



**“We Will Protect Our Community Together”: A Qualitative  
Research on Pga K’nyau Indigenous Women’s Leadership and  
Political Participation in Huay Ee Khang Village in Thailand.**

Tanyalak Thongyoojaroen

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MA  
*Erasmus Mundus Human Rights Policy and Practice Masters Programme*

School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg

Pedro Arrupe Human Rights Institute, Deusto University

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Roehampton

Department of Social Sciences, University of Tromsø – Arctic University of Norway

22 May 2023

Dissertation Module (30 ECT)

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Hays

Spring semester 2023

## **Acknowledgement**

I thank my supervisor, Jennifer Hays, who guided and helped me through this work. I also would like to thank Erasmus Mundus teachers and staff members for their guidance and for being a source of intellectuals.

This work would not have been possible without the courageous women of Huay Ee Khang Village who were willing to tell their stories and took time to answer all the questions I had. They warmly welcomed me into their village. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to P'Aeri (Noraeri Thungmueangthong), P'Naree (Naree Putaraksakul), P'Yatee (Noryatee Salaithongprers), P'Ning (Amporn Pripanasumpun), P'Jaehae (Jaehae Tansansan), P'Aepo (Noraepo), P'Kula (Kula Amornchatpan), Khun Sripen Patakanta, Khun Chanchai Noloi, P'Masu (Darunee Singphongphrai), and all interviewees.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my mom and dad, my friends, and everyone who helped me, cheered me up, and took time to support me remotely and in person. I could never have done it without all of you.

# Abstract

In Thailand, there seems to have been an increase in indigenous peoples' participation in politics and development. This raises questions about indigenous women's roles in politics and public arenas, and how they shifted the traditional role and involved themselves in leadership positions. This research explores the role of Pga K'nyau (Karen) indigenous women in leadership and participation in development in Huay Ee Khang Village, in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. Moreover, the study investigates internal and external factors that hinder and promote the role of Pga K'nyau indigenous women in leadership and community participation by examining particular challenges faced by Pga K'nyau indigenous women, including discriminatory policies, harmful beliefs and cultural practices, and access to basic human rights. And finally, the research analyses the contribution of Pga K'nyau indigenous women in the development of indigenous communities and the collective rights of indigenous peoples. In January 2023, I employed qualitative research methods and participant observation during fieldwork in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. The gathered data was analysed in relation to a theoretical framework consisting of perspectives from intersectionality, political identity, and standpoint approach. The study concludes that Pga K'nyau experienced at least two layers of oppression. Gender and the status of being indigenous women combined to create different modes of discrimination. Despite challenges, Pga K'nyau women thrived to claim their place in the public space. Their leadership and participation in politics and economic development contributed to a more inclusive and sustainable society.

**Keywords:** Indigenous peoples, ethnic minority, politics, development, women, human rights, feminism, gender, intersectionality, empowerment, Thailand

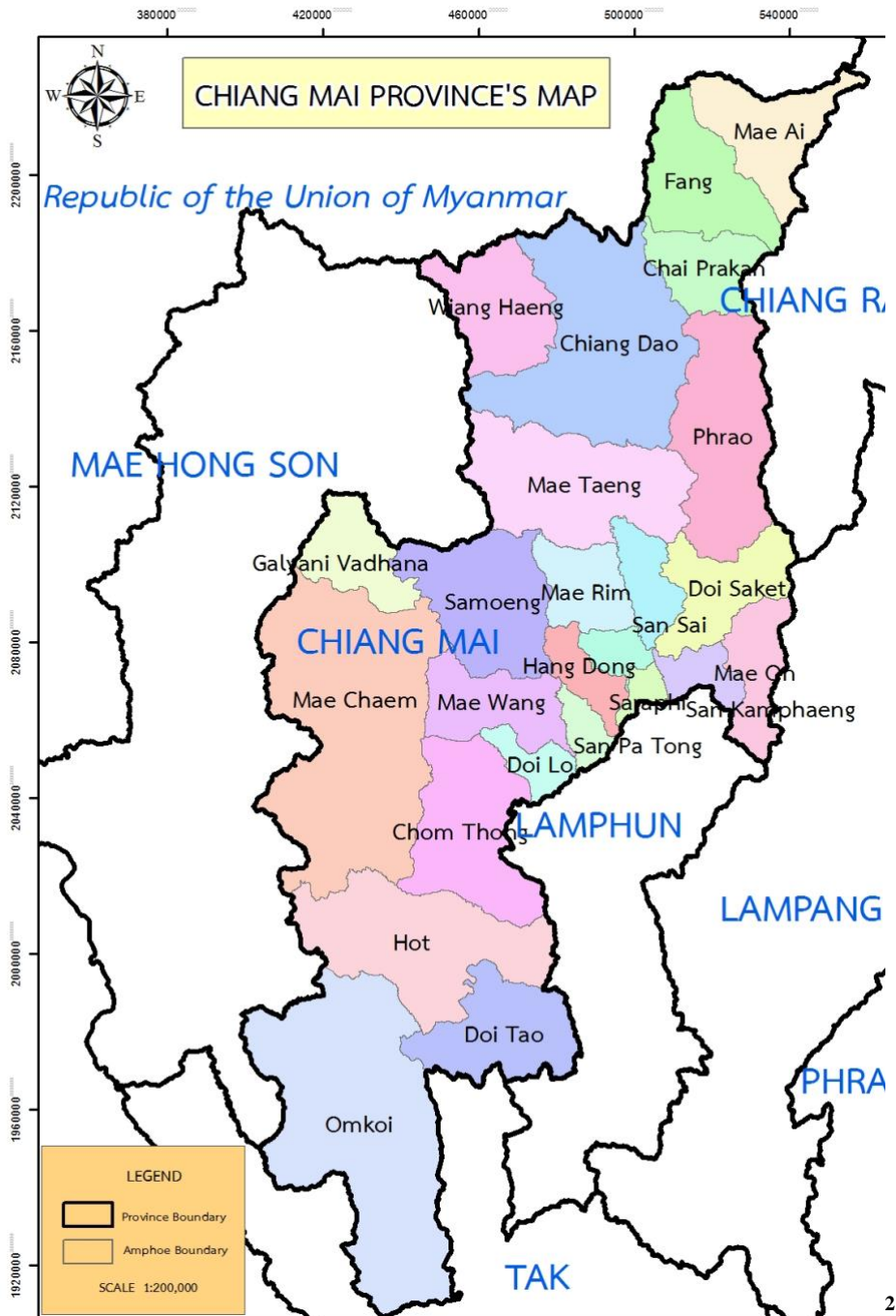
**Word count:** 16,864

# Map of Thailand



<sup>1</sup> GIS Geography, 2022. Map of Thailand, [online] Available at: <https://gisgeography.com/thailand-map/> [Accessed 27 March 2023].

# Map of Chiang Mai Province



Huay Ee Khang Village is located in Mae Win Subdistrict, Mae Wang District in Chiang Mai Province

<sup>2</sup> Chiang Mai Province Official Site, (n.d.). *Information*, [online] Available at: <https://www.chiangmai.go.th/english/index.php/welcome/information> [Accessed 27 March 2023].

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Statement of Purpose and Research Questions .....	4
1.2 Scope of Work.....	5
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL APPROACH.....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 Intersectionality .....	9
3.2 Identity Politics.....	11
3.3 Standpoint Theory .....	11
<b>CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1 Qualitative Research Methodology .....	13
4.1.1 Interviews and Focus Group .....	13
4.1.2 Participant Observation.....	14
4.2 Ethical Considerations.....	15
4.2.1 Issues Concerning Interviews and a Focus Group .....	15
4.2.2 Issues Concerning Participant Observation.....	16
4.3 Limitations of the Study .....	17
<b>CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>18</b>
5.1 Huay Ee Khang Village.....	18
5.2 Background of the Participants .....	20
5.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities .....	20
5.2.2 Everyday Life.....	22
5.3 Motive.....	22
5.3.1 Driven by the Need for Better Change.....	23
5.3.2 Break the Circle of Violence.....	25
5.4 Winds of Change .....	26
5.4.1 Volunteering.....	26
5.4.2 Women Supporting Women.....	27
5.5 Perception of Their Roles.....	29
5.6 Barriers That Hinder Women’s Leadership and Participation .....	31

5.6.1 Family.....	31
5.6.2 Cultural Belief and Unequal Status between Women and Men.....	31
5.6.3 Expected Gender Roles .....	32
5.6.4 Inability to Drive .....	33
5.6.5 Language Barriers and Education .....	34
5.7 Enabling Factors That Promote Women’s Leadership and Participation .....	35
5.7.1 Family.....	35
5.7.2 Communications and People Skills.....	36
5.8 Towards Inclusivity and Sustainability .....	38
5.8.1 Women’s Status and Empowerment .....	38
5.8.2 Projects by Women Leaders: Accessible for All .....	40
5.8.3 Youth Activities .....	41
5.8.4 Space for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities .....	42
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Appendix 1: List of Participants.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Original instructions, informant letter, and consent form in English and Thai .....</b>	<b>58</b>

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Globally, women are underrepresented in decision-making positions. According to a report by UN Women (2023), women represent only 22.8 percent of Cabinet members heading Ministries. In addition, there are only in 13 countries in which women comprise 50 percent or more of the positions of Cabinet (UN Women, 2023). Although the specifics vary according to culture, economy, and political development, women everywhere experience various obstacles to participating in political life. Traditional gender roles, discriminatory laws and regulations, as well as unequal access to basic rights often obstruct women from playing their roles in public space. In Southeast Asia, women's participation in decision-making and public areas has scarcely increased over the past decades. As of 2019, women held only 20 percent of the parliamentary seats (Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, 2019). Indigenous women tend to be particularly marginalised and excluded from the political sphere. The rights of women which are associated with universal rights and the rights to culture are juxtaposed. In the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Article 22 affirms that particular attention shall be paid to women and other groups, while Article 15 proclaims the right to culture (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Indigenous women often face multiple barriers rooted in discrimination, stigmas, and patriarchal structures that prevail within and outside their communities (International Labour Organization, 2021). Traditional values are fundamental to indigenous social life (Maffii and Sineath, 2009). Accordingly, indigenous women face a conundrum as traditional culture does not seem to provide opportunities for them to participate in the public or political space.

This thesis explores the leadership and participation of the Pga K'nyau indigenous women in Thailand. As is the case in most countries, women's engagement and participation in public and political spaces in Thailand remains remarkably low. Thailand is a middle-income country located in Southeast Asia (Romanow, 2012). The total population as of December 2022 was 66,090,475. Out of this number there were 33,351,449 females and 31,755,032 males (the Central Domicile Registration Office cited in Thai PBS World, 2023). The country is under fully authoritarian rule with a heavy military dominance (Human Rights Foundation, n.d.). Although the constitution states that "sovereign powers belong to the Thai people" (ConstitutionNet, n.d.), the monarchy has an exceedingly powerful influence in Thai politics, and has control over the military (Freedom House, 2022).



Through its ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985 (OHCHR, n.d.), Thailand assumes the obligation to take action to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in all areas, including participation in public, politics, and development activities. For the first time in 1997, equal rights between women and men has been enshrined in the principle of the constitution. The constitution states that Thai citizens are eligible to vote at the age of eighteen years old. Women and men are allowed to hold positions in politics. In addition, women and children are also guaranteed to enjoy full rights and protection from violence under Protection of Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Romanow, 2012; United Nations, 2014). Nonetheless, despite the legal obligations, women are highly under-represented in decision-making positions, politics, and public spheres (Romanow, 2012).

Although Thailand is among the first nations in Asia to grant equal right to vote, men played a dominant role in the culture and stereotypes and prejudice against women are widespread (Iwanaga, 2008). After the 1997 constitution, women held 6 percent of the parliament seats (Romanow, 2012). As of 2021, women represented only 16 percent of seats in the national parliament of Thailand (Statista, 2023; The World Bank, n.d.). The number of seats remained the same in comparison to the previous year. From 2008-2018, the number of women's parliamentary representation decreased 6.9 p.p. (Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, 2019). Throughout decades, the number of seats held by women representatives was unsteady and at a low rate (Statista, 2023). The patriarchal characteristics of politics of Thailand as well as subordination of women has continued to the present time. Traditional gender roles are the main challenge to women's participation in public space. While men are encouraged to play their roles in the public sphere, women, on the other hand, are oftentimes restricted to play their part in the private realm (Iwanaga, 2008).

Recently, Thailand witnessed political participation of indigenous members at the national level. Nattapon Suebsakwong and Manop Keerepuwadol, who are members of the Hmong and Karen indigenous groups respectively, made history as the first indigenous members of parliament of the country. Nevertheless, engagement and political participation of indigenous women remained significantly low at both national and local levels. In mainstream media, the role of indigenous women in development and the public sphere are rarely mentioned. For decades, indigenous women continued to be marginalised from political participation as a result

of institutional barriers, discriminatory law and regulations, cultural practices and values, and lack of access to basic human rights. This raises questions why it is difficult for indigenous women to participate in the political and economic sphere, and what are factors that promote or hinder their participation and leadership.

Prior to joining this master's program, I have been working in human rights and development fields with international organisations and NGOs in Thailand. I had the privilege to work with activists, human rights defenders, and community representatives from Indigenous communities. While studying in this programme, I have been in touch with indigenous human rights defenders and a former NGO worker from the north. We regularly discussed social movements and the rights of indigenous peoples in Thailand. Through my work and connections with indigenous peoples, I learned that the path to equal rights and access for public participation for indigenous women has a long way to go. In some areas, indigenous women made their effort to engage in community development and political space but they were discouraged and not accepted by either people from their community or outsiders. However, I was informed about a phenomenon in Huay Ee Khang village in Chiang Mai where leadership positions were held by Pga K'nyau (Karen) indigenous women. This made me wonder under what conditions do indigenous women enter the leadership positions and maintain their role over the past years.

### *The Pga K'nyau*

The *Pga K'nyau*, also often called the *Karen*, are the largest indigenous group in Thailand. They live in the western and northern part of the country, with an estimated population of around 549,395 people (Report of the Karen Community Survey Project by the Northern Farmers Group Network, 2017 cited in Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 2023). The word 'Karen' was introduced by British missionaries and colonists to define or call Pga K'nyau, Po people and subgroups in the nineteenth century (Boonlue, 2002 cited in Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 2023). Since then, the term 'Karen' has gained its popularity and is accepted by most scholars. However, the group called themselves *Pga K'nyau* which means 'human' or 'person.' When I discussed how I should mention the group in the thesis, the Village Chief Noraeri Thungmueangthong advised that I can cite the group as Karen but I should include the word Pga K'nyau. All of the participants I interviewed referred to themselves as Pga K'nyau people. To show respect to the group and to follow the standpoint theory which concludes that knowledge stemmed through unequal power

relations and that the researchers should work from the standpoint of the disadvantaged, I will refer to the group as Pga K'nyau in this thesis. However, I will refer to the group as Karen in Chapter 3: Literature Review as it is the term used in academic papers.

Pga K'nyau people have different tales of their historical origins. Some believe that their group has moved from place to place for generations. Some recollect that their forebears were caught in a war in the eighteenth century and relocated to the area that they currently lived in (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 83). The group has a way of life that deeply connects with nature. In their customs and traditions, the Pga K'nyau people have played a significant role in conserving forests, mountains, and rivers. However, like other indigenous groups, the Pga K'nyau experienced prejudice and stigma through mass media, school textbooks, and public documents. Hill tribes and indigenous peoples have been considered a threat to national security for joining communist groups, and blamed for the problem of production and use of narcotic drugs. Furthermore, they have been accused of forest degradation throughout the country. In addition, the discourse about indigenous people has induced many people to believe that indigenous peoples are ignorant, backward, and harmful to national security (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 85).

To give readers more context about the group, I will provide in-depth information about the village and participants in Chapter 5.

## **1.1 Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

I am particularly fascinated by how indigenous women shifted from their traditional role and overcame struggles in their everyday life while maintaining their presence in public space. To achieve equality between women and men, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) affirms that the traditional culture has to change if it does not allow women equal and meaningful participation. Within this backdrop, I seek to explore how the change happened, and how the indigenous community moved into the direction of greater rights for women.

To examine the phenomenon, the research investigates the key internal and external factors that promote or hinder indigenous women's political participation and leadership. In addition,

the study explores particular challenges faced by Pga K'nyau indigenous women, including discriminatory laws and policies, harmful beliefs and cultural practices, and a lack of access to basic human rights. In relation to this, I am also interested in studying the contribution of indigenous women in the development of indigenous community and collective rights of indigenous peoples, and human rights and governance.

## **1.2 Scope of Work**

Due to time limitations and the restriction on conducting fieldwork, the research primarily focuses on Pga K'nyau women from Huay Ee Khang Village who currently engage in leadership positions, political activity, and community development. Other women and indigenous groups are hence not included in this particular study. As a result, the research does not reflect indigenous women's public participation or political engagement in general Thailand society.

The next chapter discusses an overview of the previously published academic works, followed by theoretical approach, and methodology employed in the research. In chapter 5, the study provides in-depth details about how Pga K'nyau women took the lead to shift their roles from homemakers to decision-making positions, and barriers and enabling factors that promote their leadership and participation, as well as their contribution to promotion of human rights. And finally, chapter 6 and 7 discusses the conclusion of the findings and recommendations respectively.

# **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In every part of the world, indigenous women's political participation increases the inclusivity of the community as a whole. In the case of the Native American women in New Mexico, indigenous women's leadership and participation in environmental justice contributed to promotion of diversity and democratic participation (Prindeville and Bretting, 1998). Nonetheless, indigenous women's struggle for equal and meaningful participation in the public

sphere continued. Sylvain (2011) argues that indigenous women suffer from at least two layers of oppression i.e. as being indigenous people, and being women. For indigenous women, discussing women's rights and gender-related issues often means detachment from the collective rights (Sylvain, 2011). In the case of San women in the Omaheke Region of Namibia, they encountered class, ethnic, racial, and gender inequalities when putting efforts in advancing their human rights. The combination of race, gender, ethnicity, and other forms of persons' identities intersect to form multiple layers of discrimination San Women experience. Gender expectations and reproductive roles reinforce women to maintain traditional values. Sylvain reports that San women experienced the dilemmas of intersectional discrimination and the tension between collective rights and women's rights (Sylvain, 2011). This thesis will discuss how the Pga K'nyau indigenous women in Thailand experience intersectional discrimination. In addition, the study will investigate particular challenges faced by Pga K'nyau indigenous women, including discriminatory laws and policies, harmful beliefs and cultural practices, and a lack of access to basic human rights.

In Thailand, there are an estimated five million indigenous peoples, or 7.2 percent of the total population. The Karen, Hmong, Lisu, Ahka, Mien, Lahu, Lua, Kamu, and Thin are the recognised indigenous peoples of Thailand (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, n.d.). The Karen are the largest group of hill tribes in Thailand, living in the western and northern part of the country, with an estimated population of around 549,395 people (Report of the Karen Community Survey Project by the Northern Farmers Group Network, 2017 cited in Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 2023). Recently, issues related to Karen indigenous peoples in Thailand have been brought to attention in the academic field. The studies often identify key challenges faced by indigenous peoples such as the right to land and natural resources, right to citizenship, and poverty. However, the scope of existing research on indigenous peoples in Thailand still lacks diversity. In the case of the Karen, existing studies commonly focus on struggles for land rights, the perception of indigenous peoples as "outsiders" or refugees, and knowledge developed within indigenous communities; I will briefly highlight this research below.

Issues concerning the struggle of Karen indigenous people to claim the right to land and natural resources, and self-determination occupy a major part of existing research. This type of research highlights relations between policies regarding nature and wildlife conservation and Karen indigenous people. Buergin (2015) explains that the relations are often demonstrated as

conflicts between Karen indigenous communities and the government. The author underlines unequal power relations between the state and the indigenous community. Several studies also explore ethnic representation discourses regarding Karen indigenous peoples, which have evolved within the contexts of socio-politics. These studies point out how Karen indigenous people gained their public attention through social movements with regard to environmental conservation, the right to citizenship, and property rights (Hayami, 2016). During the period, they organised environmental movements, representing themselves in the public as natural conservationists in order to secure land rights and obtain equal status as the majority of Thai people. In contrast to Karen people in Myanmar, Karen in Thailand do not wish for an autonomous system within the state. (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 74). This type of research emphasises the role of Karen communities in taking the initiative in launching eco-tourism and representing themselves as nature conservationists to claim access to the right to land and property.

Another body of research investigates the status of Karen indigenous people as refugees in Thailand. The studies explore violence, control, and danger faced by Karen refugees within the borders of Thailand and neighbouring countries. For instance, Horstmann (2014) describes difficulties experienced by Karen indigenous peoples in their everyday life and how religious groups worked with networks and the community to provide shelter and mobilise the resources for Karen refugees. To facilitate platforms for training and empowerment, the Karen community established formal networks in Thailand. Additionally, Karen people made use of existing networks as well as support and resources from international humanitarian organisations to form resistance and collective projects. The studies demonstrated how the Karen indigenous people are marginalised in some Southeast Asian countries, but also indicated the collective role of the Karen communities in providing humanitarian support and mobilising resources for refugees (Scott, 2009; Horstmann, 2014).

Lastly, several pieces of research pay attention to knowledge, skills, and norms developed within Karen indigenous communities with experiences of interactions with nature. The research usually investigates the long history of knowledge and how it has been applied to day-to-day life within the community. For example, a study about indigenous knowledge and conservation of the use of medicinal plants documented the plants used to cure and prevent digestive system disorders by Karen indigenous communities in Chiang Mai province in Thailand (Tangjitman et al., 2015). The findings indicate the importance of indigenous knowledge, particularly in nature conservation and medical fields. Although Karen indigenous

women hold the traditional agriculture and nature wisdom (Nawarat, 2010), their role and contributions were infrequently mentioned in the studies. In the research about medicinal plant knowledge in Karen and Lawa cultures, it mentions women in both villages knew more medicinal plants than men did (Junsongduang et al., 2014). However, the crucial roles as custodians of knowledge systems and responsibility of Karen indigenous women in preserving the knowledge have not been explored thoroughly.

Even though the research about Karen indigenous people has expanded significantly in the past decades, it is still short of exploration of the role of Karen indigenous women in the political sphere at the national and local levels. Existing academic literature has rarely investigated or mentioned the role of Karen indigenous women in community engagement, decision-making, or other significant activities. One of the notable works exploring the role of indigenous women in Thailand is *Claiming place: On the agency of Hmong women* (Vang et al., 2016). The study examines sacrifices of Hmong women during wartime and their engagement in non-traditional activities. In addition, the research highlights divorced Hmong women's strategies to cope with community pressure and how educated Hmong women have played a crucial role in leading the movement to change the cultural practice and welcome divorced Hmong women back to their families (Vang et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the research and findings about the leadership role of Karen indigenous women have been limited. Nawarat (2010) explains that prevalence of patriarchal attitudes and low level of women's and girl's education were the main obstacles to indigenous women's participation in public and political spaces. Barriers to women's participation in politics include lack of access to education, discriminatory rules, social attitudes, and household responsibilities. Further struggles appear in the Karen community such as conservative views on gender, and access to education for women and girls (Nawarat, 2010, p. 34-35). In a case study of a prominent Karen indigenous woman politician in Mae Wang District in Chiang Mai, the research investigates gender identity for political participation and struggle of a woman leader in claiming place in public participation and involvement in indigenous and land rights movements (Nawarat, 2010).

The review of literature identifies that there is a lack of research examining the leadership role, participation in public areas, and the contribution of indigenous women in Thailand. Moreover, some academic works that focused on indigenous women's political participation were conducted more than a decade ago. In order to broaden the human story and ensure that women are recognized equally, the research focuses on the role of Karen indigenous women. This study

explores how the indigenous society moves into the direction of greater rights of indigenous women while investigating factors that promote and hinder indigenous women's participation in the public sphere. In addition, this research studies how women's participation advances women's rights and the development of the Karen indigenous community as a whole.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL APPROACH**

In this chapter, I will discuss three theoretical approaches employed in this research. The overall purpose of the study is to understand how the Pga K'nyau indigenous community moved into the direction of greater rights of women as well as examining factors that hinder and promote women's participation and leadership. Accordingly, I employed an intersectionality approach to see how persons' identities combined to shape inequality and discrimination. In addition, I used the intersectionality and identity politics concepts to investigate the possible imbalance of power and oppression. And lastly, I applied the Standpoint theory which argues that knowledge derived from unequal power and, consequently, researchers should work from the standpoint of disadvantaged and take into consideration people from different backgrounds experience challenges not in the same way.

### **3.1 Intersectionality**

The theories of intersectionality derived from the academic work of women of colour in North America from the 1960s-70s (Crenshaw, 1989; Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008). In the late 1980s, Kimberlee Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality to address how race, gender, class, and sexuality overlap to generate challenges in which black women experience. Crenshaw (1989) discusses several cases of discrimination against black women in the workplace, including the case of black women brought suit against General Motors. The evidence showed that the company (General Motor) did not hire black women before 1969 and that all black women employed after 1970 lost their jobs in seniority-based layoff. However, the court dismissed race discrimination complaints. Over the past decades, the intersectionality approach has proved to be practical in employing in different disciplines, including sociology, history, philosophy, and feminist studies (Cho et al., 2013). The approach bridges the study of gender, feminism, and race together to better examine the conditions faced by women of colour (Cho et al., 2013). Intersectionality is related to a study of power, which emphasises on



analysing political and structural inequalities. For instance, it highlights the role of structures in establishing the conditions of life in which marginalised women were placed (Cho et al., 2013). The approach concludes that gender cannot be used as the only analytic tool without examining other dimensions that contribute to women's experience such as race, citizenship status, history, and social class (Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008). In addition, the approach demands scholars to recognize how women from different backgrounds experience challenges in different ways, and undergo multiple forms of oppression. It enables us to analyse and understand a person through a multidimensional perspective, as well as encouraging us to pay particular attention to the interconnection of oppressions and challenges across various contexts (Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008).

As Crenshaw (2013) notes, race and gender play a significant role in political intersectionality. In the case of the United States of America, women of colour encounter forms of discrimination and racism in ways different than those experienced by men of colour and sexism in ways not always similar as white women encountered (Crenshaw, 2013, p. 1252). Intersectionality reveals how certain groups of women were made vulnerable to abuse and ultimately being ignored and left behind by institutions and society (Cho et al., 2013). For example, women of colour are placed in different positions in the economy, social, and political arenas as they are situated in marginalised places within dominant society. Minority women suffer from multiple heterogeneous subordinations, compounded with structural barriers, patriarchal socialisation, and limited access to opportunities (Crenshaw, 2013). Gender, class, and race intersect to generate particular contexts or challenges in which women of colour experience (Crenshaw, 2013). Many women are overburdened with poverty, household work, and lack of work skills. This is a result of gender and class oppression, and is worsened by the racial discrimination in the job market and household practice. Much of the problems developed from the way gender expectations for women intersect with norms that are employed to mark between good women and bad women. At times, policies, strategies, and regulations reproduce the subordination and marginalisation of women of colour by disregarding experience and intersectional needs of women of colour (Crenshaw, 2013).

Intersectionality approach has played a critical role in promoting consideration of race, gender, and other dimensions that oppress women of colour (Cho et al., 2013). Moreover, it presents the means for analysing other marginalisation as well. To explore the challenges, identities, and capability to overcome obstacles in private and public spaces of Pga K'nyau women, I

employed an intersectionality approach in the study. While conducting the research and collecting data, I have taken into account multiple identities of women in terms of gender, race, age, social class, culture, ethnicity, culture, history, the state of being indigenous, geographic location and language. Like women from marginalised groups, indigenous women experience multiple layers of discrimination and oppression. In Thailand, gender and the state of being indigenous and ethnic minority intersect to suppress indigenous women, including the Pga K'nyau. The predominant stereotypes and stigmas contribute to systematic discrimination against indigenous peoples. Furthermore, gender norms continue to discourage women from playing their role in the public sphere. As such, I particularly focus on gender and the state of being indigenous when applying the intersectionality approach.

### **3.2 Identity Politics**

Identity politics is an approach in which people of particular gender, sexual orientation, social background, class, race, and other identifying factors progress political demands based on these identities (Bernstein, 2005). The term *identity politics* has been commonly used in social science and humanities studies to explain phenomena and movements in multiculturalism. Neo-Marxist approaches to identity politics are related to factors that constitute power and reinforce oppression (Bernstein, 2005). However, unlike the theory of Marxist or neo-Marxist, civil rights and women's movements emerged in the 1960s-70s were often connected with culture and identity rather than the challenge to economic inequality (Bernstein, 2005). The approach reflects the connection between identity, experience, culture, identity, politics, and power (Bernstein, 2005). The approach encourages researchers to question why status identities are understood and portrayed as socially constructed (Bernstein, 2005). To examine the possible sources of relation of power, imbalance of power and oppression, and indigenous women's identity, identity politics approach was used as one of the tools to analyse data in this study.

### **3.3 Standpoint Theory**

In addition to the intersectionality approach and the concept of identity politics, this study is influenced by the standpoint theory presented in the book *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences* written by Joey Sprague (2016). Standpoint theory argues

that “knowledge is constructed from a specific position and that what a knower can see is shaped by the location from which that knower’s inquiry begins” (Sprague, 2016, p. 47). For that reason, the theory holds that knowledge is stemmed through unequal relations of power that construct and divide humans into dominant and nondominant groups. When developing questions, gathering data, and working on interpretations of the research, researchers should work from the standpoint of disadvantaged people and take into account that people from different backgrounds experience challenges in different ways. As Sprague (2016) notes “the transformations in social science knowledge have occurred not because of the changing identity of the scholars, but because scholars have been shifting the standpoints from which they develop scholarship.” (Sprague, 2016, p. 88). Working from the standpoint of disadvantaged allows researchers to strategically maintain diverse discourse, and generate findings to empower marginalised groups. Consequently, knowledge has changed when knowers take into consideration the experience of the oppressed. Furthermore, Smith (2005) encouraged us to question how knowledge is shaped and mechanisms that sustain privilege and those in power, and interpretation in interest and experience. One of the best ways to avoid bias in dominant frameworks is to start with the experience of marginalised groups, and learn their ways of living in everyday life (Smith, 1990). To gain and understand the perspective that comes from Pga K’nyau women and within the culture, I applied the standpoint theory through qualitative research methodology which included interview and participant observation. In the next chapter, I will discuss in-depth details about research methodology.

## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

In this study, I wish to explore the social phenomenon from the participant’s viewpoint. As a student of social science and humanities, I am passionate about social movement, gender equality, and justice. Before joining this master’s programme, I had been working with NGO and international organisations. I had the opportunity to work with ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. With my educational and professional background, I have a predominantly positive view of indigenous peoples and women’s struggle.

In accordance with the epistemological foundation of this study, I have chosen to make use of qualitative research methods i.e. interviews, focus group, and participant observation. They are

well suited when the researcher is interested in understanding participants' own experiences, and the perspective within the culture. The data analysed in this study was collected during one week of fieldwork in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand in January 2023. It is mainly derived from 9 in-depth and semi-structured interviews, one focus group, and participant observations made during this period. A focus group was organised as some participants could not communicate in Thai. The Village Chief has facilitated and translated from Pga K'nyau to Thai and vice versa throughout the session. Additional data was gathered through formal and informal conversation and interviews with one indigenous human rights activist and former NGO worker, and two academics from Chiang Mai University.

## **4.1 Qualitative Research Methodology**

To collect data for the research, I used qualitative research methods, as this approach “allows the researcher to explore and better understand the complexity of a phenomenon” (Williams, 2007, p.60). Researchers used qualitative research to examine the meaning of how people make sense of their lives and experiences (Ochieng, 2009). The research investigates the contribution of Pga K'nyau indigenous women's participation in politics and community development, how they perceive their political identities, and factors that encourage or hinder an enabling environment for their leadership and participation, and how their participation contributes to community development and indigenous peoples' rights.

### **4.1.1 Interviews and Focus Group**

At the initial stage of the study, I have been in touch with a former international non-governmental organisation (INGO) worker who was also indigenous human rights defender. We regularly had conversations and exchanged ideas about ongoing issues concerning indigenous peoples in Thailand. From our discussions, I learned that topics related to the struggle of indigenous women was the one I was most eager to explore. Before submitting the thesis proposal, I have decided to explore the topic about the leadership role and public participation of Pga K'nyau indigenous women in Huay Ee Khang Village, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Soon after, a former INGO worker introduced me to Noraeri Thungmueangthong, Village Chief of Huay Ee Khang Village who is also one of the participants in this study. Concerning data collection, I conducted a focus group, and in-depth and semi-structured

interviews with 11 Pga K'nyau indigenous women who were in positions of community leaders, politicians, founders of community enterprises, and knowledge holders. A snowball sampling technique based on reputation in the community engagement and national and local governments was employed to identify the study participants. In section 5.2, I will go to more details about who these participants were, and their roles and responsibilities.

To better investigate the contexts of indigenous community in Thailand, I also interviewed two academics from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, and a former INGO worker and indigenous human rights defender to learn more about their study and experience. Initially, I reached out to a Member of Parliament who was a member of the Pga K'nyau indigenous community. However, he was not available due to the upcoming national elections in May 2023. After finalising the research plan, I travelled to Huay Ee Khang Village in Chiang Mai Province to collect data. When gathering data, I interviewed participants in person, either at their homes, in the rice fields, or in the community gathering areas. For academics and a former INGO worker, I conducted interviews through calls and video calls. The interviews took about 45 minutes to 2 hours. I will return to the issue of anonymity in section 4.2 below, on ethical considerations.

#### **4.1.2 Participant Observation**

To explore the social dynamics and observe activities led and participated by Pga K'nyau indigenous women, I also relied on the ethnographic method and participant observation. The ethnographic method allows the researcher to become immersed in the everyday lives of participants to observe their behaviour, customs, beliefs, and practices (Williams, 2007). To capture the experience of Pga K'nyau indigenous women, I employed the four principles suggested by Sprague (2016); “1) work from the standpoint of the disadvantaged, 2) ground interpretations in interests and experience, 3) maintain a strategically diverse discourse, and 4) create knowledge that empowers the disadvantaged” (Sprague, 2016, p.87). While conducting participant observation, I explored Pga K'nyau indigenous women's day-to-day at work, interactions with community members, challenges, and how they overcome them. During the day and in some evenings, I walked around the village and farms to observe activities, everyday work, and interactions between villagers and participants. I had informal conversations with villagers, both women and men of different ages, to discuss their everyday life, and community

development and challenges. Several village members also mentioned their views towards women's participation and leadership in the public sphere. Furthermore, I had the privilege to attend the Pga K'yau traditional wedding ceremony.

The participant observation method encouraged me to learn about participants who were community leaders, politicians, founders and owners of community enterprises, youth representatives, and knowledge holders, particularly their day-to-day life, activities at work, and how they interact with community members, co-workers, and stakeholders. First, I gained access to the community through Noraeri Thungmueangthong, Village Chief who warmly welcomed me in her home. Then, I established a relationship with community members. And finally, I collected data from participant observation and interviewing key participants or stakeholders. During this period, I had the privilege to observe and participate in several activities, including Pga K'nyau traditional wedding ceremony, agricultural practice, and community gathering.

## **4.2 Ethical Considerations**

### **4.2.1 Issues Concerning Interviews and a Focus Group**

Although the qualitative method may allow researchers to gain in-depth information from participants, there are ethical concerns while conducting the study. In certain circumstances, an interview may lead to unforeseen events. It can result in unintended harm to the interviewees or participants. Some interviewees may experience unexpected intense feelings when discussing their lives (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). For instance, it was a challenge for some participants to discuss factors that hold them back from participating in the public sphere. To avoid unexpected emotional intensity, I studied about culture, values, and norms of the community before conducting the interview through conversations with a former INGO worker and academic work. Months before travelling to the village, I had informal conversations with a former INGO worker to learn about the community before visiting them. During the interview, participants may share information that could potentially put them at risk. I ensured that information about the study, concerns that participants may have, and other related issues are discussed in advance. Moreover, I informed participants that they have the right to stop at any point or withdraw from the interview anytime they feel uncomfortable. Regarding the issue

of anonymity, many participants were confident and comfortable to have their names, identifiable information, photos and videos in the study and at the thesis symposium in Spain. Accordingly, out of respect for the individual's choice, I have written out their names and information of the respondents who consented to have their identities published in the study and anonymised those who wished to be unidentifiable. I took into consideration that I have an ethical responsibility to protect respondent confidentiality. Participant identities should be described in ways that readers or the general public will not be able to identify the participants (DeWalt et al., 1998).

Apart from that, qualitative research methods have often been critiqued for being scientifically problematic in the sense that it is hard to make generalised assumptions from them. This study identifies some variables that might contribute to greater political participation of indigenous women. However, I do not intend to make any generalisations from the study. The research aims to explore the struggle of Pga K'nyau indigenous women and investigate the phenomenon in Huay Ee Khang Village as the case study.

#### **4.2.2 Issues Concerning Participant Observation**

Although participant observation helps the researcher better understand what is happening in the community or in some particular contexts, the researcher should bear in mind the limitations and critical concerns related to the method. Before traveling to Chiang Mai Province to conduct field research, I prepared information and studied about the community and problems and put an effort to understand the difference in cultural practices, beliefs, norms, and livelihood. When meeting the community members for the first time, I informed participants about the objective of the study, how the information will be used, and other relevant information. In addition, Schwartz and Schwartz (1955) suggests that the specific way or ambiguity of communication of some participants might make it difficult at times for the researcher to understand the nature of the interaction, particularly from the participant's point of view. Therefore, I carefully observed the phenomena in the setting, understood the culture and context, and recorded how participants view some issues i.e. beliefs, external community, perception of oneself, etc.

### **4.3 Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. The first is issues related to conducting field research. After I had decided to conduct research in my home country, Thailand, I was informed by the coordinator of the programme that the EACEA does not allow students of Erasmus Mundus Master's Programme in Human Rights Policy and Practice to conduct fieldwork in my home country and keep the monthly allowance. This was challenging as it made it difficult for me to follow my initial plan to conduct ethnographic research (participatory observation) for at least one month, in order to learn about the community, their everyday life, beliefs, and practice. With this rule, I was only able to stay in the village for one week. I learned a lot from the community and it was a memorable experience for me. However, I must admit that to fully benefit from participant observation, the study needed at least one or two months to employ ethnographic methods. In addition, the programme did not provide any fundings for field research. As such, it was challenging to conduct field research. In my case, online interviews were also not possible as the village was located in the mountainous areas where the internet connection was not stable at times. I noted that some participants may not have smartphones, internet connection, or devices that will facilitate the interviews. And since I could not speak Pga K'nyau language and some of them, particularly elderly people, could not speak Thai, online interviews were not encouraged. Furthermore, to gain access and trust from the community members and facilitate interviews, it was necessary to meet participants in person. I acknowledged that most participants felt more comfortable when interacting in person than online.

The second limitation concerns the lack of previous research. Prior studies that are relevant to my thesis are limited. While gathering secondary data and studying literature review, it appeared to me that the study of the leadership role of indigenous women in Thailand had not been largely explored. One of the sources related to indigenous women's role I found was about divorced Hmong women's coping strategies to cope with community pressure and leading the movement to change the cultural practice (Vang et al., 2016). Another one is the study 'Reconstructing gender identity for political participation: Hill Tribe women in Northern Thailand' (Nawarat, 2010). Both sources explored the role of Hmong indigenous women in shifting cultural practice and the political participation of Pga K'nyau women. Other academic writings investigated other topics such as the status of Pga K'nyau people as refugees,



indigenous knowledge and conservation of the use of medicinal plants, and ethnic representation. In addition, there was a few recent academic research that focused on the public participation of indigenous women in Thailand. For that reason, I took into consideration that the results of research must be interpreted with caution and a number of limitations should be borne in mind. This study only focuses on the change in which the community moved into the greater rights of Pga K'nyau women in Huay Ee Khang village. I do not intend to compare my study with other research. However, I hope that my work would be able to fill the gap and perhaps help voice the stories of courageous indigenous women who overcame all the challenges and struggles in public and private spheres.

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Huay Ee Khang Village**

Huay Ee-Khang village is located in mountainous areas in Mae Win Sub District (Tambon) of Mae Wang District (Amphoe), in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. As of March 2023, the current population of the village is 575. Within this number, 289 were female and 286 were male. Huay Ee Khang literally translates to 'leaf monkey creek.' The term "Huay" means a 'creek' or a 'small river,' and the word 'Ee Khang' refers to 'leaf monkey.' Long ago, numerous leaf monkeys were seen drinking water at a creek, and that is where the name derived from.

Pga K'nyau people have lived in Huay Ee Khang Village for many generations. In the past, there was no electricity, transportation, or any types of facilities. Accordingly, villagers relied on natural resources in the past. For generations, agriculture and shifting cultivation have been the main source of livelihood for the majority of Pga K'nyau people. Pga K'nyau people are deeply connected with the four elements in which the Pga K'nyau referred to as earth, water, wind, and fire. To show respect to nature, Pga K'nyau people perform the rituals before and after cultivation. According to the tales of Pga K'nyau, everyone on the planet is related and considered one family. In the origin, it is believed that there were twelve siblings and Pga K'nyau was the eldest child. Mother transferred knowledge to her children, including shifting cultivation, seed preservation methods, and farming.

Like most indigenous groups or ethnic minorities living in western and northern part of Thailand, Pga K'nyau people have been referred to as "hill tribe." The term "hill tribe" is often used in connection with the word "problems." As such, the term "hill tribe problems" has a negative connotation; indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities are accused for key problems in Thai society such as threats to national security, narcotic use and production, and forest deterioration. For decades, "hill tribes" have been viewed as "non-Thai" due to their different cultures and practices (Buadaeng, 2006). Some participants interviewed in this research reported experiencing discrimination when interacting with "lowlanders" or city people. The forms of harassment and discrimination include being mocked for their accent and ability to communicate in Thai, and being labelled or called "forest destroyers." One respondent revealed that she was told "hill people, Pga K'nyau, are dirty and uneducated" when she went to pursue higher education in the city. Nevertheless, some participants reported that the acceptance of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities has increased in the past years due to active social movements and a small change in media representation.

In the past, Huay Ee Khang villagers had challenges in accessing the right to nationality or citizenship resulting from distance from the village to the municipality compounded with a complicated registration process as well as systematic discriminations towards indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. As such, many villagers could not register or acquire Thai identification cards (ID). However, at present, all community members have been able to register a birth certificate, obtain a national ID card, and most of all, have the right to nationality. As reported by participants, the main struggle of the village is the right to land. At the time of field research, villagers have not been able to acquire formal documents issued by the authority or entitlements.

According to participants, the structure of the Pga K'nyau community is traditionally patriarchal. Women were not encouraged to engage in public spheres and their roles were restricted in private or, as cited by some participants, "in the kitchen," while men were considered 'breadwinners' of the house. As mentioned in the Pga K'nyau teachings, men and boys have been taught to go out to study, defend themselves, and build their skills or capacity. In the past, when the Village Chief position was appointed, not elected directly by community members, only men held the leadership position. Nonetheless, the community has shifted from appointing to electing the Chief in the past decade. In the past years, Pga K'nyau women

successfully shifted their roles from being ‘homemakers’ in the private sphere to leaders in the public affairs and economic development. I will provide more details of how Pga K’nyau women claimed their space in Chapter 5.4 Winds of Change.

## **5.2 Background of the Participants**

All participants interviewed in this study were born and raised in Huay Ee Khang Village, and are Pga K’nyau indigenous people. The participants ranged in age from 27-67 (mean = 45). Most of them were in their thirties and forties. Ten out of eleven participants were married, and one was divorced. Most of the participants had approximately two children, but participants aged 60 and above had at least four children.

Although the indigenous women I interviewed reported that they experienced challenges in accessing higher education, some participants were able to pursue higher education. Four participants received their Bachelor’s Degrees in development fields. Their fields of study included public administration, early childhood development, and social entrepreneurship. Two participants completed their studies at Grade 9, and another one at Grade 12. One participant finished her study from the Vocational Institute with a major in accounting. However, three participants, aged 60 and above, did not have access to education, either to elementary school or higher education.

### **5.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities**

The roles and positions of participants can be categorised into four groups. The first group was composed of those that held positions of local politicians i.e. Village Chief, Assistant Village Chief, Member of Mae Win Sub-District Administration (SAO), and Deputy Chief Executive of the Mae Win Subdistrict Administrative Organization (SAO). For those engaged in leadership positions of the village, their roles included carrying out village development projects, organising village administration, promoting basic rights, and empowering the community through training and capacity building activities. For those involved in management positions of Mae Win Subdistrict Administration Organisation (SAO), their responsibilities were to oversee 19 villages, which consisted of 13 Pga K’nyau villages, 2

Hmong villages, and other 4 villages (approximately 13,000 people). They were also in charge of other tasks such as promoting land rights, basic infrastructure, and farmer registration.

The second group were founders and managers of development projects, which included Head of Coffee Community Enterprise, Founder and Head of Che Su Mo Community Enterprise (traditional Pga K'nyau clothes and weaving products), and Head of "Pawmu Kleesutha (Pga K'nyau traditional herbs)" Social Enterprise. Their main tasks were to promote better economic conditions for the community, particularly elderly people and women. In addition, Pga K'nyau women also facilitated a communal platform for the villagers to meet and hold activities. Two out three enterprises were registered as community enterprises by the local authority.

The third group were youth leaders, representatives and coordinators. The work of this group included organising capacity building workshops and training for youth and children in the village. The recent activities were organic farming, green conservation, traditional Pga K'nyau knowledge, and digital security. The group acted as a bridge for community members, particularly elderly people and younger generations to connect and bonding their relationship. As mentioned by most participants, youth activities and projects have been encouraged in recent years.

Lastly, the fourth group were knowledge holders. Knowledge holders were identified and recognised by the community for their expertise and depth of knowledge. Participants classified in this group were those aged 60 and above. They were well respected within the community and being referred to as "*pu-ru*" (ผู้รู้) which literally translates to knowledge holder or knowledgeable person. Their areas of expertise included indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants, history, and culture. Their major roles were to transfer knowledge and educate the younger generation about traditional herbs, Pga K'nyau written language, *Bot-Ta* (Pga K'nyau poem-like folk songs), rituals and ceremony, and history of Pga K'nyau and Huay Ee Khang village.

Even though roles of participants were grouped into four, some participants held more than one position. For instance, Noraeri Thungmueangthong, Village Chief, was also Committee of Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), and Founder of Che Su Mo Community Enterprise. Another participant, Amporn Pripanasumpun, who was a Coordinator of

Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), also worked as a Committee of Inter Mountain Peoples' Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT), and a Founder of "Pawmu Kleesutha" social enterprise. And Noryatee Salaithongpreprers worked as Head of Coffee Community Enterprise and a Youth Coordinator of the village.

### **5.2.2 Everyday Life**

From the field research and participant observation, it was apparent that most participants were responsible for three main tasks in their everyday life. The first one was household work and routine chores, including cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, looking after children and elderly people. The second task was the work in agriculture. Participants have played a significant role in agronomics and animal husbandry. They spent hours in farming and paddy fields as well as preparing food for domestic animals, mostly cows, buffalos, pigs, and chickens. Some of them worked on other tasks such as drying and roasting coffee. And finally, the third task was their work in leadership positions and community development. As mentioned above, participants' management and decision-making work varied and can be categorised into four groups i.e. local politicians, heads of community enterprises, youth representatives or leaders, and knowledge holders. Although several tasks including household work fell to women, they managed to thrive in leadership positions and public spaces.

## **5.3 Motive**

To explore why indigenous women shifted their roles from being caregivers in the household to being leaders in the public sphere, I employed the qualitative research methodology to study the reasons Pga K'nyau women of Huay Ee Khang Village began participating in the leadership positions and community development. Some questions I used during the interview included: "When did you join this position?" and most importantly "Why did you join this position and/or activity in the public sphere?". To work from the standpoint of participants and to maintain diverse discourse through the standpoint theory (Sprague, 2016), I have chosen to use a number of quotes in order to let participants' experiences shine through as much as possible.

The qualitative data seems to point out that participants engaged in public activities at different stages of life. Some participants revealed that they began their interest in engaging in

community development when they were in their teens. Participants mentioned that they took part in youth activities and protests for indigenous and land rights. Several participants reported that they began their roles in the public sphere once they joined as Community Health Volunteers in their twenties or after getting married and having their first child. Most women worked in this position for at least ten to twenty years before advancing their role in leadership positions. For knowledge holders, participants stated that they started their role in their late thirties and forties. One participant who held the position of head of community enterprise disclosed that she undertook her role after she decided to come back to the village after she graduated from the University to promote a source of income for villagers and expand green areas.

### **5.3.1 Driven by the Need for Better Change**

The empirical data and participant observation method indicates that Pga K'nyau indigenous women were deeply connected with their land and indigenous roots. Several participants reported that they began their role due to lack of progress in community development and because they wanted a change for the better in terms of inclusion and equality. In their statement, many participants mentioned that they want to “pay back to homeland” or “native land,” which refers to native land, the community, and people, as their reasons to join community development or public space. As one participant articulated;

I think to come back and live in the community, I have to make myself useful to the community as much as I can. If I come back here and do nothing, it is like I don't pay back to my homeland.

Interview 1

In addition, many participants revealed that they took part and encouraged other women to do the same as they feel the need to have women representatives to voice out women's challenges and struggles in the decision-making process as gender-specific issues seemed to be isolated from the discussion.

When men leaders discuss, would they talk about women's problems? No, they don't. That's why we need our representative. At any level, we need someone to talk to, and that person must know about women.

Amporn Pripanasumpun, Coordinator of Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), and Founder of "Pawmu Kleesutha" Social Enterprise

Some participants reported that they struggled for acceptance of their place in the public space and gender equality since they were young. In the past, Pga K'nyau women were not encouraged to play their role in the public sphere. As mentioned by several participants, men and boys were taught to go to school and occupy leadership positions, while women and girls were mostly kept to the private sphere. One participant explained that she engaged in community work and eventually undertook the role as leader because she wanted better change and was inspired by her grandmother.

My grandmother stood up and asked her son-in-law why girls cannot go to school. (She said) they have the right to go to school. She was such a fighter because she only had daughters. My grandmother told me to go to school and took my role, including raising cows and buffaloes.

Noraeri Thungmueangthong, Village Chief

Accordingly, Pga K'nyau women struggled to claim their place in leadership positions in the public and political spheres. While setting their feet in the public sphere, Pga K'nyau experienced the tension between traditional culture and the right to equal participation in political and economic affairs. However, Pga K'nyau women found their ways to engage in the space previously occupied by men. Some participants revealed that they decided to engage in community development due to the need for a better change and a lack of women's representatives.

Several respondents held positions of knowledge holders – those identified and recognised by the community for their expertise and depth of knowledge in Pga K'nyau history, medicinal plant, rituals, and ceremony. When they described the reasons they began their role, all of them mentioned the need for community development, but more than anything, the need to connect with younger generations. Like most participants, knowledge holders were profoundly

connected with their homeland and aspired to bridge younger people with their roots of Pga K'nyau.

### 5.3.2 Break the Circle of Violence

Globally, one in three women experience physical and sexual violence in their lifetime, mostly by intimate partners (World Health Organization, 2021). In the case of Pga K'nyau women, participants reported that women in their community have also been subjected to forms of violence. However, violence against women and girls has not been widely discussed in the public. Some participants revealed that they become interested in community development and gender equality when they or their close friends experienced abuse or violence from family members or the community. One participant explained that she has suffered from forms of violence at a very young age. She reported that she was taught what women should and should not do, and that “*women are not capable.*” Later, the participant stated that she decided to resign from her job and started working for the community, particularly on women’s empowerment and gender-based violence.

I became interested in working (in the development field and gender equality) because I experienced violence by family members, my ex-husband and even my own family. My ex-husband abused me verbally and physically. My family used violence in the form of cultural<sup>3</sup> and verbal abuse.

Interview 4

According to participants, women were not encouraged to go out in the forest or any places far away from their houses for fear of physical and sexual violence. Another participant disclosed that she has been inspired to promote a better environment for women and end gender-based violence in the community when her friend was sexually harassed while collecting water at the river. To stand up for her friend, the participant revealed that she and the other friend brought the issue to a community meeting and won the case.

---

<sup>3</sup> An attempt or act to influence or control victims or survivors by misusing traditions or cultures as a means of normalising abusive behaviours (National Domestic and Family Violence Bench Book, 2022).



Since then, I have seen changes. This was a small battle that the two of us fought...When asked how the culprit should be punished, we negotiated with them to treat women the same as men. We talk about many things, such as eating and working<sup>4</sup>. We began to see changes since then.

Noraeri Thungmueangthong, Village Chief

Research data and testimonies indicated that participants began their role in the public sphere due to the need to advance community development in Huay Ee Khang Village. They have been driven by their own decision, interest, and experience. The profound connection to the homeland also influenced participants, particularly those who left the village to pursue higher education or work in the city, to come back and work for their community. Moreover, participants who were subjected to gender-based violence or had friends who were sexually abused used their experience to break the circle of violence and become agents of change within their community.

## **5.4 Winds of Change**

After discussing what motivated Pga K'nyau women to begin their role, this section will explore how women claimed their place in the public sphere before advancing their leadership positions in the local politics and economic sector. It has been challenging for women to engage in activities in the public space. For generations, women's role has been restricted to private's areas as the traditional teachings discouraged women from pursuing higher education or going out. Nonetheless, participants gradually claimed their place and played their part in community development and management.

### **5.4.1 Volunteering**

Pga K'nyau women interviewed in this research had different starting points in claiming their place in the public sphere. Most participants who held positions in local politics and leaders

---

<sup>4</sup> In the past, Pga K'nyau women were not allowed to eat lunch at the same time as men. They had to wait until men finished their meals. Some participants reported that women were left with watery soup or almost nothing. And like other cultures, women were responsible for household chores in addition to farming and other work. However, this has gradually changed. I will explain more in Chapter 5.7.2 Cultural Beliefs and Unequal Status between Women and Men.

started their roles as volunteers. Many of them took part as Community Health Volunteers (อาสาสมัครสาธารณสุขเพื่อชุมชน) and worked closely with the Tambon (Subdistrict) Health Promoting Hospital (HPH), which has been in Thailand since 2009 to facilitate access to health care for locals (Chaikoolvatana and Pakasit, 2018). Community Health Volunteers were responsible for patient screening including collecting blood sampling, running blood pressure tests, diabetes screening, and advocating and collecting data about women's reproductive health.

Several participants revealed that they took part in this position as men did not feel comfortable communicating about health, particularly sexual and reproductive health. Naree Putaraksakul, Assistant Village Chief, reported that male Community Health Volunteers felt uneasy and reluctant when conducting a survey about cervical cancer. Some of them had requested their wives to do the work for them. As such, one can see that gender played a significant role in communications within the community. Traditional gender roles have forced women to be in charge of household work, including caring for elderly people and children. However, women turned this into an opportunity to pave their way to engage in the public sphere. Everyday interaction and communication with children and elderly people as well as other women in the village crucially facilitated the role of women as Community Health Volunteers. Another participant, Chanchai Noloi who was elected as Deputy Chief Executive of Mae Win Subdistrict Administrative Organization covering 19 villages or approximately 13,000 people, reported that she had been working as Legal Volunteer for Rural Women before taking a role in local politics. She not only volunteered for people in Huay Ee Khang village, but also in other villages. For that reason, many people recognized and were familiar with her. Her role included promoting access to healthcare for women, and providing legal advice on land rights in Mae Win Subdistrict. Most participants had been working and volunteering for at least one to two decades. Through volunteer roles, women have proved their capability and eventually gained trust from community members before progressing their role into decision-making and management positions.

#### **5.4.2 Women Supporting Women**

Once women established their role in the public space, they encouraged other women to join them. Step by step, women formed groups to support each other concerning community projects, training, and women's sexual and reproductive health. Some participants reported that

they embarked their role when the current Village Chief, Noraeri Thungmueangthong, encouraged them to join the rights group. At the beginning, some participants revealed that it was stressful for them, but other women colleagues supported and advised them about the work.

Not only did women encourage other women to take part in the public sphere, they also helped other women in advancing their role in leadership positions. This was even more challenging as decision-making roles traditionally belong to men. Participants disclosed that it was challenging for indigenous women to step in and embark their role in management positions or local politics. However, women continued supporting other women to ensure women's representation in public participation. During the Village Chief election a few years ago, several participants reported that Noraeri Thungmueangthong, a woman candidate at the time, received negative comments from some people opposing women in leading positions. Nonetheless, women empowered each other and helped advocate for their peers during difficult times.

They (people who were against women candidates) said 'this team only has women. Don't vote for them.' I did not argue with them but talked to others instead. I said to them (others): Why don't we try changing? If we choose women this time, we can tell them what we want. We can try once. Nowadays, the term is not long, just four or five years. If they are not good, we can choose someone else.<sup>5</sup>

Noryatee Salaithongprers, Head of Coffee Community Enterprise and Youth  
Coordinator

Another participant mentioned that when running for Assistant Village Chief, she received immense support from women Community Health Volunteers during the election. In addition, women's strategy in advocating for women candidates included going around the village from one household to another to discuss with other women and encouraged them to open space for women.

---

<sup>5</sup> Noryatee Salaithongprers discussed how she helped campaigning for Noraeri Thungmueangthong, a woman candidate running for Village Chief a few years ago. In the end, Noraeri Thungmueangthong won the election and became the first woman Village Chief of Huay Ee Khang Village.

(I said to them) If there is an election, we need to vote for women. Let's see how women will work in this role. We have had men (as leaders) for many generations. All men. Why don't we change for women?

Noraepo, knowledge holder

Moreover, some participants revealed that they were inspired by other women and encouraged to participate in capacity-building training to strengthen their skills with NGOs, international organisations, and academic institutions. For knowledge holders, they recommenced their role when women organised activities and facilitated platforms for them to connect with younger generations.

Traditional gender roles excluded women from playing their part in the public sphere. When applying the intersectionality approach, one can see that ethnicity and gender established conditions of women's life which marginalised women (Cho et al., 2013). In the case of Pga K'nyau women, their place has been restricted to private arenas. However, women claimed their place by volunteering for the community to demonstrate their skills and to win people's trust. After establishing their role, women went further to support other women to engage in the public space. The forms of support included empowering other women to embark their role in community groups as well as advocating for other women to advance their roles in leadership positions or running for elections. It has been a challenging path for Pga K'nyau women, but they have proved beyond doubt that women are capable.

## **5.5 Perception of Their Roles**

Most of the participants regarded Huay Ee Khang Village as their own family. During the interview, they often referred to the community as "family", and to villagers as their "siblings" or "relatives." Women had a profound connection with the village and Pga K'nyau indigenous identity. Accordingly, many women decided to return to their village after leaving to pursue higher education or work or stay in their village to make changes to their community.

I have to stand up for my family. It's not just my family, but the whole community. If everyone leaves the community, there will be no one left. We have resources. We should come back and develop the community.

Noryatee Salaithongprers, Head of Coffee Community Enterprise and Youth  
Coordinator

The women I interviewed primarily perceived their role as “connector,” or “middle person.” For young and middle-aged women, they sought to act as a bridge between elderly and young people. For elderly women, they also viewed their knowledge holder role as “connectors” that tie the younger generation to Pga K'nyau culture and roots. Furthermore, participants regarded their roles as change and development agents. Several women mentioned that their role would bring about change by protecting the homeland, and alleviate those suffering or in a more difficult situation. Moreover, many participants considered their work not only for their village but for other indigenous groups in Thailand. Their tasks included promoting and protecting the rights of women and indigenous community. Most participants perceived their work as a part of collective action. Women regarded projects, developments, activities, and changes as results of shared responsibility.

As Merry (2006) notes, different groups including indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities use human rights language. In the case of Pga K'nyau women, they employed women's empowerment language and emphasized on women's ability to lead in the public affairs and economic development. To promote women's sense of self-worth and ability, Pga K'nyau women translated women's empowerment into phrases such as “women can do it all,” and “women can lead.” Accordingly, more women, elderly people, and youth were able to exercise their right to participation in public affairs and economic development. Pga K'nyau women promoted the discussion about women's health by organising supporting groups by using the language “self-care” and “self-love.” Using this discourse, Pga K'nyau women brought together different groups to take part in activities in the public space which was previously occupied by men.

## **5.6 Barriers That Hinder Women's Leadership and Participation**

### **5.6.1 Family**

Some participants revealed that they have been discouraged by their family members or in-laws. Participants disclosed that some women could not go out to engage in public work without their husbands' permission and have been forced to be in charge of traditional gender roles, including caring for the elderly. Some men did not allow women to leave the house for fear of being cheated on. Additionally, one participant mentioned that her mother and other family members discouraged her from joining workshops or capacity building activities outside the village or in the city. Furthermore, she stated that her ex-husband used to harass her at work. For that reason, I have identified family as a key factor that both enables and obstructs women's engagement in public space.

### **5.6.2 Cultural Beliefs and Unequal Status between Women and Men**

Traditional social norms and harmful beliefs continue to restrict women's role in the private sphere and reinforce their position as 'followers'. Similar to most cultures, traditional Pga K'nyau encouraged men to enjoy public space and limited women's role in the household. Men or husbands are seen as "*Chang Tao Na*" or "elephant's forefoot" which implies to leaders. On the other hand, women or wives are seen as "*Chang Tao Lang*" or "elephant's backfoot" which implies a follower. In the past, women stayed behind and did not have a voice as they were kept in the kitchen. Accordingly, harmful cultural beliefs placed women as followers and restricted their role in the private sphere. Such beliefs prevented women from exercising their rights to the right to participation in political and public affairs. Some participants reported that even nowadays women still struggle to claim their place as leaders of the village or subdistrict. As Crenshaw (2013) notes, minority women suffer from heterogenous subordinations, including structural barriers and patriarchal socialisation. Crenshaw (2013) further suggests that women of colour are placed in different positions in the economy, social, and political arenas as they are situated in marginalised places within dominant society. In the case of Pga K'nyau women, they experienced at least two layers of oppression. First, Pga K'nyau women encountered stigmas, and stereotypes from "lowlanders" or city people due to their status of being indigenous. Some participants reported experiencing discrimination while joining

activities or studying in schools in the city. However, some participants revealed that the acceptance of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities has increased in the past years due to active social movements and a small change in media representation. And second, they have been oppressed and barred from playing a leading role in the public sphere because of their status as women.

Another harmful practice that affirmed unequal status of women and men in Pga K'nyau was 'eating practice'. Most of the participants mentioned that women had to eat after men in the past. Women who ate before men were tagged as "bad women." One of the knowledge holders described how it was when working in farms or harvesting rice in paddy fields:

During lunch, women must wait until men finish their meals. It didn't matter if women were hungry or not. They had to let men finish first. After the men finished their meal, some women were left with only soup because the men ate all the meat. Women had to sacrifice for men.

Noraepo, knowledge holder

Like the teachings in one of 'Bot-Ta' (ပုဂံ) or Pga K'nyau poem-like folk songs (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 2021), it says "Big things, small things are (belong to) men," which implied that best-quality items belong to men. However, women reported that the situation and the status of women and men has improved at present. Women's participation in the public sphere promotes gender equality and raises awareness about their struggles. I will discuss more about how women's participation improves women's situation generally in Chapter 5.8.1 Women's Status and Empowerment.

### **5.6.3 Expected Gender Roles**

The society enforces gender roles on women to be responsible for all the household work, including cleaning, washing clothes, raising children and taking care of the elderly. As one participant put it: "If we talk about women's roles in the past, we cannot finish it tonight" to underline that the list of tasks women had was so long and overwhelming. However, homemaking was not considered "real work." Women's work was devalued and unpaid.

In the past, women woke up around 4 am to pound and cook rice. Later, they went to work on the farm along with men. On the way home in the evening, women had to collect herbs, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, vegetables, and food for family members and pigs. Men only carried one bag.

Noraepo, knowledge holder

Though several participants reported that their husbands did not share equal responsibility and that they were expected to fulfil their role in the household by family members or in-laws, some participants revealed that Huay Ee Khang Village gradually moved into the direction of equal rights and welcomed the leadership of women.

The public sphere had long been dominated by men. Women were kept in the private sphere and taught to stay at home to clean and care for others. Several participants revealed that some community members had a negative attitude towards women who participate in public life. Some villagers viewed women who go out as “bad women.” Women reported experiencing community gossip when they attended meetings in the city or workshops and capacity-building training. Women who went out were often labelled as “the ones who don’t love their family” and questioned why they were not in charge of their traditional gender role. Some rumours went as far as flaming stories about women going out to meet another man and cheat on their husbands. This was one of the approaches to ‘moralise’ women and keep them in the private sphere by limiting their role to “mothers” and “wives.”

#### **5.6.4 Inability to Drive**

Most participants reported that their inability to drive was one of the key factors that obstruct them from participating in public life or progressing in their work. Huay Ee Khang Village is located in mountainous areas, approximately 8 kilometres from Mae Win Subdistrict, and about 70 kilometres from the city centre (Mueang District) of Chiang Mai Province. Due to long distance and hilly areas compounded with fear of gender-based violence, it is not recommended to travel from the village to downtown or city areas by foot. Women were not taught to drive and discouraged from such activity as a result of the community’s concern for women safety as well as their attempt to keep women’s place at home or within the village.



Those days, women could not go forest or anywhere alone for fear that they might be sexually harassed. Sexual harassment cases often gone underreported as women were afraid that they might be blamed or ostracized.

Kula Amornchatpan and Interview 8, knowledge holders

They believe that men should go out and study. But if women go out, they believe that women will bring bad things to the community...When I went out (to work or join workshops), people thought I would go out to do bad things.

Aporn Pripanasumpun, Coordinator of Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), and Founder of "Pawmu Kleesutha" Social Enterprise

Only two out of eleven participants reported that they can drive a car. As women leaders and politicians had to regularly attend meetings or participate in workshops in the city centre, restriction on movement and their ability to drive remain hindrance to women's career advancement and enjoyment in public space.

### **5.6.5 Language Barriers and Education**

Participants aged 60 and above could not communicate in Thai as they could not access education at all. It was challenging for them to communicate with people who do not speak Pga K'nyau language. Nonetheless, women's groups and leaders established community interpreters to assist with translation for communicating with other outsiders. Apart from that, one participant reported that English communications skills remained a challenge for her. She explained that she was invited to attend international meetings abroad but could not participate as she was not fluent in English and some organisers did not provide interpreters for her. In addition, some participants reported that they wished to pursue higher education to "help others more."

In conclusion, key factors that hinder women from participating or playing their role in political and economic affairs are harmful beliefs, unequal status between women and men, traditional gender roles, inability to drive, and language barriers and education. Family is a factor that both enables and obstructs women from participating in the public space. Despite challenges and struggles, women thrived to claim their place in political affairs and economic development. I

will discuss factors that help women embark and maintain their leadership role in the next section.

## **5.7 Enabling Factors That Promote Women's Leadership and Participation**

Traditionally, women have been hindered from playing a meaningful role in the political and economic sphere. In the past, the role of Pga K'nyau women had been restricted in the private sphere. As described in the previous section, gender and the status of being indigenous women combined to create different modes of discrimination and disadvantages. However, the Pga K'nyau community has significantly moved towards the direction of the greater rights of women in the past years. This section will highlight family, and communications and people skills as key factors that helped women start and carry on their roles in the public sphere.

### **5.7.1 Family**

Although several women reported that their family did not support them to take their role in the public sphere, some participants revealed that they have been encouraged by their family members to participate in the public area. Family played a significant role in women's leadership development and career advancement. Some participants reported that their family members took on household chores that were considered traditional women's roles in Pga K'nyau culture to help them progress their work in the public. For instance, the Village Chief revealed that her husband cooked and took care of their grandchildren since she started participating in public activities. Through ethnographic observation and informal conversations, I understood that some men were willing to shift roles and be responsible for housekeeping, including cleaning and caring work. Although not all men in the village took on housekeeping work or shared the responsibility, the roles were gradually changing and expectations of conventional roles on women crucially decreased. As such, women's participation and leadership in the public sphere resulted in the promotion of gender equity in the private sphere. Furthermore, some participants stated that their husbands also helped them campaign when they ran for candidates during the local election.

My husband campaigned for me. He went to many households. He told them: ‘if you vote for my wife, we will help you and work as much as we can.’ He helped a lot.

Jahea Tantansan, Member of Mae Win Subdistrict Administration

Accordingly, support from family members influenced women’s leadership and participation in community development. Some participants perceived their role as ‘breadwinners’ of the family. And as mentioned in the previous section on ‘women supporting women,’ participants revealed that they took the first step in their work and advanced their career with the tremendous support from women in the village. Endorsement and encouragement from family members and other women villagers played a significant role in promoting women’s right to political and economic participation.

### **5.7.2 Communications and People Skills**

In addition to support from family members and other women, most of the participants described how their communication skills help them in performing their role in the public space and progressing their career. At the starting point of their footsteps as Community Health Volunteers, women made their way in public space through their communication skills. Women revealed that they felt comfortable when conducting a health survey with children, elderly people, and women. When encountered with negative comments from villagers, women took time to understand and communicate with them. The Village Chief Noraeri Thungmueangthong also developed a close-knit relationship with the women's group of Huay Ee Khang Village and routinely discussed activities in the community. Moreover, Pga K’nyau women established a close relationship with villagers and other networks such as academics, local and international NGOs, private actors, government agencies as well as other indigenous or ethnic minority groups in Thailand. While conducting fieldwork, I observed that most women were confident when leading their work or communicating with others. Villagers regularly visited women who held leadership positions either at their home, rice field or farm, or by calling. Through formal interviews and informal conversations with villagers, community members reported that they had a positive experience with women leaders. They reported that they felt women leaders were more welcoming and approachable.

When we disagree with something, we can talk to Mae-Luang (Village Chief). It's different from men leaders in the past. We could not say anything to them because they wouldn't listen. They didn't open space for us to exchange.

Amporn Pripanasumpun, Coordinator of Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), and Founder of "Pawmu Kleesutha" Social Enterprise

With women as leaders, sensitive topics that have been swept under the rug, such as gender-based violence by intimate partners and women's reproductive health, were discussed more often and considered as one their agendas. In addition, when villagers had to travel to the city to contact the government agencies such as registering paperwork, women did not feel comfortable travelling with male Village Chief and they could not tell much about their situation. With a woman Village Chief, they felt secured, warm, comfortable to tell problems. Gaps in the communications were filled through people's skills and women's perception as 'connector.'

The advantages of being a woman is we are accessible for all groups. People trust us. There are no gaps in communications. Women have been portrayed as 'mothers.' When children have any problems, they would talk to their mothers. In our family, we trust our mother more than father. Sons and daughters go to their mothers, not their fathers. I think that I am like their mother and they think I am theirs. I am approachable. Children and elderly can easily talk to me (get along well).

Noraeri Thungmueangthong, Village Chief

family members played a significant role in supporting women to embark and advance their role in the public sphere. Moreover, women's communications and people skills also helped them perform their role in public affairs and economic development. Women's leadership and participation in decision-making roles resulted in a more equal status between women and men in private and public space. In the next section, I will discuss how women leaders contributed towards inclusivity and sustainability.

## 5.8 Towards Inclusivity and Sustainability

To learn about indigenous women's role in community development and the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples, I conducted research about women's contribution through qualitative research methods, including interviews and participant observation as well as informal conversations with villagers, both men and women. Evidently, Pga K'nyau women's leadership and participation remarkably moved the community towards inclusivity and sustainability.

### 5.8.1 Women's Status and Empowerment

According to participants and villagers, the status of women has improved significantly in the past years. Women have expanded their roles from being mothers and wives to leaders in the public sphere. In the past, men dominated public space and decision-making positions. However, at the time of my research, women held leadership positions, including Village Chief, Assistant Village Chief, Member of Mae Win Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Deputy Executive of Mae Win Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Head of Community Health Volunteers, project leaders and Heads of Community Enterprises. The only position that has not been occupied by women was spiritual leaders (*Pu-Nam-Tang-Jit-Win-Yan* ผู้นำทางจิตวิญญาณ), who perform or lead rituals such as rice planting and funerals. Additionally, more and more people accepted women's leading role and capability as well as supporting their work, as the coordinator of an indigenous women's group expresses:

Last year, we organised a panel discussion about food security. One uncle said since he lived here, he never saw any leaders who could make as much of a change as women. He said he was impressed, and hopeful to see women can do this much. This made me feel that when I make changes, people would accept us and see our capability.

Amporn Pripanasumpun, Coordinator of Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), and Founder of "Pawmu Kleesutha" Social Enterprise

According to my interviewees, Pga K'nyau traditionally defined women as "just women," which implied that "women cannot do anything." However, women leaders changed the

narrative through community activities. To empower and encourage women to learn about self-worth and self-confidence, a series of sessions and workshops have been organised in the village. During difficult times, women formed the group to support each other.

During the spread of Covid-19, mothers took the biggest role, being a teacher, a nurse, and taking other roles. In the crisis, women were stressed. So, we talk to each other. We organised '*Listen with Heart (Fang-Duay-Jai ฟังด้วยใจ)*' group to support each other, and to listen without judging one another. It was fun.

Interview 1

Women leaders also facilitated a safe space for women to discuss gender-based violence. Previously, issues about violence against women and girls were not brought up in public arenas. At the time of my research, women leaders actively worked with a focal person in the village to end all forms of violence. Furthermore, community or social enterprises founded by women promoted women's economic empowerment. Most of the participants reported that many women in the village were no longer relying on their husband's income. In the past, women were seen as 'followers.' But with their current role and stable income, women were more confident.

Women's participation in political and public space also increased engagement of women in village activity as a whole. Participants revealed that women have been actively attending community meetings in the past years. A monthly community meeting or gathering is a forum that allows every community member to raise and discuss development, policies, challenges and problems within the community. In addition, it was a chance for the Village Chief to announce policy notices from government agencies. In the past, only men or 'fathers' participated in such activities. Nowadays, more than 90% of the participants in community meetings were women, only about 3% were men. In the meeting, women actively took part in the meeting by raising issues and concerns. As such, women leaders promoted women's participation in public space and cultivated a practice that encourages women to play their role in the public arena. This very interesting shift of community meetings becoming a women's sphere is an interesting phenomenon, and could be a topic of future research.

Acceptance of women's leadership and participation has translated into a more equal status between men and women in the household. Some participants reported that men were formerly in charge of family planning in the private sphere. Nowadays, women and men in many households shared decision-making power, including financial management and selling livestock. Through my observation while staying at Village Chief's house, male family members were mostly responsible for household work such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children. Women were mainly in charge of providing income. Although not all households in the village drastically shifted, it gradually changed and moved towards a more equal status between men and women. Many men supported women's management roles and encouraged them to take part in the public sphere.

Apart from taking an active role in public space, some participants reported that they also played a significant role in the household to raise awareness about gender equality. As mothers, they revealed that they taught their children about equality through shared responsibilities at homes. Women emphasised to their daughters and sons that household chores are not women's work. In addition, a participant who was a survivor of gender-based violence mentioned that she taught her child to make a decision by herself and not tolerate with violence. In Huay Ee Khang Village, mechanisms of empowerment and sustainable inclusivity happened in public and private spheres. The change towards equality continued to grow in a positive way.

### **5.8.2 Projects by Women Leaders: Accessible for All**

Since women occupied leadership positions, they initiated several projects that aimed to connect people and promote inclusivity. This study will mention a few projects that crucially reflect the contribution of indigenous women leaders as well as their effort to promote inclusivity. The first one was '*Women's Forest*' (*Pa-Pu-Ying* ป่าผู้หญิง), which was initiated in 2017 by Noraeri Thungmueangthong, Village Chief with a goal to use 60 Rai (approximately 9.6 hectare) to organise a green classroom for children and youth to learn about Pga K'nyau traditional herbs, to generate income for women, and to ensure a safety option for women. '*Women's Forest*' located near the community to ensure that women and children could safely travel there to harvest food, and effectively manage natural resources within the community. Over the years, the forest encouraged both women and youth to play their role in community

development. Apart from that, ‘*Women’s Forest*’ also promoted women’s economic empowerment as women weavers could collect natural dyes as well as fruits and vegetables.

The second project was ‘*Community Interpreters, Indigenous Women, Mae Wang District.*’ The ‘*Community Interpreters*’ was a collaboration between three villages: Huay Ee Khang, Huay Yen, and Pa Pai (Hmong indigenous village). Launched by indigenous women in 2020, the project aimed to assist indigenous community members who could not communicate in Thai, and to help women tackle barriers that prevent discussion of sexual health. As of 2023, there were 60 community interpreter volunteers, including 20 from Huay Ee Khang village, 10 from Pa Pai village, and 20 Huay Yen village. Most of the community interpreters were women aged 25-35. In the past years, the project has successfully connected indigenous communities with lowlanders or outsiders as well as promoting access to health care and government services. Women felt more comfortable discussing reproductive health with medical professionals through community interpreters. Furthermore, the project filled communications gaps between those who could not speak Thai with government officials.

Thirdly, woman Village Chief has established ‘*Community Tax*’ (*Pa-See-Chum-Chon* ภาษีชุมชน) about three years ago for community development projects such as fire breaks, conservation of natural resources, and water pipeline repair. Each community member paid 38 baht (about 1 Euro) per year. It was an initiative to institute sustainable community saving or financial resources. Participants reported that Huay Ee Khang Village previously relied on the government budget for development activities within the village. However, with ‘*Community Tax*,’ the village sustainably organised community projects and managed environment protection.

I want to be a part (of the team) that makes our community strong and reliable. If we rely on external agencies, it’s not as sustainable as we rely on ourselves.

Interview 1

### **5.8.3 Youth Activities**

Pga K’nyau people in Huay Ee Khang Village considered youth as an agent of change. Youth activities are not new to the community. As stated by several participants, the activities were



launched more than 20 years ago. However, the activities were organised more actively and frequently in recent years with the help of women leaders. Youth activities' objectives were to connect the younger generation with their indigenous roots and older generation as well as cultivating environmental awareness. Organised every Saturday or about 2-3 times a month, the activities included community learning, tales of Pga K'nyau, Pga K'nyau language, cleaning temples and community, Pga K'nyau poem-like folk songs (*Bot-Ta* บทเพลง), exploration of nature, and organic farming.

#### **5.8.4 Space for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities**

In the past, elderly people and persons living with disabilities in the community only stayed in their houses and did not have public space to engage with one another. Participants aged 60 and above revealed that they had no role within the community. One participant disclosed that some women, elderly people and persons living with disabilities saw themselves as worthless as they thought they were not as good as men. Elderly people tended to think of themselves as a burden to their families. In recent years, women took initiative to organise activities such as '*Happy Aging Project*' (*Krong-Kan-Pu-Sung-Aa-Yu-Sang-Suk* โครงการผู้สูงอายุสร้างสุข) and space for elderly people and persons with disabilities to encourage these groups to practise self-love. During the spread of Covid-19, women arranged a 'mental health and support group' to promote good health and well-being. It was a space for people, particularly women, elderly people and persons living with disabilities, to talk and exchange ideas. In addition, women leaders also promoted the role of the elderly as knowledge holders by regularly organising activities about Pga K'nyau knowledge, history, and values, as well as providing sources of income for the group.

In the past, elderly people hardly had work or additional income. But now, we have a job and extra income from working, selling herbs, and small products. Unlike men leaders, women saw this point.

Kula Amornchatpan, knowledge holder

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The empirical data presented in this study seems to point out positive development in leadership and participation of Pga K'nyau women in Huay Ee Khang Village. In recent years, the village has become a model community for women's leadership and inclusive society in general. Pga K'nyau women successfully transposed the traditional place of women into important leadership roles in political and economic spheres. The path to claim their space in public has been undeniably challenging. Pga K'nyau women experienced at least two layers of oppression. First, they encountered discrimination, stigmas, and stereotypes from lowlanders due to their status of being indigenous. Forms of discrimination and geographical inequalities contributed to reduced education opportunities and less access to employment. And second, Pga K'nyau women have been oppressed and barred from playing a leading role in the public sphere because of their status as women. However, despite oppression and challenges, Pga K'nyau women made their way and proved beyond doubt that they were capable. Driven by the need for better development in the community and gratitude to their homeland as well as the will to break the circle of violence, Pga K'nyau women gradually claimed their place through volunteering and engagement in community activities. Once they established their roles, Pga K'nyau women encouraged and paved the way for other women to participate in public areas. This included forming a group to support each other on issues related to community projects, women's sexual and reproductive health, and capacity-building training for women. Moreover, Pga K'nyau women who embarked their role in local politics reported receiving tremendous support from other women during the local election. Through difficult times, Pga K'nyau women stood in solidarity to help each other.

Participants' experience and accounts indicated struggles in claiming their place in the public arena. Analysing through the intersectionality approach, the study concludes that gender, ethnic status, social class, and geographical location created different modes of discrimination and challenges for Pga K'nyau women. In this study, I identified several factors that support and hinder women's participation and leadership. Family seems to be a factor that both assists and holds women back from engaging in the public area. Factors such as cultural beliefs and unequal status between women and men, and expected gender roles, compounded with lack of access to higher education, continued to restrict women's role in the private sphere.

Nonetheless, Pga K'nyau women gained trust from the community through their experience, capability, community projects and activities.

In recent years, Pga K'nyau women have brought about significant changes to Huay Ee Khang Village and other indigenous villages. Their active participation and leadership unequivocally helped engender a sense of transformation from patriarchal society to a more equal engagement of men and women in the public sphere. Through participant observation and informal conversation with villagers, my data shows that community members welcomed women's leadership and were supportive of their work. During the fieldwork period, I observed that villagers regularly reached out to women leaders through calls or by visiting their households to consult about their issues. Several participants and community members revealed that women leaders were more sensitive, open, and approachable, particularly when discussing issues related to gender-based violence, sustainable economy, and community projects. Moreover, Pga K'nyau women thrivingly initiated a more inclusive community through projects, including *'Women's Forest,' 'Community Interpreters, Indigenous Women, Mae Wang District,'* and *'Community Tax.'* The projects promote sustainable development and women's economic empowerment in the community as well as facilitating villagers' access to public services. Under the leadership of women, all groups were encouraged to take part in community activities and public space, particularly women, youth, the elderly, and persons living with disabilities. In the past, elderly people and persons living with disabilities only stayed in their households and did not have public engagement, which deteriorated their mental health as some perceived themselves as a burden to their family. However, women leaders successfully took initiative to organise activities such as *'Happy Aging Project'* and provided a platform for economic development for the group. Pga K'nyau women bridged the connection between the older and younger generation through youth activities that entails Pga K'nyau history, knowledge, and values.

In summary, Pga K'nyau women's leadership and participation in political, economic and cultural space contributed to a more inclusive and sustainable society as well as helping advance gender equality that affects both practices and the types of projects that were proposed within the community. The meaningful participation of women is essential to build an equal and democratic society where everyone enjoys human rights. To promote the leadership and participation of indigenous women, the government should work together with the private

sector, local communities and relevant stakeholders to implement gender-sensitive and gender mainstreaming practices through legal and policy frameworks.

## **CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS**

Deriving from historic unequal power relations and structural barriers, indigenous women cannot fully participate in economic and political life at the local and national levels. Although participants in this research held leadership and decision-making positions, they reported several factors that hold them back from engaging in the political and economic spheres. In this chapter, the United Nations Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was employed as a guideline for recommendations. The declaration is the umbrella of an international instrument on the rights of indigenous peoples. It establishes a framework for efforts to address injustice, and eliminate all forms of racism, violence, and discrimination against indigenous peoples, as well as advancing indigenous peoples' rights. (OHCHR, 2013; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (2020), Thailand voted in favour of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but it does not officially recognise the existence of indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities in the country. This presents several challenges to indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, including the rights to nationality, the right to land and property, and participation in political and public life.

### **Policy**

The study revealed positive outcomes and developments of indigenous women's participation in economic and political spaces. However, participants stated several barriers that obstruct them from engaging in the public space, particularly challenges stemming from discrimination, harmful practices, and violence against women and girls in public and private spheres. To ensure women's meaningful participation and equal opportunities for leadership and decision-making positions in political, economic, and public life, the government of Thailand should:

- Officially recognise the existence of indigenous peoples and the rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities across all regions of the country. The government must

acknowledge that the struggles of indigenous peoples vary and that the importance of historical and cultural backgrounds should be taken into account (OHCHR, 2013; United Nations, 2007; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.).

- Identify manifestations of structural discrimination and racism against indigenous peoples. The government should take effective measures to tackle all forms of prejudice and bias, as well as promoting better understanding of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities.
- Address key factors that hinder women and girls from enjoying their rights and achieving their highest potential. The government should employ intersectionality as an analytical framework to better understand challenges experienced by indigenous women. Additionally, a multifaceted connection between sex, gender, age, ethnicity status, geographical location, economic and income inequality should be taken into consideration in the legal and regulatory implementation.
- Acknowledge that gender considerations in policies and practice should not be seen in isolation as they are cross-cutting in nature (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2018). Consequently, the government should take gender into account when implementing policies in health, education, social security, work, and participation in economic, political, and cultural life.
- Pay particular attention to the improvement of measures associated with economic and social conditions to ensure that indigenous women can engage in a meaningful participation of political, economical, and societal activities.
- Amend laws and policies that restrict women's ability to participate, engage, or hold positions in political and economical spheres. In addition, the government should develop the implementation of reforms providing equal access to opportunities for women and men in all regions.
- Implement gender mainstreaming mechanism. This includes drafting, enforcing, and monitoring laws and public policies to promote equal access to services and

opportunities, and to ensure that women and men equally participate in decision making.

- Allocate a gender-responsive budget at the national, regional, and local levels for the promotion of women's economic empowerment and political participation. The government should consider the analysis of gender inequality and gender-based violence, objectives, activities, indicators, and related budgetary allocations in the implementation of the action plan.
- Provide free and quality primary and secondary education for all children. The government should take into account geographical locations of ethnic and indigenous communities, especially those residing in mountainous areas. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education should facilitate and consider funding tertiary education for indigenous youth.
- Promote resilient and inclusive policies that encourage people of all backgrounds particularly at-risk and vulnerable groups, including people living with disabilities, the elderly, children, and ethnic minorities.
- Recognise indigenous women's contribution in politics and economics. Indigenous women's participation leads to substantial gains for democracy and a more inclusive and sustainable society.

## **Practice**

- Work with the media to tackle stigmas, prejudice, and discrimination against indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. For decades, indigenous peoples have experienced bias and stereotypes connected to their ethnic status. Advocacy about better understanding of different groups should be taken into consideration.
- Collaborate with regional and local Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including Indigenous Media Network (IMN), Indigenous Women's Network of

Thailand (IWNT), and international organisations, to promote the role of indigenous women in leadership positions at local, regional, and national levels.

- Promote education for youth and children to change the social norms. The Government should implement programmes and interactive activities in schools about gender equality and indigenous peoples' rights as well as gender-based violence to challenge discriminatory practices and gender norms.
- Preserve and value the significance of indigenous knowledge and languages. This requires engaging stakeholders at multiple levels, from holding dialogues at the national level to organising workshops across the region.
- Promote platforms for exchange of experiences and learning between indigenous women's networks, groups, and alliances, with a focus on identifying challenges and strategies to promote women's rights and the rights of indigenous peoples.
- Empowering women as agents of change and in leadership positions through a series of workshops, capacity-building training, and learning sessions necessary for careers in politics for women of all backgrounds.
- Encourage women and girls of all backgrounds to consider non-traditional roles and decision-making positions.
- Engage men as allies in efforts to advance social change and gender equality, particularly in regards to ending all forms of violence against women and girls.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bernstein, M., 2005. Identity politics. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, 31, pp.47-74.

Buadaeng, K., 2006. The rise and fall of the Tribal Research Institute (TRI): “Hill Tribe” policy and studies in Thailand. *Japanese Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 44(3), pp.359-384.

Buadaeng, K., 2007. *Ethnic identities of the Karen peoples in Burma and Thailand* (pp. 73-97). Berghahn Books, New York.

Buergin, R., 2015. Contested rights of local communities and indigenous peoples in conflicts over biocultural diversity: the case of Karen communities in Thung Yai, a world heritage site in Thailand. *Modern Asian Studies*, 49(6), pp.2022-2062.

Chaikoolvatana, A. and Pakasit, V., 2018. Evaluation of the establishment of health promoting hospital via geographic information system in the north-eastern area of Thailand. *Science, Engineering and Health Studies*, pp.47-58.

Chiang Mai Province Official Site, (n.d.). *Information*, [online] Available at: <https://www.chiangmai.go.th/english/index.php/welcome/information> [Accessed 27 March 2023].

ConstitutionNet, (n.d.). *Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand*, [online] Available at: [https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/CONSTITUTION+OF+THE+KINGDOM+OF+THAILAND+\(B.E.+2560+\(2017\)\).pdf](https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/CONSTITUTION+OF+THE+KINGDOM+OF+THAILAND+(B.E.+2560+(2017)).pdf) [Accessed 8 March 2023].

Crenshaw, K., 1989. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *u. Chi. Legal f.*, p.139.



DiCicco-Bloom, B. and Crabtree, B.F., 2006. The qualitative research interview. *Medical education*, 40(4), pp.314-321.

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K.W. and McCall, L., 2013. Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 38(4), pp.785-810.

Crenshaw, K.W., 2013. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In *The public nature of private violence* (pp. 93-118). Routledge.

Freedom House, 2022. *Thailand*, [online] Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/thailand/freedom-world/2022> [Accessed 8 March 2023].

GIS Geography, 2022. *Map of Thailand*, [online] Available at: <https://gisgeography.com/thailand-map/> [Accessed 27 March 2023].

Hayami, Y., 2006. Negotiating ethnic representation between self and other: The case of Karen and eco-tourism in Thailand. *Japanese Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 44(3), pp.385-409.

Horstmann, A., 2014. Stretching the border: Confinement, mobility and the refugee public among Karen refugees in Thailand and Burma. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 29(1), pp.47-61.

Human Rights Foundation, (n.d.). *Our mission*, [online] Available at: <https://hrf.org/about/mission/> [Accessed 8 March 2023].

International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, (n.d.). *Indigenous Peoples in Thailand*, [online] Available at <https://www.iwgia.org/en/thailand.html> [Accessed 10 December 2022].

International Labour Organization, 2021. *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization: A study based on qualitative research in Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon, and Guatemala*, [online] Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms\\_779265.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_779265.pdf) [Accessed 3 May 2023].

International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2020. *Indigenous World 2020: Thailand*, [online] Available at: <https://www.iwgia.org/en/thailand/3610-iw-2020-thailand.html> [Accessed 3 April 2023].

Iwanaga, K. ed., 2008. *Women's political participation and representation in Asia: Obstacles and challenges* (No. 2). NIAS Press.

Junsongduang, A., Balslev, H., Inta, A., Jampeetong, A. and Wangpakapattanawong, P., 2014. Karen and Lawa medicinal plant use: Uniformity or ethnic divergence?. *Journal of ethnopharmacology*, 151(1), pp.517-527.

Maffii, M. and Sineath, H., 2009. Promoting political participation of Indigenous women in Cambodia.

Merry, S.E., 2006. Transnational human rights and local activism: Mapping the middle. *American anthropologist*, 108(1), pp.38-51.

National Domestic and Family Violence Bench Book, 2022. *Cultural and spiritual abuse* [online] Available at: <https://dfvbenchbook.aija.org.au/understanding-domestic-and-family-violence/cultural-and-spiritual-abuse/> [Accessed 12 May 2023].

Nawarat, N., 2010. Reconstructing gender identity for political participation: Hill Tribe women in Northern Thailand. *Asien*, 114(115), pp.33-49.

Ochieng, P.A., 2009. An analysis of the strengths and limitation of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 13, p.13.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1979. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* [online] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women> [Accessed 3 May 2023].

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, (n.d.). *Ratification Status for Thailand*, [online] Available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=172&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=172&Lang=EN) [Accessed 8 March 2023].

OHCHR, 2013. *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, [online] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/UNDRIPManualForNHRI.pdf> [Accessed 3 April 2023].

Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, 2019. *Women in Politics*, [online] Available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/a2422862-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/a2422862-en> [Accessed 9 March 2023].

Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 2021. *Community Stories: Local wisdom*, [Online] Available at: <https://communityarchive.sac.or.th/blog/198> [Accessed 18 March 2023].

Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 2023. *Ethnic Group Karen (Pga K'nyau)*, [online] Available at: <https://www.sac.or.th/databases/ethnic-groups/ethnicGroups/79> [Accessed 7 March 2023].

Prindeville, D.M. and Bretting, J.G., 1998. Indigenous women activists and political participation: The case of environmental justice. *Women & Politics*, 19(1), pp.39-58.

Romanow, L., 2012. The women of Thailand. *Global Majority E-Journal*, 3(1), pp.44-60.

Samuels, G.M. and Ross-Sheriff, F., 2008. Identity, oppression, and power: Feminisms and intersectionality theory. *Affilia*, 23(1), pp.5-9.

Schwartz, M.S. and Schwartz, C.G., 1955. Problems in participant observation. *American journal of sociology*, 60(4), pp.343-353.

Scott, James C, 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press.

Smith, D.E., 1990. *The conceptual practices of power: A feminist sociology of knowledge*. University of Toronto Press.

Smith, D.E., 2005. *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people*. Rowman Altamira.

Sprague, J., 2016. *Feminist methodologies for critical researchers: Bridging differences*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Statista, 2023. *Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in Thailand from 2010 to 2020*, [online] Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/730330/thailand-proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-national-parliament/> [Accessed 9 March 2023].

Sylvain, R., 2011. At the intersections: San women and the rights of indigenous peoples in Africa. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 15(1), pp.89-110.

Tangjitman, K., Wongsawad, C., Kamwong, K., Sukkho, T. and Trisonthi, C., 2015. Ethnomedicinal plants used for digestive system disorders by the Karen of northern Thailand. *Journal of ethnobiology and ethnomedicine*, 11(1), pp.1-13.

Thai PBS World, 2023. 'Thailand's official population at December 31st 2022 was 66,090,475', Thai PBS World, [online] 5 January. Available at: <https://www.thaipbsworld.com/thailands-official-population-at-december-31st-2022-was-66090475/> [Accessed 8 March 2023].

The World Bank, (n.d.). *Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%) - Thailand*, [online] Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=TH> [Accessed 9 March 2023].

United Nations, 2007. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, [online] Available at: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2019/01/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2019/01/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf) [Accessed 4 April 2023].

United Nations, 2014. *The Government of Thailand's National Review*, [online] Available at: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/13208Thailand\\_review\\_Beijing20.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/13208Thailand_review_Beijing20.pdf) [Accessed 8 March 2023].

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (n.d.). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, [online] Available at: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples> [Accessed 3 April 2023].

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2018. *Strategies for advancing women's economic empowerment in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals*, [online] Available at: [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/CSD5\\_women\\_economic\\_E\\_0.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/CSD5_women_economic_E_0.pdf) [Accessed 3 April 2023].

UN Women, 2023. *Facts and Figures: Women's leadership and political participation*, [online] Available at: [https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#\\_edn4](https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#_edn4) [Accessed 9 March 2023].

Vang, C.Y., Nibbs, F. and Vang, M. eds., 2016. *Claiming place: On the agency of Hmong women*. U of Minnesota Press.

Williams, C., 2007. Research methods. *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, 5(3).

Winai Boonlue, 2002. "Cultural capital and the symbolic power struggle of the Pga K'nyau community". Bachelor of Arts Thesis Department of Social Development Graduate School Chiang Mai University.

World Health Organization, 2021. *Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence*, [online] Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence> [Accessed 13 March 2023].

# Appendix 1

## List of participants

Interview 1

Naree Putaraksakul, Assistant Village Chief

Noryatee Salaithongprers, Founder and Head of Coffee Community Enterprise, Youth Coordinator

Amporn Pripanasumpun, Coordinator of Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), Committee of Inter Mountain Peoples' Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT), Founder and Head of "Pawmu Kleesutha" social enterprise (traditional herbs)

Jahea Tantansan, Member of Mae Win Subdistrict Administration (SAO)

Noraepo, knowledge holder

Kula Amornchatpan, knowledge holder

Interview 8, knowledge holder

Sripen Patakanta, Youth Representative

Chanchai Noloi, Deputy Chief Executive of Mae Win Subdistrict Administrative Organization

Noraeri Thungmueangthong, Village Chief, Committee of Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand (IWNT), Founder and Head of Che Su Mo Community Enterprise

Kwanchewan Buadaeng, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University

Interview 13, academic lecturer

Darunee Singphongphrai, indigenous human rights defender, former INGO worker



# Appendix 2

## Information letter and consent form (in English and Thai)

### **Are you interested in taking part in the research project “*The Leadership and Political Participation of Pga K'nyau Indigenous Women in Thailand*”?**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to examine the leadership and political participation of Pga K'nyau indigenous women in northern Thailand. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

#### **Purpose of the project**

This is a master's thesis. The purpose of this project is to examine the leadership and political participation of Pga K'nyau indigenous women in northern Thailand, how they understand their political identity, and investigate internal and external factors that facilitate or obstruct the creation of an enabling environment for women's political participation and leadership.

#### **Main research questions are:**

1. What are the roles and contributions of indigenous women in local and national politics?
2. How do politically active indigenous women perceive their role and political identity?
3. What are the key internal and external factors that promote or hinder indigenous women's political participation and leadership?
4. How their political participation promotes the development of indigenous communities and collective rights of indigenous peoples?

#### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

This thesis is for a joint-degree master's programme that is a cooperation between the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, the University of Deusto in Spain, the University of

Roehampton in the UK, and UiT – the Arctic University of Norway. UiT - the Arctic University of Norway has responsibility for the thesis and, my thesis supervisor and advisor is Dr. Jennifer Hays ([Jennifer.hays@uit.no](mailto:Jennifer.hays@uit.no)). My supervisor or advisor will not have access to the data collected for this project, only the anonymized data in the thesis. I, Tanyalak Thongyoojaroen, am the only person that will have access to the personal information collected for this project.

### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

To collect data, 10-15 Pga K'nyau indigenous women who are activists, community leaders/workers, human rights defenders, or hold positions in local governance or at national level will be interviewed. A snowball sampling technique based upon reputation in the community engagement, national and local governance will be employed to identify the study participants. In addition, another 5 persons who are members of parliament, academics, and NGO workers will be interviewed.

### **What does participation involve for you?**

In this research, I will interview participants in person, either at participants' working station, home, or other public spaces. If you are not available for an in-person interview, I will conduct an interview through video calls or calls. The interview will take between 45 minutes to 1.30 hours. The interview includes questions about the role of Pga K'nyau indigenous women in leadership, political participation and community development, the key factors that promote or hinder Pga K'nyau women's participation in politics or leadership role, and how their participation promotes the development of indigenous communities and collective rights of indigenous peoples. Your answers will be recorded electronically.

To explore the social dynamics and observe activities led and participated by Pga K'nyau indigenous, I will conduct ethnographic methods and participant observation in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in January 2023.

### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

## **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- I, Tanyalak Thongyoojaroen, am the only person who has access to the personal data.
- To ensure that no unauthorised persons are able to access the personal data, I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data. I will store the research data in an encrypted database/ platform.

If you consent, your name, age, and occupation will be published in the publication.

## **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end on 15 June 2023. The collected data will be anonymised at the end of the project.

## **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

## **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with The University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

## **Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- The University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway via Tanyalak Thongyoojaroen.
- Our Data Protection Officer: Sølvi Brendeford Anderssen, [personvernombud@uit.no](mailto:personvernombud@uit.no)
- Data Protection Services, by email: ([personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no)) or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader  
(Dr. Jennifer Hays)

Student (if applicable)  
(Tanyalak Thongyoojaroen)

---

## Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project “The Leadership and Political Participation of Pga K'nyau Indigenous Women in Thailand” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in an interview
- to participate in a participant observation
- for my interview/ voice to be recorded
- for information about me/myself e.g. name, age, and position to be published in a way that I can be recognised
- for my photographs or videos to be taken and published in the thesis and presented in the Thesis Symposium Presentation in Spain in June 2023.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 15 June 2023.

---

(Signed by participant, date)

คุณสนใจที่จะมีส่วนร่วมในโครงการวิจัยในหัวข้อ “ความเป็นผู้นำและการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองของหญิงชาวปกากะญอในภาคเหนือประเทศไทย” *“The Leadership and Political Participation of Pga K’nyau Indigenous Women in Thailand”* หรือไม่?

เอกสารฉบับนี้เป็นการสอบถามเกี่ยวกับการเข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัย (วิทยานิพนธ์ปริญญาโท) ที่มีจุดประสงค์หลักเพื่อศึกษาความเป็นผู้นำและการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองของหญิงชาวปกากะญอในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย ในเอกสารฉบับนี้ เราจะให้ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับวัตถุประสงค์ของโครงการและรายละเอียดการมีส่วนร่วมของคุณ

### วัตถุประสงค์ของโครงการ

นี่คือวิทยานิพนธ์ระดับปริญญาโท จุดประสงค์ของงานวิจัยครั้งนี้คือเพื่อศึกษาความเป็นผู้นำ และการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองของหญิงชาวปกากะญอในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย ความเข้าใจเรื่องอัตลักษณ์ทางการเมือง และศึกษาปัจจัยภายในและภายนอกที่เอื้อหรือขัดขวางการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองและความเป็นผู้นำของผู้หญิง

### คำถามหลักในการวิจัยคือ:

1. หญิงชาวปกากะญอมีบทบาทอย่างไรในการเมืองระดับท้องถิ่นและระดับชาติ?
2. หญิงชาติพันธุ์ที่ตื่นตัวทางการเมืองรับรู้บทบาท และอัตลักษณ์ทางการเมืองของตนอย่างไร?
3. อะไรคือปัจจัยภายในและภายนอกที่ส่งเสริมหรือขัดขวางการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองและความเป็นผู้นำของหญิงชาติพันธุ์?
4. การมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองของหญิงชาวปกากะญอส่งเสริมการพัฒนาชุมชนพื้นเมือง และสิทธิของชนพื้นเมืองอย่างไร?

### ใครรับผิดชอบโครงการวิจัย?

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้จัดทำขึ้นสำหรับหลักสูตรปริญญาโทร่วมซึ่งเป็นโครงการความร่วมมือระหว่าง University of Gothenburg ในประเทศสวีเดน, University of Deusto ในประเทศสเปน, University of Roehampton ในสหราชอาณาจักร และ UiT – the Arctic University of Norway UiT ในประเทศนอร์เวย์ the Arctic University of Norway มีหน้าที่รับผิดชอบวิทยานิพนธ์และหัวหน้าวิทยานิพนธ์และที่ปรึกษาของวิทยานิพนธ์คือ Dr. Jennifer Hays ([Jennifer.hays@uit.no](mailto:Jennifer.hays@uit.no)) หัวหน้างานหรือที่ปรึกษาของวิทยานิพนธ์จะไม่สามารถเข้าถึงข้อมูลที่รวบรวมสำหรับโครงการนี้ได้ เข้าถึงได้เฉพาะข้อมูลที่ไม่ระบุชื่อในวิทยานิพนธ์เท่านั้น

ข้าพเจ้านางสาวรัชฎลักษณ์ ทองอยู่เจริญ เป็นบุคคลเดียวที่จะสามารถเข้าถึงข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลที่รวบรวมไว้สำหรับโครงการนี้ได้

## ทำไมเราถึงขอให้คุณเข้าร่วม?

ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล ผู้วิจัยจะสัมภาษณ์หญิงชาวปกากะญอ 10-15 คนที่เป็นนักกิจกรรม ผู้นำชุมชน นักกิจกรรม นักปกป้องสิทธิมนุษยชน หรือดำรงตำแหน่งในการปกครองท้องถิ่นหรือในระดับชาติ ผู้วิจัยจะใช้เทคนิคการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบอ้างอิงบุคคล (Snowball Sampling) โดยเลือกบุคคลที่มีส่วนร่วมกับชุมชน ชรรมาภิบาลระดับชาติและระดับท้องถิ่น นอกจากนี้จะสัมภาษณ์บุคคลซึ่งเป็นสมาชิก รัฐบาล นักวิชาการ และองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนอีก 5 คน

## การมีส่วนร่วมเกี่ยวข้องกับคุณอย่างไร?

ในงานวิจัยนี้ ผู้วิจัยจะสัมภาษณ์ผู้เข้าร่วมด้วยตนเอง ทั้งที่สถานที่ทำงานของผู้เข้าร่วม ที่บ้าน หรือพื้นที่สาธารณะอื่นๆ หากคุณไม่พร้อมสำหรับการสัมภาษณ์แบบตัวต่อตัว ผู้วิจัยจะสัมภาษณ์ผ่านวิดีโอคอลหรือการโทรศัพท์ การสัมภาษณ์จะใช้เวลาระหว่าง 45 นาที ถึง 1.30 ชั่วโมง การสัมภาษณ์ประกอบด้วยคำถามเกี่ยวกับบทบาทของหญิงชาวปกากะญอในการเป็นผู้นำ การมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองและการพัฒนาชุมชน ปัจจัยสำคัญที่ส่งเสริมหรือขัดขวางการมีส่วนร่วมของหญิงชาวปกากะญอในการเมืองหรือบทบาทการเป็นผู้นำ และการมีส่วนร่วมของหญิงชาวปกากะญอส่งเสริมการพัฒนาชุมชนพื้นเมืองและสิทธิส่วนรวมของ ชนพื้นเมือง คำตอบของคุณจะถูกรับที่ทางอิเล็กทรอนิกส์

เพื่อสำรวจพลวัตทางสังคมและสังคมกิจกรรมที่นำโดยและมีส่วนร่วมโดยชนพื้นเมืองปกากะญอ ผู้วิจัยจะใช้วิธีการสังเกตการณ์แบบมีส่วนร่วมในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ ประเทศไทย ในเดือนมกราคม 2566

## การเข้าร่วมเป็นไปตามความสมัครใจ

การเข้าร่วมโครงการเป็นไปตามความสมัครใจ หากคุณเลือกที่จะเข้าร่วม คุณสามารถเพิกถอนความยินยอมของคุณได้ตลอดเวลาโดยไม่ต้องให้เหตุผล ข้อมูลทั้งหมดเกี่ยวกับคุณจะถูกทำให้เป็นนิรนาม จะไม่มีผลกระทบในทางลบสำหรับคุณหากคุณเลือกที่จะไม่เข้าร่วมหรือตัดสินใจถอนตัวในภายหลัง

## ความเป็นส่วนตัวของคุณ — เราจะจัดเก็บและใช้ข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณอย่างไร

เราจะใช้ข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์ที่ระบุไว้ในจดหมายขออนุญาตนี้เท่านั้น เราจะประมวลผลข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณอย่างเป็นความลับและเป็นไปตามกฎหมายคุ้มครองข้อมูล

(กฎหมายว่าด้วยการคุ้มครองข้อมูลทั่วไปและพระราชบัญญัติข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล)

- ข้าพเจ้า รัชลักษ์ณ์ ทองอยู่เจริญ เป็นบุคคลเดียวที่สามารถเข้าถึงข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลได้
- เพื่อให้แน่ใจว่าไม่มีบุคคลที่ไม่ได้รับอนุญาตสามารถเข้าถึงข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลได้ ฉันจะแทนที่ชื่อและรายละเอียดการติดต่อของคุณด้วยรหัส รายชื่อ รายละเอียดการติดต่อ และรหัสที่เกี่ยวข้องจะถูกจัดเก็บแยกจากข้อมูลที่รวบรวมส่วนที่เหลือ ฉันจะเก็บข้อมูลการวิจัยไว้ในฐานข้อมูล/แพลตฟอร์มที่เข้ารหัส

หากคุณยินยอม ชื่อ อายุ และอาชีพของคุณจะถูกเผยแพร่ในสิ่งพิมพ์

**จะเกิดอะไรขึ้นกับข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณเมื่อสิ้นสุดโครงการวิจัย?**

โครงการมีกำหนดสิ้นสุดในวันที่ 15 มิถุนายน 2566 ข้อมูลที่รวบรวมจะถูกทำให้เป็นนิรนาม (anonymise) เมื่อสิ้นสุดโครงการ

### **สิทธิของคุณ**

ทราบว่าที่คุณสามารถระบุตัวตนของคุณ ในข้อมูลที่รวบรวมได้ คุณมีสิทธิ์ที่จะ:

- เข้าถึงข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลที่กำลังประมวลผลเกี่ยวกับคุณ
- ขอให้ลบข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณ
- ขอให้แก้ไขข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลที่ไม่ถูกต้องเกี่ยวกับตัวคุณ
- รับสำเนาข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณ (data portability) และ
- ส่งข้อร้องเรียนไปยังเจ้าหน้าที่คุ้มครองข้อมูลหรือหน่วยงานคุ้มครองข้อมูลของนอร์เวย์เกี่ยวกับการประมวลผลข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณ

**อะไรทำให้เรามีสิทธิ์ในการประมวลผลข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณ?**

เราจะประมวลผลข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของคุณตามความยินยอมของคุณ

ตามข้อตกลงกับ The University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway ประเทศนอร์เวย์ บริการ

ปกป้องข้อมูลได้ประเมินว่าการประมวลผลข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลในโครงการนี้เป็นไปตามกฎหมายคุ้มครองข้อมูล

**คุณสามารถหาข้อมูลเพิ่มเติมได้ที่ไหน?**

หากมีข้อสงสัยเกี่ยวกับโครงการหรือต้องการใช้สิทธิ์ ติดต่อ:

- The University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway ผ่านทางนางสาว ธัญลักษณ์ ทองอยู่เจริญ
- เจ้าหน้าที่คุ้มครองข้อมูลของเรา: Sølvi Brendeford Anderssen, [personvernombud@uit.no](mailto:personvernombud@uit.no)
- บริการคุ้มครองข้อมูลทางอีเมล: ([personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no)) หรือทางโทรศัพท์: +47 53 21 15 00

ขอแสดงความนับถือ

หัวหน้าโครงการ

(Dr. Jennifer Hays)

นักศึกษา

(ชญลักษณ์ ทองอยู่เจริญ)

---

### แบบฟอร์มยินยอม (Consent Form)

ข้าพเจ้าได้รับและเข้าใจข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับโครงการ (วิทยานิพนธ์ปริญญาโท) ในหัวข้อ “ภาวะผู้นำและการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองของหญิงชาวปกากะญอในประเทศไทย” (*“The Leadership and Political Participation of Pga K'nyau Indigenous Women in Thailand”*) และเปิดโอกาสให้ซักถาม ข้าพเจ้ายินยอม:

- เข้าร่วมการสัมภาษณ์
- เข้าร่วมการสังเกตการณ์แบบมีส่วนร่วม (participant observation)
- ให้อำนาจเสียงขณะสัมภาษณ์
- ให้เผยแพร่ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับตัวข้าพเจ้า เช่น ชื่อ อายุ และตำแหน่ง ในงานวิจัย/ วิทยานิพนธ์
- ให้อำนาจภาพถ่าย หรือวิดีโอของข้าพเจ้า เพื่อเผยแพร่ในวิทยานิพนธ์และนำเสนอในการนำเสนอวิทยานิพนธ์ (Thesis Symposium Presentation) ที่ประเทศสเปนในเดือนมิถุนายน 2566

ข้าพเจ้ายินยอมให้ข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของข้าพเจ้าได้รับการประมวลผลจนถึงวันสิ้นสุดโครงการ โดยประมาณวันที่ 15 มิถุนายน 2566

---

(ลงนามโดยผู้เข้าร่วม, วันที่)