

**Ethnic Tourism and the Kayan Long-Neck Tribe in
Mae Hong Son, Thailand**

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Tourism ... to become one of the world's largest industries – sponsored by governments, regulated by international agencies, and supported by multinational enterprises as well as local businesses – presupposes that tourism is a positive or beneficial force. But whom does it benefit? (Smith 1978: 4)

ABSTRACT

The long-neck Kayans have long been subjected to scrutiny by both Thai and foreign writers. This study traces the historical existence of the Kayans in Burma and their status as refugees within Thailand. Since the arrival of the first group of Kayans in late 1984, this tribe have been of interest to the provincial government of Mae Hong Son, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, NGOs and tourism developers. All of these groups, in one way or another, claim to be protecting the interest of the Kayans. This thesis investigates the validity of claims that Kayan interests are being protected. It further questions the government's move to centralise the Kayans into one settlement at Huay Pu Kaeng. I argue that the Kayan race is the most marginal beneficiary of the Kayan ethnic tourism and illustrate how their vulnerability has been exploited both by government agencies and tourism developers.

Keywords: Kayan long-neck, ethnic tourism, human zoo, relocation, government of Mae Hong Son, stakeholders, exploitation

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

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Jinranai Ismail

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Date

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INTRODUCTION: THAI TOURISM AND THE KAYAN

Many Third World nations in the early 1970s embraced tourism as a quick recipe for development. Staggering from high unemployment rates and heavy indebtedness, many governments saw tourism as a source of foreign exchange to fund balance of payments deficits and service their foreign debts. Tourism also promised a viable source of investments for their backward economies and a source of quick livelihood and employment for their unskilled workers (PGX Management Committee 2000).

... the importance of the tourism industry which is experiencing prosperity, the Royal Thai Government ... established a policy to use it as a major device in attracting foreign currency into the country so as to enhance the well being of the people as well as ameliorate the national economy ... (Brickshawana 2003).

In today's world, tourism is big business in anyone's language. In all parts of the world, the growth in tourism industry has contributed to increased economic activity and national development of the country. Tourism it is argued, creates jobs, brings about new infrastructures and uplifts standards of living. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2007) reported that in 2006, there were 846 million international visitor arrivals generating US\$735 billion (US\$2 billion a day) in tourism revenue. Tourism has become "... 'number one in the international services trade', accounting for 40 per cent of global trade in services and six per cent of total world trade. The tourism industry directly provides around three per cent of global employment or 192 million jobs" (UNWTO cited in Ferguson 2007). The economic benefits of tourism, especially in generating employment and foreign exchange, has enticed many more countries to develop tourism promotion programs in which tourism becomes the foundation for national development. The Thai Government has supported the growth and expansion of Thai tourism since 1959 when the Prime Minister General Sarit

Dhanarat established an official tourism body called Tourism Promotion Organisation of Thailand (TPOT) in order to sell Thailand to the world as a tourist destination. In 1979 the National Legislative Council upgraded TPOT to be Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) under the charge of a governor. In 1966 the Thai Government initiated a Tourism Development Plan in conjunction with the Third National Economic and Social Development Plan 1972-1976. The tourism Development Plan came under the Commercial Services Plan. Prior to this there was no clear and precise plan for tourism development (Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University n.d.). The reason for the inclusion of tourism in national development planning was because tourism had been shown to bring huge foreign exchange revenue to Thailand. TAT promotes tourism by “*defining the vision in the strives for excellence in tourism promotion and tourism market development*” (TAT 2003c: 11).

TAT then launched a campaign named “Unseen Thailand” to encourage Thais to tour domestically rather than overseas, while at the same time, a campaign called “Amazing Thailand -- Unseen Treasures” was promoted to encourage overseas tourists to experience the exotic attractions of Thailand (*Thailand to pursue 'Tourism Capital of Asia' status* 2003). New tourism destinations were highlighted in the campaign, in particular to places which tourists had not seen and in activities they had not experienced. The campaign was so effective that the “Amazing Thailand” slogan was repeated and continues to be used until the present time.

Domestically, the tourism campaign received unequivocal support and cooperation from provincial government agencies, private enterprises (especially hotels and tour operators) and even village councils in remote regions (Leepreecha 2005: 6). In northern Thailand, trekking trip operators combined their excursions to include witnessing the natural beauty of the northern landscape and exotic culture of hill tribes. In 1991, out of approximately 120,000 foreigners on trekking trips, about 89.5 per cent came to the Northern provinces, viz: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son (MHS) (Kasmanee & Charoensri 1995: 2).

Of these three, MHS is known to be the poorest province due to its geographical isolation and physical landscape (Thailand Environment Institute 2005: iii). Ninety per cent of MHS province is made up of mountain ranges covered by thick tropical forest. Only two per cent of the province can be devoted to agriculture (Part1 MHS information n.d.). Thus agricultural products are insufficient to meet consumer demand in the province. MHS has to “import” most consumer products from other provinces, especially neighbouring Chiang Mai. Difficulty of transportation due to an undulating road system passing through steep mountain slopes, 1,864 curves and valleys (from Chiang Mai) makes the cost of transporting goods much higher than normal and land travel very slow. According to the governor of MHS, “tourism therefore has an important role in supporting the economic well-being of the province.” Tourists staying in MHS pay for accommodation, food, travels, motorbike hires, which all help to invigorate MHS’s economic life.

Figures from the TAT Statistics showed that in 2001 there were 231,543 tourists visiting MHS injecting tourism revenue of 966.43 million baht (\$32.21 million¹). In 2006, tourist visits to the province numbered 367,869 injecting 1,629.48 million baht (\$54.31 million). Comparatively between 2001 and 2006, the increase in the number of visitors and amount of tourism revenue almost doubled (TAT 2003a).

Every municipal district of MHS province touches the 483 kilometres long border with Burma, with a land border of approximately 326 kilometres, River Salween border stretching 127 kilometres and Meoi River 30 kilometres (MHS Department of Culture 2006: 1). The influx of Burmese refugees into Thailand means MHS that is comprised of a variety of ethnic groups. The Tai Yai is the largest group that live on the agricultural plains. The others are mountain tribes that live in the high plains. Of these the Karens are the biggest group, followed by Muser, Lisaw, Lau, Hmong, and Haw (Thailand Environment Institute 2005: 5). These tribal groupings have, over time gradually become a tourist attraction. Pictures of hill tribes now decorate travel magazines, tour brochures and postcards.

¹ In this thesis, the value of baht is calculated as 30 baht to the Australian dollar.

Another ethnic group of importance in attracting tourists to MHS is the Kayan. The Kayans maintain a cultural tradition different from other hill tribes. What is most conspicuous is that Kayan females wear brass rings around their necks to make their necks look elongated. Kayan females arouse the curiosity of the on-looker. Kayan women have thus been portrayed as spectacles for the tourists gaze. Pascal Khoo Thwe (2002: 28) in his book *From the Land of Green Ghosts: A Burmese Odyssey*, writes that “in 1936 a white man turned up in Phekhon, in the company of some Indians from Loikaw. He invited two of the grandmothers and some of their friends from the village who wore neck-rings, along with their husbands, to come to England ... they were to be taken around Europe by a circus called Bertram Mills and exhibited as freaks.” This was not an uncommon practice as colonial powers often appropriated men and women to provide illustration of “otherness”.

For similar reasons, when the Kayan refugees began to cross into Thailand towards the end of 1984, MHS province officially opened its doors to tourism. During 1985 – 1986 the province then built up an image through the mass media promoting the Kayans as a destination community for ethnic tourism (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 5, Part1 MHS information n.d.). The promotion depicted the Kayans as having the appearance and way of life that most people did not know. These tourism images make the Kayans and their village out to be a show piece or, as some writers term it a “human zoo” (Gray 1998, Harding 2008, the Nation 2008, the Age 2008). Ma Now², an elderly Kayan woman who was one of the first to drift into Thailand, narrated her experience, “I came (to Thailand) with four or five persons. There were myself, my daughter and my friends. We stayed at a refugee camp at Ban³ Huay Moh for six months. Then a government official took me and my daughter to Bangkok for four days to show us to the tourists. Then we were taken to Chiang Mai for two days, totalling six days. When I returned (to the refugee camp), I was given 500 baht (\$16.66). Since then more tourists came to see Kayans.”

² In this thesis, the names of interviewees have been changed to protect their identity. Names of Kayan females always begin with “Ma”.

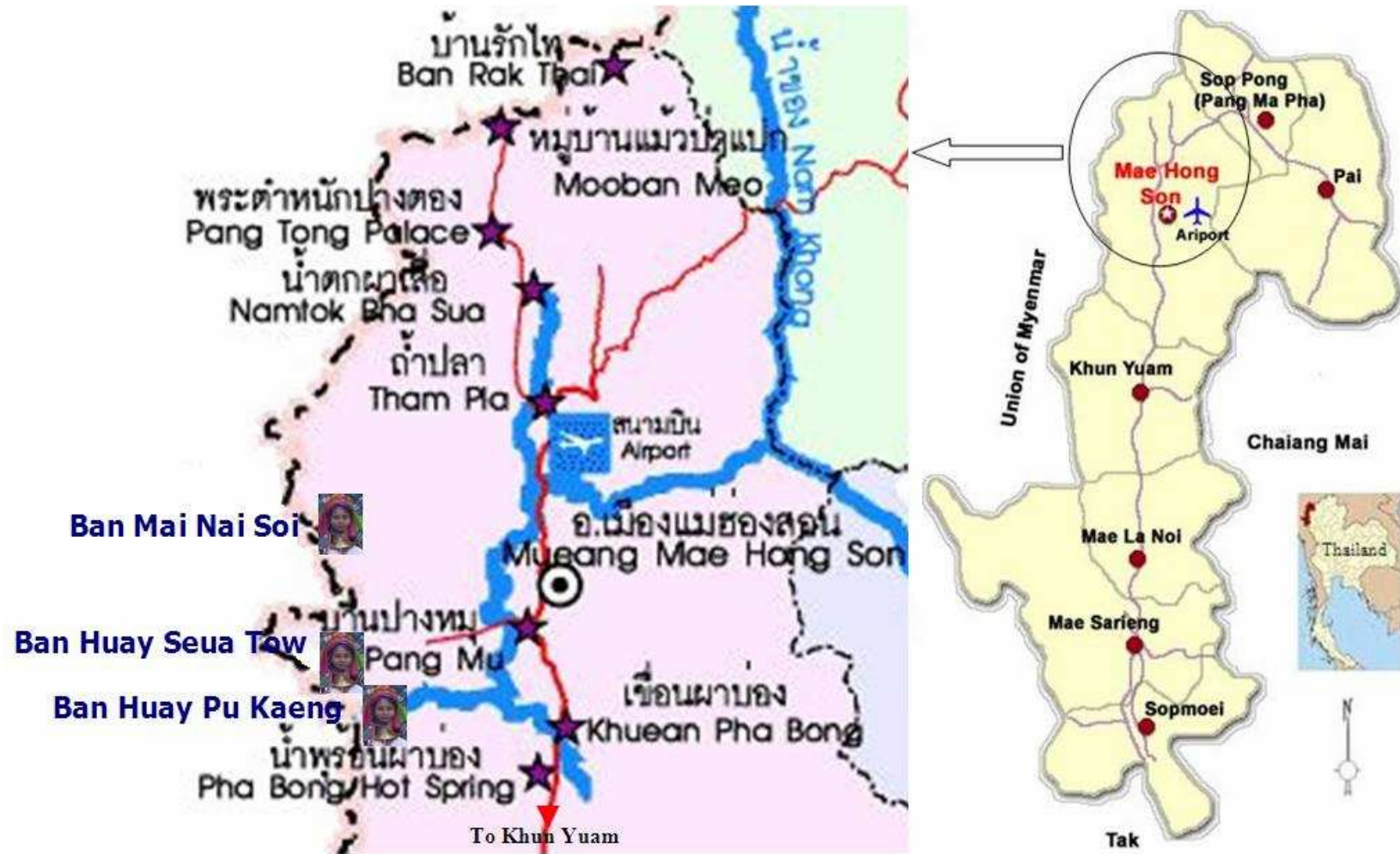
³ *Ban* or *Bahn* in Thai means village or house.

The influx of overseas tourists has made the Kayans change their focus of occupation towards tourism and, it is feared, that this encounter will gradually change the Kayan's traditional way of life. The fact that the Kayans are not settled in one place makes them vulnerable to exploitation by tourism investors and stakeholders. Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and human rights organisations have shown their concern at the infringements of the Kayans' human rights. In 2006 the MHS government proposed that the Kayans move from the three villages at Mai Nai Soi, Huay Seua Tow and Huay Pu Kaeng (*see map, figure 1 page 6*) and be relocated in one centralised settlement to be known as "*The village for the preservation of Kayan's traditional way of life and the security of MHS*".

The thesis which follows investigates socio-cultural and economic impact of ethnic tourism on the Kayan community. The Kayan women's long neck tradition plays a significant role in Kayan ethnic tourism. Increasingly it is the means through which Kayan families earn their incomes. This research examines the role of Kayan women in decision-making process involving their participation in ethnic tourism especially their decision to continue practising the long neck culture. The research examines changes of gender role in Kayan community and also investigates what other income earning options exist for Kayan women apart from being the destination hosts of ethnic tourism.

As Kayan ethnic tourism in MHS was initiated by tour operators and vigorously promoted by the provincial authorities, the research seeks to understand the rationale of the provincial government's proposal to centralise the three Kayan villages into one settlement in Ban Huay Pu Kaeng. The thesis examines the impact that such relocation has on communities in already established villages. The impact is then assessed through the data collected from people who are directly involved in the affairs of the Kayan community.

Figure 1: Location map of Kayan villages in Mae Hong Son



Source: TAT 2003b, Mae Hong Son Tourism 2000, Wikimedia 2005.

News Domains: Methodology and Background to the Study.

To date there has been no substantial work done on the Kayan ethnic tourism generally and none on the impact of Kayan relocation to the new settlement. This study hopes to shed light into the nature of ethnic tourism upon the Kayan community. The methodology used for this research sought to gain access to local views and responses to their predicament. The approach was qualitative rather than quantitative. Qualitative research provides results in rich detail of how people feel and think. This research comprised both field research and document research; the latter included related journals, newspaper reports and articles on Kayan issues, and tourist promotion materials. Before embarking on the fieldwork trip to MHS, I spent several days researching at Chiang Mai University and Chiang Mai Rajabhat University in order to gain a deeper insight into the issues relating to the Kayan, especially Kayan cultural history as well as local Thai laws affecting this displaced tribe. On my return from MHS, I did further research at those universities.

Fieldwork was significant to the conduct of this research. The area in which this study took place is the tourist village of Huay Pu Kaeng. My reasons for selecting this village are of some importance. Firstly, Huay Pu Kaeng is the village in which the provincial government of MHS chose to develop its project named "*Village for the Preservation of the Kayan Traditional Way of Life and Security of MHS*". Thus Huay Pu Kaeng village appears to be comprised of two separate villages viz: the old settlement that is already established for years and the new "project village". This will inevitably create differences in the lives of the community, between the old settlers and the newcomers. My fieldwork highlights the impact of the relocation of the Kayan in the new village. Secondly, with the in-migration of Kayans from the other two villages, Ban Huay Pu Kaeng becomes the largest Kayan settlement in MHS. Thirdly, Ban Huay Pu Kaeng is the only Kayan village where tourists have to take a long-tail boat along River Pai in order to reach it. Travelling by boat incurs a higher cost to the tourist as they have to pay for the fare which provides income to the boatmen. In actual fact there is a hidden dirt road with numerous potholes passing through vegetables gardens and forest which finally ends up at the river bank

directly opposite Ban Huay Pu Kaeng. This road is not known to non-locals, let alone tourists. Only the Kayans and local merchants use it. I have travelled by both modes to this village. The bumpy boat ride gave me the same sense of how the tourists feel but riding a motorcycle on this stony and undulating dirt road was challenging and aroused my curiosity as to how could the Kayan possibly endure this inconvenience when travelling to places outside the village.

While in MHS province, I also visited the other two Kayan villages, Ban Mai Nai Soi and Ban Huay Sua Tow. Visiting these two other settlements allowed me to make comparison with the situation in Ban Huay Pu Kaeng.

In December 2006 long before conducting my fieldwork research, I had previously visited the three Kayan villages as a tourist. This visit was to get to know and cultivate a sincere friendship with the Kayans. When I came back to Australia, this friendship was kept alive by constant contact through phone and emails. When I started to do my fieldwork in December 2007, associating with the Kayan community was no longer a strange encounter, and I received so much help and cooperation from the Kayans in carrying out my fieldwork. For my in-depth interviews I was introduced to Kayans who already had gained significant standing in the community. For example, I got to meet the first Kayans who arrived in Thailand as refugees, and who played significant roles in introducing the Kayan culture to domestic and foreign tourists; I met Kayans who received educational training from foreign and Thai volunteer teachers enabling them to speak Thai or English quite fluently; Kayans who were community representatives in dealings with provincial government officials; Kayans who moved to the new village in Huay Pu Kaeng settlement and were directly affected by the relocation project; and a Kayan who worked for an international NGO.

As far as the Kayans are concerned, my good relationship with them has earned their trust. They took pleasure in participating and answering my questions.

In order to establish a basis for my dealings with senior Thai Government officials, I established contact with the Deputy District Officer (DDO) of MHS Provincial Office while I was still in Australia, through several phone calls and emails. I spoke with the DDO many times even before I had the opportunity to meet him. Being a native Thai, dealing with Thai officials was not difficult. The DDO was very supportive of my fieldwork and gave some assistance by supplying government materials pertaining to Kayan issues. He also arranged my interview with the Governor and was present during my interview (*See further report on this under Limitations of the Study*).

Altogether there were 14 participants all of whom have direct involvement with the Kayan community. They were the Governor of MHS, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) MHS Representative, Harbour Master at Pai River boat terminal, a tour operator, tourists, a teacher at Kayan village school and Kayan natives. The reason for choosing these participants was to provide first-hand accounts from the Kayan themselves and their possibly different perceptions of Kayan issues.

Before commencing an interview, I explained to the participant my research objectives and his/her rights as participant. If there were no questions raised by the participant, I would then ask for his/her consent to do a voice recording, otherwise to take notes if any of them was apprehensive of voice recording. For all voice recordings, the interviews were then transcribed. The information was then analysed by examining the responses to each question; steadily extracting the data, comparing the answers and finally summarising the data.

Limits of the study

As a minor thesis, this study does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis of the situation of the Kayan in Thailand. It does, however, seek to provide an empirically informed account of the lives of the Kayan in MHS and recent developments within the region. While conducting the field research for this study I encountered a number of obstacles. First it took almost four months to obtain official permission from the MHS Provincial

Security Unit to conduct fieldwork in the Kayan villages. The provincial government regards the issue of Kayan as very sensitive because it attracts the attention of human rights activists. The political status of Kayans in Thailand is still unclear. That is, are the Kayans to be regarded as one of the hill tribes or are they genuine Burmese refugees? Thus in the interest of Thai national security, my formal application to conduct this research came under special scrutiny. Due to assistance from the government official mentioned previously, I was finally given permission to do the fieldwork and was also able to interview the Governor. This approval was conditional that my survey questions focus mainly on issues of tourism. Second, at the time I conducted the research, there was a change of governorship in MHS. The former governor who initiated the proposal for Kayan relocation was transferred to another province, as the Governor of Lampang⁴. My interview was therefore with the new governor who was new to the affairs of MHS. Third, the difficulty of reaching each of the Kayan villages was most challenging, especially Ban Huay Pu Kaeng and Ban Mai Nai Soi. The road from town was good sealed road but upon nearing the villages, approximately two kilometres to the villages, the road was unsealed, undulating, full of potholes, slippery when wet, with several fairly steep slopes. The road to Ban Mai Nai Soi is crossed by a running creek which could become dangerous during the rainy season if one is travelling on a motorcycle like me. Because of this I chose to conduct my field during the dry winter season, i.e. December – January. Fourth, limited finance restricted me from spending longer time in conducting the fieldwork. However, even with the constraints of time and money, I was able to gather most of the information I required. It was therefore, a worthwhile trip to MHS as I hope to show in the forthcoming chapters.

⁴ It was acknowledged that his transfer had nothing to do with Kayan relocation. It was a routine rotation of governors administered by the Ministry of Interior. The Deputy Governor of Chiang Mai was promoted to be the new Governor of MHS on 28 September 2007

CHAPTER 1 – THE KAYAN: IDENTITY, GENEALOGY, HISTORY

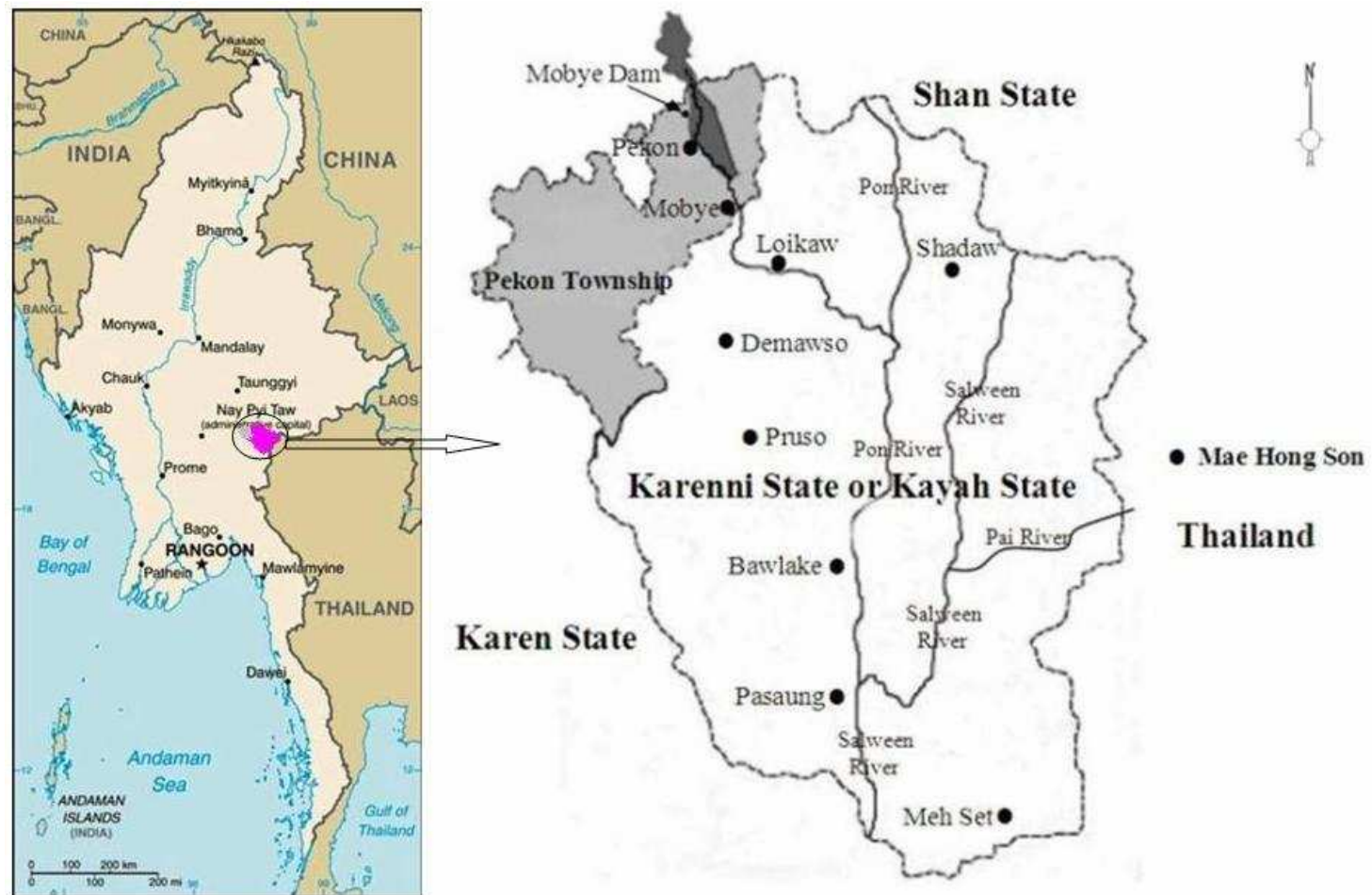
Kayan is the name that the tribe called themselves. The lowland Burmese called them *Padaung* which means *long necks* (Mirante 2006). The word *Padaung* is presumed to come from the word “*Paitong*” in Tai Yai language which means decorating the neck with gold. Thai people called this ethnic group *Kariang Kor Yau* meaning Long-Neck Karen, from the Kayan feature they see. The Kayah tribe used to call the Kayans *Lae Kur*. *Lae Kur* means “source of the river” because the Kayans were said to dwell in the highlands where a river originates. The word also means “Noble People of the Creek”. In return the Kayan called the Kayah tribe *Lao Gang* meaning “end of the river” because the Kayah tribe usually live at the lower plains close to the river (Boorootpat & Kammuang 1999: 5). This chapter describes selected aspects and rituals of traditional Kayan customary practices. I provide first, a genealogy of Kayan migration, second, an exploration of the myths surrounding the wearing of neck-rings, and finally describe some of the principal rituals animating Kayan spiritual systems and their continuing significance today.

De Vos (1982: 15) comments that “Language is often cited as a major component in the maintenance of a separate ethnic identity, and it is undoubtedly true that language constitutes the single most characteristic features of a separate ethnic identity.” Examining Kayan language can help identify which group the Kayans originate from. There are four main language groups in Burma, namely Tibeto-Burman, Mon-Khmer, Karen and Tai (Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer 1998: 15). Kayan language belongs to the Karenic branch of Tibeto-Burman language group in the Sino-Tibetan language family (Schliesinger 2000: 222, Perve 2006: 85, Boorootpat & Kammuang 1999: 8). The Kayan is one of the three major subgroups of Karenni (Red Karen) tribe. The other two are Kayaw and Kayah (Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer 1998: 11).

Ancestors of the Kayan dwelled in Mongolia some 3,600 years ago. Before the Kayans came to live in Burma, their native homeland was the middle region of Yunan plateau, China. For reasons still unclear, the Kayans migrated westwards reaching the Shan State of Burma (Boorootpat & Kummuang 1999: 5). The Kayan have since lived in Shan State and Karenni State. In the Shan State, Kayan settled in the region around Pekhon township, known as Mongpai or now called Moby which is about 25 miles northwest of Loikaw⁵ and about 150 miles from Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State (*see map, figure 2 page 13*) (Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer 1998: 11, Khoo Thwe 2002: 10). In Burma, the Kayans can be divided into 3 smaller groups: 1) *Kayan Kakhoun*, this is the group whose women wear brass coils around their necks, living in Yakkhu village and Kyatt village. The two villages are about 10 miles apart, both within the township of Demawso in Karenni State; 2) *Kayan Kangan* this is the group whose women wear silver jewellery around the neck, dwelling some 15 miles away from Demawso; 3) *Kayan Lahta* or Short-neck Kayan (Khoo Thwe 2002: 9), the group whose females neither wear brass coils nor silver rings around their necks but wear silver bangles in the arms and legs. They dwell in the rural areas of Shan State near the border of Karenni State (Boorootpat & Kammuang 1999: 7).

⁵ Loikaw is the state capital and the largest town of the Karenni State which is about 180 kilometres to the Thai border. Karenni State shares an international border with Thailand at MHS province to the east and shares state boundaries with Shan State in the northwest and Karen State in the southwest. Karenni State is divided into 7 townships namely Liokaw, Demawso, Pruso, Pasaung, Bawlake, Meh Set, and Shadaw (Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer 1998: 11).

Figure 2: Kayan's original homeland in Burma



Source: Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer 1998, Karen Human Rights Group n.d., U.S. State Department 2007.

The Kayans in Thailand: Neck-ring culture and tourism

The Kayan who took refuge in Thailand were mostly *Kayan Kakhoun*, the Kayan sub-group that wear brass coils around their necks. The Kayan began to take refuge in MHS towards the end of 1984 for a variety of reasons. Some came to escape the ethnic cleansing campaign of the Burmese military junta in Karenni or Kayah State and crossed the border at Phabong and Pangmoo sub-districts in the township of MHS. Some ran away from the fighting between the Burmese army and the Karen insurgents and taking refuge at Ban Mai Nai Soi, known by other names as Ban Tractor, Ban Kwai, or Site 1. Here they received humanitarian help from the Thai Government and were recognised as war refugees. Other Kayans sought to avoid being recruited as indentured labour through forcible relocation to non-cultivable regions. Some left Burma because the yields from their toils in the farm had to be shared with Burmese soldiers causing them to be impoverished and not to have enough food for their own family. This included yields such as vegetables, rice and animal husbandry. Refusal to hand over some of their crops or farm animals to the soldiers would frequently end up in retributions and killing.

The Governor of MHS saw that Kayan females who traditionally wear neck rings could be a great tourist attraction within the province. In 1985, the then Governor of MHS initiated a plan for tourism development for MHS. Government officials were sent to negotiate with the Kayah or Karenni leaders about opening Kayan cultural villages in MHS. Enterprising tour operators upon seeing that the government initiatives were lucrative, then made their own arrangements to go to Burma to bring Kayans to Thailand. With the assistance of Karenni leaders, private operators recruited Kayan long-necks for their own tourist villages. The Karenni leaders were paid good money which was then used to buy weapons for the Karenni rebels.

Kayan refugees who were already living in Thailand saw the financial benefit of Kayan tourism; they too went back to Burma and rounded up their neck-ringed relatives and friends to come to Thailand to be a part of tourism. One such example is given by Jenjira Sutuch Na Ayuthaya (2007), a Thai woman who married a Kayan and spends many years

of her life living in the Kayan village of Ban Huay Seua Tow. She narrates a personal experience of a Kayan woman who left Burma in response to Kayan tourism in Thailand:

At that time I was farming rice of which half of the harvest must be given to the owner of the land. Whatever left was often not enough to feed my family. Then there were the Burmese soldiers who always demanded rice from my small share. Sometimes when I had nothing to give, the soldiers would hit me. Our men had to hide themselves away from the armed soldiers otherwise they would be forcibly taken to be used as porters to carry landmines to be planted along the border ... not long after I gave birth to my seventh baby, I received news from a Kayan in Thailand informing me that life in Thailand was much better and I decided to go to Thailand with three of my children.

Today, Kayans can be found in eight tourist destinations, namely: 1) Chao Kow Kaset Cherngniwayt village, at Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. They were originally from Yapaa village, Mae Ai township in north-western corner of Chiang Mai province; 2) Mae Ta Man village, also in Chiang Mai province, moved from Chiangdao; 3) Mai village at Mae Ai district, Chiang Mai; 4) Yapaa village, Mae Ai, Chiang Mai; 5) Ta Kow Pleuak village, in the city district of Chiang Rai; 6) Mai Nai Soi village in the township of MHS; 7) Huay Seua Tow village, township of MHS; 8) Huay Pu Kaeng village, township of MHS (Ponlameuang Neua 2006). Kayan who settled in Ban Huay Seua Tow and Ban Mai Nai Soi mostly came from Kyatt village in Demawso township of Karenni State. Kayans who reside in Ban Huay Pu Kaeng were mostly from Yakkhu village, from the same township of Demawso (Boorootpat & Kammuang 1999: 8).

In memory of the dragon mother

For generations Kayan females have adorned their necks with brass coils but there is no written historical account of how the neck rings came to be a Kayan tradition. Stories are

told from mouth to mouth over generations. Not surprisingly, these oral accounts show considerable variation as to the origin of the neck-ring tradition.

One of the most popular stories within Kayan oral tradition is about the Kayan's ancestral mother who was a dragon (Khoo Thwe 2002: 18, Perve 2006: 90). Legends from Kayan mythology narrated that the neck ring was in memorial praise of the beauty of the dragon mother, the primal ancestor who gave birth to the human race. An elderly Kayan, Oong Jo narrated this story: There was a female dragon living in a big river. She wanted to know what a human being looked like. So she asked a little green frog "have you ever seen a human being?" The frog answered that it ever saw a living figure walking nearby a creek but was not sure if that was a human. The dragon then asked the frog to take her to where the frog had seen such a figure. Near the place where the frog appeared, the female dragon found a cave and she went inside it. From what she saw, she gathered that someone must have been living in it since it had lost its natural characteristics and was very untidy. She then transformed herself into a beautiful woman and cleaned up the cave. The cave man returned and saw that the inside of the cave was surprisingly clean and everything had been tidied up. He was curious who cleaned the cave. The next day when he went out, the dragon came again and transformed herself into a beautiful woman and tidied the cave. The man unexpectedly came back and saw this beautiful woman. After talking and getting to know each other, they fell in love and stayed together as husband and wife. As a result of this association, the beautiful woman became pregnant. The man went out as usual but before long he came back to get something he had left behind. He went into cave and saw his wife sleeping during the day but in form of a dragon. He was frightened. He left quickly and never returned. The wife waited for many days but since the husband did not come back, she decided to go back to where she came from. On the way, she gave birth and laid two eggs. Two hermits found the eggs. Each hermit took an egg and went his own way. When the eggs hatched, from one egg out came a male human and the other egg hatched a female human. The female human was the first Kayan and the male human was the first Pa-O, another Karen subgroup. These two human forms married and started the human generation. Seven children were born out of this marriage. Another tale states that a beautiful dragon with a long neck was

impregnated by the wind and produced the first Kayan people (Chawanaputorn et al. 2007: 639). According to Viwat, the Kayans believe that their ancestors were a swan and a dragon, so they make their necks long in memory of their ancestors (1997 cited in Boorootpat & Kammuang 1999: 14, Schliesinger 2000: 223).

According to Khoo Thwe (2002: 18), Boorootpat and Khammuang (1999: 14), Schliesinger (2000: 223), Chawanaputorn et al. (2007: 639), and Perve (2006: 89-90) the neck-rings are to protect against tiger attacks. Long ago the evil spirits were said to be angry with mankind and decided to send tigers to eat all women and so their ancestors recommended that all Kayan females must protect their necks by wearing brass coils.

Khoo Thwe (2002: 18) also mentions that the neck rings help to identify the Kayan tribe. "Our (Kayan) women ancestors wore rings around their necks so that they could be identified whenever they were reunited with their tribe." Ma Ra, a Kayan woman supported this view during my interview "formerly there were many Kayan females but many were kidnapped by the Burmans. Kayans went to ask for the return of their women, the Burmans asked which ones were their women? Because they could not identify their women, the women were not released. From thence onward it was recommended that Kayan females must wear brass coils as a form of group identity." Another similar story claims that, the wearing of brass coil emerged in order to solve problems associated with continuous ethnic fighting and as a strategy to discourage other groups from taking Kayan women. On this account the coils were intended to make their women look unattractive (Perve 2006: 90). Ma Now also relates how the neck-ring was designed to be cumbersome and make it difficult for girls to run away from home. The coil on the neck has two parts: one set is coiled around the neck and the other around the collar. At the legs, several rings are placed at the higher part of the calf, and some at the lower calf almost touching the ankles. The weight of brass rings on the body thus served to constrain mobility as Kayan tradition requires females to restrict themselves to their village and marry only men from the same tribe.

Within the Kayan oral tradition multiple interpretation and renderings are possible, for example, stories may be purposefully exaggerated or even, in some instances, completely new ones may be invented. One such story quoted by Boorootpat and Khammuang (1999: 14) and Schliesinger (2000: 223-224) is that of a nine-year old Kayan princess who escaped a Burmese onslaught on her territory. The little princess took with her a Kayan holy plant and wrapped it around her neck. She made a vow not to take the plant off from her neck until the Kayan regained their ancestral land. Kayans today use brass coil wound around their neck in memory of the princess. Other stories depict the Kayans as rich in gold and silver. When the Kayan were engaged in war, they took the gold and tied it on to their necks. The brass neck-rings today are a symbol of the old times when the Kayan were a wealthy grouping.

Oral accounts thus actively constitute social meaning and history. Some oral accounts also emphasize the aesthetic and exotic elements of the neck ring is said to enhance the beauty of a woman's long neck. Short necks are considered unattractive. For a Kayan female to develop an attractive long neck, Kayan girls start to wear brass coils at an early age, anytime between five years old to nine. The weight of a brass coil worn by a Kayan differs by age and length of time she has worn it. The coil is a solid brass rod, that is, with no hollow space in the coil. The price of each brass coil depends on its length and thickness. A brass coil worn by a Kayan may cost between 1,000 baht (\$33.33) to 8,000 baht (\$266.66). These coils are brought in from Burma. Fixing the spiral coil on the neck is done by a professional. The wearer cannot put it on by herself as a special skill is required to circle the coil around the neck neither tightly nor loosely. The service charge for placing a brass coil is usually 500 bahts (\$16.66). The brass rod is warmed over a charcoal oven to soften it and then immersed for a short moment in lime water before spiralling it around the wearer's neck. The weight of a young girl's neck rings is approximately 2.5 kilograms consisting of nine loops. After wearing for three to four years, the old one is taken out and replaced with a longer rod making more loops. The brass coil is changed about nine times in a woman's life span. The last coil change would be done around the age of 45 with the brass coil between 13 – 15 kilograms, which will

consist of 32 loops (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 10-11, Chawanaputorn et al. 2007: 639).

Kayan costume and adornments – the past and the present

Figure 3: Kayan women and a Burmanised Kayan woman in their traditional clothes, 1920s.



Source: Khoo Thwee 2002

Figure 4: The dress of Kayan women in 1920s.



Source: Khoo Thwee 2002

The traditional clothes of the Kayan have changed slightly from the past when they lived in Burma. Kayan females' costume shows their Kayan identity quite conspicuously. From the old photos taken in the 1920s, women can be seen wearing a white tunic or white top and red bottom tunic which is normally worn for weddings nowadays. They wear narrow hand-woven skirt folded at the front until the knees. From studies carried out by Boorootpat and Khammuang (1999: 9-10) the Kayan women are always fully dressed: white lose tunic down to the buttocks, long sleeve black blouse outside, short skirt to the knee made of black woven cotton material and flapped it over in front. Present day Kayan

women, mostly wear white V-neck hand-sewn blouse. I have seen such hand-made blouses in other colours, namely yellow, blue and pink. In the cold season in Thailand, they wear jackets bought from the market. Some of them still wear the traditional short skirts but most of them wear long sarong reaching the ankles. This sarong is worn by folding it at the waist and tied in a single knot, like the Burmanised Kayan woman in the photo (*figure 3 page 19*).

The hair style of Kayan woman is usually a fringe combed to the forehead and the back hair is tied high up in a bun and long wooden or silver pin(s) pushed through the hair to enhance decoration. Colourful sashes are tied around the hair and then decorated with flowers. Some present day Kayan girls do not tie up their long hair but let it hang down their back.

The most conspicuous costume of the Kayan females is the brass coil around the neck made from an alloy of silver, brass and gold. In the past, the coil had two parts, one worn around the collar with five to six large loops resting on the shoulder. The collar ring is kept apart from the neck rings by a vertical brass coil at the rear. Above the collar rings are the brass rings around the neck, often decorated further with silver chain coins and beads. The ear lobes are filled with silver plugs from which dangle silver chains and beads. In modern times, not many Kayan women wear both parts of the ring. Those who wear the collar rings are the elderly. A piece of cloth is usually placed between the neck ring and the chin to avoid irritation by chafing.

The legs of Kayan women are also decorated with rings. As Ma Now explained during my interview, “In the olden days, they also put brass coils around their the upper calf, leaving a space of about one to two inches down, then another set of brass coils are worn right down to the ankles. Nowadays, only the top part of the calf is decorated.” This woman wore rings on both parts of the calf when she was in Burma. In Thailand where the custom has become loosely observed, she took out her bottom part and replaced it with cloth just like a tight stocking. The hands are not left out in a Kayan female body decoration. Five to eight silver bangles are worn on the wrists on each hand. In the past,

Kayans were always barefooted. Shoes made the feet uncomfortable (Khoo Thwe 2002: 28).

Figure 5: A Kayan woman in a current tribal dress



Source: Paengnoy 2007a

It appears also that the wearing of neck rings in the past had different purpose to that of the present. In the past when Kayans were living in Burma, only girls who were born on a Wednesday night during a full moon were adorned with the neck rings. For these children who must be 100 per cent of Kayan parentage, wearing the rings for the first time was done in a ceremony conducted by a shaman. An auspicious day was selected to hold the ceremony. The Kayans read their destinies and plot their course of life by consulting chicken bones. The thigh bones of a chicken are stripped of the flesh and both scraped

with a knife until two small holes appear. A splint of bamboo about six inches in length is inserted in the holes in each bone. If the angles of the splint, after being probed into the holes, are alike in both bones that is a good sign and the ceremony may proceed. If not alike this is regarded as a bad omen and another day will be chosen (Bary 1933: 2).

In all the length of trouble taken to uphold tradition means that the Wednesday girl must wear the neck rings throughout her life in honour of the dragon mother. Refusal to wear the neck-rings will cause her to be exiled from the community. Boorootpat & Khammuang (1999: 10) point out that some Wednesday females who did not want to wear the neck rings committed suicide. Khoo Thwe (2002: 18) on the other hand does not mention those born specially on a Wednesday, “only girls born on auspicious days of the week and while the moon is waxing are entitled to wear them (the rings). These girls start wearing rings from the age of five, when the neck is circled only a few times. As they get older more rings are added. The rings are changed when they marry, and longer coil are added – one above and one below the main coil.”

Despite efforts to maintain a sense of tradition and cultural heritage it is apparent that today’s Kayans I spoke with, pointed out that presently in their homeland *in Burma*, less people are wearing the neck rings. In Burma the new generation of Kayans do not wear them; probably the brass coils have become too expensive to buy in the current situation of unending upheaval in Burma. The opposite appears to be the case in *Thailand*, where young and old alike wear them as a marker of ethnic identity among so many minority groups. In some cases, individuals decided to invest in the neck rings in order to get a monthly salary⁶ from the tourist village authority. Thus younger girls, whether born on Wednesday or not, have decided to wear the neck rings with the blessing and encouragement of their mothers. Ma Kham, a young Kayan woman informed me that she started wearing the neck rings when she was still living in Burma, “I am from Kyatt village, in Demawaso. Children in my village wore them and also one of my close friends. I wore it then to follow my friends”. Ma Ra, another Kayan of the same age came

⁶ Every Kayan who wears neck rings get an allowance of 1,500 baht (\$50) per month from the tourist village authority. See also Chapter 4, page 58.

from Hatukkuk village also in Demawso, “in my village no one wore it. I wear it after living in Chiang Mai for a year. I wear it because other women wear them”.

Kayan rituals and ceremonial practices

I was brought up not only among my ancestors, but among ghosts and fairies as well. Ours is a ghost and spirit culture, and for us the presence of ghosts is as natural as reincarnation is to the Buddhists. (Khoo Thwe 2002: 17)

Most of the Kayan rituals and ceremonies involve customary practices and religious beliefs which form an ethical basis for the conduct of their daily lives. As Khoo Thwe (2002: 17-18) points out “ghosts and spirits of the past were introduced into our daily lives with prayers and mantras, and they lived and ate with us like members of our families. ... They were part of us, and we part of them.” Ceremonies and rituals are designed to show gratitude to the spirits and to supplicate for rain and water, good yields from the farms, good health and cure from sickness. The Kayan’s belief in spirits is called “*Shu Ghun Bwe Kye*” meaning all types of spirits. The spirits that Kayans show a lot of respect are: spirit of the deep jungle *Ghun Bwe Kye*, the mountain spirit *Khoun Bwe Kye*, and the water spirit *Shu Bwe Kye*. Kayan called spirits *Nats* and there are all thirty-seven in total (Khoo Thwe 2002: 11). The spirit god is called *Khahkwan Bwe Kye* (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 23).

In MHS the Kayan New Year is celebrated with the erecting of a holy wooden post called the *Khahkwan*. This holy post is the gathering centre for all the spirits. In Tai Yai language it is called *Ngan Ton Tee* (T-Tree Ceremony) meaning Umbrella Tree Ceremony because at the top of the post is constructed an imitation castle which is shaped like an umbrella (*figure 6 page 25*) (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 23). This *Khahkwan* ceremony is celebrated in MHS every year between March and April. In Burma it is celebrated after harvesting. Pascal Khoo Thwe (2002: 57) explains that “auspicious days for the ceremonies were chosen by the elders with the help of bone

oracles. A chicken was killed, and the village shaman would rip the leg bones from the flesh and read the signs. If they were auspicious the festival would go ahead as planned. If they were unfavourable the festival would be postponed, and the villagers would sacrifice a pig to appease the *Nats* before the next reading of the bone oracles. They would go on doing this until the signs were auspicious, and if that did not happen the festival would be abandoned altogether. Instead the villagers would attend the festival of other villages.” Kayans in MHS do the same. Before the full moon, they will have the bone oracle with the chicken bone ritual to look for the auspicious time to have this ceremony; to find out which direction in the jungle to look for the tree and to get a prediction that the post would be male or female. If the prediction says the post will be female, the tree to be felled will be short. If the post will be male, the tree sought after will be straight and tall. The chicken bones also give signs of the best place to erect the holy post (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 23). In MHS whichever village holds the ceremony, Kayans from the other two villages will come and join the celebration. Each village takes turn to celebrate the New Year ceremony.

Figure 6: *Khahkwan ceremony*



Source: Kayan New Generation Youth n.d.

Preparation for this ceremony takes three or four days. When an auspicious day has been decided by the chicken bone oracle, the next step is to look for a blessed tree in the jungle. A team of tree fellers will be led by a shaman who will show the chosen tree. To do this, the shaman will invite favorable spirits to enter his body by chanting prayers and mantras. When he is deemed to have been possessed by the spirits, he will show a particular tree. The villagers then cut down the tree. The branches and twigs of the tree are cut away; the leaves and barks are cleaned off, just leaving a long piece of smooth clean log. All the time drums and gongs beat noisily and the long log is carried back to the village with the shaman riding on it. At the village the log is placed on benches or other wood in such a way that the chosen log does not touch the ground. They wash the log until it is perfectly clean, and then leave it to dry. The next step involves decorating the top part of the log with bamboo threads woven into beehive patterns to attract the spirits. On the third day the log is ready to be erected in the sacred field just outside the village. The ritual starts by blessing the post; the villagers slaughter pigs and offer the heads, trotters and tails to the guardian spirit of the village. A live chicken is strangled at the neck until blood profuse from its mouth and the blood squirts onto the trunk of the post. Thanks are given to the spirits by dancing around the *Khahkwan* post to the sound of beating drums and gongs. As they dance, an unmarried man goes around giving each dancer rice wine to drink. Women are not allowed to enter the ground until the whole ritual is finished and then the holy post can no longer be touched by anyone. In MHS, after the rituals around the post, the villagers will invite guests from other villages to come to their home for a feast and drinks of rice wine. The dancers at the post will come and dance again in front of each house as a blessing for the inhabitants of the house (Khoo Thwe 2002: 58, Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 24-25).

Feeding the spirits

Feeding of the water spirit is also a customary ritual performed to seek an abundant supply of water for cultivation of crops. This ritual is performed between March and May before the rain season sets in. The water spirit is approached at where the river or creek starts. Offerings to the spirits comprise of meats of buffaloes, wild boar or chicken placed

under a big tree near the creek. Where the food is left for the spirits, a bamboo fence is erected in order to prevent people getting near the offerings. Although there are no rice fields in any of the Kayan villages in MHS, the ritual is still performed since Kayans continue to cultivate crops around their houses or around creeks near the village.

Feeding the mountain spirit is a ritual to supplicate for the success of their maize and other vegetable crops grown on hill slopes and for farmers to have good health. This ritual is performed in November during the cold season. Offerings for the mountain spirit are the same as for the water spirit (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 25).

Being an agricultural community, continuous good health is very important to the Kayan. The *Takkrug ceremony* is a ritual to appease the spirit of good health. The ceremony asks forgiveness from the spirits so that the spirit would not inflict any sickness on the villagers. This ritual is done during August to October when many villagers fall ill during the rainy season. Flu and cold are common. Early in the morning before sunrise: a firestone, a piece of chicken meat, pork, and cooked rice, some tobacco, betel leaf, candle, and family clothing either new or old, are put in a basket placed on a wooden stand in the east of the village where the sun will rise. Prayers are made asking the spirit to enjoy the offerings in the basket. The basket will be left there until the next rain season the following year. In MHS this can be a family ritual or a mass ritual done together.

It is Kayan's belief that when a baby falls ill it is because the spirit has taken away the child's soul. According to Kayans, the soul of people called "kwan" is centred at the whorl of hair on top of the head. The calling of the spirit to nourish the soul is done when a new born child is one month old. This ritual involves killing a rooster and a female pig. Blood of the rooster and the heart of the pig are smeared on the baby's forehead between the eyebrows and over the nose. A small chicken feather is placed between the two eyebrows. People will then tie white strings on the baby's wrist and wish for the spirit to give the child good health. If a child falls ill, the shaman will use a type of grass (often used to make thatch roof of the house) to determine what kind of offerings the spirits would want and the place where the soul of the child is hidden. These offerings will be

taken to the place shown by the shaman and the soul of the baby will be taken home so that the child will be cured (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 26).

Kayan's wedding night

In most Southeast Asian societies, rural people have been seen to adhere to customs and traditions much more strongly than city folks. The cultural life of an Asian country is often reflected in the traditional practices of its villagers. An Asian wedding ceremony though different in each country and society is always interesting and enjoyable in its own right. So is the Kayan wedding ceremony.

Kayans do not marry people who are close relatives, not even third cousins (Khoo Thwe 2002: 39). In the past in Burma, parents are the ones who choose the future spouses of their sons and daughters. It is customarily construed that the best wife is one who can make the best rice wine. Times have changed and the young Kayan people in MHS choose their own future partners. A man who wants to marry a girl must send his relatives to the girl's parents to ask for the girl's hand in marriage. The answer for the acceptance or rejection of the marriage proposal will be given the next day. The girl must sleep the night first. If she has a good dream or no dream at all, then the answer will be *yes*. In the event she has a bad dream, then the proposal will be rejected. In case of acceptance, adults from both families will then discuss and decide what kind of dowry, in money and kind is to be paid by the groom. An auspicious time of marriage will be decided by the chicken bone oracle. During the wedding, friends and relatives will tie white strings on both the wrists of the bride and groom and wish them a happy life. The wedding ceremony is accompanied with a feast, music and tribal dance (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 27, Ma Kham). After the wedding celebration which usually finishes late at night, tradition requires that the groom carry his bride on his back to his home. Failure to perform this tradition, results in the groom being fined by the elders of the bride's side. (Khoo Thwe 2002: 32). In MHS, the tradition of the bride jumping on the groom's back for a ride home is no longer practised. There are also instances today where

a Kayan man and woman live together without being married. This practice is frowned upon by the Kayan society.

Till death do we part

From the wedding night, the bride stays at the husband's dwelling. Every Kayan marriage is for good. Divorce is never heard of in a Kayan society. Matrimonial separation only occurs if the husband or the wife goes to another town or country to work but he/she sends money home regularly. In MHS, usually husband and wife come to migrate together. Those with children come as a family. A young married couple grows old together in the same place. Only in death of a spouse, does a woman or man becomes single again.

When there is death in the community, the relatives will be the ones who bathe the corpse. The dead person is then dressed in new clothes. The body is then laid on a bed. Behind the head, a candle is lighted at all times. The candle light is believed to attract the spirits to look after the body so that it would not rot or smell. Relatives and friends would pay their last respects by dancing in slow motion around the body. This funeral dance is called *Jhwa Luu*, a ritual to send the soul of the dead to heaven. Others who do not dance will sit around and cry non-stop softly with a long melodious weeping sound. The body is kept between two to four days according to the social status of the dead person. The richer the person, the longer the body is kept. Throughout the days of mourning, cows and buffaloes will be slaughtered to feast the visitors. Kayans do not cremate their dead. They bury it in a grave with the head facing west. On the grave, there will be tomb stone with the name of the dead person inscribed, his date of birth and date of death (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 27). In MHS, the dead are generally kept for three nights. For each night, villagers from each of the three villages would perform the funeral dance.

Kayan rituals and ceremonies in MHS are the same as those practised in Burma but the way some rituals are performed might not be similar. Ma Prang, an educated Kayan

woman in MHS pointed out when interviewed, “(Some traditional practices) might not be the same anymore as practised in Burma, for example, the customs of feeding the spirits here is not the same as in Burma. But we try to preserve the customs; inevitably some of them will also be lost through generations, because the elderly people who know how to conduct these ceremonies will soon be gone. If the elderly dies, the new generation who are born in Thailand will never know of their traditional customs as practised by their forefathers. In Burma, young people are not exposed to foreign influence and can still inherit the knowledge from the elders.”

The following chapter therefore, analyses the shifting contours of belief of destination communities under the impact of global tourism. In particular, I attempt to get “inside ethnic tourism” by examining its diverse forms and impacts. The chapter argues that ultimately the promotion of ethnic tourism is a form of neo-colonial enterprise.

CHAPTER 2 - INSIDE ETHNIC TOURISM

At the dawn of the (21st) century in which the tourism of outer space begins, there is an ever increasing demand to search out societies in all corners of the globe (Grunewald 2006)

This chapter examines the nature of ethnic tourism in today's globalised world. I review the relevant literature on ethnic tourism, beginning with definition of "ethnic tourism" itself. I then examine a range of issues pertaining to the forms of ethnic tourism and their impact on the destination communities. I argue that certain types of ethnic tourism entail the exploitation of the destination community by tourist middlemen and represent a form of neo-colonialism. This chapter also provides a further basis on which to analyse the plight of the Kayan tribe of northern Thailand.

Ethnic tourism

In all of Southeast Asia, ethnic tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon. Ethnic tourism for Smith (1989: 4) is "marketing of the "quaint" customs of indigenous and often exotic peoples for tourist consumption". Xiaoping Wu (2000) subscribes to Smith's definition by not differentiating between ethnic tourism and cultural tourism in her work in Guizhou, China, where tour brochures and guide books offer the tourists 'exotic' tribal peoples whose festivals and costumes are 'fascinating and vibrantly unique', traditional and authentic. The most common feature of ethnic tourism in Guizhou is the performance of ethnic minority songs and dances, the presentation of the rituals and festivals. In a similar vein Moscardo and Pearce (1999: 417) view ethnic tourism as travellers choosing to experience first hand the practices of another culture. This may for example, involve performances, presentations and attractions supplied by small, often isolated indigenous communities. The ethnic tourist wishes to see peoples and places untainted by outside influences. McIntosh and Goeldner (1995), Smith (1978, 1989), and Van den Berge (1994) all point out to an ethnic tourist as "travelling for the purpose of observing the

cultural expressions and lifestyles of “exotic” people; pursuing the “quaint” customs of indigenous and other people as exemplified by the Toraja in Indonesia and searching for the ethnically exotic in an untouched, primitive and authentic a form a tourist can find” (cited in Moscardo & Pearce 1999: 416). Ethnic tourism is then “a type of tourism where the primary purpose is to introduce the tourist to an unfamiliar or exotic ethnic group, including material and performative elements of their culture and society” (Yea 2002: 173-174).

It cannot be denied that definitions of ethnic tourism have often been associated with cultural tourism (Li 2000: 116). Smith (2003: 29-30) points out that “cultural tourism is relatively easy to fall into the trap of using terms such as ‘heritage tourism’, ‘arts tourism’, ‘ethnic tourism’ or ‘indigenous tourism’ almost interchangeably. ... cultural tourists are interested in the more experiential aspects of culture ... particularly in the context of indigenous or ethnic tourism, the way of life of a people is a central focus.”

Ethnic tourism also overlaps with other types of tourism. Amy Elizabeth Anderson (1994) in *Ethnic tourism in the Sierra Tarahumara: a comparison of two Raramuri Ejidos* links ethnic tourism to eco-tourism or environmental tourism. Her argument is based on previous propositions by Boo (1990) and Whelan (1991) that people visit a region to enjoy its natural beauty. In doing so, they also come to contact with the indigenous or traditional group of people who live in this environment. “Visitors enjoy both the natural environment and the singular ethnic experience. Because of the ethnic groups’ dependence on the environment, it is difficult to separate ethnic tourism from the landscape in which it occurs.” This is similar to Cohen (2001: 15) who refers to the “jungle tours” conducted in northern Thailand. These he contends, “the jungle tours were in fact ethnic tourism, pure and simple” in the form of trekking trips through hill-tribe villages and forested areas. The tourists were brought to remote hill tribe localities and stayed for a few hours or a night, observing and taking pictures of the locals at close encounter in their habitat without any of what MacCannell (1989: 100-102) refers as a “tourist space”. Similarly travelling to Kayan Huay Pu Kaeng village by boat provides tourists the opportunity to admire the scenic beauty of the banks of River Pai, stopping at

the cave before experiencing the exotic culture of the Kayans, appreciating the ecology is combined with the visit to the destination community. Tourism can, therefore, be viewed as a way to explore, appreciate and enjoy the beauty of the landscape, and the local culture as reflected by the life style of the destination inhabitants. While it can be argued that tourism destroys the environment and adulterates ethnic cultures, it is also possible that sustainable forms of tourism may enhance the preservation of culture and the environment. Notwithstanding it appears irrefutable that ethnic tourism is particularly harmful when the financial benefits of tourism are not equally shared between tourism promoters and people in the destination communities and when those communities are forced to sell themselves as products for tourist consumption.

Tourisms' neo-colonialists

When the tourist industry is managed by outsiders, to whom profits flow, tourism becomes a form of imperialism, and may often develop into a neo-colonialism (Smith 1978: 5)

It is often contended that tourism brings benefits to the host country since it generates foreign exchange, creates jobs and generates business in many sectors of local industries: accommodation, transport, food, arts and craft, tours, and retail. The fallout from these economic impacts it is argued, is an improved local economy, infrastructure development, greater opportunities for shopping, and the creation of new business opportunities (Kreag 2001).

In developing countries tourism always has an important role to play in development process. Tourism can stimulate the development of other sectors such as transportation and transport infrastructure, communication, promotion of native art and craft, revival of culture; all of which have development-inducing activity attach to it (Swee-Hock 1980: 245). It may induce improvements in public utilities such as clean water supply, sewerage, sidewalks, street lighting, parking, public toilets, litter control and landscaping, improvements that benefit tourists and locals alike (Kreag 2001: 7). Tourism can also

increase a country's tax revenues through business taxes, fuel taxes and income tax (Forsyth et al. 2007).

If however, "the tourism industry does not involve the interaction of people on equal terms, it is seen as an industry for the privileged which, particularly in the developing world context, is predicated upon and takes advantage of underprivileged 'others'. It is an industry of victims as well as winners" (Parnwell 2000: 138). It is appropriate to ask therefore, just how much tourism developments benefit local populations? In particular we may ask how much of the tourism revenue really remains in the host country? The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2002a) on Tourism talks about "leakages" in tourism revenues. Leakages are the amount subtracted for wages, taxes and imports from revenue received from tourist spending. In my country (Thailand) almost all of the 5-star hotels in big cities like Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket are owned by multinational enterprises. This is easily seen by the name of hotels like Davis Hotel, The Grand Millennium, The Hilton, The Hyatt, Royal Meridien, Chiang Mai Imperial, The Empress, Chiang Mai Shangri-La, and dozens more. Go to any of the 5-star hotels in Bangkok, it is not surprising to find that the professional and managerial positions including the Head Chef are non-locals, usually Westerners. Outside hands will continue to manage the hotel industry so long Thailand depends on tourism as a means of earning huge foreign exchange by which huge profits flow back to foreign investors. Local Thais are satisfied to operate medium size hotels, guest houses and budget accommodations.

Moreover, as the UNEP points out, "in most all-inclusive package tours, about 80 per cent of travellers' expenditures go to the airlines, hotels and other international companies (who often have their headquarters in the travellers' home countries), and not to local businesses or workers. In addition, significant amounts of income actually retained at destination level can leave again through leakage" (UNEP 2002a). The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimated that between 40 and 50 per cent of gross tourism earnings in most developing countries go towards import-related leakage (UNEP 2002a). Countries, mostly in the Asian region, import brand name wines, beer and alcoholic drinks like whisky, rum, brandy and gin, and foodstuff like beef steak,

lamb chops, cheese, butter, bacon, and ham from Western countries because they cannot produce these items themselves to meet tourist needs. One of the big expenditures in this leakage process which should not be overlooked is overseas promotional expenditures as that carried out by Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan in conjunction with the promotion of their national airlines.

Besides the leakages mentioned above, one need to ask what type of jobs and income sources are generated by particular forms of tourism? Many of the jobs created for example, are precarious and insecure. This work is often low-paid, temporary, casual and seasonal, resulting in under-employment or unemployment during the low tourist season or off-season (Kreag 2001). Tour guides, coach drivers, souvenir shops assistants and restaurant workers are the most vulnerable workers in these categories.

Increasing demand for basic services and goods from tourists will also often cause price hikes that negatively affect local residents whose income does not increase proportionately. In some instances the price of land increases in value in a similar fashion, due to new constructions of hotels, guest houses, restaurant, shops and the like (UNEP 2002a). In my home province of Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, much of the agricultural lands formerly containing vast rice fields, tobacco and maize plantations were sold to foreign and local developers to build holiday resorts, guest houses and golf courses for the benefit of foreign tourists, causing a disruption of the local economic system. Non-local owners and corporations may export profits out of the community (Kreag 2001: 6) leaving the local community and its generation with no sustainable livelihood.

In local tourist destinations, tourism authorities often assume the power of neo-colonialists of the destination community while also reaping the biggest financial reward. The destination locals who are directly involved in tourism activities get the least amount of tourism revenue. Yea (2002) highlights the situation in Sarawak, East Malaysia, where destination communities must agree to the changes imposed by the tour operators to further exoticise the cultural life of the Iban tribes. If the destination community fails to

comply, no tourists are taken to visit their long-houses, meaning no income for the community. Similarly, in Kayan ethnic tourism, the Kayans must agree to the condition set by the tourism bosses (*see Chapter 4 page 58*) if they wish to keep receiving the monthly salary.

Tourism in the form of neo-colonialism results in extreme inequality in tourism revenue distribution and thus exploitation of the local community (Smith 2003: 49). However, people in some tourist destinations do not pay much attention in those contentious issues; as long as tourism brings some benefits to them. To them tourism serves as a good source for improving income, education, local infrastructure and services, opportunity for peace, understanding and greater knowledge to people in local destinations (Brunt & Courtney 1999).

Socio-cultural impact

Contact between foreign tourists and destination communities can promote international understanding, giving both sides the opportunity to learn each other's culture and values. Kreag (2001: 9) suggests that being exposed to a different culture in a different environment is an educational experience. The visitor learns about his host and the host is exposed to the visitor's values, promoting greater tolerance of social differences. This view is shared by Smith (1978: 6) who argues that many tourists genuinely want to "get to know the people". The ethnic tourist experience is different to what the tourists see or do at home because it includes experiencing the real life of the destinations they visit. It is "an interface for cultural exchange, facilitating the interaction between communities and visitors" (Gawler Visitor Information Centre n.d.: 2). "Tourists bring diverse values to the community and influence behaviour and family life. Individuals and the collective community might try to please tourists or adopt tourist behaviours" (Kreag 2001: 8). The foreign tourists do not, however, just bring themselves they also bring along their habits and culture. If we take the hamburger as an example, it is obvious that hamburger is not one of the traditional food of peoples in Asia and Africa. However, McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Starbucks, grow like mushrooms in most Asian cities. Tourism has brought

Western food to serve the palate of foreign tourists and locals. In Thailand, McDonald's adapts its hamburgers to suit the Thai taste. It sells hamburger pork with Thai herbs. McDonald's in Singapore sell sweet sour pork hamburgers adjusted from the old beef hamburgers (Wi'titanon 2007). It is not my intention to argue here that tourism is in all instances harmful. Indeed as Smith (1989: 9) comments "the tourist trade does not have to be culturally damaging." Changes can happen on both sides of the tourist divide, (tourists and locals) and changes will continue to take place (Adams 1974 cited in Smith 1989: 37). Since tourism connects people from far off places with the locals of the tourist destination, "tourism can be a bridge to an appreciation of cultural relativities and international understanding" (Smith 1989: 9). And, it may well be true as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (2001: 12) states that "tourism is an activity that contributes to a better understanding of places, people and their cultures." For this to be the case however, requires that there be respectful dialogue across cultural boundaries and a measure of equality in the process of exchange.

Tourism can allow local crafts, foods, cultural exposition and personalities to be kept alive while raising revenue for the community's economy. Tourism sustainable and culturally sensitive can improve the quality of life in an area by increasing the number of attractions, recreational opportunities and services. It may offer locals the opportunity to meet interesting people, learn about the world and expose themselves to new perspectives (Kreag 2001: 9). Tourism if developed in this manner can also serve as a supportive force for peace, foster pride in cultural traditions and help avoid urban relocation by creating local jobs (UNEP 2002c).

As often happens when different cultures meet, socio-cultural impacts are ambiguous: the same objectively described impacts are seen as beneficial by some groups, and are perceived as having negative aspects by other stakeholders. Some researchers hold the view that negative impacts arise when tourism brings about changes in value systems and behaviour and thereby threatens indigenous identity. Changes often occur in community structure, family relationships, collective traditional life styles, ceremonies and morality as seen by Wu (2000) in the Hmong community of Guizhou province in southwest China.

Tourism industry offers better opportunity to earn more and faster cash. Local Hmongs are keener to participate in cultural performances rather than working in rice field and vegetable farms. More and more young people have lost interest in farming and do not feel the need to master traditional farming skills. To add insult to injury, much of the farming land has been taken over for tourism development – preparing the infrastructure in terms of sealed roads, parking lots, restaurants, souvenir shops, public toilets and the like, has left farmers with merely rocky hill slopes for farming. Cash compensation is often too little to start farming all over again in difficult terrain. Traditional handicraft skills are slowly dying off. Village girls no longer learn to weave traditional clothes as most of them are attracted to the “easier life” and prefer to enrol and be trained as cultural dancers, singers and performers. Clothes made to suit the liking of tourists tend to be more revealing and sexually alluring. Such attire slowly replaced the Miao traditional clothes designs, which have religious and historical significance.

As Kreag (2001: 9) points out in some instances regular interactions may lead to excessive drinking and alcoholism, increase underage drinking and involvement with drugs and prostitution. Smith (1989: 9) supports that view with her comments “prostitution, drug abuse, alcoholism and juvenile homosexuality – though not necessarily caused by tourism *per se*, are increased due to the presence of many outsiders.” In this perilous encounter, both the tourist and the local should bear equal responsibility for the blame: the tourist being the “seeker” and the local being the “supplier”.

There are other facets associated with the socio-cultural fallout of tourism. Like all destination communities for ethnic tourism the Kayans are exposed to the gaze of tourists from all parts of the world. Ma Prang, a Kayan woman in Huay Pu Kaeng village commented that she had never seen a white man before. “When the first time a white tourist visited my village, I was shocked and frightened. But as more white tourists visited us, I got used to their appearance.” Some tourists are friendly and make friends easily with Kayans. Others are straight forward gazers who look at Kayans as objects of curiosity. Ma Yom, a Kayan who works for an NGO said “if tourists take more time to

ask about (our) daily lives and what we are doing and talk as friends I would really appreciate. But (when) they just come and take pictures (of us), I feel very uncomfortable.” This lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of some tourists towards the Kayans is most worrying. Ma Prang, became upset when relating her personal experience of such insensitivity, “tourists invade our privacy as if it is their right. They took pictures of us without asking permission. They just take pictures, not one but a lot. On one occasion I was breast-feeding my baby. They took pictures of me. For all I knew later, they made my photos into postcards and sold them worldwide. When I was shown the postcard, I hated it. If they want to take photos for themselves, it’s OK. But selling my breast-feeding photo to the world is not good.” In addition to the arrogant ethnocentric appropriation of her identity the Kayan woman in question was not offered a single baht for the photo. It was simply taken for granted that she was an exhibit in a live museum; a subject for voyeuristic objectification. Smith (1978: 7; 1989: 10) concludes that host-guest relationships are often strained by the mutual failure to understand social roles within respective cultures. Social stress often becomes apparent when tourism invades the privacy of daily lives.

Cultural commodification and authenticity

Culture is inseparable with human life. It is not something static but subject to changes according to social conditions and the environment. Tourism tries to make everything into a product of value for commercial gain. Smith (1989: 173) argues that “a fundamental characteristic of the capitalist system is that anything that can be priced can be bought and sold. It can be treated as commodity.” Commodification of culture can be artificial and thus inauthentic. Smith (1989: 179) contends “culture ... is something that people believe in implicitly. By making it part of tourism package, it is turned into an explicit and paid performance and can no longer be believed in the way it was before.” The commodification of culture runs the risk of being turned into a “staged authenticity.” This process might preserve a tradition but it makes it difficult to differentiate if it is original or whether it has been reformulated or invented for tourist consumption.

Tourism began to emerge as an object of research in the 1970's. Since then a vast amount of work has been produced in this field (Grunewald 2006). In much tourism research work, "authenticity" has been the main focus of discussion. Of particular concern here has been the impact on destination communities and the cultural reformulations brought about by "cultural brokers" (travel agencies, guides and tour operators). MacCannell (1976: 91) uses the term "staged authenticity" to describe the marketing of ethnic tourism. "Tourees put their culture (including themselves) on sale in order to create an appealing package" (Chhabra, Healy & Sills 2003: 705). MacCannell suggests that "the rhetoric of tourism is full of manifestations of the importance of the authenticity of the relationship between tourist and what they see" (MacCannell 1973: 14), and "touristic shame is not based on being a tourist but on not being tourist enough ... on a failure to see everything the way it ought to be seen" (MacCannell 1973: 10).

It is generally construed and expected that every ethnic tourist would like to see and experience the 'authentic' culture of the destination group. The tourist seeks out the authentic, and despises the fellow tourist who accepts a shallow, "touristic" image" (Johnson 2006). Smith (2003: 117) sees "those tourists who venture in search of traditional and ethnic cultures in remote locations are often motivated partly by an anthropological desire to learn more about communities under threat by global forces, but also to satisfy their need for cultural experiences of a diverse nature." But can the tourists get a truly authentic experience? In seeking authenticity, the tourist has a pre-formed image of what the authentic destination group is like through various kinds of media (Johnson 2006: 5). Yea (2002) notes that the more pronounced the cultural differences between the tourist and the destination community, the more successfully performed the excursions would be.

There have been criticisms that some tourism promotions are misleading because the information in the tour brochures has little similarity to the realities of life of the destination community. Any dissimilarity can be extremely problematic because it means that the destination communities are forced to make substantial alterations to many facets of their lives in order to accommodate the tourists' expectations. Leepreecha (2005: 1)

observes that tourists who eagerly explore unspoiled cultures and consume authentic experiences and souvenirs tend only to get the fake and dramatic ones. The more tourism develops the less authenticity of ethnic culture exists. Instead what we see is more and more a “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1989: 100) being performed for the tourists. “Settings are often not merely copies or replicas of real-life situations but copies that are presented as disclosing more about the real thing than the real thing itself discloses. ... A mere experience may be mystified, but a touristic experience is always mystified” (MacCannell 1989: 102). Adams’ (1997) research also illustrates how Torajan history and customs are being reshaped to accommodate tourism development in Sulawesi, Indonesia, giving rise to the problem of differentiating aspects of Torajan culture which are authentic and those which are invented. Indeed, it is not hard to find further illustrations of this process. In *Ethnic Tourism – A helicopter from “Huge Graveyard” to Paradise*, Wu (2000) points out that in the mountainous Guizhou province, southwestern China, the Miao group is very happy for the tourists to photograph and video-record their colourful religious ceremonies and processions. The more tourists that come to watch their traditional rituals, the happier are the participants as more income is generated for the host community. So much so, in Guizhou there are no longer any festivals arranged for their original purpose. As the Miao themselves said, “this is performance for the tourists; It has nothing to do with our own beliefs” (Wu 2000: 17). In South African ethnic tourism, traditional dances are shortened to accommodate the schedules of the tour groups, and traditional cuisine is internationalised to make it acceptable to the palates of the visitors (Ramchander 2004: 85).

In the form of merchandise, when a traditional product is tuned to the taste of the tourists, authenticity loses its intrinsic value. In the case of Columbian ethnic tourism for instance, “creating *molos*, which are the blouses worn by Kuna women in Colombia, is an art that began with designs that reflected the conception of the world, of nature, and of the spiritual life of the Kuna Nation. Now it is increasingly being transformed, through tourism, into a commercial trade which causes loss of its spiritual value and quality. This is changing the designs of the *molos* to correspond to the interests of the tourists, while at

the same time the Kuna women are losing their knowledge of the old designs and the interpretations and meanings of the mola designs” (UNEP 2002b).

Nonetheless a number of writers argue that not all tourists seek authenticity and that many tourists recognise the inauthenticity of the experience but still enjoy it (Cohen 2001: 32, Adams 1997, Moscardo & Pearce 1996). The tourist is aware that authenticity can be faked: “the tourist and the industry are locked in arms race of style, where the tourist reaches for ever more powerful abilities of discernment, and the tourist industry attempts to stage more and more believable displays of authenticity” (Johnson, 2006: 5). However, some tourism critics are unconcerned about inauthenticity, and do not mind staged authenticity either. They argue that at least “ethnic tourism can restore arts, revitalise skills, foster creativity and provide a platform for communities to present themselves positively” (Moscardo & Pearce 1996: 417). In some cases moreover, ethnic tourism creates a fertile context for the reinterpretation of history and custom (Adams 1997). Because of this, some tourists are more apologetic by saying that staged authenticity is alright as long the destination community is not exploited as a result of it (an American tourist).

Exploitation

Ethnic tourism follows “existing structural paths” and ones that do not always benefit the natives. Touristified ethnic groups are often weakened by a history of exploitation [...] limited in resources and power, and they have no big buildings, machines, monuments or natural wonders to deflect the tourists’ attention away from the intimate details of their daily lives. Ethnic tourism is especially vulnerable to a form of social disorder (MacCannell 1992 cited in Grunewald 2006).

It becomes apparent when reviewing the extant literature in the field of ethnic tourism that those writers who emphasize the positive impacts of tourism often tend to look no

further than the putative economic benefits that tourism delivers. On the other hand, writers critical of touristic impacts are often interpreted in the context of exploitation of the community, its culture or the environment.

In northern Thailand, where ethnic villages are too far away from towns and cities, hill tribes are brought to reside closer to town in order to provide convenience for potential tourists who have little time to make a journey far inland to where the real settlements are. In Chiang Mai, the owners of Chiang Mai Old Cultural Centre brought different highlands ethnic groups to live and perform cultural shows for tourists in town in a performance called Kantoke Dinner. The tourists are entertained with a northern style Thai dinner and entertained with hill tribe shows. Non-performers hill tribes are also given rent-free spaces to sell ethnic souvenirs and products (Leepreecha 2005). The hill tribe performers are paid for their services but a very meagre amount. Majority of them are former displaced persons or refugees from neighbouring Burma mainly Tai Yai and Karen subgroups.

Thailand has always had an ambivalent attitude toward Burmese refugees. They are often depicted as criminals, carriers of infectious diseases, and a threat to the environment in the protected jungle area.

... The Thai Government has been a reluctant host to many of them. But the Padaung [Kayan] were actively encouraged to cross the border. The Thai benefit from the extra income generated by the influx of tourists to the region (Rose 1995).

... the Kayan are allowed to live in villages away from the concealed refugee camps because the women, who wear striking brass coil neck ornaments, have been successfully promoted as a "tourist attraction" by Thai agencies (Grundy-Warr and Wong Siew Yin 2002: 110).

In spite of the fact the Kayan are “illegal migrants”, the Thai government pays more attention to promoting them as tourist attractions, even using pictures of them as images to represent MHS province. A large “Welcome to Mae Hong Son” poster at the arrival gate of the airport displays a huge photo of a Kayan long-neck woman. The incitement to visit hill tribe enclaves comes in the form of advertisements with the blessing of government tourism authorities. Enticing words like “Original”, “Primitive”, “Exotic”, “Spectacular”, and “Unspoilt” constantly appear in advertising flyers and brochures (Leepreecha 2005: 6). Ethnic groups do not know that they have been advertised as a tourist attraction, as Dong, Morais and Dowler (2003: 164) point out “the advertising is not controlled or originated by the local community.”

On the other hand, the long neck Kayans know of their value in ethnic tourism. Matow, a Kayan woman said that “in Burma, if a girl doesn’t want a long neck, never mind ... But here (in Thailand) it’s different ... if there are no long-necked women, nobody will come to see us and we will have no money” (cited in Mydans 1996).

Conclusion

When summarizing the literature pertaining to ethnic tourism, three common recurring empirical realities can be identified. Firstly, it is not the host communities that gain the most revenue from the industry. Much of the financial benefit goes to the stakeholders: travel agencies, tour operators and tour guides; Secondly, destination communities have to make adjustments to their cultural life, environment and activities to suit the expectation of the tourists resulting in more and more of “staged authenticity”; Thirdly, destination communities have no say or little power when it comes to intervening with respect to the impact of tourism⁷.

⁷ When the negative impacts of tourism are identified, ways must be worked out to minimise the harm done to local communities. Collective cooperation of all tourism-related bodies must be mobilised to analyse problems and correct previous mistakes to produce an improved and practical plans for sustainable tourism. Government organisations – central and local, private enterprises, NGOs, the mass media, academics, business experts and the local community must work together to ensure that every party benefits from tourism that is both sustainable and equitable. Utilisation of environmental resources must ensure that they are preserved for long-term benefits. Culture must not be commodified but preserved as the cultural

The social circumstances of the Kayan are historically specific and unique. The following chapters of the thesis I seek to “locate the Kayan” within the wider constellation of forces that have shaped and continue to frame their lives. At the same time, moreover, I wish to outline the *specific* empirical features and living circumstances in Kayan villages *today* in order to later demonstrate, in following chapters, how they articulate with the types of processes outlined in this chapter. I outline the nature of the re-settlement plan and its essential features. The following chapter, Chapter 3 is then, primarily a synopsis and overview entitled “Locating the Kayan today”.

heritage of a community. As ESCAP (2001: 11) concludes, “The most sustainable form of tourism will be achieved when local people take control of their lives and determine to live according to their tradition on their own terms.”

CHAPTER 3 - LOCATING THE KAYAN TODAY

My study location is in Huay Pu Kaeng village, in the western region of MHS township. This village is part of the national Mae Pai Forest Reserve. Pai River flows in front of the village. Ninety-five per cent of the designated area is made up of mountain ranges and forest, sandwiched between Par Hin Dtang National Park and Ban Nam Piang Din⁸. The border of Huay Pu Kaeng connects Ban Huay Seua Tow in the north, with Ban Huay Gaew in the south, on its east is Ban Huay Deua and its western side touches Ban Nam Piang Din. Huay Pu Kaeng is considered a satellite village of Huay Deua, in the 3rd section (or *Moo 3*) of Phar Bong sub-district, within the City District of MHS. Huay Pu Kaeng is one of the three Kayan settlements in this province (*See map, figure 1 page 6*).

Huay Pu Kaeng is now divided into two sections: the old settlement and the new settlement in a project named “*The Village for the Preservation of Kayan’s Traditional Way of Life and the Security of MHS*”. This chapter looks at both sections of the village: the origins of the settlers, population count, educational and health care facilities, and the village administration.

The original Huay Pu Kaeng village

The information board at the Huay Pu Kaeng village school states that the original settlers were refugees from Kayah State or Karenni State in eastern Burma. Due to a crack down by the Burmese military on ethnic minorities, there was constant fighting and pursuit of ethnic groups by armed Burmese soldiers. Initially these groups sought refuge in Ban Mae Sa’oop on the Thai-Burma border connected to Nam Piang Din. When the fighting spread to Mae Sa’oop, their stay here was unsustainable and unsafe, and they once again fled and took refuge in Mae Surin camp or Site 2, in the district of Khun

⁸ Par Hin Dtang National Park contains tall standing limestone rocks located near the bank of River Pai. The area around it is made up of hillock plains and cliffs, beautiful rock layers designed by nature scoured by seeping water. There is a huge limestone cave in Nam Piang Din with a floor approximately 50 metres deep. Beautiful stalactites jut out from the roof. At the mouth of the cave is a temple. A number of Buddha images decorate the inside of the cave.

Yuam, south of MHS township. However, this stay also proved temporary when they were forced to move back and stayed in the eastern side of Mae Sa'oop as new refugees. At Mae Sa'oop there was a problem with cultivating the land due to scarcity of space. Finally Kayans were relocated to Ban Huay Pu Kaeng and were granted a status of political refugees. Here their affairs were managed by a government official, possibly the village headman of Ban Huay Deau and the management committee of Ban Hauy Deau⁹.

Figure 7: The original Huay Pu Keang Village



According to a government report certified by the Chief District Officer (CDO) of MHS, the population of Huay Pu Kaeng village as on 19 March 2007 was 202 people from 44 families, with 24 Kayans females wearing the neck rings.

⁹ The village headman and the management committee of Ban Huay Deua are regarded as government officials since they receive monthly salary from the government. Under the Ministry of Interior, the village administration is the lowest level in its hierarchal system (Buadange 2001: 14).

The settlers at Huay Pu Kaeng comprise five ethnic groups, namely; Kayan, Kayoh, Tai Yai, Karenni (Red Karen) and white Karen. For peaceful co-existence among the settlers, a village community leader and four committee members are chosen through an election process. A sub-committee oversees the organising of cultural events and sports activities in the village. The role of the community leader is to coordinate with the harbour master of Pai River who manages the long-tail boat trips to Huay Pu Kaeng, and to coordinate with the village headman of Huay Deua and its management committee in matters affecting Huay Pu Kaeng dwellers. The village headman and the management committee have the responsibility to implement government schemes in the village. The village headman attends monthly meetings with the CDO (Buangdaeng 2001: 14). If there are matters directly involving the Kayan, the community leader and his committee will be invited to attend the meetings with the CDO.

There is a community school at Huay Pu Kaeng that provides basic education for the children and people of the village. At the time of my fieldwork, there was approximately 70 students attending the school. This school opened in March 2000. The then Governor of MHS, Mr. Phut Oo'Thana named the school "*Mae Fah Luang Education Centre for Thai Hill Tribe Community*". The school teaches children from kindergarten to Year 8. The teaching program uses an integrated curriculum designed by an education NGO called Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) and the government's Department of Non-formal Education, an educational program which differs from the normal Thai school curriculum (teacher at Kayan village school). Students at this community school learn Karenni language, Burmese, English, Geography, Science, Mathematics, Art and Thai language. A qualified Thai teacher is seconded to the school by the Department of Non-formal Education. The Thai sector of the integrated curriculum emphasizes the theme "Education for Living" whereby the foundation studies will lead to vocational education, improving the quality of life, and generally an education program for social and community development.

The school premises at Huay Pu Kaeng are made up of one single storey bamboo structure and one wooden hut, both of which seemed in need of urgent repair when I

visited. The wall of the school is made of woven bamboo strips, some of which are broken due to years of exposure to heat and rain. Some parts of the wall have been patched up with bamboo sheets or galvanised iron. The roof is made of dried “dteung”¹⁰ leaves. The room size can accommodate four two-metre long tables and long benches. These are arranged in rows. A blackboard hung in front of the class but in some rooms there are white boards. Some distance away from the school, there is a big clearing used as a football field. Football and volleyball are two big sports among the Kayans.

Some distance away from the settlers’ homes is a Guest House located on the eastern hill with a clearing reserved for shows and performances to welcome and entertain visitors. People who are interested to experience Kayan way of life usually stay in the Guest House for several days, especially journalists or students doing research work. Some tourists prefer to do a home stay with the Kayans.

The Huay Pu Kaeng community has mixed religious beliefs. Besides worshipping their ancestors, they are also animists with a mixture of Buddhism and Christianity. There is no temple in the village but there is a Catholic church for religious ceremonies. The catholic religion was first brought to the Kayans in 1930 by a Italian Catholic priest, Padre Carlo, in a small town called Pekhoh in Shan State (Khoo Thwe 2002: 25). Subsequently many Kayans embraced Christianity but without throwing away their old religious beliefs.

Thai authorities are always concerned that Burmese refugees will be carriers of infectious diseases, especially malaria (Bengtsson 2003: 11). The health concerns of the villagers thus capture the attention of NGOs and the government. There is a Health Centre which provides First Aid services. A full time nursing assistant is always on duty. The centre also gives information on birth control, children’s health, sanitation, nutrition, environmental health, control of communicable diseases and Aids. International Rescue Committee (IRC), an NGO helps with the supply of medicine and provides counselling

¹⁰ Large leaves found in northern Thailand forests, each approximately a foot wide and a foot and a half long. The dried leaves are sewn together onto bamboo sticks and commonly used for roofs in village huts and houses.

on mental health and depression. For child birth or other major illnesses, the Kayan always go to the hospital in town.

The new addition to Huay Pu Kaeng village

Figure 8: The new village in Huay Pu Kaeng



The new addition to Ban Huay Pu Kaeng is named “*The Village for the Preservation of Kayan’s Traditional Way of Life and the Security of MHS*” located about 500 metres north-west of the old village. The provincial government allocated a budget of 1.5 million baht for relocation expenses.

The forest land at Huay Pu Kaeng was surveyed and an area of 103 *rai*¹¹ (41.2 acres) was to be cleared to accommodate the new settlement (Sattha 2006). When it was known that only 83 people from 36 families have volunteered to move to the new settlement, only 74 *rai* (29.6 acres) of land was cleared (Paengnoy 2007b).

A layout plan of the village was prepared by provincial officials closely coordinated the work with the Office of Environmental Resources of MHS. Heavy machine was brought in to clear the jungle and flatten the land.

The government used Kayans themselves to build the homes. Truck loads of Kayan labour were transported to the new village site everyday. The construction was supervised by government officials. The budget for construction of each home was 5,000 baht (\$166.66). Each home is made of woven bamboo and the roof is made of dried “dteung” leaves. It contains a bedroom, a sitting room, a veranda and an outside toilet.

Figure 9: The house the government provides for new settlers at the new village in Huay Pu Kaeng



Source: Sutuch Na Ayuthaya 2007

¹¹ 1 acre = 2.5 rai or 40,000 sq.feet.

By mid-September 2007, Kayans from Mai Nai Soi and Huay Seua Tow who volunteered to be relocated in Huay Pu Kaeng gradually migrated to this village. The government supplied trucks and man-power from the Territorial Defence Volunteers to help with the removal. Because the provided homes have no kitchen and bathroom, the migrants also took wood and planks from their old homes to make extensions and make the home structure stronger. With new arrivals to this new village, the total population of Huay Pu Kaeng becomes 285 people comprising 80 families. Below is the break-up of the present population of Huay Pu Kaeng.

Table 1: Breakdown of Total Population of Huay Pu Kaeng

Huay Pu Kaeng	Family	Number of People	Total Population 285			
			Adults 174		Children 111	
			Adult Male	Adult Female	Boys	Girls
Original Population	44	202	59	63	44	36
New Arrivals	36	83	26	26	21	10
Total	80	285	85	89	65	46

At the time of my fieldwork, the new settlers at the new village did not have an elected community leader. By consensus among themselves, a village committee was formed consisting of 10 members. This was made up of adults, youth, single and married persons, to help plan and carry out community development, and to act as the coordinating body in their affairs with the provincial office, the old village community leader and the Huay Deua management committee.

I will return to discuss how this process of resettlement has impacted on the Kayan in further detail in Chapter 6. The situation of the Kayan in the older village and that of the settlers in the new village is indeed, the focus of the remaining chapters of the thesis. Suffice it to say here, that I argue in the remaining chapters that the Kayan *as a whole* have suffered as a result of incursions of ethnic tourism into their culture.

CHAPTER 4 – CULTURAL IMPACT AND KAYAN ETHNIC TOURISM IN MAE HONG SON

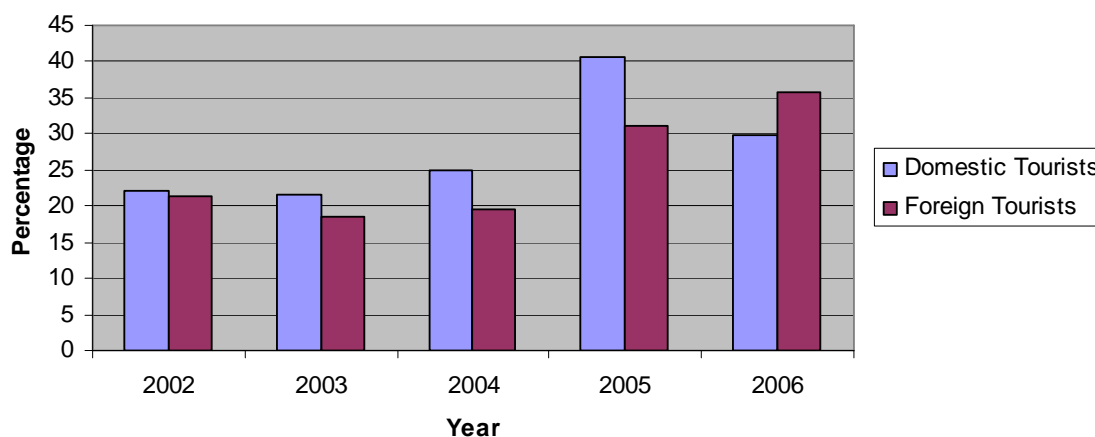
Over the years, tourism has proved to be an important economic activity that generates considerable revenue within the various provinces of northern Thailand. Chiang Mai is the tourism hub of northern Thailand and most tourists visit Chiang Mai before drifting to other provinces of the north. Chiang Mai shares its domestic boundary with MHS. By air, MHS can be reached in less than half an hour or by the winding mountain road which, it is said, to have 1,864 curves takes about five hours. From Chiang Mai, the road to MHS winds through lush tropical forest, offers spectacular view of mountain ranges, rivers and creeks, terraced rice fields, corn fields and hill tribe hamlets. In addition to the spectacular scenery of unspoilt forest, MHS holds a further attraction. As one tour operator comments; *“natural tourist attractions such as waterfalls, hot springs, evergreen forests and mountains or even hill tribes, can be seen in many places in Thailand but the Kayan long-neck villages are only in MHS.”* This chapter has as its central focus the cultural impact of ethnic tourism on the Kayan peoples residing in MHS. I begin with a brief snapshot of tourist interest in the region before discussing how Kayan families have sought to negotiate the fraught space they find themselves in, that is, as refugees on the one hand and tourist attractions on the other.

The TAT Report 2002 to 2006 on tourism in MHS, points out that Kayan villages have generated a lot of tourist interest, both from domestic and foreign visitors. Of all the tourist attractions in MHS, the Kayan villages are always in the top five as choices of destinations. This has occurred to such an extent that “Kayan women have become MHS province’s unofficial symbol” (Gray 1998).

The column graph below shows the popularity of Kayan people as an object for tourist consumption and the *“tourist gaze”* (Urry 1990). Interest from domestic tourists in the Kayan increased dramatically from 2002 to 2005, although the number of domestic tourists dropped slightly in 2006. In 2005, 40.74 per cent of all domestic tourists in Thailand went to the Kayan settlements. Visits by foreign tourists increased gradually and

steadily. The highest visitation occurring in 2006 when some 35.69 per cent of foreign tourists went to see the Kayans (TAT 2003a).

Table 2: Percentage of Mae Hong Son tourists visiting Kayan villages 2002 – 2006



The number of tourists who show interest in the Kayans continues to increase year by year. This is due to tourism promotion of MHS and also by taking Kayans to perform dances for shows in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. In MHS town itself, the municipal office puts on an annual Multi-Ethnic Cultural Festival to welcome the New Year.

As tourism becomes a global activity, it becomes more difficult to preserve traditional cultural practices and customs in any pure sense. Often tourism changes cultural relations in diffuse and unpredictable ways. Culture can be reformed, invented, adjusted and adapted to the demands of tourism in a wide variety of ways. As Sarup (1996: 140 cited in Smith 2003: 12) contends “culture is not something fixed and frozen ... but a process of constant struggle as cultures interact with each other and are affected by economic, political and social factors.” The impact of ethnic tourism on the Kayan people has both served to disrupt customary social relations, while, paradoxically, preserving some traditional practices such as the wearing of neck rings. Kayan ethnic tourism in MHS has undoubtedly played a significant role in preserving this culture. Mirante (2006) comments “some people thought the neck-rings should be entirely a thing of the past, should go the way of foot binding, but the Kayan rings -- neck, arms, legs -- were not

nearly as debilitating as the old Chinese practice of the crippling “lotus foot”. They were more comparable to the life in spike heels led by many a modern woman, and certainly less invasive than a nose-job or breast implants”. It appears that ‘modernity’ is subjecting Kayan culture to some form of renegotiation of customary practices while tourism curiously demands its preservation. However, the wearing the neck rings is not religiously compulsory for Kayan women. Many Kayan females for example, have taken off their neck rings. As a consequence of exposure to Western influences, including in particular, tourists who come to the village some Kayan women may choose a modern western style of dress. Without the neck-ring and dressed in western skirts and blouses, these females have unconsciously erased their Kayan identity.

Blessings of the neck-ring

There are additional reasons why Kayan women in Thailand have continued to wear neck rings within the transfigured space of the tourist world. While the neck-ring is a preservation of culture and ethnic identity, the money earned from tourism helps to keep the family going. Their Kayan identity gives them the freedom to stay out of the refugee camp whilst non-Kayan refugees are put in enclosed refugee camp in the seclusion of MHS jungles. This arrangement goes back to 1996 when MHS government reorganised the settlement of refugees and displaced persons in the province. Kayans in Ban Mai Nai Soi was part of the group of refugees settled in Camp 3 which comprised of six zones. The Kayan long-necks were put in Zone 6. When the three Camps 1, 2 and 3 were amalgamated into one centralized camp called Site 1, all refugees were resettled in Site 1, about an hour walk into the jungle from Mai Nai Soi village. The Kayans who were in Zone 6 were allowed to remain in Mai Nai Soi which now becomes a Kayan tourist village (Ma Prang).

Living outside the camp, the Kayans have the freedom to travel to MHS town for shopping and use government services such as hospitals and schools. Revised Thai laws

open the opportunity for Kayan children to get education¹² at any school and in any location in Thailand. At Huay Seua Tow government school, there are approximately ten Kayan students. When Kayan students finished Grade 6, they will receive Primary School Leaving Certificate like Thai students and they may continue secondary education at any Thai high school (Paengnoy 2007a). If they wish to pursue post secondary education in any district or province, they will be given permission to be absent from their village for the length of time the course runs.

Apart from Huay Seua Tow, the other two villages are located far from any government schools. So children in Huay Pu Kaeng and Mai Nai Soi have to make do with schools set up in their villages which are known as Karenni schools. The Karenni school curriculum is different to Thai school curriculum (as mentioned in Chapter 3, page 48). The Office of Non-Formal Education sends a Thai teacher to teach Thai language at the village schools. Children finishing Grade 8 in village schools will continue their secondary education in the refugee camp. The Karenni curriculum does not prepare students to continue secondary education in a Thai system. However, if there are Kayan students who wish to continue with Thai secondary education, they may enroll at Non-Formal Education schools, a kind of adult education program.

¹² In the past, in order to get entry into government schools, parents had to show proof of birth in Thailand. Thus Kayans without any birth certificate could never gain entry into these schools. This system changed after a speech made by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn in her capacity as a council member of the Refugee Education Trust, which organised the refugee education symposium in Geneva, Switzerland. (The Refugee Education Trust was set up by Sadako Ogata, former head of the UNHCR with the aim of providing quality post-primary education to the largest possible number of refugee children.) She forcefully argued that “education is a long-term project but yet urgent. We do not have time to wait and look for evidence to prove whether the kids are legal or illegal, for they grow up every day ... Education provides the opportunity to choose, the opportunity to choose peace. ... Refugees have endured the violence of war and have been traumatised by conflict that most other people have never felt nor experienced. To educate refugees sufficiently, therefore, means to provide them with the opportunity to choose peace in the future. ... While they were in Thailand, it was vital that they should get some useful knowledge and skills for their future role in society” (Bangkok Post 2002).

Following the Princess’s speech the Ministry of Education changed its entry regulations. The new law opens new opportunity for all tribes without Thai citizenship to get education at every school level and in every location in Thailand. Certificates will be issued to the student upon completion of any level of education or course. Schools accommodating this group of non-citizen children will be given government subsidies, covering pre-school education to Year 12 (Kongjanteuk n.d.).

Since the Kayans stay outside the camp, they are entitled to receive Identity Cards issued by the Department of Civil Registration, a privilege not extended to refugees in the camp. There are seventeen types of Identity Cards differentiated by their colours. Two types of coloured Cards are applicable to the Kayans in MHS, namely the *Blue Card* or the *Green with Red Border Card* (Thai Citizenship Project n.d.b).

The *Blue Card* called “Highlander’s Card” is issued to 104 Kayans who arrived to settle in Thailand before 3rd October 1985. The *Green with Red Border Card* is called the “Highlanders Community Card” is for Kayan who arrived to settle in Thailand after 1985. There are 94 Kayans who obtain this type of card. Having these cards entitle the Kayans freedom of movement within the city district of MHS and thus legalising their residency within the Thai border.

It is clear that the neck-ring culture has brought the Kayans in MHS with some ‘benefits’. Formerly the wearing of neck-rings was specifically in honour and memory of the dragon mother, but today the neck-ring tradition is practised for financial return from ethnic tourism.

Kayan Ethnic Tourism: a neo colonial enterprise?

When one asks a Burmese-born Kayan, man or woman, boy or girl, if his/her life in Thailand is better than in Burma, the answer is always “yes”. This “yes” often means that their existence is more peaceful not that they are necessarily materially better off. And, it does not mean they inherit the greatest benefit from Kayan tourism. All Kayans do say however, that the more tourists who come to visit them; the better are their chances of earning an income. In the high tourist season, apart from the monthly payment they get from the village tourism authorities some families are able to make quite substantial earnings from selling souvenirs. Consequently these families can afford television, mobile phones and motorcycles.

Thai tourists do not contribute to their monthly allowance as Thais do not have to pay the 250 baht (\$8.33) per person entrance fee. Thai nationals are free to enter any part of the kingdom without hindrance. Besides the monthly allowance of 1,500 bahts (\$50) per month per neck-ringed adult above the age of 12 and 750 baht (\$25) for children below 12, Kayans get a monthly supply of dry food, but are tied to an Agreement that Kayans who wear neck rings must stay at home from morning to evening and to be there when tourists browse through their village. They are supposed to welcome the visitors but they can perform their weaving jobs in front of their huts. The monthly supply of dry food comprises of 15 kilograms of rice per adult and 7.5 kilograms per child, some salt, cooking oil, dry fish, yellow beans and Mono-Sodium Glutamate (Ma Prang & Ma Fai, Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 19). During low tourist season, often the monthly allowance is not paid but this is sometimes reimbursed during the high season. At other times, no reimbursements are made (Ma Prang, Ma Now & Ma Fai). The monthly payment has remained the same for ten years (Ma Yom). If Kayans were workers in another industry, and there was no salary increase for more than a decade, the workers would take industrial action. The Kayans are afraid to demand increase in payment since they regard themselves as “guest” settlers on Thai soil and therefore should not create “trouble”. Thai tourism promoters have however, consistently promoted the Kayan as one of the Thai’s hill tribes (Mirante 2006). This pragmatic “hill tribe” status of the Kayans was confirmed by the MHS Deputy District Officer, “the Kayans are in fact registered as a Thai hill tribe and so do not have the right to seek asylum.” When Finland and New Zealand announced that they have approved 20 Kayan families as refugees, the Governor of MHS, Direk Kornkleep refused approval for an exit permit from Thailand. He was reportedly drawing the analogy that Kayans are "endangered species on the verge of extinction which needed protection" (The Age 2008).

Some Kayan young women are understandably upset about being portrayed and described as “exhibits in a human zoo” and “an endangered species” (Ma Prang & Ma Fai). They see the continued wearing of neck rings as depriving them of their freedom of movement and chances of being resettled in another country. Some have decided to take off their neck rings for different reasons. Ma Prang had just taken out her neck rings

which she had worn since childhood. She commented “when I was wearing the neck ring and I went into town, everyone stared at me as if I am not a human being. I took off my neck ring so that I have the freedom to leave the village and study at KSDP¹³ in town.” The village tourism authorities do not favour the neck-ringed Kayans going to town because they think if tourists can see them in town, they will not come to the village. Taking off the neck rings is a big sacrifice because it means no monthly payment will be forthcoming. Economic imperatives and financial needs thus often lead some Kayan women to put their neck rings back on again.

During my interviews, some of my participants were asked who they thought, benefited the most from Kayan tourism? “Surely not the Kayans” was the most common answer. A Thai tourist I interviewed thought the stakeholders from outside the village derived the most benefit. A teacher at Kayan village school commented that the “tour operators make a sizeable income from taking tourists to Kayan villages. The Kayans themselves get very little.” Other interviewees named several individuals and bodies who retained a good slice from Kayan tourism, ranging from the boatmen who sail the boat to Huay Pu Kaeng village, the operators of guest houses, to the motorcycle hire shops, restaurants, Seven Eleven’s, road side souvenir sellers, and the Taxation Office who collect taxes from companies.

Kayans seek to supplement their income by selling scarves and souvenirs. From a purely observational viewpoint it seems that foreign tourists to Kayan village are often happy just to stare and take photos of the long-neck women. They frequently browse through stalls without necessarily buying anything. The Thai visitors who do not have to pay entrance fees are keen to buy the Kayan scarves but often bargain for ridiculously low prices. Occasionally however, tourists will buy merchandise out of sympathy rather than a fancy for the craft. Some even put money into the village Donation Box for community development. Japanese and French tourists, for example, are credited with having

¹³ Karenni Student Development Programme (KSDP) operates since 1999 to provide schools, post High School skill development courses, boarding houses, sports & educational equipment and camp activities. In 2006-2007 KSDP provided a skill development course in MHS city to teach English and Computer to Kayan youth.

financed the construction of a wooden school building consisting of three classrooms at Mai Nai Soi and also with providing teaching and learning materials.

Staging Authenticity

The customary rituals and ceremonies which underpin Kayan social relations - described in Chapter 1 - are always performed away from the eyes of the tourists. They are not intended as shows for the tourist consumption. These are traditional rituals based on centuries of practice, tradition and spiritual beliefs. Tourists who come to visit a village may never see these rituals unless, of course, they come at a time when the ceremonies are being held, as may occur for instance during the ceremony of erecting the holy post in celebration of the Kayan New Year.

It is equally the case that the perilous economic situation of the Kayan as refugees living a marginalized and precarious existence dictates that they participate in whatever income earning possibilities present themselves. Tourist operators have been able to exploit the economic marginality and vulnerability of the Kayan to their own advantage. A certain “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1989: 98) has thus emerged which is tilted towards the tourist market.

All roads leading to Kayan villages are deliberately made difficult to reach in order to preserve the “remoteness and primitiveness” of the villages. The road to Mai Nai Soi is a functional sealed road until the last two kilometers into the village. The road then dips down a slippery dirt slope, full of potholes, climbs and dips again at many places (as mentioned in Introduction). The two-kilometre distance takes more than half an hour on a motorcycle. The road to Huay Pu Kaeng is well maintained until the boat terminal where tourists must catch a long tail boat and travel on Pai River for half an hour. In my *Introduction*, I mentioned that there is a hidden road which goes straight to the bank of the river directly opposite Huay Pu Kaeng. This unmarked or ‘hidden’ road is only known to local residents and merchants. The road to Huay Seua Tow while sound all along the way, is nevertheless crossed by ten running creeks. During the dry season,

water in the creek is quite low and crossing by vehicle is not a problem. During the rain season, these creeks carry a lot of surface flow into Pai River, this makes crossing each creek a real hazard and dangerous. The government could repair the roads to all the three villages as it did with the hill tribe settlements in the highlands of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. The provincial government of MHS is, however, adamant about keeping access to the Kayan villages this way in order to preserve a sense of “remoteness” and “unspoilt” traditionalism.

Such “staged authenticity” is also apparent in the representation of village life. None of the Kayan villages are supplied with electricity or have electrical appliances whilst houses outside the village are fully provided with government electricity. The Huay Seua Tow village is only seven kilometres from the town centre. The electricity supply stops abruptly in front of the Kayan village. Electricity supply is not extended to Kayans even though the electricity post is right in front of the village and next to a telephone transmitter. The stakeholders of Kayan tourism believe that if the villages are developed or supplied with electricity, tourists will not come. They fear the villages will no longer be seen as traditional and “naturally primitive”. Kayan houses are thus lit by oil lamps and candles. Some Kayans who are able to afford it, buy car batteries to connect small fluorescent lights. On monthly basis, the cost of recharging the batteries is higher than what they would pay for government electricity.

The whole structure of the Kayan villages is planned as a “tourist setting”. Each of the villages itself has become a “tourist space” a kind of living museum (MacCannell 1989: 100-102). Tourism has nevertheless, impacted on and “modernized” certain families and aspects of Kayan life. Some Kayans, for example, own televisions, VCD players and mobile phones. Others have learnt to use the internet. Beyond the tourist gaze they are not as ‘traditional’ as the tourists and tourism operators would have them be.

Changes in gender roles and occupations

Walk into any of the Kayan villages in MHS, one would see only women and children. Where have the men gone?

In Burma, Kayan men are known to be hard-working in providing for their family. They are skilled farmers; planting rice in terraced plots and rotating their crops to suit the growing cycle and season. They plant maize, millet, sweet potatoes, ground nuts, tobacco, fruits and vegetables. They also rear pigs, ducks, chicken, cows and buffaloes. The yields from the farms are exchanged for salt and domestic items which they cannot produce themselves. In between planting and harvesting, they traverse the jungle to look for bamboo shoots, mushrooms and edible forest plants. They collect dry wood and twigs to use as firewood; and hunt wild animals using ancient rifles and hunting dogs. Women do most of the domestic work. The women look after children, fetch water from the well, cut grass and tidy up areas around the house, weave and sew clothes, and make baskets from bamboo strips. Kayan women are known for their skill in making rice wine. The wine is for family consumption and some are sold (Boorootpat & Khammuang 1999: 18).

Life is not the same for Kayan men and women in MHS. The women are the main provider for the family. Besides wearing the neck rings which brings them a monthly payment from the village tourism authorities, they open souvenir stalls in front of their homes and weave scarves for sale to visitors. Scarves are the only product which the Kayan make themselves. Other so-called Kayan souvenirs like plastic images of Kayan females, dolls, key chains and the like are either bought from traveling salesmen or factories of which the profit is very marginal. Women who do not have stalls of their own will use their time and skill weaving scarves for other stall holders. An efficient weaver can produce two or three scarves a day. A weaver earns between 20 to 30 bahts (\$0.66 - \$1) per scarf. A small scarf about a metre and a half long and 25 centimetres wide will sell for 100 baht (\$3.33) and a wider scarf sells for 150 baht (\$5). In this cash economy Kayan women focus their occupation towards tourism as the “tourism industry offers a better opportunity for cash income than agriculture” (Wu 2000).

Kayan males in MHS do not have any defined economic role as providers for the family. With limited knowledge and technical skill and government-imposed restriction on their movement, makes it impossible for Kayan male to get paid jobs away from the village district. Their traditional agricultural skill is of no use as there is very limited land for cultivation in the villages where they are allocated to stay. My interviews with the Kayans revealed that some of the men do contract work in producing bamboo walls by weaving bamboo strips, gathering thatch for making roofs and making bamboo baskets. Some plant fruits and vegetables around the house and rear a few pigs and cows for sale or use in ceremonial feasts. Their free time is spent in the forest collecting fire wood or gathering wild banana trunks as feed for the pigs.

Apart from changes in the gender role in the economic life of the family, domestic chores have been taken up by the men. The men now chop the firewood, cook the food and feed the children, bathe the children and walk them to school. The women welcome the tourists and are always in the front line in all tourism-oriented activities (Ma Prang). What has not changed is that the man, despite being economical marginal with the MHS village, remains the leader of the family.

Illusions of Opportunities and Freedom

If Kayans were workers in an industrial firm, one could assume that the firm's directors would value their contribution as workers who provide the foundation of the firm's success and prosperity. Comparatively, Kayans as a group play a substantial role in MHS tourism industry and yet they receive the least in terms of financial reward from tourism. For example, unlike the refugees in the camp whose healthcare interests are looked after by an international NGO (IRC), Kayans have to pay for medical care at the local hospital. They are not entitled for subsidized Health Care cover as they are not Thai citizens¹⁴.

¹⁴ In 2001 when legislation was passed for the provision of Universal Health Care Thailand. All residents of Thailand who had their names registered in house registration were entitled to the 30 baht (\$1) Healthcare Scheme for all hospital services: consultation, treatment and medicines. Thus Kayans who hold the *Blue Card* and *Green with Red Border Card* were therefore entitled to this government subsidised health service. A year later however, the government amended the law so that only those with Thai citizenship were

Kayan's freedom of movement is limited to the district in which they live. Apart from walking back home to Burma through the jungles, they are not allowed to go anywhere. In Thailand they must remain in the province of MHS in the tourist villages set up by the government and vigorously promoted by ethnic tourism stakeholders. On 1 February 2008, *The Nation* newspaper carried this report "New Zealand agreed two years ago to accept two families of Kayan people whose women traditionally wear a number of brass rings around their unnaturally long necks as refugees, but Thai authorities will not give them exit visas." In the same news article, Kitty MacKinsey, of the UNHCR in Bangkok said "some 20,000 other Burmese refugees had recently been allowed to move to third countries, but Thailand was not letting a group of 20 Kayans who had been accepted as refugees by New Zealand and Finland leave". This comment was replied to in the *Bangkok Post* on 5 February 2008 by the Governor of MHS. In response he argued, "The province is home to hundreds of long necked Padaung (Kayan) who fled economic hardship and came to Thailand over a decade ago. The long-neck hill tribe people are happy and comfortable with the lives here like other refugees under the protection of Thai laws" (Kheunkaew 2008).

While Thailand can be praised for generously accommodating the Kayans for over a decade and has adopted them as one of the hill tribes, the MHS government is adamant that it is not about to release its "adopted people" for re-adoption by other countries- even on humanitarian ground. As previously pointed out, the Kayans have become an unofficial symbol of MHS province (Gray 1998) and it is clear that MHS wants to keep its tourism symbol. Being one of the poorest provinces in Thailand, MHS depends on tourism revenue for its economic well-being. If the Kayans go, so will the tourists and tourism. This does not however, justify MHS's refusal to let the Kayans leave for resettlement in a third country. For over a decade the Kayans have been living a restricted

entitled for the \$1 Healthcare Scheme. This effectively disenfranchised the Kayan from the Scheme. The Kayans were placed in the situation of having to pay for the hospital treatment and other medical services. Human rights activists and some lawyers took up the case for the Kayans stating that the government's amendments in 2002 were unconstitutional. The provisions in the Constitution have two contradictory clauses. One clause is based on human rights which provide the guarantee that "it is the right of every human to receive and enjoy equal opportunity in all matters without exception". A second clause provides "the rights of the people are those who are connected to the country, such as being Thai citizens".

life in their village district, and now they are restricted in leaving Thailand, a clear violation of their human rights.

The Identity Cards that Kayans hold only legitimises their residency in Thailand, it does not carry any other privileges. The *Blue* Card which is considered the best amongst the cards that Kayans get has its limitations. *Blue* Card holders have freedom of movement only within the district where the card is issued. If they need to go outside of the district, they are required to make a request to the provincial office for an exit permit for a leave of absence to a maximum of 7 days. For a 10-day permit, the Chief District Officer (CDO) must sign a written authority. For a 15-day permit, written authorisation must be obtained from the Governor. Thus, the physical movements and civic freedoms of Kayan's holding a Blue Card is circumscribed, closely monitored and formally regulated by the authorities.

Holders of *Green with Red Border* card have even less civil rights and freedom of movement than Blue Card holders. They are not allowed to leave the district at all and not entitled to request leave of absence.

More than half of the Kayan community in MHS do not carry any form of Card whatsoever. For this group both civil rights and their right to residential status is doubly problematic and uncertain. Kayans without any form of cards cannot leave the district. Offenders of the restriction order face jail terms and heavy fines. This form of social regulation and disciplining of population groupings is quite discriminatory. Thailand claims it willingly accommodates the influx of Burmese refugees and contends that the Thai Government has done its best in spite of the fact that Thailand is not a signatory to UN 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol¹⁵ (Refugees International 2007). Nevertheless, it is clear that these Thai laws contravene the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13 stated that

¹⁵ The Convention and the Protocol are the major tools articulated for the protection of refugees. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines refugees as "People who reside outside their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group and who, owing to such fear, cannot or do not want to return home" (UNHCR Field Office for MHS 2007)

“everyone has the right to freedom of movement ... everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” (Human and Constitutional Rights n.d.).

Restriction on the Kayan’s movement is a clear indication that MHS province is very protective of its long-neck population. MHS wants to keep Kayan ethnic tourism within its boundaries and for the Kayans to remain an exclusive MHS’s tourist attraction. The following chapter argues that it is this overriding concern which lies behind the government proposal to relocate the Kayan in one centralised settlement called “*The Village for the Preservation of Kayan’s Traditional Way of Life and the Security of MHS*”. It is against this politico-tourist backdrop that I assess the both rationale for, and the actuality of the resettlement process. I now return to the village at Huay Pu Kaeng.

CHAPTER 5 – RELOCATION, TOURISM, POLITICS

The opening of the new settlement at Huay Pu Kaeng: “The Village for the Preservation of Kayan’s Traditional Way of Life and the Security of Mae Hong Son”

For over a decade the Kayans have lived in three different locations: Mai Nai Soi, Huay Seua Tow and Huay Pu Kaeng. Each village has its own characteristics and is not over populated¹⁶ to the extent that selling souvenirs becomes over competitive. Despite the inadequacies of living facilities, each family has a settled existence and their own bamboo hut. Ceremonies and customary rituals take place in peace and harmony. Curious browsers come and go. Life in each village goes on at a slow pace. Not a great deal changes nor is it expected to change. In June 2006 however, the then Governor of MHS, Direk Konkleep suddenly announced a plan to relocate all Kayans from the three villages into one centralised settlement in Huay Pu Kaeng. This chapter explores the political rationale underpinning this decision. I examine the impact of the resettlement on the Kayan population in Huay Pu Kaeng and discuss the varied responses of the Kayan to the relocation proposal. I further analyse the consequences of the relocation on those who have subsequently migrated to the new village.

As intimated in the previous chapter, the MHS government is determined to keep the Kayans in its province in order to protect its tourism industry. There have been several attempts by interstate tourism developers to take Kayans away from MHS to other provinces. The MHS government construes this as an attempt to steal ‘their Kayans’. There are however, already Kayans in tourist villages in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. Although very small in numbers, these Kayan came directly from Burma. Having the Kayans settled in one centralised location, will of course, make the job of monitoring

¹⁶ Ban Mai Nai Soi has 238 people from 57 families, Ban Huay Seua Tow has 110 people from 23 families, and Huay Pu Kaeng has 202 people from 44 families. Total Kayan population: 550 as on 19 April 2007. (MHS Provincial Office 2007a).

their movements easier. It may also, to some extent, afford a degree of protection from unscrupulous tourism entrepreneurs.

The MHS government seeks to promote a positive image with respect to human rights of the Kayans and claims that it does not want the Kayan to be looked upon as exhibits in a human zoo. The announcement that project will not charge entrance fees to foreigners visiting the new village diminishes — to some extent — the human zoo accusation. Nevertheless, these claims appear more rhetorical than substantive if one examines the specific features of the settlement. The new village will have a totally different structure to that of existing villages. Part of the forest reserve in Huay Pu Kaeng will be cleared and allocated to Kayans to build their homes and engage in self-sufficiency farming activities. The government promises to provide assistance so that the Kayan can live as they did in Burma. Allocating a designated area to the Kayan will also help protect the rest of the forest reserve from being illegally encroached. Occupying any part of the forest reserve illegally results in heavy fines and a jail term.

One conceivable interpretation of these changes is that they represent a genuine attempt on the part of the governorship to construct a functioning, viable and sustainable Kayan community within Thailand's borders. It is more likely however, that this is merely another attempt at simplifying the marketing of the Kayan. That is, a legitimated exercise in 'staged authenticity' of the Kayan's traditional way of life which conveniently locates them in one manageable location. This project if successfully realised will make Huay Pu Kaeng the biggest Kayan settlement in Thailand, thus guaranteeing that more tourists will come to MHS.

Resettling the Kayan

Resettling the Kayan into a single village settlement is a fraught process. For many Kayans this is, and remains both confusing and uncertain. This is illustrated in the comments of the harbour master at Pai River boat terminal who stated, "if you move all the Kayans to live in one centralised settlement – the good part, it is easy to control so

that stakeholders cannot take advantage of the Kayans and their culture in which most monetary benefit goes to the stakeholders. One settlement makes it easy to manage the whole affairs of the Kayan, the village and its tourism. The bad part is the Kayans relocated to a new place is a repeat of their traumatic experience in Burma, the feeling of sadness in breaking ties with the old place, old friends and families and the environment they are so used to.” Relocation, removal or migration whether forced or voluntary always causes upheaval in people’s lives. It is obvious that sending the Kayans to restart life in a new location requires that many adjustments have to be made, both emotionally and physically. Many will find it difficult to adapt to a new surrounding and a new agricultural-based existence.

The decision to move, or not to move, was a very difficult choice to make for the Kayan who were not sure what the future might hold for them. The officials explained to the Kayan the aims and objectives of setting up the new settlement that to develop a better quality of life for the Kayan in the long run by preserving the Kayan’s way of life and its culture. Constructing an entire village that would be a replica of the Kayan village life in Burma where Kayan men would be able to once again grow crops and carry out farming activities. Kayan females would attend to domestic duties while supplementing the family income by opening small souvenir shops or selling scarves. In order to facilitate tourist access, a bridge was to be constructed over River Pai. Children would go to school in the village as normal. Kayan ethnic tourism would still take place but tourists would not just see Kayan women with the neck rings behind souvenir stalls instead they would see the total spectrum of Kayan’s life including their traditional agricultural activities. Cultural shows for the visitors were to demonstrate Kayan’s cultural heritage through music, songs and dances. Officials also stressed that at the new location, Kayans would; get special assistance from the government; be allocated land for crop cultivation; receive food supplies from NGOs as in the case of the refugee camp; receive government assistance in starting animal husbandry; be given skills training in making souvenir and help to promote Kayan’s handicraft to be an OTOP¹⁷ product. In general, it was

¹⁷OTOP (One Tambon One Product), a project to encourage each sub-district to produce a product for export. The government will assist to find the market and assist in its exports.

contended that life would be considerably better for the future generations of Kayans. (Boonphat 2006).

Socially and economically the Kayan were placed in the difficult position of having to weigh up the pros and cons of this situation. The Kayans listened to all explanation and were given the opportunity to think about the matter. This difficult decision polarised the Kayans into those who wanted to move, those who did not, and those who were unsure. Governor Direk said “some groups, afraid of losing income, are fiercely resisting the planned relocation and are inciting the Long Neck Karen to protest against their relocation” (Boonphat 2006). Even among those who had voluntarily consented to move had different reasons for their decisions. Some Kayans were willing to try out a new opportunity while others wanted to move because of the stagnant life in the old village. Some wanted to free themselves from the shackles of the village tourism stakeholder or wanted to be away from the political problems¹⁸ of the village. Those distrustful of the explanation were not willing to sign for voluntary migration. They preferred to wait and see how things went with the ‘voluntary movers’.

Signing up for voluntary migration also meant going against wishes of the village tourism operators and stakeholders who had provided them with a measure of security for more than a decade. Moving out meant no more monthly payment from the tourism bosses. No money translates into no food. Many considerations and concerns plagued the Kayan at this time. For example, would they receive the arrears of their unpaid allowances if they moved? Would the village authorities pay them if they left? They were also concerned that if they needed to use their meagre savings for the expenses of removal and could not secure an income in the new village, then their lives would be even more difficult. If they moved and then later changed their mind and wanted to come back to the old village they might find that they had lost their home site. Kayans who decided to stay put in the old

¹⁸ An unqualified man was elected leader not because of his ability to fight for the cause of the Kayans but got elected because many voters were his relatives. Being the community leader, he got special treatment from the stakeholders but remained afraid to speak up for the rights of the Kayans. The situation was sickening for some Kayans. Democratic righteousness does not exist in the villages (Ma Prang & Ma Fai, Sutuch Na Ayuthaya 2007).

villages were also nervous because of rumours that the old villages might be forced to close for national security reasons.

For the authorities however, centralising the Kayans in one new settlement appeared to be primarily dictated by pragmatic tourist considerations. The settlement would only succeed if the whole Kayan population in Mai Nai Soi and Huay Seua Tow are willing to be transferred to the new location at Huay Pu Kaeng. The provincial government placed a lot of importance in this project and insisted that all Kayans must move to the new designated location. The *Bangkok Post* reported on 3 August 2006 that Governor Direk gave the Kayans an ultimatum to move within three months. If they refused they had two alternatives, either be moved to the refugee camp or be sent back to Burma. If Kayans wished to be resettled in a third country, they must meet the requirement of having stayed in a refugee camp for a minimum of ten years. Following the newspaper report, human rights activists and NGOs cried foul and protested that the planned forced relocation infringed human rights of the Kayans. By law Kayans should have the right to choose where to stay so long they are within the district where their cards were issued. As a result of this public pressure the provincial government changed its stance and gave the Kayans the option of moving to Huay Pu Kaeng or remaining where they were. The relocation move was thus changed from compulsory to voluntary. In an interview with *Chiangmai Mail*¹⁹ in September 2006, Governor Direk said “the province has tried to be sympathetic about every aspect of the situation and if any tribes-people do not wish to move out from the old villages, the authorities will not force them to do so” (Boonphat 2006).

Ensuing headaches

Three months after moving to the new village, the new settlers complained that their savings had almost dried up because they had not received any cash income as they did previously. A Kayan woman informed me “life here is not the same as what the government promised. When we moved in the first month, the government provided rice,

¹⁹An English newspaper published in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand.

15 kilograms per adult and 7.5 kilograms for each child. When nothing came in the second month, we complained to the Deputy District Officer (DDO). Through his request, the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) donated three months rice supply to each family. Whether this donation will keep on coming, we don't know.”

Hearing Ma Prang relate her predicaments in the new village, I could not but feel extremely sad for her and her young family. Unlike her previous place of dwelling, at Huay Seua Tow, the new migrants do not get any supply of dry food. Instead, people from the Agriculture Office came and told the Kayan how to grow their own vegetables. This is quite problematic since Kayans have lost their skill in agriculture due to years of non-farming activities living in Thailand. Besides, there is very little water to irrigate vegetable gardens. Water is pumped from supplies at the old village. When people at the old village use the water, only a trickle flows to the new settlement. “In the first week we were here, there was no water at all”, Ma Prang continued. In order to make the new settlers self-sufficient, they were told to dig three wells for fish farming. Officials from the Fisheries Department supplied baby fish which filled the three wells and some fish feed. When the villagers gave the feed to the fish and most of the fish died, because the feed had long expired its “use by” date. Then people from the Poultry Department came and gave 40 hens to share among all the villagers. They were told if the chicken get light day and night, they would lay eggs every day. But Ma Prang asked “how we light up the coop when we ourselves use candles in the house, and at times we don't have the money to buy candles. The 40 chickens did lay eggs, but the villagers collected only 3 to 6 eggs per day.”

Another problem is the legacy from the old section of the village. Much of the land for crop cultivation has been used up by the old settlers. There is not much space left for new settlers to grow anything. When they tried to grow vegetables in spaces around the house, the cows came and ate the leaves. There are about twenty cows belonging to the old settlers roaming around the new homes. “Where our houses stand used to be the cows' grazing ground. The cows are so used to the area. They even eat our soap left for washing clothes in the vicinity”, Ma Prang complained.

It takes time for vegetables to grow to an edible size and the yield from home gardening is insufficient and unreliable especially during the hot summer months and the dry winter period. There is no money income from any source. In their former dwellings, wearing the neck rings entitled Kayan women to a monthly payment from the tourism bosses. At the new location, wearing the heavy neck rings does not provide any financial return. Kayans have to revert back to other tourism-related activities. Distance from the boat ramp to the new village discourages tourists from visiting the new settlement. From the boat stop, visitors have to pass through the old settlement, walk uphill of approximately half a kilometre, then walk another half a kilometre into the new village. If tourists have seen enough in the old settlement, there is little incentive to go to the new settlement, especially on a hot day or when it rains.

In frustration, many Kayans from the new village have thrown away their gardening tools and set up stalls at the old section, sharing stalls in front of the homes of old settlers. Ma Now, an elderly woman migrant from Ban Mai Nai Soi had this to say, “we would like tourists to come to the new village. If there is a direct road to our village, tourists can reach us easily and then we can look after ourselves without troubling other people. But since no tourists go in, we need to come out and sell our crafts in the old settlement using the space of someone’s house front sharing the table with the owner.” The problem with this arrangement is that if Ma Now sold something of hers, the owner of the house didn’t get the business, and Ma Now felt very uncomfortable about it. If the tourist bought the owner’s stuff, hers would be over-looked. It’s not the same when she lived in Ban Mai Nai Soi. “At the old place, I sell in front of my house and all what I sold the money belongs to me”, Ma Now continues. Because of the difficulty of enticing tourists into the new village, some Kayans went back to stay with their relatives in their former villages because they could not survive in the new village. What this resettlement project has done, it only creates hardship for the Kayans who had volunteered to move to the new village. It has proved extremely difficult for the Kayan to adjust to changing circumstances. There is little assistance from the government and the promised help never materialised. The Kayan still require money to buy dry food, petrol and medicines when sick. The concept of agricultural self-sufficiency proposed by the government in lieu of

income from tourism does not appear to be viable given the lack of arable land and the absence of co-ordinated agricultural skills programs. Ma Prang comments, “I feel so down and discouraged that I don’t get any income like before. I really want the MHS government to give us support in skills training to make souvenir articles so that we can have money to use during emergency.”

Misery in the “promised Land”

Kayans in the new village have lost their monthly payment and the absence of tourist income has been exacerbated by the failure of their agricultural pursuits, Training for Kayans in other productive skills has become necessary. Assistance from the government can best be described as lukewarm. No organisation has offered the Kayans any form of training to develop new skills. The Kayans find themselves in an invidious position partly because UNHCR and organisations under its umbrella can only provide assistance to refugees living in the refugee camp. Because Kayans live outside the camp, they miss out on all the training programs organised by UNHCR. Moreover, some Thai circles hold the absurd view that if the government provides training in vocational skills and the Kayans finally return to their birth country, they will take those skills with them to benefit Burma and not Thailand.

During my field trip I asked the Governor why no NGOs or government agencies were looking at the possibility of training Kayans to develop vocational skills. He replied by commenting that, “the way of life of every ethnic group, not just Kayan, is an easy, simple way of life, like living in the jungle, they can adapt easily to the jungle environment ...” Further conversation with the governor gave the impression that he had no definite ideas on Kayan development issues. The Governor appears to have the view that Kayans can sort out their life and problems without government ‘interference’. Indeed, he was quite adamant that the Kayans were happy to live a ‘primitive’ life. Positioning the Kayan as pre-modern in this way ignores the fact that the Kayans as political refugees must survive and adjust their lives to the requirements of a modernising economy. They have little choice but to do so. They have, for better or worse, become

part of the global tourist economy. In the absence of meaningful alternatives and support the Kayan continue to suffer.

Tale of a Wall hanging

During my field study, I had interactions with a wide cross-section of Kayans, young and elderly, men and women. One of my most extraordinary and revealing experiences however, occurred when I interviewed Ma Prang, a young married woman who was expecting her second child. When I arrived at her home, she was weaving, not a scarf but a wall-hanging. She was half-way through making another wall hanging. The completed wall-hanging, which was two metres long and about two feet wide, was exceptionally beautiful—all hand-made—and incorporated a traditional Kayan design. The work was of high quality using durable materials which would last a life time. She said it took her many days to think of a pattern and many more days to weave it into a finished product. She said she would sell it for 450 bahts (\$15). Observing Ma Prang's wall hanging it was clear that she was a gifted and original designer and craftswoman. A few wall-hangings were lying around the room but she did not know who to sell them to. For local Thais to buy, 450 bahts for a wall-hanging might well be too expensive. Despite her obvious skills and pride in her creative work Ma Prang lives an economically marginal and highly fragile existence. She cannot sell to the tourists, as she has no souvenir stall in the village. Nor can she "export" her handcrafts to other provinces. There is no government agency that helps find markets for Kayan handicrafts. Ma Prang did not know how to go about investigating possible markets for her crafts and her income generating capacities were thus confined to the limited local economy. In many ways Ma Prang's story illustrates a lack of government support hinders the personal endeavours of Kayans and prevents them from becoming financially independent and self-sufficient. The reluctance on the part of authorities to support more diversified economic activity on the part of Kayan women goes back to the government's apprehension that the Kayan women may then disappear as a tourist attraction. If Kayan women are engaged in other kinds of money-generating activities, they will not wear the neck-rings to earn the 1,500 bahts (\$50) a

month allowance and hence MHS may lose its identity as a Kayan based tourist attraction.

Kayans like Ma Prang, Ma Now, and others who have already moved to the new settlement are left with little or no options. Increasingly, they show signs of disappointment and dissatisfaction. They are distressed by the fact that they cannot return to their original place of living. Their home sites which they left behind have now been taken over by others who remained. In some cases those remaining have built additional homes for their adult daughters or sons, and thus created new stalls for selling souvenirs. The stakeholders are happier too since there are less people to pay the monthly allowances and less expenditure when the tourists are arriving in larger numbers.

The frustrations of people in the new settlement is reflected in the words of Ma Now who said, "If things don't improve in this village, I don't mind to be taken away by any tourism developer to go anywhere as exhibit or freak so long I get money to live by. If the government can't find a way out for us, we would find our own way. We just can't sit back and wait for death to come." She said there are nine women from her old village Mai Nai Soi, seven wear neck rings and two are Kayaw long-ears. From Huay Seua Tow, there are many more. If these women are taken away by other stakeholders to another tourist village, then the whole purpose of relocating them to the new settlement to improve their quality of life will have failed miserably. The MHS provincial government cannot afford to be complacent and assume that everything is satisfactory in the new settlement. There is a clear and obvious need for sustainable projects that can help alleviate the poverty and unhappiness of the new settlers. If the situation does not improve, the MHS government is sure to be the target of criticism from NGOs and human rights activists.

CHAPTER 6 – RE-INVENTING THE KAYAN:

There have been several writings in newspapers and magazines on Kayans in MHS, but to date there has not been any serious academic research into the impact of tourism on the Kayan community. This thesis has examined the consequences of Kayan's relocation to the new centralised settlement in Huay Pu Kaeng at the edge of Thai-Burmese border town of MHS. I have sought to highlight the plight of the Kayan who were forced to leave their homeland following unending persecution from the Burmese army and to shed light on their predicament as “displaced persons” on the Thai side of the border. The Kayans along with other minority groups have been the object of pursuit by the Burmese military for decades. Kayans have fled to the Thai side of the border in order to escape fighting between Burmese government soldiers and Karen insurgents. Those left behind have often been used as indentured labour to build roads or to farm rice for the Burmese army. Some are used as porters to carry military supplies for the Burmese soldiers in the border jungles.

Although the Thai government can be commended for providing “space” for Kayans to continue to exist, I have argued, the tribe has also been the “political football” of the provincial authorities and tourism operators. Burmese authorities have also made repeated requests to the Thai government for the Kayans to be returned to Burma. Little mention is made by the Burmese of the hundreds of thousands of refugees, mostly Karen of other stock, who continue to live in camps along the common border. The military regime now views Kayan long-necks to be of value to Burmese tourism and potential earners of much needed foreign exchange for the country. This brief final chapter suggests that a more durable and lasting solution to the plight of the Kayan is required. I argue, this must be one which holds out the genuine promise of sustainable livelihood for the Kayan.

One of the unresolved issues facing UNHCR and NGOs is to determine the real political status of the Kayans and to whether the Thai government has any legal right to deny the

Kayans the right to resettle in a third country. Out of a population of 550, over one hundred Kayans are registered refugees with the UNHCR office in MHS. While 20,000 non-Kayan refugees have been successfully resettled in a third country, 20 Kayan families have been refused exit permit by the MHS government even though Finland and New Zealand indicated they were willing to take them since two years ago. This reluctance on the part of the government to release the Kayans is clearly influenced by the tourism value of the Kayan to the province. None of the other Burmese minority refugees in MHS- like the Karens and Tai Yai- have been promoted as ethnic to MHS. The Kayans have been touristically classified as a Thai “hill tribe” even though all Kayans come from Karenni State in eastern Burma.

If all Kayans were registered with the UNHCR as refugees and stayed in the refugee camp, they would be entitled to continuous assistance by various NGOs under the umbrella of UNHCR. They would receive food supplies and shelter from Thai-Burma Border Consortium, medical care from International Rescue Committee, educational programmes from Jesuit Refugee Services and skill training and human rights protection from UNHCR. But, if Kayans were to be placed in refugee camps where tourists are not allowed access, the Kayans could not be used as tourist attractions, an arrangement not conducive to MHS tourism industry. Staying outside the refugee camp is no privilege at all. There is no assistance from the government either in the form of money or food. Freedom of movement is curtailed. Whether a Kayan holds a government-issued card or not, he/she is not allowed to go away from their district, in this case, outside the township of MHS. The law takes away the opportunity for Kayans to search for paid employment in other towns or provinces. They are not allowed to disperse to other parts of the country and must be gathered as one community in one colony to maintain family unity and facilitate ethnic tourism.

Unemployment among the Kayan males is almost 100 per cent and individual family income comes from the payment for females wearing neck rings in each family. No Kayan males can be called “self-employed” as they have neither skill nor capital to start any sustainable business either in their own village or the district they are in. At best, they

can roam the forest to collect firewood and gather edible jungle food such as wild mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and fruits. But this kind of activity becomes inconvenient during the rainy season from May to September.

There is no entertainment to break their boredom during their unending 'free time', especially in the late afternoon and evening when there are no intrusions by visiting strangers. Only one or two families own a radio or television operated by car batteries. The village gets very dark as soon as the sun sets. Sporadic candle lights or small fluorescent lights can be seen in the house fronts. The paths and bridges are pitch black. During the cold season from November to February, their bamboo huts get very cold. On such evenings, they light a fire outside and the family sit around the fire until all the wood is burnt out.

Kayan villages get the most tourist visits during the cold season between November to February. The influx of foreign and domestic tourists to MHS usually happens during Christmas and New Year breaks. During other months, only a trickle of tourists comes to MHS. In the summer months, when it gets very hot, few tourists are willing to take a stroll in the Kayan villages. The seasonality of Kayan tourism does not guarantee a sustainable and steady income. There are months when the neck-ring Kayan do not get any payment at all from the stakeholders. MHS authorities try to overcome such seasonal downturn by extensive advertising in travel magazines, placing images of long-neck Kayans on airport posters and travel agents' shop windows.

One problem with Kayan tourism is that the industry itself is controlled by outsiders and non-Kayan locals, especially landlords of the villages where Kayans have settled. Except for hand-woven scarves, all souvenir items in Kayan villages including T-shirts with Kayan images are moreover, manufactured in far away Bangkok. Kayans make very little profit from the resale of bought items. To increase the family income, some Kayan households have begun to offer home-stays for interested visitors who want to experience the Kayan way of life. Kayans' economic well-being is based on tourists patronising their villages. None of the three villages generate any kind of full-time paid employment.

Little progress can be seen in the Kayans' standard of living even though some of them have been in Thailand for more than twenty years.

In the present situation in MHS, the Kayans' neck-ring culture is no longer a means to uphold a cultural tradition subscribing to the old beliefs but a survival kit to get monthly payment from the village tourism stakeholders. This has had the effect of turning the whole of Kayan identity into a "reconstructed ethnicity". The spiritual value of the neck rings has been commodified and turned into money value. Consequently, children as young as five years old have now been neck-ringed in order to earn extra cash for the family.

Tourism has re-invented and re-configured the Kayan's traditional style of life. The old ways and customary practices of Kayan men and women now exist in tension with the demands of survival in Thailand. The traditional Kayan woman has been replaced by well-groomed neck-ringed females sitting behind souvenir tables waiting to sell home-made scarves as they become exhibits for the tourist gaze and camera-happy strangers. Their way of life in MHS has lost its authenticity in submission to tourism demands. Kayan girls who no longer subscribe to the neck-ring culture have changed their clothing styles to look like tourists. Kayan grievances are exacerbated by their relocation to Huay Pu Kaeng, a displacement sponsored by the government for tourism-related consideration. Relatives and families are separated further weakening family bonds and damaging community unity.

Tourism in short, has not delivered a better life to the Kayan. For the Kayan in MHS there is no infrastructural development in any of the villages: electricity supply, clean water supply, telephone lines, sealed roads into the villages, qualified doctors or nurses in any of the village health centres and no public transport from the village to town. Cooking ovens are made from strewn rocks collected from the hill slopes and cooking by firewood takes place in the open. Ethnic tourism as practised in Thailand has not therefore, improved Kayans' standard of living nor significantly lifted their life chances. Given the history of suffering of the Kayan community, one would think that they ought

to be afforded more social support and cultural respect. The dismal failure of the “new village” project at Huay Pu Kaeng clearly demonstrates why future plans for Kayan tourism—at a minimum— require that the Kayan community be consulted and actively involved in developments which determine their livelihoods. The Kayans must be provided with the social resources and cultural support necessary for sustainable livelihood to be a reality in MHS²⁰.

²⁰ The most urgent assistance the new settlers need is an adequate supply of clean water, consistent supply of rice rations and financial help for villagers to buy necessities such as medicines and necessary food items. The government with all its resources, technical expertise and labour at its disposal could provide more wells for the villagers to draw water from. Each home could also be provided with a rain water tank, or supply tap water drawn from the mountain streams so that every house has adequate supply of clean water. The government could also open up the jungle land so that more arable land is available for Kayans to grow their own vegetables and be self-sufficient. A clearly defined land tenure system is required with land equitably sub-divided among the new settlers in order that families do not unilaterally claim plots for themselves. Government allotted lands will also solve the problem of illegal invasion of the forest. During the transitional period of adapting to the new location, the government could provide the settlers with consultative support, a body or organisation through which the settlers might seek technical and material assistance. NGOs could also play a consultative and supportive role in making these communities sustainable. Training programs organised by the government or NGOs would enable Kayan youth to gain the skills necessary for employment outside the village or in town. A public transport system using buses would assist Kayan mobility particularly in situations where they may need to go to the hospital or clinic in town. Electricity supply could also be extended to the Kayan villages for safety and convenience.

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