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**DEGRADATION OR ENHANCEMENT THROUGH
TOURISM: A ROLE FOR ETHICAL/RELIGIOUS
APPROACHES**

by

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Abstract

The author argues for recognition of community values in tourism planning and development, with particular reference to the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) and the ethics promoted by Buddhism. He offers a framework for the incorporation of tourism into the economic base of the region in ways which allow communities to make choices and to protect their traditions, lifestyles and environments from negative impacts. He submits that, although the specific value base may differ from that of the Mekong region, similar approaches could be adopted in other destinations.

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DEGRADATION OR ENHANCEMENT THROUGH TOURISM: A ROLE FOR ETHICAL/RELIGIOUS APPROACHES¹

Poll Theerapappisit

“O mankind! we made you into nations and tribes that you may know and cooperate with one another.” Koran 49:13

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Introduction

Religious and ethical principles could and should be applied in development planning processes pursuing peace through tourism.

In tourism research work and dialogues, religion and ethics have provided marginal contributions to the field of study or have been largely ignored. Since 1986, an initiative by the International Institute for Peace through Tourism has contributed to international understanding and cooperation based on a vision that the tourism industry is potentially an ‘ambassador for peace’ (IIPT, 2003). However tourism development practitioners have experienced various problems in their efforts to achieve this aim. The activities of terrorists have cast a spotlight on the powerful links between religion and development, leading to big questions for the tourism industry about how the industry can contribute to an enhanced sense of peace and security for travellers in this new century.

This paper focuses on the debates over emerging problems associated with tourism development and the potential contribution from ethical and religious discourses to resolve the root cause of these, particularly in less developed countries. The findings from fieldwork in Thailand suggest that religious and ethical principles could and should be applied in development planning processes pursuing peace through tourism. The application of Buddhist ethics to a range of tourism development options is the major focus. The discussion reveals an emerging research agenda relating to a role for ethics education and training in tourism practices.

Issue in focus: Is religion conducive to peace?*

Religion is a vital element of national identity, contributing significantly to the cohesion of nations as well as fomenting conflict within and between states. Because of the growth of ethnic and religious conflict in the contemporary world it is commonplace to regard

¹ This contribution is an edited version of a paper published in *Creating Tourism Knowledge*, Proceedings of the Council for University Tourism and Hospitality (CAUTHE) Conference, Brisbane, February 10-13, 2004, CD-ROM.

religion as an impediment to international order and to peaceful conflict resolution. Modern history clearly suggests that religion, because of its absolute claims, can be a source of domestic civil strife and global disorder.

But religion can also contribute to global order and peaceful conflict resolution. One commentator, reflecting the perspectives of a growing number of scholars who regard religious communities as conducive to the peace process, has written that "the use of a religious rationale to justify a conflict creates opportunities for spiritually motivated peacemakers. They can appeal to the parties on the basis of universal religious principles or on the basis of the specific warrants for conflict resolution that exist in each religion's theology." Moreover, religious institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church and Quaker agencies like the American Friends Service Committee can play an important role in community-building and dispute settlement. Indeed, organised Protestant and Catholic organisations have played a vital role in Third World development, as well as in pacific settlement of regional disputes.

American public officials and scholars have been slow to recognise the important role of religion in modern social and political life. The failure to appreciate religion's positive public role is due in great part to what has been termed 'the Enlightenment prejudice' - the belief that 'progress of knowledge and the influence of religion were mutually exclusive, making the latter a waning force.' But the spread of modernisation has not resulted in a decline in religion. Rather, the opposite has occurred. As a result, if scholars are to develop an adequate understanding of the major forces influencing contemporary international relations, and if Western diplomats are to contribute fully to global peacekeeping, they will have to develop a greater appreciation of the role of religion in the modern world. To ignore religious institutions and thinking is to render incomprehensible some of the key issues and crises of the world today.

* This reading is an edited extract from Amstutz, M.R. (1999) *International Conflict and Cooperation: An Introduction to World Politics*, 2nd edn, Boston: McGraw Hill College, p.46.

The need for ethics in tourism development

There is no denying that the manner in which the industry develops involves a range of ethical issues.

For the same reason that it was said that war is much too serious a thing to be left to the military (Georges Clemenceau), there can be no doubt that the conduct of the tourism industry cannot be left solely to the discretion of its promoters. This paper will argue that one field of human discourse, namely the study and application of ethical value systems, including religious traditions, has an indispensable role to play in the tourism industry if it is to act as a force for good in the world.

The modern phenomenon that we know as 'tourism' has been described as, 'the biggest business in the world' (Goldstone, 2001: 45). Tourism and travel accounts for 11.7% of world GDP, 8% of world exports and 8% of all employment (the World Travel

and Tourism Council, 2000 in Urry, 2002: 5). As Urry points out, there is virtually no country in the world that is not a significant receiver of visitors.

Although at a global level tourism is an activity engaged in mainly by those from relatively prosperous countries, the impact of the industry in developing countries is frequently profound and all too frequently not benign. It is touted by international agencies as the quickest and easiest route for 'development' for less developed societies, providing for those countries or regions an opportunity to become a part of the global economy sooner and cheaper than through industrialisation. According to the United Nations Council on Trade and Development, tourism is the only large sector of international trade in services where poor countries have consistently posted a surplus (Goldstone, 2001). More bluntly, in the words of an official of the International Finance Corporation (an arm of the World Bank), if natural advantages are all you have, that (tourism) is all you can do.

Warning bells are increasingly being sounded about the threat, rather than the promise, that tourism is coming to represent for many traditional developing societies. Among the issues identified as marring the image of the industry are its reliance upon child labour, the exponential growth of prostitution and sex tourism, and the degradation of the physical and cultural landscape of the areas where tourism is a major economic activity. Among those from the industry who warn of damaging impacts and moral and ethical issues confronting tourism was Richard Stirland, director of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines in 2000:

To what extent can tourism be encouraged and developed without destroying the very essence of what tourists have come to experience and see?...Of course, it is culturally arrogant and insensitive to suggest that the inhabitants of any city, village or hamlet should continue to live in picturesque poverty merely to provide a sense of adventure and good photographs for tourists...they should not have their culture and unique environment totally submerged in the trivia of western civilisation, or even under some of the worst aspects of modern Asian lifestyles..." (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2000: 10).

There is growing recognition that the role and impact of tourism cannot be viewed solely in terms of economics and its contribution to a narrowly defined 'development'. The promotion of the industry *per se*, and its promotion over other potential human activities such as agricultural diversification or industrialisation, will inevitably lead to strains in society and inherent conflicts of interest. In short, there is no denying that the manner in which the industry develops involves a range of ethical issues.

A start has been made over the past decade in highlighting the ethical issues confronting the industry in its rapid and seemingly inexorable growth, including those in relatively pristine regions such as communities of indigenous peoples now subjected to an increasingly pervasive and homogenised global culture (Meethan, 2001; Boniface & Fowler, 1993).

Responses include the World Tourism Organization's Code of Ethics for Tourism (1999), a Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (2000), the Asia Pacific Economic Co-Operation (APEC)/ Pacific

Asia Travel Association (PATA) Code for Sustainable Tourism (2001), declarations on Peace through Tourism 2000 and 2001 (IIPT, 2003) and the Green Globe Certification program developed by the World Travel and Tourism Council for tourism companies and tourism destinations (1994).

'Degradation' in a tourism industry could stem from unrestricted commercialisation in the operations of tourism systems, profit maximisation, ecological exploitation, social and health impacts, terrorism and so on. The issue is how to avoid such degradation, while enhancing tourist experiences with goodwill, mutual respect and peace amongst various groups of stakeholders? What policy settings and principles can be applied to help move the attitudes of tourism operators and other stakeholders, including host communities, towards holistic approaches and a commitment to sustainable development, allowing future generations to enjoy the current diversity of tourism resources?

The tourism phenomenon is usually based upon a variety of elements in the interactions between tourists and the places they visit. In many cases, tourists experience the cultural and spiritual dimensions of host communities. Tourism development in such circumstances may be characterised by either 'positive peace', based on goodwill between hosts and guests, or 'repressive peace', in which conflict and resentment are suppressed. A host community upon which repressive peace is imposed may find itself preoccupied with fear or at least existing in a zone of discomfort. It may endure too large tourist visitation levels and be forced to participate in activities planned by others, such as tourist operators and government agencies. These communities and other stakeholders will not be able to avoid or remediate such conflicts peacefully without applying an ethical dimension in the development of tourism.

This chapter will offer some suggestions pertaining to religious traditions and ethical systems. It will examine how this field of study can be applied to the development of sustainable tourism planning in order to minimise conflict and achieve balanced and sustainable, culturally sensitive tourism development for the benefit of all stakeholders. Although the proposals should be of wider application, the focus will be upon a tradition and region of study especially familiar to the author - Buddhist ethics and the tourism industry in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

Case Study: Ethical tourism

Weedon (2004) conducted focus group sessions with members of the British organisation Tourism Concern to ascertain their views on 'ethical tourism'. The respondents recognised that the concept of ethical tourism is vague and, because of the subjectivity involved, probably impossible to define. It was seen as involving the various types of 'alternative tourism'; that is, as more socially and ecologically benign than mass tourism, and closely akin to 'responsible tourism.'

There is a suggestion that ethical tourism may be based on the principles of Fair Trade and corporate social responsibility (CSR) which 'bring an element of fairness and equality to tourism development' (p.4) by:

- accountability to and fair treatment of employees;
- proper environmental strategies,
- ensuring that the local community is fully informed on the impacts of tourism;

- contributions to community development
- bringing the producer and the consumer together;
- fighting poverty by redressing the imbalance in economic power;
- supporting small-scale producers; and
- strengthening the power of these producers in the market place.

It emerged from the discussions that respondents usually, but not always, chose holidays which helped the destination community. It was important to them to feel welcomed by the hosts and consumption was conducted accordingly (eg, by using locally-owned accommodation and purchasing locally-produced products). There was a strong belief in the obligation on travellers to take responsibility for their actions. Participants stressed that these choices were not always easy, and that much depended on the information available to them about destination cultures and behavioural norms.

It also emerged that all participants had begun to form their current views on tourism as a result of one (usually negative) travel experience. For most, this had involved some kind of 'culture shock' - a feeling of helplessness in the face of extreme poverty, embarrassment over unintended offence, a perception of hostility and consequent vulnerability. The greater the cultural distance, the greater the anxiety experienced.

Participants admitted that there were other motivations behind their holiday choices. These included a desire to visit a particular place or enjoy the company of others, to learn more about the world and themselves, to avoid being categorised as a tourist and to explore 'undiscovered' destinations. This suggests that the ethical concern is one element in a range of lifestyle choices.

Nonetheless, participants expressed a view that ethical tourism should not be regarded as a niche product, but as an approach to business that ought to cover all elements of tourism, and as an additional dimension to all travel.

Ethics, religious values and tourism

If actors could make ethically sound decisions, then the industry would have a greater chance of being a vehicle of goodwill.

The suggestion that religion is important for development and the converse, that development is important for religion, and hence that dialogue between religious institutions and leaders and their counterparts in development institutions should be enhanced has jarred a goodly range of people. The two worlds are often seen as far apart: religion deals with spiritual matters, while development is very much in the material world (Marshall, 2003: 5).

There is an emerging discourse in the literature of tourism studies as to how values and ethics may be employed in an industry that continues to grow at a phenomenal rate

and which has very quickly developed into an agent of social and ecological change (Fennell & Przeclawski, 2003). The authors posing that question justify the role of ethics to tourism as follows (p.140):

(A) number of conditions make tourism an appropriate candidate for ethical scrutiny, apart from the fact that it deals with human behaviour ... It involves many different actors representing many different positions, it has an applied context, it has social, economic and ecological dimensions, and it is noted for its ability to create a mix of significant impacts...Based on the assumptions and beliefs these individuals/groups have towards one another (i.e. assumptions and beliefs about tourism and tourists, local people, the environment, profit, preservation, time and space) their interactions present a number of ethical dilemmas.

It is commonly acknowledged that there are strong links between tourism and religion (Ryan, 2003). Most frequently, this issue is noted in the context of the effect of visitors upon the value systems of the host communities and there is an underlying assumption that tourism is the active component in the relationship with local communities as passive reactors to tourism-induced change. Tourism is thus viewed as an exogenous variable exerting its influence upon otherwise stable communities (Ashworth, 2003).

It will be argued here, however, that ethical values and religious traditions can be employed in a positive way in tourism planning and development, in particular in bringing about a greater degree of consensus among tourism stakeholders and in conflict resolution.

For most people and most societies value systems, or ethics, and religious traditions have been intertwined. As Preston (2001: 27-28) has written:

...though we do not need to be theists or adherents of an institutional religion to be moral, all systems of ethics draw on metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. In that sense ethical views always rest on belief systems...(and) faith may then cultivate an ethical disposition in which the self invests confidence in a centre or centres of value giving direction to one's life, within communities of shared interpretation, loyalty and trust.

Nor is our time a 'secular age' for the majority of humanity. In arguing that people continue to believe that there are important, if untapped resources within religious traditions for addressing the conflicts that often divide peoples and nations, Cox et al. (1994) observed that those who in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries foresaw the triumph of scientific rationality or of various secular and humanistic ideologies did not, it turns out, read the tea leaves very accurately. Instead the twentieth century has witnessed a phenomenal renaissance of religious traditions in virtually every part of the globe.

In their contribution on ethical stakeholder interactions in tourism, Fennell and Przeclawski (2003) conclude that if actors could make ethically sound decisions, then the

industry would have a greater chance of being a vehicle of goodwill. They conclude with the plea that further research is needed, particularly in the form of case studies, to examine situations involving stakeholders and the various ethical issues arising from their interactions. Researchers may then use this information to develop strategies for resolving such issues.

This suggests a direction for research on the role of religious philosophies and the principles of the world's major religions in endorsing and encouraging a 'peace culture' and ethical approaches to tourism in contemporary pluralistic societies. That research could focus on, for example, the use of religious values in bridging cultural divisions, in the ethical development of major tourism attractions and destinations, and in fostering the spiritual/ethical values of people associated with the global tourism phenomenon.

The fact is that not all religious people are good and not all good people are religious (Preston, 2001). It will not be suggested that all communities must or should embrace the institutionalisation of or enforce the practice of these religions to ensure appropriate tourism development. Religion should be only one vehicle reflecting the different world views and values of human life for both tourists and residents in host destinations. However, the enduring religious traditions provide a major focus of attraction for tourism development and, more importantly, can be harnessed and used positively by those communities to design peaceful and equitable tourism models.

Why Buddhist ethics?

An emphasis on dealing with shared problems could transform the ethos in promoting tourism development.

This section will focus on Buddhist values and ethics, especially in societies with Buddhist traditions such as those countries that are experiencing a rapidly expanding tourist industry in the Greater Mekong River Delta region of South-East Asia. This region has available to it a profound and potentially powerful 'primary language', that of the Buddhist tradition, from which to draw in planning for tourism development in ways that will enhance and empower, rather than degrade and demoralise, the existing communities and social structures. It will explore the interrelationship of peace through tourism with the holistic views of morality and bioethics in Buddhist traditions.

Conflicts of interests amongst various groups of tourism stakeholders could be interpreted as *dukkha* in the terminology of Buddhist ethics (Silva, 2002: 120). Human conflict and self-interest is the norm of 'suffering' (Keown, 2001b: 20), and these can only be overcome by employing shared values (Tucker & Williams, 1997; Silva, 1998). Basic moral codes of Buddhism can provide a common ground of core values for those who are involved in the processes of sustainable development (Payutto, 1995; 1998).

Trust and a philanthropic spirit based upon 'causality' (Macy, 1991) and wisdom with open-mindedness and unemotional judgment (parts of *dharma* in Buddhist ethics) can be reflected in compassion and help bridge the barriers of class, caste, colour and gender. Incorporation of this will enhance the interactive engagement of all people and encourage dialogue in a spirit of peace and mutual respect. An emphasis on dealing with shared problems could transform the ethos in promoting tourism development from one

based on self-interest to a concern with common interests and the generation of long-term benefits on a broader community level.

There are major methodological issues to be considered in the use of traditional philosophical and religious ideas to resolve contemporary development concerns. How can the key government agencies concerned in tourism development be dissuaded from focusing only on economic values? To create a strong base with a holistic policy approach, it should be initiated from a grassroots level through community participation.

The application of Buddhist ethics to tourism planning and development will now be discussed, with the hope that it will help in formulating alternative codes of conduct - originating from the roots of Eastern philosophy - for planners and policy makers in the GMS tourism industry.

How to apply ethics in tourism practice

Ethical guidelines should not be considered as formulae but rather as contributors to awareness.

Ethical principles are the crucial 'input' factors affecting people's attitudes (for example, Hendler, 1995; Howe, 1996; Preston, 2001; Theerappapisit, 2003). The problems associated with lack of local participation in tourism planning policies and conflicts of interests are ethical in character. It seems that the willingness of local people to participate in the planning process is strongly related to what they have learned and experienced in their lives, the extent of ethical input that they see in policies affecting them and the outputs of plans and implementation processes.

Figure 1 demonstrates the six ethical principles of morality, wisdom, holism and dynamism, causality, non-violence and sufficiency as the ideologies of the 'trade-off' system, using Theravāda Buddhist philosophy as a tool to indicate the balance between problems and benefits (Theerapappisit, 2003, p.52). If these principles are applied to tourism development, there are three levels in the participatory learning process for policymakers and various groups of tourism stakeholders at which they can be applied in the introduction of community-based tourism planning practices aimed at local sustainability.

This learning process (Smith, 2001) could be applied at the individual level (self-development), at mediation level (interactions in social system) or at the inter-organisational level (whole environmental system), or at all three levels. These ethical guidelines should not be considered as formulae but rather as contributors to awareness that could bring about a change favouring sustainable development, particularly for the relevant agencies of the GMS governments.

Sharpley (2000), Hultsman (1995) and Wasi (1994) described the strong link between the concept of sustainable development and Buddhist ethics as intrinsic harmony, humankind and Law of Nature (*dharma*). Figure 2 shows an alternative Buddhist model for Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) adapted from Wasi's holistic model of integration among physical, social and mental aspects.

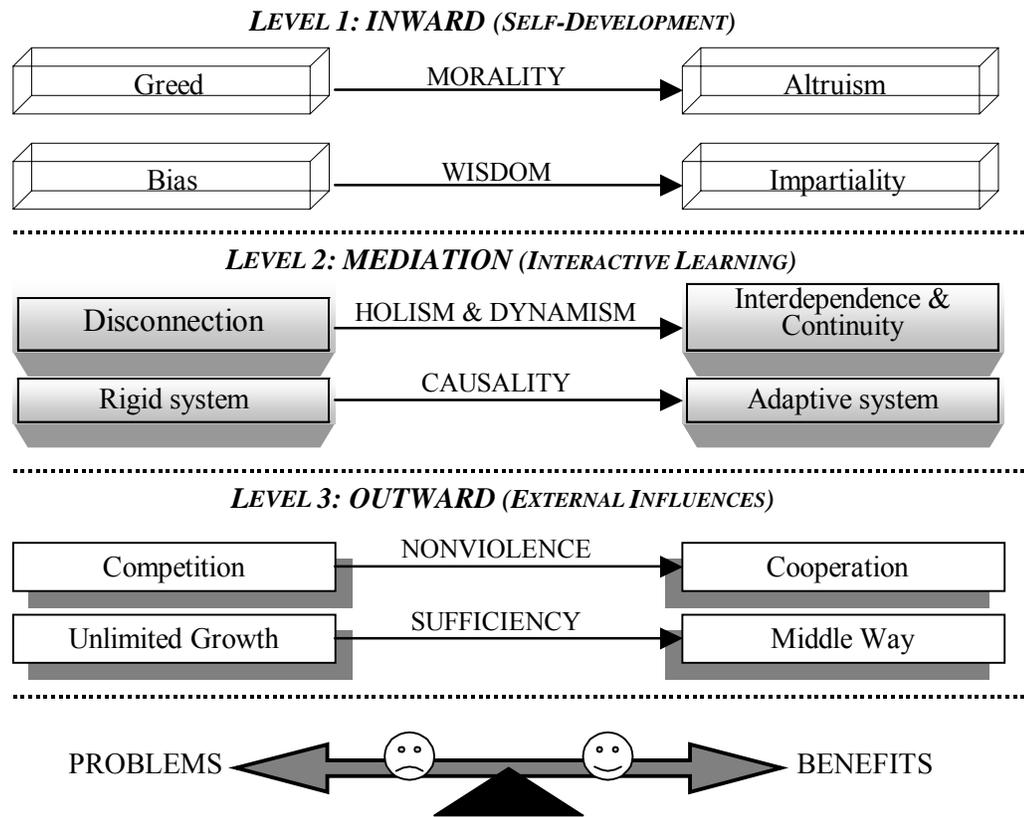


Figure 1: Buddhist Ethics: Balancing Problems and Benefits

Source: Adapted from Theerapappisit, 2003, p. 53

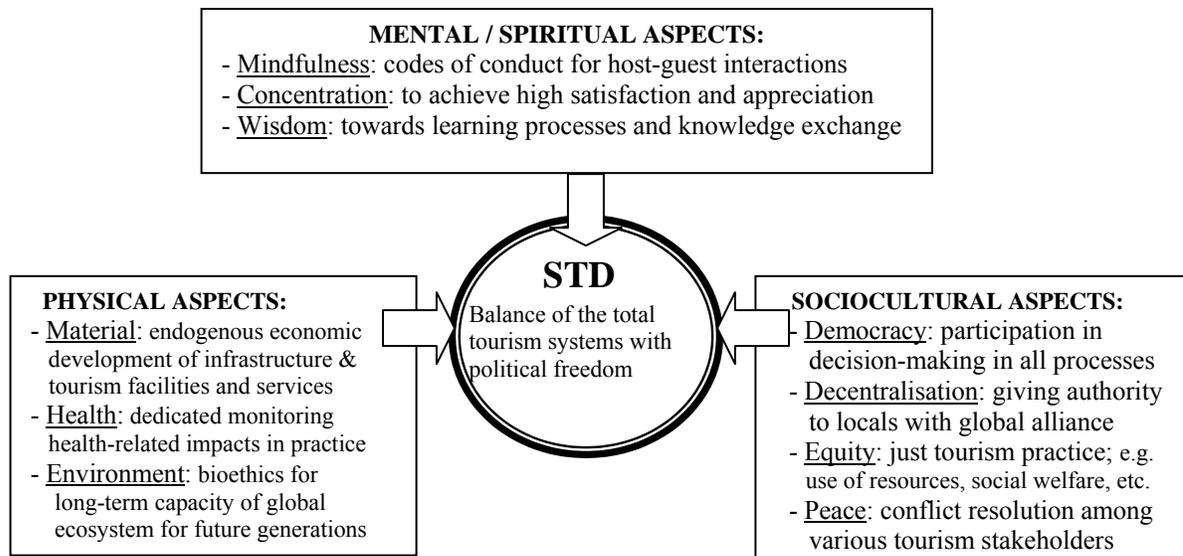


Figure 2: Buddhist Conceptual Model towards STD

In the book 'Buddhism and Bioethics', Keown (2001a) suggests that Buddhism sees man as a being with both spiritual and material sides to his nature. In trying to bring about a balance in the use of local resources there must always be communication with local people to ensure awareness of both physical and mental dimensions, so that tourism development in host societies becomes more equitable, fair and participatory.

Tourism policy options: Linking to Buddhist ethics

Each community should have an individual tourism policy option, appropriate to that particular locality.

The challenge for tourism development is to provide for social and cultural growth that is within the aspirations and objectives of the host communities. The desired outcome is sustainable tourism for those destinations that are able to develop their own particular cultural environments and maintain their unique sense of place and social ambience, especially at the community scale (Hall & Lew, 1998; Butler & Baum, 1999). Therefore, each community should have an individual tourism policy option, appropriate to that particular locality. This will not be an easy task, because the interactions among resources, visitors and host community are often complex, different from one area and country to another, and rapidly changing.

To give a picture of possible policy options, proposed tourism development scenarios were reviewed after conducting fieldwork in Thailand in 2000. Interviews were semi-structured and were conducted face-to-face with various key policymakers in both central and local governments. Key informants or leaders in potential destination communities, tourists and tour operators were also included. They were asked what tourism policy options and concepts could be applied in practice. The results of these interviews were analysed and linked with participatory observations made by the author to formulate the following four tourism policy options in terms of 'degree of development'.

- **No Tourism - 'Deep Ecology' or Preservation.** There are still a few traditional communities in remote areas which would like to remain as they are. However, some of them have a low potential for development as popular tourism destinations. Their future scenarios would mainly involve preservation programs to protect their cultural and natural environments and especially their agricultural-based life styles.
- **Self-reliant Tourism - Conservation.** Although Thai government policy is said to be geared towards protection of local resources, there are no comprehensive conservation guidelines efficiently implemented in practice. For example, some local museums in rural villages have involved no local input, from planning to operation, and there is no sense of ownership among the local residents.
- **Balanced Tourism - Conservation with Development.** The private sector seems to be leading the way in this policy option. Business has grown, as has the number of non-government organisations (NGOs) and tour operators, especially with the development of home-stay tourism. Many tribal communities in remote areas have had to adapt to serve tourist demands. Standards, safety and sanitation are

generally addressed, but the critical problem facing them is how to avoid homogenisation and maintain the diversity of local/tribal cultures and traditions.

- ***Mass Tourism - Market-driven Commercialisation.*** This popular option has been developed for its contribution to the economic base of the region. Public relations and promotion by international organisations have made use of expanding marketing networks. Major travel organisations have grown progressively in size and numbers, and have gained great benefits from exploitation of the region's tourism resources.

Can the above tourism development scenarios be linked with the six principles of Buddhist ethics as shown in Table 1? The first and last options have links with only four of the ethical principles because of their extreme approach to preservation and economic development, respectively. The second option of self-reliant tourism lacks a holistic approach. In other words, its approaches focus mainly on conservation-oriented programs.

As proposed in Table 1, all six Buddhist ethics could be applied only in the third option of *Balanced Tourism*. However, further research is needed to ascertain how each ethical principle could be used as a tool for sustainability, and how different approaches should be combined to suit distinct localities.

Community-based tourism: Towards sustainable development

Decisions about which tourism activities are to be initiated need to be made by locals.

Even remote areas in the GMS countries are unlikely to continue as purely agricultural societies with no tourism, ie, the first policy option (Pleumarom, 2001; 2002). The Buddhist ethical principles of causality, holism and dynamism, therefore, should be applied to protect them from undesirable impacts. For example, if people in remote areas with high potential for tourism could be more open-minded and accept low/no-impact tourism activities to create additional financial support for their families, would it create a win-win situation? The point is that decisions about which tourism activities are to be initiated need to be made by locals, and not by tour operators. Moreover, evaluation of the impacts should be carried out without political pressure or corruption. Last but not least, strategic action plans, resource management and monitoring programs must be conducted from time to time to avoid undesirable impacts.

The second option of self-reliant tourism should involve holistic and dynamic approaches, as should the first and the last options. The mass tourism option brings a need for much more interactive learning through which host communities and visitors might come to appreciate the diversities involved in each encounter.

Furthermore, attention must be given to the carrying capacity of each tourism attraction in this option and the ethic of 'sufficiency' taken into account. The development scenarios of *Self-reliant Tourism* and *Balanced Tourism* should utilise the proposed Buddhist ethical principles and practise to maintain economic benefit and local identity with sustainability.

Table 1: Proposed Tourism Policy Options and Buddhist Ethics

Buddhist ethics	Policy options and suggested approaches
Morality Wisdom Nonviolence Sufficiency	<i>1. No Tourism</i> - Religious/cultural revival; e.g. tradition/heritage protection programs - Regulations: building control; preservation convention, etc. - Agricultural/ecological-based programs - Archaeological site/monument restoration programs
Morality Wisdom Causality Nonviolence Sufficiency	<i>2. Self-reliant Tourism</i> - Diverse-networks in agritourism, rural tourism, heritage tourism - Educationally-based activities with local ways of life - Local involvement programs in local museums, historical parks - Wildlife tourism; trekking programs, local guide training
Morality Wisdom Holism & Dynamism Causality Nonviolence Sufficiency	<i>3. Balanced Tourism</i> - Cultural mapping; expansion of learning from local cultures - Tourist involvement in local activities; community-based tourism - Ecotourism product research & development programs; skill training - Public relations programs; information technology networks - Ethically-oriented education for tourism stakeholders
Morality Wisdom Causality Nonviolence	<i>4. Mass Tourism</i> - Increasing local employment; partnership/ profit sharing - Creating interesting/diverse events throughout the year - Expanding time for interactive learning between hosts and guests - Study of impact assessment, carrying capacity and monitoring system

The primary problem will be to understand how local stakeholders comprehend global tourism impacts and incorporate ethical principles in development and planning practice. How can they be sure that if they apply all six Buddhist ethical principles into their tourism policy options they will achieve sustainable resource management?

In the GMS countries, each government, institution, organisation, private company and community may have its own development plans and these might not work well together throughout the region as a whole (Parnwell, 2001). A process of conflict resolution using the proposed ethical principles of Buddhist philosophy could be developed to help overcome differences. A stakeholder-based approach to balanced tourism development is a key step towards greater recognition of the common interest in planning. Heritage resources, visitors and host communities should be the major concerns, rather than individuals or institutions.

Ethics education and training in tourism practices

A key aspect of this process is simply to ask the question: What is the purpose of tourism development?

To cultivate an ethos at the level of personal attitudes, it is necessary for all tourism stakeholders - the general public, tourists, destination communities, the related public and private sectors, NGOs, academics, and social and religious institutions - to be appropriately informed. Tourism is seen as able to contribute by providing experiences which involve communication and hospitality in the broadest sense and by expressing an ethic incorporated into education and training (Kelly, 2003). Hultsman (1995) and Preston (2001) also suggest an ethical framework as a process for developing a peace tourism regime in practice through education and training.

A central aim of some organisations is to develop an inspirational tourism *code of ethics*, based on the values that justify the existence of community destinations and to act as a guide in tourism development processes. However, such codes need to be reviewed regularly to ensure continuing relevance, and communication mechanisms, including advice to members about best and worst ethical tourism practices, must be established. A key aspect of this process is simply to ask the question: What is the purpose of tourism development? The answer involves a justification that is based upon the values the community is willing to observe, not merely to accept and deliver whatever tourists demand without limit.

As Preston (2001) notes, codes should be treated as a means to an end, one strategy in a comprehensive ethical tourism development program. He stresses the inherent limitations in the use of codes - that they can be adopted for the wrong reasons (for example as a public relations exercise); that no code can deal with all present or future conditions; and that they may diminish the sense of personal responsibility because of their external regulatory nature. Preston concludes that none of the measures can guarantee ethical performance and it will remain difficult to determine effectiveness in practice. Nevertheless, we should continue to pursue responsible tourism development with minimum conflicts and undesirable impacts along the processes.

In the context of the GMS, the most readily acceptable set of ethical principles is derived from Buddhism (Theerapappisit, 2003) and this paper has noted the potential relevance of those principles to the sustainable development of tourism. Loy (2003) addresses the important role of understanding in the education process, which includes the development of culture in the sense of self-cultivation. Given the importance in the GMS of Buddhist ethical standards it is critical that Preston's proposals about the design of ethical education should be developed and adapted to incorporate the Buddhist philosophies and ethical principles earlier discussed.

Concluding remarks

While temporary material benefits and basic service provisions may have been achieved through the work of government agencies in the pursuit of an 'unlimited growth' tourism

development model, the Western materialistic and individualistic values that slowly permeate the subregion's once communitarian culture cannot be ignored or discounted.

It has been suggested that problems of insufficient attention to non-economic policy issues and inefficiency in tourism planning still exist and it will take time to change the orientation of policymakers towards long-term holistic outcomes. This may also relate to emerging ethical problems and conflicts that other regions considering the development of tourism will need to face. The proposed six Buddhist ethical principles represented in the centre of Figure 1 are recommended as the basis of a developmental code of conduct to bring disparate groups together with less conflict.

Ethics education and training at all levels of general public and tourism stakeholders should be an obligatory element of a tourism system. More importantly, it must be maintained throughout future planning and development to develop the right blend of local wisdom, skills, attitudes, aptitudes, and a commitment to mitigate what could become the 'moral degradation' of the Mekong region in the near future.

...Buddhism endorses a spirit of toleration and cooperation with the natural world. It does so because this traditional mode of behaviour is given a specific sense by the tradition, and in the final analysis does not come into conflict with the ultimate goal, which is transcendence of the conditioned world. From the perspective of enlightenment, nothing may have a final purpose or essential value, but at least in the early stages of the spiritual path, Buddhism acts as though it does. Here then is one of the many paradoxes encountered in the study of this unique religious system of thought." (Harris, 2001, p.254)

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Action agenda: Spirituality in tourism

*While there may be a variety of opinions about the role for religion in tourism planning and development, few would disagree with the premise that all religions incorporate ethical principles of which many are relevant to the search for peace. Lou D'Amore, in the following extract, argues that meeting the challenges of the 21st century require 'an unprecedented level of international cooperation'.**

It is becoming increasingly evident that we require a new holistic spirituality. a spirituality that inspires us to develop our full capacities as human beings in our relationships with one another, with our creator and with all of God's creation. A spirituality that enables us to work for peace. Peace not so much as the absence of war, but peace as well being and harmony of relationships. A spirituality that is active in our local communities empowering one another, particularly the powerless; strengthening one another, particularly the weak; and working together to heal and restore our relationship with mother earth.

In this context, there is much that we can learn from indigenous cultures, and indigenous peoples throughout the world have similar beliefs regarding their relationship

to the land and all of creation. The earth is 'Spiritual Mother' in the belief systems of indigenous people providing life, nourishment and sustenance as well as their cultural and spiritual identity. The land has been inherited from a long line of ancestors. It is a sacred trust held in common for the benefit of future generations. The health of ourselves, our communities and all of creation is a spiritual relationship.

Many teachings of the indigenous people in North America use the symbol of the circle. It is the symbol of the inclusive caring community in which individuals are respected and interdependence is recognised within a holistic vision of creation. By faithful living in this circle of life we live in harmony with the Creator.

All the world's major religions provide us with ethics for right living in harmony with one another and with all of God's creation. Speaking from a Christian perspective, 'Christ came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.' How are we to understand this in our current global context as we approach a new millennium. I believe that this means life in the full sense of mind, body and spirit and in a fullness of relationships beginning with our families, colleagues in work, neighbours in our communities and extending to our neighbours in the global village and to all of God's creation.

It means an on-going search for understanding of ourselves as individuals, our purpose in life, and our role in service to others and to the earth through the gifts of free will and intelligence with which we have been uniquely endowed. It means an on-going search for an understanding of creation and the development of our capacities to live in harmony with one another and all of creation in the fullness of life.

We require now a new concept of growth and development, one which gives emphasis to spiritual, moral and intellectual growth and growth in community: growth as individuals and society that finds richness and quality in living that is not dependent on high levels of material consumption and generation of waste.

What better place to be in than the travel and tourism industry?

We are all on a pilgrimage together on 'Spaceship Earth'. The challenge before us is to use our god-given spiritual, intellectual and physical capacities during our journey together, in a cooperative manner and in a manner that builds a legacy to enhance life and an improved habitat for future generations.

* This extract is from Amore, L.J. (1998), Spirituality in Tourism - A Millennium Challenge for the Travel and Tourism Industry, *Tourism Recreation Research*, 23(1), 87-89.

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