THE ROLE OF ORPHANAGES IN CAMBODIA
~Orphanages for Tourism Attractions or for a Better Education?~

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<Abstract>

This research is about the study of orphanages in Cambodia. Their role is a subject to change due to international and national interactions. In other words, the subject of this study is Cambodian orphanages, which recently are used as an attraction for tourists. They are also often seen, by poor local families, as a way to provide education to their children. The suggestive background of the orphanages’ role changing can refer to the recently growing tourism sector: orphanage tourism, which is involved in volunteering in orphanages, while the largest simple factor is poverty in the country.
Orphanages, however, have been recognized among international researchers as harmful places for children who may face numerous risks of development delays, abuses, neglects, or exploitations. The recent growing orphanage tourism has been contributing to these risks because there are no child protection policies in many of these orphanages.

Regarding the aforementioned risks, international aid organizations such as UNICEF and other NGOs are working on against such orphanages together with the Cambodian government. They are closing down orphanages operating throughout the country, especially unregistered centers. The Cambodian government operates under the principle that “residential care should be a last resort and only a temporary solution”, and promoting community-based care by unifying children with their families from the harmful orphanages. On the other hand, the government lacks in monitoring and law policies, thus orphanages tend to be a harmful environment for children lacking child protection policies and a big number of visitors through orphanage tourism. In addition, the country is still lacking in social welfare to support poor families, therefore, orphanages could be the best choice for quality education.

The suggestion of this thesis is that the Cambodian government and other organizations put more effort in supporting these poor families by providing basic resources rather than just shutting down orphanages. Although theoretically the community-based care approach is considered to be the first choice, institutional care may appear a more viable approach to alternative care for poor children and their parents. The author, through participant observations with multiple interviews with those who are involved in orphanages in Cambodia, tried to provide through this research more details and support for the above suggestion.

**Keywords:** Orphanages, Commodification, Volunteer Tourism, Poverty, Cambodia