

# **Ethnic Tourism Development in Thailand: the Case of the Black Tai**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Thailand is one of many countries interested in ethnic tourism development. The greatest challenge in this field is the question of sustainability of ethnic identity and culture. The present study discusses the findings of an “action research” conducted in Phaihuchang village in Banglen district, Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand where the Black Tai or *Tai Dam* ethnic group, who migrated from Laos, resides. The researchers adopted a 6Ds model, implementing community-based tourism (CBT), Participatory Action Research (PAR), and SWOT analysis. Such an approach to ethnic tourism may facilitate the ethnic tourism development preparation process in the village as well as promote sustainability at the site. The findings of the study reveal positive impacts not only on individuals and the community as a whole, but also tangible and intangible cultural changes. Important factors leading to the successful development of ethnic tourism are also discussed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Tourism Development, Community-based tourism, Black Tai (Tai Dam), Nakhon Pathom province, Participatory Action Research, SWOT analysis

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ethnic tourism emphasizes direct contact and experiences between tourists and a community with a culture and traditions that are different from those of the tourists (Smith 1997). Even though ethnic tourism is able to generate income for a community, in principle, it is meant to be a source of extra income, not the main generator of wealth (Hausler and Strasdas, 2002: 3). Ethnic tourism has received positive worldwide attention, especially among countries where a great variety of ethnic peoples reside. Cultural diversity and distinctiveness are attractive features for both domestic and international tourists. Countries like the People’s Republic of China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand are among the numerous countries promoting ethnic tourism (Cohen 2001; Howard 2006; Leepreecha 2005; Hanh 2008). In certain countries, tourism plays an important role in supporting the local economy.

In 1997, Thailand declared a national policy branded “Amazing Thailand” (1998-1999) promoting tourism as a remedial measure following an economic crisis the previous year. In 2001, the government introduced another policy, “One *Tambon* [district] One Product (OTOP)”. As a result, eco-tourism, community-based tourism, or home-stay businesses can be seen in many places (Office of Tourism Development 2010). Different kinds of tourism in each community all share the same objective, which is to attract people to visit and learn something new while also generating more income for the local community.

Despite the advantages and positive impacts, tourism, in some cases, also has negative effects. Conflicts among stakeholders, diminished authenticity of local cultures caused by commoditization of cultural elements, and environmental problems can all have a detrimental outcome (Hoa and Lan 1999; Liang, Umezaki, and Ohtsuka 2003). The sustainability of tourism development is an issue of much concern (Teo and Chang 1998). As such, the process of tourism development needs to involve the local people as much as possible and consider all relevant information including both the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the community, as well as pay attention to lessons learned from past failures at other locations; in short, it should proceed with caution.

The main objective of this research paper is to propose an approach to developing Black Tai ethnic tourism by conceptualizing and implementing community-based tourism (CBT), based on participatory action research (PAR), and a SWOT analysis. This is referred to as the 6Ds model.

### 1. Black Tai People

Black Tai people have been addressed by various names such as *Thai Song*, *Thai Song Dam*, *Lao Song*, *Song*. All of these names, including the ethnic label “Black Tai” or “*Tai Dam*”, were given by outsiders because this ethnic group was dressed in black (*dam*) clothing with variations. The Black Tai people migrated from Muang Thaeng, which is the mythical place of their origin according to age-old tales chanted at funerals. This place used to be under the administration of Luang Prabang government in northern Laos (Sribusara 1987). Muang Thaeng is presently called Muang Dien Bien Phu, and is now considered as part of northwestern Vietnam.

Black Tai people migrated to Thailand as prisoners of war. The forced movements took place during the reign of King Taksin (1767-1782) and during the reigns of Rama I, Rama II, and Rama III. Baker and Phongpaichit (2005: 28-29) recount the history of migration in the 1770s and 1780s, when Taksin’s armies captured many thousands of Lanna Yuan, Lao Vieng, Lao Phuan, Black Tai, and Khmer. In 1827-1828, Bangkok went to war with the Lao ruler of Vientiane, Jao Anu<sup>1</sup>, who competed to control this frontier region. Bangkok’s armies destroyed Jao Anu’s capital and dynasty. After the 1827 war against Vientiane, over 150,000 were captured and some 50,000 forcibly marched down to the Chaophraya basin. In the 1830s, the Bangkok armies made six expeditions into the Lao regions, de-populating the left bank of the Mekong, and bringing back with them Lao Phuan from the Plain of Jars, Black Tai from Sipsongchuthai, Khmer, and Vietnamese. One purpose of Bangkok’s military expansion was to restock the population by means of forced resettlement.

Due to common migration patterns and linguistic similarities between *Tai Dam* and other Lao groups, later generations of *Tai Dam* believed they were the same group as the Laos, and called themselves *Phu Lao* ‘Lao people’ (Chakshuraksha 2003). Linguistically, the *Tai Dam* language is distinguished from the Lao language and other Lao ethnic group languages as a member of the Tai language group (Brown 1965). All languages belong to the Southwestern branch of the Tai-Kadai language family (Li 1960).

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<sup>1</sup> Lao transcription is Chao Anou.

The original settlement of *Tai Dam* people in Thailand was in Phetchaburi Province in the western region of Thailand (Piyaphan 1998). The oldest and most populated *Tai Dam* community is the village number five (Nongkhe village), Nongprong sub-district, Khaoyoi District, Phetchaburi Province (Chakshuraksha 2003). At first, they were not granted freedom of movement, but following the abolition of slavery under the reign of King Rama V in 1898, they were permitted to move to other areas, which they did in significant numbers. The *Tai Dam* people moved to nearby provinces such as Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Suphanburi, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon, and Samut Songkhram. In the Chiangkhan District of Loei Province in the northeastern region of Thailand, there is also a group of *Tai Dam* people who migrated from Laos. In addition to their migration to Thailand, *Tai Dam* people also migrated from Son La (Muang La) in Vietnam to Laos. An interview with Bakam (2010),<sup>2</sup> a 78-year-old who lives in Vientiane, discloses that most *Tai Dam* people in Laos migrated from Son La more than 50 years ago.

It should be noted that the Black Tai people keep in touch with one another by visiting friends and relatives, and they regularly visit others during cultural events, especially for important festivals or traditional ceremonies associated with their ancestors. *Tai Dam* in Thailand even arrange trips to visit *Tai Dam* people in Laos and in Vietnam. This has built, supported, and strengthened bonds and relationships, and helped to establish a network linking Black Tai communities in different places. It has also become a feature of Black Tai unity.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Black Tai People in Phaihuchang Village

A study of the language use and attitudes about ethnic identity of the Lao ethnic groups including the Black Tai in the western region of Thailand shows that, among all these ethnic groups, Black Tai are the most strongly united and thus have the most vibrant language vitality. A survey of areas inhabited by these ethnic groups reveals that, in the western region of Thailand, Black Tai villages number the most at 394 villages out of a total of 1,584 (Burusphat et al. 2011). In terms of population numbers, Black Tai are the dominant ethnic group in this region. Black Tai community-based tourism exists in some provinces of this region, namely, Petchaburi, Ratchaburi, and Suphanburi. In Nakhon Pathom Province, no successful Black Tai community-based tourism has been found so this province has been chosen as a research site.

As in other Black Tai inhabited areas, Black Tai people in Nakhon Pathom Province have assimilated well into the Thai community. There are several major factors that promote this assimilation, such as the practice of intermarriage, formal schooling in schools far from the village community and the widespread presence of electronic media in the village (Chakshuraksha 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> Bakam, K. 2010. Interview. November 21, 2010. Nongbuathongtay village, Sikhottabong district, Vientiane, Lao PDR.

<sup>3</sup> This same practice is also true of other ethnic groups, such as the Phuan, whose homeland was in the Xiang Khuang region of northern Laos. They were moved by the Siamese military and resettled in scattered communities around Thailand during the same period as the Black Tai removal (Breazeale and Samuckkarn 1988).

Consequently, the question of the nature of Black Tai identity has arisen. In general, signs of ethnic identification are religion, types of farming, dialect, diet, and dress (Moerman 1965). Black Tai people cannot be distinguished from other Thai people by the criterion of wet rice cultivation because the settlements of both groups, as well as other Tai ethnic groups, such as the Shan in Burma, are associated with irrigated wet paddy land (Leach 2004). Nor can dialect, diet, and dress be used as Black Tai emblems either. The Black Tai language is still vital where the younger generations live in an extended family environment in which older generations provide better role models for correct behavior and values. In this way, the value of language and cultural preservation has been handed down to the younger generations. A contrasting situation can be found in a nuclear family where the Thai language is dominant. Diet and dress are still preserved in old and middle generations in the latter case, but dying out in younger generations.

Apart from those criteria, persistent and permeating animism seems to be an important feature of Black Tai identity; it distinguishes Black Tai from the Thai, Shan in Burma (Moerman 1965), and the Lue in the Chiengkham District of Chiengrai Province who are Buddhists (Moerman 1965). Ancestor worship, which is related to the patriarchal family system, is also an important element of Black Tai identity. Black Tai people believe that a Black Tai house needs to have a place called *kalorhong* for ancestor spirits to reside, and an ancestor worship ritual called *senhuan* needs to be performed regularly or else the living family members will meet with unfortunate events such as illness. This strict belief has managed to survive through important rituals and customs. Nowadays, Buddhism has become incorporated into the fabric of Black Tai society but the Black Tai people persist in traditional beliefs and practices.<sup>4</sup>

Phaihuchang Village (village numbers four and five) in Banglen District, Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand was chosen as a research site for several reasons. Firstly, Black Tai people make up 80% of this community (1,636),<sup>5</sup> and secondly, a number of Black Tai language and cultural centers are located in this village. A *Tai Dam* association (Thailand) was set up at Phaihuchang Village with the primary objective being to teach the Black Tai language to the younger generations. There is also a cultural center and a traditional Black Tai model house being used as a museum that attempts to exhibit the Black Tai way of life through cultural artifacts and historical photos. This way, Black Tai children have a chance to get to know the local history and development of their own village which helps foster pride and respect in their community. These language and cultural buildings and their contents can also serve as information centers for tourists. Finally, Black Tai people in this village rely on a variety of farming methods to make a living such as rice cultivation and vegetable gardening, lotus gathering and fish/shrimp farms. Tourists may find the rural way of Black Tai life fascinating and also help to increase local people's income by buying their products.

The aforementioned factors allow the Black Tai community in Phaihuchang Village to enjoy the benefits of its cultural and social capital that serve as a quality asset

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<sup>4</sup> Sayphan (2011) also finds that Black Tai people in Dien Bien Phu of Vietnam use cultural practices to retain local Tai ethnic identity within the existing order of the nation and the contemporary globalizing world.

<sup>5</sup> The population figure is taken from Report of Demographic number of Phaihuchang population, Primary Care Unit, Phaihuchang Community Hospital, January 10, 2013, page 1.

and attraction for ethnic tourism development. What the community needs now is support in various forms from a range of organizations and interested parties to firmly establish Phaihuchang as a desirable model for emulation.

### 3. Research Framework

This current study conceptualizes three key ideas, namely, community-based tourism (CBT), Participatory Action Research (PAR), and SWOT analysis.

Community-based tourism focuses on the involvement of locals in the management and development of tourism in the community. The concept of community-based tourism is also echoed in the work by Suansri (2003). She states that community-based tourism should recognize environmental, social and cultural sustainability as the primary community concern. The management of tourism can best be planned and operated by the locals themselves as opposed to government officials. Community-based tourism originates from the assumption that, in theory, every villager owns the cultural resources in the village. As such, they should properly be the main stakeholders in the business enterprise of ethnic tourism. The planning and management of ethnic tourism should carefully consider relevant factors, as well as focus on developing local human resources and the roles of all stakeholders (Office of Tourism Development 2010). Yang and Wall (2009) note that stakeholders or partners are an important foundation of ethnic tourism development and management. Different stakeholders may have different needs. Some people set linguistic and cultural preservation as the priority of CBT, while others aim mainly at gaining extra income. Working together to achieve both goals helps to balance needs leading to successful and sustainable development among all sectors.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is the combination of different research concepts, combining methods and ideas in action research, research and development (R&D), and participatory research. The essence of PAR lies in participation. This framework encourages community participation at all stages of the process, from identifying problems, planning and implementing remedies, to assessing the results, and consolidating knowledge to be applied in planning and implementing solutions anew if the problem is not satisfactorily solved. By adopting a PAR approach, the community members are by no means mere subjects of the research; rather, they play a role as active co-researchers (Mikkelsen 1995; Whyte 1991; Dulyakasem 1993). PAR is a continuous cycle of correlative research work -- an ongoing process to the point when the objective is achieved. That is, the problem is solved to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. PAR is a framework that allows for democracy; everyone is equal, working together as a team, sharing information and learning from each other. Significant outcomes of PAR are not only acceptable solutions to problems, but also the integration of local researchers into the process and the creation of new networks. PAR provides mechanism to strengthen and develop human potential. An underlying assumption of the framework is that people always seek to improve their own condition, and that there is a need to resolve one's own problems in the course of achieving a better quality of life and in this way, self-reliance is encouraged. In other words, PAR is a research process that can lead to sustainable development and is, therefore, the most suitable research framework for this current study.

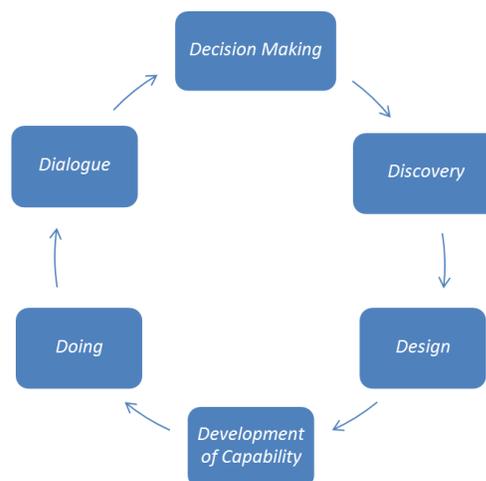
A SWOT analysis is an important tool for identifying and assessing the potential of the community and for providing guidelines towards achieving goals. Ghazinoory, Abdi, and Azadegan (2011) define SWOT analysis as a survey of all relevant internal and external factors, contributing to appropriate strategies suited for the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of an organization. *S* stands for the “strengths” of the organization; internal factors that could help facilitate and lead to success. *W* refers to “weaknesses”; internal factors that may impede progress. *O* is for “opportunities” which are external environments that allow the organization to grow or develop. And lastly, *T* refers to external “threats” or limitations or obstacles in the process. This study uses SWOT to assess the feasibility of developing a sustainable ethnic tourism model in the Black Tai community.

#### 4. Black Tai ethnic tourism development

The objectives of Black Tai CBT are twofold. The first objective is to develop the Phaihuchang community as a sustainable ethnic tourism model to be emulated by other ethnic communities that have the potential. It is anticipated that the Black Tai CBT will help to preserve Black Tai language and culture as well as refocus Black Tai children’s attention onto their own identity in the face of strong influences from Thai language and culture in the public arena, especially in schools where the main language of instruction is central Thai.

The second objective is to promote team work in the community where Black Tai people learn to analyze a problem and find its solution by themselves. In so doing, community members are able to create a learning social network within the community and extend this network to other communities as well.

Following the above objectives, a 6Ds model has been implemented at Phaihuchang Village. This 6Ds model, as seen in **figure 1**, comprises three core ideas as its principle framework for research, that is: community-based tourism, PAR, and SWOT analysis. Such a framework stresses the importance of participation, operations, and mutual understanding at all stages. These steps enable the community to develop and resolve issues together, which will facilitate sustainability.



**Figure 1.** the 6Ds model

### ***Decision making***

The 6Ds model begins with “decision making” focusing on community leaders. The external researchers of this research project recruited community leaders as partners in this research project. These community leaders work with the researchers as colleagues, participating in the conception and design of Black Tai ethnic tourism. Rabinowitz (2013) offers the following advantages of having community members participate in the participatory action research. First, local people in the community are more liable to be willing to talk and give straight answers to community researchers whom they know than to outsiders with whom they have little in common. Second, community members are on the scene all the time and may obtain information even when they are not officially engaged in research. Third, the research may receive more support from other community members because it is conducted by people in the same circumstances as their own.

The operation step starts with a PAR technique called “focus group”. For this study, a group of community leaders was recruited based on their involvement in community service. The focus group included the chief administrator of the Phaihuchang Subdistrict Administration Organization (PSAO), the deputy chief administrator of PSAO, the PSAO members, the chairman of the PSAO Cultural Center, Phaihuchang Subdistrict headman, Phaihuchang village headman, the director of Phaihuchang Public School, instructors at Phaihuchang Public School, and the chairman of the *Tai Dam* Association (Thailand), as well as learned men or local scholars.

The first meeting with this focus group was held at the field site at which they were invited to participate as partners in this research project. This meeting provided the community leaders with information addressing their rich cultural heritage and the feasibility of developing a model village for tourism development at the research site. The objectives of the research projects were outlined for the community leadership, namely: to preserve ethnic language and culture; to promote the conservation of ethnic cultural heritage; and to generate extra income. After the community leaders had agreed to get involved in the project, they officially became the participatory action research team. As a part of the community, this research team was trusted by other community members and proceeded to inform the wider community of the project's agenda.

The next step employed the orientation technique of PAR to extend collaboration to other community members. A meeting at the research site was arranged with external researchers, community leaders, and interested community members -- as potential researchers -- to discuss the feasibility of CBT in the community. The orientation consisted of an introductory activity to help everyone get to know one another; an explanation of community-based participatory action research; and the objectives of this research project. The basic assumptions of CBT were emphasized, namely: to conserve the language and cultural heritage of the Black Tai people; to share Black Tai traditions and culture with tourists through performances, ceremonies, and community products; and to generate extra income for the benefit of the whole community. The orientation provides community members with an opportunity to ask questions or to discuss anything which is unclear to them. It also helps to build a true understanding of CBT among community members and fosters a sense of partnership

with community members whilst cementing their approval and confidence. Each individual may have different ideas and different needs at the beginning, but they quickly learn to listen, compromise and make decisions together as a team. As team members, people are able to work cooperatively throughout the project.

### ***Discovery***

After a number of interested community members had agreed to be additional community researchers, the “discovery” followed. The major concern of this step is to find tourist attractions in the community. A brainstorming and SWOT analysis were used to evaluate tourist spots. Community researchers, as members of the community, know best what to offer tourists. Members worked together to determine the community’s potential cultural capital which will serve as tourist attractions.

Through the process of SWOT analysis, each potential tourist attraction was analyzed in terms of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Finally, the commonly-agreed-upon tourist attractions were identified. In searching for the cultural capital of the Phaihuchang community, community researchers realized that there were numerous potential tourist attractions in their community that needed professional management and presentation to attract tourists. They also became more aware of their ethnic identity and developed a better understanding of their own culture. This was most evident in the younger generation who began to better understand the underlying significance behind Black Tai rituals and customs.

### ***Design***

After the SWOT analysis had been used to evaluate the potential tourist attractions, the workshop technique of PAR was applied to the “Design” step. Workshops were conducted to bring the community researchers together to make plans for the ethnic tourism management. As community researchers were actively involved in the planning and implementation themselves, they soon felt a sense of ownership in the project and collaborated enthusiastically to make it successful. At workshops, the group discussed the management of the Black Tai ethnic tourism at Phaihuchang village. The major concerns were how to present suitable cultural sites and activities to tourists and how to enable them to experience and learn about the Black Tai culture and way of life. The group analyzed issues such as prospective tourists, tour routes, patterns of tourism (one day trip or home stay trip), timeline for completing each phase of the plan, job assignment (who would be responsible for what), and public relations. In making a decision on these issues, the SWOT analysis was also used to determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of each issue. As pointed out by Rabinowitz (2013), the workshops helped the community researchers to develop meeting skills and negotiating skills. The group became confident about expressing their opinions and felt comfortable with the meeting process.

### ***Development of capabilities***

Before the ethnic tourism plan was implemented for the Phaihuchang community, it was necessary to enhance the capacities of community researchers who

had no experience in tourism management. Three capacity-building activities were provided for them.

First, the observation technique of PAR, called “learning by doing”, was used. Field visits to successful tourist attraction sites were arranged for the community researchers to observe and learn from other ethnic communities, namely, the Lao community at Jim Thompson Farm in Nakhonratchasima Province in the northeast region of Thailand, the Tai Yuan community at Tontan Village in Saraburi Province in the central region, and the Black Tai community at Huakhawjin Village in Ratchaburi Province in the western region. This activity enabled community researchers to gain useful information on ethnic tourism management, to exchange ideas with members of other communities, and to create a social network with Black Tai people and other ethnic groups in other areas.

Second, a workshop about the techniques used in PAR was conducted. Experts and professionals of the Thailand Community-Based Tourism Institute were invited to host a workshop on community-based tourism. The community researchers, not only gained a true understanding of community-based tourism, but were also guided in how to design ethnic tourism for their location.

It is important to note at this point that many Black Tai people have already been assimilated into the larger Thai community; the cultural activities and rituals of Black Tai as well as the Black Tai language have been gradually dying out. Most young generation Black Tai do not want to appear different from the Thai majority and feel reluctant to reveal their ethnic identity. The research on Black Tai attitudes toward ethnic tourism in the western region of Thailand (Burusphat 2011 et al) disclosed that most middle-aged and elderly people believed that ethnic tourism would help to refocus Black Tai children’s attention onto their own language and culture. Transmission of language and culture from the older generation on down will help maintain their ethnic identity and allow Black Tai language and culture to survive through succeeding generations.

Consequently, the PAR training technique was applied so that the Black Tai young generation would be encouraged to get involved in the project. A two-week training course on how to be a junior tour guide was arranged for twenty-six students of Phaihuchang Public School. These students were primary and secondary students who had volunteered to participate in the training course. The training was fully supported by the head of Phaihuchang Public School. It focused on how to be a tour guide, the village history, Black Tai beliefs and way of life, and worthwhile tourist spots. The students also learned basic English expressions for tour guides. The training was followed by workshops in which students were separated into three groups and worked on an assignment with the external researchers as mentors, after which they presented their solutions or findings to the other groups. The training and workshop, not only provided the students with the knowledge about Black Tai ethnicity necessary for tour guides, but also fostered the students’ consciousness of their ethnic identity. The students soon took pride in their unique language and culture; they learned to treasure the customs and folk wisdom of their ancestors and were motivated to conserve them. The junior tour guide training was a PAR activity which enabled Black Tai people of all generations to share in the Black Tai ethnic tourism enterprise. The

involvement of the younger generations suggests a promising future for the conservation of the ethnic language and culture.

### ***Doing***

The “Doing” step involves the implement of the agreed plan. The community researchers activated all the plans that had been formulated with individuals doing what they could do first.

A Black Tai market was opened for tourists on Sundays only. Tourists could buy food and Black Tai products or souvenirs from there. A traditional Black Tai model house was constructed and served as an information center. Restrooms for tourists were built. The cultural center and museum were remodeled and staff at the Black Tai learning center and weaving/basketry center prepared places for visitors. By “doing”, the community researchers and villagers learned from their mistakes and cooperated in solving problems. This created a sense of unity in the community as they became more aware of their unique ethnic identity and the need to preserve their ethnic cultural traits. They also expressed the hope that CBT will improve the Black Tai economy.

When the village was ready for tourists to visit, the research team needed to promote tourism in the village through press releases. A number of activities were organized such as: inviting governmental organizations in the province to attend the opening ceremony of the village; publishing local news; making a VCD and advertising tourism in the village on-line; and holding a press conference for publicity on local radio, in newspapers, and documentary and travel magazines. The research team also invited a group of visitors, including experts in the field of ethnic tourism, local administrators from other communities, and publicists to visit the village and provided feedback and recommendations for future improvement. After collecting all the feedback and recommendations from tourists, visitors and experts alike, the research team met to evaluate the plans and discuss future improvements.

### ***Dialogue***

All steps to ethnic tourism development discussed so far included “dialogue”, a PAR strategy that leads to mutual understanding and a satisfactory solution for all. Group discussions were arranged with an assumption that all discussants were treated as equals. They themselves treated others as colleagues, not as superiors or inferiors. External researchers kept professionals, academics, and community leaders from dominating. By adopting “dialogue”, the researchers freely exchanged views and, as a group, reached a mutual decision, a process that is key to successful teamwork.

As Yang and Wall (2009) noted, different stakeholders might have different needs. By adopting PAR, differences are mitigated and balanced, and this helps to relieve tension and avoid conflicts that might arise during the group discussion. Everyone learns from each other through collaborative endeavor.

The 6Ds model comprises various steps which do not occur successively but rather simultaneously and repeatedly. The external researchers encouraged the involvement of community researchers at all steps, and they themselves acted as mentors accompanying the community on its route towards ethnic tourism development. The 6Ds model was implemented at Phaihuchang Village and enabled this village to reach the first goal of this research, namely, the village as a model of Black Tai

ethnic tourism. It is hoped that other ethnic communities, either in Thailand or outside Thailand such as in Laos and Vietnam, would learn from- and use this model to develop ethnic tourism in their own communities.

## **5. The effect of community-based tourism on Phaihuchang community**

The community-based tourism at Phaihuchang Village has brought about both tangible and intangible changes to this community as discussed below.

### **5.1 Tangible changes**

Through the processes of CBT, PAR and SWOT analysis, the community researchers implemented action solutions and recommendations from all the meetings and discussions. For example, they took part in selecting and planning featured tourist spots, making traffic signs, building a model of a traditional Black Tai house and designing a learning center for tourists, as well as improving facilities in the village to cater to tourist demands. All of this was achieved through co-operation, donations and a volunteer spirit enlivened from within by community members themselves.

After Phaihuchang Village had been prepared as an ethnic tourism site, three tourist features were realized, that is, things to see; things to taste; and things to buy. "Things to see" included a trip to experience the local lifestyle of the Black Tai people, e.g., a visit to the cultural center, Black Tai learning center, weaving house, native basketry group, lotus farm, local musical band, ethnic costume, and archaeology sites in the village. "Things to taste" presented a variety of local Black Tai foods. "Things to buy" included local products such as handicrafts, agricultural products, and souvenirs.

In addition, the community drew up a tourist calendar announcing that the village would be open for tourists every Sunday from November to May each year. May is the beginning of the rainy season when villagers prepare to cultivate their rice fields. The village is open on Sundays only so as to minimize the disruption tourism may have on the local way of life.

### **5.2 Intangible changes**

Four aspects of intangible changes on the Phaihuchang community were found from this research.

First, community researchers and other villagers have become very interested and enthusiastic about the project. They realize the value and importance of language and culture to their identity and are increasingly keen to share their cultural traits with others. When visitors arrive in the village, the villagers are determined to be good hosts. They are very helpful and offer as much information as they can.

Second, the ethnic tourism project has enabled the community researchers to recognize the importance of team work for the maintenance and preservation of Black Tai language and culture. For example, community researchers put forward the idea of setting up a Black Tai market in the village. Even though the Black Tai language is still spoken by most Black Tai people, especially the middle and older generations, merchants at the Black Tai market were encouraged to use the Black Tai language with local buyers and tourists who mostly speak standard Thai, a language within the Tai language group like Black Tai. By encouraging more villagers to actively use the

language daily, it not only strengthens the vitality of the language, but also helps foster pride in their ethnic identity. When tourists visit the village, they have the opportunity to learn the language and the culture at the same time. Local people are encouraged to wear Black Tai costumes at the market, not just speak the Black Tai language. The Black Tai children also played a part in the project. They enjoyed wearing traditional costumes, performing traditional dances, and playing traditional music. By establishing this Black Tai market, the community researchers underwent a cooperative learning process and learned how to solve problems by themselves.

Third, the chance to participate in the CBT workshop and to visit other tourist attractions enabled community researchers to learn how to effectively manage ethnic tourism as well as fully understand the principles of CBT. They were able to develop management skills such as how to share the benefits fairly and how to welcome tourists to their village. They learned how to apply the knowledge they had gained from the CBT workshop and from other successful ethnic tourism communities to their own community.

Fourth, another intangible outcome of the project was a network of collaboration. By adopting PAR as a framework, all parties and stakeholders were offered the opportunity to participate in the project. Everyone came to recognize that strong teamwork and effective networking was the key to success. In order to bring the project to fruition, they had to collaborate and help each other along each step of the way, from brainstorming and planning, to solving problems, and assessing the results. This has strengthened ties amongst partners and facilitated the creation of a network of interested parties that includes household members, teachers, monks, community leaders, local governmental officers and stakeholders.

## **6. SWOT analysis of Phaihuchang community-based tourism**

To properly manage sustainable community-based tourism, operating strategies suitable to the context of each community are needed. PAR strategies were used to develop Phaihuchang Village as an ethnic tourism village and the results were analyzed using SWOT analysis as discussed below.

### ***Strengths (S)***

This research identified four distinct advantages that make Phaihuchang a potentially ideal ethnic tourism village.

First of these is its location. The village is situated in the northern part of Banglen District, Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand, which is only 85 kilometres from Bangkok. A number of well-known tourist attractions are located in this province, for example, Phra Pathom Chedi, the largest pagoda in Thailand and the official provincial symbol of Nakhon Pathom, and Thai Human Imagery Museum. Phaihuchang village is near these tourist attractions so tourists may well choose to include this village as part of a tour of the region.

Second, Black Tai people in Phaihuchang Village face challenges in the maintenance and preservation of their language and culture. They have met these with campaigns and activities to conserve cultural practices and promote local wisdom and

pride among succeeding generations through greater appreciation of the group's history, culture, dress, language, rituals, tales, and art and crafts.

Third, the villagers have unique culture which they can share with tourists. Phaihuchang community members have managed to safe-guard key cultural capital, especially that concerning traditions and rituals, e.g., wedding ceremonies, funerals, *khwan* (soul)-blessing, ancestor worship, and handicrafts like weaving, embroidery and basketry. The food culture of the Black Tai group is also rich. During important festivals, Black Tai people prepare food for monks, friends and relatives. The sound of their traditional musical instrument, the *kaen* (reed organ), can be heard all around the village. Children also learn and play traditional music. They have even formed a village musical ensemble which can be hired out to perform at festivals and elsewhere. These authentic and unique traditions and rituals will attract tourists.

Finally, the village is strongly united. Black Tai ethnicity unites them as a single group. Pride in their unique language and culture helps bind and secure them to this location as a strong ethnic group.

### ***Weakness (W)***

In spite of the mentioned strengths, some disadvantages of ethnic tourism development at Phaihuchang Village were also found.

First, in a rural community, one may find various kinds of social networks such as family network and political network. If these networks are harmonious, they will bring unity to the community and help to facilitate any kind of development. During the period of project development, the community researchers did not build sufficient networks with all groups of people, such as some local administrators. In addition, networks with outside organizations still need to be established such as networks with district chief office and chief executive of provincial administrative.

Second, Phaihuchang is rich in cultural capital. However the management of this cultural capital is still not professional business-wise. Even though the PAR technique was used in implementing ethnic tourism at this location, some community members believed that ethnic tourism management should be conducted by an organizing committee alone, not by everyone. Consequently, some were not so committed to the idea of CBT management by means of this business model.

Third, villagers were busy with their routine activities and had little time to participate in ethnic tourism activities, especially meetings that they thought had nothing to do with their well-being. In addition, Black Tai people conduct numerous rituals and ceremonies which are usually held on weekends, for example, ancestor worship, ordination, and weddings. These ritual activities make it difficult for villagers to spare time for tourists.

Finally, insufficient financial support is another weak aspect of Black Tai CBT at Phaihuchang. At the initial stage of "doing", the ethnic tourism development was financially supported by donations from a group of community leaders and the external researchers' organization. Consequently, other community members might have felt that they were just subordinates or assistants, not the owners of the CBT project. To find a solution to this problem, community researchers drafted a budget proposal and submitted it to the Phaihuchang Subdistrict Administration Organization. However, the

grant process will take at least a year, so, in the meantime, the community researchers should consider serious fundraising, and a professional business plan draft.

### ***Opportunities (O)***

Three external factors encouraging Black Tai ethnic tourism at Phaihuchang Village were found.

First, ethnic tourism is a new trend in tourism in Thailand. Tourists are now interested in learning about different cultures so that people of different ethnicities can live in harmony. Second, Phaihuchang Village is situated near Bangkok; it is easier and more economical to access this village compared with other ethnic villages that are in other regions of Thailand. In addition, local products and food are cheap and of good quality. Finally, support from external parties is essential for CBT. This ethnic tourism project was supported by the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University; the Phaihuchang Subdistrict Administration Organization; Tourism Authority of Thailand; and mass media. Support from these organizations included initiating the CBT; capacity building; partial financial aid, public relations; and communication technology.

### ***Threats (T)***

External factors that may hinder the ethnic tourism management includes the reputation of the destination and the quality of the whole facility. Most tourists imagine ethnic tourism in a traditional way, that is, the destination is associated with beautiful scenery, nature and perhaps mountains in the northern region of Thailand. Ethnic tourism in the western region of Thailand is where one can find a departure from this traditional image; hence some tourists may think that Phaihuchang Village is not so interesting. There are no such things as floating markets or malls where tourists can shop for local products. The next threat is the standard of facilities. Most tourists expect full facilities at Phaihuchang Village as found at other high-end tourist spots. This seems to contradict the principle of community-based tourism. Ethnic tourism is arranged to serve community members and to allow tourists to observe and learn about the Black Tai villagers' way of life. The expectation that full facilities are available at the community suggests that members have failed to convey this CBT concept properly to tourists.

## **7. Suggested strategies for future sustainable development of ethnic tourism**

Development of ethnic tourism in the Black Tai village of Phaihuchang is the fruit of the strong determination of all researchers involved in this project. Participatory research supported by the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders has had a positive effect. This research project initiated community collaboration and it is expected that the Black Tai ethnic tourism development at Phaihuchang will continue beyond the end of the project when the external researchers have left. Hence, the external researchers have proposed additional strategies, which should be helpful for the improvement and management of ethnic tourism into the future. The suggested strategies are presented using a SWOT analysis as discussed below.

***Proactive strategy (SO)***

The proactive strategy is derived from the internal strength of the community, i.e., cultural capital, and the external opportunity; i.e., the current trend of tourism. The Black Tai community has a unique cultural heritage which should be effectively shared with tourists in line with the current trend of tourism, i.e., cultural diversity tourism. Social capital is another internal strength of the Black Tai community. Black Tai community members live in a reciprocal society, people are cooperative. Participating in the research project has drawn their interest to manage tourism that highlights Black Tai cultural values and meaning. This social capital serves as incentive for sustainable community-based tourism management.

***Preventive strategy (WO)***

The preventive strategy comprises community weaknesses, in this case, the shortage of financial support and the lack of an efficient managing committee, which prevented the benefit of opportunities or external environment from encouraging the CBT management.

Financial support can be achieved through fund-raising within the community. The community should set up a mutual fund for which community members can take shares. This not only attracts monetary support for CBT, but also brings about a sense of belonging or ownership in this tourism project. In addition, a Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) project could be proposed to the Phaihuchang Subdistrict Administration Organization (PSAO) to be included in the PSAO development plan together with a budget allotted to the CBT project when the plan has been approved.

A managing committee was set up for the CBT. However, the roles of committee members are not clearly specified, consequently, the CBT management was controlled by a limited number of community leaders only. It is suggested that an organization with explicit vision and mission should be established so as to encourage community members to work together equally on CBT.

***Defensive strategy (ST)***

The defensive strategy is used when the community strength is threatened by the external environment and hence prevents the CBT mission from being fulfilled. Therefore, the Black Tai community needs to use its existing strengths to prevent this threat. That is, the community members must effectively raise awareness of Black Tai's rich cultural heritage in the western and central regions of Thailand, to the wider community. This is a convenient place where one can learn about cultural diversity, since it is located not far from the city, has an easy access and it is more economical to get to than other regions. This important message can be relayed to a wider community through various channels such as interpersonal communication, websites, and social media.

***Improvement strategy (WT)***

The improvement strategy helps to overcome community weaknesses and prevent threats from effecting CBT management. The main community weakness is its inefficient management of tourist spots and activities and its inability to effectively attract tourists. An improvement to amenities should also be done such as restrooms,

parking lots, recreation/service center, and catering. Such improvements should not aim at five-star standards but rather simplicity with a focus on hygiene, convenience, and comfort.

The strategies mentioned were developed from the Black Tai CBT experience of external researchers, who believe that other ethnic groups will be able to apply them in the context of their community.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The CBT research project confirms the external researchers' belief that the Black Tai community members at Phaihuchang Village have the potential to manage ethnic tourism by themselves because they have a rich cultural heritage that would impress tourists. However, community members should not aim for monetary benefit only. The true benefit of CBT is to bring Black Tai people together to collaborate on CBT as well as to enable them to take pride in their Black Tai language and culture, which will be preserved as part of their general way of life. Cultural heritage and community collaboration are definitely the driving forces towards successful CBT as seen in other CBT projects such as that of the Tai Yuan ethnic group of Tontan Village, Saraburi Province. This CBT village is highly successful due to its efficient team work in presenting Tai Yuan language and culture to tourists.

Successful management of CBT is challenging and time-consuming. If the Black Tai community goes through the development process alone, they may feel discouraged or reach their objective only after great difficulty. Even though the CBT at Phaihuchang was initiated and fully supported by Mahidol University, it is a short-term collaboration. Therefore, a joint venture with external organizations such as the Sub-district Administration Organization and companies with a strong corporate social responsibility record may facilitate efforts. This is evident in the case of Black Tai CBT at Huakhawjin Village in Ratchaburi Province. This ethnic tourism village was opened in 2011 and has rapidly developed with the full support of various organizations such as the Community Development Department, the Cultural Council, the Sub-district Administration Organization, and the Provincial Administration Organization. If the Black Tai community can create a partnership with such organizations, any development mission will likely be successful as the Black Tai community possesses the essential social capital: pride; unity; and an ardent love for their Black Tai ethnic identity.

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