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The Management Style of Cultural Tourism in the Ancient Monuments of Lower Central Thailand

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Abstract

Cultural tourism is a vital part of the Thai economy, without which the country would have a significantly reduced income. Key to the cultural tourism business in Thailand is the ancient history that is to be found throughout the country in the form of monuments and artifacts. This research examines the management of these ancient monuments in the lower central part of the country. By studying problems with the management of cultural tourism, the researchers outline a suitable model to increase its efficiency. For the attractions to continue to provide prosperity for the nation, it is crucial that this model is implemented to create a lasting and continuous legacy for the cultural tourism business.

Keywords: management, cultural tourism, ancient monuments, central Thailand, conservation, efficiency

1. Introduction

Tourism is an industry that can generate significant income for the country and, for many years, tourists have been the largest source of income for Thailand when compared to other areas. The reason for this lies in the number of foreign tourists who travel to Thailand. This number increases every year. In 1960, 81,340 foreign visitors entered the country and generated an income of 196,000,000 baht. This is compared to 2012, when 22.3 million people entered the country. The figure for 2012 was a 15.98 percent increase on the number of visitors in 2011 (19.23 million people). It is estimated that by 2015, tourism will generate an income of two trillion (2,000,000,000,000) baht (*Business Education*, 2012). This will cause good results in the national economy. There is a large amount of cultural (art) tourism in Thailand, especially concerned with ancient monuments and religious sites. These ancient monuments and religious sites are places that show how modern Thailand has developed as a civilization since the past. They elevate Thai identity in the realms of art, culture, history and archaeology. It can thus be said that ancient monuments and religious sites are important and highly related to the tourist industry (Angkoon, 2004, p.148).

The regional development strategy outlined by the office of the national economic and social development board concerned a number of provinces in lower central Thailand, including Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, Kanjanaburi and Suphanburi. These four provinces are very important for history, archaeology, Buddhist values and works of art. This area has a suitable geography for civilizations as the land consists of mainly flat plains on three levels and many important rivers. These rivers are either branches of the Chaopraya River or independent waterways, such as the Tha Chin and Mae Klong Rivers. These rivers are intersected by many others and it is common for the area to flood in some seasons. The flooding causes the fertile dregs of the rivers to settle on the land and over time have caused the soil to become appropriate for agriculture. The rivers also provide a mode of communication. This area has thus been used as home to many people in the past and present, causing the existence of a long history, civilization and art. The area has the correct characteristics to attract tourists, as there are clearly important attractions and visible evidence of the progressive and regressive evolution of the different territories found in the ancient Kingdom of Thailand.

From the observations and excavation of Thai and foreign archaeologists, abundant evidence of human residence in the past has been found, especially in the areas around the small and large tributaries that stretch from Kanjanaburi to Tak and traverse through Ratchaburi. Here, the middle-age history of Thailand is combined with the early history of Thailand. The ancient communities of the time had forms of communication for trade with

other communities of the same time and as far away as India, China and the Middle East. This caused fast and increased social development and a communal culture, which was known as the Dhavaravati Kingdom and which flourished from the twelfth to the sixteenth Buddhist centuries. This was the first community that took on the culture of India, adapted it to everyday life and transmitted it to other communities in the area. The plentiful evidence found in ancient monuments, religious sites and sculptures reveals a strong relationship with the Buddhist religion. This is evident in the ancient monuments and archaeological sites that were home to people during the Dhavaravati Kingdom in the areas of Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, Kanjanaburi and Suphanburi Provinces (Supajanya & Wanasin, 1980, p.18).

Temples have been important religious places for the community since the past. The influence of Buddhism is important for the lifestyle of Thai people and temples are places that collect knowledge in many fields, as well as art works that are part of the cultural heritage and the identity of Thai people, such as ancient monuments, ancient objects and wall and ceiling murals. Nowadays the temples have an increased role from the past as they are now important cultural tourist attractions that can be used to study history, archaeology, culture, art work and architecture, as well as the connections in cultural history. These structures ensure that community settlements have beautiful, tranquil surrounding environments and, according to the foundations of Buddhism, their art influences the teaching of important principles of Dharma.

Ancient monuments in the temples are managed as historical tourist attractions, which are places of importance and value to history, archaeology and religion. They are places constructed by humans but are different from construction in other categories due to their cultural, historic and social value, as well as their relationship to the mentality of future generations and their nature as part of the national heritage. Nowadays, ancient monuments are managed as representative places of the stories and pride of the past. Thailand is home to a large number of cultural attractions, found across the country. They are part of the architectural and artistic identity of Thailand, especially within each location, where they are the most important places of tourism. Historical tourism, aside from providing understanding and knowledge related to local history, archaeology, local wisdom and culture, also creates mental awareness of responsibility for the maintenance of culture and the value of the surrounding environment by encouraging community cooperation in the management of the local tourist attractions. This enables development of the potential of ancient monuments and religious sites to become lasting cultural tourist attractions (Chuaybamrung, n. d., p.36).

From surveys with tourists conducted by the tourism authority of Thailand since 1997, many problems have been identified. It was found that many tourists in many different locations were shocked by the state of deterioration of the monuments and that a large number of attractions were in a critical condition. The main reason for this was found to be the level of management efficiency within the organizations entrusted with maintenance of the grounds. In some cases, there were no officers responsible for solving problems within the attractions due to overlapping areas of authority among workers on site. There were also problems with work unity and the conservation and development budgets. These problems result in the reduction of cultural and historical value. For the most part, problems are physical, such as constructions raised in the surrounding area causing congestion and depreciation of the landscape. The use of land for development of facilities is not suitable, while construction to aid transportation and traffic communication networks to enter the attractions are not complete. There is also air, water and sound pollution, as well as bad smells, overfilled trash cans and litter. These problems, which multiply in severity as days go by, show the lack of well developed tourism management and not only affect the attractions but also the community economy, society and culture (Jitnukoon, 2001, p.5). The current use of religious sites for tourism shows up the lack of faith in a number of areas, especially among non-local domestic tourists and foreigners. This lack of faith is evident in the inappropriate dress worn by visitors to the temple, the impolite postures used in photographs with Buddhist statues and the use of religious sites as places for trade. These actions reduce religious value (Pattiya et al., 1992, p.12). Tourism also has an effect on art works in and around the ancient monuments and religious sites. The pieces of art are altered or disappear and are replaced by factory-produced alternatives, causing the loss of traditional customs and reduction of artistic value. From surveys conducted by the Office of Tourism Development regarding the behavior of tourists, it was found that, for a tourist to visit a place, that place must have prominent, attractive and interesting features to make the tourist feel satisfied. The condition of attraction includes many variables, which are historical value, identity of the attraction, beauty of the attraction, convenience of access, security and ability of the attraction to manage tourist activities. Aside from these conditions, the locations must have conditions of support for tourists, whether they are in the development of facilities or sponsorship of policy in the form of budget or personnel from government and private institutions. With these, the tourist attractions may continue as efficiently as possible. Administration is an important aspect of the management, conservation and restoration of

the tourist attractions and helps to create preventative measures for any problems that may arise.

The researchers were interested in studying these various problems in order to create a model for the management style of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of lower central Thailand. This will also affect local identity and history as the community cooperates with the management of its local tourist attractions. Aside from this, the study will generate awareness of the importance and benefit that come from the value of ancient monuments. A large budget is not required, merely a knowledge of how to take care of the property, which will maintain the value of the site. This is a way to add to the potential of ancient monuments in Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, Kanjanaburi and Suphanburi Provinces, which are resources of historical tourism that reveal the cultural history of Central Thailand, The value of the monuments is especially noticed when domestic and international tourism is supported by the government and the monuments become places of increased interest among the tourist community. The creation of a model for the management of lasting cultural tourist attractions at ancient sites in this area should be considered urgent because if these tourism resources are lost, they can never be restored.

2. Research Aims

This research had three primary research aims: a) to study the historical background and importance of ancient monuments in Lower Central Thailand; b) to study problems with the management of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand; c) to study the management style of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand.

3. Research Methodology

This research used a qualitative research method. The research area was defined by a purposive sampling technique. Four locations were chosen, each of which have been registered as ancient monuments by the Fine Arts Department of Thailand: Phra Pathommachedi stupa in Nakhon Pathom Province, Mahathad Worawihan Temple in Ratchaburi Province, Chaichumpon Chanasongkram Temple in Kanchanaburi Province and Palelai Worawihan Temple in Suphanburi. The sample of the study was also selected using a purposive sampling technique and was categorized into three groups. The group of key informants included government academics or experts in archaeology, culture and tourism as well as community leaders. The group of casual informants included personnel concerned with the temple, such as monks and temple leaders, as well as temple and event officers. The group of general informants included locals, traders and tourists. Tools used for the collection of data included survey, interview, participant and non-participant observation, focus group discussion and workshop. Data from document study and field research was analyzed in four steps. The first step of data analysis from documents related to the religious sites in the four provinces and concerned the potential for attracting tourists, the potential for providing services to tourists and management. Data was verified by comparing documents from each of the four locations. If the information was corroborated by the documents, this meant that it was likely accurate and could be used as a reference. SWOT analysis was used in the focus group discussion in order to find weak points, strengths, opportunities and obstacles in each of the four ancient monuments. The second step was creation of a model for management of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand through analysis of field data obtained from observation, interview and focus group discussion. The third step was examination of the model for management of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand in the form of a workshop with the informants who provided the data. The fourth and final step in the procedure was correction of the model for management of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand based on the recommendations of the informants.

4. Research Results

4.1 The Historical Background and Importance of Ancient Monuments in Lower Central Thailand

The research found that the communities of Lower Central Thailand have been connected under the same jurisdiction since the Dhavaravati Kingdom. From the study of ancient monuments, objects and documents it was revealed that these sites have had historical, archaeological and cultural value since that time. The importance of ancient monuments in Lower Central Thailand lies in their potential for tourism and artistic heritage that is derived from the local wisdom of the past. Phra Pathommachedi stupa in Nakhon Pathom Province has five prominent features; the largest stupa in Thailand, the statue of *praluangrotrit*, the Phra Pathommachedi museum, white stone Buddhist monuments and art of the Dhavaravati Kingdom, and the four ballasts of the main hall, each at a different point of the compass, which are of ancient Chinese design. Mahathad Worawihan Temple in Ratchaburi Province has seven interesting features; a prang, a bent cloister, a *viharn* outside the cloister, a glass wall, a *pramontop*, the *pramontop* chedi and an ubosot. Chaichumpon Chanasongkram Temple in Kanchanaburi Province has four interesting features; the chedi, the ubosot, the

principle Buddha image in the temple and the doorway arch. Palelai Worawihan Temple in Suphanburi has seven prominent features; the main temple *wihan luang-por-to*, the *luang-por-to* image, the old ubosot, paintings from the Khun Chang Khun Phaen epic poem, Khun Phaen museum and *montop luang-por-tira*.

4.2 Problems with the Management of Cultural Tourism in the Ancient Monuments of Lower Central Thailand

It was found that there were problems in each of the four areas of study. The first was the lack of on-site information regarding the artistic and historical value and importance of the ancient monuments to attract tourists. There was a lack of publicity management and advertising to make the ancient monuments well-known attractions among the tourist community and to attract more visitors, such as news advertisements. There was also a lack of activities to attract tourists to the sites. The problems are caused by the lack of knowledge, understanding and persuasion among the local community regarding tourist activities and the development of ancient monuments as potential tourist attractions.

There is a lack of people with direct on-site responsibility. This problem is caused by both the community and related organizations who do not see the importance of the tourist attractions. There is no planning, project management or development to create continual and concrete cooperation. Organizations or assemblies must be created to be responsible for individual tasks. Alternatively committees must be made responsible for the management of the ancient monuments. In order to implement activities at the various temples, there must be a clear and definite model. There must be cooperative planning between the committee, temple, community and responsible local organizations for conveniences, access to the attractions (including external roads) and the on-site water, electricity, sewage, food and trade networks, as well as other amenities, including communications. The area must be ready to receive tourists and developed to provide conveniences for its visitors.

There is no policy for the management of economy and society that incorporates clear community participation, especially for the organization of various tourist activities in the temples. There are also no effective forms of advertising to promote these important sites and encourage tourists to visit. There is neither integration nor clear responsibilities so central institutions must be created to take responsibility for the continual management and sponsorship of activities and serious programs. These activities must be conducted within the province and externally to generate knowledge and budget for development and to evaluate programs for the benefit of each group involved.

The first step of data analysis from documents and field research concerning the potential and problems in each of the four locations found that there were three measures of historical tourist attractions; potential for attracting tourists, the potential for providing services to tourists and management. It was found that there are few tourist activities and there is no central institution to take responsibility for maintaining public utilities in the temples, such as water, electricity, roads, sewage, trade, food and the temple environment. There is a lack of cooperation from the community and a lack of local organization, which causes the community to lack knowledge and understanding in the conservation of ancient monuments. Community opinion of activities is rarely recorded.

SWOT analysis was used in the focus group discussion in order to find weak points, strengths, opportunities and obstacles in each of the four ancient monuments. It was agreed that the weak points were: the neglect of the value and importance of the ancient monuments, art works and architecture; the lack of a central institution to take responsibility for conservation; the lack of a defined plan; the inefficiency of management; minimal cooperation between related organizations; absence of an integration plan in the community and ignorance of provincial strategy; no activity continuity. The strengths were identified as: antiquity of community history; importance of ancient objects; archaeological excavation sites; readiness and preparation of the community to cooperate; political sponsorship of community activities from politicians at local, regional and national levels. The opportunities were seen as: the location of communities in areas of historical importance since the Dhavaravati Kingdom, attracting all visitors; convenient communications and multiple modes of access to the ancient monuments; famous local eating establishments; willingness to promote and cooperate among the people and local organizations in order to achieve success in various activities. The obstacles were identified as: lack of interest among people in the community and temple who have occupations with a higher earning potential; lack of encouragement from educational institutions for youth to participate; lack of community participation due to social development as a town, causing lack of generosity and responsibility; lack of clarity over the benefits of participation.

4.3 The Management Style of Cultural Tourism in the Ancient Monuments of Lower Central Thailand

Following the analysis of problems and potential, the next step was creation of a model for management of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand through analysis of field data obtained from observation, interview and focus group discussion. This model was built in four stages. The model was then

trialed and after these measures had been taken, a workshop was held with the informants to examine and appraise the outlined model for management of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand.

The first stage was planning and refers to a meeting among related personnel to discuss a plan for management of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand. The planning stage was aimed at correcting the problems with the potential for attracting tourists, the potential for providing services to tourists and management. From the subsequent workshop it was decided that planning should be a cooperative exercise.

The second stage of the model was process and refers to its implementation by related personnel. The model required the establishment of organizations or institutions as central bodies responsible for the cultural tourism management in the four ancient monuments. Following the establishment of these bodies, four daily cultural tourism routes were defined as access to each place. Bodies in each location then implemented tourist activities in five categories: art exhibitions; worship of monks and holy objects; meditation; provision of Buddhist knowledge and detail; souvenirs and food.

The workshop held after implementation of the model found a number of strengths and weaknesses of stage two (implementation). The creation of a central body helped cooperation, clear delegation and solved problems with the lack of leadership. These helped increase the importance and value of the ancient monument, develop conveniences and organize lasting tourist activities. However, the central body did not allow for the changing of responsible personnel and did not give importance to the ancient monument when connecting work on site. The management process was also inefficient. There was no integration plan from the community, which caused the implementation of work to occur in different directions, cooperative activities to lack continuity, fair income and benefits. Definition of a cultural tourist route to each location ensured that tourists understood the historical value of the place and realized and saw the actual importance of the various attractions in each place. Cooperation and income in local communities were also promoted and increased. There were weaknesses with the definition of routes, which included a lack of connection to the ancient monuments. It was suggested that the routes must be made more direct to increase the variety and income of the community economy. Regarding the arrangement of activities, a number of strengths were identified: art exhibitions and Buddhist worship increased tourist knowledge and awareness of the importance of art, history and religion in each location; meditation proved a very popular activity among tourists; provision of Buddhist knowledge gave an opportunity for tourists to obtain direct information; souvenirs and food were provided by community establishments surrounding the temples. Regardless of these positives, there were a number of negatives: too many forms of knowledge were required (people, manuals, temple documents & various other forms of information); the temples must not focus too heavily on commerce within the temples; people wishing to meditate could not be adequately accommodated due to a lack of tranquil locations; monks were the only individuals with sufficient expertise to provide knowledge, thus causing inconveniences with available times for consultation. This is to be remedied by the training of non-clergy personnel and the setting of consultation hours; products sold in the souvenir shops do not have a specific temple identity and there are no famous products for the area.

The third stage was the evaluation of the results obtained from establishment of a central body, definition tourist routes and implementation of tourist activities. The workshop concluded that regular evaluation meetings must be held and the satisfaction levels of tourists must be discovered. The fourth stage was correction and improvement. The related personnel gave a critique for the model and searched for ways in which to solve and prevent problems and future consequences. The workshop concluded that there must be meetings held every month to discuss how best to solve problems and prevent future consequences. The model was finally agreed upon by the members of the workshop as appropriate and fitting for the management of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Historical Background and Importance of Ancient Monuments in Lower Central Thailand

The findings of this research into the historical background and importance of monuments in Lower Central Thailand, which stated that the temple-centered communities had had their own identities and culture since the Dhavaravati Kingdom, corresponds to the work of Songkoon Chantachon (2006, pp.50-51). Chantachon's theory concerned the relationship between humans, culture and their surrounding environment and concluded it necessary for people to adapt to different social conditions. This thus created an individual cultural identity or 'culture type'. Aside from this, the history of a society affects the lifestyle of the people, as well as the current culture, community, surrounding conditions and level of settlement. This is importantly related to the cultural evolution of a society. The variety of tourist attractions, types of ancient monuments and religious sites in Lower Central Thailand helps the development of tourism. The results found that the long community histories aided

the accumulation of cultural heritage in the communities, such as the plethora of ancient monuments that can now be used in the development of tourism.

5.2 Problems with the Management of Cultural Tourism in the Ancient Monuments of Lower Central Thailand

The problems and obstacles facing the attractiveness of ancient monuments to tourists revolved around the lack of information regarding the importance and value of the sites, in turn causing a lack of interested visitors. This corresponds to theories of aesthetics that see art as holding necessary value for life and society. It is thus necessary to establish popularity in art, through creation, conservation and inheritance of its value. With this realization, artistic culture will not disappear from society. The objectives of aesthetics are purely theoretical and are not related to production. They highlight beauty rather than the creation of artists. However, by using aesthetics and, more importantly increasing information channels, the temples will garner increased popularity. This corresponds with the findings of Sujin Nimanong (2002, p.1), which stated that religious institutions had four components: buildings and fixtures; religious personnel; non-religious personnel and Buddhist teachings for them; ceremonies and customs. The third and fourth components must be recognized to manage a successful ancient monument.

The problems regarding the support of tourism correspond to the findings of Ngampit Sadsanguan (2004, pp.34-35), which discussed the creative theories of popularity. The research found that society can be compared to a living organism: it is born, grows, falls sick, recovers and moves on. As the human body has the required organs to exist, so does society. For this reason the two are related and if social creations do not consider humanity and human creations do not consider society, progress will cease. Society must therefore be quickly altered and improved to ensure future existence. This is in agreement with the work of Chantachon (p.32), which stated that society was comprised of a number of minor components, such as personnel and organizations with different responsibilities. If each of these components is focused upon and addressed individually to ensure that it is at full capacity, then, when all components are joined together, the larger social mechanism will be at its optimum potential. This will make the community ready to cooperate together for future social development.

The problems found with management organization and efficiency are related to the research of Noppawan Teerapanjaroen (2006, p.24), which stated that the potential development of a community depends of the method and existence of a cooperative policy to solve problems in the surrounding environment. There must also be a policy to outline which organization is responsible for which action and area. Regarding the strength of group cooperation and culture, the system of community philosophy and the provision of opportunities for the community to participate in decision-making and fairness, the main problem lies in the limited success of past management. This agrees with the study of Marisa Koseyayothin (2008, p.170), which concluded that participation is a foundation of lasting development. Koseyayothin found that in order to remedy community problems, there must be participation among community members at each stage and it must correspond to local folk wisdom. Continual solving of problems by community members will enable the community to correct its own problems in the future. Findings regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and obstacles of the ancient monuments correspond with those of Utit Kaotien (2003, p.42), which proposed a model for the management of tourism according to the foundations of good and self-sufficient community actions that are continually sponsored by local people, the government and the private sector.

5.3 The Management Style of Cultural Tourism in the Ancient Monuments of Lower Central Thailand

There are important components to the management style of cultural tourism in the ancient monuments of Lower Central Thailand, which are method, steps and the direction of aims and success of implementation. It is vital for cooperation in tourist management and planning to increase the awareness of the value and importance of ancient monuments. This agrees with the findings of Pintong Jiradit (2000, pp.69-73), which stated that tourism management of an elephant village in Surin Province must be classed as cultural tourism. The elephants had been raised in the local communities since the ancient past and, as such, new forms of management must not negatively affect the community. Implementation of the tourism plan should include participation of all groups, which corresponds to the research of Maturot Prapo (2000, p.116-121). Prapairee studied the tourism potential of Thai-Song Dam communities in Phetburi Province and found that the development potential of the communities depended on the strength of group cooperation, strength of culture and system of ideals. Provision of opportunities for community participation in decision-making, agreement and fairness and community participation in tourism management stem from the inclination of the people in the community, from absorption of knowledge to the reaping of benefits.

It was found that organization of activities is extremely important for the management of cultural tourism at ancient monuments in Lower Central Thailand. This corresponds to the research of Piyaporn Taweekun (2001, p.78), which stated that activities necessitate community participation and unity. The level of participation depends on the activity, whether it is suited to the skills of the locals or draws their interest. For this reason, the activity itself is the point of attraction for local participation. This is also applicable to the readiness of the

community in creating a tourist attraction at the local temple. Community participation is crucial to the success of tourism management in the area, which is in agreement with Chalong Suntoranon (2005, p.45), who found that the potential development of tourism management in Lower Central Thailand is high but there is a lack of community participation, which prevents optimum generation of community income.

Chomyong Totong (2002, pp.176-177) found that tourism in Thailand follows policies to try and make the business suitable for the nation. The objective of Totong's research was to present a management model for tourism in accordance with his findings that could be used in other areas of similar circumstance. The conclusions were twofold. Firstly, lasting tourism leads to lasting development. Secondly, lasting development leads to more lasting development. The use of management models in the community enables the locals to take care of their own society and empowers them in the development process by making them cherish and be proud of their heritage. If the community helps with the first of Totong's conclusions, they will cause the second and improve their economy, surrounding environment and quality of life.

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