



7TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Actual Economy

SOCIAL
CHALLENGES
AND FINANCIAL
ISSUES IN XXI CENTURY



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Tourist Threats To Cultural Heritage: An Investigation Of Tourist Behavior Violating The Culture of Wat Pho

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to explore the threats from tourists' destructive behavior which harms the cultural heritage by examining tourist's behavior at Wat Pho. The research reveals Destructive Behavior from foreign tourists into three key issues as Object-Destructive Behavior, Destination-Destructive Behavior, and Culture-Destructive Behavior. The study used Qualitative Approach to decipher all data. The Participant Observation (Complete Observer) was generated to collect primary data at the destination. The process goes on with the step of interpretation and summed up as a secondary data. Then, triangulate after interviewing to conclude the outcome respectively. The study explores the threats from tourists' destructive behavior which counts as the controllable factor at Wat Pho to be the useful information for pathfinders in the future. If the heritage attraction is properly managed, it would be reduced the causes of devaluation and makes cultural heritage in Thailand to becomes sustainable tourism finally.

Key-words Heritage Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Economics, Sustainable Tourism, Wat Pho

Introduction

Heritage Tourism is an essence of education in terms of arts and science in cultural aspects in the world of tourism while its significance to tourism is to present the uniqueness of civilization and culture at its best. The meaning of heritage site is so common, there always be the priceless asset of a kingdom that enables the aestheticism of historical magnificence from time to time and very important for history study. Thailand is one of the famous countries for heritage tourism which always encounters negative impacts from visitors. Those negative impacts will affect distinctively to the precious object, valuable archives, destination, and culture. Wat Phrachetuphon Vimol Mangklaram, or widely known as Wat Pho, the high rank royal monastery located in the center of Bangkok's oldest area, is one of the heritage site which provides a valuable history of arts, science, knowledge, and culture since the beginning of Rattanakosin period. The temple was also regarded as one of the most important monasteries during the reign of King Rama I of Chakri Dynasty.

On 31st March 2008, UNESCO awarded Wat Pho the Memory of The World in Asia and Pacific region, praising its over 1,360 marble-plate inscriptions of ancient arts and sciences. The award also includes the temple's fame for Thai traditional medical, and Massage school, internationally recognized, with over 100,000 Thai and foreign students enrolling each year. There is an average of 2,000 visitors a day in Wat Pho. The growth of cultural heritage tourism and the crowdedness of visitors in the temple area has prompted a concern for possible damage and violation to the heritage site as a result of tourists' behavior. As such, heritage site management is deemed vital in preventing the occurrence of threats by tourists and in avoiding any factor which may destroy the heritage site. A study to examine and measure the tourist behavior is necessary in complementing the heritage site management.

Literature review

Heritage tourism is considered to be the main and fastest growing component of the tourism industry today (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Apostolakis (2003) noted that researchers and practitioners in the field of heritage tourism management commonly ignore the link between the individual and the heritage presented. Moreover, while understanding the visitor's motivations and preferences are the key elements in shaping the tourist experience (Reynolds, 1999; Sharples et al, 1999). In contemporary society, heritage is often treated as a commodity for economic uses, especially for tourism (Granham, Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000).

The presence of "spiritual meaning"—or lack of it—in the encounter with the sacred space is essentially what distinguishes a tourist from a religious tourist/ visitor or a pilgrim. Only when a visitor can "look beyond historical and architectural details and begin to share the liturgies of the faithful, can religious tourism take on meaning" (Kamil, 2000, 17-23). Ultimately, such journeys help individuals to "make a connection with something outside themselves, some holiness or value which helps ground the pilgrim in a new being, a new lease on life, in something which gives meaning and direction" (Clift & Clift, 1996, p. 152). What is needed in Asia is a synergy between heritage and tourism with improved modes of interpretation and presentation of sites to cater for a range of tourists from the informed to the novice. Management involving locals as well as professionals, and management informed by tourist experience of the site, are critical factors. Equally there is the need for management practices and machinery geared to local conditions, not based on sophisticated Western technology. Tourism is a key factor in maintaining traditional places in Thailand as the destination where folkway, traditions, festivals, and even customs are supported by tourist spending. According to Melwani (2001), Hindus visit holy places and shines in India for a variety of reasons—religious duty, major illness or approaching to death, to seek blessings whenever any major event transpires such as engagement, marriage, a new born baby, or a new job. Similarly, Buddhist pilgrims built shrines along the Silk Road "in hopes of such blessings as personal well-being, a safe and prosperous journey, advancement in the next life, or perhaps the birth of many healthy sons" (Reza, 1996, p. 54). Clift and Clift (1996), who contend that pilgrimage is "a universal pattern common to humanity throughout history," fifteen motivations for such journeys including hope and ask for miracle, to give thanks, to express the love of God, curiosity, and to make a vacation more interesting (pp. 47-49, 53, 58). The growth in popular heritage consciousness relates to the values of people on knowing about the history of events, places, and people through time, and not just distant history but the present. A notable phenomenon of this movement is that it is not centered solely on physical places or objects but is inclusive of their meanings. It has passed from an earlier concentration on iconographic national sites and monuments privileging the rich and famous to include ordinary. Everyday places where the notion of the ordinary sacred applies. Ordinarily sacred places are those that reflect our relationships with places that have meaning because we, or our ancestors, have connection with them. Place making, and all it means to us, promotes a powerful feeling of belonging and sense of place. The growing understanding of heritage value in Asia is a significant factor that needs to be underlined often with local and city governments. Many of the heritage's data are social factors where personal data and collective memory linger and cannot be defined scientifically. What has occurred, where and when in history, can be studied objectively—there may be differences of opinion on verification of facts or whether something occurred—but it is who was involved and why they did things the way they did that fascinate people. Much of this can be, and is, open to interpretation. The result is that we get a sense that we could have been involved and this is what underscores much of the popular appeal of heritage. Notwithstanding the apparent dichotomy between objective and subjective analysis, this is where charters and principles are intended to help in establishing the significance of a heritage place (Taylor, 2004). According to Wat Pho, the sense of spiritualism and expansion of heritage tourism is inseparable because of the history phenomenon and social significance in terms of royal monasteries provided traditional knowledge as the first university for Thai people since the beginning the Rattanakosin period—circa 224 years before. Some tourists may visit Wat Pho with the purpose of tourism. As a result of that, the belief in spiritualism in tourist mind may lead to the action that impact negatively without any negative intention to Wat Pho in some way.

Methodology

The study concentrates on the tourists' destructive behavior at Wat Pho, so it deals intensively with people's behavioral patterns, mannerism, and interaction with the objects. Tourist behavior or tourist typology is relatively the work of social anthropology, in which cultural sensitivity, cognitive reaction, and ethno-religious aspect are involved. Therefore, this research deems it necessary to adopt Participant Observation as its principal methodology. This method attempts to participate fully in the lives and activities of subjects. It also aims at becoming a member of the groups, organizations, or community (Saunders et al, 2007).

Hence, Participant Observation helps to identify the happenings of behavior in a specific social setting, Wat Pho. As behavior may not be easily or adequately explained by numbers or any quantitative measures, the qualitative approach of Participant Observation can help to discover the delicate nuances of the meaning. The study employed Complete Observer as the role for methodology. This role would allow the researcher to study the tourist behavior closely at designated spots without influence from tourists' interaction with the researcher. For the Data Collection Procedure, the data collection involves three phases—primary observation, secondary observation, experiential data. For primary data, researcher deals first time observation to conduct checklist, which are containing nine actions of tourist's negative behaviors (Things that foreigners did the most while visiting Wat Pho) and tallying the frequency of each action. Then, records of what happens or what is done by the tourists through descriptive account. At the same time, the interpretation of what is observed is recorded as secondary observation through the narrative account carefully. The procedure of Participant Observation is also furnished by experiential data; that is, the researcher's notes of his perception and feelings according to the possible hidden meaning of actions or connotation. To triangulate this study, so as to secure the reliability and validity of the method, and interview will be conducted. Interview questions are derived from the actions in the observation checklist. Among the interviewees, monks, laypeople, tour guides, and massage school administrations—five from each group—will take part in this interview.

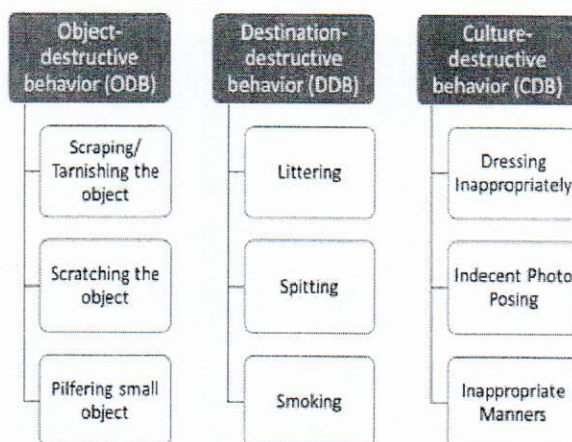
They are 5 monks, 1 janitor, 2 Security Guards, 2 Souvenir Venders, 5 Tour guides, 2 Administrators, and 3 Masseurs. Each interview should take 15 to 20 minutes, and it will be conducted after an observation is over. The 10 Interview Questions are: (1) List five inappropriate tourist behaviors you experienced in this temple. (2) Do you think that "Destructive Behavior by tourists leads to the decline of traditional culture and cause changes in the concept of Buddhism, and explain how?" (3) What tourist behavior is considered taboo in the temple? (4) What are the tourists' favorite visiting points at the temple? (5) Which areas in the temple are prone to physical damage by tourists? (7) Which gender of tourists tend to behave in an inappropriate manner at Wat Pho, and why? (8) What is your suggestion to prevent Wat Pho from destructive behavior (DB) by tourists? (9) Did you notice tourists of any ethnicity that noticeably bring disrespect to Wat Pho? And (10) Among three types of destructive behavior, which one would put Wat Pho at high risk? Then, the study approaches data analysis by using template analysis under the inductively-base analytical procedures.

According to Saunders et al (2007), template analysis is a list of the codes that represent the themes revealed from the data that has been collected. Template analysis combines a deductive and an inductive approach to qualitative analysis in the sense that codes will be predetermined and then amend or added to as data are collected and analyzed. This allows the study to re-group or prioritize the threats by tourist behavior in accordance with the findings and interview result. For the Observation Population, the research chooses only international tourists who visit Wat Pho, and is divided into two groups: Asian tourists and Non-Asian tourists. Asian tourists refer to the tourists who come from countries within Asian region such as China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, and India whereas Non-Asian tourists refer to African, American, and European tourists. The size of population is not determined, and varies depending on the dates of observation and seasonality.

As mentioned, the part of Interview Population, four groups of people who are working at Wat Pho as monks, laypeople—such as security guards, souvenir venders, janitors, tour guides, and massage school administrators are the population of the study and the total of Interviewees are twenty. To gather data from observation, Observation Checklist is a tool that come from the summary of issues appeared in first time observation uses to collect data concerning with tourist behavior upon observation at Wat Pho for secondary observation by tallying the frequency of each action. The form of checklist consists of three phases of destructive behavior (DB) and it categorized as Object-destructive behavior (ODB), Destination-destructive behavior (DDB), and Cultural-destructive behavior (CDB). Each type of DB contains three tourist destructive actions at Wat Pho.

Conclusions

The checklist allows observation on three areas of destructive behavior (DB): object (ODB), destination (DDB), and culture (CDB). These three components were conducted at the area within the temple. They refer the difference of damages that could harm Wat Pho in three ways: directly damage to the objet d'art, damage to the destination and aestheticism, and damage to the traditional culture of monastery. The observation of each destructive behavior, as three separate categories, found that there are three more units under each set of destructive behavior. The following figure summarizes the three categories of actions done by foreign tourists at Wat Pho as follow;



Firstly, Object-destructive behavior (ODB) consists of ODB1: Scraping/ Tarnishthe object: This action might occurred without tourists' intention because some of them would have faith and belief in the way of Buddha. But the outcome has impacted directly the objet d'art at Wat Pho. The decorative design of objet d'art can be faded away because of this behavior. The result from Participant Observation shows that this behavior has come about so many times depending on the number of tourist's turnover at the temple.

Asian tourists appeared to show this behavior more than Non-Asian tourists. ODB2: Scratching the object: Tourists did this by using their fingernails to scratch the objects. These caused the scratches on the object's surface. Some of objet d'art made from precious ancient gold, mother of pearl, and old woods. The observation shown that there was no scratching by other sharp object, but there were few tourists who intended to do it with their fingernails. Moreover, this behavior caused a serious damage to the objet d'art. The observation found this behavior happen more on the Asian tourists than their counterpart. ODB3: Pilfering the small object:

Some of te objet d'art were decorated with small pieces of ceramics glasses, or steels. Tourists pilfered those small objects because of their attractive appeals or perhaps tourists want to collect them with their own belief. The outcome of this action tarnished the value in terms of archeological aspect and caused fragility to the objet d'art. From the observation, Non-Asian tourists did this more than Asian distinctively. Secondly, Destination-destructive behavior (DDB), they are DDB1: Littering: This action comes from the carelessness of tourists, and it devalues the aestheticism of cultural heritage. The result of observation shown that there were many tourists did this everyday, but the frequency varied depends on the different areas within the temple. From the checklist, Asian tourists did this more than Non-Asian tourists, too. DDB2: Spitting: Similar to DDB1, this action reflects the habit of tourists, and leads to a similar outcome of DDB1. Although, this behavior would not occurred quite often within the temple area, but it shown the disrespect of the visitors to the temple. The tally from checklist shown that Asian tourists did this more than Non-Asian, too. DDB3:

Smoking: Smoking at the sacred place is prohibited. Although, there is no regulation for non-smoking in the temple, but it should be respected because Wat Pho is the Royal Monastery of Chakri Dynasty. So, smoking within this temple counted as an undoubtedly inappropriate behavior. This behavior also leads to the loss of aestheticism of the temple. From the observation, there many tourists who done this at the crowded areas within Wat Pho, and Non-Asian tourists appeared to show this behavior more than Asian tourists, too. Thirdly, Culture-destructive behavior (CDB), there are CDB1: Dressing Inappropriately: Wat Pho is such a sacred place of Buddha.

Visitors are necessary to dress politely while visiting a religious place. The fashion garments such as miniskirts, singlets, and slippers are example of inappropriate dressing for a sacred place. From an observation, most of international tourists wore the impolite clothes such as singlets, see-through T-shirts, short pants, short skirts, and slippers while visiting the temple. In the past, Wat Pho as a Royal Monastery, was the place for Royal Ceremonies and for the Kings in Chakri Dynasty, even the time has passed, but people must pay fully respect to the place as well. Non-Asian tourists appeared to show this behavior more than the Asians. CDB2: Indecent Photo Posing: Tourists who do not understand the belief and manner of Buddha tend to do this very often while taking photo with many sacred objects as a background of their photograph. The outcome of this action tends to decline of the respect for Buddha because most of sacred objects appeared in this temple were built to warship the kings and very meaningful to Thai culture.

The result from observation shown that this behavior was one of the favorite actions of tourists while visiting the temple, too. In this case, Non-Asian tourists appeared to show this behavior more than Asians. The next is CDB3: Inappropriate Manners: this action refers to sexual harassment, kissing, and hugging in which there are common manners for many western countries, but not for Thailand. All culture-destructive behavior (CDB) could lead to tourism demonstration effect for Thai society and destroy its traditional culture. And the tallies from checklist shown that Non-Asians appeared to show this behavior more than Asians, too.

Template Analysis was used to describe the data along with Participant Observation, it analyzed by areas within the temple, and the categorization of destructive behaviors (DBs) with the summary of Experiential Data in which it requires the researcher's perspective towards each of tourist's Destructive Behavior that occurred at the temple during observation. In conclusion, the highest frequency of DB after the observation is CDB1: Dressing Inappropriately, most of international tourists prefer wearing T-shirts, short pants, or short denim skirts with slippers while visiting the temple. It may come from hot climate and high temperature or maybe sometimes fashionable, but for Thai customs, the hidden meaning of this behavior holds that it is "disrespect" to the sacred place. From the stakeholders' point of view through interviewing, they really felt disappointed when saw those of tourists done this while visiting Wat Pho.

The other DB that highly appeared at Wat Pho is CDB2: Indecent Photo Posing, and CDB3: Inappropriate Manners respectively. International tourists who visit Wat Pho might be aroused by the exciting environment and behave indulgently when taking photograph using temple's surroundings as a background without awareness of the sacred place. Moreover, technology is developing everyday, people might share those of improper photos through social medias and relatives, and that makes devaluation of Thai culture and its significance in term of history as well. The examples from observation are female tourists often try funny posing with monks, hugging the stone sculpture as their posing, and sometimes try climbing on the royal pagodas.

These may bring ignominy to the temple and such an eye-sore for other Thai temple goers. Sometimes, it comes from the "culture shock", or without knowing Thai mannerism. Many of couples (international tourists) often shown their affliction through their physical bodies such as hugging and kissing, this would disrupt the feeling of Thai people because of their belief about the temple as a sacred place which provides tranquility in the way of Buddhism. ODB1: Scraping/ Tarnishing the object is mostly found during an observation. Many of Non-Asians often touch the objects because of their curiosity especially children whereas some Asians for example, Indian, and Chinese often touch the objects with the meaning of religious belief. Interviewing concerned to triangulate data from observation, the summary of it conformed with the result from observation distinctively. Information from interview can be summed up as; The five inappropriate tourist's behaviors that stakeholders experienced are dressing inappropriately, indecent photo posing, inappropriate manners such as hugging (not hugging for greeting), kissing, climbing/ sitting on the pagodas, and shouting. Touching/ Tarnishing the objet d'art and wall painting. Sometimes smoking and drinking alcoholic drinks, too.

Then, interviewees pointed out that DB can affect directly to Thai traditional culture just because Thai people are sensitive to replicate foreigners such as dressing, speaking/ acting, and even showing the replication of inappropriate manners such as sexual harassment. Thai teenagers are tend to follow the negative things done by the foreigners and it gradually impacts directly to Thai culture in the run. Moreover, Dressing inappropriately, and inappropriate manners such as hugging, kissing, and sexual harassment are considered taboo in the temple, too. The factors that motivate tourists to behave inappropriately at Wat Pho might come from the lack of knowing Thai culture, customs, and even Thai temple manner. In this case, sometimes it comes from a few of Thai people who behave indulgently without awareness of its effects, then foreigners saw it as demonstration so they imitate those things because they do not understand the righteousness of traditions and practice. According to Wat Pho, the favorite visiting points for visitors are Vihara of Reclining Buddha, Thai Traditional Massage Therapy, Sala Rai, Phra Maha Chedi Si Rajakarn, Phra Ubosotha, and Khao Mor. Vihara of Reclining Buddha and Pagodas are highest prone to damage by tourists whereas female tourists behave more inappropriately than male distinctively. The solution for Wat Pho is all tourism stakeholders should cooperate in order to in from International tourists about Thai culture, customs, and mannerism through media such as pamphlets, leaflets, brochures, and handbook to make them understand clearer and behave in the right way.

From the conclusion, Non-Asians bring more disrespect to Wat Pho than Asians distinctively, it might because of the lack of knowledge about Thai culture, culture shock, and diversity. And lastly, the highest risk that harm Wat Pho is Culture-destructive behavior (CDB), and interviewees explained more that Object-destructive behavior (ODB) or the depreciation on the sacred objects and other objet d'art, Destination-destructive behavior (DDB) or the loss of aestheticism in the religious environment can be renovate, but Culture-destructive behavior (CDB) is a big problem which leads to ill-reputation of the temple and bring about the "Demonstration Effect" to Thai people, and it is very hard to solve this kind of problem in the short time.

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