

MAKING ENGLISH EXPLANATION HANDBOOKS ON MURAL PAINTINGS FOR TOURISM COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY AT TEMPLES IN SONGKHANONG SUB-DISTRICT, PHRAPRADAENG DISTRICT, SAMUTPRAKAN PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to make the English explanation handbooks on the mural paintings relating to Buddhist stories, and to study the mural paintings installed inside the Uposatha halls of the temples in Songkhanong Sub-district, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province, Thailand. The population used in the study was the Buddhist stories depicted on the wall within the Uposatha halls in the target area, i.e., Wat Paket temple and Wat Chakdaeng temple. The informants to be interviewed as well as joined in a focus group discussion were the abbot and monks in the temples and local learned people in the community who could illustrate the importance of the mural paintings in the research area, teachers in the schools nearby, local tour guides and tourists who visited the mural paintings. The research instruments consisted of observation form, photography, structured interview form, and focus group discussion. All of the qualitative data collected was analysed through content analysis.

The research results were as follows: the English handbooks on the Buddhist stories depicted on the wall of the temples developed were very useful for the community and tourism in the area. The meanings and significance of local heritage that contained in the English handbooks were revealed to the people in the community, and could be used as tools to communicate with the visitors from around the world. Moreover, the English handbooks helped inspire people in the community in conserving their local wisdom and cultural heritage. The mural paintings of first temple depicted the six main excerpts from the stories of the ten Jatakas, defeating Mara and his army, assembly of gods, assembly

of ascetics, demi-gods, and animals, Tribhumi, and the Gate-god protectors, while the second temple depicted the excerpts from the stories of the Bodhisattas, life of the Buddha, the episode of Buddha descending from heaven, the pictures of outstanding pagodas in Buddhist countries around the world, and symbols of Abhidhamma principles.

Keywords: English handbooks, Buddhist stories, mural paintings, cultural heritage, tourism communication

INTRODUCTION

The influence on the world of English language has been known for centuries. Many would reasonably claim that English is the nearest thing there has ever been to a global language. The worldwide influence of English is much greater than anything achieved historically by any languages, and there has never been a language as widely spoken as English. It can be justifiably concluded that English is already established as the *de facto* lingua franca (English as a Global Language. 2013). In ASEAN region, the language has even been recognized as the working language and stipulated under the article no. 34 of the ASEAN Charter that “The working language of ASEAN shall be English” (The Asean Charter, 2013). This means that English has become both official language of ASEAN Community and Lingua franca which has been communicated among people in this region (Kirkpatrick. 2013). But, the importance of English language has rather begun lately in

Thailand; for the Thai people this language has recently become more important and necessary than ever because the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has aimed to completely integrate into ASEAN Community within 2015. This means that from now onwards the Thais have more chances to be as hosts to give a warm welcome to friends from around the world and inevitably communicate with them in the universal language like English.

Thailand is the most popular destination for tourists from around the world. Tourism industry of Thailand, as has already been known, generated a major income to the country for decades (Ramphaiphan Kaeosuriya, 2013), and all kinds of tourism in the country help directly draw a large amount of income to the communities as well (Phimrawee Rotrungsat, et al., 2013). Especially, at present cultural tourism has been received a lot of critical attention (Karnjana and

Sarunya, 2012) from foreign tourists, who love learning the Thai way of life, local wisdom, and cultural arts. This kind of tourist attractions locates almost every community throughout Thailand, from the city to the countryside or from a big town to a small village. But, many communities with valuable cultural capital, particularly in the countryside or small village, have no information or even details about the significance of their own asset in hands as a tool for communication with the guests who come from around the world. This would create an unfavourable impression to the visitors, who come in. According to the principles of sustainable tourism management, all information about the existing attractions should be systematically prepared for tourists to learn, understand and impress on. The tourists should be learnt how to respect and preserve environment, society, and culture of the community (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2013). Especially, the Buddhist temples, where locate the most cultural heritage throughout the country, should be revered and careful by every visitor. In such place, the tour guides as well as local people in the community should learn and understand the significance of their asset before exchanging the cultural message to the visitors clearly and carefully. Therefore,

an English handbook containing reference information about the heritage is useful and necessary for every tourist attraction.

Like many other Buddhist temples throughout Thailand, the temples of Wat Paket temple and Wat Chakdaeng temple are not only the centres of all kinds of activities and ceremonies, but also the resource of cultural tourism in the community. Especially, the mural paintings installed within the Uposatha halls of the temples are beautiful and valuable. They also attract all visitors who daily come into these temples. This makes these small local temples become the significant tourist attractions of the area. One way to support and promote the local cultural heritage to be known among the visitors is that the temples as well as people in the community must be equipped with the comprehensive knowledge on Buddhist stories related on the wall of the temples, or at least realize the significance of their own heritage before communicate the clear message to foreigners. Actually, these two temples are located in the old community called Khung Bangkachao in Samutprakan, the province nearby Bangkok. They have received their cultural heritage from the old generations since Ayutthaya period (Bunkiat Caichompoo, 2009). Even though nowadays there are a lot of foreign tourists paying a visit to these

paintings every day, the cultural knowledge concerning the mural paintings and Buddhist wisdom depicted on the wall have not much been communicated to the foreign visitors. If well-prepared information dealing with the paintings was available for the people in the community, it would be useful and easy for them to study and understand the significance of their own cultural heritage as well as to have a better tool for communication with the people around the world.

The studies on the mural paintings in temples and making tourism guide books have been conducted by some researchers, for instance, Chatbongkoch Sriwattasarn's Mural Paintings Depict The Royal Twelve-Months Ceremonies at Wat Ratchapradit Bangkok (2003), Phramaha Amphon Buddasarn's The Analytical Study of the Buddhist Philosophy and Buddhist Art from the Mural Paintings of the Pali Jataka at Wat Kruewanvaravihara (2003), Chalong Nuichim's The Development of Historical and Natural Interpretation Guide Book for Ecotourism in Phu Hin Rongkla National Park (1999), Kanjanarachcha Chomchuen, et al.'s Developing English Booklet for Traffic Police in Bangkok (2011), Sreenath Caichompoo's Community Participatory Procedure for Tourist Guide Book: Bangkachao Area, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province (2012),

Pimrawee Rochrungsat, et al.'s The Development of Tour Guide's Guidebook for Historical Tourist Attraction: A Case Study of Phra Nakorn Kiri Historical Park, Phetchaburi Province (2013), etc. It is clearly evident that the research focusing on the mural paintings relating to Buddhist literature and making English handbooks for cultural tourism in the temples of Khung Bangkachao area has not been conducted before. The researcher is, therefore, interested in doing the research entitled, "Making English Explanation Handbooks on Mural Paintings for Tourism Communication: A Case Study at Temples in Songkhanong Sub-district, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research aimed to make the English explanation handbooks on the mural paintings relating to Buddhist stories, and to study the mural paintings installed inside the Uposatha halls of the temples in Songkhanong Sub-district, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province, Thailand.

The research was conducted at the two temples, i.e. Wat Paket temple and Wat Chakdaeng temple in the target area.

The population used in the study was the Buddhist stories depicted on the walls within the Uposatha halls of the said temples: Wat Paket temple depicted the

six main excerpts from the stories of ten Jatakas (the ten previous births of the Buddha), defeating Mara and his army (a significant episode before the Buddha's enlightenment), assembly of gods (an episode after the Buddha's defeating Mara), assembly of ascetics, demi-gods, and animals (the rejoice at the news of the Buddha's defeating Mara), Tribhumi (the Buddhist view on the three planes of existence), and the Gate-god protectors (pictures of gods painted on the wall of doors and windows), while Wat Chakdaeng temple depicted the five main excerpts from the stories of the Bodhisattas, life of the Buddha, the episode of Buddha descending from heaven, the pictures of outstanding pagodas in Buddhist countries, and symbol of Abhidhamma principles.

There were sixteen informants in total in this research. Seven informants, who were interviewed as well as joined in a focus group discussion, were the abbot and monks in the temples and local learned people in the community who could illustrate the importance of the mural paintings in the research area. And, another nine informants joined in a focus group discussion when it was conducted, i.e., the teachers in the schools nearby, local tour guides and tourists visiting the mural paintings.

The research instruments consisted

of observation form, photography, structured interview form, and focus group discussion. All the qualitative data collected was analysed through content analysis. The research process was carried out through the following steps:

1. The researches and documents dealing with the mural paintings in the Uposatha halls and the history of the temples were studied in order to make the English explanation handbooks of the mural paintings.
2. A survey to the temples was conducted to acquire the data related to the mural paintings by using the observation form and photography, and using structured interview form with the monks and local learned people who could relate the stories of the paintings to the history of the Uposatha halls and the temples in the research area.
3. The data collected from the relevant documents, the observation form, the photographs of the paintings, and the structured interviews with the monks and local learned people was studied and concluded.
4. The acquired data was analysed to make an arrangement of the pictures of the paintings and to compose the correct and appropriate descriptive words for the narratives of Buddhist stories based on the order and sequence of the pictures as

appeared on the walls of the temples.

5. Different kinds of guide books, researches as well as academic documents on how to make a handbook for tourism were investigated in order to be supportive information for making appropriate descriptive handbook models of the murals.

6. The descriptive handbook models on mural paintings relating to the Buddhist stories had been prepared in both English and Thai.

7. The accurate information and contents of the descriptive handbook models had been checked by the experts on the three aspects, i.e., Thai mural paintings, Buddhist literature, and English language.

8. A trial use of the English-Thai descriptive handbook models was conducted with the abbot and monks in the temples, teachers in the schools nearby, local learned people, local tour guides as well as tourists visiting the temples.

9. Upon a trial use of the said handbook models, a focus group discussion was arranged with the users in order to acquire data on the results of the trial use and suggestions for further improvement.

10. The obtained data from the discussion had been used to adjust the illustrations, descriptions as well as designs for making the complete versions of the English explanation handbooks.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results were presented according to the research objectives as the following:

1. Making English Explanation Handbooks on Mural Paintings

In making a complete version of English explanation handbooks, the arrangements had been done as follows: The accuracy of information and contents of the English-Thai descriptive handbook models of the mural paintings had been checked by the experts on the three aspects, i.e., Thai mural paintings, Buddhist literature, and English language. The abbot and monks in the temples, teachers in the schools nearby, local learned people in the community, local tour guides as well as tourists visiting the temples during the time were invited to join in a focus group discussion in order to acquire the data on the results of the trial use and suggestions for further improvement of the handbook. From the discussion, the several improvements, i.e., the illustrations, description as well as the design, were made to get a complete version of the handbooks. There were very useful suggestions for the improvements. Some of the following suggestions were made by the participants: some pictures of the murals, which were important parts in the handbooks, were not clear since they

were photographed in a long range without a sufficient light. Some pictures inclined because they were taken in the narrow corner. In solving these problems, the researchers should have been into the research area to photograph the murals once again. While the others even suggested that due to the different background of Buddhist knowledge, some descriptions should be added or omitted for some pictures in order to be more appropriate to most people; likewise, some descriptions were too lengthy and should be shortened. Overall, some participants said that the colorful pictures of the mural paintings in the handbooks were beautiful and attractive to the readers. The descriptive contents could be well explained about Buddhism. Besides, the English explanation handbooks on the mural paintings would bring great benefits to the community and tourism in

the area. The informative handbooks about the paintings could build awareness of cultural heritage conservation as well as the local wisdom of the people in the community. The picture, illustrated below, showed the two English explanation handbooks, namely 'English Explanation on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings' and 'English Explanation on Wat Chakdaeng's Mural Paintings.'

2. Buddhist Stories depicted on the Temples' Walls

2.1 Wat Paket temple: The wall behind the Buddha image within the Uposatha hall was Tribhumi, the Buddhist view on the three planes of existence. The stories narrated here were from two books of two different periods, i.e. 'Traiphum Phra Ruang,' written by a king in Sukhothai period, and 'Tribhumilokavinichayakatha,' written by a scholar in Rattanakosin period



Figure 1: The English Explanation Handbooks on Mural Paintings

(Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto, 2013). They were full of the pictures of three spheres (three levels of existence) like a sense sphere (Kamabhumi), form-sphere (Rupabhumi), formless sphere (Arupabhumi). The pictures describing on the wall were hells, hungry ghosts, demons, creatures in the Himavanta forest, fabulous plants, human beings, demigods, gods, the sun, the moon, thunder god, lightning goddess, orbits of the earth and the sun, oceans, mountains, soaring castles of gods and Brahma. Some castles lived the god and goddess, and while some other castles lived only one god, or were vacant. The picture, illustrated below, showed the Buddhist view on the three planes of existence called Tribhumi:

The wall in front of the Buddha

image was the picture of the Buddha subduing Mara (the Evil One) and his army. The Mara fearfully appeared together with his army and shouted driving him out of his seat. The Mother Earth rose from the ground squeezing her bun to create the streams overflowing Mara and his army. The whole picture described the stories in clockwise order starting at the middle point where the Buddha was described sitting meditation. Look at the picture as illustrated below:

The wall between each window space narrated the story of ten Jatakas. The sequence of the ten Jatakas was also narrating in clockwise order starting from the wall-space nearby the entrance door on the right side of the principal Buddha image, i.e., Temiya Jataka, Mahajanaka



Figure 2: Tribhumi



Figure 3: The Buddha Subduing Mara and His Army

Jataka, Suvannasama Jataka, Nemiraja Jataka, and Mahosodha Jataka. And on the other side, next to the principal Buddha image to the end of the entrance door, the stories were arranged in the following sequences: Bhuridatta Jataka, Candakumara Jataka,

Narada Jataka, Vidhura Jataka, and Vessantara Jataka. Although some parts of the murals in this hall disappeared, some remainders could be used as data for assuming the matter further, since the style of narrating the story was in line with the Thai traditional



Figure 4: Indra Destroying a Sacrificial Ceremony of a Foolish King in Candakumara Jataka

painting of narrating the story of the ten Jatakas (Pratheep Chumphon, 1996). The picture, illustrated below, was one of the stories from the ten jatakas:

The wall-space above the windows, which had a wide and long area according to the length of the Uposatha hall appeared the pictures of the Assembly of gods. Both sides of the wall-space divided the gods into three layers. Each layer contained twelve gods. There were thirty-six ones in three layers of one side, and seventy-two ones in total of both sides. These gods came from ten thousand universes for meeting in rejoice at the Hermit Siddhattha's enlightenment (Santi Leksukhum, 2005). The picture, illustrated below, was the

paintings called the Assembly of gods:

The wall-space attached to the ceiling above appeared the pictures of ascetics with some handful lotuses and flowers. Some got dressed, holding the double-edged knife but not facing to the same direction with the gods below. The pictures described here were the ascetics, Vidyadhara, Gandharva, and animals that were pleased with the news of the Buddha's enlightenment, and wanted to see His perfections (Somdetkrommaphra Paramanuchitchinorot, 1993). One of the ascetics illustrated in the figure below was an example of this kind of paintings:

The paintings on each panel of doors

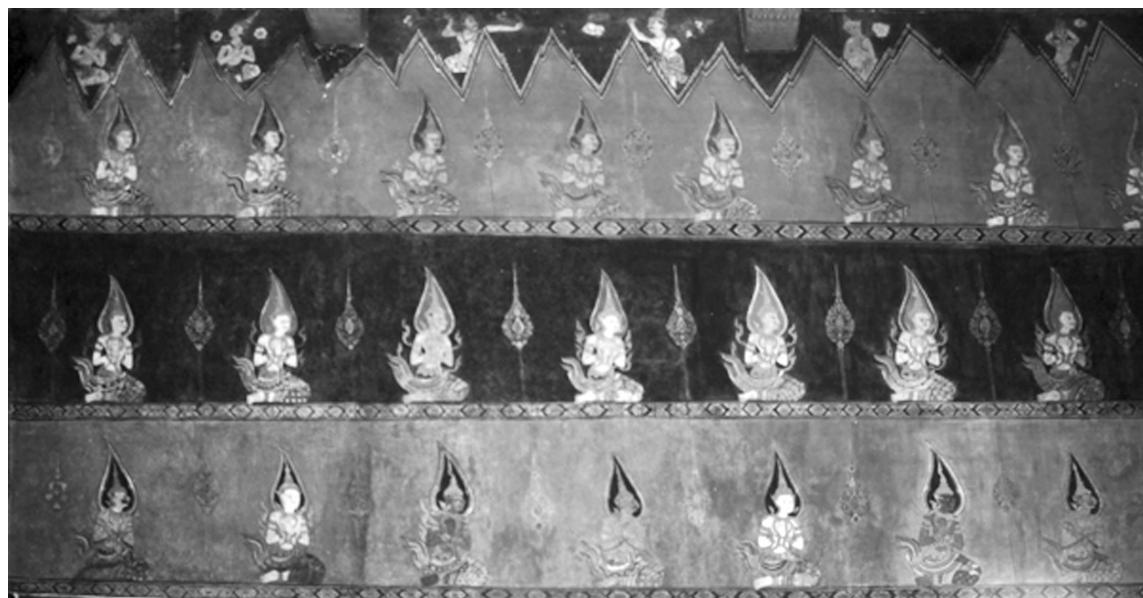


Figure 5: Assembly of Gods



Figure 6: Ascetics Pleasing with the News of the Buddha's Enlightenment

and windows inside the Uposatha hall were the gate-god protectors. They all appeared as the standing gods. Their bodies were green and white, and their heads were with halo. While the gods on the door-panels were holding two-edged swords and bows in hands, but on the window-panels had only

the unarmed gods standing. Here were the examples of the gate-god protectors with white and green bodies holding two-edged swords:

2.2 Wat Chakdaeng temple: The wall-space above the windows parallel to the body of the Uposatha hall, which



Figure 7: The Gate-god Protectors (Thawaraban)

had wide and long area, was continuously used in both sides for telling the life of the Buddha. An arrangement in order of pictures started from the wall in the left hand attached to the Buddha image, while the area between the windows narrated the important episodes of the life of the Buddha, which was known by general Buddhist people. Anyhow, the story of life of the Buddha narrated in these two areas began with the narration of two Bodhisattas (the would-be Buddha in future), i.e., Jotipalakumara Bodhisatta and Sumedhatapasa Bodhisatta, to make a connection with life of the Buddha, which

was continuously narrated further. The picture, illustrated below, showed one of the two stories about the Bodhisatta:

The paintings, then, continuously depicted story of the Buddha's life in order, i.e., the pictures of Santusitadevaputta being invited to be born as the prince, Prince's birth, his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, Buddha descending from heaven, Buddha's Parinibbana, etc. The picture, illustrated below, showed the god's plunge into the world to be born as Prince Siddhattha marking the first episode in the story of the Buddha's life:

The area on the ceiling of the



Figure 8: Jotipalakumara Bodhisatta



Figure 9: Santusitadevaputta to Be Born as the Prince

Uposatha hall appeared three paintings about the Abhidhamma principles. Each painting contained the profound meaning of the Abhidhamma principles in the picture like the wheel of Dhamma. Here was one of the three paintings about the Abhidhamma

principles:

Besides, the pictures of the outstanding and well-known pagodas of many Buddhist countries were painted at the wall-space close to the ceiling on both sides of the Uposatha hall, for example,

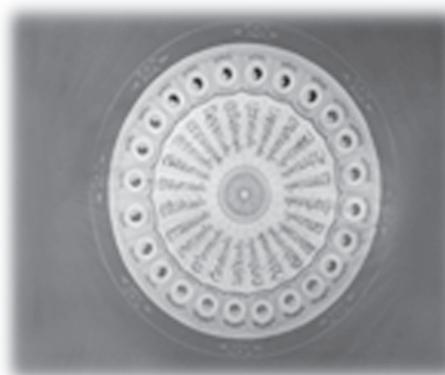


Figure 10: Principles of Abhidhamma

Phra Boromthat of Nakhonsithammarat, Thailand, Borobudur in Indonesia, Swedagon pagoda in Myanmar, Sanchi stupa in India, etc. The picture of pagoda as shown in the figure below was an example of outstanding pagodas in the Buddhist countries around the world:

DISCUSSION

which were considered as local wisdom, to the community. The paintings on the wall reflected ideas, beliefs, faiths and values of people in the community towards Buddhism, and that indirectly stimulated the Buddhists' moral awareness in the area for more than a hundred of years. The moral teachings containing in the paintings were



Figure 11: Swedagon pagoda in Myanmar

The following points based on the research results were discussed:

1. Making English explanation handbooks on the mural paintings of the two temples, i.e. Wat Paket temple and Wat Chakdaeng temple, could bring knowledge and understanding of the mural paintings,

meaningful and that, as in compliance with Sreenath Caichompoo (2012), had shaped the ways of life of people in the community for a long time. Even though, for the time being the true meaning of the creation might lose when the time passed, the paintings became an old significant cultural heritage

of the community. Therefore, making English explanation handbooks on the mural paintings of the two temples could help build awareness about the significance of the paintings again to the people in the community and help conserve the significant cultural heritage of the community as well. The contents of the English handbooks, that had been made, are appropriate, perspicuous, and complete; the pictures of the paintings are beautiful and attractive based on the order and sequence of the pictures as appeared on the walls of the temples; and the descriptive words for the narratives of Buddhist stories are correct and appropriate, which is in compliance with Pimrawee Rochrungsat (2013) that information of the handbooks should be clear and correct; the feature should be appropriate and intelligible; and last but not least, the caption should be correct and in line with each illustration given. Furthermore, the English explanation handbooks, that had been made, are very useful for the concern sectors in the research area, because with the globalization trend we have entered a knowledge-based society; English has been used as a universal language which is in compliance with Graddol (2013) that English has been extremely influencing today's world, so cross-culture has been communicated and

exchanged. Therefore, if the local people of these communities, who have their own distinctive cultural heritage like mural paintings installing inside the Uposatha halls of the two temples as their local uniqueness, need to communicate about their heritage with the visitors who daily come into their community, the English explanation handbooks on mural paintings of Wat Paket temple and Wat Chakdaeng temple would be highly required for communication to exchange their culture with the people around the world.

2. The stories as appeared on the mural paintings inside the Uposatha hall of Wat Paket temple and Wat Chakdaeng temple consisted of life of the Buddha, ten Jatakas, Tribhumi, assembly of gods, gate-god protectors, symbol of the principles of Abhidhamma, etc. These stories were created not only to beautify the Uposatha hall as dedicating to the Buddha, but also to serve as literatures which reflect the philosophy of the teachings in Buddhism by converting the abstract teachings to concrete teachings and indirectly stimulating moral awareness for the general Buddhists. This has eventually become the local cultural heritage. Furthermore, it reflected ideas, beliefs, faiths and values of people in the community towards Buddhism which is in compliance with

Bandit Inkong's concept (2006) that the purpose of the creation of the mural paintings is to motivate people to have faith in Buddhism. The stories of the life of the Buddha and the Jataka stories containing the moral teachings were meaningful towards the way of life of local people in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations are following:

1. The concerned sectors in this area should publish these English explanation handbooks, distribute to temples, community, or tour agents in order to help promote tourism activities in the area, and conduct relevant trainings concerning the usage of the English explanation handbooks, to bring benefits to the people in the community. These will enhance learning and understanding of the community's values of cultural heritage and local wisdom of tourist attractions.

2. It is also recommended that the further studies should be conducted in other temples apart from Wat Paket temple and Wat Chakdaeng temple in order to increase the areas of learning and the community's awareness in cultural heritage conservation.

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