Interpreting Cultural Heritage for Non-Thai Visitors in Hat Siao Community, Sukhothai Province, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research is aimed to verify cultural identities and evaluate existing heritage resources of the community, to identify non-Thai visitors' characteristics, expectations and acquire experiences and to develop effective cultural heritage interpretations for cross-cultural visitors in Hat Siao community. Both primary and secondary data were collected in a combination of research methods from December, 2014 to June, 2018. The literature review and documentation research were collected as the secondary data while field observations, questionnaires, in-depth interviews and a focus group were collected as the research primary data. Although cultural heritage resources in Hat Siao community embrace all aspects of the Burra Charter, its existing conditions which evaluated by the dimensions of authenticity from Hoi An Protocols has been changed by various forces. Nonetheless the non-Thai visitors in the community were from different demographic and psychographic groups, their expectations to visit Hat Siao community were largely for learning rather than having leisure experiences. Unfortunately, their experience to learn about the community cannot be fulfilled by the available heritage interpretation. Heritage interpretation is recognized as crucial tools to promote and conserve cultural heritage of Hat Siao community while improving visitors' deeper learning experiences, providing them feel appreciate and engage their senses of heritage protection. To develop effective interpretation, the community should put more focus on emerging the key messages for cross-cultural visitors and find channels to transmit the messages to foreign visitors through off-site and on-site interpretation.

Keywords : Cultural Heritage / Hat Siao Community / Cultural Heritage Interpretation / Thai-Phuan Culture

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Background

Hat Siao community is one of small heritage communities in Sukhothai province, Thailand. The cultural heritage of Hat Siao community from both tangible and intangible heritages (or coalesce) reflects to the integration between local residents and Phuan people who migrated from Xiang Khoang in Laos PDR for over two hundred years ago (Panirf, 2010). Due to its long historical background, Hat Siao community has created its own culture identity. The identity and the sense of place of this community are recognized by Thai-Phuan cultures which retain a various number of heritages inherited from the ancestors such as community history, local language, architecture, dressing, tradition and religious rituals.

Unfortunately, this community is promoting exclusively on Elephant Back Ordination Procession and traditional weaving textile, other continuity and evolving tangible and intangible heritages of this community such as annual merit-making ceremony in which new yellow robes are presented to monks from using boat as transportation, Thai-Phuan ancestor worship ceremony, Thai-Phuan architecture style and dialect have been ignored and gradually degraded their significances due to low awareness, involvement and participation of local residents.

Secondly, a high potential to promote this community for international visitors is absented. Up to the present time, there was no heritage interpretation for non-Thai visitors in Hat Siao community in order to fulfill international visitors' satisfactions and appreciations. Consequently, the significant problems of this cultural heritage community were promoting heavily on Elephant Back Ordination Procession and traditional weaving textile with less concern for the other community values and disregarding the potentials to provide interpretation for international visitors who are overwhelmingly western with no heritage interpretation for non-Thai visitors in the community. These extensive opportunities are clearly demonstrated; however, they are being ineffectively exploited. These two problems in Hat Siao community reflected on the improper of heritage interpretation.

Research Objectives

1. To verify cultural identities and evaluate existing heritage resources (both tangible and intangible) of the community,

2. To identify non-Thai visitors' characteristics, expectations and acquired experiences in Hat Siao community,

3. To develop effective cultural heritage interpretations for cross-cultural visitors in Hat Siao community

Methodology

The research used a combination of qualitative and quantities methods. Both primary and secondary data were collected. For the source of data, the primary data were gathered

from field observation, questionnaires, and focus group. The secondary data were obtained from literature review and document research. The general ideas and concepts of this study are included of cultural significance and existing condition, heritage interpretation, and cross-culture interpretation. The study was conducted from December, 2014 to June, 2018.

    1. Informants

        The subjects of this research were taken from five groups of concerned people which are 1) Forty-two Non-Thai visitors were selected by using a selection sampling method, 2) Six community philosophers, 3) Five key stakeholders in community, 4) five members of private and government agencies and 5) Six heritage tourism and interpretation specialists.

    2. Data Collection

        Objective 1: The methods used to complete this objective were both primary and secondary data in a combination of research methods. The secondary data were collected in the literature review, and the documentation research. Then, the primary data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews and a focus group meeting.

        Objective 2: The methods used in this objective were a combination of research methods. The secondary data were gathered from the literature review. The primary data were collected from field observations and questionnaires.

        Objective 3: Both primary and secondary data were collected. The methods used to collect secondary data were the literature review and documentation research. The methods used to gather primary data were field observations, questionnaires, in-depth interviews and a focus group meeting.

    3. Data Analysis

        In regard to data analysis, all results were critically and systematically analyzed. "The Burra Charter" was employed as the main tool to verify the cultural identity of the Hat Siao community. "Hoi An Protocols" and "Content Analysis" were also applied to the qualitative data to evaluate the existing cultural heritage resources of the Hat Siao community and to develop effective cultural heritage interpretations for cross-cultural visitors in Hat Siao community respectively. Furthermore, Statistical Analysis was employed for the quantitative data to analyze the results from the questionnaires as descriptive statistics.

Research Results

    Objective 1: To verify cultural identities and evaluate existing heritage resources (both tangible and intangible) of the community

    Australian ICOMOS Incorporated (2013) indicated that understanding the significance of cultural identity can help to evaluate the site and allow better information about the past to enrich the present, which will be of value to future generations. In case of the Hat Siao community, the results indicate that the mix and richness of the cultural identity reflect the combination of both the tangible and intangible aspects of the culture of the Thai and Phuan

ethic groups. All thirteen heritage identity from the findings, which include the Sin-Teen-Chok textiles, the Hat Siao temple, the Thai-Phuan housing style, the community museum and traditional local food are the tangible heritage identity of the community, while the intangible heritage identity includes community history, the elephant back ordination procession, the Thai-Phuan dialect, the Sang Khan Phu Tao festival, the Boon Bang Fai festival, the Kathin Thang Nam ceremony, the Kam Khieng traditional ceremony and the Kam Fah festival. All thirteen identities can be grouped into four categories as follows; 1) community wisdoms, 2) ways of life, 3) ceremonies and festivals, and 4) community history.

After analyzing the assessment under the Burra Charter framework (Australia ICOMOS Incorporated, 2013) with four categories of cultural heritage resources in the Hat Siao community, it was revealed that the community cultural identities embrace all value of the Burra Charter which are aesthetic, historic, scientific value as tangible resources and social and spiritual value as intangible cultural heritage resources (see Table 1).

Table 1 : Community Cultural Identities and The Burra Charter

Community Cultural Identities	The Burra Charter				
	Aesthetic	Historic	Scientific	Social	Spiritual
Community Wisdoms	Sin-Teen-Chok	Sin-Teen-Chok	Thai-Phuan housing style	Thai-Phuan housing style	Sin-Teen-Chok and Thai-Phuan housing style
Way of Life	Local food	Local food	Dialect	Local food	Local food and Dialect
Ceremonies and Festivals	Elephant back ordination procession	Elephant back ordination procession	Elephant back ordination procession	Elephant back ordination procession	Elephant back ordination procession
Community History	Hat Siao temple and Museum	Ancient Stone manuscript	Ancient Stone manuscript and Museum	Museum	Hat Siao temple and Museum

Source : Summarized by Mr. Phobphison Phob-udom

It demonstrates that the cultural heritage resources of the Hat Siao community have value in various ways. Thus, the great potential to develop the community as a cultural heritage destination is presented. On the other hand, attention on the heritage conservation of

the Hat Siao community is also required. The purpose of heritage conservation is to preserve the significance by ensuring all interventions and actions meet the tests of authenticity in all respects in the Hoi An Protocols.

To analyze Hat Siao community existing heritage resources, the dimensions of authenticity from Hoi An Protocols which comprise location and setting, form and design, use and function and immaterial qualities (UNESCO Bangkok, 2009) are employed through four groups of community cultural identity. The results reveal that the existing heritage resources representing the community's cultural identity have significantly changed. The authenticity of 'community wisdom' is represented by the dimension of 'immaterial qualities' while the authenticity of the community 'way of life' is represented by 'location and setting' and 'use and function'. For the 'ceremonies and festivals', the authenticity is indicated in 'form and design' and 'immaterial qualities'. Lastly, the authenticity of 'community history' is represented by only the 'location and setting' (See Table 2).

Table 2 : Community Cultural Identities and Dimensions of Authenticity

Community Cultural Identities	Dimensions of Authenticity			
	Location and Setting	Form and Design	Use and Function	Immaterial Qualities
Community Wisdoms				√
Way of Life	√		√	
Ceremonies and Festivals		√		√
Community History	√			

Source : Summarized by Mr. Phobphison Phob-udom

The major reason that the authenticity of Hat Siao cultural identity has changed in various ways to become inauthentic is the influence of economic development, tourism and socio-cultural forces. These can be confirmed by the studies of Taylor (2001) which stated that the local culture and its authenticity can be endangered by the increasing force of tourism while Martin (2010) pointed out that the heritage value of local communities can become inauthentic as a result of attaching economic value. In addition, social and culture changes also inevitably lead a local culture to inauthenticity (George, 2005).

There are various tools to maintain the community identity and to promote sustainable tourism. Heritage interpretation is considered as one of the crucial tools. It can be used to raise public awareness and understanding of the heritage value, which can lead to protection (Hall and McArthur, 1996). To develop the appropriate interpretation, not only understanding the existing condition of the community's cultural identity but also understanding the

audience is necessary. Non-Thai visitors, who are the target audience of this research, are reviewed in the next objective.

Objective 2: To identify non- Thai visitors' characteristics, expectations and acquire experiences in Hat Siao community

The research findings revealed that the biggest group by gender of non-Thai visitors in Hat Siao community was male (59.52%). From the grouping by age, the largest group was the age group between 26-45 years old (47.62%). The top five nationalities were American (28.57%) followed by Australian/ United Kingdom (19.05%), Canadian (9.53%), French/ German (7.14%) respectively. Most indicated their education levels as a bachelor degree at 64.29%. The result by expectation groups of non-Thai visitor who visited Hat Siao community indicated that the biggest group prefer to learn about Thai culture (26.19%) followed by to gain a new experiences (19.05%), to learn Thai history (16.67), to see something different as equal as to spend time with friend and family (14.29%) and to relax (9.51%) respectively. It is notable that, after grouping non-Thai visitors' expectations into learn (to learn about Thai culture, to learn Thai history and to gain new experiences) or leisure (to relax, to see something different and to spend time with friends and family), the results revealed that the bigger group for expectation was to learn (64.29%) while 35.71% of non-Thai tourists expected to visit Hat Siao community for leisure (See Table 3)

Table 3 : Frequency and Percentage of Non-Thai Visitors: Expectations (To Learn or to Leisure)

Expectations (To Learn or To Leisure)	Frequency	Percentage
To Learn	27	64.29
To Leisure	15	35.71
Total	42	100

Although they had different demographics, country of origin and psychographics, their expectations to visit Hat Siao community were largely to learn rather than to have leisure experiences at the community. Unfortunately, their desire to learn about the community cannot be fulfilled by the available heritage interpretation for foreign visitors. Only one-quarter of them had a learning experience from other sources but not from the community's existing interpretation.

In regard to the acquired experience of non-Thai visitors at the Hat Siao community, the results revealed that more than half of the respondents enjoyed leisure experiences from their visit to Hat Siao community (66.67%) while only a quarter of them (26.19%) had learning experiences from their visit. In addition, the results also indicated that 7.14% of non-Thai tourists returned the questionnaires with no answer in this part (See Table 4).
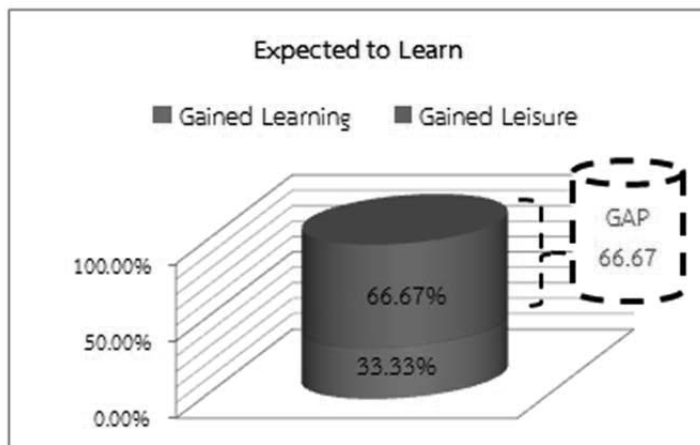
Table 4 : The acquired experience of Non-Thai visitors in Hat Siao Community (n = 42)

Acquired Experience	No. of tourists (people)	Percentage
Learn	11	26.19
Leisure	28	66.67
No Answer	3	7.14
Total	42	100.00

To identify the current situation of interpretation for non-Thai visitors and to create more effective community heritage interpretation, a comparison between their expectations with the acquired experiences from their visit (learning experiences or leisure experiences) has been made. Beck and Cable (1998) stated that interpretation is an activity which enhances our understanding and appreciation and leads to the protection of heritage sites. The acquired experiences may start from leisure, then move to learn and finally and hopefully to help to protect the sites and value.

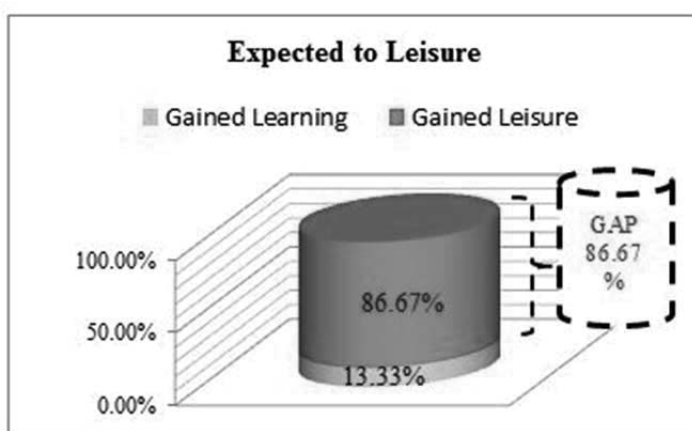-Expected to Learn and Acquired Experiences

The result clearly revealed that non-Thai tourists to the Hat Siao community who expected to learn, had learning experiences at only 33.33%, but they had leisure experiences at 66.67%. There is a significant distinction between the expectation to learn and leisure experiences at 66.67% (See Figure 1). This means that the Hat Siao community failed to promote the significance of the community and the existing heritage interpretation for foreign visitors of Hat Siao community was inadequate (see the gap between expectation to learn but gain only leisure experience). Even though the community can definitely provide leisure experiences for non-Thai visitors from owning several examples of the cultural identity, more than half of them could not obtain what they needed, could not acquire what they expected and felt disappointed with the quality of the available interpretation for non-Thai visitors.

Figure 1 Expected to Learn and Acquired Experiences

-Expected to Leisure and Acquired Experiences

The result has also shown that non-Thai visitors to the Hat Siao community came to the community with expectations to have leisure experiences at 86.67% while only 13.33% of them gained unexpected learning experiences from their visit (See Figure 2). Few of them who claimed that they had learning experiences came to the community with their friends and families or personal guides who provided additional information. The existing interpretation in the community did not allow them to better understand the community significance and it did not relate to their personal interests. If the learning experience can help to protect the sites and heritage value, the community interpretation presents a huge gap to fulfill visitors to make them have learning experiences.

Figure 2 Expected to Leisure and Acquired Experiences

In addition, this finding reaffirms that the existing interpretation for cross-cultural visitors in the community is ineffective. With a wide variety of cultural resources, the Hat Siao community can attract cross-cultural visitors to the community. The opportunity to provide both leisure and learning opportunities should not be missed. The interpretation should aim to stimulate their interest in the cultural heritage significance of the community and to enhance their understanding, appreciation and need to protect the cultural significance.

Objective 3 : To develop effective cultural heritage interpretations for cross-cultural visitors in Hat Siao community

All the above research results indicated that Hat Siao community urgently required the effective interpretation for cross-cultural visitors in order to help the community protect the heritage value and improve the learning experiences of non-Thai visitors.

According to Staiff (2014) mentioned that the effective interpretation should have four inter-related parts which are 1) the object and/ or site, 2) the interpretation environment, 3) interpretation and 4) the visitors or the tourists and the interconnecting arrows in the diagram flow both ways.

1) The object and/ or site refer to the material object or the site attraction that being visited and or viewed from tourists.

2) The interpretation environment consists of two dimensions which are viewed or experienced by visitors; the socio-cultural context of interpretation and the specific visual context. The socio-cultural context of interpretation includes the media, education, guidebooks, research (or knowledge formative) and memory/ myth/ history/ story and so forth while the specific visual context encompasses the visual environment which the tourist experiences the object or site (layout, design, ambience and atmosphere of the site).

3) For the interpretation, it refers to a distinct entity or activity within environment or context. Interpretation for tourists is made up of two parts; knowledge/ content (what is being communicated to visitors; Semiotic Theory) and communication (how the content is being transmitted to visitors; Cognitive Learning Theory and Media Theory).

4) The visitors or the tourists in the diagram will look at the object or site and experience them as formal interpretation. If the material object has meaning attached to it, the interpretation environment has a symbiotic relationship. And visitors can be both producers and consumers of meaning or knowledge. This situation can explain the reason why the interconnecting arrows in the diagram flow both ways.

Adapted the model of interpretation by Staiff to Hat Siao community (See Figure 3), it is notable that the research objective 1 has already been answered in the left side of the figure (the community identity) and research objective 2 is also addressed in the right side of the figure (non-Thai visitors to the community), the problem that stops the system from working systematically is in the middle (the interpretation environment). Hence, the community should put more focus on developing the key messages for cross-cultural visitors and find channels to transmit the messages to foreign visitors through off-site and on-site interpretations.

To convey appropriate content or what is being communicated to cross-cultural visitors in this community, the use of themes can help since it is impossible to explain everything about the site (ICOMOS, 2008). These three themes of the research suggestion are the "local ways of life through ceremonies and festivals", "Hat Siao's architectural history" or "Local wisdoms". For the theme the "local ways of life through ceremonies and festivals", the community can create interpretation with various activities offered to cross-cultural visitors on full day or half day trips by using story telling techniques in regard to visitor backgrounds and knowledge from local guides to pass on a sense of ownership to visitors. The community ceremonies and festivals which occur for the whole year can be added to the visitor activities as special events to allow them more knowledge about, and engagement with, the local ways of life.
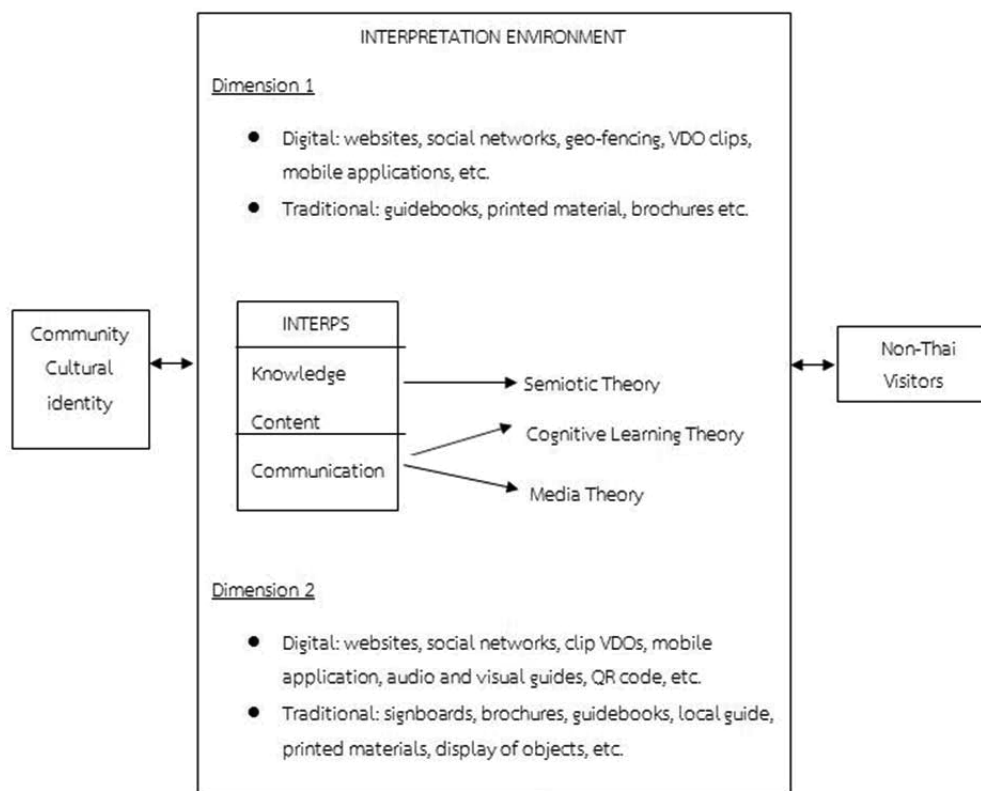
Figure 3 A Model of Interpretation for Non-Thai Visitors to the Hat Siao Community
Source : Adapted by Phobphison Phob-udom on January 26, 2018

For the channel to Communicate or how the content is being transmitted to visitors, the theme "Hat Siao's architectural history" should be developed into two methods of presentation. Information signboards, brochures and guidebooks (one-way communication) should be developed for short-term visitors. Moreover, the use of local guides (two-way communication) can assist visitors who are hungry to learn, curious to know more and enthusiastic to discover new knowledge and have more time. Since the homestay concept cannot be applied in this community due to the local belief, the home host concept can help. The home host will allow visitors to spend time in local houses, experience the authentic way of life in a traditional house and enjoy the natural surroundings, while doing local activities and eating local food but not staying overnight in the host's house is suitable for many tourists. The interpretation should not simply provide factual information but should also provoke and provide tourists with meaningful contrasts between the past and the present, help them understand their position in the world and encourage them to appreciate the significance of Hat Siao's cultural heritage and its protection. In regard to the theme of "Local wisdoms", the meaning of each of the nine patterns of Sin-Teen-Chok textiles such as

protection from bad luck, being rich or long-lasting love should also be recognized by visitors to increase the value of the products. Furthermore, Sin-Teen-Chok textiles should not be exhibited behind glass, but visitors should be allowed to touch, feel or wear them since this can facilitate experiential connection with visitors. Media techniques and external experts can be significant tools to convey the significance of Sin-Teen-Chok textiles to cross-cultural visitors and convey this local wisdom to foreign visitors.

Furthermore, the community should develop both traditional and digital techniques for interpretation. The traditional socio-cultural context technique (off-site) for non-Thai tourists in Hat Siao community refers to tour operators, guidebooks, travel magazines and printed materials. The content in this technique should be presented in various community ceremonies and festivals which occur every month over the whole year to meet different expectations and provide more varied experiences for visitors. Tour operators can be considered as crucial tools to convey the community identity. In regard to digital socio-cultural context techniques, websites, social networking and mobile applications, geo-fencing, VDO clips can be powerful tools for the Hat Siao community. Top-down policy to support and advise locals to create official websites or other media is required to send standardized messages that serve cross-cultural visitors.

For the specific visual context (on-site) technique, signboard which is the most popular choice for non-Thai visitors in this community can be considered as a traditional on-site interpretation technique. They allow visitors to read important information while on short-term visits and greater detail for the ones who have more time in the community. The information on signboards can be presented on a single signboard with important information in large letters and greater detail in smaller letters for visitors who have more time or want more detail about the community. To make the signboards harmonize with the surroundings, the design and layout of the signboard should be related to the objects or environment. Furthermore, brochures, guidebooks, printed materials, display of objects and local guide can also help. The young local guide project can also be applied in the Hat Siao community at weekends since this project can help young locals to practice English skills earn extra income, expand the local sense of possession to non-Thai visitors and also allow community involvement. The visitor center, which was abandoned and converted into a community toilet should be revived and made more active with a relaxing atmosphere to serve tourists. Digital on-site interpretation techniques such as audio and visual guides and QR code can be advantageous for the museum to allow visitors to experience the site interpretation by selecting information in their own language. This can also solve the problem of the inactive area at the rear part of the museum and when museum owner is not at the site.

Discussion

1. Hat Siao community has various examples of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Even though authenticity can facilitate the conservation of local culture and maintain the original forms and meaning, the community's existing heritage resources have a low level of authenticity in several ways that may result from economic, tourism and socio-cultural forces. Nevertheless, to create income from tourism, Hat Siao community which mainly presents its culture identity to attract visitors, has converted the culture into products and assets. Without controlled cultural commodification, it creates a conflict between conservation and commerce for local residents (Pröschel, 2012)

2. To satisfy global visitors, who have different sets of background knowledge, experience and culture, the Hat Siao community should develop interpretation related to the community's cultural identity to match the different interests, backgrounds, perceptions and culture to allow the visitors to engage in leisure activities, and enjoy the beautiful scenery and peaceful environment, which also reflect the community identity (Poria, et al., 2006)

3. The use of signboards, which is a popular choice for foreign visitors to the Hat Siao community according to the questionnaire results, can be considered as a traditional on-site interpretation technique. Although Lancaster County Planning Commission (2001) mentioned that some techniques, such as brochures and signs, are in a means of visual communication, it is untrue for the Hat Siao community. Signboards are still active in Hat Siao community because visitors need ready-to-read information as there is a lack of people who can explain it in spoken English.

Conclusion

1. According to the Burra Charter, the cultural heritage resources of Hat Siao community present various types of value; however, its existing condition which was evaluated in terms of the dimensions of authenticity embodied in the Hoi An Protocols were reported to have changed in various ways. All of these changes have been influenced by economic development, tourism and socio-cultural forces. Effective interpretation is a tool that can be employed by the community to raise public awareness, encourage local pride and conserve the community heritage to acquire long- term benefits.

2. This research also extends the investigation into cross-cultural visitors who are increasingly important in an era of global travel. After identifying the visitors' characteristics, expectations and acquired experiences enable the community, the result indicated that they had different demographics, country of origin and psychographics; however, their expectations to visit Hat Siao community were largely to learn rather than to have leisure experiences at the community. Unfortunately, the available heritage interpretation for foreign visitors cannot fulfill their desire to learn about the community. Again, the heritage interpretation can also

help provide better understanding and provoke to appreciate the significance of Hat Siao's cultural heritage and its protection.

3. Consequently, Hat Siao community needs to develop the effective interpretation for cross-cultural visitors from improving the key messages for cross-cultural visitors and find channels to transmit the messages to foreign visitors through off-site and on-site interpretation techniques.

Recommendations

This research has provided information to recommend for application to create effective interpretation for non-Thai visitors. Besides, the recommendations for further studies also indicated as follows:

-Recommendations for Application

The community should encourage community awareness and understanding about the cultural heritage resources of the Hat Siao Community. Furthermore, the community should provide visitors with better universal graphic information and more opportunities to experience and understand the Thai-Phuan cultures. Lastly, the community also needs to evaluate the feedback from Non-Thai visitors in regard to interpretation and acquired experiences.

-Recommendations for Future Research

The major recommendations for further in-depth studies about Hat Siao community are 1) more research on local attitudes and aspirations in regard to their cultural heritage identity and how they can contribute and collaborate to enhance sustainable cultural tourism through community-based tourism development are recommended for the further research. 2) re-evaluation of the existing culture heritage, trends and potential of the Hat Siao Community to be a cultural tourist attraction or secondary cultural tourist destination in Sukhothai province, Thailand and how to reach the goal and 3) expand the ways to conserve the community's heritage by developing interpretation which goes beyond language and communication

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