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JINNAPAS PATHUMPORN : COMMUNITY BASED HERITAGE TOURISM (CBHT):
A KEY SUCCESS FACTOR OF CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION OR THREAT? A CASE
STUDY OF PHUTHAI VILLAGES IN NORTHEAST THAILAND. THESIS ADVISOR: PROFESSOR
ROSS KING, Ph.D. 225 pp.

The aim of this study was to explore issues of the authentic ethnical identity of the Phuthai people in northeast Thailand and the success of their tourism management by reference to physical evidence, historical documents and comparative study of five Phuthai villages in northeast Thailand and one Phutai village in Savannakhet, Laos. The research results found that the Phuthai is a major ethnic group settled around the Phu Phan mountain range in northeast Thailand. Their cultural heritage has been retained and passed down from time through time, especially in terms of the Phuthai ethnic identity as Animist-Buddhist which had become imbued with the influence of Buddhism religion and Lan Xang culture during the time of their sheltering from Muang Thean or Sip Song Chu Tai in Vietnam to that of Muang Vang Ang Kam in Laos since 1791. Even though they had sheltered from Laos to northeast Siam on many occasions between 1824-1844 as the largest human migration beyond the Mekong river, they could still retain their beliefs, culture and patterns of everyday life as Animist-Buddhist due to the fact that these significant movements were based on their ethnic pride and the prestige of their social status, which became aspects of their interesting cultural heritage for outsiders and inspired many organizations to assist them in developing the community based heritage tourism now found in many villages of four provinces: Kalasin, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan. Their tourism programs and the activities offered to visitors are patterned products such as Palang dinner, cultural shows and home-stay accommodation. Moreover, the existing tourism management has brought them socio-cultural impacts such as economic conflict, changes to their culture and lifestyle or diminution in their locality pride. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn from the findings of this dissertation which clearly shows that the current community-based heritage tourism revealed in the case studies indicates essential threats to cultural heritage conservation. However, the best practice for turning the threat back to a key success factor is to be concentrated on real cooperation, participation and integration between the local people and their supporters for preparing a contextualized and customized cultural heritage conservation and tourism development plan particular for each specific place and engaging the local communities to participate in each development process, starting from the knowledge-providing step, the planning, decision making, implementing, the gaining of economic advantage and well-being, and then, finally, evaluating the outcomes.

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Student's signature
Thesis Advisor's signature

Graduate School, Silpakorn University
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