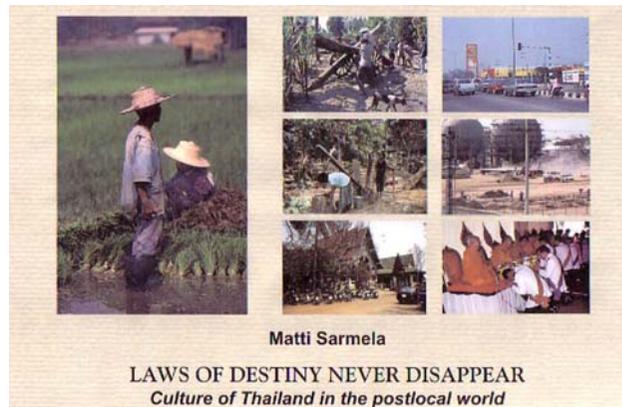


Introduction a CD-book 560 pages 380 pictures PDF-files

**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**

**Environment of life**

**Villages and houses**

**Work of the rice farmer**

## **Part II. COMMUNITY CULTURE**

**Family and community**

**School of life**

**Marriage**

**Death**

**Inside the village community**

## **Part III. VILLAGE RELIGION**

**Faith around me**

**Supernatural environment**

**Buddhist religion**

**Finalization**

**References**

**Appendix**

**Bibliography**

## 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 Lamphang 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.



## Contents

### Part I.

## A VILLAGE IN NORTHERN THAILAND

### **Foreword 12**

Tracing modernization 9 \* Theoretical perspectives 11 \* Fieldwork and the research group 15 \* To the reader 18

### **Environment of my life (interviews) 20**

About experiences in my life \* Young people don't want to farm \* Life is dying out from irrigation canals \* Should we have more development

### **Villages and houses**

Place for a human community 51

Culture of the river valleys 51 \* Lampang Province and City 52

Three villages 53

Ban Sree Muod Klao, central plains village 53 \* Ban Mae Kong Nya, village of northern plains 57 \* Ban Dong, the last forest village 58

Village houses 62

Traditional pillar house 62 \* Modern houses 63 \* Return of the pillar house 64 \* Building practices 68

Equipment of living 69

From buffalo to motor car 69 \* Conveniences of living 71 \* Triumph of home entertainment 73 \* Structural change of living environment 75

***Pictures 77-107***

## **Work of the rice farmer**

Structural change in farming 108

Local rice farming 108 \* Hierarchy of rice 110 \* Buffalo or ploughing machine? 112 \* Delocal production farming 114

Iron claws of the market 116

Crop trends 116 \* Costs of production 117 \* Intensive farming and the environment 118

Future of agriculture 119

After modernization 119 \* How much is enough? 121

**Pictures 124-173**

References 174

## Part II.

# COMMUNITY CULTURE

## **Being human (interviews) 6**

How we were married \* In the fire \* We meet death together \* The village in mourning

## **The arc of life**

Family and community 41

Women's compound 41 \* Making a communal living 43 \* Childhood environments 45 \* From village school to university 46

School of life 47

From villager to citizen 47 \* From citizen to globality 51 \* Virtual civilization 53

Marriage 55

Romantic love 55 \* Village wedding 57 \* Marriage and morality 59

**Pictures 62-128**

## **Death**

Death rites 129

The wake 129 \* The funeral celebration 130 \* The cremation 131 \* Extinguishing the ashes 132 \* Hundredth day memorial rites 132

Message of death 133

Final passage of human life 133 \* The deceased in kinship culture 134 \* The deceased in village culture 135 \* Focus of life 136

**Pictures 138-171**

## **Inside the village community**

Annual festivals 172

Farmer's festival calendar 172 \* Modern annual festivals 173 \* Chinese New Year 175

Songkran 176

New Year of Thai culture 176 \* Programme of the Water Festival 177 \* Bodhi-tree festival 180

Dangers of life 182

Attraction of sex tourism 182 \* Fated to contract Aids 183 \* Drugs and the village community 185

**Pictures 188-216**

References 217

## Part III.

### VILLAGE RELIGION

#### **Faith around me (interviews) 5**

We used to have words for everything \* Supernatural guardian of our family \* I don't believe everything sorcerers say \* What Buddha taught us

**Pictures 54-93**

#### **Supernatural environment**

The invisible world 94  
Supernatural guardians of the environment 94 \* Phii and souls of the kinship group 96 \* Supernatural forces in nature 98  
Between two worlds 99  
Village sorcerers 99 \* Mediums of the deceased 101  
Strata of local belief 102  
Heritage of shamans 102 \* Power of sorcerers 103 \* From tradition to belief in development 104

## **Buddhist religion**

Buddhism of the village community 107  
From local religion to national faith 107 \* Temple monks 108 \* Ordination of monks 110  
  
Power of the community 113  
Human being in a village community 113 \* Life of a good person 115 \* Facing postlocalism 118 \* Finalization 120

**References 123**

**Appendix 130**

**Bibliography 157**

## **Tables**

1. Framework of structural changes .....	I. 13
2. Recorded interviews 1984-1999 .....	I. 16
3. Thailand material 1972-1999 .....	I. 17
4. Three villages .....	I. 55
5. Popularity of house types 1982-2000 ....	I. 66
6. Means of transport .....	I. 73
7. Domestic appliances .....	I. 75
8. Home electronics .....	I. 77
9. Structural change in rice farming .....	I. 113
10. Perspectives of village communities ....	II. 50
11. Basic wedding format .....	II. 58
12. Strata of world-views .....	III. 105