บทความวิจัย

บทบาทขององค์กรที่ไม่ใช่องค์กรของรัฐ (NGOs) ในการเปลี่ยนแปลงการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย: กรณีศึกษา มูลนิธิกระจกเงา จังหวัดเชียงราย ประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

　　　　ชาวเขาหรือชนกลุ่มน้อยทางภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย บางครั้งถูกเรียกว่าเป็น คนชายขอบในแง่มุมที่คนกลุ่มนี้ขาดอำนาจการต่อรอง ขาดการศึกษา ขาดเครื่องมือเข้าถึงอำนาจ ถูกกีดกันออกจากระบบการต่อรองอำนาจและการจัดสรรทรัพยากร อำนาจและความมั่งคั่งในสังคม ในขณะที่การท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทย เป็นธุรกิจที่นำรายได้มาสู่ประเทศเป็นจำนวนมาก ชาวเขาในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทยถูกนำมาใช้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ แต่ผลประโยชน์รวมถึงรายได้ส่วนใหญ่ตกอยู่กับผู้ประกอบการ โดยที่ชาวเขาเองกลับได้รับผลประโยชน์เพียงน้อยนิดเท่านั้น ดังนั้น การเปลี่ยนแปลงทั้งในทางสถานะและในเชิงโครงสร้างของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ จึงเป็นเรื่องจำเป็นอย่างเร่งด่วน ซึ่งองค์กรที่ไม่ใช่องค์กรของรัฐ (NGOs) เป็นอีกภาคส่วนหนึ่งที่สามารถจะเข้ามามีบทบาทสำคัญในการเปลี่ยนแปลงนี้ งานวิจัยนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์ในการ 1) ประเมินสถานะและโครงสร้างของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ในภาคเหนือ ของประเทศไทย 2) ระบุขอบเขตของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ที่ต้อง การการเปลี่ยนแปลง 3) วิเคราะห์บทบาทของมูลนิธิกระจกเงาในฐานะที่เป็นองค์กรที่ไม่ใช่องค์กรของรัฐในการเปลี่ยนแปลงการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ 4) สรุปบทบาทขององค์กรที่ไม่ใช่องค์กรของรัฐในการพัฒนาการท่ องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ให้เป็นไปตามเป้าหมายการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน 2030 ที่กำหนดโดยสหประชาชาติ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ใช้ ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลด้วยการสัมภาษณ์เจ้าหน้าที่จากมูลนิธิกระจกเงาที่มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องกับการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์จำนวน 8 คนและทำการสังเกตแบบมีส่วนร่วมที่มูลนิธิกระจกเงาและชุมชนภายใต้การดำเนินงานของมูลนิธิกระจกเงาจำนวน 4 แห่งในจังหวัดเชียงราย ใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยวิธีการวิเคราะห์แก่นสาร (thematic analysis) เพื่อหาความหมาย จัดหมวดหมู่และตีความข้อมูล ผลการวิจัยสรุปได้ว่าสถานะและโครงสร้างของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทยอยู่บนพื้นฐานของความสัมพันธ์ที่ไม่สมดุลในหลายด้าน อาทิ ใน เชิงธุรกิจ ชาวเขาได้รับผลประโยชน์ทางเศรษฐกิจเพียงเล็กน้อย แต่ผู้ประกอบการได้รับผลประโยชน์ส่วนใหญ่ ดังนั้น การเปลี่ยนแปลงการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ ทั้งในเชิงนโยบาย (policy) ธุรกิจ (business) และแบบแผนการบริโภค (consumption) จึงเป็นสิ่งจำเป็น มูลนิธิกระจกเงาในฐานะที่เป็นองค์กรที่ไม่ใช่องค์กรของรัฐสามารถที่จะมีบทบาทในการเปลี่ยนแปลงและพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทยใน 3 ด้าน ได้แก่ การเป็นผู้ดำเนินการเปลี่ยนแปลง (implementer) การเป็นผู้กระตุ้นใ ห้เกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลง (catalyst) และการเป็นผู้สนับสนุนการเปลี่ยนแปลง (partner) ทั้งในเชิงนโยบาย ธุรกิจและแบบแผนการบริโภค ซึ่งจะสามารถพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์ให้ เติบโตอย่างสมดุลและยั่งยืน

คำสำคัญ: องค์กรที่ไม่ใช่องค์กรของรัฐ (NGOs), การเปลี่ยนแปลงของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงชาติพันธุ์, มูลนิธิกระจกเงา

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Research

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The Role of NGOs in the Transformation of Ethnic Tourism in Northern Thailand: A Case Study of the Mirror Foundation, Chiang Rai, Thailand

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Abstract

Thailand's ethnic minority groups, popularly referred to as "hilltribes", are amongst the most marginalized and underprivileged members of Thai society. Their appropriation for tourism development, referred to as ethnic tourism, entails a concerning number of ethical considerations relating to human rights, inequality, exploitation, and cultural commodification. Fundamental transformations to the state and structure of the sector are required and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) need to be recognized as key stakeholders in leading these changes. The objectives of this study are to assess the state and structure of Northern Thailand's ethnic tourism sector, to determine the key areas of transformation required, to analyze the ways in which the Thai NGO, the Mirror Foundation, is championing these transformations, and to extrapolate the findings to highlight NGOs as key stakeholders in tourism development, particularly in the context of achieving the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study uses a qualitative research approach using key informant interviews and participant observation. The areas of study are at the Mirror Foundation in Chiang Rai and its four beneficiary communities. Eight key-informants directly involved with ethnic tourism were interviewed. Data collected from the fieldwork was processed through a qualitative thematic analysis. This study reveals that the state and structure of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand is generally predicated on an asymmetrical stakeholder relationship. Transformation in realm of policy, business, and consumption to the sector is necessary and urgent. The Mirror Foundation's key roles, as implementer, catalyst, and partner, in ethnic tourism can be paired with areas of transformation: policy, business and consumption. These relationships indicate that there is a wide range of NGO roles which can influence sustainable tourism development involving ethnic minority communities. NGOs are capable of carrying out transformation within the ethnic tourism sector in Northern Thailand and beyond.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), transformation of ethnic tourism, the Mirror Foundation

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Introduction

The United Nations (UN) strives for tourism to be a tool for all member states in reaching the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2017, UN indicated the seriousness of the international community's conviction that building a better world is impossible without sustainable tourism. In 2016, the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide was 1,235 million people (UNWTO, 2017). The tourism industry contributed to 10% of the world's GDP, accounted for one out of every ten jobs, and yielded 7% of the world's total exports and 30% of world services exports (US $1.5 trillion) (UNWTO, 2017). The United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) Tourism Towards 2030 projection indicates further growth in the tourism sector. The scale and growth of the tourism industry is clearly sufficiently large enough to warrant close scrutiny. However, there exists a great deal of concern about tourism development's concomitant negative social, environmental, and economic consequences, many of which are already being felt, disproportionally in the Global South. Critics have questioned the UNWTO's prioritization of tourism's macro-economic dimension (Bread for the World, 2017), arguing that the dominant growth paradigm is inherently flawed and leads to further inequality, especially for marginalized population groups. Advocates for responsible tourism argue that tourism's potential for achieving the SDGs cannot materialize within the current structure of the tourism industry. The Berlin Declaration proclaims that in order for tourism to have any chance of meaningfully contributing to sustainable development, a fundamental transformation of tourism itself is essential and urgent (Bread for the World, 2017).

Ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand is failing to meet the potential ascribed to tourism development involving minority groups. Fundamental transformations to the state and structure of the sector are required, and NGOs need to be recognized as key stakeholders in leading these changes. This study will describe the state and structure of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand, before turning to the work of the Mirror Foundation to make a case for the involvement of NGOs in the important task of transforming tourism. In the context of the UN 2030 Vision, ethnic minority groups in Northern Thailand are amongst those which are at risk of being left behind. Considering their entanglement in the tourism industry, an investigation into the potentials of tourism to aid in this development is timely and important. Concluding that the industry is currently failing to meet this potential, transformations of the sector are required if the aims of the 2030 Agenda are to be achieved. This study argues, based on a case study of the Mirror Foundation, that NGOs are well-positioned to champion these necessary transformations.

Objectives

1. To assess the state and structure of Northern Thailand's ethnic tourism sector;

2. To determine the key areas of transformation required within Northern Thailand's ethnic tourism sector;

3. To analyze the ways in which the Mirror Foundation is championing these transformations within the communities the NGO serves; and,

4. To extrapolate the findings to highlight NGOs as key stakeholders in tourism development, particularly in the context of achieving the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
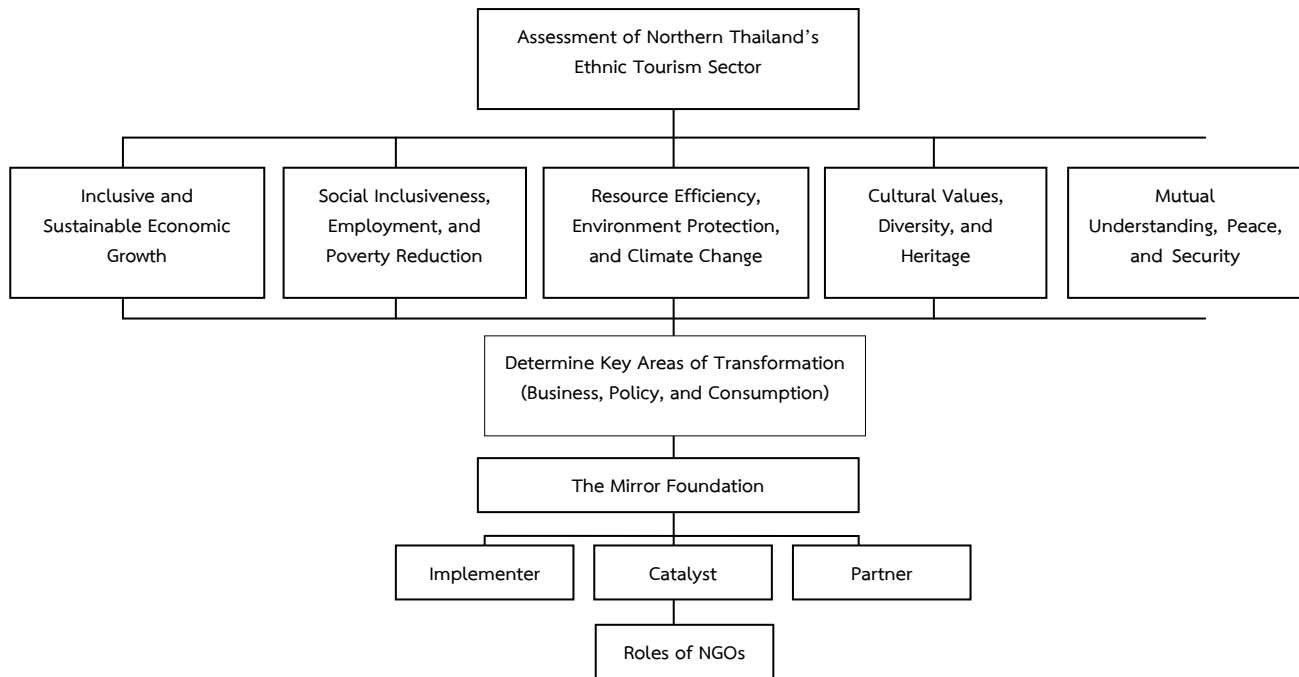
Conceptualization

Figure 1: Conceptualization

The conceptualization (Figure 1) takes the UN's criteria for sustainable tourism as a tool for an assessment of the state and structure of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand. The criteria used are 1) inclusive and sustainable economic growth 2) social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction 3) resource efficiency, environment protection, and climate change 4) cultural values, diversity, and heritage 5) mutual understanding, peace, and security (UNWTO, 2017). This is followed by an identification of key areas of transforming tourism which requires changes in policy, business, and consumption (Bread for the World, 2017). Next step is an investigation of the roles of the

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Mirror Foundation, as implementer, catalyst, and partner (Lewis and Kanji, 2009), in shaping the transformations. The final element concerns a conclusive summary, based on the case study, of the roles served by NGOs in transforming tourism, not just within Northern Thailand's ethnic tourism sector but within the industry at large.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was conducted for this study. Specifically, this study used a multi-method case study approach. A combination of secondary and primary data collection were used to collect qualitative data. Secondary data included contemporary publications in academic journals, news articles, and reports and research findings. Primary data were collected through a semi-structured in-depth interview with eight staff members of the Mirror Foundation in Chiang Rai and four beneficiary communities: Ban Jalae, Ban Apha, and Pak La, and the Rai-Som homestay site. The interviewees were chosen based on the degree of involvement in the NGO's Ecotourism initiative. Participant observation was also conducted at the Mirror Foundation and four beneficiary communities.

Research Instruments

The UN's five criteria for sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2017) were used to determine the state and structure of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand. Key informant interviews and participant observation were conducted. Key informant interview guidelines were designed for each informant, connected through the core themes of transformation in policy, business and consumption. Participant observation, guided by a checklist from Bernard (2006), was also conducted at the Mirror Foundation and four beneficiary communities in three categories: stakeholders, infrastructure, and behavior.

Data Collection Methods

The study was conducted over the course of ten days between March 2 and March 12, 2018. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight members of the Mirror Foundation's Ecotourism team in different themes: Policy, Business, and Consumption. The Director, Ecotourism Manager, Ecotourism Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator, three guides and Project Manager for the new Rai-Som farmstay initiative were interviewed at each site. Participant observation was also conducted at the Mirror Foundation head office and four beneficiary communities in three categories: stakeholders, infrastructure, and behavior to gain insight into the day-to-day operations and how they relate to their tourism initiatives.

Data Analysis

This study conducted the six phases in an iterative thematic analysis (Figure 2). Thematic data analysis involves identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes)

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within data. The data collected were analyzed to search for these patterns (themes) by using the qualitative data query software, which inform the role fulfilled by the Mirror Foundation.
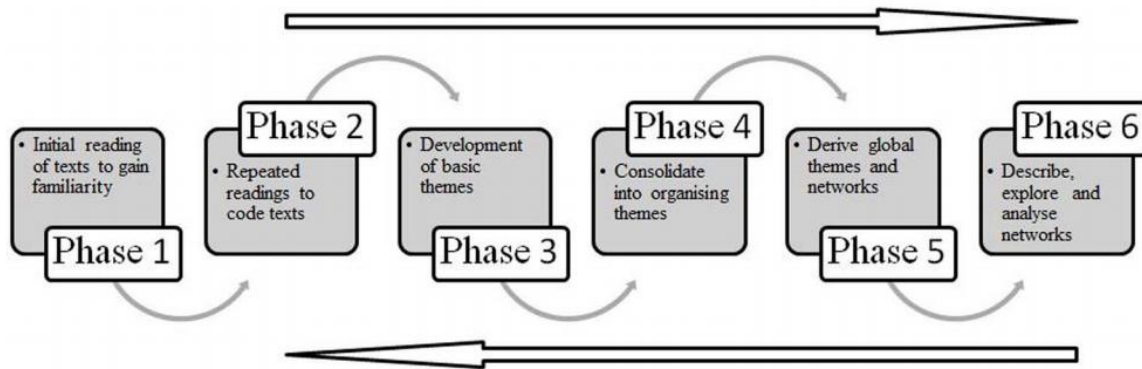

Figure 2: the six phases in an iterative thematic analysis

Source: Walters, T. 2016. Research Note: Using Thematic Analysis in Tourism Research. *Tourism Analysis*, *21*, 107–116.

Results

1. **Objective 1** of the study was to assess the state and structure of Northern Thailand's ethnic tourism sector. It was found that the structure of ethnic tourism is predicated on an interconnected relationship amongst stakeholders, including the Thai government, private business tour operators and other tour providers (such as NGOs), hilltribe communities, and tourists. Using the UN's five criteria for sustainable tourism, formulated in the context of the Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, it was revealed that Thailand's ethnic tourism sector does not meet these requirements. This can be described as follows: 1) the criteria of inclusive and sustainable economic growth is contradicted by an asymmetrical distribution of economic benefits, dire situations of economic dependency, and overwhelming lack of community participation 2) the criteria of social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction is challenged by contradictory government policies vis-à-vis integration and appropriation, lack of secure employment opportunities within tourism, and no evidence of widespread poverty reduction as a result of tourism development 3) the criteria of resource efficient, environmental protection, and climate change is contradicted by unhinged tourism development in natural areas and the outlawing of traditional farming practices and resources used by hilltribes 4) the criteria of cultural values, diversity and heritage is contradicted by an appropriation of minority groups as exotic and unmodern, a flattening of cultural diversity under the designation of "hilltribes", and widespread

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discrimination and 5) the criteria of mutual understanding, peace and security is challenged by generally superficial guest-host interactions, exploitation for tourism from a market-driven perspective, and egregious human rights abuses like human trafficking and sex tourism.

2. **Objective 2** of the study was to determine the key areas of transformation required within Northern Thailand's ethnic tourism sector. Mobilizing the three categories of policy, business, and consumption, it was revealed that in terms of policy, the transformation in the key areas of citizenship and assimilation, the effects of natural resource conservation laws, and a lack of binding tourism policies are required. In terms of business, the key issues of economic dependency, lack of community participation, a demand for authenticity, and an unequal distribution of earnings need to be transformed. In terms of consumption, the key issues that need to be transformed are staged authenticity, superficial host-guest interactions, and misinformed consumer decision making.

A key result from the analysis is that the relationship between these themes is important. The marketing of hilltribes as an ethnic tourism resource by business sector leads to a demand for authenticity, which in turn leads to staged authenticity and cultural commodification. A lack of binding tourism policies or enforcement of standard leads to lack of community participation and an unequal distribution of earnings which, in turn,

leads to superficial, economically-motivated and, in many cases, exploitative interactions with host communities. Natural resource conservation laws and assimilation policies lead to economic dependency on tourism which, in turn, leads to misinformed decision-making as tourists are not aware that their demand is perpetuating a cycle of unjust appropriation. It was identified that a lack of binding tourism policies is a key node which affects various issues and can be considered a critical priority if ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand can be transformed to become more sustainable.

3. **Objective 3** of the study was to analyze the ways in which the Mirror Foundation is championing these transformations. It was found that the Mirror Foundation is intricately involved in ethnic tourism through its Ecotours and voluntourism projects. A key finding was that the Foundation received around 40% of its funding through these Ecotourism activities. Therefore, the link between tourism and development work with hilltribe groups was clear. Based on the selected communities, it was found that there are three roles of the Mirror Foundation in ethnic tourism sector, which are an implementer, a catalyst, and a partner. As an implementer, the Mirror Foundation roles are initiating new tourism projects, providing capacity building, and developing new tourism products for existing projects. As a catalyst, its roles are devising codes of conduct and policies, lobbying on behalf of their beneficiary

communities and intervening on their behalf, and promoting an ethics-based marketing strategy. As a partner, its roles are providing operational assistance, managing a complex web of tourism stakeholders, and supplying tourists and volunteers to their established tourism initiatives. For example, at Baan Apha, the Mirror Foundation was initially an implementer setting up the tourism structure. Now that the community is self-governing, the NGO has transitioned into being a partner; supplying tourists and volunteers to the village on a regular basis and supporting the community in that way. At the Rai-Som School in Fang, the Mirror Foundation is currently in an implementer role, putting a lot of resources and time into making sure the school and farmstay are operational. At the same time, the NGO is functioning as a catalyst, advocating for the right to education for stateless children.

Based on all of these findings relating to the roles served by the Mirror Foundation, it was then made possible to identify how they connect to the transformations of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand. Undertaking a relationship analysis, the following relationships between roles and areas of transformation were identified as follows: the Mirror Foundation's main role in transforming policy seems to be as a catalyst: advocating to reform laws, intervening on behalf of their beneficiaries, and setting up codes of conduct and business policies. The partner role, through stakeholder management, is also important. As an implementer, capacity-

building to combat a lack of binding government-sanctioned tourism policies from the bottom up is also recognized. In regards to transforming business practices, it can be said that the Mirror Foundation is exemplifying best practices, particularly within an implementer capacity; ensuring that communities can depend on tourism as a supplementary form of income while also protecting their unique hilltribe way of life. In terms of transforming consumption, as implementer, they prepare communities for interaction with customers. As partner, they can supply informed and ethical tourists. As catalyst, they can encourage conscious and informed consumer decision-making. The results clearly indicate that within the network of communities in which the Mirror Foundation engages, a transformation of ethnic tourism was taking place.

4. **Objective 4** of the study was to extrapolate the findings to highlight NGOs as key stakeholders in tourism development, particularly in the context of achieving the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Mobilizing the three pertinent goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda: no poverty, decent work and economic growth, and reduced inequalities, it was shown how the Mirror Foundation's involvement in ethnic tourism was indeed working towards alleviating these very significant issues in Northern Thailand. NGOs are key tourism stakeholders in Northern Thailand capable of transforming the sector in

order to contribute to the achievement of the UN's 2030 SDGs.

Compared to the assessment of mainstream ethnic tourism, the findings show that the Mirror Foundation, as an NGO involved in tourism, is well-positioned to champion the transformations necessary in order for ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand to meet the UN's vision for sustainable development.

UN's Vision for Tourism	Mainstream Ethnic Tourism Sector	Ethnic Tourism in Communities Supported by NGOs
1. Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth	- Asymmetrical distribution of economic benefits - Economic Dependency - Lack of community participation	- Tourism is a supplementary form of income along-side other occupations - Community participation in decision-making - Community partners are paid above market prices to ensure economic advantages
2. Social Inclusiveness, Employment, and Poverty Reduction	- Contradictory government policies vis-à-vis integration and appropriation - Employment not secure, lack of social services - No evidence of widespread poverty reduction	- Employment and training for people in the communities served - Forging partnerships to determine need and appropriateness of tourism development - Tourism as part of a strategy for poverty alleviation
3. Resource Efficiency, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change	- Traditional farming practices outlawed - Unhinged tourism development	- Supporting communities relocated due to environmental laws - Regulated, small-scale and dispersed tourism development
4. Cultural Values, Diversity and Heritage	- Portrayal of minority groups as exotic and unmodern. - Flattening of cultural diversity under designation of "hilltribes" - Widespread discrimination	- Community members treated with respect and dignity – no expectations for staged authenticity - Education about different hilltribe cultures and lifeway - Solidarity and alliance
5. Mutual Understanding, Peace and Security	- Superficial host-guest interactions - Exploitation for tourism from a profit-driven, market perspective. - human trafficking and sex tourism	- Cultural exchange between visitors and host - Rights-based perspective on tourism which foregrounds agency and self-determination - Tourism situated within holistic approach to peace and security

Table 1: Comparison of Assessment of Mainstream Ethnic Tourism and NGOs' Involvement in Ethnic Tourism

Conclusion

Based on the findings outlined above, it can be concluded that:

1. The state and structure of ethnic tourism predicated on an asymmetrical stakeholder relationship whereby promotion of ethnic groups as exotic and unmodern leads to exploitative business practices and consumption patterns. Ethnic theme parks, day-trip villages and unregulated trekking tours continue to proliferate as tourism demand in Northern Thailand increases.

2. Transformation to the sector is necessary and urgent. In the realm of policy, a lack of binding tourism policies is a major node which enables an unregulated business environment. In the realm of business, lack of community participation, the phenomenon of economic dependency and a demand for authenticity lead to unethical consumer behavior. In the realm of consumer patterns, superficial host-guest interactions, cultural commodification, and misinformed decision-making create demand which perpetuates the cycle of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand.

3. The Mirror Foundation's key roles in ethnic tourism are implementer, catalyst, and partner. In particular, the NGO's ability to implement new projects, provide capacity-building, formulate codes of conduct and policies, and manage complex stakeholder relationships stand out as key functions. The evolution from Implementer (i.e. starting a tourism project) to partner (i.e. supplying tourists and volunteers) is also a key advantage of the Mirror Foundation's bottom-up approach.

4. The various roles fitting within the themes of implementer, catalyst, and partner can be paired with areas of transformation in the realms of policy, business and consumption. These relationships indicate that the Mirror Foundation's wide range of roles is capable of influencing transformations of ethnic tourism in Northern Thailand.

5. NGOs need to be given more attention in the ethnic tourism industry. This study clearly concludes that NGOs can be transformative stakeholders.

In the context of the UN's 2030 Agenda, with a goal of leaving no one behind, if businesses continue to perform as usual within the ethnic tourism sector, it is certain that thousands of ethnic minority peoples in northern Thailand will be amongst those left behind. This study has shown that a promising way forward is a more earnest look at the role of NGOs and what they are currently doing. This is to ensure that hilltribe communities are benefiting from tourism development and are given a voice. NGOs can be analyzed in terms of their ability as key stakeholders to implement the required changes.

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