

## **Stagnation of Community Forest Management: A Case Study of Nam Kian Sub-District, Phupiang District, Nan Province**

**Banjit Sairorkham\***

*Department of Sustainable Land Use and Natural Resource Management, Faculty of Social Sciences Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200 Thailand*

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### **Abstract**

The Study on Stagnation of Community Forest Management: A Case Study of Nam Kian Sub-District, Phupiang District, Nan Province aims to investigate the development of community forest management from the beginning to the present time and to use a new paradigm on the description of the forest community management in the context of a highly complex and dynamic approach by using Nam Kian as the case study. The community forest management of the Nam Kian community is one of the most empowered. Nevertheless, the forest management, which was formerly well managed, has weakened and stagnated. The study found that the community forest management has been evolving continuously. In fact, it is correlated and modified by complex factors, of which there are at least seven. These being; 1) forest ecology 2) expansion of land use on the forest 3) market economy 4) intensification of commercial production 5) community collective effort 6) community forest usage 7) community forest management. It has been shown that the change of the first five factors affect the later two factors which have moved through a dynamic change in the dimension of time in each period. In the current situation changes of the five factors, as mentioned above, affected the relationship between the community and the usage and management of community forests. It has shown the adaptation efforts of the villagers, who attached extreme importance to the economic dimension and commercial production, at a cost of diminished importance of other dimensions, especially community forest management.

The stagnation of community forest management in this study is explained well and poses a different explanation from the political ecology. The stagnation of the community forest does not come from state power mainly. It is not an ongoing increment of community forest management that depends on wisdom or cultural vitality

\*Corresponding Author:  
E-mail: banjitsai@gmail.com

of the community. It is a combination of complex factors, especially the approach of the full market economic system, the intensive commercial production, land use, labor and inputs. They affect the ecosystems and decline of biodiversity and reduce the community collective effort. Therefore, the potential of forest management is reduced. This is the phenomenon of describing the stagnation of community forest management in the real situation.

**Keywords:** Stagnation/ Community forest management/ Dynamism/ Complexity

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## 1. Introduction

The community forest management in the past two decades revealed important issues, which created a connection between the community in the forest area and the state agency. The interaction is both the cooperation and disagreement in perspectives towards natural resource management under different standpoints. Looking back on the first era of forest concessions, there have been many communities in the areas which were aware, and became more aggressive in the development of forest protection and conservation. This can be seen from the community movement which constrained the concession, thus causing the cancellation of the concession. In the north, there were more than 15 communities which had been affected, and the opposition group asked

for justice from natural resource management of the state.

By 1990 the community movements for forest management had been developed by the empowered cooperation from scholars who had the role of being the main actors (Boonchai, 2005). These scholars conceded many benefits towards society, which reflected the discoveries and enhanced the understanding toward long-term forest management. This led to wide claims in terms of the empowerment of the community culture. The knowledge, which had been developed, was to be a sharp issue on policy to push community forest legislation through. It was the way towards a positive lifestyle for communities embracing the ecosystem.

There was a push for the draft of the legislation to go through: it was the first draft bill for the rights of the community in the context of natural

resources management. The draft bill was written from the information gathered from field research. These concepts and ideas were used by scholars, NGOs, and local leaders in the village which participated in the body of knowledge development. The thought of the scholars were carefully screened and were backed up by previous academic work (Marukpitak, 2004), especially the research of "the community forest in Thailand and development guidelines" by Chammarik and Santasombat (1993). In the end, the considerations of the legislation draft had not been considered by the Senate Commissioner. As a result it caused stagnation in the legal and policy drive.

However, there were doubts about the influence of political power. In particular, the power of the knowledge and the 'facts' illustrated in academic researches that could be part of weakness of the sovereignty of community rights. This could be a problem about "the body of knowledge" in the explanation of community forest management (Forsyth and Walker, 2008; Sirichai, 2011).

It could also have been that the community forest management was more complex and more dynamic than "the body of knowledge", originally thought. It

turned out to be a weak point that the sovereignty of the state refused to accept. The foundation of thoughts and paradigms were hidden behind this and needed to be reviewed and rechecked.

Descriptions from scholars have concluded that the thinking of the majority of communities had given mutual respect and support for living together with nature. The communities which took care of the forest were on plains, upland, or communities which have a semi-commercial economy or full commercial economy. There were also other ethnic groups which shared and conserved resources vigorously. They have a strong sense of community in sharing the ideological beliefs and have a complementary relationship for mutual benefits. They have natural resources that can be operational. They have community leaders or organization leaders, vigorous rules, wisdom and traditions of resource management which belong to the community. The community has established two components; 1) the population and social system management in the same community, 2) the staple of the resource usage (Chammarik and Santasombat, 1993). The conclusion has been challenging to examine because the

actual phenomenon is highly dynamic and changeable.

The current condition of the community has the characteristics that scholars had more or less expected (Bodhitita, 2006; Boonnak, 2011). The previous description could not be explained to the community forest management as clearly as it should have. Therefore, it would be better if they find a new description to review and examine the new processes in order to find a new explanation which has a higher degree of relevance, when several community forests have been described and accepted in resource management (Buch-Hansen, Oksen, Prabudhanitisarn, 2006).

The previous explanation of the "forest community" has always used empiricism or determinism by using the deduction of the phenomenon more or less into smaller sectors to understand: watershed ecology, ecological economics, political economy, economic ecology, and political ecology separately with different foci (Prabudhanitisarn *et al.*, 2002). However, the community forest management is complex and linked to: the resource base, ecosystem, the production, and the economic system of the community which is highly dynamic. It is to achieve an understanding of

community forest management which is more complex and highly dynamic. Hence, it needs a new explanation from a different paradigm that is a more holistic and multidimensional. It shows that the forest usage and community forest management from the past to present have changed. The results of these first five factors are: 1) forest ecology 2) expansion of land use on the forest 3) market economy 4) intensification of commercial production and 5) community collective efforts. They are applied as the framework for this study.

Based on the author's research, there are two main aims: 1) to study the development of the community forest management at Nam Kian sub-district, Phupiang district, Nan province, Thailand since the beginning to the present time, and 2) to study and analyze a new paradigm in order to describe the forest community management which is dynamic and highly complex by using community forest located in Nam Kian sub-district, Phupiang district, Nan province as the case study.

## 2. Methodology

This study applied mixed methods (Creswell, 2011) to collect data from

primary and secondary sources, maps and ecological survey of the forest, including the use of questionnaires, interviews and in-depth interview to understand the complexity and dynamics of community forest management.

In order to gain in-depth investigation of complex factors which involved factors such as the economic data, production, and forest usage, the researcher has applied statistical information. There is an attempt to understand the complexity and dynamics of the phenomenon of complex factors. As mentioned about the factors prior to the introduction, the researcher analyzed the complex relationship of the first five factors and their influence on the latter two factors, by following the time-line in all three periods.

In order to analyze and compare changes and dynamism of seven factors overtime, information has been transformed into magnitude. They are divided into three periods in the form of graphs to illustrate the dynamics of each factor. The community forest usage and management are under stagnation and it is related to other complex factors (Ganjanapan, 2000) which can contribute to the different descriptions from political ecology.

### 3. Results and discussion

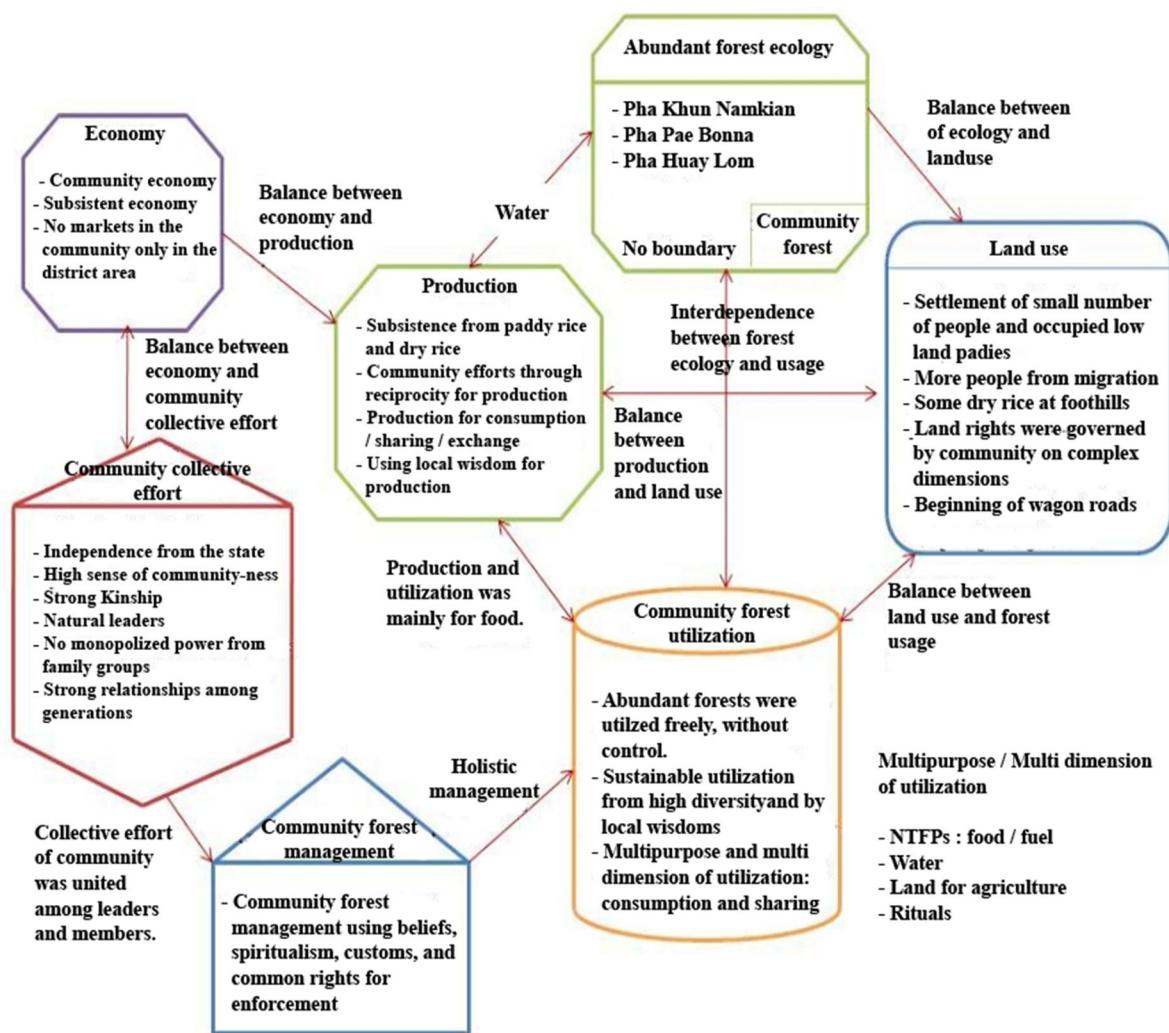
This study found that community forest management: a case study of Nam Kian sub-district, Phupiang district, Nan province has been evolving continuously and has a correlation and modification together with the key factors, of which at least seven were notably significant. These factors are; 1) forest ecology 2) expansion of land use on forest 3) market economy 4) intensification of commercial production 5) community collective effort 6) community forest usage and 7) community forest management.

It was shown that the change of the first five factors affect the later two factors which have moved through a dynamic change within the dimension of each time period. They can be classified into three periods of time as follows:

1. The first period (1921 to 1967): the settlement of the community. The population was small. The ecological conditions of forests were abundant and the resources the community used for their subsistence were abundant. The use of land was for settlement and cultivation for household subsistence. Villagers were self-sufficient and had no economic problems. They were free from the state. The relationship between villagers and

forest was interdependent. The forest was the first essential element to life: the sense of community was high. The relationship between generations was united and collective, where public affairs were concerned. There were regulations in forest management that were in

agreement with livelihood, tradition, and community culture, and influenced community members to treat the forest ritually in order to depend on the forest perfectly. They were an interaction among the seven factors of complex factors as shown in Figure 1.



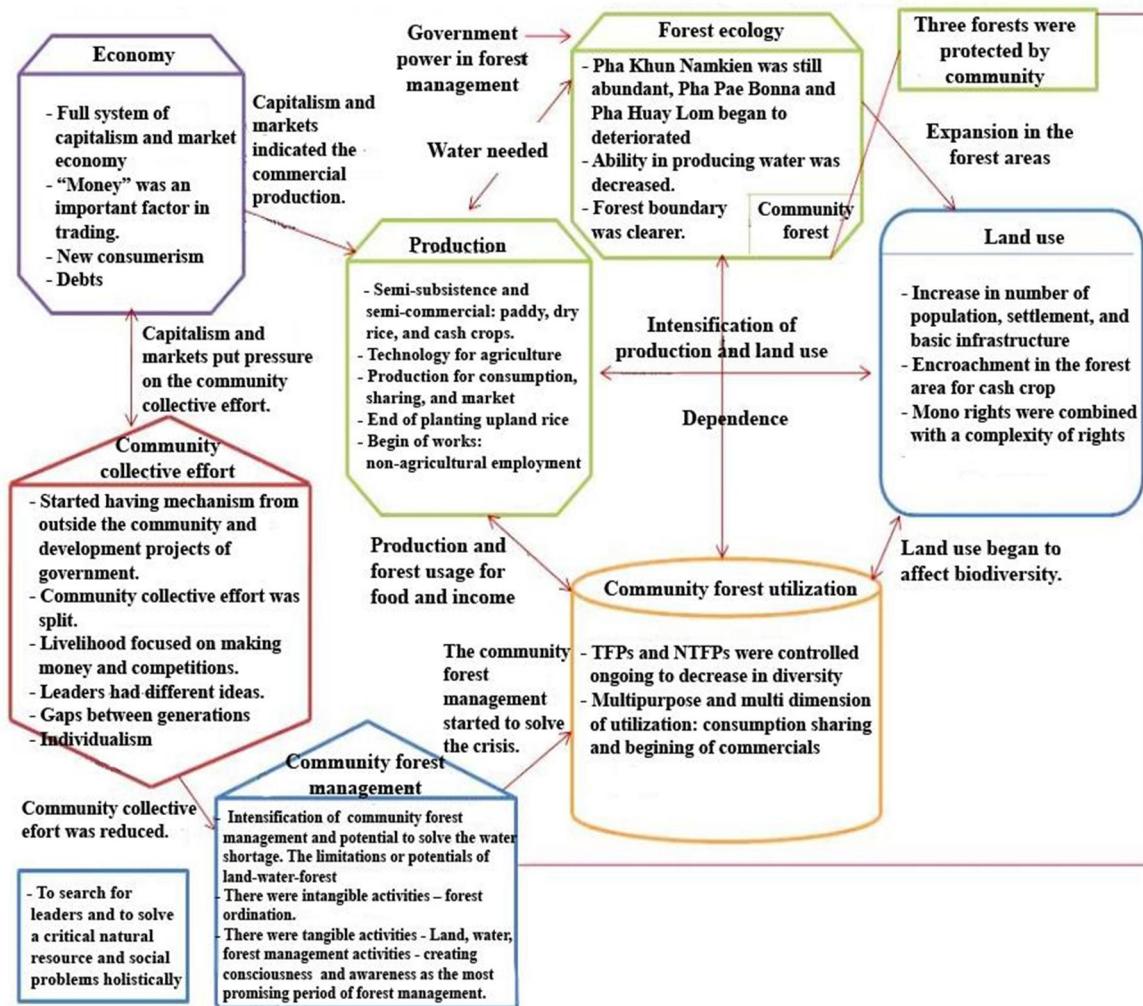
**Figure 1:** The relation of the complex factors affecting community forest usage and management of Nam Kian community in the first period

2. The second period (1968 to 2004): the expansion of the community. This began to change in many ways both in terms of the numbers of population and the mechanisms of state power, capitalism, and development projects of the state. After the development of the basic infrastructure, there were changes in community events such as the rise of logging by capitalists, policies promoting monoculture together with agricultural technology, the change of production systems to commercial production, and the beginning of increased expansion of land use in the forest. Land expansion affected biodiversity degradation and made the ability of water storage critical. It affected the community widely and at same time it created a social differentiation. The community was weakened by lack of regulation. There were social and health problems, and debt.

As such, there was an urgency for community to search for "leaders" to resolve the crisis of resources and social problems along with the community's awareness of the limits of the forest that started to show signs of trouble. These problems, therefore, created the conditions for forest management to be

developed. It depended on the participation in forest usage and forest management to create sustainability. There were strict regulations of living and forest management. At the end of the second period, the sense of community was stimulated and had a collective power in public affairs through various activities, both directly and indirectly (Tangible / Intangible) until the problems were resolved. Hence, we can see that this period of time the community forest management was the most potential and effective of all as illustrated in Figure 2.

3. The third period (2005 to present). The drastic change of economics, capitalism, and market systems had a very strong impact toward the first five factors, which subsequently affected the final two factors; the forest usage and community forest management, were degraded. Livelihood was no longer directly dependent on the forest as in the past. It was only a supplementary factor which could be depended on, or to relieve livelihood at a basic level only. The forest usage and community forest management were mainly shifted to the ecological service for water supply and for monoculture.



**Figure 2:** The relation of the complex factors affecting community forest usage and management of Nam Kian community in the second period.

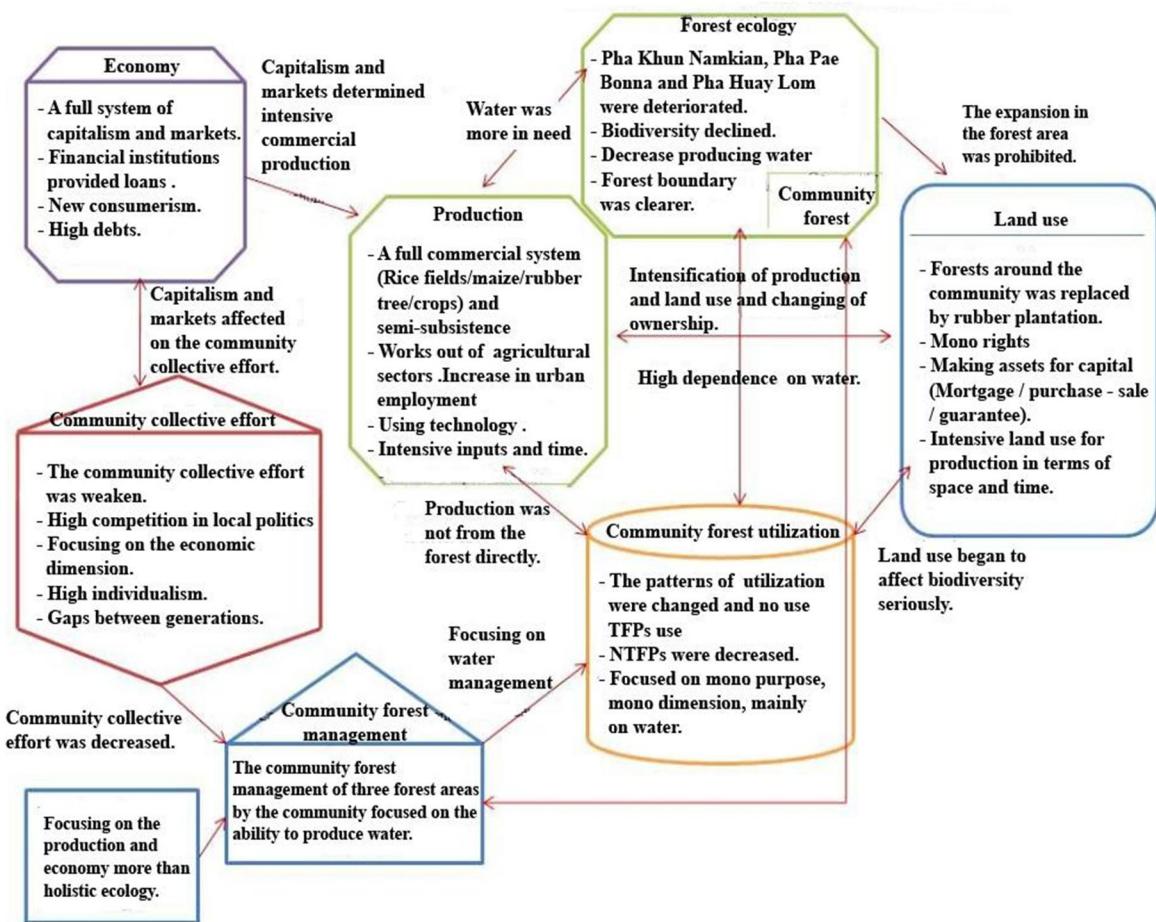
The sense of community had changed. Each household was dedicated to hard work and accelerated the intensive production of cash crops. There was no labor exchange and people were highly individualistic. The communication to create a collective empowerment in the community was weakened: there were gaps between generations. The conditions

of problems were more complicated due to the different conditions of social status and careers. The leaders were changed according to the terms and then a new board of directors took over to administrate the community. The administrative mechanism within the organization at the end of the third period

had been changed by the vision of the leaders.

The community forest management, especially at Khunkian forest, was weakened and discontinued activities such as the meetings, surveys in the forest, the youth camp for forest conservation, and coordination with external networks

diminished. They lacked funding, meetings, and planning for forest management which were limited to a few groups of leaders. The new generation left the community for education and employment. Therefore, they lacked the power to transfer the knowledge and that knowledge of forest management was discontinued (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** The relation of the complex factors affecting community forest usage and management of Nam Kian community in the third period

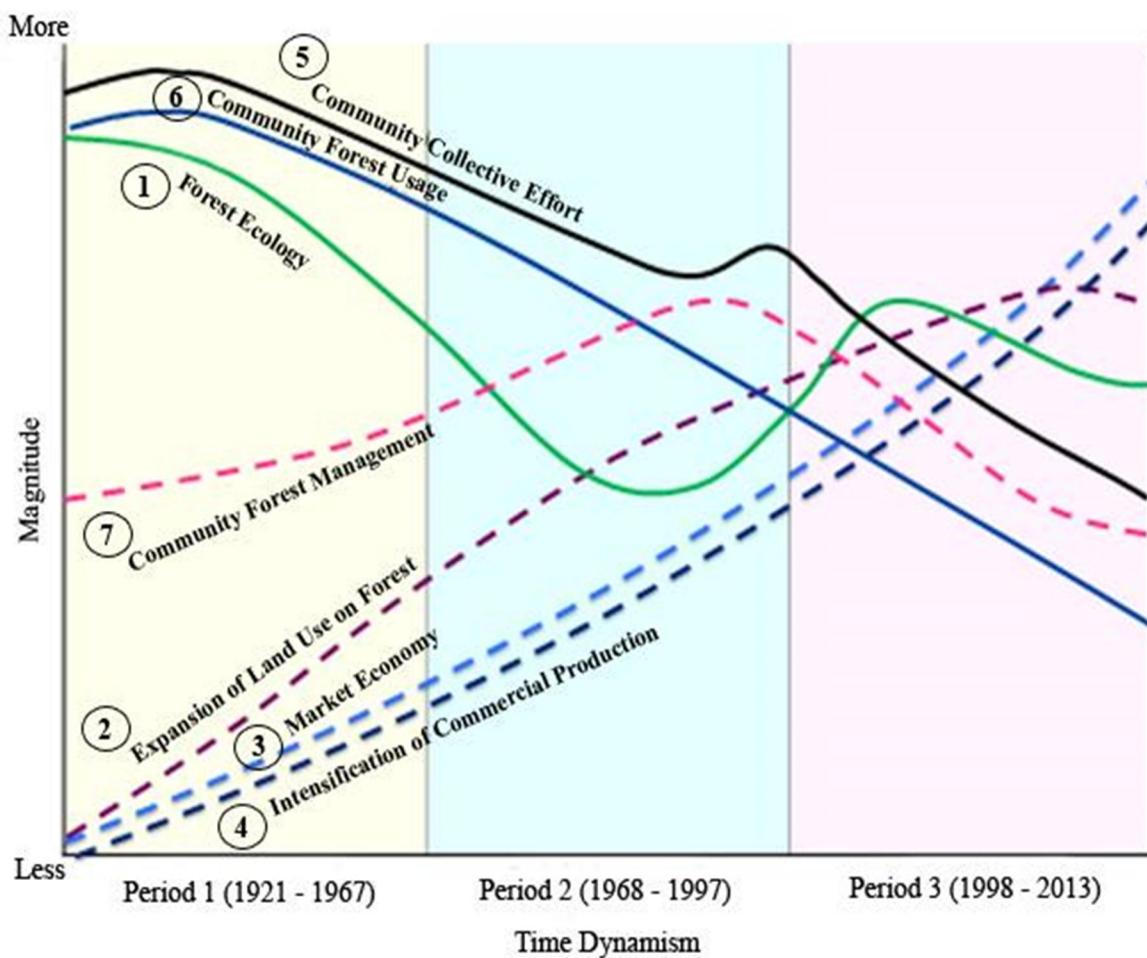
To fulfill the second objective of the new paradigm, particularly the study of the dynamics, it was found that the

community forest management of Nam Kian sub-district has been developing continually. Now that all five complex

factors that had been derived from the framework of using a new paradigm, they will be employed to analyze the characteristics of the forest ecosystem, expansion of land use in the forest area, production system, economic systems, and a sense of community along with community forest usage and management.

Each factor can be shown in the graph.

The dynamics of the changes were shown at the time period and the magnitude of change of the seven factors which determined the relationship. It was found that the community forest usage and management has multiple dynamics together with other factors which affected each other, as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** The dynamics of the changes and the changing magnitude of the seven factors which affected each other

From Figure 4, it can be summarized that the dynamics of the 7 factors which affect the community forest usage and management are listed as the following.

1) Characteristic of the Forest Ecology during the beginning was abundance. Later in the mid 1<sup>st</sup> period and the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> period, the forest began to deteriorate and continuously decreased in size. Water production also decreased. At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> period, the forests began to be restored and in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> period, biodiversity had declined. It can be seen that the line 3 shows the highest magnitude of the characteristic of forest ecology in the 1<sup>st</sup> period and decreased significantly in the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> period. However, in the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> period, the magnitude of the line had a small increase at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> period and began to decrease in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period.

2) Expansion of Land Use on Forests during the 1<sup>st</sup> period could be occupied independently due to the small numbers of the population. The plains areas were used for settlement and irrigated rice fields. In the sloping areas they grew upland rice for subsistence. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> period, lands in the forest areas were utilized to grow cash crops and these areas had the highest expansion rate.

However, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period they could not extend the land continuously due to space limitations. The line 5 shows that the forests land use was high in the 1<sup>st</sup> period and continued to increase to the highest in the 2<sup>nd</sup> period and then decreased in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period.

3) Market Economy during the 1<sup>st</sup> period was for a subsistence living. There were no markets. Later in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> periods, it started to enter into a full system of capitalism and markets along with a new consumerism. Financial institutions provided loans which as a result created an increase of debt. The line 6 shows that the magnitude of the market economic system was higher at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> period and spiked continuously in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> periods.

4) Intensification of commercial production at the beginning was for subsistence and semi-subsistence which then entered into the commercial production system fully. The line 7 shows the magnitude of intensification of commercial production increased greatly and continuously in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> periods.

5) Community Collective Effort is the key to management, self-care and governance, a way of living, a strong relationship between the generations, and

a high sense of community. Latter in the 2<sup>nd</sup> period the community was lawless and weak. At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> period the sense of community was stimulated to act in self-management. The 3<sup>rd</sup> period was changed to be more accepting toward individualism and rarely had time to participate in the community affairs because they had to accelerate production for living and maintaining the household economy as the most important priority. The magnitude of the collective power went down the lowest point by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> period. However, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> period the magnitude was higher than that of the mid of the 3<sup>rd</sup> period. The magnitude had shown that it was reduced continuously.

6) Community Forest Usage at the beginning was used independently and for many purposes without any controls because the populations were small in number, forests were abundant, there was other local wisdom being used, and household consumption and utilization was last. Later in the 2<sup>nd</sup> period, those patterns began to change and forest usage intensified. Even though, forests were recovered in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period, people did not have time to find non-timber forest products. Usage of the forest was reduced for the need of “water” only for

agriculture. The line 1 shows that the magnitude of community forest usage had decreased continually and remained very low in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period.

7) Community Forest Management in the past, according to the traditional ways, had beliefs of the supernatural. Traditions or rules of the community helped to establish norms in the resource usage to be the framework of adequacy. The interesting thing is that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> period of the phenomenon, forest degradation was in a crisis due to the inadequacy of water. It raised an awareness of the limitations of the forest to the community. At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> period, there were changes and adaptations by creating a new condition on the principle of participation in the empowerment forest management which was found to be the most effective. Nevertheless, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period, the community forest management began to lower the overall intensiveness and mainly focus on just water management. The line shows the magnitude of the community forest management was high at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> period and tended to decrease in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period.

The conclusion of the dynamics and the correlated relationship of complex factors show that the change of

community forest usage and community forest management is the result of the first five factors, which are interrelated. It makes community forest usage and management dynamic in each period of time and slides along the contexts and conditions. This can explain that the change of community forest usage and community forest management are complex and cannot be reduced to see only the power of state. Therefore, stagnation of community forest management does not reflect the previous explanation from the political ecology. This states that, the use of wisdom and the modification of the relationship with state power could give the community forest usage and management the potential to manage resources sustainably and be truly justified.

#### 4. Conclusions

The study found out that the community forest management: a case study of Nam Kian sub-district, Phupiang district, Nan province has been developing complicatedly under five factors, including forest ecology, expansion of land use on the forest, market economy, intensification of commercial production, community

collective efforts, and community forest usage and management. These factors are interrelated, which means that a change of one factor will inevitably affect at least one other factor.

Stagnation of community forest management of Nam Kian sub-district showed that the significant impact toward the community forest usage and community forest management has weakened. The influence of intensification of commercial production together with a new consumerism under a higher demand of consumption has had an influence on the way of life of the community. The transformation of complex factors related to the movement has not stopped, but it has developed dynamically according to the time periods. The value and meaning of the forest in a period of time and in a certain context have different variants. In this study, there is a crucial finding in explaining these new paradigms. The community forest management of Nam Kian sub-district has occurred with non-linear characteristics (Kaewthep, K. et al., 2006). It was not intensive in the first period and then it peaked in the second period. Later in the third period the forest management had weakened and created stagnation.

The stagnation of the community forest management in this study had not been caused by a primary determinant of state power or the weakened community rights but it is a combination of complex factors, especially in the market economy and intensification of commercial production in land use, labor, and inputs. They all affect the ecology and the degradation of biodiversity which affect forest usage. The community collective effort is degraded, leading to the degradation of forest management. This is the phenomenon that explains the causes of stagnation in this study, in contrast to the description of the political ecology which underestimated the market economy and intensification of commercial production and overestimated the community effort.

## 5. Acknowledgement

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