

Political Ecology of Forests: People and Natural Resources

Fall Semester, 2021

Course Description

The course explores the relationships between human communities and the forest ecosystems that they depend on. The course takes as its case study the ethnoecological relationship of the upland Karen (Bak'en yaw) ethnic group in the forested mountains of Mae Hong Song province, Northern Thailand. A key focus of this course is how the Karen manage their forests, including long cycle rotational farming systems, how forest management and forest resources are integrated with their cultural practices, and how state and non-local actors impact the ability of the Karen to continue their traditional way of life. The majority of the course takes place in mountain villages and forests of the Karen, living with host families, backpacking into remote villages, and studying the forests, culture and ecology in Mae Hong Son.

By the end of the course, students will have an in-depth understanding of the major issues in political ecology and how forests and human communities interact. Students will understand the specific case study of the Karen in Northern Thailand, the cultural and ecological basis for their upland rotational farming systems, and how Karen culture is integrated into upland forest ecology. Students will also learn about the efforts of the Karen to maintain their traditional way of life in the face of pressure to change and abandon their traditions. A key part of the course is understanding how marginalized communities are able to maintain their identity in the face of state pressure to change and assimilate, especially with conflict between local and non-local concepts of sustainable forest management.

Course Objectives

The objectives for this course are to:

- Understand the key concepts and issues in forest political ecology
- Articulate and understand the cultural adaptations to upland forest ecosystems in Karen culture
- Describe the ecological processes involved in long fallow rotational farming systems
- Understand forest classification and management systems
- Identify major forest species (tree and non-tree) as well as their cultural significance, if any
- Be proficient in the tools of ecological and ethnographic field research
- Demonstrate proficiency in field research, remote travel, and the tools of field research

Methodology

The course will integrate course lectures and readings with group discussions and seminars. Experiential field studies will be an important component of the course, both formal and informal. Guest lecturers will be a part of the course to share their experiences and perspective with students. Keeping up with readings, materials presented in class, and assignments is critical for success during this course.

Grading and Assessment

Course Component Details	Total
Participation	
In class participation: This means being an active participant in classes, contributing meaningfully to the discussions, questions, and ongoing learning.	5
Projects: Throughout the class participating in a meaningful way in projects and assignments in-class.	5
Field Studies: Participating in field studies outside of the classroom, both through asking questions in the field, engaging in activities, and being an active and engaged learner during field studies.	5
Total Participation	15
Writing	
Journal/Notes: An important component of learning to observe and analyze the issues during this course is taking notes in class as well as keeping an on-going journal of observations outside the classroom. This means writing daily in your journal, even if only for brief or significant observations.	10
Experiential Learning Workbook: A more structured way of taking notes and learning outside the classroom, ELWs will be assigned to specific field studies and experiential learning opportunities.	15
Essays: For this course essays are longer reflections and analysis. There are four (4) essays during the course, generally one each week. Essays should be 4-5 pages long in your journal, and cover the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How this issue or topic links to the overall topic of the course. • Why you are interested in this specific issue or topic. • An analysis of a specific issue observed or learned about during that week — describe this and why it is important. • Reference to a reading either from the course reader or outside sources. • Other questions that this issue raises for you to explore further. 	20
Total writing	45
Independent Research Project/Focused Inquiry	
Each student will choose an issue related to the course to study independently. This should be a combination of research, observations, and analysis of a topic that the student is interested in. The emphasis is primarily on field observations broadly defined, drawing on both class related field studies as well as independent observations in Thailand on your own time. This is not a book report or literature review, but a field study.	
Proposal: The IRP proposal will be a written outline and a short presentation to the class explaining a statement of intent, how data will be gathered, the feasibility of studying this during the course, and any potential challenges you may anticipate running into.	10
Progress update: This part of the IRP is a short update during the course (both an outline and a presentation) on what the student has discovered about their topic so far, what further questions this raises, any challenges they have faced and how they have overcome them, as well as further information they will be looking for during the second half of the	10
Final Presentation: On the last day of the course each student will give a presentation on their topic, focusing on the initial question, methods, challenges, and the outcome of their focused inquiry. This should be presented with supporting slides. This will be followed by questions and comments from fellow students and instructors.	20
Rubric for final presentation	
1. Clarity and organization — is the issue clearly explained, linked to the topic and readings of the course, and well organized?	
2. Experiential learning/field studies/observations — does the presentation link to specific examples of observations?	
3. Interviews — does the presentation reflect discussions, interviews, and talks with local people and community members?	
4. Depth — is the issue analyzed and explained well and thoroughly?	
Total Independent Research Project	40

Seminar Week Topics and Schedule

Readings are in the course reader. The readings are a resource for the seminars, field studies, and for your final presentation. There are a lot of readings the first week, which you will refer to later on during the field section of the course. **Be strategic in your reading** so that you focus on new materials and information, and then go back and dive deeper into the readings as needed.

Monday – November 22

Overview of Forest Management Issues: The commons and ethnic minorities

- Introduction to political ecology
- The commons and land rights
- Natural resources and forest ecology in Thailand
- Ethnic groups in Thailand

Delang, C.O. 2005. The Political Ecology of Deforestation in Thailand, *Geography* 90(3): 225-237.

Bixler, et.al., 2015. The political ecology of participatory conservation, *Journal of Political Ecology*, Vol 22, pp. 164-182.

Berkes, F. and Folke, C., 1994. Linking Social and Ecological Systems for Resilience and Sustainability, *The Beijer International Institute of Ecological Economics* The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Stockholm, Sweden

Chusak Wittayapak. 2008. History and geography of identifications related to resource conflicts and ethnic violence in Northern Thailand. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* (49)1: 111-127.

Forest Restoration Research Unit. 2006. "Recognizing Forest Types," *How to Plant a Forest: Principles and Practice of Restoring Tropical Forests*. Biology Department, Science Faculty, Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

Forest Restoration Research Unit. 2006. "Forest Type and Restoration Strategy" *How to Plant a Forest: Principles and Practice of Restoring Tropical Forests*. Biology Department, Science Faculty, Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

Optional reading

Bryant R.L. 1998. Power, knowledge and political ecology in the third world: a review. *Progress in Physical Geography* 22,1 pp. 79-94

Delang, C.O., 2002. Deforestation in northern Thailand: the result of Hmong farming practices or Thai development strategies?. *Society & Natural Resources*, 15(6), pp.483-501.

Paritta Wangkiat. "Thailand's Forest Authorities Make Northern Karen Hill-Tribesmen the Scapegoats of Deforestation". *Chiang Rai Times*. 3 May, 2014.

Tuesday – November 23

Natural resource management and key actors in resource management

- Dark and light green conservation
- Thai laws and regulations
- Alternative forest management

Isager, Lotte and Ivarsson, Soren. 2002. "Contesting Landscapes in Thailand. Tree Ordination as Counterterritorialization". *Critical Asian Studies* 34:3. Routledge. p. 402-409.

Jason Lubanski. 2012. "Brief Review of Thailand Land Issues, Laws, Regulations, and Policies". Excerpted from "*Land is Life: A Policy Advocacy Case Study of the Northern Thailand Land Reform Movement*". Capstone Collection.

Leblond JP. Thai Forest Debates and the Unequal Appropriation of Spatial Knowledge Tools. *Conservation Society* 2014;12:425-36

Vandergeest, P., & Peluso, N. L. (1995). Territorialization and state power in Thailand. *Theory and Society*, 24(3), 385-426.

Hayward, D., 2017. Community Land Titling in Thailand, The legal evolution and piloting of titling policy, *Mekong Research Land Forum*

Optional reading

Ostrom, Elinor. 1999 "Design Principles and Threats to Sustainable Organizations that Manage Commons". *Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis* 1-16. Indiana University Center for the Study of Institutions, Population, and Environmental Change.

Pinkaew Laungamsri. 2000. Chapter 3 "On the Construction of Nature Conservation" *Redefining Nature: Karen Ecological Knowledge and the Challenge to the Modern Conservation Paradigm*, 238-254. PhD dissertation, Anthropology, University of Washington, USA

Wednesday – November 24

Strategies and challenges for forest resource protection and conservation

- Types of upland agriculture
- Community based management
- Local and global forest management

Abson, D.J., Von Wehrden, H., Baumgärtner, S., Fischer, J., Hanspach, J., Härdtle, W., Heinrichs, H., Klein, A.M., Lang, D.J., Martens, P. and Walmsley, D., 2014. Ecosystem services as a boundary object for sustainability. *Ecological Economics*, 103, pp.29-37. Page 3 of 12 Meitzner Yoder, Laura S., Carrie A. Sedlack, and Rashauna S. Mead. "Swidden Fallow Length: Reasons for adjusting the swidden cycle at Huay Pu-Ling, northwest Thailand." 1-16

Prasert Trakarnsuphakorn. 1997. "The Wisdom of the Karen in Natural Resource Conservation." Pp. 204-218 in McCaskill, D., and K. Kampe (eds), *Development or Domestication?: Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm.

Pinkaew Laungamsri. 2000. Chapter 6 "Rai, Rai Lu'an Loy, Rai Mun Wian and the Politics of "Shifting Cultivation" *Redefining Nature: Karen Ecological Knowledge and the Challenge to the Modern Conservation Paradigm*, 238-254. PhD dissertation, Anthropology, University of Washington, USA

Wangpakapattanawong, P., et al. 2010. Fallow to Forest: Applying indigenous and scientific knowledge of swidden cultivation to tropical forest restoration. *Forest Ecology and Management* 260: 1399-1406.

Thursday – November 25

Field Study: Forest restoration and management: from theoretical to practical

Case Study: Forest Landscape Restoration at Ban Mae Sa Mai, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Visit: Forest Restoration Research Unit (FORRU) – Learning about "Framework Species Method for Forest Restoration"

Elliott S. (et al.) (2012). Chapter: Integrating Scientific Research with Community Needs to Restore a Forest Landscape in Northern Thailand - A Case Study of Ban Mae Sa Mai, A Goal-Oriented Approach to Forest Landscape Restoration, Volume 16.

Ciccarese, L., Mattsson, A. and Pettenella, D., 2012. Ecosystem services from forest restoration: thinking ahead. *New Forests*, 43(5-6), pp.543-560.

Kanowski, J. and Catterall, C.P., 2010. Carbon stocks in above-ground biomass of monoculture plantations, mixed species plantations and environmental restoration plantings in north-east Australia. *Ecological Management & Restoration*, 11(2), pp.119-126.

Optional reading

Forest Restoration Research Unit. 2006. "Understanding Forest Regeneration – Learning from Nature" *How to Plant a Forest: Principles and Practice of Restoring Tropical Forests*. Biology Department, Science Faculty, Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

Forest Restoration Research Unit. 2006. "The Importance of Seed Dispersal" *How to Plant a Forest: Principles and Practice of Restoring Tropical Forests*. Biology Department, Science Faculty, Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

Friday – November 26

Proposal Presentation / Films (Gather: Indigenous Foodways / Karen Weaving Traditions)

ESSAY #1 DUE

IRP PROPOSAL DUE

Field Schedule

The following schedule is flexible and may change based on availability of local instructors, community restrictions due to Covid, and other events. While day-to-day schedules may change, the assignments and mid-course will happen as planned.

Field Study Topics

The following topics and studies are an important part of the course. Depending on the conditions as well as availability of local partners (communities, national park staff, etc.) we may not be able to do all of these studies, but will do as many as is possible in the time allotted.

For the field studies, you will be using both your Experiential Learning Workbook (ELW) as well as your own field notes to record what you learn, questions to follow up on, and materials for your Independent Research Project (IRP).

- Community resource management of both agricultural and forest resources
- National parks and state resource management
- Community life, including cultural practices, religion, organization, and management
- Forest ecology, including flora and fauna
- Rotational farming systems
- Cultural practices (weaving, etc.)
- Relationships in the uplands of Thailand/Southeast Asia with the state

Field Study Methods

In addition to the primary methods of observation and recording notes in your journal, there are several specific field study methods that will be critical to the success of this course and your understanding of the coastal and island ecosystems.

- **Animal and plant identification:** Learning how to identify trees, plants, birds, and animals is a critical skill to develop so that you can complete the other field studies that are a part of the course.
- **Biodiversity survey:** The purpose of the biodiversity survey is to learn about all of the diversity of life (flora and fauna) in a specific area. The goal is to understand the number of different species in the designated area. The goal is to identify as many different species as possible in the area.
- **Community study:** The purpose of a community study is to look in-depth at a specific area and note the species diversity as well as map the species within a bounded area. The goal is to identify and count the number of different species as well as the numbers of individuals of that species in the area.
- **Transect survey:** A transect is a survey along a line in a designated area. The purpose of the transect is to understand diversity, abundance, and distribution along the transect line. The goal is to map out along the line, noting scale/distance in total, as well as where individuals cross or are immediately adjacent to the transect.

Daily Schedule

While day-to-day activities will be determined by specific conditions, studies and activities will be announced in advance whenever possible. The following schedule is open for you to fill in as the course progresses, as well as to note important dates when papers and presentations are due.

Day	Month	Day	Activity / assignments
Monday	November	29	Travel to the village
Tuesday		30	_____
Wednesday	December	1	_____
Thursday		2	_____
Friday		3	Essay #2 due _____
Saturday		4	_____
Sunday		5	_____
Monday		6	Mid course seminar / IRP Progress update
Tuesday		7	_____
Wednesday		8	_____
Thursday		9	_____
Friday		10	Essay #3 due _____
Saturday		11	_____
Sunday		12	_____
Monday		13	_____
Tuesday		14	_____
Wednesday		15	Travel back to Chiang Mai
Thursday		16	Study day / Thai Language Assessment
Friday		17	Essay # 4 Due / IRP Final Presentations

- IRP PRESENTATION IN CLASS: Please note — students are responsible for collecting all presentations before class and loading them into a SINGLE computer for presentations.
- EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING WORKBOOK DUE
- JOURNAL DUE

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes. If you are ill or otherwise need to miss a class, please inform your instructor or teaching assistant.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in ISDSI courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action.

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing an academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Grading Standards

Letter grade	Score or percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B	83–86	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C	73–76	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C-	70-72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
D+	67-69	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
D	60-66	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
F	0-59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an Incomplete.