeting on this review which was held in “Rai Kansadal Resort” in Chiang Mai was a milestone in the history of DISAC – as, among others, it led to the establishment of the Regional Training Centre for Religio-Cultural Communities (RTRC).



Team staff of DISAC-Chiang Mai 1993

The main purpose of this internal evaluation of DISAC's work over the years was to: (a) synthesise the work since 1975-1981, (b) to critically review work and draw lessons learnt, and (c) to shift from a compartmentalised approach to work to a multi-dimensional/integrated approach using the "religio-cultural approach" to development. One of the major results of this study was that *"DISAC found the structural approach (structural analysis) to development work limiting in relation to identifying and developing peoples' own knowledge and potentials and effectively utilising the same for development work"*.¹⁴ Instead, it found that the real potential lay in the peoples' own religious and cultural traditions and context. Hence, the "religio-cultural approach" was adopted as the main thrust/vision of DISAC Chiang Mai's development work for the future.

¹⁴ Karunan, Victor, 1995, Op cit, p.4.

SECTION 4:

VISION, MISSION OF DISAC- CHIANG MAI: 1980s-1990s

4.1 The Religio-Cultural Approach to Development

The early missionary activities carried out by the Betharam Fathers among the Karen hill tribes in Northern Thailand was the initial stage of defining and developing a culturally-appropriate approach to development and peoples' theology based on the traditions, local wisdom and life experiences of the hill tribe communities. This was derived from the guidance provided by Bishop Lucien Lacoste, then Bishop of the Diocese of Chiang Mai. His vision of evangelisation work among the hilltribes comprised of the following key features:

- (a) *Evangelization and development work must go hand in hand. They are indivisible. Hence all development activities – whether they are material development in the villages, or, opening up training centres for young boys and girls - must include the spiritual, religious values and ethical development as an integrated approach.*

- (b) *Development work must be carried out regardless of class/race. Human dignity must be the main concern. This policy help to explain why all the working areas of DISAC whether they are hill tribes or lowland Thai people, were able to carry out easily the work with the target groups, who profess Buddhism and the hill tribe traditional religious practices.*
- (c) *Development must entail living “in better and in worse” conditions with the villagers -as the shepherd who lives among the flock of the sheep-this is because the real meaning of development is “building solidarity” This definition has become the essential element for the methodology of the religio-cultural approach, that is the development workers have to really live in solidarity with the villagers.*
- (d) *Dedication and enthusiasm of staff: the Betharam Fathers already have lived their lives as a valuable example-through concrete praxis of word and deed. This policy has had a tremendous influence on the recruitment and development of staff in so far as personality development is concerned. In other words, the development workers should be a true servant who renders service to the people (self-dedication is needed for evangelisation - which is giving praise to God).*
- (e) *During the period of Betharam Fathers, the development of priests, religious, and lay catechists, Christian leaders were outstanding such as, the formation of diocesan sisters and the training for people with good will to become catechists, village leaders, etc.*

In 1974, the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD) was established as the social arm of the Catholic Church in Thailand. It adopted a holistic approach to development in which all dimensions are inter-related and rooted in the religio-cultural values of the people. This approach came to be known as the “Religio-Cultural Approach to Development” work that was also adopted by DISAC Chiang Mai.

In 1982, DISAC Chiang Mai adopted the “Religio-Cultural Approach to Development” after a critical assessment of its past experience utilising the “structural approach” (structural analysis) to development work. This new approach was based on four key objectives:

- (a) *Total human development – economic, religious, cultural and decision-making*
- (b) *Support to people’s organisations (POs) to help people understand and draw strength from their religious-cultural values*
- (c) *Study and utilisation of people’s cultures in their daily lives and extension of these values to other communities, and*
- (d) *Creation of relationships that promote mutual help based on bonds of community.*¹⁵

The “religio-cultural approach” involves people who are dedicated, self-sacrificing and committed to the poor. It is based on an “Action-Reflection-Action” method of work which involves both spiritual and material aspects. The approach involves self-criticism, theological reflection, openness to people’s values and cultures and an understanding that development work is evangelisation. It responds to peoples’ needs and is incorporated into the peoples’ way of life.

This approach emerged from concrete experiences of work of DISAC staff among the Karen hill tribes and local Thai villagers in Northern Thailand. The approach effectively combines “development work” – based on socio-economic projects – and “evangelisation work” – based on catechism, religious formation and spiritual training. The former involves work related to – for example – land and agriculture, environment, village funds and savings groups. The latter involves work – for example – theological reflection, teaching, catechism, formation of students in schools and the church.

¹⁵ Karunan, Victor, 1995, Op cit, p.3

Based on this approach, DISAC Chiang Mai has placed emphasis on three key principles that has guided its work over the years – viz:

- (a) *Option for the Poor – religio-cultural heritage and human development*
- (b) *Religion has an important role to play in the present human and social realities of the hill tribe communities. Therefore the Church must be part of this effort towards human development and supportive of the content and the dynamisms of the peoples' cultures*
- (c) *In the implementation of the activities and work among the hill tribes, the principle of “Action-Reflection-Action” will always go hand-in-hand. This means involving in the process of reflection, learning from one another and analysing with people at all levels in the form of a “dialogue of life”.*

4.2 Community Existence

In 1991 DISAC Chiang Mai undertook a study on “Community Existence” to document the lessons learnt from its development activities.¹⁶ Community Existence for Thai people in the rural areas constitutes *“the basis for their traditional held values and beliefs, it formulates the lives of the people and serves as a grounding for their actual and spiritual knowledge and wisdom, as well as their culture”*¹⁷ Community Existence comprises of three key elements – viz, members, social relationships and institutions. Based on this definition, three key indicators are involved in community existence:

- (a) *Internal Cohesion – i.e., ongoing social interaction between and among members of the community and institutions*

¹⁶ Kaewthep, Kanjana, Sewatamara, Ariya and Vichitporn, Sornchai (1991) – *Community Existence – Struggling and Development Process of Chomthong District, Chiangmai*, Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD), Bangkok and CEBEMO, The Netherlands.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.2.



Focus Group Discussion with community - Research on Community Existence - Chomthong district, 1991

- (b) Sufficiency means of living – i.e., for a community to survive it needs sufficient means of living – land, natural resources, etc*
- (c) Community Management – i.e., the community must have an autonomous decision-making process which adheres to every dimension of society, such as when it sells rice, or how to resolve conflicts, etc.*

Community Existence unfolds both as a “struggling” and a “development” process. The struggling process is determined by the impact of external (outside) forces on the community and the community needs to respond and confront these forces. The development process, on the other hand, is a process of intentional and planned change to achieve specific goals. The community needs to face the challenges of change brought about by development.



**CEBEMO with Dr. Kanjana Kaewthep field-visit for research on
Community Existence, Chomthong District, 1991**

DISAC Chiang Mai adopted this approach to development work based on the living experiences of the people and communities in the rural areas of Northern Thailand. It believed that *“development work should emerge from community culture – in other words, from within a religio-cultural development approach”*.

4.3 Theology of Development Work

Cosmic Spirituality

Cosmic Spirituality is a world view centred on the “sacred” in the world – the relationship between people, nature and the supernatural. It is a paradigm that is contrary to the present world view of modern materialism – which sets apart the sacred from the human being and the world. It is a dimension of transcendence that recognises the “mother

of land”, the “spirit of the human being”, the “gods of the forest and mountains,” and the “mother earth”. In contrast, modern materialism and consumerism turns everything into commodities/materials that can be bought and sold. When the dimension of mystic and sacredness in commodities/materials are taken away from the belief of the people, then capitalism creates a new belief – viz, capital and money.¹⁸

4.4 Local Wisdom and “Organic Intellectuals” (OIs)

The grassroots-based community development work undertaken by DISAC over the years was centred on discovering the potentials of “local people’s wisdom” (*phumi panya chao ban*) and “local wise person” (*prat chao ban*) – termed as “organic intellectuals” (OIs) by DISAC.¹⁹ Local wisdom comprised of all the knowledge, experience, technology



Organic Intellectuals (OI) retreat 1988

¹⁸ Thianwihan, Fr. Niphot (n.d.) – *The Power from Within for the Change of Self and Society* (Mimeo), p.2.

¹⁹ Shigetomi, Shjinichi (2013), pp.14-16.

and insights gained by local villagers based on direct experience. Local wise person or OIs are the people who retain and transfer this body of knowledge and experience to younger generations at the grassroots level. DISAC therefore integrated this approach in its development work and made it the core of its community mobilisation strategy and to develop a group of OIs over the years.

4.5 Peoples Theology

In order to formulate the biblical and theological orientation of RTRC in the last 35 years of involvement in Peoples' Movement that includes the farmers, the refugees, the Karen hill tribe and in the last 8 years with the Lahu hill tribe, a concerted effort was initiated to solicit through personal inputs and group sharing on each individual's biblico-theological orientation. The sources are not only biblical (from the Bible), and theological (teachings of the Church) but also extra-biblical, such as local traditional wisdom and teachings of the other religions.

The work and experience of DISAC/RTRC over the years with the hill tribe and lowland Christian communities has shown that there is a deep sense of "theology" and "spirituality" embedded in the traditions and local wisdom of the people. This theology of the people is holistic and inter-connected – creating an organic relationship between people, nature and the Supreme Being (God). This approach is unique and distinct from the Eurocentric theology of the Church – which has created a separation between people, nature, the ancestors and the Supreme Being (God). Among the hill tribes, nature is "sacred" which has life and meaning – e.g., land spirit, water spirit, rice spirit, tree spirit, forest spirit, etc. The "peoples' theology" is rooted in this holistic experience of life as a sacred web of inter-dependent interrelations.

The religio-cultural context of Northern Thai society based on the Lanna culture and history is unique and different from the rest of the country. This has been a conducive context and foundation for RTRC to develop the "religio-cultural approach" both with the Christian

and the Buddhist communities. Evangelisation, in this context of peoples' life experiences and local wisdom, is seen as a process of multiple approaches to upgrade human dignity in the image of God. The Church is therefore a community of diverse experiences and values that are embedded in the community – not a unilinear or monolithic but polyhedronic in approach (EG 235). Within the context of contextual theology, this approach entails taking the religio-cultural beliefs of the people in the Creator/Supreme Being of the tribal communities and their beliefs in the spirit world on their own terms as the “arena of faith” (EATWOT 2010). In this arena of faith, the many life-giving spirits of nature and the ancestors participate in the power of the Spirit of God. By this pneumatic participation, these spirits make everything in the created world sacred and life-giving. Hence where there is life, there is spirit. Hence life in the tree and water are sacred and spirited. Moreover, the suffering and struggle of our people enjoins the need for a local theology of rice so that the marginal communities of the lowland farmers and fishing folks and the indigenous peoples who consumes rice daily also participates in the paschal mystery of Christ since the rice grains die for them to give them a life of hope for a “new heaven” and a “new earth”. Furthermore, the new thinking/mission of the Church as it has evolved over the decades, from Vatican II, to BISA, FABC, OHD, CCTD, IMCS/IYCS, FIMARC, and the Pope's encyclicals lends a strong justification and legitimation of the Vision and Mission of RTRC.

RTRC developed its “*religio-cultural approach*” to development work based on this strong spiritual foundation among the people. It therefore helped to establish a close and inter-connected link between spirituality and development, as a foundation for sustainable development.

Religio-Cultural Development Approach



In summary, the overall Vision and Mission of DISAC Chiang Mai since its inception in 1975 was as follows:

“Aware of the Kingdom’s values and the power of redemption in the history of humankind as reflected in the religio-cultural approach – DISAC shares a common aspiration with the people to bring about the new Millennium – which is a society marked by solidarity, mutual aid and peace – rooted in the religio-cultural values of the people.”

Based on this vision, DISAC’s approach to development work included the following main features:

- *To give support and strengthen individuals, organisations and groups based on religio-cultural values*
- *To collaborate and link with organisations, institutions – both inside and outside the Church – to promote the religio-cultural values of the people as the base for fostering solidarity in the work with and for the people*

- *To manage its organisation with a holistic approach in the building of knowledge and popular religio-cultural institutions*
- *To attain self-reliance economically in financing and sponsoring educational aspects at both the grassroots level and within DISAC itself.*

SECTION 5:

RICE-MERIT MAKING NETWORK

“Those who have more, eat less, and the rest must be shared. Those who have less must also share”

“When we have, we all eat together. When we don’t have, we all starve together”

(Karen hill tribe traditional saying)

5.1 Context and Background

DISAC Chiang Mai started setting up “Rice Banks” in the late 1970s in the villages in Chiang Mai province to help local farmers from the clutches of the moneylenders (with over 300% interest) and to overcome shortage of rice during bad seasons. The first such Rice Bank was set up in Ban KunPae in Chiang Mai province. In this village, three prominent families had established control over the villagers for more



Tripartite relationship (Sprit-Human-Nature)

than 20 years through exorbitant interests charged on rice borrowed by the villagers. DISAC Chiang Mai helped to break this monopoly by working with the villagers to set up rice groups or cooperatives. The success achieved in this village was then replicated in many other villages in other provinces and helped DISAC Chiang Mai to lay the foundation for sustainable development work among the hill tribe communities in the years to come.

The “Rice-merit Ceremony” (*Pha Pha Khao*) was first conceptualised by Fr. Niphot Thianwihan in during this period. Its main purpose is to foster community sharing and solidarity – especially among the rural poor. This approach is used to create bonds within the communities and establish solidarity among the people.

The origins of this unique approach is based on the traditional Buddhist practice of believers making donations of rice to the Buddhist temple which has been practiced for a long time in Thailand and the



Rice merit ceremony in Phayao 1986

spiritual values of the Lenten campaign of Catholics combined with the Karen folklore of “Ba Pa Ca Nai”. Traditionally, Thai farmers have setup “Rice Banks” where farmers save a portion of the rice harvested for common use by the villagers during times of bad harvests and shortage of rice. This practice helped to overcome the problems of hunger and rice shortage among hill tribe communities for a long time. Building on this, the farmers from different villages got together to initiate projects both for material purposes (i.e., to respond to the problem of rice shortage) as well as for spiritual purposes (i.e., to encourage the virtue of being a giver and for mutual help and sharing). Farmers set up local committees for these projects which undertakes campaigns and collects rice from different rice banks in various villages in order to give to other villages in need.

This traditional practice was adopted by DISAC Chiang Mai and applied to its development work among the hill tribe communities in the 1980s. DISAC Chiang Mai organised the first-ever “rice donation

merit ceremony” in Phayao province in Northern Thailand during which surplus rice in the rice bank in one village was donated to poor families in another village. Earlier, DISAC granted rice donations directly to the villagers as “seed contribution” to help them to setup their own community groups. Such an action on the part of DISAC was seen merely as “charity” or “aid” – it did not contribute towards developing the capacity of villagers themselves to exercise mutual help and collective self-reliance. Hence, DISAC chose the alternative approach of “rice merit making” for the following main reasons:

- (a) It was in keeping with the religio-cultural approach to development work
- (b) It was indigenous and meaningful to the everyday life of the villagers
- (c) It allowed for the initiative and expertise to develop the activity in the hands of the villagers themselves
- (d) It permitted DISAC to play a mere facilitating and supportive role to the villagers’ own initiatives and activities.

Various ceremonies are performed when offering rice to needy villages. For the hilltribes, there is a local ceremony – viz, the “summoning of the spirit of rice in order to renew the attitude of sanity of rice”. For Catholics there is the celebration of the Holy Mass and the celebrant demonstrates to the participants the “death of rice” – which dies three times – during broadcasting, at harvest and during pounding – at each “death” it renders life to the other. While rice can sustain the body, it also has a spiritual dimension – viz, “rice contains the mystery of death and resurrection which is similar to Holy Communion”. Building on this traditional practice, Fr. Niphot developed the “theology of rice”. This theology functions as the nucleus of the religio-cultural approach and the development programmes implemented among the community.

The villagers themselves established criteria to identify needy families who will receive the rice donation. This included, among others:



Provincial Rice-merit committee meeting, Chiang Mai, 2015

(a) those families which have a serious problem of rice shortage, (b) ones that have the potential to follow through this donation with the establishment of a rice bank during the next harvest, (c) ones that have the potential to join in collective efforts to undertake development projects (including income generation activities, rice bank networking, community funds – funeral funds, sickness funds – savings groups, etc.)

The Rice merit network is a movement formed by a Confederation of rice merit groups in 383 villages in Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son Provinces in Northern Thailand. They are located in 9 areas divided according to establishment of Catholic communities. They have formally organised as a community organisation since 2002 using the name “*Khrua Khai Gong Boon Khao*” (Rice Merit Network). It has a committee with members who are rice merit group representatives from each village. This committee is in charge of policy development and planning. It also has an executive committee represented by members from each field area and is responsible for management with a support from Catholic organisations, namely the Diocesan Social Action Centre, Diocese of Chiang Mai.

The evolution of the Rice Merit Network can be summarised as follows:

(a) *Pre-Missionary Period:*

There has always been the practice of mutual aid among the villagers during times of food shortage. In the past, villagers were engaged primarily in subsistence production where reciprocal labour was necessary. The community was small with close relationship and traditional leaders played a significant role. Normally, village leaders called “*Hee Kho*” would give advice on mutual aid. He would, in consultation with village elders, attend to living conditions of villagers. Mutual aid within the community was done by those who had more to help to those who lacked and were helpless. They gave what they had in kind, such as rice, taro, yam, clothes, kitchen utensils, and so on, and in labour, such as husking, carrying water, house building, rice field clearing, and cultivation. In the old days, they shared meat they have hunted for food. In addition, there was also mutual aid in times of crisis or important life events, such as sickness, death, house was on fire, wedding, and so on. The concept of giving assistance to the needy (especially rice) is explained through myths, stories, legends and songs as an act of merit making and it is the task of community members to help one another.

(b) *Missionary Period (1964-1977):*

Over fifty years ago, most remote villages did not have enough rice to eat. Missionary priests who came to promote Christianity in the villages extended their assistance to solve the problem of rice shortage by setting up rice groups in different villages. They gave money to catechists or Christian leaders to buy rice and set up a community rice fund where community members could borrow in time of rice shortage. They had to pay low interest according to capacity of the villagers. The formation of rice group or rice fund by missionaries, apart from helping relieve starvation, also helped lessen the problem of drug addiction (opium) among villagers, because one of the conditions was that drug addicts did not have a right to borrow rice from this rice fund. As a



Betharam priests setting up community rice fund in Mae Tho village 1975

result, drug addicts tried to stop using drugs so that their family members would have the right to borrow rice. Hence, the problem of drug addiction was lessened and disappeared at present.

(c) The Age of the Rice Banks (1978-1988):

The Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC) of Chiang Mai started to work with the highland and lowland people on community development during this period. The main activities during the initial period was to raise awareness of grassroots leaders and provide support to economic projects, especially formation of rice bank in various villages, which was a continuation of the rice group introduced by missionaries and later developed as rice banks. The major goal was to set up a rice fund in each village, so that villagers could borrow rice in time of shortage. It was in fact a renewal of the value of mutual aid and solution of the problem of exploitation by traders and middlemen from outside. It worked with community leaders to analyse their situation and impacts on their communities in the future. They have planned to

address different community problems. For example, in the analysis the leaders saw that they did not have enough rice because they had small plots of land for cultivation. Therefore, they collectively cleared new rice fields. They found the problem of shortage of water for domestic consumption and have initiated mountain tap water system in different villages. They have requested for funds for farm implements from DISAC. They also initiated various animal-raising projects, such as cows, buffaloes, and pigs. Leaders have organised villagers in each community and extended rice banks to various villages in Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son. There were about 30 leaders who took part in the initial stage. These leaders are still leaders in different communities at present and are also leaders of the rice merit network.

The establishment of rice banks helped the villagers from having to earn wage from opium cultivation, which could solve the problem of drug addiction. They had time to clear farmland to prepare terrace cultivation, which was more productive and it was a development of permanent farmland. They organised irrigation systems and grew vegetables. Simultaneously, they attended training and learning



Community Rice fund at Ban Nai Tha 1974

workshops organised by DISAC to get updates of changes in society and the direction on development of the livelihood of the community. At the same time, there was training of community leaders in various villages to extend the concept of mutual aid, starting from rice to buffalo bank, cow bank and other economic projects, such as pig raising, chicken raising and land projects. These activities aimed at helping villagers from being exploited by traders and middlemen who provided loan and bought rice when it was still green and charged high interest rate.

(d) Rice Merit Network (1989 to the present):

Structure of Rice Merit Network

Executive Committee (Board) 9 persons		
Provincial Committee	Parish Committees	
1. Mr. Narongchai	1. Muang Ngam	1. Pai
2. Mr. Pongchai	2. Huey Bong	2. Khun Yuam
3. MS. Prapa	3. Mae Taeng	3. Huey Ton Noon
4. Mr. Ponchai 1	4. Samueng	4. Nong Haeng
5. Mr. Ponchai 2	5. Mae Pon	5. Khun Mae La
6. Mr. Chai	6. Mae Chaem East	6. Mae Tho
7. Mr. Poolu	7. Mae Chaem West	7. Mae La Noi
8. Ms. Ku	8. Om Koi	8. Sao Hin
9. Mr. Boonsi	9. Khun Pae	9. Me Sa Rieng
10. Mr. Pongpan	10. Huey Tong	10. Mae Ho
11. Mr. Sunthorn		

With the rice bank having operated for over a decade (1978-1988) and with village leaders being trained in community development, DISAC tried to raise awareness among the leaders for the rice banks to become self-sufficient. During this time, DISAC also undertook a study on community cultures. This involved a mutual search among grassroots leaders and communities to identify values in community

religions and cultures – such as the value of sharing, mutual aid, simplicity, contentment, etc. – which became central to the concept of rice merit making among the Karen hill tribe communities.

Thus, the organisation of village groups through rice merit making activity expanded to cover areas in two provinces, i.e. Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son, and some villages in Chiang Rai and Lampoon. The rice merit network was then officially setup in March 2002, consolidating rice merit groups in over 383 villages in these provinces of Northern Thailand. This network is a grassroots organisation and network with a goal to build mutual aid relationship within and among communities. The network has extended its activities to mobilisation to address present problems at community level, such as land, environment, non-chemical farming, drug, youth, revival and transmission of local cultures and wisdom. They have also fostered collaboration among communities, leading to establishment of networks on specific issues, such as network on conservation of natural resources and environment, network on river basins, network of women, network of youth, etc. Activities implemented by the network also include training and education, such as meetings and seminars of network and regional committees, training of new leaders and organisation of rice merit activity to support revolving rice fund in the community, scholarship for poor children, saving group of women and fund for assistance to orphans, widows, handicapped and old people in communities.

The difference between the Rice Banks and the Rice Merit Networks can be summarised as follows:

Rice Bank	Rice Merit Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice bank activity is purely based on “economic” reason. 	1. Rice merit activity is based on belief and culture of community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivation of organisation of people to implement rice bank is based on “problem”. 	2. Villagers got organised to implement rice merit activity based on “virtue” of mutual aid.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource to set up rice bank is mobilised from outside (foreign donor agencies). 	3. Resources to support rice merit activity are mobilised from within community according to their willingness and capacity with some contribution from outside.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice bank provides loan with low interest rate with regulations determined by outsiders. 	4. Rice merit has three types. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Grant or relief 4.2 Set up different revolving funds for community. 4.3 Set up operation fund for networks at two levels, namely regional and network.

5.2 Results and Outcomes

(a) Development based on the Religio-Cultural Approach

The Rice Merit Network has been established for over 17 years among the Karen hill tribe communities in Chiang Mai and Mae

Hong Son. DISAC's development paradigm has included not only providing "materials" to Karen villagers, but also to introduce "development concepts" based on the religio-cultural approach.

The "religio-cultural approach to development" concept is based on the value that "human persons are fulfilled when they are both "recipients and givers". When villagers were running short of rice, DISAC came in to provide assistance. Therefore, when the communities have enough rice to eat, they should also share their surplus to help others. This is the origin of a new tradition of activities, namely rice merit fund (involving over 383 communities). It is both "development work" and "merit making" deeply integrated systematically. The fund is revolved to villages where there is not enough rice. Then, the proceeds in rice and cash mobilised from this rice merit making campaign are used to set up a new community rice fund.

Given Karen people who profess diverse religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism and traditional beliefs, this rice merit making tradition unites and involved people of all faiths in the same activity with rice as the common concern and awareness of their ethnic identity.

Other activities were extended from this rice merit fund to address different problems of the communities, such as a revolving rice fund in local community, community welfare fund (in time of sickness, death, fire, flood, and so on), fund for assistance to widows, orphans, elder people, the handicapped, scholarship for poor children, women's saving groups, natural resource conservation fund, and non-chemical farming, etc.

(b) Development as a holistic, symbolic process

The initiation of a new pattern of development activities is a process of developing discourses from various perspectives in parallel with the rice merit network, which can be classified into 3 steps: production, distribution and consumption.

Production:

Raw materials for discourse production are original social capital existing in Karen or other ethnic cultures, such as stories, legends, tales, and so on, integrated with new external capitals, such as the concept on network and creation of symbols, such as logo of the network, and so on. The strategy for production of new concepts and definitions of development in the rice merit network is a hybridisation of existing and new properties. For example, the rice merit network has created new symbols by rediscovering concepts or teachings from traditional cultures, such as concepts from stories, legends and poems, etc., to design a new logo of the network. This new logo comprises a candle and bee wax (representing religious teachings and goodness). The rice stalk – a symbol representing a living based on the principle of sufficiency economy, an economy based on morality or moral economy. The Human Icon – is a symbol that is human centred in term of equal and fair distribution of resources, without holding money as the primary and human person as secondary as it is today. In this way, the villagers have created their own logo from these symbols.

Distribution:

This means distribution of the definition of rice merit fund by reviving community philosophy, perception and beliefs through various symbols in the form of logo and flag of the network, and production implements. These symbols will be displayed on different occasions or areas, such as at activities implemented by rice merit network. This helped the participants to see this unique logo and ask for its meaning that is full of concepts and ideology on mutual aid among community members.

Consumption:

In knowing and understanding the definition of each symbol, organic intellectuals would explain the meaning to community members to foster common understanding. A handbook has been prepared,

which gradually developed as a curriculum for children and youth to learn in different schools in local communities.

(c) Strategy as Struggle

A significant method of struggle against the mainstream development discourse, especially an ideological struggle, is the so-called “binary opposition” strategy. The discursive struggle of the rice merit network employs the strategy of “the good and the bad”. In other word, they institute “rice” as the symbol of the good giving life to community, foster mutual aid, sacrifice and hospitality, etc. While “money” constitutes the bad coming from outside and represents selfishness, competition, rivalry, greed, etc. This does not mean that the villagers refuse money, because they are forced to have more and live with money. In this situation, the villagers have to criticise money as the symbol of capitalism. This is the discourse developed by the villagers against the mainstream development discourse.

This struggle is played out at two levels in the rice merit network:

- (i) Struggle against definition of mainstream development discourse from the outside network itself: This discourse is based on the key question: “What is Development?”. Words, phrases and messages constantly flowing in activities of rice merit network are always re-examined. The mainstream development discourse from outside explains the definition of development as “individualism, consumerism and materialist happiness”. On the contrary, the development discourse of the rice merit network is defined as organisation for mutual aid and unity. For example, one of its poem says “one grain of paddy cannot make rice wine, one single bamboo cannot make a raft”. This implies that fraternity, morality and self-sufficiency are the core principle for harmonious and sustainable existence of community. Furthermore, we normally hear the mainstream development discourse

that “highland people are responsible for deforestation, slash and burn cultivation, intensive use of farm chemicals and drug trafficking”. On the contrary, the rice merit network extends its activities and forms different networks, such as the network on conservation of natural resources and the environment, the network on non-chemical farming, the network on campaign against drug, and so on. These attempts aim to prove themselves and tell outsiders that the highland people are not like what the mainstream discourse propagates.

- (ii) Struggle against definition of discourse within the network: Definition of discourse in the rice merit network is different depending on the economic and social conditions, and leaders, committee and ordinary members who have different understanding. It also depends on messages each one receives. However, this different understanding of the discursive definition is not the factor creating division or weakening the rice merit network at all, but it supports villagers with different conditions and status to get involved in an exercise to learn how to live together amidst diversity of opinions, beliefs and ideologies, and be able to manage this conflict. In this context, the role of discursive struggle is significant and unending in itself, because what development direction to strengthen community is would depend on how and to what direction the groups holding different sets of discourse would empower themselves to institute their discursive definition, through their methods of management, initiation of activities and equal and fair sharing of benefits, and so on.

(d) Empowering Communities through the Rice Merit Network:

Recent economic, social and political changes in Thailand have shifted the state to change its “development” direction towards greater involvement of local people. This new direction enables the state to intervene and dictate life of the villagers in all aspects to a greater extent. However, instead of being totally dominated or struggling against this domination through various means, the villagers use “discourse” as the means to struggle against mainstream development. The villagers learned to develop counter discourse against the mainstream discourse, directly and covertly to neutralize legitimacy of the mainstream discourse or to build up their negotiation power against the mainstream development discourse and marketing system.

Note: Thai words around the logo circle “Khao Aroy-Khon dee - MeekhunNatham” meaning Delicious rice - good people - hold righteous. (Rice – people –Morality or Nature – human - Spirits).



Logo of rice merit network (1989)

A study (Suppachai, 2001) found that the struggle for development definition of the villagers through the rice merit network is in fact the struggle against concept in capitalism, which is the mainstream concept the villagers are facing in their daily life. For example, they use rice against money, unity against selfishness, and so on, to combat this dominant discourse.

The rice merit network is a successful case of operation with people's participation based on community culture that could be used as a good example for application in development based on empowerment of community. The rice merit network has opened a channel for community participation in argument and definition of development, which has diverse meaning and is different depending on group of people with different interests. The rice merit network has been trying to stand firm with its goal and struggle to take the lead in giving definition. For example, it struggled to define development to give emphasis on traditional ideology of the community, and to control and manage rice merit fund, etc. These struggles for definition have led to implementation of different activities to address problems of the communities, such as rice fund, community welfare fund (in case of sickness, death, fire, etc.), fund for assistance to orphans, elder people, the handicapped, scholarship for poor children, women's saving group, conservation of the environment, and non-chemical farming. The most important struggle is expression of identity of ethnic or tribal groups, which exhibit capacity to dictate their own destiny or strength of community. This identity empowers them in negotiating for acceptance especially from outside. Although this opposition or struggle for definition sometimes might not lead to the right to definition or clearly reflect victory or loss, but it could safely be said that it is the origin of "new shoots" of various disadvantaged groups in empowering themselves.

Development of the rice merit network clearly indicates the strength of the communities. They have the capacity to manage their own life through social capitals existing in their communities, such as the role of communication in transmitting community value system

and extending social network, or empowering local communities in the struggle against systems from outside that penetrating to weaken the communities, such as capital system and modern values, etc. Regarding transmission of value system, the rice merit network has struggled to give definition that is profoundly linked with values existing in traditional cultures of local communities in the context of present society that is based on materialism and gives priority to money with individualistic relationship.

As for extension of social network, the rice merit network has developed new partners in the social network at community level. This fosters participation of all groups in the community who have different status, ethnic origins and beliefs. It is a development and empowerment of community organisation, such as conservation of natural resources and the environment, non-chemical farming, and extend the network to women and youth groups and the environment. It has also tried to develop partnership with outside organisations to promote understanding, acceptance and support to people's organisations, such as local concerned state agencies, local politicians and Catholic educational institutions, etc. This partnership has created new social capitals from the base of the network existing in the communities, such as kinship, which is a social capital in community. Extension of social network is the foundation of social capital for the benefit of individuals, community and social as a whole. This social capital or resources emerging from the process of social interaction, which can be conducive to inter-dependence and reflects social capital that is the dimension of values, power ideology and social relationship for dynamic mutual living. This social capital can be rebuilt in the attempt of struggle to build common space.

The rice merit network has fostered concrete activities on mutual aid, which is conducive to empowerment of communities. For example, it led to establishment of community welfare fund for emergency cases, such as sickness, death, fire, and so on. There are also scholarships for poor children, community rice fund for those who do not have enough rice, etc. These activities will reinforce the community to be stronger,

since they are funds initiated by and are mobilised from villagers themselves. They have committees elected by the villagers to make decision on management and plan activities. They have formulated regulations and criteria to enable all members to equally benefit from development based on the principle of justice. The criteria they adopted is that the top priority is given to the most needy. The strength of the community is reflected in the case of management of emerged conflicts. The villagers have adopted the tool of compromise in communication to avoid further rift and damage the group or network. The example of this is the case of flexibility on repayment that a rice bank extended to those who did not have rice or cash to repay with other materials.

In summary, the following are some of the main results and achievements of the rice merit network supported by DISAC Chiang Mai/RTRC over the years:

- They have a capacity in management to dictate their own life and destiny through social capitals existing in community, such as the role of transmission of community value system, extension of social network empowerment of local communities to struggle against systems from outside that are penetrating to weaken local communities, such as capital system, modern values, etc.
- Extension of social network in the rice merit network helped develop more partners in social network at community level, conducive to participation of all community groups, which is an empowerment of community organisation.
- The rice merit fund has led to initiation of concrete activities for mutual aid in an attempt to strengthen local communities, such as establishment of community funds, fund to help the poor (widows, orphans, old people), provision of community welfare in emergency, such as sickness, etc.
- The rice merit network is a grassroots organisation with an attempt to struggle against dominant development discourse

based on capitalism and consumerism in which ethnic people have to live in a situation where competition for resources, soil, water and forest is heightened and amidst accusation that they are the cause of environmental destruction.

- The rice merit network was successful in promoting people's participation based on community cultures, which could be applied in development work that gives emphasis on empowerment of local communities since there is a forum for participation at all levels, including public and private sectors as well as village communities.
- The rice merit network could apply concepts from folklore to create logo of the rice merit fund, which aims at raising awareness on mutual aid based on belief and sharing.
- After formally setting up the rice merit network, implementation of rice merit fund is an expression of identity and power towards outsiders and leads to co-ordination and interaction with public sector and various agencies towards extension of the concept further.

SECTION 6:

WATER-SPIRIT CEREMONY

6.1 History/Background

The worship of the “water spirit” (muangfai – a traditional dyke in Northern Thailand) is a traditional practice among the Karen hill tribes. The “water spirit worship” (Luj hti bo) is a common ritual practice of the Karen hill tribes concerning their belief that water has a “spirit”. In this practice, a ritual is performed beside a stream, a river or a watershed area where the water originates. Water Spirit worship is also performed in areas like irrigation canals for paddy fields. It is usually held in the month of June before the start of work in the fields.²⁰

In this tradition, it is believed that natural creation has its own power and the “water spirit” helps to revitalise the Karen communities’ traditional values to contribute to self-reliance and development. Therefore when a “muang fai” is constructed by the hill tribes to preserve water, time must be set apart every year for showing respect and gratitude and to workshop this spirit. This “water spirit ceremony” has

²⁰ Wongjomporn, Sunthorn (2008), p.20.



**Water – spirit Ceremony performed
by a village leader, Dokdaeng village 1986**



Ecumenical ritual at watershed, Mae Tung village 2015

a two-fold purpose: (a) it is a thanksgiving to the “owner” who provides abundance to his followers, and (b) it is to seek pardon for any destruction of natural creation.

DISAC Chiang Mai first encountered this tradition in Ban DokDaeng in the 1980s. In this village, the community faced serious water problems and the people believed that the “water spirit had run away”. They tried various methods to solve this problem – including the young people growing trees along the stream; seeking help from government agencies to dig artisan wells – but to no avail. The villagers then approached DISAC for help. DISAC has no knowledge and expertise for water management. It however agreed to help if the villagers themselves took the initiative and DISAC would only contribute material and financial help. In two years of preparatory work, the villagers were prepared to implement this project. The source of water was about 3 Kms away from the village and the installed tap system (using plastic tubes) had to pass through rough areas and streams. The water had to be brought from a lower to a higher level – a process that was illogical to the natural order of things. However, when the project was completed the water was able to be drawn into the village using plastic pipes and stored in small reservoirs.

During the implementation of this project, the villagers performed a “ritual of apology” to ask pardon from the “water-spirit” for forcing it into (unnatural) plastic pipes in order to overcome rough areas and carry the water to a higher level. When the project was finally completed, the Karen villagers thank “the Absolute” (the Karen concept of God – *“Ta hi ta tau”*) for granting them water and making them live happily and in unity, and to enable soil, trees, animals and people to have a new life in the village. This ceremony is normally performed by the Village Elder who chants Karen traditional litanies in front of a “spirit-house” constructed for this purpose. The “spirit house” is made of four bamboo pillars, a roof made of leaves and is constructed at the very source of the water high in the mountains (the water-shed). The Karen believe that *“the spirit house is a place where they were given a new life. It is “Tah” (the Absolute) without any discrimination. Both*

human beings and animals can drink this water, the whole community, the earth will be watered, vegetables will grow, the people will have unity”.

Since that time, the “water-spirit ceremony” is periodically performed by the villagers as a thanksgiving celebration to mark their traditional belief in the “water-spirit” and to renew community unity and solidarity. DISAC has effectively used this practice to review the development work undertaken among the communities and the lessons learnt. This has helped to combine the modern concepts of “development work” with the traditional beliefs and practices of the Karen communities – a significant achievement which shows that “development” is an integral part of the peoples’ own culture and traditions.

The shrine for the “water-spirit ceremony” is a critical part of the ritual. This is made of simple bamboo materials as a symbol of the temporary living quarters of the water-spirit – which is also a meeting place between the water-spirit and the people. A native chicken or a pig is often used for the sacrificial animal. Rice wine made by the villagers themselves is shared at the ritual. The blood of the sacrificed chicken signifies new life (the death of one’s life, and the emergence of another new life). It is this life covenant bonded by blood, that is regarded as the great covenant made between humans and the spirit of nature. The villagers renew this covenant every year through the water-spirit ceremony.²¹

Key success factors for this practice to be effective include the following: (a) the presence of strong traditional beliefs and practices that can be effectively tapped for development work, (b) the community is generally united and not divided by caste, class, ethnic or religious factors; and (c) the presence of strong community leadership that is open to change and to development.

²¹ Ibid, pp.216-217.

6.2 Results and Outcomes/Lessons Learnt

The Karen hill tribe people regard the water-spirit ceremony as the most important element for preserving natural resources and the environment. At the same time, they also believe that they must share their production with others – especially the widows, orphans and the poor people. Only by doing so will the “Absolute Being” bless them and provide for the future. As a Karen saying goes: *“We cannot eat alone, it is not delicious. We will eat together and starve together. The more we share, the more we will get and the Absolute Being will bless and provide more for us in the future”*.

The following are some of the main benefits/outcomes experiences from the water-spirit ceremony among the Karen village communities:

- (a) The water-spirit ceremony unites people, creates love and solidarity to live together peacefully
- (b) It reinforces relationships: people-to-people; people-to-nature; people-to-the Absolute Being (or, God, or Taj Hti Taj Tau) in order to live harmoniously
- (c) It creates a sense of respect, reverence for nature, the Absolute Being and other guardian spirits of nature
- (d) It is a common ground for reconciliation between humans and the Absolute Being and with nature
- (e) It enhances the strength, meaning and spiritual power of the community to confront external influences
- (f) It creates gratitude and respect towards Mother Earth – helps villagers to live in harmony with a modern lifestyle
- (g) Finally, it is a process of renewal of the Covenant between human beings and nature and the Absolute Being – that

recalls all the spirits back to nature and all creatures – creating a good relationship and peaceful co-existence in the cosmos.²²

Creating “sacred spaces” – as symbolised by the water-spirit ceremony - is a key strategy to challenge and confront the concept of consumerism and strengthen the concept of sufficiency economy, by transforming rituals or symbolic power into instruments for protecting the environment and community resources. The water-spirit ceremony performed regularly with the active participation of the local people is a process of renewal of relationships of co-existence and interconnectedness between humans and nature and the Absolute Being. In this way, the villagers reconstruct their beliefs and rituals into the context of struggle against the commoditization or commercialization of nature by the capitalist economy and its vested interests. For the hill tribe/indigenous peoples, economic values are regarded as less important to higher cultural and spiritual values – including environmental and ecological considerations – linked to ancestral domains and cultural identity. In this sense, for the hill tribe/indigenous peoples, the concept of development or well-being cannot be understood apart from their cultural and indigenous values, practices and identity as a people in direct relation to nature and the Absolute Being.

In terms of lessons learnt from this experience, the main learning is the realisation that it is critically important and urgent to transmit these traditional beliefs, rituals, knowledge and wisdom concerning nature and the environment to the younger generation. In order to do this, it is important to translate/simplify the background, concept, values and meaning of the rituals to be more easily comprehended by children and youth. Without vital community-based rituals, many young people try to adopt “modern” lifestyles to initiate themselves into adulthood – and often end up with alcohol, drugs, gangs and other dangerous activities based on external influences.

²² Ibid, pp.265-266.

SECTION 7:

HOUSEWIVES'/WOMEN'S SAVINGS GROUPS

7.1 History/Background

Overtime, the shift from subsistence agriculture and self-sufficiency to an urban-oriented and commercialised agriculture context in Thai society has had a tremendous impact on the identity and role of women in society – particularly among the hilltribes and lowland agricultural communities in Northern Thailand. Among the hill tribes, from a position in which Karen women formally enjoyed a significant degree of equality within the community and authority in decision-making, today they are dominated by a paternalistic and male-dominated culture and society. Village development initiated by the Government has resulted in power being vested in men at the local, provincial and national levels.²³

²³ Bell, Mathew (1994), p.29.



Hill tribe Women's Savings group in Khun Pae village 1993

In response to this situation, DISAC Chiang Mai developed its Women's programme to organise the village women and establish groups and networks of self-help and social entrepreneurship in order to provide them opportunities to be self-reliant and develop women's leadership in community development activities. Self-help has been an important strategy of development work to fight poverty through the maximum use of local resources – including financial. Savings groups have been initiated by DISAC of Chiang Mai and many civil society organisations in order to use the positive aspects of local financial to promote the self-reliance of poor grassroots families and communities.

The traditional context of Northern Thai society is based on the matrilineal system – wherein the northern Thai women play a key role in the economic and cultural life of the family and the community. DISAC believed that development work that ignores this key role of women in the community will lead to loss of their function and



Women's Savings group in a lowland village, Chomtong 1992

responsibility in society. Its perspective on women changed from them being just “beneficiaries” to being a specific “target group” for development activities.

Among the hill tribes, DISAC Chiang Mai started work in the mid-1980s and by the 1990s had established women's groups in 28 villages in the two provinces of Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son – which carried out activities related to vocational skills training, non-formal education and economic self-help groups.

In the lowland areas, the early activities of DISAC began in Ban Hua Sua in Chomtong District, Chiang Mai province even earlier in 1981. Women's savings groups were setup in 11 villages in two sub-districts in Chomthong. Community savings is an important activity in rural development work which is often characterised by the following factors:

- (a) There was an emergency need for money – particularly regarding children’s education or sickness in the family. With a savings group, villagers would have to find other sources of funding – like money lending – which is often very difficult;
- (b) The interest rate charged by private money lenders was too high. This often initiated the cycle of indebtedness among villagers
- (c) In some cases, even when small amounts of money were borrowed from private moneylenders, the villagers were not able to repay their debt. This often resulted in the loss of land among villagers to landowners and private moneylenders.

The key objectives of the housewives savings groups were as follows:

- To help members (housewives/women) to develop essential knowledge in development work
- To develop mutual help among members and their neighbours
- To earn extra income for the family

The formation of these housewives/women’s savings groups and other development projects went through several key steps as follows:

- Step 1: Identification of target groups - criteria used include drought-hit villages where DISAC had provided relief support
- Step 2: Identification of target population – undertaken by the villagers themselves through focus group discussions and testing the “spirit of the community”
- Step 3: Preparation – Participatory research and planning – villagers undertake participatory information gathering and research supported by DISAC staff to solicit the villagers’ own ideas and suggestions on the project and

the development work to be undertaken in the villages. This includes developing the operational system to undertake the development work – e.g., formation of structures, rules and regulations, electing committee members, etc.

- Step 4: Knowledge sharing – conducting surveys, meetings with villagers, exposure visits to other villages and projects, etc.
- Step 5: Resource mobilisation – of two types: (a) local village resources (rice banks, buffalo banks, savings groups, etc.) and (b) external resources (from government agencies – including seeds, insecticides, farm inputs, etc.)
- Step 6: Management and Technical support – combining local knowledge on management drawn from traditional practice and external inputs on development work from DISAC and other external agencies.

The overall success of this housewives/women's savings groups can be attributed to the fact that the process creating increasing awareness among the women and the villagers on the importance of self-reliance and sharing, mutual responsibility and participation.

DISAC Chiang Mai's Women and Development programme also included recruitment of poor young girls to study or undergo vocational training in Chiang Mai city where DISAC works in close coordination with three training centres established by various religious congregations – viz, Ban Marina – run by the Spanish Order of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary; Ban Bethany – run by the Ursuline Sisters; and Ban Mae Pon – established by the Betharam Fathers. In 1995, the skills and vocational trainings provided by these three centres was benefitting over 300 young girls/women from poor communities in Northern Thailand.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid, p.31.



**Marina sister providing vocational Training for young girls,
Chiang Mai 1965**

When DISAC started working in Karen communities in Chiang Mai since 1976, it worked with both male and female community members. In 1983, DISAC came to learn that males have higher opportunity in attending trainings than women because the women had to take care of children therefore unable to attend any session. In 1984, training sessions were conducted especially for women and a year after that, in 1985, women's groups are formally established and remain active until now.

For low land communities in Chomthong District, Chiang Mai province, an idea for establishing women's groups came from men in the community, which was established as a saving group. DISAC worked with the women's group since 1988.



Rice merit ceremony in Phayao 1988

DISAC also worked on women and children development areas in Phayao starting from 1980– after working for sometimes with male community leader groups. DISAC collaborate with other institutions working on women and youth. Its center in Phayao would select female youths to attend vocational training as well as life skills in relation to how to live in urban communities. In Phayao, communities faced with poverty that has driven their population to migrate to bigger town for work. It therefore started an income generation alternative for youths including “pig farm”. Later in 1993, DISAC started its scholarship scheme for female students finishing primary education to continue with their study with the hope that this would reduce labour migration of “girls” into city and provide them with more stable jobs in the future.

Stages of working on women development can be divided into the following:

- Phase 1 (1975 – 1988) DISAC played a supportive and facilitating role on women and youth development to other institutions under the Church of Chiang Mai including selection of participants, education support, and training
- Phase 2 (1989-1995) DISAC/RTRC expanded its role into community level development by adding its target population to include housewives and female youths into different development projects
- Phase 3 (1996-2000) RTRC coordinated with different stakeholders to establish a committee at the provincial Church level. This body will issue policies and directions for women development work. This contributed to an establishment of women network of organizations working on women issues under the Church.

In the meantime, the Center also established a structure of women's network for the purpose of information and experience sharing. The Church policy was established in 2000 to establish a National Catholic Committee for Women, in all dioceses. Chiang Mai Diocese established a women development department with vision and mission that is in line with the National Catholic Committee for Women.

Seminars and workshops were conducted among women representatives and groups from communities, churches, organizations and institutions to support each other in community development work through gender perspective in addition to religio-cultural approach. Target populations include women in Chiang Mai Diocese both highland and lowland population and representatives and groups from communities, churches, organizations and institutions.

Areas of work can be categorized into three groupings:

- Education: exchange experience and views on life and work and build capacity of women in knowledge, attitudes and practices that would help the work
- Coordination and campaign: for update progress of women development work in each area and coordinate work at all levels
- Development activities: to revive local and community wisdom and apply it into modern life; public relation of women development work and provide morale supports among the women.

Reviving local and community wisdom especially among women

Each year, a seminar was conducted to revive female community wisdom especially on agriculture and handicrafts. Focus was on contemplating on meanings of female wisdom in their traditional roles as well as to preserve them for local heritage. Women's groups were also supported to produce handicrafts for sale through marketing skills. Women development work also includes reviving local wisdom on



Reviving local wisdom in Phayao 1995

agriculture where women were encouraged to collect and preserve local seeds.

Prevention of human trafficking is also part of the work that DISAC/RTRC collaborates with local organizations in risk areas by providing education opportunity for children and youth; and income generation scheme for women; as well as involving in local and national campaign.

7.2 Outcomes & Lessons Learnt

This approach to women's empowerment responded to the needs of the women; it also contributed to the capacity building of the women, especially in increased leadership skills; increased awareness of roles of women in socio-economic development. Network has been built among women's groups in each community, as well as collaboration, while each group works actively on women's development activities responding to the local community context. Saving groups were also established in Phayao Province.

In some communities, women's groups have emerged into promoting vocational alternatives for women within the community. Women have also become community leaders, took part in village committee, have become local governmental officials at local administration offices and municipality. They are also part of the committee at diocese level; took part in voluntary work at national level.

Women development work among the Karen hill tribe communities have expanded into all 10 districts. Seminars were conducted on an ongoing basis with participants of 150 – 400 from each district per year. A Women's Committee was established at district level to coordinate and follow up with others. Women's groups are also involved in rice-merit making ceremony and preservation of religious value and cultures.

SECTION 8:

ENVIRONMENT PRESERVATION

8.1 History/Background

DISAC's development work in early stages (between 1975 – 1982) focused on mitigating economic problems faced by local communities in both upland lowland areas. As DISAC's policy is based on learning people's culture from the people, staff members working in Pa-Ker-Yo communities – which value nature and environmental preservation – have learnt about environmental preservation from local communities.

The later phase of DISAC working with the communities, 1983 up to present, is based on listening to the needs of the communities and addressing issues faced by communities and building capacity. DISAC has involved in environmental preservation based on communities' needs on preserving water and forest. During 1970s, DISAC worked to support communities to mitigate impact of drought which is faced by Northern Thailand.



Hill tribe villagers tie an umbilical cord on a tree – to unite the spirit of the child with the forest, 2014



Hill tribe villagers making “fire brakes” in forest to prevent wild forest fire to spread, 2014

In 1986, villagers of DokDaeng Village requested for a village's water plumbing system to relieve the situation; and this project was later expanded into other communities as well as in Phayao Province and has become a model of environmental preservation.

Environmental crisis caused mainly by de-forestation which resulted in drought even in watershed areas, has forced the government to create a “no man” in the forest areas. This approach caused an impact on land rights of the Karen, created conflicts over natural resources including soil, water and forest; introduced mono-cropping; and also involved misuse of natural resources by some influential people.

DISAC/RTRC's strategy on environmental preservation

DISAC/RTRC's religio-cultural approach emphasizes on cultural and environmental preservation; respecting the value of nature as well as respecting people – which is already familiar to local community members as this is their way of life. It intertwines activities with awareness raising of the people.

The Religio-cultural approach influenced traditional environmental preservation networks to emerge into a modern network of watershed preservation in Baan Pak Bok and Baan DokDaeng villages. Ordained forest ceremony, as conducted in Muang Tung Village, wisely reproduces the religio-cultural values to preserve and protect the environment.

DISAC/RTRC established groups among local communities on environmental preservation. Some of them are Environmental Preservation Youth Groups at Baan DokDaeng, Reforestation Youth Group at Baan Pak Bok and Baan Muang Tung. These groups were on the watch for any de-forestation incidents and forest fires in the local areas. In addition to groups established at community level, inter-community networks were also established. One of them is an Association of Hill tribes for preserving forest and wildlife composed of 10 villages from four districts. These groups and networks on environment preservation play key roles in mobilizing resources of

external groups and organizations – both governmental and non-governmental.

In Phayao Province a provincial network is also established. The main activities in this province include, among others:

1. Addressing global warming from Mae Ga sub-district to provincial level

- a. Promoting community forest
- b. Zoning forest areas for forest preservation zone, agricultural zone and residential zone
- c. Water management through establishing muang fai – a traditional dyke in Northern Thailand
- d. Reduce carbon in the air by banning slash and burn practice and preventing forest fire
- e. Zero waste project through garbage sorting

2. Environmental friendly Agriculture Project

- a. Family farming promotion project based on community wisdom in agriculture
- b. Promoting biodiversity
- c. Seed bank to promote biodiversity of crops
- d. Campaign against chemical use in agriculture

3. Establishing a learning center on cultural agriculture practices, sufficient agriculture

4. Promoting community market in Mae Sai and Mae Ga

Other environmental problems faced in Phayao Lake areas include: reduced fishing areas due to the lake becoming level lower; ecological system has deteriorated; significant reduction of fish due to

invasion of fish from other areas; and water pollution due to chemical substances from agricultural lands around the lake.

8.2 Outcomes & Lessons Learnt

Presently, the work has been ongoing on promoting reforestation, watershed preservation and community forestry in other six communities. Forest and agriculture land zoning is being conducted in one community. These projects applied participatory approach from the community to promote environment preservation and sustainable development. RTTC also works to strengthen capacity of communities in the area of 15,000 rai using Mae Tum Water reservoir so that they can manage water use in collaboration with Phayao Irrigation Office. It also works with the Thailand's Health Promotion Fund to establish a safe food network beginning at family level and above. On forest fire management, an operation is upgraded into sub-district level.

The religio-cultural approach in environment preservation has expanded to the wider community. There has been more coordination and cooperation between communities, local administration, religious organizations, and academic institutions, among others.

SECTION 9:

AGRICULTURE AND LAND DEVELOPMENT

History/Background:

With the expansion of capitalist production in the indigenous villages of Northern Thailand since the 1970s, farming and agriculture became increasingly monetized and commoditized, leading to the waning of traditional religio-cultural traditions and loss of livelihoods for poor farmers and hope among the young people. As a response to this, DISAC/RTRC organised four training workshops for villagers between March and October 2013, in order to:

- (a) deepen villagers' awareness of the sacredness of nature and the environment and sustainable life among the Karen villagers
- (b) enkindle hope in the community through the creativity of the younger generations, and



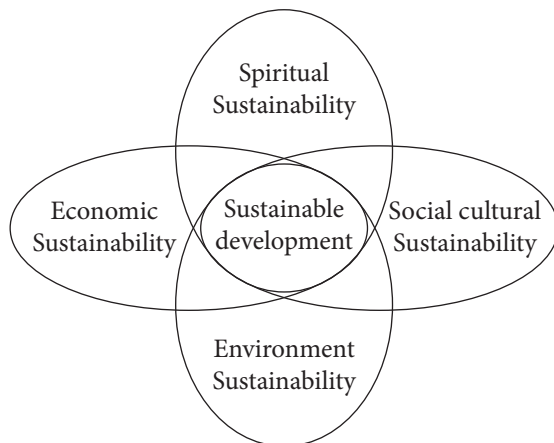
Villagers building irrigation canal for farming on the mountain, 1982

- (c) to build a network of elders, religious leaders, village headmen, housewives and youth to work together for saving the planet earth.

Key outcomes and lessons learnt from discussions among villagers during these training workshops included the following:

- Participants shared past experiences of sustainable agriculture which involved a sense of relationship with the various dimensions of nature – viz, soil, water, plants, living organisms, as well as the spiritual dimension in the process of production and consumption. The villagers called this “*Ma Chu du auf hkauv pooz*” (take only what we need) – which symbolised an environment-friendly relationship between people and nature,

- Sustainability involves at least four dimensions – spiritual sustainability, socio-cultural sustainability, natural and ecological sustainability, and economic sustainability. If any one element of this collapses, it will lead to the collapse of other elements.



- It was noted that presently nearly every element is collapsing because of the way people poison our land, forest, water and destroy local seeds with the use of chemicals and pesticides for cash cropping
- Focus must be to strengthen sustainable agriculture networking – both in the form of organisations and movements – in order to achieve the ultimate goals of food security and sovereignty. A “sustainable agriculture road map” was planned for the next 5 years
- The celebration of Mass and forest ordination are recognised as sacred regulations, so, if the land is already ordained and blessed by the priests and the monks, it means that they become sacred and under the watch of the spirits.

- Senior spiritual leaders have a rich knowledge of traditional rituals and farming practices, with a strong sense of the sacredness of nature and the presence of the natural and ancestral spirits. They are aware that traditional wisdom, local knowledge and rituals are important for rotational farming practices, in order to make life sustainable for the community.
- Senior spiritual leaders have a rich knowledge of traditional rituals and farming, with a strong sense of the sacredness of nature due to the presence of the spirits (Absolute Being), the nature and the ancestral spirits. They are aware that traditional wisdom, local knowledge and rituals are important for rotational farming in order to make life sustainable in the community.
- Rituals are important to preserve nature, river, water, soil, forest, animals and other living beings. We need rituals as thanksgiving for the spirits. Three key elements are important in our lives: (a) water for all living beings, (b) the forest to sustain biodiversity, and (c) rituals and spirits for our production and the use of land.
- Advocacy is needed through different channels – community radio programmes, workshops, forums, rice donation network campaigns, etc. The Sustainable Agriculture Group in Mae Hong Son province together with the Rice Donation Network is planning to launch a campaign at various levels (community, parish, diocese) as part of the Environment Campaign for the reduction of cash crop farming. It will be a campaign for producing and consuming safe food – run by core leaders of this network in each area. The Catholic Children's Centers and the Catholic Schools should buy organic products from the organic farming groups in order to help the villagers earn an income and, at same time, enable children to consume healthy food.



Cultural Agriculture, 2016

- Organic farming is important for sustainable life in the village. Hence it is important for the transmission of traditional wisdom and local knowledge on sustainable agriculture to be passed on to the younger generations.
- We need to begin to develop production systems that are consistent with the earth's functioning and discontinue those agricultural practices that only focus on maximum yield of a single crop in a single growing season.
- The “spiritual” cannot be separated from the “physical”. The spiritual is simply a way of understanding our world that acknowledges the connection and relationship to the rest of the expanding universe. In relation to agriculture, this suggests that we need to begin to pay as much attention to how the rest of the world works, than we do to determining how to acquire food, shelter and energy.

As in the environment preservation work above, DISAC's religio-cultural approach has guided its work on promoting natural way of doing agriculture without using chemical substances. Agriculture is based on local wisdom and respecting the natural balance. This way of thinking was applied to promote sustainable agriculture.

The role of women in seed preservation was also important. Women collected local seeds from the community and stored them at a community center, as well as kept records of each of the seeds to preserve it for the future. Seed sharing was organized among communities. Seminars and training workshops were conducted for women and farmers so that they learn new agricultural techniques to adapt to their farming practices.

Muang fai management in Phayao

The *Muang fai* management – based on the traditional way of community networking – has been in operation for over five to six generations among the local communities. Water users in different communities have become members of the group and they would elect a chief and committee members as well as establish regulations to manage the use of these traditional dikes along the stream. Each year the worship of the “water spirit” ceremony was organized (described in earlier section). It is believed that natural creation has its own power and the “water spirit” helps to revitalize the Karen communities’ traditional values to contribute to self-reliance and development.

The *Muang fai* groups played a significant role in negotiating with the government irrigation office which manages the use of water system for agriculture to ensure that there is sufficient water for all communities along the stream. In one incident, communities opposed a dam project initiated by the Department of Irrigation for it would severely affected the local *Muang fai* system. At present, there are over 15 muang fai groups established in Mae Ga sub-district.

Local Fishermen Association of Phayao Lake

Local fishermen around Phayao Lake have been affected by the government's policy, therefore they formed a group of local fishermen to address their issues. Fishermen who are affected live in three communities located in a fishing-banning zone – who were banned to fish since 1941. The group was formally established on 10 July 2000 called “Local Fishermen Association” with four objectives as follows:

1. To exchange information on sustainable fishing
2. To preserve natural resources and environment in Phayao
3. To support members who face problem in fishing
4. To coordinate with government in finding solutions to problems

The work progress of Local Fishermen Association of Phayao Lake can be divided into three phases:

- Phase 1 (1997-2000): grouping and networking among 17 communities to address impact and voice out concerns for solution
- Phase2 (2001-2003): with financial support from Social Innovation Fund (SIF), establish a plan to present to the governor on the zoning of areas for environmental preservation and revival.
- Phase 3 (2004-2012): expanding fish preservation zone up to 14 communities with budget from Provincial governor, and later to 17 communities.

In addition, the following activities were conducted

- In collaboration of Tourism Center of Phayao and relevant agencies, initiated a Phayao Lake Environmental and Sustainable Tourism Project

- Research project to examine eco-tourism management of Phayao Lake by Local Fishermen Association. The research looks at knowledge on local wisdom, way of life, history, socio-economic aspect and natural resource of fishing communities. The Project was funded by Thailand Research Fund
- Project to increase capacity of fish and establishment of preservation zone according to Phayao Development Strategy

The Association also participated in other development projects organized by government agencies and relevant stakeholders including garbage cleaning, improvement of water quality in the lake, etc.

SECTION 10:

TRAININGS/FORMATION/ EXCHANGES

10.1 Formation and Training

The formation and training programs mainly focus on providing (a) exchanges among the grassroots leaders and (b) alternative education for the young leaders from the communities in response to intention and need of the local communities in maintaining their religio-cultural values. These young leaders undergo formation through the “Organic Intellectual (OI)” and “Cultural Agriculture” courses. The aim is to form and motivate new leaders by enabling them to be aware of and confident in their local wisdom inherited from their communities. They are then inspired to commit themselves to the service of local communities and society, and involve themselves in the development of their communities in a holistic manner, with inner/ spiritual values and local knowledge.

Through the process of “*Action-Reflection/Contemplation-Action*”, the young leaders will be motivated to (re) discover their own essence/

worth when they allow God's Spirit to transform her/him from within. They are guided to live their lives holistically by integrating spirituality and life and strive to find alternatives for a more self-reliant and sustainable life with dignity and freedom of their spirit in present society.

10.2 Training for hill tribe youth:

RTRC has organized a number of training programmes for young people among the hill tribe communities over the past years. Some of the main trainings conducted includes the following:

- (a) **Training of Organic Intellectuals:** The organic intellectual (OIs) training was initiated in response to the request of the communities leaders who have expressed their needs for an alternative education which nurtures the young people with traditional indigenous knowledge side by side with modern knowledge.

RTRC has organized trainings for hill tribe youth who have gone out for formal education and willing to return to the village and back to their roots to learn the wisdom of the



Organic Intellectuals meditation session 2015

people. The Centre provides an opportunity to train these youth to understand their own worldview, culture, identity and spirituality, to know about the structure of their community and society, thus enabling them to work in tandem with the elders and leaders of the villages.

10.3 Training of the Grassroots and Spiritual Leaders

This training was organized to motivate, raise the awareness and, build up confidence in the leaders about their indigenous wisdoms inherited from community cultures so that they would be able to analyze way of life under capitalism and search for alternatives that would allow them to be independent and self-reliance with dignity, as well as being able to link their life with religion harmoniously. It helped the leaders to gain knowledge in theories, experience and skills necessary in developing their communities.

(a) Training of the Spiritual Leaders of Lahu

In the midst of the changing social condition, Lahu ethnic groups has faced the crisis in many areas such as the shortage of land, lack of occupation, drug problems, AIDS, etc. The



Lahu Spiritual leaders meeting (2014)

elders who are spiritual leaders come together and build the network of spiritual leaders to renew the faith of Lahu ethnic in order to become driving forces in solving the problems of Lahu communities. In their analysis, some of the problems resulted from the major problem that young people do not obey their parents. Therefore, the problem solution which they decide to manage first is the transmission of their cultural values to younger generation.

The network of Lahu spiritual leaders has currently expanded to 26 villages in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai provinces. The group of leaders traveled to other villages twice a month in the two sacred days of lunar month (full moon and new moon days) to talk about their religious belief. Based on religious ideas of “merit,” they celebrated these two days with religious practices, such as observing precepts, vegetarian diet and take a break from work to direct their attention to spiritual development. People gathered at the village religious hall (*haw yeh*) to worship the supreme and creating divinity (*G’uisha*) in which the water purification rite (pouring water into the hands of religious practitioners) was done prior to the common praying and the ritual dance. During the visit, the leaders discussed with villagers about living conditions and problems of the community as well as the renewal of faith, rebuilding the village religious hall, and renewal of moral leaders in Lahu traditional regime. Owing to the power of the supreme and creating divinity (*G’uisha*), the leaders also performed the rituals, such as healing practices, expelling adversity rite, and blessings of fortune and longevity for the people. Moreover, the group of spiritual leaders joined regularly the annual ritual ceremonies of villages in their network, such as New Year celebration, the construction of merit house or rice cultivation house, etc. This revitalizing movement is considered as one way to transmit their cultures to the younger generation.

(b) Training of Northern Social Forum (NSF) Leaders Network

The Northern Social Forum (NSF) was organized as a platform for leaders of people's organizations and movements in the North, particularly the spiritual leaders who maintain and transmit their cultures and beliefs in giving values and respecting the Supreme Being in nature from one generation to another generation for a long time.

The main purpose is undertake common analysis of the current situation, exchange and brainstorming for searching alternatives in the promotion of people's movements based on beliefs and cultures of the local communities.

The First Forum of NSF was held on August 9, 2010 on the topic "*Returning the Sacredness to the World.*" There were 64 participants comprising of Lahu and Karen ethnic spiritual leaders, leaders of traditional irrigation system from the lowland area, leaders of people's organizations from Phayao and Lampang provinces. It included analysis of the situation of opening Free Trade Zone in the Asian Region and its impact over agricultural sector, environment and cultures of local communities. The participants also reflected on the role



Northern Social Forum (2008)

of spiritual leaders in returning the sacred aspect to this world. According to the current situation, they agreed that it is necessary to revive faith and morality; otherwise life will be full of risks. Finally, they decided to set up a common plan and activities, such as exchange of knowledge and experiences, exchange of information, etc. In Feb 2011 another meeting of working group was held for preparing the group process and strengthening the network. In this process, RTRC has played a supportive role in strengthening the leaders network.

(c) Trainings for lay leaders and Catechists from Lao PDR:

Asian society is deeply spiritual in its approach to life. Traditional cultures and religions mark the life perspective of many Asians especially ethnic peoples, with includes a cosmic vision of life. The process of training village leaders (young leaders, catechists, community leaders) was to help the participants to develop holistically, with spirituality and internal values, alongside knowledge and skills in organic agriculture, social animation and community development. This fosters the transmission of religio-cultural knowledge

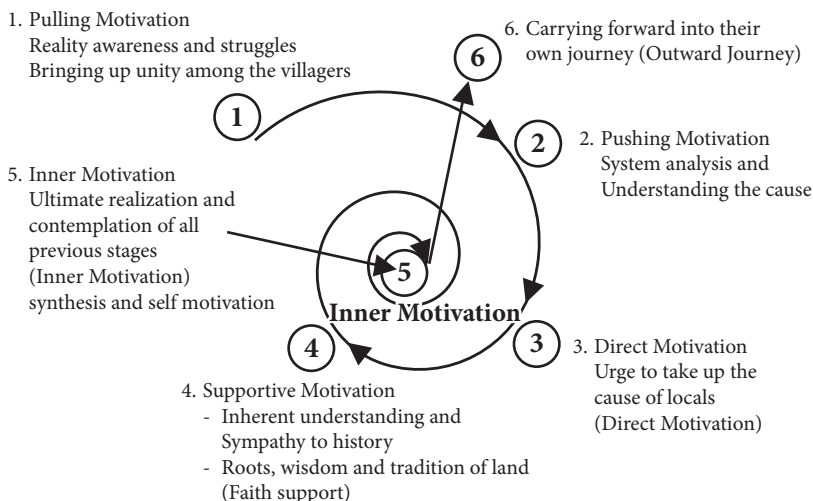


Training for Lao Lay Leaders (2016)

and values of the community to ensure their being rooted and sustainable in the present globalizing society.

The aim of these trainings were to motivate leaders to be aware of and confident in local wisdom inherited from cultures of their communities. It also inculcates in the participants awareness, ideology and commitment in offering service to their communities as a way of leadership and self-realisation. The participants are taught to carry out field research, analytical skills, to assimilate learning and disseminate knowledge. Through Action/Reflection it helps leaders (re) discover the transforming force within them and their peoples to find alternatives to live in dignity and self-reliability. We can say therefore, it is the formation of '*organic intellectuals*', i.e. persons nurtured from and within their context, becoming conscious and intelligent of their personal and collective resources. Both RTRC and Fondacio, has collaborated to provide these trainings and promote community-centered approaches.

Process of Conscientizing Young Lay Leaders



10.4 Training on Organic Agriculture

- (a) RTRC has organised 6-months intensive Training Programmes for young farmers on organic agriculture knowledge and skills to strengthen the young farmers movements. Fifteen trainees from the first group came from 5 villages consisting of three hill tribe groups – Lawa, Karen and Lahu. Between January and June 2015 there were about 20 young people attending the 6months training programme at RTRC from January to June 2015. The main components of this training include the following topics: Self-discovery through practice of Review of Life and self-reflections; Practice of Meditation and Contemplation; Lectures by experts from Universities and local experts on organic farming; Theological Reflections; Field work in the villages; etc. Following the training, the young people either go for higher studies, volunteer to serve in the villages, or, become team leaders to help the Centre train future batches of young people.



RTRC training of Organic Intellectuals 2017



Training on soil experiment for compost 2018

SECTION 11:

VISION AND MISSION OF RTRC: 1999 to 2018

11.1 RTRC Vision, Mission and Goals

The Research and Training Centre for Religio-Cultural Communities (RTRC) was set up based on systematic reflection and analysis of lessons learnt from the previous experiences and work of the Diocesan Social Action Center and the earlier work of the missionaries in Northern Thailand. RTRC aims to empower people's movements based on the religio-cultural values of the local communities and their beliefs in the guidance of the nature and ancestral spirits, and the Creator Spirit. Their religio-cultural values and spirituality are powerful context-based approaches for overcoming the challenges as they struggle to promote a more sustainable livelihood with dignity in the present society. RTRC was officially established on January 16, 1999 as a Research and Training Center with a focus on the spiritualities and cultures of the indigenous peoples in the upper Northern part of Thailand, both living in the highland and lowland areas.

Vision: *RTRC is a space for people inspired by the spirit and indigenous cultures who seek to exercise this “sacred power” for the transformation of self and society in these times of change, for the realisation of a more contemplative and prophetic lifestyle characterised by resilience and self-sufficiency.*

Mission:

1. *Organize exchanges related to the experiences and struggles of the people to build a sustainable network of local people’s movements based on their spirit-led approaches.*
2. *Organize formation and training courses for the upcoming (young) generation of community-based organic intellectual (OI’s) in order to transmit the aspirations of the communities through cultural-agriculture (agriculture rooted people’s spirituality*
3. *Open spaces for contemplation/reflection for the new generation of community-based leaders to deepen their inner life that motivates them to bring about social-ecological change in our common home.*
4. *Act as sources by generating a corpus of local knowledge through participatory research and the periodic summary of the insights and wisdom gathered from the local beliefs and cultures.*
5. *Disseminate the corpus of knowledge, values and wisdom of the cultures and spiritualities of the local communities.*

Goals/Objectives:

1. *To promote formation for the leaders of people’s organizations and strengthen the network aimed at the transformation of self and society gleaned from the cultures and spirituality of the communities and their spirit-led approaches.*
2. *To facilitate exchanges, particularly the experiences of faith among the various interest groups on their religio-cultural*

community approaches to motivate them to have their strategic working plan in response to the present situation and to work towards changes of policies supportive of the religio-cultural development of the local communities.

3. *To organize formation and training for the new generation (Organic Intellectuals) that respond to the manifest needs of the local communities in their struggle to promote their religio-cultural values and spiritualities through cultural agriculture.*
4. *To capture the summary of the insights and wisdom learned from the religio-cultural communities and their spirit-led approaches*
5. *To disseminate local wisdom on the religio-cultural values that strengthening the identities of the indigenous groups.*

11.2 Programmes

(a) Formation and Trainings:

(i) Laudato Si' workshop with catechists of Chiang Mai diocese, October 7-9, 2015

RTRC was encouraged by the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis “*Laudato Si*” – on the care of our common home, to organise trainings for village leaders on the key messages of this encyclical. RTRC’s work very much reflected these key message of the Pope’s encyclical - working with different religions, different groups of ethnic people for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor and building the network of respect and fraternity (LS 201). Through working with different religions is an interfaith dialogue of action which aims to encourage marginal communities which demand constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture (LS 144). It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. For them, land and nature are not a commodity, but



**Contemplation on Laudato Si' with youth
in Pa Pae village, Mae Hong Son, 2016**

rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there. They consider everywhere is sacred. Therefore, when remain on their land, they themselves care for it best (LS 146).

Therefore, RTRC strongly put education for awareness as the priority as pointed out in encyclical *letter* “*many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change* (LS 202). ***Change is impossible without motivation and a process of education*” (LS 15), human beings, above all we who need to change. This basic awareness would enable development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and education challenge stands before us, and it will demands that we set out on the long path of renewal (LS No. 202). With the great inspiration of “Laudato Si’”, and in order to respond to the appeal of Pope Francis, RTRC will continue its efforts to organize the ongoing learning process for the network on environment in our working areas, especially with the ethnic poor people which are the most vulnerable groups affected by climate change.**

(ii) Alternative education for the young leaders: from the communities in response to intention and needs of local communities

to maintain their religio-cultural values. These young leaders undergo formation through the “Organic Intellectual (OI)” and “Cultural Agriculture” courses. The aim is to form and motivate new leaders by enabling them to be aware of and confident in their local wisdom inherited from their communities. They are then inspired to commit themselves to the service of local communities and society, and involves themselves in the development of the communities in a holistic manner, with/spiritual values an local knowledge. Through the process of “Action-reflection/Contemplation and Action” the young leaders will be motivated to (re) discover their own essence/self-worth when they allow God’s Spirit to transform her/him from within. They are guided to live their lives holistically by integrating spirituality and life and strive to find alternatives for a more self-reliant and sustainable life with dignity and freedom of their spirit in present society.

(iii) Rice-merit Network campaign – “*Laudato Si*” – January to April 2018:

Between January and April 2018, RTRC staff (Fr. Niphot Thianwiwan, senior staff, catechists and village leaders) organised a series of visits to villages to present the key messages of the Pope’s Encyclical and hold discussions on its implications for the future work



Campaign on Laudato Si' at Bo Kaew parish, Chiang Mai 2018

of RTRC in the coming years. These meetings were held in 18 parishes in Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Sorn and Chiang Rai in which a total of over 4,000 people from the villages – including village elders, women, youth and children participated.

(b) Strengthen Peoples’ Organisations and Movements:

RTRC collaborates with people’s organizations and indigenous groups in building networks among themselves and with other social networks that endeavour to receive the values of sacredness to the world based on the cosmo-vision and spiritualities of the indigenous peoples.

(c) Research and dissemination of knowledge

In order to strengthen the religio-cultural values that can be used as a creative force for the local communities, RTRC conducts periodic research and the summation of lessons learnt. RTRC strives to disseminate to the public the local knowledge of the approaches of the religio-cultural community and the reflections on the nexus between spiritualities and the integral development of the rural communities in local context.



Environment and Rice Merit campaign, 2018

(d) Partnership with Academic Institutions/Universities:

RTRC has developed good working relations with Mae Jo University, Chiang Mai University and Thammasat University.

RTRC also plans to design M.A. level academic programmes that can be offered to young village leaders and others on areas such as: Cultural Agriculture, Spirituality and Asian Philosophies, Ethnic Studies, Religio-Cultural Approach to Development, etc. Guest Professors from various Universities in Thailand and abroad will be invited to give lectures and conduct courses. It is proposed that this programme be based as a newly-established ***“Asian Institute or School of Wisdom”*** (AIW) at RTRC in Chiang Mai. It is also proposed that this Asian Institute/School of Wisdom partner with the Jesuits in Thailand through the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for collaboration with the Community Learning College (CLC) at Chaeng San. This partnership will facilitate the regular exchanges of lecturers/professors and students who have completed their studies in CLC can pursue further studies at the AIW at RTRC.



MA students from Mae Jo University, 2016

11.3 Regional/International Networking and Exchanges

(a) Catechists and Village Leaders Training Programme – Lao PDR (January-April 2017)

The Lao People Democratic Republic is a multi-ethnic country with an estimated population of 6.5 million people. Over 60% of the population is made up of Lao people who live in the lowlands while 40% of the population consists of various Mon-Khmer groups, the Hmong and other indigenous hill tribes who live in the foothills and mountains. Lao is primarily an agricultural economy with 79% of its population engaged in farming. However, with globalisation, the opening of ASEAN, and the presence of multinational companies, these communities find themselves at a greater disadvantage with ecosystems being threatened and social problems on the rise.

The Catechists and Village Leaders Training Program was born out of a need to equip and upgrade catechists and village leaders to respond effectively to their changing situations and needs, to help them to improve their own livelihood as catechists and villagers, and to disseminate these skills and knowledge to their communities. Many of



**Exposure learning for Lao delegation with Pa Mon villagers
Chiang Mai 2018**

these catechists and their families have been affected by the opening of ASEAN markets, commercialisation and land grabbing by companies, migration to fend for their families. The local bishops raised the concern that the catechists are unable to fulfil their role with their livelihood concerns.

The training program was requested by the bishops and priests of Laos who went through a pastoral planning process facilitated by Fondacio Asia. Taking a leaf from Vatican II and Church in the Modern World, they felt that local catechists and village leaders need to acquire certain awareness and skills, particularly in Catholic Social Teaching, agriculture, health and community development for their well-being and that of their communities. They also saw the need for a training program that would help the people ‘connect faith and life’ and contribute to the pastoral progress of the Church in Laos – as catechists and lay leaders in a great measure constitute the backbone of the Church by their presence in villages and remote communities.

The program sought to transmit not only knowledge and skills in agriculture or community development, but the deepening of spirituality as proposed by “Laudato Si” and Gospel values to ensure



Lao delegates participated in Chiang Mai Diocese Catechists seminar in 2018

participants develop holistically. This is to foster the transmission of religio-cultural knowledge and values of the community amidst an ever-changing and globalizing society. Participants to these trainings included 16 catechists and lay leaders from nine villages in the four vicariates of Pakse, Thakhet, Vientanne and LaungPrabhang.

The program included analysis of motivation and awareness of oneself, family, community and society, lectures, immersion programs, fieldwork and study trips, community life and team work, meetings, seminars and also time for prayer, silence and daily Mass. It covered four main areas that are i) faith and Church teachings, particularly the encyclicals of Pope Francis ii) religio-cultural processes iii) skills in community organising iv) and agriculture skills.

Key learning points from these trainings based on feedback from the participants included the following key areas:

- **Self –discovery and appreciation of one’s origins and roots:**
 - ▶ discovering their true self with a better understanding of their family backgrounds, cultures and roots o analysis of oneself through reflection to foster personal growth
 - ▶ appreciation of the dignity of the human person regardless of one’s standing in society
 - ▶ learning and understanding the history of their communities, their past struggles and progress
- **Deepening of Christian faith, spirituality and call to mission:**
 - ▶ understanding and appreciating the story of creation, finding God in creation through meditation and contemplation in nature
 - ▶ bringing faith into daily life, work and communities

- ▶ awareness of their Christian identity and each individual's call to mission.
- **Acquiring new skills and aptitudes:**
 - ▶ in catechesis training: Learning how to teach basic catechism and contextualize the teaching, inculturation
 - ▶ agriculture skills: Organic farming (compost making, wood vinegar), vegetable planting techniques, integrated farming
 - ▶ community development: Community analysis to identify the needs of a community, environmental protection (as described in Laudato Si)
- **Widening of perspective and knowledge:**
 - ▶ changing ways of thinking and working by having a holistic view and approach
 - ▶ seeing the big picture (overall process of work) and linking all aspects of life from past to present and projecting future trends
 - ▶ realising that the knowledge and wisdom of ethnic tribes are sustainable alternatives for future development

RTRC has also co-facilitated and participated in a number of regional level (Asia Pacific) trainings, workshops and conferences in the past years – the main ones included the following”

- FABC – *Climate Change Workshop* for South East Asia region, 18 to 20 August 2015, Bangkok, Thailand
- The FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) “*Dialogue in Asia with Ethnic Traditional Religions*”, 17 to 19 November 2015, Pattaya, Thailand



Fondacio students exposure programme in Nong Tao village 2017

- Fondacio International Meeting 2018 – *Spark of Change in the World* – 5 to 14 May 2018, Manila, the Philippines.

Regional Partnerships:

At the regional level in the Asia Pacific Region, RTRC collaborates with Fondacio (Paris), Asian Youth Academy, Asia Theological Forum, etc. RTRC, with the support of Fondacio, provides intensive trainings for lay leaders and catechists from Lao PDR.

Global Partnerships:

At the global level, RTRC collaborates with FIMARC-PLDP, Camilian International Disaster Management Services (CADIS), FABC Climate Change network, etc.



FIMARC conference in Chiang Mai 2017

SECTION 12:

LESSONS LEARNT

The unique approach and contribution of RTRC over the last three decades to development and community work among hill tribe and lowland communities in Northern Thailand can be summarised as follows:

- (a) **Development worldview:** The framework and approach to development of grassroots communities was based on historical evolution and sustainable development practices. The framework/approach itself developed from local wisdom of the hill tribe and lowland communities, and integrated with progressive academic and intellectual discourses on development and sustainability. Community learning was a central aspect of developing this approach. This helped RTRC to move away from “project-oriented” development work, to seeing development as a “evolving process” based on direct learning and reflection. Solutions to problems were found within the life experiences of the people and with the given local resources – not from external influences or sources.

This also helped reduce and eliminate the dependency of villagers to outside forces.

- (b) **Peoples Theology:** The religio-cultural context of Northern Thai society based on the Lanna culture and history is unique and different from the rest of the country. This has been a conducive context and foundation for RTRC to develop the “religio-cultural approach” both with the Christian and the Buddhist communities. Evangelisation, in this context of peoples life experiences and local wisdom, is seen as a process of multiple approaches to upgrade human dignity in the image of God. The Church is therefore a community of diverse experiences and values that are embedded in the community – not a unilinear or monolithic approach. Furthermore, the new thinking/mission of the Church as it has evolved over the decades – Vatican II, BISA, FABC, OHD, CCTD, IMCS/IYCS, FIMARC, Pope’s encyclicals – has provided a strong justification and legitimation of the Vision and Mission of RTRC.
- (c) **Organic Intellectuals:** the approach and methodology used by RTRC to develop local/grassroots village leaders as “organic intellectuals” has been a unique strategy of development work. In this strategy, the critical factor has been identifying and enhancing the potential of local wisdom and the peoples’ own indigenous values, practices and worldviews using an integrated framework based on belief systems and direct life experiences.
- (d) **Sharing experiences regionally:** the vision and approach of RTRC has attracted both national church-based organisations and civil society and from other countries. RTRC has therefore been requested to conduct trainings for lay leaders, community organisers, catechists and others from South Korea, Myanmar, Lao PDR and other countries.

It capturing the main lessons learnt in this long journey from DISAC to RTRC since 1975, the following key points emerge:

- (a) RTRC's intervention program has yielded the impacts on the transmission of the way of life of the people. All the activities that RTRC has been trying to work on in the communities center on the people through projects activities at the local levels. It is a gradual and continual attempt to change the condition of the people from being self-supporting at a minimal extent, or almost unable to be self-supporting, to a new condition that the people have potential to attain self-reliance.
- (b) The work of RTRC is the work with the people, not for the people. This is confirmed by the projects activities that promote participation of the people of all levels. Grass roots representatives are committees in-charge of the projects, making decision on the projects, implementing, monitoring and evaluating with grassroots leaders.
- (c) One unique approach, RTRC adopts is inter-religious dialogue through a process of the implementation of the projects based on local religious –cultural aspects that correspond to the needs of the community. The main key principle is “Integral Human Development” which aims at developing people in all dimensions. Development activities must be based on religious values. Catechism, education and training should always conform to the life of the villagers.
- (d) It is noteworthy that Buddhists accepted rice donation ceremony and other activities initiated and coordinated by a church-based organisation. Buddhists acceptance and participation in these activities reflected that RTRC is not a threat to their religion neither to the villagers who belong to other religious denominations. On the other hand, RTRC has respected the traditional and religious foundations of

other religions and avoided creating the fear of conversion among the villagers.

- (e) RTRC recognizes the importance of the development of the local human resources by conducting trainings, forming Christian leaders, etc. It also provides training among grassroots leaders who also have responsibilities in project implementation in their own communities. This process has helped build a core group that share similar understanding in the goal of development with RTRC. The aim of this core group is to extend this concept further, at least to the members who take part in project activities so that they will understand that development is not the work of RTRC, but of the people for their own development.
- (f) RTRC's active interventions at the local levels to help improve the people's conditions is a witness to the mission of the Church today. True to her teachings, in words and in deeds, the Church in Chiang Mai shows it is helping her people to realise heaven on earth by helping and supporting them, especially the poor and the marginalized, the hill tribes, etc. to improve their living conditions and wellbeing. It is also noteworthy that RTRC does not confine its work only to the Christian communities but opens it up to people of all religions on Northern Thailand – including the “traditional beliefs” of the hill tribes – as it consider all people as equal believers before God.
- (g) The experience of RTRC in her pastoral work in local communities that have a rich religious and cultural tradition and values has made it realise that religion and spirituality cannot be separated from the peoples life experiences and rituals. It therefore tries to integrate religious and cultural values and the Christian faith into the various dimensions of life and livelihoods of the people.

What were some of the key contributing factors for DISAC/RTRC to achieve these results and outcomes over the last three decades or more? Some of the key factors include the following:

- (a) Continuity of staff overtime: many of the core staff of DISAC who first began to work with the organisation since 1975 have continued to be involved with RTRC until today. They have therefore a rich history of the work and experience accumulated over all these years and have helped RTRC to sustain its development work and extend it further to share with other church-based organisations and networks nationally and regionally.
- (b) New thinking in the Church/theology – the vision and theology of Pope Francis as contained in his various Encyclicals is showing a “new mission” for the Church in the world today – building on Vatican II and the work of many church-based organisations and movements around the world in solidarity with the poor. This has not only been a strong justification or vindication of the “Religio-Cultural Approach” of DISAC/RTRC over the last three decades of work in Northern Thailand, but also a strong motivation for RTRC to move forward to expand and develop further in the coming years.
- (c) Sense of ownership by the people themselves: this has been a key factor that has contributed to the results and outcomes of development work. The core village leaders/elders (OI’s) have been instrumental in maintaining ownership of the various activities and initiatives undertaken by DISAC/RTRC over the years and ensured that the peoples knowledge, wisdom, experience is integral to conceptualising and implementing the development activities at the local levels. This local ownership has also been the critical factor to ensure community solidarity to face the problems and challenges faced in the work.

- (d) The value and potential of local wisdom: another key factor has been the tremendous value and potential of the local wisdom of the people themselves to inform, guide and shape their actions and initiatives to solve their problems. Local solutions have been key to success and lessons learnt.
- (e) Support from local church: DISAC/RTRC has also received encouraging understanding and support from the local Church and religious congregations (Diocese of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, Marina Sisters, Ursuline Sisters, Betharam Fathers, Jesuits, etc.) in Northern Thailand, who have been key partners and collaborators in various areas of work undertaken over the past decades.
- (f) Support from regional and global networks – DISAC/RTRC has also established good partnership relationships with key regional and international networks – including FIMARC, YCW, FONDACIO, IMCS Asia Pacific, etc.

However, as RTRC moves forward to develop its next 10-year strategy of work, a number of key challenges remain to be addressed and incorporated in its future plan. Among the most important challenges ahead, include the following”

- (a) Developing the next generation of village leaders (“organic intellectuals – OI’s”) at the community level. A clear approach and strategy to identify, train and support the next generation of village leaders is needed. The training programme conducted with the local leaders/catechists from Lao PDR can be a good model to be replicated.
- (b) Developing the next generation of RTRC staff – drawn from the core group of young people that have developed at the village level.
- (c) Supporting selected young people from the villages who want to pursue future academic studies (MA/PhD) – to help them

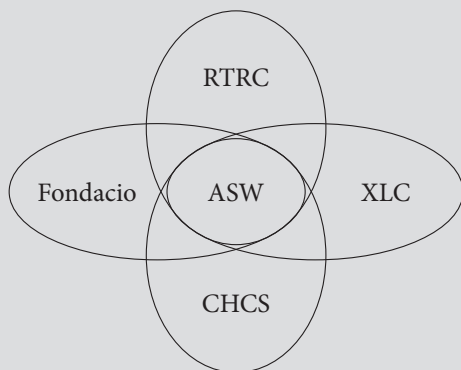
develop their intellectual and professional expertise to serve their village and their communities better in the future.

- (d) Finding effective ways to tap into the potential of young people today on IT/technology/innovation.
- (e) Invite selected young leaders to participate in RTRC Executive Board meetings and staff meetings
- (f) Organise village visits for young people to observe and learn from RTRC programmes and activities in order to pass on the knowledge and experience and to encourage/motivate them
- (g) Identify opportunities to share experiences of DISAC/RTRC with young people in the villages – organise “weekend knowledge sharing sessions”.
- (h) “Model young people” – to present their work, research and experiences with other young people in the villages
- (i) Continuing engagement with Church: taking forward the new mission of the Church – bringing back the Vision, Mission and good work of past decades of DISAC/RTRC and CCTD/FABC – to revitalise the church in the local context applying the religio-cultural approach. This is timely given the Pope’s Encyclicals on the new mission of the Church in the world today.

SECTION 13:

FUTURE DIRECTION AND WAYS FORWARD

(Organisational Chart – RTRC/ASW)



ASW = Asian School of Wisdom, Chiang Mai, Thailand

*RTRC = Research and Training Center for Religio-cultural Communities,
Chiang Mai, Thailand*

XLC = Xavier Learning Center, Chiang Saen, Thailand

*CHCS = Center for Humanities and Compassion Studies, Xavier University,
Orissa, India*

FONDACIO Asia

In April 2017, Fr. Niphot Thianwihan, Executive Director of RTRC, was invited by Pope Francis to attend the Conference on Integral Human Development in Rome, organised by the Curial Descatery to commemorate the 50 years of *aggiornamento* (from *Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et spes* till *Populorum progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*). Based on the outcomes of this Conference, the Church in the Third World/Global South has been mandated by Pope Francis in the next 50 years, beginning with 2017 based on the theological orientations of *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), *Laudato Si'* (LS) and *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) to set up formation centers to continue the spirit of *aggiornamento* of Vatican II and FABC in terms of the Church's mission of integral evangelization of the Church and development of the religio-cultural communities. This was a personal inspiration and affirmation to Fr. Niphot Thianwihan of the work done over the past 40 years by DISAC Chiang Mai and RTRC in Northern Thailand.

As part of RTRC's forward planning, the team decided to visit selected villages/districts in Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Phayao where work was being carried out with local communities to present the outcomes from the Rome Conference and discuss and seek inputs on the future direction of RTRC. Between January and April 2018, over 18 meetings were held covering approx. 500 villages from 13 districts in which approx. 4,000 village leaders, housewives, community members, children and youth and others participated. The discussions held and outcomes will be incorporated in RTRC's 10-year future plan of work.

In addition, RTRC organised a "Stakeholders Consultation" in Chiang Mai on 25 July 2018 at which key village leaders, OI's, women and youth, representatives from Church and religious organisations, academics, NGOs and civil society organisations, the Executive Board and the International Advisory Team of RTRC discussed the future plan for RTRC/ASW in the coming 10 years based on the findings of this Historical Documentation of DISAC/RTRC: 1975 to the present. The outcomes from this Stakeholders Consultation will inform and



**Stakeholders Consultation on RTRC/ASW Strategic Plan,
Chiang Mai, July 2018**

contribute to the development of a 10-year Strategy Plan for RTRC (2019-2029) moving forward.

SECTION 14:

CONCLUSIONS

This Historical Documentation of DISAC/RTRC from 1975 to the present has been the result of a research work undertaken by the core team of RTRC during the period February to December 2018. Since the initial decision to undertake this research work was made in January 2018, the RTRC core team has been meeting every month to discuss key topics related to DISAC/RTRC's vision and mission, review key programme and activities implemented over the past decades, lessons learnt and some challenges for the ways forward. A wide range of documentation, materials and publications in both Thai and English were reviewed and summarised to extract key points and learning that are included in this final report.

This is still work in progress. While a significant part of the development approach and work overtime of DISAC/RTRC has been captured in this Report, there still remain major gaps given the wide range of programmes, activities and initiatives undertaken over the past three decades. It has therefore been decided that this work will continue in the coming year as part of the future plan of work of RTRC in the years to come.

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(*kauv htauf keiz htofbiqaf*) – A Karen hilltribe folklore story

Annex 2: Case Study 2: The Myth of Creation – a Lahu folklore epic
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Annex 3: Case Study 3: Interview with Elder: Mr. Pya Weipau (91 years
old Karen leader)

Annex 4: Case Study 4: The Nine Grains of Rice

Annex 5: Map of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Diocese in 2018

ANNEX 1

Case Study 1: “Calling the bird of the rice spirit to heaven”

(kauv htauf keiz htofbiqaf).

A Karen hilltribe folklore story

“Pru! Hey, rice, come up! Bird of the rice spirit, widowed grandmother (htof Bi qaf Hpi muf mai), call the paddy up, call the milled rice up, call the rice up in the barn, call the rice up in the granary, rice in the sky, rice in the ground, rice from the north, rice from the south, rice from the east, rice from the west, rice from the big field, rice from the big paddy field, rice from the great Mekong, rice from the great Salween, rice from the great mountain, rice from the high peak, rice from Chiang Mai, rice from Bangkok, make yourself come up, make yourself increase, come up and eat the first rice, come up and drink pure water, come up and eat bird meat, come up and eat chicken meat, come up and join together, come up and be together, come up and unite, come up and be in solidarity, come up and fill the barn, come up and fill the granary, come up and fill the field hut, come up and fill the resting place!”

This prayer is recited by the Karen hill tribes in Northern Thailand during the threshing of the rice paddy after harvesting. The reference to “bird of the rice spirit” and the “widowed grandmother” is from an ancient folklore told by ancestors over the years. This story goes as follows:

Once upon a time there was an orphan boy who could only build a small house for himself in the outskirts of the main village where the landlord lived. He had no mother or father, no brothers or sisters, no neighbours, and lived all alone in his house. The landlord said to him, “I am the head of the town. I am the owner of the land and all the resources.

Whatever the people do, whatever they eat, wherever they clear a field or make a vegetable garden, they must receive permission from me first."

The orphan was very poor. He had no paddy field, no cow, no water buffalo, no pig, no chicken, and only his little house where he lived all alone. The landlord would not give him permission to clear a field, nor would he allow him to gather bamboo shoots. The orphan thus thought to himself:

"Well, if that's how it is I'll go and beg the landlord to give me food (rice) to eat."

So he went to the landlord's house. When he got there, he said to the landlord, "Sir, I am hungry. I beg you to give me some rice to eat!"

The landlord replied, "Hey, orphan. You are a lazy fellow. You are sick in both mind and body. Don't come near me!"

The orphan said to the landlord, "Oh, Sir, I am really very hungry! I cannot do anything to help myself because you will not permit me to do anything."

The landlord said to him, "Let me be straight with you. I have a great number of subjects/villagers that I must look after. I cannot allow you to do anything. Even if I could, there's nothing you can do to help me."

The orphan did not give up trying and continued to speak directly to the landlord's face with great persistence. When the landlord saw that the orphan was not going to be turned away easily he bellowed at him



Widows in Sub Muey 2012



Stateless orphans in remote area, 2012

threateningly. “Orphan, you are not welcome in my house. Go away! If you do not leave I will kill you right now!”

The orphan saw that the situation was turning nasty and so hurriedly got up and returned to his house. He was very hungry so he went around the houses in the neighbourhood begging for some food. Sometimes he could eat his fill and sometimes he could not, but he got by somehow.

A compassionate angel (Taj moo hkoŋ hpo) looked down on the life of the orphan from where she was in heaven and felt very sorry for him. She wanted to go down and help him, but had no opportunity to do so, and also if the landlord knew about it he would be very unhappy. Nevertheless, she felt that she should certainly go down and help him, but she would have to do it carefully and incognito.

One day, while the angel was waiting for an opportunity to go down and help the orphan, the landlord of another town organised a temple festival (for making offerings to “make merit”). The landlord invited all his subjects and all the people from the surrounding districts to come to celebrate the festival. Everyone was talking about going to the festival, and all the people who heard about it decided to go.

The angel looked down from above and saw the events that were taking place below. She anticipated that the landlord who was holding the festival would certainly have many visitors and that no doubt the orphan would also go along like everyone else too, but on which day she did not yet know. As she was travelling to the festival, there was, by chance, a big tree with thorns that had fallen across the road, making it totally impassable. The pathway was completely obstructed by branches, twigs and leaves.

The angel took the opportunity to transform herself into a bird and fly down into the fallen tree. Once inside, she transformed herself again, this time into an old widowed grandmother and wriggled beneath the branches and leaves into the deepest part of fallen tree. Above her was

completely obstructed with branches, twigs, vines, and other hindrances, and very difficult to get into.

The angel sat down to wait. After quite a while she heard the sound of people chatting as they approached. The old widow thought to herself, “This is it!” The sound of these people who were on their way to the festival continued to approach closer and closer, and finally they arrived. The old widow saw that they were young men and women who were certainly on their way to the festival, and that they were all dressed up in fine and beautiful clothes. When they came up to the tree they all cried out, “What! This tree has fallen and completely blocked the road. We can’t go on and we can’t go back!”

They all helped each other find a way around the tree. They walked up and down from one end of the tree to the other, thorns catching at their hands and feet until they were all noisily crying out “Ouch! Ouch!”

Just then the old widow began to speak. “Hey, grandchildren, where are you on your way to?”

They replied, “We’re going to the festival. Grandmother, how on earth did you come to be in there?”

The old widow replied, “Hey, grandchildren, please help me! The tree fell on me. I was also thinking of going to the festival, but when I got here the tree fell on me. I can’t move. Please cut me free so I can get out of here!”

The young people thought for a moment and then they said to the old widow, “Grandmother, the branches are too dense. We’re on our way to the festival and we haven’t brought knives or axes with us. We cannot cut you free, grandmother. We have to be on our way or we will not make it to the festival on time.”

The young people stood up and walked on by. The old widow watched them disappear in the distance and said to herself, “Those young men and women... I asked them to help me, but not one of them would.

If they won't even help a poor suffering old widow like me, it won't do them any good to try and make merit at the temple."

After a good while, there came the sound of another group of people approaching, this one louder than the previous group. The old widow thought to herself, this group of people will certainly have someone who will help me. When they came up to the tree, they said to each other, "Eh? A tree has fallen over and completely blocked the road. How are we to proceed? We're trying to go to the festival, but faced with this, will we be able to get there or not?"

Some of the people said, "Well, we've come this far, we have to keep going."

The old widow under the branches spoke up to them, "Grandchildren, where are you on your way to? There are many of you, please help me to get free from under here! This tree fell on me. I was also trying to get to the festival, but when I got here this tree fell right on top of me. I can't move. Please have pity on an old grandmother!"

The people asked each other, "What shall we do? The old woman is asking us to help her get free. Are we going to help her get free or not?"

Some people said, "Ahh, we're on our way to the festival and we haven't brought knives or axes with us. How are we going to cut her free? If we try to do it, we won't make the festival on time. Don't pay any attention to her. Let's go!"

They got up and walked past the old widow just like the first group. The old widow watched them disappear into the distance and mumbled after them, "These children... I thought they would help me and I got all worked up, but not one of them would help me. They walked by me without caring. If that's how they are, going to the temple festival won't bring them any merit."

After waiting quite a long while there came the sound of one person approaching, clearing the way as he came, making a loud "swish, swish" sound. As he came up to the tree, the old widow saw that it was the orphan.

He was also intending to go and participate in the festival, but was going all alone with no friends or group to go with, carrying a shoulder bag, holding a broken knife with only a short blade. When he came up to the tree, the orphan said, "Well, this tree has fallen over and completely blocked the road. When I passed here before there was no tree blocking the way. The road was quite clear and easy to come and go. This time a tree has fallen in the way. Which way are we going to go?"

All alone and talking to himself, the old widow under the branches of the tree could hear him and was sure it was the orphan. Then she spoke up saying, "Orphan boy, please cut me free and help me get out of here!"

The orphan heard the old widow's voice and asked, "Who are you, speaking from under the shrubbery?" The orphan then climbed onto the branches, stared down between the leaves and branches and saw an old woman down in the deepest part of the entangled tree. The orphan asked the old widow, "How did you get stuck in there?"

The old widow replied, "The tree fell on me. I cannot move. I will die in here. Please cut me free and get me out of here!"

The orphan replied, "Oh, grandmother, I've only got this one broken knife. I don't know if I'll be able to cut you out of there."

The old widow said to him, "Grandson, if you have a will to help me, then please try to do so."

The orphan said, "If you say so, I'll give it a try."

The orphan immediately set about trying to clear away the branches, cutting and throwing away, getting deeper and deeper and deeper. He had almost reached the old widow when he came to a big fork in the tree. It had to be cut through as there was no way to avoid it and take another route as he was now already too deeply inside. He had to go this way, otherwise he would have to start all over again from the top. The orphan thought to himself, "What am I going to do with just a fistful of knife, and I didn't sharpen it when I set out from the house again this morning. Oh, dear! What the hell, I'll try to cut through it."

So the orphan set to work cutting through the tree fork, and after quite a while it broke off. The orphan said to the old widow, "Grandmother, I've cut through the branch!"

The old widow replied, saying, "Grandson, if you have a will to help me you can do anything."

After that, the orphan continued to cut away the branches, and as he was cutting he began to be aware that he was hungry, so he said to the old widow, "Grandmother, my arms and legs are becoming so weak, I cannot lift my knife. I have no power, I have no strength left. I don't know what's going wrong with me."

The old widow said, "Grandson, you are hungry."

The old widow plucked out one of her fingernails and a flat rice cake about the size of two fingers appeared. She grasped it and handed it to the orphan. "Here, eat this rice cake, grandson."

The orphan took the rice cake and ate it all. When he had finished eating the rice cake, he felt his strength returning. He stood up and continued to cut. After a while, it seemed that he would reach the old widow after cutting for just a little while longer, but he felt hungry again. He told the old widow that he was hungry. The old widow removed another fingernail which became a rice cake and she gave it to the orphan to eat. He ate it and then began to continue cutting. He continued to cut until the sun pierced the tops of the trees and then he reached the old widow. He was able to help the old widow out from under the tree. The orphan cut the old widow a walking stick. Then he said to her, "Grandmother, come back and stay at my house! We don't have to go to the festival. We won't make it there on time, anyway."

The orphan took the old widow by the hand and set off back towards his house. Coming to a mountain on the way, the orphan began to feel hungry again as they were walking up the slope and he said to the old widow, "Grandmother, I can't go on any further, I can't walk another step."

The old widow replied, saying, "Grandson, you must be hungry again."

The old widow plucked another fingernail from her hand and a rice cake appeared again, just as before. The orphan ate the rice cake and his strength returned again and was finally able to take the old widow back to his house.

The orphan and the old widow lived together, just the two of them, until it became time to clear a field. The landlord sent out the following command to all his children and grandchildren, his subjects, and all the people:

"All my children and grandchildren, if you wish to clear a field, come and ask me beforehand. I will tell you where you can and where you cannot. If you do not have an instruction from me, do not go into the forest. I also order that if you want a field you must go and clear one today. If you do not do it today, I will not give permission."

All the children, grandchildren of the king, the subjects, and the people in the district close to the king heard the king's order and went together to clear fields, one for each person. The orphan, however, did not hear the announcement because he lived on the outskirts of the village. He did not go to clear a field on that day like everyone else. When he heard about the order it was already many days after the deadline. Nevertheless, the orphan went to see the landlord in order to beg to allow him to clear a field. When he arrived at the landlord's house, the orphan asked the head of the township, "Sir, I want to clear a field like everyone else. Will you allow me to do so, please?"

The landlord scolded the orphan, saying, "I launched the day for clearing fields two or three (several) days ago. Didn't you hear about it? The others went to clear their fields together. Where were you? I proclaimed the deadline, but you have just arrived. Don't come begging me. The land, the trees and the forest are mine. Don't come near me except on the appointed day. I cannot give you anything. You are a very lazy fellow and you are wretchedly poor. Even if I allow you to clear a field, you will just

destroy the land and the forest. Go away! I will not allow you to clear a field.”

However the orphan begged, the landlord would not relent, and so he went home. When he arrived home, the old widow asked him, “Grandson, you went to see the landlord. How did he reply?”

The orphan said, “Grandmother, he will not allow me to clear a field.”

The old widow said to him, “Grandson, if the landlord will not allow you to clear a field, we will not have any rice to eat. We must have a little field. No matter that the landlord will not allow us to clear a field. Look for a rock ledge (a shelf of rock). Then dig up some soil and spread it on the ledge, cut some branches and leaves, place them on top of the soil on the ledge to dry, and then burn them. When the fire dies down, sow rice and plant various different vegetables and fruits. If you do this we will be able to eat.”

The next morning, the orphan went out to look for a rock ledge. He searched around until he found one. He dug up some soil and covered the stone with it. Then he cut some branches and leaves and piled them on top of the soil. He left them to dry and then burned them. Then he sowed rice and planted vegetables and fruits as the old widow had told him to do.

It turned out that the rice sprouted very nicely, much more abundantly than in the fields of the other people. Every day the orphan went to weed his field on the rock ledge. When it became time to harvest the rice, he harvested it and then threshed it, and when that was finished the old widow said to him, “Grandson, build a field hut to store the rice.”

The orphan built a field hut, placed the mats and sheets in it, and when that was finished the old widow went inside the field hut. Then she said to the orphan, “Now pour the paddy down. I’ll wait down in the hut.”

The orphan poured the paddy down into the hut and while the paddy was falling the old widow shook herself. Streams of rice came out

from under her fingernails, her toenails, her eyelids, her hair, her nose, her mouth, and her clothes and began to fill the hut with a loud noise. The old widow's whole body became a beautiful golden yellow of paddy. Because of this, the orphan ended up with a big granary full of paddy.

The next day the sun rose again and the old widow said to the orphan, "Grandson, I have lived with you and helped you and told you many things up till now. You now have enough rice to eat and so it's time for me to go home. My home is in heaven above, and when I am gone do not speak my name."

When she had finished speaking, the old widow flew up into the sky. The orphan watched her go, and when she was almost out of the orphan's sight he cried out to her with a great feeling of sadness, "Grandmother, are you going home? Who will I live with? Who will help me to have rice to eat?"

When he had spoken, the old widow dropped back to the ground with a loud thud. She said to the orphan, "I tell you again, grandson, you must not ever speak of me again. If you do, it will not be good for me."

The old widow flew up into the sky for a second time. The orphan watched her go with great loneliness and unable to control his feelings, called out to her again. The old widow dropped down to earth again as she had done before. She said to the orphan that she had told him not to call her name, and then she flew away a third time. Just as she was almost out of sight the orphan watched after her, his heart nearly breaking, and then he called out to her again. This time the old widow fell to the ground dead, her neck broken.

The orphan was grief-stricken. He wrapped the corpse of the old widow and laid it on the shelf over the hearth hoping that the body would dry out and not rot so that she would stay with him for a long time to come even though she was just a corpse.

The next day, the orphan took the covers off the old widow's corpse hoping to have a look at her, but he found that the body had disappeared

and that in its place was the remains of a bird, all dried up and without any feathers on it, and a beautiful golden yellow.

Because of this, when it came time to thresh the rice each year, the orphan recalled the old widow and carried a walking stick when he carried the paddy to the granary, and when he had finished threshing the rice he performed a ritual to call back the old widow to heaven above. This ritual is called “the ritual to call the bird of the rice spirit to heaven” (kauv htauf keiz htofbiaqaf).

When the people of the district saw the orphan performing the ritual to call the bird of the rice spirit to heaven, and saw that he had harvested a great deal of paddy just by clearing a field on a small piece of rock, they all did the same as him and believed that to be the customary way of doing things from that time onwards. This ritual is practiced by the Karen hill tribes (Pgaz K’nyau) to this day.

ANNEX 2

Case Study 2: The Myth of Creation – a Lahufolklore epic (*mvapha – mi pha begins*)

A long time ago there was neither earth nor sky. There was neither wind nor rain. There was no sun, no moon and no stars. At that time, G'ui-sha (the Creator) alone existed. The universe was like a spider's web – and the spider (G'ui-sha) sat at its center.

In order to create the sky and the earth, G'ui-sha concentrated his thoughts. He could not sit down, nor could he sleep. He paced back and forth – endlessly.

Then taking dirt from his hands and his feet, G'ui-sha made four big fishes. Using gold, silver, copper and iron he made four huge pillars. The four pillars he placed them on the back of the fish. Four celestial beams he set up and four earthly beams as well.

G'ui-sha rubbed the dirt from his feet and his hands. He made the dirt into celestial rafters and earthly rafters. He placed the celestial rafters upon the celestial beams. He then spread out an earthly net – and thus, the world came into being. However, it was not stable.

Taking dirt from his feet and his hands, G'ui-sha made dirt balls to the number of seventy seven thousand and with them he filled the spaced and smeared them on the earthly net. When the earthly net was covered with dirt, the earth's surface was formed.

The sky had no celestial bones, so the sky was soft. The earth had no earthly bones, so the earth was soft. G'ui-sha removed bone from his hands and put them into the sky to become the sky's bones. G'ui-sha then removed bones from his feet and stuck them into the ground to become the earth's bones.

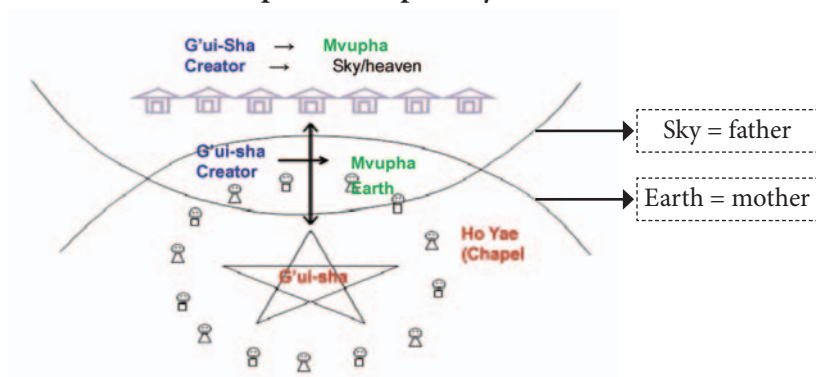
Now the sky had sky bones, so the sky was stable. Now the earth had earth bones, so the surface of the earth hardened.

Source: Adapted from: Merit and Millennium: Routine and Crisis in the Ritual Lives of the Lahupeople; Anthony R. Walker, 2003, pages 162-163)

Lahu Cosmology (Spider web G'ui-sha sat at the center)



Mvupha and Mipha Sky and earth



Tobo Neibo (Spiritual leaders)
Chiang Rai, 2015



Ho Yae (Village temple)
Chiang Rai, 2015

ANNEX 3

Case Study 3: Interview with Elder: Mr. PayaWeipau, Dok Daeng village, Hod District, Chiang Mai Province (91 years old Karen leader)

(Extracted from Wongjomporn, Sunthorn, 2008, pp.71-77)

“I grew up in a traditional family in Dok Daeng village in Chiang Mai province. I am 91 years old, a father with six children. I am spiritual leader, or, what we call “HifHkof”. I am a farmer. My life is closely attached to Mother Nature. I believe that all things, especially nature, have spirits. The bodies of water, trees, mountains, forest, watershed, rice field, and all other things have spirits. So, we as mediators between humans and nature (spirit) have to perform different kinds of rituals.



HifKho Paya at Dok Daeng village, 2008

When I was young, I went with my parents to the field when they performed the traditional irrigation water ritual. My parents always taught me to respect nature as well as the spirit of nature. Thus, my life is really close to nature.....I had to work hand-in-hand with my parents in the field, especially during the planting and harvesting seasons. Sometimes, I had to take care of the buffaloes, cows and also an elephant...

During my childhood, I was inculcated by my parents and grandparents and other elders in the community that we have to respect Mother Nature and give reverence to the water – not to waste water, not to urinate in the river, not to spit saliva into the water, or even any waste materials or garbage into the water and in the river – otherwise the water spirit will harm you.

Every year, before I start work in my paddy field, I first have to perform a water ritual – what we call “Luj hti bo”, or, worshipping the water spirit at the origin of the canal that brings water to the paddy field. When I perform this ritual, I pray to ask permission and offer thanksgiving as follows:

“SakK’caj (spirit) of the water, spirit of the earth, spirit of the forest, spirit of the mountain, spirit of all nature – come and drink the first of our rice wine – come and eat the first of our rice and chicken meat, which we all come and offer to you. Please look after our water, our soil and our land, look after our rice field, our plants, our animals, our family and our community. Please call down the rain, call down the dew, do not let our plough and other farm equipment break during work, do not let landslides cross over our canals...please take care and look after everything”.

I personally and strongly believe that I cannot live without believing in nature and doing rituals to nature. I am embedded and nurtured by nature since I was very young, as I lived most of my life in the forest – in my small cottage, in my paddy field and with my buffaloes....Only when I was 75 years old, my children asked me to come back and to stay with them in the village. I agreed with them because I felt that I am now not strong enough to stay alone and look after my buffaloes in the rice field.

Performing the water spirit ritual is not only for agriculture, but it is a common belief and practice among us that whenever we make use of the water or do any activities related to water, we have to perform first a ritual as a sign of showing respect and asking permission from the owner of the water as our ancestors taught us...The belief in the water spirit among the Karen people has been inculcated and transformed from generation to generation, both through direct participation during water spirit ritual and through teaching, storytelling, chanting, etc. However, the most effective way is by directly participating in the ritual performance because one can see, can sense and can hear the words of the prayer and of the chanting. I, myself, learnt the chant and the prayer through directly participating in the different ritual performances. I sat near the performer listening carefully to the words and the chants when they started the ritual.

This water spirit ritual has been practiced by my family and community for over 23 years, and still continues until today. However, at present, I heard some villagers are complaining that the level of water is getting lower and lower.

We live a simple life – we gather our food and utilise our resources just to meet our basic needs. We take only what we need (Maz Cu Duf, Auf KhaupPooz) . We do not have the concept of control over nature and we do not have the concept of accumulation. We consider nature as our companion and nurturer for our lives. We respect and pay reverence to nature. We do not experience gaps between nature, human and the sacred for we are inter-connected. Through rituals, symbols, chanting, cosmos, including the daily human activity is seen and live as a holy order....In this way, we are in harmony within ourselves, with the human community and the earth.

ANNEX 4

Case Study 4: The Nine Grains of Rice

Rice has Khuan() = Essence of Life

In 1961 when Thailand launched its first National Economic and Social Development Plan to promote industrialisation, rural people were persuaded to go to work in the factories – most of whom were women. In this situation, women were forced to shift roles from being home-based food producers to factory workers and migrated to work in the city to earn money. Many women without skills and education had to work in the service sector as housemaids. Many were forced to work in the sex trade, especially during the period of the Vietnam war. As a result, many women were suffering from broken families, loss of land and debt, and many also were infected with HIV/AIDS. Women lost their dignity. They became slaves to money.

The women in Phayao who went through this experience face many problems during this period. The women from the third generation began to study history or the previous generation of women and found out by using the religio-cultural approach that the value and meaning of their own wisdom based on the virtue of rice had been sacrificed for the sake of money. Based on this reflection, the women used the rice grain to cover the money as a symbol gesture to signify that rice is more valuable than money, and to show that money cannot control them anymore. Money will be used only as a tool to spend for living. Rice is more important to bring the virtues of life into our lives. Rice has use value, exchange value, spiritual value and religious value. Rice have spiritual value (Pascal Mystery) as it dies for us three times. If we eat rice, we also have to live like the rice – that is, to give life to others.

This is what the lowland people called “The nine grains of rice” – which are as follows:

The first grain is for household consumption.
The second is for helping relatives and neighbours.
The third is for entertaining visitors.
The fourth is for donating to the poor and needy.
The fifth is for exchanging for basic necessities.
The sixth is kept for the ordination of children into Buddhism.
The seventh is for supporting community activities.
The eighth is for gaining merit by donating to the monks at the temple.
The ninth grain is for building up a new society (Messianic society).



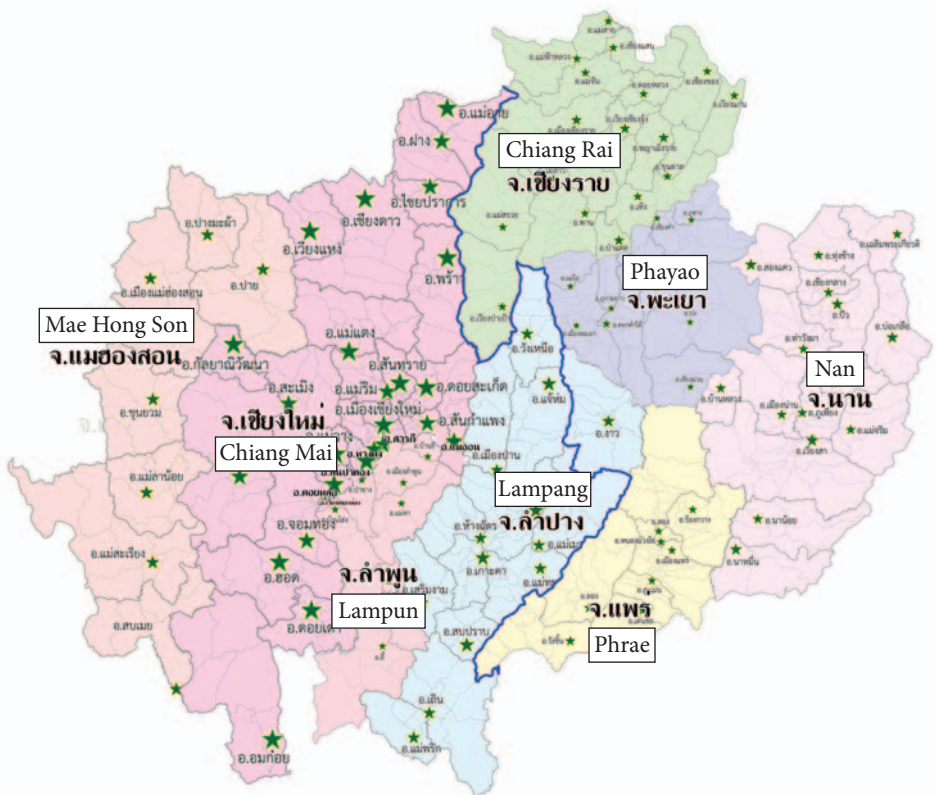
Essence of Life

คุณค่าใช้สอย	Use Value
คุณค่าการแลกเปลี่ยน	Exchange Value
คุณค่าทางจิตวิญญาณ	Spiritual Value
คุณค่าทางศาสนา	Religious Value
ข้าวตายสามครั้ง เพื่อให้ชีวิต	รหัสธรรมปัสกา
Dharma – Dies 3 times	

Old teachings of Khon Muang (Compiled) 2001

ANNEX 5

Map of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Diocese in 2018



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