



A Synthesis of Meang Virtue in the Relationship among Mae Kampong People, Forest Ecosystem and Meang System to Transform to Sustainable Tourism Value: Ban Mae Kampong, Huay Kaew Sub-District, Mae On District, Chiang Mai Province

Sorak Dithaprayoon

Sustainable Land Use and Natural Resource Management, Department of Social Science and Development

Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, No. 239 Huay Kaew Road, Suthep, Muang, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

Corresponding author. E-Mail address: sorakkie@hotmail.com

Received: 12 November 2019; Revised: 6 January 2020; Accepted: 13 January 2020

Abstract

Alternative tourism for sustainability has been in operation, but not truly successful, because of the lack of effective concepts. This research, therefore, reviews and analyzes a new concept using localization as a platform and selects a prominent local capital as a powerful tourism resource. Further, it investigates and synthesizes deeper into the 'virtue', a powerful driving operation of the capital independent from controls of capitalism and globalization. To become a promising alternative tourism, this research tests this concept by inventing an innovative package and community-based management to transform the 'virtue' into the 'value' of this tourism resource.

This research uses Mae Kampong, one of the famous tourist attractions in Chiang Mai, but without appropriate concepts, as the case study. Within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, qualitative, quantitative and spatial methodologies are employed in a two-fold purpose. Firstly, the analysis of components and conditions guiding holistic operations of the Meang system is the prominent local capital. Secondly, interrelationships between three main components, forest ecology, Meang production, and socio-cultural aspects of Meang people are synthesized using logical fitness of operations and their utilities for derivation of the 'virtue'. Finally, findings from such analyses are used as a conceptual guide for inventing and testing a community-based tourism package as the transformation into the value of this resource.

This research finds that Meang system at Mae Kampong has been sustainable from balanced interactions among the three main components, resulting in good production of Meang, ecological balance of forest, and sufficient socio-cultural livelihood. From synthesis of 'virtue', it finds that the thinking system leading to on-going operation is the combination of long adaptation of local wisdom through learning process. This thinking system has been the core guiding power for maintaining the balance of the three interrelated components and the impacts on livelihood of the Meang people. In addition, the observable holistic utility from which the Meang people benefit, is good mental and physical health with long life span. When tourist packages are invented such as the 'Natural Therapy' tourism scheme, the value of this capital has the capacity to flow on as tourists from the big cities come to appreciate the balance of these three components to recharge their battery lives.

The new concept that this research proposes and tests is an attempt to open the new dimension of sustainable tourism managed by community. Its implication requires more sample sites to test the concept, and more and effective adoption and action to materialize such a tourism scheme by policy makers and tourism supporting organizations in the future.

Keywords: Virtue, Meang System, Mae Kampong People, Tourism Resource, Sustainable Tourism

Introduction

Since 1999, the previous Mae Kampong tourism has become conservation tourism changing to ecotourism, cultural tourism, and medical health tourism. The number of tourists has increased so rapidly and continuously that the community encounter difficulty to manage and handle their large number, found that there are an increase of 2,780 tourists from 2006–2011 to 7,585 tourists in 2012–2016. Moreover, tourists' behavior has changed from traveling for relaxation and to learn about community lifestyle and ecosystem, into walk-in

tourists who came for check-in or take pictures to post through social networks. The change has brought several impacts such as physical, environment, social and cultural, including the health and lifestyle of people in the community. In addition, tourists lack understanding of the community lifestyle, communication with the community and fail to the community's regulations (Thitijamruenporn, 2009; Thailand Research Fund, 2017).

Nowadays, there are efforts from various sectors to find proper format and guidelines in tourism management. The aim is to strengthen Mae Kampong community and be an example of successful sustainable tourism management among the changing world. Moreover, the research process was implemented to build knowledge and understanding about sustainable management of natural tourism and strengthen the local capital which is the key fundamental for development. Villagers will acknowledge the outstanding resources in the area and learn its virtue and how to preserve it. The maintenance of resource assets is comparable to taking care of life capital. The main income of Mae Kampong community is from tourism. If natural resources of land, water, forest and uniqueness of the community are well-preserved, then food, home, medicinal plants and income will be preserved too. This challenge to remodel the style and practice for Mae Kampong Village (Thailand Research Fund, 2017).

Moreover, although all sectors recognize the importance of the new concept and its principle for sustainable development, new systematic and integrated holistic approach and participation or collaborative management of stakeholders as bottom-up development is needed. However, the specific direction towards tangible action is obscure because the direction was previously in conflict with the realistic situation and existing problem of local people and civil society, especially structural problem on politics, government power and executive power of the modern capital group that is rooted in the area (Prabudhanitisarn, 2012).

Exclusively, for alternative tourism in Thai society, the applied paradigm is fiercely criticized in terms of paradigm and action that it may not actually be the good solution or direction to a balance for sustainable tourism development for several reasons. Firstly, while the alternative tourism pattern is varied such as eco-tourism and cultural tourism, it is mostly focused on briefly defining and explaining principles and key concepts that cannot typically provide tangible outcomes (Jittangwattana, 2009; Toatong, 2004). Secondly, the actions related to alternative tourism mostly focus on minor components such as homestay and infrastructure, but ignore the main idea of tourism as being a 'tourism resource capital.' Thirdly, while tourism that depends and is based on community seems to be a suitable solution, it ignores the influence of capital networks and large tourism businesses that are in the mainstream tourism (Rakyutidharm, 2011).

Ultimately, both academic and action outcomes of alternative tourism development are unsteady and is in the 'Thinking Trap' that cannot be free from control of mainstream under globalization and modern capitalism. Therefore, the challenge as the aim of this study was to escape from the classical paradigm and to create the reasonable suggestion in both theoretical and action perspective that has profoundness and sharpness for representing direction on the genuine sustainable development of alternative tourism. Firstly, it typically began with economic globalization and modern capitalism that willingly let the alternative tourism being as an 'old whisky' in 'new bottle' with words 'eco' or 'cultural' to decline resistance and respond to the network of capital and tourism business in mainstream. Another possible way for escape was the 'Localization' that typically emphasizes the existing local power referred to as the 'Local Capitals' (for example, natural resource capital and cultural capital). These were absent outside and cannot be carefully controlled, and to which empowerment referred to the use of local capitals as an essential tool or effective weapon for reviving and improving people's



lifestyle. However, the use of local capitals for movement between the influence of economic globalization and the modern capitalism caused weakness of the power, especially among the increasing social differentiation. Thus, the significant action that mainly emerged from local area was demanded. The significant action represents the situation that enable people to face the risk, yet not accept external influence, instead fighting with an existing and controllable local capital and capability for reviving collaborative power. The action as mentioned might come from local people or outsiders who saw through the problems and helped to spark and support with the suitable process, resource and knowledge. Additionally, a new principle may be found by continuously adding local capital as local strength to become the essential tool or driving power to at least, not be disadvantageous, or better, can negotiate with external power (Prabudhanitisarn, 2015).

This research suggests the new logical thinking and practice to Mae Kampong tourism, which will answer the important questions in the area and lead to sustainability. The local capital, in this case, 'Meang', will be implemented with the relationship in the dimension of 'Mae Kampong People – Forest Ecosystem – Meang System'. The virtue of the relationship that holistically overlaps and is connected was analyzed, especially the virtue of holistic utility in the perspective of Natural Therapy that makes Mae Kampong people live long and healthy. Furthermore, such virtue will be transformed into a value of tourism that creates virtue-linked tourism activities which will result in the sustainable economy, balance and sustainable forest ecosystem, Meang system, and lifestyle of Mae Kampong people.

This study aimed to firstly compile synthesize and conceptualize an alternative framework by utilizing the concept of localization as the necessary conceptual framework to realize the virtue of local capital. Secondly, the study used this conceptual framework to conduct the research to locate the local capital form as a triangular interrelationship of 'People-Forest-Meang', along with the participation of the community people, to confirm that such virtue which had contributed to the people of Mae Kampong community's happiness and prolonged life before the present tourism. Thirdly, the study aimed at utilizing the finding outcomes which were conceptually and practically logical, to run sustainable tourism with new tourist model such as natural therapy, by trying out and surveying the acceptance of the community people and other concerned individuals. All these are the essences of this research.

Methodology

The study constructed and applied new theory for sustainable tourism management with three main objectives; firstly, the analysis of components and conditions guiding holistic operations of the Meang system, is the prominent local capital. Secondly, interrelationships among three main components: forest ecology, Meang production, and socio-cultural aspects of Meang people are synthesized using logical fitness of operations and their utilities for derivation of the 'virtue'. Finally, findings from such analyses are used as a conceptual guide for inventing and testing a community-based tourism package as the transformation into the value of this resource. The research method employed the concepts of 'Localization' and 'Local Capital' as mentioned above to develop and properly integrate with small associated theories to strengthen the study and construct logical suggestion for the real sustainability of alternative tourism. Ban Mae Kampong was chosen as the experiment site to relate the theory, because literature review and related researches showed that most of the researches only provided a brief explanation on tourism phenomenon with insufficient profoundness, especially without actually filling the theoretical and practical gap for sustainable alternative tourism as seen in existing truth and onsite

action. Many research works have clearly indicated that while Ban Mae Kampong brought itself to the top of notable tourist attraction of Thailand, there were several negative consequences including income inequality and unthorough-unfair income distribution (Unthong & Kaosa-ard, 2011; Laohataiwanich, 2009).

Therefore, thinking and action method for creating the sustainable tourism management as the chief idea of the study focused on the capital that was an important local tourism resource, ‘People –Forest –Meang’, by finding and interpreting ‘virtue’ as attend ‘natural therapy’ and integrating external knowledge with the internal knowledge to revive or restore the virtue for enhancing awareness, pride, cherishing and sense of ownership. The virtue was then transformed into tourism value by employing creativity and integrating with the external knowledge to transform the virtue into the ‘Tourism Package’ whereby people can access, control and own the tourism resource together. The enterprise and market management were operated by themselves that helped to bargain with the external market. Due to academic reasons, the most sustainable and appropriate way to strengthen local capital is managed by tourism resources as the necessary capital of local people that will naturally increase bargaining and distribution power and income to conserve and inherit legacies for the next generation (Sugunnasil, 2005; Pongsapich, 2006; Prabudhanitisarn, 2015).

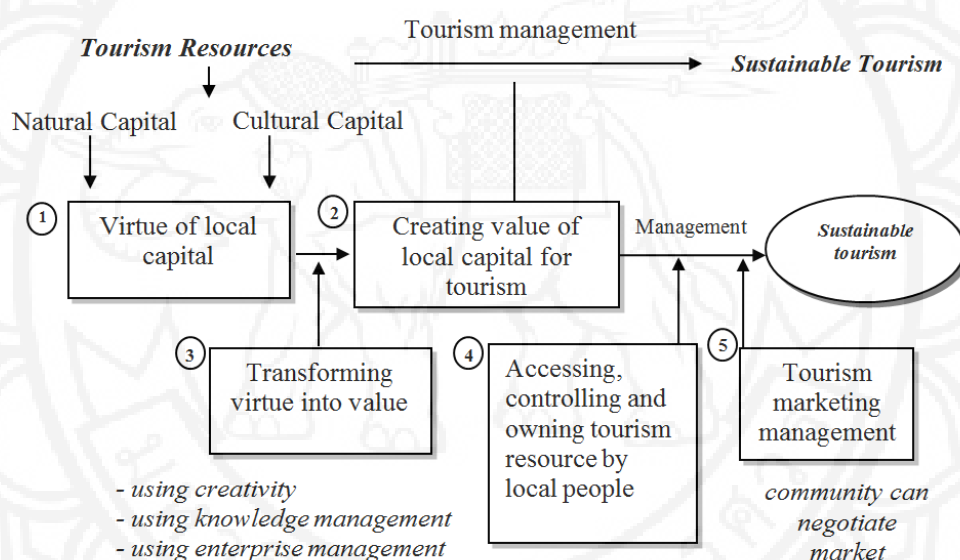


Figure 1 Construction of Theory for Sustainable Tourism

New theory from the above detail was tested and applied at Ban Mae Kampong, Huay Kaew Sub-district, Mae On District, Chiang Mai Province by using the participatory action research (PAR) to prove the tangible outcome of thinking and action method on actual location. Application of PAR in this research focused on collaboration between the researcher, community leaders and the Meang people in collecting, analyzing data and finding practical results of interrelation among forest Meang and people to initiate and test the potentials of a new tourism package. In this way, PAR method as detailed in Table 1 below is not creating actions and their results from action research.

**Table 1** Target Group and Research Tools

Application from Theory to Action	Data Source and Target Group	Research Tool
1 Searching and decoding the virtue of relationship among 'People-Forest-Meang' (Kon-Pa-Meang), especially natural therapy	Knowledgeable people, leaders, elder persons, local philosophers and Meang garden owners in Ban Mae Kampong (10 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewing related researched that were studied in the area and integrating internal and external knowledge of relationship between 'People-Forest-Meang' (Kon-Pa-Meang) - In-depth interview with stakeholders
2 Transforming the virtue into tourism value by integrating with external knowledge		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrating external knowledge by comparing and reviewing the related or acceptable researches on result of natural therapy from reliable source of information that is internationally accepted
3 Transforming the virtue into tourism value by using creativity	Knowledgeable people, Leaders, and Meang garden owners in Ban Mae Kampong and representative of local people in Ban Mae Kampong (10 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using creativity for transforming virtue of being natural therapy into value by using creativity to promote the content to communicate with outsiders - Creating tourism activities that connect to all virtue in the pattern of new tourism package or program that mainly determines tourism pattern and activities using virtue of being natural with PAR among researcher and Mae Kampong people
4 Enhancing community's awareness and understanding of virtue as being natural therapy to create access, control, ownership and communication of new virtue to outsiders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledgeable people, Leaders and Representative of Meang garden owners and Local people in Ban Mae Kampong - Related organizations, e.g. Sub-District Administrative Organization, Health Promoting Hospital, Royal project, Tourism Authority of Thailand (30 cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bringing new virtue as being natural therapy to communicate with local people in Ban Mae Kampong and related organizations to accept the thinking and action method by using questionnaire to assess awareness and understanding

Results

Concerning localization, there were attempts to actively utilize local capital, the virtue of Meang, within the interrelationship of Mae Kampong people, forest ecology and Meang system, in an integrative manner that valued the balance of ecological, social and cultural way of life and health systems of the people in the area, all of which when being used as tourist resources, could help maintain natural therapy. The process of revitalizing and analyzing the virtue of such local capital integrated outside knowledge with that of local areas resulting in the local people's awareness, pride, protectiveness, and ownership. The further step was to transform all these into tourist values utilizing creativity and integration of knowledge from outside to generate package tours. When the community accesses, controls, and acquires ownership of all these tourist resources, it would lead to the enterprise and marketing management carried out by the community, empowering its power to bargain with the outside market. This type of academic logic of empowering local capital, sustainability and relevancy represent the heart of managing tourist capitals by people in the community, leading to not merely increasing the community's power to bargain with outside, but also assures fair and thorough income distribution. Such



achievement represents sustainability, in that it gives the pride and love of their identity, reflecting their virtue and efforts to conserve and transmit to the next generation. The research produced two main findings, each of which are now expanded.

1. The local capital represents the virtue of Meang amid interrelationship among Mae Kampong people, Forest ecology and Meang system within three essential syntheses.

1.1 The synthesis of virtue on outstanding and uniqueness of 'Forest Ecology', 'Meang System' and 'Mae Kampong People' was done to recognize the virtue, outstanding, and uniqueness of the dimensions before they could be overlapped together under the identity of 'Meang Forest People' as follows:

Initially, it was discovered that the forest ecology of Mae Kampong was unique and outstanding in both physical and biological terms, creating tourist attractions and the capacity to facilitate the growth of Meang system. Moreover, concerning the virtue and uniqueness of Mae Kampong Meang system, it was discovered that Meang represents the plan growing and breeding well under the ecological system of Mae Kampong forest due to its suitable conditions including temperature, height and moisture, all of which are crucial factors. Mae Kampong forest's Meang-leaf plants ensuring their quality and taste which in turn, satisfies the market demand and consumer groups. Concerning chemical factors of Meang-leaves, it was discovered that they have significant bio-substances that can help resist and protect from many types of diseases. Finally, migration of Mae Kampong people to settle in this place was not only related to the suitable atmosphere and geographic condition for the growing of Meang, but also because of its fullness of natural resources such as lush forest, abundant food sources, clean water and pure atmosphere. Meang producing system was an occupation opening for supporting one another within a traditional kinship community fostering the holistic happiness of people at Mae Kampong.

1.2 The synthesis of the virtue of the relationship among 'Forest Ecology and Meang System', 'Meang System and Mae Kampong People', and 'Mae Kampong People and Forest Ecology' represent the syntheses reflecting the virtue having been upgraded along with the system and action of each part as follows:

Firstly, concerning the ecological system, it was discovered that Meang forest ecology was the microecology of the meso/macroecology surrounded by natural forest with ecosystem balance of forest ecology and Meang system and its adjustment after the natural balance had changed. Secondly, Meang system and Mae Kampong people interacted via thinking system and action that resulted from the accumulation of experience and learning exchange process that transmitted the Meang production from one generation to another. The process had been modified to suit contexts and various conditions to gain a precise understanding of the conditions of forest ecology that determined the growth and quality of Meang plants and leaves, ensuring the Meang system's balance, sustainability, and interdependency among the people. Finally, the interaction between Mae Kampong people, forest and ecology resulted from two systems of managing action: (a) the overall forest management to assure the balance or cope with the natural imbalance, and (b) the management on forest ecology of Meang resulting the growth and productivity of Meang with desirable quality.

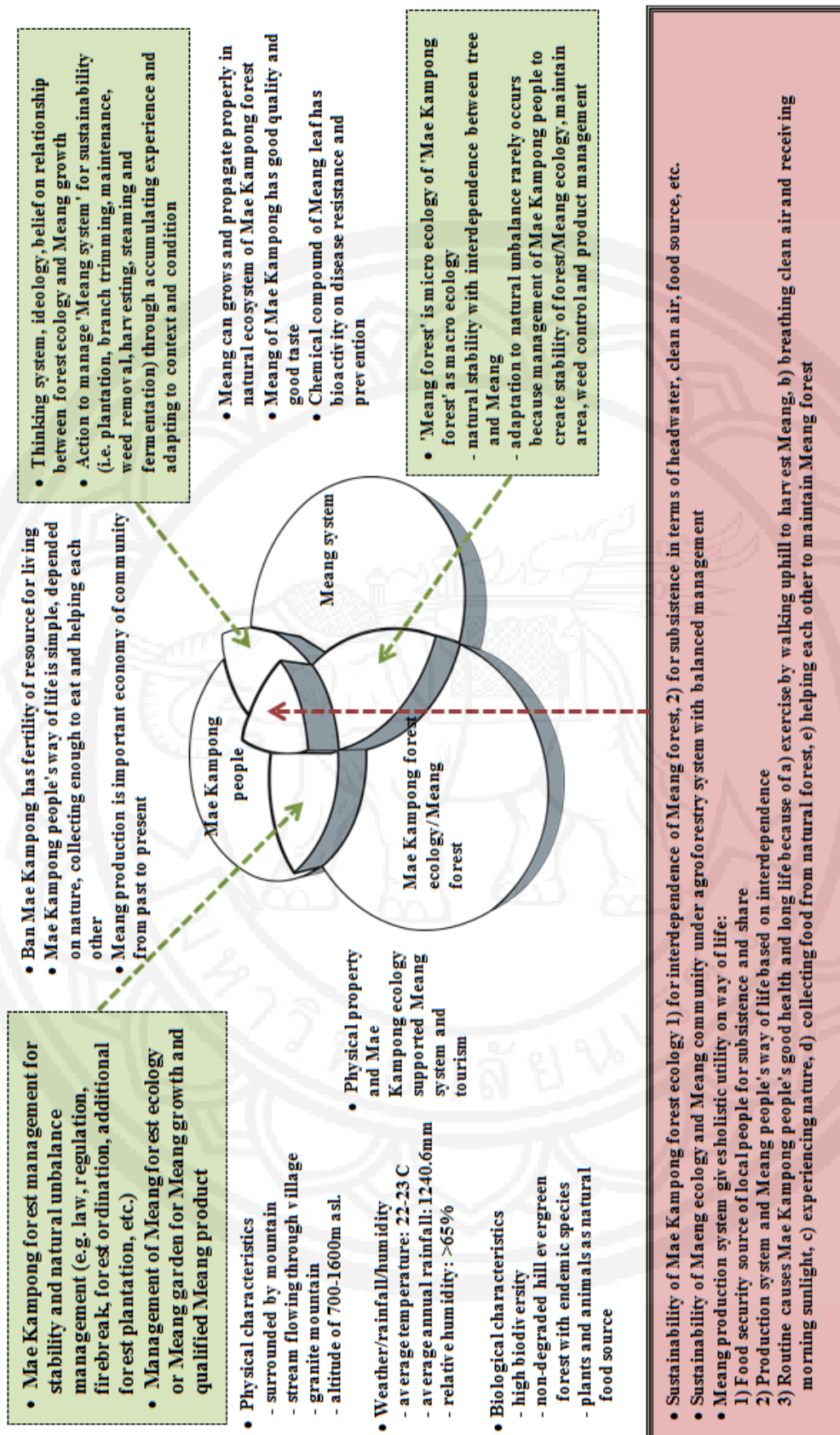


Figure 2 Virtue Syntheses of Meang in Relationship of Mae Kampong People–Forest Ecology–Meang System



1.3 The synthesis of virtue on the relationship between Mae Kampong people and Forest ecology and Meang system was to synthesize the virtue of complex interrelation reflecting utilities occurring along with the relationship between 'People, Forest, and Meang' of Mae Kampong people. Firstly, the virtue in terms of sustainability of forest ecology that can be in good health depends on the existence of 'People-Forest-Meang' People, however, depend on forest resources for living and Meang production. For coexistence of people under the beauty of surrounding nature, the fertility of forest, water source and refreshing air, Mae Kampong people continue to properly conserve and maintain their forest under two chief conditions of interdependence; for benefits of Meang Garden and for living with a water source, air, and food from forest. Thus, although the area has been established as a protected area, the empirical phenomenon shows that law alone cannot maintain forest fertility. It also depends on the way of 'People-Forest-Meang' which is proven to greatly maintain stable and sustainable interdependence of human and forest, supporting forest conservation to be a working area, headwater area, food source and clean air source, at the same time being as breath of the Mae Kampong people as well. Secondly, it is the virtue in terms of sustainability of Meang ecology and Meang community at Ban Mae Kampong that is perfect conditional that Meang production system exists in Mae Kampong people's way of life through the actions of controlling and managing natural stability and unbalance of forest/Meang ecology. By considering production plan, utilization and activities that benefits or conserves Meang forest resource under management and conservation by local people who avoid negative activities for forest and Meang in both long and short term, Ban Mae Kampong has the highest average sustainability of Meang community in northern Thailand (Linpaisal, 2008). In addition, local people have suitable/supportive management and utilization pattern with Meang forest because Meang forest greatly benefits and is important for their life, which it is a reason of why Meang forest is the most stable and sustainable agroforestry system. Finally, it is a primary virtue that Meang system or Meang production gives more than income. Its holistic benefits affect the way of life and gross happiness of Mae Kampong people as follows;

1.3.1 Their way of life daily relates to Meang forest by their utility and reliance on resources from Meang Garden or Meang forest as being food security source of local living because local people can acquire food in forest and their Meang Garden and share the food to others in community. Local people can use more than 70 plant species for food and 335 species for the herb (Boonnetr, 2004). Most of the collected vegetation for food is local seasonal and homegrown vegetables that are grown in Meang Garden. With area fertility and plant diversity, local people acquire wisdom on replacing some plants with available vegetation, such as using a sour taste of *Fagopyrum cymosum* instead of tamarind or lemon. Foods produced from the vegetation are delicious and have complex nutrition. In addition, local people use the collected vegetation as medicinal herbs in the pattern of food for healthcare and disease prevention as well as processing with knowledge and wisdom of traditional healers to cure illness.

1.3.2 Meang production system and Mae Kampong people's way of life is based on thinking set and action of interdependence. Thus, daily life of local people that walk between house and their Meang Garden have activities on the way including overseeing/monitoring/maintaining forest and natural resources, managing weeds, trimming unwanted/infected branches, collecting food in forest and Meang garden, sharing food, bringing the steamed Meang to collector, greeting and visiting others, sharing thinking and experience together. All of these are interdependence among people in the community that coexist with happiness without serious conflict, quarrel or competition on resources, which combine to make Mae Kampong community to be a helpful



society with kind people that love, care, share, support each other as well as appreciate the virtue of helping others. Thus, these actions and ways of thinking create happiness for people living in a peaceful community and society of 'People-Forest-Meang.'

1.3.3 Routine of Meang people results in their excellent physical and mental health characterized by their longevity which is 40% higher than national average (Huay Kaew Health Promotion Hospital, 2017). The daily life of Mae Kampong people that relates to nature, producing good physical and mental health, includes living in a peaceful/calm natural environment, going to bed before 9.00 pm, waking around 4.00 to 5.00 am, purifying mind with praying and paying respect to Buddha. Their daily regimen of embracing the natural beauty of forest and stream that gives good protection to their Meang forest begins with a two kilometer walk along a slope at more than 1,000 meters above sea level for 30 minutes to one hour to Meang Garden as morning exercise. Here they breathe the fresh air from Meang Garden that receives high oxygen to feel fresh as well as receiving light sunlight, intaking natural power that enhances body function by smelling the soil and Meang leaf, cherishing the growth of the Meang seeds. While sensing nature and taking care of the Meang and other trees, their hearing senses are alerted to the cascading cold waterfall from the mountain through forest and onto the village below. They are surrounded by the trill of the birds and enjoy watching their cute behavior. They harvest the food from virgin forest for consumption and share to neighbors yet take care to leave ageing foods such as papaya and ivy gourd on the stems for birds to eat. In such an environment, their minds and hearts are happy and joyful with a deep holistic understanding of nature and the ecosystem. Small happiness at each step construct Mae Kampong people to be kind, love nature, love others, help others, recognize beauty and value of surroundings, able to coexist with nature and other people with happiness every day.

To concisely depict the local capital represented in the above three virtue syntheses hidden within the interrelationship of 'Mae Kampong People-Forest Ecology-Meang System', the researcher developed a 'Virtue Syntheses of Meang' model (Refer Figure 2). This model has a high potential to transform virtue into tourism value. Visitors that embrace the nature and atmosphere of Ban Mae Kampong will immediately feel relaxed, calm and invigorated of body and mind. However, this transformation requires a new management system that will firstly create understanding to new generations of Ban Mae Kampong to recognize the hidden virtue and maintain identity of 'Meang People', 'Forest Ecology' and 'Meang System' that anchors interrelationship, and secondly, enable qualified tourists to feel the virtue as being 'natural therapy', whereby external knowledge of the benefit and power of nature is imported to enhance their physical and emotional health and promote quality longevity of life (Prabudhanitisarn, 2012). Complete management according to these dual dimensions will introduce the power of tourist attraction for the context of tourism in the present.

Raising the virtue as the main idea of transforming into tourism value needs step-by-step actions starting with communication within the community to promote pride, awareness, cherishing and ownership of virtue of their tourism-resource capital, and subsequently developing the virtue into tourism value to allow tourists to deeply touch/learn/appreciate the virtue by creating a 'tourism package' that can connect the virtue through an integrated/systematic tourism and market management by modern generations of local people, all of which will further completely the creation of 'sustainability' in all dimensions. This leads to the second finding of this research.

2. The virtue of the Meang system is turned into natural therapy to add to its tourist value. Such practice has integrated knowledge and utilized creativity to enable the quality tourists to deeply appreciate, absorb, and learn

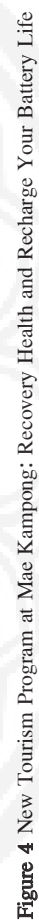
about such virtue through a natural therapy package that presents outstanding tourism resources to target tourists along the process as follows;

2.1 Medical scientific evidence were used to create the tourist package under the campaign ‘Mae Kampong: Recovery Health Recharge Your Battery Life’ for the main target group of quality tourists who were administrative personnel, company executors or organizational directors in urban centers where the atmosphere was hazardous for good health. By consuming life in ‘Meang growing and live like Mae Kampong people’, one could get in touch with the triangular balance of Mae Kampong, imbibing both physical and mental therapy along with the power of nature, producing good bodily and mental health to enhance quality life. Such activities could be included in the development of a tourist package for administrative personnel and company executives as the quality tourists for short, middle, or longer-term periods. Refer to Figures 3 and 4 for promotional logo and depiction of such a package.

‘Mae Kampong: Recovery Health Recharge Your Battery Life’



Figure 3 The Design of Natural Therapy Tourism Campaign



2.2 To improve tourism management of this new enterprise, a survey was conducted with Meang garden owners and related organizations, e.g. Sub-district Administration Organization, Health Promoting Hospital, Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, Royal project, Tourism Authority of Thailand. Responses were positive with the majority ($n = 30$) scoring a high level of satisfaction (4.84 out of 5) that the tourist package generated income distribution in the Ban Mae Kampong community and achieved its purpose of enabling tourists to appreciate the values of nature and health of the Meang environment.

Discussion

Most academic works analyzing the problems and impact of mainstream tourism under the influence of globalization and present form of capitalism find that tourism not only transformed things into goods to be consumed, but additionally provided negative impacts on society, culture, natural resources, and environment (Sugunnasil, 2005; Lash & Urry, 2008; Baudrillard, 1981). All these represent the impacts of globalization along with the state power and capital resulting in the weakness of the locality which had confronted difficulty in maintaining their condition. In an attempt to solve the problem, many academics are interested in trying to empower the locality to be able to sustain itself under globalization alongside the process known as localization (Pongsapich, 2006).

Localization realizes the significance of local people in putting hands together to take action in the process known as empowerment to create their bargaining power (Laohataiwanich, 2009). In this way, localization is a social action through local empowerment as local capital utilizing existent capital either of natural resources, social capital and cultural capital to empower the locality (Prabudhanitisarn, 2012). Such process is carried out via revitalization and reproduction to create a new meaning of local capital before using it to solve the problems or creating new products or services via localization (Sugunnasil, 2005).

Nonetheless, in using such local capitals as the tools and essence of tourism, in-depth research attempting to comprehend the power of local capital or to utilize such capital for ensuring the main or sub-social unit to have something to serve as its identity to get along the impact of globalization, and utilizing it specifically as economic creation has discovered that it has weak theoretical foundation. Consequently, the action on localization requires a selective approach to intensively delve into the virtue of such capital as recorded in initiatives led by researchers such as Prabudhanitisarn (2015) and Paipeng (2017). These authors deeply conceptualized such local capital and recommended that there was a need to firstly select only the local capital that was powerful and had impact on the locality, and secondly, to take action to find the analyzing method to gain deep understanding about the virtue of such local capitals which interacted with one another in many dimensions, not just one as has generally been done. Such an approach is required for synthesizing the virtue of Meang amid interrelationship among Mae Kampong people, forest ecology and Meang system. Besides trying to gain an understanding of the basic, outstanding and specific virtue, there is a need to analyze the virtue of the complex tripartite interaction between forest ecology and the Meang system, the Meang system and Mae Kampong people, and Mae Kampong people and forest ecology. Such an analysis has the capacity to bring to the fore the rationality and consequence of their natural interdependency. Moreover, there is a need to analyze the virtue resulting from the complex and overlapping interrelation of overall virtue of the study cases which revealed that natural therapy was logical and perfect ensuring Mae Kampong people with good physical and mental health, with quality longevity. All these are the crucial force of local capital serving as the tourist



resource for Mae Kampong community, whereby good management results not only in income from sustainable tourism, but also balances and sustains the identity and way of life of Mae Kampong people alongside the forest ecology and Meang systems.

The action to synthesize such virtues requires the commitment of local community as the owner of the virtue along with academics from outside. The process could be carried out via participatory action research starting from discovering, connecting, synthesizing, connecting, and revitalizing such capital to determine the concrete processes of firstly signifying and utilizing local capital to unify the people in the community, and secondly, identifying the core component of sustainable tourism. Such a process would emphasize the unique and exciting elements to be appreciated by outsiders as a viable alternative to the mainstream tourism which reduces tourist resources to be just the goods or short term benefits of globalization and capitalism during which people have looked solely for career and income. If sustainable tourism is the goal, there is a need to include an economic dimension, particularly to turn the virtue of capital to value for real sustainable tourism.

Lastly, this research concurs with Toatong (2004) and Suansri (2003) that the operation to ensure sustainable tourism has gone further than the concept and practice of alternative tourism which is trapped in form, type or definitions such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, agro-tourism, health tourism or community-based tourism. All these types of tourism have been found to have a gap of knowledge on sustainable tourism, particularly when the practice is concerned with how to initiate and practice the acquisition of sustainability. With this in mind, two significant pointers to be considered for the true achievement of sustainable tourism are raised.

Firstly, sustainable tourism could be unfeasible for other communities in general without the main conditions of having local capital on main tourist resources such as natural resources and socio-cultural heritage, occurring in areas with outstanding and unique tourist resources, being under caretaker or ownership of a certain community, and having managerial capacity and strength.

Secondly, to encompass the real nature of sustainable tourism requires a redefining of traditional models and definitions of tourism to be an integrative model that includes ecotourist, cultural, agricultural and health aspects. In the case of Mae Kampong, tourism aiming at enabling tourists to appreciate and embrace the virtue of natural therapy alongside the way of life of its Meang inhabitants is an example of such an integrative model. Sustainable tourism requires management as an enterprise that assist the community in which it occurs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research offers recommendations that are logical and proposes a new concept and practice on sustainable tourism through the process of participatory action research that integrates knowledge from within and outside as the essential tools via interaction of three mechanisms, namely, the community as the owner of tourist resources, academic supports serving as the core mechanism to push forward the operation within a participatory action research approach, and business and marketing mechanisms of various concerned organizations, agencies, and sectors, to promote marketing, advertising, and public relations to outside markets to support the development and management of sustainable tourism. To achieve the integration of these mechanisms requires the presence of five factors; firstly, the aim at discovering local capital on tourist resources both of cultural capital and natural resources which are outstanding, unique, or exciting, focusing on synthesizing the virtue which are deeply interconnected; secondly, the effort to revitalize the virtue of such capital to encourage the community to realize and understand the virtue and be proud and feel ownership leading to the commitment to build up tourist values;



thirdly, turning the values to top up the tourism by creating a tourist package utilizing all the virtue having been realized and supported by the community's creativity and knowledge management; fourthly, creating the system of community-run tourism in the form of an enterprise that enables the community to really access, control, and own the tourist resources to serve as the power to bargain and interact with the outside; and lastly, managing the tourist market alongside the supports of external mechanisms to connect the quality tourists with the community proposing such virtue leading to truly sustainable tourism management by the community.

The concept being proposed and tested by this research can be considered as one of the applicable academic tools realizing sustainable tourism operated by and for the community. It also provides deeper logical and empirical investigation of the core values or virtues of local capital, not just a connotation of a mere localization. Moreover, making localization through the force of local capital powerful requires continuous operation of such a local capital. Operation of local capital will eventually help local people coexist economically or at least make value added to local existing production with globalization and bring back community or local ties socially and culturally.

However, it is very crucial for this research to take a holistic approach to understand the interrelationship of the multi sphere of the phenomenon. The weakness of this approach, at the initial stage, is the possibilities of investigating scientifically related facts of each sphere. It was not possible or practical to deeply investigate for instance, the purity and volume of oxygen, the amount and characteristics of temperature, moisture and biodiversity of forest ecology and Meang garden. In health science, investigation of these factors would combine to contribute to a broader knowledge of different people's biophysical and biosocial responses with different exposure. Therefore, in order to enhance the explanations of this concept applying to sustainable tourism, further scientific studies are in need.

Acknowledgments

The study was successfully enabled with the kindness and support of Dr. Sidthinat Prabudhanitisarn, my advisor who provided helpful consultations, corrections and suggestions throughout the study time. I am very grateful for his contributions. Thanks also are extended to the Royal Golden Jubilee (RGJ) Ph.D. Programme and the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) for their committed support for this research from its inception to completion.

References

- Baudrillard, J. (1981). *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St. Louis, Mo: Telos Press. Retrieved from <https://epdf.pub/for-a-critique-of-the-political-economy-of-the-sign.html>
- Boonneter, N. (2004). *Ecotourism Management Potential of Ban Mae Kam Pong, Changwat Chiang Mai*. (Master's thesis). Graduate School, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai. Retrieved from <http://cmuir.cmu.ac.th/handle/6653943832/14274>
- Huay Kaew Health Promotion Hospital. (2017). *The Population of Elderly People Huay Kaew Sub-District, Mae On District, Chiang Mai Province Who are Older than the Life Expectancy in 1995, 2005 and 2015*. Chiang Mai: Huay Kaew Health Promotion Hospital.



Jittangwattana, B. (2009). *Sustainable Tourism Management*. Chiang Mai: Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University.

Laohataiwanich, E. (2009). *The Representation of Eco-Culture Tourism and Social Changes of the Community: A Case Study of Ban Mae Kampong, Tambon Huay Kaew, King Amphoe Mae On, Changwat Chiang Mai*. (Master's thesis). Graduate School, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai. Retrieved from <http://search.lib.cmu.ac.th/search/?searchtype=&searcharg=b1458770>

Lash, S., & Urry, J. (2008). *Economies of Signs and Space*. London: Sage Publications. DOI: 10.17323/1726-3247-2008-4-49-55

Linpisal, N. (2008). *Sustainability Assessment and Factors Determining Sustainable Tea Forest Communities in the North of Thailand*. (Master's thesis). Graduate School, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai. Retrieved from <http://cmuir.cmu.ac.th/handle/6653943832/19963>

Paipeng, W. (2017). Tourism Development from Ancient City to Living Museum at Wiang Tha Kan, San Pa Tong District, Chiang Mai. *Veridian E-Journal Silpakorn University (Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts)*, 10(5), 386-406. Retrieved from <https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/Veridian-E-Journal/article/view/109706>

Pongsapich, A. (2006). *Cultural Diversity: Paradigms and Roles in Citizens Society*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.

Prabudhanitisarn, S. (2012). *Research Project on Experience and Knowledge Analyses for the Theory of Area-Based Collaborative Development: Chiang Mai Cases*. Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund (TRF). Retrieved from https://elibrary.trf.or.th/project_content.asp?PJID=RDG55A0026

Prabudhanitisarn, S. (2015). *Local "Capital" for Localization Concept, Chiang Mai: Document of Sustainable Land Use and Natural Resource Management*. Chiang Mai: Department of Social Sciences and Development Faculty of Social Sciences Chiang Mai University.

Rakyutidharm, A. (2011). Alternatives Development of Mainstream. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, 30(2), 13-43. Retrieved from <http://socanth.tu.ac.th/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/JSA-30-2-atchara.pdf>

Suansri, P. (2003). *Community Tourism Management Guide*. Bangkok: Tourism for Life and Nature Project.

Sugunnasil, W. (2005). *Globalization*. Bangkok: National Research Council of Thailand.

Thailand Research Fund. (2017). *Managing the Carrying Capacity of the Area for Tourism by Community: Ban Mae Kampong, Mae On District, Chiang Mai Province, Phase II*. Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund (TRF).



Thitijamrueporn, T. (2009). *Managing the Carrying Capacity of the Area for Tourism by Community: Ban Mae Kampong, Mae On District, Chiang Mai Province, Phase I*. Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund (TRF). Retrieved from https://elibrary.trf.or.th/project_content/TRFN.asp?PJID=RDG54N0003

Toatong, C. (2004). *Overview of Research for Tourism Development Synthesis Report*. Phetchaburi: Rajabhat Phetchaburi University.

Unthong, A., & Kaosa-ard, M. (2011). *Tourism Development and Economic Growth in Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Institute for Public Policy Studies Chiang Mai University.

