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CHAPTER 6

Analytical Discussion and Conclusion

Mae Kampong is in transition, experiencing various changes ever since it started to take the path of contemporary development. This thesis pays attention to the aspects of cultural, economic, and social changes that occurred in Mae Kampong village over the course of the development. This chapter will conclude the thesis with the research findings and argument, analytical discussion, limitations of the thesis, and recommendations.

6.1 Research Findings and Argument

This thesis started with 3 research questions as follows: 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?; and, 3) What are the roles of villagers and leaders in tourism development?

For the first research question, Mae Kampong has experienced a rapid development since 1970s, and the culture of Mieng played a significant role in it. Ever since the foundation of Mae Kampong village, the peoples who have lived there have been engaged in Mieng production. The first contemporary development was brought to the village in the 1970s as Thai government's road building project, which intended to enhance the government's surveillance of the area in order to eradicate the communist activists who were thought to be hiding in that area. In the 1980s, the government decided to build a micro hydro power plant in the village to supply electricity to industrial cities. The installment of the micro hydro power generators was not solely done by the government but by the hands of the villagers themselves too. After the plant had been completed, the management of the generators and redistribution of the

proceeds of the electricity sales became the most important issue to the villagers because the micro hydro power plant was thought to be a common property of the village. For this, some rules for the sake of the plant management were set up, and the village cooperative system was introduced in order to re-distribute the proceeds of the electricity sales among all the villagers.

In 2000, the village formally embarked on its village tourism. Over the course of the tourism development, the villagers have got a lot of business opportunities because of the increasing number of tourists visiting the village. The introduction of tourism made it possible for the villagers to work for homestay, souvenir business, community shops, pillows stuffed with tea leaves making, cafes, Thai massage service, entertainment service such as music and dance show, drinking water business, honey production, and coffee production. Therefore, in light of the enhanced economic opportunity, tourism brought a positive effect to Mae Kampong in an economic sense.

Despite the fact that the economic landscape of Mae Kampong has changed after the involvement into the village tourism, Mieng production continues to be the mainstay of livelihood in Mae Kampong. Although the demand of Mieng is declining, most villagers still gain some income from Mieng production. More importantly, along with the tourism development in the village, Mieng came to play a different role in the village tourism scenes. In fact, the culture of Mieng is now incorporated into the tourism package through demonstration of its production and other activities. Therefore, despite the fact that the economic importance of Mieng is actually declining comparing to the past, Mieng came to subsume the symbolic and cultural meanings that are playing a very important role in the village tourism today.

For the second research question, it was found that individual perception would depend upon such factors as occupations, ages, and places they live. Therefore, for people's different perception of development and the culture of Mieng production, this thesis pays attention to the occupational difference, the spatial difference, and the generational difference as major causes of the difference in people's perception. Also, it was found that the contemporary tourism development would affect the social relations among the villagers.

The people's occupational difference is a main cause as to why different people perceive of the village development differently. For those who are heavily involved in tourism activities, their attitudes towards the development tend to be positive because it is true that the more tourists come, the more benefit they can get. On the other hand, for those who are not heavily involved in tourism activities, the tourism development is something far away.

The spatial difference was seen throughout my interviews; those who live away from the tourist area seem to still put Mieng before tourism-related businesses while those who live in the tourist area are more active in working for tourism businesses and do not care about Mieng production as much as the counterparts do. Although opportunities in tourism businesses are open to anyone in the village, those who get the biggest benefit from the tourism industry is the people who live in the area.

In fact, most homestay households are concentrated in the three clusters, Pang Ton, Pang Nai No.1, and Pang Nai No.2. Naturally, since there are more homestay households, more tourists visit the area, and the people who live in the area get more opportunities in the businesses. Presumably, this fact influences on the people's attitude towards the culture of Mieng production. Therefore, it can be assumed that the difference of economic opportunity to the people caused the difference of the individual perception of the culture of Mieng.

One of the most interesting findings of this research was the generational difference of the villagers' perception of Mieng. For the middle-aged and elderly populace, Mieng production remains very important and is still regarded as their central occupation. Nevertheless, in my interviews, some people in this generation showed some negative attitudes with resigned faces, saying that the arduous labor for Mieng production does not pay off because the selling price of it has been gradually declining. It seems that although they are aware of the importance of Mieng to themselves, they are keeping some distance from Mieng production and trying to see more opportunity in tourism business as an easier way to make a living. On the other hand, what was striking was a 12-year-old girl's comment on Mieng, saying that Mieng is a symbol of Mae Kampong, and in the future, she would like to produce Mieng. For this, at least as far as she is

concerned, it can be said that the significance of Mieng is at least communicated to the younger generations, and the village is likely to keep its identity as a producer of Mieng.

It was found that the social relations among the villagers have been changing through the course of the contemporary development, especially after the village started to embark on tourism in 2000. In the past, people in Mae kampong had a custom of reciprocal labor in cultivating tea leaves, and they let others use some tools to process Mieng for free and gave others some food and fruits for free. However, today, according to informants, the villagers have to pay to others when they ask a favor. It can be inferred that the more the village got tourism development and people got economic opportunity, the more they became individualistic, and the human relations became business-like. Nowadays, many villagers said that the people in the village, especially those who live in the tourist area are competing with each other in order to maximize their gains from tourism business.

For the third research question, it was found that in Mae kampong, the leadership role of the former village headman was strong, and the level of the common villagers' participation remains low. Like elsewhere in Thailand, Mae Kampong is set in the great hierarchy of the government's administrative system, and the current system is based on the great authority of the government. In fact, the former village headman spearheaded various development projects such as homestay service that started in 2000. His leadership got a huge support from various entities such as a sub-district office, TAT, NGOs, and academicians. In fact, his achievement has been hailed by a number of researchers who praise Mae Kampong as one of the most successful cases of rural development in Thailand. Also, he is trusted and respected by the majority of the villagers of Mae kampong. However, because of the great presence of the leader, the role of the common villagers in the decision-making process of village management has been blurred. As far as this research is concerned, it seems that the common villagers are not very keen to play a role in the decision-making process and would not like to take responsibility for the results. This is obvious considering the facts that the members of the village committee have not been changed for many years and most people seem to be happy with the current situation about the village management.

The villagers in Mae Kampong do not have a sheer sense of participation. In fact, in the monthly village meetings, most villagers sit back and just listen to the village headman, and there is little interaction between the village headman and the common villagers. Therefore, it is highly doubtful that Mae Kampong's CBT has achieved a true sense of grassroots participation. Furthermore, through my questionnaire survey, it was revealed that some villagers have negative opinions about the village leaders. Even if only a few people have this kind of negative opinions, their voice must not be ignored in examining the quality of the village's decision-making process and planning process of tourism projects.

6.2 Analytical Discussion

This thesis employs 3 concepts to guide my argument: Pierre Bourdieu's 3 types of capital (economic, cultural, and social capitals), community of meaning, and participatory development and leadership role.

First, in Bourdieu's explanation, social capital (e.g. social network), economic capital (e.g. money), and cultural capital (e.g. educational credentials) form a triangle-shaped relationship in which economic capital transfers into cultural capital, cultural capital in turn transfers into social capital, and again social capital transfers into economic capital. This theory coincides with what has happened in Mae Kampong. In Mae Kampong, cultural capital- the long lasting tradition of Mieng production- built up social capital among the villagers. The social capital in turn laid the foundation for the management of the micro hydro power program and the village tourism program so, creating wealth for the village members.

This thesis focused on the aspects of Mieng as economic, cultural, and social capitals that laid the basis of today's development. For Mae Kampong's success of the micro hydro power plant and the village tourism, the long tradition of its Mieng production in terms of its cultural and social capitals played a very important role. Thanks to the cultural and social capitals that have been harnessed by the tradition of Mieng production, Mae Kampong was able to smoothly benefit from the micro hydro power project. Similarly, the introduction of CBT came smoothly to Mae Kampong because of the above mentioned capitals of the village and the experience of the village-wide management of the micro hydro power plant. Therefore, today's economic success of

Mae Kampong's CBT comes largely from the culture of Mieng production. This is how the culture of Mieng production has been playing its role in the village's contemporary development.

Second, Anthony Cohen's theory of community of meaning maintains that community boundaries can be thought of and are existing in the minds of the community members. In other words, community is constructed out of the symbolic order rather than existing in an objective reality and it is symbolically constructed by the people's consciousness or awareness of reality. What is important is that the community symbol is not something rigid and fixed but is always in the process of transformation with relation to outside the community. Employing this concept, this thesis examined the villagers' perception of the culture of Mieng production and the tourism development. It was found that Mae Kampong's community symbol, which was solely Mieng in the past, is also in transformation. After the village's involvement into the village tourism, Mieng got integrated into the tourism practices. For this, the community symbol of Mae Kampong is becoming the fusion of the traditional Mieng production and newly emerged tourism.

Third, the concept of participatory development and leadership theory indicates that for effective development programs, grassroots participation from community members is essential and community leaders need to work in harmony with the common members. However, In Mae Kampong, it was found that power of the village leaders, especially the former village headman, is quite strong, and the common villagers have less significant role in the village's development and decision-making process. For this, this thesis suggests that employing Mieng more into the tourism practices would make the situation better based on the premise that encouraging the villagers to think how they can make use of the culture of Mieng in tourism activities would their sense of participation and responsibility in the tourism development because the culture of Mieng production is what they are the most proud of as the villagers of Mae Kampong.

In order to enhance a sense of participation among the common villagers, incorporating production of Mieng into tourism would be a good option. For Mieng production is still the most important economic activity and the biggest concern of their everyday life to most villagers, putting Mieng production into tourism programs will induce the

common villager's sense of participation. Therefore, incorporating Mieng into tourism programs has possibility of not only conserving the culture of Mieng but also enhancing the people's sense of participation, and ultimately it can empower the people and the village could proceed to a more self-reliant way of development.

6.3 Limitations

One of the most significant limitations of this research was a time constraint. In fact, the duration of the field research time was only 2 months. Fortunately, having 2 months of time in the field research made it possible to discover various facts such as how Mae Kampong has been taking its path of development and how Mieng has been playing a role in it, how the villagers have perceived of the changes, and how the social relations among the villagers are changing. However, because of the short period of time that was allowed to this research, there was a limit in the quantity of information I was able to obtain. In addition, in terms of development and the changing social relations ever since 2000, when the village officially started its tourism program with the introduction of the homestay service, the final conclusion seems to be an ongoing process. This is because it has been only 16 years, as of today, since the day of its beginning of the village tourism. Therefore, for a thorough examination of Mae Kampong village, especially in terms of the socio-cultural changes that have been occurring in it, there needs to be another research that has a much longer time frame.

Language barrier was also a major constraint I had throughout the research. Although my interpreter, who is also from Northern Thailand, did a great job, it was very difficult for me, a Japanese, to understand the opinions and the feelings of the villagers. Sometimes, my interpreter found it really difficult to translate the nuance of Thai language into English. We tried our best to overcome this difficulty by discussing with each other what my informants spoke every time after I did data collection. In addition, in Thai rural community, people tend to shy away from expressing their true feelings to outsiders. Also, it is common for tourist destination communities like Mae Kampong to have ambivalent social faces, which is known as “front stage” and “back stage” of tourist sites. For these reasons, it was extremely difficult to understand the villagers' true feelings towards various phenomena that have occurred over the course of the contemporary development in the village.

6.4 Recommendations

My findings show that the village leaders are aware that there is a great need of reconsidering the significance of Mieng as its most prominent symbol of the community culture. In fact, the former village headman now receives a consultation with some external organization for better incorporation of Mieng production into the village tourism. The necessity of it is getting more and more urgent for Mae Kampong, which has been experiencing the dynamic encounter with the outside world through its CBT. In fact, it seems that there is a cognitive gap between the villagers and tourists in that while the villagers view their village mainly as the Mieng village, the tourists see the village as a tourist village. Therefore, there is a need for the meaning of the culture of Mieng production to be reconsidered and redefined. For this, it has to be understood that there is no culture impervious to change. If the consumption of Mieng is significantly decreasing and the habit of Mieng savoring is to disappear, there might be a need of integrating Mieng more into the tourism activities so that Mieng can keep its presence even after Mae Kampong turns (if it really happens) completely into a tourism community in the future. In other words, as Cohen stresses, the villagers of Mae Kampong have to reconstruct a new community symbol and the community boundary, synthesizing Mieng and CBT through invention of new Mieng-related products (such as, for example, Mieng flavored chewing gum and Mieng herbal products) that can sell to the tourist who visit Mae Kampong.

In terms of the problem of the changing human relationship among the villagers, incorporating Mieng more into the village tourism might be also able to play an important role. In fact, the incorporation has a possibility of connecting people together because of the elements of Mieng as social and cultural capital. While the people are now involved in the village tourism where individuals tend to pursue their own individual interests, Mieng has worked as a bond between the villagers. As is mentioned, the role of Mieng as a bonding factor is diminishing because of the current decline of Mieng production level in the village. Therefore, by intensifying the presence of Mieng in tourism activities, the villagers can maintain the traditional value of Mieng as cultural and social capital that connect the village members together. It would be important to encourage more Mieng-related activities and products to play a role in tourism activities

in order to keep sound human relations among the villagers and to maintain the social cohesion.

Integrating Mieng into the village tourism programs will also enhance the common villagers' sense of participation. Although tourism is becoming an important village livelihood, Mieng is still the major concern for the villagers of Mae Kampong. Therefore, integrating Mieng more into the village tourism programs will be of great help to get the common villagers participate in decision-making and planning processes of the village tourism programs. While for the common villagers, tourism is a new idea and is often perceived as something that is happening far from them and therefore beyond control of the individuals, Mieng, on the other hand, has a long tradition and is a matter of everyday life for the individual villagers. Integration of Mieng into the village tourism would encourage the common villagers to think more about tourism programs as a matter of their everyday life, discuss with the leader and the village committee, generate their sense of participation, and ultimately contribute to enhancement of the negotiation power with authority such as provincial office and the TAT.

Finally, for scholars to come, it would be highly recommended that Thai native scholars or those who have native levels of Thai language skills from elsewhere in the world carry out researches in a much longer term. Up till now, Mae Kampong has been lively discussed by a number of Thai and foreign scholars. However, the scholars tended to focus too much on their own research interests (such as an income generation issue in rural areas and a search of the role model of tourism development), using Mae Kampong as a site to fulfill their academic interests. For this, most of them have missed more important issues that are occurring in the village, namely negative socio-cultural changes. I honestly would like new scholars to investigate the village more thoroughly, paying attention to the socio-cultural changes, for the sake of the better development of Mae Kampong village.