



Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences

journal homepage: <http://kjss.kasetsart.org>



Construction of social space in Thai hill tribe ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet province

Ogama Jakae, Prasong Tanpichai, Apichart Jai-aree*

Department of Human and Community Resource Development, Faculty of Education and Development Science, Kasetsart University, Kamphaengsaen Campus, Nakhon Pathom 73140, Thailand

Article Info

Article history:

Received 25 October 2017

Revised 30 April 2018

Accepted 24 July 2018

Available online 9 August 2018

Keywords:

ethnic identity,
marginalization,
migration,
social space construction,
Thai hill tribe

Abstract

The main purposes of this research were to study the migration, marginalization and construction of social space of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet province. The key informants were 70 people who were mainly Hmong, Mien, Karen, Lahu, LiSu, and Lua, with five government officers and five from the Thai lowland. The research employed a qualitative methodology, using an interpretation paradigm. Data were obtained from interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. A phenomenological presentation was used to conceptualize emigration, marginalized people, and the construction of social space. It was found that the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups emigrated from Yunnan province to Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. Eventually, the government did not allow them to live in the forests and they were moved to lowlands without proper management. There, they lacked some of basic human needs, had no agricultural land, and their dignity was compromised. However, they joined in the construction of social spaces by using a new dimension by being good citizens. These social spaces include social and cultural, economic, educational, political, and natural resource and environmental dimensions. Despite adversity, the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups could construct their social space by adapting their new identity in the context of Thai society.

© 2018 Kasetsart University. Publishing services by Elsevier B.V.

Introduction

Free Economy Development is the main power driving Thai society to face the rapid, dynamic, and complex social and cultural changes due to globalization. However, the majority of people could not adjust to change (Kanchanaphanta, 2008, p. 6). About one million people live in the northern and western country which is the mountain zone. Forest management using land rotation or short planting is applied in cropping. Most people and

government officers consider deforestation as destroying the upstream forest or burning the forest. Thus, ethnic bias came about, and a law was created to protect the forest and it was declared as National Parks. As a result, the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups, who were living in the forest, migrated from the area (Dutta, 2008, p. 66). The troubling issue of the Thai hill tribe ethnic group was dismissed in Kamphaeng Phet province. They were evicted from the forest areas to the lowlands by the government. The migration of people was not taken care of by the government, which caused the Thai hill tribe ethnic group to become marginalized. As a result, changes in society, traditions and culture, education, economy, government, and environment posed threats to them. The differences in power relations between the Thai hill tribe ethnic group and the government led to

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: feduacj@ku.ac.th (A. Jai-aree).

Peer review under responsibility of Kasetsart University.

marginalization, displaced situations, and insufficient agricultural land. Some of their basic needs were not met. They do not have agricultural lands, and their dignity is compromised. They do not have fundamental rights and freedom. They cannot apply for administrative jobs in the lowland area because they do not have ID cards. They lack stability in life.

This research focused on studying the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups who were affected by the Thai government policies and the pressures they faced, such as creating their social space, and developing their economy and culture. The construction of social space for a new life and released marginalization becoming cohabitation in the multiculturalism style and can stay with human dignity are necessary to live a stable life. The purpose of this research was to study the migration and marginalization of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups and the construction of social space of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups in Khlong Lan district in Kamphaeng Phet province.

Literature Review

Immigration Theory

Transnational migration is the movement of a large number of people across the border from a country in which they are citizens to reside in another country to live for a long time such as one year or more (Chantavanit, 2000, p. 14). Migration is a manifestation of the movement of displaced people, in an international and Thailand, who have lived out of their countries from two or more countries for a variety of reasons. These people have feeling positive and building their new community similar to their previous community by adapting their cultures and traditions.

The Ethnic Groups Theory

The hill tribe ethnic groups are different people from the mass people because there are differences of background, language, tradition, and culture (Burutphatana, 1983; Ramitanonta, 1993; Satsanguan, 2002). The way of life disconnects with the border of any states but the immigrant spends on remembering from the past to the future (Gupta & Ferguson, 1999; Jenkins, 2002). In addition, their identity of ethnic groups were still beyond the power state.

The Marginalization Theory

The ethnic groups or the minority groups were completely overwhelmed by the mass people of the country. They have abandoned some of culture identity; however, they have unaccepted from society (Leepreecha, 1998; Lueang-Aramsri, 1998; Whankaew, 2007). The marginalization of the ethnic groups and its process can occur isolation, and they have related with groups in the society.

The Social Space Theory

The existence with the social complexity and its dynamic makes us re-understand in the racist concept,

nationalism, tribalism, and ethnicity. These concepts had to be seen under the political context about its identity which the migrants from minority groups that had nationality, ethnicity, race. They can use their identity for the construction of social space by narrative, culture and their memories (Chareonsin-olan, 2000; Santasombat, 2005). In addition, their rites were in the construction of a new identity and social space by practicing and adaptation for overwhelming and marginalizing (Feungfusakul, 2003; La-ongpliew, 2003; Mitchell, 1994).

Methods

The participants in the study were members of Thai hill tribe ethnic groups living in Khlong Lan district in Kamphaeng Phet province. They had been pushed from the highlands to the lowlands by the government. Despite their marginalization, these people could still construct their own social space.

Key Informants

There were 70 key informants: 60 were members of ethnic groups (Hmong, Mien, Karen, Lahu, LiSu and Lua); five were not members of the ethnic groups but were government officers that had a role in the development of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups in Klong Lan district; and five were not members of the ethnic groups from Thai lowland in Klong Lan district, Kamphaeng Phet province which is the lower north of Thailand.

Data Collection

Interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations were conducted to collect data. The field research consisted of three phases: 1) examining the immigration of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups (23 of the informants were interviewed from August 2015 to November 2015); 2) examining the group's marginalization (23 of the informants were interviewed from December 2015 to March 2016); and 3) examining the construction of their social space in Kamphaeng Phet province (10 participants were involved in the focus group discussion from June 8, 2016, while 14 were interviewed and were involved in participant observations from April 2016 to December 2016). The government officials were interviewed and involved in the focus group discussion because they had adequate knowledge of the ethnic groups. Hence, some information regarding the migration and marginalization of the ethnic groups was obtained from the government officials.

Data Analysis

This study analyzed the data qualitatively, using content analysis of the data collected. This was done by separating the contents and the units, and then assigning them group meaning. Finally, the study described the ethnic groups' general experiences and the patterns of their experiences. The analysis was done in four steps: 1) describing phenomena, 2) searching for the core of the phenomena, 3)

clarifying the phenomena, and 4) interpreting the phenomena and presenting the qualitative data with illustrations.

Results

The discussion of the results of this study is divided into three parts: 1) the migration of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups, 2) the marginalization of the combined group, and 3) the construction of the social space of the group.

Migration of the Thai Hill Tribe Ethnic Groups

The Thai hill tribe ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet are the Mongoloid (Chinese–Tibetan). They migrated from the southern parts of Myanmar, China and Laos, and Northern Thailand. The Tibetan groups of Myanmar are the Karen, Lahu and Lisu who were influenced by Tibet. The earlier Chinese were influenced by the culture from China because they came from Guangzhou, Yunnan (Young, 1962). The migration of many ethnic groups who came from China and Myanmar happened because of natural and man-made disasters in 1816. The first Karen migrated from Myanmar to Klong Lan district and settled in Mooban Namtok (water fall village) 200 years ago. The Hmong migrated from Tak province in 1975 and followed by the Lisu migrated from Tak province in 1976. The Mein and the Lahu migrated from Chiang Rai province in 1985. From 1978 to 1981, the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups migrated to Doi Umphang, Klong Lan and Mae Wong from where the government officials understood that they were a hill tribe brigade who had escaped illegally from their city. In 1982, the government issued a Royal Decree for the forest of Khlong Lan, Kamphaeng Phet to be a National Park as well as Mae Wong National Park–Mae Pern in Nakhon Sawan province. In 1984, by Royal Decree, 15 villages were declared of the Mein, Lahu, Hmong, Lisu, and Akha with a population of 35,000. They were stigmatized by the government and they encroached on the forest, destroying forest and streams and their shifting cultivation caused environmental problems. From 1984 to 1986, the government officers of the Provincial Security Division of Kamphaeng Phet ordered the hill tribe people to come down to the plain of Khlong Lan district in Kamphaeng Phet province without the provision of legal areas for their housing and farms. This caused them to become marginalized in Thai society.

“...In 1945, World War 2 was started by Japan, their parents settled in Fang district, Chiang Mai province who migrated to the lower north of Thailand. They escaped from the war because they feared the soldiers. From 1947 to 1957, their parents lived in the forest called Doi Muser of Tak province growing opium to sell to the government. They had an opium trading document. There were factories of opium for smoking. Next, it was burned by the Thai government and Doi-rice was planted, and pigs were raised instead of growing opium ...”

(Manomai, personal interview, August 23, 2015)

Marginalization of the Group

The hill tribe ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet participated in the Thai development process overseen by the Thai government officials, especially in promoting cultural tourism. However, it turned out to be a distraction for them. They were treated as products for the tourists. This marginalization influenced the individuals whose dignities were affected.

“...When I saw what happened to them I felt pity because the government never provided for them brought about by their forced migration. Evacuation centers were not provided, so they became beggars, making them more marginalized and dissatisfied. They also had no immigration documents so they migrated to their relatives' villages without informing government officers, whose responsibilities include surveying and giving them Thai licenses that were not Thai National ...”

(Karaket, personal interview, March 13, 2016)

Figure 1 shows the hill tribe ethnic groups who migrated. They did not have enough food to live. They decided to migrate to places more suitable for planting, which were peaceful, and remote.

Construction of the Social Space of the Group

It was found that there were a variety of relationships. The social space construction of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet province was a result of the strong relationship between the government sector and the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups. The social space construction of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups consisted of: 1) the dimension of their culture, with beliefs in Catholicism and Protestantism, celebrations of every hill tribe ethnic group, Karen music and weaving, Mein embroidery craft, drawing clothes made of wax (Otocha), and Hmong musical instruments; 2) the economic dimension; they utilized their traditional wisdom and identity for a living such as forging knives by the Hmong, trading, with government officers and working in the private sector, silverware handicraft, Khantoke handicraft, the wicker and bamboo chairs of the Lahu ethnic group, farming, selling garlands, and working as employees. The Hmong traded around the country while the Lahu sold garlands at road intersections; 3) the educational dimension, with Roman Catholicism meaning the children learnt in Christian schools, so that their social status was raised by education and the qualified people were hired to work as government officers; 4) the political dimension, as the Lahu submitted a letter to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit to allow them to live in *Ban Lek Nai Pa Yai* Royal Initiated Project (a little house in the big woods, H.R.H. Queen Sirikit Borommarachininat). The political dimensions also include negotiations with the political government sector, adaptation and presenting themselves to be good citizens in society, their faith in the religion of the monarchy, the presentation of a good image, and their contribution by participation on activity days at the local and national

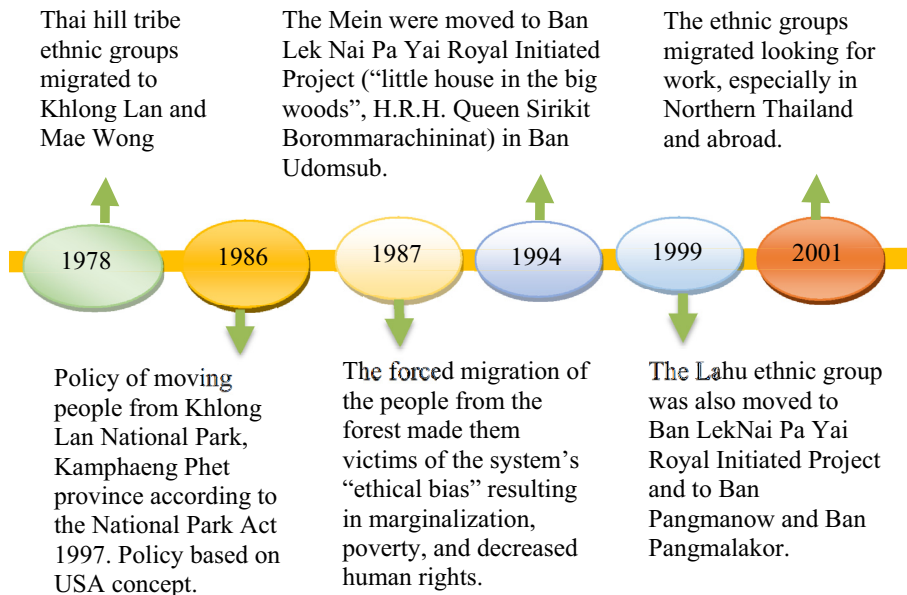


Figure 1 Marginalization of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups

level; and 5). The resource and environmental dimension by planting a teak forest within the *Ban Lek Nai Pa Yai* Royal Initiated Project in Kamphaeng Phet province.

Discussion

The results from this study showed the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet province found that their migration was disrupted by Thai lowland people who traded with them based on dishonesty. Some government officers stayed with them without paying for facilities and services (Chantavanit, 2000, p. 14) and the migration was a result of the mass emigration of the population from their own country. The migration problems could be traced back to two causes: natural disasters and man-made disasters. Moreover, there was voluntary migration and forced migration. According to Krachachan (2007, pp. 312–318), the marginalization was based on old fashioned ethnic traditions such as ghost worship. From 1594 to 1614, the Siamese high classes published their writings on ethnic exploration. In 1579, the word “hill tribe (Chao Khao)” was used for the first time, with negative connotations. Worshipping ghosts was considered illogical and unscientific.

After World War II, the image of the tribe was associated with the communist disaster, and prejudice against the ethnic groups surfaced. The image of the hill tribe was associated with national insecurity and deforestation. On the other hand, the hill tribe ethnic groups were treated as products of tourism for the benefit of the government. The marginalization came from both exploitation and rejection (Phomphaukphing, 2014, p. 154). It was found that the government was against the idea of communism and used violence against suspected sympathizers who joined the Communist party in Thailand. It became the “Battle Day”

(Siang Puen Taek Day) and the government decided to limit the political power and to suppress and control the people who were against such a political ideology (Tsing, 1993, p. 28). It was found that the Meratus people in Indonesia were marginalized politically and they made the social space between the Meratus and the Indonesia government power center. These spaces were constructed as a result of the government forcing the people who needed the resources. The government could order, control politics, economy, culture, religion, and establish their righteousness over the ethnic groups. Moreover, Keawthong (2009) found that the social change by the ethnic groups within the community was based on internal and external factors. These were the reasons for their quality of life and environment in the community of Ban Wang Mai after they migrated to the present area.

To demonstrate the diversity in each dimension of the construction of social spaces found in this study, the dimensions are divided into five parts:

First is the social and cultural dimension. The Thai hill tribe ethnic groups celebrate the new year festival, cultural tourism, ethnic music, weaving clothes and Karen basketry, handicraft, silverware and Mein embroidery, drawing designs on clothes using bees-wax and the musical instruments of the Hmong. Kittasangkha and Arvon (2009) found that the social space cultural construction for tribal culture in the Chiang Rai flower festival was organized in a specific zone, the wisdom of the Lanna Sala in Chiang Rai and the tribal culture exhibition through their performances and their lifestyle. The lifestyles of these nine ethnic groups (Thai Lue, Thai Yuan, Karen, Parong, Thai Yai, Mien, Hmong, Phu Tai and Akha) made them proud. Second is the economic dimension; where the wisdom of identity was that Hmong’s ancient knife, handmade silverware,

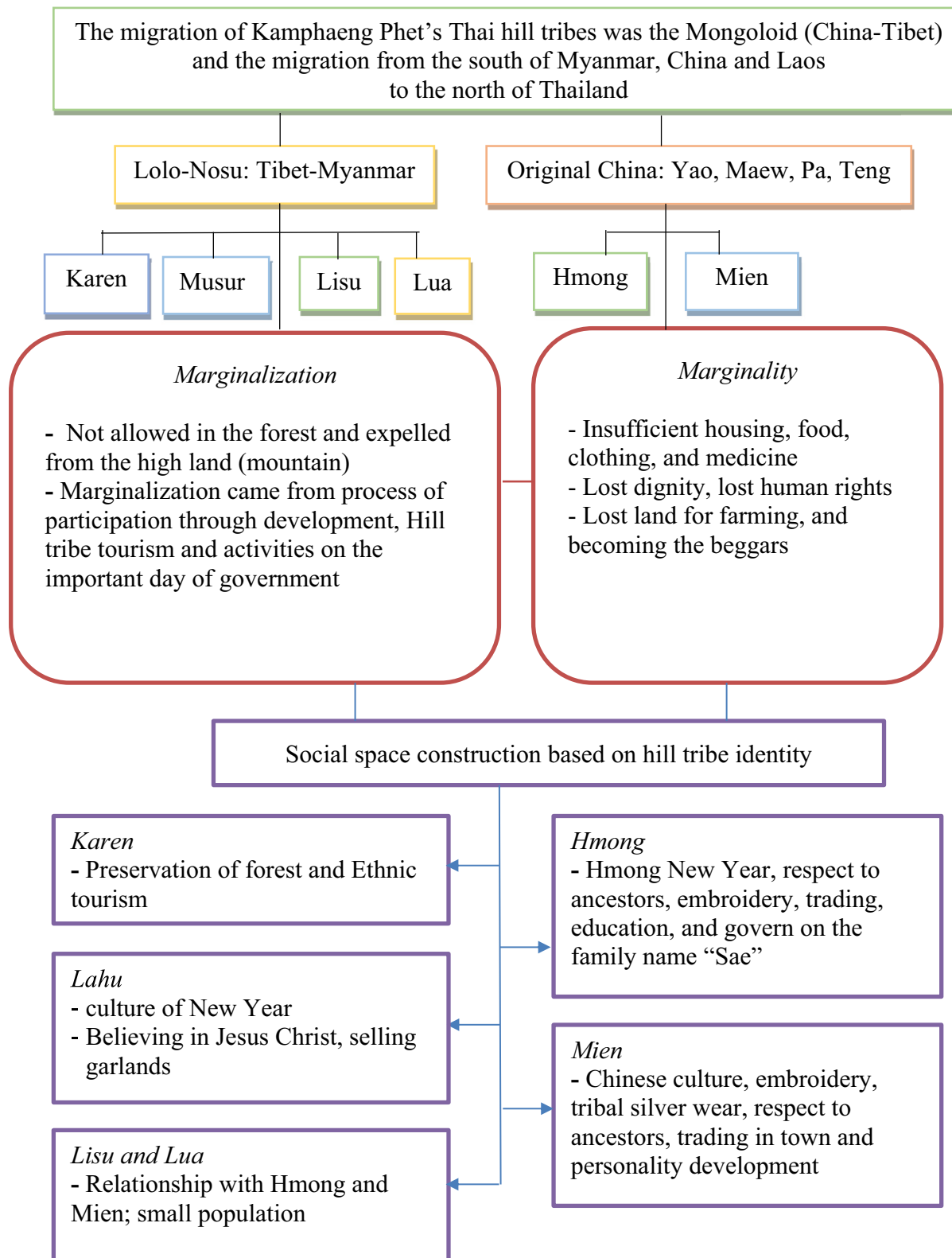


Figure 2 Social space construction

handmade Khantoke, rattan and bamboo chairs. Third is the educational dimension, where Christianity provided for the children to study in Christian schools, and according to Buadaeng (2014) that education was able to raise them up in the society, made them accepted and led to them working in the government sector. However, the Karen ethnic group began to change by adapting Buddhist and Christian beliefs in their relationships. The combination of their old beliefs and their religion helped improve their society. Fourth is the political dimension. Foreexample, the Lahu submitted a letter to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit to allow them to live at the Ban Lek Nai Pa Yai Royal Initiated Project. The political dimensions also include the negotiations with political government sectors, adapting and presenting themselves to be good citizens in society, adopting the religion of the monarchy, and the presentation of a good image (Borudieu, 1989, pp. 14–25) such as by participation in activity days at the local and national level. Lastly is the resource and environmental dimension by planting a teak forest within the Ban Lek Nai Pa Yai Royal Initiated Project in Kamphaeng Phet province.

The local people had to rely on their own capital and labor for each project so that they had to know what relationship to have with whom and what was worth fighting for. The social space construction both nothing deprecation and confrontation with the government directly, the rejection of identity from the powerful groups around them made their identity reproduced and their relationship with the powerful groups reconstructed smoothly La-ongpliew (2003, pp. 156–168). Additionally, Lom-on (2002) found that Kmu people constructed their social space by preserving forests, believing in Buddhism, and reconstructing their identity and tribalism clearly. They also had more power in their new spaces that were identified through tourism and culture such as the Kmu's New Year's tradition. Additionally, according to Borudieu (1989), the construction of the social space for the new lifestyle of the Thai hill tribe ethnic groups in Kamphaeng Phet was based on the principle of differences that included economic, cultural, and symbolic aspects. The overall findings on the migration and marginalization are provided in Figure 2.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The results of the study showed that some ethnic groups migrated from Yunnan, southern China to the north of Thailand. Some hill tribe ethnic groups migrated due to communism in Phetchabun, Nan, Tak, Chiang Rai and Loei provinces. They lived in the lowland, and together with the Mein and Hmong, stayed in a refugee center in Nan province. They moved to Kamphaeng Phet and became marginalized. They became a threat to the government, whose officials claimed the hill tribe ethnic groups planted opium. They migrated to Khlong Lan National Park because they were taxed out of opium planting. The government forced them to relocate their farms but they were given no facilities by the government during the first period. They lacked bargaining power or education. They did not have land to plant. They became poor and marginalized; however, they could construct

their social space by adapting their new identity in the context of Thai society. The male Mein made silver handicraft, the females made embroidery, the young generation traded downtown. They planted mono-agricultural crops, some went to work in farming in the United States. The Lahu ethnic group respect Christianity and Buddhism. The Hmong, Mien and Lisu respect their ancestors, by observing conservative rituals, dedicating their acquired merits to their dead ancestors and celebrating the New Year in a Chinese way. They were eventually accepted into society and could enjoy government services by being good and clean-living. Their education led them to jobs in the government sector. They were self-governing as shown by the family name "Sae". Their representative leader had a political position. All these factors led to the government allocating budget for their community development. Further studies should focus on the process of ethnic group identity for supporting sustainable cultural heritage tourism. Moreover, more studies should be done on the networking of the ethnic groups to sustain the construction of their social space. Finally, researchers or related organizations should study the social capital of the ethnic groups, such as hill tribe silverware, embroidery, rattan and bamboo basketry and their culture to help develop human resources and their communities.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

The FY 2017 Thesis Grant for Doctoral Degree Student was granted by the National Research Council of Thailand, who kindly sponsored this research. I would like to especially express my deep appreciation to the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) Human Resources Development Project, Humanities and Social Sciences for Outstanding Academic Performance of Thailand 2014.

References

- Borudieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1), 14–25.
- Buadaeng, K. (2014). *Religious spaces and the self-reidentification of migrants in the Thai–Burmese borderlands*. Bangkok, Thailand: Thailand Research Fund. [in Thai]
- Burutphatana, K. (1983). *Minorities with national security*. Bangkok, Thailand: Thaiwattanapanit. [in Thai]
- Chantavanit, S. (2000). Nationalism of Siamese Chinese's identity in the beginning of the 20th century. In P. Vajarasthira (Ed.), *China global changing*. Bangkok, Thailand: Asian Research Center for Migration, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University. [in Thai]
- Chareonsin-olan, C. (2000). *Development discourse: Power, knowledge, truth, identity and otherness*. Bangkok, Thailand: Researches and Books Center, Krirk University. [in Thai]
- Dutta, K. (2008). *Convention handbook of elimination of racial discrimination in all forms*. Bangkok, Thailand: Cross Cultural Foundation and Institute of Asian Human Rights. [in Thai]
- Feungfusakul, A. (2003). *Identity: Reviewing theory and conceptual framework*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Chiang Mai University. [in Thai]

- Gupta, A., & Ferguson, J. (1999). Beyond culture: Space, identity and the politics of difference. In A. Gupta, & J. Ferguson (Eds.), *Culture, power, place: Exploration in critical anthropology* (pp. 1–29). Durham, UK: Duke University Press.
- Jenkins, R. (2002). *Pierre bourdieu*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Kanchanaphanta, A. (2008). *A multiculturalism in its context of social and cultural transition*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: The Regional Center of Social Sciences and Sustainable Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University. [in Thai]
- Keawthong, S. (2009). *Factors affecting social change in the community under hill tribes migration project: A case study of Ban Wangmai, Wangnue district, Lampang province* (Unpublished master's thesis). Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai. [in Thai]
- Kittasangkha, M., & Arvon, C. (2009). *Ethnic relations of the mekong river: View dynamic through the local academic*. Chiang Rai, Thailand: Mekong Region Chiang Rai Rajabhat University. [in Thai]
- Krachachan, P. (2007). *Creation an image of hill tribe ethnic in Thai society between 1877 and 1977* (Unpublished master's thesis). Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. [in Thai]
- La-ongpliew, V. (2003). *The marginalization and social space construction of migrants: A case study of Dara-ong in Chiang Dao district* (Unpublished master's thesis). Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai. [in Thai]
- Leepreecha, P. (1998). Hmong ethnic group and drug problem. *Journal of Social Science*, 11(1), 136–163. [in Thai]
- Lom-on, T. (2002). *Social space construction of Kmu in Viangkaen district under marginalization* (Unpublished master's thesis). Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai. [in Thai]
- Lueang-Aramsri, P. (1998). The hill tribe discourse. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1), 92–129. [in Thai]
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Landscape and power*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Phomphaukphing, N. (2014). *Social space construction of Phutai developers* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Khon Kean University, Khon Kean. [in Thai]
- Ramitanonta, J. (1993). *Culture and diversity of biology*. Bangkok, Thailand: Local Development Institute. [in Thai]
- Santasombat, Y. (2005). *Power, space and ethnic identities: Cultural politics of nation-state in Thai society*. Bangkok, Thailand: Thailand Research Fund. [in Thai]
- Satsanguan, N. (2002). *Family institute of ethnic groups in bangkok: Case study of Vietnamese* (Research Report). Bangkok, Thailand: Chulalongkorn University. [in Thai]
- Tsing, A. L. (1993). *Communities and conservation: Histories and politics of community-based natural resource management*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Whankaew, S. (2007). *Marginalization*. Bangkok, Thailand: Department of Sociology, National Research Council of Thailand. [in Thai]
- Young, G. (1962). *The hill tribes of Northern Thailand*. Bangkok, Thailand: Thai-American Audiovisual.