

Thesis Title	Reconstructing the Meaning of Community in Rice Donating Rituals in Culture Community Development Context in Phayao Province	
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Abstract

This thesis is an anthropological study of the process of reconstructing the meaning of community of villagers. It explores the reconstructing the meaning of community by various groups in community. It also study the reconstructing the meaning by NGO's workers in the cultural community approach. It study different conditions whereby different meanings are reconstructed through rice donating rituals. The theoretical framework is shaped by two main concepts. The first concept is the meaning of rituals in development and the second concept focuses on the relationship between sacred power, merit and social justice.

In confronting with capitalism which steps into the community in the form of development which resulted in the loss of people's control and management of their resources, whereby decision-makings were made more and more from the outside, there were initiatives of the community leaders and people in community to solve problems of insufficient rice consumption which later extended into the construction of revolving funds to solve community's other problems and extended into the network building through rice donating rituals supported by the NGO. This was an endeavor of the reconstructing of community to express people's power or identity. Thus, the reconstructing of community is a process of relationship rearrangement to search for

alternative development which enables people to make their own decisions. NGO's participation in rice donating rituals opened a forum or public space in which expression of identity and reconstructing of new values through dialogues and disputes over diversified meaning of "community" could be made.

The study contends that in the midst of unequal relations in social realities, all groups regarded the same meaning of rice donating rituals as mutual help, but each group interpreted different meanings according to its own benefits which reflected conflicts within community. The poor expressed that the rituals promoted mutual help in community whereas in the past there was no help. The rituals could be interpreted as the demand of the poor for social help within the context of inequality between the poor and the rich, and within the context where the temple could not function as a center for distribution of wealth as in the past. The poor demanded for the rich to make merit and demanded for solidarity within community.

The rich and the middle class regarded the rituals as mutual help but under the meaning of reciprocity. By claiming for a just society and mutual assistance, the rich and the middle class could also make access to and take benefits from the rituals' funds. The claim for help from outside NGO was also beneficial to the rich.

The community leaders perceived the meaning of rituals as strengthening the construction of just society and mutual help and they related this with the concepts of sacred power, merit and social justice. The development workers were in agreement with the community leaders but they paid more emphasis to network building to enlarge the scope of in-between communities' assistance.

Despite the fact that diverse meanings were expressed, each group shared the same objective. The first meaning as interpreted by community leaders and development workers, emphasized equality and mutual help as "ideal". The second meaning interpreted by general villagers, focused on social obligations and beneficial reciprocity. The reconstructing of meaning of rice donating rituals could be quite flexible and could be seen in the reconstructing of meaning of merits by the housewives group. The housewives group set up a separate revolving fund from rice donating fund in response of more needs for cash at present times. The disputes occurred when the fund was brought out for loan within group members. The community leaders argued

that "merit money" could not be used in wrong ways, if so, it would bring a "sin". The housewives, on the other hand, argued that the revolving fund was already separated from the rice donating fund, therefore, the money was "not merit money (anymore), (the lending of money was therefore) not sin". This phenomenon shows that the reconstructing of meaning can be flexible and can be reversible to suit the contenders' claims.

While rice and money can be seen as materials for use to respond to individual needs in capitalism, the development work in cultural community approach, through the process of renewal of rice donating rituals, helped change the meaning of rice and money from individual property into public or common use for the whole community. This reflects how society has been bounded within the market and the state and is changing rapidly from subsistence economy to commercial economy. Within the rapid trend of monetary development where money has an increasing role as a factor of exchange, there has been a counter trend halting for a pause to think of an old morality in mutual help. Villagers and development workers become more aware that within current development trend a community can not stand alone and it needs network building of mutual assistance of in-between communities. Development process needs expansion in the form of network building.