

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is composed of four parts along with the summary: (1) a summary of the study, (2) a summary of the findings, (3) discussions of the findings, (4) conclusions, and (5) recommendations for further study.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The main purposes of this research were to identify the factors which attracted foreigners to join an English-spoken meditation retreat at The Middle Way, to measure their satisfaction in the aspect of the place, the course, and the instructors and staff members.

The study was conducted by distributing self-administered questionnaires to 50 foreigners who were joining a meditation retreat at Suan Pa Himmawan, Loey province. Closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, and a Likert Scale were used in the questionnaire, divided into four parts: personal information, influencing factors, overall satisfaction, and suggestions. The respondents were given the questionnaires after the course ended. The completed questionnaires were collected right after the respondents finished. The questionnaires were distributed in monthly classes during December - February until the number in the sample reached 50. All data received was analyzed by using the SPSS program.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The result of the research findings can be summarized as follows:

5.2.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

This part of the research question aimed to get an overview of who these people are that joined The Middle Way. The results showed that the majority of subjects (60%) were female. More than half of respondents (58%) were over 45 years

old. Many respondents were married (38%), had a bachelor's degree (44%) and worked as company employees (28%). Regarding their income, many of them (42%) earned more than US\$ 40,000 annually. Half of the group resided in Asian country such as Singapore, Hong Kong, or Nepal. Most respondents (90%) joined The Middle Way for the first time, yet many of them had a meditation background. And they found about The Middle Way mostly by word of mouth (56%) and/or website or search engine (34%).

5.2.2 The Factors Influencing the Foreigner's Decision to Join The Middle Way

The second part of this research question sought to determine the perceived importance that foreigners placed on various factors concerning why they join The Middle Way. The result shows that the atmosphere of the site is the most important factor, followed by the meditation technique and the instructor's credibility.

5.2.3 Satisfaction with The Middle Way Meditation Retreat

Most subjects were satisfied with the physical atmosphere of Suan Pa Himmawan where the retreat was organized. They felt the place was pleasant, clean, and safe from danger. When asked about the course, most subjects strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the meditation technique which they felt did not oppose their personal belief. The respondents also agreed that the class duration, the class size, and the admission fee was appropriate. Besides the satisfaction with the place and the course, the result also showed that most respondents were extremely satisfied with the instructors and the staff members for their hospitality, supportiveness, and the expertise in meditation.

5.3 DISCUSSION

This section concerns how the findings of the study match the theories and the earlier research. The discussions are as follows:

The results of the study showed that there were foreigners from around the world joined The Middle Way. This result could support the fact that more and more

people are concerned about the quality of mind, and they try to seek ways to inner peace. Meditation is no longer limited only for the mentor, guru, or the monks. Instead, it is a simple practice that can benefit people of all ages, races, and beliefs.

One interesting point is the concept of 'Pyramid of Requirements' or 'Hierarchy of Needs'. According to Maslow's study (cited in Kressler, 2003), the higher level needs will be addressed only if all the needs that are lower down are mainly or entirely satisfied. The research findings showed that 58% of the respondents were over 45 years old, 78% of them held bachelor degree or higher, and 42% of the respondents had annual income of more than US\$ 40,000. These respondents could be considered as successful persons. This fact showed that the majority of the respondents tend to be satisfied with their physiological needs: human's basic needs in order to survive; safety needs: the needs for physical safety and security, social needs: the needs for social acceptance and affection, and esteem needs: the needs to be respected. And they joined the meditation retreat in order to seek for wisdom, which is the highest level of the pyramid, the need to make the most of their natural abilities to achieve a sense of ultimate fulfillment - self-actualization.

The results showed that most respondents were satisfied with The Middle Way. However, according to the Model of Customers' Behavior and the Seven Ps marketing concept by Kotler (2004), it is very interesting to discuss the findings towards the Seven Ps concept, since some aspects still need to be improved.

The first P is Product. For The Middle Way's case, the product is the meditation technique. The findings showed that 62% and 54% of the respondents considered the meditation technique and the course reputation were very important factors that influenced their decision to join The Middle Way. The technique should be simple and easy to understand for people from different cultures or background. Moreover, it should be neutral and not oppose the practitioners' religious beliefs.

The second P is Price. According to the findings, 58% of the respondents agreed that the admission fee is reasonable, and 42% agreed. None of the respondents showed

their negative satisfaction about the cost. Therefore, the admission fee charged was not a problem for them.

The third P is Place. The retreat site should be easy to reach. 46% of the respondents stated that accessibility to the site was very important factor that affected their decision. The transportation service provided from Bangkok to the site in Loey province was appreciated. Moreover, the place must be safe from danger.

The fourth P is Promotion. Currently, the promotion of The Middle Way is not sufficient in the media publications. This might be because The Middle Way is a nonprofit organization and has limited potential to promote itself through many media. Therefore, most of the foreigners knew about The Middle Way from word of mouth. However, the website also played an important role for promotion. It is convenient for people to get the information about The Middle Way through this communication channel.

The fifth P is People. This involved the qualifications of the instructors and the staff members. The instructors must be credible and have expertise in meditation. They should have good teaching and communication skills also in order that they could communicate the teachings clearly. The staff members should be considerate, supportive and friendly. They were supposed to have meditation skill as well. Both the instructors and the staff members should have ability to communicate in English effectively. According to the findings, 58% of the respondents considered the credibility of the instructors a very important factor influencing their decision to join The Middle Way. The findings also showed that most respondents strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the instructors and staff members.

The sixth P is Physical evidence. The atmosphere of the site should be pleasant. The surroundings should be serene and peaceful, the meditation hall should be spacious enough and have moderate temperature, the accommodation should be comfortable, and the overall place must be clean. The findings showed that the atmosphere of the site was rated as the most important factor that affecting the foreigners' decision in

joining The Middle Way (score = 4.58) and the respondents felt satisfied with the physical environment at Suan Pa Himmawan.

The last P is Process. In The Middle Way's case, the process could mean the meditation practice and the extra activities during the retreat. Each meditation session should be long enough to calm the mind slowly. Yet it must not be too long for the beginners or they would feel bored or fall asleep. At The Middle Way, relaxing activities such as bubble blowing were also included in the retreat. Most participants felt that these activities really supported their meditation progress.

In addition, according to the findings, the most important factor that affects foreigners' decision in joining the meditation retreat is the atmosphere of the site. This supports the theory of 'Sappāya' that the first factor that can enhance or detain the progress of meditation practice is the dwelling place. In order to attract the foreigners to come to practice meditation at The Middle Way, related aspects of Sappāya (Dwelling place, Occupation or place to go to, Words, Persons, Food, Season or Temperature, and Postures of the body) should certainly be taken into account.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The following conclusions can be drawn from the discussion above. The factors affecting foreigners' decision in joining the meditation course at The Middle Way can be divided into seven aspects as follows:

Product – The meditation technique should be simple, easy to follow, and effective. Moreover, it should not oppose the religious belief of the foreigners.

Price – The costs and fees must be reasonable.

Place – The meditation site should be accessible and safe.

Promotion – The information about the course should be provided in the communication channels that could contact the foreigners effectively.

People – The instructors must have good knowledge in meditation and good communication skills. The staff members should be supportive. Both the instructors and staff members must have practical English skills.

Physical evidence – The atmosphere of the meditation site should be serene, peaceful, comfortable, and clean. Appropriate surroundings could help enhance the progress of meditation practice.

Process – The duration of each meditation session should be appropriate, not too short and not too long. The feedback like meditation progress should be measured. Some relaxing activities that support the progress should be considered in the program.

Although the results of the findings showed that most of the foreigners who joined The Middle Way were satisfied with the overall of the place, the course, and the instructors and staff members, The Middle Way should continue developing and improving, since there were still some weak points that some of the respondents were less satisfied with. The opinions and suggestions from the respondents are very useful. A better improvement can create more satisfaction and positive impression to the foreigners and finally convince them to recommend The Middle Way to other people or even come back to join the retreat again in the future.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for further research.

5.5.1 The major limitation of the study was the generalization of the data collected from only one particular period of time. Moreover, there should be a larger sample size in order to make the study more valid and reliable.

5.5.2 In order to find accurate information, the future research should add the in depth interviews.

5.5.3 Only willing foreigners answered the questionnaire. This created bias of analyzing by either favorable or unfavorable responses, in which case the study might not represent the population in the study area.