

DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF

BÙI THỊ BÍCH LAN.

Livelihood activities of Kháng Ethnic People in Chiềng Bôm, Thuận Châu district, Sơn La province

Specialization: Cultural Anthropology

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Survive in the Northwest environment with its own characteristics on soil, climate, hydrologic conditions, etc., livelihood activities of Kháng Ethnic People in Chiềng Bôm, Thuận Châu district, Sơn La province have shown human adaptation to nature in each particular historical period. However, analyses and justifications for the adaptation of their livelihood in the new conditions and circumstances as well as a systematic understanding about its impact in relation to sustainable development have still not been clarified. For this reason, Post-graduate Bùi Thị Bích Lan chose the issue Livelihood activities of Kháng Ethnic People in Chiềng Bôm, Thuận Châu district, Sơn La province as the subject of her PHD thesis. The thesis has not only clarified Kháng Ethnic People's experiences and knowledge to adapt to the natural environment, but also found out the changes and the inadequacies in their livelihood development. Thereby, it has identified the issues set out to Kháng Ethnic People's livelihood activities today in relation to sustainable development such as economic growth, social stability, cultural development and living environmental protection, etc.

In addition to introduction, results and discussions, conclusions and appendices, the thesis is organized into four chapters (156 pages).

Chapters 1 and 2 present an overview of research situation, theoretical bases and

research methods; an overview of Kháng Ethnic People in Vietnam and Kháng Ethnic People in the research area.

On general grounds for some researches on indigenous livelihoods, the thesis assumes that research results on livelihood activities in the past decades have importantly contributed to the planning of major policies and directions in the development of ethnic people and mountainous areas of Vietnam. Its research results also provide additional valuable material resources as a basis for planning programs to support socio-economic development for ethnic minorities in general and Kháng Ethnic People's community - the ethnic group has been receiving little attention on subsistence activities - in particular. In her research, the Thesis uses two basic theoretical frameworks (Human ecology and Sustainable livelihoods framework) and research methods (ethnographic fieldwork, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), etc....) to find out the interrelationship between Kháng Ethnic People's social system and their surrounding agricultural ecosystem as well as analyze their livelihoods and poverty since the Innovation so far in terms of the possession and access to livelihood capitals which are also known as living resources.

Kháng is one of the 21 Mon-Khmer language-speaking ethnic groups in Vietnam. They reside mainly in the Northwestern mountainous region, which concentrate on Sơn La, Điện Biên and Lai Châu provinces. Like majority of other ethnic minorities, Kháng Ethnic Minorities in Sơn La have a naturalistic and self-sufficient economy. Cultivation is the main activity in Kháng Ethnic People's economic

life in Chiềng Bôm before and after the Innovation, other activities are secondary economic sectors only, which are supportive to the cultivation and under its influence. Besides, their traditional society is completely dependent on the mountain village institution of Thái people (in addition to some Kháng's traditional elements, there still exist many Thái's cultural elements such as village layout, housing, clothing, language, writing, religions, customs and traditions as well as festivals, etc.)

Chapter 3, Livelihood activities of Kháng Ethnic People in Chiềng Bôm before Innovation (1986) is quite diverse with adequate methods such as farming, husbandry, family crafts, exchange and exploitation of natural resources. Among them, cultivation plays the most important role.

Regarding the cultivation, the upland rice is the main crop to ensure food supply for the family. However, the area is insignificant, only one rice crop together with simple farming technique, primitive tools, little care, mainly dependent on nature, etc..., low crop yields, unstable income, shortage and hunger happen often. Furthermore, maize, cassava... are only secondary crops and are not valued.

In terms of auxiliary livelihood activities, economic types such as husbandry, family crafts, hunting and gathering are indispensable activities, seasonal and complementary to farming.

Husbandry has not been developed, heavily self-sufficient with free grazing habits, little care and is mainly dependent on nature. Products of husbandry activities are exchanged when necessary, provide pulling power for cultivation of wet rice fields, provide gifts for religious activities and are

important food resources when the family has a great work, etc.

Manual labor aims to meet life and production demands in the families, sometimes to exchange. This activity focuses on knitting and weaving only.

It can be said, the picture of Kháng Ethnic People's traditional livelihood in Chiềng Bôm before the Innovation shows that the knowledges due to accumulation or learning from Thái people have become part of the indigenous cultural value system. With specific social - environmental conditions, they had appropriate behaviors in subsistence activities to survive and grow.

Chapter 4, Livelihood activities of Kháng Ethnic People in Chiềng Bôm from the Innovation (1986) until now - Changing reality and impacts on sustainable development.

Entering the Innovation period, Kháng Ethnic People's economic life in Chiềng Bôm has changed significantly. In structure, agricultural cultivation is still the predominant economic sector which provides the main source of income for the people. When the upland rice is becoming fader and fader in cultivation, the active expansion of area and intensive farming of wet rice partially met the demand for food. The secondary crops are becoming more and more dominant on sloping lands, horticultural products are gradually developing towards goods which bring back cash income; however, these are not guaranteed in terms of food security for households. Husbandry and forestry though tend to shift towards increasing the proportion of income structures but are still slow. With the scarcity of raw materials from natural sources as well as the availability of more and more goods and products on the market, family crafts tend to

decrease their roles in life. The market mechanism has made the trading and exchange activities of the people more and more advantageous which created impetus for other economic activities towards development of commodity production. The exploitation of natural resources is no longer holding an important position as before because of recession plus changes in the State Forest Resource Management Policy. Industry diversification is also a new direction in economic restructuring, however, the orientation is not very clear and specific. In general, due to a low social - economic starting point together with limitation on subsistence resources, poverty is still a major challenge.

The thesis specifies the impacts of subsistence to sustainable development in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects. Thereby, a judgement made, it can be said that Kháng Ethnic People's livelihood in Chiềng Bôm gradually achieves significant results recognized in the improvement of quality of life. However, it is faced with many challenges, demonstrating a lack of sustainability and what really appropriate directions have not yet been found. Livelihood improvement has not ensured a harmonious combination between economic growth and cultural - social development objectives, balancing economic growth with the use of resource conditions, natural resources, sciences and technologies, etc. ...

The thesis provides some solutions to find out suitable directions in improving the sustainable livelihoods of Kháng Ethnic People today:

1/ Land planning should be implemented for Kháng Ethnic People's village communities. Due to population growth and the lack of awareness in exploitation in a long time, the

productive land in Kháng Ethnic People's area in Chiềng Bôm today is short and discoloured which results in low yield and productivity. Therefore, we must first deploy the planning of land, forest for each village of Kháng Ethnic People.

2/ There should be suitable and feasible policies and measures to transform economic structure, structure of plants and animals. This is not only an immediate but also a long-term solution contributed to overcome the low productivity and depletion of land and forest resources in production activities. Crops are mainly food with low acreage and yields along with scattered farming scale, ...which are causes to severe poverty in Kháng Ethnic People today.

3/ Policies should be specific, relevant and satisfactory to link the people with forests and forest economy. Of which, the allocation of forest land on poor forest should be focused to households to supplement their income.

4/Solutions are necessary for capacity building of financial capital by changing perceptions in spending habits. Unplanned spending, low accumulation capacity are not only actual situations of Kháng Ethnic People but also most of the ethnic minorities in Vietnam. These habits are deeply rooted into the mindset of every human being and it significantly affects to financial resources in livelihood development, limits to investment in production and is one of the reasons why many Kháng households fall into debt constantly.

The thesis was successfully defended at the Institute Council, meeting at the Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, May/2013.

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