

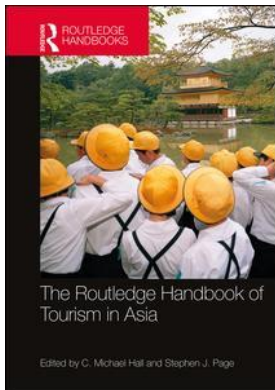
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## **The Routledge Handbook of Tourism in Asia**

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### **Tourism policies and politics in Asia**

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## 5

# TOURISM POLICIES AND POLITICS IN ASIA

*C. Michael Hall & Wantanee Suntikul*

### Introduction

While the politics of international trade, especially with respect to commodities such as fuels, receives a significant amount of attention, partly because of its impacts on global and regional geopolitics, but also because of its flow-on effects on economic and environmental policy making, the politics of tourism are nowhere nearly as well considered. Nevertheless, the politics of international tourism are a vital dimension of world tourism, and government policy is an important determinant of the character and possibilities for expansion in global and regional tourism (Matthews 1978; Elliot 1983; Richter 1989; Butler & Suntikul 2010; Timothy & Kim 2015). Issues of political stability and political relations within and between states are also extremely important in determining the image of destinations in tourist-generating regions and, of course, the real and perceived safety of tourists (Hall 2005). A government's position on the role and appropriate nature of tourism is an important component of that government's foreign policy and is usually indicative of the ideological and economic alignment of the nation. However, it should also be noted that the dynamics and trajectories of tourism are not only affected by tourism policy but also by other policy areas (Bramwell & Lane 2013; Truong 2013). Indeed, Hall (2005) has suggested that policy making in areas such as the economy, especially exchange rate policy, employment law, and the environment, may be more important for what happens in tourism development than tourism policy, although this clearly depends on the policy mix in specific jurisdictions. For example, in discussing the role of tourism in negotiations on international trade in services and their implications for tourist mobility, Hall (2008: 50) argued,

it is extremely difficult to separate the tourism services policy arena from other policy areas related to such issues as migration or international trade in general ... tourism policy per se only represents a very small proportion of the overall number of policy fields that affect tourism and for which decisions are made often with little consideration of the impacts on trade in tourism services.

This chapter provides a general overview of tourism and political issues in the Asian context. It first provides a broad introduction to some of the main themes in studies of the politics of

tourism before looking more specifically at issues of the politics of mobility, tourism in bilateral and multilateral agreements, and tourism and political instability and security.

### Tourism and politics in Asia

Tourism can be used as a political instrument in relations between states, and travel restrictions were especially prevalent during the Cold War, between countries of the socialist and capitalist blocs. Restrictions on the travel of their citizens has been used by countries such as China and the United States as a political tool for many years. For example, in the Asian context the ease of tourist movement between Taiwan and mainland China has long been an element in the countries' political relations (Guo *et al.* 2006; Chiang 2012). Importantly, tourism is also a significant beneficiary of peaceful relations between and within countries (Pratt & Liu 2016).

#### Case study 5.1 Relationships between neighbouring countries: Thailand, Cambodia and the Preah Vihear Temple

The case of the Preah Vihear Temple exemplifies the complex interrelations between politics, national identity, heritage and tourism. The Khmer temple complex of Preah Vihear lies in Cambodia, just a few hundred metres from the current border with Thailand. The location of this border has shifted repeatedly over the years. The current boundary was drawn in 1907, as the outcome of a Franco-Siamese treaty, placing the temple complex within the French colony of Cambodia. However, the territorial right over this site has continued to be a point of perennial dispute between Cambodia and Thailand. In 2008, UNESCO's ratification of Cambodia's application for World Heritage Listing for the Preah Vihear Temple was met with public protests in Thailand and a denouncement by Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, fearing that ratification of this application would legitimize Cambodian claims to the site. From 2009, the dispute escalated to a series of military skirmishes at or near the temple site, culminating in a four-day battle in February 2011, which killed, injured or financially ruined a number of local people and damaged structures.

Because of the conflict, no tourists visited the site in February 2011 (Makara 2011), and in the first six months of 2011 only 27,980 tourists came, compared to 46,400 in the first half of 2010 (Say 2011). However, once the site was again perceived as "safe", foreigners were drawn by curiosity to see the impact of the conflict on the site, while domestic tourists began to return out of a sense of solidarity (Kuntheart 2013), such that tourism to Preah Vihear recovered very quickly after the conflict. In the third quarter of 2012, the number of domestic tourists had increased by 57.7 per cent from the previous year, to 142,910. The number of foreign tourists had increased by over 77 per cent, to 13,140 (Reuy 2012). The belligerence between the two national governments was in contrast with the attitudes of local people on both sides of the border. The headman of one local *Tambon* (group of villages) on the Thai side of the border said that his main concern was to re-establish relations with people on the Cambodian side to perform a joint religious ceremony to "improve the atmosphere" (Kanparit 2013). As Suntikul and Butler (2014: 222) concluded,

the views of local participants in such issues is often more appropriate than official political positions taken in capital cities unaffected by such local conflicts. The sharing of tourism-generated revenues and employment is seen as being of greater local benefit by residents on opposite sides of the border than continued hostilities at the national level.

### **Further reading**

Suntikul, W. and Butler, R. (2014) 'War and peace: and tourism in Southeast Asia', in C. Wohlmuther and W. Wintersteiner (eds), *International Handbook on Tourism and Peace* (pp. 216–229). Klagenfurt: Drava.

An appreciation of the political context of tourism is critical to an understanding of the complex nature of tourism, particularly in Asia where political effects have had dramatic impacts on tourism flow, labour flow, investment, development and policy making (Nyaupane & Timothy 2010; Kim & Prideaux 2012; Bendle 2015; Henderson 2015). Richter's seminal works on the politics of tourism in Asia have been extremely influential (e.g. Richter 1980, 1989, 1999). Since then, there has been a range of research on the politics of tourism in Asia at both a macro-level (e.g. Elliot 1997; Hall & Oehlers 2000; Butler & Suntikul 2010) and at a national or thematic level, e.g. the Korean peninsula (Henderson 2002; Kim, Timothy & Han 2007; Timothy & Kim 2015); the politics of tourism in Myanmar and issues of boycotts and sanctions (Philp & Mercer 1999; Henderson 2003; Hudson 2007); the political economy of Asian sex tourism (Leheny 1995; Jeffreys 2008); and the politics of culture, identity and branding (Jeong & Santos 2004; Henderson 2007; Winter 2007; Geary 2013; Zhang *et al.* 2015).

Tourism also requires a degree of cooperation between the governments of tourist-generating countries and those of destination countries. Currency exchange rates, taxes, duties and customs, transport routes, immigration policies and diplomatic agreements each play a part in this. Even for non-governmental ventures, successful business efforts depend on political relations in dealing with authorities in host nations. However, such ventures are often framed by the broader set of trade agreements in which countries are engaged (Hall & Coles 2008). This is of particular importance in the Asian context because of the growing significance of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

Tourist flows between two countries provide a *de facto* measurement of the state of their political relations. A government can choose to construct political barriers against travel by its nation's own citizens to a particular foreign country as a way of indicating its antipathy towards that country's regime or people. In addition, personal or economic travel restrictions, e.g. how much money can be taken out of a country, were historically used as a means to retain scarce economic resources within a country. For example, Japan had such restrictions in place until the hosting of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Similarly, South Korea had restrictions on its citizens' travel outside the country until 1988, when the country hosted the Seoul Summer Olympics (Hall 1997). The relationship with mega-events is also no coincidence as their media profile means countries will often want to cast themselves in as positive a light as possible. Both the Tokyo and Seoul Olympics were regarded as opportunities to showcase the countries and the cities as modern and contemporary societies. For example, a study by Jeong (1988) indicated that the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul were perceived as a means to overcome the poor image of Korea in the international tourism market as a "dangerous place to visit" (Jeong 1988: 176). Indeed, tourism, together with the hosting of events, has long been an important mechanism of para-diplomacy (Soldatos 1993).

### **The politics of mobility**

Although there is much emphasis on mobility in tourism, states have the power to render their citizens and visitors immobile (Figure 5.1). Although travel may be positioned as a fundamental

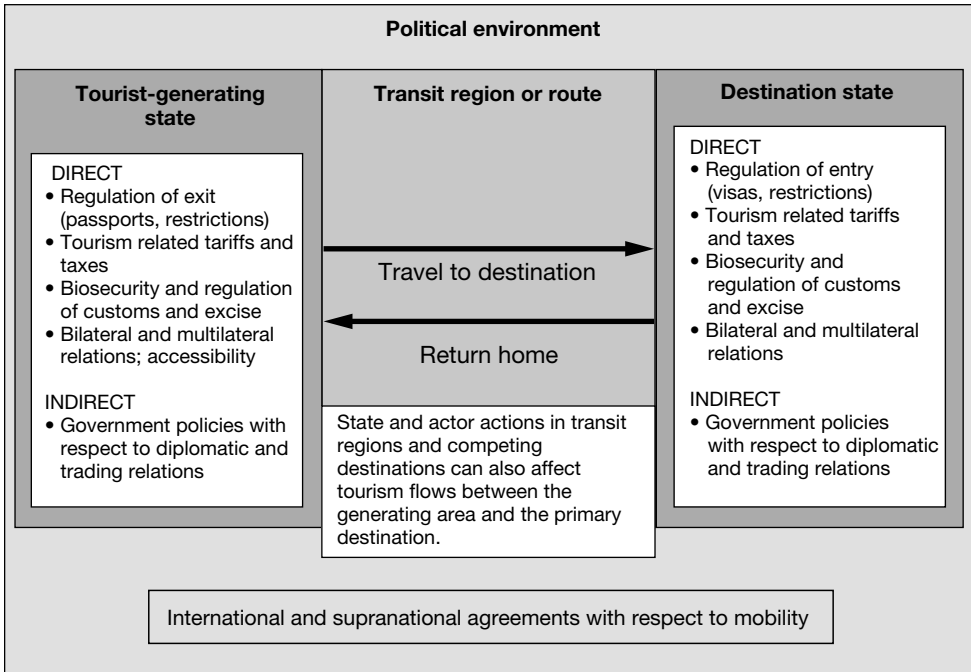


Figure 5.1 Constraining and enabling regulatory framework for international mobility.

Source: adapted from Hall 2008.

human right by a supranational body such as the UNWTO, it is rarely enshrined in law by states. Indeed, the right to control and restrict entry into state territory has “historically been viewed as inherent in the very nature of sovereignty” (Collinson 1996: 77). The capacities of the state to constrain or enable mobility can generally be classified as tariff or non-tariff barriers. Non-tariff barriers include restrictions on entry through screening by nationality or other criteria (e.g. prior criminal or medical condition or some other measure of unsuitability), cost of application for visa, travel allowance restrictions, restrictions on credit card use, and advance-import-deposit-like measures (e.g. compulsory deposits prior to travel). Tariff barriers include import-duty measures, airport departures or airport taxes, and subsidies (e.g. a consumer-subsidy measure such as an official preferential exchange rate for foreign tourists or price concessions) (Hall 2008). Tariff barriers may be managed through bilateral agreements as well as through multilateral negotiations, such as within ASEAN (UNWTO 2013).

Nowhere in international law is there enshrined a right to enter foreign spaces. For example, the advisory *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* only postulates a right of exit and entry to one’s own country and freedom of mobility within a citizen’s own country. Article 13 states:

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
- (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his [sic] own, and to return to his country.

*(United Nations 1948)*

Article 8 of the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* with respect to liberty of tourist movements also notes Article 13 (Table 5.1). However, these are only recommendations and, especially in the

Table 5.1 Liberty of tourist movements (Article 8) of UN Global Code of Ethics for Tourism

1	Tourists and visitors should benefit, in compliance with international law and national legislation, from the liberty to move within their countries and from one state to another, in accordance with Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; they should have access to places of transit and stay and to tourism and cultural sites without being subject to excessive formalities or discrimination.
2	Tourists and visitors should have access to all available forms of communication, internal or external; they should benefit from prompt and easy access to local administrative, legal and health services; they should be free to contact the consular representatives of their countries of origin in compliance with the diplomatic conventions in force.
3	Tourists and visitors should benefit from the same rights as the citizens of the country visited concerning the confidentiality of the personal data and information concerning them, especially when these are stored electronically.
4	Administrative procedures relating to border crossings, whether they fall within the competence of states or result from international agreements, such as visas or health and customs formalities, should be adapted, so far as possible, so as to facilitate the maximum freedom of travel and widespread access to international tourism; agreements between groups of countries to harmonise and simplify these procedures should be encouraged; specific taxes and levies penalising the tourism industry and undermining its competitiveness should be gradually phased out or corrected.
5	So far as the economic situation of the countries from which they come permits, travellers should have access to allowances of convertible currencies needed for their travels.

Source: adapted from United Nations (2001).

Note

The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism was initially adopted by resolution A/RES/406(XIII) at the Thirteenth World Tourism Organization General Assembly (Santiago, Chile, 27 September–1 October 1999). It was then adopted as a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, 21 December 2001.

case of the Global Code, carry very little weight in international law. Although many nation-states have entered into bilateral and multilateral agreements that facilitate mobility between state parties, the prerogative to control entry remains firmly with each nation-state (Neumayer 2006; Coles & Hall 2011). For example, arguably the most important direct measure by government on mobility is the provision of passports and travel documents (Neumayer 2006, 2010, 2011). In order to enter foreign territories, travellers require passports or other documentation, which only nation-states have the right to issue, together with a valid visa depending on which passport they hold and where they want to travel to (see also Coles 2008). Without such documentation an individual becomes stateless in an international regulatory system that is founded on the recognition of state authority (Hess 2006).

“The capacity of gaining access to foreign spaces is ... highly unequal” (Hall 2008: 38). The extent to which access to travel documentation is a right varies because of different national laws. However, even where rights exist, such documentation is not provided for free and the financial cost of passport provision may deter some potential travellers (Neumayer 2006; Coles & Hall 2011; UNWTO 2013, 2014). Furthermore, in many Asian jurisdictions citizenship by itself does not confer a right to a passport as the state may have a number of political reasons not to grant passports. Recognition of passports by destination authorities also affects travel decision making as acceptance is embedded within a complex set of bilateral and multilateral arrangements with respect to recognition of various nation-states; visa provision to provide for entry; and even sanctions on those who come from or visit some states. For example, Israeli citizens may not be able to gain entry to a number of predominantly Muslim Asian countries, such as Indonesia. Many countries also require the issuance of visas as a provision for entry, although

these can sometimes be purchased or obtained at the border. In many cases visa-granting regulations require the temporary surrender of a passport to an embassy (or other authority) of the destination country, as well as other documentation relating to identity and purpose of visit and the payment of a fee (Whyte 2008; UNWTO 2014). Economic measures may also affect travel flows. For example, many jurisdictions impose a departure tax or other taxes on international visitors or nationals, often for revenue-raising purposes, while others seek to reduce the extent of illegal immigration by having more rigorous and/or restrictive visa access for nationals of some countries (Thunø 2003).

### ***Chinese Approved Destination Status (ADS) programme***

A good example of the ways in which regulatory requirements can affect travel flows is the Chinese Approved Destination Status (ADS) programme (Neumayer 2006; Arita *et al.* 2011; Arita *et al.* 2014; Ma *et al.* 2015). Although travel for sightseeing was long frowned upon in state communist China, post-1978 and the “open-door” policy, international leisure tourism has become recognised as being an extremely significant part of the economy, an important symbol of Chinese modern economic development, and a mechanism of Chinese diplomacy and international relations. In 1981 Chinese citizens were only allowed to undertake group leisure trips to selected countries in southeast Asia (Hong Kong, Macau, Thailand and Singapore). In 1983 private travel with the purpose of visiting friends and relations (VFR) overseas was allowed. Since the early 1990s the Chinese government has enacted a number of policy changes in order to encourage outbound tourism (Zhang and Han 2004):

- The State Council enacted the *Measures on Management of Outbound Tourism by Chinese Citizens*, which have improved the management system of outbound tourism, seeking to protect the rights of outbound tourists and enterprises running outbound business. The measures stipulate the approved destination countries and regions; the qualifications, approval procedures and business processes of travel agencies running outbound business; the responsibilities of tour leaders; the rights and obligations of tourists; and penalties for not meeting legal obligations.
- The application process for passports was simplified.
- Foreign currency exchange management and control were adjusted.

ADS is a bilateral programme developed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to manage the international group leisure travel of its citizens to recipient destinations. Each destination country negotiates separately with the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and the Chinese government with respect to their specific ADS agreement. Unlike Japan and South Korea, which placed no restrictions on where their citizens could visit after their travel bans were lifted, China’s outbound tourism policy is selective and therefore, as Arita *et al.* (2014) note, is both liberalizing and restricting.

Introduced in 1995, the ADS programme enables citizens of the PRC to use personal passports and apply for tourism visas to countries approved for visitation. For national destinations approved under ADS, mainland Chinese no longer have to contact embassies or consulates in order to obtain a visa. Instead, visas for leisure group travel are provided by outbound travel agencies that have been authorised by the CNTA. However, the visas are restricted by the itinerary, which must be fixed at the beginning of the trip. Travellers are also obliged to travel in a tour group (minimum of five people including a tour leader) and are not allowed to extend their stay or apply for other types of visas. The destination tourist authority must provide a list

of approved tour operators that can handle land arrangements for tour groups. Travel solely for pleasure is not allowed to non-ADS countries. If mainland Chinese wish to travel to non-ADS countries their trip must be for business, education, or family (VFR) purposes in order to gain a departure visa.

Achievement of ADS is now recognised as crucial to the development of tourism, transport and aviation relations with China and has become a significant economic aspect of China's foreign relations, particularly with respect to smaller economies, such as those in the Pacific (Windybank 2005; Shie 2007; Arita *et al.* 2014). The ADS is also significant because, as well as providing for tourist entry into the destination country, it also allows the destination country to open a tourist office in China and conduct marketing activities, thereby potentially encouraging further demand from Chinese tourists (King *et al.* 2006). Arita *et al.* (2014) argue that since the Chinese government regards granting ADS to a country as a concession favouring the grantee country, China may be seen as using ADS as an instrument of "soft power" to gain political concessions from potential grantee countries. They cite the example of Fiji, noting that it was widely reported that China granted ADS to the South Pacific island nation in return for Fiji not recognizing Taiwan diplomatically, and highlight that the Dominican Republic is the only country that currently recognises Taiwan that has successfully negotiated an ADS agreement with China (2009) (China granted ADS to Taiwan in 2008).

### ***The significance of bilateral and multilateral agreements***

In the Asian context bilateral agreements such as the ADS appear to have had a far greater direct impact on travel flows than multilateral agreements (Neumayer 2010, 2011). Multilateral agreements have been important for the investment regime under which countries operate and may have also facilitated the opening up of aviation routes. However, individual leisure tourist mobility is unlikely to be further substantially liberalised in the foreseeable future, although some specific market segments may benefit. For example, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) members created an APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) which is designed to facilitate short-term entry through pre-clearance measures between participant countries (Hall 2008).

The Preah Vihear case, discussed above, provides a clear illustration of the contentious and counterproductive facets of nationalism that regional organizations and supranational alliances seek to overcome. Ideally, such organizations aim to build on shared assets to achieve co-prosperity (rather than quarrelling over them in a zero-sum game). Supranational alliances are both economic and political in nature, and membership in such blocs is becoming increasingly important for nations to manage economic and political relations in an increasingly globalised world, where many policy issues, such as the environment, cross international boundaries (Hall 2005). In terms of economics and trade, such alliances can range from free trade agreements to customs unions to common markets to economic unions, and may involve a pair of national governments or a regional or global bloc of nations. Such economic relations always entail political relations and with greater degrees of economic cooperation and integration increasing levels of political co-dependency and trust are also required to fully leverage the value of such relationships.

Many changes in tourism patterns in Asia are emerging as a result of the shifting economic landscape and trade policy in the region. The relationship between China and Vietnam provides an illustration. The normalization of relations between China and Vietnam in 1991 can be seen as one facet of the opening-up of both nations' economies (Womack 2006). This led to an opening of their mutual border for trade purposes, which also allowed easier passage of tourists



between the two countries. Especially with the growing affluence of some sectors of Chinese society, Vietnam became a near-at-hand and low-priced destination, leading to 12.77 million border crossings between the two countries from 1993 to 1998 (Xiaosong & Womack 2000). However, disputes between China and Vietnam over the conduct of Chinese firms doing business in Vietnam (Chan 2013), and territorial disputes regarding oil drilling rights in the South China Sea, led to anti-Chinese riots in Vietnam in 2014, which killed several Chinese citizens, causing the Chinese government to issue a “yellow” travel warning for Vietnam, leading to an almost 50 per cent drop in Chinese visitors from April to June 2014 (Thu 2014; see also Lamb & Dao 2015 for a discussion of broader anti-Chinese sentiment in south-east Asia). This is an example of the established Chinese government practice of restricting outbound tourism of its citizens to a country as a “negative sanction” in political disputes (Tse & Hobson 2008; Tse 2015).

A number of the bilateral and regional trade relationships and alliances in Southeast Asia originated in political alliances forged during the Cold War. Close Vietnam–China relations in the 1970s were driven by China’s support of Vietnam’s communist government in the war against the United States (Womack 2006). Similarly, the initial impetus for the founding of ASEAN in 1967 was apprehension among non-communist (some Western-aligned, some Muslim) countries of Southeast Asia (Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia) to join forces to strengthen themselves against the rising tide of communism in the region, which had led to the toppling of regimes in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (Hall 1997). This is in contrast to the current manifestation of ASEAN, which now counts all of the countries of Southeast Asia among its members, and has an agenda that has shifted to building co-prosperity of the member nations.

Tourism is an increasingly prominent element of this integration. The removal of barriers (economic, political and perceptual) that comes with growing economic and political integration between countries, and the formation of international economic unions, is generally associated with an increase in tourism (Timothy 2003; UNWTO 2013). Though the economic integration of ASEAN was originally based on trade of raw materials and manufactured goods, by the early 1990s tourism had become an important aspect of the organization’s consideration (Hall, 1994). For example, 1992 was declared “Visit ASEAN Year” and the member countries cooperated to promote the region as an integrated destination, to encourage tourists to stay longer. The ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2011–2015 (ASEAN Secretariat 2011) focuses on the development of “regional products” to attract a greater share of the global tourism market, including raising the quality of human resources, services and facilities, and especially connectivity and coordination between member nations. The plan calls for increased government spending on tourism from all of its members, and establishes visitor arrivals as an essential indicator of progress towards ASEAN’s overall goals (ASEAN Secretariat 2011).

SAARC (the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), founded in 1985, counts as its members Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It plays a similar role to ASEAN in promoting the integrated social and economic co-development among its members. Tourism has been an element of this integration nearly since the organization’s inception; the SAARC Technical Committee on Tourism was founded in 1991, and in 1999 a Tourism Council was established under the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry in an attempt to try to unify tourism promotion for the member countries (Hall & Page 2000). Timothy (2003) remarked that this organization has the added challenge of promoting political and economic integration and cooperation between countries with even longer-standing and continuing histories of dispute and antagonism, if not outright conflict, than those of ASEAN, and the lack of progress in SAARC tourism initiatives is indicative of this (Rasul & Manandhar 2009).

The integration brought by such supranational alliances is not without its problems. While bringing economic and social benefits to participating nations, loosening control on flows of money, people and goods can also make it more difficult to control flows of drugs, terrorists and other undesirable elements, uneven distribution of benefits among member countries, and the exploitation of weaker partner countries by stronger ones (Timothy 2003).

### **Tourism and political instability**

Political instability refers to a situation in which conditions and mechanisms of governance and rule are challenged as to their political legitimacy by elements operating from outside of the normal operations of the political system (Hall 2005). When challenge occurs from within a political system and the system is able to adapt and change to meet the demands placed on it, it can be regarded as stable. However, when forces for change are unable to be satisfied from within a political system and the consequence is the use of what the specific jurisdiction regarded as non-legitimate means, such as protest, violence, or even civil war to seek change, then a political system can be described as being unstable. Clearly, the notion of what constitutes legitimate political actions will vary from state to state. While protests such as street marches or publications critical of the incumbent government or rulers may be permitted in one country, they may not in another. For example, in Thailand there are very severe penalties for the crime of lese-majeste, including significant jail terms for criticising the monarchy or their pets (Holmes 2015).

Nevertheless, there are also degrees of political instability, with perceptions often being more important for tourist decision making than political realities or human rights issues. For example, Thai governments have tended to have very short life-spans due to the nature of their political and electoral system, including a long history of military takeovers of government. The PRC, on the other hand, has been reasonably stable even as other former state communist regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe. Political stability is therefore not a value judgment as to the democratic nature, or otherwise, of a state. Indeed, it may well be the case that some authoritarian states in Asia which limit formal opposition to government may provide extremely stable political and economic environments in which tourism may flourish, and may even promote tourism as a means of bringing in foreign exchange and improving their public image (Hall & Ringer 2000; Ghimire 2001; Sofield 2009). By their very nature, authoritarian regimes do not have to go through the public consultation measures that are in place in most Western democracies and which affect planning and development decision making (Hall 1994). Whether a political regime is repressive or not from a human rights perspective may not matter very much at all. What is far more significant from the perspective of most tourists is the extent to which a location is regarded as secure and stable. It is only when places become unstable for extended periods of time and there is media coverage that affects tourist awareness and perceptions that visitor flows change.

The role that authoritarian states have played in tourism development highlights the importance of government, media and tourist perceptions of destinations in determining attitudes towards the political characteristics of the destination and the creation of its tourist image. Figure 5.2 provides a model of some of the factors identified in this chapter and elsewhere that lead to the creation of images of the political stability of a destination region in tourist-generating regions, as well as potential reactions in the tourism destination region. As noted above, critical to market reactions to instability is the role of the media as they play a major part in conveying the relative safety or security of a destination to the market, along with word-of-mouth, and advertising campaigns sponsored by the government(s) of the tourist-generating region. For example, in 2015 the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) won awards for

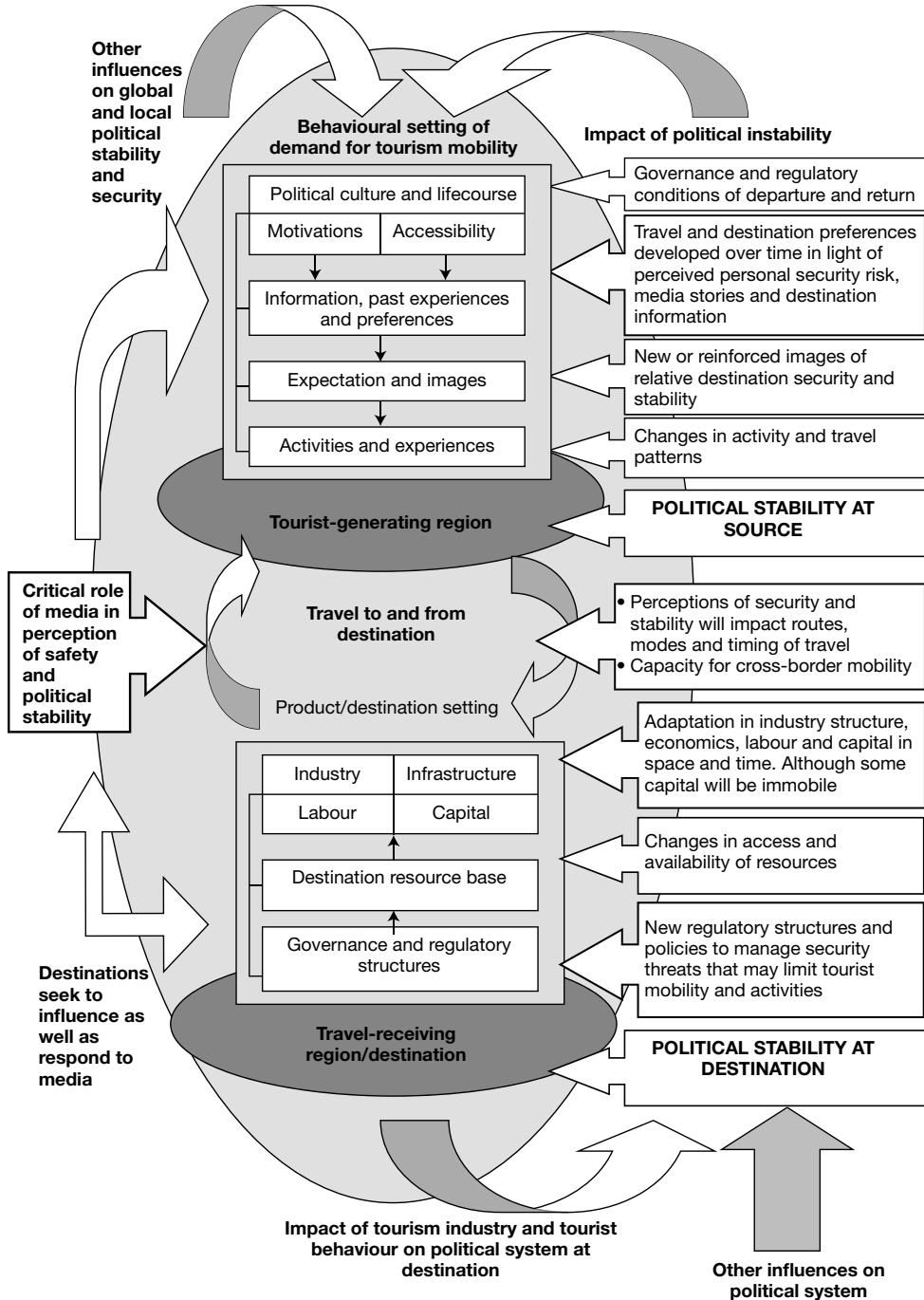


Figure 5.2 The tourism system, governance, regulation and political security and stability.

advertising campaigns that provided a completely different portrayal of the country to that seen in many Western media accounts of the country's political troubles. The YouTube video "I Hate Thailand", which is a story of an independent traveller's experiences of the kingdom after losing his belongings, in which frustration is replaced by love for the nation thanks to the help of the local people, received the Gold Award for Marketing in the Social Media Category. A second PATA Gold Award went to the "Discover Thainess" campaign in the Promotional Travel Video category. The video shows different aspects of Thai culture, including Thai boxing, Thai massage, Thai cooking, and Thai classical dance (*Tourism News* 2015). The TAT campaign is also of significance not only because of negative images of political instability in Thailand, but also stories in some markets with respect to attacks on tourists. For example, the British media have run a series of stories over the rape and murder of backpacker Hannah Witheridge in Koh Tao in September 2014. Concerns have been raised over the Thai police investigation of the murder as well as their use of media to portray their own investigation – which was substantially criticised in the British media – in a more positive light. In a post covered by the *Guardian* after the conviction of Burmese migrant bar workers who denied the charges, the sister of the murdered tourist said that "those who still think Thailand is a safe travel destination should watch a recent video produced by the cyber activist collective Anonymous that accuses the Thai police of a cover-up in the Koh Tao and other murder cases" (Holmes 2016a). Anonymous also suggested that the Thai police "would rather blame foreigners or migrants for such crimes so as to protect their tourism industry than accuse their own Thai locals, that may deter tourists from choosing Thailand as their holiday destination" (quoted in Holmes 2016b).

The issue of attacks on tourists is something that can have a dramatic impact on perceptions of a destination. For example, a series of high-profile attacks on female tourists in India as well as greater coverage of attacks on Indian women in Western media had a substantial effect on perceptions of the safety of India as a place to travel, especially for women, at a time when India was seeking to further promote the country as a destination through the "Incredible India" campaign (Mundkur 2011; Gupta 2014). For example, after the widely publicised gang rape, and later death, of a female physiotherapy intern in New Delhi in December 2012, Khan (2015: 219) suggested that after the coverage of the incident "the image of 'Incredible India' has been broken into pieces". Khan (2015) also noted that according to a report published in the *Hindustan Times* at the end of March 2013 the incident resulted in foreign tourism falling by 25 per cent on average, with an even greater drop of around 35 per cent in female tourists.

However, while direct media coverage is clearly important with respect to perceptions of security, governments also strongly affect travel flows via their communications to the media and individual travellers. Governments, through their foreign policy, can also impact on perceptions of potential destinations and capacity to travel, especially through the contents of travel advisories which not only provide travel advice on the safety of particular destinations but can also affect the price of travel insurance (Lovelock 2004; Löwenheim 2007). Although the clearest link between tourism policies and international diplomacy is seen in the extent to which freedom of movement is enabled between countries by visa and passport policies, travel advisories and short-term policy changes can nevertheless have significant impacts, especially in response to terrorism, health and other threats (Hall, Timothy & Duval 2004; Henderson 2004; Löwenheim 2007; McCartney 2014).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of some of the main features of the politics of tourism in Asia. A key point is that there is no inherent right to international travel under

international law. The vast majority of statements and politics from organisations such as the UNWTO are regarded as “soft” international law and therefore do not carry the same legal weight as the international conventions surrounding international trade, for example. In Asia a number of governments still retain tight control on their nationals’ international mobility and use tourism as a tool of “soft power” diplomacy. Tourism is also incorporated in bilateral and multilateral agreements, with the former seemingly having the most impact on mobility, usually as a result of changes in visa requirements.

However, despite greater economic and political integration in Asia, significant political disagreements and conflicts still occur to the detriment of tourist flows – examples were given from the relationship between China and Vietnam, as well as that between Cambodia and Thailand. The significance of political instability for tourism was therefore also noted, as well as issues of security. The role of the media in influencing consumer perceptions of security was highlighted, with examples from Thailand in particular, although the ongoing role of government in influencing tourist flows and perceptions remains a critical element of the politics of tourism.

### Key reading

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