

# An Analysis of Cross Culture Communication in Volunteer Tourism in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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## Abstract

This quantitative study aimed to analyze cross culture communication in volunteer tourism in Chiang Mai province. The sample group consisted of 384 volunteer foreign tourists in Chiang Mai province and they were obtained by the unknown population size formula of Cochran. The reliability level was set a 95% and the level of an error value was at 5%. A set of questionnaires was used for data collection with the IOC at .089 and analyzed by using descriptive statistics. Findings showed that, as a whole, there was a high level in terms of the following six aspects of cross culture communication in voluntourism in Chiang Mai province: 1) cultural difference, 2) equity respectfulness, 3) ability to deal with problems, 4) creative thinking, 5) unique self-competency, and 6) communicative skills. In this respect, equity respectfulness gained a highest average mean score. This was followed by ability to deal with problems, unique self competency, cultural difference, communicative skills, and creative thinking, respectively.

**Keywords:** Cross Culture Communication, Voluntourism, Volunteer Tourists

## Background and Significance of the Problem

Cross culture communication is the communication between two people using different language and having different culture and it is an important factor having an effect on tourism industry. In the case of tourism sector, personnel who are skillful in cross culture communication can enhance quality tourism. In contrast, perfect tourist spots may not fully attract tourists if tourism personnel there are not skillful in cross culture communication. In addition, personnel in tourism sector who are skillful in communication truly can impress tourists (Suwatthikul et al., 2003).

Volunteer tourism can practice people in developed countries who are wealthy, knowledgeable, and mature in terms of providing assistance to people in developing and underdeveloped countries. (Carti and Marola, 2010). Therefore, volunteer tourists visiting Thailand are from developed countries to join development activities. Cross culture

communication between volunteer tourists and local people is an important part of volunteer tourism in Chiang Mai province. As a matter of fact, Chiang Mai is the most popular province in Thailand among volunteer tourists which accounts for one-third of volunteer tourists in the country (Keese, 2011). Most volunteer tourists use volunteer tourism service of development private organizations and tour companies in Chiang Mai province. Most of them are foreigners visiting Chiang Mai about 8 weeks and below (Lough et al., 2011).

Regarding volunteer tourism, volunteer tourists are to spend their time in tourism activities. Their motivation is to gain new experience with new friends who also love voluntourism and to participate in community activities (Proyrungroj, 2014). To participate in community activities (volunteer tourism) volunteer tourists must be close to local people and there is cultural exchange between volunteer tourists and local people. Thus, cross culture communication is like an important tool to develop volunteer tourism in terms of a better understanding and satisfaction between volunteer tourists and local people.

According to the information mentioned above, the team of researchers are interested in an analysis of cross culture communication related to volunteer tourism in Chiang Mai province. This is in order to gain data used for improving a guideline for the management of cross culture communication for volunteer tourism. It aims to create satisfaction and understanding which is consistent with needs of volunteer tourists. This will lead to the development of the facilitation of volunteer tourism activities.

## **Literature Review**

Cross culture communication is regarded as a field of Anthropology - a study related to all aspects of man in order to understand their culture and way of life. Schramm (1973) explained about a communicative process for information exchange between two persons. The communicative process begins with the meaning interpretation of information transfer of each other. Actually, it is a process happening again and again until both parties understand the message being transferred. Rogers and shoemaker (1976) defined communication as the transfer and exchange of facts, feeling, opinions or even various actions which aims to change behavior of an individual. In this case, behaviors refers to candidly changing of knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and behaviors. Hence, cross culture communication can be understood as communication between the message sender (source) and the receiver having the difference in their culture, communicative skills, equity respectfulness, ability to deal with problems, creative thinking, etc. This conforms to a study of Lustig and Koester (1993) which stated that cross culture communication is a process of an exchange, symbolic interpretation, and a contest. In this respect, individuals in the communicative process are so different in their culture that there is the difference in interpretation and expectation about appropriate behaviors. This will lead to misunderstanding in communication. The United Church of Canada (2011) claimed that it usually has a comparison in terms of the difference in culture when there are two or more cultures having a relationship to each other. This is particularly between the message sender and the receiver having the difference in their culture but they use body language and nonverbal communication to convey cultural meaning. This study set a guideline for an analysis of cross culture communication based on the following aspect:

### **Cultural differences**

Early et al (2006: 5) explained that cultural metacognition makes an individual to pay attention to cultural differences and be able to organize data by himself. The following are characteristics of a person having cultural metacognition: 1) open-minded and sensitive to new culture; 2) able to explain similarity and difference of culture; 3) able to develop diverse thinking strategies in order to gain knowledge related to self-adaptation to cross culture; 4)

energetic mind when there is cross culture interaction; and 5) planning, monitoring and learning from meeting with person having different culture (Polyota, 2017).

### **Cultural dimension**

Cultural dimension is a dimension measuring a level of equity and status hierarchy in the large-power distance society or culture. That is to say, those having less power in an organization believe and accept the inequality of social class based on power. For example, seniority system or social hierarchy. In other words, those having a high social position will have the right to make a decision for the society. In contrast, in the society of small-power distance people there believe that everyone is equal. That is, every position in an organization is equal and has the right to express opinions and join a decision-making. Moreover, they can expression opinions which are against an opinion of their superior. This makes people in the large-power distance society be highly formal in many aspects such as behave, title called before the name, and point of view towards time (Phumchijzarnan, 2018).

### **Ability to deal with problems**

Livermore (2011) explained the application of cultural cleverness in various professions. He defined cultural cleverness as the ability to work effectively in the context of cultural diversity such as racial differences, age interval, organizational culture, etc. Cultural cleverness does not only focus on the understanding of different culture but it also includes the ability to deal with problems and the effective adaption to the environment having cultural diversity.

### **Creative thinking**

Hall (1981) cited that the cultural system context is an increased problem in international communication making the negotiation for finding solutions be very difficult. The communication under cultural differences of individuals is an issue which cannot be avoided. Also, cultural diversity cultures of the communication party must be understood. In this respect, the cultural system context can be classified into two main parts as follows:

1) High context culture: This can be understood as people in or outside a group are highly different in cultural context. An individual living in this system must participate in social activities and view that power is a particular matter of each person. The fact is not only in the theory, an individual in this culture usually expects that what he has said will be perceived by others or not. An individual believes that only the spoken word cannot interpret the whole messages. This is because body language (gesture) and environmental context must also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, the cultural traits of “High context” include creative communication under their own contextual frame. This aims to avoid disputes or conflicts but to keep good relationships based on appropriateness. The countries in high context culture are those in Latin America Mexico, Japan, China, Korea, Thai and other Asian countries.

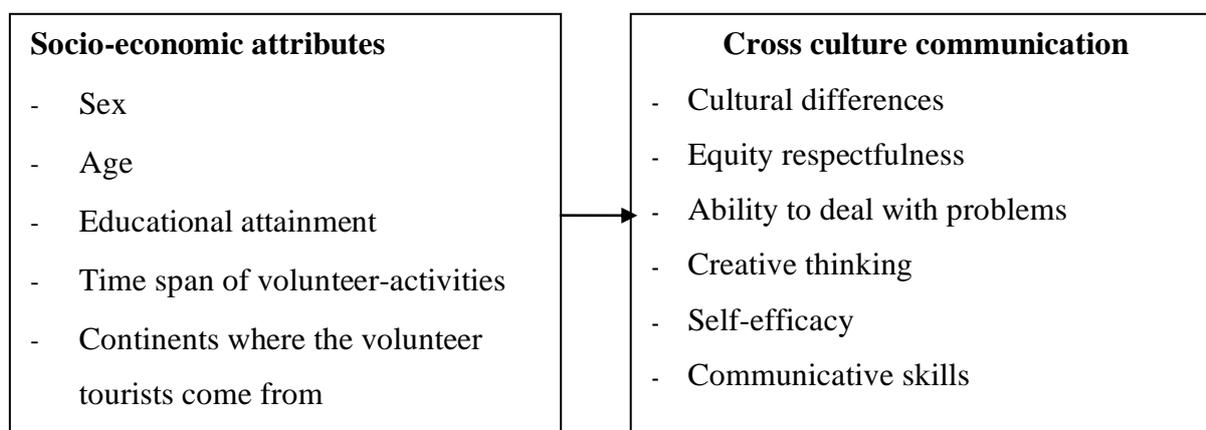
2) Low Context Culture: People in this culture have delicate obligation. They have to stay together for a long time to trust one another but are ready to be out of their group in the case of dissatisfaction. However, they will protect their group if something bad happens and “Scapegoat” may happens if needed. Besides low context is a culture having direct communication while it can be concluded from verbal language. This is because the expressed spoken words are done candidly. Also, they put the importance on an individual which is less than written agreement. In addition, people in this culture are creative and interested in new innovation. The countries in low context culture include USA., Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, and Scandinavia (Jongsuksomsakul, 2016).

### **Self-efficacy**

Van et al. (2012) revealed about cultural cleverness and components of self-efficacy perception. They referred it as confidence in doing activities in the situation of cultural diversity. It also includes the following: feeling about the ability to manage stress and anxiety arise from self-adaptation in new culture; confidence in the interaction with a person having

different culture; and confidence in working with a group of people having cultural diversity. In fact, self-efficacy perception and intrinsic motivation are related to each other. This is because a person will choose to participate in various activities when he has perceived his self-efficacy.

According to the statements mentioned above, it can be concluded that variables used as important components in this study include: 1) cultural differences-investigation of the understanding about the difference in people, culture, communicative traits of Thai people, and local culture learning; 2) equity respectfulness-willing to listen to opinions of people having different culture; 3) ability to deal with problems-be a mature and resourceful person; 4) creative thinking-investigation of local system/rules/regulations contributing to volunteer activities; 5) self-efficacy-human relations, inspiration to others, tolerance, communicative skills, etc. as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Conceptual framework in this study

## Research Methodology

### Population and sample

Since the size of population in this study is big and its number is uncertain, so the sample group size could be computed by using the formula of W.G. Cochran with the reliability level of 95% and the error level of 5% (Wanitbancha, 2011) and the sample group of 384 persons was obtained.

### Variables and Measurement

Variables used in this study comprised the following: 1) Cultural differences, 2) Equity respectfulness, 3) Ability to deal with problems, 4) Creative thinking, 5) Self-efficacy, 6) Communicative skills

### Research instrument

A set of questionnaires was used for data collection. It was constructed on the basis of concepts, theories and other related literature. The question items were under 6 factors or variables related to cross culture communication in volunteer tourism. It was the 5-rating-scale questionnaire ranging from highest, high, moderate, low, and lowest since the obtained scores were clear (Taweerat, 1997).

### Data analysis

Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics i.e. frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation.

**Table 1** General data of the respondents

<b>Personal data</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	228	59.4
<b>Age</b>		
26-35 years	175	45.50
<b>Educational attainment</b>		
Higher than bachelor's degree	220	57.30
<b>Time span of doing volun-activities</b>		
More than 4 days	277	72.10
<b>Continents where the respondents come from</b>		
Europe	213	55.50

According to Table 1, more than one-half of the respondents (59.4%) were female, their age range was 26-35 years (45.50%) and their educational attainment was higher than bachelor's degree (57.30%). Most of the respondents (72.10%) did volun-activities for more than 4 days per visit and more than one-half of them (55.50%) were from Europe.

**Table 2** An average mean score, standard deviation and levels of opinions of components about cross culture communication in volunteer tourism

<b>Cross culture communication in volunteer tourism</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Description</b>
Equity respectfulness	4.35	0.81	High
Ability to deal with problems	4.16	0.84	High
Self-efficacy	4.05	0.91	High
Cultural difference	3.87	0.96	High
Communicative skills	3.86	1.01	High
Creative thinking	3.84	0.99	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.02</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>High</b>

According to Table 2, it revealed results of the study on cross culture communication in volunteer tourism, Chiang Mai province based on the component of 6 aspects. As a whole, the respondents had a high level of their opinions about cross culture communication in volunteer tourism ( $\bar{X}=4.02$ , S.D.=0.92). Based on its details, all aspects were found at a high level as the following. Equity respectfulness ( $\bar{X}=4.35$ , S.D.=0.81), ability to deal with problems ( $\bar{X}=4.16$ , S.D.=0.84), self-efficacy ( $\bar{X}=4.05$ , S.D.=0.91), cultural differences ( $\bar{X}=3.87$ , S.D.=0.96), communicative skills ( $\bar{X}=3.86$ , S.D.=1.01), and creative thinking ( $\bar{X}=3.84$ , S.D.=0.99), respectively.

## Discussions

Based on 6 aspects of the component, the team of researchers made a sequencing of issues to be discussed as the following.

1) Equity respectfulness: Everyone in the society is equal regardless of social/economic status, and cultural differences. In other words, they live in the society with harmony and peace without discrimination. Results of the study show that equity respectfulness had a highest average mean score. This implies that everyone respects one another no matter they are different in many aspects. It conforms to a study of Lyons and Wearing (2008) which stated that volunteer tourism attempts to make tourists have a close relationship with livelihoods of local people to create communication with respectfulness and equity. This also

conforms to a study of Kate (2011) which found that respectatives doing volunteer tourism activities must be careful in choosing a project, their host, coordinators and local supporting personnel. Also, there is a professional training for interested volunteer tourists. Besides, a study of Zahra and McGehee (2013) showed that local people put the importance with respectfulness on volunteer tourists.

2) Ability to deal with problems: Volunteer tourists can well face various problems with good self-adaptation and solve problems with the western style. Meanwhile, the respondents view that and occurred problem must be solved immediately. They usually look for caused of the problem, not the problem creator. This conforms to a study of Livermore (2011) which claimed that the ability to work effectively in the context of cultural diversity does not only focus on cultural differences but also the ability to deal with problems and self-adaptation to the environment.

3) Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy truly enhances volun-activities in terms of increased efficiency, smooth and happiness. This conforms to an idea of Van et al. (2012) which indicated that self-efficacy perception can be described as the confidence in activity doing in the situation of cultural diversity. This includes the feeling of having ability to manage stress and anxiety arised from self-adaptation to new culture; confidence in working people of cultural diversity and; good interaction with people having different culture background. Intrinsic motivation has a relationship with self-efficacy perception because a person makes a decision to participate in any activities when he feels that he has capability (Van et al., 2012).

4) Cultural differences: Cultural differences between Thai people and European volunteer tourists anchor on the importance of time. Importantly, Europeans or westerners put the importance of punctuality whereas Thai people do not and this is particularly on an appointment. Also, western volunteer tourists put the importance on project/planning and implementation but Thai people do not. In addition, Thai people need to improve their English for communication which will be very beneficial for them and English speakers. This conforms to a study of Maxime (2011) which found that volunteer tourists who understand local culture of the community they are in normally are accepted by people in the community. It also conforms to a study of Hammersley (2014) which showed that local culture learning of volunteer tourists enhances learning and a better understanding in volun-activities. Likewise, Wearing (2001) found that understanding and learning way of life/local culture of a community where volunteer tourists are can make their volun-activities there be smooth and successful.

5) Communicative skills: In fact, volunteer tourists should have basic skills in Thai language communication as well as social skills for harmonious working with other. However, representatives of volunteer tourists claimed that Thai language is not essential because volun-activities are in a short period of time. Also, they revealed that Thai people should develop their skills in English language communication, particularly on volun-activities and tourism. Also, they perceived that social skills is essential in working with volunteer tourists. This conforms to a study of Sussman (2002) which stated that adaptive interpersonal skills are related to the skills in stress/anxiety management, effective communication and creation of relationships among persons.

6) Creative thinking: Creative volunteer tourists have a high tendency to help solve problems beyond their volunteer-activities which may be beneficial for the community they are in. The volunteer tourists stated that doing volun-activities has a chance to use their creative thinking for solving problems and it is challenging/enjoyable. This conforms to a study of Hall (1981) which claimed that creative communication under self-contextual framework can avoid argument or conflict. Blaming is ashamed but keeping relationships is needed based on appropriateness with time and chance. According to a study of Coghlan and Noakes (2012), creative thinking with novelty for volunteer tourists helps solve various problems and creates

good experience to them. It conforms to a study of Suanpang (2014) which revealed that creative thinking with novelty and enthusiasm to help the society of volunteer tourists help communication and volunteer-activities be successful.

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