

## Reciprocity in Phayao

บุญคุณ permeates people's lives in Phayao, yet it is a difficult concept for people to define or explain succinctly. As D9 stated, "We are never taught the definition of บุญคุณ; we just learn about it through action." Thus, this is an attempt to synthesize a variety of descriptions and articulate certain dynamics of บุญคุณ and other related terms and practices.

### บุญคุณ Described

บุญคุณ is ascribed to someone who helps and/or cares for someone else. Interviewees gave a variety of examples of what that help might look like, including helping secure the purchase of a house, giving good advice, caring for children, and providing funds to start a business. Though helping by giving money was alluded to, people were hesitant to treat financial assistance the same as other types of helping. Financial assistance appears to complicate relationships, thus it is better to not borrow money (D9), or, if you have to borrow, you should pay it back as soon as possible (D6).

Thus, บุญคุณ can be produced from numerous ways of helping. (D? even used the phrase ช่วยพี่ให้รอดจากปัญหา.) And once a person provides help to someone else, the helper (ผู้มีบุญคุณ) and the recipient (ผู้รับ) have a bond based upon a sense of indebtedness. The flow is similar to the following: 1) Lamduan helps Somchai in some way; 2) Lamduan now has บุญคุณ with Somchai; 3) Somchai will respond with gratitude and be ready to payback (ตอบแทน) when it is appropriate. The relationship will grow deeper as this cycle continues.

Respondents were clear that the motives of the one who helps are extremely significant. They looked favorably on those who help others unselfishly and without expectation. Conversely, respondents frowned upon people who หวังผลตอบแทน (help with expectation of payback) and who ทวงบุญคุณ (make someone fulfill their debt). While these practices are most commonly seen in the business realm, they can be used in other relationships and will lead to a lack of fondness. (These practices seem to align with what Larry Persons calls "instrumental บุญคุณ." It is still บุญคุณ, but it is more transactional in nature. Thus, the relationship remains at a more surface level. This could explain why one respondent had a negative tone about บุญคุณ.) However, in general, interviewees had positive feelings towards those who helped with pure motives.

As far as those who receive help are concerned, respondents were adamant that the appropriate response is ตอบแทน. D8 states that ตอบแทน is "necessary" and others said a person ต้องตอบแทน. There is not a clear formula, though, for knowing what the appropriate form of ตอบแทน is in relation to the help given. It could come in a variety of expressions. In fact, D8 said ไม่โดยทางตรงก็ทางอ้อม. Some responses to บุญคุณ are very concrete. For example, one lady said a person gave her some money to help get her business started. Therefore, the lady used that man's business to get supplies in the following years, even though there were cheaper options. Others said that ตอบแทน could be in the form of using one's เเรง when the ผู้มีบุญคุณ needs help with a task. Or ตอบแทน for financial assistance can be in the form of giving money back.

Interviewees also explained the recipients of help will respond to บุญคุณ at an emotional level. Terms such as ดีใจ, เกรงใจ, ละอายใจ, and เต็มใจที่จะตอบแทน were used for the ผู้รับ. D8 described the feeling as เขายู่ในหัวใจของเราตลอด. Respondents also described how บุญคุณ creates an ongoing response from the recipient. D10 said she will look after the house and children of the ผู้มีบุญคุณ when he is out of town. D9 said that a recipient should take fruit or go visit the person frequently and check on them. She also said that the appropriate response is to find opportunities to ให้เกียรติ. Two respondents talked about special occasions (i.e., Songkran, etc.) being opportunities to show gratitude. Regardless of how the ongoing response looks, respondents said recipients should never forget the บุญคุณ and must always รู้จักบุญคุณ. If a person does not ตอบแทน or รู้จักบุญคุณ (that person is said to be เนรคุณ, a very strong, shameful label), then the relationship could be ruined and the recipient might move away to avoid the awkward relationship.

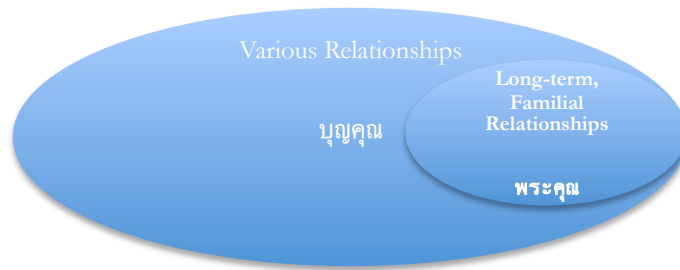
Keeping those dynamics in mind, there was discrepancy between respondents in who they felt could have บุญคุณ. Generally speaking, respondents said บุญคุณ happened between people of different social levels (i.e., older person, parent, etc.). Some did not think friends and/or neighbors could have บุญคุณ. One respondent (D7) also said that บุญคุณ must come from a significant act of helping. Common helping is หน้าที่, not บุญคุณ.

### **พระคุณ**

On the topic of reciprocity, the findings on พระคุณ have been the most enlightening. Prakhun (the word Thai Bibles use for “grace”) is very closely related to บุญคุณ and has a similar meaning. However, the research seems to indicate that พระคุณ refers to a particular slice within the more general notion of บุญคุณ. In other words, some respondents initially used บุญคุณ and พระคุณ interchangeably as they described a person who provided help. However, as specific examples and stories emerged, พระคุณ began to have a more narrow usage.

Interviewees were quick to assign พระคุณ to parents. In fact, most respondents switched from using บุญคุณ to using พระคุณ as soon as the conversation moved towards family dynamics. However, there were examples of respondents using พระคุณ in reference to someone other than parents. Yet, when they talked about a non-parent as having พระคุณ, the description indicated that there was a strong relationship with ongoing provision and care. For example, D10 described how an older neighbor helped her out significantly early in her married life and continues to look out for her. Without prompting she said he has พระคุณ. She concluded by stating that the man เห็นเราเป็นน้อง. D9 described someone with พระคุณ as แสดงว่าเขารักเรา. Therefore, the research shows that พระคุณ is primarily used for parents and those people who show ongoing provision and care to someone close to them. It is deeply familial, long-lasting, and produces a deep sense of gratitude.

Thus, the research indicates that บุญคุณ can be used for people described in the previous paragraph. It can also be used with a number of other types of providing help. However, พระคุณ is reserved for ongoing help and familial relationships.



### กตัญญู

Respondents were inconsistent with their usage of the major terms dealing with reciprocity, though distinctions emerged as more examples and stories were told. This is true with the term gathanyu. As people described the dynamics of gathanyu, a strong connection between it and พระคุณ became apparent. Generally speaking, กตัญญู describes the response of a person who has been helped. It connotes deep gratitude and a desire to return the favor in some way. Though some respondents indicated that กตัญญู can be used in various relationships, the primary use is reserved for those who received help and care from ผู้มีพระคุณ. In fact, every respondent, when asked to describe กตัญญู, mentioned a child's response to his/her parents provision and care. Within the parent/child relationship, interviewees described กตัญญู as being a strong bond a child has with his/her parents due to the ongoing care they showed over the years. D9 stated that กตัญญู with parents is expressed through showing love. Other examples of expressing กตัญญู were building a house for one's parents, providing financially for them in their later years, and physically caring for them as they age. The overall sense of กตัญญู is that a recipient of help from ผู้มีพระคุณ will have a longstanding sense of gratitude. They will seek toตอบแทน whenever possible, knowing that they will not ever be able to completely repay. Thus, a strong relationship is built upon the ongoing provision of ผู้มีพระคุณ and the deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness felt by theผู้รับ.

The flipside of กตัญญู is อกตัญญู, a refusal to show gratitude. Respondents obviously did not favor those who were อกตัญญู and indicated that society, generally speaking, will notยอมรับ คนอกตัญญู. Interviewees disagreed about the severity of society's feelings towards them. Yet, terms such asไม่ให้เกียรติ, ประณามเขาตลอด, andรังเกียจ were used in reference to คนอกตัญญู.

One interesting finding that surfaced, as two respondents indicated, is that a คนอกตัญญู wouldไม่เจริญ and/or everything they did wouldล้มเหลว. While there is not enough data to draw a conclusion, it is important to note the perceived connection (in the mind of Phayao people) between อกตัญญู and one's success and prosperity in life. Could this indicate that people view proper gratitude as essential for flourishing in life? And does this point to a high view of interdependence within Phayao communities?

### **Noteworthy Tidbits**

Interviewees were adamant that terms such as บุญคุณ and พระคุณ cannot be used for spirits or gods. They can only refer to people. D9 explained, for example, that Buddha provided us with teachings but does not provide ongoing help, thus there is no need or opportunity to ตอบแทน.

Respondents also appeared reluctant to use those terms in reference to the king. D9 said that since people cannot ตอบแทน with the king, the only response left is to love him. Other responses to the king were ความเคารพ, ใ้เกียรติ and เติตทูน.