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**THE PROCESS OF KAREN CULTURE PRESERVATION:
A CASE STUDY OF TEMPORARY SHELTER AT MAE LA,
THA SONG YANG DISTRICT, TAK PROVINCE**

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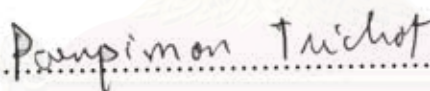
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วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาวัฒนธรรมกะเหรี่ยงภายในพื้นที่พักพิงชั่วคราวบ้านแม่หละ โดยทำการศึกษาว่าชาวกะเหรี่ยงในบ้านแม่หละยังคงประเพณีปฏิบัติวัฒนธรรมอะไรบ้าง นอกจากนี้ยังมีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะศึกษากระบวนการในการอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรมกะเหรี่ยงที่เกิดขึ้นภายในพื้นที่พักพิงชั่วคราวบ้านแม่หละด้วย

การศึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพด้วยระเบียบวิธีวิจัยสองลักษณะ คือ การศึกษาจากข้อมูลเอกสารและการลงภาคสนาม ในส่วนของภาคสนามผู้วิจัยได้ใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การสัมภาษณ์ผู้ให้ข้อมูลหลักและผู้ให้ข้อมูลทั่วไปได้ใช้แบบสัมภาษณ์ที่ออกแบบไปก่อนออกภาคสนาม นอกจากนี้ยังได้ใช้การสังเกตการณ์ ทั้งการสังเกตแบบมีส่วนร่วมและไม่มีส่วนร่วม

ข้อค้นพบจากการศึกษาพบว่าชาวกะเหรี่ยงส่วนใหญ่ยังคงยึดถือธรรมเนียมปฏิบัติตามแบบวัฒนธรรมกะเหรี่ยงโดยเฉพาะในหมู่ผู้สูงอายุ และบุคคลทั่วไปที่อยู่ในวัยกลางคน ในขณะที่เยาวชนรุ่นใหม่เริ่มรับวัฒนธรรมไทยที่ล้อมรอบพื้นที่พักพิงชั่วคราวบ้านแม่หละเข้ามายึดถือปฏิบัติเพิ่มขึ้นๆเรื่อยๆ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นภาษาพูด การแต่งกาย กริยาท่าทีที่เลียนแบบวัยรุ่นไทย การฟังเพลง นิยมฟังเพลงไทยและนิมร็องเพลงไทยมากขึ้น ด้วยเหตุนี้จึงทำให้ผู้นำและผู้เฒ่าผู้แก่ภายในค่าย หันมาให้ความสนใจกับกระบวนการอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรมกะเหรี่ยงมากยิ่งขึ้น มีการขอความร่วมมือร่วมใจในทุกระดับไม่ว่าจะเป็นระดับครอบครัว โรงเรียน และชุมชนให้หันมาร่วมกันสืบสานวัฒนธรรมกะเหรี่ยง และรณรงค์ให้เยาวชนหันมาให้ความสนใจวัฒนธรรมดั้งเดิมของกะเหรี่ยง ผ่านการอบรมสั่งสอนในชั้นเรียน และการจัดกิจกรรมตามวันสำคัญตามประเพณี ในระดับชุมชนมีการจัดการอบรม จัดการประกวด และสืบสานวัฒนธรรมประเพณีของกะเหรี่ยงในทุกโอกาส

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ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา

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BOONYISA BOONYAKIATIBUTR: THE PROCESS OF KAREN CULTURE PRESERVATION: A CASE STUDY OF TEMPORARY SHELTER AT MAE LA, THA SONG YANG DISTRICT, TAK PROVINCE. THESIS ADVISOR: MS. PORNPIMON TRICHOT, 105 pp.

This thesis have two objectives, one is to study the existing Karen culture which is still practiced in the temporary shelter at Ban Mae La, Thasongyang District, Tak Province. The second objective is to study the preservation process of Karen culture operated within the shelter. This thesis applied qualitative approach which comprised of two parts, one is documentary research and the other is field study. At Mae La, in depth interviews were done with various key informants as well as students and other ordinary people Observation with and without participations were also applied.

The finding of this thesis are as follows: 1) most of the Karen still practice Karen culture especially among the elders and middle aged men and women, while the younger generation trends to adopt Thai culture which surrounding them more and more, be it, language, dressing, gesture which imitate Thai teenagers. They prefer to listen to Thai songs as well as sing Thai songs. In this regard, preservation process is considered and planed in order to call attentions among Karen youth to appreciate Karen Culture. The process is carried and participated by all levels such as family unit, school and community at large. The policy is set and distributed among various stake-holders to participate schools and teachers put Karen culture in Curriculum and teach in class, while various groups organize training, music and singing contests as well as organize Karen festivals and custom within Mae La temporary shelter.

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
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สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Rationale

Thailand currently has hosted at least 150,000 refugees from Burma. These refugees are mainly the ethnic minority called Karen, Karenni and Mon. The cause of the flow of ethnic minority groups into Thailand was the civil war inside Burma between the Burmese government and the ethnic minority. Burma is a rich country with a diverse ethnic minority; some scholars have reported that there are at least 135 ethnic groups within the country with different dialects and cultures. However the major groups comprise of the Burmese, Shan, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon Arakan and Chin.

Amara Phongsaphit explained the term of ethnic group as those who share same cultures, customs and language. They belong to the same ancestor such as Karen, Chinese, Laos. Meanwhile, the term “the minority group” simutanously exists with the term, “majority group” which become even more obvious in the process of nation state building which comprises the land of those small indepent states and bind them together, those who have outgrown the number and have authority to govern became the majority while those who has less “power” became the minority. Conflict started when the minority groups felt that they were taken advantage of by the majority groups an social and economic development.¹ In the case of Burma, the Burmese oppress the minority groups and take more adventages. They governed the minority and try to Burmanize them despite the resistance from the ethnic minority. Due to this Burmanization process, all the ethnic minority groups united and work

¹ Amara Phongsaphit, Theory and Concept on Minority in Thailand, in Wande Saniwutimethi, “Tai Yai Identity at Thai-Burma Border” Case Study : Pian Luang Village, Amphoe Vien Hong, Chaing Mai” , (Doctoral dissertation, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 2002), p.1 .

against the Burmese government, each group has its own organization to protect their own culture and community.²

Apart from cultural abuse, political conflicts between the Burmese government and the ethnic minority is another factor that intensifies the conflicts, and civil wars were started in Burma since 1948 since British granted independence to Burma. The ethnic minority groups would like to own and govern their areas and community while the Burmese would like to have every ethnic minority join the central government which rule by the Burman, while the ethnic minority deny the demand and civil wars started since each ethnic minority has organized their own political organizations and armed groups to fight for their independence. Militarization is the means chosen by both groups to meet their political goal, thus human right abuse has become the norm of these areas.³

In case of Thailand, there are many refugee camps because Thailand shares a long 2,410 kilometers stretches of border with Burma and hosts a steadily growing flow of refugees. Today, more than 18 years after the first Karen camp were first established on a semi –permanent basis in 1984 asylum –seekers continue to be flee from the neighboring war – affected borderlands in Burma. **Currently**, there are over 120,000 refugees registered and living in official camp on the Thai Burma border. The majority of these are Karen, Karenni and Mon. There are also many other who left Burma and are currently residing in Thailand but not in official camps. This group has illegal status and is therefore limited in access to education and health services. They

² Wandee Santiwutmethee, “Tai Yai Identity at Thai-Burma Border” Case Study : Pian Luang Village, Amphoe Vien Hong, Chaing Mai”, (Doctoral dissertation, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University ,2002), p .2 .

³ Wandee Santiwuthimethi, “Tai Yai Identity at Thai-Burma Border” Case Study : Pian Luang Village, Amphoe Vien Hong, Chaing Mai”, (Doctoral dissertation , Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University ,2002), p .1 .

are vulnerable to exploitation by employers and authorities. One of the largest groups is the people from Shan state in Burma.⁴

The number of refugees in Thailand is higher and the scale of Burmese refugee problem exceeds the number of registered numbers encamped along the border. In the Mid -2001 the registered non-Burmese ethnic population comprised some 99,600 Karen over 19,300 Karennis as well a population around 12,500 Mons in their resettlement site just inside Burma.⁵

Due to the continuous increase in the number of refugees in the camp and the increasing rate of birth of more than 5% per annum, refugees are forced to live in limited space and have dire living conditions. What keeps the Karens together is their own culture and tribal traditions. The changing environment, political instability and increase in population accentuate the cultural differences of the Karens. A research on the process of culture of preservation at Mae La Camp by Pornpimol Trichot found “that a number of traditions are lost due to restrictions on Karen in refugee camps established by Thai authority as well as limited resources including equipment, knowledgeable individuals who can teach and continue the tradition and lack of motivation. But the most important reason is lack of interest to continue the culture and traditions by Karen children. Since most of the children are born in refugee camps in Thailand, they are not exposed to and are not familiar with their own tradition. In addition, they are greatly influenced by the Thai culture, and they are exposed to traditions that are created within refugee camps. Therefore, it is important that Karens conserve their traditions in order to protect their culture and identity. The purpose of this thesis is to determine the process of conserving the cultures and traditions of Karens living in Mae La camp with the hopes of rebuilding their cultures and traditions that have been destroyed during their war with Burma in a peaceful environment of the refugee camp in Thailand.”⁶

⁴ Heidi Bleser et all, “Quality of Life Assessment of Mae La camp” , Term paper of Research Method in Southeast Asian Studies , Chulalongkorn University, 2003, (unpublished paper), p.6

⁵ Ibid., p. 6

⁶Pornpimol Trichot, *A Journey of ethnic Minority*, (Bangkok : Sriboon computer and printing partnership, 2005), p. 29.

1.2 Objectives

1. To explore the existing Karen culture in the temporary shelter at Mae La such as traditional Karen dress, weaving, music and customs;
2. To observe the process of Karen culture preservation done by the Karen in the temporary shelter with the cooperation of Karen NGO;
3. To prospect what its strengths and weakness are to determine whether its exposure to Thai culture and society will weaken its identity roots;
4. To gain insight picture of the eroding Karen tradition and culture due to limitation of living life style in the temporary shelter.

1.3 Hypothesis

The Karen in temporary shelter at Mae La determine to continue (pressure) their own culture and customs despite the limitations on his due to the camp's regulation and non-responsiveness from new –generation who were born in Thailand and unfamiliar with Karen's traditional and cultures.

1.4 Research questions

1. Do the Karen community still practice their own traditional and culture?
2. What circumstances force the Karen in Mae La to desert their own customs and culture?
3. What is the process Karen cultural preservation done by the Karen community in Mae La camp?

1.5 Research Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative research. It comprises of two main tasks, the first one is documentary research such as text books, papers reports and thesis. The second part is field study. The student spent time in Mae La camp in order to interview key informants with structured and unstructured questions. Observation and Participant observation are also conducted, together with personal and group interviews such as

students, youth groups and villagers to obtain more data apart from those gathered from the key informants .

1.5.1 The Length of the field study has been divided into 3 periods .

First session : The researcher attended the course on Research and Methodology during 27-28 January 2006 . In this field study , the researcher used structured and unstructured questions for do in depth interviews ; observation of the weaving

method at Karen Women Organization. Lastly, the researcher interviewed the musical specialist about the background of Karen Music , Custom and Tradition of Karen's People.

Second Session : The researcher has participated in Karen Wrist Ceremony during 8-9 August 2006. The different method has been used including interviews , observation and participation. But the most vital ones are participation and interviews Apart from this, the researcher has visited the Karen Cloth shop for observing the pattern and color . Lastly, The researcher went to the high school for interviewing the teachers about their duty to promote cultural preserving toward students.

Third Session : This is a final period for field study which has been started from 23- 25 January 2007 .The researcher has visited The Karen Camp Committee for get dept interview in term of the process of culture preservation . Mostly, the Key Informants are : The Karen Education affair and The Karen Youth.

Key Informants:

- Mrs. Daw Let Let: General Manager of the Karen Women Organization
- Mrs. Daw Tin Yee: Senior Seller at the Karen Women Shop Organization in Zone C
- Ms. Naw Bear Wah: Seller at the Karen Women Shop Organization in Zone C
- Mr. Sain Tin Aye: Leader of Buddhism of Pure Karen
- Mr. Ta Seay: Villager of zone C
- Mr. Saw Jolly: Chair Person of Karen Camp Committee

- Mrs. Nan Moe Nin Thwe: Assistant to Chairperson, Secretary of Karen Organization Women

- Mrs. Naw Htoo Wah: In charge of Education at Karen Camp Committee

- Mr. Ha se Wah: Teacher at high school

- Mr. Kwe Se : Burma Issue Seminar Officer

The sample question

1. In the camp, when they set the culture performance , what is the duty of Karen committee for organizing the duty . On the part of Thai authority, do they cooperate in organizing the activities?

2. What is the main zone for setting up the activities , why has the committee chosen this area and is it functional?

3. The practice of animism ; Do they still worship in the camp ? If not ; what is the main cause for abandonment If in some family, sickness has n occurred do they need to worship the animism or they find the medicine for curing?

4.what is the crucial policy for cultural preservation and which organization has taken the responsibility ?

5.When they set up main policy , do the Karen committee assemble the leader of each zone How should the main policy be executed in order to implement the sub-plan in the accordance way ?

6. In each zone , how the leader distribute the duties and what are the duties for Karen Youth?

7. What is the crucial factor that has stimulated cultural preservation ?

Interview

7.1 Karen Committee

7.2 The leader of zone

7.3 School

7.4 Cultural Specialist

8. How are the reaction of Karen People when they have attended the cultural ceremony ; The feeling that they has been express ; can it be identified that the process of culture preservation will be accomplished or unaccomplished . Lastly, if the process has continuously conducted , what is final output : Would it be effect in Karen Identity?

9. When the Karen people has moved to the camp is it unavoidable that some culture , their attitude and the living life style becomes absorbed into Thai's culture . Are the willing to accept this or they do because they have to surrender with the rule . If we look in another way , when do the Karen gradually become familiar with Thai culture ; so they can easily alter the living life style in the present situation Moreover , can the understanding between cultures be utilized as the best channel for prolonging the relation between Karen and Thai officer ?

10. The changing role status between men and women ; For example , the men in Mae La Camp has worked at weaving which has been rarely appeared in the Karen custom, when the moved to the Mae La camp, Weaving has been considered as the source of income .How the men deal with the unstable situation?

1.6 Scope of study

This thesis will emphasize on preservation process of Karen culture and customs carried by the Karen community in Mae La camp. The student will explore existing Karen customs and culture in the camp and investigate the importance of the events, the main target will be on significant rituals such as wrist tidy, Karen new year and animism ritual, apart from, this the student will study on Karen craft such as waving, traditional dress, music and music instrument and art performance such as songs and dance.

1.7 Conceptual framework

This thesis will use these three concepts as guideline for study.

1.7.1 Culture

Scholars and theorists give varied definitions to the word culture for example, Tylor stated that “culture means the complicated collection which includes belief, arts, ethic, law, custom capacity and habits in which one man received and collected as a member of a society” as good enough stated that culture can mean “the living pattern of one community, it is repeated activity which organized order within that society.”⁷ At the same time, Daniel Bates and Fred Plog defined culture as something that people in one community shared, such as belief, value customs, behavior and mechanic device in which the member in that society used to communicate to each other and passed from generation to generation though learning process.⁸

Yos Tantasombat explained the basic characteristic of culture as follows:

1) culture is shared ideas and value which dictated standardized behavior, thus, the member of one society can predict the behavior of the others from the same society;⁹

2) culture is learned experiences which member in society collected gradually as he/she grow up. In this sense, culture is liked “society legacy” which pass from one generation to another generation through learning or “enculturation” which included teaching from parents, teachers and experiences collected from being the membership of one society.¹⁰

⁷ Edward B. Tylor, Primitive Culture, in Yod Tantasombat, Human and cultural, (Bangkok : Thammasat University Press, 2001), p.11 .

⁸ Samovar, Communication between culture, in Metta Wiwatthakul, Intercultural Communication , (Bangkok : Chulalongkorn University Press, 2006), p . 51 .

⁹ Yos Tantasombat, Human and cultural , (Bangkok : Thammasat University Press, 2001), pp .11-12.

¹⁰ Yos Tantasombat , Human and cultural , (Bangkok : Thammasat University Press, 2001), p. 12 .

3) Culture derives from using the same symbol such as language, money, or religious symbols. These symbols encourage people to collect knowledge and understanding about nature systematically and be able to pass them to the following generation.¹¹

4) Culture is collected knowledge and wisdom in these respect, culture role is to respond to basic needs of men in that society such as it teaches a man to find their own food, organizes law and order for society, and encourage men to adapt themselves to environment.¹²

5) Culture is a process in which men give definitions to life and other things surrounding them, for example, men, all over the world, will give definition to life in terms of religion, rituals belief, and power. In this regard, men create “institute” or “organization” to garantce the above interpretations such as when power is interpreted and defined, the political institution is formed or established. Consequently, when interpretation in changed or different from the former one, the substance of the institution is also changed.¹³

6) Culture is dynamic, not static put keeps on changing all the time. This dynamism may arrive from various factors, such as diffusion from other cultures and belief, development of technology which effected on patterns of productions. In many cases, the rapid changes in technology which go beyond the adaptation of culture and practices can cause “culture lag” which makes men in society feel alienated to the society they belong.¹⁴

This thesis will use the basis characters of culture explained by above as guidelines conceptual framework to study on Karen culture.

¹¹ Ibid ., 12 .

¹² Ibid ., 12 .

¹³ Ibid ., 12 .

¹⁴ Yos Tantasombat, Human and cultural, (Bangkok : Thammasat University Press, 2001),

1.7.2 Ethnicity

Ethnicity as explained by Fredrick is the consciousness that is formed continuously in which the members of that ethnic group select various identities such as language, religion, costume diet and eating habit and others in order to differentiate themselves from others which is called “ethnic boundary”. This boundary is not static but rather adaptable and changeable in according to the changing environment. Each member of the ethnic group will determine the ethnic foundry together in order to separate themselves from others.¹⁵

Yos Tantasombat explains that ethnicity is the concept may be used ambiguously and variously, however, ethnicity means a group of people who speak the same language, they belong to same politic unit and same clam, they passed through the same historical experiences and also share the same pattern of culture. In this regard, ethnicity is not limited by blood or physique, but rather, ethnicity defines their own identities and at the same time was defined by their own imagined historical consciousness, thus, ethnicity is not handmade product which has a brand static attached to it forward, but in contrarily, changing all the time. To understand the ethnic group may start from studying their historical consciousness which they select to interpreter as significant factors for their own society.¹⁶

The Karen who is one ethnic group amongs others in Myanmar has their own historical consciousness. They have lived in Burma, or Myanmar as its called today, for centuries, have had their own places, their own language and culture. They go through the same historical experiences under the Burman’s rule and the British’s rule and finally experienced the oppression from the Burmese government, which

¹⁵ Fredrik Barth , Ethnic Groups and Boundaries , in Wandee Santiwuthimethi , “Tai Yai Identity at Thai-Burma Border” Case Study : Pian Luang Village, Amphoe Vien Hong, Chaing Mai”, (Doctoral dissertation , Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 2002), p .4 .

¹⁶ Yos Tantasombat, Human and cultural, (Bangkok : Thammasat University Press, 2001), pp. 122 -123.

consequently forced some of them to migrate to Thailand as displaced person fled from fighting. This Thesis will study the Karen as one ethnic group from Burma.

1.7.3 Culture preservation process

Metta Wiwattananukul explains the process of “acculturation” as a process in which one will encounter when confront with new culture which is differ from what one come from and has to relate to the for many years to come, this process will encourage he or she to adapt himself or herself to the new culture gradually. However before adopting new culture, he or she will experience the process of appreciating his/her own culture deeply, thus, emerging the need to preserve some of his own culture which deems significant for him/her.¹⁷

Berry J.W et al’s model of inter cultural adaptation process in which one will absorb deeply in his/her own culture before adopting new culture as follows:¹⁸

1. **Ethnic Oriented Identity** in which one will highly attach to his/her own ethnic identity and trend to adopt new culture less or refuse them at all.¹⁹

2. **Bicultural Identity** is a process in which one attempts to preserve his/her own culture but at the same time adopt new culture as well.²⁰

3. **Assimilation Identity** in this sense is a process in which one is not attaches to his/her own culture and perceives he/she as a new member of new culture.²¹

¹⁷ Metta Wiwattananukul, Intercultural Communication, (Bangkok : Chulalongkorn University Press, 2006), p. 216

¹⁸ J.W. Bery et all, Comparative studies of acculturative stress, in Metta Wiwattananukul , Intercultural Communication , (Bangkok : Chulalongkorn University Press, 2006), p .236

¹⁹ J.W. Bery et all, Comparative studies of acculturative stress, in Metta Wiwattananukul, Intercultural Communication, (Bangkok : Chulalongkorn University Press, 2006), p .237 .

²⁰ Ibid., p. 237 .

²¹ Ibid., p. 237 .

4. **Marginal Identity** is a process in which one feels that he/she does not belong to neither group, the former or the latter culture, which may be cultured the “marginal man”.²²

In this thesis, the Karen at Mae La camp have experienced the first and second processes, which are the ethnic-oriented identity and bicultural identity. Some of them, especially the elders still cling to traditional Karen culture and adopt less of new culture found in the camp or Thai culture, while the middle aged group and young generation co-operate together to preserve Karen culture as well as learn to appreciate Thai culture which emerges in and around the camp. This thesis, will emphasis on these two process from Berry’s model as conceptual framework.



²² Ibid., p. 237.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF MAE LA CAMP

2.1 History of Mae La Temporary Shelter

The Mae La Temporary shelter has served as a place to accept people fleeing from fighting in Burma for over ten years. The situation was not peaceful along the Thai –Burmese border from Tak to Mae Hong Son Province since the ethnic Karen's army staged a movement against the Burmese Government in order to gain independence for the ethnic Karen group. The Karen army had been fighting until the end of 1994 and in 1995 the Burmese army managed to take control of almost all the main areas of Karen people. Accordingly, a great number of Karen people had to move along the Thai – Burmese border and many of them crossed into Thailand in Tak province. In order to provide temporary shelters for these people, six camps were established in this area. They include:

1. Temporary refugee camp Ban Mae La, Bah Mae Ok Pa Ru, Moo 3, Tambon Mae La.
2. Temporary refugee camp Ban Ka Maw Loy Koh, Ban Mae Huh, Moo 6, Tamboo Mae Tan.
3. Temporary refugee camp Ban Kler Koh, Ban Tee Noh Koh, 4 Tambon Mae OO Su.
4. Temporary refugee camp Ban Sho Klo, Ban Mae Song Moo 1, Tambon Mae Song.
5. Temporary refugee shelter Ban Mae Salid, Ban Mae Salid Luang, Moo 2, Tambon Mae Song.
6. Temporary refugee camp Ban Mae Tha Waw, Ban Mae Tern, Moo 2, Tambon Tha Song Yang.¹

¹ Summary of temporary shelter at Mae La camp , p . 2 .

However, that there were many camps scattering along the border made people living in the camps vulnerable to attacks by Burmese troops and hard for Thai soldiers to protect them. Therefore, in 1996, the Thai Ministry of Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Defense decided to integrate all the six camps into one, the Mae La camp.²

Figure 2.1 Map of Temporary shelter at Mae La Camp



Source : TBBC Program : July to December 2006 .

² Ibid., p.2

Figure 2.2 Lay out Temporary shelter at Mae La camp



สัญลักษณ์

⊕	HI	+	สถานพยาบาลองค์การ เชมเปส เอเชีย
⊙	MOI	□	สนามฟุตบอล
⊕	MSF	⬠	สำนักงาน พื้นที่รักษา
⊗	SMRU	△	จุดตรวจด่านตรวจบริเวณ ชายแดน
☆	IOPS	—	ถนน
⊙	ZOA	~	แม่น้ำ
⬆	โกดัง2	⊙	ภูเขา
△	จุดตรวจ	□	ขอบเขตพื้นที่
▭	โรงเรียน		
⊕	หน่วยวิจัยมาลาเจีย		

Source : Sorraphong Wichaidit : Identity Formation of Karen Displaced Persons : A Case Study of Karen in Mae La Temporary Shelter, Thasongyang District, Province . Master's Thesis

Figure 2.3 Karen Temporary shelter



Source: TBBC Program : July to December 2006

2.2 Location

The Mae La Temporary Shelter is located in Ban Mae Oak Hu, Moo 9, Tambon Mae La, Amphoe Tha Song Yang, Tak Province. The area number is MU 3393-3692, close to road number 105, Amphoe Mae Sariang. The camp's area is about 1,148 Rai or 1.16 km². This area is mountainous and had been a private teak forest concession. There are several streams running through the camp. The stream called Huay Oak Ru passes the north of the camp from the east to the Moie River. It is an important water source for the camp's residents. In the middle part there is also another stream called Huay Chi Maw Ku. This stream runs from the south to the north and meets the Pa Ru stream on the northern side of the refugee camp. In the summer these streams are dry but there are nearby ponds and also 60 dug wells in the camp to supply water for people living in the camp.³

³ Summary of temporary shelter at Mae La camp , p . 3 .

2.3 Facilities

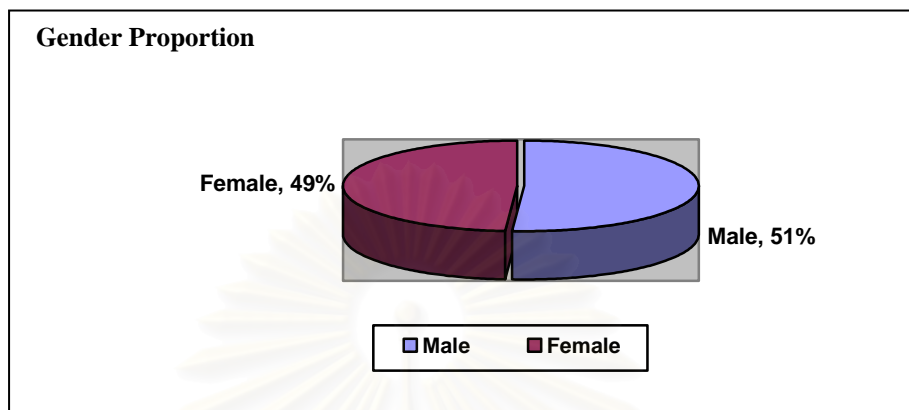
1. Temporary Mae La resident office set up for the Thai government and NGOs' staff.
2. Hospitals: There are 2 clinics in zone B and zone C.
3. Malaria Research Office: There is 1 Malaria Research Office zone B.
4. Family Plan Office: These offices were established by Thai Royal Project in zones A, B and C.
5. Schools: There are 20 nursery schools, 14 primary schools, 1 special education school and 1 Bible school.
6. Religious buildings: There are 4 temples (Buddhists are about 35 percent of the population), 5 mosques (Muslims are about 15 percent) and 24 churches (Christians are about 50 percent).⁴

2.4 Population

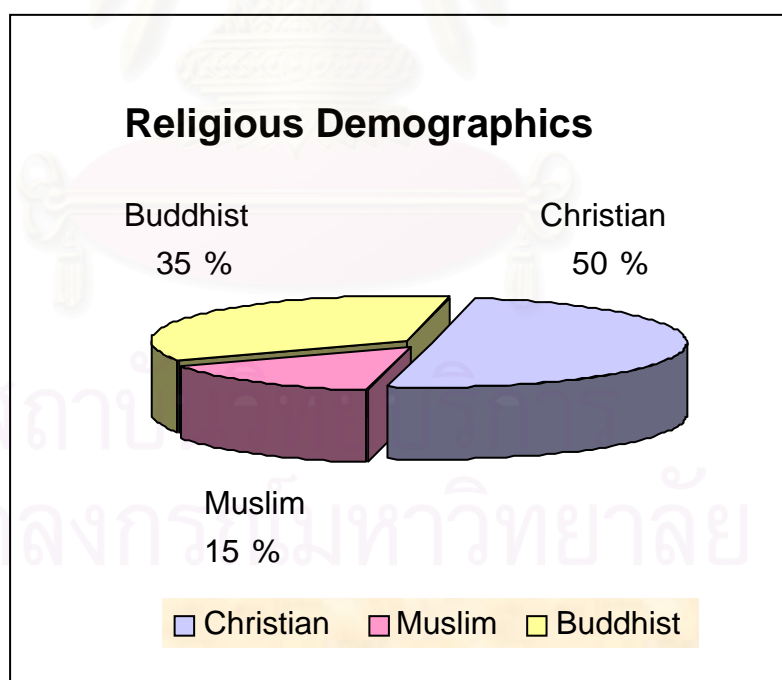
According to the December 2006 figures, there are 49,275 residents in the camp. The majority of the camp residents are mainly Skaw Karen, with some Pwo Karen, Burmese and Mons. There are about 70-80 new births and 10-12 deaths every month. The numbers of male and female are almost equal.⁵

⁴ Summary of temporary shelter at Mae La camp , pp . 3-4

⁵ Heidi Bleser et all , “Qyality of life Assesment of Mae La camp” , Term paper of research Methods in Southeast Asian Studies , Chulalongkorn University , 2003, (unpublished paper) ,p. 9 .

Figure 2.4 Gender Proportion

Source: Quality of Life Assessment of Mae La. Term Paper of Research Method in Southeast Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2003.

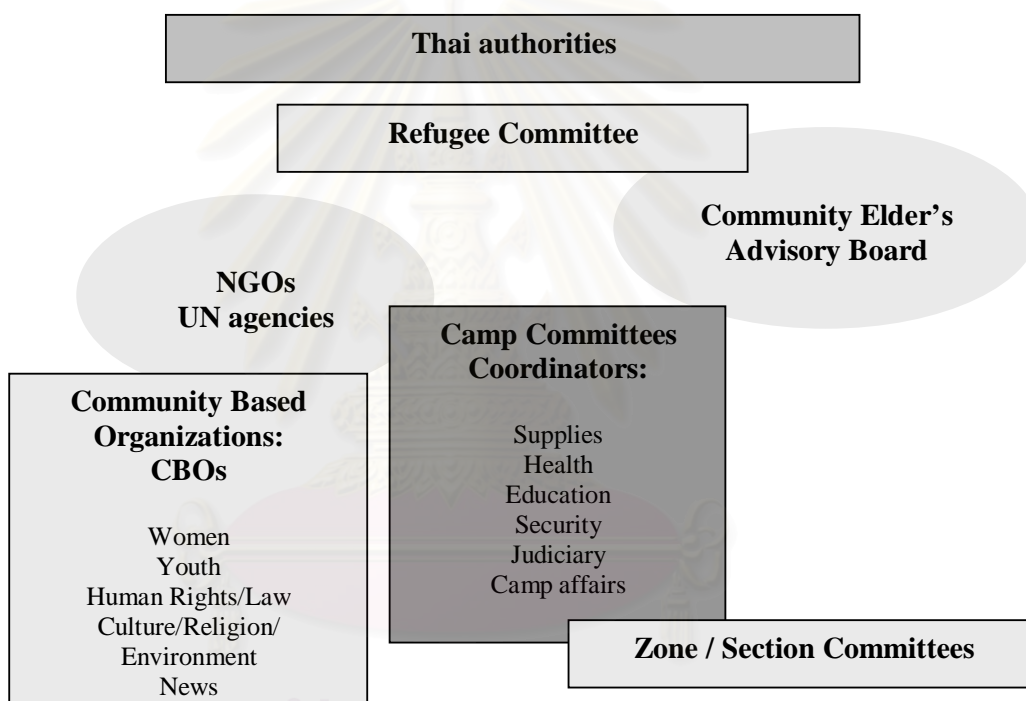
Figure 2.5 Religious Demographics

Source: Quality of Life Assessment of Mae La. Term Paper of Research Method in Southeast Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2003.

2.5. Administration

The camp is divided into three zones: zone A, zone B and zone C. The organizational structure of administration of the camp is illustrated in the following chart:

Figure 2.6 Organizational Structure of Administration of the Camp
Source: TBBC Programme Report: July to December 2006



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2.5.1. Roles and responsibilities of the Thai authorities

The Royal Thai Government maintains ultimate authority over all refugee camps in Thai territory, while the Ministry of Interior at provincial and district levels enforces refugee policy and control the daily running of the camps in collaboration with refugee and camp committees. In charge of the Mae La camp are 1 Tha Song Yang Thai commander and 7 temporary staff members. There are also 78 Thai volunteered soldiers guarding the camp. With regard to the Mae La camp, the Thai authorities are responsible for the following matters:

- Monthly monitoring and registration of displaced persons;
- Assignment of volunteered soldiers to the 13 entrance gates of the camp;
- Examination of NGOs' programs to ensure they are in accordance with the Ministry of Interior's policies;
- Coordination with Department of Security and other departments involved.⁶

As for volunteered soldiers, their boundaries of guardianship have been divided in the 3 zones into 16 groups:

In Zone A: groups A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5, with five households in one group.

In Zone B: groups B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5, with five households in one group.

In Zone C: groups C1A, C1B, C2, C2, C3A, C3B, C4, and C5, with seven households in one group.⁷

⁶ Summary of temporary shelter at Mae La camp , p . 7 .

⁷ Ibid., p. 7 .

2.5.2. Community Elder’s Advisory Board (CEAB)

The Community Elder’s Advisory Board is made up of elders appointed from the local community and responsible for organizing and overseeing refugee committee and camp committee elections and assisting in solving conflicts. The central Karen CEAB is based in Mae Sot, while there is one camp-based board in Mae La camp made up from local population of the camp.⁸

2.5.3. Refugee Committee (RC)

The Karen Refugee Committee is the overall representative for all Karen refugees living in different camps all over Thailand. The Refugee Committee oversees activities of all the camps through camp committees, coordinates assistance provided by NGOs, liaises with UNHCR, the Royal Thai Government and security personnel. The Karen Refugee Committee is based in Mae Sot with branches in Mae Sariang, Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi.⁹

The selection of the Karen Refugee Committee members takes place every three years and is organized by the central CEAB. Of the total fifteen members, seven are appointed by the CEAB and the remaining eight are chosen from representatives from all the camps.¹⁰

2.5.4. Central Committee for Mae La Camp

The Central Committee for Mae La Camp is the administrative and management body of the camp. It coordinates the daily running of the camp and its services in collaboration with local MOI officials, and serves as the main link between the camp residents, NGOs, UNHCR and local Thai authorities. The Central Committee is composed of 15 positions as follows:

- Chairman
- Vice Chairman

⁸ “Organization structure” , Thailand Burma Border Consortium (July to December 2006) :56.

⁹“ Organization structure” , Thailand Burma Border Consortium (July to December 2006) : 55 .

¹⁰ “Organization structure” , Thailand Burma Border Consortium (July to December 2006) :56

- Secretary
- Assistant Secretary
- Administrator
- Accountant
- Head of Security Guard
- Head of Food Stuff Affairs
- Food Stuff Affairs Assistant
- Head of Health care
- Law and Human Rights Assistant
- Head of Educational Affairs
- Head of Youth Organization Affairs
- Head of Woman Organization Affairs¹¹

The Central Committee is an elected body. Usually the selection of its members is organized every two years by an election commission set up and appointed by the outgoing central committee. New camp committee members are selected by representatives from each section of the camp. When the new camp committee has been set up, it organizes the selection of the camp's zone and section leaders.¹²

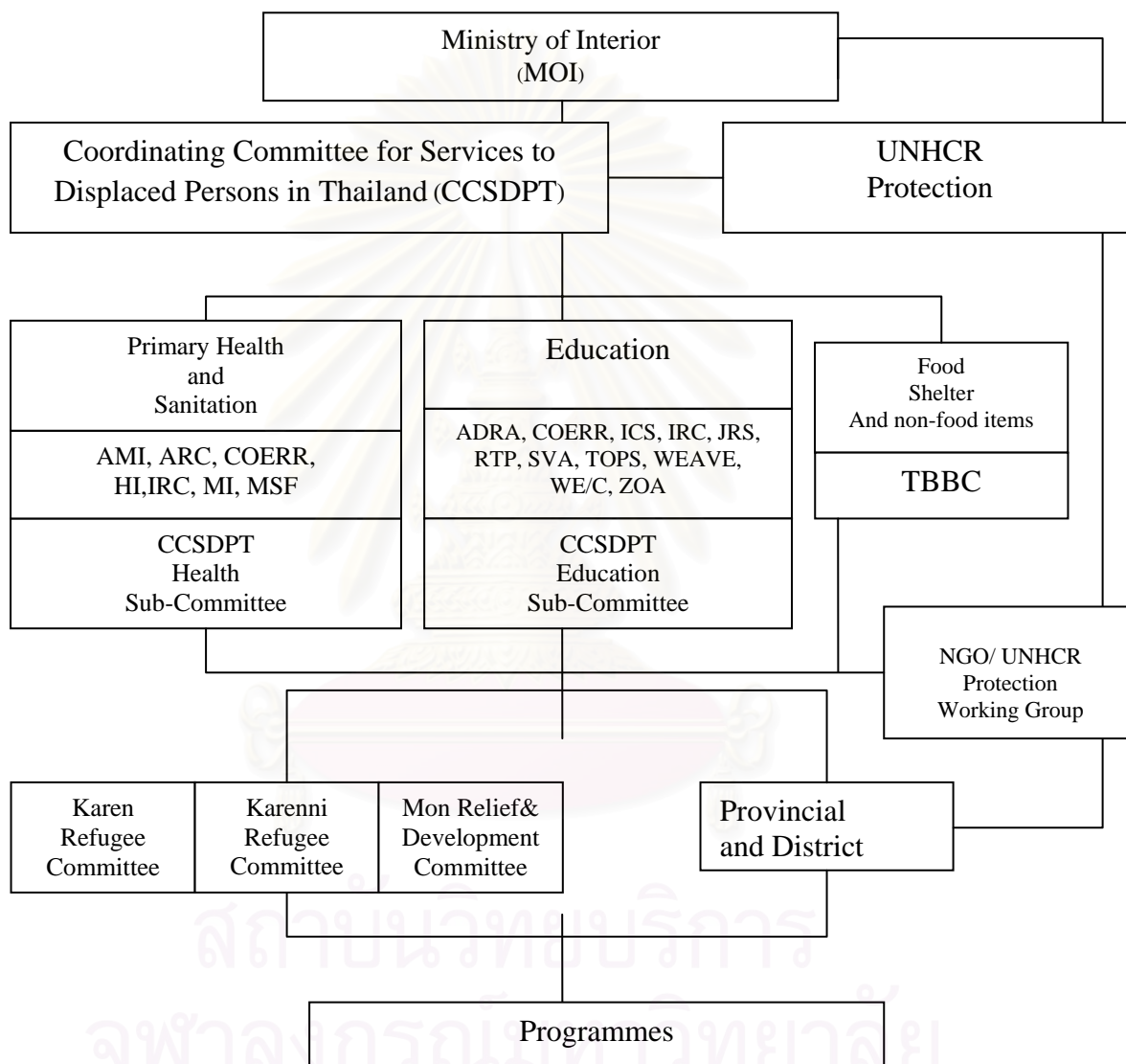
2.6. Assistance from NGOs and International Organizations

There are many institutions, both Thai and international, engaged in the provision of relief assistance to displaced persons living in Mae La Camp. In general, the structure of relief assistance to the Karen, Karenni and Mon refugee camps in Thailand is demonstrated in Graph 4, which is also applied to Mae La Camp.

¹¹ Summary of temporary shelter at Mae La camp , p . 7 .

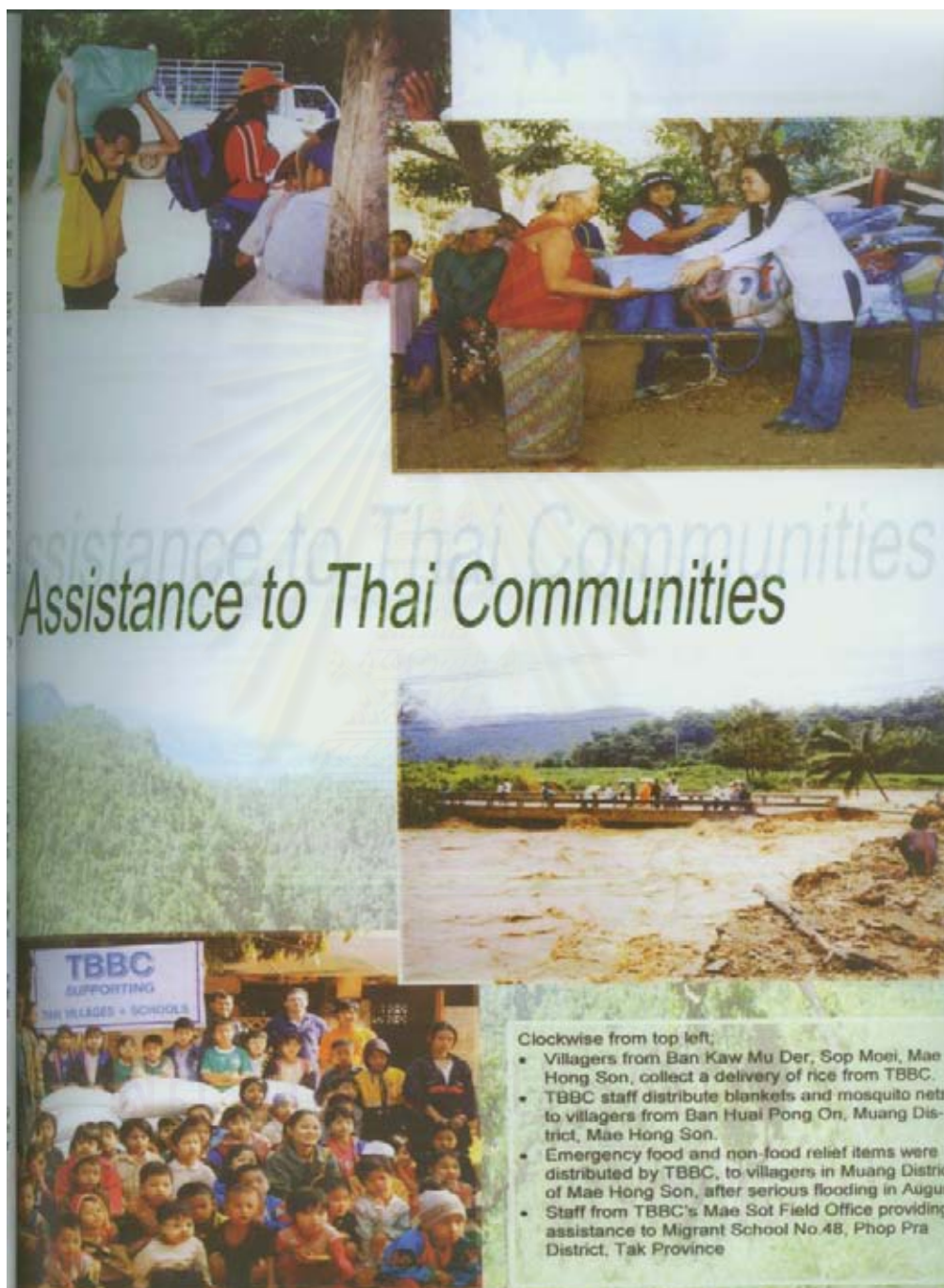
¹² "Organization structure" , Thailand Burma Border Consortium (July to December 2006) : 57

Figure 2.7 Structure of Relief Assistance



Source : TBBC Program Report: July to December 2006

Figure 2.8 Assistance Communities



Source : TBBC Program Report: July to December 2006

Figure : 2.9 Food supply



Source : TBBC Program Report: July to December 2006

2.6.1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

In general, the main duties of UNHCR are as follows:

- Observe and interview when there is a displaced person escaping from fighting;
- Remove the displaced person to a safer place;
- Support Thai government and NGOs with their assistance to the displaced person;
- Register the displaced person with Thai authority;
- Return the displaced person to their motherland after the situation gets stable.¹³

In Thailand, the UNHCR became involved in the displaced person affairs along the Thai – Burmese border as late as in the latter half of 1998, mainly because Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees or its companion 1967 Protocol. Therefore, the role of UNHCR regarding the refugees on the Burmese border is principally limited to monitoring and protection. From 2005 the UNHCR has become increasingly engaged in the resettlement of refugees in the third countries.¹⁴

2.6.2. Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC)

The TBBC is a consortium currently comprised of ten NGOs from eight countries working to provide food, shelter, non-food items and capacity-building support to Burmese refugees and displaced persons in Thailand. Like other NGOs working with displaced persons from Burma, the TBBC works in cooperation with the Thai Government and implements its programmes through partnerships with refugee committees, community-based organizations and local groups. Particularly in Mae La Camp, the TBBC supplies the camp's residents with bamboos and other materials to build houses, foods, drinking water, cooking fuel, cooking stoves, utensils, clothing, blankets, bed nets and sleeping mats, and educational supplies.

¹³ Summary of temporary shelter at Mae La camp , p . 8.

¹⁴ “History and Development” , Thailand Burma Border Consortium (July to December 2006) :

2.6.3. Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR)

COERR is the only NGO working in the field of environmental management in Mae La Camp. Regarding the Mae La camp, COERR has the following mandate for its service program:

- Relief support for the victims of natural disasters
- Community-based waste management systems and environmental protection
- Sustainable agriculture training and production
- Self-help activities
- Social services for orphans, elderly and handicapped
- Healing of memory and reconciliation
- Educational supplies and materials¹⁵

2.6.4. Healthcare Organizations

- Aide Medicale Internationale (AMI), France: Provide the medical things.
- Medicines Sans Frontieres – France (MSF-F): Provide medical care
- Handicap International (HI), France: Assist handicapped people.
- Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU): Conduct research on malaria in cooperation with Mahidol University, Bangkok.
- The Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand (PPAT): Control population growth, working under the Thai Royal sponsorship.
- International Rescue Committee (IRC), America: Assist eye care.
- Taipei Overseas Peace Service (TOPS)¹⁶

¹⁵ Heidi Bleser et al , “Qyality of life Assesment of Mae La camp” , Term paper of research Methods in Southeast Asian Studies , Chulalongkorn University , 2003, (unpublished paper) , p. 55 .

¹⁶ Summary of temporary shelter at Mae La camp , pp. 8-9 .

2.6.5. Education Organization

- ZOA Refugee Care, Netherlands
- World Education/ Consortium (WE/ C)
- Taipei Overseas Peace Service (TOPS)
- International Child Support (ICS)
- Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Australia
- Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA), Japan
- Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment (WEAVE)
- Handicap International (HI)¹⁷



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¹⁷ Summary of temporary shelter at Mae La camp , p. 9.

CHAPTER III

THE KAREN AND THEIR CULTURE

Before they migrate into Thailand and stay at the temporary shelter in Thailand, the Karen live in the area called “Karen State while some of them can also be found in the delta Ayawadi River. This chapter will look at the Karen and their culture practiced in Thai community before moving into Thailand, in order to compare to what one left inside the temporary shelter at Mae La. Karen belongs to Tibeto – Burman according to some historian believe that the Karen habituated in the eastern part of Tibet before migrate into China and later on moved them to the area along Salawin river in Burma. The Karen preferred to live on high mountains or deep forests in order to protect themselves from being reunited in to the army by the rulers. The area where the Karen live in Burma called Karen state which border Thailand from Mae Hongson to Prachup Kirikhan provinces.¹

According to San C. Po “The position of Karen in Burma before the advent of the British was that of a subject race in true fashion. They were treated as slaves, hence, they made their homes on the mountain side or on tracts of land far away from the town and larger village occupied by Burmas² to live apart from themselves and to retain their cultures and characteristics. Somehow, they managed to live apart by themselves, and to retain their culture characteristicsthe Karen,thus are found scattered throughout the Delta, Pegu, Tennesarim and the hills of eastern Burma.

The two most important divisions of the Karens are Pwo and Sgaw, they are sometimes classified, according to their location, as plain Karens and hill Karens³The plain Karens are highly civilized people, intelligent and well educated. Due to the fact that many Karen had been converted in to Christian by missionaries such as schooling and social practices, thus, they were quite civilized compared to hill Karens who were

¹ Bunchuay Srisiwat , Hilltribe in Thailand (Bangkok : Matichon Publishing , 1992), p.50.

² San C. Po, Burman and the Karen , (Bangkok : white lotus , 2001second edition), p. 18 .

³ Ibid., p.22

peasants who made their living by swidden cultivation thus, for hill Karen, villages were organized and among kin groups Kinship remains important as the basis for Karen communities, since all the family members have to depend each other for labour.

However, in Burma the range of culture and social structure are varied among “the Karen encompasses swiddeners in the hills, wet-rice cultivators in the valleys and sophisticated town and city dwellers who subscribe to a variety of animist, Buddhist, and Christian philosophies.” Despite these variety, “from the standpoint of Karen, a Karen must speak the Karen language, should know Karen folk tales, eat like a Karen, dress like a Karen, and act like a Karen to his follow Karen” In this same category, “the languages seem to be the most important criterion: no one who dose not speak Karen is considered to be Karen.”⁴

Karen belongs to the vast Sino-Tibetan linguistic stock which includes Chinese and the numerous Tibeto-Burman languages. The Karenic languages probably constitute a separate linguistic group in themselves, but they may be related to the Tibeto-Burman family Within the unintelligible, and the relationship between these is still obscure. One thing that seems to be accepted is that Pwo and Pa-O (Taungthu) form one linguistic subgroup, while the Sgaw and the tribes in Burma’s castern hills form another⁵

Most Karen languages have no traditional script, although one missionary source mentions “a peculiar orthography found among the Lehkeh Pwo Karens near the Thai-Burma border, called ‘hen-scratching’”.⁶ The first writing system was

⁴ Shigeru Iijima , Ethnic Identity and Sociocultural Change among Sgaw Karen in Northern Thailand, In Keyes, Charles F. (ed), Ethnic Adaptation and Identity, (Phiadelphia: ISHI,1979) p.120.

⁵ Moha . Razha Rashid and Pauline H. Walker, The Karen People : An introduction , from farmers in the hills : Upland peoples of North Thailand, in Lebar , Frank M. ,Gerald C . Hickey and John K. Musgrave (eds .) , Ethnics Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia , (New Haven :Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), p. 59.

⁶ Moha . Razha Rashid and Pauline H. Walker , The Karen People : An introduction , from farmers in the hills : Upland peoples of North Thailand , in Raymond W. Beaver, The Pwo Karen Church : In Muang Shwe Wa, (Rangoon : Burma Baptist Convention, Board of Publication, 1963) p.334 .

developed in 1832 for Sgaw Karen by an American Baptist missionary, using Burmese letters.⁷ With some modifications this was later extended to Pwo Karen, and many religious books were translated into these languages and printed in Burma for the Karen.⁸

The Karen diet consists of rice and chilies while vegetable and meat from animals raised in the villages such as pigs and chicken also included together with fish and wild game. The Karen dress may have small variations in dress within a general pattern. Sgaw men usually wear purchased show pants (cut, pieced and sewn, draw together at the top with a rope or belt) and homespun red and white blouse. The unmarried girl's garment is a single pieces blouse, reaching almost to the ground usually of white colors with some red decoration. The married of women's dress is two-piece, with a tubular skirt and a hip –length over blouse and predominantly black both skirt and blouse may have elaborate weave decoration in a variety of colors.⁹

Since the majority of Karen found in Mae La camp are those who come from Karen state where the characteristics of community is agriculture-based, thus the culture and customs studied in this chapter is to look into the mainstream Karen in this condition, animism was the practiced among the Karen before they know Buddhism and Christianity, thus, the rituals to worship the natural spirits and ancestor sprits are considered important for Karen.

⁷ Moha . Razha Rashid and Pauline H. Walker , The Karen People : An introduction , from farmers in the hills : Upland peoples of North Thailand, in U Zan, Soward E. Erville, Bapist work among Karen :In Maung shwe, (Rangoon: Burma Bapist Convention , Board of Publications, 1963), p .312 .

⁸ Moha . Razha Rashid and Pauline H. Walker , The Karen People : An introduction , from farmers in the hills : Upland peoples of North Thailand ,in U Zan , Soward E. Erville, Bapist work among Karen :In Maung shwe , (Rangoon: Burma Bapist Convention , Board of Publications , 1963) , pp .312 -313 , Raymond W. Beaver, The Pwo Karen Church : In Muang Shwe Wa , (Rangoon : Burma Bapist Convention , Board of Publication , 1963) pp.334 -335.

⁹ Peter Kunsteadler, Ethnic Group, Category, and Identity: Karen in Northern Thailand, In Keyes, Charles F.(ed), Ethnic Adaptation and Identity, (Philiadelphia : ISHI ,1967) , pp.125-126 .

3.1 Ritual connected to Nature Spirits

3.1.1 The Lord of Water and Land

Agriculture, The majority of Karens, i.e. those dwelling in the plains, are wet-rice agriculturists. Rice culture presumably differs little from that of the Burmese and Mons. Karens of the forested hills practice swidden agriculture, each village claiming a recognized area within which the individual farmer selects his plot—partly by means of divination. Rice is harvested in October and November and after threshing is stored in granaries. Swiddens are also planted to legumes, cucurbits, yams, sweet potatoes, peppers, chilies, and cotton. Valley bottom lands produce tobacco, bananas, citrus and other fruits, and sugar cane.¹⁰

Karen community usually situates on the hills and valley suitable for cultivation. Like agriculture, the forest is a source of human livelihood, either for human habitation or cultivation. Thus, there are many occasions, that the Karen will convert the forests into cultivated areas. However, since, they believe that all the forests belongs to spirits, in preparation to take the chosen land, the spirit of the land must be informed and offered sacrifice and evil spirits must be chased away before human being can inhabit or use the area. For the Karen the community and its surroundings, space are demarcated into community, forest and the fields. There is a direct correlation between community order and the fertility of the fields. Good harvest, rich forests and abundant—clear water reflect the effectiveness of ritual and the “coolness” of the community and its land.¹¹

Ceremonies. Various stages in the agricultural cycle are marked by propitiatory rites. Birth and death require appropriate ceremonies, and virtually all therapy requires ritual approaches to the supernatural. Ceremonies conducted for the welfare of the entire community tend to be cyclical and fixed. Illness and medicine. The ultimate cause of illness, accident, and death is spiritual. These untoward

¹⁰ LeBar, Frank M., Hickey, Gerald C. Hickey and John K. Musgrave (eds.), Karen from ethnic groups of Mainland Southeast Asia, In Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology, (Columbus :Ohio University, 1922), pp .75-95 .

¹¹ Hayami Yoko, Between Hills and Plains, (Melbourne : Kyoto University Press, 2004), pp.141-142.

occurrences result from attacks by spirits upon the vital principle, absence of the vital principle from the body, or victory of a seven-fold spirit which is in constant struggle with the personality. Remedies of vegetable and animal origin are used, but the greatest therapeutic reliance is placed upon rites intended to remove the influence of maleficent spirits or to recover an errant or seduced vital principle and fix it in its proper body.¹²

There appear to be at least four concepts of the soul: (1) The tha, a sort of conscience, is said to have a personality which persists after death. (2) The living body is thought to be animated by a vital principle, existing before birth and surviving after death. It can leave the body, causing illness or death, and it can, as a ghost, assume the form of its proper body or possess the body of another. (3) The seven fold kala is a lifelong inhabitant of the human body, yet seeks to cause its death. Animals and inanimate objects are also possessed of kala, or perhaps by emanations of their owner's kala, since at death a person's possessions are destroyed to remove his kala from the village. (4) The so, or personality, is not well described except that it is in opposition to the seven-fold kala. The Karens have a vague notion of a localized afterlife, the destination of the kala, provided death was not caused by accident, violence, or dread disease. Eventually the kala is reincarnated. Disposal of the dead is by burial in a mat or coffin, and associated funeral rites are mainly to ensure that the deceased's kala will absent itself from the community of the living. The corpse is taken out of the house through a special opening. On returning from the burial ground, the villagers erect obstacles so that the deceased's kala cannot follow.¹³

According to Harry Ignatius Marshall, the Karen believe that "Lord of the water and land are deities who rule over the land of the earth. They are superior to the spirit that preside over rivers and have tempers that are easily disturbed, therefore,

¹² LeBar, Frank M., Hickey, Gerald C. Hickey and John K. Musgrave (eds), Karen from ethnic groups of Mainland Southeast Asia, In Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology, (Columbus :Ohio University, 1922), pp .193, 218-221, 234-247 ,270, 275-278 .

¹³ LeBar, Frank M., Hickey, Gerald C. Hickey and John K. Musgrave (eds), Karen from ethnic groups of Mainland Southeast Asia, In Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology, (Columbus :Ohio University , 1922) , pp. 193-209 ,218-222.

ill –spoken word as well as improper action, easily offend them. From this, the Karen also believe that every tree, river, lake and indeed almost every nature object is supposed to be inhabited by the divinity.¹⁴ All rituals for the lords of water and land and the various spirits of the land must be performed by men led by head of community, either by the community as a whole, or in individual rites performed by households. Male and elders thus retain exclusive access to communication with the Lord of water and land and other minor spirit of the territory through various ritual means including sacrifice, offerings, songs and prayer etc. through which the welfare of the community and its constitutive members are ensured.¹⁵

3.1.2 The process of sacrifice ritual

When the time is decided, a suitable spot near a good stream has been chosen to which every family is expected to bring a boar and a white fowl, while chief bring the bullock or a goat. An altar of the bamboo with seven posts on each side has been erected, the roof of which consists of seven tiers each smaller than the one below, like that of Buddhist palace. Posts are set round to which the sacrificial creatures are tied. On the day named for the ceremonies a liquor jar is placed at the foot of each post, and young man is appointed by each chief to kill his animal after a prayer has been uttered by the great chief. During the prayer, men stand holding sickles over the victims while the chief place their hands on the animals.

The young men then hamstring the animal and cut their throat as soon as the chiefs remove their hands. The blood is poured around the place of sacrifice. The gall – bladders are examined to see if they are full and well-rounded. If so, the sacrifice is thought to be acceptable. Otherwise, it is evident that the sins of the people are not yet absolved and will not be, until they provide satisfactory animals. However, that the first offering proves to be acceptable, the hair is burned off the animal, their heads and feet are cut off and laid upon the altar and seven bamboo water joints are fastened to its posts when the flesh is cooked the chief go to the altar, takes some rice and meat on a silver tray, fills all of the bamboo joints and put some of food down

¹⁴ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White lotus, 1997), p. 225.

¹⁵ Hayami Yoko, Between Hills and Plains , (Melbourne, Kyoto University Press, 2004), p. 143.

at various place on the altar. He then eat a morsel himself, after which each of the others eat in turn¹⁶

3.2 The ritual of worship ancestor spirits

Apart from worshipping the natural spirits, Karen also worshipping ancestor spirits. According to Bunchuay Srisawat the ancestor spirits were their ancestor, be the great grand parents or grand parents who passed away. The spirits of ancestor will protect and bless the members of the family, thus, the Karen will worship the ancestor spirit twice a year.¹⁷ For these special occasions, all the members of the family have to attend, no matter wherever they are, when times for worship the ancestor spirits, come, they must return home and participate in the ceremony. People who attend this ceremony will wear Karen traditional costume.

Traditionally, Karen people believe that their ancestor who have passed away are watching, blessing and protecting their new generation, therefore, they may be free from danger, for this purpose, all relatives from far must gather together annually to bolster communication and to help each other for family affairs. People who attend the wrist-tidy ceremony must wear full traditional costume.

The ceremony could only be sponsored by an elderly couple who had lived together as husband and wife for their entire married life. The senior couple called upon the spirit of the children to come back from the place of darkness and to stay with grandparents and relatives. The senior couple prayed that the children would behave themselves well, act with good discipline and preserve their culture.

There are seven materials used for wrist-tidy ceremony

A glass of cold water

Three white threads

¹⁶ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma :A study in Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok ,White lotus press,1997), pp. 235-236.

¹⁷ Boonchuay Srisawat , Hill tribe in Thailand , (Bangkok : Matichon publishing company, 2002), p .57 .

Seven rice ball

Seven triangular –shaped lumps of sticky rice in the packages

Seven boiled bananas

Seven branches of flowers

Seven pieces of sugarcane

All of these have a specific meaning. The glass of cold water is to regain the peace of mind and strength and cleansing body and mind. Water is one of the main sources of life that people and animals depend upon. As human, we frequently make mistakes both physically and mentally in our lives so their mistakes will be cleansed from us in the same way as we take a bath with clean water.

The white threads represents as protection of the person from misfortune and evil spirits the rice ball stands for being united. If rice has separated in pieces, it would be decay in the short period of time. if the rice holds together in the balls, it will last for a long times the triangular shape steamed sticky rice in packages represents solidarity and sharpness when sticky rice is made triangle shape in the banana leaf, it is sticker and sharper like weapon banana represents good discipline and loyalty. When the banana plants produce its fruits, it starts from a single branch. Then the fruit appears serially and in order from the main branch. The branch of flower presents our ability to settle and grow at any place. However, the paw wee the branch of flower can grow anywhere in any season as long as they can put down it roots somewhere. it can grow quickly and doesn't need much water. Sugar cane signifies the quality of good ethnics, moral values and racial progress.¹⁸

¹⁸ www.kawtoolei.com

Figure 3.1 Ritual in agriculture time



Plate 4-4. *liu tà* ritual. An elder performs a *liu tà* ritual with a pig in his rice field. Women look on from the field hut.

Source: Hayami Yoko: Between Hills and Plains

Figure 3.2 Pouring the liquor



Plate 4-1. *khwede* ritual

Source : Hayami Yoko :Between Hills and Plains

Figure 3.3 A wrist –tying



Source: Hayami Yoko, Between Hills and Plains

3.3 Wrist tying ceremony

According to Kwanchewan Buadeang, the wrist –tying ritual was called “ki cue” literally means “tying the wrist” There are many types of ki-cue ritual, sometimes they were held separately and sometime in conjunction with other rituals. Some rituals were conducted many times a year by individual household, for its members to feed k’la (vital essence or khwan in Thai) and to maintain good health. Some were conducted by religious specialists for individual persons who feel ill due to an imbalance of k’la possibly as a result of attack spirits.¹⁹ Twice a year, a community wide wrist –tying ceremony is held at key points in the agricultural cycle at the beginning of the Karen Year. it also performed at times of crisis in the

¹⁹ Kwanchewan Buadeang, Buddhism, Christianity and the Ancestor : Religious and Pragmatism in a Skaw Karen Community of North Thailand , (Chiangmai : Sprint , 2003), p. 131.

community to appease the spiritual. Wrist –tidy is practiced in the Karen state by numerous peoples both upland and lowlands but the **details of practices may differ**.

It generally, the ritual will start with entails tying cotton strings around the wrists of the sick person. Or who depart a long trip, having bad dreams, while the soul (K’la) in Karen term of the person is called upon to return and remain his body. The rite can be performed for single person, a family or the entire community. And accompanied by a feast to lure the soul back, villagers refer to the communal occasion as the great wrist-tidy as villagers and visitors moves from house to house, tying wrist for other families.²⁰ The day before, everybody busily clean their house and wash their clothing. Special treats are prepared: steamed glutinous rice with red bean wrapped in banana leaves and steamed glutinous rice pounded with sesame salt. In each household the wife brought in the sacrificial livestock such as pig and sat at the top of house ladder with her husband facing out of the house. They placed a basket lid in front of them filled with unworn skirt and shirt, uncooked rice and rice-cakes. These are each intended to entice the k’la to return. They crouched over the basket lid carrying the pig over the basket. They took turns tapping the top of the ladder with the wooden spoon; spoon for cooking rice and calling the k’la of each family member. Then husband struck the pig’s head with the spoon and asked “returned yet?” to which children called from inside the house already.²¹

In the any Karen sacrificial ritual, a pig or a pair of children will be used. As for the pig full and round, the animal, whether The small round dinning tray is prepared in the heart –space a bowl is placed in the Center and rice piled around. There are candles around the rim of tray which are lit after the liquor has been prepared. Numerous length of the white cotton thread are cut and placed across the tray. Elders both from within and outside community attend in the guestroom outside. the husband taps the tray with the wooden spoon as he calls k’la of each family members. He and his wife takes turn and tying the wrists of the children. Each thread is first dipped in the soup and rice and the performer continues to call child k’la as the

²⁰ Hayami Yoko, *Between Hills and Plains*, (Melborne: Kyoto University Press, 2004) pp. 146-147.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

matter winds the thread around the wrist three times and then ties a knot. The remaining thread is cut off again dipped in the soup and rice and placed either on the child's head or shoulder. Each parents 'ties' every child and older children also tie their younger siblings. The guests are then called to tie the wrist of all the family members.²² K'la is attracted by feast and the miscellaneous items on the basket lid. The festival itself intensified the communication with spirit and is congenial to return the k'la. The state of individual of k'la, the family and the community also related the elders introduce a state of coolness in the community by titling the liquor and singing song of male elders. The villagers create happy state by calling back their k'la. The land must be cool for K'la to come back and stay, then the villagers are strengthened for planting and harvesting.²³

When the round of wrist-tidy complete the husband perform khwae (titling the liquor) and share liquor to his family after which the feast begin. By this time the entire village is in the festival mood as more friend and relatives from surrounding village come to join the wrist-tidy ceremony and drinking liquor as the morning proceed the village head House to house, drinking and feasting in every one. Each of household becomes in its turn the dinning room for the entire. After all when the household finish wrist-tidy the elder begins to sing Karen song moving from house to house, drinking and eating praying and singing. The larger the gathering is, the greater the ritual effect and thus the greater the prestige for receiving household.²⁴

The community wrist-tidy is a time for reflecting on the community. On the occasion of this gathering, villagers discussed a wide range off issues, from problems in the local community to the importance of traditional Karen customs, the community heightens awareness of the immediate community and its history prompting self-reflexion by the elders. The community-wide ritual is held at important time in the agricultural Calendar, the calling and securing of k'la is made effective by every possible means appropriate food, sacrificing animals ; titling liquor and drinking, singing Karen song hanging their colorful clothing the festival and Convivial spirit of

²² Ibid., p. 149.

²³ Hayami Yoko, *Between Hills and Plains*, (Melborne: Kyoto University Press, 2004), p. 150.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 150.

all combine towards ensuring health and well being of community. In the rite, the condition of each community member's k'la is predicted on the ritual and social condition of the community. Thus, performing the rite reinforces the connection between the individuals health and well-being and the community's social order. It is a ritual of blessing by supplicating the tutelary spirits, productivity and fertility are ensure for the community.²⁵

It is note worthy that the rites aimed at ensuring the well being of the overall community and its individual members in preparation of the harvest, ensurring the fertility and prosperity are solely performed by the head of village and the male elders, if a woman were to say prayer to the Lord of Land and Water, it would bring heat and disrruption to the land. Thus, even though the fertility of humans, livestock and crops is invariably embodied by and associated with females, it is ultimately controlled by the male elders.²⁶

Figure 3.4 Wrist –tying ceremony for calling k'la back



Source :Hayami Yoko, Between Hills and Plains

²⁵ Hayami Yoko, Between Hills and Plains, (Melborne: Kyoto University Press, 2004), p. 152.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 152.

3.3.1 Wrist tying for medicinal purpose.

Apart from being the ritual for community blessing, the wrist-tying ritual or Ki-Cue is used for other occasions such as to cure the sickness. In those days, Karen community is far away from town, thus, deprived from medical treatment as people who live in urban areas, they, then, have to rely on their own traditional ways of treatments. Ki Cue or wrist tying is therefore means to cure the sickness or bad health. In this rite, case, the parent will perform the rite for their children. According to Kwanchewan Buedang, the chicken would be used for this rite, to be carried by the child mother or father or in some case by parent in law. The father or the one who performs the rite will cut the throat of a chicken, letting the blood flow into the sicked child, which held above the plate made from woven bamboo. Then the sick child would be asked to wash hands to wash the blood away, and the plate was thrown away. The chicken is cooked, and the father who performed the rite would put chicken meat and rice on the child's hands, drew a white thread over the food and washed it away with water. The sick child will spit on the thread and then to be washed together with food through the floor to fall on the ground underneath the house, in order to chase away the malevolent k'la (kwan) from the body. After that the benevolent K'la are to be tied back again to the body of the sick child as the performer put chicken and rice in the child's hands again. He tied first one wrist, then the other, with white thread, while praying, the child eat the chicken and rice, and rite is finished.

3.4 New Year ceremony²⁷

According to Kwanchewan Buedang, the Karen new year is celebrated to mark the beginning or cultivation time. The ritual took place over two days, on the first day, the ritual was conducted by the head man or the Shaman of the village at the Shrine. A representative of each household would bring a chicken to be sacrificed, cooked and offered to the guardian spirits. On the second day each household held a Ki cue (wrist-tying ritual). The head man and other villagers took turns in participating in the

²⁷ Kwanchewan Buedang, Buddhism, Christianity and the Ancestor Religious and Pragmatism in Skaw Karen Community of North Thailand, (Chiangmai : Sprint , 2003), p .139 .

Ki cue of each household. The head and feet of the chicken killed for Ki cue from every household were given to the head man.²⁸

Bunchug Srisawat confirmed that, wrist tying would be held for all the animal sacrificed before killed and cook, and also all the people. Every household will also bring a bottle of liquor to offer to the sha man or head man who performed the new year ritual.

The representative of each household will pour the liquor in to glass and offer to the sha man who will offer that liquor to all spirits in order to ask for favore for a rich and abundan harvesting. After that he would take a sip before roletate to others in the household as a symbol that everybody drink with the spirits. After that the head of farmily will offer another glass to the sha man and then pass to the elders in the family and other members even small children. The Sha man who perform the rite, will go on the every household in the village, every one will then celebrate by singing Karen songs to each other.²⁹

However, the new year cermony may differ from villages to village, but for one thing is that, it is a time that everyone in the community will return home to celebrate. According to another sorce,³⁰ the Karen new year is celebrate as follows. On the night of New Year Eve, the religious leader which the Karen people called as The “Hee villagers. Each house has expected to send one representatives to the Ceremony and the representatives should be the head of the household and must be a man. Each head of household should bring a bottle of alcohol and gathering at the religious leader of the house. When everyone has arrived with the alcohol the religious leader will begin the ceremony. The ceremony has been called “consuming the first alcohol and begins with gathering all of the bottles together before the Hee Ko

²⁸ Ibid., 139.

²⁹ Boonchuay Srisawat, Hill Tribe In Thailand, (Bangkok : Matichon publishing company, 2002), pp . 63-65 .

³⁰ www.hilltribe.org

New Year Morning

Karen will wake up bright and early to begin the ceremonies. Chicken and pigs will be killed for used as sacrifice offerings. They will be set on the knee high table along with bottle of alcohol. Next the ceremony will be performed to call the spirit of one's children and grandchildren. The elder in the ceremony will lead to the ceremony and all the members must be presented. The elders will begin by knocking on the table with a piece of wood as it is believed that this will call the spirit to the bodies. Next the elders will tie piece of string around the wrist of the children and grandchildren while reciting a petition prayer to the spirit, asking to be blessed. The prayer will be interpreted as that every member can be able to live happily and free from the danger. After that the children had wrist tied, the family will eat together and then go to the party after that. Teenagers will go search off the party for gathering people until the whole village has come together to enjoy the feast. Alcohol will be poured and a prayer will be recited asking the spirits to bless the village with the spirit of community and brotherhood. After this, everyone will drink together in merriment. Happiness and goodness will be wished on everyone in every home in the village. Of all the ceremonies held by the Karen during the New Year's festivities, the most important has to be that held on the first day of the New Year. It's up to each village to decide when they will celebrate New Year's Eve (*Nee Saw Ko*) and for how many days, but once the first day of the New Year has been observed everyone will be expected to return back to work to greet the New Year.

All of the above refers to Buddhist Karen (*Aw Kae*), but there are also a great many Karen who are Christian. The New Year's observances of this latter group are very similar, only they will be adapted to suit their Christian beliefs. The festival will start with everyone going to church and praying. Afterwards, everyone will eat together. Bellies full and spirits high, people will bring out their rice and other items collected during the harvest in order for an assessment to be made of their monetary value. Once this item of business is out of the way, local sports competition will be held. As evening comes and sky grows dark, drama and acting will serve as entertainment for the village. No alcohol will be consumed and no one will go home drunk on this day. After the drama show is over, people will all return to their houses. During this

time, villagers will each pray every night for seven straight nights. Only after these seven days have passed will it be considered a new year.³¹

3.5 The traditional of Sgaw dressing

Harry Ignatius Marshall describe the Karen dressing that were used widely among the Karen that the blous to wear is cale “hse”. This “hse resembles a smock in that it is a loose, unfitted garment, falling from the shoulders over the body. It is made by sewing together two narrow strips of cloth to form an oblong, inverted “meal-bag”. Holes are left in the seams at the upper corners through which the arms are thrust, and another opening is left in the middle seam at the top, which serves as the neck of the garment. This “hse” reaches from shoulder to the calves, thus, men wear this outfit as his entire costume, while in some place, it can be shorter and wear with loin cloth (sometime replaced by short transers).³²

The Karen men knot up their long hair on the top of the head or over the right left ear, according to the customs of their particular locality fastening it with a piece of white muslim or other light-weight cloth.

Little girls wear a single hse falling from their necks to their ankles at least when it is new. In some village they wear white hse without any ornament or color. But in other place wear a black garment with color yarned at the neck around the arm holds. In some locality the maiden wear the long white ‘hse’ reaching to the ankles until they are married but it is more common for them to put on the skirt and wear a shorter Hse about the time they arrive at maturity.

The women of all these tribes wear the simplest kind of skirt; it is straight slip instead of being gathered about the waist is drawn tight across the back, banded across the front, and the fullness tucked in at the waist line, thus allowing action of knee. The garment remains in place remarkably well, although no belt is used. When the women bathe, those on the plains doing so with much regularity than sisters in the hills, they

³¹ www.hilltribe.org

³² Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : white lotus , 1997), p. 35.

bring the top of the skirt up underarmpits and fasten it over the breast in the same manner as about the waist.

The blouse present a variety of designs. The most common is the plain black or dark blue “hse” with little or no ornament on it. Sometimes it is decorated with small rosettes or stars of colored yarns or fern-like figures. The prettiest decorations are made with the hard white seeds of various shapes of the plant called Job’s Tears (Luke U Duey – in Thai). The seeds would be sewed on the finished garment in parallel rows, in rows forming V-shaped figures, or in the forms of stars or rosettes and edging the arm and neck holes.³³

The head-dress of the women is called “hko peu kil” consists of a piece of cloth about two yards long and a foot wide. The middle part is plain white. At either end, there is a fancy woven (“u”) portion about twenty inches long, red in color and crossed at intervals of two inches by transverse lines. When worn, it is twisted about the head in such a way as to form a peak over the forehead with the color fringes down the back.³⁴

It is common that both men and women carried a bag (“hteu”) slung over his shoulder as a part of his outfit, In their pocket he can carry everything. The bag has been separated in to two parts one, which forms the straps consists of a strip from four to six inches wide and five or six feet long. Both ends are fringed. The other piece is from six to eight inches wide and from two to three feet in length. Each end of the long pieces is folded length wise in the middle and sewed together for forming the bags The short piece is folded crosswise in the middle and sewed to these corners or end, thus forming the corner of the bags the hemmed ends of the short piece form the edges of the mouth of the bag. The cloth woven for these bags is usually red with length wise stripes of white, yellow or black Different tribes have their different pattern of colors.³⁵

³³ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White lotus , 1997), pp .38-40 .

³⁴ Ibid., p .40 .

³⁵ Harry Ignatius, “ The Karen People of Burma”, A study in Anthropology and Ethnology (Bangkok : White lotus press,1997), p . 43.

Figure 3.5 Karen Skirts and Bags



KAREN SKIRTS AND BAGS

Source : Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People in Burma

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Figure 3.6 Women's Garment



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
WOMEN'S GARMENTS
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Source : Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People in Burma

Figure 3.7 Unmarried Women



จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Source : Boonchuay Srisawat, Hill tribe in Thailand

Figure 3.8 Karen at Ban Huay Lumphun Province



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Source : Boonchuay Srisawat, Hill Tribe in Thailand

Figure 3.9 Sgaw Karen Maidens



TWO SGAW KAREN MAIDENS

One from Tharrawaddy and the other from Tavoy District. The Tavoy girl (on the right) is wearing a smock made of black velvet purchased in a bazaar and trimmed with embroidery of colored yarns. She also has on a head-band such as is worn in that district.

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Source : Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People in Burma

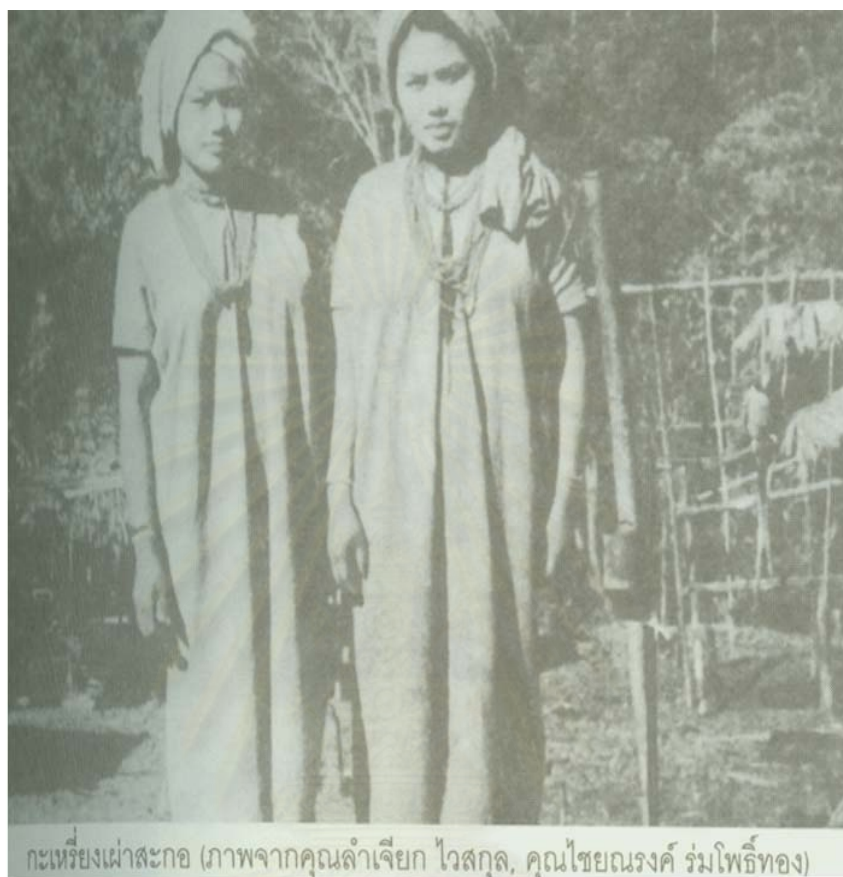
Figure 3.10 Virgin Sgaw Women



Source : Boonchuay Srisawat, Hill tribe People in Thailand

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Figure 3.11 Sgaw Tribe



Source : Boonchuay Srisawat, Hill tribe

3.6 Karen weaving and dyeing

Karen cloth is made from cotton yarns which they made from cotton fibers. Every girls and women know the arts of making cotton yarns for weaving into clothes and dresses.

The next stage in the work is that of dyeing. The colors imparted to the skeins of cotton yarn are shades of blue to black, red, and yellow. In producing the blue shade the skeins are soaked in a solution of the bark or leaves of the wild indigo plant, called “nawxaw” in Korean, the depth of color depending on the duration and repetition of the soaking, until has been obtained. The red dyes are derived from the stick-lac so commonly found ion the Toungoo Hills. During the years just preceding

the world War a good deal of foreign dyestuff was introduced among the Karen people, and yellow came to be used in addition to the other colors.³⁶

The weaving of the yarn into cloth comes next in order. The threads that are to form the warp of the cloth must first be got ready for the hand-loom (“hta”). This is done by unwinding the skeins and stringing the thread around a few pegs driving into a leveled and cleaned space of ground, until enough has been laid down to fill the loom. If there is no convenient place out-of-doors for this purpose, the long threads are strung on pegs around the family living-room or along one side of the corridor of the village-house. The Karen loom is a primitive affair much like those to be seen among the hill tribes in Burma, the Kachin, for example, or to be found in Malaysia and the adjacent regions. The Karen loom has no frame, differing in this respect from the Burmese loom. It consists of little more than a bamboo pole five and a half or six feet long, over which the warp-threads are passed, this pole being held in place four feet or so above the floor against the back portion of a living-room, two of whose large bamboo uprights have holes in them for inserting the pole. From this support the warp extends at an incline some ten or twelve feet to the lap of the weaver, who holds it taut by means of a strap around her waist, while she sits flat on the floor with her feet braced against a section of large bamboo. The thread is wound. It is passed by hand from side to side between the separated layers of the warp, is pulled taut, and then forced tight against the last of the interwoven threads by a piece of Burmese ebony wood, shaped like the enlarged blade of a saw on the rod in the weaver’s lap, only a yard or two being the product of an ordinary day’s work. On the plains the younger generation of Karen women use the Burmese loom and can accomplish more with it³⁷.

Variations in color are obtained by introducing different colors of thread. When a colored pattern is woven for a skirt or the border of a blanket, this process is called “u,” meaning primarily “inserting the fingers” in reference to picking up certain

³⁶ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White lotus , 1997), p .110 .

³⁷ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White lotus , 1997), pp. 110 -111.

threads under which the filling threads must be passed in order to produce the desired pattern.³⁸

After its removal from the loom the cloth is plunged into water and spread out to dry. Knots are tucked in and straggling ends removed, but no other finishing is thought necessary. Such cloth is very firm and almost indestructible. The width of a strip as it comes from the loom is from eighteen to twenty inches. Between three and four yards are required for a skirt. This length is cut the proper dimensions for a skirt are secured. The ends of this larger strip, which is nearly two yards long and about forty inches wide, are sewed together, and the skirt is finished. The cloth for a man's garment is cut and sewed in much the same way.³⁹

Figure 3.12 Karen Weaving under her house

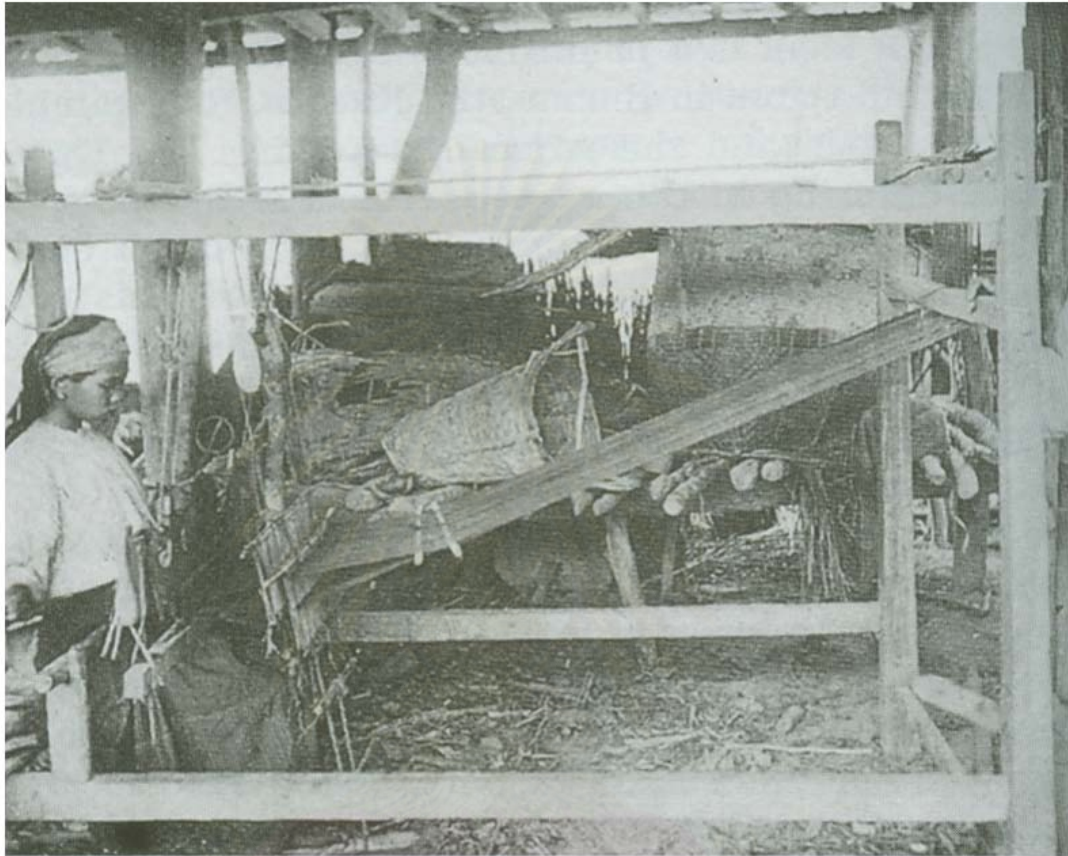


Source : Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People in Burma

³⁸ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White Lotus , 1997), p. 111.

³⁹ Harry Ignatius, “ The Karen People of Burma”, A study in Anthropology and Ethnology (Bangkok : White Lotus press, 1997), pp. 111-113.

Figure 3.13 A Karen girl at a Burmese Loom

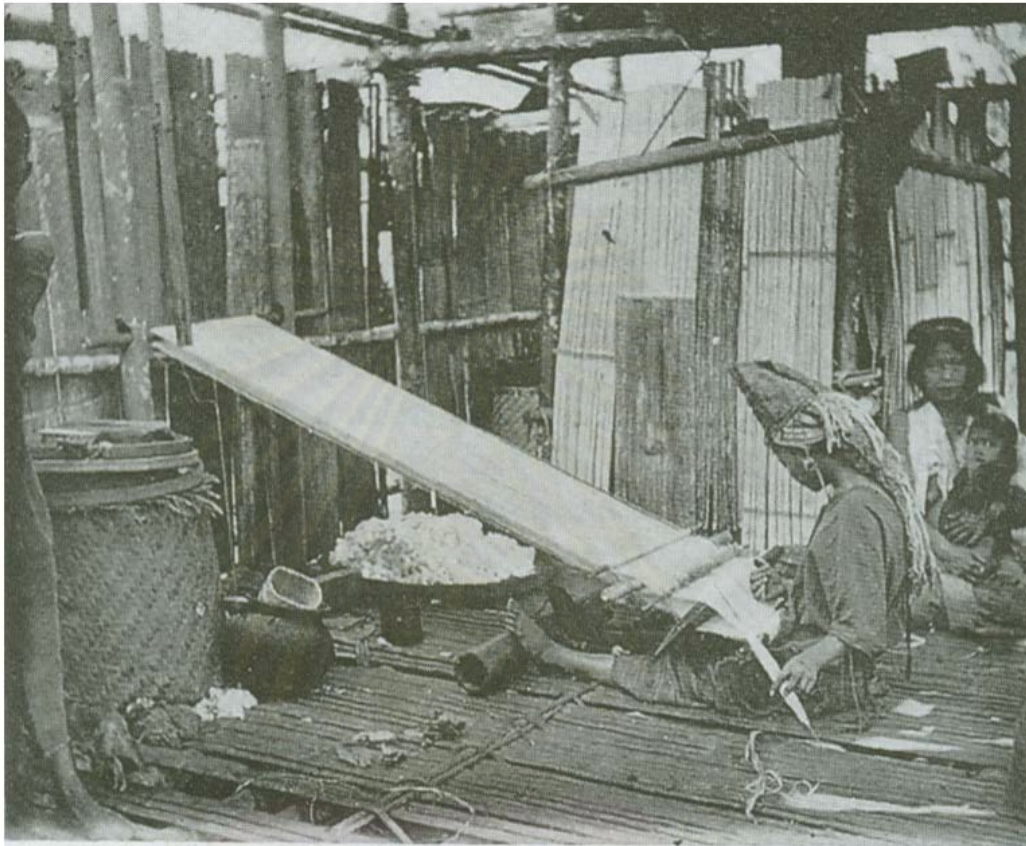


A KAREN GIRL AT A BURMESE LOOM

This loom, which has a frame and is more easily operated than the Karen loom, is in common use among the Karen women on the plains.

Source : Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People in Burma

Figure 3.14 The Karen Loom



THE KAREN LOOM

This loom is simplicity itself. The airy construction of the Karen family-room is shown in this picture.

Source : Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People in Burma

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3.7 Music Instruments and Dancing

3.7.1 Karen Music

The Karen use the pentatonic or five –toned scale, which has belonged to the Eastern Nation since early times. This scale consists of the first, second, third, fifth and sixth intervals of the modern octave. They appear to know nothing of different musical keys, but in starting a tune try one pitch or another until they have found the range suitable to their voices. They do not keep accurate time in their singing, but hold one or another tone as suits their fancy, introducing quavers on the long notes and sliding down or slurring from one tone to the next. Some words and phrases are repeated over again, thereby suggesting the repetitions in an anthem. As they sing in minor strain, their music has a quality of sadness.

On their instruments they play tunes that are not rendered vocally. This is especially true of the melodies they play on the pipes (“hpi ba”), rather than of set compositions. These pipes are capable of producing really beautiful music, consisting largely of improvised runs and variations, demanding no small skill⁴⁰.

3.7.2 Music instruments

The Karen has seven of eight primitive musical instruments, besides drums, cymbals, and gongs. Those in common use are the harp, the jew’s-harp, the bamboo guitar or fiddle, the xylophone, the flute, the graduated-pipes, the gourd bag-pipe, and the wedding horn. In the olden days every Karen youth possessed a harp (“t’na”), which he carried with him on all occasions. Even at the present time in the villages along the Pegu range one can generally hear these soft-toned instruments. Indeed, in the middle of the night one’s sleep may be disturbed by the monotonous strumming on one of them by some wakeful old man, who is trying to beguile the slowly moving hours.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White Lotus , 1997), p .161 .

⁴¹ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White Lotus , 1997), pp .161-162 .

The body of the harp is hollowed out of a block of wood and looks not unlike a miniature dug-out canoe less than two feet long and about five inches in width. A strip of deerskin (of the barking-deer) is stretched across the open top, and lengthwise along the middle of this, a piece of wood is fastened to which the strings are attached. The other ends of the strings are fastened to pegs that fit into holes in the arm of the instrument. This arm is curved somewhat like the prow of a boat and is inserted into the sharper end of the body of the instrument. Formerly the strings consisted of cotton fibre, but fine brass wire, bought at the bazaars, but they are now substituted for the cotton strings.⁴²

A few harps that were made of bamboo, a large section between the nodes being utilized for the body, of which the open side was covered with deerskin extending well down along either edge and fastened with thong-lacing underneath. From one end of this body, and firmly lashed to it, was an arm of wood, the strings being strung from this across to a cleat fastened to the deerskin. This instrument is a very resonant one. In the Pegu Hills the harps have seven strings, the upper one serving only as a stay; but farther north five strings seem to be the rule, all being tuned and played.⁴³

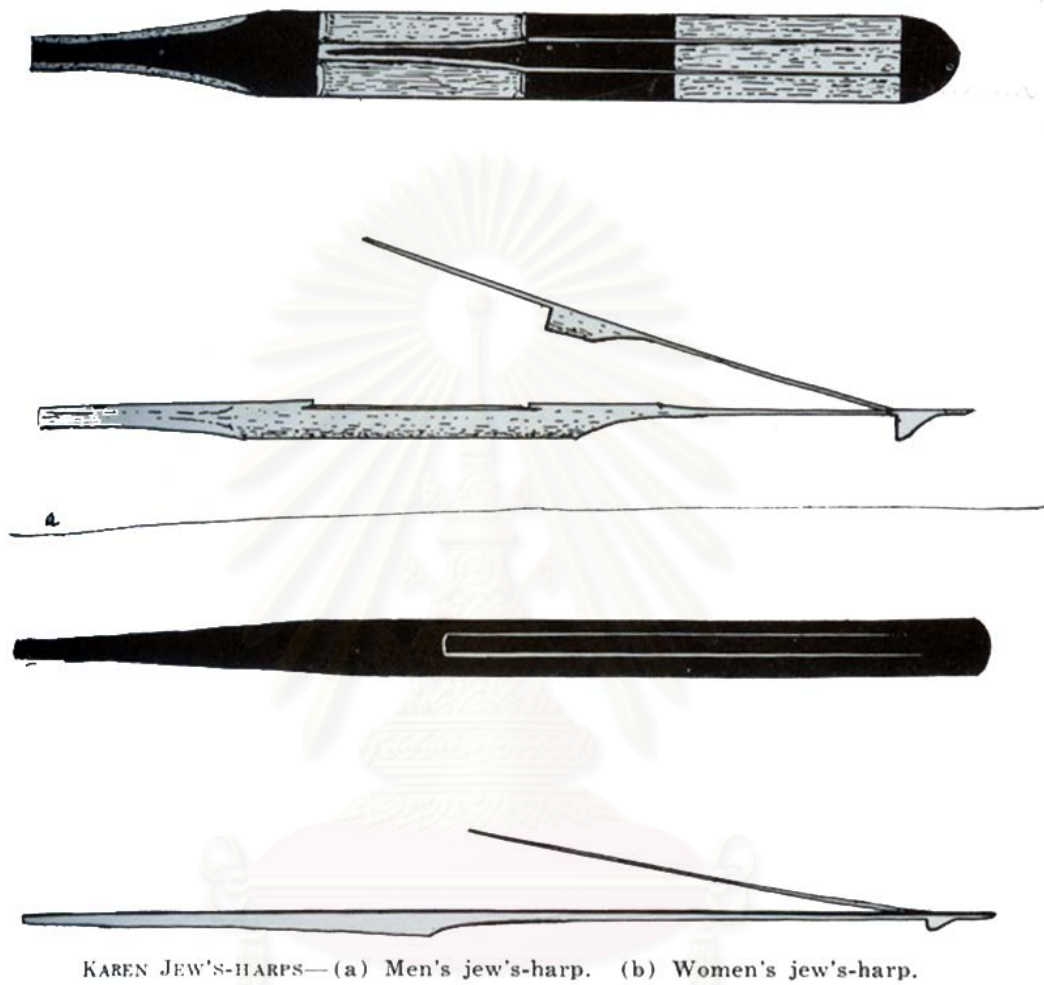
The jew's-harp ("t'xe") is usually considered the women's instrument though there is a short one played by the men. When wooed by the youth with his harp, the maiden replies with her jew's-harp. This instrument consists of a narrow strip of bamboo a foot long and an inch wide at one end, from which it tapers gradually to a point at the other. The tongue is cut in the wider end.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p.162.

⁴³ Ibid., p.162.

⁴⁴ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White Lotus , 1997), pp .162-163 .

Figure 3.15 Karen Music Instrument



KAREN JEW'S-HARPS— (a) Men's jew's-harp. (b) Women's jew's-harp.



A KAREN GUITAR

DP

Source : Harry Ignatius : The Karen People of Burma :

A very primitive kind of guitar or fiddle (“thaw tu”) consists of three strings stretched along one side of a hollow bamboo, which has long longitudinal slits on either side of the strings to emit the sound. This instrument may be played with the fingers like a guitar or with a bow, which is nothing more than a smooth strip of bamboo. Nowadays the strings are brass wires fixed in slits at one end and held in place at the other by a cord around the barrel of the instrument.⁴⁵

The “paw ku” resembles somewhat the African xylophone and is often made by individuals from green bamboos while stopping to rest by the roadside. After they have played a few strains on it they pass on, leaving it to dry up. It consists of eleven tubes ranging from seven and one-half inches to twenty inches in length and from an inch and a half to six inches in circumference. One end of each tube is cut off square at a node of the bamboo, which the other is sharpened like a quill pen. The distance from the closed end to the shank, where the opening begins, varies from two and one-quarter inches for the tube producing the highest tone to eleven and one-half for that producing the lowest. In addition to this series, there is a base pipe thirteen and three-quarters inches from the node to the shank and thirty-two inches to the point. This one is an octave below the third largest tube of the series and, when played, is struck with another pipe, which is as long as the fifth tube of the instrument. These two are called “klo” (drum) and “klo a deu” (drum enclosure), respectively. The player strikes the tubes of the xylophone with small mallets whittled out of bamboo, while the bass accompaniment is played, usually by a second performer, on the “klo.” The tones are not unlike those produced by playing on different sized bottles.⁴⁶

The “po dwa” is an open bamboo pipe about a cubit in length with three or seven holes down the side, as the case may be. It is not played with the instrument held in the position of the transverse flute of the military fife, but in a more or less vertical position like the flageolet, with the notched end of the instrument resting

⁴⁵ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : White Lotus, 1997), pp.163-164 .

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

against the chin just below the lips. The player blows over the notch and secures the different tones by opening and closing the holes like a flute-player.⁴⁷

An instrument of graduated pipes, similar to the “Pan’s pipes” known among the ancient Greeks, is familiar in the Tenasserim division. It comprises a number of slender bamboo tubes ranging from a foot or more to three or four feet in length, bound together in a bundle by rattans. “Hpi ba” is the name applied to the instrument by the Karen, who play it with considerable skill and use it frequently. It is said to be of Talain or of Siamese origin.⁴⁸

The wedding-horn of “kweh” has but three notes, but should be included in the list of musical instruments. It consists of a foot or more of the smaller end of a buffalo horn, or an elephant’s tusk hollowed out and the tip cut off, so that a hole the size of a pencil is left through the truncated tip, and a reed (made nowadays of a piece of tin or brass) is inserted as a mouthpiece, on the concave side of the curve midway between the two ends. The player produces different tones by blowing or inhaling through the reed and by closing or opening the hole in the tip with his thumb. Sometimes these horns are ornamented by encircling the two ends with silver bands. The ivory instrument is thought to be a choicer one than that made of buffalo horn.⁴⁹

Drums, cymbals, and gongs of Burmese manufacture are often found nowadays in Karen villages.⁵⁰

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⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 164 .

⁴⁸ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : white lotus, 1997), pp .165-166.

⁴⁹ Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People of Burma : A Study of Anthropology and Ethnology, (Bangkok : white lotus , 1997), p .167.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p . 167.

Figure 3.16 A Performance with xylophone



Source : Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People in Burma

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Figure 3.17 Karen Orchestra



A SGAW KAREN ORCHESTRA, THARRAWADDY HILLS
The harp and the guitar are being played together.

Source : Harry Ignatius Marshall, The Karen People in Burma

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3.7.3 Dancing

Dancing of any sort appears to be very little cultivated among the Karen. The practice of walking or parading around the corpse at a funeral can hardly be called dancing, for the participants do not perform any special steps, or more in figures, or observe time and rhythm apart from the chanting of their verses. No one has been able to tell me anything about dancing among the Sgaw Karen. Colonel MacMahon has, however, given an account of a ball held in his honor by the Tsaw-ku Karens in the Toungoo Hills. At this dancing party the whole company moved forward, backward, and sideways, swaying their arms up and down, except that they extended them backward when they courtesied. The woman wore a special headdress of basket-work, like a brimless hat, which was adorned with beads and the wings of green beetles. This headgear proved to be a novelty, even to the members of other Karen tribes who constituted Colonel MacMahon's retinue.⁵¹

The Karen culture described in this chapter does not exist in Mae La camp anymore. Eventhough, some of them can be seen and traced but somehow, they has lost some their original characteristics especvally the practices in rituals of spirit worship Karen arts such as in Karen weaving is almost lost and the Karen traditional dress has undergone a lot of adaptations. More over, Karen music and song are no longer appreciate by the youngs. In this regard, Karen culture preservation in Mae La camp is considered important, in order to keep the Karen culture alive and vital.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 167.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROCESS OF CULTURAL PRESERVATION IN MAE LA CAMP

Introduction

In the Mae La Camp, it seems to be an oppressed living condition for the Karen. They have to desert their homes and their ancestral lands to live in a space foreign to them where there are many limitations. First, there are many regulations set by the landowners to be followed. Secondly, the living areas are too small either to live in or to move freely. Although in the camp they are safe from the threatening of their lives by Myanmar's soldiers, the Karen is not able to live the life they wish to live. Despite these stressful and poor living conditions, the Karen still has high hope for better future. They all are waiting for the day when Myanmar is in peace again when they will go back to their homeland to live their life in a peaceful Karen's way. However, the most important thing they can do to keep up their hope and to tie all the Karen together is the empowerment to build a strong awareness among their people. It is imperative to build strong senses of kinship and shared ethnic group.

To stimulate these senses in older generations is not so difficult. But to build them in the young ones, especially those who were born in the camp or who have been migrated to Thailand at very young ages, seems to be the troubles. The younger ones were not born to the community with complete Karen's cultural environment. They were parts of the new different culture in the camp where the social practices are different from the traditional ones. Moreover, there are the Thai social practices blended in a certain parts. It is, then, almost impossible to make the young generations appreciate the Karen's traditional values. The Karen's elders and leaders have to take on the responsibilities to nurture and train the new generations to follow traditional values in leading their life as much as possible. The elders put strong emphasis on their roles to make certain that the young wholeheartedly carry on traditional values in

their way of life. It is clearly shown in the way “Hath Too Wah” and Ha Sha Wah” who are teachers in secondary school in the Mae La Camp express their concerns that:

“Every nation must have its own culture, traditions. If traditions are not well preserved, they will wither away. Nowadays, Karen’s youths speak a word in English and a word in Karen alternatively. This should not happen. Youths must lead their life the way common Karen people live and speak one language; that is, Karen’s only.”

Both teachers observe that the youths, more and more, accept strange new culture to practice in their daily lives. Thus, it is the responsibilities of all concerns in Mae La Camp to promote and practice thoroughly traditional values in living the lives even if they are not close to the fully practice in the old Karen’s communities. It would be strong enough to prevent the new way of life in the camp to do harm to the traditional values.

4.1 The process of tradition preservation

The Karen in Mae La camp still cling to their culture ;despite the hardship they have to face in everyday life . Apart from that , being surrounded by Thai society at large and monitored closely by Thai Authorities and also engaged deeply with Western NGO workers, it is hard for the Karen not to be influenced by different traits of culture both from Thai and Western .Consequently, the process of Karen preservation their own culture and identity becomes important and needed . Several mechanists are invented and planned in order to keep the spirit of being Karen getting strong , policies are made and participation from all stake holders are required .Karen leaders in the camp make sure that Karen festivals ,ceremonies , music ,performing arts, handy –craft are well –trained and pass down to the young generation in order to keep the cultural vital and being practiced all year long within the camp . The process is the woven into everyday life activities. The Karen in Mae La Camp still speak Karen Language , dress like a Karen , consume Karen diet and practiced Karen rituals such as Karen New Year , Wrist-tying and ancestor worshipping , play the Karen music .to keep the Karen culture vital and strong , it needs every individual , family , schools and other association in the camp to participate wholeheartedly.

Observation taken at Mae La Camp and interviewing many different key informants, especially those who are leaders, camp committee members, authorities in charge of the camp, and the elders who support traditional values, I have gathered numerous steps taken to preserve the Karen traditions by all stake-holders as follows:

4.1.1 Making the policy together

The policy makers comprise of leaders and elders who are of the older generations and those who are keen on the knowledge and the practices of traditions in the Karen way of life.

4.1.2 Implementing the policy in all units

It is deemed important that every one has the roles and responsibilities in the preservation of traditions as set in the policy. In Mae La camp, the policy requires every member to perform their own functions: from the family units with duties of parents; teachers in school; group leaders for community projects. Therefore, the preservation of traditions begins from the first social establishment which is closest to a child; that is, the family, outwards to schools and to the larger establishment of the communities.

4.1.3 Set activities

School and the community both have roles to organize the activities related to culture in the Mae La camp which will participated by every one in the camp.

4.1.4 Campaign

Most teachers, artists and camp leader try to convince the younger generation in the camp to practice Karen culture in many aspects, such as wearing Karen dress, playing Karen music performing Karen's folk dance etc. In this regard, campaigning for such events is the must in this preservation process.

4.1.5 Participating

Most of Karen in the Mae La Camp always participate in the cultural activities .Being participated in the ritual is not only for entertainment but it can create unity among Karen People.

4.1.6 Training

There are many groups and individual who are willing to train Karen's to young generation for example the Karen Women Organization, is help promote the Young People to have knowledge about weaving both traditional and with new technique.

4.1.7 Contest

In the Mae La camp, they promote ability of Karen Youth by organizing many contests which encourage the young generation to participate. These contest enable and encourage, the young Karen to practice their own arts and culture.

4.2 Stake –holders participated in preservation process

4.2.1 Family

Family is the first establishment in society that gives cultural and ethical teaching to a child. “Thai society, father and mother teach their children to “wai” (show respect by forming hands in a prayer position and bow the head) a person who is older than they are. The younger should not stand in higher positions than an old person sitting nearby. These teachings are not only aimed at forming behaviors but also the means to convey social symbols systematically. In addition, when a mother teaches her child to cook, it is to introduce the child to a kind of spicy curry and how its paste is prepared. This is considered a pass-on of the Thai culture. To pass on the culture is to guide the younger generation to learn the system of social symbols.”¹ As in the case of the Karen, Karen children learn of culture, traditions, beliefs, and ways of life from their father and mother, grandparents and great grandparents in the first place.

Family is the fist social establishment which supports the continuation of social culture: be it the spoken language; the dress codes; the foods and how they are prepared; the values to be followed; the taboos to be avoided; the important rituals

¹ Amara Phongsaphit, Culture Religious and Ethnicity ,: Analysis Thai Humanitarian, (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn Printing,1998), p.20.

to be performed. This social culture is passed on by having the younger generations observe and imitate how traditional values have been practiced by the older generations. Also, the elders of the community have numerous ways to persuade the young to believe in the principles of the cultural practices and perform their duties as required. One of the examples is Ta Seay Go. The elders often tell the young about the rites of feeding the spirits, that “to perform the rite of feeding the ancestral spirits is to invite them to protect the family member so that they can live happily. If we do not perform the rites the family members will be sick.”² This shows that the elders strictly teach the young in their families to show respect to and to follow the traditions, and believe that the family will be in danger if they ignore their duties. The teaching of Ta Seay Go is one method of imposing the practice of important rites, not to bring bad luck to the family, and the teaching has been passed on from generations to generations steadily. Thus, in the end, the young members of the family gradually absorb all the ideas and practices.

4.2.2 Educational unit (Schools)

School is a social institution that is important to the community second to the family as far as cultural preservation is concerned. Teachers not only have the role to teach knowledge to be learned in schools but also to promote and build awareness in preserving traditions. Sucheap Punyanupaab stated that “culture is not something that can be left to grow unattended, but it needs to be cultivated or to be stimulated by thorough practices or trainings”³. This concept has always been emphasized in the camp. The teachers’ important role is to continuously help their students understand more about and appreciate their own culture. In all occasions, the students have a good chance to participate in and thus admire their cultural activities regularly organized by the teachers and elders. In order to fulfill their responsibilities to promote the preservation of traditions, schools have organized more cultural activities for the students apart from the ones prepared by the camp. The schools provide background

² Interview with Ta Seay Go , 24 January 2007.

³ Sucheap Punyanuphap, Cultural Study, (Bangkok: Spiritual Cultural Association, 1959), p. 26.

information on the history of cultural practices with an emphasis on the importance of the activities and on the proper practices of each ritual performed. These culture activities are considered part of the policy set to be implemented in all primary and secondary schools in Mae La Camp.

There are three levels of schools in the camp: primary; secondary and post-Ten. Most of the children in the camp are encouraged to attend schools by their parents or the leaders. A few stay at home to help their parents to work or to take care of their younger sisters and brothers. Those in schools study from the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon when they return home. Since children spend most of their time in schools, schools serve good functions of nurturing the love and admiration in Karen children of all the Karen's good traditions, like the way described by Sucheap Punyanupaab.

In the case of Mae La camp, the leaders and the committee members have set up a policy by which teachers have to stress the significance of the culture while teaching at schools. "In part the schools are responsible for providing knowledge on the Karen culture that is in practice."⁴ Each year the camp committee sets dates to perform certain rituals in the camp and informs the school about the events. Children learn to take part in many roles required for. Also, they are assigned to the task of decorating display boards. Some take part in public relation activities. They all participate in a number of activities in the making of the rites.⁵

On the day after the events, teachers often ask their students to give details on the performing of the activities, their attitudes and how they feel when they take part in the ritual. From my interviews with teachers, it is found that students feel "good" to be part of the ritual.

4.2.3. Community

Community or social organization is an important social institution to pass on traditions to its members. Apart from family and school, Ember put it that "a

⁴ Interview with "The Lear nard" who did not have to be named , 9 August 2006.

⁵ Interview with Saw Jolly, Chair Person Of Karen Committee, 25 January 2007.

community or organization that is non-kinship in numerous forms shares four common basic characteristics: First of all, there are conditions and qualifications set for members which exclude certain persons from being its member. Secondly, the membership of the group or organization is based on mutual objectives and interests. Thirdly, the group or organization has a clear structure. Fourthly, members are able to participate in the activities organized by the group and are proud to be part of the group or the organization.”⁶ 10 This also applies to the case of Karen community in Mae La camp. Since it is a Karen community migrating from Myanmar, qualifications of the member is clearly set. Moreover, the Mae La camp is a community with clear structure. There is an administrative system. All the members share the same goal and interests; that is, to keep the Karen community exists as long as it could. Lastly, each member takes part in the communities’ activities and is truly proud to be Karen. However, I would like to point out that with every member regularly taking part in organized cultural activities, the communities are strongly tie together as one. The important cultural activities that should be mentioned are the wrist-binding ceremonies and New Year ceremonies. Policies are set for the preparation of these events. Also, responsibilities to manage the ceremonies are shared among the committee members from each zone. Zone A, B and Zone C have their members to join in the working committees. There are about twenty persons in each working committee. A member is assigned to the tasks according to his/her skills and areas of expertise. These tasks include public relations, display, preparation and decoration of places for ceremonies, facilitating the formal ceremonies, and safety measures.

⁶ C.R. Ember and M. Ember ,Cultural Anthropology, 2nd ed.(New Jersey; Prentice Hall,1977), p.188,referto Yoth Santhasombat, ,Human and Cultural, (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 2001), p. 172.

4.3 Existing Karen Cultures found in the Mae La Camp

4.3.1 Karen Language

Karen Language has been served as the official language for communication within Mae La Camp, it has been used as teaching language at school. Whereas, The school promotes to use Burmese, English and Thai language for teaching; especially English has been considered as the second language in Mae La camp. The majority who can speak English well are Karen Committee and Karen scholar since they have been educated from Burma. Furthermore, Karen people are get familiar with missionaries so, they educated Karen can fluently speak English well. When they moved to the Mae la camp, the Karen committee and scholar has urged all school to teach English. because student can have a chance to work with non-organization in order to assist people at the camp and they can continue their education in aboard; Therefore, Karen student has a motivation to learn English. Speaking English in the camp doesn't strange. But the Karen youth improperly change Karen Language; According to the Teacher state "The conversation of Karen Youth will have English"⁷ Because of the assimilation culture has attached, the teacher and parents recognize that some day Karen Language has been adapted from external forces. However, Karen People in the Mae La camp have completely freedom for expressing and teaching their language comparing to Burma that they have to use Burma as official language; they can use Karen language within their home and community which has been directly impacted to Karen Youth can speak both Karen and Burmese. Most of people can speak Burma, and they tend to ignore Karen Language. Being living to in Mae La Camp, it is good chance for Karen committee and teacher try to brush up Karen Language to be taught in school; it will be guarantee that Karen Language has existed.

⁷ Interview with Hath Woo, Teacher, 23 January 2007.

Figure 4.1 Karen Language Announcement



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Source : Author's Photograph

4.3.2 Dressing

Most Karen women at the camp still wear traditional clothes. Karen women wear delicately cotton-woven Karen dresses (Pa-Sint). As for Karen single women and girls, they wear long dresses with red threads or threads of other colors woven in a white long piece of cloth. As for married women, they dress in cotton-woven Karen dresses (Pa-Sint) and colorful V-neck shirts. Nowadays, most Karen mid-aged women and old women still wear Karen traditional dresses whereas teenagers have abandoned traditional Karen dresses. Normally, people who still wear traditional Karen dresses and V-neck shirts are married women. Of course, V-neck shirts worn by these Karen married women are fashionable in color and style. In the past, women would generally dress in black and their clothes were woven in red threads decorated with beads whereas men would wear red shirts. Today, men still wear red shirts and the red shirts are popular to wear on Karen people's special occasions

According to an interview with Naw Bar Wah and Daw Tin Yee (managers of clothes shops at Mae La Camp), “nowadays most Karen people wear traditional Karen attires on New Year's Day and when they attend a wedding at church or temple.”⁸ In addition, schools have a policy for students to wear traditional Karen attires every Wednesday and students also need to carry a bag made of cloth with a shoulder strap (Yarm).

The preservation for wearing traditional Karen attires still prevails; however, the style and color of Pa-Sint, shirts and bags have changed over time. For example, married Karen women used to dress in black or brown but now they dress in different colors because now the Karen themselves no longer grow cotton, spin the cotton and dye the cotton for making clothes. In the past, they obtained the colors to dye woven cloths from tree bark and leaves; therefore, there were not many colors to choose from except brown from tree bark, red from lac (a type of tree), and yellow from the core of jackfruits, green and black from tree bark and tree roots. However, threads used for weaving into a cloth nowadays are the ready-to-use-threads that can

⁸ Interview with Naw Bar Wah, , Seller at Karen Women Organization , 27 January 2006.

be bought from the market in town. Definitely, the colors from ready-to-use threads are much more colorful than the colors obtained from natures. As a result of this, The Karen attires at the camp are diverse in color with various modern designs because old-aged weavers passed away and those who weave now are younger weavers. These young weavers create modern patterns and styles and their creativity result in what Karen people wear today at the camp. In terms of Karen men's shirts, the background color nowadays is still red. As for the patterns of Pa-Sint and dresses for single women, they are still long white dresses.

For old Karen people, they still favor traditional style and color of Pa-Sint with red threads woven into their clothes. The bags made of cloth with a shoulder strap (Yarm) are still popular among Karen men and women of all ages. Yarm is seen as a very unique type of bag that has widely been used among Karen people for ages. The designs and colors of Yarm have been developed over years. As a result of this, yarm is a favorite souvenir among visitors who visit Mae La Camp.

Besides their attires, Karen people enjoy chewing areca nuts and betel leaves smeared with lime (Mark) and smoking tobaccos. Not only Karen men enjoy doing these activities but Karen women also so it is not very unusual to see Karen women smoking tobaccos or cigarettes made of banana leaves or dried corn leaves. Normally, home-made cigarettes smoked by Karen women are made of banana leaves or dried corn leaves and these cigarettes are folded with tobacco mixtures that are produced and used within their homes. Chewing areca nuts and betel leaves is another popular activity among men, women, children, teenagers, mid-aged people, and old people. In other words, it is the popular activity at all ages. If one walks around Mae La Camp, he or she will find many shops that sell areca nuts and betel leaves smeared with lime and they are sold piece by piece. The ground around these shops is red-stained because Karen people spit the juice from areca nuts and betel leaves everywhere. For Karen girls, they are not fond of chewing areca nuts and betel leaves because they consider this activity as an old-fashioned and obsolete activity but for Karen men this is popular among male teenagers and old men. However, men will start chewing Mark when they enter middle adulthood.

Figure 4.2 Some children wear traditional dress at school while other do not



Source : Authors' Photograph

4.3.3 Art and Music

According to Mr. Boonchuay Srisawat, the Karen regardless of tribes loves music, singing, and dancing. The main musical instrument is “Koi” which is made of buffalo horns.⁹ Interviewed the elderly San Tin Aye at his house, who is an expert of Karen music. “He described the physical features and functions of each musical instrument and we found out that these Karen musical instruments are still in use. In addition, the musical instrument “Tina Gigor” which is similar to a guitar in form can be played both in fast and slow rhythms. “Song Gor” is another musical instrument that San Tin Aye showed to the researcher. This type of musical instrument is similar to Burmese vina but it is different in terms of the number of strings. The number of strings of Song Gor is less than that of Burmese vina.

⁹ Boonchuay Srisawat, Hill Tribe in Thailand, (Bangkok: Matichon Publishing Company,2002), p.56.

The last musical instrument is “Kwo” which is made of buffalo skin, elephant skin and bamboos. Frequently, Karen teenagers play Kwo for courting women. Despite the old Karen musical instruments being replaced by modern musical instruments; however, these old Karen musical instruments are still being played because old Karen people strongly support and preserve their music through teaching and training Karen young generations on how to play these musical instruments”.¹⁰

Figure 4.3 Kwo Instrument



Source : Author's Photograph

¹⁰ Interview with San Tin Aye , Leader Buddhism of Pure Karen , 28 January 2006.

Figure 4.4 Song Gor Instrument



Source : Author's Photograph

4.3.4 Wrists-Binding Ceremony and Ancestral –Worshipping Ceremony

There are many forms of wrists-binding ceremonies depending on purposes. Sometimes the wrists-binding is for healing, bringing good luck back to ones, apologizing to those who have been done wrong, building harmony among people and it is also a way to encourage one another. Karen people believe that through wrists-binding they can rebuild a united and strong nation; therefore, Karen people take wrists-binding ceremony seriously. According an interview with a middle-aged woman, who went to take part in a wrists-binding ceremony at Mae La Camp, she stated “Karen people regardless of tribes or where they live will come back for the

wrists-binding ceremony because the ceremony itself is considered as a family gathering for those who live far away from their families and the main purpose of the ceremony is to bring good luck into one's life and the ceremony usually takes place in August. It is believed that spirits will be harmed in August and August is chosen to be an appropriate month for bringing good luck back into one's life. An astrologer is a person who will schedule an exact date to execute the ceremony through the calculation of the waxing moon and the waning moon. Karen people believe that if they cannot attend the ceremony on a scheduled date, disasters will visit them. The ceremony first starts off with the elderly worship ancestral spirits. Next, the ceremony committee will invite seven pairs of respected Karen spouses to execute the ceremony by praying, blessing, and binding wrists. There are things used in the wrists-binding ceremony and they are:

1. Glutinous rice: it represents harmony.
2. Water: it represents holy hearts and also water is symbolic in the way that it washes away bad things.
3. Bananas: they represent strength. Bananas are symbolically seen as extending a family line or reproduction.
4. Flowers
5. Sugar canes: they represent soft and gentle personality of Karen people.
6. Sticky rice: it represents a unity to fight for a country or a nation.
7. Holy Buddhist strings: they represent holiness. They protect people against from dark spell and evils. Three holy Buddhist strings used in this ceremony will be put around three times and this is equal 9 times. Karen people believe that number 9 is a number of prosperity".¹¹

¹¹ Interview with "The Lear nard" who did not have to be named , 8 August 2006.

Figure 4.5 Wrist-tying

Source: Author's photograph

However, there are some changes in the procedure of the religious ceremony. The procedure is not executed fully and perfectly as the procedure executed in Burma due to the inconvenience of location, family gatherings, or difficulty in finding offering such as chicken or pork. According to an interview with Mr. Kuayse, an officer at Burma Issue Organization, “An original wrists-binding ceremony of Karen people will start very early in the morning and family leaders have to go to a river to worship the ghosts of water, forests and hills. These family leaders will ask these ghosts to bring back the spirits of family members to their bodies and when arriving at home the family leaders will knock on a ladder and ask “Are the spirits back to the bodies yet?” Then family members will shout “Yes, the spirits have already come back”. Next, the family leaders enter their houses and go to a kitchen to knock on kitchen pillars to bring back the spirits. After that, the family leaders will bind the firstborn's wrists and the firstborn will bind the wrists of the next brother or sister and

the ceremony will go on in succession until the lastborn. Last, the family will get together to have a meal. The food is a male chicken and a female chicken. Before boiling the chicken, family members must treat the chicken with two bottles of liquor. Once the family is finished eating, the family leader will invite their neighbors to have food. However, according to an original traditional custom, after completing the ceremony at home, villagers would gather and have a meal at a house of a village leader so they can a drum performance. Before hitting the drums, Karen people would sprinkle water onto the drums. Although the wrists-binding ceremony at Mae La Camp is not fully and perfectly executed as the original ceremony, the sense of harmony and unity still prevails among Karen people.”¹²

4.3.5 Ancestral-Worshipping Ceremony and Karen New Year Ceremonies

Nowadays we can hardly see ancestral worshipping a Mae La Camp since young generations do not practice it anymore. Only old people still practice this ceremony because they are Buddhists and some of the old people still worship different types of ghosts. According to an interview with Sain Tin Aye in Burma, “ his village people are Buddhists and they worship different types of ghosts and spirits. The god that they worship is “Bu Thow Koh” and the worship is held on Karen New Year’s Day”.¹³ We had another interview with Ta Seay Go in Burma also. According to him, “ people at his village still worship unsettled ancestral spirits and respected gods such as Katartha, Vidruraka, and Guvera. These gods need to be worshipped because they protect family members. If they don’t have a worshipping ceremony for these gods, the family members may get sick. The procedure of the ceremony begins with worshipping Buddhists and praying first. Next, they worship four gods with offerings such as desserts. After that, there will be future prediction by using chicken bones. The purpose of this prediction is to predict what kind of sickness a person has and what type he has been possessed”.¹⁴ According to Mr. Bunchuan Srisawat, Karen people favor having ghost spirits around their houses because if a family member gets

¹² Interview with Kuayse, Burma Issue Officer, 25 March 2007.

¹³ Interview with Sain Tin Aye, Leader Buddhism of Pure Karen, 28 January 2006.

¹⁴ Interview with Ta Seay Go , 24 January 2007.

sick, then they can perform the chicken bone ceremony to ask the spirits of the ghosts where the family member has been demon-possessed.¹⁵ However, villagers at Mae La camp perceive having ghost spirits around their houses as a way to protect what they fear. When Karen people have moved to the camp and they are not familiar with the environment around the camp, then they will have to adjust to the environment under pressure, social norms, and rules. These kinds of things can cause them to feel insecure and fearful. By praying to ancestral spirits, forest ghosts, and hill ghosts, this will take away their fears and insecurities. However, this perception has been changed over time because presently many people have started to see the ceremony as being an obsolete and unreasonable ceremony according to Mrs. Moe Hnin Twee, Secretary of Kwo and Assistant Committee.¹⁶

Figure 4.6 Chicken Bones for Predication



Source : Author's Photograph

¹⁵ Boonchuay Srisawat, Hill Tribe In Thailand, (Bangkok: Matichon Publishing Company, 2002), p 59.

¹⁶ Interview with Nan Moe Nin Thwe, Secretary of Karen Women Organization 24 January 2006.

4.3.6 Karen New Year

The ceremony that takes place on Karen New Year is different from that of universal New Year since Karen calendars differ from those of Burmese and of other countries. Their New Year's Day will usually be either in January or December depending on their astrological calculation. According to an interview with Mr. Kuan-Se, "Karen New Year's Day was originally named "Ne Kho Festival". Prior to the first of January, villagers will make desserts, food and prepare liquor for a banquet. The next day family leaders will take their members to a house of the village leader to receive teachings from him. Most of the time, the teachings will come from poetry. In addition, villagers worship water and forest ghosts as a way to show their sincere appreciation. The village leader will offer villagers raw rice as a souvenir because raw rice is white and white represents holiness. By offering raw rice to villagers, it signifies that their family will be abundant in food. In the afternoon, there will be a wrestling competition held by Karen people. Generally, the celebration on New Year's Day at refugee camps including Mae La Camp usually takes place on the first of January and this is more enjoyable than the celebration of traditional New Year's day".¹⁷

In the Mae La Camp, it seems to be an oppressed living condition for the Karen. They have to desert their homes and their ancestral lands to live in a space foreign to them where there are many limitations. First, there are many regulations set by the landowners to be followed. Secondly, the living areas are too small either to live in or to move freely. Although in the camp they are safe from the threatening of their lives by Myanmar's soldiers, the Karen is not able to live the life they wish to live. Despite these stressful and poor living conditions, the Karen still has high hope for better future. They all are waiting for the day when Myanmar is in peace again when they will go back to their homeland to live their life in a peaceful Karen's way. However, the most important thing they can do to keep up their hope and to tie all the Karen together is the empowerment to build a strong awareness among their people. It is imperative to build strong senses of kinship and shared ethnic group.

¹⁷ Interview with Kuayse, Burma Issue Officer, 25 March 2007.

To stimulate these senses in older generations is not so difficult. But to build them in the young ones, especially those who were born in the camp or who have been migrated to Thailand at very young ages, seems to be the troubles. The younger ones were not born to the community with complete Karen's cultural environment. They were parts of the new different culture in the camp where the social practices are different from the traditional ones. Moreover, there are the Thai social practices blended in a certain parts. It is, then, almost impossible to make the young generations appreciate the Karen's traditional values. The Karen's elders and leaders have to take on the responsibilities to nurture and train the new generations to follow traditional values in leading their life as much as possible. The elders put strong emphasis on their roles to make certain that the young wholeheartedly carry on traditional values in their way of life. It is clearly shown in the way "Naw Htoo Wah" and Ha Sha Wah" who are teachers in secondary school in the Mae La Camp express their concerns that:

"Every nation must have its own culture, traditions. If traditions are not well preserved, they will wither away. Nowadays, Karen's youths speak a word in English and a word in Karen alternatively. This should not happen. Youths must lead their life the way common Karen people live and speak one language; that is, Karen's only."

Both teachers observe that the youths, more and more, accept strange new culture to practice in their daily lives. Thus, it is the responsibilities of all concerns in Mae La Camp to promote and practice thoroughly traditional values in living the lives even if they are not close to the fully practice in the old Karen's communities. It would be strong enough to prevent the new way of life in the camp to do harm to the traditional values.¹⁸

4.4 The mechanism for Karen Culture Preservation

In addition, the camp committee not only implements rites and ceremonies but also carries out cultural promotion activities. There are regular contests for traditional

¹⁸ Interview with Naw Htoo Wah , Ha Sha Wah , Teacher , 23 January 2007.

arts and music, together with dances to stimulate Karen youths' interest in Karen's performing arts. The contests are organized regularly every year. Moreover, many forms of traditional arts are often taught to the young Karen. For example, one elder, San Tin Aye who are keen on making traditional Karen musical instruments and good at playing the instruments, trains those youths who are interested at his house. Other members of his family are good at traditional dance. They also help pass on their knowledge and skills to children in the camp. It is important to introduce the young children to Karen's musical instruments. Nowadays, youths turn to play guitar and sing Thai songs that they learn from radio and CD players. These have become are very popular among the children in Mae La camp. With the thought that they are outdated and old-fashioned, the youth starts neglecting traditional Karen songs. One way to bring back good traditions, in music and songs, is to encourage the teaching and learning of those music and songs. Each year at important ceremonies, the committee gives support to the singing and dancing in traditional ways. Although nowadays the youth have lost interests in these songs and music, the committee has hoped that the support would help build up groups of interested people. It can be clearly observed that opportunities are provided for the young ones to learn and to express their talented abilities with a strong sense of good traditions.



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Figure 4.7 Wrist-tying Ceremony, followed by a singing contest



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Figure 4.8 A musical master with his collection of musical instruments



Source : Author's Photograph

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Figure 4.9 The musician master with his student



Source : Author's Photograph

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In addition to musicians and performing artists are groups of housewives and the Karen Women Organization (KWO) who play a significant role in preserving Karen weaving culture. For Karen, the weaving is an important culture. It supports the community which is a self-sustained in nature. The community produces tools using in daily life in the family or in the community. Karen women must be able to weave, to make clothing, to make cloth for other functions like blankets and bags. The weaving techniques pass on from a grandma to a mother and then to a daughter. It is said that Karen women should be able to weave or otherwise no one will take her to be his bride. There are weaving equipments in every home. A woman should learn Karen weaving culture. For Karen, the weaving is an important culture. It supports the community which is a self-sustained in nature. The community produces tools using in daily life in the family or in the community. Karen women must be able to weave, to make clothing, to make cloth for other functions like blankets and bags. The weaving techniques pass on from a grandma to a mother and then to a daughter. It is said that Karen women should be able to weave or otherwise no one will take her to be his bride. There are weaving equipments in every home. A woman should learn how to weave and make clothing and other things which are necessities in the home. It is a long line of Karen traditions in the making of clothing.

The change has come around when the Karen had to move into the camp. There are limitations in terms of the environment, tools and equipment. Their tools and equipment were left behind when the Karen started their long travels. The traveling is tough. They had to escape from Myanmar soldiers. They had to move from places to places so many times that the Karen had lost most of their belongings. They came to live in the camp with almost their bare hands. Sometimes, they have lost their simple waist looms. Also, they do not have an essential material for weaving that is cotton. In the camp, there is not enough space to grow any agricultural produces. Karen is not able to buy cotton materials from the market. The weaving becomes a luxury for Karen women. Not everyone can weave. In consequence, the change of dressing occurred. The traditional dress began to disappear when women are not able to weave the traditional cloth. The donated clothing came to replace the traditional dress.

Things are worse when the clothing donated by NGOs and other organizations come in regularly. The Karen began to abandon their traditional dresses. Youths do not wear traditional dress. Women no longer weave. The pass-on of traditional weaving discontinues when children spend most of their time in school. They have not spent time at home learning from the elders. Lack of tools and motivations to weave are the crucial factors facing the Karen in the camp.

Figure 4.10 Sewing training center , run by Kwo and supported by Zoa



Source : Author's Photograph

Figure 4.11 At the weaving center in the camp



Source : Author 's Photograph

According to an interviewing with Karen Women Organization Manager, “it is an intention of the Karen community in Mae La camp to support youths to put on more traditional attires. It is observed that in the camp most middle aged women wear traditional Karen dresses but the men put on ordinary attires worn by Thai male”¹⁹. However, all carry cloth bag, which is a unique Karen characteristic. Bags are used for multiple purposes: it is used to store things when traveling, to keep foods and some other things in all occasions.

¹⁹ Interview with Daw Let Let, Karen Women Organization Manager, 27 January 2006.

Weaving cloth, making bags and making dress are some activities which have been done seriously and regularly. The products are not only for use in the households but for sale to visitors to the camp as well. Sometimes Karen Women Organization even manages to sell the products through Non-Organization to outside markets.

Figure 4.12 A cloth shop at Mae La Camp



Source: Author's Photograph

The abovementioned are measures to strengthen culture and interests in various cultural activities of the Karen people in Mae La camp. This is also the way how Karen people preserve their traditional culture and values within the living conditions of the camp.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to the interview and collection of field data at Mae La Camp, a researcher found that the customs that people still practice are wearing Karen attires and weaving and also wrists-binding ceremony as well. These customs have been practiced continuously even though the procedures and styles might have differed from original patterns. The purpose of maintaining these customs is that Karen people would like to preserve their own customs as they used to preserve when they were living in Burma. Karen people have been trying very hard not to lose their own customs even though these Karen refugees have moved to the camp in Thailand with new surroundings they have to face and Thai regulations and rules that they have to obey. Therefore, they pretty much struggle to maintain their identities while they are living in the land that is not theirs. Certainly, Karen people have encountered obstacles to preserve their customs since the young Karen born in Thailand have been influenced by Thai ways of thinking and values; therefore, these young Karen have been assimilated into Thai society and culture rather than Karen cultures. As a result, the strong desire and the idea to preserve Karen culture and customs have been supported and encouraged by groups of Karen old people, Karen committee, and Karen culture specialists.

1. The customs of wearing Karen attire and Karen weaving: regardless of ages, people at Mae La Camp are all willing to dress in their own tribal attires every Wednesday. In addition, every school in the camp requires students to wear their tribal attires as well. Karen attires are worn not only on special occasions but also in daily life. Thai government supported this idea by donating clothes and necessary things.

Being used to live in the state of Kortulae, Karen people made a living on agriculture and cotton plantations. Cotton spinning was responsible by men and cotton weaving was responsible by women. Cotton weaving was taken as an important career for all Karen families because if they had not weaved their own cotton, they would not

have had clothes to wear. Due to such a long distance from downtowns, all Karen people, especially women, have to know how to weave. Weaving was perceived with different aspects. For example, weaving in one aspect was perceived as displaying their custom but in another aspect it could be seen as an intelligent inheritance being passed down from old generations to young generations. The importance of weaving has started to erode due to the inconvenience of setting up facilities, lack of experts or specialists and lack of interest to learn among teenagers.

Once Karen people have settled in the camp, weaving has become significant to them since Karen people living at the camp are unable to find jobs in the city of Mae Sod; therefore, the need to create jobs and generate incomes within the camp had to be taken into account. As a result, weaving has regained its importance so that Karen people at the camp can support their families. Unlike Islamic people living in the same area, they are merchants and those who are educated they would take teaching jobs as a way to support their families. However, weaving is considered as a job for the less educated or the unemployed. According to field researcher who went to weaving centers at Mae La Camp, they saw Karen men weaving like other Karen women. The researcher concluded that because of the pressures from the surroundings, men have to go out and help women make a living in order to support their families as a way to reduce pressures towards uncertain and changing surroundings. As for the future, the ratio of men weaving tends to increase as long as they cannot find jobs that suitable for them.

2. Wrists-binding ceremony: this ceremony is an important ceremony for all Karen people because in the old days Karen people depended on water, forests and mountains in order to carry out their agriculture. As a result, to show sincere appreciation to the ghosts of water, of forests and of mountains, ghosts-worshipping ritual is very significant and all Karen families must participate in wrists-binding ceremony which is one of many steps in ghosts-worshipping ritual.

With the reference of Kwanchiwan Buadang,¹ “The wrist-tying was called ki cue-literally ‘tying the wrist’ there were held separately, and sometimes in conjunction

¹Kwanchewan Buedaeng, *Buddhism, Christianity and the Ancestor*, (Chiangmai: Sprint Thailand, 2003), p. 131.

with other rituals. Some rituals were conducted many times a year by individual household for its members to feed k'la and to maintain good health. Some were conducted by religious specialists for individual persons who feel ill due to imbalance of k'la possibly as a result of attack by spirit¹. This ceremony must be practiced regardless of where they live. This ceremony is also considered as a family gathering where all Karen family members get together and the leaders of the families execute the ceremony. However, at Mae La Camp, the wrists-binding ceremony is not executed only within the families but also executed at community level which is held by the Karen committee. The purpose of organizing this ceremony is that to create and strengthen harmony among Karen people because Karen people who migrated to the camp come from different villages and different tribes. In addition, this ceremony creates attachment and has Karen people get familiar with each other. The ceremony implies that Karen people must be harmonious and stay together though tough and good time and help one another; therefore, harmony is seriously taken into account. Wrists-binding is a symbolic mean to convey messages that Karen people will not leave anyone in their group behind and some day they will help each other to retrieve a nation. Furthermore, another purpose of this ceremony is to remove fears when living under pressures with other people from different families and without knowing their destiny so the wrists-binding ceremony comforts and encourages them.

3. Languages: Many various languages spoken at Mae La Camp so it is very essential for Karen people, especially the young people to be able to speak Burmese, Karen, English and Thai languages. When they were living in Burma, Karen people needed to learn Burmese because it was an official language but when they moved to the camp they can speak Karen language as much as they can. Mid-aged and young people are very enthusiastic to learn other languages such as Thai and English because the schools at the camp offer both Thai and English curricula.

From the point of view of the researcher, it is such a great thing that Karen people are able to learn Thai and this is seen as one of the ways to upgrade their language skills. Through Thai language, Karen people learn Thai customs indirectly. Definitely, by interaction with Thai officials, Karen people must be able to speak Thai as an old saying says "When in Rome, do as the Roman do" This proverb is for

people who need to adjust to new environment in order to balance their lives. Language can be learned not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom such as through greetings and interacting with other people in order to build friendship. Once we can converse basic structure of that particular language, it is easy to continue the friendship. The researcher noticed that the new generations are very eager to learn both Thai and English. For example, there is a teenager who acts as an interpreter for the researcher and she can speak Thai fluently because she was educated in Thai school. Thus, she is able to adjust herself quickly to the new environment. Unlike old people, they think that it is not necessary to learn other languages because they can receive information from their children who can speak Thai. Another thing is that they are not forced to speak Thai like they were forced to learn Burmese and Thai language is not made to be an official language for them.

According to the researcher, not many Karen people can speak Thai only the volunteers. From the researcher' point of view, Karen people should learn how to speak Thai because when they have problems with Thai officials they will be able to communicate and understand what they are supposed to do. In addition, the researcher think that Thai government should hire more personnel who can speak both Karen and Thai in order to interpret for Thai officials when they want things to run smoothly.

4. Music and Performing Arts. At Mae La Camp, the preservation of music and performing Arts is obviously seen. According to musical specialists, each instrument is made of wood and music is always used in different rituals to entertain villagers. Modern music and songs are more favorable to Karen teenagers than traditional music and songs. Most of modern music are from the merchants who bring video or CDs from downtown of Mae Sod. As a result, the importance of preserving traditional music has started to fade away among teenagers, especially music that concerns natures, religions, and realizing the obligations one should pay back to his or her parents. Traditional music or traditional Karen dance will be performed only on special or religious occasions.

From the observation of researcher, Karen people compose songs from real life and true natures of human beings in order to teach young generations and embed good values in them. Songs also are used to stimulate children to love music at

Mae La Camp. Karen teenagers seem to be very happy when they practice instruments and dances. Though music is abstract but it has been utilized to strengthen Karen people and give them hope to hold onto.

5. Karen People's Personalities at Mae La Camp: Generally, Karen people are very attached to agriculture and rice fields. As a result, most of Karen people are friendly, patient, hard-working, and honest. However, at Mae La Camp, lives and societies here have changed so Karen people have to adjust their personalities when they meet strangers each day. Certainly, the researcher, who went down to the camp to collect the data for 3 times, experienced different emotions and feelings of these Karen people each time they collected the data. The first time they went there to conduct a research on Karen customs, they thought that Karen people would live at the camp temporarily but the researcher noticed that Karen people had difficult lives due to emotional pressures and scars from previous conflicts and unfamiliarity of new surroundings they were encountering. They looked fearful because of unpredictable situations that could occur at any time. However, they still retained some of their strong personalities and those were patience and persistence to give up. During the first time of conducting an interview with Karen people, the researcher needed to have interpreters accompany them to Karen people's houses. Karen people were very cooperative in giving information; however, without interpreters, they would be suspicious and fearful. After the interview, the researcher sensed that Karen people were helpful and sincere whether they were children or adults; however, the researcher also sensed their fear towards strangers as well. Before the researcher left, they had the opportunity to listen to Karen songs played by old people and their family members. The songs were about giving blessings and wishing good luck so the first visit was very impressive for the researcher. The researcher felt that Karen people were very glad that they were important to the researcher. As for the second visit, the researcher had the opportunities to participate in wrists-binding ceremony. Karen children and old people were informed about the coming of the researcher and their participation in the ceremony. Karen people warmly welcomed the researcher. The researcher did not sense their fears in their eyes and attitudes anymore. During the second visit, the researcher conversed with Karen monks and they were informed by Karen monks about the pressures that Karen people faced inside the camp and the

wrists-binding ceremony helped comfort them and create a sense of belonging among them.

The roles of Karen monks are not only leaders of ceremony but also counselors for Karen people. Every time Karen people are in troubles, they would go to temples to express their problems, consult Karen monks and receive advice from the monks. This is also the reason why Karen people have so much faith in Buddhism and they study and know the core principles of Buddhism seriously. For them, Buddhism is a way to terminate their emotional discomfort and release them from troubles.

During the third visit, the researcher interviewed 5 people in Karen committee. The researcher met a female Karen official who can speak English and understood questions well. She was well-educated and she had modern way of thinking. The researcher asked her about superstition and dark power. She commented that this kind of belief has been embedded in Karen people since they were very young. However, when moving to the camp, many Karen sick people were cured from their illness by Thai medical officials and NGO volunteers so this kind of belief started to fade away. Furthermore, she stated that some of Karen people do not truly understand why the wrists-binding ceremony is always held each year. This ceremony is unacceptable for Karen who are Islamic people and Burmese. However, Karen people presently have understood more about the meaning of this ceremony. She concluded that Karen customs at Mae La Camp is the only physical evidence that Karen customs still exist. Karen customs are displayed more obviously at the camp than in Burma because Burma had Burmanization policy and the country wants to unite every tribe in Burma. According to the researcher, when Karen people moved to settle at the camp, they were emotionally disrupted and they had to obey and follow the regulations set by Thai officials. If Thai government had promoted understanding between Karen people and Thai officials, there would have been no problems and they could have lived together peacefully at the camp. For example, Karen people wanted to raise a Karen flag when they wanted to organize their cultural performances. We all know that a national flag represents the country's independence and uniqueness. In Karen people's point of view, raising their own flag shows the respect towards their culture and they do this without any hidden agendas. However, from Thai officials' viewpoint, they

perceive raising a Karen flag as an act of betrayal to Thailand and the researcher saw that raising a Karen flag was an inappropriate action because the action would be seen as Karen people wanting to possess Thailand as their own land. However, the researcher agreed that singing a Karen national song “Papakarer” is an appropriate action to do in order to show their patriotism.

According to the researcher, patriotism can be displayed in several ways not only through attires, language or singing but also Karen people should build patriotism among their own people based on past experiences or harmony which will be a determining factor whether building a Karen nation will exist. The question to be asked here is not about whether language, attires, performances and lifestyles can be factors to preserve Karen customs and culture but the question that should be asked is how much they can preserve their customs and cultures after having moved to the camp. In addition, the bottom line is not about whether their customs are practiced the way they were practiced in Burma but the bottom line here is that Karen young generation should play a significant role in preserving Karen customs in order for them to appreciate and understand Karen customs. This task is quite a difficult task to achieve and Karen people must find ways to explain with good reasons to Karen new generations regarding what is acceptable and unacceptable in their new environments. Without informing good reasons to the new generations, the preservation of Karen customs seem impossible and unsuccessful because Karen young people will not truly understand what custom preservation will offer them in the future since they are already living in the camp and they have regarded themselves as Thais. Therefore, this task must not be the responsibilities of communities only but also of schools and families because schools and families are strong fundamental institutions to materialize and maintain custom preservation.

Recommendations

Like it or not, the Karen culture preservation is very much under stress and challenges, due to the limitations facing in the camp. A part from that, the Karen are now enclaved by Thai culture at large, thus, it is not surprising to see Thai culture assimilated into Karen culture at Mae La camp. The new generation who were born

inside the camp are more familiar with this changing cultural practices than with the traditional Karen culture, but even that, it does not mean that the new generation are less “Karen” than their parents and relative. The emerge of new characteristics of Karen culture is well understood and accepted by all, but at the same time ,intensify the need to preserve some Karen culture that can be saved and make them alive within the camp that the Karen can be proud of their ancestors’ culture and identities.

In this respect, some recommendations about the culture preservation may be useful. The first recommendation is for the education institute, schools and teacher. As one looks into Karen curriculum used in Mae La camp one will find that, there is less subjects and content on Karen culture. In this respect, those who develop curricular can find more spaces for Karen culture to be studied and appreciated. Text books, and other visual aids, such as CVD, VRC should be produced and displayed in classes and stored in library. Apart from that, teachers should co-operate with the “learned men and women” in the camp or outside, those who are keen on Karen culture and performing arts. These people should be invited into classrooms and schools to train the children on the subjects that they are keen of.

As for teenagers, the young generation are full with energy, they should be encouraged to find their own talents either in music, dances, songs or handy-crafts and be trained to be excellent in each arts and with co-operation with the camp leaders, teachers and Thai authorities should provide opportunities for these young artists to show their talents to Karen’s publics as well as Thai public. Apart from this, the products of Karen handy-crafts should be promoted among Thai society. When the products, they produced can be sold and returned financially, they will have more inspiration to produce more, and if with the help of NGO workers and Thai authorities, the products of longyi, Karen blouses and bags can be sold country wide, the willingness to be investigate into Karen authentic-crafts would be encouraged automatically.

The second recommendation is for Thai authorities working in the camp as well as those who deal with the Karen displaced persons from fighting in Mae La camp. The Karen in the camp are the victims of political oppression in Myanmar, the things that keep them alive and looking forward into future is their culture and identity,

thus these two things are needed to be kept vital. The only thing that Thai authorities can do is to permit them to practice their own culture within the camp and if some want to be part of the process, be appreciate what the Karen perform. Do not look down or say bad things toward the Karen culture, help them to be sure and proud of their culture.

The third recommendation is for Thai public in general. Thailand is luckily to attack many nationalities and ethnic groups, thus, we can appreciate a variety of cultures and arts. Karen culture, by all means, is another one offered to us, so what we can do is to welcomed them and appreciated their culture. The Thai are open minded and “Jae-Kwang” (big heart), we should not close our mind and our heart to appreciate the culture and arts that the Karen offers to us.

As a matter of fact, this latest recommendation, should not be emphasized much, since we can all see that every one who visit Mae La camp, always come back with a few “Yam” (cloth bag)as souvenir The Karen handy-craft already have a place in Thai’s heart.



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