

## Book Review: Dolezal, C., Trupp, A., & Bui, H. T. (Eds.) (2020): *Tourism and Development in Southeast Asia*

Aquino, Richard

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## Book Review: Dolezal, C., Trupp, A., & Bui, H. T. (Eds.). (2020). *Tourism and Development in Southeast Asia*.

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Richard S. Aquino<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

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In recent decades, tourism has seen dramatic transformations, but with uneven development in Southeast Asia, a region promoted as a destination having unique biodiversity, diverse cultures, and hospitable people. These resources might be commodified into tourism experiences; however, this commodification is often fostered with the ultimate motivation of alleviating poverty, conserving threatened landscapes and ecosystems, empowering communities, and cultivating cooperation amongst Southeast Asian nations. Claudia Dolezal, Alexander Trupp, and Huong T. Bui's *Tourism and Development in Southeast Asia* provides a current platform for critical debates on the adoption of tourism for development, and calls for implementation of alternative and sustainable development through tourism. This edited volume stresses persistent issues concerning the viability of tourism as a development strategy, which can be summarized into the following themes: equitable distribution of economic benefits, local community participation, environmental costs associated with tourism activities, and, governance.

Although most of the chapters have overarching foci on local communities, case studies situated in provincial, regional, and national contexts were incorporated. In terms of geographical settings, the chapters cover eight of the eleven countries in Southeast Asia. While it can be practically challenging to curate a volume with cases on all Southeast Asian nations, the editors were able to include contributions on lesser-researched, yet emerging destinations, such as Lao PDR (Chapter 7), Myanmar (Chapter 11), and Cambodia (Chapter 12). The volume features an even distribution of geographical concentration, compared to previously published collections on tourism in the region, which mainly presented research on popular and frequently-studied (as well as visited) destinations (e.g., Indonesia, and Thailand).

The contributors to this volume have diverse academic backgrounds, making the collection multidisciplinary in nature. More importantly, contributors stem evenly from within (12 authors) and outside (12 authors) the region of Southeast Asia. Unlike preceding works, which were mainly authored by outsiders to the region who are informed by Western/Euro-centric views and researcher gaze,

this edited collection celebrates local perspectives and features a balanced etic/emic assessment of the issues. This volume amplifies local academic voices on tourism and development in Southeast Asia. In doing so, it responds to the current calls to curtail the neo-coloniality of Southeast Asian tourism knowledge production (e.g., Aquino, 2019; Wijesinghe & Mura, 2018) reinforced by global capitalist development mechanisms (Wijesinghe, Mura, & Culala, 2019).

The volume comprises 14 chapters, divided into four parts. Part I introduces the theoretical and methodological foundations of the book. Written by the editors, Chapter 1 sets the scene by systematically reviewing published studies on Southeast Asian tourism and development, while Chapter 2 (Bui and Dolezal) comprehensively narrates the evolution of tourism development in the region in line with development theories. These introductory chapters objectively position the volume within existing tourism and development paradigms and discourses, and invite readers to reflect on the sustainability of tourism development in Southeast Asia. Chapter 3 discusses methodological insights into conducting fieldwork in Southeast Asia. However, instead of outlining rigid methodical steps, Dolezal, Trupp, and Leepreecha share their practical experiences in the field. This chapter prompted me to reflect on my own fieldwork experiences (as a Filipino academic doing research in the Philippines), and relate with the same challenges experienced by the authors (e.g., gaining access, and social and power relations in the field). I concur with Leepreecha's argument that one cannot ever become a full insider into the communities being 'researched' – even though you may have been born in the same country. This chapter emphasizes that researcher positionality should not be neglected when conducting ethnographic research through fieldwork. Moreover, this chapter is a valuable read for researchers, regardless of their geographic origin or cultural background, planning to embark on fieldwork in Southeast Asia.

The dependency and management of tourism in natural environments are explored in Part II, addressing topics on funding, stewardship, and collaborative conservation. Two protected area management models, namely co-management (with private enterprises and non-governmental organizations) and geoparks (or geological parks), that are becoming popular in the Southeast Asian context, are explored in this section. Despite the novelty of these approaches, the meaningful involvement of communities was strongly stressed. Perhaps, instead of the public-private partnerships (PPPs) revealed in Chapter 4 (by Long and Bui), another 'P' that stands for 'people' should be added to these models (e.g., Baltic Urban Lab, 2018). As revealed by Kausar, Darmawan, and Firmansyah (Chapter 6), conservation programs and target outcomes are usually pre-determined by external stakeholders, not the communities themselves. Although this is not a new occurrence in tourism development, these contributions point out that having strong community control is a more desirable way of managing protected areas. After all, adjacent local communities are the most important stewards of these natural areas.

These chapters transition well to the contents of Part III: Tourism, development, and local communities. The contributions in this part engage with current debates on community-based tourism (CBT), such as the impacts of tourism on the poor (Chapter 7), entrepreneurship (Chapter 8), and livelihood and cultural transformations (Chapters 9 and 10). In many ways, the findings of these chapters accentuate

the common problems and negative outcomes concerning tourism (e.g., disempowerment), local communities, and ‘minoritized’ ethnic groups in the region. In this regard, I found Yotsumoto’s contribution (Chapter 11) particularly thought-provoking, especially on the value of self-determination for indigenous peoples. In his conclusions on the implications of modernity on the cultural landscape, tourism, and authenticity of the Ifugao Province in the Philippines, Yotsumoto wrote:

Farmers, however, are generally not interested in the preservation of traditional culture, which originated from outside and which reminds them of the past hard life. They have internalised the idea that modern life is a better life. Thus, farmers’ pursuit of the modern life continues to undermine the authenticity of traditional culture and landscape which disappoints tourists. (p. 157)

While it can be argued that cultural sustainability is an important aspect of sustainable development, these people’s pursuits of self-determined aspirations (e.g., having a modern house) are paradoxically hampered by tourism and other globalizing mechanisms (e.g., the World Heritage Listing). This chapter may prompt tourism stakeholders (e.g., visitors, planners, and experts) to re-think their positions in inculcating visions and desires for authentic experiences in host communities.

Part IV contains chapters that analyze another vital aspect of tourism development: governance. Contributions here explore both macro- (Chapters 11 and 13) and micro-perspectives (Chapter 12) on destination governance. In the latter chapter, Müller, Markova, and Ponnappureddy’s analysis of CBT in Cambodia showed that organic and non-formally organized tourism activities worked better for the locality under study. Although not perfect, this case exemplifies that top-down tourism development strategies, whether initiated by the public or private sector, are not always ideal. Top-down initiatives are often susceptible to poor coordination between actors from the top (e.g., funding agencies, governments, etc.) and the ground (e.g., communities) (see also Chapter 11), further impeding their success.

This edited volume offers well-crafted contributions to present debates on tourism and development in Southeast Asia. The editing of the chapters followed a consistent format, articulating the history of tourism development in each country, and guiding readers who are less familiar with the contexts of the featured countries. Chapters 7 and 10 would benefit from more recent data; yet, this offers opportunities for researchers to follow up on these case studies. In the culmination of the volume, the editors recognized some topics that were not covered. In addition to these limitations, it would be great to see chapters situated in supranational contexts, such as the influence of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community or China-Southeast Asia relationship/interventions on tourism development in the region. Furthermore, this edited volume was published during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when tourism is almost non-existent worldwide, exposing the vulnerability of the industry to such crises. While many academics propose that this is the right time to re-imagine tourism (e.g., Everingham & Chassagne, 2020; Haywood, 2020), readers of this volume must also reflect on whether tourism is the right solution to the problems of the developing world. Overall, this volume is a valuable addition to tourism, development, and Southeast Asian studies. The chapters

in this volume can be utilized as teaching cases and references, but most importantly, have practical implications for tourism leaders, academics, and development practitioners in Southeast Asia.



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