

## **Gurjun-Oil Tree: Buddhist Way and the Conservation and Revitalization of Gurjun-Oil Trees in Isan Cultural Forests**

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**Abstract: Problem statement:** This research aimed at investigating the background of gurjun-oil trees in Iran cultural forests, the present situation and difficulties of gurjun-oil trees and the Buddhist way concerning the conservation and revitalization of them in Iran cultural forests. **Approach:** A qualitative research was applied to find the data in 7 forest areas of the province of Yasothon, Roi ET, Sisaket, Ubonratchathani, Burirum, Mahasarakham and Kakasin. The sample of 147 people was selected by means of a purposive sampling consisted of 42 key-informants, 70 people involved the conservation and revitalization of gurjun-oil trees and 35 general informants. The data were collected by survey, a participative observation, a non-participative observation, a structured in-depth interview, a non-structured in depth interview, a focus-group interview, a workshop and an evaluation of planting activity. Research data were analyzed according to research purposes and presented by means of a descriptive analysis. **Results:** The results revealed that gurjun-oil trees in Iran cultural forests (cultural forests in the north-east of Thailand) were native trees which gave people a lot of useful things; for example people used oil of gurjun-oil trees for tinder, torches and putty. The present situation is a sharp reduction in the number of trees, the forests deteriorated into denuded forests, the people degenerated into selfish persons and competed in using natural resources for living and commercial purposes. The Buddhist way concerning the conservation and revitalization of gurjun-oil trees was the participation of three sectors; they were community leaders, state leaders and monk leaders. Necessarily, all community members must do their right duties in order to conserve and revitalize gurjun-oil trees. **Conclusion/Recommendations:** In conclusion, the conservation and revitalization of Gurjun-oil trees must support by the participation of all social sectors then it will be a sustainable way in the future.

**Key words:** Gurjun-oil trees, Buddhist way, conservation revitalization, Iran culture forest

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Iran cultural forests were the forests in the north-east of Thailand which people located them while they had been setting their villages in order to make a living of Thai-Lao cultural groups in the period of Forest-Village-Community during 1713-1793. At that period, the people migrated from Vientiane in the Lan Chang Kingdom to the Korat Cultural Basin in Thailand. Each of communities located a cemetery-forest for the funeral, a Don Pu Ta-forest for ancestor-spirit dwellings and a utility-forest for a grazing of cattle and collection of forest products for example natural-seasonal food, firewood, wood for a house structure, herbal medicine and oil of gurjun-oil trees for tinder, torches for night lights, putty for sealing bamboo buckets, racing boats or canoes (Kettet, 1997).

In early of 1987, Iran cultural forests encountered with difficulties such as a sharp reduction in the number of trees, the forests deteriorated into denuded forests, the people degenerated into selfish persons and competed in using natural resources for living and commercial purposes since an increase of population. That period, the community leaders must take an action of forest-conservators in order to protect natural resources from human destroying. The participation of community was a main factor which led to the success of forest conservation. Gurjun-oil trees in Iran cultural forests were useful for people in many ways so they conserved them by means of Buddhist way management which was called Dhammik Sangha or the principle of living in society. Thus all people shared the useful things from gurjun-oil trees and participated in forest conservation (Phakhangpiew, 2000). The

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purposes of this research are to investigate the background of gurjun-oil trees in Iran cultural forests, the present situation and difficulties of gurjun-oil trees and the Buddhist way concerning the conservation and revitalization of them in Iran cultural forests.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Research area:** The research areas were selected by a purposive sampling in the north-east of Thailand. Seven cultural forests were selected from the provinces of Yasothon, Roi et, Sisaket, Ubonratchathani, Buriram, Maharakham and Kalasin research method.

A qualitative research was applied to this research and the data were collected by a survey, a participative observation, a structured in-depth interview, a non-structured in-depth interview, a focus-group interview, a workshop and an evaluation of planting activity. Research data were analyzed according to research purposes by means of a descriptive analysis. The sample of 147 people was selected by means of a purposive sampling consisted of 42 key-informants, 70 people involved the conservation and revitalization of gurjun-oil trees and 35 general informants.

## RESULTS

The results of this research were as follows:

- The background of gurjun-oil trees in Iran cultural forest revealed that they were native trees which gave many useful things for the people and grew in the forests which the first generation of those villages located them as the forests of the villages
- The present situation and difficulties of gurjun-oil trees in Iran cultural forests revealed that they have been reduced by the people and capitalists who have fallen them down for commercial purposes and some people have fallen them down for constructing their houses and making firewood or charcoal but they have not planted them for the replacement
- The Buddhist way concerning the conservation and revitalization of gurjun-oil trees revealed that Dhammil Sangha (The principle of living in society) was used for conserving and revitalizing gurjun-oil trees. The success of all activities depended on the participation of three sectors; they were community leaders, state leaders and monk leaders

## DISCUSSION

The researchers would like to discuss research results as follows:

- The background of gurjun-oil trees in Iran cultural forest revealed that they were native trees which gave many useful things for the people and grew in the forest which the first generation of those villages located them as the forests of the village. By those strategies, the villagers took the four requisites of life from the forests and learnt to preserve them for long term use. This is consistent with the research result of Yongwanit (1992), it revealed that the way of life of local people depended on biological diversity and it was a base of sustainable development which based on indigenous knowledge and natural resources. Since gurjun-oil trees have given a lot of useful things for a long time, so they have appreciated them as valuable trees until nowadays
- The present situation and difficulties of gurjun-oil trees in Iran cultural forests revealed that they been reduced by the people and capitalists who have fallen them down for commercial purposes. Moreover, some people have fallen them down for constructing their houses and making firewood or charcoal but they have not planted them for the replacement. These difficulties are consistent with the research result of Tirasatsawat *et al.* (1995), it revealed that the forests in the north-east of Thailand were deteriorated into denuded forests by the people and capitalists who used them for planting economic plants such as cotton, jute, corn, cassava and sugar cane and they also fell down the trees for delivering to sawmills, making sleepers for the State Railway of Thailand and making charcoal for the users in Bangkok so the areas of the forests were reduced and finally they changed into denuded forests
- The Buddhist way concerning the conservation and revitalization of gurjun-oil trees revealed that Dhammik Sangha (the principle of living in society) was used for conserving and revitalizing gurjun-oil trees. It also was a core-religious belief which Buddhists believed strictly. Thus when communities encountered with difficulties, people would participate to solve them away because they thought that everybody should respond to the problems and all problems affected everybody. All activities concerning the conservation and revitalization of gurjun-oil trees were cooperated by three sectors that were community leaders, state leaders and monk leaders. Conservation activities such as planting gurjun-oil trees in the forest of community, ordaining gurjun-oil trees by wearing around their thinks with Buddhist-monk robes in order to protect them from people destroying,

planting gurjun-oil trees in the area of temple or school. A success of each activity depended on the participation of all community-members. This is consistent with the research result of Kanya (1995), it revealed that the Buddhist doctrine concerning forest-conservation with means of friendly relationship and responsibility of the people in society was applied to encouraging people's participation in the conservation of community forest. And that way got along well with Buddhist world view which emphasizes the importance of conservation but avoids destruction

### CONCLUSION

Gurjun-oil trees are useful trees which northeastern people are very familiar; they appreciate them as valuable trees and attempt to conserve them as historic trees in Iran cultural forests. Thus all activities concerning conservation and revitalization of gurjun-oil trees are usually held by the three-sector cooperation which are community leaders state leaders and monk leaders. A success of each activity depends on the participation of all people in the community, so Dhammik Sangha (the principle of living in society) is necessary for the success of all activities concerning gurjun-oil trees conservation and revitalization.

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