

Thesis Title Highland Community's Management of Eco-Tourism

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Abstract

The research on Highland Community's Management of Ecotourism was aimed: 1) to study the changes in the cultural structure of highland communities; 2) to study the concept and management system of community ecotourism in relation to natural resource management; and, 3) to study the organization management and benefit-sharing of the community involving ecotourism. The study was conducted in Ban Huai Hee, Huai Poo Ling Sub-district, Muang District in Mae Hong Son Province. The target community consisted of the Karen ethnic minority group.

For data collection, a semi-structured interview method comprising of participatory and non-participatory observations and small group discussions, was used. The study key informants comprises of people involved in the implementation of ecotourism in Ban Huai Hee including the senior citizens, resource persons in the community, formal leaders, community in-born leaders, members of the Ban Huai Hee ecotourism management committee, tourists who have visited the community, forestry officers, and development workers from both governmental and non-governmental agencies. All data collected from the study were checked and categorized in group and later analyzed and presented in a panel discussion.

On changes in the cultural structure of the community in terms of its values, production and human relations systems, results of the study showed that there were not many changes in the cultural structure of the Karen community. However, there were some adjustments in some important aspects in order to harmonize with social outside changes. Even though the community had been converted from Animism to Christianity, its value for respecting the existing nature has allowed the production system of the community to remain as a self-subsistent system with a narrow scope and non-destructive capacity. Besides, the human relations system of the community is still maintained in the form of a family structure that is strong and united and provides much assistance to one another.

As for the community concept and perspective towards tourism management, it was found that the ecotourism activities were used by the community as tools to maintain the ecology system and bio-diversity of the natural resources, together with the conservation and rehabilitation of the local wisdom and cultural traditions of the community rather than to implement tourism activities solely for economic gains.

The organizational management of the community utilized the family relationship (clan) and the seniority systems which are integrated in the business management system that contains the structural function and task division to create sense of responsibility towards the joint organization.

The benefit sharing management system of the community covers the groups at the household, group and community levels. The proceeds from the ecotourism activities are allocated to member households 80%, to the group 15% and to the community level 5%.

It is believed that the highland communities have the natural and cultural potentials including skilled community members, to manage the ecotourism activity as an alternative for developing community business and at the same time for conserving and restoring the local wisdom and culture of the community in order that there is a participatory learning process of the people in the society for the conservation of the natural resources and sustainable development.