



## ANCIENT RELIGIOUS SITES MANAGEMENT FOR CULTURAL TOURISM IN NORTHEAST REGIONS OF THAILAND<sup>\*</sup>

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### Abstract

The objectives of this research were 1) to study temples with ancient sites in the lower northeast provinces of Thailand, 2) to study the management of temples with ancient sites in the lower northeast provinces of Thailand, and 3) to propose management guidelines temple with ancient sites to be a cultural tourist attraction in the lower northeast provinces. Qualitative research was conducted that consisted of documentary study, interview, and focus group discussion. Research tools were open-ended interviewed form and questions for focus group discussion. Data were collected by interviewing 20 experts, and about 20 people were attending focus group discussion. Data were analyzed by using content analysis. Results indicated that 1) temples with ancient sites in the temple in the lower northeast provinces of Thailand found that it was located at Surin Castle, Wat Pa Khao Noi Buriram province, and Prasat Sa Kamphaeng Yai Yai, Sisaket Province. These 3 areas are all temples that have problems with the management of temples both in terms of location and management as well as being a representative of temples that tried to manage temples with ancient sites for cultural tourism. 2) The management of temples with ancient sites in the lower northeast provinces of Thailand found that the abbots and the committee of the Fine Arts Department, field trips and academic should have particular roles for managing temples with ancient sites to be a cultural attraction. Activities can be made together by seeing that it is a local treasure together and has value for society as a nation until the realization of love and cherish. 3) Management of temples with ancient sites in the temple to be a tourist attraction in the culture should be joined by many parties. Abbot should have relevant knowledge in the history of the ancient monument, and the management of the M4 is connected. Trust and activities should also be created to connect with many parties. There are a few guides in providing knowledge and understanding to tourists and coordinate with the Art Department that should have a visual media to promote the tourists to visit the temple more understanding and should have light, sound or tradition activities in order to preserve the remains of the society as well.

**Keywords:** Ancient Religious Sites Management, Cultural Tourism, Northeast Regions

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## Introduction

The earliest settlers in this region were hunter-gatherers. The Neolithic, with the introduction of agriculture, dates from 2,500 to 1,500 years BCE. The Bronze Age dates from 1,500-500 BCE, and the Iron Age from 500 BCE to 500 CE. It is in the Iron Age that the first evidence of hum and settlement emerges in the province, with approximately sixty known Iron Age sites. The earliest known historical period is the Dvaravati. This was an Indian-based culture, which diffused through the north-east region of what is now Thailand. Evidence of this culture is found in Surin region dating to between the 7th to 11th centuries CE. It was in this period that Buddhism became the dominant religion of the region. Surin Province is located in the southern part of northeastern Thailand, with a total area of 8,104.056 square kilometers (approximately 5,077,335rai). The distance from Bangkok is about 450 kilometers (Baker, Chris 2005, p. 15) Surin Province borders Roi ET and Mahasarakham Provinces on the north, Sisaket Province on the east, Buriram Province on the west, and Cambodia on the south. In this area, prehistoric human settlements in late Metal Age, date about 2,000 years old were discovered, along with more than 59 ancient communities. Due to its topography which bordered the Khmer empire, communities in Surin Province had been influenced by Khmer kingdom since 7th (Baker, Chris, 2005, p. 35) century. After the decline of Khmer empire, no obvious evidence suggested the later community in the area

Following the Dvaravati period, the powerful Khmer Empire expanded its influence throughout what is now the southern Isan region of Thailand. This period covers the 7th to 13th centuries CE. Surin was an important part of the ancient Khmer empire. Temple ruins and a substantial ethnic Khmer minority remain part of Surin. Khmer stone inscriptions date from c. 600 CE. Over the next several centuries a growing number of Khmer sites were constructed in the province, most notably Prasat Sikhoraphum. These sites would have formed part of the network of Khmer infrastructure centred on Prasat Phanom Rung. With the collapse of the Khmer empire in the 13th century Surin province faded from history. It is in the 18th century that it re-emerges. At this time a Kuay local leader named Chiangpum became the royally appointed ruler of the region (Baker, Chris 2015) According to legend he presented a rare white elephant to the Chao Phaya Chakri, future King Rama I. In gratitude, Chiangpum was awarded the royal title Luang Surin Phakdi and appointed the village headman. When Rama I became the Thai monarch, he appointed Luang Surin Phakdi as the province's governor.

However, its development has only been successful in the south and the north of Thailand while the Northeast or Isan, lags behind in terms of the least visited area in the country, even though it has the fascinating blend of Thai, Lao, and Khmer cultures presented in cultural and archaeological sites. To solve this problem, the government has



launched the "Amazing Isan" campaign and promoted Isan as an inexpensive destination. However, tourism income in the Isan region is still regarded as low in relation to other regions (Hammon, Organization, 2000) With regard to this unsatisfactory level of tourism development in the Isan region, a thorough analysis is crucially needed to determine the extent to which tourism can be further developed there. (Galvani, 2005) (Ratanakomut, 2006)

The World Tourism Organization (Ampon Thamrongrak. Public Governance, 2012) has said religious tourism is about the beliefs that people have transferred generation to generation, and it is a tool for identifying people's backgrounds and cultures in each area. These cultural aspects are presented as a form of tourism, including activities related to tradition, beliefs, and local ceremonies (Baker, Chris, 2005) However, religious tourism may include a day of worship that is important in each religion (Baker, Chris, 2005) The Greek National Tourism Organization (2011) under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism stated that religious tourism is not new; it began even before the religion itself was born with the pilgrimage (Shabbir; D'Silva, Joyce, eds, 2011) Religious tourism then became an event that people participated in to worship at sacred places and to participate in activities such as releasing animals to the wild and giving alms. However, these activities are essential to the distribution of income to people around the area.

Many studies have attempted to define religious tourism; Istvan et al. (2012) say religious tourism refers to all travel to sites of religious importance that is motivated, at least partly, by religion. However, Vorzsak and Gut (2009) add that religious tourism means not only visiting sites, shrines, and structures with religious significance but also attending religious conferences, different culturally religious events, exhibitions of cultic objects, and concerts of sacred music.

The province slowly grew in population, there was a continual influx of people from surrounding areas, principally Cambodia (part of what is now western Cambodia was ruled by Bangkok at this time), however Surin was largely self-sufficient, and somewhat isolated. This changed with the advent of the railroad in 1922. Surin and its economy was exposed to the wider world. Chinese and Indian merchants settled, manufacturing increased, and Surin joined the modern world. Ordination parade on elephant's back. The vibrant tradition is held mostly on the 13th-15th day of the waxing moon in May (around mid of May) at Wat Chaeng Sawang, Ban Ta Klang, Amphoe Tha Tum. Khmer, Laotian, and Suay people are all Buddhist and families wish their sons to enter monkhood and study the dhamma before marriage. The ordinations of large numbers of monks simultaneously on elephant back over long distances confer great merit on the families of the ordained. The area of present-day Surin, Si Saket, and Buriram provinces have long history of human



settlement which dates back to prehistories times. Historically the region has been ruled by various powerful kingdoms including the Angkorian Khmer Empire, the Lao kingdom Lan Xang, and the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya. Reflecting this history as part the greater geo-cultural area of Thailand known as Isan, Surin, Si Saket, and Buriram are ethnically diverse. The primary language is the Isan dialect of Lao. Speakers of Central Thai account for a small minority while nearly 50% of the population is ethnic Khmer. (Prasopsuk, R., P. Piampongsan, P. Prathepha and B. Yodmalee, 2005, p. 25)

The management of temples that are present in the area is not yet known and is not widely known. There is no promotion for ecotourism. The researcher wanted to study this work. To respond to such research.

### **Objectives of Research**

1. To study status of Ancient Religious Sites Management for Cultural Tourism in Northeast Regions of Thailand.
2. To study factors effecting achieving Ancient Religious Sites Management for Cultural Tourism in Northeast Regions of Thailand.
3. To purpose guide line of ancient religious sites management for cultural tourism in northeast regions of Thailand.

### **Research Methodology**

1. This research uses Qualitative methods Research consisting of follows
  - 1.1 Document Review. Documentary Research which can be divided into categories, namely:

Primary Sources: this type of research includes textbooks on theories and concepts of decentralization, local ancient place organizations in both domestic and oversea temple. Other primary sources include document, memos relevant laws and drafting laws, and the report on local ancient places reform approaches of local ancient places and decentralization reform committee of the National Reform of Sangha Council reform approaches of the National Reform steering Council, and etc.

Secondary Sources: these include news information, interviews, analysis, documents from seminars and other related research works.
  - 1.2 In-depth Interviews. which the research will interview research samples or key informants of Ancient Religious Sites for Cultural Tourism Management about ideas or concepts of the policy of upgrading Ancient Religious Sites for Cultural Tourism Management to be Municipality which the researcher selects cultural tourism management in Northeast Regions of Thailand such as; 1) Surin Province (Prasat Srikoraphum) 2) SiSaket Province (Sra



Kampaeng Yai) 3) Buriram Province (Wat Pa Khao Noi) 4) Faculty of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Wangnoi

### 1.3 Focus Group Discussion

The research will provide a group of 9 experts to discuss and ten tourist debate about the subjects of this research “The Policy of the Ancient Religious Sites for Cultural Tourism Management. List of experts examined as followings:

This focus group discussion should be done particularly by using experts consisting of 9 persons in Surin, Sisaket, Buriram provinces.

### 2. Data analysis in qualitative research is divided into 3 steps

2.1 Analyze data to create an Ancient Religious Sites for Cultural Tourism Management model.

2.2 Interview the experts or Related Persons

2.3 Focus Group Discussion to assess the temple management style.

## Rresearch Result

1. The researcher has studied the training of management to abbots and committee to have vision, proper problem-solving skill with the direction to understand both the temple and ancient religious sites together with the community to be in the same page. Also to develop their management training skills so they become good and efficient leaders by training and providing outing to see other sites’ management with the cooperation of Fine Arts Department. The understanding the problems and collaborate hand-in-hand with Fine Arts Department officers to improve the sites in the same direction under the support of Local Administration Organization who is responsible in such local area about what to do and don’t as a preventive pattern so there will be no problem afterward.

2. To segregate the duties and responsibilities among the parties involves is necessary especially the part which is under the handling of Fine Arts Department. The body of knowledge from research is drawn in Figure 4.1 to link the relationship of all parties related to the ancient sites. The duty of all parties among Abbots, Fine Arts Department, Tourism Authority of Thailand and Community (villagers and youth) which is inclusive of Local Administration Organization officers.

3. The knowledge of how to look after the ancient religious sites properly. From the model, each unit has the responsibility and relationship to each other in term of managing and looking after the ancient religious sites. Abbots and Fine Arts Department officers should well aware of the historical background of such sites and can explain to the community and youth who have duties in such place. The transparency management and conservative protection training for sustainable tourism from the cooperation of all parties.



## Research Discussion

From the research topic on “Ancient Religious Sites Management for Cultural Tourism in Northeast Regions of Thailand” the research discussion is as follows:

Most of the ancient religious site or temple which has ancient religious site within the temple are under the responsibility of Fine Arts Department to jointly look after the sites together with the community around the sites. The communities are inclusive of villages, youth and Local Administration Organization officers. All responsible persons should propose their recommendations and come up with the policy to be follow by a group of appointed committee to manage.

The appropriated segregation of duties to abbots to look after and to lay down principles in the scope of their responsibility together with Fine Arts Department officers who have direct responsibility of the ancient sites jointly with communities to set up policies for the ancient religious site management.

The understanding among all parties who are working together about the process and scope of responsibility is necessary for the better segregation of duties. Research Discussion From the research topic on “Ancient Religious Sites Management for Cultural Tourism in Northeast Regions of Thailand” the research discussion is as follows:

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## Research Body of Knowledge

The researcher can conclude the results of focus group discussion concerning results of Ancient Religious Sites Management for Cultural Tourism in Northeast Regions of Thailand shown in the Figure 1 as follow

Figure Ancient Religious Sites Management Model

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To understand the problems and collaborate hand-in-hand with Fine Arts Department officers to improve the sites in the same direction under the support of Local Administration Organization who is responsible in such local area about what to do and don't as a preventive pattern so there will be no problem afterward.

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From the model, each unit has the responsibility and relationship to each other in term of managing and looking after the ancient religious sites.

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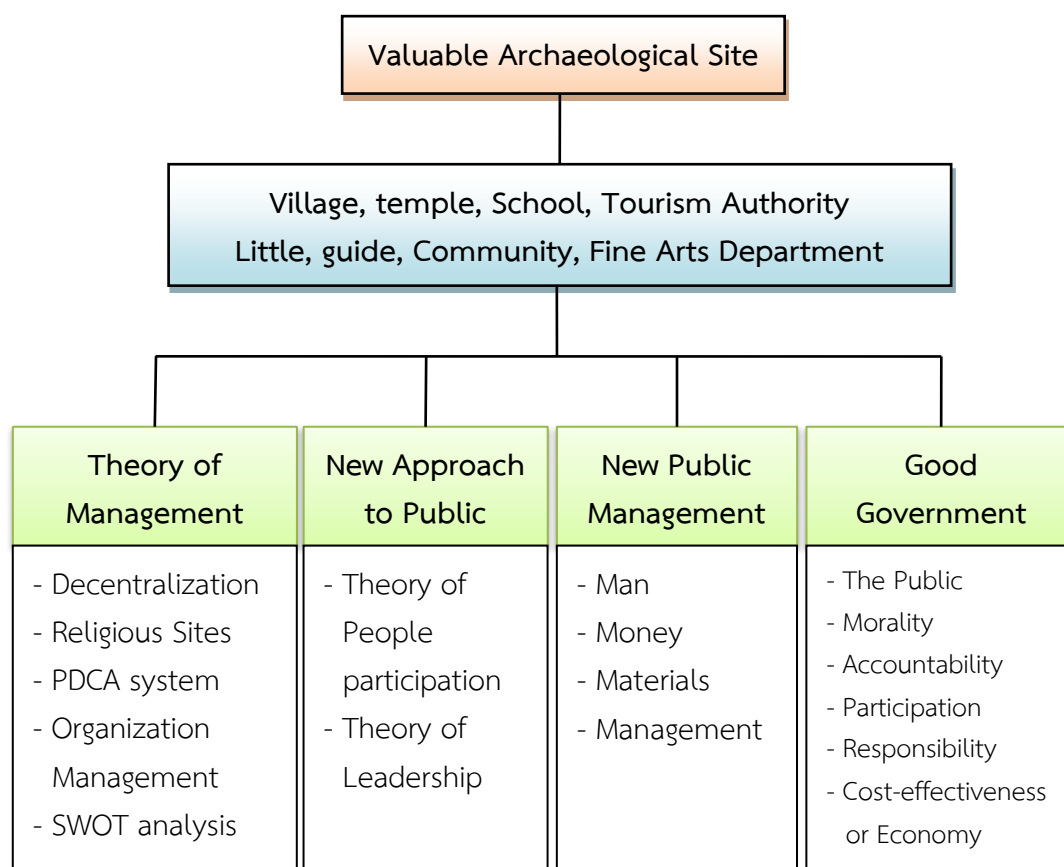


Figure 1 Ancient Religious Sites Management Model

### Research Suggestion

The management process of the Ancient Religious Sites for Cultural Tourism in Northeast Regions of Thailand is as follows

#### 1. Suggestions in practice

1.1 Able to apply knowledge in this research to be used in temples with historic sites for greater administrative efficiency.

1.2 Can apply the knowledge gained in seeking cooperation from various organizations. In order to develop the temple to be a sustainable tourist destination.

1.3 Able to apply knowledge in designing international temple guidebooks that are beneficial to tourists of all nations and languages.

#### 2. Suggestions for research

2.1 Researcher can conduct research on "Development of a tour guide in temples with historic sites for conservation"

2.2 Researcher can conduct research on "The application of the 4 M management theory to develop the abbot's management system in temples with historic sites"



2.3 The researcher can use the knowledge to further research on "Management of temples that have historic sites as an ecotourism tourist attraction according to Buddhist principles"

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