

CHAPTER I

THE LONG-NECKED KAYAN (PADAUNG) - TRAPPED IN ETHNIC TOURISM

1.1 Introduction

The villages of the Padaung ethnic group, also known as the ‘Long-Necked’ Karen or *Kayan Lahwi*, are now sometimes called human zoos, as the occupants are effectively held as hostages along the Thailand-Myanmar border for ethnic tourism purposes. The female Long-Necked Kayan are the main attraction for the tourists and they have thus become objects of interest for the local authorities and businesses in the area. The cultural identity of the Padaung has also changed meaning as part of the tourist commoditization process. In my paper, I will study the impacts of the ethnic tourism process on migrant Padaung people; on their daily lives and livelihood strategies, plus the representation of the Padaung’s ethnic identity, as well as the negotiation tactics used by the Padaung women in terms of their body modifications.

1.2 Who are the Kayan (Padaung)?

When I was in Yangon in Myanmar during the 2000s, I developed an interest in the Padaung when I saw their picture in the local weekly newspapers, and this was reinforced when I saw an advertising banner in Bangkok in 2004. A senior editor told me that the Padaung had migrated from Myanmar to Thailand and that tourists have to pay an entrance fee to see them along the Thai-Myanmar border. Somewhat surprisingly, I had only seen them twice before in Yangon - at Shwedagon Pagoda. Under Nay Win’s Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) regime, people in Yangon have tended to believe the government-inspired idea that the Padaung are cannibals (Pascal Khoo Thwe 2002). According to my online survey, there are many Myanmar people from within the country and abroad who do not know where the Padaung live inside Myanmar, and some even think that ‘Padaung’ is a kind of bird

rather than an ethnic group. My interest in them grew further after I read about them in the media; but to know who the Padaung are, it is also necessary to know the other related ethnic groups – the Karen, Karenni and the Kayan.

The Kayan¹ people are a sub-group of the Karen, who inhabit many areas of western and northern Thailand, and can be divided into several sub-groups. The most numerous in Thailand are the *Sgaw* Karen (the largest sub-group), but the Karenni and Kayan, being sub-groups of the Karen, have migrated to Thailand over the last two decades. The Karenni can be divided into eight sub-groups and the Kayan can be divided into four sub-groups (see Figure 1.1), these being the Kayan Lahta, the Kayan Ka Ngan (Kayaw – Big Eared Kayan), the Kayan Lahwi (Padaung – Long-Necked Kayan) and the Kayan Ka Khaung (Khon Eden Phan 2005, Shin Htway Yin 2005); however, Thai people know them as the ‘Long-Necked’ Karen (Nipa 1993). There are around 120 Long-Necked Padaung living along Thai-Myanmar border and in the other provinces of northern Thailand (see Appendix C), but in Huay Pu Keng village, my field study site, I found that around twenty Padaung girls from three Long-Necked villages had already taken off their brass rings.

In Myanmar, the Padaung live in Kayah State, Shan State – to the west of the Than Lwin (Salween) River and around the Pekon hills (Map 1.1). Kayah is Myanmar's smallest state, bordering Thailand's northern province of Mae Hong Son. Kayah State is still off-limits for tourists, and the region contains rugged, mountainous terrain with difficult, steep trails, and its people ostensibly practice slash-and-burn (swidden) cultivation. The total Padaung population, spread across the eastern parts of Myanmar, is around 25,600 (Shin Htway Yin 2005) and among them around 800² (Khon Eden Phan 2005) are Long-Necked women (Appendix B).

¹ Also known as Karenni (Red Karen) - they are named Kayah in Myanmar.

² This population figure is based on documents from 1993. Although Shin Htway Yin lists the population of the Kayan (Padaung), she omits the population of the brass ring wearing women. The known Long-Necked Padaung population has since decreased in Myanmar but the exact number is unknown.

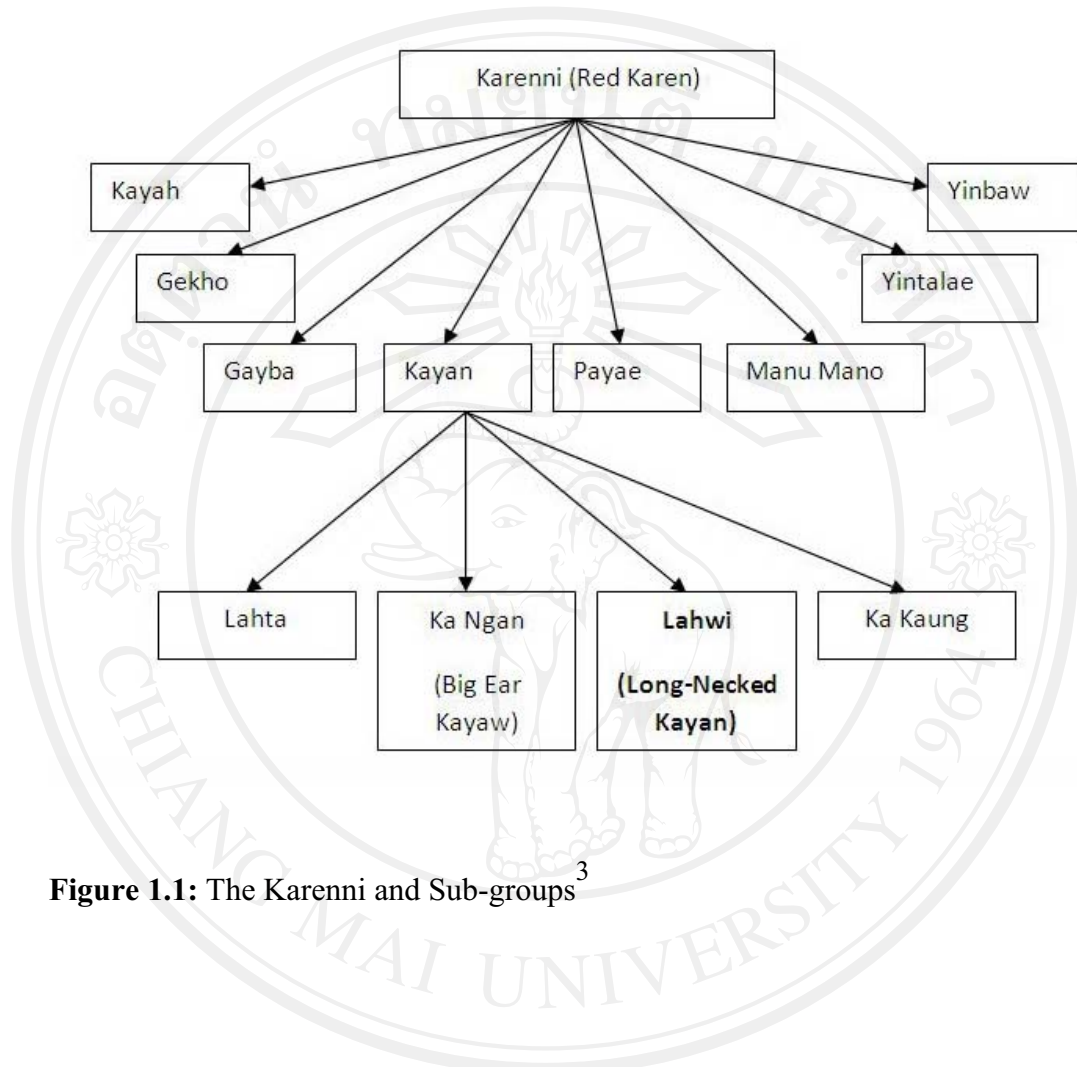
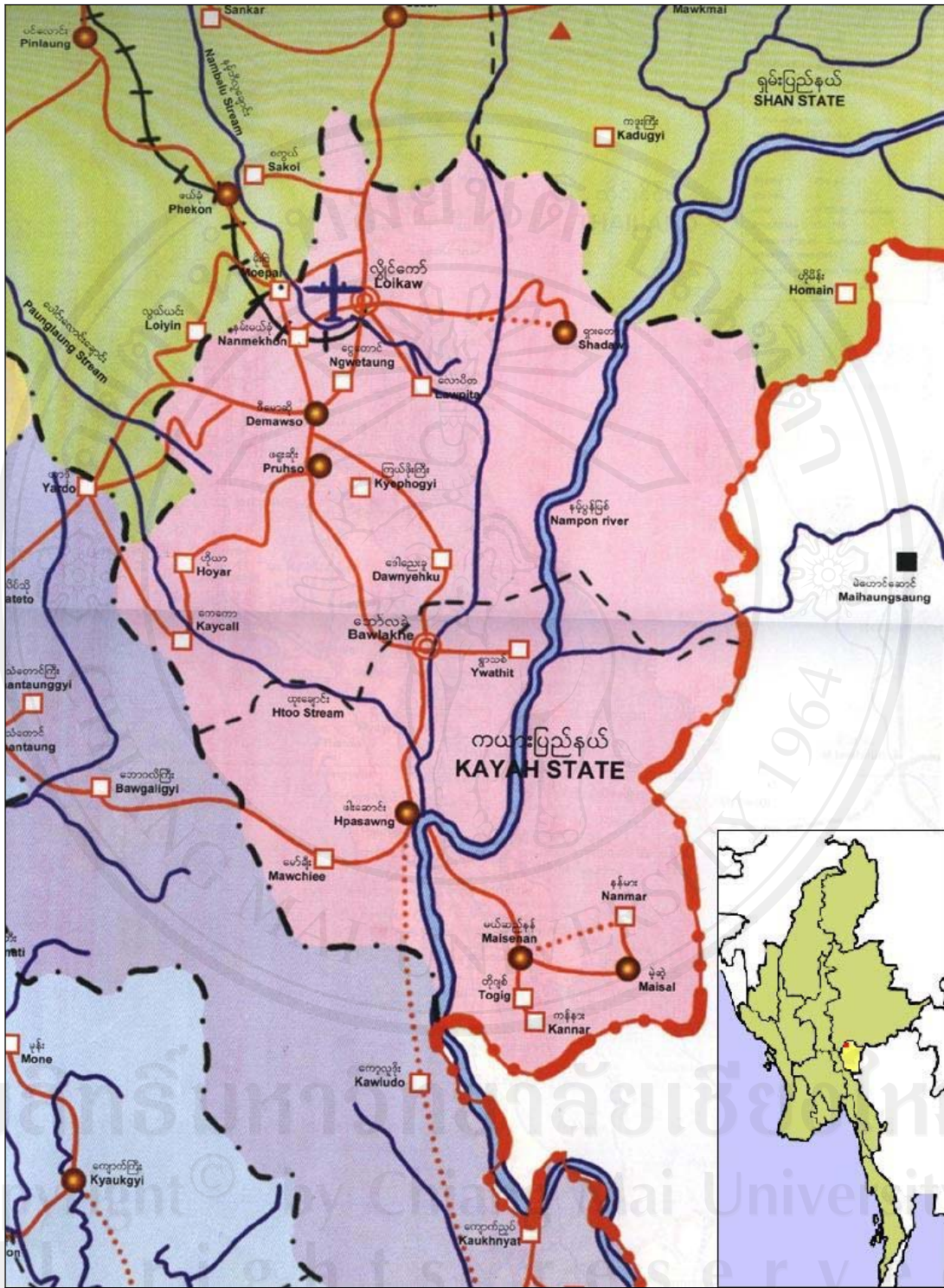


Figure 1.1: The Karenni and Sub-groups³

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³ This diagram is drawn according to a list from 'Kayah', published by BSPP in 1967.



Map 1.1: Kayah State in Myanmar - Homeland of the Long-Necked Kayan

The Padaung Long-Necked women traditionally wear many tight bronze rings around their neck, and the weight of these rings pushes their neck and shoulder muscles deep into their shoulders, creating the illusion of a longer neck. In fact, it is the upper body which has been pushed down to create the appearance of a longer neck (Figure 1.2). The main coil is comprised of sixteen to 22 loops, and some of the neck coils are very heavy, weighing anywhere from between five to twenty kilos. The women feel discomfort from the coil rubbing against their skin and often protect their chin or shoulders with small napkins or towels. Furthermore, the tight knee coils also affect their circulation and cause discomfort⁴.



Figure 1.2: X-ray of a 43 year-old Long-Necked woman who has worn the brass rings for 38 years (taken at Mae Hong Son Hospital)

At first, the women were unaware that covering their necks with brass would eventually cause their neck muscles to lengthen and their shoulder blades to be depressed (Khon Eden Phan 2005). Although the original custom was that only a girl born on a Wednesday with a full-moon could wear the rings around her neck, in

⁴ Although in this study I will focus on the neck coils, the Padaung also wear coils around their knees and ankles.

Thailand almost all the girls in the Kayan villages have started to wear the coils over the last twenty years, as it has become a sign of beauty.

1.3 Long-Necked Karen, Kayan or Padaung: A Confusion of Terms

The Kayan author, Uncle Khon Eden Phan, explained to me that outsiders should not call the people in the Kayan villages either Padaung or Long-Necked 'Karen'; the Padaung refer to themselves as Kayan. The original word Kayan comes from '*Kan Yan*', *Kan* meaning 'territory or region' and *Yan* meaning 'permanently' in the Kayan language. As a result, the Kayan word has the meaning 'the people who stay stable in their region', which is now in complete contrast to their current situation as migrants in Thailand, to this day being moved by the Thai authorities from one village to another. In the past they rarely moved outside Kayah State in Myanmar, during which time they had a longstanding economic and social relationship with the neighboring Shan. During that time, many Shan traded with the Kayan villagers, and the Shan called the Long-Necked Kayan, *Yan Pad Daung*, which means 'the Karen who wear rings'. As time passed *Yan Pad Daung* gradually changed to the Burmese term *Padaung*.

To distinguish the Kayan who wear rings from those who do not, the term *kyay kwın pat* (girls/women who wear rings) is used. Most Kayan are not offended by the term 'Padaung' or 'Long-Necked' and indeed they themselves use the term 'Long' and 'Short' to refer to themselves. In their daily conversation, the terms 'a girl/woman with a long neck' (*lel pin shay*) or 'a short-necked (*lel pin toe*) woman who does not wear neck rings' are often used. However, the term 'giraffe women' is considered offensive.

The Kayan men are able to distinguish themselves among the four Kayan sub-groups. When I listened to and observed their conversation, I heard the men identify themselves as 'Padaung'; not only the men, but sometimes the long-necked women refer to themselves as Padaung, the widely known name. It is only Kayan scholars and educated Kayan who know how their name was constructed who do not accept the

titles *Yan Pad Daung* or Padaung, or Long-Necked Karen. As far as I could observe, the Kayan follow the suggestions and ideas of their intellectual members, but not in a serious way. Although they have their own given title, the Lahwi, this term is rarely used. During my field research, I never heard them use the term Lahwi, and the attempt to change the term is seen as an idea constructed by the Kayan intellectuals, in order to promote their right to self-determination.



Figure 1.3: A Long-Necked Woman from Huay Pu Keng

In this study, I will use the terms ‘Long-Necked Kayan’ and ‘Long-Necked Padaung’ or ‘Padaung’, to differentiate them from the other sub-groups.

1.4 Political Struggles of the Karenni and Kayan

In this section, I want to give a brief political history of the Karenni and Kayan armed groups. The Karenni Army (KA) under the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), to which the Kayan and Kayaw are related, is one of the groups in Myanmar which has fought for self-determination over the years.

On December 23rd 1946, General Aung San, President of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), persuaded the Karenni to accept the accession of the Karenni State into the proposed Union of Myanmar, while at the same time, the British lobbied the Karenni to join the Frontier Areas. At the beginning of 1947, the Karenni people celebrated the Karenni New Year in Loikaw and hoisted the three stars Karenni flag at Loikaw football stadium.

No Karenni representative attended the Panlong Conference, which was held on February 12th 1947, and a few months later, in April 1947, a meeting was held in which Karenni leaders decided not to accept the accession of Karenni State into the Union of Burma, the resolution being adopted in order to safeguard the independence and sovereignty of Karenni State.

On 14th April 1947, a Karenni and Mobyé delegation met the Inquiry Commission of D.R. Rees William MP, in Maymyo, northern Shan State, at which they presented a petition containing ten statements declaring the will of the Karenni people. Gobi Turee and Shwe Lay from Bawlake, Thaik Ba Han and Paulu from Mobyé, Saw Shwe and A Mya Lay from Kyeh Poe Gyi, Sao Lawei, U Sein, Ba Thaug, and J. Grasu from Kantarawaddy were at the meeting; however, the British delegation dismissed the demand.

On June 9th 1947, the Legislature (Constituent Assembly) met in Yangon, but no Karenni representative attended the meeting. However, at the meeting, Karenni State was included as part of Union of Burma under the new constitution, and there was one further concession made: the 1947 Constitution granted the Kachin, Karenni and Shan a certain amount of autonomy in their own ethnic areas and the right to secede from the Union of Burma ten years later. On realizing that Karenni State had been incorporated into Myanmar, the Mobyé representative Thaik Ba Han, who was at the meeting, immediately rushed back to Karenni State and informed the Karenni leaders of this news, as the leaders were at the time holding a meeting in Moso.

On June 20th 1947, the Karenni representatives, Gobi Turee and Saw Their met with the British governor-general in Yangon, and issued a statement with regard to whether or not to become incorporated into the Union of Burma upon their return from Yangon.

On hearing the news about the new constitution, the Karenni leaders called an emergency meeting and appointed U Sein, Sao Wanna, A Mya Lay and Thaik Than Tin to go Rangoon to protest against the inclusion of Karenni State in the Union of Burma's new constitution. This delegation went to Rangoon in September 1947; however, instead of protesting about the new constitution, they were lured by the AFPFL leaders, accepting bribes and cooperating with them. Without the consent of the Karenni government and people, the delegation accepted the bribes and agreed to join the Union of Burma, only objecting to Chapter 9, Part 4, Article 180(1) (a), which said that Karenni State would be a special region within a planned new Karen State. Hearing this, the Karenni leaders issued a statement immediately relieving the delegation of its authority.

In November 1947, the AFPFL leaders sent the military police into Karenni State and armed the members of the delegation who had accepted the AFPFL offer, plus their followers. The Karenni leaders wrote a letter to U Nu, leader of the AFPFL, protesting against the military police being sent there without the permission of the Karenni government and people. As a result, Karenni people and students gathered in Loikaw and demonstrated, showing their objection to the Burmese military presence; however, the four collaborators set up a rival government.

In the same month, the Karenni National Organization was formed in order to support the United Karenni Independence States Council (UKISC) politically, and later, in 1957, the KNPP began its armed struggle. In 1995, the KNPP, Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) and Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNLPP) agreed a ceasefire and became allied with the Myanmar military regime⁵, then in 1996, the

⁵ State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)

ceasefire collapsed between the KNPP and the Myanmar military regime and fighting resumed. During the 1990s, and during fighting between the Karenni armed groups and the Myanmar military regime, around 5000 Karenni became internally displaced people (IDP). Thousands of Karenni, including many Kayan Padaung, fled to the Thai border, adjoining Mae Hong Son Province. Some of the Kayan men now settled in Huay Pu Keng in Mae Hong Son Province, formerly served as soldiers in the KNPP.

The geographical base of the KNPP is in a mountainous area on the border between Mae Hong Son Province in Thailand and Kayah State in Myanmar. The KNPP base is only a few miles from Huay Pu Keng and is part of a buffer zone between Thailand and Myanmar. Soldiers from the KNPP avoid Thai border patrol police and check points when visiting Huay Pu Keng. KNPP has an influential role, not only in terms of political activities, but also in the social sector, both in Kayan Long-Necked villages and Karenni refugee camps.

Kayan refugees in Thai camps came formerly from nine villages across Kayah State, with most from Rwan Khu and Daw Kee villages. The Kayan people from Lay Mile village in Kayah State first settled in Huay Pu Long camp near the Thai border in 1983. At that time, tourists from Mae Hong Son crossed the border to see them at the camp, and due to the Myanmar military's offensive operations in 1988, six Long-necked Kayan households moved to Huay Pu Keng camp in 1989 (Khon Eden Phan 2005, Nipa 1993). This move brought them into contact with the outside world and sealed their fate in terms of becoming an exotic tourist attraction.

To evade further Myanmar army offensives carried out during October 1992, in November they moved to Kayan Tha Yar camp, and from there, in 1995 nine households moved to Huay Sua Tao. In addition, seven Kayan households who had settled for a year in Mae Ain camp, Chiang Rai Province in Thailand, moved to Kayan Tha Yar camp in March 1998.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

For my study, I approach the problems on two levels; at the representational and operational levels. For the first level of approach, I will discuss the discourse of ethnic tourism, the commoditizing process of the Long-Necked Kayan, and the perceptions of Thai people towards them. For the second level, I will outline the cultural practices and interrelations of the Padaung, such as the differing views on commoditization between the old and new Padaung generations, and the daily lives of the Padaung, as well as the livelihood strategies used when dealing with powerful actors.

First and foremost, I want to discuss the discourse on ethnic tourism. The Thai Government's promotional project, the "Visit Thailand Year" began in 1989. In 1997, Thailand declared an "Unseen in Thailand" year, and in 1998, an "Amazing Thailand Year", and ethnic group members appeared in advertisements as a colorful attraction for tourists. At the beginning of the ethnic tourism campaign in the 1980s, the Akha and Hmong became representative of tourism in the country, and thus objects of the tourists' gaze. Tourism has played an important role in Thailand in recent years, not only bringing foreign currency revenue, but also acting indirectly as an important stimulant for the development of infrastructure and services (Cohen 2001:24). Tour agencies advertise highland 'ethnic tours' using different images, and Cohen has collected some of the special illustrative terms used, such as "original, primitive, exotic, spectacular and unspoilt". Once new ethnic groups such as the Long-Necked Kayan and 'Big-Eared' Kayaw had migrated to border areas around the 1990s, they also became attractive tourism objects.

The Thai Government has invested a lot of money in infrastructure projects in the highland areas of northern Thailand, especially road construction activities, and these have provided convenience for tourists. The roads to remote areas, such as near Huay Pu Keng village in Mae Hong Son Province and the group of Huai Yuak Mlabri villages in Nan Province, would not have been paved if the villages had not been tourist sites (Prasit 2005). In addition to making a connection between ethnic tourism and the various forms of development, for my research I also wanted to describe the

process of ethnic tourism in a Padaung community, in order to explore the village members' voices.

This study will investigate the current situation in terms of ethnic tourism and what processes have taken place within its discourse. I will study how ethnic tourism has contributed to the dynamics of development and what the impacts have been on the ethnic groups. It will also be interesting to explore what power processes have occurred among the key actors; the Padaung and others from outside. I will study Padaung women's relations with and reactions to other actors, such as the local authorities and the tourists, as well as the Padaung women's own family members. I will also explore the new cultural causes that have emerged as part of the ongoing process of commoditization within the Padaung community.

After focusing on the ethnic tourism discourse, I will continue to explore the impact of touristic consumption on culture and the gender body. The Padaung people in Mae Hong Son are also a victim of business groups, similar to other ethnic groups in northern Thailand - more and more becoming "powerless commodities in the tourism supermarket" (Alting von Geusau 1998), manipulated by tour operators and being treated by tourists as a human zoo due to their distinct culture, following their great suffering during the civil war and their forced displacement at the hands of the Myanmar military regime. Since that time, the Thai local authorities have tried to restrict them using a number of control mechanisms, for economic purposes. The Padaung in this case are powerless, since they are living as refugees or illegal migrants, and the tourism industry provides them with the means to survive to a certain degree, whether partly or totally. What I am interested in exploring is the way in which they remain proud of their own cultural identity as popular, attractive figures, though it is this very identity that has caused them to be commoditized by the authorities, business people and tourists.

Both mothers and daughters have become part of the ethnic tourism markets in the so-called villages, where they just sit around waiting for the tourists. As a result, Padaung women are the main source of income for the family; Padaung mothers

encourage their daughters to become good girls and provide an income for their own family by wearing coils around their necks⁶. Traditionally, only a few Padaung girls could wear the neck rings, but since tourism has been promoted, other youngsters have enlisted in order to meet the tourists' demands. The previous ring wearing process took too long to sustain them as the main attraction in a tourist village, so the process has since been speeded up.

In this study, the subject matter is the tourists' key focus – the women. Their cultural identity is more associated with a physical presence in terms of 'body modification' than the dress and material culture of other ethnicities. The aim is to study the changing meanings and shifting values in an appropriate way; to understand clearly the ongoing commoditization process, its force and impacts on the Padaung women, I will investigate the ethnic women's status as objects of the tourists' gaze and as a gender body within the touristic consumption process.

I will continue my study in terms of the Thai's perception; especially the local authorities, tour guides and business people who commoditize and exploit the Padaung, though it is already a controversial issue within the media and human advocacy groups. The authorities pay more attention to promoting the Padaung for tourism purposes, even using their pictures as images to represent the Province. The control of the local authorities is particularly obvious when the Padaung apply for resettlement in other countries (see Chapter V, Section 5.4).

Ethnic tourism in the highlands of northern Thailand has become both a political and an economic issue, as Prasit (2005) points out. Although there is obviously a contradiction in the State's legal policies and its tourism strategy, as long as ethnic people, their practices and their communities attract tourists, other legal issues are ignored. The Thai authorities argue that the Long-Necked Padaung are economic migrants who earn a good living from the tourist trade and have chosen to settle outside the refugee camps. The authorities, sensing a profit, have created a 'win-

⁶ Editorials, Standards: The International Journal of Multicultural Studies, Vol 7, No 2.

win' situation, giving the Long-Necked people villages within their natural environment and then allowing and encouraging tourists to visit them; hence promoting tourism in these remote areas of Mae Hong Son. For the Myanmar military regime, the Padaung are purely a political concern, but in Thailand they are a political as well as an economic concern. On this point, I will study how the Padaung have become trapped along the border within 'human zoos', stuck between a civil war in their homeland and being exploited on Thai soil. I will explore what reasons are used to control the Padaung in terms of security concerns on the surface, while they are used for economic benefit in reality.

In my research it is worth highlighting the ways in which the Long-Necked Padaung's culture is expressed within their critical situation. In their homeland in Myanmar, these cultural practices are slowly and steadily dying out, while in Thailand their customs have resurfaced rapidly in the last decade, but have changed among the new generation. Not only has a proportion of the population started wearing the brass rings again, but some also add a greater number of brass rings at a younger age than in the past, not in accordance with tradition⁷, though during my research, I found that recent dynamics have meant that an increasing proportion of the population are actually taking off their rings again (See Chapter V, section 5.3.2.).

The single Padaung women who wear rings around their necks earn about 1,500 baht per month, whilst the married women earn around 2,000 baht. Their salaries are administered by local business people, which 'encourages' them to stay in one place and acts as an incentive for the new generations to wear the neck rings. The way these actors treat the Padaung is still a controversial subject among scholars, the mass media and human rights advocacy groups. Padaung women are being objectified, but they want to be subjective. During my visits, I examined the Padaung women's reaction to the commoditization of their "cultural tradition", as well as the changing process of Kayan ethnic representation.

⁷ Traditionally a five year-old wore a one kilo ring; two more were added at aged ten and fifteen, and another two were added before the girls turned twenty – a total of five rings. Now the first ring is added at five, the second at eight, the third at thirteen and the final two by the time the girl is fifteen.

I will uncover the meanings behind their cultural practices in Myanmar, and compare these with the shifting meanings that have developed in Thailand, in order to clarify the practice of their culture and to explore what has happened to the cultural process, such as for example maintaining their cultural practices when away from their homeland and in the context of tourism – cultural practices changing with their livelihood strategies. To put this another way, I wish to understand how the wearing of many rings can have different meanings, whether it be to maintain or to reconstruct.

Due to the external pressures and factors, there has been a change in the views, perceptions and ways of life inside Padaung communities, especially for the women. In other words, there have been different reactions to the current situation; some have accepted and some have resisted. I focus on this point, as one of my research problems looks at the terms of negotiation. Currently, an increasing dilemma for the younger generation of Padaung is whether to seek an education and their citizenship rights, or whether to seek resettlement in a third country. The Karenni political groups have initiated their own education system for the younger generations, with the help of NGOs, but their schools are illegal and are not recognized by the Thai authorities.

I will also explore the different views, backgrounds, thoughts and experiences of the older and younger generations. Since Padaung women often find themselves photographic objects, I will try to understand how this affects them and their unchanging daily lifestyle; to sit and wait for tourists and pose for photos over and over again, every day. I am interested to know how the women deal with this phenomenon and what negotiations take place, and whether this daily routine leads to a generation gap developing, and what the solutions to any problems this raises might be.

To understand their survival process I will focus on the daily routine of a Padaung family - their livelihood strategy, as well as the traditional practices carried out by the Padaung community. During my research, it was interesting to explore and

compare their previous lifestyle in Myanmar with the one they have in Thailand – I did this by joining them with their housework, working alongside the family members in activities such as cooking. I was also able to assess the status of the men in the families in society and in their daily lives. As Padaung women are the main tourist attraction, they are paid 1,500 to 2,000 baht per month as a salary, while the men receive a rice allowance of 260 baht per month. The men are only able to help with traditional activities such as selling and doing the housework, and a few Kayan men can normally be spotted around the village, as they are generally outside laboring in the rice fields or occasionally working on construction activities. I will explore the role of men in the family as well as in society, in order to understand the status of both the men and the women, and their relations in the past and now.

I wish to explore how the Padaung in Thailand continue to follow their traditional activities and beliefs; for example, Pascal Khoo Thwe (2002) mentions in his memoirs that making rice-wine is one of the most important activities in a Padaung family, as rice-wine is traditionally drunk from when a baby through to adulthood. Rice-wine is mainly drunk on special occasions and a woman's ability to make rice-wine still represents a kind of social status. I also want to explore the marriage traditions and the kinship system in place, since there are strong clan linkages, though they are currently separated into small groups.

As an overall part of my research problematization, Padaung women are tourist objects, but at the same time they have also maintained their traditions, in their own way, and it is still important to study the ethnic tourism process and its impact on people in terms of development and the pressure brought to bear on culture. In this paper, I wish to study the dynamics of ethnic tourism development and its impact on one group of migrant ethnic people, those with an 'exotic' culture. By looking at the intrusion of cultural commoditization and the exploitation of the Padaung, I aim to study not only the cultural process of a new meaning, but also the power process.

I will also explore how the process of their daily struggles, their self-identity and their ways of life are necessarily being negotiated in the situation within which

they are trapped. I wish to understand what their reaction to the factors influencing them has been, their consciousness of their own cultural identity within the commoditization framework, and their response to contact from outside. I seek to investigate the continuing process of ethnic tourism, the self-esteem framework of the Padaung, the contradictions that have developed in terms of their cultural practices, and the involvement and use of their cultural identity within the commoditization process, plus its impact on Padaung ethnicity.

1.6 Research Questions

In order to study the commoditization process, women as objects of ethnic tourism, the shifting meanings and values of their cultural practice and identity, and their reactions to these issues, I developed the following questions in order to approach my research target:

1. How has ethnic tourism represented Padaung identity within the process and context of cultural commoditization?
2. What are the changing meanings and values attached to the Long-Necked Padaung women's bodies?
3. How have they negotiated in terms of being the subject of the tourists' gaze and with the powerful forces of cultural commoditization?

1.7 Research Objectives

1. To examine the changing representations of body modification, as practiced by the Long-Necked Padaung women in Thailand.
2. To understand the Padaung's views and individual sentiments with regard to cultural commoditization. .
3. To investigate the ways in which people have reacted to the political and social forces that have impacted upon their culture.

1.8 Research Methodology

I used participant-observation as my key research method for collecting data. James Spradley (1980: 54) claims that there are two purposes to participant observation: to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people and physical aspects of the situation (cited in Fife 2005: 71). Jackson says that participant observation is carried out in order to learn about a native's world, to take their common sense and align it to the researcher's own common sense, and to learn how people solve existential problems in appropriate ways (Jackson 1989, cited in Fife 2005: 71). The Padaung are a quiet people and rarely express their feelings to strangers, and as a result, I thought that participant observation would be the best method to use to understand their daily lives as tourist objects and their native lifestyle. I also collected data using the media and from documents, interviews, observation and from recording a live history. I tried to develop a qualitative research approach using these methods.

1.8.1 Research Site and Target Group

My research site was Huay Pu Keng⁸, near the Thai-Myanmar border in the province of Mae Hong Son (Map 1.2 and 1.3). My first phase of data collection at the field site took place between June and August 2008, though during August that year I had to return to Chiang Mai for a visa notification. I returned to Huay Pu Keng during September, as the start of a second phase of work for a few weeks, in order to carry of work.

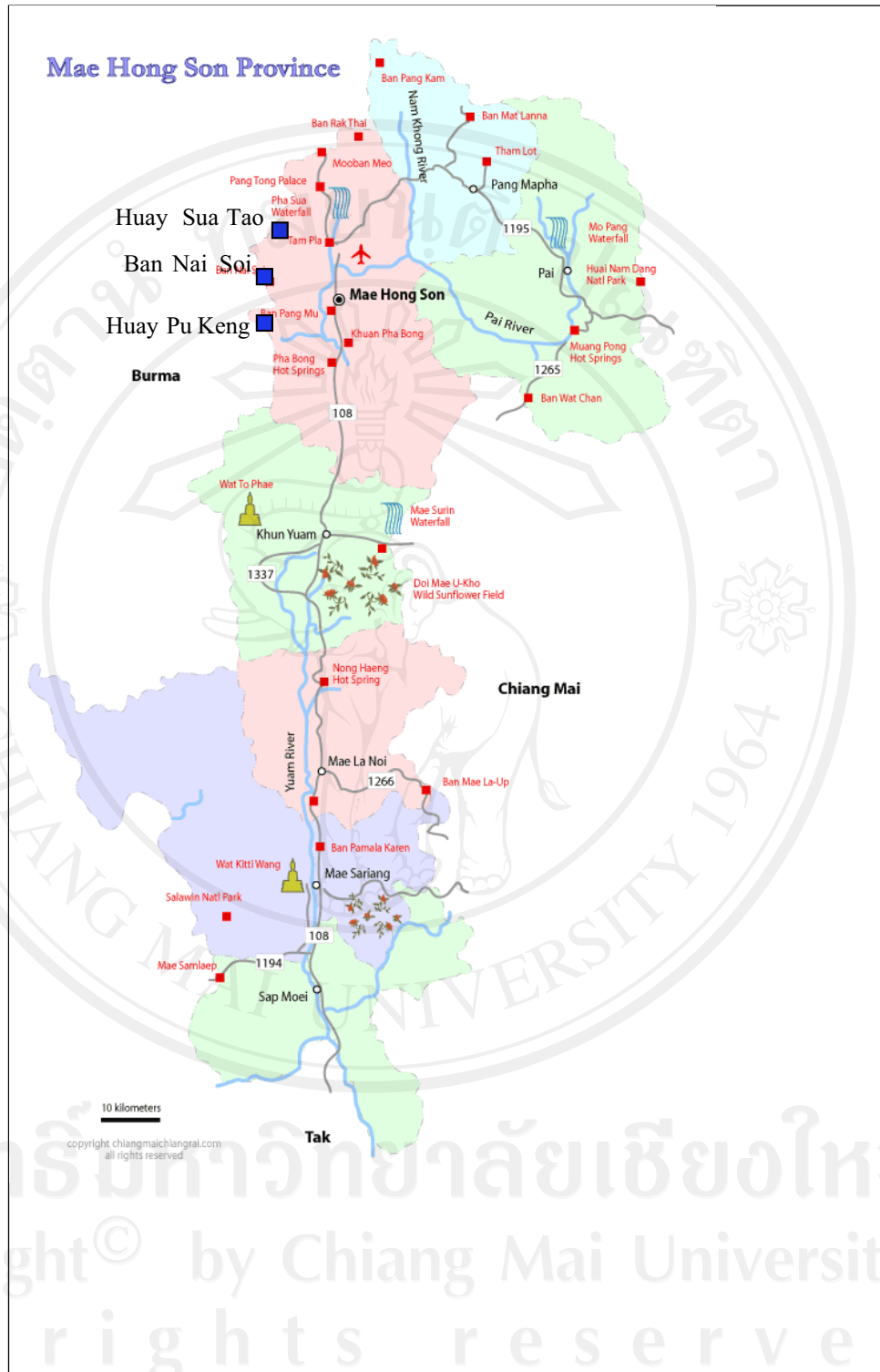
As the neck ring wearing female population is not very large, I focused on a single village for my data collection and analysis. The village was still undergoing a relocation process - to newly designed village, when I started my field research, and as I was about to finish my field work, I saw some villagers moving to a refugee camp, as part of the initial stages of applying for resettlement in a third country.

⁸ There are various spellings of the village's name, including Huey Pu Keng, Huay Pu Kaeng, Huay Poo Kang and Hwat Pu Ket. In this study, I will use Huay Pu Keng.

There are two Kayan (Karenni) sub-groups in Huay Pu Keng – the Kayan (Long-Necked) and the Kayaw (Big-Eared), but the target of my research was the Kayan, especially the ring-wearing women who have been given many names, including Padaung, Long-Necked or more crudely ‘giraffe women’, though they prefer to call themselves Kayan (Lahwi).



ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่
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Map 1.2: The Thai-Myanmar Border and Mae Hong Son Province



Map 1.3: Three Long-Necked Villages and the Research Area - Huay Pu Keng

1.8.2 Secondary Data Review: Media Material and Documentation

It is hard to find anything about the Kayan Padaung in the literature and work written in English, except for the memoirs of the Kayan scholar, Parscale Khoo Thwe, entitled ‘From the Land of Green Ghosts’, Khon Eden Phan⁹’s ‘The Narratives, Beliefs and Customs of Kayan People’, plus some media articles. Most articles tell the same stories and give similar views. Even the Myanmar Encyclopedia (1963)

⁹ A Kayan author who has recorded Kayan narrative history and beliefs in both Burmese and English – his book is a draft and is available in hard copy at some shops in the Long-Necked villages.

mentions the Padaung, but only has three paragraphs and is a very general comparison with other ethnic group's histories and culture. I also found some research papers about the Padaung in the Thai language, and I also collected books, reports, maps, photos, journalistic articles, newspaper cuttings and electronic data, plus announcements and statements by the Thai local authorities, the KNPP, UN officials and NGOs. I gathered such information from a variety of media sources in order to gain a broader understanding of public concerns as a whole, and to gain a background knowledge of the local area as a researcher (Fife 2005: 54). I also reviewed and examined secondary data - about the Padaung's socio-cultural position, to contribute to my background knowledge and to trace the dynamics of their situation. The history of the Kayan Padaung and the historical reasons for their wearing of the brass rings still require further study.

During my research, I found that the Burmese media, especially the media aimed at the Burmese in exile, has influenced the Thai-based international media, such as the Nation newspaper, and this is the primary group to have expressed concern and that has informed people about the exploitation of the Padaung people. To reflect upon and trace the position of the Padaung throughout their period in Thailand, I used media releases and press releases, reports and documents from NGOs, and activist groups also proved very useful for my data collection exercise.

When I visited Mae Hong Son, I stayed at the office of the Kantarawaddy Times newspaper, where I also contributed articles, carried out editing work and gave short-term training to new Karenni reporters. The Mae Hong Son based Kantarawaddy Times is run by ethnic Karenni journalists and acts as a watchdog for Karenni affairs. I got the chance to read a lot of books, dictionaries and reports about the Long-Necked Kayan at the Kantarawaddy Times office.

1.8.3 Interviews and Discussions

Since the Padaung have no record of their own history, I focused on holding interviews in order to explore the narratives given by the different generations, and to

stimulate recent memories of their homeland in Myanmar. I used semi-structured, partly structured and unstructured interviews for this purpose, depending on the responses of the person or group with whom the interview was taking place (Mukherjee 1933). I used semi-structured interviews carried out in an informal manner and in a relaxed setting, as well as minimally structured one-on-one interviews with key informants. When I was in the field, I noticed that the Padaung have a lot of words to describe visitors and the media, and I loved to listen to their feelings and hopes. Anthropological research often means letting people speak for themselves, and I therefore relied heavily on informal interviews and conversations with them in order to unearth their real feelings and expectations.

In terms of the discussions held, I used individual and group discussions. During my stay in the study village, I spoke to many people from various backgrounds; for example, some of those who live in the village have a close relationship with the Karenni political organizations, and I also explored the views of the modern, knowledgeable people in the village, such as the Kayan journalists and volunteer teachers.

For my interviews and discussions, I used the Burmese language with the Padaung women, men and teachers, and after my second short trip to the Long-Necked villages prior to my proposal being submitted, I was able to observe their situation and had the chance to speak with the women, young girls, men and teachers. When holding open and relaxed discussions with the girls and women, in some cases I arranged for a Padaung female assistant to be present – a lady called Mu Yan¹⁰ from the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and she helped me throughout my data collection exercise. She had just finished her Post-Ten Leadership Program (equal to a formal diploma) and thus had returned to Huay Pu Keng, where she had taken off her neck rings. She is a brilliant student and can speak Burmese, Thai and English very well. In their illegal school, the common language spoken is Burmese, because the

¹⁰ For confidentiality reasons, all names given are pseudonyms.

school relies on teachers who have passed their high school exams or graduated from Myanmar. The other languages taught at the school are Karen, Thai and English¹¹.

1.8.4 Participant Observation

I used the participation technique to investigate the Padaung's daily lives and observe their activities and the conditions in Huay Pu Keng, as I wanted to understand how they lead their lives in these so-called village areas. I observed their interactions within their own community and also with outsiders such as visitors, tour operators and the local authorities. I also explored the hopes of the young girls in the village regarding their education and their future ambitions; my observations were useful in terms of learning about their lives and understanding their environment.

1.8.5 Collection of Life Histories and Stories, Poems, Songs

I met the village headman in order to learn about administration and negotiation activities in the village, plus with other senior villagers in order to hear their stories; their narratives and memories provided me with a picture of their past experiences and their future hopes. The elderly Padaung women speak mostly Kayan, and although they can speak Burmese a little, they were reluctant to speak Burmese in front of me, as they were worried they would speak it incorrectly. As a result, sometimes I let them speak Kayan and Mu Yan interpreted for me.

For my research, I also wished to know more about the meanings of their poems and songs, so I collected traditional as well as modern songs for this purpose. The themes of the songs reflect their lives as refugees, their separation from families and country, the displacement of their people, exploitation of their natural resources, the fact that they have lived in a constant state of war and their love for their mothers, country and lovers. Through these songs the young students hope to communicate

¹¹ I observed that they use Thai when dealing with Thai visitors, English with foreigners, Karen within their own community and at school, but for announcements (such as health education posters), they use Burmese.

their feelings and their plight to the world. In the modern songs I found mostly reflections of hope among the young Kayan.

1.9 Ethical Considerations

When I visited and stayed in Huay Pu Keng, I explained to the village head, the Kayan elders and other responsible people what I wanted to do, and learned what their limitations were. I made clear my status as a researcher in the village; because of what I had learned from NGO workers and volunteers - that some of the villagers may believe strangers are spies or informers for the Myanmar military regime. In interviews and conversations, I gave villagers the chance to withhold their names from my research writings, and I have kept their private data and stories confidential, as per their wishes. Finally, I shared with them all copies of the photographs, records and stories I recorded.