

Phayao Family Research Summary: A Desire to Stay Near "Family"

Introduction and Methodology

One of the decisions we had to make as a team was how best to approach our research here in Phayao, considering a balance between our time constraints and our desire to use the standards of research tools and methods to the best of our abilities. Initially, in an effort to use our time wisely, we developed some categories of research that we thought were most important to know about that would also be vital to our ministry in Phayao. Some of these categories included religion, work life, education, social projects, the economy and family life. Later, however, we decided that these categories might actually distort the kinds of information that we could gather from people and might even leave out some important areas that are central to the life of people in Phayao. Ideally, we wanted to have people in Phayao tell us their "story" so we could learn what's most important to them, without biasing the information towards the areas we wanted to know about. Unfortunately, it is near impossible to interview someone without at least giving them some parameters within which to discuss their lives. To balance all of this, we looked back at our categories to find a starting point for our research that was broad enough to avoid reflecting too much bias on our part while also specific enough to prompt responses from people that would provide fruitful data appropriate for analysis. The category we decided on was family life. Family seemed like an appropriate starting point because it is a category that is already present in Thai culture and it touches on so many other areas that we are interested in, like religion, education and work. Our goal for this first "project" was to get people to tell us about their families, using as rich and detailed descriptions as possible.

The method of data gathering that we decided to use was semi-structured interviewing. Semi-structured interviews consist of a few pre-set questions but also have the flexibility of allowing the respondent to talk about things that they think are important. Also, while we only started with a few broad, open-ended questions, we also listened carefully to the responses so we could ask follow-up and probing questions based on what they said. Often, the initial responses to our questions would lead to other topics that provided fruitful data. Some of the questions we began our interviews with include: 1) How many people are in your family and who are they? 2) What does your family do for fun/travel? 3) Describe a typical week in the life of your family? 4) Describe your relationship with so-and-so in your family? 5) How do you show love to your family? We thought these questions were "neutral" enough that responses could still touch on a wide range of topics yet they would allow people to give us lengthy and detailed descriptions of their family life. We ended up recording 20 interviews that ranged in length from 15 minutes to just over 30 minutes each. Our 20 respondents consisted of both males and females, had an age range of anywhere from early 20s to late 70s, and had a diversity of educational backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. After recording the interviews, we sent the sound files off to people in Chiang Mai who we hired to transcribe the interviews (in Thai script) and send the text files back to us so we could analyze the transcripts.

The method of qualitative data analysis that we decided to use is a method called **Grounded Theory**. Grounded theory is a common method of qualitative data analysis used by anthropologists and sociologists. The theory uses an inductive approach to research that aims to get an *emic*, or "insider's," perspective on the topic at hand. No theories or hypotheses are

proposed at the beginning to be tested by the data nor do the researchers develop theories or models based on outside analytical tools. The method tries to develop models and hypotheses by having the researcher become very familiar and "grounded" in the data itself, in this case, the responses of our interviewees. By becoming familiar and thoroughly immersed in the data, themes and theories should "emerge" from the data. Though "emerge" may be a misleading term since the researcher takes an active role in determining how the data is organized, grounded theory buffers the impact of the researcher's biases on theory formulation because the data itself is the basis on which theory is built. A key step in the process of grounded theory is the coding of data. Coding is just another way to say categorize or organize. Our raw data was the text of the interviews, so we broke down the transcriptions into smaller, more manageable bits of data by reading each line of text and coding sections of text that seemed interesting or important. The actual code itself would be a short phrase or word that describes the significance of a piece of text. One piece of text can have multiple codes depending on how the researcher determines the different ways the text is significant. These codes became the building blocks of the major categories and themes that went into our theory about Phayao families. An important technique that we implemented in our coding was to code "in vivo." To code "in vivo" is to let the actual words in the text serve as the name of codes or categories. Often, we coded "in vivo" when a key word or phrase seemed to be significant or captured the essence of a larger piece of data. Otherwise, we used English phrases in our codes. To assist in our coding and other parts of our analysis, we used a research software called **NVivo8**, which kept track of our codes and what parts of the transcriptions belonged under each code. It is important to remember that the coding of data is actually a part of the analytical process itself because there is not a standard or obvious way to code or categorize any piece of text. So, the very fact that we re-name or categorize parts of interviews means we are analyzing them.

Another key component of grounded theory is that it is an iterative process. This means that analysis is taking place throughout the research project and not just delegated towards the end. Theory is constantly being formulated and adjusted as we interviewed, read transcripts and coded. Often, after our team had coded a set of interviews, we would get together to share our codes and our thoughts on what we thought was significant in our interviews. These conversations helped shape our analysis towards the end of the project. After all the interviews had been coded, we printed each code out on an index card and spread them out on the floor. We all worked together to group the codes into categories that made them easier to manage. We came up with several major themes that seemed to reflect the main emphases of the data, but eventually we decided on one theme to serve as the central organizing concept for our research on Phayao families. We then began to group codes into new categories based around this core theme. Other codes and categories that did not seem to connect or were tangential to our core theme were kept to the side. These categories will serve as helpful starting points and ideas for other major research topics we will do in the coming months. After we organized all the codes into sub-themes or categories around our core theme, we began to draw connections between the different categories. By talking through the different connections that we saw, we came up with a model (see page 16) that summarizes our research on Phayao families. This report is a summary of that model. Please understand that because this project was done quickly and with not anywhere close to the amount of rigor that the academic world requires, the conclusions about our data presented here are tentative at best. We will try to be clear what positions and statements we are more sure of than others, but, in general, this summary is just our best guess as

to what might be a significant way to understand Phayao social structures, particularly the family. At the same time, we feel that many of the ideas and inferences we make would be "on the right track" if more thorough research were to be done, though, certainly this would lead to a greater nuance of the conclusions we have here.

A Desire to Stay Near "Family"

Our core theme was "A Desire to Stay Near Family" and seemed to be a prominent feature of much of our data and a theme around which much of our data could center. This phrase is a fitting and helpful way to describe the central theme of our data because it has captures both the breadth and variety of our data while also helping connect the disparate parts. The term "desire" needs some explanation because, for us, this term means more than just an inner need, fulfilled or unfulfilled, that people expressed through their responses in our interviews. On one level, yes, many people expressed directly that they wanted to be near family or spoke in general that Phayao/Thai people like to live in proximity to one another. On another level, "desire" simply reflects the actual living arrangements of Phayao families that people reported. It was common for people to report living near their extended family, with "near" often meaning in the same neighborhood or at least the same town. Also, there were many instances of adult children and their parents living in the same house. Along these lines, "desire" is not a feeling or want, but a description of actual circumstances. We also saw a "desire" to stay near family by looking at the instances where this seemed to be at tension with some other factor that might cause "staying near family" to be absent.

"Near" also needs some further explanation. For the most part, "near" reflects the idea of physical proximity, such as the living arrangements mentioned above. A common theme in our data was the presence of families (meaning more than traditional nuclear family members) living in close proximity with one another--living in the same house, neighborhood or town (amphur). This seemed to be the norm rather than the exception for Phayao families. From our data, "near" can also mean the status of the relationship between members of the family--meaning relationships are "smooth" enough where reciprocity and interdependence can function at a high level. "Near" does not mean that the relationships are close in terms of high emotional attachment--a sense of warmth, openness and love (as a feeling) between people. We do not exclude the possibility that this kind of nearness exists in Thai relationships (our experience tells us it does), but just that our data does not seem to emphasize that aspect. What seems to be more important, or at least what showed up more in our interviews, was an emphasis on relationships in which people provide for physical needs, help each other solve problems and show concern for the well being of one another.

Finally, another important part of our core theme, A Desire to Stay Near "Family," is that "family" is in quotation marks. This is to emphasize that, in our model, family just as often indicates relationships outside of blood and marriage ties as it does within. Specifically, many of our interviewees talked about their weekly routines in the context of spending time with people, particularly neighbors, who had no familial ties yet were referred to as "Pi gap Nong." Interviewees also emphasized how Phayao is a place where people live in community and treat each other like family. Like nearness to actual blood family, a desire to be "near" to this kind of family means both physical proximity and the kind of nearness defined by smooth relationships--reciprocal and interdependent. It is important to remember that while our research initially set

out to investigate family in the traditional sense, our research since has led us to broaden the meaning of family for the Phayao context. The fact that we were able to learn about this aspect of Phayao culture illustrates one of the advantages of starting with this broad category.

A large part of this report will be demonstrating how the rest of our data illustrates, supports and contributes to the core theme of Desire to Stay Near "Family." Many of our other themes and categories directly support this theme. The report will describe these other categories and our best guess as to how they are connected to the core theme. Any sub-categories under these will also be described along with their connections to other parts of the model. Another major part of this report will be describing those categories or themes that do not support the core theme and are actually at tension with the Desire to Stay Near "Family". Often, these tensions in our model reflect efforts by people in Phayao to try to hold on to a Desire to Stay Near "Family" as much as possible in the midst of competing circumstances or values. In other instances these tensions may challenge the validity of our core theme. Specifically, some of our data may indicate a shift in Phayao culture where a Desire to Stay Near "Family" is not as important or valued as before. Our claim, however, is that Phayao people, on the whole, demonstrate a strong Desire to Stay Near Family. Where there is evidence in our data for a shift away from this, we believe this is a recent phenomenon and will give our best inference as to what may be contributing to the shift.

Living Arrangements = Proximity to Family

One of the clearest indicators to us that Phayao people have a desire to be near their families are the descriptions given about family living arrangements. More often than not, interviewees reported living in the same house, neighborhood or town as their extended family. Several people mentioned that, as adults, they still lived in the same neighborhood as their parents or in-laws, and a few said that they their whole extended family lived in the same moo baan. Others said that while they did not live in the same moo baan as their parents or extended family, they still lived close by in the same town. One person (C3) even summarized that Phayao families in general like to live close together in community: ที่พะเยาบ้าน พี่น้องนี้จะปลูกหลัง คือจะอยู่เป็นกลุ่มๆ. In talking about how they lived close to their families, people mentioned the benefits and positive aspects of being near family. Things mentioned include how families help each other solve problems by giving advice, share possessions, help with childcare, and how the grandfather serves as the head of the household brings a sense of warmth to the family. Though not surprising to us, people mentioned that it was common for grown adults, married or single, to live in the same house as their parents. One person even mentioned living in the same house with their spouse and both sets of in-laws. Overall, this kind of living arrangement was seen as positive and desirable. At least one person mentioned directly that part of the reason Thai people seek to live near or in the same house as their parents even as adults is that it is a way to honor their parents as "poo yai" of the family. As Americans, we tend to seek independence and separation from our parents as we get older, but for Thai people, (C6 คนไทยยังอยู่กับคนมีอายุยังดี). One of our tentative hypotheses related to this is that reciprocity and hierarchy are highly valued in nearly all relationships in Thai society, perhaps

more so than other, more egalitarian relationships. Thus, it makes sense that parents, as both older people (higher in status) and as people who have built up a debt of *bhun khun* with their children, end up living with their children as a sign of their children's honor and efforts to reciprocate. We will mention more about the importance of hierarchy and reciprocity later. To summarize, part of what supports the claim that Phayao has a strong Desire to Stay Near Family is the fact that they live in proximity to one another and generally regard this as a positive thing and something that brings benefits to the family.

One living arrangement that surprised us because of the frequency that it appeared in our data was the situation where a parent(s) did not live with their minor children. This theme in our data both supports and is at tension with our core theme of Desire to Stay with Family. Most often, these situations involved a father who lived and worked in another province (or country, in one instance) while his wife and children stayed at home, near the extended family. In one sense, this living arrangement reflects a Desire to Stay Near Family in that the family decided to have the majority of the family be in proximity with one another (wife, kids, extended family) while only the father had to be away. It reflects a strong desire to keep the larger family close together rather than have a father be able to live together with his wife and kids. At the same time, this situation is also at tension with our primary theme in that, on one level, the father who lives in another province away from wife, kids and extended family is demonstrating a lack of desire to be with family. At least this shows that for Phayao people (men in particular) there are some things that are strong enough to compete with their Desire to Stay Near Family (ok, from now on I will abbreviate this as DSNF). One of our strong hypotheses that we are confident about is that at the root of this tension is a Desire for Work. In the situation where a father works in another province away from his family, work competes with, and wins out against, a DSNF. What we cannot be sure about is whether the Desire for Work reflects situations where work in another province is the only option for the father to provide for his family or where the job is a preferred or actively sought choice even when other options may be available. In situations where working in another province is necessary, but undesirable, there still is a strong value placed on a DSNF. Where work in another province is preferred (i.e., better money, higher position, fulfilling occupation), this may be evidence that something else is of higher value than a DSNF for Phayao people. (This might very likely be the case. Our data does not tell us what is the highest value for Phayao people, just that DSNF is strongly valued. It would be interesting to know how this relates to other values of Phayao people.)

Desire For Work At Tension With DSNF

Our theme of a Desire for Work reflects a variety of meaning in regards to how work connects to family life. In our interviews about family, we asked about people's weekly routines and how they spent their free time. Inevitably, this led our interviewees to talk about their work life. Desire for Work means several different things. On one level, Desire for Work means that our interviewees talked about not having enough work or that it is hard to find work in Phayao. These people expressed a desire for work in that they lacked work and needed more of it. On

another level, Desire for Work indicates that interviewees talked about their schedules in such a way that work dominated their time commitments. Some people needed to work long hours or multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Other people seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time working, not because they needed the money but because work seemed more important than other things in their schedules.

In some instances work seemed to be the one thing that dictated how much time could be spent on other things. This was especially demonstrated in another theme in our data, Lack of Free Time. Many of the people we interviewed said they had little or no free time. For these people, work commitments prevented people from having time to do other things for leisure. They spent most of the day at work, worked everyday of the week or had only a few days off a year for work. Some people regretted that they did not have more free time because of their work commitments, while some of those who had free time said they used their free time for business activities or only took vacation when work was not an option.

Whether out of necessity or out of preference, this Desire for Work sits in tension with a DSNF for Phayao people. When a lack of work exists for Phayao people, this may lead them to leave Phayao, and thus their "family", in order to find work. However, the instances where people work so much that they have little time to be with family, though in the same town/neighborhood/house, does not necessarily indicate tension with a DSNF. Our data showed that there were several instances where the grandparents were the primary caretakers of minor children, even when the parents lived with their children or lived nearby, because of parents working long hours. Some people even mentioned the benefits of having grandparents nearby or hiring a nanny because it allowed them to work more hours during the day. Thus, the fact that less time is spent with family does not necessarily mean that there is tension between a DSNF. Our data does not indicate that "nearness" to family has anything to do with the amount of time spent with other family members, even children. As will be discussed in a later section, what seems important for family relationships is that needs are provided for (i.e., having a job that puts food on table) more than time spent building what we might call emotionally close, intimate relationships. We have a tentative guess that these dynamics may be why it is common for a parent to live in a separate province from their children. What we do feel confident in saying is that when a Desire for Work causes a family member to leave family in Phayao, it represents a tension with a DSNF. Again, whether this occurs out of necessity or preference determines whether it also indicates a shift in how much value is placed on a DSNF compared to other desires.

Phayao Families in the Context of a Struggling Economy

There are several other categories directly related to a Desire for Work that need to be explained, but first it will help to discuss a larger theme in our data that is connected to almost every other theme, directly or indirectly, in our research. It might be better to say that this theme actually reflects the current context in which Phayao families find themselves. In our interviews with

people about their family, a prominent theme that emerged was that **Phayao is Struggling Economically**. Most of the time when this theme came up, it resulted from interviewees discussing Phayao in general. One person (C3) explained that since Phayao separated from Chiang Rai and became its own province, it has struggled economically and is **ยังไม่ดีเท่าที่ควรเพราะว่ามันเป็นเมืองเล็ก**. Other people also mentioned (H2) how Phayao's small size put it at a disadvantage economically to bigger cities where there are more job opportunities (C5) because of the presence of factories and industry. Other people generalized that Phayao people do not make a lot of money (C3) and that the only reason that people come to Phayao is for vacation and being with family (C2). A couple of people even mentioned being poor themselves (R4 & C4). At the same time, despite the poor economy in Phayao, people talked about how Phayao people are still happy and that it is nice to live in a small, peaceful town with little traffic. On the whole, however, Phayao people feel their economy is not strong, and this has an important connection with other themes in our data that relate to a DSNF.

Phayao's struggling economy is one aspect of our research, we think, that supports a Desire for Work, at least where a Desire for Work means a lack of work, a need for extra work or having to work long hours just to make ends meet. Another theme closely related to a Desire for Work, as mentioned before, is a Lack of Free Time. Usually, people who had little time for leisure said it was because they had to work too much. A few people directly mentioned that it had to do with not having enough money because "teaow" costs money. Also closely related to a desire for more work is a Desire for Supplementary Income. Several people mentioned that what they needed was extra money, either to provide for their families or to have money to start a business. Sometimes people gave this as a reason why they wanted extra work. Two other themes emerged that relate to a Desire for Supplementary income. We think both themes, Going into Debt and Being Content with What You Have, arise in a response to a Desire for Supplementary Income. Some people mentioned borrowing money, from a bank or from friends, in order to have enough to live on a day-to-day basis. Others mentioned borrowing money in order to start a business. On the other side, some of our interviewees mentioned that they and/or Thai people in general try to be content with what they have, instead of seeking extra money or going into debt. One lady, in particular, mentioned that her family stressed saving money instead of going into debt. They would only purchase large items once they had saved up enough money instead of buying things on credit. Our sense is that this is a rare exception and that people going into debt is a common problem in Phayao and Thai society in general. However, there is language that is common among Thai people and that emerged in our interviews about being content with what you have and suppressing the desire to buy more stuff. We think that this language and idea is present at least in part because of what Buddhism teaches but maybe even more so because of the King. The King has stressed the need for Thai people to be content. Our sense is that while Phayao people may use the language of being content, in actual practice it is common for people to go into debt. It is difficult to tell how much weight to give statements that Phayao people are content though they have little money.

The theme Phayao is Struggling Economically sits in tension with and also supports our main theme of a DSNF. Some people mentioned that the lack of work and opportunities to make money means they have to leave their families in Phayao and go somewhere else. Also, students who study in Bangkok or elsewhere are more likely to find work in other places than coming back to Phayao to be near their families. In another way, Phayao's struggling economy supports the DSNF. People are more likely to live together and need to depend on one another when money and work are scarce. The fact that grandparents can help take care of children becomes even more important to allow parents to work enough. Part of a DSNF, it seems, is to help deal with the hardships of living in a time when the economy is not doing well. It would be interesting how a DSNF might change in a situation where the economy was doing well.

Neighborhood as Family

Another prominent theme in our data is that, though we asked about family, people also talked about their relationship with their neighbors as if they were like family. The phrase อยู่แบบพี่แบบน้อง or similar phrases were used by respondents to describe how neighbors in Phayao live. We all know from experience that people in Thailand call each other "Pii nong" even though they are not related. One lady, who volunteered for the health department in her moo baan, even mentioned that she was like a "second mother" for people in the moo baan because of the way she cared for people. When one person was asked about why people use this language, this person said that it is because "we love each other like family". Others mentioned how living like "Pii nong" means we respect one another and look out for one another. "There are not problems with burglary in Phayao because neighbors keep watch over each other's houses," one interviewee said. Also, another person mentioned that Phayao people do not have to work as hard as other provinces because they live like family and help each other. We also heard people mention how neighbors spend life together and the importance of joining in neighborhood events, like new house ceremonies. Neighbors not only participate but also help prepare for the events. So, when we talk about being near "family," for Phayao, this also includes neighbors. Though more research would need to be done to show this, our guess is that, especially when actual family is not present, Phayao people show a strong desire to stay near neighbors. The dynamics of needing and maintaining smooth relationships, as previously described in regards to family members, are also present among neighbors.

Interviewees also mentioned religious activities and ceremonies as common ways that neighbors spent time together. Sometimes neighbors simply join together to go to the temple on religious days. Other times, neighbors will บอกบุญ whenever there is a special merit making opportunity to invite others to come. More research is needed, but we guess that these religious activities that neighbors share contribute to the cohesiveness of the neighborhood. We also have a sense that these activities involve a lot of face-making, honor-making opportunities that play into the reciprocal nature of neighborhood relationships.

Another important theme that interviewees mentioned frequently was the way Neighbors Depend on and Help Each Other. One person commented that Phayao was better than Bangkok because people in Phayao help each other, while Bangkok people are only concerned about themselves. This same person said that people "must" depend on and help each other because "who could make it on their own?" Other people generalized about Phayao in similar ways saying that they live in community and help each other like family. A couple of other significant phrases used to describe how neighbors relate to each other include *สงสารซึ่งกันและกัน* and *เอื้อเฟื้อกัน*. Part of what we saw that makes neighborhoods like family is that people provide for each other and help each other solve problems. These relationships also seem to emphasize the reciprocity and interdependence that seem so important in most family relationships.

Our interviewees also mentioned several different social development projects that they had personal contact with or at least knew someone who had. While many different projects (*khroong gaan*) were mentioned, what stuck out to us as being significant was how many of these projects were designed to help people at the level of the *moo baan*. One person mentioned that when his Lion's Club looked for opportunities to serve the poor, they looked for particular *moo baans* to focus on. Services similar to "soup kitchens" were based in the neighborhood for the poor living there. Other neighborhood-based service/development projects include arranging activities to take care of the elderly, health department volunteers who offer consultation on child nutrition and vaccinations and projects that helped neighborhoods produce merchandise to sell for profit (such as OTOP). Interviewees also talked about how government money for community development is usually funneled through the *moo baans* who then decide how to use it. Things like the *ธนาคารหมู่บ้าน*, which loans out money to *moo baan* citizens for starting businesses, and the *โครงการชุมชนพอเพียง*, which gives money to *moo baans* for economic development according to the size of the *moo baan* and based on how the *moo baan* plans to use the funds, are two good examples. One person even criticized a development project aimed at providing job skills training for people (*โครงการต้นกล้าอาชีพ*) because it did not focus on the *moo baan* and thus was not convenient for people to participate. "Something that allows people to stay in the *moo baan* and make a living would be better," he added. This combined with the fact that social development projects largely focused on the *moo baan* seems to reinforce the idea that Phayao people have a desire to stay near their neighborhood "family."

As we recognized how social development projects focused on neighborhood communities, several questions surfaced as to how this connects to the struggling economy of Phayao. Are these projects present because the economy of Phayao is struggling? And are they as necessary when the economy is doing well? What does this mean for our observation that neighborhoods are like families and that Neighbors Depend On and Help Each Other? Does this mean that even though neighbors do help each other, it is not enough in a struggling economy? Does it mean that these projects are not that helpful because neighbors take care of each other well enough? Does it mean that neighborhoods where these projects exist are not functioning properly as "family"? Or does it mean that the kind of help that neighbors offer each other is of a different nature than what the social projects offer, and thus these projects are filling a gap that Phayao neighbors never intend to fill on their own? Or does this challenge the idea that Phayao neighbors do in fact depend on and help each other at all? Or does it mean absolutely nothing?

We have some ideas about the answers to these questions, but more research is needed to know for sure. Part of Ryan's Moo Baan research is trying to answer these questions more fully. It seems that these questions will be important for how we move forward in our future ministry.

Emphasis on Parent/Child & Sibling Relationships, not on Marriage

One thing that stuck out to us clearly after processing all 20 interviews was that we had a lot of description from people about their relationships with their parents, children and siblings, while we had very little description about husband/wife relationships. Also, what little information we did receive about marriage relationships was mostly negative. We classified this information into three categories: Strong Parent/Child Relationships, Strong Sibling Relationships and Lack of Emphasis on Marriage Relationships.

Strong Parent/Child Relationships. Much of the discourse by our interviewees, when we asked about their family relationships, focused on their relationships with their parents or children. This theme also connects to two of our other themes: Adult Child and Parent Live Together and Adult Child Provides/Cares for Parents. As mentioned above, many of the respondents described situations where adult children lived in the same house as their parents and/or in-laws. Overall, people described this as a positive and desirable thing. In at least one situation, the adult child actually took on the financial burden of caring for his parents. Someone also mentioned that it was common practice for children to give their first paycheck to their parents. From our experience, adult children take care of and live with their parents as a way of reciprocating the provision and care given by their parents when they were young. Our tentative hypothesis is that children feel indebted to their parents for how they took care of and raised them and it is customary to respond by living with and taking care of them when they are older. This is where the language of "bhun khun," "thob taen," and "gathanyuu" comes in to play. Derran is continuing to research these words in his work on reciprocity in Thai relationships. It is also the case that even when adult children do not financially or otherwise care for their parents, choosing to live under the same roof still serves as a sign of honoring their parents. We guess that it also provides the parents ongoing opportunities to build up the debt of bhun khun with their children.

We tentatively hypothesize that this building up of "bhun khun" with children is a major part of what goes into making the parent/child relationship strong when the children are younger as well. Many of our interviewees described relationships with their younger children in a way that reflects this. Particularly, the language of parents wanting to provide what is best for their kids and not wanting to discipline their children too much might come into play here. Also, an emphasis on building up "bhun khun" with how one provides for the physical needs and future well-being of one's child also helps explain why it might be common for parents to live apart from their young children. Feelings of warmth and intimacy built on living in proximity with one another seems to not play into the parent/child "bhun khun" relationship as much. (However, there were a few examples of this in our data.) Our guess is that it is more important that parents provide for their children in such a way that their children will reciprocate when they

are older. Certainly, there is much more research needed to confirm any of this, but this is a direction we think is worth looking into.

Strong Sibling Relationships. While not as prominent as the parent/child relationship, our data also demonstrated an emphasis on the relationships between siblings in a family. Interviewees mentioned living with their siblings as adults, providing financially for siblings who needed it, helping siblings solve problems and taking care of/protecting siblings from harm. Not everyone we interviewed mentioned having strong relationships with their siblings, but those who did talked about the relationship in these ways. Like the parent/child relationship, sibling relationships seemed to focus on providing for physical needs, helping solve problems and showing concern for the well-being of one another. It is not clear whether these relationships have the same emphasis on reciprocity as parent/child relationships, but our guess is that at some level they do. It's also not clear what dynamic the age difference inherent in "pii gab nong" relationships provides to increase this kind of reciprocity. Regardless, "Bhun Kuhn" can probably exist among siblings without the presence of clear differences in status. Chris is looking more into how language of "pii gab nong" might fit into the hierarchical nature of Thai society. It seems clear, however, that the way people talked about sibling relationships supports our main theme of DSNF.

Lack of Emphasis on Marriage Relationship. Perhaps the most glaring deficiency in our data where we expected to find much was in the area of husband/wife relationships. After sorting through all of our codes and grouping them into themes, we were left with hardly anything regarding marriage that was positive. There were 3 interviews that mentioned a husband/wife relationship in terms of being a faithful or "good" relationship. Other than that, all our data regarding marriages is either negative or neutral. Most of the data regarding marriages talked about husbands and wives who were unfaithful to each other. In fact, one of our themes that did not make it into the model was "jaow choo" though it was mentioned frequently. What's significant for us is not so much *how* people talked about marriage as how little it came up. In the course of our interviews about family life, people chose to talk more about other relationships instead of relationships with their spouses. Part of this could be because of sheer sampling size and that by conducting more similar interviews people would talk about these relationships. It could also be that Thai people do not like to open up about their relationship with their spouses, even in surface-level sort of ways. Our tentative hypothesis, however, is that the lack of data about marriage in our interviews is that Thai people do not value these relationships as much as other family connections. The husband/wife relationship may not be the "center" of the family like we tend to picture it in the West. If our assumptions about Thais valuing relationships that involve hierarchy and reciprocity are correct, this might help explain why marriage is not as important. Perhaps because the marriage relationship is absent or lacking in these dynamics, it is less valued by Thai people. Maybe spouses aren't expected to reciprocate in response to "bhun khun" like in other relationships. Maybe the egalitarian nature of marriage makes it less valuable for Thai people since the binding force of "bhun khun" reciprocity is not as present. Or, at least,

this might be why they have little to discuss about marriage when asked about family. This might also play into why we see such a high rate of infidelity among Thai spouses, though certainly there are lots of other factors involved.

Whatever may be the reason for our lack of data, our research has surfaced many questions for us to ask about Thai marriages: What are the reasons for and the repercussions of the rampant infidelity in Thai marriages? What exactly makes two people husband and wife? Is it having a ceremony? Is it registering a marriage with the government? What role does love of any kind and specifically romantic love have to do with Thai marriage? What are the roles of husbands and wives in Thai marriages? How can Thai families be best represented visually, especially if a husband/wife relationship is not at the center of the model? Answers to these questions will be very important for our ministry in Phayao.

Out of these three themes, both Strong Parent/Child Relationship and Strong Sibling Relationships support our main theme of a Desire to Stay Near Family. Both illustrate that "nearness" involves not only proximity, but also maintaining smooth relationships where reciprocity and interdependence can take place. It is not clear whether the third theme of a Lack of Marriage Relationship supports or is at tension with a DSNF. Our lack of information about marriage does not necessarily mean that Phayao people do not value or have a DSNF. However, the large amount of data discussing infidelity and divorce in marriage probably does sit in tension with a DSNF. One of our other themes, Broken Families, reflects this tension. Much of our data in this theme focused on situations where divorce or infidelity caused a fracture in the family. In some situations, divorce led to children having little to no contact with their parents. One person even generalized that Thai people (particularly fathers) will have nothing to do with their children once they are divorced from the mother, including sending child support. One woman reflected this when she said she never visited her father in BKK after her parents divorced. There were also a couple of situations mentioned in which parents abandoned their kids and left them with grandparents. In at least one of these situations, the mother re-married and had another family. We can't help but conclude that this kind of brokenness, which leads not only to a lack of proximity with family, but also a lack of smooth relationships, is at tension with a DSNF. It would be interesting to know more about how frequent divorce is in Thailand and how it affects families. It would also be interesting to know how often spouses remain together amidst infidelity in order to maintain nearness to family.

Dealing with Conflict: A Support Mechanism for DSNF

Another theme that emerged from our data had to do with how "families" dealt with interpersonal conflict. A lot of our interviewees discussed conflicts with people in their families and neighborhoods and how they dealt with these conflicts. We organized the data into three major categories that describe the ways Phayao families deal with conflict. As will be explained

below, we believe that these methods of dealing with conflict act as a support mechanism for maintaining a DSNF.

Presenting "Family" as Conflict-less. Our attention was drawn to this theme by how many people responded to a basic question: "How is your relationship with _____?" We asked about all kinds of relationships including spouses, parents, children, in-laws, siblings and neighbors. We were surprised by how often people responded not by describing the relationship in detail, whether positive or negative, but by telling us how the relationship lacked conflict. Many times people responded to this question about a particular relationship by simply saying ไม่มีปัญหา or ไม่มีอะไร. It seemed that instead of talking in depth about relationships, our interviewees were more concerned about presenting the relationship as being void of conflict. Others became defensive and uncomfortable when we asked about relationships and one person even apologized that he could not provide much helpful data since he had no conflict in his relationships. It appeared that many people assumed that asking about a relationship meant that we were asking about the presence of conflict in that relationship. Other people defined their relationships with relatives by saying they didn't argue much. Though none of our questions led with talking about conflict or arguing, people often used their responses to tell us that there was little to no conflict in their relationships.

When conflict, particularly arguing, did come up in our interviews, the same impulse by people to minimize the presence of conflict was still strong. People would mention that they argued with their "families" but then qualify it by saying that their arguments were about silly things, that arguing was normal for relationships or that they argued infrequently. One phrase used that captures this impulse is ทะเลาะเถียงกันเฉยๆ. One respondent even claimed that their family had never had an argument in 20 years. Even when people generalized about Phayao, they took care to present the province as having few or no problems. One person claimed that Phayao families have few problems while another mentioned how alcohol was a big problem in society only to claim that the problems existed in other provinces besides Phayao. From our other data, we know that conflict and arguing are not as absent in Thai families as some of our interviewees would have us believe. It seemed really important for people to talk in ways about their families and neighborhoods that presented their relationships as void of conflict.

This method of dealing with conflict helps maintain a DSNF by convincing self and others that there is no conflict and thus nothing to upset the harmony of smooth relationships within "family." The presence of smooth relationships, even if only a convincing illusion, means that "nearness" with others can still thrive. We can only live in proximity, provide for each other's physical needs and help each other solve problems if we have relationships that are smooth and conflict-less. Otherwise, a Desire to Stay Near Family would not be possible. Obviously, we see some issues regarding "face" in this theme. Intentionally presenting relationships as having minimal conflict helps save each other's face. Smooth relationships and efforts to guard against face loss go hand in hand.

Conflict Avoidance. While “presenting family as conflict-less” is one form of conflict avoidance, the theme Conflict Avoidance refers to methods used to avoid confrontation once a conflict is present and recognized by at least one party in the relationship and methods used to keep from causing more conflict. A couple of people mentioned that when fighting occurs, one way to deal with it is to ignore the other party. Even whole families may ignore someone when a conflict occurs between an outsider and one member of the family. Third parties in the middle of conflict mentioned that they dealt with conflict by not choosing a side. Interviewees mentioned that they ไม่อยากเข้าข้างใคร when a conflict is present to keep from making it worse. Ignoring conflict in these ways is aimed at keeping relationships from breaking at pivotal moments of stress.

Reconciliation of Conflict. This method of dealing with conflict is closely related to conflict avoidance in that people described situations where confrontation was avoided long enough that the relationship was finally reconciled. One person mentioned that after an argument, the parties would wait a month and then talk to each other and pretend that nothing happened. The relationship goes on as before. Another person mentioned that some time after a conflict, two parties will greet each other to show that the issue has been resolved even though there has been no other communication about the issue itself. Others mentioned that once other people in a neighborhood notice two people ignoring each other because of a conflict, the two parties come together and talk again. It's not clear why the fact that others notice brings them together again, but one of our hunches is that the need for smooth relationships in community is so strong that outside pressure makes this possible. The conflicting parties risk losing face if others see them as the cause of unsmooth relationships within the community.

All these themes reflect our previous knowledge about Thai culture that says Thai people tend to deal with conflict in indirect ways, often ignoring conflict as a means to maintain smooth relationships. By dealing with conflict in these ways, Phayao people are able to maintain a strong Desire to Stay Near Family. Haley is looking more deeply into how Phayao people deal with conflict with her current research project.

Miscellaneous Themes Supporting or at Tension with a DSNF

We were able to categorize a lot of data into smaller themes that were connected to our core theme but it was not obvious how these themes fit in with the rest of our model. We will briefly describe these themes here, both those that support and are at tension with a DSNF.

One theme that both supports and pulls at a DSNF is the issue of alcohol use. Many people mentioned that alcohol was a problem in their family or for Phayao families in general. Often, alcohol was connected to arguing in the family. Another person summarized that alcohol use in the family is something that Thai people don't want to talk about. It seems to be a big enough problem for Thai families that it is worth hiding in some cases. Other interviews mentioned how alcohol was used at family celebrations and at other family gatherings. In these instances, alcohol seemed like something that brought people together and was part of maintaining closeness within the family.

Another theme that sits in tension with a DSNF is the theme Education Affects Family. Many

interviewees mentioned that it was common for children to leave Phayao to get their education. Some parents felt the education in Phayao was not good enough to let their children go to school here. At the same time, people mentioned that children leaving family and home for education was not a positive thing, but just a necessary thing. In other interviews, education seemed at tension with smooth family dynamics in that kids were so busy with studying, homework and tutoring that they had little time to spend with the family or talk with their parents.

The theme Distance Between Family Members includes data from people who described situations where family members lived not in proximity to one another. A few people mentioned living alone in Phayao while their family lived in other provinces. Some adult children mentioned visiting their family only a couple of times a year. One lady said even though she regularly visits the town where her siblings live, she rarely goes to see them. One mother had a relationship with her adult son that is completely cut off. Not everyone we interviewed had parents or children living in Phayao. While it is too hard to speculate on all the factors involved in these situations, it indicates that there are some things that keep a DSNF from being fulfilled.

Another theme closely related demonstrates that our claim that Phayao people show a strong desire to be near family may be declining. Language of ต่างคนต่างอยู่ reflects independence in the midst of our claim that Phayao people live nearby and depend on their "families." For various reasons, some people live far from their families, both in proximity and otherwise. It would be interesting to know whether these signs of independence are increasing in Phayao society and if so, for what reasons.

Conclusion

Our findings from our research on Phayao families are very tentative and we only have some hunches about what this may all mean. What this research has done is given us further questions to ask and think about, and some directions for further research. Even as tentative as these findings are, it would probably also still be helpful to talk about what the implications are from the themes we have found so far in these first 20 interviews.

