

# **Forest is life: Maniq's struggles with ethnic tourism and forms of resistance**

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## Abstract

The Maniq is an ethnic group found in the Banthat Mountains in southern Thailand. They earn their livings by hunting and gathering. Like other ethnic groups in the country, the Maniq has been affected by tourism development. This article is a qualitative study that highlights the reasons and factors that led the Maniq into tourism. This includes being employed as a way to earn a living by being the subject of tourist attraction. The ways in which the Maniq negotiates against the powers surrounding them will also be discussed. This article argues that under the current situation, the Maniq is unable to use their existing self-defense mechanisms — by fleeing deep into the forest or relocating when in danger or uncomfortable, as they did in the past. The Maniq has to overcome new obstacles related to tourism they have never experienced before. With the realization that they are powerless and cannot escape tourism, they have developed performative mechanisms to resist the powers that surround them. This is not to overcome the new culture they are facing, but rather to feel free from exploitation and to coexist with the forest.

**Keywords:** Maniq, ethnic tourism, negotiating power

## 1. Introduction

“Developing and creating various tourism activities in the province, promoting and publicizing the province's good image to domestic and foreign tourists is important to attract more tourists and investors to Phatthalung province. Phatthalung province is one of the oldest cities in the south with a long history. It has beautiful and diverse arts and culture. It is also rich in natural tourism resources, from the sea to the mountains, beautiful waterfalls, caves, cliffs, and the culture of the people, including city people and forest people such as Sakai (Maniq), etc. Therefore, we are confident that the tourism agencies that participated in this meeting will bring their good experiences to the public and invite people to visit various tourist attractions in Phatthalung province. I believe this is the way to improve the quality of life of people in Phatthalung province, which is in line with the vision and strategy of Phatthalung province.”<sup>1</sup>

With the remarks of the Governor of Phatthalung province, who chaired the public relations project meeting to promote the image of tourism in Phatthalung province, mentioned the goal of the strategy to promote and develop tourism in the province, which focuses on showcasing the province's strengths through natural resources, performing arts, and Maniq ethnic group to attract the interest of tourists, especially those looking for novelty. This intends to increase the number of tourists in the province and boosts the economy at both the provincial and community levels through tourism.

The Maniq is an ethnic group who live in the forests of the Banthat Mountains. Their way of life is hunting (as they are part of a hunting-gathering society), moving back and forth in the forest depending on the abundance of natural resources. They have their own culture and use resources that can be obtained from the forest to earn a living. This specific social group

can be found in the forest areas of Phatthalung province, south of Thailand. When tourism is used as an important mechanism to generate income for the country, ethnic groups such as the Maniq is turned into an attraction for tourism. Their "cultural being" has been portrayed in publicity materials similar to that of an object in consumer culture (Duangwises, 2014). Ethnic tourism has been defined as an important mechanism to learn about the lifestyle, traditions, and culture of people different from one's own. Ethnic tourism thus creates a new experience for tourists by using the existing capital such as cultural and ethnic groups. This type of new experience for tourists can lead to income that can be distributed to different regions of the country (Buruspant et al., 2013).

The Maniq has been having difficulty with the changing conditions of the forest. The abundance of natural resources has decreased. They also have to adapt to becoming the target of tourism that comes from people outside the forest and tourism agencies who want to exploit their way of life by giving them a new meaning as a cultural product. This is a fairly new type of exotic tourism where people are photographed, participate in the activities of Maniq daily life, and learn about the culture of the Maniq people. Smith (1989) describes ethnic tourism as presenting ethnic characteristics to meet the needs of tourists. It involves selling "Otherness" by turning the Maniq into a product that tourists consume for pleasure.

This type of tourism has redefined the Maniq's way of life, making them into a form of commodity. The process reinforces social marginalization of the Maniq. They are positioned as "the Other" through the "gaze" of the tourists. Tourists also tend to exercise their power by "gazing at" the locals and expecting them to offer things that tourists want to see and know (Urry & Larsen, 2011). However, locals like the Maniq tends to resist the desire of the visitors/tourists.

In this article, the researchers present the reasons that led to the inability of the Maniq to live in the forest and the development of community tourism that has its relationship and

impact on the Maniq in the study area. The study also explains how the Maniq resists the power system surrounding them in relation to tourism and makes suggestions that are beneficial to both the Maniq and local tourism businesses. This article argues that while the Maniq has realized that they are powerless, they could not escape the encroachment of tourism. However, they have a very subtle way to negotiate against the powers in order to be free in the forest.

This study is a qualitative research in which a field research was conducted in Pa Bon District, Phatthalung province in 2018-2020. The researchers traveled to Maniq communities several times and spent one to two months in Maniq communities each time. As regards to tourism-related activities associated with Maniq, the researchers visited the area and collected data through observation and participation as tourists. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the Maniq and those who involved in tourism businesses. This study has been granted ethical approval for human subject research by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University. (The project number IPSR-IRB -2018/10-298). The data collection strictly followed the guidelines and requirements of the Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects. Therefore, to protect the personal data of the informants, everyone will be referred to with pseudonyms.

The article begins by exploring the Maniq's way of life in relation to the forest and their dependence on forest resources. This allows us to understand the Maniq cultural background, beliefs, and practices that are intimately connected to the forest from birth to death. When the forest changes, it has inevitably impacted the Maniq's way of life. The next part looks at different forms of tourism and the factors that contribute to the growth of ethnic tourism business. The article then discusses the impact on Maniq as they are being subjected into a product of tourism and the negotiations of the Maniq against agencies who come into contact with them. Finally, the paper addresses the needs of the Maniq within the context of change within the forest, along with recommendations for related parties.

## 2. Maniq: forest is life, life is forest

The Maniq is an ethnic group belonging to the Negrito family, a subgroup of Negroids living in the forests (Duangchan, 2006). In Thailand, they live mainly in the Banthat Mountains usually found in Satun, Phatthalung, and Trang provinces. Maniq means "us". The Maniq call their neighbors *hamiq*, which means "them" or "the others" (Lukas, 2004). The Maniq has dark-skinned body. Their curly hair sticks to their scalp, their nose is flat, and their lips are quite thick. Their bodies are well-proportioned, strong, and about 150-160 cm tall. The Maniq live as a hunter-gatherer society and make tools from simple natural materials. They reflect the wisdom that coexists with the forest through their dwellings, bags, weapons, some types of clothing, etc. The Maniq has a quiet character. They speak little and directly with a straight face. They usually avoid talking to strangers and prefer a quiet instead of chaotic place. When there face problems such as their settlements are being invaded or having to compete for forest resources, the Maniq flee to another place. They hide in a hut or run deep into the forest and come out only when they feel safe (Duangchan, 1980; Ukrat, 1993).

The Maniq live nomadically, constantly moving back and forth in the forest, usually choosing a place in a hilly area or along a cliff covered with tall trees. Settlements are often based on an abundance of food with enough wildlife and fruit for daily consumption. The area has to be near a water source, stream, or waterfall that is safe from wild animals or natural disasters. The hut or "*haya*" is built on a stable area that is not on a flowing or sloping waterway to avoid hazards from flowing water or flooding. The site must be away from old trees to prevent trees from breaking and falling on the hut, and to protect the area from wild animals that may enter at any time (Duangchan, 2015). The Maniq migration is not just a response to the daily need for food. Rather, it is a management method that alternates natural resources to maintain the balance of the ecosystem and avoid diseases that can be caused by the unsanitary

use of the area for a long period of time. According to a study by Loekbubpa (2021), the total number of Maniq living in the Banthat Mountains is estimated to be about 350 to 400 people. They are living in small groups scattered throughout the forest area. Each group has about 15 to 40 members. Together, they share the use of forest resources. Loekbubpa (2021) argues that if they live together in large groups, they would affect the forest ecosystem and cause imbalance and even food shortages.

Due to their independent lifestyle, the Maniq moves freely anywhere in the forest. When they are sick, they can find medicinal herbs to heal themselves. The Maniq builds "*haya*" from leaves that are degradable. The *haya* looks like a small shed with small logs stuck into the ground as a structure. The thatched roof is made of leaves from palm plants that have been weaved to overlap. The sleeping area is made of a small bamboo paved floors, slightly sloping. At the head end side, it is raised about one foot above the ground to allow comfortable sleeping and to keep moisture off the ground. When they sleep, they turn their heads outward (Udomsri, 2021). According to Maniq beliefs, the feet are the most important part of the body. If their leg or foot is injured, the Maniq cannot walk to find food in the forest. Therefore, they turn their feet inward (Duangchan, 1980). In this way of life, the Maniq collects only the bare necessities such as essential utensils and clothing. Some equipment such as sharp objects, hunting equipment, or poisonous objects that are dangerous for children are stowed in the woven holes under the roof. Clothes and sarongs are placed on the floor to generate warmth. Fire is very important for life in the forest. Each *haya* has at least one bonfire (depending on the number of family members) to warm the body. The fire is used for cooking and visibility at night. The warmth of the fire can also cure or relieve ailments caused by the cool and damp atmosphere of the land and forest. In the morning, the Maniq's face is covered with the ashes of the fire. The Maniq believes that the ash can relieve and heal fevers caused by cold and certain types of wounds. In case of illness or cold, the ashes of the fire are smeared on the face, forehead, arms,

upper body or on the nerve points of the body associated with the symptomatic points (Loekbubpa, 2021).

The main foods of the Maniq are wild animals, fruits, and wild yams (*dioscorea*). In the process of finding food, the Maniq is divided into two groups. The male group is responsible for hunting. Every morning the males would hunt wild animals which will be used to feed the whole group. For hunting, the Maniq goes deep into the forest with hunting weapons called "*Tud*" or blowpipe. *Tud* is a weapon made from bamboo trunks with long, slender stems. The diameter is about 2.5 to 3 centimeters. It is 2 meters long, stacked in two layers. The wood has burned dark brown colour and polished to a shiny surface. Most of the daily food are from medium-sized warm-blooded animals such as monkeys, gibbons, wild boars, hog badger, and birds, depending on the weather and season. Generally, no more than 1-2 animals are killed in the daily hunt. The women group not only has to take care of the household and children, but sometimes they also have to go to the forest with a basket on their back and carrying a sarong dangling the baby on their side (Loekbubpa, 2021). The Maniq has their own way of observing the vines on the ground. When they find a trunk, they dig it up with a stick to the root where the tubers are buried. They do not tear out the trunk, but prefer to dig around it so as not to damage it, and pull out only the tubers. Once they have the head of the tubers, they cover the excavated soil to keep it intact. This practice maintains the balance of the ecosystem. The stem grows and accumulates food, from which new roots are formed and the Maniq can collect again in the future. The Maniq has learned from generation to generation to live in harmony with nature and maintain its ecosystems. (Maneenoon, Sirirugsa, & Sridith, 2008).

The Maniq people believe in "forest spirits" which exist in relation to birth, death, settlement, hunting, curing diseases, and even natural disasters. The Maniq believes that "forest spirits" are involved in everything, so there are guidelines and prohibitions that have been passed down from generation to generation. The Maniq believes that the "forest spirits" live

everywhere in the forest, for example in big trees, anthills and so on. Every activity in Maniq life is associated with this belief from leaving the house to even hearing a whisper that indicates the possibility of hunting. When a child is born, the Maniq buries the placenta of the newborn under the ground near the fire. They believe that the children will grow up healthy and unharmed (Duangchan, 1980). The choice of the Maniq settlement must be allowed each time by the forest spirits through prayers. If a member destroys an anthill, the person in the family will fall ill for no reason or even lead to death. When someone died, the corpse is placed in his/her *haya*. The other members put all the belongings of the deceased in the *haya*. They do not use all of these items, but disassemble the *haya* to cover the body and then leave the area. It is believed that death makes the area no longer auspicious. Loekbubpa (2021) argues that the relocation is not only to avoid misfortune, but also to prevent members of the group from contracting certain diseases that come from the dead body.

With a way of life that coexists with the forest, depends on the forest resources for its livelihood as well as for culture and beliefs, the Maniq has close relationship with the forest ecosystem. The transmission of everyday experiences from generation to generation and from childhood to adulthood cultivates the Maniq to survive amidst the hardships of the forest. Knowledge and wisdoms from the teachings nourish and strengthen such relationships until they become part of Maniq's body. As supernatural beliefs related to life have always been told, practiced, and seen, although forest spirits cannot be seen or touched, they have entered the consciousness for the Maniq to obey unconditionally. The forest spirits play an important and a powerful role in every aspect of Maniq's mind. For this reason, although they live in difficult and dangerous forests, they feel that they can rely upon the resources when one is born, grows old, sick, or dies, without suffering or despair, and without having to rely on anyone to help them, even if they have difficulty sustaining themselves. They are happy to live in the forest,

which is like their own home. This reflects their own strength, experience, and expertise that can stay on their own.

### **3. Forest changes livelihood changes**

Banthat Mountains contain a tropical rainforest located on a north-south axis in southern Thailand. It covers some areas in the four provinces of Satun, Phatthalung, Trang, and Songkhla. The Banthat Mountains are under the influence of the monsoon coming from the Andaman Sea, which provides abundant rainfall throughout the year. The Banthat Mountains are rich in plants and wildlife of the country. It has been declared a "Khao Banthat Wildlife Sanctuary" and is under the supervision of the Wildlife Conservation Office. (Department of National Parks Wildlife and Plant Conservation, 2012)

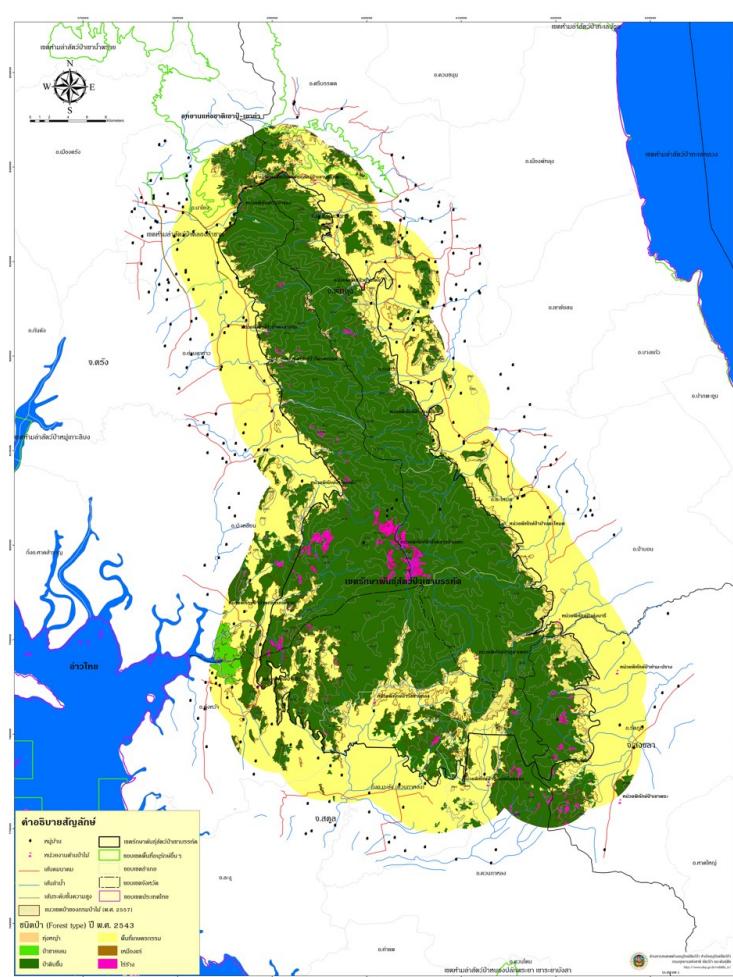


Figure 1 Topography of the Banthat Mountains

Source: The Wildlife Conservation Office, Department of National Parks Wildlife and  
Plant Conservation, 2012

Banthat Mountains have a total forest area of 3,424.473 square kilometers or 2,140,295.60 rai, including 1,919,446 rai of land and 220,850 rai of water. It is one of Thailand's most diverse ecosystems, encompassing upstream forests, mangrove forests and fertile coastal strips with important natural resources (Department of National Parks Wildlife and Plant Conservation, 2007). Along the Banthat Mountains on the Phatthalung province side, most of the forests are tropical rainforests, accounting for about 80% of the total area. There are many important plants such as rubber trees, malacca teak, takhian, etc. In addition, 20% of the area is

an evergreen forest hill, which is lush and dense throughout the year. It can be considered that the Khao Banthat forest on the Phatthalung side has a diverse and fertile ecosystem, which is not different from the Khao Banthat forest on the other side of other provinces (Ramarn et al., 2018).

Nowadays, the ecosystem of Banthat Mountains has changed dramatically, affecting the livelihood of people who use forest resources, such as communities living near the forest, farmers, and ethnic groups, especially the Maniq (Sombunburana, 2015). Under this context, the study divides the main events affecting the forest ecosystem of Banthat Mountain into the following 4 categories:

1) Forest concessions in 1961. This is when the government issued forest concessions in the Banthat Mountains. As a result, some logs were cut and people were attracted to the forest area to establish an agricultural land. This Thai forest concession was influenced by the British who were logging in India and Burma during the colonial period. The Thai government established the "Forest Department" in 1896 to oversee logging activities and benefits. The aim of the forest concession was to link the economic system between the public and private sectors in the timber industry and to process the products both within the country and export them abroad. Since 1961, the country's forest area, which was 171 million rai or 53.33 percent of the country's land area, had shrunk to 82 million rai or 25.62 percent of the country's land area by 2006 (Department of National Parks Wildlife and Plant Conservation, 2007). Forest areas have been continuously reduced. However, the government has taken many ways to preserve the forest areas. In 1989, the cancellation of forest concessions, known as "forest closures", was announced. After the end of forest concessions, a survey by the Ministry of Forestry showed that the concession forest area in the whole country was 230,000 square kilometers, or 143 million rai (Department of Forestry, 2018). The phenomenon of decreasing forest area has led

the government to recognize the importance of forest conservation, with the main goal of keeping the remaining forest as natural as possible.

2) The suppression of communist groups which the government considered a threat to the security of the state in southern Thailand, such as the Communist Party of Thailand Southern Branch (CPT Southern Branch), the Separatist Movement Group (SMG), the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), and other groups. These groups used the forests of Banthat Mountain as their base of operations, and the government considered these groups a threat to the security of the state. The Thai government established the Defense and Suppression Communist Command Office (DSCCO) in 1965 in order to use direct force to suppress these groups; applying the concept of "destroy first, develop later". The DSCO was later transformed into the Internal Security Operations Command Office (ISOC) in 1973. The ISOC was established as a central command whose main objective was to eliminate conflicts through various forms of military actions. In 1980, the government changed its policy from suppression to reconciliation to draw communist party members out of the forests and motivate them to be national developers through the policy known as 66/2523 (Prime Minister's Order No. 66/2523) (Suma, 1985; Phuengkanthai, 1978). During the military operations, the forests of Banthat Mountains were affected by being invaded and partly destroyed. As a result, the forest ecosystem changed from a forest area of 11,001,875 rai or 24.89 percent of the total southern region to 10,276,250 rai or 23.25 percent of the total southern region (Department of Forestry, 2018). This also affected the livelihood of the Maniq, who also use the natural resources of the forest.

After the end of the suppression of the communist groups, the government has focused on community development both in terms of transportation systems and public utilities such as road construction, water supply, and electricity to increase the potential of the communities and maintain the stability of the country.

3) The construction of a reservoir in Thung Naree sub-district, Pa Bon district, Phatthalung province. As part of the Royal Development Project for the country's water resources under the philosophy of "Water is Life," the Pa Bon Reservoir was built in 1994 to alleviate the problem of water shortage in agriculture (Office of the Royal Development Projects Board, 2009). This reservoir covers the total forest area of 7,000 rai. As a result, an area of 320,000 rai was lost in 1988, and by 2000, the forest area was only 273,750 rai (Department of Forestry, 2018).

4) The expansion of forest communities. Since the development of infrastructure and transportation systems combined with the availability of water sources from royal projects, many people from other provinces are attracted to move and settle in the area. The need of land for agriculture leads to encroachment, occupation, and deforestation for the cultivation of rubber and palm plantations, etc. The case study of Pa Bon district shows that the population has grown significantly. The population statistics from the Phatthalung Provincial Administration Registry Office show the population growth in Pa Bon District as per the following table

*Table 1* Population statistics from the civil registration, Pa Bon District, Phatthalung Province

Year	Population	Population Density (Sq Km)
2000 - 2004	42,393 - 43,558	114.61
2005 - 2009	43,981 - 45,335	119.29
2010 - 2014	45,798 - 47,312	124.29
2015 - 2018	47,312 - 47,890	126.01

Source: Phatthalung Provincial Statistical Office (2019).

The population in Pa Bon district is steadily increasing. As a result, each community must expand its territory to accommodate the growing population. Pa Bon District is located near the forest area. Therefore, it is inevitable that the forest area will be converted into a residential area and an agricultural area for villagers. From the forest area of 276,250 rai, only 273,750 rai of Banthat Mountain Forest on the Phatthalung side remain. (Department of Forestry, 2018)

It can be seen that the forest area of the Banthat Mountains has changed due to the above factors that directly and indirectly affect the forest ecosystem. When the fertility of the forest ecosystem decreases, it also affects the Maniq's way of life and leads to a shortage of resources necessary for their livelihood. Hamilton (2006) raises the question of how the Maniq can live if their forest habitat disappears. The forest is the Maniq's only home. Nowadays, natural resources are limited, so their daily lives face more uncertainties.

#### **4. Tourism, a new phenomenon in the Maniq society**

Tourism in the forest community of Pa Bon district in Phatthalung province was launched in late 2007 by a group of people from the community who established the "Phu Pha Phet Homestay and Ecotourism" (Sombunburana 2015: 85). The area is rich in forests, mountains, valleys, large caves and canals where water flows all year round. The famous Wang Sai Thong waterfall is also an attractive place for tourists in this community. Since the area has been developed and equipped with more convenient transportation and communication systems, tourist groups are encouraged to visit. People in the community are also interested in establishing a tourism business, such as a resort or rafting business. The result is a peaceful community on the edge of the forest opening up for tourists. This leads to continued economic growth of the community (Promsombat, 2010). People in the community also arrange activities for tourists to explore the Maniq's way of life, which also attracts more tourists. Observing the

Maniq's way of life is often integrated into the activities of each host family. "Relax, admire nature, get excited about rafting, visit Sakai": is the phrase used to promote and attract tourist groups to the area, as a means to boost the community's economy.

As a result, the community has become known for its natural and cultural attractions in the tourism market. This is in line with the work at the provincial level. Phatthalung Province set up a tourism marketing development plan in 2012 under the slogan "Phatthalung Mueang Bai Jai"," introducing "Khao Pa Na Le" (mountain, forest, rice field, sea) tourism and incorporating the novelty of the Maniq's way of life to attract a more diverse group of tourists and generate more revenue from ecotourism. (Phatthalung Province Development Plan, 2018; Thongnueakhaeng et al., 2009: 126)

With the province's initiative, many tourist groups visit the province and remote areas such as the communities in Pa Bon district. Every month, there are people who travel to the community including student groups, government and private organizations, a certain group of tourists who are interested in environmental conservation, groups of people who are looking for new experiences, groups of charity tourists who bring things to help, donate, and support the Maniq people who are presented as poor and needy. These groups of tourists travel back and forth, bringing the silent community to life as never before.

In the context of tourism development, there is an attempt to present Maniq people as an attraction as their identity is projected as 'the Other', particularly for economic reason. In the process, the Maniq is being taken advantaged as their lives have been given a new meaning as a commodity that satisfies the needs of tourists, using the identity of otherness to create economic value for communities and provinces.

## 5. Maniq as a tool for local tourism

The Maniq was first introduced as part of tourism business via a representative of the villagers who had a relationship with the Maniq. This representative organizes a tour to Maniq dwellings in the forest. Both parties benefit from each other. The community earns income from the tourists, and the Maniq receives donations in the form of small commodities or money. Around 2007, there were a number of tourist groups who wanted to earn merit by donating to the poor and needy. These groups are interested in making a difference and wanted to do charity works and help other poor people. This is the first step that led the Maniq into tourism.

"At that time, probably from 2007 onwards, not many tourists came here.

Most of those who came are often volunteer groups, schools and various organizations that want to develop and help people who have a hard time in life and lack something. When they learned that there is a Sakai group living in the forest, they contacted local government officials. And the local state representative coordinated with Nanon (pseudonym by author), who knows well and specializes in Sakai. They went together to visit Sakai's dwelling. At that time, however, the Sakai people were still on a high ridge and were not very popular with tourists. Nanon feared that it might be dangerous for tourists to go up the hill. Nanon brought some Sakai down to collect the donations and explained details about Sakai life to the tourists. Photos were taken, and then a tour was taken to other tourist attractions before dispersing. I think this event left some impression on the tourists as well. This group of volunteers wanted to help needy people, and Sakai is considered poor and really lacks everything. The tourists saw it with their own eyes and felt it themselves. So I think this event definitely left an impression and experience on them."

(Ji, pseudonym, personal communication, July 16, 2018)

Although charity tourism, which provides benefits for villagers, received good feedback, as the Maniq received donations that can contribute to daily survival, this initial activity also brings difficulties and problems for the Maniq as well.

"The tourists come each time. They would walk around and enter in our shelter. The leader of the group comes and says, that day will come, this day will come, and say walk down to them. Get the things they brought for us. We have to go down. We can't deny because he gave us an ultimatum, *"If you don't go, I won't help you guys anymore."* What can we do? We have to go down. Every time we go down, we waste our time to find food. Why don't you come and visit us yourself?"

(Dam, pseudonym, personal communication, February 26, 2018)

Charity tourism has developed within the above context for a couple of years. Around 2009, the community launched ethnic tourism, which made the Maniq, the main tourist destination. From a community-based tourism, which was run by representatives of the village, the organization has shifted to local government focusing on tourism promotion, which tries to attract the outside world to the Maniq's way of life. An example of this is the wedding of a Maniq couple that was reported in the media. "By organizing a Sakai wedding, Phatthalung opens Pa Bon town to tourism." (Sakai wedding ceremony, more than 500 people participated, 2009) Tourist groups were invited to participate, experience and learn about the Maniq's way of life.

"The Chief Executive of Phatthalung Provincial Administrative Organization opened the Sakai wedding ceremony in the forest area above Pa Bon Reservoir, Thung Naree Sub-district, Pa Bon District, Phatthalung Province. It was a wedding ceremony between *That Ya* and *Bin La*, the Ngo Sakai people living in the forest of Banthat Mountain Range. More than 500 interested people and tourists came to witness the wedding of the Ngo Sakai people."



Figure 2 Maniq wedding ceremony.

Source: MRG Online <https://mgronline.com/south/detail/9520000112100>

Although this Maniq wedding ceremony is staged as uniquely exotic, it draws references from the past tourism activities that invite couples to get married in exotic locations in Thailand. For the Maniq, this activity is an invention created by people who do not possess the culture. It is not a celebration for the couple but an activity to bring economic benefit for the community and the province. The organizer uses the media as a means to promote tourism and to convince people to experience the novelty of the Maniq people. This ceremony has values and meanings that are greatly different from the Maniq culture.

"For us, if we like someone, we agree to live together forever. We don't have complicated ceremonies. We just visit the girl's parents and inform them that the two of us agreed to love each other. Then the members of the group will perform a ceremony by bringing the galangal leaves and root medicine from the house of both men and women, put them in the fire and burn them until they're completely burned, and the leader of the community will tell the forest spirit. "Er... this couple loves each other, let them live together in peace, without pain and sickness" (in Maniq language). Then we move in and live together. Since both families know each other since they were born, there are no complicated steps."

(Pai, pseudonym, personal communication, June 22, 2018)

"When I got married, someone who was an outsider arranged it for me. I didn't know how to participate in the wedding. But I just told him that we got married and that I had already proposed to my wife's parents. At that time, he hosted a wedding like an outsider. He brought dresses for us, a red loincloth and a red flower for my wife to wear. Although I didn't like the dress, he brought it for me to wear. Then they invited the governor to witness. On the day of the event, there were many people who attended. They made my wife and I feel uncomfortable and afraid. There was nothing we could do. Many people asked me about my livelihood, took pictures, and gave me a marriage certificate. I don't know what it's used for. But I kept it and did what he said until the ceremony was done."

(Yao, pseudonym, personal communication, June 22, 2018)

Tourism activities involving the Maniq continue and new forms of tourism have been developed to learn about the way of life of forest dwellers. In 2015, the project "Learn Nature, Share for Maniq Sakai" was organized by the youth group Hanpho Yim Phatthalung. The aim was to learn about the Maniq people's way of life and culture, and to help poor people by donating them essentials such as rice, dry food, snacks, water and clothes, etc. At that time, the group of participants consisted of students, youth network members and village representatives. The activity was carried out in a simple form: Donation of items and visits to the Maniq community.



Figure 3 "Learn nature, share for Maniq Sakai." By Ban Lo Han community tourism, 2015

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=170625006931450/>

"In this activity, the students wanted to learn about the way of life of the Maniq people, who are the last ethnic group living in the Banthat Mountains. They wanted to learn about the Maniq people and donate to them. Therefore, they collected donations and loaded them in a pickup truck. It felt like going to a volunteer camp. I was one of the participants in this activity. I offered to explain the Maniq way of life in details to the students. This is because I have been familiar with this group for a long time and have studied their culture in some context. After completing the activities to visit the Maniq, I took the

group to dinner together where they shared their experiences, from each student's perspective. The youth groups all worked very well together, seemed happy, and also enjoyed this activity."

(Nam, pseudonym, personal communication, October 20, 2018)

The activity achieved the goals in terms of building experience to the youth group to learn about the Maniq's way of life. The experiences are shared through social media by representatives of the Han Po Smile youth group and a group of community representatives to express their impression of participating in the activities that provide knowledge and fun new experiences as well as helping people who suffer from lack of resources like the Maniq.

Although all the activities presented above may seem like a small trip in which many groups of people participate. People are always learning and bringing things that help the Maniq. From the Maniq side, they are being portrayed as a kind of new and attractive product that invites guests to experience, to challenge themselves and to get excited by the different culture. The Maniq did not play any role at all in process tourism. They just sit quietly for people to stare at them and listen to the conversation between the guide and the group of tourists describing their own lifestyle and culture. Sometimes this is real and sometimes it is not. Within this position, the Maniq is an image of difference that looks pitiful in the eyes of the visitors.

The trend of tourism in this area has been increasing day by day and is becoming more diverse. In 2014, there was tourism in the forms of listening to music, planting in the forest and visiting Maniq culture, organized by local community groups and folk musicians under the name "Music Festival for the Preservation of Sakai (Maniq) Life". It was held at a place on the edge of the forest near the Maniq dwelling. The musicians sang various songs and visited the Maniq group, with donations of necessary items to the Maniq. In addition, the organizer

persuaded the Maniq to set up their *haya* near the temporary event site to participate in the event while also introduce their culture to the festival participants.

Activities like this have been repeatedly organized, for example, in 2017 there was an activity called "Khon Rak Pa Phi Phi Nature: Music Festival of the Phu Banthat Mountains" held with the participation of artists, actors and tourists from other provinces. There were a variety of activities. Apart from musical performance, among the most important activities were those aimed to preserve the ecosystem of the Banthat Forest. For example, trees were planted together in honor of King Rama 9 and King Rama 10 and the landscape around the dam where the concert was held was kept clean. There were stores selling products and food. They showcased local products from the province, including food, fruit and souvenirs. The event was attended by a large number of people. Most importantly, Maniq people came out of the forest and presented their culture in this event. This event was very popular and led to another event in 2018 under the theme of "Phu Banthat 2, Music Festival of the Mountains"



Figure 4 Poster "Phu Banthat 2, Music Festival of the Mountains"

Source: MGR Online <https://mgronline.com/south/detail/960000098620>

"This music festival was organized by representatives of the community in collaboration with a group of artists. They had already had experience with the Maniq. Therefore, they wanted to help the Maniq by donating part of the proceeds to the Maniq, so they could buy food to eat in times of hunger. The event provided fun for the tourists who participated and also for the Maniq. The group of artists who came here came voluntarily. I think we should work together to make this activity a better experience."

(Bao, pseudonym, personal communication, August 28, 2018)

## **6. Maniq negotiation against dominant power**

In case of discomfort, dissatisfaction, or insecurity, in the past Maniq people have fled by taking their babies and run into the deep forest, or even moving to a new place if the current dwelling was no longer safe. This is a natural mechanism of the Maniq. When they feel unsafe, they flee into the forest. Nowadays, such actions are no longer possible due to the limitations of the forest. Part of the forest has become agricultural areas for the villagers. The changes in natural resources have forced the Maniq to become more dependent on the villagers. Both in the form of permanent residence and through the exchange of benefits between them, including food, sustenance, wages, and compensation in various forms, especially related to tourism. The Maniq's negotiations against dominant powers have since developed and changed over time based on changing circumstances. The performative patterns that the Maniq adopted in daily life include the following:

1. Facial expressions. The Maniq has since adopted distinct facial expressions in response to doing something they do not like or want to do. This includes a stiff facial expression, furrowed eyebrows, or a sideways glance that shows I do not want to do such thing.

These facial expressions are often shared between relatives, members of the same group, or even people who are close to them.

2. Gossip in their own language. This is a negotiation process that almost always takes place when the Maniq is unhappy with something. They exchange ideas with others by using their own language to disguise what they want to express in response to being ordered, being forced, or referring to the *hamiq* (outsiders) who are looking down on them or saying things that are not true, etc.

3. Lingering, pretending, absentmindedness. When they are under the influence of groups that force them to do undesirable actions that cannot be denied. The Maniq refuses by indirectly showing that they do not want to do, do not like, or do not understand the reason why they should do it. The lingering and pretending to be absentmindedness happens frequently whether it is during the tourist activities, when they want the Maniq to show their talents, when they receive donations from tourists, or even when they are hired by other people to do the tasks that are not their own.

4. Deception, keeping silence, acting stupid or presenting pathetic appearance. These traits accentuate the Maniq's characteristics of preferring silence and preferring to observe people. Without familiarity with the Maniq, it is difficult to understand clearly whether they are naturally being that way or are just pretending. The Maniq's way of acting stupid is not always their means of denial. Sometimes it is also a call for attention, such as when they pretend to the villagers that they have moved away, pretend to the tourists that they do not know or do not have something.

The above negotiation practices have been adopted in almost every activity involving tourists. Maniq plays no role in the tourism activities. They only do something when they receive the order to do it for the tourists to see. It is noted that every time the Maniq was asked, they do not answer any questions. The verbal communication is one way, by the organizer

giving the information. The Maniq remains silent and stares at the visitors. Sometimes they chatter in their own language so that others could not understand what they mean, or they linger and behave in a way that suggests that they do not want to accept donations from tourists, or even walk away.

Although the Maniq was involved in certain activities that were seen in relation to their rituals and beliefs, there was a hidden negotiation there as well. The Maniq just wanted these activities to be done. Some Maniq negotiated by gossiping afterwards or talking to non-tourists/villagers to express their dissatisfaction, for example, the Maniq told the researchers that "the wedding ceremony in our culture is very simple. We only pay respect to our ancestors. That event is not mine, but it is your culture" (Khai, pseudonym, personal communication, December 27, 2020). The negotiation methods embedded in all these tourism-related acts may seem timid or naïve to others. But in Maniq's dimension, it suggests a negative response. The resistance is coded in behaviors that appear subtle and safe from the eyes of powerful authorities. This is how the Maniq negotiates practices in daily life. It was a process that Maniq could easily perform that evades the supervision of others. Although such methods do not lead them to negotiate anything, the performance was the only way for the Maniq to come to terms with power relations on their own.

As discussed above, the Maniq also negotiates through a mechanism of power relations between groups. A wide range of people interacts with the Maniq in one way or another, including tourism organizers, villagers, government agencies, academics, public health officers, and even educators. The Maniq enlists the help of the groups whom they trust and can talk to in order to solve problems they are facing. This relationship is seen as strengthening the Maniq's power under the authority of another. It is another way to negotiate between Maniq and others when problems arise. No matter how serious the problem is, the Maniq seeks the help of one or the other groups of people who can help them solve the problem.

The Maniq usually describes how pitiful it is to be taken advantage of by powerful people on issues they cannot solve by themselves. Their way of sharing the situation leads to those who listen and are willing to help them. This can be seen as a process of negotiation, a means of solving problems and opposing domination under unjust conditions. In this way, the Maniq has become the mastermind of negotiations between parties. Among the issues the Maniq asks others to help with are:

1) The problem with the land dispute. Often the Maniq is exploited by the villagers, asking them to move stating that they live on the land that belongs to the villagers. Initially, the villagers said the area was still empty and there were no plans with the land, so the Maniq was allowed to live there. The Maniq came and cleared the area until it was empty and built *haya* to live in. Not long after that the villagers drove them off their land. The villagers used the power of ownership to exploit the Maniq by forcing them to work. In such a case, the Maniq was unable to negotiate with the owners. The Maniq asked a local authority for help by describing their problems, thereby portraying them as powerless and pathetic. This led the local officials to feel compassion and really want to help the Maniq. So they negotiated with the landlord. This allowed the Maniq to continue living without having to move away. In addition to these problems, the Maniq is also asking many other authorities for help at the same time. The Maniq wants the authorities to coordinate with to help solve the Maniq's land problems. They ask to be allowed to live in the area they want without being evicted later.

2) Scarcity is a major problem that the Maniq have always faced since the forest has changed. With limited wild animals, there is less food for all group members. These problems are caused by the fact that there are fewer and fewer forest resources. At the same time, there are fewer donated items and the Maniq is unable to obtain food from outside the community themselves. The Maniq coordinates assistance from village officials, local

authorities, and others. When there is a lack of food or money for necessary items, contacts are made to obtain direct assistance, such as obtaining food, dry goods, clothing, batteries, etc.

3) The problems related to tourism. This type of problem occurs frequently and the Maniq cannot solve by themselves. In a tourism situation, the Maniq is invited to participate in activities and then cheated out of the benefits they are entitled to based on the conditions communicated by the organizer. "They came and told us they would organize tours, play music, and tourists would come. We were to pack the necessary things and move for the show. He told us that we would also get food and supplies and that he would give us money" (To, pseudonym Maniq people, personal communication, August 25, 2018), which happened after the activity. Maniq people who were promised to receive the benefits according to the conditions previously mentioned by the organizer (whether it is practical equipment such as flashlights, radios, cell phones, clothes, clothing and money, etc.) do not receive anything. The problem is that the Maniq cannot ask for anything. They ask other acquaintances for help to negotiate the benefits for them according to the agreed terms. After the Maniq received help, many people negotiated peacefully with the organizer. The organizer of the event was not indifferent and willing to fulfill the conditions by providing the benefits that the Maniq should receive according to the agreement.

These practices indicate that the Maniq has learned a system of power surrounding them. At a certain point, they turn from victims to actors. They show their pitifulness when they are in the victim role and demand the attention of those who can negotiate and solve problems that they cannot. As subordinates, like Maniq, they know that they are powerless. Therefore, they rely on the power of others on whom they can rely on to negotiate against the oppression they do not want. The Maniq, having endured the struggle of life under the influence of others, has evolved with practices of resistance and defiance, putting themselves behind the scenes to manipulate others and negotiate with other powers. In other words, the Maniq has not always

been the defenseless as they have adopted and executed the instrument of power themselves. The Maniq is constantly learning and adapting when they are oppressed, and can temporarily transform into a negotiator, resulting in a bargaining power for their own survival under this change.

## 7. The future of Maniq in tourism contexts

In the midst of changing circumstances, the Maniq was thrust into a time of hardship. The Maniq faced many problems that they had never faced before. The knowledge they had acquired from living with the forest was no longer enough to cope with the changes affecting their daily lives. Escape to the depths of the forest as a self-defense mechanism cannot be used in this current situation. It is imperative that the Maniq learn to use and adapt their existing social network as an advantage; to negotiate problems so that they are not being taken advantage of by surrounding people. The include problems with the villagers who drive the Maniq out of the area, or in the context of tourism led by tour operators who exploit the Maniq by using them as a commodity to attract the attention of tourists, or by scamming money or doing things that are not according to the agreement. These issues not only make the Maniq's lives more difficult, but also emphasize their inferiority status and being further subjected to marginalization.

Maniq life is inevitably linked to many power groups, especially in the local tourism context. The Maniq has been commodified by being portrayed as different from ordinary people. They have been presented as needy and poor in order to draw attention to many types of tourists that could bring economic benefits to the community or to certain groups. The Maniq has been in a state of oppression, unable to defend themselves against the many overwhelming forces. Under these circumstances and with limited means to determine their own way of life, the Maniq skillfully transforms themselves into a negotiator against the abuses in tourism, both

through their daily expressions and by borrowing power from other groups. However, these tools have not prevented the Maniq from continuing to be a subject in the context of tourism.

"Tourism which is coming, whether we like it or not, we have to live with it.

At least the tourists who come to help us. We aren't starving. We go to the forest with less food. Nowadays it's getting harder to find food every day."

(Jam, pseudonym, personal communication, August 24, 2018)

Tourism practices which project the identity of the Maniq as being different from other people can be seen as a small portion of activities adopted by certain groups of tourists. However, the pattern of tourism today is the same as it was in the past. In the past, Siamese elites traveled to upcountry either for administrative duties or for pleasure. They narrated on their journeys in the form of administrative reports or poems in which they described about people with a culture different from their own. Winichakul (2000: 534-535) explains that the elites referred to the people they encountered as "the Otherness." They divided these people into two groups: "*chaopa*" (jungle people) and "*chaobannok*" (rural villagers), comparing the culture of the people with the word "*charoen*" (developed) or "*siwilai*" (modern) of the city dwellers. This considers other people's different cultures as "the Others." The way they deal with other cultures is the same in the past and the present. They use "gazing at", "describing", "cataloging" and "recording" the Others as objects. As in the case of Maniq, Maniq is referred to as "*chaopa*", which reflects the undeveloped people in both the way of life and the living conditions. In the context of tourism, Maniq is an object that becomes a commodity for tourists to satisfy and have new experiences. Moreover, the study assumes that this type of tourism will not diminish in the future. Rather, more diverse forms of tourism will be developed and activities will be expanded in neighboring provinces. The Maniq who are affected by tourism are not only group discussed in this paper. Other Maniq groups may also be affected by tourism as well.

"We don't want to be like the others. We want to live in the forest that is as fertile as before. There are many animals that we can hunt. There are plants that we can use. There is water that we can bathe. We can go anywhere without anyone's permission and without fighting with anyone. Let our children and grandchildren have a free life. We can live without anyone harassing us and without anyone looking down on us like we get now."

(Tam, pseudonym, personal communication, February 26, 2018)

The desire for the future of the Maniq is not to accumulate wealth, or to live in a big house. The Maniq simply wants a free life in the fertile forest. A peaceful life without hustle and bustle, with food to eat and the freedom to move around as they wished. They want their children to be able to survive on their own without being taken advantage of and despised by others. Such desires may not be easy to fulfill in the current situation. However, this study also sees certain life paths emerging for Maniq. If all parties (including the Maniq, the villagers, tourism authorities, and local authorities or local government agencies that have influence) understand, help, and support each other, they could make a commitment to not exploiting the Maniq or exploiting their differences for their own benefit, and accept the Maniq's identity as a member of society. In the future, all parties will benefit equally.

Tourism brings various benefits including the community's economy, a condition that the Maniq is aware of, and the researchers do not oppose the entire concept. The portrayal of the Maniq in tourism practices should be adjusted to consider the impact on the Maniq who has been subjected to poor and disadvantaged images that reinforce their otherness in society. To enhance the community through tourism, the researchers suggest encouraging the Maniq to co-create tourism activities by presenting their deeply connected relations with the forest that the Maniq are proud of. The ability to live in the midst of the forest and the wisdoms that others do not have brings both the benefits and the uniqueness that can be linked to a more considerate

form of tourism. Likewise the Thai Yuan ethnic group in Ban Ton Tan, Saraburi province, Wetchawong (2010) pointed out that these people present their identity to tourists through ethnic dance performances and food cultures. They open guesthouses where tourists can stay overnight. Exhibitions about Thai Yuan cultures are displayed in the community hall. This gives visitors the opportunity to better understand the Thai Yuan people and impress the cultures that are different from their own. It also brings the young generation of Thai Yuan to search and explore their lost traditions. This creates awareness among the Thai Yuan. The young generation and youth are proud of their own ethnicity. Another example is the Lahu ethnic group in Chiang Rai province, whose identity is commodified by tourism. The Lahu ethnic group makes its living from agriculture and turns itself into homestay tourism entrepreneurs. They use their ethnic identity to present stories of farming in harmony with nature to tourists. They take on the role of tour guides and tell stories about living in harmony with nature. This provides the Lahu ethnic group with an income and a career as entrepreneurs in homestay tourism (Passayawan, 2010). From these examples, it is clear that the presentation of their identity by ethnic groups for the purpose of tourism. It can generate income at the local and national levels. It is also a tool for promoting ethnic pride and also contributes to the search and revival of lost traditions as well.

Finally, the adaptation and transformation of the Maniq, which occupies the whole body and mind could be seen as a way to cope with external circumstances such as tourism instead of a way for self-improvement. The Maniq does not want to develop themselves as equal as those people in the external society. The Maniq negotiates or fights problems with the desire to live and survive in peace without being expected of anything rather than to be with the forest. Even if the forest has changed or reduced in size, the Maniq still holds on to the idea of living free. No matter how many years have passed or what direction has changed, the Maniq will remain with the forest, even if what has been lost or changed cannot be reversed.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> Remarks by Mr. Phisit Boonchuang (Governor of Phatthalung province and chairman of the public relations project for promoting tourism image of Phatthalung province) at the meeting "Phatthalung Traveling Activities" organized by the Office of Tourism and Sports, Phatthalung province on 14-15 June 2011.

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