

Pwo Karen donate rice and vegetables to Chiang Mai city residents

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by, Victoria Vorreiter



In the face of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Pwo Karen villagers from Ban Mae Tun and Ban Na Keiyn in Om Koi District recently contacted the Thai military in Om Koi District with a request to share their harvest with residents of Chiang Mai as a way to help in the relief effort. On Wednesday, 29 April 2020, thousands of individual bags of organic rice, vegetables, fruit, and vitamins (smile) carefully prepared by the Karen were transported in a large black military truck to the Phra Chao Kawila Monument Square* on the Mae Ping River, across the road from the Chiang Mai Thai military barracks. Beginning in the late afternoon, 30 Pwo Karen members, men and women, young and old, served food for several hours under the guidance of their formidable spiritual leader, Panasia Wongsottokrai, to more than 1,000 Chiang Mai citizens, who, destitute by the pandemic, had lined up in the park for hours.



It was an unforgettably moving experience to see the gentle Pwo Karen, so beautifully dressed in their traditional hand-woven clothing, stretching out their arms with the fruits of the earth and the fruits of their labor. The benevolent efforts of these Karen, who are often not fully recognized as Thai citizens, united together diverse peoples—Chiang Mai residents, Thai soldiers, monks, and Karen villagers—in a moment of compassion, a gesture of humanity.



* Phra Chao Kawila (1742–1816), also known as Phra Boromrachathibodi was a Siamese nobleman of the Chet Ton Dynasty who ruled as king of Chiang Mai during the early Rattanakosin period. He is credited with rebuilding the population of the city of Chiang Mai after the long-running wars between Siam and Burma.

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