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Monks, Monarchs and Mountain Folks

Domestic Tourism and Internal Colonialism in Northern Thailand

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Abstract ■ The development of domestic (or national) tourism in Thailand in the second half of the 20th century relied on a new kind of relationship between the state and local cultures. Rural spaces have been reinvented and transformed into appealing visual and conceptual archetypes which sustain discourses on both local and national identity and history. Thai tourism allows a kind of pacification of the relations between the centre and the periphery, but it also perpetuates an internal colonialism, both towards Tai and non-Tai populations. This article investigates the social significance of domestic tourism in Chiang Mai and the links between non-Western representation of travel, nationalism and localized identity. It focuses on three attractions scattered along the road going up to the mountain of Suthep (Doi Suthep), one of the most famous tourist destinations in northern Thailand: a Buddhist temple, a royal palace and an ethnic village. These three attractions provide crucial insights into the history of domestic tourism in Thailand: its similarities to and differences from previous forms of travel, its relations to the idealization of the rural and its role in the pacification of the relations between the Thai state and its geographic and social margins.

Keywords ■ Buddhism ■ Hmong ■ identity ■ internal colonialism ■ nationalism ■ Non-Western Tourism ■ Thailand ■ travel

Blindness or denial? Non-western tourists in the anthropology of tourism

The anthropology of tourism sometimes seems to stammer.¹ Dennison Nash wrote in 1981 that it was obsessed by the behaviour of Western tourists or by their impact on 'host' societies and asked anthropologists to study the

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cultural variations of tourist practices as well (1981: 461). In 1983, the *Annals of Tourism Research* published what is still today their only thematic issue specifically devoted to non-Western, tourists with articles on Japan, Mexico and India. In the introduction, Nelson Graburn made a call similar to that of Nash: 'if the subject of the anthropology of tourism is to truly measure up to the global, comparative scope of the anthropology of other institutions (cf. religion, kinship, stratification, law and so on), it must become cross-cultural' (1983: 9). At the beginning of the 21st century, however, nothing fundamental has changed and Kristina Ghimire rightly argued in the first pages of her book on *Native Tourists* that 'the bulk of social science enquiry has been concerned mainly with the socio-economic effects of tourism in the North or involving Northern tourists in the South. Little knowledge exists on Southern tourists' (2001: 2). What has happened then? How to explain that Nash's and Graburn's sentences can be reused, nearly word for word, 20 years later? Why does the anthropology of tourism so often confine itself to a sociology of Western tourists?

An economic argument seems unconvincing. While the tourists of developing countries usually have less purchasing power than Western tourists, they usually generate in their own country (domestic tourism) or in neighbouring countries (regional tourism) an equal and sometimes higher income since they are much more numerous (Ghimire, 2001: 3). In Thailand for instance, official statistics show that in 2004 there were 74.8 million Thai tourists as against 11.6 million foreign tourists. Despite their daily expenses being lower than those of the foreign tourists, in that year Thai tourists generated nearly the same internal revenue at the national scale (Tourism Authority of Thailand [TAT], 2004: 15, 87). A more convincing and obvious argument lies in the spectacular aspect of the encounter between Western tourists and non-Western populations, while domestic tourism in non-Western countries appears more difficult to identify and less 'appealing'. However, the explanation must also be sought in an intellectual heritage or, in other words, in the content and the orientation of the debates that have developed over the nature of tourism.

During the last decades, most authors on the subject have radically denied that tourism constitutes a sort of extension of pre-modern forms of mobility, as was suggested by Dennison Nash (1981). Instead, they insisted on the break introduced by mass tourism, which was born in the Western industrialized and urbanized societies, and primarily in England, at the end of the 19th century. One can distinguish broadly three kinds of approaches. Dean MacCannell (1973) defined tourism as a nostalgic quest for authenticity, echoing the alienation experienced by the inhabitants of urban societies. Non-Western societies became tourist destinations because they crystallize a series of representations about exoticism (simplicity, generosity, nudity, pristine nature): the myth of the good savage as a mirror of the Western (and urban) malaise. Other authors, such as Erik Cohen (1979), have criticized MacCannell's 'unitary' approach and emphasized

the diversity of tourist motivations. Finally, a third and more recent approach departs from both MacCannell's nostalgic quest and from Cohen's typology. It emphasizes the 'de-differentiation'² between the tourist experience and daily life. Technological innovations (mainly new modes of transport, harmonization of time, photography) have facilitated and increased mobility of both peoples and visual signs (artefacts, pictures). The latter enhance the desirability of travel and model a 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 2002 [1990]) which interferes with all aspects of daily life.

Each of these three approaches has proven partially relevant to understanding the social dynamics of tourism, but each has also failed to address two major issues. First, they have stressed the recreational aspect of tourism while ignoring its political implications, especially the role of the state in the development of travel. In several of his recent publications, Adrian Franklin (2003, 2004) rejects the idea that tourism is the 'natural' consequence or product of people's desire for escape from their everyday life. Franklin insists on the desirability of travel as a concept that needed to be 'constructed', and for which important means of persuasion and innovative techniques have been deployed, sometimes by the private sector, but also primarily by the state. He argues that nationalism (and colonialism) has transformed places/landscapes into something attractive, worth visiting and preserving. He contends: 'it was not difference and the extraordinary that created tourism but the opposite, the extension of belonging, the prospect of taking up a place in the new national cultures that beckoned them' (Franklin, 2004: 298). In that respect, tourism deserves primarily a historical and political anthropology to understand how, in a given place or country, a tourist culture emerges and becomes an 'ordering process'.

The second point is that these approaches have also, until quite recently, overlooked the practices and representations of non-Western tourists. This 'Northern bias' (Ghimire, 2001) can be considered both as a blindness and as a denial. We usually don't see the non-Western tourists because we cannot help considering them only as benevolent and dependent hosts. There is a neocolonial violence in this attitude which is reflected in the current state of the anthropology of tourism (Alneng, 2002). Even when non-Western tourists are mentioned, they are usually considered as late avatars of their Western counterparts. In other words, they are denied their own originality. As Erik Cohen puts it: 'tourism is essentially a modern phenomenon' and even if more and more tourists are coming from non-Western countries, they are nonetheless 'tourists in the western sense of the term, even though their specific mode of travelling may incorporate some elements from their own cultural traditions' (1994: 12). But why should we identify modernity with Western countries? 'If tourism is a modern phenomenon', retorts Victor Alneng, ironically, to Erik Cohen, 'why then is non-Western tourism modern in a Western sense, not in a non-Western sense?' (2002: 126).

Admittedly, the urban way of life and the feeling of nostalgia (toward the past, popular culture and nature) appear as universal characteristics of 'modern' tourists, whatever their cultural background, *de facto* linking tourism with the diffusion of the Western way of life and acculturation (Doquet and Evrard, 2008: 179–80). However, since most of the historical studies on tourism have either focused on Northern Europe or considered it as the birthplace of 'modern' travel, they have tended to equate the latter with culturally bounded forms of mobility. In doing so, they have neglected the fact that each culture has its own way of defining the boundary between holiday and everyday (which echoes the boundary between Culture and Nature, Ourselves and the Other), authentic and inauthentic, and also of regulating appropriate and acceptable leisure (Franklin and Crang, 2001: 7). Similarly, nationalism has drawn on similar patterns in different countries (for instance, geometric cartography, the leading role of an urban middle-class, the romanticization of origins), but the value of these patterns, the results of their combination and the 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991) they produced could be locally different. For instance, recent works on Asian tourism (Winter et al., 2009), and especially on Chinese domestic tourism (Leicester, 2008; Nyiri, 2006; Tan Chee-Beng et al., 2001) have underlined the precedence of domestic tourists over foreigners at most contemporary sites, their contrasting expectations and attitudes towards authenticity and otherness, as well as their specific expressions of nostalgia, such as 'lineage tourism' among the urban and overseas Chinese, or 'Mao tourism' among the rural populations. There is more here than just purely formal and superficial variations of behaviour and representations between West and East. 'Mao tourism', for instance, is not solely the expression of a wish to return to old ways of life but also an implicit criticism of the present time and the current political and social context (Graburn, 2001: 83). Far from being a defence of relativism, investigating non-Western practices of tourism is then a matter of considering tourism as a 'total social fact' in its cultural as well as its political and historical variations, and of assessing, for each specific context, how and when the transition to a tourist culture occurs.

While following Adrian Franklin's recommendation to take tourism 'more seriously', we shall challenge – or at least try to complement, some aspects of his analysis. Like Bauman (2000) and Urry (2002 [1990]) before him, Adrian Franklin divides the history of tourism into two periods: there was first the development and the propagation of a dominant culture (internal colonialism, more or less until the 1950s), and later on the valorization of local cultures making them into objects of desire. He considers this change as a consequence of – among other causes – the development among tourists of a 'generalised receptivity and predisposition to objects of everyday', a process which he terms aestheticization (Franklin, 2003: 71). We would like to insist rather on a political

aspect, which is quite obvious nowadays in non-Western countries: local cultures and their symbols (places, objects, peoples) become objects of desire and marketing for tourists as part of a process of control and pacification of social relations. In other words, they are subject to commoditization and fetishism (rather than *aestheticization*) either because they are no longer perceived as a threat to the nation-state, or because there is a need to soften and domesticate their difference.

Our argument here is twofold. First, the tourism 'ordering' is not devoid of political, symbolic and sometimes physical forms of violence and colonialism (both external and internal), even in its current stage of development. This ongoing violence related to the tourist gaze and industry is especially obvious in non-Western countries, an aspect which Franklin's somewhat optimistic and very Western-centred analysis overlooked. Second, tourism's 'ordering' includes the possibility of a 'disordering' through asymmetries (of gaze, of representations, of authenticity) or conflicts (between residents, tourists and tourist industry actors). This is linked not only to the violence inherent to tourism, but also to its intrinsic contradictions. The desire for recreational consumption of landscapes, things or even peoples tends to be exclusive either ideologically (tourists always say they want to avoid tourists) or concretely (nature parks exclude forest dwellers, tourist places oriented towards a domestic clientele usually receive few Western travellers, etc.). It can also be potentially disruptive, especially when a sacred value is attributed to a tourist place, as is the case with the mountain of Suthep (Doi Suthep) in Chiang Mai.

Local identity and sacred sites: the ambiguity of heritage tourism

Overlooking the city of Chiang Mai, the Doi Suthep (Suthep Mountain, 1600 m), has become one of the main destinations for the tourists (both Thai and foreign) visiting northern Thailand. It is estimated that Doi Suthep receives 160,000 visitors per month, 120,000 of whom visit its most sacred and oldest attraction, the Wat Phra That, said to have been built in 1371 CE. A majority of them (mostly Thai and Singaporean, but also Chinese and Indian), can be considered as 'pilgrim-tourists' (Cohen, 1992) since they come to pay homage to the relic of the Buddha enshrined in the temple and to acquire merit for their relatives (*tam bun*) but they also simultaneously enjoy various attractions (sightseeing, waterfalls, ethnic village, royal palace, shopping) in the vicinity of the temple. Collective pilgrimages also occur between April and June and include the processions organized towards the pagoda on various occasions such as Songkhan and more especially Visakha Bucha Day when local people ascend the mountain and sleep on the esplanade of the temple to commemorate the birth of the Buddha.³ Other forms of collective or individual pilgrimages – somewhat

less strictly religious – include for instance the ascent of the mountain by the new students of Chiang Mai University in mid-June.

Wat Phra That Doi Suthep is strongly associated with a northern variant of *theravada* Buddhism, called Yuan Buddhism, itself directly linked with northern Thai⁴ people's (*khon müang*) identity. It is revered as one of the most sacred Buddhist sites in Thailand and one of the 12 sites a faithful Buddhist should visit during his life.⁵ From a political and historical point of view, the temple refers also symbolically to the Lawa and Mon cultural background of northern Thai identity⁶ and, perhaps more importantly for the visitors, to the emergence of the Thai civilization. The relic of the Buddha enshrined in the pagoda is believed to come from Sukhothai, which is considered to be the first independent Thai polity, which later on became part of the Lanna kingdom centred on Chiang Mai.⁷ These intermingled religious, political and historical aspects define the sacred value of the place but in an ambivalent way. They provide a conceptual space of identification for a wide range of visitors, but at the same time they can support attitudes and discourses of defiance towards the state and the tourism industry. Indeed, the temple has been directly associated with religious and political developments which highlight the problematic relation of the 'revitalized' northern Thai identity and the Siamese kingship.

During the early 20th century, Doi Suthep was the focus of a revivalism movement led by a 'holy man', a monk known as Khruba Sriwichai. Born in 1878 in a village near Lamphun, Khruba Sriwichai acquired a reputation as a *ton bun*, that is a 'source of merit' in the Yuan Buddhist tradition, through his asceticism, his determination, his vision of Buddhist society, his presumed magic powers and also his extensive building activities. Among his more renowned achievements is the 11 km road ascending the Doi Suthep, which is followed today by all the tourists going to Wat Phra That. Simultaneously, Khruba Sriwichai also came into conflict with the national Buddhist authorities (*sangha*) and with the Siamese state. At that time, the Siamese authorities were trying to integrate the rather decentralized and loosely organized northern *sangha* into a more hierarchical and national-centred religious order. Khruba Sriwichai refused to follow the new regulations enacted in the Sangha Act of 1902, by which senior monks had to be authorized by their superiors and by district officials before conducting ordinations (P.T. Cohen, 2001). He was summoned twice to Bangkok, in 1919 and later in 1936, to answer charges of disobedience and sedition. His followers were also accused of fomenting revolts and some of them were arrested.

Through his defiance of the *sangha* and, implicitly, of the Thai state, Khruba Sriwichai became a symbol of northern Tai culture in opposition to Bangkok power, a leader of the periphery against the centre at a time when Siamese power was flagging (the constitutional monarchy was created in December 1932, and the King Prajadhipok – Rama VII – abdicated in 1935). Official recognition by the state came only in early 1948, ten years

after his death, during the brief government of Pridi, when the Thai regime was less authoritarian and more open to local personalities (Ka, 2006: 121). A statue of the revered monk was commissioned by the Department of Fine Arts in 1946 and was later placed at the bottom of the Suthep Mountain, at the very beginning of the road built by Khruba Sriwichai and his followers. This statue became an idol worshipped by all the Thai visitors, whether locals or from other provinces, prior to their ascent of the mountain. Western tourists, by contrast, do not always stop by, perhaps because their visual consumption of place is less embodied in the quest for cultural authenticity and religious imagery than for the domestic tourists, and because most of them do not have the same cultural ability to pay attention to the signified as well as to the signifier.

The fame of Khruba Sriwichai has become intimately woven into the reputation of the Doi Suthep as a domestic tourist attraction. Through a process of integration in the national landscape of local heroes whose actions once challenged the power of the centre, local culture is no longer seen as a threat but rather as a value, as heritage. In other words, it can be valued today precisely because it was denied and marginalized in the past: the 'local exoticism' or the 'popular culture' sought by the domestic tourism always presupposes a history that is not avowed but by which it is ontologically constituted (de Certeau, 1993: 45). Nevertheless, this process is never completely achieved and the sacred value of the place can periodically resurface in unexpected ways in the form of a popular opposition to projects led directly or indirectly by the state. A good example is provided by the failure of the cable car project on Doi Suthep during the mid-1980s. First proposed in 1969 by the Tourism Authority in Thailand, this project was later endorsed by the Chiang Mai provincial authorities, who planned the construction of a 2.8 km cable car route from the Chiang Mai zoo, at the bottom of the hill, to its summit, in the vicinity of the temple. This project generated huge opposition from local residents, both Thai and foreigners. Lengthy and hot debates were held in the newspaper while several protests were organized in front of the Chiang Mai governor's office during 1986 before the government eventually put the project on hold.

The debates and discussions over the project focused on several points, among which two appear of special significance here. First, the private companies in charge of the project said it would bring more foreign tourists to Chiang Mai, a claim which was strongly rejected by local residents and academics who pointed out – rightly – that Thai tourists by far outnumbered their overseas counterparts on Doi Suthep (73 percent local to 27 percent overseas in 1985 according to the TAT statistics) and that the cable car, with its novelty value, would be much more appealing to the Thai tourists than to the foreign ones. Indeed, and following what we noted earlier about the contrast between local and foreign tourists in terms of the interest they show in the Sriwichai statue, this is another good example of the asymmetric representations of place and leisure among foreign and

domestic tourists. Local tourists favour modern or up-to-date means of transportation while foreigners, Westerners especially, prefer to 'go local' as much as they can (and would surely not be interested by a mode of transportation that they can experience in their own country). In other words, while Westerners look for exoticism and authenticity in the Other's past, non-Western tourists find these qualities in Western symbols of modernity.⁸

Second, the debates also focused on the threat the cable car would represent for such a sacred destination as Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. Among the opponents to the project, the most frequent argument was that a modern tourist attraction would allow the recreational aspect of the visit to take precedence over the religious one. It would demean the spiritual value of the site and destroy its sanctity. This 'fundamentalist' approach, stressing pilgrimage (*tambun*: a religious act through which one acquires merit for others) as opposed to 'fun' (*sanuk*) can seem somehow contradictory given the presence of numerous shopping stalls at the bottom of the stairs leading to the temple. It was indeed mainly a way of opposing the 'technological' discourse of both the private sector and the authorities, and expressing defiance toward a project perceived as driven by Bangkok-based businessmen.

The private companies and the provincial administration were unable to answer these concerns appropriately. On the issue of protection of the natural environment, they could give technical guarantees and argued that their project was doing more good than harm. However, their attempts were no use because the environmentalists' discourse also invoked 'irrational aspects', such as the ritual and spiritual value of the place, considered by the locals to be 'the soul of Chiang Mai' (*Bangkok Post*, 29 June 1987). Promoters of the project then tried to enlist religious support and obtained the approval of the abbot of the Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. Even this proved to be useless, however, since it raised tensions inside the monastic community and encouraged some of its members to publicly display their opposition to the project. On 24 May 1986, several hundred monks and laymen gathered in Chiang Mai before walking toward the Chiang Mai governor's residence and delivering a petition with 740 signatures. Posters attacking the sponsor of the cable car project, the abbot of Wat Doi Suthep and the TAT were also put on display. The meeting began with an invocation of the spirits of the Three Kings⁹ and of Khruba Sriwichai, thereby linking a struggle against a mass tourism project with emblematic symbols of northern Tai culture revivalism.

The monarchy, the Thai travel culture and the 'gaze toward the north'

Seven kilometres after Wat Phra That, one reaches the royal palace of Phuping. The palace was built in 1961, three years after the first visit of King

Bhumibol to Chiang Mai, and serves as a royal residence for the king, his family and his guests, especially during the winter months (January to March). The number of tourists visiting the palace varies greatly, from an average of 100 per day during the low season to over 3000 per day during the high season and religious festivals such as Songkhan and Loy Khathong. A majority of the tourists are from a Tai cultural background: most of them are Thai citizens from the north and the centre of the country, but a substantial number of Shan (locally known as Tai-Yai) also visit the palace.

Other royal palaces in Thailand have become tourist destinations in the past decades (the Royal Palace in Bangkok and the summer residence of Chonburi for instance), but the Phuphing Palace bears a special significance since its construction coincided more or less with the development of domestic mass tourism in Chiang Mai province at the beginning of the 1960s. Its location near one of the most sacred temples of northern Thailand and on one of its most scenic roads contributed directly to the transformation of Doi Suthep into a kind of 'total tourist complex', in which sightseeing as part as a search for leisure (*sanuk*) also involves a loyalty toward Buddhism and respect for the monarchy and the nation (Peleggi, 2002: 69). Indeed, our argument here is that the construction of the Phuphing Palace can be seen as a turning point in the transformation of traditionally pilgrimage-oriented forms of travel on the mountain into a modern domestic and multi-purpose mass tourism. It is also the most recent manifestation of the special and ambiguous relationship the Siamese aristocracy has developed with its northern margins.

The construction of Phuping Palace appears clearly as a symbol of internal colonialism. More precisely, it is part of an old historical trend, which has seen the Siamese power attempt to subordinate the sanctity of any sacred place in the country to royal rule. In the Tai-Yuan culture, sacred places (i.e. relics of the Buddha) are usually found outside the city (*müang*), often on mountains once honoured by fertility cults, whereas in the Siamese cosmogony, the relics stand (or are brought) into the royal centre. Richard O'Connors (1990, cited in Baker, 2004: 396) has perfectly summarized this tension between the two conceptions of place and power:

Overall, we might call this a shift in the goal of traditional rites. Where all Tai seek prosperity, Yuan and many others focus on fertility. Their cults thus grant power to places if only to tap it. In contrast, the Siamese subsume this animistic fertility in a Buddhist quest for order or discipline. In the end, this 'order' arises from royal rule, not sacred places. So it neutralizes or at least subordinates every place but one – the royal centre.

With the Phuphing Palace, we have another example of this subordination process: the royal power cannot deny the sanctity of the place, but takes it over in order to increase its own legitimacy.

Among Thai tourists, the popularity of the palace is related to its location, its rose gardens¹⁰ and, of course, to the royal presence itself. The

palace seems to constitute the fusion and the embodiment of both a traditional imagery of the north and of certain aspects of the king's life, especially his education in Switzerland and his taste for long walks in the mountains. Among the Thai visitors that we interviewed, Switzerland was the place most often cited as an ideal tourist destination. This cannot be explained only by the contrasting landscapes or climates; it has to be linked with the identification with a living model. Such identification also played a role in the increasing popularity of trekking among the urbanized middle class. During his stays at Phuping Palace, the king is said to have walked regularly on the mountain, in order to contemplate the nature and occasionally to pay a visit to the neighbouring Hmong village of Doi Pui (more on this below). Indeed, the path leading to Doi Pui village, which has been transformed nowadays into a concrete road, is said to have been the first mountain walk opened to tourists in the Chiang Mai area. The Royal Projects, created in 1969 for agricultural development and opium eradication in highland villages, also recently included the promotion of (so far mainly domestic) tourism in their targeted villages with the slogan 'Follow the King's footsteps!'

However, this is not to say that modern Thai tourism should be conceived simply as emulating an elite behaviour since this would surely be a misleading shortcut. Rather, contemporary Thai domestic tourism should be understood as the result of a double shift. First, travel by the aristocracy set up the conditions of the new state of mind necessary for leisure travel. Several decades later, mass tourism developed mainly through the intervention of the state and through a commoditization of local culture. The following paragraphs analyse more precisely this two-step process.

There is a long tradition of travel among the Thai aristocracy going back to the end of the 19th century, during the King Chulalongkorn reign. At that time, the travel culture of the Siamese elite underwent a dramatic transformation through the combination of three factors: increasing transport facilities, numerous overseas trips of the elite¹¹ and increasing pressure from the part of the two main colonial powers of that time, France and England. It was during that time that a fundamental shift occurred at a discursive and cognitive level. A new conceptual frame or state of mind emerged which made travels both necessary (in controlling the territory) and appealing while they were at first considered a painful separation from one's place of origin. This can be understood, for instance, through the development of early forms of travel literature in Thai language.

In Thai poetry, the genre called *nirat* is a kind of complaint about the pain of a separation which is typically due to a journey (real or imaginary) that the author has to accomplish. Around the end of the 19th century, a new type of *nirat* appeared, closer to the travelogue, giving less emphasis to the love-longing than to the description of the places actually visited.¹² Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul explained how what used to be 'a poetic expression of love-separation melancholy with the [sometimes purely

imaginary] chronology of excursion in the background' was progressively transformed into a modern style of travelogue, paying more attention to the landscape and the places actually visited, to the 'going to' rather than the 'leaving from' (Thongchai, 2000: 42–3). Melancholy did not completely disappear but became secondary to the exaltation of the discovery and the mapping of the Siamese interior. Indeed, one may argue here that the melancholy of those left behind, as expressed in the old style of *nirat*, re-surfaces as nostalgia in modern travel. There is a double reversal in this process. While melancholy expressed the homesickness of the traveller, nostalgia refers to something irremediably lost or supposedly so. More importantly, nostalgia in modern travel takes for its object the travel destination (as a symbol of what has been lost at home), while in classical *nirat* melancholy refers to its origin (the loved ones or atmospheres left behind). This shift (from melancholy to nostalgia) appears crucial since it set up the proper conceptual frame, or state of mind, for travel to become something appealing. It is also obvious in the emergence and the development of a visual culture among the aristocracy (see for instance Morris, 2000: 209–10). The 'uncivilized North' is progressively turned into a phantasmagorical 'northern pastness', which then becomes an object of discourse and gaze for the Thai elite.

While, on the one hand, travels by the aristocracy allow us to understand how a desire for travel came into being, on the other hand they do not relate directly to modern mass tourism. Indeed, if similarities can be found, a closer look reveals two kinds of historical and sociological discrepancies. First, an obvious difference is that the first travellers – aristocrats, king, administrators – were 'interrogators', there was no pretence at close intimacy. Indeed, most of them displayed negative attitudes toward the locals, who were said to be uncivilized and dirty (Renard, 1999). Their travel was intended to develop knowledge of Siam's interior (what Thongchai calls the Siamese 'proto-ethnography') and to set up a new kind of territorial power. In other words, their travel displayed their status and their superiority over their local/native informants. This is not true today, or not in the same way: the gain or confirmation of status which travel can provide is mostly aimed at the social network at home, not on site.

Second, the travels of the aristocracy were only the prerequisite for the construction of a 'Siamese geo-body' (Thongchai, 1994), that is an *ordering* both of a physical, social and mental landscape which turned travel into something appealing and provided landmarks, rituals and objects for its transformation. Mass tourism came later and required both a well-developed nationalism, transformations of the image of the north through new (visual) media and state-sponsored policies. Among the latter, the development of new means of transport (first the train in 1921, then later the plane) was accompanied by the organization of special promotional tour, such as that organized by the Railway Company in 1931 for *songkhan* festival (Renard, 1999: 95). The Tourism Authority of Thailand (created in

1960) opened an office in Chiang Mai in 1968, and launched marketing campaigns to promote travels in the northern provinces (highlighting temples, handicraft, landscapes and beautiful girls), while training their inhabitants to become hosts for the tourists. In the 1980s, the airport was expanded, numerous hotels were built and bus trips from Bangkok to Chiang Mai were organized for the Thai urban middle classes who paid 3000–4000 baht for a three-day tour.¹³ At the end of the 1980s, around 2 million Thai domestic tourists were visiting Chiang Mai each year (this number has remained constant up to now) and by 1990, about 40 percent of all commercial enterprises in Chiang Mai were working directly or indirectly with the tourist industry (Anchalee, 1999: 77). The ‘voluntarist’ creation of a domestic tourist market by the national authorities (who later on gave it back to the private sector) shows clearly that previous forms of aristocratic mobility did not mechanically generate modern domestic mass tourism. It was not until the development of a fully fledged industry and travel advertisements that this process could really flourish, and that Thai citizens could really begin ‘dreaming’ to be tourists.¹⁴

This ‘Thai tourist dream’ was also nurtured by urbanization, heritage policies and the idealization of the rural. While those factors are no different from those encountered in Western countries, they were nonetheless embedded in a specific cultural context and therefore combined differently from the way they did in Europe. Preservation of historical monuments started under the reign of Rama VI (1910–25) but became a truly important issue only at the end of the 1970s, which, interestingly, was a period of profound division among Thai civil society. In addition to the communist guerrillas in various border areas, this period was marked by the ‘revolution’ of October 1973, when a civil government took control of the country, and then by the massacres of October 1976 at Thammasat University, after which the military took power again. From that time on, the politics of heritage became a national concern closely linked with the celebration of the monarchy. Historical Parks, such as Sukhothai (Unesco World Heritage Site in 1991), became symbols of the longevity and the fame of the Thai kingdom and supports for Thai popular nationalism.

During the same period, in the academic and intellectual spheres, a new paradigm emerged which idealized the rural world. In sociology the ‘School of Community Culture’ (*watthanatham chumchon*) argued that independence and egalitarianism prevailed in traditional rural societies and that their encounter with capitalism and the state was problematic. In history, the project of ‘Local History’ (*prawattisat thongthin*) rejects the official historiography based on royal chronicles and investigates the history of small principalities (*müang*) and insists on the relative political independence they were able to sustain until the beginning of the 20th century. While these works have certainly led to important achievements from an academic perspective,¹⁵ it is also quite obvious that they have relied on and perpetuated two ideological biases: first, the rural – and the local –

is the symbol of an idyllic past (*rural-ness* is equated with *past-ness*) endangered by modernity and, second, solutions to present problems are to be found in lessons from the past.

On the whole, the improvements in communications networks, the multiplication of 'local histories', the idealization of the rural, the politics of heritage, as well as the onslaught of numerous magazines, journals and travel guides devoted to these subjects directly contributed to the development of leisure mobility among Thai citizens and consequently of a domestic mass tourism industry. Under the influence of an idyllic, traditionalist and nostalgic vision of the countryside, rural spaces have been re-invented and transformed into appealing visual and conceptual archetypes which sustain discourses on national identity and history. Such 'landscaping' processes are qualitatively different from those that occurred at the end of the 19th century: while cultural difference was at that time 'encountered', it is now 'sought after'; while it was equated with backwardness and danger, it is now considered as something picturesque and pleasurable.

In Chiang Mai, as in other places in the country, these conceptual reversals allowed the rise of domestic tourism since the end of the 1970s. The city became 'subjected to a discourse of culture premised on the fetishism of appearance' (Morris, 2000: 237). The 'Lanna culture' revivalism – once considered a potential disruption of national cohesion – became associated with the origin of the Thai nation, with large-scale production of 'traditional' artifacts and souvenirs, and also with specific rituals such as the wearing of Lanna costume each Friday to the office. Here, tourism sustained a kind of pacification of the relations between the centre and the periphery: from fears of separatism to the promotion of regionalism, from a contemptuous attitude to a nostalgic gaze. It also perpetuated an internal colonialism, through self-identification (including self-censorship)¹⁶ and displacements. The northern Thai turned themselves into objects of desire for urban tourists and at the same time they enacted the same process toward their own margins, the so-called 'Hill Tribes'.

Domestic tourism in the highlands: from 'the Other within' to 'the fancy Other'

At the very end of the Doi Suthep road, nearly 20 km from the Khruba Sriwichai statue, lies the Hmong village of Doi Pui. This destination is the 'ethnic' component of the package tour sold by the red taxis (*silordaeng*) at the bottom of the mountain. Today, most of the visitors who go to the temple, then to the palace and eventually to the Hmong village are Thai, not foreigners. This was not always the case, however, since Doi Pui village became a true domestic tourist attraction only when the road between the palace and the village was improved, in the mid-1980s. Previously, there was only a dirt track and most of the visitors were westerners.

The Hmong of Doi Pui village originally migrated from south-western China to upper northern Thailand at the end of the 19th century. Around the 1920s, Hmong began to settle in the vicinity of the Suthep-Pui mountains. In 1951, Hmong communities in this area were disturbed as a result of a conflict between government officers and Yunnanese opium traders. A few years later, five Hmong families settled down in their fields at the contemporary location of Doi Pui. Later on, other Hmong villagers joined them and formed a new village. In addition to Hmong, Yunnanese Chinese from urban Chiang Mai and elsewhere also joined them in the village. The village economy in those days was largely based on self-sufficiency. The villagers practised swidden agriculture to grow rice for household consumption, and maize for both domestic animals and humans. The only commercially oriented production was opium, which was sold to increase family income and to face unexpected events such as illness requiring medical treatment. Although the area was declared a protected forest as early as 1949, and although opium growing and smoking was officially banned in 1959, there was no clear policy implementation at that time. The real change came during the 1960s and, once again, it was closely related to political integration, more precisely, to direct contact between the monarchy and the villagers.

After the Phuping Palace was built in 1961, the royal family spent a few months each year in Northern Thailand (from December to March), regularly visiting the highland community of Doi Pui, as well as other communities in neighbouring districts and provinces. While there was certainly, as we have noted before, a leisure aspect to the treks undertaken by the king and his relatives, one cannot completely ignore their political motivations. It was a time when Thailand was facing the 'threat of communism' both from neighbouring countries (through its support of US military actions) and from its own territory (via the Communist Party of Thailand). As usual, the Hmong had quite a bad reputation: they were opium growers and in constant contact with the Haw traders, they were feared for their military skills and for their ability to cross borders. The interest of the king in the Hmong of Doi Pui, among other Hmong villages in the area, was then 'deeply rooted in a concept of a volatile alterity' (Race, 1974: 105), which would prove dangerous if the villages were influenced by communism. The kingdom could not just let them live as before at the margins, it had to control them more directly, to lessen their strangeness in order to ensure their faithfulness towards the country.

Doi Pui village was one of the first villages in Thailand whose inhabitants were granted Thai citizenship (in 1963), and it was also one of the first to be selected for a Royal Project in 1969. Officially, the aim of the project was to promote commercial agriculture and crop substitution, as well as to eradicate the opium industry. Concretely, its main role was to enforce the regulations of the National Park Agency. However, villagers felt that the project constrained the commercial economy and had little direct

effect on agricultural development since it did not distribute enough seeds. Lychee plantations, for instance, were developed primarily through contacts with Ho traders rather than with project officials. As for tourism, a somewhat different discourse prevailed. The king contributed with his own fund to the opening of the first souvenir community store in the village in 1971. Although the store failed because the village headman took the benefits for himself, it led to the development of an increasing number of privately owned shops. During the first few years, some villagers expressed concern over the reliance on tourism as a tool for economic development. While some pointed to the multiplication of young beggars who were taught by their parents to ask for money from foreigners, others remarked that tourism favoured the production, sale and consumption of opium in the village. These problems eventually disappeared at the end of the 1980s when the number of tourists increased sharply and the income generated grew to several times higher than that from agricultural activities.

Today, Doi Pui receives an average of 300 visitors per day but this number can reach 1000 persons in the high season, especially during the *songkhan* festival (in April). These visits generate around 70 million baht of income for the villagers or around 50,000 baht per villager per year (more than US \$1300). There are a total of 135 tourist-oriented stores and 11 restaurants in the village, which numbers only 134 households and 1391 people. Souvenirs include Hmong costumes, resin figurines, old coins, herbal medicines, pickled fruits, postcards, ornaments, seasonal agricultural products, etc. Outside Doi Pui, Hmong villagers travel to sell souvenirs in different places throughout the country such as Phuping Palace, Doi Suthep temple, Chiang Mai, the Chatuchak market in Bangkok and even as far as Hua Hin and Phuket. Most of these souvenirs are standardized objects and only a few are actually produced in the village or relate directly to Hmong culture. One of the most significant consequences of the development of the souvenir economy was the installation in the village of non-Hmong people. Doi Pui village today, for example, includes seven Chinese, four Karen, 13 lowland Thai households and even two Nepalese individuals who sell typical Indian or Nepalese objects such as *mandala* paintings.

The Hmong of Doi Pui were so successful economically (apart from tourism revenues, they also produced fruits and vegetables for sale in Chiang Mai) that they could successfully oppose relocation projects that were intended to force them out of the National Park. More recently, they also opposed the Forestry Bill, which was intended to strengthen the control of the state over forested areas used by the highland farmers. In the meantime, the tourist economy encountered a radical change: Doi Pui attracted fewer and fewer Western visitors but increasing numbers of Thai tourists. Road improvements and homogenization of the souvenir trade in Chiang Mai played an important role in this. This shift is also a consequence of the emergence, at the end of the 1980s, of a new discourse on

ethnic minorities among the media, and especially the Thai newspapers (Krisadawan, 2000). Following the creation of numerous NGOs representing the interests of the highlanders (called 'indigenous groups' today), the 'wild' and even frightening Other of the 1970s became, in the eyes of Thai travellers, a pacified and appealing one.

The example of Doi Pui village leads to few reflections on tourism and so-called 'ethnic' identities. First, the Other is engaged in a process of 'representation and commoditisation of itself as an object of desire' (Peleggi, 2002: 72), which has important implications for ethnographic knowledge and methodology. In the case of the Hmong, for instance, some traditional rituals have been transformed in order to give a better image of their group in relation to the Buddhist practices of the lowlanders. This is the case, for instance, with the *ntoo xeeb*, which traditionally serves to call and appease the spirit of the place *thuvotim* and is organized at the base of one of the oldest trees in the vicinity of the village. Today, this ritual has been transformed to appear as the Hmong equivalent of the Thai ritual *buat pha*, the ordination of trees practised by the Thai Buddhists (Prasit, 2004). The two rituals are completely different, both in their sequence and in their meaning, but they nonetheless became symbolically associated and the Hmong ritual became the symbol of their attachment to the forest in 'indigenous' public discourse. The transformation of the ritual in Doi Pui also parallels the growing influence of Buddhism as the religion propagated by the state in the framework of the assimilation policy of the ethnic minorities. A dignitary of the Bangkok *sangha* has erected a temple there and 20 houses of the Vang clan converted to Buddhism in 2002.

This representation of self on the part of the ethnic minorities is not without contradictions. For example, one of the two small museums constructed by the Hmong of Doi Pui to attract tourists and exhibit their culture present some of the most controversial symbols attached to Hmong identity, and for which the Hmong often claim to be misunderstood (by Thai and Westerners alike). The tourists will notice the poppies and marijuana grown in front of the entrance, presented here as a symbol of the past. They will also observe within the museum a reconstitution of the traditional so-called wedding by abduction, when a young man takes his future wife out of her village and lets his relatives arrange the compensation to his in-laws, a practice officially banned by the Thai state. These are only outward inconsistencies, however. Linking cultural features to familiar religious practices among the majority group (as in the case of the *ntoo xeeb* as previously mentioned) or associating them with purely historical, non-threatening features (opium, marriage by abduction) are two sides of the same 'domestication' process.¹⁷

A superficial analysis could conclude that through the pacification of social relations it allows, tourism plays a critical role in a pluralist, though official and superficial, narrative of the nation. This is certainly true in the case of the Hmong of Doi Pui where royal patronage, in addition to their

ability in trade, provided them with good economic opportunities. Here, tourism favoured economic development and also allowed villagers to assume openly both their cultural difference (at least a consensual version of it) and their position of citizen-subjects (see also McCaskill et al., 2008: 277–318). However, this is not the case everywhere, since the hidden undercurrent of tourism in Thailand lies sometimes precisely in the impossibility of the ‘ethnic Other’ escaping his marginality. In Thailand during recent decades, the state has pursued an assimilation policy in a capitalist context and several mechanisms have been implemented in order to assimilate the highlanders: the obligation to choose a family name which has a meaning in the Thai language, formal education exclusively in – Central – Thai language and the propagation of Buddhism, all three of them considered as attributes of *Thai-ness*.¹⁸ At the same time, however, it has also enacted an exclusivist approach, for instance by establishing strict citizenship criteria (McCaskill et al., 2008: 17). There are currently no less than 17 different types of identity card issued throughout the country by the Ministry of Interior to various ethnic and/or migrant populations (Ministry of Interior, 2008). While this situation is supposed to be temporary (the various documents being the first step towards access to full citizenship), in reality the evolution is very slow and it is estimated that close to half of the ethnic minorities residing in northern Thailand still lack the basic rights of Thai citizenship (Eversole et al., 2005: 130). The documents established by the Thai authorities restrict the highlanders’ mobility and also often prevents them gaining access to basic education, health care or land ownership.

In such a context, the ambivalence of tourism is obvious: it is promoted as a tool for economic development on one side, and on the other side it does not alleviate the fundamental vulnerability of those who receive the visitors. In the most extreme cases, it could even be said that this vulnerability is one of the characteristics which renders the tourism industry profitable. The (in)famous ‘ethnic zoos’ of the so-called ‘Long Neck’ Kayan at the Burmese border¹⁹ or of the less well-known Mlabri in Nan province²⁰ show clearly how the tourist gaze nurtures itself through symbolic and physical violence. By considering peoples as landscapes, the tourism industry imposes a form of exoticism in the same way as a state would put an opponent under house arrest. The mobility of some privileged people (either foreigners or domestic tourists) necessitates the immobility of others and keeps them in their marginal position.

A second reflection concerns the contrasting and partially contradictory ways through which staged identities are consumed by international and domestic tourists. In the case of Doi Pui, the former began avoiding the village as soon as it became attractive to the latter. The same process occurs nearly everywhere; indeed, some villages are particularly popular with domestic tourists while others are popular with international visitors, and the organization of their tourist space and services differs markedly. A possible reason for this differing popularity is that different tourists seek

different experiences. The search for authenticity – even reduced to some basic social interactions – predominates among foreign visitors, and, paradoxically, this has led to the development of a full-scale tourist economy in some villages, including queues of photographers waiting to take their shot of the same person wearing traditional costume, and the sale of standardized souvenirs obviously unrelated to the village.

On the other hand, Thai domestic tourists favour *sanuk* (or fun) over authenticity: the difference must be enjoyable – so not too different – to be an object of desire. An interesting example lies in the practice of wearing ‘ethnic dress’ and having a picture taken with friends (a similar practice may be found in Vietnam and in China too). In Doi Pui, numerous stalls offer the possibility of renting Hmong costumes, wandering in the poppy gardens and having pictures taken before returning to the valley. The villagers say that they got the idea of developing such business in Doi Pui five years ago, after they saw similar stands in the Night Bazaar in Chiang Mai city offering traditional northern Thai costumes for hire.²¹ Such dressing-up is sometimes described by the Thai people as ‘fancy’. Old photos, taken at the beginning of the 20th century, suggest that this practice was already common among the members of the aristocracy (Turton, 2000: 362–3), although we do not know precisely when it was introduced. Recent photographs also show members of the royal family wearing ‘hill tribe’ attire whenever they visit the Doi Pui village. The fact that such a practice caught on with Thai tourists in Doi Pui (especially women), however, goes beyond the simple popularization of an aristocratic (and Victorian?) pastime. Instead it reflects a process of making the Other ‘consumable’ and ‘imaginable’: after all, if we were to refer to a dictionary, we realize that the term ‘fancy’ may be applied to a costume, as well as a whim, taste, fantasy, an illusion and even cookery! Hence, wearing ethnic clothing should not be conceived as a process of assimilation but a desire for inclusion shared by the locals (here the Hmong) themselves.

As peripheral communities and populations were incorporated into the state, it became necessary for them to appear in a manner that represented their acquiescence to the state and it is in this moment that the demand for ethnic costume begins to be made. In effect, costumes come to work as the signs of a double status, evoking both anteriority vis-à-vis the nation and encompassment by the state. The one who wears ethnic costume is not so much a subject-citizen as a sign of difference abstracted. (Morris, 2000: 210)

The Other is domesticated and at the same time his difference is made appealing through a standardized code. Most of the Western tourists are not attracted by such practices because they do not ‘speak’ to them as they speak to Thai people: the ‘code’ used here does not match with their representation of authentic travel and interactions with local peoples. Paradoxically then, wearing ‘fancy’ dress became, in the perception of the Thai tourists, a way of asserting a modern Thai identity.

Conclusion

So, we have come full circle. What is the common point between the statue of a charismatic monk, a famous temple, the king's palace and a Hmong village? They have all become domestic tourist attractions scattered along the same road and they all participate in a didactic imagery of *Thai-ness*. An interesting detail is that one of the very first attractions on the road, namely the Wat Srisoda, relates symbolically to the last one, the Hmong village of Doi Pui. The Wat Srisoda was built by Khruba Sriwichai in the 1920s to promote the Buddhist religion among the ethnic minorities. In 1965, the Project *thammacarik* (Dhammacarika, lit. 'wandering Dharma') was implemented by this temple under the responsibility of the Department of Social Welfare (Prawit, 2002): it was the time when the Buddhist *sangha* worked hand in hand with the royal administration to prevent the spread of communism among the so-called 'Hill Tribes' 'by instilling in them a sense of belonging and loyalty to the nation' (Suwan, 1967 in Keyes, 1971: 564). Nowadays, the spread of Buddhism among the ethnic groups is still considered as one of the major components of the assimilation policy promoted by the Thai state and the monks from Srisoda temple are still sent to the ethnic villages for a few months each year to encourage their inhabitants to convert to Buddhism. With 360 monks and novices coming from highland villages, most of them Karen (260), but also Hmong (70), Akha and Lahu (30), the Wat Srisoda is as much a way to access education for poor members of ethnic minorities as a symbol of the links between the monarchy, Buddhism and development projects in peripheral areas of the kingdom.

Each of the three attractions studied in this article reveals one aspect of the social dynamics of domestic tourism in Thailand. The history of the Wat Phra That Doi Suthep shows that pilgrimage became progressively integrated in a multi-purpose mass tourism, and, conversely, that the sacred value of the place could also give rise to local revivalist movements which may contradict the state-sponsored tourist industry. The example of the royal palace offers an opportunity to understand how a tourist culture emerged in Thailand, and, more precisely, the role of the elites, the state and also the middle class in the construction of a 'gaze from Bangkok to the North' (Reynolds, 2006: 278). Such northward gazes may be regarded as a manifestation of internal colonialism, which later became associated with fetishism and mass consumption. This transformation of the northerners and of the northern culture into objects of desire also had important implications for the so-called 'ethnic minorities' who lived on the margins of the Tai social space, as shown by the case of the Hmong village of Doi Pui. Here, tourism allows the creation of a 'fancy Other', or, in other words, of a domesticated difference which can mirror and support the sense of national belonging.

By focusing on domestic tourists in Thailand, we wanted to show that domestic tourism is not simply an emulation of international tourism and that it has its own historical and cultural dynamics. The transformation of Chiang Mai into a tourist destination in the second half of the 20th century relied on a new kind of relationship between the state and the local cultures. Rural spaces have been reinvented and transformed into appealing visual and conceptual archetypes, which sustain discourses on local national identity and history. As we have noted previously, the *tourism ordering* sustained a kind of pacification of the relations between the centre and the periphery, but it also perpetuated an internal colonialism, towards both Tai and non-Tai populations, creating a whole continuum of situations, some of them relatively balanced (such as in the case of Doi Pui), others much more exploitative. It then also created new spaces and new symbols for contestation of the central power, that is for *disordering*. Finally, another contradiction of the development of domestic tourism is that, while it allows a more pluralist discourse on national identity, it also stages cultural diversity in a way which does not always cope, and sometimes even contradicts, the exoticism expected by Western tourists.

Endnotes

- 1 We would like to thank the three anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier version of this text. A shorter version has been published under the title 'Staging the Nation, Exploring the Margins: Domestic Tourism and its Political Implications in Northern Thailand', in Winter et al. (2009).
- 2 For a discussion of this notion, see Wood (1998: 228–34).
- 3 More precisely, Visakha Bucha day marks three distinct events in the life of the Buddha: his birth as Siddhatha Gotama, his 'inspiration' when he actually became the Buddha, 35 years after his birth, and his death, 45 years after becoming Buddha. All three events occurred on the 15th day of the waxing moon in the 6th lunar month, which is the day of the full moon.
- 4 As is usual in most academic works, we distinguish Thai (citizens of Thailand) from Tai (culturally and linguistically related populations: Tai-Yuan, Tai-Lü, Lao, Shan, etc.).
- 5 In the Yuan tradition, a 12-year cycle is related to a list of both 12 animals and 12 shrines. Among the 12 shrines, four are located in the Mae Ping valley, which is considered as the centre of the northern Thai identity, the others in peripheral provinces, in Isan, Burma, India and one in heaven (see Keyes, 1975).
- 6 According to the legend, the mountain was named after the hermit Sudeva, the son of Pu Sae and Ya Sae, the two Lawa (Mon-Khmer speaking population) guardians of the Chiang Mai valley, who are still worshipped on the nearby summit of the Doi Kham.
- 7 The Lanna (million rice fields) kingdom, of which Chiang Mai was the capital, extended its control to what is today north Thailand between the 13th and 16th century. It was later integrated into the Thai kingdom.
- 8 An idea first expressed by Spooner (1986) and then taken up again by Shepherd (2002).

- 9 Namely Phya Mangrai, founder of Chiang Mai, Phra Ramkhamhaeng (from Sukhothai) and Phya Ngam Muang (from Phayao). A statue in the centre of Chiang Mai represents the meeting of the three kings (thought to have taken place in 1287), when they swore a pact of eternal friendship. This happy triple alliance is conceived as the beginning of the golden age of the Lanna kingdom.
- 10 Chiang Mai is known as the 'city of the rose': *kularb vieng ping*. On floral tourism and the origin of rose in Chiang Mai see Renard (1999: 94).
- 11 Rama V went to Singapore, to India and to Europe, where he was received twice in France in 1897 and 1903.
- 12 This transformation occurred when the *nirat* in *klorn* verse merged with *phleng yao* genre. There was then a 'move from subjective romanticism to naturalism to realism' (Reynolds, 2006: 88; see also Manas, 1972).
- 13 Linda Richter (1989: 90) indicates, for instance, that in 1983, the TAT organized 15 such trips for a total of 1300 Thai tourists.
- 14 On nationalism in Western countries and its role in the development of tourism as an activity to be 'dreamt of', see Adrian Franklin (2004).
- 15 On 'Community Culture', see a detailed bibliography in Rigg and Richie (2002) as well as in Hirsch (1993). For 'Local History', see, for instance, Peleggi (2002).
- 16 The locals ensure that they, and their culture, conform to what the travellers are expecting to see and how they want to see it. This process involves negotiation of their own image and even self-censorship, such as the reluctance to stage publicly the pre-Tai and pre-Buddhist cultural background into which northern Tai identity (and the image of Chiang Mai) unfolds. For instance, one should recall here the story of the animistic ritual held each year on Doi Kham for the spirits Phu Sae Ya Sae, the two Lawa guardians of Chiang Mai. Once a popular tourist attraction (until the end of the 1980s), this ritual, which involves a buffalo sacrifice and the performance of a medium possessed by the spirit, is now held secretly, since the villagers expressed their concern at being considered as backward and unfaithful to Buddhism after images were broadcast on national TV.
- 17 The process of 'museumification' is always closely linked with the 'pacification' of social relations. For example, in Nan province, the previous sanctuaries of the Communist Party have now been turned into historic tourism attractions (*Bangkok Post*, 15 December 2005).
- 18 A detailed description of the policies adopted by Thailand and its neighbours toward the ethnic minorities is beyond the scope of this article, but the reader will find useful resources in MacKinnon and Vienne (1989), McCaskill and Kampe (1997), McCaskill et al. (2008) and Prasit et al. (2008).
- 19 The Kayan (a sub-group of the Karen) live with an uncertain legal status in the Thai-Burmese border area, in villages where tourists willing to pay can admire the particular body modification of the women, which consists of coiling lengths of brass around their necks. The Thai authorities refuse to issue ID cards or work permits to Kayan refugees – some of whom have been settled in Thailand for more than 20 years – but at the same time agree that the local tourist agencies pay 1500 baht to each parent whose daughters agree to wear the famous rings on their necks. Villagers can receive up to 100 visits per day (especially in the villages that specialize in catering to the domestic clientele) and are paid to pose in front of the camera or to sell standardized souvenirs brought in by Thai wholesalers. The Thai authorities recently refused to grant exit visas to some of these people, who had been selected for a United Nations funded resettlement project in New Zealand.

- 20 The Mlabri (known as *phi thong luang* in Thailand; they are linguistically related to other Mon-Khmer speaking populations) are a hunter-gatherer group found in small communities in the provinces of Nan and Pua. In Nan province, one Mlabri community settled down in 2000 and is now living close to a Hmong village while being regularly visited by (so far mostly Western and Japanese) tourists led by a Hmong guide paid by a Chinese travel agent. They do not receive the tourists in their own village though, since the guide and the travel agency make the tourists believe that these people still live in a nomadic way and hide the fact that they have been settled and evangelized for the past seven years. So, at each visit of a tourist group, two to three Mlabri families have to go in the forest where, at a meeting point agreed previously with the guide, they display, semi-naked, their traditional way of slaughtering a pig, which will later be eaten by the tourists.
- 21 Doi Pui villagers, who belong to the Green Hmong subgroup *hmong ndjua*, also took advantage of the fact that their traditional costume is more colourful than that of the other Hmong populations (White Hmong or *hmong daeu*) in Thailand. With the development of tourism in Southeast Asia, these variations of costumes between the two Hmong subgroups (who also differ in their dialect) are becoming less and less obvious and are progressively erased by the spread of a more 'fancy' model very popular among the Hmong populations of Southern China.

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