

Management of the Ban Tha Chin Historic Site for Tourism^{*}

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Abstract

The management of the Ban Tha Chin historic site for tourism is proposed as a guideline to comply with the provincial development planning of Samut Sakhon Province, which promotes ‘historical tourism and ecotourism’ as a major source of revenue through its historicity and natural environment. However, economic development should not be an exclusive goal of this historic site management. Ban Tha Chin Community, a significant historic site composes of tangible and intangible heritages expressed in its built environment, customs, traditions, and way of life. They need to be revealed for the tourist’s impression and simultaneously maintained for the inheritors. Inevitably, the management of heritage site has to consider heritage conservation integrated with tourism planning and sustainable concept to achieve the management goal.

Keywords: Management of Historic Site, Landscape approach, Sustainable development, Tourism planning

Introduction: Statement and Significance of the Problem

Ban Tha Chin is a coastal and riverine city connected with the river basin of the Tha Chin River and the coastal plain of the Gulf of Thailand, both of which are conducive to a rich fishery industry. Fishery resources are the main products for industry and trade and are important to the economy of Thailand. Furthermore, the potential of this area is characterized by supporting the growth of Bangkok with a land transport network. However, the highway does not make reaching this historical area easy by car. For visitors, Ban Tha Chin serves as a seafood market and a break from a long journey along the two part Mae Khlong- Mahachai Railway route. The route begins at Wong Wian Yai Railway station in Thonburi Bangkok before terminating at Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province. Visitors usually spend time only at Mahachai

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market, which is on the route to the pier nearby where they board a ferry to cross to the west bank before taking another train on the Mae Khlong Railway to Samut Songkhram Province. As a result, the historic value of Ban Tha Chin is being ignored from the perspective of tourism.

The Research Question

The key research question is ‘How can Ban Tha Chin Community be managed as a historic site for tourism?’ and the secondary research questions are:

1. What measures are needed to conserve and manage a historic site for tourism?
2. What are the critical aspects of the cultural context of the historic site that should be considered?
3. What role do the meanings of historical tourism and ecotourism play?
4. What is the historic value of the historic site identified as heritage by theoretical concerns?
5. What are appropriate measures to regulate the tourism and conservation of the site?
6. Can sustainable development be achieved through the management of Ban Tha Chin Community?

Objectives

To integrate landscape heritage conservation with social, economic, and environmental development through historical tourism and ecotourism by:

1. Reviewing existing materials in order to develop management guidelines.
2. Investigating management guidelines for conservation and tourism development of historic site.
3. Recommending guidelines for implementation.

Research Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is a combination of literature review, an examination of the existing site, participant observation (on-site visits, observing activities), field studies of the urban system, in-depth interviews, and photo recording. The aim is to suggest a landscape approach to the management planning of Ban Tha Chin as a historic site for tourism based on the assumption that tourism can be a powerful force in maintaining traditional places and improving economic and business success.

The management of heritage is a process to preserve the integrity of heritage and continued authenticity as a tourism product and the management of tourism is a process to determine the potential of the historic site for development as a tourist destination. This will be a qualitative research focusing on the processes of the urban system, conditioned by social, economic, political and cultural constraints over time.

The research instruments employed are open-ended and semi-structured questionnaire, camera, computer notebook, and interview. The study also uses both primary and secondary sources including primary survey to understand the background of the heritage site contexts from the past until the present.

History

Ban Tha Chin, located on the Gulf of Thailand, is ideal for trade and fishery and has a continuous life with its remains as historic evidence of its past. It is a place which has associative value related to the way of life of people who live in the area of the flooding coastal low-land within the cultural and natural context of historic site. To understand this historic place, it is important to know its history. The followings are the brief history of the Ban Tha Chin Community:

- Chinese Port for commercial at the estuary of the Tha Chin River with water-based communities since the Ayutthaya Period
- Fishing villages of the Chinese migrants along the coastline in the early Rattanakosin period of King Rama I-IV
- Prosperity community at Tha Chalom and Mahachai Sub-districts with new land transportation both roads and railways since the period of King Rama V.
- ‘Fishing city, factory town, agricultural ground, and historic site’, the slogan of Samut Sakhon Province, is the present of this historical site.

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The understanding of ‘historical tourism and ecotourism’ should be established. It is found that ‘historical tourism and ecotourism’ plays the same role as ‘sustainable heritage tourism’ in a theoretical context as adapted from Marsden (1990), Park (2014), Vargas (2012), and Ziffer (1989). In general, tourism can have positive effects on conservation and development in many heritage places when the concept of sustainability is taken into account. However, tourism is described as ‘exploitation’ when heritage becomes a product of a commodification process.



Figure 1 Map of Samut Sakhon Province and transportation
From Google map

Ban Tha Chin is a place which has historical and natural value in terms of landscape heritage and the associative value related to the cultural route of the Mahachai Canal in the Ayutthaya Period and the Mae Khlong- Mahachai Railway in the Rattanakosin Period. Assessment by using landscape approaches in this research shows that the Ban Tha Chin Community is an extensive landscape with natural and cultural heritage along the cultural route and the coastline. The landscape of Mahachai District, the historic center area, has significant and distinctive characteristics of prosperous fishing villages merged with water-based communities along the estuary of the Tha Chin River, the main commercial and transportation hub of the province. The western neighborhood area has significant and distinctive characteristics in the cultural landscape of salt marshes where the work places of people who live in the water-based communities along the Sunak Hon canal merge with the fishing villages of Chinese migrants along the coastline. Lastly, the eastern neighborhood area has significant and distinctive characteristics of a protected landscape with high biodiversity in its natural state, developed to support the growth of the Ban Tha Chin Community. There is also intangible heritage in terms of local culture, local knowledge, and way of life, which has significant and distinctive characteristics formed by people who live in the area of the flooding coastal low-land within the cultural and natural context of historic site (see figure 1).

However, these heritage values are not easily understood by outsiders, who require heritage interpretation. The role of interpretation is to present the significance of those landscape values in a relevant and accessible manner to the host community and the visitors, with appropriate, stimulating and contemporary forms of education, media, technology and personal explanation of historical, environmental and cultural information (ICOMOS, 2007). The interpretation can also be represented in terms of conservation and tourism development as an increasingly common and popular form of product development at heritage sites (Light & Prentice, 1994).

Results:

Requisites for Conservation

Nowadays, heritage is not a fixed and unchanging entity. Its scope and range have substantially expanded from a monument-based to a landscape-based understanding of heritage. The major international organizations involved in heritage conservation and management have created landscape-based instruments to manage heritage products as resources and commercial activities. The landscape approaches including cultural landscape (UNESCO, 1992), protected landscape (IUCN, 2002), historic urban landscape (UNESCO, 2011) and cultural route (ICOMOS, 2008) are tools to properly regulate the need for the modernization of historicity and the natural environment, while at the same time preserving the intangible heritage or intangible value of tangible heritage embedded in the landscape. It is an integrated and harmonious relationship between conservation and new urban development. Park (2014) also gave a perspective of heritage conservation as a new creation which focuses on managing changes, not just preserving what already exists or preventing changes. Heritage conservation is not just protecting and sustaining the historic environment or even managing changes as mentioned before, but it is increasingly regarded as a value-added entity that improves the image of the places or destinations concerned. In this regard, heritage conservation is also a capital-driven economic activity (Herzfeld, 2010).

In terms of conservation, the different valuable heritage needs different conservation work such as the preservation/protection/ rehabilitation of buildings and monuments in a physical dimension, the regulation and urban planning of protected/cultural/historic urban landscapes in a spatial dimension, and the education/collaboration/participation of locals and stakeholders in a social dimension to maintain the value of heritage and to control changes while at the same time sustaining the new urban development.

The conservation of the Mae Khlong- Mahachai Railway, a cultural route which runs through three provinces, Bangkok, Samut Sakhon, and Samut Songkram, is adopted by the recommendation of the ICOMOS (2008) charter which promoted the sustainable use of historic ties developed along cultural routes with tourist activities for sustainable development. It requires a specific methodology with the establishment of a system of coordinated and integrally managed activities.

Requisites for Tourism Development

The results of tourism assessment clearly indicate that each zone of the study area has its own identity with the potential to develop as a destination with both historical and ecotourism attractions. Furthermore there is also educational, cultural, sport, bicycle touring, and train track tourism. However, there are limitations for the existing tourism which require improvement and development.

The existing private sector tourism industry maximizes economic benefits and makes decisions about tourism development in an unrestricted and unplanned way, oriented toward short-term economic gains. In the long-term, it may affect the host communities and destroy the environment as tourist destination. A better solution could be achieved by planning, management, and creative intervention and coordination and collaboration with the business sector, the public sector, the nonprofit sector, and professional consultants.

In terms of tourism, tourism planning by Gunn (2002) seems to be the most appropriate tool for this methodology. It is considered as a tool employed for the implementation of the tourism management planning process, which is considered as the main process of the Ban Tha Chin historic site management for the following reasons:

1. It is a creative intervention with three goals of enhanced visitor satisfaction, community integration, and resource protection to achieve better economic impacts.

2. It is a new mind set for tourism development as tourism becomes much more complicated. The supply side of the Ban Tha Chin historic site involves nearly every citizen, every public agency, and every organization because visitors are exposed to everything. Greater environmental awareness and planning sensitivity in all tourism development aims to respond to tourism demand for destinations and attractions of natural and cultural resource significance.

3. It processes from the macro to the micro scale according to three dimension of conservation planning as follows:

- Regional planning, as a comprehensive plan, is integrated planning such as transportation and urban planning, conservation and tourism planning.

- Destination planning, as a community-attraction complex, performs a key role for tourism with basic elements of transportation and access, one or more community with adequate public utilities, attraction complexes (clusters), and efficient and attractive transportation links between cities and attractions.

- Site planning, the final development, involves the planning and design of individual property developments for hotels, restaurants, resorts, roads and attractions. It includes

surrounding development of traveler attractors and attractions, transportation, and information systems, with relevance to residential needs and desires, and the economic health of the community.

Requisites for Sustainable Development

It is obvious that the management of the Ban Tha Chin historic site is very difficult to accomplish because of the complexity of the integration of conservation, tourism and sustainable development. Such action involves many players who have their own goals and objectives. The existing tourism policy derived from provincial development planning aimed to develop the capacity of tourism as a major source of revenue for the province by promoting ecotourism and historical tourism, and promoting investment in tourism facilities. It is a singular policy direction and is too narrow for the complicated task of historic site management for 'sustainable heritage tourism'. Broader policies are needed according to Gunn's suggestion which is 'if tourism is to be successful in the future, public and management must strive for all four goals: enhanced visitor satisfaction, improved economy and business success, **sustainable resource use, and community and area integration**' (Gunn, 2002).

Tourism Planning

The policies for management guidelines are developed schematically from the result of research analysis and the adaptation of management policies of IUCN (2002), Mitchell, Rössler and Tricaud, (2009), and Gunn (2002). This set of policies is offered as a foundation for the management framework of Ban Tha Chin Historic site for sustainable tourism development. It comprises of policies related to tourism management, policies related to heritage management, and policies related to sustainable management.

It is essential to establish management policies as guidelines before developing the process of tourism planning. These guidelines are also used to outline the objectives of tourism planning at all levels.

1. Regional planning

1.1 Objective of regional planning

- To conserve the cultural route and heritage assets.
- To develop Samut Sakhon Province as a primary destination.
- To create a vision for future planning.

1.2 Development concept of regional planning

- Development of the Mae Khlong - Mahachai Railway as a tourism route between Bangkok - Samut Sakhon Province and Samut Sakhon - Samut Songkram Province with the cooperation and collaboration of the tourism industry, regional and local government (such as

the Railway Department, the Tourist Department, Bangkok, Samut Sakhon Province, and Samut Songkram Province) to integrate conservation with tourism in regional tourism planning.

- Development of Samut Sakhon Province from a secondary destination to a primary destination for historical tourism and ecotourism by cooperation and collaboration with the tourism industry, local government, professional and other organizations, and resident communities.

- Future planning for tourism growth and the expansion of bicycle trails along the cultural route of the railway with cooperation and collaboration of the tourism industry, regional and local government including the Railway Department, the Tourist Department, Bangkok, Samut Sakhon Province, and Samut Songkram Province. Tourism growth planning should be initiated after the monitoring and evaluation of the potential for tourism development has been done.

- The development of land-use planning and transportation planning requires cooperation and collaboration with the Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning, provincial authorities, and municipalities of the three related provinces for future planning.

2. Destination planning

2.1 Objectives of destination planning

- To encourage historical tourism and ecotourism at the Ban Tha Chin Community historic site and its surrounding area in ways that will attract more tourists, increase their length of stay, increase the amount of money they spend, and ensure that any adverse social, economic, and/or environmental effects are minimized as a result of activities to improve tourism.

- To provide tourist experiences with local traditional culture.

- To enhance and preserve basic community values.

- To sustain the qualitative and attractive aspects of the heritage landscape and the well-being of local people.

2.2 Development concept of destination planning

- Group 1: For policies

- 1) Roles of stakeholders

- 2) Sustainable development

- Group 2: For physical development

- 1) Attractions

- 2) Transportation and the services

- Group 3: For program development

- 1) Activities and promotion
- 2) Information
- 3) Research

3. Site planning

It is important to identify the design needs such as ‘an attraction complex’ as a gateway at the main entrance of the Ban Tha Chin historic site in the area of commercial space of Mahachai Market merged with the recreation and public space of Wichian Chodok Fort and Mahachai Railway Station, which is one of the results from the destination planning process. This example of physical development project requires the process of site planning as follows:

- Step1: Market analysis
- Step2: Program definition
- Step3: Site selection/Revised program
- Step4: Site analysis
- Step5: Synthesis
- Step6: Conceptual design
- Step7: Feasibility
- Step8: Final plan

Conclusion

As a result of the tourism planning process, the cultural route of the Mae Khlong-Mahachai Railway plays an important role in the development of regional planning because it has the potential to develop the historic ties of communities along the route at the same time develop tourist activities by train and bicycle in sustainable way. The main idea of destination planning is to develop the Ba Tha Chin historic site as a primary destination. This requires the creation of major visitor centers and improved accesses. Mass tourism can then be managed, tourist services and links can be provided, and heritage assets can be developed as attractions with good promotion and marketing. The two steps of regional and destination planning lay the foundation for the areas and types of development that have potential, and can provide the concrete results in the final planning at the site scale. It is obvious that site scale planning needs the cooperation and collaboration of not only all conservation stakeholders and tourism action committees from the three sectors of decision makers - governments, non-profit organizations, and commercial enterprise, but also professional designers to transform the concepts of decision makers into buildable management development with creative

design to achieve the goals of ‘sustainable resource use of historic site’ and ‘enhanced visitor satisfaction.

Discussion

Although the relationship between conservation and tourism is very close within the concepts of tourism planning, conservation planning could be manipulated separately from tourism development, which is dynamic depending on changes in the market and new supply development.

The process of monitoring and evaluation must be undertaken for measures intended to prevent the negative impacts of tourism and to determine oversaturation and need for de-marketing. Enthusiasm and commitment may wane if it appears that no one is concerned about whether the objectives are working.

However, the implementation derived from the conservation and tourism planning process could be only a guideline to initiate the management of Ban Tha Chin Historic Site because there are limitations of the research as follows:

1. The data of heritage assets are collected, observed, and analyzed in the view of the researcher. They lack stakeholder participation especially local people who are the most important stakeholders to achieve the goals of the management planning process. A sense of ownership of a heritage site and the involvement of local communities must be enhanced by way of encouraging active community participation. It is essential for the owners to evaluate the heritage to preserve it for future generations.

2. Using a landscape approach as a tool to deal with the management of heritage site is new in the theoretical context. The introduction and understanding of all stakeholders must be prepared.

3. The study area of the research is only a part of Samut Sakhon Province and focused on the historic center in the Mahachai District, so the findings and implications can only be applied in the study area. Other areas of the province would have to apply this methodology for themselves because each area is unique in geography, history, condition, and context. Although local administrations have gained significance regarding their authority and duties in tourism planning, it would be better if a comprehensive tourism development plan was prepared.

4. The limitations of data used in this research are that was conducted in a fixed-time period and only in the view of the researcher.

Suggestions for Future Research

It should be noted that the management of historic site for tourism should not be limited to the extent of the area by name, for example, the tourism management of the Mahachai District, the historic center of the Ban Tha Chin Community historic site, which has historic ties to the neighborhood areas within the local context of associative sites along the cultural route of the waterway and railway. Consequently, the tourism management of the Mahachai District as a historic center must include the management of neighboring areas and the associative sites along the cultural route. The data collection of the site and surrounding context has to be regarded as the most important process of the management plan. The more materials there are, the more innovative ideas of tourism management can be created.

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