

Lund University
Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies
Masters Programme in Asian Studies
Southeast Asia Track
January 2008

DRAWING BOUNDARY AND REALIGNING IDENTITY
The Karen in Northern Thailand in the Context of Tourism

Author: Chanin Chiumkanokchai
Supervisor: Monica Lindberg-Falk

Abstract

With the purpose to scrutinise ethnic identity as it negotiates through times of change, this thesis focuses on how the identity of the Karen in northern Thailand has been defined in the context tourism. The meeting of the Karen with foreign tourists and Thai tour guides is studied through the notion that inter-ethnic relations are necessary for ethnic identity to exist. Interviews and participant observation were carried out in order to understand the Karen's self-ascribed identity. As a result, this thesis illustrates how cultural expressions were used by the Karen to present themselves, demarcate their ethnic boundary, and utilised as a strategy in dealing with disputes. Furthermore ethnic identity persists, although the Karen's definition of it may change through the adaptation of cultural forms.

Contents

	Acknowledgements	3
I.	Introduction	4
	Research problem	4
	Purpose and research questions	4
II.	Methodology	5
	Design and aim	5
	Collection of material	5
	Reliability, validity, and reflexivity	6
	Access and selection	7
	Ethical considerations	8
III.	Disposition	8
IV.	Brief Literature Review	9
V.	Analytical Framework	10
VI.	Presentation and Analysis	12
	Introducing Tipokhi village	12
	Self-ascribed identity of Tipokhi villagers	12
	Changing context: external influences and adaptation	20
	Tourism: presentation, differentiation, and representation	24
VII.	Conclusion	34
	Bibliography	36
	Appendixes	38
	I. Informants interviewed	38
	II. Interview questions	39
	III. Pictures	40

Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation to mum, who continually push me to be the best I can, and dad, for financial and mental support. Thank you to Monica Lindberg-Falk for rearranging her schedules and working with me until the very last minute. My sincere gratitude goes out to Sangkeaw Trakansupakorn who helped me endlessly throughout the whole fieldwork duration, and her relatives, Songponsak Rattanawilailuk, for thought provoking discussions and Somdee Kamponkul for taking me to the field. This thesis could not have been completed without my friends and host family there. Their names, however, cannot be mentioned in order to preserve confidentiality. Lastly, I am grateful to aunt Kaysorn who let me stay at her place in Chiang Mai to transcribe and write my thesis, Mario for accommodating me in his room during the last crucial days of writing, and Josef for his ever-friendly service at the Asian Studies Library.

I. Introduction

Research Problem

The inspiration for this thesis was rather personal. During my previous employment in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, I had met and befriended people who are known as the Karen. While some of them were refugees who had fled structural violence in Myanmar, others were Thai-Karen, my colleagues. I have become close to the latter and as a product of mutual differences, our interaction have always been a cultural exchange. My Karen friends spoke of their home villages in the mountains. Some of these communities are only reachable by dirt roads and their inhabitants carry on a 'traditional' way of life closely related to nature. But this did not conceal their modern fashionable clothes, migration to urban areas, fluency in Thai and sometimes English, and academically trained mentality. It is this blend of 'traditional' and 'modernity' that captured my curiosity.

In Thailand the Karen, along with other 'hill tribes', are perceived by the general public as exotic people whose communities have been frozen in time, isolated from the modern mainstream society. However, recent developments such as improved infrastructures, urban migration, access to formal Thai education, reception of the media, changing agricultural economy, and infiltration of tourism have been changing the lives of the Karen, raising the level of interaction between them and other ethnic groups, including other ethnic minorities, Thais and foreigners. Among these developments, tourism directly entails increasing contacts between the Karen and outsiders. Paradoxically, ethnic tourism portrays the Karen as backwards and isolated, yet tourism in its current state is a phenomenon of modernity and globalisation. Although studies on the impacts of tourism on minority groups have been typically focused on either economic benefits or cultural degradation, this thesis is concerned with ethnic identity and how it is responding to a transformative environment under tourism.

Purpose and Research Questions

With a purpose to scrutinise ethnic identity as it negotiates through a changing context, this thesis focuses on how the identity of the Karen in northern Thailand has been influenced by tourism, which has increased their interactions with non-Karen, who are foreign tourists and Thai tour guides. For that, the relationship between the self-conception of the Karen identity and their perception of non-Karen was

investigated. Also, a certain degree of contestation between ‘tradition’ and ‘modern’ was taken into account because tourism is one of many external influences Karen communities are facing. Therefore, the research questions are: how has the Karen identity been defined with the influence of tourism; what is the relationship between the Karen’s self-conception and their perception of non-Karen (foreign tourists and Thai tour guides); and how has the interplay between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ affected the Karen identity.

II. Methodology

Design and Aim

A case study design was adopted because this thesis is “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.” (Yin, 2003, p.13) The exploration of ethnic identity cannot be divorced from either the context in which it exists or the real interaction between members and non-members of the group. For that an experimental design was not applicable. Initially, both longitudinal and comparative studies were considered. But they were not feasible due to a combination of limited time and demand for thorough materials. The research was conducted qualitatively to bring out the depth and nuance of the issue rather than attempting to generalise quantitatively.

The thesis aims to understand the Karen identity as it responds to a changing environment. However, it did not seek an objective hypothesis. A standpoint has been taken that the social world only exists subjectively through our perception, interpretation, and interactivity. The goal is to comprehend the Karen identity, not to discover its objective essence.

Collection of Material

The fieldwork was ethnographic in nature. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were considered as the methods suitable for this thesis. Two trips were made to the site of research between the 23rd of October and 19th of November in 2007. A total of 17 days were spent in the field. During this period, I tried as much as possible to live like a Karen. I eat, slept, and worked in the rice fields with the locals, observing and engaging in their way of life, rituals, and interactions with tourists. A day was spent at the local primary school where I attempted to teach the students English. Also, I participated on a one-day trek with tourists who were led by

a local Karen tour assistant. Although the duration was quite short, participant observation remained crucial to the research. Dewalt and Dewalt (1998, p. 264) argued that participant observation “enhances the quality of the data obtained during fieldwork ... [and] the quality of the interpretation of data”. From observations, casual conversation, and simply living like a Karen, there was a continual formulation of an understanding on how various aspects of the informants’ lives were related to their identity.

14 in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 local Karen, a Thai tour guide, and a non-local Karen who worked extensively with the community¹. The interviews were semi-structured under different areas of interests². The questions were mainly aimed to provoke responses on how the Karen conceptualise their ethnic identity and their perception of the tourists and tour guides. The interviews were recorded and, for the most part, transcribed into verbatim written form. The analysis was done by thematically sorting the transcriptions and written observations, then relating each portion of relevant materials to the analytical framework.

It must be noted that when the materials were gathered, I only used the term Pgganyaw, which refers exclusively to speakers of S’gaw Karen and not other Karen languages.

Reliability, Validity, and Reflexivity

Due to the adopted notion of ethnic identity being self-ascription by the actors (Barth, 1969 p.10), conducting interview was not merely valid but probably the best method to understand the Karen ethnic identity. However, one issue was that the conception of ‘Kareness’ varied among the informants. This was unavoidable because any identity is essentially how each individual relate her or himself to the group. Nonetheless, even though the group members defined their common ethnic identity differently, it does not lessen their sense of belonging to that group. The abstract concept of boundary between members and non-members of an ethnic group translated well into empirical questions concerning differences between the two parties.

My presence in the village as a Thai must be taken into consideration in regarding reliability. Thai population is the country’s politically and economically

¹ See appendix I for list of informants.

² See appendix II for interview questions

dominant group, whose members possess more life opportunities and sometimes discriminate against the Karen and other 'hill tribes'. Also, by simply being an outsider to the community, I was concerned that the villagers may not want to share their thoughts and feelings. However, being an ethnic 'other' proved advantageous. It appeared that the villagers wished to present their identity so that the ethnic 'other' would understand them. A satisfactory degree of trust was established, particularly after I had lived like a Karen for a week, went back to Bangkok, and still returned to stay longer in the village. I participated in several days of harvesting. Sharing my labour with the community made me a small part of it. From the interviews, there were details I believe the informants would not have revealed unless they trusted the interviewer. However, language was an undeniable obstacle in the interviews and observation. Because I cannot speak Karen, the interviews were carried out in the informants' second language, Thai. Also, I could not comprehend the conversations among the villagers themselves. This may have affected the reliability of the empirical materials, though for the most part they appeared unproblematic.

Access and Selection

There are many Karen communities hosting tourists in Thailand. The village that became the case for this thesis was chosen primarily because access and a host family were guaranteed by my contact, who was an NGO worker in the area. I could have bought a tour into any other Karen village, but arriving with my contact proved beneficial because rapport was established quickly. The village was also ideal as it was renowned for being relatively 'traditional' in terms of beliefs, agricultural practice, and cultural aesthetic forms in comparison to more 'developed' Karen villages.

My contact put me up with a local youth group leader. He quickly became my friend and key informant. From him I learnt which households host tourists and who the local guide assistants were. I focused my interviews on those who had direct dealing with tourism because interaction between the Karen and non-Karen were concentrated there. School teachers were also interviewed because I believed they were concerned with the impact of external influences on the identity of the next generation Karen. Moreover, I interviewed one of the children who participated in singing to tourists as well as a Thai guide, both of whom were part of the tour mechanism. Additionally, the village monk was interviewed in order to gain more

ideas about religion, which many locals have attributed as a key aspect to their identity. Lastly, a non-local Karen was interviewed due to his extensive experience with the locals as an NGO worker. One issue was that in the end, only two women were part of the selection of ten informants. This was because women were less likely to work with the tours than men. This gender bias may have affected the quality of materials gathered.

Ethical Considerations

This thesis adhered to the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies' ethical guidelines for conducting research and fieldwork. My identity as a student and nature of the research was revealed at the onset of the field study. Also, anonymity of the informants was guaranteed and informed consents were sought before each interview. For that, the informants have understood their voluntary status, right to terminate participation, and how the collected materials would be used.

The issues of ethnic minority and the development of tourism industry in Thailand can be sensitive and political. Although this thesis dealt primarily with the Karen identity, criticisms of state policies and tour guides arose. This underlined my responsibilities to uphold confidentiality of the informants. Nonetheless I believe the research subjects will not be exposed to any harm or risks as a result from this thesis. Furthermore, I considered this study to have been positive for the members of the community by having stimulated contemplation on their identity and how tourism and other changes have had an impact on them. Questions from the informants were welcomed. Ideally, a mutual learning experience had taken place between the research subjects and the researcher during the fieldwork.

III. Disposition

The rest of the thesis is divided into four sections. First, a brief literature review outlines three themes of the Karen, tourism, and ethnic identity. Second, the analytical framework explains three concepts of ethnic identity which was applied to the thesis. These are self-ascription, relative ethnic identity, and cultural expressions. The third section covers the presentation and analysis of the empirical materials, which starts with an introduction to the case community. Then the cultural expressions of the Karen are explored, followed by a description of external factors, such as infrastructure development, urban migration, and formal education and how

they have influenced the identity of the villagers. Subsequently, the mechanism of tourism is illustrated. The implications of the tours are then given through the villagers' presentation of their identity, the perceived differences between the Karen and tourists, and the role of tour guide as presenters of Karen identity. Finally an attempt to answer the research questions is given in the conclusion.

IV. Brief Literature Review

Relevant literature to this thesis can be categorised under three themes, which are the study of the Karen, tourism, and ethnic identity. Under the first theme, it is said that the Karen is possibly the most studied group out of all high-elevation ethnic minorities in northern Thailand. Nonetheless, the edited volume by Claudio Delang (2003), *Living at the edge of Thai society: The Karen in the highlands of northern Thailand* is the only anthology focused exclusively on the Karen since the publication of an edited volume by Charles Keyes (1979), *Ethnic adaptation and identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma* (Delang, 2003, p. x –preface). The former contains chapters on negotiated identity under shifting natural conservation discourses, anthropological accounts on social practices and sexual morality, and socio-economic adaptation to national development policies. The latter is rather outdated, but contains ideas that are still valuable, dealing directly with the adaptation of the Karen ethnic identity. Some of the chapters are from a more historical perspective while others encompass different contemporary themes including inter-ethnic relations and socio-cultural change.

Under the theme of tourism, Cohen (1996, p.114) concisely summarised the biases in the studies of tourism in less developed area, namely the anthropologist and sociologist's negative bias towards tourism as a case of 'noble savage syndrome', where tourism, coupled with commercialisation of ethnicity, are seen as a threat to the locals' pure and precious way of life. On the other hand, economists tend to have a positive bias towards tourism while generally ignoring negative socio-cultural consequences for the benefit of 'development' and economic growth. Cohen's comparative work on the different 'hill tribe' villages in northern Thailand revealed that the effects of tourism vary in each case. Overall, tourism has not been totally disruptive as the reality is much more complicated than the biases can suffice. In order to illustrate the above mentioned biases, Prasith Leepreecha's article "Jungle tour: a government policy in need of review" (1997) exemplifies the negative bias

towards tourism as it threatens the socio-cultural well-being of the locals. On the other hand, Dearden (1996) admitted to the negative impact of tourism but sees this as a result of poor structuring and management of the industry, which if overcome would result in mostly positive gains for the 'hill tribes'.

Lastly ethnic identity is fluid. It is adaptive to new circumstances and sometimes contested as outsiders attempt to impose certain category on an ethnic group. There are several works fitting under this concept. From his research of the Kachin in Burma, E. R. Leach (1954, cited in Keyes, 1979, p.3) concluded that an ethnic group is a social entity, which exists as an opposition of other such groups. Pinkaew Laungaramsri (2003) discussed the shifting discourses on the Karen ethnic category as defined by the Thai state. She concluded how myths are used to categorise the Karen and they continued to be an arena for contestation over ethnic identification. A tension is evident as the Karen identity is being negotiated between the Karen themselves and how the state and general public perceives them. Toyota (1997, p.240) advocated the native's point of view to be brought forward as "[n]either ethnic identity nor 'tradition' is a fixed entity, inherent from generation to generation, but rather they are products of interpretation, symbolically constructed in the present". While much research has been carried out under the subject of the Karen, tourism, and ethnic identity, none to my knowledge has focused exclusively where all three overlap. This thesis will fill the void by analysing the identity of the Karen in a changing context, which was brought about by tourism.

V. Analytical Framework

Three concepts on ethnic identity have been applied in this thesis. First, ethnic identity is achieved through the processes of "ascription and identification by the actors themselves" (Barth, 1969 p.10). For that, the Karen decides whether or not they are Karen. Furthermore, the Karen define what it means to be Karen. Ethnic identity is primarily a self-conception. It excludes how others, such as the state, the general public, tourists or guides categorise the group, although these external perspectives may have affected how the Karen identify themselves.

Although an ethnic identity is often characterised through distinctive cultural traits, the relationship between culture and ethnicity is not always straight forward. There are cultural characteristics that are similar among different ethnic groups and members within one ethnic group may have different cultural traits (Eriksen, 1993,

p.11-12). Under these circumstances, Barth (1969, p.13-16) suggests that an ethnic entity is a social organisation whose boundaries, rather than culture within them, serve to define the group. This leads to the second concept of relative ethnic identity. An ethnic group is a socially constructed entity that exists only in relation to other groups.

By definition, ethnic groups remain more or less discrete, but they are aware of – and in contact with – members of other ethnic groups. Moreover, these groups or categories are, in a sense, created through that very contact. Group identities must always be defined in relation to that which they are not – in other words, in relation to non-members of the group. (Eriksen, 1993, p. 9-10)

For that, interaction between members and non-members of the group is necessary for an ethnic identity to exist.

For the third concept, even though Barth (p.13) dismissed cultural traits as having limited relevance to ethnic identity, and advocates instead the investigation of social boundaries, I am agreeing with Keyes (1979, p.4) who countered Barth by stating that “cultural expressions such as myth, religious belief, ritual, folk history, folklore, and art ... these symbolic formulation of ethnic identity, provide individuals with meanings that make relationship between ethnic groups meaningful.” As already discussed above, there is no one-to-one relationship between a set of cultural traits and ethnic identity. However, this does not prevent members of the group to define their identity through perceived cultural distinctiveness.

By relating the above three concepts, it can be reasoned that inter-ethnic interaction defines and demarcate ethnic identity through self-ascription by the actors. Furthermore, ethnic identification is related to cultural expressions, which provide meanings to membership of an ethnic the group. This is the framework in which the research was carried out. It enabled the voice of the Karen to come through in defining their own ethnic identity, which is theoretically shaped by their encounters with non-members of the group, namely the tourists and tour guides.

VI. Presentation and Analysis

Introducing Tipokhi³ Village

Tipokhi is around two hours drive from Chiang Mai, the capital of northern Thailand, with the last half-hour of the trip being on dirt road. The village is situated in a forested mountainous area, around one hour drive to the nearest town. Its inhabitants are S'gaw Karen, also known as Pgaganyaw. There are estimated fifty households in four clusters which make up the village. The surrounding area is used to grow rice, either on permanent plots or swidden fields. Livelihood is mainly based on farming, hunting and gathering forest product. The village economy is largely self-sufficient, although this is changing with tourism being one of the influences. The houses are basic, mostly built by the locals themselves with timber and other materials from the forest. A pipe system brings spring water to the village and toilettes are available. Tipokhi is renowned for being one of the most traditional Karen villages in Chiang Mai province. This is because hand-woven Karen clothes are worn, along with the preservation of other traditional art forms. Also, livelihood is based on self-sufficiency and animistic beliefs are being observed.

Self-ascribed Identity of Tipokhi villagers

How can 3 to 3.5 million people, living in Thailand and Burma, retain a distinctive ethnic identity even though they are culturally diverse ...? (Keyes, 1979, p.1)

Although the above question is beyond the scope of this paper, it brings forth the complexity of the Karen ethnic identity, namely the variations of culture under a single category of Karen. In the case of Tipokhi, while the villagers identify themselves as Pgaganyaw or S'gaw Karen, they tend to describe this identity with reference to their immediate community. This mirrors Raja's comment that the Karen themselves, "while recognizing some affinity with other Karen elsewhere based on a recognition of a common language, nonetheless hold to some uniqueness of identity based on residence in *a particular locality*" (1990, p. 118). When questioned about distinguishing characteristics of Pgaganyaw people, the informants responded with one or a combination of language (S'gaw Karen), aesthetic cultural forms (traditional

³ A fictitious name of the case village

dress, music, and poems), religion (Animism and Buddhism) and way of life (self-sufficient livelihood with nature).

With the notion of self-ascription and cultural expressions, these markers are not supposed to, and in fact they do not, comprise objective distinguishing features of the Karen people as a whole. Rather they are perceived by the actors as unique characteristics which members of their group share. Moreover, with the idea of relative ethnic identity, the fieldwork was in effect an interaction between members (the informants) and a non-member (the author) of the group that resulted in the following description of identity.

Language

Nearly all informants related S'gaw Karen language to their ethnic identity.

To be a P'gaganyaw you have to learn the alphabets of P'gaganyaw. You have to know it otherwise you can't read, can't speak. There are 24 characters.
(Paw Gay)

Aye Htoo, the Tipokhi School principal explained that S'gaw Karen has one spoken form and two written forms, the first of which was devised by a Christian missionary utilising roman characters and the second, called *liwa* is an adaptation from Burmese writing. The latter form is being taught at the school along with Thai and English.

Author: If I wanted to be a P'gaganyaw, what would I need to do?

Per Dae: You have to speak P'gaganyaw. You have to speak Karen. Karen must speak Karen and Thais must speak Thai.

Apart from the obvious importance of language making up the informant's ethnic identity, two other points can be interpreted from the above answer. First, the contrast between "Thais must speak Thai" and "Karen must speak Karen" seemed to have been a result of the interviewer being Thai, a non-Karen whom the actor differentiated his ethnic group with. Secondly, Per Dae's usage of the term P'gaganyaw and Karen as interchangeable, as other villagers do, seem to suggest that by Karen he means specifically P'gaganyaw. If that is the case, the finding here is similar to what Stern

(1979, p.63) stated about the Pwo Karen, who considered their language, which is mutually unintelligible to S'gaw Karen, to be "significant in their own definition of their ethnic group".

Cultural aesthetic forms – traditional dress

Traditional dress, poems, music and songs are considered by the villagers as unique aesthetic forms of Pgaganyaw culture. According to several informants, Tipokhi village is known for the conservation of these arts. The Karen's hand-woven dress is probably the most visible identity marker to any of their onlookers, and it is perceived by the villagers as such. Several informants took the time to point out the differences between a long white dress for unmarried girls and a combination of black top and long skirt for married women, but the men retain the same kind of red shirt unaffected by their marital status.

Despite how Tipokhi is said to be a village where traditional Karen clothes are worn on a daily basis, in reality modern clothes bought from the city were a common sight. An interesting observation is that women tend to wear more traditional dress than men. Even then, they often match their dress with pants to work in the rice fields or hopping on motorcycles. Paw Pler explained that weaving clothes is usually accomplished by women while the men weave bamboo into various useful items such as baskets, but today while most women still know how to weave traditional clothes, the men seemed to have been losing the art of bamboo weaving.

In some situations traditional attires were deemed necessary. These are at the school, when coming into contact with non-Karen, and during ritual. Even though the village school does not enforce a formal uniform, one of the teachers explained that traditional clothes have become fairly common because many parents encourage their children to wear them. During my visit, the students were practicing a dance to be performed at an international conference of ethnic groups in Chiang Mai and traditional dress was seen as a must for such an occasion. This leads to the second situation where dress is important for identity, the meeting of non-Karen.

If we go out somewhere dressed in our tribal costume, other tribes will be able to tell that this person is of Pgaganyaw tribe. (Paw Pler)

Paw Pler is a leader of the village youth organisation who often travel to the city to attend meetings and cultural exchanges. He also plays Taena, a traditional Karen harp and sings classic Karen songs. Every performance in the city is carried out while wearing his Pgaganyaw shirt. However, I have travelled into town on two occasions with Paw Pler and others in his family and observed that they did not wear their traditional costume. Although dress is important on occasions where Karen identity is celebrated, in other circumstances, it is probably unnecessary to stress one's identity, especially as an ethnic minority among town-dwelling Thais. The last situation where traditional dress is viewed as a must is during rituals.

Some days I wear it [traditional shirt], other days I don't, it depends on the situation, but if I am feeding the spirits I have to wear it. (Per Dae)

In this case wearing traditional attire is linked to another aspect of identity, religion and its practical form of rituals. This is similar to what Iijima observed in his study of the Karen, who view that traditional clothes must be worn when performing *oxe*⁴ rite (1979, p. 109). Also, relating traditional attire to religion is similar to another Karen village where a majority of its residences are Christians. Aye Htoo described how the villagers there would only wear traditional dress on Sundays for church.

Religion: Animism-Buddhism

The majority of Tipokhi villagers uphold a belief system derived from Animism and Buddhism. The former is a belief in souls, ghosts of ancestors and spiritual beings in nature. The latter became part of the villagers' identity since they have accepted the dominant religion of Thailand along side their original beliefs.⁵ Most informants view this syncretic religion as an integral part of their identity. Related to the belief system are of rituals, morality, and principles, which are all effective in everyday life. The following are some accounts of rituals:

⁴ Literally feeding the ancestor spirits

⁵ See Kwanchewan Buadaeng (year 2003, p.47 - 68) on the Karen reception of Christianity and Buddhism and its implication on ethnic identity

When one is born, they would put one's navel [umbilical chord] in a bamboo block and tie it to a tree, which becomes the life of a P Gaganyaw; a P Gaganyaw is born. (Shge Lah)

Fundamental rituals are performed to mark the stepping stones of the villagers' life. The above is only a minute detail of a birth ritual. Then there are intricate marriage ceremony and funeral, both of which last several days. Additionally, rituals are performed to cure illnesses, bid farewell, make apology, and show gratitude.

Before we start to hit the rice [to retrieve the grains] we have to get a chicken and cut its throat so that its blood runs down to what we call a *satuang*⁶. We pour the blood down and pray to *chao tee*⁷ and *chao din*⁸. All beings that we uphold we have to speak their names. (Paw Gay)

Rituals are also performed on different stages of the agricultural cycle in each year. The above is done during the harvesting season, but there are also others before planting the first rice, when the villagers has finished harvesting, before eating from a new harvest, local new year, and family ancestors' soul calling in October.

Most important, we cannot eat before *chao tee*, we have to let the *chao tee* eat first. Every morning I put this here [he points to a small portion of food, wrapped in a leaf and tucked onto the ceiling]. This is for the *chao tee*, for the god. (Paw Gay)

Daily rituals are part of life. They generally take the form of 'feeding the ghosts' by offering portions of rice and other food to spirits. The above are various Animistic rituals on the individual, family, and community levels. Below are Buddhist aspects of the believe system and its combination with animism.

My heart reaches towards the dharma. (Paw Pler)

⁶ A small container for feeding the spirits, made from a leaf or woven bamboo

⁷ Literally means lord of the place, in this case referring to a spiritual entity

⁸ Lord of the land/soil, another spirit being

I don't work; I stay at home on a *sil*-day⁹. I don't kill animals. It's the one day I make exceptions. (Paw Gay)

During the fieldwork, there was an important Buddhist holiday at the end of rainy season. I accompanied Paw Pler to the village temple in the morning after buying some food and necessities to give to the only monk at the village temple. The monk is part of the Thammacharik¹⁰ programme, which was aimed to spread Buddhism to the far reaches of Thailand. That night, we returned to take part in a circling of candles ritual. There were more proportion of young people there than similar occasions in town, many of them wearing traditional Pgaganyaw clothes. While we were walking bare-feet with candles and flowers around the small temple, the monk's chant in Pali was accompanied by the voices of the girls singing a traditional Pgaganyaw song. An informant stated that this song has been passed down for generations and sung in Animist rituals prior to the arrival of Buddhism. This suggests that not only do Buddhism and Animism coexist, they are syncretised, even within a single ritual. This point is also illustrated by how the monk's religious authority is matched by that of a *hiko*, an animist religion leader.

The belief system also provides morality and codes of conduct for the villagers. For example, engaging in sex before marriage is a behaviour that is called "wronging the ghost". Such behaviour is said to upset the spirits and bring harm to the perpetrator's person and family.

Beliefs are related to livelihood and happiness. It tells us not to harm others or behaving in extreme. (Paw Pler)

Two accounts of dreams were given by informants during the fieldwork. First, a boy recounted a dream in which he was peeping at a girl taking a shower. Although this seems to be a perfectly normal male adolescent dream, the boy had said that in Pgaganyaw terms, his behaviour was unacceptable; it was immoral of him to have that dream. Second, a young man dreamt of holding a baby, who was said to be his offspring. He believed the dream was a result of a ghost playing tricks on him. These

⁹ Buddhist precept day, four in each lunar month including full, both quarters, and new moon

¹⁰ See Swearer (1995, p.99) on how Buddhism was sponsored by the Thai state in nation-building

interpretations illustrate how the belief system operates on both levels of dream and reality.

The Animist-Buddhist religion is expressed in rituals, morality, and codes of conduct. It is even applied in healing and the interpretation of dreams. The totality and importance of the belief system exist as a discourse on thoughts and behaviour. They define how the individuals relate among themselves, their families and community. Therefore religion is not merely abstract thoughts on supernatural entities or symbolic rituals. It makes sense of reality and guides concrete everyday actions. This is probably the reason why the Karen at Tipokhi identify intensely with their beliefs. Paw Gay stated that the religion is “a religion for all Pgganyaw”, although he often mentioned how there are a few Christian Pgganyaw families also living in the village.

[T]hose who have studied the Karen in Thailand have not found that the Karen associate their identity with a distinctive religion”, rather Karen follow a number of different religions while remaining Karen: traditional forms of spirit and ancestor worship, tattooing cult (*cekosi*), various forms of millennialism, Christianity and Buddhism. (Keyes, p.12)

This is a valid point, but it is illustrated here that the informants considered their belief system as a cultural expression of their ethnic identity, even though it is not universal to all Pgganyaw.

Way of life

The main occupation of Tipokhi villagers is rice farming. This is carried out in two forms, which are wet-rice cultivation and swiddening. The former is more permanent with terraced fields in valleys where water can be diverted into while the latter is done on steeper areas where a patch of forest is burnt before planting. A rotation¹¹ system is utilised. After a field is harvested, it is left to fallow and the following year's rice is grown on another field. Each family usually have several swidden fields, which they rotate cultivation on. The villagers also tend smaller grounds of assorted vegetables,

¹¹ Rotation of fields not rotation of crops; some Karen are advocating that they no longer practice semi-nomadic style of swiddening (*tum rai luen loy*), which was seen as detrimental to the environment, but a more permanent form of swiddening through field-rotation (*tum rai mun wien*).

fruits and nuts, or grow them among the rice in the fields. Cultivation of rice and other vegetation is said to have been solely for consumption and not commerce.

Each family also raise animals such as cattle, water-buffaloes, chickens, and pigs. A pig or a chicken is sometimes killed for rituals or important meals, but cattle and buffaloes are long term investments which can be redeemed when the family needs money. The villagers also gather and hunt from the forest. The fieldwork was carried out at the beginning of winter when there was still some rain. It is only during this time of year that a certain kind of forest mushroom can be collected. Frogs, rats, beetles, bee larvae and flying squirrels are some of the local delicacy. Extensive indigenous knowledge on wild herbs is applied for curing illnesses. The ideal of a self-sufficient livelihood, closely connected to nature is viewed as part of the informants' ethnic identity.

A Pgaganyaw is born in the forest, lives with the forest and dies in the forest.
(Eh Say¹²)

The differences between Pgaganyaw and lowlanders are beliefs and way of life. Pgaganyaw people live with the forest on mountains, away from townspeople. (Shge Lah)

The ethnic boundary between lowlanders and Pgaganyaw drawn up here is traced over a spatial/ecological one. The fact that there are Pgaganyaw and other Karen temporarily and permanently living in urban areas does not prevent the informants identifying with a life that is remote from urban areas and connected with nature.

We have indigenous knowledge about herbs and, in the past, live in a way that does not rely on ... the outside. We rely on ourselves; live with the forest.
(Paw Pler)

Although the village economy has recently been influenced by tourism, small-scale commerce such as selling forest mushrooms or raising cattle, and selling labour, the

¹² The informant is actually living in the city.

idea of self-sufficiency remains an important cultural traits attributed to the ethnic identity of Tipokhi villagers.

Pgaganyaw means living in a simple way, living easy and eating easy, loving peace and not creating trouble. (Lah Mu)

The last aspect of the way of life has to do with being down-to-earth. Modesty, simplicity, compassion and compromise are highly regarded values and identified as general characteristics of Pgaganyaw.

Summary

The cultural expressions of language, aesthetic forms, religion and way of life are integral parts to the self-ascribed Pgaganyaw identity. These expressions were brought about through the interaction between the member (informants) and non-member (author) of the group. However, with some scrutiny, none of these cultural traits are truly distinctive to the Pgaganyaw group. Even so, this has not prevented the informants to relate them to their ethnic identity. For that, cultural expressions provide meaning to an ethnic identity. They make sense of group membership by establishing an ideal model of who a Pgaganyaw is. As we shall see, these cultural expressions are used to maintain the boundary between members and non-members of the group.

Changing Context: external influences and adaptation

Development, progress, prosperity came in. Roads, electricity, phones came in. So things started to change. (Aye Htoo)

According to informants, solar cells along with deep-cycle batteries were brought into Tipokhi in 2006 by the government. Prior to that there was no electricity in the village. Although only a limited amount of energy can be stored in the batteries, solar power enables the villagers to watch television, listen to CDs, and recharge their mobile phones on a daily basis. In the village cluster that I stayed in, there were only two televisions. Every night some of the villagers would gather around these TVs to watch the news and soap operas. Often when I met a local, after she or he finds out that I was from Bangkok, I was asked if I knew any celebrities.

Although every society seems to be undergoing constant transformation, the rate of change at Tipokhi is rather swift. Within the last ten years, the road to the village has improved enough so four-wheel drive vehicles are no longer necessary. Small motorcycles have become common for transporting rice from the fields to the village and people to the nearest town.

More people from the community started to go outside. (Aye Htoo)

Several of the men I spoke to has travelled as far as Bangkok to sell their labour to supplement their livelihood. Traders from town sometimes drive up to Tipokhi on pickup trucks, looking to buy forest products and sell their goods in return. NGO workers, students, tourists and guides are all temporary guests in the village.

In terms of education, opportunities have increased as the local primary school, kindergarten and nursery have seen dramatic improvement within the past decade. Also, a handful of students are now attending boarding high schools in other Karen villages nearby. I spent a day at the primary school teaching English and interviewing teachers. The students sang the Thai national anthem in the morning and a song praising the King before going home. They use Thai textbooks and learn in Thai language. At the same time there are Karen culture classes on Fridays to teach *liwa* (the written form of S'gaw Karen), Taena (traditional Karen harp), and *hta* (traditional poems). The school is a site where Pgaganyaw and Thai identity are negotiating.

Christianity has also made inroads to the village, though there is not yet a church. Differences in beliefs have caused some concerns among the villagers. On top of this are the trekking tours bringing in foreign tourists and Thai guides. Locally owned guesthouses were built in the village along with several permanent camps in the forest. The above changes definitely have an impact of the villagers' language use, cultural aesthetics, way-of-life, beliefs and values, all of which are part of their identity. Except for tourism, which the next section is devoted to, the perspectives of the informants on these changes are given below.

Cultural Aesthetic forms and Language

We are just moving forward. The mat that we are sitting on, we bought it rather than weaving it out of bamboo. (Paw Gay)

Manufactured materials are available from the nearest town. In this case, it has replaced some cultural aesthetic forms such as woven baskets and mats.

Contemporary artists use country or ‘string’¹³ styles but [they sing] in Pgaganyaw. (Shge Lah)

An adaptation such as this is a negotiation of identity. The musical styles are influenced by the Thais, but the language, probably a more fundamental part of identity is retained.

People who studies in the lowland, they wear school uniforms and townspeople clothes, but when they return home, their parents would get them to wear traditional dress. When they are at home, they should speak Pgaganyaw language ... and not coming home speaking Thai to their parents. (Shge Lah)

The possibility of identity change has prompted preservation sentiments of its current form. Perceived identities markers of language and dress can be temporarily stored within oneself to fit into Thai society, as long as they are brought out again at home.

Beliefs

People with education – the opportunity to study higher than other villagers – have a different way of thinking. They have different perspectives. They don’t see much importance in the beliefs of their ancestors. (Lah Mu)

Pgaganyaw should protect our culture and religion. I am talking about Buddhism and Spirits. Pgaganyaw should live with these two. I don’t want Christianity, which comes in and disrespects beliefs and everything else. They don’t care about anything. They see it [Animistic beliefs] as having no benefits to society; unusable. They take after the outside and the foreigners too much. (Paw Pler)

¹³ In Thai *string* means modern music style with instruments such as guitars

Some of the informants are concerned with the belief system being challenged. Both education and Christianity are viewed as influences from the outside that is strong enough to affect the informants' ethnic identity.

But the Christians, they don't believe in *sil*-day; they only believe in Sunday ... They asked us to help them work on *sil*-day. But when it's a Sunday and we ask them to help us, they don't come. (Paw Gay)

While the informant's Buddhist practice of not working on Buddhist precept days mirrors that of the Christians' Sundays, there is trouble when it comes to labour sharing practice of the community.

I had no stereo. When there were weddings, Pgaganyaw would sing in a group. We sang when there were deaths too. But now we have stereos. When there's a wedding or funeral, the music comes from the stereo: boom, boom, boom. (Paw Gay)

The performance of rituals has changed through the availability of modern equipments. Paw Gay also recounted that when he was young, he and his peers can perform funerals and other important rituals, but the young generation today have lost this ability.

Tradition and Way of Life

Shge Lah stated how indigenous knowledge on healing prevents a mother of a newborn from eating certain food, but modern medicine is recommending the same food to the mother so she would produce nutritious breast-milk for her baby. He added that people make the choice to solve these contradictions by either choosing the modern ways or retaining tradition. Another solution is a combination of both when possible. I told him that when I was ill, the family I stayed with offered me both paracetamol and traditional herbal tea. The next quote concerns values.

Present day Pgaganyaw have been influenced by outside trends, like capitalism, so the hearts and minds of some people have changed. They have wants. They want to be rich and powerful. (Paw Pler)

Being rich and powerful is opposite to the Pgaganyaw ideals of modesty and simplicity. Paw Pler believes that Pgaganyaw should be aware of these influences but retain their principles in times of change.

Summary

External factors brought alternatives that were seen as threats to the present form of the villagers' Pgaganyaw identity. This is because cultural expressions that make up this identity are perceived as being subjected to change. Hence, there is a concern for the preservation of identity. Preservation in this case is not always a rejection of outside influences but an adaptation of one's practice. Dress or language for example should be stored safely when one travels to the cities, but brought out again when one is back in the village. Thai musical styles can be adopted but the lyrics are sung in Pgaganyaw. Learn formal Thai education but attend Pgaganyaw cultural classes. Modern medicine can be washed down with traditional herbal tea. Here identity seems fluid and negotiable. But to completely lose these cultural expressions can be seen as changing ones' ethnic identity:

In villages with prosperity/development, the villagers resemble townspeople. Pgaganyaw people would discard their culture ... It is like changing oneself into a townspeople¹⁴. (Lah Mu)

Tourism: Presentation, Differentiation, and Representation

According to informants, trekking tours have been with Tipokhi since 1998. The tour operators are mainly based in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, where foreign tourists have the choice of purchasing different packages offering activities such as trekking, elephant riding, bamboo rafting, and of course, home-staying in a Karen village. The peak season is winter, during which several groups of tourists stay in Tipokhi each week. The number of tourists in each group ranges from around three to twenty.

¹⁴ Townsperson was translated from *Konmuang*, meaning people of the town or principality, but the term is generally used in northern Thailand to refer to town-dwelling Thais.

They are always accompanied by at least one tour guide. Six houses in the village are for hosting tourists along with three permanent camps at a nearby creek and waterfall. Most of the guesthouses are locally owned. A few of the villagers have a part-time occupation in preparing lodging for tourists and assisting the guides. The villagers occasionally sell traditional hand-woven clothes to tourists. And usually, after the tourists have finished dinner, the local children are organised into a singing group to perform for the tourists and requesting donation in return.

At Tipokhi tourism facilitates the interactions of peoples from different ethnic groups. On one hand is the Karen; on the other are foreign tourists from numerous ethnic backgrounds and Thai tour guides. With the idea of relative ethnic identity, such interaction is the site where a sense of group identity is formed. Here the focus is on the villagers' ethnic identification in relation to the tourists and guides. It should be kept in mind that this interaction is limited because most of the villagers do not speak English. Nonetheless, tourism brought about an awareness of the locals' identity as they present themselves to, and differentiate themselves with, the non-members of the group.

Presenting Identity

The tourists come up here to learn, not just to have fun. They come to learn about culture and traditions. (Pi Lae)

They just want to see the views, trees, mountains, waterfalls, and that's it. They don't want to see Karen culture. (Paw Gay)

As the above contradicting accounts reveal, after ten years of tourism, there are still differing opinions on the tourists' motivation for visiting the village.

The tourists who come here, what they want to observe, we don't know ... do they just want to have fun or do they want to see our way of life? (Aye Htoo)

The answer to this seems to lie in the variety of tourists visiting the village. They are different in terms of age, gender, ethnic background, individual personality and

interests¹⁵. The tourists' knowledge of the Karen, whose houses they are staying in, also ranges from zero to formidable. While, a guide spoke of an incident when a tourist challenged him of certain facts on the Karen, other tourists I spoke to said that they knew nothing about the locals, whose village they are staying in. Despite these differences, one commonality of the tourists is that they are non-Karen. Their presence in the village as an ethnic 'other' appeared to activate some of the villagers' sense of identity as they seek to present themselves to the tourists; to say who the Pgganyaw are.

If we can, we would spread knowledge, understanding, and culture. What we have is the structure of our community ... indigenous knowledge, herbs, musical instruments, language and beliefs. If we present this to the tourists, they would see us as Pgganyaw people. (Paw Pler)

Ethnic identity is meaningless without its expression. Along with several other informants, Paw Pler wishes to promote his Pgganyaw identity by referring to the cultural expressions of language, aesthetics, religion, and way of life, all of which are seen as significant characteristics of his ethnic group.

A part of me wants the foreigners to know us because only a few people know about Pgganyaw ... They only know hill tribes but we are Pgganyaw. (Aye Htoo)

The general public conception, national policy agendas, and tourism often lump together Thailand's various minority groups of high elevation under the single, simplistic category of 'hill tribes'. (Pinkaw Laungaramsri, 2003, p.23) This makes little sense in terms of ethnic identity as other minority groups are perceived as culturally different to the Karen. It appeared that Aye Htoo would like tourists to recognise her ethnic group as well as discerning Pgganyaw from 'hill tribes'.

Presentation of identity is done passively and actively. Passive presentation means the informants perceive that their identity is shown to the tourists by basically carrying out their lives as usual; identity as self-evident.

¹⁵ see Chambers (2000, p. 18-23) for different ideas on what tourists seek and tourist typologies

Tourists would know that this is Pgaganyaw tribe. It's in how they [the villagers] are dressed, their way of life, and work the fields. This is unique to Pgaganyaw. They are not like other tribes. (Aye Htoo)

In other circumstances, informants actively present their identity through conscious efforts. The following examples regard dress.

When I go with the tourists, most of the time I wear a Pgaganyaw shirt. (Paw Gay)

Paw Gay is an assistant guide. True to his words I observed that he usually wears his red Pgaganyaw shirt when he works with tourists. Also, Pi Lae described how local women are welcome to sell their hand-woven Pgaganyaw clothes to the tourists as a way to distribute income in the community and promote Pgaganyaw culture. Another form of active presentation is mentioned by Paw Pler, the youth group leader, and Lah Mu, the village monk, of efforts to find support for the establishment of a cultural centre for tourists or other interested persons to visit.

Moreover, I had the opportunity to accompany Roh Pu, a local guide assistant, when he was leading a group of tourists through the forest from one village cluster to another. He told the tourists about the qualities of each herb that we came across in accordance to indigenous knowledge, along with showing them how to live off the forest by looking for honey, squirrels, and pretending to shoot birds and frogs with his sling shot. In accordance to Pgaganyaw beliefs, Roh Pu poured his beer on the earth for the spirits before he had his first sip while explaining the significance of his action to the tourists. He also told them to apologise to the spirits first before urinating in the forest. Furthermore during the walk, he pointed out a hill in the forest that was surrounded by a ditch then recounted a legend of a hidden treasure that is protected by a ghost. Lastly, when he arrived at his home with the tourists, after having a shower he put on his Pgaganyaw shirt. A tourist then asked him if what he was wearing was a traditional Thai shirt. To this he replied "no, it's Karen". All of this is part of what Roh Pu and other informants ascribed as aspects of their identity: way of life, religion, and aesthetic forms.

This [showing culture to tourists] is important for others to see that Pgaganyaw people are real. (Lah Mu)

Presentation of identity is a way to reaffirm the villager's ethnic group. It stresses the cultural traits which members of the group considered vital to their identity and begs others to acknowledge the existence of their ethnic group. This is where the expression of identity takes place. In this case, tourism was said to have provided encouragement for the preservation of the group identity:

If a village ... changes and people wear modern clothes, it becomes less interesting and deters tourists ... A village without tourists would keep developing. There is less conservation and more change, more receptive to [outside] cultures. But if it's like this then we try to keep things the same as much as possible. (Shge Lah)

Perception of differences and tensions

With the idea of drawing ethnic identity from the boundary between members and non-members of the group, the informants' perception of differences between Pgaganyaw and tourists is crucial to the villagers' sense of ethnic identity. These dissimilarities serve to describe who is not a Pgaganyaw.

Although many locals appeared apathetic to the presence of tourists among their midst, tensions are revealed when they contrast tourists with Pgaganyaw. On the surface, these tensions seemed to have been the result of the coming together of groups of people, each of which has distinct values and norms that are incompatible. However, the rationales given when judging certain behaviours of tourists as unacceptable are often related to the informants' ethnic identity.

When the foreigners behave wrongly, it makes the community's culture deteriorate. The beliefs will deteriorate ... If we make sacred beings look at us badly, they will not take care of the village, the community. They will recede. (Paw Pler)

Paw Pler was commenting on the engagement of premarital-sex among tourist couples who stay at the village. Although many of the tourists' actions not complying

with Pgganyaw norms are typically dismissed in terms of cultural relativity, sex before marriage is perceived as intolerable because it has ramification for the whole community according to the belief system. Usually when such a misdeed is committed, the couple would have to perform a ritual of apology to the spirits and the villagers. However, such a ritual cannot be carried out by the tourists for obvious practical reasons and the fact that they do not share the Pgganyaw religion. Here, the informant's religion, which is a crucial part to his self-ascribed identity, is perceived as being under threat.

The tourists would express love by [publicly] hugging or kissing. This is normal for them, but in our tradition it is not. (Aye Htoo)

Showing affection in public is not perceived as detrimental as premarital-sex. Even then Aye Htoo, who is the village school principal and teacher, recounted with some concern that children would approach her at school to inform her about this seemingly strange behaviour of the foreigners. Aye Htoo stated that she explained to the children that such acts are not part of Pgganyaw culture and should not be emulated. Even so there was a case of a young, married, local couple showing affection in front of their peers. The story was retold by Paw Pler, who believed that the couple's behaviour was the result of imitating the tourists. The informant commented how the act appeared normal when carried out by foreigners but repulsive when done by Pgganyaw. Unlike the case of premarital sex, displaying affection is judged differently according to whether or not the actor is a member of the ethnic group.

The tourists were whatever is comfortable, but in a traditional Pgganyaw community, people wear non-revealing clothes ... In the old days for a female, if her dress is loose and people can see her knees, she is embarrassed enough to commit suicide (Shge Lah)

One thing [difference] is their clothes. They uphold something else, I can't blame them ... Some tourists only wear underwear and walk around. (Li Lu)

One of the most frequent accounts relating to the differences between tourists and Pgganyaw is that tourists, particularly females, would sometimes wear clothes that

are considered too revealing, to the point being regarded as undergarment or the wearer being almost naked. Li Lu related clothing norm to religion and dismissed the tourists' behaviour in terms of cultural relativity. On the other hand, he stated that no P Gaganyaw would dare to dress as scanty as tourists. Again, the belief system has been brought forward. This time it was applied to clothing norms, stressing the importance of religion for P Gaganyaw identity as it is differentiated against the tourists.

There is a belief that the village has an 'owner'¹⁶. But they [tourists] were singing and shouting even after one or two in the morning, and still they didn't stop. This affects the way of life and the practice of being timid ... A loud village is a village without peace. It's according to their [the villagers'] beliefs. (Eh Say)

Loud noises at night generally offend the ears of anyone who used to sleep in peace and quiet. But here the informant framed the disturbance in three facets of identity, including religion, way of life, and values. According to Eh Say, he and the village leader had to confront a tour guide who became offensive, after one of the locals threw a rock at the guesthouse where the sound originated from. The informant stated that he drew on aspects of P Gaganyaw identity to negotiate with the guide to lower the volume caused by the tours. Here ethnic identity was brought forward as a strategy to deal with a dispute caused by tourism.

The villagers' ethnic boundary is drawn through the perceived differences between them and the tourists in three ways. First, it defines who is not a P Gaganyaw; members of the group would not behave like the foreigners who violate the norms and etiquette of the village. Yet such actions are normally tolerated by taking into account cultural relativity. Secondly, tourism is seen as a threat to the group identity by challenging the belief system and providing improper examples for the local children. Because inappropriate behaviour does not conform to the codes of conduct provided by the belief system, to some informants, there are real consequences of offending the spirits who protect the village. Also, children are often the subjects of concern when improper examples are there for them to follow. This implies the possibility of

¹⁶ 'Owner' was directly translated from Thai, used in this case to refer to spiritual being who watches over the village

identity, in its current manifestation, being subjected to change in future generations. Third, ethnic identity was used as a strategy to negotiate conflicts brought about by tourism. It determines what is appropriate or inappropriate in the village, outlining certain rules and regulations that non-members must comply while they are residing within the community.

Representation of identity by tour guides

I have never spoken to the foreigners. I have only spoken to the guides. (Li Lu)

Language barrier prevents direct communication between the villagers and the tourists. In Tipokhi, only two local guide assistants have some command of English. Consequently Thai tour guides, who speak English as their occupational prerequisite, dominate the interaction with tourists at the village. Ironically the guides, who are non-Karen, control how the Karen villagers are portrayed to the foreigners. Because the guides bringing tourists to Tipokhi are all Thais, they are also an ethnic 'other' for which the identity of the villagers is drawn against. Even though they are in a position to present the villagers' identity to the foreigners, the guides are generally seen to have limited knowledge about Pgganyaw. Here a boundary is drawn through the perception that non-members are unable to comprehend the distinctive characteristics which only members of the group have internalised. Some accounts of this are given below.

[Pgganyaw] culture is something the guides from the city are unaware of. (Roh Pu)

The guides¹⁷ who are mountain people, when they explain to the foreigners, they get to the profound. When there's a ritual in a village, they know all of it ... Their knowledge is direct ... But the lowlander guides, like I told you, they have to lie. (Roh Pu)

¹⁷ The informant is referring to Pgganyaw guides in other areas. There are no Pgganyaw guides in Tipokhi.

Roh Pu disclosed that whenever a Thai guide is unable to explain certain aspects of Pgaganyaw culture to the tourists, she or he would simply make it up. This was said to be the usual practice because guides have limited knowledge of Pgaganyaw.

The guides do not have a satisfactory understanding of us ... They just want money. They think narrowly ... just the outer shell. (Paw Pler)

They are lacking [knowledge] on the issues of the community, issues concerning rights of Pgaganyaw ... The government said that Pgaganyaw cannot live with the forest. This is a problem for the community ... but the guides don't know about this. (Paw Pler)

National environmental policies often view the Karen and other ethnic groups who live and practice swiddening in forests as a threat to the environment. However, with support from NGOs and academics, the Karen have been using their identity, of living with and protecting of the forest, to retaliate and negotiate with the government. (Pinkaw Laungaramsri, 2003, p.35-39) This strategy appeared to have reinforced Pgaganyaw identity in regarding living with nature. However, the importance of this is perceived as being beyond the knowledge of the guides.

When they feed the spirits, the lowlander guides don't know about it. For example if [a family in] this house is feeding the spirits, meat that is bought is not allowed up, but they [the guides] brought pork into the house. (Roh Pu)

The above quote relates the perception of the guide's inability to understand Pgaganyaw rituals to the next issue of their violation of the villagers' values under the belief system.

Author: Is there any other cultural differences between Pgaganyaw and foreigners?

Kamon¹⁸: Free sex, that's the difference. That's the only difference, the end.

Some guides when they are drunk ... they kiss the foreigner, take their hand and walk into the forest ... Some of the guides told me that I was stupid, the foreign women are like this, why don't I sleep with them. I'm not stupid because my children and wife are at home. If I do this I will destroy our tradition and offend the spirit. (Paw Gay)

Similar to the case of tourists engaging in premarital-sex, the perceived lax sexual mores of some Thai guides are differentiated with the stricter values associated with P Gaganyaw beliefs. Paw Gay also recounted another story when a guide friend of his had brought him to a karaoke bar in town where sexual services could be bought. He said that he had lost his rhythm and affirmed that such behaviour is "not the style of P Gaganyaw".

The ethnic boundary between the Thai guides and the villagers are drawn in two ways. First the guides are perceived as outsiders who have limited knowledge and understanding of the P Gaganyaw. Although they are in the position to mediate communication with, and represent P Gaganyaw people to the tourists, guides are seen as non-members of the group who cannot comprehend the cultural traits that only members of the group share. Secondly, Thai guides are seen to have disrespected P Gaganyaw beliefs either from the lack of cultural knowledge or personal choice. This is a point of differentiation between members and non-members of the group. It reinforces the identity of the Karen by showing who is not a Karen.

Summary

Tourism brought about the presence of two ethnic 'other' to Tipokhi. They are foreign tourists and Thai tour guides. This has several implications for the P Gaganyaw identity. First, the villagers responded by presenting their identity through meaningful cultural expressions. From this the actors appeared to seek acknowledgement of the existence of their group. Secondly, tour guides were in the position to portray the P Gaganyaw to the foreigners, but being another ethnic 'other',

¹⁸ Kamon is a Thai tour guide

guides were seen as unable to comprehend what it means to be Pgaganyaw. Here a boundary is drawn against the non-members who have not internalised the cultural knowledge of the group. Third, by differentiating members with the non-members of the group, Pgaganyaw identity was defined through the negation of who is not a Pgaganyaw. Fourth, improper behaviours of the tourists and guides were either dismissed through the idea of cultural relativity or perceived as a threat to identity. On that note, cultural expressions were utilised in negotiating disputes created by tourism.

VII. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to scrutinise an ethnic identity as it negotiates through a changing context. The first question raised was how has the Karen identity been defined with the influence of tourism. Here it must be noted that the group identity was ascribed by the actors through cultural expressions of language, aesthetic forms, religion, and way of life. Although these cultural traits are not universal to all Karen, they provided concrete meanings to the group identity and formed an ideal model which individuals were measured against. With that in mind, tourism illustrated how cultural expressions were presented, used to delineate the Karen from non-Karen, and became instrumental in dealing with disputes. These processes portrayed multiple manifestations of the Karen identity, which was reaffirmed through the interaction with non-members of the group.

The second research question was an enquiry into the relationship between the Karen's self-conception and their perception of non-Karen. In the context of tourism, non-Karen were perceived as being unable to comprehend cultural traits that only the Karen have internalised; having a different set of values and behaviours; and in extreme cases, a threat to the integrity of the Karen identity. The perception of non-Karens served to define the Karen identity by negating who is not a Karen. Therefore self-conception of the actors and their perception of non-members of the group are two sides of the same coin. They perpetually reinforce ethnic identity by maintaining a boundary between the actors and their ethnic 'other'.

The third question asked how the Karen identity has been influenced by the interplay between 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Recent developments in Tipokhi have brought alternatives to the established practices of the community. Modernity is sometimes viewed as a threat to the Karen identity because associated cultural

expressions were seen as being subjected to change. This has created sentiments of preservation. As a result, there were adaptations of 'traditional' cultural forms, which were concealed and retrieved as necessary, or combined with newly adopted forms. For that, cultural expressions, the concrete meaning that actors give to their identity, may gradually change through time, but the Karen identity persists by re-association with new meanings.

Bibliography

- Barth, F. (ed) (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget
- Bernard, R.H. (2002) *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Walnut Creek, London: Altamira Press,
- Buadaeng, Kwancheewan (2003) *Religion and Ethnic Identity: case study of the Karen in Thailand and Myanmar*. Social Research Institute, University of Chiang Mai: unpublished (in Thai)
- Chambers, E. (2000) *Native Tours: the Anthropology of Travel and Tourism*. Illinois: Waveland Press
- Claudio O. Deland (ed.) (2003) *Living at the Edge of Thai Society: The Karen in the highlands of northern Thailand*, New York, London: RoutledgeCurzon
- Cohen, E. (1996) *Thai Tourism: Hill Tribes, Islands and Open-Ended Prostitution*. Bangkok: White Lotus
- Davies, C.A. (2002) *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* ASA Research Methods in Social Anthropology. London, New York: Routledge.
- Dearden, P. (1997) "Trekking in Northern Thailand: Impact Distribution and Evolution over Time" in Parnwell, M. J. G. (ed) *Uneven Development in Thailand*, Athenaeum Press.
- Dewalt, K. & Dewalt, B (1998) "Participant Observation" in Bernard, H.R. (ed) *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, Walnut Creek: Altamira
- Erikson, T. H. (1993) *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Virginia: Pluto Press
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1983) *Ethnography: principles in practice*, Cambridge: University Press
- Iijima, S. (1979) "Ethnic Identity and Sociocultural Change among Sgaw Karen in Northern Thailand" In Keyes, C.F. (ed) *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: the Karen on the Thai frontier with Burma*. Pennsylvania: ISHI
- Inter Mountain People Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT) (1995) *Indigenous Knowledge of Pgangayaw*, unpublished (in Thai)
- Keyes, C.F. (ed) (1979) *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: the Karen on the Thai frontier with Burma*. Pennsylvania: ISHI
- King, V.T. (1999) *Anthropology and Development in South-East Asia: Theory and Practice*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press

Luangaramsri, Pinkaew (2003) "Constructing Marginality: the 'hill tribe' Karen and their shifting locations within Thai state and public perspectives", In Claudio O. Deland (ed.) *Living at the Edge of Thai Society: The Karen in the highlands of northern Thailand*, New York, London: RoutledgeCurzon

McCaskill, D. & Kampe, K. (eds) (1997) *Development or Domestication? Indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia*. Bangkok: Silkworm

McCaskill, D. (1997) "From Tribal People to Ethnic Minorities: The Transformation of Indigenous People" in McCaskill, D. & Kampe, K. (eds) *Development or Domestication? Indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia*. Bangkok: Silkworm

Prasith Leepreecha. (1997) "Jungle Tours: a Government Policy in Need of Review" in McCaskill, D. & Kampe, K. (eds) *Development or Domestication? Indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia*. Bangkok: Silkworm

McKerron, M.A. (2003) *Neo-Tribes and Traditional Tribes: identity construction and interaction of tourists and highland people in a village in northern Thailand*, Graduate School, Chiang Mai University: unpublished thesis

Miller, R. (2000) *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories*, London, California, New Delhi: SAGE

Rajah, A. (1990) Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Nation-State: The Karen in Burma and Thailand, in Wijeyewardene, G. (ed) *Ethnic Groups across National Boundaries in Mainland Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

Spencer, S. (2006) *Race and Ethnicity: Culture, identity and representation*, Oxon, New York: Routledge

Swearer, D. K. (1995) *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*. New York: SUNY press

Toyota, M. (1997) "The Effects of Tourism Development on Akha Community: a Chiang Rai village case study" in Parnwell, M. J. G. (ed) *Uneven Development in Thailand*, Athenaeum Press.

Yin, R. J. (2003) *Case Study Research: Design and methods* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage

Appendix I - informants interviewed

Name	Age	Sex	Comments
Paw Pler	21	M	-leader of local youth group on P Gaganyaw indigenous knowledge -plays and teaches Taena, a traditional Karen harp -in the village he is one of the last in his generation who is well-versed in hta, traditional Karen poems -two interviews conducted
Paw Gay	43	M	-assistant tour guide for past 8 years -assistant to village leader -two interviews conducted
Shge Lah	27	M	-teacher at the village primary school -lives in nearby village
Aye Htoo	27	F	-principal and teacher at the school for 10 years -lives in nearby village
Pi Lae	25	F	-hosts tourists in her house with Roh Pu, her husband -teacher at the school for 10 years
Wah Paw	13	M	-attends local school -participates in singing to tourists
Per Dae	50 est.	M	-the village leader -owns a house especially for hosting tourists
Lah Mu	22	M	-the village monk under Thammacharik programme -has been staying in Tipokhi for past 16 months
Roh Pu	29	M	-tour guide assistant -hosts tourists at his house
Li Lu	33	M	-tour guide assistant
Eh Say	40 est.	M	-research assistant at Chiang Mai university -worked extensively with the community over the past decade -lives in Chiang Mai
Kamon	26	M	-Thai tour guide -lives in Chiang Mai

Appendix II – interview questions

The following questions were only used as a rough guide. Each interview was more of a conversation. Many other issues were probed and other questions were spontaneously formed during the course of the interview.

1. Bio-data: name, age, sex, family status, ethnicity, religion, language(s), education, place of birth
2. Career:
 - current occupation
 - prior jobs
 - other forms of income earning activities
 - other family members' occupation
3. Ethnicity:
 - If I wanted to be a Pgaganyaw, what do I need to do?
 - How are Pgaganyaw people different to other people?
4. External factors:
 - Is your community changing? If so how?
 - What brought on this change?
 - What is the result of this change?
3. Tourism:
 - How has the presence of tourists affected your life?
 - Do you communicate with the tourists?
 - What do you do when the tourists are here?
 - What do you do when the tourists are not around?
 - What do you think the tourists expect from you?
 - Did you learn anything from the tourists?
 - Did the tourists learn anything from you?
 - How are tourists different to Pgaganyaw people?
 - What would you say to a tourist who wishes to permanently live in your village?

 - What is your opinion on the tour guides?
 - Do the lowlander guides understand Pgaganyaw people?
 - Do you think there are differences between a Pgaganyaw guide and a Thai guide?

Appendix III – pictures



Above: young Karen man in traditional shirt. The sign was used in an ecological/religious ceremony. It states “we live and eat with the forest”.

Below: permanent terraced rice field (back) and harvested swidden rice field (front)





Above: Students practicing a dance to be performed in an international conference of ethnic minority groups

Below: a Karen woman engaging in traditional weaving

