SINO THAI EXPLORATIONS

CHINESE STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON MOBILITY AND TRANSFORMATION IN NORTHERN THAILAND

Sino-Thai Explorations: Chinese Student Perspectives on Mobility and Transformations in Northern Thailand

Yunnan University and Chiang Mai University
Summer School August 2019

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About the Summer School and publication

This publication features perspectives from anthropology students at Yunnan University on different aspects of mobility and transformation across the changing social landscape of Northern Thailand. The research articles contained here are the product of a collaborative summer school hosted by Chiang Mai University in August 2019, where fifteen selected students from Yunnan University were given the opportunity to conduct short-term fieldwork under the guidance of local academic mentors. The work produced is a series of enlightening case studies, across urban life in Chiang Mai to rural livelihoods on the border, which traces aspects of these transformations. Most importantly, the book shows the potential for critical engagement in Southeast Asia from Chinese anthropologists-in-training, and should therefore be read within that context.

Sino-Thai Explorations:
Chinese Student Perspectives on Mobility and Transformation in Northern Thailand

National Centre for Borderlands Ethnic Studies in Southwest China & School of Ethnology and Sociology, Yunnan University, China

Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

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ISBN: xx-xxx-xxx-xxx-x

Executive Editors: Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, He Ming
Project Coordinator: Kanchana Kulpisithicharoen
Publisher: Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development
Tel: +66 (0) 53 94 3595-6 / Fax: +66 (0) 53 94 3279
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Printed: November 2019

National Library of Thailand Cataloging in Publication Data

Duangkamon Doncha-Um.
Burmese Migrant Domestic Workers: Tactics of Negotation Among Muslim Female Domestic Workers in the Chang Klan Community of Chiang Mai, Thailand .-- Chiang Mai : Chiang Mai University Press, 2017.
xxx p. -- (Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration).

1. Pa-Oh (Asian people)--Burma. 2. Burma--Social life and customs. I. Title.

305.8958
ISBN: **xx-xxx-xxx-xxx-x**

Copy Editors: Xixi Geng, Elliot Lodge, Jeff Moynihan, Charlotte Trenk-Hinterberger
Cover Photo: Zhou Xinyi
Layout and cover design: Jeff Moynihan
Printer: Wanida Karnpim Limited Partnership

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FOREWORD

from Professor He Ming

For Yunnan University, this Sino-Thai summer school, hosted by the RCSD at Chiang Mai University, provided an important opportunity for Anthropology students to learn and practice academic skills. These students were selected for their high achievement in their cohort and their desire to build their skills in research methods and engagement with our regional partners.

The project follows long-term collaborative efforts between the National Centre for Borderlands Ethnic Studies in Southwest China, Yunnan University, and the School of Ethnology and Sociology at Yunnan University, with both the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, and the Center for Ethnic Studies and Development at Chiang Mai University. Going back over a decade, we have worked to build a research network focused on cross-border themes. This has included the hosting of regional seminars and scholar and student exchanges.

This project focused on understanding the social and cultural context in Southeast Asia, and many of the themes that emerged in the Northern Thai context showed examples of ongoing connections of ethnicity, language and culture across borders, including the presence of Chinese diaspora. The students commented on the value in being in field sites with academics who were attentive in supporting their fieldwork, while also benefitting from sustained use of English in an academic setting.

I would like to thank Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and the team at RCSD for hosting us in Chiang Mai and working towards this output of short academic articles from our students. This is a unique opportunity for young researchers to work closely with foreign researchers and have their work edited and published in print.

We hope that this project can push us forward towards further collaborative efforts between our students and scholars in the coming years.

Professor He Ming, Executive Editor

Leader, First-class Discipline Construction for Ethnology, Yunnan University

Director, National Centre for Borderlands Ethnic Studies in Southwest China, Yunnan University

PREFACE

Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti

This publication features the perspectives of fifteen students from the School of Ethnology and Sociology, Yunnan University, based on a Summer School which included a series of lectures and short-term field research across six different sites in Northern Thailand. The central theme of the Summer School focuses on Sino-Thai connectivity, particularly Southwest China and Northern Thailand through mobility, trade, tourism, borderland livelihoods and social memory. This collaboration between IES/Yunnan University and RCSD/Chiang Mai University is the first of its kind under the current BRI initiative by the Chinese government.

In a series of lectures, the program exposed them to issues relating to mobility, ethnicity, and various facets of transformation across local communities. Attempts were made to introduce students to concepts commonly used in social science. Students then conducted fieldwork under the guidance of academic mentors who all had close connections to the communities being studied. While in the field, the students were challenged to use the methods and tools of the researcher while confronting different social realities. Over the next two months the students worked closely with an academic writing team to produce these articles, and they also had the opportunity to present their research findings to audiences in Chiang Mai and Kunming.

This series of eleven papers is organized according to each field site. The first of these, Chiang Khong, is small town straddling the Mekong river border area, and highlights the intersection of economic change with the local social fabric. Ma Yifei reflects upon how a community of Chinese diaspora is negotiating their identity amid livelihood shifts, while Shan Zhenjin looks at how infrastructure development on the river is impacting the local community. The second field site is Chiang Kham, an area of Phayao province notable for its pocket of Tai Lue diaspora originally from modern-day Yunnan. Li Yuelin, Chen Huangrong and Cheng Size explore social memory as reflected and constructed in performance and action, while Wang Meijun and Zhang Yuanyuan examine this notion of social memory through its representation in the local cultural center.

The book then ventures back to the border town of Nor Lae, where the minority Dara-ang people negotiate different aspects of their livelihoods within the Thai state. Sun Mongxuan and Zhou Xinyi survey the impact of a large state agriculture initiative on local livelihoods. The fourth group of researchers stayed within the urbanized,

rapidly developing city of Chiang Mai, investigating the changing nature of the local tourism industry. In Chiang Mai, Zhijun Tao engages with notions of the tourist 'gaze' through Chinese tourist representations and imagination in the capital of Northern Thai culture. Xu Wei looks at how actors in the Chiang Mai tourism market are adapting to changes through learning and using Chinese language.

Staying in Chiang Mai, the fifth group of researchers seeks to understand how Shan people, comprising Chiang Mai's most numerous migrant group, negotiate city life by carving out social spaces. Wang Duli looks at livelihoods and forms of adaptation within the spaces are forged by food production and sale, while Wang Kunyan posits that physical spaces in the city are essential organizational support networks for migrant workers. The last team of young researchers traversed between Chiang Mai and Phayao provinces to examine the textile trade of Hmong people in its broader economic context. Dong Wen looks at how the emerging trade has led to changing roles for women in Hmong communities, while Xu Qinying reflects on how consumer preferences shape the production process.

Throughout this project, students were encouraged to critically engage with their surroundings and continually reflect upon their own positionality in conducting research. As such, the articles contained here should not be held up to intense scrutiny as standalone research outputs, but instead should be seen as reflections through the eyes of Chinese students engaging with the unfamiliar and learning about the research process.

There were many people who helped this exciting project come to fruition. Most notably, we would like to thank the field coordinators who gave their time and expertize to the project; Lecturer Ekamol Saichan, Dr. Long Xiaoyan, Dr. Malee Sitthikriengkrai, Dr. Aranya Siriphon, Dr. Busarin Lertchavalitsakul and Dr. Prasit Leepreecha. Most importantly we would like to thank our colleagues at Yunnan University: Dr. Fu Yunxian, Dr. Wang Yueping who accompanied the students throughout the Summer School, and Professor He Ming and Ms. Zhu Min for their generous support. Kanchana Kulpisithicharoen and Chanida Puranapan were integral to organizing much of the program. Our appreciation goes to Elliot Lodge, Jeff Moynihan, Charlotte Trenk-Hinterberger and Xixi Geng for their time, patience and intellectual guidance to the students.

Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Executive Editor

Director, Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the Sino-Thai Relations Summer School and this publication. First and foremost, Professor He Ming from Yunnan University and Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti made this collaboration possible, along with Prof. Long Xiaoyan, Assoc. Prof. Wang Yueping, and Assoc. Prof. Fu Yunxian from the School of Ethnology and Sociology at Yunnan University.

In addition, the field trips would not have been successfully undertaken without the academic guidance of Dr. Aranya Siriphon, Dr. Busarin Lertchavalitsakul, Lecturer Ekamol Saichan, Dr. Malee Sitthikriengkrai, and Dr. Prasit Leepreecha. Dr. Ta Wei Chu and Dr Wasan Panyagaew also contributed lectures to the summer school.

Kanchana Kulpisithicharoen managed this project, coordinated everything in Chiang Mai, and was ably supported by Chanida Puranapan at the RCSD. Zhu Min arranged many aspects at the Yunnan University end, including a wonderful stay for the editorial team in September. Charlotte Trenk-Hinterberger, Jeff Moynihan, Elliot Lodge and Xixi Geng worked closely with the students to support their academic writing and the publication of this edition.

The summer school relied heavily on the excellent support of a large team of field trip assistants and Thai-Chinese translators. This included Ping Yanqin, Korawan Buadoktoom, Penpit Changakrum, Urai Yangcheepsutjarit, Satiya Kuankham, Jevy Lee, Akkaranee Jaiwanglo, Lijun Wang, Mala Saewang, Weerachat Uttaranakor and Zhenkun Liu.

We would also like to thank all those who supported the research as hosts or informants in the field sites. This includes Rak Chiang Khong, Chiang Khong Customs, Chiang Khong Immigration, Chiang Khong Subdistrict Administration Organization Office, Skyline Adventure Zipline, Warorot Market Management Office, Tai Lue Cultural Centre of Ban Yuan, Lanna-Tai Culture Center of Phayao University, and MAP Foundation.

MAP OF FIELD SITES

ON THE MARGINS

Chiang Khong, Chiang Rai Province

Chiang Khong is a small yet bustling border trade town between Thailand and Laos. On the Lao side is Huayxay, a town dominated by small-scale Chinese merchants and imported goods from China, a result of the economic expansion of China into the country. The Thai-Lao Friendship bridge, constructed in 2013, spans the Mekong River and links Chiang Khong to Huay Xai, as part of the larger GMS (Greater Mekong Sub-region) development plan that connects China via Yunnan Province to Bangkok, Thailand. It was expected that infrastructure development in Chiang Khong would boost borderland economic growth among the local people, though such impacts on the local communities and livelihoods remains contested. This pocket of northern Thailand is also notable for different groups of Chinese diaspora.

Advisor: Lecturer Ekamol Saichan

Identity and Adaptation among Chinese Diaspora at Baan Wiang Mok, Chiang Khong District

Ma Yifei

Ma Yifei, from Liaoning Province, is currently a second year masters student at the School of Ethnology and Sociology at Yunnan University, majoring in Ethnology.

Abstract

Baan Wiang Mok, a village consisting of people from eight ethnic groups, is located in Chiang Khong sub-district, northern Thailand. The first group of villagers who came to settle in this village area were Chinese from Yunnan province. They immigrated to Thailand about 50 years ago, finally settling down in the area where they are living today and became the majority group in the village. This paper mainly focuses on exploring forms of adaptation after migration and the identity of the Yunnanese Chinese people in the village, as well as the problems they are faced with. The analysis indicates that after settling in Thailand for years, the identity of the Yunnanese Chinese became multilayered, with them possessing identities that are associated with their ethnic culture as well as 'Thai' culture. Through the fluid process of preservation and adaptation, these people are now living in-between their pre-migration memories and their everyday experience in this multi-ethnic village in Thailand. In the end of the paper, some cultural and social problems that are facing these villagers, which are variously related to their unsettled identities, will be discussed.

Keywords: Yunnanese Chinese, northern Thailand, adaptation, identity

Introduction

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a large number of Kuomintang (KMT) troops fled mainland China due to their defeat against the Communist Party. According to Duan Ying (2012, pp.48-57), they first gathered

in northern Myanmar, and founded the "Anti-Communist and Anti-Russian University" to continue their military training. However, shortly afterwards, their nationalities, military background and their links with the rebels had disturbed the Myanmar government, which in 1953 lodged a complaint to the United Nations demanding the withdrawal of KMT troops from Burmese territory. When withdrawing from Myanmar, the authorities of KMT still wanted to retain some of the armed forces, with the hope of altering the situation, so they left behind some forces in Myanmar while the rest retreated. After the withdrawal of the majority of the forces, they can no longer support the remaining troops except occasionally distributing some daily supplies by plane. Later in 1975, due to the expulsion of KMT soldiers by the Myanmar government and the instability of the country's political environment, these KMT soldiers left Myanmar and most of them eventually arrived in northern Thailand.

According to a local informant, during the same period, while the KMT were retreating from Myanmar, another group of people who were classified as rich peasants or landlords were faced with persecution due to the land reform policy during the liberation of Yunnan Province. Due to policy at the time, their lands and properties were to be confiscated by the government and they might also be severely punished. In order to escape punishment, these people also left China and some eventually ended up in northern Thailand.

According to some scholars such as Duan Ying and Na Jingan (2012 & 2012), after living in Thailand for more than 60 years, these people have gradually adapted to Thai culture. They have learned Thai language; they are similar to Thai people in terms of living style and diet; and many of the second and third generations of these Chinese marry Thai people. But at the same time, they still maintain some aspects of traditional Chinese culture. For example, most of them can also speak Yunnan dialect, and celebrate Chinese traditional festivals and so on.

Baan Wiang Mok—or Lian Hua New Village by its Chinese name—is the village where the Yunnanese people from the aforementioned historical events resided after they came to Thailand. It is located in Huai So sub-district, Chiang Khong district, Chiang Rai Province. It's a village with 334 families and 2,017 people. There are eight different ethnic groups living in the village. Among them, the five most populous ethnic groups are Yunnanese Chinese, Aka, Dai, Lahu and Miao. 112 families of Yunnanese Chinese came here in year 2518 of the Buddhist calendar (1975 CE). The head of the village told us that many people in the village belonged to the KMT's 25th division and were the KMT's intelligence department. When they left the mainland, higher-ranking officers ran to Taiwan and lost contact

with them, so they stayed in Southeast Asia. The vast majority of these Yunnanese Chinese did not come to Thailand directly after leaving China, but spent some time in other nearby countries, such as Myanmar and Laos. However, because those countries were also very politically unstable at that time, there was war and danger, so they chose to continue to migrate to Thailand. There were two main routes for them to come to Thailand, one is from Yunnan to Myanmar and then to Thailand; the other is from Yunnan to Vietnam, then to Laos, and finally to live in Thailand (according to an interview with the husband of the head of the village) By the time they arrived, 34 Miao families already lived there. These Yunnanese Chinese came from China one group after another during a similar period of time and lived in the central area of Chiang Khong District for 13 years. However, since they were armed, the government thought their existence was a threat to the security of Chiang Khong, so it requested them to move to the village area where they are living in now. At first, only Miao and Yunnanese Chinese came to settle in the village. But later, because of inter-ethnic marriages, people of various ethnicities began to move in, sometimes bringing along their relatives, causing the number of residents to grow significantly with the number of 'ethnicities' swelling to eight.

The gate of Baan Wiang Mok (source: Google Maps)

In terms of the current livelihood situation of people in this village, it is worth noting that, firstly, most of the young people are away from the villages as they seek job opportunities from outside the community, particularly in bigger cities across Thailand. Therefore most the residents who remain in the village are middle-aged and elderly people over 50 years old. Since they all possess a certain amount of land and other properties in the villages that both offer them security and need to be

taken care of, they are reluctant to leave the village to live in the city. Secondly, according to my field research, the Yunnanese Chinese co-habit with the other seven ethnic groups on seemingly good terms. The village allows its inhabitants to keep their own beliefs and cultural practices, although a certain level of participation in Thai cultural practices is required. Thirdly, there are both Thai and Chinese schools in the village and almost all school-aged children will receive education. Thai and Chinese schools are run separately. Most students will go to Thai schools during daytime and attend Chinese schools at 6pm in the evening.

Research questions

Understanding the history, formation and current situation of the village provoked me to ponder the adaptation processes of the Yunnanese Chinese people in the village and investigate more about the shifting identities of these people s they are living in a village with diverse ethnic groups far away from home. I therefore discerned the following research questions to guide my field work in the village.

1. How do the Yunnanese Chinese adapt to Thailand and does the adaptation have an influence on their identity?
2. Are there any socio-economic problems currently faced by Yunnanese Chinese in Baan Wiang Mok?

Methodology

Given that the time of this field trip is limited, I cannot participate in the daily life of the local people, so I mainly use methods of observation and interview. Through observation, we can see some basic characteristics of the village, such as the housing situation, the decoration of the home, body language and emotions of the interviewees, interactions between the villagers and so on. As for the interviews, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. Before entering the field, I prepared some questions basd on background information I read in academic literature, as well as initial data provided by my field trip leader. During the interview, according to these questions and the respondents' answers, some new related questions were raised spontaneously.

During my research, I interviewed the representatives from four families altogether. The rational for choosing my interviewees were as follows: the first one was contacted by our field trip leader through his connections before we arrived in the village. The interviewee was an elderly woman who had abundant knowledge about the history of the Yunnanese Chinese migration to this area. We were then introduced to the

second family through our first respondent, in which only an old woman remained while the rest of the family sought employment and education away from the village. Following this, we then decided to interview the village head's family in order to retrieve more accurate information about the village. Our last respondent is one of the only two remaining KMT soldiers in the village and is considered to possess the oldest remaining memory of the place. Due to the limitation of time, my basic principle in selecting interviewees is to try to find people who can provide relevant information for my proposed research questions. In addition, most of the young people in the village go out to work, so the interviewees are mostly middle-aged and elderly people.

Findings

Livelihood adaptation

In the decades since the Yunnanese Chinese migrated to Chiang Khong, their livelihood has changed to some extent. One of our interviewees, Grandma Yang, told us that when they first moved to Chiang Khong, they could not farm. They just went to the mountains to harvest some rice and brought it back home to eat. As there was no cleared land for cultivation in the village, they had to turn the original forests into arable land by themselves. In the beginning, they had no seeds for cultivation so they had to borrow seeds from the nearby Miao people. Their living conditions were very difficult throughout that time. After economic conditions improved slightly, they began to grow fruit. At first, mango and lychee were planted. Later, the villagers realized that the two fruits were not easy to transport and store, so they decided to grow longans instead. The fruits they harvested were sold both domestically and regionally, bringing them decent incomes that ameliorated their living conditions.

Nowadays however, the situation has changed again. From my observation as well as the respondents' information, most of villagers that remain in the village are middle-aged and elderly. Young people prefer to leave their hometown to work in big cities instead of farming for a living. They mainly work in big cities like Chiang Mai and Bangkok, and some of them have left Thailand for Taiwan to work. According to the interview, because young people in their villages have been learning Chinese since childhood, their language skills are generally better than Thai people in other places, so they can work as tour guides or as Thai-Chinese translators. Moreover, thanks to the closer interactions between China and Thailand in recent years, many Chinese have invested in businesses in Thailand and Chinese tourists travelling to Thailand are increasing at an unprecedented rate. As a result, a large number of people who can speak both Chinese and Thai language are needed in

society at large, so they have a lot of job opportunities and can earn higher incomes outside the village. The village head told us that, generally speaking, people earn 300-500 baht a day in Thailand, but people who can speak Chinese can get 800-1000 baht per day. Therefore people are very willing to learn Chinese and working in related fields in order to improve their living conditions, with no exception for villagers from Baan Wiang Mok. In the village, we can see that most of the houses are in good conditions and some of the houses are newly built in modern architecture style. Some villagers confirmed my speculation that most of these houses were built using remittances from young people working outside the village.

Cultural adaptation: succession of traditional Chinese culture and absorption of Thai culture

In terms of language, everyone in the village can speak Chinese. Among them, the elderly can speak Yunnanese dialect fluently, but they cannot proficiently use Mandarin and Thai. Young and middle-aged people, on the other hand, have acquired more language skills particularly in Yunnan dialect, Mandarin, Thai and English. The dissemination of Chinese language, however, has undergone quite some obstacles throughout their history. After the Yunnanese Chinese settled in the village, they began to find ways to teach Chinese. The original Chinese school was set up by their own fund-raising which was only enough for a thatch house to be built. Only when the financial situation improved could they start to build a wood house and then renovate it again. Teachers are regarded as educated people in the village. However, the Thai government did not allow Yunnanese Chinese to run Chinese schools or teach Chinese, as the Thai believed that the villagers should not learn Chinese now that they had come to Thailand. One of my interviewees, Fan, recalled that the Thai government forbade them to teach Chinese when they first migrated and confiscated their books and the other tools they used in teaching. She said, "We taught the student secretly, when they arrived in the village, we ran into the mountains as soon as possible." Nowadays however, because of rapid economic development and the improved status of China in the international sphere over the recent decades, the Belt and Road Initiative as one salient example, the interactions between China and Thailand have become ever more frequent and closer. Given that many Chinese people come to Thailand to travel or invest, the Thai government has loosened its control against Chinese population and culture and instead recognized the importance of the study of Chinese. Chinese teaching in Baan Wiang Mok has gradually been accepted by the Thai government.

The Chinese School in Baan Wiang Mok

Slogans posted in schools: "Please speak Chinese"

When it comes to custom, I observed that the Yunnanese families in the villages mostly practice both their traditional customs as well as following the cultural norms of the Thai society. There are many traditional festivals in China, such as

the Spring Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, the Zhongyuan Festival and so on. In the village, we can see spring couplets - materialistic symbols of Chinese New Year considered to bring auspices to the families - attached to the doors of almost every family.

Most village families have Spring Festival couplets in front of their door.

Through interviews, I learned that Yunnanese Chinese in the village are also celebrating these festivals in accordance with Chinese tradition. They set off fireworks and offer sacrifices to ancestors during the Spring Festival, eat rice dumplings during the Dragon Boat Festival, and eat moon cakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival. In Chinese tradition, family numbers should reunion during important festivals, Yunnanese Chinese still retain this tradition. Young people working outside are expected to come home to celebrate events such as the Spring Festival. While celebrating Chinese festivals, the Thai government also requires them to participate in Thai festivals, such as Father's Day, Mother's Day, water festival and so on. For every important Thai festival, the village has to send representatives to attend. The families have followed these rules and norms without discernable resistance.

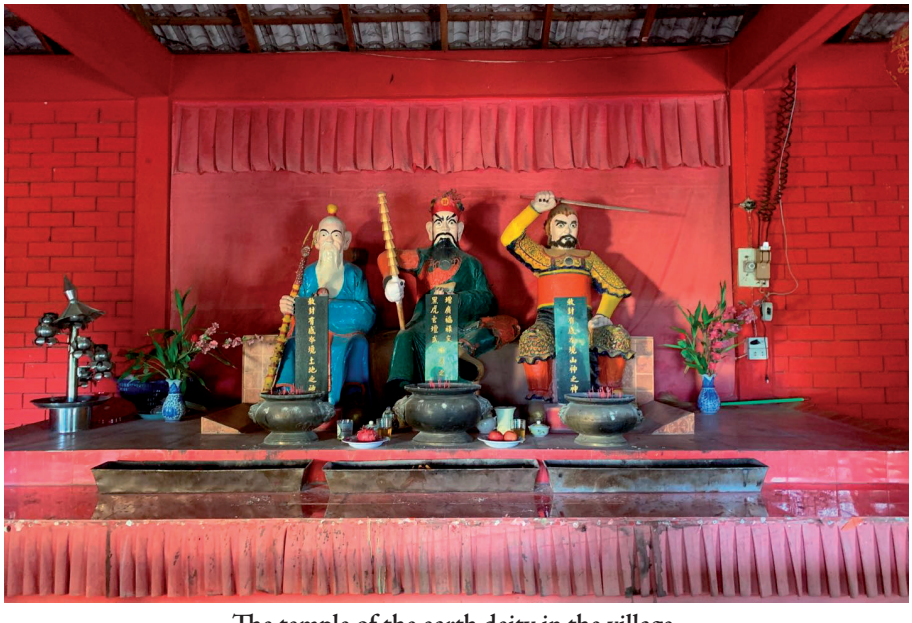
In terms of religious beliefs in this village, there is mainly Buddhism, traditional Chinese folk beliefs and Christianity in the village. All three of these beliefs are

embodied in the village. Among them, the earliest Christian believers were mainly the Lahu people in the village. They built churches in the village and enrolled children from local and foreign Christian families to learn Chinese. There is also a temple of the earth deity and a Buddhist temple built adjacent to the mountain in the village. There are two monks residing in the Buddhist temple. There are many Buddhist statues in and around the area of the temple made by these two monks. Families who believe in Buddhism in the village also put some Buddhist statues in their homes to worship.

Buddhist statues in one of my interviewees' house yard

As for the temple of the earth deity, it is said that when the Yunnanese Chinese first arrived there, they built a relatively simple one. Later, villagers voluntarily gathered money and labor to improve the conditions of the temple as their economic situation became better. In this temple, the earth deity, the fortune deity and the god of mountain are worshipped. At the same time, I also observed that there are still some ancestorial sacrificial rites practiced in the village. Families that follow these traditional rituals place ancestral shrines in their home. There appears to be no contradiction between the traditional folk beliefs and the beliefs of Buddhism or Christianity in these families.

The ancestral shrine in one of my interviewees' home



The temple of the earth deity in the village

The multilayered identity of the Yunnanese Chinese

There are many theories on the concept of ethnic identity, amongst which the most distinctive are the objective characteristics theory and subjective identity theory. The theory of objective characteristics mainly defines ethnic groups by physical or cultural characteristics, such as skin color, height, language, customs and other criteria to judge a person's ethnic identity. However, in the later stage of ethnic studies, scholars began to question the theory of objective characteristics. They thought that the existence of these characteristics was not enough as a criterion to judge which ethnic group a person belongs to.

The theory of ethnic subjective identity mainly includes Fredrik Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries, primitivism and instrumentalism. Barth's theory of ethnic identity holds the point that ethnic identity is the product of the interaction between self and others and is restricted by both sides (2014, p.46). Barth believed that the study of ethnic groups should not only focus on the cultural characteristics of ethnic groups, but also on the relationship between different groups. The function of ethnic boundaries is not to isolate people's interactions, but to organize, communicate and standardize such interactions. At the same time, culture plays an important role in the formation of borders. Therefore, with the change of cultural characteristics, the identity boundaries of ethnic group members will also change.

The theory of primitivism holds that ethnic identity comes mainly from innate or fundamental emotional connections. Individuals in the group will inherit some established kinship, language, religion, customs and so on. Unlike objective characteristic theory, primitivism theory does not regard these factors as a criterion for defining ethnic groups, but pays attention to subjective cultural factors. As distinct from primitivism, instrumentalism holds that ethnic identity is not established, but constructed in reality. They believed that ethnic identity can be manipulated as a tool for gaining certain benefits. Wang Mingke (1997) wrote that in interpersonal communication, people tend to "promote the greatest cohesion of each other with the smallest common identity" (p. 39).

For the Yunnanese Chinese in my research, I argue that they hold multilayered identities with aspects of both traditional culture and Thai culture. On the one hand, they can speak Chinese and retain some traditional Chinese customs. They have certain affections for Chinese culture. On the other hand, most of them have also learned Thai and attend Thai festivals. At the same time, in order to live a better life, all of them want to be able to obtain official identification in Thailand rather than the overseas Chinese identification they are holding, which does not grant them full rights compared to a Thai citizen.

I propose that the above identification theories can be combined to analyze the formation of their identity. First of all, elderly people among the Yunnanese have a deep memory of and attachment to China. Many of their relatives still live in China, whom they still keep contact with. In terms of objective characteristics, they are obviously different from Thai people in terms of language and customs. The existence of cultural differences makes them possess some differences in consciousness in their interaction with other ethnic groups. These differences are what Barth calls "the boundary", which organizes, communicates and regulates people's interactions.

When I finished all the interviews, I noticed a little boy wearing a short sleeve T-shirt with the Chinese name of the village printed on it. I asked him whether they have hosted some events with the village as a representative unit. He told us that it was their clothes for the sports meeting this year. The sports meetings are organized by Chinese people in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai who have joined the Yunnan Guild and Taiwan Overseas Chinese Committee. It is held every year on March 28 and the villages involved take turns hosting the events. One can infer that through the holding of these sports activities, the Chinese groups in northern Thailand have formed links with each other which may also be a way for them to support their identity.

Existing problems

During the field research, I found two main issues that are facing the Yunnannese Chinese at the moment, both affecting their livelihood and identity.

The first problem is about cultural inheritance. Currently, most people in the village who have attachments with Chinese traditional culture are elderly – generally the first generation of immigrants from China to Thailand. Middle-aged people also celebrate traditional festivals, but their cultural identity may not be so strong, while young people may have little attachment to Chinese culture. For the first generation of immigrants, although they have lived in Thailand for a long time, many of their relatives are still in China, so their ties with China have not been cut off completely. My last interviewee, Mr Zhang, who turns 85 years old this year, is one of only two remaining soldiers in the village who were in the 25th division of the Kuomintang. The old man could not hear us clearly, but after knowing that we were from Yunnan province of China, he kept telling us that he was from Yunnan and his sister is still in Yunnan province who just visited him several days ago. Together with his wife, the couple also showed us a picture of the husband's sister's family. When we were about to leave, his wife took us out and said that she was really happy to have someone come to visit her, and she hoped that we could chat with her next time we are in the village.

Whether in terms of the language they speak or connections they have kept, we can feel the strong attachment of the elderly towards the place they migrate from and traditional Chinese culture. As Grandma Fan told us, their life in Thailand was very hard at first, but they still managed to run schools and let their children learn Chinese, which means that they could not forget their ancestors and traditional culture. Nowadays, the young and middle-aged people are approving more and more of learning Chinese, but the old people have different intentions for doing so. For the former, part of the reason for their willingness to learn Chinese is to achieve the development prospects and proficiency that Chinese can bring to them. More and more people in the village are earning money from their jobs related to Chinese translation and some have returned to their hometown to rebuild their houses. So the villagers are also more willing to let their children learn Chinese. However, the connections with the Chinese identity and culture their ancestors once had are gradually disappearing.

The second problem is regarding identification issues. Nowadays, in Baan Wiang Mok, people are holding three different kinds of identification cards: overseas Chinese card (also called "Pink Card"), minority identification card and Thai identification card. When the Yunnanese Chinese first immigrated to Thailand, the government issued them refugee cards. After living in Thailand for a period of time, they could pay the government some money to change the refugee cards into overseas Chinese cards, but these cards could not be further changed into Thai identification cards. Nowadays, many people in the village are still holding overseas Chinese cards or minority identification cards. There are two main ways for people to obtain Thai identification cards. One is for people who have served as soldiers during the war between Thailand and other countries. This group of people contains minimal numbers as most of them already passed away. Although they can get Thai identification cards, their relatives cannot receive it. The other way is the offspring of those who hold overseas Chinese certificates and who are born in Thailand. Those people who hold minority identification cards only need to pay a certain amount of money to obtain Thai identification cards, but the people who hold the pink card cannot apply for Thai identity cards. People with overseas Chinese cards are not granted full rights compared to a Thai citizens, such as lower school fees and the right to pursue a government job. Without Thai identification card, they are often deprived of legal protections. For example, if they need the police to come to solve some of their problems, the police may charge them extra money to agree to do so. There are more disadvantages that are caused by not holding a Thai ID card not only in their daily practices, but which also affects their sense of belonging and their feeling of security in the land where they reside.

Conclusion

During the decades of their migration to Thailand, Yunnanese Chinese in Lianhua new village in Chiang Khong have changed their livelihood and culture in order to better adapt to the Thai environment. Now they not only retain the traditional culture, but also absorb aspects of Thai culture into their daily practices. At the same time, they also have a sense of identity for the two cultures. The phenomenon of multi-layered identity is worth scholarly attention as it explores the fluidity of ethnic identities and the complexity it embodies when it comes to people's livelihood and culture and their interactions with each other. My findings in this short research also indicate a couple of pressing issues that are facing these villagers currently. One is how to pass on traditional culture to younger generations, and the other is how to obtain formal identification of Thailand and receive more protection from the government. Both issues are closely related to their ethnic identities and adversely affect their daily lives, and are hence in need of urgent attention from actors including community members, scholars and government institutions.

Final reflections

Since the village we investigated is a Chinese village, the villagers have a strong affection to their cultural background and the area where they originated from, especially the elderly. In the cases of some of my interviewees, when they hear that we are from Yunnan Province, they feel much closer to us and are more willing to tell us their stories. Our presence immediately invoked their memories. Being Chinese, I was conscious that my own identity could easily affect my own judgement and emotions towards my respondents. I could be more easily concerned about their inheritance of traditional Chinese culture and ignore other aspects.

Another important fact that affects my research is the realization that Thailand's national policy toward ethnic groups is rather different from China's. The Chinese government has officially identified 55 ethnic groups besides the Han nationality, and identities are all determined and written on national identity cards. In Thailand, however, there is a different system of official classification of ethnic groups compared to China. Therefore, I am interested in conducting research regarding ethnic people in Thailand bearing the above differences from that of China in mind.

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The Impact of the Mekong International Friendship Bridge on the Local Community of Chiang Khong District, Thailand

Shan Zhenjin

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Abstract

Since the Fourth international Friendship Bridge linking Chiang Khong and Houay Xay was built in 2013, Thailand's national economy continued to benefit from improved logistics connections and regional trade. Local people in Chiang Khong, however, have experienced various levels of impacts from it. The negative impact of the friendship bridge on these border residents is firstly reflected in the income and modes of transportation of the local people. Through the field interviews with local residents of Chiang Khong, it can be found that the local people hold various levels of dissatisfaction with the bridge. This paper will investigate into the impact of the establishment of the friendship bridge between Thailand and Laos on the lives of local people in Chiang Khong, by analyzing first-hand data obtained from field interviews and observations. My findings, extracted from various engaging actors in Chiang Khong, indicate that the infrastructure projects initiated by international organizations mainly focus on mainstream economic growth, but often exclude powerless people from the benefits of development - in this case this is local residents who previously to benefit from bustling border trade and tourism in Chiang Khong. I argue that the voices of various actors involved in the development project, especially those whose livelihoods are closely linked to and even dependent upon these projects, need to be heard and consulted in order to achieve more holistic outcomes from proposed development projects.

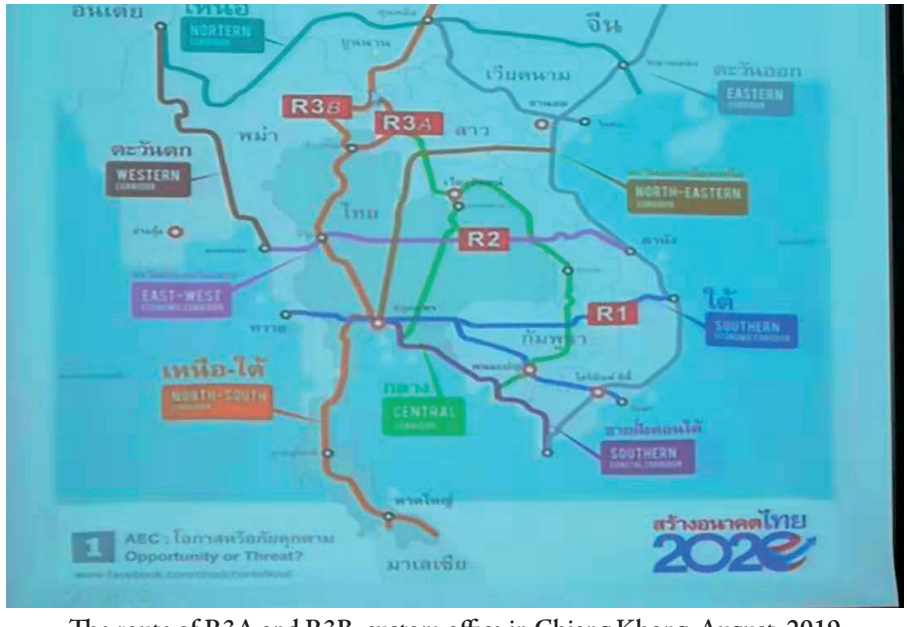
Keywords: Fourth International Friendship Bridge, GMS, Chiang Khong, border, Belt and Road Initiative, Thailand, Laos

Introduction

Chiang Khong is a border district along the Mekong river in Chiang Rai province in northern Thailand, which is a small but bustling border town that attracts many businessmen and tourists. As a transit point between Thailand and Laos, although the district was once considered insignificant, it has gradually built up its importance for border trade and regional cooperation since the Great Mekong Sub-region was formed. What is now a very important transit point in the North-South Economic Corridor of road R3A, Chiang Khong did not assume its significant role from the very beginning. Chiang Saen Port, however, was once regarded as a much more important transit point than Chiang Khong, particularly before Chiang Saen Port2 and the fourth international friendship bridge linking Chiang Khong (Thailand) and Houay Xay (Laos) were developed.

Chiang Saen, a small border district near the Golden Triangle of Chiang Rai province, was once not only a popular destination for domestic and international tourists, but also a busy town for border trade. According to Ekamol Saichan, Chiang Sean Port was once a small local port run by the municipality, until March 2003 when the government authorized the Port Authority of Thailand to manage and operate with modern systems and manual work (2019). During that time, any local people and foreign tourists who were eager to visit the Golden Triangle were connected by the Chiang Saen Port. As more and more tourists and businessmen came to Chiang Saen, the once normal border city became a famous and bustling town. Hundreds of guesthouses and restaurants were established. However, because of the difficulty of manage the three functions or roles of Chiang Saen (historical city, tourist town and center of border trade with China) , the Thai government decided to build Chiang Saen Port 2 in 2011, and the Fourth International Friendship Bridge linking Chiang Khong,Thailand, and Houay Xay, Laos, to help reduce the transportation stress of Chiang Saen Port. These two solutions actually helped Chiang Khong (especially the bridge area) become a more convenient point for overland logistics and border trade, but it decreased the importance of Chiang Saen as a transit gate in the development of Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Economic Corridors. In 2008, since the road R3A totally came into service, Chiang Khong has since become a main transit point, largely replacing Chiang Saen.

Chiang Saen Commercial Port



The route of R3A and R3B, custom office in Chiang Khong, August, 2019

The construction of the Fourth Mekong Friendship Bridge under the GMS program is a major construction project between China and Thailand, beginning in 2013, with the two governments sharing the construction costs equally. The bridge is about 12 km away from centre of Houay Xay and 10 km from the centre of Chiang Khong, and is also an important transit point for border traders and

tourists. The programs initiated by the GMS directly impact its member countries including Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and China, and especially some border cities within these countries (Menon, 2007). The border trade and investment in these cities increased sharply and the face of these cities has changed fast (Saichan, 2019). Infrastructure development, such as international bridges, as a prioritized development plan in the GMS transportation sector, plays an important role in encouraging trade, investment and tourism in the region (Sadotomo & Nakayama, 2019). The Fourth International Bridge between Chiang Khong and Houay Xay provides a case in point here. It is evident that the opening of the bridge has made the town larger and attracted many owners of guest houses and restaurants to do business in these two cities. Though such infrastructure construction under the GMS works well in different border cities, it also has caused some problems due to negative aspects of development, especially on the local community. One can find a brief account of this situation by Ekamol stating that most local people, including those who deal with service sectors such as petty merchants along the road, were disappointed with this connecting bridge (2019). Such findings indicate that locals in Chiang Khong haven't shared the benefits of GMS with the government, and they have been forced to change their lifestyle and jobs. The residents in the local community in Chiang Khong need to face such changes and adapt themselves, but most of time they remain trapped in difficult situations.

This paper is based on data collected from field interviews with residents from the local community, officers from government institutions, as well as local organizations – all conducted in August 2019 in Chiang Khong and focused on the impact of International friendship bridge on local community and how the locals react to the changes after the bridge came into operation.

Research question

What are the impacts of Chiang Khong International Bridge on Thai communities, at the national and local level?

Methodology

In my fieldwork, I mainly obtained relevant information through interviews with personnel of different institutions and residents in Chiang Khong as well as observations from the field. For the interviews that I have conducted, I divided them into three groups based on the identities and general opinions regarding the bridge of my interviewees. They are: the officers from government institutions, residents

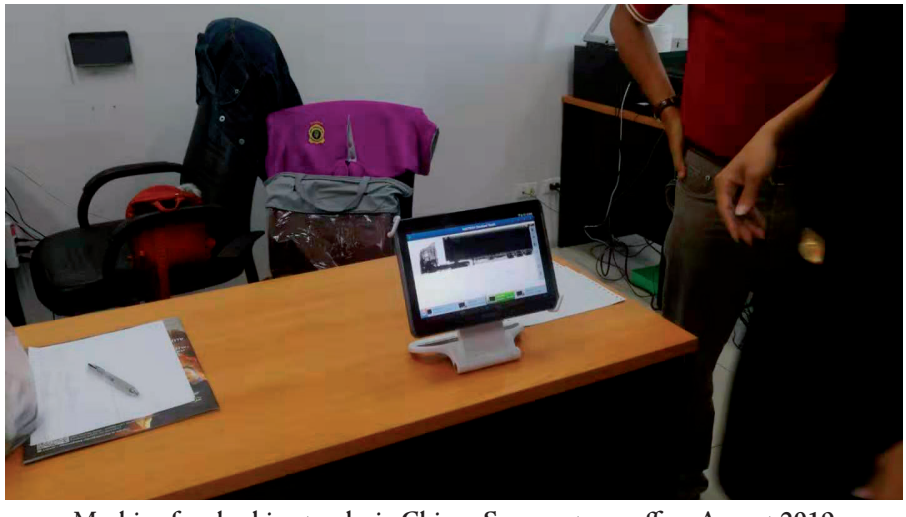
from the local community in Chiang Khong and one local civil society organization. It has revealed during the interactions with my respondents that their attitudes towards the establishment of the bridge are distinctly different from each other. Generally speaking, the officers from government institutions hold positive views towards the bridge, whereas the local residents express quite the opposite. Interviewees from the civil society organization remain somewhat neutral. In interactions with government officers, I interviewed the Sheriff of Chiang Khong District, the Chief of Chiang Khong Custom office, and two officers from Chiang Khong Immigration Office. Through these interviews, I learnt the purpose of building the Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge from the government perspective, and obtained specific data on the local economic situation after the completion of bridge. Besides the above mentioned respondents, I also interviewed the Vice President of Chiang Rai Chamber of Commerce (Chiang Khong District), from whom I obtained the opinions of the local chamber of commerce on the Friendship Bridge and the economic changes and challenges they have been faced with. In interviews with residents and local organization, I mainly interviewed a hostess of a hostel and the head of a local NGO. As an individual directly affected by the Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge, the comments and opinions of the hostess is very representative. As an organization serving the residents, the NGO's special status between the government and the residents can provide a new angle for me to study local problems.

Due to language barriers, it was difficult for me to carry out participant observations during the field trip. However, general observations of the environment, people's daily interactions as well as my respondents' ways of life played an important role in my interpretation of the issues happening in this border town.

Findings

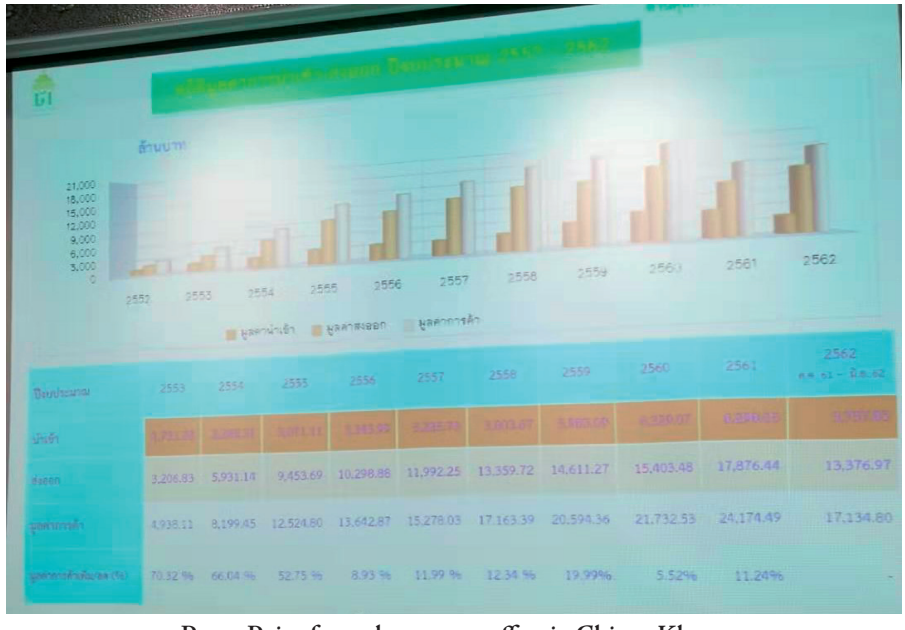
Through interviews with the officers from government institutions in Chiang Khong, residents in local community and local organization, it can be inferred that the benefits of the Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge are shared by the central government (Bangkok) and local government (Chiang Khong), as well as trading businesses and the large-scale logistics industry, while the negative aspects of the bridge are mainly borne by the residents of the local community. The residents are disappointed with this connecting bridge, especially those who make a living by working in the hospitality industry. In this part, I will analyze interviews to explain how the bridge works positively for Thailand's economy at the macro level, but why residents from the local community in Chiang Khong who should benefit from the construction project, in reality become the "victims" in most situations.

The fourth International bridge was built in response to the political economic needs of countries in the GMS, especially Thailand, Laos and China, all eager to strengthen their connections to support investment and economic collaborations across national boundaries. Since the opening of the bridge, a single-stop inspection (SSI) system was established aiming to simplify the procedures of exit and entry in and out of the country. With the help of modern management systems, the transit process was made even easier. One example here is that vehicles entering Thailand through customs are required to drive through a high-tech scanning machine to check illegal items without, staff having to physically check inside the truck every time. One can see the process has improved significantly in terms of timesaving and convenience. Thanks to the brief formalities of country crossing among the bordering areas of China, Laos and Thailand, three countries have benefited from increased logistic connectivity whereby more investment is attracted into this region and economic collaborations are enhanced (Sadotomo & Nakayama, 2019). As an overland border-crossing point (BCP), the bridge fills the hole in the connectivity system at the North-South Economic Corridor in the GMS by not only stimulating cross-border trade but also increasing the mobility of people. Before the bridge, both residents from local communities on each side of the Mekong river and foreigners from third countries travelling across borders need to take the ferry. However, after the bridge came into use in 2013, transportation methods among these three countries have improved, making the trip into each country quicker and easier than before.



Machine for checking trucks in Chiang Saen customs office, August 2019

During interviews with government officers, we were frequently shown the economic development of Chiang Khong after the completion of the friendship bridge in statistical charts. It is apparent that the overall economic situation of Chiang Khong has been improving every year since the completion of the bridge, while the connection with Laos and China has been strengthened. It can also be inferred from the statistics that after the opening of the bridge, the national economy benefited from tourism and logistics industries due to the strengthening of transportation connectivity between Chiang Khong and Houay Xay regions.



PowerPoint from the custom office in Chiang Khong

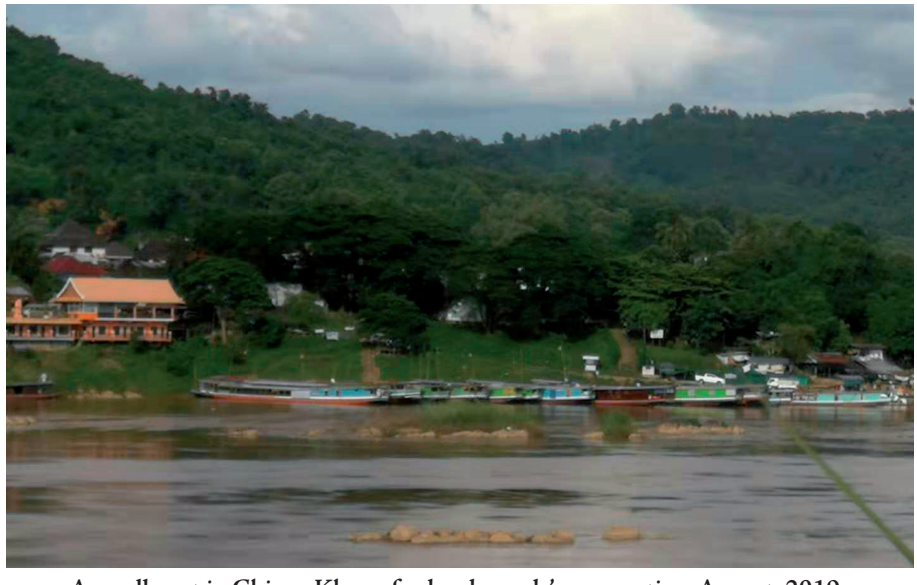
However, during my field research, I observed that not many tourists and cargo trucks can be spotted in the town and many local businesses such as hotels, hostels, restaurants can be found closed along the Mekong River - a withering scene from which one can infer the area's past busyness. Although the International Bridge with its modern management system was built in Chiang Khong, this border town was surprisingly "sleepy". Just as Sadotomo and Nakayama (2019) mentioned in their paper, the surrounding border area was surprisingly inactive. The new city on the Chiang Khong side of the bridge had deteriorated to the point of becoming a ghost town. Local people living along the Mekong River whose livelihoods are dependent upon the hospitality businesses were rather disappointed with the bridge and they think they didn't share the benefit of it as they were made to believe by

government institutions. Through interviews with residents, it was further proved that residents are holding much dissatisfaction against the cross-border bridge, which connects the greater region of the three countries, but adversely impacted their livelihood. The following part will explain the negative impact of this cross-border bridge on the lives of residents by analyzing the attitudes of some of them.

Closed guest house in Chiang Khong

Before discussing the impact of Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge on local people, there is a need to explain the situation of the local transportation routes before and after the bridge came into service. Before the completion of the bridge, residents in Chiang Khong and Houay Xay can travel across Mekong river from any ports without any formalities, while foreign tourists holding passports from third countries can also cross the Mekong river freely by a ferryboat run by the local people. For local people, the ferryboat enabled the residents in border area to cross the river easily without use of a passport when they need to buy food and daily items. For international travelers, taking a ferryboat across the Mekong river was also preferred as it was considered more adventurous and unconventional. However, after the completion of the bridge, the government closed most of the ports in Chiang Khong. Residents in Chiang Khong are now required to apply for border

pass in the Immigration office to be eligible to cross the border. Residents complained that the friendship bridge is too far from their homes (around 10 kilometers), meaning they needed to spend much more time and money to travel from town center in Chiang Khong to the bridge. For those people whose daily wages are not high, cross-border trips have become a financial burden. Additionally, local people need to update their border pass regularly, which means more fees for acquiring the documents. Compared to the benefits of the border pass such as allowing border residents to purchase daily items without paying custom duties, the disadvantages seems to have caused much more trouble.



A small port in Chiang Khong for local people's commuting, August, 2019

The price of transfer bus from guest house to the bridge, August 2019

For international tourists, it is also compulsory that they cross the border through the bridge. As mentioned above, the bridge is not in very close vicinity to the Chiang Khong town center, and tourists have less incentive to travel all the way into the town. Consequently, as fewer tourists end up stopping over at Chiang Khong, the income of local people who conduct small business along the Mekong River decreased sharply and they blamed the bridge for harming their interests. The enhanced connectivity between Chiang Khong and Houay Xay makes staying over at either town unnecessary. According to Ekamol, my field trip leader, there is a time limit for commuters who are Laotian and Thai commuting across borders regularly holding their border passes. When the waterway was the only option, it took people more time to travel across the border, hence the need to stop over at the border town. This situation is what local people would like to see as their businesses thrive with tourists flowing in. However, after the bridge shortened the travelling time across the border significantly, the number of tourists stopping over at the border town plummeted as they can utilize the saved time to travel to other areas in the country. As their businesses stagnated, many of them chose to put an end to it and look for alternative jobs.

It is worthwhile to cite the powerful narrative of one of my interviews here to illustrate the downturn this border town has experienced after the establishment of the bridge. Malee, the hostess of a hostel, responded when asked about her opinions on the bridge:

> This is a project of the government, and they promised big dreams including all locals and everyone. Chiang Khong would be a particularly central economic area. Moreover, the government said: it is a big dream, we would be costly, and we can do good business. However, it is not. After the bridge, you know, just like a diamond is bomb! They close the border and stop foreigners across the river and some cars just pass the Chiang Khong but no one stop here. There is no economy here. It's a big dream, it's nice. And it makes a high price of property, makes the land and housing more expensive in Chiang Rai. However, there is nothing in Chiang Khong, people suffering, people no money, they don't have money for education and medicine, you know, it's a problem. They can build bridge, but they should not close the ports, the cheaper way to cross the river. We need to have a choice. Now we need a border pass for Thai and Laos and passports. It is not good. People have no money, so they use drugs and other bad things. When the economy is terrible, this is the result. And you know, we are under military government, so they never listen to us, they only listen to themselves and tell us: turn left and turn right. We have to do what they want. They do not understand our culture, small businesses, and they do not understand what we want. They just did what they want. Just like they cook for us and no matter if you like or not, you need to eat it. However, it is good for the transportation business and the regions in Thailand and the Chinese investors.

Malee further noted that this collaboration amongst countries in this region aimed at reducing the transportation costs across borders in order to facilitate macro-level trade, but ignored local people's livelihoods. From the accusations of local people against the government, it can be seen that the sharing of the benefits of the Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge does not include residents from the local community. Besides, I also found that the income of the residents who live along the Mekong River and earn their living by ferrying travelers and selling small handicrafts fell the most. Before the construction of Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge, these boatmen earned a good income by transporting residents and foreign tourists across the river along the Mekong River. The boatman's wife often makes some handmade souvenirs to sell to tourists waiting for the ferry. This mode of the family division of labor was an essential way of survival for the local boatman family

in Chiang Khong. However, after the bridge was built, passport holders had to cross the border through the bridge, which led to a sharp drop in the income of the local boatman's family and forced many people to seek other jobs. Local people's criticism of the government's construction of the Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge is also reflected in the land use around the cross-border bridge. The government did not inform the residents when planning the bridge construction. Instead it informed the relevant businessmen interested in investing in Chiang Khong area first. These investors bought the land owned by the residents near the bridge at a meager price and sold it at a higher price to some investors from other countries. When the bridge was completed, the government held a meeting to officially inform the residents of Chiang Khong after such deals among investors were already done. Residents believe that the reason for this delayed dissemination of information is that the government was worried that residents were unwilling to provide land to build the bridge or ask the government for high compensation. Although the government built the bridge to develop the national economy, from the position of residents the government did not serve the people.

Although the bridge has brought these two border towns "closer", the benefit of the bridge has not been enjoyed by the local residents whose livelihood is dependent on people's cross-border activities. The bridge between Chiang Khong and Houay Xay has weakened Chiang Khong's position as a cross-border transit point. When passing vehicles or passengers no longer need to stop at Chiang Khong, the local economy consequently suffered. Residents in Chiang Khong did initiate a few protests against the local government to raise the issue of falling tourism and the long travelling distance from the bridge. Nonetheless, it ended up having minimal affect on the decision making of the upper level. Moreover, even though a few ports were reopened under the pressure of protests, there was insufficient staff to guard the checkpoints on the Lao side of the border, making this solution impractical. Faced with similar issues, residents in Houay Xay chose to take up a more aggressive approach by collecting extra fees from commuters and tourists alike. Summing up, although the R3A bridge project under the GMS was conducted with the benign intention to strengthen regional connectivity, it only succeeded at the macro-level in benefiting a small group of people who already possessed ample resources and capital. On the contrary, the connectivity between the border residents that once was so close got interrupted. A question worth contemplating here is: Who is the bridge for?

Besides paying attention to the attitude of local people after the establishment of Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge, I also focused on how the government officers and leaders of local organizations in Chiang Khong think about the impacts that

the bridge has brought to the local community, and how they have or have not planned to improve the situation. In an interview with the Sheriff of Chiang Khong District, he acknowledged that he knew the impact of the bridge on the local people and was trying to help the them out of their difficulties through some different plans. First of all, the government is building a railway from Bangkok through Phayao to Chiang Khong. This line will potentially become a transportation channel directly connecting Bangkok, Chiang Khong, and Houay Xay that will attract more freight companies to set up factories in Chiang Khong and also provide more job opportunities for local people. Also, he noted that a highway from Bangkok to Chiang Khong will be built. This road will become a fast passage connecting Chiang Khong and Bangkok, which will promote the transportation and tourism development in Chiang Khong in the future. The second solution is the development of tourism. The Chiang Khong government is aware of the negative impact of the bridge on the income of residents in the Chiang Khong area especially within self-employed industries. They speculated that the fundamental reason was that the tourism industry in Chiang Khong area is mono-faceted and there is now nothing worth to stay for travel purpose in Chiang Khong. In order to boost tourism in Chiang Khong and Houay Xay, the Thai government and the Lao government are discussing on how to make use of the natural resources in Mekong river to create a unique scenic spot. At present, the local government in Chiang Khong is planning to build a cultural center by cooperating with local temple and ethnic minority villages to attract tourists with diversified cultural tourism. At the same time, the district government also plans to build a bicycle lane along the Mekong River, which will be the first bicycle lane for sightseeing in Thailand - if successfully built. The Chiang Khong government hopes that the bicycle track can also attract related bicycle races to be held in the region to promote the economic development of the local tourism industry.

In addition to the government, the chamber of commerce in Chiang Khong also claimed to provide important solutions to the plight of residents near the bridge. During the interview, the vice president of Chiang Khong Chamber of Commerce said that as local businessmen, they believed that Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge had helped the development of the local logistic business industry. However, he is also aware that some residents are suffering from negative consequences. Solutions they have applied to alleviate the situation include; attracting 7-11 convenience stores into Chiang Khong to generate more jobs, and offering skill-training courses such as truck driving, language learning and plantation to better equip the local residents to adapt to the new economic model of Chiang Khong after ferry related jobs become more scarce. The vice-president of the Chiang Khong Chamber of

Commerce told us that the courses they offered were supplementary courses, which were mainly in line with the future development policy formulated by the Chiang Khong government, and they were committed to including residents in these development plans so that they could receive more benefits.

Although both the Chiang Khong government and the Chiang Khong Chamber of Commerce have provided many solutions to tackle the current difficulties for residents, they have not been applauded by Khru Tee, the leader of a local NGO - Rak Chiang Khong Conservation Group and founder of the Mekong School. He believes that the solutions provided by the government were not practical for the local people but only solve problems on the surface, Similarly, as the courses offered by the Chamber of Commerce only short-term courses that were offered at the early stage of the bridge construction, there is really minimal long-term benefits for the locals. He claimed that these measures are more like a "show" in response to external concerns and pressure. The NGO, however, is committed to making the local people know more about the real situation of Chiang Khong. They teach courses on the history, geography, and the environment of Chiang Khong. If a scholar comes to Chiang Khong for his or her research, he will also introduce residents to work with the scholars. He believes that only through education can the local people improve the situation in their region, and educations remains a precondition to emerge from their predicament. By understanding the local situation in Chiang Khong, residents can have a voice in development projects instead of blindly following the government or investors. Khru Tee believes that only by returning the right of choice to the residents, and giving them the right to choose, will people be really helped.

Conclusion

Through the above analysis, I can answer the research question I raised at the beginning of the article with a certain level of confidence. The biggest beneficiaries from the establishment of Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge have always been the national economy and large private businesses. However, while improved transportation is leading to strengthened connections among countries at a macro level, it is the groups of border residents that have been gradually "marginalized" by these development projects. The residents of Chiang Khong were supposed to be the most direct beneficiaries of the Thailand-Laos Friendship Bridge project, but as the government did not carefully consider the interests of the residents when building the bridge, local people did not enjoy all the benefits brought by the cross-border bridge. The conflict between the government at the center, protecting their interests,

and the marginalized residents of Chiang Khong has gradually deepened due to the divide in their interests. Such conflict surrounding mega government infrastructure projects can also be found in other countries in this region. For example, the growing sexual economy and the increased vulnerability of local people who have lured into these forms of business along the National Route 3 in Luang Namtha Province, Lao PDR, remains a problem (Doussantousse, Sakounnavong, & Patterson, 2011). The negative impacts these infrastructure projets bring to nearby communities are of great importance and demands attention from various actors across society - especially the government whose improved actions would be of priceless value to the affected civilians. What the government in Thailand needs to consider now is how to build a bridge of communication between the interests of residents and the government. The government should consider the impact of all development projects from the perspective of residents and should include residents in the overall planning of these projects, rather than allowing them to be marginalized.

Therefore, I propose that every government should engage with residents closely before implementing development projects from the top-down level, and pay attention to the voice of residents. Residents have the right to decide how to build their hometown. The government should also reflect on the practicability of the existing solutions. The "super plan" for the future planned by the Chiang Khong District government cannot directly and quickly work for the residents. At the same time, the plan put forward by some local organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce is not a viable solution either. I suggest that the Chiang Khong District government needs to establish practical solutions, such as allowing foreign tourists holding passports to enter and leave designated ports to increase the income of local boatmen in Chiang Khong, strengthening cooperation with local NGO organizations to help the local people understand the specific situation in their hometown and choose appropriate development projects in fully-planned ways, and holding regular meetings on solving the employment problems of local residents - so that residents can fully grasp relevant information in a timely manner.

Final reflections

China is famous for its large-scale and technically challenging infrastructure construction. For example, the Duge bridge in China, the highest bridge in the world with the road deck sitting over 565 meters (1850 feet), is a cable-stayed bridge on the border between the province of Guizhou and Yunnan (Xinwen, 2016). As one of the most famous infrastructure construction projects in China, it was called "the Chinese Miracle in Construction" due to the difficulty of construction

(Qin,2018). Similar situations happen with many Chinese mega construction projects as they are represented among mainstream discourse for Chinese audience as positive forms of progress that empowers the development of China, whereas most people ignore the negative aspects of these large-scale constructions.

Therefore, it was to my surprise when I was introduced to the case in Chiang Khong, where there is a huge discrepancy between opinions towards the bridge among residents from local communities and the officers from government institutions. This contrasting situation has also sparked my interest on investigating the attitudes of residents of the local community near the International friendship bridge, which appears to be more complicated than officials claim. I consider the situation in Chiang Khong as providing a good case through which to reflect the contradiction between country and local level development influenced by transportation infrastructure projects. Throughout my research, my findings also provide me with reflective tools, which constantly remind me to look into issues from different perspectives rather than fixating only on one.

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Social Memory and Diaspora

Chiang Kham, Phayao Province

The Tai Lue form a major part of the population in Xishuangbanna of Yunnan province in China; while smaller numbers live in Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. Tai Lue villages are commonly located in river valleys and feature cultivated paddy rice. They are rich in culture, as expressed through Buddhism-related rituals and ceremonies. Two hundred years ago, many Tai Lue were forcibly moved to northern Thailand settling in towns in Chiang Mai, Phrae, Nan, Payao and Chiang Rai provinces. As diaspora in Thailand, they often continue to relate to their homeland in Xishuangbanna through the oral history of their migration, food, and traditional dress. In Chiang Kham, Payao province, Tai Lue have revived their social memory and identity by establishing a local museum recording the social history of the Tai Lue, while supporting community-based tourism to promote Tai Lue ethnic identity.

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Constructing Social Memory through Action and Performance: The Case of Tai Lue in Northern Thailand

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Abstract

Tai Lue communities in northern Thailand have, in recent years, attempted to revive their own production of culture through various actions and activities in what can be understood as the construction and reconstruction of social memory. There are five Tai Lue villages in the Chiang Kham district of Phayao province whose villagers are closely linked because of their common Tai Lue identity. This year, as an example of a cultural activity, the five villages took turns to hold a cultural celebration, through the support of the government and a sponsoring foundation. The communities are the organizers and main participants of these cultural celebrations. They exhibit food, textiles and performance of Tai Lue with the support of other institutions. In this context, the biological understanding of memory refers to something physically inherent in human beings, but collective memory and social memory reflects human social behavior. This concept can help illuminate how Tai Lue communities act in such a way that supports the construction of such memories. Based on analysis of this cultural celebration in Donchai, this paper explores how Tai Lue attempt to maintain the close interpersonal relationships, strengthen their understanding of ethnic identity and pass on social memory through this celebration.

Keywords: social memory, Tai Lue, performance, northern Thailand, cultural production

Introduction

This study is based on research at a temple located in Ban Donchai in the Northern Thai province of Phayao, amid a community of five Tai Lue villages. This temple is in the center of Ban Donchai and serves nearly a thousand people across a visually idyllic community. A clear stream flows through the village, and along the river upstream and downstream there are another four small villages. It appears to the external observer that there is a close socio-economical connection among these five villages and a sense of shared livelihood.

Their historical understanding is that their ancestors, these days referred to in Thailand as *Tai Lue* (In Chinese they are called the Tai people) were living in the Xishuangbanna in the Southern Yunnan Province of modern-day China. According to Long Xiaoyan (2011), who wrote about the history of memory of Tai Lue in northern Thailand, many Tai Lue people became refugees and had to escape to the north of Thailand, about two hundred years ago in the Ratanakosin period, due to a period of conflict with various regional forces such as the Qing dynasty and the Burmese. A painting in the local temple depicts how, after few years of calm life, disaster happened again, and they were taken away and forced to move to the territory of the Kingdom of Lanna.

Upon settling, the Tai Lue prepared to cultivate the surrounding land and established three villages on what was an unfamiliar site. Finally, they had forged a new home. Local understanding is that years of peaceful life followed, as more and more land was planted with rice and a rapidly growing population flourished. The three former villages have since grown to five, which we can now see on the map today. These communities remain closely connected, with them frequently communicating through mobile applications, local broadcasting, and through creating official histories.

Ban Donchai, a village of 460 families and 866 total population, today is a place where most people do business as a profession. According to recently conducted research by Long (pers. comm., 2019), in this village 50 percent of people work in business, while 25 percent are civil servants, 10 percent are farmers, 10 percent work outside the community and 5 percent are laborers. The village has a chief and two assistant chiefs. The village chief, who takes care of all administrative affairs, is elected by the villagers and holds significant authority, while the two village chief assistants are responsible for security, construction, and drafting documents respectively. Additionally, the community has a lot of groups that are composed of local people organizing specific matters related to aspects of culture and economic life.

The culture of the Tai Lue in northern Thailand has also experienced significant change over recent decades, and the impact of modernization has had a major impact on their cultural practices. As the Thai economy modernized from 1980s, the Tai Lue tried to learn the culture of the Thai people in an attempt to more easily integrate into the central Thai way of life (Long, pers. comms. 2019). As this research refers to, from 1990s, amid the influence of globalization, Tai Lue began to place greater importance of supporting and preserving aspects of their own culture, especially in clothing and textiles. By developing their own popular textiles for the broader market area, they sought avenues through which to support their traditional culture and demonstrate their traditions to the outside world.

Community tourism projects have been one of the most important ways in which this has been done. One such example is the rotating community cultural celebration which has emerged in recent years. Three other villages (Ban Yuan, Ban Mang and Man Tad) in the area have already held this event, and in August 2019, the fourth iteration was held in Ban Donchai. This research focuses on this event as an entry point to understanding the production of social memory, through participating in the event throughout the whole process to understand the Tai Lue's modern construction of culture, with close reference to local perspectives and sources.

This event was held for the first time two years ago. According to a local source, the event began with villagers from all the communities joining together to support it. In the village Ban Mang, seven people from different positions became community cultural workers, volunteering to do something for their community. Since their establishment, the committee has remained the same, and they are active in community affairs. Three of the seven members were teachers, along with a retired nurse, two officers and a female graduate from Chiang Mai University, and the committee remains integral to producing the event two years later.

In studying this event, the concept of social memory will be heavily relied upon. The use of it here references the notion that biological understanding of memory refers to something physically inherent in human beings, but that collective memory and social memory reflects human social behavior. This concept, this paper argues, can help illuminate how Tai Lue communities act in such a way that supports the construction of such memories. In recent years, China's philosophy, history, anthropology, ethnology and other disciplines have paid close attention to various constructions of historical memory and social memory. Scholars have explored social memory in cultural inheritance from different perspectives using vivid case studies.

In this Chinese academic discourse, Li Bo (2013), a scholar who studies social practices among the Dali community, argues while that memory is understood as a

kind of biological instinct, social memory refers to a kind of social behavior designed to revive memory. Paul Connerton's (1989) conception of social memory is also useful here. In his highly regarded work, he insists that social memory makes sense only when it can be passed on, and commemorative ceremonies and bodily practice are two of the most important ways to preserve and pass on social memories, differing from the previous understanding that written texts were more sustaining. In the Northern Thai context, many scholars have explored notions of social memory. For example, Wansan Panyagaew has devoted much research to the Tai Lue people, and he has focused on their shared history and social memory. While Long, who supervised this field research, is a particular authority on such constructions among the Tai Lue.

Using a conception of social memory that supports these notions, this research argues that social memory is not primarily created through museums or written history, but instead through intentional action and practice. This paper will attempt to show how people in the Tai Lue community of northern Thailand construct their own understanding of their identity. By specifically studying the rotating cultural celebration held in Ban Donchai village in August 2019, which is a regularly held event around these communities, aspects of performance, food and textiles give a vivid representation of how memory is constructed, cultivated and reproduced with the intention of forging a common understanding of what it means to be Tai Lue within this changing social context.

Research question

How do the Tai Lue people in northern Thailand construct forms of social memory through holding a rotating community cultural celebration?

Methodology

This research relied on two common anthropological methods to complete research, which are participant observation semi-structured interviews. First of all, we visited temples and museums to gather information about the migrant history of Tai Lue in written, museumified form. After gaining this, we observed the cultural market to explore how social memory is transferred and remembered through physical manifestations. We then interviewed some key people and even participated in some community activities to gain further insight. During the five days of field work, we observed five temples, two museums, a community tourism project, a Mothers' day activity, two textile centers and the morning market. We interviewed eleven people

who we defined as key informants to understand elements of social memory. By using these two methods, we gained insight what the social memory of Tai Lue is, how they show it in the culture market and who is involved in this project.

Among the eleven people, except two teachers from Phayao University, the rest are Tai Lue and, while they held differing social positions, they all have a strong sense of self-identification about culture and appeared to be devoting themselves to showing the social memory of Tai Lue so we selected them to be the interviewees. Some of them included the village headman, a mathematics teacher in the local school, a volunteer, the abbot from the nearby monastery, an old woman, and museum worker.

The space that we particularly observed was the community cultural celebration project, which formed the core of whole research. After gaining some information about community tourism, we found that within this setting, social memory of Tai Lue was largely transferred by clothing, food for sale and performance, so the research focused on these components. However, while the community tourism is rich in social memory, but we could also find more hidden cultural elements through other places and other people. In observing this event, we paid attention to the interaction between different social actors, and observed how the physical space was transformed and utilized in the context of cultural production.

Research findings

On August 10, 2019, Ban Donchai successfully organized the rotating community cultural celebration through the initiative of the villagers, along with financial support from the government-backed Safe and Creative Media Development Fund, and assistance from Phayao University. As previously mentioned, throughout this day villagers wore Tai Lue's costumes and brought with them their locally made bags as they joined in the celebrations. Through intentionally constructed forms of performances, food and textiles, the people present there could feel the understanding of their own culture, which served to strengthen the connection between Tai Lue people and their understanding of their identity – it was an occasion where people had a unique opportunity to express themselves and their culture.

The findings are divided into four parts, presenting data alongside analysis of how these aspects of the event contribute to the construction of social memory. The first section details the roles of different actors in organizing the event, and the following three sections cover performance, food and textiles as the three major physical materializations witnessed at the event.

Local and external actors in the production and organization of the event

Interview respondents uniformly made it clear that there is no formal organizer and that they do it all of their own accord on a voluntary basis. The community itself is the biggest organizer of the event and different parts show initiative through the whole process. This process began with the five community committees in Chiang Kham holding a meeting, writing an activity plan and submitting it to Phayao University, with the goal of providing a place for the display of culture and identity. Phayao University revised the plan and submitted it to the foundation, which then distributed the funds to the five communities. A similar cultural activity was held two years ago, but it was led by the government and the money was distributed to the community. According to the teacher at Phayao University, previously the community was ordered to undertake the activity, but this year the village played a far more active role in organizing the event through their own actions and in their own image.

As the organizer of this cultural event, the community therefore plays the most important role in the whole process. In order to deepen self-cultural identity and find out the uniqueness of their own culture, Tai Lue attached great importance to the inheritance and preservation of aspects their own culture. According to Long (pers. comm., 2019) the Tai Lue of northern Thailand faced significant challenges in the 1950s and 1960s, and as a migrating frontier ethnic group they tried to integrate into the central Thai conception of nationhood, evolving their language and clothing to be more assimilated with the majority population of Thailand, parts of which are also reflected in paintings in the local temple. However, with the rise of the consciousness of ethnic difference in Thailand in the 1970s and 1980s, across ethnic populations a form of cultural marketplace began to flourish, with the Tai Lue realizing the value of their own culture and beginning to support its sustaining through holding cultural activities and promoting local language, textiles, food and performance – this event is a vivid representation of the culmination of these decades of renewed initiative.

In addition to community workers, there are a range of villagers assigned to sell things and perform. For example, they sell butterfly cakes, coconut, glutinous rice sugar and textiles, and, of course, these people also participate in performances. On the day of the event, the dance team in blue costumes was from neighboring Ban Mang village. Just as Ban Mang helped Ban Donchai, the other four villages help each other when it is their turn to host the event. The five communities rotate in their role as event hosts. Ban Donchai is the fourth community to host, and the remaining fifth community will hold it soon. Every community has the same procedure when the community is responsible for holding the event; the committee

collects the opinions of the masses, villagers apply to the village committee for the products they want to sell and on the day they get a booth to sell prepared items. As for performance, villagers will also apply to the village committee, and then perform according to the program list.

However, there are also a range of external actors and supporters who play a crucial role in organizing the celebration. The Thai government's Safe and Creative Media Development Fund provides some financial support. The local government in Chiang Kham District provides a suitable political environment for the event, establishing basic policies for the development of community tourism and the protection of traditional culture - in the conclusion of the rotating community cultural celebration, the District Head spoke of his satisfaction with the event and expressed his continued support. The government also gives support through requesting police to provide some security.

However, the Lanna Research Center of Phayao University is the most important external actor in the organization of the celebration. Based in the Phayao province of northern Thailand, the University's Lanna Research Center studies and supports local cultural activities. After the community wrote a plan for this cultural celebration, Phayao University played a connecting role in helping submitting the plan to the government fund, and was also involved in giving support and assistance when community residents prepared for this event.

On the day of the cultural celebration, we met a couple that worked at Phayao University and were one of the main participants in the event. The woman, Gippu, is 37 years old and after studying Japanese at Chiang Mai University, she began to help the local government with cultural projects. Now she is doing research at Phayao University. They told us that some of the villagers could dance, sing songs, make local food and weave local textiles but other villagers had forgotten these traditional practices. If these people wanted to participate in performances and other shows, or simply wanted to learn these traditional skills, then Phayao University could send in some experts who knew traditional techniques to guide the villagers and teach them the skills. This cultural institution is engaged in the study of ethnic culture, so it is very familiar with the traditional skills of Tai Lue and can re-teach the villagers these crafts.

Throughout the event, Phayao University was therefore closely involved in what this research considers to be the construction of the social memory of the Tai Lue in the Yuan District. It is not only a communication between the community and the foundation, but more importantly, as a cultural research institution, Phayao

University uses cultural elements of the Tai Lue which are understood by the staff at the Lanna Research Center, including diet, dance, and clothing, to help those who have forgotten these practices to perform them again. According to them, some practices that were once lost, are once again taught to future generations by these researchers and are expressed in ceremonial occasions. Gippu expressed that she encouraged them by saying "this is your own culture" in order to strengthen their recognition of their identity.

In addition, Phayao University is also responsible for the evaluation of this cultural celebration. On the day of the activity, people from Phayao University issue a feedback questionnaire on the celebration. This is important, according to Gippu, because Phayao University will provide suggestions for improvement to the village that will hold the next cultural celebration in order to make the next event better. These materials themselves are also valuable resources for them in understanding community perceptions towards expressions of their own culture.

The important role played by this external actor in supporting the event is interestingly similar to Delcore's (2003) work in northern Thailand on how NGOs have made links with governments, social movements, and transnational issue networks as well as with one another for the purpose of reconstituting memory. He argues that NGOs provide an ideal context in which to examine the production and reproduction of cultural understanding in the Thai context, with representations of rural identities often supported through the actions of civil society – much like the emphasis placed on recovering cultural knowledge by Phayao University here.

Cultural performances

One of the most important components of this activity is the singing and dancing performances of the Tai Lue. Some of the performances on the day of the cultural celebration were completed on a temporary stage, while another part of the dance was performed in an open space in front of the Buddhist Hall. Our team filmed and recorded all the performances.

There were twelve programs in the cultural celebration on this day from 3 until 8pm. On the day of the activity, we took the time to record the performance. In the next two days of interviews, we learned through the village head and a retired teacher about program terminologies, the crowd composition and some internal meaning attached to each program and their Tai Lue elements. Because the original program name is Thai, it can only be described after being translated into English.

The twelve performances were organized by the villagers themselves and practiced voluntarily. The villagers we interviewed on the day of the activity all said that in their eyes these songs and dances belonged to the Tai Lue people alone, and to nobody else. Although in the eyes of other ethnic groups and outside visitors, their singing and dancing performances can be seen in other regions and their song and dance movements are somewhat related to Thai style performance, these Tai Lue people insist that this is exclusively theirs. They state that everything is distinct, unique and not associated with other ethnic groups. Even though the style of some songs is similar to that of other ethnic groups, Tai Lue think they wear their own costumes to perform songs and dances, meaning these are their own songs and dances.

The first performance aspect is drumming, and the performers are all men and local villagers. Some of them are workers who are not retired, and some are helping their wives sell things. The drum which they play is traditional, and they can change the style freely during the process of playing. In the interview we also learned that each village has only one drum. It is usually used during performance programs, and it can also be lent to other villages, but not when it comes to drumming competitions.

August 11th, 2019 in the temple of Ban Donchai.
Villagers were participating in the rotating culture celebration.

The second aspect of the program was a peacock dance that was played by two women. They were dressed in pink peacock costumes and green peacock costumes. Through interviews with national volunteers, it emerged that the traditional peacock dance needs to involve wearing a mask, wearing a peacock-decorated costume, and

dressing like a peacock. However, the two women did not wear masks when performing peacock dances.

The third one is *khap-lue*, which is a traditional song of the Tai Lue, and there are such songs in Xishuangbanna, China. Zhangha art is an important cultural matter of Dai people, In Dai areas of Xishuangbanna, Zhangha art was mainly presented in ceremonial activities such as the new house, the ascending monk, and the sacrificial village (Hang, 2018) which is very similar to what the village chief of Donchai told us: "we sing *khap-lue* on many occasions, such as building a house, men pursuing women and getting married." He also told us that *khap-lue* tunes are basically fixed, with some old songs and some impromptu singing. Many people today don't sing old *khap-lue*, many people add some impromptu lyrics. On the day of the cultural celebration, the *khap-lue* expressed gratitude and apology to the land gods because the villagers believed that such a celebration was a kind of occupation of land and space, so they should express their gratitude and apology to the land god. From this, we can get that the Tai Lue people in Chiang Kham of Phayao province of Thailand migrated from Xishuangbanna. They sing such songs on such occasions to preserve this social memory by memorizing the migratory route and memorizing their ancestors by memorizing songs.

August 11th, 2019 in the temple of Ban Donchai.
Villagers were singing traditional Tai Lue songs

The last one is the lion dance. On the day of the cultural celebration, the villagers performed two lion dances. The show is also completed by two people who dress holding up a lion suit. The head of Donchai village told us that the lion dance is a unique dance belonging to the Tai Lue people. He emphasized that the lion dance

we saw that day was a unique dance of Chiang Kham and such a performance can't be seen in other places. The villagers believe that this sense of uniqueness is reflected in the shape of the lion.

Food, preparation and presentation

On the day of the cultural celebration there are three main special traditional food of Tai Lue in that are seen there, which are called lotus cakes, mayuan, and huo. In their eyes, they used to be the daily foods of Tai Lue people, but they lost their role in the diet of local people because of the impact of modernization, which has changed traditional cooking methods and made these foods quite uncommon in daily life. However, in the context of cultural renaissance, the Tai Lue people have begun to recognize the significance of traditional food and express a desire to highlight their uniqueness. In deciding to promote these foods, community elites and the researchers from Phayao University invited the villagers who have knowledge in production technologies to make this food on the spot at the market and provide it to the public for free. We carefully observed the production of the three foods when we arrived at the venue.

The first example of traditional diet of Tai Lue is a food that the people call *huo*. This is a type of scone made from eggs, cane sugar, salt and glutinous rice. First, like a sitting cake, they use a rolling pin to make it into a round shape, which looks like a thin, transparent layer with a little yellow tinge. After forming it into a round shape, they let it dry on the hay. After drying it for a while, it is be grilled on the stove until it becomes brittle and ripe. Finally, many pieces of the cooked *huo* are thinned.

August 10th, 2019 in the temple of Ban Donchai.
Villagers were making and showing *huo*- the traditional food of Tai Lue .

This kind of grilled *huo* is a traditional snack that has been passed down for many generations and is now forming part of the memory of the Tai Lue people. One woman we interviewed told us that the Tai Lue like to eat desserts after dinner. *Huo* is a snack in their opinion. In the past, when the Tai Lue people went out, they would bring a bundle of *huo* to eat on the road, or roast it to have with family in the winter. At that time, the family sat in front of the fire and chatted while roasting. This is part of the myth of Tai Lue' life of the past. However, with the development of science and technology, there is no need to rely on the stove for cooking. Many people think it is too troublesome to make *huo* so they do not eat it as often as before. Therefore, in this cultural celebration, the Tai Lue show the *huo* that they used to make, in order to show a form of constructed memory of the past.

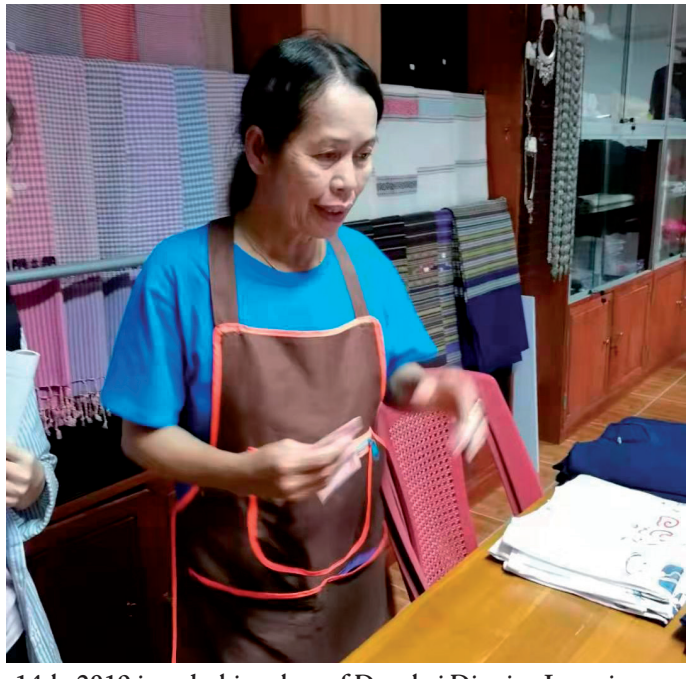
The other foods displayed are fried snacks, lotus cakes and hemp rounds. These things are usually made together because they are fried foods and the production process is similar. The difference between them and *huo* is that Tai Lue people in the daily life still make these two kinds of food, and the villagers will sell them in the market as snack.

August 13th, 2019 in a market of Yuan District.
Investigators were asking native sellers how do the Tai Lue's food.

Not only is traditional food sold, but also modern iterations have a place in the rotating community cultural celebration. On one side, people wear traditional clothing and sell traditional food - most of whom are middle age women, but on the other side of the event, women wearing modern clothing were selling modern food. What used to be daily food of Tai Lue people has lost its place in the diet of local people because of the impact of modernization, which has changed traditional cooking tools and made the production of these food less practical. In the context of the cultural memory, Tai Lue people begin to recognize the importance of their tradition food and now have a desire to highlight their uniqueness. Community elites and the researchers from Phayao University decided to invite the villagers who have master production techniques to make this food on the spot at the market and issue it to the public for free. We carefully observed the production and sale of three foods throughout the event.

Clothing and textiles as adapted memories

"If you ask me, how can I quickly identify if that person is Tai Lue or not, I must judge from her clothing." a textile seller told us. Tai Lue at the event wore clothes distinctly highlighting their ethnic characteristics: shoulder bags, headscarves, and belts. Through this form of silent language they can show others they are Tai Lue and they are different from everyone else. The clothing of Tai Lue is largely composed of four parts: coats, skirts, headscarves, decorative female skirts, and belts for men.



August 14th, 2019 in a clothing shop of Donchai District. Interviewers and the clothing store owner were talking about characteristics of Tai Lue clothing

Of the 54 small booths for the event that day, four were for textiles. These textiles all have distinct characteristics and are all made of cotton. All of the textiles being sold resemble nationalistic and ethnic costumes - there are no fashionable modern style ethnic clothing there, like can be seen in other ethnic textile markets in northern Thailand. These textiles sellers mainly include clothes, skirts, scarves, cloth bags, and handmade trinkets such as earrings, key chains and coin purses. Among them, the skirt and the small bag account for a large proportion of the textiles being sold. In our opinion, the skirt is a form of traditional Tai skirt, many of which feature striped designs. In general, the skirt is very rich in color; most of them are dark shades, such as dark blue, brown, black and dark red, but there are also a few bright colors including pink, red, yellow, green.

A large number of the textiles are small bags of various colors and styles, which can be roughly divided into two categories. One is a small bag with strong national characteristics. The cloth bag is stitched and sewn with a longer span, and it seems that the production process is simple. Everyone who came to participate in this event had the same style of bag - mostly red in color, with a small amount of blue, brown

and beige. The villagers told us that this is a small bag belonging to the Tai Lue. Before this occasion, we had never seen other Tai people with cloth bags similar to those that all attendees had with them. The other kind of cloth bag is more fashionable and modern in style. The style is similar to bags used in daily life, and its ethnic characteristics are less obvious. It is only from the material and the pattern that the Tai style can be seen.

The tops are all short-sleeved designs made of cotton, and the colors are the same as the skirt – mostly dark with a few in lighter tones. Women's clothing is slanted and features lacing, while men's clothing features more buckles. There is also a cotton-woven scarf, similar in pattern with the skirt, and mostly white.

August 12th, 2019 in a Tai Lue traditional house.
We interviewed an old woman, a master of making traditional textiles

At the stalls selling textiles, there are also some small accessories including earrings, key chains and coin purses. These trinkets are handmade using cotton. The patterns on the canvases and the skirts are very similar. After observing the sale of local textiles we interviewed Nong, a local museum worker. She told us that the water flow pattern design on the skirt is the most special aspect of Tai Lue costume. The design of the water on the textiles reflects the importance of water to the Tai Lue because, in the past, Tai Lue people lived by the river and so it gives them a way of remembering the lives of their ancestors. When we asked the villagers or textile stall owners about Tai Lue clothing, the respondents also strongly emphasized the significance of water patterns for their understanding.

Conclusion

Social memory is manifested in a variety of ways, and food, performance and textiles at this particular festival present an illuminating starting point in order to analyze how this is performed and materialized through modernized constructions of the past. Tai Lue evidently want to convey cultural characteristics that exist within their lives through representing aspects of the past. For Tai Lue, singing, dancing and weaving are represented as part of their daily life and daily ritual. Through these activities, they believe the younger generation can learn what it means to be Tai Lue from the older generation, and also they can carve out a distinct identity for themselves as different from other Northern Thai ethnic groups which is inherently connected to myths of the past.

While this paper has shown how cultural memory is something intentionally cultivated and constructed, nonetheless is it clear that participating in the activities held by community is beneficial to forging closer relationships and a shared sense of identity among the community. Everyone who participates in organizing the event are volunteers with a desire to do something for the community, and the sellers and attendees really emphasized the value they saw in bringing people together and instilling a sense of tradition in spite of the modern lives people continue to live.

However, it is clear from our fieldwork that social memory is less important for younger members of the Tai Lue community, with those who are more accustomed to modern life in Thailand finding less importance in practicing their own identity, even if it is something that is constructed. The event was attended by very few young people, and one young man who was interested in traditional culture talked with regret that so few of his classmates wanted to participate in the event because they think that compared with the colorful modern life, the traditions of Tai Lue are too

boring. He also said that traditional culture is withering away, with the local schools indifferent about even introducing the traditions. An older man also observed that most of the people who attended are over 40, and that the young are not interested in tradition because they have no time. He said that they have to study and work in big cities far from home to earn money for when they are older. It seems clear that while these practices have gained traction among along Tai Lue, modern lifestyles make it challenging to forge a space for traditional culture among the young. This is something that perhaps needs greater emphasis in future research.

Despite this, we can nonetheless observe that an opportunity is being created to support the inheritance of the culture of the Tai Lue. As they perform different parts of their culture, they begin to really feel the unique characteristics of it, and the people are proud of who they are and are sparked into a continuing search for new forms of social memory. Although such events are never true representations of daily life, and the people themselves understand the constructed nature of 'history' and 'identity', they see social value and the forging of community cohesiveness in creating social memory through human performance of the past, however accurate such portrayals may be.

Positionality and reflections

As students from China, we always have the habit of comparing things that we saw in this countryside with the same in our hometowns. But there is something different. For instance, the local people showed a high degree of autonomy in the process of the event's preparations, something that seems to be quite hard to witness in our country. In China, the government will be in charge of almost everything, and there is minimal space for the villagers to play a role.

In the process of the research, although some new and strange things impressed us a lot, some aspects were difficult to understand and we would always pay attention to things that are more familiar and easier to compare with our experience in China. Although it helps us understand the local life better, it also limits our sight to some extent. In fact, our lead teacher played an important role in introducing us to the local people, and she was very kind in helping support the whole research. They are patient in answering all questions and giving us more research opportunities while in the field. However, language is the biggest problem for us. The different language means that we needed translators to convey information, and, of course, sometimes this poses a limitation as gathering some information becomes unclear.

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Social Memory of the Tai Lue Diaspora: the Tai Lue Cultural Center of Ban Yuan Village

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Abstract

The Tai Lue are a Tai people who migrated to Laos, Myanmar, and northern Thailand from Xishuangbanna in Yunnan province of China more than two hundred years ago. There are many Tai Lue people in Chiang Kham district of Thailand's Phayao province, on the border between Thailand and Laos. By reconstructing the history and culture of their ethnic group, people of the community have formed a social memory of Tai Lue. Especially since the 1990s, the Tai Lue have gradually attached more importance to the history and culture of their ethnic group, and have also developed their cultural identity and self-confidence.

To some extent, "social memory" is constructed on the basis of people's selective memory of real history, with multi-dimensional interactions and influences in this process. A "final" social memory is led and influenced by people and organizations. Among the Tai Lue in Chiang Kham, the Thai government, research institutions, village leaders, village organizations and community have jointly worked in creating Tai Lue memory of history and society.

Museums are places of cultural inheritance, protection, and storage of social memory. In the Tai Lue Culture Center of Ban Yuan village of Chiang Kham, the process of design and construction has created a dominant narrative of social memory, embodied in this physical space. This space allows people to build their

own cultural and historical memory of concrete practice. In the process of a visit, a story is told for the visitor in this space, and this awakens broader social memory. At the same time, people have their own strategies to construct Tai Lue society, identity and cultural memory.

This paper aims to analyze how Tai Lue social memory is shaped by community gatekeepers, how it is organized, and the social and historical process of shaping a dominant narrative of Tai Lue identity.

Keywords: social memory, Tai Lue, Chiang Kham, Buddhism, religious space

Introduction

Research topic and its importance

By focusing on the Tai Lue Culture Center in Ban Yuan village of Chiang Kham, Phayao province, we want to find out how local people maintain, keep and construct their social memory; who is involved in the construction of social memory, and who receives Tai Lue social memory.

Background, field site and its socio-economic context

The Tai Lue people form a major population in Xishuangbanna of Yunnan province of China, and today mainly live in Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. To the east and southeast, Xishuangbanna borders Laos, and to the south and southwest, it borders Myanmar. Historically, this people of this area were Tai. The Tai people are Buddhist and made a livelihood by planting rice. The 'Tai world' of the upper Mekong includes contemporary northern Thailand, northern Laos, eastern Shan state of Myanmar, and southern Yunnan of China (Wasan, 2010).

Hsieh and Wijeyewardenethe noted of Xishuangbanna that

> the arrival of European colonialism in the late nineteenth century is a significant reason for their [Tai peoples'] migration. From the late nineteenth century to the late 1970s, Sipsongpanna has experienced over many times warfare, rebellions, bandits, the Second World War, civil wars and political turmoil in China. This ongoing crisis of place has caused huge numbers of its inhabitants to become forced migrants, uprooted people, asylum seekers and exiles (as cited in Wasan, 2010).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the old confederation of the Lue petty states were conquered, divided, demarcated, and controlled by the British, French, and Chinese. For the following century of turmoil, many Lue people, including elites and locals, fled from their homes in Xishuangbanna to other places, often multiple times over multiple borders. This resulted in the Lue population of Xishuangbanna dramatically falling—by about half—by the end of the Second World War (Wijeyewardene 1993, cited in Wasan, 2010).

According to historical materials, three major factors pushed Tai Lue migration from Xishuangbanna to northern Thailand: war, trade and marriage.

The biggest reason was war and conflict. During the Rattanakosin era of Siam (1782-1932), the Northern kingdom of Lanna had a policy of "keep vegetables in the basket, keep slaves in the city." At the time, the city-states of Lanna were heavily depopulated by conflict with Burma, and needed people to maintain the cities and hold the borders of Lanna. Conflict between city-states or small kingdoms in the region often ended with the defeated party losing a large part of its population—captured and controlled by the victorious party. This new injection of slave labor would boost the productivity of the victor kingdom (Long, 2012). In 1782, many Tai Lue people were forcibly moved into Nan from the area of Xishuangbanna to increase the population and labor force. This was the biggest migration of Tai Lue people into what is now Thailand.

The second push factor for Tai Lue migration was oppressive policies of control over ethnic groups to consolidate borderlands during the Qing dynasty, especially in the early 18th and mid-19th centuries. Many Tai Lue people left the Xishuangbanna area and ended up northern Thailand. A third wave of Tai Lue migration came with the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949); some Tai Lue leaders led their people to follow the defeated Kuomintang army as they fled Xishuangbanna into different areas of northern Thailand, Laos and Myanmar (Burma).

Tai Lue villages are historically located in river valleys and they cultivate paddy rice. They are rich in culture, expressed through Buddhist rituals and ceremonies. As diaspora in Thailand, they have documented their migration history, food and traditional dress in various forms, such as setting up local museums, holding cultural festivals and painting murals to record Tai Lue social memory. In Chiang Kham, Tai Lue people have revived their social memory and identity by establishing a local museum, and operate community-based tourism to promote Tai Lue ethnic identity.

Our fieldwork was carried out in Chiang Kham district of Phayao province. Phayao province is one of many Tai Lue settlement areas in Thailand. It is located

on the border between Laos and Thailand, bordering Chiang Rai province in the north, Phrae province in the south, Nan province in the east and Lampang province in the southeast. To the northeast is Laos. Our field work site was in the Ban Yuan area of Chiang Kham district, where there are five villages, all named after their original villages of origin in Xishuangbanna. This naming is one obvious reflection of their memory of the past and a collective memory of their hometowns.

Our group focused on Ban Yuan village. The traditional livelihood of the Ban Yuan people is rice farming. Double cropping rice can be grown here, but people only plant one season in most cases. In the past, all the villagers were farmers and worked in the fields. But in recent years, people have largely stopped farming the land, most of which is rented out to outsiders. There are two ways locals rent out land for farming: one is to distribute harvested rice; another is to hire people to do farmwork. Most people who come to the village to rent land and work are from other ethnic minorities, either from highland areas or from Myanmar or Laos. Villagers who own land have stable food and secure incomes.

According to the research of Long (pers. comm., 2019), this village has 225 households with a total population of 632. Of these, about 70 percent are civil servants, about 25 percent are businessmen and the remaining 5 percent are farmers. Most of the villagers are Tai Lue. The community organizations of Ban Yuan village are of two kinds: one is organically formed associations, such as the old people's association, the young people's association and so on. The second is organized through community committees. The villagers are almost entirely Buddhist. Buddhism runs through and is closely related to almost all of their lives.

Many young people from the village are working in other places, and old people in the village mainly rely on their relatives who work in other places to send money to support them, so they don't do farm work anymore.

This village and the four others mentioned above are geographically close to each other, and all are close to larger local towns, so villagers can purchase fruits and vegetables easily. In the market, traders sell traditional foods and villagers buy them. For the Tai Lue people of Chiang Kham these traditional foods also play an important role in creating social memory.

In this research, we investigated the process of the establishment of the Ban Yuan village museum, and how the main exhibits (including looms, textiles and articles of daily use, religious articles, and the physical layout) serve a role in maintaining Tai Lue identity and social memory. We examined the traditional livelihoods of Tai Lue people, the role and status of religion in their lives, and how they construct their social

memory through the museum and other cultural spaces. By using the above aspects, we explored the undercurrents that drive Tai Lue culture in Chiang Kham.

Social memory

Social memory has several different definitions. The Taiwanese anthropologist Wang Mingke writes that "concepts of collective memory or social memory have been associated with the study of ethnic identity, nationalism and the development of historical anthropology" (2001, p. 136). According to his definition, different groups—ethnicities, nationalities, or others—have a specific understanding of historical facts and memory, and construct them through the vast array of their individual and shared experiences: history, myths, legends, songs, food, literature, storytelling, ceremony. Visual objects—from statues to architecture, textiles to paintings—are one medium for saving social memory and to circulating it in a society.

For the social memory of the Tai Lue people in Chiang Kham county, we used the construction of ethnic identity from the concepts of Wang Mingke. What we looked for from the interviewees was not the "fact" of history, but people's understanding of the past, their memory of their past and their interpretation of who they are now, and how it is presented in visual, tangible objects—specifically in the Ban Yuan museum, but also in other "culture" spaces.

A museum of historical artifacts is also a place of human memory, with the function of cultural memory. It is a place for memory preservation and provides space for collective public memory. Collective memory reflects the cultural characteristics of a group, reveals their national identity to others, and strengthens the ethnic identity of the group. The "Tai Lue Culture Center" is the most direct carrier of social memory for the Tai Lue community of Ban Yuan, and an important tool for preserving that memory. Tai Lue social memory is stored in this fixed space, and when Tai Lue from other places enter this space, their own memories are stirred.

When a visitor enters the museum, the first thing they see is the routes by which Tai Lue ancestors migrated to this place, and the distribution of the Tai Lue people. They find next textiles and tools; reminders of the past livelihoods of the Tai Lue people, farming and weaving. The textiles are mostly clothing, for various occasions (religious occasions, celebrations, banquets, and so on). The characteristics of Tai Lue are especially visible in women's apparel; river patterns on women's lower garments (usually skirts), which is a characteristic of the Tai Lue, different from other groups. There are also many religious items in this museum, reflecting their Buddhist faith.

The contents and arrangement of the museum is set by community leaders with input from the community, through multiple interactions of the local community. Many people have been involved in the museum from construction over 20 years ago to continued operation today: the head monk of Ban Yuan temple, museum designer, representatives of village organizations, the village head, and regular villagers. It is their wish to see the Tai Lue community to remember and memorialize. In a multifaceted, inclusive and cooperative process, they choose what to show in the museum, and how to show it.

Research questions

How is Tai Lue social memory shaped by community gatekeepers, and how do they construct social memory to create and maintain a narrative of identity and history?

Methodology

Observation

We chose to observe the surroundings and human geographical environment at the field site for our investigation and research work.

1. The leader and the visitors of the museum in Ban Yuan village
2. Monks at Ban Yuan temple, the temple architecture and some temple items
3. People who came to the cultural market in Ban Donchai, small retailers and performers
4. Thailand's Mother's Day celebrations
5. The owner of our hotel and his family

Interview: formal and informal interview

Before we did interviews, we told interviewees our purpose and what we wanted to know. Interviews were both formal and informal. We talked with five people, all of them were friendly to us. They were very happy that we were learning about their culture and history.

By talking with them, we got much useful information and learned their attitudes towards their own culture and history.

They told us about their migration history, written in the books and in paintings on the wall. They are educated people—including academics and students coming to do research—and other Tai Lue people from the surrounding area. Different people had a variety of opinions. Our interviewees included:

1. Nong, formal interview at Ban Yuan museum. Female, retired primary school teacher, 60 years old, leader of the museum. She is not local from the area, but she is Tai Lue. We had three interviews with Nong, covering the following:

- The history of setting up the museum including its process and purposes
- The support from foundations, the government, the elderly, the leader of community, community committees
- The organization of the museum
- The meaning and purposes of exhibits

2. Jarat, informal interview in Ban Sopwaen. Museum volunteer, male, a retired primary school teacher. He led us to visit the "Tai Lue Memorial Hall of Ban That Sopwaen," a local museum. Through the tour, we learned about the history of Tai Lue migration from Xishuangbanna and their past way of life.
3. Khun Chai Boonparn, head monk, Ban Yuan Temple, formal interview at temple. Male, 70, head monk. He was the first to propose the idea of building this museum for Tai Lue culture, and it was built based on his idea. He clarified sources of support for the museum; funding and so on.
4. Chanaphorn Chanthaphun, informal interview in culture market. Researcher at Phayao University, female, 37 years old. Through talking with her, we learned about Tai Lue traditional food, dance, song, and textiles, and also about the organization and structure supporting this "Cong Cun Tong Tiou" (culture market).
5. York, informal interview in temple museum. Museum volunteer, male, 38 primary school teacher. We learned about Tai Lue traditional architecture and religious beliefs.

Findings

Our fieldwork focused on static social memory as represented in the "Tai Lue Culture Center" museum, and we observed dynamic social memory outside of the museum also. We chose the museum as the center to explain our research findings.

Establishment of the museum

Before discussing the museum, it is necessary to introduce some cultural, social and economic background of Thailand. According to Long, beginning in the 20th century, the Thai state and government had a great influence on the construction of social memory of Tai Lue people (pers. comm., 2019). Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Siamese state started the construction of the "Thai" nation, mainly through Buddhism, school education and the use of Thai language. These three methods influenced the culture and society of the Tai Lue people in northern Thailand. According to Long (pers. comm., 2019), from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, Tai Lue identity in Chiang Kham was greatly influenced by the Thai state. During this period, Tai Lue people in Chiang Kham wore Thai clothes, began to eat mainstream Thai food, and speak the Thai language. By the 1980s, they had almost completely integrated into Thailand, embracing the identity of the Thai nation and the culture and identity of "Thainess." In Chiang Kham, the Tai Lue people held themselves to be Thai people, with "Thai" identity like the rest of the nation, just with a different local culture and dialect.

Starting in the 1970s, the Thai government started to promote tourism as a national industry. From the late 80s and 90s, local ethnic cultures also began to be used as a tool to promote tourism to new areas. In this atmosphere of official approval, Tai Lue textiles gradually became a selling point of local tourism. At the same time, tourists became interested in traditional food, clothing and textile products of the Tai Lue people. The unique history and culture of Tai Lue could fit into a larger national trend of "ethnic fashion."

Tai Lue social memory is influenced by local governments; they play an important role. In 1994, Phayao province started an annual Tai Lue cultural festival in Chiang Kham to develop the local culture market, tourism and economy—Chiang Kham still holds this festival today. The development of tourism in Thailand and northern Thailand has helped promote the recognition of Tai Lue culture by Thai people, creating a space where local people can show their ethnic identity. This is one example of the dynamic process behind Tai Lue social memory as conditions and context changes (Long, 2012).

Before the establishment of the museum, the land belonged to the Buddhist temple of Ban Yuan village. Sometime in the 1980's, Khun Chai Boonparn (Matichon), the head monk of the temple, noticed that villagers who used to wear Tai Lue traditional clothes to the temple were wearing them less and less. He also noticed that Tai Lue who used to make a living by weaving were rarely using their

looms, and many of the younger generation did not know how to use this traditional technology at all. He was worried and wanted to preserve Tai Lue tradition. He asked the village head to bring four looms to the temple. The four looms were donated voluntarily by villagers. He then invited villagers to come to weave in the temple, and an initial group of five weavers began working.

By 1988, Khun Chai Boonparn came up with the idea of building a local museum, and the project to build the museum began. He discussed how to build the museum with the local community.

Ladawan is the daughter of one of the first five villagers who came to the temple to weave. In 1993, she wrote a report to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) on the establishment of a local museum. The TAT gave funding to help locals build the museum. The fund was the museum's first, and the museum was completed in 1994. The following year, the monks of Ban Yuan temple began to decorate the museum and completed construction. The museum structure was designed by a villager's son; that villager was also a member of the first group of five temple weavers.

Khun Chai Boonparn donated some scriptures, a Buddha figure, and some religious supplies to the museum. He also collected looms and textiles from villagers, including Tai Lue traditional garments and flags. Some villagers donated Tai Lue traditional living implements, such as kitchen utensils and bedroom supplies. They received no money for their donations to the museum. In this way, the museum was initially completed.

The layout of the exhibits

When you enter the museum on the first floor, the first thing you see are exhibition boards. With words and images, the board introduces the culture of Tai Lue. To the right there are some textile looms. On the first floor are eight looms, called *ki*. Because textile used to be an important means of livelihood for the Tai Lue people, looms and various textiles are prominently placed on the first floor of the exhibition hall. In addition, the placement of looms in the museum is a signal of the importance of passing on cloth-making. The museum shows looms and the textile process both to show Tai Lue identity, and to awaken the memory of the younger generation of Tai Lue about their own ethnicity. A lot of space is also used to display Tai Lue traditional garments in the hall on the first floor. The wall to the right is covered with flags, and different ones are placed on a table. Finally, in the corner of the first floor, there are some Tai Lue traditional funeral articles on display.

The second floor holds a large Buddha figure. Buddhism plays a very important role in the lives of the Tai Lue; the Buddha statue is not at the most prominent place on the first floor because if someone is on the second floor, they would be moving above the head of the Buddha, which is considered disrespectful. So the Buddha statue is placed in the most prominent place on the second floor. The second floor mainly displays religious articles and some Confucian classics. A Tai Lue traditional bedroom, traditional utensils used in the kitchen, and some daily necessities are also displayed. These exhibits provide visitors with a visual representation of traditional Tai Lue life. They attempt to show what makes them different by showing their lives in the past; showing their ethnic identity, and explaining who are the Tai Lue.

Representative exhibits

Textile looms and process

Weaving takes six steps. The weaving process is extremely complex and requires a lot of patience. However, many people are interested in weaving and come to learn, including villagers and students. There are also Tai Lue people from other areas who come to learn to weave.

We visited our translator's grandmother—a skilled weaver. She taught us how to spin and told us how the government supports her growing cotton to pass on her textile skills and develop local tourism.

Textile, as the traditional livelihood of Tai Lue people, plays an extremely important role in their life. However, through our observation and interview, we found that today's Tai Lue people don't weave anymore; the younger generation of Tai Lue people can't weave at all. The textile tools in the museum display local identity by showing that weaving is an important part of their social memory, even if they no longer weave out of necessity.

Flags

The Tai Lue flag is a textile used by Tai Lue as a marker of their identity. There are three kinds of flags on display in the museum; to commemorate the dead, to offer prayers and wishes for one's own future, and to show respect and dedication to Buddha. All of the flags express the wishes of the Tai Lue people, combining symbols and images from their lives and religion, giving their patterns special meaning. Their hopes for the future and memories of relatives and friends who have passed are shown on the flags, showing that religious belief and spiritual support are important parts of their life and social memory.

Although the flag is an important manifestation of Tai Lue social memory, it is rarely seen in Tai Lue life today. The flags used at funerals and hung in temples are store-bought, and people have largely stopped making their own flags.

Tai Lue traditional garments

There are six kinds of Tai Lue traditional costumes on display in the museum: aristocratic dress, daily wear dress, war dress, home dress, wedding dress, and costumes for performances. The design of each kind of costume is different, but most have river patterns on women's dresses; this is distinctive of the Tai Lue and symbolizes how water can take away bad things and make life better.

Tai Lue traditional clothes have distinctive and unique colors and styles. Nowadays, Tai Lue people seldom wear their traditional clothes in daily life; the dress appears more as cultural symbol in the public eye. When there is a traditional festival or a big event, people wear Tai Lue clothes to show their ethnic identity and tell people that they are Tai Lue. For example, at the cultural market on August 10 in Ban Donchai village, the performers of each village wore costumes of different colors and performed on stage. Whether in the past or present, clothing is indispensable when Tai Lue people to participate in events, and is a direct expression of their culture. Clothing is a medium for them to participate in social interaction, and one manifestation of their social memory.

Religious items

On the second floor, in the first exhibition hall, many religious items are displayed. Besides a Buddha figure, there are scriptures containing important religious events, geomantic omens, and astrology. The scriptures were donated by Khun Chai Boonparn. He wants to share them with others—no matter where they come from—so they understand Tai Lue culture.

Buddhism is of great significance in Tai Lue life; it is both an expression of and a tool to preserve their social memory.

Bells

There are two kinds of bells in the museum. One is religious, used by monks to collect alms. When the monk rings the bell, people will know that he has come to collect alms. The other is used in daily necessities. Also, each cow has a different bell with a different sound, so owners can find their cows and tell which are theirs.

Bells not only represent a Tai Lue traditional way of life, but also religious practice that is so closely related to their life—Buddhism. They are one embodiment of the Tai Lue way of life, and again, a physical representation of social memory.

Organization of museums

At the beginning, Khun Chai Boonparn asked his monks to run the museum. The monks of the temple in Ban Yuan village ran the museum for fifteen years, but with mixed results. In 2010, Nong retired from teaching and volunteered to work at the museum—the first volunteer at the museum. She also knew how to weave. After she arrived at the museum, she redesigned the exhibits.

The museum is currently staffed by 13 volunteers divided into three groups. The first group began in 2017, the second group (leading group) started in 2018, and a third group in 2019. Most of the work of the museum is done by volunteers who work in shifts. The work is a shared task and carried out socially. These three groups often make handicrafts related to Tai Lue culture to sell to visitors. Proceeds from the handicrafts pay for electricity (300-600 baht a month) and water (mainly drinking water for visitors). The volunteers don't get paid, and they make handicrafts more to continue the Tai Lue culture than to make money. Except for the costs of running the museum, they divide the rest of the income equally.

The volunteers at the museum are all women and local villagers. They volunteer to work in the museum to promote Tai Lue culture and can also earn a small additional income working there.

Museum supporters

Supporters of the museum can be divided into four groups. One is villagers. Villagers volunteer to help in their spare time, and many of the museum's exhibits are donated by them. In addition, villagers put money into merit boxes, which are used to support the operation of the museum.

Another group of supporters is monks. Some of the exhibits in the museum were donated by monks. In its first fifteen years, the museum was run by monks.

Some Phayao University researchers also support the museum. They study Tai Lue culture and often come to Tai Lue centers in the area to study and research, including the museum in Ban Yuan village. They get information from the museum and also provide valuable information about Tai Lue culture to the museums.

The last group of supporters are organizations. One supporting the Ban Yuan village museum is the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), a department of the Thai government. Another is the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC), an academic institution under the Thai government's Ministry of Culture.

In 1993, during Thailand's cultural renaissance and with the government advocating tourism, the TAT funded the museum, which activated its establishment. The Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre holds regular meetings every year, and the museum head (teacher Nong) attends. Normally, after the meeting, the SAC makes an annual grant to the Culture Center of Phayao University, which then makes a grant to the museum. The SAC money is mainly used to repair the museum or to buy display cases and panels.

Supporters of the museum have promoted the development of the museum in obvious and concrete ways, but at a deeper level—because of its continuous development and improvement—Tai Lue social memory has been preserved. The supporters of the museum, to a certain extent, are all conservators and leaders of Tai Lue social memory. They represent the Thai government in its desire to help ethnic groups develop their culture in order to stabilize Thailand's borders and solidify people's self-identity as "Thai." Further, both museum supporters and the Thai government also want to promote Thai cultural tourism through their support.

The dialect of Ban Yuan village

Through our observation, the people of Chiang Kham also have their own dialect. Our translator Akkaranee Jaiwanglo, a Tai Lue from Ban Yuan, told us that

their pronunciation is somewhat similar to the Xishuangbanna dialect. Although they use Thai in everyday life, and many of the younger generation of Tai Lue don't speak Tai Lue anymore, their language is somewhat different from the official language of Thailand.

Their dialect, a dynamic cultural symbol, differs from other regional dialects and has a distinct "brand" of ethnic identity in the subconscious of local Tai Lue people. They use dialect not only to tell others that they are Tai Lue, but also to remind themselves that they are Tai Lue. Their dialect is the sum total of Tai Lue cultural knowledge as they have integrated into Thai life, and also is an expression of their social memory. Dialect is a medium Tai Lue people use to both inherit and promote their culture. It is not just a *part* of, but also the *carrier* of their social memory.

Social memory and the history of Tai Lue migration

The history of migration in religious mythology

Tai Lue migration history is mainly recorded in temple murals and in museums. Historically, the story of Tai Lue migration begins with the story of a quarrel between ancestors—a powerful uncle and a nephew—in what is now Xishuangbanna, China. This family quarrel eventually led to war. The uncle sought support from dynastic regimes in China, Burma, Laos and other neighboring countries. With their help, in the end, the nephew was defeated. The nephew's power and goods, now in his uncle's hands, left him with nothing, so the nephew fled with his army and retinue. When they reached the Mekong, they found land suitable for a new home and began a new life. They grew rice and built temples for their monks and to practice Buddhism. In the museum murals, people of this period lived together with monks, sharing houses and food, and farming together. Temples were built to provide food for the monks, who helped villagers grow rice in the fields. Material life and spiritual life were both important for the Tai Lue.

As their population grew, they moved again to different places, along rivers into Laos, Myanmar, and across northern Thailand. Today the five villages of Ban Mang, Ban Yuan, Ban That Sopwaen, Ban Yuan, and Ban Donchai are all Tai Lue who originated from different places.

The elderly in the village are familiar with the migration history in the temple and museum murals. The second and third generations of the Tai Lue local community only know that they are from Xishuangbanna, and their understanding of their migration history and some traditional culture is limited to stories or descriptions from their elders.

The history of imagination and creation

As we know, much of history is constructed. The social memory that emerges from history is produced in the imagination of the central government, elites and the people. Through written language, expression and communication, both oral and folk histories are recorded and sorted by community and leaders to become "local history." The construction of Ban Yuan's local museum buildings is the combination of the ideas of designers and painters, as well as village chiefs. The murals in the temples and museums are expressions and ways of memory, as well as reflecting the world view of the painters and Buddhist belief. The community cultural market also reflects the community's understanding of this period of history through art.

This migration history exists not only in collective memory, but also in the individual imaginations of the villagers themselves. In the process of creating and painting the murals, villagers participated, expressing their own opinions and ideas. The local community shows their migration story to others in the murals, and more importantly, show their identity and preserve their social memory. From our observation and interview, we found that in the process of building this museum, the thoughts of designers, local communities, village leaders and local government all played important roles in constructing social memory. In those thoughts are issues of the relationship between state power and marginal areas, infiltration and jurisdiction of state power, and the selection of memory.

The function of the Tai Lue Culture Center

We saw that in this village, people have some autonomy in their choice of memory. For example, during the annual community cultural celebration, content and form are relatively flexible, and villagers can choose what to show outside visitors in their intent to perform and show.

However, through other observations, we found that local elites or village leaders hold quite a lot of power to organize and construct social memory. This was reflected in two aspects; one was in the decision-making and conception of the museum. The design process was completed by community leaders after consultation with and support of the Thai government and a royal foundation; it didn't seem the community had a strong voice in this beginning phase. Second, this museum is mainly used to present villagers' migration history, traditional culture, and religious beliefs. These three aspects are most prominent in Tai Lue social memory, and elites have a stronger voice and much more power in the discourse of official writing and communication than normal community members.

However, this process can also be inclusive. Most obviously, people in the village directly elect their village leadership. The head monk is not only leader of the temple, but also a community member who knows the social memory of the Tai Lue. He can explain the religious aspects of Tai Lue history and identity, which adds Buddhist thought and content to Tai Lue social memory. The community continues to support the temple and the monks there financially and otherwise; this indicates at least some level of agreement or at least, no major conflicts.

Through our observation, the museum is small and not so popular, with only a few local people visiting. Local villagers are mostly here to learn to make textiles, or work as staff of the museum. Meanwhile, tourists who visit are mostly from different parts of Thailand. They travel to this museum and learn Tai Lue history and culture. Before they leave, many of them will give a monetary donation or "merit" into the "merit box," which is also a source of income for the museum.

Some researchers and teachers from the Lan Na research center of Phayao University, from some universities in Laos, and from local schools also organize students to come to this museum to learn Tai Lue culture. So the museum has the function of communication and learning. Not only can Tai Lue culture be disseminated, but also academics are able to learn Tai Lue history and culture for their research.

Temple and museum - religious space keeping social memory

Ban Yuan villagers are Buddhists; the village has a Buddhist temple, a school for monks and the Tai Lue Culture Center. The museums and temple are closely tied to their social memory and religious beliefs. Their religious customs are basically the same as other Thai villages and are quite similar to Buddhist practice in the Xishuangbanna area of China. Religion is an important part of the social memory of Tai Lue people, and still now plays an extremely important role in their lives. Visibly, the temple as community institution possesses strong power over the expression of social memory. In the religious beliefs of the Tai Lue, Buddhism and belief in natural gods can exist simultaneously. Animistic worship is a strong religious belief of the local Tai Lue. It is not only a kind of worship, but also has rich historical and cultural connotations.

At present, many material practices of the Tai Lue have weakened; but one of their most important cultural markers of ethnic identity is the worship of ancestors and gods. Tai Lue people worship different gods through different activities every year. According to Dr. Long Xiaoyan, people worship gods to express respect and

to their ancestors and also to continue, strengthen, and enhance their ethnic identity, so that future generations will not forget the achievements of their ancestors, nor forget the source of their own achievements (pers. comm., 2019).

Because the majority of Ban Yuan village originally migrated here from Xishuangbanna's Mengla area (now Kang, in China), the use of ancestral place names and their faith is tied to gods whose names are derived from their ancestral home. It is important to local people to continue to worship these gods, showing their identity as Tai people, with memory of the past alive in present cultural expression.

There are two religious belief systems in the village today; Buddhism and animism/spirit worship. In Ban Yuan, animism is reflected in many practices, including sacrifice to village gods. This ritual activity is the largest, and not unique to this village. According to a Tai Lue monk from Xishuangbanna familiar with the northern Thai context, this ritual is practiced by almost all Tai Lue people, and definitely by all the villages that have moved here from Xishuangbanna. Sacrifices to the ancestral god of Mengla are made every three years. According to the Buddhist calendar, all the descendants of Tai Lue who moved here from Mengla participate in the ceremony of sacrifice. Other local Thai representatives also participate, and it is very ceremonious.

The Ban Yuan community also worships the god Mengman. Since the village moved here from Mengman in Mengla prefecture of Xishuangbanna, the ancestral god of Mengman is given an annual worship service by the entire village every year on August 6 of the Buddhist calendar. In the village there is a small Mengman god temple, in the middle of a 300 square meter yard. The idol in the small temple of Mengman is a warrior who rides a horse and carries a long sword. He is the ancestor who led migration from Mengman in Xishuangbanna.

Another village told us they perform a ritual once a year to the gods who established their village—in other words, to the ancestors who are believed to be the founders of the village. These sacrificial rites also have some taboos. For example, in some places only men are allowed to go in. In others, no one from outside the village can enter the village to worship their god, in order to maintain the identity of the village. Sacrifice to village ancestor gods is important, as village identity is determined by worship of their specific god, and by which people maintain their individual identity as part of a community. On the day of the sacrificial ceremony, the whole village should take part, and after the ceremony, the entire village eats together.

Local Tai Lue communities also offer sacrifice to their house gods. Each family has a god of their family's ancestors. Villagers usually place this shrine in a corner

of their house, but there is usually no specific sacrificial object. They offer some food on the house shrine during festivals.

Tai Lue religious beliefs and the history and memories of them stored in the museum of Ban Yuan are closely related to Xishuangbanna and have many similarities—memories of the past. According to a Tai Lue monk from Xishuangbanna now living in northern Thailand, these common ritual activities of worship and sacrifice—whether in Xishuangbanna or in northern Thailand—are the means by which the Tai Lue community reproduce their ethnic and cultural identity. The use of religious articles, performance of sacrificial rites, and holding to taboos and other beliefs all channel the inheritance of tradition and culture. In their day to day life, the greater purpose of these practices is to enhance unity; to not forget that they are descendants of the same Tai Lue ancestors, so that in their current real life they continue to help each other and seek a common livelihood. No matter what changes have taken place, people still maintain their sense of identity in this aspect.

The writing and historical interpretation of Tai Lue memory involves many people. The government, the Lanna research center of Phayao University, village heads, villagers' autonomous organizations, museum staff and their leaders, and individual villagers all work to preserve and control their historical and social memory through interpretation and creating discourse. The people in this village speak the Tai Lue language, which is the same language as in Xishuangbanna and the same language of the Tai Lue who migrated to Thailand from Xishuangbanna (albeit with some general differences). The retired teacher and museum head Nong said "by using their language, we can know whether he is a Tai Lue, and whether we are the same."

The temple is not only a place for Tai Lue to preserve and inherit their traditional culture, but also a storage place for constructed historical memories. At the same time, the museum is also an extra source of income. People who make textiles can earn some money selling them here. This museum also serves as a venue for many activities. Religious customs are held here almost every month of the year. Primary and secondary schools in Thailand have "classroom in the temple" activities. When people enter the Ban Yuan temple, the murals are immediately in their line of sight, a piece of visual communication. Throughout their historical memory of both voluntary and forced migration, the Tai Lue are always depicted as pursuing a better life.

From our observation we saw that that the population of the village moves and exchanges with each other and with outside communities frequently, and as such

real historical memory exists in their daily culture. Tai Lue traders who often went to other markets, said, "Although I don't know exactly where I came from or how things used to be, I'm Tai Lue and also Thai, and that's something I won't forget."

Conclusion

The Tai Lue Culture Center is both a carrier of and a storage vessel for social memory of the local Tai Lue people. While some memories fade away with the passage of time, Tai Lue migration history has been reconstructed through religious images in murals—created and painted by designers and artists, with the input and oversight of the head monk of Ban Yuan temple, community committees, academic institutions, villagers, and the retired teachers and volunteers who work in the local museum. The process of constructing their social memory is flexible and pluralistic, and not dominated or controlled by any single party. By building and operating the museum, multiple individuals, forces and organizations work to shape and store Tai Lue social memory in this physical space.

Some details and fragments of history are quietly deposited in the museum, becoming spiritual sustenance for future generations to recall their history and look forward to the future, and a source of honor and pride for the village and its people.

Through the course of social change and the passage of time, the social memory of Tai Lue has changed as the community has remade their social memory, both under the guidance of leaders and as individuals. Temporary social spaces like collective activities, markets, festivals and rituals provide opportunities for practice and inspiration to carry on Tai Lue identity and culture. Buddhism—held in high importance in mainstream Thai culture—is also strongly linked to Tai Lue social memory, and is embedded in religious ceremonies and activities. In this way, Tai Lue social memory is reproduced and inherited in certain times and spaces through the pluralistic leadership of religious leaders and community leaders.

Positionality and final reflections

In the early days of this field work, we participated as tourists. However, at the Ban Yuan museum and the temple—the focus of our research—we participated in observation and interview as researchers. The retired teacher working at the museum and the monks were very friendly and warm with us. The villagers were also very hospitable and unpretentious. While participating in the cultural celebration as

tourists, we could feel the enthusiasm and simplicity of Tai Lue. Their kindness took a lot of pressure off our fieldwork.

When we did this work, we also have our own feelings, not only as anthropological researchers, but also as tourists. So we also tried to reflect and try our best to avoid cultural prejudice. At the same time, we always maintain and believe that the cultures in the world are culturally constructed and relative. As researchers, we live in a different social and cultural background, and we try our best to make ourselves free from the influence of cultural values, personal preferences, and even ethnic and class prejudices. However, no matter how hard we tried, we were still confused about many aspects of Thai culture at the beginning. For example, in terms of personality, men are quite different from Chinese men. Chinese men are a little tough; In Thailand, men are just as gentle as women. In many places in Thailand, such as temples and homes, people are required to take off the shoes before entering. At first, we thought it was tedious and unnecessary. But as we learned and understood, we learned why. Therefore, we try to adapt ourselves to their culture.

Due to time limitation, we have not thoroughly explored the conditions and reasons that contribute to Tai Lue social memory, or what unofficial social memory is, how it differs from official social memory, and why there are differences among them. In addition, because of the language barrier, communication between informants and us was limited to some extent, which leads to some limits in our description and understanding.

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Cross-border Migration

Nor Lae, Chiang Mai Province

Nor Lae village, located right on the Thai-Myanmar border in Fang District of Chiang Mai Province, is home to ethnic Dara-ang people (also known as Palaung). Most of the population migrated from Shan state, Southern Myanmar since the late 1970s as a result of conflict and political issues. When the Dara-ang became involved in the Royal Project in the 1980s, community members were hired as farm workers for cultivating temperate crops. Due to the lack of arable land in the area of Nor Lae, many Dara-Ang also use farmland on the Myanmar side of the border or work as daily laborers and in tourism-related areas. Until today, Dara-Ang from Burma continue to come to Nor Lae village not only for political reasons but also due to better employment opportunities and economic prospects on the Thai side of the border. However, the newcomers do not have legal status in Thailand, which restricts their civil and property rights and access to social and economic welfare, while they also face continued livelihood challenges.

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The Impact of Royal Agricultural Station Angkhang on the Dara-ang's Socio-economic Livelihoods in Nor Lae, Northern Thailand

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Abstract

This paper describes five days of fieldwork in Nor Lae, an ethnic Dara-ang community in Fang District, Chiang Mai Province, northern Thailand. The Dara-ang migrated from Doi Lae, Shan State, Myanmar, to escape ethnic armed conflict over 40 years ago, and finally settled down in Nor Lae at the Thai-Myanmar border in 1982. Over the course of time, they gradually became involved in the Royal Agricultural Station Angkhang, a project that was granted permission to use parts of the National Reservation Forest for highland agriculture research and for the cultivation of economic crops, such as strawberries, tea, roses and organic vegetables. Nowadays, the income of the majority of the Dara-ang depends on the Royal Project. As relatively new immigrants to Thailand, most of the Nor Lae villagers do not hold Thai citizenship. This paper attempts to describe how the involvement of the Dara-ang in Nor Lae in the Royal Project has developed and changed since the beginning of the initiative, as well as to elaborate how the project influences some of the key aspects of the Dara-ang's livelihood today.

Keywords: Dara-ang people, border, Royal Project, Royal Agriculture Angkhang station, livelihoods

Introduction

Between 1982 and 1984, a group of around 200 ethnic Dara-ang (Palaung) migrated from Doi Lai, Shan State, in the southern part of Myanmar to Nor Lae Village, Fang District, Chiang Mai Province in northern Thailand, to escape armed conflict and fighting between different ethnic groups and the Burmese army. They settled down directly at the Thai-Myanmar border, in the area of today's Nor Lae, after the King Rama IX granted them permission to stay in Thailand in 1982 (Deepadung, 2009).

Today, Nor Lae village has a total population of 1282 people, or 240 households, and is divided into 4 districts and 10 sub-zones, with each sub-zone consisting of about 3-4 households. 99% of the villagers are ethnic Dara-ang, only a few ethnic groups (e.g. Lahu) have married into the community. The villagers call themselves "Dara-ang ren" or "Red Dara-ang". They speak the Dara-ang language of the Palaungic branch of the northern Mon-Khmer sub-groups, Austroasiatic language family (Deepadung, 2009). The area around today's Nor Lae has been declared as a National Reservation Forest in 1967, and as a National Park in 2000 (Sitthikriengkrai, 2019, per. communication).

Until today, Dara-ang from Burma continue to flow into Nor Lae village, not only for political reasons but also for better employment opportunities and economic prospects on the Thai side of the border. However, the majority of the villagers do not hold Thai citizenship, but only a "pink" ID card, a document issued by the state to Non-Thai citizens which restricts civil and property rights, and opportunities to access social and economic welfare (Sitthikriengkrai, 2019, pers. comm.).

Nor Lae village is located approximately 5-6 kilometers north of the Angkhang Royal Project. This Royal Agricultural Station was established in 1969 at Doi Angkhang Mountain as the first agricultural research station to improve the quality of life of ethnic highlander groups.

According to the Royal Project Foundation (2011), the Royal Project Angkhang was founded with three main objectives: first, to study upland agriculture by taking advantage of geographical features. The royal agricultural station is located in the mountains, at an altitude of 1400 meters. Thus, the climate is suitable for crop cultivation all year round, e.g. temperate fruits, such as peaches, pears, persimmons, kiwis, blueberries and strawberries, as well as temperate plants, such as roses and tea. Second, the project focuses on agricultural research, experimentation, and training of farmers. Since there are numerous highland and border villages in

northern Thailand, similar to Nor Lae, Royal Projects have been founded as an initiative of King Rama 9 to act as demonstration and study centers, and to provide development directions for ethnic communities. The centers provide technical support for a wide variety of plateau agricultural developments throughout the year (Royal Project Foundation, 2011).

Before the Royal Project moved into the village area, the villagers practiced shifting cultivation and grew opium along the Thai-Myanmar border area. After joining the project, the life of the villagers improved in some regards, but with the passage of time, the social and economic impacts of the project on the villagers have changed. Today, the existence of the Royal Project is closely related to the survival of the cross-border migrants because it grants them permission to live and to work in Thailand.

Moreover, this paper aims to shed light on how the involvement of the ethnic Dara-ang in the Royal Project influences some different key aspects of the villagers' livelihoods today. This can only be understood with a brief look at the historical context of the development of the engagement of the Dara-ang in the project. Thus, the article aims to show how the Dara-ang's participation in the Royal Project has developed and changed since 1967.

Due to constraints of time, this study does not aim at conducting a comprehensive analysis of various aspects of the villagers' livelihoods. For example, it does not distinguish between different types of livelihood resources, strategies, or livelihood outcomes, or identify institutional processes that link these elements.

Research questions

1. How did the participation of the ethnic Dara-ang into the Royal Project Angkhang develop after it was established in 1969?
2. How does the Royal Project influence some key aspects of the Dara-ang's livelihood today?

Methodology

In our study, we used field visits, observations and interviews to analyze how the Royal Project influences some aspects of the socio-economic livelihood of the Dara-ang. We chose these research methods during our field trip as they can help us to understand the actual situation in the village, including the migration history

of the villagers, and the development of the Dara-ang's participation in the Royal Project. Field observations can confirm the interview content, and vice versa.

We used our three and a half days in the village to visit different sites associated with the Royal Project, for example, the border check point, the main road, the strawberry fields, organic vegetables plots, tea plantations, a nearby temple, the Royal Project research center, the military base and a Chinese restaurant, and we stayed at the Royal Project's research center. Although our research focuses on the impacts of the Royal Project on some key aspects of the Dara-ang's livelihoods, this is not a study of the Royal Project itself. Our article rather tries to give an overview on relationship between the Dara-ang people and the Royal Project. As for research methods, we used walking, immersion in the field, field observation, and face-to-face interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of the Royal Project for the Dara-ang people. All material used in this paper was collected during our field work from August 9 to August 12, 2019.

During the field visit, we were most impressed by the road running through Nor Lae village, because according to the map, this street forms the border between Thailand and Myanmar, with Myanmar located on one side and Thailand on the other side of the road. Due to the location of Nor Lae right at the border, we walked forth and back between Thailand and Myanmar every day. This road also reflects the uncertainty of the village's location, because it is difficult to determine whether certain parts of the village belong to Myanmar or Thailand.

Nor Lae village: the road running through the villages forms the border between Thailand and Myanmar

When we first arrived at the Royal Research Center, we were surprised about the scale and arrangement of the center. In the tea gardens, strawberry fields and organic vegetables plots, we were able to observe parts of the Royal Project land planning. The different crops seemed to have a high quality.

During fieldwork, we interviewed a total of six informants: the current village head (Lai), three former village heads ((Namo, Jarling, Wu), a young guide (Ane) and an "ordinary" villager (Putt).

For example, in our interviews, three village leaders (Namo, Jarling, Wu) talked about the Dara-ang's history of immigration, how they started participating in the Royal Project, and how they adapted to the project. They introduced some of the Royal Project employees to us, explained us the development history, and some aspects of the current situation of the project. Moreover, we interviewed a young guide (Ane) and an "ordinary" villager (Putt), who gave us insights about the villagers' participation in the Royal Project, production processes, sales and regulations. The interviewees helped us understand the impacts of the Royal Project on some key aspects of the Dara-ang's livelihoods today.

Findings

How has the participation of the Dara-ang in the Royal Project developed after its establishment in 1969?

Before the permanent settlement of the Dara-ang in 1981

Due to ongoing armed conflict between the Myanmar military and the Shan and Wa army in Shan State, ethnic groups living along the Thai-Myanmar border began to migrate across the border into Thailand in the 1970s.

Also the Dara-ang decided to move from Doi Lae village, Shan State, Burma, to Nor Lae, Thailand, in 1979, because they were greatly affected by the violent conflict. For example, they were forced by the Shan army to work as soldiers or porters and experienced other forms of violence and exploitation.

According to the former head Jarling, the first group of Dara-ang peoples migrated from Burma towards Thailand and asked the Shan and Lahu ethnic groups for directions to Thailand and arrived at the Thai-Myanmar border after eight days (Interview with former head Jarling, 10.08.2019)

Before the Dara-ang settled permanently in Nor Lae, they could choose which crops they wanted to grow. As the national boundaries were still unclear at this time, they cultivated land in Myanmar and Thailand. The Dara-ang relied on opium and rice cultivation to make a living. During this period, the Royal Project was established in 1969, but it did not have any influence on the villagers.

The Royal Project's experimentation period (1981-1988)

During the "experimentation" period of the Royal Project between 1981 and 1988, Rama IX visited Baan Nor Lae twice. During these visits, the Dara-ang and their livelihoods attracted his attention. Before, the Thai government was not aware of the Dara-ang situation, or that they were terrified of being deported to Burma.

The father of our young guide Ane told us "when Rama IX came to the village in 1981, the King asked me what help I want, and I said that we want to live here, we don't want to hide." The Thai monarch allowed the Dara-ang people to move from the mountain environment to live near the road. In 1984, Rama IX visited Nor Lae village for the second time. At that time, the state began to implement a nation-wide opium ban, and villagers were prohibited to grow opium. Although the government's ban was not particularly strict at that time, the Dara-ang began to reduce their opium cultivation and to look for alternative crops.

During this period, the Royal Project was in its initial and exploratory stage, and the land management was relatively loose and flexible. Due to a growing population and the lack of arable land, more and more villagers were starting to use land Myanmar. Also more and more crops were grown.

Royal Project's promotion period (1988-2002)

During its promotion period between 1988 and 2002, the Royal Project implemented various crop planting programs. Nor Lae's villagers gradually joined the royal initiative to reduce their opium cultivation and to try the cultivation of alternative crops, such as plums, pears, and peaches. At this time, the Royal Project did not place rigid constraints on the villagers, and a strict management system was not yet set up.

During the planting process, some Dara-ang became volunteers for the Royal Project. They assisted the implementation of the project and promoted the participation of other villagers in the project.

Also the former village head Wu worked as a Royal Project volunteer. He remembers:

> From 1995 to 1997, I went to the Royal Agricultural Research Center, and I learned something about cultivating techniques, some knowledge on economic crops. Through us, the Royal Project got connected to the villagers. Because it was all voluntary, the Royal Project thanked us for attending the training, and sent all volunteers 1000 baht a month.

After he became the village head, Wu became the mediator and contact person between the Royal Project and the villagers. Every time the Royal Project planned to introduce new crop varieties to the community, he organized meetings and introduced the new ideas to the villagers, and then reported the feedback of the villagers to the Royal Project.

In 1988, the Royal Project asked the Forest Department to grant 250 acres of land to the villagers of Nor Lae, at that time a village of around 50 to 60 households. In 1999, the Royal Project developed a separate 50-acre plot to grow tea trees which they called "the year 2000 tea plantation" (Royal Project Foundation, 2011). It took six years for the plants to grow up, and the villagers raised income by planting vegetables under the tea trees. In the same year, the Royal Project distributed 25 samplings to each family, including peaches, persimmons and pears to the villagers.

In 1999, the first trial planting of roses began. At that time, the Royal Project was friendly and supportive to the Dara-ang famers. If the villagers chose to grow organic vegetables, the Royal Project provided seeds, fertilizer and pesticides to them through the Royal Agricultural Research Center. All costs had to be covered by the villagers themselves. After the Royal Project purchased all crops from the villagers, the farmers received 50 percent of the income, and the other 50 percent were deducted to cover the costs for the seeds and chemicals.

In 1995, the Royal Project developed a project to pickle peaches in collaboration with the provincial government. Special technicians were sent to the villagers to support them in the pickling process. However, the villagers were not successful with the production, and the taste did not meet the standards of the Royal Project. The project of pickling peaches was cancelled, and the money invested by the Royal Project could not be regained. Later, a community shop similar to a cooperative was set up in the village in order to facilitate commodity exchange and trading. However, many villagers took things without paying their bills, which led to the continuous financial loss of the project and finally, its termination. However, at this stage, the technicians in the Royal Project had a very close relationship with the villagers and provided help and support to the villagers.

How does the Royal Project influence some key aspects of the Dara-ang's livelihoods today?

In our small research project, we placed a particular focus on the influences of the Royal Project on the livelihoods of the Dara-ang after the Project's rules and regulations began to greatly restrict the villagers' freedom of choice in the agricultural production process, i.e. the period from 2003 until today. Through our research, we analyzed how some key aspects of the Dara-ang's livelihoods are influenced by the Royal project

The period of the Royal Project's strict implementation (2003-now)

After its exploration period ended in 2002, the Royal Project redistributed the 98,8 acres (250 rai) of land previously allocated to villagers in order to promote the planting of organic vegetables. A cooperative was established to standardize and regulate the cooperation with the villagers, which gradually also reduced the freedom of choice of the villagers.

Compared to the other periods, in this current period the Royal Project has the greatest impact on the villagers' livelihood. Not only does it affect their livelihoods in terms of cultivation, but also in terms of product acquisition. The establishment

of a cooperative and the increasing control of land acquisition and management ultimately led to changes in income. Because of the increasingly strict control of the Royal Project, many villagers wish that the Royal Project grants them more freedom and rights. Moreover, in this time people are still using land in Myanmar to grow crops.

Crop cultivation: limited freedom of choice

The Royal Project's impact on planting is mainly reflected in the increasingly strict requirements. For example, every piece of land must be planted with crops as prescribed by the Royal Project, and the crops harvested by villagers can only sold to the Project when they meet certain quality criteria. Nowadays, the main crops the villagers are required to grow are organic vegetables and imported fruits (including persimmons, peaches, pears, plums, and strawberries), tea and roses, and a number of newer varieties, such as avocados, mushroom and coffee.

According to the former head Wu, in 2004, the Royal Project began to promote the cultivation of organic vegetables, so chemical fertilizers could not be used and it was prohibited to grow vegetables under the tea trees because these trees need chemical fertilizers. Since 2004, the Royal Project officially started to plant strawberries. Today, there are a total of 5,9 acres (15 rai) of strawberry fields in the village. Roses were officially planted from 2004 onwards. In 2005, the Royal Project began to promote the cultivation of strawberries and roses in large quantities. A few villagers started planting Jiaogulan (*gynostemma pentaphylla*) in 2007, but at that time, no special area was allocated to them for cultivation, but the herb was planted near the village. In 2015, Jiaogulan was officially introduced by the Royal Project, and it was planted next to the tea garden.

Although the Royal Project decides which crops the farmers have to plant, the Project considers itself only as providing land and technology to the villagers. In the interview, the Royal Project staff told us that the villagers are not workers for the Royal Project, but they are planting on their own land.

During the planting period, each family was given an acre of land to plant and families had to deal themselves with the distribution of their household labor. In other words, the Royal Project chose what to plant, regardless of the labor force in each family. Since many families had a surplus of household labor, a number of villagers remained unemployed. However, the Royal Project did not take responsibility for their situation. On the other hand, if a family did not have enough labor, e.g. to harvest or to pick tea, the villagers did not hire labor, but they helped each other.

Overall, the Royal Project limited villagers' freedom in terms of the variety of crops to be planted, the technology to plant, and the division of household labor.

Plantations in the Royal Project

Royal project greenhouse crops

Management of land: limited control of the villagers

In terms of land, the Royal Project mostly impacted the villagers' livelihoods through land distribution. For the villagers, land is a necessary means of production and survival. However, because the village is located in a National Park, farmland can no longer be expanded. This limitation causes a series of land distribution and management problems.

The land allocation by the Royal Project is fixed, limited and cannot be changed by the farmers. At the same time, the number of family members in the village is increasing, so that the collaboration the Royal Project alone cannot meet the basic needs of the villagers. Many villagers thus use land on the Burmese side of the Thai-Myanmar border.

A gate at the Thai-Myanmar border

According to the villager Putt, in 2002, the Burmese army began to charge rent from the Dara-ang for using land in Myanmar after they noticed that the Dara-ang people could earn a certain amount of income through cooperating with the Royal Project. In the past, the soldiers had just asked the Dara-Ang for labor force in exchange for using land on the Burmese side of the border. The Myanmar soldiers collected between 30,000 and 50,000 baht per year from the farmers. The land use tax is split equally between among whole community of nor Lae. About 25 larger households

rent a bigger area of land for 1,000 baht per year, 30 middle-sized households pay yearly around 500 baht, and 20 households rent a small area of land for around 300 baht a year. The price is set by the village committee, following to villagers' suggestions. When the villagers cross the border to Burma, soldiers will keep and register their pink cards. The cards will be returned to the farmers once they are on their way back to Nor Lae. According to a rough estimate from a young community member, in 2015, the Dara-ang villagers used around 1067,5 acres (2,700 rai) of arable land in Myanmar, on parts of this land they had previously grown opium. The Thai and Burmese border posts allow both sides to cross the border.

The border between Thailand and Myanmar has not yet clearly been determined. People living in the border area are thus subject to the interventions of the state forces of the two sides. For example, the implementation of the Royal Project helped to replace large-scale opium production by economic crop cultivation, and has thus substantially transformed the Dara-ang's livelihood activities. However, the Royal Project is strongly also influencing the land use and management of the Dara-ang. Because the village is located in a National Reservation Forest, the land allocated to the villagers by the Royal Project is restricted. As the population grows, the land is not sufficient meet the needs of all people, and the villagers have to continue to grow crops in Myanmar. Moreover, some plantation schemes have brought great financial risks to the villagers, leaving many of them indebted. "It's hard to feed my family on income from the royal program," one villager (Putt) said, "so we have to continue farming in Burma, but now we don't grow opium, now we grow potatoes and taro (…).

Product acquisition: restrictions through quality criteria

The Royal Project's influence on the acquisitions of agricultural products is mainly reflected in the strict control of product quality, product classification and price control.

If the villagers wish to participate in the Royal Project, they usually sign a contract with the project. The provisions of this contract stipulate that all products have to be sold to the Royal Project. If these rules are violated, they will have to pay fines. However, some of the villagers do not fully comply with the contract, but at the same time also do not face strict penalties. Participation in the project rather depends on the villagers' loyalty to the project.

According to the new village leader Lai, the Royal Project regularly buys crop from the farmers, but if it rates the quality as inadequate, or the stock has reached its peak, it will not accept any products. In this case, the villagers are allowed to sell

these products at the market e.g. at Yunnan villages or Lahu ethnic groups nearby. There are certain criteria for crop acquisition set by the Royal Project. The selection of fruits is generally based on the appearance, while roses are judged based on stem length and quality of the blossom. The Royal Station will buy certain crops based on their quality on a yearly basis, e.g. strawberries and other crops that need longer time to grow. Before buying, they will assess the quality of the products, and then determine the price. Vegetables will be purchased every month. For the cultivation of organic vegetables, the prohibition of using pesticides and fertilizers is particularly important. The quality of organic vegetables is strictly controlled by the Royal Project, and usually, the vegetables are sent to Chiang Mai to test whether pesticides and fertilizers have been used or not. If chemicals are found, the farmers will be punished accordingly. There are three levels of punishment: at first, a warning will be issued. If this person is caught a second time, the project will stop buying crops from this producer, and if rules are violated for a third time, the land of the villager is seized. So far, however, land has not yet been confiscated.

Strawberries are tested in front of villagers, but vegetables, mushrooms and other crops are not. The purchase price of strawberries is similar to the market price, but the price for vegetables and other cash crops greatly varies. For example, a young leader in Baan Nor Lae said:

> when the Royal Project is buying 100 kilograms of strawberries this year, families have to negotiate, or the Royal Project buys only the best quality and the villagers have to sell the rest to the market. The acquisition differs between crop varieties. For example, strawberries are, according to the quality, divided into three levels, A, B, C, with the different levels achieving different prices. The villagers can know the price of the strawberries, but for vegetables and other crops, they don't know the specific price. Only the royal projects knows it after inspection, but we can't get any specific price information.

Until 2019, villagers sold most of their crops to the Royal Project. However this year the Royal Project has further limited their purchases, because the Royal Project is not able not sell in urban shops as well as in the past.

Setting up a cooperative: increasing debts

The most important influences of the Royal Project on the livelihoods of the Dara-ang were caused by the formation of a cooperative.

As mentioned above, in the past the villagers had started a shop similar to a cooperative, but due to poor management, it was closed down. In 2002, the Royal Project officially took over the shop and tried to transform it into a royal cooperative. From 2007 onwards, the operation and management of the cooperative were improved and standardized.

Through this organization, the Royal Project provides seeds, fertilizers, production technologies, and purchase plans to the villagers. Moreover, the cooperative requires the villagers to buy shares for a certain in order to receive permission to plant different crops. The establishment of the co-operative marks a turning point for villagers' livelihoods, because through this organization the Royal Project managed to share its investment risk with the farmers, and the farmers had to invest their own money. As a consequence, they engaged more in the production to regain their investment, but at the same time, pressure and the risk of debts for the farmers increased.

All participants in the Royal Project have to buy 50 shares as a registration fee (for a total price of 500 baht, with 10 baht per share) for the cooperative. Different kinds of crops require different amount of shares, for example, tea, jiaogulan, and vegetables require the payment of 10,000 shares, roses around 20,000 shares and strawberries the purchase of 30,000 shares. When the villagers get paid by the Royal Project, 50% is directly deducted from their income for the costs of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. In order pay the shares, each time 5% is deducted from the remaining 50% of the income, until the costs for shares are covered. If the villagers have enough money, they can buy shares directly at one time, but usually they don't, so they have to take more and more loans, even though they sometimes they do not have any income. Due to the lack of planting experience, poor planting techniques or natural disasters, the harvest might be not as expected. Then the villagers face great risks of financial loss, and many villagers have started accumulating debts.

For example, our young guide Ane started to grow mushroom in 2017, but due poor technology, the mushroom did not meet the quality standards. Thus, he could not cover his expenses, but he still had to continue growing mushrooms, and had to pay for the shares of the cooperative. As a result, he did not have any income last year. If the quality of this year's products continues to be poor, his family economy will face severe problems.

The relationship between the villagers and the co-operative can also come to an end. For example, if someone dies and the family doesn't want to continue working

with the Royal Project, allocated land will be taken back, and the family is returned the shares of the cooperative. If a family has been growing the same crop for some time, but is unable to repay the debts and the product quality cannot meet the standards, they have to negotiate with the Royal Project whether they can stop the plantation. Moreover, they can ask the project to find temporary jobs for them, such as construction work in the Yunnanese village nearby.

The main reason for setting up a cooperative is that the Royal Project reduces its own investment risks and transfers them to the villagers. In the past, the villagers just grew their products, and the Royal Project was the sole investor and buyer. This turned out to be too risky for the Royal Project because some villagers were producing crops that weren't up to the standards so they had to borrow money from the project to get seeds and pesticides. Thus, the Royal Project was concerned about the financial losses. Therefore, the cooperative was taken over and established, which acted as a "wall" to separate the Royal Project from the villagers, and the villagers became involved in the risks of production. Since then, the Royal Project has acted as the buyer, while the villagers, are not only the producers, but also have become the largest investors in the cooperative.

In the Royal Project, three types of employers work with the villagers: financial managers, researchers at the research center, and the planting technology team. The Royal Project technical team and villagers are most closely linked. However, the relationship between the villagers and the technical personnel also depends on the individual, as some technicians are very concerned with the productions and guide the villagers during planting, while others only interact with the villagers when there are new arrangements or policy adjustments. The technical personnel changes frequently, in generally every two years.

According to the young guide Ane, the villagers also engage in negotiations with the officers. For example in the case of mushroom cultivation, in the first year, the production could not meet the standards, so they did not have income. In the second year of planting, they could thus not return the loan, so they discussed with the Royal Project staff, and as a result in the second year there were granted permission to keep the loan. When new varieties are introduced, the villagers usually accept them if the environmental conditions (e.g. weather) are suitable for cultivation. However, if not, the villagers have the chance to discuss with the project and to wait for conditions to improve.

In sum, the Royal Project, the villagers and the cooperative form a triangle structure that requires the villagers to become shareholders and to participate in the investment, posing great financial risks to the farmers.

Income stratification between villagers

Finally, the Royal Project has impacts on the villager's incomes, which have risen, but not nearly as much as the Royal Project envisaged.

The Royal Project estimates that each member earns between $70,000 and $100,000 per year, but only a very small percentage of households can actually earn that amount. The income of this village is roughly divided into three levels. The first level are those villagers who earn only enough money to spend on a daily basis. They cannot grow vegetables, e.g. due to the lack of cultivation skills, so they work as wage laborers. The second level are middle income villagers who do not work as wage laborers, but plant crops; The third level are high-income villagers who manage to plant successfully, and their income level reaches the expectations of the Royal Project. However, the actual income of villagers is very different, and the income gap between the levels also depends on the plant varieties.

According to the villager Putt, the average income is about 70,000 to 100,000 baht per household. There are only about 70 high-income families with an annual income of more than 100,000 baht. The highest income can reach up to 250,000 baht per year. In addition to growing organic vegetables, these farmers are also able to grow additional crops such as roses, strawberries and tea. The family of Putt is an example for a family with a high income. They do not only grow organic vegetables, but also strawberries and mushrooms. Last year, the quality of strawberries and mushrooms was very good, so they had enough money to rent land in Burma, and in addition to their other plantations, to grow taro and potato in Myanmar which additionally increased their income.

The Royal Project is a source of income for the villagers. However, due to their investments in the cooperative, some villagers have accumulated debts, and consequently income differs greatly across families.

Conclusion

Since the Royal Project was established in 1969, the livelihood of the villagers in Baan Nor Lae have changed in four stages. During the first stage, Dara-ang people had just moved to Thailand from Myanmar. The Royal Project had only been recently established and did yet not cause any influence to the Dara-ang.

In the second stage, the development of the Royal Project changed the livelihoods of the Dara-ang from opium cultivation towards cash crop production. After the Dara-ang migrated from Myanmar to Thailand, they did not have any land to survive. The Royal Project helped the Dara-ang to settle down, provided a stable and peaceful living environment to them, and provided them a certain degree of protection. The Royal Project and the government gave their consent to the settlement of the Dara-ang people in the border area of Thailand, but the lack of citizenship of the Dara-ang still a posed a problem to the villagers.

In the third stage, the Royal Project continuously explored new ways and taught young outstanding villagers new planting methods and techniques. In this period, the Royal Project technicians had the closest relationship with the villagers. Some joint projects between the Royal Project and the villagers of Dara-ang were not particularly successful, and even caused financial losses for the Royal Project. Moreover, more and more Dara-ang had gradually turned away from opium production and began to participate in Royal Project. Some villagers joined the project actively and willingly, and others rather reluctantly. During this phase, the villagers became more dependent on the Royal Project for their survival, and the project began to limit their autonomy of land use.

In the fourth stage, the Royal Project significantly strengthened its control over villagers, and reduced their degree of freedom and flexibility. After the first two stages of establishment and exploration, the Royal Project gradually took shape and set up management methods for land planning and project development. Strict standards were set for land allocation, crop planting, and product acquisition. Due to the increasingly strict auditing standards of the royal project, villagers today can sell only high-quality crops to the Royal Project, while crops that do not meet the standards are rejected. However, the farmers can sell them independently to the market. After the establishment of the cooperative, a number of villagers have accumulated debts, and the income differs greatly across families. However, despite the restriction of land and civil rights, the villagers have found ways to adapt to their environment. While cooperating with the Royal Project, they are also renting land on the Myanmar side of the Thai-Myanmar border and constantly seeking other opportunities to make a living.

Above all, the Royal Project helped the mountain immigrants to adapt to a new life, contributed to the protection of the ecological environment, and helped replacing opium cultivation through cash crop cultivation. It further increased the income of the Dara-ang through engaging them in cash crop production, a transformation that had a great significance for their way of life. At the same time, through

negotiations, the Dara-ang people also influenced the Royal Project to some degree. Through their participation in the project, they were able to closely interact with Thai society and adapt to a new environment in the mountains.

Final reflections and positionality

In the following section, we (the two authors) will both present some final reflections on our positionality in the research process.

Zhou Xinyi

This was my first time to do field work overseas. Human beings are often afraid and uneasy of the unknown, for example, unknown places, languages and people. Before I visited the field site, I learned that I was going to a small village on the Thai-Myanmar border that used to grow opium and was located close to the Golden Triangle. This description undoubtedly increased my fear. I wondered what kind of place we were going to, and what kind of people were living in this village. Would it be chaotic and busy? Since the villagers are Dara-ang people, what are differences between them and Dara-ang in China?

As a sophomore from China, I had few opportunities to deal with border and immigration in the past, so I have never had similar experiences before. When I enter the lives of strangers who live in a place with unclear boundaries, and who speak a language I don't understand, it becomes very difficult to do field research. Although our tutors have given us a lot of guidance, and the translators made our stay more convenient, we still faced many difficulties during data collection. We became the "Chinese guests" in Baan Nor Lae.

What made me feel most helpless during my fieldwork overseas was the fact that I did not get much information about the field beforehand, so it was difficult for me to choose my research topic. Before I went to the field site, I learned only a little about the Royal Project from some reading materials. Based on my limited knowledge and my assumption about the field site, I prepared an outline of the study which roughly focused on how the local people participated in the Royal Project, and how the Royal Project affects the lives of the villagers.

In Nor Lae, we had a daily working routine. We introduce our name, age, and the reason and purpose of our visit to the people in the field. We explained that we are students from Yunnan University of China. While we were out in the fields taking pictures and talking about others, they were also watching us. When the

former village head learned that we were students, he told us that he is hoping that more and more people will get to know the living conditions of the Dara-ang in Baan Nor Lae, also from the perspective of students, so that the community will get more external support.

In the area of Doi Angkhang, Nor Lae is the only village that participates in the Royal Project without having rights to use land freely. In fact, the majority of the Dara-ang in Nor Lae do not have Thai citizenship, so they are not permitted to leave the area, and there is barely a way for them out of the Royal Project. The relationship between the Dara-ang and the Royal Project made me curious, and I wanted to understand more what makes this cooperation possible and how it limits the survival of these migrants in Thailand. For me, I cannot imagine a pink card in the context of China, i.e. a group of people who is living legally in a country, but who do not hold citizenship cards, or a country that has more than two kinds of ID cards. I was also curious whether the identity card and ownership of this kind of identity document are related to the Royal Project.

Sun Mingxuan

"We are Dara-ang people and want to be Thai."

I am a Chinese student who visited the Thai-Myanmar border for four days of fieldwork. In an interview with one of the villagers in Nor Lae, I was deeply impressed by his words, because they made me feel and understand the helpless situation of the Dara-ang. During these days of fieldwork, we learned from many villagers that the local Dara-ang do not have Thai identity cards, so they cannot enjoy the same rights and privileges as Thai citizens. We heard from our six interview partner that no-one of the first generation in Nor Lae holds Thai citizenship. Only a few members of the second generation have citizenship cards. Compared to this, my life is safe and stable. Thus, I often thought about what kind of life I would have without identity documents and land. I imagined that my life would be full of fear, sense of belonging, and uncertainty about my future.

It has been more than 40 years since the first group of ethnic Dara-ang ethnic have migrated from Myanmar to Thailand. A number of the younger Dara-ang villagers are born in Myanmar, but have been living in Thailand for a long time, others are born in Thailand. When I asked about a young Dara-ang villager who was born in Thailand if in his heart, he feels like a Burmese or a Thai, he said: "we often say we are Dara-ang, but we want to be Thai people. But if one day, Myanmar is able to provide us similar living condition as Thailand, I am willing to return". Although their parents have been living in Thailand for decades, the Thai government

does not recognize them as Thai citizens, and under the modern state system, they have no land, no identity documents, and they seem to have a limited sense of security and belonging. Therefore, their relatives and ethnic group members who are in the same situation as them seem to be particularly important for the Dara-ang villagers. In my opinion, they identify themselves much stronger with their own ethnic group than with the country. At present, the Nor Lae villagers are strongly attached to the Royal Project. The project has the right to allocate land to the villagers and also can take back it back any time, and at the same time, the villagers have no right to choose the crops for their plantations. The Nor Lae village residents can only sell crops with the highest quality to the Royal Projects. Thus, the Dara-ang villagers have little freedom of choice for their own space. In their daily interactions and negotiations, the relationship between the Royal Project and the villagers is not equal. In interviews, I could feel that the lack of citizenship and land makes the villagers passive. Some of the young people in Baan Nor Lae were born in Burma, others in Thailand. However, based on this, it should not be judged where they belong to. What they care most about is which country can provide them with a stable and content life. The elder Dara-ang villagers who have migrated from Burma to Thailand have experienced war, hunger, and poverty. In their perspective, the most basic needs in life, like enough food and proper clothes, are most important. The younger generation in Nor Lae has been living in a rather smooth and safe environment, but they wish to be able to enjoy material goods and to have access to better education and medical care.

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Tourism Transformation

Chiang Mai City, Chiang Mai Province

The Chinese tourism boom in Chiang Mai is partly attributable to the 2012 film *Lost in Thailand*, which was mostly filmed in the city. In 2017, the number of Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai reached 1,700,000 and some Chinese have taken advantage of the business opportunities that have emerged from explosive tourist growth. Tourism-related business operated by both Thai and Chinese entrepreneurs have emerged on the landscape; including real estate purchase and rental, hotels and resorts, restaurants, souvenir shops, entertainment parks and shopping venues to cater to these new tourists. Amid the changing landscape of tourism in Chiang Mai, it is important to engage with issues of how local people cope with such changes.

Advisor: Dr. Aranya Siriphon

Gazing upon Chiang Mai: The City in Chinese Tourist Representation and Imagination

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Abstract

A big leap in Chinese tourist visits to Chiang Mai was inspired by the movie *Lost in Thailand* (2012), filmed mostly in Thailand. In the seven years since, Chinese tourists have made a great contribution to the development of the tourism industry and Chiang Mai economy. Different types of tourist destinations as well as economic entities in the service sector have been built up in order to meet the demands of Chinese tourists. With the diversification of travel modes, Chinese tourists' imagination and expectations of Chiang Mai city are also diverse and varying. The main focus of this paper is to discuss how Chiang Mai is represented, the Chinese tourist "gaze" looking at Chiang Mai, and what influences the formation of their imagination and actual behaviors as well as the 'gap' between their expectation and realization.

Keywords: Chinese tourists, Chiang Mai, representation, imagination, tourist gaze

Introduction

For centuries, Chinese have been to travelling to Thailand for various reasons, such as trade and migration. It was not, however, until the implementation of the reform and opening policy of the Chinese government that the modern 'Chinese tourist' appeared in Thailand. In 1990, the Chinese government announced that Thailand was on a list of approved overseas destinations, with certain types of trips permitted (e.g. those who had families or relatives in Thailand could visit). Such limitations were canceled in 1995 and, from then on, Thailand became a tourist

destination for Chinese citizens. The 2012 movie *Lost in Thailand*, with many of its scenes shot in Thailand, made a great contribution to the Thai tourism industry. The movie became a hit in China and drove throngs of Chinese tourists to the kingdom. In 2013, more than 3 million Chinese tourists visited Thailand, bringing in more than 100 billion baht in tourism revenue. According to Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports, over 35 million foreign tourists visited Thailand in 2017. More than 9.8 million of them were from China, the highest proportion. Pongpanu Svetarundra, the permanent secretary of Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports, confirmed that in 2017 the greatest contribution to tourism in Thailand was still made by Chinese visitors. (Xinhuanet, 2010.01.16, para.1&3)

According to data from Korawan Sangkakorn (2013), modern Chinese tourists visiting Chiang Mai are 62 % women, and 37.5% men. Visitors under thirty accounted for 44.4% of the total number, those aged 31-40 totalled 27.4%, people 41-50 were 5.6%, and people over 51 accounted for 3.6%. The majority of tourists travelled with their families, friends or as couples; her results also showed the vast majority of tourists—96 percent—chose to travel freely, with only 4 percent with a tour group. Statistics from Thailand's tourism body differed, showing that Chinese tourists were more than 10 million in 2018, with a ratio of independent to group tourists of about 70:30 (Feature: Changing trend of Chinese tourists navigates Thailand's tourism development, 2019.07.09, para.14). Whatever the number, there is no doubt that Chinese tourists, especially younger Free Independent Tourists (FITs; the opposite of tour group travelers), have already become a prominent group in the touristic space of Thailand.

Chinese FITS as a family group in One Nimman

In recent years, when talking about Chinese tourists in Thailand, the role of social media is more significant than ever. For those who travel with groups, they often choose apps like Ctrip, the largest online travel agency (OTA) in China (CBInsights, 2017), to help book accommodation, transportation, package tours, corporate travel management, and more. However, for Chinese FITs, the app 小红书 (RED) and the tourist website *mafengwo.com* are two of the main channels through which they can collect travel tips and plan their travel schedule. Founded in 2013, 小红书 (RED) is an online tour guide mobile phone app and e-commerce platform for Chinese shoppers. Unlike other platforms, users of RED first focused on sharing overseas shopping experiences online. Later, information sharing about makeup, sports, domestic decoration, travel, hotels and restaurants appeared in RED, touching on almost every aspect of consumers' experiences. The website *mafengwo.com* was founded in 2006. It is an online platform where a vast number of travelers can share their stories and travel experiences. Also, people can collect information about hotels, restaurants and tourist spots from famous bloggers on the site.


Popular online travel platforms RED, mafengwo, Ctrip

"In his book *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry (1990) explains that the phenomenon of taking a tour affects the way in which geographical locations are seen" (Sumara, 1994, p.42). "Tourist gaze" is a key concept used to analyze questions of Chinese tourist practice researched and discussed in this paper. Essentially, the "gaze" refers to the perspective from which tourists imagine their destination. Connected with socio-economic background, the gaze has a great influence on the construction of tourists' imagination and expectations toward places, as well as their understanding of socially-created ideas in the context of tourism. At the same time, local people who perceive the common pattern of tourists' expectations will often "gaze back" and create/change things in order to meet the demands of tourists. For cities and areas where tourism acts as the backbone of local economy, this two-way gaze is related closely to social and cultural transformations.

Introduction of field sites

One Nimman: Strategically located on Nimmanhaemin Road, One Nimman fuses modernity with local culture through a selection of restaurants, art spaces, café and bars. Visitors find leading brands and independent shops selling design items crafted by local manufacturers (many handicrafts are made by ethnic groups from rural areas of northern Thailand). It is a place for tourism. Many tourists, including many from China, will visit this place when in Chiang Mai. A travel note which can be found on sohu.com (a famous Chinese website) describes One Nimman as "Chiang Mai city in miniature." Thus, if someone wants to research the representation of Chiang Mai city from the perspective of Chinese tourists, One Nimman is an ideal field site.

Maya Mall: Situated at the corner of Nimmanhaemin/Superhighway and Huay Kaew Road, Maya is one of the most conveniently located, compact shopping spaces in Chiang Mai city. For most Chinese tourists, it is widely known as a main shopping center in Chiang Mai, offering snacks, pharmacies, crafts, cosmetics, clothes, souvenirs, children's products, restaurants, and more.

Chinese tourists in Maya Mall

Skyline Adventure Zipline: Skyline Adventure is the longest and highest zip line in Chiang Mai. It offers tourists an outdoor adventure, an exciting experience as well as a great way to explore. It is located in a rural area of Chiang Mai, and it takes more than one hour to get there from the center of city by car.

Chinese FITs at Skyline

Doi Suthep: Overlooking Chiang Mai city from the mountaintop, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep is a famous tourist spot located on the mountainside, and is one of northern Thailand's most sacred temples. Going by taxi from CMU to Doi Suthep takes about 20-30 minutes. There are tourists from different countries, and the proportion of Chinese tourists is much less than in One Nimman or Maya Mall. There are both Chinese FITs and guided tour groups on Doi Suthep, in roughly equal numbers.

Warorot Market: Situated in the heart of Chiang Mai, *Kad Luang* or Warorot Market is considered the most important market in the region. It is not merely a market for trade, but also reflects the diversity of local life, as well as folk art and culture. It began to be known by Chinese tourists from *Lost in Thailand*, as some scenes were filmed in this market. During the last two years, there has been a decline in Chinese tourist groups and an increase in Chinese FIT visitors.

Research questions

1. What is the representation of Chiang Mai city as received by Chinese tourists, and what factors affect its formation?
2. What is the imagined and expected city of Chiang Mai, and how does that imagination influence Chinese tourists' ideal modes of travel, as well as their actual feelings and behaviors?

Methodology

Interviews: This is the main approach applied during my research. To know how Chiang Mai city is imagined and experienced by Chinese tourists, it necessary to listen to their opinions and what they have to say. Direct interviews to collect people's ideas directly and easily from tourists was the most effective method, so I did not receive any help from the local guide in advance. I looked for interviewees and did on the spot informal interviews, and had conversations with strangers who were often busy sightseeing. Although it was the best way, sometimes I would still encounter difficulties during the interview.

Observation: Sometimes tourists didn't want to answer questions because they were shopping or sightseeing (especially people on package tours following their tour guide). For some of these cases, it was best to change from interview to observation. Careful observation could reveal some interesting behaviors and practices in certain places.

Tourists from different social backgrounds hold different ideas and perspectives on the same subjects. The social context of different groups (like gender, age, income, FITs or group tourists) must be considered in analyzing the diversity of people's impressions towards Chiang Mai city.

Findings and analysis

The representation of Chiang Mai

In representations of Chiang Mai, there exists a common pattern: most Chinese tourists like to use the adjective *youxian* (悠闲的) and the noun *manshenghuo* (慢生活) to describe their imagination and feelings about this city. *Youxian* means relaxing, leisure, and at ease; *manshenghuo* means "slow life" where people can live a simple life as they wish and don't have any particular work to finish. From this common pattern, the city of Chiang Mai—a well-known tourist destination—represents a temporary retreat, especially for tourists who work and live a fast-paced life in China. People come to Chiang Mai for the chance to relax and admire the beauty of well-preserved nature, which is rarely seen in big modern cities in China.

Chinese tourists' general impression of Chiang Mai also shows a diversity beneath this common pattern. For instance, two young ladies at One Nimman (aged between 20-30) told me that they think Chiang Mai is a *wenyide* (文艺的) city (*wenyide* is an adjective describing a romantic place with cultural presence); another woman of around 30-40 from Guangzhou considered Chiang Mai as a *xiaozi* city (many Chinese associate the middle class with houses and cars, and *xiaozi* with candlelight dinners and a glass of wine); a Chinese high school teacher around 35-45 years old regarded Chiang Mai as "a city of *wats*." He said that he is very interested in Buddhist culture and spent three days visiting temples and museums. Some parents also mentioned that Chiang Mai has many international schools that provide high-quality education for their children. A man from Beijing around 60-70 on Doi Suthep said that this is a perfect place for retirement because of the fresh air.

Tourists who have different economic backgrounds and social identities often look for different things from the same location, and that's how they *create* a special Chiang Mai of their own, based on the diverse environment, the various types of tourist locales in the city, and their own individual demands.

Social media plays a very important role in the formation of their representation. From interviewee's responses, FITs (Free Independent Tourists) get much information from the app '小红书 (RED)' and the website *mafengwo.com*—two

platforms where bloggers write and add pictures to share their experiences and their feelings towards a certain place. From discussion, some Chiang Mai locals who work in tourism still attribute how Chinese tourists think about Chiang Mai mainly to the movie *Lost in Thailand* (2012). This film raised the number of Chinese tourists dramatically 5-6 years ago. Now, however, when I asked Chinese tourists "where did you get information that formed your impression of Chiang Mai," none of them mentioned this movie. Instead, most young people, as well as middle-aged tourists, said that they found key ideas from social media. Older people linked Chiang Mai with Teresa Teng, a Taiwanese singer who was well-known all over Asia in the 1980s, and died in Chiang Mai in 1995. Social media has, to some extent, taken the place of the movie *Lost in Thailand* and become the main way that Chinese tourists discover Chiang Mai.

As an independent platform for tourist information-sharing, social media has a very strong influence. On these platforms, information is more concentrated and colorful than ever before. Among numerous tips from both users and staff writers, those with high hits counts are highlighted and read by many who use the same online platform. It follows that tourists engaged with the online platforms hold diverse but roughly similar ideas about the representation of Chiang Mai city.

Before and after: the gap between imagination and experience

Interviewees' responses to the question "what was your imagination of Chiang Mai before you came here" were various, but with generally good expectations. Their answers were: leisure and relaxing; a safe and tranquil town; and special for its distinct culture, different from other cities like Bangkok and Pattaya. Before coming to Chiang Mai, Chinese tourists begin to construct their imagination of Chiang Mai city in two main ways. First, by collecting travel tips online. Young people often use popular apps and online sources to search for information on different places, compare suggestions from online bloggers, and decide where to visit. Through this process, their imagination of Chiang Mai city is constructed.

For example, every Chinese tourist I interviewed (except two older women) mentioned using *mafengwo.com*. The website describes Chiang Mai as "a tranquil town for relaxation" where tourists can experience the "slow life" (慢生活) in the city just by spending an idle afternoon in a small coffee house or enjoying special snacks and fruits in the local market. Another genre of notes on *mafengwo.com* provides practical information about accommodation, transportation, and recommendations. One post on "the top 6 cannot-miss spots of Chiang Mai" has more than 600,000 views and introduces places like Nimmanhaemin Road, Wat

Chedi Luang, Doi Suthep, Warorot Market, Chiang Mai University and Tha Phae Gate (Mafengwo Editorial, 2018.03.02). These online notes depict Chiang Mai as a colorful destination that can fulfill a variety of needs.

The second way that tourists' imagination of Chiang Mai is built is by word of mouth, via friends and relatives who have already been there. During fieldwork, I met many FITs who came to visit a certain place because it was highly recommended by their friends. For instance, a young couple at Skyline Adventure Zipline said their entire trip was "totally a direct copy" of their friends' trip to Chiang Mai. They even used the same local driver that their friends hired.

However, my research showed that many Chinese tourists changed their attitude about Chiang Mai after visiting many places in real life. A side-by-side comparison (based on opinions I collected from many interviews) between people's imagination and their actual feelings is below:

Imagination before visit	**Actual feelings after visit**
Cheap	Some thought that, except for food, medicine and some cosmetics, general prices for commodities, accommodation and transportation were not as low as they imagined. One woman (about 30-40, from Tianjin) at Maya mall said that clothes on sale were 'neither cheap enough nor good enough.' 'In my place, we have clothes of better price as well as better quality', she said.
Quiet and peaceful	Traffic jams are common in the city, and the streets are noisy. Large numbers of tourists make the city feel crowded. It is hard to experience the tranquil life that existed in their imagination.
Well-preserved environment with lush green vegetation and fresh air	The smell of auto exhaust made people, especially older people from coastal provinces like Guangdong and Zhejiang, very annoyed. One woman (about 60-70 from Guangdong) complained about the awful smoke of the red cars at least three times. She said when they took the red car to Doi Suthep, the auto exhaust made her feel nauseous. But in general, tourists were satisfied with the natural environment, especially in rural tourist places like Doi Suthep and Skyline Adventure Zipline.

Imagination before visit	Actual feelings after visit
A good place for relaxation	Most FITs and tourist groups said that their trip was fully arranged in advance, and none of them said that a small coffee house or a local park was on their 'to do list'. Some parents even complained that their original purpose of the trip—to relax in a city famous for 慢生活 (slow life)—wasn't doable because they had to take their children and family to visit tourist spots every day. They felt if they didn't visit them, it would be as if they had not been in Chiang Mai.
Rich in religious artifacts and culture	Many Chinese tourists I interviewed this time said that they wanted to visit or had already visited some wat in Chiang Mai (a middle-aged Taiwanese man at Doi Suthep told me he had already visited four *wat* in two days, and the main purpose of his trip is to 'feel the atmosphere of Theravada'). They said the tranquil atmosphere and devout monks could match their imaginary image of Theravada Buddhism, as well as how they imagined Chiang Mai.
Famous for its night markets	All the tourists I interviewed at the Sunday street market said they found the market nothing special. Many only bought snacks and drinks. They seldom stopped at stalls for long time, and some seemed very disappointed and impatient, asking questions like 'how long to get to the end of this market' and 'when can we go back to the hotel'.

About half of the interviewees felt satisfied in general with their visit and said that they did enjoy the "slow life" of Chiang Mai. These people were mainly younger tourists. The other half of interviewees described Chiang Mai city as 'undeveloped', 'crowded' and 'messy'. They said that the low-rise buildings, narrow streets, polluted air and tourist crowds made them feel disappointed and ruined their image of Chiang Mai, to some extent. These people were mainly middle-aged or older people from big, developed cities in China. One middle-aged woman complained that, compared with European cities like Rome and Paris, Chiang Mai is 'not worth visiting at all', because it is less developed than even the city where she lives.

Socio-economic background and other factors like gender and age also influence Chinese tourists' perspectives from which they gaze at Chiang Mai, and this certainly adds to the gap or tension between expectations and reality. The construction of imagination and expectation, as mentioned previously, is influenced by online bloggers and the labels they give to different destinations. For example, when asked how they formed their imagination of Chiang Mai, three young women in One Nimman all said that their general ideas (totally they mentioned 'slow life,' 'leisure',

'文艺的' and 'rose of northern Thailand') came from expressions written in some of the most widely-read notes on *mafengwo.com*. Meanwhile, tourists from the most developed cities in China, who have traveled to many places around the world, usually held higher expectations, and younger, more curious tourists had lower expectations. Based on existing ideas and diverse expectations, they gaze at Chiang Mai from different angles. To what extent they find satisfaction during their trip, then, depends on the interaction between their gaze and reality. If reality can match or even exceed their expectation—like some younger women who enjoyed themselves very much in Maya Mall and Warorot—there will be little "gap" between imagination and experienced impressions. But, if the reality cannot reach their expectations—like the women complaining about crowds at the night market or the auto exhaust on the street—tensions and gaps become visible.

Young tourists in Chiang Mai: do they become 'cultural learners?'

One of the stereotypes of Chinese tourists is of powerful buyers who are interested in nothing but shopping. It seems that wherever Chinese tourists go, one of their main purposes is to buy stuff, including popular brands, goods and products which are cheaper and better than in China, souvenirs, gifts and so on.

But this mode of travel is changing among the younger generation of Chinese tourists. According to Korawan Sangkakorn (2013), in terms of entertainment consumption, new experiential tourism—such as learning to cook Thai food (10.9% of tourists took a cooking course) and learning Thai language (8.9% of tourists spent at least some time learning some Thai)—emerged in the consumption patterns of 2013. During the fieldwork, many young FITs told me that they didn't want to shop in Chiang Mai. They think they can easily get many things they want online, so there is no necessity to spend travel time on shopping. Instead, they prefer to use their time to visit natural landscapes or historical sites. From their own words, they have a strong wish to experience local culture. For example, a Chinese teacher who works in Malaysia said that, before his trip, he had already researched the history of Doi Suthep from the Internet as well as books; he then came to visit the wat in person, "in order to learn more about this place and its culture."

Many of these "cultural learners" put this wish to experience local culture to practice. For example, two groups of FITs I observed brought flowers and incense to offer in the temple, which they bought at the temple entrance. Unlike western tourists who usually just walked around the temple and briefly looked at the sculptures and architecture, these Chinese FITs prayed in front of the Buddha statue and made donations, like local people. According to a tour guide at Doi Suthep, even most

tourist groups'"must visit" list have one or two shopping centers. In fact, Chiang Mai has many places, like Doi Suthep and Elephant Conservation Community, which meet the demand for "spending more time with nature and local culture." I observed many young tourists on package tours listening carefully to their guide's explanations, and they even raised relevant questions, such as "do the local people still use this kind of traditional tool in their life now?" Some parents also asked "why do people use the Chinese name *shuanglong* (two dragons) for this Thai *wat*?" with their children.

Two Chinese travel groups at Doi Suthep.
Tourists are listening carefully to their tour guide's introduction

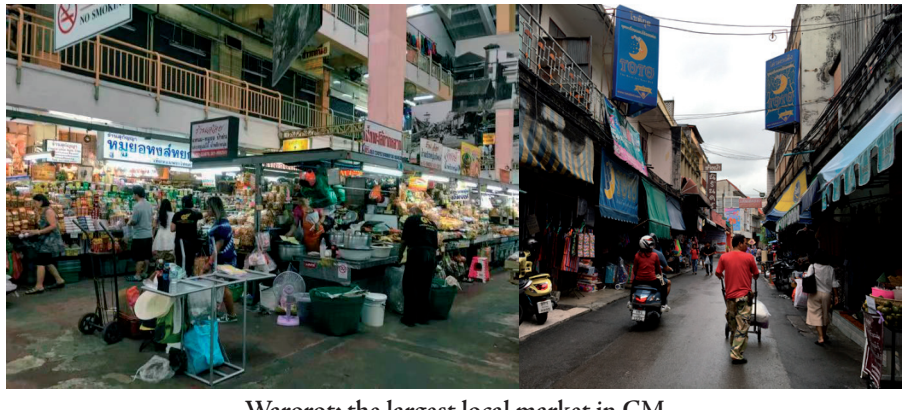
This phenomenon merits more analysis. For example, when asked why they chose to visit places like Doi Suthep or Skyline—examples of 'historical sites' or 'natural landscape'—some FITs would simply answer: "Isn't this place well-known to all? It is a very famous check-in spot (*wang hong dian* 网红点), so we will definitely come to *daka* (打卡, or clock in)." It seems popularity and reputation drive young tourists to visit these places. We may say that their visit is the result of similar mindsets—rather practical and influenced by the same cultural background—as well as information they collect through social media. However, their behavior shows they are trying to adapt their trip to a 'cultural' approach, on the way towards constructing a new traveling mode. This new mode contains less consumption activities, but more chances to experience nature and engage local culture.

Two cities: representations based on touristic space

For many Chinese tourists who travel to Chiang Mai, 'Warorot' is known as the name of a large local market, as well as a popular tourist locale. In Thai language, people like to call this area *kad luang* meaning 'big market'. At One Nimman, I interviewed a middle-aged woman from Shanghai about her impressions of Chiang

Mai. She emphasized her bad feelings about Warorot market twice, saying that the dirty floor, the messy stalls and the poor quality of goods were far from her expectation. She stayed there for just a few minutes and left quickly. Other interviewees I met at Warorot market held similar opinions. Except for a younger woman (about 20-25) who thought the market was fantastic for its various food products, older and middle-aged tourists from China all thought it was not worth visiting. Some of them came for cheap souvenirs to give their friends after going back to China. Some of them simply wanted to check-in (*daka* 打卡) to this popular locale. An elderly woman, together with her middle-aged daughter, told me that they paid a visit to the market 'just because it is located in Thailand'. If the location of Warorot were in China, they would definitely not be interested at all.

However, from the interview with the manager of *Kad Luang*, the quality of products is as good as in 7 Eleven or other stores outside the market, or even those on Nimmanhaemin Road. Commodities in *Kad Luang* are often sold wholesale to retailers who own shops or stalls in tourist areas, so the market's prices are lower, in general. With a history of more than 100 years, this market serves not only tourists, but also local people. Goods needed in regular life, from vegetables to diapers, can all be found in *Kad Luang*. Compared with other tourist locales, the proportion of tourists also seems lower. Stalls inside the market usually close after 18:00. In the evening many vendors set up roadside food stalls serving locals and tourists until nearly midnight. Then, in the very late hours until dawn, small mobile vendors come to buy cheap provisions sold by wholesale sellers, which they then drive around the city to sell at construction sites, to various communities, and in other underserved areas. The cycle of the market in one day does not stop, but tourists see only one small part of it.



Warorot: the largest local market in CM

Warorot market is just a typical example. In fact, due to the development of tourism, Chiang Mai city has already been split into two kinds of life: one for tourists, and one for locals. Considerable overlap does exist between these two lives, but through formation of representation and imagination, it seems that, to a large extent, Chinese tourists' gaze of Chiang Mai is restricted to the "tourist city" designed and built up by the tourism industry and their own expectations and constructions. This is most obvious in that Chinese tourists are very concentrated in specific places. This limited gaze, however, exerts a strong influence on the expectations of Chiang Mai, as well as on the understanding of key concepts like "relaxation" and "local market"—concepts that play an extremely important role in the process of constructing tourists' own ideas about the city of Chiang Mai.

Another example of how tourists gaze at the city is the story of one middle-aged woman from Shenzhen, who was planning to visit Baan Tawai, a village known as "the source of Chiang Mai handicrafts." However, her driver misunderstood her words and took her to Baan Kang Wat instead. Baan Kang Wat is an artist community where many young artists sell products to tourists. She then went to Baan Tawai again and said the number of tourists there was much lower than at Baan Kang Wat. She had a strong feeling that "these two places are completely different, although they are both marketplaces for handmade crafts" and she knew that the closer, younger Baan Kang Wat is mainly for tourists, "not a good place to view the real life of local craftsmen." If she had never been to Baan Tawai, she would be left with the image of "the handicraft center of Chiang Mai" being what she saw and felt in Baan Kang Wat—a tourist spot, constructed and beautified to reach tourist expectations. However—unlike many Chinese tourists—she was eager to see local life outside of 'Chiang Mai as tourist city' and insisted on fulfilling her wish. Her experiences and feelings towards Chiang Mai are thus very different from others.

Conclusions

In the eyes of Chinese tourists, Chiang Mai is presented as "a city for relaxation and recreation." Many visitors use the words "relaxing," "leisure" and "slow life" to describe their imagination of Chiang Mai. The main way they form these imagined expectations is through travel tips, through popular online sources, and their own friends' word of mouth. Besides the influence of social media, this formation of imagined representations is linked to their lives in China. Tourists from middle-class families in big modern cities like Guangzhou and Hangzhou usually live a fast-paced urban life. Their visit to Chiang Mai, to some extent, can be regarded as "a temporary escape/break" (Wang Ning, 1999) from their daily routine. This also

helps explain why these people often mention "relaxation" and "slow life" when talking about how they imagine Chiang Mai.

Imagination is a key factor that drives Chinese tourists to choose Chiang Mai as a destination. For many young FITs, other factors like price (a trip to Chiang Mai costs less than a trip to Europe) and location (it takes only a few hours to fly from China to Chiang Mai; much less than to Europe) are also very significant. Nonetheless, the *imagined* city of Chiang Mai has become a persuasive force, especially when choosing between Chiang Mai and other Thai destinations, like Bangkok or Pattaya. Young Chinese tourists' ideal mode of travel is changing in general. Instead of a traditional shopping and eating trip, they want to experience something "different." Compared with other tourist cities in Thailand, Chiang Mai provides an ideal space where nature is well preserved, religious life is tranquil, and culture is diverse. More importantly, the tourism industry has created certain areas that match the imaginations and expectations of Chiang Mai city—small coffee houses famous for 'slow life' or *xiaozi*, and night markets. It is easy for young FITs to satisfy their taste for the exquisite and unique, which the tourist city of Chiang Mai offers them.

However, we see gaps between imagined and actual feelings. The main reasons why some Chinese tourists feel disappointed seem twofold: one is related to each individual's social and economic background. Nearly all the interviewees who complained about the "undeveloped city" were older or middle-aged people from developed cities in China. They expressed their annoyance with narrow streets and the smell of traffic fumes, for the world they live in before visiting Chiang Mai is quite developed, full of skyscrapers and symbols of modernity. There exists some unevenness in their mind, and they find reality mismatching their expectations. Also, there is the tourist 'gaze,' influenced by individuals' different socio-economic backgrounds. This has a strong influence on tourists' understanding of the relationship between their own expectations and socially-created tourist themes, like 'relaxation' and 'local market.' This understanding is paradoxical: what tourists hope to experience may not always be what they will actually enjoy. Just as in the example of Warorot market, people come to visit because of its attractive title: 'largest local market in the city.' But some of them feel unhappy, finding the market messy and dirty, not reaching their expectations. In fact, what makes them unsatisfied is exactly the "real" appearance of the local market, which was what they imagined they were eager to see.

The perspective from which Chinese tourists gaze at Chiang Mai can influence not only their cognitive construction of the city—by asking themselves the question 'What do I want to find in Chiang Mai'—but also their behavior during their trip.

People who expect to learn more about local culture act as "cultural learners" (although they may do this unconsciously); tourists who view Chiang Mai from the angle of heritage tourism spend more time visiting *wats* or other historical sites; those interested in authenticity go beyond the touristic city and try to find the "real" life of local people. Different tourists find different treasures in the same city. Their final experience of Chiang Mai must pass through the double filters of constructed imagination and the lens of their real-time gaze.

Reflections on positionality and limitations

As a young Chinese, I am familiar with the cultural background of tourists who have the same nationality and live in the same era as myself. For example, when they mentioned the app '小红书 (RED)' and the travel website *mafengwo.com*, I knew what they were talking about at once; I also use these two online platforms to collect travel tips before traveling.

As a Chinese person doing short-term fieldwork in Thailand, I also considered myself as a tourist, for we all stay temporarily in a foreign country and interact with local life and society. Sometimes I compare my own feelings or ideas with the tourists I met to find something different or in common, and this kind of thinking also affects my interpretation of what the interviewees said.

As a young apprentice anthropologist, each time I started a conversation with interviewees, I would introduce myself as a college student studying social science. After knowing who I am, some of the interviewees showed kindness and support, while others would either refuse to answer my questions or answer in a perfunctory way, making it hard for me to get detailed information. The positionality of being a research student, on one hand, helped me get closer with some interviewees; for others it limited my ability to get information as some interviewees thought helping me with my research would waste their precious travel time.

This time we only had five days for the fieldwork, which prevented me from doing a better job. The data I collected is far from enough. A lack of theoretical knowledge was also a limitation. Thus, some analysis/interpretation of the data in this paper may be superficial.

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Local Adaptability in the Chiang Mai Tourism Market: Learning and Using Chinese Language

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Abstract

Starting in 1988, Thailand began welcoming Chinese tourists, and since that time Chinese tourist arrivals has continuously grown. After the release of the film *Lost in Thailand* (2012), a new wave of Chinese tourists began pouring into Chiang Mai. Chinese tourists have become some of the most important consumers of Chiang Mai's tourism market. From the changing landscape of tourism in Chiang Mai, the challenge for local people is how they negotiate and adapt to such changes. In this context, it is now very common for locals working in the Chiang Mai tourism market to learn and use Chinese. Based on an investigation into learning and use of Chinese by people in the local tourism market, this paper attempts to investigate the adaptability of tourism workers in Chiang Mai to these changes.

Keywords: tourism, adaptability, Chiang Mai, Chinese tourists, Chinese language

Introduction

In 1988, Thailand was among the very first foreign countries that the Chinese government granted permission to its people to visit (Korawan, 2013). Beginning in 1990, Chinese citizens were also allowed to travel to Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand for family visits (Arita, Croix & Mak, 2012). Since then, Thailand has witnessed an increasing number of Chinese tourists, year after year. Tourism is one of the pillar industries of the national economy of Thailand, and in recent years, the number of foreign tourists visiting Thailand has remained high.

Chiang Mai is one of Thailand's top destinations. As a well-known Southeast Asian tourist destination, Chiang Mai attracts tourists from all over the world. In 2012, some scenes of the movie *Lost in Thailand* were filmed at locations in Chiang Mai. Afterwards, Chinese tourists began to pour into Chiang Mai, based on the very high popularity of the film in China. According to Korawan (2013), this new group of visitors began rapidly exploring Chiang Mai. Chinese tourists became important consumers of Chiang Mai's tourism industry and contributed greatly to Chiang Mai's tourist economy. Now, on the streets of Chiang Mai, Chinese characters are seen very frequently, and it is not surprising that local retailers or scenic spot staff communicate with Chinese tourists in Chinese. Learning and using Chinese has become a common phenomenon in Chiang Mai.

Doi Suthep; many Chinese tourists in the Chiang Mai tourism market

Through the investigation of learning and use of Chinese by local tourism workers, this paper discusses the adaptability of people—especially those working in the Chiang Mai tourism market—to the changes in the local tourism landscape.

According to Martin (2012), adaptability is the active regulation of an individual to evince enhanced outcomes. Adaptability is specifically a human characteristic and shows free will, conscious choice, and application of skills, effort and thought. The learning and use of Chinese in the Chiang Mai tourism market reflects

adaptability well. According to a recent report on the website of Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports, in the first half of 2019, Thailand received 19.6 million foreign tourists and, although mainland Chinese tourist numbers fell, China is still Thailand's largest source of foreign tourists (2019).

A large number of Chinese tourists who come to Chiang Mai cannot speak English well, and a good number not at all. Nonetheless, local people hope that Chinese customers can bring them economic benefit. Learning and using Chinese is an adaptation of local people to the changes in the tourism landscape, and a result of the growing economic status of Chinese tourists. In this process, individuals and organizations use different strategies for learning and using Chinese. At the same time, the Chiang Mai tourism market has always had the participation of Chinese businessmen, and they too are adapting to the large number of Chinese tourist arrivals in Chiang Mai.

Methodology

I had only five days of fieldwork in Chiang Mai, and the short time limited deep investigation. Also, because most of my field sites were in business districts, tourist attractions, tourism projects and local markets in Chiang Mai, and most of my interviews were with Thai people who are in contact with Chinese tourists, so it was difficult for me to collect data from other groups related to my topic, such as from Thai government offices. Effective data collection methods that I used included key informant interviews, informal discussions with Thai tourism workers, and field observations.

The study area was in Chiang Mai, Thailand, the city where I trained to do fieldwork. In preparation for the fieldwork, my team was given the theme "Tourism and Impacts," and through their arrangements I visited several field sites in five days. These field sites represent some part of Chiang Mai's tourism market, and Chinese tourists are important customers in these areas.

Survey time	**Field site**	**Main tourist activity**	**Remark**
9 August (all day)	One Nimman; Nimmanhemin Road; Maya mall	shopping	located in Chiang Mai urban area
10 August (afternoon)	Doi Suthep	sightseeing	mainly in and near Shuanglong Temple
10 August (towards evening)	Chiang Mai University	sightseeing	
11 August (before noon)	skyline adventure zipline, Bann Pa Pan	Tourism project (skyline); sightseeing	located on the outskirts of Chiang Mai, Doi Saket
11 August (evening)	Sunday Street Market	shopping	located in the Chiang Mai urban area, Ta Pae gate,
12 August (before noon)	Baan Tawai,	sightseeing; shopping.	Located in Chiang Mai, Hangdong District
12 August (afternoon)	Borsang Handicrafts Center	sightseeing; shopping.	Located in Chiang Mai, Sankampaeng District
13 August (before noon)	Chinatown	shopping	mainly in Warorot Market

My teaching assistants and Sino-Thai translators gave me a lot of help in my field work. Most of the interviewees spoke Thai, so the translators helped me conduct the interviews.

Survey time	Field site	interviewee	selection
9 August (all day)	One Nimman; Nimmanhemin Road; Maya mall	more than 20 Thais a family from China	shop assistant or shopkeeper Chinese tourist
10 August (afternoon)	Doi Suthep	5 Thais	shopkeeper
10 August (toward evening)	Chiang Mai University	2 Thais	staff of Visit CMU
11 August (before noon)	Skyline Adventure Zipline, Bann Pa Pan	2 Thais 1 Chinese	boss(1), staff(5) tourist
11 August (evening)	Sunday Street Market	3 Thais	shopkeeper
12 August (before noon)	Baan Tawai	2 Thais 1 Chinese	Shopkeeper (also handicraftsmen)
12 August (afternoon)	Borsang Handicrafts Center	3 Thais	shop assistant or shopkeeper
13 August (before noon)	Chinatown (Warorot Market)	7 Thais	shop assistant or shopkeeper Manager(2)

My interviewees were shop owners, shop assistants, mobile vendors, the management team of Warorot market, and other relevant tourist workers in Chiang Mai who have learned some Chinese language or have Chinese tourist customers. I wanted to focus on the learning and using of Chinese in the Chiang Mai tourism market, and interviewing these people was a good approach. At the same time, during my field research, these people were also the easiest to reach. There was usually no appointment with my interviews. I choose suitable subjects on-site during the field work.

In addition, in-depth and comprehensive observation was also an important part of my field investigation, but many times my observation was very short, and it was difficult to make a comprehensive observation of a shop or tourist site.

Research questions

1. How do service workers in the Chiang Mai tourism market learn and use Chinese?
2. How do people in the Chiang Mai tourism market exercise adaptability to negotiate changes in the tourism landscape through the use of Chinese language?

Positionality

I did this fieldwork during my summer school in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand. As an undergraduate majoring in ethnology in Yunnan University, this field investigation was good field work training for me, and also a great challenge. I needed to overcome my own lack of experience and language barriers. I went into the field investigation under the leadership of the translator, explained who I was with the interviewees, and observed how Thai people working in Chiang Mai tourism have learned and used Chinese from the perspective of a ethnology student.

From just five days of field data, it is unrealistic to discuss all the issues in the Chiang Mai tourism market. Most of my interviews were with Thai people working in the Chiang Mai tourism market, and they preferred to answer my questions from an economic standpoint, which may limit a more comprehensive analysis. My identity as a foreign Chinese asking questions about Chinese also affects the accuracy of field data, and the interviewees may not want to tell me what they really think.

Findings

Chinese language learning and use in the Chiang Mai tourism market

Chinese characters in shops and at tourist attractions

Chinese characters are widely used in places where Chinese tourists most often visit, such as business districts and popular tourist attractions. Using Chinese in these conspicuous places allows Chinese tourists to get the information they want from tourism service workers quickly. Compared with learning to speak Chinese, the use of Chinese characters on signs or menus does not take a long time to use—most Thai workers who interact with Chinese tourists use online tools to translate

and print the Chinese written language. In the Chiang Mai tourism market, Thais will use written Chinese to attract Chinese tourists per the existing demand.

Business districts

One Nimman, Nimmanhemin Road and Maya Mall, are tourist business districts, where handicrafts, makeup, skin care products, luxury goods, local snacks and so on are widely available for sale. Signposts in One Nimman, ATM machines, digital billboards, and outdoor signage of restaurants in the area all have obvious explanations of discounts, products, and location information in Chinese. Menus, price lists, product signs and so on inside shops also have Chinese translation for tourists. Sometimes there will be some irregular use or mis-translations. Written Chinese translations sometimes have both traditional Chinese characters as well as simplified characters; it is unclear if Thai tourism workers know the difference.

In the Sunday Street Market and Chinatown, there are not as many Chinese characters as in One Nimman, Nimmanhemin Road and Maya Mall. Mobile vendors who sell in the Sunday Walking Street Market and in the Chinatown area use Chinese characters rarely, but some can be seen in shops. The goods preferred by Chinese tourists are marked with names and prices in Chinese, and there are also simple Chinese words in advertising, such as 手工制作 (shǒugōng zhì zuò) or "hand-made".

One Nimman; The use of Chinese characters in business districts

Popular tourist attractions and sites

Doi Suthep is a popular tourist attraction in Chiang Mai. There is a long set of steps from the front gate to top, where the monastery is located. Many Chinese characters can be seen along the way, including at the entrance to Shuanglong Temple (Doi Suthep Temple) and on some sculptures and buildings inside. The written Chinese here tells tourists matters needing their attention while visiting the temple, and is also on written fortunes that visitors receive after reciting prayers.

Skyline Adventure Zipline is the longest zipline in Thailand and is a popular destination for Chinese tourists visiting Chiang Mai. There are many Chinese banners in its visitors' sitting area and some Chinese New Year-related decorations, such as written goodwill wishes for the Spring Festival, and red lanterns.

Baan Tawai is a village that produces and sells handicrafts. There were fewer written Chinese language signs here because of the lower number of Chinese tourists. It is not as well-known to Chinese visitors, and goods produced here are sold in other markets around Chiang Mai. The Borsang Handicrafts Center receives some Chinese tour group visits, so some signs introducing various goods in Chinese were visible here.

The basic function of written Chinese language in the Chiang Mai tourism market is to facilitate basic information for Chinese tourists. The written Chinese is mostly for instruction and explanation. The frequency with which written Chinese appears in different places is related to the number of Chinese tourists and the goods; when the customers are mostly Chinese, or some property of the goods is not immediately understood by Chinese tourists, Chinese writing emerges to explain.

Chinese language learning in the Chiang Mai tourism market: individuals and organizations

Individuals

Most of the interviewees said their Chinese teachers were Chinese tourists, and they learned some simple Chinese in the process of buying and selling with tourists over time.

A middle-aged woman who works at a dried fruit store in Maya mall said she could communicate with customers in basic Chinese. She has worked at Maya mall for more than four years, learning Chinese by accumulating the meaning of some words. She shared her learning method:

> I hear some words they say, write them down, and then remember them. I'll ask my customers later if they know this word. Slowly I can accumulate some simple words. Mainly with tourists, but also with college students, I learn a word a day. For example, the Chinese eat durian and say it is very *tian* (sweet). I don't know what *tian* means. Some college students come over. They can speak both Chinese and English. I will ask them in English what is the meaning of *tian* in Chinese.

The owner of a fresh juice store on Doi Suthep took the initiative to make a list of Chinese fruit names by using Google translate after a large number of Chinese tourists began coming to Doi Suthep. She began to learn some simple Chinese from these tourists. If the tourists often mentioned the names of certain fruits, she

could remember them, such as *ping guo* (apple). She also learned *jia bing* (with ice), *bu jia bing* (no ice), *shao bing* (less ice), and *yi dian* (a little ice).

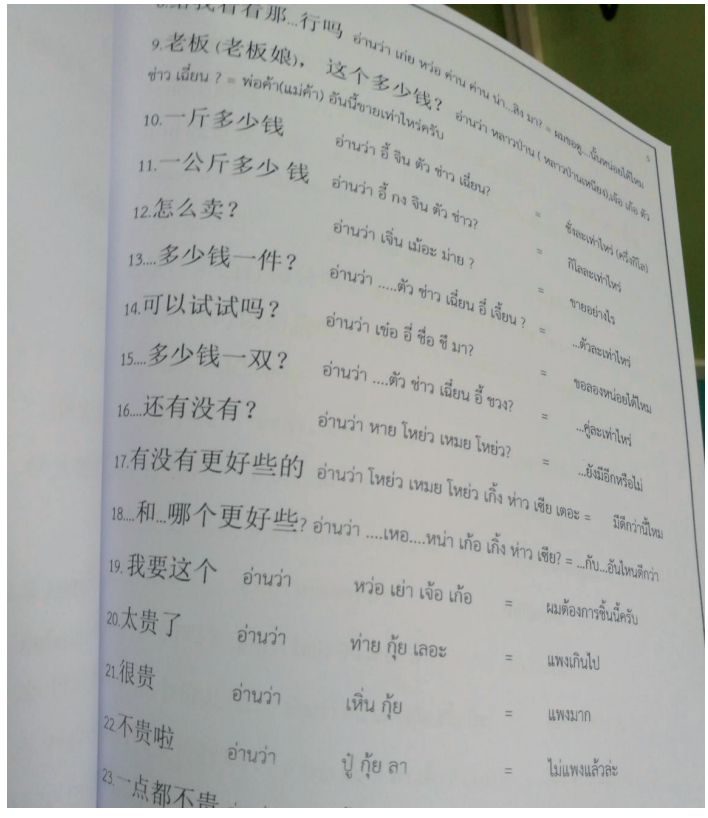
Some interviewees said they would learn Chinese from others, such as tour guides, nearby shopkeepers, or from Chinese friends. A young female shopkeeper at the Sunday Street market said that, in addition to learning Chinese from tourists, she also learned Chinese from many of her Chinese friends, who rent her property and live in Chiang Mai. Some interviewees who were just learning Chinese didn't hide that they were practicing pronunciation of Chinese words, and asked us how to pronounce some. A female shopkeeper who has been selling on the Sunday Street for just three months asked the translator how to say "I made it (the goods) myself" in Chinese at the end of the interview.

Organizations

Some interviewees in One Nimman, Visit CMU, Skyline Adventure Zipline and Warorot Market indicated that they had learned Chinese under the guidance of teachers. Some managers of shopping malls or projects offered free spoken Chinese training, and required or encouraged their employees to participate in these courses, usually teaching Chinese related to their work.

A clerk at a dried fruit store in One Nimman said some employees take a Chinese language training course once a week to learn what they need when selling their products. A driver at Visit CMU (Chiang Mai University's guided tour for Chinese tourists) said he studied Chinese for three months, learning about tourist pick-up, tour time, and so on before working.

The boss of Skyline Adventure Zipline has higher Chinese requirements for his employees, especially the guides in charge of the zipline, for safety reasons.



Warorot Market; Some Chinese content taught in free Chinese classes

His employees who apply to become guides need to be trained by teachers and have simple tests occasionally. In addition to learning Chinese from teachers and tourists, some employees also learn Chinese on the Internet, for example, by watching Chinese instructional videos from YouTube and Douyin.

Unlike Skyline, the free Chinese classes introduced by Warorot Market managers are not mandatory. The boss of Warorot Market mentioned that the market needed a spoken Chinese teacher to the local government, so they set up a free Chinese class in Warorot Market. The manager encouraged Warorot Market merchants to learn Chinese, but there is no mandatory requirement.

Whether individuals or organizations are making an effort to learn Chinese, the content of learning is usually spoken Chinese that can be applied in practice. Learners' learning scope is limited to that directly related to their job or a commodity, and learners rarely learn Chinese beyond this range. No matter in what way, the

initiative of Chinese learners to learn Chinese has many factors, almost always related to the frequency of contact with Chinese tourists. The result of individuals and organizations in learning Chinese differs in practice. Managers and teachers play an important role in the process of learning Chinese in organizations, while the process of learning Chinese by individuals lacks the guidance of these people. Thai learners of Chinese who study through an organization or with a formal teacher can learn more Chinese language context—behavior and culture—than individuals. This difference is obvious when Thai tourism workers with different learning backgrounds use their Chinese. According to the observations in the field, Thai tourism workers in Skyline Adventure Zipline and Warorot Market could not only speak better Chinese than at other field sites, but also had a deeper understanding of Chinese tourists' behavior, thought, and culture.

Chinese language usage in the tourism market

The results of Thai tourism workers' efforts to learn Chinese vary widely. This depends largely on usage. Through observation and interview, most of the answers point to the fact that it is Chinese tourists who are the biggest buyers. The frequency of dealing with Chinese tourists is related to the final result of Thais learners in the tourist market, especially workers in tourist shops. The use of Chinese by Thai tourism workers who learn Chinese in organizations is also influenced by other factors, such as their overall level of knowledge of Chinese.

Physical location and type of goods are conditions that determine how many Chinese tourists choose to step into a shop. This affects how often these shop workers use Chinese. The impact of geographical location on passenger flow can be reflected in the Doi Suthep tourist worker interviews. I interviewed a total of five shops, located on different places near Shuanglong (Doi Suthep) Temple. I pretended to be a tourist talking to the shopkeepers using Chinese. The owner of a more remote shop said the Chinese language ability of the shopkeepers who operate on the street near the gate to the monastery is better than that of the owners of the remote shop. Selling the same things, shops on the street are used to using Chinese to talk to Chinese tourists, while remote shops rely on calculators.

Like at many tourist destinations, tourists in Chiang Mai want to buy local specialties and souvenirs with local characteristics. Chiang Mai has a wide variety of products, and some goods that have a price advantage over the Chinese market are also popular with Chinese tourists. Not all goods are favored by Chinese tourists. According to a shopkeeper who spent six or seven years in Warorot Market selling dried fruit and other food, she could talk directly with Chinese tourists in the process

of buying and selling, and nearby food sellers had about the same level of Chinese skill as she did. But a shopkeeper in the market who sells Buddhist ritual items said she could not speak Chinese, and that Chinese tourists come to her store very rarely.

Doi Suthep; A store near the street

If shop assistants or store managers can speak Chinese, customers stay in their stores for longer periods of time. The shop workers make some effort. When some interviewees demonstrated how to introduce a product to a customer, they sometimes spoke a monologue describing the item; not a real-time response to customer questions, but a mechanical recitation of a pre-memorized answer. But, a few shopkeepers could naturally respond to questions in Chinese, even including many adjectives and raw materials in the description of commodities.

Thai tourism workers learning Chinese in organizations use the language much more frequently than those learning by themselves, and they gradually accumulate Chinese cultural expressions with the help of teachers and Chinese tourists. Thai workers at Skyline Adventure Zipline in Thep Sadej, Chiang Mai, with the help of teachers have gained some knowledge of Chinese culture; for example, how to make greetings during festivals like New Year or Spring Festival. The Chinese language teacher at Skyline (a Thai man in his thirties) told us that he taught his

employees how to address Chinese tourists of different ages and genders. This deeper understanding beyond basic language is for several reasons. One is time; Chinese tourists need to stay for at least two hours at Skyline Adventure Zipline. During that time, they will meet employees with different jobs, such as guides who need to introduce—in Chinese—the rules they need to follow to have a safe and good experience. Two is the importance of communication; Skyline must ensure tourist safety on the zipline, and fluent Chinese language performance helps them achieve this important purpose. Three is financial; tips given by Chinese tourists are an important source of personal income for the employees. The boss of Skyline Adventure Zipline stressed that he forbids employees to ask for tips from tourists directly, but instead to treat tourists with a sincere heart. The guides take the initiative to offer a large formal apology to each tourist group after their trip is done, for any problems or discomforts that might have happened (often, there are none), so that tourists take the "hint" and offer them a tip.

In buying and selling behavior, the use of Chinese language for communication with tourists plays two roles: attracting Chinese tourists and transmitting information. Almost all shop assistants or shopkeepers who have studied Chinese will speak to Chinese tourists on their own initiative. When spoken Chinese is not enough to support the conversation, they will continue with tools such as Google translate and calculators.

Shops with good location and the right variety of goods attract many Chinese tourists. The length that Chinese tourists stay and shop in a store is related to how much they want to buy and the language proficiency of the store workers. In some tourist sites that Chinese visit for experiences, the desire to buy is replaced by a good feeling towards the employees who serve tourists—this is expressed through tipping. In the face of different consumer needs of Chinese tourists, Thai tourist workers use different approaches with the Chinese language, adapting to the entry of Chinese tourists.

Changes in the tourism situation: Chinese tourists and businessmen

Since 2018, there has been a downward trend in the number of Chinese tourists coming to Chiang Mai. Nonetheless, they are still important customers in the tourism market. The number and type of Chinese tourists, and the mode and purpose of their travel in the tourist landscape of Chiang Mai have also changed. Further, there are some Chinese merchants working with locals in the Chiang Mai tourism market.

Chinese tourists

The phenomenon of learning and using Chinese in the Chiang Mai tourism market is based on a critical mass of Chinese customers; similar to Thai peoples' learning and use of English. Most interviewees were basically normal Thais who needed to communicate with Chinese visitors to Chiang Mai to make more money selling goods or services. These tourism workers learned and used Chinese to help tourists buy things. At the same time, changes in the situation and mode of Chinese tourists affect these Thai workers' learning and using Chinese.

In recent years, more and more Chinese "free and independent travelers" (FITs) have started to visit Chiang Mai, reflecting how Chinese tourists have increasingly more choices about their mode and destination when traveling. Chinese tourists with tour groups have little chance of close contact with locals, traveling on fixed itineraries. Also, tour guides are likely to take their groups to shops that cooperate and offer commissions, and the guides act as translators for tourists to communicate with shopkeepers. According to a Chinese businessman in Baan Tawai, because the itinerary of Chinese tour groups is arranged by guides, it is difficult for tourists to come to some places which are the origin of many goods, such as Baan Tawai. Now, more and more Chinese tourists choose free travel, and some who have prepared by searching online will know of these shops that do not work with tour groups.

Much of Chinese language learning in Chiang Mai is the result of local people taking the initiative—they have chosen to learn and adapt to the large number of Chinese tourists entering Thailand. This is not just a unilateral effort by the Thais. An elderly Chinese tourist traveling with a group said she had few opportunities to communicate with Thai locals. In a few experiences of contact with locals, she preferred to communicate using simple Chinese and mobile phone pictures. A young Chinese FIT tourist said she met some Thais who were very good at Chinese and when she went shopping, met shopkeepers many times who tried to communicate in Chinese. She didn't think they needed to learn more Chinese, because selling goods is a simple connection. Two people even said that some tourists thought that the Chiang Mai tourism market had become saturated with Chinese language.

Larger Chiang Mai tourism market entities, such as shopping malls and shops, are scattered around the city, selling mostly to tourists. Learning and using Chinese can boost business, without creating stereotypes of Chinese tourists. The manager of Warorot market, a Thai woman of Chinese ancestry, said that Chinese guests are the same as Thai customers; some people like to create problems, others are very easy to get along with. She may be right that Chinese and Thai customers are not much

different, but Chinese customers' mobility in the Chiang Mai tourism market is different from locals and other customers. Both Chinese tour groups and FITs' Chiang Mai destinations overlap heavily. FITs seem to have more options, but in reality a limited number of popular tourist spots attract the majority of all tourist visitors. These sites almost all have some economic component. The flow of Chinese tourists in the Chiang Mai tourist market is traceable, and many, if not led by tour guides, still rely on others to set their path; individual travel and independent exploration still often end with FITs going to the same scenic spots—introduced by online celebrities and influencers—that are heavily visited by standard tour groups.

Chinese business people

Communication between Chinese business people and locals at various Chiang Mai tourist destinations is done using Thai and English. Most Chinese merchants are middlemen who buy or wholesale goods onwards to China. One Chinese businessman said there were six units in Baan Tawai that hired Chinese workers to acquire handicrafts, and most of the people who did business with him were Chinese. The presence of Chinese businessmen has almost no connection with local people learning and using Chinese, and no locals in Baan Tawai had interest in learning Chinese before some Chinese tourists entered the market. Even when the locals make some effort to learn Chinese, none of them learn from local Chinese businessmen.

With the increased number of Chinese customers, Chinese businessmen who compete with locals in the Chiang Mai tourism market have a language advantage. When interviewees at Baan Tawai talked about why they wanted to learn Chinese, they mentioned that Chinese tourists preferred to shop in the stores of Chinese businessmen. To some extent, this stimulates local people's desire to learn Chinese.

Adaptability and the tourist "gaze"

Learning and using Chinese is an ongoing phenomenon in the Chiang Mai tourism market for both individuals or organizations, and the impact of Chinese tourists on the Chiang Mai tourism market is also ongoing. Local people have shown their initiative and adaptability in the face of this change. These people use Chinese in order to adapt and negotiate with the changes in the overall tourism picture; it is not purely active, nor purely passive. There is no doubt that their choices—made in the face of the reality of large numbers of Chinese customers—are mainly due to economic considerations. But, the people who drive this trend

have individual differences, different environments, and their own psychology of desires and aspirations, all of which determine their behavior.

The use of Chinese language in shopping is generally quick and simple, but the Chinese language used at tourism attractions can be more frequent, deeper, and diverse. Compared with selling goods, tourist attractions need to use consideration and service to impress their customers.

Focusing on the behavior of individuals in the whole of the Chiang Mai tourism market, it becomes clear that workers exercise their adaptability to face changes. One such change is the way tourism workers adjust to the Chinese "tourist gaze." For example, when tourists choose to go to Skyline Adventure Zipline, it takes them nearly a day: leave in the morning, go back in the afternoon, and stay at Skyline adventure zipline for more than two hours. In order to make a better impression on tourists, and with many hours to do so, Skyline tries to improve the quality of its service as much as possible, focusing heavily on the learning and use of Chinese.

Skyline Adventure Zipline; Interaction between Chinese tourists and guides

According to observations and interviews with staff at Skyline, the staff are still adjusting to learning, using, and adapting methods of expression in Chinese when

in contact with Chinese tourists. The Skyline guides, with the help of their Chinese language teachers, have taken on Chinese names which they choose from various idols, singers or actors who are well known in Chinese pop culture. One said "my name is 'Zhou Jielun'" or "Gu Tianle," and asked customers if he sang better than Jay Chou, or was he more handsome than Gu Tianle? They hope they will be remembered by tourists, and they are generally successful. When the guides introduce themselves with these familiar names, most tourists respond positively to the guides' funny performance.

"Bodies perform themselves in-between the direct sensation of the 'other' and various sensescapes" (Rodaway, 1994, as cited in Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.196). The interaction between guides and visitors at Skyline creates familiarity and a comfortable environment through jokes and greeting; it is performance by the Thai guides, contrasting the "other"-ness of their Thai selves and the setting of Thailand with the familiarity of spoken Chinese and references to Chinese pop culture. The Skyline guides put this use to create connections and value for the tourists and economic reward for themselves. This relationship model has been learned and adapted by the guides after long and frequent contact with Chinese tourists. With the help of Chinese teachers, and through other means (such as online language videos), the guides master the necessary language, and the response by tourists stimulates them to either learn more Chinese or stop. The presence of tourists has changed the language usage of Skyline adventure zipline guides—some have chosen ways to leverage the increasing numbers of Chinese tourists, while other Skyline employees said they didn't need to, or didn't have the motivation to learn. These people didn't think they needed much Chinese, and most tourists said the Chinese they could speak was good enough.

Unlike architecture, clothing, or other things that have visual influence, language is more abstract and specialized. Language is difficult to classify as an object of tourist gaze, but the existence of large numbers of Chinese visitors in Chiang Mai has given it special meaning. Chinese language has accompanied the emergence of Chinese tourists, and it serves them with an obvious function. Viewing the use of Chinese language as tourist phenomenon, Chinese tourists have begun to consciously notice its existence. For the vast majority of tourists, while in Chiang Mai it is not possible to participate in the mother tongue of Thai. So, with the appearance of Chinese language in Chiang Mai's tourism landscape, it causes Chinese tourists to have some sense of dislocation. The frequently visible written Chinese characters and Chinese spoken around Chiang Mai tourist areas is one expression of Chiang Mai's cultural diversity. But many visitors from China may prefer to see

a scene different from their home life. They do not need or want a foreign tourist destination that speaks fluent Chinese, so the Chinese used by people in the Chiang Mai tourism market has to maintain a sense of distance from tourists. This distance is a "consensus" between tourists and locals; Chinese has a range of usage and learning for Chiang Mai in tourism, and its construction is the result of feedback—positive and negative—from both sides. Local workers in the Chiang Mai tourism market negotiate a tourist environment that both offers better service but still meets the "distance sense" expectations of tourists.

Conclusion

This paper revolves around two questions: How do service workers in the Chiang Mai tourism market learn and use Chinese? How do people in the Chiang Mai tourism market exercise adaptability to the changes of the tourism landscape through the use of Chinese language? The push to learn and use Chinese in the Chiang Mai tourism market is directly tied to the large number of Chinese tourists who have entered this market. People need to communicate directly with Chinese tourists. They learn Chinese through individuals or organizations, and use Chinese in tourist retail or in tourist services. Now that Chinese tourists have become the largest tourist group, the changes in the Chiang Mai tourism market are related to Chinese tourists' consumer and cultural behaviors. The depth to which local tourist workers learn Chinese varies according to their individual needs and motivations. Language has also become an object of "tourist gaze." Local adaptability to Chinese visitors' conscious and unconscious expectations of language and communication is reflected in the learning and creative uses of Chinese language by tourism workers.

Final reflections on limitations and directions for future exploration

In addition to economic factors, what other factors affect the behavior of local people to learn and use Chinese? Since almost all of my interview subjects focused on economic benefits, I didn't explore their personal educational backgrounds or other social identities. The "tourist gaze" is a useful analytical paradigm, but lacking data from Chinese tourists, as I interviewed mostly Thai tourism workers. Also, having only focused on Thais in Chiang Mai's tourism market, this discussion of "adaptability" may be one-sided.

This short research led me to ask many new questions about the role of Chinese language in the Chiang Mai tourism market that may be interesting for future

investigation. What kind of experience can Chinese tourists have in a country that can communicate in Chinese? Are Chinese tourists conscious of local people exercising their adaptability? Just as local Chiang Mai people have negotiated with and adapted to the seemingly endless number of Chinese tourists, Chinese tourists have also adapted to locals who can communicate with them in simple but increasingly skilled Chinese. This situation will most certainly change in the future as tourism tastes, cultural modes, and greater connectivity impact the environment of tourism in all of Thailand, and in Chiang Mai; these may be all be interesting research directions.

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Negotiating Social Spaces

Chiang Mai City, Chiang Mai Province

For almost two decades, Chiang Mai has been a hub of migrants, particularly the Shan from Myanmar who are the largest population of migrants in the city. They mostly work in occupations including construction workers, domestic workers, and waiter/waitress in restaurants. While working in Thailand, these transnational migrants send remittances to their family in Myanmar; and yet some have settled the family in Chiang Mai with their children being educated in the city. However, it is difficult for them to regard the two places they associate with as their "homeland", as they have been away from Myanmar for a long time amid political turmoil, and in Thailand they are without full citizenship rights. To negotiate their lives in the city, they have created social and cultural spaces that help them to relate to their homeland and their ethnic identity – one such example is their food culture.

Advisor: Dr. Busarin Lertchavaritsakul

Strategies of Adaptation as Livelihood Negotiation among Shan Migrant Food Sellers in Chiang Mai

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Abstract

Shan migrants who have moved from Myanmar form the largest ethnic migrant group in Chiang Mai, and since settling in northern Thailand, many Shan have used the popularity of their distinct cuisine to sell Shan food as a way of earning a living. Shan migrant food sellers have shown a large degree of variation in changing the nature of their food to sell to different groups. I regard these changes as a way of adaptation, as these people act out their own food customs and practices, while continually evolving the product to suit the large market of Shan workers in Chiang Mai, and other customers such as foreign tourists. To an extent, such an understanding of cultural adaptation also reflects power relations between sellers and customers, and migrants and local people. Using ethnographic methods and analysis, this paper argues that by looking at Shan migrant foods we can analyze how Shan migrants turn food adaptation into an existence strategy.

Keywords: Migrant networks, food culture, Shan, Chiang Mai, adaptation

Introduction

In Chiang Mai there are around 90,000 Shan migrants who have moved from Burma over the course of several decades, and because of their illegal status, they cannot find formal employment in the city. Due to their undocumented status, they cannot open shops or restaurants directly, and most of them are hired to manage food stalls and restaurants on behalf of those who have legal status. This has caused the Shan to adapt to this context, through forms of negotiation around the different

cultural and economic challenges in Chiang Mai. This paper tries to determine the characteristics of Shan migrant food and find how they change their food, showing the different relationships between the Shan migrant and local people.

Shan State is situated in the northern and eastern part of Myanmar, and shares borders with China situated to the north and Thailand in the east and south. As the largest of seven main minority groups in Myanmar, Shan migrants come to Chiang Mai because Chiang Mai is the main metropolitan center in northern Thailand, and the city has a great demand for cheap labor, and so it is a good choice for them to seek their forms of gainful employment.

Missionaries from the west first introduced the term "Shan" in the 19th century. In fact the Shan people have many ways in which they are referred to; the Shan people call themselves *Tai*, in Thailand the central Thai people regard Shan people as *Tai Yai*, viewing them as historically, culturally and linguistically connected people to themselves. Officially and in English language they are generally referred to as Shan.

According to Jirattikorn's (2017) work on Shan migrant communities in Chiang Mai, there are two primary reasons for migrating to Thailand - the first one is economic, the second one is security or safety-related which impacts relative access to education, "two concerns hold them back: the lack of jobs available for them at home and their children's education." (Jirattikorn, 2017, p. 78)

This research is particularly interested in how this community of people variously uses food and food spaces as a form of livelihood adaption, pushing social boundaries and adapting to different needs in the context. On food connectivity among mobile populations, Wilk (2012) argues that different attitudes toward cuisines are related to attitudes towards groups of people, and is connected to the marginality of food within social boundaries, showing how this leads to some foods being loved and others less appreciated. Utari (2012) discusses the process of redefining regional and ethnic identity through food by looking at forms of cultural meanings and the status attached to *sinonggi* in Indonesia (sago palm flour paste) in relation to rice, and the practices of a people reasserting their identity through food, eating habits and food presentation. Likewise, this paper seeks to understand how a community variously adapts its food to suit the context, while still remaining attached to its identity.

Though dealing specifically in the realm of food, this paper will rely upon the more flexible notion of 'adaptation' within a migrant community to gain some insight into patterns of production and consumption and economic life. Within migration studies, the emergent paradigm is, rather significantly, less interested in 'integration' in the traditional sense of creating community cohesion (Urry, 2000). Rather, by

understanding migrant actions as less reliant on becoming acculturated in their host destination and moving towards a sort of more permanent state of being, the less rigid conception provided by 'adaptation' allows a more nuanced view to emerge that more accurately reflects the complexity of migrant behavior. In this particular context, this enables us to grapple with the dual notions of how Shan migrants both adapt to their host community, and maintain their cultural and linguistic ties, through various practices associated with food.

This paper tries to focus on Shan migrant food adaptation and the forms of their adaptation, and explore how adaptation processes reflect relations between the Shan migrants and members of different communities and social groupings around Chiang Mai city. In considering this, the paper attempts to analyze adaptation as a strategy for how Shan migrants live in Chiang Mai. Finally, the paper looks at these adaptation strategies through the lens of power relations, attempting to understand how different social contexts influence the responses of different actors.

Research questions

1. How do Shan migrants variously adapt their food to the tastes and culture of different people in Chiang Mai, while the food remains attached to their identity?
2. How do these changes and adaptations reflect the power relations present in each local context?

Research methodology

Research sites

This research is mainly situated in Chiang Mai city, and the main study sites include Shan migrant food stalls at the periodic market, the restaurant nearby the temple, the Shan language school and the NGO. We visited and observed nine shops, two restaurants, a temple school, and an NGO over the course of four days. The stalls are all mobile stalls, and they usually move from one market to other markets, and the assistants of each stall are family members. The 2 restaurants are nearby the temple, and every restaurant has two parts - the first part is used to sell food, and the second part is a living space. The temple school is a palace which Shan migrants can learn Thai language and other courses. The NGO, named MAP, helps Shan migrants working in Chiang Mai city. These two places gave some further

contextual background on the Shan community in Chiang Mai, but the research focused more specifically on the food spaces.

Data collection

During the fieldwork, I tried to observe the market and the restaurant where the Shan migrants sell food and to understand the way they communicate with different customers. By collecting this information, I was able to see their living environments and working spaces in Chiang Mai, and also was able understand the relationships between Shan migrant and the other groups by observing the different ways they communicate with different people.

In order to know the characteristics of Shan migrant food, I tried to eat at every Shan migrant stall and restaurants – and I always ordered different dishes. I also follow the routes of the mobile stalls to see their different customers at different markets. I also paid attention to the menus of the restaurants in order to see what dishes the restaurateurs set and serve customers, and how these varied in differing social contexts.

I also interviewed 15 people, including sellers, customers, tourists, and students. There are 10 females and 5 males among the 15 persons. Because time is limited, I couldn't go into great depth with only four days to cover several spaces, but the variety of actors and responses nonetheless gave some illuminating insights, as I still could gather background information about different people, and talk with them around 30 to 40 minutes covering their current situation and movements and adaptations within the context of food.

Places of Shan food: stalls and restaurants around Chiang Mai

Shan migrant food stalls are usually located at the periodic market, of which there are several locations in which food sellers ply their trade. The stalls are always along the main street in every market and there are two types of Shan migrant food stalls: the noodle stall and the ingredient stall.

The noodle stalls are very simple; several tables put together, with rice noodles on placed on banana leaves, ingredients in bowls and sauces in the small jars on the table. The noodle shop always has two parts; the first part is used to make food, and the second part is to receive the customer. Customers can eat at the stalls and also take away with plastic container.

Noodle stall in the night market

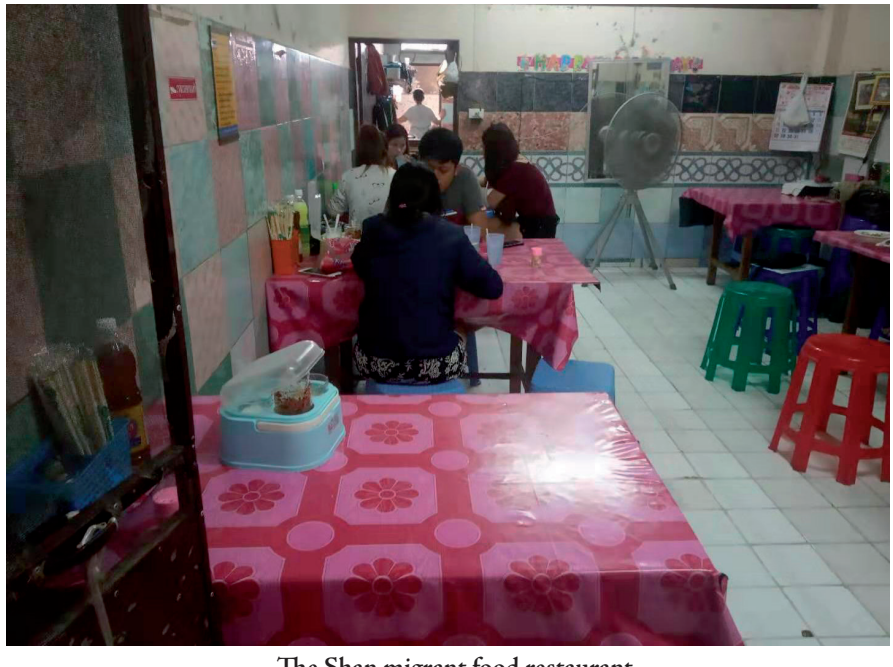
The ingredient stall is different from the noodle stall, and in fact this stall also sells noodles as a sideline activity. The stall has a big umbrella like a tent, and there are some cooking utensils around the shop and at the front of the shop the seller puts a big table for selling food. On the other side, they do preparation for cooking the food for selling. When they go to this morning market they always bring enough raw materials to cooking, such as enough flour for cooking a kind of circular Shan pasta.

Ingredient stall in the periodic market; Picture 3: Man cooking noodles

The restaurants are usually located near Shan migrant communities and around the temple, and they always combine the working area with living spaces.

There are 3 to 5 tables in the restaurant. Each desk can sit four people and the desk is closer to the living area for the seller's use. The place for cooking food for customers is near the door of the restaurant, so it is very convenient for the customer and the seller. The customer can order food quickly and the seller can serve the dishes faster, because of this spatial division. Some restaurants don't only sell Shan migrant food, but also sell Shan traditional clothes.

The restaurant sell food and clothes



The Shan migrant food restaurant

The customers who frequent Shan migrant food restaurants depend on the location of stalls and restaurant around the city. But the main customers include Shan migrants, foreign tourists, students, along with Tai people in Chiang Mai city. Each stall and restaurant also have some regular customers, mostly Shan migrants and Shan students. Each shop is intentionally located in areas near places of work and study for the migrant community. One seller of a small Shan restaurant described how she opened in a location of close proximity to many informal settlements where construction workers live.

Ying is a seller in a Shan food restaurant who started her business five months ago; from Langkho, she is 30 years old and came to Chiang Mai when she was 16.

> Although I already noticed there are many Shan workers nearby, it still surprised me when many customers come to eat food at the restaurant, and thanks to the temple next to the restaurant, there are so many monks, Shan people and tourists, particularly during special activities at the temple."

Production and consumption of Shan food in Chiang Mai

Most Shan restaurants sell popular Shan food which is produced to suit the taste of the local Shan community. Before discussing how this menu is adapted, it is necessary to first briefly discuss the features of food production and consumption, the various menus each restaurant has designed, along with interviews with local sellers to give some insight into the Shan food.

Restaurants and stalls generally sell the same common Shan migrant foods, like *khao soi ko* (a light yellow flat noodle salad mixed with a red sauce made of tomato), *kee nok pao* (a kind of snack made of khao soi noodles deep-fried in oil), *khao som* (rice mixed with many ingredients by having tomato as a main one, which turns rice to be orange), *khao ya ku* (red sticky rice), *khao sen* (rice noodles) and *khao sen nam ngiew* (Shan-styled rice noodle in a soup added with pork blood, *dok ngew*, and other elements such as chili, onion, garlic, and tomato)

We can distinguish Shan migrant food restaurants and stalls by these dishes. Most Shan migrant food restaurants do not sell drinks because the main customers do not order drinks when they eat at the Shan food restaurant. The gender division of cooking Shan food also affects the food they sell in the restaurants. For example, cooking is considered one of the must-do duties of a Shan woman, and Shan women

are also good at cooking rice, so if you go to a restaurant run by men, the restaurant generally will not sell rice.

About the menu offered in the restaurant, Ying, a seller in a Shan food restaurant, told us how she designed the menu.

> When I designed this menu, I wanted to put 100 kinds of Shan food on it, but considered the practical situation like the time to cooking and the food Shan people eat daily, now my menu only have 24 different dishes.

In discussing how Shan workers in Chiang Mai frequent these local restaurants, Lertchavalitsakul (2015) describes how laborers, without regular time off and often working overtime, have little time to cook themselves. To save money and time, they cook once in the evening to also cover breakfast the following day. Furthermore, Lertchavalitsakul notes, "they do not cook dishes which are too elaborate, or require complex preparation" (2015, p. 131). So they usually go to the restaurant to eat lunch, and they always order two or three dishes, and it cost about 60 baht for each meal.

Adapting the taste and sale of food to different markets

The forms of adaptation of Shan food is discussed here in three parts, which variously reveal different aspects of flexibility in relation to food: cooking skills, the Shan drink, and Shan rice noodles.

Many Shan food sellers not only use Shan food cooking skills but also learn local food cooking skills to supplement their existing knowledge. Ying, the aforementioned seller at the restaurant by the temple, discussed how she designed her menu in a way that adapted to the lifestyles of the local community, and also how she was able to integrate some skills from her life experiences after migrating to Thailand.

> There are two kinds of food at the restaurant: Shan food and Tai Lue food. I learnt the skills of cooking Shan food from my mother and the skills of cooking Tai Lue food from the Tai Lue restaurant where I worked before.

Research conducted by Fontefrancesco et al. (2019, p. 2) found that migrants attempt to adapt to unfamiliar conditions in two primary ways; the first is to "preserve" their identity through increasing their use of items from their place of origin using creative methods to procure them. Secondly, and of most relevance to this paper,

migrants tend to adapt their traditional food customs by combining their traditional products with new ingredients in a way that "invents new dishes and creates new folk culinary and/or herbal knowledge." In this familiar vein, Shan migrants attempt to maintain the taste of Shan food to Shan migrants, and also adapt ways to serve and suit non-Shan customers.

Another example of adaptation within the migrant context is *khao moon rod song*. A kind of drink or dessert of Shan people, it has three small circular jellies of different colors (yellow, pink and green), with shredded coconut and cookies, and the customer can choose which kind of jelly they want, and add in as they please. When they pick up the ingredients they want, the seller will put them together into a cup and add sugar, water and ice. It can be mixed together in a cup or taken away in a plastic cup. But when we interviewed Neo, the drink seller in the periodic market, he told us of the adaptation he made when he sold the drink.

> I was born in Langkho, and came to this city 5 years ago. I learned the skills of making *khao moon rod song* from my wife who also sells this drink in the other market. I was a construction worker, but the pay was very low, so I went to sell drinks at the market. I didn't put strawberry syrup in this drink before, but now I add strawberry syrup into the drink for every customer to make the drink taste better. At first it's the tourist want to put in the strawberry syrup, but then I found that it tastes good so I add it all the time and I also put more ice in the drink because ice is more available in Chiang Mai.

The most marked example of adaption is undoubtedly the variations to traditional noodles that can be seen in different settings around the city. Noodles are a common food that is sold in every restaurant and stall, and it's also a daily food for Shan people as not only does it save time but it is also very easy to cook. When Shan migrants cook the noodles, at first they boil the rice noodle, put the rice noodle in a soup, then add some minced meat and other ingredients such as chili, onion, garlic, and tomato. In describing these food practices, Lertchavalitsakul (2009, p. 93) shows how important the Shan noodle in Shan people daily life by saying "apart from religion-related ceremonies, at weddings, which are held at the bride's house, *khao sen*, or rice noodles are served to guests instead of an ordinary meal of rice and curries."

There are two main kinds of noodles - one is a soft noodle which can make salad and the other is hard rice noodles which needs to be pre-boiled before being eaten. For the hard noodles, the seller will provide soup and pickled vegetable. Most Shan

food stalls sell similar foods and ingredients, and traditionally there is only one type of noodle in each dish. But at the stall we visited, we found there is something different from the original Shan food. At the night market where the main customers are foreign tourists, the stall provides many choices for the customer, which means the tourists can choose what kinds of noodles they want to eat.

In a sense, the sellers are adapting to the changing social fabric of Chiang Mai by introducing more accessible options to attract a greater range of consumers. "This noodle isn't Shan food, because they add vegetables and other ingredients into the noodles" exclaimed our field guide who is an expert on this topic. When we visited a stall in the noon market, a seller named Wing told us how her husband's experience led to him introducing foreign ingredients into traditional noodles:

> I came from Kakpane, my husband was born in Burma, and my daughter is 26 years old. We started selling Shan migrant food 5 years ago and we always move from one market to another market. Because the economy not good, the sales of the food also have been down. Several years ago, my husband tried to introduce some foreign dishes, then he learned the skills to cook this Chinese noodle and this noodle sells very well in the market.

As Fontefrancesco et al. (2019, p. 15) notes, "food adaptation is known to be partly the result of a complex cultural negotiation between the host and home cultures and environments of a migrant population". Chiang Mai city as a multi-cultural city, which has people from many cultural backgrounds and big tourist numbers, means that not only does the culture and environment influence the Shan migrant food, but also the economy of tourism affects their adaptation in Chiang Mai. In order to earn more money and attract more customers to the stall, Shan migrants sell foreign dishes like Chinese noodles in a Shan migrant food stalls, even though it differs from traditional Shan food. In an urban setting with the cultural and linguistic diversity of Chiang Mai, Shan migrant food has become more and more flexible.

Power relations as adaptation in food selling contexts

Thai restaurant owners and their Shan sellers

The Shan food economy of Chiang Mai gives a glimpse into the power relations in different aspects of the community, through which sellers are forced to adapt to various expectations and forces imposed on them. Due to restrictions on ownership

of land and business for migrant people, the stall and the restaurant owners are always Thai people and legal Shan people (those who have, often after many years, managed to attain identification) and because of the illegal status in Chiang Mai of most of the community, the Shan migrants often suffered forms of injustice.

Because of the absence of legal protection, the salary of the Shan migrants depends on the employer, and the Shan migrant is powerless to challenge the owner of the stall and the restaurant when they suffer forms of unfair treatment. This, in itself, is a form of adaptation to the local environment, with the sellers needing to carefully negotiate the extent of their agency. One example of this is Ying, who has opened her own shop in spite of the challenging power structures: "I rent this restaurant from my former boss. This is because I don't have legal status in Chiang Mai and the rent is 6000B a month".

However, some Shan migrants have spent a long time working in the food industry in Chiang Mai and have the desire to open their own shop and gain greater autonomy in their lives as sellers, but this has proven very difficult. Chankue, a 40 year old man who works as a manager in a Shan restaurant, said, "although I have worked at this restaurant for 16 years, I am still employed by the restaurant owner, and I can't have my own restaurant." Nitt, a 26 year old student also noted:

> I also want to open a Shan migrant food stall, but I can't because of my illegal status. Even though I have a special card in this city I can't go to other cities without permission.

Shan migrants play the main role in the production of Shan food, but their situation as undocumented leads to their role being closely determined by law, status and citizenship. The owner can change the Shan migrant food in whatever way they want and have complete control over all aspects of the business, despite the integral role of the sellers in forming the business. Mei is a 17 years old girl who works in the night market. She reflected this sense of powerlessness at being a Shan person who was employed by a Thai person to sell Shan food.

> I'm not the owner of this shop, I was employed by the shop owner. I am a Shan person from Burma, but my employer is from northwest Thailand. I sell the food with her every night. She decides what food we can sell to the customer and how to sell it. I'm an assistant and she is the boss. I listen to her.

Shan migrant workers and sellers as a more equal network

Shan migrants can't get legal status quickly, and when they come in Chiang Mai both the state from which they came and the state they have arrived have both denied them status. Despite this they are able to adapt by creating forms of familiarity within the Shan food industry. Though they are not being treated equally by Thai owners and there still exists a barrier between the Shan migrant and the Thai citizen, when they speak Shan language and interact with each other they feel more equal, even though they are illegal migrants in this city.

"I don't know what they are talking about, because they speak Shan language." When the Shan migrant food sellers talked with Shan customers, our translator always told us this. When two Shan people speak Shan language at the Shan migrant food stall and restaurant, they also create a form of "habitus" between themselves and the other group, referencing Bourdieu's (1984) notion of the way people can organize themselves in an unconscious way, forming a type of structured structure based on familiarity within a social context. Accordingly, Shan language and culture can be regarded as a door—keeping other groups outside and only allowing Shan people in.

While the food industry creates a space of more equal relations between Shan people, many migrants in the food industry nonetheless have a desire for upward mobility, often expressing the need to learn more skills and eventually own their own businesses. Chai expressed his desire to not only be a seller:

> I was 28 years old and come from Langke, I came to Chiang Mai when I was 20 years old with my parents, but because of the war in Burma my parents went back to Burma to take care of my grandmother. I was a monk at a temple in Fang when I was 16 years old, and then I came to Chiang Mai when I was 19 years old. I went to this language school about 2 years ago. I want to learn more new things at this school, because I want to be equal with Tai people at this city by learning more knowledge.

Conclusion

According to Lertchavalitsakul (2009), Shan food can be thought of as "a space of power relations in the forms of contestation of meanings, tactics of negotiation, and means of resistance. Ethnic food is seen as patterns of place and space making by people in a variety of situations and contexts" (Lertchavalitsakul, 2009, p.55). Exploring this notion, this paper regards forms of adaptation as a strategy for Shan

migrants to live in Chiang Mai city. Ethnic food can be regarded as a symbol of national identity, but it does not mean it cannot change, and if it is changed it cannot be the symbol of national identity – the truth is to the contrary.

In this article, I focus on the relationship between Shan migrant food, the forms of Shan migrant food adaptation and the power relationship between Shan migrants and other groups, by looking at the forms of Shan migrant food adaptation as a strategy to live in Chiang Mai. I argue that Shan migrants and especially Shan food sellers relate to the Shan migrant food as a way to survive in Chiang Mai. In order to show the space where the Shan migrant food sell, this paper introduces Shan migrant food stalls and restaurants, describing Shan migrant food in a general way, before paying close attention to the forms of Shan migrant food adaptation, and the related ways of adaptation to the power relations between Shan migrant food sellers and Shan migrant worker, and Shan migrant seller to the Thai owner. This exploration reveals how adaptation in a migrant context is flexible and negotiated, with people to varying degrees maintaining their traditional customs and habits, whilst simultaneously working to understand the changing social context in the place they migrated.

Positionality and reflections

Though we always introduced ourselves before we started an interview with the informants, different social contexts garnered different responses based on our own position as student-researchers and their identities.

When we told the sellers of Shan food restaurant that we are students from Yunnan University and we want to do research about Shan migrant food, the sellers were not interested at all. They just continued their work, and answered the questions we asked. However, when they noticed that we are Chinese and speak Chinese language, some of them wanted to learn some simple Chinese words from us. They told us many Chinese tourists eat at their stalls and restaurants these days.

However, this was totally different when we went to the school and the NGO. It presented a more formal situation, and both students and the staff were more curious about our research. They tried to provide more information about Shan people, the city, where Shan migrants came from and their life experience in Chiang Mai. The students were very happy to talk with us and even invited us to eat Shan food with them.

While we visited the restaurant and the shop in the market, our teacher told us that we should not interrupt their business, and moreover we should get involved in their activities as an assistant – but due to the language barrier between us and the interview subjects, we could not be assistants and so we tried not to disturb them.

In fact, no matter whether in a market or school, the Shan people were very nice to us—they answered our questions patiently and tried to provide information. So I considered why Shan people have different attitudes in different places, and considered that it was perhaps due to different educational attainments - Shan migrants who sold food in the market came to Chiang Mai when they were a little boy or girl, so they were not interested in our research, but if we asked some question about their business, they could tell us everything.

When were writing ethnography, we always say that power comes from the writer, because it is the writer who decides what he or she want to show to the reader. However, during fieldwork, we found that power comes from the people who are better educated, as they can generally give the researchers the information they want and need. This is a notable limitation in my research – that I generally only focused on the people who can provide important information to me, and only reflect their opinion, while those people who cannot express their thoughts in a lot of detail needed to be given more attention. With greater time and in hindsight, I would pay more attention to people who initially appear reluctant to share their thoughts openly.

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Social Space and Local Support: Organizational Networks for Shan Migrants Workers in Chiang Mai City, Thailand

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Abstract

The research focuses on Shan migrant workers who migrated from Shan areas in Myanmar to Chiang Mai, Thailand, to improve their livelihood opportunities and escape the impact of protracted conflict. While many of these migrants do not have legal status in Chiang Mai, they are able to navigate the various contours and livelihood challenges in this growing city in northern Thailand. While generally working in low-wage industries, particular social spaces across Chiang Mai provide forms of support through economic activity, language learning, and supporting organizations. Such spaces create a network among fellow Shan migrants, helping them to adapt to the life and environment in Chiang Mai better. This paper aims to understand particular social spaces across the city, analyzing how they serve as a central network, forming a vibrant community with an embedded support structure, which is integral to the lives of people in Chiang Mai's largest ethnic migrant population.

Keywords: Shan migrants, social space, migrant support network

Introduction

Shan people are a Tai-speaking ethnic group who settled and lived scattered around what is now mainland Southeast Asia, mainly in Myanmar and southwestern

China. Over the last two decades, partly because of the development of tourism, Chiang Mai has become a busy city with greater opportunities for employment. It has therefore become a hub for migrants, particularly Shan people from Myanmar who are the largest population of migrants in Chiang Mai. According to Jirattikorn (2017), Shan migrants from Myanmar have primarily moved to Chiang Mai to escape difficult economic conditions and conflict in Shan State - despite moderate improvements in recent years - and also to provide better education to their children.

According to the MAP Foundation, a NGO working with migrant workers communities from Burma in Chiang Mai, there are about 90000 Shan migrants in Chiang Mai who have legitimate status (pers. comm., 2019), but in fact, the number of Shan migrant workers living in Chiang Mai is far greater than this; this population is now largely involved in the economy as daily wage laborers; as construction workers, domestic workers, or working in restaurants.

At present, MAP sources explain that Shan migrants face two main troubles. For legitimate migrant workers, if they had come to Chiang Mai and registered in a particular job with a certain employer, they cannot change jobs without legal problems. For the rest of Shan migrant workers, MAP says the most difficult aspect of life in Chiang Mai is that they do not have any documents or identity cards to testify their legal status which would allow them to live and work in Chiang Mai indefinitely. Because of this, many cannot find a job they want, so they have to make a living in areas of work where they do not need to provide documents.

It is also clear that because of their undocumented status, many employers chronically underpay these migrants and often withhold their salaries. If employees turn to the police for help, they face the threat of being arrested because of their illegal status. If they try to exercise their rights through negotiation between government and employers, they have to pay off agents for the necessary documents, and consequently, the unfortunate workers face much uncertainty. Therefore, it is clear from widespread observation around Chiang Mai that they look for social spaces and organizations that can give them freedom and familiarity to conduct activities and interact with their fellow Shan people – this paper focuses on stalls in the market, Shan food restaurants, a temple school and a local NGO as examples of these spaces.

It is clear that Shan migrants initially come to Chiang Mai in relatively precarious social situations, without money, unable to speak Thai language and only able to communicate with family, and with little idea about the situation in Chiang Mai and Thailand - an especially problematic situation for young kids who followed their parents. If migrants want to ask the local government or other relevant departments

in Chiang Mai for help when they suffer injustice or problems, they cannot communicate with them easily, so their problems are exacerbated. After settling in Thailand for some time, these initial challenges are lessened, particularly with the relative ease Shan people have in gaining Thai language proficiency, but the aforementioned lack of access to rights and common experiences of exploitation continues unabated. These circumstances across the spectrum of migrant experience creates the need for social spaces to support these people, provide them with a degree of familiarity, and a network to help them negotiate their lives in Chiang Mai.

This paper will therefore discuss the network that is formed behind several places or situations, which are termed *social space*, and the forms of community organization that exist in these spaces. The definition of social space employed here is based on the conceptualization of it among different scholars across the social sciences.

Johnston (2004) defines social space as a space that social groups perceive and use, which can reflect the values, preferences and pursuits of social groups. It is clear that many geographers view urban social space alongside corresponding concepts as material space and economic space, which is concerned with social activities and social organization. Although this definition appears quite similar to social space in the field of sociology, it is obvious that Johnston defines social space from the perspective of geography, placing greater emphasis on space from the meaning of area. By understanding the connection between physical space and the social realm among the Shan migrant community in Chiang Mai, we can gain greater insight into these support networks.

In research about the cultural politics of Shan ethnic food by Lertchavalitsakul (2009), she mentions that in recent years, there are two concepts that emerged gradually in the social sciences - "place" and "space" - and she uses the explanation of Donnan and Wilson (1999) to distinguish between these two. "Place" refers to a common idea among a community of something physical and cultural in a particular area, but "space" is more a conceptual and imaginary construct that emerges from relations created by certain subjects, which can make sense to society at large. Furthermore, Lertchavalitsakul also noted the relevant concept of "practiced place," which was defined as a physical place, visible location and a place where people can connect with others in their hometowns.

This research explores the social space as a place of social practice. That is to say, the "space" refers to several particular areas in the public space where people conduct activities and interactions in a way that enables them to network and support each other. In this paper, the main social spaces I found were the stalls in

the local market, Shan restaurants, and the temple school. It was obvious that all of them represent places of relative permanence and stability among the often chaotic lives of the migrant community, forming something settled that provides a space for the Shan people to operate in their economic activities, forms of learning, and interactions with others all the time. In the process, a long-term and cohesive network among Shan migrants can be formed gradually, which helps them with earning a living in Chiang Mai and connecting them with friends and relatives in their homeland. In short, an invisible network exists behind the physical space.

Research question

How do Shan migrants adapt to the life and environment of Chiang Mai through support networks that exist behind various social spaces?

Methodology

In conducting this research, I spent 5 days conducting fieldwork, visiting three markets - Friday Morning Market, Warorot Night Market and Wat Chang Kian Periodic Market. In addition, I visited the Wa Pa Pao temple school and an NGO called MAP Foundation. I interviewed 15 people across these different places. In the whole of the field work, the most important methods used were observation and semi-structured interviews.

Before I entered the field site, the main methodology that I had preconceived in my mind was participant observation. However, as we had relatively limited time to participate in all kinds of activities and experiences and to interact with Shan people in each field site repeatedly, so we chose observation to be a main research method. As a matter of fact, we did not have any idea about what these sites were really like, so at first we placed emphasis on observing what we could see and hear.

Actually, almost all our field sites were part of the public environment, especially markets and restaurants - so it was impossible for us to prepare systematic questions to ask interviewees in this limited time. Some of our interviewees were stall sellers and restaurant owners and they were very busy all day when they had to interact with their customers. They could hardly chat with us freely, so we often waited until the customers were relatively scarce. As the time for us to interview was so precious, we had to focus on learning how to get significant information in a short time.

The reason why we chose to use semi-structured interviews was that sometimes interviewees would say something beyond our anticipation, so we had to allow the

conversation to flow in a way that engaged with new information. That way we could collect original data for the research. By using this method, we could communicate with the interviewees naturally.

Research findings and Analysis

From the data I collected through observation and interviews across a total of six field sites, there are four social spaces where Shan migrants regularly get together to conduct activities and interact with each other: stalls in the market, Shan food restaurants, and the temple school - which all are more obviously grounded in their physical space. In addition, a local NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) is interpreted here as forming a particular type of social space, even though it is less of a physical presence in the lives of Shan people. Therefore, in this section, I will explain in detail about each social space and the forms of social organization by using relevant observations and interviews. Through this collection of spatial analysis, I aim to show how Shan migrants create interpersonal networks behind the social space and how they use the network to adapt themselves to the lifestyle and environment of Chiang Mai.

Social space - Shan market stalls

This paper analyses two market spaces in Chiang Mai – the Friday Morning Market and the Waroros Night Market. Both of these spaces are very busy and crowded and one can observe dynamic economic activities and interactions in daytime and at night. There were a number of stalls that sold Shan dishes and Shan products; for example, fried Shan tofu, a Shan style yellow noodle salad, *kao ram feun* (similar to tofu) and other ingredients that used to make meals, including tofu and vegetables.

The stall in the market is the first social space of Shan migrants. When they first come to Chiang Mai, they work as wage laborers in the city and are sometimes able to obtain specific cards that allow them to stay longer legally. For example, they must have a passport and work permit. At times, they can obtain a highlander ID card to allow them to stay up to ten years, which enables them to work in more jobs. In this space, they conduct similar economic activities and form interactions with their customers. In the process of their activities, they have a lot of opportunities to make contact with all kinds of customers, such as local Thai people, Shan people and Chinese tourists. In these spaces they can learn the spoken language of local people so that they can adapt well to the context and environment in Chiang Mai.

A Shan market stall that is popular among the migrant community

One stall owner, a 31 years old man working with his 38-year-old brother and sister, sells special Shan food. They live in a city called Fang. Many years ago, their mother migrated to Chiang Mai to do business, so all of them were born here, and when their mother got older and returned to Myanmar they continued to carry out the business for eight years. Previously, they sold Shan food in mobile stalls everywhere in Chiang Mai where the rental is cheap. Afterwards, they decided to sell Shan products in this market because they wanted to find a settled place. The ingredients they use to make Shan food are purchased from a wholesale market in a district of Chiang Rai called Mae Sai, located on the Thai-Myanmar border.

We talked to another couple selling Shan products. The husband is of Tai ethnicity and come from a city of Myanmar close to Dehong in Yunnan, China. From Monday to Wednesday every week, they sell Chiang Mai noodles (*khao soi*) in their stall that is rented in a small restaurant, and from Thursday to Sunday, they sell special Shan products across different markets in Chiang Mai. They have three children of varying ages who come to this stall to assist them sell the products when it is busy.

Lily, a Shan female seller who came to Chiang Mai from Myanmar 20 years ago, makes Shan products by herself. Every Friday she comes to this morning market to sell Shan products. Lily has an evening stall in Wararot Market and she says that there are many Chinese tourists there, so she can make more money in Chiang Mai than in Myanmar. She earns around 300 B per day in Chiang Mai, but in Myanmar she only earns around 100 B, and this was why she did not want to go back to Myanmar.

Night market stall

Most importantly, as is seen here, when Shan migrants first come to this city they consider stalls in the market as a form of connection with their friends and relatives who already do business in the market, and can turn to them for help to find ways to make a living.

In the Waroros night market, the owner of the stall is young lady called Rei. She came to Chiang Mai from Lashio in Myanmar about 13 years ago. Because of severe flooding in Myanmar, many Shan people at that time migrated to Thailand

looking for jobs to make a living. After first working in a textile factory in Bangkok, her job was extremely busy and she had no time to learn Thai seriously, and so she learned Thai language just by communicating with other local people when she was working. Now, she can speak some Chinese through chatting with a lot of Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai.

She has been selling Shan products for 3 years in the Warorot market every day, using what she learned from her mother. All Shan girls are able to make Shan products, but because many Shan people think that Thai food contains too much sugar, she prefers to make the food by herself at home. Sometimes her family likes to invite Thai and Shan friends to their house for lunch. All the ingredients that she uses are purchased from the Friday Morning Market, and she uses fresh ingredients every day.

When Rei worked in Chiang Mai, many friends and relatives from Myanmar would turn to her for help to look for some jobs. She said if they owned documents that allowed them to work and live in Thailand, she could help them find all kinds of jobs easily, but in recent years, Rei found that Shan people came to Thailand less and less because if they wanted to find job through the local government in Thailand, they had to pay 2000B for a guarantee deposit and 2500B for documentation, which is very expensive for them.

When Shan migrants come as customers to the stalls of Shan products, they interact with the stall owner through shared language and identity, maintaining lasting contact with each other so that they can help each other and exchange information about their situation in Chiang Mai. Therefore, it is obvious that the stalls in the market are one of the social spaces that have provided connections between the stall owners and their customers, Shan friends or relatives.

Social space - Shan food restaurant

There are two Shan restaurants in Chiang Mai that are analyzed here which can help with understanding this as a second social space for migrants to access forms of social networks. In small houses, the restaurant owners live here with their families, and make a living by selling Shan style dishes. Because they are authentic Shan people and what they make are authentic dishes, a lot of Shan people would like to have lunch in their restaurants. This kind of space has similar aspects to Shan stalls in how they give opportunities to Shan people, but unlike the food stalls, the social dynamic here is somewhat different due to them mainly being owned by Thai people, not by the Shan workers themselves – it is only through local connections that they can manage their own businesses.

Shan Vegetarian Food

A restaurant called Shan Vegetarian Food is located near Wat Suan Dok in the busy Suan Dok area of Chiang Mai. This restaurant was started by a Shan lady called Pin. Fourteen years ago when she was sixteen years old, she migrated to Chiang Mai from Lanke, a town near Mongnai in Myanmar. At first, she came to Thailand with her friends just for travelling and found that the living condition in Chiang Mai was better than in Myanmar, so she made a decision to stay here for working. When she came to work here, her first job was introduced to her by her sister who was a domestic helper, and afterward she worked a waitress in a Thai restaurant. She then worked in a vegetarian restaurant for twelve years. Over the years, due to connecting with many Thai people, she has learnt to speak Thai language. She found there are a number of Shan restaurants at Wa Pa Pao's back alley, but there were none in the Suan Dok area, so she decided to do start one. The owner of this restaurant where Pin works leased the three-story house to her, so she just pays 6000 baht a month in rent.

Pin runs the restaurant from 9.00 am-9.00 pm every day. Her restaurant mainly serves Shan people who live around here, and some tourists also come. Many Shan people like the products that are made by her. There is a temple near the restaurant and Pin told us that there are many Shan people who go to the temple to take Thai language lessons every Sunday, and then eat lunch in her restaurant. Sometimes, Buddhist monks from the temple also have lunch there. As the situation in Myanmar is improving, Pin is thinking whether she could do some business in her hometown in the following years.

A local Shan restaurant behind the Wa Pa Pao Temple

The other restaurant is near Wa Pa Pao temple. This restaurant has been running for 20 years. During this time, it has gone through several owners. A 36-year-old man called Ni has run this restaurant for the last ten years. He came from Mongpon with his family when he was just thirteen years old in 1996. Originally his family made a living by farming, and the harvest was not bad. But, he knew people in his hometown who went to Chiang Mai to work and he followed them also looking for work to try to earn more money.

While previously working in construction, he found that there were no stalls or restaurants that sold Shan food near the place where Shan workers were, and

that many Shan workers did not like Thai food because it had too much sugar. Most importantly, they had no time to look for a Shan food restaurant to eat. He knew a Shan friend who held Thai citizenship who helped him rent this house for running the restaurant. However, at first he was not capable of making Shan products at all, because in his original opinion, in Shan families men are supposed to work outside to earn more money, and cooking was the primary capacity of women – so he began to learn cooking from his wife.

The main customers of this restaurant are Shan people. Especially on Sunday, many Shan people come to Wa Pa Pao temple to take lessons, so Sunday is a busy business day. When he just started running the restaurant, there were only a small amount of Shan customers, but in recent years, with the increased population of Shan migrant workers, his business has gotten better and better. In addition, many Shan friends and relatives of him migrated from Myanmar to Chiang Mai so they would come to his restaurant to ask him for help finding jobs. He helped finding them jobs such as waiting in restaurants, and as porters in a warehouse in the market. It is obvious that this restaurant run by Ni is not only a place that sells the Shan products, but also a significant connection between himself, his friends and relatives and the broader Shan community.

From these two cases, it is apparent that restaurants are a central place for the selling of Shan products, and most importantly for forming connections with Shan migrant friends and relatives, which serve a crucial purpose in giving people support and a sense of familiarity throughout their difficult lives. In addition, we can also perhaps understand these as a form of family housing for them in a certain sense. Both owners live there with their family members and can create a sense of a family space that forms part of the appeal for the Shan community. Pin lives with her husband and their little child in the third floor of her restaurant, while Ni lives with his mother, little brother and his son together. Therefore, this social space is a spot that sells the Shan products for them to earn a living, but it also creates a network between the owners and their friends and relatives. It provides a warm atmosphere which helps the people living there to have a sense of home and belonging, which is well-received by the restaurant's loyal customers.

Social space - temple school

The third social space which is analyzed here is the temple school - located in the Wa Pa Pao temple, which provides regular language learning for foreign migrants in Chiang Mai —especially helping Shan people practice more to adapt to the language context in Chiang Mai. The tuition of this school is free, so from 9.00

am-12.00 am every Sunday, many migrant workers enjoy coming together to this school to take Thai language lessons.

Classroom of Temple School

There are about 50-60 students in the classroom; most of them are young, around 20-25 years old, and are divided among several learning groups who practice everyday conversation with each other in Thai language. All of them work in various places across Chiang Mai. For example, a 23-year-old girl called Mi works in a bakery, and a boy of a similar age as Mi, called Nan, works as barista in a café, while another man is a tour guide in Chiang Mai. Usually all of them are extremely busy in the weekdays, but every Friday they like taking lessons here. In the class, the teacher first gives some words and teaches the students how to speak and write them, and afterwards the students practice in their own group with each other. The teachers lecture for just a small part of each class, allowing more time for practice. After they finish class, the teacher gives out papers full of Thai words as homework to the students. At noon, the Shan people get togther to have lunch in the restaurants behind the Wa Pa Pao temple, like the restaurant owned by Ni.

Mi appears the most active girl among all students, and she can speak a little bit of English because she studied at another school on Nimmanahaeminda Road in Chiang Mai. She migrated from Mongnai to Chiang Mai when she was 15 years old, and because of the poor condition of her family her parents did not have enough money to support her to go to school - so she had to come to Thailand to find a job without graduating from senior high school.

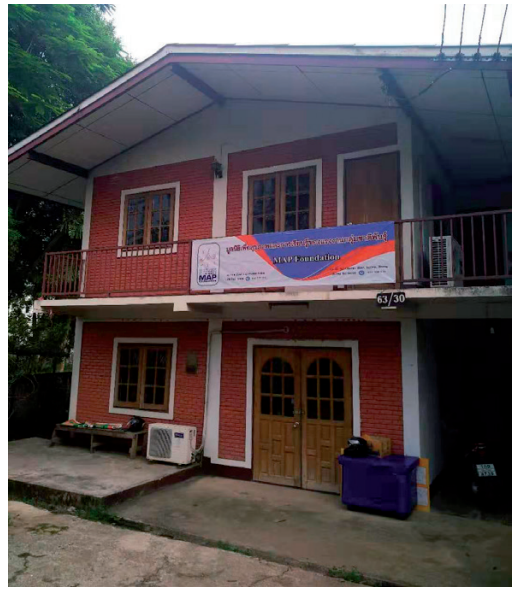
Mi has a strong interest in learning any language. She thinks if she wants to live in Chiang Mai, she needs to communicate more and more with local people. She expresses quite strongly that learning language is essential to her ability to flourish in Chiang Mai and to adapt to life here, particularly with the emergence of Chinese. Mi said that Shan people who visit the temple school often face great difficulties, and when they come to take lessons they often share their adversity with others. She feels that the space provided at the school is important for them as they can feel the supporting hand of their fellow migrants. This helpful atmosphere means they enjoy regularly getting together to study Thai in this school.

A quiet Shan boy called Nan also expressed the significance of learning Thai language at the temple school. Nan came to Chiang Mai to work in 2009 because of the challenging social situation in Myanmar at the time. He could not go to school or find a job. He thought that if he wanted to adapt to the environment in Chiang Mai, he must learn Thai. For him, usually he can practice it when he is working and talking to local people. But at this school, he can study Thai systematically and practice it in an enjoyable environment with many Shan friends. Therefore, it is obvious that the temple school is a very important place that can help him improve his Thai language speaking and writing skills and gain support from other Shan people.

The temple school is therefore an important social space for Shan people, and every Sunday they get together from everwhere in Chiang Mai to take the Thai language lesson together. This school is a network that can connect every Shan person, not only by providing language lessons that help them practice communication skills to adapt in Chiang Mai, but also by providing a place where Shan migrant people who are in the same situation can get together to share their experiences about life in Chiang Mai. If someone faces problems in their lives, other people can support them.

Social space - MAP Foundation

The final social space that is analyzed here is a local NGO called MAP Foundation. Its office building is a small house with two floors. In the meeting room is a whiteboard in front of the desks, which contains a lot of words relevant to migrant workers, such as "Document issues are a big problem for Migrant Workers and "No Borders. Freedom of Choice!"



MAP Foundation office

The managers of MAP Foundation said the organization has been established for over 20 years, and is managed by the local government and the ILO (International Labor Organization). In effect, MAP Foundation plays an important role in the interaction and communication between Shan migrant workers and government officials. The purpose of the organization is to support Shan migrant workers who come to work in Chiang Mai. For one thing, it can provide assistance for Shan migrants to help prove their legal status in Chiang Mai, and when basic rights of Shan migrants are violated, the organization defends their rights on their behalf.

Tin, one of the managers there, is also a Shan migrant worker. 6 years ago, she listened to a program about Shan migrant workers from the local radio station, and after taking an interest in the organization, she became a volunteer here. Tin has helped many Shan migrant workers to solve problems. When she became more and more experienced in this work, she ultimately decided to stay here and to continue the work into which she has put her heart.

In order to help Shan migrant workers to know more about real-time policy and institutions, MAP Foundation set up a radio station to spread news and information in Shan language. The content largely relates to migrant rights, safety in work places and other social issues, and followers can leave messages in the comments line about their setbacks, difficulties and other confusions they have.

They are also present on Facebook and Line social networking apps, and so far have around 1000 followers. As this may have limited reach, the organization holds concerts or meetings which often hundreds of Shan workers attend, where they can share their experiences of life in Chiang Mai and speak out about what they are suffering in the workplace, and receive advice and suggestions.

From my point of view, MAP foundation is a significant social space that Shan migrant people have created. As a space dedicated to Shan people, the organization can help them face setbacks. In fact, this social space consists of two parts; one is Shan migrant people who are looking for support, and the other is Shan people who are experienced in handling this complex situation. They can interact in this space and thereby enhance the interpersonal support networks of Shan migrant workers.

Conclusion

Over the recent two decades, Shan migrant workers have migrated from Myanmar to Chiang Mai, Thailand, to find opportunities to improve their livelihood. In this paper, it can be found that four particular social spaces - market stalls, restaurants, temple schools and the MAP Foundation provide forms of support through economic activity, Thai language learning, and supporting organizations. Such spaces create a network among fellow Shan migrants, which helps them adapt to the life and environment in Chiang Mai better.

The stalls in the market are the first social spaces that provide connections between the stall owners and their customers, Shan friends or relatives. The Shan restaurants form a connection with Shan migrant friends and relatives, and serve the crucial purpose to give their fellow Shan people support and a sense of familiarity throughout their difficult lives. The temple school is another social space that provides language lessons to help Shan migrants practice communication skills to adapt in Chiang Mai, and create a network among Shan migrants who are in a similar situation, so they can get together to share their experiences about life in Chiang Mai. Lastly, MAP Foundation, an NGO which is dedicated only to Shan migrant workers, gives them the confidence to face setbacks bravely.

When various activities and interactions are conducted by Shan people, the four social spaces serve as the central network that helps form a vibrant community with an embedded support structure, which is integral to the lives of people in the largest ethnic migrant population in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Positionality and reflections

As we all know, as a researcher, the position taken upon enter the field site is extremely important, because it can determine how the research informants react to you and this affects how one collects data, and the actual value of it.

When I took the lesson about how to do the field investigation in China, my teacher had told me that sometimes there was no need to express the position of researcher, and that interviewees might distrust you and would not want to tell the truth. However, in this fieldwork, our coordinator would introduce us directly as students who were interested in Shan ethnic culture to the interviewees. At first, I thought perhaps they did not understand it, but they acted quietly, friendly and some even showed gratitude to us, which was really beyond my expectation.

What made me most moved was that after many of them discovered what we wanted to learn, no matter how busy they were, they would answer every question patiently and specifically, so that we could obtain a plenty of valuable data. From their reaction, I could see their kindness to foreigners and the respect to researchers. Most importantly, they were very pleased to discuss their life and ethnic culture, all of which helped us collect more data to support our research.

When entering tourist sites, there is no doubt that we are Chinese. When we walked around and spoke Chinese in the field site, like the market, most local people would regard us as Chinese tourists. Actually, we did not mind them perceiving us like that, because I thought this position might provide a good chance for us to participate in their activities and interactions so that we could experience their daily economic activities. As there were four members of our group—a coordinator, a translator and two students—we needed to chat with the interviewees through our translator. In this process, we could not be certain if the translator expressed the question well, or if the interviewees understood it well, and so to some extent, the data we collected might not be first-hand. Therefore, it was obvious that we had some problems on using this position to do the field interview.

As of our research topic concerned Shan migrant workers, it was important for us to understand how their status in Thailand was legal or not, so that involved some sensitive questions. However we could not ask this kinds of ideas directly through questions like "do you have Thai citizenship" or "do you have legal status", unless the interviewees talked about it of their own accord - like a Shan woman who was a seller of a Shan product stall, she and her husband had bought a house in Chiang Mai, so according to this, we could assume that she might have legal Thai

citizenship. The truth was that she was married to her husband who had citizenship, so that they had the ability to buy a house. Managing the sensitivity around this issue was a challenge for us consistently throughout the project.

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Ethnic
Textile Trade
Chiang Mai Province &
Khod Yao, Phayao Province

Hmong (Miao) ethnic people are concentrated in China, Vietnam and Laos, with some in Thailand. Hmong textiles are closely intertwined with various aspects of their life, and they are used in customary tradition and festivals. In recent years, Hmong textiles have transformed from locally worn materials to cultural commodities in the ethnic handicraft market across Southeast Asia and beyond. The Cross-border trade of Hmong textile is closely linked to local, national, and global trade networks, which is observed within the spaces of production and trading from Phayao to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand.

Advisor: Dr. Prasit Leepreecha

Changing Roles of Women in the Hmong Textile Trade in Northern Thailand

Dong Wen

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Abstract

This article explores how the increasing engagement of Hmong women in the ethnic textile trade has changed their roles in various aspects of social life. Data was collected through interviews with ethnic Hmong in two different field sites in northern Thailand, Chiang Mai city and Khod Yao village. The study identifies 4 key areas of change: First, the commercialization of textiles has led to a transformation in the meaning of needlework for Hmong women: nowadays, they learn embroidery skills for personal or business interests rather than to find a future husband. Secondly, the participation of Hmong women in the textile trade has led to a change in their daily duties, and the gender division of household labor has been challenged. Thirdly, their status as traders provides Hmong women the opportunity to extend their geographic space and networks, and thus, to gain wider social support and recognition. Finally, knowing the key technologies of textile production and being able to earn substantial income gives the female traders more decision-making power in the family. The author argues that the growing engagement of women in the Hmong textile trade and the change of their participation has gradually liberated them from the constraints of traditional Hmong culture.

Keywords: Textile trade, Ethnic trade, Hmong, women, role, transformation, northern Thailand

Background

Before I attended a summer school at Chiang Mai University in August 2019, I had only a basic understanding of the Hmong and their engagement in the textile trade, mainly from some studies on this ethnic group (e.g. Peng, 2015; Symonds, 2004; Zhang & Huang, 2009).

For example, from Symonds (2004), I learned that the Hmong in Thailand are a subgroup of the Miao in China. Partly due to persecution in history, large numbers of Hmong moved out of southwestern China into the mountains of Laos, Burma (Myanmar) and Vietnam in the seventeenth century, and over the last hundred years, also to the mountainous areas of Siam (Thailand) (Symonds, 2004, pp. XXIV-XXV). This history of migration suggests that there are some connections or transnational networks between ethnic Hmong in different countries, e.g. Thailand and China.

From the Chinese scholar Peng Xuefang (2015) I gained some knowledge on the Hmong textile trade in China. According to the author, textile trade forms an important part of the economic development of regions where many Hmong reside (e.g., Gui Zhou Province). Chinese government departments have attached great importance to the inheritance of Hmong embroidery technology and have supported the Hmong in developing their textile trade in various ways. The state has also set up various projects to promote and protect intangible cultural heritage. They financially supported Hmong people with excellent embroidery skills to teach these techniques. Moreover, local government agencies have undertaken efforts to link the Hmong textile trade to tourism in order to boost economic development among the Hmong in the whole area (Peng, 2015). Peng's research made me aware that connecting Hmong textiles with tourism did not only increase the value of the products, but also helped preserving Hmong handicraft skills. According to the Chinese scholars Zhang and Huang (2004), in the Hmong textile production in China, most of the heirs of this intangible cultural heritage are women, because in the traditional Chinese Hmong family, women were required to have good skills in needlework (Zhang & Huang, 2009). Zhang and Huang's research points out that in both traditional and contemporary Hmong society women play a crucial role in textile production.

Prasit Leepreecha (2019, pers. Communication) introduced background information on the Hmong textile trade in Thailand to us. We learned that the Thai Hmong textile trade consists of a global trade network, with a base in Chiang Mai and Phayao in northern Thailand, and connections to China, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and some Western countries. This made me realize the importance of a global perspective in the study of the Miao/Hmong textile trade.

Against this backdrop, I was curious to find out about the Thai Hmong textile market and its differences with the Hmong textile market in China. I was particularly interested in the participation of Hmong women in this business. Thus, I decided to focus my research on how the role of Hmong women has changed after engaging in the Hmong textile trade.

Since I chose a gender-related topic, I also tried to gain a deeper understanding of concepts of gender. A number of scholars (e.g. Mead, 1935; Beauvoir, 1949) have studied gender issues during the last century. For example, Mead (1935) comes to the conclusion that differences between men and women are not biologically, but socially determined. Mead's study helped me to understand the importance of taking into consideration social and cultural aspect of gender formation when studying the relation between Hmong women and textiles. Beauvoir (1949) proposes that a woman's character is formed through a masculine universe and concludes that only by achieving economic independence, it is possible to achieve equal love (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 724). Rubin (1975) introduces the concept of the gender system and elaborates how this system is closely related to the economic and political system, but has its own operating rules.

The work of Beauvoir (1949), and Rubin (1975) made me aware that in my own research on the role of Hmong women in the textile trade, I have to pay attention to different factors that can have an impact on changes of gender roles, including the economic and political system and social structures.

Based on these early studies, a number of scholars have analyzed relations between women's crafts and gender. Jolie (2014) describes that in different cultures, women often work as producers of textiles, while men engage in the commercial textile trade. However, the author also finds that in traditional communities not yet affected by the market economy men also play an important role in the production of textiles. Based on these observations, Jolie analyzes how the textile industry affects men and women in a different way, and analyzes the division of labor, textile traditions and social capital in traditional societies. These archaeological and ethnological data from Southwest America suggest that in some contexts, weaving has gained ritual significance and increased opportunities for weavers to accumulate social capital. For them, social capital turned out to be more important than economic capital (Jolie, 2014). Social capital refers here to the social acquaintances and networks that can lead to opportunities for higher status within a society (Bourdieu, 1986). Hardy (2012) describes that in the context of a rapidly changing society, embroidery has become a vehicle that reflects transformation processes among women in Mutwa, Tanzania. The authors elaborates the changes in the relationship

between these women and embroidery, and how they have adapted embroidery according to their changing ethnic identity and Islamic consciousness.

These studies inspired me to explore the impacts of the rise of the Hmong textile trade in Thailand on women from a gender perspective, and to understand the transforming role of Hmong women in this trade.

Research question

How has the role of Hmong women changed after engaging in the Hmong textile trade?

Research sites

Data was collected during fieldwork from August 9-13, 2019 in two field sites:

1. Warorot Market in Chiang Mai
2. Khod Yao village in Phayao, both in northern Thailand.

Hmong clothing shops in Warorot Market

Khod Yao Village

Hmong traders at the Warorot market informed us that with a history of around 100 years, this market is the oldest in Chiang Mai. The sale of Hmong fabrics is concentrated in an area lined with simple stalls and houses on the edge of the market. This area emerged around 30 years ago, even though the exact year of the first formation of the market is unknown. The traders recall that at first just a few families set up simple stalls. Afterwards, more and more sellers joined the market and eventually formed today's Hmong textile sales market.

The second field site Khod Yao, is located in the border area between Thailand and Laos. Currently, 86 families (518 individuals) are living in Khod Yao, all ethnic Hmong. According to a middle-aged man who opened a shop in the village, most of the villagers moved from China to Laos before World War II, and then from Laos into Thailand. He told us that the majority of the villagers are engaged in two occupations, farming and trading. However, there are some families that no longer cultivate fields, but specialize in textile trade. As early as 1997, he said, some in the village started working in the textile trade. At that time, only a few families bought linen from Laos, but only sold products in their leisure time in Chiang Mai. From 2007 onwards, more and more people started participating in the textile trade. Now, there around 20 households in the village involved in the textile trade. Other households don't sell goods directly, but work for traders, e.g. in reprocessing fabric.

In northern Thailand, the first field site, Warorot market, is the main market for Hmong textiles, while the second site, Khod Yao, is the major area for processing and producing Hmong textiles. Both locations are part of the larger production chain of Hmong textile trade in Thailand and connect the Thai Hmong trade to the wider region. Therefore, studying these two locations can provide important insights into the Hmong textile trade in Thailand and beyond.

Methodology

My main research methods were field observation, interviews and document research.

Observing the Hmong traders and their customers at Warorot market and the Hmong villagers in Khod Yao allowed me to gain insights into the gender distribution among different groups involved in the whole trade chain, from the production to the sale of Hmong textiles. I observed that mostly women are engaged in the production of Hmong textiles, and only a few men help their families by doing simple work, such as cutting recycled clothes into pieces.

My main data was drawn from interviews. In total, I interviewed 5 informants: First, A, a 43-old male owner of a Hmong Textile shop, and second, B, 40-years only wife of A. Both A and B run their business together. My third informant is C, a 22-age Hmong girl who graduated from college and now helps selling products at her mother's textile shop. My fourth informant (D) is a Hmong designer. She started her own business around 3 years ago which is running well today. Finally, I interviewed a 67-year old women (E). She was the first to start a business in her family, and now, almost all family members (three generations) are involved in the textile trade. This case is special, because her married daughter is also working in the family business. Interviews with different generations in this family have particularly helped me to analyze the impacts of textile trade on Hmong women, as well as to draw conclusions regarding the division of responsibilities and changes in the lives of women.

Before I started my fieldwork, I had a basic understanding of the global trade of Hmong textiles in Thailand. After developing my research questions, I read relevant research on the relation between women's craft and gender (e.g. Jolie, 2014; Hardy, 2012) which was very helpful to my research.

Findings

Based on the data I collected during my fieldwork, I was able to identified 4 key areas of change of the role of women after they engaged in textile trading.

Change of Hmong women's role in textile producing

My informants explained that in traditional Hmong society, embroidery and making of clothes were essential skills of Hmong women. Mothers started training their daughters in embroidery and in sewing at a very young age. These skills formed

an important precondition for Hmong girls to find a husband. In the traditional upbringing in the Hmong families, women were considered to be subservient in the patriarchal family, born to serve their husband and family.

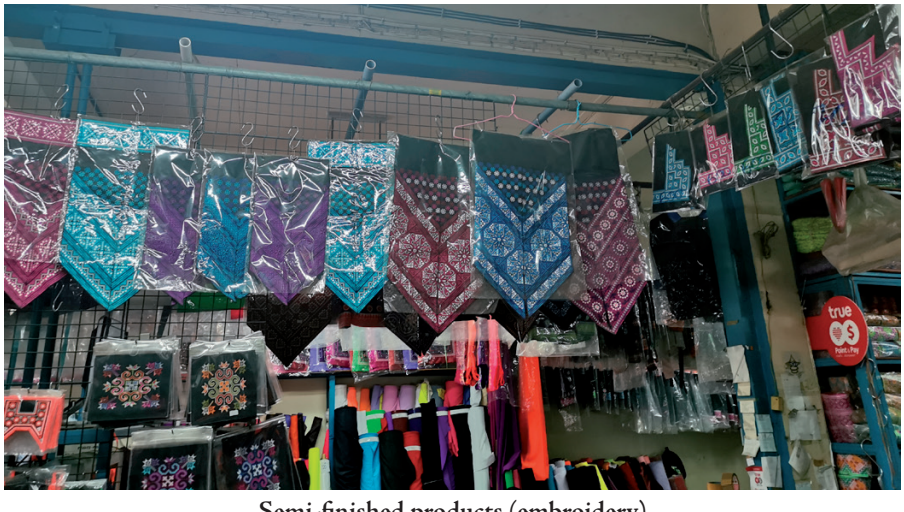
A woman I interviewed (B) who sells Hmong textiles at the Warorot market explained that she had been taught embroidery techniques by her mother since she was five years old. If she did not learn well enough or did not meet her mother's expectations, she was harshly criticized, and sometimes even beaten. She also told me that in the traditional Hmong society, Hmong families were usually reluctant to spend money to send girls to school. Instead, parents preferred girls to learn practical life skills, such as looking after the orchard, cooking, or making clothes. In their childhood, Hmong girls were mainly busy helping with household chores. In the family, Hmong women were trained in weaving, embroidery, sewing and other techniques of textile production. This was important to meet the family's need for clothes. At that time, it was not convenient to purchase daily necessities, because the Hmong lived mainly in rather remote mountainous areas. At the same time, most of the Hmong families were barely able to support the family's living needs and did not have enough money to buy clothes and other products. Whether a woman was diligent and good in domestic chores, laundry and cooking or not became a criteria to evaluate a "good Hmong girl".

The data suggest that traditionally, the production of Hmong textiles, including embroidery and sewing formed an important part of Hmong women's daily life. On one hand, the skills of a woman in Hmong textile production were a prerequisite for marriage, on the other hand, the quality of Hmong textile production seemed to be a criteria to evaluate the value of a woman.

In 1982, Thailand enacted its fifth economic development plan. The Thai Government set up the National Tourism Commission and began to enact various policies for the development of tourism (The Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan, 1982-1986). In the years after the adoption of the plan, Thailand's tourism industry began to grow. The increased arrival of tourists in Thailand created opportunities for the expansion of the global Hmong textile market.

Thailand's Hmong textile market has not only been developed further by tourism, it has also established broader and more complex trading networks. Based on my research, there are three different types of products: 1) raw materials, including wool, cloth, etc.; 2) semi-finished products, including a variety of handmade and machine-made embroidery; and 3) end products, including a variety of bags and clothes made from used and new textiles.

Raw material (wool)



Semi-finished products (embroidery)

Products made from used cloth

A new style of product.

I believe that the gradual formation of the Hmong textile trade market has created opportunities for many Hmong families. In this process, the significance of Hmong women's textile production has changed.

A 67-year-old Hmong woman I interviewed (E) remembers: "when my youngest son was 3 years old (27 years ago), I went to Chiang Mai with my friends and tried to start a business. At that time, I only sold some linen on the roadside. Two years later, I was able to buy a van from my savings. My husband helped me driving the car. When I went to Chiang Mai to do business, my husband was in charge of babysitting."

This case illustrates how women like her became more mobile and began to move between Khod Yao and Chiang Mai after engaging in the textile trade. Due to the rise of the textile trade, also the economic value of the garment technology of Hmong began to increase. The clothes, once only produced for domestic use, were now able to generate income for families.

Another 23-year-old women I interviewed (C) had just graduated from college and had not yet found a suitable job. Since her family needed a seller, she decided to help her parents in the shop. "My parents never forced me, my older and my little sister to learn how to make clothes or to embroider, because we were going to school," she said. "My older and my younger sister are married, and both of them only started learning needlework after they got married. They learned needlework mainly for the textile trade business. I started to learn needlework a year ago, mainly because I was very interested in embroidery."

Her statement indicates that, for girls like her, needlework is no longer an indispensable prerequisite for marriage. This young trader also explained me that this traditional practice is no longer popular today, and Hmong women do not have to learn needlework before they get married now. As long as both men and women like each other, they can marry. Based on this interview, I concluded that young Hmong girls like my informant do no longer agree with the idea of girls having to learn needlework to serve their families, but their willingness to acquire embroidery skills is primarily based on interest and business opportunities.

My informant C also told me: "As most of our customers are Thai, the vests with a collar sell better. Therefore, my sister and mother design this style of cloth more. Our shop does not sell traditional Hmong clothes anymore". As we can see from this case, some Hmong seller have changed the style of their textiles, to offer products that are more popular with consumers. These sellers try to be responsive to the market demand in order to achieve higher financial returns.

Bases on two of my interviews, I concluded that in different periods, textiles have played a different role in the Hmong family. Before the rise of the textile trade, due to lack of supplies, the textiles were produced by the Hmong women only for their families. After the rise of the textile trade, however, the products were more and more made to cater to customer preferences. The Hmong textiles seem to be well-known and appreciated by the market and purchased and used by different consumers. In this process, it seems that the identity of female Hmong producers began to change, from being an unpaid family service provider towards businesswomen pursuing financial interests. More generally, the data indicates that needlework is no longer a mandatory condition for women to be chosen by their husband's family. Thus, it appears that the function of Hmong textiles has changed, from domestic use to the generation of income, and these changes have freed the Hmong women I interviewed from the traditional evaluation criteria of being a "good girl". Of course, this change has not only been driven by the increased commercialization of textiles, but is the result of a complex interplay of different social factors.

Changes of Hmong women's role in everyday duties

In the traditional Hmong society, daily responsibilities are divided between Hmong males and females. This is reflected in the different upbringing of girls and boys. My informants told me that Hmong girls began to learn how to make clothes, how to cook, and how to take care of others at home at a very young age. After these girls got married, they had to take care of their husbands and the whole family. Boys did not need to learn how to do housework like girls, but they were taught that men are responsible of providing for the family. According to Symonds (2014), the Hmong division of labor mirrors its gender divisions, with designated tasks for women and men, and a few overlapping areas, such as harvesting rice, in which both sexes participate. Women are responsible for the household or domestic work, which includes cleaning, childcare, feeding pigs and other animals, food preparation and cooking, whereas men make baskets and work with silver for the production of jewelry, and iron for tools (Symonds, 2014, p. xxvii).

My female informant (E) told me, "When I was ten years old, my mother started teaching me how to embroider. I also began helping my mother to raise chickens, to cook, to look after my younger siblings, and sometimes to help my mother in the farm. At that time, I did not go to school, I was just like all the other girls in the village who traditionally grew up like this." Another female Hmong informant (B) said: "In my parents' generation, men cut trees and built houses, and although they could manage farmland, my mother would help with farm work." The data

suggest that in the traditional Hmong society, Hmong women took over a variety of household chores, including family care, cooking, making clothes, laundry, small-scale family farming. Besides, they also helped their husbands planting crops, while men were mainly responsible for agricultural cultivation, the sale of crops, as well as some heavy labor. More generally, the daily division of labor of the Hmong families could be described as men being mainly responsible for external affairs, and women being more in charge of internal affairs related to the family.

These circumstances changed somewhat when girls got more opportunities to go to school. My interview partner E told me: "I did not teach my daughter needlework when they were little, because they were at school all the time. They did not need to help me with the housework, and they did not need to help me with farm work either. At that time, we did not continue to grow rice, but planted fruit trees, because they do not need so much labor. My daughters just needed to study hard." My interview data indicate that with changes of livelihood patterns and of the Hmong social system, Hmong women are no-longer forced to learn traditional skills and service roles when they are young. However, this does not automatically mean that the division of responsibilities in the traditional Hmong family has changed, i.e. that men are more responsible for external affairs and women are mainly in charge of for domestic affairs.

My informant B told me that she and her husband are now both in charge of the business, and that she is mainly responsible for communicating with hired designers to determine the style and pattern of textiles. She is also responsible for sales in the store. In contrast, her husband is mainly in charge of the production process in the factory, such as digitalizing patterns created by his wife and other designers and processing them in the factory. Her husband will also be responsible for delivering goods to customers. At the same time, he does do any housework, such as laundry and cooking, unless his wife is away from home for a longer period of time. My informant A (the husband of B) said: "I am generally responsible for purchasing goods, delivery and factory matters. But all of these tasks depend on my wife's decisions, i.e. what color, what materials, and what kind of fabric with pattern we buy, as well as what design we use and how we match it to the products. Because women have a better understanding and knowledge about colors and patterns, they know best how to harmonize them." My data indicates that in this generation, something has changed in women's daily duties. Women seem to be no longer just responsible for housework as they used to be, but they also play an important role in the textile trade. They are doing business and making money together with their husbands. At the same time, it appears that although these

women are responsible for external affairs in the textile trade as their husbands, men are rather not taking over tasks that have "female labels", such as needlework, washing clothes, or cooking.

My interview partner B told me: "Many of my customers are Hmong from the mountains nearby, most of them are female. Sometimes they come to my shop to buy ready-made embroidery to sew clothes." This statement raises the question whether in rural areas, needlework, like sewing clothes, is still primarily the responsibility of women.

But with changing livelihood systems and increased access to education for Hmong girls, the influence of the traditional concept of Hmong society seemed to have weakened. At my second field survey site Khod Yao, I observed a family reprocessing old Hmong clothing. A father cut old clothes in pieces, i.e. smaller embroidered parts, while his daughter reprocessed the pieces with a sewing machine next to him. Today's middle and younger generation of Hmong women seemed to have been less traditionally educated, also due the improved access to education from an early age on. Therefore, there also seems to be a greater flexibility in the division of daily responsibilities.

In conclusion, the old generation of Hmong women did not have the chance to attend school. Before the commercialization of Hmong textiles, Hmong women considered excellent needlework skills and diligence as indicators for their own value. The data suggest that in line with the traditional Hmong upbringing of girls, Hmong women were trained to do housework and learn embroidery, and marriage reflected the value of this training. Moreover, for these Hmong women, marriage also conveyed certain family responsibilities. After the increasing commercialization of Hmong textiles, one of the main goals of the women became the generation of income through textiles. As more and more Hmong women participated in the textile trade, also the traditional division of family responsibilities began to change. There seem to be some men who work as their wives' assistants, e.g. helping in cutting fabrics, transporting goods, etc. But this only indicates that the commercialization of Hmong textiles has caused slight, but not fundamental changes, in the daily division of work between Hmong women and men. Since more and more Hmong women receive school education, they get less and less influenced by traditional concepts of family education. In my opinion, the daily division of labor will be more and more detached from the constraints of the traditional concept of Hmong family, and the "gender label" of family affairs will become weaker and weaker.

Changes of Hmong women's social space

Particularly due to the rapid development of tourism in Thailand, Hmong textiles have obtained a distinctive commercial value. These Hmong textiles are not only a commodity, but also a symbolic carrier of Hmong culture, so they are particularly popular among domestic and foreign tourists. A shop owner told me that from the 1990s onwards, more and more women in Khod Yao village moved to Chiang Mai to do textile-related trade. The main reason why these women began to sell textiles was to improve family income. My informant B explained: "Before our family started to engage in textile trade, we had no savings at home. At that time, we mainly grew rice and corn, rice was eaten by the family, and corn could make little money." This statement suggests that Hmong women who first "stepped out of the family" and began to engage with the "market" chose this path in order to survive.

From the perspective of gender construction, gender roles are arranged and embodied through spatial order (McDowell, 1999). In the traditional Hmong society, women were confined to "family" space. This included responsibilities like family diet, parenting, cloth production, and textile embroidery, tasks that were associated with traditional gender roles and with the value of Hmong women. The limitation of geographical space has, to some extent, also restricted the possibility for Hmong women to play a role in other spaces. However, with the gradual formation of the Hmong textile market, more and more women in Khod Yao began to engage in the textile business in order to improve the economic situation of their families. Geographically, the Hmong textile trade is concentrated in Chiang Mai, so the trade provides an opportunity for Hmong women in the village to break through the confines of traditional space. In this section, I will analyze how these Hmong women involved in the textile trade have overcome constraints of traditional social space through an expansion of both, geospatial and interpersonal networks.

For Hmong women, engaging in textile trade does not only mean the extension of geographical space, but also to break through social boundaries. My informant E told me: "When I was 45 years old (in 1998), I started to work in the textile trade business. Initially, a female friend from the village took me by bus to Chiang Mai to sell goods from Laos. We were all in the Warorot market, just selling goods along the road. Two years later, our family had enough money to buy a van, so me and my husband could drive goods to Chiang Mai together. Two years later we opened our own shop. In this process, I also developed some stable cooperative relations with customers. My husband can't write, so he's mainly in charge of driving, and I'm in charge of the business."

My informant D, a Hmong costume designer, said: "I have teams in 17 different places, some of them consist of old villagers who are responsible for embroidery and design. I also have a lot of customers, most of them are Thai, but there are also many foreign tourists. I usually post photos of my clothes on Facebook, WeChat and other social media, and if customers like them, they'll contact me. There are also buyers who will come to my shop to see goods and to order in person. Many of my customers are regular customers, some are tourists."

The data indicate that through engaging in textile trade, Hmong women did not only break through restrictions of geographical space, but also their interpersonal relationships changed with the expansion of geospatial space. In the textile trade, for example, these Hmong women began to recruit human resources, such as suppliers of material, factory managers, designers, customers and other business partners, who established contacts with each other through commercial cooperation, e.g. through the internet, telephone, etc.

In my opinion, the rise of textile trade not only allowed Hmong women to overcome the limitations of geographical space and to expand their network resources but at the same time, with the continuous expansion of social space, also enabled them to the accumulate social resources. The data further suggest that with this expansion, also ideas, values and behavior patterns of Hmong women have also changed. First, the perception of the technique of textile production has changed. In the traditional Hmong society, girls learned and practiced needlework in order to be recognized by their families and future husbands, and thus, to increase their self-worth (i.e. the self-perception of the women of their own value). After the rise of textile trade, the textile-related work no longer served the family, but aimed at gaining commercial benefits. At the same time, embroidery and production skills are no longer necessary for Hmong women, because the textile trade has a created a commercial trade network, and designers can be hired. Second, the attitude towards knowledge and education and the perception of self-worth seem to have changed. I assume that since more and more Hmong women engage in the Hmong textile trade, they will gradually realize the importance of knowledge and school education for their children. Moreover, doing housework and sewing clothes seems to be no longer the only criteria for evaluating the value of women.

Changes of gender roles and power relations

According to my interview partner E, before the rise of textile trade, the main sources of income for Hmong families in rural areas were opium (before 1958) and agricultural products, which generated only a small revenue. The growing

engagement in the textile trade provided higher income to the Hmong families. Today, women play the most important role in the business. Husbands usually act more as assistants in this process. In business, they seem to follow arrangements and advices of their wives.

Many Hmong women have learned complex embroidery techniques and have their own unique understanding of traditional Hmong costumes and patterns because they have been influenced and educated by their families. With regard to the collection and procurement of textile materials, they are thus more aware of what patterns can reflect aspects of traditional Hmong culture particularly well, and what kind of products will be popular with consumers. This is something that Hmong men are less able to do. From the product design to the production, Hmong women are more sensitive to color, they know how to match different patterns, how to increase attractiveness of designs for costumers, skills that are more difficult for Hmong men to take over, due to the female Hmong's unique experiences with the textiles und their particular upbringing. In the product sale, Hmong women will recommend products that are suitable for different types of customer, according to their specific needs and characteristics. Therefore, female seller seems to be able to sell more than men. Due to the important role that Hmong women play in trade, they have more decision-making power in the business. My informant C summarized: "In my textile business, my mother is responsible for most of the things. She is responsible for the design of the products, and also manages the hired designers and tailors. My dad sometimes washes cloth at home, sometimes he buys or delivers goods to customers, but my mother arranges what he does."

In gender studies, the improvement of women's economic ability is considered an important factor in changing the gender role of women under a patriarchal structure (Luke & Munshi, 2011). By selling textiles, some Hmong women became the primary income earner in the household, which allowed them to have more decision-making power at home, to discuss with their husbands and to determine some important matters within the family. This increase in women's economic ability has enabled Hmong women to overcome certain traditional constraints. According to our assistant teacher Urai Yangcheepsutjarit (2019, pers. communication), a Hmong researcher herself, in the traditional Hmong society, married daughters no longer belong to this family (i.e. a married woman becomes a member of her husband's family and will no longer be involved in her family' affairs, especially financial matters). This is similar to an old saying in China: "The daughter who marries is the water that is poured out."

However, in the family of my informant E, things are different. She narrated, "I'm old, the wife of my eldest son and my eldest daughter have taken over the family business. After they made more and more money, they began to expand their business into three shops. Later on, my eldest son, the eldest daughter's husband, my second and my youngest son also joined the business". Her eldest daughter was already married when she joined the family business. In traditional Hmong society, married daughters were responsible of taking care of the husband's family, and thus did not have much financial interactions with their mothers. But this daughter became part of the family business. My interview partner told me that at first, she wanted only her eldest son lead the business, but the risk seemed to be too big, so she decided to let the both the elder son and daughter take over the business, so that the risk could be shared between the two. Although the second and the youngest son joined the textile trade business after they had grown up, they are still not familiar with doing business. The second daughter has gained many experiences in the textile trade and plays a crucial role in the family business. Therefore, even though the eldest daughter is already married, she can still participate in the business. She does not have to live with her husband's parents to look after of them, although they need care. Since she makes a lot of money through the business, she only needs to pay for their living costs. This case illustrates that the contribution of Hmong women to the household economy strengthens their voice and their decision-making rights within the family. In line with this, power relations between wife and the husband seem to have changed as well. Besides, the economic ability of Hmong women can change traditional social structures, so that Hmong women can decide more freely how they want to live. This also means that women with higher economic ability can have more control over their lives.

Conclusion

After Hmong women began to engage in textile trade, their textile production started to gain economic value. Through engaging in trade, they were able to overcome the confines of family space, because as the businesses expanded, the social networks of Hmong women expanded simultaneously. Because many Hmong women need to focus on the profitable textile trade, they are not required to take over as much housework as they used to do, and men seem to help with some of the chores when necessary. As Hmong women play an indispensable role in the textile trade, they are able to make more money than their husbands. Thus, in both business and family affairs, they have gained more decision-making power. The

changes have allowed these women to break through the constraints of traditional ideas and contributed to the transformation of traditional female roles.

The above conclusions are based on data obtained during field research in Warorot Market and Khod Yao. However, due to the short time for the field work, the data collection was not comprehensive, but can only illustrate my point of view to a certain extent. If there is chance to continue this research, I would like to delve deeper into the changes of the role of Hmong women by taking into account other influencing factors, such as national policy, social and educational aspects. Also, I would like to explore changes in the role of Hmong women who are not involved in the textile trade.

Final reflections and positionality

During field work, my status as "foreigner" and my status as "student" may both have had an impact on my data collection. First, it is possible that the informants were reluctant to tell me the truth or gave me half-truths, because they did not want to share personal information with a stranger. Also, they did not gain any benefits from my interviews, so they were probably not willing to spend much time talking to me. Moreover, the meaning of my questions as well as the responses of my informants may have changed due to the translation of our interpreter. At the same time, I wondered how my research affected my interviewer partners. Perhaps my questions encouraged them to reflect on topics related to their families, such as why they engage in the textile trade, and what is their real interest in this profession.

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Production Processes of Hmong Textiles in Northern Thailand

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Abstract

This study explores influences of customer preferences on the design and production processes of Hmong textiles in northern Thailand. In both field sites, the Hmong textile market in Chiang Mai and Khod Yao village, Hmong traders and producers rely on the textile business to make a living. Based on data collected through interviews and field observation, products in the Hmong textile market in Chiang Mai were divided into three categories, according to the preferences of different customer groups: products for Hmong people, for customers from Asia and for Western tourists. In addition, the author suggests that customer preferences also affects the production processes of the Hmong textiles.

Keywords: Hmong people, northern Thailand, Textile business, Production process, Cross border trade

Introduction

Ethnic Hmong and textile trade in Thailand

The Hmong, a sub-group of the ethnic Miao, live scattered in different parts of East and Southeast Asia (Culas & Michaud, 2004). From the early 1800 onwards, this ethnic group has moved from China to Northern Vietnam, Laos and Thailand (Culas & Michaud, 2004; Mottin, 1980). During the mid-and late nineteenth century, groups of Hmong people gradually migrated from the Thai-Lao border further into Thailand, due to ongoing war in Laos. At first, they spread across mountains areas in North and Northeast Thailand (Xu, 2014). Miao (2010) describes that the migration history of the Hmong nationality is reflected in the pattern of their traditional clothes (Miao, 2010).

For several decades after their migration into Thailand, the Hmong did not receive much attention from the Thai government (Yu, 2011). Only during the 1950s and 1960s, when the influence of Communism began to grow in Thailand, the Thai state and the royal family began to set their sights on the Hmong. They raised growing concerns that ethnic highland people would sympathize with the Communists, and thus, jeopardize national security. Thus, government officers granted Thai identity cards to some of the highland people (Yu, 2011). Moreover, from the 1980s onwards, the state also increased efforts to replace opium with cash crop cultivation among the Hmong and other highlander groups, even though opium had already been officially banned in Thailand since 1958 (Renard, 2001).

According Urai Yangcheepsutjarit (2019, pers. communication), a Hmong assistant researcher, Hmong mainly relied on economic crop production after the cultivation of opium was banned in the kingdom. However, the market price of cash crops was not very stable, so that the Hmong increasingly began to engage in craft/textile production and trade. Cohen (2000) describes how the crafts of the Hmong were more intensely commercialized and promoted to the market than products of other ethnic groups in Thailand (e.g. the Karen, Lahu). Firstly, Hmong products are attractive to a wide range of customers. Moreover, their outstanding commercialization has been attributed to a number socio-political factors, in particular, the migration of large numbers of Hmong refugees from Laos to Thailand in the 1970s, and initiatives of various government agencies and private entrepreneurs to commercialize Hmong art as a source of income for these refugees. Besides, Hmong products became dominant in the ethnic textile market, because craft projects were implemented in Hmong villages to replace opium production (Cohen, 2000).

Miao (2010) describes that nowadays, the Hmong people use mainly two routes for transporting fabrics from China to Thailand. The first and main route starts from Wenshan, then passes through Mohan in China, over Houeyxay in Laos, before reaching Khod Yao, Chiang Mai and Bangkok in Thailand. This route is mainly used by Chinese Hmong to sell clothes directly to Thai Hmong. Another route starts in Wenshan and Mohan in China, continues over Muangxai to Xayabuly in Laos, and finally, ends in Khod Yao and Chiang Mai, and sometimes Bangkok, Thailand. This route is mainly used by Lao Hmong who purchase their clothes from the Chinese Han (Miao, 2010).

The field sites

This research project is part of a summer school on Sino-Thai relations, a cooperation project between Yunnan University, China, and Chiang Mai University,

Thailand, in August 2019. The fieldwork was conducted in two field sites: a Hmong textile market near the local Warorot Market in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand where we collected data for 3 days. The second field site is the Hmong village of Khod Yao in Phusang district, Phayao Province, where we stayed for two days.

The Hmong textile market in Chiang Mai

According to our interviewees, who are traders in the Hmong textile market in Chiang Mai, this market in has been established more than 20 years ago. It can be divided into two main areas: one area is densely packed with cloth shops. This area belongs to a Thai Chinese businessman, and the Hmong traders rent land from him to set up their cloth shops. In the other part of the market, shops are located in the first floor of townhouses. Hmong traders in this area rent their shops from different house owners. When the market was first set up around 20 years ago, it consisted only of four or five Hmong textile shops. However, since the business of these sellers went well, more and more of their relatives and friends joined the market. Accordingly, the size of this market gradually grew substantially over the past two decades. According to a Hmong trader, today, there are more than 50 shops in the market. It usually opens from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm. Most of the Hmong sellers in this market are from Khod Yao village.

Khod Yao village, Phayao province

Khod Yao is a village located in Phusang district, Phayao Province, northern Thailand. All residents of Khod Yao are ethnic Hmong. According to the village chief, Khod Yao has a total population of 518 people, or 86 households. When the first Hmong people migrated to Thailand in the 1950s, they settled down in Huay Ming, a mountains village located in the border area between Thailand and Laos. However, the area continued to be affected by war in Laos, so this Hmong community decided to move further to Huay Saen, another mountain village in Thailand. In late 1960s, the Hmong community still felt the impacts from the war, so they relocated their community to the area of today's Khod Yao, located in the lowlands. According to the village head, in Huay Miang and Huay Saen, the Thai government still allowed the villagers to plant hemp, but once thy moved to Khod Yao, they were prohibited from growing this crop. Thus, they began to buy hemp from the neighboring countries China and Laos.

Development of textile trade in Khod Yao

According to the village chief, at present, the Hmong community in Khod Yao has two key sources of income, i.e. agriculture and the textile business. In 1997 (2540

in the Buddhist era), after the Hmong people had lived in Khod Yao for over 20 years, they gradually began to engage in the clothing trade. At first, they bought second-hand hemp fabrics from China from the Laotian Hmong and sold it in Chiang Mai. The village head explained that these Hmong in Thailand contacted their relatives and friends in Laos, and then the Laotian Hmong contacted their relatives and friends in China. Thus, a transnational trade chain was gradually formed and established, based on relations between families and friends. Because most of the Hmong at this time didn't have enough funds to rent their own shops, some sold fabrics directly on the street, while others offered their products to shop owners.

According to the Khod Yao village chief, in 1997 (2540), the traders only sold hemp without color and pattern. Only around 10 years later, they began to market second-hand skirts. In 2007 (2550), almost the entire village started buying second-hand clothes to process them into linen bags and linen skirts for sale. Some of the Hmong villagers were able to process the fabrics themselves, others were less skilled in sewing and asked tailors for help. Over the following years, the villagers also started selling new clothes. The development of the trade of new clothes can be divided into three stages: in the first stage, the Hmong villagers directly sold goods to customers for a rather low price. In the second stage, a trader in Chiang Mai asked the Hmong to wash, clean and soften the cloth, so that they would sell better and achieve a higher price. The Hmong villagers followed his suggestion. In the third stage, the Hmong began dyeing the cloth, so that the selling price increased again.

In the Chiang Mai Hmong textile market, I found many different kinds of Hmong textile products. Some of the products are made of new cloth, others of used fabric. Besides, we discovered handmade and machine made products. The variety of the products is broad and included dresses, skirts, bags, purses, shoes, and other accessories. Through interviewing a number of Hmong traders in this market, I learned that different customers usually buy different kinds of Hmong products, and that also the production processes of textiles differ. I began to wonder if the different customer preferences have an influence on the design and production of the textiles. In other words, I became interested in how the style of Hmong textiles and their production processes are being shaped by the preferences of different customer groups.

Research question

How do the customer preferences influence the production types and processes of Hmong textiles?

Methodology

During my field work, I used observation and interviews as main research methods. At first, the observation of products in the different textile shops helped me to select my interview partners. During my data collection, interviews were particularly useful to obtain information. In the Chiang Mai Hmong textile market, I interviewed a total of 7 Hmong traders. In Khod Yao, I conducted interviews with 2 villagers involved in the Hmong textile business. Combining observation with interviews helped me to get a deeper understanding of the field: for example, in some interviews I felt that I had ask my interview partner all my question, and I was unsure what else to ask. However, after I continued my observations in the field, I was able to generate new questions.

As a recording tool, I only used a notebook. Because we conducted our interviews with the help of a translator, I had enough time to take notes during the translation process. However, organizing multiple language recordings was quite challenging.

Findings

Hmong textile market: customer preferences

At the Hmong textile market in Chiang Mai, we discovered that different goods were sold in different shops, and that there was also a variety of customers. After interviewing the traders, I divided the customers into three groups: Hmong people, other Asian and Western buyers. In the following section, I will introduce the different product preferences of these three types of customer groups.

Preferences of Hmong customers

The first group are Hmong customers. At the Hmong textile market, we barely saw any Hmong trader wearing Hmong costumes, but they all wore casual clothes, like t-shirts and trousers.

According to Ms. Urai Yangcheepsutjarit who is Hmong herself, as well as some traders whose customers are mainly Hmong, most of the Hmong customers prefer to buy new clothes. Usually, the Hmong only wear traditional Hmong costumes for three days around the New Year's Day. Since New Year means to say goodbye to the old and to welcome the new year, the Hmong prefer to wear costumes made of new Hmong fabric. Especially the older generations of Hmong don't wear clothes made of used cloth, as they often think that used fabric is not clean and will thus

have negative effects on the health and fortune. Moreover, in their opinion, particular attention should be paid to the cleanliness of the upper body, so tops and shirt made of used cloth should not be worn. Besides, used cloth should not be used for valuable things, so particularly elder Hmong will rather not use a purse or bag made of second-hand fabric. Also, the younger generation don't want to dress outdated; therefore they prefer to purchase new fashionable styles. According to some of the traders, in the past, the color of the clothes was relatively simple; mainly indigo was used. However, after the color variety increased, many Hmong preferred to buy these colorful clothes. However, although many Hmong customers prefer new fashionable styles, most of the patterns on their clothes are still traditional ones. The patterns of Hmong textiles tell the Hmong's history, especially their history of migration. The horizontal line on the women's clothes symbolizes the field, a small dot represents the village, a big flower is the town, and a green line symbolizes the river (Yun, 2010). Hmong textiles can be divided into machine-made and handmade products. Handcrafting is more time consuming and requires more skills than machine-based production, so the price for crafted products is higher. Nowadays, handmade Hmong products can be found less than machine-made products, but they are still attractive for many Hmong people. However, since many Hmong usually wear traditional hand-made costumes only around New Year's Day, and at the following days they are supposed to wear a new outfit, many Hmong people choose machine-made costumes to save time and money.

Preferred clothes of Hmong buyers
(Source: Hmong textile store "Hmong Sister")

Preferences of Asian customers

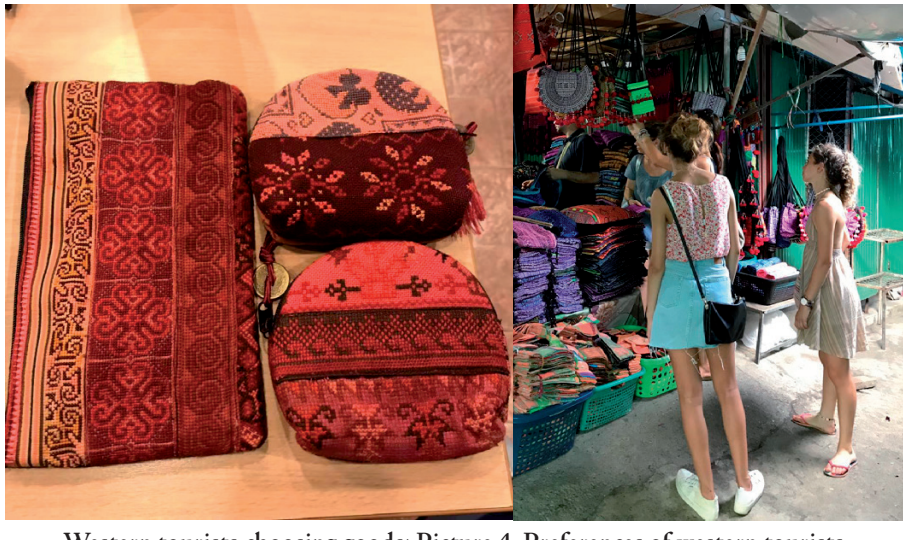
Customers from Asia (mainly, China, Korea, and Japan) form the second group of buyers. This group usually prefers new cloth made of hemp. A 38-year-old female trader whose customers are mainly Asian explained us that in Buddhist belief it is not suitable to wear second-hand clothes. Many Asians believe in Buddhism, so a lot of them also prefer new clothes. However, the preference of these Asian people for new cloth is not as strong as that of Hmong people. Used fabric is also acceptable to many of them. These customers from Asian countries seldom wear traditional Hmong costumes as a daily outfit. Thus, they are more likely to purchase modified versions with new and more casual shapes (as shown below). They usually buy both, traditional and new patterns of clothes. In the store, I saw clothes printed with non-traditional patterns, such as polka dots, or cherry blossoms. This seems to be in line with the aesthetics of some Asian people, for example, cherry blossoms are popular among Japanese buyers. However, clothes with traditional patterns are also sold in this store. The same trader also told us that in her opinion, traditional Hmong clothes and patterns are attractive for Asian customers because they consider them as distinctive cultural garments of traditional mountain people.

During my observations, I rarely saw colorful goods, but almost all the products were blue (indigo dye) and white. Some items in the store are handmade, other are machine-made. Customers from Japan, Korea and China usually choose products based on styles and patterns, but rarely ask if products are handmade or not. Certainly, handmade products are more expensive than machine-made products.

Preferred costumes of Asian buyers (Sources: Dong Wen & trader in the Chiang Mai Hmong textile market, textile store "KP Collection")

Preferences of Western tourists

The last group comprises western tourists who usually prefer buying used cloth. A 35 years old male trader with mainly western customers explained to us that vintage style is popular in western countries, and that for many westerners this style has a unique charm. Moreover, he described that western tourists usually prefer handmade products, but they do not know much about how to identify whether a product is handmade or not. Usually, they assume that old things are handmade, so they prefer products made of used cloth. According to this trader, western visitors usually also don't know that Hmong people perceive used cloth as unhygienic and harmful for the health. If they knew, our informant assumed, they would probably prefer products made of new cloth. Usually these western customers think that old things are handmade, so they prefer to purchase goods with traditional Hmong patterns. Besides, he also told us that the more complex the pattern is, the more likely western tourists will purchase it. However, western customers usually don't wear traditional Hmong costumes as their daily outfit, but they prefer to purchase modified versions which have a new and more common shape. According to my observations, western tourists buy both, colorful and indigo dyed products.



Western tourists choosing goods; Picture 4. Preferences of western tourists (Source: Xu Qinying; Chiang Mai Hmong textile market)

Production processes of the Hmong textiles

The previous section has elaborated that diverse customer groups also have different preferences for textiles. In the following section, I will analyze how the preferences of the three customer groups, i.e. Hmong, Asian and western buyers, also influence the production processes of the textiles.

The Hmong textile market: transnational trade routes

Most traders we interviewed at the Chiang Mai Hmong textile market buy fabrics from China, Vietnam and Laos. Since pictures cannot sufficiently show the desired color and pattern of the fabric, traders usually travel to China once or twice a year to see the style of fabrics themselves. After these Hmong traders have chosen style and quantity of the garment, the Chinese traders will deliver the goods to Chiang Khong. If the Hmong trader runs out of stock, they don't have to travel to the Chinese traders again, but they can directly order from the seller through the internet. Chiang Khong is a small town and port at the Thai-Lao border. A male trader whose customers are mainly Hmong people told us that in order to facilitate trade between the two countries, a bridge was built by Thai government in 2013. Holders of a Thai passport or ID card can easily travel to Laos via that bridge, but have to return within one day. The Hmong traders also explained us that the location to buy material has changed, due to the construction of the bridge. Before Chiang Khong port began to operate, traders usually bought fabrics from the village Baan Huak in Thailand. Traveling to Baan Huak was less convenient for the traders than going to Chiang Khong. In addition to their own selection of products in China, the Hmong traders in Thailand have other ways of buying goods. Sometimes, Chinese traders will directly contact the Hmong traders through the internet or even visit them in Thailand to present their samples. Moreover, there are a number of middlemen who purchase fabric from China and sell it to the Hmong traders. Some of these middlemen are Laotian, others are Hmong Thai.

Hmong customers: production processes

Hmong customers usually prefer new clothes with fashionable style. A 50 years old male trader in the Chiang Mai Hmong textile market whose customers are mainly Hmong told us that since 2 years, his family has been traveling to China each year to select modern fabric. He explained that some of the cloths with new fashionable styles are only available in China. Besides, buying directly at the factory in China is cheaper than elsewhere. Another male trader, around 35 years old, told us that his family designs style and pattern of the clothing on the computer. Afterwards, they will send the design and purchased new cloth to a factory for

processing. Some shops have their own factories, others don't. Those without a factory will usually hire villagers in surrounding communities. Most of the factories and family shops produce textiles by machine. Because machine-made cloth is cheaper, it is more in line with the purchasing power of most customers.

Asian customers: production processes

A 38-year-old female trader in the Chiang Mai Hmong textile market whose customers are mainly Asian told me that they prefer "modern", non-traditional pattern like polka dots, or cherry blossoms. Thus, she does not need old and traditional Hmong clothes as raw material for her products, but she rather designs the patterns herself at the computer. As for raw materials, she uses clothes, pants and hats without pattern (see picture below). Asked who processes those products, the trader explained that 7 producer groups of 4 to 5 elderly women work for her in different villages. Some of the groups produce handmade textiles, other fabricate machine-made products. Groups that produce handmade cloth receive a higher payment. In Khod Yao, I interviewed a young lady of (around 20 years old) whose family makes handcrafted products for traders in the Chiang Mai Hmong textile market. She told me that her family will receive patterns from the traders through the internet. Then her family will find craftsman to produce pattern stamps (as shown below) and also purchase wax for dyeing. She told me that her family started engaging in the Hmong textile production because their relatives who had successfully set up a business. After her aunt received too many orders, she handed over some of the work to her relatives. In this way, her family became involved in the business of processing Hmong textiles.

Hat without pattern
(Source: Xu Qinying; Chiang Mai Hmong textile market)

A young female producer is processing fabrics with a stamp and wax
(Source Xu Qinying; Khod Yao village)

Stamp; a young producer melts wax (Source: Xu Qinying, Khod Yao village)

Western tourists: production processes

Traders with mainly western customers will redye the garment to make it look darker and older, because westerners prefer handmade crafts and vintage style products. Some of material the traders receive from China, Laos and Vietnam is still colorful, although most of the fabrics are used. They will cut the used cloth into small pieces, and then sew pieces of different color together. The traders usually make products of different layers of cloth because westerners prefer products with complex patterns.

Type of products	Source of materials	Method of producing	Customers
New Hmong dresses	New cloth from China, Laos, Vietnam	Machine made in factory	Products for Hmong
Indigo crafts	New cloth from the Hmong textile market in Chiang Mai	Design the pattern by traders themselves and let some groups of old ladies in village to reproduce	Products for other Asian people
Handmade crafts made of Hmong used cloth	Used cloth from China, Laos, Vietnam	Reproduce by handmade in village	Products for Westerners

Overview of the Product Types and Production Processes

Conclusion

Through my field work I found that Hmong traders in the textile market in Thailand design and make products based on the tastes of different customer groups. My research also shows that customer preferences have an influence on the production processes of these textiles.

In the larger context, I think that certain government policies have also had an influence on the Hmong textile business. For example, before Thailand developed its border trade, Hmong Thai trader had to smuggle raw material from neighboring countries into Thailand. But after the Chiang Khong port was opened, these traders could easily and conveniently buy material from Laos or China. Moreover, with the promotion and rise of tourism in Thailand, more and more foreign tourists are visiting the country, many of them interested in purchasing Hmong textiles. This trend has also increased the income of some Hmong textile traders. However, I think that this

growing transnational trade also has some negative influences on Hmong textiles and their producers. For example, Hmong textile traders whose customers are mainly Asian more and more change the traditional pattern of their costumes to suit their customers. In the long-term, I think this trend can threaten Hmong traditional handicrafts, which forms a crucial part of traditional Hmong culture.

The Hmong textile trade is a transnational, trans-ethnic business. Large parts of the Hmong textile business are carried out through networks of relatives and friends. When a Hmong trader earns well, he/she often invites friends and relatives to join the trade. If Hmong traders in Thailand want to purchase material, they contact their relatives and friends in Laos who, in turn, contact their relatives and friends in China. These networks are related to the history of Hmong migration. Thus, I consider the Hmong textile trade as a good entry point to study Hmong society and culture in Thailand and beyond.

Final reflections and positionality

I am a sophomore from Yunnan University, majoring in Ethnology. In August 2019, I took part in a summer school in Chiang Mai University. During field work, we learned that some of our informants had traveled to China to purchase goods, so they had learned some Chinese, for example, "Hello", "Thank you", "Goodbye" and other simple phrases. They also told us about their experiences in China. For example, one trader complained that in China most of the signs are only Chinese, which makes traveling for foreign businessmen rather inconvenient. In his perspective, China's signs are not in other languages, because China has so many citizens that it doesn't need foreign visitors.

Because our informants were almost all traders, for them we were not only interviewers but also customers. Sometimes, they showed us textiles to explain their business to us, and we could not resist buying from them, because the products were so beautiful. I think some of them were more willing to communicate with us because we bought their products.

I think my partner and I have established good relationships with almost of our interviewees. Some of them brought us water during the interviews, others provided us a discount when we bought their products, and a number of them gave wallets for present to us. We also bought color pencils and toys for their children. Besides, we added two of our interviewees in WeChat.

Our teachers Dr. Prasit Leepreecha and Ms. Yangcheepsutjarit are both Hmong. Me and my partner are Han people, our translator belongs to the ethnic Dai. After we introduced ourselves to the traders, most of them asked us, "Are you Hmong?" For me, this was quite unusual, because I expected them to ask us first where we come from. After the traders in the Hmong textile market learned that we are not Hmong, they were still enthusiastic about us. During the interview in the Hmong textile market, our assistant teacher Ms. Urai always used her own Hmong background to help us establishing relationships with the traders. At the time, I did not yet know the importance of Urai's introduction. However, in Khod Yao we split into two groups to conduct our interviews. In my group, a Thai translator helped me, but I did not have Hmong to help me connecting with the Hmong villagers. Therefore I encountered difficulties in my fieldwork. Many Hmong villagers didn't want to talk to me by claiming that they were too busy. But I could actually observe that they had a lot of free time. Through this incident, I learned about the importance a Hmong mediator when conducting fieldwork in a Hmong community. Moreover, this experience gave me the impression that Hmong people have a strong sense of their ethnic identity.

My fieldwork had certain limitations. First, we spent only a limited time in the field. Thus, it would have been necessary to better prepare our field work in advance. Second, most of the interviews were in Thai language, so I had to rely on translators.

My partner and I were interested in different research topics, but we only had one translator. Since we both had to interview our informants at the same time, we often interrupted each other and jumped between topics, so that some of our interviewees seemed to be confused. We should have discussed the order of questions beforehand to better structure the interviews. Third, since I only used a notebook as recording tool, the information I obtained might be incomplete or incorrect. I should also have used other recording methods to ensure the validity of my data. Fourth, we underestimated the importance of pictures during our field trip, so we didn't take enough photos. Especially since my research focuses on different types of Hmong textiles, pictures would have been useful to give readers a clearer understanding of my findings. Fifth, my interview techniques could be improved, for example, my questions were sometimes too complex and difficult to understand for the interviewees.

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All participants from Yunnan University and Chiang Mai University at certificate-presenting ceremony in Kunming, 21 September 2019

SINO THAI EXPLORATIONS

5 - 17 AUGUST 2019
CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

18-21 SEPTEMBER 2019
YUNNAN UNIVERSITY, CHINA

This publication features perspectives from anthropology students at Yunnan University on different aspects of mobility and transformation across the changing social landscape of Northern Thailand. The research articles contained here are the product of a collaborative summer school hosted by Chiang Mai University in August 2019, where fifteen selected students from Yunnan University were given the opportunity to conduct short-term fieldwork under the guidance of local academic mentors. The work produced is a series of enlightening case studies, across urban life in Chiang Mai to rural livelihoods on the border, which traces aspects of these transformations. Most importantly, the book shows the potential for critical engagement in Southeast Asia from Chinese anthropologists-in-training, and should therefore be read within that context.