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An Examination of Residents' Support for Tourism Development in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The study tested residents' tourism support model based on social exchange theory in Thailand. The associations of five independent variables (i.e., perceived economic-gain, eco-centric attitude, positive impact, negative impact, tourism-related jobs) with residents' support for tourism development were examined. The study findings indicate that when most residents heavily rely on tourism in terms of jobs and income creation, even though they understand negative impacts of tourism, they still support for tourism development. The model may be particularly suitable when the tourism industry is not promoted as the main industry and local residents believe other industries can generate more benefits than the tourism industry.

Keywords: *residents' tourism support model, social exchange theory, Thailand.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been considered as an industry that brings various benefits for tourist destinations, such as new employment opportunities and increased tax revenue. Many researchers, however, have found that tourism not only brings benefits to a tourist destination but it also causes negative impacts (Ap and Crompton 1998; Choi and Sirakaya 2005; Gursoy, Jurovski, and Uysal 2002; Jurovski, Uysal, and Williams 1997; Milman and Pizam 1988; Yoon Gursoy, and Chen 2001). These days the potential positive and negative impacts including economic and environmental elements are well known even to local residents. While it has been still controversial whether tourism development enhances or destroys community sustainability, researchers have suggested that 'sustainable tourism development' gains prominence to sustain local communities by enhancing positive impacts and minimizing negative impacts (Choi and Sirakaya 2005). To achieve successful sustainable tourism development, support from the host community's residents is necessary because successful operation and sustainability depend heavily on residents' good-will (Andereck and Vogt 2000; Gursoy et al. 2002; Jurovski and Gursoy 2004). To gain residents' support, it is very important to understand what factors influence residents' reactions (e.g., support) towards tourism development (Yoon et al. 2001).

Most studies in residents' support for tourism development have been conducted in developed countries (e.g., USA). Several researchers, however, have argued that factors that influence local residents' perceptions are different between developed and developing countries (Dodds 2010; Jafari 1982; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2010; Sirakaya, Teye, and Sönmez, 2002).

This study aims to test the local residents' tourism support model, which has been mostly examined in developed countries, with local residents in a developing country, Thailand. Thailand is ranked 13th for international arrivals with 12.9 million visitors (World Tourism Organization 2007). Despite the growing importance of understanding local residents' support for tourism development, Thailand still lags behind in studying as a component of sustainable community development (Dodds 2010; McDowall and Choi 2010). This study identifies and examines factors that influence Thai residents' support for tourism development.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to social exchange theory (SET), all human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and individuals engage in social activities only to the extent to which the perceived benefits are greater than the perceived costs (Homans 1958; McDaniel, Verille and Madden 1985). SET has been applied in travel and tourism research to understand how local residents calculate costs and benefits of tourism and how results of the calculation affect their perception toward tourism development (Ap 1992; Jurowski et al. 1997; Yoon et al. 2001). In this study, four factors (i.e., perceived economic gain, eco-centric attitude, perceived positive impact of tourism, perceived negative impact of tourism) were examined as the costs and the benefits.

This study focuses on economic gain in an individual level, such as local residents' increased household income as the number of visitors increases and/or visitors spend more (Jurowski et al. 1997; Keogh 1990). Compared to the community level of economic gain, the individual level of economic gain can be easily recognized by local residents; therefore, it is significantly influences residents' perception and support for tourism development (Ap 1992; Gursoy et al. 2002; Jurowski et al. 1997; Kayat 2002; Liu and Var 1986). Thus, it is hypothesized that local residents' perceived economic gain is positively associated with support for tourism development.

Local residents' eco-centric perception is another significant factor that affects residents' reaction to tourism development. Uysal and his colleagues (1994) note that local residents with stronger eco-centric attitudes are likely to prefer natural resources being allocated for protection and preservation, whereas those with stronger anthropocentric attitudes utilize the environment to satisfy human needs and desires. Several researchers (Gursoy et al. 2002; Jurowski et al. 1997) have found that local residents who have stronger eco-centric attitudes are likely to view tourism development as a cost rather than a benefit, and tend not to support tourism development. Thus, it is hypothesized that eco-centric attitude is negatively associated with support for tourism development.

Positive impact of tourism development includes several elements. Tourism development stimulates local economy as it creates good paying jobs and increases tax revenue. It also provides incentives for protection and conservation of natural resources (Doswell 1997). Tourism development enhances the quality of local infrastructures (e.g., road, utilities, recreation amenities) as the tourism industry develops these for tourists (Andereck and Nyapane 2011; Besculides, Lee, and McCormick 2002). All these positive impacts will contribute to residents' standard of living and thus enhance residents' quality of life (Andereck and Nyapane 2011). Thus, local residents who perceive tourism impacts as positive are likely to support tourism development (Jurowski and Gursoy 2004; Perdue, Long, and Allen 1990). It is hypothesized that perceived positive impact of tourism is positively associated with support for tourism development.

Tourism development causes negative impacts as well. Rapid and unplanned development to meet the demands of increasing number of tourists results in various negative impacts on the natural environment (Brackenbury 1993) and it increases residents' living cost

(e.g., rental fees, prices for houses) (Milman and Pizam 1988). Overcrowded areas due to the tourism development cause traffic congestion, noise and pollution and the building and signs for the tourism industry may destroy the community pleasant atmosphere (Ap and Compton 1998; Yoon et al. 2001). Tourism development also causes a decline of moral values due to the usage of drugs and alcohol and rising crime rates (Lindberg and Johnson 1997). Thus, local residents who experience negative impacts more are not likely to support for tourism development (Gursoy et al. 2002; Jurowski et al. 1997; Milman and Pizam 1988). It is hypothesized that perceived negative impact of tourism is negatively associated with support for tourism development.

Local residents are divided into two groups: those who directly depend on the tourism industry and those who do not (Liu and Var 1986). Local residents who are employed in the tourism industry or whose family incomes are generated from tourism businesses value positive impacts more than negative impacts and they support for tourism development (Allen, Hafer, Long, and Perdue 1993; Jorowski et al. 1997; Lindberg and Johnson 1997; Nunkoo and Ramkisson 2010). On the other hand, local residents not employed in the tourism sector value negative impacts more and thus they do not support tourism development (Allen et al. 1993). It is hypothesized that tourism-related job is positively associated with support for tourism development.

METHODS

The population of this study was residents in the Mu Si community, Thailand. This community is located by the entrance of the Khao Yai National Park and it provides various tourism infrastructures (e.g., hotels, tourist attractions) to accommodate visitors of the Khao Yai National Park (Dudeck 2004). Using a convenient sampling method, self-administered survey questionnaire was distributed to a target sample of 300 local residents in the Mu Si community through the door-to-door method. An English version of survey questionnaire was translated into Thai and the Thai version was retranslated into English by another translator.

Three items to measure perceived economic gain were adopted from Jurowski et al.'s study (1997), five items for eco-centric attitudes were from Choi and Sirakaya's (2005), and twelve items to measure perceived positive or negative impacts of tourism were from Yoon's (2002), using a 7-point Likert-type scale, in which 1 represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree. To measure support for tourism development, five items from the study of Yoon et al. (2001) were used with a 7-point Likert-type scale, in which 1 represents strongly oppose and 7 represents strongly support. Additionally, respondents were asked to provide information about their demographic profiles.

FINDINGS

Out of the 275 completed surveys, 250 were usable in the data analysis. More than half of the respondents were female (54.2%) (Table 1). About four out of ten respondents were between 18 and 29 years old (43.0%) and held high school diploma (38.2%). More than half of the respondents (55.7%) had a household income of less than 10,000 Baht. The majority of respondents had tourism-related jobs or were part-time employees (71.9%). Only 8% of respondents worked for education and government agencies. The data were recoded into two groups (i.e., tourism-related jobs vs. education and government agencies). Part-time employees were categorized as the tourism-related jobs because they generally work for the tourism industry.

Based on the results of factor analyses (i.e., factor extraction and factor rotation) and reliability analysis, good items were selected for each factor. Table 2 presents the results of factor rotation using VARIMAX and reliability of each factor. To test hypotheses, multiple regression using a stepwise method was conducted and its results suggested three models (Table

3). According to Model 3, the perceived positive impact of tourism ($\beta = 0.35, p < .001$) was positively associated with support for tourism development, eco-centric attitude ($\beta = 0.16, p < .05$) was positively associated with support for tourism development, and tourism-related job ($\beta = 0.16, p < .05$) was positively associated with support for tourism development.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Personal Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	114	45.8
Female	135	54.2
Age		
18-29	107	43.0
30-39	80	32.1
40-49	45	18.1
50 or older	17	6.8
Level of Education		
- High school	152	61.8
College +	94	38.2
Monthly Household Income		
Less than 10,000 baht	136	55.7
More than 10,000 baht	108	44.3
Occupation		
Part-time employees and tourism-related jobs	179	71.9
Education and government agencies	20	8.0
Others	50	20.1

CONCLUSIONS

Local residents, who valued positive impact of tourism or worked for the tourism industry, were more likely to support tourism development. They also recognized the importance of preservation of natural resources in their community. The mean score of an eco-centric factor was the highest among four factors. In opposition to our assumption, local residents who had stronger eco-centric attitudes were more likely to support for tourism development.

The study findings indicate that the local residents' tourism support model based on SET does not always explain local residents' perception and support for tourism development in developing countries (e.g., Thailand). When most residents in the Mu Si community heavily rely on tourism development in terms of jobs and income creation, even though they understand negative impacts of tourism or concerns for natural resources protection, they still support for tourism development. The model based on SET may be particularly suitable when the tourism industry is not promoted as the main industry and local residents believe other industries can generate more benefits than the tourism industry (Kayat 2002; Nunkoo and Ramkisson 2010).

Economic gain has been considered as one of the most significant factors that affect residents' support for tourism development. However, there was no significant association in our study. We additionally conducted ANOVA and found that there was significant differences between two groups (i.e., tourism-related jobs (T) vs. education and government agencies (EG))

in perceived economic gain ($M_T = 5.11$ and $M_{EG} = 4.25$; $F_{(1, 198)} = 6.48$, $p < .05$) and support for tourism development ($M_T = 5.65$ and $M_{EG} = 5.11$; $F_{(1, 198)} = 6.52$, $p < .05$). These findings indicate that tourism-related job has a stronger impact on resident perception (Allen et al. 1993; Ap 1992; Perdure et al. 1990).

Table 2
Factor Analysis Results with Means and Standard Deviations

	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings	Mean	SD
Perceived Economic Gain^a	.866		5.03	1.46
My current household income increases when the number of visitors to the Mu Si community increases		.926	4.94	1.70
My current income comes from the money spent by travellers of the Mu Si community		.807	5.02	1.62
The income of the company I work for (or my own business) comes from the tourism trade of the Mu Si community		.736	5.09	1.61
Eco-Centric Attitude^a	.658		6.22	.90
The diversity of nature must be valued and protected in the Mu Si community		.728	6.24	1.03
Proper tourism development in the Mu Si community requires that wildlife and nature habits must be protected at all times		.623	6.20	1.05
Perceived Positive Impacts of Tourism^a	.779		5.50	.91
The tourism industry stimulates the local economy		.710	5.83	1.14
The tourism industry creates good paying jobs		.706	5.67	1.08
Tourism contributes to residents' standard of living		.693	5.11	1.49
Tourism enhances residents' quality of life		.666	5.41	1.01
Perceived Negative Impacts of Tourism^a	.804		4.76	1.36
Tourism development increases traffic congestion, noise and pollution		.821	4.85	1.50
Tourism development destroys nature and the environment		.799	4.70	1.67
Tourism causes overcrowding in our community		.648	4.72	1.61
Support for Sustainable Tourism Development^b	.673		5.60	.92
Nature-based tourism attractions (e.g. camping areas, parks, trekking)		.735	5.69	1.26
Events/outdoor programmes (e.g. recreational facilities, exhibitions, sport events, public events)		.698	5.29	1.52
Supporting service development (e.g., hotels, travel agency, restaurants, entertainment, souvenir shop)		.652	5.67	1.20
Cultural or historical-based attractions (e.g. museums, folk village, historic sites)		.640	5.75	1.16

a. A 7-Point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree).

b. A 7-Point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (strongly oppose) and 7 (strongly support).

Table 3
Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on Support for Sustainable Tourism Development

	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	Beta	<i>t</i> (Sig.)	Beta	<i>t</i> (Sig.)	Beta	<i>t</i> (Sig.)
Perceived Economic Gain	-	-	-	-	-	-
Eco-Centric Attitudes	-	-	-	-	.16	2.32 (.021)*
Perceived Positive Impacts of Tourism	.42	6.43 (.000) ***	.41	6.37 (.000) ***	.35	5.19 (.000) ***
Perceived Negative Impacts of Tourism	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tourism-related jobs	-	-	.16	2.43 (.016)*	.16	2.51 (.013)*
Model Summary						
R ²	.174		.198		.219	
R ² change	.174		.024		.022	
<i>F</i> change (Sig. <i>F</i> change)	41.40 (.000)***		5.91 (.016)*		5.38 (.021)*	
ANOVA						
Regression <i>F</i> (Sig.)	41.40 (.000)***		24.17 (.000)***		18.27 (.000)***	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

SET was originally based on utilitarian economics (Turner 1986; Yoon 2002). In utilitarian economics, it is assumed that people normally seek to maximize their monetary benefit in decision making (Turner 1986). While utilitarian economics ignores the impacts of non-economic benefits, SET suggests that people consider not only economic benefits but also environmental/social benefits. Our study results suggest that people have a different weighting system and they give a lot of weight to economic benefits than non-economic benefits. Future study should examine residents' different weighting systems in their calculation of costs and benefits.

There are limitations in this study. There may be discrepancies in understanding survey questions because the measurement scale items were originally developed in English and translated into Thai. Because the majority of respondent (71.9%) worked for the tourism industry, the study results may over-represent residents who have tourism-related jobs.

Table 4
Means of Support for Sustainable Tourism Development Differed by Group

	Group ^c	Mean	SD	F-Value	Sig.
Perceived Economic Gain ^a	T	5.11	1.38	6.48	.012*
	EG	4.25	1.93		
Eco-Centric Attitudes ^a	T	6.22	0.87	.00	.984
	EG	6.23	1.14		
Perceived Positive Impacts of Tourism ^a	T	5.52	0.92	.64	.424
	EG	5.35	0.87		
Perceived Negative Impacts of Tourism ^a	T	4.73	1.33	1.08	.299
	EG	5.06	1.56		
Support for Sustainable Tourism Development ^b	T	5.65	0.89	6.52	.011*
	EG	5.11	1.01		

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

a. A 7-Point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree)

b. A 7-Point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (strongly oppose) and 7 (strongly support)

c. T: Tourism-related jobs (n=179); EG: Education and government agencies (n = 20)

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