

Let's Go Back

Home

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Title: Let's Go Back Home

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1. Khwan is the soul, or life spirit, believed to dwell in living beings and material things (e.g. humans, animals, and rice). It is believed that when the Khwan leaves the human body, a person will fall ill. In Karen cultural tradition, elders are tying white threads to the wrist of younger people while giving blessing, to fend off bad luck and evil spirits. It is recommended to let the thread fall off on its own.

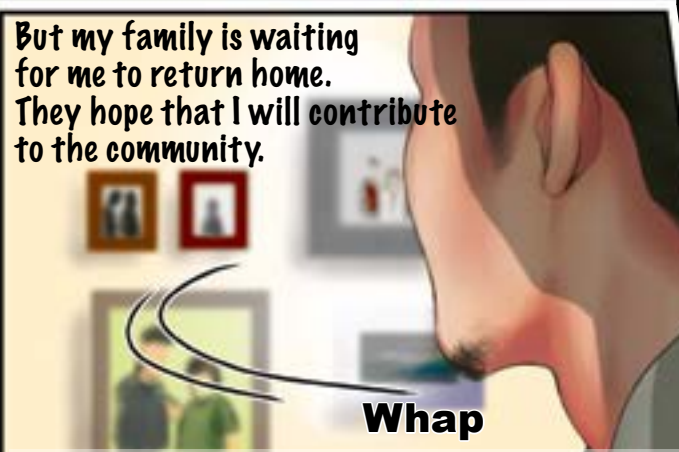
2. Pue Pue is grandfather in Pgakenyaw language.



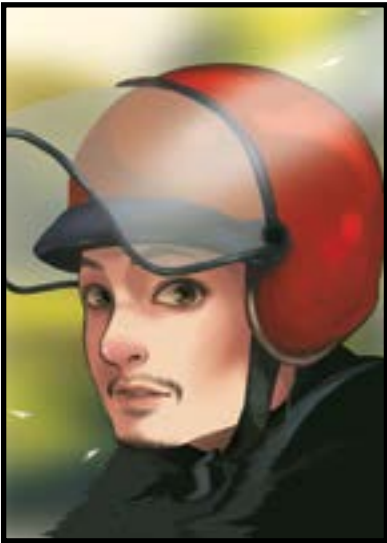
Yos's home is Mae Yod village, a Pgakenyaw community in the mountainous area of Mae Chaem district, Chiang Mai province. Traveling back from the city to his village takes Yos about 6 hours.



Yos, a young Pgakenyaw man, left his community many years ago to study in the city. After graduating from university, his friends moved to different places to find work in town.³



But my family is waiting for me to return home. They hope that I will contribute to the community.



Mae Yod village was declared as 'Special Cultural Zone', in line with the Cabinet Resolution on the restoration of the traditional practices and livelihoods of Karen People, enacted on 3rd August 2010.



This Cabinet Resolution emphasizes the rights, authority and duty of the villagers to protect and maintain a traditional Karen way of life in all community aspects.

3. The Karen, an indigenous group in Thailand, can be divided into two main subgroups, the Karen Sgaw (who call themselves Pgakenyaw, with the term "nyang" meaning "person" or "human being") and the Karen Pwo. The terms Karen and Pgakenyaw are used synonymously used throughout the book.

The Cabinet Resolution is based on the Sufficiency Economy principles of his Majesty the King Rama IX, as well as on the Pgakenyaw's philosophy to respect nature.



The resolution was formulated with the participation of various actors, including government agencies, NGOs, academics, and communities. It promotes the traditional Karen way of life as well as the declaration of Special Cultural Zones for sustainable community management.⁴



It was passed on the 3rd August 2010, along with principles and practices related to the revival of the Karen traditional livelihood.



Mae Yod village is one of the Karen communities that still maintain their traditional way of life and knowledge on natural resource management under the Cabinet Resolution. Their traditional lifestyle has been accepted by all parties.



4. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) is a development approach based on Buddhism aiming for sustainable development through the integration of physical, social and spiritual dimensions. It promotes a balanced way of living and resilience in the face of internal and external challenges."







Dad,
why do we need
to do rotational
farming?

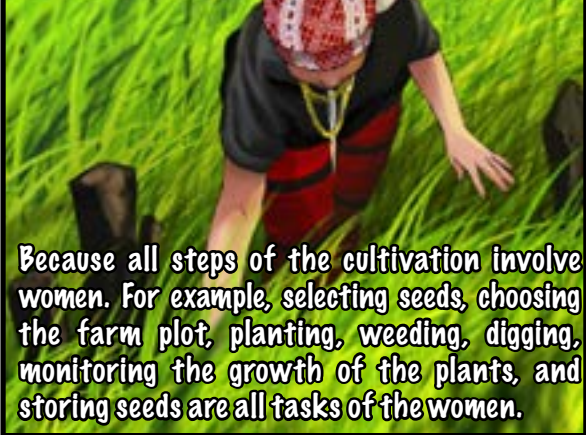


We still
practice rotational
farming because it is
a cultural heritage
from our ancestors.
This system has proven
to be a sustainable
form of harmonious
coexistence with
the forest.

The traditional rotational farming system of the Pgakenyaw has been passed down through generations. After one year of cultivation, the field will be left fallow for 7 to 12 years, allowing the soil to regenerate before the next cultivation cycle starts. Through our shifting cultivation system, we have been able to preserve the community forest for generations.



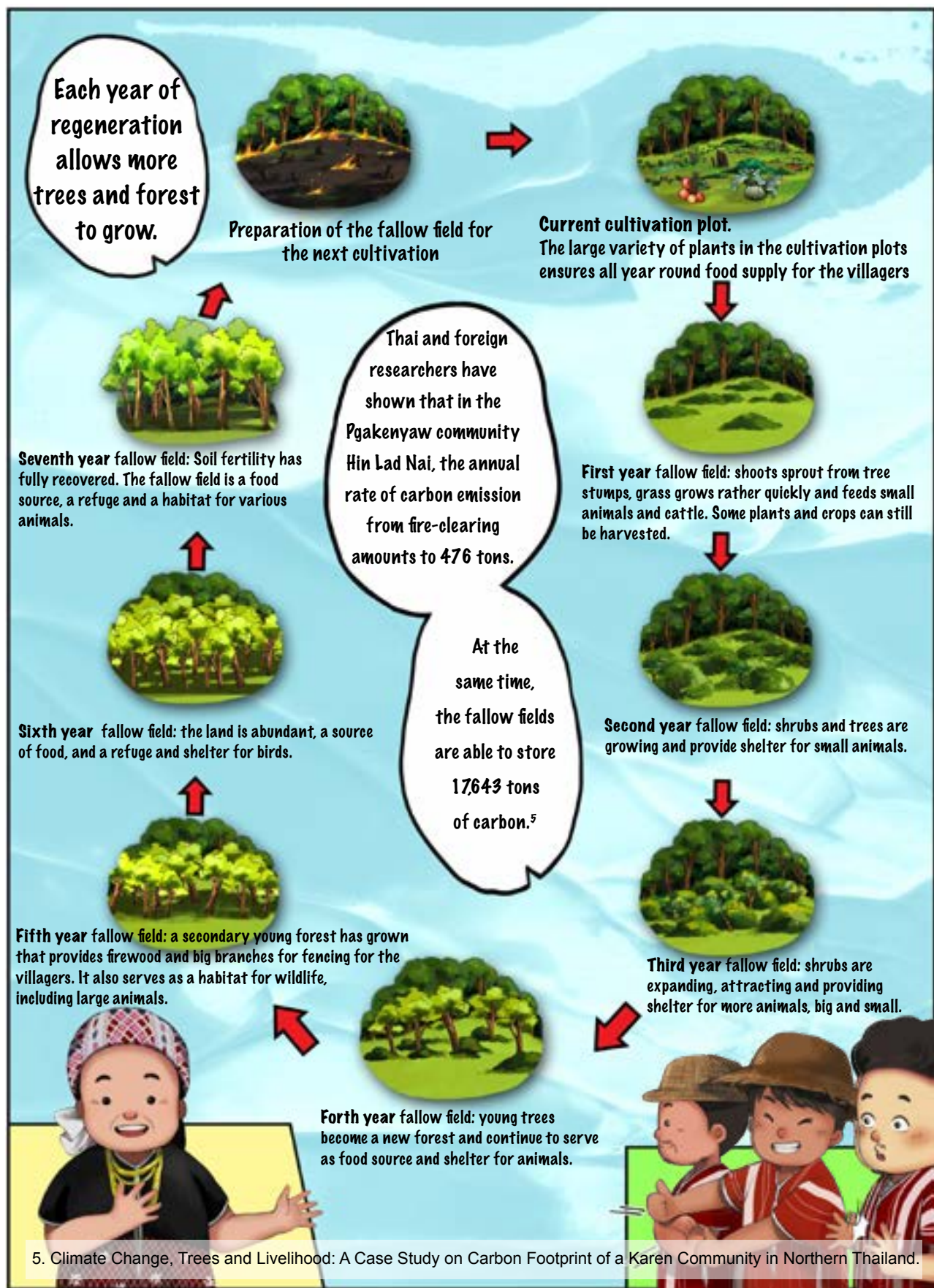
We, the Pgakenyaw people, think that the rotational fields belong to the women.

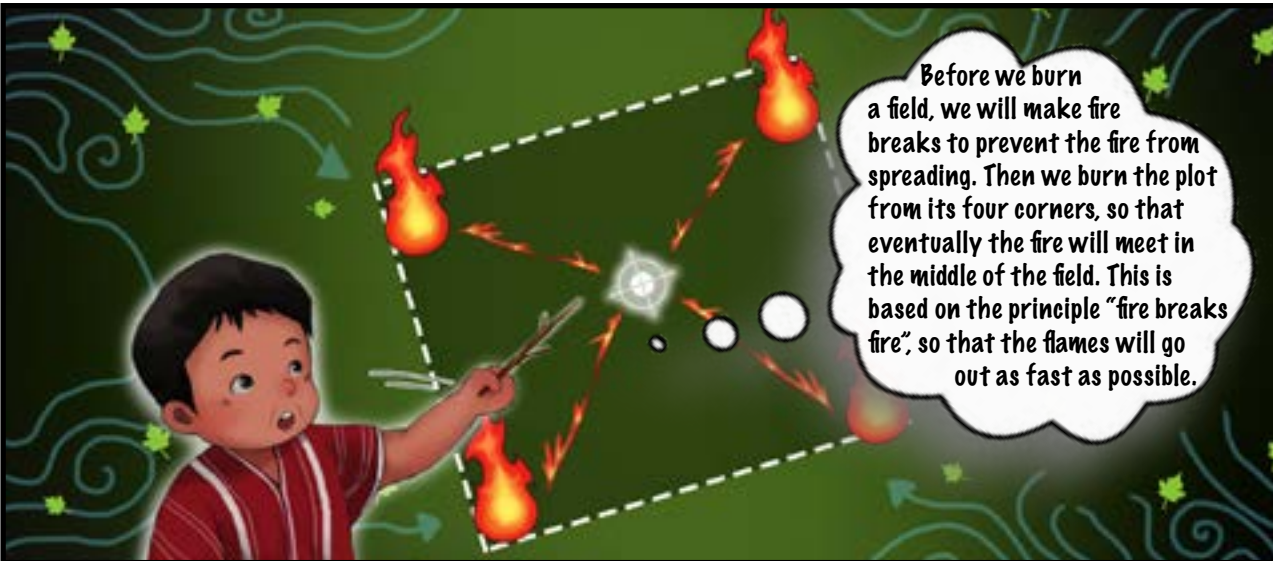
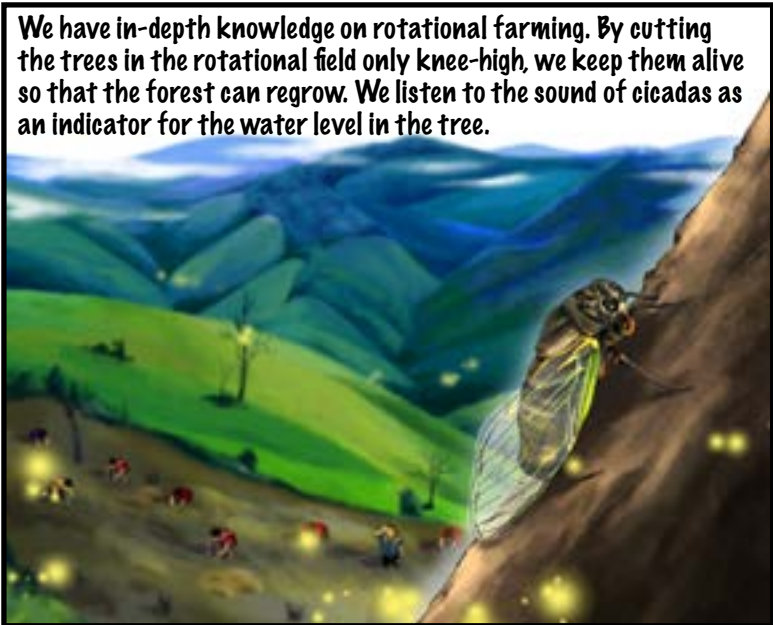
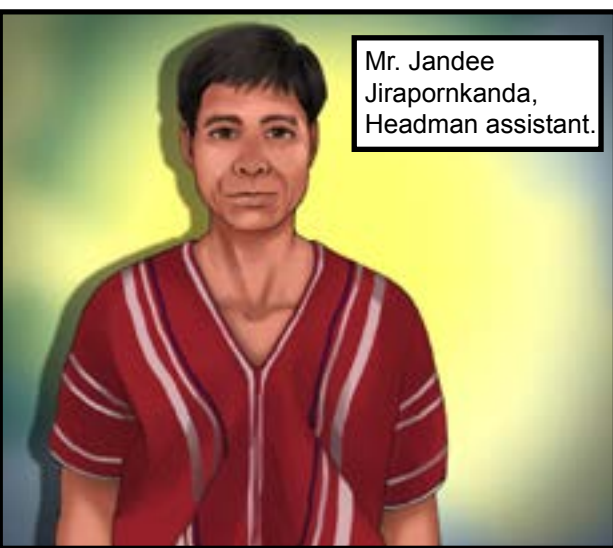


Because all steps of the cultivation involve women. For example, selecting seeds, choosing the farm plot, planting, weeding, digging, monitoring the growth of the plants, and storing seeds are all tasks of the women.



It requires the
perseverance and
expertise of the women
to generate a plentiful
harvest in the rotational
field, and to pass on the
knowledge to the next
generation.





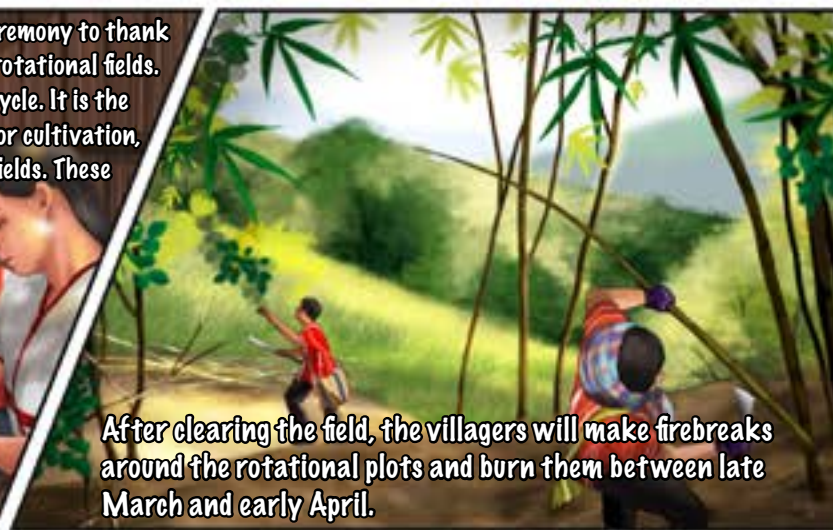


Rotational farming involves many steps throughout the year.

The system starts with a wrist-tying ceremony to thank the sacred powers for looking after our rotational fields. This ritual marks the beginning of new cycle. It is the task of the Hee Kho⁶ to select the fields for cultivation, and the villagers will start clearing the fields. These activities will take place every year between mid-February and March.



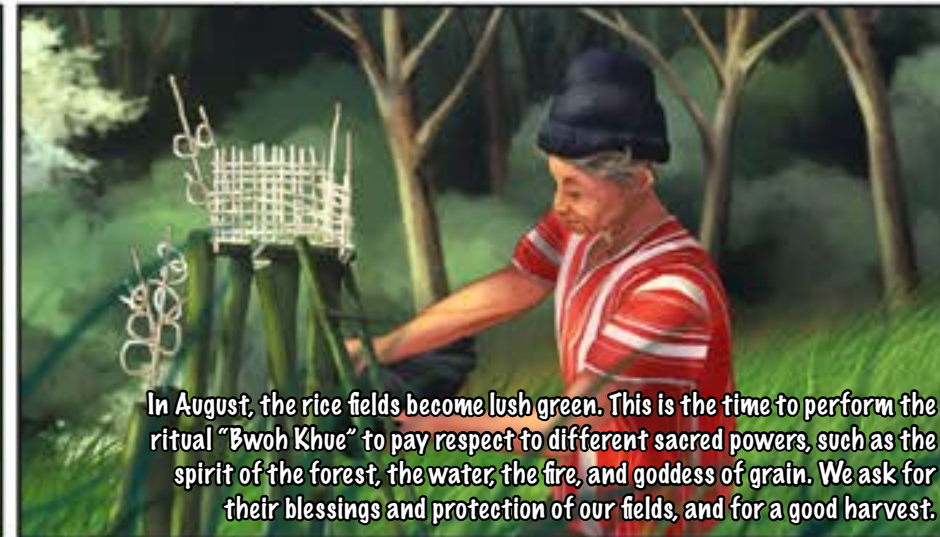
After clearing the field, the villagers will make firebreaks around the rotational plots and burn them between late March and early April.



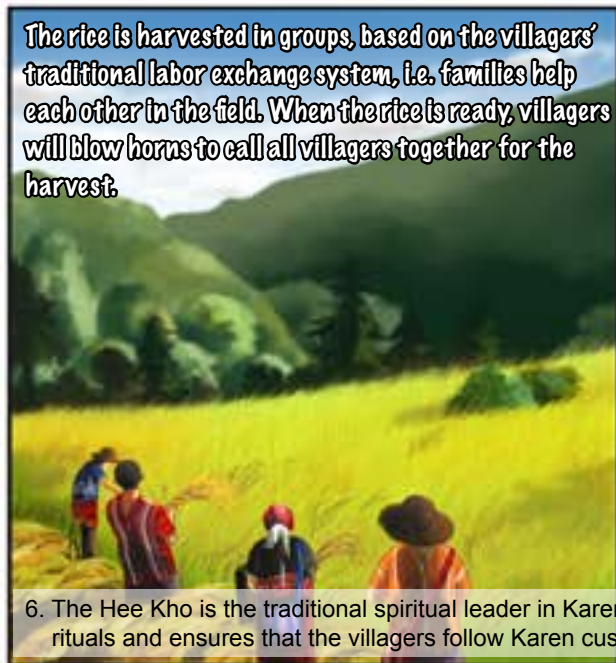
Between late April and early May, women from each household will prepare seeds. They will sow rice together with other crops.



After the planting, each family has to take care of their field. Between June and August, each plot will be weeded at least 3 times.



In August, the rice fields become lush green. This is the time to perform the ritual "Bwoh Khue" to pay respect to different sacred powers, such as the spirit of the forest, the water, the fire, and goddess of grain. We ask for their blessings and protection of our fields, and for a good harvest.



The rice is harvested in groups, based on the villagers' traditional labor exchange system, i.e. families help each other in the field. When the rice is ready, villagers will blow horns to call all villagers together for the harvest.



During the harvest, women will select rice seeds in each plot for the next cultivation cycle



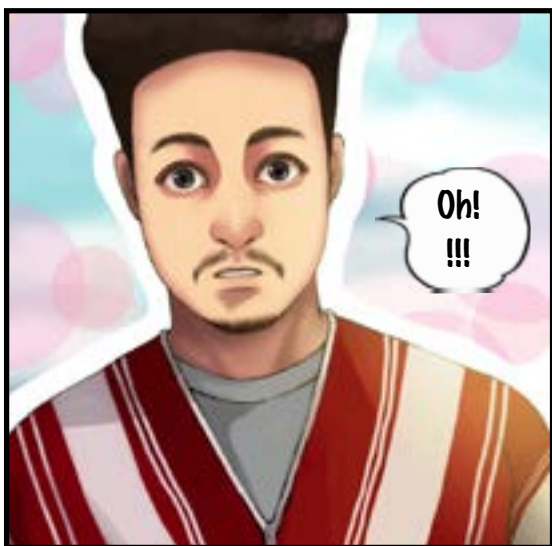
After the harvest, the ritual "Koh Thaw Tho" will be performed to call the rice spirit bird back to heaven. Yellow and red flowers are used to thank the bird for an abundant and sufficient rice yield.⁷



Finally, each family makes rice whiskey. To thank each other, the villagers invite one another, and they drink and celebrate together. This marks the end of the one-year cultivation cycle.

6. The Hee Kho is the traditional spiritual leader in Karen culture. He is responsible for all community rituals and ensures that the villagers follow Karen customary law and rules.

7. According to Pgakenyaw legend, it is believed that the rice spirit turned into a bird (Hto Bif Hkaf) and helped the Pgakenyaw taking care of their shifting cultivation fields



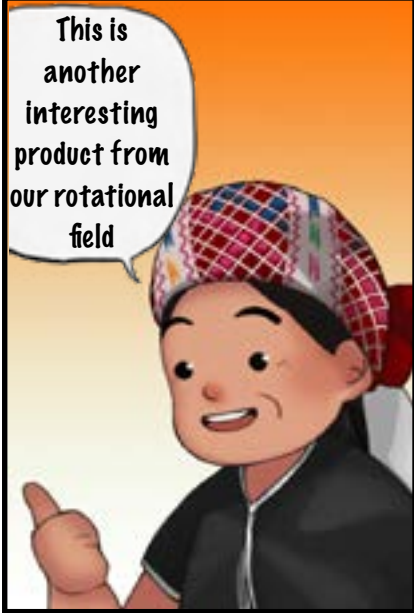
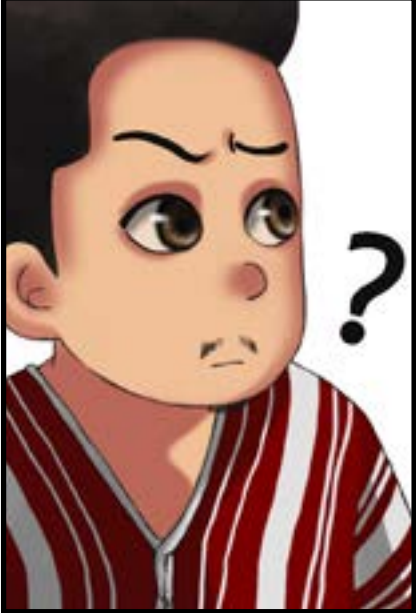
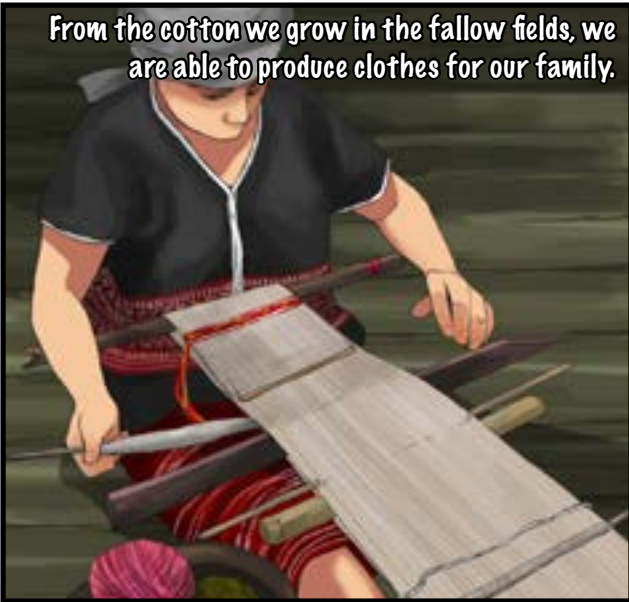


Per Mo Ter Si Ma Lo Dee, Per Pa Ter Si Ma Lo Dee, Ma Lo Gur Tur Kheu Ah Klee, Ma Lo Gur Tur Naeo Ah Klee, Gur Tur Mae Pae Anee Sir Si Ta Ka Nae Kay Pur Tur Si.



Usually, there are more than 100 different kinds of edible plants in the rotational farm.





8. Hor War is a kind of basil which can be found only in rotational farm.

3 LOOPS 2 conditions

The diagram shows three overlapping circles: 'Moderation' (red), 'Reasonable' (orange), and 'Self immunity' (teal). The intersection of all three is labeled 'Middle path'. Below these circles, two arrows labeled 'Knowledge' and 'Morality' point towards a large yellow arrow labeled 'Sufficiency'.

We have designed our business in line with the concept 'three interrelated components and two underlying conditions' of King Rama IX's 'Sufficiency Economy philosophy'⁹ which is similar to the Pgakenyaw philosophy to respect nature.

In our community forest, we grow many edible crops, as well as coffee.

Coffee trees are grown in the shade of larger trees in the community forest. Here, we can gather fruits, mushrooms, bamboo shoots and many other forest products, even firewood.

Thus, the community forest does not only provide food, but also income to the whole community.

We have set up our own brand, 'Phue Phie Coffee', meaning 'Grandparents Coffee' in Pgakenyaw language. Because we use raw materials and knowledge transmitted from our ancestors, we chose this brand name to remind us on our roots.

9. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) is based on three key components:

- Reasonableness, i.e. the accumulation knowledge and experience, along with self-awareness, compassion and empathy
- Moderation, referring to the need for people to follow the middle path, not to live in extremes;
- Self-immunity refers to the ability of people to protect themselves from negative impacts of external events.

Besides these three components, two other conditions need to be met to make the principles of sufficiency economy work: knowledge and morality.

Now, we are collaborating with seven Pgakenyaw communities in different provinces. Together, we have created the brand 'Pgakenyaw' for our community collaboration.

Whatever we do, we never forget our roots.

Ah!

All of us

Whatever we do, we never forget to respect the nature and forest that we depend on.

This important principle was passed on to us from generation to generation.

Mr. Sabohpho Sakprasertkit, traditional leader (Hee Kho), a position inherited by bloodline.

In Pgakenyaw tradition, the *Hee Kho* is a well-respected leader, in charge of performing community rituals and ceremonies, as well as of preserving cultural traditions among the community members.



"Per Trure O Pwa Ti Ter Ngay, Per
Trure O Pwa Kaw Ter Ngay."
(Don't get carried away by
the city life.)

"Pwa Ti O Pa Ti Ba Pway, Pa Kaw
Oh Pa Gor Ba Pway"
(They have to pay for water
and buy their own land.)

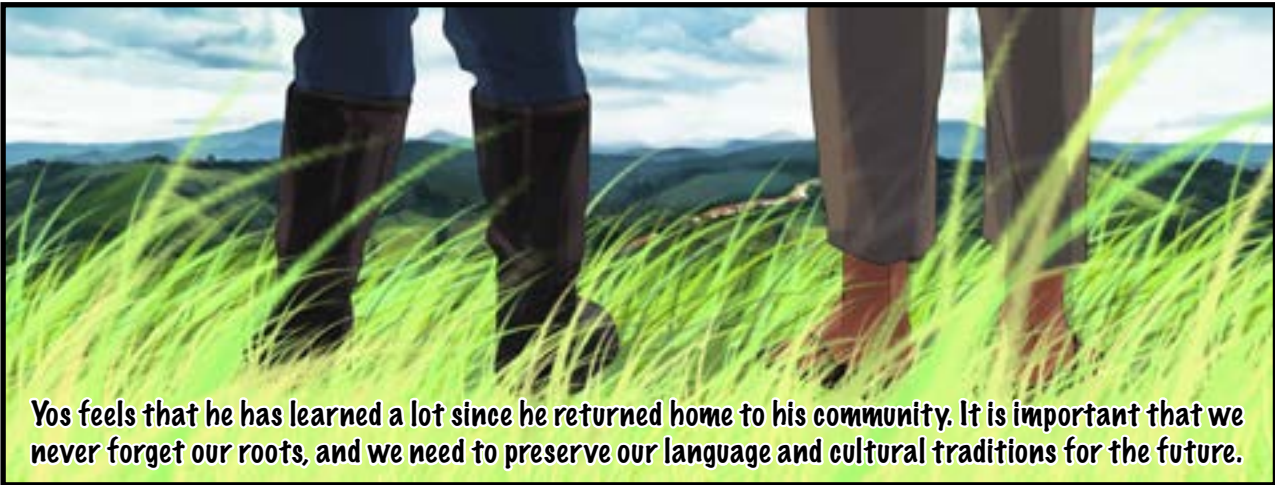
"Ker Tor Dah Per Kaw
Ngay Ngay, Aw Ba May,
Saw Ba Dur Chay"

(Take good care of the land
that you have inherited, and you
will always have food
and clothes to wear.)



whoosh

whoosh



Yos feels that he has learned a lot since he returned home to his community. It is important that we never forget our roots, and we need to preserve our language and cultural traditions for the future.



"Ker Say Choo Ler-a Khoh May, Pgakenyaw Choo Leu-Ah Pho Ahlee"

(A horse draws its strength from its hooves. But humans draw their strength from their children.) Therefore, it is important that we pass on our Pgakenyaw knowledge, culture and traditions to our offspring).

From our ancestors we inherited the wisdom
of respecting nature and of managing land and
resources in a sustainable way.

Children, take pride in being Pgakenyaw. Please come back to your home and community.

Voices from Mae Yod Village

Many young people have to leave their community to study or to work in the city. As a result, they become alienated from their traditional way of life, and they tend to forget their roots and the value of their own community. Every ethnic group has its own language, culture and way of life. If the language disappears, this ethnic group will lose its identity. We want our Karen youth to always remember their roots and language. We hope that the message in this comic book will reach our youth. We want them to preserve and pass on their own language and culture, because these are important resources in their life. We want them to be proud to be Pgakenyaw. We will push for the inclusion of a local curriculum in the formal education system in order to secure the transmission of our knowledge and language to future generations.

Mr. Dilok Trakoolrungamphai, Headman of Mae Yod village

Language and culture are crucial elements of our identity. As Pgakenyaw, we are proud to have our own language and culture. While we can learn other languages, we should never forget our own mother tongue and cultural background. We need to pass on these important parts of our identity to the next generation. This comic book aims to create a deeper understanding on Pgakenyaw people and culture, particularly in Mae Yod village. Most importantly, this book encourages the younger generation to appreciate their own culture and language and to be proud of being Pgakenyaw.

Mrs. Yanika Thamoon, female leader and leader of the women group in Mae Yod village.

Culture and language are the key constituents of our Pgakenyaw identity. We should mutually support each other to preserve and keep them alive. The new generation plays an important role in sustaining our traditional way of life. They should not only be attracted by urban life, but be aware that their ancestral land, their culture, language, and tradition are core parts of their identity. Ethnic and cultural diversity need to be preserved, as in other countries with plural societies. Multiculturalism is beautiful, and managing social diversity is an art.

Mr. Somchai Jirapa-amon, teacher at Ban Khun Mae Yod School

We have to preserve our Pgakenyaw language because it is a distinct feature of our identity and culture. Without our language, Pgakenyaw people would not exist. I like reading this comic book because it is very cute and funny. If others read it, they will gain a better understanding of our rotational farming system.

Ms. Vilasinee Mongkolwat Children at Ban Khun Mae Yod School

Information of Mae Yod village

Mae Yod village, formerly called Pha Mahong village, was founded by Mr. Bohlo more than 200 years ago. With a total population of 455 people (223 men and 212 women), the village is located in Moo 9, Mae Suek Sub-District, Mae Chaem District, Chiang Mai Province. Before its official registration in 1999, Mae Yod was a satellite village of Ban Pha Lapi, Moo 8.

As part of the village administration, leadership is passed on through patrilineal descent. The traditional leader, called Hee Kho, is responsible for performing all kinds of community rituals and ceremonies, some of which cannot be conducted by anyone else. When the Hee Kho passes away, his eldest son replaces him. If the deceased has no male offspring, his male relative can take over the position. The current village headman is Mr. Dilok Trakoolrungamphai.

Nowadays, the villagers in Mae Yod earn a living through their rotational farming system, in which fields are cultivated for a short time, and then are allowed to lie fallow for 7 to 12 years.

Mae Yod village is one of the pilot communities that were declared as Special Cultural Zone in line with the 2010 Cabinet Resolution on the restoration of traditional practices and livelihoods of Karen people, to provide solutions to land right issues and to secure their livelihoods. A Special Cultural Zone is a legally recognized and protected zone with the aim of preserving local ways of life, traditional culture, knowledge and cultural heritage, including community residential areas, arable land and sacred areas.

The United Nations estimates that there are around 370 million Indigenous Peoples in the world, living across 90 countries. While they account for less than 5 percent of the world's population, Indigenous Peoples make up 15 percent of the world's extreme poor. They speak the majority of the world's nearly 7000 dialects and represent around 5,000 different cultures.

Even though indigenous live in different social, regional, and cultural contexts, they encounter similar problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples. According to the United Nations, they all are struggling for the recognition of their indigenous identities and customary rights over their ancestral lands, territories and natural resources. Worldwide, Indigenous Peoples continue to face systematic violations of their rights and freedoms.

In Thailand, Indigenous Peoples who comprise about 10 percent of the total population, continue to experience various problems and multiple forms of discrimination. For example, many are unable to access basic public services due to the lack of citizenship, language barriers, and the remoteness of their communities. As the Thai Constitution does not recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples, they are not entitled to the rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which Thailand voted for in 2007.

As a result, the rights of Indigenous Peoples to participate in the political life, as well as their rights to self-determination, to land, resources, and territories, have continuously been denied, resulting in the loss of their distinct identities and cultures.

In order to protect and preserve Indigenous Peoples' traditional way of life, their identities, languages, cultures, and knowledge for future generations it is crucial to recognize and respect their rights to self-determination, land, resources and territories..

This comic book was co-produced by the Mae Yod village, Pgakenyaw Association for Sustainable Development (PASD), and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), with the aim of creating love, respect, and pride among the indigenous youth for their origin and cultural identity. The publication also seeks to generate a deeper understanding of the Indigenous Peoples' lives and livelihoods among the general public. Their traditional way of life and culture which is closely intertwined with nature, is illustrated by the Pgakenyaw people who have their own language, culture, traditions, and rich knowledge to manage their own community and natural resources sustainably.