



## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CULTURAL TOURIST ATTRACTION: A CASE OF AYOTHAYA FLOATING MARKET IN AYUTTHAYA PROVINCE, THAILAND

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### Abstract

This paper aimed at scrutinizing how Ayothaya floating market was established as a cultural tourist attraction by adopting a concept of intangible heritage and its presentation. Consequently, this paper posited that Ayothaya Floating Marketing has high competitive advantages over many floating markets from various dimensions including its name, location, buildings and decorations and presentations. The market is located within the proximity of World Heritage Site of Ayutthaya Historical Park. In addition, material physicality as well as atmosphere has been designed to be as similar to what were mentioned in the written historical evidence. Moreover, the major purpose of the market establishment coherently indicated in line with Tourism Authority of Thailand's campaign was to conserve and present "Thainess". This increased the drawing ability to attract a number of both domestic and international tourists whose desires were to fulfill the nostalgic feelings and to experience "Thainess" as part of their visits at World Heritage Site. Taking Tourism Life Cycle into consideration in order to foresee the sustainability of the market, it is found that it reached the development stage by observing an increase number of tourists, fee collection for non-Thai individuals, signs and symbols in various languages as well as the involvement of tourism stake holders including local inhabitants, business entrepreneurs, local government and tourists.

**Keyword:** Ayothaya floating market, cultural tourism, intangible heritage, tourism life cycle, Thainess

## 1. Introduction

Not only are tangible heritage places such as historic buildings, temples or palaces developed to be tourist attractions, but intangible heritage also plays a vital role in drawing tourist attention to the destination. MaKercher (2002:84) stated that “intangible heritage raises a number of interesting issues for the tourism sector /.../ it is manifested through live performances, festivals, events, storytellers, and local markets”. This reflects the importance of tangible and intangible heritage with regard to its value and benefits to the tourism industry. Furthermore, the tourism campaign ‘Discover Thainess’ launched in 2015 by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has motivated many business entrepreneurs to revive and make the so-called ‘Thainess’ visible in various material forms in relation to selected interpretations from different perspectives . By following the concept of intangible cultural heritage and the promotion of “Thainess”, many attractions have either been established or renovated to represent national, local or ethnic identity. The floating market represents ‘Thainess’ and is becoming popular at both the domestic and international level. This paper purposefully chose the Ayothaya Floating Market to be a case study of a man-made intangible cultural heritage attraction to serve two main objectives. Firstly, to understand how the market is presented in terms of its cultural value and interpretation, and also to assess its impacts on ‘Thainess’. The second purpose of this paper is to briefly evaluate the position of the market by adopting Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle (2006) as to indicate the sustainability of the market and perhaps to be a lesson for future man-made cultural tourist attractions.

## 2. Ayothaya Floating Market: Its Cultural Significance, Interpretations and Impacts

Established on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 in Pai-Ling district near Chang Temple and Maheyong Temple, Ayothaya Floating Market received attention from both domestic and international tourists, particularly Asian tourists. This floating market is a *built market* on an area of 60 Rai (96,000 square meters). It is located in the old capital city of Thailand with the objective “to preserve the local way of life, arts and culture for the next generation”<sup>1</sup>. Hit by severe flooding in 2011, the market was temporarily unavailable for about two months and reopened on 25 December 2011 after the flood had subsided.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.paiduaykan.com/76\\_province/central/ayutthaya/ayothayamarket.html](http://www.paiduaykan.com/76_province/central/ayutthaya/ayothayamarket.html) retrieved on June 5, 2016. This website contains information obtained from the official website <http://www.ayothayafloatingmarket.com> but it is not accessible.

Floating market, or *Talad Nam* in Thai, refers to a market in/by the river. Ayutthaya is an island surrounded by three main rivers: the Lopburi, Pasak and Chaophraya Rivers. People in the city are connected by water transportation. Moreover, besides being a capital city, Ayutthaya also served as one of the most important entrepots in Southeast Asia until its fall in 1767, which strengthened the relationship between people and the river. However, this connection is less evident today. The floating markets in Thailand utilize their geographical location by a river or canal to provide a sense of authenticity. Mckercher suggested that “the setting of cultural space is important, for intangible heritage is intrinsically linked to a place or context. Removing the heritage asset from its context may affect its authenticity” (Mckercher, 2002: 83).

Ayothaya floating market is situated outside Ayutthaya Island and is far from the three main rivers. It is located in a large artificial pond that was constructed to host the floating market. This helps formulate a realistic element of the market, *Talad Nam* as well as to stimulate visitors’ sense of authenticity (see figure 1).



**Figure 1** Ayothaya Floating Market

Conceptually, Ayothaya floating market is purposefully presented as a built cultural tourist place in terms of dress, architecture, tradition, folk display and way of life (Paiduykan, 2016). This theme reflects the marketing strategy of this place as well as the way elements and structures are coherently established within the market. Vendors in the market dress in traditional costumes, shops were built in a Thai style with rooftops similar to a picture drawn by a Western diplomat who visited Ayutthaya during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (see figure 2 and 3), a performance about Ayutthaya’s history, particularly during the reign of King Naresuan, is intentionally selected and scheduled (see figure 4), and traditional products are sold in an attempt to replicate Ayutthaya’s way of life. These are ways to pass on and

convey knowledge to the next generation about history, material and non-fabric culture or arts of Ayutthaya kingdom. It also means this market also helps to “provide personal experience, not only of that which has survived from the past, but of the contemporary life and society of others” (ICOMOS, 1999). It is as well a place for “articulating national pride or group identity” (McKercher, 2002: 77). It is best to summarize the cultural significance by referring to Principle 2.4 of International Cultural Tourism Charter (1999):

“The retention of the authenticity of heritage places and collections is important. It is an essential element of their cultural significance, as expressed in the physical material, collected memory and intangible traditions that remain from the past. Programmes should present and interpret the authenticity of places and cultural experiences to enhance the appreciation and understanding of that cultural heritage”



Figure 2 House in Ayutthaya kingdom

Source: <http://camillesourget.com/en/rare-books-loubere-thailand/>. Simon de La Loubère.



Figure 3 A building in Ayothaya floating market



Figure 4 A performance about King Naresuan who fought for Ayutthaya's independence

### 3. Ayothaya Floating Market: Current Status and Condition

Many websites explain that the market consists of 16 zones and each zone is named after each district in Ayutthaya province. The market comprises 249 shops including 50 boat-shops, 40 traditional folk shops and 159 other shops. It operates daily from 10.00 – 20.00 hours. No entrance fee is collected for Thai nationals but 200 Baht is charged for non-Thai tourists.

Zoning in the market is arranged as follows;



Figure 5 Ayothaya floating market map

- A-O, T : Markets that are differently named by each district of Ayutthaya province
- R : Performance Hall
- S : Arts Exhibition Hall

The zoning offers activities for tourists. These include sightseeing at the structures and buildings, shopping for traditional and OTOP products, and other products and services including food, massage, boat tours, elephant rides, and watching performances. All activities are arranged in accordance with the concept of establishing the market as stated in the previous part (see figure 6).

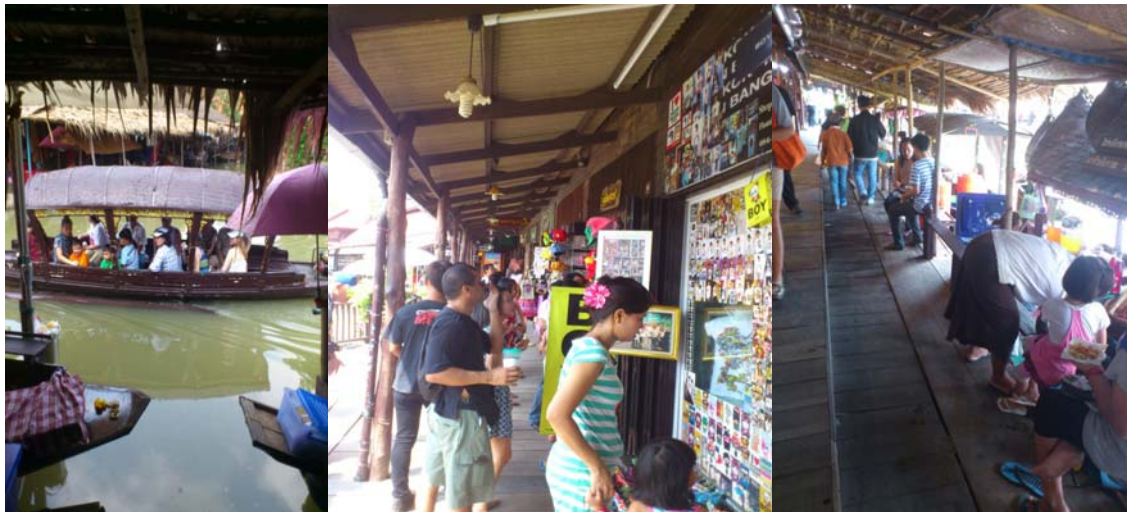


Figure 6 Activities in the market

It is also shown in the map that there is a large car park for personal vehicles in front of the entrance to the market (8,000 square meters) and for tourist coaches on the left side of the market (see figure 7). Both car parks have space for a maximum of 500 personal vehicles and 50 coaches. Both car park services are free of charge. From this information, it is possible to estimate the carry capacity of 4,000 tourists a day (one personal car has on average 4 persons and one tourist coach has 40 persons). Moreover, there are many private parking areas organized by local inhabitants nearby. The fee is reasonable (30 Baht per car with no limitation of parking hours). However, the number of tourists might not reach that figure on weekdays. In contrast, the number of tourists is large at weekends and holidays.



Figure 7 A car park at the floating market



From personal observations, weekends and holidays are regarded as the peak periods for this market. The reasons that might influence this trend are as follows. Firstly the length of leisure time (a personal factor) for tourists to visit a destination is significant. If the leisure time is long, the destination chosen might be further from their residence and vice versa. Ayothaya floating market is not far from Bangkok metropolitan area, and it can be accessed conveniently within 1 hour. Secondly, this floating market is the largest market in Ayutthaya province where people in all ages can learn and experience the traditional way of life of people in the Ayutthaya kingdom. Therefore, it might fulfill educational and nostalgic purposes for tourists (Swarbrooke, 1999). Lastly, the amount of time spent at the market is generally no longer than two hours. Most tourists might choose Ayothaya floating market as a stopover after touring the World Heritage sites and spend their leisure time doing various activities including food, shopping and walking along the route (see figure 4). Tourists come and go throughout the day except at lunch time when all of the food shops are full. These activities raise questions as to how much they learn and experience the cultural heritage of Ayutthaya kingdom and whether this market really presents the cultural heritage of Ayutthaya. These questions will be discussed in the later part of the paper.

Looking at the demographics of tourists, most are locals and Asian tourists from China. Most Thai tourists come to the market with their family and sometimes with their extended family. They come by personal vehicle. Teenagers were also observed on the observation days. Popular activities include photography and food. It seems they paid attention to the scenery and atmosphere of the place rather than the character of the buildings, the outfits of vendors or the traditional products of Ayutthaya. International tourists usually come on large private guided tours.

Mckercher's types of cultural tourists include the purposeful cultural tourist, the sightseeing cultural tourist, the serendipitous tourist, the casual cultural tourist and the incidental cultural tourist, but the number of each type varies depending on the destination's reputation (Mckercher, 2002: 144-147). By taking Mckercher's analysis into consideration, tourists at Ayothaya floating market are comprised mostly of purposeful cultural tourists because they came here as part of their World Heritage tour. Sight-seeing cultural tourists, who only visited to shop and eat, were also evident, and there were some incidental cultural tourists who watched cultural shows and experienced the way of life presented through many activities in the market by the river.

#### 4. The Local, Regional and National Economic Value of the Place

It should be noted that a well-managed cultural attraction does not provide benefits only to the owner, but should distribute revenue to locals at a regional and national level. It should encourage involvement from relevant persons including communities and indigenous people (ICOMOS, 1999).

At the local level, from a talk with vendors in the market it was found that this market is privately-owned, and that locals who wish to do business need to pay a monthly rent. The rental price varies depending on which location and what type of product is sold. For example, it is 7,000 baht per month to sell palm sugar drink in a boat. The merchant prepares only drinks and containers, but the boat and costume are arranged by Ayothaya floating market. The seller added that she has been there since the flood subsided and would stay longer (a talk on 9 July 2016). It probably indicates the income she earns per month must be higher than the rental fee. In addition, locals are hired to work in the market in many positions such as mahouts, boat drivers, cleaners and so on. This could help improve their quality of life and stop them from migrating to the capital city for a job.

In terms of regional economic value, as this market attracts many tourists, it is essential for provincial officers to improve the infrastructure, such as roads, electricity supply and running water. This facilitates tourist visits to the market and other attractions in Ayutthaya province. It can build up links between the attractions and also promote cultural heritage on a wider level.

In terms of the national economy, government receives income and revenue indirectly through taxes and other fees from the tourists and cultural attraction owners. It ensures that government will return income to the locality and region through financial subsidies provided by provincial and municipality offices. Provincial and municipality officers will use the funds to improve the quality of life for locals with spending on schools, hospitals and safety and more importantly, to prevent flooding at other attractions in Ayutthaya.

#### 5. Impacts on 'Thainess'

As stated earlier, intangible cultural heritage should be treated carefully when it becomes a tourism product. It means intangible cultural heritage is transformed into a consumable product (Mckercher, 2002: 76). Mckercher also pointed out that tourists may





want an authentic experience but may not want to be confronted by reality (Mckercher, 2002: 76). In addition, it should be preserved and sustained to enable tourists to enjoy the place in an appropriate manner (ICOMOS, 1999).

There are some examples of inappropriate ways to present cultural heritage as tourism attractions such as in case of Luang Prabang (UNESCO, 2004) and Hoi An (UNESCO, 2008). Those two cases are appropriate to compare with Ayothaya floating market in terms of the impacts on cultural heritage. The problems have been identified as 1) operating time 2) architectural patterns and activities presented through buildings, costumes, food and performance.

Firstly, the operating time of this market is from 10.00-20.00 hours daily. This could reduce the charm of the market because there is no specific time to visit, which decreases the significance of the way of life. Floating markets are historically unique, particularly in the case of the Ayutthaya kingdom. Floating markets are filled with domestic and international products according to the historical evidence. In addition, the floating market is also a place where people from different areas meet each other, both seasonally and occasionally. The result of this problem is similar to Luang Prabang's problem.

“by scheduling these events at inappropriate times or outside of their relationship to various religious activities or community functions...these festivals could then become irrelevant in the lives of the local community and are therefore no longer practiced. In this way, the community could lose part of their unique and valuable heritage” (UNESCO, 2004: 55).

Secondly, architectural patterns and activities presented through buildings, costumes, food and performance influence tourist perceptions. A floating market could be a place that restores the life of locals in former times but should be built in accordance with historical facts. It sounds easy theoretically but is very difficult in practice. With the purpose of gaining more benefits, floating markets have become a showcase where several unauthentic products are sold and performances that might not represent the culture of people are demonstrated. Therefore, if floating markets are carefully established, they will truly represent the cultural value and will preserve it. If not, they will destroy the value of the culture and area and it will become commercialized. In other words, it is a commodification. International Cultural Tourism Charter also stresses this issue as follows;

"interpretation programmes should present the significance of heritage places, traditions and cultural practices within the past experience and present diversity of the area and the host community, including that of minority cultural or linguistic groups. The visitor should be informed the differing cultural values that may be ascribed to a particular heritage resources"(ICOMOS, 1999).

Furthermore, it will create a stereotypical way of life of Ayuttaya people for tourists. Though some might argue that at least it is a good start to build up national pride and identity, there is a risk of losing authentic practices and heritage value. People will perceive that what is presented in the floating market is what people in Ayutthaya kingdom practiced. This also reflects the distortion of cultural heritage to serve the purpose of business rather than heritage conservation.

The potential problem to tourism that is related to the two aforementioned impacts is the loss of interest in Ayothaya floating market. It is because it cannot preserve and present the “authenticity” of cultural heritage properly. Tourists who seek ‘something different’ will later realize that what they found at Ayothaya floating market, can easily be found at Chatujak weekend market or at another floating market in Thailand (see figure 8). When the number of tourists decreases, it means the income and benefits will be also reduced and it will negatively affect the local economy.



Figure 8 Shops in the market



## 6. Tourism Life Cycle and Ayothaya Floating Market

To examine the sustainability of Ayothaya floating market in this paper is done by analyzing in which the stage of the Tourism Life Cycle Ayouthaya floating market is. It is posited that currently Ayothaya floating marketing is in the development stage. It should be noted that there are several floating markets in many provinces of Thailand, and it seems Thai people, as well as international tourists, have some prior knowledge about this type of cultural attraction. To build a new floating market and to gain attention from tourists is not easily achieved; therefore, Ayothaya floating market, as discussed in the former part, was conceptually constructed and claimed to be the largest floating market in Ayutthaya province with the “authentic” features of buildings, costumes, performances and shops. This concept aims to draw the attention of tourists. Caulton stated that the primary aim of the development process is to provide a physical environment which will encourage visitors to explore, whatever the social and personal context of the visit” (Leask and Yeoman, 1999: 45). Moreover it is suggested that in the development of a customer-focused visitor attraction, target visitors should be identified and consulted at the conceptualization stage to ensure that the attraction is both understandable and enjoyable, and meets educational objectives (Leask and Yeoman, 1999: 45).

Situated close to a World Heritage Site, Ayothaya floating market has possibly gained a reputation as a place to exhibit Ayutthaya’s way of life. The buildings in the market were constructed similar to those in the Ayutthaya kingdom, the vendors dress like those in the past, and shops, besides selling modern products, offer local products to tourists. Tourists can experience water transportation and watch performances about Ayutthaya’s history. These emphasize the attempt to attract tourists in the development stage. Evidently, the number of both domestic and international tourists has tremendously increased. Moreover, it will continue to grow as a result of the government promotion of “Thainess”, and the market provides more signs and suggestions in the Chinese language and other languages all over the area



Figure 9 (left) A no-smoking sign in different languages

Figure 10 (below) A mixed group of tourists at the entrance

## 7. Conclusion

Ayothaya floating market has been presented by utilizing its location, cultural presentation and interpretations. These are essential and successful elements that attract domestic and international tourists. However, the presentation of Ayothaya floating market might also challenge the sense of ‘authenticity’ which the market claims to protect with regard to “Thainess” because the aforementioned elements have been commercialized and commodified for business purposes. Moreover, the number of tourists has significantly increased. This signifies the development stage in the Tourism Life Cycle. As a result, if the management plan does not ensure the sustainable presentation of the intangible cultural heritage, it is likely that the market will not pass to the consolidation state in the near future. In contrast, if the floating market secures its original purpose of establishment, to present the Thai ways of life, in other words to present “Thainess” that have been derived from written historical evidence from Ayutthaya period, the market has high possibility to attain the consolidation stage. However, the compromise between commercialization and presentation of “Thainess” should be taken into account in order to sustain this built cultural tourist attraction.



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