

Moving towards tourism-modernity: The process of Thai touristization and economic transformation

Yuthasak Chatkaewnapanon, Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand 50000
yuthasak_c@payap.ac.th

Abstract

Throughout Thailand's history there have been many stages that created historical and cultural legacies. In particular, the aspect of modernity in Thailand is the influence of the globalization period. The period of neighboring country colonization, was the first phase of Thailand globalization process and resulted in the subsequent transition to a unified nation-state, largely responsible for its ability as a country to completely control its geography, culture, society and politics. In other words, this stage led to the state-authorization of the Thai language, Buddhist-based cultures, Chakri dynasty, and Bangkok as a center of administration. The second phase of Thailand globalization process was the nation's industrialization that resulted in a modern economic transformation utilizing the high performance of the agricultural industry, cheap labour, and an abundance of raw materials. Therefore, the first two phases of Thai globalization process through the process of colonization and industrialization emphasizes the change of economic transformation of the nation from the status-ridden *feudal* past to the creation of an open *capitalist* society.

Since then the country move towards tourism-industrialization. Tourism has become a major cause for dynamic, development processes and their consequences for tourist destinations and their population in previously non-tourist settings, generally in areas with outstanding scenic, natural and/or cultural resources. The process of Thailand tourism-industrialization or touristization creates massive tourist related construction and tourist activity projects which have changed various landscapes of Thailand. This paper therefore argues that the touristization process is the third phase of globalization in Thailand, which is responsible for the transition of many rural communities from largely *agricultural-based communities* to contemporary *tourism-based societies*, which are manifested by a shifting of occupations, roles, powers and social standing among various social groups within them.

Introduction

Throughout Thailand's history there have been many stages that created historical and cultural legacies. Those legacies varied throughout time, place and social level, such as Thailand's old historic period and the period of globalization that affected the process of Thailand to a more modern society. These different stages of national legacies have built upon each other, developed from each other and resulted in a Thai identity. In much of literature of modern Thai history, globalization is portrayed as one of the major influences that are keys to the development of Thailand as a modern society. Moreover, many of the most important phases within the period of Thailand globalization process, such as colonization and industrialization stages, seem to be recurrent in the studies of Thai history. In other words, there has been much study of Thai society's various periods of globalization such as colonialism and industrialization that influenced major areas of Thailand's development, including society's initial development, policies and governments, the country's potential and constraints (Askew 2002; Baker and Phongpaichit 2005; Girling 1981; Krongkaew 1995; Peleggi 2007; Reynolds 1991; 2006).

More recently, there have been research studies on Thai society and globalization which specifically focus on tourism development. In this respect, studies present various aspects and empirical overviews of major areas of tourism development, policy and local government, tourism participation and planning, the encounter of host-guest, organization and infrastructure development, including the issue of rural community development. Although all these research studies provide an understanding of tourism's development effect on Thailand from multidisciplinary perspectives, there is an absence of the engagement between tourism and Thailand society within Thai history conception and analysis – precisely the gap that this paper attempts to address. In other words, this paper argues that along the line of modern Thai history which focuses on Thai society and the globalization process, literature should include not only the discussion of Thai society in colonization period and Thai society in the industrialization period but also the discussion of Thai society in touristization period.

Colonization: the first stage of Thailand Globalization process

An important modernization of Thailand took place during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910). During that time, the country encountered Western imperialism. To sustain the country's independence and sovereignty, King Rama V implemented social infrastructure investment, government reform, high level diplomatic relations and trade agreements. In other words, through the Western colonization of neighboring countries in the nineteenth century, Thailand experienced its own significant period of modern transformation. As outlined in Tanabe and Keyes (2002a), the processes of modernization that Thailand has undergone is based on the following. First, Buddhism reform, the goal of which is to have a more scientific understands of the world (Baker and Phongpaichit 2005) and second, the global economic integration and the capitalization of its own economy (Krongkaew 1995; Panya 1995; Phongpaichit and Baker 1996). The third process was the political transformation from absolute monarchy to democracy – based on a constitution (Bunnag 1977; Wyatt 1994). The last process of modernization was the re-identification of 'Thainess' parallel to the process of globalization (Girling 1981; Reynolds 1991; Tanabe and Keyes 2002a; Van Esterik 2000).

In addition, the constructions of Thai modernity were based widely on 'the broader population through various urban- and elite-controlled means of cultural production: commodity markets, mass media, government bureaucracy, standardized school curricula' (Mills 1999: 16). As the Western colonization of neighboring countries in the nineteenth century reinforced the political reforms and Buddhist educational reforms, Siam successfully achieved the goal of building one nation (Wyatt 1994; Reynolds 1991). In this respect, the country's redefinition of its internal political power institutionalized the political, social and economic system, which supported the centralization of social status and the accumulation of Bangkok as the centre of the Siamese political system (Winichakul 1994). The first stage of Thailand globalization, therefore, resulted in centralized Bangkok.

Industrialization: the second stage of Thailand Globalization process

The stage of Thai globalization through the colonization process was followed by the nation's industrialization. This period of global capital (1950s) resulted in high performance of the agricultural industry, cheap labour, and an abundance of raw materials. Furthermore, Thailand's industrial growth in the 1960s, coupled with the International Bank of Rural Development (IBRD) guidelines for national development, the industry quickly supplanted agriculture as the basis for economic expansion. The country began to export secondary products such as textiles, garments and processed foods (Phongpaichit and Baker 1996).

A clear scenario of the country's transition into modernity can be seen in the case of Bangkok's transformation (Askew 2002). The modernity process is reflected in massive construction and real estate projects which have changed the city landscape of Bangkok and led to massive migration from rural areas to cities in search of work (Asker 2002). In essence, the urbanized Bangkok and its economic activities resulted in a migration of labor across the country, particularly from the north and northeast of Thailand to the capital. Isvilanonda and Hossain (2003: 109) conceded that 'a wage differential between rural areas and cities encouraged farm labour out-migration.' The effects of the second phase of Thailand globalization processes became more visible demographically as they grew into recurrent crises of overpopulation and overdevelopment of Bangkok's urbanity (Mills 1999; Van Esterik 2000; Yasmeen 2002).

Within the second stage of Thailand globalization process, the central Thai governments launched 'The National Economic and Social Development Plan'. It provided the guidelines and directions for the country's development. The main objective of the First, Second, and Third Development Plans (1961-1976) was to construct and improve the country's physical infrastructure in order to cope with the modernizing centralist state. Therefore, this stage of Thailand globalization affected the physical integration of rural areas by upgrading infrastructure, communication, and transportation such as a modern postal system, telegraph services and railway lines, which led to a gradual change of majors cities beyond Bangkok, such as Chiang Mai, Nakorn Rachasima, Haad Yai, for international market (Baker and Phongpaichit 2005; Wyatt 1994).

Touristization: the third stage of Thailand Globalization process

Thailand has been acknowledged as the fastest growing tourist destination since the 1960s (Elliott 1997). The diversity of cultural and environmental resources, coupled with the phenomenon of R&R trips (rest and recreation) for American soldiers' to Thailand during the Vietnam War (1962-1975) resulted in a booming of Thailand's tourism development (Li and Zhang 1997; Higham 2000). In 1960, the Thai government established the first national body to promote tourism in Thailand – the Tourist Organization of Thailand (TOT). In 1979 TOT was renamed 'Tourism Authority of Thailand' (TAT). Through the support of the TAT, the tourism industry in Thailand became internationally competitive (Tourism Authority of Thailand 1998). Therefore, the Thai governments seek to provide an extensive development process at national, provincial and local levels in response to the growth of tourism.

Within the third stage of Thailand globalization process, the Thai governments, for the first time, integrated the national tourism policy into the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) 1977-1981 (Phongpaichit and Chiasakul 1993). At the beginning of the National Tourism Plan, it highlighted the development of tourist attractions, infrastructure and facilities for the main tourist destinations around the country. Smith (1992) notes that the growth of tourism in Pattaya resulted in urbanizing the area to address tourism development. In other words, to accommodate the tourism growth, the numbers of tourist infrastructures including tourist accommodations and entertainment businesses in forms of bar-beer have growth significantly in Pattaya area over the years.

The development of tourism in Phuket, however, came late compared to Pattaya. Phuket's economy was originally based on the exports of tin, rubber, coconuts and fish. However, as the price of agricultural products dropped massively, tourism development was then perceived as an alternative economic development to replace agricultural and mining activities (Phuket Tourism Master Plan 1976). Although tourism development in Phuket started in the early 1970s, the island did not become an international tourist destination until the opening of the Phuket airport in 1979. Coupled with a bridge connecting Phuket to the mainland, the island became easily accessible for both domestic and international tourists. Since then tourism development has grown significantly with massive infrastructure in form of international hotel chains and entertainment businesses such as discotheques and bars have been built (Kontogeorgopoulos 1998).

During 1982-1997, tourism was the largest foreign earner in Thailand's economy (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2002). Tourism was the means of economic growth at all levels as well as a tool for the country's economic recovery after the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997-1998 (Higham 2000). Regardless of the suffering from the economic crisis, Thailand was synthesized for tourism growth due to reasons such the quality and diversity of tourism products and services and the favorable exchange rate for shopping tourism (Wisansing 2004). In addition, the 'Amazing Thailand 1998-1999' promotion was introduced after the devaluation of the Thai *baht* in 1997 in the hopes of attracting and encouraging visitors to spend more money in the country. Coupled with the location of Thailand and easy access to Bangkok International Airport (Chon and Singh 1994), the Amazing Thailand campaign was highly successful and became the country's image to the world (Intarakomalyasut 2001).

Since then, Thailand tourism plans have been built on the success of the 'Amazing Thailand' marketing and promotional campaigns. The plans are to develop new marketing strategies. Moreover, TAT encourages the diversification of the country's tourism products and to identify opportunities for future investment. It includes the issues of the creation of tourism employment and enhancement of the industry standards (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2002). Therefore, Thailand in its touristization period has resulted in development of many rural areas to address the TAT plans of creating, developing and diversifying tourism products. In this aspect, many rural areas where little growth occurred during Thailand first two stages of globalization are significantly developed during the third stage of Thailand globalization, Thailand touristization period.

Conclusion: Touristization period in Thailand Globalization Process

Within a large historical process (Duval 2004), Thailand has been significantly integrated into the globalization process in three major stages mainly: during colonization of neighboring countries period, the country's industrialization process and during the boom of the Thai tourism industry. The first two stages of Thailand globalization led to the state-authorization of Thai language, Buddhist-based cultures, Chakri dynasty and Bangkok as a center of administration. Moreover, the inner colonialism of Bangkok as political and economical center reflected the country's 'internal spatial and social peripheries ... that are dominated by a metropolitan core [Bangkok]' (Hall and Tucker 2004: 2). Therefore, these

periods formed the lifestyle and attitude towards Bangkok civilization (Van Esterik 2000). At the same time, it inserted the *Thai identity* into every location in the country.

However, from the 1980s, a series of investments, primarily in the tourism related industries, set in motion a process that rapidly changed the character of Thai society. The reason for this is that large-scale tourism development in forms of transportation, communication, recreation, accommodation and other service industries as well as the integration with the resultant tourists has reshaped many characteristics of Thailand society, in particular and to a greater extent in those rural areas than any other single aspect of its economy. As tourism grew, resultant improvements in the infrastructure and the demand for more tourist facilities contributed to the promising growth of rural communities and thus presented the set of conditions for unprecedented rural development.

Consequently, many locations in Thailand, along with Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket were subjected to tourism development which spread rapidly across the country. Today there is scarcely an area in Thailand that is not influenced by tourism. Thus, the tourism industry can be described as the instrument that transformed the whole country. Indeed, while Bangkok was and still is mainly the major destination of great opportunities, a newly liberalized economy and *thansamai* (civilized) life style (Askew 2002; Van Esterik 2000) during the first two stages of Thailand globalization process, tourist destinations in many rural areas in Thailand have been developed as sites of new modes of living and values. Importantly, *Touristization* is the third phase of globalization process in Thailand, which is responsible for a transition of many rural communities from largely *agricultural-based communities* to contemporary *tourism-based societies*. This is manifested in a shifting of occupations, roles, powers and social standing among various social groups in these societies. Thus, it is necessary to engage touristization process into the analysis of modern Thai society and its globalization process.

References

- Askew, M., 2002, *Bangkok: place, practice and representation*, London, Routledge
- Baker, C and Phongpaichit, P., 2005, *A History of Thailand*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Bunnag, Taj., 1977, *The Provincial Administration of Siam 1892-1915*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press
- Chon, K.S. and Singh, A., 1994, Environmental challenges and influences on tourism: the case of Thailand's tourism industry,' Pp. 81-91, in C.P. Cooper and A. Lockwood, (eds.), *Progress in tourism, recreation and hospitality management*, (Vol. 6), Chichester, John Wiley
- Duval, D.T., 2004, 'Cultural tourism in postcolonial environments: negotiating histories, ethnicities and authenticities in St. Vincent, Eastern Caribbean,' Pp. 57-75, in C.M. Hall and H. Tucker, (eds.), *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested discourses, identities and representations*, London, Routledge
- Elliott, J. 1997, *Tourism: politics and public sector management*, London, Routledge
- Girling, J.L.S., 1981, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press
- Hall, C.M., 1997, *Tourism in the Pacific Rim: development, impacts and markets*, 2nd edition, Melbourne, Longman
- Hall, C.M. and Tucker, H., 2004, 'Tourism and postcolonism: an introduction,' Pp. 1-24, in C.M. Hall and H. Tucker, (eds.), *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested discourses, identities and representations*, London, Routledge
- Higham, J., 2000, 'Thailand: prospects for a tourism-led economic recovery,' Pp. 129-143, in C.M. Hall and S. Page, (eds.), *Tourism in South and Southeast Asia: issues and cases*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann
- Intarakomalyasut, N. 2001, 'Amazing but not for long', *Bangkok Post*, 2 July 2001
- Isvilanonda, S. and Hossain, M., 2003, 'Dynamics of rice farming in the Chao Phraya Delta: a case of study of three villages in Suphan Buri province, Pp. 109-124, in F. Molle and

- T., Srijantr, (eds.), *Thailand's Rice Bowl: Perspectives on agricultural and social change in the Chao Phraya Delta*, Bangkok, White Lotus
- Kontogeorgopoulos, N., 1998, 'Accommodation employment patterns and opportunities,' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25(2): 314-339
- Krongkaew, M., 1995, *Thailand's Industrialization and its Consequences*, New York, St. Martin's Press
- Li, L. and Zhang, W., 1997, 'Thailand: the dynamic growth of Thai tourism', pp. 286-303, in F.M. Go and C. L. Jenkins, (eds.), *Tourism and Economic Development in Asia and Australasia*, Cassell Imprint, London
- Mills, M.B., 1999, *Thai Women in the Global Labor Force: Consuming desires, contested selves*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press
- Panya, O., 1995, Change from within: adaptation and self-determination in three rural communities of Northeast Thailand 1900-1992, Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Department of Geography, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington
- Phongpaichit, P. and Baker, C., 1996, *Thailand's Boom!*, New South Wale, Allen & Unwin
- Phongpaichit, P. and Chiasakul, S., 1993, 'Service,' Pp. 151-171, in P.G. Warr, (ed.), *The Thai Economy in Transition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Peleggi, M. 2007, *Thailand: the worldly Kingdom*, London, Reaktion
- Reynolds, C.J. (ed.), 1991, *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand 1939-1989*, Victoria, Monash University
- Reynolds, C.J. 2006, *Seditious Histories: contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts*, Singapore, Singapore University Press
- Smith, R. A. 1992, Beach resort evolution: implications for planning, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19: 304-322

- Tanabe, S. and Keyes, C.F., 2002a, 'Introduction,' Pp. 1-39, in S. Tanabe and C.F. Keyes, (eds.), *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii
- Tourism Organization of Thailand, Pacific Consultants International, Tokyo and Design 103 Limited (March 1979), *Master Plan and Feasibility Study Tourism Development of Phuket*
- Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1998, *The Action Plan Formulation for Rehabilitation of Tourism Attractions at Ao Plang-Nga, Krabi, Phuket, and Ko Samui Surrounding: Final Report*, Bangkok, TAT
- Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2002, *Statistical Report 2002*, Bangkok, Tourism Authority of Thailand
- Van Esterik, P., 2000, *Materializing Thailand*, Oxford, BERG
- Winichakul, T., 1994, *Siam Mapped: a history of the geo-body of a nation*, Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai
- Wisansing, J., 2004, Tourism planning and destination marketing: towards a community-driven approach: a case of Thailand: unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Lincoln University, New Zealand
- Wyatt, D. 1994, *Studies in Thai History*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books