

The Emergence of a Nature Conservation Ritual: Local Negotiations with Environmentalism in Northern Thailand

Nishida Masayuki

Introduction

Increasing political and economic interaction between rural and urban areas in northern Thai society has begun to create opportunities for local village communities to become involved in state forest conservation policy-making. However, it has also led to northern Thai people being involved in a considerable number of conflicts regarding the claiming of land rights, the distribution of natural resources and citizenship issues of residents in forests all over northern Thailand.¹⁾ To solve these problems, participatory forest management, which is the topic of this paper, has been discussed as a promising alternative method for achieving appropriate management in harmony with all stakeholders. Participatory forest management is a forestry framework that allows village communities to participate in sharing benefits from the forest, making decisions about the forest, and joining in forest management activities.²⁾ In Thailand, the term for forest management is generally translated as community forestry. The Thai state has stepped forward in involving local communities in state forest management by stipulating community rights in conserving natural resources under state law in the 1997 Thai Constitution.³⁾ Furthermore, the government established the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment in 2002 as a public institution to transform the state's business-oriented forest management to an environmental-conservation-oriented management with local communities. Along with these paradigm changes in Thai forestry, political power relationships on forest management are also gradually shifting from confrontation to negotiation among stakeholders.

With the increasing enthusiasm of the environmental movement for local communities' involvement in forest management, Thai local communities and NGOs are seeking legitimacy for their natural management using their own local knowledge or *phumpanya* to negotiate their interests in the forest with the centralised forest management by the state. Local knowledge originally meant just a set of practical information accumulated over generations in a specific area. This knowledge includes local agricultural techniques, the knowledge of edible or medicinal plants, the religious skills of rituals and knowledge of local social systems. However, NGOs and local communities have used local knowledge of forest management as an argument to support their claims for the superiority of local people's natural resource management over that of the state.⁴⁾ The superior nature of local knowledge was claimed as a solution to the failure of large state projects, which caused ecological

destruction and damage to local community. Local knowledge supporters compared the shortcomings of the state's use of simplified scientific knowledge with the complex and detailed knowledge of local people. They sought for a holistic approach with detailed knowledge from the local community for keeping a fragile system of local resource management.⁵⁾ The argument has been used by local knowledge promoters and local villagers since the 1980s, and has gradually resulted in the state's recognition of the legitimacy of local participation as an alternative form of management.

This thesis examines how to utilise religion in the nature conservation movement surrounding the village and how to transform local rituals for the social negotiation of using nature conservation. Responding to Thai society's acceptance of nature conservation rituals, villager leaders flexibly reorganised their local knowledge of the sacred spirit forest to symbolise the whole village's nature conservation consciousness in social negotiations between villagers and state agencies. By using these symbols of localised environmentalism, community villagers demonstrated the uniqueness of their nature conservation consciousness, their ability to conserve the forest and their loyalty to state policy, thereby strengthening the alliance between the outside powers and villagers.

Background

In the village of Ban Mae Luang, an 0.88 hectare sacred spirit forest was transformed into a showcase for a well-managed forest in 2002.⁶⁾ The forest was reorganised by village leaders from a customary taboo forest to an experimental community forest to demonstrate their unique forest management using local knowledge. With the state agency's approval, the spirit forest became a communal symbol of nature conservation and loyalty to the state forestry policy. This study took advantage of participant observation and interviewing in Thai lowland villages in Northern Thailand. Participant observation was carried out for a year and two months from May 2007 to June 2008. The research site, Ban Mae Luang village, is located in Saeng Thong District in Chiang Mai Province (Figure 1). The Ban Mae Luang villagers mainly cultivate glutinous rice and cash crops such as maize and peanuts, at the foot of the mountains, and work at farms or construction sites in neighbouring villages as wage labourers. Ban Mae Luang is an administrative village, which had 1,103 inhabitants and 302 households in 2007.⁷⁾ The village is roughly composed of two hamlets. At the centre of the Mae Luang River Basin, there is a large hamlet called Ban Mae Luang. The main part of the population is located here. On the south-eastern side of the village, there is a smaller hamlet called Ban Mahoi, which has 133 inhabitants. A few decades ago, these hamlets were administratively separate. The hamlets have some independence from each other, for example, they have close networks of agricultural practice, kinship groups or festival coordinating groups. They are nowadays integrated into a single village.

Forest management in Ban Mae Luang has been undertaken by the Watershed Management Unit (WMU) and the village council in an integrated framework of forest management. The increasing scarcity of forest land in northern Thailand, including Ban Mae Luang, has resulted in numerous conflicts between this way of im-

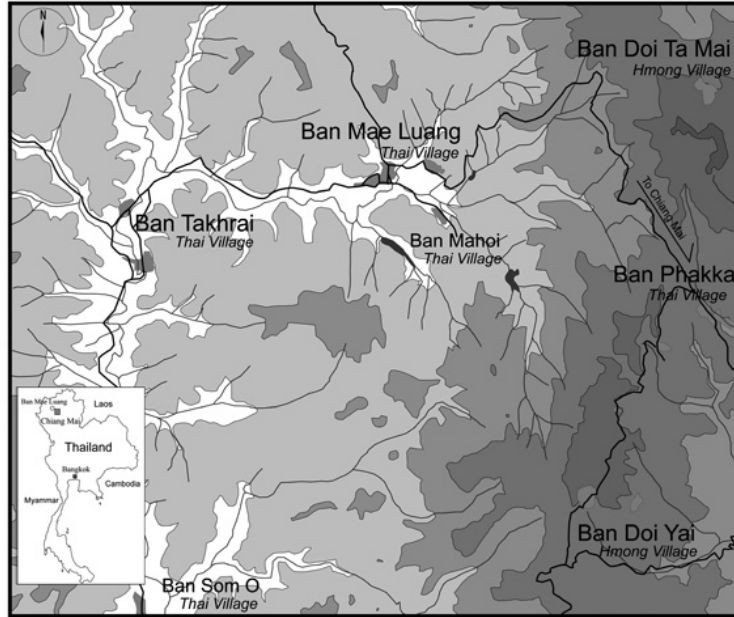


Figure 1: Map of Ban Mae Luang

proving villagers' livelihood and the state's resource management in the past few decades. In Ban Mae Luang during 2007–2008, however, forest management did not face an urgent problem of deforestation. Rather, village leaders and the WMU, a state agency in charge of the Ban Mae Luang forest, shared recognition of the recent recovery of watershed forest as a result of their efforts in participatory forestry.

This new phase of forest management in Ban Mae Luang is now leading to the relaxation of the conflict between the state agency and villagers, because it stresses the importance of mutual cooperation between the village and the state agency for natural conservation. Problems such as commercial logging or bushfires are regarded as manageable as long as mutual agreement to respect forest policy is kept between them. In this situation, forest management has become more negotiable among state agencies, village leaders, ordinary villagers and other stakeholders with various backgrounds. All have joined in forest conservation through participatory forestry to achieve different purposes at various levels.

Domestication and Forest Wilderness

The Ban Mae Luang sacred spirit forest is located in the west of the village and sustains lowland evergreen vegetation with rich biodiversity containing various gigantic trees, shrubs, birds, snakes and insects in just an 0.88 hectare area. It also includes religious facilities at a clearing at the east edge of the forest. There are eight shrines to village guardian spirits. Villagers call the forest *dong kam*. The term *dong* means “place” or “forest.” The word *kam* does not have any fixed definitions among villagers, but some believe that *kam* was taken from *kammaphan* (reincarnation) or *kam* (karma). From this term, it could be thought that the forest is located between the living world and the dead world of spirits, *mueang phi*.⁸⁾ The forest has been cus-

tomarily not touched by exploitation.

Kham (64), a grandmother of my host family, sometimes worried about my frequent research on the spirit forest, the largest forest land conserved because of spirit beliefs. She would ask me about spirits in the forest: "Aren't you scared of the spirit forest? How about spirits? I am scared of them." Ban Mae Luang villagers usually avoid going into the spirit forest. Except for festival days or certain events, the spirit forest is not a part of their daily activities. Bunmi, a middle-aged female villager, explained that "no children play in the spirit forest. Adult villagers also keep away from the forest because they are afraid of passing through the dark forest." Most villagers believe that this forest has village spirits that reside in it and they will curse anyone who cuts large trees in the forest, with incurable sickness and misfortune. Most villagers both young and old half believe in the spirits and that it would be terrible if hasty behaviour did insult the spirits and cause terrible misfortune, so it is safer to keep away from them.

A few villagers expressed their doubts about spirit beliefs, such as one man who claimed, "I do not believe in spirits because I am Buddhist." Nevertheless, he did not dare vandalise the spirit forest. His opinion, however, is rare in the village. Tan (67) said, "I cannot cut down a tree in the forest. Maybe we can cut it, and no problem, maybe nothing happens. But I just keep it because our ancestor kept it safe from cutting and it is waterhead forest we should keep." Tan's reasons for keeping the forest can be attributed to both ancestral behaviour and environmental conservation. Thus, the avoidance of cutting down trees in the spirit forest seem to come from not only nature conservation thought from outside the village, but also the religious beliefs and social demands of the local villagers.

There are several discussions about the relationship between forest and village in the Thai cognitive map in existing literature. In the spatial order in village rituals, local villagers conceptualise the relationship between the village and the forest as being in a competing balance between the centralised civilisation power in the village and the fierce power of nature in the peripheral forest. Michael R. Rhum, an anthropologist who studied religious concepts of space in a northern Thai village in the late 1980s, illustrated the centrally oriented structure of the village polity in this spatial order. From the aspect of the binary social concepts of culture/nature and centre/periphery, he argued that northern Thai lowlanders basically regarded the village as a centre of civilisation with order and values superior to the peripheral forest with its disorder and wildness.⁹⁾ Rhum interpreted the northern Thai spatial concept of internality and externality: the centrality of the Thai village is holistically conceptualised by the sacred powers mixing various religious elements like the Buddha, *thewada* (celestial beings) and guardian spirits; on the other hand, externality is conceptualised as malevolent spirits with the embedded characteristics of disorder and wildness.

Ban Mae Luang village as well as being a centre of civilisation and social order is also the geographical centre of the basin of the Mae Luang River. Both Buddhism and the worship of guardian spirits indicate the spatial concept of village centrality. Northern Thai Buddhist villages usually have one prime temple, called the head temple or *hua wat*, which is the highest point of centrality within the village commu-



Figure 2: The *Song Kho* Ritual

nity.¹⁰ Most of the collective activities, such as annual Buddhist rituals or village meetings, are held in the village temple. Similarly, village or house guardian spirits are also believed to protect the villagers at various levels including the whole village, hamlets, kinship groups or individuals. At village level, there is a village guardian spirit called *phi suea ban* or *chao pho*, which is a benevolent spirit who protects the village and villagers from misfortune, epidemic or enemy attack from outside the village. Villagers gather annually to worship at the village spirit shrine on certain days around the Thai New Year, at a day in the northern Thai fourth and ninth month and at the beginning and end of the Buddhist Lent. Villagers ask guardian spirits to protect the peace and prosperity of the village from evil spirits, bad luck or diseases from outside the village.¹¹ The Buddha and the village guardian spirits and ancestral spirits help to maintain the moral centre of the communal order. Bad illness, misfortune and hurt are sometimes interpreted as the result of being impious to the Buddha or the spirits, so those who have inauspicious events tend to go to the temple for merit making to seek forgiveness or perform a spirit belief to expel misfortune.

The local beliefs in the village illustrate that the forest was generally conceptualised as a place of danger and wildness, so they had to protect their lives in the village by utilising rituals. The order and civilisation in the village had been constantly threatened by the strong disorder and wildness of the forest. To repel any disturbance from forest wildness, the boundary between the forest and the village is symbolically demarcated by village rituals. For example, Ban Mae Luang villagers annually practise a ritual to expel bad luck from the village, called *song kho ban* on one day of the Thai new year (Figure 2).¹² *Song kho* means “expelling adversity.”¹³

The ritual in 2008 was performed as usual by a male officiant who was an ex-monk called *nan*. At first, the officiant propitiated the celestial guardian spirits called the four direction guardians.¹⁴ Then, he invited villagers to symbolically



Figure 3: A Monk's Purification after the *Song Kho* Ritual

transfer evil, impurity, illness or misfortune to bamboo baskets by washing their hair on the baskets with lustral *sompoi* water.¹⁵⁾ In the basket, there are sweets, dolls or some offerings to the spirits so that they are appeased and evil spirits are expelled. After this, the village monks recited Buddhist sutras (Figure 3). While the monks were reciting, all the villagers held a long white cotton string connected with a Buddha statue and the monks to purify the area inside the village by channelling the Buddha's sacred power. After the ritual, some villagers took the baskets to the boundary of Ban Mae Luang village by pickup trucks and motorcycles. The four baskets were dropped on the roads at the edge of the village in the four directions of the village, which are beside the crematorium, the garbage dumping site or the gates of the village. Thus, villagers delineate the boundary between the village and the forest (Figure 4). Evil and bad luck are chased away to the periphery of the village.¹⁶⁾

The sacred spirit forest and rituals have become a controversial topic in this binary relationship of the village and forest because the spirit forest is both a religious centre and a local forest for the villagers. This forest may not be categorised as a peripheral forest in the villagers' cognitive map because the protection of the sacred forest is strongly connected with peace and prosperity in the central village.¹⁷⁾ Some scholars argue that the spirit forest should be thought of as a domesticated space that has been divided from the undomesticated forest by the villagers.¹⁸⁾ Rhum categorised these kinds of sacred spirit forests as the "inner periphery" in northern Thai village cosmology.¹⁹⁾ The spirit forest implies symbolic competition and negotiation between the forest and the village community at the time of the establishment of a village.

Yukio Hayashi notes a process of domestication of forest spirits from interviews with villagers in northeast Thailand.²⁰⁾ Their spirit forest is called *dong puta*, which literally means an ancestral forest. When the first settlers of the village came to the

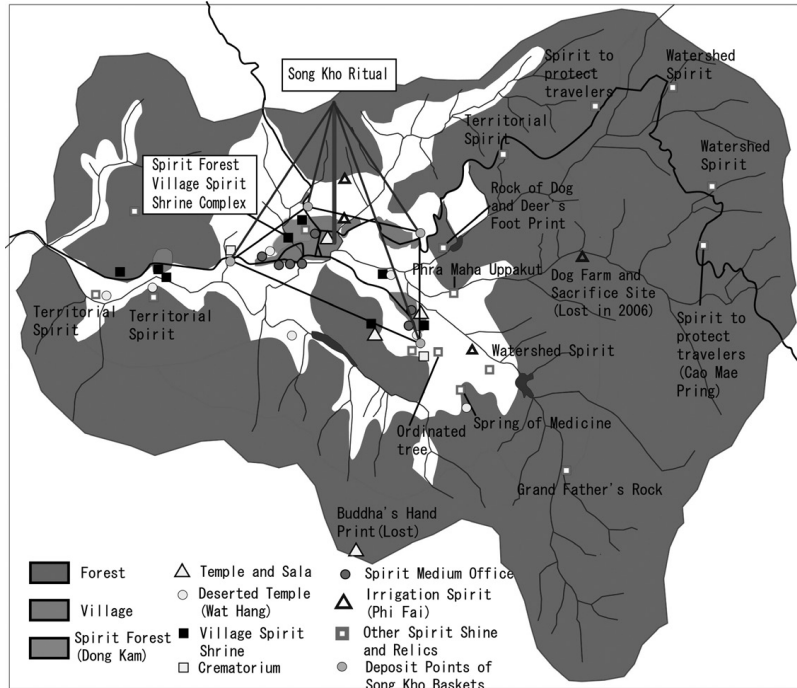


Figure 4: Locations of Sacred Relics and Religious Centres

forest, they had to struggle with the evil spirits who were living there. After discussion, the settlers and the forest spirits agreed on a compromise to divide their residences with each other. The settlers promised that they would build a spirit shrine with a small forest around it before clearing the forest to establish their village. Thus, through worshipping the spirits in the forest, their evil, wild power were domesticated by the village to become benevolent guardian spirits for the village community.

This connection between the village and the spirit forest can also be seen in the system of rituals in the Ban Mae Luang spirit forest. The forest has an institutionalised shrine system whose spirit shrines are thought to be associated with several hamlets. Map 3 illustrates the design of this shrine complex. The forest has a pantheon of village guardian spirits, which imitates the old feudal system of the Lan Na Kingdom. Most villages in Saeng Thong district have only one or two village guardian spirits, but some villages have this kind of institutionalised village guardian spirit system.²¹⁾ The largest, Shrine 3, is that of *chao pho khwaen*, who is regarded as having paramount power over all the other village spirits.²²⁾ *Khwaen* refers to the title of the sub-district head in the Lan Na administration system.²³⁾ All other village spirits are regarded as vassals of *chao pho khwaen* and are related to each hamlet in the village.

Shrine 1 is the shrine of the village spirit of Ban Mahoi. The Ban Mahoi also has an annex shrine outside the spirit forest.²⁴⁾ Shrines 2, 3, 4 and 6 do not clearly represent their hamlets any more because the expansion of the Ban Mae Luang main hamlet has integrated these old hamlets. Shrines 7 and 8 still represent the northern

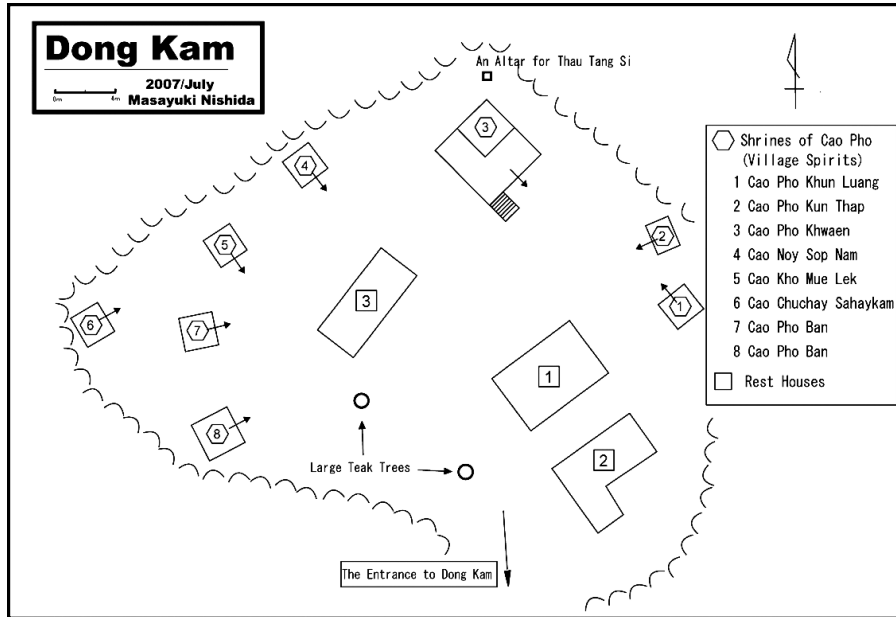


Figure 5: Location of Village Spirit Shrines in the Spirit Forest (*dong kam*)

hamlet and the southern hamlet, which have also nearly been integrated with Ban Mae Luang now. Shrine 5 is for *chao pho kho mue lek*, who was a legendary warrior worshipped by people around Chiang Mai.²⁵⁾ He is an attendant of the *chao pho khwaen*.

The village guardian spirits receive offerings by male priests of their hamlets as taxes in exchange for their protection of the hamlets and the village.²⁶⁾ Thus, the symbolic association between spirits and hamlets makes the sacred forest a symbol of the unity and prosperity of the village. Twice a year, villagers gather in the spirit forest to make offerings to their village spirits (Figure 6), then they invite a medium for possession ritual in the forest (Figure 7). Therefore, insults against spirits in the spirit forest or the forest itself are interpreted as a challenge to the village community. People who insult the forest are expected to suffer punishment, such as a pain or fever that does not heal or, at worst, death by the village spirits. For example, in the spring of 2008, the dead body of a villager was found hanging from a tree in the spirit forest. Ban Mae Luang villagers gossiped that the village spirits probably ate him because the person was a bad drinker who bothered both villagers and village spirits. The sacred forest was domesticated to play the functional role of protecting order in the village.

This development of ritual and beliefs in the spirit forest seems to be special in other spirit beliefs. Recent deterioration in natural resources and increasing interaction with modern urban society are gradually transforming the relationship between the village and the forest. This transition can be observed from the narratives of the Ban Mae Luang villagers. Villagers often talked about the fact that beliefs in the undomesticated forest spirits have faded away in the village due to social change in the village. As discussed before, Northern Thais believe that the forest is the residence



Figure 6: Villagers Making Offerings to the Spirit Forest

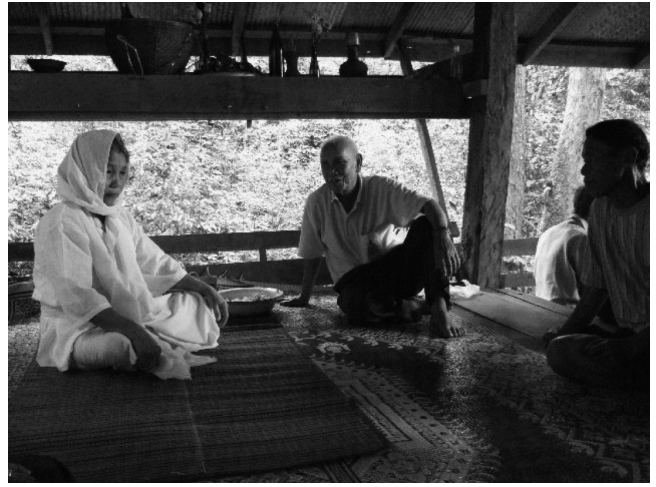


Figure 7: Conversation between Female Medium (*khon song*) and Male Priest (*khon tang khao*)

of dangerous spirits. They were called *phi pa* or *phi sat*.²⁷⁾ *Phi pa* or *phi sat*, which literally means forest spirits or animal spirits, but to most people it means miscellaneous malevolent spirits in the forest. According to the some villagers' narratives, the deterioration of the spirit belief has been explained as follows: "the unfamiliar flashes and noises frightened the forest spirits, which favour darkness and silence, and chased them away to the inner forest" or "following the expansion of the village, the forest in which the forest spirits lived was cut down to build houses or to be sold."

Following the changes of modernisation and deforestation, spirit beliefs have become the symbol of backwardness. The local techniques of propitiating, expelling and domesticating the spirits or making merit in the sacred forest are being suppressed by the strong power of modernisation. Several deserted temples and surrounding forest have been protected by spirit beliefs in Ban Mae Luang. Ban Mae Luang villagers believe that a harsh spirit called *phi ka yak* protected the ruin of the old temple and its forest similarly to the spirit forest.²⁸⁾ However, farming now threatens the area around the deserted temples. Two of the sites have been already transformed into upland fields or residential areas. One spirit medium in the village stated that "deserted temples are protected by *phi ka yak*. But people can cut trees with a chainsaw in a flash. There is no time for the spirit to stop them cutting."

Despite the existence of the spirit forest, local beliefs have shown that undomesticated wild spirits are gradually being marginalised in their role of protecting the forest. The deterioration of wild forest spirit stories may reflect the flexible will of the local community where the question of protection or not depends on the circumstances surrounding the forest.

The Origin of the Forest Conservation Ritual

The role of religion in mediating between the forest and Ban Mae Luang villagers' livelihoods is gradually being replaced by scientific knowledge and modern thought. This general conclusion leads to the following questions: if the spirit beliefs in the forest are weakened in the Ban Mae Luang village, why do the villagers still continue to mention the spirit forest in the relationship between forest conservation and spirit beliefs and practise spirit forest conservation? What makes the spirit forest special to villagers? To answer the questions, it is necessary to consider the trend of environmental politics and religion in Thailand.

Since modern environmentalism initially came into northern Thailand during the 1980s, the marginalised local religion was revived as a symbol of localism and coexistence between the villager and the forest. Nature conservation rituals, rituals for promoting environmental conservation or to demonstrate conservation consciousness to the public, were newly invented and developed in an interaction between NGOs, villagers and the state agencies. The rituals emerged from the Buddhist monk's renovation movement using social work by involving local religions or modifying the interpretation of their Buddhist doctrine to solve social problems.

Nonetheless, in this decade, local communities, NGOs and academics have proposed and gradually implemented the utilization of local knowledge as an alternative to state forest management, allowing local communities to manage nature conservation themselves.²⁹⁾ Tim Forsyth and Andrew Walker pointed out that local knowledge is embedded within the political values of traditionalism, community and local democracy in the Thai environmental movement.³⁰⁾ Scholars explored local livelihood customs and rituals, and (re)discovered the local knowledge used by villages to empower the role of local communities in natural conservation.

A group of Buddhist monks, called environmental monks, played an important role in giving birth to nature conservation rituals and promulgating the concept. An environmental monk is one who is interested in saving people and wildlife by combining the ecological order and the world order of Buddhism. They emerged from the same doctrinal line of a Buddhist group called development monks, involved in a social movement in the Thai monkhood or *sangha* around the 1970s. At that time, some monks declared themselves as development monks to involve themselves in social activities to resolve social problems such as poverty and lack of development in Thai rural areas.³¹⁾ In the 1980s, their interest shifted from development to environmental conservation following the rise of environmental problems in rural villages. The first involvement of a large group of monks in environmental issues in northern Thailand is thought to be the protest against a cable car construction in Mt Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai, in 1985.³²⁾ Environmental activists and *sangha* following Lan Na traditions and Buddhism in Chiang Mai openly protested against the cable car plan because they thought the sacredness of the mountain should be kept from secular development. Following the protest, some monks started to take an important role as environmental monks to protect the forest from encroachment by outside commercial interests or development projects in other areas.³³⁾

Many scholars have recently focused on nature conservation rituals called "tree ordination," which spread across northern Thailand.³⁴⁾ The tree ordination ritual

was invented in Nan Province in 1989 by Phra Manas Nathiphithak, an environmental monk, and NGOs with the enthusiastic support of the urban middle class.³⁵⁾ The ritual was intentionally associated with Thai Theravada Buddhism and environmentalism. The trees were symbolically ordained to prevent it from being cut down, wrapping it in orange robes according to a Buddhist ritual. Manas and the NGOs noticed that villages in Nan had been suffering from water shortages or forest degradation caused by commercialised agriculture and state-led development projects. Tree ordination was introduced as a part of an educational program to emphasise the importance of the forest using Buddhist teachings. Manas and the environmental NGOs promoted the connection between nature conservation and religious morality to local villagers by using the tree ordination as a counter development movement.

After the tree ordinations in Nan, another environmental monk, Phra Phithak Nanthakhun along with twenty monks, also carried out a larger scale tree ordination. This ritual in 1990 attracted a broader range of people, including two hundred villagers, district officials and journalists.³⁶⁾ The ideas for this environmental ritual came from Phithak's experiences of travelling around Thailand in the 1980s, discussing environmental principles with several famous monks, including Manas in Nan Province and Phra Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) in Wat Suwan Mok, a meditation centre in Southern Thailand.³⁷⁾ Phra Buddhadasa influenced many environmental monks. Though the ritual, he criticised the state and private developers and sought to cease the greed and selfishness that led to the destruction of nature. This influenced the theoretical base of Phithak's environmental movement. Since the first tree ordination in 1990, he carried out several tree ordinations and educational programs in northern Thailand.

Phithak also reorganised Lan Na religious rituals into a more modern environmental context. The *pha pa* ritual is a Northern Thai traditional ritual of offering robes to monks by leaving them on a branch of a tree. Phithak recommended also including seedlings for afforestation as offerings to the monks in this ritual. In addition, he also adapted the *suep chada* ritual for nature conservation. The *suep chada* ritual is another northern Thai ritual, which was originally held to pray for long life for human beings, houses, villages or cities. He used it to draw people's attention to river pollution in 1993.³⁸⁾ Phithak utilised the concepts of "good Buddha and fierce spirit" and through his rituals, the long village history of worshipping Buddha and spirits was symbolically connected to forest conservation. The ritual also symbolically reproduced the story of suffering villagers asking Buddha and spirits to recover order in this world.³⁹⁾ Buddhist symbols were employed by environmental monks to stress the religious connection to conservation and were used to garner publicity and public sympathy.⁴⁰⁾

While the legitimacy of tree ordination was considered controversial by the central *sangha* in Bangkok, the rituals met a favourable reception and sympathy from various classes of the Thai public and soon spread over all of the Thai countryside. For NGOs, environmental Buddhism was reinterpreted in the context of deep ecological thought in modern environmentalism. Both Buddhism and deep ecology have this eco-centric and spiritual approach.⁴¹⁾ Following increasing numbers of

supporters, the Thai state, the king, international institutions and companies also started to give the rituals official recognition and support as preferable nature conservation rituals. The state agencies sponsored large-scale tree ordination rituals in northern Thailand. For example, the governor of Chiang Mai sponsored tree ordination along the road from Chiang Mai to Lamphun around the late 1990s.⁴²⁾ During the 1996–1997 period, the Northern Farmer’s Network organised the ordination of fifty million trees in community forests in acknowledgement of the fiftieth year of the King’s reign.⁴³⁾ Companies also supported tree ordination as one of their corporate social responsibility activities. The Petroleum Association of Thailand (PTT), one of the largest Thai state-owned oil and gas companies, rewarded Phra Manas Nathiphithak with a “Green World” Award and Phra Phithak Nanthakhun with a model citizen award in 2000.⁴⁴⁾ The media also broadly featured their environmental activities. Through increasing mass media coverage on environmental issues in Thailand, the local community found an audience in the Thai public, international civil society and the state agencies from they asked for support for their utilisation of the forest resource using their local knowledge.

Success in gaining recognition of the idea of participatory forest management also generally led to the Thai public having a romanticised perception of local knowledge in community-based forest management as a panacea for dealing with environmental issues.⁴⁵⁾ Local villagers’ demonstration of local knowledge was also gradually welcomed by external agencies promoting their participatory forestry projects. Both the state and the public sought an ideal community in participatory forest management policy in harmony with the local ecological system, in response to demands from the mass media.

However, the boom in the tree ordination ritual started to have different purposes to what was originally intended. As it became a popular activity of the Thai public, the state and companies, the tree ordination gradually lost its meaning as a protest against state forest policy or commercial agriculture, but rather gained a new meaning of demonstrating loyalty to state nature conservation. Darlington noted a complaint by Manas that “the whole nation is going crazy for ordaining trees.”⁴⁶⁾ Despite Manas founding tree ordination as a criticism against deforestation and environmental education, the ritual was performed without consideration for the long-term care of the tree, in order to make an immediate and superficial political statement.⁴⁷⁾ Nature conservation rituals are being transformed from being an instrument of protest to an instrument of negotiation among stakeholders.

In response to the increasing demand for nature conservation from the state, the king and urban citizens, the state agencies had to commit to nature conservation activities. For the state agencies, nature conservation rituals became a handy tool to demonstrate their good governance in nature conservation through newspaper, television, website, magazine or governmental reports. The syncretism of Buddhism and environmentalism succeeded in improving the reputation of the state’s policy makers. A government officer in the local WMU recognised the important relationship between religion and nature conservation. He said that “religion and nature conservation are related to each other. Even though I have never seen any tree spirits in my life, the tree ordination is a good psychological tool to persuade the villag-



Figure 8: Tree Ordination by Sub-district (Source: District Yearly Magazine, *Saeng Thong Samphat* 2007)

es to prevent them from cutting the tree.”⁴⁸⁾ Every year, several sub-district or district councils in Saeng Thong hold a collective ritual of tree ordination as a part of a project to celebrate the king (Figure 8).⁴⁹⁾ Images of their nature conservation efforts are distributed around Chiang Mai Province by the state agencies and mass media.

To examine how the state agencies practically and ideologically mobilise local communities for nature conservation rituals, this section will focus on one ritual held by two of the state agencies: Saeng Thong District Office and the WMU. On 2 December 2007, Saeng Thong district held a large ceremony of tree planting to celebrate the Thai king’s birthday in Pa Som temple, located on the top of a hill in Saeng Thong district. The district office and the WMU had created an official sacred forest for the king, Buddhism and the state, and demonstrated their responsibility for nature conservation to the public. The large collective ceremony included various events such as tree planting, the Buddha statue installation ceremony, check dam building and firebreak building. Through these rituals, the forest was symbolically made sacred.

Participants were brought from all the villages in the district to represent the district. Village leaders had a duty to mobilise about ten members and provide transportation from the village. On the morning of the ceremony, Ban Mae Luang village council sent four pickup trucks with ten members including a village chief and vice chief. At the site of the ceremony, a large banner was erected on a gate with the words celebrating the king’s birthday and the nature conservation activity of the day. At least six hundred villagers and school students wearing yellow shirts to show respect for the king, military men, Buddhist monks, government officers and NGO workers assembled for the ceremony. Some companies and research institutions also had their tents in front of the temple gate to advertise new agro-technolo-



Figure 9: Distribution of Seedlings for Planting



Figure 10: A Ceremony in Wat Pa Som Temple

gies, such as bio-fuel or fertiliser making machines, to local villagers.

The nature conservation ceremony was symbolically constructed by Buddhism, the king and the state in the context of local community. Officers of the WMU brought 1,100 seedlings from their nursery and distributed them to participants climbing up the hill to attend the ceremony (Figure 9). When villagers and students arrived at the top, they planted seedlings at various spots one by one around the temple. In front of the temple, a large picture of the King surrounded by abundant flowers was set up on the stage (Figure 10). Inside the temple, rows of monks sat on the carpet. After the planting, a group of military men formed a procession carrying a large metal statue of Buddha from the foot of the mountain. Accompanied to the lively sound of drums and the sprinkling of flower petals, the villagers invited the procession into the temple where the monks were waiting. After that, the district chief made a speech to the audience. In the speech, the district chief stated that the day's conservation activities, including the tree planting, check dam building, and firebreak building, were dedicated to the king. He emphasised that nature conservation activity followed the will of the king and that it was good behaviour to show responsibility and to pass on fertile land and a headwater forest to the next generation.

The main purpose of the state-led ritual was to impress on people the state's legitimacy to govern the forest through demonstrating a direct connection between the state, symbols of Buddhism and the king. The Saeng Thong district chief worked as an agent of the king and state. The district officers utilise tree planting to prove good environmental governance and encourage unity with nationalism. At the same time, it also helps the district officers enforce the mobilisation of local villagers in collective environmental conservation activities. Villagers were compulsorily in-

volved in the activities because it shows their loyalty to the state and to the king.

In addition, the state agencies moderated their control of local villagers by using the local symbols of Lan Na traditional Buddhism. In the speech, the district officer mentioned local religious symbols, Khruba Siwichai (1878–1939), who was a famous and influential charismatic monk in northern Thailand in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. By recalling aspects of past historical events, particularly in the public activities of Siwichai to construct the road to Mt Doi Suthep temple in Chiang Mai, the district office attempted to integrate honourable pious Lan Na traditions into the state forest policy in order to draw public cooperation.

The forest ordinations as a tool of local NGOs and environmental monks have been gradually integrated into the state forest governing system. The nature conservation rituals that environmental monks and NGOs had originally invented for environmental education using religious methods have nowadays been transformed into a tool to demonstrate the effort of the state agencies. Through the state nature conservation ceremony, the district office mobilised people and installed a new sacred forest for promoting nature conservation. Local communities also started to accept the state-led tree ordinations to demonstrate their cooperation in environmental activities and to improve their relationship with powerful authorities. In the ceremony, pictures are taken, food is distributed, message boards or banners are posted, and publications advertising forest conservation are distributed to the public. The state agencies developed the nature conservation rituals as a handy method to encourage local villagers to take on the state conservation policy, and consequently villagers are gradually losing the chance to express their local ideas and subordinating to the state agencies through the mobilisation to the state's nature conservation in Buddhist events.

Transformation from Spirit Forest to Community Forest

The state agencies' increasing reputation and villagers' accumulating experience about the nature conservation rituals have led local village leaders to utilise their local rituals as a tool to express their voices and draw the attention of the Thai public and state agencies. In this balance of the relationship among the stakeholders involved in the forest, local village leaders seek their unique symbol of local environmentalism to emphasise the legitimacy of their forest management. Yos Santasombat mentioned that local knowledge is symbolically utilised for negotiation among stakeholders as a cultural resource.⁵⁰⁾ The concept of cultural resources emphasises the manipulation of customs and identity as part of “an invention of tradition” to which Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrence O. Ranger have drawn attention.⁵¹⁾ They focused on ‘the invention of tradition’ in various national ceremonies or costumes. In this process of invention, the flexibility of custom easily “grafted” new thoughts with old customs to make them more attractive as a good old “tradition” for a public audience.

Thus, in creating a symbol of village local nature conservation, a unique and attractive management full of the essence of localism was chosen by the Ban Mae Luang village leaders. As seen in the case of tree ordination, the Buddhist ritual of nature conservation is at risk of being deprived of their autonomy by external

agencies. Since Buddhism is shared by the most of the Thai population, the state agencies can use Buddhism to justify their intervention with local communities in forest management, such as setting locations or mobilising labourers. On the other hand, spirit worship secures local communities' freedom and initiative in terms of conservation and utilisation of natural resources by excluding outsiders' power because spirit beliefs contain local knowledge, antiquity and local history, which is little known to outsiders. The different sets of knowledge from Buddhism provide local leaders a chance to successfully retain their initiative and freedom to practise nature conservation and construct narratives on it.

This focus on connections between village guardian spirit shrines in the spirit forest and environmental issues is gradually spreading across Northern Thailand. For example, there is another village shrine in the Mae Hia sub-district in Chiang Mai, which is famous for its forest ritual for a couple of village guardian spirits called *pu se* and *ya se*. This spirit forest and its facilities have been well developed as part of a tourist destination for an important festival in Chiang Mai. Mae Hia sub-district also explains the ritual from an environmental aspect. In an article in the *Chiang Mai News* on 26 May 2010, Mae Hia city officers explained that the ritual has conserved the sacred forest and look after the waters of the Mae Hia River for the livelihoods of downstream villagers for hundreds of years. The article reported that 'the traditional ritual of the spirit forest has created approval for and a need for the protection of the forest in the mind of the local community. It has resulted in the conserving of this forest sustainably and protecting it from encroachment'. Inside and outside the village, the village shrines have started to gain a symbolic position with an environmental connotation among Northern Thai people.

In Ban Mae Luang, the village spirits and the spirit forest have become an ideal symbol of the village's uniqueness, conservation consciousness and eco-friendly lifestyle, and this has helped the village in its efforts to gain management of the forest. At the very least, they have been used as significant evidence to show the public that the villagers are not the main culprits involved in deforestation. However, for politically weak villages and ethnic communities, manipulation of the status of the spirit forest becomes necessary to show a clear connection with the state nature conservation project. In 2002, Ban Mae Luang village decided to establish an experimental community forest project in their spirit forest following agreement about technological and financial supports between local leaders and local officers in the WMU. In the establishment of this, village leaders used the customs of the spirit forest in their experimental community forest project as a symbol of their communal forestry using local knowledge. However, as seen in the previous section, the customs of the spirit forest were little related to nature conservation in the modern sense. Therefore, they reinterpreted their spirit forest into modern environmentalism mixing local ideas and modern technology to suit both the needs of the state agencies and the villagers. Village leaders positively adapted two strategies to do this: imitation of the stereotype of a community forest and arrangement of villagers' behaviour to suit nature conservation.

At first, village leaders attempted to use the state-led community forest implemented as an experimental government project at another site of the village as a



Figure 11: One of the Message Boards in Front of the State-led Community Forest

prototype. The state-led community forest project was established as a pilot project by the WMU in 1993. The project was run in cooperation with the neighbouring villages including Ban Mae Luang. The workers were hired by the unit as wage labourers. The site was located in the forest, twenty minutes away from the village by motorcycle. The project site was well set up with scientific facilities for forest management such as experimental forestry plots, a rest house, small ponds, a natural fertiliser fermentation site, and workers' houses. General information and the mission of the community forest were posted on a message board. The map on the board illustrated the systematic forest management by plotting the location of trees. The names of medicinal plants were researched (Figure 11). Eighty nine species of medicinal herbs and instructions for use were listed in the booklet which local officers distributed to visitors.⁵²⁾ Everything was in order and tidy similar to other well-organised projects in Thailand.

Village leaders applied this system of state-led community forest to their own spirit forest, and in 2002, the spirit forest in Ban Mae Luang was designated as a village-led experimental community forest project by the WMU.⁵³⁾ The community forest imitated the appearance of the governmental project with the assistance of the WMU. The spirit forest was reformulated along modern lines. A new wooden gate to the forest was established. On a wall of the rest house, pictures of the national flag, the king and Buddha were posted. In addition, similar facilities to that of the state-led community forest were created inside the spirit forest: the gate, rest house, message boards, a list of herbs and natural fertiliser fermentation sites. At the same time, the WMU and NGOs came to introduce the method of making natural fertiliser and traditional herbal medicines to the village, but these technical transfer programs held little interest for the villagers. The fertiliser and herbal medicines did not fit the villagers' lifestyle. One villager said that "if we are really sick, we do not use such herbs. We just go to buy medicine in Chiang Mai or see a doctor."⁵⁴⁾ The



Figure 12: The Rest House in the Village Community Forest

utilisation of forest products was also almost negligible. Even though regular seminars run by the sub-district administration on fermented fertiliser, distribution of documents and some facilities there continued, the designation of the community forest did not encourage villagers' utilisation of the spirit forest. In 2007, the rest house started to fall into disrepair and the messages on the message boards faded away (Figure 12).

The combination of spirit forest and community forest, however, provided a tool for Ban Mae Luang village leaders to influence local villagers' behaviour in achieving a common consensus on nature conservation. The village leaders just changed the title of the spirit forest to community forest and added scientific and environmental meanings. They succeeded in reorganising the political power structures surrounding the spirit forest to unify the whole village for nature conservation purposes. Conversely, village leaders convinced the villagers to protect the forest for various mixed reasons including local customs with obligations and respect to the spirits and village ancestors. In the interviews with Ban Mae Luang villagers, almost all villagers agreed to support protecting the forest. Reasons for protection of the forest fall into three categories. Firstly, most of the villagers mentioned that those who insulted the spirit forest would receive punishment from village spirits. The forest had already an important religious identity. Secondly, they also emphasised their duty as a community to keep this forest as a significant part of village culture. The importance of the forest as a cultural heritage from their ancestors had its motivation from the point of view of protection. Thirdly, there were also the nature conservation reasons. The villagers were afraid that destruction of the forest would cause water shortages, unstable river waters, and arrest by forest police. All these reasons show that various opinions like local spirit belief, community thinking, and modern forest conservation thoughts have come together in the villagers' view of the forest. Accepting both local spirit beliefs and scientific forest conservation methods

enabled the integration of both local villagers who believed in spirit beliefs and ones who did not, in their forest management and this resulted in a more unified village.

The spirit forest is further used to prove the good management of Ban Mae Luang village by its leaders to outside monitors. For example, on 10 February 2008, a village meeting in Ban Mae Luang was held with the officers of the WMU. In the meeting, one of the village watershed conservation committee members reported that the results of mandatory monitoring showed that there were just two cases of logging in the community forest, but both of the cases had already been approved by the village council in advance. Then, the village chief questioned all present asking if they had seen anyone who had cut down trees from the spirit forest. Everyone stated that nobody had seen any other loggers in the forest. Management of the forest by the villagers and a united consensus on natural conservation were proven in front of the officials.

Village leaders have a practical approach to the management of the experimental community forest as shown by the overlapping of their management efforts with the worship activities of the spirit forest. On 22 March 2008, the village chief used a loud speaker to gather people in the sacred forest. It was the third day of the renovation of village shrines in the spirit forest. The WMU also allowed villagers to cut timbers for shrine renovation from their tree plantations in keeping with the local culture to conserve the forest. Old villagers dug the soil and levelled the ground by using a hoe. Young men climbed on poles and assembled the timber using hammers. The whole village was organised by village leaders to join together in renovating the village guardian shrines. The renovation of the village shrines was explained as a project for strengthening the community by village leaders, but it also had a notion of forest conservation. Some of the materials like the timbers were donated to the village by the WMU. The unit encourages community activities for nature conservation in the forest because they can then benefit from reporting their special collaboration with the local community to promote nature conservation.⁵⁵⁾ Under the guise of environmental conservation, the rituals in the spirit forest are also supported by the local powerholder, the WMU.

In conclusion, village leaders succeeded in arranging the needs of all villagers and outside agencies by syncretising nature conservation with their faith. The spirit forest became an ideal symbol for village leaders to use to fit in with the modern environmentalism pushed by the state agencies. Even though customary rituals, annual gatherings and the tree cutting taboo based on spirit beliefs were gradually disappearing from the village in recent years, village leaders revived the old beliefs by associating them with modern environmentalism. Local leaders reinterpreted the meanings of the sacred forest to fit with forest conservation policies without any conflict. On the other hand, the village leaders also succeeded in establishing an alliance with state agencies by providing successful cases of participatory forest management using local cooperation and knowledge.

Conclusion

Between the trends of environmentalism and localism in Northeast Thailand, nature conservation rituals became a negotiation tool to demonstrate the performers'

responsibility and ability towards nature conservation and to seek participants' agreement on the legitimacy of the performers' consciousness on nature conservation. Responding to the increasing reputation and acceptance of nature conservation rituals by the state and the public, Ban Mae Luang village leaders nowadays have reorganised their local religious rituals and added new facilities in the spirit forest as symbols for the demonstration of the villagers' efforts and behaviour towards nature conservation as a new "tool for resistance."⁵⁶⁾ Through the rituals, they have sought legitimacy for managing the forest and thus avoiding the bad labelling of deforestation. The recognition of their natural conservation ritual by the WMU office has strengthened the relationship between the state agencies and villagers, and because of the confirmation of the local knowledge as being eco-friendly, the state agencies can delegate the forest management to the village leaders.

In addition, this study also suggested the new tool of local knowledge does not belong only to the local communities. As the recognition and reputation of local knowledge increases, powerful stakeholders like the state agencies also attempt to justify their nature conservation management by demonstrating a good relationship with local communities and an understanding of local knowledge. The state agencies also utilise local knowledge in state forest policy. By utilising local symbols and discourses, the state agencies like the district office and the WMU have also attempted to demonstrate the involvement of local participation and good understanding by villagers to justify the legitimacy of their governance. The cases of tree ordination showed that local knowledge is beginning to be separated into state-supported local knowledge and unsupported local knowledge. The state-supported local rituals were encouraged by state funding and political support, but they put at risk the position of local knowledge as the voice of the local community independent from external powers.

Through the rituals, the state agencies, local village leaders, NGOs and local villagers socially negotiate their position in forest management. Therefore, nature conservation rituals have become a new arena where stakeholders compete to initiate and legitimise participatory forest management in the political economy of natural resources. Ban Mae Luang village leaders always explore their stock of local knowledge and utilise the old knowledge in new contexts, claiming it as authorised local knowledge from village history.

Yukio Hayashi described a tale told by an old villager almost fifty years ago in Northeast Thailand about village spirits who were negotiators among villagers, outsiders and forest spirits. The story was about the first settlement of his village:

The first settlers inevitably encountered spirits [...]. The settlers had to obtain permission from these [forest] spirits to clear the land and needed the assistance of a spirit to communicate with the forest's inhabitants. This intermediary was the guardian spirit (*phi puta*) who provided divine protection to the world of men and governed the world of the forest and its inhabitants.⁵⁷⁾

In the past, a village guardian spirit became a negotiator with outsiders such as forest spirits or other ethnic groups to protect the peaceful life in the village. At

present, village leaders utilise the village spirits as a symbolic negotiator among various stakeholders by bridging different technical terms, ideas, images and interests in the social negotiation of natural conservation. In this alliance of the state and village leaders, the village spirits' miraculous power is no longer a fantasy. Offenders to their forest will actually be punished by the WMU or forest police following official laws. Using belief in village spirits has actually confirmed the alliance with the state agencies through this hybrid religion of local knowledge and modern environmentalism.

Notes

- 1) Anan Ganjanapan, *Local Control of Land and Forest: Cultural Dimensions of Resource Management in Northern Thailand*, (Chiang Mai: The Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Chiang Mai University, 2000); Jin Satō, *Kishōshigen no poritikusu: Tai nōson ni miru kaihatsu to kankyō no hazama* [Politics of Scarce Natural Resources: Thai Villages and Development and Conservation], (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2002); Tim Forsyth and Andrew Walker, *Forest Guardians, Forest Destroyers: The Politics of Environmental Knowledge in Northern Thailand*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 335.
- 2) Thomas Brendler and Henry Carey, 'Community Forest, Defined', *Journal of Forestry* 96, 3, (1998), 21–23.
- 3) In the 1997 constitution, section 46 admits people have "the right to conserve or restore their customs, local knowledge, arts or good culture of their community and of the nation and participate in the management, maintenance, preservation and exploitation of natural resources and the environment in a balanced fashion and persistently as provided by law." Section 69 stated the peoples' duty "to protect and pass on to conserve the national arts and culture and local knowledge and conserve natural resources and the environment, as provided by law." Moreover, Section 79 states the roles of the state for environmental conservation and its promotion. Section 46 and 69 in the 1997 constitution on community rights and duty on nature conservation and local knowledge have been succeeded by Section 66 and Section 73 in the new 2007 constitution.
- 4) James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Anan, *Local Control of Land and Forest*; Pinkaew Leungaramsri, *Redefining Nature: Karen Ecological Knowledge and the Challenge to the Modern Conservation Paradigm*, (Chiang Mai: Earthworm Books, 2002); Yos Santasombat, *Biodiversity: Local Knowledge and Sustainable Development*, (Chiang Mai: Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, 2003).
- 5) Anan, *Local Control of Land and Forest*, 7–13.
- 6) The names of persons, locations and some institutions I used in this paper were replaced by pseudonyms to protect the privacy of informants.
- 7) Ban Mae Luang Village Community, *Phaen Chumchon: Phaen Chumchon Ngoppraman Yut Sat Yu Di Mi Suk Pi 2550* [Community Plan: Strategic Planning for Well-Being and Happiness 2550], (Chiang Mai: Samnakngan Phatthana Chumchon Amphoe Saeng Thong [Community Development Office in Saeng Thong District], 2007).
- 8) Davis briefly notes that *mueang phi* is one way of denoting 'the land of the dead' in *Muang Metaphysics*, 257.
- 9) Michael Raphael Rhum, *The Ancestral Lords: Gender, Descent, and Spirits in a Northern Thai Village*, (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1994).
- 10) Ban Mae Luang village has two temples. One temple, Wat Mae Luang, has a *sema* permit from the state, which allows it to have an ordination ceremony of monks in that temple. The other is Wat Mahoi, which is ranked at a lower level of temple as it does not have monks. Ban Mae Luang and Ban Mahoi were once different villages centring on their own temple. After the integration, Wat Mae Luang became a prime temple in the village, but Wat Mahoi has been also used for some festivals of the hamlet.

- 11) Richard B. Davis, *Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual*, (Bangkok: Pandora, 1984); Philip Stott, 'Mu'ang and Pa: Elite Views of Nature in a Changing Thailand' in *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, Chitakasem Manas and Andrew Turton eds., (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1991), 142–154; Rhum, *The Ancestral Lords*.
- 12) In Ban Mae Luang, the ritual is held on the first day of the year or *wan pak pi*. I attended the ritual on April 16, 2008.
- 13) Davis used the term of *song khau*. *Khau* is the northern Thai form of the Sanskrit word *graham*, which is adversity. In his explanation, *khau* denotes the celestial bodies which are responsible for human misfortune in Thai astrology in *Muang Metaphysics*, 102 and 104.
- 14) *Thao tang si* or four direction guardians' ritual is offerings to ask protection by the Brahmanism and Buddhism gods. Four directions lords are regarded as follows; *dhitrastra* in the north, *virudhaka* in the south, *virupaksa* in the west, *kubera* in the north. In the rituals, the priest also gives offerings to *indra* (sky) and *mae thrani* (earth). (See Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 76, 105–106.)
- 15) Lustral water is the water in which fruits of *sompoi* (*acacia concinna*) are soaked. The water is used as soap in south Asian countries.
- 16) These expelling rituals are multilayered being practised at the village, house and individual levels. Villagers also practised these rituals for personal reasons. Similarly to the village's case, the bamboo baskets or banana leaf baskets (*kuwak*) with evil or misfortune are also brought to the periphery of a house or a hamlet.
- 17) Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*; Rhum, *The Ancestral Lords*.
- 18) Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*; Keiji Iwata, *Sō moku chū gyo no jinruigaku: Animizumu no sekai* [Anthropology of Plants, Woods, Insects and Fish: The World of Animism], (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1991), 225; Andrew Walker, "Matrilineal Spirits, Descent and Territorial Power in Northern Thailand," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 17, 2, (2006), 196–215.
- 19) Rhum, *The Ancestral Lords*.
- 20) Yukio Hayashi, *Practical Buddhism among the Thai-Lao: Religion in the Making of a Region*, (Kyoto, Rosanna: Kyoto University Press, Trans Pacific Press, 2003), 84, 93.
- 21) Davis noted that some northeastern villages have institutionalised village guardian spirits systems in *Muang Metaphysics*, 264. Further studies about the institutionalised spirits system in Northern Thailand were done by Rhum's research *The Ancestral Lords*.
- 22) Rhum also notes the paramount status of *cau pho khwaen* in the spirit pantheon at Landing, Northern Thailand. Davis noted the paramount status of the Great Lord *Tin Taa* over other lesser spirits in *The Ancestral Lords*, 268. Other villages in Saeng Thong district also have a similar high spirit called *chao hua nua* (literally, "head of north prince" which means "king") or *chao pho kandaeng*.
- 23) There are differences between *khawaeng* and *khawaen*. According to Ongsakul et al., *khawaeng* was larger than *khawaen* in the categories of local administration in Lan Na Kingdom in 1900 in *History of Lan Na*, (Chiang Mai, Silkwood Books), 209. In the present administration system, *Khawaeng* is similar to a district and *Khawaen* is a sub-district.
- 24) Ban Mahoi annex shrine and shrine complex in the spirit forest are recognised as one united facility in the ritual. On festival days, offerings were gathered from all hamlets for the spirit forest. Then, the offerings are equally divided into nine portions. While officiants were offering eight portions to the eight shrines in the spirit forest, one officiant went out by motorcycle with the remaining one portion to put at the annex shrine of Ban Mahoi.
- 25) Chalatchai Ramitanon, *Phi Chao Nai* [Lord Spirits], (Chiang Mai: Khlet Thai, 2002), 43–54.
- 26) A male priest is usually called *khon tang khao*, which literally means "a person who offers rice." There are nine male priests and one spirit medium who join in the spirit rituals in this forest.
- 27) Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 258.
- 28) Local villagers knew the locations of the deserted temples well because the site had many pieces of pottery and bricks scattered on the ground.
- 29) Anan, *Local Control of Land and Forest*.
- 30) Forsyth and Walker, *Forest Guardians, Forest Destroyers*, 14.
- 31) Susan M. Darlington, "Rethinking Buddhism and Development: The Emergence of Environmentalist Monks in Thailand," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7, (2000), 1–14.

- 32) Darlington, "Rethinking Buddhism and Development."
- 33) Donald Swearer, "Centre and Periphery: Buddhism and Politics in Modern Thailand" in *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*, Ian Christopher Harris ed., (London, New York: Pinter, 1999), 194–228 and 220.
- 34) Susan M. Darlington, "The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand," *Ethnology* 37, 1 (1998), 1–15; Susan M. Darlington, "The Good Buddha and the Fierce Spirits: Protecting the Northern Thai Forest," *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8, 2, (2007), 169–185; Nicola Tannenbaum, "Protest, Tree Ordination, and the Changing Context of Political Ritual," *Ethnology* 39, 2, (2000), 109–127; Lotte Isager and Søren Ivarsson, "Contesting Landscapes in Thailand: Tree Ordination as Counter-Territorialisation," *Critical Asian Studies* 34, 3 (2002), 395–417; Henry D. Delcore, "Symbolic Politics or Generification? The Ambivalent Implications of Tree Ordinations in the Thai Environmental Movement," *Journal of Political Ecology* 11, (2004), 1–30.
- 35) Darlington, "The Ordination of a Tree," 7.
- 36) Darlington, "Rethinking Buddhism and Development."
- 37) Ibid.
- 38) *Suep chada mae nam* was firstly invented by Phra Manas Nathiphithak in 1990. The ritual was held for the Mae Chai River in Phayao Province. Phithak Nanthakhun also attended this ritual as an advisor. Since 1993, Phithak has performed *suep chada mae nam* for the Nan River in Banacit Sairokham and Baiya Thanat, *Buat Pa Suep Chata Maenam: Kan Chatkan Pa Lae Nam Choeng Watthanatham* [Tree Ordination and Ritual for Longevity of the River: Traditional Management of Forest and Water], (Chiang Mai: Munnithi Hak Mueang Nan [Hak Mueang Nan Foundation], Nanathakan Graphic-Print: 2006), 57.
- 39) Buddhism teaches of a diminishing and a recovering of order in the world. This world is located in the last diminishing period of *gotama* Buddha and is waiting the reborn of *meitreyia* Buddha as a coming saviour (See Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand*, (London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 47).
- 40) Darlington, "The Ordination of a Tree," 7; Darlington, "Rethinking Buddhism and Development"; Banacit and Baiya, *Buat Pa Suep Chata Maenam*.
- 41) Daniel H. Henning, "Buddhism and Deep Ecology: Protection of Spiritual and Cultural Values for Natural Tropical Forests in Asia," in *Personal, Societal, and Ecological Values of Wilderness: Proceedings of the Sixth World Wilderness Congress*, (Rocky Mountain Research Station, U.S.A., 1998); Swearer, Sommai et al., *Sacred Mountains of Northern Thailand and Their Legends*.
- 42) Darlington, "The Good Buddha and the Fierce Spirits," 179.
- 43) Nicola Tannenbaum, "Protest, Tree Ordination, and the Changing Context of Political Ritual," *Ethnology* 39, 2, (2000), 109–127.
- 44) Darlington, "The Good Buddha and the Fierce Spirits," 180.
- 45) Yos, *Biodiversity*.
- 46) Darlington, "The Good Buddha and the Fierce Spirits," 179.
- 47) Ibid.
- 48) Interview with an officer in the WMU on April 23, 2007.
- 49) Saeng Thong District Office, "Khrokan Buat Pa Caloem Phrakriat 80 Phansa Pracam Pi" [Forest Ordination Annual Project in Commemoration of the 80th Birthday of His Majesty the King], *Saeng Thong Samphan* [Saeng Thong's Public Relations], (Saeng Thong District, Thailand, 2007a), 1.
- 50) Yos Santasombat, *Flexible Peasants: Reconceptualising the Third World's Rural Types*, (Chiang Mai: Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Chiang Mai University, 2008).
- 51) E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 52) Watershed Management Unit, *Thanakhan Ahan* [Food Bank], (2007).
- 53) Interview with a member of staff of the WMU on August 18, 2007.
- 54) Interview with a villager on March 17, 2007.

- 55) A report on the spirit rituals was used in a proposal for a community forest plan in Ban Mae Luang village. The author took some photos of some of the pages of this report at a village chief's house in preliminary research in 2006. But the report was lost after a flood in the village at the end of the same year.
- 56) Pinkaew, *Redefining Nature*, 211.
- 57) Hayashi, *Practical Buddhism among the Thai-Lao*, 112.