

Tourism: Blessings for All?

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Abstract

Tourism is particularly important in developing countries, such as the Mekong countries, usually forming a more significant component of gross domestic product (GDP) than in developed countries. However, it relies to a large extent on natural resources and cultural capital that are in the public domain. The returns from tourism in the Mekong countries exhibit varying degrees of leakage from the host countries. Apart from Thailand, such leakage has been estimated variously at 3–40%. Domestically retained value added is high despite employment of foreign executives and equipment imports. The proportion of retained value added is shown to be 92% of total tourism revenue in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where the distribution of tourism income among the participating industries is also shown. Case studies in Thai villages show that while tourism offers opportunities in rural areas, it worsens the income distribution pattern in rural societies. However, Thai residents in general perceive the main benefit of tourism to be spreading the fame of Thailand—national pride rather than income—and almost all persons interviewed thought net impact would be positive. Nevertheless, while much tourism relies on social capital, profits from tourism do not seem to be returned to communities to enhance that social capital. Indeed, it is argued that tourism is involved with too much public capital—social, cultural, and environmental—to allow it to be regulated entirely by the market. While benefits accrue to a few people or groups, costs are borne by the general public and taxpayers who are not direct beneficiaries of the tourism industry.

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Introduction

Traveling and tourism have occurred for thousands of years, initially in the form of pilgrimages, exploration for new land, colonization, and trade. The tourism industry did not take off until the 18th century after the advent of mechanized transportation following the first industrial revolution. By the end of the 19th century, aristocrats and the elite who took a grand tour of continental Europe had created a demand for what has emerged as the tourism industry (Mastny 2001). However, statistics related to tourism became available only in the 1950s when the annual number of total travelers then recorded was around 25 million and the total tourism receipt was over US\$2 billion (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton 2000). Today, total international arrivals are about 700 million and the total tourism receipt is estimated at around US\$500 billion (WTO 2004). The World Tourism Organization proclaimed that the tourism industry is the world's largest and fastest-growing industry, with an average growth rate of about 7% over recent decades. Income from tourism spending grows 35% faster than the growth of tourism, creates about 200 million jobs worldwide, and accounts for about 10% of global GDP. For small developing economies, the proportion of tourism income in GDP (in 1999) was claimed to be unusually high, reaching 88% for the Maldives, 40% for Macao, and 21% for the Seychelles (Mastny 2001). Tourism has become a favorite economic sector of many governments, not only in developing countries, but also in developed countries, such as Japan, which launched a Visit Japan Year in 2003.

Today, tourism is a buzzword for a quick and easy development paradigm. The Declaration of Montelimar II of the Central American countries prioritized tourism as the paramount economic growth strategy and proclaimed that region as a single tourism destination (Stonich 1998). In the Greater Mekong Subregion, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), and Thailand have all proclaimed tourism as a priority strategy. A tourism sector strategy to develop and promote the subregion as a single destination is being used by the governments concerned (Cambodia, People's Republic of China (PRC), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam (ADB 2005b)).²

Yet, stories of horror and glory in tourism abound. The glory stories are often related to income and employment generation, the attraction of foreign exchange, the opportunities that tourism could provide for regional, rural, and community development, and the opportunity to use tourism as a means for education in history, culture, nature, and conservation. The horror stories tend to emphasize the unstable nature of tourism, its possible uneven impact on income distribution in favor of the better-off, and its negative impact on society, culture, and the environment.

² The PRC is included in the Greater Mekong Subregion because, geographically, parts of Yunnan Province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region are in the watersheds of some of the major rivers in the subregion.

Tourism has a special feature that distinguishes it from other economic sectors or industries in that tourism products are composite products, i.e., the products are necessarily an aggregate of a wide range of goods and services. First, it relies heavily on natural capital, such as beaches and mountains that are in the public domain. Second, the efficiency of the industry is not determined only by the management of its operators but also depends heavily on the management of public infrastructure, such as transportation by air, land, and sea, and pollution control. Third, tourism thrives on cultural capital. Tourists tend to prefer destinations of exotic and unique cultures, especially those sites proclaimed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to be World Heritage. Last, tourism benefits from social capital. Tourists often seek to attend local festivals, witness collective activities, such as harvesting, or become guests of community-based ecotours. This paper aims to examine the way these different capital inputs are used to create tourism values and how the generated values are distributed among the stakeholders.

The paper first investigates the returns from tourism in some GMS countries and, as far as possible, establishes the way returns are being shared. Perceived benefits and costs of tourism are then discussed. Next, the manner in which tourism exploits and reaps the benefits from the use of physical, social, and cultural capital is explored. It is argued that tourism is involved with too much public capital to allow it to be regulated entirely by the market. However, this paper cannot claim to be comprehensive as there are few empirical studies related to tourism in the Mekong countries. Most of the studies are consultant and community reports for product development and marketing rather than critical evaluation of actual local tourism experience. This is partly because mass tourism is a new phenomenon in these countries.

Tourism Income and Foreign Exchange Earnings

The most obvious and tangible benefits of tourism include income, foreign exchange earnings, tax revenue, and the generation of employment. Tourism was among the top five leading sources of foreign exchange revenue of 69 developing countries (Benavides 2001). The combined tourism income of the least developed countries exceeded their second largest nonexport receipts by 39% in 1998.

Tourism is an important sector in Mekong countries: the proportion of tourism income as a proportion of export value and GDP for Mekong countries is given in Table 1. Indeed, measured in terms of proportion of GDP, the tourism sector is more important for some of the Mekong economies than for those countries that are world top tourism destinations, those that earn the highest revenue from tourism. Of the Mekong countries, Cambodia is the most dependent on tourism income, which is around 12% of its GDP.

Table 1: Size of Tourist Economies in 2004 (selected countries)

Destination	Tourist Arrivals 2004 (million)	Tourism Earnings 2004 (US\$ million)	Tourism Revenue as % of GDP 2004	Export Earning 2004 (US\$ billion)	Export as % of GDP 2004	Tourism as % of Export
World Top Destinations						
France	75.12	40,842	2.04	451.0	22.52	9.06
Spain	53.60	45,248	4.56	179.0	18.05	25.28
United States	46.08	74,481	0.64	819.0	7.02	9.09
China, People's Republic of	41.76	25,739	1.56	593.4	35.98	4.34
ASEAN Destinations						
Malaysia	15.70	8,198	6.96	126.5	107.40	6.48
Singapore	5.71	5,090	4.77	179.5	168.09	2.83
Indonesia	5.32	4,798	1.86	69.7	27.06	6.88
Philippines	2.29	2,012	2.33	39.6	45.82	5.08
Thailand	11.74	10,034	6.14	97.7	59.76	10.27
Viet Nam	2.93	2,170	4.80	26.2	58.02	8.27
Cambodia	1.06	532	11.57	2.5	53.40	21.67
Lao PDR	0.89	118	4.89	0.5	18.86	25.93
Myanmar ^b	0.22	99	1.08	2.40	26.32	4.12
Other Destinations						
Italy	37.07	35,656	2.13	346.1	20.69	10.30
Mexico	20.62	10,753	1.59	188.6	27.88	5.70
Hong Kong, China	21.80	9,007	5.53	265.7	162.96	3.39
Egypt	5.75 ^a	6,125	8.15	7.7	10.22	79.73
Japan	6.14	11,202	0.24	565.5	12.23	1.98
India	3.37	4,769	0.69	72.5	10.48	6.58

- Sources: 1) WTO World Tourism Barometer 3(3), October 2005. Available: http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/eng/pdf/barometer/barom0503_e.pdf (16 June 2006)
- 2) http://www.nesdb.go.th/econSocial/macro/NAD/1_qgdp/data1_06/menu.html (19 June 2006)
- 3) 2005 Statistical Report on Tourism in Laos, National Tourism Authority of Lao PDR (tourist arrivals and tourism earnings). Available:
- 4) http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?Report_ID... (23 June 2006)
- 5) World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development. Released September 2005. Available: http://wdsbeta.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2005/09/20_000112742_20050920110826/additional/841401968_2005082630000823.pdf (26 June 2006)
- 6) <http://www.adb.org> (16 June 2006).
- 7) Myanmar: Tourism Status Update. Seminar on Mekong Tourism: Learning Across Borders II (1-3 June 2006).
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- 9) Travel Industry to Change in Ways We Cannot Imagine. Seminar on Mekong Tourism: Learning Across Borders II (1-3 June 2006).
- 10) Viet Nam Tourism: Current Development and Strategies up 2010. Seminar on Mekong Tourism: Learning Across Borders II (1-3 June 2006).
- 11) 2005 Statistical Report on Tourism in Laos. Lao National Tourism Administration Planning and Cooperation Department Statistics Unit.
- 12) Mekong River Commission.

Notes: ^a Tourist arrivals are 2003 statistics

^b 2002 statistics

One of the most acclaimed negative features of tourism is that much of the tourism income leaks out of host countries in the form of international airfares, royalties, and fees paid to foreign managers and foreign trade names; to tour operators, airlines, and hotels; and for imported food and drinks. There are three types of leakage related to inbound tourism. First, there is the pre-leakage that includes home countries' margin and airfare. Second, there is internal leakage, or the import content of inbound tourism. This indicator measures the proportion of leakage in tourism expenditure after the tourists have reached the destination. Third, invisible leakage occurs in the foreign exchange cost of resource depletion and deterioration. Financial leakage is likely to be high in countries where there is little manufacturing and service capacity.

Financial leakage in the developing world ranges between 40% in India and 80% in the Caribbean.³ This figure probably includes pre-leakage and internal leakage. The same study claimed that tourism leakage in Thailand is as high as 70%.

The internal leakage is best estimated by a tourism satellite account.⁴ The average internal leakage for developing countries is 40–50% (Benavides 2001) and 10–20% in the most advanced and diversified developing countries. A tourism satellite account prepared by the National Economic and Social Development Board of Thailand in collaboration with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) completed in 2004 reported that the import content of Thailand's tourism sector in 2003 was about 22% of tourism income. The most recent estimate of ADB (2005a) shows foreign exchange leakage of 3–4% for Thailand, 25% for Yunnan Province of the PRC, 35% for Viet Nam, and 40% for the three poorest Mekong countries. The different estimates for Thailand lie in the different definitions of tourism income and leakages.

The present author's study of the hotel industry in Thailand provided additional information on internal leakage through interviews with entrepreneurs. Fifty years ago, when the hotel industry began, almost everything in a hotel needed to be imported, including chairs in the restaurants. Today, imports by hotels are limited to exotic food, beverages, and limousines (Mingsarn, Nukul, and Akarapong 2004). It was estimated for the author that the proportion of foreign food and beverages in four and five star hotels would not exceed 15% of total sales or about baht (B)1,500 million (about US\$37.5 million⁵). Royalties and fees for brand names and management of the top 42 hotels in Thailand totaled only B932 million (US\$23.3 million) in 2002.

Salary payments for foreigners in the hotel industry in 2002 totaled B2,000 million (US\$50 million). When foreign salaries, profit depreciation, and food and beverage expenditure are added and compared with the lower estimate of hotel income of the Thai Department of Revenue of B44 billion (US\$1.1 billion), the leakage for the hotel industry was approximately 8.6%.

³ (Sustainable Living cited in http://www.uncpie.org/pc/tourism/sust_tourism/home.htm).

⁴ A tourism satellite account provides information about the economic contribution of tourism to gross domestic product and employment.

⁵ An approximate exchange rate of US\$1.0 = B40 is used throughout.

The much bigger foreign leakage is in outbound tourism. In 2002, international tourism expenditure of Thai residents amounted to US\$3.3 billion (World Tourism Organization 2004). This is about 42% of foreign exchange earnings, leaving a net earning of US\$4.6 billion. Outbound tourism is increasing rapidly in the PRC also. In 2002, the PRC earned US\$20 billion but also spent US\$15.4 billion on tourism. The net foreign exchange earning for the PRC that year was only US\$4.6 billion.

Tourism and Domestically Retained Value Added

Total income or total revenue created by an industry does not accurately measure the real contribution or the total value of the industry. In fact, this measure tends to overestimate the real contribution because income includes components of value generated by other enterprises. For the tourism sector, a much better measurement of its economic significance is its contribution in value-added terms because a substantial part of tourism income includes internal transactions within the sector, i.e., tour operators buying accommodation services from hotels and vice versa. Therefore, adding up the aggregate tourism income tends toward double counting. A measurement that excludes double counting is value-added GDP, a widely used measurement of a country's economic size or strength, based on value added.

Several countries are attempting to give a proper account of the contribution of the tourism sector by establishing a tourism satellite account. Unfortunately, for the Mekong countries only information on Thailand is available. On the basis of tourism income, the share of international tourism revenue in GDP is around 6% but on the basis of value added the share drops to less than 5%.

Yet not all of the value added created by the tourism industry remains in the countries. The tourism sector may employ many foreigners as executives, entertainers, chefs, etc. Many enterprises may also be foreign owned and profits may have to be remitted abroad. Machinery, transport equipment, and fittings may have to be imported. Therefore, the domestically retained value added of tourism could be low. In this connection, a study conducted on nine subtourism industries in Chiang Mai (excluding the airline industry) revealed that the domestically retained value added (DRVA) of the Chiang Mai tourism industry is very high. Most sectors showed the proportion of DRVA above 90%, with a few industries at 99% (Table 2). Box 1 gives more detail on the economic impact of Chiang Mai tourism.

Box 1: Economic Impact of Tourism in Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is one of the most famous cities for tourism in Thailand. It is known for its friendly and serene people and cultural events, such as the Songkran festival, the Thai New Year. Each year the city hosts about 3 million tourists, of which half are international tourists. The city ranked third after Bangkok and Phuket in terms of visitation.

Chiang Mai is the only province where the economic significance of the tourism subsector has been estimated, including hotels, guesthouses and resorts, restaurants and food catering, golf, spas, tour agencies, tourist buses, car and motor cycle rental, and fuel stations. It was found that in 2002, the tourism sector in Chiang Mai generated a total revenue of B38 billion (almost US\$1 billion). When the double counting is netted out, the value added of the tourism sector was estimated at B12 billion (US\$0.3 billion), which accounted for about 14 % of the gross provincial product. The industry accommodated over 8,000 enterprises and directly employed over 52,000 workers.

Source: Mingsarn et al. 2004

Table 2: Domestically Retained Value Added of Chiang Mai Tourism

Subtourism Industries	Value Added (B, million)	% of Retained Value Added
Hotel and Resort (excluding restaurant in hotel)	3,641	93.14
Guesthouse (excluding food and beverage service)	405	97.00
Restaurant, Food and Beverage Shop		
Restaurant and food catering	3,621	90.57
Bar, night club, and liquor-served shop	556	98.36
Overland Travel		
Inter-province public transportation	10	99.40
Local public transportation	196	89.87
Hired shuttle vehicles	71	66.33
Transportation Supporting Service		
Gasoline station	661	76.85
Rental Service		
Car rental without provided driver	71	57.47
Motorbike rental without provided rider	7	88.81
Tour/Guide Service	1,615	98.86
Entertainment, Sport, and Recreational Services		
Spa	41	91.34
Golf	110	96.08
Total	11,005	91.64

Source: Mingsarn et al. 2004.

Note: Some subtourism industries are not included due to data shortage or because they are made up of mostly self-employed persons. Income per labor employed in some subtourism industries was not included if employment took place outside Chiang Mai Province.

Tourism and Intra-industry Distribution of Economic Gain

As mentioned earlier, the real contribution or the economic gain of having an industry is the value added. The way in which this value added in the tourism industry is divided among stakeholders is shown in Table 3. The table presents the returns to labor, capital, and government in the tourism industry in Chiang Mai in 2002. The data were obtained from profit and loss statements of over 450 enterprises in Chiang Mai and from about 500 interviews with owners, managers, and workers.

In the promotion of tourism, income of the host government from taxation is often overlooked as an important economic gain to the country. The figures of government

Table 3: Distribution of Economic Gain in Chiang Mai Tourism Industries, 2002

Industry	Labor (%)	Capital (%)	Government (%)	Value Added (%)
Hotel and Resort	48.60	40.06	11.34	100.00
Guesthouse	45.39	52.25	2.36	100.00
Hotel and Resort (excluding restaurant in hotel)	54.54	34.92	10.54	100.00
Guesthouse (excluding food and beverage service)	48.28	49.59	2.12	100.00
Restaurant, Food and Beverage Shop				
Restaurant and food catering	67.76	26.23	6.02	100.00
Bar, night club, and liquor beverage shop	86.19	13.59	0.22	100.00
Overland Travel				
Inter-province public transportation	89.77	9.93	0.30	100.00
Local public transportation	8.79	91.17	0.04	100.00
Hired shuttle vehicles	14.81	84.90	0.29	100.00
Transportation Supporting Service				
Gas station	28.94	69.14	1.92	100.00
Rental service				
Car rental without provided driver	1.86	96.99	1.16	100.00
Motorbike rental without provided rider	20.15	79.84	0.01	100.00
Tour Guide Service	39.00	56.77	4.24	100.00
Entertainment, Sport, and Recreational Services				
Spa	41.73	57.71	0.56	100.00
Golf	71.99	27.09	0.92	100.00
Total	54.67	39.07	6.26	100.00

Sources: (1) Interview/survey conducted by the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University
(2) Profit and Loss Statement 2002
(3) The report on Hotel Industry in Thailand as stated in Chapter 1

revenue in Table 3 include mainly indirect tax. From this it is evident that the Government obtained its largest share in the hotel industry, more than other industries, where the tax share was relatively small.

It should be noted that in 2002, the hotel industry income, based on a TAT estimate, was 8.68 times larger than income reported to the Revenue Department. For the whole country, the income reported to the Revenue Department was less than 25% of the income estimated from TAT statistics. This type of discrepancy is not unique to Thailand and could be due to a) underreporting income by private entrepreneurs, b) overreporting the number of local tourists (because unlike foreign tourists whose total numbers can be conveniently collected by the Immigration Department, the number of local tourists has to be estimated by means of a sampling method), and c) a combination of a) and b). The incentive for overreporting the number of tourists is that larger numbers attract more public funding as well as community support.

The share that went to labor was the least and the share that went to capital was the greatest in the car rental industry because it is the most capital intensive. It should be noted that the returns included in this table excluded tipping, which is a fairly high proportion of income in the hotel and entertainment industry. The night entertainment industry shows the highest share accrued to labor. This is because the number of drinks that can be sold depends on the ability of the girls to sell them. Returns to labor for night entertainment girls are often high but the number of good years for the girls is very short (Box 2).

In the golf industry, the largest share of employment goes to caddies. Chiang Mai has six golf courses and about 600 caddies are employed. It is quite common in the industry that wealthy tourists (mostly from Japan and Republic of Korea) hire four caddies: one for the golf bag, one for a stool for sitting, one to carry drinks, and one to carry a large umbrella. Caddies are invariably female. For these women, their age and golf carts are their biggest employment threats (Box 3).

The share that goes to capital includes profits, interest, and depreciation. In Thailand, because hotels form a prestigious industry, many top hotels are family owned and some have even ventured to be international chains. The hotel industry in Mekong countries other than Thailand is still in the initial phase and relies on international chains to offer high-standard luxury hotels and foreign airlines for domestic transportation. It can be expected that the share going to local people in these countries would be much lower than in Thailand.

Perceived Benefits and Costs of Tourism

Tourism can also create nonfinancial benefits, such as pride, informal education, and exchange of experience. Community-based tourism is a means for local communities to develop networks and connections with the outside world.

Box 2: Ladies of the Night: Where Have All the Old Girls Gone?

Most ladies of the night in Chiang Mai leave their home villages in their early teens. Some are from the high mountains in the north. Some walk for days to cross the borders into Thailand. They have come because of the city lights and for the income that they hope to send back to their parents. A network of agents delivers these girls into different trades according to their physical looks and readiness.

Those too young will be given hormones to hasten their maturity and are first kept as domestic helpers, as dish washers or kitchen hands in local restaurants. The first night jobs are usually in restaurants that have a karaoke machine. After the young girls are accustomed to service jobs, they will be offered a job in a traditional massage parlor. At this stage, their income will increase sharply to B12,000–18,000 (US\$300–450) per month. The service fee the parlors obtain is B300 (US\$7.5) for 2 hours. The girls receive one third of this. A new girl usually commands great interest from customers and her services could be bought four to five times a day. She also earns extra income from tipping.

After some time, when the girls are no longer new, income from massage without sexual services will start to decline. Agents then approach the girls to transfer to a nontraditional massage parlor. They will be working in the sex trade, which will earn them B5,000–30,000 (US\$125–750) for the first time and then B1,500–3,000 (US\$37.5–75.0) per customer. At this stage they are called “sideline” girls. Tipping could also be as high as B500 (US\$12.5). Good-looking girls can earn more than B100,000 (US\$2,500) per month. These incomes are virtual incomes, to be known, seen, but not to be used, and are kept by the agents. The girls are allowed to take part of the income home or spend it on necessities. The rule of the game is the girls keep the jobs and the agents keep most of the money.

The peak period is unfortunately too short. About two months after their debut into the sex trade, the girls will be transferred to other massage parlors and therefore may be disguised as new girls there. This process is called “dyeing the cat.”

The next 2–3 year period is the most important turning point for the girls. Few dyed cats are lucky enough to find a husband and a home. The others face a period of declining income. Older girls receive only a third of the B900 (US\$22.5) paid to the parlors. Total monthly income is sharply reduced to B9,000 (US\$225) and usually drops still further, B3,000–5,000 (US\$75–125).

Not long after, the older girls disappear one by one, following a path to perdition. Today HIV/AIDS is the greatest and most prevalent risk for the ladies of the night. Yet young girls, one after another, are lured to replace the older girls. It is amazing that such a business that uses human lives as input is allowed to prosper. Some of the operators even hope to join parliament!

Source: Interviews by Komsun Suriya and Mingsarn Kaosa-ard.

Box 3: Caddies: Women in the Sun

Women in Southeast Asia as a rule do not like the sun because they value fair complexions. But not woman caddies! For this group of women, sunny days are moneymaking days.

Contrary to expectation, most of the caddies in Chiang Mai are middle aged. Some are almost 60 years old. Young girls that have tried to be caddies usually cannot last long because it is a difficult job. Although caddies constitute about half of a golf course's work force, they do not have regular salaries. They are paid B150 (US\$3.75) for 18 holes. Tipping is about B100 (US\$2.50) per 9 holes. In sunny months, caddies earn about B9,000–10,000 (US\$225–250) per month. On rainy days when there are fewer golfers than caddies, they work on rotation. During rainy months, caddies are often sick but they have to come to work because life must go on.

Caddies call their customers "boss." A caddy's daily destiny depends on the boss. If the boss wins the match, his caddies might receive good tips. If the boss loses the match, caddies are a convenient vent for anger.

For these women, life is not easy, come rain or sunshine.

Source: Komsan Suriya and Kusumal Warongsurat 2004.

For political decisions, perceived costs and benefits are more useful information than actual costs and benefits. However, for good governance, information on actual costs and benefits is necessary. If the perceived and actual benefits and costs are very different, it is important that the correct information be given to the public. However, for qualitative benefits, such as social and cultural impacts, perceived benefits and costs are very close to if not the same as actual benefits and costs. Unfortunately, there are very few studies on actual and perceived benefits and costs in Mekong countries.

In Thailand, in an attempt to evaluate the perceived benefits and costs of tourism before a new national tourism plan was designed, 3,319 Thai people were interviewed (Mingsarn et al. 2001). The majority (more than 80%) revealed that after the benefits and costs had been considered (Tables 4 and 5), they believed that tourism was beneficial and that the Government should continue with tourism promotion. What was amazing about this finding was that pride, not income, was the most frequently cited benefit. When asked what would be the main benefit of promoting tourism, about 98% of the respondents answered that the benefit was to spread the fame of Thailand so that Thailand could be known worldwide. Nearly all the respondents felt proud about promoting Thai culture and identity to foreigners. Foreign exchange income came third as a perceived benefit. This is in stark contrast to the view of politicians and government officials who invariably cite income as the main benefit of tourism. Beneficial effects of income, employment generation, and distribution to remote areas and poorer segments of the communities were the three items that received the lowest ranks.

When the respondents were asked to consider the cost of tourism, the distribution of tourism income in favor of the rich was thought by 77% of the respondents to have

Table 4: Perceived Benefits of Tourism
(% of answers; N= 3,319)

Benefit of Tourism	Impact			
	High	Medium	Low	No Impact
1. International reputation	77.3	21.2	1.4	0.1
2. Increased national pride	71.4	24.9	3.1	0.6
3. Increased foreign exchange	57.1	39.7	2.5	0.6
4. Improved tourism sites	50.4	41.7	7.1	0.8
5. Diversified pattern of tourism	47.5	41.6	9.5	1.3
6. Distribution of income to outer provinces	38.8	47.7	12.3	1.1
7. Increased income and employment	32.5	52.6	12.6	2.3
8. Redistribution of income to lower income groups	18.9	47.0	28.7	5.4

Source: Mingsarn et al. 2001.

Table 5: Perceived Costs of Tourism
(% of answers; N= 3,319)

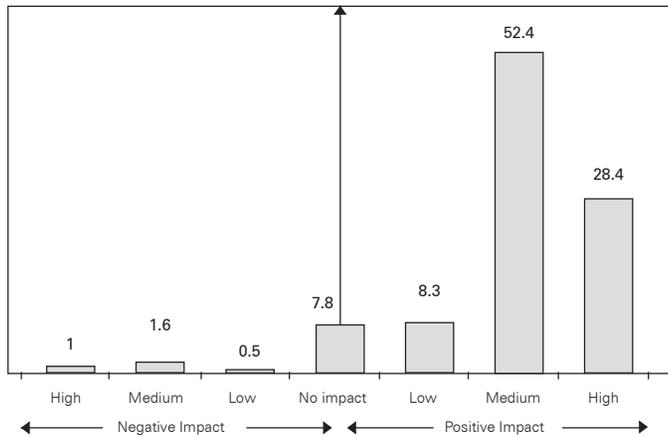
Costs of Tourism	Impact			
	High	Medium	Low	No Impact
1. Redistribution of income to richer groups	33.3	44.5	15.5	6.7
2. Creating a money-oriented value system	29.9	35.3	23.6	11.2
3. Lack of readiness to absorb tourism	29.0	37.6	24.7	8.7
4. Promote prostitution	25.8	32.2	26.9	15.2
5. Induce drug problems	23.6	30.8	31.4	14.2
6. Induce international crimes	20.7	35.6	33.9	9.7
7. Destroy natural resources and the environment	17.2	40.2	30.5	12.2
8. Compete for public utilities and infrastructure	17.2	28.8	29.8	24.2
9. Redundant use of advertising expenses	10.3	37.8	33.7	18.2
10. Destroy local culture	6.5	26.3	39.7	27.4

Source: Mingsarn et al. 2001.

the most significant impact. Tourism was also thought by a significant proportion of respondents to create a money-oriented value system. Slightly more than half of the respondents felt that tourism had significant impact on the sex trade and cross-border crimes and were concerned about environmental degradation and competition for resources. Surprisingly, only one quarter of the respondents felt that tourism had a moderately negative impact on local culture and only 6% of respondents believed that the impact on culture was severe. It should be noted that as the costs of tourism tend to be intangible, the incremental, additive, and probably unevenly distributed, perceived costs of tourism could be underestimated by society at large.

The respondents were asked to weigh both benefits and costs and evaluate the net outcome. The answers were overwhelmingly positive (Figure 1). About 28% thought the impact could be highly positive, 52% thought the net impact would be moderately positive, and only 2% thought that the net impact was negative.

Figure 1: Perceived Net Benefits of tourism in Thailand (% of Sample; N=3,319)



Tourism and Poverty Alleviation

Tourism is believed to play a significant role in redressing poverty for several reasons. First, growth is thought to help poverty reduction through the trickle-down effect. A study covering 83 countries between 1987 and 1998 revealed that poverty reduction was impressive in countries with high growth rates (Chen and Ravallion 2000 cited in Mingsarn 2003). Tourism is a sector where growth rates have been impressive in many poor countries and the expanding sector tends to offer more jobs and income than other sectors, both directly and indirectly. Second, some types of tourism provide opportunities for the poor to provide services in their own homes and communities. Backpackers, for example, are willing to eat street-side food and use low-cost accommodation. Third, tourism can be developed in areas unfit for high-yielding agriculture and other alternatives. It can employ labor-intensive technology and investments and can employ many female workers.

A Thai study based on a macro model for the country suggests that tourism expansion is not pro-poor (Anan 2006). At the provincial level, experience in the Mekong countries seems to suggest that tourism has not yet made substantial positive contribution to poverty reduction. Siem Reap, the province that received the highest income from tourism, was ranked second poorest province in Cambodia (UNDP 2004 cited in Yin Suriya 2006). Empirical studies at a community level are not conclusive, although they tend to suggest that tourism reduces poverty in the sense that extra income can be earned, but the amount

is small. A case study in Kirirom National Park in Cambodia (Men Prachvuthy 2006) indicates that tourism income is very small compared with the income from charcoal that tourism was introduced to replace. A village study by Yin Suriya (2006) and a study in Norkor Kroav, a village 10 kilometers from the Angkor Wat complex, indicate that tourism is a significant source of employment (Ang Sokun 2006) and from which a significant proportion of the poor earned more than US\$3 a day. This is impressive considering that 34% of the population of Cambodia still earned less than US\$1 a day in 2000 (Mingsarn 2003). Two village case studies in Lao PDR also revealed that tourism was a significant source of cash income (Thavipheth 2006).

In Yunnan, a home-stay service introduced to replace sand excavation creates less income than these environmentally degrading industries but helps to improve the general environment. (Huang Juan 2006). Empirical studies at the community level suggest that the extent of income depends on the size of demand and villagers' access to tourism resources.

It may be concluded that tourism income is a significant source of income for those participating in tourism but the scale of benefits depends on strength of demand and access to tourism resources.

Income Distribution from Tourism

As mentioned earlier, most of the (Thai) respondents interviewed felt that tourism and tourism promotion would make the rich become richer. If this is true, the income distribution pattern would worsen. The Social Research Institute has started to investigate this situation by looking at income distribution at the village level.

Three case studies of villages that operate community tourism have begun. The first case study includes two Hmong villages of similar size and situated close to one another in Chiang Mai Province (Akarapong et al. 2006). One village operates a small museum and a guesthouse. The other village is not involved in the tourism business. Both villages are engaged in agriculture as the main occupation. The methodologies used to measure income distribution were the Gini Coefficient and Shorrocks Index and both methods suggested the same result: considered separately, tourism income distribution is more uneven than agricultural income. Without tourism, the distribution of income of the village that operates the museum is better than that in the other village. However, when tourism income is included in the total income, the pattern of income distribution of the village that has tourism is seen to be worse. The reason is that the majority of earnings from tourism come from selling handicrafts. Those who have more capital can invest more in the products, including buying ready-made products from the market to be sold to tourists.

The second case study was a Thai village that was awarded "best community-based tourism" by the Ministry of Tourism and Sport. The village earns a fairly large

income from tourism. The study confirmed again that tourism income tended to be more unevenly distributed than agricultural income but more even than income from other nonfarm activities.

The third case study was a traditional Thai village in Samut Songkhram Province in Central Thailand. The village is probably the most successful and the most well known example of community-based tourism measured in terms of visitation and total income. In 2003, the village grossed more than B1.6 million (US\$40,000) from tourism. In this case study, only those involved in tourism were investigated. The result confirmed that tourism income was very uneven. When the group was divided into five income classes, it became evident that the highest income class (i.e., top 20%) obtained about three quarters of the income earned.

It can be concluded from the case studies that tourism offers income opportunities to rural areas and can distribute income from town to rural villages, but within the villages, tourism will worsen the income distribution pattern of their agrarian societies. The reason is that tourism, like other business activities, requires investments for production of handicrafts, renovating the houses for tourist accommodation, and buying equipment, such as beds, bedding, and boats. Poorer members of the village can only engage in guiding, which means merely earning a slightly better daily wage.

Tourism and Social Capital

Social capital is defined here in a narrow sense to relate to social organizations, such as norms and networks that allow collective actions to create values. The values created need not be financial but could be security, peace, and happiness. Social capital is intangible but could be reflected by rite and ritual as well as by tangible outputs, such as communal irrigation systems (including management). A skyrocket festival is a reflection of social capital because one person cannot successfully launch a festival. Temples in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Thailand are outputs of social capital but a temple itself is social infrastructure.

Social capital in a wider sense often includes shared knowledge and ancestral wisdom, but these can be termed cultural capital. The concept of social capital is here limited to collective action, whereas cultural capital can be used individually and no collective action is necessary. An Akha embroidery design is a manifestation of cultural capital. Anyone who has access to an Akha embroidery design can exploit it to suit his or her own purpose. In a way, science and technology today may, hundreds of years from now, be considered as cultural capital.

The argument against tourism as far as social capital is concerned is that tourism exploits freely and profits from the output of social capital but seems to reciprocate poorly. For example, in Chiang Mai, a Flower Festival is held in February each year. This

festival is not culture related but was invented as a Flowers and Decorative Plants Contest. A parade of over 20 vehicles exuberantly decorated with flowers is the center of attraction of the festival. The sponsors of decorated vehicles are district administration and business organizations. Apart from the decorated vehicles, students, farmers, and youth groups volunteer to take part in the parade. The event has turned out to be a great success for tourism. All hotels, guesthouses, and even temples that accommodate people are overbooked at this time each year. A study in 1992 revealed that Chiang Mai obtained 40% increase in income from the event (Phiangchan 1992). According to the study, the hotel association sponsored only one vehicle. An investigation into the economic gain from the event found that big businesses, such as hotels and transport companies, are the major beneficiaries of the event, reaping about 40% of the income. The hotel sector, in particular, earned B75 (nearly US\$2) from every B1 (about US\$0.03) it invested in the sponsored vehicle. When the result of the report was shown to stakeholders to request more cooperation from major beneficiaries in the following year, there was no response.

Community tourism is another area where successful tourism depends on strong social capital. Community tourism cannot be organized without recruiting village members for such functions as catering, transporting, guiding, and arranging accommodation. Social conflicts could arise if resources normally kept for collective and communal uses are converted into use for tourism that benefits only a few. For example, temple compounds, which are used as playgrounds by village children, are converted into parking space. In Thailand, it is true that village leaders are the key to the initial success of community-based tourism, but the sustainability of the undertaking depends on the level of participation and reciprocated returns to village members. It has been observed that members of the groups that engage in community tourism tend to be kin or close friends of the village leader (Akarapong et al. 2006).

Because tourism relies on social capital, it is important that some profits from tourism are at least partially used to enhance social capital. In the studies that we have done, it does not seem that this is the case. Most of the communities that engage in tourism have made little profit and a few are still paying back debts. Some villages use some of the proceeds to take care of the environment, to manage garbage, and to maintain local roads, but there is not enough surplus to pay for nonphysical capital used.

Yet, the advent of tourism may be enough to stimulate social capital. A case study of the development of Dai Park in Namenghan of Xishuangbanna in Yunnan Province, PRC, suggests that tourism stimulates the Dai to greater respect of their own culture and allows them to reconstruct their identity in a multicultural environment (Luo and Ma 2004).

Tourism, Culture, and Cultural Capital

Most of the studies on tourism and culture tend to concentrate on change in the traditional values and norms to create an obsession with consumerism following contacts with tourism (Pleumarom 2004a, 2004b). A study in a H'mong village in Sapa, Viet Nam, suggests that women's participation in the tourism sector has increased their income and correspondingly the equality between men and women (Huu 2004). Important decisions are made by both men and women because women have become cash earners. At the same time, tourism jobs have taken mothers' time from their children. Other studies tend to indicate both positive and negative social and cultural impacts.

Culture is undoubtedly one of the main attractions of tourism. In fact, most countries put their culture up for sale. Malaysia, for example, exploits the fact that it is a multiracial society to advertize itself as "truly Asia."

Two major arguments are put forward against tourism. First, tourism introduces unbecoming and alien behavior and consumption patterns. Young women or even children may be lured by the promise of consumer goods and drugs into sex tourism. Full-moon nude and sex parties on beaches create concern and confusion about the norm of relationships between men and women. As for consumerism, in the age of information technology and under the currents of globalization, it is difficult to separate the cultural impact of tourism from the impact of trade and media or even western education. Mass media, especially television, and a borderless and almost real-time communication device, such as the Internet, may be much more powerful than tourism. As for the full-moon sex parties, the blame should fall on the local government and local communities rather than tourism.

The second argument is that commercial use of culture by tourism may lead to modification and distortion or lead to uses that show disrespect. Local cultural capital could be misused and the returns pocketed at the expense of the original owners, not only economically but also spiritually. The protest in 2004 of the Sangka Council and civil society groups in Chiang Mai against the use of temple architecture and Buddhist art in five-star hotels in Northern Thailand exemplifies this argument. Revered objects that are used in important worship activities and events have been used to decorate hotel premises or are used as decoration unbecoming to their status of reverence. Temple architecture, which traditionally is not to be used for residences, can now be seen as part of a lobby. Flags used to worship Buddha are used to decorate food stalls. In one case, a hotel has created a magnificent cultural complex that includes an exact replica of a few small but most gracious temples from rural areas. This act is said to exterminate the uniqueness of the original temples and has destroyed the eligibility of the original complexes to be considered as World Heritage sites by UNESCO. The villagers from the original temples were upset to find that even the settings, the trees in the background, and the defects of the temples, are the same. The groups

also feared that placing of the temples in areas that may be used for social functions while certain worldly activities, such as alcohol consumption and dancing, would be performed in front of the Buddha images. In addition, the group was concerned that the all-inclusive city resort could deprive the local original sites of their own tourism opportunities; tourists could visit the hotel and then return home having seen the temples, leaving no economic gain for the local communities (Rungthip and Sukit 2004).

Some people may find it difficult to understand why the villagers were upset to find an exact replica made of their temples. Should they not feel proud that heritage has been recognized? Those inclined to this view might consider as an analogy a beloved daughter or girl friend being cloned and the clone version working in a bar or as a go-go dancer.

As mentioned earlier, cultural capital is a communal asset that is in the public domain. However, its use is governed by social norms. In the past, social norms have controlled the use of Buddhist art and architecture and prevented the domestic market using them in local residences. Traditionally, Thai people believe that using objects that belong in the temples or their replicas is inauspicious. International tourists are not governed by local norms and have found temple architecture attractive. Thus, a new market has opened for temple architecture and art for commercial use. Dr. Akin, a leading Thai anthropologist concluded, after completing a study on the impact of tourism on the Bang-Fai festival, that

...culture will continually change as the society and the beliefs of the people change. Tourism may be just one factor contributing to change. Tourism in itself neither harms or helps the culture: it is how we deal with it that matters. If we are willing to do everything to our culture - modifying it, changing it, making it falsely more spectacular in order to attract tourists - then we would damage our culture. We would be prostituting ourselves and selling culture for money from tourists pockets.
(Akin 1992)

Environmental Capital

Natural resources and environment are major raw materials and are more utilized than culture by the tourism industry. Two thirds of tourists seek a sun, sand, and sea vacation. Tourists going for a nature holiday also have a longer duration of stay than tourists on a sightseeing holiday.

On the supply side, nature tourism could be used as a means for regional or rural development. Skiing and sun, sand, and sea tourism are considered to have promoted the outer regions of both developed and developing countries (Pearce 1995; Weaver and Fennell 1997 cited in Ennew 2003).

Overextraction of natural resources to service uncontrolled tourism may lead to sustainability problems. For example, overdrawing water is a common problem among island tourism economies. Overextraction of water in the Bay Islands of Honduras, where the amount of freshwater is meager, affects the water table and allows the intrusion of seawater. This has led to a saline water supply system to local communities that have since had to convert to bottled water for drinking (Stonich 1998). Contaminated wells and springs further impose health risks and increase treatment costs for the poorer segments of the communities. In Thailand, the solution to scarcity of water is the key to the sustainability of tourism in Phuket, the most well known sun, sand, and sea attraction in Thailand (Mingsarn et al. 1997).

While the tourism industry creates substantial goods and services, it can also generate substantial wastes and associated problems that degrade the environment and cause the demise of the industry itself. Environmental concerns usually arise too late and only after the costs measured in terms of lost revenue and tourists have been discerned. In addition, the costs of mitigation and abatement become very high and are distributed unfairly to all taxpayers in the economy. In developing countries, where environmental governance is relatively weak, the environment is often used as a sink, with wastes being discharged into the environment to reduce individual costs. Disposal of sewerage into marine waters and freshwater not only destroys tourism but also incurs health risks to both tourists and local residents.

Pattaya, one of Thailand's most famous beach areas, is the most notorious example of the way environmental negligence incurred exorbitant prices, not only to society but also to the tourism industry. After Pattaya reached an income peak of B17 billion (US\$0.425 billion) in 1990, its revenue started declining along with its environmental quality (Supachit 1992). The decline in revenue came from the loss of high-income tourists. It took more than a decade before the Pattaya beach environment gradually improved, but its reputation has already been tarnished and Pattaya can no longer claim back its high-income tourists.

Thailand's tourism has not learned from this mistake and many new beaches are repeating Pattaya's experience. According to a recent survey by the Pollution Control Department of 14 world-renowned beaches in Thailand, including those in Phuket, Samui, and Phi Phi, none could attain a five-star status (Nantiya 2004). The criteria for awarding stars to these beaches include the amount of coliform bacteria, the amount of solid waste on the beach and in nearby communities, the quality of sand and sand dunes, coastal erosion, and coastal land-use problems caused by construction work.

In order to tap the high-end market, ocean cruises are often welcome without the recognition that most of the consumption by tourists is done on board and only a little expenditure for daily tours and fresh food is made on land. Tourists on board luxury cruises generally generate about 3.5 kilograms (kg) of waste compared to the targeted national goal of 1 kg per person for urban dwellers in Thailand. These floating hotels

generally leave an enormous amount of waste to be treated by host countries. The infamous case of the Royal Caribbean Cruise, which was fined US\$18 million on 21 counts of disposing of pollutants into US waters, is an example. Ocean cruises are not yet popular in the Mekong countries because of the lack of facilities for luxury docking.

In Thailand, solid waste has become a major problem in many national parks. Some parks, such as Phu Kradoeng, have initiated charges (based on degradability) for wastes. In the Peruvian Andes and Nepal, trekking trails have been dubbed Coca Cola trails and toilet paper trails. ([http:// www.minumemmati.net/eng/ publi/tourism-leakages.htm](http://www.minumemmati.net/eng/publi/tourism-leakages.htm))

The destruction of natural capital could also lead to social conflict. In the village of Plai Phong Phang in Central Thailand where viewing fireflies is one of the main attractions, the disturbance from the noise of the tourist boats irritated local residents, and the frequent journeys have eroded the river banks, so some of the residents decided to cut down the trees that support the fireflies (Kanang 2004; Akarapong et al. 2006).

Tourism can destroy or change the habitat of wildlife. In Khao Yai National Park, Thailand, it is believed that roads constructed in national parks have obstructed the natural pathways of elephants. The change of route made by the elephants to avoid traffic to a more dangerous path has resulted in accidents to young elephants.

Tourism's contribution to nature and environment is much harder to observe. In order to sustain tourism income, cities and the industry should heighten their interest in the conservation of natural resources. Income from tourism can be used to finance protection and conservation. One tour operator initiated and contributed around US\$45,000 annually to the Orangutan Foundation from five groups of visitors to Kalimantan. Gorilla tracking permits in Uganda also help finance local development. Tourism helps increase the awareness of the value of the environment and can be an effective means of youth education.

Conclusion

This paper shows that tourism is increasingly important for Mekong country economies, not only in terms of income, foreign exchange, and employment, but also in terms of the increasing flow of people. The importance of tourism is likely to be accentuated when control on Chinese outbound tourists is gradually relaxed, when the PRC will become the world's largest tourist exporting country. Owing to its proximity to the PRC, Mekong countries would become one of the major destinations of Chinese tourists. In particular, Yunnan Province, PRC, could become an important gateway, especially for tourists and migrants.

On the supply side, tourism today penetrates deeply into grassroot societies. Community-based tourism has become trendy and many villages are seeking tourism opportunities. Trekking tours take tourists to see "authentic" village life. The eagerness

for authenticity sometimes leads tourists to interfere in the everyday life of people who have no stake in the tourism industry,

The Mekong economies have strong competitive advantage in tourism, especially among Asian travelers. Considering that the large proportion of tourism in the countries is intraregional, tourism is an increasingly important venue for exchange of ideas, including a means for informal education among Mekong countries. Exchange of people through tourism in the future could potentially be a tool for peace as well as conflict.

Unfortunately, not enough research on the impact of tourism exists in these countries. Many more empirical analyses are needed for governments wanting to readjust their policies on tourism. Thailand is the only country with relatively abundant tourism research. Based on the experience of Thailand, income to government is relatively low and much lower than what could be collected. When comparing the income share between groups in the communities where tourism has taken place, tourism income tends to be distributed in favor those with higher incomes. Moreover, the distribution of income within a group engaged in tourism activities tends to be more uneven than for the distribution from agricultural activities. The findings confirm the perception of many people that although tourism has potential for increasing income and employment, it tends to worsen income distribution patterns or it tends to favor the higher income groups in the economies. When the value-added share between foreign and local stakeholders is examined, it is evident in the case of Thailand that apart from transport and the related petroleum industry, the domestically retained share is relatively high.

Although tourism has positive income potential, it can also create substantial environmental and social costs that are difficult to measure. These unknown costs could undermine tourism's sustainability. However, properly managed tourism can help preserve local cultures.

I would argue that tourism exploits too much public and social capital to be left to the market to regulate its activities. The devastation of tourism in southern provinces of Thailand as a result of the tsunami on 26 December 2004 clearly indicated how social capital was required to save the tourists and tourism capital. Moreover, it has been shown that while benefits accrue to a few people or groups, costs are borne by the general public and taxpayers who are not direct beneficiaries of the tourism industry. In such tourism destinations as Spain, Portugal, and Greece, citizens, nongovernment organizations, local political parties, and others have proposed and protested for various forms of protection to national and local governments and the private industry to keep tourism under control and minimize its impact on ecosystems and communities (Kousis 2000). This paper has shown that not all tourism outcomes are blessings and tourism does not automatically guarantee blessings for all.

The tourism industry should not be allowed to be driven totally by demand and subordinate societies and ecosystems in order to attract tourists. At present, the governments of most Mekong countries are focused mainly on using tourism to make

money. It is important that civil societies and academics in the major tourism destinations gear themselves up with knowledge of tourism impacts and participate actively in the process of tourism planning and monitoring. Mekong countries can put their experiences together and learn from one another. For example, Thailand can learn from Cambodia regarding the experience of casinos and from Lao PDR about community-based tourism and natural capital management. The way in which these countries may gain from tourism depends upon the creation and exchange of knowledge and the level of public participation in tourism planning and monitoring.

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