

## ABSTRACT

TITLE	THE VANISHING FRONTIER —AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF NOMADIC KAREN
NAME	YOSHIMATSU, KUMIKO

This is an ethnography of Sgaw Karen living on the hills in Northern Thailand, my fieldwork on which is based had been conducted between 1986 and 1994. In those days of my fieldwork, the Karen I stayed with no longer had a frontier to migrate; that is, their sedentarization seemed to be becoming an obvious fact. Their way of life, however, had still kept their previous nomadic culture. They were just in the middle of struggling to adjust themselves to new surroundings. Virtually everything of their livelihoods, social organizations such as village and house, subsistence, tools, kinship, annual events, life cycle ceremonies such as wedding and funeral, beliefs, oral traditions, supernatural beings, moral and values could be understood as systems designed to proliferate and migrate. The purpose of my dissertation is to write the culture of nomadic Sgaw Karen, in which process I show what mechanism had dispersed them into unoccupied areas and as a result to expand their frontiers.

The dissertation consists of eight chapters including introduction and conclusion. In the introduction I discuss theoretical approaches to mobility of shifting-cultivators and my positioning in writing ethnography. It is also pointed out that my research area was located in an eastern frontier of Karen distribution.

The first chapter deals with the historical process of generating the ethnic category called Karen, which virtually includes various different

groups. The term Karen is the outcome of intermingling of state politics, Christian missions, ethnographical studies, and civil movements, etc. It is clarified here where the "tribal" people of my study is among the "Karen."

The second chapter describes the general outline of the research area in respect of natural environment, subsistence based on foraging and slash-burn cultivation, and life cycle. The local history which brought changes to their nomadic culture is also referred to.

Their migration was institutionalized in three social categories - *go* (country), *ji* (village) and *du* (house). Mobile system of respective category is discussed in the following three chapters. Chapter three points it out firstly that their migration means "moving from *go* to *go*." Since the *go* of the dead, paralleled with those of the living in a space, illustrated more traditional livelihood, by analyzing funerals, I throw light into their concept of *go*. *Go* is a territory formed by three directions; east-west, upper-lower streams, and up-down, where its ruler governs and in which villagers make a living by forest products. On the border of the dead men's *go*, another supernatural being, in whose hand human beings are left after the Creator god departed, determines the life-span and way of living of each person who leaves for the living persons' *go*. It is described that origin myths of these are colored by features of hunting and gathering culture in the early human era..

Chapter four discusses another category of *ji*, as "moving from *go* to *go*" is equivalent to shifting *ji* to a new site. A nomadic *ji* is composed of ten houses or so, which residents are in relationship with siblings and their offspring. *Ji* has the leader called *jiko*, who is both the founder and the patriarch of the village. His son is expected to succeed to father.

The reconstruction of village sites since 1930's shows that one *ji* has one river, that is to say, *ji* is formed on the basis of a river. By examining the ceremonies held on the borders of both *go* and *ji*, it is turned out that a *go* is formed by building a *ji*. The territory of *go* is within watershed of the river, over which water source its ruler stays. *Ji* is the human area within *go*, where *jiko* obtained the sanction to stay of the ruler. It is the sanction that is handed down to a son in his building a new *ji* along its tributary.

A new *go*, however, is formed on the basis of the tributary river, and thus *go* proliferates along rivers. Until the 1960's of all tributaries being occupied, *ji* had kept shifting its site every four or five years. As *jiko* serves

as religious mediator between the ruler and *ji*, his death put an end to his *ji*. All the residents have to move out to look for a new one. Genealogical seniority has to be taken account of building or joining *ji*, so that, in case of the son's succession, the seniors split with him.

The other category of *du* is discussed in Chapter five. Though *du* is an easy-built bamboo hut with a thatched roof, which lasts only four or five years at longest, *du* is identified with a married couple and considered to last throughout their life. The ritual of *du* is performed by the couple with their parents as go-betweens. The priority is given to the wife due to the deity concerned with reproduction. Since children are parts of mother, the ritual body expands in maternal line. It is the deity that never allows any share with other *du* with exception between mother and her eldest married daughter in a short term, so that all children eventually move out after marriage of their parents' *du*. *Du* thus proliferates. Married children, however, tend to stay within a half-day walking distance of their parents because the ritual requires the parents' attendance as mediators. This residential pattern perhaps retains that of the former *ji* of a longhouse.

It is between the ruler of *go* and the deity of *du* that the most competitive relationship is formed—neither shared nor overlapped. Those who can handle them together are restricted to the couple. The wife is responsible for the deity of generations, and the husband deals with the ruler of space, which gives them high mobility. The couple is stable as being united for life and also is mobile being an independent unit to look for a new *go* to migrate.

The chapter six describes the ongoing crisis sprung out in their nomadic culture at the time of my fieldwork in each respective category *go*, *ji* and *du*. It is concluded that their mobility is brought about by both genealogical seniority and the competitions among the supernatural beings. Their frontier vanishes when every tributary in a basin has its own *ji*.