On the Edge of Thai Society toward Tourism Employment

มุมมองของชุมชนชายขอบต่อสายงานในธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยว

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Abstract

A comprehensive study was carried out in the tribal area in Chiang Mai, Thailand with a group of hill tribe people, Karen and Hmong. The study aims to explore perceptions of these groups of people towards impacts from tourism employment. This paper seeks to extend our understanding of these two culturally distinct groups by considering them as employees in tourism sectors located in Chiang Mai. The analysis discusses the perceptions of Karen and Hmong employees, working for tourism business managed by Thai nationals. The analysis focuses upon the respondents perceptions regarding their perceived impacts from employing tourism job with the Thai. Due to the limited numbers of hill tribe people, two hundred questionnaires administered. The research demonstrated that the cultural backgrounds and ethnicities of these two tribes do effect their perceptions resulting in differences in their views of impacts from working in the tourism industry. That said, it can be briefly elaborated that despite a few similarities in the perceptions of the Karen and Hmong of positive impacts upon themselves resulting from their working with the external tourism actions (ETAs), the major concerns were focused on the significant differences in their perceptions towards negative impacts as Hmong tend to perceive more of the negative impacts when compared to the Karen group in terms of losing their value and belief in their traditions and sacred sites as they had to deal with them as tourist attractions. Moreover, Hong also strongly projected that they have failed to maintain their relationship with their family due to their working pattern with the ETAs.

Keywords: hill tribe, perception, tourism employment, acculturation

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้ได้ดำเนินการในพื้นที่ชุมชนชายขอบของกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์กะเหรี่ยงและม้งในจังหวัด เชียงใหม่ของประเทศไทย โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจการรับรู้ของกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์เหล่านี้ที่มีผลกระทบจาก การเข้าทำงานในสายงานการท่องเที่ยว ซึ่งบทความนี้ได้มุ่งที่จะขยายความเข้าใจของทั้งสองกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ ที่แตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมด้วยการพิจารณาจากผู้ที่ประกอบอาชีพในภาคธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยวของจังหวัด เชียงใหม่ โดยทำการวิเคราะห์เกี่ยวกับการรับรู้ของพนักงานชาวกะเหรี่ยงและม้งต่อผลกระทบที่ปฏิบัติงาน ให้กับธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยวซึ่งจัดการโดยคนไทย เนื่องด้วยกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์มีจำนวนจำกัด จึงเก็บแบบสอบถาม จากจำนวนสองร้อยคน ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่าภูมิหลังทางวัฒนธรรมและชาติพันธุ์ของทั้งสองกลุ่มมีผล กับการรับรู้ต่อผลกระทบจากการทำงานในอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวที่แตกต่างกัน โดยกลุ่มม้งที่ทำงานใน ภาคอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวมองเห็นถึงผลกระทบด้านลบมากกว่ากลุ่มกะเหรี่ยงในประเด็นเรื่องการสูญ เสียและลืมเลือนวัฒนธรรมประเพณีและความเชื่อของตนเองจากการต้องนำเสนอสิ่งเหล่านั้นเป็นกิจกรรม ท่องเที่ยวที่ใช้สนองตอบความต้องการนักท่องเที่ยว ยิ่งไปกว่านั้นกลุ่มม้งยังรับรู้ผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้นกับตนเอง ในเรื่องการเปลี่ยนแปลงรูปแบบโครงสร้างในครอบครัวเนื่องจากต้องผันตนเองมาทำงานในสายงานบริการ ซึ่งทำให้มีเวลาทำงานที่ไม่แน่นอนและไม่สามารถมีเวลาใช้ชีวิตกับครอบครัวได้ตามวิถีแบบเดิมอีกต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: กลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ การรับรู้ สายงานในธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยว การผสมผสานทางวัฒนธรรม

Introduction

In recent years there has been a growth in multi-cultural working environments (Fine et al., 1990), not only in the developed world (Berry, 1997) but also in less developed countries and regions, (Wilson et al., 2001). Vergunst (2008) argues that as societies develop economically there is an increased demand for resources, including human resources and as a result, there is an increased degree of interaction between people from more developed, often urban areas and those from the less developed, often rural areas, despite similarities or dissimilarities in culture and/or ethnicity. The Thai government has for some time recognised tourism as an opportunity for reducing the prosperity gap between urban and rural areas, retaining the population and improving the welfare of rural communities (Community Based Tourism Institute (CBT-I), 2008). Therefore, the Thai government promotes the development of hill tribe tourism to both private and public sector investors in order to create job opportunities and thereby improve the incomes of local people.

In this research 'external tourism actors' (ETAs) are defined as Thai entrepreneurs who tend to dominate a host community due to their higher social status and wealth when compared to the hill tribe people. They are individuals from outside the tribal community who are not tourists, but attracted by the opportunity to develop their businesses in a new location.

The perceptions and attitudes of residents towards tourism employment has been investigated in a number of studies (Pizam, 1978). However, relatively little research has thus far been conducted on the perceptions of two tribal people who work with ETAs,. Two hypotheses were considered; one (Ho) is that the respondents from each of the different tribes have similar experiences, perceptions and values in relation to employment with individuals from outside their community. The alternative hypothesis (H1) is that ethnic tribal and cultural differences will result in differences in their views of their employment by individuals of another culture in this instance Thai national who are the majority of the Thai population.

Research Objectives

To explore and compare perceptions of the two culturally distinct groups of hill tribe people towards their employment in tourism business.

Literature Review

The aim of this research is to explore perceptions of different groups of hill tribe people in the northern part of Thailand after they have been working with the ETAs, it is vital to share the essential issue of the perceptions, the influences upon perceptions and followed by culture diversity in the workplace. Social Exchange theory was the main theory behind as it represents and explains how people think and perceive benefits and costs from working with the ETAs in tourism industry. Last but not least, this paper also underlined overview of the chosen hill trip people and characteristics of ETAs as it directly related to the core of this paper.

Definitions of perception

Schiffman and Kanuk (1987) academically define the terminology of perception as "a process by which an individual selects, organises, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world" Rungapadiachy (1999); Samovar and Porter (1991) offer a similar definition defining perception as the method by which stimuli are chosen from the external environment and interpreted into profound meaningful internal experiences. According to Smith (2002) perception is a primary aspect of judgment. Perception is significant in supporting the views of an individual, and their thinking, about the world. It determines how individuals experience objects or events (Haakonssen, 2006). Merleau-Ponty (2002) "Perception is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them". The emphasis of these later definitions is particularly relevant to this investigation, as it helps clarify how differently group of hill trip people would perceive and value certain impacts.

Influences upon perception

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) perception is not totally objective, it depends on neonatal, childhood, and later experiences (Klein, 2007). Supaap (1993) pinpointed five determinants of changes in perception are family, friends, school, career and the media. In view of Reisinger and Turner (2003) perceptions are influenced by a number of external factors, economic, social, cultural, geographical, and internal factors, demographic, psychographic, and behaviouristic. Tajfel (1978), Samovar and Porter (1991) and Brislin and Cushner (1996) agreed upon the notion that one of the main factors that directly influence perception is culture. In terms of perceptions of tourism development, several scholars (e.g., Ap and Crompton, 1993; Brougham and Butler, 1981; Husbands, 1989; Lawson et al., 1998; Murphy, 1983; Pizam, 1978; Ryan and Montgomery, 1994; Thomason et al., 1979; Tyrell and

Spaulding, 1984) have focused on the perceptions of tourism held by residents of the destination community. These findings demonstrate that people who live in the same community and share the same culture do not necessarily have shared interests or perceptions and they often hold very mixed views (Hall, 1994).Therefore, the background plays a significant role in directing how one think, feel and likely to result in how they form their behaviours.

Cause of cultural diversities in the workplace

According to Tung (1993) a cross-cultural work group often forms as a result of an organisation recruiting people from different cultures to work together. Yet, Granrose and Oskamp (1997) highlight several factors as reasons for cultural diversity in the work place explaining that some groups voluntarily come to live together (e.g., immigrants, in this case the ETAs) while others are involuntary (e.g., refugees, slaves, indigenous peoples) or willingly move to a new location (e.g., immigrants and refugees) or if permanent (e.g., ethno-cultural groups) or temporary (e.g. sojourners such as guest workers and asylum seekers), while other groups have had the new culture (e.g., indigenous peoples and national minorities) (Granrose and Oskamp, 1997). However, despite different factors leading to the establishment of plural societies, Berry and Sam (1996) suggest that the fundamental processes of intercultural relations and psychology adaptation appear to be common among these groups, what is different is the degree of interaction of each group which can result in different outcomes.

On the other hand, Granrose and Oskamp (1997) explain that the outcome of contacts in culturally plural societies can be divided into two domains; acculturation and ethnic relations. While, Berry (1990) points out that when individuals or groups have continuous intercultural contacts, changes occurs and the minorities often become part of the mainstream culture. However, Granrose and Oskamp (1997) assert that the results from the interaction could vary due to a number of factors, social, political and psychological factors that characterise the two groups in contact. Moreover, they justify that acculturation and ethnic relations in plural societies can result in outcomes that range from conflict and stress to mutual accommodation and adaptation.

Social Exchange Theory

Understanding the role of social exchange theory and what it represents can contribute greatly to the main idea of this paper as it explains how one would perceive benefits and costs of their interaction with certain issue. Sutton (1967) asserts that host

and guest contacts can be compared to a social exchange, and that therefore, the social interaction between outsiders and host residents can be assessed in terms of perceived costs and benefits. Social exchange theory (SET), has been widely used in tourism research to determine resident's perceptions in tourist destinations (Allen et al., 1993; Andereck et al., 2005; Ap, 1992; Nash, 1989; Perdue et al., 1987). Several researchers have applied this theory to study diversity of perceptions in a single community (Ap, 1992; Jurowski et al., 1997; Madrigal, 1993; Perdue et al., 1987). These studies found that host residents favour tourism when the benefits they acquire from tourism is greater than their losses. The theory assumes that people select exchanges having assessed the rewards and the costs (Ap, 1992). Theoretically, residents who view the results of tourism as personally valuable and believe that the costs do not exceed the benefits will perceive more positively and favour the introduction of tourism (Ap, 1992; Turner, 1981) and these studies support this hypothesis.

Hill tribe people in Thailand

Thailand has a population of around 70 million (Colin, 2014) and hosts a variety of ethnic groups, the hill tribe minority groups in the north of Thailand, estimated at 914,755 (Social Development Center, 2008) are not an indigenous population and have been relocating around Southeast Asia for over 1000 years. Rajani (2002) argues that these tribes have moved to Thailand due both to their traditional nomadic lifestyle - moving around on a 7 year cycle practicing a "slash and burn", 'swidden' farming techniques, coupled with political and economic problems and other social pressures (Evrard and Leepreecha, 2009; Eversole et al., 2005; Hall and Patrinos, 2006; McKinnon, 2003). Rajani (2002) suggest that the Karen people moved to Thailand approximately 200 years ago whereas theHmong entered Thailand later, around 150 years ago, scattered throughout the country but occur primarily in the remote mountains of the north (Toyota, 2005). However, an increasing number of hill tribe people in Thailand in recent decades have shown a willingness to participate in development programmes with the hope of becoming closer to mainstream Thai society (Aguettant, 1996; Buadang, 2004; Wijeyewardene, 1990). Charles and Mi Mi, 1961; Cohen, 1989; Nadel, 1995; and Parry(2007) suggest that hill tribe people live in societies that appear to be distinct and different from many contemporary societies including Thai society. Cummings (2005) and Wall (1996) claim that hill tribe people tend to have lower standards of living. McKinnon (2003) describes the stereotype of hill tribe people as "forest simpletons". They tend to be treated as a second class citizen often being mistreated by the majority groups in Thailand and less power when compared to other ethnic groups in the country.

Hill tribe tourism and External Tourism Actors (ETAs)

The ranges of actual/potential tourism activities in hill tribe locations are not only interesting for tourists but also for stakeholders, investors and businessmen who foresee the opportunities to develop tourism businesses (Cohen, 2000). The potential for hill tribe tourism is to generate income for the nation; thus, the government, private sector investors and various NGO's, the Thai Royal Family, considered as the ETAs have provide employment opportunities for local hill tribe residents and as a result have created multi-cultural work places introduced a range of activities for hill tribe community destinations, i.e. the Royal Project, an agriculturally based foundation has been promoting cash crops and hill tribe tourism as replacements for growing the opium poppy (Rajani, 2002; Royal Project Foundation (RPF), 2003). Various government led initiatives have sought to encourage hill tribe people to become involved in tourism with the primary goals to provide supplementary income and to provide genuine knowledge about these people to rectify any misunderstanding among outsiders, and importantly to help boost the Thai economy. More recently many ETAs have entered these hill tribe areas with the intention of developing tourism businesses (Thai Development Research Institute (TDRI), 1997).

Methodology

A two stage integrated methodology was adopted to gather primary data. In the first stage, focus groups were conducted with respondents from each tribe who were employed by ETAs. The profiles of the focus group respondents are given in Table 1.

The focus group discussions explored the following themes; types of tourism businesses, degree of involvement, reasons for working with ETAs, and the conflicts encountered in the workplace and finally, the villagers proposed solutions. The data from these focus groups were analysed, using content analysis, and grouped together to identify the major themes relating to the respondents experience of employment with ETAs a number of which had not emerged from the preceding review of the literature. These findings together with the findings of the literature review were used to create and design a questionnaire, distributed to a sample of respondents in the selected communities to identify the perceptions and attitudes of Karen and Hmong respondents. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements relating to: 1) the types of tourism businesses, 2) their degree of involvement, 3) their reasons for working with ETAs, 4) the conflicts they encountered with ETAs, and finally their proposed solutions. Each statement was evaluated on a five point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree.

A pilot study leading to a modification of the questionnaire was undertaken with a sample of respondents who had experienced the role of ETAs in the expansion of tourism in Doi Inthanon and were therefore able to relate to the questionnaire. The results from the pilot tests demonstrated that some further clarification was required and also demonstrated that face-to-face interviews would be essential as some of the respondents had difficulties in understanding the Thai language and others did not like to read the questions; hence, to gain as accurate information as possible, interviewer completion was essential.

It was clear from the focus groups and general observations in the villages that the majority of both tribes are still employed in agriculture or other non ETA-related jobs. Unfortunately no records or data exists as to how many of the Karen and Hmong in Doi Inthanon work with ETAs. An estimate of made by the village headmen from both tribes indicated that approximately 150 of their tribal members work for ETAs, representing approximately 15% of each tribal community. Based upon this information a sample size of 100 respondents from each tribe who work for ETAs was agreed. Logistical and pragmatic factors, not least the difficulty of finding respondents at home during daylight resulted in a snowballing approach to sampling being applied to reach 100 respondents from each tribe, working with ETAs. Data was analysed using SPSS Version 16. Descriptive data including frequency, mean score and median were used in discussing the distribution of responses gathered during the quantitative survey. Differences between the samples were determined based upon the Mann Whitney U test, is based on ranks, the median (middle rank), and therefore, mean range is the most appropriate summary statistics to report (Peacock and Kerry, 2007). However, in this instance median scores, mean value and the frequencies of each variable are given, to clarify the interpretation of the results (e.g., Shoham et al., 2006; Xu et al., 2009). While nominal and categorical data was collected the majority was ordinal being derived from five point Likert scales and was non-parametric (Field, 2006); therefore, the Mann Whitney U test was used to analyse the perceptions of the different independent sample groups (Polit and Beck, 2004). Furthermore, the chi-square test was used in the analysis of the nominal and categorical data collected (Field, 2006) e.g., type of employment, degree of involvement, proposed solutions for perceived conflicts. In both cases the significant value for rejecting the null hypothesis was 0.05 (Field, 2006; Pallant, 2001).

Perceptions of impacts arising from working with ETAs

Similarities

Table 1 Similarities in the perceptions of the Karen and Hmong of impacts upon themselves and other employees resulting from their working with ETAs

Variables	Mean Rank of agree and strongly agree			Mean Score 5=strongly agree	
Perceived impacts resulting from working with ETAs	Karen	Hmong	Sig.	Karen	Hmong
The arrival of ETAs has resulted in a greater demand for female labour	104.24	99.87	.549	4.51	4.41
I've more confidence after working with ETAs, and can easily work with all type of nationalities	108.37	95.94	.061	4.75	4.62
My colleagues always make fun of me being a tribal person which makes me want to lose my identity	99.86	104.03	.507	2.43	2.50
Tribal people have changed themselves to be more 'Thai like' after their interaction with ETAs	98.14	105.68	.323	3.58	3.92
I earn more income from ETAs but with more expenditures as well	107.16	97.09	.166	4.40	4.32
I have failed in keeping in touch with my tribal friends	97.82	105.98	.232	1.68	1.85

Equally, every respondent from both the Karen and Hmong shared the opinion (mean >4.5) that demands were higher for female labour and by working with ETAs has given them more confidence and allowed them to be more open and to work more easily with other nontribal people. This can be supported by Ap, (1992) who proposed that people, especially host residents, tend to favour tourism when the benefits they acquire from tourism is greater than their losses. Turner (1981) also claims that the social exchange theory plays a significant role in this context by supporting this findings as the theory assumes that people select exchanges having assessed the rewards and the costs first then decide whether it worth doing or not. This concept is consistence with the results of this study as both groups also recognised that while their income increased so did their expenditures. They were also inclined to agree that they have changed themselves to become more 'Thai' like as a result of working with ETAs. This may be due to the fact that they are more willingly to participate in the tourism industry, although they may

need to lose something in return, but they get to accelerate themselves to involve in the development programmes with the hope of becoming closer to mainstream Thai society (Aguettant, 1996; Buadang, 2004; Wijeyewardene, 1990).

However this issue was not the biggest concern for the majority of the respondents from the questionnaire as both sets of respondents disagreed (mean <2) that as a result of working with ETAs they failed to keep in touch with their tribal friends.
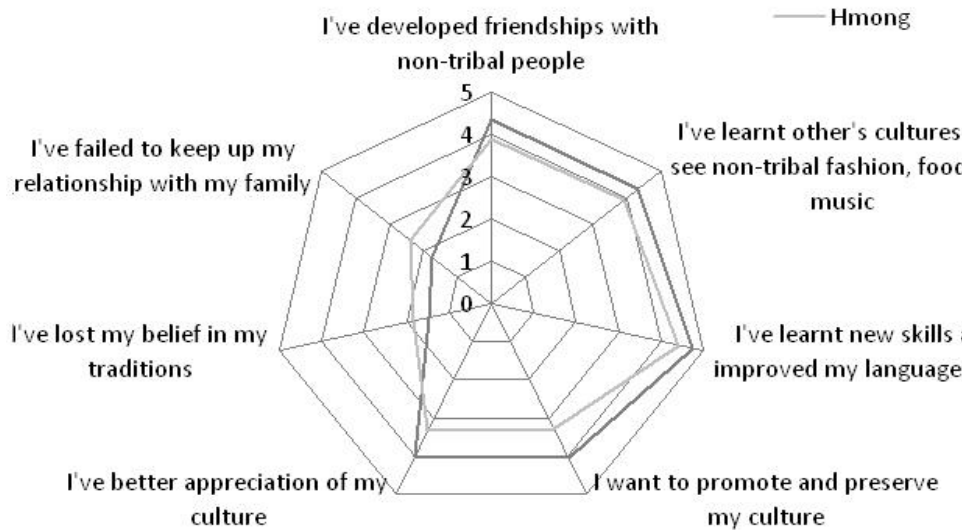
Differences

Table 2 Differences in perceptions of the Karen and Hmong towards impacts upon themselves and other employees resulting from their working with ETAs (figures in bold indicate significant differences)

Variables	Mean Rank of agree and strongly agree			Mean Score 5=strongly agree	
Perceived impacts resulting from working with ETAs	Karen	Hmong	Sig.	Karen	Hmong
I've developed friendships with nontribal people from working with ETAs	115.28	89.36	<.001	4.35	3.89
I've learnt other cultures and see nontribal fashion, food and music by working with ETAs	116.39	88.30	<.001	4.33	3.92
I've learnt new skills and improved my Thai and English language skills	117.68	87.07	<.001	4.71	4.39
I want to promote and preserve my cultural products, e.g., culture, dress codes, and food	119.30	85.53	<.001	4.03	3.27
After working with ETAs, I've a better appreciation of my culture	121.98	82.98	<.001	4.01	3.33
I've lost my belief in my traditions and sacred sites after working with ETAs because I deal with them as tourist attractions	89.33	114.06	.001	1.47	1.82
I've failed to keep up my relationship with my family	81.06	121.93	<.001	1.76	2.41

The results from the tables above revealed that the Karen and Hmong perceived similarly many positive impacts resulting from working with ETAs. Yet, the Mann Whitney U test identified some significant differences in their perceptions towards the issues listed above.

Figure 1 Differences in perceived impacts resulting from working with ETAs: comparison of means for Karen and Hmong (5=strongly agree)

The results from the Mann-Whitney U test showed that the two ethnic groups perceived seven of the thirteen impacts differently. It can be explained that external environment play an important role in directing how one would interpret the world they are in, yet, the greater influence would be from the individual profound meaningful internal experiences (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1987; Samovar and Porter, 1991). A calculation of effect size was performed based on their Z-scores of the results that hold significant differences in their views. However the results represent small to medium effect (below the .3 criterion) for the view of impacts from their employment with ETAs. Therefore, it can be concluded that their experiences of impacts, shown in Figure 1, were significantly different. However, these differences were not that significant as they only held small to medium effect size.

Having compared similarities and differences between the two ethnic groups, the following tables show the results from the Mann-Whitney test for significant differences in perceived positive and negative impacts between males and females within each ethnic group (intra-tribal group by gender), as well as across the ethnics group (inter-tribal group by gender). The findings from this study can clearly be explained by Samovar and Porter (1991) that one of the main factors that directly influence perception is culture and supported by Granrose and Oskamp (1997) who believed that culture strongly influences the environment in which people are raised, in that it exposes them to experiences and produces meanings. Berry and Sam (1996) also emphasised that once people who hold a different set of culture and value are crossing each other; it is most likely result in

diversity and often leads to a conflict when there is no proper management and poor foundation of understanding culture differences.

Conclusion

Culture plays a significant role in directing how one perceives and interprets things. As a result, it is more or less reflecting on their behaviour towards certain situation, and for this case is a tourism employment with the Thais. The findings from this study suggest that though tourism business can enormously draw attention and attract minority groups of people to work in this industry due to the obvious economic benefits, yet the hill trip people from different cultural backgrounds tend to perceive and act upon things differently.

Recommendations

Understanding perceptions of people, especially those who hold a different value and from a different cultural background can lead to a more appropriate management for tourism employment. Therefore, a combination of insight into culturally specific perceptions, behaviours and understanding of broader cultural value is strongly recommended in a working environment with a high diversity. Thus, tourism employers should be well-aware and prepared to handle and accommodate different mind-set from their employees. A better understanding of culturally embedded values and perceptions of the hill tribe employees should result in a rewarding working experience for them and effective management for tourism employers.

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