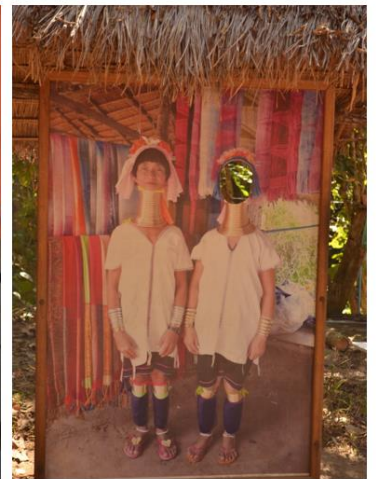


# From Objective to Existential Authenticity

## Power Dynamics in Ethnic Tourism and Shifting Position of Kayan in Northern Thailand



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Master thesis, Human Geography

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## The photos of the cover page

Top left: the entrance of Huay Sua Thao village (Laemlak, 2020)

Top center: Masha, a Kayan woman playing the guitar (Fair Tourism, n.d.)

Top right: the souvenir cutout panel in Bann Tong Luang village (Fair Tourism, n.d.)

Bottom left: the tryout brass-rings for tourists (Laemlak, 2020)

Bottom center: Myo Khin, a Kayan woman weaving on a loom (Fair Tourism, n.d.)

Bottom right: wood carvings made by Matio, a villager, also offered in workshops (Fair Tourism, n.d.)

# Preface

Traveling and meeting people from different cultures has long been my passion. Besides my fulltime work at a bank, I spent my twenties backpacking to see more of the diverse world we live in. During my travels, I saw the rapid and dynamic changes tourism brings to culture and people's way of life in the 30+ countries I visited. In this time, I was also given the opportunity to work as a volunteer for an education-related NGO, organizing study tours of cultural experiences. During my volunteer work and travels, I became interested in the potential that touristic encounters have to empower both local people and tourists, when destinations are developed properly. This curiosity brought me to study tourism and particularly the topic of ethnic tourism for my master thesis.

However, 2020 has been a challenging year to conduct research in tourism due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Cancellation of my fieldwork required me to revise my original research plan, and initially made me lose sight of my objective. Therefore, I am very grateful to all the people who supported me to overcome the challenges and complete this thesis. I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude.

First and foremost, I am grateful to all the respondents who helped my research by sharing valuable insights into tourism of the Kayan communities from their perspective. Every conversation helped me to rediscover the purpose of and excitement for my research. I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Lothar Smith, for his insights and feedback through our online meetings. His advice gave me lots of inspiration and encouraged me to keep on going in these difficult times. I would also like to thank Charlotte Louwman-Vogels, the director of Fair Tourism, who helped me to connect with the key persons in the field with her wide personal network. Occasional meetings with her and my fellow interns at Fair Tourism have made me feel connected to the actual field, even though I have been working remotely all this time.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my friends and family, who have been supportive throughout this study period. I would like to thank Sander for proofreading and useful comments. I am also thankful to my friends in Thailand, Saranyu and Chakkrapan, for sharing information and connecting me to Thailand. Many thanks go to my best friends back in Japan, Hiroko and Emi, for encouragement and always making me positive through video calls. Also, I am grateful to my dance team members of Sway of Life, for a lot of fun moments and making me feel at home here in the Netherlands. Many thanks to Aaron, who has always been supportive when times are emotionally challenging, helped me to grow confidence in every small achievement I made, and encouraged me to fulfil this research in this trying time. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, whose support and recognition for my passion to study abroad has meant a lot to me.

Haruna Chinzei

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## Executive summary

Thailand is one of the countries that has achieved a rapid economic growth through tourism in Southeast Asia. Ethnic tourism has been one of the major tourism sectors in the Thai tourism industry, as the Northern Thailand accommodates a variety of hilltribe minority groups. The Kayan tribe (one of the Karenni subgroups), having escaped from the military junta in Myanmar in the 80s and 90s, is one of the minority groups that has been playing an important role in Thai ethnic tourism. As their villages became popular tourist destinations, increasingly diverse actors both at local and global level have become involved in and brought about the expansion of tourism activities in their villages.

However, while the tourism supply chains that connect local villages and global tourists have been developed to a global scale and there are diverse actors involved, previous studies have not put much attention to the power dynamics among those multiple actors. The aim of this research is, therefore, to bring the perspectives of different actors together and explore how tourism in Kayan communities is constructed among their diverse and changing roles, motivations and influences on one another. The Kayan communities is selected as a case for this research, as the uniqueness of their status in Thailand makes it interesting to investigate how this 'power' is embedded within ethnic tourism. In order to explore the power dynamics within tourism in the Kayan villages, the role of five different stakeholders in both the production process and the consumption process are investigated, including local tour operators; international travel industry; international travel media; Kayan communities and tourists. Semi-structured online interviews as well as content analysis of the online materials from each of the actors are conducted.

Through the multi-stakeholder approach, it was found out that there are multiple layers of mediation in the construction of tourism in Kayan villages, where different actors influence each other. The Thai government has a considerable influence on tourism as well as daily activities of hilltribe communities, through their policies and regulations. The travel industry and the travel media play a substantial role to construct the image of Kayan people through their representations, and tourists develop their expectations according to such information and gaze at the local people through a particular lens. Local communities in turn understand their external image presented in the market and respond to the tourist expectations by actively staging themselves. It is also found out that the host communities have developed the sense of belonging to such staged setting over time and there is a growing initiative to utilize tourism for their livelihood as well as to express and protect their cultural identity. Moreover, tourists are nowadays increasingly aware of the broader socio-economic situation of Kayan people and their impact of tourism on the local communities. Accordingly, a gradual shift is seen in host-guest encounter from playing the 'staged authenticity' to creating more 'authentic connections' with each other through interactive experiences. In order to create a sustainable future vision of ethnic tourism, it would be important to reconstruct tourism based around the notion of this 'existential authenticity', and each stakeholder is required to revise and update their perspectives and practices accordingly.



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## Abbreviations

CBT:	Community-Based Tourism
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
DMC:	Destination Management Company
GSTC:	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
HPK:	Huay Pu Keng
HST:	Huay Sua Thao
ITO:	International Tour Operator
MHS:	Mae Hong Son
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OTA:	Online Travel Agent
UNWTO:	United Nations World Tourism Organization



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. International tourism trend and tourism development in Thailand

The global tourism industry has grown rapidly since after the Second World War. United Nations World Tourism Organization estimates that international tourist arrivals increased from 25 million in 1950 to 1.4 billion globally in 2018 (UNWTO, 2017, 2019). The tourism industry accounts for 10.4% of global GDP in 2018 and had been one of the growing economic sectors worldwide before the pandemic. The growth rate of the tourism sector reached 3.9% in 2018, outpacing the global economy for the eighth consecutive year (WTTC, 2019). Especially in the Global South, tourism has become an important tool to achieve economic growth. With abundant tourism resources such as pristine nature and cultural heritage, tourism has been expected to serve to diversify the income source, to gain foreign exchange as well as to generate jobs for local population. As a result of that, many local landscapes are now incorporated into the global tourism trend and increasingly exposed to the wave of globalization.

Thailand is one of the countries that has achieved a rapid economic growth through tourism in Southeast Asia and was ranked as one of the 10 world most visited countries in 2018 (UNWTO, 2019). Since the 1960s, the Thai government has put focus on the economic development of the country and tourism has been placed as one of the main focus-sectors at state level. Since then, tourism has served as an important tool to acquire foreign currency, to create employment and to compensate the trade imbalance in Thailand (United Nations, 1996). During the state-led tourism development in the 1960s, which corresponded with the mass-tourism trend in Western society, the primary goal of the government was to maximize the national income by increasing the number of visitors, and therefore focus was put on the investment in large-scale infrastructure projects as well as attracting foreign investment such as large international hotel chains. In this context, Thailand's Northern region has been incorporated as one of the major destinations for its rich natural resources. More international tourists have started to visit the Northern region as the access has improved.

## 1.2. Ethnic tourism and hilltribe communities in Thailand

Ethnic tourism has been developed as one of the alternative types of tourism since the expansion of mass-tourism in Western society, in response to the increasing tourist desire to escape from ordinary life and to have authentic experiences elsewhere (Ishii, 2007; MacCannell, 1976). Ethnic tourism is defined as the form of tourism where the cultural exoticism of natives becomes the main tourist attraction (van den Berghe, 1992). As the indigenous villages become popular tourist destinations, various tour services have been developed and everyday culture become showcased by local communities to meet the expectations of tourists (Bruner, 1991). From the perspective of post-colonial scholars, however, it has been pointed out that such tourist expectation towards 'exotic' landscapes is "a thin parody of the

colonial experience” (d’Hauteserre, 2004, p.237) and that the travel writings that exoticize ethnic tribes reflect the Western colonial myths and have served to confine them “in a timeless present” (Pratt, 1985, p.120). Moreover, it has been pointed out that as indigenous people are often in vulnerable position within the mainstream society, they often become the most marginalized beneficiaries of tourism (Ismail, 2008; Miyamoto, 2012).

Ethnic tourism has been one of the major tourism sectors in the Thai tourism industry, as the Northern Thailand accommodates a variety of hilltribe minority groups. The hilltribe ethnic group in Northern Thailand consists of 10 linguistic groups with a population of approximately one million, who have moved from surrounding countries (Ekachai, 2013; Leepreecha, 2005). The villages of ethnic minorities started to be developed as tourist destinations in the 1970s. During the early stage of state-led development, the main tourist attraction in the Northern region was recognized as pristine nature, such as the tropical forest. At the same time, hilltribe communities were not on the list of major attractions to promote (Leepreecha, 1997). As the access to Northern region improved, some adventurous tourists who seek for ‘off-the-beaten-track’ destinations started to visit ethnic villages and showed interest in their beautiful costumes and artifacts. Villagers then got the idea to start a tourism business by selling those items to tourists (Leepreecha, 2005). The government and the local industries then started to see the potential of the hilltribe communities as tourism resources. Since then, many trekking tours through the mountains to visit hilltribe villages have been developed by local businesses, and the annual number of international visitors reached approximately 100,000 people in the 1990s (Ishii, 2005). Nowadays, the tourism supply chains which connect local hilltribe villages and global tourists has been developed to a global scale, and tourists have wider channels and easier access to these remote destinations.

### 1.3. Kayan communities in Thailand

The Kayan ethnic tribe is one of the minority groups in Northern Thailand that has been playing an important role in Thai ethnic tourism. They are often known as the ‘long-neck tribe’ in the context of tourism, referring to their appearance in traditional costume. The Kayan tribes are refugees from Myanmar, having escaped from the military junta in the 80s and 90s, and settled in refugee camps along the border between Myanmar and Northern Thailand. Due to their unique appearance and the increasing popularity of hilltribe tourism among international visitors in Thailand, they have been incorporated into the tourism industry since the 1980s. Kayan women who wear brass-rings around their neck were encouraged to move from the refugee camp to artificial ‘theme park’ style villages that are open to tourists (Miyamoto, 2012). Even today, the majority of Kayan people are still not in possession of Thai citizenship. As the result, their freedom of traveling is restricted and therefore they have limited opportunity for employment outside of the village. Therefore, for most of these people, tourism is a vital income source to make a living in the current circumstances (Miyamoto, 2012).

The way tourism is organized in Kayan villages, however, has long been regarded with controversy in international society. In 2008, the UNHCR reported a story of one young Kayan girl whose asylum seeking to third countries as

a refugee was disapproved by Thai government, as they are considered as an important tourist attraction for the country. Since then, this destination attracted large number of criticism and the exploitative practices of the government and tourism developers are increasingly reported by international media. The way people are 'forced' to engage in tourism in those small villages has been extensively criticised as a 'human zoo' (Harding, 2008; Ismail, 2008).

## 1.4. Research objective

A number of hilltribe communities have been involved in tourism in Thailand. Over time, increasingly diverse actors both at local and global level have become involved in and brought about the expansion of tourism activities in those villages. The position of hilltribe communities within the global tourism market has also shifted accordingly, through the changing discourse around hilltribe tourism as a result of negotiation among different actors. Previous studies in the field of ethnic tourism, however, have not put much attention to such power dynamics among multiple actors. The aim of this research is, therefore, to bring the perspectives of different actors together and to explore how tourism of hilltribe communities is constructed among their diverse and changing roles, motivations and influences on one another. This study will particularly look into the case of the Kayan communities in Northern Thailand. The Kayan communities have been a central actor of ethnic tourism in Thailand, as they are promoted and imagined as one of the most 'exotic' destination with their distinctive culture. At the same time, their villages have long been discussed as one of the highly controversial destinations within the international society due to the exploitative practices of powerful stakeholders. The Kayan communities is selected as a case for this research, as this complex layer of power relations that has produced tourism in the village made it an interesting case to investigate how this 'power' is embedded within ethnic tourism.

In order to explore the power dynamics that construct tourism in the Kayan villages, the role of stakeholders in both the production process and the consumption process will be investigated. The process of production includes the ways various attributes of Kayan people are commodified, presented and distributed by the industry, media and host communities themselves under their various motivations. The process of consumption, on the other hand, is the ways tourists imagine, create expectations for, and experience the Kayan villages as a holiday attraction. While the mainstream criticism towards Kayan tourism tends to focus on the power imbalance between 'powerful' actors and 'powerless' local communities, this research takes the standpoint that the power is more complex, multiple and dynamic and that each actor has a certain degree of agency to influence the processes. Therefore, this study tries to take a step back and look at the criticism as one type of 'power' that brings a certain influence on the process of tourism.

## 1.5. Research questions

As mentioned in the previous section, the main research objective of this study is defined as:

*To investigate in the power dynamics within the process of production and consumption of tourism in Kayan communities in Northern Thailand*

In order to achieve the main research objective, sub-questions are formed within the following three aspects:

### 1. Local context

- *What is the historical context and present situation of Kayan villages in Thailand that are involved in tourism?*

### 2. Process of production

- *What kind of tourism products, offers and activities can be identified in Kayan villages?*
- *Who are the local and global stakeholders involved in the production of Kayan tourism, and what are the functions of each stakeholder?*
- *Who has the power to represent the Kayan people and what kind of representations are made by these actors?*
- *How is the issue of authenticity defined and dealt with by actors involved in tourism production?*
- *How are the ethical concerns dealt with by each actor involved in tourism production?*
- *What are the motivations of villagers to engage in tourism and what are the assumptions/intentions behind commercialization/staging of themselves for tourism?*

### 3. Process of consumption

- *What kind of motivations, expectations and knowledge do tourists have before visiting Kayan villages?*
- *What kind of activities/behaviour of tourists are identified in the villages?*
- *How is the local environment and tourism products/offers perceived by tourists?*
- *How do tourists understand their impacts on the villages?*
- *How is 'responsibility' defined and practiced by tourists?*

## 1.6. Relevance

Since its rise in the 1970s, ethnic tourism has attracted attention both in academia and the industry. Various impact of tourism on ethnic communities and the local process of adapting to those changes have been studied. As for economic aspects, the broad economic impact on the host communities (Ishii, 2012) and how tourism is incorporated as a livelihood strategy by host community members (Sunaga, 2009) are investigated. With regard to socio-cultural aspects, how tourism has transformed the customs of the host communities, such as gender roles and kinship relations (Morais,

Yarnal, And & Dowler, 2005; Sheikhi, 2015) as well as the cultural and ethnic identity of the members of the host communities (Bruner, 1991; Yang, 2013; Zorilla, 2000) has been studied in ethnic communities in different regions. From the tourist side, perception of authenticity and its relation to tourist satisfaction has been studied regarding ethnic tourism (Johnson, 2007; Walter, 2016, Yang, 2012).

While a lot of insights are gained in different aspect of impacts on local communities as well as from the perspectives of different actors so far, few studies have investigated the power dynamics among different actors in image construction and its long-term impact on tourism in ethnic villages. In order to fill this knowledge gap, this study attempt to bring the perspectives of different actors together and to find out the way discourses of Kayan tourism are produced and transformed.

Furthermore, the study will also be societally relevant, as it provides ground-level actors with an overhead view of the roles, positions, power and relations of different actors and help them to create more comprehensive strategies for future development of ethnic tourism. In this way, this research also suggests the direction in which different actors could effectively cooperate to produce mutually beneficial development in the field of ethnic tourism.

## 1.7. Thesis structure

This research is aiming to critically analyse the way tourism in Kayan villages is constructed through the power dynamics among multiple actors. This thesis consists of seven chapters. After the introduction of the context and research objectives in this chapter, a theoretical framework will be discussed in *chapter 2* to show what kind of conceptual approach is taken to capture the power dynamics that construct tourism of Kayan communities. Following this conceptual framework, in *chapter 3*, an overview of the research design and methodology will be discussed. In *chapter 4*, the context of the study sites and study subjects are described, addressing the power relations that have formed the current local environment. After that, an overview of general functions and positions of each of the stakeholders in Kayan tourism will be provided. Thereafter, *chapter 5* will delve into the analysis of how each actor influences each aspect of the production and consumption processes of tourism. In this chapter, we will look into the role of each actor respectively: first, the role of the local and international travel industry is investigated by analysing their websites and operational policies. Next, the role of international media will be investigated by conducting discourse analysis of their articles. Thereafter, the perspectives and agency of the Kayan communities will be examined, referring to interviews with villagers in two Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son. Finally, the nature of tourist experiences will be analysed in relation to the influence of other actors, using TripAdvisor reviews. *Chapter 6* will discuss the three major points that were found out throughout the analysis in this study, taking a long-term perspective. Finally, in *chapter 7*, the conclusion and the recommendations for any future research, as well as a future direction of tourism in ethnic communities will be provided.





## 2. Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I will explore the theories and concepts that are characteristic of ethnic tourism. First, the postcolonial framework which is applied throughout this study will be described (2.1). Then, the concepts relevant to the production and consumption of tourism will be discussed (2.2), including the way representation is produced and consumed in the global tourism market (2.2.1) and how local environment in destinations are transformed in the course of tourism development (2.2.2). Thereafter, we will look at the emerging trend in tourism consumption and how those concepts intersect with the processes of ethnic tourism (2.3). Finally, issues of authenticity that arises during the course of tourism development will be elaborated (2.4). This is followed by the conceptual framework (2.5) which will guide this study.

Theory on	Process in global market	Process in local environment
Approach	Postcolonial approach (2.1)	
Context		Globalization/Hybridization (2.2.2)
Production process	Representation (2.2.1)	Commercialization/staging (2.2.2)
Consumption process	Tourist gaze (2.2.1) Experience economy (2.3) Responsible tourism (2.3)	
Outcome	Issue of authenticity (2.4)	

*Table 1. Theories on each process of global market and local environment*

### 2.1. Postcolonial approach in tourism studies

Throughout this thesis, a postcolonial approach is taken to critically reflect on the power dynamics within the construction of ethnic tourism. This study particularly focuses on finding out how neo-colonial relations are embedded in the image construction of and knowledge production about Kayan people among various actors in tourism. Postcolonialism is a theoretical approach that looks at the legacies of colonialism and the structure of oppression that fix the underlying power relations in contemporary geography, typically between the Global North and the Global South (Pastran, 2014). Postcolonial theory understands that such power relations are based on the discourse of binary oppositions between North and South, where the Northern world is represented as forward and advancing, while the South is constituted as backward and stagnant (Echtner & Prasad, 2003) and that such discourse is “socially constructed, historically and geopolitically situated, and underpinned by power dynamics” (Pastran, 2014, p.46). Therefore, this postcolonial approach aims to reveal and decentre the power of the North to implicitly construct the definition and the understanding of people and places in South, by revealing the ways the knowledge is produced (Williams, Meth & Willis, 2014).

Edward Said's work 'Orientalism' (1978) is one of the first and most well-known works that examine the post-colonial discourse, revealing the way the concept of 'Orient' has been produced by Europeans. In his work, it is argued that the two man-made geographical sectors of 'Orient' and 'Occident' are a European invention, and each reflects and supports defining one another (Said, 1978). The colonial discourse of such an ideological boundary between North and South has long been reflected in a number of post-World War II development projects. The development of the global tourism industry has been "following the same directional global flows, and using the same structures of privilege, power, and hegemony" as those post-war development projects (Pastran, 2014, p.46). Particularly in tourism, such colonial power relations are often reflected in the way local resources are dealt with by outside actors and the way colonial 'myth' is utilized in image construction of Third world destinations. Therefore, the postcolonial approach is a useful framework to critically analyze the underlying power relations and cultural stereotype embedded in tourism development processes, especially of the Third world countries.

A number of critical scholars have taken a postcolonial approach in the field of tourism studies. Pastran (2014), for instance, applied a postcolonial approach to critically examine the nature of volunteer tourism, revealing the way colonial discourse is embedded in the description of voluntourism advertisements. In the context of Thai ethnic tourism, Evrand & Leepreecha (2009) brought up the notion of 'internal colonialism' between the center and periphery region within the country. They pointed out the situation in which the reinvention of the Northern image as "the fancy Other" (p.312) in the rise of domestic tourism led to create a new gaze towards the hilltribe populations within mainstream society (Evrand & Leepreecha, 2009).

The postcolonial framework helps to look at power relations at two levels: the structural level and the ideological level (Pastran, 2014). The structural perspective focuses on revealing a neo-colonial structure in which the resources in Third world countries are exploited by developed countries or powerful outsiders (Bruner, 1991). The ideological perspective, on the other hand, critically looks at the Western gaze towards the exotic "Other" in Third world countries, which echoes with the colonizers gaze which sees the colonized population as 'inferior' (d'Hauteserre, 2004). In this study, this postcolonial approach is taken mainly at the ideological level, in order to critically reflect on how 'power' is exercised by each actor through the image construction and knowledge production of Kayan people in the context of tourism.

## 2.2. Global/local processes in ethnic tourism

### 2.2.1. Production and consumption of representation

#### Representation

One of the focuses of this study is to investigate in the ways the Kayan people and their culture are represented by different actors involved in tourism. Representation refers to the ways in which language, symbols, signs and images conceptualize objects, people or things (Williams, et al., 2014). In the context of tourism, such representation is made

in various forms of descriptions about people and culture of the destination, such as travel information websites, brochures, guidebooks, travel magazines, articles, promotional videos, tourist reviews or individual blogs/vlogs. According to Gandhi (2019), discourses exercise power through representation, as they control both the mode and the means of representation in a given society. From the postcolonial point of view, the colonial discourse still continues to dominate representation of the Global South by the Global North (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). Furthermore, in tourism, representation plays a substantial role in forming the tourist expectations. In the study of visual representation, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) point out that the way a subject is represented within the visual image would define the emotional relationship between the viewer and the subject in the visual image.

Williams, et al. (2014) introduced four common types of representation of the Global South, which are largely based on Eurocentric assumptions. The first common representation is “exoticism and eroticism”, in which the South is described as exotic, mysterious and static compared to the Western world. It is based on the process of Othering, which places the European experience at the center and ‘normal’, while viewing the people and culture in South as ‘abnormal’ and ‘other’. The second representation, which is the important sub-theme of exoticism, is the people of the South as “noble savages”. This notion is used to romanticize the way people in the South live, close to the nature with simplicity and honesty, which the Western world had lost. The third representation is the South as “a place of poverty and in need of help”, which highlight more contemporary face of ‘Orient’. This notion associates people in the Global South as lacking something, as vulnerable and helpless, and in need of help from wealthy Northern countries for ‘civilization’, based on normative ideas of how people should live. Finally, the fourth common representation is the south as “dangerous place that threatens the North”, in which the South is imagined as those who threaten the life and lifestyle of North, by causing overpopulation, political instability, and terrorism.

Indigenous people in Third World countries have been thought of as appropriate to project such ‘Orientalist’ images in their distinctive lifestyle (Ishii, 2007). In order to market the exotic image of ethnic destinations, the tourism industry has depicted ethnic groups as ‘primitive’ and ‘unchanged’, leading to a certain stereotypical gaze of tourists upon ethnic groups. As a result, ethnic communities have often been imagined with certain geographical environment or certain traditional economic activities, such as living in the jungle and engaging in hunting and gathering (Bruner, 1991). However, such representations to exoticize people and culture in Third world destinations have been criticized as “deeply rooted in colonialism and tourist experiences of “exotic” landscapes are a thin parody of the colonial experience” (d’Hauteserre, 2004, p.237) and the travel writings that reflect the colonial ‘myth’ on ethnic groups have been pointed out as serving to fix them “in a timeless present” (Pratt, 1985, p.120). In this study, I will take a critical perspective to investigate in how such ‘colonial myths’ are embedded in the representations of Kayan people and culture in the context of tourism.

## Tourist gaze

The concept of tourist gaze (Urry, 1992) refers to the set of expectations tourists carry toward the destinations. The study of tourist gaze by John Urry (1992) is one of the first studies that reflects the postcolonial perspective in tourism, revealing the way tourist construct the image of 'Other' based largely on the colonial myths. Tourist gaze is formed by various representations produced by "tourism and tourism-related institutions, including tourist agencies, TV travel programs, travel books, advertisement, as well as all sorts of semiotic reproductions of touristic images that satisfy the quest of tourists for something extraordinary" (Chan, 2006, p.193). Tourist gaze is socially organized and systematized and therefore varies across social groups (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Furthermore, people "gaze upon the world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education" (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.2). Tourist gaze reflects not only the commercial representations, but also the norms and values in wider society they originated from. Tourists recognize and interpret what they see and do in the destination based on their expectations (Perkins and Thorns, 2001). As such, the examination of tourist gaze helps to understand the meanings tourists attach to their holiday consumptions. In this study, how the tourist gaze reflects the tourism representation and their beliefs and values as well as how it influences their perception and experience will be examined.

### 2.2.2. Processes in local environment

#### Globalization and hybridization of local landscape

The postcolonial approach seeks to challenge the Northern discourse by putting focus on the perspective of the South. Contrary to the simplified representation of the South often made in tourism marketing, the local environment is not static but more complex, dynamic and constantly changing through a continuous process of reinvention and negotiation of new forms of identities (Williams, et al., 2014). As a consequence of development of tourism industry at a global scale, the local environment is increasingly exposed to the international movement of people, goods and ideas, and as such a continuous flow of materials and ideas has been inevitably transforming the local way of life. A larger influx of tourists, mainly from the Western world, into the local domain means that there are increased chances for locals to encounter the occidental standards and values. Remote ethnic communities too are not an exception from the tide of globalization, and ethnic landscapes are in the process of hybridization of traditional and modern customs (Walter, 2016).

Hybridity is a concept that is used to refer to the coming together and mixing of two cultures through migration and globalization (Williams, et al., 2014). This is a useful concept that captures the inevitable transformation of all cultures in an era of globalization, and therefore is adapted in various academic areas from traditional disciplines, such as anthropology, to more recent and interdisciplinary fields, including tourism (Kraidy, 2005). According to Liebmann (2015), cultural hybridity is "the combination and modification of elements from two or more different social groups in ways that challenge preexisting power relations" (p.322). Hybridity can be better captured not as a *result* of the mix of 'us' and 'them', but as an ongoing *process* of creating 'us' and 'them' (Liebmann, 2015). A hybrid culture is one of the

basic materials that is used to construct ethnic meaning, and the construction of hybrid culture is an internal group processes of cultural preservation, renewal, and innovation (Nagel, 1994). Therefore, when minority ethnic groups engage in constructing hybrid culture, they also engage in the process of creating their ethnic boundaries that defines who they are and how they fit in the mainstream culture (Nagel, 1994; Plaza, 2006).

Hybridity come to appear in various aspects of local environment. Material culture, for example, is one of the key dimensions to examine cultural globalization and hybridization. Material culture is a term that describes the objects people use and how these reflect wider cultural practices and meanings (Williams, et al., 2014). The objects within everyday space reflect not only the linkages between people who live in this space and outside world, but they also project their identity and desire. Therefore, examining the material culture gives the insight into the hybridized practices that are carried out in local settings (Williams, et al., 2014).

Hybridity is not only about the cultural mixture in tangible objects such as what people wear, possess or use, but it also appears in the process of constructing ethnic identity. Identity is a dynamic and constantly evolving property of an individual or a group, and ethnic identity is a product of negotiation between ethnic group and the larger society they belong to (Nagel, 1994). For example, through his research on the ethnic identity of one-and-a-half and second-generation Caribbean Canadians, Plaza (2006) found out that university serves as a period of identity change for ethnic minorities, as it gives the opportunity to critically observe the mainstream culture through their ethnic lens. Through his research, he pointed out that while younger generation of ethnic minority groups tend to find the mainstream culture more appealing in their early life, when they matured, studied and get back to their original communities, they start to see their ethnic culture equally respectable as mainstream culture (Plaza, 2006).

Hybridity in the context of tourism, however, is often considered as negative consequences of globalization as it is thought to threaten “the orderliness of the schematized reality of tourists” (d’Hauteserre, 2004, p.242), meaning that the complex, hybridized local reality does not match the tourist expectation for ‘authenticity’, constructed by various tourism representations. Such established visual expectation of tourists in turn leads to the staging of everyday culture in the host communities.

### Commercialization and staging of everyday culture

From the perspective of local communities, tourism is one of the ways to generate income for their living. In ethnic tourism where the everyday culture of local people itself is the main tourist attraction, various aspects of everyday life of locals became showcased and commodified as tourism products to meet the expectations of tourists (Bruner, 1991). Related to the commodification of everyday space, Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen & Duangsaeng (2015) for example studied about homestay tourism, explaining that homestay is the process of commercializing one’s home in order to utilize home for profitable purposes. When ethnic communities engage in tourism, they inevitably engage in commodification of their everyday activities, spaces, local products and skills under the commercial purposes. It has been,

however, pointed out by tourism scholars that such practice of cultural commodification leads to cultural degradation (Shepherd, 2002).

As a process of production of local tourism settings, MacCanell (1973) theorized the local process of cultural commodification in his concept of 'staged authenticity', where local everyday spaces are divided into six different stages from 'frontstage' to 'backstage', that defines the boundary between the public and their private realm. In order to meet visual desire of tourists, local communities create 'backstage' in artificial manner, where tourists are invited to have a glance at 'authentic-looking' scene of local life which is actually just a show for tourists.

## 2.3. Emerging trend of tourism consumption

### 2.3.1. Co-creation of experiences and mindfulness

Compared to the early years when travel information was predominantly provided by tourism professionals, tourists nowadays have access to wider range of information through the internet, that provide them with more diverse and multiple perspectives about the destinations. As a result, tourists are increasingly aware of the broader social, political and economic context of ethnic minorities as well as the nature of staging for tourism by local people (Walter, 2016). In the rise of experience economy, consumers nowadays unquestionably desire personalized and identity-rich experiences rather than simply consuming commodities, goods or services (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In the context of tourism, tourists are increasingly seeking to be an active co-creator of their experiences through interaction with the destinations (Buffa, 2015), rather than being a passive consumer of existing products created by tourism professionals. In such shift of tourist attitude, the distinction between production and consumption of experience is becoming increasingly ambiguous.

Related to the quality of tourist experiences, mindfulness is another concept that is increasingly studied in the field of tourism. According to Moscardo (2017), mindfulness is when one's mind is active and focused on the immediate setting and has a sense of control over the situation. As mindful people are engaged in the present moment, they can "actively process information and question what is going on in a setting" (Moscardo, 1996, p.381). When people are mindful, they are more likely to realize that "there is not a single optimal perspective, but many possible perspectives on the same situation" (Langer, 1993, p. 44). As a result, mindful visitors tend to enjoy their visit and express more satisfaction from their experiences on the destinations (Moscardo, 1996). In addition, mindfulness not only enriches the tourist experience and leads to their higher satisfaction, but it also provokes more sustainable and ethical choices and behaviours of tourists (Chan, 2019; Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010), as mindful visitors are more open to giving up old beliefs and actively think about their impacts and roles in the destination from broader perspective. As interactive and personalized experiences make tourists more mindful and help them build emotional connection to the destination, the recent shift of trend from consumption to co-creation of experiences would have potential to change the quality of guest-host encounter.



### 2.3.2. Concept of responsible tourism

There are growing debate and awareness about responsibility of tourists and tourism industry on the destinations (Caruana, Glozer, Crane & McCabe, 2014; Minca & Oakes, 2014). As tourists are increasingly aware of their impact on the destinations, not only the elements of entertainment but also the ethical consumption, whether products are justly produced and that their consumption benefits the local population, is becoming an important factor in their holiday making (Buffa, 2015). For example, Buffa (2015) describes the recent behavioural trend of younger generation travellers, in that they are eager to learn about the destination in advance and to ensure that their visit will benefit the local population, culture and environment.

As the responsible travel itself is becoming a part of new identity of tourists, travel products that contain the responsible element is gaining popularity and the concept of responsibility is increasingly used as a marketing tools by the industry. For instance, 'volunteer tourism' is one of the alternative forms of travel product emerged from responsible travel trend, usually marketed as mutually beneficial form of tourism (Pastran, 2014). Moreover, as consumers are nowadays turning critical eyes on the operational manners of the industry, there is an increasing effort in travel companies to set up responsible policies and comply with the international standard in their day-to-day operations.

## 2.4. Issues of authenticity in ethnic tourism

Issue of authenticity has been extensively discussed in the field of tourism. In modernist theories, tourist motivation has been theorized as the desire to escape modern, ordinary, 'inauthentic' life and seek for authenticity elsewhere (MacCannell, 1976). Authenticity has been considered as an important attribute of ethnic tourism (Yang & Wall, 2009). There are a number of different approaches towards how the concept of authenticity is consumed by tourists, which could be generally divided into two perceptions. One is 'objective authenticity', in which realness resides in toured objects or events (MacCannell, 1976). In this point of view, copies, replicas and fake artefacts are deemed inauthentic. The perspective of 'constructivist authenticity' sees the authenticity of objects not as an absolute concept but as the socially constructed one, and therefore there are various versions of the authenticity on the same object. The concept of 'New Age Primitivism' by Errington (1998) described a situation in which "objects come to signify a purely imaginary Other, one no longer tied to any specific context, geographical, historical, or otherwise" (Shepherd, 2002, P 185). Such situation could lead to the 'postmodern emptiness', where Third World people are pressured to perform idealized primitiveness for culturally consuming tourists (MacCannell, 1990; Shepherd, 2002).

On the other hand, 'existential authenticity', the second approach, sees authenticity not as a belonging of toured objects, but it resides in tourist themselves. 'Existential authenticity' is a state of being in which one is true to oneself or one's nature (Wang, 1999). In tourism setting, existential authenticity appears when tourists feel 'authentic to oneself' through holiday experiences, as people can express themselves more freely when they are away from everyday duty (Wang, 1999). Taylor (2001), through the research about Maori ethnic tourism, argues that even in staged

tourist experiences, sincerity in communicative experiences between tourists and hosts can produce a sense of authenticity. Therefore, from this perspective, whether the toured object is 'original' or not is not important. Study of Wang (1999) exposed the limitation of objective type of authenticity in tourism and indicated that existential authenticity would be the alternative element of tourism experiences. The definition of objective type of authenticity in ethnic tourism would also be increasingly challenged, given that the local environment is constantly exposed to the global flow of materials and ideas and their culture and identity are inevitably transformed and reconstructed over time.

## 2.5. Conceptual model

In this section, the conceptual framework of this research is presented (*Figure 1*). Throughout this research, *postcolonial approach* is taken to critically examine the power dynamics within the process of constructing tourism in the Kayan communities (2.1). The process is approached from two different aspects, the process in the global market (2.2.1) and the process in the local environment (2.2.2). Regarding the process of the global market, the ways various *representations* of the Kayan communities are produced by different actors in the international market as well as the ways *tourist gaze* is formed and influences on tourist experiences will be examined. For the process of the local environment, the situation of *globalization/hybridization* of the villages as well as the communities' endeavour of *commercialization/staging* for tourism will be investigated. In each of the aspects, the influence of emerging trend of consumption, *experience economy* and *responsible tourism* will be examined. Finally, the *issue of authenticity* will be investigated in each step of the process, including how 'authenticity' is marketed by the industry, how it is presented by the communities themselves and how it is perceived by tourists.

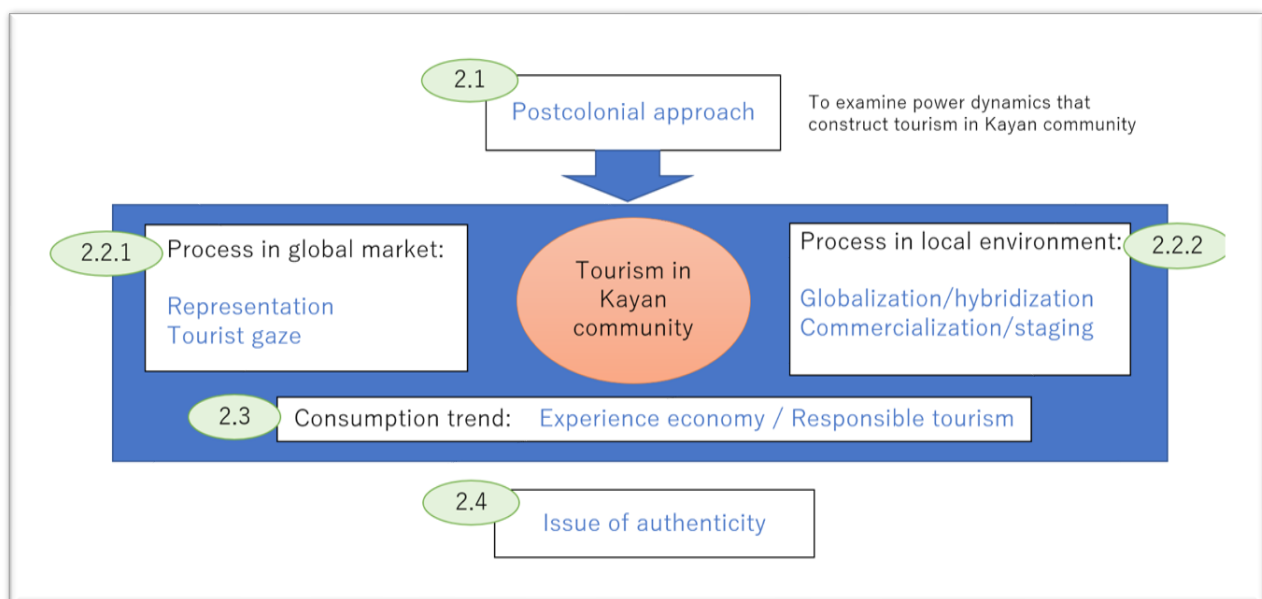


Figure 1. Conceptual model

### 3. Methodology

In this chapter, an overview of the research design of this study will be provided. First of all, the epistemological approach to this study as well as the choice of the methodological approach will be discussed in the first section (3.1). This is followed by the particular methods of data collection selected for this research (3.2), explaining the intention and the way each method is applied in this study. Thereafter, the process of data analysis will be described (3.3). The last section provides the reflection of the methods including the limitations and ethical considerations (3.4).

#### 3.1. Epistemology

This research is in line with the postmodern paradigm. For postmodernists, knowledge and truth is always relative to a particular culture or historical period and therefore it is considered that there is no such thing as universal truth that transcend time and place (Gorton, 2010). In this point of view, the truth is a social construct which is only true within particular context where that truth is constructed. This research takes the standpoint of postmodernism, as the main objective is to critically investigate in the way the image and definition of the Kayan are constructed among the different actors in the context of tourism, based on the recognition that those image and definition are not a universal truth out there, but a product of the exercise of power of each actor.

In order to identify the power relations embedded in the processes of constructing tourism, the use of qualitative research methods was chosen over quantitative methods. According to the definition of Denzin & Lincoln (2011), qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p.3). As this study tries to understand and produce the description about the nature of power of each actor and the dynamics among different actors, qualitative approach is considered to be more suitable than quantitative research, which focuses on finding out the simplified and generalized trend out of the large sample (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie & French, 2016).

To achieve the research objective, approach was taken to each process of production and consumption side. In order to effectively collect the data for those two processes, the combination of three qualitative approaches, ethnographic research, content analysis and phenomenological research, are used for this study. First of all, ethnographic research is used to collect the data primarily from the production side. Ethnographic research looks for a pattern of a particular culture-sharing group, especially of their social organization and ideational systems (Wolcott, 2008). This approach is considered to be suitable to investigate in the process within the Kayan communities, as they share the same socio-economic status and the cultural environment in Thailand. Secondly, various online contents are used to investigate in the image formation process by local/global tourism industry and international media. Content analysis is considered to be suitable for this purpose, as the Internet is increasingly normalized as a part of everyday lifestyle (Mkono, 2012) and online contents nowadays play a substantial role in the course of holiday planning of tourists. For the

consumption process, on the other hand, phenomenological approach is taken. The phenomenological research focuses on describing the essence of the experiences for the individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The description of phenomenological research consists of 'what' they experienced and 'how' they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, phenomenological approach is considered to be suitable to investigate in the process of tourist consumption, as tourists studied in this research are not a homogeneous group of people who share the same culture, but they are the group of those who share the same experience of visiting Kayan villages as tourists.

## 3.2. Data collection

A number of different methods are used to collect the data. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I was unfortunately not able to travel and conduct the fieldwork in the study site during the duration of this research. Therefore, this research has been conducted primarily through the use of the Internet. It needs to be noted that there were a number of limitations regarding the data collection due to the circumstances, which will be further described in the last section of the chapter. Overall, two methods are mainly used in this study: conducting online interviews and collecting online materials via Internet search. Additionally, I searched for the past interviews that were conducted by other researcher in the same study site as well as asked for cooperation to my fellow intern at Fair Tourism who lived in Thailand during the period of this study to conduct observation and focus group interview on behalf of me. The intention behind the selection of each of the methods as well as the way it is applied in this study will be explained in this section.

### 3.2.1. Semi-structured online interview

In order to investigate in the production process, first of all, in total 8 online interviews with the different actors were conducted, including a community member, local and international travel industry and experts from local and international organizations. In Appendices, the list of the respondents ([Appendix I](#)) as well as the example of the interview outline ([Appendix II](#)) can be found. All the interviews were conducted one-to-one, in English, using either phone call, online meeting tools or email. Among 8 interviews, 2 interviews were conducted via video call, 4 were via phone call and 2 were done through email. All the oral interviews were recorded using either the audio recorder of my mobile phone or the recording function of the online meeting tools, so that the conversations can be transcribed and be used for the analysis in more accuracy. Due to the trouble of the audio recorder, one interview conducted via phone call failed to be recorded and therefore I made notes about the content of the interview as soon as the interview was finished.

While the means of communication vary, the principal of semi-structured interview technique was applied to all the interviews, as the combination of some guidance as well as flexibility was needed to collect the information effectively within the balance between confirming the necessary information and exploring new concepts. Therefore, while the lists of questions were prepared before each interview, whenever the new and interesting topics or perspectives were raised by the interviewees, I tried to ask probing questions and gain deeper insights about those topics. After

the interviews were conducted, all the conversations during the interviews were transcribed word for word. After all the transcriptions were made, each of the interviews was analyzed using Atlas.ti program, which will be further explained in the next section.

In addition to the primary data gained from the online interviews, the secondary data was used as complimentary due to the difficulty to have sufficient number of respondents from the communities of the research sites. The secondary data used in this study include the interviews conducted by Samantha Smits during her fieldwork in 2020 with the community members in two Kayan villages in Northern Thailand, Huay Pu Keng village and Huay Sua Thao village, as well as the observation and focus group interview conducted in 2020 by Saranyu Laemlak, an intern at Fair Tourism who lived in Thailand during the period of this research.

### 3.2.2. Online materials

Next to the interviews, various online materials that are relevant to this study were collected via internet search. Mkono (2012) argues that the Internet is emerging as a valuable fieldwork site for tourism research, as the Internet is increasingly becoming a part of everyday lifestyle including travel activities and therefore web-based research technique can be used as complimentary to the traditional field research technique. In this research, online materials are used as a data for both production process and consumption process. For the production process, the websites of the local and international tour operators and the articles of the online travel magazine were collected. In total 12 websites of the local tour operators, 2 websites of the international tour operators and 7 articles of the online magazine were collected via google search, with the combination of the keywords including *Kayan*, *Long-neck*, *hilltribe*, *Northern Thailand* and *tourism*. All the websites except for two of the international tour operators are written in English. The websites of two international operator, Dutch and Japanese, are both translated into English using the google translate for the convenience in analysis. For the consumption process of the tourists, in total 280 TripAdvisor reviews in the category of 'Long-neck village' are used. The reviews were from one to six paragraphs long and were all written in English. While not all of the reviewers reveal their countries of origin, judging from the characteristics of the texts and photos, it can be considered that those are mostly written by the international visitors. The contents of all the collected materials were analysed using Atlas.ti program.

### 3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the computer program Atlas.ti. All the collected materials were put in the program and categorized by the type of the actor, including tourists, villager, industry, media and expert. First of all, open coding was conducted using a set of codes created according to the conceptual framework before starting the analysis process. In the course of open-coding, new codes were added whenever new and relevant concepts came up while going through the data. After the process of open-coding, axial-coding was conducted. In this phase, codes were sorted into larger

categories and similar codes were merged together. Thereafter, relationships between different codes and categories were analyzed and interpreted based on the theories provided in the conceptual framework. Finally, the findings were organized by actors as well as by themes and presented in chapter 4, 5 and 6.

	context	production	consumption
local	<b>Local community</b> <b>Ethnographic approach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with villagers</li> <li>Interview with local NGO</li> <li>Observation in a village</li> </ul> <b>&lt;relevant concepts&gt;</b> <b>Globalization/hybridization</b>	<b>Local community</b> <b>Ethnographic approach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with villagers</li> <li>Observation in a village</li> </ul> <b>&lt;relevant concepts&gt;</b> <b>Commercialization/staging</b> <b>Experience economy</b> <b>Authenticity</b>	
global		<b>Travel industry</b> <b>Content analysis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with travel companies</li> <li>Websites of tour operator</li> </ul> <b>International media</b> <b>Content analysis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online articles</li> </ul> <b>&lt;relevant concepts&gt;</b> <b>Representation</b> <b>Responsible tourism</b> <b>Authenticity</b>	<b>International tourists</b> <b>Phenomenological approach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourist reviews</li> </ul>  <b>&lt;relevant concepts&gt;</b> <b>Tourist gaze</b> <b>Responsible tourism</b> <b>Experience economy</b> <b>Authenticity</b>
Interviews with experts: to gain insights in overall context and processes			

*Table 2. Overview of concepts, approach and methods of data collection*

The field of investigation is roughly divided into three categories, including context, production process and consumption process, in both local and global environment (*Table 2*). ‘Global context’ as well as ‘local consumption’ is not dealt with in this study, as firstly this research focuses on the international tourists and the consumption within the local environment is excluded from the scope of this study. Secondly, the primary focus of this study is tourism in the Kayan communities, rather than a particular sector of the global market. Therefore, while the general trend of the global tourism industry and the consumption pattern of international tourists will be briefly examined, empirical investigation of the context of particular market will not be conducted in this research.



### 3.4. Limitation

First of all, there was a considerable limitation in data collection, as in my capacity as researcher, it was rather unfortunately not possible to conduct fieldwork in the study site due to Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, while not entirely dismissing the original topic, the focus of the original research plan, that relied to a large extent on the fieldwork, needed to be revised. In the original research plan, I was going to look into the nature of the host-guest interactions and how each actor perceives and influences each other. However, the situation of pandemic made it almost impossible to conduct research in this original plan, as there were nearly no tourists visiting the study site during the period of this research. Researching from the distance also means that the opportunity for building rapport with the villagers and having informal conversations to understand their worldview was largely restricted.

While searching for alternative data available, I found out that lots of descriptions about the Kayan communities are produced by different tourism stakeholders under different purposes, and different discourses arise from those descriptions which would consequently influence the host-guest encounter. Therefore, I decided to reconstruct my research plan, focusing on the image construction of the Kayan people in the context of tourism. There are, nevertheless, several limitations that should be noted, as some types of data that I was initially planning to obtain in the field had to be replaced by secondary data or collected in alternative methods.

First of all, interviews with tourists were replaced by the online tourist reviews. However, due to the high anonymity of the reviewers, it was difficult to identify the characteristics of tourists who share each of those opinions and remarks. Moreover, the fact that I could not observe the reactions in their encounter would restrict the depth of the interpretation of their experiences. Secondly, as it turned to be difficult to reach out the local community members due to the instable internet connection in the local villages, the past interviews that were conducted by Samantha Smits (2020) for her Bachelor thesis, and the focus group interview conducted by Saranyu Laemlak, an intern at Fair Tourism who lived in Thailand, were used. As those interviews were conducted in the different research context, even when respondents were talking about the relevant topics of this research, there might be a subtle gap between what the respondents meant and how I interpreted them for my research. Moreover, as the tone of voice or the facial expression of the respondents were not visible, there would be a limitation in the depth of interpretation. Finally, as I could not contact anyone from the commercial villages outside of Mae Hong Son, the descriptions about those villages are relying on the general information obtained from the desk research as well as from the interviews with experts who are familiar with tourism in Thailand.



## 4. Positioning Kayan in the context of global tourism

In this chapter, the context of this study will be provided. First, the historical context of tourism development in Thailand and how the hilltribe population have been incorporated in Thai tourism industry will be described (4.1). Then, I will zoom in on the particular case of the Kayan communities in Thailand (4.2), providing the description about the historical and geopolitical background of the Kayan people, the involvement of the Kayan villages in tourism and the situation of each village this study will investigate. Thereafter, the overview of the stakeholders who are involved in tourism in the Kayan villages will be provided (4.3), explaining the function, motivation and power of each actor regarding tourism in the Kayan communities.

### 4.1. Tourism development and hilltribe populations in Thailand

#### 4.1.1. Tourism in Thailand

Tourism has been placed as one of the economic focus-sectors in Thailand since the 1970s. The initial stage of tourism development has been led by the government as a state-level project, and therefore focus has been put mainly on the large-scale development of infrastructure such as airlines, airports and highways. In this initial stage, two main categories of resources were selected as the major tourism resources to promote to the international market: natural resources, such as tropical forest, and cultural resources, such as Buddhist temples and historical monuments (Ishii, 2005). As a result of state-level promotion, tourism sector has grown to a major economic contributor to the country, making up 17.7% of its GDP in 2016 (Theparat, 2017). However, due to the rapid growth in number of tourists, various negative side effects have arisen in certain destinations, problems such as environmental destruction in the coastal area and the issue of human-trafficking of women and children from vulnerable ethnic minorities from rural to urban area for commercial sex exploitation and labour, especially in the expansion of the sex tourism industry.

In 2016, the Tourism Authority Thailand (TAT) released The Second National Tourism Development Plan (2017-2021), which shows the path for Thailand's tourism development for the following five years. This plan is in line with the wider national strategy called the Thailand 4.0 strategy, which aims to transform the national economy into a value-based economy through innovation, knowledge, technology and creativity (Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok, 2017). In the context of tourism, it is aimed to turn the country in a sustainable destination by targeting more quality tourists over quantity as well as improving wealth distribution across the regions. In this context, community-based tourism in rural regions is positioned as one of the key sectors, due to its potential to offer unique and diverse experiences to attract higher-quality tourists as well as the way to generate alternative income for rural regions. Jaranya Daengnoy, director of CBT-I, a Thai NGO which supports the local communities with CBT development, described the recent positive attitude of the government towards community-based tourism development: *"Government wants to develop CBT in various sectors, such as agriculture, education, industry, because they now see that CBT is a tool to develop the basic*

*economy of the country. If the community develop CBT successfully and have more tourists, then that will increase the income of the country.” (J. Daengnoy, personal communication, July 14, 2020)*

#### 4.1.2. Hilltribe populations in Thailand

Northern Thailand is home to a variety of hilltribe minority groups. The hilltribe ethnic group in Northern Thailand consists of 10 linguistic groups with a population of approximately one million (Ekachai, 2013; Leepreecha, 2005). Many of the ethnic minorities originated from neighbouring countries such as China, Myanmar and Laos and settled along the Northern mountainous border. For centuries, hilltribe populations and central Thai community have had harmonious and a reciprocal relationship as trading partners, and the journeys up and down the hills were made by both highlanders and lowlanders to buy goods from each other (Leepreecha, 2005). However, this relationship has gradually changed since Thailand experienced the rapid economic development after the 60s. As the awareness for nature conservation has grown in Thai society, hilltribe communities were seen as a ‘threat’ for the environment due to the custom of shifting cultivation practiced by some of the hilltribe groups. In addition, during the cold-war period, hilltribe populations were associated with a communist guerrilla, that was gaining power in neighbouring countries close to the Northern region and therefore seen as a ‘threat’ to the mainstream society (Sunaga, 2009). Those negative images casted on hilltribe communities contributed to the process of Othering of those groups in Thai mainstream society (Sunaga, 2009). Discrimination towards ethnic minorities in Thailand, especially for hilltribe communities, has still been an issue until today. Bangkok post states that "Nearly a million hill peoples and forest dwellers are still treated as outsiders—criminals even, since most live in protected forests. Viewed as national security threats, hundreds of thousands of them are refused citizenship although many are natives to the land"(Ekachai, 2013).

In the context of tourism, however, hilltribe minorities are widely recognized as a major tourist attraction of the Northern region of Thailand. As an expansion of the international visitors to the Northern region, hilltribe villages have become one of the popular spots among tourists who seek for ‘off-the-beaten-track’ destinations (Leepreecha, 2005) and the government and local industry started to see the potential of hilltribe communities as tourism resources. Since then, many trekking tours through mountain to visit hilltribe villages have been developed and the annual number of international visitors reached approximately 100,000 people in the 1990s (Ishii, 2005). Nowadays, in an effort of transforming the country as a sustainable destination, development of community-based tourism in ethnic minority villages is seen as a tool to attract quality tourists and to redistribute the tourism income for the economic development of rural regions.

## 4.2. Kayan people and tourism

### 4.2.1. Kayan communities and tourism in Thailand



Map 1. Karenni state (Wars in the world, 2012)



Picture 1. Tourism advertisement of Kayan village (Laemlak, 2020)

While there are more and more hilltribe communities involved in tourism in Thailand, this study will particularly zoom in on the Kayan communities as a case of hilltribe tourism in Thailand. Kayan is one of the hilltribe minority group that has been involved in tourism since the early year of tourism development in Thailand, due to their unique cultural feature of women who wear brass-rings around their neck. The Kayan are a linguistic subgroup of the Karen population, which is the largest ethnic group in Thailand, and they belong to the smaller group of Kayah (Karenni) people (Heikkilä-Horn, 2019). Kayans are particularly known for their custom of women wearing brass-rings around their neck and therefore often called 'long-neck Karen' in the context of tourism. While there are several terms to refer to the Kayan people such as 'Padaung' and 'Giraffe-women', those terms are usually perceived as derogatory and Kayan people themselves generally prefer to call themselves as 'Kayan'. The term 'Giraffe-women' was used particularly during the British colonial era and some women with brass rings were taken to Europe by British circuses to be exhibited as an entertainment (Heikkilä-Horn, 2019).

The Kayan in Thailand originate from Kayah (Karenni) state in Myanmar and moved to Thailand in the 80s and 90s to escape from military violence on minority groups and settled in the refugee camps in border regions. Their

settlement in Thailand started in 1983, gradually followed by many to escape the military junta in Myanmar.

While Kayan's tradition of wearing brass-coils has been explained by different scholars in many different ways so far, including to imitate Mother Dragon of the tribe, to distinguish themselves from other tribes, to avoid being kidnapped, and to protect their neck from tigers, most of the Kayan women nowadays seem to wear the brass-coils out of personal motivation, such as the market value in the brass coils, peer pressure, beauty and desire to preserve the tradition, rather than traditional reasons and beliefs (Heikkilä-Horn, 2019). However, some of the young generation nowadays no longer want to wear the rings due to various reasons (Tuntates, & Chittasutthiyan, 2019), mainly to be able to get a higher education and to create an alternative lifestyle outside of the community (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020).

### **Commercialization of the first Kayan 'refugee' village and establishment of artificial villages**

While the initial reason for the first Kayan people to have crossed the Thai-Myanmar border was to escape military violence in Myanmar, due to their unique appearance, they have been incorporated into the tourism industry in Thailand. Among a number of villages that are nowadays involved in tourism, Huay Pu Keng village is the first Kayan village that was set up for Kayan refugee population and incorporated into the tourism industry. The village chief of Huay Pu Keng expressed his perception of this development at that time: *"When the Thai government saw, the Kayan people especially Kayan long-neck women.. And then they very interested. Ah this tribe very strange and very interested. And then they promote about the Kayan people. And they put like in one particular place like Huay Pu Keng here. A wonderful place. And they promote to the world and with other community."* (Noung, personal communication through translator, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020).

Due to the increasing popularity of visiting the hilltribe villages among international tourists, a lot of artificial villages, which are designed especially for tourism, have been set up in different regions of the country, especially near the major tourist destinations. According to this development, more and more Kayan people started to cross the border not to escape the war, but in search for the economic opportunities in the tourism industry in Thailand. Referring to the commercial villages in Thailand, Jaranya Daengnoy, the director of CBT-I, explained the complex status of Kayan people in Thailand: *"They are not even a refugee. When you are refugee, you have a reason to live here, you have status. You have an organization to support. But those Kayan people, they don't come by a refugee reason, but they come by, they followed the businessmen to settle here as a business product, tourism product"* (J. Daengnoy, personal communication, July 14, 2020). This complex status of Kayan people, especially of those who live in commercial villages, makes it difficult for the government to provide any official support, from the tourism development to other basic needs in various aspect of their life.

As Kayan villages have been recognized as one of the lucrative tourist attractions for the country, there seems to have been a certain government control over the community's movement. According to a villager in Huay Pu Keng,

Pay Yu, there was once a situation where the government prevented the resettlement of a Kayan villager to the third countries: *“In Thailand, the Thai government they don't want that the Kayan people to go outside the country, because it's the kind of attraction for the tourists. [...] If no long-neck people here anymore and people don't visit we lose income.”* (Pay Yu, personal communication, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020)

### **Restrictions posed on Kayan people in Thailand**

Due to the vulnerable status within Thailand, there are a number of restrictions Kayan communities face in Thailand. Firstly, their lack of citizenship prevents them from free movement outside of the province they live. The village chief of Huay Sua Thao, one of the commercial Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son, explained that in order to travel outside of the province, a certain document is required: *“we have restrictions from government for travelling. We don't have any document, we are not allowed to go out, to go and walk. To go and travel in other province and other areas. We do have like a pink card, so we have to first have travel documents. We have to have travel documents from the district officer.”* (La Mae, personal communication, March 8, 2020, Smits, 2020). Especially those who came not as refugee but were ‘brought’ by Thai businessmen to commercial villages, their rights and freedom in many aspects of life is largely restricted by the village owners in exchange for receiving financial compensation as a wage (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020). Moreover, the restriction of traveling also leads to a limited opportunity for employment outside of the communities, combined with other reasons such as discrimination from mainstream society and their lower educational background.

#### 4.2.2. Mae Hong Son

Mae Hong Son is a province in the North-West of Thailand, where the Kayan people who came from Myanmar first settled down. Therefore, Mae Hong Son is generally considered as the original region of the Kayan communities by the community members themselves. The Mae Hong Son province is located east of three States in Myanmar, namely Shan, Kayin and Kayah. In Thailand it's next to Chiang Mai and Tak province. Mae Hong Son is the most mountainous province in Thailand, with around 90% of the land covered by forest and natural reserves (Thailand Hilltribe Holidays, n.d.). The climate in Mae Hong Son is tropical and it can be foggy all year round, and therefore called 'the Land of three fog' (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d. a). Mae Hong Son holds an estimated population of 284,100 in 2019, among which over 60% consists of ethnic minority groups. Due to the proximity to Myanmar, numerous influences of Myanmar can be seen in the style of temples and buildings in the province (Sikorski, n.d.)

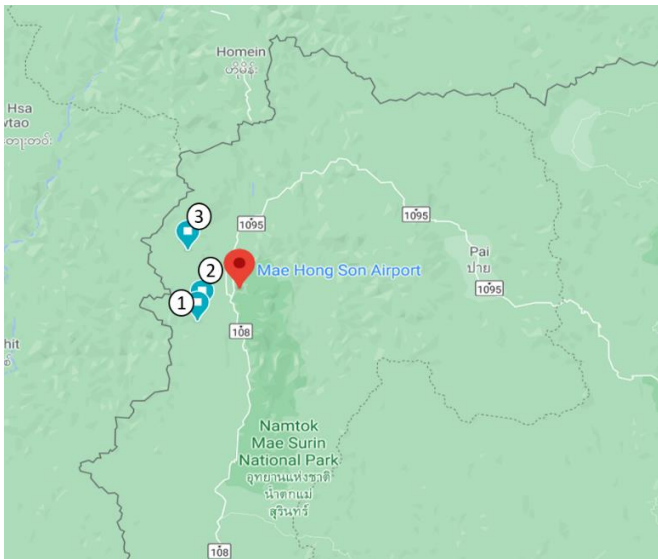
There are three Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son: Huay Pu Keng village, Huay Sua Thao village and Baan Nai Soi (Tuntates & Chittasutthiyan, 2019). Huay Pu Keng is the largest village amongst the three and is located along the Pai river, close to the Thai Myanmar border. The second largest village is Huay Sua Thao, which was opened in 1995 as a commercial village for tourism. The smallest village is Baan Nai Soi, which has 20 families and 104 residents according to the sign at the entrance as of February 2011 (Tuntates & Chittasutthiyan, 2019). According to the village chief of Huay Pu Keng, while the villages in Mae Hong Son have long been the centre of highland trekkers, the number of tourists in Mae Hong Son is decreasing over the years, mainly because of the newly set up commercial villages such as in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Pattaya which are more accessible from the major tourist destinations. In addition, the foreign tourists are gradually shifting from Northern Thailand to Myanmar, which has recently opened up for tourism after the transition from the military rule to the civil government in 2011.



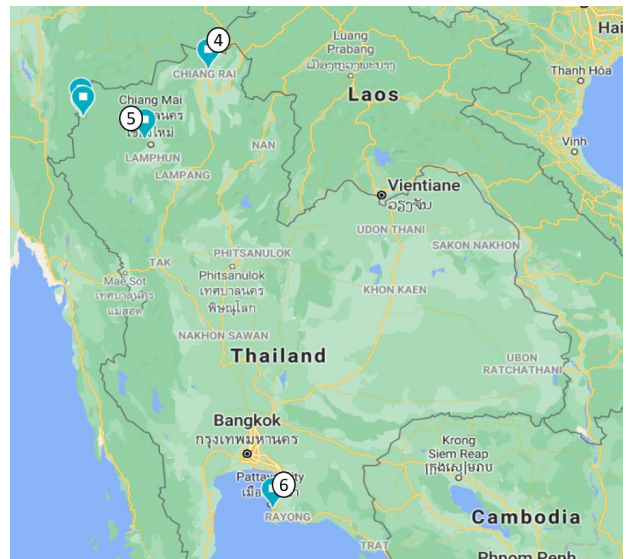
Map 2. Mae Hong Son province (Sikorski, n.d.)



#### 4.2.3. Kayan villages in Thailand



Map 3. Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son (Google Maps, n.d.)

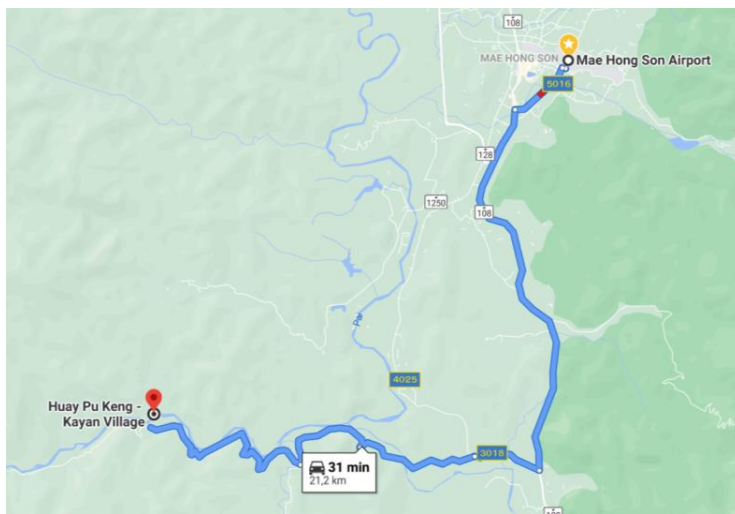


Map 4. Major commercial hilltribe villages in Thailand (Google Maps, n.d.)

Most of the Kayan people in Thailand who engage in tourism live in Mae Hong Son or the commercial ethnic villages in Chiang Mai, Ching Rai and Pattaya (Trupp, 2011). Three Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son that are mentioned in the previous section are shown on the map: 1. Huay Pu Keng, 2. Huay Sua Thao, 3. Ban Nai Soi (*Map 3*). In addition, a number of commercial villages have been set up outside of Mae Hong Son province primarily for the purpose of tourism. For example, 4. Union of Hilltribe villages (Chiang Rai), 5. Baan Tong Luang (Chiang Mai), 6. Hilltribe village Pattaya (Pattaya) are the ones which are most often visited by international tourists (*Map 4*).

Due to the pandemic of covid-19, I was unable to travel to Thailand and conduct the fieldwork that was originally planned among two villages in different locations, Huay Pu Keng village (Mae Hong Son) and Baan Tong Luang village (Chiang Mai). Therefore, in this thesis, the interviews conducted by Samantha Smits (2020) in two Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son, Huay Pu Keng village and Huay Sua Thao village, and a focus group interview conducted in July 2020 in Huay Pu Keng village by Saranyu Laemlak, an intern at Fair Tourism who live in Thailand, are used as a source of Kayan people's perspectives.

#### 4.2.4. Village: Huay Pu Keng



Map 5. Route to Huay Pu Keng village from Mae Hong Son airport (Google Maps, n.d.)



Picture 2. General impression of Huay Pu Keng village (Top left: Fair Tourism, n.d.; Top right & bottom: Laemlak, 2020)

Huay Pu Keng village, the largest Kayan village in Mae Hong Son, is located Southwest of Mae Hong Son city and can be reached by boat across the Pai River. Huay Pu Keng village is the first Kayan village in Thailand whose original settlers are refugees from Eastern Myanmar (Ismail, 2008). At first, six Kayan households settled in the camp which later became the current Huay Pu Keng village. As more and more Kayan people moved to Thailand later, they settled in different places across Thailand such as Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai (Heikkilä-Horn, 2019).

Currently, Huay Pu Keng community consists of 5 tribes (Kayan, Kayaw, Red Karen, Pakayor and Tai Yai) with approximately 300 people, among which around half of them are involved in tourism activities. In general, female villagers are more actively involved in tourism than male villagers, as their skills of weaving and their distinctive appearance is thought more appealing to the tourists (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020). With regard to community organization, there is a village chief and a village committee consisting of 5 members, who are the main actors to lead the community. The community hold monthly meetings to create the consensus within the community about tourism, where each member has an opportunity to speak out their opinion.

The main tourism income in Huay Pu Keng village comes from 200 baht of entrance fee, selling crafts, offering workshops and accepting tourists in homestays. As Huay Pu Keng is the first village for the Kayan refugees and there is no businessman who directly controls the village, the community members have relatively high independence in terms of tourism operations and incomes generated from tourism. However, as the village works together with Huay Due boat station, the income needs to be shared with the boat station in case the tourists come via this boat station. As tourism is considered to be an endeavour of the whole community, a part of income from tourism is distributed to the entire community: *“for the entrance fee that we collect from the tourists, actually, this one we use for the community development. We are using this money for the whole village. Not only for the group of people who are working for the tourism, but also for others who live in Huay Pu Keng.”* (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020).

Despite the national tourism policy to encourage the community-based tourism development in hilltribe communities, where the communities take the full initiative in tourism management, Huay Pu Keng village is so far the only Kayan village that has successfully developed community-based tourism. This has been achieved with the support of Fair Tourism Foundation, a Dutch non-profit organization, especially in developing activities as well as marketing those products to the international tourists, which will be further described later in this section, *Workshops*.

While there is no precise number of visitors recorded in Huay Pu Keng village, according to the village chief, in July and August they have the most foreign tourists because of the summer holiday in Western countries. In autumn, they mostly have Thai tourists. The village chief explained the situation of declining visitors in Mae Hong Son, mentioning the impact of newly set up commercial villages in other regions: *“Only high seasons and when we have a Kayan new year, yeah then it is crowded. But for the other seasons, other months, other days there is no crowd. It’s not like in the past. In the past, around 8 or 9 year ago. Every day was almost crowded. Many Kayan villages. Established in other areas, other provinces. Like Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Pattaya. So more choice go there. So, they are not coming to a Kayan village in Mae Hong Son anymore. 8 or 9 years ago, almost every day. Started from 6am until 6pm. [...] Right now we*



have crowded only in high season and when we have Kayan new year. Only 2 reasons.” (Noung, personal communication through translator, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020)

During the low season of tourism, villagers usually engage in alternative work within the village such as collecting leaves and growing crops for the income: *“We also do other livelihood like seasonal livelihood. Because like during the high season we live on the tourists [...] but starting from January, February, March, this month, we mostly collect the leaves, we prepare the leave and we sell it so we get a better income for a family. [...] June, July, August, September yeah we work in the nature. So mostly we grow the sesam. [...] The small seed, the black one. [...] for the girls especially, they are weaving. But for the collecting a leave, putting a leave together. To make all the leaves together, both man and woman can do this. And also agriculture both men and woman can do this.”* (Noung, personal communication through translator, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020).

## Workshops

With the support of Fair Tourism Foundation, the village have developed various activities and workshops that utilize local skills and knowledge, such as weaving, wood carving, brass-ring making and so on, where tourists can experience local skills and the way of life (Figure 2, Picture 3). This not only enables the community to gain higher profit than simply selling the goods, but also creates meaningful encounters that lead to mutual understanding and respect.



# HUAY PU KENG WORKSHOPS

Pha bong, Mueang Mae Hong Son District Mae Hong Son 58000 Thailand

The **first** and **only** Kayan village that offers CBT activities

KAYAN DOLL CARVING 500 THB	COOKING CLASS 300 THB
WEAVING 400 THB	RICE POUNDING 400 THB
BRASS BRACELET MAKING 500 THB	CAVE EXCURSION 300 THB
BRASS RING MAKING 400 THB	TREE PLANTING 300 THB
CATAPULT MAKING 300 THB	MEDICINAL PLANTS HIKE 400 THB
WOODEN HANDICRAFT MAKING Bracelet, Spoon, Ring 400 THB	LOCAL HOMESTAY 400 THB per night
SMALL BOAT MAKING 300 THB	Try authentic Kayan food for only 100 THB per meal!!
BAMBOO HANDICRAFT MAKING Cup, bottle or bell 400 THB	*Each workshop lasts one to 3 hours or tailored.
TRADITIONAL DANCING WORKSHOP Donation Based	*Price for each workshop and homestay is per person.

Visit and immerse yourself  
in Kayan, Kayaw, Red Karen, Pakayor and Tai Yai cultures.  
With locals, you can discover  
unknown places and unheard stories.



Watch on Youtube:  
"Kayan Beyond The ring"  
"Like We Don't Exist"  
"Learning from the Karenni Refugees"

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Figure 2. Activities offered in Huay Pu Keng village (Fair Tourism, n.d.)



Picture 3. Workshops in the village. The opportunity to experience the local skills is becoming a major tourist attraction (Fair Tourism, n.d.)

### Hybridity

As the theories suggest, hybridity of the different customs between two societies is also observed in the everyday landscape of Huay Pu Keng village, both in their material culture and growing identity as a Kayan community in Thailand. As an example of hybridity of the modern and traditional custom in material culture, Huay Pu Keng village recently got access to the internet and villagers are now able to browse internet in their traditional houses. *“the speed of the internet is very slow, because a lot of people in this village, they are using, like this is new for them, and also people are using internet especially in the night time, because they are all coming back from work, and relax, and people are watching*



*YouTube, play games, and that's why the speed of the internet is very slow in the night time.*" (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020). Accordingly, the devices such as smartphone chargers are installed in the village (Picture 4). The mix of different customs is also visible in the everyday scene such as costumes (Picture 5).

Hybridity is seen not only in material culture, but also in their identity. The younger generation of the Kayan communities is increasingly starting to integrate into the Thai mainstream society. For example, as for the education, the Thai government opened a school in Huay Pu Keng village (Picture 6), where both Thai teachers and Kayan teachers give education for the Kayan children based on the Thai curriculum. This gives the children an access to higher education outside the village, when they finish the primary education in the village. This has led them a mixed identity between two societies they belong to: *"Most of the young people, they are taking off the rings as well because of the educations. Because when they finish the education in Huay Pu Keng, they have to go to the other village, so they are not convenient with the rings. [...] and also they are not convenient with the rings to integrate with the other people or other ethnicity or with Thai, especially with the Thai community, mostly taking off the rings to access to the high education in other villages."* (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020)

Another example of hybridity is observed from a story of a 24-year-old male villager in Huay Pu Keng, Puyan, who has a Thai girlfriend from Northeast of Thailand. They met in Chiang Mai while Puyan was working and his girlfriend was traveling, and now they live in Huay Pu Keng village together with their child. In the village, she set up a business that connects Kayan and Thai community, making use of her social network between two societies: *"I sell hand woven fabric on Facebook. The best seller is the hill tribe patterns. Also, the brass rings and accessories are also one of the best seller products"* (Liew, personal communication, July 24, 2020, Laemlak, 2020)



Picture 4. Hybridity in material culture (modern devices). Left: a Kayan girl using a smartphone (Fair Tourism, n.d.). Right: smartphone chargers in lockers installed in Huay Pu Keng village (Laemlak, 2020).



Picture 5. Hybridity in Material culture (costume). Left: Kayan women (Laemlak, 2020). Right: Kayan children (Fair Tourism, n.d.).



Picture 6. Thai school in Huay Pu Keng village (Laemlak, 2020)

### Relation with the government

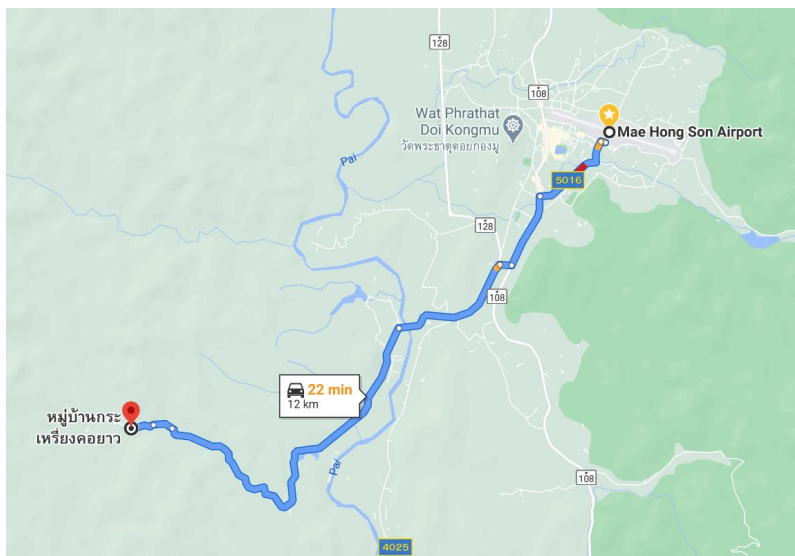
According to the interviews, villagers in Huay Pu Keng perceive that the Thai government is not very active to provide supports for their community both in everyday life and tourism development. According to the village chief, *“Actually, there is not too much, like government support. Only the roads are by the government what is good because it is more easy for use for the transportation to go to the city, go to the hospital, like this. Other things, there is no really support from the government.”* (Noung, personal communication through translator, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020).

As hilltribe communities in the Northern area live close to nature, they are required to comply with a governmental regulation regarding environmental protection and the government is actively involved with the community in this regard. *“we are here living nearby the environment. We depend on the environment, we depend on the trees, we depend on the forests and there is laws, they have environmental laws. They have a forest ministry. [...] A minister of the forest. This is one of the branches from the Thai government. So they really ban cutting the trees, consuming the environment. This is really against the Thai national law. So this is only where the government is involved with the villagers. So they come here and create some awareness not to use so much environment, not to cut trees, not to cut the bamboo. So plenty, OK you can use for yourself. OK. That is understandable but you cannot really cut many trees and sell to the other community or to other persons. You cannot use it at a business like this. It is very prohibited.”* (Noung, personal communication through translator, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020)

While there seems to be not much active involvement of the government regarding the living condition of the village, there are some endeavors of the government to support the cultural event of minority communities. The village chief mentioned, *“Sometimes, last year, last 2 years we got support from the government when we had Kayan new year festival. They came and support, participate with us, give us some kind of.. This kind of support we get from the government.”* (Noung, personal communication through translator, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020). Pay Yu, a committee member of Huay Pu Keng, explained the recent endeavor of the Thai government to create a connection between minority communities and the host society through the cultural event: *“now more Thai government organisations, they invite Huay Pu Keng to participate with a Thai cultural something. For example, for a special ceremony in Mae Hong Son, they invite Huay Pu Keng to perform the Kayan traditional dance. And also to talk about the Kayan culture, to share the Kayan culture with the traditional clothes and instrument”* (Pay Yu, personal communication, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020)



#### 4.2.5. Village: Huay Sua Thao



Map 6. Route to Huay Sua Thao village from Mae Hong Son airport (Google Maps, n.d.)



Picture 7. General impression of Huay Sua Thao village (Laemlak, 2020)

Huay Sua Thao village is located southwest of Mae Hong Son city and is the second largest Kayan village in the province. Huay Sua Thao village was opened in 1995 primarily for commercial purpose, to give easier access to a Kayan village for tourists (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d. b). The village has rows of souvenir stalls where the villagers sell handcrafts, yet unlike Huay Pu Keng village, there are currently no activities such as workshops or homestays offered in the village, as described by the chief: “right now we don’t have much. We have only Kayan women, people who attracting to the tourist. [...] Mostly they come and take picture, buy stuff from the Kayan community and ask questions about the Kayan culture.” (La Mae, personal communication, March 8, 2020, Smits, 2020)

Huay Sua Thao does not have a village committee and only has a village chief who leads the community. La Mae, the village chief in Huay Sua Thao, explained this situation as the lack of capacity of villagers to become committee members: *“Because of the limited human resources. Because of all the limited education. Not a lot of people come and work together.”* (La Mae, personal communication, March 8, 2020, Smits, 2020). Regarding the livelihood of the community, Huay Sua Thao village does not have land for farming within their village, and therefore in the tourism low season mostly men take up daily jobs outside of the village such as in construction, farming and hunting (La Mae, personal communication, March 8, 2020, Smits, 2020). However, for those who do not have a Thai ID, it is difficult to have such alternative jobs outside of the village due to the restriction of the movement. Piga, a 22-year-old male villager whose main job is to collect food and animals in the forest explained his limited job options: *“If I do not do this job, I cannot do another job, because in this village, we do not have the ID card. I cannot work in another city, only stay in the village.”* (Piga, male, 22, HST).

According to the village chief, Huay Sua Thao is mostly visited by Thai tourists. While there is no data available regarding the number of visitors, most of the tourists visit during the high season and Kayan new year (La Mae, personal communication, March 8, 2020, Smits, 2020). As for income from tourism, the main income comes from entrance fee and selling of goods in the stalls. According to several female villagers in Huay Sua Thao, there is also a small compensation from the government by wearing the brass-rings. *“but very little. Just for rice, for food”* (Mu Ko, personal communication, March 8, 2020, Smits, 2020).

#### 4.2.6. Commercial hilltribe villages

There are several commercial hilltribe villages in Thailand that are set up by businessmen primarily for the purpose of tourism. Most of those commercial villages are opened in proximity to the major tourist destinations such as Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Pattaya so that they are more accessible for tourists from the major tourism hubs. According to Jaranya Daengnoy, the director of CBT-I, most of the Kayan people who live in those commercial villages are those who followed Thai businessmen in search for better economic opportunity (J. Daengnoy, personal communication, July 14, 2020). In addition to those who were ‘brought’ from Myanmar, there are also some Kayans who have moved to commercial villages from Mae Hong Son, due to the dropping number of tourists to Mae Hong Son. *“it’s like got less and less people there (in Huay Sua Thao village), because most people.. They want to go to a better place. You can say, because you know. In Mae Hong Son there’s.. in other Kayan villages set up in other provinces like Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Pattaya. There are more tourists going there. It’s closer and more tourists go there.”* (Pay Yu, personal communication, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020)

In the commercial villages, however, there are more restrictions of freedom and rights of the villagers than original villages in Mae Hong Son, due to the control of village owners usually from Thai society. *“In other Kayan villages in Thailand, in Chiang Mai Chiang Rai, Bangkok, the rights are very limited by the businessmen. If they don’t have a permission, if they don’t get a permission from the businessmen they cannot go to the outside village, if they go to outside, maybe their salary, their wage may be a little bit restricted.”* (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020).

Looking at the tourism offers in those villages, various aspects of the Kayan culture are made into an entertainment to satisfy expectations of visitors. For example, there are brass rings which tourists can try out on their neck, or a life-size cardboard of the Kayan women with face cut-out, where tourists can fit their face in and have souvenir photos (Picture 8).



Picture 8. Example of commodification of culture, Baan Tong Luang village (Fair Tourism, n.d.)





Picture 9. Consumption of visual image. Tourist taking picture with the 'Kayan women with brass-ring, weaving on a loom' in Baan Tong Luang village (Fair Tourism, n.d.)



Picture 10. Entrance of union of hill tribe villages, Chiang Rai. The sign boards and the gate in the village entrance give an impression of the village as an 'ethnic themepark' (Laemlak, 2020)



Picture 11. Mae Ping village, near Pai (Laemlak, 2020)

### 4.3. Key actors involved in tourism in Kayan villages

While Kayan people are the central actors of tourism in Kayan villages, there are many other actors that play different roles to develop, market, operate and consume Kayan tourism at global scale. Those actors are involved in construction of image and narrative of Kayan under different functions, motivations, intentions and relationships with Kayan communities. In order to gain the whole picture of the characteristics of each actor in Kayan tourism and how each actor influences certain aspects of the process, a stakeholder analysis is conducted. This section mainly puts focus on gaining an overview of which actors are involved and what kind of role and power each actor has with regard to Kayan tourism. The way each actor fulfils the role and exercises power will be examined in Chapter 5 in more detail.

Stakeholder analysis has its roots in political and policy science, and is used to understand the behaviour, intentions, interrelations, interests and resources of various stakeholders involved in the processes and how each stakeholder influences the decision-making process (Brugha & Varvasovszky, 2000). First of all, based on the online research, the major stakeholders involved in Kayan tourism are identified and illustrated in the diagram below (*figure 3*). Then, the key functions of each stakeholder and their motivations to fulfil those functions are described. Furthermore, the power, authority and influence that each stakeholder holds over the process and the nature of relationships with other stakeholders are investigated, based on the interviews held with stakeholders.

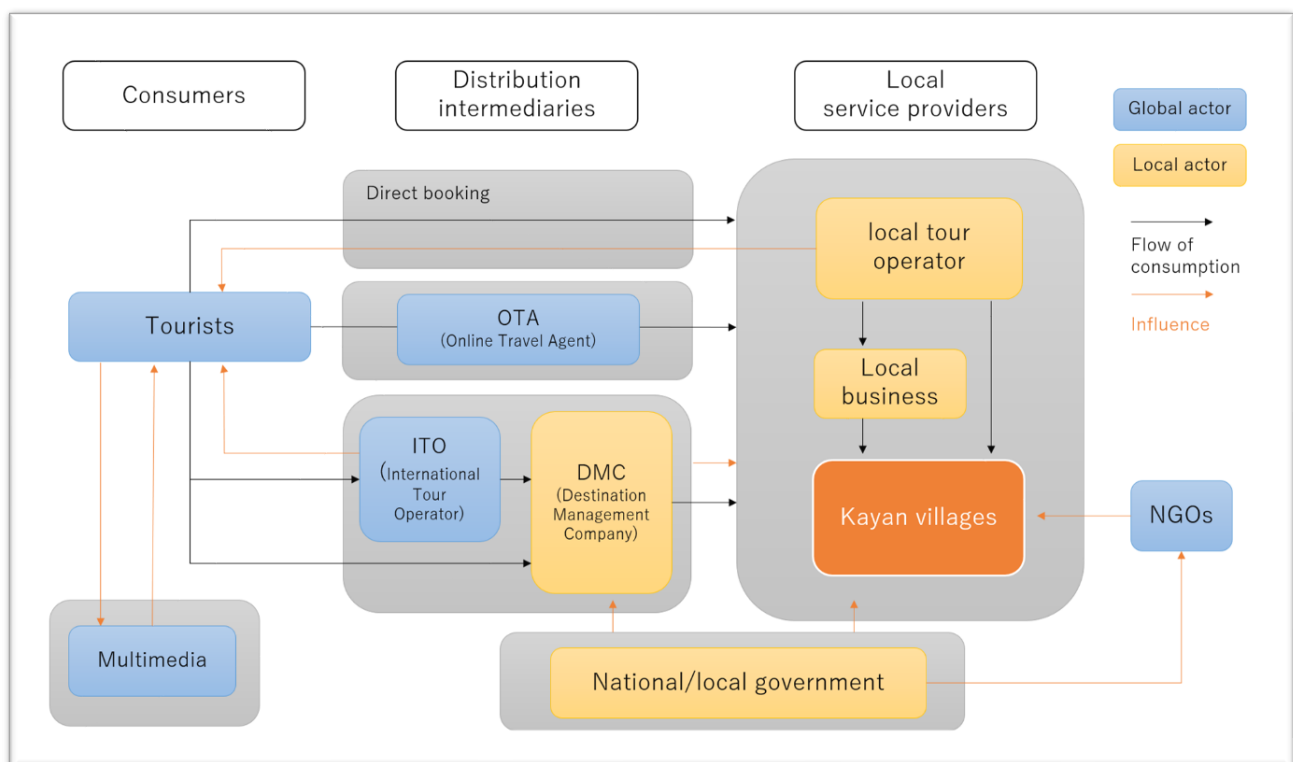


Figure 3. Overview of the stakeholders of Kayan tourism. Created by the author, adopted from Daly & Gereffi (2017)

Figure 3 shows the overview of the stakeholders, their functions and influences in Kayan tourism. According to Daly & Gereffi (2017), actors in leisure tourism can be divided into three major categories: consumers, distribution intermediaries and service providers. First of all, the box on the right side of the diagram depicts the local service providers, who offer the local tourism products to tourists on the destination such as excursions, activities, goods and related services. In Kayan tourism, Kayan communities who host tourists in their village and the local tour operators who operate excursions to those villages fall into this category. Secondly, the three boxes in the middle of the diagram show the three main different channels for global consumers to access to the local products. Actors in this category, named as distribution intermediaries, are global actors who stand between local actors who provide experiences on site and the global tourists who consume those experiences. In Kayan tourism, there are mainly three kinds of distribution intermediaries: International tour operators (ITO), destination management companies (DMC) and online travel agents (OTA). They operate at an international level and help packaging and showcasing the local experiences in the global market. Thirdly, tourists are the consumers of the local experiences whose behaviour is influenced by, and influence on the whole process of production by different stakeholders. An interesting point regarding tourists is that while they are the consumers of tourism, they can also become a producer of tourist experiences through the output on various channels that would potentially influence other tourists. Finally, there are other stakeholders that do not have direct interest in Kayan tourism but have a major influence on the whole tourism processes in hilltribe communities, namely national/local government, NGOs and travel media, which are described at the end of this section.

The way each stakeholder is involved in tourism will be described based on the interviews with each stakeholder, including a community member (Pay Yu), a local tour operator (Rose Garden Tour), employees at DMCs (Alexandra Michat, Kim Martin Rasmussen, Raphael Ansart) and community-based tourism experts who are familiar with the tourism development in hilltribe communities (Peter Richards, Jaranya Daengnoy).

#### 4.3.1. Local Service Providers

##### Kayan communities

First of all, as has been already described in the previous section, Kayan communities are the most obvious and crucial stakeholder of tourism in Kayan villages, because they are the very actor who offer the unique local experiences that attract tourists. Without their distinctive culture, those small, remote villages would not have experienced much development as tourist destination. Among different motivations, the primary reason for majority of the Kayan people to be involved in tourism is for their livelihood, mainly due to the limited employment opportunities outside of their communities caused by their unstable status in Thailand. In order to host the international tourists, various tourism offers have been developed utilizing their local skills and distinctive culture. While Kayan people are playing the central role in hosting tourists, the whole process of operating tourism in the communities involves a number of different actors. For example, the communities are to a large extent dependent on tour operators regarding the supply of the tourists,

because of the remoteness and poor access to the village. While some of the community members have desire to become tour guides to show around their own village, there is a major obstacle to obtain the licence as a guide, including the requirement of Thai nationality and fulfilment of official training from the government that costs a considerable amount of money and time (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020). In this study, I will bring the focus on the perspective of local communities and look at how they perceive tourism, what kind of motivations and intentions there are behind their involvement and how they relate to and negotiate with other actors.

### Local tour operators

Local tour operators are those based in a particular region and operate excursions primarily at the regional level. There are a number of tour operators in Northern Thailand that operate half-day to multi-day tours to hilltribe villages. Those tour operators are predominantly from the Thai community. The main function of local tour operators in relation to Kayan communities is to bring tourists to and guide them around the villages. Tour operators are vital suppliers of tourists to Kayan villages, as most tourists participate in group tours to visit Kayan villages, due to its remoteness and poor access (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020). In addition to the physical functions to operate excursions, tour operators also have major influence on tourists' image construction about Kayan people through various representations on their websites, leaflets and verbal explanations on site. As they stand between tourists and host communities, their role is often described as a mediator between two different cultures. The primary motivation of local tour operators to be involved in Kayan tourism is to make profits by offering tours to their villages and charging a fee to tourists. Therefore, as a general rule, their products and descriptions are developed in a way that attract tourists to their services under the commercial purposes. In this study, the way Kayan communities are represented on tour operators' website as well as how Kayan villages are incorporated in the tour packages will be analyzed.

#### 4.3.2. Distribution intermediaries

##### International Tour Operators (ITO)

International tourists have a number of different channels to access the local products. International Tour Operators (ITO), the travel agencies that are based and operate in the market countries, would have been the most conventional channel for tourists who want to travel abroad. The main function of international tour operators is to develop tours in cooperation with the local actors in the destinations and sell those products to the customers in their countries of operation. As they are one of the first contact places of tourists at the early stage of their holiday planning, the way they present the destinations would influence tourists' choice of as well as expectations for the holiday destinations.

The major difference between local tour operators and international tour operators is that while the former is specializing in attracting various tourists to one particular destination area, the latter are usually focusing on to attract one particular market country/region to various destinations. As international tour operators make profit by selling the



tours to the customers in particular countries, their products and operational policies tend to reflect the trends and values generally shared in their market countries or regions. Moreover, such tendencies and operational policy of the international tour operators would influence the practices of local providers because of the scale of its supply chain. In this study, how Kayan people are represented by international tour operators from different market regions as well as what kind of sustainability policies are applied in their operation will be analysed.

### Destination Management Companies (DMC)

The second distribution mediator is Destination Management Companies (DMC), which are based and operate in the destination countries and work as a mediator between local supply and global demand. The main function of DMCs is to make arrangements of various tourism services on the destination for the international tour operators and the inbound tourists upon their request. The DMCs often operate in multiple countries in the same region. The type and the region of their clients depends, some work predominantly with the clients in particular countries or regions, while others cover a wider range of client types and regions. DMCs mainly operates business-to-business, usually as a land operator of international tour operators to develop their tours in cooperation with local service providers such as transportation services, guides and tour operators.

As land operators that hold a larger-scale global supply chain compared to local businesses, from the perspective of such local businesses DMCs are important suppliers of the international customers. Therefore, the way they operate on the destinations has considerable impact on the practices of local actors. As DMCs are committed with particular destination while working closely with the international clients, many of the DMCs in Thailand are taking initiatives to set up sustainability policies that are in line with international standards and applied in their day-to-day operations. Therefore, in this study I will look at how the concept of sustainability is incorporated and practiced in the general operational policies of DMCs.

### Online Travel Agents (OTA)

Online Tourism Agents (OTA) are relatively new type of distribution intermediaries, that operate various online reservation platforms for travel-related services and activities. While the concepts and genre vary from booking of accommodations to holiday activities, the main function of OTA is to connect the local service providers and the consumers through their online platform. Nowadays, as the internet is becoming widespread in every step of tourism activity, such OTA platforms are bringing about a change in the traditional local practices that have already been established based around the large supply chain of international actors, as the suppliers and the consumers increasingly become connected in more direct manner through such online platforms.



### 4.3.3. Consumers

#### Tourists

Tourists are the central actor in the consumption process who spend their money on various tourism services and thereby influence the whole production process. Tourists travel out of various motivations and bring their own image and expectations to the destinations, which are formed by different information sources such as brochures, websites, travel agents, guidebooks, media articles, word of mouth, review sites or blogs. In addition to such expectations, tourists also come along with certain beliefs, values and norms that are often shaped in the societies they belong to. Such 'tourist gaze' determines their perception, behaviour and the nature of the experiences in the destinations. In addition, while tourists are primarily the consumers of tourism, they can also contribute to the production/reproduction of destination images by sharing reviews through various channels such as review sites, social media, blogs and their personal network. As internet is increasingly becoming an important information source for tourists, their 'word of mouth' shared on the online channels would especially have influence on the behaviour of potential tourists. In this study, the expectations, values, beliefs and recent consumption trend of tourists and how those elements influence the nature of their experience will be investigated through the analysis of TripAdvisor reviews.

### 4.3.4. Other stakeholders

#### National/local government

While the government is not a direct stakeholder of Kayan tourism, they have considerable influence on the local and international tourism businesses and the Kayan communities through its policy, regulations and licensing for tourism-related activities. As described in the latest tourism policy of The Second National Tourism Development Plan released in 2016, the main motivation of the government to support and promote ethnic tourism is to attract high quality tourists in the effort of transforming the country as a sustainable destination. In relation to tourism in hilltribe communities, while hands-on supports are mainly provided by various organisations that are active on the ground, the government mainly holds influence on those activities through the funding for the communities or the projects carried out by organizations. Furthermore, not only tourism-related activities but also a wide range of day-to-day activities of hilltribe communities are under the influence of the government through its policy and regulations regarding minority populations. The relation between the government and the communities as well as their influence on the local environment are described in the earlier section of this chapter (see [chapter 4.2 Kayan people and tourism](#)).

#### NGOs

There are a number of local/international non-profit organizations who are actively working with hilltribe communities in Northern Thailand. Those organizations operate under different missions, such as to improve living conditions of hilltribe communities, to provide vocational training or to tackle human rights issues. Related to tourism, Thailand

Community-Based Tourism Institute (CBT-I) has a distinctive role on tourism development in local communities. CBT-I is an organization established in 2006 to support the communities' CBT development and has had major influence on the Thai government tourism policy. The funding for the activities of CBT-I mainly comes from the Thai government organizations and international organisations, and CBT-I has trained over 100 communities through various projects since its establishment in 2006 (J. Daengnoy, personal communication, July 14, 2020). According to Jaranya Daengnoy, the director of CBT-I, however, no Kayan communities have been assisted by CBT-I with the tourism development so far, mainly because of the difficulty to get sufficient budget due to their complex and unofficial status in Thailand.

With regard to the Kayan communities, Fair Tourism Foundation, a Dutch NGO, has been actively working with Huay Pu Keng village in Mae Hong Son to develop community-based tourism in their village. Fair Tourism has supported the community to develop workshops and activities that utilize local skills, aiming to generate more interaction and mutual respect between host and guest (see [chapter 4.2.4 Huay Pu Keng](#), Figure 2). While their projects are occasionally funded by the tourism-related businesses as well as the funding organizations, their activities are mostly on a voluntary basis of the director and the student interns. This limitation of the financial source seems to be a challenge of to scale-up their activities. In order to expand the scope of their support to other Kayan communities, Fair Tourism is now in the process of asking for funding as well as looking at the opportunities to become a social enterprise.

### Travel magazines

Finally, while not being a direct stakeholder of Kayan tourism, travel magazines are one of the vital sources of information for tourists, with its different characteristic and communication objectives from other mass media or tourism professionals (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007; Hsu & Song, 2013). With their credibility and ability to reach out to a wide range of potential tourists, travel magazines are considered to have a significant influence on forming the destination image of tourists, as well as their future travel behaviour (Hsu & Song, 2013). The fact that the articles on the online travel magazines are mostly written by the Western writers, who are usually tourists and have similar perspectives as the potential Western tourists, also signals familiarity and trustworthiness to the readers in Western society. In this study, articles on online travel magazines that deal with the topic of Kayan people and tourism will be analysed to see how Kayan people are presented differently from the industry's writings and what possible effect they have on tourist behaviour.

## 5. Production and consumption of tourism in Kayan villages

Previous chapter focused on creating the overview of stakeholders and what kind of role and power they hold in Kayan tourism. This chapter takes a closer look at the way each actor fulfils their roles and exercises power in the production and consumption of Kayan tourism. This chapter consists of mainly two parts, the production process and the consumption process. First of all, I will look at the production process by putting focus on each actor respectively (5.1), starting with the analysis of the representations produced by the local tour operators (5.1.1) and the international travel industry (5.1.2), followed by the analysis of discourses raised in the critical articles of the international travel magazines (5.1.3) and finally, I will look at tourism from the host communities' perspective through the interviews that were previously conducted in two of the Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son (5.1.4). Thereafter, the focus is brought to the consumption process (5.2), investigating in the nature of tourist experiences through the analysis of the online tourist reviews (5.2.1).

### 5.1. Process of production of tourism

#### 5.1.1. The local tour operator

There are a number of local tour operators operating in Northern Thailand. As described in the previous chapter, the main function of the local tour operators is providing tour services in a particular region. In addition to this physical function, the tour operators also have a major influence on tourists' image construction through their representations of destinations. In order to investigate the ways Kayan communities are incorporated into the products and presented by the tour operators, in total 12 websites from 7 local tour operators are analysed in this study. Among 12 websites, 2 include general information of Karen/Kayan people, 5 are about the specific villages (Huay Pu Keng, Huay Sua Thao, Baan Tong Luang, Ban Pa Ao and Ban Ta Khao Tom Tha Sud), and 5 are the descriptions of the tour packages. Those three different types of websites are used in this study, as those are all considered as general information sources tourists are likely to come across when planning a visit to the Kayan villages.

#### Tour packages

First of all, the tour operators play a substantial role as a supplier of tourists to the village, considering that the majority tourists who visit Kayan villages participate in tours. In order to see the general trend of how Kayan villages are incorporated into the tour packages, I will briefly examine the descriptions of 5 tour packages offered by the local tour operators.

Looking at the contents of the tour packages, all 5 tour packages include more than one destination and in most of the cases Kayan villages seem to be visited as a brief stop in combination with several other attractions. Among these 5 tours packages, none of them seem to include the interactive activities such as workshops or homestays. The length of the tour varies, from the half-day tour of 4 hours long to the full-day tour that lasts over 12 hours. Most of the

tours are designed to provide tourists with a certain standard of comfort, such as pick-up service in the hotel, air-conditioned car and an English-speaking guide. Overall, it seems that currently these package tours are not a big opportunity for the local communities to generate income, and the power to present the Kayan people seem to be held by the English-speaking tour guides who accompany the tours. One example of the tour package is provided below (Box 1), while the rest will be found in [Appendix III](#).

## One Day Visit of 5 Hilltribes & Long Neck Village (LCM-19)

Sights and Stops

📍 1

Time length

🕒 6 Hours

Availability

📅 Every day


Minimum pax

1 Person

Language spoken

English

Book Now



TICKET PRICE :	ADULT	KID
* vouchers valid for the booked date and mentioned time only..	₹ 6,753 ₹ 7,453	₹ 6,753 ₹ 7,453

### Trip schedule

: One Day Visit of 5 Hilltribes & Long Neck Village ▲

- Our guide will pick you up at 8:30am. Then it's off to visit an orchid farm and butterfly farm in the morning where you can see Thai orchids and bring the beautiful orchids home with in your photos. Before lunch, visit five different hill tribe villages - Akha, Meo, Lisu, Palong and Karen Long Neck village. You will learn how all these tribes are different in their living styles and lifestyles. Finally you will, visit Chiang Dao Cave and Temple.

**Itinerary :**

- 08:30am pick up from hotels.
- Drive towards Mae Rim.
- Visit orchid farm and butterfly farm.
- Visit four different Hill Tribe villages - Akha, Meo, Lisu and Palong.
- Thai Lunch (not too spicy).
- Visit Chiang Dao Cave and Temple.
- Visit Karen Long Neck and Big Ear village.
- 04:30pm Drive back to hotel or guest house in Chiang Mai.
- Please contact us after booking to know the exact pickup time for your hotel / Area. Transfers are provided for customers whose hotels are present inside the main city center area. If booked elsewhere then extra charges will be applicable.

**Included**

- An air-conditioned car or minivan.
- Admission fees as mentioned on program.
- Thai lunch (not too spicy).

**Excluded**

- Alcoholic Beverages
- Personal Shopping

Box 1. Example of the tour package of the local tour operator (Thai Holidays, n.d.)

## Representation: languages

The tour operators are one of the major producers of the destination images. The way destinations are presented with the languages as well as the visual images has major influence on tourists' construction of image. In this section, the ways languages are used to describe the Kayan people will be analysed. I will look at the descriptions through a post-colonial framework, applying the four major Northern representations of the Global South discussed by Williams, et al. (2014), 'exoticism and eroticism', 'noble savage', 'a place of poverty and in need of help' and 'dangerous place that threatens the North'.

As the observation of the 12 websites, the major contents include the information about the Kayan culture, history, socio-economic situation, lifestyle, livelihood, beliefs, rituals and their involvement in tourism. It is observed that as a general tendency of the language use, this information is mostly written in a matter-of-factly manner rather than the use of dramatic expressions. However, the characteristics of the information selected on the websites itself seems to serve to emphasize the cultural distinctiveness of the Kayan people from the major audiences, who would mostly be the international tourists.

### Exoticism

Firstly, while not necessarily in an obvious manner, the most commonly used representation on the 12 websites seems to be 'exoticism and eroticism', typically describing the hilltribe people as 'lacking civilization' particularly from the types of clothing, housing and the beliefs they have (Pieterse, 1992). This way of framing has an effect to create an 'idyll' type of visual image of the destination, which visitors in the busy everyday life would be seeking for in their holiday experiences. Looking at the contents, first of all, simplicity of the housing style of the Kayan is often described, emphasizing its distinctiveness from the mode of life which most tourists would be used to.

*"Most villages are remote from Thai civilization. Houses are made of teak or bamboo and usually constructed on stilts to provide space and shelter for livestock." (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

*"They love quiet and simple lives. Just look at their houses, they are a kind of small cottages consisting of high poles and terraces. Sometimes they even build their houses on the ground." (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.)*

Secondly, the distinctiveness of the Kayan culture is also described in their traditional beliefs and their harmonious way of life with natural environment based on such traditional beliefs. The emphasis on the communities' attitude to firmly follow the traditional beliefs and maintaining the ancient ceremonies also seem to contribute to the 'exotic' image of the Kayan people.

*“The Karen has rituals to live harmoniously with the “Lord of the Land and Water”, as well as with nature spirits in the rocks, trees, water and mountains that surround them. They also have guardian spirits and believe in the soul. They use a system of rotation over a large area of land and do not cut all the large trees down when they clear a plot. They are also the only group to have built terraces to grow wet-rice.” (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

*“Although some Kayan people have converted to Christianity many still follow their traditional Kan Khwan beliefs and at festive times of the year everyone participates in the ancient ceremonies.” (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.)*

Tourist gaze, a particular visual expectation toward the destination, is often formed by the way viewers are introduced to look at the local environment in a particular perspective. The following description places the viewers in a position as a ‘witness’ of the ‘traditional lifestyle’ of the Kayan people, which implicitly creates an imaginary boundary between the viewers and the local people.

*“In the village we can witness the traditional lifestyle and farming methods of these people whose animist beliefs and culture remain firmly adhered to by them.” (Rose Garden Tour, n.d.)*

Thirdly, ‘exoticism and eroticism’ of the local people is also seen in the description of the gender roles and male-female relationships in the local communities. The presentation of the differences in customs from the average Western culture seems to emphasize the ‘exotic’ image of local people as those who firmly follow the ‘traditional belief’.

*“A Karen family contains a wife and a husband. They don’t live together before getting married. That’s against their tradition. Also, they’re not divorced easily. When it comes to a wedding ceremony, the women can choose her own groom and she also have to pay for everything of to get her wedding done. After a wedding, the husband will have to live in his wife’s parents for a harvest season, in order to help them with some works. After a harvest season, the husband is allowed to move out to start a new life with his wife.” (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.)*

*“A female who has not yet married must dress in a long white outfit which stretches down from the shoulders to the ankles. In Karen it is called the “Chay Kwa,” [...] Once married, a woman is prohibited from wearing the long white Chay Kwa again.” (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

Fourthly, in addition to the description about the uniqueness of their lifestyle, some writings associate the Kayan population with particular geographical features and describe them as those who found a comfort in such ‘primitive’ environment, which emphasize their physical remoteness and the image as those who live far from ‘civilization’.

*“Centuries ago, many ethnic groups have settled themselves in northern Thailand. They usually live in quiet areas like mountains.” (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

*“Primitive, poor and often marginalized by Thais, the hill tribes prefer to live in the uplands undisturbed” (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

Besides the description of ‘primitiveness’ in their customs of housing, belief and geographical features, the description about the lack of modern facilities also seems to contribute to support the ‘exotic’ image of the Kayan as those who are remote from ‘civilization’.

*“Huay Pu Keng long neck village is surrounded by jungle. There is no signal, no electricity and it’s so quiet. The people friendly and very happy to talk or be photographed” (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.)*

*“The Karen villagers have few possessions and little if any furniture, usually sleeping on floor mats, cooking on open fires, and drawing washing and drinking water from a nearby river.” (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

Finally, while it is observed that majority of the writings tend to provide information about the Kayan people in a matter-of-factly way rather than the use of dramatic expressions, there is also a tour description from one tour operator that exoticizes the Kayan people in more direct manner, projecting a particular visual image on their customs.

*“Visiting a one of the numerous Karen Long Neck villages in Thailand is one of the most exotic experiences on the planet. The mystery and beauty that sound the tradition of using brass rings for exaggerated jewelry is something better seen in person than in a book...It is a real life National Geographic Magazine to have to see to believe.” (Sun Leisure World, n.d.)*

### **Close relationship to nature**

Another common representation that is found in the description of the Karen and Kayan people is ‘noble savage’, which puts emphasis on their close relationship with nature. This way of representation especially appears in the description of their custom of farming and their relationship with animals.

*“Karen People just live their lives in natural ways. They grow plants and raise animals, which are pigs, cows, buffaloes, and chickens, to make their livings.” (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.)*

*“They are predominately farmers of agricultural produce for their own use and are often referred to as ‘The farmers of the forest’.” (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

On the website of one of the tour operators, the close relationship between the Karen people and the elephants were described through an interview with one of the Karen community members. By directly citing the languages of the local people themselves, the emotional bond of the people with the elephant is described in more realistic and convincing manner.

*"If you are talking about love, I love my elephant. I love it as much as I love my child and my wife. Sometimes when you bring an elephant back, it also brings skin diseases back with it. I need to bathe it and get medicine for it. I love it like a child, a child that cannot take care of itself sometimes. We must take care of the elephants. Sometimes when their toenails are cracked we need to put medicine on it to heal it. When they died, I cried for many days. It seems like your relative had died. I didn't have to study since I was born. I never abandon it or leave it alone, I will be unhappy if I didn't see it. You can compare it with teachers. They teach the children everyday, and if they don't see their students for one day, they will feel as if there is something missing, and they will be unhappy. Some days I only get 10-20 Baht but I still do it. Even if I don't make any money I just want to work with them and take care of them. To find them new places to stay, to bathe them, to feed them...all these things make me happy." (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

### **Attitude towards representation**

Apart from the cultural representation of the Kayan, some of the tour operators expressed their attitude regarding the ethical concerns of tourism practices in the Kayan villages that are intensively discussed in the international society. An interesting fact found out here is that they show a different understanding and response to the concept of 'human zoo' from the international media and the tourists (see [chapter 5.1.3](#); [chapter 5.2.1](#)). While the general criticism of 'human zoo' points out the situation where the local people are confined in the artificial villages to become a 'tourist attraction', some tour operators seem to perceive the term of 'human zoo' as a misframing of the Kayan people that lacks respect and proper understanding for their culture and their situation.

*"There are some of general people call their lands 'The Zoos of Humans', which is not right. They may be different from us or evacuated from other countries, but they are humans anyway and they deserve good living. By the way, the reason that they have to stay only in their lands, is that they only have non-Thai ID card. They have to work within their determined area only and are not allowed to go outside. These should be understandable" (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.)*

*"I heard about human zoo of the longneck village over 20 years ago. My opinion is very rude for them I do not agree. They must respect orther culture. There are 40 millions touristes per year go to Thailand so Thailand Is human zoo country?" (Ju, Rose Garden Tour, personal communication, May 27, 2020)*



While there are various descriptions about the Kayan traditions and their culture that create an exotic image of the people, as the tourists are nowadays becoming more knowledgeable and critical about what they see in the villages, there also seems to be an increasing effort of the tour operators to provide more realistic descriptions about the situation of the local people. They take into account the major questions and concerns of the tourists and try to provide an alternative perspective using a position as an actor who are familiar with the local environment.

*“For your information, the village was especially built for these villagers, as they came from other lands. According to the Thai law, they’re not allowed to work anywhere else. They live their lives by selling souvenirs and being agricultural employees. They also don’t want to return to their homelands. Therefore, the village has been being their home all long. The village is an interesting conservation tourist attraction. This is not a ‘human zoo’ like many people may think, but it’s just a peaceful residence of a group who have minds and hearts just like us. If you wish to learn about ethnic culture and see beautiful nature, choose this trip.” (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

### Representation: Visual images



Picture 12. Image of a Kayan woman, weaving on a loom (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)

Besides the languages used to describe the Kayan people, the visual images also play a big part of creating the image of the Kayan people for viewers. In this section, therefore, the way the visual images are used on the tourism websites, the intention behind and its effect will be examined.

Total number of images	women	Women +men	landscape	Village/ community	other
87	45	2	5	16	19

Table 3. Number of visual images on different subjects

On the 12 websites studied, there are in total 87 visual images describing the Karen and Kayan people, villages, communities and landscapes (*Table 3*). Among those images, more than half of them, 45 images, are those that capture the women in the tribal costumes. Interestingly, while there are 2 images that featured man and woman together, there are no picture that capture only men. Furthermore, 5 images capture the landscape around the villages and 16 images describe the view of inside the villages and communities such as housing, souvenir stalls and the scenes of everyday life of the communities. Through the overall investigation, it can be said that as a general tendency, those visual images seem to be reflecting relatively realistic images of the people and villages rather than overly exaggerating the utopian images. However, the subject as well as its frequency to appear on the websites seem to have implicit effect to bring the viewer's major attention to a certain subject and therefore contribute to form the particular image of the Kayan for viewers.

### Women



Picture 13. Images of Kayan women (*My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.*)

Total number of images of women	Women with smile	Women weaving/ doing handicraft	Women in tribal costume brass-ring/other costume	Women looking at camera
45	26	8/4	24/21	26

Table 4. Number of visual images of Kayan women by category

Majority of the images on the websites about the Kayan ethnic tourism are focusing on the women in their tribal costumes. Among the total 45 images of the women in costumes, over half of them, 26 images, capture the women looking at the camera with a smile in their face. Also, 8 pictures feature the women sitting in front of the loom and weaving. In order to analyze what is really suggested from the way women are depicted in those websites, Philip Bell's (2001)

'behaviour variable' is applied. He came up with the list of behaviour values mainly used in human subject advertisements, by combining Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) semiotics study and Goffman's (1979) analysis of gendered bodies represented in advertisement. This variable focuses on the 'gaze' as well as the 'bodily poses' of the represented subject.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), the gaze of the subject in the image affects the interaction between the viewer and the subject in the image. In their theory, the image makes 'demand' or 'offer' depending on whether the subject is looking at the viewer or looking away. When the subject looks at the viewer, the connection is established between two sides, 'demanding' the viewer to enter into some kind of imaginary relation with the subject. The kind of relation is indicated by other means, such as facial expression of the subject. Goffman (1979) studied the way gendered bodies are represented in advertisements and analysed that three major actions of women, 'head canting', 'bashful knee-bending' and 'self-touching' as the representations of powerlessness, by placing viewers in the superior position in relation to the subject.

The list of behaviour variables (Bell, 2001):

- a. Offer/ideal: the model depicted offers herself/himself as an idealized exemplar of a class or attribute, looking away from the viewer (for example, the statuesque pose of a female model displaying clothes).
- b. Demand/affiliation (equality): model looks at the viewer, directly, smiling.
- c. Demand/submission: model looks down at viewer, not smiling.
- d. Demand/seduction: model looks up at the viewer, head canted, smiling or 'pouting'
- e. None of the above

Applying those variables to the 45 images of the Karen and Kayan women on the websites studied, each category turned out as the chart below:

Behaviour variables	Total number
Offer/ideal	12
Demand/affiliation	25
Demand/submission	0
Demand/seduction	0
None of the above	8
Total	45

*Table 5. Behaviour variables of the visual images of Kayan women*

### Demand/affiliation

Of the 45 images, majority of them, 25 images, fell into Demand/affiliation category which capture the women looking at the viewer and smiling. By their expressions, the viewers of those images are asked to enter into the friendly relationship with them. Considering the context that those images are used in the tourism websites on tour operators, the intention is fairly obvious that the tour operators attempt to create the emotional connection between potential visitors and the Karen/Kayan women, and make the viewers feel that they are welcomed to visit them. This focus of the visuals on the 'friendly, quiet and welcoming'-looking women would have an implicit effect to form the expectation towards the attitude of the Karen/Kayan women for the viewers.



*Picture 14. Example images of Demand/affiliation*

*(Top left, AP Good@Travel, n.d.; top right, My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.; bottom, My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.)*



### Offer/ideal

The second most used type of images is Offer/ideal category that applied to 12 images, most of which capture the women who are engaging in the traditional activities. By displaying the Kayan women earnestly working on their crafts or performing traditional dance or music, this type of images 'offer' the ideal examples of the attribute of the Karen/Kayan women, creating another visual expectation of the Karen and Kayan women within the viewers that they would encounter during their visit.



Picture 15. Example images of Offer/ideal (Top left, My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.; top right, My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.; bottom, AP Good@Travel, n.d.)

### **Villages, communities and landscape**

Next to the images of the women, there are in total 21 images that capture the inside of the villages, community activities and the landscape around the villages. Those photos are inserted between the descriptions and support viewers to visualize those descriptions, contributing to create the images of what the 'authentic' villages should look like. For example, *Picture 16* is shown with the description about the relationship between the Karen people and the elephants, offering the visual image of the close interaction between the people and the elephants embedded in their daily

activities. *Picture 17* seems to depict an everyday scenery of the village rather than its commercial side, where a man is working on a house and a child is looking at it. *Picture 18* are the landscapes around the village, that would help the viewers to confirm an association of those tribal people with certain geographical features and to create visual expectations for what they would come across on the way to the village.



*Picture 16. Image of close relationship with elephants (My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

*Picture 17. Image of the inside look of a village (My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.)*



*Picture 18. Images of the landscapes around villages (Top left, AP Good@Travel, n.d.; Top right, My Chiang Mai Travel, n.d.; bottom, My Chiang Mai Tour, n.d.)*

### Summary: Power of the local tour operator in image construction of the Kayan

One of the roles of the local tour operator in relation to the Kayan communities is to bring tourists to their villages. Looking at the contents of their tour packages, the Kayan villages are mostly visited as one of the attractions among the several different destinations. However, the activities organized in the villages such as workshops or homestays, which generate more direct interactions with tourists and the income to the host communities, do not currently seem to be a major part of their tour programs.

In addition to the physical function to bring tourists to the villages, the local tour operators also have major influences on forming tourists' visual expectations of the Kayan people through their representations both with the languages and the visual images. In the analysis of their websites through a postcolonial lens, it is found out that 'exotic' images of the Kayan people are generated in the way their lifestyle, customs, beliefs and geographical features are described, emphasizing the distinctiveness from the busy, industrialized Western society. Similarly, the visual images used on the websites support the established images of the 'Kayan women' who are wearing the brass-rings around their neck, weaving in a traditional wooden hut and welcoming tourists with a friendly smile. In addition, the photos of the villages and landscapes shown on the websites would also contribute to the visual expectations within the viewers of what the 'authentic' Kayan villages should look like.

Having said that, nowadays there are a wide range of information sources available other than the descriptions of the tour operators, and tourists are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about the local situation and becoming critical about what they see and experience. Reflecting such recent tourist trend, efforts are also seen in the tour operators to produce more comprehensive descriptions of the complex local reality of the Kayan people, and to address the questions about the authenticity as well as ethical concerns of visiting the villages.

### 5.1.2. The international travel industry

While the local tour operators are based in particular destinations, the international tour operators are those who are based and operate in particular market countries. As they have long been one of the major channels of holiday booking for the international tourists, how they present the destinations would influence the tourists' image construction about particular destinations as well as their future behaviour. Moreover, as the international tour operators usually specialise in a particular market, their products and policies tend to reflect the general trends and values in their market countries or regions. In order to gain insights on how the Kayan people are represented by the international actors, the descriptions produced in two different regions, East Asia (Japan) and Europe (The Netherlands) will be analysed in this study. Using the four common representations by Williams, et al. (2014), a postcolonial perspective will be applied to analyse the descriptions of these two international tour operators.

## Representation

### Japanese tour operator - JTB

JTB is the largest travel agency in Japan, which operates tours in both private leisure and corporate business sectors to both domestic and international destinations. The description about the Kayan is found as a part of a one-day tour package that visits the hilltribe village in Chiang Mai. The original description in Japanese has been translated into English with Google Translate for convenience of the analysis.

Having a general look through the content, it is observed that the description mainly consists of the stories of the tradition and culture of the Kayan people rather than the contemporary situation of the Karenni people, including the custom of brass-rings, history and lifestyle living with elephants, traditional crafts and geographical environment. Such nature of contents, that emphasize the distinctive customs from most of the Japanese viewers' everyday life, seems contributing to the production of a nostalgic image of the Kayan people. Having a look at the usage of the languages and the visual images, firstly, the 'exoticism' of the Kayan people can be seen in some parts of the description. For example, the title of

*"Karen tribe, who stretch their neck and ably control elephants" (translation adjusted by the author)*

explicitly emphasizes two stereotypical attributes of the Kayan people, 'stretched neck' and 'skilful elephant user'. These associations are further supported with a following visual image of Kayan women wearing the brass-rings, that makes the image given by the title clearer for the viewers.

Secondly, the representation of the people in the Global South as 'Noble savage' is also seen in the description, with a framing of the Karenni men as skilful elephant users.

*"Karen's men have literally lived with elephants for a long time and learn how to manipulate wise and powerful elephants. Even now, the Karen people are the most common elephant users."*



## Karen tribe who stretches his neck and manipulates elephants

The most famous hill tribe in Japan may be the Karen Padun, a part of the Karen tribe. The Karen Padung tribe is a widespread ethnic group from Thailand to Myanmar, and women may have the image of a Kayan because of the custom of wearing a brass ring around their neck and extending their neck.

This brass ring is rolled up from an early age and gradually lengthened. It seems that the origin of the decoration is not clear.



Karen Padun woman with a brass ring around her neck

Men, on the other hand, are skillful users of elephants.

Once upon a time, elephants were an important labor force in Thailand and a valuable means of transportation on the battlefield, riding elephants to attack. Among them, Karen's men have literally lived with elephants for a long time and learn how to manipulate wise and powerful elephants. Even now, the Karen people are the most common elephant users.

Speaking of Karen people, silver accessories cannot be removed. With its delicate sculptures and cute design, you will want it when you see it.

It is also famous for its uniquely woven fabrics. The striped woven fabric, which is not only beautiful but also very durable, is not only beautiful but also very durable, from bright colors such as red and pink to astringent colors using plants as dyes. It is also used as.

The Karen Padung people live mainly in the mountainous village of Mae Hornson. It is about 4 hours drive from Chiang Mai, near the border with Myanmar.

*Box 2. Tour description of JTB 1. translated with Google Translate*

Another interesting perspective to look at the tour descriptions from the different regions is how and to what extent the different values and beliefs that are generally shared in the society of those regions are reflected in the products.

For example, regarding the activities of elephant riding, different approach is seen between two operators in different continents. Looking at the tour content of JTB, elephant riding forms a major part of the tourist experience, advertised with a photo of tourists riding the elephants (Box 3). It seems that here the more focus is put on satisfying the curiosity of the viewers, by offering the activities that are aligned with the cultural story presented in the description.

*“JTB offers a plan to visit a folk village while trekking on an elephant. Why don’t you experience the culture of hill tribes while riding on the back of an elephant?”*



The folk village is near the Mae Sa Elephant Camp, known for its conservation and breeding of elephants, where you can experience elephant trekking, elephant shows and feeding. JTB offers a plan to visit a folk village while trekking on an elephant. Why don't you experience the culture of the hill tribes while riding on the back of an elephant?

*Box 3. Tour description of JTB 2. translated with Google Translate*



### Dutch tour operator – FOX travel

Next, the description produced by a European tour operator will be examined. FOX travel is the largest Dutch tour operator which specializes in long-distance travel programmes. FOX travel offers the tours to various destinations, including Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean Islands. The description about the Kayan village is found as a part of a 22-days tour package that visits the different regions around Thailand. For convenience of the analysis, the original Dutch description has been translated into English with Google Translate.



### Really FOX

#### *Workshop with the locals!*

After breakfast we visit the mysterious long-necked tribes by boat. In half an hour we sail to a remote village where we get a guided tour through the small streets with authentic houses. At the long neck strains, every girl, born with a full moon, gets a copper ring around her neck every year. A special sight!

#### **Workshop at the long-necked tribes**

In the village you can take part in a workshop where you can make an utensil in an authentic way, as the long-necked tribes also manufacture them themselves. A fun way to get in touch with the locals!

After this we visit the temple Wat Doi Kong Mu, located on top of a hill with a beautiful view over the vast surroundings of Mae Hong Son. In the evening there is plenty of time to discover the town and visit the local night market.

Box 4. Tour description of FOX Travel 1, translated with Google Translate

Looking at the description through a postcolonial lens, first of all, ‘exoticism’ of the Kayan people can be seen in some languages as “mysterious” and “remote village”. The anecdote of the traditional brass-rings custom also seems to contribute to create an exotic image of the Kayan people.

By comparing the tour contents of JTB and FOX travel, several different features are observed. While the description of JTB shown in the previous section is mainly focused on telling the story about the tradition and culture of the Karenni people, in the description of FOX travel, the emphasis seems to be put more on the interactive element of the tour. For example, in *Box 4* the description starts with the title of “*workshop with the locals!*”, followed by the description of the workshop:

*“In the village you can take part in a workshop where you can make an utensil in an authentic way, as the long-neck tribes also manufacture them themselves. A fun way to get in touch with the locals!”*



Today we have a day off. Recommended are the optional excursions in the area. For example, you can visit an elephant park. During this animal-friendly excursion, you can take care of the elephants for a day, feed them and watch them bathe in the river. Given the popularity of this excursion, you can already book it when booking.

The nature lover can also visit the beautiful Doi Inthanon National Park full of green nature, beautiful waterfalls and extensive plantations. The park is named after the highest mountain in the country and is nicknamed 'The Roof of Thailand' (all optional).

*Box 5. Tour description of FOX Travel 2, translated with Google Translate*

Another element that reflects the different tendencies is regarding the animal-related activities. While the elephant riding is offered as a major attraction in the tour of JTB, together with the story of the Karen people and elephants, in

the tour of FOX travel, more emphasis seems to be put on the endeavour towards the animal protection over its entertaining aspect. Looking at the description, the activities with the elephants are mainly about taking care of and interacting with them, with the emphasis on animal-friendliness:

*“During the animal-friendly excursion, you can take care of the elephants for a day, feed them and watch them bathe in the river.”*

This mixture of creating an exotic image and emphasizing interactive and sustainable element of the activities seems to be a reflection of the mixed desire of the tourists in this market, in which people seek for ‘exotic’ experiences elsewhere, while at the same time being a responsible tourist making sure their behaviour does not hurt the destinations.

### Defining responsibilities as the international actors

As the international actors hold global, usually larger-scale tourism supply chains, the way they operate in the destinations have considerable impacts on the practices of the local actors. Since the idea of the responsible travel becomes widespread, more and more consumers come to choose the companies which have responsible policies in place (A. Michat, personal communication, July 7, 2020). Accordingly, many international companies nowadays set and comply with the responsible policies, aiming to operate their business in sustainable and ethical manners on the destinations. In order to see how the notion of ‘responsibility’ is defined and put into practice by the international tourism industry, in this section, I will look at the general operational policies of the international tour operator and the DMC. As examples, policies of FOX travel, a Dutch tour operator, and EXO travel, a DMC operating in Thailand, are analysed in this study.

#### Travelife certification scheme

One widely recognised international framework of sustainable tourism operation is the Travelife certification scheme, which is organised by ECEAT, a not-for-profit organisation based in The Netherlands that promotes sustainability of the travel industry. This framework is based on several major international sustainability and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) standards and guidelines, including GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria) and OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises. The certification scheme consists of over 250 criteria that cover different management areas of travel companies, such as office and retail management; supply chain management; and customer management. Furthermore, the standard is also used as a benchmark for a range of CSR themes and issues, including energy efficiency and conservation; water and waste management; greenhouse gas emissions; labour practices; human rights; community relations; ecosystem conservation; cultural impacts; health and safety; fair business practices; customer protection and animal welfare (Travelife, n.d.).

### **International tour operator – FOX travel**

FOX travel holds the highest status of the Travelife certification scheme, and their sustainability policy and the action plan have been developed in conjunction with its standards. On the website of FOX travel about environmental policy and sustainable tourism (<https://www.fox.nl/duurzaam>), various endeavours for sustainability are described, including the CO2-neutral travel; plastic-free travel; and care of animal welfare. In the sustainability policy of FOX travel, their role is described as encouraging the sustainable operation of the local actors in the destinations.

*“We work with local agents, accommodation, transport and activity providers and encourage them to operate sustainably. In this way, Reizen contributes to the development of sustainable tourism, so that everyone can travel carefree, now and in the future.”*

In relation to the activities in Thailand, FOX travel has been a supporter of the World Animal Protection (WAP) campaign 'Get off the elephant'. Since 2014, all the elephant-related excursions offered by FOX travel are the ones where tourists get to know elephants only in their natural environment (<https://www.fox.nl/duurzaam/duurzame-initiatieven>).

*“as a Dutch travel industry, we have been trying for years to change the welfare of elephants, for example by prohibiting elephant rides. From FOX Verre Reizen, our goal for the coming years is to prevent all unnatural contact with these beautiful animals so that this is the last generation of elephants that lives in captivity. Unfortunately we are not far enough yet and there are still many elephants living in captivity in these parks. [...] That's why elephant rides are no longer offered and elephants no longer have to do tricks.”*

### **DMC - EXO Travel**

EXO travel, a destination management company (DMC) that operates throughout Southeast Asia, is one of the companies that holds the highest status of the Travelife certification scheme. According to Alexandra Michat, the sustainability director of EXO travel, EXO created a set of their own operational standards for responsible travel. This standard consists of 5 categories that define the company's attitude towards local actors when developing the tours, namely 'carbon friendly'; 'social impact'; 'cultural interaction'; 'make a difference'; and 'local benefit'. Looking at what each category entails, firstly, 'carbon friendly' is an orientation to make the activities vehicle-free as much as possible. Secondly, 'social impact' shows their aim to create interactions between tourists and the local people and giving income opportunities for the local people by sharing their special skills and knowledge. Thirdly, for the 'cultural interaction', the purchase from social enterprises is included as a tour component that ultimately benefit the local communities, such as having lunch at the local vocational training restaurant. Fourthly, for the 'local benefit', certain percentage of the tour price goes to the local communities without intermediary. Finally, to 'make a difference', certain amount of the tour prices are donated to non-profit organisations that benefit the local communities or local environmental conservation (A. Michat, personal communication, July 7, 2020).

As local suppliers of their tour packages are selected according to these responsibility standards, these operational policies seem to have a considerable power to improve the sustainability and justice of the local practices. However, selecting the 'ethical suppliers' also means that the destinations that are inherently not possible to meet such ethical standards are excluded from their global supply chains. For example, as the commercial hilltribe villages are primarily set up for a commercial purpose and there are often complex and unclear power relations between the villagers and the village owners, it is difficult to ensure the ethical correctness to visit those villages by nature. Therefore, under the label of 'responsible tours', people who live in this type of villages become difficult to be a part of its supply chain. According to Kim Martin Rasmussen, the product manager of EXO travel Thailand, currently the commercial type of Kayan villages are not included in their tour packages. *"EXO Travel Thailand does not include in our programs any spots specifically established to commercialise and display Kayan women wearing the brass rings extending their neck. On some of the walks in villages in the Mae Hong Son area there is a possibility to see Kayan women in their natural living environment in some communities, but we do not arrange or guarantee any such encounters"* (K. M. Rasmussen, personal communication, July 13, 2020)

To arrange the hilltribe excursions, EXO travel cooperates with several local organisations and enterprises that support sustainable tourism development of the local communities. Alexandra Michat, the sustainability director of EXO travel, mentioned: *"they (CBT-I and local alike, organisations that support community tourism development) are really in line with how we want to work and policy we have, so we like to rely on them"* (A. Michat, personal communication, July 7, 2020). However, as explained by Jaranya Daengnoy, the director of CBT-I, not every community has access to the assistance of such supporting organisations. Especially regarding the Kayan people in the commercial villages who moved to Thailand for economic reasons, as most of them have neither Thai ID nor records as refugees, they are often in the difficult position to get a financial support from the government to take part in the capacity building programs. While the endeavours of the international actors have a considerable effect to transform the local practices, when looking closely into the local reality, there seem to be a complex and often invisible structure within the local environment that prevent the certain communities to benefit from such international endeavours.

### Summary: Image construction and sustainable endeavours of the international travel industry

As the travel agencies have been one of the first places tourists contact in their holiday planning, their way of representing the destinations influences the tourists' image construction as well as their future behaviour. Through the analysis of the tour descriptions of the international tour operators from two different countries, Japan and the Netherlands, different tendencies were seen between the markets. In the description of the Japanese tour operator (JTB), the focus is mainly put on the cultural fascination of the Kayan people, while the Dutch tour operator (FOX travel) seems to emphasise more of the interactive and responsible elements of their tour program. Such different presentations of the



products seem to, on the one hand, reflect the consumption trend of each market country. On the other hand, such discourses of the tour operators also help reproducing a particular behavioural trend within each market, by suggesting a particular emotional relationship with the destinations.

In addition to forming the tourist expectations and their behaviour, the international tour operators also have an influence on the local businesses through their global supply chains. As an actor who stands between the international market and the destinations, the operational policies of the international tour operators and the DMCs seem to well reflect the changing consumption trends of the international tourists. As the tourists are becoming increasingly conscious of their impact of their holiday consumptions, more and more international travel companies came to set the sustainability standards to apply to their operations. However, while such trend generally seems to improve the sustainability and justice in the local tourism operation, looking closely into the local reality, there seems to be a complex and invisible structure that prevent such international endeavours to reach out to certain groups, including the Kayan.

### 5.1.3. The international travel magazines

Along with the information from the tourism professionals including the local and international tour operators, the travel media has been one of the important information sources for tourists. With its credibility and ability to reach out the broader audience, the travel magazines have a major impact on forming tourists' destination image and their future travel behaviour (Hsu & Song, 2013). In this study, 7 articles on online magazines that deal with the topic of tourism in the Kayan villages are analysed. Of those 7 online articles, 6 are from travel magazines and 1 is from a fashion magazine. All the 7 articles are likely to have the Western authors and 4 of them are freelance travel writers according to their profile information. The types of information covered in the articles and the use of the languages within the contents will be investigated from a postcolonial perspective, applying the common types of Northern representations by Williams, et al. (2014).

**The reality behind Thailand's Kayan Long Neck Hill Tribe will make you rethink your trip**

TRAVEL, CHIANG MAI, THAILAND, THAILAND

Ben Wilson · Nov 14, 2017

IN THE HILLS of northern Thailand are the cities of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, famous for the Golden Triangle (where the borders of Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos meet) and the Kayan Long Neck Hill Tribe — a sub-group of the Red Karen people.

ADVERTISEMENT

The Kayan people are originally from Myanmar. Due to political turmoil in the late 80s between the Karen National Liberation Army and the military dictatorship in Yangon, and the violence that ensued, many of the Kayan people escaped to Thailand and were set up in refugee camps.

The Kayan tribes quickly became a "tourist attraction", mostly because the girls and women (also known as "giraffe women") traditionally wear brass coils around their neck. The girls start wearing these brass coils from the age of five, and more are added as they get older. The brass will push the collarbone down to compress the rib cage. This will give the impression that their neck is longer and stretched. There are several theories that attempt to explain where this tradition started; some accounts state that the brass rings were used to make the women look unattractive to the slave traders who were hunting them down, while others explain were that it was a sign of beauty and wealth.

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Box 6. Example of an article of the online magazine (Matador network, 2017)

Overall, the general attitude of the articles analysed in this study is to take critical perspectives towards the tourism in the Kayan villages, putting the focus on the contemporary socio-political situation of the Kayan people and their vulnerability within the Thai society. When compared to the popular representations made by the tour operators ([chapter 5.1.1](#); [chapter 5.1.2](#)) that mainly put focus on the fascination of their culture and tradition, the descriptions of those articles seem to play a different role in tourists' image formation, adding the socio-political layer when looking at the Kayan people.

*"While the Kayan people have escaped the strife they previously faced in Myanmar, they continue to encounter ongoing challenges while living in Thailand. Owing to the limited rights afforded to them as refugees, there are often restrictions placed on their ability to travel outside of their own villages, and Kayan children are not only ineligible for Thai citizenship but also often have limited educational opportunities." (culture trip, March 2019)*

*"Because of their colorful, traditional dress and dramatically elongated necks adorned with brass rings, the Paduang subgroup of the Karen people from Myanmar/Burma have long been considered a tourist attraction in Thailand." (trip savvy, July 2019)*

*"In a Karen long neck tribe the locals, especially women, the biggest attraction of this circus, appear as if in a zoo without cages, so that you can take a good photograph." (Backpackers Bay, January 2019)*

The descriptions about the socio-political situation of the Kayan people often come along with the critical views towards the situation of 'internal colonialism', where the Kayan people are exploited as a tourist attraction by the government and the tourism industry due to their vulnerable status. Taking a postcolonial perspective, however, it is also identified that this type of narrative implicitly represents the Kayan communities as 'a place of poverty and in need of help'. This type of representation contributes to produce the imaginative boundary between the 'well-ordered' North and the 'problematic' South, where the practices that lack the moral and respect for the basic value of human rights still prevail.

*"From a young age, Kayan girls are disadvantaged. They have little to no access to schools, roads, electricity, or any type of healthcare, and those with rings around their neck will never get to experience life outside of these makeshift villages." (Matador network, November 2017)*

*"now Zember has removed her coil — in protest of her captivity. She no longer wants to keep Thailand's shameful secret: that the long-neck women are Burmese refugees who are being prevented by Thai authorities from taking up asylum overseas. As a lucrative tourist attraction, the women are forced to live in a virtual human zoo." (Marie-Claire, 2008)*

*"Thanks to the tourist revenue they generate, the Thai authorities allowed Kayan villages in the provinces closer to Chiang Mai where tour companies could "promote their business." Tourist flock here to see what they think is traditional living. The Kayan women only receive a small portion of the money generated by tourism; most of it goes to the tour operators." (Matador network, November 2017)*

## Please Set Me Free

Forced to serve as a tourist attraction in a human zoo, the long-neck women of Thailand want to cast off their coils and live modern lives like the rest of us – if only the government would let them.

*Box 7. A headline of a magazine article (Marie-Claire, 2008)*

Another common characteristic of the articles in the travel magazines is that the authors of the articles themselves have also been a tourist to this particular destination they write about, and that the descriptions are mostly based on their personal experiences as a tourist. The fact that the authors often have similar perspectives with the main audiences seems to create a sense of familiarity and consequently make their argument more convincing and feels reliable to the audience.

*"If I had done the research before my trip to Thailand, I would never have gone to a Kayan village and indirectly participated in the exploitation and suffering of the Kayan women and girls." (Matador network, November 2017)*

*"You are encouraged to take photos but this made me very uncomfortable. Even when I asked for permission to take photos, my guide said, "no problem, that is what they are here for." It really takes away from the experience." (The Outbound Collective, n.d.)*

Moreover, all of the 7 magazines raise the discussion on the controversy of the visit to the Kayan villages. Compared to the descriptions by the actors in the tourism industry that mainly focus on the cultural fascination of the Kayan people, those thought-provoking writings of the magazine articles seem to stimulate deeper consideration in readers on the issue of ethical correctness and their impacts and responsibilities in visiting those destinations.

*"In this visit there will always be a dilemma of perspectives. Will we be exploiting these people in an unworthy manner or contributing positively to the social and economic development of their region. In the end, it will be up to each one the decision to visit or not this place." (Backpackers Bay, January 2019)*

*“One solution to overcoming the Kayan’s problems over the years has been for them to embrace tourism as a means of supporting themselves. However, the popularity among tourists of visits to the Kayan people’s remote villages in northern Thailand isn’t without its controversy. While some see downsides to tourists visiting Kayan villages – it’s true that, in some cases, little of the money spent by tourists makes it through to villagers themselves – it nevertheless provides a much-needed opportunity for the Kayan people to make money by selling handicrafts, as well as to ensure the ongoing preservation of their community’s traditional way of life by sharing it with the world.” (culture trip, March 2019)*

Among the mainstream discourse of the magazine articles that critically looks at the local practices, there is also an article that brings the debate to an alternative direction, by highlighting the current endeavours in Huay Pu Keng village.

*“In recent years, there has been a lot of media coverage of the ethical inaccuracy of visiting such villages, but this village has come up with opposition. They would rather receive visitors, as long as they are interactive visits, not human zoo scenes. [...] Community Based Tourism is an absolute win-win situation. Visitors get a unique experience and a nice home-made souvenir and the Kayan can realize health care, training and other projects from the higher income.” (Lonely Planet, n.d.)*

### Summary: Power of travel magazines on image formation and tourist behaviour

The travel magazines have been one of the main information sources for the tourists and therefore have major influences on the image formation as well as the future behaviour of the tourists. The travel magazine seems to be generally considered as a reliable source, as the articles are mostly written by the authors who have experienced the destination themselves as tourists with their own perspectives. Moreover, as the authors have the similar characteristic and the familiar values to the main readers, the potential Western tourists, their way of producing descriptions seem to sit well with the readers. Also, the fact that the authors are mostly independent writers from the tourism industry seems also to give a sense of neutrality and therefore a certain degree of reliability in readers.

Looking at the contents, one common attitude recognized in those magazines is to critically reflect on the contemporary socio-political situation of the Kayan people, rather than emphasizing the fascination of their unique culture and tradition. This gives an alternative perspective to the readers in constructing the images of the Kayan people. Moreover, the critical standpoint and thought-provoking writings of the travel magazines seems also have an influence on the future behaviour of the tourists, by stimulating not only the curiosity about the destinations, but also the deeper consideration on the ethical correctness and responsibilities about visiting those destinations.

#### 5.1.4. The Kayan communities

*“Once I entered the village, I personally felt impressed by the staged authenticity which is perfectly blended into the natural environment surrounding it. Accidentally, I heard the sound of someone calling the village to stay in their position to do a performance by weaving something in their house” (Field notes, the first impression of Mae Ping village, S. Leamlak, n.d.)*

The Kayan communities are the most obvious and crucial stakeholder of tourism in the Kayan villages, because they are the very actor who offer the unique local experiences that attract tourists. The previous sections have examined the power of the travel industry and the media to produce/reproduce the certain images of the Kayan people and to influence the tourist behaviour as well as the local practices. In this section, on the other hand, focus will be put on how the Kayan people themselves perceive and respond to such images and narratives produced by the external actors. I will investigate, firstly, the major motivations of the villagers to engage in tourism and, secondly, the way the Kayan communities understand, utilize and negotiate with such tourist gaze constructed by the external actors. To provide the perspective of the Kayan people, interviews conducted by Smits (2020) in two Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son, Huay Pu Keng village and Huay Sua Thao village are used. For each of the quotes, the name of the villager, gender, age and the village of residence are provided.

#### Motivations

While there are various reasons for the Kayan people to engage in tourism, for many of them, the primary motivation seems to be for their livelihood. Three female villagers who sell souvenirs in Huay Sua Thao, who are in their 30s and raising their kids, expressed the importance of the income from tourism, especially to support their family.

*“I feel happy when more tourists come. Sometimes, I worry a little bit we do not have tourists. We then can have problems with our families. When we have less income and also family problems.” (Mu Paw, female, 33, HST)*

*“we want more tourists to come here. So if more tourists come here, maybe we will get more income for our families. So I want them to come here.” (Mu Tu, female, 30, HST).*

*“she just say only when we cannot sell. We cannot get money, because she has many things you know. You need money. She thinks about it, yeah. She has many kids, you know. For go to school, she uses money. But one day, she cannot sell, she cannot get money. She is serious about this one.” (Mu Da, female, 38, HST, through translator)*

According to these female villagers, while their husbands work outside of their village, the earning from tourism is the primary income for their household because of the limited job opportunities outside of their community. La Mae, the

village chief of Huay Sua Thao, is motivated to further develop the community-based tourism within the village, as he considers that tourism is a good way to generate alternative jobs within the village for those who do not want to go out of the community for work.

*“I hope that the villagers here will get more income. So they don’t really have to work outside of the village if they don’t want to. So they can also earn money in other ways.” (La Mae, village chief, male, HST)*

Secondly, next to the economic motivations, tourism is also considered as a possible tool to maintain the Kayan tradition and culture alive. Nong, the village chief of Huay Pu Keng, described the changing cultural identity of the younger generation and their decreasing commitment to the traditional practices. He expressed the concern that the culture and traditions of the Kayan, which is an essential part of their identity, would not last long. He considers that sharing their own culture with tourists would be the effective way to raise the sense of pride in the community members. While there has been a critical view by the international society emphasizing that tourism has been ‘forcing’ an ‘unethical tradition’ on the Kayan people, this statement of village chief indicates that there is a growing initiative of the community themselves to actively use this aspect of tourism to maintain and express their cultural identity.

*“more people came and we feel proud. We feel proud, that we, Kayan people, how do you say? Become popular, become a known culture that we never expected before which is also good. We can say which is good for Kayan people, that we can maintain our culture as well without have this kind of maybe without tourists our culture could be extinct. Without our culture we would not exist anymore in the future. That is what we concerned us, what is concerning also. [...] We love our culture but we cannot say 100 percent, that Kayan people and Kayan culture would exist in the world until the end of the world. We cannot say because, you know the situation day by day changes, the situation like change every day and you know? There I already mentioned, like young people when they have access to the higher education they don’t want to put the rings on anymore. It’s like that. We love our culture, we try to maintain them. If there is no tourist, tourist coming is the kind of one way to maintain our culture.” (Nong, village chief, male, HPK, through translator).*

As mentioned by the village chief in Huay Pu Keng, majority of the villagers seem to simply enjoy sharing their culture with tourists and this can motivate them to stay engaged in tourism. Contrary to the major critical narratives found in the international media ([chapter 5.1.3](#)) that tourism perpetuate the practice of the ‘unethical’ tradition, a number of villagers expressed that sharing their culture and history with tourists make them feel good and generate their sense of pride.

*“I feel good, because I want to show my.. How to call it? Tradition to the tourists. Yes, I want that tourists come here to see our village and also our culture and tradition. (Ma Pang, female, 36, HPK)*



*“sharing my traditional to the tourists, I feel happy and very proud of my traditional.” (Zong, female, 28, HPK).*

*“I want different people to come here and want the tourists to know about our culture. Where are we from? Like this. So, we also have our own culture, like this. Who lived in the war want to know all, like this. I am happy with my culture and when I share it to the tourists.” (Phu Yok, male, 22, HPK)*

*“For me, it’s good if I can explain about my traditions and culture. To tell that to the tourists coming here. What happened with the long-neck people? About the history. Explaining this, I like.” (Piga, male, 22, HST)*

*“We are from Myanmar and described as minorities, cultures and ethnicities, who also want to show who we are. So it is good to have a tourist to learn about our culture.” (Pay Yu, male, 30, HPK)*

Finally, for some villagers, tourism also seems to be an opportunity to gain new knowledge from the outside of their living area through the interaction with tourists.

*“when the tourists come.. We also feel like we do learn something from them. It’s like cultural exchange, which is good.” (Mu Lai, female, 36, HPK)*

*“If we had never seen a tourist move, maybe we don’t know about the western cultures. And we don’t.. We don’t know how they look. Like this and when they come to this village.. We, it’s like a.. We know something about the Western culture and also they understand maybe also a lot about the culture. So this good, kind of exchange.” (Pay Yu, male, 30, HPK)*

*“They teach me something, you know. What I never know before. Yeah, sometimes, when you sick, they can recommend “you can eat this medicine” or you can make something, how to take care. Everything. When you go to school, you learn from the teacher in the classroom, but this one more. Because you can talk with many tourists, you know, from somewhere else.” (Ma Jok, female, 36, HST)*

### Assumptions and intentions

While tourists create various images towards the Kayan people, there are also efforts of the community members to understand the expectations of tourists. Based on those assumptions, the community members have developed various tourism offers in their villages and have determined their attitude towards tourists. For example, Huay Pu Keng village has developed various workshops through which tourists can learn the local skills and the way of life (see [chapter 4.2.4 Huay Pu Keng](#), Figure 2). The villagers in Huay Pu Keng expressed their recognitions and intentions behind this endeavour.

*“when the tourists come, they want to do like a.. weaving.. When the tourists see weaving, they want to do. When the tourists see our.. making the leaves. The tourists want to make. When the tourists see us making bamboo cups, they want to try. When they come here, they act like this” (Ma Nae, female, 42, HPK).*

*“in the past, before, like a proper CBT, in the past, when the tourists come to this village, they just come and go around and watch the long-neck woman, and buy stuff. Take a picture later they go back says “nothing much to do”. But, it’s like upturned the CBT, introduced in this village and we come up with the new ideas, maybe to provide kind of a workshop” (Pay Yu, male, 30, HPK)*

Ma Jok is a 36-year-old female villager in Huay Sua Thao. She engages in weaving and selling souvenirs in the stall to tourists and actively interacts with tourists and explains about the Kayan culture. Behind her attitude, she seems to be aware that tourists are no longer just come to take photos and satisfy their visual desires, but they are interested in learning the ‘reality’ from the stories of the local people themselves.

*“Tourists, when they are travelling many place, they want to know. Yeah, it’s OK for me, yeah. I can explain yeah. They can know, you know? The real culture.” (Ma Jok, female, 36, HST)*

She also explained her effort to come up with the new ideas for her products to increase sales.

*“For me, weaving. If I have time, I learn from my phone you know. The new fashion or something you know. For next year, to sell the tourists. It’s a different workshop. Because, when you have the.. something interesting and different.. many shops can sell more” (Ma Jok, female, 36, HST)*

In addition to organizing workshops, villagers also consider their traditional celebrations as an important attraction for tourists. Nung, the village chief of Huay Pu Keng, thinks that tourists are happy when they come across new experiences, and especially the events such as the Kayan new year celebration fascinate tourists. Through the analysis of the websites of the tour operators in the previous sections, the traditional beliefs and customs of the Kayan people are found to be one of the major elements that form the tourists’ image of the Kayan people. An interesting point here is that, while the Kayan community continues to hold the traditional celebrations from their beliefs and cultural identity, they are at the same time also aware of the images and expectations tourists carry towards them and make use of their customs to attract and entertain tourists.

*“Some tourist they come and they are lucky that they come on the day we celebrate our cultural tradition in the village. Once a year we sacrifice for the forest or for the water, the river. We sacrifice, we kill a chicken, we pray to the religious spirits. This year please give enough water or give enough rain so we can get a, we can grow more vegetables. Some tourists come on that day and they learn more about the enemies and the believes of the Kayan people. They are very fascinated, very good to learn. Because they have never experienced this kind of thing. So they are very happy.” (Noung, village chief, male, HPK, through translator)*

## Conflict and negotiation

As there is a growing initiative of the Kayan communities in tourism, the conflicts with other stakeholders arise from time to time. For example, Pay Yu, one of the committee members of the CBT group in Huay Pu Keng village, explained the general perception of the community members towards the tour operators and the guides from the Thai community who take tourists around the village.

*“some tour guides don’t really know about the culture of the Kayan people. Sometimes when they lead the tourists to Huay Pu Keng, some of the information that they are providing for tourists are not really correct. Yeah, not really correct, sometimes even they don’t know how to answer the questions, if some of the tourists, they raise some question to tourist guide, sometimes they cannot answer and they just let the question like this.” (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020)*

An established image of the ‘ethnic villages’ could also lead to the external pressure to prevent the village from changing. According to Pay Yu, until recently Huay Pu Keng village had no internet or phone signal, because the government believed that the presence of such technologies would reduce the attractiveness of the village as an ‘exotic’ tourist destination. The story shared by Pay Yu, however, illustrates the community’s capacity to negotiate with the government, using their position as those who are most closely involved with tourists.

*“Before we have phone signal and internet, we always have to arrange our voice to the government and fight with the government. In the beginning they don’t want us to have this kind of signal. Because they think, if we have phone signal or like internet, maybe there will be not really a nature or maybe no interest for tourists anymore. But in reality, most of the tourists who are coming here, they prefer to have internet, because for some tourists, when they spend overnight in Huay Pu Keng, they also want to work a little bit, but they cannot connect with the internet, so they cannot work and they have to go back to the city.” (Pay Yu, personal communication, June 24, 2020)*

### Growing sense of belonging and identity

Another remarkable point found in the interview with the members of the Kayan communities in Mae Hong Son is the development of the sense of belonging to their new environment and the new collective identity as a community. Even though the Kayan people are originally from Myanmar, a number of villagers described their village in Thailand as 'original'. The shared experience of moving from Myanmar as refugees and having built up a new life together seems to have strengthened their collective identity. Moreover, the presence of the commercial villages newly set up outside of Mae Hong Son especially seems to have let them position themselves as the 'original' Kayan people in Thailand.

*"our village is the first village that came from Myanmar. In Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai it's different. I want to say that our village is the first village that the long-neck come to Thailand. It's a better place. It's original." (Pho La, male, 25, HPK)*

*"our village here is an original village. This village, stay about 35 years already here." (Zong, female, 28, HPK)*

*"in some places in Thailand just for business. You know? They make for business only. The ones who want to see the culture and the old, you know should come here." (Ma Jok, female, 36, HST)*

Ma Pel is a 30-year-old female villager who came from Myanmar and now lives in in Huay Pu Keng with two kids. Besides weaving and selling crafts to tourists, she also engages in collecting leaves in the forest and farming in the garden. She emphasized that their culture and lifestyle is not for the income from tourism. Her remarks show that the village, originally set up by the government to promote as a tourism attraction, has now become the place of belonging and the everyday life for the villagers. It also indicates that while the income is one of the major motivations, the importance of tourism as the income source seems to depend on the livelihood situation of each village.

*"Our village is not for the money. We already stay here for a long time and want to stay forever. And also, we are not the same like Chiang Mai. If in Chiang Mai the tourists don't come, they go back to Myanmar, but this village will always stay. Even if the tourists don't come, we stay. We still do our job, like make a weaving, cup of bamboo and like this. [...] Even if the tourists don't come here, we still wear the rings. Also when we go to the garden or the farm, we are still wearing the rings. We don't take them off." (Ma Pel, female, 30, HPK)*

Phu Yok, a 22-year-old male villager in Huay Pu Keng, was born in this village. Now he is a teacher of English and Burmese at the school in village. He states that making money is not the primary motivation for them to engage in tourism. His remarks indicate that there is an increasing sense of control within the community over their livelihood situations.

*“We are from Myanmar. We also have.. we came here and we try by ourselves. We wanted to have the village here. Like this. I want the tourists to know, we are not here for money. Even if we don’t have tourists, we still have our own job like a.. farm, like a garden. So, we still have everything. So, if you are interested, you can come and visit. You can see our activities like this.” (Phu Yok, male, 22, HPK)*

### Summary: Agency of the local communities

In this section, I have put focus on how the members of the Kayan communities themselves perceive, understand and respond to tourism and the attitude of the external actors. While the image construction often occurs beyond the reach of the local communities, it is found out that the communities have developed a considerable level of understanding about how they are imagined by the outside world and actively respond to and make use of such established images under various motivations and intentions. While there is a rather negative tone of the international media that emphasizes the Kayan people’s vulnerability and the exploitative tourism practices of the powerful stakeholders, looking from the communities’ perspectives, tourism seems to be perceived and approached more as a pragmatic tool for their livelihood, for protecting their cultural identity and for gaining new knowledge. Moreover, the observation of such internal process of the communities also revealed that there is a growing sense of belonging and a development of the new collective identity in their villages, and that the community members has a considerable capacity to confront and negotiate with the external actors based on their rediscovered identity in Thailand.

## 5.2. Process of consumption of tourism

### 5.2.1. The tourists: tourist gaze, expectations and experiences

In the previous sections, I have looked at the production process by focusing on the roles of each actor involved in the image construction of the Kayan. In this section, on the other hand, the focus will be put on how the constructed images and narratives influence the tourist experiences and how tourists reproduce such images and narratives through the communication about their experiences. The tourists are the central actor in the consumption process, who spend their money on various tourism services. They bring various images, expectations, ideas and beliefs about the destinations that are constructed by the tourism representations as well as influenced by the general values and norms shared in the societies they belong to. Such 'tourist gaze' determines their perceptions and their behaviour, and consequently have influence on the way tourism is organized in the local communities. In order to examine the tourist gaze and the nature of their experiences, in total 280 reviews on TripAdvisor written in English are analysed in this study. It should be noted that the category of the reviews is called 'long-neck village', and which specific village each of the reviews is referring to was not clear. First of all, the major expectations carried by tourists and its relation to their perceptions of the villages will be investigated. Then, I will look at the ways more fundamental beliefs and values of the tourists influence their perceptions of the villages. Thereafter, I will also give an eye on the recent consumption trend of the tourists and how this would contribute to the shift in the tourist behaviour and experiences.

#### Expectation: Authenticity

##### Perception of 'inauthentic': commercial

The tourists come along with various expectations towards the people and the culture of the destination, that are often constructed by the tourism professionals (see [chapter 5.1.1](#); [chapter 5.1.2](#)). Among different expectations, a number of tourists expressed in the reviews that they expected to encounter the 'authentic' Kayan people and their culture. For those visitors, however, often the gap between their pre-established images of the 'authentic village' and the local reality produces the perception that the village is 'fake'. Looking at the tourist reviews on TripAdvisor, many of the visitors expressed their expectation for the 'encounter with the real tribe'. Their disappointment came when they found out that what they were visiting was actually the commercialized village with a row of souvenir stalls where people make money from tourism, instead of the real local way of life.

*"it was just rows of open stalls selling the same thing one could find on any street in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai. Disappointing experience as we were expecting to have a glance of the lifestyle of the Long neck tribe"*

*"it was also very much a let down because they do not live here and most of what is sold is the same rubbish you can buy in the night markets etc"*

*“Many speak English so well and I am sure they are there for tourists. They were putting to me the assembled collar. I was a little disappointed because I really thought I would see the village and the house in which they live, and women with long necks.”*

*“I was a little disappointed when I reach the place because it felt a bit "commercial" and isn't really a "village" or "tribe".”*

*“The women are looked at like animals in the zoo, and the entire village has turned into a market place. What you see here has certainly nothing to do with the traditional lifestyle”*

### **Perception of ‘inauthentic’: modern**

Related issue to the tourists’ perception of authenticity is the modernization and hybridization of the local environment. According to Peter Richards, who worked in a community-based tourism project in Kayah state in Myanmar, as a general trend when communities have more income from tourism, it becomes possible to buy more convenient appliances. Consequently, the communities start to accommodate both traditional and modern elements in their lifestyle. *“In a real situation, I think that most of the villagers now, they are kind of living with one foot in a traditional life and one foot in a kind of contemporary modern world [...] the villagers are living in 2020, just like we are, everyone is living in 2020.”* (P. Richards, personal communication, July 16, 2020). In the context of tourism, however, hybridity of local landscape is often considered as a negative consequence of globalization, as it would threaten the tourists’ belief of the ‘local authenticity’. On the TripAdvisor reviews, some visitors expressed the disappointment when they witnessed the industrialized aspect of the village such as solar panels, electronic devices and facilities that are not in line with their image of the ‘traditional’ tribal life.

*“If you guessed it's traditional, you will be dissappointed. They have solar energy system for electricity. You will find it in the corner of artshops.”*

*“Our mistakes is when we venture to the back alley and by mistakes, found the true face of the community. The school is bigger and a new church with volleyball court made from bamboo strips. They have satellite tv and solar panels.”*

### **Perception of ‘inauthentic’: staged**

In response to the tourists’ desire to encounter the ‘authentic’ local culture, there are often efforts of the host communities to stage some aspects of their way of life ([chapter 5.1.4](#)). However, contrary to their efforts, a number of visitors expressed that the whole setting of the village felt rather unnatural, as if they were in an ‘attraction park’ or a ‘circus’. They pointed out that the people looked as if they were put on a show, performing the tradition which is not based on their authentic cultural identity.



*“Whilst interesting to see Long Neck Karen, I can't help but feel like I am looking at circus freaks. These people are on show to the paying tourist because we, the tourist are happy to pay to see them and the way they live.”*

*“Artificial attraction park- First you have to pay for the entrance; it is like an attraction park. Then you will find some women with long neck, waiting for you (i suppose they dress like this when a bus of tourist arrive.) Then it is clear that the goal is to buy and buy again stuff 'made localy' (but more probably made in China).”*

As discussed in the theory of the staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973), the ‘backstage’, where the real local life is believed to be carried out, has been what stimulates the curiosity of tourists. Therefore, trying to break into the backstage to find out the ‘real face’ of the host community is a typical tourist behaviour. In the TripAdvisor review, some tourists described their ‘exploration’ of the backstage and shared the ‘truth’ they discovered, that the village is actually not the ‘real village’ but merely the ‘stage’ for tourism.

*“We arrived at 10:30 am (no one was at the tollgate to cash the mentioned 250 baht) and except for the occasional stunned man no one was on the street. One shop was already opened selling bamboo hats and other stuff, but there was no Kayan woman whatsoever. Even after strolling around for some minutes we did not see any of those storied woman which made us clear that all the stories are true and that the women are actually driven there to be stared at.”*

*“I tried to be a researcher and I entered into the houses that are behind, believe it or not, the daily shopping market, but it seems to me that almost no one lives.”*

## Expectation: learning and experiencing

### **Lack of the opportunities for learning and experiencing**

Along with the expectation to encounter the ‘authentic’ local way of life, many tourists nowadays seem to be eager to learn something new about the destinations through experiences on site. This type of tourists often expects that the villages offer some opportunities that makes them more knowledgeable. They showed disappointment when they found out that visiting the villages do not actually add much new information to their knowledge or stimulate their curiosity.

*“We are not souvenir tourists. We like to visit places to learn about the history and environment. This place was a major disappointment to us as we walked away knowing no more about the people then when we'd arrived”*

*"We were excited about going to find out about the history of the long neck people but all we saw was a pile of over priced souvenirs that you had to buy to take a photo."*

*"We paid 300 baht to get there and I would honestly expect to get some information about the tribes there or I would expect them to show me some of their traditions. All you get is sad people (who just pretend to follow the traditions) who are trying to sell you some souvenirs."*

*"Since there is no signs or any indication of where you should be walking or not, it was hard to tell what we were looking at. Maybe if you know the difference in the tribes then this village would be a more valuable experience but for those of you that don't, you will be like me and wandering around aimlessly and without a clue as to their cultures."*

## Values: moral and ethics

### Perception of injustice: Exploitation

Not only the expectations, but also more fundamental values of the tourists also have a major influence on the way tourists perceive the destinations. Not only the exotic image of the Kayan people, but tourists nowadays seem to gain substantial knowledge and understanding about the socio-political situation and vulnerability of the Kayan people in Thailand through various information sources (see [chapter 5.1.3](#)). Looking at the TripAdvisor reviews, a number of tourists raised ethical questions about the way tourism is organised in the Kayan villages. Many of them perceived injustice in the situation where tourists are asked to pay to enter the village and photograph people, who are 'confined' in tourism.

*"You pay a 300 Baht fee to enter a "human zoo" where you'll pay to take photos with women who are confined to heavy "neck rings" from birth and buy memorabilia made in China (you will see them weave a scarf in front of you but the rest is business for whomever gets all the profit). They will only get half of the entrance fee (your tour guide will get the other half). It's uncomfortable and it shouldn't be encouraged in this manner."*

*"Walking around through this village is like walking through a human zoo; all the ladies are stared at and photographed and they hope to sell some of their (homemade?) products"*

*"The guide told us that we are free to take photos, however it felt more like it was a human zoo. I couldn't tell if these folks actually live there, or are there just to work and to put on a show."*

*"Depressing experience to see how refugees live and are exploited as a tourist attraction"*

*“Total exploitation of people and even children having to dress up for a Tourist to take a Pic. Shocking, and will need to change.”*

*“Felt terribly sorry for the people posing for the tourist cameras.”*

#### **Perception of injustice: Enforcement of tradition**

A number of tourists expressed their perception of injustice especially regarding the traditional custom of wearing brass-rings. They recognize that women and female children are ‘forced’ to follow this tradition to earn money from tourism, against their wishes to be free and ‘normal’.

*“Nowadays, the female children of the village stand at a crossroad as early as the age of 5. Should they wear the coils around their neck, keeping their cultural traditions alive and possibly earning money for their families from tourists with fat wallets? Or should they leave the rings off so they can go to regular public schools, and integrate better into Thai society?”*

*“Originally, the practice of stretching necks by addition of rings was used to make the ladies unattractive to slave traders. Now it is just to attract tourists, often against the wishes of the children, who just want to be modern and “normal”. The practise should be stopped and the Thailand government should step in to prevent such scams on tourists.”*

*“I know they rely on tourists for their livelihood, but this again perpetrates what was a dying tradition. Young girls are again being loaded with brass collars to keep the tradition going for the future of the tourist trade”*

*“I never wanted to support the attraction by going to long neck village to see the ladies. It gives them more reason to put heavy metals on their daughters or girls for more tourists to visit”*

#### **Perception: dilemma**

As the notion of responsible travel become widespread, tourists are nowadays becoming increasingly conscious of the impact they bring to the destinations. In the case of the Kayan village, however, the complexity and unclarity of the power relations and various debates raised in the different information sources seem to have made it difficult for tourists to grasp the actual impacts of tourism on the local people. Looking at the TripAdvisor reviews, a number of tourists expressed the dilemma and mixed feeling regarding their behaviour.

*"Some say that it is a human zoo and we should not support such exploitation of people. Some say that visiting them benefits those people because of profit sharing and because Kayan people are refugees and do not have employment opportunities in Thailand... hard to know"*

*"I always have mixed feelings when I visit places like this. On the one hand I feel like I am exploiting the people and treating the place like a human zoo. On the other hand I know they rely on tourists for their livelihood, but this again perpetrates what was a dying tradition. Young girls are again being loaded with brass collars to keep the tradition going for the future of the tourist trade"*

*"A dilemma for me of course, i wanted to help but i don't know if I'm doing the right thing by not supporting them. In the end, i bought a scarf from her."*

### Consumption trend: co-creation of experience

#### **Perception: existential authenticity**

According to Pine & Gilmore (1998), in the rise of the experience economy, consumers nowadays increasingly seek for personalised and identity-rich experiences. They are ready to be a co-creator of their experiences rather than simply consuming ready-made goods and services (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In the context of tourism, 'interaction' and 'learning' are becoming the important elements in holiday experiences. While the large part of the tourists expressed the lack of the 'authenticity' of the villages in its commercialised, modernized or staged settings, some tourists seem to accept such 'inauthentic' setting and go beyond the pre-established expectations. Interestingly, even in such 'inauthentic' settings, the tourists who actively created an emotional connection with the villagers through the personal interaction seem to have experienced a state of 'existential authenticity' within their sincere relationship. Looking at the reviews, this type of tourists also tends to perceive their experience more positively.

*"We found all the young people spoke English, especially in the Karen tribe (Long Neck). We were talking to one of the young girls that had her young daughter there and asked all sorts of questions. She didn't mind at all it was really interesting talking to them about their culture and why they have the traditions they do. They even gave us some of the rings to hold. They are heavy!! We all had a really good time here."*

*"The villagers were very friendly, happy to have visitors taking photos and interested in chatting. Lots of souvenirs, but locally produced and well priced. It was great to wander around this type of village and see the different houses and buildings and crafts. I was worried about the human zoo aspect, but it didn't have that feeling at all."*

One visitor shared the villager's perspective she learned through the personal conversation with a Kayan girl, which she seems to have found is different from the major narrative generally shared among tourists.

*"We spoke a girl- mary- said she was long neck but took the wire away because she wants to move to US. Said her "cards" soon be ready and she will be free to move. Many of them are moved to the States or Aus and New Z. So their "rights" are about change. When i asked where the money goes we pay, said it goes to the village buying food etc [...] She denied my words they are human zoo, and asked me to translate You to go there"*

It is observed that personalized interactions with the host communities are likely to give tourists more realistic and nuanced understanding of the Kayan people's perspectives and generate compassion towards the situation the Kayan people are placed at. It is also found out that the tourists who became 'mindful state' through the fruitful interaction with the local people seem to get more concrete sense of their impact on the communities. Consequently, they tend to practice what they define are the responsible behaviours, such as buying the handicrafts made by local people, making donation, lending an ear to the villagers' story and also encourage others to visit the local people with respect.

*"The point I want to share here is that they are free to choose how and where they live. So go and support them by buying a few nice souvenirs which they made themselves."*

*"Look, this is not an authentic experience really - there is a commercial aspect, but I think you are helping the tribe survive by supporting them, so go. You get a better idea of tribal village life than if you didn't go, but of course not quite the real deal"*

*"Although it feels strange to go to a village as a 'tourist attraction', if you are respectful towards the villagers and buy from them, you are truly helping them"*

### Summary: Tourist expectations, experiences and power of words

Through the analysis of the tourist reviews, it is found out that the tourists carry a particular set of expectations and beliefs constructed by various factors and perceive the destinations according to such pre-established images. This tendency, however, seems often lead them to perceive the village as 'inauthentic', because of the gap between their own definitions of the 'authentic village' and the reality of the village, which is often more commercialized, hybridized and staged. In addition, many tourists expressed the ethical concerns about the way tourism is organized in the villages, in that the Kayan people seem to be 'exploited' as a 'tourist attraction' by the powerful outside stakeholders. In the shifting

consumption trend, however, the tourists nowadays increasingly seek for more personalized and identity-rich experiences through the interactions with the local people. Consequently, the objective type of authenticity of the village is becoming less important for some of the tourists. Instead, these tourists seem to perceive the authenticity in sincere emotional connections with the host communities.

Moreover, while the tourists are the central actor of the consumption of tourism, they also become a producer of the tourist experiences by sharing their experiences through various channels. The word of mouth is nowadays becoming one of the important information sources for the tourists when making decisions about their holiday activities. Therefore, the output of the tourists seems to have a considerable power to reproduce the images and narratives of the Kayan people as well as to encourage/discourage certain behaviour of the potential tourists.





## 6. Discussion

The objective of this research has been to investigate various power relations embedded in the construction of tourism in the Kayan villages. The previous chapter zoomed in on the power and influence of each actor in various processes of the production and consumption of Kayan tourism. In this chapter, I will attempt to bring the different actors together to create a bigger picture of how they influence and negotiate with each other and construct the tourism in the Kayan communities. Firstly, I will try to capture the power dynamics among different actors and how they influence each other (6.1). Then, I will zoom in on the internal process of the communities and look at the development of collective identity and initiative in tourism as well as the growing aspiration for the future (6.2). Finally, based on the current power relations and the shifting attitude of the communities, I will explore the notion of sustainability in the context of ethnic tourism and the possible future direction of tourism in the Kayan villages (6.3).

### 6.1. Power dynamics in constructing tourism in Kayan communities

In this research, my focus has been on bringing different stakeholders together to see the power dynamics that constitute tourism in the Kayan communities. What was discovered through this multi-stakeholder approach is that there are multiple layers of mediation in the construction of tourism in the Kayan villages, where different actors influence each other. Below I focus on four key dimensions that help explain this space of encounters.

Firstly, the government has a substantial influence both on the tourism-related activities as well as a range of day-to-day activities of the communities through the policies and regulations. In the case of Huay Pu Keng village, the village has been initially set up by the government for the first Kayan refugees and many aspects of their daily activities have been restricted due to the lack of their official status in Thailand. Moreover, not only the direct influence through the policies and regulations, but the government also has influence on the communities through the funding of projects and activities of various organizations that are working on the ground ([chapter 4](#)).

The second dimension is the industry's representations and the tourist gaze. The travel industry plays a substantial role in tourism of the Kayan villages as a mediator between the host communities and the tourists. While the local tour operators have been an important supplier of tourists, currently their tour packages do not seem to bring lots of opportunities for the communities to present themselves with their own voices. Also, the representations made by the travel industry through their websites, brochures and on-side explanations largely influence the formation of the tourist expectations and their behaviour. Through the analysis of the tour descriptions, I found out that different discourses arise from the different layers of framing used to describe the Kayan people, from the cultural framing that emphasize their distinctive way of life, to the social framing that critically describe the socio-political situation where Kayan people are placed. In addition, by comparing the international tour operators from two different markets, I found

out that the products of the international tour operators largely reflect the characteristics of the tourists in each market, and such discourses of the tourism industry in turn reproduce the pattern of the tourist behaviour in each market ([chapter 5.1.1](#); [chapter 5.1.2](#)). The tourists create and revise their perspectives based on such representations made by the tourism professionals. The majority of tourists seem to bring a particular set of expectations and beliefs to the destinations and perceive what they see according to their pre-established images. Such behaviour, however, seems to often lead to disappointments because of the gap between their expectation and the real environment they come across. On the other hand, tourists who had personal interactions with the local communities seem to feel an authentic emotional connection with the local people. Such difference in perceptions of the same destination also indicates the power of the 'tourist gaze' to define their experiences. Moreover, while the tourists are the main actor of the consumption of tourism, they also become a producer of the tourist experiences through the output on various channels and influence the behaviour of other potential tourists ([chapter 5.2.1](#)).

Thirdly, the critical discourses of the travel media about tourism in the Kayan villages have had an influence on the attitude of the tourists as well as the travel industry. The controversy of Kayan villages has long been a topic extensively discussed in the international society ([chapter 5.1.3](#)). Such critical writings in the travel media has provoked the ethical questions and dilemmas within many tourists and led them to take particular behaviours, such as tourism boycott. This in turn seems to have also stimulated the tourism industry to adjust their perspectives. For example, reflecting the rise of the responsible tourism trend of the tourists, the international travel industry, such as the destination management companies and the international tour operators, are moving towards more sustainable and ethical operations ([chapter 5.1.2](#)).

Finally, there is a communities' response to such external presentations and the tourist expectations. By putting a focus on the attitude of the community members, I found out that the community members are to a large extent aware of such expectations of the tourists and actively use the established image of the Kayan people to present themselves, adjust their attitude towards tourists and develop their offers. They seem to be ready to put themselves on a stage and play out what tourists expect is the 'traditional' way of life. Also, in response to the tourist desire for learning the local culture, the community members came up with workshops, invite tourists to their special events such as the new year celebration, and actively interact with tourists ([chapter 5.1.4](#)). Such response of the communities to the external presentations, however, also indicates that there is a growing collective identity and initiative in tourism within the communities. The next section, therefore, puts focus on the communities' internal process and discuss the formation of a new identity within the communities.

## 6.2. Internal process of communities: home making and identity building

*“Long time ago, we stay in Myanmar.[...] Mostly Kayan people, we are living like this and stay like this. And we live in Burma. And we know, we never experienced that. One day, we never expect like one day there would be a tourist who would come. Who comes and watch our culture, who come and learn about our culture who comes and is curious about our culture. At that time, when we first went to Thailand. Thai-Burma border. And when the Thai government saw, the Kayan people especially Kayan long-neck women.. And then they very interested. Ah this tribe very strange and very interested. And then they promote about the Kayan people. And they put like in one particular place like Huay Pu Keng here. A wonderful place. And they promote to the world and with other community. So we have a strange vibe.. Coming from Myanmar, which is Kayan people they are living here. If you want to come and visit you are welcome.” (Noung, village chief of HPK, personal communication through translator, March 4, 2020, Smits, 2020)*

The previous section looked at how the different actors play their roles, influence each other and together construct and revise tourism in the Kayan villages. In this section, on the other hand, I will put focus on the communities' internal process behind the response to the external influences. An interesting point is that, even though the villages were initially set up by the Thai government and the tourism development has been largely led by the external actors, the community members have built a sense of belonging and a new identity in such externally given environment over time, and they are ready to take initiative to use their position to negotiate with the external world.

The Kayan communities have been given various positions and definitions by the different actors. Originally coming as 'refugees' from Myanmar, the initial purpose of the Kayan people in Thailand was not to engage in tourism. Their involvement in tourism began when they were 'discovered' by the government and relocated to one village to become a 'tourist attraction'. They were then promoted by the tourism industry in the international tourism market. Various tour descriptions of the Kayan people and culture have been produced, contributing to the image formation of the Kayan as an 'exotic tribe'. As such, they were gradually made into a 'symbol of ethnic tourism' in Northern Thailand. Moreover, as the villages of the Kayan people become the well-know destination, power imbalance between the Kayan communities and the powerful outside actors have brought the Kayan people in a position as a 'victim of tourism' for a number of international media.

While tourism development has thus been largely led by the external actors, however, in the course of playing out the 'staged authenticity', such staged setting seems to have become accepted as a new reality and incorporated into a part of the new identity of the communities. For example, in Huay Pu Keng village, while the people initially came from Myanmar, many of the villagers now feel at home in this staged setting and identify themselves as the 'original Kayan community in Thailand'. Also, after being a tourist attraction for many years, the villagers are now to a large extent

aware of the external 'gaze' and actively stage themselves according to their established images. For example, they are happy to offer the photo opportunities to tourists or proudly present their culture through workshops and traditional celebrations. Moreover, tourism is nowadays recognized by villagers themselves as a means of livelihood and a tool to maintain their cultural identity, and there is a growing initiative to utilize tourism to improve their situation. Over time, the communities seem to have synthesized the external image and their identity, and endogenized the new authentic selves. As a result, the village that started as a 'touristic theme park' has gradually developed to a new 'place of belonging' for the Kayan people.

Behind such reconstruction of the new collective identity and initiative in tourism, there seems to have been an internal process of the communities to reflect on their positionality within the society. Firstly, sharing the same struggle, or even the same destiny, of escaping from their home country and building up an entirely new life in a new environment together would have strengthened the bond among community members. The recent development of commercial villages and the presence of Kayan newcomers who moved to such commercial villages with different context and reasons would also have encouraged them to position themselves as the 'first' and 'original' Kayan in Thailand. Secondly, being a minority in the society and confronting the host society as 'common enemy' would have brought the community members close together. Especially the Kayan communities, who have long been in marginalized position in the mainstream Thai society and used as a 'tourist attraction', making a collective action to resist or to negotiate with larger society would have generated the sense of unity within the communities. Moreover, being gazed as 'exotic' in the host society seems to have made them particularly aware of the uniqueness of their ethnicity, that could be used to create and protect their position in the society. It seems that over time, the communities have grown their collective identity in the negotiation with the larger society.

However, whilst the first generation has built up their new collective identity and seems to have found a certain comfort in their new environment, such collective identity seems to be becoming weakened, as members in different generations started to show different responses to the community's future. It is revealed that the younger generations are growing their aspiration for an alternative future and having the higher sense of freedom to depart from such staged village. As they were born and grew up in Thailand, they do not share the same memory and the experience of the struggle of the older generation with fleeing a war. As the attitude of the government is gradually changing to embrace them in the society with increased opportunities, the mainstream society that has been a 'common enemy' for the community would no longer feel as 'enemy' for them to fight against. They seem to be increasingly questioning to continue the life in the village as a tourist attraction and starting to look for alternative possibilities for their future. For example, in Huay Pu Keng village, many of the younger female villagers nowadays choose to take off the brass-rings, in order to pursue the higher education and create a new life outside of their community without being given a strange look. Instead of actively expressing their collective ethnic identity, some of the younger generations seem to choose to change into new forms of themselves to be better integrated into the Thai society. Such difference in responses to the mainstream society inevitably lead to the internal frictions of the collective identity within the community.

By putting the focus on the internal process of the communities, it is revealed that the communities constantly negotiate their position with the wider society and redefine their identity over time. In the situation where the multiple layers of identity are evolving within the communities, the question arises: what the future relationship between the ethnic communities and tourism would be like. The next section will delve into this question, exploring the concept of the future and sustainability in Kayan tourism.

### 6.3. Redefining the future and 'sustainability' in ethnic tourism

In the previous section, I looked at the development of the collective identity within the communities as well as the different responses towards the future among different community members. This raises a new point of discussion, regarding the long-term relationship of the communities with tourism. As discussed in the previous section, not only the physical environment of the village, but also the identity of the community members continuously changes through the negotiation with the changing outside environment. The issue of sustainability is, therefore, not only about how to maintain the 'traditional culture' as a tourism resource. A more fundamental question arises, that is, whether and how community members themselves want to maintain their 'traditional culture' as well as stay involved in tourism in the future. Building on the insights in current power relations and the shift in the communities discussed in the previous sections, I will explore the concept of sustainability and the future of Kayan tourism.

Discussing the concept of 'sustainability' in the context of ethnic tourism would not be as straightforward as, for example, in natural resource conservation, where preserving the natural environment as 'status quo' is the central objective. In ethnic tourism, while the uniqueness of the culture and lifestyle of the ethnic communities is the main tourism resource, simply trying to 'preserve' this 'collective culture' would conflict with the right of the individual members to choose their own future and lifestyle. Especially in the situation where the communities are dynamically changing from the inside, the external definition of 'authenticity' seems no longer aligned with the evolving individual identity as well as the state of being part of the communities. As culture is not static but always changing, trying to 'freeze' people in a certain state of being would not only raise ethical questions, but it seems to be almost an unrealistic attempt.

Then, what would be the possible form of future tourism for the ethnic communities? In order to redefine the 'sustainability' in the context of ethnic tourism, I will bring back the attention to the communities themselves and start by asking, 'do the community members want tourism?', 'who in the communities, and how do they want to have tourism?'. When zoomed in on the internal process of the communities in the previous section, two types of response to their future were currently identified among different groups of community members: to take initiative and actively utilize tourism, or to grow aspiration for alternative future. Taking into account these different orientations, the possible scenario of future tourism in the Kayan communities will be explored.



Growing initiative of the communities and the limitation of externally defining 'authenticity', first of all, indicates that ethnic tourism needs be reconstructed based on the autonomy and the bottom-up endeavour of the community members. Peter Richards, who worked in the community-based tourism project with the Kayan community in Kayah state in Myanmar, emphasized the importance of the communities' autonomy in managing the tourism resource in the community-based tourism. *"Most important is that the community members 1) have a chance to pause and reflect on which aspects of local life they wish to maintain and 2) have the freedom and autonomy to be able to choose which aspects of local life they wish to change or develop."* (P. Richards, personal communication, December 14, 2020). As it has been discussed in the previous section, the villagers are no longer those who quietly sit as the passive recipients of tourism, but they are aware of their own value as 'tourist attraction' and ready to present themselves with their rediscovered authentic selves. The new form of sustainable relationship of the communities with tourism would, thus, start when they take initiative to make use of tourism on their own terms, whether it would be as a means of livelihood, or as a tool to express their cultural identity.

At the same time, in order to make tourism flexible for the change of the communities, there should be the freedom of the community members to choose their relationship with tourism. What has already been indicated by the experiences of other ethnic communities is that those younger generations, who once left their community and happened to rediscover its value from the outsiders' perspective, may become the contributors of the next phase of tourism development. The diversifying aspirations and identity of the individuals within the community, therefore, not necessarily indicate the decline of their 'traditional culture', but it may bring about the transformation of it, where the 'traditional culture' of the ethnic community become revitalized by the next generation with the newly discovered hybrid identity.

In order to collectively move towards the next form of sustainability in ethnic tourism, each of the actors, including the industry, tourists and the Thailand national government (also at local levels) is required to update their perspectives and practices. Furthermore, such shift of concept of sustainability also brings about a fundamental shift in power relations in ethnic tourism. In the next chapter, therefore, I will bring back a postcolonial perspective and conclude my research with the insights into the shift in power relations among key stakeholders.

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1. From objective to existential authenticity: shifting power relations

Throughout this research, I have taken a postcolonial approach to critically examine the power of different stakeholders to construct the image and knowledge of the Kayan people in the context of tourism. Based on the discussions in the previous chapter, I would like to conclude this research with providing some insights in the gradual shift of power relations among the key actors, that may also indicate the future direction of ethnic tourism.

The concept of 'authenticity' in the context of ethnic tourism seems to have long been considered in the sense of 'objective authenticity' among the tourism industry, the tourists and the host communities. People and culture of ethnic tribes have been presented in the tour descriptions with particular images such as 'exotic' and 'traditional', and tourists have gazed upon the people through such pre-established lens. Accordingly, the communities have made efforts to stage their daily spaces in a way that meets such external expectations for 'authentic' villages, despite the complexity and dynamically changing local environment. From a postcolonial perspective, however, such tourism practices seem to reflect unequal power relations at both structural and ideological level, where the external actors dominate the production of the image and knowledge of the local population, and the cultural resources of the local people are used in a way that fits to these external discourses.

Such traditional power relation in ethnic tourism, however, seems to be starting to change. In the course of playing out the 'staged authenticity', the communities seem to have internalized such external 'gaze' and rediscovered the new collective identity in this staged setting. In such situation, they seem to be no longer merely 'performing' a touristic image, but they are presenting the new authentic selves through tourism. When there is a growing initiative of the communities themselves to redevelop their identity in such dynamically changing environment, and convincingly present this new sense of authentic selves, it would no longer be realistic to keep projecting the old notion of 'authenticity' on them. The conventional tourism practices centring around the objective type of authenticity, therefore, seems to be reaching its limitation.

The shift is seen not only at the community side, but also in tourists. Nowadays, tourists are becoming more knowledgeable about a wider socio-economic situation of the Kayan people and aware that the traditional sense of purely 'authentic' village would not exist anymore. Also, tourists are increasingly conscious about the consequences of their behaviour and tend to choose the holiday activities that meet their own ethical standards. Moreover, as traveling abroad become easier and tourists become more experienced, a growing group of tourists are interested in not only satisfying their visual desires, but to create deeper emotional connections with their destinations.

Such shift in both the host communities and tourists, the key actors of both the production and consumption side, is gradually bringing a shift in the nature of their encounter. They are moving from playing a game of creating and discovering the 'staged authenticity', to co-producing the 'authentic connection' with each other. Consequently, the

distinction between the roles of the production and the consumption is becoming obscure. When the host and guest together generate this 'existential authenticity' through their sincere relationship, the host-guest power relation is likely to become more equal. The tourists are no longer obsessed by their own definitions of the 'authentic village' to judge the authenticity of the local environment, but they are aware of the hybridized nature of the local life and accept the way local communities define and present themselves. Thus, the 'authenticating right', the power to define the authenticity, is more equally distributed between these two sides. Promoting this 'existential authenticity', the authentic connection between the tourists and the communities, would be the key for the sustainability of ethnic tourism, as authentic relationship between people can always be generated, no matter how dynamically the situation, identities and the lifestyle of the local people continue to change.

Establishing the new form of ethnic tourism, that is based on this improved guest-host relation, requires not only the revision of the attitudes of the communities and the tourists, but also of the perspectives and practices of the different stakeholders involved in the processes. Based on the insights into the power dynamics among multiple stakeholders obtained in this research, in the next section, some recommendations are provided on how different actors can play a role with one another and synthesize their efforts to collectively reach the new and improved development of the Kayan tourism.

## 7.2. Recommendations

The main objective of this research was to bring the multiple actors involved in the Kayan tourism together, namely the travel industry, NGOs, the Thai government, the travel media, the tourists and the host communities, and investigate the power dynamics among these different actors. Based on the prior discussion (chapter 6) and the conclusions drawn, this section provides recommendations for further research.

First of all, the fact that I was unable to conduct fieldwork on the study site due to COVID-19 pandemic caused a considerable limitation to provide the subtle nuance of the attitudes, views and experiences of each stakeholder in the field. Especially, the development of the individual identity of the community members and its relation to the formation of collective ethnic identity and the response towards tourism is something that was difficult to address remotely within this research, while it will be a crucial point when discussing the future and sustainability of ethnic tourism. Therefore, more empirical research that focuses on the identity and the agency of individual community members will be recommended. In addition, while this research mainly looked at two villages in Mae Hong Son, considering the recent development of the commercial villages all around the country, research on home making and identity-building process of this type of villages would also add an important perspective to develop the further debate on ethnic tourism.

From the insights obtained through the multi-actor analysis of this research, I would also like to provide recommendations for the actors involved in tourism on the ground, on how each actor can develop their roles and engage

with each other to collectively make progress in ethnic tourism of the Kayan communities. First of all, for the national government, ethnic tourism is an important resource to attract quality tourists to transform the country into a more sustainable destination. In order to achieve this vision, it is crucial to build a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship with the ethnic communities. Taking into account the internal process of the communities discussed in chapter 6, the role of the government in turn would be to give security of their position and transfer the autonomy, allowing them to redevelop tourism on their own terms. While transferring the autonomy would not be without concerns, there are increasingly critical eyes of the international tourists that could also not be ignored. Sharing the responsibilities with the outside organizations that work with the communities on the ground would also be an effective direction in order to create the policies and regulations that better reflect the real condition of the communities.

Secondly, as the attitude of both the host communities and the tourists are changing, the tourism industry is required to further develop their role as a mediator to produce more personalized interactions between hosts and guests. In order to help tourists to open their mind and appreciate what the local people present, marketing of authenticity should be carefully considered. The tour operators are required to replace the entrenched representations of 'imaginary other' with more comprehensive descriptions of the contemporary situations of the local people. In addition, creating mutually beneficial tourism operation with the host communities would also be important. For example, discussing the fair division of responsibilities such as sharing the guiding role inside and outside of the village, and developing tour programs that include workshops and activities in the village, would provide the communities with more opportunities for direct interaction with tourists as well as to make income. Considering that a growing group of tourists are nowadays critical about the operational manners of the industry and seeking for more responsible and interactive experiences, this shift in marketing would also be the way forward to make their business sustainable.

Finally, the critical discourse of travel media has provoked ethical concerns in the potential tourists and has had a major influence on their behaviour. By emphasizing the problematic power relations in the local tourism practices, the critical articles have created the emotional conflict between the potential tourists and the actors involved in the production of tourism. To foster the mutual understanding between hosts and guests, the role of travel media would be to use its credibility to create the next level discussion, that highlights not only the long-standing controversy, but also the latest efforts of the communities and other actors that supports the positive shifts in the way tourism is organized in ethnic communities.



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## Appendices

### Appendix I: List of interviewees

Name	Representative of	Category	Means of communication
Alexandra Michat	EXO travel (Sustainability director)	DMC	Phone call
Kim Martin Rasmussen	EXO travel (Regional manager Thailand)	DMC	Email
Raphael Ansart	Panorama destination (former employee)	DMC	Phone call
Ju	Rose Garden Tour	Local tour operator	Email
Pay Yu	Huay Pu Keng village (community board member)	Community member	Phone call
Jaranya Daengnoy	CBT-i (Director)	Expert Local NGO	Phone call
Peter Richards	International Trade Centre (consultant)	expert	Video call
William Harnden	IECD (Former project development manager)	expert	Video call

## Appendix II: Example of Interview outline

### Jaranya Daengnoy (Expert, the director of CBT-i)

How CBT-I works with communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I saw the list of communities on website (<a href="https://cbt-i.org/community/">https://cbt-i.org/community/</a>). Are those the communities CBT-I worked with so far?</li> <li>- I am interested in where CBT-I sees the potential for successful CBT development in communities. Are there certain criteria to be met by communities before they can actually receive the training and support from CBT-I?</li> </ul>
Kayan communities from the perspective of CBT expert
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For my research, I am looking into the Kayan villages such as Huay Pu Keng &amp; Huay Sua Tao in Mae Hong Son, Baan Tong Luang in Chiang Mai, and Union Hilltribe village in Chiang Rai. I would like to ask whether you know those villages, what you know about those villages, and how you see the potential of CBT development in those villages.</li> <li>- If I understand correctly, CBT-I hasn't worked with Kayan communities so far yet. What do you think are the major obstacles for Kayan communities to develop CBT? Do you think the vulnerability of the community (e.g. lack of citizenship of community members/ living in the villages owned by businessmen, not community themselves) is a part of the constraints?</li> </ul>
Function of CBT-I for marketing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where in global market do you see the strong demand for CBT in Thailand?</li> <li>- What are the functions of CBT-I in terms of promoting CBT towards global market? What kind of companies/organizations does CBT-I partner with, and what does CBT-I do with them specifically?</li> </ul>

### Alexandra Michat (DMC, Sustainability director at EXO travel)

About EXO travel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who are the major clients of EXO travel?</li> <li>- Does EXO work mainly B to B, or B to C?</li> <li>- Which regions are the clients of EXO travel mainly from?</li> <li>- Do you find different level of awareness or commitment to sustainability among clients from different regions/countries?</li> </ul>
How EXO travel works with hilltribe communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does EXO travel work with Kayan community?</li> </ul>

- For what kind of clients does EXO travel usually arrange the excursion to hilltribe communities?
- Who are the local partners when conducting excursions to hilltribe communities?

#### About sustainability policy

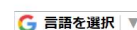
- How does EXO travel define sustainability in hilltribe tourism?
- Conducting tours in ethical/sustainable manner is also a process of selecting appropriate local suppliers. What does EXO travel see in selecting suppliers of hilltribe excursions, and are there any criteria for selection?
- Does EXO travel partner with local organizations for sustainable operation?

## Appendix III: Descriptions of the tour packages of the local tour operators

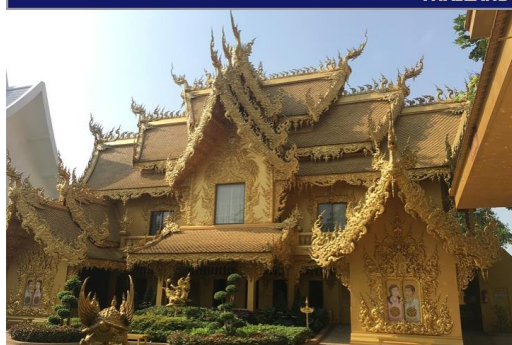
### Tour description 1. Thailand local tour (n.d.)



Tour Code: CNX-0010  
 Tour name : CHIANG MAI: Join Tour White temple-Bann dam museum-Golden Triangle-Long Neck  
 Tour type : Outside Chiang Mai  
 Start point : Chiang Mai



#### THAILAND LOCAL TOUR: Thailand tour with local price



Tour Code: : CNX-0010  
 Tour name : CHIANG MAI: Join Tour White temple-Bann dam museum-Golden Triangle-Long Neck  
 Tour type : Outside Chiang Mai  
 Start : Chiang Mai  
 Land Transfer  : Round trip

#### Booking enquiry

Servicing guest enquiries is an important aspect of the electronic communication with guests. Use the Booking Enquiry feature to send ...

E-mail: [thailandlocaltour19@gmail.com](mailto:thailandlocaltour19@gmail.com)



Tour booking urgent call: +668 65541515  
 Working hour Mon - Fri 08:30 - 20:00 u. | Sat - Sun 09.00 - 17.00 u.  
 e-Mail: [thailandlocaltour19@gmail.com](mailto:thailandlocaltour19@gmail.com)

TOUR PACKAGE RATES ARE QUOTE IN THAI BAHT

TOUR TYPE: CHIANG MAI: Join Tour White temple-Bann dam museum-Golden Triangle-Long Neck	Price Per Person Jan 01,2019- Dec 31,2020
White temple-Bann dam museum-Golden Triangle-Long Neck (Adult rate per person)	1,350
CHILD RATES	PRICE PER Child
White temple-Bann dam museum-Golden Triangle-Long Neck (Child rate per person)	1,150



#### TOUR / PACKAGE INFORMATION

##### CHIANG MAI: Join Tour White temple-Bann dam museum-Golden Triangle-Long Neck

- Destination: Thailand (Chiang Rai)
- Start City: Chiang Mai
- Tour Type: Private / Join in Group
- Duration: Full Day (7.00-18.00)

## ITINERARY:

07.00 - 07.30 am. Pickup from your hotel depart to ==>

- - Hot Spring
- - White Temple (Rong Khun Temple)
- - Baan Dam Museum (Black Museum)
- - Visit Long neck village
- - Golden Triangle (Where Thailand , Laos & Myanmar meet)

### 1. White Temple (Wat Rong Khun)

Rong Khun Temple is unique from other temples in that it has been constructed entirely in a radiant white color with sparkling reflections from mirrored glass mosaics embedded in the white plaster. The temple is the idea of Mr. Chalermchai Kositpipat, one of Thailand most renowned artists, who wanted to build a temple all in white to signify the purity of Lord Buddha. The artist continues to puts his religious belief and desire to enrich Buddhism in Thailand into his contemporary art design.

Rong Khun). The great standing Buddha, also white, standing in front of the back, is also superb. Between the White Temple, the Black House and the Blue Temple, Chiang Rai is definitely the city of colorful temples!

### 2. Bann Dam Museum

207 Km. drive from the middle of Chiang Mai city to Baan Dam (Black House) is the unique creation of national artist, Thawan Duchanee. Part art studio, part museum, part home, Baan Dam is an eclectic mix of traditional northern Thai buildings interspersed with some outlandish modern designs. Baan Dam is a thought-provoking combination of sanuk, the surreal and the sombre and whilst it's fair to say that some of the artwork and themes on display won't be to everybody's liking, I'd still recommend checking out the Black House if you are visiting Chiang Rai.

### 4. Golden Triangle

The Golden Triangle is the area where the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar meet at the confluence of the Ruak and Mekong rivers. The name "Golden Triangle" coined by the CIA is commonly used more broadly to refer to an area of approximately 950,000 square kilometres (367,000 sq mi) that overlaps the mountains of the three adjacent countries.

Along with Afghanistan in the Golden Crescent, it has been one of the most extensive opium-producing areas of Asia, and of the world, since the 1950s. Most of the world's heroin came from the Golden Triangle until the early 21st century when Afghanistan became the world's largest producer.

### 5. Karen Long Neck

Visiting one of the numerous Karen Long Neck villages in Thailand is one of the most exotic experiences on the planet. The mystery and beauty that sound the tradition of using brass rings for exaggerated jewelry is something better seen in person than in a book. We had ethical questions on if it these hill tribe villages would feel like human zoos, but thankfully we decided to visit anyway. It is a real-life National Geographic Magazine experience to have to see to believe.

#### INCLUSION:

- Round trip transfer from and to your hotel
- English tour guide
- Admission fees
- Lunch
- Insurance

#### EXCLUSION:

- All others expenses are not mention in program

#### CHILD POLICY

- Infant 1-3 years old will be free of charge (Sitting with parent)
- Children 4-10 years old Child rate
- Children 11++ Same price as Adult

#### BOOKING CONDITION & POLICY:

- Booking within 24 hrs. before travel date
- Cancellation before travel date 24 hours free of charge
- No show & Cancellation same date of travel charge 100%

Payment:

- Full Amount on reservation confirmation or before 24 hours before travel date

*Tour description 2. AP good@travel (n.d.)*



## HALF DAY LONG-NECK HILL TRIBE AND OTHER HILL TRIBES

TOUR CODE: AP-07

**Highlights:** Long-neck hill tribe and other hill tribes - Orchid and Butterfly Farm or Elephant PooPooPaper Park.

**Details:** Half Day Sightseeing Tour

**Tour operated by** : AP GOOD @ TRAVEL (Private Tour only)

**Tour duration** : 4 Hours

**Tour departing** : Departs daily on a private basis

**Pickup time** : 08:30 a.m. or 01:30 p.m. at your hotel lobby, please advise us in advance on your booking.

**Pickup & drop-off conditions:**

- Free pickup & drop-off for hotels located in Chiang Mai city area only.
- Additional charges will apply for locations outside Chiang Mai city.
- If you are unsure about the specific of your hotel or resort location, you can e- mail or call us upfront.

**Itinerary:**

We depart from your hotel to **Long-neck hill tribe village and other hill tribes** such as Lahu, Padong and Hmong at Baan Tong Luang. Baan Tong Luang Hill Tribe Cultural Preservation Village, advertised as an Eco-Agriculture Project. Civilization and materialism change their lives from hill tribes who live with a peaceful life, behind the mountains, to people who live rush in the city. Some cultures are almost gone from the minds of the new generation and no one knows when it will be forgotten. After this, we continue to visit an **Orchid and Butterfly Farm or Elephant POOPOOPAPER Park**. You can choose one of two routes.

**Activity plan:**

08:30 a.m. Pick up from your hotel in Chiang Mai  
Drive 45 minutes to Baan Tong Luang Village  
Visit Long-neck hill tribe and other hill tribes, walk around the village to see their lifestyle  
Visit Elephant POOPOOPAPER Park or Orchid Farm and butterfly Farm  
Return to your hotel in Chiang Mai  
12:00 - 12:30 p.m. Arrive at your Hotel in Chiang Mai

**Remark:** Program may be subject to changewithout notice due to available schedule and any other unforeseen reasons. All timings are approximate.



SERVICE TYPE	PRICES PER PERSON IN THAI BAHT				
	1 PAX	2-3 PAX	4-5 PAX	6-7 PAX	8-9 PAX
Private Tour (4 hours)	3,500	2,000	1,650	1,500	1,400

**What's included:**

- Private air conditioned van or car with Licensed driver
- English speaking tour guide with TAT license. Other languages are available on request
- All entrance fees / tickets as mentioned in the program
- All activities as mentioned in the program
- Bottled drinking water in our car
- Travel accident insurance

**What's not included:**

- Your personal expenses
- All kind of alcohols & soft drinks
- Other optional tours

**Extra options:**

We carry a list of the extra options which can be added to your program. If you are interested in adding one or more to your program, please let us know and we will tell you if it is practical and what the additional fee will be.

**Tiger Kingdom, Monkey, Snake and ATV**

**How to wear:**

- Free Style

**What to bring:**

- Camera
- Sunscreen cream
- Sunglasses
- Insect repellent
- Hat or cap

**Giving tip:**

- If you are happy with the level of service you've been provided by our tour guide and other local suppliers.

**Transportation:**

We only employ safe and careful drivers and use the most modern and comfortable air conditioned cars or vans. Transportation will be arranged depending on the size of your group.

Please note during peak holiday periods we often need to contract vehicles to meet the high demand. Occasionally the make and model will be different from that described above but we do ensure all contracted vehicles offer the same comfort and safety level.

**Tour description 3. Rose Garden Tours (n.d.)**

MHS.3 9.00 - 17.00	Hilltribes tours	1,700	1,900
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meo hilltribe villages. (Yod Doi.about 1,250 meter)</li> <li>• Long neck village at Nai - Soi.</li> <li>• Long ear village.</li> <li>• Karen people</li> <li>• View point</li> </ul>		



### MHS.3 \*\*\* HILL TRIBES TOUR

Start from your hotel at 9 a.m. to drive for about 1 1/2 hours to a Meo village passing through hillsides of tropical rainforest. In the village we can witness the traditional lifestyle and farming methods of these people whose animist beliefs and culture remain firmly adhered to by them. We return to Mae Hong Son for Lunch. In the afternoon we shall visit the longneck, Long Ear and Red Karen village of Hua Sua Tao, described in tour D.

Time : Approximately 7 1/2 hours.

Tour description 4. Sun Leisure World (n.d.)

## Chiang Rai Day Trip from Chiang Mai including Golden Triangle & Long Neck Tribe with Boat

0 Reviews

Thailand, Chiang Mai

5% Cash Back Offer



from 1534 THB

Get Cash Back 76.7 THB

Lowest Price Guarantee

Select Date and Travelers

Date

Number of pax

Check Availability



14:00:00 hours (Approx.)



Hotel pickup offered



Mobile ticket



Offered in: E

## Highlight

Visiting a one of the numerous Karen Long Neck villages in Thailand is one of the most exotic experiences on the planet. The mystery and beauty that sound the tradition of using brass rings for exaggerated jewelry is something better seen in person than in a book. We had ethical questions on if it these hill tribe villages would feel like human zoos, but thankfully we decided to visit anyway. It is a real life National Geographic Magazine to have to see to believe.

### Include



- An English speaking tour guide
- An air-conditioned car or minivan
- Admission fees ticket to white temple
- Buffet Lunch
- Include boat trip fees and tax to laos border (sit boat around 20 minutes)

### Exclude



#### **Child Policy:**

Child 3- 7 years old

Child height over 120cm will be charge as adult rate

#### **Pick up area:**

Chiang Mai City OR Near Thape gate

### Tour Description



#### **Itinerary:**

07:00- 07:15 After transportation around 1 hour, you will arrive at Mae Khachan Hotspring, as a breakpoint, with available toilet and restaurant services. Let's take a view on the highest geyser in Thailand.

- Departure to Rong Khun Temple. Explore the stunning architecture, white building adorned with glass.
- Departure for the Golden Triangle, Chiang Saen in Chiang Rai Province. We will take a lunch break here.
- Visiting the Golden Triangle, the northernmost region of Thailand.
- Visit the laos border around 35-40 minutes ,there will be a boat riding across the Khong River to laos border
- After finish a meal and sightseeing in the Golden Triangle
- Sightseeing Wat Prathat Phu Khao
- Departure for the hill tribes village and visit the Karen Long Neck tribal village.
- Way back to Chiang Mai. It will take around 3 hours

20:00-21:00 -you will arrive to Chiang Mai, reach your hotel safely.

**\*\*Please Bring your passport \*\***