

**Cultural Commodification: Where Ethnic Minorities
and Development Policies Meet**

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Abstract

Broad development policies targeting impoverished ethnic minorities seek to merge cultural preservation and economic development goals using cultural commodification as a means to improve livelihoods and way of life. Since culture found its way into development policy—transforming it from a commodity centred concept to a human centred one—the diversity of culture itself has risen to the forefront as something in need of protection and as a valuable commodity. While the global tourism industry offers economic potential, a plethora of constraints are evolving. New opportunities are caught in the balance between the satisfying of economic and cultural objectives, especially for ethnic minorities who experience some form of marginalization. In an effort to empower them advocacy organizations, development practitioners, and some national policies encourage community participation in the decision-making process. This requires cooperation and will from all actors involved or affected from the community level right up to central government.

Keywords: development policy; cultural commodification; ethnic minorities; cultural tourism; economic development; cultural preservation

Subject Terms: Development policy – culture; Ethnic minorities – indigenous peoples; Culture and tourism – heritage tourism; Economic development–handicraft industries – community development; Northern Thailand; Canada – First Nations

Executive Summary

For much of the last decade development practitioners have looked at bringing the main goals of economic development and cultural preservation together to improve the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable ethnic minority groups. A burgeoning global tourism industry has shown great promise for supplying the financial means for achieving that merger. The process of cultural commodification tends to enhance cultural preservation objectives while at the same time offering economic opportunity. Interdisciplinary literature and research has further recognized that ethnic minority communities face varying degrees of constraints from conflicting ideologies attached to cultural and economic realms, which are further compounded by the varying levels of socio-political and economic marginality often experienced by these people.

The project at hand is concerned with how macro policy combining cultural preservation initiatives and economic development strategies relying on tourist markets interact at both national and community levels. Can cultural commodification provide sustainable preservation and positive economic outcomes at the same time? Sustainability of both is thought to come from the contribution of community involvement in the decision-making process, but there is still no mechanism in place to account for the failure or success of commodification.

Whether cultural commodification will in the end offer sustainable preservation or provide strong economic solutions is yet to be formerly determined. Examination of context-

specific scenarios that explore the experience of First Nations in Canada and ethnic minorities living in Northern Thailand reveal that there is no 'one' ideal or attainable result that unfolds via the merger of economic and cultural realms. Every poor ethnic minority community has a distinct degree of marginality that affects its level of market access and its control over its economic and cultural destinies. Broad macro policies intending to preserve ethnic minority culture and strengthen economic positions run as much risk of failure as prior development policies that did not consider how a culture itself, and the institutions built from it, affects development outcomes. If minority groups continue to be marginalized either socio-politically or economically, outcomes will not meet the standard international development practitioners recommend.

for Tyler...

*and for artisans worldwide that supply
humankind with inspiration & intrigue*

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Figure 2 With permission: Steve Smith, Kwakwaka'wakw. *Untitled*, 2008. Photos: Lara Hill38

Glossary of Abbreviations

BCT	Border Crafts of Thailand
FCS	Framework for Cultural Statistics
ICRT	International Centre for Responsible Tourism
INAC	Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NAS	National Statistics
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NITA	Native Investment and Trade Association
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
TAT	Tourism Authority of Thailand
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNPFII	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WTO	World Tourism Organization

Preface

The foundation for this project is formed from my involvement in the cultural industry as both a working artist and as a traveler not immune to the delights that spill like treasure from the rich reserves of human diversity.

More particularly, I've been interested in how tangible culture becomes a communicative conduit serving to enhance how we encounter, engage, and express our time in history. For most of us, I believe, the process can be as simple as sipping hot apple tea after hamam or as elaborate and breathtaking as surveying a Buskashi match in rural Tajikistan. Such moments, midst myriads more, attach themselves to travellers and often become memories made whole when local artefacts capture an essence of the authentic for us. I relish such souvenirs and the more I learn from them, the more humbled I am by the complexity of our world.

And the more curious. Having for several years made a living from my treatment of cultural elements, traveling eventually brought me to question more deeply how the creation of cultural forms affects its producers. Especially when the artifact is being created to meet an economic necessity and not an artistic imperative. The question, of course, raised many more leading in turn to this examination of indigenous cultural forms as industry.

As a producer and a consumer of culture I focus, despite the privileges I benefit from compared to so many, on the tensions rising from the effort to find a balance between the preservation of cultural integrity and the selling of marketable wares. Increasingly vulnerable groups in global society must cope with those tensions, the demands of outside actors, and the process of commodification. The more we know of this process the more likely we are to find ways to improve its function as a lifeline.

Introduction

For as long as humans have been able to marry their wanderlust to mobility, market forces have emerged as a natural interaction between visitor and visited. Traditionally, travellers have sought to take home souvenirs from exotic destinations and entrepreneurial hosts have benefited through the trade of such artefacts from relics to handicrafts in exchange for currency or commodities brought from afar. These transactions were built around a nexus of evolving paradigms which, in the present day's scenario, advanced this simple exchange into a complex matrix involving merged cultural preservation goals and economic development strategies for poor ethnic minority groups.

Though aspects of culture have been commodified for centuries within the context of tourism and trade, the sale of such commodities has not long been seen as a manifestation of important market forces in the development field. Only in more recent times have development practitioners and state actors recognized and acted on the potential that culture, and products derived from it for the 'tourist' market, could serve as part of a broad economic development strategy. In the case of many ethnic minority groups faced with marginalization and/or the disappearance of sustaining economic activities as fundamental as land use, tapping into cultural industry is seen as a means of alleviating poverty. As well, debates within modern globalization and post-colonial discourse shed light on the plight of indigenous and ethnic minority cultures, which face annihilation through assimilation policies and homogenous pressure. From the late

1990s, development practitioners have looked at bringing economic development and cultural preservation goals together for ethnic minority groups. The process of cultural commodification to all intents and purposes, enhances these cultural preservation objectives while at the same time offering economic opportunity, but not without challenge. Numerous opportunities have been identified in both economic and cultural realms, but seemingly at the expense of each other. Too much emphasis on preservation can detract from economic realities and too much emphasis on economic realities can detract from preservation efforts. Opportunities and challenges experienced within cultural and economic realms are intrinsically intertwined and therefore should not be treated separately when attempting to merge them.

This project is concerned with how macro policy combining cultural preservation initiatives and economic development strategies relying on tourist markets interact at the community level. Can cultural commodification provide sustainable cultural preservation and economic goals at the same time? Development discourse does not deny the existence of a host of socio-cultural, political, and environmental challenges when considering the implications of tourism schemes in peripheral communities. However, the majority of development literature has restricted itself to a broader overall view. From this macro perspective, the interplay between the now seemingly inseparable realms of culture and economic development sets rather noble goals for tourism, but an array of interdisciplinary debates and evolving global dynamics constantly challenge this new approach when they are considering the broader goals within country specific, and community specific contexts. Recent development discourse places hope and emphasis on the role of community empowerment and participation to ensure the

sustainability of the initiative, but a new question arises: can marginalized communities access the tools necessary to exercise control of the decision-making process and outcome of these objectives?

Terminology and Parameters

Much of the terminology used in this paper falls under a rubric that, diplomatically, would best be described as contested. The word *culture* itself has no one definition that can be agreed on within disciplines, let alone across them. As observed by noted anthropologist Adam Kuper in 1999, “[b]etween 1920 and 1950 no fewer than 157 definitions of culture were created by American social scientists, most of them by anthropologists...” (57). The definition for *culture* used here will draw from a generalized contemporary anthropological view including: the learned beliefs and practices, perceptions and attitudes, passions and expressions that set one group apart from another (George and Reid 92). Culture in this framework should be perceived as having tangible and intangible facets. The tangible facets (textiles, painting, weaving, carving, dance) are expressions derived from the intangible (beliefs, values, perceptions, religion).¹ Inspired by Franz Boas’ conception of multiple cultures in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), anthropologists Ralph Linton and Margaret Mead distinguished between the notion of ‘culture’ and ‘a culture’ in the 1930s. Their work highlighted the differences which cultures are responsible for creating between groups. It is the presence of this ‘otherness’, this cultural difference that the tourism industry depends on to fill its marketplace with patrons seeking to explore/consume cultural diversity and the products of it (Ibid).

¹ This explanation has been inspired by the merging of many conceptions found in the bibliography

The *commodification of culture* refers to the production of the aforementioned 'tangible wares' so they can be consumed by people outside of the cultural group they are visiting. Many definitions in tourism literature attempt to clump the commodification of culture and the fact of tourism together, implying that it is the existence of tourism that prompts the commodification process (Cohen Contemporary Tourism 101, Urry). A more succinct definition is required here and put simply commodification accounts for any cultural product that is produced for economic purposes, not cultural ones.² Or it, "is a process by which things (and activities) come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value..." (Cohen Contemporary Tourism 111).

As well, much of the broad development literature, specifically literature affiliated with the United Nations, prefers use of the term, *indigenous*. The terms *minority* or *ethnic minority* are also used. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) working definition of *indigenous people* includes those who occupied and relied on lands prior to colonial or state claims and have maintained distinct cultural characteristics (UNESCO and Indigenous People 10). Canada's Department of Indian and Northern Affairs describe the meaning of *indigenous* as 'native to the area', similar in meaning to *aboriginal people*, *native people* and *First Nation people* (INAC Words First 12). For the purpose of this paper, some

² Cultural reasons for production include for example: artworks made for religious or ceremonial purposes, distinctive clothing and handicrafts made by community for wear and use within that community.

communities found outside of the net of those definitions³ are excluded and the more specific term, *ethnic minority* will predominate, with exception of citations. Some ethnic minorities, like indigenous people, have faced conditions of social, political, and/or economic marginalization since the rise of the nation-state. These groups are perceived as occupying what Chief George Manuel described in his 1974 book, *The Fourth World*, as tantamount to the statelessness of ancient nations within modern borders. Splendid as the phrase *Fourth World* is, it occurs in contemporary literature with such a variety of evolving definitions attached (Cohen Crafts of Thailand, Notzke, Smith), that it also will not be used here.

The tourism industry offers many kinds of opportunities to ethnic minorities. To keep the parameters of this paper in focus a definition for the kind of tourism affecting them directly is needed. Those available have come to include many subcategories: pro-poor tourism, indigenous tourism, heritage tourism, and ethnic tourism. They can, however, be seen in two broader categories: ecotourism (a much studied phenomena) and cultural tourism (a more recent arrival). Ecotourism has generated tensions with land rights, environmental policies, sustainability and conservation. There is a large and growing body of literature and research devoted to exploring the management, the sustainability, and the constraints of ecotourism. It is widely viewed as a tool for poverty reduction and is evaluated for its effects on ethnic minorities,

³ For the purposes here, it is important to recognize that some highland peoples of South East Asia periodically moved their communities in pursuit of fertile land for swidden agrarian practices. This preceded the formation of state boundaries, thus the term indigenous is debatable because they occupied a range of land that now reaches across several state borders in the region. Also, some of these populations in the modern nation state have/had refugee status, others have restrictive identity cards, but all groups must be considered.

their relationship with the land, as well as the dichotomy that rises between the protection of natural environments and the potential income ecotourism offers to the impoverished.

While mindful of ecotourism's being integral to contemporary development strategies, this paper will focus on development issues that fall under the umbrella of cultural tourism. Constraints and opportunities of ecotourism dominate the literature, whereas cultural tourism, focusing on aspects of cultural commodification and ethnic minorities, is a newer phenomenon from a development perspective and requires more case study and research.

Part One of this paper describes my reading of key interdisciplinary literature and the intellectual and political factors that have informed the expansion of development policy to include the cultural dimension since the 1980s. And, from that defining anchor, how aspects of culture came to be viewed both as malleable and valuable—in need of protection, as well as being a useful commodity that poor ethnic minority communities can market to tourists in one of the faster-growing global industries. From that macro view, this paper will then examine various interdisciplinary dialogues on the subject and critique and explore the various opportunities and challenges that rise out of cultural commodification as it affects ethnic minority groups. Particularly those groups that experience some form of marginalization. The section will conclude with an examination of some organized external advocacy generated by support for the communities of concern.

Part Two explores and compares how macro policy engages with the realities affecting ethnic minority people living in Canada and Thailand, specifically First Nations and Hill Tribes. It will compare the real experiences found in both countries at different stages of a similar

trajectory in both an evolving global context and in a policy environment. Though each country is at a very different juncture of industrialization and development, macro policies involving the plight of ethnic minority cultures—poverty and marginalization result with an unexpected comparability for both groups and therefore make for a useful comparison when evaluating those policies.

Part Three builds an analysis that applies micro-level considerations and real experiences to current macro policy prescriptions to reveal areas in need of more research and understanding. It will be seen that development goals relying heavily on the tourism industry to sell cultural goods may offer some economic and preservation opportunity, but may not effectively meet the needs of ethnic minority groups for economic development through tourism alone. Current macro policy that merges preservation goals with economic ones cannot always cope with the varying realities experienced by ethnic minorities at the community level. It will be very difficult to track, monitor and evaluate whether or not broad policy prescriptions can successfully improve livelihoods while protecting cultural diversity at the same time.

Part One: Literature Review

1.1 Development Policy Perspectives from 1980 to Present

At a joint UNESCO/World Bank conference, *Culture in Sustainable Development* held in 1998, the opening address noted that it was then the first time that the World Bank had hosted a forum including cultural ministers. Culture had not before been given policy relevance in development. At that point, culture had finally been recognized for its flavouring of the institutional nuances existing between groups and as a means of soliciting different outcomes from the same economic development strategies. The social sciences had not contributed to the World Bank's development efforts until the late 1970s and then primarily from an environmental conservationist approach. Even by the mid-1980s, when the relevance of culture had made ground in development theory, there still were no more than two or three World Bank staff contributing from the social sciences (Koch-Weser 3).

The realization that culture, and consideration of it, plays a central role in sustainable development supported economic development efforts that had shifted toward a 'do no harm' policy. That policy came in response to failed development efforts and to a rise in political advocacy across disciplines and within civil society for the cause of poor and marginalized people. Interestingly, the field of anthropology had by then been undergoing a theoretical shift for quite some time. Indirectly at first, it had influenced the focus of the development field's lens onto redressing of the neo-liberal economic reforms that so clearly had not performed well in

the developing world. According to Sarah Radcliffe, the development field prior to the realization of the relevance of culture in development policy was marred by the failure of development programs. The field saw Western-styled development as ‘the only trajectory to growth’ (6). It was not until culture itself was recognized as central to development that different varieties of capitalism and market forces, rooted in and operating from very ‘different historico-geographies of cultural practice and institutional settings,’(13) were of importance to the shape and growth of useful outcomes. It was the United Nations Development Programs’ human development reports, starting in 1991, together with the launch of the United Nations first *Decade for Cultural Development* (1988-1997), that solidified the shift in development thinking from commodity-centred criteria to looking at human centred ones, formally placing culture and development together in the same arena (Throsby 2).

The culture and development paradigm of the 1990s segued into the rise of awareness for the cultural fragility of indigenous and ethnic minority groups. Not only did prior policies of assimilation during colonial times seeking to rescue ‘primitive’ peoples have devastating impacts on indigenous culture (Smith 3), but the actions of development policy and structural adjustment programs post Washington Consensus also unintentionally served to crush indigenous culture (Radcliffe 4). In 1999, Kuper asserted that the “debate about culture has become political again” (228). This was in part because of the concern being raised by non-governmental organizations, scholars, and anti-globalizers and their call for aid in the preserving human diversity as, UNESCO insisted, a ‘fragile treasure’ and for empowering voiceless people who are politically, socially, and economically marginalized. The United Nations’ second

International Decade of the of the World's Indigenous Peoples (2005-2015) that followed the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted by member states in 2001, took the matter even further with its aim to promote cultural diversity as 'an ethical imperative' and matter of human rights. More recently,

UNESCO's current Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007) places strong emphasis on the implementation of the *International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples* as part of the strategic objectives to safeguard cultural diversity and encourage dialogue among cultures and civilizations and enhance the linkages between culture and development. UNESCO is committed to promote the "full participation of minorities and marginalized and vulnerable groups in devising, implementing and monitoring policies and actions which directly affect them" through an interdisciplinary approach. (UNESCO and Indigenous People 12)

A common contemporary theme running through development discourse places more and more emphasis on enabling participation and community empowerment for the success and sustainability of development initiatives, to 'promote the full participation of minorities...' as indicated by above UNESCO position. Part of that process intends to build on the respect for indigenous/ethnic culture and the acknowledgement of the importance of indigenous heritage and knowledge systems. It is thought that from within these knowledge systems ethnic communities can continue to build their economic, social, and cultural institutions; not from imposed external actors and institutional frameworks as has been the case in various forms throughout history. To enhance the new strategy, the United Nations' efforts supporting the indigenous peoples' ability for empowerment and participation aim to include multilingual education and the promotion of equitable partnerships with non-indigenous partners (Ibid). These efforts fall in step with the United Nations' Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

(UNPFII), which brings the vigilance for villages strategy into the broader mandate of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals by 2015⁴ (Ibid 13).

Voices from within ethnic minority communities (what very few there are extant in related literature) have noted, as early as Canadian First Nations Chief Manuel so pointedly did in 1974, that, “our own needs can be fully served only through the development of our own institutions,”(Manuel and Posluns 217). He also requested empowerment from and cooperation with the state, “The demand of Indian people that we be allowed to sit at the table where our lives are being negotiated, where our resources are being cut up like a pie... The whole history of Canada has largely been one long negotiation about the distribution of economic and political power,”(218). Manuel’s book *The Fourth World* is, at its core, largely about self-determination. He had his finger on the empowerment pulse decades before the international development community. His ideas about a bottom up approach in cooperation with a central government are in sync with what development practitioners are now prescribing as the foundation of development strategies today. Community participation and control are being promoted as the main ingredients of development initiatives that aspire to be sustainable.

1.2 Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Informing Macro Policy

Culture in development, inspired by the growing interest in protecting diversity and in reviving the stagnant or dying economies of marginalized communities, occurred simultaneously with a rapid growth in global tourism and the increasing recognition of culture as

⁴ For further reading about the MDGs, see: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

a latent commodity to germinate in a valuable industry all over the world. “The most distinguishing feature of mature capitalist systems over recent decades has been the re-creation of economies around the symbolic value of culture(s),” (Smith and Robinson 3). In a recent report released by the World Tourism Organization (WTO), they calculated that tourism in emerging and developing markets has grown at an average of six to eight per cent in the last decade (double that of industrialized nations) and that tourism has become a crucial source of income for seventy percent of the world’s poorest countries. The WTO has predicted that the number of international travellers will almost double by 2020 and in light of this it has encouraged development practitioners to recognize the long term potential that tourism can offer as a sustainable growth mechanism (WTO Emerging Tourism Markets). This unprecedented rise in global outbound tourism, along with the increased interest in human diversity and cultural commodities that permeate it, creates a potent niche window of opportunity for ethnic minority communities.

The move to merge the preservation and economic goals of ethnic minorities with burgeoning tourism industries does solicit new challenges and suffer from some constraints. The tensions that exist between the differing demands of economic and cultural realms create strains between left and right ideologies. Along with the concerted effort to employ ‘do no harm’ development strategies these tensions present unparalleled policy challenges. A range of research and literature across different disciplines grapples with the multitude of considerations engaged with cultural commodification and economic development. Much of that literature is

restricted to concerns within one or another of the disciplines, but all are useful when brought together in the analysis of the broader policy objectives that do aim to be multidisciplinary.

John Urry's influential book *The Tourist Gaze* (1990) pointedly informs the nature and progression of the demand side of the tourism industry. Urry connects the rise in mass tourism and cultural commodification to the influence of tourists' tastes and consumption patterns, each one working to shape trade relationships in the post-modern tourism industry. He sees the rise in tourism as coming from the rise of the middle class and its members' increasing desire to break away from the pace and mechanics of hectic modern lifestyles. There are many different varieties of touristic 'gaze', some tourists yearn for 'primitive' experiences and for reconnection with the past (MacLeod 183, Smith 129)—ethnic minority communities, especially poor ones, can cater to this demand (Hinch 247). Ethnic minorities are rich in their supply of that 'otherness' giving them the cultural resources that tourists seek (Smith and Robinson 3). The commodifying of culture offers a 'souvenir' of that experience, either in the form of handicrafts or, for example, documentary photographs of cultural performances and everyday living. In addition to other tourism related income, some communities have come to profit most from the sale of handicrafts and souvenirs. (Cohen Thai Tourism 125, Crafts of Thailand 12-13)

Several peer-reviewed journals, predominantly those published in Western countries, have begun to explore the post-modern tourism phenomenon. Authors Lew et al compiled a list of academic journals dealing directly with the tourism industry. It includes such staples as the *Annals of Tourism* (established in 1974), which was followed by *Tourism Management* (1979). Ten new journals that started publishing in the 1980s, and the 90s brought forth an explosion of

industry periodicals that came to include publishing in countries such as Turkey, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan. A sampling of titles include the: *Journal of Tourism Studies* (1990), *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (1993), *Tourism Analysis and Tourism Economics* (1995), *Tourism, Culture & Communication* (1998), *ASEAN Journal on Hospitality and Tourism* (2002), and the *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* (2003). By 2004, Lew et al had accumulated a list of 76 tourism related journals (11-13) chock-full of valuable interdisciplinary research and critique. The title content and sheer volume have come to reflect the growing economic importance and socio-cultural impact of tourism as well as the related and evolving socio-political focus of this new era. Tourism itself is recognized as a unique industry deserving of its own branch of research because it is not purely an economic activity, 'tourism is also a social force that has profound impacts upon societies and peoples,' (Higgins-Desbiolles 223).

Nelson Graburn's discussion of fake 'airport art' in 1967 and his book, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts* (1976), along with Erik Cohen's ongoing and exhaustive research into the processes of change occurring between tourism and local cultures, both continue to influence and inform contemporary research across disciplines. Themes dominating the inspired literature of the last few decades highlight several interwoven tensions and paradoxes that occur in cultural commodification as it affects ethnic minority communities. The overarching issues identified to challenge macro policy deserve more explanation than can be accommodated here, but they can be condensed into three main reoccurring categories as described in the left column of Figure 1 below. The top row compares those challenges to three identifiably divisive positions (Hinch 247).

	1. Pessimist	2. Conservative	3. Advocate
Authenticity & Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural devolution • fossilization • decreased quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural evolution • regulations to protect artist and consumer (property rights, labelling) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural revival • pride • improved profile
Economic growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inequitable • exploitive • unsustainable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diversification • regulations to curb rent seekers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • source of sustainable income
Power struggle between actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of bargaining power • marginalization • expropriation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cooperation between state, NGOs and community = path to empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • growth = increased bargaining power • post-colonial reconciliation

Figure 1 Three perspectives on cultural commodification as it pertains to ethnic minorities.

Authenticity and Meaning

The most common issue raised across the literature relates to the evolving authenticity and meaning of tangible culture when societies engage with tourism. (See especially: Graburn, Cohen, Cole, MacCannell, Notzke, Smith, Smith and Robinson, Hinch and Butler,) Tourists' demand for souvenirs symbolic of their travel experiences can act to revive and preserve a tangible culture that might otherwise be on the brink of disappearance. In this light the demand for icons is seen as a positive process serving to enhance intercultural dialogue and to grow local community pride as part of an already evolving process of symbolic cultural meaning. Commodification thus offers a way to stimulate interest in traditional techniques and practices as well as showcase its practitioners.

A dominant and prolific perception from the pessimists' view is that commodification through tourism can be destructive and culturally unsustainable because it merely packages culture for commercial purposes (Hinch 250) and acts as, "a process by which 'otherness' becomes a commodity to be consumed," (Cole 90). Tangible culture is seen as being

renegotiated as it slowly but surely loses meaning for its producers as they participate in seeing their items modified increasingly to the specifications and satisfaction of foreign tastes and demands. The work undergoes a transformation since it veers from cultural function to source of income. Eventually tangible culture that has lost local cultural meaning through commodification has to be staged as an authentic event item in order to meet the tourists' want of genuine artefact (Cohen Contemporary Tourism 101-103).

Where renegotiation or devolution of cultural meaning is perceived as negative, so too is the long-term affect of tourists' demand for an authentic product or experience. Tourists' nostalgia for the authentic and the primitive can threaten to fossilize the natural process of cultural evolution. It tends to suspend cultural identity within a timeframe, instead of the natural ebb and flow of people reacting to new influences. The suspension can be seen as another form of imperialism or control when actors outside of the community secure the market and other benefits of the commodification process while keeping communities 'primitive' and 'authentic' in response to consumer demand (Smith 141).

Economic Growth

For many communities whose economic activities have been limited by policies restricting areas such as land use and hunting rights, tangible culture tends to be the one unlimited response they can muster to get out of poverty. But it requires an expert aligning of the right slope to all the conduits before the system flows. Economist Jagdish Bhagwati vehemently argues that fears about the loss of cultural diversity are wrongly directed. The fear should be grounded in the fact that most 'primitive' or peripheral communities simply do not have access

to the mainstream economy. “[E]conomists want to invent and then implement policies that would extend to the indigenous peoples the globalization-induced prosperity that they might be missing out on!” (115).

Anthropologists have long recognized that the economic opportunity afforded by cultural commodification wields a double-edged sword. People can use that approach to generate income from their cultural capital, but they need to be wary of the potential detriments to cultural meaning and interpretation or of being financially exploited by outside forces if they lack full control of the enterprise. The pessimist view has determined that the eventual effect of economic growth through tourism is socially and culturally erosive (Smith 117). This view does carry weight and especially in view of the fact ethnic minority communities tend to be politically marginalized and thus easily bypassed economically or are susceptible to exploitation by middlemen be they foreign, domestic, or of the state’s apparatus.

Power Struggle Between Actors

There is a delicate balance between cultural preservation and commodification and between whom it best benefits. Cohen makes an important observation about how culture can be commodified by anyone, sometimes in the form of expropriation (Cohen Contemporary Tourism 101). His observation has been exemplified by the experience in Canada and Australia as each country has benefited hugely from the marketing of indigenous images used at no financial cost to make their countries more attractive to foreign cultural and eco-tourists—often with a romanticized and unrealistic representation of the current cultural and living standards being experienced by either country’s ethnic minority (Notzke 93). “Passionate efforts of the

tourism industry to 'protect' traditional culture may hide a form of romantic 'elitism' which is actually attempting to 'freeze' these cultures for the benefit of the tourists and the tourism industry rather than for the benefit of the indigenous hosts themselves." (Hinch 251) At least in those countries, along with the United States, New Zealand, and Scandinavia, 'Aboriginal people enjoy various degrees of legal and constitutional status and recognition,' (Notzke 9). National policy in those countries has swung to encouraging cultural and economic development within ethnic minority communities but it is too early to gauge how successfully the policy is translating into reality. Such is not being experienced by ethnic minority groups who are not legally recognized, as is the case in many African, Asian, and Latin American countries. This is, of course, where civil society and non-government organizations come to play a role in curbing exploitation. But ultimately, if governments have no incentive to uphold or enforce laws that protect ethnic minorities from various forms of rent seeking, these communities will remain vulnerable and ultimately remain powerless.

Respected tourism author Tom Hinch identifies community control as central to all the challenges faced by ethnic minority peoples when examining the prospects of sustaining a commodification for cultural tourism. He is interested in the ability of communities to influence the outcomes from tourism and whether they are able to weigh both the costs and the benefits of the process to themselves (247). It should be up to the people affected to decide how much of their culture they are willing to risk for the sake of economic opportunity, but they need to fully understand the risks and the opportunities to make informed decisions. Stroma Cole (94) and Claudia Notzke (9) highlight the benefits tourism provides to marginalized communities in the

form of increased political capital and bargaining power. More and more indigenous and ethnic minority groups “have become more informed of their legal and political rights and they have increasingly exercised them,” (Hinch and Butler 10). The more recognition and value the ethnic minority community has of the national economy, the more power they wield over their own cultural destinies. “Tourism can be harnessed for economic as well as political empowerment for indigenous groups,” (Notzke 9). “The very fact that tourists are starting to take an interest in the culture, traditions and lifestyles of indigenous peoples has provided a means of strengthening their position,” (Smith 42).

1.3 Advocacy

In recognition of the fact that governments do not or cannot always actively comply with broad policy prescriptions, numerous international non-governmental organizations, forums, conferences, and political advocacy groups have gathered to address and to assist with meeting the concerns facing poor and marginalized peoples who lack bargaining power. This kind of support offers a viable means of moving toward empowerment when it otherwise remains unreachable.

In the tourism context, organizations like UK-based *Tourism Concern* established in 1988, look to ensure that ethnic minority communities benefit from the tourism that directly affects them. *Tourism Concern* campaigns and produces educational material that informs media and the public in an effort to fight exploitation and support Fair Trade in tourism, human rights, and community-based initiatives. The organization’s *Ethical Tourism Guide* puts the onus for

fairness on tourists' shoulders and aims to empower the consumer with the ability to make informed and responsible consumption choices at their destination.

The ethical imperative has made headway and is now in market sights of big business. Every year the kingpins of the global travel industry meet to showcase the latest information and industry trends at one the world's largest trade shows, London's *World Travel Market*. This year's event, taking place in November, will dedicate an entire day of seminars and awards⁵ to the cause of 'Responsible Tourism'. The first *Responsible Tourism Conference* was held in 2002 in Cape Town, which preceded the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 (Capetown Declaration). The second conference, with 503 delegates from twenty-nine countries, was supported by the Department of Tourism in Kerala, India this past March. These events, alongside other partnerships and research conducted by the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) take a pro-poor approach in supporting ethnic minority groups through tourism.

⁵ Rewards are sponsored by Virgin Holidays, anyone can nominate any tourism organisation based on their promotion of responsible tourism practices that, " [minimizes] negative impacts and [maximizes] positive ones...[by] putting something back to conserve their culture or environment..." (Telegraph Responsible Tourism Awards 2008). There is no indication of whether any ethnic minority perspectives were considered in the judgement of those 'ethical' or 'responsible' award-worthy practices.

Part Two: Micro Studies in Northern Thailand and the Northwest Coast of Canada

The following section begins with an appreciation of the common experience shared by ethnic minorities living in Thailand and in Canada. In the broad sweep of their experience it is possible to observe and assess the macro policy affecting each of their estates. Though the policy environments at the national level in each country are larger and more complex than the space allotted them here would indicate, even a brief introduction of the scenario in each region will illustrate how both ethnic minorities' socio-political and economic status relates to the international policy objectives of the host country. Specific scenarios help to exhibit the complexity of the realities experienced from one community to the next. These demonstrate the potential for constant challenges to wider policy objectives seeking to preserve culture while providing economic opportunities for ethnic minorities through a commodification of that culture.

2.1 Common Ground

In the broadest comparative sense, as recognized by the UNPFII, all the indigenous peoples of the world should be acknowledged as socially, economically, and culturally vulnerable and in need of the support of the international community:

Indigenous peoples are the inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to other people and to the environment. Indigenous peoples have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are

distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Despite their cultural differences, the various groups of indigenous peoples around the world share common problems... (UNPFII, [About UNPFII](#))

First Nations people faced cultural obliteration during Canada's nation building process and then marginalization as a result of the sustained indifference of policies delivered with a practiced prejudice. Traditional cultures with economies linked to land use found themselves increasingly restricted as a result of struggles over land claims and contemporary environmental policies. Despite decades of deceit, First Nations have experienced a cultural resurgence. This is being realized in part through a rise in political advocacy, a rise in demand for heritage preservation, and through self-governance as well as external support, largely from the state and NGOs. It is also being realized because of a rise in interest in cultural tourism with its corresponding increase of lucrative foreign visitors. Each development has spurred a revival in and commodification of traditional culture, including the ascension of contemporary artwork, which is collected by both foreign and domestic consumers alike. In fact, the First Nations people residing on the West Coast of Canada have a long history with the commodification of cultural goods, one built on a budding tourism industry that dates back to the early 1800s and domestic trade dating back years further.

By comparison, ethnic minorities living in Northern Thailand have only been exposed to tourism for the last few decades even though regional trade of specialized commodities for particular groups is nothing new to them. That short exposure does mean that they too have experienced assimilation pressures and the loss of economic and cultural activities while enduring Thailand's nation building process with its evolving policy climates linked to national

security, residency status, and restricted land use. Along with political advocacy and programs created for the plight of political refugees, and a boom in tourism that peaked in the 1980s, the sale of tribal handicrafts initially surged under the support of NGOs and state funded initiatives. Spontaneous community crafts production followed suit shortly thereafter. Many communities have benefited from the revival of cultural tradition and techniques as well as having found supplementary income through cultural commodification (some communities even depend on it for their main source of income (Cohen Thai Tourism 125)), but whether or not this can be sustained over the long term is yet to be determined.

2.2 Thailand

Tourism-related discourse most often designates ethnic minority groups living in northern Thailand as *hill tribes*, and visiting these communities is typically known as *hill tribe trekking*, with souvenirs that have come to be known as *tribal handicrafts*. The term *hill tribe* in Thai language, 'Chao Khao', is locally controversial in that the word 'Khao', or 'mountain' in Thai, has a pejorative gist in that it also means 'wild' or 'primitive'. 'Khao' builds on local socio-political prejudice (Cohen Crafts of Thailand 10, Vaddhanaphuti 157) that dates back to the 1950s when the northern region started to come into the state's focus as a result of mounting security fears linked to neighbouring communist insurgencies attributed to the Indochina Wars affecting Burma and Laos. Political unrest prompted waves of refugees and migrants to enter Thailand, which the Thai government saw in the overall as problematic for national security. Problematic too, at that time, were rising environmental and political concerns over slash and burn agricultural techniques used for opium cash crops that many Highland groups relied on.

What the state came to label as a 'hill tribe problem' unfairly bunched all the ethnic minority groups living in the northern principalities whether they were new occupants or not (Keyes 127). Erik Cohen lists nine main groups that were identified by Thailand's Tribal Research Institute in the 1960s⁶: Karen, Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Lisu, Akha, Htin, Khamu, and Lawa (Crafts of Thailand 11). Some of these groups, most non-indigenous to Thailand, are further divided into subgroups with each having cultural distinctions of their own. An additional group, identified as the Palaung, who fled Burma and communist insurgency in the 1980s and 1990s, also inhabit villages in Northern Thailand (Howard and Wattanapun 79). Not including refugees from Laos and Burma, by 1996 the hill tribe population (there is controversy over the statistical accuracy) is estimated at 793, 012 (Cohen Crafts of Thailand 11).

The 'problem' was as much socio-political as it came to be economic. The Royal family played an integral role in initiating many of Northern Thailand's poverty alleviation projects. In 1969 King Bhumibol visited the Northern highlands with the hope of finding useful solutions for the myriad of problems surrounding poverty, deforestation and reliance on opium cash crops. It was at this time that he created the 'Royal Project', starting with crop diversification, that intended to replace opium plants with peach trees. By the late 1970s over eighty 'development centres' in different villages had successfully been created to assist desperate

⁶ The Tribal Research Institute was established in Chang Mai in 1965 as a result of the growing interest in the periphery for security in relation to; communist insurgencies during the Indochina Wars, environmental and political reasons. Before the 1950s, most of these people did not fall under the concern of the kingdom.

farmers (Kanthatham).⁷ The Thai government also attempted to solve the combined issues initially through assimilation policies ('Thai-ization' through language, education, and religion), then by expanding infrastructure, by granting residency status to hill tribes⁸ or offering resettlement to others, and by crop diversification, textile and handicraft production initiatives (Border Crafts of Thailand), and the boosting of Thailand's image as a tourist destination through ambitious tourism campaigns initiated in the 1980s.

A 2005 report, published by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP 56-7), evaluated the economic impact of tourism campaigns and the contribution to poverty alleviation that the resulting tourist trade brought to Thailand. By 2002, Thailand had taken in a total of 10.79 million visitors who had generated about US \$7.5 billion in foreign exchange (5.96 per cent of total GDP). As a result, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) invested funds into various community tourism programs aimed at reducing poverty. Projects included agricultural processing, handicraft production, and hill tribe trekking. The report does not provide any village-level income statistics. The National Statistical Office of Thailand (NAS) regularly conducts various surveys (every two years) and publishes online data. Their household socio-economic survey shows that the average monthly income had gone from 3,631 baht per month in 1986 to 12,185 baht per month in 2001. Though conducted at the household level, the surveys are published as national averages. The only breakdown is reflected

⁷ For further reading on the history of the Royal Project see: *The Peach and the Poppy: The story of Thailand's Royal Project* published in 2007 by the Royal Project Foundation. It provides insight into a successful and alternative approach to 'Alternative Livelihoods' and 'development-lead narcotics control' (Williamson).

⁸ The registration process for a residency 'Blue Identity Card' does not grant citizenship. It has been criticized as being another form of an exclusionary, restrictive and controlling tool to determine who has access to natural resources in the Thai kingdom. There were some ethnic minorities who missed out on the registration process. (Vaddhanaphuti 162)

in a table showing the Gini coefficient of household income distribution by region and community type.⁹ The Northern region village score in 1986 was 0.329 compared to the entire municipality score that year of 0.329, which in 2001 changed to 0.344 (village) versus 0.379 (municipality), (NAS). This shows that inequality has not changed very much since 1986, but it also does not indicate if there has been any change in overall economic wellbeing at the village level prior to the tourism boom because again, these scores represent overall averages. There are also no statistics available (to my knowledge) that specifically track income generated from cultural commodities in peripheral communities.

Erik Cohen concurred that no systematic economic study on commercialized craft production in Thailand had been conducted by the year 2000 (Crafts of Thailand 22). Gathering statistical information, specifically in regard to ethnic minorities living in Northern Thailand, is difficult and particularly problematic because socio-political complications have rendered many residents non-existent or illegal if they did not qualify for or had missed out on attaining their Blue Identity card (Vaddhanaphuti 161-2). Cohen estimates that northern ethnic minority artisans in the 1970s and 1980s earned less than US \$1 per day. This was acquired mainly through piecemeal remuneration from sponsoring NGOs and market shopkeepers. Raw craft producers (of carvings, pots, and the like) were found to make the least money, while positions held up the marketing chain (specifically middlemen) made the most locally. The highest earners were gauged to be importers in foreign countries who add considerable mark-

⁹ The Gini coefficient is a useful way to measure inequality by comparing income distribution between members in society. A score of 0 reflects complete equality and 1 indicates complete inequality. For further explanation see the World Bank's website at:
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPA/0,contentMDK:20238991~menuPK:492138~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:430367,00.html>

ups to the product (Cohen Crafts of Thailand 22-4). “There is no doubt that textile weaving can be an excellent source of income for women in T’ai¹⁰ societies, but all too often their work is not sufficiently rewarded. For the most part, much to the delight of middlemen and to the detriment of cultural heritage, hand woven products are placed in the lower end of the price range spectrum...” (Naenna 48).

In addition to the agricultural Royal Project development initiatives, Queen Sirikit took a personal interest in supporting textile and handicraft production. In the mid-1970s, Sirikit launched the SUPPORT foundation to fund ethnic minority artisans as part of a poverty reduction strategy that at the same time would work to preserve cultural heritage as seen in traditional textiles. Erik Cohen found these merged goals to be conflicting in the case study of a sponsored weaving project located in Ban Namon (Crafts of Thailand 256). Even though Sirikit’s foundation has maintained high standards for quality products, artisans have been restricted to producing very traditional designs. This effort has worked to preserve cultural heritage but the only market for the products exists within the domestic and conservative middle class. The marketing channels and location of sales outlets have pretty much bypassed both tourist and foreign markets. In addition to the inability to evolve product designs to garner new consumer markets, the initiatives have, as a result, neglected their full economic potential (Ibid 263-274).

¹⁰ The term ‘T’ai’ refers collectively to a distinct ethnic group living across Southeast Asia.

In a more recent attempt to help reduce rural poverty the Thai government, in collaboration with Queen Sirikit's Royal Project foundation, launched OTOP in 2001 (Leicester). OTOP, 'One Tambon (town), One Product' is modeled after a Japanese initiative,

- 1) To construct a comprehensive database system which accommodates necessary information from every Tambon in Thailand;
- 2) To promote local Thai products for every Tambon, and to facilitate the buy-and-sell procedure;
- 3) To bring internet technology to villages and this is the starting point of the Tambon Internet Project;
- 4) To help encourage and promote tourism in Thailand down to Tambon level. Thus more income will be distributed to rural people;
- 5) To help rural people to exchange information, ideas, and to improve communication across various Tambon. (OTOP)

The program was initiated out of the realization that rural artisans face many barriers in accessing and preparing their products for export markets. OTOP works to support and showcase merchandise on the international stage via trade shows, high profile national outlets, and through e-commerce networks (Leicester). To my knowledge, success of this initiative from the community level has yet to be deciphered.

Hmong Refugee Textiles

Drawing from Cohen's field observations in the region dating back to the 1970s, the first distinguishable ethnic minority group to commodify their cultural goods in volume were the Hmong (Crafts of Thailand 27-41). The Hmong represent a relatively new group in Northern Thailand. It wasn't until the first half of the nineteenth century that they began migrating south

from Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, China into northern Vietnam and Laos. Their migration was initiated by their desire to escape war in China, but later movements were characterized by a search for fruitful farmland. The first wave into Thailand has been associated with favourable conditions for opium cultivation, a valuable non-perishable commodity that transported easily and grew well at high elevations where they preferred to live in isolation. In those years they were welcome in Thailand's northern principalities for their capacity to contribute to the economy through trade. Soil conditions, however, could not sustain crops for very long, so villages tended to move accordingly, sometimes back into Laos. It wasn't until the 1970s that Hmong located in Laos started entering Thailand as refugees to escape the political unrest of the Indochina War. All Hmong fell into the 'problem' category through their association with opium production, and vigilante uprising when in the 1960s, Thai armed forces, wielding guns and napalm, had brutally invaded long established Hmong villages¹¹ and resettled the survivors at lower elevations in an attempt to sever any Communist insurgency ties and to secure the border. More recently, with the increase of international tourism and rise in foreign interest in the plight of political refugees, the Hmong's cultural uniqueness has begun to shine with a more positive light. According to Cohen it was the combination of political upheaval, displacement, and loss of farming practice that eventually made the Hmong receptive to craft production (Crafts of Thailand 28).

In 1965, the Border Crafts of Thailand (BCT) was founded as a security venture to encourage craft production and improve livelihoods for resettled communities. Christian

¹¹ Not all Hmong entered Thailand as political refugees, there were Hmong already living in Thailand's highlands before the Indochina wars.

missionaries and NGOs also contributed to the commercialization and marketing of Hmong textiles, mainly through the refugee camps. The Hmong came to be known for the production of a textile 'square' that was culturally used for ceremonial purposes and was eventually adapted to consumer's tastes servicing as tablecloths and wall hangings. The majority of the 'squares' were produced in NGO sponsored refugee camps.¹² Camp products could only be sold through middle-manned conduits, controlled by NGOs. Products were marketed through non-profit, tourist-targeted outlets in Chiang Mai, and to Western and Japanese markets. Refugee products "became the principal tribal items exported by foreign NGOs," (Ibid 14).

NGO production policies and their marketing outlets had an interesting impact on Hmong textiles. In response to consumer demand for 'authentic' tribal products, Hmong women were encouraged to produce their own designs. Many patterns were based on traditional motifs, but eventually, "these Hmong textiles carried a message, through which the displaced Hmongs presented to the wider world outside the camps the glory and joys of their past, and the hardships and tragedy of their recent historical experiences," (Ibid 41). As demand for their products grew in wider markets, NGOs were faced with the trade-off between quality versus quantity and the demand for variety. They were mindful not to set standards too high so as not to exclude opportunity for the lesser skilled workers. The result was lower quality products.

NGOs who marketed exclusively to foreign markets required more precise standardization in sizes, colours, and patterns to satisfy those market tastes. The result successfully employed many Hmong artisans, but the work lost variety and creative innovation.

¹² Refugees were restricted from work outside of the camps. Craft production was one of the few avenues available to supplement their livelihoods.

Refugee art flooded the market during the 1970s and 1980s. Because refugee textile production and Hmong livelihoods were supported by NGOs, they were able to produce more and at lower prices than other ethnic minority groups in the region. This made it difficult for other tribal artisans to compete in those markets. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, many of the best Hmong artisans had moved on, either as repatriates to Laos or as immigrants to other host countries like the U.S.¹³ Their departure left an ebbing craft industry in its wake.

When the refugees left and the NGOs reduced or ceased their activities in Thailand, hill tribe crafts stagnated and lost their leading role in the touristic crafts market. The decline of demand from abroad, owing to a waning interest and growing apathy towards 'ethnic art' in Western societies, led to a fall in exports of tribal crafts by the remaining sponsoring foundations and other non-profit organizations. (Ibid 17)

Cohen's research and documentation of the Hmong refugee textile story, as briefly outlined here, provides several interesting considerations. Naturally the large-scale production of products for foreign markets led to a devaluation of the original cultural meaning, as seen through Hmong 'squares', and quality was forced to surrender when demand increased. But what was initially developed as an economic vehicle for refugees and displaced persons, for those who had no other means of income, spontaneously transformed into a communication tool for otherwise voiceless people and the sharing of meaningful stories with the world. The experience provided a window for improved livelihoods, as long as consumer demand was there, but eventually that demand faded as circumstances evolved. The majority of the marketing and exchange took place between sponsoring NGOs and foreign countries, which left the Hmong

¹³ As many as 100,000 Hmong were sponsored for resettlement in the United States. (Cohen Crafts of Thailand 43)

with very little control over the process other than what designs they chose. In the end it was political circumstance and NGO involvement that shaped the transformation and meaning of the Hmong refugee products and marketing routes, not the tourism phenomenon that the country was experiencing at the time.

Palaung Dyes

The work of anthropologist Michael Howard and Wattana Wattanapun (2001) trace the history of the Palaung's movement into the northern regions of Thailand. Their migration began in the early 1980s as a means of escaping oppression and the communist forces that plagued their villages in Burma. Thirty-four men of the first group of 120 Palaung people that arrived in Thailand were met with imprisonment for illegal entry and for cutting down trees to make shelter (79). After pleading their case with the king of Thailand, the Palaung were granted permission to stay in the region, but they were given access to very little useful land for their traditional subsistence and cash crops of corn, rice and tea (81). Currently, there are approximately 5,000 to 6,000 Palaung people residing in northern Thailand (Ashley 2).

Recent research conducted by doctoral candidate Sean Ashley of Simon Fraser University (2008), argues that tourists' demand for 'tribal' products has served to restore and revive natural dyeing techniques used by the Palaung, as well as providing a welcomed source of income. Commodification may have altered the look and form of the original pieces, but without economic incentives brought on by tourism, the use of traditional techniques that use natural dyes most likely would have been lost to the Palaung given that they had long since abandoned

the labour-intensive process of weaving in exchange for the cheap pre-dyed cloths that were being imported into Burma (3, 8).

By incorporating weaving skills on their traditional back-strap looms with the use of natural dyes, the Palaung have been able to produce fabrics for traditionally inspired skirts, scarves, and various shoulder bags and meet the demand of tourists visiting the villages of No Lae and Pang Daeng Nai on a daily basis. In 2002, the primary product sold to tourists were handbags, but over time it was discovered that the sale of scarves fetched double the income for less labour and thus more profit (Ibid 6). The revival of the natural dyeing technique came in response to the communities' recognition that tourists prefer to consume 'authentic' and natural looking products. Ashley discovered that no one could remember how to use or produce the natural dyes, but they were able to tap into local development and NGO networks to gather knowledge about natural dyeing techniques from other ethnic minority communities in northern Thailand (9). As long as the products continue to maintain their 'tribal' quality, despite the fact the foundational dyeing techniques were learned from other ethnic communities, tourists perceive them as 'authentic' products and provide the Palaung with valued income (14). In line with Ashley's conclusion that, "commercialization of local crafts does not lead to local products becoming meaningless for the local people,"(14) this is an example of a case where commodification has had a positive effect in both cultural and economic realms in response to tourism.¹⁴

¹⁴ For further reading on recent case studies in the region see *Culture and Development in Southeast Asia*, edited by David B. Wangsgard and slated for publishing by White Lotus Press later this year.

2.3 Canada

While it is a term that has fallen from favour, indigenous groups of Canada were long referred to as *Indians* by the state as can be seen in the name and literature used by the federal Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). The term *Aboriginal*, according to the *Canadian Constitution Act, 1982*, includes Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada (Department of Justice Canada, 35 (2)). And a third, more commonly used term today to describe the indigenous community is *First Nations*. This was a designation adopted in the 1980s, having been expressed as a matter of preference by First Nations communities. It replaces the externally derived word 'band' which refers to a 'body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown' (INAC Words First 10).

When speaking specifically about Canadian First Nations on the West Coast, there are several culturally distinct groups that have traditionally lived from just below the Sixtieth Parallel to what is now the Canadian/American border. Most of which these unique people include the: Tlingit, Tsimshian, Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw, Kwakiutl, Nuu Chah Nulth', Gitksan, Coast Salish, Squamish (Jonaitis, X-XI). Registered members of the First Nations' population in British Columbia totalled 114, 120 persons in 2002 with 50.2 percent of them living on reserve land (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development). According to British Columbian statistics, the average yearly income in the goods sector in 2000 for on-reserve residents was \$17, 422 compared to \$35,530 for non-First Nations people (BCStats 14). Even though the Government of Canada sees and supports education as a priority for First Nations communities, in 2001, only 52 per cent of on-reserve residents, aged 25-64, had completed high school or

higher compared to 78.8 per cent for non-First Nations people. Only 4.5 per cent of them had attained a post-secondary degree compared to 24.6 per cent of non-First Nations (Ibid 6).

First Nations Art: A Journey

Traditional economies of the West Coast First Nations were primarily hunter/gatherer and, because resources for such economies were rich they lived in permanent villages, had time to develop carving technology and woodworking skills, and translated those into vivid cultural expressions which extended into other mediums such as painting, weaving, and jewellery-making. Art came to play a significant role in the communities' social and religious expressions and serves numerous purposes in societal functions, cultural perception, and symbolic personification of knowledge and spirituality. Art makes their supernatural world visible and differentiates social groups, status, and kinship lineage through adornments like crests and emblems.¹⁵ Artwork is seen as a, "graphic representation of knowledge Nowhere on earth is there an art form like it. Not only is it unique, but it is highly technical and sophisticated," (NITA 'Ab Art '95 5). Such sophistication and aesthetic intensity have made the art highly appealing to, and collectible for, other ethnic groups who began arriving to the continent as explorers and traders as early as the late 1700s.

The wealth brought to the coastal region in the early 1800s, and the demand for cultural objects that it allowed, nurtured a burgeoning cultural industry that was mutually beneficial to foreign traders and First Nations (Jonaitis 171). Contact with white visitors had an effect on artists' designs, which came to include interesting depictions of those foreigners in various

¹⁵ Crests represent kinship lineage and social status in animal forms such as Ravens, Eagles, Bears, Wolves and more.

cultural contexts. This rich trade relationship diminished during the oppressive colonial years, as was First Nations' culture, and their livelihoods. Policies of the new British Columbian colony that joined the Canadian Confederation in 1871, sought to 'civilize' First Nations people through a collection of fierce assimilation policies (Ibid 174). Government discourse served to create negative stereotypes of First Nations with a growing number of white settlers who had no interest in First Nations' art and culture. It was during this period that the native population finally became a minority in their own lands (Ibid 172). Despite harsh policies that tore families apart, restricted cultural practice, and ignored tradition, met defiance with punitive acts including incarceration (Ibid 175), some cultural groups like the Kwakwaka'wakw, Haida, and Gitksan were able to evade the authorities and carried on with traditional cultural practices (Ibid 176, 224). Due to this latter effort, and continued demand for First Nations' artworks by tourists and consumers from abroad, culture, and products of it, continued to hold out against deprivation and assimilation (Sheehan 16)¹⁶. Ironically, by the late 1920s, Canada had adopted Northwest Coastal art in a nationalistic attempt to distinguish itself as being more than just of its' European heritage (Jonaitis 238-9). This national identity has since been used in tourism marketing schemes to portray Canada as rich in cultural heritage. Resulting from this new and perpetuated national identity, an appreciation of the art by non-First Nations slowly began to grow within the domestic majority despite open and ongoing discrimination forcing First Nations into a political struggle for survival.

¹⁶ Recommended reading: *Pipes that won't Smoke; Coal that won't Burn* by Carol Sheehan, traces the evolution of Haida argillite sculptures and their meaning through the history of external exposure.

It was not until the 1960s, along with the open discussion of colonial legacy and aboriginal rights movements¹⁷, that Northwest Coastal art experienced a resurgence. In support of that movement, by the 1990s, “the federal government [had] long promoted arts and crafts programs as vehicles of aboriginal economic development...,” (Blundell 78). There are numerous federal and provincial funding and grant agencies across Canada today, like the Canada Council for the Arts,¹⁸ which support First Nations artists and organizations with direct grant funding. Out of a total \$152.645 million granted in the 2006-07 funding year (Canada Council for the Arts 15) the Council assigned \$5.9 million of it directly to individual First Nations artists and organizations (Ibid 17). Present day trade of cultural commodities is largely conducted between skilled First Nations artisans, gallery and retail outlets, domestic and foreign tourists, and international import markets. Collection of Northwest Coastal art reached into the highest echelons of art for the first time with the record-breaking sale of a rare Tsimshian mask¹⁹ for US \$1.8 million at a New York Sotheby’s auction in 2006 (Griffin).

Contemporary celebrated work continues to draw from tradition and break new ground. Widely respected and collected Kwakwaka’wakw artist Steve Smith exemplifies the brilliant merging of tradition with the freedom and flare of contemporary technique in his latest creation *Untitled* (Figure 2, below).

¹⁷ The late Bill Reid, played a large role in revitalizing First Nations’ art.

¹⁸ Aboriginal Arts occupies its own category within the council. Also note the Canadian commission for UNESCO is an independent branch within the Canada Council for the Arts, which acts to advance UNESCO’s mandate, <<http://www.unesco.ca/en/commission/ccfu/default.aspx>>

¹⁹ This was an historical piece.



Figure 2 With permission: Steve Smith, Kwakwaka'wakw. *Untitled*, 2008. Photos: Lara Hill

Artistic freedom supported by market demand, has also provided an evolving conduit for expressing First Nations' stories, whether good and bad and in a manner similar to that of the communicative Hmong squares,

Some artists are content to present simply their Native identity and heritage, while others make statements, sometimes quite strong, on issues of land claims, discrimination, ecology, and sovereignty, thus challenging the dominant culture and expressing resistance against those who so long oppressed them. (Jonaitis 249-50)

But beyond high art and political venue, contemporary commodification is as much linked to a First Nations' impetus to preserve their own cultural heritage through education and tangible expression (NITA 'Ab Art '95 6) as it is linked to cultural industry and tourism.

Art versus Souvenir

Valda Blundell published a compelling component of her research in the *Annals of Tourism Research* in 1993. A foundational thread in her work weaves through an exploration of the tensions existing between the state's economic development strategies for First Nations, and state policies promoting cultural tourism as it pertains to who has had control over and benefits from Canada's souvenir trade. "This is a huge market in Canada...", (78). Statistics Canada reported that tourism had generated \$19.4 billion of revenue for all three levels of government in 2006, or two per cent of total GDP that year (Statistics Canada 3). While the report does not give a full sector breakdown, it does indicate that taxes on products 'were the single largest source of tourism revenue.' Touristic curios and artworks depicting First Nations people and their heritage are symbolic of Canada, but the 'low end' products of the souvenir industry came to be seen as violating both consumer and intellectual property rights, as well as stimulating political struggle since so few First Nations companies have had adequate market access.

In light of this, and in conjunction with the rise of awareness and of advocacy for ethnic minorities in the 1980s, mainstream media began to publish critical articles highlighting concerns over the souvenir trade in Canada. Two national reports were called to investigate 'imitation native art' and 'fakelore' (Blundell 68-69). The reports were commissioned in 1983 and in 1990 by First Nations organizations, regional governments, and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. The 1990 report concluded that,

[A]boriginal peoples rarely benefit economically from the production or sale of inexpensive "native type" souvenirs, although these objects depict them or replicate their distinctive cultural forms. Instead, mass-produced objects made

by non-native companies flood the market, making it difficult for aboriginal producers to compete with their own generally handcrafted items. (Ibid 69)

Most of the items in question are inexpensive mould-made replica totems, soapstone carvings, drums, bows and arrows, or feather headdresses.²⁰ Objects bearing First Nations-inspired motifs include key chains, mugs, tea towels, and T-shirts. All are targeted to domestic and foreign tourists who seek cheap holiday mementos, mostly from souvenir shops that sell other Canadiana-branded curios as well. A large portion of the items were found to be labelled as 'authentic' or 'handmade', disregarding the fact that most Western consumers assume that 'authentic' means that the object was made by or approved of by the community and peoples from which the souvenir comes (Ibid 70). Some products labelled as 'Made in Canada' or objects bearing exotic, native-sounding names, were found to be mass-produced abroad and distributed by European companies (Ibid). Other pieces bearing misleading name brands like 'The Aardik Collection' imply that the souvenir came from Canada's Inuit communities in the Arctic when, in fact, they have not.

The 1990 report also concluded that blatant commandeering through labelling, design, and production channels were clearly in violation of laws and legislation such as the National Trade-Mark and True Labelling Act, and even worse, "these acts have hardly ever been enforced," (Ibid 71). Crude reproductions, and misrepresentation of First Nations' art and peoples, not only insult the integrity of genuine artisans said the report, but it also claims that many "native type" souvenirs violate the 1988 Canadian Copyright Act (Ibid):

²⁰ Some of the items are made from plastic instead of the 'stone' or 'wood' they imply they are made of in the labelling.

While earning from arts and crafts are economically important in many aboriginal communities, they are insufficient to provide most native producers with an adequate income, and so they would clearly benefit from greater access to the “low end” (souvenir segment) of the market. (Ibid 78)

A concerned non-profit organization, the Native Investment & Trade Association (NITA), has since 1989 continued to work to support First Nations businesses by creating partnerships and networking opportunities aimed at improving market access. NITA sponsors conferences and forums to build businesses, their capacity, and industry linkages. The NITA sponsored *Ab' Art '95* conference provided an educational opportunity for First Nations artisans and creative companies to learn about the latest industry and market trends, how to promote, market, and price themselves competitively, as well as access business improvement resources and training. The organization is currently developing NITAnet, a web portal that will provide:

- (a) access for small Aboriginal businesses to web E-commerce through the new NITAnet storefront,
- (b) the first on-line Aboriginal directory in Canada,
- (d) sectoral forums that will provide valuable information and contacts,
- (c) the NITAnet trading board that will allow the postings of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations looking for opportunities, employment, business partners,
- (e) an entirely new kind of web platform for Aboriginal people to purchase goods and services, and
- (f) eventually NITA will have available full web casting production studio for the development of Aboriginal programming, web casting marketing and product placement opportunities (NITA).

In similar fashion, the government of Canada hosts a website, *The Aboriginal Canada Portal*, which provides links to on-line resources, contacts, information, and government programs and services available to First Nations people,

The goal of the site is to continue as it evolves into a virtual forum in which all Aboriginal stakeholders (Aboriginal peoples, organizations and government policy and program developers) may locate, discuss and share information, views, services, successes and issues amongst one another; and, act as a central gateway to increase the awareness of Aboriginal Peoples history, heritage, traditions and Aboriginal community successes among Aboriginal Peoples and non-Aboriginal Canadians. (ACP)

These and similar initiatives, along with efforts by First Nations entrepreneurs themselves, have brought national attention to the importance of increasing First Nations participation in the mainstream economy. And, even though non-First Nations companies have dominated the profitable 'low end' market, First Nations producers of those products have begun to make progress in marketing their products at trade shows and by collectively branding and promoting their products as 'authentic' to retailers who in turn can honestly promote the products as such (Blundell 81).

Even though souvenirs are only small replications of original works, First Nations crafters and small businesses active in that market, while few in number, have control over how the items represent their past (Ibid 82). As Blundell most eloquently concluded, "even inexpensive souvenirs are sites/sights of struggle over power," (84). Ongoing debates about, "how cultural forms are to be produced, and made meaningful, and by whom," (84) will continue to challenge Canadian legislation and protective enforcement measures for consumers and producers. In an even broader sense, international bodies like the World Intellectual

Property Organization (WIPO) will continue to inform and challenge member states to improve their national policies and legislation with regard to cultural appropriation in order to achieve international expectations and standards.²¹

²¹ In September 2008, WIPO will launch a pilot program specifically to assist indigenous communities with the tools and skills needed to manage intellectual property issues on their own. (WIPO)

Part Three: Evaluation of Key Factors

In terms of the UNPFII's broad conception of social, economic, and cultural vulnerabilities experienced by the world's indigenous peoples the examples derived from ethnic minority populations in Canada and Thailand reflect the constraints in their experiences. But the extreme range in the variables from one community to the next, as the scope of examples in the above micro studies show, illustrate that the tension between cultural preservation goals and economic development ambitions at the micro level threaten to open a Pandora's Box with the prescription of blanket policies aimed at merging those goals through cultural commodification. Both the opportunities and the challenges identified throughout the literature react very differently when applied to context-specific scenarios. A communities' socio-political and economic status within the matrix of a national context, vary not only from one country to the next, but they also vary from one community to the next. Route of access to markets and degree of control over the entire process determines the balance found and priorities set between achieving economic and preservation goals. Determining economic or preservation successes individually is attainable, but there is no definitive definition of success when trying to merge those goals.

3.1 Market Realities

A host of issues arise when considering the tourism market as a sustainable source of income for commodified cultural objects. Culture, crafts, and tourism are seen as inseparable by

some (Smith 130), but as glimpsed in the Hmong refugee textile experience, the most profitable channel of income came from the international export market. Tourism is a growing industry and offers plenty of economic opportunity in many forms, but communities and policy makers have a lot to consider with regard to context-specific market realities, and whether or how tourism may or may not provide a sustainable source of income.

In John Urry's *Tourist Gaze*, he equates cultural commodification to the product of tourist consumption patterns resulting from a rise of the middle class. Three important considerations and avenues which require further research can be expanded from his observation: (1) a paradox occurs when balancing the tensions between cultural and economic objectives, (2) the rise of the middle class has come to include a recent boom in outbound Chinese tourists leading to, (3) the majority of tourism research and literature has been conducted by Western scholars, of Western tourists, which has implications for fully understanding the expanding field.

While the search for 'primitive' and 'otherness' is at the core of many tourists' desire and can bring economic opportunity to poor communities, it ultimately reaches an apex which creates the paradox that when communities modernize too much to remain of interest as the embodiment of 'otherness' (Cole 92, Cohen Thai Tourism 102). "It is a groups' marginality that is their major source of attractiveness, and preservation of their distinctiveness is a crucial precondition of the sustainability of their tourism," (Cole 91). As Cohen has discovered through his research in Thailand, modernized communities brandishing electricity, satellite dishes, and comfortable houses instead of rustic and aesthetic thatch-roofed huts are a disappointment to

visitors seeking to experience and witness primitive life. A similar process results for commodified handicrafts that lose their cultural meaning as a result of external pressure or mass production. While mass production works to meet increasing demand and reduce per unit cost, it also threatens to diminish the handmade quality that made the product appealing in the first place ultimately decreasing demand. Cohen refers to this as a, “cyclical process of commercialization, from inception to stagnation,” (Cohen Crafts of Thailand 3). On the preservation side of the paradox the fear is of a loss of cultural meaning and diversity, on the economic, fear rises from a loss of demand.

If demand for cultural objects in the tourism market is shaped by the tastes of the middle class, what does that mean for global tourism and consumption of cultural products now that the middle class demographic is shifting to include more and more countries? The WTO has recognized that China and India represent significant and emerging domestic tourism markets, but the potential for international outbound tourism has also been on a steady rise. Chinese outbound tourism is a phenomenon unto itself. The ripple effect of China’s unprecedented economic boom has yet to be fully appreciated as it filters through different sectors outside of her borders, particularly through tourism. Inbound and outbound tourism in China was forbidden by Mao Zedong’s politburo right up to 1978. Travel was ‘once officially scolded as a wasteful activity’ but after China’s ‘opening’ to the world under Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms, travelling abroad has gained prominence as a symbol of social status and a tool for aiding global business connections (Arlt 9-20). Thailand was the first country to grant Chinese tourist visas, and since then the number of Chinese visitors to Thailand has gone from 21,464 in

1987 to 779,070 in 2004 (Ibid 145). The Tourism Authority of Thailand reported their country to have been in receipt of 1,003,141 tourists from China in 2007 (TAT).

As a matter of course most tourism-related scholarship has been dominated by studies investigating the motivations of Western tourists from North America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. There are few studies exploring the motivations of South Americans, Arabs, Africans, and Indians (Prentice 276) let alone more recent Chinese motivations. “Domestic Chinese tourism is accustomed to visiting ‘minority’ people and viewing their ‘primitive’ folklore and heritage. This established pattern of behaviour is served by visits to Chiang Mai [Northern Thailand],” (Arlt 146). This is significant for the region. If ethnic minority communities in other destination countries—especially within easily and cheaply accessible Southeast Asia—could come to better understand and harness the consumption motivations of the new and up and coming tourist demographic, the economic side of the coin toss may offer a useful point on access to an untapped potential. As well, the opposite effect of a rising middle class must also be considered. As history has informed us, economies are known to crash. Rising oil prices this year have caused a tightening of Western belts and should that trend continue,²² outbound Westerners and consumption of handicrafts will dwindle too.

A key observation made by Cohen recognizes that ethnic minority communities were not necessarily autarkic prior to accessing tourism. Many have been engaged with domestic markets or other channels of international trade long before the post-modern global tourism phenomenon (Van Roy 213, Sheehan, Cohen Crafts of Thailand 4). This is particularly

²² The WTO has recognized that, “Uncertainty over the global economic situation is affecting consumer confidence and could hurt tourism demand.” (WTO)

important when considering the possibility of a waning tourism industry, or of gaining access to other marketing channels for cultural goods. By concentrating on tourist consumption only, communities may miss out on supplying larger, more stable markets domestically or accessing international export markets as seen in the case of Ban Namon and the Hmong refugee textile experience.

Gaining access to markets is central to any entrepreneurial endeavour. Besides the ever-present possibility of exploitation by middlemen, lack of access may simply be a symptom of geography. Communities that reside on the periphery or are not readily accessed by tourists have to find outlets to sell their goods. Those outlets might be in urban centres or through international exporting channels. Without adequate access to educational opportunities,²³ many ethnic communities remain at the mercy of middlemen to get their goods to market until they have developed enough insight and economic capacity or bargaining power to access those opportunities on their own. While not all middleman situations take advantage, the optimum scenario then from an economic perspective is to build the bridge that links ethnic minority producers with the benefits from the trade and marketing of their cultural products when they discover or create an adequate enough demand for them.

3.2 Community-based Approach

When dealing with cultural tourism and ethnic minorities specifically, Melanie Smith is careful to address the threats that communities also face as they engage in cultural tourism. She

²³ Per noted in Part Two, around half of the First Nations population in BC do not have high school diplomas, without business and marketing skills it is very difficult to compete in the Canadian handicrafts market.

argues that by employing a community-based approach those threats are not only minimized but benefits will also be maximized. When the community itself—and the cultural products within it—fall under the avaricious gaze of the tourist, due to the actions and control of other actors (such as government, middlemen) it makes the community vulnerable to the possibility of becoming a ‘human zoo’ (117). It is also true that while the demand for tangible culture grows, the role of the middleman and a corresponding risk of exploitation grows too (131). While mindful of the pitfalls, Smith is also quick to claim that cultural tourism initiatives can and have been very lucrative from an economic point of view and very successful from cultural perspectives. When managed properly they can serve to enhance cultural pride and national profile while, at the same time, providing control over access to financial benefits. In short; sustainability is best realized through a community-based approach to tourism (121). Drawing from a *Tourism Concern’s* publication, Smith lists ten characteristics that support a community-based approach to tourism and that can apply to other forms of cultural commodification outside of tourism. Of the more important:

community tourism should involve local people. This means that they should participate in decision-making and ownership, not just be paid a fee,

the local community should receive a fair share of the profits from any tourism venture,

tour operators [and middlemen] should try to work with communities rather than with individuals,

tourism should support traditional cultures by showing respect for indigenous knowledge. Tourism can encourage people to value their own cultural heritage,

local people should be allowed to participate in tourism with dignity and self-respect. They should not be coerced into performing inappropriate ceremonies for tourists,

and people have the right to say no to tourism; communities that reject tourism should be left alone. (Smith 121-2)

When the community members are part of the decision making process, they have more control over how their tangible culture is portrayed, thus reducing the exploitive 'human zoo' effect, the degree of expropriation others can get away with, and the insult of cultural misrepresentation. The Canadian souvenir trade provides a useful demonstration of this. Though First Nations' businesses occupy only a small portion of the low end souvenir sector, they are branding a business identity for themselves among consumers and retailers through First Nations' run trade shows, product exhibitions, and collective labelling schemes that promote the 'authenticity' of their artefacts. As a result they have more control over how their culture is portrayed in the market (Blundell 81-2) making the tourists' preference for 'authentic' work to the advantage of local entrepreneurs.

Though full control is idyllic, self-determination in enterprise is not a stand-alone solution in forwarding the sustainability of development initiatives. A balance is required and it must juggle effective centralized state support, partnerships with mainstream society's tourism-related enterprises, and popular support from within the community itself (Hinch 254-5). Most importantly, exercising control requires the capacity to do so. Decision-makers of a community must have a solid understanding of the inner workings of the tourism industry (the effects it could impose on their community and their culture despite the benefits), as well as international market trends should the export sector be a more appropriate product destination.

Communities must have access to the tools needed in evaluating the inevitable trade-offs between cultural and economic goals—or to decide if engagement in cultural commodification is even appropriate for their community. Empowerment in cultural commodification can only truly supervene when governments are willing and have the capacity to provide access to appropriate and quality educational opportunities, starting at the primary level and carrying on through to business and marketing training at a post secondary, which is essential if communities are to gain a strong position in the lucrative marketing chain (Cohen Crafts of Thailand 23). As well, cultural expropriation and rent seeking, or mismanagement by middlemen can often only be curbed and enforced by a willing government.

Of course, this represents only one side of the scenario. Willingness and involvement must also come from within the communities themselves and from the mainstream majority. As noted on the *Tourism Concern's* list, that local people should participate in the decision-making and ownership, not just be paid a fee (Smith 121) for participating in culturally related enterprises. Where a more equitable share of power will promote the sustainability of minority business undertakings, controversy can also arise over the stakes that mainstream society has in related sectors (Hinch 254). Thus the success and the sustainability of commodification through tourism relies on the working partnerships between government, the community *and* mainstream society (Ibid).

Some governments cannot or will not provide a capacity for the building of market tools or enforcement of protective measures while others force communities into cultural commodification and tourism enterprises. This is where NGOs such as *Tourism Concern* and

UNESCO can help mobilize political advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable. Even though there is no one definition of or consensus on what is deemed ethical or responsible when considering an ethnic minorities' position in the realm of tourism or beyond, political advocacy on the behalf of marginalized people may act as the bridge to a community's foothold in the control of their own cultural and economic destinies so ultimately they can define it for themselves. The Hmong's textile experience saw NGO's playing a very large role. They donated the supplies needed to get textile projects underway and then helped in linking those products to consumers. Without such support from the international community, the Hmong in refugee camps may not have had the same opportunity.²⁴

3.3 Measure of Success

"[I]ndigenous tourism is a moving target," (Hinch 255).

As described in Part One, development policies seeking to protect cultural diversity and promote economic growth through cultural commodification and tourism are relatively new directives aimed at assisting poor ethnic minority communities in the periphery. The awareness of the plight of indigenous and ethnic minority groups had largely been absent from development schemes up to the 1990s (Radcliffe 89). Measurement of the new formula has thus yet to be adequately undertaken, as of yet there is no consensus on a model that merges culture with economic goals (Throsby 3). What exists is complicated by the tensions existing between economic goals and cultural goals. Also, most study has dealt primarily with them as

²⁴ There is a growing body of literature that examines the community-based or participatory approach to economic development through tourism. For further reading (with different positions) see Li 2005, and Tosun 2005.

separate issues. As well, consideration of the broad spectrum of growing variables needs to be counted in. Such variables include: levels of marginalization, the degree of market access, what the tourist consumption pattern is (considering up and coming outbound nations), and the will to carry through at community, government, and mainstream levels. There are several indicators and systems of measurement which can be drawn on for a starting point, but none thus far can cope with the complexity underlying such broad goals.

Social indicators, such as education levels and health and birth rates, have been complimented and supported by economic measurements in reports such as the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* and the United Nations *Human Development Index* but other questions remain. How can the rate of regression be measured in cultural changes stemming from commodification? How does such change become detrimental? At what point can external influence on society be measured as having an unfavourable effect on cultural objects and their meaning? How important is that when the process has, in turn, improved livelihoods? A wealth of research literature demonstrates that cultures evolve/devolve when they commodify. But just who or what determines where an acceptable trade-off exists in satisfying either cultural preservation or economic achievement? An obvious answer is that communities themselves should decide, but it has also been recognized that the degree of marginalization and control a community does *not* have, can override that decision.

Purely economic measurements are more easily obtained and taken from national inbound tourism statistics. More and more governments have started collecting data on cultural industry too, including the amount of internal cultural grant allocations for arts, micro-business

loans, as well as tracking the income generated from cultural commodities sold both domestically and through export channels. Information pertaining directly to ethnic minorities is often absent from statistical breakdowns, including national statistics having to do with tourism while cultural commodities also tend to deal with national averages, so improvement from policy prescriptions at the community level is difficult to decipher. As seen in the case of Thailand, economic measurements are difficult to gather in societies where groups are politically and even geographically marginalized.

UNESCO devised a practical methodology to capture information about cultural activities, which is deemed useful at the national level in tracking global economic trends pertaining to cultural industry. This would seem to be the only data source this kind at the international level attempting to merge cultural and economic realms although still from a purely commodity-based perspective. *The Framework for Cultural Statistics* (FCS) was first published in 1986 and again in 2006 in an effort to develop a database to track both the economic evaluations and the cultural statistics derived from its 120 member states via data supplied by national institutions. Each country's data was adapted to FCS's methodology to:

reflect the specific cultural realities of their country.. [in] ten distinct categories: (0) cultural heritage; (1) printed matter and literature; (2 & 3) music and the performing arts; (4) visual arts; (5&6) audiovisual media (5) cinema and photography; (6) radio and television); (7) socio cultural activities; (8) sports and games; (9) environment and nature. (Global Alliance and UNESCO 4)

It could be useful to combine FCS's data with national tourism statistics to reveal trends pertaining to categories (0), (2 & 3), (4) and (7) as they correspond to tourist consumption patterns. Unfortunately the FCS is fraught with shortcomings and has been under revision

because cultural-related data is so highly contested and so incredibly difficult to capture and measure, especially with regard to the speed of technological change affecting how we market, access, and consume culture today (Ibid).

From the cultural preservation perspective Cohen discusses locating a cultural base-line by evaluating cultural objects that were created before outside contact compared to after contact and resulting market forces (Crafts of Thailand 17, Contemporary Tourism 111-113), but he indicated that this too is difficult to do because communities have been engaged in domestic and regional trade long before the tourism phenomenon (Crafts of Thailand 4) and some before any ethnological study was able to identify and track change within more elusive communities. The First Nations story is an excellent example of early exposure influencing the path that art, and income from it, can take when exposed to outside market and political forces. Prior to colonialism, production and trade of cultural artworks enjoyed positive growth and evolution to the benefit of hosts and visitors. It was not until political power shifted, and forces from outside the First Nations' communities took control over their cultural and economic destinies, that trade and cultural production took a downturn. Now, along with increased mobilization and bargaining power, evolution of First Nations' cultural works have served to revive both tradition and the intrinsic value of quality pieces to the growing benefit of First Nations people. Cultural expropriators will continue to lose dominance in cultural industry sectors as informed consumers and retailers exert their preferences for 'authenticity' in First Nations' products and as advocacy puts more pressure on governments to improve and enforce intellectual property and copyright laws.

The Palaung story appears to offer successful achievements in both cultural and economic realms. Growing advocacy through NGOs and collective support for ethnic minorities in Thailand has proven timely in reinforcing the success of their current textile enterprises. Commodifying the dying technique has served both to inspire an artistic tradition that was almost lost and providing a source of livelihood for an economically vulnerable community. Measuring this multifaceted triumph is feasible economically, but from the cultural perspective, it can only be reflected by the communities' collective acceptance and willingness to work with and evolve the medium along with tourist market demands.

Concluding Remarks

Ever since cultural marketing began carving its niche into the bedrock of development policy in the 1990s it has established benchmark goals pertaining to the preservation of cultural diversity and the alleviation of poverty for the world's vulnerable ethnic minorities. A growing global tourism industry characterized by a distinct taste for 'otherness' offers provisional economic relief with a culturally preserving effect through the commodification of tangible culture. Though offering the promise of economic rewards through village level enterprise, in many cases the ethnic minority community must also face a multitude of constraints. The balancing act that then results between cultural preservation and economic reward, not to mention the complications of variables from one community to the next, continues to present challenges along the path to a useful policy package.

Cultural products evolve through the process of supply and demand even though it may be detrimental, or a devolution of culture, when change occurs as the result of an external actor taking control of parts of the process and exploiting or expropriating the cultural resource. The same can be said of an externally imposed cultural fossilization. On one hand culture export serves to provide a source of income while contemporary decentralized development prescriptions seek to include communities in the decision-making process with the intent to foster the sustainability of tourism-based development initiatives. On the other hand there are context-specific mechanisms and institutions in place that challenge the ability of marginalized

peoples to fully employ the community-based approach. Fortuitously, numerous non-governmental organizations and initiatives have manifested in recent decades to assist such communities in gaining a rung on the development ladder, which perhaps offer the only avenue available to some for initially attaining the bargaining power and self-determination needed to decide their own cultural and economic destinies.

Whether cultural commodification will in the end offer sustainable preservation or economic solutions is yet to be determined. The outcome depends partially on whether communities will be able to produce their products to meet the demands of evolving consumption patterns. From a broad development perspective the complex matrices that expand from seemingly seamless prescriptions are quite new to the field and as a result there are no concrete mechanisms in place or yet conceived with which measure both economic and cultural outcomes.

Perhaps there never really can be. Successfully merging economic and preservation goals may come at the expense of the sustainability. It's very difficult to commodify an aspect of culture without renegotiating its meaning in some way. That renegotiation may induce positive or negative results depending on a combination of related circumstances. It is positive for the community that wants to revive cultural techniques and practices, it is only economically rewarding if there is sufficient demand for the product and the producing minority group is able to gain fair access to the financial benefits.

Examination of context-specific scenarios reveals that there is no 'one' ideal or attainable result that can unfold via cultural commodification in merged economic and cultural realms.

Every poor ethnic minority community has a distinct degree of marginality that affects its level of market access and its control over both economic and cultural destinies. Further complications rise out of how new these considerations are met which means we have yet to see if a panacea can be extruded over the long term. Then too, the success of the commodification process is also dependent on how it is measured and by whom; there are many actors involved in the process, each with differing motives and concerns. Ultimately, the community at the heart of the endeavour should be empowered enough to have control over their own cultural destiny and share in the benefits derived from the mainstream economy.

And tourism is just a segment of the opportunities that are available for cultural commodities. In the current rendition of a globalized world, e-commerce offers amazingly direct links to markets otherwise difficult for peripheral communities to reach. The ruse for ethnic minority groups is that macro policies are simply too generalized to deal with the specific constraints that ethnic minorities face in the country-specific context, even regional contexts. These constraints must be addressed at the community level where weighing the costs and benefits involved in pursuing this type of economic activity can be done by those who it affects most. Current literature, however, is dominated by non-indigenous voices paralleling extant power imbalances (Hinch 255).

Broad macro policies intending to preserve ethnic minority culture and strengthen economic positions run as much risk of failure as prior development policies that did not consider how a culture itself, and the institutions built from it, affects development outcomes. If minority groups are marginalized by their own governments, clearly national policy is not in

compliance with what international development practitioners are recommending. Broad policies require a cascading compliance from the top to the community level and back to the top again. This is rare, and difficult to carry through, even in industrialized countries like Canada where policies have been progressive.

Contemporary development prescriptions call for policies that promote community participation and their empowerment through development initiatives. The examples from Thailand and Canada demonstrate how context-specific constraints relate to the status of minority groups and the level of recognition from both state and mainstream society. In addition they reveal other factors that play a role in outcomes ranging from physical locale to a lack of educational capacity or the will to harness market opportunities. Some groups remain marginalized despite the lip service of well-intentioned national policy packages, but this is where political advocacy and support from the international community and NGOs can and have assisted communities in a first step toward mobilization. Political advocacy on the behalf of marginalized people often acts as the bridge necessary for them to gain an eventual level of control over their own cultural and economic destinies. The more empowered they are, the more control communities have over how their culture is portrayed and the more access they have to reaping the economic benefits from the sale of them.

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UNPFII. United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

<<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>>

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