

Social and Cultural Existence and Change of Paka-Kyaw Ethnic Groups in Kamphaeng Phet Province

Nutarada Wongnaya

Graduate School, Kamphaeng Phet Rajabhat University, Aumphur Muang
Kamphaeng Phet Province, Thailand
nutrada2346@gmail.com

Keywords: existence and change, society and culture, Paka-Kyaw, ethnic groups, Kamphaeng Phet province

Abstract. A Scope of this study consists of Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups inhabiting in Petjakor community and Wung Krasang community. The rationale of the study is because the villagers remain their traditional way of life by relying on and utilizing the forest resources together with maintaining their original cultures, language, beliefs, and local wisdom. The research found that the society of Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups is kinship with no class discrimination, but it is prioritized with senior respect. They have self-sufficiency, simple living, and community sharing. They use the forest space with respect to rituals and beliefs for the sacred things in the forest. In the cultural way, although they have Buddhist beliefs, their spiritual beliefs and practices are still inherited continually. For their dress, it is currently mixed and matched traditional costumes with modern costumes. Married women do weaving for their family members. Regarding their language, they have their own spoken and written language, called "Riva", that is currently almost extinct. They do not use it outside their villages since they feel inferior and irrespective from Thais. For their food, they have three meals a day, and most of them buy rice and meat from the nearby markets, but they can have vegetables from the forest near their villages. They also apply their local wisdom for health and medical cares.

1. Introduction

Thailand is one of ASEAN members. It consists of multi-national, multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic populations. The society in Thailand is characterized by a variety of populations in each region: North, Central Region, Northeast, and South. Local people in each region have their unique languages, cultures, and traditions. In addition, Thailand contains several ethnic groups and subgroups that migrate from Southern China. There have been the migratory communities in the high mountain ranges of Northern Thailand for hundred years. This is because the geographic conditions are similar to their native places. Mountains, forest ecosystem, and rich natural resources are appropriate for community development. Example groups of migratory communities are Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Lisu, Akha, Karen Kachin, Mlabri (Phi Tong Luang or yellow leaf), etc. They remain their identity and diversity of languages, cultures, traditions, beliefs, rituals, and costumes, as well as knowledge and wisdom counted from their ancestors for hundreds of years until the present.

Sgaw Karen or Paka-Kyaw is the most populous ethnic group of Karen. They have their own language, rituals, culture, language, as well as hundreds of tales, myths, and histories. However, most of the tales, myths, and histories have been unrecorded in written form, they have been told from generations to generations. Paka-Kyaw is the ethnic group that is renowned for their production system and life styles, with a sustainable reliance on natural resources. They are likely to settle down at bottom basin areas surrounded by rolling hills near water sources. However, they are unlikely to settle down on high mountains, or build their houses on ridges, and dislike bamboo gutter systems into the villages. Nevertheless, they like to make their houses in the areas of mixed deciduous forests, bamboo forests, and dry deciduous dipterocarp forests. Their settlements and production systems are consistent with the surrounding forests and ecosystem [1].

For the Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet Province, they are the large ethnic groups. Their community areas are in the adjacent forests in the national parks: Wang Chao National

Park and Khlong Lan National Park. For earning a living, they are employed by other people in the villages or surrounding communities. Their life styles have been changed due to the influence of the government development policy that aims to elevate the quality of life and well-being by creating jobs for people in the economic self-reliant communities to increase their income for the modern appliance purchase. They possess the cultures of consumerism and objectivism through the influence of television media, the internet, social media, and values for distinguish social class and socioeconomic status. Paka-Kyaw people adapt themselves for economic, social, and cultural changes that affect their traditional, social, and cultural strengths in the communities. From the simple life to the urban life, they mainly rely on the development of objectivism including costumes, food, and living, but lack of communication with their local language. For these reasons, the researcher is interested in studying the existence and change of society and culture of Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet Province.

2. Research Methodology

The researcher applied ethnography research in the study. The informants included village leaders, Paka-Kyaw group leaders, local knowers, linguistic experts, weaving experts, traditional ceremony leaders, local medical doctors, women, youths, elderly people, and surrounding people. Data collection methods in the research were in-depth interviews, observations, and field notes. The observations dealt with life styles and living, traditions, cultures, and surrounding contexts. Content analysis was used to analyze the data together with triangulation techniques for data validation and with focus group discussion in the community for the information accuracy.

3. Results and Discussion

The research found that the society pattern of Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet Province is multicultural. There is a blend between traditional culture and Thai culture in order to get accepted by Thais. It is clearly seen that the spoken language is changed. Paka-Kyaw people communicate with two languages, that is, they use Paka-Kyaw language in the community, and they use Thai outside the community. They also dress in with modern styles in their daily lives, and Paka-Kyaw married women do weaving from backstrap looms for their family members. Every Paka-Kyaw person has their handmade shoulder bags represented as the symbol of their ethnic groups. In addition, their food and household appliances in daily lives are similar to Thais, but they still rely on food and some kinds of herbs from the forest. Regarding the religions and beliefs, they hold Buddhism together with the spiritual beliefs and practices. They have similar beliefs like Buddhists to the terms of “sins”, “to do good and to ignore evil”, and merit-making ceremony on Buddhist religious days. Similar to Thai funerals, they organize the funerals by burning the dead in temples, but in the past they buried the dead in tombs. Furthermore, they have the value that sons repay their parents, and especially their mothers, by ordaining as monks. There are some strict religious beliefs and practices - the ceremony of spirit worship. Each year, all family members must attend the ceremony to pray to spirits. In the ceremony, Paka-Kyaw women are the leaders running the ceremony of spirit worship at the night time, particularly for ancestor spirits and household spirits, in order to pray them bless their family members for safety, happiness, and health daily. Also, Paka-Kyaw people’s life styles depend on the forest that is like their lives and souls. Every time when they do not work, they will go to the forest to collect vegetables, fruits, and herbs for food and medicine. They have a great deal of respect to the forest and the use of forest resources. They believe in guardian spirits of the forest. Therefore, every time before going to the forest, they will pay respect to guardian spirits for asking their permission and protection. If anyone does anything that shows no respect to the forest or against the beliefs, such as deforestation and wild animal killing, they will be punished, that possibly causes sickness and death. This is consistent with [2]. She stated that the image of “Paka-Kyaw” ethnic groups is environment-friendly people. They are

widely accepted from the society. This is because of many reasons. The first reason deals with their beliefs and practices of rituals that reflect their respects to the nature including their capability in water resource reservation. According to the research of Winai Banlue, he found that almost two decades there is a body of knowledge regarding Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups, gathered from academic papers, articles, journals, and documents of Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups' local wisdom, that are publicized by Private Development Organization. The documents are used to support the political movement for their identity, and mass media displays them as "natural protectors" and "forest friends."



Fig. 1. Paka-Kyaw women do weaving from backstrap looms

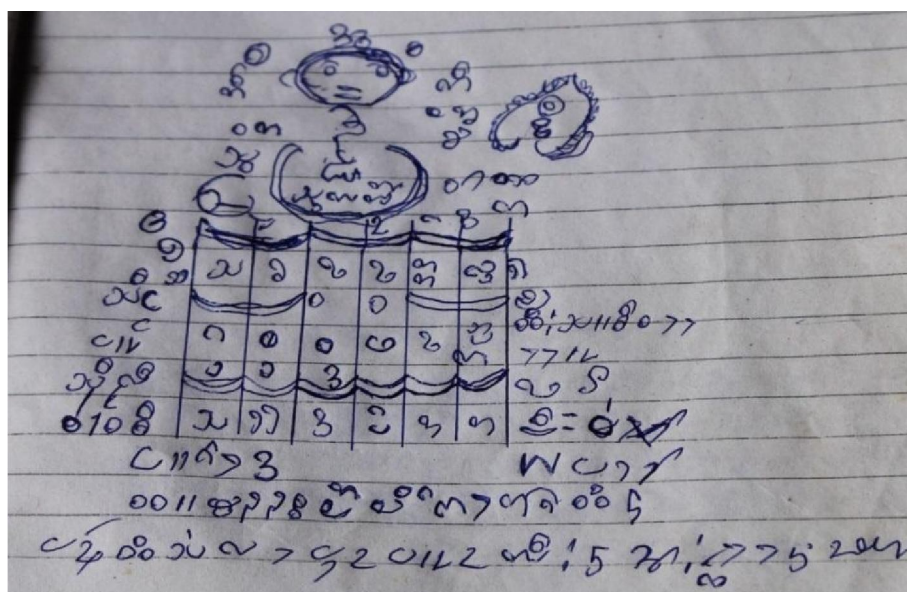


Fig. 2. Fortune note written in Paka-Kyaw language, "Riva"

4. Conclusion

Even though the public may see and think that Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups have self-adaptation to social, economic, and cultural changes by blending their traditional cultures with modern cultures more. Paka-Kyaw's life styles are similar to Thais, such as costumes, communication skill with Thai language, household appliances in daily lives, and religious ceremonies. However, from the in-depth study, it is found that they still restore their identity in terms of language, cultures, and beliefs in spirits and the sacred things. Of Paka-Kyaw population, there are only a few families marrying Thais. Paka-Kyaw ethnic groups have their own value to get married within their ethnic groups for their race existence. Regarding the life styles, they have different life styles to Thais; that is, Paka-Kyaw are the people known for their love of peace, tranquility, solitude, senior respect, and no class discrimination. Their houses are mostly built of bamboo. They communicate with their own language. They use their own hand-made costumes. They store their plant seeds for cultivating in the next rainy season. Moreover, their life styles are mainly related to the forest as the main living necessity. Both Paka-Kyaw men and women still have forest foods and herbs for their families with believing in the guardian spirits of the forest. Therefore, they will use the forest resources with respect and sufficiency. Their cultures and beliefs lead to their renown of forest guardians who live their lives with their own life styles, cultures, and beliefs together with continuing their racial and ethnic identity from generations to generations.



.Fig 3. Paka-Kyaw's traditional and modern costumes

Acknowledgements

Thank you to village leaders, Paka-Kyaw group leaders, local knowers, linguistic experts, weaving experts, traditional ceremony leaders, local medical doctors, women, youths, elderly people, and every people in Wung Krasang community. They are the volunteer participants in the in-depth interviews regarding the information of their society, rituals, and cultures. In addition, they also took care of the researcher throughout the study. Special appreciation also goes to patriarch Vachee Thaipool who is the prayerfully and respectfully spiritual leader of Paka-Kyaw community. He sparked the idea and inspiration and gave advice and consultation to the researcher. This makes the study well completed.

References

- [1] Y.Santasombat. "Biodiversity and local wisdom to sustainable development" 2nd edition, Nonthaburi Publishing, Chiang Mai, 2001, p.33.
- [2] K. Buadaeng. "Karen : Diversity of life from mountain to city" Ming Muang , Chiang Mai, 2006, pp.8-11.