

# Defining Visual Arts or Media to represent Sense of Religion Place in Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

During this COVID-19 era, the world is now living with COVID-19. This disease needs to be treated delicately. The widespread of this disease creates an impact throughout many different industries, especially with a social gathering. Social distancing has to be applied to stop the spreading of the disease. In solving the spreading problem, the online platform of any work or study activities has been adopted and applied in supporting social distancing and maintaining regular activities of work and study. Tourism is the one most important hit by this pandemic. In recovering the tourism industry, vaccination is the new hope to humankind. Stop spreading might be the new hope from vaccination while waiting for it. Moving into the online arena brings another hope of getting the tourism industry a new life. Sense of place is the key to connecting tourist and attraction place. Creating a sense of place through visual media can establish such a connection. Using visual art through an online platform might bring tourism to a new start. Using design thinking as a research methodology in searching for



attraction place in religion and identifying the identity of religious place is the key to define the character of religious place. Therefore, matching the characteristic of religious places with visual art characteristics should bring a sense of religious place through the virtual environment later. 360 Photosphere or 360 Spherical panoramas, Color photographs, and Video tours are 3 types of visual art picked to represent religious places the best. At last, all three visual art or media can stimulate tourists in developing a connection between tourist and place. The development of realistic imagery from all 3 visual arts might shed some light on better visual media in religious places. Creating a sense of place environment for tourists to experience without traveling to the actual place while this pandemic is still going might be within reach.

**Keywords:** Religion; Sense of Place; Visual Arts; Semiotic; Tourism.

## Introduction

COVID-19 is the most horrific pandemic that spread throughout the world. It becomes the world problem with the majority impact tourism industry across the board. Many countries halt their airline operations and stop the related tourism industry. The loss in revenue is staggering high in each tourism-related country such as Thailand. In this concern, Thailand adopts its tourism industry and manages to contain the situation despite the collapse.

Presently, the vaccination brings new hope to Thailand tourism. Thailand's public health department issues new rules and regulations for vaccinated tourists to quarantine for 7 days instead of 14 days within a quarantine area. This will include the issue of a vaccination certificate. As for non-vaccinated tourists reduced the quarantine period to 10 days with stumbled around the quarantine area in hope of boosting the tourism industry shortly (Kasemsuk, 2021). Although vaccination can bring new hope to the tourism industry of the more open country for tourism and boosting better and secured transportation without spreading more disease, the vaccination is still not guaranteed safe from side-effects like other well-known vaccines like influenza or measles. CDC published the possible side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine as physical pain and swelling, fever, muscle pain, headache, chill among basic symptoms of getting COVID-19 vaccination shot (CDC, 2021).

During this pandemic, most operation especially education system has been moved into online learning. Most educational institutes are urged to adopt online education and e-learning in letting students study from home alongside “Stay home away from COVID-19”. Pandemic shut down all schools across the globe. E-Learning is on the rise and here to stay for the long haul in fighting pandemic situations. There is a significant surge in using online learning software, dictionary online, and video conferencing during this COVID-19 (Li, 2020). Work from home is also another campaign to let people work from the comfort of their home in the hope to reduce social contact and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Tourism should be able to do the same in online virtual platforms.

At first, when tourists come to visit a place, they have physical contact with a place and develop some relationship with a place called the sense of place. The definition for Sense of place can be varied depends on discipline. Basically, in terms of tourism, it involved the relationship between tourists and the place they visit. It usually defines the

characteristic and unique identity of each place that interacts with people as well (Sense of place in Wikipedia, 2021). Therefore, this sense of place is the connection between place and tourist through senses and other elements surrounding that particular place. Religion place is located all around the world. People interact with sacred spirit, tourist can identify the place as attraction place. The relationship of place and people makes the place meaningful. Popularity of people within religion place is well-known by society at some point (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Religion place has its unique senses to be identified as house of worship. This research intends to find that attribute in sanctuary in defining the place physically through visual arts. The design thinking process is applied to deliver the method of researching the area and identifying the identity of religion's place within the area.

### **Research Objectives**

This research is aimed to:

- 1) Explore the area of Banglumphu as case study for Religion attraction
- 2) Analyze and categorize religion attraction places in Banglumphu
- 3) Identify the sense of religion place for visual arts

### **Research Methodology**

This research is followed a design thinking process to design the virtual environment of sense of place in focus on Religion part for this particular research article. The design thinking process was used in this research. There are 5 stages in design thinking – Empathy, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test (Springboard, 2021). The first stage is the Empathy stage. The qualitative research method has been mainly used to experiment in this research. In-depth interviews and surveys in photography have been used to investigate the area of the case study. The exploration of the area in search of different attractions develops multiple groups of attraction places.

Four categories, in particular, have been identified and focused on to define the identity of the area. There are historical architecture, religion, community, and gastronomy. Religion attraction places will be focused on in this research article. Local people within the case study area have been interviewed and discussed history, lifestyle, and any other related topic about the area in search of significant information. There are 12 of them and the summary of all in-depth interviews will be presented later.

The second stage is the define stage. This is to analyze the problem or information from the define stage. Methods as an affinity diagram, Information architecture, mindmap have been used to categorize information, lay down the structure of the case study area, and break down the problem.

The third stage is the ideate stage. In this stage, idea creation for the solution of the problem has been developed and demonstrated for the wider possible design solution. There is one method that is used in this stage which is active search. It is to find many possible ways to design the solution through online resources or a traditional one. After finishing the search, one or two possible solutions are selected for the next stage – the prototype stage. That is in stage four.

In this stage, the actual design of the solution is developed. All functionality has to work in order to prove the solution of the design. Then, the last stage is the evaluation stage. In this stage, the prototype is tested and evaluated by an expert and actual user. Both methods are called expert review and user testing. The result will be reported as the outcome of this research. The below diagram shows the design thinking process.

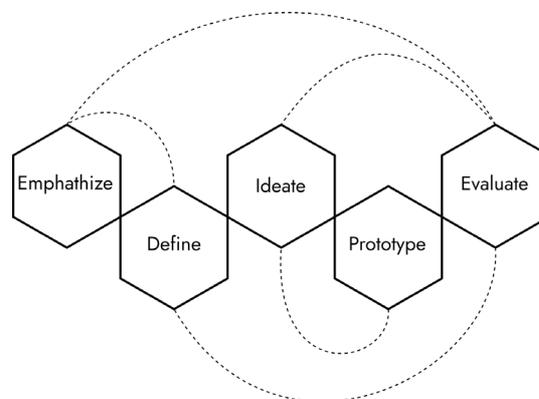


Figure 1: Design Thinking Diagram

## Research Result

From the first and second objectives, the research result was found that there are many different categories of attraction places within the area of a case study. Even though the area has been defined as a historical site, some activities have blended in smoothly inside the historical architecture of this area. Four categories have been defined as the identity of this area – historical architecture, religion, communities, and gastronomy.

Focusing on religion categories for this research article, there are 3 types of religious architecture in this area – Temple to represent Theravada Buddhism, Mosque to represent Islam, and Shrine to represent Mahayana Chinese Buddhism and other significant figures/goddesses. In each category used color to represent it in the web design – Orange for Buddhism, Yellow for Islamic, and Red for Chinese Shrine and alike. Wat or temple held most respectful and ancient in the area – Wat Bowonniweth Vihara. This temple has been erected for 250 more years in this area. It is also located a couple of relic of important King Rama of the Rattanakosin era. Wat Chanasongkram is another important temple in this area as adopted by the queen of Luang Chakjessada. Phra Pinklao's Relic has been kept in this temple. Chakkramong mosque is the very first and important mosque in the Rattanakosin era situated in this area. It is the most ancient and respectful for all Muslims around the area. Chao Por Nuu shrine is one of the most sacred shrines located on the bank of the Banglumphu canal.

Based on the past history, local people believed that he helped protect the fire from burning the community and protect the area from disaster and all. Each religious place has its own characteristic and particular location that tourists could experience the place in a special way. The experience in visiting each religious place can establish a sense of satisfaction in tourist's emotions. The surrounding of religious place creates a different atmosphere in the sacred of each religion. One temple, in particular, creates a forest-like environment surrounding by sacred figures. The mood of the place develops a mindful environment for laypeople to have a peaceful mind. In such an environment, meditation can develop within a human's mind and calm one's emotion toward the meditative stage. Most temples even situated in the middle of the area cultivates peace and a quiet atmosphere for Buddhists to come and wind down. Mosques can also find the same peaceful environment for focusing on the praying ritual 5 times a day.

Therefore, the 3rd objective, the result for this research article is as in figure 2. It shows how to identify religion's place in the physical environment for tourism. In visual arts though, there are only some of the selected visual art in this research that can represent the sense of place for religion well. Figure 3 indicates the result through expert review and user testing.

All visual arts representations are 360 Photosphere, Panorama photo, B&W photographs, color photographs, video tours, visual storytelling, and sound. For holy place, 360 photo sphere, panorama, color photograph, and video tour and sound have been picked to represent the sense of place for place of worship. Based on user testing results, most users picked 360 photospheres, color photographs, and video tours to represent religious places more than the rest of visual arts and sound.

### Religion

		Shape/Form	Chanting	Scent	Space	Signage
1	Wat Bowonniweth Vihara	X	X	X	X	X
2	Wat Chanasongkram	X	X	X	X	X
3	Wat Tritosathep	X		X	X	X
4	Wat Sam Phraya	X	X	X	X	X
5	Wat Sangwej	X			X	X
6	Wat Mai Ammatarod	X	X	X	X	X
7	Wat AimWorranuch	X	X	X	X	X
8	Wat Parinayok	X	X	X	X	X
9	Chakrapong Mosque	X	X		X	X
10	Baan Tuk Din Mosque	X	X		X (IN)	X
11	Luang Chakjessada Shrine	X		X		
12	Chao Por Nuu Shrine	X		X		
13	Chao Por Kow Tuk Shime	X		X	X	X
14	Phra Chao Taksine Shrine	X			X	X
15	Trimullati Shrine	X				
16	Chao Mae Toranee Shrine	X				
17	Chao Mae Tubtim Shrine	X	X	X	X	X
18	Khao San Shrine	X				
19	Ganesha Shrine	X		X		

Figure 2: Show identity of each house of warship

### Religion Media

- ✓ 360 Spherical
- ✓ B&W Photo
- ✓ Visual Story
- ✓ Sound
- ✓ Cylindrical
- Color Photo
- ✓ Video Tour

Figure 3: Media that can represent holy place

## Body of Knowledge

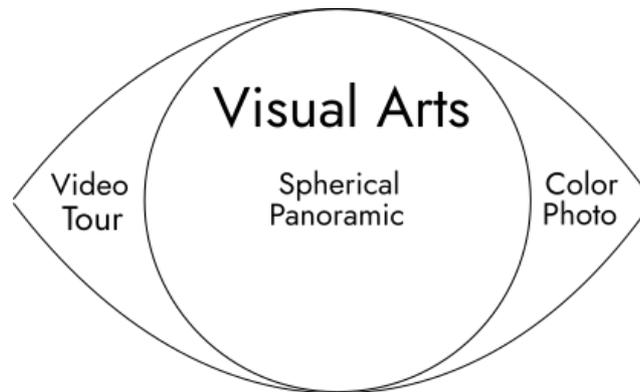


Figure 4: Visual Arts Sense of Religion Place

The above model explains what this research found out in using visual art to represent the sense of place for Banglumphu. Color photographs, 360 photospheres, and video tours would specifically represent the sense of religious place.

The color photograph can express form and environment including the atmosphere of religious place in which create a sense of architectural environment through sighting sense. The form of religious architecture develops the connectedness between tourists and places. Winfried said in "Handbook of Semiotics" about Photography and Sign that the 3D object when projected through photograph process does not change geometrical quality and attribute which can represent that object or place for that matter (Nöth, 1995). Still, an image or photograph can be as powerful as a moving image like a video tour in representing one specific moment in time of recent atmosphere.

In 360 photosphere using a single spot surrounding its environment to create a sense of religious place. Multiple still images establish the virtual sphere-like environment for tourists to sense the place at one moment in time. This virtual sphere-like environment creates a simple effect of being there at that place.

Video tour, on the other hand, creates a sense of moving right along the pathway of community or place in exploring the environment and setting of a place. Moving forward image develops a sense of walking along with the place even though tourist has no control over the movement. In the physical world, tourists can walk anywhere as they pleased. In the visual art of video tours, the creator creates one specific environment for tourists to

watch. On the contrary, tourists have appreciated the feeling of being there and walking along with the place.

Incorporated all these 3 visual arts media into an interesting mixed media should be able to establish a better sense of religious place, otherwise, each individual visual arts can express its own value to connect with tourists.

This body of knowledge can be used in developing a virtual environment using these media to express the character of each place. Tourist experience can develop an interesting attachment through the virtual display without being at the actual place using visual arts. John Berger said in “Ways of Seeing” that words comes after seeing. People recognized things through seeing more. Words cannot replace what we see as visual. Image came to represent something not too far up, but over time, it becomes the one outshined its representative. The image or visual can also express how someone sees something or place in different aspect (Berger, 1977).

### **Research Discussion**

From the research result of the first and second objectives, it was found that there is diversity in sanctuary within the case study area. When discussing holy place or place of worship, it is defined as space or construction that was built for devotion in each religion or belief. There would be a temple, church, shrine, or mosque (Wikipedia, 2021). There are a variety of beliefs coming from the migration of people from the southern part of Thailand and abroad. These people brought a new religion to the area and also a variety of cultures and traditions of gastronomy. The influential religion in this area is Buddhism. The first group of Muslims who was settled in the Rattanakosin era established the very first mosque in this area – Chakrapong mosque.

This mosque mixed different architecture from Roman mix Persian and Arabian style together well (Pipitthanarak, 2018). This mosque became the center of all Muslims around the area including outside the area as well. As of today, many people and cultures from the past have been gone most of it but the sense and feel of the area are still there. The story of each religious place is still told by earlier generations. Even if there is a globalization wave flowing in the area, but the way of life toward religious place can still exist today in the different form to fit into the new era.

Shrine in Latin means the storage of holy book but in terms of place, it is used to pay deity tribute in god or human form (Wigington, 2018). Shrine has a variety of its kind in Chinese Buddhism – Mahayana – as the main belief. There are also shrines with important figures of Thai culture such as Somdet Phrachao Taksin. There is a sacred place as his story in fighting to protect the area. People respect him as a respectful figure. In this religious place's category, color is used to categorize different religious places. Orange is for a Buddhist temple. Yellow is for Islamic Mosque. Red is for all the shrines both the human figure and superficial figure. Color should be able to distinguish religious place and how to identify it later on.

From the research result of the third objective, due to the difference in location and how it was built in the past, some religious places have been adjusted to fit into the new city plan and structure. Since most of the past transportation is through the river or canal, most religious places are located near river or canal. The road had been built long after most religious places were built, then, the main transportation has changed into on land instead. Transportation might not be an attribute to identify the sense of sanctorium well. Space, Sound, shape/form, scent, and signage are what identify as the sense of religious place. Space is for space within the religious place for religious activities. It can be inside or outside. Shape and form referred to the form of religious architecture within the temple. Based on Rudolf's book, form and shape can express the artistic view of architecture. The line and curve attribute convey the symbolic of structure to express its form of architecture. The photograph that captures the architectural form into shape can also express the sense of each architecture through this ever powerful yet simple visual art medium (Arnheim, 1974). Scent means the smell of incense or garland within any religious place. Signage is to give directional and wayfinding toward telling tourists where it is. Toward looking into visual arts, these qualities can be used to pick visual art media that can express those attributes the best. Based on the figure above, in panoramic, both types can represent religious places. Videography in both types can represent religious places well. Sound is the only element of media that can represent a religious place through Chanting. B&W Photograph has been used to represent religious place as to express historical sense. Thomas said that iconic sign can be seen in photograph since it represents the subject in the visual way. Then, photograph can be used as a representative of place in referring to the place (Sebook, 2001).

## Conclusion

Pandemic creates a lifestyle change throughout the world. The online environment becomes a new territory for exploring the opportunity. Many industries change their own platform of work into virtual reality with less social. The tourism industry needs to shift its own paradigm as well. It might not work as well in accepting new experiences over a virtual environment. New technology can change all that. Visual art or visual media can also be medium of gaining a better experience for intangible experience between tourist and attraction place – the sense of place in sanctuary. Seeking for the identity of holy place in this particular research article should extend into other attraction places. Defining visual arts in representing the sense of religious place can shed some ideas and establish a new beginning for tourism in the virtual environment. Hopefully, it can establish a new tourism industry and develop hope for a new adventure into the virtual world with exciting creativity beyond the physical world in the future.

Recommendation in order to extend this research further is to as follows:

- 1) Fine art department should collect and update information about all the oratory in the Banglumphu area for reference later.
- 2) Some of the religious places should keep it like it used to be. Renovate the religious place sometimes destroy the historical mark in identifying a sense of history to that place.
- 3) Researcher will gather and develop a virtual map and traditional map for tourist information.
- 4) Collecting in-depth information about each of the religious place and develop a new identity to each religious place for future tourist attraction.

As in future research, more information can be collected and analyzed to develop more detail in living together with the COVID era. The case study area of the research should extend out into Rattanakosin island based on the newly defined map.

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