Policies for Cultural Tourism:
Ethics and Values

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Physical anthropologists stipulate that among the things that led to the development of homo sapiens is when he started to stand upright. This enabled him to do two things simultaneously: first, to travel with more facility; and secondly, to see more things around him, with the additional height gained. It is this superior mode of locomotion and the need to see more that eventually led to the spread of the human species all over the world. Although we see different kinds of populations today, these all belong to a single human species - the differences among people lie largely in their being phenotypes: differences that rise from different modes of adaptation and co-evolution with specific social and physical environments. It is these differences today that motivates people to go to places different from their homegrounds; and to see cultural aspects of societies different from one's own.

We are concerned on this occasion more with ethical considerations in the cultural aspects of tourism pertaining to these two types of environment: physical and social; physical, because there are aspects of the natural environment that, through the machinations of man, have become relevant culturally;

and social, because what one sees of societies, whether extant or non-living, are products of culture. It is the nature of things, however, to change through time so that due to the process of co-evolution, cultures and ecosystems are altered.

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Tourism policies of governments explore dimensions of development along the above lines. Concerning the delineation and ground "operationalisation" of policies, there are problems when developmental strategy does not take into account the essential characteristics of the natural and cultural environment, and the needs, aspirations and values of the people involved. The problem is compounded by the fact that ecological diversity and differential cultural adjustments to their effective environments have led to the evolution of different societies with their respective constructs. That each society possesses variations of its

central culture makes it even more complex. This tendency to diversify and to become different is particularly strong along the margins of adjacent societies - the cultural ecotonal areas where culture change is much more accelerated. Ethnic boundaries become more diffused along these areas of intense inter-ethnic contact, particularly where transactions over boundaries are frequent or institutionalized in market systems.

One of the key cultural issues that policy makers are confronted with is the problem of dealing with very complex societies. Another is that these societies are entrenched with formidable

sets of value orientations and ethical sets of parameters, and are constantly evolving. One other corollary issue is that all countries engage in competitive enhancement of their respective tourism potentials.

As a general provision, all countries would declare as a policy of the state to protect and preserve the nation's cultural heritage, its properties and histories in order to conserve the ethnicity of local communities and the nation as a whole because these are precisely the potentials for development which includes tourism.

Given the initial formulations of the foregoing, the ethical issues become apparently formidable. One can only gloss over some of the issues for purposes of illustration.

Tourism and Archaeology
Archaeological sites in many countries are exploited for tourism: Ban Chiang, Tabon Caves, Sangiran, Pajitan, Niah Cave, Kedah, and many others.

There are numerous ethical issues and some will be given as situational models:

1. Archaeological sites call attention to themselves due to their significance in the prehistory of a place or of mankind as a whole. These sites give a time depth to a locality which intrinsically increases the interest value. The nature of archaeology is such that after the removal of archaeological materials, nothing is left to be seen except perhaps the ground where the back-filled excavations were before, or the empty cave. However, the sense of the significance of the place remains intact. One consideration that might be taken in cases like these

Thailand, photo by Nipon Sud-Ngam

is the issue of a historical statement of fact which, if reduced to an absurdity, reads like the post World War II graffiti, "Kilroy was here". The immediate response will be "So what?". The fact could have been read in a guide book without the need to visit the place. There were many instances when people are brought to a prehistoric site after a long trek, only to ask upon arrival, "What is there to see?" Historicity alone may not be sufficient. The fact should be supplemented by artifactual evidences that are visually and intellectually, or at the very least environmentally gratifying which makes the travel worthwhile.

2. There is also the obligation of planners to provide for the necessities of both protecting the environment in the immediate vicinity of archaeological sites as well as the comfort and needs of people who come. When numbers of people visit, there is always interaction and subsequent to the encounter, the environment loses: garbage is created, grass is trampled, souvenirs are taken, to speak of the more minor things. Such degradation can be prevented by planners who provide facilities, i.e. garbage containers, designated pathways, souvenir shops, etc..

3. Archaeological excavation sites are occasionally preserved intact, showing the stratigraphy, where segments of the site are left, and artifactual materials remain in situ. This of course enhances the attractiveness of the site. Cases of these are those in Ban Chiang, and The Tabon Caves.

One issue that can be raised in the area of academics is: can the desire to enhance the tourism potentials of an area (by keeping segments of the site intact for people to come and see) counter the need for thorough research to obtain sufficient data by completing the excavation - leaving nothing else to see? The conflict between academic needs and tourism potentials will have to be resolved on the basis of the value of the trade-off.

4. There is also a sociological problem. These archaeo-logical areas become natural gravitation points for the nucleation of population - if the people were not already there in the first place. The influx of population due to the attraction of a site inevitably generate effects on the social organization and structure of the community in question. This will be discussed further in the Anthropological section.

5. These sites increasingly become places where in-vestments are profitable, resulting in the development of conflicts between locals and foreign investors. It is here that the role of market economy stands out.

An issue of more serious concern is the proliferation of fraudulent artifacts. When the impact of the pottery from Ban Chiang hit the archaeological world, vessels supposedly from the site proliferated, reaching even the Philippines. When seventeen grave stone statuaries were found in Calatagan, Batangas, their number in-creased suddenly in the antique market. Anti- quities from

archaeological sites are much sought after in tourism; thus, controls have to be made to provide the dividing line between the authentic, reproduced and fraudulent pieces. This in fact is the lesser of the problem since it involves production which necessitates only the institution of controls such that reproduction are not passed off as authentic pieces.

6. The more serious de-velopment will be the exposure of archaeological materials to illegal exploi- tation, pilferage, exportation and even theft. Much have been said of illicit trade in antiques that this need not be discussed here but much of this trade spill off into the tourist industry and, thus, needs to be mentioned even in passing.

Anthropology and Tourism
While entire populations are involved in tourism, more often than not, it is traditional cultures that draw visitors. The world has experienced a general leveling of cultures, especially the aspect of material culture. This can largely be ascribed to the network of international marketing that has led to the spread of manufactured goods, apart from other factors like the influx of the evangelizing religions, public educational systems, and national politics. Cultures in the hinterland are affected, by this market economy, to a lesser degree. The result of this is the convergence in the visual aspect - at least - of many societies all over the world. Through all this uniformity, what stand out are the cultural communities that have managed to conserve some of their

traditional traits and clothing.

In the Philippines alone, at present there are at least seventy-six major ethno- linguistic groups with about 270 sub-groupings (with their respective cultural variations). Many of these groups have blended into mainstream society; only those in the hinterlands, with minimal outside contact, have managed to keep their traditional traits. The alteration of ethnic cultures is inevitable since no culture can remain static. Cultural changes occur not only when confronted by alien cultures, but also because internally, societies are continually modified by the constantly changing state coordinates in their structure and organization. In many aspects of culture and behaviour, the Ifugao, Dyak, Kayan, Meo, Lao, Minangkabau, Simalungon Batak of today are different from their own people a hundred years ago. In countries such as Indonesia, the ethnic situation is likely to be more highly complex than that of the Philippines.

1. A serious ethical problem that besets all countries today with respect to traditional cultures is how to portray them. The Bayanihan Dance Troupe, a famous cultural export of the Philippines, for instance, present traditional dances in many international events. One of the most spectacular of these dances is "Singkil", where crossed bamboo poles, without accompanying music, are clapped to the floor or together in rhythmic syncopation while the haughty "princess", with her nose up in the air, steps over the poles

in a spine-tingling dance that can hold an audience in thrall. One native dancer commented that the way the "princess" and her retinue were dressed were "something out of this world". The costumes were attractive and eye-catching, she said, but were merely caricatures of native clothing, and certainly, not traditional. She also added that, to her people, the dance always takes place in a festive event which is a happy occasion, so the "princess" in the "Singkil" is happy and not haughty. In short, what are being portrayed are approximations and improvisations on an imagined culture that is still supposed to be existing. In all fairness to the Bayanihan Dance Troupe, the dance and all the other dances in its repertoire are choreographed, incorporating modern artistic and creative inputs.

2. The problem with representing traditional dances is not limited to the Philippines, where choreographed performances of traditional ethnic dances take place on stages. Dances, ethnic celebrations or rituals happen within the context of sociological activities: a wedding, a good harvest, a birth, or a death where members of the community participate. Today, on a proscenium stage before a seated audience, cultural dances are performed by designated and professional or specially trained performers who are dressed similarly in costumes but are not active participants in the community from which the event is drawn; neither are they dancing in accordance with the mental templates formed only by long

years of traditional practice.

The point here is what do we really want to portray to tourists: a cultural event or a stage show. Nowadays, the terms are interchangeable - a staged ethnic dance presented to regale foreign visitors is called a cultural show. Of course, the rationalization is that ethnic cultural events are not as spectacular as one that is staged by professional performers, and certainly while native dances dress their very best, their clothing will not compare with the lavishly costumed dancers of a professional dance troupe. The ethics of the situation is - what is really being presented to visitors in propagating tourism: is it actual culture, a simulation, or merely something tourists want to see?

3. In most cases, the authentic and traditional versions of dances, clothing, rituals, etc. are things of the past and no longer exist. Contemporary ethnic groups are different from their ancestors or ascendants. They now practice the modern version of their respective cultures, and treat their traditions as reconstructions. This cannot be helped because the traditional society is already gone - all the indigenous institutions, religions, dances, rituals, domestic economy, and leadership have largely

disappeared, and replaced by contemporary institutions.

The ethics of the situation calls for whether or not a country should present the antiseptic mega-production of "cultural events" or the people as they authentically exist now without the window dressing.

4. In connection with this problem of representation is the question of what trait to portray or depict, and of which ethnic communities. Often, the selection and emphasis are merely the particular obsession of a choreographer; thus, one of the most spectacular rituals in the Philippines, the buklugan of the Subanon, has never been depicted; this is because no choreographer knows enough about the rituals to attempt reproduction.

5. To maintain authenticity is actually a bigger problem. It entails that government should intervene in the conservation of the remains or survivals of a traditional culture. It means reviving or substituting government for ethnic institutions that no longer exist in order that the semblance of the original culture may be kept in view. Therefore, in the Philippines, there are government agencies like the Office for the Southern Cultural Communities (OSCC); Office for

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the Northern Cultural Communities (ONCC); and Office for Muslim Affairs (OMA). How these offices will fare through time remains to be seen because they are confronted by the tides of inevitable change. A bill from the lower house of Congress of the Philippines was recently passed to abolish the above offices. The version in the upper house is now a subject of controversy in several public hearings.

6. A more sensitive moral issue is an ecological one. Natural systems, whether an ecosystem or a traditional society, are critically balanced. Environmentalists follow a basic principle that one does not introduce a new species in an ecosystem without first ascertaining if the new species might create an imbalance that will lead to the collapse of the entire system. One does not introduce a new species of plant in a forest because this might prove to be a parasite that will kill other species and start a chain reaction that destroys the forest. One does not introduce an animal that will upset the food chain because again it might create an imbalance in the structure of the animal population; it might be a predator without its own predator to keep its population in check. The same principle operates in the workings of human societies.

Contact between two cultures is an area that is very sensitive, as anthropologists well know. Contact means the initiation of change that corresponds with the intensity and frequency of interaction.

There is always disruption in a culture when it encounters a foreign one. The disruption may be biological, for instance, the case of the Tau't Batu of Palawan. This group have been in relative isolation and have not developed immunities to more common diseases of other populations. It was feared that the introduction of the common cold might lead to the dissolution of the population.

7. The influx of a new culture, brought in even in terms of tourism, has its more immediate effect on the material culture. Goods and products heretofore unknown to the native culture are introduced, creating new needs and demands for these goods, and a new market where money is of utmost importance in the transaction. It might start in trickles but the impact on the native culture can be devastating. Countries which went through colonization are gross illustrations of the case in point.

8. The creation of new markets may have a benign effect on a native community. The local economy, after all, will benefit from the market. However, there exist the possibilities of negative contacts, such as traits heretofore absent in a native culture.

In addition, there are many occasions where artifacts of an ethnic group become so popular and profitable in the market that it is not uncommon to find these artifacts sold in other ethnic areas, e.g. the baskets of the Tirurai in southern Mindanao are being sold in the markets of the Cordilleras in northern Luzon, while the basketry of the Ikalahan

highlanders of northern Luzon have been taken over by the lowlanders.

9. The introduction of the use of prohibited drugs, alcoholism and other despicable and anti-social behaviour into ethnic cultures can be tragically destructive. Provisions should be looked into to prevent such cultural infiltrations.

10. It is a law of nature that in the processing of energy, the direction is towards the more developed system. When two societies are in contact, the flow of energy will be toward the more developed society. In concrete terms, the benefits derived from the contact between two societies will move toward the developed society. What it means is that the less developed society will be exploited. This can easily be seen if one takes a look at the price of an ethnic object in an antique shop and compare this with the price in the locality where it came from. There will be large disparity in the prices. This situation can be extended to many other aspects of relationships between disparate societies. While it is only fair that both society will benefit from contact, it is up to government institutions to see to it that exploitation are reduced to tolerable levels, or that equity be established.

The above discussed examples of cultural contacts will inevitably lead to the alterations in native cultures, which will in turn lead these societies into the mainstream. With the traditional cultures changed, the only recourse for tourism is the introduction of reconstructed

culture as in the case of the Philippines, the Bayanihan Dance Troupe.

The Dilemma

For the sake of tourism, traditional cultures of ethnic societies are presented as reconstructions or enhancements. This is inescapable and is probably the only recourse at present; and in relation to this, a dilemma exists. Authorities are obliged to beware of the effects of tourism on native culture, but also aware of the duties toward those encouraged to come and visit. In the competition amongst countries for a larger share in the tourism market, there is a need to enhance the country's potentials. But there is also the obligation not to stretch the truth, or create false values in terms of historicity, authenticity and culture. Indeed, the answer to these problems, including the numerous ethical issues, are very complex.

Cultural properties including those with tourism potentials are part of the heritage of a nation. The primary obligation should be their conservation. Those in the field of conservation know very well that this is a misnomer for even if cultural properties are well taken care of, the process of


Local Market, Myanmar (Burma)

deterioration is not actually stopped but is merely retarded. The process of degradation goes on until finally in due course, the property is completely destroyed. Whether this be artifacts or indigenous cultural groups, the degree of deterioration is directly proportional to the amount of exposure. Cultural properties, which are utilized in tourism, receive a tremendous amount of exposure, and archaeological sites with preserved trenches, for instance, would eventually suffer

the consequences of too much ground vibration from feet trampling around, causing trenches and baulks to collapse.

Indigenous peoples will be parting with their artifacts in exchange for market commodities, acquiring new cultural traits, and becoming less and less of what they were before. There is always a price to pay in the name of development but the question should be whether one wants to pay the price, or not. It is really a choice of what we value most.

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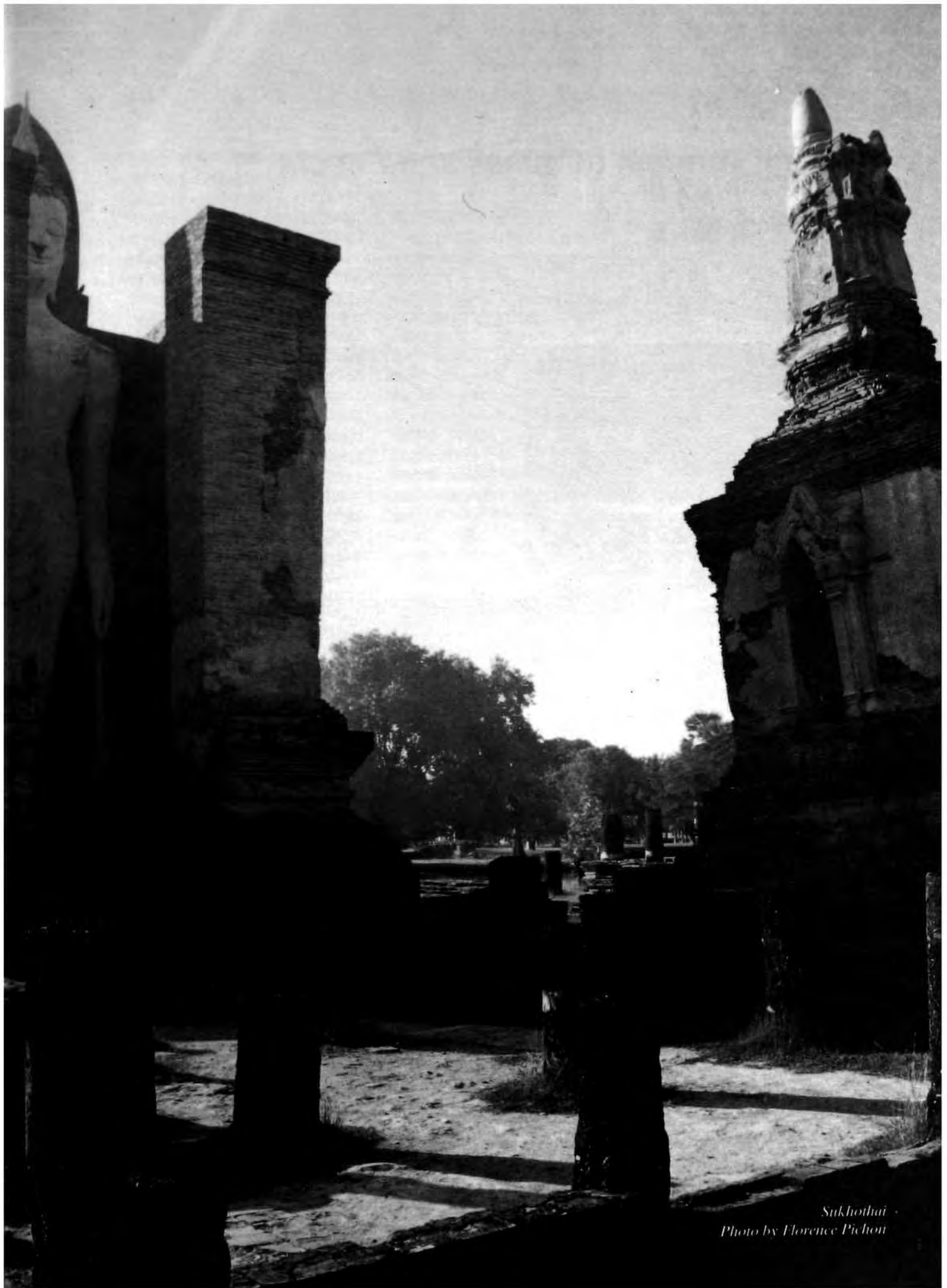
Sukhothai
Photo by Florence Pichon