The Effects of Ethnic Tourism on Yao Community in Sapa District, Lao Cai Province, Vietnam

Dinh Thu Thuy*
Yos Santasombat**

Abstract

This research is an attempt to analyze the ethnic tourism development in Sapa district, Lao Cai province, Vietnam, with special focus on the effects of tourism on local community. In 1990’s, the government, developing agencies, and even many local communities already see tourism as important to development and modernization. Different tourism development strategies may have different socio-cultural consequences. In order to understand these issues, I focus on Yao community in Ta Phin village. The development of tourism offers opportunities for local people to earn cash by selling traditional products, guiding tourists, driving tourists, performing arts… The drive of tourist consumption and profit-making gradually changed Ta Phin’s agriculture-based economy. Villagers’ desires to obtain more income lead to shifting to the new economic mode as they move from tradition to modernity. As a result, traditional social life changed, being expressed through: local economy, environment, and socio-cultural institution. Local people are not passively influenced by tourism but also they positively adapt these problems.

Keywords: Tourism Management/Good Governance/Sapa District/ Lao Cai Province/ Vietnam

*M.A.Student, Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development Program (RCSD). Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University.
**Ph.D.,Associate Professor,Sustainable Development Program RCSD). Faculty of Social Sciences,Chiang Mai University, Advisor.
Presented At the National and International Graduate Student Conference Community and Environmental Management for Sustainable Development in ASEAN
Introduction:

Tourism is the major social and economic phenomena of modern time, as Crompton and Richardson noted that “tourism has been regarded as a commercial economic phenomenon”. Tourism is being used as a mean of achieving development in destination areas. The most compelling reason for pursuing tourism as a development strategy is its positive contribution to the local and national economy. The most obvious and tangible benefits of tourism are income, foreign exchange earnings, tax revenue, and the generation of employment. Tourism was among the top five leading sources of foreign exchange revenue in 69 developing countries in 1998 (Benavides, 2001).

Therefore, tourism also becomes the major income generators in the Mekong economies. Thailand has a long history of tourism development starting in 1950 when the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) was established. In 1987, Thailand launched the first Visit Thailand year, and the Amazing Thailand campaign was launched again to aim to rescue Thailand from the financial crisis in 1998-1999. Following the success of Thailand, the government of Lao PDR announced Visit Lao PDR year in 1999-2000. And in 2003-2004, the Royal government of Cambodia launched Visit Cambodia year with the slogan: “Cambodia: world of treasure”.

In Vietnam, tourism has been developing rapidly. Under the deepening globalization, Vietnam is striving for the national goal of industrialization and modernization. After the onset of “doi moi” (the process of renovation) which officials started in 1986, Vietnam has made remarkable complex progress of socio-economic change. International integration brings both challenges and opportunities for economic industries, one of them is tourism development. According to Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, the social income from tourism in 2007 was 22 times as much as 1990, reaching more than US$ 3 billion per year and accounted for 4% of GDP. According to the calculation by UNWTO, this figure was US$ 7.6 billion, accounting for 11.2% and bring 3.6 times bigger than direct revenue. Thus, tourism becomes one of main economic industries in Vietnam.

Nowadays, tourism has spread from urban centers to more remote regions, such as in the mountains, small islands…., and hill tribe tourism or ethnic tourism is a recent phenomenon. In the context of modernization, many tourists are bored with city life and look for new places with something new. The hill tribes are said to embody with their need. They are remote, backward
areas, and untouched by civilization. Now ethnic tourism attracts more and more tourists, so many governments are focusing tourism development in highland regions and highland resources to serve tourism.

In Vietnam, ethnic tourism is considered an important and potential sector as it is facilitated by a number of 54 ethnic groups and diverse cultural characteristics. There are many famous tourist sites which attract domestic and international visitors, such as, Sa Pa (Lao Cai province), Mai Chau (Hoa Binh province)… Sa Pa is located in Lao Cai province, close to the border with China. The total population of 36,000 consists mostly of minority groups. Besides the Kinh (Viet) people, there are 5 main ethnic groups in Sapa: Hmong (54%), Yao (24%), and a small number of Tay, Giay, Xa Pho. Sa Pa is a quiet mountain town and home to a great diversity of ethnic minority peoples. This is the advantageous condition for ethnic tourism development.

Tourists often buy these traditional products for souvenir of their trips and gifts for their families and friends, such as: handicrafts, jewelry…. They can view the weaving technique of ethnic women and cultural characteristics of different ethic groups. In the past, festival activities were arranged at a fixed time and only used in their own community. But now they are shown for visitors. So long as tourists are willing to pay money, they can organize villagers putting on their traditional costumes to perform the traditional dances at any time. Tourists can take part in traditional cultural activities: folk songs, folk dances and folk games… The natural, flexible styles of them have changed, together with the cultural connotations. In order to satisfy visitor’s needs, these local products are changed and re-organized. Local people have specialized their cultural activities for business purpose: changing styles, color... This leads to the fact that meanings of local products are changed. However, to satisfy consumers’ needs and get high profits, people try to exploit local resources which destroy local forests and environment. Simultaneously, the detail and quality of local products will become poorer. As a result, local natural and cultural resources are gradually changed and eroded. Moreover, ethnic groups themselves are put on show by tour operators, so they become powerless commodities in the tourism market and inhabitants of a human zoo visited by tourists for their distinct culture (Alting von Geusau 1998). Consequently, ethnic tourism has contributed to the consumption of ethnic culture.

There are many researches on influences of ethnic tourism. The research on ethnic tourism tends to study on economic impact, and the erosion of culture of ethnic people as they
have responded to tourism. There are few studies on the cultural changes in the highland regions, particularly those brought about by tourism. Cohen (1985) pioneered the research on tourism in the highland villages. He focused on the impacts of tourism on the villagers. Cultural modification have been compounded and exacerbated by tourism. Not only their cultural products but also local people themselves become commodity to serve tourists. As Alting von Geusau (1998), the ethnic people are “powerless commodities in the tourism supermarket”. Unequal power relations have been examined between highland and lowland people (Turton 2000), and between tourists and highland people (Cohen 2001). I believe that ethnic people play an active part in the changes and that their culture is constantly changing.

Yao is one of the largest ethnic minorities in Sa Pa. However, while many researchers take interest in the modification of H’mong’s lives, there is the small number of previous researches on Yao people and in particular the Red Yao. Ta Phin is Yao’s village which is one of tourist main point sites of Sa Pa. It is a remote commune around 12 kilometers from Sapa. The commune centre is located in a valley, and surrounding mountain are relatively low so that people move without hardship to and from villages and to Sa Pa to trade and sell goods. There are two main ethnic groups: Black Hmong and Red Yao, which have distinct culture. The Black H’mong can be found all over the Sapa area. In Sa Pa, the Black H’mong community make up the majority of the population; however, in Ta Phin, they populate a small commune on the West side of the major rice paddy field. They are not as active in the tourism product here but are play a major role in the hemp production as well as brocade supply to some tourist shops in Sapa and Hanoi. They may seem quiet and shy. Differently, Red Yao people participate in almost tourist activities in Ta Phin. My research will be a pioneer academic on this group in this village.

I would like to concentrate on the process of ethnic tourism in Yao community to explore their voices. I investigate the ethnic tourism development and the commoditization process. After that, I continue about the problems and the impacts of tourism development and touristic consumption on aspects of local people.
Research Objectives:

I intend to achieve the following:

- to study the ongoing situation of tourism and the process of commoditization
- to examine the impacts of ethnic tourism on local lives: economy, environment, cultural and social life
- to analyze the adaptation, adaptation strategies and negotiation of ethnic people the context of ethnic tourism development; and the policy of the state and the interactions among the different actors: state, tourist agencies, ethnic community, and ethnic others

Conceptual Framework:

The following conceptual framework is to analyze the socio-cultural effects of ethnic tourism.

In Vietnam, after “doi moi” started in 1986 and under the context of globalization, industrialization, and modernization, Vietnam’s tourism has been developing rapidly, especially ethnic tourism. One of the effects of tourism development is local cultural change. In my research, I want to emphasize the consumption process of culture: from traditional cultural products to goods for sale and exchange. Thus, I want to discuss the nature of commoditization, particularly cultural commoditization, the modification of cultural identity. This is the process of modifying cultural practice of ethnic people, such as, cultural goods (art, sculpture), service (dance, music), and activities (festival, ritual)… as commodity for tourist consumption. Therefore, ethnic tourism and commoditization of culture bring more opportunities and challenges for local people. I focus on the socio-cultural effects of this process on Yao community. In the situation of tourism market, how the problems of market impact on women, and how they adapt and negotiate. Moreover, I determine the emergences of different actors such as: state, tourist agencies, ethnic others, and Yao people themselves which impact on the change of Yao’s lives. Examining the influences of actors will help me to understand these problems better.
In short, I will analyze perspectives about cultural commoditization and socio-cultural impacts of ethnic tourism on Yao community in Ta Phin commune as well as the adaptation process to understand the response of local ethnic minority people.

Research Methodology:

- **Secondary data collection:**

  I collected the various published and unpublished documents from government agencies, research institutes, and media. There are books, reports, articles, maps, photos, electronic data… on tourism development and the impacts of tourism. I will also consider data on the history and background of tourism and their socio – cultural effects on local people in Sa Pa province and Ta Phin village.
- **Participant observation:**

I spent time observing and conversing local daily activities and condition in the village. I want to observe their daily life with their own community and with outsiders such as visitors, tour operators and local authorities. I also explore the changes in local practices within different groups of villagers, especially women.

- **Interview and discussion:**

I pay attention to interview in order to explore their narrative stories given by generation to generation and to stimulate their recent memories of their homeland. I will apply in-depth interview with a questionnaire for unstructured interviews. I will interview local officers to understand process of tourism as well as data showing the influences of tourism and commoditization process in all aspects of local village. Moreover, I will interview local people: elderly people who have an understanding about the history of the village, and women to know the changes in women’s roles and their support in their community when tourism develops. I also interview tourists for their felling their views of villages.

For discussion, I discuss with many people who have various backgrounds. For example, Yao people who work in local authorities, Yao volunteer teachers, Yao tour guide…

- **Data analysis:**

Firstly, I examine the discourse of ethnic tourism, cultural commoditization process. In the second, I explore the ways of being practice of culture, such as different views on commoditization between different generations, different groups, and examine the daily life of Yao as well as their livelihoods.

For the discourse of ethnic tourism, I focus on current situation of tourism contribution and what kind of impacts to inhabitants. Then I continue studying the problem on touristic consumption on culture and gender body. The meaning of their cultural practice at previous time and how shift the meaning at present are compared. Daily life of Yao family, their livelihood strategies as well as traditional practice of Yao community, and their coping/adaptive strategies in this situation are analgised.
Result of the study and analysis:

**Sa Pa’s tourism situation**

**Sa Pa – special position in tourism route in Northern Mountains of Vietnam**

**History of tourism in Sa Pa**

Sa Pa is located in Lao Cai province, close to the border with China. Sa Pa is a quiet mountain town and home to a great diversity of ethnic minority peoples. The total population of 36,000 consists mostly of minority groups. Besides the Kinh (Viet) people, there are 5 main ethnic groups in Sapa: Hmong (54%), Yao (24%), and a small number of Tay, Giay, Xa Pho.

The first permanent French civilian resident arrived in Sa Pa in 1909. Realizing the site with its attractive continental climate had potential; French began building many restaurants, churches, villas... for tourism in Sa Pa from the 1920s. After that, because of wars, many constructions in and around Sa Pa were destroyed, and the town entered a prolonged sleep. In the early 1960s, New Economic Zone migration scheme was set up, then new inhabitants from lowlands started to migrate to the region. Since the 1990’s, due to the innovation policy (Doi Moi) of the government, Sa Pa was fully reborn and became the most attractive tourist site for visitors due to the diversity of ethnic groups and cultures. According to National Administration of Tourism, in 1995, there were 9300 visitors (2300 foreigners), but for the first 6 months of 1996, there were 7282 visitors (3282 foreigners). In 2010, for the 7 months, there were 571,000 tourists. And the number of tourists for the 6 months of 2011 reached 632,000, including 295,000 international visitors.

Lao Cai’s government invests in tourism development and considers it as one of the main economic sector of this province. The positions of Lao Cai and Sa Pa have advantages of the diversified development of tourism such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, resort ..., and attract more and more tourists. This brings an important contribution to the development of the country, in the industrialization and modernization of the country. Government gives top priority to developing tourism in Sa Pa, Bac Ha and Lao Cai city, which motivates tourism development in Sa Pa. Many types of tourist attractions are open, such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, community tourism, ethnic tourism....
Physical context

Lao Cai map
(http://laocai.gov.vn/sites/sapa/bandohuyen/Trang/634046080882184190.aspx)

Lao Cai is a province of northwestern in the mountainous region of Vietnam, far from Hanoi 338km, bordering the province of Yunnan (China). The east of Lao Cai is Ha Giang province, the south is Yen Bai province, the west is Lai Chau and Son La provinces. Lao Cai is the fragmented terrain; creating a variety of terrain types, such as, valley, mountain, including Fansipan (elevation 1.343 m) – Vietnam’s highest mountain – is dubbed “the Roof of Indochina”.

Although the natural environment was not particularly favorable for agricultural development due to cold weather, each year only one rice crop is planted, here is appropriate to develop vegetables in cold region. Lao Cai possesses many beautiful landscapes, cultural and historical diversity, which is condition to develop a unique form of tourism: adventure tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, ethnic tourism…

One of the beauties of Lao Cai is Sapa. Sa Pa is located in Lao Cai Province, north-west Vietnam, and 350 km north-west of Hanoi, close to the border with China. The Hoang Lien Son range of mountains dominates the district, which is at the eastern extremity of the Himalayas. This range includes Vietnam's highest mountain, Fan Si Pan, at a height of 3142m above sea level. The town of Sa Pa lies at an altitude of about 1600 m. The climate is moderate and rainy in
summer (May—August), and foggy and cold with occasional snowfalls in winter. Around Sapa, Bac Ha, Si Ma Cai, Muong Khuong, Bat Xat and Lao Cai are attractive destinations on the tourist map of Vietnam. The villages are scattered in Muong Hoa valley, O Quy Ho, Lao Chai, Ta Phin, Sa Pa with low mountains surrounding. Sa Pa is suitable for development of trekking tourism, ecotourism...

Sapa is also famous because of favorable climatic conditions for vacation activities. Sa Pa is known as Europe's regions in Vietnam because of the fresh climate. Sa Pa is four seasons in one day. Sa Pa is not only attractive in the summer but also in winter, especially on the coldest days, tourists like to enjoy snow.

Sa Pa has diversified flora and fauna. There are over 800 species of plants, and more than 600 animals. Sa Pa is a tourist center with the appropriate conditions to develop many types of different tourism, such as ecotourism, community tourism, cultural tourism, resort... to attract domestic and foreign tourism. However, tourism in Sa Pa has led to many changes in the entire social and cultural life of the people here.

**Ethnic character**

According to many researchers as Be Viet Dang, Dang Nghiem Van, Tran Quoc Vuong ... most of the ethnic groups in north-western in Vietnam were derived from Chinese migration. In Sa Pa, now there are 7 ethnic groups are H’mong, Yao, Tay, Giay, Chinese, Phu La, only Kinh people are new immigrants to Sa Pa from the early twentieth century. The Hmong, Yao and other ethnics live in mountains and valleys. The Kinh mainly live in towns and surrounding town areas. The H’mong is the largest population, following is the Yao.

In 2005, population was 43,600 people, with seven main ethnic groups, including H’mong, Yao, Tay, Kinh, Day, Phu La and Chinese: H’mong 54.9%, Yao 25.6%, Kinh 13.6%, Tay 3%, the remaining 1.6% is other ethnics. According to Population Census in 2009, population was 52,899 people: Hmong 51.65%, Yao 23.04%, Kinh 17.91%, Tay 4.74%, Day 1.36% Day, Xa Pho 1.06%, other ethnic groups 0.23%. The ethnic people mainly live on agriculture and traditional crafts; and Kinh live on agriculture and commercial services.
The above map shows the distribution of different ethnic groups in all villages in Sa Pa.

Sa Pa is an area of history, variety of language and culture of many ethnic groups. The process of migrating to new lands for settlement and development of minority groups in Sa Pa has gradually created their ethnic identity and diverse culture. This characteristics attracts tourism go to Sa Pa to explore, learn and experience the unique culture of ethnic minority.

**Yao community – diverse cultural characteristics**

**History of Yao people**

From the late 1800’s to early 19th century, the Yao migrated into Thailand, Vietnam, and the highlands of Laos. The number of Yao people ranks 6th in the ethnic minorities in mountainous northern Vietnam. They live in mountainous provinces, for example, Ha Giang, Yen
Bai, Tuyen Quang, Cao Bang, Lai Chau, Lao Cai. Yao people live in different regions: highland, middle, and low regions. Highland is the melting pot of most Red Yao.

The Yao in Vietnam divides 7 main groups, but in Lao Cai there are 4 Yao groups, living in Bat Xat, Bao Yen, Sa Pa, Ta Phin… In particular, the Red Yao accounts for 66.7% of the Yao in Lao Cai province. Red Yao people derived from Yunnan (China) until the late 18th century. In Sa Pa, the Yao is mainly the Red Yao, which contribute to -ethnic diversity for this multi-ethnic and multi-cultural land.

**Economic situation**

Agriculture is the main livelihood of Yao people. Turning mountain slopes into terraced fields is the main type of farming of almost ethnic groups in Sa Pa. Terraced fields can be observed in many villages: San Si Ho, Ta Phin, Ban Khoang… This farming way is the basic of stable produce, which leads to the settlement of ethnic minorities. Terraced field is cultural work of the H’mong and Yao, reflecting traditional knowledge of the H’mong and Yao. The Yao also gardens, plants medicinal herbs and fruits. Sa Pa is the ideal natural condition for the cultivation of tropical and temperature plants. About animal husbandry, animal include cow, buffalo, pig, duck, chicken… Traditional handicrafts of Yao people are: textile and brocade fabrics, dying hemp fabrics, and silver smithing. Especially, Yao people have indigenous knowledge about medical plants. They are also famous for their herbal bath. Having an herbal bath helps you refresh your mind and body after a hard working day as well as reduce stress. It also helps pregnant women recuperate after giving birth. Now many places which sever tourists bathing by herbal plants are opened in Ta Phin and Sa Pa.

Nowadays, Sa Pa becomes a tourist attraction in northern Vietnam. Thus, Yao people have more opportunities for family income; such as, selling traditional products, opening restaurants, or tourist guides… Through the crafts, we can understand the culture, creativity, as well as the feelings of people doing products. Sa Pa has established trading center in Sa Pa for exchange and sale of ethnic products: textiles, embroidery, fruits…

In short, tourism development brings new economic activities, and helps ethnic people gain more income for their families. However, it also makes ethnic people gradually neglect
traditional economic activities, particularly agriculture because they can earn money fast through accessing tourist market.

The field in Ta Phin

**Socio – cultural situation**

Traditional handicrafts of Yao people are: textile and brocade fabrics, dying hemp fabrics, and silver smithing. The silversmiths mostly make jewelry: earrings, necklaces, bracelets, rings or key chains. Sewing and embroidery are the specific work of Yao women. Most of the girls have to start their embroidery when they are nine or ten years old. They are taught by their mothers and grandmothers. After much practice, the girls are able to make their own clothes to wear for when they get married. These traditional crafts attract the attention of tourists, so they are being recovered to server tourist market. In addition, traditional cultural performances are staged for tourists. Visitors are involved folk dances, folk games, and enjoy the traditional cuisine of the H’mong and Yao. They also join in festival of Yao culture: wedding ceremonies, ritual dances “Bai Tram”, love singing… These festivals, containing Yao identity, attracts tourists to Ta Phin.

Especially, Yao people have indigenous knowledge about medical plants. Yao people cure disease and illness with traditional home remedies that have been passed down through the
generations. Yao people are also famous for their herbal bath. Having an herbal bath helps you refresh your mind and body after a hard working day as well as reduce stress. It also helps pregnant women recuperate after giving birth.

About family relations, man is the leader in the family. Family traditionally often has many members. Children’s marriages are arranged by their parents. In families, husbands do heavy works: building houses, doing agriculture…. wives do housework, care children, weave…. About community relations, in ancient times, due to fighting with wild animal, robbers, the relations among villagers are very tight. At present, all works always involves the help of the families in the village. Yao people severely denounce laziness and stealing.

Yao women is sewing

**Ta Phin – a point of ethnic tourism in Sa Pa**

Ta Phin is one of tourist main point sites of Sa Pa. It is a remote commune around 12 kilometers from Sapa. The commune centre is located in a valley, and surrounding mountain are relatively low so that people move without hardship to and from villages and to Sa Pa to trade and sell goods. The fresh air and beautiful natural landscape make Ta Phin to be a tourism point. Moreover, cultural life of ethnic community is also attractive tourism to experience. Predominately H’mong and Yao people have settled in Ta Phin, although there is a small population of Kinh people as well. Black Hmong is 263 households and 1573 people, Red Dao is 185 households and 1106 people, Kinh is 26 households and 84 people, Giay is 1 household and 3
people. There are two main ethnic groups: Black H’mong and Red Yao, which have distinct culture.

All above conditions have led to the development of a new economic activity – tourism industry. Ta Phin has received many domestic and foreign investments, which actively helped tourism development through training, organizing local structure, raising awareness, accessing market…

**The economic and environmental effects of ethnic tourism in Ta Phin village**

**The economic effects**

In the past, goods are produced and consumed by the same household. Instead, many products are now becoming commodities to be traded for money. In agricultural production, in the past, Yao people only focused on rice, one crop one year, but now, they start leasing their lands. Many Kinh people rent their lands to grow vegetables and the Kinh hire the Yao to cultivate. They give the Kinh big benefits, and the Yao realize the benefits in the cultivation of products for sale. They gradually invest their capital in the production of goods to sell. Thus, awareness of the Yao of agricultural production has dramatically changed. They found that selling some products will earn a large of money and buying some products will be cheaper than they spent time to do themselves. Then they use this money to buy other important products. For example, a person picked two strings of mushroom. In the past, they would bring home to eat, but now “I will sell them and I can earn 40,000 to 60,000 VND. I can use this money to buy fertilizer. If I can not sell, I will bring them home to eat.” (a Yao woman, 41 years old). Thus, a mount of money they ear will invest in production and improvement their living standard. Most households now have TVs, VCDs, motorbikes…, some have computer. A Yao woman (70 year old) said: “Since tourism, my family life is better, not hungry anymore”.

The Yao previously produced crafts to serve their needs, thus their products bring their own features and we can find different products of different ethic groups. Nevertheless, since the appearance of market, the products become more diverse and they do not bring the characteristics of their own communities. We are not surprised to see the products being brocaded the patterns of the Yao in Bat Xat but the Red Yao of Ta Phin embroiders. Or, Ta Phin’s villagers bought the products being made by industrial machines from Sa Pa to sell to tourists in Ta Phin. As a result,
Market competitiveness is rapidly increasing, and this leads to the limit some sector which is not enough competitive in market, including traditional brocade of Red Yao people in Ta Phin.

In addition, other traditional handicrafts are also recovered to become products for sell: silver smithing, traditional medicine, drum making. However, revenues from them are uncertain. Because of lack of capital and market knowledge, Yao people have co-produced and established cooperative organization: brocading club, Sa Pa Napro native company. The birth of these organizations helped restore and develop traditional handicrafts, increase revenue and improve living standards of local people. Thus, local economy is changing to market economy and the position of craft manufacture and tourist services become more important in local economy.

There are many new economic activities for tourism: homestay, tour guide, herbal bath service, hawkers… Near 100% Yao people join in tourist activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of tourist activities</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selling brocade products</td>
<td>80% population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestay</td>
<td>11 households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour guide</td>
<td>11 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving visitors</td>
<td>5 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herb bath service</td>
<td>3 household</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(My collecting data 2012)

As above box, most of people take part in selling brocade products. In addition, they also join in other activities. Both Kinh and Yao people open homestay services. However, souvenir shops, food shops belong to Kinh people. They are new migrants from other areas, they do not have fields, and thus they only can rely on the business while Yao people do not have enough capital to open shops.
The above box shows the incomes of household from tourism. Not only agriculture, most of Yao households take part in tourist activities. Among 30 household in my survey, around 50% population can earn 3 – 4 millions VND each year. Only one Kinh household who live in the center of the village earns over 10 millions VND each year. People can earn income from tourism more than from other activities: agriculture, forestry.

The environmental effects

Along with the increased numbers of tourists not only cause changes in economic and cultural activities but also impacts to the ecological environment. The appearance of needs and meeting the needs of visitors are keys to creating attractive destination. However, the increase in tourists in the village led to the expansion of tourism activities and the great pressure on the
environment. The exploitation of medicinal plants, rare plants will reduce the number of natural plants. Also, using wild animals for food services for tourists will deplete rare animal. This causes the risk of natural resources and ecological imbalance.

In addition, leaving litter is so often. Waste treatment system is poor, thus, garbage problems are becoming urgent. Local government needs to conduct projects to solve this problem, and enhance local people’s awareness about environmental issues.
The socio – cultural effects of ethnic tourism in Ta Phin village

The process of cultural commoditization

Commoditization is the process which a non-commodity is turned into a commodity, or is the assignment of economic value to something not previously considered in economic terms. Cohen remarked that “commoditization is a process by which things (and activities) come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in the context of trade, thereby becoming goods (and services); developed exchange systems in which the exchange value of things (and activities) is stated in terms of prices form a market (Cohen 1988). In Marxism, commoditization is used to describe a modification of relationships, formerly untainted by commerce, into commercial relationships. As Marxist political economy, commoditization takes place when economic value is assigned to something not previously considered in economic terms; for example, an idea, identity or gender. Therefore commoditization refers to the expansion of market trade to previously non-market areas, and to the treatment of things as if they were a tradable commodity.

Culture is undoubtedly one of the most attractions of tourism. Tourists often searches for local traditions and new experiences, thus there is a requirement for the maintenance of traditional values and the need to sell those traditions. It becomes marketable as a special product for foreign and domestic visitors.

Due to a growing number of tourists arrive, various components of traditional culture such as costumes, rituals, performances, arts, and crafts… become commodities. Because of exposure to tourists, the hosts “display themselves” by dressing their traditional costumes while using ordinary dress at home or selling craft objects that they have created as souvenirs, or performing rituals for visitors which are unrelated to their ritual calendar. Consequently, their traditional meanings could be lost and changed, as McKean suggests that cultural performances and items of material culture produced for tourist market become commodities and lose their meaning for those who “package” and sell them to tourists (cited in Victor T.King and William D.Wilder 2006). Similarly, according to Cohen (1988), local costumes and customs, rituals and feasts, and folk and ethnic arts become touristic services or commodities, as they come to performed or produced for touristic consumption.
Moreover, local people do not care about the importance and internal meanings of cultural products anymore (Greenwood 1977, Cohen 1986). The folklore performances and crafts are now produced because of money. In Huang Juan’s research about Tibetan tourism, she found that festival activities such as singing or dancing, arranged at a fixed time, are now used to server visitors. So long as tourists are willing to pay money, they can organize villagers putting on their traditional costumes to perform the traditional zhiqiang dance around the bonfire at any time (Huang Juan 2003). Or, a lowland resort owner in Mae Rim district (Chiang Mai) offers various dresses of highland ethnic groups for tourists to rent and wear for taking photographs (Prasit Leepreecha 2008).

In addition, the fact that the commoditization of culture is encouraged by the middle man: tour agencies, tour companies… could lead to the exploitation of local labor and cultural resources. Simultaneously, this process effects on self-cultural products. Instead of serving local people, these products are made towards satisfying outsiders’ needs. They are transformed according to the tastes of tourists.

In Ta Phin, we can see the commoditization of all sectors of traditional Yao culture

- **House:** the home of the Red Yao becomes a attractive products for tourists. Tourists often visit Yao houses to learn the customs of local people. Houses of many families were extended and cleaned. The attic being used for containing is now being repaired for visitors who want to stay overnight. Kinh people built house in Yao style for homestay. Because tourism activities are mainly in the center of the village and along the route to the Ta Phin cave, the Yao tend to build house along the road. In the past, the Yao carefully choose housing location and direction, but now, near the road is themost important choice of all people.

- **Cuisine:** Many families open homestay and food services for tourism. In Ta Phin, visitors have less need to eat. This, the development of tourism does not significantly impacts on Yao food culture. Traditional food of the Yao is: black chicken, rice wine and and pig “cap nach”. Pig is fed by vegetables, maize and raised for a long time.

- **Traditional costumes:** Traditional costumes become valuable commodities. In the past, Yao women sew clothes, hats, bags… to use, but now they use these things as goods to sell. Men wear traditional costumes less than women. Today, men wear clothing as the Kinh. Men are less involved in tourism activities than women. In fact, tourists want to see ethnic people wearing their
costumes, so Yao people are aware of keeping their own identity in their costumes. Yao women often wear traditional clothes. They play an important role in tourist industry. They use traditional costumes because their personal preference, and the main reason is serving tourism. It can be clearly seen that tourism has play a role in maintenance Yao traditional costumes.

One of the impacts of tourism is making souvenir products. They are: bags, scarves, wall hangings, table cloths, belts, purses, cushion covers… The products are sewn with many different sizes, styles, and colors. Yao women often sit to embroider and sell products in front of the bus station, which deeply impresses on tourists.

- Traditional customs: Going to Ta Phin, visitors will learn more about their customs, traditions, lifestyle of local people. The activities, such as: dances, songs… which used to be reserved for the religious ritual were performed in their community on special occasions, but now are shown in an open space. The performances such as wedding ceremonies, ritual dance “Bai Tram”, folk game “catching tortoise”, folk dances… are recovered to stage for tourists. In order to attract visitors and server their needs, the natural, flexible styles of traditional shows have changed, together with the cultural connotations, which could be called “tourist performances” or “staged performances”. Therefore, they become commodities.

Due to traditional materials, performances are attractive many domestic and foreign tourists. Tourism agencies advertise these activities and change them to be tourist products. Tourists especially enjoy community activities, wedding ceremonies, festivals…
Some folk games in New Year festival

(http://vietnamnet.vn/vn/xa-hoi/8714/dau-nam--xem-nguoi-dao----giao-duyen.html)

The social effects

In traditional society of Yao people, family usually has more than 3 generations. Doing farming work need much of labor in milpa economy, and thus these crowd families will have higher income. Today, with changing economic structure, services bring higher income for these households without much of labor. This leads to household separation and nuclear families. Yao families are mainly nuclear families which have 2 generations (one married couple and their unmarried children). Each family now has only 2 or 3 children. Thus, child care conditions improved.

In terms of working division, the husband is supposed to take over all hard jobs such as farming work including cultivating, ploughing, harverting and creating terraced fields, forging and knitting… Therefore, the role of husband is far more crucial, while women have less chances to discuss of making decision on important issues. In the family, the husband has decisive ideas on bulding new house, arranging marriages, welcoming guests, and keeping money. However, nowadays, women can earn more money than before. In Ta Phin, people who take part in tourism service are mainly women. They easily access tourist market. They sit and wait for tourists in front of the bus station all day. They follow and implore tourist for buying their products. In the
past, family income is from agriculture, the husband is a person bringing income. However, because of selling products, guiding tourists... As a result, the roles of women are enhanced. Tourism greatly contributes to equity between men and women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision on building a new house</th>
<th>Decision on arranging marriage for children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My colleting data (2012)

The percentage of both husband and wife making decisions on building a new house and arranging marriage for children accounts for 53.3% and 70% respectively. The above box signifies that role of women is gradually strengthened.

In the past, the wife was supposed to fully fulfill housework, husband and child caring. At present, the wife also takes part in social activities. The husband helps his wife housework, and some wives become money keepers of their families. A Yao woman (27 years old) told: “My husband is at home, gathering firewood and gardening. I keep money, and then he asks me money to drink”.

According to tradition, lineage relations were highly appreciated. The role of a lineage had to be the oldest who has experience and high responsibility with his lineage. Yao people respected elders who played important roles in their community. But now, under the influence of market economy, there are some changes in this relation. The roles of elders are not as important as before. The new generations are good at working, adopting themselves to tourism sector and attending tourist services. They have economic conditions and help some poor members of lineage so they have respects in lineage’s general works. Thus, when choosing head of a lineage, a person who has market knowledge, education level is chosen head of a lineage. Due to the
competitive nature of market, there are often conflicts among villagers. Women who are street vendor are ready to fight each other to sell their own products to tourists.

Tourism also brings social evils: gambling, karaoke, prostitution, drug addiction… Because of the phenomena many people are attracted and neglect their works. In Ta Phin, there is no clear survey about situations of addiction and prostitution. Many Yao girls stopping their study left home to be tour guide in Sa Pa. Among 15 girls working in Sa Pa, there are 3 girls getting pregnant and not daring return home.

**Conclusion**

Today, the context of globalization is one of the reason to promote development of tourism, including ethnic tourism. Through tourism, people have opportunities to share, learn and experience different ethnic groups, diverse culture. In Vietnam, ethnic tourism has emerged since recent years. The northern mountains of Vietnam having advantageous environment and diverse ethnic cultures are the potential tourist destination. In there, Yao community becomes cultural focal point to attract tourists, which enriches cultural diversity of ethnic minorities and promotes tourism development in Sa Pa.

Tourism impacts all aspects of local people at the destination. In Ta Phin, tourism brings more jobs, increase income, preserves traditional culture, re-create ethnic identity. Nevertheless, tourism also leads to environmental pollution, resource depletion. The process of cultural commoditization gradually erodes cultural values.

**Suggestion**

In tourism industry, local participation and local voice are not important. Tourist benefits are mainly in the hands of tourist agencies. Local people do not have enough capital to be independent traders. Therefore, development projects should pay attention to local people. To develop sustainable tourism, to bring economic benefits as well as protect cultural resource, the role of local people in tourist destinations is enhanced because they are the owner of these destinations.
Acknowledgements

There are many kind people around for helping and encouraging me to finish the research. My advisor, Dr Yos Santasombat, advises me step by step applying the knowledge and methodology to the study. I would also like to appreciate to Ajain Elkamol Saichan who helped me how to understand deeply on the insight of people in my research field and how to make sense for those data which help improving my research. Because of them, I am not only learning the skills, knowledge from them but also receiving their concerns spent to my research. I am also many thanks for teaching and scholastic encouragement of the lectures in RCSD program: Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Dr. Chusak Wittayapark, and Dr. Pinkaew Laungaramsri who introduced me to useful knowledge of sustainable development field during the time of my study.

In Vietnam, I am particularly indebted to the leaders and community member of Ta Phin village who tried to help me understand their live’s issues. Even I can not write all their names here but their image and their life stories in my deep memory. Their love and warm giving to me become the motivation which efforts I pass the hard time to finish this work. I sincerely thank Dr Tran Huu Son, Director of Lao Cai province’s department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, for giving me the data and information about tourism development. A million thanks for Dr Nguyen Duy Thieu, Vice Director of Vietnam Museum of Ethnology for his advices and suggestions.

Final but not last, I am thankful for my family who encourage and support me in the most difficulty time. All of my classmates and my Vietnamese friends are in my heart with the sweet memory about the time we have shared.

Thanks God have given me the luckiness to meet those kind people in both Vietnam and Thailand. I will not only keep for myself ‘the gifts’ those people have given to me, they will be transferred to next generations who need my help in future.
References


