

**Tourism Infrastructure Construction under the Belt and Road
Initiative along Indochina: An Analysis of Cambodia's State-level
Policy; and Policy Recommendations for Vietnam and Laos.**

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ABSTRACT

Officially introduced in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has gained much attention and response from the international community due to its massive geographic and economic scope. The initiative focuses on establishing a network of international trade routes connecting Asia, Europe and Africa through a variety of infrastructural projects backed by China. The implementation of BRI facilitates global transportation, flows of resources and human-to-human exchange, which are all the impetus for tourism development. On the other hand, tourism is integrated in the Action Plan of BRI as important pillar to the successful realisation of the initiative.

This study aimed at gaining better understanding of BRI tourism investments in Indochina countries, one of the strategic areas of cooperation under BRI's framework. It also sought to analyse the state-level policies of recipient countries in response to BRI investments, and the consequences of such policies on social groups and on tourism development.

The study was underpinned by a relativist epistemology and a constructivist paradigm. A qualitative, case study approach was adopted to explore the impacts of BRI and recipient countries' state-level policies following the implementation of the initiative. Two case studies were selected for this research, which were the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and Dara Sakor Seashore Resort in Cambodia. The rationale behind these cases was that they were among the most significant investment projects in tourism under BRI framework, yet they had not been properly examined from the tourism perspective. The research utilised secondary data for the analysis; and adopted the conventional content analysis approach. This research was carried out based on the process of a policy analysis which included two major steps: problem analysis and outcome analysis. The Social Construction Framework served as the main theoretical framework for the evaluation of policy outcomes.

The study concluded that among the three Indochina countries, Cambodia was the most enthusiastic partner in the development and implementation of BRI, while Laos remained supportive and Vietnam is still cautious. Facing the problem of inadequate infrastructure, Cambodia had embraced the initiative, formulating policies that favoured the

interest of the Chinese investors over the needs of the country and its people. The examination of the case studies showed that such policies disproportionately allocated economic benefits and political advantages to the Chinese investors, while created burdens for the local residents living in concession areas and the local business; and limited the social power of the non-governmental groups. Another outcome was that these investments likely created more problems for Cambodia, in terms of economic leakage from tourism activities and environmental issues, rather than bringing actual economic impacts. The study suggested that governments should carry out more comprehensive and systematic planning and management strategies, while improving governmental transparency and promoting decentralization in order to take full advantages of BRI cooperation opportunities and avoid negative consequences of Chinese investments.

ASSERTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature of candidate:

17/06/2019

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

Since 2013, China has actively promoted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a grand strategy in Chinese foreign policy that has proved to be a development catalyst for China and the global economy. Taking the idea from the Ancient Silk Road, the BRI aims at reconstructing the international trade routes with the proposal for two strategic components: the Silk Road Economic Belt (the “Belt”) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (the “Road”). Infrastructure investments lie at the core of the Initiative with an announced investment of USD 8 trillion for the construction of transportation systems, energy and telecommunication networks spanning over 70 countries in Asia, Europe and Africa (Hurley, Morris & Portelance, 2018). Over the past six years, the Initiative has been expanding and drawing positive responses from countries and organisations all over the world. By March 2019, 125 countries and 29 international organisations had signed cooperation agreements with the Chinese government within the Initiative’s framework (Office of the Leading group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative (OLPBRI), 2019).

Central to the prospect of fostering people-to-people bonds and state-to-state relations of the BRI, is the development of tourism. As stated by OLPBRI (2019, p.1), “with regard to different civilizations, exchange will replace estrangement, mutual learning will replace clashes, and coexistence will replace a sense of superiority”. Tourism development (which promotes cross-cultural understanding and facilitates international cooperation in a wide range of fields) is in harmony with the BRI’s vision of building a global community with a shared future and common prosperity. Infrastructure development under the BRI serves as gateways for interactions among countries and their people, as well as cross-boundary exchanges and communication. Furthermore, the tourism industry will benefit directly from the Initiative, as the development of global infrastructure and transportation links enhances tourism accessibility, increases demands for cross-border tourism, and smooths the way for business activities (UNWTO, 2019). The development of tourism infrastructure not only facilitates tourism-related activities, but also supports the overall conditions of infrastructure and the transition of means of production (WTCTF,

2017). It is essential for countries to ensure the extent and standard of tourism facilities and services are adequate, as these are the key determinants of destination development (Henderson, 2009). International aids and trans-national cooperation are sought by many countries with limited resources, as these provide the necessary funding and expertise for the provision of tourism infrastructure systems (Henderson, 2009).

Although the Belt and Road Initiative has been attracting the attention of experts around the world and a considerable amount of literature has been published on the topic, current knowledge of the Initiative has focused mostly on either understanding it from political and economic standpoints, or its impact on global trade flows, supply chains and connectivity (Lee et al., 2017). Until now, far too little attention from tourism academia has been paid to the BRI, and research publications concerning the association between the BRI and tourism development are elusive. This research contributes to an understanding of the BRI by providing the first comprehensive investigation of tourism-related infrastructure investments under the Initiative. The research focuses on the Indochinese countries of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, which are prominent regions in the BRI agenda. While Laos is part of the transnational Kunming – Singapore railway projects, Vietnam and Cambodia are at the gateways of the Maritime Silk Road through the South China Sea. Their strategic locations and long history of cooperation with China (Pang, 2017) has allowed them to become not only important points of connectivity on the BRI's trade routes but also the key beneficiaries of the Initiative in terms of tourism infrastructure development.

1.2 Research aim and objectives

This research centres around one broad question: How does a recipient country respond to tourism infrastructure as foreign direct investment under the BRI and how do policies relating to the BRI affect social groups and tourism development?

To provide a comprehensive answer to the research question, the following research objectives were formulated:

- To gain better understanding of the current status of BRI investments in Indochinese countries and provide a list of all tourism infrastructure projects in the region under the Initiative.

- To identify the government-level policies in response to the BRI and the underlying reasons behind such decisions.
- To discover the consequences of such policies on social groups in terms of the allocation of benefits and burdens, as well as impacts on their social construction.
- To draw policy implications for Indochinese countries to leverage the prospects created by the Initiative.

1.3 Research design

The analysis process of this research adopted models by Weiner and Vining (2017) and Patton, Sawicki and Clark (2013). The Social Construction Framework by Ingram, Schneider and deLeon (2007) was chosen to help measure and evaluate the consequences of the policies, as this framework captures the dynamics between policies, group identities, their political orientation, and economic benefits.

This research is based on data collected from five secondary sources, including: (i) official government institutions' documents, (ii) project management authorities' reports and statistics, (iii) research and reports from non-governmental organisations and private individuals, (iv) media archives and news reported on related aspects, and (v) online reviews from TripAdvisor. To understand the complexity of the BRI, and gain insights into the impacts of policy implementations following cooperation under the BRI, the research uses a multiple case study approach that offers an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Two projects in Cambodia were selected for analysis: the Golden Silver Gulf Resort in Preah-Sihanouk province, and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort in Koh Kong province. These two projects were purposely selected for the research as they were among the most significant tourism investments within the BRI framework (Goh & Thul, 2018), playing important roles in the establishment of the Maritime Silk Road and the development of Cambodia as the recipient country.

1.4 Overview of the research structure

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. The second chapter is an extensive critical review on the existing body of literature on the research topic. The review starts with an overview of infrastructure development within the tourism context, and components of the tourism infrastructure system, based on the conceptual model by Murphy, Richard

and Smith (2000). It then discusses the background for transnational cooperation for infrastructure development. The next section covers the general aspects of the BRI, and outlines the current status of tourism development under the Initiative in Indochinese countries. Following the literature review is the methodology chapter. This chapter outlines the specifics of the research framework (policy analysis using the Social Construction Framework), research and data collection method (secondary research), and the case-study approach. The next chapter provides an examination of the policy problem and its background. Chapter five presents the findings developed from the data as these relate specifically to the consequences of the policies according to the Social Construction Framework. Chapter six discusses the major themes of the analysis process, summarises the research findings, and outlines significant policy implications of the research. Finally, chapter seven draws conclusions, explains how the research achieved its aims and objectives, addresses its contribution to the wider research context, and proposes future studies of the BRI in a tourism context.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Infrastructure is claimed to be one of the most critical foundations for tourist destination development, perhaps second only in importance to an area's resource base (Sakai, 2006). Tourism infrastructure not only allows the functioning of tourism activities but also facilitates the production, distribution, and consumption of tourism products. Recurrent inadequacies and failures in the infrastructure system may damage a destination's accessibility and reputation, impacting directly on tourists' destination choices and overall satisfaction (Henderson, 2009).

The world's infrastructure system is undergoing significant transformation with the proposal and implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. This trillion-dollar grand initiative will boost global trade and cross-border human exchange through the establishment of infrastructures connecting China to other countries around the globe. As an industry that promotes the value of global people-to-people exchange, tourism goes hand-in-hand with the development progress of the Initiative. Although the BRI is a global phenomenon that is changing the world's economic and socio-political landscape, very few studies exist to shed light on the connections between tourism development and the BRI.

This chapter is structured into two major parts. The first section discusses infrastructure development in tourism, including the role of infrastructure in tourism development, the components of tourism infrastructure systems, and transnational partnerships in infrastructure development. The second section concerns the Belt and Road Initiative, addressing its concept, impacts, and challenges, explaining the motives behind the BRI, and discussing it within the context of tourism infrastructure development in Indochina. The discussion about the BRI and tourism infrastructure pays special attention to the Indochinese region of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, as these three countries have a critical role in the successful realisation of the BRI, in terms of geopolitical, economic and political aspects (He, 2017; Li & Yongke, 2017).

2.2 Infrastructure development in tourism

2.2.1 The role of infrastructure in tourism development

Leiper (1979) was among the first scholars to recognise the importance of infrastructure, more specifically transport facilities, in the tourism system. He argued that “a region requires transport facilities for locals to travel out, in the same way, as it requires them for tourists to visits” (Leiper, 1979, p.90). Other scholars have supported this argument (e.g. Sakai, 2006; Currie & Falconer, 2014). They have pointed out that transport infrastructure is essential to tourism, as it facilitates the necessary movement of travellers and establishes the overall connectivity between and within destinations. Leiper also discussed the efficiency of transit routes, which are the physical links between traveller-generating regions and tourist destination regions (Figure 2.1). Efficient transit routes can provide easy access for a large number of travellers (Leiper, 1979), influencing travellers’ destination choices. Inefficiencies in transit routes such as lengthy travel times, high prices or uncomfortable journeys may increase the likelihood that travellers may seek alternative destinations (Leiper, 1979).

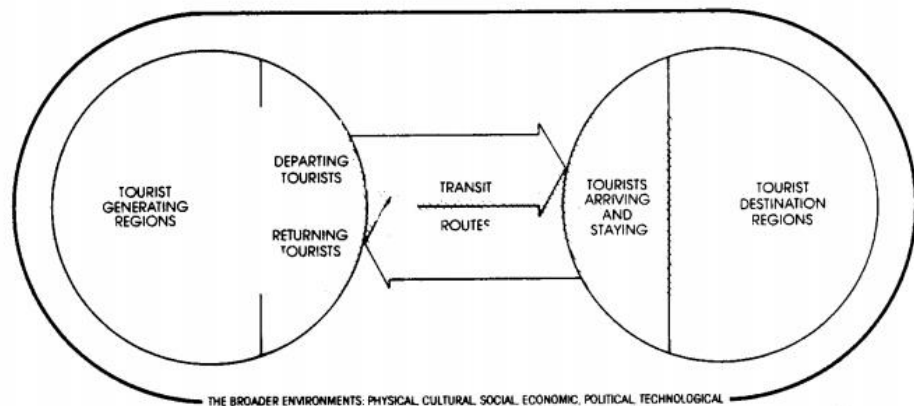


Figure 2.1 The tourism system

Note: Reprinted from “The framework of tourism: Towards a definition of tourism, tourist, and the tourist industry” by N. Leiper, 1979, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 6(4), 390-407. Copyright 1979 by Elsevier Ltd.

The role of infrastructure was also pointed out in Smith’s (1994) model of a tourism product, which consists of five elements: the physical plant, service, hospitality, involvement, and freedom of choice. The tourism infrastructure, as part of the physical plant, provides the fundamental resources on which any form of tourism is based (Smith,

1994). Subsequently, Sakai (2006) pointed out that infrastructure is vital to the development of tourism as it allows commercial tourism activities to occur. Infrastructure facilitates the production and distribution of tourism services, and in some instances, makes the supply of tourism services possible (Sakai, 2006). Smith stressed that the availability, design, and quality of infrastructure are the determining factors of the consumers' experiences.

Ritchie and Crouch (2003) positioned infrastructure as one of the supporting factors and resources in their model of destination competitiveness and sustainability (Figure 2.2). While remaining hidden comparing to other factors in the model, infrastructure is essential for the rest of the structure to function effectively (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003, p. 131).

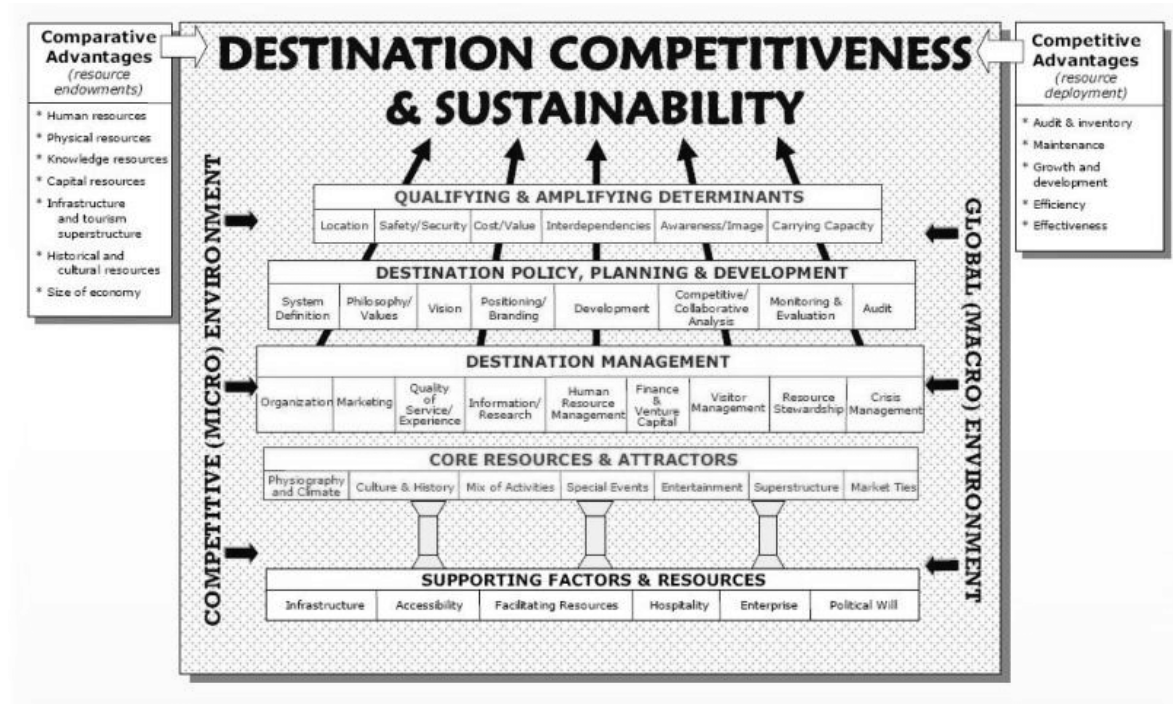


Figure 2.2 The Ritchie/Crouch model of destination competitiveness and sustainability

Note: Reprinted from "A model of destination competitiveness/sustainability: Brazilian perspectives" by J. B. Ritchie & G. I. Crouch, 2010, *RAP - Rio De Janeiro*, 44(5), 1049-1066. Copyright 2010 by CABI International.

Within this framework, infrastructure is argued to affect destination competitiveness in two essential ways. Firstly, infrastructure is a determinant of overall tourist satisfaction (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Tourists' perceptions of the image of infrastructure, including its availability and quality, may influence their destination choice (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Thompson & Schofield, 2007). Secondly, infrastructure may serve to facilitate or hinder the

functioning of the tourism system (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). All types of business involved in the tourism industry rely on infrastructure in order to function efficiently (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The feasibility of a new tourism venture depends on the availability, adequacy, and cost of infrastructure in the destination (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The works of Smith (1994) and Ritchie and Crouch, both viewing infrastructure as an element of the tourism product experience, has provided a good theoretical background for the role of infrastructure in tourism development.

Prideaux (1998) pointed out that most of the existing models of destination development fail to incorporate the tourism infrastructure's role in facilitating development. In his discussion of the Resort Development Spectrum, Prideaux highlighted tourism infrastructure as a major feature in each phase of development. In the long term, the provision of tourism infrastructure should parallel the growth of the industry (Prideaux, 1998), in order to ensure an uninterrupted service level (Sakai, 2006), while not exceeding the destination's capacity (Page & Connell, 2009). At the same time, the future outlook of tourism infrastructure is also affected by technology development, as well as geopolitical and socio-political changes (Sakai, 2006). The tourism system described earlier by Leiper (1979) also represents the arrangement of multiple elements and facets of tourism, including infrastructure, within the broader environments. All these factors can either support or hamper the ability of a government, as well as public sectors, to invest in tourism infrastructure projects.

2.2.2 The components of a tourism infrastructure system

From a broad perspective, infrastructure includes “the subordinate facilities, equipment, systems and processes that provide a foundation for a wide range of economic needs perspective” (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003, p. 21). In that sense, the tourism infrastructure system also covers public safety, mail and delivery services, medical services, financial systems, educational systems, and national safety that benefits both residents and tourists (Sakai, 2006). Elements of infrastructure as a foundational factor for destination competitiveness, according to Ritchie and Crouch (2003), can be classified into two major groups, as presented in Table 2.1. “General infrastructure” is defined as the facilities, systems, and services that would normally be referred to as infrastructure, while “basic services infrastructure” is that which provides necessary support to the functioning of a

destination, although these forms are not generally considered as infrastructural (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

Table 2.1 Elements of infrastructure from a tourism destination perspective

| Group 1: General infrastructure | Group 2: Basic services infrastructure |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transportation systems - Public safety - Water resources and supply systems - Electrical generation and transmission systems - Sanitation and drainage systems - Natural gas services - Telecommunications systems - Mail and freight services - Medical systems - Financial systems - Education systems - National defence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retail and shopping facilities - Food stores - Garage and maintenance facilities - Chemist shops - Book stores - Laundry services |

Note: Adapted from *The competitive destination: A sustainable tourism perspective* (p. 132), by J. Ritchie & G. Crouch, 2003, Oxfordshire, UK: CABI Publishing. Copyright (2003) by CABI Publishing.

In their interpretation of the destination product, Murphy, Richard and Smith (2000) identified two sub-components contributing to tourist destination experience, including the service infrastructure and destination environments (Figure 2.3). From this perspective, tourism service infrastructure is framed within the broader context of macro-environment, or the physical environment of a destination (Murphy et al., 2000). The service infrastructure is comprised of six essential elements: accommodation services, transportation services, travel services, food services, recreation and attraction services, and shopping services (Murphy et al., 2000). Within this study, the classification of tourism infrastructure by Murphy et al. is adapted, as it differentiates tourism infrastructure from environmental impacts while highlighting how these tourism service infrastructure elements and destination environments combine to contribute to a traveller's perceived satisfaction.

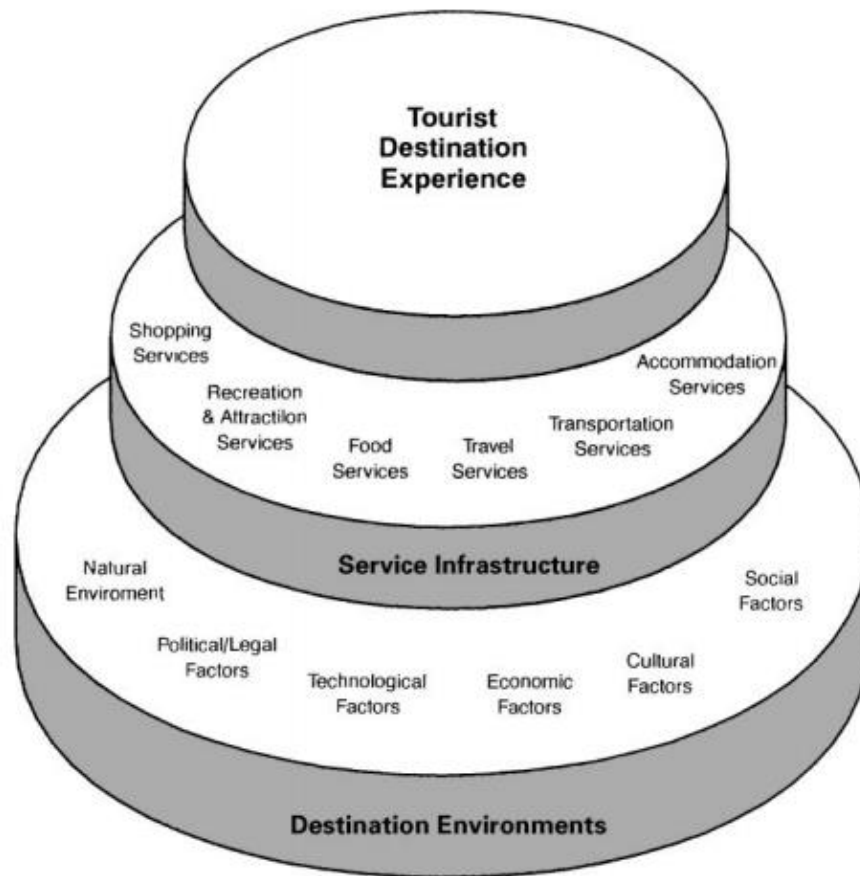


Figure 2.3 A conceptual model of the destination product

Note: Reprinted from "The destination product and its impact on traveller perceptions" by P. Murphy, M. P. Richard & B. Smith, 2000, *Tourism Management* 21(2000), 43-52. Copyright 1999 by Elsevier Science Ltd.

Accommodation services

The introduction of accommodation services is part of the history of human travelling activities, as travellers have always been in need of accommodation when away from home (Robinson, Lück & Smith, 2015). The accommodation sector is very diverse and can be categorised variously. The most common way of classifying accommodation services is by the type of establishment (Figure 2.4). It is important for investors and owners to calculate the demand for accommodation services, in order to plan for accommodation supply, decide on the types of business, and estimate the levels of financial investment into property (Robinson et al., 2015).

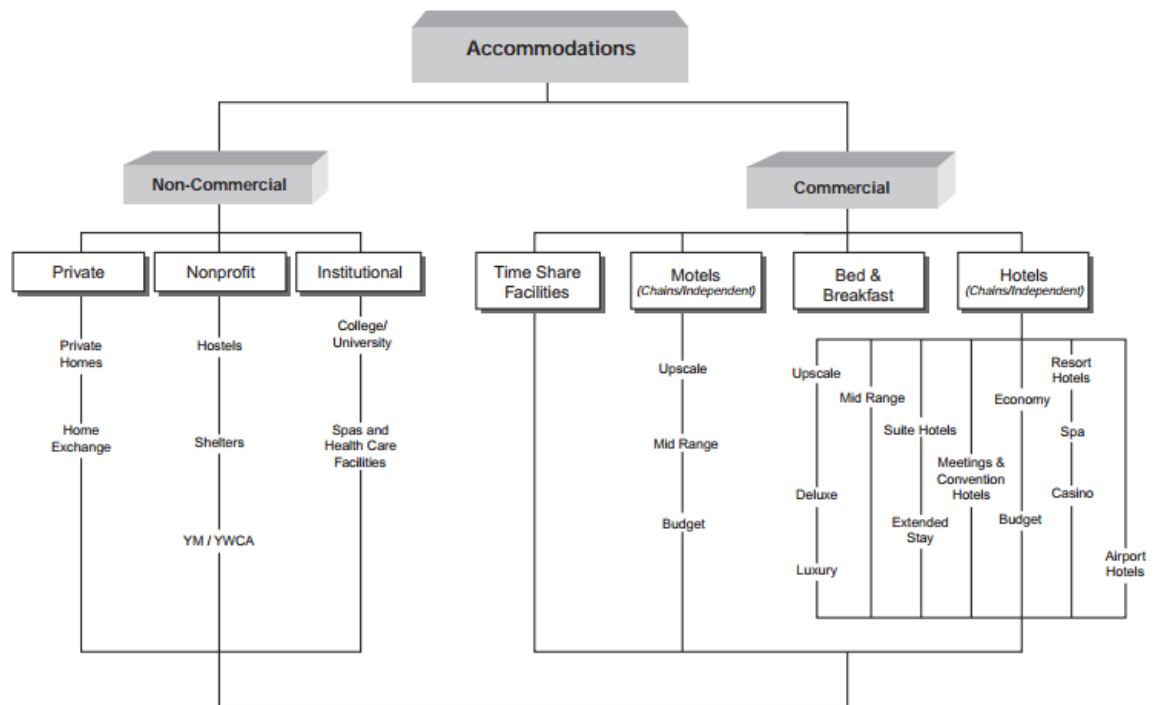


Figure 2.4 The accommodation services structure

Note: Reprinted from “*Tourism: principles, practices, philosophies (Twelfth edition)*” (p. 125) by C. R. Goeldner & J. R. Ritchie, 2012, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. Copyright 2012 by John Wiley & Sons.

Transportation services

Transportation is an essential element contributing to the successful and sustainable establishment and development of a tourist destination (Henderson, 2009). The tourism transport system, as defined by Prideaux (1999, p. 55), is “the operation of, and interaction between, transport modes, ways and terminals that support tourism resorts in terms of passenger and freight flows into and out of destinations, the provision of transport services within the destination, and the provision of connecting transport modes in the tourism generating region”. Rather than considering transportation as a group of separate components, Prideaux considered it as a system in which a change to a specific mode has a complicated impact on all other components of the system and tourism activities. A transportation system includes four fundamental elements: the way, the terminal, the unit of carriage and the motive power (Benson & Whitehead, 2013).

- The way is essentially the route along which the traffic moves. There are three types of way: Natural ways (for example, the air, rivers or footpaths), artificially

improved natural ways (the natural routes improved by human activities), and artificial ways (the deliberate works of humans).

- The terminal includes (i) the point of traffic access, (ii) the point of traffic interchange, and (iii) the point of traffic consolidation. The terminal may range from the form of a simple bus stop to a complex airport, depending on the purposes and forms of transport.
- The unit of carriage, or the mode of transport, is the specific class of vehicle in which passengers or goods are accommodated. The contribution of the unit of carriage to the tourist experience can be evaluated according to travel speed, carrying capacity, comfort, cost, or safety level.
- The motive power, or technology, is the propulsion unit driving the vehicle in use. Technological development influences the price structures, convenience, and safety level of travel services, impacting the competitiveness of a travel service or tourist destination.

Food services

The food sector is usually viewed as an integral part of the accommodation sector, but can also take other forms of independent businesses (Robinson et al., 2015). It is labour intensive, generating the largest number of new establishments and new jobs in any industry (Goeldner, 2003, Robinson et al., 2015). Different types of food services infrastructure are presented in Figure 2.5.

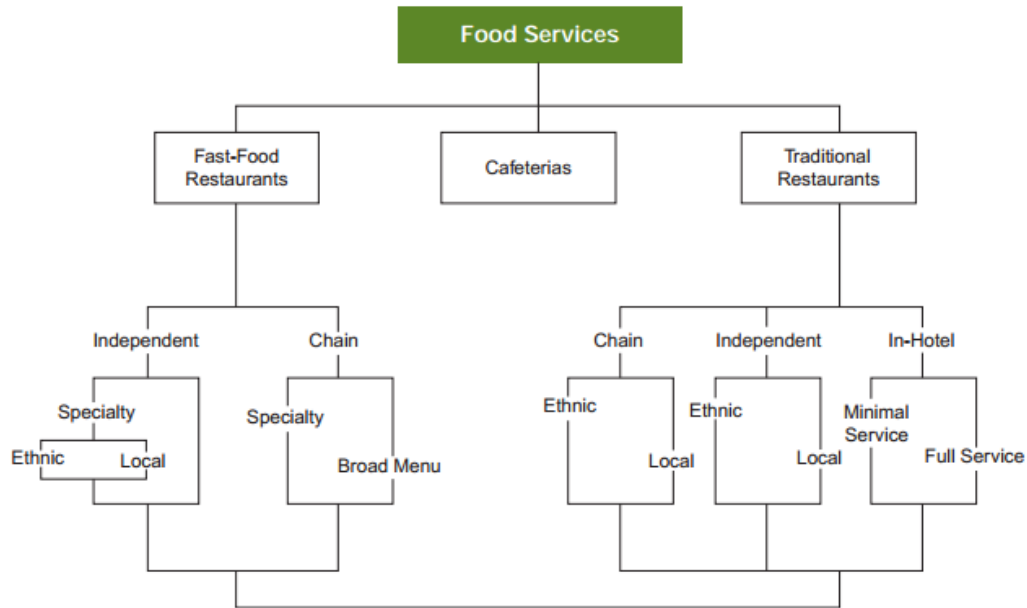


Figure 2.5 The food services structure

Note: Adapted from “*Tourism: principles, practices, philosophies (Twelfth edition)*” (p. 137) by C. R. Goeldner & J. R. Ritchie, 2012, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. Copyright 2012 by John Wiley & Sons.

Recreation and attraction services

Visitor attractions are “natural locations or features, objects, or man-made constructions that have a special appeal to tourists and local residents” (Robinson et al., 2015, p. 185). They are arguably one of the most vital components in the tourism system, functioning as a major pull factor for tourists (Robinson et al., 2015). Attractions can range from natural attractions, to human-made buildings and special events (Goeldner et al., 2003; Swarbrooke, 2002). Additionally, recreation services allow people to access indoor and outdoor facilities where they enjoy the natural beauty of an area while participating in sports and other recreational activities (Goeldner et al., 2003).

Recreation and attraction services infrastructure can be financed by the public, private or voluntary sectors (Swarbrooke, 2002). However, because attraction projects are usually high-risk investments with short life cycles and high start-up and maintenance costs, most attractions find it difficult to find financial support, especially from private financial institutions (Swarbrooke, 2002). The private sectors are often involved in the tourism industry in the form of small recreational businesses (Goeldner et al., 2003).

Shopping services

While shopping is rarely referred as the primary reason for travel, or a critical factor in destination choice (Kent, Shock & Snow, 1983; Jansen-Verbeke, 2012), it has been listed as the primary activity for both domestic and international tourists (Goeldner et al., 2003). Shopping facilities and infrastructure have been studied by researchers as important attributes for measuring tourist destination image (Jenkins, 1999). According to Jansen-Verbeke (1991), several features of a shopping environment and infrastructure should be taken into consideration in order to make a shopping attraction function as a tourist attraction. These features include:

- Functional characteristics of the environment: The range of shops and clustering of facilities, parking spaces, and pedestrian priority.
- Qualities of the environment: The overall settings and displays of goods, accessibility, the architectural design of the buildings and shops, and aesthetic image and atmosphere.
- Hospitableness of the environment, in terms of social, visual and physical aspects.

2.2.3 Infrastructure and trans-national cooperation

The oldest form of transnational infrastructure dates back to the 1st century BC with the establishment and expansion of the ancient Silk Road connecting Asia and Europe (UNESCO, n.d.). In modern history, ideas on cross-border infrastructure were explicitly discussed in the post Second World War era in Europe (Schot, 2010). Over recent decades, international and intraregional infrastructure development has had a central role in many countries' socio-economic growth, especially in developing Asian countries (Bhattacharyay, Kawai & Nag, 2012). A study by Zhai (2012) about infrastructure in Asia highlights the role of transnational infrastructure in terms of lowering trade costs and trade barriers, facilitating the integration of developing countries to the global economy, and poverty alleviation. In agreement with Zhai (2012), a report from World Economic Forum (2014) on regional infrastructure development in Africa pointed out that transnational infrastructure programmes can contribute to social and economic welfare by boosting cross-border trade, opening opportunities in the world market for landlocked countries, and improving accessibility to security and energy sources. In tourism, perhaps the most significant transnational tourism route is the Silk Road Programme, initiated by the World

Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). As outlined in the Silk Road Programme, one of the focus areas of the initiative is offering high-quality infrastructure and increasing cooperation among Silk Road countries to facilitate smooth travel across international borders (UNWTO, 2016). In 2014, the UNWTO Silk Road Programme worked with UBM Routes, an Affiliate Member of UNWTO, on the Routes Silk Road initiative, that brings together airports, airlines, tourism policy-makers, and other aviation stakeholders to develop air services, boost air connectivity and promote open-air policy within the Silk Road region (UNWTO, 2016).

Nevertheless, there are several barriers associated with the development of transnational infrastructure. The major challenge is meeting the projects' financial needs (Jones, 2006; Bhattacharyay et al., 2012). For example, it is estimated that Asia will need about USD 8.22 trillion for national infrastructure development, and an additional USD 320 billion for regional and international infrastructure projects (Bhattacharyay et al., 2012). However, cross-border infrastructure investment in Asian countries is facing numerous constraints coming from those countries' economies, including a lack of participation from the private sector and economic deficiencies (Bhattacharyay et al., 2012). Another challenge comes from policy and institutional capacity (Fujimura & Adhikari, 2012; Schipper & van der Vleuten, 2008). Upon the completion of infrastructure construction, the implementation of institutional and regulatory frameworks is urgently needed to ensure the realisation of regional and international externalities (Fujimura & Adhikari, 2012). Furthermore, conflicts between participating governments can also be a constraint that reduces the impact of projects. To address these difficulties, and in particular, to fill the gap in the ability to finance all infrastructure needs, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is an emerging trend welcomed by most developing countries, as this not only brings capital resources, but also transfers technology and management skills from developed countries to poorer ones (Fung, Garcia-Herrero & Ng, 2012). However, it is also argued that a country cannot solely rely on FDI, but national governments should also contribute a substantial part of the financing of regional infrastructure investments, supported by effective coordination of international organisations and financial funds (Fung et al., 2012).

2.3 The Belt & Road initiative

2.3.1 Overview of the Belt and Road Initiative

2.3.1.1 Background to the Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative was firstly proposed publicly in September 2013 in Chinese President's Xi Jinping's speech, in which he said it would “[P]romote people-to-people friendship and create a better future” in Kazakhstan (Summer, 2016, p. 1630). The Initiative was later officially introduced in the reform blueprint of the Communist Party of China as one of the three highlighted policy strategies before 2020 (Huang, 2016). It draws inspiration from the ancient Silk Road, which was the trading route covering the Eurasian continent, connecting China with the Middle East and East Africa via Southeast Asia in the 15th century (Ji, 2017). The goal of this billion dollar campaign was to strengthen five key areas of global connectivity: policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people exchange, from China across the Eurasian continents (The State Council, The People's Republic of China, 2015). Global infrastructure development lies at the core of this Initiative with the proposal of two strategic trade routes (Alon, Zhang & Latteman, 2018):

1. The land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (the “Belt”) that starts in Xi’an, China, linking China to Europe through Central Asia and Russia, to the Middle East through Central Asia, and to Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean.
2. The maritime-based 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (the “Road”) that starts in Fuzhou, China, connecting south-eastern Chinese regions with Europe through the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and on to the South Pacific.

China's One Belt, One Road

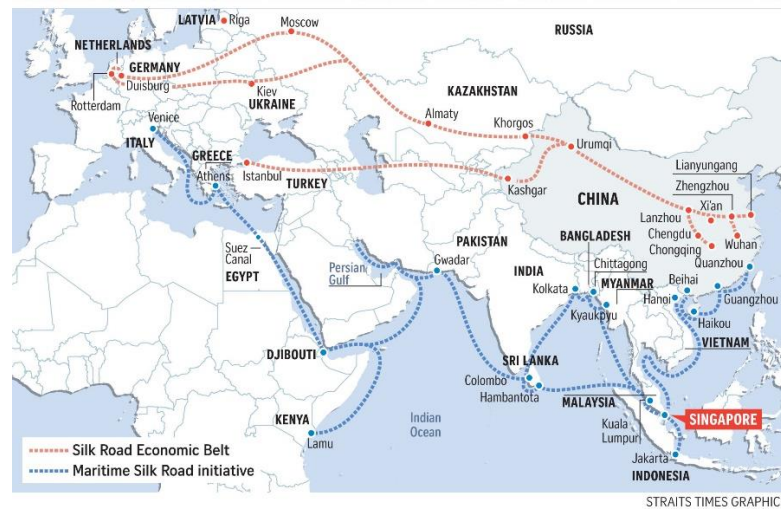


Figure 2.6 Map of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road

Note: Reprinted from “China makes tracks on modern Silk Road” by S. N. Goh, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/china-makes-tracks-on-modern-silk-road>. Copyright 2017 by The Strait Times.

It is estimated that this Chinese grand enterprise will over 70 countries and more than 60% of the global population, accounting for about one-third of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 75% of its known energy reserves (He, 2017; Alon et al., 2018). Under the BRI, China is investing in the construction of major facilities including ports, airports, expressways, roads, railways, oil and gas pipelines, power plants, and so forth (Tao & Zhong, 2018). This facilitates transnational trade between China and participating countries, and generates benefits to those countries in terms of domestic infrastructure development, economic growth and people's quality of lives (Tao & Zhong, 2018).

2.3.1.2 The motivations behind the Belt and Road Initiative

In a preliminary assessment of the BRI, Huang (2016) pointed out three factors that triggered the formation of the Initiative. Firstly, there was an urgent need for China to reconfigure its economic models, in order to sustain strong economic growth (Huang, 2016). China has been relying on labour-intensive, low value-added manufacturing and heavy industries (Huang, 2016). However, to improve the competitiveness of the economy and avoid the middle-income trap (situations in which a country stagnates and fails to grow to advanced-country level after emerging from poverty to middle-income level (Kharas &

Kohli, 2011)), China has been shifting its focus to more high-technology, high value-added sectors (Huang, 2016). The BRI will create new business opportunities for China's exports and outward direct investments (Tian, Yu & Zhang, 2016). Secondly, as China has become a newly emerging economic power, the country can no longer maintain a low profile in international affairs (Huang, 2016). Improved connectivity and a global system of commerce-enabling infrastructure as results of the BRI will create a new structural power back Chinese resources and capabilities (Lairson, 2018). Such a system would considerably improve the regional and global position of China, and to a certain extent, challenge the hegemony of United States of America (USA) (Lairson, 2018). Ma (2017) further supported this viewpoint by placing China in the context of bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Through a bilateral partnership, China could not only minimise its dependence on one country but also increase the influence of its foreign policies (Ma, 2017). Furthermore, China uses multilateral cooperation to gain more international support, especially from the European Union (EU) (Ma, 2017). Thirdly, China views the existing international economic system as no longer suitable for the new reality of the world economy (Huang, 2016). The economic growth of developing Asian countries has been the new turbulence of the world economy (Lairson, 2018) and is transforming the international system from the American-dominated, Western-led system to a collaborative East-West joint system (He, 2017).

The BRI also represents President Xi Jinping's pursuit of political performance, and his desire to leave a strong policy legacy (Nie, 2016). China's 21st century's foreign policy is usually referred to as the "China Dream", which, as defined by Xi Jinping, is a dream for China to become a great power in the international system, engaging in the global community in a way that will maximise the nation's interests, benefits and powers (Schortgen, 2018). Under Xi's leadership, China's foreign policy has transformed decisively from the long-standing "taoguang yanghui" ("keeping a low profile") to "fenfa youwei" (striving for achievement) (Nie, 2016). The BRI is defined by the Chinese Government as an integral part of the country's "Going out" strategy which is described as "overwhelmingly positive, benign and peaceful, and not devoid of symbolical references" (Cau, 2018, p. 50). For three years since the first official proposal of the BRI, to 2017, the BRI has progressively moved from concept to actual implementation, due to the strong support from top leadership (Cau, 2018). Almost all levels of China's Government are

involved in the realisation of the BRI (Nie, 2016). In 2015, the Chinese Government established a special leading group to oversee the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, and an action plan on how to implement the BRI was issued by the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce in March 2015 (Nie, 2016). Several financial institutions, such as The Silk Road Fund (established in 2014), and The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which began operating in early 2016, have been launched to provide financial support to interconnectivity projects under the BRI (Nie, 2016).

The BRI is underpinned by new neomercantilist thinking (Zhang, 2016; Yu, 2017). China's neomercantilism promotes nationalism, patriotism, technologicalism and a favourable balance of trade (Yu, 2017). The BRI represents this idea, because it supports global trade and its institution while pursuing a globalisation strategy led by the government to accumulate capital and wealth for the nation (Zhang, 2016). The Initiative highlights China's goal to be a leader of the global economy by coordinating manufacturing and developing global capacities (Zhang, 2016; Yu, 2017). The establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank also represents China's ambition to extend its influence on global finance, while strengthening economic and political ties with other countries (Anderlini, 2014; Yu, 2017).

China has consistently stated that it has no intention of building an international economic system that parallels the USA's Marshall Plan (Huang, 2016; Cau, 2018) that transferred USD 13 billion of aid from the USA to western Europe from 1948 to 1951 for reconstruction after World War II (Long & Eichengreen, 1991). In response to concern over the political motives behind the BRI, Xi Jinping asserted that the Initiative is not a geopolitical tool as it complements the status quo and respects the three "noes": no interference in the internal affairs of the partnered countries, no seeking of influence over other countries, and no striving for hegemony (Cau, 2018). The BRI is marketed as uniting countries and communities around the idea of globalisation and free trade based on for-profit and win-win cooperation (Cau, 2018). Furthermore, the reform of the international economic system resulting from the BRI will allow emerging markets to have a greater voice in related decision-making processes (Huang, 2016).

2.3.1.3 The impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative is promoted as a “win-win scenario” for all participating partners (Guluzian, 2018). For China, the Initiative serves as a boost to the domestic economy by offsetting industrial overcapacity, creating more economic opportunities (especially for less developed regions of the country), and opening up new overseas markets (He, 2017; Guluzian, 2018). In fact, China’s trade and investment in the BRI’s participating countries has been increasing (He, 2017). The total value of bilateral trade with 65 countries along the Belt and Road was USD 962 billion; and the share of exports grew steadily to 28% in 2016 (He, 2017). From a long-term perspective, the Initiative is described as a tool aimed at China’s “Two Centenary Goals”: doubling the country’s GDP by 2021 and increasing per capita GDP to at least that of countries with an average level of development, by 2049 (Cau, 2018). Additionally, through diversification of import sources and hydrocarbon transport routes, China also hopes to secure its energy supply through the BRI (He, 2017; Guluzian, 2018).

As infrastructure has a central role in the international cooperation mechanisms of the BRI, the Initiative contributes significantly to the development of global infrastructure, filling a gap in the existing international economic architecture (Huang, 2016). Even though there have been no official data on the total number and value of projects under the BRI, it was reported that in 2015 the China Development Bank had reserved USD 890 billion for more than 900 infrastructure development projects across more than 60 countries, and the Export-Import Bank of China confirmed support of more than 1,000 projects in nearly 50 participating countries (He, 2017). For participating countries, especially marginalised regions, the BRI opens an opportunity for infrastructure development, economic growth and becoming a part of the global supply (Guluzian, 2018). The BRI could potentially turn the economically underdeveloped and politically unstable Belt and Road region into a new engine for global economic growth (Huang, 2016). In particular, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia are the primary beneficiaries of these projects, due to their geographical proximity and close relationship with China (He, 2017).

Fundamental to the multilateral cooperation structures of the BRI is tourism, an industry that highlights the role of people-to-people bonds in linking cultural values to economic development (Winter, 2016). The BRI will provide accessibility to previously

remote regions and communities, and build a system of economic corridors and hubs of tourism development (Winter, 2016). In terms of tourism potential, the BRI is expected to bring together 80% of the world's heritage across more than 60 countries and facilitate travel activities for 4.4 billion people (Qiang, 2017). According to the China National Tourism Administration's Chairman Li Jinzao (2017), tourism will have a crucial role in the success of the BRI, notably regarding the promotion of international connectivity. The development of tourism would not only accelerate the development of other industries but also strengthen human-to-human and country-to-country bonds along the Belt and Road. Chairman Li also estimated that the scale of two-way tourism exchanges between China and participating countries had already exceeded 25 million trips by May 2017. During the Belt and Road Culture and Tourism Development Forum in Beijing (Sep 2017), Du Jiang, deputy director of the China National Tourism Administration, announced that the total tourism value of countries participating in the Initiative accounted for approximately 70% of the world's tourism industry in 2017 (Jie, 2017). Under the BRI framework, China has been expanding cooperation in tourism by initiating several cooperation mechanisms and tourism promotion alliances, as well as making efforts to streamline visa procedures and travel experiences in Belt and Road partnered countries (OLPBRI, 2019).

2.3.1.4 Challenges for the development of the Belt and Road Initiative

Despite the opportunities and benefits discussed, there are several risk factors and challenges that will determine the successful realisation of the BRI. In terms of economic aspects, a major source of risk lies within China's capacity. The Chinese Government and Chinese companies are not major operators in transnational projects, and most of the Chinese FDI is reported as not profitable (Huang, 2016). Another challenge for the BRI comes from the participating countries. Many of the Belt and Road countries are among the poorest in the world, with corrupt governments and economies that are heavily dependent on foreign investments and funds (Lu, 2017). Investment in these countries, therefore, might be a risky gamble for the Chinese Government.

Furthermore, there are risks of cultural and political clashes across countries, and between the BRI countries and China (Huang, 2016). The countries involved in the BRI vary by economic systems, political regimes and cultural values (Huang, 2016). While China is pursuing a foreign policy of not interfering in other countries' internal affairs, it is

not certain there is no political conflict arising from the BRI as people-to-people exchange is among the focus of the Initiative. There has been anti-Chinese sentiment and opposition to Chinese investments, as seen from the case of Myanmar's Myitsone dam (Lu, 2017), and Vietnam's three Special Economic Zones: Phu Quoc, Van Don and Bac Van Phong (South China Morning Post, 2018).

2.3.2 The potential of tourism development in Indochinese countries under the Belt and Road Initiative

The three Indochinese countries (namely Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam), with their strategic location as the gateway to both land-based and maritime routes, along with a strong economic and diplomatic link with China, have become a prominent area for the Initiative to focus on (Li & Yongke, 2017). China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi mentioned that the BRI will facilitate dialogue and deepen the cooperation of countries in the Lancang – Mekong basin area, as well as promoting the ASEAN integration process and the Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation (He, 2017). Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia will benefit significantly by participating in the BRI since the considerable investment from China for infrastructure development is a solution to their infrastructure deficit, thereby accelerating economic prosperity (Ju, 2017). In response to the proposal for the BRI, all three countries have given positive responses and appreciation of the Initiative, with Cambodia and Laos being the most supportive, while Vietnam is still cautious (Chan, 2018). In 2017, Cambodia's President Hun Sen stated that the Initiative would offer alternative sources of capital for infrastructure development in ASEAN countries (Heng & Po, 2017). The estimated total value of the road infrastructure projects alone agreed between Cambodia and China is approximately USD 2 billion (Heng & Po, 2017). Concerned that Laos might fall into debt following the construction of the Singapore – Kunming highspeed rail link, Laos' Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith said that they did not mind much about the burden of debt, and considered the provisions in the agreement favourable (Tani, 2018). Vietnam, while not on good political terms with China (mainly due to the South China dispute), has joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and is open to infrastructure investment opportunities from China (Chan, 2018).

In terms of tourism development, the BRI will provide accessibility to previously remote regions and communities, and build a system of economic corridors and hubs of

tourism development (Winter, 2016). Table 2.2 provides a summary of the major tourism infrastructure projects under the BRI in the three Indochinese countries.

Table 2.2 Major tourism infrastructure projects under the BRI in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos

| Country | Project | Type of infrastructure | Project cost in USD |
|-----------------|---|---|--|
| Cambodia | Phnom Penh-Preah Sihanouk Expressway | Transportation services | 9 billion (Pham, 2019) |
| | Sihanouk International Airport | Transportation services | 5.7 billion (Vu, 2017b) |
| | Golden Silver Gulf Resort | Accommodation services Food services Recreation and attraction services | 5 billion (Pham, 2019) |
| | Dara Sakor Seashore Resort | Accommodation services Transportation services Food services Recreation and attraction services Shopping services | 3.8 billion (Pham, 2019) |
| | Cambodia – China Friendship City | Accommodation services Transportation services Food services Recreation and attraction services Shopping services | 1.5 billion (Connor, 2018) |
| | National Road 58 | Transportation services | 120 million (Ismail, 2018) |
| | National Road 214 and construction of Mekong River Bridge | Transportation services | 113 million (Ismail, 2018) |
| | Preah Vihear – Koh Kong Railway | Transportation services | 11.2 billion (Focus on the Global South, 2013) |
| Laos | Singapore Kunming Rail Link (SKRL) | Transportation services | 5.95 billion (Laos – China railway) (Tani, 2018) |
| Vietnam | Hanoi Metro (Cat Linh – Ha Dong route) | Transportation services | 868.04 million (Xiem, 2018) |

It is clear from data in Table 2.2 that the BRI has changed infrastructure conditions in parts of Indochina, and holds promise for tourism development in the region. However, studies on the impacts of the BRI in tourism generally, and tourism development in Indochina in particular, are elusive. To date, there has been no comprehensive summary of tourism infrastructure development projects under the BRI in Indochina, prohibiting the study of the potentials, challenges, and prospects of the region's tourism industry in light of this grand initiative.

2.4 Summary

It is concluded from this section that infrastructure is acknowledged as an important element in a thriving tourist destination development programme. Investors, managers, and policymakers can consider infrastructure as a complex structure with environmental factors, in order to understand the influence of infrastructure on constructing a destination product and forming tourists' perceptions. Furthermore, transnational infrastructure development has been an emerging trend in recent years, not only providing opportunities for tourism development but also benefiting the economic growth and social welfare of a country. Discussion on the BRI, the most massive transnational infrastructure development programme of the 21st century, has pointed out the potential of boosting global economic growth and promoting human-to-human exchange among countries. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are receiving much investment in terms of tourism infrastructure under the Initiative. However, the impacts from this investment are questionable.

This study notes the paucity of literature concerning tourism development in relations to the proposal and progress of the BRI. Most relevant studies are from Chinese professionals, and researchers from BRI participating countries have not yet made a significant contribution to the understanding of the BRI, especially from the perspective of partnered countries. Without this fundamental theoretical basis, tourism academia, investors, and policymakers are unable to evaluate the impacts of the BRI on the development of tourism in a region and identify implications that leverage the Initiative to achieve a win-win cooperation climate.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an outline of the research design used in this research. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the philosophical positioning of the research. In the next section, an explanation of the selection of secondary research methodology is provided, followed by a discussion on the use of the case-study research approach, secondary data collection method, and content analysis method. The analysis of data in this research follows the process of policy analysis, which is also introduced. After this section is the presentation of the Social Construction Framework which serves as a theoretical framework for the policy outcome analysis. Finally, the ethical considerations of the study are outlined.

3.2 Research philosophy

The ontological perspective of this research is relativism. Relativism considers that reality is dynamic, and there are numerous realities varying from context to context and from person to person (Gray, 2014). In contrast with realism, which argues that the world's operation is constrained by natural laws and exists separately from human perceptions, relativism believes that it is the human consciousness that makes sense of existence.

This research embodies constructivism as the epistemological position, which is based on the standpoint that knowledge is constructed by the interactions of the world and interactions between individuals (Gray, 2014), thus is dynamic and changeable (Crotty, 1998). Constructivists aspire to explain, evaluate or foresee the trend of a phenomenon through a complicated process of data collection and analysis, idea testing, and cognitive thinking (Crotty, 1998).

The ontology and epistemology together form a philosophical foundation that underpins the research's paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm emerges from constructivism, which is concerned with the idea of the co-existence and relationships between human consciousness and the world. Knowledge is understood from the researcher's point of view, resulting in different meanings for one phenomenon (Scotland, 2012). In this research, findings are defined within a collective consideration of (i) contextual analysis, including political, economic and social aspects, (ii) different

viewpoints (as there is no universal comprehension of the BRI and its influence); and (iii) the researcher's own experience, expertise and perception of the research objects. Qualitative data gathered from interpretative methods, therefore, is of particular importance to the creation of new and authentic knowledge (Scotland, 2012).

3.2 Research methods

3.2.1 Research methodology: Secondary research

Secondary research refers to the use of data that were not originally collected for the research purposes, but instead sourced from the previous works of others (Curtis & Curtis, 2011; Veal, 2018). A secondary research approach allows for a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the literature to form a more refined perspective of the phenomenon being studied (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). A study using secondary data may involve integration and re-evaluation of data from different sources, in order to draw new findings and implications, evaluate the availability and quality of existing materials, and suggest what remains to be examined (Stewart & Kamins, 1993; Curtis & Curtis, 2011). In most cases, the data still need additional processing and formatting to be valid for the research purposes, whether they are in raw form or highly processed (Veal, 2018).

A major advantage of the secondary research approach relates to time and cost. Generally, it is quicker and less expensive to conduct a secondary research investigation, especially when the research has a tight budget and limited timeframe (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). In the case of tourism research, a considerable amount of tourism data have been collected and organised by government agencies (Veal, 2018). While the immediate policy implications of these data are limited, they are potential sources for researchers to extract and analyse data in order to yield more serendipitous findings (Veal, 2018). Furthermore, since the purpose of this research is to assess state policy of Cambodia following the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (which started in 2013), the secondary research approach offers a practical way to investigate this phenomenon over a long period of time.

3.2.2 The case-study approach

Given the complexity of the policy process, and the nature of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is an unfamiliar phenomenon, but uniquely rich in information and meaning

(Yin, 1994), two cases will be examined in this research. The uses of different cases in policy research can also offer in-depth understandings of a phenomenon and generate empirically-based domestic generalisations (Stafford, 2013). This method is particularly useful in studies concerning tourism planning, development and policy analysis (Xiao & Smith, 2006). Veal (2018) proposed three outcomes that the case-study approach aims to answer within the context of a policy-related evaluative research, and which are paraphrased for the purposes of this study: (i) to confirm or raise doubts as to the effectiveness of Cambodia's state-level policies to leverage the BRI, (ii) to suggest alternative policies, and compare the effectiveness of one policy against another, and (iii) to outline the context, causes and solutions for the policy problem.

This research will investigate the policy implementation in two Chinese investments in Cambodia: the Golden Silver Gulf Resort (in Preah-Sihanouk province) and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort (in Koh Kong province). Since the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, China has constantly expressed its desire to become a key facilitator in the grand strategy. Cambodia and China have signed 19 Memoranda of Understanding agreements following the BRI, and China constitutes of 29.31% of total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Cambodia from 2013 to 2018 (Marpono, 2018). This emphasises the increasing role of Cambodia in the successful implementation of the BRI. These two projects are purposively selected for this study as they are not only the key points of connectivity along the Belt and Road, but also among a few investments specifically in the tourism sector under the BRI.

3.2.3 Data collection method

Data was be exclusively drawn and analysed from secondary sources, focusing on quantitative statistics of the infrastructure projects, as well as tourism development data. There were five main sources for data collection: (i) official government institutions' documents, (ii) project management authorities' reports and statistics, (iii) research and reports from non-governmental organisations and private individuals, (iv) media archives and news reported on related aspects, and (v) online reviews from TripAdvisor.

3.2.4 Data analysis method: Content analysis

Qualitative content analysis was chosen as the appropriate research technique to analyse the documents relevant to the research's purposes. Krippendorff (1989) defined qualitative content analysis as a research tool that makes replicable and valid inferences from textual materials to their contexts. Kolbe and Burnett (1991) pointed out that content analysis is observational, and used to systematically evaluate the symbolic meanings of recorded communications. It can be applied to various forms of documents including public documents and media content (Finn, Elliot-White & Walton, 2000). The use of content analysis in examining data is particularly valuable for identifying the changes in policy and planning, and understanding the influences of such changes because (i) content analysis can be conducted for any time period, and (ii) the perceptions and reflections of key informants are likely to change over the course of their lifetime (Heslinga, Groote & Vanclay, 2016).

The advantage of this technique is that it allows researchers to establish their own social-scientific context for enquiry, thus enabling them to discover new trends, patterns and meanings that go beyond the untrained understanding of data (Krippendorff, 1989). Nevertheless, it is also an inherent weakness of the method that the interpretation of data is susceptible to researcher bias, limiting the study's contribution to knowledge (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991).

This study used a conventional approach to content analysis. The conventional approach is suitable for the purpose of describing a little known phenomenon, especially when theory or existing literature on the topic is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Rather than imposing predetermined categories, the researcher allowed new inferences and insights to flow from the data (See Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This process is described by Mayring (2000, p. 4) as "inductive category development". Hsieh and Shannon (2005) summarised conventional content analysis into six main stages, as depicted in Figure 3.1.

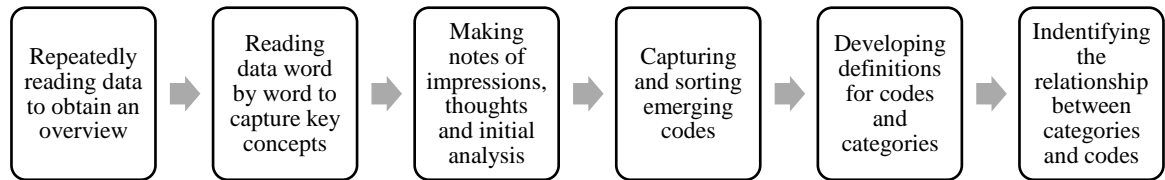


Figure 3.1 The process of conventional content analysis

Note: Adapted from “Three approaches to qualitative content analysis” by H.F. Hsieh & S. Shannon, 2005, *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. Copyright 2005 by SAGE Journals.

This research adopted an inductive approach to coding, which means that the themes did not emerge from preconceived categories, but from the data after a careful process of examining, analysing and comparing relevant documents. The findings of this inductive process are not in the form of statistical data or countable units, but uncover patterns and themes that are pertinent to the research topic (Althede, 1987), resulting in concept development or model building (Lindkvist, 1981).

3.3 Policy analysis framework and methods

3.3.1 Policy analysis process

As the purposes of this research include examining the design, implementation and impacts of Cambodia’s state-level policy on BRI investments, the research was in the form of a policy analysis. Broadly defined, policy analysis is the systematic examination of a policy’s implementation and consequences (Vining & Weimer, 2017; Patton, Sawicki & Clark, 2013; European Training Foundation, 2018). A policy analysis, consequently, is a set of methodical procedures that attack a policy problem (Patton et al., 2013). A model for rational policy analysis process, as suggested by Vining and Weimer (2017), is presented in Figure 3.2.

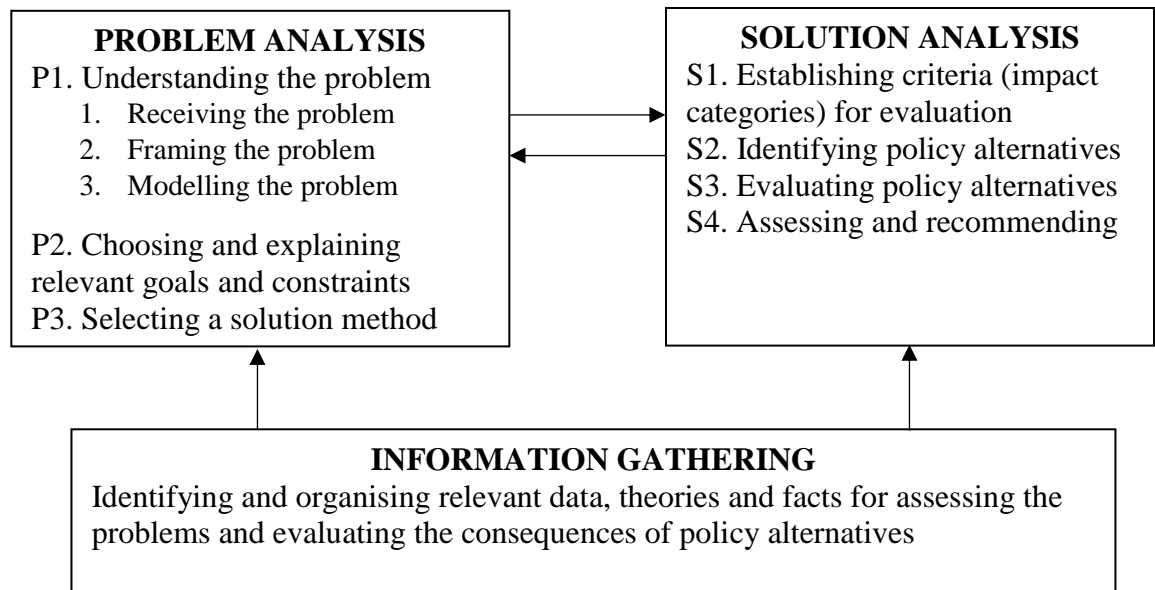


Figure 3.2 Rational policy analysis process

Note: Adapted from *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*, by D. L. Weiner and A. R. Vining, 2017, London: Routledge. Copyright 2017 by Pearson.

In this model that was first introduced in 1989, the problem analysis consists of two major steps. Understanding a policy problem involves analysing data and information to determine the magnitude and extent of the issue (Patton et al., 2013). This prepares a strong background for problem analysis, conveying the importance and urgency of the policy problem (Vining & Weimer, 2017). Vining and Weimer (2017) proposed an extra step in framing a problem in terms of market failures (situations that occur due to inefficient distribution of goods and services in the free market) and government failures (such as the inefficiency of government in promoting social goods). The next step in policy analysis requires the researcher to decide on appropriate goals. In general, goals can be broken down into two broad categories: substantive goals, such as equity and efficiency, and instrumental goals, which are the conditions required to achieve substantive goals (Vining & Weimer, 2017). It is also necessary to consider any resources that are essential to maintaining and implementing the current policy, as well as alternative options (Vining & Weimer, 2017).

Solution analysis begins with establishing criteria in order to evaluate the current policy, and to compare, measure and assess different policy alternatives (Patton et al., 2013, p. 47). Selected criteria must be central to the nature of the problem and the key participants in the policy design process, and relevant to the available data and resources (Patton et al., 2013). The second step of the solution analysis is the specification of policy alternatives

that can potentially help achieve the policy goals (Patton et al., Vining & Weimer, 2017). According to Vining and Weimer (2017, p.356), “analysis cannot be competent unless it comprehensively reviews all the alternatives in terms of all the goals.” The evaluation of policy alternatives may reveal the most suitable policy choice for the issues, as it explains whether the current policy and other options can satisfy the evaluation criteria, need further examination, or can be discarded (Patton et al., 2013, Vining & Weimer, 2017).

The information in Figure 3.2 highlights the importance of data gathering and revision throughout the analysis process, which is often ignored in other rational analysis models (Vining & Weimer, 2017). However, this model has received criticism for unrealistic requirements (Patton et al., 2013). In order to provide an alternative analysis framework, Patton et al. (2013) proposed their simplified six-step integrated policy analysis model, as presented in Figure 3.3.

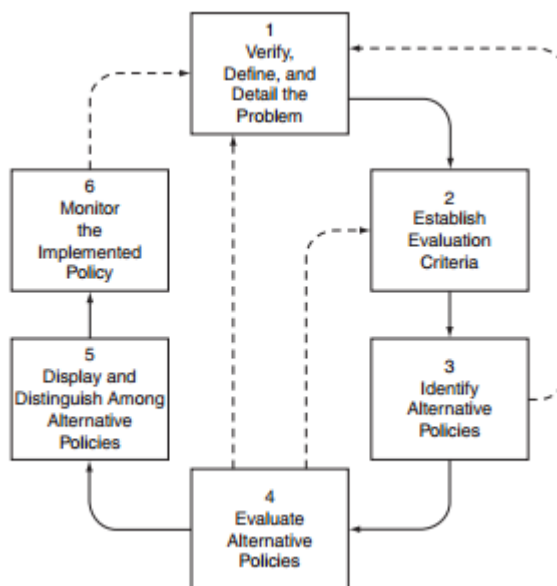


Figure 3.3 Six-step policy analysis method

Note: Reprinted from *Basic methods of policy analysis and planning* by C. V. Patton, D. S. Sawicki and J. J. Clark, 2013, London: Routledge. Copyright 2013 by Taylor & Francis.

This research is an evaluative policy analysis conducted after the implementation of a policy, describing and evaluating its consequences (See Patton et al, 2013). In the scope of this research, as the policies have already been implemented, it is not necessary to follow all of the steps in the original processes. Therefore, the analysis process has been modified to suit the nature and objectives of this research, as shown in Figure 3.4.

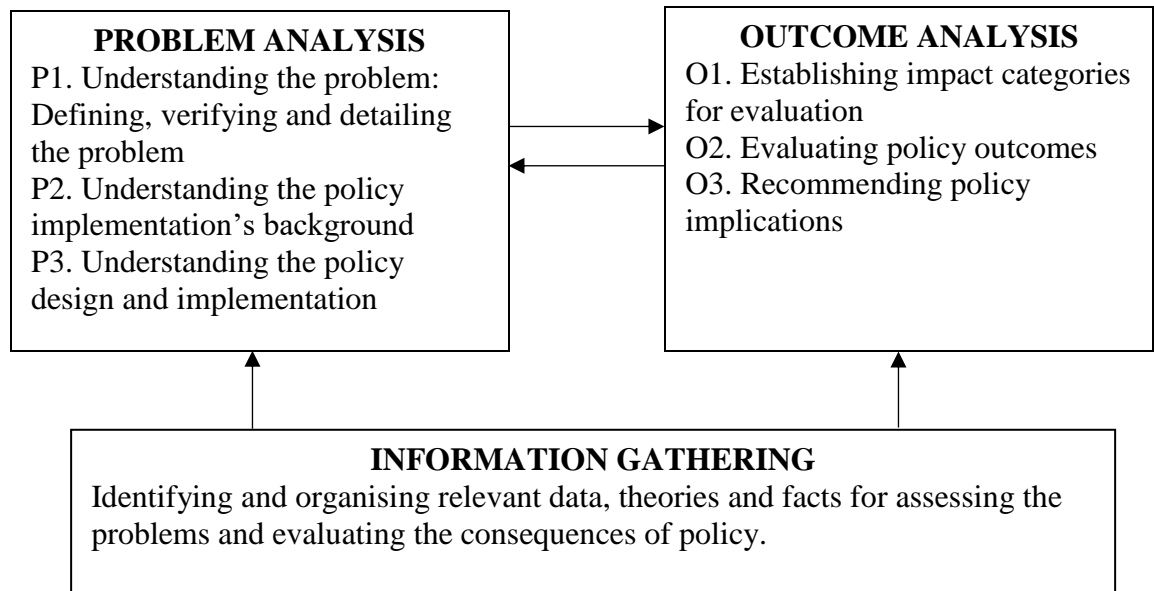


Figure 3.4 Integrated policy analysis process

This research combines the models of Vining and Weimer (2017) and Patton et al. (2013) to form an appropriate integrated approach to the research questions. The analysis of this research starts with a definition of the policy problem, followed by an examination of the policy background and the rationales behind the policy design. The existing policy and its implementation are then presented for further evaluation. As this is an evaluative analysis, the impacts of the policy are the focus of the outcome analysis. Rather than highlighting policy alternatives to the existing ones, this research aims at finding and suggesting policy implications that can improve the efficiency of policy design and implementation in the future, or in similar situations. The data analysis and discussion of findings in this research are organised according to this modified process.

3.3.2 The Social Construction Framework and tourism policy implementation

To begin the stage of outcome analysis, criteria must be established for the evaluation of policy impacts. This research adopted the Social Construction Framework as the main framework for evaluating the consequences of Cambodia's state-level policy for the Chinese investments under the BRI. Since the 1990s, attention has been placed on understanding institutional theories, and the roles, interests, responsibilities and power arrangements of various stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and communities, in tourism policy (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). From the 2000s onwards, researchers have begun to explore the consequences of tourism development on

marginalised interests, identifying much needed implications for sustainable planning and policy (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). Various conceptual frameworks, tools, and analysis methods have been developed and adapted in order to measure and evaluate the effects of tourism policy (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). However, in most cases, those frameworks were not specifically designed for tourism study. In addition, only a few studies have captured the participation of socially constructed groups to the tourism policy process, and the long-term impacts of tourism policy to group identities, their political orientation, and economic benefits. Notable works relevant to this research include Dela Santa's (2013) use of the Advocacy Coalition Framework in examining the complexity of the tourism policy process and its outcome in the case of the Philippines. In the book "Tourism Public Policy, and the Strategic Management of Failure," Kerr (2003) adopted a Multiple Streams approach to analyse the different nuances and sensitivities associated with the sources of tourism policy outcomes in Scotland. In this, he observed that tourism policy frameworks were required to cope with complex networks of governance and encapsulate the "nature of tourism change and variation" (Kerr, 2003, p. 41).

The Social Construction Framework, despite being an understudied model in the area of tourism study, is able to demonstrate the involvement of different stakeholders to the policy process, and the impacts of policy on social groups. As shown in Figure 3.5, the framework investigates the interaction between political power resources and social constructions in the policy process to create differences between the target population and the response of policymakers, to these different social constructions (Ingram, Schneider & deLeon, 2007).

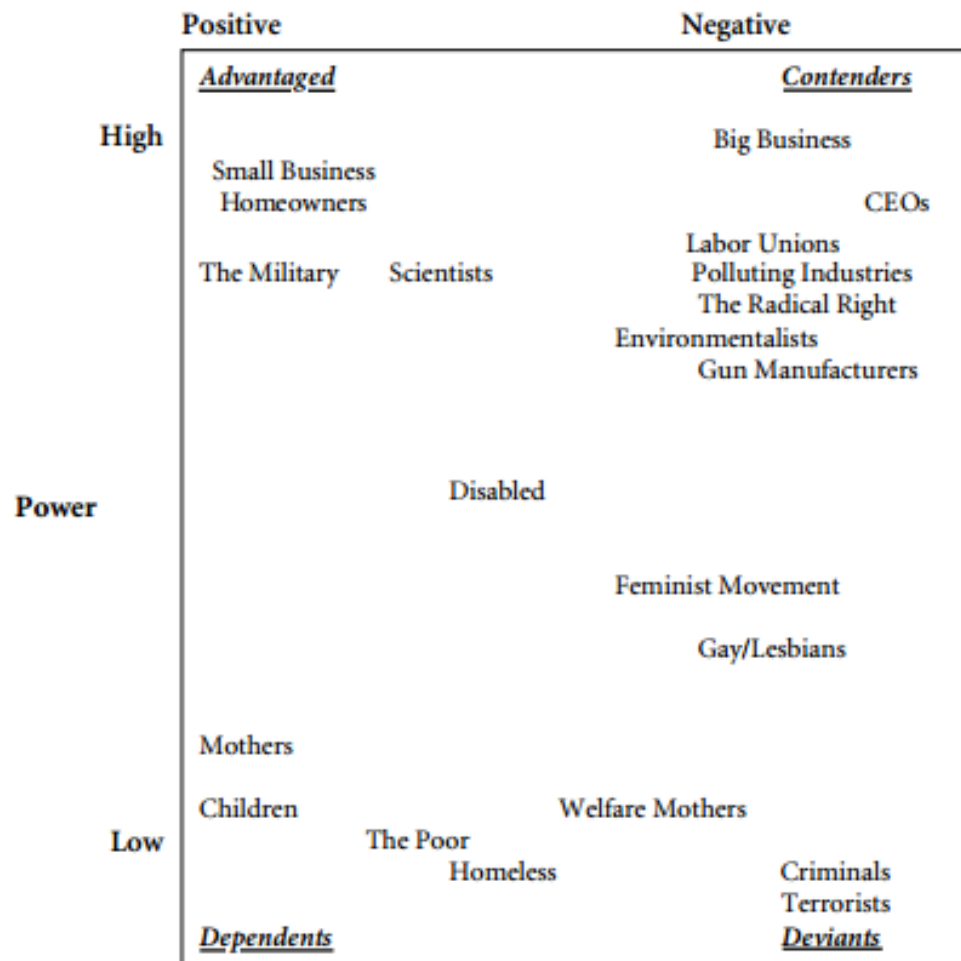


Figure 3.5 The Social Construction Framework

Note: Reprinted from Social Construction and Policy Design (p. 102) by H. Ingram, A. L. Schneider & P. deLeon in *Theories of the Policy Process* by P. A. Sabatier (Eds), 2007, London: Routledge. Copyright 2007 by Westview Press.

The framework focuses on two dimensions of the target population: (i) the political power, which refers to the extent of the target group's political resources, indicating the group's political strength and social movements (Ingram et al., 2007), and (ii) the social construction, which refers to "valence or the positive or negative social construction of the group as more-or-less worthy and deserving and as contributing more-or-less to the general welfare" (Vining & Weimer, 2017, p. 272). Target populations are constructed using meanings derived from three sources: (i) historical presumptions implied in the problem definitions, (ii) technical definitions and routine categories as seen by professionals and experts of the policy domain, and (iii) cultural stereotypes and affective responses associated with the contextual characteristics of the policy problem (Donovan, 1993). Any

target group could be placed at any point of the matrix; however, it is more useful to classify the group into one of the four distinct cells emerging from the matrix (Ingram et al., 2007, Vining & Weimer, 2017):

- *Advantaged* groups enjoy positive social construction and strong political power. They tend to receive benefits, rather than burdens, from public policies. They also have greater participation in policy designs and are often treated with favours from the policymakers.
- *Contenders* have relatively substantial political power, but a negative social construction, as they are regarded as undeserving and morally suspect. Policymakers tend to allocate benefits to the *contenders*, and make it difficult for the public to notice such benefits. The *contenders* may incur burdens from the legislation, however, they are less severe and difficult to enforce in reality.
- *Dependents* include groups lacking in political power but socially constructed as deserving sympathy. Therefore, policies targeted at them do create benefits. However the benefits are inadequate and less than those of the *advantaged* groups and *contenders*, as the *dependents* have a lesser role in relation to national wealth, and do not have enough political power to request for more benefits.
- *Deviants* tend to be subject to a disproportionate amount of burdens and few benefits, as they are regarded as an underclass and often blamed for social ills. Their weak social constructions and political power are barriers to their ability to have a voice in policy designs, as well as in the broader economic and social system.

Evidence from various studies on the Social Construction Framework have proved that policy designs and implementation differ significantly according to the political power and social construction of the target population (Ingram et al., 2007). Furthermore, policymakers can reinforce or undercut social construction in the form of public approval or approbation (Ingram et al., 2007). Thus, it is important to include social construction in the evaluation of the effectiveness of public policy.

As suitable as the Social Construction Framework is for explaining the dynamic between policy and democracy, the framework is problematic in terms of its ability to generate testable propositions and whether the policy is a unitary phenomenon (Lieberman, 1995). As summarised by Ingram et al., (2007), the framework has been applied to more

than 40 policy studies, and further work is required to solidify the framework as a policy research approach. The current research expects to open up new possibilities for applying the framework to explain tourism issues, making a valid contribution to the growing body of tourism policy research.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval is not required for this research, as it uses secondary data from publicly available sources and there is no need to interview or involve human in the data collection process.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the philosophical position and research design followed in this thesis. This research is underpinned by a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology, and supported by an interpretivist paradigm. A qualitative, case-study approach is utilised as this is the most appropriate way to gain insights into and understandings of the impacts of state-level policy design and implementation under the BRI's cooperation framework. Considering that prior knowledge concerning the BRI within the field of tourism is elusive, this research adopts a conventional content analysis as the research tool due to its capability of enabling researchers to discover trends, patterns and meanings from the data, rather than from preconceived categories. In this case, data collected from secondary sources have been selected as the most suitable form of data for analysis.

The flow of analysis in this research follows a simplified policy analysis process, including two main steps of problem analysis and outcome analysis. The use of the Social Construction Framework is particularly useful in the outcome analysis because it provides a theoretical background for drawing inferences on how the basis and delivery structures of policy design vary depending on the political strength and social construction of target groups (Ingram et al., 2007). Chapter four explains the background of the policy problem, and presents the Cambodian government's policy design following its decision to participate in the BRI.

Chapter 4 Problem analysis of Cambodia's policies to Belt and Road tourism projects

4.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the first stage of the policy analysis process, which is problem analysis. This involves the assessment of the context, determination of the problem's empirical basis, and identification of the problem that can be changed by public policy (Weimer & Vining, 2017). The first section provides the political and economic background for the analysis, and defines the policy problem of Cambodia's Government. It is then followed by an introduction of the case studies, which are two major tourism investments under the framework of the BRI in Preah-Sihanouk and Koh Kong provinces, Cambodia. Finally, the chapter presents the policy designs of the Cambodian Government to solve its policy problem and facilitate the development of the projects.

4.2 Background to the study problem

Several studies and reports suggest that there is a significant need for infrastructure development in Cambodia, in order to improve connectivity among regions, reduce travel time, and save cost. Cambodia will need USD 9 billion for the construction of 850km of roads, including expressways by 2020, and USD 26 billion by 2040 (East Sea Studies, 2017). According to Prime Minister Hun Sen, at least USD 500 – 700 million per year is required to fill the infrastructure gap (Zhang, 2017). However, tourism infrastructure remains a challenge for Cambodia as the country is ranked poorly in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Travel and Tourism Competitiveness 2017: 96th for Air transport infrastructure, 108th for Ground and port infrastructure and 102nd for Tourist service infrastructure (WEF, 2018). Compared to its regional neighbours, Cambodia's tourism infrastructure is much underdeveloped, disadvantaging the country in terms of destination competitiveness (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Comparison of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness among ASEAN countries (2017)

| Country | International tourist arrivals | Overall competitiveness ranking | Infrastructure index ranking | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | | | Air transport | Ground and port | Tourist services |
| Thailand | 29,923,185 | 34 | 20 | 72 | 16 |
| Malaysia | 25,721,251 | 26 | 21 | 34 | 46 |
| Singapore | 12,051,929 | 13 | 6 | 2 | 24 |
| Indonesia | 10,406,759 | 42 | 36 | 69 | 96 |
| Vietnam | 7,943,600 | 67 | 61 | 71 | 113 |
| Philippines | 5,360,682 | 79 | 65 | 107 | 87 |
| Cambodia | 4,775,231 | 101 | 96 | 108 | 102 |
| Laos | 3,543,327 | 94 | 97 | 111 | 86 |

Source: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017 (WEF, 2018)

The Cambodian tourism sector has expanded considerably, directly contributing 14.1% to the nation's GDP in 2017, and expected to rise by 5.9 per cent per year until 2028 (WTTC, 2018). According to Tourism Minister Thong Khon, the kingdom is projected to host up to 15 million tourists, generating USD 10 billion by 2030 (Xuxin, 2019). The Royal Government is therefore proactively seeking investments in the tourism industry to accommodate the increasing number of international arrivals and local tourists from the middle-classes.

To improve competitiveness with neighbouring South East Asian countries, and to develop political status, especially in the matter of territorial disputes, Cambodia's political and economic aspirations have been reinforced by the announcement that Cambodia will take advantage of China's BRI. On several occasions since the inception of the Initiative in 2013, Prime Minister Hun Sen has openly expressed enthusiastic support to the BRI and a willingness to be at the core of the Initiative in South East Asia. In a recent statement at the annual Belt and Road forum in Beijing, as reported by The Khmer Times (2019), he emphasised the Government's appreciation of the BRI in aiding Cambodia's socio-economic development, job creation, and promoting exchanges between people through trade, tourism and technology. In 2017, about USD 1.6 billion from China was invested in

Cambodia, which was nearly 30% of the total foreign investments, and construction contracts signed by the end of that year were worth USD 17.54 billion (CDC, 2018). Cambodia is a focal point for the sea-based trade route of the BRI, and has several deep-water ports, airports, roads and resorts funded by the China. China has invested USD 4.2 billion in the southern coastal province of Sihanoukville, and USD 1.1 billion alone in 2017 (nearly 85% of the foreign investment in the area) (Ellis-Petersen, 2018). By participating in the BRI, Hun Sen and his Government can take advantage of the rapid development and ambitious vision for transnational cooperation with China, enjoying generous support from China while maintaining a peaceful political relationship with its neighbours. However, there is real fear from foreign observers and academia that Cambodia's policies in relation to the BRI and Chinese investments is a double-edged sword, threatening the country's sustainable economic development and political stability. This research has taken Cambodia's problem of infrastructure development and its decision to fully support the BRI as its points of departure, and relevant policy designs of the Cambodian Government must be viewed within this context in order that their purposes, functions and consequences can be examined rationally.

4.2 Overview of case studies

Among several agreements Cambodia has signed with China under the BRI, two key projects are selected to be examined for the purposes of this research: the Golden Silver Gulf Resort (in Preah-Sihanouk province) and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort (in Koh Kong province). This section presents background information on these projects, covering their development history, facts and figures, and construction progress.

4.2.1 Golden Silver Gulf resort

The Golden Silver Gulf resort is located inside Preah Sihanouk's Ream National Park, about 18km from the centre of Sihanoukville and 7.3km from Sihanoukville International Airport. The project is "a part of a response to Belt and Road strategy", as stated by Tourism Minister Thong Khun in an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony in 2016 (Ngamsangchaikit, 2016; Kotoski & Chandara, 2016). The 3,300 hectare mega project will cover 28 km of coastline on the Ream Peninsula and the western half of Koh Thmei island and include luxury villas, five-star hotels, an exhibition centre, duty-free shopping centre, healthcare facilities and an international port (Ngamsangchaikit,

2016). The construction of the project was accelerated in 2014 by Yeejia Development Co. Ltd, a subsidiary of the Chinese-own firm Unite International Investment Group (Pye & Titthara, 2014). In 2016, Yeejia signed memoranda of understanding with 13 new partners, mostly Chinese companies, to develop and supply services for the project (Kotoski & Chandara, 2016; Ngamsangchaikit, 2016; Mai, 2017). Bill Pho, Yeejia's executive assistant, confirmed with media in a speech in 2014 that the development would cost around USD 5 billion and take 20 years to complete (Pye & Titthara, 2014)

More benefits accrued to Sihanoukville and the Golden Silver Gulf Resort following the agreement between Public Works and Transport Sun Chanthol, and China Communication Construction Company Ltd's (CCCC) president Liu Qitao, to build the first highway project in January, 2018 (Sotheary, 2018b; Pisei, 2019). Construction of the first highway project in Cambodia officially started in March 2019, and will take four years to complete, according to Cambodia's Ministry of Public Works and Transport (Pisei, 2019). The budget for this project is estimated at USD 1.9 billion (Biendong.net, 2017). The highway runs parallel to National Road 4, spanning 190 km (Meng, 2018; Pisei, 2019). It connects the Golden Silver Gulf Resort project with the two largest international airports in Cambodia, located in Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh (East Sea Studies, 2017). The highway will start at Tomnup Kob Srov Road in Phnom Penh, and run to Kampong Speu province's Chbar Mon town, passing through National Road 4 to the west side to Sihanoukville's Prey Nop district, then cross back to the east side of National Road 4 (Pisei, 2019). The 24.5 metre-wide asphalt highway will include two lanes in each direction, 89 bridges, four rest stops, three service stations, and have a speed limit of 80 to 120 kilometres per hour (Sotheary, 2018b).

4.2.2 Dara Sakor Seashore Resort

This project began in 2008, long before the official announcement of the BRI in 2013, and after Cambodia leased nearly 40,000 hectares to Tianjin-based firm Union Development Group (UDG) for 99 years. It was accelerated again in March, 2016 (Vu, 2017a), and referred to in the Belt and Road 2017 yearbook published by an affiliate of China's Ministry of Commerce as one of the most significant projects under the BRI's framework so far (Goh & Thul, 2018). The Dara Sakor Seashore Resort agreement was signed between the Chinese partner and representatives of the Cambodian Government, which included the Minister of Environment, Minister of Economy and Finance, and

Minister of Commerce (Touch & Neef, 2015). The resort was planned to cover over 98 km, which is 20% of Cambodia's coastline (Nachemson, 2018). According to a report by Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, the UDG planned to invest USD 3.8 billion in the project, which consisted of several urban zones, a city-sized casino resort, a golf course, airport, and a deep-water port (Peel, Kynge & Haddou, 2016; East Sea Studies, 2017). The airport runway, which is currently under construction, will be approximately 3,400 metres long, which is longer than that of Phnom Penh International Airport (Nachemson, 2019). The new international deep-water port is estimated to be more than 14 metres deep, and large enough for cruise ships and vessels weighing 10,000 tonnes. The development of the project is expected to take place in 25 years, divided in five phases (East Sea Studies, 2017).



Figure 4.1 Perspective of Dara Sakor Seashore Resort

Note: Reprinted from <http://www.union-groupcompany.com/index.php/Ch/En/Xmgl/xmgl#page2>. Copyright Union Development Group.

4.3 Cambodia's policy in favour of Belt and Road tourism projects

4.3.1 Government of Cambodia's support for Belt and Road tourism projects

The Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort projects have gained favourable public support from local government. The Golden Silver Gulf Resort was personally endorsed by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen; in a letter of support in 2009, he expressed his gratitude to Yeejia's commitment and the decision to invest in

Cambodia's tourism industry (Pye & Titthara, 2014). The same year, Hun Sen also approved the establishment of a special committee of representatives from seven ministries and government bodies to resolve any contradictions or issues arising during the development of the project (Pye & Titthara, 2014; Datviet, 2016). Chhit Sengnguon, vice governor of Sihanouk province, welcomed the project, as it encouraged the development of the tourism sector, attracting more foreign visitors to the province (Khmer Times, 2016).

The Dara Sakor Seashore Resort also received support from the Cambodian Government. Commerce Minister Pan Sosarak, in a meeting with Tianjing Union Development Group's chairman in September, 2018, openly expressed his support for the project: "I support this project and believe that it will strengthen the economic integration of Cambodia in the global trade system as well as boost our image abroad and attract international tourists and investors" (Chan, 2018). According to the UDG's website, the Cambodian government also established a ministry-level committee, led by the secretary general of The Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC), with committee members from the CDC, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Customs, Ministry for Land Management, Urbanism and Construction, and the Tax Department, in order to ensure the smooth implementation of the project.

4.3.2 Business ownership and investment incentives

According to Law on the Investment of the Kingdom of Cambodia (1994), the Cambodian government permits total foreign ownership of a local business or commercial enterprise in most sectors. During the business forum with the Tianxia Chaoshang Economic Conference's investment delegation in Phnom Penh in August, 2018, Sok Chenda Sophea (secretary general of the CDC) encouraged further Chinese investment by explaining that Cambodia was the most liberal and open country in the region; foreign investors could own 100% of their investments with no restriction on capital or profit control in any sector (Liangyu, 2018). This caused an influx of Chinese investment to Cambodia, and CDC statistics show that Chinese investors are now the most active. In 2016, Chinese investors surpassed those in Cambodia to become the largest source of direct investment, contributing nearly 30% of the total capital investment (valued at USD 1.2 billion) (CDC, 2017).

4.3.3 Investment incentives

As stated in Chapter V in the Law on the Investment of the Kingdom of Cambodia (1994), the tourism industry is among nine important fields that are seeking investments. Investment incentives, according to Article 14 of the Law of Investment (1994), include:

- A corporate tax of nine per cent;
- A corporate tax exemption of up to eight years, counted from the year the corporation derived its first benefit, with a five year loss carried forward;
- Tax exemption on the distribution of dividends, profits, or proceeds of investments;
- Permission to bring foreign nationals who are management personnel and skilled workers, and their families.

Furthermore, investments in the tourism industry are entitled to complete import duty exemption on all raw materials, construction equipment, and immediate goods.

4.3.4 Land ownership and concession

As stated in Cambodia's Law on Investment, chapter VI – Land Ownership and Use, Article 16 (1994), (i) only Cambodian citizens and legal entities in which more than 51% of the equity capital is owned by persons or other legal entities holding Cambodian citizenship, shall be vested the ownership and use of Cambodian land, and (ii) investors are permitted a long-term land lease of up to 70 years, renewable upon request. According to company representatives and public documents for the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and Dara Sakor Seashore Resort projects, both Yeejia Development and the UDG have been granted a generous 99-year lease from Phnom Penh (Kynge & Haddou, 2016; Goh & Thul, 2018).

Yeejia Development was granted the land concession for the project in 2009, which was endorsed by the Prime Minister in a letter to the Chairman of Unite International (the parent company of Yeejia) (Phong, 2016). In May 2010, a royal decree was issued to revoke Yeejia's land ownership, with ownership passing to the Ministry of Environment. In 2016, a spokesman from the Ministry again confirmed Yeejia's legal ownership of the 3,300 hectares of land in the Ream National Park, providing assurance to Yeejia of all the licences needed for its tourism development project (Kotoski & Chandara, 2016).

According to the Harbour Ambitions report (2017) by the Center for Advanced Defense Studies, the UDG was registered as a Cambodian company owned by a Cambodian citizen, and therefore eligible for full ownership of the 40,000 hectares of land. However, it was subsequently discovered that the UDG was originally foreign-owned, and its ownership status changed only a year before the agreement was signed. In 2011, the UDG once again became a Chinese owned entity, part of Tianjin Union Development and chaired by a Chinese national (C4ADS, 2017).

In terms of land concession limits, Cambodia's 2001 Land Law, Article 59, stipulates that "land concessions areas shall not be more than 10,000 hectares". The land concession for the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort, however, is four times larger than the limit.

Both projects are approved on national park land. The Golden Silver Gulf Resort is inside Ream National Park, and Dara Sakor Seashore Resort is in the centre of Botum Sakor National Park near the Gulf of Thailand (See Figure 4.2). According to Article 56 of Cambodia's Protected Area Law (2008), any development in such areas requires government approval, which is subject to the results of a careful environmental and social impact assessment, but there is no proper explanation or assessment of how such major projects can obtain approval on protected land.

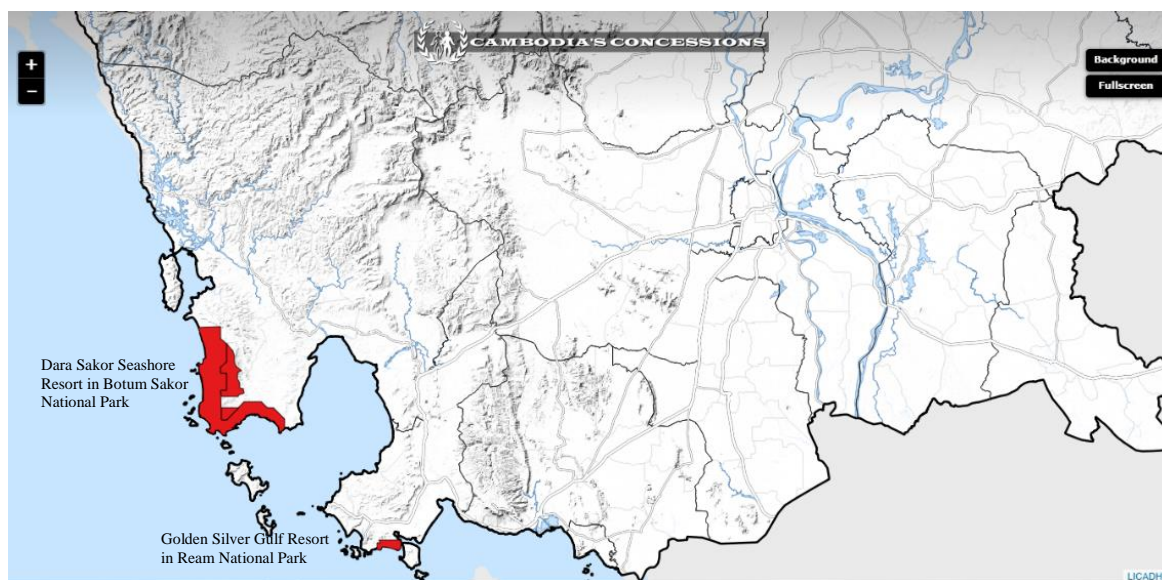


Figure 4.2 Land concessions in Botum Sakor National Park and Dara Sakor Seashore National Park

Note: From LICADHO: Cambodia's concessions. Retrieved from http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/land_concessions/

4.5 Summary

Cambodia is currently facing a critical problem of inadequate infrastructure capacity, and the tourism sector is no exception. This has affected the country's competitiveness as a destination, and limited the potential for tourism development. China's grand initiative to invest in the construction of trade routes connecting Asia and Europe has been embraced by the Cambodian government, with hopes that it would offer timely opportunities for Cambodia to achieve its development goals. Since the early stages, the BRI has promoted bilateral cooperation between Cambodia and China in terms of physical infrastructure and connectivity development. Two ideal examples of BRI-linked investments are the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort, which have significant potential for transforming the tourism infrastructure in Cambodia.

Amidst the implementation of the BRI, the Cambodian government has formulated a range of laws and regulations to facilitate the development of related projects and facilitate business activities in Cambodia for Chinese development partners. Both the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and Dara Sakor Seashore Resort projects were welcomed by the Cambodian authorities and gained direct support from government bodies. It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the Cambodian Government not only creates and implements policies that favour the interests of Chinese investors, but is also willing to adhere to the rules loosely to lower financial barriers and increase investors' control over projects. The next chapter discusses the consequences of such policies, in terms of how they allocate benefits and burdens to stakeholders involved in the process of policy implementation.

Chapter 5 Outcome analysis of Cambodia's policies on Belt and Road tourism projects

5.1 Introduction

The outcome analysis of Cambodia's policies in relation to Belt and Road tourism projects is based on the Social Construction Framework presented in Section 3.3.2. The discussion specifically explores research objective (3): to discover the consequences of policies on social groups in terms of the allocation of benefits and burdens, as well as impacts on their social construction. While there are several target populations and stakeholders involved in and impacted by the implementation of such policies, four target groups have been selected for analysis in this research. The findings are presented according to the target groups of Chinese businesses, local residents in concession areas, local businesses, and non-governmental groups.

5.2 Chinese businesses

Chinese investors, as the primary target, are the largest beneficiaries of policies relating to the BRI. The primary policy actions taken by the government are (i) increasing investment incentives for foreign investors, (ii) facilitating the ease of doing business in Cambodia, especially tourism business, and (iii) deregulating, or in some cases, making exceptions outside the legal frameworks. As a result of these governmental efforts, investment from China increased by 80% from 2012 to 2016, making China the largest source of investment into Cambodia.

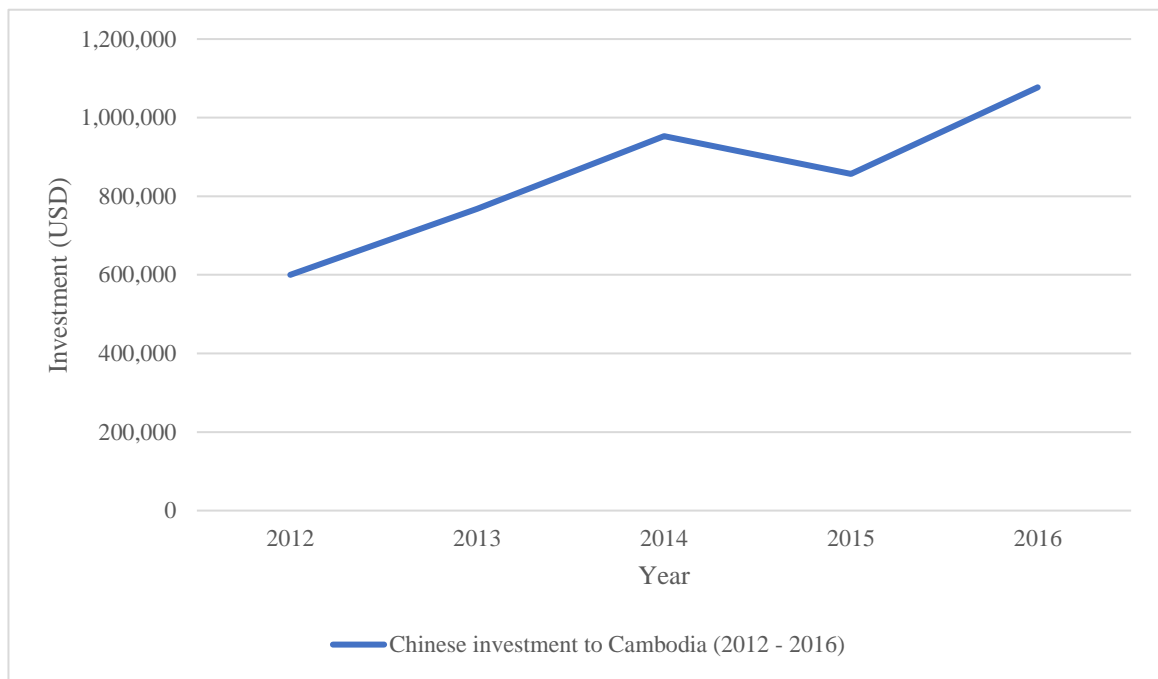


Figure 5.1 Chinese investment into Cambodia (2012 – 2016)

Note: Data sourced from Investment Trend by Council Development of Cambodia (2016)

Using the typology of Ingram et al. (2007), the Chinese investors can be categorised under the *contender* group, given their substantial economic and political resources and their negatively perceived social image. The design of the Cambodian Government’s policies supports this interpretation, as Chinese businesses receive disproportionately large benefits from the policies due to their political power. An analysis of state documents shows that several Chinese investments were actively facilitated by Prime Minister Hun Sen (Kynge & Haddou, 2016). Fu Xianting, the chairman of the Unite International Investment Group, parent company of Yeejia Tourism Development, is regarded as “Big Brother Fu” in Cambodia’s Chinese business community, due to his high state and military honours in Cambodia, as well as his “family-like” relationship with Prime Minister Hun Sen (Pye & Titthara, 2014; Kynge & Peel, 2016). He has made several donations to Hun Sen and the Royal Government (Pye & Titthara, 2014, Kynge & Peel, 2016), one just nine months before Yeejia Development secured the land concession for the development of the Golden Silver Gulf Resort project, receiving a personal congratulatory letter from Hun Sen. Such military-corporate relationships are common in Cambodia since the release of a Government memorandum in April 2010, that allows private companies to finance military units to encourage a culture of sharing (Pye & Titthara, 2014). Investment from the UDG, a privately owned Chinese company, is also believed to have government support. Hun Sen

met the President of UDG, Li Zhiqiang, during his visit to China in May 2008, the year that the company secured the land concession for Dara Sakor Seashore Resort (C4ADS, 2017). The signing ceremony for Dara Sakor Seashore Resort was between Zhang Gaoli, former Deputy Minister of China and chair of the ad-hoc steering committee overseeing the BRI, and several highly ranked Chinese leaders (East Sea Studies, 2019).

Arguably, there is a two-way relationship between Cambodian leadership and the Chinese economic presence. While Chinese financial aid and political legitimacy supports the Cambodian political system (Cock, 2010), diplomatic and political conditions in Cambodia have helped Chinese investments secure approval and protection from government bodies (Cheang, 2017). The accommodating policies of the Cambodian Government have communicated a clear message that reinforces the political status of Chinese companies, and further expands the alliance between Cambodia and China.

Both the Dara Sakor Resort and the Golden Silver Gulf Resort projects are based on opaque agreements between the Royal Government and the Chinese partners, made behind closed doors, and offering limited transparency to the public. While Cambodian Land Law does not permit concessions on national protected areas, in 2008, the King of Cambodia signed Royal Decree No. NS/RKT/0408/392 to amend the 1993 Royal Decree. The new decree reclassified 36,000 hectares of Botum Sakor National Park as state private land making it eligible for the land concession granted to the UDG (Subedi, 2015). However, it is still unclear why and how the land concession in a national protected park was granted to Yeejia Development for its investment in Ream National Park.

There is increasing concern over the unusual 99-year land lease term, with some arguing that the term is too long, and the Government is handing territory to foreigners. However, this should not be perceived as a problem, as the land is still under the control of the Cambodian Government as part of the country's territory. In other words, no matter how long the term is, investors are still bound by Cambodia's laws and regulations, and responsible for all related fees during the lease term. A land concession does not mean leasees are granted rights to set up their own territory with a governance system independent of the host country. Furthermore, the practice of granting land concessions is not uncommon in South East Asia, as Singapore and Malaysia provide a maximum land-lease of 99 years (Tan, 2019; Bernama, 2018), while Vietnam and Thailand are proposing

amendments to their land laws that allow exceptions under governmental decree (Colliers, 2016; Son, 2018). According to Dai Luoc Vo – director of the group coordinating the plan for the Bac Van Phong Special Economic Zone in Vietnam - the land lease period for a luxury tourism project can be up to 120 years to allow for extended construction times (Reatimes, 2018).

Nevertheless, such policies have relieved the Chinese investors of several financial burdens. The 99-year lease with the UDG netted the Cambodian government USD 1million per year, increasing by USD 200,000 annually (C4ADS, 2017). However, according to the contract, the UDG is exempt from leasing fees for the first ten years (Marshall & Thul, 2012; C4ADS, 2017). The ambiguous ownership of the project, as explained above, also hints at the prospect that Chinese developers are taking over full ownership of Cambodian land.

The Chinese investors also take advantage of the benefits and political power accruing to them, by exercising control over politically weaker groups. From 2014 to 2018, the UDG's employees and securities had been reportedly destroying hundreds of houses in the communes of Koh Kong, as well as bulldozing the crops of families who did not agree to the compensation offered by the project developers, or who refused to relocate from the concession area (Subedi, 2015; Touch & Neef, 2015, Channyda, 2018; Sotheary, 2018). Yeejia Development, the investor in the Golden Silver Gulf Resort, is also reported to have forced families to leave their land without paying them compensation (Odom & Wright, 2016), aided by direct supportive action from the local authorities. It is further reported that military police and naval officers helped them force the villagers to leave, or helped restrain their attempts at resistance (Titthara, 2011; Titthara & Boyle, 2014). The UDG, through its communication manager, Wang Chao, confirmed in April 2015 that issues of compensation and relocation were to be managed by the Government, because the company lacked the technical ability, capacity, and previous experience to solve community issues. He explained:

The government is taking care of the relocation issues and promised to compensate those living legally in the area, and evict those who were living there illegally. We financially supported this, but the company cannot identify who is legal or not, and leaves that to the government. (Drbohlay & Hejkrlik, 2017, p. 185)

5.3 Local residents in concession areas

In general, the influx of Chinese investments, especially those in the tourism sector, have created more job opportunities for Cambodians to work on construction sites and within the tourism industry. Reports provide evidence that Cambodians in Sihanoukville working in resorts and casinos can earn between USD 120 to USD 200 per month (Ellis-Petersen, 2018), and Mandarin-speaking Cambodians earn even more: between USD 700 and USD 1200 per month (Faulder & Kawase, 2018). This is higher than the 2017 monthly average income per capita in Cambodia, which was recorded as USD 113 (CEIC, 2017). Those working on Chinese construction sites may earn three times that which is offered by local investors (Ellis-Petersen, 2018). However, a disadvantage of this investment trend is the potential for exploitation, diminished labour rights, and the tendency for Chinese companies to hire Chinese rather than Cambodians (Hoang, 2018) as the Law of Investment allows them to hire foreign nationals from abroad.

The communes in and around the concession areas of Ream National Park and Bokor National Park have high poverty rates, ranging between 20% and 40% (See Figure 5.2, in which Ream National Park and Bokor National Park are marked with stars). Therefore, they fall into the *dependents* group under the Social Construction Framework, so can be viewed as deserving but with little political power.

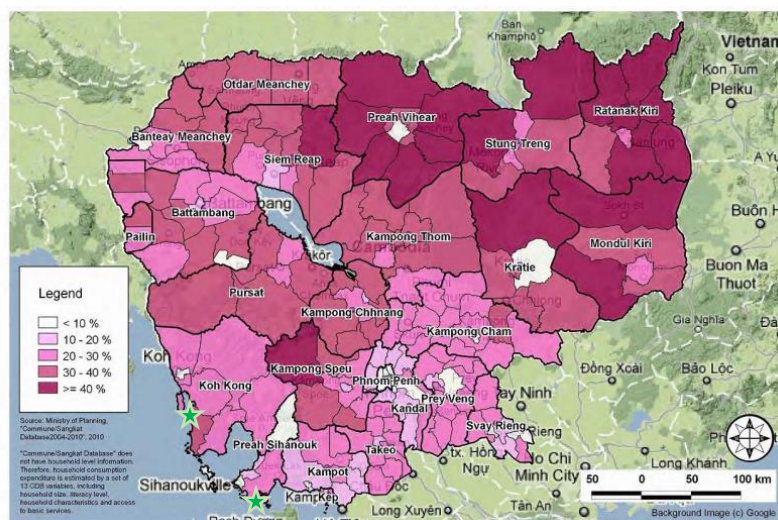


Figure 5.2 Distribution of household poverty rate (%) by district in Cambodia, 2010

Note: Retrieved from "Kingdom of Cambodia – Study for Poverty Profiles in the Asian Region. Final Report," by JICA, 2010. Copyright 2010 by JICA.

However, while the Cambodian Government claimed that local people would benefit once construction was completed and Chinese tourists arrived at the parks, data and statistics suggest that the investment policies for the Chinese partners create burdens for the local people. Since the concession in Ream National Park was granted in 2008, 1,143 households have been ordered to relocate from the concession land, or have been affected by the replacement plan (Titthara, 2022; Touch & Neef, 2015). According to a report by ADHOC, around 30% of these households rejected the offer of compensation, instead choosing to fight to retain their land (Titthara & Boyle, 2014). Some villagers reported that the UDG forced evictions, illegally taking the land from them, even though they had legal documents authorising their legitimate ownership of the land (Titthara & Boyle, 2014). In the case of the Golden Silver Gulf Resort, although there has been no exact detail on how many families need to relocate, media reports suggest there are around 500 (approximately 10 per cent of the population living around the protected area affected by Yeejia Development's plan), and these families have been fighting over land ownership with the company since 2009.

As the national parks are relatively distant from transport infrastructure and trading centres, it is a challenge for people there to access food, clean water, and public services. Data from field studies have shown that the parks form extremely important income sources for local communities, and have a significant role in the Government's poverty alleviation policies. For example, up to 84% of households living in Ream National Park depend on the park's forest and aquatic resources, which contribute 70% of their average yearly income (ICEM, 2003). After the land concessions were granted, the villagers were requested to relocate from the land, and offered compensation packages by the investors. In my view, this sentence could be placed earlier, as much of this discussion depends on understanding this.

Compensation package offered by the Union Development Group to households in Botum Sakor National Park (Touch & Neef, 2015; Dhrbohlay & Hejkrlik, 2017)

- 0.5 hectares of residential land
- 2 – 3 hectares of farmland, but without official ownership certificates for the families.
- A 6.5 – 7.5 metre-wide wooden house
- Financial compensation of between USD 250 and USD 8000 per hectare

Figure 5.3 Compensation package for Botum Sakor Seashore Resort

As reported by Touch and Neef (2015), the relocation site outside the project site of the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort, is deep inside the Botum Sakor protected area. It is reported that the so-called “farmland” is not ready for farming, requiring heavy groundwork to clear the forest, and is too high for the villagers to grow crops (Reaksmey & Marks, 2010; Dhrbohlay & Hejkrlik, 2017). Furthermore, the houses are in poor condition and there is no electricity system or sanitation facilities in the relocation village (Dhrbohlay & Hejkrlik, 2017).

A study by Drbohlay & Hejkrlik (2017) pointed out that before the relocation, their participants could earn, on average, USD 316 a year (ICEM, 2003). However, most of them could not earn as much as they did after the relocation, due to that they were only able to rely on unskilled and irregular income sources (ICEM, 2003). Fishing remained their primary income source, however, they now had to bear the extra costs of travelling and setting up temporary shelter for fishing. Only 20% of the participants in their focus group worked as hired labourers with the UDG, or as golf caddies or hotel staff, and were paid USD 150 to USD 200 per month. Some people quitted the job and returned to fishing at their old place because they could not adapt to the working environment in Chinese enterprises (Titthara & Boyle, 2017). Living in remote areas, distant from the coast that once provided them with basic resources, income and employment, many villagers were struggling with their daily lives. Roads were reportedly in poor condition, making travel difficult and increasing the cost of access to public services (Dhrbohlay & Hejkrlik, 2017).

Disproportionately distributed benefits and burdens, as well as the increasing political power of the Chinese businesses, has resulted in several cases of resistance to land grabbing and displacement, as shown in Table 5.1. The reaction of the local people suggests that government policies have reinforced the socially constructed position of the Chinese businesses in the public mind as getting more than what they deserve and not well-regarded. Such perceptions are likely to linger until there is considerable commitment from either the local authorities or the investing companies to settle the disputes. That these issues remain unresolved also indicates the relatively poor political power held by the local people. As noted by Ingram et al. (2007), this is an inherent attribute of the *dependents* that prevents their asking for more benefits.

Table 5.1 Resistance to land grabbing and displacement in the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort (2010 – 2019)

| Date | Location | Action | Outcome |
|-------------|---|--|--|
| May 2010 | Koh Kong | 240 families held a demonstration in Phnom Penh to complain about the lack of compensation from UDG. | Officials from Hun Sen's office presented a letter to the villagers stating that the Prime Minister had handed over the issue to the provincial governor to handle. |
| Dec 2011 | Kiri Sakor commune and Tham Sar commune, Koh Kong | Relocated families blocked National Road 48 for 7 hours to protest against the provincial authorities and UDG. | The Kiri Sakor governor said he would resign if he could not resolve the issue by February, 2012. |
| Mar 2012 | Koh Kong | Community members gathered in front of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China to submit their petition to Chinese President Hu Jintao, who was visiting Cambodia during the ASEAN Summit. | Villagers were prevented from submitting their petition and sent home. |
| Feb 2014 | Koh Kong | 80 villagers blocked National Road 48 to protest | Negotiations with the local authorities commenced the following day. The district governor confirmed that they agreed to the villagers' demands to stop property removal and allow them to build temporary houses, but |

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| | | | that land compensation, which was from the company's share, was beyond his authority. |
| Mar 2015 | Prey Nub district, Preah Sihanouk | 106 families filed a petition against Yeejia Development Company objecting to land grabbing. | Officials from the National Assembly's Human Rights and Anti-corruption Commission confirmed receipt of the petition but there was no response from Yeejia. |
| Mar 2016 | Preah Sihanouk | Community representatives held a press conference to present evidence of the land disputes with Yeejia. | Representatives from Yeejia Development and United International could not be contacted. |
| June 2016 | Kiri Sakor district, Koh Kong | 529 families signed a petition to ask the local authorities to double the size of their replacement plots. | UDG said they would leave the petition for the local authorities to address. The provincial governor advised that they would take action to move the families staying illegally on UDG's land. The Ministry of Environment did not confirm any further compensation, but said they would look into the requests of the families. |
| Mar 2018 | Kiri Sakor, Koh Kong | 14 families filed a petition to the Ministry of Land Management and the Ministry of Environment to | Officials from the Ministries confirmed that the petition had been forwarded to the Ministries' leaders to review. |

| | | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| | | complain about the land dispute with UDG. | |
| Apr 2018 | Koh Kong | 30 villagers filed a petition to the provincial governor, asking him to intervene after UDG had destroyed their crops the previous week. | The provincial governor said they had not received the petition, but would look into the case. |
| May 2018 | Kiri Sakor district, Koh Kong | Villagers protested outside the Ministry of Environment's offices after the Ministry failed to respond to their petition over the land dispute with UDG. National Road 48 was blocked by the provincial authorities to stop them from travelling to Phnom Penh. | The villagers returned to their provinces without an appropriate answer. Representatives from the Ministry said they were looking into the documents and petitions. |
| Mar 2019 | Kiri Sakor district, Koh Kong | Representatives of the community travelled to Phnom Penh to ask for resolution of their petition requests after months of waiting. | A spokesman from the Ministry of Environment said they were working hard towards a resolution and were waiting for the Prime Minister to decide whether the petition should be transferred to the Land Management Ministry's Land Dispute Resolution Committee. |

Source: Synthesised from Vannarin (2010), Titthara (2011), Khe (2012), Titthara and Boyle (2014), Reaksmey (2014), Sotheary (2015), Odom and Wright (2016), Pheap (2016a), Pheap (2016b), Sotheary (2018a), Channyda (2018), Meta (2018) and Sotheary (2019).

It is evident that in most cases, the UDG and Yeejia were silent about the resistance actions, often relying on local authorities to settle the disputes.

The Cambodian Government has been ignoring the proper implementation of the “leopard-skin policy” embedded in the 2001 Land Law and Ministerial Order no. 01BB-2012, in favour of the Chinese investors. This policy mostly addresses the idea of “concession development through regularization rather than eviction” (Dwyer, Polack & So, 2015, p. 2), minimising the need for relocation and the impact of economic concession land to livelihoods. Most significantly, the policy recognises individual land entitlements of families living in economic concession land, state land, or communally managed land (Neef, 2016); most resided in rural and forest frontier areas (Milne, 2013). When an economic land concession is granted, according to the “leopard-skin policy”, residents should be left where they are in the economic landscape, rather than being evicted, and concessions developed instead, around the land occupants (Dwyer et al., 2015). In the cases of the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and Dara Sakor Seashore Resort examined above, the concession agreement and benefits were decided between the investors and Government first, followed by a disregard to the legal framework which is supposed to improve the social construction of the *disadvantaged* group. The policy could not be implemented, as explained by the government officials and company representatives, because of issues with water and sanitation; however Touch and Neef’s (2015) study pointed out that the reason behind this, was that the communities living by the coast would pollute the water and have a negative impact on the investment. The affected villagers were not informed about the relocation plan, nor involved in any discussion, nor any decision-making process (LICADHO, 2015; Dhrbohlay & Hejkrlik, 2017).

5.4 Local businesses

The local businesses are categorised as belonging to the *advantaged* group, according to the Social Construction Framework, due to their political power and deserving social position. The government policies in response to BRI tourism investments do not directly impose benefits to or burdens on the local tourism businesses, however, consequences of such policies have had impacts on construction. As they become operational, mega tourism complexes such as the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort increasingly attract and cater for Chinese tourists, as expected by the

Cambodian Government. In fact, China has become the biggest market for Cambodian inbound tourism. In 2008, the number of Chinese arrivals to Cambodia was 129,626, which was only 5.93 per cent of the total arrivals. In 2018, Chinese tourists topped the list of visitors by country of residence, with 1.9 million arrivals (more than 30% of total international arrivals – See Figure 5.4), and the number is expected to grow to 3 million by 2020.

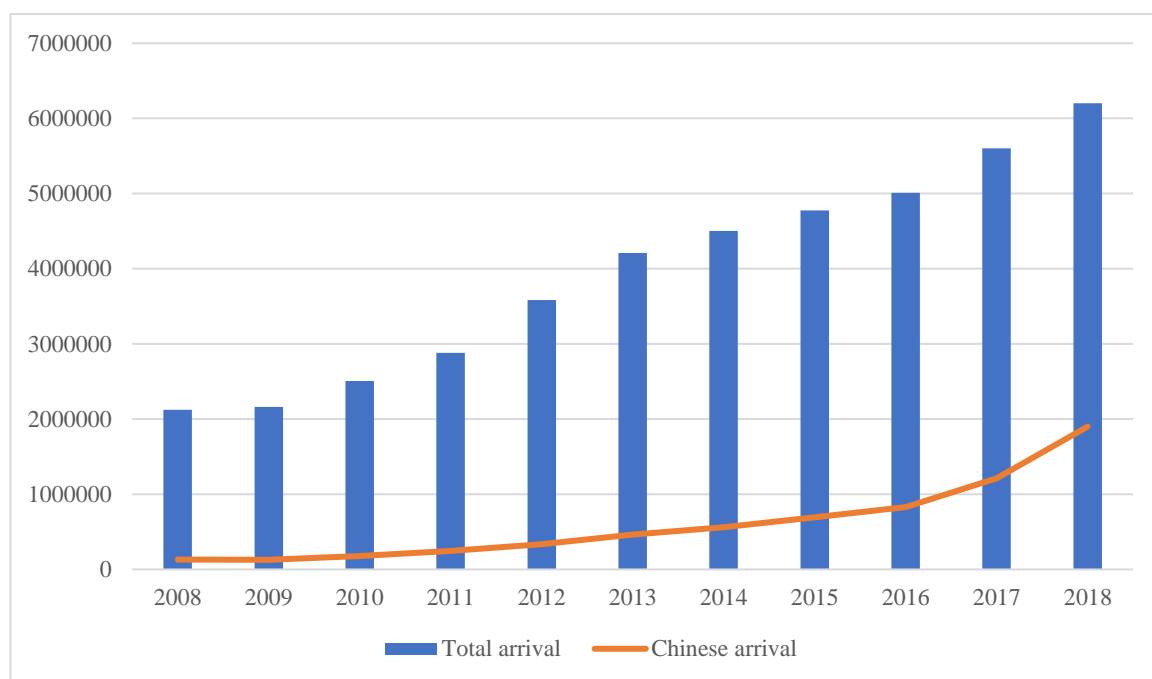


Figure 5.4 International tourist arrivals to Cambodia (2008 – 2018)

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Kingdom of Cambodia (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019)

While it is too early to calculate the benefits to and burdens on local businesses as consequences of government policy (as the projects are still in their beginning phases), it can be predicted from market trends that local people are in doubt of positive outcomes. Several news outlets reported the disappointment of Cambodian business owners as they witnessed Chinese tourists neglecting services offered by locals (Ellis-Petersen, 2018; Fifield, 2018; Tuoitre, 2018; Connor, 2019; The Asean Post, 2019). It was also confirmed by Chhay Sivlin, the president of the Cambodian Association of Travel Agents, that Chinese tourists travelling to Cambodia preferred all-inclusive tours by Chinese agents, and preferred services operated by those of their own nationality. This is due to the availability of Chinese-owned tourism businesses in Cambodia, because of the supportive government

policies, and the language barrier, which encouraged Chinese tourists to seek Chinese service providers (Connor, 2019). As both the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort are planned to be tourist cities that provide all tourist and entertainment facilities in one place, there is a strong possibility that money from Chinese tourists will be spent at Chinese-owned businesses, rather than going to the local people.

While not being able to benefit from the influx of Chinese tourists, local tourism businesses may face the threat of losing their traditional markets. In the early 2000s, Western countries such as the USA, United Kingdom, and France, were dominating Cambodia's market. However, the rapid development of Chinese properties and Chinese tourism has driven up the prices of services. In Sihanoukville, which is the nearest city to both the BRI projects, the number of Chinese tourists quadrupled from 2016 to 2017, and hotel prices increased three times in the past few years (Tuoitre, 2018), making the city lose its advantage of an affordable, off-the-beaten-track destination for budget travellers.

The construction of Chinese resorts along the coastline and national parks of Cambodia also influences the perception of travellers to these destinations. For the purposes of this research, 73 online reviews from visitors through TripAdvisor website (an internet platform that records and publicly displays comments from visitors about their experiences of services and destinations) for Ream National Park were collected. The reviews were generated between June 2016 (when Yeejia development announced its partnership with 13 Chinese companies for the development of the project) and April 2019. Data were manually recorded and transferred to Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, then converted to NVivo 12 (software for analysing qualitative data) for analysis. Online reviews for Botum Sakor National Park, however, were not available.

The visitors' perceived experiences and satisfaction are exemplified through their positive and negative comments on major themes, as depicted in Figure 5.5.

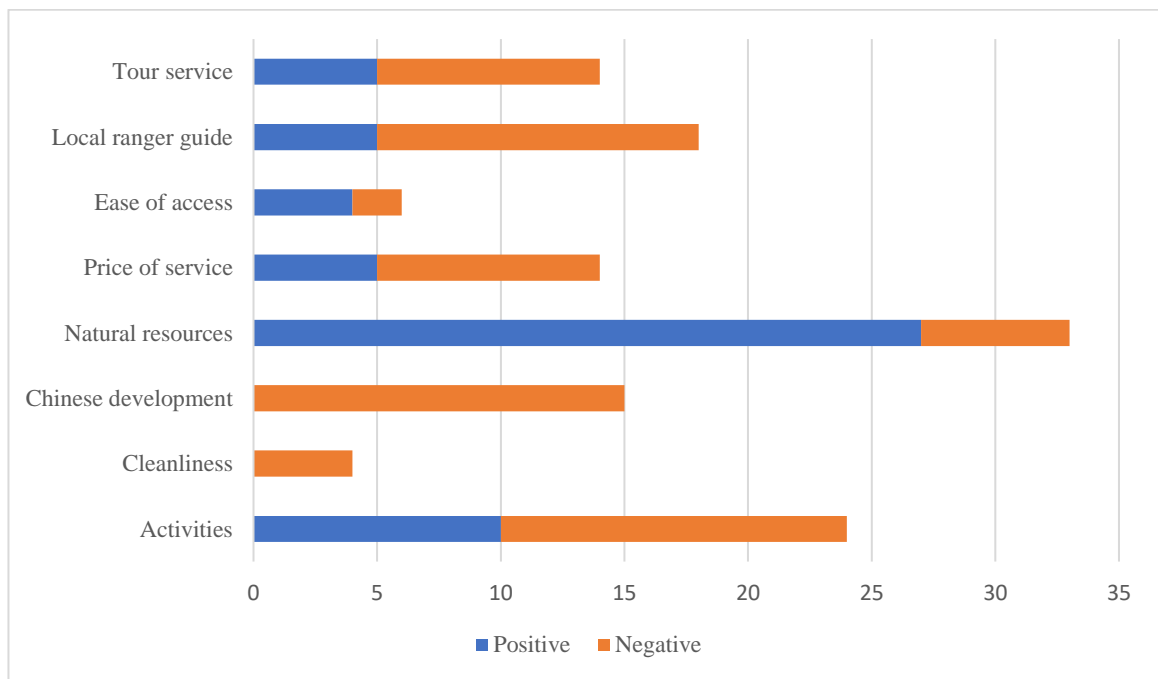


Figure 5.5 Themes in visitors' online reviews of Ream National Park

As can be seen, the theme “Chinese development” has the highest numbers of negative comments, and there were no positive comments from visitors to the park. More than 70% of comments mentioning this theme came from users self-identifying as from the USA, Australia and Europe. Notably, out of the ten newest reviews for Ream National Park, nine mentioned disappointment with the development around the park. Representative comments on this theme are:

Unfortunately, a large section of this once-beautiful national park is undergoing development with earth upturned and swaths of forests burned and cleared (*user jt10s, reviewed on 08/05/2019*).

This National Park is about to be destroyed. I was there 6 months ago to ‘design a new resort’. I had no idea of the importance of the site before I arrived, no idea my site was within a NP (*user benny260, reviewed on 19/02/2019*).

The fishermen told us, formerly there were more guest houses which were removed due to the interest of Chinese investors who bought the land (*user reppi, reviewed on 25/04/2016*).

While the analysis shows several reasons for the disappointing experiences of tourists to Ream National Park, inevitably the tourists are noticing the change in the surrounding environment of the park, and expressing their concerns over the tourism development in the area. This could partly be the underlying reasons for the decreasing trend of Western tourist arrivals, who were expecting to experience the country’s specific

features before it was globalised (Egmond, 2007), as feared by local tourism business owners.

In order to improve the capacity and competitiveness of local tourism businesses, the Ministry of Tourism has released the “China Ready” strategy, a five-year strategy with the target of attracting around two million Chinese tourists by 2020. The strategy provides a guideline for tourism authorities on facilitating visits by Chinese tourists, and developing human resources in line with the changing economy and market. Certain businesses, if they meet the criteria of the Ministry of Tourism, can receive accreditation from the Government as being “China-ready”. According to Chhay Sivlin, the private sector was trying to apply the guidelines to their businesses, including hiring Mandarin-speaking staff, providing customised products for Chinese guests, and preparing signs, documents and materials in Mandarin (Sokhorg, 2017a). However, the implementation of the guideline also requires efforts from businesses to equip themselves with the necessary skills and adjust the nature of their services to match Chinese preferences. This may result in increasing operational costs in the short-term, and the long term prospects are unclear. Until 2017, there were only 15 tourism and hospitality operators with China-Ready accreditation from tourism officials (Sokhorg, 2017b).

5.5 Non-Governmental groups

While Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are usually considered *contenders*, due to their positively constructed social image and lobby power to governments, their political and social construction is different in the case of Cambodia. Foreign conservation groups in Cambodia have not exercised their influence, so protected areas have been violated, as the groups are afraid of damaging their relationships with the Royal Government (Marshall & Thul, 2012; Meyn, 2017). Their concerns arise from the case of Global Witness, an environmental NGO that had been working on illegal deforestation and land grabbing in Cambodia since 1995. Global Witness was forced to close its office, and banned from entering Cambodia in 2005, after the leak of its unpublished report “Taking a Cut – Institutionalised Corruption and Illegal Logging in Cambodia’s Aural Wildlife Sanctuary” (Global Witness, n.d.). The political pressure on NGOs in Cambodia escalated in 2015 when the Cambodian Government passed the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO) against opposition from the USA, EU, United

Nations and hundreds of local and international organisations. Since then, several NGOs have been warned or shut down by the Government, and NGO officials sent to prison or removed from Cambodia (Sokhean & Paviour, 2017).

The increase of direct investment from Asian countries, especially China, often with minimal barriers and restrictions, has reduced Cambodia's dependency on Western support. This geopolitical shift has freed Cambodia from conditions around human rights and democracy, which used to be a carrot-and-stick advantage for foreign NGOs in Cambodia. Nevertheless, NGOs are still taking their relatively acceptable political and social construction to advocate for human rights and environmental issues in protected areas and ask for transparency in the entitlement of economic concession lands. The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (LICADHO) has collected and disclosed data on Cambodia's concessions, in an effort to urge the Government to make public all information on economic concession lands, as well as to assess their social and environmental impacts. In February 2015, the NGO Forum on Cambodia, Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC), The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), LICADHO and the Community Legal Education Center (CLEC) issued a joint statement under Cambodian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to condemn the violations of the UDG to the communities in Botum Sakor and Kiri Sakor district, Koh Kong, and ask for intervention by Cambodian governments to stop the violations and conflicts between villagers and the UDG (AHRC, 2015).

It was not until July 2018, that the environmental and human rights NGOs, namely Wildlife Alliance, LICADHO and ADHOC, were called upon to cooperate with the Ministry of Land Management, Ministry of Urban Planning and Construction, Ministry of Environment and provincial officials of Koh Kong, to monitor the data collection process and resolve the long-standing land dispute issue in Koh Kong (Sotheary, 2018a). However, it was reported by the Koh Kong provincial administration that only Wildlife Alliance accepted the invitation, and representatives from ADHOC said that they did not receive the information (Sotheary, 2018a).

5.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the key findings from the content analysis of secondary data on two cases: the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort. It is

clear from the cases that the Chinese investors, who are the target population of the policies, have gained favourable treatments from the Cambodian legislators as a result of their strong political ties with the Government and the active participation of both countries in the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative. However, the local people living in the concession area suffered because they were evicted from their land and struggled to adapt to the new environment. This was also a violation of the “leopard-skin policy”, that was supposed to protect the rightful land ownership of individuals. Only a few were employed in the tourism sector following the development of tourism projects in their area. The local businesses were viewed as the *advantaged* social groups, but did not benefit from the Government’s policy, but instead, had to face the challenge of increasing competition and the loss of their preferred market. Finally, the non-governmental groups enjoyed a relatively unfavourable social construction in Cambodia, meaning they were not able to fully exercise influence over the land disputes, environmental destruction or the lack of transparency. The next chapter continues the discussion about the consequences of policy design to social groups by linking the current knowledge from the Social Construction Framework to the research findings, and exploring deeper meanings emerging from the analysis regarding the development of the tourism industry and policy implications.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a synthesis and discussion of the main findings from the analysis of secondary data in chapters four and five. The chapter sets out to frame the research findings within the two research objectives on discovering the consequences of Cambodia's state-level policies, and formulate policy implications for Indochinese countries. The interpretivist paradigm enables a conventional, inductive approach to content analysis. While existing literature was reviewed to facilitate the understanding of tourism infrastructure systems and current research on the BRI, inferences and findings of this study emerged from the data and were open to individual interpretation.

This chapter presents a summary of population proposition, distribution of benefits and burdens, and anticipatory feedback from policy design situated against the Social Construction Framework reviewed in chapter three. It is then followed by a discussion on broader impacts of the BRI and relevant policy design of the Cambodian Government on the country's tourism development. The research background and synthesis of findings together lead to the final discussion of policy lessons for Cambodia's neighbouring countries, Vietnam and Laos, in order to leverage the opportunities of the BRI while minimising its negative impacts.

6.2 Population proposition, distribution of benefits and burdens, and anticipatory feedback to policy design

The Social Construction Framework suggests that policy designs have consequences on social reputation and the relationship between a population and its government; and target populations are treated differently in policy designs (Ingram et al., 2007). Analysis from the cases of Belt and Road investments in the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort has yielded similar patterns in the way the Cambodian Government treated different groups, and the consequences of such policies. As predicted by the Framework, the politically powerful but negatively perceived *contenders* are more likely to be entitled with hidden benefits and empty costs. The Cambodian Government has demonstrated its willingness to embrace investments under the Initiative to solve the

problem of infrastructure development, continuing its comprehensive strategic partnership with its closest ally.

The use of the Social Construction Framework in policy analysis is particularly helpful in providing insights on how the policy design has consequences on other stakeholders or other social groups involved in the process (Ingram et al., 2007). Following the implementation of the policies, burdens increased for the local people in the concession land of Botum Sakor National Park and Ream National Park, who represent the *dependents* with weak political power but positive social perception, despite the fact that they were promised benefits from the tourism development. The local businesses, who have been perceived as deserving, struggled as Chinese service providers and the tourist flow from China caused the decline of their traditional market against increasing competition. The disproportionate distribution of benefits and burdens extended the political gap among groups, as the *contenders* were empowered by the policies while other groups' attempts to change the situations were undermined. Because the policy conferred too many benefits to *contender* groups, their social construction as "getting more than they deserved," was reinforced, causing resistance from relatively *disadvantaged* groups during implementation.

One of the assumptions underlying the Social Construction Framework is the anticipatory feedback, which argues that the policymakers craft a policy design not only to solve a policy problem, but also to ensure positive reactions and minimise negative reactions from parts of the public that are believed to be important to the current political system and the possibility of re-election (Schneider et al., 2019). In this case, only the Chinese investors, who are the main beneficiaries of the policies, actively supported the policy implementation process; local businesses, local people and environmental and human rights groups all showed concern, disapproval and hostile reactions to such policies. The framework suggests that legislators do not want to openly favour negatively constructed groups or burden *deviants*, in order to gain support from their voters; however it is worth noting that the Framework was developed, and mostly studied in the USA and other democratic countries. While claiming to be "adopting a policy of liberal democracy and pluralism" (Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, 1993), Cambodia's regime is categorised as authoritarian and ranked 125 out of 167 in The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2018 Democracy Index (EIU, 2019). Transparency International ranked Cambodia poorly: 161 out of 180 countries on the Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International,

2018). The country has been governed by Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party for more than 30 years, and the 2018 election was heavily criticised in Western countries because voters had no meaningful rights; this resulted in Hun Sen's party gaining all the seats in the lower house and National Assembly (Heng, 2019). The suppressive political environment in Cambodia explains why the Cambodian Government ignores the anticipatory feedback mechanism in policy design, instead prioritising policies that benefit its long-standing rulership and political regime, and aligning with foreign diplomatic policies.

The social construction of the target population and other social groups, along with impacts and feedback to the Cambodian Government's policies around Belt and Road tourism infrastructure projects resulting from the analysis, is summarised in Figure 6.1.

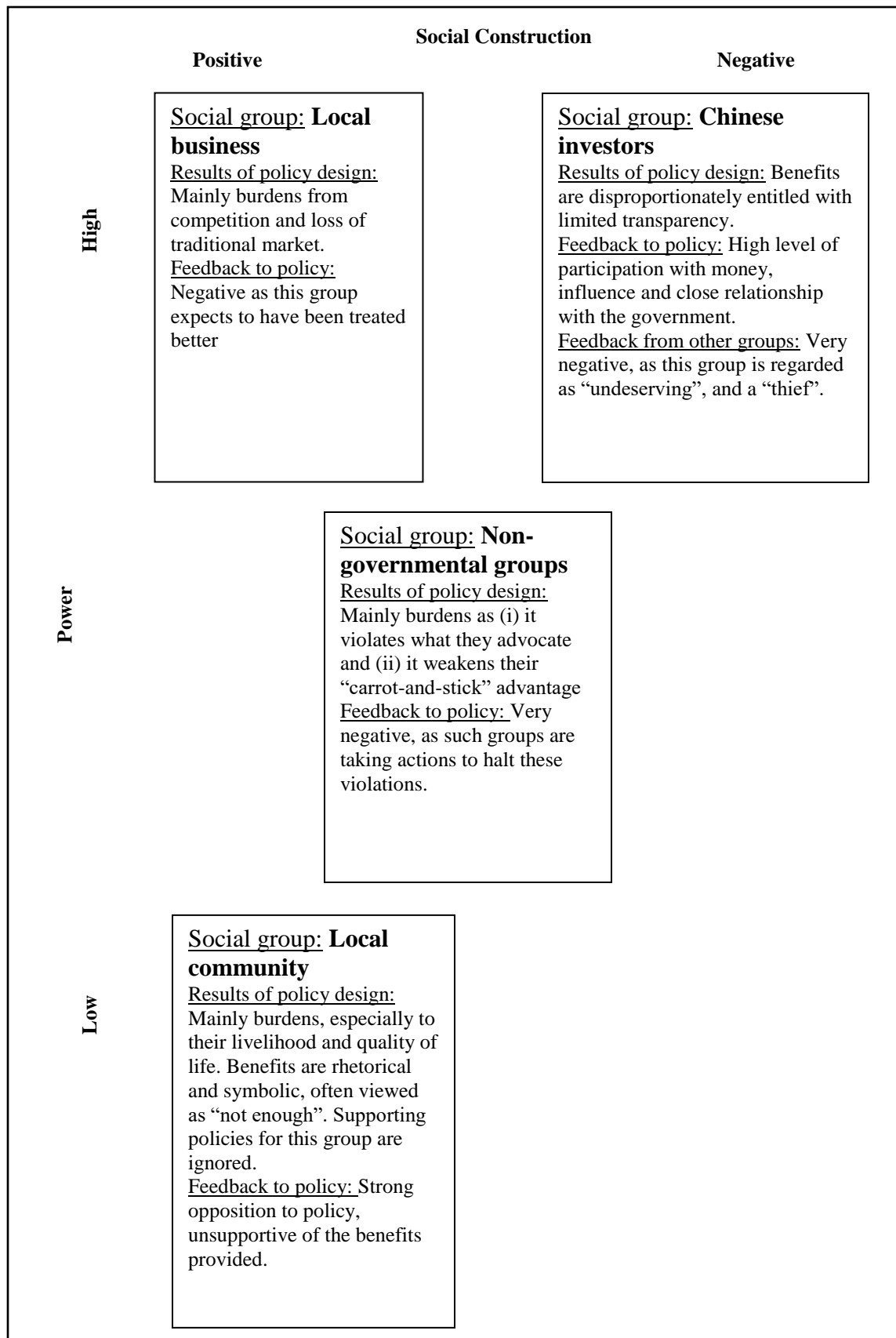


Figure 6.1 Social construction, results of policy designs and feedback to policy

6.3 The impacts of policy design on tourism development in Cambodia

The Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort are envisioned by the Cambodian Government to be the major attractions for tourists, second only to Angkor Wat. Both projects are slated in the underdeveloped, rural areas of Koh Kong and Preah Sihanouk, where transport facilities and service infrastructures are inadequate for tourism development. Ream National Park drew 200 tourists per year, generating an income of USD 2,500, while the tourism sector at Bokor National Park was valued at USD 675,000 per year, with 8,000 domestic and 750 international tourists (ICEM, 2003). Such massive infrastructure projects will not only draw more tourists to these destinations but also enhance the competitiveness of Cambodian tourism. Import-export and trade activities also benefit from the provision of new deep-water ports and airports, supporting the overall industrial development and economic growth of the provinces. Nevertheless, there has been no official announcement regarding the economic, social and environmental impact assessment of such projects. Information on the facilities' scale, capacity and other technical details, from either the Government or the Chinese investors, remains unavailable to the public, making it almost impossible to calculate the projects' value.

While benefits for Cambodia's tourism sector and its economy are ambiguous, by approving the land concession for the UDG and Tianjin, Cambodia also loses opportunities and revenue from tourism development and coastal industries along more than 20% of its coastal line for at least 99 years as per the contracts. The profits from these lands, as they are not restricted by law, will be exclusively awarded to the Chinese corporations. Apart from the minimal income from the concession land, the only other source of revenue for the Cambodian Government is tax paid by the developers and their partners once the projects are completed. However, it will take 20 years and 25 years, respectively, for the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and Dara Sakor Seashore Resort to be completed. Additionally, it will take even longer for Cambodia to receive any revenue from taxing the Chinese companies, as they are entitled to up to eight years' tax exemption by the Law of Investment.

Another burden for Cambodia is the loss of its natural resources, as both projects fall directly in the protected natural areas. Botum Sakor National Park is the largest national park in Cambodia. A four year study, from 2005 to 2009, by Frontier Cambodia (2009), identified high levels of biodiversity and significant populations of species that created

conservation concerns in the national park. It is also home to a large representation of precious coral reefs and mangroves, and is one of the richest repositories of fauna and flora worldwide, according to Wildlife Alliance (2017). Ream National Park is a crucial site for flora, fauna, reptiles and amphibians that are extremely vulnerable to human activities (Frontier Cambodia, 2005). Its terrestrial and marine habitats have significant eco-tourism potential, and the park is able to attract at least 10,000 visitors per year with appropriate management (Lopez, 2001). Not only does the construction of tourism facilities in protected areas result in the degradation of ecosystems and deforestation due to the construction of facilities, but also the relocation of villagers into previously untouched forestland has negative impacts on the environment. A study by Touch and Neef (2015) found that the Government had issued a sub-decree that allowed forestland clearing for the purpose of relocating families from the concession land of the UDG. Furthermore, the forest has been destroyed for the construction of roads around the coastline and container port (Reaksmey & Marks, 2010).

In the case of tourism infrastructure projects in Cambodia under the Belt and Road programme, it appears from the analysis that the perception and the need of the target population (the Chinese investors), rather than the interest of Cambodia and its people, is the critical decision determination of the legislators. Cambodia's increasing dependence on China, despite the negative consequences, arises from several causes. Firstly, the diplomatic alliance with China is deeply rooted in Cambodia's history, and has been developing extensively under the regime of Hun Sen. Secondly, due to Cambodia's vulnerable economy, troublesome political environment, and high level of corruption, several countries have been cautious about investing in Cambodia. Most recently, the EU launched trade sanctions on Cambodia over its increasing disregard for human rights and democratic governance (Blekinsop, 2019). Meanwhile, China has continued its support and facilitated the construction boom in Cambodia with a no-strings-attached approach. Unlike investment from American and other Western donors, Chinese investment is directly allocated to the Government and often comes with no requirement for results or development commitment (Var, 2016).

6.4 Policy implications for Vietnam and Laos

Similar to Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos are important partners to China in the successful implementation of the BRI. While Vietnam is among the first countries that the sea-based route goes through, Laos is a part of the transnational Kunming – Singapore railway. Both countries require significant foreign funding to improve the inadequate infrastructure, and the investment environment in these countries is considered challenging, due to the lack of democracy and transparency in governance. Nevertheless, each country responds differently to China’s proposal for the BRI. In the 2017 Belt and Road Forum, Laos communicated its willingness to participate in the Initiative (Shrestha, 2017). Investments from the BRI are central to Laos’s implementation of “land-locked to land linked” strategy that will stimulate the economy and facilitate connectivity as well as ease of travelling in the country. Vietnam, however, is still cautious towards the BRI, for two reasons. Firstly, Vietnam is less dependent on Chinese loans than is Cambodia, and Chinese projects are perceived by the Vietnamese public as low-quality and untrustworthy (Le, 2018). Secondly, the long history of political tension between Vietnam and China makes Chinese development, especially large-scale infrastructure projects, remain a significant concern for the policy makers and for every citizen of Vietnam. Most recently, Vietnam witnessed wide-spread public anger after the proposal for the Phu Quoc Special Economic Zone in 2018. Incentives proposed in the plan included a 99-year term lease, and were similar to what was offered to Cambodia, triggering fears that it was an act of Government to sell the land to Chinese investors. Its sensitive geographic location raised concerns that Phu Quoc might become part of what is called China’s “South East Asia strategic triangle”, formed with Golden Silver Gulf Resort (Cambodia) and Kra Canal (Thailand) (Nguyen, 2018). Considering that Vietnam and Laos are still in the early stages of cooperation with the BRI, policy analysis from the case of Cambodia will identify important implications that will help the effective future implementation of the BRI there, especially in tourism.

First and foremost, countries need to promote transparency in policy designs and government decision-making. Transparency, as defined by the Asian Development Bank (2010, p. 2), is “the availability of information to the general public and clarity about government, rules, regulations and decisions”. It reinforces predictability and good governance, and helps prevent policy failure and corruption (ADB, 2010). A transparent government has provision for the press and the public to witness, question and examine its

operation, have an effective feedback mechanism, and request data and documents related to legislations and the operation of the government. It also means in this case, that Chinese investors must provide access to accurate and timely information and specifications of the projects, instead of keeping these details hidden from the public.

Prior to the approval and implementation of an infrastructure investment project, the Cambodian Government should carry out a social and environmental assessment of the project. The assessment should provide detailed analyses and forecasts of impacts, which are part of the proposal and planning of the project, in order to measure and control any adverse consequences, and to incorporate such proposals into strategies for sustainable development. It is recommended that the Cambodian Government establishes partnership with qualified NGOs, improve the mutual communication and understanding, and engage NGOs in the assessment, measurement and monitoring of the projects.

The proposal, planning and execution of the projects must be in accordance with the legislation framework and should not interfere with the effective implementation of other policies. It is also important for legislators to take into account the emotional and symbolic impacts of benefit and burden allocation driven by the social construction of the population, and the feedback effects of policies. Rather than entitling excessive benefits and incentives to the Chinese investors, the Government should impose regulations for the purposes of avoiding economic leakage from the activities of foreign tourism businesses, therefore allocating benefits to the local people and minimising negative impacts to the environment. This can include requiring the Chinese investors to commit to local employment and improve the quality of life for local people, ensure that they receive adequate training to meet any job requirements, and prevent the loss of forest, water pollution and degradation of the natural resources. Another key item that needs monitoring relates to the land issue. Proper implementation and enforcement of laws relating to land ownership, and strengthening the administration process and legislation is essential. It is important, during the process of planning for an infrastructure project, to build an action plan for settlement and/or relocation of households living in land concession areas, including the negotiation process and livelihood recovery. Any assessment, regulations and wider policy agendas must be discussed in terms of how they are addressed in the strategic planning process and the wider picture of tourism development.

Finally, successful implementation of tourism infrastructure projects relies on the relationship between the planning processes at the national and provincial levels. At the lowest level of government, a local authority is the most suitable governmental body to monitor and regulate policy implementation and development within its territory (Yusup et al., 2016). Effective communication and coordination from a local authority bridges the gap between policy design and policy implementation, settles disputes between among populations and resolves the inequalities in social and political constructions. Instead of the state government taking full control of project assessment, approval and implementation, decentralisation accelerates the decision-making process, promotes public participation in such processes, and develops a democratic political environment. In addition, capacity development strategies at the local level should be in place to address the limitations of legal frameworks and instruments, as well as the lack of technical and financial capacity.

6.5 Summary

Policy design affects social groups through the messages it conveys, rules of participation, resources allocation and actual experiences with policy (Ingram et al, 2007). The findings from this study confirm some of the propositions in the Social Construction Framework regarding the relationships between characteristics of target groups and the allocation of benefits and burdens to them, particularly in the cases of Chinese investors and local people living in concession areas. However, in the case studies, the social construction of local businesses and non-governmental groups, as well as the treatments they received from the government, suggests that social constructions are not hegemonic across policy arenas, but depend on the policy context, the researcher's perspective and other boundary conditions of the study.

In regard to the potential for tourism development in Cambodia, it can be concluded from the cases researched that the economic gain from these projects remains unclear, and the policy designs of the Cambodian Government put the tourism industry at risk of economic failure. Furthermore, the implementation of its policies also raises concerns over human rights issues and environmental degradation. This research suggests that governments should carry out more comprehensive and systematic planning and management strategies, while improving governmental transparency and promoting

decentralisation. The conclusion chapter follows, which re-addresses the research objectives, and outlines the limitations of the study as well as directions for future research.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Research objectives re-addressed

The main purpose of this research was to understand the response of recipient countries to tourism investments under the Belt and Road Initiative, and the impacts of government-led policies surrounding such projects on social groups. Through analysis of secondary data using a case-study approach, the research has highlighted significant findings related to infrastructure investments under the BRI and for the wider tourism industry. The findings, in accordance with each research objective, are presented and discussed below.

Objective 1: Gaining better understanding of the current status of BRI investments in Indochinese countries and providing a list of all tourism infrastructure projects in the region under the initiative.

In terms of the first objective, the research has successfully collected and summarised information about tourism infrastructure projects under the BRI. The investigation revealed that among the three Indochinese countries, Cambodia has the highest number of projects in various types of infrastructure, and is receiving most of its funding from China. This reflects Cambodia's enthusiastic participation in the Initiative, if not, its increasing dependency on China, politically and economically. Laos is also a supporter of the Initiative, mostly due to the construction of the transnational Kunming – Singapore railway. However, despite its strategic location on trade routes and significant potential for coastal tourism development, Vietnam is adopting a more cautious approach to the Initiative, as a result of clashes with China over territory in the South China Sea.

Objective 2: Identifying the government-level policies in response to the BRI and the underlying reasons behind such decisions.

The second major finding from the case studies of the Golden Silver Gulf Resort and the Dara Sakor Seashore Resort in Cambodia was that the policy designs of the Cambodian Government have given favours and benefits to the Chinese investors of these projects. Favour and benefits include governmental support, full control over ownership of the business and its profits, tax incentives, and economic land concession. While most of the incentives are stated in laws, some were entitled through royal decrees allowing

exceptions that were outside current law, notably the 99-year land concession within the Ream National Park and Botum Sakor National Park. Cambodia's acceptance of the BRI and the excessive control given to Chinese investors are due to strong diplomatic relationships with China over the course of history, and especially under Hun Sen's governance. While Western countries are opposed to Cambodia because of its Government's authoritarian leadership regime and high level of corruption, China has become Cambodia's largest source of developmental assistance. Accepting investments under the BRI allows Cambodia to access substantial funding from China-led firms and financial institutions that can solve the challenge of the infrastructure deficits in the country.

Objective 3: Discovering the consequences of such policies on social groups in terms of the allocation of benefits and burdens, as well as impacts on their social construction.

Using the Social Construction Framework (Ingram et al., 2007) in policy design, this study has identified that the Chinese investors, classified as *contenders* in the framework, were the target population, as well as the main beneficiaries of policies by the Cambodian Government. Furthermore, the benefits came with empty costs, as they facilitated owning and doing tourism business in Cambodia, while removing economic burdens for them. As a result, their political power was reinforced, although they were perceived as underserving by the public.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is the disproportionately distributed benefits and burdens to social groups, which were related to their political and social construction. Burdens increased for the local people, who were politically weak but socially deserving. Although they were promised benefits from tourism development in the area, the investments from China actually had negative consequences on their land ownerships, incomes, and livelihood. The local businesses, despite their politically and socially strong status, also faced challenges from the loss of traditional markets and competition from Chinese service providers. Furthermore, human rights and environmental groups in Cambodia did not enjoy political power, as they were expected to have according to the theory of the Framework, so their voices were suppressed when advocating for the rights of other social groups against the influx of Chinese investments.

As a result, social groups that were burdened by the policies all showed negative feedback through the implementation process of the policies.

Objective 4: Drawing policy implications for Indochinese countries to leverage the prospects created by the Initiative.

The results of this investigation show that the key determinants of such policy designs were the perceptions and needs of the Chinese investors, rather than those of Cambodia and its people. There was mounting evidence showing that the investments were likely sources of frictions to Cambodia. Even though the investments were predicted to contribute to the development of the Cambodian tourism industry, the economic impact of the projects was ambiguous due to the lack of transparency and limited access to information. Additionally, the favourable policies of the Cambodian Government towards such projects was aggravating the problem of economic leakage in tourism sector. By granting land concessions in otherwise protected areas, Cambodia lost control over the development potential of 20% of its coastal line, and now faces serious issues of deforestation and degradation of the ecosystem.

Taken together, these findings from the research have a number of practical implications for Indochinese countries, in order to leverage the development opportunities while avoiding the high price of economic partnerships under the BRI. It is suggested that transparency, which is the availability of information and clarity of governmental decisions, is a crucial factor in preventing policy failure and corruption. Countries seeking investments from foreign entities should carry out economic and environmental impact assessments prior to the approval and implementation of the investments, and involve qualified NGOs in the process of impact measurement and evaluation. Legislators need to take into account the emotional and symbolic impacts of benefit and burden allocation driven by social and political constructions of the population, ensuring that their benefits and well-being are parts of the agreements with investors. Finally, governments should promote decentralisation and the empowerment of the local authorities. This would help to not only bridge the gap between policy designs and policy implementations, but also resolve disputes and inequalities in social and political construction among the populations.

7.2 Limitations of the research

The main limitation of this research is inherent in the data collection methods. This research relied on data from secondary sources, which were initially collected for purposes other than this research; the researcher was therefore not able to control how the collection processes were carried out. Another challenge of secondary data collection methods is the lack of control over data quality, as there were discrepancies among data collected by different researchers and media reporters. This limitation is related to the fact that the BRI is not fully implemented and the tourism infrastructure investment is still under construction. The provision of data was also hindered by a lack of information about Belt and Road investments that have not been made available to the public by the Chinese Government, the Cambodian Government, or the Chinese investors.

Due to the nature of qualitative research and case-study methods, broader generalisations cannot be made about tourism infrastructure investments under the BRI. The findings of this study cannot be applied to all countries partnering with the BRI as they have different motives and strategies that follow the country's political, economic and diplomatic regimes when participating in the Initiative.

7.3 Recommendations for future research

The study of Belt and Road implications in the tourism context remains an unexplored topic in the tourism field, and this research has signified the need for more attention to this area. In order to understand an initiative of such great scale and ambition, it is necessary to develop a framework for effective policy designs and topical expertise. As suggested, government transparency and cooperation among different stakeholders in destination management is needed for further studies on the potential of tourism infrastructure investments in driving tourism development, and the assessment of their potential economic, social and environmental impacts.

It is also recommended that the Social Construction Framework, as discussed in this research, be applied more in tourism policy research. It is imperative for policy researchers to pay attention to how policy designs impact social groups' constructions, as well as the distribution of social benefits and political power resources, and public opinion. Using the Social Construction Framework, other data collection methods can be adopted to provide

more insights into the impacts of tourism infrastructure under the BRI. Future research needs to use surveys, interviews or focus groups to gain primary data that yields a deeper understanding of the target social groups. It is recommended that researchers, when using the Framework in different contexts, should consider the social constructions of target groups using Donovan's (1993) propositions on how the meanings of each group are constructed before classifying them into the matrix, as the social and political environment of the study might be different from the environment in which the Framework was established.

The Belt and Road Initiative has generated high hopes for the establishment of large transportation networks, infrastructure systems and trade routes through Asia, Africa and Europe – areas responsible for 70% of global tourism (WTCTF, 2017). As the Initiative has been expanding there will be future investments in tourism along the routes of Belt and Road that not only facilitate travel activities but also strengthen connectivity among countries in the network. Therefore, a greater focus on the BRI from tourism academia is needed for better understandings of how to leverage development opportunities from the Initiative while minimising the negative consequences it may have.

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