Professor Michael Moerman, American Anthropologist who is interested in ethnic group studies in Southeast Asia, periodically came to Thailand to study Tai Lue ethnic group in Ban Phaed, Chiang Kham district, Phayao province from 1958 to 1989. At the beginning of his work Chiang Kham district was still part of Chiang Rai province. Professor Moerman wrote many articles and books relating to village life in Thailand. His works make great contribution to Thai social and cultural study, and are considered as classic work pieces for students in Anthropology.

On his retirement from University of California, Dr. Moerman came back to Thailand to participate in the talkfeast, entitled “The Anthropologist as Informant: 45 Years of Encounters with a Tai Lue Community” on February 21, 2005. On his visit, he brought 16 boxes of the fieldwork materials, including slides and video tapes to donate to Princess Maha Chkri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre to conserve and archive for the future study on Tai Lue and public interests.

Return to learn about his initiation of work in Thailand. When Michael Moerman was an undergraduate, a lecturer said that “There is no other place to find things to learn, beside Southeast Asia.” Thus he began to read about the region, and found that on the mainland there were no other ethnic groups in which there was complicated classification than Tai people. It consisted of Shan, White Tai, Black Tai and so on. He began to study Tai Lue in Chiangkham district and defined his research questions on ethnic identification. Why did the people identify themselves as Thai, Northern Thai and Tai Lue?

More than six thousand records of Dr. Moerman fieldwork materials consists of handwritten notes, typewritten data cards, letters, photos, video tapes, and sound recordings. They contain the information of the communities, individuals, people’s daily life, traditions, economic life, history and education. Dr. Moerman engaged various approached to study people and society for instance participatory observation, to be accommodated in the places where he conducted his research or in-depth interviews. All findings cover eighty-two categories of the research study, and they relate both general inquiries and personal information which become absolutely the legacy for next generations.
In addition, many letters reflect his relationship to the locals. Establishing rapport in fact is an important part of fieldwork for anthropologists. Besides these letters, Dr. Moerman wrote correspondence to Phraya Anuman Rajadhon and Kraisri Nimmanhaemindra who were well-known scholars among Thai intellectuals. It aimed to solicit their support for fieldwork and to keep contact with both of them after his research. Obviously he maintains the relationship to the people ever since he returned to the States.

In conclusion, the collection of Dr. Moerman materials depicts a history of Tai Lue community, and it retells the early fieldwork of pioneer anthropologists who intensively conducted field research in a faraway community. Dr. Moerman recorded the findings from his direct observation and remembrance on thousand paper pieces and more than 3,000 slides.

Today Dr. Moerman withdrew from anthropological works to practice acting, but his records from the fieldwork assemble a great collection of data for anthropology students who are interested in Tai Lue. Particularly, the collection becomes important resources for community history.