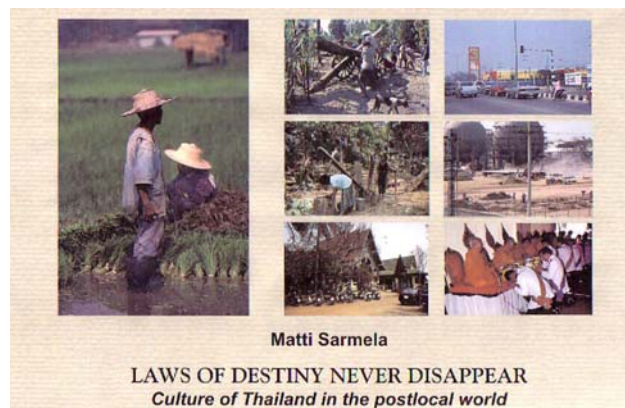


Introduction a CD-book 560 pages 380 pictures PDF-files

Matti Sarmela

LAWS OF DESTINY NEVER DISAPPEAR

Culture of Thailand in the Postlocal World



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**Helsinki
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Local cultures in Lampang province, Northern Thailand

Part I. A VILLAGE IN NORTHERN THAILAND

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Villages and houses

Work of the rice farmer

Part II. COMMUNITY CULTURE

Family and community

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Death

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Introduction

Local Thai culture in the postlocal world

The book is a descriptive overview of the culture of the villages. It contains material on the villagers' housing, rice farming and other means of livelihood, community life, festivals, weddings, funerals, sorcerers and healers, as well as village Buddhism. The author draws surprising parallels between the worldviews of peoples of Thailand and Finland, the past and future of local cultures.

Matti Sarmela started collecting material on Northern Thailand in 1972. Based on a longitudinal field study, he wrote his description of three villages in Lampang Province, and the changes in villagers' lives over three decades. The book also speaks through the voices of villagers themselves and village monks. They describe the everyday lives of local people, and how they cope under conditions of a constant flux of change, what they think about life, the future, and the fate of human beings after death.

- ***Three decades of structural change in three villages of Northern Thailand.***
- ***Three descriptive perspectives: villager interviews, anthropological interpretation, story told in 380 photographs.***
- ***Three main sections: living environment, community and religion.***
- ***Three cultural eras: local, delocal and postlocal.***

A village in Northern Thailand

Part I of the book describes the material culture of the villages, the village milieu, houses, villagers' lifestyles and livelihood. Over the years, modern bungalows have risen alongside the traditional Thai house, but the latter has returned in the 1990s in a new form. Village houses have acquired furniture, TVs, fridges and other domestic appliances that have changed families' lifestyles and food preferences; today, ever more family yards contain a car.

Old rice farming methods, adapted to local environment, have become production farming. Rice farmers discuss machinery, costs, fertilizers, spreading of environmental pollutants. Many would like to return to self-sufficient farming. The ploughing machine has triumphed, the water buffalo is threatened with extinction.



Community culture

Part II of the book examines the arc of human life within the village community of the past and in today's industrializing and urbanizing society. Future expectations have changed. Thailand has become a modern education society, where young people are forced to fight ever harder for college places and jobs. Today's Asian young people are beginning to compete with Westerners in know-how, productivity, global industrial resources. On the other hand, villagers are worried by disappearance of community morality, threat of drugs and AIDS, spread of international consciousness industry and narcissistic lifestyle - in common with people all over the world.

Village religion

Part III examines the supernatural environment of the villages, supernatural guardian spirits of the home compound, cult of ancestors and spiritual forces of nature. Of religious role-players of the villages, sorcerers and mediums and their rite techniques are outlined. The author traces religious thinking from shamanism and sorcery to modern cult of development.

Finally, he describes local Buddhism, monk-hood and ordination of local monks. Buddhism has also changed since the era of village religions. The villagers are concerned about secularisation and uncertainty about what is ethically right and wrong in the new commercial environment. In a competitive society, different people rise to prominence from those who engendered respect in local communities.

Finalization

The book concludes with the author's monologue about the power of the village community and the future of locality. Will community spirit, mutual assistance of relatives and neighbours, caring for one's fellow human beings, die out? Will the laws of destiny, the ethical foundation of local cultures, disappear? Will people everywhere adapt to a uniform postlocal environment, a future of a final, perfect world culture?

Research material

The book is based on interviews of hundreds of people, questionnaires, press cuttings and thousands of photographs. Matti Sarmela, together with his research assistants, started collecting questionnaire material in 1972, based on which he was able to monitor the changes in the villagers' living environment and world-views. Since 1985, Sarmela's working group has interviewed 365 villagers in total, and of the





interviews, the accounts of 29 villagers were selected for the book. Almost 20,000 photographs were amassed over the decades. The illustrations for the book were selected from a collection of 14,000 colour slides, and they depict all the areas of life that are discussed in the book. The material is the largest and most diverse corpus of follow-up material ever collected on local cultures of Thailand. The entire material is preserved in the archives of the Museum of Cultures, Helsinki.

The author

Matti Sarmela was Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Helsinki from 1973 to 2000; he was Finland's first professor in his field. During his time, the Department of Anthropology was established within the University of Helsinki, its researchers engaging in fieldwork into diverse cultures outside Europe in all continents; among its doctoral theses are two on Thailand. Sarmela's own bibliography consist of eleven books and over 200 papers. The present book is a sequel to his study *Paikalliskulttuurin rakennemuutos* [Structural change in local culture] 1979 (1985), which is one of the classics in Finland on research into cultural change. His major work, *Suomen perinneatlas* [Atlas of Finnish folklore], also translated into German, was awarded the prestigious *Tieto-Finlandia* literary prize in 1995.



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