



Frontispiece: A Tourism Transition Model for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Chiang Khan District, Loei Province.

A Tourism Transition Model for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Chiang Khan District, Loei Province

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Abstract

The research was conducted to answer the question: what will become of the Chiang Khan Old Town in the future and what preservation model could be applied to accomplish equilibrium between tourism and cultural heritage preservation? Primary data in the research were from interviewing local residents, tourists, non-participant knowledgeable persons, and the officials of the Chiang Khan Municipality; secondary data were from related official reports. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in analysis.

The ‘cultural heritage phase’ concept was used for forecasting the possible future of the Chiang Khan Old Town. In the future, it is possible that entertainment tourism would replace cultural tourism and outsiders would replace some local residents; and tourism, if profitable, would benefit outside investors rather than local residents. For this reason, a heritage plan for balancing tourism with cultural heritage preservation was proposed in this study. Cultural tourism researchers should be aware that when people are living in the destination, almost all cultural heritage will be commodified for money and then the authenticity of the cultural heritage will disappear or be left in a desperate state. The research found this process has already begun in the case of Chiang Khan.

Keywords: *cultural heritage, cultural tourism, heritage preservation, preservation model, cultural heritage phase model, effect of tourism, Chiang Khan.*

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Introducing the Chiang Khan Old Town

Chiang Khan is a district of Loei Province in the Northeast of Thailand, 587 km. from Bangkok. It is regarded as a land of rich cultural heritage with its kindly and friendly indigenous people living strongly according to Buddhism practice, its old style wooden houses in an old market place, its Lanna-Lan Xang style of Buddhist temples, its natural heritage of the serene Mekong River and the wonderful Phutok hilltop for watching the sun rising through the mists below.

Visitors are warmly welcomed by the hospitality of local residents. Generosity is a famous intangible heritage well known to visitors. In the past locals would commonly ask visitors to have a meal together with them during meal time.

There are also traditional wooden buildings for both living and selling commodities in two long rows along the cultural street. They are sometimes called shophouses and are traditionally found in Southeast Asian countries.



Figure 1: Rows of middle zone shophouses in the cultural zone of Chiang Khan Old Town, quiet during workdays. Source: the author, 29 March 2009.

Some Buddhist temples are notably beautiful such as Wat Sree Koon Muang. Every morning at 6.00 am, both local residents and tourists sit in line to give steamed glutinous rice to monks and novices. This custom has been practised continuously for many years but is rarely seen elsewhere. It is an important part of the significant cultural heritage of the Chiang Khan Old Town. See Figure 2.



Figure 2: *Morning alms giving to monks. Source: the author, January 2010.*

There is also the natural heritage of Chiang Khan, such as the Mekong River and Phutok hilltop which are regarded as tourism resources.



Figure 3: *Mekong River close to Chiang Khan. Source: the author, January 2010*

The Mekong River, Figure 3, is next to the Chiang Khan Old Town flowing between Thailand and Laos. Because of its wide body of water, looking across it may create feelings of serenity, fear, or doubt about lives on the opposite bank. Almost all visitors coming to Chiang Khan go to the riverbank to relax their minds along the river. Eastwards, eight kilometers from the Chiang Khan market, the Mekong River abruptly turns right directly towards the Thai bank and suddenly turns back again. Visitors in the past twenty years went to see attractive small white and brown round rocks lying on the Thai bank. Unfortunately local residents sold the rocks many years ago, but visitors still visit there today to see the large sand flat when water is at low level.

Phutok hilltop, six kilometers east of the Chiang Khan Old Town, is another tourism resource. In winter if the fog is thick, on some early mornings tourists and local residents ride up to this hilltop to see the unusual and beautiful view. Looking down, they see the flat fog spreading like a wide sea covering buildings and trees. Looking eastward, they see the rising sun. See Figure 4.



Figure 4: *Phutok Hilltop at sunrise. Source: the author, January 2010.*

The Chiang Khan Old Town was not well known to tourists until 2009, when a group of young people came to the place and were surprised by the cultural heritage there. They then publicised it on the internet, resulting in many tourists coming to the old town from that time. Word of mouth also persuaded more tourists to visit. The Chiang Khan Old Town subsequently became a cultural heritage tourism site.

The problem

If we regard the cultural, architectural, and natural resources of the Chiang Khan Old Town as valuable heritage, we may be worried about its potential ruin by careless tourism in the future as the number of tourists has been rapidly increasing since 2009. Ways of life are changing. The careers of local residents have changed with the introduction of money from tourists. Traditional shops selling goods and services for the everyday life of local residents such as sugar, candles, electric lamps, tailoring and photography services are becoming rare or disappearing. The daily life of local people is changing from

traditional activities to tourism services. For example, houses for living have become guesthouses and small traditional restaurants have become western-breakfast shops. It may become merely a market place for tourists, not the cultural heritage site and community that we might expect to see. If the objective of site development is mainly for the creation of wealth, then the conservation of natural, cultural and architectural heritage is likely to fail. As can be witnessed in some other heritage places, the desire for money can easily destroy cultural heritage; it is more powerful than the desire for heritage preservation.

Some official organisations are considering cultural and architectural preservation for the Chiang Khan Old Town and held a meeting, 'The Development of Chiang Khan', on 14 January 2010 at the Chiang Khan Municipality Office, to consider its development as a sustainable tourism place (anon., 2010). However, heritage preservation is problematic since the site has already been changed in undesirable directions, with impacts on both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The research questions

The question that the study would seek to address can be posed in two parts:

1. How will the Chiang Khan Old Town fare in the future? Will it be possible to balance tourism with heritage preservation?
2. If maintaining a balance is less than possible (i.e. money is more highly regarded than cultural heritage), what planning model is needed to prevent an entirely undesirable outcome?

This two-part question leads, in turn, to two objectives:

1. To study the trend of heritage-tourism growth in the Chiang Khan Old Town.
2. To set up a model for balanced growth between tourism and heritage preservation – cultural, architectural and natural – in the Chiang Khan Old Town.

Scope of the study

1. The scope of contents was the trend of heritage-tourism growth and measures to preserve cultural, architectural and natural heritage in the Chiang Khan Old Town.
2. The duration of the study was from 2009 to 2012.
3. The site to be studied was the heritage preservation zone, i.e. Chai Khong Street of the Chiang Khan Municipality area.

Research Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in this research. The qualitative approach was that of ethnography (Wilderdorn, n.d.), focusing on social meaning through close field observation of socio-cultural phenomena. For qualitative data collection, the author used the methods of interactive interviewing and direct observation in the community

The qualitative research involved the author intensively observing and informally interviewing stakeholders over a three-year period. In most cases, those who had deep involvement and really knew the story of the site could provide more reliable information and predictions than those who had less direct experiences of the place. Statistical analysis was not appropriate as a tool in this case.

In addition, numerical data were necessary for some aspects of the analysis and then descriptive statistics were required. Descriptive statistics are simple statistics used to show 'how much' things are, such as mean (average), median (centered order number) and mode (highest frequency) and sometimes these are compared. Inferential statistics are another way to test hypotheses but were not necessary in this research.

The study used the cultural tourism phase model and the available data to explain the phenomenon of tourism of the Chiang Khan Old Town. For a theory-based exposition of models of life cycles (phases) in cultural tourism, see Garay and Cànoves (2011) which was based on Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle model; on the latter, see Butler (1980; 2006).

Theoretical concept: cultural tourism phases when there is a resident population

It is less difficult to preserve tangible heritage where cultural tourism and architectural tourism involve uninhabited buildings and sites. In such cases damage is mainly caused by nature and poor preservation methods – Angkor Wat, Taj Mahal and the Egyptian Pyramids are examples of this type of tourism destination.

On the other hand, when a cultural tourism destination belongs to many private owners who reside inside or nearby the site, heritage preservation is very difficult and can fail because those people try to change the heritage to create income. The residents are, at some level, aware of their heritage significance and preservation but money is more significant than heritage because of their immediate needs at the time.

There are four components associated with cultural heritage tourism: 1. Number of tourists; 2. Number of local residents; 3. Number of outsiders doing tourism business; and 4. Heritage significance. Figure 5 might help to explain the four phases of cultural tourism, where the horizontal axis represents time. The left vertical axis is for the number of tourists, number of local residents, and number of outsiders doing tourist business. The right vertical axis is for heritage significance. Lines are in red, purple, and blue.

- Number of local residents in red line.
- Number of outsiders doing tourism business in red line.
- Number of tourists in purple line.
- Level of heritage significance in blue line.

Assumptions: The situation of the four phases will occur if:

- People live in the destination.
- Heritage belongs to many people.
- There is no heritage appreciators' influence to the destination.
- There is no serious control from local government or other organisations.

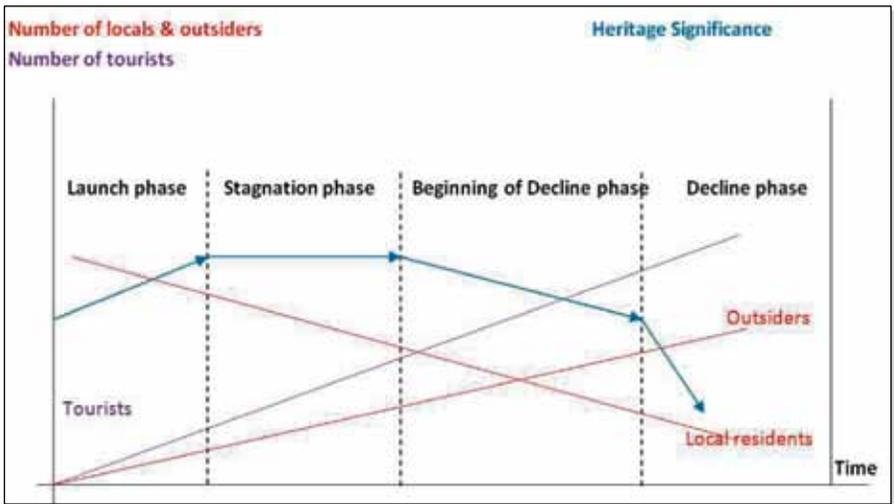


Figure 5: Four phases of cultural tourism when people reside within the destination.
Source: the author.

When tourism is growing while local residents are living in the site, the health of the community and the cultural heritage can proceed through four phases as follows.

1. Launch phase. The cultural or architectural heritage already exists before tourism begins. Then there are some cultural heritage appreciators who visit the site and discover its significance. If they consider that other people should visit it, they will publicise it, introducing the place to other people. Cultural tourism starts when an increasing number of tourists visit the destination.

In this phase

- Tourists are increasing.
- Heritage is developed for tourism. Local residents are aware of their heritage significance.
- Economic benefit begins. Tourism business is good enough to induce outsiders to do small tourism business.
- Displacement of local residents by a few outsiders begins.

2. Stagnation phase. In this phase the situation moves forward in the same direction as the first phase, except for heritage significance.

- More tourists than the first phase.
- Local residents remodel their houses or change careers to tourism business. They get more income.
- More outsiders arrive to engage in tourism business lured by the potential for more profit from more tourists.
- More displacement of local residents can be noticed as land prices rise. Land is so expensive that selling it provides money upfront, and is seen as better than gradually collecting money from tourism business. Local residents with less experience cannot see profit-making opportunities as well as outsiders can.
- Development of cultural heritage is less than in the launch phase because concerned people hurry to get money and do not have enough time to think about their heritage.
- Tourism circumstances seem better, except that the cultural heritage is slightly neglected.

3. Beginning of Decline phase. In this phase, the economy of the destination is prospering. Some will be satisfied with this and regard the situation as a boom with economic benefit from tourism. However, some effects are hidden as follows.

- More tourists come to the destination.
- More outside investors, sometimes foreigners, invest in large-scale tourism businesses that local residents cannot do, such as big modern hotels, because the opportunity to make good profits is high enough for large-scale investment.
- Displacement of local residents is more obvious because the price of land is so expensive that they had better sell their land and move to other places.
- The significance of heritage considerably declines when local residents' main objective is money, not culture. Local government thinks the same.

4. Decline phase. Observed without proper reflection from outside the community, tourism is booming and the place is well known and crowded with tourists. Some may identify this stage as ‘tourism success’, but the economic success is mainly for the benefit of outsiders; local residents have poor status and there is a failure of cultural tourism as follows.

- The site is crowded with tourists.
- More investment from outsiders.
- Few local residents are living in the destination, and those who remain have become employees of the outsiders. Most sell their now expensive land and move elsewhere. Some displaced local residents fail in their businesses through lack of business skills and lose more or all of the money they obtained from selling land.
- Loss or degradation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is almost disregarded because outsiders control the place. Genuine cultural heritage has no significance for them.

Data collection.

The primary data were collected over a three-year period by observation and interview of local residents, tourists, non-participant knowledgeable persons and local officials, while secondary data were obtained from related official documents. Both probability and non-probability sampling methods were used for collecting data. Interview sheets were investigated for sound design using social science principles as follows (Boonserm, 2012).

- Items were relevant and sufficient for analysis.
- There were crosschecks where necessary.
- The questions were not ambiguous to mislead interviewees.
- There were no leading questions.

Data analysis and synthesis

From evaluation of the heritage significance of the Chiang Khan Old Town by local residents, tourists and the author, the heritage that was regarded as of highly attractive significance (by at least two sources) were the Mekong River, the temperament of local residents, morning alms to monks, and wooden houses. Details are in Table 1.

Table 1: Heritage attraction significance of the Chiang Khan Old Town evaluated by local residents, tourists, and the author

Kind of heritage	Locals' view*	Tourists' view*	Author's view
Natural heritage			
<input type="checkbox"/> Mekong River	77, HS	70, HS	HS
<input type="checkbox"/> Phutok hilltop	70, S	20, NS	NS
<input type="checkbox"/> Koodkoo Sandbank	70, S	48, S	NS
Cultural heritage			
<input type="checkbox"/> Temperament of residents	100, HS	90, HS	HS
<input type="checkbox"/> Morning alms to monks	100, HS	92, HS	HS
<input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist monasteries	77, HS	43, S	S
<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic food	67, S	27, NS	NS
<input type="checkbox"/> The Chiang Khan Old Town dialect	60, S	25, NS	S
<input type="checkbox"/> Handicraft	40, S	19, NS	NS
<input type="checkbox"/> Thai classical music	30, NS	0, NS	S
Architectural heritage			
<input type="checkbox"/> Old wooden houses	70, S	81, HS	HS

Source: From interviews in 2013.

Figures are percent of interviewees who agree with the significance.

NS: not attractive, S: attractive, HS: highly attractive.

Tourists' view and behaviour.

Table 2 shows tourists' views and behaviour. Most tourists stayed one night at guesthouses. They spent money at the Chiang Khan Old Town – approximately 1,130 and 700 baht per person in 2010 and 2012 respectively. Morning alms giving to monks was their highest satisfaction in 2010, but old wooden houses were their highest satisfaction in 2012. Their dissatisfactions were too many cars in the cultural zone and wooden-house remodeling.

Table 2: Views of tourists on the Chiang Khan Old Town in 2010 and 2012

Item	2010	2012
Accommodation	80% at guesthouses, mostly one night	82% one night, 6% more than one night
Expense at the site	1,130 Baht/person	700 Baht/person
Satisfaction	92% morning almsgiving 90% temperament 81% old wooden houses 70% Mekong River	70% old wooden houses 47% morning almsgiving 13% temperament 6% Mekong River
Dissatisfaction	49% wooden house remodel 35% traditional lifestyles changed to business	55% too many cars 27% new style houses

Source: From interviews in 2013

Awareness of local residents

Awareness of cultural value and the tourism effect is a crucial factor in balancing tourism with heritage preservation. Other factors are supplementary.

For heritage significance awareness, all resident interviewees regarded morning alms to monks and the temperament of residents as their most significant heritage, while 70% of them regarded their old wooden houses as significant heritage.

For tourism effect awareness, 57% of interviewed residents assumed that most tourism income would go to residents in general. More than half of them did not wish for too many tourists, for avoidance of culture deterioration. They suggested 400 tourists a day as the appropriate number (median).

In terms of cultural preservation, 40% of interviewed residents said they would retain their ancestors' lifestyle. Regarding house repair, 77% in 2010 were very concerned to repair their old houses without eccentric construction – for example, by using wood as the main material and keeping old styles in order to remind them of their architectural heritage. However, this concern was not found two years later.

From the author's observation and from interviews, local residents knew how important was their cultural heritage but they did not know exactly what will happen to their lives in the future and how to deal with changes in the Chiang Khan Old Town. They thought that when more tourists came to the place they would get more money through guesthouses and selling food and souvenirs. It was hard for them to imagine how an economic boom could destroy their cultural heritage and drive them from the place, as happened in Luang Prabang (Engelhardt *et al.*, 2004), because they did not have experience of such a situation.

Tourism Effect

Changes to the Chiang Khan Old Town consequent on tourism transition have been both in better and worse directions as follows.

Cultural heritage change. This was observed from 2009 to 2012. The most significant cultural heritage that presents to tourists every day is the morning alms giving to monks. Hospitality is another important cultural heritage – it is a hidden intangible virtue which, by merely looking at the place, observers would not know. However, tourists appreciate the character of local residents when they visit the Chiang Khan Old Town.

From the author's observation from 2009 to 2012, cultural heritage was slightly changing in a negative direction. Morning alms giving to monks in 2011 and 2012 had declined from 2010, because there was business attached to the real activity of alms giving. For example, there were vendors selling food to tourists to give as alms to monks, thus annoying tourists even if it was convenient for them to buy. Because of the increased tourism presence, food put into the monks' bowls was so much that it needed helpers – interfering to take this food out of bowls and lay it in carts or motor cycles to carry it back to the monasteries. This had become an unsightly cultural practice. There was no such practice before 2011. Therefore, the author assesses this cultural change as slight deterioration.

For hospitality, in 2012 both tourists and the author rarely found local residents invited us to sit down and have dinner together as in 2009. Life was more or less business oriented and the locals did not have much time for others. However, their eyes still showed benevolence to visitors.

Architectural heritage change. The architectural heritage of the place is principally the many wooden houses along Chai Khong Street. Wooden houses have been progressively and continuously changed to concrete-wooden houses or to completely concrete houses. Therefore, wooden houses, as significant architectural heritage, are fewer than in 2009.

From the author's observation of wooden houses in the Chiang Khan Old Town from 2010 to 2012, about 30 houses of 225 houses (13%) had been modified or even demolished and re-built to make them suitable for guesthouse businesses. The wooden houses have changed so much that visitors hardly recognise their old heritage appearance. The demolished and rebuilt wooden houses were in current styles, with nothing left for the memory – they were now of wood or wood-concrete materials. Therefore, architectural heritage was changing in a worse direction from 2009.

Heritage preservation awareness change. Local residents and the Municipality Office were in 2012 better aware of heritage preservation because they realised that their heritage created income to them. The Municipality Office educated local residents to realise the significance and value of their heritage.

From the author's observation, many tourists deeply appreciated the Chiang Khan Old Town's heritage and worried about the survival of its cultural heritage because they had noticed that some groups of tourists came here for entertainment such as drinking alcohol and eating expensive food that also satisfied local merchants and their passion for money. It was more common that local people had heritage preservation awareness in their minds, but changes under the influence of money were in the minds of the same people. What will now happen is not difficult to predict.

Tourism change. It was difficult to count or even approximate the numbers of tourists because there is no entry ticket or other firm evidence to show. Using the median number of the estimation of the 29 knowledgeable interviewees (non-participants) was the best method. They estimated tourists were continuously increasing during 2009 to 2012. During 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively, they estimate that 200, 300 and 400 tourists were present each day on workdays in the wet season, and 200, 400 and 500 tourists in the dry season; and that on holidays this rose to 500, 700 and 800 tourists in wet season, and 700, 850 and 1,000 tourists in the dry season.

From the author's survey in 2012, there was capacity to accommodate approximately 760 overnight tourists at the site – there were 89 guesthouses (used for other purposes as well) with space for about 8 guests each and accommodation for 50 guests in a hotel. The capacity of accommodation was enough during workdays but not enough during holidays. During holidays, guesthouses outside Chai Khong Street catered for the excess tourists.

From the author's observation, the number of tourists was increasing slowly, but the numbers of accommodation places was increasing rapidly. There could be problems of imbalance in the future, causing debt problems to guesthouse owners.

Economic change. The economy of local residents was better by 2012. The knowledgeable interviewees assessed that they had more income from tourism such as guesthouse services and selling food and souvenirs to tourists. The extra income from tourism could not be estimated correctly in this research because it required complex survey methods and was outside the scope of the study (and for such an estimation in an Isaan village, see King and Sairoong, 2013).

From the author's observation, ideas of speculative income could bring about future poverty. This was liable to happen because many residents who remodeled their houses had to borrow money from commercial banks or rich people in Chiang Khan or elsewhere. They did not consider any investment risk – they were so optimistic that they did not care what will happen in the future. This is usual for those who are not businessmen. The crucial problem was that they might have to leave their beloved Chiang Khan Old Town if the situation was not on their side.

The knowledgeable interviewees felt that the rapid increase of tourists together with higher inflation made prices of food and accommodation at the Chiang Khan Old Town continually higher. From the author's observation, the prices of food and accommodation were unreasonably high in some shops and some guesthouses, while some others kept reasonable prices. The author observed two prices of the same quality goods in the same place. This damages Chiang Khan Old Town as a cultural tourism place in the future.

It may be that economic benefit will gradually fall into outsiders' pockets. From the author's survey in 2011, there were 39 outsider business people or 20% of business people in Chai Khong Street. Only one year later in 2012, there were 55 outsider businessmen or 24% of the same group of people in the same street. For simplicity,

in 2011 outsiders doing business made up about 20% of all people at the site, while in 2012 this was approaching 25%. Interestingly, seven outsiders (4% of all people along the street) had been owners of the houses along Chai Khong Street in 2011 while 14 outsiders (6% of all people along the street) owned the houses along the same street in 2012. That is, outsiders doubled during one year. On this evidence, the outsiders would increasingly replace locals, maybe all of them, in the future; outsiders were more keen on business than local residents.

Happiness change. The knowledgeable interviewees estimated that local residents were happier during 2010 to 2011, but that happiness did not increase from 2011 to 2012. The reason was that they had more income in 2011 than in 2010, but then their income leveled out from 2011 to 2012; also some of them were in debt because of remodeling their houses.

From the author's observation, the happiness of residents did not depend only on income, but also their pride in their cultural heritage that strangers had visited. They had initially been happy seeing visitors in their town. But, as time went by, their place was so crowded that some who did not have tourism businesses were upset.

The trend of heritage tourism growth in the Chiang Khan Old Town

From the information obtained comparing the four phases of cultural tourism shown in Figure 5, the tourism growth of the Chiang Khan Old Town has passed the launch phase completely and is starting to enter the stagnation phase. See Table 3.

Table 3: Evaluation of the trend of heritage tourism growth of the Chiang Khan Old Town

Situation	Evaluation	Phase
Tourists are increasing	Yes	Launch phase
Heritage is developed for tourism	Yes	Launch phase
Economic benefit begins	Yes	Launch phase
Outsiders entering to share tourism business	Yes	Launch phase
Displacement of local residents begins	Yes	Launch phase
More tourists than the first phase	Yes	Stagnation phase
Local residents remodel their houses or change careers to tourism business	Yes	Stagnation phase
More outsiders coming to the destination	Yes	Stagnation phase
More displacement of local residents can be noticed	No	Stagnation phase
Development of cultural heritage is less than in launch phase	No	Stagnation phase
Tourism circumstance seems better except cultural heritage is slightly neglected	Not likely	Stagnation phase

Source: Using cultural tourism phase model for the evaluation

In a short time the stagnation phase may be complete and the place may go into the beginning of decline phase. That is the bad effect of tourism on the Chiang Khan Old Town and may occur unless a rigorous conservation plan is implemented before more undesirable results happen.

Conclusion

When the Chiang Khan Old Town became a cultural tourism site, tourism caused many circumstances to change, as follows.

- Cultural heritage such as morning alms giving to monks and old wooden houses were commodified, resulting in less highly regarded heritage and changes in heritage awareness.
- Guest houses and hotels are sufficient for the increasing numbers of tourists, except during long holidays.
- Local residents who engage in tourism business have more income, but others suffer from a higher cost of living. Some tourists are victims of some guesthouse and restaurant owners, being over-charged. Some 39 outsider families (20% of local families) are present for tourism businesses and may replace local residents in the future.
- Cultural tourism has passed the launch phase and is entering the stagnation phase. It is possible to go forward to the pre-decline and decline phases if no strict preservation plans are operated as soon as possible. The Chiang Khan Old Town may become an entertainment tourism site, not a cultural tourism site as at present.

Recommendations for balanced growth

The research findings suggest a possible model for balanced growth between tourism and heritage preservation as follows.

- Local residents tended not to realise the significance of heritage preservation nor anticipate the negative effects of tourism on their future; therefore, education on cultural tourism and the heritage values of the place is urgently needed, along with an enforceable plan for the future. The Chiang Khan Municipality and knowledgeable people should work with local residents in meeting this objective.
- Some tourists were victims of unreasonably high tourism prices; however, tourists can publicise the reasonably priced guesthouses and restaurants to the public via social media.

- Many tourists were dissatisfied with the many cars left running and parking in the cultural zone. Therefore, the Chiang Khan Municipality should help in managing traffic in the zone.

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