

## THE CREATING IMAGES FOR NORTHERN WOMEN IN THE THAI TOURIST INDUSTRIES: THE STRATEGIES AND IMPACTS

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to study the characteristics of the gender in Thai society and investigate the “social strategies” employed in creating them. It also aimed at exploring the correlation of attitude towards gender roles and socio-economic status with the creative tourism in Thailand. The study will focus on the thematic aspects as follows; Firstly, it will consider the phenomenon of gender from the viewpoint that this is defined by a cultural system through social and historical conditioning. Biological differences apart, people’s values, expectations and actions are shaped by the concept of „gender”. There is therefore a need to discuss the status and the roles that are imposed on women by a society and its culture, whose influence never ceases to affect the social relationships between the sexes. Secondly, it will look at the gender aspects of tourism to the attention of policy makers, not only the term of empowerment gender roles but also contribute the creative activities for making the sustainability of tourism in Thailand.

Keywords: gender, creative tourism, culture, woman, Northern Thailand

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to present the changing images of northern women in the upper part of the Northern Region of Thailand so called “*phuying nuea*” (Northern women). The study area chosen was Chiang Mai Province as it has been known as the central city of the north. The study found that the changing “Image of the northern women” resulted from a change in attitude and imagination about the northern women which has been related to the history and political change along with economic and socio-cultural change in Thailand. Another interesting aspect was the fact that the image of northern women seemed to be related to the continual expansion of tourism of the country since the 1960’s.

### The Image of Women: Past Development

According to the history of Thailand, around the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in the upper region known as “The Lanna Kingdom,” Chiang Mai was also the center of the administration during the period when Lanna was under the rule of Rattanakosin (or Siam) with Bangkok being the central power. As a result, Lanna was viewed by those in Bangkok as “the other” or inferior. The ruling class from Bangkok which came to oversee the Lanna region tended to create the picture of the lower status of the women. They referred to northern women as “Laotian women who ate salamander, tree lizards and frogs”. They were

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considered dirty, lazy, tricky and weak-willed. This image can be found in the literature of the Rattanakosin period as well as some government documents of the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Judging from the power relation aspect that formed the context of the northern women in times past, their roles and duties revolved around the economy. They served as the financial managers of their family. And most significantly, women were the family inheritors because they were usually land owners or the ones who inherited the family's land. This was evident in their role being accepted and recognized by the society. Moreover, one characteristic of the northerners was that the family houses were built on the land that belonged to the woman's family. After their marriage, the man would move in with his wife's family. In addition, the women in the north also engaged in trade within their community. Thus, the women had the role in allocating and dividing the profits gained in the family and the community as well.

Furthermore, Thai society and customs were based on Buddhism, which was integrated into the people's way of life. Certain Buddhist teaching and lessons were applied to the governing and control of the people's behavior. This could be seen in some laws and life conduct of the members of the society. Therefore, the women's roles and status was different from that of the men. The men's roles and status involved public space mainly. This was because the structure of Buddhism excluded women from participating in many of the practices. For example, women could not be ordained into the monkhood for serious or official learning of Buddhism. Moreover, Buddhist teaching framed the roles and status of the women in such aspects as putting the men in a higher status and privileges. Men were able to gain merit from ordination for a chance to concentrate on learning about Buddhism and its teaching. This barred women from gaining a great merit directly. All they

could do was to provide patronage to Buddhism by giving offerings to monks, providing support to temples or arranging for an ordination of their sons since the women themselves were not able to be ordained to enter into the monkhood.

This rigid pattern exerted an influence on men-women relationships. It framed the women's concept and behavior. Several literary monks reflected this thinking as could be found in some proverbs and old sayings. For instance, the concept of family relationships directed that women should be faithful to their husbands and abstain from adultery. One who violated this rule would be named a woman of many hearts (*phuying lai chai*). There were penalties for such an act as stipulated by the law. A husband was able to kill his wife if she was caught committing adultery. It seemed acceptable for a man to have more than one wife. It was rare to find a literary work or a teaching or proverb that could be used for a social tool to indicate the indecency of polygamy while a woman was condemned or considered wrong to have a divided attention for other men who were not her husband. This was deemed as defining the good tradition.

This complicated status prescribed to women created the complexity of northern women. This was because their image was created by people of other groups like those from Bangkok based on prejudice and disrespect as in the case of calling northern women (*i-lao* or (damned Laotian) women. This was the phenomena in the time the Siamese society greatly changed due to the impact of colonization in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in Southeast Asia. The aristocratic Bangkok people adopted the political, economic, and social attitudes and concepts from the west. Meanwhile, the northern society remained unchanged as the western influences reached them much later than their Bangkokian counterparts. Thus, it instilled in the Bangkokians the attitude that the people who were different from them were inferior. (Anan, 1984)

On the other hand, the negative attitude of the Bangkokians toward northern women also led to the attempt among northerners to modify their culture to become “civilized” according to their Bangkok counterparts. This was obvious among the Lanna elite who tried to create their cultural “identity” by imitating the world view of the Bangkok aristocrats, in particular in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when new forms of dance and music emerged in Lanna. The northern style dance in this period became more systematic and had come clear pattern in terms of dress, wearing the *phasin* or tube skirt, hairstyle bundled up high and decorated with flowers; soft and gentle dance steps which became a fixed image of northern women in the later time.

The readjustment of the administrative structure with Bangkok being the only center of power and the cancellation of the former kingdom system in 1905 along with the change in Thailand’s administrative system of absolute monarchy to a democracy in 1932 brought a great change to the upper northern society. The northern rulers had to change to fit with the political, economic, and social changes. This included the loss of power of some of the ruling class. The coming of officers from Bangkok and the expansion of some Chinese merchants, whose economic power were rising, making them become the middle class of the Thai society. One of the impacts was the change in the social relations structure that caused conflicts concerning assets, class and landless or land-rent farming. After 1957, the land ownership structure in the upper north had changed. The majority were landless people whereas the land rights were in the hand of a small number of people, Chinese in particular. Land rental and the promotion of cash crop cultivation caused the price of land to rise steeply, causing a great change in the social structure of the northern society. For example, in the past people were accustomed to labor sharing in a kinship

manner, but the changes reduced close family ties and capitalism rose until the peasant society collapsed.

The study revealed that the above mentioned characteristics were an integrated component related to gender and it finally led to the image creation of northern women. As mentioned earlier, the significant role of northern women in the past was in inheriting the family land. But the changes caused a disruption of this tradition. Since land became something attached to price and could be sold commercially, the male members of the family or brothers began to seek land ownership or claimed their rights in sharing the land. So, land was divided among both male and female members. Thus, women owned a smaller size of land and could easily lose the power of ownership. The land could be sold to the richer farmers or to people from the city. This, on the other hand, forced some northern women to become hired laborers in the city or to migrate to other places where they could find the means to make a living.

Nevertheless, when the influence of the Bangkok government spread more and more into the rural areas by creating benefits on the local resources and creating an economic mechanism causing the locals to depend on the state to link them to the local investor groups, the Chinese investors in particular, built up a strong relationship with the state power by seeking benefits in relation to the government policy and expanding their investment through government support and seeking capital from the state. Another interesting issue was the policy of accelerating development in the upper north with Chiang Mai being the core city in the region according to the national development policy through tourism, which began with the National Economic and Social Development Plan 1 of 1961 (Plaior, 1989). This made Chiang Mai the center of tourism and brought a huge amount of income to the investors in the area who expanded all kinds of service business, namely shops, hotels and tourist

attractions. Along with this expansion came the hiring of women workers as sales assistants, woodcarving factories and others such as umbrella, lacquerware and weaving factories. The sole purpose was to attract visitors. This practice engaged the image of northern women to support and promote the tourism industry. Thus, it injected the image of northern women into society at large.

This was an important turning point of the image of northern women from the negative one to the image of beautiful desirable women in Thai society. This was caused by the local Chinese investor groups who played an important role in terms of economy in the northern region around the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, who presented the image of a beautiful northern woman by modifying the physical aspects and the personality of the northern ruling class, as a result of local cultural adaptation. That is an image of a northern Thai woman who is beautiful, sweet and gentle, and who speaks pleasantly. This image was intended to be used to inform about the society exploited by the government policy, whether intentionally or not, especially as regards tourism. Moreover, the investor group managed to control the media, in particular the printed media that spread the image of northern women to go along with the benefits of the wider society. Thus, the northern woman's image was exploited for their benefit until it reached a large number of people. On the other hand, the impressive image of northern women became a fixed image that was generally accepted and perceived by the society.

### **The Changing Images of Northern Women in the Thai Tourist Industries**

The development of the transportation network in the north stated in the National Economic and Social Development Plan 1 (1961) to plans 2-4 (1967-1971) placed emphasis in one direction that was to make the rural area more and more developed while a core city

was set up in each region. Chiang Mai was one that received priority in development making its economic expansion happen quickly, which created a need for labor from the rural areas both inside and outside the economic system as mentioned earlier, the service business section in particular (Anchalee 1986). And when the government aimed to create income from tourism, the role and duty of women in relation to the family and the community as agricultural producers had to change. A number of women became unskilled laborers outside their villages, mainly in the service sector. In this respect, the created image of northern women contributed greatly in terms of economic value in the tourist industry of the country.

The reasons for Thai tourism promotion in 1961 were due to political stability and improvement of aviation facilities in Bangkok. The hotel business and retail trade expanded rapidly as a result because of the tourist demand together with being a popular holiday destination among American soldiers in Vietnam (1955-1975).

The change in the perception of northern women from inferior and oppressed to that of an attractive one began around 1963 as the consequence of the promotion by the investors in the north and those in Bangkok basically for making benefit. The creation of an image of a beautiful woman of the northern women was the way to make money for the country. It was used by the government to promote tourism. Therefore, the *Tourism Organization Thailand* was established in 1960 as an agency to conduct the management, planning and promotion in tourism. Within the first year the organization brought in 1.96 million Baht in revenue from tourism. As many as 81,340 tourists came to Thailand during this time compared to the previous year that brought in 149 million Baht revenue and 61,571 tourists. Since then, the income from tourism continued to rise. In 1963, it brought in 394 million Baht and 195,076 tourists to Thailand.

Consequently, the government concentrated on tourism promotion to boost the country's economy. And the first province besides Bangkok the government expected to get a lot of benefits from tourism promotion was Chiang Mai. This was due to the province's being rich in such resources that could be used for tourism such as topography, climate, impressive customs and culture, natural sites and convenient means of communication. Therefore, Chiang Mai was included in the government policy concerning a tourist city for tourism promotion to bring income to the country according to the National Economic and Social Development Plan 1 (1961) and onward. Moreover, the number of international tourists worldwide has been on the increase quite rapidly, too. This was because people had more free or leisure time and new technology allowed them to travel faster and cheaper. The Boeing 747 was brought into service for the first time in 1970 and Thailand was one of the countries in Asia to benefit from this and to led to tourism promotion that kept growing to become the tourism industry that the government expected to bring income to the country according to the national policy.

The continual growth of tourism and its promotion resulted in the expansion of the industry so that a small organization at first was upgraded to an independent organization of a state enterprise status whose responsibility covered a broader area to include development, tourist resource conservation and promotion as well as publicizing tourism and it became the *Tourism Authority of Thailand* in 1979. The following year (1980) was declared a Tourism Year of Thailand to motivate more and more Thai and foreign tourists to travel within the country. At the same time, the government provided support to build a better communications system to go with the increase in tourism while a safety system included the establishment of the Tourism Police (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1989). At the same time, the

private sector was encouraged to invest in all kinds of businesses relevant to tourism, such as tour companies, travel companies, Thai Airways, hotels, shops, souvenir shops (Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce 1978) and so forth, to accommodate tourists and travelers who came to Thailand (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1984).

The government tourism promotion, by having a core city being the center of the region made Chiang Mai the center of the northern region. This move caused a phenomenal economic expansion in commerce especially the service industry. For this reason, the Chiang Mai labor market concentrated on service rather than industrial factories. Most of the northern women entered the labor market mainly in the service sector. Meanwhile, it coincided with the tourist promotion, holding up the impressive cultural image as a state policy.

The government also promoted tourism related advertisement and publicity through various kinds of media creating the motivation for tourism. The strategies included using both the printed media and film to present different tourist attractions. The national development policy through tourism went along well with the local investor groups who also played an active role in presenting the image of the north. Chiang Mai was presented as a tourist city rich in admirable culture and traditions. At the same time, the image of northern women was advocated to be like a beautiful flower and one who was innocent, sweet and gentle in manners and speech (Boonchuey, 1961). This image of northern women had been communicated and perceived among the Bangkok elite since 1910 through the first Thai opera that dealt with a sweet, delicate and attractive Chiang Mai girl. The image was used again in tourism promotion with Chiang Mai being the target to bring in huge revenues as a tourist city.

Some tourguide books and magazines have been published and distributed since 1961. The success in this

aspect significantly contributed to a tourism boom in the upper northern region of Thailand. Prosperity and success included the agriculture in the region, in particular in the year 1980, which was declared the Thailand Tourism Year. It was meant to enhance the tourism promotion policy to bring foreign currency into the country to reduce the national deficit and to distribute the income from tourism to the provincial sector. The government's relying on tourism promotion to create income made tourism become a kind of industry as can be seen in several Thailand Tourism Years being declared with the purpose of boosting the income from tourism.

### The Impacts of Creating Images for Northern Women in the Thai Tourist Industry

The growth of Thailand's tourism industry started in 1961 when the government initiated tourism promotion. Previously the number of foreign visitors in 1967 was 336,000 and the number of American soldiers who came on holiday during the Vietnam War was 54,000. But in 2007, the number of foreign visitors was 14 million with an average length of stay approximately 9.19 days each. This brought the national revenue of 547,786 million Baht and made Thailand ranked number 18 in the world in terms of tourists, 14.5 million tourists compared to 82 million visitors in France whose size is about the same as Thailand's while France had the highest number of foreign tourists in the world (UNWTO, 2007).

The *Tourism Authority of Thailand* stated that 55% of the tourists coming to Thailand in 2007 were from the Asia-Pacific region, mainly Japan, Malaysia, and those from the West were mostly from the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, America and Scandinavia, whereas the number of tourists from the Middle East and Russia increased as well. As for Thai tourists, there were as many as 55% who

came to visit their homeland. The highest number of visitors to Thailand occurred around Christmas and New Year as many from the West were coming to escape the cold weather to Thailand.

Furthermore, Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand its latest arrivals report showing Thailand welcomed 19.1 million international visitors in 2011 increasing from year 2008 to 2010 when arrivals reached 14,584,220, 14,149,841 and 15,936,400 and reported significant gains in tourism industry revenue in 2011 at 776,217.20 billion Baht representing an increase of 30.94% from 592,794.09 billion Baht in 2010.

Thailand continues to rise in ranking of the international tourism receipts. From Table 1, it shows that the change took place in the Top 10 ranking by international tourism receipts in 2014. Following the strong rebound in 2013 Thailand jumped from 9<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> place in tourism receipts, while Hong Kong moved up one position to 9<sup>th</sup> from 10<sup>th</sup>. It is most notably that Thailand climbed further, up to 3<sup>rd</sup> place from 5<sup>th</sup> (in 2015) in terms of tourism receipts in its second year of double-digit growth, hitting the US\$ 50 billion marks in 2016 (see Table 2)

International Tourism Receipts			
		Billion US\$	
Rank		2014	2015
1	United States	191.3	204.5
2	China	105.4	114.1
3	Spain	65.1	56.5
4	France	58.1	45.9
5	United Kingdom	46.5	45.5
6	<b>Thailand</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>44.9</b>
7	Italy	45.5	39.4
8	Germany	43.3	36.9
9	Hong Kong (China)	38.4	36.2
10	Macao (China)	42.6	31.3

Data as collected by UNWTO, July 2016  
Source: UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2016 Edition

**Table 1.** World’s top tourism destinations and the international tourism receipts in 2014-2015

**Table 2.** World’s top tourism destinations and the international tourism receipts in 2015-2016

International Tourism Receipts			
		Billion US\$	
Rank		2015	2016
1	United States	205.4	205.9
2	Spain	56.5	60.3
3	<b>Thailand</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>49.9</b>
4	China	45.0	44.4
5	France	44.9	42.5
6	Italy	39.4	40.2
7	United Kingdom	45.5	39.6
8	Germany	36.9	37.4
9	Hong Kong (China)	36.2	32.9
10	Australia	28.9	32.4
<b>Data as collected by UNWTO, July 2017</b>			
<b>Source: UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2017 Edition</b>			

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, out of the 3.54 million foreign visitors coming in the first month in 2018, 2.14 million were from East Asia, over 900,000 from Europe, and 811,000 from the United States, South Asia, Oceania, Middle East, and Africa. The tourist arrivals represented a 10.87% increase year-on-year, while tourists from South Asia alone increased by 20.65%. Thailand generated 188.89 billion baht from these international tourists in one month, or an increase of 11.59% year-on-year. Meanwhile domestic tourism also generated 956.75 billion baht in cashflow, or 8.38% increase over the previous year. For the entire year in 2017, tourism generated 2.78 trillion baht to the country, up 10.51% from year 2016. Therefore, it could be said that Thailand tourism has grown phenomenally during the past decade, making the income from tourism within the country rise from 380,417 billion Baht in 2007 Baht to 2.78 trillion baht in 2017 (Thai PBS, 2018). That is a huge number of incomes that is earned in tourism of Thailand. This enormous economic

growth based on the tourism industry, on the other hand, affected the image of northern women so much that it became a fixed or memorable image in Thai society until the present as could be described as follows.

### Sex Service Women

The expansion of the tourism industry in Thailand created an impact on the northern Thai women, especially the image as prostitutes. In the later period, the policy on boosting the economy through tourism promotion of Chiang Mai created a high income and caused some economic changes in the area. For instance, many new commercial areas sprang up along with several sex service zones. This was partly due to the creation of the attractive image of the northern women. The promotion of such images was also used by local investors using all kinds of media since 1963 (Plaior, 1989). These images led to the perception of the beauty of northern women. This value and attitude was intensified by various social activities, for example beauty contests in which many northern women participated and often won prizes. This made the general public believe and expect that a beautiful woman had to somewhat possess certain qualities similar to those of northern women (Suphratra, 1993).

This social acceptance and beliefs about the image of beautiful northern women together with the constant tourism campaign supported by the government draw a large number of tourists to the north whether to appreciate the beautiful culture and city or to look at the northern women. At the same time, the service industry continued to expand to cope with the tourists, in particular the night clubs and bars, restaurants and hotels. The prosperity of this kind of industry has been related closely with the arrangement to provide young girls for the sex service industry. (Jiralak, 1982)

One unavoidable fact that comes with the economic growth as a result of the country's modernization along the line of cultural consumption could make the beauty of northern women became a target product of advertisement, which at the end became a kind of commercial goods to be traded. This was also the consequence of the service customers in Thailand favoring the physical features of a northern woman as having a light complexion, slender figure, sweet and gentle manners and a pleasant way of speaking. A large portion of the task was the result of the inherited concept and attitude toward beauty presented through different kinds of media. At the same time, this concept of beauty was overlapped with the images of a northern woman who was easy going, innocent, ignorant and lazy. All of this was the image imposed by people in Bangkok conveying their negative, insulting attitude that persisted for a long time in the past. Thus, northern women were stamped with that image of beauty and were made into a "product" to provide service to customers/tourists (Jiralak, 1982). Moreover, the economic change in the rural areas caused a lot of people to suffer poverty and unemployment due to the collapsing agricultural sector and the spread of consumerism as well as materialism. The growth of tourism that led to the expansion of the service industry forced a number of northern women to engage in the sex service which in turn became another image of northern women according to the perception of the general public or society at large.

This can be seen from the statistics showing an increase in the number of northern women engaged in prostitution since the government began promoting and encouraging tourism in Thailand. In 1960, it was estimated that among the cheap prostitutes in Bangkok those who came from the northeast was 60% while 30% came from the north and only 10% were from the central region (The memorial book "Yonok", 1960). After that the number of

those from the northeast declined while their northern counterparts constantly increased in number (Jiralak, 1982). A survey in 1975 on the number of female masseuses in Bangkok showed that 32% were from the north and 27% from the northeast (Naengnoi et al., 1980). It is interesting that the rise of prostitution from the north can reflect the value given to the image of northern women presented in various kinds of media to the extent that they have become accepted images and such quality of beauty was valued.

The Thai government through promotion of tourism invited some foreign writers to come and write about Thailand to publicize it in their respective countries. It was found that some of these materials published in the US in 1967 mentioned the brothels around Si Phraya Road in Bangkok for having mostly women from the north, such as Lampang, Lamphun and Chiang Mai. It was seen that since 1969, after the PATA conference, there was a report about Thai women being lured by some tourists to go to West Germany to do some performances and to offer sex service around 1976 (Jiralak, 1982). Regarding the upper north area, it was found that the Chiang Mai Airport was opened for international commerce followed by the Thailand Tourism Year 1980. This promotion of tourism resulted in many more service businesses being established to cope with the rising number of tourists inside and outside the country. Thus, the rise in the service business sector and tourism obviously affected the status and role of northern women. For instance, there were a number of cases of women from Dok Khamtai District of Phayao Province who went to Bangkok to offer sex service since 1973. The kind of value placed on northern women and the growing economy in the villages also caused a lot of women to enter prostitution. Those women were able to send a large amount of money to their families. Since then, the Dok Khamtai District has become notorious for this practice and was stamped with the image of

prostitution to the point that it could create a legend of prostitution in Thailand. Several studies since 1977 indicated that a large group of sex service women came from the north. (van Grimsven, Limanonda, et al., 1995)

Unfortunately, because of the large number of temporary sex workers and the migratory nature of prostitution in Thailand, it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of women involved in the sex industry at one point in time. Estimates of number of people involved in prostitution in Thailand range from 70,000 to 2.8 million (Hays, 2014). However, This evidently reflects the impact of gender value due to the creation of the women's image in such a light.

### **Image of Women as Laborers**

Women laborers refers too the group of women who were related to the commercial economy in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors which was the outcome of the national development policy in terms of economic and social aspects together with the attempt to link the rural areas and the northern region to Bangkok. Unfortunately, the scheme happened to destroy the self-sufficient economic system and resulted in the change to a commercial economy. This change also affected the status and ther role of northern women and made it more complicated. As the educational system could not reach all groups of people in the rural areas, this caused women to be deprived of the opportunity for an education. Thus, they became hired laborers or unskilled laborers or were forced to enter the sex service

Expansion of economy resulting from tourism drew more and more women into the industry until it became a social expectation on the role and duty of women. Northern women had to engage as hired laborers in the service sectors like restaurants, hotels and shops in the city. At the same time, they still carried on their role

in the family. Most women worked in the tourism industry as hired laborers who commuted from home to the work place every day. But unmarried women might stay at or close to thier work place or move around with their employers like their male counterparts did. However, women in the labor market received relatively lower pay and welfare than their male colleagues.

It was also found that the number of women hired laborers in the north rose along with the increase of the service sector in the northern region, for instance, when there were new commercial centers in Chiang Mai in particular. These places usually had such products as local handicrafts like woven fabrics, wood carvings and they tried to attract tourists by bringing in young, good looking girls to be their sales assistants. Advertisements through the media for tourism promotion also encouraged more and more northern girls to head for the city to work in many commercial areas and some completely gave up their farm work.

Nevertheless, the study discovered that the changing image of northern women as hired laborers along with the economic change of the country by being housemaids, unskilled laborers in the industrial sector or laborers in other types of labor outside the system such as street venders or conducting business of their own appared to be not as clear an image as that of women in other regions of Thailand, especially women in the northeast. It could be that the image of these women in the sex business, which partly resulted from the media presentation stressing more of the northern women's image in prostitution. For the above reasons, the change related to tourism in the north with Chiang Mai being the center stressed such an image related to the sex service so excessively that it left the general public with such an impression. Therefore, it could be concluded that the government tourism related policy, the presentation by the media in that manner, the need and value of tourists and the profit desired by the investors from both the central and

northern regions made the image of northern women appear to be that for commercial purposes that finally made them end up with the image of prostitutes (Nidhi, 1995).

## 2. CONCLUSIONS

### Gender and Creative Tourism

With the ideas and the economic trends in the future toward “creative economy” in which the economic, cultural and social systems interact or are interrelated with technology, intellectual property and income generating tourism as well as job creation from the promotion of social activities along with the focus on cultural diversity and human resource development could lead to a great change in the tourism industry worldwide. Thus, cultural tourism has become creative tourism whose parameters were defined by UNESCO as tourism whose objectives correspond to community development for sustainability of the community members. In this light tourism must blend well and relate to the history, culture and way of life of the respective community in terms of learning and experimentation to bring the people to experience based on what actually exists in that community. The community is expected to be able to use creative tourism as a tool to maintain a balance due to the change caused by tourism in the community itself. The profit is expected to go to the community both that created in the capitalism system and that which brings sustainability for the community development.

The significance for Thailand lies in this new kind of development in the tourism industry toward creative tourism with new kinds of tourist attractions and additional value through creative activities based on and related to the culture and wisdom as well as experience shared by a local people and the tourists. While tourism in the upper northern region was designed to go along

with the development and the presentation of the northern women’s image in relation to the service sector and tourism to the extent that it has created a negative picture of northern women, the important issue was raised due to this situation about how the Thai government and the northern region would handle the situation in terms of development for those tourist places to grow sustainably and strongly based on the culture to allow tourists to participate in exchanging the experiences and become active in making contributions to the local culture in a dynamic manner to enhance the local charm and lifestyle. Tourists should be able to engage in searching for their identity with the story of the local culture as the background. The role of the northern women in commercial activities should not be focused on only the economic value in such a way that it gives the image of women as service givers. Instead, it should be directed in such a way that it creates employment opportunities for northern women in terms of economic value from the cooperation of the government agencies from both the central and the local levels, including the community members, entrepreneurs and the tourists as well as to ensure a sustainable growth of tourism.

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