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"Motorbike Guide for Westerners": Entrepreneurial Development and the Creation of a Cultural Tourism Product in Transitional Vietnam

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"Motorbike Guide for Westerners":
Entrepreneurial Development and the Creation of a Cultural
Tourism Product in Transitional Vietnam

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Degree
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Karl Russell Kirby
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ABSTRACT

Vietnam is undergoing economic transition from a command economy to an economy with greater market characteristics. Transition is fundamentally reshaping the country through economic liberalization and increased exposure to foreign markets. The Vietnamese are developing institutions necessary for market growth and international tourists are arriving in ever-larger numbers. This research project is a case study of businesses that provide guided motorbike tours and evaluates the businesses based on two criteria: as a study of institutional growth during economic transition and as an examination of tourism production through guide interpretation. The author interviewed and observed sixteen guides in Vietnam—from Dalat in the Central Highlands to Tam Coc, just south of Hanoi—during two months of fieldwork research in summer 2010.

The study identifies a variety of institutional types, from informal guides to formalized businesses with a high degree of support from market institutions. Though market activities are becoming increasingly complex and sophisticated, many services remain informal. The study also investigates how guides create products for tourists through interpretation. The guides draw upon the landscape, people and culture in Vietnam, and their own personal narratives to create a tourism product that they call the "Real Vietnam." The guides sell access to Vietnam, and tourists purchase a sense of intimate knowledge of their destination. Together with tourists, guides participate in place-making interpretation that utilizes both the real geography of Vietnam and the imaginary geographies of foreign visitors. The research reveals the ways in which actors at the local scale adapt to large-scale processes, and in turn influence the course of economic transition in Vietnam and the content of international tourism.

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Chapter 1A. Introduction

Vignette

Philippe[1] began his story after lunch, over strong drip coffee in a café beneath a Buddhist monastery. The monastery was the final stop on a day tour around Dalat, in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, that included a guided hike up a nearby mountain, a visit to a religious festival, stops at area businesses specializing in tourism handicrafts, and tours through local chrysanthemum nurseries. Philippe declared, smiling broadly, "Life was very hard, but now I am a king!" Philippe described the series of professions that he held over the course of his life. During the American War he fought as a soldier in the Army of South Vietnam. After the reunification of Vietnam, the culmination of the victory of North Vietnam over the South, he spent two years in a re-education camp. He worked ten years as a forest fire fighter ("very hard work, sleeping in the jungle, very little to eat!"); a year and a half mining for gold in an open pit, constantly worrying about cave-ins, never earning a windfall; two years as a train porter ("my back ruined!"), sometimes earning additional income by selling black market train tickets; a brief but unsuccessful period as a farmer: all of these occupations preceded his current profession, conducting guided tours for foreign tourists throughout Vietnam. His present, kingly status contrasts sharply with the prolonged ordeal that he underwent after 1975. This period, in which he could find little reliable employment, produced many misfortunes: his wife and son were badly injured in a motorbike accident, and after quickly using all of his available resources—with little remaining money to pay for surgery—their health problems persisted for many years. ("They say we are a socialist country, but in Vietnam you must pay!") His narrative mirrors the

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[1] The names of contacts and participants have been changed to protect their privacy.

larger narrative of Vietnam following its long civil war, an extended period of widespread poverty in which many people struggled to provide the basic necessities.

But Philippe calls himself a king now; his current profession provides him with a comfortable income, and his family's needs are met. What accounts for this change? Philippe has a great deal of social and cultural capital: he was raised in a relatively wealthy household where he learned French and later English. His family's economic capital was largely destroyed during the War; one house was bombed by the US Air Force, and the remaining wealth was quickly lost after the North's victory.[2] Structural changes in Vietnamese society, however, have given Philippe the opportunity to adapt his skills to meet the demands of foreign tourists. Philippe is able to combine his language ability with a deeper personal sense of what would interest tourists, as well as a shrewd capacity for learning about his surroundings and using those qualities for tourism consumption. Philippe uses his local knowledge and his communication skills to create an appealing product for foreign tourists. But Philippe sells more than his environment: he also sells himself, his insider knowledge, his personal narrative. His life story has the uncanny quality of embodying a particular national narrative as it may appear to foreigners. Through their acquaintance with Philippe, tourists achieve more intimate knowledge of the nation as a whole.

Philippe is not alone in his profession; he works with a group called the Dalat Easy Riders, a relatively well-known organization specializing in motorbike guide service throughout Vietnam. They are but one of many similar organizations—in addition to guides that do not

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[2] Philippe seems to come from a fairly cosmopolitan, western-leaning milieu. He was raised Catholic, and like many other Christian Vietnamese his family relocated to South Vietnam after the French defeat in North Vietnam in 1954. His wife's family was also part of the southern, anti-communist elite. Philippe told me his father-in-law was a pilot for the South Vietnamese Air Force, and that, as a result of his involvement in the war, he spent nine years in a re-education camp until his death.

have any official affiliation—though by most accounts they are pioneers and their name is frequently copied by other organizations (figure 1).[3] The Dalat Easy Riders, and similar organizations, are examples of the many tourism services that have grown in response to the increased numbers of tourists in Vietnam in the last two decades. Their organization—and the entrepreneurial culture to which they belong—represent institutional adaptation to the growing market economy in Vietnam. Vietnam, like China to the north and many eastern European countries, is in the process of transitioning from a predominantly socialist, planned economy to a market economy, while still retaining many socialist characteristics (particularly in the political sphere).[4] Changes in the economic institutions that govern life in Vietnam, and the emergence of new institutions that challenge old norms, are important areas for study because they are prime indicators for how successfully the population adapts to new structural conditions (Van Arkadie and Mallon 2003). Regulatory and normative institutions provide structure and meaning to human activity (Scott 1995), and economic activity that benefits the population as a whole will be nurtured—or will wither—in these institutions.

Philippe and his colleagues operate at the nexus of powerful forces of global change—international tourism and political-economic transition. Political-economic transition is fundamentally remaking Vietnamese society, and international tourism presents opportunities to individuals such as Philippe to participate in this transition through entrance into the market

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[3] The Dalat Easy Riders web site states that they began guiding fifteen years ago. According to their company history, The Lonely Planet included them in their guide book beginning in 2001 (Dalat Easy Riders. http://dalat-easyrider.com/Websites/English/aboutus.aspx. Accessed March 21, 2011). Many other organizations use the same name to capitalize on their fame. Increasingly, these organizations appear in cities other than Dalat, such as Hoi An, Hue, and Nha Trang (figure 1).

[4] The most common description of Vietnam's political-economic system is "market-led socialism" (Watts 1998, Fahey 1997). Many economists refer to the overall process of market growth in command economies as "economic transition," and the countries where this process is underway are often called "transitional economies." Though the experiences of each of the countries listed are somewhat similar, we will see that the differences are profound. For a more complete discussion of the political-economy in Vietnam, see Chapter 1B.

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Figure 1. Map of Vietnam with Motorbike Guide Businesses in Selected Locations

economy. In the context of transition, I am pursuing the following questions: How have the institutions that control and shape economic life in Vietnam evolved during the transitional process? How do organizations such as the Dalat Easy Riders and individuals such as Philippe influence entrepreneurial culture in Vietnam? What can we learn about international tourism through this particular tourism product? This case study presents empirical data from individuals and organizations working at this critical intersection of forces in Vietnam. Results suggest that individual actors and groups of actors in Vietnam are actively shaping their economic environment, albeit with constraints imposed from outside and from within.

Actors in Transition

This case study first focused on the Dalat Easy Riders and expanded to include other organizations and individuals, both in Dalat and outside, with an increasing variety of business practices. The Dalat Easy Riders provided a template for motorbike tours that has been copied by many other businesses, and the size of the organization as well as its relatively long history led me to begin my empirical observations with them. Qualitatively, the Easy Riders offer a great deal of value; I first used their service in 2008 and was deeply impressed by their professionalism and creativity. The Dalat Easy Riders function as a sort of cooperative. Each driver is responsible for buying and maintaining his own equipment and for finding customers; they receive the Easy Rider brand and organizational support in return for a portion of their income. Other organizations operate in different ways, some as proprietary businesses with employees and others as central guide offices with a range of services. Still others are guides who work solo or with temporary associates, often informally and commonly at the margins of

the profession. This range of practices is an important component of the analysis that follows, and certain distinguishing characteristics of this population should be noted.

Xe Ôm Chơ Tây

The most important distinction is between guides who simply use motorbikes as transportation and those who view their service—motorbike guiding—as a distinct profession. The title Easy Rider—drawn from the popular 1969 film directed by Dennis Hopper—communicates to tourists images strongly associated with motorbikes. The name denotes a specific form of transportation—motorbikes—distinct from other form of transportation for tourists such as buses and vans. This distinction is also true among the Vietnamese, expressed through the name that other Vietnamese use for the guides. A common service for both foreigners and Vietnamese alike is a *xe ôm*, or motorbike taxi. One guide explained to me that he is often referred to by other Vietnamese as *xe ôm chơ tây*, roughly translated as a motorbike taxi driver for westerners.[5] Whether or not the phrase is meant to be derogatory, the guide took exception. In his words, "they cannot walk in my shoes." He adamantly believed that his skills set him apart; his ability to speak English, to relate to foreign tourists, and to interpret their surroundings all added value to his service.

This guide's self-appraisal placed him within an order of guides specializing in motorbike transportation. To his mind, his ability to communicate with tourists, both through language and

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[5] Gillen (2009) discusses the etymology of the expression *người tây*, literally translated as "person west." He detects a slightly demeaning tone to the word, once used to describe French colonizers. Interestingly, the term's meaning has been expanded to even include behaviors and consumption patterns of foreigners in Vietnam. Gillen writes, "It was used by Vietnamese to describe the French colonizer and is sometimes used today in slightly demeaning terms to describe all Western people. . . . Shifts in theVietnamese economy have broadened definitions of the term *'người tây'* to reflect the economic and social habits of foreign investors, new residents, and overseas tourists. . . . If one takes the historical trajectory of *'người tây'* from the period of French colonization in the 1800s, the term's consumptive tendencies carry much historical baggage and thus may incorporate the consumption of people, livelihoods, and identities as much as material or symbolic goods" (2009, 196).

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by estimating their interests, placed him at the top of a hierarchy of guides beginning with *cyclo* and *xe ôm* drivers, and continuing to guides conducting multiple-day tours and earning considerable salaries.[6] Indeed, language ability is one of the most significant distinguishing factors. Guides that speak more fluent conversational English can more reliably secure customers, negotiate a higher price, and provide more meaningful explanation and description to tourists.[7] English-language ability gives drivers access to customers with deeper pockets and greater willingness to spend far more extravagantly on a service that most Vietnamese would see as superfluous. Several *xe ôm* drivers whom I spoke with and observed seemed handicapped by their unpolished English. Most of these guides picked up the language piecemeal through conversation with tourists, or, in one case, through lessons broadcast on television. Their counterparts at the upper end of the spectrum, however, often learned English in formal training programs, by spending time abroad (in one case), or (in some notable cases) through their past association with Americans during the War.

This hierarchy is further demonstrated and reinforced by a variety of additional factors. The most visible is the quality of motorbike that guides used. By law, the maximum allowable size motorbike in Vietnam is 150 ccs (cubic-centimeters),[8] but a range of quality based on newness, maintenance, and brand is apparent within this restriction. More successful guides often have Japanese bikes, such as Yamahas, that are relatively new and meticulously maintained. Less successful guides, such as one *xe ôm* with whom I spoke, often can only afford

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[6] *Cyclos* are pedal-driven methods of passenger transportation popular among tourists. The ambling pace of *cyclos* encourages leisurely sight-seeing, and their mildly anachronistic appearance in the highly motorized streets of Vietnam underscores their touristic appeal. Van Gemert, Genugten, and Dahles (1999) describe the Indonesian analogue for the *cyclo*, the *becak*. Interestingly, the authors note a hierarchy of *becak*-men, similar to *xe ôm* drivers, beginning with those specializing in local transport up to those who deal exclusively with tourists (1999, 100).

[7] English is the *lingua franca* of international tourism in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese learn at least some English in school, and tourists from non-English speaking countries usually communicate with tourism workers in English.

[8] But even this size is the subject of a luxury tax. The majority of motorbikes in Vietnam are 125 ccs or less, often 110 ccs.

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Chinese-made motorbikes of inferior quality; this particular *xe ôm* was only able to afford his motorbike through a no-interest loan from a wealthier friend. Though engine size is limited by law, the size of the motorbike itself enters into the hierarchy. Guides that specialize in longer tours—and thus command a higher daily salary—have larger motorbikes with greater fuel capacity, heavier suspensions, and more room for a passenger with luggage (figure 2). Without such equipment, guides are limited to less lucrative day trips, or point to point transportation within small geographical areas.

Clear distinctions can also be made from the associations to which guides belong, both formal and informal. Formal associations, such as the original Dalat Easy Riders, provide a recognizable brand name to individual guides, and guides within the group provide referrals for each other and invite other guides to participate when they are hired by groups of tourists. These associations provide formal means for guides to build relationships, complete with standards for reciprocation and rules for cost sharing. Guides in groups traditionally share rooms and swap interpretive duties at consecutive stops. Mutual assistance can extend outside of formal groups, however, particularly in the case of referrals. Guides frequently recommend friends and acquaintances to tourists who are travelling outside of their location. Guides with greater networks of acquaintances outside of their area will potentially receive more referrals and net more business. Coupled with language ability, the ability to build and maintain networks—a significant source of social capital (Dahles 1999a, van Gemert, Genugten, and Dahles 1999)—is one of the main predictors for success in the industry. The hierarchy rewards those who are better endowed with both physical capital, in the form of up-to-date equipment, and social and

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2a. Traffic scene in Hanoi. The motorbikes depicted are representative of the bikes that many Vietnamese use for commuting.

2b. Motorbikes of a size and weight typical for touring.

2c. The author, with guide, on a touring motorbike.†

Figure 2. Commuting and Touring Motorbikes

† Photo Diane Fenwick

cultural capital, including strong English-language ability, well-developed networks of associates, and above all a keen ability to anticipate tourists' desires.

Interpretation

The study group— *xe ôm chơ tây*—is defined by more than just superficial contact with foreign tourists; they are actively involved in interpreting their surroundings to tourists, thereby building and reinforcing their environment as a product for tourists' consumption. At its heart, tourism is an act of consumption, socially defined and subject to cultural and economic forces (Britton 1991, Rojek 1985, 1993, Squire 1994, Shaw and Williams 2002). A tour is a transaction, and by entering into this transactive relationship guides perform an integral part of the tourism economy. The act of interpretation contributes to a narrative that includes Vietnam's landscape, its people, and even the guides themselves. Interpretation reveals the place-making power of tour guides, encouraging the formation of a Vietnamese identity that melds the geographical imaginary of tourists with the real geography of Vietnam. Furthermore, the institutions they build affect the Vietnamese economic landscape, subtly altering the trajectory of economic transition in Vietnam. These two categories—institutional change and tourism production—form the substance of the analysis that follows.

Significance

This research contributes to academic understandings of regions that experience rapid economic changes associated with globalization. These issues include post-socialist economic transition, the workings of informal economies, and the phases of entrepreneurial development. This research also has implications beyond its academic merit. Understanding these broader

issues and how changes at global and national scales filter down to individual actors—and how adaptations at local scales in turn affect processes at larger scales—is necessary to promote equitable economic development. It is not sufficient to simply change the macroeconomic structures of transitioning countries to meet developmental goals. Institutions that connect individuals to the larger economy, such as banks, regulatory agencies, legal institutions, and business federations, must be established and/or improved. This research explores the connections of individuals to these important institutions, and how actors form alternate institutions. Finally, this work addresses deficiencies in international tourism as a tool for development. Many scholars note the problems that prevent tourism from enriching host populations, including excessive external leakages—money that leaves the host population through profit expropriation and demand for foreign inputs—and isolation from local economies (Britton 1991, Shaw and Williams 2002).[9] These studies note that policies that encourage the growth of domestic tourism services are likely to increase the benefits of tourism for local populations.

This study contributes to the discipline of geography by examining the adaptations of individuals to changing economic circumstances. It is important to recognize the interaction between actors and their environment, and how structure and agency mutually affect each other. Too often economic development and transition are treated as inexorable processes that take place beyond the influence of individuals; in this understanding people are subject to larger forces and have little power to shape their economic environment, particularly where more powerful external forces are enmeshed at the local scale. Geographers are increasingly aware

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[9] External leakages refers to money flowing into an economy, through international tourism in this case, that is then re-directed outside of that economy through demands for outside products and through profits for foreign corporations. External leakages undermine one argument for tourism as a tool of economic development, namely that it is a good source of foreign exchange. See Chapter 2 for a more complete discussion.

that this understanding is incomplete. Individuals have freedom and self-determination, and they can influence social and economic structures, frequently in creative and unexpected ways. Human geographical research should demonstrate how social and economic structures affect people and, in turn, how people shape the economy. Heidi Dahles, in her examination of small-scale tourism enterprise in Indonesia, voices this concern eloquently, arguing for

> a theoretical framework that integrates the analysis of political and economic structures and an understanding of cultural context with a concept of human agency. Such a model should enable individual action (the innovating risk-taking entrepreneur) to be related to the macroeconomic processes that constitute development. Implications for the analysis of small-scale enterprise in the context of capital relations are to approach entrepreneurs as reasoning actors and not just as reactors (1999a: 14).

This study will place individual behavior within structural change by qualitatively examining the actions of actors as responses to transitional pressures in a small, but dynamic, sector of the Vietnamese tourism economy.

Chapter 1B.   Political Economy of Vietnam

The businesses discussed in the previous section represent a snapshot of what is possible in contemporary Vietnam.   Economic transition is a dynamic and fluctuating process; new possibilities arise as individuals form new associations and take part in new economic activities. Motorbike tour guides are part of a distinct industry with unique characteristics, but they are enmeshed in larger structural forces in Vietnam.   In this section I will discuss the political economy in contemporary Vietnam, and the position of the country within the transitional process.   I will begin by discussing the competing and often intertwining regimes under which Vietnam operated over the course of the twentieth century, capitalism and socialism.   The contemporary transition is a continuation of economic modernization that builds on an increasingly outward looking economy.   In order to better understand this economic transition, however, we must take the history of Vietnam into consideration, particularly the legacy of the American War.   The conflict reflected and reinforced deep divisions in Vietnamese society between north and south, and these fissures were carried over into the post-reunification period. I will briefly outline some historical circumstances that have implications for many guides in this study.   Thereafter I will discuss the political process of reform in Vietnam, *Doi Moi* (economic renovation).   I will then introduce issues related to modern institutions and their influence on the political-economic transition.   Finally I will discuss the effects of political and economic reform on the growth of tourism in Vietnam.

Economic Modernization

There are many difficulties in describing economic change as "modernization." Modernization implies a teleological movement from "primitive" to "advanced," and too often this has meant imposing exogenous economic systems on local systems, frequently to the disadvantage of local populations. Teleological understandings predict that modernization is an inevitable process, one that will eventually overtake traditional lifestyles. Conservatism, however, is as common as radical change, and the two exist in tension. Modernization is neither inevitable nor, often times, even preferable (see Inglehart and Baker 2000 for a discussion of modernization and traditional values). At risk of repeating the conceptual error of the inevitability of modernization, I will use the term to describe the process of historical change in Vietnam that contributed to the contemporary economy. Fundamentally this describes the change from a largely village economy, where the vast majority of economic activity happened locally, to today's multiple-sector economy with strands reaching across oceans and continents (Van Arkadie and Mallon 2003, Jamieson 1993). During the colonial period this meant re-orienting the productive capacity of the country to the needs of a mercantilist system. During the socialist period, modernization meant bolstering a centrally-planned economy internationally aligned with other socialist states, principally the Soviet Union. In the contemporary period, modernization has meant opening Vietnam to increased flows of capital, goods, and people— including tourists—that we collectively (if not chaotically) call "globalization."

Competing Modernities

Vietnam's colonial origins extend back to the seventeenth century, when French Catholics established missions in Vietnam. In an often-repeated narrative, Europeans extended their

involvement in the country through increased trade, by military interference in internal politics, and finally through the establishment of a formal political entity, *Indochine française*, in 1887. Native resistance to colonization culminated in the Viet Minh victory over French forces in 1954, and the Geneva Convention of the same year formalized France's exit from Vietnam.[10]

The preceding colonial period disrupted traditional Vietnamese society. According to Jamieson (1993), the French colonial period arrived during a particularly conservative period in Vietnamese society. The rapid and nearly absolute defeat shocked the Vietnamese, leading many to question the efficacy of their leadership and their institutions. In a matter of decades, many Vietnamese embraced western institutions more vigorously. Jamieson writes, "Growing numbers of people were forced to conclude that only by mastering Western culture and its secrets could the nations of the East become the equal of Western nations" (1993, 56). Though village life continued as it had for generations in rural areas, many cosmopolitan Vietnamese embraced foreign culture, including western-style education and political institutions. Western political theory also grew in popularity. In the early twentieth century many of Vietnam's future leaders became enamored by Marxist thought.[11] The nationalist and independence movement swept up many of these forward-thinkers. They believed that independence could mean a return to pre-colonial systems, but it could also provide an opportunity to move toward modern social and economic systems that, while foreign in origin, had an explicitly Vietnamese character.

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[10] The Viet Minh was a collection of nationalist groups that came together to drive the French out of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh, the first leader of an independent North Vietnam, came out of the Viet Minh movement, as did many of the other military and political leaders of North Vietnam (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam).

[11] Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the communist North after the French defeat, like many other young Vietnamese, spent time abroad in the early part of the twentieth century. He famously worked as a baker in New York, a waiter in London, and he was a student in Paris. He lived a bohemian life, initially becoming exposed to communist ideology through other students. While in Paris, he wrote several of the nationalist elegies that are now venerated in Vietnam.

Socialism offered an alternative form of modernity that promised to return control of Vietnam to the Vietnamese.

Not all Vietnamese nationalists were communists. The period up to and following the anti-colonial movement was fluid; Vietnamese nationalists contended with each other to determine what political and economic system should succeed French colonialism. Geographically, the ideological divisions ran between North and South Vietnam, a division that was formalized by the 1954 Geneva Convention that established a political boundary along the 17th parallel.[12] Free elections were mandated by the Geneva Accords to follow in 1956, but these never occurred due to the growth of hostilities between North and South. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (in the north), aligned with the Soviet Union, represented a socialist competitor to the Unites States' ally, the Republic of Vietnam, in the south. Communist insurrection in the South and aggression from the North led to increased US military involvement, escalating in 1965 with the arrival of thousands of US troops. The nationalist conflict was scaled up to become a theater in the Cold War, and American support of the South led to a drawn-out conflict that brutalized the nation for the next twenty years. US involvement peaked in 1968, and steadily declined until withdrawal in 1973. Lacking support from the US, the South was quickly overrun by the North, culminating in the fall of Saigon (later renamed Ho Chi Minh City) in 1975 (see Maclear 1981; for a history of the war prior to American involvement, see Lawrence and Logevall 2007). With the collapse of the South's last independent government, Vietnam was unified under a socialist government, becoming the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976 (Fforde and de Vylder 1996).

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[12] This separation led to the migration of many Catholics and pro-western Vietnamese from north to south due to anti-religious and anti-imperialist socialist doctrine. Philippe's family, the guide from the opening vignette, was among those who left the north after the end of French occupation. Jamieson (1993) estimates that 850,000 to 900,000 people moved in all.

The war shaped the economic and political regimes in North and South Vietnam and reflected deep cultural differences between the two regions. Jamieson (1993) describes how ecological differences between the North and South promoted social divisions. The majority of the population is distributed in two regions, the Red River Delta in the North and the Mekong Delta in the South. The Red River Delta region is more prone to ecological disturbance, such as floods and droughts, damaging typhoons and crop failures. Jamieson writes, "as a result, the local culture has emphasized the subordination of the individual to collective discipline of family and village" (1993, 5). The Mekong Delta, by contrast, is a much more reliable source of water and produces higher agricultural yields due to its favorable climate, "generating differences in cultural emphases and social organization between the two core regions of Vietnam" (1993, 5). The author continues:

> Life has been easier and more secure in the southern third of Vietnam, and the harsh discipline found in the north has always been considerably moderated there. Southern villages have always been more open, less corporate, more tolerant of individual initiative and cultural heterodoxy (1993, 5).

These historical-geographical differences are reflected in contemporary attitudes. Many of the guides with whom I spoke expressed mistrust of northerners, and disliked their social manner. "They are too impatient" they may say, "and unfriendly." The Lonely Planet guidebook even makes a similar observation. "Ask a southerner what they think of northerners and they'll say they have a 'hard face,' that they are too serious and don't know how to have fun. Ask a northerner what they think of southerners and they will say they are too superficial, obsessed by business and, well, bling" (Ray et al. 2007, 350).

These cultural and social divisions were exacerbated by the history of the war, and by the events that followed. Planners from the North initially intended to annex South Vietnam over the course of several years, allowing the widely divergent institutions and culture to gradually

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converge (Jamieson 1993, Duiker 1989). However, the rapid and absolute victory of the North over the South changed these plans. Jamieson writes:

> To born-again Communists . . . the heterodoxy, the degree of individualism and freedom of thought and expression to which the people of South Vietnam had grown accustomed, was anathema. The "corrupted" culture of the south was an obstacle to progress. The aging Communist leaders believed they possessed a privileged insight into the future. They had power. Surely they would not lack the will to act upon their convictions (1993, 361).

Duiker (1989) elaborates on the triumphalism of North Vietnam: "Power must be consolidated over the South, and remnants of the opposition eliminated. . . . A new revolutionary program must be drafted to broaden the base of support for the new order. South and North must be reunified and prepared for the final advance to socialism" (1989, 4). The North found itself in complete control, and they had the initiative (and indeed the need given the dissolution of the Republic of Vietnam) to remake society in a socialist manner.

Many southerners feared reprisals, but by most accounts the predicted "bloodbath" did not occur.[13] There were certainly "show trials" of former South Vietnamese officials, and executions, but large-scale reprisal never occurred as feared. In addition to economic upheaval, however, the new unified government instituted highly disruptive policies in the form of "re-education" camps and mass movements of the population.[14] Jamieson (1993) estimates that more than one million people were ordered to report to these camps. Often they were kept

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[13] Nguyen Van Canh disputes this assertion. He discusses several instances of "secret liquidations" that took place in villages surrounding Saigon (later Ho Chi Minh City). He collected these accounts from southern refugees from Vietnam to the US and Australia following the war (Nguyen 1983, 125).

[14] The opening of new agricultural territory, dubbed "New Economic Zones" by the government, was meant to rapidly convert unproductive land to more productive uses. Practically, this involved moving people from the lowlands to the less fertile highlands, and in some cases moving hill tribes into other unpopulated places (often with disastrous ecological effects). In many cases, northerners were moved into the southern highlands (see Jamieson 1993, 365-366 for more information). One guide pointed out a village beneath Dalat (in the Southern Highlands) that he said was created for northerners after the war. Another guide lamented the growing population in the Central Highlands, mostly composed of northerners. He said they were ruining a landscape that was not meant to hold so many people.

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indefinitely. Jamieson writes, "For hundreds of thousands of intellectuals, religious leaders, politicians, people who had worked with or for the Americans, soldiers and civil servants, 'reeducation' meant years of hard manual labor on starvation rations" (1993, 364). After release from these camps, most southerners were unable to find work in the professions for which they were trained. Nguyen (1983) writes, "The so-called reunification of Vietnam was in fact a conquest of the South by the North. . . . Even at the lower administration levels, northerners were appointed to almost all positions of power and influence" (1983, 111). The new government was in effect an occupation, and southerners lost the right to influence their country through official channels (though we will see that informal means to shape the nation remained available to many Vietnamese).[15]

Doi Moi

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and its post-1976 successor, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, were established as socialist states that incorporated authoritarian principles of central economic planning. The state dictated production of resources in order to meet developmental goals, including agricultural quotas, industrial output, and foreign trade. Laws limited private ownership and restrained individuals from entering into private economic arrangements. Today the Vietnamese government defines Vietnam as a "Socialist-oriented Market Economy," characterized by a growing private sector, massive amounts of foreign direct investment, and export-led economic growth (Radio Voice of Vietnam 2003). The reform

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[15] Many of the participants in this study also described exclusion from career opportunities and a loss of self-determination. For a more complete discussion, see Chapter 5.

process that guided this transition, called *Doi Moi* (renovation), began shortly after reunification and accelerated in the 1980s.[16]

Traditional understanding of economic transition in Vietnam emphasizes the top-down effects of policy changes by the Vietnamese government. Economists Adam Fforde and Stefan de Vylder complicate this interpretation. They identify separate stages in the Vietnamese transition process, including a "fence breaking" (*phá rào*) period and a formal transition period.[17] The authors differentiate these categories into, respectively, "an informal (i.e., illegal) system [in the late 1970s] and a formal (i.e., legal) transitional model [beginning in the 1980s]," (Fforde and de Vylder 1996, 39, parentheses in original). This distinction creates a more nuanced and complex understanding of Vietnamese economic transition by framing popular action as the primary catalyst for change. The tradition of "fence breaking" also establishes the informal economy as an important means for the Vietnamese to address structural problems in the formal economy.[18] The authors describe transition in Vietnam as "reform from below," brought about by the unplanned actions of individuals outside of the formal economy. These actions in turn led to the legally-sanctioned expansion of market-oriented activities (Fforde and de Vylder 1996, Freeman 1996, Lloyd 2003, Irvin 1995, Fahey 1997). In this sense, the cumulative actions of individuals outside of the formal economy were more responsible for changing the economic landscape than the government policies that eventually followed.

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[16] The Sixth Party Congress in 1986 marked the commitment of the Vietnamese government to widespread reform; as such, this date is often used to denote the turning point in Vietnam's political economy.

[17] "Fence breaking" is a commonly used metaphor for autonomous transactions that began to increase in frequency as the centrally-planned economy broke down in the late 1970s. These activities include transactions between factories and suppliers that circumvented the state, as well as localized activity such as illegal produce markets.

[18] Schneider (2002) defines the informal economy as activities that produce unreported income. The author further divides the informal economy into illicit activities, such as drug distribution and prostitution, and activities that are outside of the established formal legal framework but otherwise lawful. This study will commonly refer to tourism services that fall into the latter category.

Doi Moi punctuated Vietnam's changing political and economic character. Market-led socialism, since the 1980s, has fundamentally increased Vietnam's economic involvement with the global economy through increased foreign-direct investment, increased trade, and increased direct transactions through such activities as international tourism. The clear trend evident in the Vietnamese economy reflects our previous use of the term modernization—an outward looking growth trend. Though Vietnam has rejected certain aspects of modernity offered through socialism, such as collective agriculture and centrally-planned production, it has wholly embraced economic modernization in the form of global capital. Vietnam is now a major producer of raw materials and manufactured goods sold on the world market, and foreign capital—along with foreign tourists bearing foreign exchange—flow into the country in amounts that would astound an observer from twenty-five years earlier (figures 3—5).

Institutional Development

For many Vietnamese, economic modernization has meant fundamental changes in employment and in lifestyle. Vast numbers of Vietnamese are moving from the agricultural sector into manufacturing and services (figure 6). The period since *Doi Moi* has coincided with huge increases in productivity and in personal income: food shortages in the early 1980s have transformed into vast surpluses that feed a large export market; population has exploded, as have cities bursting with rural migrants; reformed property laws allow some individuals to amass large fortunes, while more people move into the middle class. The amount and variety of economic activity in Vietnam require institutions that meet the needs of a complex modern economy.

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Gross Domestic Product

Absolute and per Capita

Figure 3. Gross Domestic Product

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators Database

Indicators of Trade Growth

Figure 4. Indicators of Trade Growth

Source:
† International Monetary Fund, World Development Indicators Database
‡ World Bank, World Development Indicators Database

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Foreign Direct Investment, net inflows
(BoP, current USD in millions)

Figure 5. Foreign Direct Investment

Employment by Sector

■ Employment in Services ■ Empoyment in Industry ■ Employment in Agriculture

Figure 6. Employment by Sector

Schools are necessary to train the workforce; legal systems must ensure property rights and legal obligations while also protecting the population; redistributive systems, such as social security and public healthcare, are required in place of large family structures and subsistence agricultural economies; and finally, a fair tax structure must fund all of these expensive modern institutions. Vietnam has made some strides in all of these areas. Literacy rates are high, 93.9% for males and 86.9% for females (CIA World Factbook); modern healthcare is available (though not universally, and often at great cost to the patient); and authority, in the form of police and government representatives, is held firmly in the hands of the state (for better or for worse).

Modern institutions, such as those listed above, fill specific roles as the population increases and means of production shift, from predominately agricultural/rural to urban populations engaging in service-provision and manufacturing. But certain regulatory and normative institutions are specific to market-based production regimes. Legal systems enforce contracts, banks provide capital, labor organizations preserve workers' rights, and firms with market experience build a competitive environment. One common debate among economists regarding economic transition is the preferability of building these institutions *de novo*, if they were completely absent prior to reform, or from the remnants of previous institutions (Koslowski 1992, MacMillan 1995). Often, it is argued, institutions are harder to reform than build from scratch because of resistance to change and institutional "path dependence."[19]

But one essential characteristic of the Vietnamese socialists system—prior to reform— was its inability to assert meaningful institutional control. Fforde and de Vylder (1996) call the

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[19] Path dependence is a fundamental concept in evolutionary economics (Nelson and Winter 1982, see MacKinnon et al. 2007 for a review of evolutionary economics in economic geography). Path dependence in this study is meant to describe the difficulty to overcome institutionalized behavior in critical institutions. Róna-Kas writes, "Social change is impossible without altering the social structure. The social structure, however, suffers from a massive case of inertia. Because of these recalcitrant structures, changes proceed sluggishly and unfold in unforeseen and unintended ways" (1997, 120).

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Vietnamese government following reunification (in 1975) a "weak" state, unable to enforce its economic policies and impose its will on the vast, geographically dispersed population. Van Arkadie and Mallon identify this as one of the sources of Vietnam's growth since reform. The authors write,

> One difficulty in interpreting that period and subsequent developments is to judge how far apparent weaknesses were also hidden strengths. . . . Evidently it was (and remained) true that there was a large gap between the state's pretensions to manage the economy through central planning and implement a Soviet-style industrialisation [sic] strategy and the degree to which a logic of autonomous action and initiative operated, even within the state-"controlled" sector. . . . The foundations of a 'strong economy' were being laid unintentionally, both in that the gigantism of Soviet-style industrialisation [sic] was avoided and that there was a high degree of practical autonomy within local units (2003, 41-42).

Though the state sponsored certain industries, and to this day promotes would-be monopolies in many industries such as tourism, Vietnam did not have firmly entrenched, behemoth state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that could pose as obstacles to reform. The pre-reform system also allowed for autonomous decision-making, which would in turn become useful as Vietnamese developed institutions to function in the growing market economy following reform.

Again we may consider different forms of economic institutions—regulatory represented by the state and normative and cognitive institutions embodied by individual groups of economic actors. The first category includes market-supporting institutions, while the latter includes individual firms and entrepreneurs that engage in diverse economic activity. Observers have pointed out that market-supporting institutions in Vietnam do not function as effectively as a contemporary market economy requires. Despite this fact, however, Vietnam's economy has grown remarkably throughout the reform period (MacMillan and Woodruff 2002). Van Arkadie

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and Mallon explain this growth by pointing to the quality of human capital in Vietnam and the ability for individual actors to take risks in the economic sector.[20] The authors write:

> Institutions performed well because of the use Vietnamese have made of them. The high quality of human capital and its importance is readily observable in Viet Nam in the facility with which so many actors in the economy—from farmers, to businessmen and state officials—have demonstrated entrepreneurial flair in grasping economic opportunities (2003, 33)

Just as in the previous discussion of the roots of economic transition in Vietnam, analysis of the continuing growth of the Vietnamese economy can find firm rooting in the creative and adaptive behaviors of individual entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial organizations.

Tourism in Transition

In the last two decades, tourism has become a significant source of revenue in Vietnam, earning nearly 4 billion USD in 2008 from an estimated 4 million international arrivals (World Bank 2011). As the Vietnamese government became more committed to a market economy, tourism development became central in its growth strategy. In 1994, the US government lifted its embargo on Vietnam. Policies within the Vietnamese government changed, allowing greater movement of tourists. In 1995 the National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) released the *Master Plan of Vietnam Tourism Development Period 1995-2010*, with the following goals: "1) To develop the tourism industry into a spearhead economic sector of the country; 2) Step by step to turn Vietnam into a considerable center of tourism, trade and service in the region; and 3) By the year 2020, Vietnam will be one of the leading countries in tourism in the region" (quoted in

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[20] The authors readily admit the difficulty of using human capital and entrepreneurship as explanatory variables because of the imprecision of the evidence. Qualities of entrepreneurship are difficult to measure and predict. The authors also caution that "such observations can often be little more than *ex post* rationalisation [sic] of observed performance based on anecdotal evidence, and is sometimes no more than ethnic prejudice" (Van Arkadie and Mallon 2003, 35).

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Asian Tour 2011). Figures for yearly tourist arrivals and estimates for tourism expenditures in Vietnam have increased steadily from 1995 to the present (figure 7). VNAT now lists multiple projects on their website with a total of hundreds of millions of dollars of announced investment (table 1). The Vietnamese government clearly sees tourism as an engine of economic growth in their outward-looking market economy.

But Lloyd (2003) notes ambivalence on the part of the government about tourism integration in Vietnam. Like many other developing economies, Vietnam is more interested in large scale, highly capitalized developments that isolate tourists in specialized enclaves (Scheyvens 2002, Hampton 1998, 2003, Dahles 1999b). Guides in this case study discussed periodic restrictions on their freedom of movement with tourists.[21] These restrictions impose considerable barriers on small-scale entrepreneurs whose success is pivotal to the growth of the Vietnamese economy. If access to tourists is limited by the government, small-scale entrepreneurs could suffer as a result. Vietnam has a large array of petty enterprises that offer services to foreign tourists, demonstrating the zeal with which actors in the country have adapted to the market of foreign tourists. The continued development and growth of this sector in the Vietnamese economy demonstrate the power of individual actors to help shape the economy, and could also contribute to continued market growth in Vietnam.

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[21] This is particularly true in situations involving ethnic minorities. Local governments are frequently suspicious of contact between foreigners and minority populations. According to the guides with whom I spoke, many minority tribes are embroiled in disputes over land rights, and the Vietnamese government may be fearful that outside rights organizations could fan the flames of discontent. This topic will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Figure 7. Tourism Indicators

Source: World Tourism Organization World Development Indicators Database
† Data not available prior to 2003
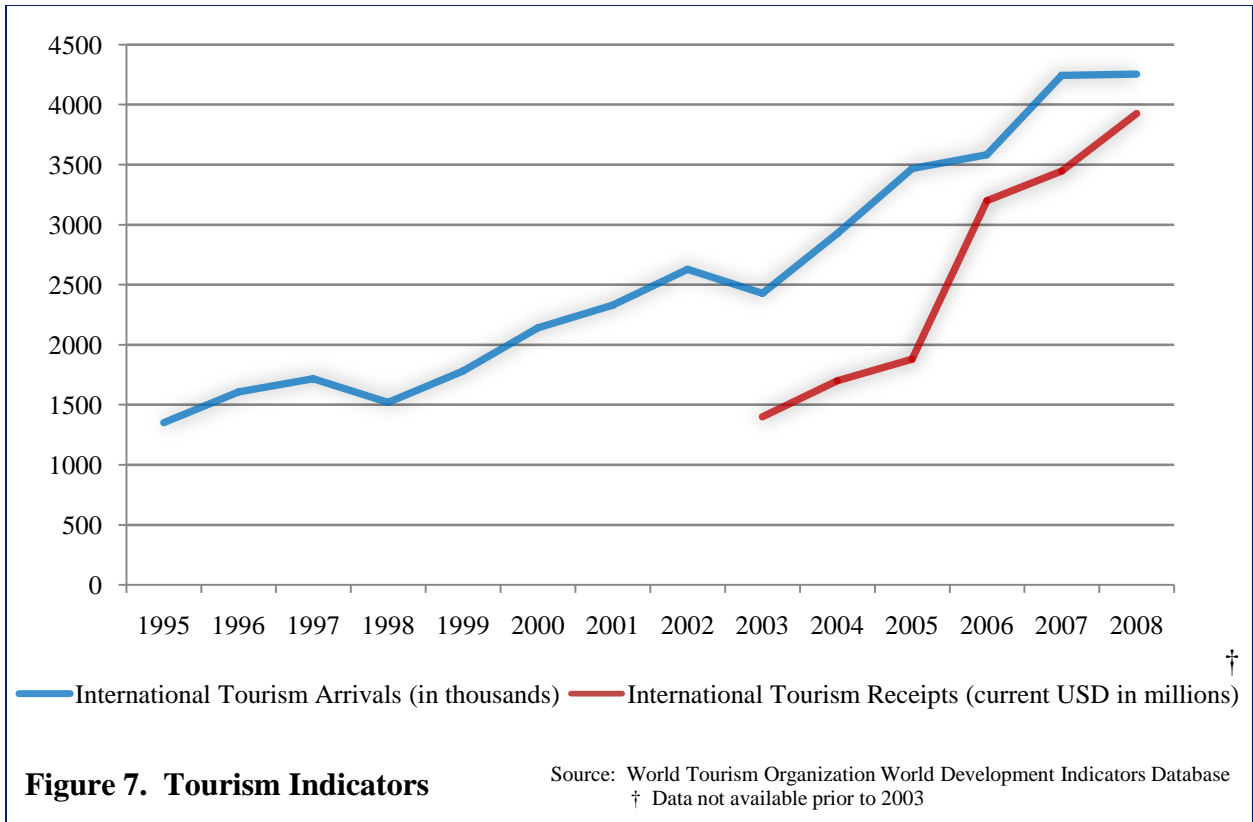
Table 1. Investment in Tourism Infrastructure †

Name	Location	Announcement Date	Firms	Investment Capital
Marina	Danang (coastal)	2/16/2011	VinaCapital & Local Firm	174 million USD
Courtyard by Marriot-Ham Tan Resort	Phan Thiet (coastal)	10/28/2010	Saigon-Ham Tan	143 million USD
Oceanami Resort and Luxury Home	Phuoc Hai (coastal)	9/28/2010	Hoa Anh Dao Tourist JSC	55 million USD
Grand Plaza	Hanoi	9/28/2010	Charmvit (Korea)	NA
Mercure Sontra Resort	Danang	9/6/2010	Sai Gon General Service JSC	20 million USD
Trung Hoi Resort	Nhon Ly-Cat Tien (coastal)	8/26/2010	Trung Hoi Tourist Co., Ltd	108 million USD
Petroland Tay Ninh Hotel	Tay Ninh	8/13/2010	Potrocapital &Infrastructure Investment JSC	1.4 million USD
Le Meridien Danang Resort and Spa	Danang	5/5/2010	Saigon-Da Nang Investment JSC	110 million USD

† The projects listed above are just a sample of projects announced over the course of the last year. One government summary of tourism investment had this to say about tourism foreign direct investment:

> The Ministry of Planning and Investment reported that the amount of investment in entertainment has increased sharply, particularly in the south. A total of 121 entertainment FDI projects with a combined registered capital of 3.5 billion USD, were started in the first five months of this year [2010], representing almost half of the country's FDI, said the ministry (VNAT 2010).

Chapter 2.   Literature Review

This study addresses the growth of small tourism businesses in Vietnam. Scholars have produced a rich variety of literature on tourism in developing countries (Britton 1982, 1991, Freitag 1994, Simpson and Wall 1999, Wang and Wall 2005, Shaw and Williams 2002, Ioannides 1995) and on small-scale tourism development (Wilson 1997, Hampton 1998, 2003; Scheyvens 2002, Dahles 1999a, 1999b, ter Steege, Stam, and Bras 1999). But economic development in Vietnam cannot be discussed without including the destabilizing and transformative effects of economic transition. Some works specifically address international tourism in transitional economies (Lloyd 2003, Worthington 2001, Ateljevic and Doorne 2003, Szivas and Riley 1999). However, in order to gain a more complete understanding of research on this topic, and due to the vastness of the literature involved, it may be better to approach tourism development and economic transition as distinct topics. Thereafter we can identify the areas in which the two fields intersect and the areas that demand further research. The following literature review will first survey the literature related to tourism and development and then discuss core issues related to economic transition. Finally, I will explain how these fields will be combined in the research that follows.

INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

Many scholars have studied the dynamics of international tourism in developing economies (Britton 1982, 1990, Freitag 1994, Simpson and Wall 1999, Wang and Wall 2005, Wilson 1997, Hampton 1998, 2003, Scheyvens 2002, Dahles 1999a, 1999b). Their work raises an important question about tourism's potential for economic development in underdeveloped

countries: What sort of development does tourism provide, and for whom? Many of these studies find that tourism development, as it is practiced in underdeveloped economies, has as much destructive as creative potential. The following review will first discuss critiques of mass tourism development, followed by research that demonstrates how small-scale, independent tourism may improve tourism's effect on local economies. This is significant for the research that follows; the businesses from this case study are precisely the type of small-scale, locally-owned businesses that promote local participation in the tourism economy. We will then review theoretical explanations for the growth of independent tourism under capitalism. The literature demonstrates that independent tourism contributes to the expansion of the global "pleasure periphery" (Turner and Ash 1975) while creating new tourism products for consumption.[22] Finally, I will discuss literature related to the role of the informal economy in tourism development.

Tourism and Economic Development

Following the mid-century growth in leisure consumption and air travel, planners and academics viewed tourism—rather uncritically—as a positive tool for economic development. Resort developments in locations such as the Caribbean and the South Pacific satisfied demands from cosmopolitan travelers for "exotic" destinations and a perceived need to invest in lagging economies. Policy makers and many academics viewed tourism development as a promising method for economic growth in less-developed countries (Ioannides 1995). During the early 1960s, many international organizations—including the World Bank, the United Nations

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[22] The "pleasure periphery" refers to areas, often in poorer countries, at the frontier of tourism expansion. The term "periphery" refers to dependency theory, as part of the core-periphery dynamic between wealthy, metropolitan economies and outside, underdeveloped economies. See Wallerstein (1976) for a more thorough discussion of dependency theory.

Development Program, and the Inter-American Development Bank—sponsored programs to provide loans and support to tourism development in less-developed countries.[23] Geographer Stephen Britton was among the earlier critics of tourism as a tool for development. Britton (1982, 1991) built a critical theory of tourism development in less-developed economies that draws on dependency theory of capital relations between core metropolitan economies and peripheral countries. Britton conceptualizes dependency as "a process of historical conditioning which alters the internal functioning of economic and social sub-systems within an underdeveloped country," resulting in "the simultaneous disintegration of an indigenous economy and its reorientation to serve the needs of exigenous [sic] markets" (Britton 1982, 333). According to Britton, the tourism industry shares tendencies with global capital towards spatial assimilation and capital accumulation. Resorts transform destinations into standardized consumption products, meeting socialized expectations for leisure (the Four-S model: Sun, Sand, Sea and Surf). Mass market tourism developments often appropriate space and resources—often in collusion with local elites—from host populations and frequently offer far less meaningful local economic development than promised.

The bogeyman for Britton and other critics is the resort—a highly controlled environment designed to maximize the profit potential of a location. Resorts become, in effect, tourism enclaves separated from local economies. These enclaves are likely controlled by multi-national corporations that are able to capture tourism expenditures. The result is a loss of foreign exchange, or "leakages," that originate from demands for capital-intensive infrastructure investment and foreign inputs, and continue as foreign firms siphon profits from the host

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[23] By the late 1970s, however, these organizations were less optimistic about tourism's development potential and, citing the failure of projects to meet expectations, the World Bank dissolved its tourism department in the early 1980s (Ioannides 1995, 237-238).

economy. The promises of economic development through tourism—a market for local products, gains in foreign exchange, employment opportunities—are diminished to a few low-wage, menial jobs for locals. Several empirical works address the consequences of enclave development (Freitag 1994, Simpson and Wall 1999, Wang and Wall 2005), observing the negative externalities of tourism enclave development. These authors observe that where resort development fails, and where many other types of mass tourism fall short, is that they neglect to take local needs into account. Locals are often excluded from ownership, management, and in the worst cases, from any form of input.

Milne and Ateljevic (2001) find fault in Britton's original critique of tourism development by pointing out that local actors *can* have a profound influence on tourism development. "Dependency theory" the authors write, "is often accused of being 'obsessed by the global level, and the world system' (Corbridge 1986), therefore ignoring the possibility that what occurs within a nation/region may be just as important as those influences that originate outside its boundaries" (Milne and Ateljevic 2001, 375). Decision-making capacity need not exclusively lie in the hands of foreign corporations and local elites. The authors argue that locals can influence tourism development. "Local government, industries and individuals can exert some degree of control over their own destinies. . . . Both frameworks [dependency and modernization theory] fail to consider the possibility that by empowering locals to have input into development plans, the deteriorating cycle of evolution might be minimized or avoided" (Milne and Ateljevic 2001, 375).

For these reasons, many researchers suggest that independent market tourism (such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, low-budget tourism, and backpacking) may be more beneficial to local residents. These authors advocate access to tourists for local populations. Wilson (1997)

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studied small independent businesses in Goa, India, and concludes that these offer a better, or perhaps simply less destructive, form of tourism development when compared to mass-market resorts. Hampton (1998, 2003) examines empirical evidence from Lombok and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and draws a similar conclusion regarding backpacker tourism. He compares small-scale, local businesses to mass-market tourism on the basis of several criteria, including foreign exchange earnings, employment, linkages with other productive industries, and opportunities for local ownership and participation. His findings indicate that businesses that cater to independent tourists can offset the negative effects of mass-market tourism. Scheyvens (2002) notes that, though many governments in least developed countries ignore or discourage backpackers in favor of mass-market destination development, these travelers may ultimately present a more reliable and balanced development opportunity. Smaller scale, independent tourism provides locals with improved access to the market of foreign tourists, therefore increasing tourism's potential for more equitable development. These works illustrate the need for more detailed empirical work on the links between tourists and local entrepreneurs.

Tourism and Consumption

Mass-market tourism and independent tourism are differentiated by more than just scale. John Urry (1990, 1995) describes a cultural shift in leisure and travel that firmly establishes boundaries between mass- and independent tourism. An important element of Urry's formulation is the separation of the collective gaze and the romantic gaze. The collective gaze assumes membership in a group; sharing experience is essential to the experience. Travel to designated tourist locations and participation in certain leisure activities signify membership in a preferred class of consumers. Seaside resorts and cruise ships explicitly fit into this category.

The romantic gaze, on the other hand, places "emphasis . . . . upon solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze" (Urry 1990, 45). These preferences are built into different forms of consumption, what Urry calls the "dialectic of novelty and insatiability at the heart of contemporary consumerism" (Urry 1990, 13). The romantic gaze is to a degree antithetical to the collective gaze; it places higher value on unique and inimitable experience, increasing participants' store of cultural capital.

Changing patterns of consumption in tourism mirror larger changes from Fordist mass consumption to post-Fordist consumption (Urry 1990, Harvey 1989). Mass consumption limits choice and offers products less differentiated by changing tastes and fashions. Post-Fordist production, on the other hand, demands that producers pay more attention to the tastes of consumers, resulting in higher degree of variety and choice available to consumers. Post-modern patterns of consumption have created a larger service class and a "new petit bourgeoisie," who possess more in terms of cultural capital than real capital. This condition creates new approaches to pleasure that place a higher demand on novelty and experience. Preference for independent touristic experiences reflects this demand.

The search for novelty in global tourism has a spatial effect, noted in Turner and Ash's (1975) work *The Golden Hordes: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery*, and reflected in Butler's (1980) formulation of the tourism destination life cycle. As locations increase in popularity, tourism "pioneers" establish new locations in an ever-expanding frontier of global tourism. This phenomenon has meaningful implications for Vietnam, a country only recently opened to foreign tourists. But changes in cultural economy also affect the types of activities that are suitable for tourism consumption. The romantic gaze seeks out new vistas to settle upon and activities in which to participate. For pioneers in tourism—those who Cohen

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(1979) described as "experiential, experimental, and existential tourists," indulging the "romantic gaze" (Urry 1990)—any facet of daily life in "exotic" locations can be a product for consumption. Tourism, in this sense, is a search for authenticity (MacCannell 1976). This search for authentic, and unique, experience will profoundly affect the ways that entrepreneurs in tourism craft and market their services.[24] Demand for authenticity gives local service providers very real comparative advantage over outside firms, though we will see that presenting tourists with "authentic" experiences necessarily involves a great deal of interpretation and some uncertainty.

Informal Economy in Tourism

The studies mentioned thus far have considered small-scale, independent enterprises as a tool for locally-responsive economic development. Questions remain regarding the strategies and interactions that determine the success and sustainability of this type of business. A common theme in the literature is the presence of a pervasive informal economy for small-scale tourism service providers. Wahnschafft (1982) and Timothy and Wall (1997) examine the dual economy created by formal and informal divisions in tourism enterprises to learn about the possibility for successful entrepreneurial growth. The authors observed drastically different government and entrepreneurial relations in Pattaya, Thailand, and Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Government intervention greatly determined the outcome; state policies in Thailand discouraged informal businesses while Indonesian officials tacitly supported informal activities.

Dahles (1999a, 1999b) also examines the dual economy—formal and informal businesses—in tourism. Specifically, she discusses Indonesian tourism policy as a conflicted

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[24] Chapter 5 will explore these themes in greater detail.

and often contradictory response to the informal economy. She notes a liberalizing tendency in national policy on tourism development, while regulations against small informal entrepreneurs increase at the local scale. She writes:

> Although in the modernization paradigm small entrepreneurship may flourish in the early stages of capitalist development, it will soon be absorbed by large-scale business agglomerations. Small-scale businesses surviving under these circumstances are regarded as an obstacle rather than a vigorous force in tourism development. In that case, governments are characterized by an overtly antiparticipatory attitude: local participation in general, and business initiatives of small-scale entrepreneurs in particular, do not meet with supportive policies. Instead, governments often counter deregulatory measures at the top with more regulation and control below. Although deregulation facilitates large-scale and transnational investments, the petty business sector is subdued to formalization (Dahles 1999a, 5).

But, according to Dahles, the capitalist system does not absorb the informal economy; both formal and informal elements exist side-by-side (the afore-mentioned "dual economy"). This is an important observation as many entrepreneurial businesses in the developing world operate outside of the formal, mainstream economy. And as we have seen, small-scale, independent (and often informal) tourism services, in theory, provide better opportunities for local control. In Vietnam, the dual economy is an especially important topic for research as the nation is in the early stages of capitalist development.[25] The following section will explain how economic transition in Vietnam—from a command economy to a largely market-based economy—adds additional layers of complexity to our analysis.

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[25] Lincoln (2008) underscores Vietnam's tenuous position *vis a vis* the informal economy in her examination of the state's attempts to limit and regulate street food vending in Hanoi. "Street vending, as a particularly visible part of the informal sector, lies on the fault line between contradictory impulses in a newly capitalist country with a fast-growing GDP. The Vietnamese state's attempt to limit the geographic presence of street vendors is an attempt to reconcile the entrepreneurial energies of petty traders with the city's desire to appear attractive and 'modern' for foreign visitors" (2008, 265). She goes on to say that street vending appears to be "little interrupted" by the new regulations, demonstrating the resiliency of the informal market in Vietnam.

ECONOMIC TRANSITION—POST-SOCIALIST CHANGE

The following section reviews work on economic transition, beginning with a broad discussion of what transition means and how it has been accomplished in Vietnam. We will then explore theories on institutional change and how these theories partially explain transition in Vietnam. Finally we will explore a category of actors that are, arguably, the most important agents of transition: entrepreneurs, and specifically to Vietnam, micro-entrepreneurs.

Transition in Theory

Social scientists frequently argue about the nature of economic transition. Planners and economists have studied the emergence of market characteristics in command economies since the fall of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc satellite states, but specific aspects of economic transition remain in contention. Arguments about market transition often hinge on absolutes; economists are more prone to make bold, prescriptive statements about market transition than many other social scientists. Economists and political scientists often explain economic transition as the result of policies, a top-down approach that emphasizes actions of the state to regulate economic activity. Many western economists simply regard economic transition as a capitulation of socialist ideology to market capitalism.[26] They argue that post-socialist growth relies on the successful transmission of market ideology to transitioning countries. They debate whether governments should adopt a "Big Bang" approach to transition—like the Soviet Union—or whether socialist countries should proceed cautiously, "crossing the river while

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[26] Francis Fukuyama called the demise of communism in eastern Europe the "End of History," a much maligned phrase that sums up the triumphal attitude of market theorists. Fukuyama's (1989) paper is a bit more nuanced; at worst he seems guilty of historicism. But his blend of history, culture and economics is interesting, provocative reading.

feeling for the rocks,"[27] the so-called "gradualist" approach adopted by China and Vietnam (Wei 1997). They debate what is most important: changing macroeconomic structures or improving institutional and behavioral structures in the transitional country (Roland 2002). Is massive privatization optimal for economic transition (Brada 1996, Frydman et al. 1999)? Is political liberalization necessary (Fidrmuc 2003)? What is the root cause of economic transition: governmental *dictat* or cultural and social change (de Melo et al. 2001, Fforde and de Vylder 1996)?

But other lines of argument recognize that economic transition usually involves blending older forms of central planning and newer market behaviors. Smith and Pickles (1998) emphasize "actually existing transitions," counter to proponents of a neo-liberal transition model (Smith and Pickles 1998, 10).[28] "Actually existing transitions"—transitions as they occur outside of academic models—have resulted in a variety of economic forms. Scholars have called the different forms and outcomes of this process "hybrid" capitalism, "recombinant" capitalism, or "Third Way" economic systems (Watts 1998, Fahey 1997). Countries in these categories do not fit the duality of socialism and capitalism that political economists have assumed for decades. In these cases, it is difficult to separate the state from the private sector, and the actual operation of the economy confounds neo-liberal ideals of free markets and *laissez-faire* regulation. In the case of Vietnam, transition has resulted in a system that rebuffs simple binomial classification into a free market or a command economy, and the state and private

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[27] This phrase is attributed to Deng Xiaoping, the premier of the Chinese Communist Party during the Reform and Opening period in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is interpreted as taking cautious steps to reform the economy rather than bold strokes.

[28] Sometimes called the "Washington Consensus," the neo-liberal model for transition is predicated on privatizing state companies, liberalizing market forces, and macro-economic stabilization (Naim 2000). Critics argue that this leads to too many internal disruptions, and that a "one size fits all" conception of economic reform ignores local contexts (Smith and Pickles 1998).

sector are often difficult to distinguish (Gillen 2010). A Vietnamese official bewilderingly characterizes the Vietnamese economy as a "socialist-oriented multi-sectoral economy driven by the state-regulated market mechanism" (Watts 1998, 450). Clearly the changes in the Vietnamese economy have not resulted in a pure market economy.

If the outcome of Vietnamese economic transition is not easily explained by economic theory, this may reflect the outcome of a process carried out largely beyond the guidance of the central government. Fforde and de Vylder (1996) identify a spontaneous, unplanned character in the Vietnamese transition, less distinguished by a government program than by historical process. Even prior to *Doi Moi*, a dual economy existed, labeled by the authors as plan-market duality (1996, 3). On one end of the duality was the neo-Stalinist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) model, and on the other the transition model, which allowed limited market activity. The DRV model, which included agricultural collectivization and strong central control of the economy, failed to provide adequate resources for the population. Food production was limited (due in no small part to damage from the War), and economic re-growth lagged (Van Arkadie and Mallon 2003). This resulted in "fence breaking," or what the authors term "reform from below" (Fforde and de Vylder 1996, 12), which in turn fueled economic transition. Central planning requires a well-organized and powerful state. Fforde and de Vylder, however, characterize the DRV as a "weak state", unable to enforce its policies across the irregular and locally-oriented geography of Vietnam.[29] Power was concentrated regionally in the various provinces and not centrally in the national government. As a result, farmers and factory

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[29] Vietnam's physical geography—a long, thin country with large metropoles at either end—complicates centralized administration. The cultural differences, discussed earlier, exacerbate this difficulty, with the result that local governments often have much more power than the central government. (Though it is debatable whether any country can exercise effective central planning without a large institutional and infrastructural system. Japan, for instance, has a deeply-enmeshed bureaucracy and island geography in addition to a culture that emphasizes obedience. These factors contribute to a highly coordinated economy).

operators could manage their surplus through local arrangements. (This raises the question of how high these "fences" actually were). By many measures the Vietnamese economy underwent economic transition long before the government recognized market growth as official policy.

This is particularly true in the South, which had a long tradition of market capitalism only briefly interrupted between annexation to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1975 and prior to the initiation of reforms in 1986. Earlier I noted the cultural differences between North and South Vietnam, one significant difference being commercial culture. Recall that North Vietnam had a communist system in place since the mid-1950s. South Vietnam, by comparison, had a thriving market system strengthened by the frenetic wartime economy. The South was forcibly converted to communism after the war, but elements of the market economy—such as "fence breaking" discussed above—persisted in the South. Geographer Donald Freeman (1996) describes a well-established informal market economy that thrived in the South, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City. Local communist cadres primarily enforced sanctions against medium- and large-scale businesses; small-scale and petty enterprises were largely ignored and remained active. But this political-economic shift, which mandated a quick conversion to state ownership, created "dislocation in the centrally controlled economy that made the unregulated household and petty-enterprise sectors all the more crucial" (Freeman 1996, 189). The net loss in efficiency and productivity created demand for basic necessities that were met by extra-legal enterprises. The growth of the informal sector during the late 1970s and early 1980s demonstrated the economic potential in Vietnam. The informal sector essentially rendered economic liberalization a *fait accompli*, which was eventually formalized by *Doi Moi*. Freeman continues, "Without the existence of well-organized economic and logistical structures at the grassroots level, *Doi Moi*

might have produced not a sudden, successful economic boom but economic chaos, like that which overtook the former Soviet Union after perestroika" (Freeman 1996, 193).

While there is general consensus among academics on what "economic transition" means, there is little agreement on how or why it occurs, how governments and markets adapt to transition, or what successful transition will actually mean for a country. In the case of Vietnam, the government has embraced market reforms while resisting political reform, but elements of public ownership persist (Van Arkadie and Mallon 2003). The Vietnamese system is an uneasy mixture of public and private ownership, a market system with a command-economy hangover that—for lack of a better descriptor—is summed up as "market socialism" (Fahey 1997). What is clear, and what the above works demonstrate, is that Vietnam has a long tradition of popular action outside of strictly circumscribed political boundaries, beginning with "fence-breaking" during the socialist period and continuing to the current informal economy. These forms of popular challenge have had a direct effect on Vietnamese institutions in ways that will be explained in the following section.

Institutional Change

In order to fully understand economic transition in Vietnam we must understand how institutions in Vietnam transition and continue to change. Scott (1995) defines institutions as "cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior" (quoted in Droege and Johnson 2007). Institutions, both formal and informal, connect the individual to larger social and economic structures, and they are themselves the building blocks of those structures. The continuity of the informal economy throughout Vietnam's transitions and counter-transitions is equivalent to continuity in local institutions that

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shape the Vietnamese economy. Regulatory structures—political institutions, legal systems, and production regimes—changed through conflict and reform, but social norms (normative institutions) and patterns of behavior (cognitive institutions) proved more resilient to regulatory challenges and more fluid in uncertain circumstances. The traditional village economy (as a normative and cognitive institution) continued throughout the post-colonial period; other institutions (such as informal markets) demonstrated more fluidity, or elasticity, than regulatory institutions by their ability to adapt to social needs. Black markets provided necessary goods that were relatively unobtainable through formal means due to underproduction and currency inflation; at the same time traditional economies—subsistence agriculture and barter—met the needs of rural dwellers (Freeman 1996).

But a better understanding of the complexities of transitional economies requires a more complete conception of how institutions undergo—or resist—change. Droege and Johnson (2007) propose the concept of meso-institutions. These are weak institutions that arise after the destabilization of previous institutions, and precede the formation of more enduring institutions.[30] Meso-institutions, though themselves weak and prone to alteration, succeed discredited and ignored institutions and lay the groundwork for future, more permanent institutional structures. The authors posit three stages: 1) *fractured ideology*, in which prior and accepted institutional forms are de-legitimized; 2) *actions as rules*, including a broad range of experimentation—often using the remnants of previous institutional forms—outside of formal or

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[30] "Meso" in this conception is meant to imply an intermediate form, as opposed to a scalar form such as a regional or sectoral scale (see Helmsing 2001). Interestingly, another use of the term from evolutionary economics has analytical value for this study. Dopfer, Foster, and Potts (2004) propose a meso-analytical framework for tracking change within an economy; the meso-level (generic rules of action) is where innovations and learning from the micro-level (individuals and firms) inform and alter the macro-level (industries and economies). To avoid confusion, this study will exclusively discuss meso-institutions as intermediate structures and activities, as defined by Droege and Johnson (2007).

accepted practice; and 3) *retrospective legitimation*, meaning the *post hoc* acceptance, through regulation, of institutional forms that are deemed useful. The authors illustrate their theory with a case study of rural Chinese township and village enterprises (TVEs) that sprung from communal agriculture and coexisted with early private-sector formulations. The authors label this a "dual-track economy" (Droege and Johnson 2007, 91), echoing Fforde and de Vylder (1996). In these cases, there was no formal policy of how TVEs should develop, but experimentation was either tacitly or formally encouraged. "Institutional guidance took a backseat to experimental action. Using actions as rules to subsequently guide institutional development ultimately created effective institutions by allowing the reality of organizational actions to serve as a template for effective institutional structures" (Droege and Johnson 2007, 95).

Droege and Johnson (2007) firmly place actors at the center of their analysis. As institutions gradually lose their authority and utility, actors experiment with new forms of organized behavior, reflected in the authors' formulation of "actions as rules." The authors elaborate:

> Meso-institutions encourage *bricolage*, the process of recombining elements of old institutions to craft new institutional solutions (Campbell 1997, 2004), but they also allow room for innovation to allow actors to craft entirely new institutional structures that may or may not contain remnants of past institutions. *Actor action becomes a key feature of meso-institutions*, or what Campbell (2004) calls *actor entrepreneurship*. These social actors must learn to abide by changing, amorphous and often conflicting rules . . . (Droege and Johnson 2007, 83, italics mine).

Though the authors use empirical evidence from China to explain their theory of meso-institutions, the similarities between Chinese and Vietnamese economic transition encourage comparison. The theory of meso-institutions explains in part the spontaneous characteristic of economic transition in Vietnam identified by Fforde and de Vylder (1996) and the widespread

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petty enterprise in Ho Chi Minh City described by Freeman (1996). *Doi Moi* can be understood as a "retrospective legitimation" of these actor-led processes of change. Experimentation with new institutional forms that meso-institutions allow may help explain why Vietnam has experienced sustained market growth despite the lack of formal market-supporting institutions (McMillan and Woodruff 2002, Van Arkadie and Mallon 2003).

We must be careful, however, to avoid the assumption that meso-institutional change will necessarily lead to more stable, enduring institutional forms. Droege and Johnson (2007) add that institutional experimentation potentially leads to chaos, with social groups interpreting rules in different ways (Droege and Johnson 2007, 88). They admit potential detrimental outcomes, such as the normalization of bureaucratic corruption in one of the districts within their study area (Droege and Johnson 2007, 93). Other persistent, prior institutional forms can become a source of conflict. As we have seen in Vietnam, for instance—as a legacy of state ownership—public and private sectors are often difficult to disentangle. The strong, formerly socialist state sector shares an uneasy coexistence with the budding private sector (Gillen 2010). Lloyds' (2003) study of the growth of small-scale, privately owned traveler cafes in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City found that they were subject to erratic treatment from the government, sometimes left alone and at other times subject to stringent regulation. The owners often encountered competition from state-owned enterprises that attempted to profit from a novel, though proven source of income. Furthermore, exogenous forces interfere with institutional formation in transitioning economies, complicating our understanding of institutional development. Many economic institutions in Vietnam have grown in response to the increasingly globalized economy, including export-oriented firms, foreign partnerships, and, of course, tourism services. New

institutional forms respond to these external processes, and these institutions are to a degree shaped by demand from outside.

The Role of Entrepreneurs

A study that places actors at the center of social and economic changes in Vietnam helps to understand changing institutional and structural patterns. Entrepreneurs—individuals who actively experiment and build new institutional forms—reveal the variety of experimental forms that take place in a transitional context. Scholars argue that the nature of entrepreneurship in transitional economies must be fully understood in order to gauge the pace and the success of economic transition (Berkowitz and Dejong 2001, Peng 2006, Smallbone and Welter 2001). McMillan and Woodruff (2002) note the centrality of entrepreneurship in Vietnam's transition, particularly the positive effect on net employment of private sector small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the remarkable growth in the Vietnamese economy in the period following reform. This is particularly noteworthy given the significant lack of market-supporting institutions such as banks that are willing to lend to private companies, credit-reporting bureaus, and courts that enforce contracts (McMillan and Woodruff 2002, 155). Entrepreneurs in the private sector built and reinforced relationships within networks to make up for the lack of formal institutional assistance. The authors write, "Large parts of the new market economy arose spontaneously, through the initiatives of entrepreneurs. They succeeded by self-help: they built for themselves substitutes for the missing institutions" (McMillan and Woodruff 2002, 154).

Many studies suggest that scale is an important consideration in successful entrepreneurship. As previously noted, SMEs have been the driver of change throughout the transition process; we must also consider micro-enterprises in this discussion. Micro-enterprises

are distinct from SMEs by scale because a single person or a family operates a micro-enterprise. Rarely do they require the management and coordination of SMEs. Micro-enterprises are frequently informal because they allow greater ease of entry than formal operations and their activities tend to fill smaller niches—such as food vendors and mechanics—than larger, formal businesses (Hipsher 2010). Development experts often consider micro-enterprises as a potentially positive tool for small-scale development, and literature about the merits of micro-credit is steadily increasing (Mead and Liedholm 1998). Micro-enterprises are particularly important in Vietnam. One study estimates that, in 2006, micro-enterprises comprised approximately fifty-six percent of total businesses (Thai and Ngoc 2010).[31] Studies have addressed the response of micro-entrepreneurs in Vietnam to changing institutional practices and structural patterns using a meso-institutional framework (Tran 2010), though few have specifically looked at the ways in which micro-entrepreneurs build and maintain the institutions under the often-chaotic conditions of economic transition.

The tourism industry in other transitional countries reveals economic dynamics that have implications for Vietnam and for this research. Worthington (2001) sees the service sector, specifically tourism, as a catalyst for transition in Estonia. Services were an overlooked sector in most socialist countries as central planners often preferred to emphasize industrial and agricultural means of production. New economic activities, such as tourism services, build momentum and offer alternatives to state investment and management (Worthington 2001, 390). One recurring institution found in the literature is the informal economy, or black market. While emphasizing characteristics such as resourcefulness, adaptability, and culture integrity, Ateljevic

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[31] Given the informal nature of many micro-enterprises, these numbers can be called into question. Significant undercounting is possible, though the authors may have compensated for this error through some interpolative technique. The study does not specify the methods that the authors used to create their estimate.

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and Doorne (2003) discuss the legacy of state intervention in Croatia and its enduring effects on entrepreneurial tourism enterprises. Referring to informal or black market tourism accommodation, the authors write "[these practices were] paradoxically underpinned by the system of public ownership, which ensured the absence of individual accountability, provided political protectionism and privileges, and consequently eroded any sense of the public good" (Ateljevic and Doorne 2003, 136). These attitudes contributed to cynicism towards formal institutions, and led to greater reliance on "personal economies and social networks" (2003, 142). Szivas and Riley (1999) study tourism employment in Hungary during economic transition. The authors assert that the existence of the black market is essential for economic transition, and tourism entrepreneurship is part of this process (Szivas and Riley 1999, 752).

Economic transition "happens" in the institutions that contribute to the social and economic life of a country, and in institutions that form and grow in response to market opportunities. These institutions can be described as "meso-institutions," or organizations and patterns of action that bridge the previous command economy and the burgeoning market economy (Droege and Johnson 2007). Many of these institutions are composed of individuals engaged in entrepreneurial action, often improvising and innovating in the process. Within the range of institutions that are developing in a newly marketized economy, micro-enterprises and informal enterprises are manifestations of the entrepreneurial spirit that is leading Vietnamese transition. Their success or failure, given the political and economic constraints, is a good measure of the strength of Vietnam's growing market economy.

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Further Research

The above literature review demonstrates the importance of understanding small-scale tourism entrepreneurship as a tool for development, particularly given the fragmentation of the market for global tourism and the growing popularity of independent tourism. At the same time we see that individual actors—entrepreneurs and micro-entrepreneurs—are essential in the process of economic transition in Vietnam. The two processes—tourism development and economic transition—are embodied in individual, risk-taking and creative entrepreneurs. Their strategies are an important field of study; through their actions, we can discern characteristics about entrepreneurial adaptation and the structures in which they are situated. To better understand tourism development and economic transition, we can ask the following questions: What institutions do tourism entrepreneurs build and how do they interact with other institutions that govern economic activity in contemporary Vietnam? What products do they create given the expectations of foreign tourists? How do they fit into the meta-narrative of globalization that attempts to rationalize economic convergence and normalize the internationalization of leisure?

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Chapter 3. Methods

The findings of this project are based on a case study of motorbike enterprises in Vietnam. Bradshaw and Stratford define a case as a specific example of general processes that can be theorized (2005, 69). A case study allows theory to be developed inductively, and established theories can be tested under specific circumstances. The purpose of a case study is not to narrow the scope of geographic research to ideographic description, but rather to observe and understand how larger processes affect conditions at a local level, and how those local actors and institutions influence larger scales. The purpose of case study research is to study processes at different scales, from macro to micro, and *vice versa*. Eyles (1988) emphasizes the need to focus on specific places to enhance our understanding and explanation of larger forces. Citing the method of "thick description" pioneered by Clifford Geertz, Eyles emphasizes the need to "grasp the complexities of context and the significance of local knowledge" ultimately leading to improvement of theoretical understanding (1988, 3).

I used in-depth interviews and observation as the primary means to collect data. These methods reflect an intensive research agenda that explains behavior in greater detail (Bradshaw and Stratford 2005). This case study attempts to explain broadly described behavior by intensively studying specific circumstances. Bradshaw and Stratford write, "We need to establish what actors do in a case, why they behave as they do, and what produces change both in actors and in the contexts in which they are located" (2005, 69).

Rather than choosing a representative sample of tour guides and determining a valid number of interviews, case study logic proceeds sequentially. Each interview provides increasing clarity, and information provided by interview subjects shape questions for

subsequent interviews. The object is to reach saturation, when no new material is gained from further interviews (Smalls 2009). Far from providing statistical inference, a case study looks for logical or causal inference, and hypotheses must be evaluated by logical connection (Mitchell 1983, cited in Smalls 2009). We can determine by statistical means, for instance, that the informal economy forms a large portion of the total economy in Vietnam, but a case study can reveal institutional obstacles that fuel the informal economy. The data that I collected from interviews provide insight into the effects of structural change on actors in Vietnam.

I used unstructured and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix). The questions addressed how the participants became involved in tourism, how they operate their businesses, and how they have responded to institutional obstacles. The interviews had a funnel-like structure, beginning with the history of the business and moving toward questions that address adaptation to changing economic conditions. This interview method has the advantage of establishing and building rapport with informants. Beginning with more general questions allowed me to discern their interest level and how willing they would be to discuss further topics in more detail. These questions allowed participants to become more comfortable with me as an interviewer (see Dunn 2005 for a more detailed discussion of interview structure). I compiled a list of questions prior to the beginning of the fieldwork research and I refined questions after each interview. This method allowed me to proceed inductively, changing questions and foci as new information informed my original questions. I did not strictly follow these questions as in a formal interview, but they served as a guide for discussion. I often allowed informants to determine the course of the conversation, both to build trust and to allow unanticipated

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information and topics to surface.[32] This method allowed informants to shape the direction of the interview while still keeping the topic within the boundaries of the research project.

Cultural and Institutional Considerations

While conducting interviews, I was very aware of cultural and institutional barriers to effective communication with research participants. Cultural barriers can prevent effective communication because the interviewer may be unable to understand the many subtleties involved in communication; it is entirely possible to unknowingly offend interviewees without some understanding of cultural conventions for communication. I consulted research about cultural differences in communication prior to the fieldwork phase of this research. Hofstede (1984, 2001) provides an empirical framework for analyzing cultural determinates for communication, establishing the following categories: 1) Power distance, 2) Uncertainty avoidance, 3) Individualism, 4) Masculinity, 5) Time orientation, and 6) Indulgence versus restraint. These characteristics are arranged on a spectrum, from high uncertainty avoidance to low, and more indulgent to more restrained, and so on. Kohl (2007) uses Hofstede's framework to identify characteristics of Vietnam that have strong bearing on communication. She finds that Vietnamese have a higher power distance, a higher level of long-term orientation, and lower levels of individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance than Americans. Harrison and Lassen (2005) call this raft of characteristics a form of "Confucian dynamism," or "group

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[32] This method provided valuable information. I was reluctant to broach the topic of governmental corruption, but after a seemingly routine traffic stop, I was treated to a lengthy discussion of petty corruption in Vietnam. Another topic that I did not anticipate was the amount of anxiety that entrepreneurs have as a result of the transition to a service and manufacturing economy from a predominately rural economy. (I will discuss these topics in more detail in the conclusion.) These are topics that I would either be to reluctant to broach or unaware of their importance to this study.

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orientation, respect for hierarchy, the concept of face, avoidance of conflict and confrontation, the importance of relationships, and the need for harmony" (2005, 55, quoted in Kohl 2007).

For this research, I needed to pay particular attention to building relationships and establishing rapport. These are, of course, important considerations for any method of data collection involving human subjects. But in particular, I learned that a brusque or abrupt manner would not earn me any useful information. Kohl calls Vietnam a "high-context culture"— nonverbal signals and indirectness indicate respect, whereas in our own "low-context culture," directness is more valued (2007, 4). Going right to the point during interviews would damage rapport; I approached my participants respectfully, allowing time to establish rapport and to allow their stories to be heard. Typically, my periods of interviews and observation lasted for multiple days; this allowed me to collect a large amount of observational data and to build rapport with participants to elicit more and richer information. Kohl cites a Vietnamese phrase, "If you want good tasting food, then boil it well" (2007, 3).

But there are significant institutional barriers to effective fieldwork in Vietnam. Scott, Miller, and Lloyd (2006), three researchers who have participated in extensive periods of fieldwork in Vietnam, discuss the difficulties in navigating the various institutions that can potentially prevent a researcher from gathering his or her data. Official permission to conduct research proceeds in a hierarchical pattern, from officials at the top of bureaucracies and government agencies to local individuals. The authors note that obtaining official approval and support from a local institution in Vietnam can often be difficult, and that research can be misdirected through interference from intermediaries. They point out that local research "assistants" will often direct researchers only to subjects that will support the official party narrative. The authors write:

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> People were reluctant to talk about everyday practices that may run counter to given policies or social norms. Of course, everyone knew that disputed practices existed, but to openly acknowledge these strategies of resistance and their incongruity with official discourses or norms was generally not viewed as appropriate in general [sic], and certainly not as an appropriate topic for research (Scott, Miller, and Lloyd 2006, 33).[33]

This possibility posed risks to my research as practices that run counter to the norm, such as the informal economy, are precisely the type of information that I was researching.[34] By being aware of these obstacles prior to initiating fieldwork research, I was able to avoid potential difficulties.

As a tourist myself, I was able to evaluate tourism strategies as they relate to foreign tourists in Vietnam. I focused primarily on strategies that the guides used and how they interpreted and explained their activities; as a participant I was able to see these strategies in practice and learn through observation how participants approached their work. Indeed, taking positionality into account, I could not escape the attitude and approach of a tourist. By not assuming the attitude of an impartial observer, I was able to discern how guide and tourist together construct meaning.

Given these factors—coupled with cultural preferences for trust in communication—I decided not to record interviews on a digital voice recorder. Recording interviews would have had a chilling effect on participants. I also wished to discourage the perception among participants that their interview could pose a risk to them. Instead I typed field notes on a

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[33] Interestingly, the authors note greater willingness to contradict official narratives among southerners than northerners and in the Kinh ethnic majority. "While in the north people tend to be more reluctant to express their criticism of State policy, southerners are known to be more frank. . . . Moreover, some people astutely saw the research interview as a chance to express their criticism (an expression of their resistance)" (Scott, Miller, and Lloyd 2006, 33). The research participants in my study were almost exclusively southern, and they, too, were quite willing to discuss matters in ways that ran counter to officially accepted dogma.

[34] The authors describe their relationships with Vietnamese institutions that sponsor their research as the "political economy of research." Many universities and research institutions are underfunded in Vietnam, and research collaboration often comes with a price tag. Collaboration with Vietnamese researchers would likely have posed an additional burden on this research.

computer at the end of each day, and I recorded specific quotes by hand. This allowed me to digest the conversations and observations of that day and it helped me to synthesize the day's experiences. These journal-type entries enabled me to discern themes and adjust research questions. In effect, this method started my analysis while still in the field.

I used a variety of methods to recruit research participants. In a previous trip to Vietnam, in January 2008, I established contact with a pair of guides who work as Dalat Easy Riders. These guides introduced me to the industry, and they became the first group from which I chose participants. Thereafter I used a snowball sampling method, based on recommendations of prior interviewees, and an opportunistic sampling method. Most tourism districts in Vietnamese cities are rather small; guides typically patrol a limited area to look for potential customers. Upon arrival in a new city, potential interview subjects usually approached me almost immediately. Allowing them to initiate their sales pitch, I gained information about their business and whether they would be useful participants in this study. The interviews and observations typically proceeded during daylong or multiple-day tours,[35] in some cases as much as ten days. These lengthy periods of observations were mainly reserved for key informants, those participants who proved the most articulate and knowledgeable about their profession. (Table 3) I chose participants based on time spent in the profession, overall knowledge of the tourism industry, and, of course, willingness to discuss the circumstances in which their businesses operate. Participants were selected from a range of businesses, some with high levels of formalization that use sophisticated marketing procedures and centralized administration, and some with lower

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[35] I was aware that the client relationship could pose ethical problems in the research process. I especially wanted to avoid the perception among potential participants that their income was somehow dependent on their willingness to participate or that they were required to provide information that they would be normally reluctant to share. To avoid this perception, I negotiated daily rates for tours prior to introducing my research project. After a price was agreed, I explained the purpose of the project and I informed them about their rights as participants. Furthermore, I primarily gathered information through observation, which did not require potentially intrusive questioning.

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Table 2. Participant Information.

Guide	Occupation/Affiliation	Location	Period of Observation
Nhât	*Xe Ôm*	Ho Chi Minh City	2 days
Lộc	Proprietor	Dalat	1 day
Phuoc	Dalat Easy Rider	Dalat	3 days
Paul	Dalat Easy Rider	Dalat	3 days
Suong	Employee—Day Tour	Dalat	2 days
Philippe	Dalat Easy Rider	Dalat	10 days
Trọng	Dalat Easy Rider	Dalat	10 days
Hien	Dalat Easy Rider	Dalat	1 day
Liem	*Xe Ôm*	Hanoi	2 days
Thao	Proprietor	Tam Coc	1 day
Nhất	*Xe Ôm/Cyclo*	Hue	2 days
Nam	Employee—Day Tour	Hue	1 day
Rot	Proprietor	Hue	2 days
Vụong	Employee—Day Tour	Hoi An	1 day
Danh	Proprietor	Hoi An	3 days
Peter	Vietnam Easy Rider	Dalat	3 days

levels of formalization. This range allowed me to observe a variety of motorbike enterprises, from the least formal to more highly formalized businesses. During two months of fieldwork research, I travelled approximately 2,000 miles by motorbike, and covered nearly the full length of Vietnam, from Can Tho in the Mekong Delta to Lao Cai, on the Chinese border.

Following fieldwork, I coded my daily field notes by subject. I then arranged this coded data into analytical categories suggested by Anselm Strauss, one of the founders of grounded theory: conditions, interactions among actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences (Strauss and Corbin 1990, quoted in Cope 2005). Grounded theory is an inductive approach to research that allows theory to grow from empirical data, or as Herbert states, "order should emerge *from* the field rather than be imposed *on* the field," (2000, 552, italics in original). This approach

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allowed me to examine the data more objectively, without an excess of preconceived theoretical notions. I found that the informal economy operated differently than I previously imagined. In particular I found that market institutions function across a range of varying complexities—from informal to formal, highly organized to mostly improvised. These findings are important because they reveal a greater degree of complexity in the dual economy than scholars often assume. I also discovered that guides pay a great amount of attention to the purposeful construction of meaning for tourists. Their interpretation of the landscape, of Vietnam's history, and of their own lives is an appealing, and somewhat unique, product for tourists.

Chapter 4.   Institutional Formation

Institutional (Business) Types

      Motorbike guide services are one of many private-sector businesses that have grown in Vietnam during the last two decades. This growth happened despite a lack of market-supporting institutions in Vietnam following reform (McMillan and Woodruff 2002, Van Arkadie and Mallon 2003). In this section we will explore a variety of businesses forms that provide guided motorbike services. I apply the meso-institutional framework to categorize these businesses as "weak," intermediate institutional forms, or "strong" institutions (Droege and Johnson 2007, 83). Droege and Johnson (2007) use "weak" institutions as a term to describe intermediate institutional forms that grow during periods of institutional change.[36] "Weak" institutional forms retain experimental and improvisational characteristics that are typical of businesses that develop in an early market environment. "Strong" institutional forms have qualities that are more characteristic of a maturing market environment. For the purposes of comparison, I will evaluate the businesses in this study based on how authority is structured, how cooperation among guides is organized, and how competition is managed. The results suggest that weak business institutions exist beside strong institutions, despite decades of growth in the market economy. While many newer businesses adopt stronger institutional practices, weaker forms persist and even grow.

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[36] The terms "weak" and "strong" are not meant to describe the effectiveness of each organization in question, nor are the terms meant as predictors of each organization's success or failure. We will see that some businesses thrive despite a relative weak structure, and other nominally strong organizations do not fare as well in a competitive environment. See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of Droege's and Johnson's (2007) meso-institutional framework.

"WEAK" INSTITUTIONAL FORMS—DALAT EASY RIDERS

The Dalat Easy Riders are perhaps the most recognizable and well-established guide service in south-central Vietnam. Dalat is widely recognized as a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists; indeed, Dalat may be more highly valued by domestic tourists, often referred to as the "Honeymoon capitol" of Vietnam. (Based on my observation, however, Vietnamese travelers do not hire motorbike guides, preferring instead to use vans or buses. The guides from this study, aside from some *xe ôm*, cater exclusively to foreign visitors.) References to the organization begin appearing in guide books in the early 2000s,[37] and message boards on travel in Vietnam are full of descriptions of this group from the southern Central Highlands. Their name, frequently appropriated by other organizations, is even used as a generic descriptor of motorbike guide service in Vietnam. Several features of the organization, however, suggest that they are a weak institution, characteristic of experimentation in new institutions as Vietnam develops a market economy.

History

The history of the Dalat Easy Riders, established just ten years after the stated reforms of *Doi Moi*, situates their growth squarely in the period when Vietnam was openly developing its contemporary market system. Theory suggests that during this period—after the centrally-planned economy and prior to the maturation of a market-based economy—meso-institutions are likely to appear. The story of the emergence of the Dalat Easy Riders illustrates a political-economic system in flux: a group of former South Vietnamese soldiers and translators, fluent in

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[37] The home page of the Dalat Easy Riders (as best as I can tell, the original group of motorbike guides) states that they began guiding fifteen years ago, and that they first appeared in the Lonely Planet guide book in 2001. "About Dalat Easy Rider." Url: http://dalat-easyrider.com/Websites/English/aboutus.aspx Accessed March 24, 2011.

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English, began offering guide service in and around Dalat. The guides were excluded from employment opportunities in the socialist system due to their earlier involvement in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam or in South Vietnamese institutions. As English-speaking tourists began to arrive in greater numbers—after the US government lifted its trade embargo in 1994 and as the Vietnamese government relaxed restrictions on foreign travel—these formerly impoverished ex-soldiers found that their language skills and local knowledge could be a source of income.[38] While ex-soldiers from North Vietnam enjoyed comfortable pensions or secure jobs within the bureaucracy, former soldiers from the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) were left to improvise careers (see Philippe from the opening *vignette*). Tourism became one strategy among many to meet their needs. This story is difficult to verify, though I did speak with one Easy Rider who had been a translator for the US Army and with another who was formerly a member of the South Vietnamese Army. Their history reflects a narrative of revaluation of their abilities, though their personal histories are not necessarily typical of most Easy Riders. Another Easy Rider with whom I spoke had formerly been a math teacher; another was an electrician; one Easy Rider had even been a member of the communist, post-war Vietnamese military, and he had fought in Cambodia during the Vietnamese invasion in 1979.

Though the Dalat Easy Riders are now a formal organization licensed by the local government, it is not difficult to imagine their early business as largely informal, similar to many of their contemporary competitors. The history of other organizations, such as traveler cafes in Ho Chi Minh City, suggests that local governments only develop an interest in informal tourism businesses after they have proven profitable (see Lloyd 2003). The current popularity of the Dalat Easy Riders is most likely attributable to favorable reviews in *The Lonely Planet* series of

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[38] See Chapters 1b and Chapter 5 for more discussion on this topic.

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guidebooks.[39] The Easy Riders developed their service without the benefit of local market-supporting institutions such as formal training programs or strategic business services. Their business practices and internal organization likely grew through experimentation outside institutions of the centrally-planned Vietnamese economy. This in turn reflects the period in the meso-institutional theory labeled "actions as rules," the second in three stages of institutional change. "Actions as rules" describes a period when individuals formulate practices outside of accepted institutional frameworks. This period follows "fractured ideology," when accepted institutional forms lose legitimacy, and precedes "retrospective legitimation," when useful institutional practices are accepted and supported by regulatory means (Droege and Johnson 2007).[40] Relics of these experimental market behaviors can be seen in the Easy Riders' contemporary business structure and practice, which we may collectively label a "weak" organizational structure. Command and control functions are decentralized among its members, reducing strategic clarity. Though norms within the group both structure cooperation and constrain competition, fissures between members reveal weaknesses within the organization.

Structure

The Dalat Easy Riders do not appear to operate with a strict formal hierarchy, including centralized strategic and administrative authority. Rather they function as a type of collective. Informal hierarchies based on experience are somewhat apparent, though any individual's ability

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[39] It is useful to note the power that *The Lonely Planet* guidebooks have in shaping international tourism. Businesses that receive favorable reviews are almost guaranteed customers. This noteworthiness, however, often comes at the cost of imitation. This is true for the Dalat Easy Riders, whose business name has been appropriated by several competitors. Little scholarship on the *Lonely Planet* exists, but see Mercille (2005) for a discussion of the guidebook's media effect. See also Laderman (2002) for a discussion of how guide books contribute to discourses about the American War in Vietnam.

[40] See Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of Meso-Institutions.

to influence the organization is likely persuasive and non-binding.[41] The organization provides individual guides with a recognizable brand name and some general practical guidelines in return for a membership fee and a portion of each guides' income. Additionally, membership in the group provides forms of support from other members, including references and overflow business. The guides, however, are responsible for buying and maintaining their own equipment and for finding and engaging potential customers. This diffusion of essential functions to individual members—particularly marketing—allows other sub-forms of organization to develop within the business, often based on networks that are built on personal affinity and obligation. Authority, then, is built not only on institutional principles but also on often spontaneous and shifting alliances.

Growth within the group has also contributed to a partial loss of organizational identity and perhaps even strategic drift. The group has expanded its ranks considerably from the time when it was a loose association of like-minded guides. Without strong organizational principles, the group has difficulty maintaining standards of quality (see below). The Dalat Easy Riders today consists of between eighty-two and eighty-eight drivers (depending on two separate estimates by drivers with whom I spoke). The original group of guides was, of course, much smaller, but over time the group has grown (to the chagrin of several members of the group who keenly feel increased competition for customers). Guides must pay for the privilege of being an Easy Rider. Not only do they pay a licensing fee to the local government (perhaps informal payments as well) but they must also pay a portion of their income to cover administrative costs.

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[41] One senior member with whom I spoke, though judged successful by the estimation of other guides, implied that he was unable to influence the strategic direction of the group. He clearly did not like the drastic expansion, but was either unable or unwilling to change its direction. This raises the question, who is responsible for the group's strategic choices? Quite possibly the group's actions are uninfluenced by consistent leadership. Certain members may benefit from the group's expansion (see below) while the group as a whole suffers.

The Easy Riders even have an up-front fee for potential members. One guide I spoke with, who was not a member of the Easy Riders, called this "paying for the blue jacket." The Easy Riders of Dalat all wear a recognizable black and blue jacket or vest with the company's logo (figure 8). The jacket "costs" about 10 million VND (about 500 USD). Senior members may receive portions of these payments, thus creating incentive for the Easy Riders to expand their ranks through a form of patronage.[42] In essence, they may be purchasing the privilege to wear the logo, enriching more privileged members while damaging the organization as a whole by adding too many guides for the amount of business available. One clear strategic goal would be to limit the number of Easy Riders to ensure consistent business for members and to maintain quality. If, however, senior members can expect cash to expand their ranks, then the immediate incentive may be stronger than long-term strategy. The Easy Rider expansion affects interactions between members, creating tensions that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Competition and Cooperation

Membership in the Easy Riders provides significant benefits, as I noted earlier, particularly mutual assistance between guides. The formal organization coordinates individual efforts and structures cooperation. Within the formal association of Easy Riders, however, individual guides form networks that are based on preference and personal affinity. Guides frequently work with other guides, providing service to tourists in pairs and in trios, sometimes more. In these situations, guides can divide the workload and costs considerably by sharing

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[42] This seems to be a fairly common practice in Vietnam. Several participants informed me that in order to get a job one had to pay for an introduction or a recommendation for a job. These fees can be exorbitant; one participant told me it may cost 50 million VND (about $3,500) for a government job, another estimated as much as 200-300 million VND ($9,000-$14,000). Many of the Vietnamese with whom I spoke shared the assumption that this is one method that those in public (and in this case private) positions use to enrich themselves.

The author with Dalat Easy Riders†

Figure 8. Easy Rider Logos   † Photo Garry W. Shores

interpretive duties at stops and splitting hotel rooms. Additionally, guides increase the number of potential trips by forming these impromptu partnerships. When a guide includes a colleague in a group trip he may expect some form of reciprocity through inclusion in the colleague's next trip.

These forms of cooperation exclude outside guides, but they may often prevent Dalat Easy Riders from other sources of customers. Personal networks are built exclusively within the formal association of the Dalat Easy Riders; one would not expect to see an Easy Rider working with an unaffiliated guide. When I introduced a guide from a different organization to an Easy Rider with whom I had spoken, the Easy Rider said dismissively, "We don't know this guy, he's not with us." The unaffiliated guide said that the Easy Riders were not "friendly," that they resisted making any type of arrangements or alliances with other guides who are not part of their

group, even those outside of Dalat who could help extend their geographical reach. The organization forms a competitive bloc that draws a stark line between insiders and outsiders, even though strategic relationships outside of the group—perhaps in different cities—could increase opportunities to attract customers. Commonly, guides outside the organization make arrangements with hotels and guesthouses for customers in return for a kickback (they pay the hotel for access to customers). Easy Riders resist such arrangements, instead relying on their reputation.

While networks of cooperation within the organization enhance business opportunities for some, they also deepen inequalities within the group. Earlier I explained that some Easy Riders are dissatisfied with the rapid growth of the organization, which creates an increased amount of competition within the organization. Guides must find their own customers; customers are not assigned by the Easy Rider organization to equalize income. In many cases, tour guides resist sharing information about locations of interest with other Easy Riders, attempting to maintain a competitive advantage even within their own organization. Increased competition decreases opportunities to find customers, in turn building tension between the core group of Easy Riders and newer entrants into the profession who want to replicate that success.

Many older, more-established guides are also concerned about the effect of newer guides—particularly younger, less–experienced guides—on the brand identity of the Dalat Easy Riders. These younger guides are distinct from the core group of Easy Riders both in age (guides in their late twenties and early thirties) and in experience (without immediate experience of Vietnamese history). Some guides placed the number of younger guides at about half of the total guides, or approximately forty. I had a conversation with a more-experienced Easy Rider about younger guides, and, expressing doubt about their abilities, he explained "We want Easy

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Riders to be famous service!" He understood that the quality of service depended on the knowledge and experience that each guide offered. This knowledge extends beyond merely spatial information—the location of a scenic waterfall, the name of a minority tribe in a given area, or the site of an historic battle—and into personal experiences. Tourists are more interested in hiring a guide with a rich personal history, someone who embodies the history of the country, thereby providing the tourist access to that history in a more meaningful, personal manner. The guide with whom I had this conversation had been a soldier for the South Vietnamese Army. He had spent time in a re-education camp, and he had previously struggled to earn a living as a result of his political history. He eagerly shared his story (particularly when he was negotiating a longer tour), and subtly placed his personal story into the story of contemporary Vietnam. By contrast, many of the younger guides offer to "party" with their customers, and little else. This approach seemed somewhat impoverished compared to guides with richer personal histories. Older guides seem concerned that this approach will diminish the value of the Easy Riders as a quality service. The incorporation of so many younger guides without the experience and appeal suggests lack of strategic planning, leading to dilution of the Easy Rider identity.

Tensions within the organization are punctuated by instances when guides attempted to undercut other guides. When customers agree to hire a guide, they pay a deposit, typically half of the amount for the entire trip. Guides will explain that they need this money for their families, or that they will need the money for hotels along the trip. These reasons may be true, but I also discovered that the money effectively discourages competition. One younger Easy Rider attempted to lure me away from a long trip that I had scheduled with another guide. He said that I would enjoy his company more; he asserted that the older guides did not drink with their customers and do other things that younger, male tourists might enjoy. (Some guides offer more

salacious components to their tour.) He continued to suggest that I should change my plans until he learned that I had already paid a deposit. Significantly, however, he never attempted to undercut the other guide on price. Other guides from less established organizations were quick to offer a lower price to lure customers away from other guides. Though competition within the Easy Rider organization is fierce, they appear to adhere to certain unwritten guidelines.

Though the Dalat Easy Riders are perhaps the most well-known and visible operation of their kind in Vietnam, their institutional practices reveal weaknesses in the organization. Guides within the group act almost as individual entrepreneurs. They capitalize on the brand name and on certain forms of organized cooperation, but competitive strategies are very much left up to the individual, and overall strategy seems lacking. The brand name itself has increasingly questionable utility when larger numbers of less-skilled guides without the personal appeal of earlier members dilute the brand image. The Dalat Easy Riders have built a recognizable business through the appeal of individual members and recognition in travel literature, but it is unclear if the group will enjoy continued success as original members age and outside competition increases. And finally, though networking is one of the primary growth strategies for small-scale business people (ter Steege, Stam, and Bras 1999)—and though the Easy Riders likely built their organization through networking—the group seems to have closed ranks, refusing to form potentially beneficial relationships outside of their geographical area and with other businesses. The Dalat Easy Riders experimented with business practices that were novel in Vietnam during a time of transition, but their survival as the industry matures and competition increases is questionable given their weak institutional structure.

"STRONG" INSTITUTIONAL FORMS—ALTERNATIVE BUSINESS MODELS

Other businesses in Vietnam, while offering essentially the same service as Dalat Easy Riders, demonstrate very different organizational forms. To underscore the difference from "weak" institutional forms—and for lack of a better word—I will describe these as "strong" institutions. These organizations are characterized by clearer lines of authority, more sophisticated strategies, and overall higher professionalism. Many of the businesses that I observed were proprietary in nature, with individual entrepreneurs employing additional guides or contracting work to others. They often use contacts with other tourism services such as hotels to increase their business, or they broaden their range of services to include other, potentially lucrative lines of business. In many cases the proprietor had received formal training—in English, tourism, or both—reflecting increased investment in tourism training in Vietnam. In other instances, larger businesses with more resources expanded into guide services, contributing to a type of service capture.[43] In the following section, I will briefly discuss several examples of businesses that I encountered, demonstrating increasing organization among guide services.

Proprietary Businesses

Proprietary businesses—or businesses with clear ownership and operational responsibilities—that specialize in guided motorbike tours benefit from greater market development in Vietnam. A proprietary business promotes clearer lines of authority and more consistent strategy than the Easy Rider model. The proprietors with whom I spoke have a high

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[43] Service capture happens when a business that is not strictly involved in guide work adds guiding service to their repertoire, especially when it has proven profitable. Hotels and guesthouses are in the best position to capture services from outside guides. I saw no evidence of state companies that participate in motorbike guide services, though the Vietnamese government supports tourism State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) that compete with the private sector in other forms of tourist services. SOEs are more likely to participate in larger group tours. See Lloyd 2003 for a more extensive discussion of tourism SOEs in Vietnam.

degree of centralized control of their operation, and many proprietors have training in tourism and management. These proprietors freely use the success of the Dalat Easy Riders as a model for their own businesses. They adopt the substance of the Easy Rider tours—the motorbike imagery, the promise of exposure to the "real Vietnam," even the name in many cases—while streamlining the business operation to reflect the increasing professionalization of the industry.

Rot operates a tour guide business in Hue, and he has formal English-language instruction and training in tourism. He worked previously as a tour guide in Hanoi, and he has operated his business in Hue for about seven years. Rot has a business partner, and they have eight employees. I first made contact with one of Rot's employees, Nam, when we met outside a café within hours of my arrival in Hue. Nam contracted a day tour with me for the following morning, and Rot spoke with me immediately after Nam. They have clear responsibilities, with Nam concentrating on day tours, for which he earns a portion of the money that tourists pay to Rot. Rot is then able to use the day tour to market longer tours to tourists.[44] This method closely resembles the method that Dalat Easy Rider's use with the difference that Rot has established a division of labor. More routine, less lucrative day tours are relegated to employees while multiple-day tours that command a much higher price are reserved for Rot.

It appears that Rot's greatest advantage, in addition to long experience and formal instruction, is his ability to network with other local businesses and with individuals outside Hue. Rot contracts with hotels in Hue to operate tours that are booked at their reservation desks. The hotels receive a portion of the payment, the guides another, and presumably Rot takes the final cut. Rot has contacts in Hoi An, about 120 kilometers distance from Hue, that also aid his

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[44] The Dalat Easy Riders typically approach tourists by offering them a day tour around Dalat, usually for 20 USD. They promote longer tours at the end of the day trip that cost as much as 75 USD per day. Guides value the multiple-day tours more highly for the increased daily salary. In this sense the day tours are merely preliminary leg-work.

business. Rot maintains relationships with tailors in Hoi An as well as several other guides.[45] He markets tailor services to tourists going to Hoi An, while also receiving references from the tailors, possibly even collecting a commission. He recommended a guide to me for further trips and even sub-contracted a day tour to another driver (reserving a significant portion for himself). In addition to guide work, Rot seemed interested in any type of business that he could capture from foreign tourists. He even suggested that I might like to find a potential wife while taking down the name and number of a local girl who expressed interested in marrying a foreigner. (Thanking him for his consideration, I declined). He said that he had made a "few" such deals in the past.

Rot referred me to Danh when we arrived in Hoi An. Danh, working with his wife, operates out of a storefront in the tourism district in Hoi An. The storefront provides him with visibility and a greater sense of permanency. He, too, adopts the Easy Rider name and the business model, though motorbike tours are not the majority of his business. By his estimation travel booking—flights and bus tickets—contribute the most income to his business. Guide work is a second source of income. (Danh had just concluded a tour with an American war veteran and the veteran's family. In this instance Danh rented a van to provide transportation.) Like Rot, Danh took a popular tourism service and adapted its day-to-day practice to better fit a more advanced market environment. Though he freely co-opted the title Easy Rider in his advertising literature and in decals on his motorcycle, Danh saw himself more as a tourism service provider, willing to use any method to claim a portion of the vast tourism market. He

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[45] Tailor shops and custom shoe-makers—perhaps the most significant service available to tourists in Hoi An—ddeserve some recognition and would make an interesting study. One estimate placed the number of tailors at 200, in a city with an approximate population of 75,000 (Ray et al. 2007). The industry has a complex web of store fronts and back-shop tailors with networks of subcontracts and cross-ownership. Along with motorbike guide services, tailors exemplify the extent and complexity of services that cater to foreign tourists in Vietnam.

demonstrates greater market sophistication than operators such as the Dalat Easy Riders by taking advantage of a greater range of services that tourists demand. Danh was hopeful, even confident, that his service would thrive in a city that is well-known for tourism; he even named the business after his son in hope that he would someday inherit the business.

Service Capture

Another type of guide business involves service capture—when businesses not strictly involved in guide work include that service in their repertoire, especially when it has proven profitable. These businesses are often more highly-capitalized businesses—particularly hotels—that have a greater amount of financial resources than individual guides from which to draw. Perhaps the most significant resource is a location that attracts tourists, providing hotel owners with economies of scale and with easy access to potential customers. Hotel owners frequently strive to provide a wide range of services, or to arrange commissions for services that are provided by outside businesses.[46] By comparison, guides unaffiliated with hotels must approach tourists in public, where the tourists are often on guard against solicitation. In addition to guide services, hotel operators frequently offer travel booking, spa services, dining and entertainment. This type of service capture is a significant form of competition that can place guide services without equivalent capital at a great disadvantage.

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[46] The web of commissions in tourism services is truly remarkable. Taxi drivers and motorbike guides receive a commission to bring a tourist to a hotel; in return these drivers pay a commission for the business that a hotel sends to a guide. Tailors pay commissions for recommendations from hotels *and* guides. Essentially, anytime any business is sent anywhere, someone will probably receive a commission.

Immediately upon arrival in Dalat I met Loc, who had positioned himself at a bus station with a van ready to take arrivals to a local guesthouse.[47] Within minutes of arrival he was describing his day tours around Dalat, claiming special access to local minority tribes and promising lunch at his family's home. Loc had a very polished approach; he too had attended a university in Dalat where he studied English and tourism. As it turned out, he subcontracted the tour to another guide, Son (the first and only female motorbike guide that I met; by her estimation she is the only one in the entire country). She is an English student at a local university. He explained that his "cousin" would be running the tour, though neither she nor any of the other drivers were related. Loc, too, ran an operation where work is subcontracted to other guides, owners receive a cut, and hotels are better able to capture tourists' business. His effort enhanced the guesthouse's business in return for a highly-visible location and a customer base for his business.

Both of these forms of businesses—stand-alone proprietary businesses and larger-capital businesses—demonstrate a greater degree of centralized control and organization than the Dalat Easy Riders. They illustrate an overall increase in professionalism within the industry: many of these practitioners have formal training in tourism and management practice; they often invest in their businesses, such as in a storefront in a tourist section, to increase their profile; frequently they expand the amount and variety of services to diversify their income.[48] These businesses are direct beneficiaries of the increased amount of market-supporting institutions in Vietnam. They would likely not operate with such a degree of sophistication without the availability of formal

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[47] One can imagine a wide variety of situations where commissions may be expected. Loc likely had to pay to have such a good position, ready to receive tourists as they arrive. This type of rent-seeking behavior demonstrates how adept people are at finding ways to make money from relatively affluent people (namely foreign tourists).

[48] This is particularly useful during the rainy season in Vietnam. Tourism overall decreases, but motorbike tours are especially difficult to conduct due to the weather. Many guides with whom I spoke expressed concern about this loss of business, and they doubled their efforts during the peak tourism period to compensate for their looming loss.

training programs and capital. They stand in contrast to the Dalat Easy Riders, who started as a loose association of guides and continue to operate without strict organizational principles. But they also benefit from the pioneering work of organizations like the Dalat Easy Riders. These businesses built upon experimental enterprises to create standardized business operations, with the benefit of having observed the success of the Dalat Easy Riders. Finally, however, I should stress that many guides participate in both loose networks and more highly formalized associations. Though Easy Riders often resist formal arrangements outside of their group, they are not blind and deaf to opportunities provided by expanding their knowledge and contacts. Similarly, business owners make spontaneous judgements about business opportunities, (illustrated by Rot's decision to subcontract his day's obligation to another guide) that reflect a suppleness in response to shifting circumstances and percieved advantage. Though many guide businesses are increasingly structured and formal, they cannot ignore the informal networks across which they operate.

PERSISTENCE OF "WEAK" FORMS

The discussion so far suggests a pattern that can be partially explained by meso-institutional theory: organizations (e.g. the Dalat Easy Riders) experiment with new economic actions (i.e. "meso-institutions") during periods of institutional change. They then become formalized and displaced by stronger institutional forms as market practices mature (i.e. retroactive legitimation). This succession, however, is complicated by the persistence of weak institutional forms in guide organizations, both in their original formulation (represented by the

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Dalat Easy Riders) and the entry of a vast number of informal guides.[49] These informal guides form shifting and non-binding organizations that coordinate individual efforts, though largely ineffectively. Again we see that individuals shoulder most responsibilities, with even less strategic coherence than the Easy Riders. Authority is largely absent, and competition and cooperation are managed solely by the individual. Informal guides establish ephemeral networks that are prone to dissolution through lack of trust. In essence, they cripple themselves through their inability to coordinate their efforts in a consistent and reliable way.

Informal Businesses

Peter "belongs" to an organization called Vietnam Easy Riders. He is based in Dalat, though I met him through a referral from a previous informant, Danh, in Nha Trang. Again, Peter is responsible for purchasing and maintaining his own equipment and for finding customers, and he appears to have complete freedom regarding with whom he associates and how he conducts his business. Peter forms relationships with hotels and guesthouses to receive referrals in return for a kick back, a strategy that many Easy Riders resist. He also networks with guides outside Dalat to increase his business. Vietnam Easy Riders, as an entity, appears to exert no pressure on Peter's individual actions and also appears to offer very little in the form of organizational infrastructure and support. Peter says that he himself is responsible for web advertising, and that he partners with other guides to build and maintain web pages. As with Easy Riders, Peter relies on word-of-mouth referrals and a direct approach to find customers.

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[49] It should be noted that, by many measurements, Easy Riders are often more successful than their competitors. Based on my observation, they often negotiate a higher daily rate, secure more work over longer periods, and offer a qualitatively better product. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

Peter has no formal guide registration, nor does his organization establish clear practical guidelines or operational rules. The Vietnam Easy Riders appears more as a "Potemkin" organization, merely a front. In reality, guides claiming to be Vietnam Easy Riders operate informally and with little organizational support apart from personal relationships. Most interesting in Peter's case, however, is that Peter has a high level of human capital. He is not stuck in an informal role as a result of having little to ability, as might be expected. Peter has worked as a guide for six years. He lived in Canada for eight years, first studying tourism in Toronto and then living in Vancouver. (He told me that he tried three times, unsuccessfully, to enter the United States.) His English language skills, both pronunciation and knowledge of slang, reflected his long stay in Canada. (He even indulged in free-style rapping from time to time.) He found it easy to relate to tourists and to anticipate their needs. He was most proud of his extemporaneity; other guides, in his opinion, are too rehearsed and stiff. Though he had an older motorbike, it was well maintained. Seemingly, he had all the desirable skills for an Easy Rider. Peter, however, did not want to become an Easy Rider because of the high cost of joining the organization.

Furthermore, Peter did not see formal recognition as a benefit; he explained that he need not bother to register his business or seek any official approval to perform guide work. I asked if he was concerned about lack of insurance, or if he worried about official interference in his work. He responded that "if trouble came, it wouldn't matter" whether or not he had a license or insurance. A license would not necessarily protect a guide from abusive authority, and accidents would likely be arbitrated by bargaining with authorities to determine fault and compensation. Peter's comment suggests that, in this case, the external institutions involved—local government and law enforcement—are inconsistent. Peter noted the expense required for formal registration

with the Easy Riders—the cost of the license and the price for the "blue jacket." He clearly sees no purpose in formal registration; he is able to operate his business without a license, and formality offers little incentive. By all appearances, formality seems more useful as a competitive tool; formal guides warn tourists about informal guides, saying that "they cannot protect you" in the case of an accident. Formal guides carried a card (the Dalat Easy Riders I spoke with were eager to show theirs), but this did not seem strictly necessary given the profusion of informal guides.

But informality often means that the guide has less organizational support and less security. As previously noted, associations between informal guides are often conditional and temporary. Guides that are not part of a formal association may have less reason to honor commitments; a guide will quickly gain a negative reputation within a formal organization if he deals shadily with his fellow guides. Along with the freedom of association that exists outside of a formal organization such as the Easy Riders, guides are also freer to double-deal or to renege on agreements with other drivers. Peter, nominally a part of the Vietnam Easy Riders, told an interesting anecdote that illustrates the dangers of such associations. He paired with another driver to maintain a website and share references; Peter did not have enough experience with the internet to create a website. He learned through a German tourist that had specifically asked for him that she had been referred to another driver. Peter discovered that his partner had been sending customers to another driver whom he owed money—customers that by agreement should have been referred to Peter. Such double-dealing in a more formalized operation would be highly sanctioned.

The Dual Economy

How, then, are we to understand the continued presence of informal enterprises in an industry that is maturing through formal training programs and higher capitalization? The simplest answer is that people can still make money performing guide work, with or without a formal license or a sophisticated organization. Much of the job still involves being in the right place at the right time, and building rapport with tourists to convince them to agree to a service that may at first seem risky.[50] Across formal and informal boundaries, established or new, the most successful guides are those who can communicate most effectively with tourists. The ability to network and build a variety of contacts—both within and outside of formal associations—can enhance business opportunities. Given these skills, formality and sophistication may matter less than individual abilities.

Another explanation of the continued presence of informal guides points to entrepreneurial culture in developing countries in general. Dahles (1999a) explains that imitation is one of the primary risk-aversion techniques among petty entrepreneurs. ("They always like to make photocopy" one Dalat Easy Rider explained to me, lamenting the large amount of imitators). This is clearly obvious in the case of motorbike guides. Guides in the formal sector—proprietary and highly-capitalized businesses—and the informal sector co-opt the practice and even the name "Easy Rider" to build their businesses. The high prevalence of

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[50] One of the main selling points is safety. Guides ask tourists to write how safe they felt in the journals that guides use for advertising. This fear of a traffic accident is not unfounded, particularly with warnings such as these from the US State Department: "Traffic in Vietnam is chaotic. Traffic accidents occur frequently. The most common victims are motorbike riders and pedestrians. At least 30 people die each day from transportation-related injuries and many more are injured, often with traumatic head injuries. Traffic accident injuries are the leading cause of death, severe injury, and emergency evacuation of foreigners in Vietnam. Traffic accidents, including those involving a pedestrian and a motorized vehicle, are the single greatest health and safety risk you will face in Vietnam" ("Vietnam Country Specific Information." US State Department. Url: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1060.html#traffic_safety. Accessed March 25, 2011).

imitation makes it necessary for the Dalat Easy Riders to advertise themselves as the "real" Easy

Riders. Dahles writes about petty entrepreneurs:

> They are enterprising and inventive in the exploitation of new market niches and means of orientation, but they are less so in the product they offer. Once a product or formula has proven successful, everyone is willing to share in the success. Petty entrepreneurs fail to establish themselves in the tourism industry in a way that enables them to make a sustainable profit. Although they do not react passively to external forces, they are not independent and self-sufficient actors either. They act within certain parameters defined by the entrepreneurial culture they depend on (Dahles 1999a, 13).

The condition of the market economy in Vietnam encourages such imitation. Guides cannot

protect their brand identity through legal means and informal guides feel no need—and see no

real benefit—in formalizing their business.

But the continued presence of an informal economy in guide work illustrates another

concept that many theorists have labeled the "dual economy"—or the continued existence of

informal and traditional businesses alongside formal and modernized businesses (Drakakis-

Smith 1987, Gilbert and Gugler 1992, van Diernen 1997).[51] Debate continues regarding the

usefulness of the dual economy concept—whether it is primarily instrumental in absorbing

excess labor or whether it is itself an innovative force that contributes to the overall economy

(Dahles 1999b). Still others see it as an essential component of tourism entrepreneurship in

developing countries (Dahles 1999a, 1999b, Bras and Dahles 1999). Dahles views small-scale

tourism entrepreneurship as a continuum of formal and informal, even a combination of the two

traits. She writes, "Small-scale entrepreneurs are neither representatives of a traditional,

informal, 'involute' economy, nor do they fit definitions of the completely modern, formal,

capitalist sector. They participate in both economies" (1999a, 12). In Vietnam this description

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[51] The dual economy and informal economy are central to development literature. I will not delve deeply into this topic in the space given, except to discuss how they may help to explain tourism entrepreneurship in this context. For more extensive discussion, see Chapter 2.

holds true. Motorbike guide work diverges from Easy Rider-type organizations into more highly organized businesses at the formal end of the spectrum and into ephemeral, loosely organized groups at the informal end.

The amount and variety of organizations in Vietnam that offer essentially the same service—guided motorbike tours—supports certain aspects of meso-institutional theory while confounding others. Theory suggests that experiments in weak forms of institutional behavior lead to new established norms, or "retrospective legitimation." Droege and Johnson write: "'Retrospective legitimation' implies that some actions become sanctioned *post hoc* and ultimately become the rules, norms, or patterned actions while other less successful actions are simply ignored or fade away" (2007, 82). But the informal economy in tourism did not simply fade away; it is still a distinct sector in Vietnam.

Why does the informal economy persist? It primarily exists because there is no incentive for businesses to formalize. Formal businesses do not necessarily receive access to market-supporting institutions. Taxes do not ensure that citizens can rely on redistributive mechanisms—active in advanced market economies—such as social welfare, reduced-cost education, and subsidized healthcare. Formal participation in Vietnam does not mean inclusion in a larger system with sophisticated and responsive institutional architecture. Relationships between businesses and regulatory institutions are still tenuous and difficult to predict.[52] Ultimately, institutional development in Vietnam requires greater sophistication in organizations engaged in market activity—private businesses, small-scale entrepreneurs—and greater trust in institutions that support a sound market economy.

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[52] Most of my respondents expressed mistrust of government institutions. Police often demanded bribes, and official services such as licensing and registration often require informal payments. "I *love* police in my country" one guide said with a large dose of sarcasm.

Chapter 5.   Tourism and Representation

Tourism as a Cultural and Economic Encounter

In the previous chapter I discussed how guides in the study group adapt to changing political-economic circumstances by adopting new behaviors through experimentation with a variety of economic norms. We considered this as an example of meso-institutional change—when "actions as rules" supersede previously institutionalized behavior to create new institutions (Droege and Johnson 2007). In this manner, market services—tourism guide services—grew during a period when the centrally-planned economy was rapidly dissolving in Vietnam. But we would have an impoverished discussion if we only consider economic behavior in our examination of this industry. Culture, and the ways that culture is represented, play a very significant role in tourism. While perhaps not unique, tourism is notable among industries for the way that it inextricably combines economy and culture (Squire 1994). Tourism is a form of consumption (Britton 1991), influenced by socialized approaches to leisure (Rojek 1985). Places, and tourists' experiences in those places, are products for consumption (Urry 1995). Included within places are natural endowments, historical narratives, and the people that occupy those places along with their lifestyles. Guides help to shape those products through interpretation; they direct the tourists' gazes while providing context for their understanding. In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which guides create products of consumption to enhance their businesses, and how the guides themselves become a sort of product.

CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMPTION

There are two ways of discussing culture in relation to consumption that we must first distinguish. The first is culture as a product for consumption. For tourists, this means exposure to a culture other than their own, an "exotic" culture that signifies the tourists' departure from their own routines and into "distinct types of liminal zones" (Urry 1990, 11). Exotic cultures provide tourists with escape and with intimate knowledge of the outside world, a motivation Chris Rojek calls pursuit of "the ageless aristocratic principle of broadening the mind" (1993, 175). But we must also consider culture as a determinant for consumption; culture dictates what tourists consider are desirable leisure pursuits and what they consider appropriate products for consumption (Shaw and Williams 2002, Rojek 1985, 1993). Urry (1990, 1995) discusses two culturally-determined modes of consumption in tourism that he labels the "collective gaze" and the "romantic gaze." The collective gaze characterizes the development of seaside resorts, theme parks, and other large scale tourist attractions that we cumulatively label mass tourism destinations. The romantic gaze, however, emphasizes solitude and separation from the larger mass of tourists. Various versions of this gaze can be seen in such categories as "eco-tourism", cultural tourism, budget tourism and backpacking.[53] Poon (1989) has characterized this as a shift from "old tourism"—including packaged holidays and standardized tours—to "new tourism," or more individualized and customized tourism experiences (cited in Urry 1990, 14).

The growing influence of the "romantic gaze" in tourism and the forms of tourism that this attitude encourages mirrors changes in other contemporary forms of production. Urry calls this a shift from "organized" to "disorganized" capitalism, or what others have called the "post-Fordist shift" (1990, 13, see also Harvey 1989). Post-Fordist production is postulated as an

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[53] See Scheyvens 2002 and Hampton 1998 and 2003 for a more lengthy discussion of backpacking.

alternative to Fordist mass production, emphasizing greater flexibility and a broader range of options for consumers. These options reflect lifestyle choices; consumption is promoted as a means of distinguishing one's self, as a method of establishing and reinforcing identity. The accumulation of cultural capital figures largely into increasingly different types of consumption. Status is not strictly configured through accumulation of wealth, but also through taste, style, and accumulated experience—building a greater store of cultural capital. Gaining access to ever more remote places, moving intrepidly around the globe, and adapting to widely different contexts all provide tourists with a greater sense of mastery of the art of travel. (By accumulating enough of these experiences, tourists may even be able to call themselves "travelers," deriding the mass of "tourists.") This condition creates new approaches to leisure that place a higher demand on novelty and inimitable experience.

Change in consumption patterns have broadened what many consider appropriate touristic activities, returning to our original formulation of cultural tourism as a consumption of culture itself. MacCannell (1976) called tourism of this sort a quest for authenticity.[54]   Urry, writing about this search for "real" lives of others, describes potential consequences: "Almost any sort of work, even the backbreaking toil of the Welsh miner or the unenviable work of those employed in the Parisian sewer, can be the object of the tourist gaze" (1990, 9). These words from twenty years ago are borne out in accounts of "slum tours" through crowded cities in developing countries (Odede 2010, Rolfes 2010); in agro-tourism (see also agri-tourism), where

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[54] This point is a matter for some debate. Urry adds that authenticity is not necessarily important. He writes, "it may be that a seeking for what we take to be authentic elements is an important component here but that is only because there is in some sense a contrast with everyday experiences" (1990, 11). That is to say that the "authentic" lives of "others" may contrast with a feeling of inauthenticity in the tourists' everyday lives, therefore underscoring the liminal, in-between state that tourism promotes. Urry calls this phenomenon "post-tourism," where the tourist is aware of and perhaps even enjoys a feeling of inauthenticity in tourism experiences. In the context of the present case study, however, authenticity is one of the central components of the guides' product, and the ways that guides present "authentic" aspects of the landscape is an essential part of their competitive advantage.

tourists can work on farms as part of their leisure(?) experience (GTZ); and in "dark tourism," involving visits to places notorious for misery and destruction (see Lennon and Foley 2000). Urry explains this seemingly puzzling trajectory of tourism by calling contemporary tourists "collectors of gazes," eager to always see new sites and "less interested in repeat visits to the same auratic site. The initial gaze is what counts" (1990, 46).

The tourist's gaze is voracious, always seeking out new vistas and novel experiences. This quality directly affects the spatiality of tourism, leading to expanding frontiers, or what Turner and Ash (1975) call the "pleasure periphery." Urry explains: "The romantic gaze is an important mechanism which is helping to spread tourism on a global scale, drawing almost every country into its ambit as the romantic seeks ever-new objects of that gaze" (1990, 47). Vietnam, a country effectively closed to tourists for decades due to war and isolation, is now at the frontier of tourism.[55] Cultural shifts in consumption affect the types of products tourists demand while expanding the territory subject to tourists' interest; Vietnam is now an arena for tourism consumption as well as a product for that consumption.

Market Niche and Value-Added Interpretation

But, as I have stated, this is a mediated form of consumption, shaped by larger cultural forces and by actors in the host country. The guides from this case study actively shape the product—their locality, or a tourism version of their locality—through processes of inclusion, exclusion and interpretation. The act of guiding and interpretation represent a focal point where exogenous forces—namely international tourism abetted by political-economic change in

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[55] See Chapter 1a for more information about Vietnamese tourism policy and the growth of international tourism in Vietnam.

Vietnam—intersect with strategies of local actors to create a cultural and economic exchange. The product is influenced by cultural norms of consumption, the "romantic gaze," and the creation of the product reinforces these norms by offering a venue where the gaze can be indulged. The case study demonstrates the ability for local actors to identify and exploit market niches in contemporary consumer culture. Dahles writes "small entrepreneurs [do not] react passively to changing markets and to attempts of the bureaucracy to regulate economic life from above. They are enterprising, inventive, innovative, and creative in the exploitation of new niches in the market as well as in the law" (Dahles 1999b, 33). By most measures, local actors— guides as entrepreneurs—are better equipped to satisfy tourists demands for authenticity because they themselves (often with some image manipulation) represent authentic local culture.

What then are the specific endowments of local guides? Ter Steege, Stam, and Bras (1999) question whether local guides simply act as intermediaries between host populations and tourists (Gurung, Simmons and Devlin 1996), choosing to emphasize the entrepreneurial characteristics of local guides. The authors suggest that successful guides offer a combination of business and network acumen with other, less tangible abilities to anticipate tourists' needs and to craft compelling narratives. The authors write:

> Local tourist guides sell images, knowledge, contacts, souvenirs, access, authenticity, ideology, and sometimes even their body and their feelings. . . . Their knowledge of the local culture is not limited to facts, figures and *couleur locale*, but also includes the art of building a network, monopolizing contacts, exploiting the commission and tipping system, and sensing trends within tourism. Moreover, insight into the culture of the guests is a prerequisite for success. Local tourist guides have to search for convincing ways to address tourists and find out their interests and wishes. To make the encounters as profitable as possible, efforts are made to develop longer lasting relationships with their guests. *Important in becoming a successful guide is the ability to turn social relations and narratives into a profitable business asset* (ter Steege, Stam, and Bras 1999, 115, italics mine).

Finally, the product comes down to a successful *narrative*, or the ability to build a context for what tourists encounter, and to facilitate tourists' participation in their surroundings. The interpretation that local guides offer and narratives that they construct create a value-added product—the more compelling, the better. The remainder of this chapter will examine the ways that the guides in this case study frame and present their surroundings. Finally, we will see how the guides' personal narratives become an essential part of their tours, and of the tourism product.

THE "REAL VIETNAM"

The first job of an interpretive tour guide is to convince tourists that their previous tourism experience of Vietnam was not "real." This is not a difficult task. Prior to encountering the tour guide, tourists have moved through highly circumscribed situations contrived to provide comfort and assurance. Restaurants with English language menus; hostels and guesthouses filled with other foreign tourists; transportation used almost exclusively by foreign visitors; guided mass tours, bristling with cameras and heavily-laden with souvenirs: all of the these situations are familiar to most foreign tourists in Vietnam, and they have the cumulative effect of building a sense of unreality, especially compared to the daily life of Vietnamese observed outside of the narrow tourism community. The guides in this study understand this impression of unreality, and they offer an alternative to the mass-tourism experience. "See the Real Vietnam." "You won't see another tourist the entire trip." "Eat where locals eat. Sleep where they sleep." "Guide books are too easy, tourists want adventure." These lines reinforce the feeling that tourists have been missing out on the real thing, and the guide offers the key to authentic experience beyond the mass of other tourists.

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The motorbikes themselves reinforce the sense that one is participating more fully in the life of the country. Little else appears as essential to life in contemporary Vietnam as the motorbike. One estimate places the number of motorbikes in Vietnam at sixteen million.[56] Motorbikes are one of the most visible and remarkable material aspects of life in Vietnam. Patti McCracken, of the Christian Science Monitor, writes, "To the Vietnamese, a motorbike is not just a vehicle, but a bionic limb. A magic carpet. A personal jet pack, able to propel them from their living rooms (where many park their bikes) to any doorstep. Legs and feet are backup forms of transport, used only as a last resort" (McCracken 2008). Tourists gape at the sheer volume of motorbike traffic moving throughout Vietnam's urban areas; one often hears excited retellings of crossing busy streets on foot ("Just walk forward slowly—don't stop—they'll avoid you!"); few tourists leave the country without reams of photos of entire families on motorbikes, pigs and geese and chickens, towering mounds of consumer items (figure 9). Traveling by motorbike signifies the tourists' participation in this seemingly essential aspect of Vietnam.[57]

Tourism is ultimately the consumption of symbols. Tourists recognize the ubiquity of motorbikes in the country; their utility becomes a defining characteristic of the country itself, and tourists are eager to pay to participate. Furthermore, these symbols are established through tourists' pre-conceptions of their destinations. Urry writes, "This mode of gazing shows how tourists are in a way semioticians, reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established

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[56] "Vietnam—Overview." The Lonely Planet. http://www.lonelyplanet.com/vietnam Accessed March 20, 2011.

[57] Other authors have discussed motorbikes as a symbol for the economic transformation of the country in general. Freire (2009, see also Truitt 2008) discusses motorbikes as a symbol of consumerism among Vietnamese. She writes, "The motorbike is the 'economic tool' of the *Doi Moi*, the symbol of the reforms and the economic transformations recognizable everywhere in the country. . . . the motorbike is an object of social classification conveying new values such as pleasure and hedonism, demonstrating that the former communist country has entered into a 'pleasure-seeking' and 'distraction-oriented' phase as a society linked to the market economy" (2009, 84). This is an interesting interpretation, but not one that I will explore in any detail.

Photo Diane Fenwick

Photo Diane Fenwick

Figure 9. Motorbikes Used in a Variety of Roles

notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism" (1990, 12). Guide books tell us what to expect, literature and movies inculcate a fictional understanding of tourists' destinations, and interactions with other tourists reaffirm impressions and build expectations. Urry calls this an "aestheticisation [sic] of consumption," or anticipation from "imaginative pleasure-seeking." He continues, "People's basic motivation for consumption is not therefore simply materialistic. It is rather that they seek to experience 'in reality' the pleasurable dramas they have already experienced in their imagination" (1990, 13). The symbol, then, is a product of the tourism imaginary, the fictional destination that only by chance intersects with the real place.[58]

Cultural Landscapes

What, then, are the symbols that the guides in this study choose to offer, the activities and landscapes that by processes of exclusion and inclusion become part of their narrative of Vietnam? The tours are remarkably consistent, a series of tableaux drawn from ordinary life. The tours include economic activity—mostly small-scale household production such as a family-owned tofu shop, household weaving, a local noodle production facility, silk-worm cultivation— as well as some larger-scale production, including industrial-scale silk weaving, lumber mills, and vast agricultural operations (figures 10 and 11). The scale and range of economic activity tells a narrative of entrepreneurial energy and ingenuity that combines traditional methods of production with contemporary accommodations to the global market.

Another category of symbolism emphasizes alterity in the form of minority tribes.

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[58] The Tourism Studies Working Group at the University of California, Berkeley define the tourist imaginary as "a nexus of social practices through which individuals and groups intersect to establish a place as a credible destination" ("Tourism Imaginaries / Imaginaires Touristiques" http://www.tourismstudies.org/tourismimaginaries.englishportal.htm. Accessed March 20, 2011).

10c. *Cónico* Weaving near Hue

10d. A vase made from Artillery Shell

10e. Plywood Production †

10b. Silk Loom in Hoi An

10j. Unspooling Silk Worm Cocoons

10f. Rice Noodle Production †

10g. Silk Worm Cocoons

10a. Tofu Production in Dalat

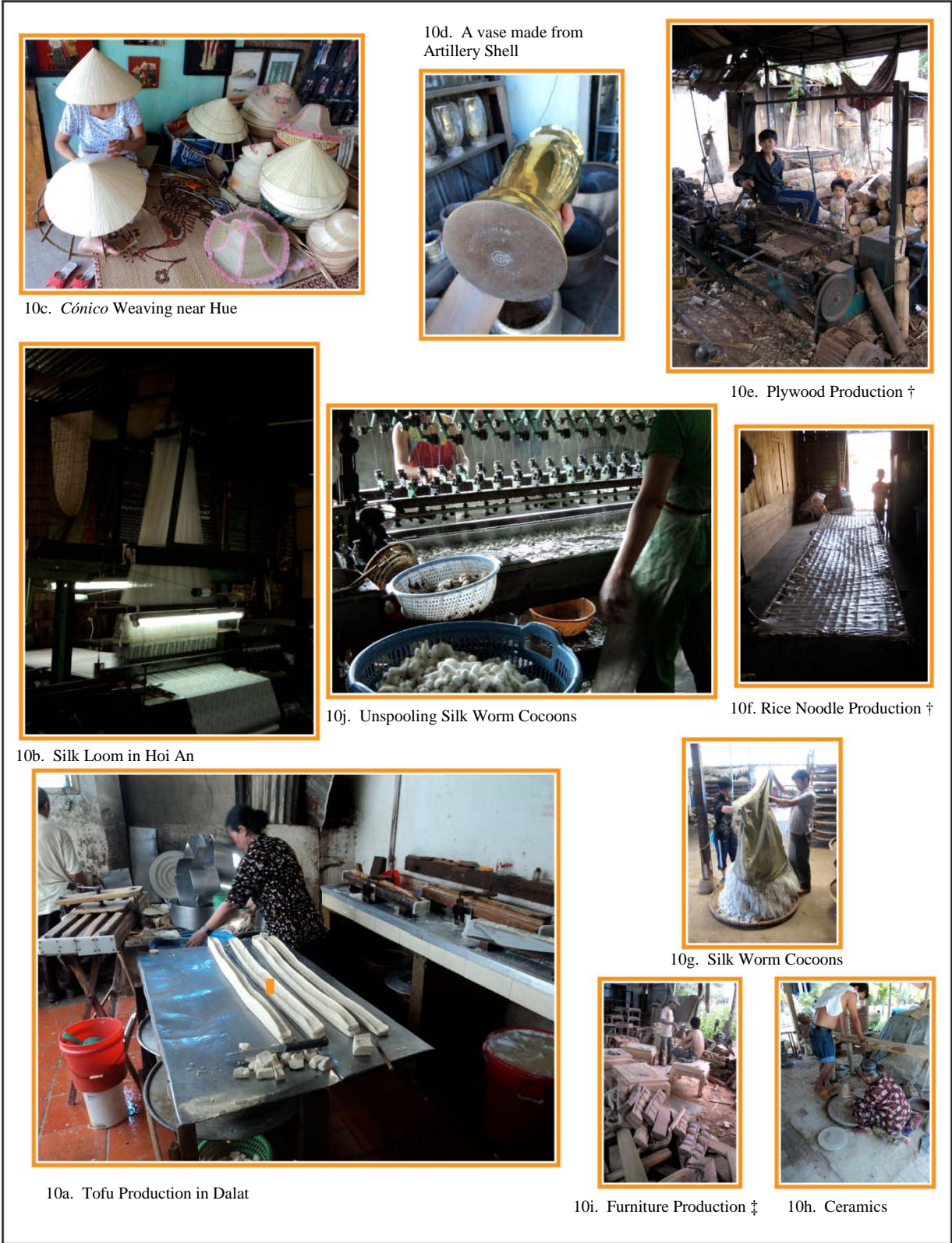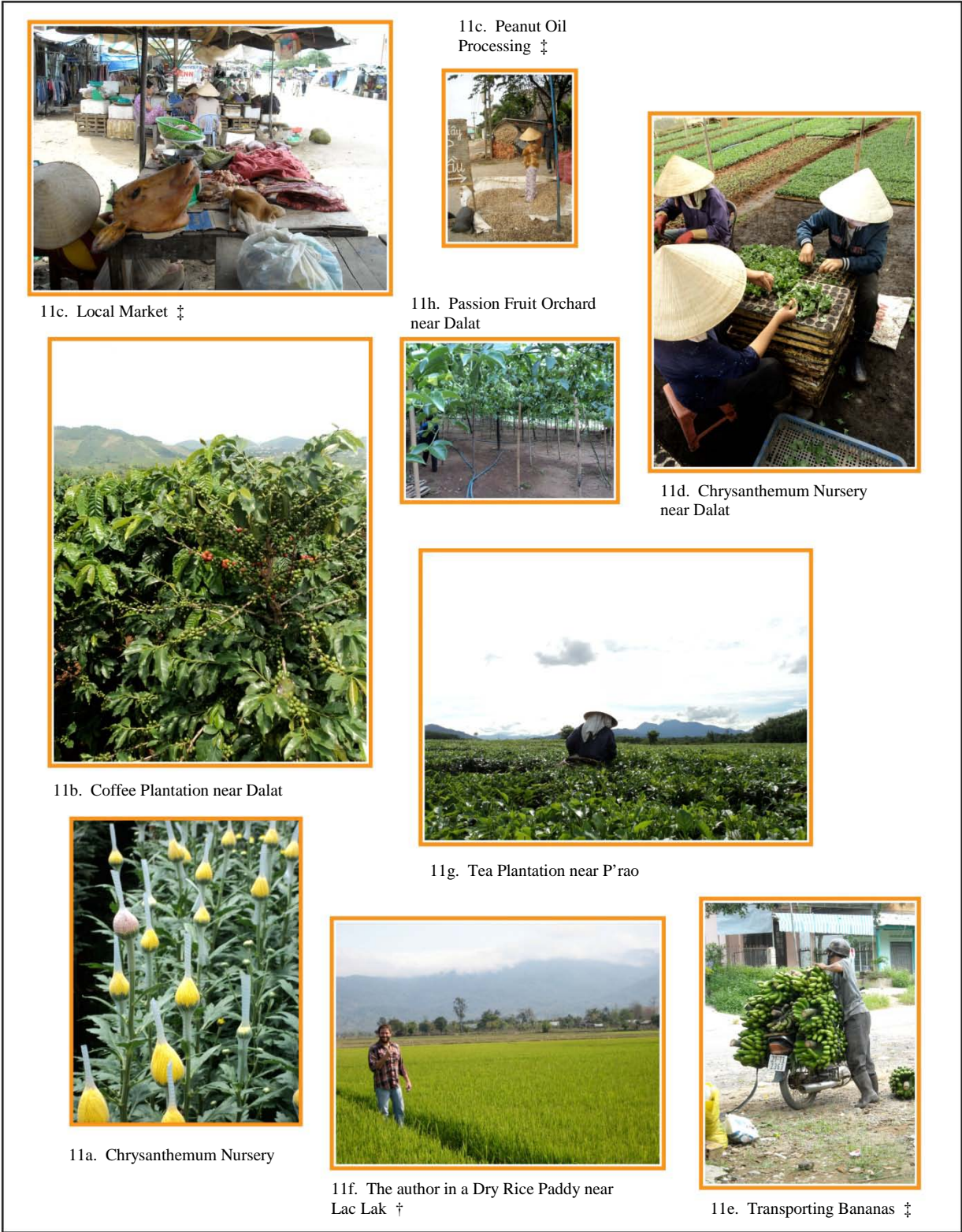10i. Furniture Production ‡

10h. Ceramics

Figure 10. Tours of Cottage Industry

† Photo Garry W. Shores ‡ Photo Diane Fenwick
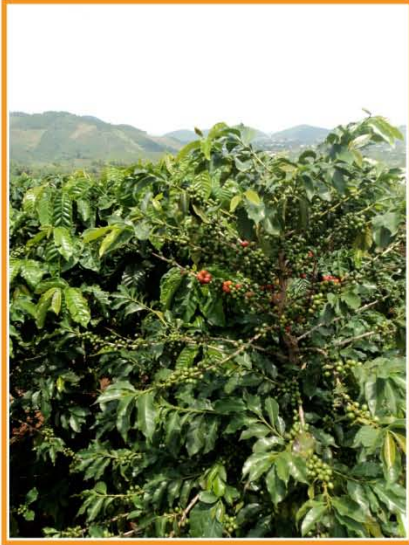
11c. Local Market ‡

11c. Peanut Oil Processing ‡

11h. Passion Fruit Orchard near Dalat

11d. Chrysanthemum Nursery near Dalat

11b. Coffee Plantation near Dalat

11g. Tea Plantation near P'rao

11a. Chrysanthemum Nursery

11f. The author in a Dry Rice Paddy near Lac Lak †

11e. Transporting Bananas ‡

Figure 11. Tours of Agriculture

† Photo Garry W. Shores ‡ Photo Diane Fenwick

Guides will often take tourists into minority villages, pointing out characteristics such as house construction, cultural artifacts, and farming methods.[59] Frequently these explanations will have an anthropological tone, a docent-like description of spousal relationships or connection to nature. Sometimes the guide will regretfully describe the backward practices that keep minorities mired in poverty ("too many children," "they do not understand money"). Like most of the other stops on the tour, visits to minority villages begin with a seemingly arbitrary stop on the side of the road; the guides then lead the riders into the center of the villages, sometimes into the houses themselves (figure 12). Guides will then lead conversations with members of minority groups by interpreting from English to Vietnamese, and sometimes other minority languages. Frequently the guides will have an established relationship with the minority groups; other times the stop is truly random, and the guides meet the subjects of the tour for the first time.

In both of the above categories, guides offer access to facets of life that may be inaccessible to tourists. As much as the objects of the tour themselves, guides sell this accessibility. Typically, tourists' experiences of Vietnam are limited to a constricted world purposefully assembled for tourists. Resorts confine tourists to narrow stretches of coastline, or to gated communities in remote locations. The Vietnamese government, ambivalent about foreign influence, even encourages and reinforces separation between locals and tourists (see Lloyd 2003).[60] Beyond actual restrictions, however, tourists simply do not have the ability to

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[59] The majority Viet Kinh mostly refers to the various tribes of non-Viet ethnicities as "minority peoples". Guide books estimate that there are fifty-four separate ethnicities in Vietnam apart from the majority (Ray et al. 2007).

[60] The government seems most interested in restricting tourists' access to minority groups. Frequently when I arrived in a minority village, a government representative would appear. Sometimes they were members of the minority group that worked as government representatives. They do not necessarily prohibit further interaction. In

bridge divides between tourism spaces and local spaces. Guides sell this ability, and in the process they expand the boundaries of touristic experience.

War Tourism

Places are partially defined by how they fit in tourists' imaginary, and to many tourists Vietnam is most strongly associated with conflict (Alneng 2002). War sites, as designated by guides, act as supplements to officially recognized memorials (figure 13). These sites are a form of alternative, or vernacular, memorialization (Dobler 2010), not officially designated but used for some other purpose (in these cases, commercial). Guides are able to offer these sites as uniquely valuable because they only become meaningful through the guides' interpretation. These memorial locations are often surprising, and some are quite powerful, all the more so for their esoteric quality. I will discuss three examples.

The first example is a landscape near Lac Lak, in Dak Lak province, containing the façade of a catholic church and a concrete slab that marks the site where the building once stood (figure 14). I had the opportunity to see this church twice, in 2008 and in 2010, with two separate guides. Unprompted, the first guide explained that the ruin was the result of an errant bomb, destroyed in fighting over a bridge across the river adjacent to the church. The second guide, from the same organization, interpreted the destruction quite differently. A flood, he explained, destroyed the church. Both explanations are plausible, and it is unclear if either guide

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one case the representative simply monitored the conversation, though my guides were keenly aware of his presence. One guide told me that he sometimes feigned problems with his motorbike at minority villages in case a government representative arrived. The tendency to limit interaction between minority groups and tourists can extend to large areas. Upon arrival into Pleiku, in the Central Highlands, one guide told me that just two years prior I would have been interviewed by local police upon arriving to this fairly large city. Buon Me Thuot, also in the Central Highlands, opened only relatively recently to foreign tourists. The main reason the government limits access to minority villages seems to be disputed property rights; many minority tribes have land claims and local governments want to discourage "agitation" among minority groups.

12c. Guide with Host ‡
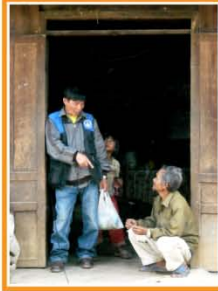
12d. Entrance to a Raised House near Lac Lak

12e. Exterior of a Long House

12b. Interior of a Long Hous

12f. The Gaze Returned †

12a. Approaching a Village near P'rao

12f. Uncle Ho Looks On

Figure 12. Tours of Minority Villages

13c. Relic Bunker near Danang

13d. Detail of War Memorial in Dak To

13g. War Memorial in Dak To

13b. War Museum in Ho Chi Minh City

13e. The Names of the Fallen

13a. Monument and Construction in Buon Me Thuot

13f. Tank with Incense

Figure 13. Tours of War Memorials

a.

b.

b.

Views of the same church near Lac Lak on two separate
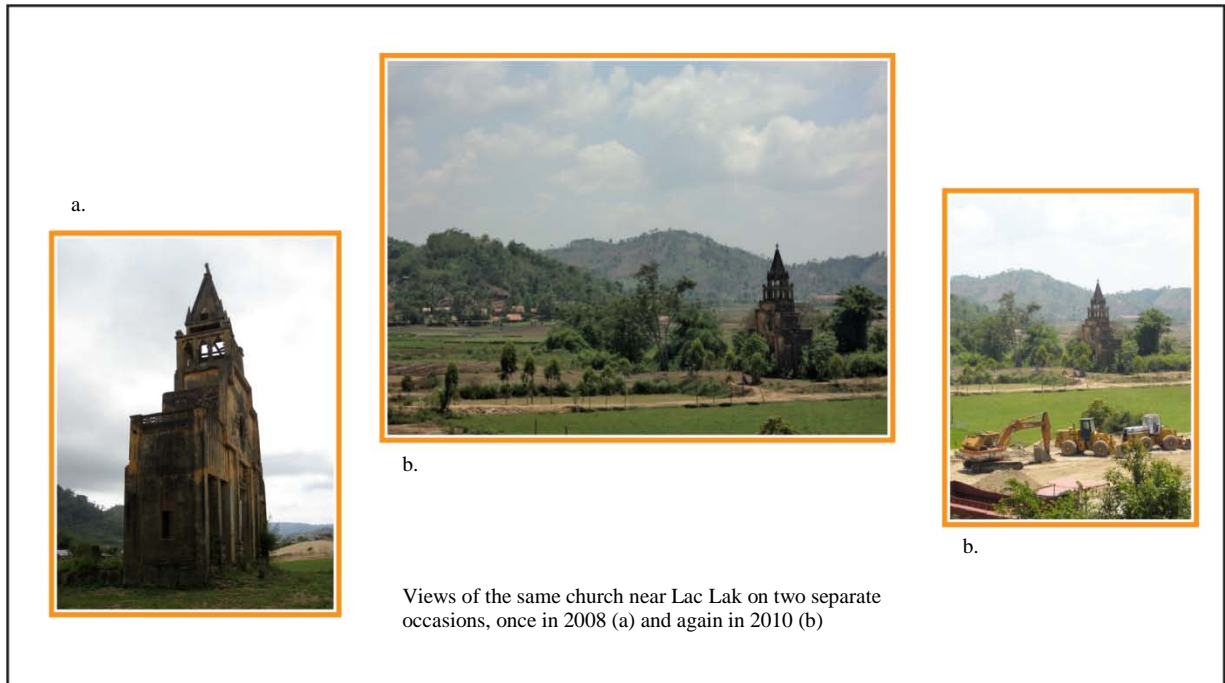occasions, once in 2008 (a) and again in 2010 (b)

Figure 14. Church Façade: Three Photos, Two Interpretations

was knowingly false, or what in fact destroyed the church. The first explanation, however, meets tourists' expectations of such evidence in the landscape.

The second example is more ephemeral, and exists for purposes entirely apart from memorialization. On two separate occasions—once at a scrap yard along Highway 13, near Pleiku, and another time at a lot adjacent to the military installation at Khe Sanh (itself a permanent memorial)—guides took me to local businesses that collect reclaimable materials (figure 15). These yards act as recycling centers, a place for locals to sell recyclable waste that is resold and transported for reclamation. Rusting evidence of the past conflict lies in heaps, here haphazardly and there sorted into piles: unexploded bombs, artillery shells, landmines and— incredibly—an eight feet wide mound of tiny bits of shrapnel. All of this material was spread out across the landscape before nearby residents—working mostly in remote mountain

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Figure 15. Scrap yards near Pleiku and Khe Sanh

locations—unearthed these bits and pieces to sell as scrap. This evidence of the astonishing amount of violence during the war was hidden beneath thick jungle, but locals build them into piles and guides show them to tourists. However, local people do not comb the landscape to build monuments, but to provide income. The piles of rusted weaponry rise and fall with the price of scrap metal.

A final example of vernacular memorialization occurred when guides interpret the landscape itself as a monument to past destruction. Deeper into the Central Highlands and nearer to the center where much fighting occurred, my guides increasingly called my attention to landscapes scarred by war (figure 16). Entire swaths of hillsides remain barren. Partially forested and even denuded hills are visible for miles. Forty years after the fighting had ceased,

16b. and c. Hill slopes prepared for planting

16d. Dry rice cultivation; along with tapioca the most common crop in traditional highland agriculture.
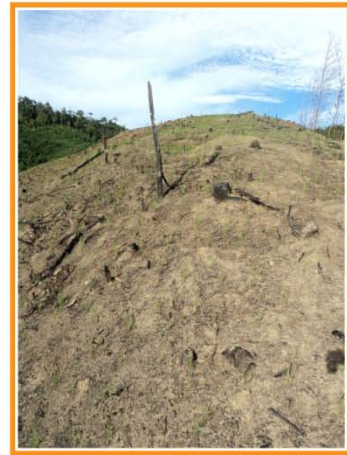
16a. On Phoenix Airstrip (an abandoned US Air Force base) near Dak To. The hill slopes above the airport once held a fire base. The vegetation was cleared to improve visibility. Author and guide pictured. †

16e. Flood damage near Dak To. Note burned tree stumps, likely due to slash and burn cultivation.

Figure 16. Ecological Destruction, Ambiguous Interpretation
    † Photo Diane Fenwick

the land still showed evidence of the incredible amount of chemicals (in the form of dioxin) and napalm that the US military used during the war. But this, too, is an ambiguous interpretation. De Koninck (1999) notes a variety of causes that may have contributed to deforestation in Vietnam's highlands, of which war is only one. The expansion of "New Economic Zones" after 1975, relocation of lowland dwellers into highlands and vice-versa, increased demand for forest products, and shifting slash-and-burn cultivation practiced by minority tribes—all bear some blame for ecological destruction. None of these factors have been adequately explained. The guides themselves expressed some uncertainty. "The war destroyed the jungle a little" one told me, "but people destroyed the jungle a lot."

Geographer Kenneth Foote (1997) provides a conceptual framework to categorize memorial sites. Foote explains that memorialization is used to attach meaning to sites where violent events occurred, and meaning is negotiated by members of the community. Meaning for tourists, however, frequently deviates from locally constructed meaning. Tourists appropriate landscapes to fulfill their own expectation for what is meaningful. Evidence of the American War in Vietnam, an historical event charged with significance and weight, are alluring discoveries for tourists.

GUIDE AS PRODUCT

Finally we must consider how guides' personal narratives figure into tourism production. We have seen how they expand frontiers of tourism both conceptually and geographically, through interpretation of landscapes and by providing access to hidden meanings (and frequently locations). Much of this production is predicated on guides' ability to present an authentic product; the guides must have gained the trust of their customers and convince them of the

authority of their interpretation. In an earlier chapter, I alluded to this tendency while discussing the age of guides who work as Dalat Easy Riders; older guides have greater authority due to their perceived experience, and their interpretation of Vietnam gains a degree of legitimacy when it is paired with their personal narrative.

Please recall the vignette that I introduced at the beginning of this discussion. Philippe's life story, as told by Philippe, had an uncanny ability to sound like the embodiment of the larger narrative of Vietnam: he experienced conflict, poverty, and finally regeneration. Philippe shared these details during our first day, when we were touring around Dalat. His personal narrative had the same effect as a sales pitch. I do not want to suggest that his life story was false or contrived, but Philippe's narrative demonstrates how effectively guides market themselves and their service. And Philippe was by no means alone.[61] Other guides included details from their lives, often early into our acquaintance, apparently to build customer rapport. Often these personal narratives revealed the difficulty of life after reunification, prior to reform. They told stories about lack of food, of severely curtailed civil liberties, of family members who were lost during the war or who were persecuted because of their wartime affiliation. One guide told me about his experiences during the occupation of Cambodia; another explained how the government controlled the population following reunification through food rationing ("they hold you by the belly"); another described being wounded during an ambush near a stop on our tour; still another described selling watermelons to US soldiers as a child. These accounts build a sense of intimacy with the guides, and a personal connection to their history and the history of the nation. One account of an Easy Rider tour demonstrates the power of narrative in appealing

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[61] The Dalat Easy Riders seemed most adept at weaving their personal narratives into tours. This may reveal some sophistication in how the organization trains individual guides, or perhaps this again demonstrates how effective techniques become copied.

to customers, and the appeal of being shown hidden remnants of the War. The travel record follows:

> As far as we were concerned, one of their [Easy Riders] greatest selling points was Hong himself. He was a former lieutenant in the South Vietnamese Army, so we knew we would hear firsthand accounts of the war. . . . As much as we enjoyed the factory and farm tours, we were even more blown away by Hong and Duc's war stories, the never-ending stream of propaganda billboards and historical sites including Charlie Hill and Phoenix Airbase. One of our many stops was Dak To, a major battlefield in the American War. Other than a faded plaque, some bomb craters and barely visible trenches, there isn't much to indicate it was once the scene of intense fighting. If we hadn't been there with the Easy Riders we never would've been able to distinguish it from the surrounding area (Nomads for a Year 2010).

Many guides even explained how discrimination continues in the form of exclusion from better jobs and from higher education. This situation was confirmed by other people in the tourism sector with whom I spoke.[62] Their account forms a narrative of overall exclusion from public affairs following the end of the War. Their stories echo and confirm Philippe's account of his hard-scrabble existence prior to doing guide work, partly due to the poverty in the region, but also due to government policies (either official or unofficial). These stories are remarkably consistent. Many travel writers and guide books recount these stories. An article on Travel Online that discusses Easy Riders relates, "Most guides were once soldiers of the South Vietnamese army (and members of their families), who couldn't get authority to work because of their connection with the previous government" (Zimpel 2011). Says another travel article:

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[62] The owner of a tailor shop in Vietnam explained that his wife, who mostly ran the shop, could not get into a university because of her father's role in the War. He said that a questionable past meant exclusion from a job in the public sector, which provides greater security and benefits. (He implied that the main benefit is the ability to pocket extra cash in the form of informal payments.) This points to an interesting dynamic in contemporary Vietnam: as an owner of a successful business in the private sector, the shop owner was doing quite well, but the public sector promised more security and stability. Furthermore, the public sector seems to provide more social capital. It may be that as Vietnam transitions, the private sector will begin to accrue more social and cultural capital in addition to the fortunes that are being made by entrepreneurs in the market economy.

> Undoubtedly, the biking experience and landscape are second to the Easy Riders themselves. Binh Dunhill is the leader of the pack. He is gangly and good-natured, always wearing conspicuously clean white despite racing through the mud all day. He was born on the southern Mekong Delta and trained as a doctor. In the war, he was a pilot in the American Air Force. When the South was "liberated," Dunhill also managed to survive a "reeducation" camp (Sullivan 2006).

Overlander.TV, another travel web site, calling Easy Riders a "tourism activity that is synonymous with Dalat," describes the founding of the service: "The story goes: veterans of the South Vietnamese Army set up the Easy Rider tours because they found it hard to get other work" (Overlander.TV 2010). The video later shows a trio of guides that the narrators call the founders of the organization.[63]

All of these accounts reinforce a narrative of exclusion that is followed by a period of renewal.[64] The victory of the north over South Vietnam and the socialist institutions that followed penalized a class of people: former soldiers and family members of former soldiers for South Vietnam. By implication, this is also a class of people who were more outward looking, suffering as a result of their association with a defeated government at the hands of an insular, repressive communist regime. Political and economic reform—including opening the country to foreign tourists—allowed these formerly impoverished victims to draw from the skills they had

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[63] I recognized one of the trio as a guide with whom I had a brief conversation. He told me at the time that he was a translator for the 101st Airborne during the War.

[64] I call these life stories "narratives" because they are accounts of personal history for the purpose of building authenticity and establishing an authoritative voice. I do not mean to imply that these stories are in any way false or contrived, though there is no way to confirm the details that the guides provide. I also do not mean to imply that every guide I spoke with had similar stories; many guides were too young to have any meaningful involvement in the War or plainly said that they had little to contribute about the War (though it was rare to meet someone unaffected by the American War in Vietnam). Polkinghorne (1995) discusses the importance of narrative: "narrative is the linguistic form uniquely suited for displaying human existence in situated action. Narrative descriptions exhibit human activity as purposeful engagement in the world. Narrative is the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes" (1995, 5). This definition of narrative echoes David Ley's discussion of ethnographic research as an "attempt to make sense of their [the subject's] making sense of the events and opportunities confronting them in everyday life" (1988, 121, quoted in Herbert 2000).

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acquired from their earlier association with foreigners (i.e. Americans). The story is compelling, social capital lost and then revalued under changing political-economic circumstances.

Narratives and Meta-Narratives

The narratives that Philippe and his colleagues present place them at the center of changing structural forces in Vietnam. International tourism provides them with an opportunity to establish a trade and to draw from their local knowledge and their personal set of skills; political and economic liberalization allowed this opportunity to occur. Both movements—the flow of goods and people across borders, and the convergence of political and economic systems that promote international circulation—are features of the globalized world. Through the guides' narratives, tourism itself is valorized as a positive source for change and renewal. Access to international tourists—and conversely access for tourists to Vietnam—allowed the guides to renew their contact with the world outside Vietnam and enabled them to rebuild their livelihoods. Our conception of globalization tells a narrative of an ever-shrinking world, one in which distant locations are physically less difficult to reach through the low cost of air travel. Globalization also provides greater access to those places through the removal of political boundaries and the promotion of capitalism as the means of exchange. Tour guides in Vietnam now have the freedom to enter into economic relationships that meet the demands of tourists. The guides' narratives, describing a revaluation of skills through political-economic change and by their relationships with tourists, are subsumed under the meta-narrative of globalization.

We have seen that the guides primarily deal in symbols that refer to tourists' expectations. These symbols cumulatively contribute to tourists' sense that they have experienced a place, that they have been introduced to its essence by a helpful guide. When

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considering the meta-narrative of "globalization," we see how the act of guiding is also symbolic. It represents the monetization of a relationship and tourists' freedom of movement in a globalized world. Tourists are able to purchase connections with locals along with their lived experiences and interpretation. They acquire access to another place without the difficulty of real life—of learning the language, living under the same economic constraints as locals, and *actually* understanding the myriad contexts that build social life in a foreign country. Perhaps ironically, this ability to purchase access to a destination comes at the price of the authenticity that many tourists value.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In this research I evaluated motorbike guide services in Vietnam based on two criteria: 1) The growth and change of market institutions in Vietnam during economic transition from a command economy to a market-based economy, and 2) Tourism production through guide interpretation. I used a meso-institutional framework (Droege and Johnson 2007) to analyze motorbike guide businesses, categorizing them as either "weak" institutions characteristic of institutional change, or "strong" institutions aided and legitimized by other market-supporting institutions. The case study determined that a broad heterogeneity of institutional types co-exist in the guided motorbike tour industry.   While some businesses demonstrate increased institutional support—through formalized training programs and more highly organized administration—other businesses and individuals operate with very little institutional support, or entirely informally. The results suggest a dynamic that resembles the dual economy as observed by Dahles (1999a, 1999b), where more highly formalized businesses exist alongside informal service providers. A completely formalized and modern economy does not spring forth *de novo*, but traditional and informal economies persist.

In the second part of the discussion I expanded my analysis to include *what* the guides produce in addition to *how* they organize and build the institutions to which they belong. The guides understand the changing nature of international tourism, including tourists' desire to participate in authentic experience to build up their social and cultural capital. To adapt to these changing patterns of consumption, guides use their local knowledge to appropriate the landscape of Vietnam, its people and their lifestyles, and the guides' own lived histories. The guides

synthesize these elements to create a product desirable to curious foreigners who want to experience the "real Vietnam."

I divided this investigation of individuals and organizations into two categories, as growth of market institutions in Vietnam and as an expansion of the conceptual and spatial frontiers of tourism. I intended to demonstrate how globalizing forces exert influence over the situated lives of individual actors in Vietnam—and how these actors in turn subtly alter the course of these large-scale processes. Economic liberalization is increasingly integrating Vietnam into the global economy. Vietnam is a significant provider of resources for the world market, including raw materials and manufactured goods, and a potentially large consumer of goods and services that flow throughout the global economy. International tourism is emblematic of these globalized flows of resources, but it also exceptional because it involves the movement of people and the increasing penetration of pleasure-seekers into ever more far-flung locations on the globe. Tourism is not an exclusively economic transaction, but a cultural-economic encounter that is difficult to fully understand through measures of international arrivals and commercial exchange. We must also look closely at the content of the encounter, and the meanings that guides and tourists construct.

Meaning in tourism is often communicated through symbols, certain signs that indicate tourists' participation in contexts that are different from their own. These symbols are subject to expectation and anticipation, conditioned by media representations of the world "outside," of "other" geographic contexts. But tourism would lose much of its appeal without the delight of discovery, of finding one's self in spontaneous and potentially surprising situations. The guides in this study meet both criteria for discovery—the uncannily familiar and the extraordinary—through their interpretation of the landscape and with their own narratives. Tourists arrive in

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landscapes and situations that seem quintessentially "Vietnamese"—weaving through knee-to-knee traffic in Hanoi, traversing rice paddies through karst terrains, climbing and descending steeply pitched, thickly jungled mountain roads. And, punctuating these many miles traveled, guides reveal locations that are hidden for most tourists—a productive cottage industry behind a ramshackle concrete façade, a minority village at the end of a dirt road, an overgrown pillbox, a rusting tank or bomb crater from the war. Adding to these experiences, the guides themselves reveal meaning through their own personal histories. By offering their acquaintance they remove a third veil for tourists: past simulacra contrived for tourists' consumption, past mute landscapes and inscrutable activities (which, of course, compose daily lives for Vietnamese to which tourists have no access), and into a direct encounter with individuals who, by their own claim, carry the history of their country.

But tourists' participation, and the relationships that they build with local guides, have questionable authenticity. Dean MacCannell (1976) prefers to call these types of encounters a form of "staged authenticity." Urry (1990) describes MacCannel's description of the social relations that emerge in tourism:

> "Real lives" can only be found backstage and are not immediately evident to us. Hence, the gaze of the tourist will involve an obvious intrusion into people's lives, which would be generally unacceptable. So the people being observed and local tourist entrepreneurs gradually come to construct backstages in a contrived and artificial manner (1990, 9).

The guides in this study facilitate such "intrusions," and the act of looking into lived experience in Vietnam is in essence their product. Indeed, they lay bare their own histories in the process of tourism production. But these narratives are, by definition, staged, and the aspects of life in Vietnam that they present to tourists through inclusion and exclusion are elements in a tableau that, while vivid, are only ambiguously "real."

And how, finally do we view entrepreneurs in small-scale tourism enterprises such as the guides from my case study? There is a tendency, not altogether unjustified, to think of these individuals in binary terms, as either receptors of processes beyond their control or as actors engaged in reshaping their economic environment. Tourists may see petty hustlers where theoreticians see heroic actors; some academics may see neocolonial forces at work where others see structures and agency engaged in dialectic change. All of these conclusions may be true in certain circumstances, but none alone reveal the scope of interactions involving millions of people creating strategies to cope with a multitude of shifting circumstances. Perhaps our understanding is best served by distilling the evidence to create a narrative with essential human qualities: individuals, beset by uncertainty, create livelihoods that allow them to meet their needs using the tools available to them, in an environment that limits many possibilities while allowing others. These limitations and opportunities are constantly changing, but these individuals adapt in many creative ways.

Vignette Revisited

In the beginning of our discussion, Philippe's story provided an introduction to the types of narratives that guides convey to attract tourists. These life stories are meant to communicate the narrators' lived experiences and to illustrate the larger narrative of Vietnam as a whole. These narratives are themselves a part of tourism production: they are purposefully constructed to communicate cultural authority to tourists and, ultimately, facilitate a financial transaction. But they are life stories nevertheless, and barring complete falsification, they deserve to be taken at face value. Philippe generously told me his story, and it is perhaps appropriate to provide more details, along with some observations of my own, in the remaining space.

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I explained before that Philippe endured many hardships to arrive at his present position. His livelihood allows him to thrive in his current economic environment, but his aspirations are not limited to guide work. He has two sons; one currently studies business management at a university in Ho Chi Minh City. Philippe does not envision tourism as a profession for his son. He hopes that his son will choose a more consistent, more well-regarded profession. He calls his son daily to encourage him, and to make sure that he is meeting his responsibilities. Philippe's son is his security; he knows that he cannot continue to perform guided motorbike tours much longer, and he worries about failing health in his old age. Like the vast majority of Vietnamese, without the security of a government pension, Philippe cannot count on having his material and health needs met when he is no longer able to work. He has no property and no source of income outside of tourism. Philippe has committed a large portion of his current income to send his son to university in the most expensive city in Vietnam, though he admits that he is not at all certain that his son will find a job after graduation. Vietnam is a relatively well-educated developing country, and many young Vietnamese with college degrees must make do with work that is far beneath their aspirations.

Philippe tells me his is a king, but my time with him exposed many anxieties and resentments that he would not include in a sales pitch. A seemingly routine traffic stop—45 kmph in a 35 kmph zone—revealed the depth of frustration he feels with his current circumstances. The police officer would not accept a bribe while tourists were present, so Philippe had to arrange the payment for the next day. Philippe was outside his home territory, and he asked an acquaintance at a hotel to help him settle his debt.[65] He was certain that the

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[65] Paying fines in Vietnam is a byzantine process. The authorities created rules to attempt to reduce police corruption: one must go to the police station, receive a copy of the fine, pay the fine at a separate location (a bank or some sort of financial institutions), and take evidence of the payment back to the police station. The process is so

hotel owner cheated him: "800,000 dong for a ticket that should only be 500,000!" His bitterness led to a stream of resentments over the next few days. "You have to pay money to get a certificate [of sale], or you have to wait a year . . . They put your paper in the bottom of the stack." "Your government," he said to me "should pay for soldiers of the South. We have suffered too long." "When the communists came they destroyed all of our cemeteries. There are no monuments to the soldiers of the South!" When he felt slighted by anyone, he would become angry and withdrawn. And yet he was funny, engaging, nearly always surrounded by amused older women. No doubt much of his behavior was determined by his personality, an almost mercurial character that veered from sullen to boisterous.

But (if I mine Philippe's personality a bit further) surely much of his character was formed by the events through with he lived. Philippe began life wealthy, but this wealth was taken from him by the war and by the government that followed. He struggled through the intervening years, from the end of the war to the present, though he is now more comfortable and secure than in previous times. But his perceptions of wealth and status were shaped well before he began his current profession. He provides a profitable service, but enduring status comes through property ownership. Furthermore, property owners and people in power are earning vast fortunes in contemporary Vietnam. Coffee planters around Dalat can earn hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly; factory owners grow prosperous from exports; government officials enrich themselves through the country's flawed public institutions. Philippe has been at the center of wide fluctuations of social equity in Vietnam: from a period of vast inequality between French colonists and Vietnamese; through a period when inequality was coercively (if only nominally)

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burdensome that most people just duck around to the back of the police station to informally pay a larger amount, just to avoid the day-long process described above.

reduced; and now to a time when inequality is again increasing, this time through the vicissitudes of the market. Philippe's tourism business helps him to prosper in Vietnam's current economic climate, but uncertainty—and even a sense of powerlessness—still troubles him.

In this sense, we can view Philippe's story as emblematic of contemporary Vietnam. The past exerts a powerful influence, and every period over the course of the last century has been beset by contingency. The current transition to a market economy presents opportunities for many Vietnamese to improve their economic security, though social change on such a scale inevitably increases uncertainty. Many Vietnamese are optimistic, however, and their hopefulness is encouraged by the considerable economic growth in Vietnam over the past twenty-five years. Furthermore, many Vietnamese, like Philippe and his colleagues, are actively engaged in shaping a society that is continually emerging.

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APPENDIX—INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Operation

Through the following questions, I intend to establish a description of how guide services operate. This typology won't be generalizable, but I can establish some facts about the guides that could provide context for the following sections.

1. Is tour guiding your primary occupation?
2. Are you based in one location or do you change locations frequently?
3. Do you work with other tour guides? Do you work with the same tour guides?
4. Do you maintain connections with other tourism service providers, such as hotels or cafes?
5. How do you contact tourists? Do you find it difficult to engage customers?
6. Is guiding competitive? Are guides cooperative or do guides frequently undercut each other?
7. How have you seen the industry grow? Are more tourists interested in your service? Have many other guides come into the industry?
8. How organized are other tour guide services? Do you encounter many foreign guides that lead tours?
9. What difficulties do you encounter? What are the biggest obstacles to overcome?

Background

The following questions will establish the specific work history of the participant. I hope to establish the relative human capital of the participant as well as some of the barriers to entry for guides.

1. How long have you worked as a tour guide?
2. What prompted you to become a tour guide?
3. What jobs did you have before you became a tour guide?
4. How did you learn about the industry? What prior work experiences enabled you to enter into this business?
5. Have you ever operated a business before?
6. Did you come from this area? If not, did you come here specifically to act as a tour guide? How would you characterize the opportunity available in guide work?
7. What was the most difficult part about becoming a tour guide? Is it hard to operate a business in tourism?

Outlook

These questions will be more open-ended, designed to explore the participant's opinions.

1. How has the nation changed in the past twenty years [dependant on age of participant]?
2. Since you became a guide, how has tourism changed? Have tourists' interests changed?
3. [If the participant operates his/her own business] is it more or less difficult to operate a business now than earlier? If so, what accounts for the increasing difficulty? If not, what has become easier?

4. Do you see your industry, and the country, moving in a positive direction? How do you think your industry benefits the country?

VITA

The author graduated high school in Knoxville, Tennessee, after which he earned his bachelor's degree in history from Maryville College. Before beginning the master's program in geography at the University of Tennessee, the author worked a variety of jobs. The author's many work experiences helped to inform his research interests and vastly improved his work ethic when compared to his early academic efforts. Among the many jobs of which the author is proud are sushi chef, over-the-road truck driver, caretaker and assistant manager at Mt. Leconte Lodge, and now graduate assistant.

The author's work experiences were leavened by periods of travel. He spent several months of travel in New Zealand and Australia; Mexico, Guatemala and Belize; and Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia. His travel in Southeast Asia directly led to the formulation of this thesis research, but more broadly, these travel experiences led the author to geography as an academic discipline. Perhaps no other discipline combines historical synthesis and environmental studies with direct engagement as successfully as geography. The author is enthusiastic about the potential of geographical studies to provide understanding and direction for our uncertain global environment.

Rusty remains interested in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. He hopes to return to Vietnam in the near future, both to increase his understanding of the region and to take advantage of further research opportunities. Future research efforts will likely incorporate political-ecology theory into empirical studies of Vietnam and Southeast Asia. The region is a growing source of resources as well as a strategically important economic and political arena of globalization. Geographers—and indeed representatives of all academic fields—must further extend their work into this critical and fascinating region.