

Experience Extraction and Generating New Knowledge by Tourism Service Providers Responding to Chinese Tourists' Needs and Behavior:

A Case Study in Chiang Mai, Thailand

การสกัดประสบการณ์และสร้างความรู้ใหม่โดยผู้ให้บริการทางการท่องเที่ยว เพื่อตอบสนองต่อความต้องการและพฤติกรรมของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีน : กรณีศึกษาในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ ประเทศไทย

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the process of knowledge creating and knowledge developing activities for tourism service providers to gain new knowledge which responded to the Chinese tourists' needs and behavior in Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province. The key informants were tourism related people in the area, which were knowledge experts, knowledge managers and knowledge workers who performed the tourism tasks. Data was collected through group discussions, in-depth interview and analysis using the SECI model to encourage the key informants to share knowledge and experiences together. The analysis and synthesis the collected data from the knowledge experts and managers were conducted before combining the gained knowledge with the tourism service providers' tacit knowledge to create better operational guidelines and a working manual. The results showed that tourism service providers could build new knowledge through the knowledge creating activities which was then led into a working manual. When implementing the knowledge from the working manual, it was found that the tourism service providers were able to conduct the service properly and could meet the Chinese tourists' needs and behavior completely with confidence.

Keywords: Chinese tourist, Tourist's needs tourist's behavior, Knowledge creation, SECI model

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้ได้ศึกษากระบวนการสร้างความรู้และพัฒนากิจกรรมการสร้างความรู้แก่ผู้ให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยว เพื่อให้ได้ความรู้ใหม่ที่ตอบสนองต่อความต้องการและพฤติกรรมของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีนในอำเภอเมือง จังหวัดเชียงใหม่ ประชากรคือผู้เกี่ยวข้องกับการท่องเที่ยวในพื้นที่ประกอบด้วยผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านความรู้ ผู้จัดการความรู้ และผู้ใช้ความรู้ในการปฏิบัติงาน ดำเนินการรวบรวมข้อมูลด้วยการอภิปรายกลุ่ม การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก และการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยรูปแบบการสร้างความรู้ SECI เพื่อให้กลุ่มตัวอย่างแบ่งปันความรู้และประสบการณ์ร่วมกัน แล้ววิเคราะห์และสังเคราะห์ความรู้จากผู้เชี่ยวชาญ และผู้จัดการความรู้ และนำไปผสานกับความรู้ฝังลึกของผู้ให้บริการทางการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อให้เกิดแนวทางปฏิบัติงานที่ดีขึ้น ผลของการวิจัยพบว่าผู้ให้บริการทางการท่องเที่ยวสามารถสร้างความรู้ผ่านกิจกรรมตามกระบวนการและสามารถรวบรวมเป็น คู่มือการปฏิบัติงาน ในด้านต่าง ๆ ได้แก่ ความรู้ในการปฏิบัติงานด้านการต้อนรับและทักทาย การเสนอความช่วยเหลือหรือ บริการ แนวทางการปฏิบัติขณะให้บริการ ลักษณะนิสัยของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีน ความรู้ที่จำเป็นในการให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยว คุณสมบัติที่จำเป็นสำหรับบริการการท่องเที่ยว ข้อควรระวังในการให้บริการแก่นักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีน แนวปฏิบัติเพื่อ ความเป็นเลิศในการให้บริการนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีน เคล็ดลับในการให้บริการนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีนให้ประทับใจ เมื่อนำความรู้

จากคู่มือการปฏิบัติงานไปใช้พบว่า ผู้ให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวสามารถปฏิบัติงานเพื่อตอบสนองความต้องการและพฤติกรรมของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีนได้อย่างถูกต้อง ครบถ้วนและมั่นใจ

คำสำคัญ : นักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีน ความต้องการของนักท่องเที่ยว การสร้างองค์ความรู้ เชกโมเดล การจัดการความรู้

Introduction

According to the 2009 tourism statistics, there were 10.9 million Chinese tourists visiting Thailand, in which 1.2 million Chinese tourists visiting Chiangmai. While the number of Chinese tourists to Chiangmai had increased from 1.0 million people in 2018 to 1.2 million people in 2019, which resulted in an increasing number of 16.08 percentage of Chinese tourists (Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019). Most satisfied factor that Chinese tourists visiting Chiangmai required was the friendliness from the involved people and stakeholders (Sangkakorn, 2013), and also the expectations and satisfaction of Chinese tourists regarded to valued service for the paid price (Sangkakorn *et al.*, 2016) while one of the weaknesses of Chiangmai service sectors was about the under-qualified service and personnel (Auttarat & Poonsukcharoen, 2021). It was founded that some of Chiangmai tourism characteristics did not meet the needs and expectation of the Chinese Free and Individual tourist (FIT) significantly, especially in terms of transportation and restaurants which included qualified services by the tourism related personnel, but the hospitality was the most desired requirement by the Chinese FIT at its importance of 93.08%. More than 80 percent of the Chinese tourists were satisfied with the tourism in Chiang Mai, while the rest mentioned that some products and services did not meet the needs (Untong, 2018), which indicated that the Chinese tourists could be satisfied if the tourism service providers understand and provide the best hospitality.

The service providers for Chinese tourists were supposed to have more training or learning about Chinese tourist behavior (Bandurat & Wongmontha, 2020) to understand and deliver the best service. Sangkakorn, *et al.* (2017) reported that Chinese tourists suffered from cultural differences, leading to a lack of understanding between tourists and local people and that had led to some anti-Chinese tourist people. Tourism service provider's attitude towards Chinese tourists according to lacking understanding in Thai tradition (Rabob *et al.*, 2019), resulted that the behavior of Chinese tourists annoyed people. But this problem could be improved if the stakeholders gain the practical knowledge that is developed by a suitable process. Also, to facilitate the Chinese tourists, who were increasing in numbers, the service providers should communicate for the better understanding (Choibamroong, 2017) to service and satisfy the Chinese tourists about the tourism data communication.

The SECI model has been well known as a conceptual framework that was developed by Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995). The model describes how explicit and tacit knowledge is generated, transferred, and recreated in organizations, education and tourism. It consists of four modes of knowledge conversion which are Socialization (tacit to tacit), Externalization (tacit to explicit), Combination (explicit to explicit), and Internalization (explicit to tacit). A tourism community in Samut Songkhram province, Thailand (Chansukree *et al.*, 2017) had implemented the process to develop its creative tourism and could reach the project's goals. Pongjam (2019) had used the process of SECI model to develop a training course in scoop for newly recruited news anchor of Channel 7 Television, the circulation of the valuable knowledge and the step-by-step extraction of the knowledge could facilitate the knowledge creation methodology. Zhang & Li (2008) had applied the SECI model for the design of tourism products in Guazhou county in Gansu Province, China, PR. and illustrated the four stages of designing tourist products. In doing so, it was successful in formulating a SECI model for the design of tourist products in the area, and it satisfied the tourists' needs of traveling experience and made products with distinct characteristics. Thus, tourism

service personnel should know and understand the knowledge creation process in order to analyze, synthesize, create, and disseminate the knowledge with colleagues while working. The expected results would lead to the expansion of the customers' interests, the satisfaction of Chinese tourists, creating opportunities, and increasing sustainable growth in Chiang Mai's tourism market.

Objectives

This study aimed in establishing the knowledge of service providers to become initiative in responding to the needs and behavior of Chinese tourists. The research objectives for this study were the following:

1. To investigate on creating knowledge for tourism providers in responding to Chinese tourists' needs and behavior.
2. To develop knowledge creating activities and an evaluation process for tourism service providers in responding to Chinese tourists' needs and behavior.

Materials and methods

1. Methods

In conducting the research, quantitative research approaches were applied together with a development research using participation processes in creating practical knowledge in the form of an operation manual for tourism service providers. The key informants consisted of:

- 1) The knowledge experts: A group of people who have a broad and deep competence of knowledge, skill, experience and understanding about the Chinese tourists and tourism through practice or education in participating with Chinese people or tourists.
- 2) The knowledge managers: A group of people who supervise the position of others in a tourism related business, promote and facilitate the exchange of knowledge both in terms of working activities, service delivery feedback and improvement.
- 3) The knowledge workers: A group of the task operating people or officers who were responsible for the job operation by using their own ability to subdivide, compare, synthesize, summarize, analyze and organize the collected information in reaching the job's goals, solving a problem or delivering the service to clients. The number of key informants and the background were shown in the Table 1.

Table 1 Number and Background of the Key Informants

Group	Role	Key informants	Background
1	Knowledge experts (18)	2 Chinese studies scholars, 2 tourism scholars, 2 Chinese tourist representatives, 2 people in the community with Chinese tourist experience, 2 food business operators/owners, 2 travel business operators/owners, 2 accommodation business operators/owners, 2 souvenir business operators/owners and 2 tourist guides with at least five years of working experience	The knowledge experts consisted of the academicians who had worked in the field of Chinese studies and tourism development. The Chinese tourist representatives were university lecturers who had been both tourists and researchers, while the people from the local community had several times welcomed Chinese tourists in Singharat Soi 4 community. The business operators/owners performed their own business in the

Table 1 (Continue)

Group	Role	Key informants	Background
			city of Chiangmai and had provided services to Chinese tourists, and the tourist guides had worked for a Chinese tourist-focused tourism company in Chiangmai for ten years.
2	Knowledge managers (14)	2 food business manager/staff leaders, 2 travel business manager/staff leaders, 2 accommodation business manager/staff leaders, 2 souvenir business manager/staff leaders, 2 people in the community with Chinese tourist experience, 2 Chinese tourist representatives, and 2 tourist guides with less than 2 years of working experience	The knowledge managers were two restaurant staff leaders, two tour company managers, two managers of guesthouses, two souvenir shop staff leaders, two people from Kuankama and Wat Ket community which there always be Chinese tourists' visiting. All the organization / shop/ company located in the city of Chiangmai. The tourist guides had worked for a Chinese tourism company in Chiangmai for almost two years, while the Chinese tourist representatives were Chinese people who were residing in Chiangmai at the time of research conducting.
3	Knowledge workers (10)	2 food business staff, 2 tourism business staff, 2 accommodation business staff, 2 spa and massage business staff, 2 souvenir shop staff	Knowledge workers were two waitresses from two restaurants, one reservation staff and one general staff from a tourism company, two receptionists from a boutique hotel, two female masseuses of a massage business, two souvenir shop staff, which all business located in the city of Chiangmai.

All key informants were purposive selected based on the scope of job description (tourism service for Chinese tourists), the business type, and the location of the workplace in the area of Chiang Mai city. The sampling technique was the purposive selection as the characteristics of the selected groups were in accordance with the research objectives which required knowledge, expertise and experience in providing services to Chinese tourists. A list of the qualified people and businesses was prepared, whereas the key informants were purposively selected based on their qualification. They were formally invited to participate in the research. The key informants taking part in the research were shown in Figure 1.

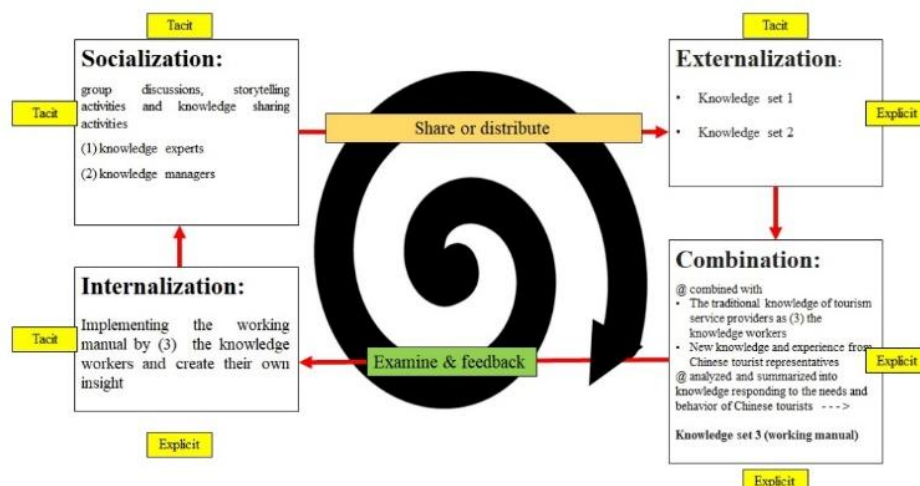


Figure 1 SECI Model for New Knowledge Creation to Meet Chinese Tourists' needs and Behavior (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995)

The figure 1 represented the SECI model to acquire the new knowledge that will meet the needs and behavior of Chinese tourists based on previous behavior studies of those traveling from China. The tools for data collection (collected between June 2020 and November 2020) were; group discussions and guidelines for the knowledge experts and knowledge managers, storytelling activities, voice recorder in the group discussions, transcribing, in-depth interviews for the group of the knowledge workers, non-participation observation form, small group discussion with voice recording and transcribing for the group of the knowledge workers, a working manual and checklist. The procedure of knowledge creation with the SECI model and the research activities were divided into four stages, and each stage had the key informants divided into groups and performed in the processes as followed:

1. Socialization step: The researcher set up group discussions, storytelling activities and knowledge sharing activities for each group of the knowledge experts and knowledge managers to capture the knowledge points which led to the sets of knowledge 1 and 2 as the knowledge experts and knowledge managers had different tacit knowledge due to the responsibilities. In this step, the group of the knowledge experts consisted of 2 Chinese studies scholars, 2 tourism scholars, 2 Chinese tourist representatives, 2 people in the community with Chinese tourist experience, 2 food business operators/owners, 2 travel business operators/owners, 2 accommodation business operators/owners, 2 souvenir business operators/owners and 2 tourist guides with at least five years of working experience. The group of the knowledge managers consisted of 2 food business manager/staff leaders, 2 travel business manager/staff leaders, 2 accommodation business manager/ staff leaders, 2 souvenir business manager/staff leaders, 2 people in the community with Chinese tourist experience, 2 Chinese tourist representatives, and 2 tourist guides with less than 2 years of working experience.

2. Externalization step: The researcher converted the tacit knowledge from the report of the two groups into explicit knowledge in a form of concepts, guidelines and descriptions in responding to the needs and behaviors of Chinese tourists.

3. Combination step: The researcher set up a group discussion, a storytelling and knowledge sharing activity for the group of key informants (3) which were the knowledge workers, who were 2 food business staff, 2 tourism business staff, 2 accommodation business staff, 2 spa and massage business staff,

2 souvenir shop staff. Then, the key informants discussed and applied the gained concepts, guidelines and descriptions from the previous step with their traditional knowledge of the service in responding to the needs and behavior of Chinese tourists. The conclusion was recorded and rechecked by everyone before summarizing into a form of a working manual for tourism service providers and staff to have it implemented in their operation.

4. Internalization step: Before implementing the working manual, the key informants, which consisted of 2 food business staff, 2 tourism business staff, 2 accommodation business staff, 2 spa and massage business staff, 2 souvenir shop staff, were evaluated on their working performance. The evaluators were the researcher, the Chinese tourist representatives, the knowledge workers' co-worker (either a manager or a colleague) at the workplaces via a checklist, and in-depth interview, an evaluation form, an observation and a group discussion for the group of knowledge workers, which consisted of 2 food business staff, 2 tourism business staff, 2 accommodation business staff, 2 spa and massage business staff, 2 souvenir shop staff. They were asked to apply the instructions into their daily tasks.

After 30 days, the key informants were again evaluated on their working performance by the same group of evaluators. They were asked to present their improved performances and the new created practical knowledge which caused by the working manual implementation.

Results

Investigation on Creating Knowledge for Tourism Providers in Responding to Chinese Tourists' Needs & Behavior

The knowledge workers or tourism service staff who had learned from the created working manual, could generate a new practical performance for the Chinese tourists in their own style of service. The original practice or knowledge applied by the staff who provided tourism services to the Chinese tourists was the general working procedure of each business or workplace. The staff could perform the tourism service as instructed by the leaders or business owners. Most of the staff have had the essential service qualifications but they had limited knowledge on China PR and Chinese people. After implementing the working manual into their work, the staff showed the awareness of delivering the best services to the customers. In conducting the service, they were aware of the tourists' expectation and did the best to complete it. The observation and evaluation for the working manual implementation showed that the tourism service providers or staff could respond to the tourists better. The newly created working manual was in a guidebook format as well as in digital format which were easy to get access and to share with others.

Developing knowledge creating activities and an evaluation process for tourism service providers in responding to Chinese tourists' needs and behavior

1. The created knowledge could be done through the SECI model which consists of four modes of knowledge conversion.

1.1 Socialization step: This resulted in the conversion of the tourism service providers' tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge through shared experiences in social interaction. The knowledge experts and knowledge managers, with expertise in Chinese tourists' needs and behavior, socialized and shared the hidden knowledge; there appeared a personal critical tacit knowledge which caused them in making things professional.

1.2 Externalization step: After collecting all the explained expertise of the knowledge experts and knowledge managers, the tacit knowledge was converted into an explicit knowledge in the form of guidelines and descriptions responding to the needs and behaviors of Chinese tourists.

1.3 Combination step: It was most useful to allow the knowledge workers who directly handled the tourists to blend their traditional knowledge with the extracted new knowledge from the knowledge experts and knowledge managers. In this step the combined knowledge was converted from the explicit knowledge to a working manual.

1.4 Internalization step: It showed internal relationships in which explicit knowledge was transferred to tacit knowledge and then applied at the individual level. The knowledge workers' explicit knowledge was absorbed, and it enriched their tacit knowledge capacity. The evaluation showed that the staff who responded to Chinese tourists not only performed a better service following the instructions and explanation in the created working manual, but also indicated their own idea of impressing the Chinese tourists.

2. The extracted and created knowledge from the knowledge creating activities could be summarized in critical conclusions and expanded in the created working manual. The Knowledge sharing and creating activities, and the created working manual was shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Knowledge Sharing and Creating Activities and The Created Working Manual for Tourism Service Providers in Responding to Chinese Tourists' Needs and Behavior

The extracted and generated new knowledge were;

2.1 Welcoming and greeting. A loud but warm and polite greeting in either English words or Chinese words, smiling with body language.

2.2 Offering a help or service. Offering to help with a mindful sentence, and continuing with a conversation on other subjects until the tourists are satisfied with their expectations or needs. Finally, kindly offer a service but don't push or rush.

2.3 Service conducting. A service provider or staff must have in mind the two characteristics of the serving mind: 1) Internal mind: such as a willing mind to serve, understanding other people, paying attention, having mercy, being cheerful, showing a kind heart, and smiling occasionally. 2) External mind: such as a good personality, good health and hygiene, a clean body and appearance, having no discrimination or racism.

2.4 Characteristics of Chinese Tourists; things they like. Having positive feelings toward Thai people. The Chinese tourists love having a massage very much. The Chinese tourists love to eat delicious food that is affordable. They need sincerity. **Things they don't like:** Dealing with adverse

reactions of service providers, such as dissatisfaction action from the tourists' questions, unprofessional service (staff's personal matters while servicing in a massage), unclear or not reasonable explanation, and cheating.

2.5 Qualifications Required for Tourism Services. Ability to respond to inquiries in online service channels, basic Chinese verbal communication skills, the reliable performance and gesture while servicing, a sensibly positive attitude towards Chinese tourists.

2.6 Precautions for Providing Services to Chinese Tourists. It was highly recommended to avoid a conversation about politics and the opinion of the governance, especially about the Republic of China (Taiwan), Hongkong an Tibet, the Chinese political and economic system, criticizing on any belief, tradition and culture. Often at times there will be some miscommunication due to the language barrier.

2.7 Best Performance in Providing Tourism Services to Chinese Tourists. It could be caused by the staff's attitude towards Chinese tourists, a clear explanation and answer to all inquiry, having less rules or regulations for Chinese tourists but clear information and explanation were acceptable.

2.8 Tips for Providing Impressive Service to Chinese Tourists. A staff could impress the tourists with a picture of the product or service, online payment channels, a Chinese speaking staff, the convenience services, Seven-Eleven or other convenient stores, massage shops, tourist attractions, and restaurants to provide a family or friendly atmosphere.

3. Results of the performance evaluation based on the working manual's Implementation

The Group 3 key informants (knowledge workers) which were 2 food business staff, 2 tourism business staff, 2 accommodation business staff, 2 spa and massage business staff, 2 souvenir shop staff, were evaluated their working performances before and after studying the working and implementing the manual to their daily tasks to compare the learning outcomes and the exchange of created knowledge and the learning issues according to the working manual's instruction. The key informants were evaluated on their improved performance and the tacit knowledge gained from the working manual implementation via a checklist, an evaluation form, an in-depth interview, an observation and a group discussion. The results of the 10 tourist service providers' improved performance on 9 topics of the extracted and generated new knowledge, could be summarized as the average and compared the improvement as shown in Figure 3.

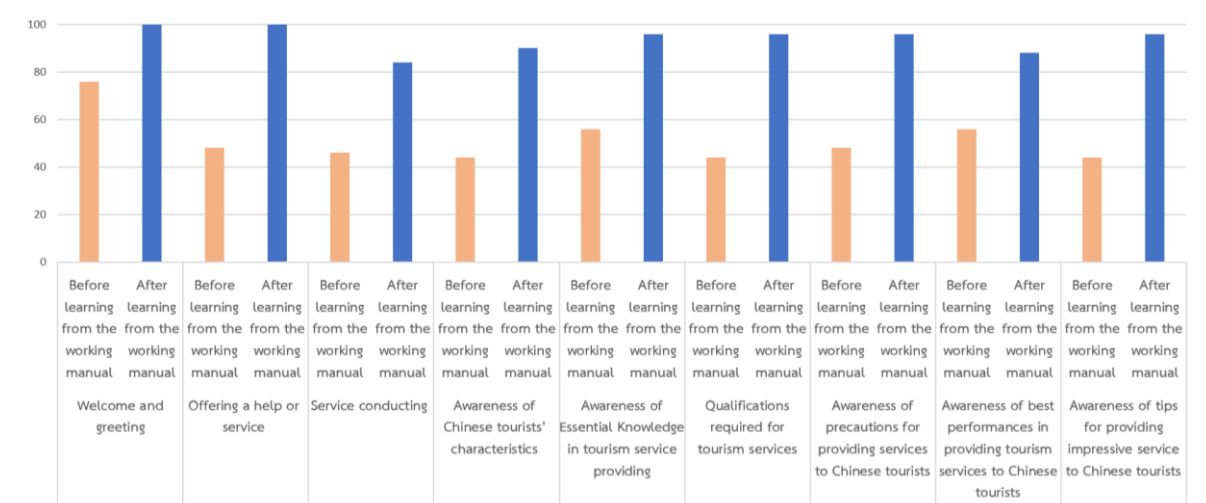


Figure 3 Results of the Performance Evaluation Based on the Working Manual's Implementation

Moreover, the result from an in-depth interview, an observation and a group discussion presented that the key informants (the knowledge workers or tourism service staff), who had learned from the working manual, could generate their new knowledge for servicing the Chinese tourists in their own style of service with confidence. The key informants could learn to combine Chinese tourists' travel characteristics and their own experience, so that they could create the satisfied service to Chinese tourists, such as;

- Chinese people like walking on foot while Thai people don't like. And that knowledge made them prepared or had a plan to prepare umbrella and bicycle lending service.
- Chinese people like hot water, even in the warm climate in Chiangmai. So, The key informants prepared electricity pot or other relevant tools.
- Chinese people see Chiangmai as their own backyard of the house, and it makes them feel easy, relaxed and fun and they always make a loud noise of fun. The staff learned to support the tourists 'fun, not try to block them from the relaxation.
- Chinese people are not the stubborn and selfish people. They are ready to follow the rules and ready to help. The staff learned to inform them correctly.
- Chinese tourists love to take photos those could show the Thainess. So, the staff would provide a place with decorations showing the Thainess.

Discussion

Before conducting a knowledge creation process for tourism service providers for gaining knowledge and responding to the needs and behavior of Chinese tourists with the SECI model, the knowledge was within the minds of those who were in power (knowledge experts), had supervision over others (knowledge managers), and carried out the tasks and duties (knowledge workers). In the workshop, the knowledge issues and ready-to-use experience were captured from the Chinese tourist stakeholders with an objective of drawing tacit knowledge to be a foundation in creating a practical working manual. Also, the tacit knowledge had been taken and converted into the explicit knowledge. In addition, the knowledge set was combined in the process of externalization with the existing traditional knowledge of the key informants and transformed to be an explicit knowledge working manual form for the staff providing the tourism service. Furthermore, the created knowledge for tourism service providers and staff was generated in a combination process and then reported in a form of working manual. The handbook guide in responding to the needs and behavior of Chinese tourists enabled the service providers to take the initiative in finding better methods or solutions that fits with the situation, thus helping them to be more confident in their working positions.

Conclusion

The newly created knowledge included the topics and performance guidelines in welcoming and greeting, offering a help or service, service conducting, characteristics of Chinese tourists (likes/dislikes), essential knowledge of tourism service providing, qualifications required for tourism services, precautions for providing services to Chinese tourists, best practices in providing tourism services to Chinese tourists, and tips for providing an impressive service to Chinese tourists. The model could exchange and develop 7 new knowledge topics which were the topics of welcoming and greeting, offering a help or service, service conducting, characteristics of Chinese tourists, essential knowledge of tourism service providing,



qualifications required for tourism services, precautions for providing services to Chinese tourists, best practices in providing tourism services to Chinese tourists, and tips for providing impressive service to Chinese tourists. In a working manual format, it could be practically performed at work and gave the Chinese tourist representatives a great deal of satisfaction. Nowadays, the interactions, habits and influence of young travelers were represented using pictures, social media posting and stories (Torres, 2016, pp. 2132-2155). Therefore, when the service providers continued with doing a better performance according to the new created knowledge, the Chinese tourists were definitely satisfied.

Suggestions

For research utilization, the study suggests the following:

1. The result of the study should be shared with the public in order to extend the service quality.
2. The government sector should collect the knowledge gained from this study and create a manual for the public to benefit the tourism.

For future research, the study suggests the following:

1. Taking an assessment of the newly developed model that is being put into practice by measuring on the important points to see if they are actually meeting the needs and expectations of the tourists coming from China.
2. Extend on this model in responding to the needs and behavior of tourists from other countries, such as USA, Europe, Australia, Japan etc., as the needs and culture are different from each other, and are also the major customers of Chiangmai city.

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