

# Guidelines for Promoting Tourism Based on the Cultures of 8 Ethnographic Groups in Ratchaburi Province

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## *Abstract*

This research on 'Guidelines for Promoting Tourism Based on the Culture of 8 Ethnographic Groups in Ratchaburi Province' aimed to investigate the existence of cultures of 8 ethnographic groups in Ratchaburi Province and to create guidelines for utilizing these cultures in promoting tourism. This qualitative research employed both individual and group interviews, and participatory observation as its research tools. Data were analyzed using the manifest content analysis technique; it did not focus on interpretation or latent content analysis.

According to the research findings, the cultures of the 8 ethnographic groups can be divided into 3 categories: 1) a culture that has been recorded but is now extinct; 2) a culture that still exists but is only performed on special occasions or events, for example, wearing auspicious traditional clothing on special days in place of contemporary clothing, or the use of special dialects to communicate among elders or relatives; and 3) a living culture that continues until the present, for instance, local food, the Mon Songkran festival, the Lao Vien Songkran festival, the Thai-Karen Songkran festival, Chinese New Year, the Chinese 10<sup>th</sup> lunar month festival or Thai-Karen spirit soothing ceremony. Ongoing celebration of these festivals and activities indicates that these practices have been accepted and selected by local inhabitants to pass on to future generations. They are preserved although the values, beliefs and implications [implications- meaning unclear] these practices embodied in the past have changed periodically. In conclusion, the cultures of 8 ethnographic groups in Ratchaburi Province have been integrated into the adopted culture.

To utilize the cultures of the 8 ethnographic groups to promote tourism, one should focus on the expression of living culture in the community such as ethnic Songkran festivals, local or ethnic gastronomy [cuisine?], Chinese New Year or the Thai-Karen spirit-soothing ceremony. The interrelationship [admixture?] of belief, meaning and emotion in these traditions will encourage targeted tourists to visit and have direct experience of these cultural activities. Promoting the ethnic Songkran festival should be given highest priority as it corresponds with the national Songkran festival and it is a long holiday. This gives the community or interested tourists the option to join the traditional Songkran festival in order to learn from and participate with local people who should also be encouraged to display local food. These actions are to strengthen existing traditions and culture, add value to and differentiate tourism in the province, revive dying cultural practices, and encourage the conservation and public display of cultural practices.

**Keyword Ethnographic tourism : cultural tourism : Ratchaburi**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The national economic and social development plans from the previous eight to the current one have encouraged adding value to the creation of goods and services based on knowledge and innovation in order to perpetually the income generated. Studies have focused on cultural advantages and benefits of economic value added (EVA) under the concept of creative economy. (TAT, 2011, p. 4) Yuwadee Nirattakul (2011, p. 3) stated that applying the concept of creative economy to tourism service in managing creative tourism in order to increase cost and value involved four integrated factors: capital, creative thinking, cultural property and specific skills. These factors should be applied through[out] the process that fosters the concept of creative tourism and include individual and social surveys of natural and cultural assets, identity and wisdom. The surveys will result in value differentiation which leads to value creation or redefinition for marketing. This is consistent with the UNESCO's concept of developing creative tourism (DASTA, 2011) which states that the aims of creative tourism should conform to sustainable community development by providing experimental tourism activities that relate to history, culture and the way of life in the community so that tourists acquire direct experiences and knowledge from the community.

The above concepts of creative economy and tourism reveal that culture is ~~an~~ [a source of] important social capital which can create added value for economic development of the community and country. Culture is a people's way of life in the community; its diversity is useful to the society and country as it can result in] income distribution, economic strength creation, and promotion of local communities' dignity and societal strength. (Prawet Wasee, 1998, p.7) Culture is an important tool for community development, especially when developing tourism because culture can attract tourists and it is a sustainable product which exists in the community forever. So a community's culture ~~is~~ [requires] the lowest investment cost in tourism businesses and should be managed for the maximum benefit.

Concerning the cultural assets of Ratchaburi Province, it was found that the city has a long history with evidence of Dhavaravadee and Khom culture. It was a cultural centre of the Mae Klong basin as well as a frontier town used for national defense mobilization in ancient Thailand. It was also a strategic location where ethnic groups emigrated to earn their living or because of being prisoners of war and invoking not sure of your meaning the moral authority of his majesty. There are 8 [you only list 7] ethnographic groups in Ratchaburi Province including native Thai, Chinese Thai, Mon Thai, Tai Yuan, Karen Thai, Lao Vien Thai and Lao Song Thai. Their diversity inspired the researcher to [identify] guidelines for utilizing the cultures of the 8 ethnographic groups to promote tourism. The results of this study should provide local] information and guidelines to provincial tourism organizations when developing their tourism management. In addition, the study is consistent with the concept of developing the creative economy and tourism based on local culture and wisdom.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

To achieve] the objectives of this study, cultural reproduction and value tree analysis were used as the conceptual framework for considering the existence of cultures. Qualitative research was conducted by means of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participatory observation. Respondents were village chiefs, village committees, members of sub-district organization and informal community leaders (e.g. elderly people, government officials related to the communities and participants in cultural activities of the ethnic groups in Ratchaburi who are knowledgeable about the history and background of the cultures, beliefs, and traditional ways of life of the ethnographic groups in Ratchaburi.

## III. STUDY RESULTS

1. The existence of culture in 8 ethnographic groups in Ratchaburi Province was described according to the concept of cultural reproduction and value tree analysis (Kanchana Kaewthep and Somsuk Hinwiman, 2008). Ratchaburi Province has been continuously developing

from prehistoric times to the present. Development has progressively brought about a great number of changes in the economy, society and community living. The surrounding changes have led to changes in culture, beliefs, tradition and way of life. Nowadays the ethnic identity is less strong because other customs are accepted owing to progress, development and emigration. People moving out of the community to study and earn a living has caused various changes in languages, ideas and values. Moreover, emigration from other areas has led to a mixing of cultures. Newcomers are not aware of local cultures so they do not pay attention or join cultural activities and they are not indoctrinated into the culture. Because cultural identity is less strong, people express their culture only on special occasions such as wearing ethnic costumes during important festivals or on formal occasions. Generally they wear contemporary clothes. Dialects are mostly spoken to communicate among elderly people and relatives. As with other Thais, the Thai language is used to communicate with others in society. Concerning cultural reproduction, the cultures have been transmitted up until the present as evidenced by the Chinese Thais' New Year festival, Karen's Ang Mi Thong festival and Songkran festival. When the inherited customs are carried out, the thoughts, beliefs, values and hidden meanings are adopted. For example, the Karen people's Phook Khaen Riak Kwan festival is held annually in the ninth lunar month (called "Lah Khok") which is about the end of July or beginning of August. During this time the weather is cool with torrential rain which causes illnesses such as malaria. The Karen Thais believe that their sickness is caused by their eccentricity -- not following their ancestors regulation -- as well as by various surrounding spirits such as forest spirits, water spirits, guardian spirits, harbor spirits and field spirits which aggravate their own souls which are called "Kwan". The purpose of the Phook Khaen Riak Kwan ceremony is to call the soul back to the body to bring their descendants good things such as good health, happiness and long life. Beliefs have changed because of medical advances, but the ceremony is still carried out to maintain community morale and [to provide an opportunity to those who have migrated for work to pay a home visit. This reveals the ethnic identity of Karen Thais, their transmitted culture as selected by local inhabitants to [pass on] in the form of adopted culture.

2. Suggested guidelines for promoting tourism based on the cultures of the 8 ethnographic groups are as follows:

2.1 The culture used for the promotion should be an existing one that has been passed on until the present. It does not require the new creation [of activities] because of its existence.

2.2 The culture used in tourism should be valuable, meaningful, sentimental and believable to targeted tourists. Therefore, these three types of culture are suggested.

(1) To promote tourism through the cultural capital of Karen Thais in Suan Phung District by promoting the Phook Khaen Riak Kwan (Ang Mi Thong) festival. This local festival is held annually owing to the Karen people's belief that every person has an unseen Kwan or soul who loves to roam. Sometimes the soul is unable to return to the body because it gets lost or is caught by spirits and the person might become sick or even die. To call the Kwan back to the body the Phook Khaen Riak Kwan ceremony is conducted by having elderly people tie [red threads to] the wrist of the target person and say words to recall or induce the soul to return as well as bless him or her with happiness, prosperity and all good things. The underlined meaning of the ceremony is to encourage relationships, generosity and build morale. It is consistent with the philosophy and belief of providing psychological treatment to a person who feels insecure and needs moral [support]. The ceremony which symbolizes important cultural values reveals the connection of happiness, body, mind and environment through the utilization of knowledge and wisdom. Tourists can participate in the activity of tying to build morale and gain happiness through the belief in the Kwan. They can also be involved in other cultural activities during the ceremony, for instance, eating local food,

watching performances like playing bamboo mouth organs, and watching local sports e.g. running race with a basket on the back, oily pole climbing race, pitching Sabaa and eating Karen people's Khao Ho

(2) To promote tourism through the ethnic Songkran festival. In Thailand, Songkran is a long holiday festival celebrated all over the country; workers usually return home and some Thais take their holidays during the festival. The celebration becomes a tourist attraction. The ethnic groups in Ratchaburi Province conduct celebration activities according to their beliefs and customs. For instance, Mon people offer a traditional dish called Khao Chae which is rice in ice water; Lao Vien people conduct flower processions whereas Karen Thais worship Luang Pho Nuam at Wat Charoen. The ethnic Songkran festival can be preserved and passed on if festival activities are creative and based on the traditional ethnic Songkran values.

(3) To promote tourism through ethnic gastronomy culture. Local food sources have been used for daily sustenance and the preparation of ethnic food. They have been creatively produced for many generations based on local wisdom until they have become distinct ethnic gastronomy cultures identified with each ethnic group. The diverse ethnic foods should be displayed along tourism routes by the housekeeper cooking groups such as on the routes to Damnoen Saduak Floating Market or to Suan Phueng District in Ratchaburi Province.

#### IV. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

##### 1. Conclusion

The cultures of 8 ethnographic groups in Ratchaburi Province are valuable social assets which can increase the value of tourism. Various sorts of cultural production are identified in the province such as Tai Yuan Jok silk fabrics, cotton fabrics at Ban Rai, Tai Yuan brass products at Ban Khao Loy Mune Co, Karen fabrics, jar pottery which is Chinese Thai wisdom heritage, Lao Song local museum at Ban Hua Khao Jean, Mon temples and architecture, gastronomic wisdom and annual ethnic festivals. The above assets can be tourism resources that encourage creative tourism. Utilizing culture to promote tourism is creating new values and restoring the cultures which might otherwise fade away. On 25 June 2011, Lt. Patcharodom Oonsuwan, the mayor of Amphawa Sub-district stated, "When time passes, culture starts to vanish and its value changes. For example, the value of betel nuts which were good for chewing in the past decreases because people quit chewing them. New values are created when they are used for natural dyeing, so betel nut trees still exist. Similarly any culture can maintain by creating new values."

##### 2. Suggestions

2.1 Cultural attractions in Ratchaburi Province whose products are not distinguished can supplement mainstream tourism by linking with established routes of tourism. For instance, linking the route to Damnoen Saduak Floating Market with eating Mon local foods, as well as visiting Wat Khanon to see Nang Yai (puppets for grand shadow play), and Wat Khao Chong Pran to see a hundred million bats along with visiting the Mon museum at Wat Khongkham, Photharam District.

2.2 The cultures of 8 ethnographic groups in Ratchaburi Province should be utilized for tourism promotion by promoting their cultural activities which are part of the

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communities' identity such as the Phook Khaen Riak Kwan ceremony, ethnic Songkran festival and ethnic gastronomy. They are valuable, meaningful, sentimental and able to involve target tourists as participants in tourism activities rather than as observers. These activities are consistent with creative tourism which allows tourists to relate to culture through learning. (UNESCO, 2006) Focusing on tourist groups with niche interests, the activities facilitate tourists' participation for knowledge consumption and experiential learning (Rossitza Ohridska-Olson and Stanislav Ivanov, 2010). It is recommended that creative tourism activities based on the cultures of 8 ethnographic groups should be further developed and encouraged to create local identity as a part of creative economy.

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