Strengthening Communities from Japan and Indonesia, through Local Spirit, Traditional Culture and Sustainable Tourism

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Introduction

The researchers for this paper are involved with the Amphawa Floating Market tourism destination in Thailand, as members of the local media and creators of the journal Mon Rak Mae Klong (Love the Mae Klong). The district of Amphawa is located in Samut Songkram province, 75 kilometers southwest of the Thai capital, Bangkok. Amphawa has a population of around 50,000. The majority occupations are farming, fishing, and related small industries. Amphawa started to become a tourist destination in 2005 when its old floating market was revitalized. This has generated significant economic growth, and growing negative impacts on the local way of life. A lack of early collective planning including community participation, and failures of management, has resulted in a local environmental crisis and in development without direction.

In this research, we try to seek a balance between “conservation”, by which we mean preserving something in its original form, and “development”, by which we mean economic and especially tourism development. We assume that local communities can maintain their own identities while opening up to tourism, and we ask “how is this achieved”? To answer this, we visited communities in Japan and Bali, Indonesia that have been engaged in tourism activities for some time and that have also fostered appreciation and pride in their local identities. The study also investigates governmental and non-profit organization (NPO) and non-government organization (NGO) tourism policies and activities, and looks at how to create stronger networks of local people to support sustainable tourism.

The Effects of Tourism on Local Communities

“Development was... considered as an elementary step for achieving better living. But it also demolished a number of historical heritages. And to make matters worse, it deprived local residents of the Najimi feeling (layered familiarity) of heritage and community” (Maeno, 1999).

Economic growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has long been prioritized in international discourse. Yet it has become obvious that development focused on materialism alone provides people only with financial satisfaction, while failing to provide satisfaction at the physical and psychological levels. It also has many adverse impacts on the environment and local communities’ ways of life. There are two key approaches to development. “Exogenous development” means that major resources, finance and technology are mobilized from outside, whether by central government for infrastructure development or by private enterprise for factory or resort development. Local people are involved as staff members or as observers. They are not implementers. “Endogenous development” means that local people mobilize locally available resources such as the natural environment, culture or history, to implement activities for improving social welfare. Local government, private enterprise, academics, NPOs/NGOs and mass media support these activities. Unfortunately, exogenous development is most commonly found in developing countries, including in relation to tourism.

The island of Bali has a highly distinctive character within the country of Indonesia. Bali’s natural beauty and deep-rooted Hindu belief systems have made it a prime destination for travelers from around the world. Major tourism to Bali began in the 1970s when the government of Indonesia constructed Ngurah Rai International Airport, allowing foreign flights directly into the island. Mass tourism has since brought many benefits to local people, including increased employment and economic growth. However, the rapid expansion of tourism without proper planning has also caused serious problems. Most of the large profits from mass tourism go into the hands of wealthy outside entrepreneurs and investors. Local people have suffered negative environmental and social impacts such as overflowing garbage, conflicts over the limited water supply, damage to the environment and crime. Demands for swimming pools, golf courses, beachfront resorts and air-conditioning have put great strains on Bali’s ecosystem. In south Bali, rice paddies are slowly giving way to more hotel rooms, villas and tourist shops. Cultural challenges include the loss of traditional meanings and authenticity through the
The lives of some Balinese have become caught up in the alcohol, illicit drugs and various shades of prostitution found in the tourism nightlife scene (JED, 2002).
In Japan, Shirakawa-go is an old village in a once-isolated valley in Gifu prefecture. The valley has become a major tourism attraction due to its lakes, hot springs, national park and unique large farm houses with distinctive thatched roofs in the *gassho* style (*gassho zukuri*), which translates as the shape of clasped hands. The roofs, whose design dates back some 300 years, are constructed at a 60-degree angle to prevent the gathering of snow (the area experiences severe winters). Shirakawa-go was made a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 1995 and its popularity is increasing. Today it is visited by an average of 1,500,000 Japanese and foreign visitors annually. Numbers increased dramatically after 2008 when a new expressway and tunnel shortened travel time to the location.

Ogimachi is the largest village and main attraction of Shirakawa-go. In 1971, the village had a policy of “Don’t Sell,” “Don’t Rent” and “Don’t Destroy,” which was designed to help the village maintain its local character. However, when mass tourism arrived, new and unexpected problems followed. Traffic jams became a health and safety issue. Farmlands were abandoned as farmers became owners of gift shops and restaurants. Some agricultural land was turned into income-generating parking spaces. The location became less attractive. Business and personal conflicts increased within the community. Formerly strong relationships were eroded.

Around 2009-2010, members of the population of Shirakawa-go began to realize that large number of tourists might not always provide the best results. Studies of tourist behavior showed that many tourists spent only 45 minutes in the village. Tourists went on brief walks, took photographs, went to the toilets, disposed of their garbage and then moved on. They did not spend money or enter the houses to see the way of life. The numbers of visitors staying overnight was in decline. Residents decided that the quality of tourist was more important than the quantity. Visitors should result in a greater spread of income around the community. These were large challenges to which the World Heritage village must still find an answer.
Shirakawa-go

Photo: Weerawut Kangwannavakul

Traditional farmhouse with thick thatched roof, Gassho style.
(Left, below) Gassho Zukuri repair needs a lot of workers.
Photos: Weerawut Kangwannavakul

The Work of the 2010/2011 API Fellows
Tourism Concepts to Minimize Negative Effects on Local Communities

Tourism activities started in the West during the 18th century when the wealthy upper middle class sought new experiences, knowledge and pleasures. Their pursuits included discovering ancient Greek and Roman cultures, learning foreign languages and acquiring knowledge about other civilizations. Tourist activities expanded after the invention of modern transport significantly reduced the time and cost of travel. Eventually a professional tourism business offering all kinds of services took root (Kestes, 2011).

In the East, the precursor to tourism was often travel related to faith and religion. In Japan, for example, in the Edo period, local governors (daimyo) traveling from Kyoto to Edo (Tokyo) to report to the Shogun, were the forebears of modern tourism. The long distances meant that small towns along the way became places for overnight stays. Accommodations known as ryokan arose in what became known as “post towns”. Nowadays, many post towns have developed into tourism attractions.

However, the main tourism industry today in Japan is an offshoot of capitalism and globalization. World tourism has evolved into an important global economic force. Tourism is an industry with its own institutions teaching Western, business-oriented curricula and management styles and defining universal global standards. Globalization creates an expectation that travel anywhere will provide one ambient standard and one “international” style of service.

While mass tourism has caused damage and community breakdown in many instances, a variety of ideas and concepts have emerged to foster new attitudes and approaches. These are primarily based on the idea that one must reduce the negative impact of tourism and pay more attention to local identities. Examples include:

- **Ecotourism** refers to “responsible travel” to natural areas. It aims to conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local people. (TIES, 1990)
- **Sustainable Tourism** refers to tourism that attempts to impose a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate current and future employment for local people. The aim of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development brings positive experiences to local people, tourism companies and tourists.
- **Responsible Tourism** was defined in Cape Town in 2002 alongside the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The principles of responsible tourism include: minimizing negative economic, environmental and social impacts; generating greater economic benefits for local people and enhancing the well-being of host communities; involving local people in decisions that affect their lives; making positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and maintaining the world’s diversity.
- **Community Based Tourism** refers to tourism that takes environmental, social and cultural sustainability into account. It is managed and owned by the community, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life. (REST Project, 1997)
- **Green Tourism** refers to environmentally sustainable travel to destinations where climate impacts are minimized with the aim of respecting and preserving natural resources and adapting programs to fit the context of fragile resources (Graci and Dodds, 2008). (In Japan, “green tourism” refers to tours providing the opportunity to stay in an agricultural, mountain or fishing village. Travelers are offered a holiday close to the natural environment and local culture. They engage in hands-on experiences in agricultural and fishing communities and interact closely with local inhabitants).

These concepts have generated increasing interest from the public and are already being implemented, though on a small scale compared to mainstream tourism.
In highly developed urban consumer cultures such as Japan, the rural community is often left behind. Rural populations are primarily elderly and are dwindling to the point where it has become a serious problem. This has helped spark a trend among urbanites to visit rural areas to experience “old-fashioned hometown experiences” and nature.

“Green Tourism” started to take shape in Japan around 1992. Today, it is an important factor in establishing cooperation between cities and rural areas. It has helped to create awareness of local heritage and the natural environment, and to provide a way in which the urban population can experience rural lifestyles. They may discover where the food they eat comes from and how it is grown, and they may even try to grow and harvest food themselves. This kind of experience can broaden and deepen the perspectives of city people. For rural people, it creates income, and revives enthusiasm to learn more about their heritage. Green Tourism has encouraged villagers to research, value and protect their cultural heritage. Rural people have used this kind of tourism to revive villages formerly in decline. Tourism has thus become a mechanism for cultural conservation and has helped to create a deeper understanding of culture within Japanese society.

“Green tourism in Japan is now just a minor movement. However, it is expected to grow slowly but steadily, since it does provide both urban and rural residents with intensely enjoyable experiences. Reflecting on our lifestyle and life course leads us to wonder about what is really important and what we really want to do in life. Green tourism may provide an opportunity to rediscover our own souls, our own locality and our country, something that clearly cannot be gained through an ordinary sightseeing tour”. (Hasegawa, 2005)

Strong Community: a balanced co-existence of local heritage conservation and the development of sustainable tourism

A “strong community,” we believe, is one that is capable of protecting its traditional culture and spiritual roots, in tandem with engaging in contemporary sustainable development. A strong community can foster peace, tranquility, sufficient incomes and the right to determine the way in which it evolves. Conservation is as important as development but should not be pursued only or primarily in relation to buildings and the environment. It should encompass maintaining the link between the community’s everyday life and that of the surrounding region.

Japan has demonstrated quite clearly that conservation of traditional culture and heritage is also a way to develop a country as a whole. Japanese society emphasizes both national and regional history. The latter in particular has helped to empower local communities, which in turn has contributed to the general development of the country.

The participation by ordinary people in local history investigation helps forge bonds and feelings of kinship within a region. The past becomes a kind of “living history” and a “shared memory” which can become source of significant psychological, cultural and economic strength and can serve to fulfill regional needs (Satayanuruks, 2009)

Cultural conservation is now a vital aspect of Japanese society. It does not mean going back to live in the past. Rather, it means finding the value of good things that can be restored to use in modern life. It is a system of linking the past with the present in order to prepare for a better future (Phongphit, 2011)

One excellent case study in Japan is the castle town of Kawagoe, Saitama Prefecture, near Tokyo. Most traditional houses in Tokyo were destroyed in the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923. Such houses survive in Kawagoe, which has since become known as Ko Edo (Little Edo), a reference to the old world of the Edo (1603 to 1867). The town is a major attraction for tourists who wish to travel back in time, relax and escape the hustle and bustle of Tokyo. The main characteristics of the town are the kurazukuri, old warehouses that were built with especially thick earth walls to prevent fire damage. Rows of these structures line the town’s Ichiban-gai Market Street.

In 1970, when Japan was modernizing fast, many ancient and traditional buildings were destroyed. The Japanese government subsequently decided to conserve old historical towns. It issued a regulation to protect man-made structures with national and cultural significance (termed “cultural properties”). The Kawagoe local authority wished to register the old traditional houses in the Ichiban-gai Market Street area in this program. However, the town’s people did not unanimously agree on the issue. Some residents felt...
that they would lose the freedom to do what they liked with their own homes.

In 1983, a group of young people in the town who saw the importance of Kawagoe’s historical remains started an NPO called Kawagoe Kura No Kai (Kawagoe Revitalization Association). The association initiated various activities to raise greater understanding and pride in the town’s heritage. Later, after local development policy meant that the town’s business heart moved location, the Ichiban-gai area went into a deep decline. Kawakoe Kura No Kai began works identifying Kawakoe’s special and unique features. It concluded that these were located in the town’s history; in its architecture and in the way of life of its artisanal craftspeople who produced superior food, knives and other products, and who had close relationships with their customers.

Kawagoe eventually achieved conservation status and success due to community leaders who, with academic assistance, fostered awareness of the national cultural significance of its buildings. Success was also the result of community involvement in making decisions about the town and how people wished to live. For example, it became policy that new road construction and parking lots had to be outside of the conservation area. Inside the conservation area, only small roads were allowed, for easy walking and for the safety of elderly people and children. A decision was made that artisanal homes and shops would be combined. A community center and public parks were established. Big businesses were prevented from setting up in the conservation area so that small local businesses could continue to thrive. Townspeople were able to prevent the construction of a high-rise condo, which threatened to destroy the atmosphere of the historical town. They pressured the Kawagoe council to buy back the land and develop it into a public space to improve local and visitor quality of life.

As residents began to take care of their old buildings and revive old lifestyles, tourism became the town’s main source of income. Today, Kawagoe has been named a Traditional Architectures Preservation District under the Protection of Culture Properties³.

Ichiban-gai Market Street is crowded with tourists on weekends.

Photos: Weerawut Kangwannavakul
Panel 2

(Left) Kurazukuri are ancient warehouses with thick earthen walls. (Right) The “Toki no Kane (Time Bell Tower)” clock tower is a symbol of Kawagoe dating back to the beginning of the Edo Period.

Photos: Weerawut Kangwannavakul

Landscape improvement, before and after
The Role of Various Stakeholders in Creating Strong Communities and Sustainable Tourism

- Government Officials at Policy Making Level

National and local government policy and regulations have a great influence on the success or otherwise of attempts to create strong communities. The most effective approach by government is to support and work with communities, rather than to prescribe solutions. In Japan, government approval for policies supporting historical towns and cities is generally accompanied by the allocation of funding for the restoration of residential buildings. This motivates local people to conserve old houses that can be quite difficult to maintain.

For example, in the old castle city of Takayama in Gifu Prefecture, the area surrounding Takayama Castle has become a historical tourism site. In recent years, the local administration has created policies to protect the town’s old charm and to attract tourists, while also enhancing the quality of life of local people. This is captured in the slogan “The city which is comfortable to live in is also comfortable to visit”.

Districts such as Sanmachi and Shimonomachi-ooinmachi which contain old Edo shops (called Old Private Houses) have been designated Important Preservation Districts. Homeowners are partially funded to renovate their houses following various height and other guidelines. All shops must adhere to signage regulations. Road and footpath surfaces are leveled for ease of use by the elderly and disabled. There are numerous public benches. Public toilets are taken care of by local residents. The townspeople’s enthusiasm to commit to the greater good is an aspect of Japanese character that is taught to children from a very young age and is an important factor in building a strong community.
• **NPOs/NGOs**

Activist groups work to support, control, evaluate and protect the public interest. A good relationship between local people, the government and NPOs/NGOs can create a fruitful collaboration for the conservation of culture and the environment. In Japan, NPOs created by local people articulating local concerns and objectives have played a decisive role. They receive funding from the government and encourage others in the community to join as volunteers to organize public activities. In Indonesia, NGOs working with locals often provide a balance to the role of government.

• **Private Entrepreneurs**

It is a cliché that private business and the pursuit of profit often perpetrates damage to cultural heritage and results in community decline. In fact, we have witnessed a new kind of tourism which expects profits but also sees the importance of creating a strong community.

In Bali in 2002, the Wisnu Foundation, an important ecological conservation NGO, created the Jaringan Ekowisata Desa (JED) or Village Ecotourism network, to ease problems arising from mass tourism. The network was structured in the form of a business enterprise with the help of four demonstration communities; Pelaga, Sibetan, Nusa-ceningan and Tenganan villages. JED mandated that the communities design and manage tourism themselves. The communities earn 70 percent of the income from tour programs while 30 percent goes to the JED network.

After the Bali Bombing in 2002, many businesses collapsed and unemployment increased sharply. In Pelaga village, a handful of villagers had watched the ups and downs of mass tourism with trepidation. They knew that the tourism industry would one day reach their quiet village in the mountains. They could see that without proper structures, this could have severe negative effects. With NGO support, they consulted together on the future. They started by conducting a village survey. The findings confirmed that the village had many valuable resources and high potential for self-managed tourism. The options included to pursue mass tourism and possibly high profits, or less profitable ecotourism, which would preserve local ways of life and natural resources. Finally, the majority voted for the latter. A panel was created to work on the project. They defined coffee growing as a central theme for local ecotourism. Villagers began to grow organic coffee, which was better for the environment. Tourism subsequently made Pelaga village famous and its coffee products became well known. This enabled villagers to gain bargaining power with coffee traders, an unexpected bonus.

Travelers to Pelaga via JED learn each step of quality coffee production. They sample local food made by village housewives, take a guided tour of the rainforest with local guides, see a traditional show by village dancers and sleep in home stays in true Balinese style. The village has its own niche and is not interested in international certification. However, villagers put their hearts into the hospitality they show to visitors. Part of the earnings from tourism is given to a local committee for public use. Thus, all community members benefit from the activities.
A welcome drink of organic coffee
Photos: Weerawut Kangwannavakul

Traveling is an opportunity to learn local lifestyles
Photos: Weerawut Kangwannavakul
People

People are obviously the most important element in building a strong community. If the villagers of Pelaga and three other villages had not come together over the idea of self-sufficiency and sustainable tourism, they could have become mere service providers within mass tourism. In Japan, the conservation of the town of Tsumago started with the efforts of a few individuals. Finally, more local people joined in the efforts to spearhead conservation. Now visitors to Tsumago enjoy an authentic and vibrant atmosphere. There are a reasonable number of visitors but the general feel of the town does not appear to be too commercial. This is because of rules forbidding the placement of products on the footpath in front of shops, and banning shouting to attract visitors into the establishments. Shop signage must follow the same character and designs and all houses that double as shops must hang the traditional brown, black or navy Japanese sign curtains (*noren*) at the front. The locals of Tsumago have achieved a lot, even though some individuals may wish for a higher number of visitors. Problems are dealt with through compromises reached at regular meetings. Tsumago’s success indicates that it is not so difficult to create an understanding of town protection and a sense of community pride.
An old street in Tsumago post town
Photo: Weerawut Kangwannavakul

“Noren” and signs in harmony with the landscape
Photos: Weerawut Kangwannavakul
Conclusion

The case studies in this paper confirm that in a world where boundaries are blurred, travelers still seek unique local cultures. Communities that understand this will not struggle to change their identity in order to be like others, in the misguided belief that this is the only way forward. Instead, they will choose to safeguard their identities, traditions and spirituality, and to value the things that they already have. This will also motivate coming generations to maintain, promote and enrich valuable heritage. To be successful, tourism that is self-managed by communities needs the involvement of all community members.

NOTES

1 The author traveled with Weerawut Kangwannavakul, who helped to document the research in images.


3 The entry states: “As administered by the Japanese government’s Agency for Cultural Affairs, the Cultural Properties of Japan include tangible properties (structures and works of art or craft); intangible properties (performing arts and craft techniques); folk properties both tangible and intangible; monuments historic, scenic and natural; cultural landscapes; and groups of traditional buildings. To protect Japan’s cultural heritage, the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties contains a “designation system” under which selected important items are designated as Cultural Properties, which imposes restrictions on the alteration, repair, and export of such designated objects. Designation can occur at a national, prefectural municipal level. As of 1 February 2012, there were approximately sixteen thousand nationally-designated, twenty-one thousand prefecturally-designated, and eighty-six thousand municipally-designated properties (one property may include more than one item). Besides the designation system there also exists of a “registration system,” which guarantees a lower level of protection and support.”

REFERENCES


