

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Rationale of the Study**

Starting from the 1950s, Thailand had experienced an unprecedented economic boom in the nation's history until the 1980s. The average annual growth in the 1960s was 8 per cent, 7 per cent in the 1970s, and 4-6 per cent in the beginning of the 1980s (Bello et al 1998: 10). Thai people, especially those who are in the nation's capital, Bangkok, enjoyed the economic boom and started to live a "modernized" lifestyle. However, behind the scenes of a national economic success, rural villages were forced to face a predicament because the urban-centered industrial economy was based on neo-liberal economic beliefs. The national economic boom was coupled with the political views of disregarding the countryside as peripheral, stagnant, and threatened area, preferring investment into cities as the predominant driving force of the national economy (Pasuk and Baker 1996: 146). The flourish of the cities today came largely from the sacrifice of the rural sector's interests, depriving farmers in rural areas of substantial income and turning them into politically powerless smallholders, urban employers, workers, and civil servants for the sake of the interests of the people in the commercial sector, bureaucratic, and military elites (Bello et al 1998: 135). In addition, it has been widely claimed that the government's agro-export policy was aimed to obtain foreign exchange so as to finance urban industrialization, affecting self-sufficiency of the rural peasants. In the 1960s and 1970s, the integration of rural agriculture into international trade forced many owners/ cultivators to be engaged in growing non-rice cash crops such as tobacco, soybeans, and temperate vegetables; and by growing these crops, the farmers became more and more dependent on the international market economy and were forced to purchase a large amount of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides (Bello et al 1998: 141). This led people who had been traditionally engaged in agriculture and other primary sectors to be cast in the vicious cycle of debt payment, forcing some of them to seek employment in urban construction or manufacturing industries.

In the case of rural communities in Northern Thailand, development came into being in the 1970s, initiated by Thai government policy, which was influenced by the US's anti-communism schemes. In the mid-1970s, many student activists fled to mountainous areas of Northern Thailand for communist activities; for this, the construction of the paved roads that connect cities and provide access to the local areas was deemed necessary by the government in order that the state could mobilize power and surveillance of these areas (Yos 2008: 93). After that, the national export-oriented economic policy led the local communities to grow cash crop such as baby corn for export. Also, as a relatively recent phenomenon, local communities that are rich in natural resources are seen as potential tourist destinations for the sake of the national tourism industry, which now accounts for no less than 10 per cent of the Thai GDP (BBC News 2015). Indeed, over the decades, the tourism industry in Thailand has been acclaimed as a "ticket to development" and the largest earner of foreign exchange (Williamson and Hirsch 1996: 186), and because of the development of the country's official tourism strategy, this has created a number of negative socio-cultural consequences especially for local livelihood: accelerated land speculation; displacement of farmers; commercialization and commoditization of traditional cultures such as that of ethnic minority peoples; increase of prostitution; and environmental degradation (Bell 1996: 58).

For this phenomenon, in the late 1980s, there was a growing awareness of self-sufficient community building as a countermovement to the government-led development policies that are based on a top-down approach. This idea was materialized by peasant leaders, NGO workers, and intellectuals as the community culture (*wattathanam chumchon*) movement for achieving the ideology of peasant defense based on bottom-up decision-making (Pasuk and Baker 1996: 159). However, the statements of the community culture activists have been criticized by many scholars who regard it as romantic view towards past communities, which, critics state, has not existed in the history of Thailand. The arguments between community culture movement proponents and the opponents will be further discussed in a chapter below.

Bearing in mind the current debate mentioned above, this thesis aims to examine the socio-cultural changes that occurred in the village over the course of the contemporary

development and ultimately the outlook of community self-sufficiency and self-reliance, deploying a realistic and empirical approach to look at the Thailand's contemporary phenomena happening in the rural communities.

In light of the historical context of the relationship between Thai communities and the high-powered state authority, examining one specific community which is struggling to find a way of development in the globalized world today will be of great help to understand the contemporary notion of rural development in Thailand. In this thesis, I will focus on a village called Mae Kampong, which has been under great influence of Government policies in terms of development, and yet has a great deal of potential for achieving a self-reliant way of community governance because of its traits as a traditional agrarian rural community.

Mae Kampong is the village No. 3 of seven villages in Huay Kaew sub-district, Mae On district, Chiang Mai province, Northern Thailand, known as a major producer of a Northern Thai traditional snack of tea leaves called *Mieng*. It is located in the east of Chiang Mai province, about 50 kilometers from the city. It lies at an average height of 1,300 meters above sea level. It has been about 100 years since the first generation of this village who had been searching for suitable places for tea cultivation came from nearby areas to settle in the location and started to form the community. Now, the village has 134 households and 374 people in total. The village consists of six clusters, Pang Nok, Pang Klang, Pang Khon, Pang Ton, Pan Nai No.1, and Pang Nai No.2. The village was named after '*maenam*' (translated as river in Thai) and its native flower called '*dok kampong*', thus the name, Mae Kampong, is a short and combined form of river and a local flower. Today, the production of *Mieng* is not the sole economic industry in Mae Kampong. In fact, in 1982, as a government-led rural development project, two micro hydro power generators were installed near the river that runs through the village, and electricity generated is supplied within the village. Also, in 2000, the village started its official tourism project as a form of community-based tourism (CBT), introducing the village homestay service.

Here, some problems facing the village should be mentioned. Currently, there are three noteworthy problems in Mae Kampong. First, because of the changing lifestyle of Northern Thai people, the demand of *Mieng* is declining; Northern Thai people

nowadays think Mieng is not tasty and old-fashioned compared to the contemporary substitutes such as chewing gum and coffee (Reichart and Philipsen 1996: 129). As a consequence, it would be natural that the significance of Mieng in Mae Kampong is diminishing both in terms of economic aspect and cultural aspect. Second, the development of Mae Kampong itself should be reconsidered and analyzed. Although Mae Kampong seems to have an egalitarian system of village management, there are actual power relations working behind the scene between the village and the national authority. Third, as differentiation of labor in the village occurs- different groups of homestay service, making of pillows stuffed with tea leaves, Thai massage, and so on emerged as a consequence of the involvement of village tourism-, fragmentation of the village entity seems to have been occurring, and the consequent change of the social relations among the villagers might be inevitable. In fact, for example, the income gap between homestay serving households and non-homestay serving households should be significant since one family which accepts homestay visitors can earn 520-580 Baht per visitor for one night. What can be deducted from this is that since the involvement of tourism, which is based on the market system, commercialism came to play a role in the human relations of the villagers. All the problems here will be discussed in the following chapters.

Tourism in the contemporary world economy is one of the fastest growing sectors and plays a significant role in international transactions and creation of employment around the world. Today, tourism industry accounts for as many as 10 per cent of the world GDP and creates a tremendous level of job opportunities- one in every 11 jobs in the entire world is thought to be directly and indirectly related to tourism (World Tourism Organization 2015). Ever since the advent of the contemporary mass tourism after the end of the World War II, the significance of tourism in the post-war world economy has been increasing worldwide. In fact, many governments of nation states started to seek to multiply their economic scales and foreign exchanges through the involvement into international tourism, and in 1967, the UN general assembly states that “Tourism is a basic and most desirable human activity deserving the praise and encouragement of all peoples and governments.” (Burkart and Medlik 1974 cited in Wood 1993: 51).

In Thai case, foundation of Tourism authority of Thailand (TAT) in 1950 was the start of its official nation-wide tourism policy. Later on, early stage of its tourism development as an international tourism destination is said to have started from the end of Vietnam war (in fact, world-famous Pattaya beach was at first developed as a resort place for the US military soldiers for comfort during the Vietnam war), and it started to gain popularity among international tourists as a result of the waning presence of US military after the war (Hitchcock et al 1993: 16). Since then, for international tourists, especially those from the Western sphere, Thailand has been a popular tourist destination. Furthermore, Thailand launched its first *Visit Thailand Year* in 1987, and the *Amazing Thailand* campaign was subsequently launched, with its aim of rescuing the country from the financial crisis in 1998/1999 (Champa 2011: 2).

Today, thanks to its abundance of cultural capital and splendid natural resources, a lot of tourists visit Thailand every year. Today, it is calculated that tourism accounts for no less than 10 per cent of annual GDP of Thailand (BBC News 2015). For tourism is considered as one of the most important industries to secure foreign currencies, the government has invested a great amount of money into the tourism industry and regards rural areas of Thailand that are rich in natural resources such as Northern area as potential tourist destinations for tourists who seek pristine natural scenery of Southeast Asia. Indeed, in 2007, Thailand attracted more than 14 million foreign visitors, creating an expected wage of 547,782 million Thai baht (around US\$ 15 billion) (TAT 2008). With respect to Chiang Mai area, the number of visiting tourists in this area was 5,356,867 (67% Thai and 33% foreigners) in 2007, and these directly and indirectly brought about 38,894 million baht (US\$ 1.1 billion) in terms of tourist income (TAT 2008).

Generally speaking, the tourism industry in Thailand brought about both an economic growth and negative influences on Thai societies. Certainly, as World Tourism Organization states, tourism brings about a number of positive effects for the tourists and in destinations: influx of money into economic capital; increase in local employment; acquisition of foreign exchange with ease for destination countries; interaction between tourists and hosts; unique experiences for tourists that are otherwise unfelt in their home places, etc. These are the major reasons why governments and

international agencies hail tourism as a preferable economic activity and are keen to promote it as a driving force for the national economic development. However, it has to be noted that the true impact of tourism goes far beyond simple economic benefits such as revenues, job creation, and foreign exchange acquisition.

Narratives about tourism development have been revolving around the negative economic and socio-cultural effects it brings to local communities. From an economic point of view, it has been lively argued that tourism created a new predominance of foreign ownership in the industry, resulting in a core-periphery relationship between developed and developing countries, which prevents destination communities and the local people from benefiting fully from tourism (Telfer 2002: 54). In many cases, tourism development is often led by foreign tour companies and service providers and does not reflect a destination community's interest, or rather marginalizing the local people. In many international tourist sites, situations in which tourist facilities such as hotels, restaurants, shops, etc. are owned by affluent foreign investors – they have advantages in the tourism business in that not only they tend to have more economic resources but also they have knowledge about what international tourists expect from the destinations because they themselves are foreigners-, and local peoples are nothing more than employees hired by them with meager wages. In this way, the mainstream tourism turns local destination communities and the local people into the objects of development but not subjects (Reid 2001, cited in Timothy 2002: 149). This is how leakage of money in tourist destinations occurs. It is a flow of money from tourists from other countries to business owners who are also from other countries with little trickling down effect to local people. This is one of the major reasons why tourism is criticized as another dependency theory or “a new type of plantation economy” (Telfer 2002: 54).

Negative impacts in terms of socio-cultural dimensions on destination communities brought about by tourism have been also widely discussed. Such issues include environmental degradation, destruction of local cultures, changing value systems, changing human relations among host communities, and any possible conflicts between hosts and tourists. A lot of literatures point out that the interaction of tourism with the common activities of local communities is potentially harmful because there is a great deal of risks of marginalizing local culture, of casting local economies into a

dependence on the whims of tourists, and of creating some unwelcome social pathologies and behaviors in the communities (Fagence 2003: 55).

Those issues can be boiled down to the concepts of cultural imperialism and assimilation by tourists from developed countries and commoditization of culture. Since it is often true that tourists from developed countries expect their hosts to secure the same level of living standards for them such as electric apparatus, transportation, and food, tourism industry tend to impose the tourists' cultural values to destination countries. Because of this imposition, in order to be successful in the tourism business, destination communities have to abandon their own culture to some extent and be subjugated under the tourists' culture (Hashimoto 2002: 220). By the same token, people in the host community, especially the youth, tend to appreciate and be tempted to follow the lifestyles of the western tourists. The blind copying of westerners by host community population causes a number of detrimental influences on the spiritual and cultural norms of them such as disrespectful attire and behaviors in religious occasions, demonstration of affection in public, and tourists' diet patterns (McCarthy 1994, cited in Hashimoto 2002: 221).

In addition, the support from the government of the tourist destination for protecting their culture is often inadequate. In international tourism, governments are always beneficiaries of free movement of capital, namely acquisition of foreign exchange, and do not often take care of some negative impacts brought about by the free movement of people (e.g. conflicts between tourists and locals, pollution in the destination community). Uniqueness of destination communities' culture, to which the tourists are attracted, is nowadays politically utilized by a government policy, which often views cultural tourism as a sole economic option to the local communities. Moreover, the environmental and socio-cultural consequences of tourism are often ignored by the government, and the consequences and the responsibility of protection from them often falls to the destination communities themselves, usually without sufficient political support (Smith 2009: 61).

In addition to the cultural changes in host communities, tourism industry can also cause changes in social relations within the communities. Since such situation as that tourists from developed countries spend much more amount of money in one day than the local

people in destination communities could earn in a year is not rare, there would be often scrambles among local people to make fortune from some businesses to the tourists. For this, if it is not managed well, tourism can cause a negative social influence on the host communities, opening up some previously non-existent social divisions because of the broadening economic gap between those who are active in tourism industry and those who are not. For negative influences such as those mentioned above, the notion of community-based tourism (CBT) is expected to play a significant role as countermeasures. In fact, In Mae Kampong, tourism has brought about various changes, and CBT is one of the most important elements of Mae Kampong today. The changes and the concept of CBT will be explained in the following chapters.

Considering the various threats and problems that can face Mae Kampong, there is a need of re-evaluating the development trajectory that has been taken so far in order to examine preferable paths they can take from now on. All in all, despite the fact that Mae Kampong has achieved a great deal of development, it has to be said that the development was chiefly brought about by the government under the framework of rural development in the Northern Thai context mentioned above, not by the villagers themselves. Thus, one has to accept that the development of Mae Kampong is a result of the Government-led rural development schemes and that the initiation by the villagers has not played a major role in the village's contemporary development.

In the case of Mae kampong, a change in the mode of the village's economy, namely from traditional production of Mieng to community-based tourism, brought about wealth and the material abundance to the villagers. However, tourism development often has two sides of which a negative one can possibly lead to the destruction of essential elements for the community cohesion. Much criticism has been made to the current development debate, pointing out that examining culture and regional distinctiveness is often missed out in the existing literatures. In fact, according to Brohman (1995), development should be contextually defined because overlooking each local context cannot only be a mere oversight but also a blind spot (Broham 1995, cited in Rigg 1997:43). Therefore, in this thesis, emphasis will be made on the examination of Mae Kampong's tourism development and the resultant changes in terms of cultural, social, political, and economic perspectives. Over the course of the



development, the meaning of culture in Mae kampong has been also in need of change. Amidst the currency of tourism development and its increasing role as the main source of income for many villagers, Mieng continues to be the mainstay of livelihood in Mae Kampong. Its meaning for the community, however, has been less relevant to economic return as in the past but rather shifting towards becoming a symbolic capital as villagers integrated it in their community-based tourism activities and practices.

In summary, this thesis will evaluate the tourism development in Mae Kampong and resultant changes in terms of economic and socio-cultural dimensions within the village and decision-making process in terms of participation and leadership in order to explore the reality of contemporary Thai rural communities by examining Mae Kampong as a case study.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Objectives**

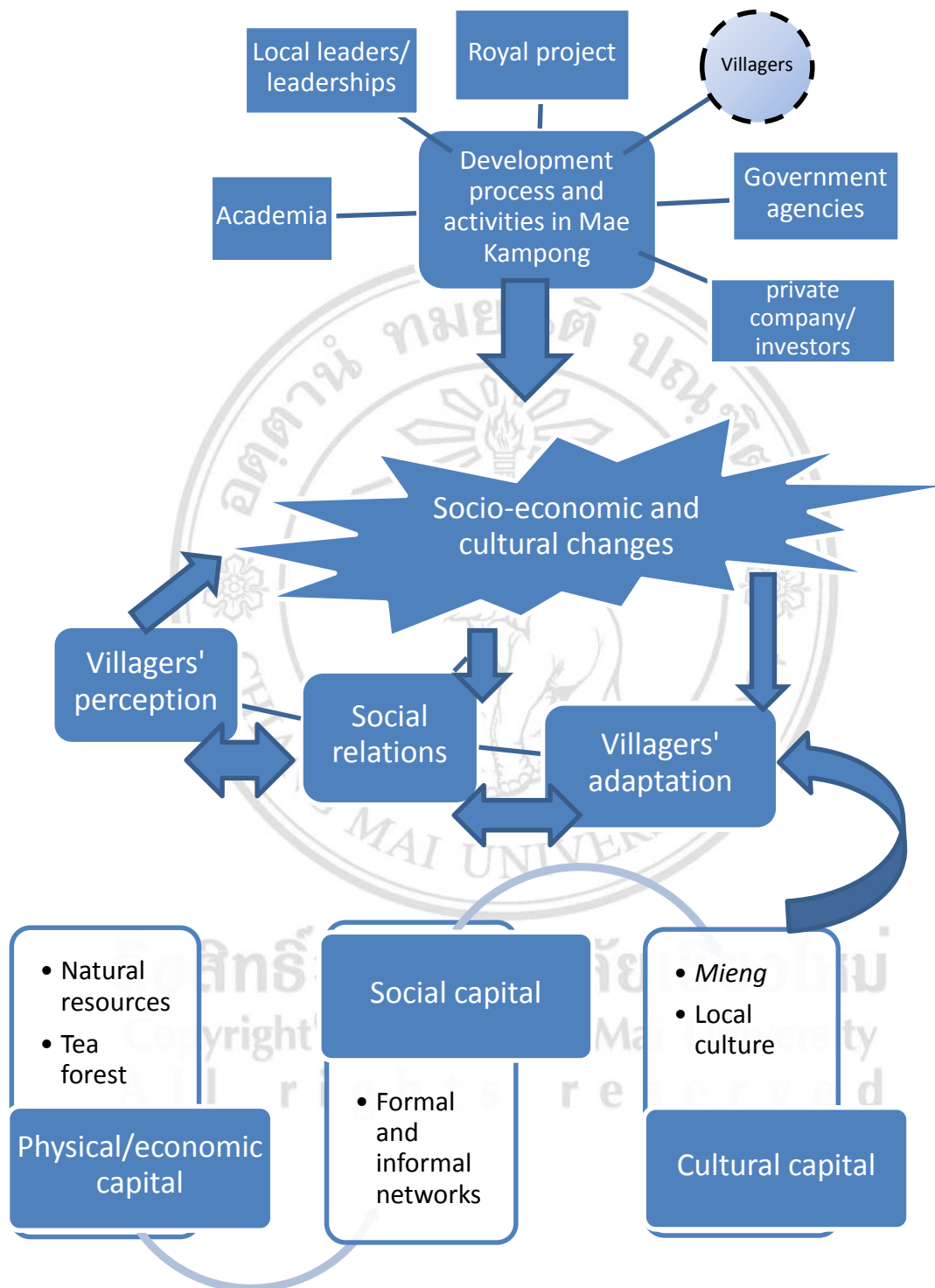
### **1.2.1. Research Questions**

1. How has the culture of Mieng played a role in the contemporary development, and how has the meaning of Mieng been changing in the context of tourism development in Mae Kampong?
2. What are villagers' perceptions of the development of community-based tourism, and how has this development affected social relations among villagers?
3. What are the roles of villagers and leaders in tourism development?

### **1.2.2. Research Objectives**

1. To examine the role of culture of Mieng production and the changing meaning of Mieng in Mae Kampong through the course of development.
2. To investigate the impacts of development and the resultant changes on social relations among villagers.
3. To examine the common villager's level of involvement in the decision-making process of the village and the leadership role of the village leaders.

### 1.3. Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework signifies the focus of my study on the socio-economic and cultural changes in Mae Kampong as a result of the development activities initiated and

operated by various actors. Also, the roles of local villagers in the participation in this development process will be analyzed by this study. Of great importance to this study is how these changes due to development in Mae Kampong will have impacts on the changing meaning of Mieng production and social relations among villagers and on the social cohesion of the community as a whole. It is also important to investigate villagers' perception of the changes happening in the village, and how villagers adapt through the mobilization of existing physical/economic, social, and cultural capitals in the village.

## **1.4 Literature Review**

### **1.4.1 Mae Kampong**

Because of its distinctive features such as Mieng production, hydro-power plant, and Community-based tourism (CBT), Mae Kampong has attracted a number of scholars' attention. Much of debate has been made in terms of small scale energy production and tourism in Thai context so far, and Mae Kampong has been often cited as a successful case. Although no significant case study examining the socio-economic and cultural changes, the village's administrative structure, and future outlook of development in depth has been made, it would be useful for this thesis to discuss the points that were made by the existing works by some scholars who studied about Mae Kampong.

Yaowapa and Chuangchoe's (2009) paper, which was presented in an international tourism conference held in Bangkok aims to bolster the notion of sustainable tourism as an alternative form against the mainstream mass tourism, employing Mae Kampong as a role model of tourist destination community in Thailand. In the paper, the history of Mae Kampong is briefly illustrated and its achievement in the tourism industry, such as TAT's (Tourism Authority of Thailand) most outstanding community-based tourism award and its incorporation into the government's One Tambon One Product (OTOP) program, is hailed as one of the noteworthy cases in Northern Thailand's tourism. However, paying special attention to an economic success of Mae Kampong's tourism makes Yaowapa and Chuangchote ignore comprehensive discussion of the village. In other words,

they miss out examination of cultural elements of the village and deem the tradition of Mieng production as something destined to die out.

In fact, the cultural aspect of Mae Kampong is absent in the paper, making an impression that tourists gather at the village in order to solely explore the nature which happened to be located in what is called Mae Kampong. However, in fact, tourists come to the village with various reasons including the purpose of seeing the villagers' traditional way of life, and here the custom of their Mieng production plays a major role in it. This can be clearly seen in their following statement: *"The community recognized that investing in ecotourism would offer them a new source of income which could replace their traditional Miang income"* (Yaowapa and Chuangchote 2009: 7). From this statement, it can be seen that they think that Mieng production is just a disappearing custom and should be replaced by tourism activities. In order to fully understand the village's socio-economic aspects and to explore a better way of rural development, examining the cultural element of the village is indispensable.

Similar to Yaowapa and Chuangchote are Kontogeorgopoulos, Anuwat, and Varaphorn (2014). In their joint paper, the three scholars clearly state that there are three factors in Mae Kampong's success in tourism: sheer luck, significant external support, and individual leadership within the community (Kontogeorgopoulos et al 2014: 108). According to Kontogeorgopoulos, Anuwat, and Varaphorn, Mae Kampong is fortunate in that it is located only 50 kilometers from the city of Chiang Mai and that the geography of the village with a stream in a steep forested valley enabled it to have the micro hydro-power generators and the village cooperative system, which cultivates a pattern of cooperation and became the basis of Mae Kampong's CBT. Thus, Mae Kampong was "lucky" to begin with; thanks to its geographical circumstances, Mae Kampong was allowed to benefit from the micro-hydroelectricity program and CBT (Kontogeorgopoulos et al 2014: 114-115).

Although it is true that Mae Kampong has a geographical advantage in that it is just 50 km away from the city of Chiang Mai, a major transportation and tourism hub in Northern Thailand, using the word “lucky” is inappropriate and missing the historical background of it. In Mae Kampong, people traditionally helped each other when processing tea leaves into Mieng, eventually creating the sense of cooperation among the villagers. This sense of cooperation fostered by the long-lasting tradition of the village-wide Mieng production laid the basis of hydropower project and in turn that of CBT programs too. Therefore, the word “lucky” is inappropriate. Rather it should be said that the “success” of Mae Kampong’s CBT management was made possible by the community’s tradition of mutual help and various forms of capital. This point will be further discussed in the following chapters.

In addition to the first point of their reasoning of Mae Kampong’s success factors, the second and third points, namely external support and individual leadership within the community, should also be reconsidered. Whereas the dominant theory of CBT often advocates the essentiality of community participation in decision-making process for tourism activities, the authors seem to glorify the external institutions such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the government, Royal projects, and the charismatic role of the former village headman. For this, in their work, sustainability of CBT, which most likely can be achieved by community participation and grassroots empowerment, is set aside. It has to be said that their argument does not pay attention to the facts that the external institutions are often whimsical, and whether a community can get their support depends on a complex power relations; and that they glorify the presence of the strong leadership of the former village headman in Mae Kampong and miss out the common villagers’ role in tourism development.

Komsan and Gruen’s (2012) work, which explored Mae Kampong’s methods of tourism activities, pays particular attention to its souvenir production. Throughout the paper, they emphasized the importance of tourism-induced activities such as handicraft souvenir production based on

the findings that souvenir production can reduce poverty because it requires only unskilled workers and the poor can easily participate in the activity and get the spillover effect, as opposed to the core tourism activities such as homestay, trekking, and cultural show, of which profit only goes into hands of the richer households who have capital for such activities and afford investment into them (Komsan and Gruen 2012: 1). The significance of Mae Kampong's souvenir production business lies in its pro-poor elements that include those who are insured, disabled, and with degraded capability, most of whom are no longer capable of working in the tea farms because of their physical difficulties.

This point made by Komsan and Gruen is significant in that it pays attention to the fact that quite a few of elderly people in Mae Kampong cannot engage in Mieng cultivation anymore because of their physical difficulties, but thanks to its tourism activities they now have alternative sources of income. However, one missing point of their argument is the fact that Mae Kampong has the cooperative fund system that financially supports all the village members. Because nowadays the source of the cooperative mostly comes from remittance of homestay households (a homestay household gets 520 Baht from one visitor, and 170 Baht out of it goes to the cooperative), it has to be said that the affluent households that have facilities for the core tourism activities to accept visitors are making significant contribution to the poorer counterparts. Therefore, the statement that the income from the core tourism activities concentrate at the richer households is a one-sided story and can sound unfair to the rich, who make effort to accept the tourists.

Sasiwimon and Hervik (2014) attempted to examine Mae Kampong's CBT from tourists' perspectives. Paying particular attention to Danish tourists in Mae Kampong, they found that each tourist perceives the CBT contents of Mae Kampong differently. For example, according to the authors, while a 25-year-old tourist reacts to the Mae Kampong's ritual of praying for rain very negatively and deems it an irrational and superstitious practice, another Danish tourist, a mother of two children reacts to the tourism program very

positively because she is open-minded enough to think that everything her kids experience in Mae Kampong's tourism program will broaden their world views and enrich their lives (Sasiwimon and Hervik 2014: 211-212). This insight of Sasiwimon and Hervik's will be useful when thinking of effective tourism programs and for decision-making in the village.

Another scholar who did a research in Mae Kampong from tourists' perspectives is Amnaj (2014). His interest lies particularly in Japanese long-stay tourists in Mae Kampong and the role they play in tourism industry of Thailand. His findings are indicative in examining the socio-cultural aspects of Mae Kampong as a tourist destination community. In fact, a questionnaire survey he carried out in the village indicates that as many as 65 households out of 68 (95.5 per cent) agree to open their forest tea lands to tourists to show how they cultivate tea leaves to the tourists (Amnaj 2014: 180-181). Also, he concludes that Mae Kampong should emphasize things that reflect the identity of Lanna (Northern Thai) culture and the "Mieng way of life" (Amnaj 2014: 191). This statement indicates the author's awareness that tourism destination community should well interact with the tourists by conveying their community identity in order to avoid the "commodification of 'rurality' as a playground of urban dwellers" (Amnaj 2014: 193).

Finally, Mattijs Smith's work in 2014, which focused particularly on Thailand's energy issue taking Mae Kampong as one of a few successful cases of rural communities that maintain micro hydro-power generators as the main source of electric energy, is interesting because he pays much attention to the socio-economic changes that occurred in Mae Kampong. Mattijs says that although the economic success of tourism and the advent of improved quality of infrastructure seem to have dissuaded people from leaving the village, nowadays, in fact, many young people in search of better education and job opportunities leave to big cities and many of them do not want to come back, and this phenomenon makes an aging and shrinking population and the community-wide dependence on tourism and

remittance (Mattijs 2014: 163). Although examining this issue in depth is beyond the scope of this thesis because the phenomenon of outflow of rural population into cities and subsequent issue of aging and shrinking population in rural communities is ubiquitous in many parts of today's Thailand, the statement articulates well the current situation of Mae Kampong.

In addition to the population problem, Mattijs mentions the declining presence of economic and cultural values of Mieng, saying that Mieng fields nowadays are being abandoned and the tendency will keep going (Mattijs 2014: 163). This is currently one of the biggest concerns the people in Mae Kampong have. Indeed, a deputy village head thinks that the level of development Mae Kampong achieved is already enough, and now the villagers should pay attention to maintaining the existing system such as water supply, electricity system and forest management (Mattijs 2014: 163). Mattijs's work is of significance in that his articulation reveals Mae Kampong's current socio-economic situation.

In summary, Mae Kampong drew attention from scholars (see for example Baicha 2003; Nuttane 2003; Somsak 2001) who have interests in eco-tourism as a sustainable and eco-friendly form of economy in search of an alternative model of economic development. In addition, the successful case of the village's micro hydro-power program also draw attention from researchers (Mattijs 2014; Bongkotch and Ratchawihit 2002) who are seeking an alternative way of energy production to tackle various environmental problems.

However, because of the researchers' great interests in particular research areas such as tourism and renewable energy, examination of social, cultural, and economic changes Mae Kampong has been experiencing has not yet been sufficiently carried out. It seems that Mae Kampong has been illustrated by many researchers as a model community in the globalized world which successfully incorporated various egalitarian conceptual schemes, and the analysis of the village's administrative components and

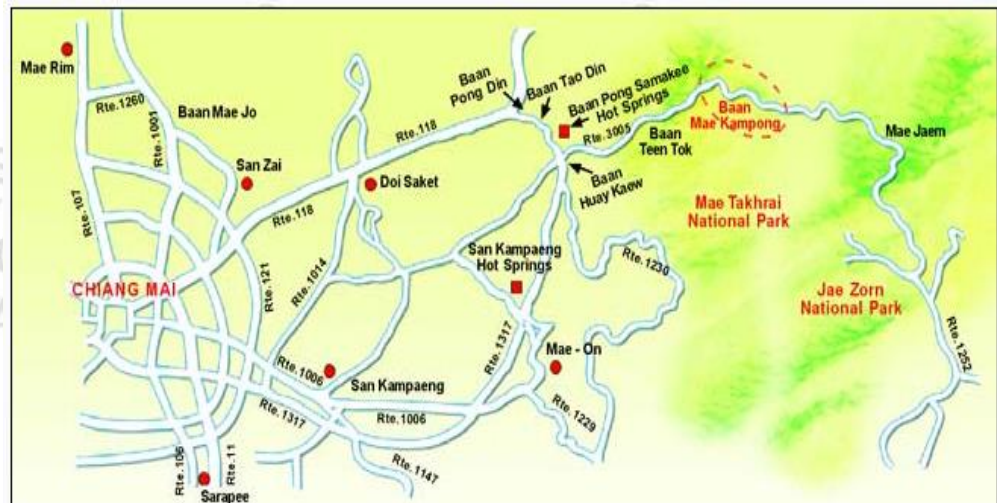


socio-cultural aspects have been missed out. This is a gap I would like to bridge by this thesis because a major objective of my research in Mae Kampong is to examine the socio-cultural changes that occurred in the village over the course of the contemporary development.

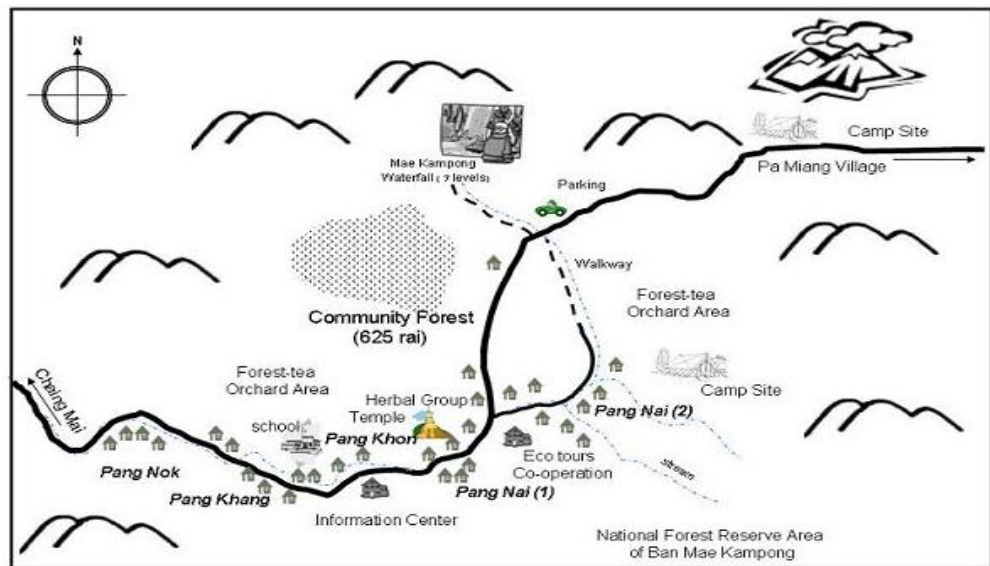
## 1.5 Research Designs and Methods

### 1.5.1 Research Site

My research site is Mae Kampong, village no. 3 of seven villages in Huay Kaew sub-district, Mae On district, Chiang Mai province. It is located at 1,300 meters above sea level, only 50 kilometers away from Chiang Mai city. Currently, the village consists of six clusters, each of which is distanced by a few hundred meters from the other. There are 134 households and 374 people in the village. All six clusters were my research sites. By conducting two-month ethnographic field research in the village, I found that the level of involvement into the tourism activities varies among hamlets; households in some clusters that are close to the center of the village are more keen to accept tourists as homestay visitors while that of clusters on peripheral areas are less active.



Source: <http://www.mae-kampong.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=395992>



Source: [http://www.chiangmai-chiangrai.com/baan\\_mae\\_kampong-high\\_living.html](http://www.chiangmai-chiangrai.com/baan_mae_kampong-high_living.html)

**Figure 1.2: Maps of Mae Kampong**

### 1.5.2 Unit of Analysis

My research's unit of analysis was divided into: 1) individuals; 2) households (both homestay serving households and non-homestay serving households); 3) each section of economic activities (making of pillows stuffed with tea leaves, traditional massage service, honey production, music playing, etc.). I attempted to obtain in-depth information from the villagers, especially from interviewing with individual informants, so as to understand their feelings towards the village's culture, changes, and the future prospect of the village's development. Thus, questions for the individuals as a unit of analysis turned out to be open-ended ones. On the other hand, hearing from members of the groups of economic activities was carried out in more factual basis in order to empirically understand the current situation the villagers are in. In economic groups, both representatives of the groups and common members became my interviewees and the interviews with common members were carried out without the representatives, who are expected to be closely in touch with the

community board's members. This is to ensure the freedom of the common members in the expression of their opinions.

## **1.6 Methods of Data Collection**

### **1.6.1 Interview**

In my data gathering about the changes which have been occurring in Mae Kampong and villagers' perception of the changes, the method of qualitative data gathering is more appropriate since qualitative methods are best used to analyze the depth insight and understandings of the targeted people. I employed the methodology of open-ended interviews. Operating Interviews with individuals was the most important because it is the most appropriate and efficient way to better understand the situation of the village and individual feelings. I interviewed with some 30 people, men and women, the young and the elder (from 15 year olds to 70 and more). The key informants included the former village headmen, who is the most powerful in the village; the village elders who know a lot about the history of the village; young people (as they represent the opinions of the next generations for the future of the village); representatives of each economic activity groups; the manager of a zip line service company, *Flight of the Gibbon*; and the tourists who came to experience the community tourism in Mae Kampong. My research hypothesizes that Mieng incubates sound human relationship and a sense of cooperation among village members. Thus I carried out my research on the premise that the tendency of diminishing presence of Mieng might affect the social relations among villagers and people's identity as village members. I employed in-depth interview to gather villagers' views on these. In order to obtain balanced opinions from the villagers, I categorized the households in Mae Kampong into four groups (Table 1 below) according to the levels of their involvement into Mieng

production and tourism activities (especially homestay service) in order to see if different opinions emerge between villagers whose levels of involvement in Mieng cultivation and tourism activities differ.

**Table 1.1: Types of household to be interviewed**

Household types
1. High level of Mieng cultivation, low level of tourism activities
2. Low level of Mieng cultivation, high level of tourism activities
3. Only Mieng cultivation, no tourism activities
4. No Mieng cultivation, only involve in tourism activities

### **1.6.2 Focus Group**

In order to listen to the opinions from the villagers in different roles comprehensively, I employed the focus group interview method for each different economic group - homestay serving households and non-homestay serving households; pillows stuffed with tea leaves making group; traditional massage group; and coffee production group. In addition, I carried out some easy focus group with different age groups such as those who are 15-25 years old, 26-45 years old, and 45-60 years old and over. The objective was to encourage smooth discussion and to obtain opinions that well reflect different experience of different age groups. This turned out to be of help for me to understand the attitudes of all generations towards Mieng and community development. By dividing the villagers into different groups on the basis of stakeholder, I managed to see various perspectives that reflect their occupational and economic concerns, enabling me to better understand the current situation of the village.

### **1.6.3 Participatory Observation**

In order to familiarize myself with the rural village everyday life in Northern Thailand, participatory observation became of great help to understand the community customs and culture. My participatory observation included any such activities as walking in the community forest, picking up tea leaves, processing the tea leaves into Mieng, Buddhist merit-

making (*tambun*) activities, and encountering the tourists. Especially, experiencing tea leaves picking and processing Mieng contributed to better understanding of the traditional way of life. Since I hypothesized that Mieng had a characteristic of social and cultural capital, it was essential for me to get first-hand experience of Mieng production. I encountered the traditional economic activity that most villagers have been living on.

#### **1.6.4 Questionnaire**

In this research, a questionnaire survey was conducted in order to find the villagers' opinions. The questions in the questionnaire were intended to find their opinions about the village management and the future outlook of the village. Examples of the questions that appeared in the questionnaire are as follows: *The village leaders listen to your opinion or not? If not, why? What do you do?; In your opinion, what Mae Kampong should be like in the future?* For this questionnaire is intended to find the villagers' subjective ideas, the nature of the questions is qualitative and open-ended. A limitation of this questionnaire survey was a low return rate of the questionnaire respondents. In fact, out of 50 copies of the questionnaire papers distributed, I got only 31 back, and I obtained useful answers only from 19 respondents. In spite of the low return rate, some comments given by the 19 respondents were very interesting. Sometimes, people feel hesitant to express their honest opinions in a face-to-face interview. In that sense, this questionnaire helped in unveiling some people's real opinions.

#### **1.7 Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 is about general information of this thesis. It explains background and rational of the study, research questions and objectives, conceptual framework, research site, and research methods.

Chapter 2 focuses on theoretical explanations of ideas and concepts that are used in this thesis to explain the realities of Mae kampong village. The explanation includes some concepts of community studies, Bourdieu's three types of capital, and community

participation and leadership role. This chapter will help readers understand what is happening in Mae Kampong today.

Chapter 3 explains the history of development in Mae Kampong and discusses Mieng as an essential element of the village in terms of economic, cultural, and social dimensions. This chapter emphasizes the importance of Mieng and the changing meaning of it in the context of its tourism development. The significance of Mieng is illustrated in terms of economic, social, cultural capital, and also indigenous knowledge to Mae Kampong villagers.

Chapter 4 examines the villagers' perception of the changes that were brought about by the village's development. This chapter revolves around the real voices from the villagers. Therefore, this chapter is based hugely on subjective ideas of the villagers themselves and attempt to discover Mae Kampong's experience over the course of its development.

Chapter 5 examines Mae Kampong in terms of the people's participation into decision-making and the village's management system. This chapter also identifies the current problems of the village in terms of its management system and implies some countermeasure to the problems.

Chapter 6 concludes and wraps up this thesis by describing the research findings, argument, analytical discussion, limitations of this research, and further recommendations.