

Cultural Tourism : *Causes and Effects*

Surin Klaichinda

Editor's note:

We apologise for the mistake in inserting incorrect photograph here (which is not one of Mr Surin Klaichinda). This was due to a last minute layout placement just before print. The photograph below belongs to Mr Pongsathorn Kessasamli (who is the author of "Why Cultural Tourism?" on page 32).



Surin Klaichinda

The tourism industry in Thailand formally started during 1933. Twenty-five years later, a government's tourist agency, the Tourism Organization of Thailand (TOT), was founded. In 1979, the organization evolved into the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) as tourism became an important industry to boost economic expansion in Thailand.

By 1982, tourism became the top earner of foreign revenue for Thailand, and assumed a vital role in national economic development. However, tourism businesses also, unfortunately, affect the social structure of the country. The impact of tourism was magnified at the 1976 conference of the Pacific Area

has become a subject of debate.

It is widely accepted that natural beauty, and the gentle manner and ways of life of the Thai people are among the prominent factors which attract increasing number of foreign tourists to visit Thailand. The human-related factors, including man-made items as well as human conduct, arts, customs, traditions, and the way of life; these are collectively known as "culture".

Cultural tourism is a basic component of - and plays a vital role in - the tourist industry. Setting a goal to visit any natural tourist attraction, for instance, forest, mountain, beach or seaside resort, one will have to interact with people in that

Travel Association (PATA) as a double-edged sword. The keynote speaker stated that "Tourism is like a fire which can help you cook food [but can also] burns your house". Since the mid-1980s, the notion of its negative impact

locality to appreciate the natural beauty of the area. The inhabitants of each locality have their own way of living; this is the essence of the definition of "culture".

"Culture" and "Tourism" have sometimes been ambiguously defined. One unclear explanation is that tourism or travelling is the utilization of tangible cultural assets as raw materials or resources. Such assets are archaeological sites, religious structures, human habitats and their surroundings, dramatic arts, music, museums, festivals, and other forms of cultural expression. The aforementioned have been serving well as tourism resources up to the present. Maybe it is from this understanding that the idea is formed that only tangible cultural assets play a role in tourism industry development. Therefore, promotion of tourism is mainly centered around the development of tangible assets. Up to now this strategy has worked well, and continues to be used extensively. In the last decade of this century, however, evidence of the negative impact of tourism on society has become more apparent. This has become critical, and serious measures must be taken to tackle problems.

Tourism development or tourist industry management, not only ignores intangible cultural resources, but its development process has also devalued these resources. For example, facilities or services are catered toward tourists who want to view temples or places of worship; they are taken to visit those places, asked to change into proper attire, told about the history of the site, and instructed on what they should do (which visitors of other religious backgrounds may not follow). As a result, those tourists may not be conscious that those exquisite structures they have witnessed are the products of intangible culture. They may not appreciate that such beautiful and grand structures have come into existence due to the loyalty, confidence, and magnificent imagination of the creators. In addition, in order to build such edifices, the architects and artisans had to struggle to overcome many obstacles and difficulties.

The terms "Tourism", "Tourist Industry" and "Tourism Industry" are synonymous. These terms are also related to various disciplines, namely, psychology, social psychology, archaeology, social anthropology, ethnology, aesthetics, linguistics, natural science, theology and other fields in the humanities. It is not an overstatement to say that tourism

is a discipline, related to all subjects.

Dr. Salah Wahab, author of the book "Tourism Management", explains: "In trying to analyze tourism or to formulate a conceptual framework of tourism, the movement images come to the mind. Tourism can be looked at in the abstract, namely, as a phenomenon involving the movement of the people within their own country the tourism can be explored abstractly as the movement of homo sapiens from one place to another in the boundaries of their own country (domestic tourism), or travel to other land (international tourism).



*Thai dance performance
Photo by Nipon Sud-Ngam*

Movement or travelling can be taken individually or collectively. It creates interactions and coherence of various human conduct, human understanding, feeling, perceptions motivations, pressure, satisfaction, the notion of pleasure and others. These behaviours or manners are the

relationship between nations which is becoming more international".

Swiss professors Hunziker and Krapf defined "tourism" as a totality of phenomena and relationship which are formed by the travelling and sojourning without commitment of a long duration of stay nor interaction to earn a living at the place visited. This definition is widely accepted by the International Association of Scientific Experts on Tourism (AIEST).

It should be noted that culture is a fundamental factor of the tourist industry as each country has its own unique culture that attracts tourists. Cultural tourism, hence, is an experience and a process of studying nature and the behaviour of living things that stimulate acculturation, paving the way to world peace.

In the contemporary context, tourism is being blamed for its cultural impact. There is a notion that tourism is a powerful source of

cultural change, causing changes that are faster than they should be. Uniqueness of certain culture is disappearing, and great efforts are needed to solve the related problems. Some studies have been conducted in Thailand to determine the degree of impact of tourism on society and culture.

A study on Chiangmai and Luang Prabang, which were linked in the past, and were previously known as "Lanna" and "Lanchang", was carried out by the Environmental and Social Science, Mahidol University. A summary of the research conclusions made in 1986 is as follows:

Social Impact:

Tourism developments, together with urbanization, weaken the close relationships of people in a rural society. The style of houses made have changed from the Lanna Thai style to modern designs. Influences and ideas brought in by tourists have changed home design. Prostitution, even though it did not begin with tourism, and has existed before, have expanded because of the demand. Crime, according to the study, is not directly caused by tourism, but, if the crime rate in Chiangmai as a whole is considered, including problems caused by foreign nationals, it shows that the rate increases during the peak tourist season. Foreign gangsters operate in the area, while some tourists engage in illegal activities such as selling drugs, etc.; these tourists usually travel on their own and stay in cheap guest houses. Migration is another area that the study investigated. Findings show that, as a whole, tourism causes only a small degree of migration (due to local employment in tourism-related ventures). Female labourers and service girls flocked to the places such as Pattaya, and other tourist areas where employment attracts people from Bangkok and other provinces. The social role of

women in education and the economy is also found to be undergoing transition.

The study revealed the following cultural impact of tourism on the country:

1. Tourism causes changes in traditions by adding new activities to make a native festival more exciting, for example, the creation of beauty pageants during the Songkran and Loy Krathong celebrations in Chiangmai. These beauty contests are not typical activities of Chiangmai. Although it is accepted that the content of customs has changed, preservation and promotion of local culture can still be made. However, holding indigenous festivals to please tourists discourage participation of the local inhabitants, and devalue such events.
2. The spoken and written language of Chiangmai was altered long ago, according to the assimilation policy during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Interaction between locals and tourists causes further deterioration of the use of the northern dialect.
3. Religious rites or ceremonies are given less attention as locals spend more time and energy on tourism-related activities.
4. In positive ways, the arts (music and handicrafts) have been influenced by tourism. Local arts and handicrafts are restored so as to boost

economic growth although some forms of arts may be changed and lack aesthetic values.

The trend of tourism acting as a forceful agent of cultural change can be compared to what happened in Europe during the industrial revolution. Such phenomenon is explained by the idea of "lag condition". Social scientists note that "intangible culture adjusts itself slower than tangible or material culture". The reasons for that may be vested interests in tradition, fear of change, lack of confidence in self-adjustment, inadequate or unsuitable education, and fear of social pressure.

Tourism is considered as a cause of problems, rather than a transitional process that results from human intellectuality in technological advancement. As changes in various fields are taking place (politics, economics, education and social relations), tourism should be a meaningful means for cultural preservation.

At present, travelling for leisure has become a big and powerful industry. It is predicted that expansion in both size and form will generate rapid growth and more complicated information, making personnel training urgently necessary in order to produce an efficient and competitive workforce. In addition, the influx of foreign cultures and competition is intensifying by the day. Tourists are also now more demanding of a cost-quality-professional service, experience and the value of time.

When exploring any culture, each individual is interacting not only with another, but also with their ancestors and later generations. It is an interaction with the past, present and the future of the community, involving linguistics, literature, laws, government, education, religion, beliefs, etc..

With reference to the term "culture", it is basically understood in the sense of conservation of traditional culture, even if it is realized that culture is also in constant evolution. Traditional culture in its particular conservative aspect is a genuine tourism development as the preservation of an indigenous culture, and keeping it in its original form, is a way of maintaining the quality of tourism itself.

In conclusion, tourism and its industries create social and cultural impact in different degrees. While transition is unavoidable in tourism, certain measures and policies for cultural tourism are essential to ensure beneficial changes to society. These may be summarized as follows:

1. Experts and all parties concerned with the tourist industry should determine appropriate means of presenting indigenous culture to tourists. Conservation planning must be harmonious with current social conditions.
2. Introduce values, significance and source of culture into local

and education plans, and into the tourism industry system.

3. Local administration and related agencies should promote select aspects of culture by reviving traditional activities.
4. The mass media should publicise activities that support cultural promotion to increase appreciation of local culture among local inhabitants.



Sukhothai
Photo by Florence Pichon

5. Tourism-related governmental agencies must organize or support groups which organize demonstrations, and presentations in promotion of cultural activities to the local community as well as to foreign visitors.
6. Promoters and organizers of cultural events must act with responsibilities toward the local populations by ensuring that the priorities of their tasks are to increase knowledge and understanding of local or indigenous culture.

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