

## Chapter Eight

# The Impact of Trekking Tourism in a Changing Society: A Karen Village in Northern Thailand

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### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to examine the role of tourism in the economy of Ban Chaidee,<sup>1</sup> a Karen village in Northern Thailand. I will discuss the factors causing the deeper involvement of the villagers in the trekking tour business and explain the effects of tourism on the village. Furthermore I will show that tourism caused the villagers to become more firmly involved in a market economy dominated by Thai and foreign enterprises. I shall argue, by putting the data into the model proposed by Stephen Britton in 1982 that this entry into a market economy in turn caused the villagers to become more integrated into Thai society.

The study presented here is based on research which I conducted in Thailand between mid-May and the end of October 1996. During this time I spent six weeks in Ban Chaidee village researching the socio-economic role and the specific effects of trekking tourism. Different categories of informants were interviewed, using several Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques such as mapping, welfare rankings, historical profile and seasonal calendars. The data thus collected covers roughly the period from the mid 1970s up to 1996.<sup>2</sup>

I will start by describing the research village and the organization of its economy. Then I shall explain briefly why the villagers are so keen to become involved in tourism by looking at the history of the village and the important socio-economic changes which have recently taken place there. Thirdly, I will concentrate specifically on the weight of trekking tourism in the village economy, considering issues such as how many families are involved in this activity, which kind of tourist activities the villagers are involved in, how tourism fits in with other household economic activities, what tourism means in a family's economy, who in the village is really profiting from tourism, and how tourism affects the community both in a positive and negative way.

Fourthly, I will look at the structural organization of the tourist industry from the hotel sector to the small scale providers in Ban Chaidee. Given that this article focuses on tourism at the village level the organization of tourism in Ban Chaidee receives more attention than the large scale sectors. Explaining the power relations in the large scale tourist sector is of importance for the fifth section of this paper, in which I will place the data concerning the Karen village in Britton's model.

### BAN CHAIDEE

Thirty years ago, the Karen village of Ban Chaidee was established at its present location. Situated at an altitude of approximately 900 meters, it is connected with the nearest Thai village by a 9 kilometer long dirt road. During the rainy season the road becomes impassable for cars and motorbikes. Owing to a migration from another settlement named Kwang,<sup>3</sup> combined with to natural population growth, Ban Chaidee eventually developed from a hamlet into a village with a population of 212 people spread over forty-one households.

Although proforma Catholic or Protestant, the villagers are actually convinced animists as are other Karen in upland areas. Their animistic beliefs are strongly connected to a very important part of their economy, agriculture.<sup>4</sup> To earn a living, the people of Ban Chaidee traditionally engage in several economic activities. One of the most important ones is swidden agriculture, in which all the households of the village take part. Although paddy fields are highly valued,<sup>5</sup> the villagers do not have the opportunity to cultivate much paddy because of the lack of suitable land. Land is scarce and almost all of it is already in use. If the yields of their fields are not high enough to guarantee a decent living, the Karen of Ban Chaidee traditionally go to the nearby Thai villages to work for wages or engage in trade. When selling their labour, they are employed to harvest longan, onions or soya beans, cut weeds or plough the fields. The products they trade, such as chestnuts and bamboo shoots, are gathered in the forest. These products are traded in exchange for money or bartered for rice, fish, chilli and tobacco. If the forest products do not find their way onto the market, they are then consumed by the villagers themselves. In addition to paid labour, gathering and trading, the villagers hunt for food, mainly small animals such as crabs, fish and squirrels.

Villagers also make baskets and weave clothes and bags for their own use. Husbandry is also common with every household in the village keeping animals such as chickens, cows", buffalo and pigs. Most animals are not for sale as these Karen do not consider it worthwhile to sell for a low price after sometimes years of feeding and care. However cows and buffalo can be sold if a household is in need of cash, for example when buying additional rice or constructing a house. Finally, every family

also has a garden in which fruit and vegetables are cultivated for household consumption.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND TOURISM

According to the Royal Forestry Department of Thailand, deforestation in the country has become a severe problem over the last thirty years. In 1961, more than 68 million acres of land were covered with forest, 53 per cent of the total area of Thailand. In 1989 this figure was only 35.6 million acres (28.03 per cent). By 1989 the forested area had decreased to 27.95 per cent of the total national landscape. According to Leungaramsri and Rajesh (1992), this deforestation was caused mainly by excessive logging by wood processing industries.<sup>6</sup> By 1989, the severe problem of deforestation and the popular movement against commercial logging forced the Thai government to implement a logging ban which amounted to a 'major restraint' on commercial logging. Leungaramsri and Rajesh (1992) however found that illegal logging continued (Leungaramsri, Rajesh 1992: 21-2). In addition to a restraint on commercial logging, the 1989 logging ban also prohibited swidden cultivation, a measure which directly affected the people of Ban Chaidee. Since the ban was implemented, the Karen villagers have not been allowed to clear and burn new fields for cultivation which resulted in shorter fallow periods for the existing swidden fields. As a consequence, the fields cannot recover sufficiently between crops and their fertility has declined. Furthermore, the deterioration of their swiddens forces the villagers to burn vegetation which is not yet fully grown and the consequent shorter duration of burning does not kill all small pests. These uncontrolled pests and the decline in land fertility have caused a decrease in the yields of crucial subsistence crops. Switching from shifting cultivation to paddy cultivation - a means of cultivation permitted by the government - is difficult for the villagers of Ban Chaidee because nearly all land suitable for paddy fields is already owned and in use. Neither the government nor international agencies have managed to offer alternative forms of agriculture to the villagers of Ban Chaidee, for instance by introducing new crops or new agricultural techniques, in spite of the fact that such help has been offered in many other areas of Northern Thailand.<sup>7</sup>

Another factor in the increase in the scarcity of the resources needed for the villagers' subsistence is the disappearance of wildlife. Before the Second World War when nearly two thirds of the total surface of Thailand was covered with forest there was no particular need to protect wildlife. However, the growing demand for timber and accompanying deforestation, the increased availability of fire arms, and rapid population growth led to a decline in the wildlife of Thailand. This problem has been recognized by the government and protective measures have been taken. (Arbhabhirama 1988: 199-200) These measures have reached Ban Chaidee: the villagers

stated that for 7 years now, hunting has been prohibited in the area. (It must be said that many people in Ban Chaidee were aware of the problem long before the prohibition hunting and most families had stopped hunting large animals). Smaller animals, such as fish and crabs, as well as foods such as mushrooms have also declined in the surrounding area of Ban Chaidee. According to the villagers this decrease in wildlife and forest food began 15 to 20 years ago, and has been worsening ever since.

The resulting scarcity of resources has made it more difficult than ever for the villagers to make a living in the traditional way. The only solution was to seek other sources of income, and this is precisely what has happened in Ban Chaidee. After the logging ban was implemented in 1989 and the prohibition on hunting wildlife was introduced the villagers started to venture further away from their village community to trade and to work as paid laborers for Thai farmers. Then came tourism, another alternative source of income in which many villagers took an interest.

### TREKKING TOURISM AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS IN BAN CHAIDEE

Trekking tours in Ban Chaidee area are very similar to those described by Michaud (1997) in his research village in Chiang Dao area. In our case, the tourists book a tour in Chiang Mai for two to four days, very often from the guest-house where they stay. The group, usually made up of six to eight people, is then taken from the tour agency or the guest-house to the trekking area by truck. From where the truck drops them they go on foot with a guide, to visit a few hill tribe villages, in each of which they usually stay for a night. During the first couple of days they go on a sightseeing tour to the waterfall near Ban Chaidee. On the last day they walk back to the nearby Thai village where they can eat and drink at a restaurant. Here the group will be picked up by the agency's car to be taken to the starting point of the river leg of the trip. After bamboo rafting downstream for approximately one hour, they reach an elephant camp where the group can take a one and a half hour elephant ride, before finally being driven back to Chiang Mai by truck.

Tourism began in Ban Chaidee around 1987, and during the first two years there was only one household who were active in tourism. This household provided accommodation for the tourists, but was not involved in any other tourist activities. By 1990, the number of tourists visiting the village had increased noticeably. Some households looking for extra income took advantage of this opportunity and began to offer accommodation to tourists. Approximately two years after the introduction of the logging ban many villagers had started to work as porters for the trekking tour guides, which involves helping with the carrying of food during the trek and helping the guide to cook for the tourists. Other households started to sell

woven products such as sarongs and bags to visitors. By 1995, at the time of my fieldwork, there were ten households providing accommodation for tourists. Furthermore, seventeen households were engaged in porter work and twenty-one households sold woven products to tourists. One household also offered massage to visitors. A total of thirty-one households out of forty-one in the village had become involved in one or more tourist activities.

There are three main sorts of tourist activities in which the villagers of Ban Chaidee are engaged. These are the selling of handicrafts woven by women (bags, sarongs and shirts), porter work for which men go to the nearest Thai village to contact the tour guide and offer their services, and offering accommodation to tourists, which includes selling soft drinks and whisky. Accommodation for tourists is provided on two sites, one in the village itself and the other at a waterfall situated downhill from Ban Chaidee, 25 minutes walk away. Out of the ten households which accommodate tourists, eight do so at the waterfall and four in the village, two households offering accommodation at both places. Providing accommodation in the village and porter work are carried out on an individual basis, by which I mean that in relation to these activities, there is no co-operation between households and each works independently. However, in relation to the selling of handcrafted goods and the provision of accommodation for tourists at the waterfall there is co-operation between households, some producers giving their woven products to a household which accommodates tourists. The latter sells these to the visitors and for payment, receives a share of the profit. In this way, households which are not involved in housing tourists are able to take advantage of the contact between providers of tourist accommodation and the tourists in order to sell their products. The producers of these goods are also able to save on labour since they do not have to engage actively in the selling of their products.

At the waterfall, one 'guesthouse' has been constructed on each side of the river and in each house four households co-operate with each other. The households split the costs and profits, and each provides one person to stay at the waterfall and look after the tourists. In this way there are almost always four people present at any one house at the waterfall.

There are four reasons why these eight households work together. Firstly, there is not enough space at the waterfall to build eight houses to offer accommodation to tourists. Secondly, if the various households operated on their own, the competition would become too strong, and for many households it would no longer be worthwhile to provide tourist accommodation. Thirdly, each household on its own does not have the capital to make the required initial investments, i.e. buying items such as blankets, mats, knives and pans. Fourthly, a household operating on its own does not have enough extra labour available to combine providing

accommodation at the waterfall with other economic activities. Furthermore, if one of the four families has other urgent work to do, it is easier for it to spread its labour because three other people remain at the waterfall who can do the work. Lack of labour and capital did also play a significant role in Forsyth's (1992, 1995) research village, Pha Dua. In Pha Dua, a Yao settlement, the villagers sell goods and services to day trippers stopping by on chartered bus rides. According to Forsyth's findings, the main constraints on setting up stalls in order to sell goods to tourists were shortages of money and available labour. (Forsyth, 1995: 883, 888-9)

In Ban Chaidee all the households involved in hosting tourists, in selling handcrafted goods, and/or in porter work combine tourism with a number of other economic activities. Figure 1 gives only a broad overview of the economic activities of a household active in tourism, the situation not being identical for every household in the village. For instance, some households are less involved in paid labour or do not have paddy fields. Nevertheless it provides a good portrait of the economic activities of an 'average' family.

All households in Ban Chaidee are active in other economic activities alongside tourism, such as rice cultivation (swidden and paddy), trading, gathering, weaving, or working in wage labour. This corresponds with the findings of Michaud (1997) who conducted a similar research in 1992-93, at least in the initial stages of the development of tourism in his study village. During the first years of tourism there, Michaud noted that only three households were actively engaged in tourism. As in Ban Chaidee, these households were still engaged in their traditional means of production and networks of co-operation and were wealthy enough to be able to make spare labour available for tourism related activities. But things started to change in Michaud's research village a few years later, when the number of visiting tourists increased beyond a certain threshold. As a result, the families active in tourism were required to spend more time at home and less in the fields, and were to be more regularly in contact with the visitors. This meant a change in their lives which they did not like. These families also became reluctant to sell larger amounts of opium to tourists - a regular tourist demand in Michaud's Ban Suay - because of the potential risks they ran with the Thai authorities. As a result these 'first wave' households started to withdraw from the tourist business and simply reverted to their more traditional economic activities. Since Ban Suay was deemed to be a suitable and profitable location for trekking tourism, the Thai guides started to look for other households who could provide the required services. Several poorer households saw their chance and replaced the initial wealthier families. These newcomers to the business now had to spend a lot of time servicing the tourists which meant that they were not in a position to work their fields regularly. But in fact the majority of these 'second wave' hosts were opium addicts and had already been cut off from their traditional means of production. Furthermore, because most adults from

these households were addicted to opium, they could not maintain strong interclan ties through profitable and productive marriages, and as a consequence, they did not have enough children to work the land effectively. All this resulted in their near total separation from co-operative links with the community. (Michaud 1997: 139-141) While the Ban Chaidee situation clearly reflects the first stage of the development of tourism in Ban Suay, it remains to be seen whether a similar shift of households active in tourism will ever take place there.

For some households in Ban Chaidee it is difficult to combine tourism with other activities because the high season of tourism - as the figure above shows - coincides with agricultural activities, trading and working in paid labour. The villagers have tried to solve this problem by establishing co-operation between households, as already mentioned. Providing accommodation for tourists in the village does not cause a great many problems. Everyone in the household helps, but it is mainly the female head of the household who looks after the tourists: she routinely organizes most of the domestic work and it is easier for her to combine this work with tourism. For example, when urgent work has to be done in the fields the mother looks after the tourists until they leave before going to the fields to help her family. However, for a few households it is impossible to be involved in tourism at all because they do not have enough family labour.

Providing accommodation for tourists is the most profitable tourist activity for the Karen in Ban Chaidee. Two households out of a total of thirty-one earn the most important part of their revenues from tourism. One of these households accommodates tourists in the village only and the father does porter work. This household has been accommodating tourists for nine years and was the first family in Ban Chaidee to become active in tourism. Because they have been involved for so long they have established in tourism good contacts with the tour guides, through which they are able to attract a large number of visitors. The other household makes significant profits out of accommodating tourists both in the village and at the waterfall. The remaining eight households involved in providing accommodation earn less either because they started only recently and therefore have not yet established good contacts with the tour guides, or because they only provide accommodation at the waterfall. The households who accommodate tourists at the waterfall must split between themselves the earnings derived by the group, which leaves less profit per household. In general porter work and selling woven products are less profitable than providing tourist accommodation. The sale of woven products in particular is not very profitable because tourists are not often willing to buy these products.

The money earned from tourism is spent on different sorts of products. Table 1 gives an overview of the products on which the households active in tourism spent the money which they earned.

*Table 1* Products bought with the money earned from tourism

<i>Products that are bought with the money earned from tourism</i>	<i>Households involved in tourism</i>	
	<i>Households which offer accommodation (N = 10)</i>	<i>Households which do not offer accommodation (N = 21)</i>
- Rice	9	20
- Other food than rice	7	10
- Clothes/Cotton in order to make clothes	5	12
- Health-care	1	2
- Tools for agriculture	2	-
- House construction	6	1
- Construct/Buying paddy field	3	-
- Motorcycle	3	-
- Other	2	2

Total N = 31

Table 1 shows that almost all households involved in tourism - regardless of whether they accommodate tourists or not - spend tourism money on rice or other food. A lot of households also spend part of that money on clothes or cotton fabric. These are all products needed to meet human basic needs. Products which are more expensive, such as a (new) house, paddy fields, or a motorcycle, are only bought by the households which provide accommodations to tourists.

Considering the high proportion of households which buy food and clothes, and the fact that all the households active in tourism combine this with several other economic activities, it is clear that tourism in Ban Chaidee is an activity which only supplements other sources of income. Because of tourism some family members trade or work less in paid labour than they used to, as tourism takes place at or nearby their homes and requires less work. However tourism has not replaced outlier activities, especially agriculture, which is still regarded by the villagers as their most important economic activity. Nevertheless tourism now provides an important part of these households' income. It enables people to earn money to buy the goods necessary to their economic health and as I have already made clear, this money has become very important for the many Highlanders who cannot grow enough produce of their-own anymore as a result of policies implemented by the government within the last 10 years or so.

However tourism does not bring benefits only, it also has a cost. Authors who have studied the impact of trekking tourism on hill tribe communities include Michaud (1994, 1997), Toyota (1993, 1996), Dearden (1996) and

Kesmanee and Charoensri (1994). Most of these authors point out the positive as well as the negative effects of trekking tourism. One of these effects, deemed negative by Kesmanee and Charoensri for instance while Michaud takes a neutral stance on the issue, is the selling and smoking of opium. Smoking opium often occurs on trekking tours because the guides promote this activity (Michaud 1997) and tourists find it exciting and adventurous. The hosts who prepare the opium pipe often smoke together with the tourists. For the tourists smoking opium is a one-off experience, but for the hosts, who are in contact with tourists on a regular basis, it is a more regular activity and if they were not already addicted before tourism developed, they may easily become so. Several respondents in Ban Chaidee mentioned the drug issue. According to them the smoking of opium started some time after the first trekkers visited the village. The drug problem became more severe five years ago, and the respondents said that as a reaction some villagers had organized themselves and banned drugs in the village. The respondents claimed not to know whether or not opium is smoked by tourists at the accommodations at the waterfall though. Only one respondent who accommodates tourists there said that he once saw a tour guide bring drugs in, which would support the claim that the Karen themselves have withdrawn from this activity. Because my stay at Ban Chaidee was relatively short, it was difficult for me to find out much about such a sensitive issue as the smoking of opium, and I cannot ascertain whether or not opium is or was smoked on any regular basis by tourists there.

Another negative effect of tourism on the village community and its surroundings has been pollution. Throughout the village, by the side of the road and at the waterfall, one can find plastic bags and wrappings, paper and bottles. However it is important to note that tourists are not the sole culprits of this pollution. There is no organized rubbish collection in the village, and hence the villagers do not know where to leave the waste from the products which they have bought at the market or at the small shop managed by some of the villagers. The villagers dump their garbage anywhere in the village or bury it. In addition to the problem of pollution, several respondents complained about the noise tourists make when they drink and sing late at night, and some villagers said that they found being photographed by tourists a nuisance. The customs of the villagers are also being ignored: many tourists publicly bathe naked or in their underwear or walk around the village in shorts. This would be unthinkable for Karen men and women, particularly the latter.

In Karen tradition, there is a strong solidarity among village dwellers and products can easily be borrowed or shared between villagers. Because of the strong market influences at present, this custom is disappearing of the population in Ban Chaidee. In the past the villagers charged each other lower prices than they asked from Thai people or from tourists. This

corresponds with the findings of Hamilton's study (1965) about the economy in a Karen society. However this separation has also started to disappear in Ban Chaidee, especially between the households who accommodate tourists and those who do not. Nowadays for example, if villagers want to buy a bottle of water from a family involved in accommodating tourists, they must pay the same price as the tourists, i.e. 10 baht, compared to half this price a few years ago. Several respondents mentioned that many people involved in accommodating tourists are more concerned with earning money from tourism than with the problems which the community faces. When there is a community meeting in which problems are discussed, many local tourist 'entrepreneurs' are not really committed, and participate very little in the discussion. Some others who are not involved in accommodating tourists see this attitude and the high prices which they have to pay for products, as evidence of selfishness, an attitude they judge incompatible with a long tradition of co-operation between kinsmen and neighbors. These issues cause tensions between the villagers. Supporting this observation in Ban Chaidee, Michaud (1997) has noted a very similar social fracture in his Hmong village, where what he calls the 'second wave' of local tourist hosts ended up being marginalized in their own community for similar reasons.

#### THE ORGANISATION OF THE TOURIST INDUSTRY AND THE POWER RELATIONS WITHIN IT

The trekking tour business in Northern Thailand is connected to the international tourist industry. The tourists who visit the hill tribes on trekking tours are mostly foreigners, the Thai themselves having little interest in going on trekking tours. The hotel chains, the airline companies and the large scale tour operators enjoy the strongest position in the tourist industry. These are owned by foreign transnational corporations, the Thai nobility, the Thai government and a handful of economically and politically powerful Thai families. They have the expertise and the capital to control the flow of tourists in Bangkok and other ports of entry, and to all major destinations within the country.

Down at the provincial level, tourism in Chiang Mai is similarly structured: the tourist business in this city is mainly controlled by a group of 30 powerful families who have close kinship and business ties with each other. (Meyer 1988: 113-52, 457-8) Regarding trekking tourism, the next most powerful players in the tourist industry are the jungle tour operators and the guest house owners in Chiang Mai which offer trekking tours to visitors. These operators sell their tours as an exciting trip in the labyrinthine mountains inhabited by hospitable and colorfully costumed tribal people. (Cohen 1983) The tours mostly take place in an area called the Golden Triangle, an area which is surrounded by mystery and where

opium is illegally cultivated (Michaud 1995: 89). The tour operators are dependent upon the larger companies described above and their business<sup>1</sup> is directly affected when fewer tourists visit Chiang Mai. Not only the jungle tour operators, but also the hill tribe people involved in the trekking tour business will be affected by a reduction in the number of tourists visiting Chiang Mai. The hill tribes are the least powerful and least influential of all the players involved in the tourist industry. However this does not mean that they are passive players in the game. With the means they have, the hill tribes try to secure as good a position as possible in the trekking tour industry. The whole structure of the trekking tourist industry with the hill tribes as the weakest players in the business and the large national and multinational firms as the strongest, corresponds with, the findings of Michaud (1993:24).

Cohen (1983), Michaud(1995) and Dearden (1994; 1996) point out that it is not the hill tribes, but the jungle tour operators who initiate the trekking tours. This is also the case in Ban Chaidee. The tour operators in Chiang Mai organize the tours, and it is the tour guides who will contact a family in Ban Chaidee in order to organize accommodation for the night. As I have already pointed out, most villagers are eager to become involved in providing accommodations for tourists, and the tour guide can choose from a large number of families. The villagers are thus in a position of dependency: the business agreement is not put in writing, and if the tour guide is not satisfied with the course of business he can switch to another family or group of families. The villagers are not only dependent on the tour guide in an economic sense, but also as regards to communication with the tourists. A language barrier exists between the hosts and the tourists and both sides are dependent on the tour guide, who acts as an interpreter for the parties. Many tour guides do not feel obliged to translate faithfully, the conversations between hosts and tourists, and Thai guides who often know little about hill tribe society and culture frequently give biased or plainly wrong answers to the questions posed by the tourists. The image which tourists form of Ban Chaidee and its people is for a major part determined by the tour guides, (see also Cohen and Cooper 1986, Kesmanee and Charoensri 1994, Michaud 1997)

As was mentioned earlier, besides visits to Ban Chaidee and other hill tribe villages, the main activities on a trekking tour are bamboo rafting and elephant riding. These activities take place in a valley about 15 kilometers from Ban Chaidee, and are organized by Karen as well as non-Karen from the Thai village of Sya, 9 kilometers away from Ban Chaidee. Three families from Ban Sya control bamboo rafting and another three families hire Thai people for rafting because they are easier to contact than the hill tribe people. For elephant riding, Karen people are hired because, as is well known, they are more skilled and experienced in looking after and guiding elephants than Thai people. Some of the elephants are owned by the families in Ban

Sya and some are owned by the Karen guides themselves. None of these Karen people originate from the area near Ban Chaidee, but come instead from another district in Northern Thailand.

It is difficult for the villagers of Ban Chaidee to find to work in these tourist activities. The villagers first have to walk for about an hour and a half to Sya village and from there they must wait for a truck or bus to take them to the actual location where these activities take place. Accessibility becomes even more difficult in the rainy season when the only road between Ban Chaidee and Ban Sya becomes muddy, making it difficult even to walk on. In addition, the villagers are only offered work at the bamboo raft station when some regular worker is ill, or sometimes in the high season when extra tourists visit the area. At the elephant camp, it is only possible to find work if an elephant guide quits and the owners look for someone else to replace him. But at the end of the day, the villagers of Ban Chaidee have never set up their own business to offer these activities quite simply because they do not have enough money to do so.

In his study village, Michaud (1997) calculated that nearly 98% per cent of the money spent by tourists on and during a trekking tour never reaches Ban Suay; it goes for the most part to the Thai operators and middlemen. The tour operators have to spend money on hiring a truck, buying food for the tourists, on hiring two or three rafts and elephants, and on the wages of the trekking tour guides. Based on data collected over one full year in 1992-1993, a little more than 2 per cent of the money spent by tourists visiting Ban Suay was found to reach the Hmong villagers. Based on an annual average of eight trekkers per group, Michaud calculated that the income earned by one family from one such group would then be 260 baht per night. In a hypothetical calculation of the annual income of a household active in tourism, assuming that one family would host one group of tourists per day throughout the year, a family involved in providing tourist accommodation could then earn up to 94,900 baht per annum. However, the highest revenue actually found by Michaud was much lower, namely 68,940 baht (Michaud, 1994: 348-A), and this for one only household out of 6 involved in hosting tourists there. My data show lower figures: The average size of a tourist group in Ban Chaidee is seven people; the two households which earn most from tourism in Ban Chaidee have approximately six tourist group per week visiting them in the high season; the income received from such a group is about 210 baht, 140 baht for accommodation and 70 baht for beverages. The flow of tourists in Ban Chaidee, is not constant throughout the year because trekking tourism here is subject to seasonal influences. The high season, shown at Figure 1, takes place in the months of July, August, November, December and January, which amounts to a maximum 154 days in total, or 22 weeks. On an annual basis this would mean an income of 27,720 baht, not counting the

additional odd group outside that period. Nevertheless, this is much less than the 68,940 baht of Michaud, who included all sources of income inclusive of opium selling, for which he produced detailed figures.

Here it must be noted that the income figure I calculated for Ban Chaidee is merely an estimate<sup>8</sup> based on a household which is one of the top earners in tourism in Ban Chaidee. There are only two households which manage to earn such a high income. The other households earn much less because they mostly provide accommodation at the waterfall where they have to split their earnings among four households. In particular the households which are only involved in selling handcrafted goods earn much less. Toyota (1996) and Michaud (1997) point out that, in their case studies, selling handcrafted goods provides only a small amount of income, if any at all. This is also the case in Ban Chaidee: several households have stopped selling woven products because it is no longer profitable: The tourists showed no interest in their products. I personally saw no-one selling handcrafted goods during my stay in the village.

#### **TREKKING TOURISM IN BAN CHAIDEE IN A MODEL OF DEPENDENCY**

In this section it is my intention to put the data discussed above into a model developed by Stephen Britton (1982). Britton looked at the workings of international tourism and the relations of power and dependency between its various sectors. Britton argues that businesses in underdeveloped countries lack capital and expertise and therefore rely heavily on foreign capital. Privileged groups in underdeveloped countries can take advantage of tourism at the expense of less privileged people. According to Britton, large foreign and national companies use dominant mechanisms to protect their interests. These dominant mechanisms consist of control over technology, expertise, bargaining power and product pricing and design. All participants at all levels of the tourist industry profit to a certain degree. However because of the dominant mechanisms, the large foreign and national companies (i.e. those at the top of the hierarchy) are able to extract the economic surplus and to accumulate capital. Furthermore, Britton argues that the large corporations control the flow of tourists to the various destinations in the country. From these destinations or resort enclaves the tourists make short trips into the urban and rural subsistence sectors for sightseeing, entertainment and shopping (Britton 1996: 155-72).

Britton presented his ideas in a scheme, which is shown in Figure 2. I have slightly modified Britton's scheme to allow it to better reflect what happens in my research area. It shows the villagers of Ban Chaidee active in tourism and their position in the tourist industry. The jungle tour agencies and Thai middlemen in the trekking tour business are dependent on airline, train and bus companies, large tour operators and hotel chains. They

regulate the flow of tourists to Thailand and to various destinations in the country, such as Chiang Mai. If the number of tourists visiting Chiang Mai was to decline, this would seriously affect the business of the jungle tour agencies, the Thai middlemen and the hill tribes active in tourism. A decline in the number of visiting tourists could occur for example occur if new-tourist destinations were offered by the large companies to their clients. I cannot elaborate on how the relations of power and dependency between jungle tour agencies and the large national companies work in practice since this issue would need further research. As I have explained above, the main focus here is on the relations between the jungle tour agencies, the Thai middlemen and the villagers of Ban Chaidee involved in the trekking tour business. The jungle tour agencies and the Thai middlemen also use dominant mechanisms to protect their interests: Trekking tours are organized by tour operators, and they also determine the price of the tours. The tour operators have an office in Chiang Mai, where tourists from Bangkok arrive, and this gives them a good opportunity to attract customers by advertising their 'exciting' and 'adventurous' treks (Cohen 1983). The supplementary activities on a trekking tour, such as elephant riding and bamboo rafting, are organized in the main by Thai middlemen in the area around Ban Chaidee. A major part of the money spent by tourists on a trek flows to these middlemen, as Michaud (1997) has already shown. As already explained, it is difficult for the villagers of Ban Chaidee to find employment in the activities controlled by the Thai middlemen, nor do they have the capability to establish their own tour agency in Chiang Mai or, indeed, anywhere else. The people of Ban Chaidee can only earn an income from the specific activities of accommodating tourists, porter work, or selling handcrafted goods. And even this is not guaranteed; the tour guide selects a family before the villagers can provide accommodation for tourists and thereby to earn income from the most profitable tourist activity in the village. This results in a flow of profit to jungle tour operators and to the Thai middlemen, which is illustrated in Figure 2 by the black arrow leading towards the intermediate sector. Only a very small share of the money goes to the villagers of Ban Chaidee. Since environmental problems have become worse and the Thai government has forbidden the traditional alternatives such as hunting of wildlife and clearing of land for swidden cultivation, it has become increasingly difficult for the villagers in Ban Chaidee to make a living. Hence tourism is a very attractive alternative, although with unavoidable pitfalls.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Tourism in Ban Chaidee is supplementary to other household economic activities. It does not replace any other activity, and agriculture, is still regarded by the villagers as their most important economic activity. In Ban

Chaidee only a few households earn a sizeable income from tourism. Nevertheless, it enables family members to earn the additional income they need in this time of scarcity.

Several factors play a major role in the integration of Ban Chaidee villagers into the Thai nation state. Environmental damage and government policies have depleted the traditional resources of the villagers, forcing them to find new sources of income and to become more integrated in Thai society. Tourism is one of these new sources of income which in turn plays an important role in the integration of the people of Ban Chaidee into the Thai nation state. Through trekking tourism the villagers become more active in the capitalist market which is part of Thai society. However this does not mean that the villagers easily give up their own lifestyles and traditional ways of production. This becomes very clear when looking at their wishes: they want to maintain shifting cultivation, a source of income which is closely related to their religious and spiritual beliefs, and which they see as their most important source of income.

Tourism does not only bring in additional income, it also has undesirable effects. These are the pollution caused by the litter dropped by tourists, noise pollution late at night, encroachment on the norms and values of the villagers, and the tensions produced amongst the people of Ban Chaidee themselves.

Tourism brings the villagers into contact with a market economy, which is strongly characterized by relations of power and dependency. The trekking tour business is organized and controlled by the jungle tour operators in Chiang Mai and the Thai middlemen in the area around Ban Chaidee. These agents have the money and the knowledge to organize the trekking tours and to control the market to the detriment of their competitors, amongst whom the villagers are the weakest. Most of the profit derived from trekking tourism goes to the jungle tour agencies and to the Thai middlemen, and only a very small share is left for the Karen of Ban Chaidee. However, this is far from stating that tourism is an insignificant source of income for households in the Karen village, nor are the villagers in Ban Chaidee passive players in the game: they try to secure as good a position as possible in the trekking tour industry by the precious little means they have. The villagers actively look for jobs as porters and maintain good contacts with the jungle guides in order to keep their positions as providers of accommodation. Furthermore, if the villagers have difficulty entering the tourist business, they set up new forms of co-operation which, for example, resulted in the provision accommodation by a waterfall situated nearby by several households. However, if the village changes significantly in future, or if too many tourists visit the village and the romantic image of 'authenticity' and 'remoteness' is lost, it is possible that tour agencies will leave and tourism will cease to exist in the village. This would mean a considerable loss of income for the households active in

tourism and possibly the deterioration of the economic situation that could ultimately lead to the dissolution of the village altogether as a community (Michaud 1993). It is difficult for the villagers to change this situation of unequal power and dependency alone. On the one hand they do not have the means to do so. On the other it is difficult for them to give up the tourism business because they need the income. This need is the result of the changes to which their society has been subject during recent years.

Michaud (1991) points out that in his research village, the first wave of households involved in tourism were still engaged in their traditional activities of production and networks of co-operation, and could actually decide to give up tourism and successfully revert to agriculture. Except for this reversion, which has not yet shown signs of occurring in Ban Chaidee, his research corresponds with the situation in my study village. From the villagers' point of view agriculture is actually the most important economic activity. In Ban Chaidee tourism does not result in the isolation of villagers from networks of co-operation, such as the exchange of labour during planting and harvesting. On the contrary, in some cases tourism actually creates new co-operative relationships.

Other similarities between my research results and previous studies exist. In Ban Chaidee tour guides play an important role in the image tourists form of the villagers, corresponding with the findings of Cohen (1982), Kesmanee and Charoensri (1994), Toyota (1996) and Michaud (1997). The negative effects of trekking tourism on this Karen community, pollution for instance, are also described in the research of Kesmanee and Charoensri (1994) and Dearden (1994, 1996). Michaud (1997) demonstrates that the Thai middlemen in particular profit from the trekking tour business. Nearly all of these authors argued that the organization of trekking tours is not under the control of the hill tribes, but is instead operated and initiated by outsiders who are mostly of Thai origin. My research has confirmed in its own way each of these previous findings.

In this study, trekking tourism proves to be one agent of socio-economic change, one whose importance is growing, yet still only one among others. Other factors contribute to change in the community of Ban Chaidee. Environmental degradation and government policy are interconnected with tourism. Environmental degradation and government policy have made it more difficult for the villagers of Ban Chaidee to make a living in the traditional way. To compensate, the villagers had to find alternative sources of income, of which trekking tourism proved to be one. Trekking tourism in turn contributes to changing the village community further. As a result of the development of tourism the villagers of Ban Chaidee have become more firmly integrated into the national market economy. Consequently, they are also becoming more integrated into the Thai nation state.

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It is important to note that all figures derived here are estimates. My stay in Ban Chaidee was relatively short and the villagers do not keep records of their income and expenditure, which makes it impossible in this case to give accurate figures. Furthermore, the earnings of 210 baht per day can strongly fluctuate because some groups of tourists spend more on beverages than others. Exact figures could only be given if the income and expenditure of a limited number of households would be monitored carefully for at least a year. To this day, only Forsyth (1992) and Michaud (1994) have carried out such studies.

## NOTES

- 1 For consideration related to professional ethics, I have decided to give my research village a fictitious name. Other villages and topographical places in my research area are not cited by their real name either.
- 2 This chapter stems from my MA thesis in Development Studies. For more detailed data and explanation of research methods, see 'Trekking Tourism and its Role in a Process of Socio-economic Change: A Karen Village in Northern Thailand as an Example', published in 1997 as an occasional paper by the Third World Centre at the Catholic University Nijmegen (The Netherlands).
- 3 fean Kwang was faced with major water shortages and infertile farming land due to which its inhabitants started to move to different areas. One of the villages they moved to was Ban Chaidee.
- 4 The agricultural cycle in Karen society is always associated with religious events, and food is offered to the spirits to please them in the hope of obtaining a better harvest. Rice is always an item among the food being offered, it is the most important agricultural product in both the economic and the cultural sense.
- 5 Paddy fields are highly valued because they yield a higher and more consistent harvest per unit than a swidden. Moreover paddy fields being privately owned by families, they can be inherited by children but not swidden land, which is community land.
- 6 Leungaramsri and Rajesh (1992) point out that 'Thailand's forests have been viewed by the state as a vast timber resource to be exploited for commercial purposes'. The food processing industry had permission from the Thai government to carry out commercial logging on a large scale, which is the main cause of the deforestation problem in Thailand. In 1968 the Thai government granted 516 logging concessions. These concessions covered an area of 60 million acres, which was almost the half of Thailand's total land area of 128.4 million acres.
- 7 Sirisambhand (1992) discusses in her work the policy towards the hill tribes in the government's National Development Plans. She points out that during the Third National Development Plan (1972-1976) the government and international agencies started to introduce agricultural development programs for the hill tribes in which cash crops were introduced to replace opium and to reduce shifting cultivation.