

# **What Kind of Collaboration now exists between the Mountain Peoples and the Tourism Industry?**

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## **Introduction**

Most tourists, on a holiday trip to N. Thailand generally do not want to be bothered with the problems which “exotic hill tribes” have. They do not have time and energy to look “behind the scenes”. They want to have a good time and relax. A certain percentage of tourists, really curious and maybe frustrated by what they see or also read in the newspapers, already are coming home with some questions raised. This certainly will affect the Industry and also Thailand’s economy in the future. The Tourist Industry’s main bona fide and realistic leadership of PATA, for this reason, wants to have a look at the complex reality behind “the amazing scenes”, smiling faces and colorful dresses, at the grassroots of Thailand’s Mountain Ethnic Minorities. The reality of relations between the “Tribal” Peoples, living in mountain villages and cities in Northern Thailand and the multi faceted Tourist Industry, is extremely complex. It has its positive sides, but has changed considerably in the last 20 years. Relations between Mountain Peoples and the Tourist Industry certainly have not improved in this period and we have to find out why, before solutions can be found. This means also that it cannot be dealt with in a few pages only. If we want to reflect on the collaboration, now existing between the Mountain Peoples and the tourist industry in Northern Thailand, we first (1) have to listen to the opinion of the mountain peoples in the villages, at the grassroots. After that (2) we have to see how this “industry’s supermarket” looks from the point of view of the tourist, entering it. We then (3) have to ask about whom and what we are speaking, when we talk about collaboration. We (4) cannot escape to look at the widening gap between an impoverishing mountain people population and the city-centers, resulting from the “economic miracle”. We have to give some critical analysis of this negative impact of urban development and also of the response of city-based mountain peoples. Finally (5) we can see in how far the tourist industry can make a contribution to resolve some of the problems and develop its positive potentials.

## **1. How some mountain villagers see tourism and its changes**

Having lived over twenty years in mountain-villages and in daily contact with mountain peoples, I can remember a whole range of scenes and remarks made villagers in different villages of the North, regarding tourism.

- A. At the beginning of the 1980’s, at a meeting of several Akha headmen, in Chiang Rai, most of them still were full of expectations in regard to White Guests visiting Akha villages. “We are extremely happy with the visits of White Guests. Some of them were living in our villages for longer time and we were able to teach our language and culture. They were so happy and we also were happy that they were writing down so many texts and elements of our Customary Law and Traditional Knowledge; When they write all this down, they will be able to make books for our children, who now study in the lowlands and the laws, morality, knowledge and ceremonies and songs built up over centuries by our Ancestors of 60 generations will not be lost”. “They also can show some of this to other white guests,

coming for a short time; You know: Lowland peoples and even teachers do not have any interest and they think, that we really don' t have a culture or a religion, except Spirit Religion. Just like the Yeso and Yesu peoples, who think that we “adore demons”. Other white guests and some Hipoon (Japanese) are the only ones, who want to know our language and cultures. Some Hipoon even think, that their culture came from the Akha culture; There was a whole movie-group coming to film our food and recipes, because its just like the food in some areas of their country”.

- B.** By the mid 1980's there still was optimism in many villages: *Jungle Trekking* was spreading and the lowland guides, often from the immediate neighborhood, had good relations with the village-leadership which was reasonably paid also. Although they sometimes behaved and dressed somewhat strange, *Trekkers* had good relations with villagers and were, in some way, still seen as *guests*. Some people sold some handicraft and trekkers were happy to also wear an Akha shirt, to show at home. There were still some forests left.

At the same time some enlightened foreigners had started *Educational and Development Tourism*, for somewhat larger groups, sometimes combined with *eco-trekking*. At that time, however the Urban Development started to have its negative impact in the mountains, as is clear from the following examples:

- C.** In 1989 “Half of our agricultural land was converted into pine tree plantations” said the headman of *a village in the Wawee District* who does not want to be mentioned, “This happened after roads were made and 40, 000 bigger trees were ‘adapted away’ in the whole region, by elephants and trucks”. “After the trees had disappeared the government did not care too much about the road anymore, so the tourist busses cannot move in, and in the rainy period not even the small pick up trucks”; “Some couples of white guests came walking up sometimes in the past and although they look funny because of long hair, they seem to be envious with the life we live, and don' t understand our problems; But they really have interest”.

“Also some very good groups of White Guests come in walking. They sleep in different houses in our village and make walking trips to villages in the neighborhood. They like to have very tough ‘Akha massage’ in the evening when they are tired.” “One of these groups even stayed a few days to help us repair the school, about which nobody cared; they also gave some money to the village-fund. Yes, they helped ‘Development’, and we do dances for them in the evening”. “Problem is, however, that many of our younger and more clever peoples have moved to the cities, for study or business, because they see no future here anymore and the school does not fit the lowland school system”. Small scale *Trekking Tourism* was still alive and *Educational/Development tourism* had come in. This was important, because villagers had lost half of their arable land.

- D.** In 1992 I made one of my several visits to an Akha village on a beautiful and high location, *in the Northern Mae Chan District* that had just been replaced by the authorities, in order to become a “*tourist-village*”. It was a place designed for *Mass-tourism*. From the village one has a very beautiful view over the Mekong valley area. Its inhabitants had come from Burma as refugees about 30 years ago, escaping internecine warfare there. The village had lost its land however and was supposed to attract a great amount of tourists. I asked my friends, older women, there: “What about Gala Pyu/White Guests coming here? Do you make a lot of money now?”

The answer of my friends was: “Making money is so, so, but the number of white guests is going down. They now just come for about 10 minutes to make pictures: but they don't like to buy from us too much handicraft anymore: They think that it is too expensive and lowlanders also sell it”.

“So, you loose a lot of time and no money coming in: Would you rather prefer not to be bothered by tourists anymore?” was my question. “Oh no”, the women said, “life is hard enough; all the younger people have left and there is no fun anymore: Please let the White Foreigners come: We still can laugh and laugh a lot, from time to time, but “to the inside”, of course”; “Look at their clothing, their legs and bellies, we cannot get enough from our laughing; What kind of laws, morality and customs do these people have? Not too many, we think. Some men look also really like monkeys who do not know shaving yet. And still they have a lot of money. How come? “We are fed up, however by their shooting with cameras at us. They don't even know who we are, what our background is: Our cultures and sufferings. Do they think that we are exhibitionists? Who in the world wants to be shot at with cameras, by unknown people, except exhibitionists? And they don't even want to give 10 Baht for taking our image home with them. A friend of us did the same and started to shoot at them, for fun, with a camera without asking and they got very angry. We had to laugh a lot “to the inside”, of course”.

“Sometimes there are also nice people amongst them, who want to talk with us and we want to talk with them: But there is the language problem and the guides don't know our language; they don't even want to know our language as they are looking down on us, as Ekaw, and that is a very bad word”; “But Thai people are always smiling even if they look down on us as monkeys, or wild forest people. A friend of us who understands some farang language heard a guide saying to a crowd of white guests with cameras: *‘This is probably the first time in their life that they see a camera!’*”

“He also told, that *he knew our language very well and that we are very nice, and natural and also that we have free sex; that we are afraid of spirits and wash only once a year*, and more wrong thinking like that. If we sometimes see farang boys and girls behaving and also smell white guests-even on distance-we think that perhaps the opposite is true. But over a very long time we have adapted to that by not getting angry, and remain friendly “to the outside”; So the white guests probably think that we get along very well with the lowlander, but I think that they have no idea where they are and who we are”.

“There is one main thing about which we cannot laugh at all: Its that some guides tell to the white guests: *‘Please don't give them money, because they have no money economy but a barter/exchange system: money will spoil them: but it is good to give candies to the children’*. *‘I will take care of the money’*, said this guide. We don't understand this: are the white guests blind? Don't they see the silver rupees on our women's headdresses? Many of us from Burma still think in rupees, when we estimate the value or cost of some pig, chicken, or things to sell or to buy; this now has changed in Baht. We Akha always and even in the far past, had to look for money and to think in money. Its raining only six months and in some years its not even enough, so we had to plant all kind of things to sell, through the mountain Chinese, such as cotton, from which we made cotton-strips, sesame, ginger, peppers. In the last 50 years or some of our villages in Burma above 1000m had to plant, unfortunately, also ya-phi (opium). Our women's headdress is our bank account for difficult times and in Burma we often had to burry it in the soil, because of military and robbers. This has started in Thailand also. But the problem remains, that so many white guests think, that everything in the mountains is free or cheap, maybe because the lowland

people always say: *Bondoi sanuk, In the mountains its always fun*. Please don't mention the name of our village when you tell this story to your friends!"

"By the way", said one Akha woman, "White guests and guides are not all as bad as this: There is one group, with a woman leader from Holland: She stayed in our village for half a year, about ten years ago and studied our Zang/Customary Law".

"She knows more about our culture and problems; she also speaks a little bit Akha and we are always happy when she comes with a group. They behave polite and as normal people do. We also can talk quite normally, because the Dutch lady translates for us. When we have become friends, they ask when they want to make a picture and send us copies afterwards. They also show us pictures of their own family, children and villages, so that we know who they are; if they sleep overnight and eat they also pay a normal price for it, like Akha guests also do. We only don't understand one thing: These people wash themselves only once a day or two days".

- E. In 1994 the headman of an Akha village of the Mae Suay district was in Chiang Mai. He looked bad and worried a lot: "Some very sad things happened in our village; the yaphi pyu or yakh'ao (heroin) has taken over in my village and has created many problems."

"Several people smoked opium already and that was too bad; some opium smoker who speaks some foreign language became friend with a lowland boy, who is very good in some foreign languages. This guy told foreigners, that opium smoking is one of the Akha's best traditions from the ancestors."

"They were lying about this, because our Ancestors did not know opium and so they did not make laws for it. Opium came in when I was 10 years old (about 1945), but we cannot grow it here: Its too low. It only grows above 1000 meters. They who grow it don't smoke it, but they who not grow it are much poorer and that's why they smoke it."

"These two addicts brought in all kinds of strange people, who just went to houses of smokers. They had no interest in our village and culture at all. They only thought that it is was very dirty. But the next day they left so happily and also the opium smokers were happy, of course. They made quite some money when the foreigners had gone the police came in and arrested some of the smokers. What happened was, that many changed from opium to heroin, because it's more difficult for the police and the rangers to see". But why do people use opium and heroin? I asked.

"This is because the people don't see a future anymore", my friend said, "But most of them really want de-addiction! We went through several cut-opium/heroin programs and everybody was happy. Only when 'outsiders' give it or smoke it, it seems ok". "If foreigners come to visit, we like them to help improving our life and to throw away the bad habits; now our village has a bad name". "We cannot see those people anymore as guests". So *Opium Tourism* came in already, but was followed by *Heroin Tourism*.

But what is the good news? I asked: "The good news is that some people got a sewing machine and now are making *handicraft, with colours from plants*, which they can sell, at least sometimes, because there is a lot of work in it, making it expensive"

"Also some University People from Canada came in and who know plants very well (Ethnobotanists); some of our women, who know the forest-medicine plants very well have been teaching them and they wrote down 150 different plants names; They told us however that we should keep this knowledge for our own use, because, there are always

many sick people, and there is no modern medicine. If we give this knowledge away, all kinds of people would come in, empty the forest and sell plants for their own profit". This is what we started to call *Special Interest Groups Tourism*.

- G. 1998: Recently I went back to the "tourist village" with the beautiful view, in the upper Mae Chan district, and where the older ladies had made such good jokes about the white foreigners they saw. There was no laughing any more and no joking. Small handicraft shows were closed.

Most leading persons and the young had left. Some girls were sleeping over sewing machines, where they worked for lowlanders, for 50 Bt. a day "The lowlanders and guides now also take care of the handicraft", they said. Some of the men and women, who had not made it to the lowlands worked for lowlanders as wage-labourers for 70 Bht. Income for the old people left sometimes comes from their children, who have studied and with jobs in the lowlands, or from those doing business in one of the lowland cities. In a few cases of girls it was not clear what kind of a job this was.

By lack of future some had also started to smoke heroin. A few had been arrested by the police, and were held in special police- directed de-addiction prisons, if they did not want to pay "bail-out-money". "Horse-medicine", an Akha name for "Ya-ba" or the ecstasy pill also had come in. There were rumors that some smaller carriers/dealers in these produce in the area had been shot. It was not clear by whom.

The nice Dutch lady from Holland and her groups still were coming faithfully and there were a few more small groups coming, with "normal" people. They said, however, that maybe in the future they would go somewhere else. Mass-tourism and the commercialization had taken their toll.

- G. Recently, 1998, there was an International Akha Workshop in Mae Salong, in Thailand's Upper North-West, near the Burmese border. There were Akha "native" researchers/representatives from S. China, Burma and Thailand. Also present were some of the village-based Akha traditional "Cultural Specialists", called Phima or "Reciter". Intention of the workshop was to coordinate the writing down of the long "archaic texts", in Akha, and to be translated in modern Akha, in order to preserve them for younger generations.

Mae Salong seemed an ideal place, as its inhabitants are mainly previous KMT Chinese and Akha, who have good relationships. Akha Women still walk around proudly in Akha traditional cloth. There is also an Akha guesthouse, probably the only one managed by Akha themselves, in Thailand. Mae Salong has beautiful views and many flowers. Unlike in so many villages in lower areas people don't seem to be stricken by poverty, although those working in the tea-plantations around don't get a very high daily wage. Tourism is well organized also and Akha profit certainly indirectly from it. In this International Akha Studies Meeting the problem of Tourism in the Triangle area came up and the image created of the Akha by all kind of publications.

Thai Akha representatives were rather pessimistic. In general tourism has gone down, and it is also limited now to villages, which can easily be reached by road or by boat. In those villages for many months there are almost no tourists and sometimes too many. Most of them come in for a very short time only and don't buy too much.

Villages some days are flooded, which most people don't like. Sometimes they are empty. Because people are poor foreigners are sometimes surrounded by women who are pushing

to sell some of their small produce. Children, who see how easily foreigners pay, often started begging. This is very bad for our image to the outside world.

Villages, with not such an easy access, don't see too many *trekkers* anymore. There is also a lack of information about the rich Akha culture and their problems.

One of the main Akha leaders in Thailand was most pessimistic: "Some uncivilized white foreigners come into our village secretly and stay with heroin-addicts. They also want to make money and push themselves in ceremonies, shooting pictures without the village people even knowing it. Or they walk into a house, where a woman is just dressing up and than they shoot. Somebody showed me a book and pictures, and my whole family was there! They don't ask permission or say thank you. They even tell white foreigners to the outside that they are specialist in our language and culture".

"An Akha friend of mine translated parts of these books for me and we were very angry with all the mistakes made. At least two or three on one page and giving us a very bad image. What they show is happy villagers and what they call 'traditional lifestyle'; They also call us 'jungle people' and 'spirit adorers' which is not only very insulting, but there are no jungles anymore. Nothing about our problems and sufferings in border-areas; and how we had to change our lifestyle all the time"

"Those people are like *peh seu* ('vampires/scavengers') who 'eat our people' by profiting from the weakness of some and than defecate money after that."

"But how can the outsider, seeing pictures and fantasy books, know what is behind our beautiful cloth. Or our morality and laws, which are much higher and older than of these white people, and 'scavengers' have only the law of eating other people. If these people would be Akha we would have a village court punishing them heavily for slander." There are several of this kind of scavengers around, now, agreed the Burmese and Chinese Akha representatives "and they even seem to write in their books, that they are our friends or of those knowing Akha zang, very well."

Lets work very hard on showing the truth, the meeting concluded. Than the scavengers will have a problem. Also: there are still several good smaller tourist companies around, who want to help us. From these remarks I concluded that de relations between Mountain Minority Peoples and the Tourist Industry, including the media also, had not improved in the last 10 years or so. But that there still was hope for improvement. "If you go slow, slow, and carefully, things will improve some day", is the Akha saying.

## **2. How the Tourist Industry Supermarket looks from a tourist point of view.**

Lets now look at the other side of the spectrum: The Tourist Supermarket, Chiang Mai. During the last 20 years I have seen Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand and tourism into the mountains developing themselves beyond recognition.

In and around *Chiang Mai city* a tourist might even wonder, where on earth to be. In its business center and its Western part there now are high-rise buildings, including luxury hotels, condominiums, and executive office buildings. Pizza-Huts, McDonalds,

Donut establishments are all over the place. Cafes, Nightclubs, Playboy clubs Karaoke, often with rows of girls or lady boys waiting for customers outside seem to have become dominant in certain areas. Traffic on main roads has often become impossible. Big modern

cars, huge trucks, of all expensive international brands with irritated drivers talking through mobile phones, try to cut off others for precedence. Motorbikes with daredevil youth or whole families and belated hippies, yuppies with German helmets on Harley Davidsons swarm around defying all rules. A well-organized police without human face, all looking the same because of their gasmasks, is giving ballet shows. Or did they just come out from an UFO or maybe from a war with poison gas?

On the big four to six lane highways, one passes gasoline stations of all international brands, enormous billboards with lots of Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, Chinese but also Western names. Enormous shopping malls. Around Chiang Mai super de luxe and heavily guarded Western style housing complexes. Superhighways have green international traffic signs, telling where one is. Hordes of rushing tourist vans and busses, with dark windows (for better view?), having to make it somewhere very urgently for some reason, make the roads unsafe. Ambulances, police cars try to make their way through all this, to pick up the victims.

*The night bazaar* now occupies many blocks near a polluted river. There is a mixture of races and produce from many countries. "Where are you from?" is asked in many languages. It has become almost impossible to walk there and get rid of vendors. "Do you want a beautiful girl? Or a boy? How old?" or "Maybe hash, ice?" is asked too often. In the restaurants "flower children" with imprecating eyes and beggars hang on. Is this Las Vegas, Mexico city, Manila or maybe seeing from the Chinese characters, Taipei", Goa? Its just the smile, Thai language signs and some "unspoiled" sois, temples, monks and Doi Suthep, still reigning majestically, remembering one to be in Thailand, telling that this is still the good old Chiang Mai.

Also *Tourism has changed completely* in 20 years, from a small-scale business into an Industry with a multitude of faces, spreading its tentacles to nearby towns. Chiang Mai and especially its center must be very confusing for the tourist. There are hundreds of guesthouses, restaurants and many luxury hotels: They advertise Jungle Trekking tours with guides speaking all tribal languages, Unspoiled Hill tribe Villages, Golden Triangle with Opium Museum, Poppy-flowers, Bamboo Rafting on rivers past unique hill tribe villages, Handicraft profit going to tribals; Unique Sceneries, Resorts, Elephant, Butterflies and Snake Camps, umbrellas, Real Traditional Massage, Kantoke with hill tribe dances, "Its all there just for YOU" and so on.

There seems to be also plenty of *information* for the tourist: Postcards with laughing and happy hill tribes in traditional costumes of all kinds; Guides, describing possible tours; Bigger picture books with the same happy and smiling exotic "tribals" living authentically in jungles. There are four or five competing expensive monthlies: "See Chiang Mai", "See North Thailand", etc., some "Especially for Men". They are full of advertisements, maps, and pictures of happy hill tribes.

We don't like to go to the night bazaar any more for fun. Having worked for more than twenty years with the Akha people in the villages and Chiang Mai we sometimes go there just to say hello to some of our many friends. We knew many from the villages, in the past but they moved to the city; There are certainly *30-40, 000 mountain peoples living in and around Chiang Mai*. Several are more or less successful business people in the night bazaar or they have their own shop. But business has not been so good, lately. The few speaking English have direct contact with the tourists. But the only tour company, which in the past was managed by mountain peoples, has been taken over by the lowlanders.

Some are still temporarily guides. Many live in certain areas around Chiang Mai in their own or rented houses, but several also in slums. Many of the younger study. Others work temporarily in the construction business. There are also some working in the nightlife, younger girls and boys: Some are factual prisoners in closed brothels. Worse off are some of the children, often refugees from Burma, who are exploited to sell flowers or fruits to tourists and the slum children.

If friends or visitors of our SEAMP Library / Information and Documentation Center come to us and ask, which tourist-company we can recommend we have to say in all honesty: “We really don’t know, which company to recommend!”

Maybe you could join one of the eco-tours through scenic areas with a smaller group, like a trip on a raft or to the Mekong River, or to Doi Inthanon. But if you pass mountain villages, don’t believe all what the guides are telling you”.

“If you want to stay a few days in a mountain village, then one of the mountain students from one of our NGOs, speaking English, is free on a weekend, or in vacation and can go with you to his/her village; Then you come as a friend or guest and not as a ‘tourist’, and that is what the people like most” We and some of our “tribal NGOs sometimes still help organize *Personalized Educational, Guest help Development or Eco-Tours*. But the kind of people interested in this in the West come to Thailand less and less.

Maybe that now Asian tourism from Japan, Taiwan or Singapore will come in, and there are signs in that direction.

### **3. Who and What are we talking about? A Critical Analysis.**

It we reflect on collaboration between Mountain Peoples and the Tourist Industry, it has to be clear first of all- about whom and what we are talking. And after that we have to ask if they are somewhat equal partners, which seems to make the difference between “collaboration”, “cooperation” and “exploitation”. We can only see this, however, in the context of rapid changes and commercialization in Thailand, and its consequences. For making up a realistic future policy on tourism, it seems necessary to first see the naked facts of changes, in the Thai mountains, in the last 20 -30 years, in the eyes; They have to be analyzed critically.

Maybe that the Tourist Enterprise, after that, can help to resolve some problems. Tourism should not destroy the Goose with the Golden Eggs, but help it to survive.

#### **A. The Mountain Peoples: Who are they?**

##### *i. Kinds of Mountain Peoples in Thailand*

Mountain Peoples, as they call themselves and are also called in Thai language on request of H. M. the King, in 1973, count -at this moment- in between 600-700, 000 people and are divided, in more than 2200 villages, over mountainous areas in the Western and Northern mountainous border-areas of Thailand.

They are divided into 6 bigger and 5 smaller major ethnic minority groups, with quite a difference in language, history and psychology. Often there are even considerable differences in language between subgroups. The largest group of Mountain Peoples is the Karen, who count about half of the total amount. They are mostly spread over

Thai/Burmese Western Thai border areas. With the Mon (not to confuse with Hmong), Lua/Lawa they belong to the oldest groups of highland minorities in Thailand and remnants of a pre-Thai original lowland population.

They are generally classified, by linguists as belonging, with the Khmu, Htin and Mabri of the Nan-Province area, to the Mon-Khmer language family. Relative “latecomers” are the Akha, Lisu and Lahu, who came into Thailand since the 1870’s, mostly from Burma and the S. W. Yunnan Province of China as a consequence of violent wars of the last few centuries in the these areas, and where they belonged to an original population, of the Tibeto/Burmese language family.

Refugees from these groups have been coming in from Burma, until quite recently, as a consequence of internecine wars there. The same is true for Hmong and Yao/Mien, from the Sino/Tibetan language family, who also came in from China since last century and more recently from Laos a consequence of the Vietnam War. All these groups thus have languages and cultures, completely different from the majority Thai population, being from the Austro-Asiatic language family and Buddhist. Most Mountain Peoples honour their ancestors and follow a severe, pragmatic Customary Law. One of the major misunderstandings and mis-informations regarding highlanders is, that they are “animist” and adore, fear a host of spirits.

Their worldviews and ceremonial life are however closer to a pragmatic Taoism, in which man and nature surrounding him belong together and have to be kept in balance. Some of my friends tend to joke: “Lowlanders and Christians are Spirit adorers; we don’t have a Spirit religion” Still several highlanders have become Christian, often for practical reasons.

## ***ii A Lack of basic information on mountain peoples’ culture, history, spreading and problems.***

Most tourists, coming to Thailand are not aware of this. They are even less aware of three other basic data and facts:

***First of all:*** that the 6-700, 000 mountain peoples of Thailand are the “top of the Iceberg” of a mountain-population of at least 20 million peoples. This when we only count the population of the mountainous areas around the Mekong River in Thailand, Laos, Burma and the Southern part of the Yunnan and Kweichow Provinces of China. The Hmong have an estimated population of 6 million people over this area; the Akha and related peoples 2, 5 million, the Yao/Mien 4 million etc.

***Secondly:*** That the Mountain Peoples do have sophisticated cultural backgrounds, and roots, which go back into history deeper than some of our Western societies. These have cemented a very strong sense of identity and belonging in each of these groups. The myth that they are “nomads” is not correct. They have been moving because of wars and outside forces and not even that far from their original homelands. In most cases it’s only a few hundred kilometers. Most tourists are much more “nomadic” than the mountain peoples and live also more “undisturbed”.

They are in fact best comparable with the surviving minorities of Incas and Aztecs, and other Latin American minorities, who were dominant in the past. In the last decades of post-colonialism South East Asian Mountain minorities have developed a great number of intellectuals, government officials and business people, but mainly in Southern China, Laos and Burma. In Thailand their number is relatively small however, although some NGOs

(Non Governmental Organizations) have developed. A high number of mountain peoples also have become city people because they do not see a future in the mountains anymore and the mood in the villages is often rather dim, because the future of the village is not sure.

***Last but not least:*** That one of the most striking characteristics of the Mountain Peoples is, that they *are extremely normal people* and who-like other normal peoples of living cultures - want to adapt to modern life and development, as equals. They are from “survival cultures”, which over centuries of harsh lives have learned to adapt to any circumstance. Because of lack of normal schools in the highlands, problems with citizenship and land rights they are lagging behind, especially in Thailand, where their number is relatively small. Most major groups, such as Akha, Hmong, Yao and Lisu, now have their “International Culture Study Groups and Conferences”, with “native” representatives from China, Burma, Laos and Thailand. In these conferences their own researchers-of academic level- discuss possibilities to save the “Precious heritage of old archaic, centuries old, texts and songs, before the older generation, still knowing them dies”. Besides this, adaptation of mountain peoples’ cultures to modern times and also to city life is discussed. Such efforts are now encouraged and supported by the UNESCO and powerful International Foundations.

### ***iii Is Tourism spoiling the “Hill tribes”?***

There is a whole scientific literature about the question if tourism “spoils” the mountain people with the view of blue genes, cameras, pick up trucks. It’s the same way as talking about monuments, zoos or landscapes. “Being spoiled” does -in fact- mean, that they want to develop and adapt themselves, like others, because of increasing contact with the modern world, also through daily government sponsored minority radio programs and television, entering now. Tourism, in contrast needs to keep them as they are and many a tourist seems to become angry discovering that people have been dressing up especially for them.

But don’t they do so in Volendam, Holland, Bretagne, France, the Native Indian Resorts in the USA and so on? In fact, mountain peoples also have been dressing up for most picture books and cards. In several of them and on some major tourist places, those dressed up in fancy cloth are factually lowlanders, who want to make some money from picturing.

I have asked many a tourist, why they don’t come to Thailand in the traditional dresses of their over grand mothers and fathers, but many don’t seem to understand. This means that there is a tendency in tourism to keep people “underdeveloped”.

As for spoiling or even corrupting: Opium, heroin and now amphetamine tourism corrupts the Mountain Peoples most, because it does not help them out of poverty; But it corrupts some of the tourists and guides. As for “spoiling”: we have to look at the budgets and where the money goes in terms of percentages. Tourist-enterprises, expensive hotels or beach resorts, some of the guides are spoiled most of all. It leaves-in budgets- only the crumbs for the local mountain villages, “because its so cheap up there”. The mountain villagers’ pragmatic reaction to this is: “Better a very little bit, just for survival, than nothing”.

The problem of which the tourist and in most cases the Tourist industry is not and cannot be aware without being informed about it, is the “*Widening Gap*”.

With the widening gap I mean the increasing economic distance between the “capitalist miracles”, which the tourist can see in urban centers and the impoverishment of a high percentage “highland population” living at the grassroots in the villages or in city slums. Why this Increasing Gap between haves and have-nots in one country? As for relations: Why can one less and less speak of a collaboration between Mountain Peoples and the Tourist industry? These questions can only be answered by a more critical analysis of changes in the last 2-3 decades.

## **B. The Widening Gap: The Tourist Industry as part of increasing Commercialization. Profit going to Urban Centers.**

### *a.) Lets face the facts:*

In 1991 our SEAMP-Thailand Research Institute made a study, with the help of a Canadian Government organization, in 12 villages of 6 different ethnicity minority villages of different altitude in the mountains, on the “Impact of Urban Development and Commercialization”. Summarizing this study showed: That between the 1960’s and the beginning of 1990’s the total population in the mountains increased from half a million to 6 million peoples and the ethnic minority population from 250.000 to 600.000 peoples, with the influx of refugees from Burma and Laos, making up for high mortality. The majority in the mountains became mainly that of the poor lowland Thai peasant moving up. There was also of a considerable number of Haw Chinese and ex- Kuomintang military in border area towns.

Ethnic Minority Peoples thus had become a minority of 10 percent, in the mountains. As for the twelve villages (Hmong, Yao, Karen, Lisu, Lahu and Akha), it proved, that none of these villages had land-rights. Less than 50% of its inhabitants were in the possession of an Identity Card, recognizing their Thai citizenship. 4 of these mountain villages were no longer allowed to be on the same place where they had been for a long time already with permission of local authorities. One reason given to the villagers was, that the area where the village was located had been declared wildlife sanctuary, national park, or watershed area, in 1986.

A lot of tree logging was going on there, however. Much space was also taken for the building of some luxury houses and bungalows for “eco-tourism”, tourist resorts or pine and eucalyptus plantations. In the case of two villages, it was told, that the land on which they lived, had been sold to real estate agencies. They were not told, where to resettle and most of the older people had no idea, where to go.

3 villages complained that much of their land had been taken over by lowlanders and to be used as plantations for coffee, tea, flowers and pine trees. The villagers now were forced to work there for 40 (women) - 45 (men) Baht a day, but with deduction of the food offered by the companies. They were also forced to work for logging companies, to cut trees, for the same low price. The impression was created also, that the mountain peoples were the ones cutting the trees and quite some were imprisoned for this reason. In 2 villages the farming land had been taken over by lowlanders and they had -for this reason- started to sell handicraft to tourists, for survival. Average income per household, with an average of 6,5 persons, was about 32,000Bt per year (at that time 1,280US\$). For a few better off villagers it was higher, but for the majority of villagers much lower.

Income from selling handicraft and tourism included in this, was noticed in 6 villages and brought about 70,000Bt a village, or 2,800US\$ a year. This was 46US\$ a household a year. But again: One village was much better off than others, and a few households better than others. Quite an alarming finding was also, that in most of these villages some people had committed suicide and which was quite a new phenomenon never happening in the past.

Besides this the drug-addiction in all villages had gone up to an alarming rate of 6-10% of the adult population. With the injection of heroin and some girls being sold into prostitution in the lowlands also HIV/AIDS had entered some villages. As for medium life expectancy in the mountain peoples' villages: it was 40 years of age, as compared with over 60 years in the lowlands. Reason for this was malnutrition and lack of medical care. It -finally- was clear that in the twelve villages about an average 10% of the population had left or was leaving to the lowlands and the cities. Those without ID cards were not able to do so. Villagers in general were worrying and aware that the situation had deteriorated quickly. The conclusion of the study was, that the deterioration in the mountains was related to the rapid development of the Urban Centers "eating" resources from the mountains. This was 1991 and the situation has gone worse since.

Reason of these developments was that Thailand wanted to become a NIC, a Newly Industrialized Country. Having little Industry it was in search for resources of forest, land, precious goods and cheap labour in its peripheral areas, such as the mountains. Everything started to become "Industry", such as Agro/Forestry Industry, clearing forested areas in order to plant quickly growing Pine and Eucalyptus trees to make pulp; Sex-Industry, to make sex workers out of girls and boys; Real Estate and Land Industry, to make golf-courses, resorts after "landscaping" wild areas; Hydro-electric Industry, by making dams in some remaining wild-life reserves. Also the Tourist Business became an Industry with an increasing number of workers of all kinds. In the North its intention was to show the tourist the wealth of ecological beauty left, beside a treasure house of ethnic minority peoples of different cultures. But, converting them into uneducated primitives. In some cases a self-fulfilling prophecy. All this was not so different from what happened in many "Developing Countries".

### ***B) Commercialization leading to De-Personalization and the Increasing Gap:***

The problem of "Industrialization" is however, that it leads to "Commercialization" Commerce and business are a normal and necessary part of life and society; Also Mountain peoples have been involved -over centuries already- in trade and business in the area, and stories about buying and selling in markets, or through Chinese Middlemen, are in the old archaic texts conserved by the Akha, over some hundreds of years, for example. There were even markets in the past and where mountain peoples were sold as slaves, a reason for which many still have the word "Ka" or "Kaw" in their name. They were however not always treated that badly and certainly better than those in the Western "slave-trade". On traditional markets relations were still "between people". They were "personalized".

**Commercialization** is different from the past Commerce, in that in the last 20 years of "Globalization" everything, including mountain ecology and people living there became a product on a worldwide "Supermarket".

I personally was able to also observe a rapid commercialization of everything in Thailand's mountains from a mountain people villagers' point of view and also as researcher. In this

whole process of commercialization, plants, wildlife became objects and produce only, without regard for conservation. Also people become such objects and we thus see a process of: *A person being seen as an object with financial value only, a thing or commodity, on a market. We call that "De-Personalization"*.

*The problem of the Tourist Industry and especially of the increasing Mass-Tourism thus increased the De-Personalization of the Mountain Peoples.*

This made it also impossible for them to have any partnership in most of the tourist enterprises, of which they became rather the powerless victims. A mistake, made by lowlanders and tourist-industry alike is that they look at mountain villages, like they look at old archaic ruins, museums, monuments, landscapes or animals in zoos, which are just objects. One pays a ticket to the guardians and receives some information. But information about what one sees in zoos and museums is more correct than the information or misinformation one can find on the mountain peoples.

Main problem of this commercialization and de-personalization was the financial output of commercialisation / depersonalisation was centralized in increasingly richer urban-based enterprises and multi-nationals. Luxury Hotels, Executive Buildings and Condominiums in the city centers went up; what also went up was the price of mountain-land, previously seen as wild wasteland; with it also drug-addiction went up. Trees, nutrition and chances for future living in the mountains in many ethnic minority villages, went down. An this is, what we call: *The Increasing Gap*.

The lately liberalized Thai national press does not make a secret of problems such as illegal logging, forced prostitution and child labour, corruption and drug gangs in Thailand and elsewhere. As for tourism: quite some attention has been given to the case of the "Long Neck Karen" or Paduang Peoples who became virtual prisoners of some tour companies. Otherwise it seems that little serious research has been done on the "increasing gap" and its reasons.

On the contrary, in 1998 during the economic crisis there seems to re-emerge a new tendency, to see the mountain peoples as "encroachers", "drug-traffickers", "illegal immigrants" or those who cut trees and spoil the water. Calls for resettlement to the lowlands of all hill tribes also are coming back. *It seems that recently, besides the economic gap, also the Information-Gap between highland and the main city centers has increased. Thus De-personalization of "hill tribes" also penetrated national the media, again.*

### ***c.) Commercialization and Packing: Marketing Minorities***

Commercialization by the Tourist Industry has created a *Supermarket, middlemen and a product, being the exotic mountain peoples and the beautiful scenery*. There is the competition for "unspoiled or non-tourist villages" and this leads us to the problem of "Packing". I remember a discussion with an Akha tourist guide, who spoke English well and had become "Christian". He did not know too much of his own culture anymore and told his clients all kind of stories about sex, prostitution and primitiveness of the Akha. I asked him, why he did tell all this non-sense about his own people and why he would not study and explain more about Akha culture, and his own proud ancestry/history.

His answer was: "Talking about Akha Culture is the job of you, anthropologists; what we do, as tourist companies, is business. They are two completely different things. In fact is the "packing" and in languages which the mountain peoples do not understand or speak, a

major problem. Even Thai is not spoken by a great deal of older highland minority population. Nor the local minority languages by the Thai guides; but for the tourist it is difficult to hear the difference.

*Packing starts -in fact- with the word “Hill-Tribes”.* It is a word, which by many is conceived as diminutive and indicating wildness; it is also strange to call mountain- areas over 1000m up to 2000m hills, and in neighbouring countries, where some of them live at altitudes of 3000m, “hills”? As for the word “tribe”: If this means, that in most ethnic minorities family, super-family relations and respect for common ancestry are still socially and economically important, then many Thai villages are also tribal, not to speak of the Chinese-Thai. “Go with us to the Mountains, to see the Hill Tribes”; “Tour to Inthanon Mountain also passing hill tribe villages” etc. are not unusual advertisements!

Now in most cases the words “Highlanders”, “Mountain Peoples” or “Ethnic Mountain Minorities” are used. It seems that only tourism and the missionary enterprise keep sticking to the word “Hill Tribes”, a residue of British colonialism.

There are, however, many more serious “packings” and they stem a great deal from the many prejudices and ignorance about the mountains in the lowlands, outdated missionary literature and romantic/exotic seasoning of those making the packing. A very long list could be made of such “packings”. We have seen some of them in previous chapters. This whole phenomenon is also called: **Marketing Minorities**.

### **C. Reactions of the mountain peoples:**

For many people in mountain villages it seemed, in the 1980’s, that loss of land and also cash crop could be recompensated by sale of handicraft and tourism. Handicraft was traditionally not for sale though, and most villages also had given up growing and weaving their own cotton, because of increasing scarcity of land. Confection of handicraft thus proved very expensive. Trying to have a voice in tourism was even more difficult. Power, in the mountains of Thailand, is mostly not in the hands of the mountain peoples and relations with lowlanders have been historically already, rather exploitative and unequal. Younger and more clever people with ID cards, had already moved to cities and lowlands as students or business people, in construction or restaurant enterprises and some (but not too many) in the nightlife (with the exception of those girls lured into prostitution under false pretense of being offered a job).

It thus was logical to start to build up power for the mountain people in the lowland cities. This happened in the 80’s and 90’s in the form of *NGOs for Mountain Peoples Culture, Development and Education (MPCDE)*. Emphasis was on lowland education of the younger mountain peoples and the integration of traditional cultural values in their education.

These NGO’s developed into legally recognized Foundations and Associations, creating networks between mountain villages by setting up *Inter Village Committees*. These also started to assist villages in resolving legal problems, drug-rehabilitation and personalized guiding. Examples of such NGOs are: *AFACT* (Akha Association for Education and Culture in Thailand), Chiang Rai, *IMPECT* (Inter Mountain People for Education and Culture in Thailand), Chiang Mai and *IMWECT* (Inter Mountain Women for Education and Culture in Thailand), Mae Suai. Management is by mountain-peoples themselves, as it

proved that lowlanders' management, with some exceptions only, created too many misunderstandings.

Some "advocacy" and Information/Documentation Services for tourists, media and researchers were set up, in these NGOs and in **SEAMP-CD-RDI** (South East Asian Mountain Peoples Culture and Development's Research Documentation and Information), Chiang Mai. A *Cooperative Handicraft Company*, originating in this context is Golden Triangle People's Handicraft, also in Chiang Mai.

These "Tribal" NGO's started to engage in small scale and *Personalized Guiding* of tourists, film crews or media-people to villages. They also tried to encourage self-management of smaller, local village-based tourist-enterprises. It was taken care that visitors were able to personally be in touch with the culture, reality and leading personalities in villages. Appointments with villagers are made in advance and coming into the village the proper local procedures are followed, by first presenting the visitors to the village-leadership. Profit goes to village-funds or rice-banks and not to drug-addicts. In 1988 also a three monthly publication, called *Chivit Bondoi*, or *Life on the Mountain*, was set up in Thai and English. It was published and edited by Mountain Peoples' NGOs and financed by a development organization in Europe. It was also tried to make a small booklet, containing information on the main ethnic minority groups, but this failed.

Before 1994 several forms of tourist-, or rather, *personalized "Guest" programs* developed from these NGOs. SEAMP-Thailand developed over the years, can be called "*Scholarship tourism*". Individual tourists, couples, smaller groups were given insight in the cultures and lack of access to lowland education of highland youth. Tourists were asked, after coming home to make a yearly contribution for student scholarships or adopt students whom they had met during their trips. Over 15 years about 600 highland students have been able to study with scholarships derived from these contributions.

Other examples of personalized tourism are "*Development-Tourism*" and "*Educational Tourism*". In development tourism the visitors stay for several days in a village, lodged by families and they also get acquainted with dances and handicraft. During their stay they help villagers to repair or build a school, a meeting or guesthouse (from bamboo, wood, thatch grass), to use a sewing machine, etc. In educational tourism the accent is on what the tourist/guest can learn from highland mountain peoples' cultures and Traditional Knowledge. In other cases groups would make special trips to forests and this was the beginning of *eco-tourism*.

Related to this are the "*Special Interest Guest Programs*". They have been set by SEAMP up for certain categories of foreign specialists, like medics, ethno-botanists, musicologists, environmentalists, lawyers etc. These foreign specialists than are introduced into the Traditional Knowledge and praxis of mountain peoples regarding their field of specialisation. This can be the traditional medical system; use of medical, food and colouring plants; traditional forest conservationist laws; traditional customary law etc.

Until 1993/4 these Highlander NGOs managed to do small scale personalized tourism in which the highland village-leadership and people played a major role, quite well. By that time *mass-tourism* started to increase however, and also the number of Bangkok and foreign based larger tourist-companies. It proved however that mountain peoples NGOs and villagers were unable to cope without the help of outsiders knowing the village-needs and cultures well. Reason for this was, that in the growing and *increasingly competitive*

*tourist and handicraft ventures*, faxes and computers were needed and later e-mail systems, besides careful planning, and English language.

Thus not only Westerners got involved, but also Japanese, Singaporeans, Nepalese, Taiwanese and so on. And not all of them bona fide, of course, as in many cases these helpers had become jobless in their own countries and had come to Thailand as “free-lance” something to survive, also often settling in villages. The same had also happened with unemployed lowland citizens knowing some English.

The saying in Chiang Mai was: “If you have no job, you start a tourist company or an NGO”. There were, besides increased competition, also three developments, which increasingly frustrated the bona fide and personalized tourist-ventures, organized by Mountain Peoples’ NGOs.

1. Highlanders/village oriented Mountain People’s NGO’s, who organized more personalized guest eco-tourism had been too dependent on foreign funding, which was gradually withdrawn. Because of limited English speaking and business oriented staff and lack of capital, they had not been able to set up a related company able to compete with the others. In some cases ventures that had been successful, were taken over by lowlanders.
2. The publication “Chivit Bondoi”, the “Cultural awareness” programs for staff and students in these NGOs were terminated between 1992 and 1994, by the same Western Funding agency. The same happened with information and advocacy programs. Reason was that it wanted to concentrate on “economic development”.
3. The biggest and culture oriented NGO, which had also been the first, managed by Akha, in Chiang Rai, collapsed almost completely a few years later, by lack of funding; As Educational NGO it had not been able to build up self-reliance either.

There were several other smaller NGOs originated in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai by different ethnic minority groups, but they were rather focused on their own survival in the city or on helping HIV/AIDS patients: None of them had time or funds to concentrate on tourism. When I asked my friends from these several Mountain Peoples NGOs if they would be able to give me any example of good and personalized tourist ventures, initiated and supervised by “Tribal” NGOs left, they were hardly able to give such an example. Maybe some hotel or guesthouse still happened to have a good guide; or maybe in some tourist village area the locals still had some control.

## **4. Summary and Conclusions:**

### **A. Summary of a closer look into Lowland/Highland relations, as observed by the tourist.**

- There is a decrease in real interest in mountain peoples’ cultures and needs, in the vacationing sight seeing mass tourist, with limited time. They are in several cases also confronted with impoverishing villages, competing vendors, begging children. Few tourists, companies and lowlanders are aware of the “widening economic gap” between urban centers and the highland population, behind this. This gap seems to be a consequence of urban development, commercialization and de-personalization of the mountain minority population.

- There has been a dramatic increase in drug addiction in the mountains, factually a consequence of impoverishment, lack of future prospective, land rights, primary health care, access to modern education and citizenship. Abuse of this situation in the form of opium/heroin tourism, selling into prostitution, fake media coverage, literature and even projects, only makes the situation worse.
- A high percentage of the ethnic minority population has moved to the lowland and urban centers, and can be found in several strata of those societies, but mostly in the educational, business and service sectors, including nightlife and slums. We can find also an increased abuse of younger women and children, a great deal of them refugees from neighbouring countries. In this context a new leadership and NGOs of several kinds have originated. So far they have not been able to build up structures for equal partnership with the competing Tourist Industry. Possibilities of equal partnership even seem to have gone down.
- There is a high need for adequate information about the mountain minority peoples, as well in the national Thai, as in the international media. Research done over the years as well on mountain peoples' cultures, and on their problems, are mostly in foreign languages including Japanese and Chinese. They have not reached -in popularized form- the mountain minority population in the lowland, reading Thai; even less the Tourist Industry in Thailand or abroad. There even seems a certain reluctance most of the Industry to receive adequate information. Part of this is due to the fear to hurt the image of the tourist industry and the existing "Packing"; part is due to ignorance or to the traditional discriminatory tendencies towards the mountain population.
- In recent years the national Thai and English language press have been publishing more openly about environmental and drug problems in the mountains, including corruption, but leaving an increasingly negative image regarding Highlanders. Also the Information Gap has widened.
- Unfortunately the existing information in the bookshops is mostly in English and expensive, exotic and de-personalized, with some exceptions only. It's also often full of factually incorrect and discriminating elements. In general its more market than people oriented. A few French publications are excellent, but too academic for the tourist, even if he happens to read French. A delightful series of republished colonial traveler/discoverer accounts of past centuries is useful for the researcher, but not really helpful for the tourist, because these travelers tended to see the "natives", including the Thai-peoples, with colonial eyes, as wild, uncivilized and with weird superstitions.

Badly needed is a smaller practical publication, in Thai and English, with an overview of the main ethnic minority groups, their history, cultures and problems, according to the latest research findings and which the tourist can read easily before entering villages. It has to also try to do away with many of the prejudices and myths, but without romanticizing. Main purpose is re-personalization. Not an easy job to do.

## **B. Categorizing the Tourist Industry on Input from Mountain Peoples:**

When we try to categorize the tourism industry of many kinds, forms and sizes that have developed in Northern Thailand over the last 20-30 years we come roughly to a following division:

1) **Smaller groups tourism (3-15 people; really interested; not in hurry) We can call this “Ethno-Tourism”**

- a) Personalized, non-exploitative/sharing interest groups who want to meet and discuss culture and problems: meeting villagers on equal grounds. Income for village funds, or non-addicted workers.
- i) Guest/scholarship tourism
  - ii) Trekking: Concentrating on scenery/jungle and people.
  - iii) Mini-eco-tourism
  - iv) Special Interest groups: medics etc.
  - v) Educational tourism: Concentrating on mountain peoples culture/problems.
  - vi) Development Tourism: Help improving the villages.

Problems: Communication/Information/Expertise; Roads/transportation: four wheel trucks needed, because these groups want to avoid mass-tourist villages. These are more Study Tours than vacation. Income for organizers not adequate. Lowland NGOs are not adequate to deal with this; some can also become exploitative. English speaking highlanders are not necessarily more reliable than those not speaking English.

b) De- Personalized, exploitative groups:

- i) opium/heroin tourism
- ii) sex tourism
- iii) exploitative media tourism.

These sometimes go together in the case of “scavengers”.

Problem: This kind of tourism is taken for granted by local “authorities”, who sometimes are involved themselves, because of their low salaries.

2) **Mass/Vacation Tourism (larger groups)**

- a) Personalized non-exploitative (groups not in a hurry)
- i) Personalized/sharing Eco-tourism plus encouraging handicraft.
  - ii) Resorts/Lodges/Guesthouses, managed by mountain peoples, profit going to villagers. Do they really exist? These are extremely rare, and are often initiated by “anthropologically oriented or informed” foreigners, but could be encouraged to develop into “Ethno-Tourism”.
- b) Non-Personalized, tends to be exploitative (Groups in a hurry).
- i) Larger groups with little time: Just Vacation, doing Thailand this year: “Do” Northern Thailand in a few days.

Problems same: Information; communication; need to buy handicraft from Burma. Behaviour of guides; lack of local expertise. But improvements difficult to make.

- ii) Opium/heroin tourism: Still existing, undercover, for larger groups.
- iii) Sex tourism: Some people hanging on in villages; parents hoping for foreign husband. In villages normally not available, except when organized by “outsiders” or heroin addicts speaking English, in a few villages only.

Problems: Difficult to change, because of “local authorities” interests. Lack of information/expertise and unwillingness to receive adequate information.

***Places, Areas, Information-Centers, Handicraft Centers, where direct relations with Mountain Peoples can be made***

**a) Places/areas (in Chiang Rai Province):**

Scenic places on trips: In the higher mountain and border areas peoples tend to be somewhat better off and more relaxed. Such are Doi Tung, Mae Salong, Hinteak, Doi Chang, Doi Wawee; Also villages along the Mae Kok River rafting trips are still interesting.

Villages: In the Chiang Rai Province most villages are concentrated in the Mae Suai District and Mae Chan districts.

What about the roads?: The roads to major Chinese towns in the border-areas are excellent; Roads to the inside and leading to villages tend to be bad, especially in the rainy periods and hot months, of March and April. But generally 4 wheel trucks have no problems. But trips of interested groups have to be pre-arranged. And some expert help is generally needed.

**b) Handicraft:**

Night Bazaars in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai: They are still the best places to be in direct contact with mountain peoples; but one has to be guided to where they are.

Handicraft Shops: In the multitude of handicraft projects, showrooms and shops in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai one has to be guided or informed which ones are managed by mountain peoples and are cooperative-oriented.

There is also an excellent coordinating project, Thai Craft, in Bangkok, giving reliable information about this. Tourists have to know also, that not everything from the mountains is cheap, if they want to have good quality.

**c) Information:**

Cultural Centers: There is a multitude of Cultural Centers in and around Chiang Mai/Chiang Rai. Information on mountain peoples is generally very poor or not existing.

Information Centers: Smaller tourist information is all over the place, but part of the de-personalized “Minority Marketing” Syndrome. More serious centers are: The Government sponsored Tribal Research Institute, located at Chiang Mai University.

As for Mountain Peoples NGOs, there are only IMPECT, occupying itself with all main minorities, except Akha. Besides this SEAMP-CD-RDI, managed mostly by Akha and with a substantial library. Both have problems with understaffing, lack of adequate English language and lack of funding. The anthropologist -advisor/consultant of SEAMP is also hardly in Chiang Mai, except for pre-arranged group-introductions, with videos. The same is true for educational or development oriented ethno-villages trips. Sometimes a foreign volunteer is available.

Publications: There are also 2-3 tourist oriented and sometimes useful monthlies, but with hardly any attention for mountain minorities. There is no publication left edited for/by mountain minorities. UNDP Bangkok has started a Highland Newsletter lately, and for the whole Mekong River quadrangle area. It still is an excellent initiative at its beginning, but so far still somewhat far from the cultural and development reality in the villages.

As stated before in previous section, there is so far no reliable and easily readable literature, informing the tourist about the mountain minorities.

Websites on the Mountain Peoples and Handicraft: They have come up like mushrooms in the last few years, and it is difficult for the Web search engine to distinguish the serious and mountain people inspired projects or NGOs from the fantasists, the scavengers and the minority marketers. Even an Akha University is mentioned, which only can make locals laugh. Lack of censorship is also a problem in this respect. Most NGOs have no Internet or time to go into the cyberspace and most mountain peoples even have no idea, what this is.

### **C) How PATA can make a contribution to resolve some problems?**

From an analysis and scanning of collaboration and relations between Thailand's Ethnic Mountain Minorities and the tourist industry, it is clear that problems exist and that they even might be on the increase. This does not mean, that all tourist ventures are bad: There are quite some good ones left. Nor does it mean that there are bad intentions. There are many good ones, also in the industry people fighting for their survival and families, especially now in time of financial crisis. Like everywhere else in the world tourism has to adapt and re-adapt itself continuously. For Tourism and the National Economy it is important, however, that all those involved somehow have an adequate share and also a voice. "The Forum of the poor" had a voice by themselves and was successful. That was also the case of the "Golf Course Cadies". It seems that a "Forum of the Highlanders" is in the making also.

When we look at the problems we have seen, there are many which cannot be resolved without the country's gradual change to a real democracy. A great deal also cannot be changed without the help of local and Tourism Authorities. But control of guides f.i. has failed so far. So has the control of the drug traffic, prostitution, pedophilia and so on. Lobbying with some government people is possible, however, on a personal basis.

As for the position of Ethnic Mountain Minorities some problems have come up constantly and can be dealt with gradually in ways stated below. They are:

1. The lack of adequate information in the national Thai and English media: Promote such information through the national press and other media, including maybe ITV, regarding a negative impact of urban development and tourism on the Ethnic Mountain Minorities, correcting existing negative trends. There are sufficient critical journalists and media people, who would be willing to do so, when furnished with sufficient documentation and maybe some other help, such as informative trips for critical media representatives.
2. The lack of any adequate easy readable tourist literature: Promote and help produce such literature in Thai and major tourist languages on the ethnic minority mountain population's culture, history and problems of adaptation to the "increasing gap", also correcting misunderstandings by giving facts.
3. Lack of and diminishing power of Mountain Peoples' NGOs: Re-enforce Bona Fide Mountain Peoples' NGO structures, in order to help them to build up some power and have some voice in the tourist venture. This could take different forms, such as: Promote education of English speaking guides, knowing their own culture; help re-enforce existing mountain peoples information service centers with the help of experts; maybe help to revamp a newsletter about culture and problems in mountain villages, in

English and Thai, with the help of experts. Promote videos, making village based information possible. Selection of NGOs and leading mountain people leadership, as well as experts has to be done after careful screening, however, given existing competition. An Inter Mountain People Advisory Board of just a few reliable persons could serve such a purpose. Tour operators are often not the best advisors.

4. Lack of people oriented alternative ethno- and eco- tourism: Promote educational-, development and interest group tourism to pilot villages, with full involvement of village leadership and possibly mountain people managed NGO's. Promotion of traditional, village based dance groups, with traditional songs and dances, and promotion of local handicraft ventures also can help to make such pilot villages attractive, and create awareness in villages of the value of their culture. It has to be taken care, however, that such ventures are not co-opted. In Thailand and elsewhere everything is eco- and tamachaat already. The "Umbrella" of an international organization might be useful in such cases.

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