

Research Article

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE LEARNING PROCESS-BASED CULTURAL TOURISM INTERPRETATION OF KHAO PHRA WIHAN NATIONAL PARK

Prasert Yothicar^{1*} and Sangkae Punyasiri²

Integrated Tourism Management, Graduate School of Tourism Management National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Bangkok, Thailand^{1*}

Graduate School of Tourism Management National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Bangkok Thailand²

sertty_ssk@hotmail.com^{1*}

ABSTRACT

This research aimed 1) to investigate the current context of cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park and the best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management, and 2) to create and check the development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park. This research was qualitative; documentary research and in-depth interview were employed. The content analysis was applied for data analysis. The research results showed that the current context of cultural tourism interpretation of the park consists of: (1) the interpreters, such as the Office of National Park and Khao Pha Wihan national park, (2) the story of tourist attractions of the park, (3) interpretive media, such as visitor center, interpretive signs, website, and staffs of the park, and (4) tourists. Furthermore, the best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management is Angkor Wat temple, Cambodia. Also the interpretive management structure consists of three main sectors namely international communities, public sector, and private sector. In conclusion, the development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of the park consists of: (1) the interpreters, such as the Office of National Park, Khao Pha Wihan national park, and tour companies, (2) the story of tourist attractions of the park, (3) interpretive media, such as visitor center, interpretive signs, website, staffs of the park, and tour guides, and (4) tourists who are involved in the perception and learning about the interpretation of tourist attractions in the park.

Keywords: Learning process-based interpretation, Cultural tourism, Khao Phra Wihan national park

INTRODUCTION

Khao Phra Wihan national park is a protected natural area in Si Sa Ket and Ubon Ratchathani provinces bordering Thailand and Cambodia; the park is quite rich in forests, wildlife, scenery, and cultural attractions such as Mo I Daeng Cliff, Don Tuan Khmer Ruins, Twin Stupas, Low Relief, Sa Trao Pool, Khun Si Cave and Waterfall, Huai Khanun Dam, and An Ma Checkpoint. Both Thailand and Cambodia have agreed on tourism cooperation, Khao Phra Wihan national park plays a significant role as a gateway to visit Preah Vihear Temple, the cliff-top Khmer ruins on Cambodian soil (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2014). But the tourist attractions in Khao Phra Wihan national park in the perception of a majority of the tourists focus only on "Preah Vihear temple" as a wonder thing. Also due to the impact of political unrest in Thailand and the expansion of the controversial issue about the overlapping claim area of Preah Vihear temple between Thailand and Cambodia, the number of tourists has decreased heavily. While there are an abundance of the tourist attractions in Khao Phra Wihan national park, which are valuable and important that has been developed as the Khom-Khmer cultural tourism. Because of lack of tourism interpretive planning to create the perception and greater understanding, most tourists pay attention only

to Preah Vihear temple (Chancharat et al., 2012).

Tourism interpretation is the art of communication and presentation that stimulates the interest of tourists to make them understand the value and the importance of natural, historical and cultural resources. However, the tourism interpretation in national parks will not always be successful or communicate to tourists exactly as the interpretation's goals of the national park. Due to the interpretation in the national park is to educate tourists about tourist sites; therefore, appropriate interpretive techniques should be used to create an experience for tourists to learn more about features/wildlife they have seen. While the tourism interpretation in the national park is ambiguous; it leads to an unsuccessful way of communication. Also the contents of interpretation are out-of-date and the interpretive methods are unvaried and unattractive. These results cause a receiver not able to perceive and understand the meaning and value of cultural resources of historical site (Unaphom, 2013).

Therefore, it is a particular issue in this research interesting about the cultural tourism interpretation development of Khao Phra Wihan national park, which the roles of all stakeholders are related to the management of interpretation at the park. Also for stakeholders to understand

that interpretive significance planning is a way to communicate between the cultural resource stories and the tourists to help them understand the resource significance and story and a way to learn and experience more culture effectively and sustainably. The aim of this study is to investigate the context of cultural tourism interpretation based on the process of communication. There are four major elements of communication process: the sender or interpreter of the park, message or story for interpretation, channel or interpretive media, and receiver or tourist (Berlo, 1960; Chettamart, 2002). Additionally, the investigation of the best practical interpretation of cultural tourism interpretive management as 'benchmarking'; it is a valuable tool to help to understand the way to develop the process of learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of this park (Department of Tourism, 2015). It is, thus, interesting as well as vital to thoroughly study the current interpretation as the development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation employed by Khao Phra Wihan national park in order to explore the feedback of the perception of tourists about the context of cultural tourism interpretation. The results of this study will allow Khao Phra Wihan national park to further manage their current cultural tourism interpretive planning in tourist attractions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the current context of cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park, and the best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management.
2. To create and check the development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park.

RESEARCH BENEFITS

1. The development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park.
2. The research outcomes can be applied by Khao Phra Wihan National Park to further manage their current cultural tourism interpretive planning in tourist attractions.
3. Researchers and relevant agencies to exchange knowledge and experiences on the development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation model, the results of this study will be integrated with tourism community development plan and tourism paradigm shift in the development of new forms of the interpretation to further manage their current cultural interpretive planning in tourist attractions.

RESEARCH SCOPE

1. Content scope: (1) the current context of the cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park, and the best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management, and (2) The development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park.

2. Area Scope: Khao Phra Wihan national park, Si Sa Ket province, Thailand.

3. Population Scope: the specialists of the cultural tourism interpretation such as staffs of the park, and academics of cultural tourism interpretation such as lecturers, instructors, interpreters in the field of cultural tourism interpretation or communication.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

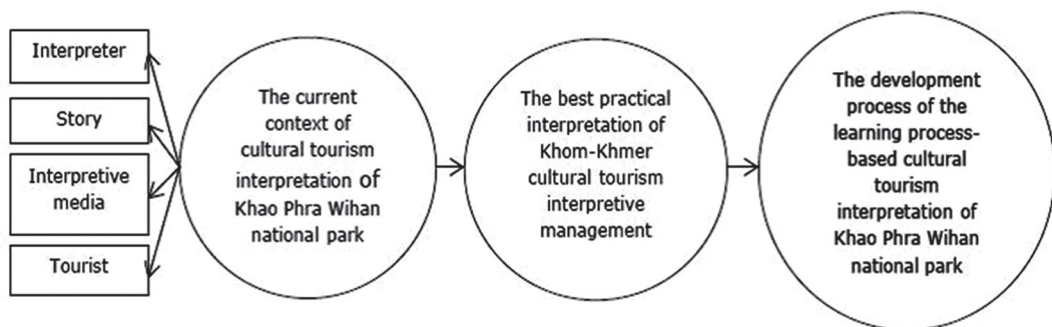


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research employed in-depth semi-structured interviews with the specialists of the cultural tourism interpretation, which consisted of 10 staffs of the park, 11 members of the academics of cultural tourism interpretation such as lecturers, instructors, and interpreters, and 10 members of the academics of cultural tourism interpretation.

The research phases: 1) conducted an investigation of the current context of cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra

Wihan national park by 10 in-depth interviews with staffs of the park, 2) conducted an investigation of the best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management by 11 in-depth interviews with the academics and interpreters, and 3) conducted a creating and checking the development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park by 10 in-depth interviews with the academics and interpreters.

The researcher, research assistants, recording devices, and cameras were the qualitative research instruments to collect data from various sources. The open-ended questions were the main research instruments in this study with the objective to elicit as much related information as possible from the respondents. Hence, qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed by a content analysis technique which interview transcriptions were categorized into preset codes of tourism interpretation extracted from the literature. Some interesting data emerged from the transcriptions revealed new findings.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

1. The current context of cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park, and the best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management

1.1 The current context of cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park

The research found that the overview of the current context of the cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park consisted of the components of Berlo's

SMCR Model of Communication (Berlo, 1960), it started from the sender or interpreter, such as the Office of National Park and Khao Phra Wihan national park, the story of tourist attractions at the park, interpretive media, such as visitor center, interpretive signs, website, and staffs of the park, and receiver, such as tourists. In addition, the management structure that links from the Office of National Park to Khao Phra Wihan national park served the purposes in managing interpretation. It means that being a historical site, the Office of National Park is also involved in the decision-making for the development of the site; the provision of visitor centers and interpretive signs fall under the responsibility of the Office of National Park for the purpose of conservation. Also Khao Phra Wihan national park collaborates with the office of national park to be a site manager; the aim of these purposes is to enhance the quality of tourist attractions in the park. Moreover, Khao Phra Wihan national park acts as site interpreters who have more flexible strategies to manage the tourism interpretation; the key qualifications include knowledge, credibility, and interpretive skill, etc. Overall, the current context of cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park is shown in the following figure 2.

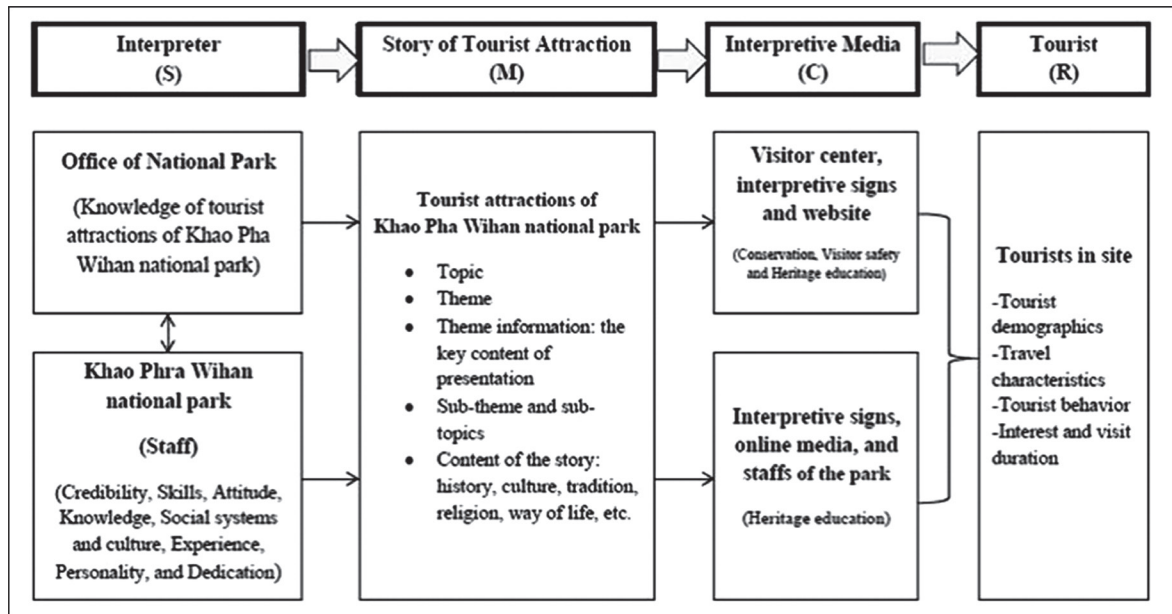


Figure 2 The current context of cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park

2. The best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management

The research found that the key informants expressed their opinion about the best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism in the same direction as Angkor Wat temple of Cambodia, which was inscribed a UNESCO World Heritage Site. For this reason, the development of visitor management and tourism interpretation was defined as a significant driver to enhance visitor understanding as well as appreciation of the site (Chanvirak, 2013).

Regarding the findings from interviews with stakeholders at Angkor Wat temple, these

findings illustrate the overview of the interpreters taking part in managing interpretation at Angkor Wat temple. This section is all about the lessons learned: the best practical interpretation of the Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management. The conclusion of this section is presented in the below figure 3 listed from the international organizations to the private sector. Each sector of interpreters, such as international communities, public sector, and private sector, provides its strategy toward achievement of managing interpretation at Angkor Wat temple. The links from APSARA to UNESCO and from APSARA to the Ministry of Tourism serve different purposes in managing interpretation. It means

that being a World Heritage Site, UNESCO is also involved in the decision-making for the development of the site. APSARA collaborates with the Ministry of Tourism to conduct training courses for local guides. Management of interpretation varies according to the objective and the responsibility of the relevant stakeholders. But one thing that appears in the

key qualifications of all the sectors of interpreters at Angkor Wat temple is the knowledge: the story of Khom-Khmer civilization and the art of presentation. Thus, these findings will also highlight different views on how to improve the management of interpretation at Khao Phra Wihan national park can be summarized as shown in a following figure 3.

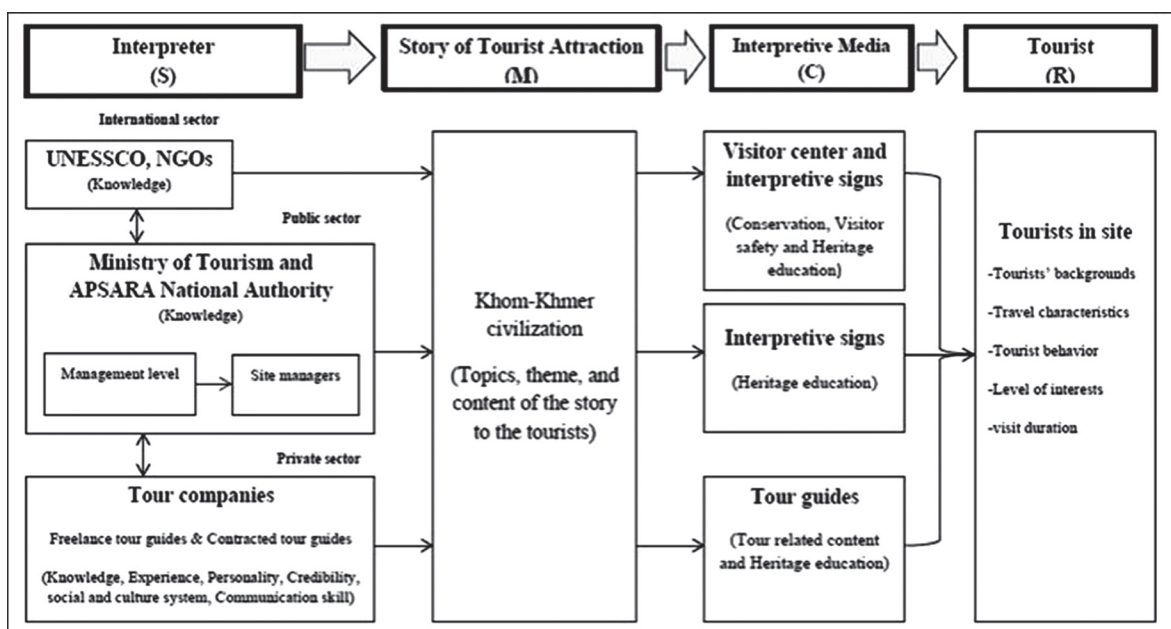


Figure 3 The process of the best practical interpretation of the Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management: Angkor Wat temple

3. Creating and checking the development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park

As is demonstrated by the comparison above, benchmarking is a management tool

to develop and improve the interpretation and performance of a tourist site. Moreover, it is important to understand the current context of the two destinations thoroughly. The management of effective interpretation should not emulate or follow the processes and

operations of the benchmark destination without first having a thorough knowledge and understanding of the specific context of this destination and its similarity to the own destination (Department of Tourism, 2015).

Khao Phra Wihan national park, for instance, should make comparison with Angkor Wat temple in the context of the interpreter and the interpretive media. These are the gaps of interpretive management at this park, and highlighting what should be improved. It means that Khao Phra Wihan national park is under consideration by the UNESCO World Heritage Site together with the Phrea Vihan temple of Cambodia. This is an opportunity to manage the tourism interpretation more effectively. All stakeholders should study the limitations and obstacles to the tourism interpretation; their tasks and interpretive policies in managing interpretation at cultural heritage sites should be clear. The results of this study will allow the site interpreters to further manage their interpretive planning in sites. While the context of the story for interpretation and the context of tourists of both these destinations are not different because the story of tourist attraction is about Khom-Khmer culture; the analysis of tourists includes similar factors as well.

After conducting a study of lessons learned from the experience of those involved

in the management of interpretation of both these destinations, this study was concluded as a development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park by academic consideration. This process should illustrate the relationship between relevant interpreters and their tasks in managing interpretation at tourist sites. In addition, this process performs destination benchmarking by considering a competitive destination which has distinct characteristics in terms of the current context of tourism interpretation. Not only the destination benchmarking, but also the techniques of how to create co-creation tourism experiences of the tourists, by which the way to draw tourists' attention is to keep them involved in the tourist activities and shared experiences to achieve the perception and the learning with the interpreters in the site. Finally, the feedback of the tourists is needed to contribute to the assessment of the objectives or goals of this interpretation. Hence, this study can show the summary of findings derived from a comparison between both Khao Phra Wihan national park and the Angkor Wat temple. The details of each component are as follows.

Interpreter or Sender

Interpreter embraces the Office of National Park, staffs of Khao Phra Wihan

national park, and tour companies. The key qualification of all the sectors is the knowledge: knowledge in Khom-Khmer cultures and knowledge in art of presentation, by which is based on a common idea about conservation, preservation and heritage awareness. Moreover, the site interpreters such as staffs of this park and tour guides must have credibility, communication skills, attitude, social systems and culture, experience, personality and dedication.

Story of tourist attraction or message

Story of tourist attraction encompasses the history of tourist sites: Mo I Daeng Cliff, Don Tuan Khmer Ruins, Twin Stupas, Low Relief, Sa Tao Pool, Khun Si Cave and Waterfall, Huai Khanun Dam, and An Ma Checkpoint. The key factors affecting the message are topic, theme, theme information, sub-theme, and content of the story that describes the important details and provides some context: history, culture, tradition, religion, belief, art, way of life, and geographic.

Interpretive media or channels

Interpretive media are used to send the message of Khao Phra Wihan national park. These are divided into two types: personal interpretation such as the site interpreters and tour guides, and non-personal interpretation

such as visitor center, interpretive signs, and website as well as online media. The key factors affecting the interpretive media are: media choice, including appropriateness of media choice, determined by site location, target, content, etc., and interpretive technique, including creative and initiation, arts of speaking, linking content to the tourists with conservation, restoration, heritage education, etc.

Tourist or receiver

Tourist embraces the tourists of Khao Phra Wihan national park: domestic tourists and international tourists. The following are the factor related to tourist: tourist demographics, travel characteristics, tourist behavior, etc. In addition, tourists must be involved in the perception of the current context of cultural tourism interpretation and the learning needs about cultural tourism interpretation model of the park. The results of the feedback of tourists will allow the Khao Phra Wihan National Park to further manage their current cultural tourism interpretive planning in tourist attractions to enhance the learning experience of tourists.

Thus, the development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park is shown in the following figure 4.

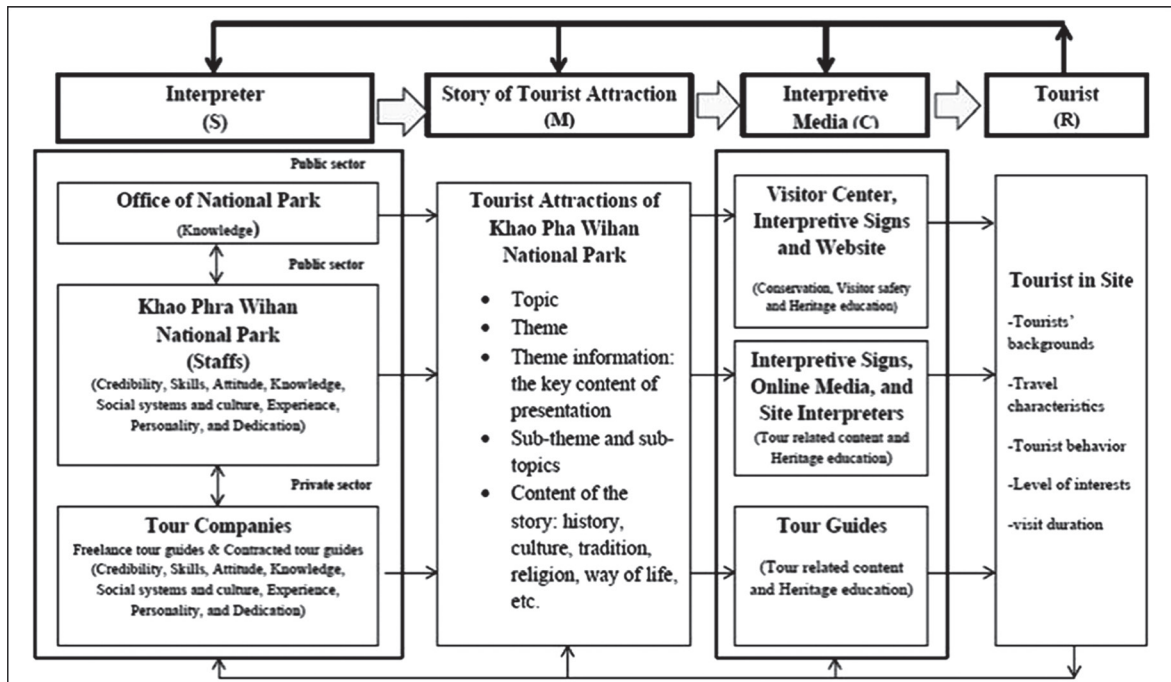


Figure 4 The development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park

Discussion

1. The current context of the cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park consisted of the components of the Berlo's SMCR Model of Communication as reflected in (Berlo, 1960). This Model has mainly four components described the communication process: sender, message, channel and receiver. The roles of all components are related to the management of interpretation at the park. So, the developing interpretive planning in tourist sites should focus on the key factors of the context of tourism interpretation such as: (1) Interpreters with the

relevant factors are credibility, communication skills, attitude, knowledge, social systems and culture, experience, personality and dedication. (2) Story of tourist attractions at this park, the key factors affecting the message are topic, theme, theme information, sub-theme and contents of the story: history, culture, tradition, religion, way of life, etc. These stories can be developed as new tourism activities as reflected in (Nindum et al., 2017), "The Development of Ethnic Traveling Routes in Chaing Rai Province". The study found that the ethnic traveling routes in Chiang Rai can be created into three routes which are: Nature along Ethnic

Route, Mountains in Ethnicity's Lifestyle, and Doitung: Hill Tribes way of life. (3) Interpretive media which are divided into two types such as personal interpretation and non-personal interpretation; the key factors affecting the channel are: media choice and interpretive technique. Lastly, (4) tourists who are needed to consider tourist demographics, travel characteristics, tourist behavior and interest and visit duration. This is in line with the study conducted by (Seanyen, 2015), "Communication Model for Promoting Tourism on Thai Lanna Cultural Conservation". The study revealed that Communication Model for Promoting Tourism on Thai Lanna Cultural Conservation consists of the following: sender, message, channel, mass media, and receiver. Furthermore, the current context of the cultural tourism interpretation of this park should be developed an information system to manage tourism interpretation in this site. It will allow the site interpreters to further manage their current cultural tourism interpretive planning in tourist attractions as reflected in (Caichompoo et al., 2017), "Tourism Management Information System of Khung Bangkachao Area, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province". The study revealed that the information could be sorted into four categories: information about tourist destinations (ecotourism, agriculture tourism, cultural tourism, local wisdom); bike

riding activities; local accommodation; and local products which are well-known and popular. This information will assist with the further promotion of goods and services in the tourism destinations.

2. The best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism interpretive management is an ideal "model" benchmarks. Evaluation the best practical interpretation of cultural tourism interpretive management, there are five categories: destination's potential, interpreter's potential, the story of tourist attractions, the interpretive media, and the tourists as reflected in (Chettamart, 2002); it is a valuable tool to help to understand the way to develop the process of learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation and the interpretive design of cultural tourism of Khao Phra Wihan national park. The research found that the best practical interpretation of Khom-Khmer cultural tourism was Angkor Wat temple of Cambodia, which was inscribed a UNESCO World Heritage Site; it became an attractive tourist destination in Southeast Asia. As become a UNESCO World Heritage Site; the development of visitor management and tourism interpretation was defined as a significant driver to enhance visitor understanding as well as appreciation of the site. This is in line with the study conducted by (Department of Tourism, 2015), "Interpretation

in Tourism Destination for Ecotourism, Historical tourism and Cultural tourism (A Guideline for Developing Interpretive Planning in Tourism Destination)". The study revealed that the best practical interpretation is all about the lessons learned. This data will contribute to help the research see the gap between the tourist destination and the benchmark destination, highlighting what should be improved. Importantly, it will assist in identifying what must be done to improve performance and helping the tourism destination to be more precise and clear in assessments and to achieve the goals.

3. The development process of the learning process-based cultural tourism interpretation of Khao Phra Wihan national park should illustrate a relationship between relevant interpreters and their tasks in managing interpretation at this site. This is because the management structure consists of two main interpreters namely public sector and private sector. Each sector has its own responsibility associated with interpretation. The links from Khao Phra Wihan national park to the Office of National Park and from Khao Phra Wihan national park to the tour companies serve different purposes in managing interpretation. But the key qualification of all the sectors is the knowledge: knowledge in the Khom-Khmer culture, knowledge in art of presentation. In addition, all sectors are required to conduct

the survey of the perception about the context of cultural tourism interpretation and the learning needs about cultural tourism interpretation model of the tourists. The results of this survey will allow the site interpreters to further manage their current cultural tourism interpretive planning in tourist attractions to enhance the learning experience of tourists. This is in line with the study conducted by (Chanvirak, 2013), "Managing interpretation at a UNESCO heritage site: A supply-side perspective of Angkor Wat Temple, Cambodia". The study provided a comprehensive understanding of the involvement of stakeholders in managing interpretation at heritage sites. Management of interpretation varies according to the objective and the responsibility of the relevant stakeholders. But one thing that appears in the qualifications of all the sectors of interpreters at Angkor Wat temple is the knowledge: knowledge in the story of Khom-Khmer civilization, knowledge in art of presentation, by which is based on a common idea about conservation, preservation and heritage awareness. While the site interpreters are tour guides who interact directly with tourists; so, they must not only have knowledge in the story of Khom-Khmer civilization to interpret to the tourists, they also have the experience and good understanding of the social and cultural system of tourists to

enhance the good personality and credibility of the interpreters in this World Heritage site. Interpretation at Angkor Wat is also influenced by communication between multiple stakeholders.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendations for interpretation in Khao Phra Wihan national park, there should be developed the method to recruit both national and international tour guides as well as the training courses to develop professional tour guides. In addition, an investigation into tour itineraries should be made in accordance with the activity process that present about the tourism resources of the site. So that, tourists may have adequate times to learn an authentic experience. In the sections of story and interpretive media should be accurate, and kept up-to-date with the situation in the tourist sites.

2. Recommendations for future study, it is suggested that future study should focus on other methods of inquiry; it is required to conduct the survey of the perception-behavior of the tourists about the context of cultural tourism interpretation and the learning needs of the tourists about cultural tourism interpretation model. The results of this survey will allow the Khao Phra Wihan national park to

further manage their interpretive designs in tourist attractions to enhance the learning experience of tourists.

REFERENCES

- Berlo, David K. (1960). *The Process of communication: an introduction to theory and practice*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Caichompoo, S., Caichompoo, B. & Preechayakul, P. (2017). Tourism management information system of Khung Bangkachao Area, Phrapradaeng district, Samutprakan Province. *Phranakhon Rajabhat Research Journal, Humanities and Social Sciences*. 12(1), 90-99. (in Thai)
- Chancharat, N. & Maneenetr, T. (2012). Tourism impacts from conflicts between Thailand and Cambodian case of Prasat Khao Phra Wihan. *Journal of International and Thai Tourism*. 8(2), 67-83. (in Thai)
- Chanvirak, S. (2013). *Managing interpretation at a UNESCO heritage site: a supplyside perspective of Angkor Wat Temple, Cambodia*. Master of Tourism Management, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

- Chettamart, S. (2002). **Interpretation: a management tool for national park in Thailand**. Retrieved May 5, 2013, from <http://www.thailis.or.th/tcd/> (in Thai)
- Department of Tourism. (2015). **Interpretation in tourism destination for eco tourism, historical tourism and cultural tourism (a guideline for developing Interpretive planning in tourism destination)**. Bangkok: V.T.K. Printing. (in Thai)
- Nindum, S., Khunsri, J., Benchakorn, B., Jeena-boonrueang, S., Jeenaboonrueang, N. & Chuenwong, P. (2017). The Development of Ethnic Traveling Routes in Chaing Rai Province. **Phranakhon Rajabhat Research Journal, Humanities and Social Sciences**. 12(1), 26-37. (in Thai)
- Seanyen, T. (2015). Communication Model for Promoting Tourism on Thai Lanna Cultural Conservation. **Academic Journal Phranakhon Rajabhat Research Journal, Humanities and Social Sciences**. 6(2), 350-362.
- Tourism Authority of Thailand. (2014). **Khao Phra Wihan National Park**. Retrieved October 5, 2014, from <http://www.thai.tourismthailand.org/Khao Phra Wihan National Park>
- Unaphom, P. (2013). Role of Cultural Heritage Interpretation of the World Heritage Site of Historic City of Ayutthaya. **CITU Review**. 1(2013), 1-4. (in Thai) .