

***Role of Community in Strengthening Identity of Cultural
Tourism Resource in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand***

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Abstract

Nakhon Pathom has been considered an important historical, and Buddhist city in central Thailand. This culturally diverse city is known as the home of the biggest pagoda in Asia. Within this context, this research aimed to: 1) study the potential for cultural tourism at Klang Khu Wiang temple, and; 2) investigate participated role of community in strengthening identity of this cultural tourism resource. The samples of the study consisted of: 1) 370 people living in Sampatuan sub-district; 2) 7 other members of the community, including two community leaders, two civilians of Sampatuan sub-district, three vendors, and an academic representative. A questionnaire and focus group discussion were used for data collection during May-August 2013. The collected data were analysed by frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and content analysis.

The findings showed Klang Khu Wiang temple in Sampatuan sub-district had sufficient tourist resources and facilities as it was located near the main river of Nakhon Pathom province. The temple was also famous for the giant medical pot and herbal healing. The overall participated role of the community in strengthening identity of cultural tourism resources was found to be at a high level. The aspects of planning, implementation, and utilisation evaluation were at a high level, whereas the evaluation aspect was at a moderate level. The principal problems of strengthening identity of cultural tourism resources of the area were lack of knowledge and understanding of responsible people and lack of public relations. Recommendations for strengthening identity of cultural tourism resource were development of participation from the community, increasing attractive public relations for tourists, having a responsible team to implement improvement, and more cooperation from other people in the community.

Keywords: role of community/ participation/ identity/ cultural tourism

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1. Introduction

Currently, cultural tourism is more interesting since it is focused on study for knowledge of art, culture, tradition and way of life of people in a community; moreover, it is also aimed to emphasize knowledge and pride in culture, ancient buildings, art, architecture, and tradition (Chukiat Nopaket, 1999; Wanna Wongwanich, 2003; Boonlert Jittangwattana, 2005). Thus, development of cultural-based tourism resources agrees with the aims of the present National Economic and Social Development Plan (2013-2016), which focused on changes in economy, society, resources and environment, area and community development, and national security (Office of National Economic and Social Development Committee, 2011; Office of National Economic and Social Development Committee, 2010: 5-6). Thailand is one of the countries in East Asia, which have high potential for tourism, due to its rich and various tourist resources – natural and cultural tourist attractions. The country has yearly attracted millions of local and foreign tourists, and it has been ranked as one of the best tourist destinations in the world (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011: 8).

2. Literature Review

Studies of tourism management of some national famous tourist attractions to raise them to the sustainable world-class level, for example, a study in Phuket province (Manas Chaisawat et.al., 2013: vii) showed the tourist attractions in Phuket could be developed to become qualified tourist place; however, they needed improvement in many aspects, especially in management. (Boosaba Sittikan and et al. 2001: 4-5) studied the tourist attraction management, based on community participation, of Baan Mae Klang Luang community on Mount Intanon, in Chiangmai province. The results showed the villagers had experience of being beneficial entrepreneurs; however, they also had problems in management. Moreover, the study of developing Kratumbaen Market in Samut Sakhon province to become an ecological tourist attraction (Niwat Matarat, 1998: a) showed the overall potential of tourist resources was at a moderate level, and revealed high levels of problems in all aspects of the development, particularly the aspect of responsible organisations for the management, and for the community's participation. The findings indicated Thailand has a lot of various tourist attractions; but some have not only lacked of potential for developing them to become well-known to draw revenue and better economy of the communities, but also for good management, especially participation of people in the community.

The problems affecting the development of the country's tourism industry and the review of the related literature can be concluded that cultural tourism is important for Thailand. The cultural tourism has to depend on the participation of the related people in the community. This study was conducted to examine the potential of the cultural tourist attraction at Klang Khu Wiang temple, Sampatuan sub-district in Nakhon Pathom, through analyses of its strength, weakness, obstacles, and chance; a survey of tourist resources and facilities was applied to investigate its potential; moreover, principles of Cohen and Uphoff (1980: 213- 217) were used to study the participating roles regarding planning,, operation, benefit receiving, and evaluation.

3. The Methodology and Model

This case study aimed to: 1) study the potential to become a cultural-based tourist attraction at Klang Khu Wiang temple; and 2) investigate participated role of community in strengthening identity of cultural tourism resource. The samples of the study consisted of: 1) 370 people living in Sampatuan sub-district; 2) 7 other members of the community, including: 2 community leaders, 2 civilians of Sampatuan sub-district, 3 vendors, and an academic representative. A questionnaire and focus group discussion were used for the data collection during May-August 2013. The collected data were analysed by frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and content analysis.

4. The findings

The findings of the study revealed that:

4.1 Klang Khu Wiang temple in Sampatuan sub-district had sufficient tourism resources and facilities as it was located near the main river of Nakhon Pathom province. The temple was also famous for its giant medical pot and herbal healing.



Picture 1 Big pot of herb



Picture 2 Herbal garden



Picture 3 Look Nimit



Picture 4 Giant charms



Picture 5 Various local agricultural products



Picture 6 The Tachine River

4.2 The overall participated role of the community in strengthening the identity of cultural tourism resources was at a high level. The aspects of planning, implementation, and utilisation were at high levels, whereas the evaluation aspect was at a moderate level. The main problems for strengthening the identity of cultural tourism resources of the area were lack of knowledge and understanding of responsible people and lack of public relations. The recommendations for strengthening the identity of cultural tourism resources included development of participation from the community, increasing effective public relations, having responsible teams to implement improvements, and more participation from people in the community.

5. Summary and Discussion

5.1 Klang Khu Wiang temple in Sampatuan sub-district has potential to become a cultural-based tourist attraction due to its location on the bank of the Thachine or Nakhon Chai Si river, which flows through many provinces in Central Thailand. The river makes the areas of Klang Khu Wiang temple attractive with natural shades. It is also a historical site relating to ethnic groups who migrated or caught from Vientien to this settlement. They have transferred their original culture and indigenous wisdom, which presently becomes their own uniqueness and can efficiently attract tourists' interest. The tourist attraction here has basic facilities to meet tourists' service standard, such as electricity, tap water, toilets, direction signs, food and beverage shops, and sufficient parking lots for visitors. The site also has areas that can be used for organising various cultural tourist activities since there are Lao ethnic group living here at present. Giving chance to people in the community to participate can help improve tourism, and cause the province to be developed in other aspects, which can lead to revenue increasing. Thus, the procedure agrees with the perception of Rachaphorn Chansawang (2003: 16-18) who stated that, "Tourism is developed to business and it can be expanded to industry, respectively. Actually, it can indeed affect the economy and society." Community people's participation helps the people to be proud of their own culture, ancient buildings, art, tradition, and historical inheritance (World Tourism Organization, 1997; Chukiat Nopaket, 1999; Wanna Wongwanich, 2003; Boonlert Jittangwattana, 2005: 283; Ranee, Isichaikul, 2003: 83).

The findings of the study show Klang Khu Wiang temple's unique identity is the local herbal indigenous wisdom in illness treatment, evidently confirm with its herbal

garden with lots of herbal plants, and a giant herbal pot easily seen as a landmark of the tourist site. It agrees with the perception of cultural uniqueness which causes the local people to acknowledge how they differ from others (Nattanai Prasarnnam, 1999). Also, encouraging local people to participate in tourist activities agrees with the perception of community-based tourism which causes everyone to have senses of resource owning and beneficial share, and these senses can also lead to their awareness of conserving the local culture and environment (Pojana Suansri, 2003: 24; Terdchai Chuaybamrung, 1997: 110-111). The findings also support the study of Prapatchai Chainork (2011: abstract) who studied direction of cultural-based tourism development in Baan Daan Sai, Loey province and found the potential of the site which had unique identity in both natural and historical tourist resources with continually local inherited tradition.

5.2 The finding revealed participatory roles of the community in enforcing the uniqueness of the tourist resources at Klang Khu Wiang temple as a whole were at high levels; when each role was considered individually, three roles were found at high levels-, planning, operation, and utilisation, respectively, but the role of evaluation was found at a moderate level. The findings also yielded problems of the community participation in building cultural identity of the tourist site concerning lack of qualified people in cultural tourism to take management tasks, and lack of public relations for both domestic and foreign tourists. Recommended solutions were supporting cooperation in the tourism management among all the related organisations, particularly the community and the local. Increasing public relations of cultural-based tourism at Klang Khu Wiang temple to both domestic and foreign tourists was recommended. For participatory cooperation in enhancing the unique identity of Klang Khu Wiang temple, more responsible people obviously taking charge in managing the tourist site, opening more chance for the community people to have more cooperation. The findings supported the results of the study of Irawat Chomraka (1999: abstract) which found problems in promoting cultural-based tourism at Phailuang sub-district, in Lab Lae district, Utraradit province regarding little public relations, and solution was cooperation among relating organisations in the region. The findings also agree with the principles of actual roles of relating people and their participation in planning or making decision, operating activities, receiving benefit, and evaluation (Kannika Phumiwongpitak, 1997: 12; Santad Chuaputtan, 1998: 2; Somboon Amponpanarat, 1999: 18).

The findings of this study which supported the other studies' findings indicate that the major important problems found in tourist attractions around Thailand were: 1) lack of perception of tourist people about tourism, services, suggestions or giving information about tourism, and; 2) problems of management, lack of responsible people, tour guides, people's participation, and continuous public relations of the tourist attractions. Authorised people in both private and public organisations and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports should take charge by coordinating all the relating organisations. Thus, the development of tourist attraction at Klang Khu Wiang temple should take weakness, and threat of the site into consideration. The directive principles are establishing perception for the local people, increasing public relations of the tourist resources to domestic and foreign tourists, enhancing cooperation of all the private and public organisations including relating people, community and the local, organising more various activities in cultural-based tourism, and developing security for tourists. The public relations and tourist attractions' networking may be

able to develop Klang Khu Wiang temple as one of the major cultural tourist attractions in Nakhon Pathom province and it can make more jobs and revenue, strengthen the community and economy, and further national sustainable development.

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