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Tourism and Leisure in Thailand: Erik Cohen and Beyond

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Victor T. King

Abstract:

One of the major research interests in the study of development, culture and identity in Thailand during the past four decades has comprised the effects and processes involved in the development of international tourism and the globalization of leisure. More recently attention has also been paid to the importance of domestic tourism in Thailand and the wider Southeast Asia as economic growth has led to an expansion in the local middle classes and greater opportunities for leisure activities. Tourism in Thailand has tended to focus on selected sites along an axis which includes the northern hill or 'tribal' regions, Chiang Mai and its environs, the greater Bangkok metropolitan area, and several beach and island resorts in southern Thailand. The leading scholar in research in this field has been Erik Cohen. Not only has he contributed to the store of empirical material on Thailand on a wide range of tourism-related subjects, but also to an important series of theoretical debates in the sociological-anthropological study of tourism. These debates examine the appropriate concepts to be deployed in understanding tourism and the transformations which it has set in motion. In tourism studies, there are several key ideas which have preoccupied researchers, many of them in relation to Thailand: cultural 'touristification' and commoditization; imaging and representation; staging and authenticity; identity and ethnicity; host-guest relations; mediation and tour guides; trajectories of change; sequential typologies; and the tourist gaze. A most recent set of discussions generated by Erik Cohen and Scott Cohen has considered the utility of the sociological concept of 'mobilities' and the problem of Eurocentrism in understanding local-level touristic encounters. The paper will critically review these concepts in a changing Thai tourism context.

Keywords: *tourism, mobilities, encounters, Erik Cohen, Thailand*

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Tourism and Leisure in Thailand: Erik Cohen and Beyond¹

Victor T. King

INTRODUCTION

Tourism Development in Thailand

Erik Cohen has remarked that, in the 1990s, ‘Thailand is, even from a global perspective, a mature tourist destination; it is certainly one of the touristically most developed countries in the Third World’ (2001a [1996: 1]; and see 2008a: 3). Its journey towards modern tourism activities began primarily in the 1960s in the context of the American use of Thailand for its military bases and as a place for GI rest-and-recreation (R&R) from the Indochina War. Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963) established the foundations for international tourism in his open-door policy on foreign investment and the development of an infrastructure in transport, communications and accommodation, supported subsequently by substantial levels of American military aid between 1965 and 1975 (Kontogeorgopoulos, 1998: 226). The Tourist Organization of Thailand (TOT) was established in 1960 during the Sarit regime, later to become the Tourist Authority of Thailand (TAT) in 1979 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017). Landmarks in the development of tourism in Thailand were ‘Visit Thailand Year’ (1980 and 1987), ‘Amazing Thailand’ (1998-99), ‘Unseen Thailand’ (2003), ‘Thailand Grand Invitation’ (2007), ‘Thailand Talk to the World’ (2007) to coincide with the late King Bhumipol Adulyadej’s 80th birthday, ‘TAT’s 50th Birthday’ (2010), ‘Amazing Thailand It Begins with the People’ (2013-14), ‘Discover Thainess’ (2015), and ‘Unique Thai Local Experiences’ (2017). The ‘Amazing Thailand’ campaign also continues, and in 2018 a new promotion was launched, ‘Open to the New Shades of Thailand’. Importantly during the early

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2000s Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's administration formulated a more comprehensive tourism policy and intensified the promotion of tourism, restructuring and upgrading the industry to ensure that Thailand became 'the tourism capital of Asia'; and although there were some post-Shinawatra policy modifications, broadly speaking the TAT continued the direction set by his government (Cohen, 2008a: 4).

What is most significant in understanding the trajectories and character of tourism in Thailand is that a large segment of activity is based on domestic and not international tourism (2008a: 2). Even in international tourism, the overwhelming numbers of foreign visitors come from neighbouring ASEAN countries and East and South Asia. Of the top 20 visitor sources 13 are Asian countries. In 2016 Thailand received 32.59 million visits and tourism generated some 2.52 trillion baht for the national economy (Wikipedia, 2017). Of these 8.644 million were from neighbouring ASEAN countries, the main source was Malaysia (3.534 million) and then in order Laos, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines. Of other Asian tourists in the top twenty over 14 million came from other Asian countries: China provided 8.757 million of these, and then South Korea, Japan, India, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Therefore, two-thirds of tourists to Thailand in 2016 were Asian. Moreover, visitors to many of the major sites in Thailand are either domestic Thai tourists or Asians from neighbouring countries. Of non-Asian tourists in the top twenty Russia was first and then the United Kingdom, USA, Germany, Australia, and France amounting to 5.434 million visitors; this is obviously not an insignificant number, amounting to approximately 16-17 per cent of tourists; they tend to focus on well-defined and promoted tourist sites in the Western media and package tourism industry: beach resorts in southern Thailand, Bangkok and its shopping, night-life and heritage, and Chiang Mai, hill tribe areas, and nature. In addition, the Thai government and the TAT began to realize the importance of domestic tourism with the rapid growth of a Thai middle class and an increase in leisure time and disposable income, especially significant for those tourist attractions around the major urban centres, particularly in the Greater Bangkok Metropolitan Area.

Therefore, the major features of tourism in Thailand, as Cohen emphasized, is the need conceptually to address the importance of touristic encounters among and between Asians and between Thais, with less preoccupation on Asian-non-Asian interactions (which was a feature of earlier empirical and theoretical studies on Thai tourism). Cohen's later work demonstrates this

increasing shift to issues generated by the ‘domestication’ of tourism’ (2008a). This fact must also be linked with the increasing evidence of regionalization in tourism. Wall remarked over two decades ago on the significant increase in the volume of travellers moving across the Asian region (2001: 316, 321, 323).

Cohen attempted to capture this process of regionalization but also the maturation of tourism in countries like Thailand (2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d). He identified ‘four principal trends of change’ (2001a: 4). He categorized these as: (1) ‘massification: from personalized to impersonal tourism’ from the 1970s, with the development of transport, communications and tourism infrastructure; (2) ‘expansion: from centralized to dispersed tourism’ away from the main tourism hubs of Bangkok, Phuket and Chiang Mai to such destinations as Chiang Rai, Haadyai, Mae Hong Son, Pai, Kanchanaburi and several southern islands such as Krabi and Trang; (3) ‘heterogeneization: from homogeneous to diversified tourism’ to meet the needs of an increasing range of tourists: European, American, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, Malaysian, Singaporean, Russian, and Middle Eastern, and to move from sex tourism to ecotourism, historical-heritage-cultural-ethnic tourism, vacationing, medical tourism and theme parks (and see Cohen, 2008a:1-21); and (4) ‘regionalization: from isolation to regional integration’ in that Thailand plays a pivotal role in the coordination, supply and support of tourism to the Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam (2001a: 4-14). Of course, there would need to be some elaboration of these stages in regional comparative terms in that some destinations elsewhere in Southeast Asia have not been subject to ‘massification’; some sites fail in competition with others; other sites experience different forms of tourism which merge into longer term sojourning and retirement. In my view, there is no general model or template of regionalization in ASEAN.

Following Cohen, Thailand as a mature tourism market and one which has been open to commercialization and international tourists, has certain distinctive features. Surrounded by nation-states which were relatively closed to tourism until the 1990s, the regionalization of tourism has been a relatively recent phenomenon in that Thailand has become a hub and springboard for movement into nearby countries which have only recently embraced a market economy. His model, though it works well for Thailand and its neighbours does not work so well for, say, the movement of certain categories of tourists and visitors between Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and the Philippines, which importantly, unlike Thailand, were also subject

to colonialism (see, for example, King, 2016a). If we reorient ourselves to domestic tourism and the regular movement of Southeast Asians across borders within the region for a variety of purposes prior to the development of mass tourism and the expansion of cross-border movements, then we can begin to shift our frames of reference.

In regard to the increase in mass tourism Cohen also points to a ‘ubiquitous process’ in Thailand, whereby ‘natural attractions’ or ‘pre-existing environmental, cultural and historical sites and events, which appear, or are promoted in the language of tourism...as “authentic”, “pristine” or “untouched”, in alleged sharp contrast to the prevailing state-of-affairs in the contemporary West’ have to be adapted or protected to cope with the increasing pressures of tourism (2001d: 155). At the same time, newly-contrived attractions appear to ‘enhance the attractiveness of the destination’ and to either ‘deflect tourists from the declining natural attractions’ or serve as substitutions for them (ibid.). These comprise such attractions as theme and amusement parks, wildlife and bird parks, craft and ethnic villages, and new festivals and events; these may over time become ‘naturalised’ and incorporated into local cultures and ways of life and presented as ‘traditional’ or part of local ‘ethnic identities’ (ibid.: 156-170; and see 2008a). Cohen’s interesting suggestion which has supporting evidence in recent developments in mainland Southeast Asia is that ‘regionalisation of mainland Southeast Asian tourism.....may well reinforce the process of Thailand’s touristic transition, with Thailand as a country specialising in the provision of facilities and contrived attractions while the newly opened countries and the remote border regions of Thailand provide fresh natural environmental and cultural attractions’ (2001d: 171).

Substantive Issues

Among other things, this paper provides a critical overview and appreciation of Erik Cohen’s sociological-anthropological research on tourism in Thailand from a reading of his major publications and a face-to-face and email dialogue from 2014. It is structured around Cohen’s observation that his research did not stem from ‘a long-range research project’; rather it comprised ‘shifting and expanding interests’ which ‘developed over the years in a process of interaction between theoretical concerns and research findings’ (2001b: ix, 2001c). In much of his work on Thailand, his approach adopted appropriate concepts to address the topic or issue under investigation; there was no specific theory that was pursued single-mindedly in the analysis of the empirical material.

The most important biographical appreciation of Cohen's work has been provided by Scott Cohen (2013) who has also co-authored several theoretically significant publications with Erik Cohen since 2012 (see, for example, Cohen and Cohen, 2012a, 2012b, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; and Cohen, Cohen and King, 2016). Scott Cohen indicates that up until his 2013 publication there was 'only piecemeal biographical information available about him [Erik Cohen] in the public domain' (2013: 104), though there had been some informative autobiographical exposures in Erik Cohen's own work (see, for example, 2001b, 2007a: 50-59, 2012a), and useful material in Graburn's brief appreciation (2004: 94-95). The concluding comments of Scott Cohen on Erik Cohen's work sets the scene for my current adventure: 'Encapsulating Erik Cohen's contribution to the advancement of the field of tourism studies in a few words is a problem, for his work has been incredibly varied, covering so many ways in which tourism interfaces with the contemporary world' and 'Professor Erik Cohen's work has been absolutely fundamental to the development of tourism studies and its dissemination from both sociological and anthropological perspectives' (2013: 109, 110).

The crucial concerns for social scientists since the second half of the 1970s have been the social and cultural interactions between visitors, tourism intermediaries, and local communities and their respective responses, and the interpretations that they construct of these complex encounters (Cohen indicates that his early interest in hill tribe tourism in the 1970s was in 'touristic interactions' and especially between tourists, 'jungle guides' and ethnic minorities [2001b: x-xi, 1982a, 1983a, 1985a, 1989a]). In addition, in sociological terms, Cohen was interested in the organizational forms, interactions, and the content of and the processes involved in a wide range of tourism activities: emerging tourisms and resulting touristic differentiation in attractions, sites and events (1972, 1979a, 1979b, 1979c, 1983b, 1984a, 1987a, 2001a, 2001d, 2001e, 2008a; and see Dann and Cohen, 1991); the socio-economic backgrounds, experiences and motivations of tourists, and the different categories of tourists (1974, 1979a).

Cohen also developed an ethnographic interest in 'hill tribe tourist art' and the need 'to place this within the wider context of cultural, economic and political trends in the region' (2001b: xi, 2000, 1983a, 1989b, 1989c, 1993a, 1996a), and imaging and representations of peoples and sites in advertisements, brochures, greetings cards, postcards, and popular and scientific literature (1992a, 1992b, 1993b, 2001d). He also explored the ways in which tourism becomes implicated in cultural politics and identity formation in the encounters between the nation-state and its

constituent ethnic groups (1983c, 1992a, 1993b). More generally, Cohen examined the varied interactions and linkages between local tourist phenomena at the micro-level and the wider social, cultural and political context (2008a); and the social, cultural economic, political and environmental consequences of tourism (1978, 1988a, 2007b, 2008a). He has also addressed a range of seemingly disparate elements and events in tourism in Thailand: among others, Chinese vegetarian festivals and spirit possession (2001f, 2009a, 2012b), medical tourism (2010a), the symbolic and practical role of animals in tourism (2009b, 2010b, 2012c), tourist jokes (2010c), golf tourism (1995a), tribal costumes (1988b), spirit houses (2014a), backpacking (2004a), pilgrimage (1992c, 2004b), floating markets (2016a), tourism-related crime (1996b, 1997), tourist murders (2008b, 2016b), tourist fatalities in natural disasters (2009c), tourism crises (2010d, 2012d; Cohen and Neal, 2010), urban heritage (2014b), tattoo tourism (2013), and food tourism (Cohen and Avieli, 2004).

He has brought together these concerns, among a host of other overview and general papers, in his collected essays: *Thai Tourism: Hill Tribes, Islands and Open-ended Prostitution* (2001a, 2001b, 2001c, [1996]) and *Explorations in Thai Tourism: Collected Case Studies* (2008a). He has also published other collected works, but these are not exclusively directed to Thai tourism (1991, 2004c). His *Thai Tourism*, as its sub-title suggests, comprises 14 papers, grouped into three broad categories: hill tribe tourism in northern Thailand; ‘vacationing’ or island tourism in southern Thailand; and sex tourism in Bangkok. Cohen also refers to these three broad categories of tourism in the introductory chapter to his second collection *Explorations* and refers to several other researchers who have explored facets of these three different geographically/regionally-located kinds of touristic encounter (2008a: 1).

However, in the successor volume, Cohen dwells on the diversity of tourism and its progressive differentiation in Thailand as a mature and continuously developing destination; he suggests that up the 2000s research had failed to address adequately this diversity (2008a: 1-2). In an important respect, it is a continuation and elaboration of the framework which he devised in his first volume to capture trends and dynamics in Thai tourism development (2001a, 2001b; and see 1995b, 2001d). This framework engages with the maturing and diversification of tourism, set within the wider socio-cultural, economic and political relationships and processes of modernization, development and growth in Thailand, and with the beneficial and detrimental

impacts or effects of a rapidly expanding, internationalizing service industry (Cohen, 2001a: 24-28). He has demonstrated admirably this changing response to the demands of tourism, both domestic and international, in his more recent examination of the ‘permutations’ of Thailand’s ‘floating markets’ and the presentation of a ‘sequential typology’ of continuously active, revived, new neo-traditional, and new, innovative markets (2016a: 65-78).

Therefore, in the second collection which comprises reprinted publications or revised papers in the period from 2005 to 2007, he ranged over several issues, some of which can be expressed as ‘emerging’ tourisms, including such topics as tourism and disaster (specifically the *tsunami* in southern Thailand); tourism and environmental change; backpacker tourism in Pai, northern Thailand; elephants and tourism; medical tourism and the institution of the ‘hotel-spital’ (and see, for example, 2010a); and the post-modernization of (mythical) events, fantasy sites (the American West and cowboy towns in Thailand) and greetings cards which incorporate and meld Western and Thai themes. Interestingly, what he suggests, in his introduction to this collection, is that the diversity of his case studies has required a set of diverse concepts, echoing his earlier comments on engaging with analytical approaches appropriate to the task in hand. Therefore, the studies ‘lack a common theoretical framework’ (2008a: 2, 15-20). I will return to these matters later, specifically in considering Cohen’s and Scott Cohen’s subsequent development of a ‘mobilities paradigm’ (see, for example, Cohen and Cohen, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

In his overview of 2008 Cohen refers to several macro-sociological studies which address processes of change and development generated by tourism, but, even with full recognition of the importance of these contributions (for example, Elliott, 1983; Forsyth, 1995; Kontogeorgopoulos, 1998, 1999; Meyer, 1988; Parnwell, 1993; and Peleggi, 1996; and see also Li and Zhang, 1997; McDowall and Wang, 2009; McDowall and Ma, 2010), it has been Cohen’s work, in my view, in its comparative range and depth of detail and innovation which has held centre-stage. My only observation in this regard is that Peleggi has made a significant contribution to our understanding of heritage and its presentation in Thailand (see, for example, 2002, 2007, 2017).

Early Sociological-Anthropological Contributions to Tourism Studies

Tourism has attracted increasing sociological-anthropological attention from its birth as a legitimate subject for study some four decades ago because of its ‘inexorable links with culture’

and its engagement with ‘cultural otherness’ (Burns, 1999: 33; Yamashita, Kadir Din and Eades, 1997: 14). These concerns resulted in the formulation of such concepts as ‘staged authenticity’, ‘tourism as a sacred journey’, ‘cultural commoditization’ and ‘cultural involution’. Above all tourism was conceptualized as a dynamic cultural process which would increasingly ‘impact’ on those communities living and working in and around tourist sites and become incorporated into processes of cultural change and identity formation at the local and national levels.

However, looking back at the mid- to late-1970s which marked the birth of sociological-anthropological studies of tourism, Thailand did not play a formative role either as case material or in conceptual development: for example, it did not figure in the work of such scholars as Graburn, in his studies of ethnic and tourist arts as carriers of symbols and messages, and his concept of tourist travel as a ‘sacred journey’ (1976, 1977 [1989]; and see Cohen, 1985b); in MacCannell’s thesis on the ‘leisure class’ and the ‘homelessness’ of the ‘modern’ (1973, 1976); in McKean’s formulation of the notions of ‘economic dualism’ and ‘cultural involution’ (1973, 1976, 1977 [1989]); in Smith’s categorical division between ‘hosts and guests’ (1977 [1989], 1989); and in Wood’s work on tourism and underdevelopment, his reconceptualization of the relationships between tourism and culture, and his critique of Western ethnocentrism and Western-derived normative categories of analysis (1979, 1980, 1993).

The neglect of this mature tourism destination was confirmed in Smith’s widely acclaimed *Hosts and Guests* (1977[1989]). Significantly there were chapters on cultural tourism in Bali (McKean, 1977[1989]) and ethnic tourism in the Toraja Highlands (Crystal, 1977 [1989]), but no attention to Thailand (and see King, 2008). Perhaps this was a consequence of the differences in tourism in these two destinations in the 1960s and 1970s. Anthropologists could comfortably study cultural and ethnic tourism in Indonesia, in that these were embedded in the relationships between minority populations and the nation-state, but they were less at ease in addressing sex and leisure activities in Thailand. Interestingly it was much later in Indonesia that social science shifted its attention from cultural and ethnic tourism to sex tourism (Dahles, 2009). In the case of Thailand, prostitution was made illegal in 1960 and was a problematical area for social science research because of this official view (Cohen, 2001a: 3).

Tourist-oriented prostitution and the complex socio-cultural encounters between foreign tourists and young Thai women was not addressed to any degree until the exceptional work of Erik

Cohen (1982b, 1984b, 1986, 1988c, 1993c, 2003). Cohen says, in his reflections in the 1990s on this field of study, that it was ‘a subject of considerable public attention and controversy, but on which little empirical research had been undertaken’ (2001b: xi). Indeed, when Cohen was developing his concept of open-ended tourist-oriented prostitution (1993c) and the ambiguous relationships between Thai hosts and *falang* guests (1982b, 1986), there were very few studies of the consequences of the touristic commercialization of sexual relationships, other than those by Keyes (1984), Thitsa (1980), Phongpaichit (1982) and Senftleben (1988). Manderson explains this neglect, in her examination of the touristic representations of women and sexuality in Thailand. ‘Sex and tourism share marginal status within the social sciences. The disinclination of anthropologists, among others, to study the latter has been in part a wariness of the uncomplimentary analogy between tourism and anthropological practice, in part also because of tourism’s association with leisure, hence the implicit triviality of its study as well as pursuit.... For sex, too, uncomfortable sets of personal associations pertain’ (1995: 307; and see Manderson, 1992; and Crick, 1996). In my view, it was unlikely at that time that the major Western social science funding bodies, given their ethical concerns, would have supported ethnographic research on sex tourism, though increasingly the issue of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS attracted attention from NGOs and funders concerned about the need to encourage changes in policy in developing countries (Cohen, 1988c; Leheny, 1995). Indeed, the title of one of Cohen’s papers, ‘sensuality and venality’, in exploring the fuzzy boundaries between prostitution and open-ended hosting, would not have been officially welcome in Thailand at that time (Cohen, 1987b).

In fact, Cohen’s first major contributions to research on tourism in Thailand did not primarily address sex tourism, but instead examined the kinds of tourism which would be acceptable in professional anthropological circles: firstly, hill tribe tourism, ethnicity, and ethnic arts in the uplands of northern Thailand (Cohen, 1982a, 1983a, 1988b, 1989c, 1992a, 1992b); and then beach and resort tourism in the southern islands of Thailand (1982c, 1983b, 2001e).

Cohen’s Contributions

General Perspectives and Comparisons

I have undertaken a brief review of some of Erik Cohen’s in previous publications (King, 2009: 46-53, 63-64; 2015a: 507-519) and see Hitchcock, King and Parnwell, 2009a: 19-20; and King,

2015b). In this present appreciation of his work, I have attempted to update the review and reconsider some of his more recent conceptual and empirical contributions. In his early studies, he characterized tourism in Thailand in terms of an interesting complementary dualism: ‘eroticism’ and ‘exoticism’ or, in popular discourse, the quite striking opposition between ‘brothels’ and ‘temples’ (2001a: 2-3). Cohen refers to these as ‘structural opposites’. The study of tourism, like sociological and anthropological studies more generally, is replete with these dual categorizations: work and leisure, ordinary/every-day and extraordinary, home and away, study and entertainment, authentic and inauthentic, reality and fantasy, hosts and guests, nature and culture, international and domestic, global and local, tradition and modernity, tradition and invention, and hot and cool, as well as the perspectives which cluster around Western/Eurocentric/Orientalist and ‘alternative/non-Western’ approaches (King, 2015a: 508-509).

In the late 1970s, Cohen, in his first major study of tourism in Thailand, viz. hill tribe tourism, drew our attention to a significant issue: the academic literature on the social and cultural ‘impacts’ of tourism had failed ‘to discuss systematic differences between types of tourists or types of communities’ (2001h:115 [1979c]). He identified an absence of ‘the middle range of systematic comparative studies which are specifically designed to examine the differential impact of given types of tourism under different sets of conditions’ (ibid). Ambitiously he addressed this lack of comparative work by examining the differential effects of ‘tribal village tours’ and ‘jungle tours’ on five communities from three different ethnic groups (Meo [Hmong], Lisu and Akha). He identified three analytical variables – the place of tourism within the local socio-economic context, the nature and organization of the tourism enterprise, and tourist-villager interactions (ibid: 118-119).

Cohen’s argument was based on the important premise, which has been a recurring theme, that tourism should be understood in terms of interrelated processes and not as ‘an isolated event’, in that it generates consequences for the host communities which can be anticipated or intended, as well as ‘unexpected and often not desired’ (ibid: 113). This became a persistent theme in his later work. Cohen concluded that ‘although some of the villages may have been “spoilt” by tourism, and hence are no longer as “authentic” as they used to be in the past, intensive penetration of tourism has not had a markedly disruptive impact on the economic and social life of the villagers’ (ibid: 140). What is remarkable is that, although some comparative research has been

undertaken in Southeast Asia since Cohen's study, there has been very little in the way of country-wide let alone region-wide comparison. In his later studies, Cohen returns to the proposal that much more comparative work remains to be undertaken (see, for example, 2008a: 20-21).

I have also recently attempted to remedy this lack of a comparative perspective in an overview of tourism research in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysian Borneo and Indonesian Kalimantan (King, 2016a). Therefore, Cohen remains something of an exception in his wide-ranging and systematic studies of the different dimensions of tourism in Thailand (2001c, 2008a), although there have been several edited collections which have drawn attention to some of the similarities and differences in tourism experiences both within and across countries in Southeast Asia (see, for example, Hall and Page, 2000; Picard and Wood, 1997; Teo, Chang and Ho, 2001; Hitchcock, King and Parnwell, 1993, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Hitchcock and King, 2003).

Cohen's comparative study and his related papers on hill tribe tourism in Thailand (1982a, 1983a, 1983c, 1985a, 1989a, 1992a, 1993a, 1993b, 2001h [1979c]) address themes which continue to play a vital role in sociological-anthropological studies of tourism. A major concern is, in Cohen's terms, the 'impacts' of tourism on local communities. This has long been a preoccupation in our research, although the ways in which host-guest interactions and their consequences have been conceptualized have changed since Cohen undertook his early studies, particularly the notion of tourism as an external force 'impacting' on local communities (see, for example, Wood, 1993; Picard, 1996). Rather than seeing the social effects of tourism on local cultures as 'destructive', 'negative', or 'inimical', on the one hand or 'negligible', 'moderate', 'more beneficent' or 'positive' on the other (Cohen, 2001h [1979c]: 113-121; 140-144), researchers have more recently moved beyond this 'normative' framework to one which conceptualizes 'culture' and 'tradition' in symbolic terms, as a 'hybrid entity', and as 'constructed' and 'reconstructed', 'invented', 'improvised', 'manipulated', 'relational', 'historically unfinished' and 'consumed' (see especially Wood, 1993: 58-60; 64-66; and Erb, 2000: 709-736; Hitchcock, 1999: 17-32; Picard, 1996: 190-200; Yamashita, 2003: 4).

This is not to say that Cohen's earlier work on 'impacts' was not carefully qualified in assessing the costs and benefits of tourism in different local contexts in northern Thailand because he was examining a range of social, cultural, economic and environmental circumstances. But, in my view, he had not yet embraced fully the notion of 'traditions' as represented and attributed

symbolically, though this perspective was prefigured in his rethinking of the sociology of tourism (1979b). Even after Wood's re-conceptualization of 'culture' and 'cultural change' in the 1980s, in the second edition of Smith's *Hosts and Guests* (1989), the editor keeps to a concept of change as 'impact' or, in cost-benefit terms, as 'beneficial' or 'damaging', as do certain of the contributors, and the preoccupation is with the encounter between 'foreign' hosts and 'domestic' guests, which remained a central but problematical issue in tourism research into the 1980s and 1990s. The focus, in an Asian context, continued to be on the encounters between non-Asian international tourists and domestic hosts; the increasing importance of domestic tourism and Asian tourism within Asia had still not come firmly into focus.

Authenticity and Authentication

Arising from his earlier empirical work on hill tribe tourism, Cohen addressed the complex concept of 'authenticity' in evaluating the cultural effects of tourism. Addressing hill tribe trekking, he examined the touristic search for the 'primitive' and 'remote' as an opportunity for the 'staging of authenticity' (1989a: 30). He argued post-normatively that conceptions of what is 'genuine' and 'invented' or 'false' are 'socially constructed' (1988a). He reconsidered MacCannell's concept of 'authenticity' and the view that tourists were in search of original 'social' experiences, and in this quest, beyond their every-day, fragmented, alienated, 'inauthentic' lives, they discover or rediscover their real selves and a sense of personal and social wholeness and structure by re-creating something perceived as real and representative of a lost pre-modern state (1973; 1976). In his theoretical discourse on 'the structure of modern consciousness' (Cohen, 1989a: 32) MacCannell also developed the related notion of 'staged authenticity' in which tourist hosts, agencies and guides, entrepreneurs and representatives of the state, in promoting the attractiveness of their tourist assets, construct seemingly authentic experiences to seduce their guests (1973: 602-603). The tourist becomes ensnared in a contrived 'tourist space' which presents 'unchanging native traditions', 'pristine cultures', and 'exotic communities'.

Staging is of two main kinds, although these can be interrelated and complementary: 'substantive' where an attraction is altered or created afresh, and 'communicative' where authenticity is either presented in tourist promotional literature without necessarily interfering with the attraction or site thus advertised, or where the attraction is interpreted as authentic by tour guides and intermediaries (Cohen, 1989a: 33-35). Cohen then elaborated on a neglected element

in tourism research, that of the complex and changing roles of mediation, interconnection and representation of the 'jungle guide' in northern Thailand (1982a) and the 'tourist guide' more generally (1985a); the guide as a crucial intermediary is regularly engaged in the process of 'authentication'. Cohen's study of 'jungle guides' is an interesting case of agency because, at least in the initial stages of tourism development in the hills of northern Thailand, the state did not assume a leading role. Rather it was the interaction between 'alternative' tourists (generally young travellers in search of 'authentic' experiences) and 'local entrepreneurs' which generated hill tribe tourism (1989a: 31). Cohen also noted, in the case of 'jungle guides', that the provincial authorities had not encouraged tourism, but 'half-heartedly acquiesced to its spontaneous development' (1982a: 234). However, once it had developed the authorities began to regulate it and professionalize the 'marginal' occupation of jungle guiding. Cohen has said, 'Enterprising travellers who penetrate new "unspoilt" areas frequently become the unsuspected pioneers of the touristic penetration of these areas by less adventurous individuals, who follow in their footsteps' (1989a: 33). From the 1970s onwards these young travellers then interacted with 'freelance local guides' and 'small jungle-tour companies' (1989a: 38-39). Cohen stressed the importance of the personal qualities of the guides, their charisma, experience, reputation and linguistic abilities as well as the activities of a small group of tour companies which were key agents in developing and presenting 'images' of the hill tribes (1989a: 59-61).

In his exploration of authenticity, Cohen also addressed Graburn's proposition that tourism is 'a sacred journey', a pilgrimage in which tourists move from the profane, mundane, compulsory round of work and day-to-day existence to the sacred, unfamiliar, voluntary world of 'elsewhere', in which those who escape briefly are refreshed and renewed in specifically 'ritualized breaks in routine that define and relieve the ordinary', and which are preferably authentic (1977[1989]; 1983; Cohen, 1985b). In other words, in the conceptualizations of MacCannell and Graburn travel for leisure and enjoyment in the encounter with the 'other' and the 'unfamiliar' are translated into journeys of self-discovery, and the quest for fulfilment, social status and mental and physical renewal.

Cohen, however, argued convincingly for a much more diverse set of motivations and purposes for tourists, and for a concept of authenticity of which the criteria vary depending on the views, perceptions, and evaluations of the tourist or observer, always, of course, within the context

of the complexities and ‘unknowables’ with which they are faced (1988a: 378; and see Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003). Authenticity is therefore negotiable and fluid, and this explains why ‘a cultural product, or trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic’ (Cohen, 1988a: 379; and see Cohen, 2010e). Authenticity, like culture and ethnicity, is also a focus of debate and contestation among local hosts, and as Erb suggests, this arises partly from different readings of what authenticity might mean (2003: 131-132; and see Allerton, 2003: 124-126). This process of the increasing perceptions of the ‘inauthentic’ becoming ‘authentic’ also combines conceptually with the related notion that ‘invention’ over time translates into ‘tradition’.

More recent debates on the concept of authenticity and the differences of interpretation between ‘objectivists’, ‘constructivists’ and ‘post-modernists’ have not, in my view, advanced our understanding significantly. However, there appears to be a more general agreement that we should abandon attempts to determine ‘objective [object] authenticity’ and address the diverse and personal nature of tourist experiences, and that, for certain tourists, to accept that they can undergo an ‘inauthentic authentic’ experience and that we are dealing with intra- and inter-personal states connected to ‘existential authenticity’ (Reisinger and Steiner [2006] and Wang Ning [1999]). Therefore, we do not need to abandon the concept of authenticity, rather, we address its socially constructed nature, and recognize that tourists can perceive authenticity to their satisfaction even when it is staged.

Our research will continue to require us to question tourists about their levels of satisfaction with their vacation, and satisfaction will often turn on the concept of authenticity. This relational perspective must also embrace tour guides, for example, who articulate and mediate the contested images of tourist sites, including official ones, and decide whether they present something which they themselves perceive as culturally authentic or as something which responds to market-demands (Dahles, 2001: 3).

Cohen constructed a scheme in relation to tourist motivations and authenticity, arguing for a range of tourist types, from ‘authenticity-seekers’ to ‘recreational’ tourists seeking not the authentic but the pleasurable, and to ‘diversionary’ tourists ‘who seek mere diversion and oblivion...unconcerned with the problem of authenticity of their experiences’ (1988a: 377; 1979c). In other words, for Cohen, ‘not all tourists seem to seek authenticity, or to pursue it to the same

degree of intensity'. Recreational tourists, for example, tend to 'exhibit a rather playful attitude to the authenticity of the visited attractions' and they 'willingly.... cooperate in the game of touristic make-believe' (1989a: 32). This 'make-believe' was dissected by Cohen in examining the promotional literature provided by tour guides and agencies on hill tribe tourism in northern Thailand. His assessment of the increasing 'gap' between 'image' and reality' provides a poignant reminder of what 'staging' entails in the incorporation and display of ethnic minorities (1989a: 30-61, 1992a).

In Cohen's later work with Scott Cohen he takes a rather different direction, and rather than examining personalized tourist experiences and pursuing Wang Ning's tripartite categorization of objective/object, constructed and existential authenticity (1999), the Cohens turn their attention to the sources and processes of authentication and who authorizes authenticity (2012a). They discern two kinds of authentication, with reference to Selwyn (1996), though these are not absolute, clearly distinguishable categories: the 'cool' which refers to accepted, official, formal, authorized definitions of authenticity where the authorizing agent is usually identified; and the 'hot' which addresses the arena of authenticity construction comprising 'perpetual transformation', 'augmentation' and '(re)enactment. 'Hot' authentication involves the 'immanent, reiterative, informal performative process of creating, preserving and reinforcing an object's, site's or event's authenticity'; and the authorizing process is much more problematical to identify (2012a: 1300, 1310-1311). This seems to me to be a positive way forward in handling the increasingly problematical analytical status of the concept of authenticity. After Cohen and Cohen's pronouncements I am not convinced that there is much more to say on this matter.

Tourism, Globalization and Commoditization

In much of Cohen's work on Thailand there is an underlying theme which addresses the provision or production of tourist experiences and resources as consumables or commodities to be displayed, sold and appropriated (see Selwyn, 1993: 119-120; Urry, 1995; Watson and Kopachevsky, 1994). These considerations must be placed in a post-modern, globalized context within which culture and society become increasingly fragmented, pluralized, contested, imagined and commoditized and 'distinctions between "real" versus "fake" and "natural" versus "unnatural" [are pushed] beyond recognition"' (Burns, 1999: 62; and see Sofield, 2000: 49-50; 2001: 106-108; Urry, 1990: 85; 156; Wood, 1993: 64-66). Debates about the nature of culture and identity and about whether

these are, or elements of them are ‘authentic’ are therefore ‘complicated by the abrasive power of globalisation, which is strong, visible and increasingly pervasive, especially with the rapid advancement in satellite-based information technology and mass media, together with the invasive dominance of multinational corporations’ (Yamashita, Eades and Kadir Din, 1997: 30; and see Sofield, 2001: 103-120). Culture then is ‘hybridized’ and ‘deterritorialized’ and one finds in, for example, items of material culture and ‘tourist arts’ the embodiment of a range of meanings which defy simple categorization as genuine handicrafts or as ‘airport art’ (Yamashita, 2003: 5; and see Adams, 2009).

One of Cohen’s major conclusions in his work on northern Thailand is that there are considerable variations in the effects of tourism on local communities and the kinds of tourism activity (2001h [1979c]: 118-120; and see Sofield, 2001: 104). This, in turn, entails the recognition that tourism is a complex, dynamic, unbounded and variegated phenomenon which is not amenable to one-dimensional explanations, single theory frameworks or ‘universal generalisations’ (Cohen, 1979b, 1979c, 2004c; Sofield, 2000: 45; 49; Wood, 1993: 55). As Wilson warned some time ago: ‘We must be wary of allowing ourselves to become entrapped by any one conceptual framework’ (1993: 35), a guiding principle which Cohen has vigorously adopted. Therefore, one way out of this dilemma is precisely Cohen’s approach in undertaking wide-ranging comparative studies and in selecting appropriate concepts to address the specific research problem in hand. Tourists also differ on a continuum of dependency or degree of institutionalization, expressed most prominently in Cohen’s early quadripartite classification of the institutionalized ‘organised mass tourists’, the less dependent ‘individual mass tourists’, the relatively independent ‘explorers’ and the free-wheeling, discomfort- and novelty-seeking ‘drifters’ (1974: 527-555). But even Cohen’s classification did not capture the complexity of the category ‘tourist’; it was followed by categorizations based on finer discriminations of tourist types and on different domains of tourism (Smith, 1977[1989]; 1989: 4-6; Wood, 1980; 1984; and see King, 2017). Nevertheless, these attempts at classification, while necessary, have tended to lead to stereotyping and oversimplification, and by their nature have underplayed the dynamics of tourism as a process.

Tourism as well as embodying and expressing a process of differentiation is also intertwined in other processes of modernization. This poses one of the greatest challenges to tourism research in that it is often difficult to disentangle the ‘impacts’ of tourism development in

a rapidly developing country like Thailand from other processes of change, particularly with the rapid expansion of the international media and electronic communication. In the case of island communities and small scale tribal populations or minorities directly exposed to tourism activities (see Cohen, 2001a, 2001e, 2001g), the exercise to identify sources of change might be straightforward, but even these transformations are unlikely to be only tourism-generated. As Cohen said, in his study of hill tribe tourism, it is a ‘difficult task ...isolating the impact of tourism from other kinds of impacts on the tribal communities emanating from the wider society’ (2001h [1979c]: 117). Nevertheless, overall ‘The growth of tourism in Thailand did not occur in isolation – as it did in some small, isolated island states on which tourism is the principal or sole industry; rather, tourism grew hand in hand with the rapid economic development of the country, comprising the industrial, financial, communicative, and service sectors’ (2001a: 24; Elliott, 1983).

Cohen’s overall assessment in the mid-1990s, using the notion of ‘impact’, rather than ‘touristification’ was that the effect of tourism on ‘mainstream Thai culture has had some creative as well as debasing consequences’. However, the impact ‘on the way of life of some small and vulnerable ethnic groups...can be seriously detrimental’ (2001a: 26-27; Dearden, 1996, Dearden and Harron, 1994, and Toyota, 1996). It seems that the concept of ‘touristification’ is not so appropriate for Thailand; tourism in Bangkok, for example, given that it has developed in a highly cosmopolitan, urban environment, has not ‘touristified’ Thai culture. It is one of many forces of change. The effects of tourism are more dispersed and disparate in a much more segmented industry than in a ‘touristified’ site like Bali; Thailand’s tourism has not concentrated on specific ethnic groups nor has there been a focus on cultural diversity within a national culture. Overall Cohen has recognized processes of staging and cultural invention, but he has tended to view ‘impacts’ and the commercialization of culture and nature as having both negative and positive effects.

An Emerging Mobilities Paradigm and Alternatives?

More recently Erik Cohen, mainly in an extraordinarily productive partnership with Scott Cohen, has drawn attention to the context within which tourism and emerging forms of tourism are currently developing in a globalizing world. The main concerns in these processes are the increasing pace of change; time-space compression; our saturation in information and images generated through the global media; the fragmentation of social and cultural life; increasing risk

and insecurity; pervasive consumerism and commoditization; and cultural pluralization (2012a, 2012b). What are the concepts which have emerged to address these changes? The dominant concepts in the study of tourism have been provided through sociological-anthropological research and through political economy and historical perspectives. Obviously, globalization theories have held centre stage. However, a constant theme running through much of this endeavour is the need to understand the interactions and relationships – the ‘encounters’ - between a range of stakeholders and interest groups engaged in tourism.

Cohen, in eschewing a general theoretical framework, in his second collection of essays, instead set out a range of issues or guiding principles for research; some of these relate to notions of globalization and the combination of the insights from sociology and anthropology. He points to the importance of comparative research, and the linkages and ‘linking institutions’ between tourism activities and the wider social, cultural and political context; the sources and dynamics of ‘tourism-related events and processes’; the tensions and conflicts, and the power relations between local residents and small-scale businesses and outsiders and large-scale business; and the agency exercised by the local population; the conflicts between commercialization, local cultural and environmental preservation, and local autonomy; and the ‘incongruities’ between values and beliefs and between these and the circumstances on the ground, and how these are mitigated, resolved or deployed to enhance the attraction of touristic assets. Importantly, he also emphasizes the increasing profile of domestic and Asian tourism, some of which now coincide with international tourism activity, which requires tourism research to move away from paradigms and concepts based on Western ethnocentrism and find ways of developing approaches to address emerging touristic phenomena (2008a: 15-21).

Mobilities

Erik Cohen and Scott Cohen have been developing a conceptually sophisticated attempt to overcome the issue of Eurocentrism or Western-centred perspectives. This critical intervention refers to Syed Farid Alatas’ call for ‘alternative discourses (1993, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2015) and Syed Hussein Alatas’ critical stance on ‘intellectual imperialism’ and Western ‘Orientalism’ (1956, 1974, 1977, 1979, 2000). The Cohens have proposed that a ‘mobilities’ approach to ‘discretionary travel’ might serve to address the Eurocentric character of conceptual frameworks in the sociology of tourism (2012a, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). More than this they argue

that a mobilities perspective might serve to set in motion a ‘paradigmatic shift’ in the sociology-anthropology of tourism. Their work has emerged in the context of globalized processes of change and the expansion and differentiation of the experience, contexts and consequences of personal mobility.

For me the value of the approach of the Cohens is to address the issue of the problematical nature of tourism (and tourism studies) as a category and as an apparently unified and defined field of study, and to draw attention to the fact that there is now a range of phenomena, events and activities which are included (or becoming increasingly so) within tourism, but which were previously considered within other forms of scholarly enquiry or seen as part of other arenas of social, cultural, economic and political life, encapsulated within a process of physical movement (international and domestic business, labour mobility, transnational migration, diasporas, sojourning, retirement abroad and so on). In this regard, they are often referred to as ‘new or emergent tourisms’ or, like ecotourism, ‘alternative’ or ‘sustainable’ forms of tourism. In addition, the mobilities approach throws up other motivations for travel, not necessarily to seek authenticity or an escape from the tedium and regularity of every-day life, for example, but rather to pursue prestige and markers of modernity. There is then no longer a clear-cut division (if there ever was) between the ordinary and extraordinary and between work and leisure (2012b: 2181-2183, and see King, 2017).

Well before the Cohens considered the utility of a mobilities paradigm, Franklin and Chang had argued for the relocation of the study of tourism within a broader conceptual field; they had perceived tourism as ‘no longer a specialist consumer product or mode of consumption’, nor ‘a definitive and exotic event, process or phenomenon of minor or marginally eccentric importance in post-modern life’, but instead ‘a significant modality’ which was contributing to the organization and transformation of people’s everyday lives (2001: 6-7; and see Rojek, 1995; Rojek and Urry, 1997; Inglis, 2000).

The Cohens take their inspiration from the pioneer voice in the sociology of mobilities, the late John Urry (2000, 2007). Urry has been concerned, in association with Hannam and Sheller, among others, to develop our conceptual understanding of the processes, character and consequences of movement (Hannam and Knox, 2010; Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006: 1-22; Sheller and Urry, 2004, 2006: 207-226). But, as Sheller indicates, citing Urry, the concept of

‘mobilities’ does not (as yet) comprise a coherent conceptual model, but rather captures the coming together of disparate fields of study (2011: 3; and see Urry, 2007). It therefore does not, in my view, constitute a paradigm, though it marks an important watershed, I think, in Erik Cohen’s (and Scott Cohen’s) perspectives. Prior to his engagement with ‘mobilities’, it seems to me Erik Cohen eschewed attempts at developing larger-scale or all-embracing paradigms or theories. He invariably operated at a lower conceptual or middle-range level.

In their earlier excursions into what they have styled the developing paradigm of mobilities, the Cohens also explored two other interrelated ‘novel theoretical approaches’. These comprise: the performativity approach and actor-network theory (ANT) (2012b: 2180-2186). They suggest that the ‘mobilities’ paradigm and these related theoretical approaches are not fully formed, but they might offer promising perspectives and ways forward in understanding travel. In my view, though ‘mobilities’ is styled ‘a paradigmatic shift’, it does not encompass, nor can it address analytically the total field of tourist encounters, and this appears to be the reason why the Cohens elaborate other perspectives designed to address the issue of touristic encounters between a range of actors, stakeholders and interest groups.

The mobilities paradigm applied to tourism studies has been critically examined by several authors, raising issues to do with the conceptualization of ‘discretionary’ as against ‘compulsory’ or ‘necessary’ travel in, for example, business travel; the politico-economic or ‘power’ context of the regulation of mobility, and the ‘frictions’ or ‘blockages’ on travel (see, for example, Chen and Chang, 2015; Coles, 2015; Rogerson, 2015; and see Hall, 2015; and responded to by Erik and Scott Cohen, 2015b: 68-69).

Performativity

I have already argued (King, 2015a: 512-513) that the notion of ‘performativity’ is not as ‘novel’ as the Cohens suggest (2012b: 2183-2184); it is a loose concept embracing expressions and actions which include well-established sociological concepts (behaviour and meaningful bodily movement, identity, symbolic and self-representation and -expression, impression management, staging, imaging, and simulation). But what the Cohens draw attention to are the ways in which performance is connected to the creation of places and identities (both for residents and those visiting) and to the structuring and changing of relationships and meanings through an increasingly

‘reflexive awareness’ in tourist sites (Edensor, 2001, 2007; Franklin and Crang, 2001: 10). In other words, ‘performativity’ refers not only to the staging of tourist-related events, but also to tourist behaviour and reflections (Bruner, 2005). It also comprises the translation of symbolic categories and representations into concrete, observable acts which often form part of a repetitive cultural repertoire presented to and in interaction with tourists, but which can be subject to modification and change depending on consumer demands and on the reflections and perceptions of those involved in the touristic staging of their culture. The concept of ‘performativity’ also resonates with earlier concerns in tourism studies, exemplified in Selwyn’s study of symbolism, images, myths, representations and semiotics (1996). However, ‘performativity’ does not have the status of a paradigm (established or emerging). Much of what is included in this framework can be accommodated within the sociological-anthropological concept of ‘encounter’.

Actor-network Theory

Again, the notion of ‘actor-network-theory’ (ANT) (2012b: 2184-2186) does not provide anything that is especially original; any analysis of tourist experiences has to examine relations and networks between people/actors/mediators/translators and between humans and things/objects/communicative devices; in this regard, according to the Cohens, networks are seen as project-specific, in flux, hybrid, and heterogeneous (van der Duim, 2007). The emphasis is on impermanence, but networks can also be sustained and given substance by continuous performance and re-energizing; in other words, there can be a degree of consolidation so that some network relationships are more solid and on-going than others, and regularities and patterns are discernible (Boissevain, 1979, pp. 392-394; Boissevain and Mitchell, 1973). Furthermore, the dynamism and transformative capacities in networks are not only located in ‘translators’ or ‘mediators’. Again, the concept of ‘encounter’ can address the problems generated by this element of the Cohens’ emerging paradigm.

Encounters

A persistent theme in research on tourism in Southeast Asia during the past three decades has been the importance of understanding encounters and interactions, drawing in part on symbolic interactionist perspectives (Berg, 2001: 8-10; Blumer, 1969: 5; Goffman, 1959), and situated within an understanding of wider economic and political processes and structures of change, and

in relation to issues of culture and identity (King, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b). The concern with encounters was captured in Smith's dual categorization of 'hosts and guests' and their interrelationships and exchanges (1977 [1989], 1989); it has remained central to my recent collaborative work on heritage sites, though this simple categorical opposition between local residents and visitors needs considerable modification to address the complexities of touristic encounters and the domestic and intra-Asian dimension (King, 2016b; Sherlock, 2001; Smith, 1989).

I have argued elsewhere that our understanding of encounters, including both chance and planned or arranged engagements and those which are one-off or multiple, regular or irregular, and reciprocal, collaborative, complementary or adversarial is still the central focus of the tourist experience. These encounters comprise person-to-person relationships, those between groups (or at least between members or representatives of groups), and those between local communities and national and international bodies and agencies. They also embrace interactions of individuals and groups within electronic and media networks and with information technology (which includes images and representations), between individuals and information provided in material form (guidebooks, tourist and government agency literature, travel books, signage and displays at sites), and between individuals and material objects (in museums, exhibition centres, at archaeological and heritage sites, in natural landscapes[which includes fauna and flora]). Encounters between people are often cross-ethnic, cross-cultural and cross-national; but with the rapid increase in travel and tourism within national boundaries, and between similar culture areas, the cross-cultural dimension needs qualification. This in turn poses questions about the distinction and sometimes opposition between domestic and international tourists, though this categorization remains a useful way to capture broad differentiations. Encounters also encompass the behaviours generated (in bodily expressions, language, dress), the motivations and interpretations implicated in them, and their character (for example whether they are one-off and temporary, or continuous, reciprocal or conflictual). This concept embraces the Cohens' concepts of 'performativity' and 'actor-network theory'.

With specific reference to research on heritage tourism in Southeast Asia, there is evidence again of the deployment of the concept of 'encounters'. A recent comparative volume on UNESCO World Heritage Sites demonstrates this analytical framework (King, 2016b). In examining

encounters there is recognition that these global sites, located and demarcated in national territories, mark out spaces for complex interactions between various interest groups (local communities, tourists, conservationists and researchers, national and provincial politicians and bureaucrats, and international heritage and tourism organizations). What has also emerged is the importance of these sites, not only as global sites visited by international tourists, but also as domestic sites frequented by their own citizens, often with different motives for visiting from those who come from outside the nation-state. This has become an increasingly important theme in recent tourism research and one which serves to modify perspectives on world heritage. However, I would stress that the concept of ‘encounter’ is a low level conceptual framework in the analysis of empirical material; it is not part of a theoretical scheme or paradigm.

Concluding Remarks

It is an almost impossible task to provide a detailed evaluation of Erik Cohen’s prolific research and publication record, extending over a period of more than 40 years and covering such a broad range of ethnographic subjects and concepts (see, for example, Cohen, 2001c, 2004c, 2008a, 2014c). All I have been able to do is present certain significant themes and ideas. It would take a substantial critical volume to do justice to his innovative and energetic research career. I have had the pleasure of engaging Erik Cohen in conversation in Chiang Mai on several occasions and exchanging numerous emails with him. When I mentioned that I was preparing a critical appreciation of his work, he responded generously and modestly, with an interesting reflection on his work on Thailand. I think it captures what Scott Cohen has referred to as Erik Cohen’s rather ‘serendipitous’, ‘gradual’, ‘opportunistic’ and ‘eclectic’ scholarly engagement with tourism (2013). It does suggest that a higher level theoretical approach is not part of Erik Cohen’s repertoire (2004c); indeed, given his very broad ethnographic reach, it is difficult to envisage what theoretical approach might encompass it. His response to me, in an email (pers. com., 2 May 2017) captures precisely his contribution to research on Thai tourism. He says, ‘I have never quite linked the dynamics of tourism with the broader political and social developments in the country; nor is my work on the micro or mezzo-scale fully integrated with the macro-theoretical work, either that of the 1970-80s or (in the work with Scott [Cohen]) of the 2010s’.

Therefore, Erik Cohen has not been inclined to construct a grand theoretical scheme, although he has argued cogently with Scott Cohen, on behalf of the emerging paradigmatic status of ‘mobilities’ (Cohen and Cohen, 2012b). But has he? Paradoxically, he seems to have moved gradually to a higher-level theory in pursuing what is clearly a productive conceptual framework of ‘mobilities’, but then, in my view, he has hesitated and offered additional concepts (not paradigms) of ‘performativity’ and ‘actor-network theory’. Although he also qualifies his binaries in post-modern terms, he proposes with Scott Cohen, a future for research on tourism (2012b), with which I would not take issue, and I hope that the purpose of this paper is to promote and endorse this agenda; but while I welcome ‘mobilities’ as a contextualization of what we are currently doing and hope to achieve in tourism research, my inclination is to engage much more decisively with ‘performativity’ and ‘actor-networks’, embraced within the concept of ‘encounters’. But there is a problem; in a subsequent email to me (pers. com., 11 June 2017), Erik Cohen has recently informed me that I have misunderstood his intentions in relation to ‘mobilities’, in that this was not ‘a theoretical construction on my part’ but merely a review of the ‘state of the art’. This is for me a confirmation of his approach to theory; like me he is content with low level concepts (King, 2009b). Nevertheless, I sense, in his work with Scott Cohen, a desire to move tourism studies into a new theoretical/paradigmatic arena. I remain to be convinced.

Having moved beyond such concepts as ‘authenticity’ and ‘the tourist gaze’, Erik and Scott Cohen present us with a movement from ‘synchronic’ to ‘diachronic’ perspectives, from ‘permanence’ to ‘flux’, from ‘being’ to ‘doing’, from ‘structure’ to ‘agency’, from ‘sedimented social patterns’ to the ‘process of their emergence’ and ultimately from ‘stable fixtures’ of social and cultural life to ‘mobilities’. For me the only remaining question is whether ‘mobilities’ constitutes a paradigm? Ultimately it does not matter all that much to me in that Erik Cohen’s contribution to our ethnographic knowledge, understanding and contemplation of tourism in Thailand will stand the test of time. He has moved from the social-structural to the symbolic, from the organizational to the post-modern. What impresses me is that he has regularly and constantly anticipated future developments in tourism research; he has a prescient presence; not only that but, being resident in Thailand over many years, he has served almost as a roving scholarly reporter of tourism developments in Thailand, from disasters to floating markets, from festivals to elephants; from pilgrimage to prostitution; I could go on endlessly.

And I need to rectify a comment that I made some years ago about Erik Cohn's Thai-centric approach. His critical and thoughtful commentaries on the development of tourism in Thailand are exemplary. They are unsurpassed; I cannot recall a corpus of research on any other part of the world that captures and understands what is happening to a country which has engaged in tourism development during the past 40 years. Furthermore, his work on ethnicity and tourism in Southeast Asia generally and mainland Southeast Asia specifically and his more general pronouncements about tourism research in Southeast Asia (1999) proves me wrong about his Thai-centrism (Cohen, 2001i, 2008c, 2016c). My current assessment is that he has captured, explained and helped us understand what tourism means to us, how we experience it, its significance in a globalizing world, and the consequences of our increasing involvement in travel and leisure; this is no small accomplishment. In an email (pers. com., 11 June 2017) from him, with due modesty, he suggests that 'I exaggerate the significance of [his] work'. I beg to disagree.

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