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CHAPTER FOUR

COMMODITIZING HIS MAJESTY'S FOOTPRINTS: TOURISM IN HIGHLAND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN THAILAND

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Introduction

This chapter investigates the ways His Majesty the King's visits to highland ethnic communities have been commoditized by the Royal Project and other relevant sectors. It is argued that the monarchy plays essential roles in launching projects relating to the contemporary popular tourism in highland ethnic communities. Importantly His Majesty's visits and initiatives which have become history and symbol have been commoditized for tourism purposes. The historical development of the monarchy and tourism in highland communities began from the time of Chao Dararassamee, the consort of King Rama V when she returned to Chiang Mai since the 1910s. From 1961 on, since the Phuphing Palace was built, His Majesty the King and family members have made visits to highland villages near the palace and elsewhere in the north. In addition to His Majesty's initiative on the Royal Project for introducing cash crops to replace opium cultivation among highland farmers in 1969, he donated funds and launched a store for local villagers to sell handicrafts for tourists. After promoting agricultural products for a few decades, the Royal Project started the tourism business in specific Royal Project sites in the early 2000s, with the slogan of "Following His Majesty's Footprints". Despite the fact that tourism has become popular in these Royal Project sites, highland ethnic peoples still do not participate much. Furthermore, tourists do not pay much attention to what His Majesty the King initiated but place more emphasis on exposure to nature, for leisure and relaxation.

Commoditization and Ethnic Tourism

Tourism is not just the way tourists visit tourism sites and host communities but involves encounters between tourists and hosts, and also middlemen (van den Berghe and Keyes 1984). Previous studies on tourism in highland ethnic communities in northern Thailand have focused on the way ethnic people produce and sell products or commodities for tourists (Cohen 2000). However, I have discovered that the history and symbolism of the monarch's visits to highland communities and initiatives have also been commoditized for the tourism business. Therefore, it is important to understand the concept of commoditization in relation to the historical development of ethnic tourism in northern Thailand.

Commoditization, in general, means the process of taking a product or commodity to either exchange or trade it in the market, which creates value. In other words, economic value results from the exchange process or commoditization. Among social scientists, Karl Marx and Arjun Appadurai are the two outstanding scholars who focus on the concept of commodity, instead of commoditization. Karl Marx, according to Arjun Appadurai, defines a commodity as "a product intended principally for exchange, and that such products emerge, by definition, in the institutional, psychological, and economic conditions of capitalism" (Appadurai 1986, 6). Marx views commodities as special kinds of manufactured goods or services, which are exchanged within capitalist modes of production. With quite a different perspective, Appadurai contends that "commodities are things with a particular type of social potential, that they are distinguishable from 'products,' 'objects,' 'goods,' 'artifacts,' and other sorts of things – but only in certain respects and from a certain point of view" (1986, 6). He then points out that commodities should be viewed as existing in a very wide variety of societies.

With regard to the circulation and exchange of products or commodities Marx has also pointed out that commodities are tied to money and an impersonal market and exchange value. For him, the value of commodities is not only economic but also social (Marx 1971, 48). Meanwhile, Appadurai focuses on the nature of exchange, which includes barter (direct exchange) and exchange of gifts. To him, barter is the direct exchange of objects for one another without reference to money directly, while gift exchange, embedded in the spirit of reciprocity, sociability, and spontaneity, ties things to persons and locates them in the flow of things in the flow of social relations (1986, 11). He then extends this observation to

the issue of the social life of commodities, which is politically linked with value and exchange. The value of commodities is political because of the "constant tension between the existing frameworks (of price, bargaining, and so forth) and the tendency of commodities to breach these frameworks. This tension itself has its source in the fact that not all parties share the same interests in any specific regime of value, nor are the interests of any two parties in a given exchange identical" (1986, 57). Dealing with the demand side of economic life, Appadurai shows that "politics is the link between regimes of value and specific flows of commodities" (1986, 57). The politics of value can take in such forms as the politics of diversion and of display, and the politics of authenticity and of authentication.

With regard to tourism, the politics of value of commodities or commoditization can be seen in the ways that local culture has been taken to perform or produce for tourists' consumption (Cohen 1988, 372). In addition to culture, other kinds of services, such as sexual service for tourism purposes, are also a part of the commoditization process (Cohen 1988; Gates 1989). Erik Cohen (1988, 2000), who examined the issues of tourism among highland ethnic groups in northern Thailand, pointed out that the process of commoditization of handicrafts among the Hmong and Mien ethnic groups had changed from items previously produced for family members and local use to objects sold to tourists. This transition was either made by villagers themselves or sponsored by missionaries and non-governmental organizations, since the 1970s. According to Cohen, the more villagers produce the less the value of handicrafts can be controlled by local or ethnic owners. Like Cohen, I also found that the Hmong handicraft vendors in Doi Pui village west of Chiang Mai city produced touristic goods in more quantity but with less quality, if compared with what they made for family use.

In addition to handicrafts in Thailand, previous studies on tourism and commoditization in other countries have explored general cultural issues and ethnic identity, such as the cases of Maya (Medina 2003; van den Berghe 1995), ethnic groups in Singapore (Leong 1997), peoples in the Island Pacific (Linnekin 1997), and ethnic groups in China (Yang 2011). Swanson and Timothy (2012) have focused on the commoditization of local souvenirs for tourist business. Cases of heritage sites in Southeast Asia have also been commoditized for tourism purposes (see in Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell 2010). Moreover, services, especially sexual services as in prostitution, have also been considered as commoditization in tourism (Cohen 1996). These examples indicate that the commoditization

of local culture, ethnic identity, handicrafts, or even personal services derives from tourism. Previous studies have usually emphasized the local people's side of commoditization, instead of commoditization by outsiders. However, in my case I found that, among the highland ethnic groups in northern Thailand, the commoditization of touristic issues and roles has been imposed by outsiders. It is the history and symbolism of His Majesty the King's visits to highland communities which have been and are being commoditized, initially by the Royal Project. They have themselves been transformed into commodities for tourist consumption.

Historical Development of Tourism in Northern Highland Communities

Highland ethnic minorities in northern Thailand are contradictorily viewed by outsiders, particularly Thai mainstream society and the state government, as "others" who are primitive and a threat to national security but are attractive for tourism development purposes. Regarding the historical background, they are both native people to the area and recent immigrants from neighbouring countries. During the early 1960s to the early 2000s ten ethnic groups were officially categorized as "hill tribes". These comprise the Karen, Hmong, Mien, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Lua, H'tin, Khamu and Mlabri. Among these ten groups, the Karen, Lua, H'tin and Mlabri are native people who have lived in northern Thailand for centuries, some communities even longer than the lowland northern Thai or Yuan people. Meanwhile, the Hmong, Mien, Lisu, Lahu, and Akha had migrated from Southwestern China for some generations, and certain groups have even settled during the last one to two centuries. These so-called hill tribe groups presently identify themselves as "indigenous peoples" (Leepreecha 2013). There are also other groups who recently migrated into Thailand and inhabit hill villages. These include Yunnanese Chinese, Dara Ang (Palong), Kachin, Kayan (long-neck people), and Shan. The total population of the ten highland ethnic groups is around 1.5 million (Department of Public Welfare 2002) of the 67 million total national population. Highland ethnic villages are also scattered in 20 provinces of northern and Western Thailand, while individuals and families live and work throughout the country.

During the 1960s to 2000s, highland ethnic groups, especially the hill tribe groups, were perceived by the Thai government and international

organizations as "primitive people" who presented social and political problems for the country and international society. They were identified as nomadic people living in remote hill villages who moved from place to place to find new cultivation areas (Geddes 1976). The issues which were identified as "hill tribe problems" included their involvement with communist movements in the Cold War period, opium cultivation, slash-and-burn agriculture, and poverty, defined by low incomes, poor health, illiteracy, and so on. Highland socio-economic development programmes were launched from the 1970s, targeting opium eradication among highland farmers. Concerning opium cultivation, which was the legacy of the colonial regime, the Thai government, after it was pressured by international countries via the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), terminated the concession of opium dens operated throughout the country in 1958. In 1969, His Majesty the King, upon visiting highland villages, initiated the Royal Project to promote cash crops to replace opium cultivation. Other state agencies and international countries followed his initiative. Up to the early 1980s, the state government strictly enforced the law by sending troops to destroy poppy fields. Since then, highland farmers have stopped growing opium (Vaddhanaphuti et al. 2010; Renard 2001). In order to survive in upland villages they have attempted to develop cash crop cultivation and non-agricultural sources of income, including tourism.

For the state government, in addition to cash crop substitution, tourism promotion in highland villages was seen as an alternative source of income. Despite the fact that highland ethnic minorities have been perceived as "exotic" and "primitive", their traditional ways of life have been promoted as tourism attractions. Such an irony has been conceptualized by Evrard and Prasit Leepreecha (2009) as domestic tourism and internal colonialism. The authors discovered that the ethnic village of Doi Pui is one of the popular tourism destinations, in addition to the Buddhist temple and the royal palace, among domestic tourists from Chiang Mai city. However, travel between lowlanders and highlanders had just started in the late 1960s. Prior to then a lack of transportation and a fear of diseases, particularly the transmission of malaria during the rainy season, limited both highland and lowland movements up and down the hills. Only some lowland traders, hunters, and adventurers went into the hills.

Visits to highland villages began during the early 1960s and initially numbers of government officials and international personnel were sent to conduct surveys and provide services for basic needs for highland people.

In the meantime, His Majesty the King and other members of the royal family began to visit highland villagers, initially both for trekking and understanding the villagers' everyday lives. After the royal visits there came lowland Thai adventurers and foreign tourists. Thai tourists visiting mountainous villages can be categorized into three groups: wild animal hunters, business people, and journalists. Among those, Boonchuay Srisawaddi, a famous writer and author of *30 Nations in Chiang Rai*, is a good example. In 1968 the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) opened the first out of Bangkok office in Chiang Mai, and Thailand also hosted the meeting of the Pacific Asia Tourism Association (PATA) in Chiang Mai. Doi Pui, the Hmong village near Doi Suthep, was one of the villages visited by conference participants. According to villagers, since then, foreign tourists have started to visit Doi Pui and other nearby highland villages (Leepreecha 2008). However, most of the highland communities in the 1960s to 1970s were not easily accessed by road, but could only be reached by means of longer walks and hikes. Trekking tourism was discovered and highland ethnic communities were increasingly marketed as tourist attractions, with the promise to see and experience their primitive and unspoiled way of life (Cohen 1983).

The next context relevant to highland tourism can be traced to the "Visit Thailand Year" in 1987 which was launched as a promotional tourist campaign by Thailand's national tourism organization. Since the mid-1980s, most of the highland villages have become accessible by road, due to an improvement in the political situation following the end of the Cold War together with highland socio-economic development projects targeted to eradicate opium cultivation among highland peoples (see Renard 2001). Both national and international tourist agencies increasingly added hill tribe tours to their programmes. Moreover, in the late 1990s the Thai government started another campaign entitled "Amazing Thailand" which decisively promoted highland ethnic communities and their traditional way of life (Leepreecha 2008). In addition to state and private agencies, other actors played a major role in bringing the images of highlanders to the lowland public, especially through the media. For example, the movies *Tai Fah Si Khram* (Under the Blue Sky), *Khon Phukhao* (Mountain People), *Sua Phukhao* (Mountain Tiger), and songs of Mida, *Sao Chiang Mai* were popular and prominent. Another influential medium used to present the highland ethnic images to the outside world was photography in the form of postcards (see Hitchcock, King and Parnwell 1993, 13).

The mid-2000s saw the onset of mass domestic tourism. Today, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promotes tourism not only for foreign tourists but also for domestic tourists, as the economic status of Thai people has improved. According to the Department of Tourism, the country registered 24,710,284 domestic tourists during January to March 2014. Compared to other parts of the country, the northern region received the highest number of 4,657,789 Thai tourists, while the Southern region where the attraction of the beaches was important was second with 4,579,400 domestic tourists (<http://www.tourism.go.th/home/details/11/221/24333>). In general, people from the North and Northeastern areas travel to beaches in Eastern and Southern Thailand during the summer time, while people from the Central, Eastern, and Southern regions travel to the mountains in the North and Northeastern regions, during the winter. High mountains and highland ethnic communities are the main destinations for domestic tourists (Leepreecha 2014).

Prominently, besides the small business sectors in towns, the Royal Project has become an essential organization in promoting and operating tourism in highland communities. The Royal Project gradually added the tourism business to cash crop promotion from the early 2000s. Visiting agricultural sites and learning about His Majesty the King's Footsteps and his initiative in each place were highlighted by the Royal Project and relevant agencies.

Royal Visits

Although ecotourism and ethnic tourism are popular among Thai tourists today these tourist activities did not exist before the 1990s. It may be argued that this recent popularity derives from the visits of the monarch which have gradually brought development of domestic tourism there. Travel was not a traditional culture among Thai people, except for specific groups of people and for particular purposes, as Thongchai Winichakul notes:

The enjoyment of travel which we yearn for today might not be what people in Siam before the late nineteenth century experienced. Travel was not a desirable activity, and pleasure was not its primary purpose. Not only was travel rough, tough, and possibly dangerous, but there were also political and social constraints which made travel less enjoyable. The serfs (*phrai*), slaves (*that*), and their lords (*cao*) alike, though for different

reasons, were supposed to get permission from their overloads before travelling. The lords and their subjects did indeed travel for war and other business, but travel was not for entertainment or leisure. Only traders enjoyed a certain freedom of movement, though it was primarily for their livelihood. Monks also had the liberty to travel, within certain rules and at certain times of the year, but this was supposed to be a method to encounter spiritual challenges. Religious pilgrimages, solitary travel, were primarily for acquiring inward wisdom and spiritual enlightenment. The wilderness was the ideal site for the search for wisdom not because of any perceived environmental beauty, but because it was the negation of normal life; it was adversarial nature, wild animals and so on, to be subdued by the power of merit. (Winichakul 2000, 42)

Furthermore, Thongchai Winichakul found that royal travel was mainly for leisure and to escape stress.

By the late nineteenth century, Prince Damrong wrote that the two aims of travel were pleasure and knowledge (Damrong 1961, 1–5). Place-names, flora and fauna were no longer poetic signifiers triggering a traveller's longing for the beloved, they became food for curiosity, knowledge, and satisfaction. A traveller's desire was to get away from old things, depressing, familiar things and to visit, to see, to have contact with the unfamiliar, exotic world. King Chulalongkorn loved travelling, and was advised to travel by his doctor in order to get away from the stress of work. For that reason he travelled widely in Asia and Europe. Travel was for leisure, relaxation, and temporary freedom (Winichakul 2000, 43)

In addition to leisure and relaxation, the main purpose of royal visits was to visit and learn about the variety of everyday lives and local groups, especially rural communities, within the kingdom. The pioneer visit of the Crown Prince Vajiravudh to Lanna or the northern provinces of Thailand in 1905 was also a political strategy for uniting the regions in one Thai nation, in the context of colonial invasion. However, royal travel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century only reached the lowland towns and communities in the north.

Highland communities in northern Thailand, to the lowland people, were previously associated with the wilderness, danger, and wild animals, and evil spirits. In addition highlanders were perceived as "others" and forest peoples, or even as non-humans, such as the Phi Tong Luang (The Spirits of the Yellow Leaves) (Bernatzik 1958). Furthermore in the perception of lowland Thais these people were cruel, fierce, and dangerous. Only some traders, hunters, and pilgrim Buddhist monks from

the lowlands travelled to jungle and highland communities. Government officers did not visit highland villages until after the Second World War. At the beginning, border patrol police were sent out to reach them during the late 1950s to early 1960s, due to the political context of communist insurgency in the Cold War. Later on, officials from other state agencies sent out staff to develop the highland people.

Regarding royal visits to highland communities, for both leisure and development, it can be divided into three different periods. The first period for the purpose of recreation began in the early 1930s. Princess Dara Rassamee, a princess of the Chiang Mai court who had been living in Bangkok as consort to Chulalongkorn, King Rama V, returned to reside in Chiang Mai in 1932. As a royal family member, and influenced by King Chulalongkorn, she and her followers travelled to nearby famous high mountains, such as Doi Ang Khang and Doi Suthep where she had a resting house. Along the way, the blossom of the opium poppy, the costumes and the way of life of the highland people drew her attention (Satraphai 1989).

The second period was during the early 1960s to 1990s, when travels were undertaken by His Majesty the King and the royal family. Since Phuphing Palace was built in 1961, on Doi Suthep, the mountain near the western area of Chiang Mai city, the royal family normally spent a few months at this palace during the winter. Being a close neighbour of nearby Hmong villages, the King began to visit highland Hmong villages, initially both for trekking and understanding the villagers' life. Upon visiting them and learning about opium cultivation and poverty, he initiated the Royal Project for cash crop promotion to replace opium cultivation in Doi Pui Hmong village in 1969. According to Peesadet Ratchanee, the Director of the Royal Project, "the Royal Project happened because of His Majesty's travel for tourism" (*pai thieo* or *sadet prapath ton*), when he trekked and took helicopter rides to visit highland villages (<http://kanchanapisek.or.th/kp12/history/index-tour.htm> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iI0HYQxO-7o>).

The third period dates from the mid-1990s to the present. Although His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen ended their visits to highland communities from the mid-1990s, Princess Sirindhorn and other royal family members occasionally made visits, in order to initiate new projects and follow up His Majesty the King's development projects. Subsequently, the Royal Project played a major role in continuing these initiatives in cash crop promotion, educational development, basic infrastructure development and, furthermore, tourism promotion.

Visits of the monarchy to highland communities resulted in the embeddedness, perception, and continuity of the royal initiatives among at least three groups of people. First, the highlanders had the opportunity to welcome the royal family's attention and feel that state officials, even the monarchy, acknowledged them and their needs and interests. Secondly, lowlanders perceived and began to increase their understanding of the highlanders through different kinds of media which reported the visits of royal family members to highland people which brought development to them. Finally, government officials have to take on board the ideas and initiatives of the royal family in order to implement projects for highland villagers. Tourism promotion in highland ethnic communities is one of these initiatives, especially leisure activities and businesses following the previous routes of the monarchy, since visits of the royal family, especially His Majesty the King, during the 1960s to 1990s became a history and a symbol.

Commoditizing His Majesty the King's Footprints

Studies of commoditization normally focus on the process of making valuable objects to be exchanged in the marketing system. An object that has been traded from one person to another, with exchange of objects or money, generates a commodity chain in the commoditization process. Regarding commoditization in tourism, previous studies concentrated on enabling local cultural objects and performances to be sold in the context of the tourism business (Cohen 1988; Greenwood 1977; and Jarvenpa 1994). Yet, my point here touches upon the commoditization of history and symbols of the monarchy's visits to highland communities, to the extent that such history and symbols are not material objects but social memory. I am curious to know how His Majesty the King's visits to highland ethnic communities have been commoditized and become a popular contemporary tourism business, especially in the context of the Royal Project. Moreover, what are the tourism activities and businesses which the Royal Project has operated?

In order to understand the contemporary roles of the Royal Project and other sectors in promoting tourism in these sites in highland ethnic communities which started in the early 2000s, they need to be placed in the context of national tourism promotion. Since Thailand succeeded in campaigning for the "Visit Thailand Year" in 1980, with the arrival of two

million foreign visitors, the second occasion was launched in 1987 to mark the 60th birthday of His Majesty the King, with 3.4 million visitor arrivals. The arrival of foreign tourists generated huge revenues that turned tourism into the country's top export earner. The third campaign was launched as "Amazing Thailand 1998-1999", in order to mark the 72nd birthday of His Majesty King Bhumiphol Adulyadej. The campaign resulted in visitor arrivals of 7.76 million in 1998 to 8.58 million in 1999. Again, the Tourism Authority of Thailand launched the "Unseen Thailand 2003" in order to attract foreign visitors and boost domestic tourists. The number of international visitors remained above 10 million for consecutive years and in order to keep the flow of tourist revenue into the country, domestic tourism was launched by the Thai government (<http://www.tatnews.org/history>). This national context of tourism promotion had certainly influenced the Royal Project's transition from only cash crop promotion to a positive tourism campaign in its sites.

The Roles of Relevant Sectors and Mechanisms

In my view there are four sectors that have played important roles in commoditizing His Majesty the King's Footprints for tourism business. These include the Royal Project, villagers in the Royal Project sites, and media sectors. First, the Royal Project started to promote tourism activities in its sites in the early 2000s, based on the idea of "Following His Majesty's Footprints". In addition to the national context of tourism promotion the policy of promoting tourism in the Royal Project also derived from Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra's "transforming assets to capital" policy, launched in the early 2000s. Furthermore, it was the aim of the Royal Project to look for non-agriculture-based promotion for both the project and highland villagers, after emphasizing cash crop promotion for three decades. The tourism promotion section was extended under the structure of the Royal Project. Guesthouses, camping areas, and other basic infrastructure were prepared in the villages in which the Royal Project was located. The office and field staff and the local villagers were trained for the tourism business. The main concept for operating tourism in Royal Project sites was initially launched as a joint project between the Royal Project and local villagers. Ideal activities included taking tourists to experience cash crop cultivation and learning about His Majesty the King's initiative in these local sites. However, the Royal Project finally took over the key roles of tourism business management. Villagers,

finally, either ended up by being hired by the Royal Project or, side-by-side, set up their own tourism businesses, sometimes competing with the Royal Project.

Secondly, highland villagers also benefit and take part in promoting tourism, emphasizing the idea of following in "His Majesty the King's Footprints". In general, affiliating with the Royal Project and the monarchy helps villagers, whose settlements have been mostly declared to be part of forest conservation areas. Specifically, villagers could earn income from tourism, side-by-side with the Royal Project. Different villages are involved with tourism in the Royal Project in different ways. The first example is Doi Pui, a Hmong village near Chiang Mai where the Royal Project was launched in 1969. Although there is no longer agricultural extension in this village, since villagers mainly rely on tourism, village leaders initiated a trekking route following His Majesty the King's previous trekking route from Phuphing Palace to the village, about half an hour's walk. Villagers built a small pavilion (*sala*) at the edge of the village, where the King took a rest while trekking to the village. Photographs of the King and details were put in the pavilion, which has become one key spot of tourism in the village. The next example is Nong Hoi Hmong village in Mae Rim district in Chiang Mai province, where His Majesty the King made several visits in the past. Besides cash crop extension and manufacture in the village, the Royal Project promoted the high hill nearby, namely Mon Chaem, a tourism spot, which has a scenic view. The Royal Project built temporary houses for restaurants and souvenir businesses but no guesthouses. Hmong villagers do not directly join the business of the Royal Project but operate camping sites in their nearby cultivation fields. In the winter, domestic tourists visit the Royal Project's cultivation and scenic sites, then stay overnight in the Hmong guesthouses and tents in camping sites.

Thirdly, the popularity of tourism in following "His Majesty the King's Footprints" has been promoted by the media. At the beginning, in the early 2000s, the Royal Project published its own pamphlets and other material sources for wide dissemination. Web and Facebook pages for promoting tourism in the Royal Project sites had also been created. The Royal Project had published guide books for tourism in the Royal Project sites, such as "Doi Inthanon: The Highest Summit of Siam" and "Angkhang: The Amazing Place". Later on, private tourism business companies, local villagers, and individual websites and Facebooks provided information on tourism in and around the Royal Project sites. Furthermore, television programmes on tourism, documentary films, and

organized forums for broadcasting and disseminating information were produced (see for example the programme "Royal Project: The Extreme Tourism Source in Thailand", broadcast on 21 March 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iI0HYQxO-7o>)).

Finally, tourists disseminate information about their visits on social media. The most effective means for disseminating information widely is Facebook and Line used by tourists who had visited the Royal Project sites and posted their own photos; so information of tourism on the Royal Project sites has been passed on widely among Thai people. A staff member of the Royal Project in one village pointed out that "We have our own website, but rarely update the information. What we learned from tourists is that they got information from friends who used to come here and sent beautiful photos to share with friends".

In summary, royal visits, particularly by His Majesty the King, to highland ethnic communities from the 1960s to the 1990s became a history and symbol for highland villagers, lowland Thai peoples, and officials of related government agencies. In addition to cash crop promotion, the Royal Project launched tourism businesses based on the idea of "Following His Majesty the King's Footprints" from the early 2000s. Later on there were different sectors and mechanisms which participated in boosting the popularity of contemporary tourism in the Royal Project sites. In the context of tourism promotion and tourism boom in Thailand, history and symbol in the sites visited by His Majesty the King were intentionally promoted for tourism purposes. At present, the wide use of modern technologies of communication facilitates the dissemination of information on the tourism opportunities offered in relation to the Royal Project.

Tourism of the Royal Project

Although the Royal Project Foundation launched tourism activities aiming at promoting the accomplishments of His Majesty the King's efforts in replacing opium cultivation by cash crop extension, in reality the contemporary tourism activities have not much done with such information. If one searches for information on tourism in related Royal Project websites, what one can find in the basic information is a map of the tourist route for reaching destinations in different Royal Project sites. Each place emphasizes the promotion of specific kinds of culture, natural attractions, and crop products. For example, Doi Inthanon promotes Karen

and Hmong culture, Sakura blooms, fruit, vegetables, flowers, and trout fish; while in Angkhang in Fang district the colourful costumes of the Palong ethnic group, strawberries, peaches, and other local agricultural products provide the attractions.

Agro-tourism is also highlighted. Visiting cash crop cultivation areas is promoted for tourism in the Royal Project sites. Information regarding the contemporary crops cultivated by both the Royal Project and local highland farmers has been provided as tourism attractions. Those cash crops include cabbages, salads, carrots, Japanese pumpkin, zucchini, and so on. Examples of fruits are plums, peaches, grapes, strawberries, cape gooseberries, and so on. Tourists are encouraged to visit, take photographs, learn, and even buy fresh products in the field or demonstration site. According to a local farmer in Nong Hoi village, "Thai tourists don't really walk into the cultivation field because of dirt in the rainy season. Also, farmers cannot spend time to talk with tourists while working in the field."

Resorts of the Royal Project have been built for tourists to stay overnight in the local Royal Project station. In addition, the Royal Project also provides yards, tents, and camping fires for tourists to stay overnight in the site. The tourism management is also under the Royal Project. A few local villagers, or even immigrant labourers, are hired to take care of the resort. However, in most of the villages the Royal Project operates tourism activities and local villagers also set up their own guesthouses and provide yards and tents for camping. Those are beyond the Royal Project's control. Furthermore, local national park offices also run such tourism businesses, sometimes side by side with those of the Royal Project. An example is the Doi Inthanon site where both the Royal Project and the National Park established tourism resorts in the Khunklang Hmong village. It should be noted that the high season for tourism in highland ethnic communities is only during the winter and some long weekends in the summer. Therefore, the Royal Project and local villagers have to do other things to earn income in the low season.

Selling local agricultural products is the main business of the Royal Project. Tourists can buy food and drink in some sites where the Royal Project has opened restaurants, such as in Doi Inthanon, Nong Hoi, and Doi Angkhang. Foods are cooked from raw products in the local site. Some special dishes, such as trout, can only be found in the Royal Project restaurant in Doi Inthanon station. Coffee has also become a popular drink in Thai culture. Tourists are encouraged to stop and sample the coffee for refreshment before driving to other places. At the local shop or restaurant,

packed products of vegetables and fruits are available to buy. Besides the local village shops the Royal Project has set up its own shops in various places in towns, such as on university campuses, airports, and market places. "Doi Kham" (Golden Mountain) is a brand name for selling products of the Royal Project. In order to publicize the products, the Royal Project annually displays and sells agricultural products in luxury hotels and exhibition halls, both in Chiang Mai and in Bangkok. The exhibition attracts visitors who are mostly town-dwellers to travel to the cultivation sites in highland communities.

It is quite rare for local ethnic villagers to be involved in tourism in the Royal Project, since such tourism is entirely managed by the organization. Local villagers' basic involvement includes growing cash crops and selling them to the Royal Project; some of them are also hired as daily labourers or staff of the local sites. According to my observation, those villagers who benefit the most are land and business owners near the local Royal Project sites, since they can set up their own businesses parallel to the Royal Project. In addition to the Hmong villagers in Nong Hoi village, as described above, the Yunnanese Chinese in Doi Angkhang and the Hmong people in Doi Inthanon also run their own guesthouses and yards for camping tents on their lands. Nevertheless, in some sites the local villagers and the Royal Project discontinued their cooperation, and the touristic business failed. A good example is Mae Sa Mai, a Hmong village and the Royal Project site in Mae Rim district of Chiang Mai province, in which villagers disagreed about the Royal Project and refused to get involved in the resort it had built.

Tourists who visit the Royal Project are lowland Thais, both from northern Thailand and other parts of the country; very rarely do foreign tourists visit these sites. Domestic tourists drive their own vehicles and travel from place to place in the uplands. Some reserve accommodation, some do not. According to the Royal Project and National Park Offices, resorts are fully booked during the high season or winter time. Therefore, tourists who do not reserve a resort either bring their own tents or rent tents from those agencies located in mountainous villages. From my research, Thai tourists are not interested in exploring what His Majesty the King had initiated, and as promoted by the Royal Project, but are more attracted to scenic sightseeing.

In brief, despite the fact that the Royal Project initially launched tourism by emphasizing the history and symbolism of His Majesty the King's visits and initiatives, the contemporary tourism-related activities do not relate primarily to those issues. The tourism businesses of the Royal

Project concentrate on providing accommodation and selling food and drink and agricultural products. Local highland ethnic villagers rarely involve themselves in the Royal Project's tourism businesses, except those that can be set up on their own alongside other official tourism businesses.

Conclusion and Discussion

The contemporary popularity of tourism in Thailand, both at the national level and in highland ethnic communities, derives from the royal travels either for leisure or for visits to local people. In highland communities, tourism was begun in the early 1910s by Chao Dararassamee, the princess of the Chiang Mai royal court who was the consort of King Rama V, after she returned from Bangkok to live in Chiang Mai. Later on, in the early 1960s, the present Thai monarchy, led by King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, began trekking and visiting nearby highland ethnic villagers to learn about their ways of life and their problems. Arising from these visits, His Majesty the King initiated the Royal Project, in order to replace opium cultivation by other cash crops. Though His Majesty the King had ended his visits to highland villages by the 1990s, the Royal Project still plays an essential role in both cash crop extension and tourism promotion.

Commoditizing "His Majesty the King's Footprints" for tourism is unique. Unlike the commoditization of other objects in the tourism business, Footprints and the initiatives associated with the Royal Project are elements of both symbol and history. Such symbolism and history have been launched to promote the commoditization process through the Royal Project since the early 2000s, in the context of tourism promotion at the national level and to encourage domestic tourists to expose themselves to the northern mountains and the cold weather in the winter time. The contemporary popularity of tourism in the Royal Project sites has been promoted by the Royal Project, local villagers, the media and tourists using different means.

The tourism activities of the Royal Project prioritize the selling of agricultural products, providing rooms and tents for staying overnight, and selling food and drink, instead of giving lectures for tourists or student groups. However, one has to understand that educational tourism could not be operated, due to the nature of Thai tourists who travel for leisure rather than to study. Thai tourists usually make a short visit to a tourism site, take photographs, and leave. They do not really pay attention to social, cultural

and historical details, especially the history of His Majesty the King's visit to and initiative in these local sites. Even Thai tourists who stay overnight in the Royal Project sites simply enjoy singing, dancing, and drinking rather than learning.

Furthermore local highland villagers are not involved much in the Royal Project's tourism businesses. Some of them have become daily labourers for the Royal Project, while others have set up their own small-scale tourism businesses alongside the Royal Project in local villages. With the exception of taking photographs of the colourful costumes of local ethnic children, Thai tourists do not pay much attention to the culture of highland people. In the Thailand context, highland ethnic minorities are viewed as "others" who are backward and cause trouble to the country; in the eyes of Thai tourists they are much less touristically interesting than beautiful mountain scenery. According to a Hmong villager in Nong Hoi village, where the Royal Project is based, "Thai tourists visit here because of the famous 'Mon Chaem', the scenic site, not [because of] the Hmong's way of life. They even don't know that there are Hmong in Mon Chaem" (interviewed Tong, pseudonym, 2015).

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE MONARCH, THE ELEPHANT, AND TOURISM IN CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

PLOYSRI PORANANOND

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the influence of the visit of the Siamese monarch on the evolution of the elephant's role in Chiang Mai. Although elephants were known as carriers for long-distance travel in the past, they were used primarily in the logging industry in Chiang Mai during the colonial period. The visit of King Prajadhipok and the Queen to Chiang Mai in 1926 may be viewed as the starting point in turning elephants into a part of the development of the tourism industry in the city, when the troop of elephants first appeared in Chiang Mai to accompany the King and Queen from the rail station to the inner city. After that the elephant came to be known as the image of Chiang Mai by visitors from outside. This resulted in an increasing demand for wood carvings of elephant figures as souvenirs of Chiang Mai. Later the elephant was adopted as the official symbol of Chiang Mai province. With regard to tourism development in Chiang Mai, the elephant camp was then established as the centre for elephant shows and activities for tourists in Chiang Mai. Among tourism marketing and promotion, more elephant camps were established, then new patterns of elephant shows and activities have been created to entertain tourists who are the major customers of the elephant camps. Besides tourism development and economic benefits, theoretical concepts of place branding, representation, symbolic consumption and tourism, and political-economic change are discussed as factors in the evolution of elephant roles in Chiang Mai. The changing role of elephants in Chiang Mai reflects the political and economic transformation of the city.

It is interesting that the image of Chiang Mai has been branded as the place of elephants, although they were not original to the area. First, they