

**Thesis Title :** Sustainable Land Management: A Case Study of the Karen's Shifting Cultivation in Chiang Mai Province

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### **Abstract**

The study on sustainable land management: a case study of Karen's shifting cultivation in Chiang Mai province using sociological and anthropological approach examined the state conservation policies that affected an access to lands for rotational cultivation system. The Karen practiced dynamic land management under various pressures with the guidance of three concepts, i.e., 1) sustainable development concept; 2) property rights concept; and 3) dynamic rotational cultivation concept.

The findings revealed that the on going incorporation of the peripheral communities to the central state control and market system resulted on the multi-level conflicts over access to and control of territory. The important issue has been the conflict between the state and local community. Local communities claimed their access to and control of natural resources on the basis of traditional system of usufruct rights. Meanwhile the state claimed its legitimate rights through state property system and conservation policies. Moreover, the penetration of market system into the communities forced the villagers to adjust to changes. It was found that the Karen managed to adapt in 3 patterns.

The first is the dependent and unsustainable shifting cultivation system. This pattern is unable to assure livelihood security of the villagers even though the villagers

took a great effort to manage it properly. For instance, they tried to divide the land into the small plots for rotation to maintain the suitable fallow period but the yield is still decreased to the level that is not enough for consumption. Meanwhile some villagers opted to remain cultivating in the same plot of land as the way the sedentary farmers did by relying on the means of production such as commercial fertilizer. However, they in turn had to depend more on the outside market and unsustainable cultivation system.

The second is the transitional and unsustainable system. This system is still not sufficient enough for the livelihood security of the villagers. Nevertheless, the villagers who employed this pattern struggled to adjust to the changing conditions by exploring alternative cultivation system that is dynamic and potential to be in transition to sustainable system in the future. This system, however, is still at infancy stage and unstable. It still depended on purchasing means of production, outside market, and additional wage labour.

The third is an alternative and sustainable system. This system is capable of adjusting to the alternative of mixed system of cultivation. That is to combine a sustainable rotational cultivation system and permanent commercialized agriculture and agro-forestry, by keeping fruit trees and other trees in the cultivated lands in the same way as the second pattern. This system is more sustainable because there are a large amount of land areas for long fallow period of rotation. It is proved to be stable and sufficient.

The study also showed two common characteristics shared by the above three patterns of cultivation. First, the villagers tended to practice intensive cultivation and agro-forestry in order to hold the land for ownership rights. Second, the villagers maintained their usufruct rights over the fallow lands. These two land holdings manifested that the villagers tried to integrate the complex land holding. This mixed system would help the villagers to keep their cultivating system alive through the pressing condition from outside. Because this mentioned system enable the villagers to combine the private property with the common property. It provided the opportunity for the villagers under stress to adapt and help reduce the conflict within the communities.

Under the constant pressure from conservation policies of the Royal Forestry Department, the villagers realized that it was necessary to maintain the communal lands for adaptation. They at the same time called for state to guarantee their private property

on the cultivated lands as well as the communal rights on community forest. The integration of these two systems to co-exist as the complex system on the basis of common property resource management would assure the capability of the communities to have alternatives for adaptation and maintain the dynamic of rotational cultivation system. The community forest can facilitate the sustainable rotational cultivation for the whole communities.