

## **Cultural Corruption:**

### **The Impact of Development and Tourism**

### **on the Hilltribe Cultures of Northern Thailand**

It is the industrialised nations of the northern hemisphere which have spread the gospel of conservation and the need for ecology. They can afford to spread this belief as they have passed through the primary stages of industrial development; they are now concerned with preserving the small areas of their own surviving wilderness for urban leisure; they also wish to save the large remaining spaces in other countries for tourism and for future natural resources. Yet considerations of pollution, of the ecological balance of nature, and of the conservation of primitive ethnic groups are largely irrelevant to underdeveloped countries, which still cannot feed or clothe or house their populations adequately.<sup>1</sup>

One of the less attractive features of the collapse of the Communist regimes of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s was the triumphalist gloating engendered amongst cold war warriors and their supporters, who saw themselves both vindicated and victorious. The great Marxist experiment was over, and the predominantly western systems of social, economic and political organisation — the secular, technological, egalitarian, free-market, liberal-democratic nation state — had been clearly demonstrated to be superior. Nor was this simplistic analysis confined to those on the right of the political spectrum; indeed, an almost universal tendency was emerging whereby the western model was seen to be without valid alternatives in philosophical or historical terms: liberal democracy, that is, was the culmination of mankind's ideological evolution.

With commendable timing, this essentially Hegelian view of historical development was reassessed in the light of recent events and subjected to rigorous scrutiny in Francis Fukuyama's 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*.<sup>2</sup> Although a balanced and scholarly work, stressing Hegel's antimaterialist view of the importance of the desire for

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Sinclair, *The Naked Savage* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1991), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1992).

recognition, Fukuyama's work was misread by many as providing further theoretical support for the proselytising of western liberal democracy as the one true ideology. Taken out of context, the following paragraph, for instance, especially the final sentence, seemed to confirm the rightness of this view:

Societies have a degree of freedom in the extent to which they regulate and plan capitalist economies. . . . Nonetheless, the unfolding of technologically driven economic modernization creates strong incentives for developed countries to accept the basic terms of the universal capitalist economic culture, by permitting a substantial degree of economic competition and letting prices be determined by market mechanisms. No other path toward full economic modernity has been proven to be viable.<sup>3</sup>

(Fukuyama might have prevented a certain amount of misinterpretation by inserting a 'yet' into that final clause.) There are of course several questions begged by this passage, not the least important of which is the implied (or at least inferred) assumption that "full economic modernity" is a universally desirable goal. As one writer has recently summarised this development model:

Our societies have chosen to put their faith in the technological promise, the technical utopias, their evolution, their growth, the stuff they produce, the commodity lifestyle, the scientific notions of progress, the universally homogenized development models, the emphasis on large scale, the emphasis on machines even for the most delicate processes like *teaching*, the redefinition of knowledge to that which a machine can produce.<sup>4</sup>

It is sadly ironic that, while in the developed world Mander and other respected economist critics such as J.K. Galbraith and Hazel Henderson are challenging the notion that economic growth and progress are unqualified benefits, the developing economies, seduced by western visions of material success, flattered by labels such as 'young tigers' or 'Asian dragons' and encouraged by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are embracing inescapable debt and environmental disaster in pursuit of these highly dubious goals of development (defined purely in terms of economic growth, as though the maturity and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Mander, "Tyranny of Technology", *Resurgence* (Hartland, UK) 164 (May/June 1994), p. 22.

value of a society were to be determined only by its production) and modernisation. Although Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia is justified in accusing western critics of hypocrisy in their attempts to influence Asian development policies, there is equal hypocrisy in the claim that any of the newly-industrialising economies in the region are adhering to an indigenously Asian model of development; at the nation-state level, Fukuyama's interpretation appears to be accepted virtually worldwide.

The central characteristic of this western model of development is its materialist reduction of every aspect of human existence to economic terms; even those areas of experience previously thought to be irrelevant, or at least outside the competency of classical economics, have begun to appear now as 'externalities', and attempts are being made to incorporate them into the economic equation.<sup>5</sup> As Jeremy Seabrook points out, however:

Economics is neither science nor art, but ideology. Its system of accounting is extremely selective about what it includes and what it omits, in terms of both costs and benefits, profits and forfeits, advantages and penalties. This partial and fragmented view of human affairs is now the focus of an evangelizing fervour by Western governments and financial institutions.<sup>6</sup>

Given this fundamental inability of economics to take (literally) into account large and crucial areas of human existence, any drive for economic efficiency is bound to result in human and social casualties which, depending only slightly on the nature and ethos of the society concerned, will generally either be ignored, rationalised or swept aside. Where the casualties occur in a minority culture of no obvious economic value (often the reverse) to the dominant one, this is even more likely to be the case, even though:

... there are enormous costs involved when human beings are dispossessed of those activities which it is quite proper for them to carry out for themselves and for each other, freely, outside the money economy. Skills are struck from the hands and imagination of women and men; people are robbed of function and purpose. One of the

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<sup>5</sup> Environmental costs are a good recent example. Even economists have seen the absurdity of a definition system whereby the cost of the clean-up of the oil spill resulting from the *Exxon Valdez* disaster could appear as a positive contribution to GNP. Recent attempts have also been made to evaluate loss of biodiversity.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Seabrook, *Victims of Development: Resistance and Alternatives* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 8.

problems of the growing arena of economic activity means that these costs must be borne by a shrinking number of the non-economic. This in turn places more and more pressure on women, and on those people who must bear the brunt of the often violent and disturbing changes that occur as we pass more deeply into the money economy.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, the further away from the western model of an economic society a community happened to be, the greater would be the impact of the changes alluded to by Seabrook, above. Some of the pressures, moreover, may be related in more or less indirect ways to economic development; the reason, for instance, that tourists seek out 'traditional' societies is the very fact that such societies exemplify a non-economic (by western standards) life style. Central governments, finding at last an economic value in their backward, non-productive minority cultures, have not been slow to exploit the potential of this kind of tourism. The cultural impact of those very tourists, however, may be far greater than that of the gradual shift to a cash economy. (Seabrook even refers to the phenomenon as "The Tourist Malignancy."<sup>8</sup>)

The Southeast Asian region is ethnologically one of the richest areas in the world, with an astounding variety of cultural patterns still found within a relatively restricted land area. At the same time, this is one of the fastest growing economic regions in the world, its development model based uncompromisingly on the western one. The collapse of Communism in Europe has certainly accelerated the acceptance of this model by formerly socialist states such as Vietnam and Laos, and there is little reason to doubt that the aggressive modernisation of the region will be imposed irrespective of cultural, political or environmental frontiers, as this recent news item on economic development shows:

Some of these developments have found an agenda in the so-called Northern Growth Quadrangle, encompassing parts of Thailand, Burma, Laos and southern China. Backed by the Asian Development Bank, the concept aims to generate trade and economic growth in one of the last marginal areas of Southeast Asia. Infrastructure projects, some funded by the bank, will link the two driving forces of the effort: China's economic vibrancy and Thailand's commercial sophistication.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Vatikiotis, "Unlocking Yunnan", *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong) Vol. 157, No.51 (December 22, 1994), p. 24.

Unfortunately, this so-called 'commercial sophistication', coupled with its rapid economic expansion, currently threatens, as in so many other countries in the region, the cultural integrity of Thailand's ethnic minorities. For the remainder of this essay therefore, I should like to focus on the situation in Thailand which, from its 'advanced' stage along the path to development, presents a dismal prognosis for countries following its lead.

During the cold war period, the Kingdom of Thailand was seen by the United States as the last bastion against the Communist tide that seemed to be engulfing the Southeast Asian region. Although there were many critics and academics at the time who derided the shallowness of thought on which this 'Domino Theory' was based, the US State Department and the Pentagon were sufficiently convinced to pour enormous funds into the Thai economy as well as using the country during the Korean War and Vietnam War periods as both a military base and a 'rest and recreation' destination for US troops. As Richard West comments:

The new prosperity of Thailand as well as the rise in education and living standards meant that, even if South Vietnam fell to the communists, there was now little likelihood of the 'domino theory' taking effect. Paradoxically, the American aim of preventing communism by raising the living standards and hopes of ordinary Asian people had been achieved not, as President Kennedy had intended, by peaceful progress, but out of the profits of war.<sup>10</sup>

Since then, Thailand has been one of the fastest growing economies of the region, with tourism as its most important source of foreign revenue.<sup>11</sup> Although most visitors were attracted to Thailand by its deserved reputation as a beautiful land of friendly people and strong cultural traditions, the country also acquired an unsavoury name as a destination for organised sex tours, the male participants of which came to take advantage of the cheap and liberal sex industry that had originally been developed for troops in Bangkok or Pattaya on 'rest and recreation'. It is true that the west did not introduce prostitution to the country. As the Thailand scholar William J. Klausner notes: "One must, of course, accept the fact that prostitution is traditional in

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<sup>10</sup> Richard West, *Thailand: The Last Domino* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1991), p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> In 1957, there were three tourist hotels in Bangkok; just ten years later they could be counted in hundreds. Today, they are virtually innumerable.

Thailand and not the product of western or U.S. military influence."<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the troops did have the effect of creating an expanded demand for young girls (and boys) that soon outstripped supply (to employ an appropriate economic metaphor), and ruthless entrepreneurs were soon touring poor northern villages offering naïve parents small sums of money for their children, who would work in Bangkok as 'waitresses' or 'dancers'. The cynicism of the official Thai government attitude to this morally indefensible yet highly lucrative situation was demonstrated by its repeated denials that prostitution in any form existed in the country — prostitution, of course, being against the law in Thailand.<sup>13</sup> Not wishing for Thailand to be known *only* for its sex facilities however, the government had begun to respond to growing international and internal pressure when the AIDS epidemic rendered the whole idea of sex tours a great deal less attractive to potential clients. Government support and entrepreneurial energy were therefore focused on a new area of potential tourist interest: the half-million or so people belonging to the colourful minority cultures of Thailand's north and west.

In its drive to attract visitors, the Tourist Authority of Thailand (they of the apt acronym) have recently produced a 60-minute videotape entitled *The Hilltribes of Northern Thailand* which, according to the accompanying description, shows "the rich cultural variety of Thailand's multi-ethnic society." Dealing in turn with the six main tribal groups recognised by the Royal Thai government — Karen, Hmong, Yao, Akha, Lisu, Lahu,<sup>14</sup> — the video shows gatherings of smiling villagers all dressed colourfully in spotless traditional costume taking part in dances, weddings, festivals and the like in scenic locations under cloudless skies. Although the soundtrack is mostly comprised of music, song and laughter, a respectful commentary in Japanese periodically breaks in to give superficial information on the activities being shown. At no point are any of the myriad problems besetting hilltribe life alluded to, and the video is a blatant attempt to attract more Japanese interest in the enormously destructive tourist activity of hilltribe trekking; tourism, as noted above, is Thailand's largest earner of foreign revenue, and the hilltribe cultures are seen as another resource (along with timber and teenage girls) to be exploited. In reality, hilltribe life is an increasingly desperate struggle for health, survival and cultural identity, and as a corrective to the rosy picture presented by the video, a few of the

<sup>12</sup> William J. Klausner, *Reflections on Thai Culture* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1993), p. 224.

<sup>13</sup> Only since the 1950s; ironically enough, the legislation was, like the ban on opium, a direct result of western pressure.

<sup>14</sup> These designations are those used by most anthropologists. However: "Whatever name you call any particular tribe arouses the ire of experts, who say it is incorrect and insulting." (West, op. cit., p. 13.)

major problems might usefully be reviewed. As the semi-official booklet on the hilltribes produced by the Tribal Research Institute at the University of Chiang Mai so baldly states, however: "Most of these problems are related to some aspects of the hilltribes' way of living which are considered to be inappropriate to the present socio-economic and political situation of the country."<sup>15</sup>

At present, the greatest threat is that posed by the combined pressures of population increase and environmental demand. As Paul Harrison notes, "The idea of forest peoples exerting no pressure on the environment is mythical. . . . But when population density and consumption are low, and technology limited to digging sticks and blowpipes, the pressure is slight and sustainable."<sup>16</sup> That is, while swidden, or slash-and-burn agriculture may be a perfectly viable and sustainable practice for small bands of roving cultivators prepared to move villages every fifteen years or so, there is now a serious shortage of available land. (Conversion to cyclical bush fallow methods is a temporary solution at best, and requires even more land. Few hilltribes have the resources to adopt irrigated field agriculture.) Although hilltribe people have a low life expectancy (hard to estimate in the absence of firm data, but probably around 44 years, strongly influenced by high infant mortality rates), populations tend to double every twenty years. At the same time, environmentally insensitive logging and the construction of roads and dams are destroying the forests themselves, along with the wildlife and vegetable food and medicinal resources.

Logging's biggest role in deforestation is as a facilitator for shifting cultivators. Logging roads provide access into the forest for settlers. Instead of eating away at one outer edge, they can corrode the forest on many fronts from within. Just four logging roads criss-crossing a square block of forest will double the perimeter accessible to settlers. But logging roads do not cause the influx of settlers — they merely facilitate it.<sup>17</sup>

This demand for land has led to increasing outbreaks of inter-tribal and inter-village warfare (particularly in the more assertive Hmong and Lisu cultures), some of them very bloody. Paul and Elaine Lewis comment rather delicately of the opium-growing Hmong that their need for land:

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<sup>15</sup> *The Hill Tribes of Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Tribal Research Institute, 1984), pp. 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Harrison, *The Third Revolution: Environment, Population and a Sustainable World* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1992), pp. 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

... may be disproportionate when the needs of their tribal neighbours are considered. Their hunger for land even leads to disputes among themselves, the severity of which may tax the ability of the village headman to arbitrate. More significantly, it may lead them into rivalry with other tribal groups for land they wish to possess.<sup>18</sup>

Linked to the land crisis is the opium problem. Opium cultivation has been illegal in Thailand since 1959,<sup>19</sup> yet many villages, having been forced away from self-sufficiency into a cash economy, are totally dependent on opium revenue. Government-sponsored crop substitution schemes have had some success (the video has a scene of laughing Akha girls picking coffee beans), but these are only sporadically implemented and take at least ten years to become effective. Also, the advantages of opium cultivation are many: It is easy to grow, bringing high profits (in cash-economy terms) for little work, and as it can only be grown above 1,000 metres, there is no competition from lowland farmers. Furthermore, remote villages may be forced to grow opium by rapacious traders, often Haw Chinese or Shan, or by nationalist armies such as the Karen, the Shan and the KMT to raise money for arms.<sup>20</sup> (Nor is it unknown for senior figures in the Thai military to be lucratively involved in the opium trade.) Levels of addiction in the villages are rising, reaching epidemic proportions with the Hmong and Akha.

Apart from addiction, hilltribe villages are susceptible to a variety of serious medical and nutritional problems including malaria, cholera, hepatitis and malnutrition, as well as a range of infant diseases. A simple infected cut can have fatal consequences in the absence of clean water and antiseptics. The loss of the forests has removed the source of traditional medicines and, similarly, the disappearance of forest game has led to protein deficiency in hilltribe diet. Market-bought dietary supplements are often rich in monosodium glutamate and other additives, leading to further health problems, as has the enforced switch to greater consumption of polished rice. Away from the larger towns, hospitals and clinics are non-existent; traditional healers are disappearing, with few young people willing to learn the art, and peripatetic, largely untrained 'injection doctors' with their small range of old, unsuitable drugs and dubious syringes probably spread more disease than they cure.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul and Elaine Lewis, *Peoples of the Golden Triangle* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1984), p. 133.

<sup>19</sup> See Note 13.

<sup>20</sup> The notorious Khun Sa is the product of a Chinese father and a Shan mother.



Educational facilities are as poor as medical ones; without access to even primary schooling in most cases, few hilltribe people learn to read or write Thai, this illiteracy contributing to the low esteem in which they are held by the ethnic Siamese. When the hilltribes began to cross into Thailand (mainly from China and Burma) around one hundred years ago (before in the case of the Karen), they had little contact with the valley-dwelling Thais. As increasing populations of both highlanders and lowlanders have recently brought the communities more and more into competition for land and resources however, so prejudice and discrimination against the hilltribes has grown; pejorative terms for them abound in the Thai language.<sup>21</sup> At the official level, the Thai government views hilltribe people with suspicion; having no allegiance beyond the village or tribal level, they are seen as potential dissidents, especially as they tend to inhabit sensitive border areas. The majority are technically stateless, having no citizenship, and are therefore without redress to official or private abuses. The King of Thailand has tried to improve the rights of hilltribe people but, far from Bangkok, the success or otherwise of such initiatives depends almost wholly on the attitude, often indifferent at best, of local officials.

Of course, life in hill villages is not ineluctably 'nasty, brutish and short'; the hilltribes need help, but it is also unarguable that these cultures have a great deal to teach the 'developed world'. Given time, it is quite possible that the hilltribes, with appropriate and sensitive action on the part of the Thai government, could adapt sufficiently to deal with the problems outlined above while still retaining their distinct cultural identities. Obviously they would change, but they have always been ready to absorb outside features into their traditional patterns. Even in the highly conservative Akha culture, elements of Christianity and Buddhism, both Theravada and Mahayana, have been incorporated into essentially animist religious ritual without drastically altering the cosmographic conception. Similarly, Akha girls' head-dresses are at present frequently adorned with silver Indian Rupees showing the head of George V (Victoria, being a woman, is less highly prized!); in pre-Imperial times they presumably used Moghul coins, and in the future when the George V coins are all gone they will doubtless find an appropriate substitute. Paul and Elaine Lewis conclude the work cited earlier with the pious hope that: "The resilience of these people has served them well in the past; may it be adequate

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<sup>21</sup> "The lowland Thais, Burmese and Vietnamese all have their opprobrious term for the hill people, meaning something like savage." (West, *op. cit.*, p. 13.)

to preserve their integrity in years ahead."<sup>22</sup> The point is, however, that they are not being given the time to make the necessary adaptations at their own pace, and it may be that, in the long run, the factor most strongly contributing to the destruction of these cultures may be the impact of the rapidly increasing numbers of superficially sympathetic, benevolent tourists.

Hilltribe cultures are quite robust enough to cope with the visits of a few scholars, anthropologists, community development officers and the like. Indeed, such visits often provide a great deal of harmless fun for the villagers, and this kind of visitor will in general be informed enough about the culture not to disrupt it. (Missionaries are a different category altogether and I shall perhaps discuss mission activity in a separate essay.) What is happening now, though, is that villages are being overwhelmed by hordes of young, white, middle-class, educated World Travellers. (Not tourists, please; tourists go on package tours and stay in Hilton hotels, and therefore do not experience the 'real culture' of the places they visit.) An introductory anthropological guide produced for such WTs supplies — without apparent irony — a reasonable though far too rosy pen picture:

The typical hill tribe tourist, then, is fairly young, single, travelling cheaply through Asia, staying in cheap local hotels or guest houses, eating at outdoor food markets, trying to live within the local culture rather than observing it. He or she will be a student, teacher or professional person who has taken several weeks or months off to 'see the world' — the equivalent of the Victorian grand tour. . . . They will tend to be very environmentally aware and try very hard not to be patronising in their attitudes to the locals. They may prefer to be called 'travellers' rather than tourists.<sup>23</sup>

The reality is sadly different; for every 'traveller' who has bothered to buy and read even a guide such as this, there will be hordes of others whose attitude to hilltribe cultures is uninformed and uncaring. *Lonely Planet* guidebook in one hand, Pentax Autofocus in the other, these new Visigoths are Land Cruised in (by Thai or Chinese entrepreneurs) from Chiang Mai or Mae Hong Son to a village which may see a dozen or more such visits in a day. The average WT then wanders uncomprehendingly around for a quarter of an hour, smiling, taking photographs,

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis and Lewis, op. cit., p. 291.

<sup>23</sup> John R. Davies, assisted by Tommy Wu, *A Trekker's Guide to the Hilltribes of Northern Thailand* (Salisbury, UK: Footloose Books, 1989), p. 95.

buying handicrafts and distributing sweets, cigarettes, money and T-shirts with patronisingly misplaced generosity before going on to 'collect' the next culture. It does not take many weeks of such visits before the village children, dental caries well established, are begging for sweets and charging for photographs, while their elders neglect traditional work in order to produce low-quality handicrafts to meet the souvenir trade. Market forces are thus being proselytised, albeit unwittingly, with an efficacy that Reagan and Thatcher could only dream of. The more enterprising WT may elect to go on a 'trek' through the jungle for a few days, stopping overnight in hilltribe villages; numbers are obviously smaller and cultural impact is correspondingly diminished, but on the other hand this means that even villages remote from towns and roads are affected.

In short, hilltribe cultures are being turned into a Disney-style theme park, the people stripped of dignity and independence in an exploitative process that is no less pernicious for all the unawareness of its clients. Faced with the problems outlined in the earlier part of this essay, and constantly exposed to representatives of what seems a materially more successful culture, it is small wonder that young people in the villages are losing faith in their traditions. Without opportunity in Thai society and dissatisfied with their own, increasing numbers of these youngsters are making their way into the cities and leading precarious existences by doing any kind of work, legal or not, that keeps them alive.

Huge sums of money are being made out of the exploitation of the hilltribes, which is why the Thai government considers it worthwhile to make a glossy video with a soundtrack in half a dozen languages. Guidebook writers like Tony Wheeler and Joe Cummings<sup>24</sup> have done very nicely out of convincing people that following the books' instructions somehow qualifies them as morally superior travellers as opposed to tourists. Even some hilltribe villages themselves, although well down the profit ladder, are entirely dependent on tourist income, with a well-organised cash economy. The fact that these villages bear the same relation to traditional culture that MacDonalds bears to *haute cuisine* does not seem to affect the number of visitors. Other countries in the region that are just opening up to tourism, such as Burma, Laos and Vietnam, all have significant hilltribe populations and have long looked enviously at Thailand's tourist revenues; there is little ground for optimism that the same patterns of exploitation will

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<sup>24</sup> Tony Wheeler is the founder of the hugely successful and sadly misnamed *Lonely Planet* series of guidebooks; Joe Cummings is his Thailand writer.

not emerge in those countries. (Excluding, of course, those cases where the tourist potential of the tribal minority happens to be of less value than their environment, such as the Penan in the hardwood forests of East Malaysia<sup>25</sup> or the Amungme on their copper-rich hills in Irian Jaya.<sup>26</sup>) And not just national governments are culpable; the Karen of Burma, to help finance their independence struggle, recently forced the relocation of an entire village of Padaung people, who are actually a sub-group of the Karen, from their home deep in the hills above the Salween to a dusty hillside near Mae Hong Son. Tourists (many of whom are probably morally opposed to zoos) can now be easily transported to the new village where, after paying a fee to the Karen Independence Army, they can gawp at the 'giraffe women' of the Padaung. The depressing fact that the Karen are prepared to exploit their own people in this way hardly suggests that the situation would improve if the minority tribes were given more autonomy. As long as there is a demand, in terms of sufficient numbers of affluent tourists prepared to participate in the process, the exploitation will both continue and intensify.

The central issue is one of empowerment. The hill tribes themselves must have the right to decide how fast, and to what extent, they wish to participate in the cash-based market economy of the developed world, including tourism. Unfortunately, the pressures they are under — political, economic and environmental — are such that the hilltribe cultures are unlikely to ever have the time and autonomy to make these decisions. The only hope, paradoxically enough, may be that the developed world itself is increasingly confronted by problems that threaten its own complacency with regard to the superiority of its systems. Discussing the struggle between settled, agricultural, predominantly western, civilisation and non-settled cultures, the anthropologist Jack Weatherford has written that:

For now, it appears that civilization has won out over all other ways of life. Civilized people have defeated the tribal people of the world who have been killed or scattered. But just at the moment when victory seems in the air for civilization, just at the moment when it has defeated all external foes and made itself master of the world, without any competing system to rival it, civilization seems to be in worse danger than ever before.

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<sup>25</sup> See Stan Sesser, *The Lands of Charm and Cruelty: Travels in Southeast Asia* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 239-294.

<sup>26</sup> See Norman Lewis, *An Empire of the East: Travels in Indonesia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), pp. 223-237.

No longer in fear of enemies from outside, civilization seems more vulnerable than ever to enemies from within. It has become a victim of its own success.<sup>27</sup>

As the developed world is forced more and more critically to examine the assumptions with which it operates, it may learn to take a more sophisticated, respectful and humane attitude towards cultural diversity. There is no 'end of history', there are only new beginnings, and there are at least signs in the present age of a willingness to consider paradigms other than the defunct materialist equation of economic growth with happiness. Any shift in thinking in the developed world will, of course, take considerably longer to influence policies in developing countries, and it will be too late for many cultures around the world, including possibly the hilltribes of Thailand, to regain an adequate measure of self-determination. Cultures, however, can be rejuvenated; the increasingly self-confident native American cultures of the United States in particular are showing what can be achieved with a degree of empowerment, and if developing countries can begin to consider truly multicultural policies rather than assimilative ones, — the salad bowl rather than the melting pot, — there may yet be hope. Even if only, as Weatherford seems to suggest, such policies are adopted for crudely instrumentalist reasons:

We must recognize the value of all people not merely out of nostalgic sentiment for the oppressed or merely to keep them like exhibits in a nature park. We must recognize their rights and value because we may need the combined knowledge of all cultures if we are to overcome the problems that now threaten to overwhelm us.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jack Weatherford, *Savages and Civilization: Who Will Survive?* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1994), p. 288.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.