

# Revitalizing Ritual Performances for Environmental Conservation and Climate Change Adaptation: A Case Study of Ecotourism in Khaw Nu M'cung National Park, Myanmar

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## ABSTRACT

Environmental conservation is vital for sustaining biodiversity, ensuring ecosystem services, and mitigating climate change. Despite its importance, a theoretical gap exists in integrating indigenous knowledge with contemporary conservation strategies. Indigenous knowledge, which deeply coexisted with cultural practices, has been marginalized due to colonial histories and religious development. This marginalization neglects valuable ecological insights embedded in traditional rituals and practices. However, ecotourism presents a promising avenue for bridging this gap by leveraging the symbiotic relationship between indigenous communities and their natural environment. Ecotourism centered on indigenous practices fosters environmental stewardship and empowers local communities economically and culturally. Ecotourism can enhance conservation efforts while promoting sustainable tourism activities that highlight traditional ecological knowledge while preserving cultural heritage. In the context of Khaw Nu M'cung National Park in Myanmar, incorporating Chin indigenous rituals and traditional activities into ecotourism initiatives offers a holistic approach to environmental conservation. The touristic performance can guide sustainable resource management and biodiversity preservation. This study proposes a new dynamic of ecological conservation, emphasizing the revival and integration of indigenous rituals and traditional knowledge. Doing so aims to create a sustainable model that respects cultural heritage while addressing contemporary conservation challenges, ensuring the harmonious coexistence of nature and indigenous communities.

## KEYWORDS

Environmental Conservation; Ecotourism; Indigenous knowledge; Ritual; Myanmar.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Chin State, located in northwestern Myanmar, borders Bangladesh, India, Rakhine State, Magwe Region, and Sagaing Region. It covers around 14,400 square miles. The people who settled in the Chin Hills refer to themselves as Chin indigenous people because they arrived in the region before anybody else. Among the more prominent names given to this social group are “Chin” and “Lushai,” generally in Myanmar, and “Mizo” and “Kuki” in India (Sakhong, 2013). Even though the name is differently applied, all clans share a common history, culture, customs, rituals, and traditions. The dialects they speak have a common root language belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Most of the literature on the Chin, including national and international documents, use the term “Chin” or “Chin indigenous people” who settled in the Chin State, Myanmar. Indeed, it is the home to the southern Chin indigenous people, who called themselves the K'cho tribe, which includes the Dai, Da Yindu, Uppu, Mun, and Ng'gha clans, according to traditional clan descendants.

This research takes place in the Southern Chin State of Myanmar. Mount Victoria, named by the British, is known as Natma Taung by the Myanmar government and Khaw Nu M'cung by the Chin native people, reaching 10,500 feet above sea level. The Khaw Nu M'cung National Park is rich in natural resources, including diverse flora and fauna,

with habitats such as evergreen hill forests, grasslands, and rhododendron fields. Khaw Nu M'cung National Park in southern Chin State, established in 1997 and covering 279 square miles, holds potential for ecotourism due to its natural beauty, favorable weather, and rich biodiversity. The park houses over 159 fauna species. It was established to preserve biodiversity; the park promotes ecotourism and conservation, integrating Chin traditional heritage into its programs, reviving indigenous knowledge that had declined due to state domination and Christian practices. However, development faces challenges such as superficial conservation efforts, lack of stakeholder involvement, and ineffective solid waste management.

Regarding the socio-economic situation of the indigenous communities who reside in the Khaw Nu M'cung National Park, shifting cultivation seems to be the most common practice to obtain their essential nourishment and exchange products on the market. Regarding access to local markets and trading between villages, the geography of the Chin State has made it challenging to develop secure and reliable routes between towns and townships. Generally, the local farmers have been blamed as the destroyers of biodiversity, species, and the forest in Chin State. In 2000, the government tried to introduce tea and coffee plantations as a substitute for shifting cultivation, but it failed. The area was then introduced as an ecotourism destination by the central government, and some of the core concepts of ecotourism still need to be developed. Therefore, this research emphasizes ecotourism development in the Khaw Nu M'cung National Park at Kanpetlet, the home of the world's rarest bird species. The native people also felt that the government did not preserve the national park well and criticized the fact that ecotourism and conservation efforts are only implemented on paper and that no conservation mechanism is required to incorporate the various stakeholders in the national park. In these circumstances, the local indigenous communities are being blamed by local authorities for destroying the forests, burning fires to practice shifting cultivation and hunting endangered wildlife in the woods. Garbage management has become increasingly weak, and none of the local hotel industries, government, or tour operators are responsible for managing it. The accumulation of litter, paper, cartons, cans, plastic, polyethylene, and cans has become a threat to the local communities and the natural biodiversity of the national park.

The ecotourism in Khaw Nu M'cung National Park, located in Chin State, Myanmar, relates to broader ecotourism debates by exemplifying sustainable tourism's practical challenges and opportunities. Known for its rich biodiversity and unique cultural heritage, the park's promotion of ecotourism aims to boost conservation efforts and provide economic opportunities for local Chin communities. Indeed, ecotourism in Khaw Nu M'cung addresses the broader environmental debate by showcasing how strict regulations and community-led conservation programs can balance tourism with ecological preservation. This approach can serve as a model for mitigating adverse environmental impacts, such as habitat destruction and biodiversity loss, which critics often highlight as significant issues in ecotourism (Weaver & Lawton, 2007).

At the same time, the cultural impact of ecotourism in Khaw Nu M'cung provides a lens through which to examine preserving traditional practices while catering to tourists. Stronza & Gordillo (2008) argue that it is vital to respect cultural exchanges that benefit tourists and local communities. They propose understanding the essentiality of cultural homogenization and the commodification of indigenous cultures. In addition, the economic impact is also a critical aspect, as ecotourism has the potential to provide substantial benefits to local communities (Stronza, 2007). By contrast, Honey (2008) criticizes that ensuring equitable distribution of these benefits remains challenging. Indeed, this concern is an essential factor in effective community-based tourism models, where locals have ownership and control over tourism activities

and are crucial for addressing the issue of unequal economic gains often captured by external investors.

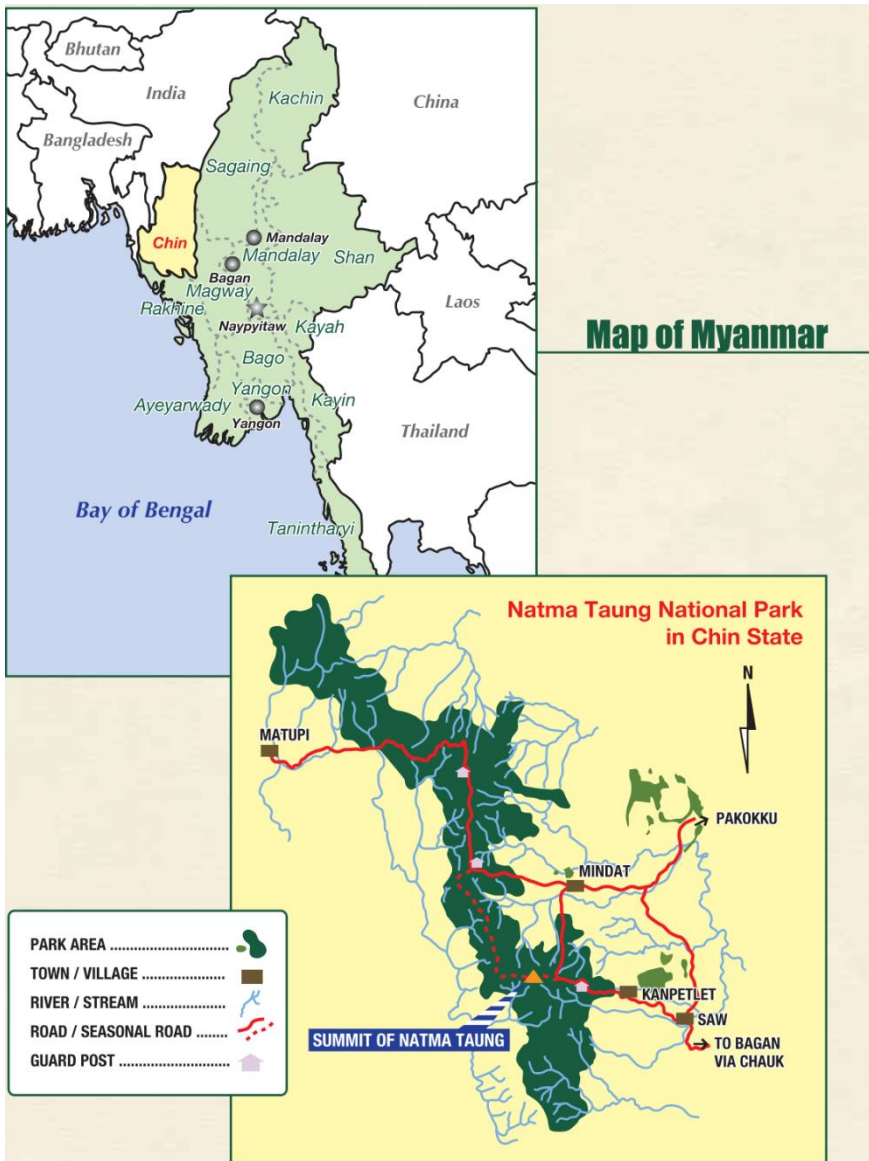


Figure 1. Map of Khaw Nu M'cung as a research location<sup>1</sup>

Another important factor is the management of tourist behavior in order to align it with local customs and environmental conservation efforts (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Thus, educational programs for tourists about the area's cultural and ecological significance can foster more responsible tourism practices, addressing concerns about the imposition of external values and expectations on local communities (Butcher,

<sup>1</sup> This map is adapted from the Book of Taxonomic Enumeration of Natma Taung National Park

2007). By focusing on these elements, Khaw Nu M'cung National Park fills the gaps in academic controversies surrounding ecotourism. For instance, indigenous knowledge plays a crucial role in bridging these gaps. The traditional ecological knowledge of the Chin people offers valuable insights into sustainable environmental management and conservation practices. Integrating indigenous knowledge into ecotourism strategies can enhance the effectiveness of conservation efforts and ensure that tourism development respects and preserves local cultural heritage. This approach aligns with the broader debate on incorporating indigenous perspectives in sustainable development practices. By documenting and utilizing indigenous knowledge, this research can address the academic controversies related to ecotourism's environmental, economic, and cultural impacts, offering more comprehensive and culturally sensitive solutions. Indeed, ecotourism in Khaw Nu M'cung National Park exemplifies how sustainable tourism can address broader ecotourism debates and fill academic gaps by integrating indigenous knowledge. The park's initiatives provide valuable case studies for sustainable tourism development by balancing environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic benefits. This approach contributes to a more nuanced understanding of ecotourism and highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge in creating effective and culturally respectful tourism practices.

While extensive scholarly research has delved into various facets of ecotourism, such as its structural components, positive impacts, tourist perspectives, and the operational aspects of tour operators, there still needs to be a more significant aim in understanding the indigenous perspective on ecotourism. Indigenous communities possess unique worldviews, cultural values, and sustainable practices that shape their definition and perception of ecotourism. This paper argues that exploring the indigenous perception of ecotourism is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of its dynamics. Moreover, it examines how indigenous communities adapt their knowledge of ecotourism, contrasting with the Western scholarly paradigm. By recognizing and respecting ecotourism's indigenous definition and adaptation, scholars and practitioners can foster more inclusive and sustainable approaches that align with these communities' cultural values and environmental conservation practices. This research contributes to bridging the gap between Western-centric perspectives and the indigenous worldview, ultimately enriching the discourse on ecotourism and promoting culturally sensitive and community-driven sustainable tourism practices.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The tourism sector continues to grow, making a substantial contribution to the gross domestic product of many countries, creating job opportunities, and driving sustainable development. Owing to its income-generating capacity, tourism plays a crucial role in the developmental sector, fostering a healthy economy and mitigating poverty within communities. The tourism sector is broadly categorized into mass tourism and ecotourism (Kiper, 2013), each with its own complex methods and procedures to achieve distinct goals. Mass tourism encompasses inbound, outbound, religious, and historical tourism, while ecotourism involves activities such as bird watching, community-based tourism, adventure tourism, hiking, snorkeling, kayaking, and visits to animal sanctuaries. Ecotourism explicitly focuses on biodiversity conservation, local economic development, and positive impacts on the culture of the community (Coria & Calfucura, 2012). The indigenous perspective on ecosystems, biodiversity, and wildlife, distinct from the scientific community, is crucial. Respecting nature's existence calls for conserving diverse environmental formations and habitats. Ecotourism provides benefits and experiences related to sustainability and eco-friendly practices and

creates business opportunities for the local community. For example, tourists can enjoy local customs and services, allowing native communities to earn income and preserve and promote their traditional ways of life through cultural displays and economic activities such as selling traditional foods and handicrafts.

There are both positive and negative aspects in regard to ecotourism. Several scholars have studied these aspects, giving us a clearer picture of how ecotourism works in real life. Concerning its positive aspects, some of the demonstrated impacts of ecotourism indicate increased revenues which can be utilized to maintain parks and wildlife areas as well as supporting the local community (Weaver, 2001; Krüger, 2005). It also has been shown to result in the creation of new jobs as well as improving local infrastructure and diversifying the local economy (Weaver, 2001). However, these positive aspects are packaged together with various negative impacts which can harm the places it aims to protect. Generally, ecotourism leads to an increase in tourists who may damage the local habitat, cause pollution, and disturb wildlife (Weaver, 2001; Cater, 2007; Krüger, 2005). It can also lead to the overuse of local resources, which may harm local culture (Weaver, 2001), as well as result in increased inequalities within the community (Carter, 2002). Lastly, many ecotourism initiatives tend to follow a one-size-fits-all approach, which does not take into account the local context and misinterprets that different communities have distinct needs and challenges (Quesenberry, 2000). These theorists have put forward solutions in order to deal with these challenges. Carter (2002), for example, argues that we must balance the economic benefits of ecotourism with the negative social environmental impacts in order to ensure that it helps everyone and does not cause more problems than it solves. It is also highly recommended that ecotourism initiatives not only involve the local community but rather allow community members to be the principal managers (Meletis & Campbell (2007). Finally, Quesenberry (2000) argues that ecotourism initiatives need more realistic and tailored approaches that consider the specific context of each place.

The concepts and definitions of tourism vary across communities. Sustainable tourism aims for long-term responsibility within a community, while community-based tourism seeks shared responsibility at the local level (Boonratana, 2010). In addition, the insights from Giampiccoli & Saayman (2016) underscore the importance of context-specific definitions in understanding the concepts of values, principles, and responsibilities, particularly within the tourism sector. Building upon this, Prosser (2001) advocates for a broad definition of tourism that encompasses physical movement, the transient nature of stays, and the diverse types of activities and experiences travelers engage in during their journeys. Consequently, Fennell (2001) introduces ecotourism as a subset of tourism that emphasizes conservation, education, ethics, sustainability, and benefits for the local community. This framework highlights the potential for tourism to provide economic opportunities, contribute positively to environmental conservation efforts, and empower local communities. By integrating these principles into tourism practices, ecotourism seeks to minimize adverse environmental impacts while maximizing benefits for visitors and host communities. By acknowledging the diverse range of values, principles, and responsibilities inherent in tourism, stakeholders can work towards creating experiences that not only enrich the lives of travelers but also contribute positively to the well-being of destinations and communities.

Overall, the effectiveness of tourism initiatives hinges on clear definitions and thoughtful application of principles tailored to each community's unique context. Tourism initiatives can navigate challenges and maximize benefits by recognizing the diverse cultural, environmental, economic, and social factors. Clear definitions ensure that tourism activities are culturally sensitive, environmentally sustainable, and

socially responsible, fostering positive relationships between visitors and the community. Thus, clear principles can guide accountable tourism development, preserving natural resources, promoting inclusive economic growth, and enhancing social well-being. Ultimately, aligning tourism practices with local values and aspirations can lead the way for sustainable tourism that enriches communities, fosters cultural exchange, and creates lasting positive impacts for all stakeholders involved.

In the case of Chin ecotourism, it emphasizes social-orientation principles for sustainability and improving the well-being of the local people, focusing on the inclusion and valuing of the way of life and customs of indigenous people's tourism activities. It also adapts some of the tourism standards from ASEAN's community-based tourism, defined as any tourist activity owned, operated, or managed by the community, benefiting sustainable livelihoods and preserving cultural traditions and heritage (Khanal & Babar, 2007). It is crucial to construct the debate on the official terminology between the public and private sectors to emphasize the value of conservation, education, and benefits to the local community, enabling the government to formulate concrete definitions, legislation, and public policies. Although ecotourism aims to conserve the ecosystem, biodiversity, and wildlife, the challenges are still unsolved by national policy. For instance, human behaviors, such as wildlife hunting, forest burning, flower picking, and poor waste management in national parks, negatively impact ecotourism's value. Therefore, it is crucial to define the practices of ecological conservation through ecotourism participation of indigenous people as a responsible approach for conserving the environment and empowering local communities, supporting well-being rooted in indigenous knowledge, values, and practices that conserve native lands, watersheds, wildlife habitats, and forests.

In addition, it is crucial to adopt the knowledge-management approach to fill the gap between knowledge and practice in indigenous society, cooperating with indigenous people to share knowledge and ideas for value-added products and services (Ruhanen, 2008). For instance, whether viewed as a global abstraction or applied locally in indigenous society, sustainability is crucial. A new proposal for sustainable development, focusing on heritage as a "cultural" concept, aims to preserve cultural significance, meaning, language, diversity, collective memory, and identities (Nurse, 2006). Furthermore, with a critical role in environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community resilience, indigenous knowledge provides an invaluable resource that contrasts with modern practices often disconnected from local ecosystems and sustainability. This body of knowledge, developed through generations of interaction with the natural environment, offers a holistic approach to managing natural resources that emphasizes balance, respect, and sustainability. However, the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge face significant challenges, including the impacts of modernization and globalization, legal and political barriers, and the loss of elder knowledge bearers. These challenges create a substantial knowledge gap that, if addressed, can be utilized to enhance ecotourism initiatives, promoting environmental sustainability and conservation while supporting indigenous communities economically and culturally.

To understand sustainability, indigenous knowledge systems are deeply embedded in indigenous communities' cultural practices and daily lives, providing sustainable methods for managing natural resources and maintaining biodiversity. Berkes (1999) underscores the importance of this knowledge in environmental conservation, noting that indigenous communities possess an intricate understanding of their local ecosystems, which contributes significantly to biodiversity management. Traditional practices provide a deep understanding of local ecosystems, sustainable practices, and cultural heritage that modern approaches often overlook. This knowledge is integrated

into ecotourism through various means, such as guided tours, cultural demonstrations, community-based tourism initiatives, and conservation projects. For instance, indigenous guides share traditional ecological knowledge and cultural narratives, offering tourists a richer and more meaningful connection to the natural environment (McCarter & Gavin, 2011). Cultural demonstrations and workshops allow visitors to engage in traditional crafts, dances, and cooking methods, highlighting sustainable resource use and cultural significance (Leepreecha, 2005). Community-based tourism initiatives, where indigenous communities design and manage tourism activities, ensure these practices align with local values and priorities, supporting cultural preservation and economic development (Brosius et al., 2005).

Furthermore, ecotourism projects focused on nature and wildlife conservation often incorporate traditional ecological practices, such as indigenous fire management techniques, demonstrating the practical application of indigenous knowledge in modern conservation efforts (Nyong et al., 2007). This integration enhances the tourist experience by providing unique, culturally rich encounters and promotes environmental sustainability by adhering to practices that maintain biodiversity and ecosystem health (Posey & Dufield, 1996). The economic benefits of ecotourism for indigenous communities are significant, generating income and creating jobs while supporting the transmission and preservation of cultural heritage (Gupta, 2011). Educational opportunities provided by ecotourism raise awareness about the importance of indigenous knowledge and environmental conservation, fostering greater appreciation and respect among visitors (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). By bridging the knowledge gap between traditional and modern ecological management, ecotourism offers a promising avenue for achieving sustainability and conservation goals while enhancing the well-being and resilience of indigenous communities.

Therefore, the literature on indigenous knowledge highlights its critical role in environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community resilience. It also emphasizes the challenges of modernization, legal barriers, and the loss of elder knowledge bearers. Comparing and contrasting the traditional and modern perspectives on environmental management reveals a substantial knowledge gap that can be leveraged for ecotourism initiatives to promote ecological sustainability and conservation. With its deep-rooted understanding of local ecosystems and sustainable resource management practices, traditional environmental knowledge contrasts with modern tourism's often more exploitative approaches. By integrating indigenous knowledge into ecotourism, communities can offer unique, culturally rich experiences that educate visitors about sustainable living and environmental stewardship. This approach helps preserve and valorize indigenous knowledge and provides economic benefits to indigenous communities, fostering a symbiotic relationship between cultural heritage and ecological sustainability. For instance, community-based tourism initiatives can include guided tours led by indigenous people, showcasing traditional practices such as agroforestry and water conservation, thereby bridging the knowledge gap and reinforcing the value of indigenous wisdom in contemporary environmental conservation efforts.

Nevertheless, co-existing environmental conservation knowledge has been studied by many scholars, focusing on conservation, community-based initiatives, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and indigenous forest management in various regions (Fisher et al., 2020). The study highlights the necessity of harmonizing customary rights with national policies to ensure sustainable forest management. It advocates for the central government to acknowledge local efforts and licenses, thereby supporting both environmental conservation and the rights of indigenous communities. Consequently, Asriyani & Verheijen (2020) discuss the complexities of integrating local conservation

efforts with national strategies, emphasizing the importance of recognizing customary rights, developing inclusive policies, and fostering community participation in conservation and development initiatives, particularly eco-tourism. They argue that integrating local interests into ecotourism initiatives is essential for sustainability and equitable benefits. Recognizing and supporting customary rights, developing inclusive policies, and fostering community participation in conservation and development initiatives are crucial to ecotourism.

Interestingly, Fisher et al. (2020) highlight the critical role of local institutions, adaptive strategies, and sustained research in addressing environmental and conservation challenges in the Wallacea region, advocating for respectful engagement with local communities and nuanced approaches to conservation. They argue that local knowledge, historical and political ecology, and sustained research efforts should be integrated to address the conservation and environmental challenges facing the Wallacea region. It emphasizes the need for respectful engagement with local institutions and communities, capacity-building among local researchers, and a nuanced approach that considers both traditional knowledge and emerging issues for a holistic understanding of conservation dynamics in Wallacea. Meanwhile, Akhmar et al. (2022) delve into the TEK of the C  r  kang people, showcasing their deep connection to the forest, protective attitudes, and the importance of symbolic knowledge in sustaining conservation efforts, emphasizing the intertwining of cultural beliefs, ethics, and practical conservation actions. Their main argument centers on assessing when and how the C  r  kang people's TEK contributes to effective forest conservation. Indeed, the C  r  kang people's deep connection to the forest, rooted in their cosmology and origin myths, have fostered protective attitudes akin to "sacred ecology" (Berkes, 1999; Akhmar, 2022). Their ethical norms enforce this connection, limiting access to the forest except for rituals and emphasizing symbolic knowledge over technical methods. The sacred forests provide cultural and regulating ecosystem services, benefiting the community and the environment. Thus, the study underscores the significance of TEK in forest conservation, especially when aligned with adaptive strategies and external support, highlighting the complexities and resilience of indigenous approaches to environmental stewardship.

In addition, Depari (2023) states that the marginalization of indigenous communities has led to their exclusion from policymaking processes, impacting their ability to participate in decisions related to natural resource management. The argument emphasizes the role of social capital, local norms, and informal sanctions in influencing pro-environmental behaviors and community-led initiatives. It underscores the significance of these principles in governing shared resources effectively and sustainably, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced in indigenous forest management. Thus, the study sheds light on the complexities of community-based resource governance and the ongoing efforts to address historical marginalization and promote inclusive decision-making processes. Therefore, the pieces of literature reflect an understanding of the complexities, challenges, and resilience of community-based conservation and sustainable development approaches. It is also crucial to address the analysis of the area's need to emphasize inclusive, adaptive, and context-specific strategies integrating local knowledge, values, and institutions into broader conservation frameworks in Khaw Nu M'cung National Park of Chin State.

Consequently, Gilbert (2006) argues that awareness of rights and project implications empowers communities to engage more effectively and assert their interests in development projects. Therefore, it emphasizes the critical elements of FPIC and reflects a broader shift in development paradigms towards more ethical and inclusive practices prioritizing affected communities' rights and participation. This



argument can also be worked within the broader academic debates, highlighting the importance of integrating FPIC into development practices to achieve more equitable and sustainable outcomes in ecotourism.

In addition, managing tourist behavior to align with local customs and environmental conservation efforts is crucial (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Educational programs for tourists about the area's cultural and ecological significance can foster more responsible tourism practices, addressing concerns about the imposition of external values on local communities (Butcher, 2007). By focusing on these elements, Khaw Nu M'cung National Park addresses academic controversies surrounding ecotourism, especially regarding indigenous knowledge's role. The traditional ecological knowledge of the Chin people offers valuable insights into sustainable environmental management and conservation practices, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of ecotourism's environmental and cultural impacts. Furthermore, adopting a knowledge-management approach to bridge the gap between knowledge and training in indigenous society is crucial (Ruhanen, 2008). Indigenous knowledge systems, deeply embedded in cultural practices and daily lives, provide sustainable methods for managing natural resources and maintaining biodiversity (Berkes, 1999). Integrating indigenous knowledge into ecotourism initiatives enriches the tourist experience and promotes environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and community resilience (McCarter & Gavin, 2011; Battiste, 2002; Brosius et al., 2005). By valuing and leveraging indigenous knowledge, ecotourism can achieve its conservation and sustainability goals while supporting the well-being and resilience of indigenous communities.

However, despite these strengths, a research gap in indigenous knowledge is evident. While the scholars touch upon the importance of indigenous knowledge in the context of ecotourism and sustainable development, there needs to be more detailed exploration and critical analysis of how indigenous communities perceive and contribute to these initiatives. Further research could explore how indigenous knowledge systems shape and enhance ecotourism practices, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between traditional wisdom and modern tourism initiatives. In conclusion, the strengths of the scholars' contributions lie in their extensive coverage, in-depth analysis, clear articulation of ideas, global relevance, multidisciplinary approach, and application of academic concepts. However, the research gap related to the detailed exploration of indigenous knowledge in the context of ecotourism presents an opportunity for further scholarly inquiry and a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in the intersection of traditional practices and contemporary tourism initiatives.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, drawing on secondary data analysis, in-depth interviews, and field observation to investigate conservation practices, social norms, and ecotourism in Khaw Nu M'cung National Park. Secondary data analysis formed the initial phase of the research, providing a comprehensive review of existing literature and historical context. This step established a foundational understanding to guide further investigation.

In-depth interviews were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders, including the former director and current staff members of the National Park management office, local tour guides, motorbike carrier group leaders, members of the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) committee, representatives from the Open Development Foundation (ODF) community organization, and domestic and international tourists. A total of sixteen individuals were selected based on a snowball sampling method. The length of

in-depth interviews varied according to each interview, ranging between one to two hours, with an average duration of one hour per interview. Interviews were conducted in the Chin language by the researcher and subsequently translated into English. These interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into integrating indigenous knowledge in ecotourism, tourist interests, and challenges faced in sustainable development.

Given the researcher's inability to conduct onsite research due to the COVID-19 pandemic and political conflicts in the area, communication with key informants was primarily facilitated through Zoom and telephone calls between 2021 and 2023. The interviews were digitally recorded, and interview notes and scripts were transcribed into English. The researcher carried out the transcription process manually. An inductive process was employed to identify themes, with initial codes developed aligning with themes such as indigenous knowledge, understanding of ecotourism, local participation, rituals, and environmental changes. The data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observation with local community members, ecotourism operators, and environmental experts. Following the data collection, an inductive process was initiated to identify and develop themes manually in an Excel spreadsheet. The initial step involved familiarization with the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. During this phase, initial notes were taken, and preliminary codes were assigned to data segments corresponding to the initial codes: ecotourism, local participation, ritual, and environmental change. Open coding was used to break down the data into manageable segments, assigning initial codes such as 'ecotourism benefits,' 'community engagement,' 'ritual performance,' and 'environmental impacts.' These codes were then reviewed and refined, grouping similar codes to form more coherent sub-codes. The identified themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the data and were relevant to the research questions. This inductive approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the interactions between ecotourism, local participation, rituals, and environmental change in the studied context. The ongoing engagement, by continuous communication and interaction between the researcher and critical informants over the specified period, ensured the accurate interpretation and validation of data, particularly regarding the perceptions of the Chin indigenous people.

Field observation was conducted from April to May 2019 and March to April 2021, involving participant observation and interaction with community members. Activities included documenting indigenous practices, observing rituals, conducting oral history interviews, and engaging with traditional dance group leaders and former CBT committee members. All interactions and observations were meticulously recorded in field notes and voice recordings, with oral consent obtained from participants. For data analysis, I employ a grounded theory approach. According to Glaser & Strauss (1967), grounded theory was applied in 1967. It is a qualitative research method that builds theories directly from data through repeated, comparative analysis. It involves open, intermediate, and selective coding to identify, connect, and refine categories. In addition, it has extended this with a constructivist approach, emphasizing the co-construction of meaning between researchers and participants and highlighting the influence of the researcher's perspective on theory development (Charmaz, 2006). Both approaches stress the importance of deriving theory from empirical data, ensuring it is grounded in real-world observations. Indeed, all interviews and field notes underwent initial coding, leading to identifying different themes that aligned with my original research questions to understand how indigenous knowledge has reemerged due to ecotourism development in the Chin community.

Additionally, field observations were conducted during cultural presentation sessions and hiking expeditions in the national park, allowing for comprehensive data

collection through interactive and observational methods. By combining qualitative insights from interviews with rich data gathered through field observation, this study aimed to examine the complex interplay between conservation practices, cultural traditions, and ecotourism, contributing to a deeper understanding of the sustainable management of Khaw Nu M'cung National Park.

Informed consent is fundamental to ethical research practice, ensuring that participants fully know their involvement in the study and the associated implications. For this study, informed consent was obtained from all participants before any data collection commenced. Participants were given a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, the research procedures, and potential risks and benefits. This information was provided through oral consent, and participants were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity, detailing how their data would be securely stored and used solely for research purposes. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

#### 4. RESULTS

##### 4.1 Revival of indigenous knowledge in Khaw Nu M'cung National Park

Khaw Nu M'cung National Park was established by the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MECF) in 1997 with four primary objectives: to conserve biodiversity and promote sustainability, preserve watershed and forest management, improve community development through the establishment of a national park, and generate income through ecotourism services. The park spans three townships—Kanpetlet, Mindat, and Matupi—covering 176,202 acres. The region's temperature ranges from 3 degrees Celsius in winter to 32 degrees Celsius in summer and includes diverse ecosystems like hill evergreen forests, pine forests, hill savannah, and hill forests. According to the national park report of 2018, the national park was inhabited by 141 types of wildlife, 35 types of insects, 345 types of birds, 77 types of butterflies, and 210 types of orchids in the area, with the white-browed nuthatch bird being a notable native species exclusive to this national park. Ecotourism activities in the region include sightseeing, hiking, birdwatching, and orchid, and flower tours, offering travelers a chance to experience the culture of the Chin indigenous people. A hotel zone comprising seven hotels in Kanpetlet and Mindat townships was established within the national park (Office Report, 2018).

Despite these goals, the National Park and ecotourism were primarily initiated by the central government to incorporate the business sector rather than empower the initiative of the native people, as evident in the interview with Mr. Mang [pseudonym] local businessman. Especially after the central government officially launched the hotel zone, conservation became weaker because hoteliers needed to participate actively in environmental conservation. Indeed, the overarching aim of ecotourism is to conserve biodiversity, enhance ecology, and facilitate economic development for the local community, contributing to poverty reduction through income generated from ecotourism services (Office Report, 2018). Thus, the national park has become a tourist spot in southern Chin State, and many domestic tourists come to explore nature and culture in ecotourism activities.

*“The most famous tourism activities are cultural presentations, trekking, and camping in the national park areas. Among them, the cultural presentation is highly demanded by domestic and international tourists because Chin indigenous myths and traditional ways of life are unique from other parts of Myanmar.”* (Interview with Mr. Mang [pseudonym], Local businessman, May 18, 2019)

Regarding cultural presentation, traditional dance, ritual performance on indigenous living, and the performance of women's facial tattoos attract the most attention from tourists. Traditional Chin indigenous rituals, particularly those related to environmental knowledge and conservation, have reemerged with the development of ecotourism. Chin locals now present their customs and traditions to tourists, including oral history and cosmology through ecotourism activities. Myanmar's governance and Christian belief prohibit most traditional rituals, causing a scarcity of cultural practices. For instance, the Chin State boasts the highest percentage of Christians in Myanmar, a transformation primarily attributed to Reverend Arthur Carson, an American Baptist missionary, and his wife, who arrived in Chin lands in 1899 (Lian, 2021). Establishing a mission station at Hakha, the current capital of the Chin state, they converted the Chin people to Christianity. They introduced new traditions, eventually denouncing the pre-existing practices as barbaric. Despite the Christian influence, Chin indigenous knowledge experiences a resurgence due to resistance to the cultural and traditional understanding of ecological conservation; practices previously prohibited by the state and Christianity. Despite approximately 90% of the Chin population following Christianity, the eldest members of the community remain the sole performers of these traditional rituals, marking a significant aspect of Chin history. With increased exposure to the outside world, younger Chin individuals may find these traditional rituals less attractive. However, photographers, journalists, and historians frequently visit the Chin state to document these vanishing rituals. Many Chin customs and traditions have been reconstructed, combined with ecotourism, showcasing their ancestors' ecological knowledge and practices.

*“I was invited to showcase a ritual activity called ginger (local name “thing”), communication between human and non-human mountain spirits. I also need to learn from our elderly to confirm their performance because I have never been trained to gain this knowledge. I enjoy presenting the performance of traditional rituals to tourists. It is not just to earn money but also to share knowledge about environmental and cultural presentation. The tourists and a new generation of our indigenous can learn throughout our performance in ecotourism activity”* (Interview with Mr. Ki [pseudonym], May 20, 2019)



**Figure 2.** Rituals Performance Ground at National Park Areas

On the verge of disappearance for many years, this knowledge has found renewed expression in tourism presentations within the national park, emphasizing the importance of the forest and presenting forest management practices as forms of ancestral indigenous knowledge. Indeed, Chin indigenous people's myths involve using ginger in rituals to communicate with various mountain spirits, as ginger is considered a means of connecting with these spirits, and they avoid areas with ginger plantations. This practice serves to conserve ginger as a traditional herb. Traditionally, native people built short-term shelter houses on their farmlands, designating one corner of their fields for growing ginger, often adjacent to the shelter house. Shifting cultivation was organized around ritual activities, each requiring ginger to communicate with the spirits for various reasons. Ginger is also used as medicine and an ingredient in foods, giving everyone a designated "ginger corner" in their farmland. During these rituals, offerings are made to the spirits using tree ginger, which grows naturally on trees, or forest ginger, found on the forest grounds.



**Figure 3.** Ritual Communication between Humans and non-human mountain spirits.

As Phillips (2021) discusses in "Staging Indigeneity: Salvage Tourism and the Performance of Native American History," the desire to 'preserve' indigenous cultures can lead to a paradox where the very act of preservation alters the cultural practices being protected. This dynamic is evident in the ritual presentation in Saw Lawng village, where tourism activities intended to support cultural heritage have resulted in modified performances that cater to tourist expectations rather than maintaining traditional authenticity (Phillips, 2021). Indeed, while salvage tourism has brought economic opportunities to the Saw lawng community, it has also introduced challenges. Staging cultural practices for tourists can diminish their traditional significance, and the economic benefits are only sometimes equitably shared. This duality underscores the need to carefully manage tourism activities to ensure cultural preservation efforts do not inadvertently lead to cultural erosion. Thus, salvage tourism provides a critical lens to understand the complex interactions between tourism and cultural preservation in Saw Lawng Village. An interview with a CBT member from Saw Lawng village stressed that,

*"I felt that ecotourism had brought back our indigenous knowledge and practices, and even religious institutions have prohibited it. Nevertheless, it is a learning space for our new generation who shall know indigenous ways of conservation of environment, culture and tradition."* (Interview with Msw. Mai Mai [pseudonym], March 28, 2021)

Thus, ecotourism, by creating economic incentives for the indigenous community, becomes a means of preserving and revitalizing their traditional practices. The presentation of rituals and customs to tourists sustains these practices and instills a sense of pride and value within the community. The revival of traditional rituals, such as those related to ecological conservation, not only aligns with the principles of ecotourism but also contributes to the overall cultural heritage of the Chin indigenous people. For instance, external visitors' documentation and appreciation of indigenous knowledge, including photographers, journalists, and historians, play a crucial role in perpetuating these practices. This statement is evident in the interview with Anthony, a local tour guide who takes tourists to see cultural performances in the village every day:

*“Now ritual presentation plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between the indigenous community and outsiders, narrating oral histories and cosmologies that were once forbidden”* (Mr. Nai [pseudonym], March 30, 2021).

Recognizing and celebrating indigenous wisdom within the ecotourism framework creates a cycle of cultural preservation, economic empowerment, and heightened environmental consciousness. In essence, ecotourism becomes a transformative force, breathing vitality into endangered indigenous knowledge and ensuring its transmission to future generations. Therefore, ecotourism can offer economic opportunities for indigenous communities, potentially supporting and preserving their traditional practices. Presenting rituals and customs to tourists may help sustain these practices and foster a sense of cultural pride. While the revival of traditional rituals, including those linked to ecological conservation may align with ecotourism principles, it is essential to recognize the complexities involved. External documentation and appreciation of indigenous knowledge, such as through photography and journalism, can play a role in preserving these practices. However, it is essential to approach this recognition with sensitivity to the community's values and needs. While ecotourism can contribute to cultural preservation and economic empowerment, it is crucial to holistically consider its potential impacts on the environment and local communities.

#### **4.2 Ritual activity as educational space**

Ritual activity persists through generations, adapting to traditional farming systems and serving as a cultural cornerstone for the Chin indigenous people. Two methods exist for communicating with spirits. An ordinary person can engage with the spirit in less critical situations like hunting or small ritual activities. However, for significant events such as bridge building, house construction, protection from attacks, and serious illnesses, a shaman must perform the required rituals on behalf of the family, village, or tribal group. Typically, a shaman imparts their skills and knowledge to a successor to preserve this specialized knowledge.

Another set of resurging rituals involves traditional healing practices within the Chin community, particularly for illnesses associated with spirits from the forest. The shaman identifies the spirit connected to the ill person using ginger shaped into a triangle. The positioning of ginger pieces thrown onto the ground determines the ritual's success. Negotiations with the spirit involve confirming its origin and, if necessary, bargaining over the type and size of sacrificial animals, such as chickens, pigs, goats, buffaloes, or Mithun. The negotiations, often involving explanations of human hardships, aim to secure the spirit's acceptance of the offering. Despite the prohibition of many indigenous practices by Christian churches and the state, the Chin indigenous have found a revival of their traditional rituals, especially in the context of ecotourism.

In addition, Chin indigenous people apply ritual disciplines to confront the development carried out by outsiders, particularly hoteliers. They protest outsiders' investments by bringing their indigenous knowledge into the land and forestry management.

*"I felt that ecotourism in our native land is the expansion of land grabbing in Chin State. None of the hoteliers are interested in protecting wildlife and forests and respecting indigenous land management. Most of the land allocation has been made by the central government, and it caused land conflict in our community. That is why I do not like ecotourism expansion in our native land."* (Interview with Mr. Thang Thang [pseudonym], September 2021)

Thus, ecotourism can betray the indigenous community by extending land control indirectly to the indigenous communities. According to Johnston (2000), he argues that ecotourism, while often marketed as a sustainable and culturally respectful form of tourism, can lead to the dispossession of indigenous lands if not adequately managed. To mitigate these risks, Johnston emphasizes that ecotourism initiatives must be controlled by the indigenous communities themselves, ensuring that they retain rights over their lands and can incorporate their knowledge and traditions into the ecotourism framework.

These rituals serve as tourist cultural attractions and are crucial in transmitting indigenous knowledge related to environmental conservation and encounter development in indigenous communities. Despite prohibitions, incorporating these practices into tourism underscores their significance in preserving cultural heritage and educating future generations about ecotourism. As the Chin engage in these ritual activities, they not only showcase their respect for the environment but also impart their knowledge, traditions, and shared values to the younger generation, emphasizing a harmonious coexistence with nature. Indeed, indigenous knowledge and rituals are crucial for fostering a comprehensive understanding of climate change education. Indigenous rituals, deeply embedded in cultural practices, provide a unique lens through which individuals can perceive the intricate relationships between human activities and the environment. These rituals, often marking agricultural cycles and seasonal changes, encapsulate generations of wisdom in sustainable resource management, offering practical and lived knowledge beyond theoretical understanding.

Integral to indigenous knowledge is Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which encapsulates centuries of observations, practices, and wisdom developed by indigenous communities in harmony with nature. TEK provides invaluable insights into ecosystem dynamics, weather patterns, and adaptive strategies that have sustained communities through changing environmental conditions. In climate change education, incorporating indigenous knowledge contributes to a more inclusive and diverse perspective, challenging dominant Eurocentric narratives and instilling a sense of cultural identity among indigenous learners. This integration bridges the gap between scientific understanding and local wisdom, enriching the educational experience with nuanced insights into environmental changes.

Moreover, preserving rituals and indigenous knowledge is paramount in addressing the cultural erosion associated with environmental shifts. As climate change disrupts traditional practices and ways of life, education becomes a vital tool for cultural preservation. By incorporating indigenous elements into curricula, educational systems actively safeguard cultural heritage, ensuring that future generations can adapt to environmental changes while maintaining a solid connection to their traditions. In essence, the fusion of rituals and indigenous knowledge in climate change education

not only equips individuals with the tools needed to address environmental challenges but also nurtures a deeper appreciation for diverse ways of knowing and living in harmony with the planet. Significantly, this research found that indigenous knowledge is essential to the success and authenticity of ecotourism at Khaw Nu M'cung National Park. The ritual performance in ecotourism reconstructs the revival of indigenous knowledge regarding conservation and climate change. For example, the ritual performance of mountain spirits reveals the norm and tradition of Chin indigenous people in the mountain areas. Based on the training norms and practices, the mountain has been divided into three parts according to the mountain's spiritual power order. According to the ritual order, the villagers build a very close relationship with the spirit of the first mountain near the village, governed by the farmland spirit, which protects the people's livelihood and ways of life. Secondly, they are associated with the middle higher mountains, which regulate the deep forest and traditional harp for the excellent health of the people. The villagers are prohibited from cutting the trees freely compared to the first mountain near their village. This higher mountain is a reserved area for the local people but is restricted by traditional norms and discipline, such that if they cut the tree, their residents can be burnt by the forest fire because most of the houses were built with trees from this area.

Meanwhile, the villagers can cut the big trees to build a home or village bride (a wooden bridge) after getting permission from the village headman, including tribal elders. According to the traditional norm, older people must offer the mountain spirit to allow them to use the tree for the community's needs. Thus, this constructed traditional norm promotes forest conservation in higher mountains and harmonizes society with ritual activities. In addition, the highest mountain spirit is the most potent mountain and guardian of the people, the hill, and the weather. These mountains have become a "sacred place" well preserved by local norms. Before going to this mountain, the villagers must offer or commit something before entering the mountains. For example, the villagers will provide the head for wildlife if they get from hunting inside the hills. At the same time, they must organize rituals at home before going to the mountains. The community also believes the highest mountain spirit can guide the human soul into the other world of Death Village. That is why the community gives good respect and tries to invite those spirits to their ritual activity in the village.

Indeed, communal norms and beliefs are also responsible for protecting the deep forest through rituals, disciplines, and cultural harmony in the Khaw Nu M'cung National Park areas. It can be observed that indigenous knowledge and the social harmony of Chin indigenous knowledge in environmental conservation and climate change adaptation. This traditional knowledge encompasses a deep understanding of local ecosystems, sustainable practices, and cultural heritage, offering unique and valuable insights that modern approaches often overlook. Integrating indigenous knowledge into ecotourism provides a way to present these insights through guided tours, cultural demonstrations, community-based tourism initiatives, and conservation projects. By involving indigenous communities as leaders and guides in ecotourism activities, tourists can experience an authentic connection to the natural and cultural landscape. This presentation of indigenous knowledge not only enhances the tourist experience but also fosters a greater appreciation for the intricate relationships between indigenous cultures and their environments. Moreover, ecotourism benefits from this integration by promoting environmental sustainability, supporting economic development in indigenous communities, preserving cultural heritage, and educating visitors about the importance of conservation and indigenous practices. This symbiotic relationship between ecotourism and indigenous knowledge highlights the potential for mutually beneficial outcomes that enhance cultural heritage and environmental



stewardship. By valuing and leveraging indigenous knowledge, ecotourism can achieve environmental conservation and sustainability goals while supporting the well-being and resilience of indigenous communities.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The ecotourism initiatives of the Chin indigenous people in Myanmar offer a multifaceted lens through which to examine preserving traditional practices while catering to tourists. While some inequalities may arise from ecotourism, with certain members benefiting more than others, the overarching narrative underscores the fragility of indigenous knowledge in the face of external pressures, notably the suppression of traditional rituals influenced by Christianity. However, integrating these rituals into ecotourism activities presents an opportunity to bridge the gap between cultural preservation and sustainable development.

This reintegration allows the Chin people to showcase their cultural heritage to a global audience while preserving their unique ecological knowledge. However, there are pitfalls to navigate, including the risk of ecotourism resulting in a “performance” of indigeneity, altering cultural traditions, practices, and experiences. However, with careful management, ecotourism can serve as a platform for authentic cultural expression and environmental stewardship. Special care must be taken when developing tourism initiatives in Indigenous communities. Indigenous tourism involves the complex interplay of performing Indigeneity and maintaining authenticity (Graham & Penny (2014), managing commodification while upholding cultural integrity (Ryan & Aicken, 2005), and navigating the theatrical nature of cultural displays (Picard et al., 2014). The global dimensions of these performances (Scarangella, 2010) and their local impacts on communities (de Azeredo Grünewald, 2012; Logan, 2009) highlight the critical effects of performing Indigeneity. As Graham & Penny, Ryan & Aicken, Picard et al., Scarangella, de Azeredo Grünewald, and Logan discussed, engaging with these dynamics underscores the need for sustainable tourism practices that respect and preserve Indigenous cultures.

In the broader context of climate change education, incorporating indigenous knowledge and rituals emerges as a powerful tool. These traditions, deeply rooted in understanding nature and its cycles, provide a holistic perspective that complements scientific approaches and fosters a sense of cultural identity and environmental stewardship among indigenous learners. The confluence of ecotourism, indigenous knowledge, and ecological conservation in Chin State reveals a narrative of resilience, adaptation, and the quest for harmonious coexistence. As the Chin ritual presentation embraces the opportunities presented by ecotourism, it stands at a crossroads where choices made today will shape the cultural and environmental legacy for future generations. Revitalizing indigenous knowledge, preserving cultural practices, and fostering responsible tourism development can merge into a narrative that safeguards natural beauty and cultural diversity.

The cultural impact of ecotourism in Khaw Nu M'cung provides insights into the challenges and opportunities inherent in respectfully engaging with indigenous cultures. Stronza & Gordillo (2008) emphasize the importance of respectful cultural exchanges that benefit tourists and local communities, highlighting the need to avoid cultural homogenization and commodification of indigenous cultures. Additionally, the economic impact of ecotourism is significant, as it has the potential to provide substantial benefits to local communities (Stronza, 2007). However, ensuring equitable distribution of these benefits remains challenging, as Honey (2008) noted, especially

in community-based tourism models where locals often lack ownership and control over tourism activities.

Moreover, managing tourist behavior to align with local customs and environmental conservation efforts is crucial (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Educational programs for tourists about the area's cultural and ecological significance can foster more responsible tourism practices, addressing concerns about the imposition of external values on local communities (Butcher, 2007). By focusing on these elements, Khaw Nu M'cung National Park addresses academic controversies surrounding ecotourism, especially regarding indigenous knowledge's role. The traditional ecological knowledge of the Chin people offers valuable insights into sustainable environmental management and conservation practices, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of ecotourism's environmental and cultural impacts. Furthermore, adopting a knowledge-management approach to bridge the gap between knowledge and training in indigenous society is crucial (Ruhanen, 2008). Indigenous knowledge systems, deeply embedded in cultural practices and daily lives, provide sustainable methods for managing natural resources and maintaining biodiversity (Berkes, 1999). Integrating indigenous knowledge into ecotourism initiatives enriches the tourist experience and promotes environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and community resilience (McCarter & Gavin, 2011; Battiste, 2002; Brosius et al., 2005). By valuing and leveraging indigenous knowledge, ecotourism can achieve its conservation and sustainability goals while supporting the well-being and resilience of indigenous communities.

In essence, the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge face significant challenges, but addressing these challenges can enhance ecotourism initiatives, promote environmental conservation, and support indigenous communities economically and culturally. The confluence of ecotourism, indigenous knowledge, and ecological conservation in Chin State illustrates the potential for mutually beneficial outcomes that enhance cultural heritage and environmental stewardship. By embracing indigenous knowledge and practices, ecotourism can contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive future for Myanmar's indigenous communities and their environments.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study has revealed the transformative impact of incorporating indigenous rituals and knowledge into ecotourism at Khaw Nu M'cung National Park in Myanmar. The findings indicate that ecotourism helps preserve biodiversity and revitalizes traditional practices that have been marginalized due to historical and religious influences. Indigenous communities benefit economically while safeguarding their cultural heritage and ecological wisdom. The research underscores the importance of involving local communities in ecotourism projects to ensure these initiatives respect and promote cultural values and environmental practices, leading to sustainable and inclusive conservation efforts.

Furthermore, the educational aspect of ecotourism provides significant benefits. Ritual activities serve as learning opportunities for both tourists and younger generations of indigenous people, thus fostering a deeper understanding and respect for indigenous environmental conservation methods. This is crucial for perpetuating these practices and the overall success of ecotourism initiatives. Future research should delve into several pivotal areas to further understand the role of indigenous knowledge in ecotourism and environmental conservation. Long-term studies could reveal the lasting effects of ecotourism on indigenous rituals and environmental practices. Comparative analyses of ecotourism projects across different regions could

identify best practices and common challenges in integrating indigenous knowledge. It is also vital to examine the economic benefits of ecotourism, ensuring fair distribution and long-term sustainability for indigenous communities. Another significant research area is investigating how local and national policies affect integrating indigenous knowledge into ecotourism and conservation efforts. The involvement of indigenous communities in decision-making processes is essential to enhance community ownership and control over ecotourism projects. Additionally, studying the specific contributions of indigenous knowledge to climate change adaptation within ecotourism can provide valuable insights for future initiatives.

In summation, ecotourism in Khaw Nu M'cung National Park has significantly contributed to reviving and preserving indigenous knowledge and rituals previously marginalized due to external influences. This revival imparts valuable lessons in environmental conservation and helps maintain cultural heritage. Although ecotourism brings economic benefits to local communities, challenges such as the commodification of indigenous cultures and issues with equitable economic benefit distribution persist. A well-managed ecotourism framework led by indigenous communities can balance cultural preservation, economic development, and environmental sustainability. Addressing these challenges in future research will deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics between ecotourism, indigenous knowledge preservation, and sustainable development. Ultimately, these efforts will ensure that ecotourism is a crucial platform for environmental stewardship and cultural conservation, fostering resilience in the face of globalization and environmental changes.

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