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Tourism and Poverty Alleviation in Nature Conservation Areas: A Juxtaposition between Japan and Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the interrelationship between the tourism and poverty nexus in two countries, Japan and Vietnam, particularly focused on nature conservation areas. It argues that although tourism has often been linked with poverty through the concept of pro-poor tourism (PPT), limited research has investigated this from different perspectives of developed and developing countries where may suffer different types of poverty, that could be absolute or relative poverty. On the one hand, tourism may contribute positively to poverty alleviation, on the other hand, it may impact negatively to inequality of income distribution during its growth process. Little is also discussed about the perspectives of local people with regard to tourism in nature conservation areas, whose voices may influence the success of conservation outcomes. This is particularly important for both developed and developing economies such as Japan and Vietnam which are suffering with different types of poverty issues. Taking two case studies – Yakushima, a natural world heritage site (NWHS) and Cu Lao Cham, a marine protected area (MPA) as the two particular nature conservation areas, this research seeks to answer three main

questions: (1) How do local people perceive tourism's impact on poverty alleviation in the case of Cu Lao Cham? (2) How do local tourism enterprises perceive tourism's impact on income distribution and spatial tourism development in the case of Yakushima? and (3) What are the barriers for poverty alleviation or mitigation of income inequality in Japan and Vietnam?

This research utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. A survey was administered with 205 local people in Cu Lao Cham. Interviews were conducted with 32 and 41 local tourism enterprises in Yakushima and Cu Lao Cham, respectively. It indicated that the people in both cases perceived positively the impact of tourism to their lives and the local economies. In the case of Cu Lao Cham, locals' perceptions regarding tourism and poverty alleviation are more clearly reflected. However, in the case of Yakushima, tourism growth may not necessarily contribute to equal income distribution and is perceived as creating a gap between tourist villages and non-tourist villages. At the same time, the people in both case studies also felt the inequalities of income distribution not only between local tourism stakeholders on the islands but also

between locals and non-locals who come from the mainland. In addition, in the case of Cu Lao Cham, tension and disagreements with regard to uneven tourism benefit distribution happened among various tourism participants. In terms of barriers to tourism participation, local people in Cu Lao Cham also faced a number of critical challenges in which the lack of knowledge and skills, insufficient financial capital, and market access appear as the most critical obstacles.

Furthermore, the research findings in both cases are consistent with the aim of PPT concept that tourism is not only generating economic benefits but also creating effects from social and cultural aspects (i.e., lifestyle aspect in the case of Yakushima and gender aspect in the case of Cu Lao Cham). Above mentioned insights of those people (both positive and negative ways) may have an effect on the conservation outcomes of the two case study areas as there is a strong relation between tourism growth and its impacts on local people residing with (in) these nature conservation areas.

This research also confirmed again the importance of local people's perceptions regarding not only tourism and poverty alleviation overall as some previous research supported but also in the relation to tourism and conservation goals. Once the insights of local people have been deeply understood and their attitudes tended to support tourism development in nature conservation areas, the goals of sustainable tourism development in these special settings are more likely to be achieved.