Local Messages and Cross-cultural Interpretation:

A Case Study of Hat Siao Community, Sukhothai Province, Thailand

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Abstract

This research aims 1) to verify non-Thai visitors' characteristics and behaviors in Hat Siao community, 2) to identify the need of local involvement and participation on their heritage identity interpretation and 3) to propose cross-cultural interpretation in Hat Siao community based on local involvement and participation. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were conducted through site observations, in-depth interviews, open-ended questionnaires and focus group. The result found that non-Thai visitors in the community have different characteristics, behaviors and experiences on community cultural heritage; however, the local involvement and participation on community heritage interpretation is needed. Thus, this research proposed the cross-cultural interpretation for non-Thai visitors in Hat Siao community regarding to local message, involvement and participation in order to fulfill global visitors' interests, backgrounds, behaviors and encourage them to come and spend more time in the community.

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาคุณลักษณะและพฤติกรรมของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติที่มีต่อ
ชุมชนหาดเสี้ยว 2) ศึกษาความจำเป็นของการมีส่วนร่วมของคนในการแสดงออกซึ่งอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรม
ของชุมชน 3) นำเสนอการสื่อความหมายข้ามวัฒนธรรมให้กับนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติด้วยการให้คนในชุมชน
เข้ามาเกี่ยวข้องและมีส่วนร่วม การวิจัยนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพและเชิงปริมาณ ซึ่งข้อมูลที่ได้มาจากวิจัย
ครั้งนี้มาจากการลงสำรวจพื้นที่ การสำรวจแบบสอบถามปลายเปิดต่อนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติ การสัมภาษณ์
แบบเจาะลึกและการสนทนากลุ่ม ผลจากการศึกษาพบว่า 1) นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติที่เข้ามาท่องเที่ยวใน
ชุมชนหาดเสี้ยวมีความหลากหลายทั้งด้านคุณลักษณะและพฤติกรรม 2) ชุมชนขาดการมีส่วนร่วมในการ
แสดงออกซึ่งอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมของชุมชน 3) งานวิจัยนี้จึงได้นำเสนอการสื่อความหมายข้ามวัฒนธรรม
ให้กับนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติในชุมชนหาดเสี้ยวด้วยการให้คนในชุมชนเข้ามาเกี่ยวข้องและมีส่วนร่วมเพื่อ
ตอบสนองความสนใจ ภูมิหลัง พฤติกรรมที่หลากหลายและช่วยกระตุ้นให้นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติเข้ามา
ท่องเที่ยวและอยู่ในชุมชนนานขึ้น

คำสำคัญ : นักท่องเที่ยวข้ามวัฒนธรรม การสื่อความหมายมรดกทางวัฒนธรรม การสื่อความหมายข้าม
วัฒนธรรม ชุมชนหาดเสี้ยว ความเกี่ยวข้องและการมีส่วนร่วมของคนในชุมชน

Introduction

Hat Siao community is the sub-district of Sisatchanalai District which is located in the
northern part of Sukhothai province. The tangible and intangible cultural heritage of this
community reflects to the integration of local residents and Thai-Phuan people who migrated
from Lao People's Democratic Republic over centuries years ago (Panirf, 2010). The famous
examples of the cultural heritage identity of Hat Saio community include the elephant back
ordination procession, Thai-Phuan housing style, Thai-Phuan dialect, Thai-Phuan ceremonies
and festivals, the ancient Ubosot (or Buddhist chapel) which was registered under the
supervision of the Fine Arts Department of Thailand in 1987, the Sathorn Gold Textiles
Museum, local foods which refer to Kaw Khong (curved rice snack) and Kaw Tho Thae (flatted
rice snack), and the nine patterns of traditional weaving of textiles (or Sin-Teen-Chok) which
are not only well-known by domestic tourists, but also international tourists.

Although Hat Siao community mainly presents its plenty of culture identities to attract
both local and global visitors, Based on the research questionnaires from non-Thai visitors in

the community, in-depth interviews and focus group workshop from various concerned stakeholders, it indicated that only few of international visitors come and/or stay overnight in the community. They are also pointed out that the non-Thai visitors do not have any idea what should they read, see, do or reflect within the community. The cross-cultural interpretation for non-Thai visitors in the community is lacked and cannot fulfill their needs and expectations. Hence, most of foreigner visitors normally come and spend only short time within the community. Secondly, it is notable that one of the significant key to conserve community identity is the local involvement and participation. Unfortunately, the mix and richness of community cultural identities which have been handed down through the generations have been ignored, devalued and faded away in terms of its significance due to the low level of local involvement and participation on their heritage interpretation. Interpretation would not be effective if it comes only from outsiders with less or no local involvement as it is less likely to extend the local pride and sense of place to visitors.

According to heritage interpretation can considered as a crucial tool to extend the length of stay of tourist, provide visitor more engagement, improve their experience and build their perception of the site. Furthermore, the ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Sites (2008) stated that heritage interpretation can be used to raise public awareness and understanding of the heritage value, which can lead to protection of community identity. Tantiyamas (2007) also indicated that interpretation should involve local participation since the key to success for interpretation depends on locals taking ownership and being involved in the preservation and explanation of their heritage to visitors. From these regards, to make the international visitors to come and stay longer in the community as well as appreciating the community heritage identity, the cross-cultural interpretation for non-Thai visitors based on local involvement and participation in Hat Siao community should be described.

Objectives

1) To verify non-Thai visitors' characteristics and behaviors in Hat Siao community;

2) To identify the need of local involvement and participation on their heritage identity;

3) To propose cross-cultural interpretation based on local involvement and participation.

Scope of Research

To answer the three research questions, this research geographical location focuses on the area of the Hat Siao community. The scope of study content is conducted with both qualitative and quantitative approaches. From using a purposive sampling method, open-ended questionnaires have been distributed to forty-two Non-Thai visitors. A snow-ball technique was conducted to expand the research data from six community key informants, five private agencies and government officers and six heritage tourism and interpretation specialists. The limitation of the number of non-Thai visitors was presented since they extensively visited the site only on the special occasion such as elephant back ordination procession and non-Thai tourists who cannot communicate in English were not the research respondents. This research was conducted during December, 2014 to June, 2018.
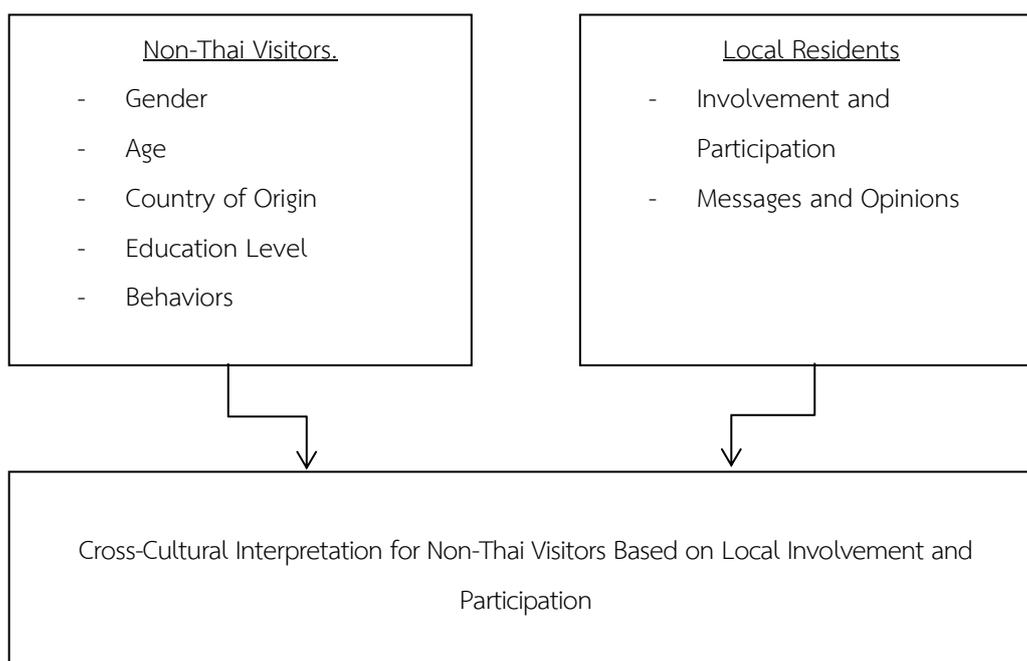
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Definition of Operational Terms/ Research Terms

Thai-Phuan: The Phuan ethnic group of people migrated from Xiangkhouang province in Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand. They spread out in small groups over most of the northeaster and center of Thailand.

Elephant Back Ordination Procession: The annual group ordination on Elephant back at the Hat Siao community is arranged annually on 7 April. The monks-to-be get dressed in colorful traditional outfits adorned with ornaments.

Sin-Teen-Chok Textiles: The traditional tube skirt is weaved into the shape of a sack. They consist of three parts; the top, the body and the foot. The foot part, which is called teen or foot in Thai, is woven with a unique technique called 'pick and pull', or chok in Thai.

Ubosot: Ubosot is the main prayer room in Buddhist temples. It can be called Bot in short and is where monks get ordained. Ubosot also refers to a hall used for rituals. It is rectangular shaped with the main entrance usually facing East. It stands within a boundary formed by boundary stones (Sema) which separates the sacred place from the profane.

Literature Reviews

Cultural Heritage Visitors

Cultural heritage tourism as a specific market segment has only recently been identified in the last two decades; nevertheless, travelling to historic sites has occurred for centuries (Confer et all, 2002). During the 20th century, the culture and heritage field has witnessed continuous growth beyond expectations (Mason, 1993). Cultural tourism is a kind of conservation and sustainable tourism which includes local community involvement and cultural preservation. ICOMOS (2008) also defined cultural tourism as a discerning type of tourism which takes account other persons' cultures.

Visitors' Characteristics and Behaviors

Wilson (2009) stated that understanding the target market plays a significant role for every company or site. The different age, gender, place of origin, i.e. the demographics of visitors, could be useful in developing effective interpretation. Successful interpretation should meet the needs of all individuals according to Ballantyne et al. (1998). The types of visitor need to be explored in order to understand the characteristics of visitors. Leiper (2004) stated that there are three segments to classify tourists which are demographic segmentation (age, gender, income, social class, education, occupation, and lifestyle), geographic segmentation (where the visitors come from), and psychographic segmentation (what they do during their stay at the site including the attitudes and behaviors of visitors). In addition, Mayer (2010) indicated that the psychographic characteristics of visitors such as their interests, motivations, attitudes, knowledge, and expectations are also essential information which

provides further insight to develop effective interpretation. The various kinds of visitor psychographic characteristics could help to forecast their behaviors which can be linked to the plan so that appropriate content and form of interpretation can be prepared.

Heritage Interpretation

Tilden (1977) also indicated that interpretation is an educational activity which brings out meaning and relationship through the use of original objects by using first-hand experience and illustrative media rather than factual information. Hall and McArthur (1996) stated that interpretation could also help visitors to develop a deeper awareness, appreciation, and understanding of heritage sites. Furthermore, Beck and Cable (1998) also stated that interpretation is an education activity which enhances our understanding and appreciation and leads to the protection of heritage sites through various media tools. Interpretation is about informational and inspirational processes. Furthermore, interpretation can refer to "the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of cultural sites. This can include prints and electronic publications, public lectures, on-site and directly related off-site installations, educational programs, community activities and ongoing research, training, and evaluation of the interpretation process itself" (The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Sites, 2008). Staiff (2014) mentioned that the effective interpretation should have four inter-related parts which are the object and/ or site, the interpretation environment, interpretation and the visitors or the tourist and the interconnecting arrows in the diagram flow both ways. The object and/ or site refer to the material object or the site attraction that being visited and or viewed from tourists. He also mentioned that, in this digital age, interpretation is "an education activity that communicates the heritage significance of places, sites, monuments, and objects to visitors in order to increase awareness, deepen appreciation and understanding of themselves and the world they live in". Visitors can access, learn or even participate anywhere and at any time. They are not considered as a passive receiver anymore since they have become co-authors.

Cross-cultural Interpretation

Reisinger and Turner (2003) stated that cross-cultural tourists bring their own set of perceptions and expectations as well as their own cultural preferences and their own forms of indigenous knowledge. They also indicated that not only is there a language limitation,

but there is also a variety of human interactions between international visitors and local hosts; for instance, non-verbal behavior, religious beliefs, time, orientation, attitude to privacy, manners, customs, forms of address, body language and gestures. Poria et al. (2006) mentioned that visitors from different cultures may experience heritage sites differently based on their own systems of meaning, ideals, myths, beliefs and understanding. Besides, Appiah (2006) indicated that cross-cultural interpretation should stress similarities by using common things that all humans share and understand in the interpretation rather than more limited forms of communication

Local Involvement and Participation

Saipradist (2005) mentioned that interpretation would not be effective if it comes only from outsiders with less or no local involvement as it is less likely to extend the local sense of place to visitors. In other words, Sutunyarak (2008) stated that heritage interpretation needs local involvement and collaboration in order to send the right message to visitors. The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Sites (2008) stated that the involvement of associated communities and stakeholders in planning might make the interpretation interesting and real. Du Cros (2013) indicated that the best interpretation should concern the value of the site and also share the local identity. This could help to emphasize local distinctiveness and identify the reasons for visiting and the unique selling point of the place.

Research Methodology

Both Quantitative and qualitative research methods were intensively employed in this research through four research tools as follows;

- **Field Observations:** To expand the site investigation, field observations were conducted which also provided the researcher with actual data which might differ from the documents.

- **Questionnaires:** The open-ended questions were created and distributed to non-Thai site visitors (42 persons). They were questioned about the basic characteristics and behaviors on their site visits.

- **In-Depth Interviews:** The in-depth interviews related to the basic information of non-Thai visitors and their behaviors, the local involvement and participation and cross-cultural interpretation and local involvement and participation were conducted with various

concerned people in the community; community key informants, key stakeholders and members of government and private agencies on their heritage interpretation involvement and participation.

-   Focus Group: To make this research valid and reliable, various concerned people such as informants, key stakeholders, members of government and private agencies and heritage tourism and interpretation specialists were attended in the focus group workshop. The focus group of twenty participants was launched to identify the current situation and propose the cross-cultural interpretation and local involvement and participation as a one day workshop to share and discuss the different perspectives of the proper direction of heritage interpretation for cross-cultural visitors in the community.

All tools and research findings were integrated, critical analyzed and conducted under the supervision of Ph.D. academic advisor. Statistical Analysis was systematically employed to analyze the data from the questionnaires and the content analyze was applied to complete the research objectives.

Results

1.   Non-Thai visitors' characteristics and behaviors in Hat Siao community

The findings show that the basic characteristics of non-Thai visitors to the Hat Siao community were male (59.52%), the largest age groups belonged equally to the age groups 26-35 and 36-45 years old (23.81%), the largest nationality group of non-Thai visitors in Hat Siao community was American (28.57%), the education level was mainly bachelor degree at 64.29% (See Table 1).

The length of stay in Thailand for 1- 15 days, stayed in Sukhothai for 1-3 days but stayed in Hat Siao less than 1 day. The largest group travelling in the community is families. The community's sources of information for foreign visitors before their visit largely depend on family, friends and relatives and then followed by the media, TV, radio and internet. The available communication for international visitors in the community is lacked and available only for the Sathorn Gold Textile Museum; however, messages are offered as one-way communication (small descriptions in each object) without regard to the background knowledge of cross-cultural visitors. Some of them also claimed that "I wish I could read Thai". After spending time in the community, almost all foreign visitors claimed that they understood more about the community from their family, friends or relatives and internet or

applications. No one mentioned that their understanding was enhanced by the community interpretation. The results show that non-Thai tourists in the Hat Siao community need to know more about the historic value followed by the social value, the aesthetic value, the spiritual value and the scientific value, respectively. Signage is the popular choice of interpretation technique for non-Thai visitors to the Hat Siao community, followed by websites, applications and other media, and printed materials, respectively. From the detailed interviews, the reason that visitors chose signage as their first choice of interpretation technique is because they need ready-to-read information as same as the officially information with no extra paid at the actual place.

Table 1: Demographic profile of Non-Thai Visitors (n = 42)

Demographic Profile	No. of tourists (people)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	25	59.52
Female	17	40.48
Age		
16 – 25 years old	5	11.90
26 – 35 years old	10	23.81
36 – 45 years old	10	23.81
46 – 55 years old	9	21.43
Over 56 years old	8	19.05
Country of Origin		
USA.	12	28.57
Australia	8	19.05
United Kingdom	8	19.05
Canada	4	9.53
France	3	7.14
Germany	3	7.14
Sweden	2	4.76
South Africa	2	4.76
Education Level		
Below Bachelor Degree	7	16.67
Bachelor Degree	27	64.29
Higher than Bachelor Degree	8	19.04

2. Local involvement and participation on their heritage identity

For the local involvement and participation, the results indicated that locals need to share their cultural values as well as extend the sense of possession to all local and foreign visitors. They indicate that they need to present themselves as a cultural heritage destination which can attract visitors around the world in every season by offing the variety of Thai-Phuan cultural heritage, not only the elephant back ordination procession. They understood that promoting mainly the famous festivals of the community such as the elephant back ordination procession cannot provide the community enough economic benefits from tourism. They also need the top-down direction from the government in term of budget support and official English message advice. Unfortunately, the community participation and involvement such as meetings to encourage locals to share opinions on cultural heritage conservation of their own community are totally lacking. All of the local residents in the focus group workshop mentioned that "We all willing to help and have many ideas to improve our community interpretation for cross-cultural visitors; however, our voices cannot be heard by the concerned authorities. This focus group is the first meeting which allows us to share our ideas on our heritage identity interpretation".

3. Cross-cultural interpretation based on local involvement and participation

From knowing this, the cross-cultural heritage interpretation in Hat Siao community should understand the varied visitor interests, backgrounds, perceptions, cultures and behaviors to encourage them to come, enjoy and spend more time and money in the community with regarding to the local messages, local voices and requires local involvement in presenting their heritage. These can be benefits to both community residents and local or global visitors. In the focus group workshop, some of the community philosopher stated that "We realize that we have good assets in cultural heritage identity which can attract both local and global visitors to the community, and we are proud of sharing our stories to all visitors. And now we know who they are and what the non-Thai visitors really need to know from us from your research. All we needed is the government support in terms of; budget, English versions and/or translations, global promotion and clear directions regarding to our voices".

Conclusion and Discussion

Non- Thai visitors in Hat Siao community have different characteristics, behaviors and experiences on community cultural heritage; thus, the community heritage interpretation should not ignore this information in order to fulfill global visitors' interests, backgrounds, behaviors and encourage them to come, spend more time in the community (Meethan, 2001). Furthermore, the local involvement and participation such as meetings to foster a sense of local pride and interest in their own culture and finally conserve community heritage significances for long–term benefit is required (Tantiyamas, 2007). Consequently, the cross-cultural heritage interpretation in Hat Siao community regarding to the local messages, involvement and participation can help the community to convince non-Thai visitors to come and spend more time and money as well as conserve the community heritage identity.

The interpretation should encourage potential visitors to recognize, come, stay longer, experience, learn and be satisfied by the cultural identity of the community. The community should aim to include various activities and offer the variety of Thai-Phuan cultural heritage in order to provide first-hand experiences for both males/females, adults/children and Asian/European to come in every season and stay longer in the community (Hargrove, 2017).

The architecture of Thai-Phuan housing style and ancient buildings in Hat Siao temple which reflect the local way of life can arouse the interest of male visitors while the Sin-teen-Chok textiles and community history can stimulate female interest. In addition, interpretation for children should aim to offer the fun of discovery, participation and be different to the adult version. To attract more male and female international visitors to the Hat Siao community, the community should develop better transportation, facilities, and sanitary and security conditions, which would be beneficial, directly and indirectly, for both local and tourists since the quality of facilities and services can encourage visitors to stay longer, spend more money and revisit the site (Hargrove, 2017). Moreover, Kreag (2001) stated that improving the quality of life in host communities can help facilitate educational experience, improve understanding about different communities, bring greater tolerance about social differences and satisfy psychological needs.

Community interpretation should serve the different cultural from different part of the world visitors and high level of education visitors with no simple address the names and date objects found or word-by-word translation, but it should stimulate and present these groups

of people with deeper knowledge, encourage and challenge them to connect the values of the community with their personal experiences. When the interpretation relying largely on the interpretation from visitors' family, friends and relatives, the quality of the interpretation and the officially message from the community will never be handed on to the visitors. Various kinds of media need to be developed to make Hat Siao community better known by both local and foreign visitors. It is essential that local empowerment is established. However, in this case, the community's cross-cultural interpretation should begin with top-down policy. The government needs to support the community in terms of budget, English versions and/or translations, global promotion and clear directions. Then the goals, visions and missions of local stakeholders can be established since Uzzell (1989) stated that interpretation should not only focus on visitors' expectations and experiences but should also focus on community involvement in any heritage.

Kow (2017) indicated that digital technology has become more powerful and intensively used by visitors; thus, the digital technique such as audio and visual guide and QR code can help visitors to experience the objects and site interpretation and manage their time appropriately by selecting their own languages on their specific interested objects for the community museum. Currently, it can be concluded that the visitor better understanding came mostly from their companions who may or may not provide correct information to them. The officially heritage interpretation at the Hat Siao community should be established to provide official, standard content and better quality information.

The community interpretation can prioritize the provision of interpretation at an appropriate length for the visitors from using the finding of this research in term of visitors' need to know in community which are the historic value followed by the social value, the aesthetic value, the spiritual value and the scientific value, respectively.

The community should also consider both traditional techniques of interpretation (signs) as well as digital techniques (websites/ applications/ other media) to provide information about the community's significance and cultural characteristics to foreign visitors.

Once again, the interpretation will never be effective if it does not include local involvement, a sense of possession and the need for heritage protection for all local and foreign visitors (Sutunyarak, 2008).

Recommendation/ Implication

Recommendation of this Research

The proposed result of this research would be presented to Hat Siao community to develop interpretation for non-Thai visitors in order to encourage more international tourists to visit the site, stay in the community, meet the local people, and learn more about the regional community identity, which can eventually generate economic benefits for local communities. Secondly, this research could increase the awareness to conserve the community for long–term benefit, as well as to encourage local pride in their cultural identity. Lastly, this research could also contribute as a body of knowledge for other heritage communities in Thailand and other regions to preserve and maintain the identities of small communities sustainably.

Recommendation to Further Research

Based on research findings, the study has provided the recommendation the interpretation for non-Thai visitors in Hat Siao community. Nevertheless, there are major recommendations for future research as follows; 1) Assessment of the impacts in regard to Thai Phuan cultural heritage resources in the Hat Siao Community from tourism development and how to minimize the negative impacts, 2) Regular review and monitoring of visitor satisfaction in regard to current heritage interpretation to continuously improve visitor experiences and 3) Feature contemporary theories and concepts on cultural heritage tourism such as interpretive trends and challenges and local collaboration which can be applied in the Hat Siao community.

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