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## Local Traditions to Promote Sustainable Agriculture in Northeastern Thailand

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HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi, an expression in a Northeastern Thai dialect literally translates to “The twelve Esan Cultures spreading to each of the twelve months of the year and the fourteen rules for good deeds have descended and have taken a strong foothold into Esan’s ways of living.” Despite a sudden turn in society into a modernized polarity, this cultural footprint remains intact within the agricultural exercises in Esan region. Although the invasion of modern technology has been accepted as a tool for advancing agricultural productivity, modernization in agriculture cannot withdraw the descended culture from Esan’s ways of life. The practices of HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi culture help to create sustainable agriculture in the region.

Observations made in Esan villages that were exercising sustainable agriculture activities revealed that the activities of HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi that contribute to sustainability in agriculture are: Boon Khoolarn held in February, Boon Bergpha held in March, Boon Songkran held in April, Boon Bungfai (fire rocket) held in June. Among these traditions, Boon Bergpha is believed to be fundamental to sustainability in agriculture. It is believed traditionally that the sky’s gate would first be unlocked in March introducing the first rain of the year. Traditionally, in the third waxing moon in March, people would take note of the direction from which the sound of thunder originated; the annual rainfall would be predicted accordingly. The third waxing moon in March is associated with a natural phenomenon used for predicting annual fertility. It is said to be the day in which, “Frogs go without mouth and otters go without anus.” For Esan farmers, this marks the date on which to bring soil amendments, mulch, and fertility back to their fields. This exercise is been common for farmers residing around the Mekong Subregion

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## **Introduction**

HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi is a norm that is fundamental to the lives of the folks living in Northeastern Thailand. Descended from the old Laotian tradition centered around the lower Mekong River region, it is reckoned as the cultural environment that has been practiced for wellness and solidarity of the communities in the region. “HeetSibsong” means the twelve traditions that are practiced collectively by the members of Esan communities in each of the twelve months of the year. “Kong Sibsi” is a set of rules that everyone in an Esan community must follow. The core concept of the Kong Sibsi prescribes roles that individuals have to carry as members of their respective societies. The traditions of HeetSibsong are collaborated upon by all members of the society, believing that it helps activate wellness and prosperity in their community. The traditions in HeetSibsong, each connected to a month of the year in the Thai traditional calendar, can be divided into the following groups, based on the types of effects they have on society: 1) The traditions that cause peace, trigger individual social commitment, and provide preservation to the Buddhism are; The First month’s tradition of hibernation, The Third month’s tradition of Boon Khaojee, The fourth month’s Tradition of The Great Incarnation (Boon Phawed), The fifth’s tradition of Songkran, The seventh month’s tradition of Boon Sumha, The eighth month’s tradition of Starting Buddhist Lent, The eleventh month’s tradition of Ending Buddhist Lent, and The twelfth month’s tradition of Boon Gatin, 2) The traditions that commemorate the passing away of relatives and acquaintances are; The sixth month’s tradition of Boon Bungfai (rocket festival), The seventh month’s tradition of Boon Sumha, The ninth month’s tradition of Khaopradubdin, The tenth month’s tradition of Boon Khaosak and, 3) The traditions that relate to agricultural occupation which is the main job in the region are; The second month’s tradition of Boon Koonlarn, The third month’s tradition of Boon Bergpha, and The sixth month’s tradition of Boon Bungfai. Boon Bergpha is an important tradition that is conducted to mark the beginning of agricultural activities, especially rice farming, which has been the main job for farmers in Esan. Boon Bergpha is consistently practiced alongside the culture of rice farming in the region. Mahasarakham is a province located in the center of Northeastern Thailand. Since most people there grow rice as their primary job, the Boon Bergpha tradition is observed and in 1988, was appointed as the province’s main tradition. The tradition is celebrated on the third waxing moon in March every year. This tradition has become a core tourism activity and links into it much collaboration from all the people in Mahasarakham province. Boon Bergpha was pioneered in a village like BanMi Village, Khao Sub-district, Muang, Mahasarakham province. This village has brought back and revised the

culture of Boon Bergpha. In 2015, Mahasarakham celebrated its 150th anniversary and the Boon Bergpha tradition was set as a cultural concept of the celebration. Boon Bergpha has been the highlight of Mahasarakham for more than 27 years. The researcher was interested to find out why Boon Bergpha is so well preserved in Mahasarakham, as well as the activities of Boon Bergpha that contribute to the sustainable agriculture of the region

### **Objective of the Study**

The objectives of this research were threefold. 1) To investigate the types of activities of Boon Bergpha that were practiced in Esan in the past, 2) To investigate the types of activities of Boon Bergpha that are practiced in Esan at the present, 3) To see to what extent activities in the Boon Bergpha support sustainable agriculture in Esan.

### **Framework**

#### **This research involves two frameworks.**

1. Framework about identity: This framework reflects common sense and physical traits that are shared by people in a community, such as a common language, ethnicity, religion and commitment to society. The similarities in these areas are brought about by the confinement of leaders wishing to create a community image that stands out from other communities.

2. Framework on Invention of Tradition: The invention of tradition refers to an establishment of any tradition by state or government, followed by the tradition being reinforced to community practice. Tactically, these invented cultures are associated with existing historical information, which after time, convinces people that it is an old historical culture. Some traditions are invented due to historical disputes. Some traditions are also invented to fulfill tourism demands.

These two frameworks were used as guidelines to identify how the past and the present activities of Boon Bergpha are differently managed in order to portend sustainable agriculture. It sought to verify how the Boon Bergpha tradition helps promote tourism in Esan and in Thailand as a whole.

### **Methodology**

This research was based on the qualitative research discipline. The researcher collected data by reviewing related articles and in-depth interviews during the field trip. Questions in the interview were obtained after the

reviewing the literature. The interview questions focused on; 1) the origin of Boon Bergpha in Esan region and, 2) the extent to which activities of Boon Bergpha are preserved and passed on in Mahasarakham province. The key-informants who gave information about the preservation and details of the activities of Boon Bergpha were community leaders and local scholars. The population and the research samples were from Ban Mi Village because this community continues to practice the tradition of Boon Bergpha. The data was combined and analyzed via the descriptive analysis.

## **Review of Related Literature**

This research was developed after reviewing of the following literatures.

1. The principle on inheriting by SurasakSampradit (2003) posited that traditional inheritance is a process in which people follow a well-formed tradition aiming at conserving the tradition and keeping it alongside their society. The inheriting process is a tradition is based on 6 steps

1.1 Selection and revision of tradition. This process involves selecting a tradition that is at risk of disappearing. The traditions selected in this process are deemed valuable for living a moral life and for individual and social development.

1.2 Development of selected tradition. The selected tradition is readjusted to make it accommodate for and be beneficial for the current ways of life. The adjusted traditions are used for occupational development. Sometime knowledge on science and technology is integrated into the activities of the tradition to make these activities more supportive for production process, marketing, and environment conservation.

1.3 Dissemination of the developed tradition. The already well-developed traditions are disseminated to the people to teach them the value of the adjusted tradition, developing awareness and ability to participate correctly in the tradition. The dissemination of the new tradition can be done via promotion through family, schools and presenting them on any cultural events.

1.4 Promoting Tradition. The tradition will last if it finds its way into community appreciation. To achieve this goal, tradition conservation groups should be created in communities to work as agents to push forward consistent practice of the newly developed tradition.

1.5 Spreading and exchanging news about good practices. Different methods of news dissemination should be implemented to spread the ideas of the traditions to other communities.

1.6 Developing of local scholar. Each society is believed to be embedded with local scholars with different fields of proficiency. These people should be encouraged to exhibit their wisdom, to further develop their knowledge, and to obtain social recognition via the presentation of certificates.

2. An in-depth study about Boon Bergpha by WogornMagdee (1993) was aimed to: a) trace the origin and components of the Boon Bergpha tradition in Mahasarakham province in order to; b) investigate the beliefs embedded in the Boon Bergpha tradition. Magdee collected his data from a field trip study and from reviewing literature relating to components of rites. It was revealed that the first Boon Bergpha tradition was conducted in Mahasarakham in 1984 at Ban Gair Village, Nathong sub-district, Chiang Yuen district. In the event, agricultural activities performed on the Third Waxing moon of the third month (based on Thai traditional calendar, this is the first month of the year to have rain), were revised. The revised version of the activity was aimed to escalate spirit among the farmers as well as promote the importance of using compost as a soil amendment. In 1989, the activities of Boon Bergpha that had been developed in Ban Gair village were integrated into Mahasarakham annual cultural festival to promote tourism in the province. The highlight of the event is the performance of rites related to agricultural beliefs. The exhibition of Boon Bergpha activities was well-furnished with scenes, costumes and a deeply procedural step of Boon Bergpha itself, all making the activities of Boon Bergpha secret and spectacular for all of its audiences.

3. Reviewing of Boon Bergpha evidenced in the old palm-leaf encryption. The principles of the old tradition of Boon Bergpha were found in palm-leaf encryption in BanNonglom Temple, Muang District and in BanDongBung Temple in Nadoon District, both in Mahasarakham province. A senior abbot and former head of Mahachai Temple, Doctor PhraAriyanuwat, took initiative to translate the encryption written in old Esan into Thai. It was found that the old Boon Bergpha was conducted on the third waxing moon on the third month of the traditional Thai calendar in order to provide patronage to farmers prior to the beginning of the farming season. The rites also served to provide precautions to the farmers about their agriculture risks, such as seedling systems and proper fertilizers to use. Conclusively, as mentioned in the old encryption, the old Boon Bergpha prepared the farmers for the starting of their cultivation (PhraAriyanuwat).

## **Results**

1. It is observed in this research that the activities in the Boon Bergpha tradition mainly reflect the beliefs relating to rice farming which is the

primary occupation in Esan. Traditionally, the rites of Boon Bergpha were held on the third waxing moon on the third month in the traditional Thai calendar. This date is believed to be the first day that the gate to the sky was opened, letting rain fall to the earth. Traditionally on this date, the farmers closely listened to the roaring of the first thunder of the year. The direction from which the thunder originated was used to predict the amount of rainfall for the year. Knowing about the assumed amount of water helped farmers select the right kind of plants to cultivate. It is believed that the third waxing moon is the date in which people live a fully happy life. Therefore, another idea of the Boon Bergpha tradition is to remind people of the unexpected changes in life and that they should learn to live their life with precaution. Examples of activities specific to agriculture are; tracing for the direction from which the first thunder was originated, worshipping the Posop, goddess of rice, as well as a ceremony to welcome rice into the barns. Below are predictions about the characteristic of rain and agricultural production based on the direction of the thunder.

1. Thunder from the east. The east is believed to have Garuda as its directional animal. If thunder originates from this direction, it is believed that there will be an abundance of rain, which means rice farming will be fruitful and people will then be able to make a lot of merit.

2. Thunder from the southeast. The cat is the animal for the southeast. It is the direction to the wind gate. If thunder originates from this direction, it is predicted that there will be less rain, making rice farming deficient and making people face poverty. It is also predicted that there will be an epidemic outbreak.

3. Thunder from the south. The lion is the animal for this direction, which is the direction of the golden gate. If the first thunder is traced from this direction, a lot of rain is expected, with high chances of flooding in the rice fields. Two-fifths of the rice area in the plateau area will be damaged. This kind of weather will be suitable for rice farming in higher area. Regardless of rice farming, it is expected to have a lot of fish and crabs.

4. Thunder from the southwest. The tiger is the animal for this direction, which is the direction of the tin gate. Good, suitable amount of rain is expected from this direction, leading to fertility in orchard productions, fish and crabs, and happy people due to fruitful rice production.

5. Thunder from the west. The naga is the animal for this direction, which is the direction of the iron gate. If thunder originates from this direction, it is predicted that there will be less rainfall, rice in the field will suffer due to water insufficiency, and will eventually die. This drought may cause great damage.

6. Thunder from the northwest. The rat is the animal for this direction. It is the direction to the stone gate. A moderate amount of rain is predicted. The rice production will be half good and half bad, less fish and crabs, and people may encounter illness.

7. Thunder from the north. The elephant is the animal for this direction. It is the direction to silver gate. A good amount of rain is predicted. The rice production will be fertile and all people will be happy.

8. Thunder from the northeast. The cow is the animal for this direction. It is the direction to the soil gate. Good rain is predicted throughout the year. The rice production will be fertile and people will be happy all year round.

Based on this belief, Esan folks celebrate Boon Bergpha, originally called “Boon Bergban,” in order to beg for the blessing from Tan, the God who takes care of the sky. By offering Tan with worship, he may have mercy for the farmers by unlocking the auspicious celestial gate to provide good rain for farming.

On the third waxing moon of the third month, three phenomenonons are said to happen, including,

1. The frog without a mouth event. During this period of the year, frogs live while hibernating. They do not hunt for food and tiny white web forms over their hole.

2. The otter with an anus event. During this period, layer of tissue develops around the anus of otters. It is believed that they do not excrete during this time since they do not eat anything.

3. The sweet puree event. Puree is usually bitter and sour, but they turn to be sweet during this period of the year.

Four main rites are performed during the Boon Bergpha tradition including;

1. Raising the spirit of rice ceremony, better known in Esan as “Boon toompaklao”

2. Toiling to compost the rice field

3. Making merit for the house, is usually done together with Boon toompaklao

4. Offering a full bucket of rice to the temple

Processes for each of the rites above are as detailed below.

1. Raising the spirit of rice ceremony is conducted to worship Phosob, the goddess of rice, to encourage ease in rice trading, and to share rice with the ceremony participants.

Utilities needed for the ceremony include;

1. Nine leaves of Baikoon or golden shower leaf.

2. Nine leaves of Baiyor or golden shower leaf.
3. Two of a five-story Khunmarkbeng or standing ceremonial trays
4. Big Gratong divided into nine rooms, each filled with betel, cigarettes, rice corn, globe amaranth, crown flowers, ivory, food and desserts, fruits, whiskey, chicken, eggs, steamed rice in banana leaf, taro, potatoes (hard and soft) and rice porridge boiled with molasses.
5. Banana trunk
6. Sugarcane
7. Khan 5 and Khan 8 (a pair of vases; the first filled with 5 pairs of flowers and 5 pairs of candles, another filled with with 8 pairs of flowers and 8 pairs of candles)
8. Candle
9. Incentive joss stick
10. Lamp
11. Fragrant powder
12. Cologne
13. A tray to carry a ring, comb, and mirror
14. A bed set (mattress, pillow, blanket)
15. A pumpkin and different kinds of banana
16. Ceremonial money equal to one Baht and 25 Stang.

### *Ceremonial steps for the raising the Rice Spirit*

1. Pave a white sheet of cloth over the pile of rice. Then put the worship table on the cloth. Finally tie a holy thread with the table and besiege the barn with the same thread. Tie the other edge of the thread to the house of the owner of the barn.
2. The ceremony leader wearing all white clothes and carrying a small palm leaf book sits facing an auspicious direction in front of the table. Then he leads the chant from the palm leaf book. Part of the chant is about worshipping the Buddha, the Sila and the monk and another part of the chant is about inviting guardians and gods to gather at the site of the ceremony.
3. Two men are appointed to stand at the two sides of the barn. As the ceremonial leader is chanting, they shout out loud periodically in order to welcome all of the good spirits to the barn.
4. After end of the chant, all of the worshipping materials should remain at the barn for seven days, however, things that can rot may be withdrawn.
5. It is prohibited to take any of the rice out of the barn before the seven day period.



### ***Toiling to compost to rice field ceremony***

#### **Procedures**

In the early morning of the third waxing moon day in the third month, farmers carry compost which mainly consists of the soil-like dung of buffaloes or cows from the stable under the farmer's' house to their fields. The toiling of the compost must be finished by noon.

### ***Making merit for the house ceremony***

This ceremony is conducted to lead the good deeds from the Tri-Sila into the house.

#### **Procedures**

The first activity starts in the evening, during which the hosts invite five or nine monks to the house to perform a religious sermon. The same number of monks are invited to deliver morning sermon and give a chance for people to make merit at the host's house by offering food to the monks.

### ***Offering a full bucket of rice to the temple.***

The old Esan people had a lot of respect for the monk and Buddhism as a whole. It is said that anything good they had, they should offer it to the monks before they would take it themselves. Temples in old Esan also had barns to store the rice that people donated to the monks. Later, that rice would be given to the poor.

#### ***Procedures***

The third waxing moon of the third month is when the farmers have just finished taking the rich into their barns. During this time, there are several rules or restrictions for the farmers to follow as defined below.

1. Rice must not be taken out from the barns prior to conducting the raising the spirit of rice ceremony. If in need of rice for consumption, the farmers must separate a portion of rice for consumption before taking the rice to the barn.

2. The farmers must not take the rice out from the barns on the Sila days, which include the following dates; the 7-8th and the 14-15th, this is applied for both the waxing and waning days.

3. Before scooping the rice, the scooper must sit down and do the “Wai” (Thai way of respecting) and say, “For the merit of the rice and the water, may I have rice to eat forever”.

In summary, the raising of the spirit of the rice, barn gate wrapping ceremony, and the making merit of the house are all conducted in the morning. In the afternoon, the villagers offer the full bucket of rice to the temple. After all the activities are completed, the farmers feel ready to start the next season farming. By this mean, Boon Bergpha is a prestage in preparing farmers for their farming and plays a crucial part in promoting agricultural jobs.

### ***The Present Practices of Boon Bergpha Tradition***

2. This research scrutinized the current practices of the Boon Bergpha tradition exercised specifically in Mahasarakham province from 1988 to 2016. It revealed that Boon Bergpha has been used as the name of Mahasarakham’s annual cultural festival since 1988. The festival has the following history.

In 1985, Mr.SaiSarothorn, who was the agriculture official of Chiang Yuen district at the time, joined together with the villagers from Ban Bag village in Chiang Yuen to bring back the dying tradition of taking compost to the rice field to bring fertility to the land. The activity was well participated in by the villagers. Amazingly, the rice production of the villagers that year increased by 50 percent, the result greatly satisfied the farmers. In 1986, the campaign was relocated to Ban Nongson in Chiang Yuen. This time, the head of provincial agricultural officials, Mr.NikomMagdee, invited the press to the activity. In addition to carrying compost to the field, the worshipping of the goddess of land, PhraMaetoranee, was also conducted in the event. The offerings consisted of whiskey in a port, whole chicken soup, dessert, banana and sugarcane. The event revealed a full-form of worshipping culture that had been forgotten at that time. By the lead of the Chairman of the Mahasarakham Media Association, Mr.PrasartRattanapanya, a petition was sent to the governor of Mahasarakham, Mr.SawaiPranamee, requesting that Boon Bergpha be incorporated as a theme for Mahasarakham annual cultural festival. The request was discussed in the provincial monthly meeting with the local scholar, PhraAriyanuwat, the head abbot of Mahachai Temple. In the meeting, it was agreed upon that Boon Bergpha be integrated as a theme for the province’s annual cultural festival starting in 1987. Unfortunately, since Mr.SawaiPranamee was relocated to take a position as a governor of Nakhonrachasima province, Boon Bergpha Tradition was not integrated into the festival that year. The new governor of Mahasarakham, Mr. Jin Wipataglad,

agreed on the idea to integrate Boon Bergpha into the provincial festival and therefore, the first integrated festival was launched for the first time in 1988 under the name “Boon Bergpha and Red Cross Festival. It lasted for seven days and nights. The first day of the festival started on the third waxing day of the third month. The ritual of the festival has continued consistently for the duration of 27 years in 2015.

More importantly, 2015 was a year that marked the 150th anniversary of Mahasarakham province. Boon Bergpha and Red Cross Festival was held between 22 January to 1 February, 2015 (for 11 days and nights). The intersection around the police station area was occupied for the opening ceremony. The vice minister to the ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation presided over the ceremony, and the governor of Mahasarakham, Mr.ChayawootChantorn, reported the objectives of the festival to the chairperson. Mahasarakham and Red Cross organization has held the festival continuously for 27 years in order to preserve valuable Esan tradition and encourage local people to pay attention to make their land fertile for fruitful agricultural products. The money raised from the festival will be used to support Red Cross activities to benefit the public as a whole. The festival helps create harmony among all groups of Mahasarakham people while successfully promoting the tourism industry of the province. Activities in the festival include a beautiful parade and procession during the opening ceremony to reflect the villages ways of living, exhibitions of different organizations both public and private, and agricultural product competitions. On 22 January, 2015, there was a ceremony to worship PhraMaePhosob, the goddess of rice at Banmi village, Khao sub-district, Mahasarakham. The activity was led by the Mahasarakham governor. The prediction about the direction and amount of rain was given. After the worshipping of PhraMaephosob, the villagers toiled compost to their rice fields, the activity that marks the starting of sustainable agriculture.

The objectives of Boon Bergpha in Mahasarakham are as follows;

1. Conserve Esan tradition regarding land and soil promotion
2. Increase farmers’ awareness about soil treatment
3. Disseminate techniques on clean agricultural methods
4. Exhibit the advancement of the agricultural methods under the royal initiative.
5. Raise funds to promote agriculture and Red Cross activities

The above objectives show how Boon Bergphapromote a wellness to lives of the people in Mahasarakham. The activities also help conserve old rites of Boon Bergphatraditioin.

The benefits of Boon Bergpha Tradition

Boon Bergpha has the following benefits for farmers:

1. It helps the farmers get ready for the coming cultivating season. Making merit prior to the cultivation uplifts the farmers' spirits and it helps them to prepare their soil for planting rice.

2. The chance to make merit helps farmer rid themselves of their stinginess.

3. It makes the farmer feel grateful for their land, environment and other sacred gods such as Tan God--the god who provides rain, and PhraMaephosob--the goddess of rice.

4. It emphasizes to the farmers the value of rice consumption. Rice is kept tidily in the barns. The farmers are encouraged to chant before scooping any rice from the barns. Valuing rice was one of the preachings of Lord Buddha, "No other property is as valuable as rice" (Boon Bergpha, 2015).

3. The Findings on how Boon Bergpha is supportive of sustainable agriculture.

Sustainable agriculture means agricultural processes that are appropriate for the ecosystem. It highlights using resources efficiently without polluting the environment neither for the short nor the long run. Sustainable agriculture is a means to make agricultural activity last far into the future because agricultural activities are made environmentally friendly via the process resource management called agro-ecosystem (CharunJuntaluckana).

In the past, sustainable agriculture did exist in Esan because most agricultural activities were for domestic or in-house consumption. Small portions of agricultural products that remained after family consumption were sold for some money, which was then spent on other goods that the farmers could produce by themselves. Since the reinforcement of the first National Economic and Social Development Plan in 1957, the purpose of agricultural production shifted from domestic consumption to production for trading. After this struggle, Thailand was deemed the world's number one exporter of many agricultural goods, including rice, sugarcane, rubber and tapioca. This demand for mass production made Esan agriculture more dependent on chemicals, which inevitably affected agricultural production methods and severely damaged the agro-ecosystem.

It is important to try to change agricultural activities back to sustainable activities as they used to be. Boon Bergpha Tradition is believed to help bring back the sustainable agriculture to Esan because of the following activities.

1. The worshipping of PhraMaePhosob, the goddess of rice. This ritual is practiced on the belief that PhraMaePhosob makes rice grow. Giving homage to this goddess technically prepares farmers for rice planting. The

farmers are encouraged to prepare both their fields and ploughing materials. Moreover, since paying homage to PhraMaePhosob is a village event in which all people in the village must participate, it promotes harmony among the farmers. The event provides the chance for the farmers to exchange their farming techniques on seedlings and saplings; a good jumping off point for sustainable agriculture.

2. Filling the fields with compost (soil-liked dung). The most common compost for Esan farmers is “pooy cork,” a Thai word that literally means “fertilizer from stable.” Pooy cork is the dung from the stables that are traditionally fixed under the farmer’s house. After being stepped on for a long time, the dung gets crushed and looks more like soil. Pooy cork is used along with other forms of fertilizers such as chicken waste. The main component of pooy cork is fibers from leaves, straw and other plants. Therefore, applying pooy cork to the rice is a good way to return organic matter back to the soil. Using compost from animal waste is a wise way to manage wastes from livestock. It is estimated that there is about 35 million tons of waste from livestock. If left without proper management, these solid wastes can trickle into rivers, leading to water pollution. Turning this waste into compost helps manage solid waste problems in agricultural process, while being able to detoxify or restructure the soil quality. Pooy cork is a compost that is beneficial in two ways. First, it slowly provides a food source to plants. Since pooy cork has a lot of organic fibers, it slowly decomposes thanks to bacteria in the soil, turning nutrients in the fibers into a viable energy source for plants. Second, filling pooy cork to the land can help restructure the soil because adding pooy cork to the land can increase amount of organic matter in the soil. Since pooy cork is available in the village, the farmers can share this compost and help their neighbors to spread the compost in the fields. These pictures of giving and sharing promotes a harmonious agriculture community.

3. House merit making ceremony. This ceremony is to increase the spirit of the house owner before the starting of the farming season. It is believed to be auspicious to invite the monks to the house to conduct a merit. After the chanting and bless giving, the head of the ceremonial monks uses a bunch of dried grass to throw holy water on the people who attend the ceremony, the house and its pets, and the agricultural devices. This helps raise the spirit of the people and get them ready for the beginning of the new farming season.

4. Offering a bucket of rice to the temple. This activity is considered to be beneficial in three ways. One, it is a way to clear out old rice from the barn to make room for the new season’s incoming rice. Two, offering rice to the monk is an effective way to make merit because Esan people have

faith in the Buddhist monks. Later the monks can donate the rice to the poor. And three, it generates harmony in the society.

In summary, Boon Bergpha has been conducted as an annual cultural festival in Mahasarakham province is able to maintain traditional characteristics of the Boon Bergpha that was conducted in the past. Moreover, some adjustments were made to the tradition in order to accommodate current living conditions. Boon Bergpha has become one of the highlights of tourism in Mahasarakham. Most importantly, it is revealed in this research that Boon Bergpha plays a crucial role in the conservation of Esan tradition and in promoting sustainable agriculture, which will, in turn, lead to further conservation about the region's environment and ecosystem.

### **Suggestions**

The research result should be applicable to different groups of people.

#### **1. At an individual level:**

Everyone in the province should know about HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi which provides guidelines for Esan people to do good deeds. People should especially know about Boon Bergpha because it is a tradition that supports sustainable agriculture. The prescription in HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi encourages people to do good deeds, which should bring peace to the community and help people solve problems peacefully.

#### **2. At a community leader level:**

Community leaders should be efficient in cultural nourishment. They take the lead to make Boon Bergpha happen in their communities. They are the people who can report to higher administrators like, sheriffs or governors to ask for the money support so they can organize cultural activities in their village.

#### **3. At a national level:**

There should be continuous support from the government to help the communities preserve Boon Bergpha. With governmental support, communities will be able to conduct their plans to make Boon Bergpha sustainable in their communities. The communities should make the tradition of Boon Bergpha outstanding in order to obtain national recognition as the community that best preserves HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi. At that point, the community can become a resource for other communities to

learn about HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi, leading to the sustainable preservation of Esan tradition.

Suggestions for future research

1. Create a discussion within communities to elicit thoughts regarding the existence of HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi in their communities.
2. Restore other rituals of HeetSibsong-Kong Sibsi that are disappearing.
3. Disseminate the results of this research to other communities to increase awareness of sustainable agriculture via the process of research and development.

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