



# Building of networks to revive the lifestyles and pass on local cultural knowledge heritage of Thai hill tribes for promotion of cultural tourism in Kamphaeng Phet

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## Abstract

The objectives of this research were to synthesize promotion guidelines and apply research findings in developing cultural tourism on the cultures of the different Thai hill tribes in Kamphaeng Phet. The study had a qualitative design with primary informants consisting of six Thai hill tribes. Data collection was done by interviews and group discussions. Data analysis relied upon processes for interpreting and verifying the reliability of data by utilizing the triangulation technique. Data are presented in line with anthropological research principles. The research found Thai hill tribe people living with new lifestyles as Christians in the Lahu tribe while the Hmong, Mien and Lisu tribes practiced the rite of honoring ancestral spirits, conservative rituals. Revival of the lifestyles and passing on of the local knowledge heritage of Thai hill tribes consisted of the following three steps: (1) Creation of acceptance on the individual level through adaptation to social environments and personal development, while overcoming the status of being a subculture; (2) Building relationships on the group level with establishment of relationship groups; and (3) connecting relationships for acceptance on the network level by utilizing social and cultural capital. The promotion guidelines and application of the research findings in cultural tourism on the cultures of Thai hill tribes consisted of the following: (1) the development of model lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage among Thai hill tribes through cultural tourism; (2) experimenting with the use of innovations; and (3) evaluation of results from experimenting with the use of innovations.

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## Introduction

Thai hill tribes are groups of people who have long-established relationships in Thai society. They differ

among groups in terms of culture, tradition and ways of living. In total, there are 56 groups distributed in 67 provinces across the different regions of Thailand with a total of approximately 6,100,000 people or about 9.68 percent of the entire national population. Their lifestyles are diverse according to their economic, social, traditional statuses and adaptations to their natural resources, geographies and societies in which they live (Department

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of Social Development and Welfare, 2002). The development of Thai hill tribes over the past 50 years has occurred primarily under the concept of “collective policy”, whether in terms of border security, drug problems, deforestation, shifting cultivation or population increase rate reduction. Overall, however, past Thai hill tribe development results consisted of improved livelihood and quality of living for Thai hill tribe people, including negative impacts from development Mingthipon and Limseri (2009) and many remaining problems faced by ethnic groups such as lack of rights and uncertainties regarding their place of living, lack of legal individual status, and lack of security and balance. In addition, most ethnic group members remain poor with significant inequalities in regards to income distribution, and the overall development strategies and guidelines set by various agencies frequently continue to lack clear goals toward structured collaboration and have management weaknesses (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to plan and take action in an integrated manner to produce holistic solutions to the existing problems. Thai hill tribe people of the Hmong, Mien, Lahu and Lisu tribes living in Kamphaeng Phet originated from the migration of large numbers of tribes across China and Myanmar following natural disasters and human threats. The tribes migrated to the lower northern region and were impacted by social and cultural developments (Jakae, 2019). The ethnic groups in these areas passed on and preserved their tribes’ local cultural knowledge heritage in their daily living through behaviors, expressions, knowledge, skills, tools and inventions through cultural areas and congregations in response to environmental conditions and to make a living, while improving themselves. Although modern society and cultures have changed, the cultural wisdom of Thai hill tribes has not been researched. Furthermore, the building of networks to revive the lifestyles has not been established because some lifestyles are culturally dominated. The inheritance of cultural wisdom has not systematically been recorded for storage as written data with information technology so that the departments involved can use the data for cultural tourism and improved quality of life.

Therefore, it was necessary for this research to establish a network for reviving the lifestyles and passing on the local cultural knowledge heritage of ethnic groups living in Kamphaeng Phet in order to promote and apply the research findings on local cultural knowledge heritage in the development of cultural tourism on the cultures of Thai hill tribes. The purposes of this research were to study the lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage of Thai hill tribes, establish a network for reviving traditional lifestyles,

pass on the local cultural knowledge heritage of Thai hill tribes, synthesize promotion guidelines and apply the research findings for developing cultural tourism based on the cultures of Thai hill tribes living in Kamphaeng Phet.

## Literature Review

### *Social Network Building Concept*

Social network building is a connection of groups of people or organizations consenting to exchange news or share in activities by organizing network structure with equal freedom based on respect for rights, trust and generosity for one another. The main issue of the abovementioned definition is that network members’ relationships must be consensual. Activities in networks must be equal or have exchanges. Network membership must not have effects on the personal freedom or identity of any person or organization. In building networks to have a shared vision, members must see future purposes in the same vision, have perception and understanding in the same direction and a goal to move forward together. A shared vision will give energy to the driving process and unity while helping scale back conflicts from different opinions. On the contrary, if some members have visions or goals in conflict with the network’s visions or goals, the aforementioned group member’s behaviors will be different from practice guidelines shared by network members (Daopiset, 2011; Inwang & Srithongpim, 2017). As previously stated, network building is the connection of groups of people or organizations consenting to share news or activities. In network building: (1) relationships between network members must be consensual; (2) activities in networks must be equal or involve exchanges; and (3) membership in networks must have no effect on the freedom or identity of the people or organizations involved (Ponsri, 2017).

### *Cultural Heritage Concept*

This concept is the preservation of true cultural heritage in that the inheritance of cultural heritage should be preserved and local cultural heritage should be inherited to promote and use research findings on cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage consists of immaterial cultural expressions in a diverse representation of living human heritage and the most important vehicle of cultural diversity (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2000). Cultural heritage is a major factor in creating and inheriting gender roles and identity, which is important for gender equality. Cultural heritage enables society to inherit values and norms while creating

expectations related to the gender and sexual identity of community members (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017).

### *Cultural Tourism Concept*

Cultural tourism is traveling to a local place to seek new experiences and learn about the culture of that area and attractive local identities in every area such as language, architecture, tradition, ancient sites and artifacts. These attractions pull tourists to that area. More importantly, cultural tourism supports mutual benefit (Rodtassana, 2014), recognizes the importance of economic, social and environmental sustainability, and adheres to the principle of causing minimal impact on the environment (Tongpeng, 2011).

### **Methodology**

This research employed a qualitative research methodology as follows:

#### *Key Informants*

This research used purposive random sampling. The informants were six Thai hill tribes with unique lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage passed on to the present. These groups consisted of the Hmong, Mien, Karen, Lahu, Lisu and Lua tribes. There were 60 subjects in total. As for research instrumentation, data for research were collected by using the following instruments: (1) *Interview Form*: This consisted of a semi-structured interview form containing pre-specified questions. Informants were asked to tell stories in response to their questions while the interviewer made audio recordings, took written notes and took photographs. The questions covered backgrounds, lifestyles, living conditions, cultures, traditions and local cultural knowledge heritage; and (2) *Group Discussion Questionnaire*: This consisted of questions designated for the purpose of collecting data during group discussions for brainstorming the ideas of participants in two key areas as follows: (1) building of networks for reviving lifestyles and passing on the local cultural knowledge heritage; and (2) guidelines for promoting cultural tourism on the cultures of Thai hill tribes.

#### *Data Collection*

The researcher used mixed methods to gather data in order to obtain in-depth and accurate data. The data collection procedures were as follows: (1) In-depth

interviews of community elders and thinkers about the lifestyles and passing on of the local cultural knowledge heritage of Thai hill tribes living in Kamphaeng Phet (35 of the informants were interviewed from August 2018 to November 2019); and (2) Workshops and group discussions covering the following two key issues: (2.1) building of networks for reviving lifestyles and passing on the local cultural knowledge heritage; and (2.2) guidelines for promoting cultural tourism on the cultures of Thai hill tribes living in Kamphaeng Phet (25 of the informants were interviewed from December 2019 to March 2020).

#### *Data Analysis*

The present research used descriptive analysis for data analysis by describing data and raising examples of statements made by informants alongside empirical evidence in the form of tables, maps and illustrations and presentation of data in a descriptive format. For protection of the rights of informants, the researcher tightened procedures and processes to prevent violations of the participants' rights to privacy.

### **Results**

The discussion of the results of this study is divided into three parts: (1) Lifestyles and Local Cultural Knowledge Heritage of Ethnic Groups; (2) Building of Networks for Reviving the Lifestyles and Passing on the Local Cultural Knowledge Heritage of Thai hill tribes; (3) Synthesis of Promotion Guidelines and Application of the Research Findings in Cultural Tourism.

#### *Lifestyles and Local Cultural Knowledge Heritage of Ethnic Groups*

Kamphaeng Phet is a socially diverse area, and the major lifestyles of the Thai hill tribe of Kamphaeng Phet consist of the following: (1) The Hmong tribe has transferred New Year traditions, wearing half-body Hmong tribal costumes in daily life, embroidery and wax-pattern textiles Ua Ta Ca (Ua-Tab-Cab), the Kaen musical instrument, traditional knife-forging; the younger generation are educated and work as civil servants, company employees or merchants all around the country, administration is by family names; (2) The Mien tribe has developed handicraft local knowledge on hill tribe silverware, hill tribe embroideries, New Year traditions, Chinese-style ancestor worship linked with lifestyles, ordination ceremonies, funerals and weddings; the tribe

has a high level of unity and collaborates with the government; (3) The Karen tribe models ethno-tourism due to its excellently preserved culture and traditions such as tribal music, textile-weaving, basketry, knife-forging, herbal medicines, agriculture, and the fact that they live at Khlong Wang Chao National Park, an area with attractive scenery; (4) Lahu tribe members adhere to Roman Catholic or Protestant Christianity and have New Year traditions, Khan Tok handicrafts and wicker or bamboo furniture. The tribe also engages in agriculture and sells flowers to restaurants and wreathes at road intersections; (5) The Lisu tribe has a small population due to the fact that the hill tribe lost cultivation land subsequent to being driven out by the government as well as through droughts. Consequently, the tribe migrated back to Tak while remaining members live in villages and participate in development activities with the Hmong and Mien tribes; and (6) The Lua tribe has a very small population and no land for cultivation. As a result, tribe members work for hire in other provinces while remaining tribe members live in villages and participate in development activities alongside other tribes. As previously stated, Kamphaeng Phet has many different ethnic groups such as the Karen, Mien, Lahu, Lua, Hmong and Lisu tribes. Effectively, this means that this area has diverse social relationships and cultural, traditional, economic, commercial and heritage connections with each tribe maintaining its own unique lifestyle and local cultural knowledge heritage.

*Building of Networks for Reviving the Lifestyles and Passing on the Local Cultural Knowledge of Thai Hill Tribes*

The findings of the study on the building of networks for reviving hill tribe lifestyles and passing on the local cultural knowledge heritage reveal that the New Year traditions of all Thai hill tribes were as follows: Hmong tribe people practice “Nor-Pejo” to hearten them, pay respect to their ancestors, celebrate, sing songs, participate in local game-playing, hold sports competitions, compete in local sweet making contests and throw a ball for welcoming visitors; Mien tribe people practice “Jia Xiang Hing” on Chinese New Year, praying and blessing for the coming year. The Mien tribe also celebrates with youth performances on stage and Mien speech contests; Lisu tribe people practice “Kho-Oia” on Chinese New Year by paying respect to their ancestors or worshipping ghosts, making merit at a shrine, asking for God’s blessings and the blessings of elders, singing, playing music and dancing Jakue-style; the Pakakayor Karen ethnic group or “Nee Sor Ko” celebrates the New Year in January after harvesting, eating new rice, participating in heartening wrist tying ceremonies for their children and

other celebrations; the Lua tribe has the traditions during the Songkran (Thai New Year) festival following Buddhism with merit-making and water-pouring alms to bless the elderly; the Lahu tribe practice “Kor-Jao-Wae” by giving thanks to God covering the following three steps:

Step 1: Creation of acceptance on the individual level. In the past, the ethnic groups of Kamphaeng Phet faced problems from every direction such as forced migration, loss of ability to rely upon or make use of forests for sustenance, being stigmatized for drugs, lack of personal identification cards, lack of permanent housing and lack of education, etc. Due to these conditions transforming Thai hill tribes into sub-cultures, Thai hill tribes have developed their own capabilities through their lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage in addition to adapting to survive and developing positive attitudes of people from Thailand’s plains by socializing and participating in activities with lowland Thais and Thai hill tribe members for self-improvement. Self-improvement started with choosing to take up honest occupations such as working for hire, selling agricultural goods and handicrafts or even, in some cases, eventually becoming private business owners due to expertise in commerce and successful crossing over sub-culture obstacles through self-improvement and studying the Thai language, obtaining basic education and adjusting attitudes about educational equality.

Step 2: Building of relationships at the group level. Thai hill tribes have improved their lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage on the group level as follows: (1) Building of relationships among Thai hill tribes. By living in the same locality, interactions and interdependence among the ethnic groups has occurred with influences from social and economic relationships such as family relations and trade or exchanges of goods. These relationships led to the congregation of different groups and mutual reliance; (2) Establishment of relationship groups such as professional groups, social groups, groups of adherents to the same religions and congregations to enhance occupations; and (3) Driving group relationship activities by enhancing occupations on the group level such as farmers’ groups, Karen textile-weaving groups, hill tribe embroideries, handicraft and wax-pattern textile groups and Hmong knife-forging groups, etc.

Step 3: Connecting relationships to acceptance on the network level. By utilizing social and cultural capital in the creation of networks such as Hmong ethnic group network of Thailand, Mien ethnic group networks of Thailand, Lahu ethnic group networks of Thailand and Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian networks, etc., these networks facilitate the congregation of ethnic groups in the form of interrelated networks.

### *Synthesis of Promotion Guidelines and Application of the Research Findings in Cultural Tourism*

Based on brainstorming through group discussions along with in-depth interviews with the sample group consisting of members of the Hmong, Mian, Karen, Lahu, Lisu and Lua tribes of Kamphaeng Phet to determine promotion guidelines and apply the research findings in the development of cultural tourism in Thai hill tribes, three steps were found as follows: (1) The development of model lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage Thai hill tribe through creative economy; (2) experimenting with the use of innovations; and (3) evaluation of results from experimenting with the use of new lifestyle and local cultural knowledge heritage innovations in ethnic communities through creative economy and summary of the results of the experiment and drafting of the report on the lifestyle and local cultural knowledge heritage innovations of communities. Ideas have been offered on how to revive the lifestyles of traditional New Year celebrations and local cultural knowledge heritages in tourism narration and practice with the establishment of museum centers, cultural activities and exhibitions of equipment for living at hill tribe cultural centers. These have led to ethnic promotion and campaigns to raise youth awareness about cultural values and improvements in New Year traditions. Moreover, tourism information should be created for the outside to welcome New Year traditions and promote sustainable cultural tourism. Lastly, cultures and traditions should be preserved with storage of history and identities both by tourism management and ethnic communities with expression of local cultural knowledge heritages for acceptance and understanding of differences by tourists.

Nevertheless, the research also found that the factors contributing to success in the development of model lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage of ethnic groups through creative economy resulted from the ethnic communities having potential for creative tourism, eco-tourism, nature tourism, and academic tourism due to the presence of many important resources and tourist destinations such as Mae Wong National Park, Khlong Lan National Park, Khlong Lan Waterfall, and Chong Yen. In addition, Khlong Lan District uniquely stands out for the traditions, cultures and lifestyles of Thai Song Dam, Thai hill tribes, Thai plains, Isan, and northern ethnic groups, and excellent cooperation occurs with relevant agencies such as the Highland People Development Center, Highland People Cultural Exhibition Center, Khlong Lan Pattana Sub-district Municipality, Khlong Lan District Office and the local people.

### **Discussion**

Kamphaeng Phet is home to many Thai hill tribes. This has led to diversity in lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage Thai hill tribes. These lifestyles and local cultural knowledge heritage form a social capital foundation, which has developmental potential in many areas. For instance, research by Jakae (2017) studied the local knowledge management processes of the Hmong and Mian tribes in Kamphaeng Phet and found that every member of said ethnic groups dressed up in their culturally-unique tribal costumes during new year festivities and created Hmong embroidery products with patterns that mimic their natural environment such as poppy flowers, wild flowers, three groves, rocks, tigers, elephants, snails and fish. In addition, the study concurs with research by Buadaeng (2014) which found that Karen tribe members began changing their traditional beliefs and were building new relationships with a new authority through adherence to Buddhism and Christianity. In doing so, they altered their religious identities by integrating new identities with existing ones so as to enhance their social status, whereby Karen tribe members constantly had to engage in conflict with power from people living in the plains and the government. Accordingly, promoting sustainable conservation tourism in Thai hilltribe ethnic groups which live in an area surrounded by attractive natural features such as mountains and waterfalls and diverse cultures and lifestyles will allow outside people to experience this natural beauty and learn about the lifestyles of the local people. Most hill tribe people have migrated from South China over many decades to settle in the remote and mountainous areas in northern Thailand (Hill Tribe Welfare and Development Center, 2017).

Analysis of the process of building networks for reviving the lifestyles and passing on the local cultural knowledge heritage of Thai hill tribes in Kamphaeng Phet revealed that the network-building process requires at least three components, namely, creating acceptance on the individual level, building relationships on the group level and connecting relationships with acceptance on the network level through utilization of social capital and cultures in establishing networks to continuously accommodate development activities and programs. Similarly, a study by Min (2015) found that migrant factory workers had low salaries and suffered from problems related to their work and living conditions due to limited support and social security from the government and factories and lack of skills in managing finances and making improvements through work knowledge. The study concurs with research by Prastio, Nurzafira, Ibrahim, Susanto, and Roekhan (2020). ADJT uses three types of speech acts, which are directive with the function of prohibiting, ordering, and asking, expressive

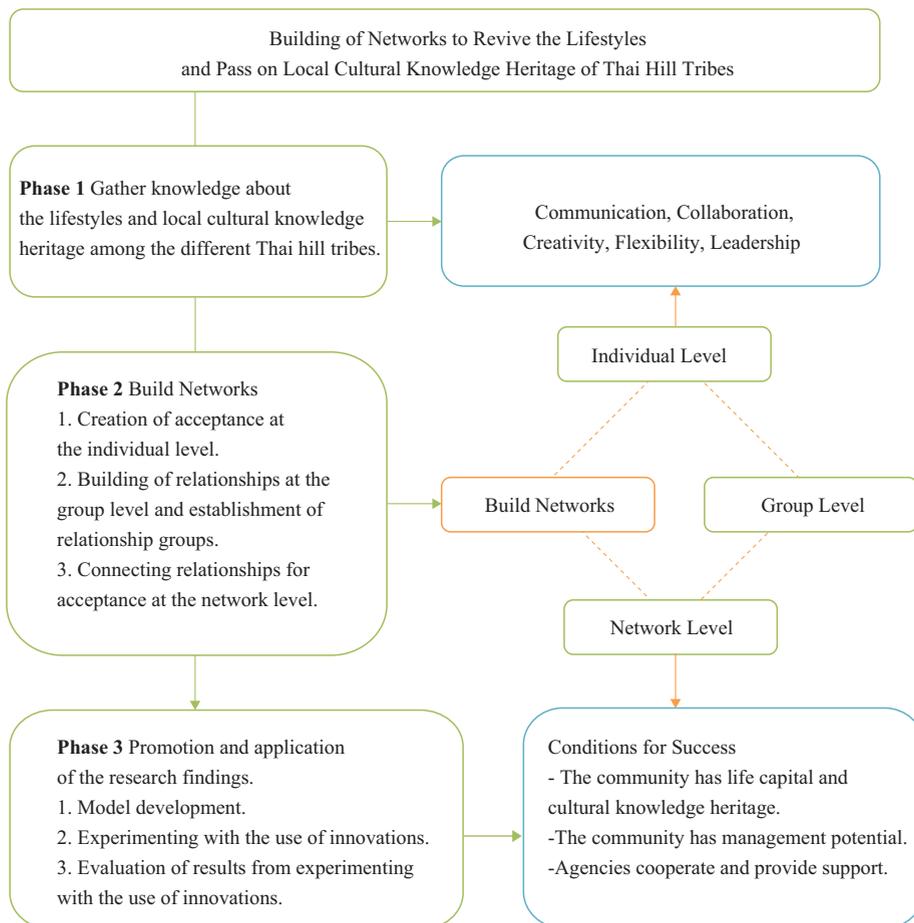
with the function of thankfulness and commissive speech acts in the function of refusing. It can be concluded that ADJT frequently uses illocutionary acts to deliver information to interlocutors. The factor that is the main element of local cultural heritage shows this by indicating the creator’s and inheritor’s identities as basic components of cultural identity with constant creation in response to the historical and social evolution of communities and related persons by connecting with community culture and groups of people. True cultural heritage is an inseparable relationship between heritage and human rights (Lenzerini, 2011). In recent research by Wisuthilak (2017) entitled “Creative Tourism Model Project”, the work group proposed that attributes for creative tourism need to consist of local and process attributes based on the attributes of creative tourism activities.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

Thai hill tribes living in Kamphaeng Phet have many lifestyles and local cultural heritages that can lead to

improvement of cultural tourism. These distinguishing characteristics can be developed through the building of networks for reviving the lifestyles and passing on local cultural knowledge heritage. Thai hill tribes in the area are already socially and culturally united to an extent. Therefore, the promotion guidelines and application of the research findings in cultural tourism in Thai hill tribes include success factors such as utilization of social and cultural capital in establishing networks and the integrative work of related agencies.

Further studies should focus on the development of community culture innovations to support researchers or related organizations studying this social capital. Finally, the researchers developed an innovative model for managing and adding value to community cultural capital to promote the foundational economy and enhance quality of life. The findings of this study made it possible to synthesize promotion guidelines and application of the research findings in cultural tourism in Thai hill tribes as shown in Figure 1



**Figure 1** Building of Networks to Reviving the Lifestyles and Pass on Local Cultural Knowledge Heritage of Thai hill tribes

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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