

THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY'S PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CAMERON HIGHLANDS, MALAYSIA: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The development of the tourism industry in the Cameron Highlands has brought many positive impacts directly or indirectly to the local community in general, including the minority group of indigenous people. The main purpose of the study is to analyze the general socio-economic and environmental impacts upon the indigenous community as a result of tourism development in the Cameron Highlands. This analysis is based on their perceptions of three aspects, namely economic, social and environmental issues due to tourism development. Face to face interviews with selected respondents using the stratified random sampling method were undertaken during October-November 2011 in the village of Sungai Ruil indigenous community. A total of 90 respondents were interviewed. Research findings show that the development of the tourism industry has created positive impacts on these three aspects for the indigenous communities in Sungai Ruil. The results also revealed that in comparison the social impact is greater than the economic and environmental impacts.

Keywords: *Indigenous community, Tourism development, Cameron Highlands.*

INTRODUCTION

The Cameron Highlands, Pahang, is one of the most popular tourism destinations in Malaysia, owing to the development of agro-and eco-tourism products. Agro-tourism includes the tea plantations, strawberry parks, vegetables and flower farms and eco-tourism includes forest reserves, forest trails/jungle tracking, waterfalls and rivers. However, there are several other potential tourist attractions, which have not been fully developed such as the indigenous settlements, souvenir sales centres, butterfly gardens and the built environment of colonial architecture.

The beauty of the Cameron Highlands has attracted about 65% domestic tourists and the remainder are international tourists, especially from Singapore and India. Domestic tourist arrivals generally come at weekends and the peak season is during school holidays. The Cameron Highlands' development is also associated with the development of agriculture and logging. These sectors are the main providers of employment opportunities and economic resources for the local community which comprises Malay, Chinese and Indian. Among these ethnic groups, the indigenous community is very isolated either from participation in the economic development or from receiving any impact from the economic development due to the fact that they live in very remote areas and far from development hubs. Those who live on the fringes of the city were also not interested in being involved in the development because they have always been in their comfort zone practising their traditional lifestyle. Only recently, has there been an awareness of the need for them to be involved in economic development as their natural sources of income from forest produce are fading fast with the invasion of forests from logging activities, agricultural development, construction of hydropower dams as well as highway constructions.

Realizing that there is a change in this community life due to the development in the Cameron Highlands, this study took the initiative to study the impact of development on the indigenous communities. Specifically, this study aims i) to evaluate the impact of tourism development on the indigenous community in the

Cameron Highlands, and ii) make a comparison between the impacts of economic, social/cultural and environmental changes due to tourism development. The presentation of this paper is followed by the scope of the study, background study area, research methodology, research findings, conclusion and policy implications.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research focused on the impact on the indigenous community in the Kg. Sg. Ruil Cameron Highlands. On the other hand, the indigenous community's perspective of the economic, social/cultural and environmental impact that they might have received due to tourism development will also be evaluated. The research is based on the method of face to face interviews with respondents.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

Issues relating to the indigenous community have been debated by many academics and NGOs. It is because, the indigenous peoples always faced positive and negative effects from development, including tourism development in the Cameron Highlands. In the Cameron Highlands, indigenous communities live in 27 villages, mostly in remote areas. The village located about 2.4km from Tanah Rata is an example of a modern village and is the location for this study. This village is inhabited by about 1100 people with a total of 143 households. Most of them are middle aged. The majority of the indigenous people are of the Semai (96.7%) ethnicity, followed by Semelai (1.1%) and Temiar (2.2%). Approximately 44.4% of them are self-employed and the rest work in various sectors. Their income is in the range between RM501-RM1500 (42%), and based on the study's findings, about 38% received a monthly income of less than RM500. This implies that most of them are still poor (Malaysia, EPU, 2000).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adapted the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Sabatelli and Shehan, 1993), which categorized the tourism impact into four dimensions, namely the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts. Each dimension was consequently measured on a set of predetermined items. This research formulated these items into a simplified version to enable a better comprehension by the indigenous respondents of the information needed by the questionnaires. Sg. Ruil settlement was selected as the target population area since it is the only settlement located in the urban area of the Cameron Highlands. The population was stratified into heads of households and members of households. This would enable the collection of a heterogeneous and representative sample for a reliable analysis. Detailed interviews with 110 indigenous people were carried out in this study.

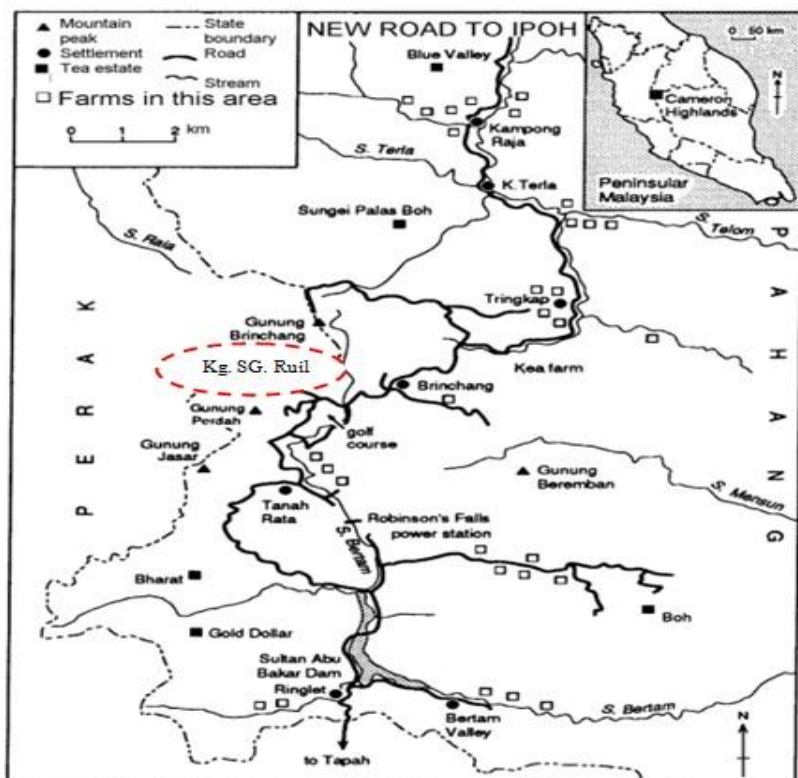


Fig 1: Research Location and the Cameron Highlands District

RESEARCH FINDINGS: ANALYSIS OF TOURISM IMPACTS

Dyer et al. (2003), found that tourism development had brought various impacts to the local community who benefited in terms of job opportunities and increased cultural understanding, wealth and welfare. This finding was supported by studies conducted by several researchers (Husbands, 1998; Madrigal, 1993; Lankford and Howard, 1994). In fact, Ritchie (1984) categorized that the positive and negative effects of a mega development plan would not only bring significant economic impacts, but also other impacts including physical, socio-cultural, psychological and political. This study will analyze whether the development of the tourism industry in the Cameron Highlands has an impact on the indigenous communities in terms of their economy, socio-cultural aspects and the environment. The analysis is based on their level of agreement with related questions posed to them during the interview.

Economic Impact

Table 2 shows the impact of tourism development on the economic aspects. Clearly, the development of the tourism industry has led to increased incomes for the indigenous people in the Cameron Highlands, as 82.3% of the respondents agreed with this statement. Similarly, in terms of employment opportunities and family economic improvement, about 78.8% and 68.9% of respondents respectively agreed with the statements. However, the development of tourism also caused an increase in the prices/costs of houses (56.6%), the price of essential goods (61.1%) and more importantly, the increasing financial needs for family support among the indigenous people (71.1%). Such circumstances have changed the attitudes and lifestyles of this community from people with a simple lifestyle (depending on forest produce) to a more complicated lifestyle where they have to go out from their settlement for jobs. This is evidenced by the survey as the research found that around 44.4% of all respondents interviewed had a job with various sectors of the economy. Approximately 63% of them confirmed that tourism development had increased their incomes.

Table 2: Tourism Development's Impact on Economic Aspects

Statements	Percentage (%)	
	Agree	Not Agree
(a) Provides more jobs for indigenous people	78.8	21.2
(b) Increases the incomes of indigenous people	82.3	17.7
(c) Increases the economics of indigenous people	68.9	31.1
(d) Increases the prices of house/land	56.6	43.4
(e) Increases daily expenses	68.9	31.1
(f) Attract outsiders do business within nearby areas	52.2	47.8
(g) More money is required to finance the rising cost of living	71.1	28.9
(h) Increases the prices of basic needs	61.1	38.9
(i) Increases salaries	63.3	36.7

Socio-Cultural Impact

In analyzing tourism development's impact on socio-cultural aspects, a total of 12 related statements were presented to the respondents. Of the 12 statements, it was found that the development of the tourism sector had increased the number of outsiders' arrivals to the indigenous people settlements with a total of 96.7 percent. This means that the villages of the indigenous community are among the tourist destinations visited. This situation has prompted the community to improve their ability to talk about their culture to outsiders, especially tourists (95.6%). They also feel proud of their culture (86.6%) and have increased their interest in meeting outsiders/tourists (84.5%).

The influx of people/tourists is not altering and disrupting the life of this community. Even in terms of religion, tourist arrivals have not restrained or prevented them from engaging in religious practices and culture (92.3%). This means that these communities can still maintain their traditional practices. This finding is slightly in conflict with a study by Ryan (1991), which found that the indigenous community began to refuse or limit their tourism activities. This rejection was also reported by Mercer (1994), who indicated the occurrence of disruptions to the social life of indigenous communities as the number of tourist arrivals increased. Indigenous communities also felt that the influx of tourists could

change and destroy their culture, especially if their settlements became a popular tourist attraction (Greenwood, 1989; Moowforth and Munt, 1998).

The arrival of a large number of tourists would increase congestion. However, only part of the respondents agreed (46.4%). This means that their perception of the influx of tourists is that it only created serious congestion at recreational/rest areas in the Cameron Highlands as well as the area around their homes. The influx of tourists was also stated as not causing any damage to public property (46.4%) and also did not lead to depletion of government funds to finance tourism development and provision of infrastructural facilities (47.8%) in the Cameron Highlands.

Table 3: Impact of Tourism Development on Socio-cultural Aspects

Statements	Percentage (%)	
	Agree	Not Agree
(j) Changes the lifestyle of the indigenous community	68.9	31.1
(k) Does not disturb the indigenous people's daily living	68.9	31.1
(l) Increases the number of outsiders coming to the indigenous people's settlement	96.7	3.3
(m) Increases the number of outsiders (tourists) met by the indigenous community.	84.5	15.5
(n) Feelings of pride by indigenous people in their culture	86.6	13.4
(o) Increases cultural activities related to indigenous people	78.9	21.1
(p) Increases the ability of storytelling about the culture of indigenous people	95.6	4.4
(q) No disturbance in the practice of indigenous people's own religion and culture	92.3	7.7
(r) Rest areas become more congested	36.4	63.6
(s) Roads and public services are well maintained	46.4	53.6
(t) Increase in vandalism	46.4	53.6
(u) Depletion of government funds	47.8	52.2

Environmental Impact

This section refers to the respondents' level of agreement on the quality of the environment as a result of continued tourism development. A total of 10 main questions were presented to respondents. Only about 41-57% of the respondents stated that the influx of tourists due to tourism development had an impact on the environment in terms of increased traffic congestion, solid waste/garbage disposal that pollutes the environment as well as noise and water pollution/contamination.

This means that the indigenous community in Kg Sg. Ruil can still tolerate the presence of tourists. In fact, they still feel safe (85.5%) in the Cameron Highlands in this time of rapid tourism development. In fact, they still continue to enjoy good clean air quality (92.2%). The development of tourism is believed to help protect the environment through the preservation of flora and fauna (62.2%).

Table 4: Impact of Tourism Development on the Environment

Statements	Percentage (%)	
	Agree	Not Agree
(v) Increases traffic congestion	56.6	43.4
(w) Degrades the quality of life due to large amounts of waste disposal	55.4	44.6
(x) Pollutes the environment	52.2	47.8
(y) Noisy environment	47.7	52.3
(z) More solid waste disposal	45.5	54.5
(aa) Water pollution/contamination	41.1	58.9
(bb) Cleaner environment	61.4	38.6
(cc) Helps to preserve the natural environment (forest and wildlife)	62.2	37.8
(dd) Good air quality at settlements	92.2	7.8
(ee) Feel safe staying in the Cameron Highlands	85.5	14.5

Comparative Analysis Based on the Mean Score

To study the priorities of impact influence in general on the indigenous community, the mean analysis was performed. The mean for each element in the economic, socio-cultural and the environment is depicted in Figures 2, 3, and 4. The average mean of each sub-group impact is also calculated in this study. The result

shows the average mean of the economic impact is about 3.25, the average mean of the socio-cultural impact is around 3.53 and there is an average mean of around 2.97 for the environmental impact. Of all these three impacts, the socio-cultural receives the highest impact from tourism development for the indigenous community. Among all these sub-impacts, it was found that the development of tourism helped to increase the arrival of tourists in the settlements of indigenous people (4.82), followed by the absence of interference with the performance of religious and cultural practices (4.67) and increased story telling ability about the culture of the indigenous community (4.54).

The lowest mean is for the environmental impact. The three elements in the environmental impact that contribute the lowest impact are garbage disposal (2.39), contaminated/polluted water (2.29) and increased traffic congestion (2.28). Detailed information pertaining to the mean values of the various impacts is given in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

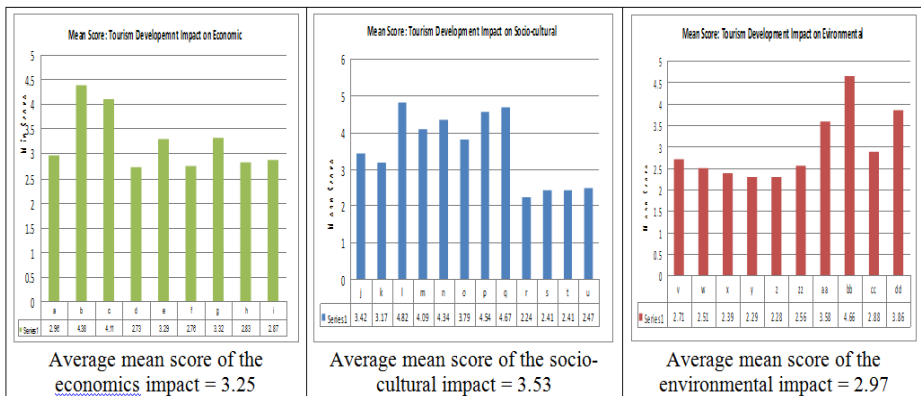


Fig 1: Mean Score of the Economic, Socio-cultural and Environmental Impacts on the Indigenous Kg. Sg. Ruil due to the Development of the Tourism Industry in the Cameron Highlands

CONCLUSION

The development of tourism in Cameron Highlands has had several impacts – economic, social, cultural and environmental - on

the indigenous people within the surrounding areas. This development has also provided advantages and benefits to them especially with regard to employment opportunities. But at the moment they hope environmentally friendly development projects in tourism activities will be prioritized. From the social aspect, almost all respondents are happy with the increased numbers of tourist arrivals to their settlements. This is because they realize that tourist activities would benefit them and have other positive impacts on the community development and economic activities of the indigenous people.

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