

**CASE STUDY ON
THE EFFECTS OF TOURISM
ON CULTURE AND
THE ENVIRONMENT**

THAILAND

by Chupinit Kesmanee and Kulawadee Charoensri



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P R E F A C E

The present publication in the series on Culture and Tourism in Asia is devoted to the Effects of Tourism on Culture and the Environment in Thailand. The "case studies" were undertaken as part of a project jointly formulated by Indonesia and Thailand in 1992 and based on a research design developed by experts on culture and tourism in a meeting held in Cipanas, West Java, Indonesia from 22-24 July 1992.

The project comes within the purview of the "World Decade for Cultural Development" (1988 - 1997) proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which ushered in a new era of sustained activities in the field of culture both at national and international level. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) being assigned the role of lead agency for the Decade has sponsored the project.

Over the past decade Asia has witnessed tremendous social, cultural, political and technological changes. The rapid growth of tourism on large scale in some countries in the region has been a significant agent of these, not all very welcome, changes. Like in most developing countries of the world, tourism in many Asian countries is also conceived as a powerful means of attracting the coveted foreign exchange and an easy means of boosting the national economy. It brings investment, creates jobs, and promotes sales of crafts and local artifacts, etc. Accordingly the cultural heritage sites, performing arts, crafts and natural resources have all been exploited in attracting the tourists. This approach, however, reduces the cultural heritage and the environmental assets to an economic commodity minimizing or sometime completely ignoring their socio-cultural values.

Moreover converging of a large number of tourists of different background on a historic monument or site and location of tourist facilities on the cultural heritage sites have often resulted not only in altering of the original features but also in all kind of pollution damaging or even destroying the fabric of the monuments and works of art. The zeal of collecting mementoes, particularly from the archaeological sites, has also led to vandalism of many sites. Tourism, viewed from another perspective, is also a factor of acculturation which affects attitudes, alters popular beliefs, changes mentalities

and spreads new concepts relating to work, money, and human relationship. Sometimes it also destroys the ties that bind people to their faith, religion and aesthetics. In the wake of accumulation of restaurants, bars, discos and other entertainments come disturbing public behaviour, drunkenness, vandalism, crime, indecency, etc. The youth in many cases emulate the visitors behaviour and social conflicts brew. On the other hand tourism, by bringing people of different cultures together, provides a direct contact between them and thus serves as a powerful means of diffusion of world cultures. It provides an opportunity of friendly and peaceful dialogue leading to better understanding between people and nations. It can build bridges and create friendship between nations leading to establishing of peace - the penultimate goal of the United Nations.

Sporadic studies on various aspects of tourism have been carried out previously but there are serious gaps in existing knowledge on tourism in Asia. There is a need to review these studies and evaluate their impact. The project aims at assessing the present state of tourism, and studying its impacts on culture and the environment in participating countries in Asia. The findings of the case studies are expected to lead to formulation of practicable guidelines which will promote sustainable tourism: a tourism that encourages better understanding of a people and respect for their culture, and protects natural and social environment of the host country.

The present volume is the result of the researches undertaken in Thailand. Khun Chupinit Kesmanee and Khun Kulawadee Charoensri deserve to be congratulated for their sincere efforts to collect, review and analyze the data. The views and opinions expressed in the case study represent the views and opinions of the author and not of UNESCO. The recommendations in Chapter V may be found useful and utilized by the interested agencies. It is our sincere hope that the case study will encourage further research on the impacts of tourism on culture and the environment.

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July 1995

A B S T R A C T

In keeping with the growth of tourism worldwide, the trekking industry in the north of Thailand is on the rise. In 1992, it was reported that there were more than 200 trekking company outlets in Chiang Mai.

It is most often believed that tourism can help generate supplementary income at the local, grass-roots level. It is also argued, however, that tourism causes the deterioration of local culture, results in inequitable income distribution and leads to dependence upon outsiders.

From this study, it was found that the impact of trekking tourism varies from locale to locale. Tourism is invariably an encounter between two different cultures. But this does not invariably provide the opportunity to the hosts and the visitors to learn from each other. Instead, contact between the tourist and the villager is often largely mediated by the tour guides who play the role of cultural broker. The distribution of income earned from trekking in a local community may not always be widely distributed. The problems of drug addiction and prostitution are not always the consequence of trekking tours, but rather of weak village leadership. Data collected from the three villages studied indicate that they all face economic problems which are closely associated with a scarcity of land resources. The way in which trekking tours are organized also threatens the environment by causing damage to the farmers' fields, using up scarce bamboo resources and contributing to pollution by improper disposal of waste.

The recommendations in the study are made in order to contribute to the development of a sustainable trekking tourism. Cooperation among all parties involved will be important. Community organizations must be involved in planning and servicing the visitors. Thus, it is important that the tour agencies should work hand-in-hand with the community organizations. This will lead to a situation wherein tourists can gain an understanding of the interrelationship between the environment and the local people and their culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team would like to express its gratitude to Philip Dearden, Jean Michaud and Mika Toyota for their kind permission to share their data. Special thank goes to the Office of the National Culture Commission for its well-thought out initiation of this research project.

Thanks to Khun Yi Khongrai, a Karen young man who offered his assistance in many ways in the field. Without his help, the research team would have been left in despair and unable to meet the project's time deadline. Many thanks also go to the Karen, Lahu and Akha peoples of the three villages in Mae Taeng District where the study was undertaken.

Last, but not least, thanks to Khun Sirinant Sukanit at the Tribal Research Institute for her efforts in producing the report of this study. It is hoped that the information presented herein will be useful to all parties concerned and that trekking tours can be improved, becoming a more sustainable enterprise.

Chupinit Kesmanee
Kulawadee Charoensri

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I. INTRODUCTION

Overview of the situation

As a consequence of worldwide interaction through foreign trade accompanied by modern communication, international tourism has risen in popularity, hand-in-hand with national economic growth. Tourism has become an industry in the sense that it is institutionalized and constitutes one of the major sources of revenue from overseas. In 1988, it was reported that there were approximately 389 million tourists globally who generated revenues of approximately US\$194 billion (Tourism Business 1988: 68). Three years later, in 1991, it was estimated that 430 million tourists travelling outside their own countries generated about US\$250 billion (World Tourism Organization 1991: 1).

The tourism industry in developing countries is expected to bring in the needed foreign exchange, and to create jobs, therefore helping to upgrade the standard of living of the people in the host countries. The United Nations estimates that poor countries earned about US\$55 billion from tourism in 1988 (O'Grady 1990: 6). Tourism also provides opportunities for people of different cultures to meet and interact. With regard to tourism in developing countries, the tourists typically come from countries which are more affluent than their hosts. Thus the two cultures that meet are more often at opposites of the economic spectrum. This may lead to misunderstanding and therefore, conflict. It has been observed that income generated by tourism is not equitably shared. The larger portion of income goes to the multinational companies who own and control the industry (*ibid.* 7; *Business Time* 31 August 1981). This implies that the local people who are located at the bottom of the scale of income distribution, would normally receive the lesser share although they are the source of tourist attraction.

Tourism in Thailand has been growing for two decades. In 1971, 638,738 foreign tourists visited Thailand and spent 2,214 million. Over the decade between 1971-1981, the rate of increase in tourists averaged 12.2 per cent per annum (Environment Research Institute 1982: 33). Between 1986-1988, the increase in the number of tourists was 20.2 per cent per annum on

average (Tourism Business, op. cit.: 68). Although in recent years, Thailand has witnessed a gradual decline of tourist growth rates, the absolute number of tourists remains high as shown in the following table:

Table 1: Annual Number and Percentage of Foreign Tourists and Income Derived from Tourism

Year	Foreign Tourists		Income from Tourism
	Number (mil.)	Increase (%)	(million Baht)
1987	3.48	+23.6	50,024
1988	4.23	+21.5	78,859
1989	4.81	+13.7	96,385
1990	5.29	+10.2	110,572
1991	5.08	-4.0	100,004

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand 1992

Over the years, tourism growth in Thailand which was originally focused on Bangkok and the sea resort of Pattaya spread out to other up-country destinations. Chiang Mai province, which has developed numerous facilities, and diverse tourist attractions, is now considered one of the major tourist spots in the country. In 1986 there were 710,207 tourists, both of Thai and foreign origin, coming to Chiang Mai (Tourism Authority of Thailand 1987).

Trekking tours are one of the major tour enterprises organized in the north of Thailand. In general, Thai trekkers favor visiting natural attractions while foreign trekkers prefer to combine natural beauty and exotic cultural experiences on their routes (Pusatee et al. 1992: 3-9). This implies that foreign tourists have more direct contact with the local people than do Thai tourists. As for the annual number of trekking tourists in Thailand at the time of this survey (1991), it was reported that there were about 120,000, of whom 89.5 per cent came to the north; namely, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son provinces (ibid: 3-15).

Tourism is generally regarded as a factor in boosting economic growth. However, tourism can also be a factor contributing to the deterioration of local culture, inequitable income distribution and dependence

upon outsiders (be they the local private agencies, foreign or multinational companies).

Nevertheless, neither the positive nor the negative agents of tourism can be ignored and denied their importance in affecting the socio-economic development of a region. To cope with this reality means that tourism should become a process which encourages participation at all levels. This should include the local people in the planning, implementation and profit-sharing associated with tourism development. An alternative and more sustainable tourism is what should be looked for, in order that all parties concerned benefit from the enterprise and that better understanding between the tourists and their hosts can be achieved.

Research Objectives

This study is designed to achieve at least three objectives. First, it investigates factors contributing to the impact of tourism on indigenous local cultures and the environment. Second, it explores the interplay between local people, their culture and their environment. Finally, recommendations are made in order to promote sustainable tourism while preserving the local culture and environment.

Research Rationality

Of all the various types of tourism in Thailand, the trekking tour has been selected for this case study in order to learn about its impact on the local people, their culture and environment. The fact that trekking tours allow for a direct encounter between the tourists and their local hosts suits the aims of these research interests.

The local people who are the subject of this study comprise of ethnic minority highlanders who are known collectively as "hill tribes". These highlanders live a by-and-large traditional lifestyle. The tourists, on the other hand, are mostly foreigners from developed countries. This leads to an encounter of two groups of people whose cultures are very different. The way trekking tours are organized in the north of Thailand imposes direct contact of the two cultures as tourists are expected to stay overnight in villages.

This research has been designed to learn from the villagers' perspective. As the ethnic minorities whose socio-economic as well as political status is confined to the peripheral sector of the larger Thai society,

opportunity is relatively limited for them to voice their own problems and needs. This study offers a chance to the local hill tribe peoples to express opinions of the tourist industry growing in their midst.

The research team is aware that the information presented in this report does not provide a complete picture of the situation because neither the views of the tour guides nor the tourists have been included. However, we feel our "emic" interpretation is justified by the fact that the hill tribes are compelled to play both the role of object of tourist attraction and to be the passive recipients in the decision-making process of the trekking industry. For better or worse, it is, above all, the local people who have to bear the consequences.

Research Methodology

1. Study Villages

The sample sites for this study are located along one of the most popular trekking routes in Amphoe Mae Taeng, Chiang Mai Province. The area is inhabited by several ethnic groups, namely, Karen, Lahu, Akha, Shan and lowland Thai. A trek offers tourists with not only a variety of ethnic encounters, but also a visit to a natural geyser. In addition, elephant rides and rafting along the Mae Taeng River cater to the more adventurous tourists. In this study, three villages were selected to represent three different ethnic groups: Karen, Lahu and Akha:

- Village A is located in Tambon Kud Chang, Amphoe Mae Taeng, Chiang Mai Province. The villagers are Karen of the Skaw subgroup.
- Village B is a Red Lahu village located in the same tambon as Village A.
- Village C, also in Tambon Kud Chang, is a village populated by a combination of Lahu Bala and Lo Me Akha. Two households are lowland Thai.

To enter the area from Chiang Mai town, one takes the main road to Fang district, but makes a left turn to Pai district at the Mae Malai junction. From the road to Pai district between the village of Pa Pae and Mae Lao, another road branches out to the right leading to Ban Pong Duad, a lowland Thai village. One of the popular trekking routes in this area starts from Ban Pong Duad. The trekkers reach Ban Pong Noi, a Karen village, in less than an

hour. From Pong Noi, the group can either walk the left track to the Karen village of Pa Kluai or take the right track to Village A, the study village. Either route takes approximately an hour. It takes another hour to walk from Village A to the elephant camp at Ban Pang Kha (Karen). The tourists then take an elephant ride and cross the Mae Taeng river to Ban Pha Ngerb (Lahu) in a quarter of an hour; or they can go fifteen minutes further to Village B (Lahu), the study village. From either Pha Ngerb or Village B, travellers enjoy rafting along the Mae Taeng River to Ban Sob Kai (lowlander Thai). Some tour groups end their journey at Sob Kai, while others spend a few more hours walking to Village C (Lahu and Akha), the last study village on this trekking route, and then head back to Sob Kai to complete their tour. (Fig. 2, p. 12).

2. Data Collection and Analysis

The research team spent three months from June to August 1993 working in the field to cover the three villages mentioned above. The techniques of participant observation and in-depth interview were applied throughout the field investigation. Questionnaires were designed to collect data at the village level. This was done by interviewing key informants in the selected villages. Further information was derived from in-depth interviews. Observations were also recorded in the field-notes. Special attention was paid to the characteristics of the tourists as well as their guides and their relationship with the villagers.

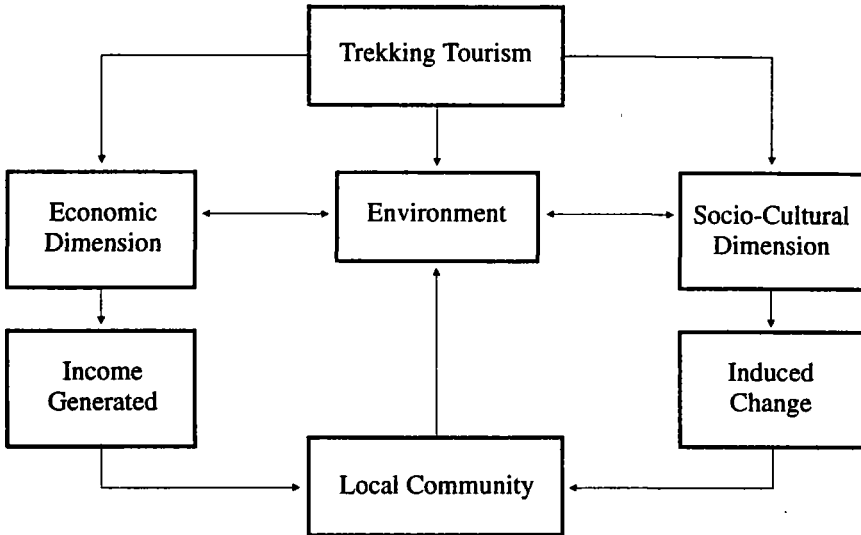
In constructing the conceptual framework of this study, the research team spent considerable time reviewing existing documentaries and literature. This made it possible to compare the findings in other studies with those from the fieldwork undertaken in this study. Efforts were made to emphasize the analysis of data from the villagers' perspective. Thus, both "emic" and "etic" interpretations were applied throughout the investigation.

Conceptual Framework

Tourism, in a broader sense, is an ancient phenomenon. Pilgrims visiting religious centers or Australian aborigines visiting sacred places are examples of traditional "tourism". This leads Nash (1978: 35) to conclude that:

"It seems clear, therefore, that tourism is not totally confined to industrial or modern society; but it also is true that only in such a society does it also become a pervasive social phenomenon."

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Trekking Tourism



Among other factors, including improved transport and communication facilities, increased productivity is a factor contributing to the development of tourism because increased productivity leads to increased leisure time. Tourism in the developing world is, however, a controversial subject. On the positive side, tourism is regarded as a source of substantial income generated within a country as well as in a local village (Dearden 1991 and 1992). From the villages surveyed it has been found that 79.3 per cent of villagers are engaged in tourism related occupations (Pusatee et al. 1992: 6). In fact, tourism has been considered one of the major sources of foreign exchange since the 1960s. Tourism is also thought to spread economic activity into areas which are spatially peripheral and marginal in economic terms (Hitchcock et al. 1993: 17). However, tourism has been criticized widely for its negative socio-cultural as well as environmental impact (e.g. O'Grady 1990). Furthermore, data drawn from a case study of trekking tours in a Hmong community, also in north Thailand, reveals that the extra cash income earned from the trekkers within the village ends up in the hands of middlemen who are mostly not from the Hill Tribe (Michaud 1993: 9). Thus, while admitting that economic opportunities for people in peripheral areas are provided by tourism, Toyota (1993: 9-10) proposes that:

"...any form of tourism creates a complex series of social and cultural impacts on societies, and should not be assessed only in economic terms. Moreover, tourism may also differentially affect different groups of people in terms of the differentiation of economic, political, and social power and position in the society ... In this sense, cost-benefit analysis does not help much, as it is highly dependent upon form whose perspective costs and benefits are being assessed."

Avoiding the expansion of the tourism industry is, however, next to impossible. The question that begs an answer is how to ensure benefit to all parties concerned.

II. ETHNIC HIGHLANDERS AND TREKKING TOURISM

Who Are the Ethnic Highlanders?

Thailand is the homeland of a wide range of various ethnic groups. The northern highlands in particular, contain the greatest number of ethnic groups. Geographically the northern region is characterized by a mountainous terrain. Thus, local people of the north are identified, according to their geographical location, as highland or lowland dwellers. Although there are a number of ethnic groups residing in the northern lowlands, with Thai/Tai in the majority, they are collectively called "Khon Muang" (town people). Whereas those who live in the highlands are referred to as "Chao Khao" (hill people) which is translated into "hill tribe" in English. According to the government, the term "Chao Khao" only officially covers nine major ethnic groups: Karen, Hmong, Yao, Lahu, Lisu, Akha, Lua, H'tin and Khamu. However, the hunting and gathering people who call themselves "Mla Bri"¹ (jungle people) are also considered a hill tribe. Actually, apart from the above-mentioned groups, other ethnic categories, for example, Shan² and Chinese Yunnanese, can be found in the northern mountains of Thailand.

1. Population and Distribution

According to the statistical data compiled by the Tribal Research Institute in 1992, the nine major tribal groups have populations as shown in the following table:

These hill peoples are distributed geographically across 20 provinces from the northernmost Chiang Rai to the central region as far south as Prachuap Khiri Khan. Of the 20 provinces inhabited by the hill tribes, Chiang Mai, Tak, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Rai and Nan form a group of provinces having the greatest highland population, with 56,865 highlanders living in Nan up to 142,251 in Chiang Mai (Tribal Research Institute, 1992).

-
1. Mla Bri are popularly known as "Spirits of the Yellow Leaves" people.
 2. A subgroup of Thai/Tai speaking people.

Table 2: Highland Population in Thailand

Ethnic Group	No. of Villages	No. of Household	No. of persons	%
Karen	2,120	55,406	292,814	51.07
Hmong	237	11,775	91,537	15.96
Lahu	410	11,334	57,144	9.97
Yao	173	4,705	34,545	6.02
Akha	196	5,728	32,041	5.59
H'tin	115	4,450	25,613	4.47
Lisu	124	4,124	22,743	3.97
Khamu	31	1,530	8,705	1.52
Lua	40	1,464	8,227	1.43
Total	3,446	100,516	573,369	100.00

Source: Tribal Research Institute, 1992 (based on data from the 1985-88 census)

Employing a number of economic strategies and land use systems, the highlanders can be classified into two major groups: the first, who are called "pioneer swiddeners", comprises the Hmong, Yao, Lahu, Lisu and Akha; the second group composed of the Karen, H'tin, Khamu and Lua are called "established swiddeners". The latter use a field rotational system of agriculture. Those who have traditional expertise in opium-poppy cultivation belong to the first group, while members of the second group usually possess the technical know-how of terraced paddy fields and small-scale irrigation.

2. Major Problems in the Highlands

In order to understand the highland situation and its related problems, it is important to pay due regard to the rationale for government development intervention. This has been based primarily on three key concepts: halting shifting cultivation, eradication of opium production and national security (see also Renard 1986: 4; Radley 1986: 82; Tapp 1990: 31).

As seen from one perspective, these three concerns are the source of all problems, and the solutions seem to be straightforward. If shifting cultivation leads to frequent relocation of settlements and therefore, forest destruction, to solve the problem, it is necessary to introduce sedentary farming into the highland communities. Thus, permanent landuse is equivalent to permanent settlement.

Cash crop replacement programs have long been attempted in order to eradicate opium-poppy cultivation. Unfortunately, the cash crops introduced are mostly monocultural. The resulting soil degradation has led more and more highland farmers to adopt chemical fertilizers. The comment made by a lowland farmer reflects very well the emergence of a new problem:

"For poppies, the hilltribes need only a small piece of land. They can be grown only once a year. And they don't require the use of any pesticides...for cabbages, however, the hill tribe people need to clear a lot of land to make it profitable. They use rotating sprinklers to shower the cabbage plots all day [with water fertilizers and pesticide] and they grow cabbages all year round... Our buffaloes get sores if they swim in the creeks. We get diarrhoea and dizziness if we drink the water" (Bangkok Post, 19 February 1990).

In addition, after the introduction of cash crops, the overall economic situation in a highland community still does not seem to improve substantially. This is reaffirmed by the data collected in the course of fieldwork in several hill tribe villages in Pang Ma Pha sub-district of Mae Hong Son province:

"In terms of economic development in PMP [Pang Ma Pha] rice deficiencies are still a major problem reported by the villagers. Cash crops introduced by different agencies, and by brokers, so far do not offer highland families a secure income. Marketing of various farm products, especially fruits and vegetables, is a chronic problem for many farming families contributing to economic difficulties, including debt. Price fluctuations from year to year leave farmers uncertain as to whether or not they will get a reasonable income from the sale of produce" (Chupinit and Gebert 1993: 72-73).

The participation of some of the hill tribes in the communist insurgency a few decades ago led the Thai Government to conclude that because these hill people have recently migrated into Thailand, they lack loyalty to the Thai State. This was seen to pose a threat to national security. Thus, it was government policy to instill in the hill peoples a sense of belonging to the Nation. This was done mainly through education and other government services in order to "win the people's hearts". Although this policy was successful, concern for national security, still persists and is

reflected in the reluctance and/or delay by the government to grant the hill peoples, citizenship and property titles.

All these problems are closely related. The members of a highland family do not feel economically secure; their farmland may be taken away because of reforestation policy; the lack of citizenship inhibits their access to land ownership. Last, but not least, the family is subject to relocation at any time.

As the process of development accelerates, these already marginal people risk becoming more marginalized. This leads some people to hope that tourism may be able to offer an opportunity for the hill people to share in the benefits of development.

Government Policy on Tourism

In 1924, a public relations sector was set up within the administrative structure of the Thai Railways in order to assist foreign tourists and to promote Thailand to potential tourists overseas. A tourism promotion plan was first articulated in 1936 which consisted of three aspects: (1) public relations to draw the tourists in; (2) entertaining the tourists while in country; and (3) maintenance of tour spots and accommodations.

In 1949, after the interruption of World War II, the Thai Government revived the promotion of tourism and placed the office in charge within the Department of Broadcasting. In 1959, the same year the Hill Tribes Welfare Committee was set up, the Tourism Organization of Thailand (TOT) was also established as an independent agency assigned mainly with promotional work. The growth of the tourism industry was so impressive that two decades ago the government declared that:

"The Government will support tourism seriously because tourism employs people. The Government will promote a bureau of tourism and enlarge the role of tourism. The Government will encourage development to provide employment opportunities for rural people. Tourist services will be improved in rural areas to promote this development (Manus et al., op cit: appendix 1)."

In 1979, the law on Tourism in Thailand was enacted to reorganize TOT into the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). In 1992, Parliament passed a new law on tour businesses and tour guides. Under this law TAT is

vested with the mandate to promote and control tour business and the tour guide profession.

The current policy of tourism announced by the Government through TAT are the following:

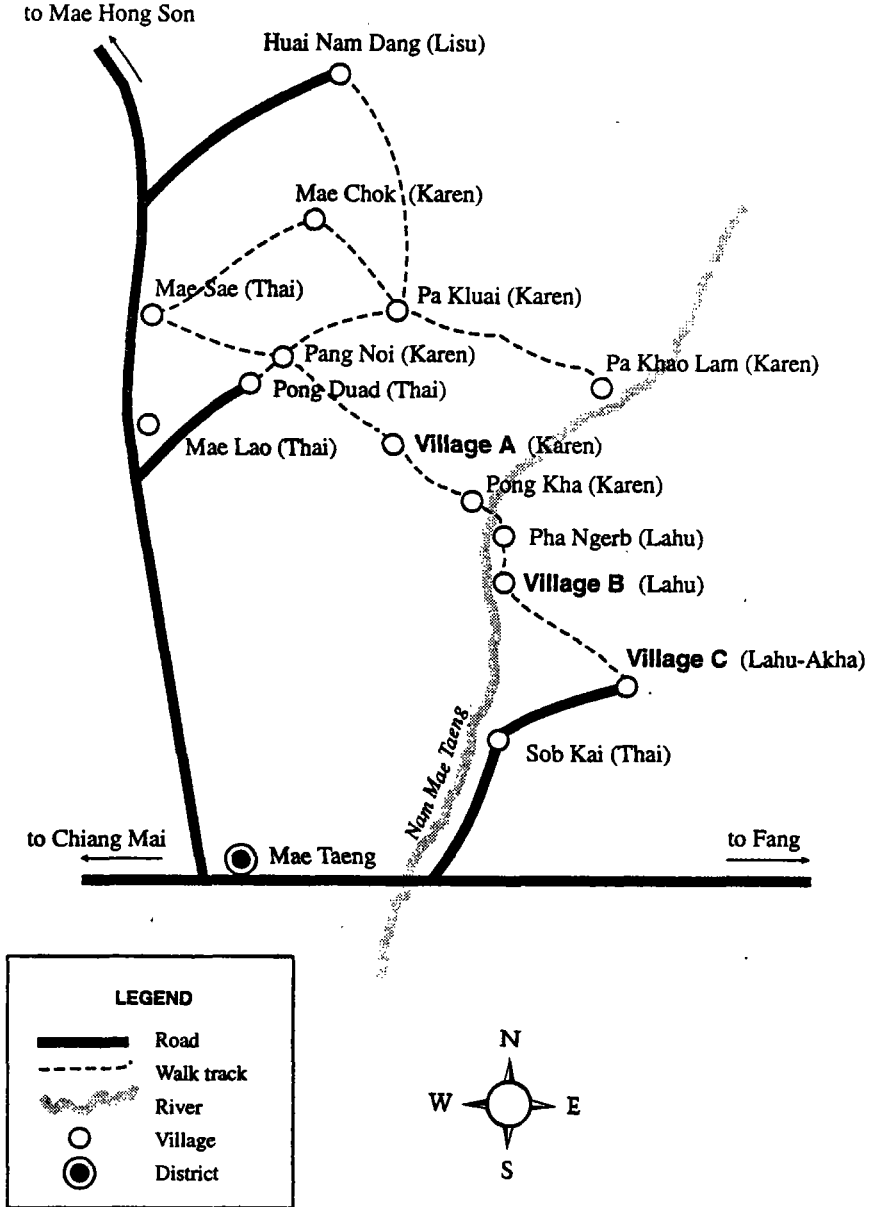
1. to promote and encourage the foreign tourists to come to Thailand in order to bring in foreign currencies to quicken the economic growth at large;
2. to expand the tour sites into the local areas to ensure the distribution of income derived from tourism to all regions;
3. to preserve and revitalize the cultural assets, natural resources and environment in order to best maintain the Thai identity;
4. to develop facilities and services for tourism to meet with the proper standard in order to impress the tourists more pronouncedly;
5. to increase security measures for the tourists of both Thai and foreign origins to enable them to travel to all destinations in Thailand with confidence in physical and property safety;
6. to promote tourism within the country among Thai people, especially the low income group and the youth in order to provide welfare from tourism to the local people;
7. to create the local human resources for tourism industry and;
8. to promote the people's participation in wider activities related to the development of tourism (Tourism Authority of Thailand, N.D.: 1-3).

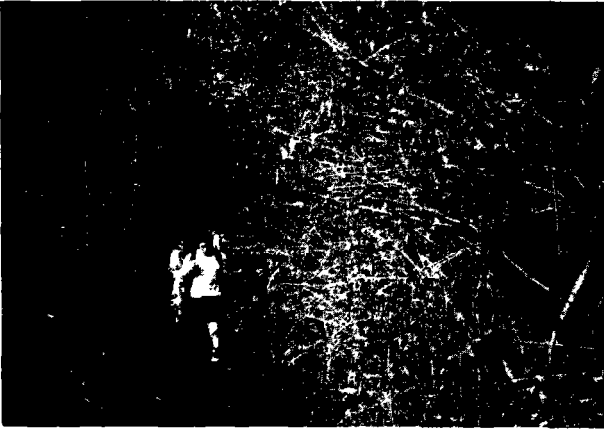
In 1987, it was recorded that approximately 3.4 million tourists came to Thailand, spending 49,000 million baht, as a result of the promotion of "Visit Thailand Year" announced by the government. Government after government continuously and strongly promoted tourism.

Trekking Tourism in the Highlands

According to Dearden, trekking in northern Thailand started twenty-five years ago (Dearden 1992: 221). At about that time trekking tours were confined to certain areas mainly within Chiang Mai, and the number of tour agencies was limited. Since the outbreak of fighting against communism infiltration in the north of Thailand in 1967, the government declared many

Figure 2. Map of Trekking Routes in Mae Taeng District





*Trekking
in Mae Taeng area.*



Elephant riding



Rafting

areas in the region as war zones. Foreign tourists were discouraged, and in many cases prohibited from entering these "red" zones. It was much later that the trekking industry expanded, with estimates of over 100,000 trekkers per year in the late 1980s (Dearden 1991: 405, citing Klinpraneet 1988: 14).

Michaud makes a noteworthy remark when he points out that in spite of a fair number of research works on Hmong communities produced by different authors, "...none of them seems to have encountered tourism in the communities they investigated (Michaud op, cit.,: 2). This he suggests,

"...may be because they chose their village sites with criteria of isolation from such outside influence. Or if they actually witnessed tourists passing by, maybe none considered it to be an important enough factor to be included in their research...(ibid)."

Actually, one of the authors to whom Michaud refers mentioned in his work a brief and superficial encounter between a group of French tourists accompanied by a town tour guide and Hmong villagers (Chupinit 1991: 253-4). However, it is possible that prior to 1980, trekking tours were confined to limited areas and their impact on local lives and culture was minimal. One of the earlier works on tourism in the highlands was organized in 1976 applying a survey technique in an attempt to gain some knowledge of the situation (Manus et al. 1976).

Statistics compiled at different time-intervals show clearly how the numbers of foreign tourists has risen:

- in 1974, the number of overseas tourists visiting Chiang Mai was 41,000³
- in 1985, the number of foreign tourists visiting Chiang Mai was 215,600⁴
- in 1986, the number of foreign tourists visiting Chiang Mai was 268,129⁵ ; and,
- in 1990, the number of foreign visitors in the northern region was estimated at 562,000 out of which 62,210 went on a trek.⁶

3. Source: Chiang Mai Airport Improvement Report, Pacific Asia Travel Association, 1975

4. Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand, Chiang Mai, 1987

5. Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand, Chiang Mai, 1987

6. Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand, Chiang Mai, 1992

In 1992, it was reported that there were over 200 trekking company outlets in Chiang Mai alone (Dearden 1992: 221). However, only two years earlier (1990), trekking tour companies registered as members of the Northern Region Trekking Tour Association numbered only 20 (Committee for Justice and Peace of Thailand, *op cit.*: 10).

At the time of writing, there were four popular trekking routes in the North:

- the Mae Taeng route: including visits to Karen, Shan, Lahu and Akha villages, and a hot spring;
- the Mae Sariang route: including visits to Hmong, Chinese Yunnanese, Karen, Shan and Lahu villages, a waterfall and a hot spring;
- the Phrao route: including visits to Karen, Lisu, Palong, Akha and Shan villages, and a waterfall; and,
- the Chiang Rai route: including visits to Karen, Lahu, Yao, Akha and Shan, a waterfall, Mae Sai town and the Golden Triangle.

All these treks take 3-4 days, with the service charges ranging from 900 baht - 1,400 baht. In addition, other attractions for the adventurous are elephant riding and bamboo rafting, or a combination of both (Committee for Justice and Peace of Thailand, *ibid.*: 11-12).

However, in relation to the trekking industry, there has never been a policy on trekking promotion stipulated at the national level (Pusatee et al., *op cit.*: 7-1-37). Indeed, if the trekking business is to be sustainable, the government should take steps to ensure that there are positive long-term effects of this enterprise and the local populations.

III. CULTURAL FEATURES AND VILLAGE PROFILES

The three villages included in this study were drawn from Karen, Lahu, and Akha ethnic groups. The three ethnic groups can be distinguished from each other easily by means of dialect, traditional costume, and housing style.

Cultural Features of the Karen, Lahu and Akha⁷

1. Karen

Karen comprise the largest portion of the highland population. Their 2,120 villages are located in the mountainous regions along the Thai-Myanmar border as far north as Chiang Rai and south to Prachuab Khiri Khan. The exact time when the Karen first settled within the boundaries of Thailand is unknown, but their ancestors had been present here for no less than 200 years.

There are four major Karen subgroups:

1. Skaw or Pga Ker Yaw are also known as White Karen
2. Pa-O or Tongsu are also known as Black Karen
3. Bwe or Kayah are also called Red Karen
4. Pwo or Plong are sometimes mistakenly called Red Karen

Karen settlements, tend to be located at relatively lower altitudes than groups producing opium. It is not uncommon to find that Karen villages have been located at their present site for 100 years or more. This is made possible by the Karen's practice of land rotation or cyclical bush fallow shifting cultivation and terraced paddy-fields. The Karen are also well-known for their ability to domesticate wild elephants.

Karen are matrilineal while, at the same time, relatives of both husband and wife are equally respected. Premarital sexual intercourse is

7. The information provided here is based on the hill tribes of Thailand, Tribal Research Institute, Chiang Mai, 1987.

strictly prohibited. Monogamy is also strictly observed traditionally. Village authority is inherited along the leader's family line.

Karen can be considered pantheists, due to the fact that they believe in spirits and gods as well as worship ancestors. Reputedly, Karen are feared by others for their witchcraft power, but are generally regarded as peaceful and humble.

2. Lahu

The Lahu are called Muser in Thai. Ethno-linguistically, they are classified into the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. Among the hill tribes of Thailand, the Lahu seem to have the most numerous subgroups; at least six are found, namely, Lahu Nyi or Muser Daeng (Red Lahu), Lahu Na or Muser Dam (Black Lahu), Lahu Shehleh or Muser Na Muey, Lahu Laba, Lahu Phu or Muser Khao (White Lahu), and Lahu Shi Muser Luang (Yellow Lahu). The Lahu can be found in seven provinces - Chiang Rai (23,131), Chiang Mai (22,684), Tak (5,050), Mae Hong Son (4,884), Kamphaeng Phet (694), Lampang (689), and Phetchabun (12).

Monogamy and nuclear families are common among the Lahu. However, a Lahu household can become an extended family for some years. When a man marries a woman he is expected to live with his parents-in-law to perform bridal services. Because of the bilineal nature of Lahu society, kinship ties are not strictly important in forming a clan system. Thus, it requires the authority of the village leader with spiritual support from a village priest to oversee all community affairs. Although the Lahu believe in various kinds of spirits, they place "Geusha" as the highest God. In this, they are considered theistic animists. The New Year celebration is perhaps the most important event of the year and is held sometimes between January and March.

As is common among pioneer swiddeners, the Lahu prefer to clear their upland fields from virgin forest by means of slash-and-burn cultivation. Dry field rice and maize are the major staple crops, while opium-poppy cultivation has been largely abandoned in most Lahu communities.

In certain areas in the highlands where various ethnic groups live in close proximity, the Lahu dialect is used to facilitate communications.

3. Akha

Akha are known to the lowland Thai as Ekaw. Historically, it is believed that the Akha are linked with the ancient Lolo in the southern part of China. By preference, the Akha locate their settlement along ridges of the

mountains. In Thailand, at least two subgroups of Akha can be distinguished by their different costumes: one is known as "U-lo Akha" whose immigration can be traced over a hundred years back; and the other is called "Lo Me Akha⁸" whose presence in Thailand is only recent. At present, the Akha are distributed through five provinces: Chiang Rai (27,427), Chiang Mai (2,411), Tak (1,179), Lampang (732), and Phrae (292).

A patrilineal clan system is the rule governing Akha society. Monogamy is prevalent, but in practice, there is no rule prohibiting an Akha man having more than one wife. Village leadership is divided into secular and sacred domains. Concerning belief systems the Akha are pantheists.

Similar to other ethnic highlanders, the Akha also practice shifting cultivation with dry field rice and maize as their staple crops. Opium-poppy is only cultivated by the Lo Me subgroup.

Ceremonies and festivities are relatively more frequent among Akha than other groups. The swinging ceremony, for example, takes place sometime between August and September. New Year is celebrated for four days in December.

Village Profiles

1. Village A

1.1 Administrative location

The village is located in Tambon Kud Chang, Mae Taeng District of Chiang Mai. In terms of local administration, village A is a satellite of Ban Pa Khao Lam, another Karen village to the east.

1.2 Population

Village A is a Skaw Karen community group. Out of 105 villagers in 16 households, there are 36 men, 23 women, and 46 children, all of whom are Catholic. All householders have Thai citizenship.

1.3 Village history

In 1980, the first group of seven household settlers moved from Ban Pa Khao Lam. The leader of this first group was born in Ban Khun Tae, Tambon Doi Kaeo, Amphoe Chom Thong, Chiang Mai, in 1942. He moved

8. The term "Lo Me" is claimed to be "Doi Mee" a place where these people have abandoned their homeland.

twice before settling down in Village A. Since 1985, he has taken his family to Ban Mae Sae, Tambon Pa Pae, Amphoe Mae Taeng, Chiang Mai to set up a mission center. Three households later joined from Ban Huai Sai Luang in Amphoe Mae Taeng. At present, there are a village traditional leader called "hi kho" and a Christian leader in Village A.

1.4 Communications

From Mae Taeng town, there is an all weather tarmac road 56 kilometers to Ban Mae Sae (Khon Muang), Tambon Pa Pae, Amphoe Mae Taeng. From there, a foot track leads to Ban Pong Noi (Karen) in about one hour; and from Bang Pong Noi, it takes another hour to go to Village A on foot. There are only three radio receivers in the whole community.

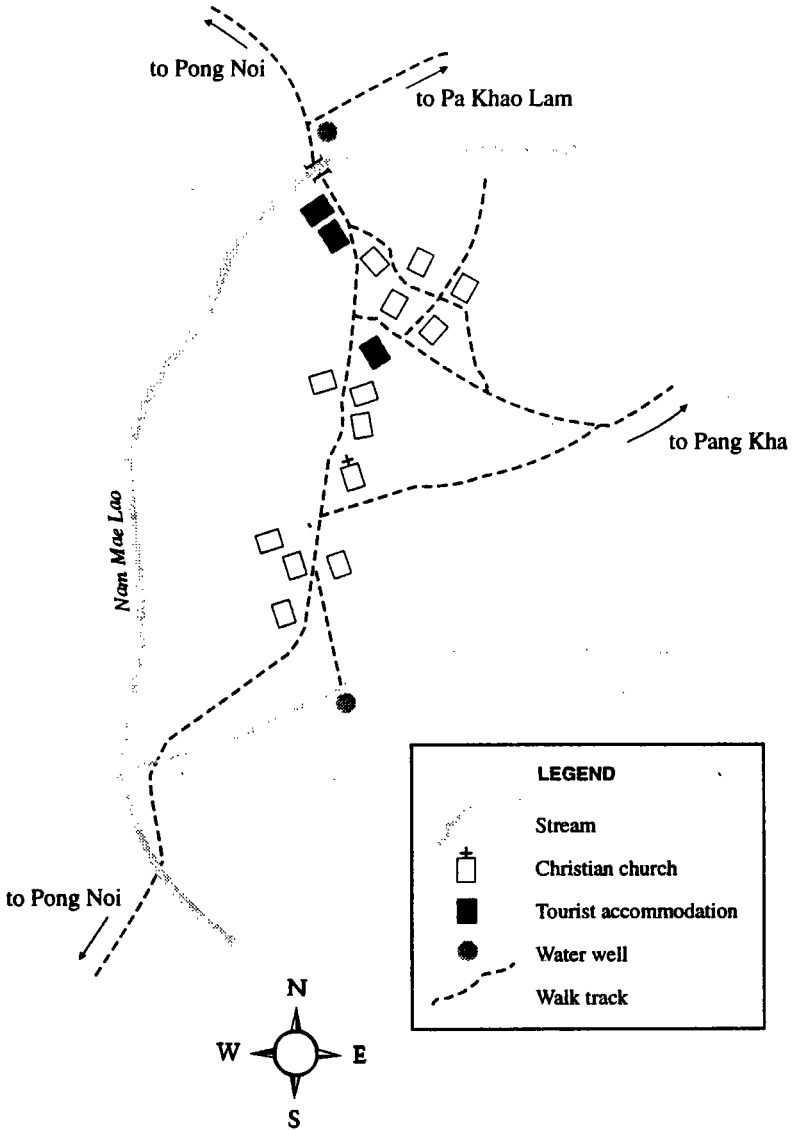
1.5 Village economy

Rice is the major staple crop in Village A where approximately 150 rai are planted with upland rice and maize each year. After the harvest, the fields are left fallow for three years on average. The traditional land rotation cultivation practiced by the Karen has shortened the fallowing cycle from the original eight to ten or more years. Eleven households own about 50 rai of terraced paddy fields, while all have developed individual orchards with a combination of fruit trees, chiefly, mango, papaya, longan, lichee, banana, pomelo, jack-fruit, lemon and pineapple, amounting to 20 rai. However, only one household can produce rice to meet its annual needs. About seven households face an annual rice shortage averaging five months. The rest run short of rice most months. Thus, the villagers have to resort to wage work to supplement what they grow. Several kinds of off-farm work are related to trekking tours: for example: cutting bamboo for rafts and working as porters. Unfortunately, all the agricultural lands belonging to Village A lie within a forest reserve area which theoretically cannot be cultivated or cut. Chickens and pigs are numerous in the village. Cattle are raised by all, but only eight households own buffalo. According to key informants, the problems related to agriculture are not only pests and rodents in the field, but also the elephants used in trekking which encroach on the farmers' fields and orchards.

1.6 Education

There is no school in the village. Thirteen students, four boys and nine girls, are currently in schools elsewhere. Of all the villagers, about 20 persons have some education (Grade 4). Fourteen persons have completed Grade 6, while only six persons have completed lower and upper secondary education levels.

Figure 3. Map of Village A



2.4 Communication

From Village A, it takes less than two hours on foot to go to Village B. The village is not accessible by road. Generally, the villagers go to Tambon Sob Kai to buy needed commodities.

2.5 Village economy

The village is located within a forest reserve. Their reason for immigration does not conform to the traditional migration pattern of the hill tribes. The search for new fertile land is the major driving force for migration among most hill tribes, but the people of Village B came to this area specifically to earn their income from the trekking business. None of them work their own fields. Seven households own in total about 100 chickens, while only one family raises two pigs. The sources of income in Village B are all related to trekking tours. All households earn income from providing accommodation (with one meal) to the tourists. Hiring their labor out is another source of income for the villagers. Some work as porters; others cut and prepare bamboo rafts. Some villagers have opened village shops to serve trekkers with beverages, and snacks. Some villagers provide opium to tourists as an experiment. A number of women earn income from prostitution.

2.6 Education

There are no educational services available in Village B. Except for the policeman who has a Lahu wife in this village, none of the villagers has attended school.

2.7 Health service

Government health services have not yet reached the village. The only source of health care in the village is provided by a traditional practitioner. Common seasonal diseases include diarrhoea in the hot season, colds and malaria in the rainy season, and colds in the winter time. Eight women have adopted birth control. There are two village wells that serve the whole community all year round. Latrines have not been introduced into the village.

2.8 Village organization

There is no community organization of any form. Thus, the village leadership is left in the hands of a traditional leader whose authority is not altogether decisive, because village members come from different villages of origin.

3. Village C

3.1 Administrative location

The village is located in Tambon Kud Chang, Amphoe Mae Taeng, Chiang Mai. There are, in fact, two groups of settlements sharing the same village name: one is populated by Lahu of the Bala subgroup; and the other is an Akha village of the Lo Me subgroup. The two villages are in close proximity. However, both Lahu and Akha communities are officially recognized as satellite villages of Ban Sob Kai. Therefore, there is no official headman in Village C.

3.2 Population

There are 59 households in the Lahu settlement with 88 men, 84 women, and 150 children; a total population of 322. In the Akha village, there are 20 households with 107 people. In addition, two Khon Muang households also live in the same vicinity. Apart from the two Khon Muang families, only five Lahu and seven Akha households have been granted citizenship. The Lahu villagers are all Catholic but the Akha are traditional pantheists.

3.3 Village history

In 1982, six Akha households moved in as the first pioneer group from Mae Chan district of Chiang Rai province. A year after (1983), the first group of Lahu settlers, about 20 households, was led into this area by a traditional leader from Ban Thung Pang Paw, Tambon Muang Ngai, Amphoe Chiang Dao, Chiang Mai. This Lahu leader, now aged 53, was born in Ban Thung Pang Paw, but because of the scarcity of cultivable land he and his followers decided to move and to settle down here. Indeed, the settlers came in as pioneer farmers when the whole area was unoccupied. Other families came to join later, mostly from Amphoe Mae Ai.

3.4 Communications

From Village B, it takes less than two hours on foot to reach Village C. Starting from the Chiang Mai-Fang main road, another road branches out not so far from Mae Taeng river and runs about 35 kilometers, passing through Ban Sob Kai, to reach Village C at the other end.

3.5 Village economy

All the cultivable land used by Village C lie within a forest reserve. Thus, in practice, while the farmlands are occupied the villagers have no title to the land. All the villagers practice dry field rice and maize cultivation. The duration of field fallow practiced in Village C ranges from three to five years.

It is estimated that the total area of farmland under shifting cultivation for the Akha group is not more than 150 rai, whereas the Lahu as the late comers occupy 200 rai of farmland. This makes the Lahu's access to cultivable land on a non capita basis much less than their Akha neighbours. (Akha: approximately seven rai per household. Lahu: three rai per household). In fact, a number of farmers from this village have to rent land for cultivation in Sob Kai a Khon Muang settlement. Ten households grow taro as a cash crop; while 16 households own irrigated paddy fields of altogether about 100 rai. Approximately ten rai of orchards have been developed by four households. Fruit trees such as lichees, bananas, and mangoes are grown in these orchards. Pigs and chickens are commonly raised among the Akha and Lahu for ceremonial purposes and for home consumption. The animals can be sold when a family is in need of cash. Ducks are also raised by all households. Only few families own buffaloes, horses or cattle. None of the Akha and Lahu households produce enough rice to meet their annual needs. Therefore, all households are compelled to resort to wage work. Many villagers have to hire their labor out outside the village; and the majority earn an income from cutting bamboo for rafts. With regard to agricultural problems, field crops are often destroyed by wild boars and tame elephants. Water is frequently scarce and insufficient to irrigate both paddy fields and orchards. In addition, epidemics occur among domestic animals, especially during the dry season.

3.6 Education

A village school was set up in 1992 by the Provincial Non-Formal Education Center. The school is located in between the clusters of Akha and Lahu. Three teachers are posted in the school to take care of 45 boys and 40 girls. Sixteen male and female students are studying outside the community. The villagers who have primary school background number 115, whereas three persons have finished junior secondary school. One member in the village is a university graduate.

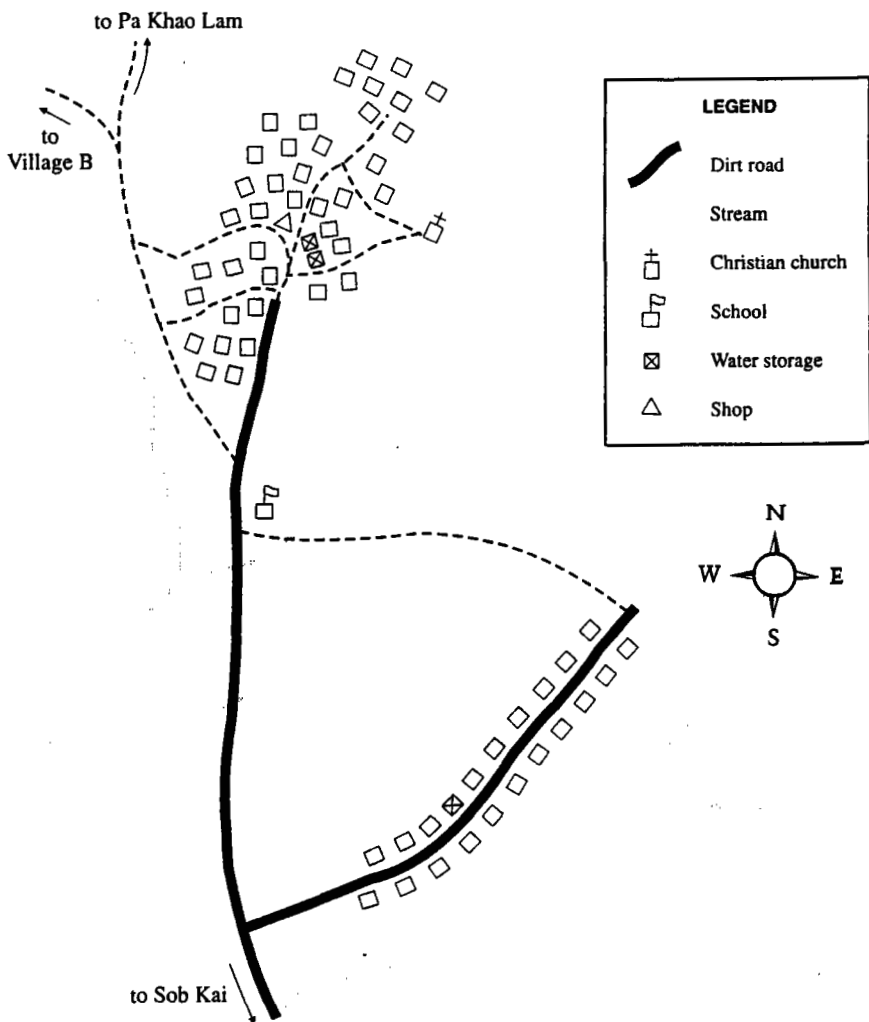
3.7 Health service

No government health services are available in Village C. Diseases common among the villagers are diarrhoea in summer and colds in rainy and cold seasons. The birth rate is high in this village. Only last year, 15 babies were born into Lahu families. However, 15 women have now adopted birth control. The village water supply system has already been installed and ten households have constructed proper toilets for their own use.

3.8 Village organization

In 1992, a village committee comprised of four members was set up. Later that year, a youth group was also organized. The group currently has a membership of 15. There is a village rice bank with 300 thung (1 thung = 20 liters) of rice available to be borrowed. The village school is the only government agency located in the village.

Figure 5. Map of Village C



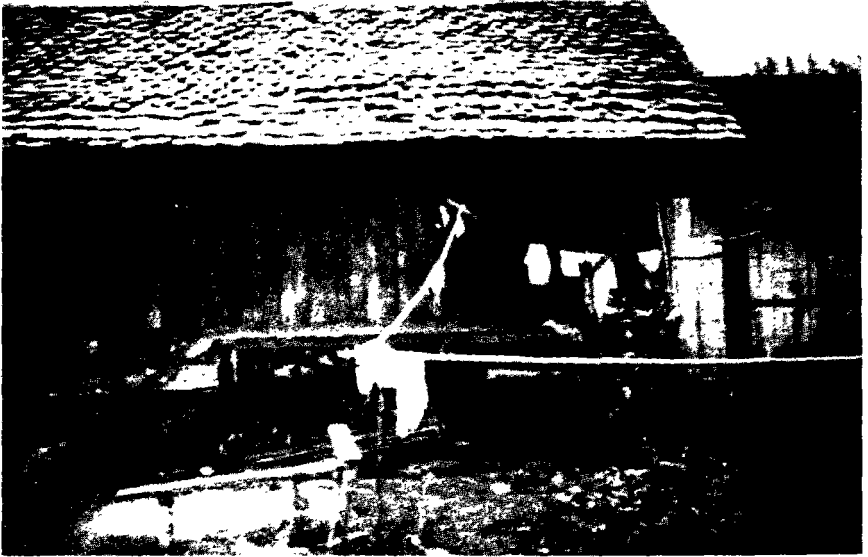
IV. IMPACT OF TREKKING ON LOCAL LIFE AND ENVIRONMENT

Trekking Patterns and Situations

Normally, a trek starts from Ban Pong Duad, a Khon Muang village where trekkers can pay a brief visit to a natural hot spring, to Ban Pong Noi (Skaw Karen), to Village A (Skaw Karen) and to Ban Pang Kha (Skaw Karen) where there is an elephant camp. From there, tourists ride on elephants and cross the Mae Taeng River to Village B (Red Lahu). Rafting along Mae Taeng river starts from Village B to Ban Sob Kai (Khon Muang), and from there the trekkers either go to Village C or return to Chiang Mai. On this route, the trek lasts three days and two nights. The number of tourists visiting Village A in one day ranges from 2 to 28, and guides from 1 to 5. There are five tour agencies running their trekking businesses in this area. According to key informants in Village B, however, the highest number of visitors to the village at one time is 100 in the peak season. The field record shows that from 28 June to 1 August, or a total of 35 days, Village A was free from trekkers only five days. This makes an average of nine trekkers and two guides visiting Village A per day. All the trekkers coming to this area report that their journey was planned by tour agencies in Chiang Mai. It is unlikely that an individual tourist can trek along this route on his/her own without the accompaniment of a guide. The proportion of male and female trekkers is almost equally distributed on average (4.68 men and 4.89 women per day). The ethnic background of tour guides are Thai, Karen, Hmong Lahu and Lisu.

Trekking Impact of Local People and Culture

It is believed that the trekking industry can help generate income among the local people who live along the trekking trail. However, the data collected in the course of this investigation indicates that income derived from trekking may not be distributed widely within the villages. Although it is common for the trekkers in many areas to pay 20 baht for an accommodation of one night plus one meal in Village A and C very few people earn their income from this. Only three houses in Village A are used to accommodate



Tourist accommodation in the village



Village shop



Local sellers approaching the tourists



Elephants are brought into the area to entertain the tourists

tourists, while in Village C the sleeping quarters for trekkers belong to the village headman. Village B provides a completely different picture. As was mentioned before Village B was established mainly to serve trekking tours. Thus, in practice the tour members can be placed in any household in Village B for an overnight rest. In this case, it can be claimed that all the village households benefit from trekking.

There are a few small shops in these villages where the tourists can buy beverages, snacks, and other necessary items. Trekkers are reported to make purchases from the village shops more often in Village C than the other two. Handicrafts are rarely bought by the tourists in any of the three study villages. Some poor villagers hire their labor out as porters for the tour groups while some others are hired to cut bamboo for rafts.

Under the circumstances it should, perhaps, be extremely difficult to expect people from two different cultures to learn anything of substance from each other during a trekking tour. Even if the two parties are enthusiastic about learning from each other, the language barrier poses a major obstacle. Both the tourists and the villagers have to depend on the tour guides to overcome this barrier. It is thus through the eyes of tour guides that the local hosts and their foreign guests perceive each other. Tour guides play the influential role of culture broker (Toyota op.cit.: 47).

In relation to the drug abuse problem, a number of researchers have found a positive correlation between the extent of the problem and the presence of trekking tours (Michaud op.cit.: 12 and Toyota *ibid.*: 45-51). Elsewhere, however, it is reported that visits by trekking tourists is not necessarily a warning signal for drug abuse problems (Chupinit and Gebert 1993: 70). This implies that the relationship between drug addiction and the tourists can vary from one area to another depending upon several contributing factors. This is verified by the incidence of drug abuse in the three study villages where the extent of drug addiction is not the same. In Village A where village cohesion is strong, drug abuse is not a problem. Whereas in Villages B and C, drug addiction is on the rise. In addition, the service of prostitutes was reported to be available in Village B as well. According to the informants, there are at least six prostitutes working in the village. It was reported that prostitution took hold in Village B at about the same time tourism increased markedly in 1988. An unknown number of guides are claimed to use the service of prostitutes in the village. Not only opium, but heroin and marijuana are also available in Village B. The drugs are brought into the village either by the

villagers, or by traders from outside, or by the guides themselves. At least one guide is reported to be addicted to heroin.

As it was mentioned earlier that the language barrier is the biggest obstacle for direct communication between the villagers and the tourists. From the survey of these three villages, only one man in Village C was found who could use English. Thus, the way in which the villagers learn from their foreign guests is through observation. Unfortunately, what the villages have observed from the trekkers does not seem to offer a positive image of their guests. It is entirely a matter of cultural differences when tourists, both men and women, undress or change clothes in full view of the villagers; the villagers are extremely embarrassed by such behavior. There are other things the tourists do which disappoint their hosts, for example, hanging out their underwear to dry.

In 1993, there were three robberies of tour groups on the route between Ban Sob Kai and Village C. As a result, the tourists now come less frequently to this area. In May, trekkers were held up by five robbers; and a month later (June), three robbers committed the same crime. During the field investigation in August, another tour robbery took place. After the robbery in May, a local police unit was posted at Pha Ngerb. Yet at raft camp near to Village B, a crime was committed twice, not so far away from the police unit. Eventually, two robbers were killed by the police and three more were arrested. It was found that the criminals were Kbon Muang and Akha.

In brief, although exotic culture is promoted to attract foreign trekkers, little opportunity is provided for anyone to learn much from this cultural encounter. Tour guides seem to play the major role as mediators between the two parties, but their information and interpretation are highly questionable when viewed from either perspective. The problems of drug addiction and prostitution are not always the consequence of trekking tours. One may say, however, that the level of village cohesion can either prevent or provoke problems. Thus, the negative impact of trekking tours on a community with weak leadership can be observed as demonstrated in Village B.

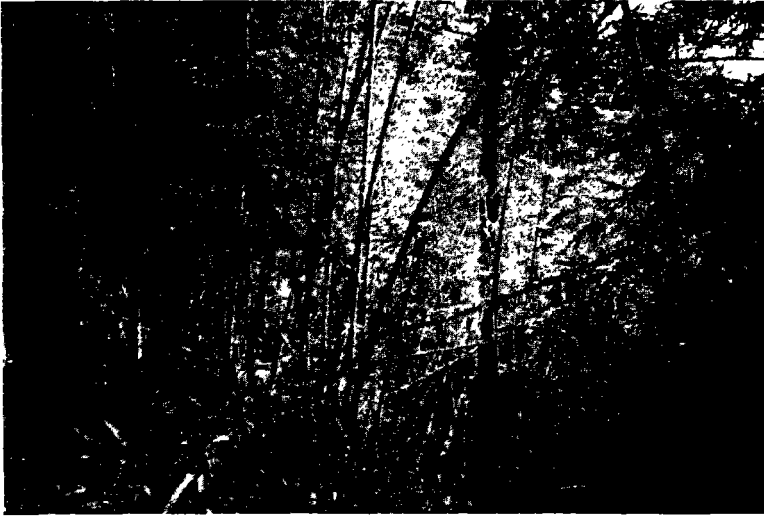
Impact of Trekking Tours on the Environment

There has been opposition to trekking among a number of villages, mostly Karen and Khon Muang. Inter-village meetings, encouraged by NGOs, have been held. The problems related to trekking tours were discussed but a

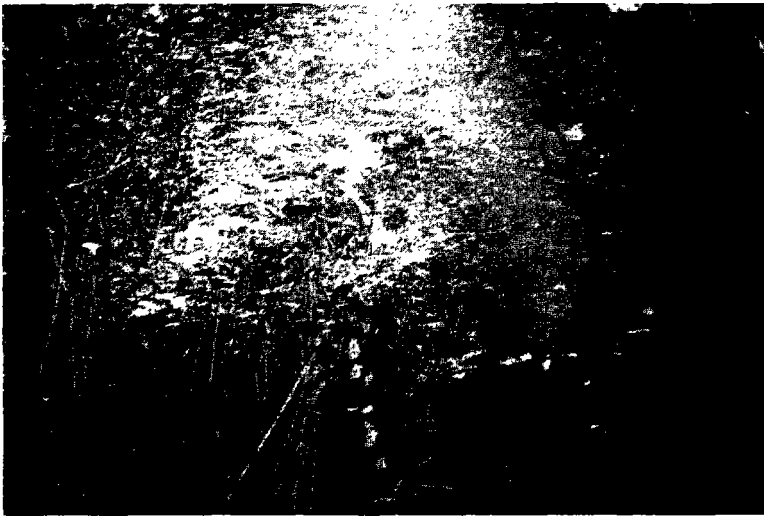
satisfactory solution to the problems has not yet been found. One of the problems encountered by local people is that their farms have been encroached on by elephants which have been brought into the area to entertain foreign tourists. These elephants also destroy wild banana trees in the vicinity of the headwaters. During the peak trekking period, elephants have to be brought in from many areas and their number makes it most difficult for elephant keepers to control them properly.

Another problem that has become increasingly serious is the cutting of bamboo. Despite the fact that bamboo cutting and raft making offer a good chance for local people to earn extra income throughout the year, bamboo thickets in the area have been over-exploited due to fact that a raft made of bamboo can be used for only a limited time. In recent years the villagers have witnessed a decrease in the bamboo forest. Since bamboo has been one of the most important sources for domestic use for a wide range of purposes, local people are now finding it extremely difficult to find sufficient bamboo either for home consumption or for other domestic purposes.

Disposable waste, such as toilet paper and sanitary napkins can be found on the river banks and, sometimes, in the rivers. The villagers find it most annoying that the river is polluted in this way. Normally, human waste as well as garbage should not be disposed of near or in waterways. In Village A and B, toilets are not yet available and tourists find it most convenient to use sites near the waterway as their toilet. This problem is aggravated by the number of trekkers entering the area. For example, according to our field record, there were 274 tourists over 35 consecutive days. If only half of them make use of the "river bank toilet", there would be more than a hundred toilet users monthly on the bank. Unless a more sanitary means is found such practices will have disastrous environmental consequences.



Bamboo thicket



Disposable waste along the trekking route

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

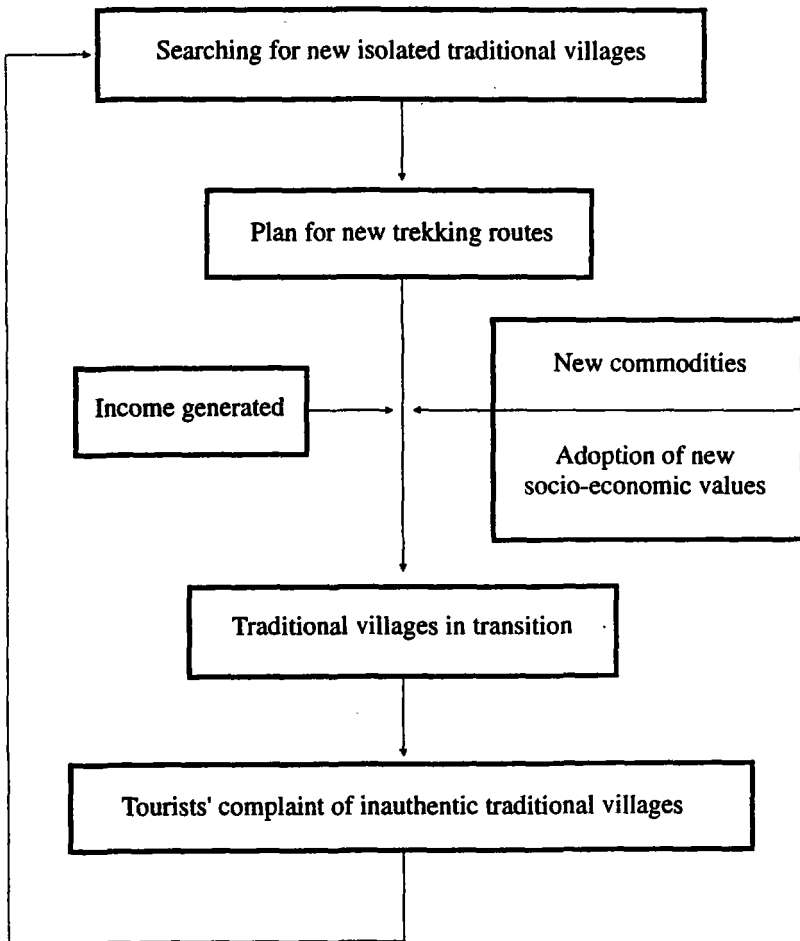
Conclusion

The findings from the research projects which have been carried out indicate that the consequence as well as impact of trekking tourism varies. For example, in certain areas where trekkers spend more on handicrafts, villagers are encouraged to produce more and income can be distributed among a wider group of villagers. In other areas, the distribution of income derived from the trekking business is more limited. The problems of drug abuse and prostitution are found closely associated with trekking tours in one area, but in another they are not. This may require wider and more intensive investigation before drawing any conclusions. Apparently, there are other factors contributing to the different impact on local people and their culture. As a word of caution, one needs to take into account the contextual and situational analysis of trekking tourism before generalizations can be drawn.

Although resentment is expressed by local people about the way in which trekking is organized, villagers still expect economic benefits from the trekking business. This economic expectation was equally shared among the key informants of all three villages. Nowadays, it is common for highland communities to find that their farmlands are constrained by state laws, be it a national park, or forest reserve, or wildlife sanctuary. The three study villages are no exception. In the Karen Village A, the traditional cycle of field fallow has been shortened to the extent that rice yields are much lower than in the past. In the other two villages, farmland has become scarce and the majority of villagers have to resort to wage work. All these villages lie within the boundary of forest reserves where, legally no one is any longer allowed to till the land. Such modern laws designed to preserve the natural environment contradict customary landuse practices among the local residents. Thus, although the intention is to preserve the environment, the local inhabitants are deprived of their customary use of the land. The trekking business has made its presence felt in a number of highland villages. Even though the local people are well aware of their passive role in this business, trekking offers a chance for villagers to earn supplementary cash.

Considering the commercial cycle of trekking which can be illustrated in a simplified diagram as following, the cycle as presently organized does not seem to be sustainable. However, if properly organized, trekking can be promoted to benefit the local people in the long run.

Figure 6. A Commercial Cycle of Trekking Tour



Cultural authenticity is, perhaps, a major incentive to draw tourists to trekking/jungle tour agencies. However, the question can be raised: what can be identified as authentic and how can this authenticity be maintained? The situation seems contradictory in a sense that if a tour guide can locate a hill tribe community which is relatively isolated from outside contact, he is likely to set up a new trekking route leading to that newly-found and "authentic" traditional village. By the time the village has become popular among trekkers, small shops pop up one after another with the presence of modern commodities, such as Coke, beer, and coffee. Bamboo houses and thatched roofs are gradually replaced by houses of more modern materials. The late coming tourists start to complain about how "unauthentic" the traditional village is. Then comes a time when the guide is compelled to find a more isolated village.

That there has never been a fixed culture, to begin with, Toyota (ibis : 24) has pointed out clearly:

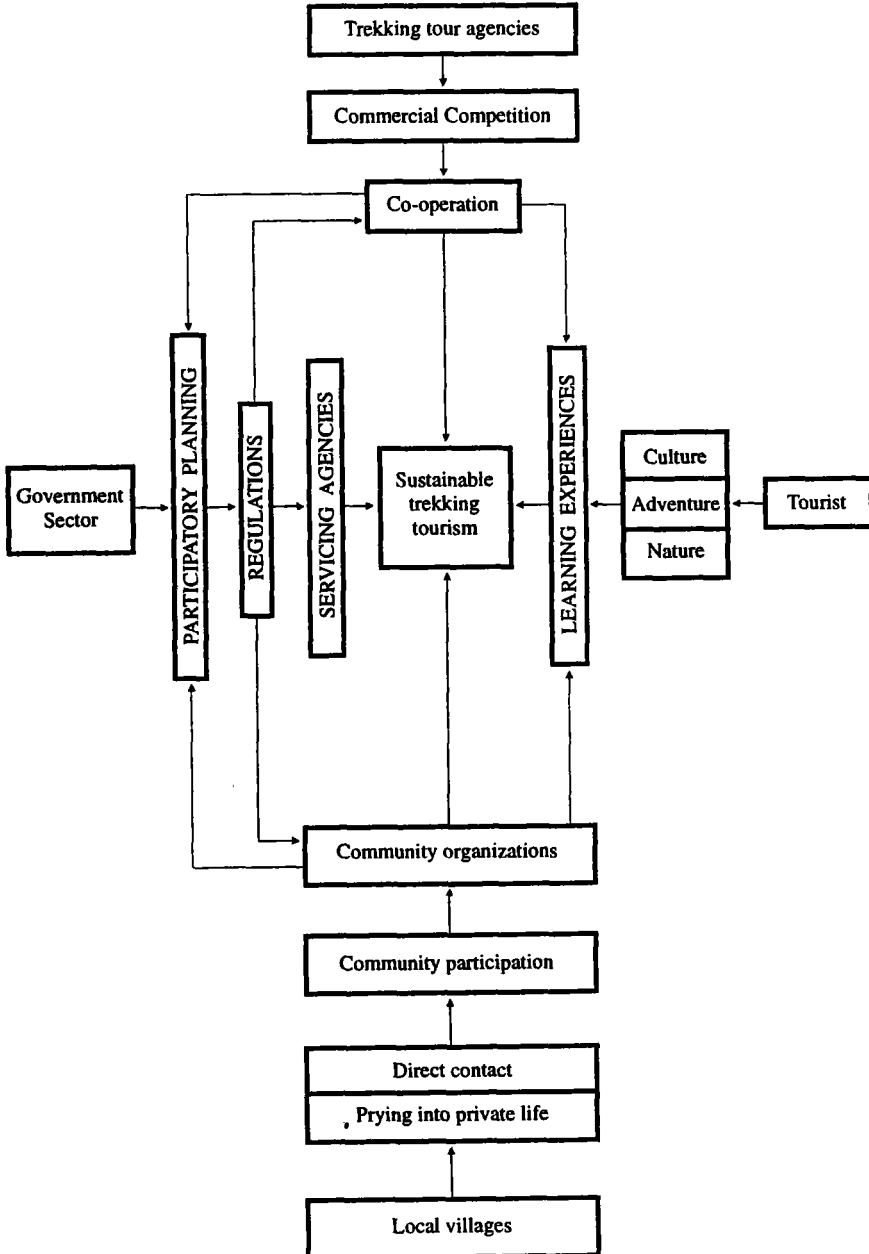
"...from the symbolic point of view, it is understood that both 'traditional' culture and cultural identity are ceaselessly reformulated and symbolically constructed in the present. Both of them are products of interpretation. Since there is no objective, bounded, 'authentic' tradition that we can identify, no interpretation is either 'right' nor 'wrong'.

The nature of private enterprise makes the trekking business highly competitive. In 1990, it was reported that only twenty agencies were registered as members of the Jungle Tour Association in Chiang Mai. It is estimated that there are over 200 trekking tour agency outlets in Chiang Mai alone, but membership in the Jungle Tour Association has not increased substantially.

As a system, trekking tourism can be divided into four interrelated components, namely, tour organizers or tour agencies, the government sector, local communities, and tourists. Unfortunately, these major components do not work together nor are they all well organized. It is foreseeable that if the trekking industry is left to develop spontaneously on its own with considerable competition, it will self-degrade. Unless more serious and well-planned measures are taken to ensure co-operation, trekking tourism will remain far away from sustainability. In an attempt to look for alternatives to the current conventional trekking, each component will be examined at length.

Recommendations

Figure 7. Trekking Tour Alternative



1. Tour Agencies

Serious competition among the tour agencies does not allow for spontaneous co-operation. Nevertheless, co-operation is the first step towards sustainability. Tour agencies have to find some means to reduce the degree of competition and turn competition into co-operation and sharing of benefits. This requires, first of all, a common place where tour agencies can meet and plan for future co-operation. Once these tour organizers unite, a number of ideas and activities can be planned and negotiated together, such as:

- how to upgrade the quality of trekking tours to a level which will attract more and new generations of travellers. Serious attention should be paid to "eco-cultural trekking" to see if it is feasible to develop;
- how to develop qualified tour guides who perform their functions with professional standards of etiquette;
- to what extent the local communities can take part in the industry of eco-cultural trekking; and
- to avoid a situation in which tour agencies fight among themselves, especially in the low season, a fair method has to be negotiated and agreed upon how benefits can be shared between big and small businesses

2. Government Sector

In order to improve business, trekking tour agencies have to get organized. This can be achieved through the intervention of the authorities through regulations. However, the regulations should not be shaped in a top-down direction; instead, the process must allow for involvement from various sectors. Not only regulations, but the whole system of trekking promotion needs to be designed by means of participatory planning. The ultimate objective is to find a sustainable basis for trekking tourism. Regulations, in this case, should be regarded as agreements made ideally with consensus. The following are examples of recommendations which should be included in the regulations:

- trekking tour agencies must form a coordinating body with compulsory membership;
- under the umbrella of a trekking tour union/association, a way in which the benefits can be shared between big and small companies must be found;

- thought must be given of how to involve local communities into the planning and managing of "eco-cultural tourism";
- to what extent and in what areas those servicing agencies, (tourism authority and police for instance) can assist trekking tourism more appropriately; and,
- concerns for environment, local culture and security measures have to be spelt out as part of the regulations.

The recommendations formulated can only become a reality through participatory planning wherein all those concerned are involved namely, tour agencies, village delegates, government agencies, scholars, and NGOs.

3. Community Organizations

The special feature of trekking tourism is that it allows people of different cultures to meet. Although the strangers who come to visit are customarily treated as the guests, the feeling of prying into the private life of the villagers is inevitable. Whatever the argument may be, it is not for the tour agents, nor the tourists, nor the tourism authority, to determine the location of the local villages they can visit at whatever time they please. This decision has to be made by the villagers as to who-when-where and how they want to host. Thus, the receiving communities must be involved in the planning of the trekking business. This can be done through existing community structures such as the Village Committee. Through these community organizations, servicing of trekking tours in every local community should be planned in close co-operation with the tour agencies. To site a concrete example: if a mature villager is hired as a guide assistant, he is likely to be able to identify the names and, perhaps, usages of existing flora and fauna. Or, the Village Committee in co-operation with the Youth Group can prepare traditional performances to entertain visitors. Or, a traditional specialist can be invited to transfer his cultural know-how to the guests. This type of activity will make the visit more meaningful. To accomplish this, close co-operation is required. Preparation of village organizations is a prerequisite.

4. Tourists

A combination of exotic culture, adventure and love of nature provides a major incentive to draw travellers into the trekking business. However, the existing management system allows only the tour guides to play a decisive role in determining the route, the villages and the interpretation of culture. Tourists need to be provided with information and practical, yet entertaining, experiences. In this regard, eco-cultural tourism should be developed in the way that introduces learning experiences into the services. With this orientation, tour agencies must work out plans together with community organizations. It may be necessary for the tour companies to reorient their promotional emphasis away from how exotic a hill tribe culture is. In a new context of eco-cultural tourism, culture should not be perceived of as a rigid entity immune from outside influences through time immemorial. Instead, a more dynamic view of culture has been discussed as is concluded by Toyota (*ibid.*, 60) that, "... any culture in this world is a historical product of adaptation, resistance and compromise." In this light, the tourists will learn about the interrelationship between the environment and the local people and their culture.

In summary, a more sustainable trekking tourism should be placed as the ultimate objective in redesigning the trekking industry. To achieve this end, co-operation generated by a set of regulations is important. However, to formulate the regulations, all parties concerned must participate in the planning process. The formation of a trekking tour union/association with compulsory membership and the involvement of community organizations in the trekking business are strongly recommended. Training courses should be provided for the tour agencies and their guides as well as representatives from the local communities. The expectation of the trekkers (formed by promotional campaigns) needs to be restructured in the way that the traditional culture should be perceived of in a more dynamic view. Thus, it is recommended that learning experiences should be integrated into the existing trekking services. Finally, it must be emphasized here that the involvement of the local communities will not only provide rich information to the visitors, but also lessen the embarrassment felt between the local hosts and their visitors. In this way, the local people will be convinced that preservation of the environmental as well as the traditional culture can bring benefits to them in a new way.

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