

Report, Field Trip 3:

Introduction

Group No. 3, the “Eco-Adventurers“, departed on Sunday, July 22nd 2018 to Mae Kampong Village.



After arriving at the village, we first explored the village’s forest, then met the current village headman at the Miang museum, and lastly had a conversation with the former village headman. These activities provided us an overall impression of the village’s current situation. Having a “real-life” background as a basis, we decided to split into three groups with certain focus: A = inequality regarding Miang, B = TDR itself, C = inequality regarding Ecotourism. In the next days, the sub-groups went to the village to interact with their “target-persons” depending on their focus. For example, Group A had an interview with a Miang producer while Group C went to a homestay and guesthouse to talk to the owner. Group B split again to follow the two other groups in order to reflect on TDR itself during the actions of the others. Then, we presented our results to the other groups in the next morning, so that we could plan the new day on the basis of the findings.

Thursday, July 26th was our last day in Mae Kampong. After a final group discussion in the morning and having lunch afterwards, we left the village.

In the following are the results of our group work during the field trip.

Mae Kampong Village

The village of Mae Kampong wasn't officially founded until the early 1900's, it is thought that the first farmers moved to the area from nearby Doi Saket more than 200 years ago. Those early settlers came here to farm the land and grow tea which was used to make a local delicacy known as *miang* from fermented tea leaves. *Miang* is loaded with caffeine from wild tea leaves, so you will get a quick buzz of energy after chewing on it for a while.

To produce *miang*, wild green tea leaves are mixed with salt and left to ferment in a jar outdoors. In the past, chewing *miang* was very popular but nowadays the young people are not interested in chewing *miang* anymore.

Over the years, the demand for *miang* dropped, and the villagers started to look for other sources of income. In the 1980's the people of Mae Kampong began growing coffee under the Royal Project. They also used the stream running through the village to produce hydro-electric power. In the 1990's the community adapted again.

The Thai government were encouraging each sub-district – called Tambon – to produce a product, service or activity that it could be associated with as part of the new “One Tambon One Product” – in short OTOP – scheme. The idea of OTOP was initially a concern for the village headman until he decided to propose Mae Kampong as an



ecotourism village to take advantage of the natural surroundings and beautiful location.

Ecotourism means responsible travel to natural areas conserving the environment and improving the well-being of the local people. It focuses on socially responsible travel, personal



growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are primary attractions.

After Mae Kampong became an ecotourism village, some villagers opened their doors as

Homestays – which means that the Tourists sleep at the residence of a local and can therefore experience their everyday lives – others opened their own guesthouses – where the owner usually lives in an entirely separate area within the property, so the visitors have their own private space.

Today, Mae Kampong is a role model for other villages that want to introduce the ecotourism model in their villages as well. Every day, many groups of 30 to 80 people arrive in Mae Kampong to participate in lectures the former village headman gives about how to do the transition from agroforestry to ecotourism.

TDR

Briefly, TDR (Transdisciplinary Research) can be defined by some key words such as many disciplines, many stakeholders and change/problem oriented. In Transdisciplinary, we have a combination between a prefix trans means across and disciplinary means discipline. This new methodology includes various disciplines from many different fields. Besides that, not only academic factors but also non – academic factors such as interviewees or farmers can involve in a transdisciplinary research. This is one of the characters that helps to distinguish TDR from the other research methods – many stakeholders. Moreover, TDR was born because of people and for people. It helps to resolve real life problems.

Challenges of applying TDR

Overall: The majority of villagers consider us as tourists not researchers. This explains why they feel always uncomfortable while responding to our questions.

Free listing: Before starting an interview or a short conversation, we have to explain the reasons why we do this research to interviewees. It takes time to make clear some academic concepts in research. Some of them understand, some don't.

Participatory method: In term of interviewees, they seem to be unwilling to answer our questions.

(in-depth) Interview: The interviewees have too much experiences in interview that they can predict our questions. It is quietly unnatural while responding.

Interpretation: language barrier in communication is the most difficult. Although our interpreters try their best, it still has some obstacles to understanding each other.

Oher: Well – organized village, lack of time (just 5 days to do TDR), uncontrollable factors (bad weather, mosquitos, ...)

Methods + findings

1. Inequality in Miang Production

Overview

Miang is the traditional product of Lanna highlander for 200 years. Most of forest land is covered by tea plantation and the Mae Kampong people rely on Miang production in the past. Mae Kampong is the village which is one of the initiatives participating the OTOP project of Thai Government which is decided by the headman. Since they decided to transform Mae Kampong as an eco-tourism village to take advantage of the natural surroundings, Miang production have been changing a lot.

Miang is Mae Kampong's life and identity culture, Miang bring the benefit to community and Mae Kampong People earn money and build house in the past. People rely on tea plantation in the forest. Besides, people have been doing a lot of thing to protect the forest such as the villagers in the community have high perception in collaborating to make the fire break zone along the village border. Three mentioned factors: Miang, people and forest has closely relationship and co-creation the value to each other.

Interview: gender role and trading system



The group interviewed Mr. Saneh, a local villager who has been working in the fermented Miang industry for over 30 years. Our questions to Mr. Saneh concerned his personal background and history with Miang, his thoughts and feelings, the Miang market and the current situation.

We found out that Mae Kampong village has changed its economic orientation. (1) The first change is the conversion from culture and the use of Miang products to ecotourism business. (2) The second change is that the villagers move from farming (Miang and coffee) production to service and (3) the last change is the transformation from homestay business into the guesthouse. Due to the changing orientation of business, the role of men and women has changed significantly. Men will pick tea leaves and do heavy work in the Miang production stage while women mainly do light jobs such as packing products.

Participatory method

Today the Mae Kampong villagers not only do ecotourism, except for a few who still produce fermented Miang, they also produce other products made from those tea leaves. Tea pillow is one of the popular products for tourists when they visit Mae Kampong.



So, we went to a tea pillow workshop where we made our own tea pillows with the help of the shop owners. This created a relaxed atmosphere to have a free conversation with the shop owners. During the conversation, it turns out that Miang was a major part of the owner's lives in the past.

Running the tea pillow workshop is an additional opportunity of earning money for them which reminds them of the past days with Miang. Their main income is generated by their homestay business.

Free listing: What comes to your mind when you think of Miang?

The free listing method is a very easy method to apply: The group asked random people (local villagers + tourists) on the street, in coffeeshops, restaurants etc. to list words or word groups that come into their minds when thinking of Miang. After collecting a few lists, these are the words which are often mentioned by the respondents:

- old people
- chewing Miang while smoking and eat salt
- tea is more popular now
- lack of interest of fermented Miang and Miang producing
- Lanna high society
- Lay's chip

We found out that the young generation doesn't chew Miang any more, they are reminded about Miang culture via their grandmother and grandfather in their family. People mentioned Miang in the context of the old fashion of the Lanna's high society with the activities in chewing Miang with salt while smoking. Young people know Miang based on their image about Miang tasted Lay's chip products rather than fermented tea leaves. Because of this reason, fewer and fewer villagers have been producing Miang in Mae Kampong village. Tea is more popular, some other products made from tea leaves are also produced in the village such as tea leaves, tempura, Miang coffee...

I. Conclusion

Before coming the field trip, the group of the researchers thought there might be inequality in Miang plantation and space sharing. The reason the group of researchers mentioned is Miang is Mae Kampong people's life, the villagers rely on the forest to earn money to support their life condition. However, after the trip we found that Mae kampong transferred the business model from forest oriented to service oriented via eco-tourism. Therefore, there might have 4 inequality issues in term of Miang production and other products related to Miang leaves.

Inequality in ...

- Gender role: There are three main inequality issues in Miang cultivation period (1) At the family level, there are still differences in the roles of men and women. Man worked harder in picking up Miang leaves from trees, while women packed.

- House hold plantation: (2) At the village level, some family/house hold has big plot of land, while some had small, far and near village too.
- Trading system and the role of middle man: (3) Among Mae kampong and other lowland villages, traders were from lowland villages who brought rice up to sell or trade with Miang products in Mae Kampong. Mainly, lowland traders gain or benefit from trading rice with Miang.
- Opportunity: In the present context, individual and house hold who has more knowledge on technology of roasting and packaging, financial capital and market would has more opportunity to develop new product from Miang leave to increase the tourist satisfaction in term of making souvenir.

2. Inequality in ecotourism

Overview

Mae Kampong is one of model villages regarding credited hospitalities, environmental conservation and village development program for other Thai villages in northern Thailand and very famous for ecotourism destination in Chiang Mai province. Within the village development program, former village headman is pioneer leader and very active to lead the village from very isolated village to modern eco-village in northern Thailand. Under his previous relationship, he had initiative home-stay program in the village, convinced the natural lovers from Thailand and abroad. His ideology becomes on of good example to learn ecotourism development in northern Thailand.



Free listing

For the Free-listing method we went through the village and asked ten different groups of people, including tourists, local people and shopkeepers. The question we raised was “What comes into your mind when you think about Mae Kampong?” But soon we realized that we had to reformulate our question, because the respondents only told us their reasons for visiting the village. So, we changed our strategy a little bit – which worked pretty well – and asked instead “Can you tell us five to ten word that come into your mind, when you think of Mae Kampong?”

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And these are the words which were mentioned by several groups:

- weather
- scenery
- atmosphere
- nature
- coffeeshops
- Wua Tang
- homestay & guesthouse
- Hipster Village

In-depth interviews

The second method we used were in-depth interviews with some Homestay and Guesthouse owners. The main questions we asked were about their past lives and their work on the miang plantations and how their lives have changed in the course of tourism. We also wanted to learn more about the Homestay and Guesthouse business, how it works, what steps are needed to run this business, and what they expect from the future.



Regarding home-stay program, the system is still managing by former village headman. Before they started home-stay, the villagers are very hard work in agro-farm. However, formal village headman inspired home-stay program and organized the structure to organize home stay procedure. For instance, the home-stay program also has a certain regulation to become

a home-stay owner for the guest. The following regulation need to be followed by the owner - the toilet should be in western style, blankets, pillows should be enough for maximum seven persons and at least three dishes of Thai foods could be provided to the guest. The home-stay charges 520 Baht for one tourist that included accommodation and three meals – breakfast, lunch and dinner per day. Amount from 520, 180 Baht is contributing back to village fund. In this way, the villagers are equally benefit from home-stay program. In the system, If the guest prefers to stay in home-stay, he or she has to inform to former village headman. And then, the

former headman will allocate the guests to different home-stay. It means that routine system is practice in home stay program under management of former village headman.

Besides home-stay program in the village, we also studied about guest house business in the village. The guest house is individually owned by the villagers and managed independently in the community. It charges 500 Baht per person including breakfast and dinner only. Unlike the home-stay system, the guest house owner has to contribute back only 50 Baht per person to village fund. Regarding official recognition of tourism department, they have to follow the regulations of district Thailand tourism. Moreover, the advertisement is mainly depended on their network through social media, person to person and guest referral among guest house owners.

Observation

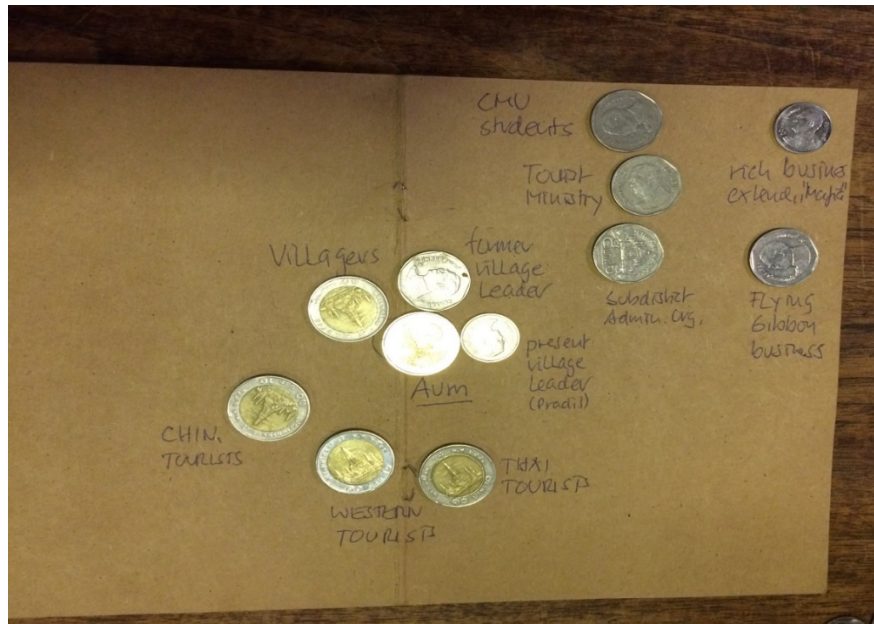
The third method we used was the Observation method. We observed different groups such as local people and Tourists or visitors from other villages, who came to learn about the ecotourism business. We went for example to the community center and observed a lecture the former village headman gave them. We also went through the village and just observed the everyday life of the local people, the tourists and several shops.

Coin game

The last method we used was kind of a game which we called coin game. We asked Aum, a 22-year-old local villager who is going to be the future vice village headman to place some coins for us regarding their importance concerning Tourism. The size of the coins stands for the importance of a person or institution, the distance stands for the Accessibility and Connectivity to that person or institution.



So, we asked Aum a simple question: “Who is important for you? And how reachable is this person or institution for you?” Our aim was to let him talk without interrupting him and maybe he would tell us some important things we probably would not imagine about.



Coin Game with Aum, 22 years old, future vice village headman: For example, the medium sized coin (on the right side) stands for the Tourism Ministry. Because it is medium important to him and medium accessible, he placed it a little bit far away. But the big coins near his Name represent the former village headman and the villagers, who are very important to him and very easy to reach, because they live in the same village and they can talk to each other every day.

II. Conclusion



Reflecting on our research studies, we have noticed that the village plays a role model for other villages in different district regarding on ecotourism, home stay and tourism hospitality. Former village headman plays a crucial role to lead and provide his lecture to researchers, tourists, villagers from other villages. Analyzing this short research, we also

seen some inequality in leadership and the contribution to village fund between home-stay and guest house. For instance, home-stay contribute 180 Baht for village fund, but the guest house owner contributed only 50 Baht. In this case, we can see that inequality in contribution and seem discrimination for home-stay because they have to serve one additional meal and 130 Baht more than guest house. In this case, we can learn income inequality in two different ownerships

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– homestay and guesthouse. In addition, the former village headman plays major key roles than current village headman regarding to give lecture to visitors and home-stay program management. It could be a challenge to management and leadership.

Final comments

Despite of the challenges our group met during the field trip, we still could make important experiences and had some major findings.

Mae Kampong is a remarkably well-organized village which has been following the development idea of the former village headman for 18 years now. On the surface, there are no problems to be target. But after a few days of interacting with several stakeholders, we were able to find some inequality issues regarding the fields of Miang and Ecotourism.

Another issue concerns the village`s future: Mae Kampong currently focuses on ecotourism and the homestay/guesthouse business as the major income, which is backed by the former village headman. But what if something happens what will impact or even stop the tourism activities in the village, e.g. a bomb attack like Bali in 2002? Although ecotourism is successfully implemented in the village, further thinking is needed to diversify the sources of income. For example, the revival of the Miang industry could be a possibility.