

Making English Handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings for Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism in the Community

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Abstract

This article was a part of the research entitled, "Making English Explanation Handbooks on Mural Paintings for Tourism Communication: A Case Study at Temples in Songkhanong Sub-district, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province." The purposes of this paper were to review the Buddhist messages that contained in the English handbook of Wat Paket and to present the advantages that the said handbook given to the community in general. The population used in the study was the Buddhist stories depicted on the wall within the old Uposatha hall of the said temple. The abbot and monks in the temple as well as learned people in the community as the informants were interviewed to relate the importance of the said mural paintings. And, later they also joined with the group of trial users of English explanation handbook model, i.e., the teachers in the schools nearby, local tour guides and foreign tourists. The research instruments consisted of observation form, photography, structured interview form, and focus group discussion. All of the qualitative data collected was analysed through content analysis.

The research findings were that the English handbook, which had been made for emphasizing the significance of mural paintings relating to the Buddhist stories depicted within the old Uposatha hall of Wat Paket was very useful for the sustainable cultural heritage tourism of the community in the research area. The meanings and importance of local heritage that contained in the handbook was revealed to the people in the community. The handbook, which had been developed, could be easily used by the relevant sectors in the community as a tool to communicate with the visitors from around the world. Moreover, the knowledge on Buddhist stories that contained in the handbook helped inspire the local people in conserving their own cultural heritage of the community.

Keywords: English handbook, Buddhist stories, mural paintings, cultural heritage

1. Introduction

Wat Paket is the Buddhist temple located in the old community of Khung Bangkachao in Samutprakan province nearby Bangkok, which had received its own cultural heritage from the old generations since Ayutthaya period (Caichompoo. 2009). Like the other temple in this area, Wat Paket has served as the centre of the community for centuries. All kinds of the community's activities, ceremonies, way of life, belief, culture, custom, and local wisdom can be seen involving with this temple. The outstanding cultural heritage of this temple that remains to be seen today is the mural paintings installed within the old Uposatha hall. The paintings still show their antiqueness, beauty of the old style and extremely worth studying. They are not only beautiful and valuable in themselves; but also attract all visitors who daily come into

this place. This makes this small local temple become one of the significant tourist attractions of the area.

Nowadays, every day these paintings have chances to welcome both the Thais and foreigners, who love visiting the cultural arts, local wisdom, or learning the Thai way of life. But, the problem is that the temple or the concerned sectors in the community have not much enough information or even details about the significance of the paintings in hands to pass to the guests, who are visiting the place. Thus, the cultural knowledge concerning the mural paintings and Buddhist messages depicted on the wall have not much been communicated to the visitors. Of course, this will leave in the visitors an unfavourable impression about the place. Therefore, the people in this community must realize the significance of their own cultural asset and be equipped with the comprehensive knowledge on the Buddhist stories related on the wall of the temple, before communicating with the people around the world.

For the sustainable tourism management of the attractions, The Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2013: Online) suggests all information about the existing attractions should be systematically prepared for tourists, who are interested to learn, understand and impress on the particular attraction. This is one of the principles for sustainable tourism management. Thus, it will be useful and easy for the people to communicate with the visitors if well-prepared information dealing with the paintings available in this community. This way will help support and promote the cultural heritage of the community to be known among the visitors around the world, as well. Especially, at present cultural tourism in Thailand has been received a lot of critical attention from foreign tourists around the world (Limsaengsuwan. 2012: Online). All of these visitors love visiting the cultural arts, local wisdom, and learning the Thai way of life.

As has been known, English, the dominant global language, is considered to be the most appropriate tool to be used in information management because the world population who uses English as a first and second language altogether has reached approximately more than one billion. Moreover, it cannot be denied that most of the existing and current technologies and sources of information in the world today are available in English. And, within 2015 the number of English users will be increasing to two billion people (Graddol. 2013) because the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has aimed to completely integrate into ASEAN Community. English has become increasingly important and necessary as it has been recognized as the working language of ASEAN as stipulated under the article no. 34 of the ASEAN Charter that "The working language of ASEAN shall be English" (The ASEAN Charter. 2013). That means Thai people have more chances to meet new friends from around the world at home and inevitably communicate with them in English. Therefore, the Buddhist message and significance of the mural paintings should be described and available in the global language like English. Such well-prepared information dealing with the paintings will be useful and easy for the people in the community in general to study and realize the significance of their own cultural heritage. Moreover, they can have a better tool for communication before exchanging clearly and carefully the cultural message to the visitors around the world.

There are a number of studies on the mural paintings in temples and making tourism guide books that have been conducted by some researchers, for instance, Sriwattasarn's Mural Paintings Depict The Royal Twelve-Months Ceremonies at Wat Ratchapradit Bangkok (2003), Buddasarn's The Analytical Study of the Buddhist

Philosophy and Buddhist Art from the Mural Paintings of the Pali Jataka at Wat Kruewanvaravihara (2003), Nuichim's The Development of Historical and Natural Interpretation Guide Book for Ecotourism in Phu Hin Rongkla National Park (1999), Chomchuen's Developing English Booklet for Traffic Police in Bangkok (2011), Caichompoo's Community Participatory Procedure for Tourist Guide Book: Bangkachao Area, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province (2012), Rochrungsat's The Development of Tour Guide's Guidebook for Historical Tourist Attraction: A Case Study of Phra Nakorn Kiri Historical Park, Phetchaburi Province (2013), etc. It is clearly evident that the research focusing on the mural paintings containing the Buddhist stories and making English handbook for cultural tourism in Wat Paket, the temple in Khung Bangkachao area of Samutprakan Province, has not been conducted before. The researcher is, therefore, interested in doing the research entitled, "Making English Explanation Handbook on Mural Paintings for Tourism Communication: A Case Study at temples in Songkhanong Sub-district, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province." And this paper entitled, "Making English Handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings for Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism in the Local Community," intends to review the Buddhist messages that contained in the English handbook of Wat Paket and to present the advantages that the said handbook given to the community in general.

2. Research Methodology

The article aimed to review the Buddhist messages that contained in the English handbook of Wat Paket and to present the advantages that the said handbook given to the community in general. The research was conducted at Wat Paket, the temple located in Khung Bangkachao area of Samutprakan Province, Thailand. The population used in the study was the Buddhist stories depicted on the wall within the old Uposatha hall of Wat Paket, namely the six main excerpts from the stories of ten Jatakas (the ten previous births of the Buddha; defeating Mara and his army (a significant episode before the Buddha's enlightenment); assembly of gods (an episode after the Buddha's defeating Mara); assembly of ascetics, demi-gods, and animals (the rejoice at the news of the Buddha's defeating Mara); Tribhumi (the Buddhist view on the three planes of existence); and the Gate-god protectors (pictures of gods painted on the wall of doors and windows).

There were sixteen informants in total in this research. Seven informants were interviewed as well as joined in a focus group discussion, i.e., the abbot and monks in the temples and local learned people in the community who could illustrate the importance of the mural paintings in the research area. And, another nine informants joined in a focus group discussion when it was conducted for the trial use of the English handbook on Wat Paket's mural paintings, i.e., the teachers in the schools nearby, local tour guides and tourists visiting the mural paintings.

The research instruments consisted of observation form, photography, structured interview form, and focus group discussion. All the qualitative data collected was analysed through content analysis. The research process, which has been mentioned in the article, "Making English Explanation Handbook on Mural Paintings for Tourism Communication: A Case Study at temples in Songkhanong Sub-district, Phrapradaeng District, Samutprakan Province (Napatalung: Online)," was also mentioned here as follows:

1. The researches and documents dealing with the mural paintings in the Uposatha halls and the history of the temple were studied in order to make the English explanation handbook of the mural paintings.

2. A survey to the temple was conducted to acquire the data related to the mural paintings by using the observation form and photography, and using structured interview form with the abbot, monks and local learned people who could relate the stories of the paintings to the history of the old Uposatha hall and the temples in the research area.

3. The data collected from the relevant documents, the observation form, the photographs of the paintings, and the structured interviews with the abbot, monks and local learned people was studied and concluded.

4. The acquired data was analysed to make an arrangement of the pictures of the paintings and to compose the correct and appropriate descriptive words for the narratives of Buddhist stories based on the order and sequence of the pictures as appeared on the wall of the temple.

5. Different kinds of guide books, researches as well as academic documents on how to make a handbook for tourism were investigated in order to be supportive information for making appropriate descriptive handbook model of the murals.

6. The descriptive handbook model on Wat Paket's mural paintings relating to the Buddhist stories had been prepared in both English and Thai.

7. The accurate information and contents of the descriptive handbook model had been checked by the experts on the three aspects, i.e., Thai mural paintings, Buddhist literature, and English language.

8. A trial use of the English-Thai descriptive handbook model was conducted with the abbot and monks in the temples, teachers in the schools nearby, local learned people, local tour guides as well as tourists visiting the temple.

9. Upon a trial use of the said handbook model, a focus group discussion was arranged with the users in order to acquire data on the results of the trial use and suggestions for further improvement.

10. The obtained data from the discussion had been used to adjust the illustrations, descriptions as well as designs for making the complete version of the English explanation handbook.

3. Research Results

The results were presented according to the article objectives as follows:

3.1 The Buddhist messages contained in the English handbook of Wat Paket

3.1.1 Tribhumi, the Buddhist view on the three planes of existence was illustrated on the wall behind the principal Buddha image within the old Uposatha hall of Wat Paket. The stories were from two different period-books, i. e., 'Traiphum Phraruang' and 'Tribhumilokavinichaya-katha' from Sukhothai period and Rattanakosin period, respectively (Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto). 2013: 3). The paintings showed the pictures about the three spheres (three levels of existence) like a sense sphere (Kamabhumi), form-sphere (Rupabhumi), formless sphere (Arupabhumi), based on the stories from Buddhist literature mentioned above. The following pictures were described on the wall, namely hells, hungry ghosts, demons, creatures in the Himavanta forest, fabulous plants, human beings, demigods, gods, the sun, the moon, thunder god, lightning goddess, orbits of the earth and the sun, oceans, mountains, soaring castles of gods and Brahmas. Besides, some castles described as the living of Brahmas. The

picture, illustrated below, showed the Buddhist view on the three planes of existence called Tribhumi as mentioned and described in English Explanation Handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings:

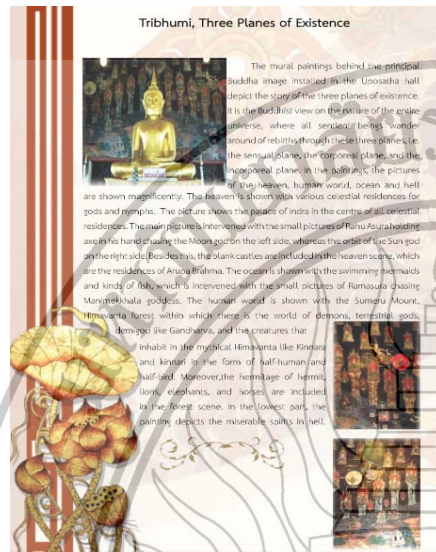


Figure 1. Tribhumi

3.1.2 The Buddha defeating Mara and his army was described at the wall space in front of the principal Buddha image inside this Uposatha hall. The Mara fearfully appeared together with his army and shouted driving the Bodhisatta (the would-be Buddha) out of his seat. The Mother Earth rose from the ground squeezing her bun to create the flood destroying Mara and his army. The whole picture described the stories in clockwise order starting at the middle point where the Buddha was described sitting meditation. The picture illustrated below was the Buddha defeating Mara and his army as mentioned and described in the English Explanation Handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings:

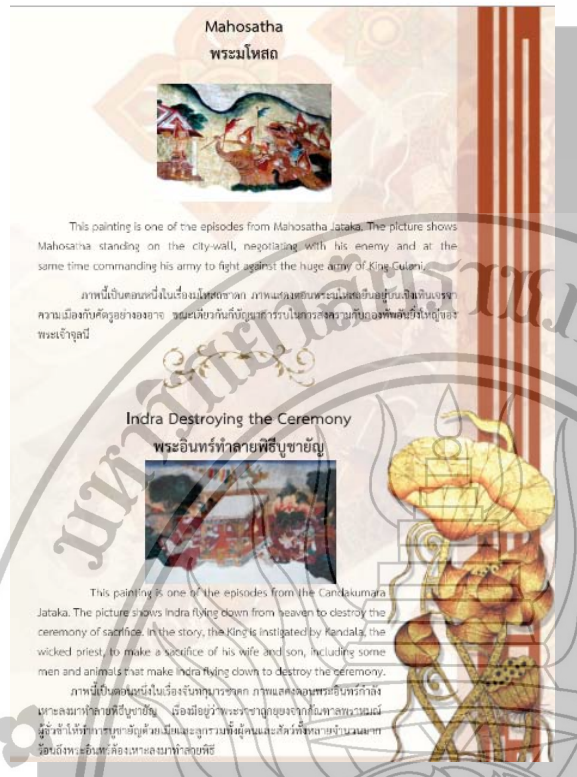


Figure 3. Mahosatha Jataka and Candakumara Jataka

3.1.4 The Assembly of gods was described at the wall-space above the windows, which had a wide and long area based on the length of the hall. Both sides of the wall-space divided the gods into three layers. Each layer contained twelve gods. There were thirty-six ones in three layers of one side, and seventy-two ones in total of both sides. According to the Buddhist literature, these gods came from ten thousand universes for meeting in rejoice at the Bodhisatta's subduing Mara (Leksukhum. 2005: 85). All of the gods turns their faces to the same direction as if they are looking at the principal Buddha image's face in the hall. The picture, illustrated below, was the paintings called the Assembly of gods as mentioned and described in English Explanation Handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings:

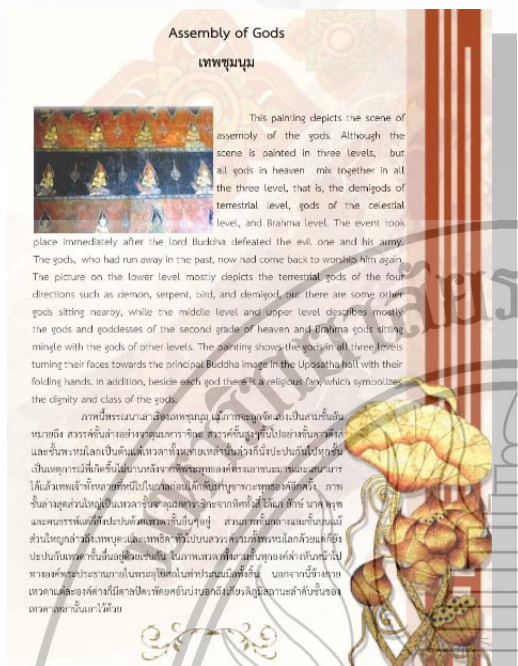


Figure. Assembly of Gods

3.1.5 The assembly of ascetics with some handful lotuses and flowers were described at the wall space attached to the ceiling of the hall. In the picture, many ascetics appeared in particular dressings, holding lotuses and flowers, but not facing to the same direction with the gods described at the below level. According to the Buddhist literature, these ascetics in the forests were pleased with the news of the Bodhisatta's subduing Mara, and wish to see the perfections of the lord (Somdetkrommaphraparamanuchitchinorot. 1993: 205). They, then, gather on this occasion. All of the ascetics illustrated in the figure below were the examples of ascetics as mentioned and described in the English Explanation Handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings:



Figure 5. Assembly of Ascetics

3.1.6 The gate protectors were described at each panel of doors and windows inside the Uposatha hall. They all appeared as the standing gods. Their bodies were green and white, and their heads were with halo. While the gods on the door-panels were holding two-edged swords and bows in hands, but on the window-panels had only the unarmed gods standing. Here were the gate-god protectors as mentioned and described in the English Explanation Handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings:



Figure 6. The Gate Protectors

3.2 The advantages of the English handbook of Wat Paket given to the community

Making English explanation handbook on the mural paintings of Wat Paket could bring knowledge and understanding of the mural paintings, which were considered as local wisdom, to the community. The paintings on the wall reflected ideas, beliefs, faiths and values of people in the community towards Buddhism, and that indirectly stimulated the Buddhists' moral awareness in the area for more than a hundred of years. Besides, the English handbook on the mural paintings would bring great benefits to the community and tourism in the area. In addition, making English explanation handbook on the mural paintings of Wat Paket could help build awareness about the significance of the paintings again to the people in the community and help conserve the significant cultural heritage of the community as well. The picture, illustrated below, showed the English explanation handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings.



Figure 7. Book Cover: *The English Explanation Handbook on Wat Paket's Mural Paintings*

4. Discussion

The following points based on the research results were discussed:

4.1 The stories as appeared on the wall inside the old Uposatha hall of Wat Paket consisted of the six main excerpts from the following stories: the ten Jatakas, Buddha defeating Mara and his army, assembly of gods, assembly of ascetics, Tribhumi, and the gate protectors. These stories were created not only to beautify the Uposatha hall as dedicating to the Buddha, but also to serve as literatures which reflected the philosophy of the teachings in Buddhism by converting the abstract teachings to concrete teachings and indirectly stimulating moral awareness for the general Buddhists. This has

eventually become the local cultural heritage. It can be said that the paintings reflected ideas, beliefs, faiths and values of people in the community towards Buddhism which are in compliance with Bandit Inkong's concept (2006: 64) that the purpose of the creation of the mural paintings is to motivate people to have faith in Buddhism. Above all, the stories of the life of the Buddha and the Jataka stories containing the moral teachings were meaningful towards the way of life of local people in the community. The moral teachings contained in the paintings were meaningful and that, as in compliance with Caichompoo (2012), had shaped the ways of life of people in the community for a long time.

4.2 Making English explanation on the mural paintings relating to Buddhist stories of Wat Paket can bring knowledge and understanding of the mural paintings which is considered as the cultural heritage of the community. It also builds awareness to conserve local wisdom which passed from the ancestors of the people in the community (Caichompoo, 2009). In addition, English handbook that had been made, are certainly useful for the people in the community to use as a tool for communication to the visitors from around the world, because now English has been used as a global language which is in compliance with Graddol (2013) that English has been extremely influencing today's world, so cross-culture has been communicated and exchanged. Therefore, the English explanation handbook on mural paintings of Wat Paket would be highly required for communication to exchange their culture with the people around the world.

5. Conclusion

The mural paintings installed within the old Uposatha hall of Wat Paket were as the remaining cultural heritage of the old community nearby Bangkok. The English handbook on Wat Paket's mural paintings relating to Buddhist stories, which has been made for the local people, were very useful for the community and tourism in the area. While the local people could acquire more knowledge on their own cultural heritage, the foreign visitors could acquire more knowledge on the particular attraction from the handbook, as well. Moreover, this handbook would not only help support and promote the cultural heritage of the community to be known among the visitors around the world, but also help the local people find inspiration in conserving their own cultural heritage.

6. Recommendations

The followings are some recommendations:

1. For implications: the concerned sectors in the community should publish and distribute this English handbook to the temples, schools and tour agents in the community in order to help promote tourism activities in the area. The relevant people should be trained concerning the usage of the English handbook to bring benefits to the community in general. These activities will enhance learning and understanding values of cultural heritage as well as local wisdom in the community.

2. For further studies, the research on the cultural heritage of the community should be more conducted in other temples as well in order to increase the areas of learning and the community's awareness in cultural heritage conservation.

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