

# The Study of Mutelu Tourism to Respond to the Chinese Market in Chiang Mai Province

Nattanicha Jinasot<sup>1</sup>, Kanokporn Numtong<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*This article aims to study the state of mutelu tourism in response to the Chinese market in Chiang Mai Province through a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The population comprised 145 Chinese tourists visiting Mutelu tourist attractions in the Chiang Mai Province. The data were collected through a questionnaire and an interview with a purposive sample group of ten experts in amulet marketing in Chiang Mai. It was found that the majority of tourists were female aged 25–35, holding a bachelor's degree, reflecting differences in values, attitudes, and ideas across age groups. Of the Chinese tourists, 97.24% visited the Mutelu tourist attractions. The most popular Mutelu spots in Chiang Mai were: 1) Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, 2) Wat Phra Singh, (3) Wat Doi Kham, among others. The purpose of their visits was predominantly to pay respect and acquire amulets for financial prosperity and fortune, accounting for 59.31% of the total. The popularity of these destinations among Chinese tourists can be attributed to the following factors: (1) serving both sightseeing and Mutelu purposes, (2) having good service, (3) having testimonials by famous figures that had sparked interests, (4) being Chiang Mai's landmarks with interesting histories and easily accessible locations, and (5) being established as a result of reverence for renowned respectable monks. Other factors affecting tourists' decisions were: (1) seeking a spiritual anchor to enhance mental well-being, (2) similarities between Chinese and Thai beliefs, and (3) following recommendations by celebrities and well-known figures.*

**Keywords:** *Mutelu tourist attractions, Chinese tourists, Chiang Mai, Chinese market, Reverence.*

## Introduction

Tourism plays a major role in national development by increasing investment and employment, thereby improving the livelihoods of citizens. It was one of the main driving forces of the Thai economy, generating 3 trillion baht or 18 percent of the GDP before the COVID-19 pandemic. International tourists account for two-thirds of the visitors, and the rest are domestic (Bank of Thailand, 2023). Thailand is rich in tourist resources, both natural attractions and cultural assets, including beautiful and unique traditions and ways of life.

Chiang Mai, located in northern Thailand, is naturally surrounded. Its Lanna heritage and local wisdom translate into valuable crafts that attract both domestic and international visitors. From January to July, 2023, the number of international tourists visiting Chiang Mai was 2,188,758 with Chinese tourists at spot No.1, followed by Koreans, Malaysians and Americans (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023).

Mutelu tourism refers to visits made with the purpose of paying respect or asking for blessings from revered holy beings, causing sites to become trending tourist attractions. It is undeniable that this kind of tourism is gaining momentum in the global market, as statistics show that in 2019, it generated 10,800 million baht in revenue, and it is expected that the economic values generated will triple within a decade (Future Market Insight, 2023). The popularity of mutelu tourism is not exclusive to Thailand, but it has expanded worldwide, particularly among Chinese tourists, as can be seen from investments related to mutelu tourism in Thailand which accounted for 2.40 percent (Ministry of Commerce, 2023). At present, research on Mutelu tourist attractions has been scarce and has mostly focused on satisfaction in terms of cultural tourism. This has prompted researchers to study Mutelu tourism in response to the Chinese market in Chiang Mai. The results can serve as guidelines for the Tourism Agency and promoting cultural tourism, which serves as a key driving force of the country's economic development.

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<sup>1</sup> Lecturer in the Department of Oriental Languages, the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer in the Department of Eastern Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University, Thailand. Email: kanokporn.n@ku.th. (Corresponding author)

## Literature Review

This study divide the literature review section into two parts: relevant theories and relevant studies.

### *Relevant theories*

#### *Definition of 'Mutelu'*

Innews (2021) explained that 'Mutelu-style' or 'Mutelu' originated from spoonerism of 'Penangkal limu Teluh' ('Antidote of Witchcraft' in English), an Indonesian film directed by SA Karim which was released in 1979.

Duangwiset (2022) stated that Mutelu is a belief in sacred objects or amulets that have the power to change life for the better in terms of finance, health, romance, family, education, and others. Mutelu enhances fortune and, protects oneself from harm. Those in possession of sacred objects created based on religious beliefs or holy beings must behave properly, such as during rituals, worship at religious establishments, and propitiation.

Srimeethum and Setthajit (2023) defined the term as reverence for supernatural beings, whether it worshipped holy beings, astrology or superstition. Nowadays, it combines Buddhism, Brahmanism, and beliefs in the naturals and deities, forming the belief and faith of the believers.

In conclusion, the widely adopted term, 'Mutelu-style' or 'Mutelu', is associated with superstition, supernatural belief and worshipping sacred objects or amulets. It serves as a spiritual anchor, reinforcing positive outlooks in terms of career, finance, health, and education. It also serves as a source of protective or attractive forces (Metta Mahaniyom).

### *Relevant tourism theories*

This section discusses tourism theories that offer relevant and useful information and ideas for future research.

Serirat (2007) stated that demographic and tourism features, consisting of

age, gender, income and education level, can help define target groups as well as facilitate the measurement process compared to other variables. Individuals with different demographic features will have different psychological features, as can be analysed as follows. 1) Gender gender differences give rise to different communication behaviors. 2) Age products respond to the needs of different age groups and contribute to differences in thoughts and behaviors. 3) Education this factor also impacts individuals' thoughts, values, attitudes and behaviors. 4) Income: a key variable that determines the market portions, indicating buying power or the lack thereof.

Kusumawati, Rahayu, and Putra (2022) proposed that factors affecting clients' decision to visit Yogyakarta, Indonesia include flexibility of visit, location, duration of trip, ease of adjustment, and travel and preparation process.

Onputtha, et al. (2023) claimed that decisions to visit Mutelu-style temples were made based on researched information about the temples; knowledge, faith, and beliefs; service quality; authentic and organic information provided; professionalism, hospitality, and civility expressed by temple personnel; and a clean and orderly environment.

In summary, the study of tourism theories shows that demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income and education are important factors in determining target groups and analyzing tourism behavior. Each characteristic affects people's thoughts and behaviors differently. For example, gender influences communication behavior; age influences product demand; education influences values and attitudes; and income is a variable that indicates the ability to pay for products. Other factors that influence the decision to travel to different places include flexibility in visiting, travel time and adaptability, quality of service, ease of information, courteous and friendly services, and cleanliness of the place's environment.

### *Relevant studies*

A literature review on mutelu tourism revealed that there were a total of 10 studies published internationally, accessible via CKNI, and two domestically on Thaijo.

Chokariyapithak et al. (2022) studied the marketing planning of Thai amulet businesses targeting ASEAN and Chinese tourists in Pattaya City, Chonburi Province. In-depth interviews were conducted with 11 tourists, comprising three Singaporeans, three Malaysians, five Chinese, six Amulet entrepreneurs, and one Amulet marketing expert. The marketing, operational, and strategic plans for amulet businesses consisted of four parts: 1) form, 2) production, 3) target customers, and 4) location of distribution.

Onputtha et al. (2023) studied the impact of service quality on value perception and tourist decision making among GEN-Z Mutelu tourists. Data were collected from 400 GEN-Z tourists who enjoyed visiting Mutelu-style temples in Bangkok and the periphery. The results showed that there were six dimensions of Mutelu-style temples' service quality, including credibility, trust, tangibles, empathy, response, and harmony, all having direct and indirect impacts on value perception and tourist decision making with a statistical significance of 0.01 .

Qin (2009) studied the local belief-based tourism development of Changgangling in Guangxi through a survey distributed to villagers. Local beliefs included enchantments, nature worship, spirit and diety worship, ancestor worship, and Taoism. 2) Tourism values derived from local beliefs were social, political, economic, and artistic, all of which affected the development of tourist attractions. The following development recommendations were made: (1) promoting local activities such as devotional dance believed to have healing effects; (2) developing and promote other spaces in the village as new attractions, as well as tourist facilities; and (3) organizing promotional campaigns or exhibitions to generate interest in cultural tourist attractions.

Song (2017) studied the present situation and preventive measures regarding tourist resource development in Hainan, and found that religious attractions differed by region, religion, and period of belief expansion. The study also reported several issues related to religious tourism, including (1) excessive commercialization of Buddhist and Taoist attractions, (2) religious tourism attraction management, (3) inequality, and (4) tourist services, as well as a shortage of tourist facilities. These issues resulted from a lack of understanding of the structure of religious tourism and government officials' insufficient understanding of their roles and shortcomings in the religious legal system. For the sustainable development of religious tourism, it was recommended that 1) facilities undergo renovation, 2) insights into religious tourism be provided, 3) the government's role in religious tourism be clearly defined, and 4) the religious legal system be revised.

A literature review shows that there is still a small amount of research on mutelu-style tourism both domestically and internationally. Most studies focus on cultural tourism development and marketing planning for Thai amulet businesses.

### **Research Methodology**

The research process comprised four stages: 1) identifying the population, 2) creating research tools, 3) data collection and 4) data analysis.

1) Identifying the population The population of this study included (1) 145 Chinese tourists visiting Chiang Mai Province and (2) a purposive sample group consisting of 10 experts in amulet marketing in Chiang Mai.

2) Creating research tools: Data collected from reviewing relevant literature were used to develop a questionnaire.

3) Data collection: The researcher distributed a questionnaire to 145 Chinese tourists visiting Chiang Mai and interviewed 10 experts in amulet marketing in Chiang Mai. The questionnaire distribution and field interviews were conducted by the researcher. The data collection process began on from September 26, 2024 to December 10, 2024.

4) Data analysis: This mixed methods research combined qualitative and quantitative research.

(1) The research verified the data collected from the questionnaire and analysed them using descriptive statistics for percentage.

(2) The researcher analyzed the data collected from in-depth interviews with amulet marketing experts to categorize Mutelu tourist attractions in Chiang Mai.

(3) The researcher visited the top ten destinations among Chinese tourists and analyzed their environments, tourist attraction management, and selling points.

#### *Objective*

To study the state of mutelu tourism in response to the Chinese Market in Chiang Mai Province.

#### *Expected benefits*

1) Guidelines for TAT for designing Mutelu travel routes in Chiang Mai and other provinces

2) Guidelines for developing and promoting cultural tourism in response to the Chinese market are a key driving force behind the country's economic development.

### **Research Results**

The findings were divided into two parts: (1) analysis of respondents' demographic data and (2) analysis of the state of mutelu-style tourism in response to the Chinese market in Chiang Mai.

#### **Analysis of respondents' demographic data**

The data collected from 145 distributed questionnaires were analysed and presented below.

**Table 1. Respondents' demographic data**

Variable	Amount (person)	Percent	Variable	Amount (person)	Percent
1. Gender	145	100	4.2 Physician/nurse	3	2.07
1.1 Male	37	25.52	4.3 Teacher/instructor	8	5.52
1.2 Female	108	74.48	4.4 Businessperson	22	15.17

2. Age	145	100	4.5 Entrepreneur	49	33.79
2.1 Below 25	24	16.55	4.6 Office worker	5	3.45
2.2 25–35	75	51.72	4.7 Merchant	31	21.38
2.3 36–45	42	28.97	4.8 Farmer	3	2.07
2.4 46–55	3	2.07	4.9 Student	19	13.10
2.5 over 55	1	0.69	4.10 Others	1 (Unemployed)	0.69
3. Education level	145	100	5. Religion	145	100
3.1 below undergraduate	19	13.10	5.1 Buddhism	10	6.89
3.2 undergraduate	99	68.28	5.2 Christianity	3	2.07
3.3 postgraduate	27	18.62	5.3 Islam	1	0.69
4. Profession	145	100	5.4 Atheism	127	87.59
4.1 Government official	4	2.76	5.5 Others	4 (Taoism)	2.76

The majority of the 145 respondents were female entrepreneurs between the ages of 25 and 35, with bachelor's degrees. A significant portion was identified as atheists. (Table 1)

### Analysis of data on Mutelu-style tourism in response to the Chinese market in Chiang Mai

This section is divided into three parts as follows.

#### *10 most popular Mutelu-style tourist attractions among Chinese tourists*

Table 2. Data on Mutelu-style tourism in response to the Chinese market in Chiang Mai

Variable	Amount (person)	Percent
<b>1. Have you ever planned to visit or visited Mutelu-style temples/attractions?</b>	145	100
1.1 Yes	141	97.24
1.2 no	4	2.76
<b>2. mutelu-style temples/attractions that you wish to visit or have visited (multiple answers available)</b>		
2.1 Wat Phra Singh	79	54.48

<b>2.2 Wat Phra That Doi Suthep</b>	118	81.38
<b>2.3 Wat Doi Kham</b>	64	44.14
<b>2.4 Kruba Srivichai Monument</b>	13	8.97
<b>2.5 Wat Lok Moli</b>	50	34.48
<b>2.6 Wat Chedi Luang</b>	51	35.17
<b>2.7 Wat Chiang Man</b>	35	24.14
<b>2.8 Wat Suandok</b>	52	35.86
<b>2.9 Monkuware</b>	9	6.21
<b>2.10 Wat Sri Koet</b>	14	9.66
<b>2.11 Wat Ko Chok</b>	16	11.03
<b>2.12 Wat Sri Don Moon</b>	24	16.55
<b>2.13 Others</b>	0	0.00

Mutelu tourism involves travelling to appreciate the beauty of architectural sites with an interesting history. Visitors can also make merits, participate in other religious activities and ask for blessings from holy beings associated with the place, as well as purchase amulets. Data analysis revealed that 97.24 percent of the tourists visited Mutelu tourist attractions in Chiang Mai with Wat Phra That Doi Suthep being the most popular spot at 81.28 percent, followed by Wat Phra Singh (54.48%), Wat Doi Kham (44.14%), Wat Suandok (35.86%), Wat Chedi Luang (35.17%), Wat Lok Moli (34.48%), Wat Chiang Man (24.14%), Wat Sri Don Moon (16.55%), Wat Ko Chok (11.03%) and Wat Sri Koet (9.66%). (Table 2)

*Factors contributing to the popularity of the top 10 Mutelu tourist attractions among Chinese tourists*

Five factors contributed to the popularity of Mutelu tourist attractions among Chinese tourists. 1) These destinations meet the needs of tourists to appreciate their beauty, and to pay respect and acquire amulets simultaneously. 2) Services provided at these places allow for convenient visits through, signs, descriptions, and instructions on how to acquire amulets and participate in religious activities mostly written in Simplified Chinese (Figure 1-4). Both traditional and simplified Chinese appear in the descriptions only at Wat Sri Don Moon. Moreover, technology has been incorporated for convenience; for instance, tourists can scan a QR code that redirects them to the history of a place written in Chinese. At Wat Sri Koet and Wat Sri Don Moon, Chinese-speaking assistants provided suggestions and details on amulet acquisition, thus contributing to increased sales. This corresponds to Mr.C's statement saying that now that he could speak Chinese, he was assigned to explain the process to Chinese tourists who visited that place daily. In addition, more people in the amulet business have come to purchase resale in China. The ability to communicate in their language helps customers make purchase decisions quickly once they are informed about the benefits. This is consistent with what the owner of an amulet shop located in Wat Sri Koet said that when Chinese tourists came to pay respect for Phra Chao Khaeng Khom there, they would stop at his shop. He also shared that throughout the course of 10 years in the business. At present, due to his ability to communicate with them in their mother tongue, his sales increased, and he became well-known among Chinese amulets aficionados Mr.G (Personal communication, December 5, 2023). It can be seen that in addition to the tourist attractions' beauty and value, tourists are looking for convenience and good service quality.

Figure 1-4. Examples of Chinese signs within Mutelu temples in Chiang Mai



3) Technology has become an integral part of everyday life and has contributed to the exponential growth of the tourism industry, as most tourists make use of it to study routes, search for images and relevant information, and follow recommendations by famous people or travel applications. The result is trend-driven tourism, which reflects an individual's identity as someone who is trendy and up-to date. The majority of Chinese tourists are aged between 25-35, and this population group was born in the period when technology became an important part of life and was considered technologically proficient. Undeniably, online popularity has a significant impact on tourism. 4) The destinations are famous places or landmarks in Chiang Mai, where the locations in the city center make it fast and convenient to travel from one to the other. Visitors can enjoy beautiful historical Lanna architectures, as well as pay respect and engage in religious activities believed to bring about prosperity. After visits, some have been granted wishes and become believers, making recommendations to friends who then decide to visit these sacred places. 5) Tourist attractions originated from faith in respectable religious figures, attracting visitors who seek to pay respect to highly respected monks. Some of these revered figures travelled overseas and had followers from other countries. Reverence may result from the belief that the monks have enchantments or magical power to change life to improve or facilitate the achievement of goals. Granted wishes result in greater faith and believers, drawing visitors who travel individually or in groups to undergo ceremonies to enhance good fortune, eliminate bad fate, get Na Na Thong, which is a gold-gilding enchantment ritual, or acquire amulets blessed by revered figures. This is because Mr. C said that Wat Sri Don Moon, with a renowned Lanna monk, Phra Khru A, as the abbot had Thai and international followers, particularly Chinese followers who visited the temple and obtained the gold-gilding enchantment to enhance attraction power and auspiciousness. This enchantment comes in two packages, small and large, costing 500 and 1,500 baht (Figure 5-6), as well as undergoing a ritual to ward off of bad fate using Satuang ('a rectangular container made from banana sheaths holding offerings'), also called Bat Phlee in Central Thailand. A nother popular ritual is candle worship, which is believed to bring about luck and prosperity, and ward off bad fate (Figure 7-8). respectively. The abbot of Wat Ko Chok Kruba A explained that the temple had a large number of Chinese visitors and most acquired Ong Si Hu Ha Ta ('a creature with four ears and five eyes') and Takrut ('tiny rolled metal amulet'), as well as undergoing a ritual to ward off of bad fate using Satuang. A nother popular ritual is candle worship, which is believed to bring about luck and prosperity, and ward off bad fate (Figure 9-11).

Figure 5-6. Na Na Thong ritual performed by Kruba A



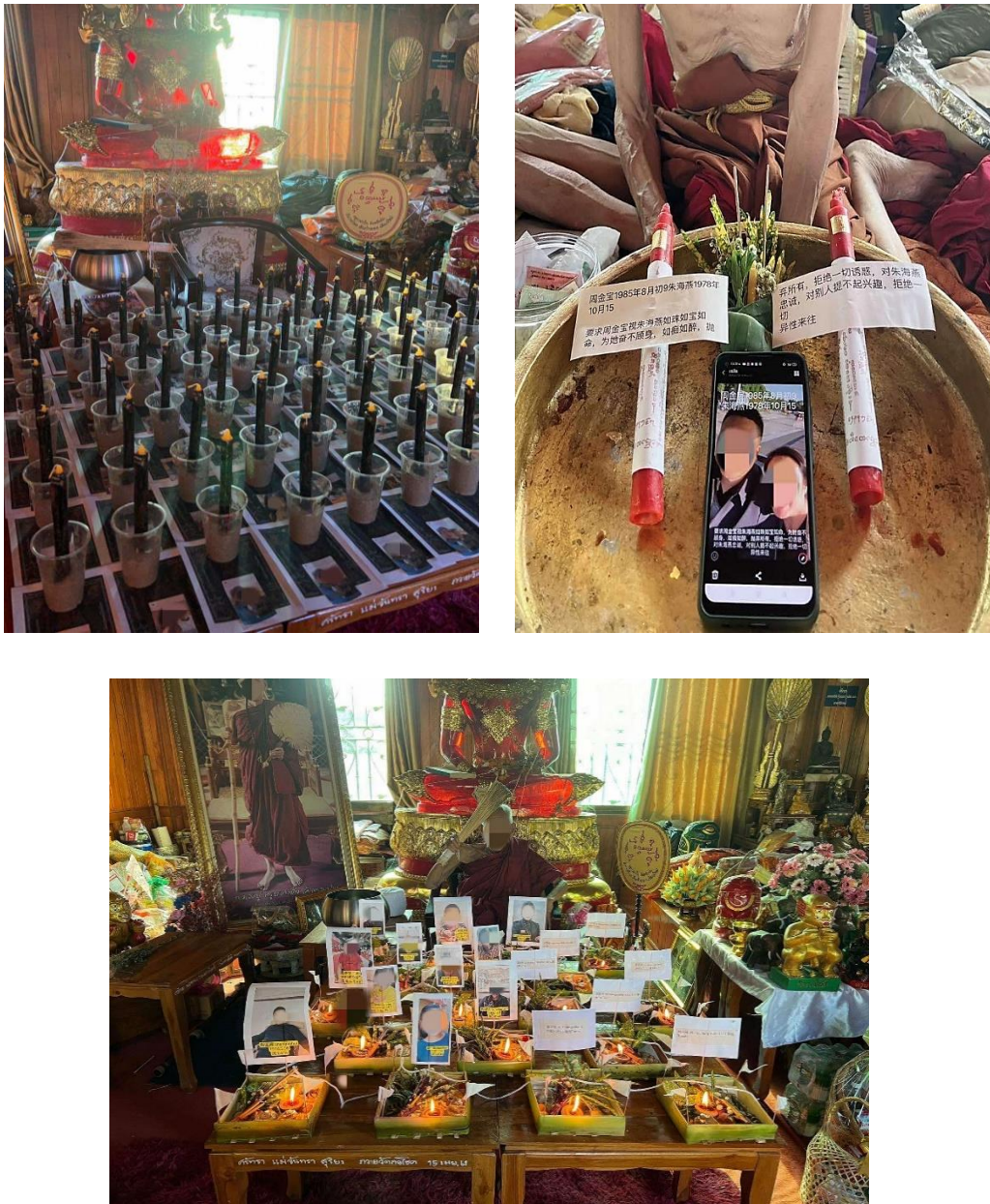
Figure 7-8. Satuang ritual performed by Kruba A



Source: Wat Sri Don Moon's Facebook page



Figure 9-11. Satuang ritual performed by Kruba B



Source: Photograph taken by Kruba B's assistant

#### *Factors affecting Chinese tourists' decision to visit Mutelu tourist attractions*

The factors affecting Chinese tourists' decisions to visit Mutelu tourist attractions and acquire amulets in Chiang Mai are as follows: 1) They need a spiritual anchor to enhance their mental well-being. The majority's age range of 25–35 years reflects differences in values, attitudes, and thoughts. While subjects such as superstition and amulets are not widely accepted among the elderly population, potentially due to socialist ideology, the younger generations of 25–35 years appear to have different values with tendency towards liberalism, as opposed to conservatism, as a result of social changes and economic crises causing them to struggle for survival in an unequal society. A happy life is difficult to attain due to numerous problems in life and increased access to online media, where users share their stories of success in public, inducing social comparison and subsequently accumulated stress among those who witness. Without spiritual sanctuary, individuals resort to superstition in response to insecurity in life.

Additionally, the fact that the majority of Chinese tourists were atheists raises the question of what led them to embrace superstition. Further investigation revealed that China has the highest number of atheists (700,680,000), accounting for 52.2 percent of the Chinese population and 62.2 percent globally (Pew Research Center, 2012), potentially because of the influence of Confucianism and Taoism since ancient times. After the Open Door Policy, China was under a socialist regime in which religions or traditions were not promoted. At present, Chinese people are free to follow their religion of choice. The fact that individuals who do not follow any religion does not mean that they do not believe in anything and choose to believe in Mutelu is a valid choice, as it offers value to believers. It is thus unsurprising that a significant number of Chinese have chosen this alternative to help soothe their minds and, provide a sense of security. Those who seek to succeed also embrace superstition with the belief that it can help pave the way to success, and despite not being able to prove or see instant results, superstition can provide a sense of comfort. 2) Thai and Chinese cultures have shared similar beliefs and traditions involving worshipping deities, ancestors, heaven and earth, and gods since ancient times. For instance, a group of deities known as ‘Wǔ lù shén’ or "the five gods of fortune" are believed to possess the ability to bestow wealth and prosperity. On the fifth day of the first month of the Chinese New Year, incense is ignited at five locations within the household. This practice is rooted in the belief that, by doing so, individuals will be bestowed with prosperity as they venture outside of their homes. The reasoning behind this belief lies in the representation of the five gods associated with five cardinal directions. Thus, regardless of the direction one chooses, wealth is believed to follow. Another case in point is ‘Fú Lù Shòu’ known as ‘Hok-lok-siu’ among Thais, are three deities originating from Chinese folk religion that continue to be worshipped by modern-day believers. These sacred figures bestow success, prosperity, happiness, and good health. When experiencing a sense of directionlessness, Chinese individuals often rely on superstition for guidance, just as Thais turn to sacred figures, amulets, horoscopes, temple visits, and merit-making to seek spiritual solace. Both Chinese and Thai people gravitate towards these objects and practices because they offer a sense of tranquility and psychological comfort. It is therefore not surprising that Chinese individuals who have grown up in such belief systems would also embrace Mutelu, as there is a commonality in the pursuit of spiritual stability, success, and prosperity in life. 3) Successful people practicing Mutelu are another factor that influences tourists' decisions. Social media have broadened people's exposure to the lives of individuals worldwide, including well-known and successful people. By following these individuals, observers gain insights into their experiences, including the places and activities they share on social media. When influential figures visit sacred sites and have their wishes fulfilled, they often share their experiences, validating their belief in the power of these places and subsequently increasing the demand to visit them. As a result, a trend known as mutelu-driven travel has emerged, in which individuals follow the recommendations of famous individuals who have successfully made wishes, hoping to achieve similar success. attractions or organizing special events that attract the attention of Chinese tourists. 4) Marketing and advertising play a key role in attracting Chinese tourists to Mutelu tourist attractions. Using popular digital platforms in China, such as WeChat, Weibo, and XiaoHongShu, to promote and reach the target audience, creating interesting content about the sacredness of the place, such as photos and videos, helps stimulate interest. In addition, spiritual attractions also rely on cooperation between tour companies and tour guides to enhance their reach to the target audience, such as creating tour packages that include visits to Mutelu tourist.

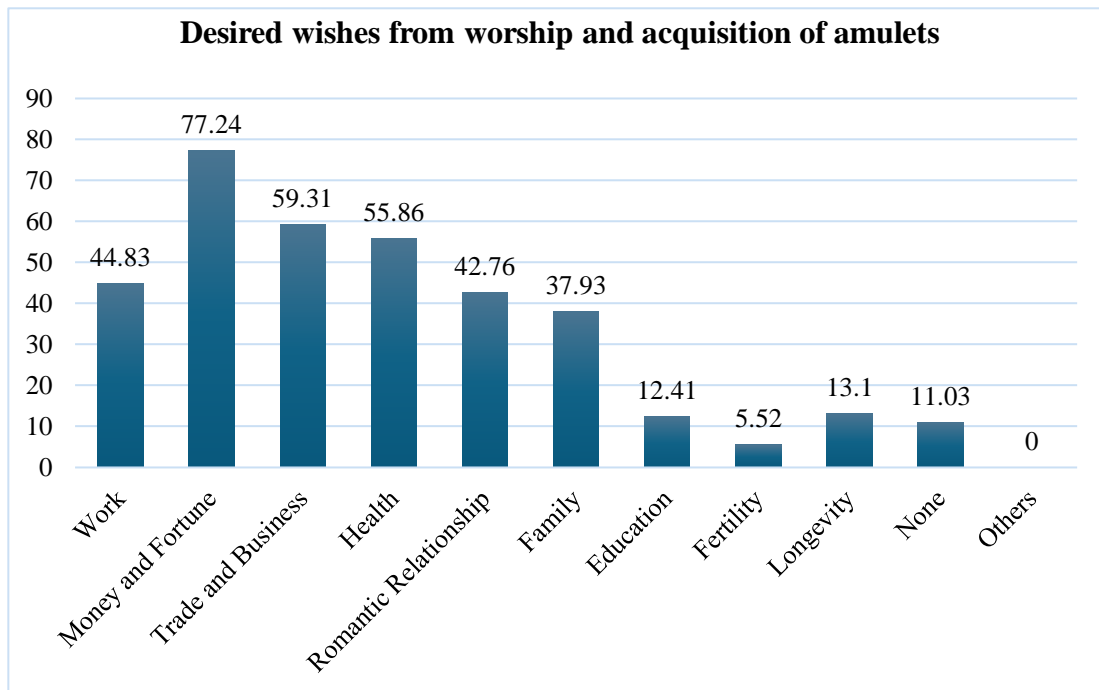
### *Mutelu tourism phenomenon in Chiang Mai*

The Mutelu tourism phenomenon in Chiang Mai can be examined from the perspectives of tourists, entrepreneurs, and tourist attractions.

### *Mutelu tourism through the perspective of tourists*

The findings show that the purposes of Chinese tourists' trips to Mutelu tourist attractions were two-fold: (1) to visit and pay respect for sacred figures and (2) to acquire amulets.

Figure 12. Bar chart illustrating desired wishes of Chinese tourists



The bar chart shows that the majority of the tourists wished for money and fortune at 77.24 percent, consistent with a remark by an expert on amulet marketing at *Wat Ko Chok* Mr.D (Personal communication, 2023, December) 17) saying that Chinese visitors mostly came to ask for prosperity and fortune, as well as a liaison at *Wat Phra That Doi Kham* Mr.F (Personal communication, 2023, December) 8) who said that the temple was very popular among Chinese tourists and most came to ask for fortune, professional success, money or luck from *Luang Pho Than Jai*, known to grant 'instant wishes'. If their wishes were fulfilled, they would return and offer at least 50 jasmine garlands in return. A great number of granted wishes inspired others to pay a visit, hoping to have their own fulfillment as well. Those who could not visit in person had the option of offering returns or making wishes through video calls. Mr. F also added that a record high of 500,000 garlands offered to *Luang Pho Than Jai* of 500,000 garlands was set by a Chinese visitor. This evidence illustrates the significance of money in Chinese culture, as it has the potential to enhance individuals' standard of living and provide them with access to the four requisites of life, although money itself is not considered one of them. In addition, money can provide safety and acts as an indicator of success, leading to respect for society (Figure 12).

#### *Mutelu tourism through the perspective of entrepreneurs in amulet business*

Site visits revealed that most tourist attractions offered amulets for acquisition with the exception of first-class royal temples. The most popular amulet among Chinese tourists who wished to acquire or purchase amulets was Takrut at 44.44 percent of 36 respondents, accounting for 24.83 percent. This is consistent with the statement by an expert in amulet marking at *Wat Sri Don Moon* Mr.C (Personal communication, 2023, November) 10) saying that the most popular amulets at the temple were (1) Takrut Phattakhun 108 Baramee Kao Khanajan with serial numbers and Phong Wan Kesa Powder: 'Sang Maha Viharn Luang' model (2) golden Takrut: 'Nunduang' model" (3) Silver Takrut Salika: 'Setthi Ngoen Lan' model and (4) Trakut Hua Jai Setthi. Amulets bestowing luck, wealth, and business success were the most popular among

Chinese. This is similar to the case of Wat Phra That Doi Suthep as per an expert there Ms.N (Personal communication, December 2023), who explained that visitors to the temple were predominantly Chinese, coming for sightseeing, worshipping, or purchasing amulets. The popular items included (1) Trakut Jingjok Song Hang believed to bring about attraction, profits, fortune, and prosperity, and (2) Trakut Ka Sathon believed to protect wearers from harm and black magic, deflecting bad actions or thoughts back to the source.

In addition to tourists, Chinese entrepreneurs in amulet businesses travel to Chiang Mai for vacation, while also purchasing amulets for resale purposes. A Chinese businessman trading sacred objects Mr.T (personal communication, 2023, November) 10) mentioned that Kruba A's amulets were highly popular in China, and he frequently visited Kruba A's temple to acquire products for reselling in China. Due to his extensive experience in the industry, he primarily engaged in online sales, occasionally opting for livestreaming in order to instill confidence in customers regarding the authenticity of the products. Additionally, the inclusion of live demonstrations of consecration rituals conducted by Kruba A resulted in a notable increase in sales. He added that this business had drastically improved his life this year, featuring a three-fold increase in profit. This is consistent with statements by the expert at Wat Ko Chok Mr.D (personal communication, December 2023, 17) claiming that Chinese tourists visit the temple partake in various rituals aimed at warding off misfortune and lessening the impact of unfavorable circumstances. These rituals, including the candle offering ceremony, are conducted both individually and in groups. Additionally, individuals have the option to participate remotely in these rituals through online platforms. To facilitate their involvement, Chinese agents utilize WeChat to transmit personal information such as names, dates of birth, and photographs of the participants. The temple organize rituals in batches, varying in size from large to small, typically accommodating an average of 100 participants per batch.

### **Mutelu tourism through the perspective of entrepreneurs in tourist attractions**

Tourism plays a critical role in the overall development of a nation by, facilitating economic growth through increased investment, employment opportunities, and enhanced living standards. A noteworthy manifestation in this realm is the growing prominence of faith-driven tourism, also referred to as Mutelu tourism. It has emerged as a significant contributor to economic value and, consequently, has become part of Thailand's soft power scheme. Being a cultural and religious hub, Chiang Mai is rich in cultural heritage and unique tourist attractions, and is thus capable of attracting a great number of domestic and international visitors, particularly from China. Consequently, both the public sector and tourist attractions themselves strive to develop novel strategies for tourism that will improve their ability to provide safety, amenities, and convenience. These efforts include initiatives such as employing Chinese speaking tourguides, creating signage in Chinese, maintaining cleanliness and upkeep of the sites, and offering opportunities for purchasing amulets, all in response to the demands of Chinese tourists driven by Mutelu.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

### **Conclusion**

The factors contributing to the popularity of the top 10 Mutelu tourist attractions we as follows: First, these places serve both sightseeing and mutelu purposes simultaneously. They also offer excellent convenience for Chinese tourists through various facilities, including informative signboards that provide a historical context and explanations of amulet acquisition. Additionally, Chinese-speaking liaisons offer detailed information, recommendations, and guidance on amulet purchases. Moreover, testimonials from renowned personalities or travel applications have sparked an increase in trend-based travel experiences. In addition, these well-known landmarks, conveniently situated in close proximity to one another, showcase the captivating beauty of Lanna architecture and embody a rich historical legacy. Lastly, the inception of some of these premier destinations can be attributed to faithful beliefs in revered figures, entailing visits by tourists who seek to pay respect to them.

Regarding tourists' decision-making, multiple factors influence the decision of Chinese tourists to visit Mutelu tourist attractions. The first is the desire to find a spiritual anchor to enhance one's mental energy.

Second, the presence of shared beliefs between Thai and Chinese cultures attracts tourists. Third, testimonials and endorsements from celebrities or successful individuals also have considerable influence on their decision-making processes. Finally, marketing and advertising encourage Chinese tourists to visit the tourist attractions of Mutelu.

This phenomenon of mutual tourism can be analyzed from three perspectives. From the viewpoint of tourists, their visits are mainly for the purposes of sightseeing, paying respect to sacred sites, and acquiring amulets with wealth and fortune being at the top of the desired wishes, accounting for 77.24 percent. Another aspect to consider is entrepreneurs' point of view. Most attractions in Chiang Mai have amulets for sale, apart from first-class royal temples, with Trakut being the most popular among Chinese tourists at 44.44 percent. Not only do tourists come to acquire these items on their own, but also entrepreneurs in the amulet business whose purpose of visit is to travel while purchasing these products for resale. Finally, as tourism is one of Thailand's key industries, there are constant efforts for improvement in order to enhance the capacity of tourist attractions by providing safety, improved facilities, and convenient and effective communication in the Chinese language, while maintaining them in good condition and responding to the needs of Mutelu-driven tourists by offering vending spots for amulets.

## Discussion

The findings of this study are as follows.

The term 'mutelu' is commonly used to describe the practices and beliefs associated with superstition, supernatural belief, the veneration of holy entities, and the use of amulets. It functions as a spiritual anchor and is believed to have a positive influence on life in several dimensions, from work, finance, and health to education, among others. It may also provide protection from harm or enhance attraction power. This is consistent with Duangwiset's (2022) description that mutelu is a belief in propitious objects that have the power to induce positive changes in life, leading to success. These objects are created based on religious beliefs or venerable, holy beings.

Regarding the demographic data, most of the respondents (145) were female entrepreneurs aged between 25 and 35 years, with bachelor's degrees who identified themselves as atheists. The results reveal that respondents of different genders, age ranges, education levels, professions, and religions respond differently to mutelu tourism, consistent with Serirat's (2007) claim that demographic and tourism features, including age, gender, income, and education, can help with the process of defining target groups. They can also be measured more easily than the other variables. Variances in demographic features correspond to disparities in psychological traits. In the survey, interest in mutelu tourism was more prevalent among female respondents than males, and most were aged between 25 and 35, highlighting the differences in terms of values, attitudes, and thoughts. Typically, older generations of Chinese tend to exhibit a lack of openness to the subject of superstition and amulets because of the strict nature of socialism at that time; however, a shift in value can be observed in the 25 - 35 group whose preference leans towards liberalism, as opposed to conservatism in the older groups. It could also be due to life problems facing modern people, causing them to feel lost and thus resort to superstition in the hope that everything will go smoothly and success will be achieved. Even if the effects are not immediate or provable, superstition offers psychological comfort. In terms of belief, the fact that atheists form the majority of the Chinese population may be attributed to Confucian and Taoist influences since ancient times, in combination with the socialist regime after the Open Door Policy, which discouraged religious or traditional practices. Nowadays, with the freedom of belief, which varies depending on individuals' purposes and attitudes, many Chinese are becoming believed in sacred beings and objects. More than half (59.31%) of Chinese tourists who have visited Mutelu attractions in Chiang Mai came to pay respect and acquire amulets for wealth and fortune, meaning these things are highly prioritized by the Chinese, as they allow access to the four requisites, a comfortable life, and optimal healthcare. Money is also an indicator of success, bringing about praises and respect, as manifested in the saying, which means that although money is not everything, the lack thereof makes life impossible. There are two main purposes for visits to Mutelu tourist attractions: sightseeing and paying respect, and acquiring amulets. The most popular item among tourists, Trakut, was at the top of the

list at 44.44 percent. Although each iteration differs according to the purpose of creation, most studies focus on bestowing wealth, fortune, and commercial success.

On the topic of factors accounting for the popularity of the top Mutelu tourist destinations, these destinations cater to the preferences of tourists, allowing them to both admire the beauty of their surroundings and engage in activities such as showing respect and acquiring amulets. Second, services provided help to facilitate and enhance the experience thanks to signboards written in Simplified Chinese to give descriptions and instructions, allowing for optimum understanding. The third is testimonials by celebrities and travel applications, creating travel trends that reflect individuals' identities and earn their approval as someone who always stays up-to-date with trends from society. The majority of Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai are aged 25 – 35, which means that they grew up with technology and are proficient in it. The influence of online popularity on tourism cannot be overstated. Fourth, these places are famous locations with an interesting history and convenient locations. Lastly, the origins of tourist attractions can be traced back to the profound faith in esteemed religious figures, which draws visitors who seek to pay homage to highly revered monks. Some revered individuals have gained international followers, as they travel abroad and inspire devotion from diverse countries. This reverence is often rooted in the perception that these monks possess enhanced or magical abilities that can positively alter life circumstances or aid in the fulfillment of personal goals. Consequently, the fulfillment of such wishes reinforces the faith of believers and generates word-of-mouth. All of these factors help attract believers to visit these Mutelu destinations, which have a long-standing history and exceptional beauty, as well as service quality, convenience of travel, credibility, and high levels of faith in esteemed figures and objects. This is consistent with Onputtha et al.'s (2023) claim that the decision making process prior to visiting Mutelu Temples encompasses several factors, including conducting thorough information research, utilizing knowledge and faith, assessing service quality, verifying the authenticity of provided information, evaluating staff hospitality, and ensuring a clean environment.

The decision to visit these destinations may be attributed to the need for a spiritual anchor and the similar beliefs shared by Thai and Chinese cultures, as can be seen in multiple traditions involving worship of gods, deities, and ancestors. When individuals find themselves feeling lost or without a clear path, they often rely on superstitions for guidance. This is particularly evident in Thai culture, where people seek solace through various practices, such as turning to sacred figures, amulets, horoscopes, temple visits, and ritualistic acts of meritmaking. Similarly, Chinese individuals gravitate towards these objects and practices, as they offer a sense of tranquility and psychological comfort. Consequently, it is not surprising that those raised in such belief systems would also embrace Mutelu, as it aligns with their shared pursuit of spiritual stability, success, and prosperity. In addition, endorsements from prominent individuals and popular travel applications have contributed to a surge in the popularity of trend-focused travel experiences. Followers of celebrities and their superstitious journeys tend to believe these testimonials about their wishes being fulfilled, which in turn reinforces faith and demand for such destinations. Tourists, influenced by these emerging trends, aspire to achieve ultimate fulfillment and success in life by seeking assistance from supernatural entities.

### Suggestions

1. Due to the fact that as some tourists might refuse cooperation, having a large population size can cause delays in the research.
2. It is advisable to request assistance from the tour guide in distributing the surveys in situations where tourists are unwilling to cooperate because of their lack of trust in strangers and fear of encountering scammers.
3. It is crucial to thoroughly communicate the research objectives to the interview participants, who may have concerns about potential societal backlash or criticism regarding the promotion of superstition.

4. It is important that the interviewer understands the local dialect because some interviewees may be more proficient in local variation than the standard one. Using the local dialect also makes them feel comfortable and willing to share information.

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