Tourism in Thailand–Authenticity as *"Insta-bae"* for Japanese Tourists: A Case Study of Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen

Kunphatu Sakwit

Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
Email: platuna42@hotmail.com, Kunphatu.S@chula.ac.th

Abstract

The Thai temple or *wat* is regarded as one of the most salient features of Thailand tourism. Some Thai temples are likely to be well known by a specific tourist grouping. Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen (also known as Wat Paknam Phasi Charoen) is one of these places, having drawn a number of Japanese tourists in recent years. This article aims to study the social construction of authentic experience for Japanese tourists at this temple. The research also intends to look at how Japanese tourists interpret the functional objects it contains, and to draw upon Baudrillard's theory of "the system of objects" in the context of Thai temple tourism. To conceptualize authenticity, Baudrillard's ideas about functional objects were used extensively, especially those regarding interior design and atmosphere. Methodologically, I conducted qualitative research, employing a documentary research technique in which I researched Japanese tourists' Instagram and Tripadvisor posts. The findings indicate that authenticity, here, refers to the interpretation of the temple as *"Insta-bae,"* which renders it authentic for Japanese tourists without affecting its Buddhism-related function. What Japanese tourists view as authentic are the interior design and atmosphere, which are functional objects in the temple. I argue, therefore, that authenticity is socially and differently constructed for Japanese tourists, in that their interpretations and experience regarding this temple differ from those of Thai Buddhists.

Keywords: authenticity, Thailand, Baudrillard, tourism, Japanese tourists

Introduction

Authenticity has been one of the most hotly-debated issues in the sociology of tourism studies. According to Cohen (2016: 69), "Asian tourists seem to be generally little concerned with authenticity." If this is the case, what attracts them to tourist sites? Authenticity is an important element of the tourist experience not only for Western tourists; it also matters to Asian tourists, or, rather, they care about authenticity but they perceive and interpret it differently from their Western counterparts. Still, little attention is given to the authentic experience of Asian tourists in a non-Western context. Here, I focus on authenticity for Japanese tourists in particular. The Thai newspaper *Siamrath* (2023) reported that the Tourism Authority of Thailand expected to welcome 1.25 million Japanese tourists to the country in 2023. According to Hongsranagon (2006: 60), "there has been a strong relationship between Japan and Thailand, and Thailand has thus been one of the preferred destination countries for Japanese tourists both for short-term and for long-term stays." Visiting Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen has become a popular, must-do activity for these tourists. Although

located outside the center of Bangkok, the temple draws approximately 500 Japanese tourists a day (Chibi Anngle, 2020).

Relatively recently, Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen has been included for the first time in well-known and easily available Japanese guidebooks on Thailand–'*Rurubu,*'[1] (2019-2022) and '*Mappuru*'[2] (2018-2022)—and it was featured in the Japanese television series *Chugakusei Nikki*, which was aired on the TBS channel in 2018.[3] In addition, there is a strong connection between Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen and the one in Narita, Japan, and it also has a branch in Chiba Prefecture: Wat Paknam Japan was the country's first Thai temple (Watthai, 2023), built in 1996 to serve the purposes of mindfulness, merit practice, and the spreading of Thai Buddhist culture (Watthai, 2023). However, there is no clear evidence that the existence of Wat Paknam Japan is a reason for Japanese people visiting its principal branch in Thailand.

Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen is noted in particular for the number of Japanese tourists it attracts. In this article, authenticity is associated with Japanese tourist arrivals. I investigate how the temple has become such a popular tourist attraction and how Japanese tourists interpret authenticity in the temple. Local Thai Buddhists come to there to pray, regardless of the existence or not of authenticity. Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen functions as a sacred place for Buddhist adherents while simultaneously acting as an attraction in the context of tourism. Drawing upon Baudrillard's theory of "the system of objects," I suggest that authenticity in the temple is socially constructed by "functional objects" contained within it, with Japanese tourists interpreting authenticity based on their experience with *Insta-bae* places. I develop Baudrillard's concept of "functional objects" as a means to critically conceptualize authenticity. For Baudrillard, the term refers to interior design and atmosphere:

> The term "interior design" sums up the organizational aspect of the domestic environment… In the discourse of advertising the technical need for design is always accompanied by the cultural need for atmosphere. The two structure a single practice; they are two aspects of a single *functional* system. And both mobilize the values of play and of calculation–calculation of function in the case of design, calculation of materials, forms and space in the case of atmosphere (Baudrillard, 2005: 30, emphasis in the original).

Design always comes with atmosphere, and the two are essential components of a place and its environment. The values of design and atmosphere make a place, or an object, functional. In the case of tourism, design and atmosphere may enable a place to become a tourist attraction, and attract tourists to that place. Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen simultaneously serves two functions, one as "*Insta-bae*"[4] and the other as a sacred site for Thai Buddhists. Additionally, the study looks at the Japanese tourists' interpretations of the functional objects in the temple, and the extent to which Baudrillard's theory can shed light on authenticity for these tourists. For this study, I conducted qualitative research, using online documentary analysis of Japanese tourists' Instagram and Tripadvisor posts. Further details are provided in the method section.

---

[1]   Amazon.co.jp: るるぶタイ バンコク・アユタヤ'20 (るるぶ情報版海外) *Rurubu Thai Krungthep-Ayuttaya 2563 (Rurubu Nangsue namthiao chabab tang prathet)* (In Thai): Japanese Books [Rurubu Thai Bangkok-Ayuttaya 2563 (Rurubu guidebooks for foreign countries)

[2]   Amazon.co.jp: まっぷる タイ・バンコク'19 (マップルマガジン 海外)：昭文社 旅行ガイドブック 編集部 *Maapuru Thai-Krungtep 2562 (Mappuru Nitayasarn shababtangprated)* (In Thai) [Mappuru Thai-Bangkok 2562 Mappuru International Magazine]: Japanese Books

[3]   『中学聖日記』ロケ地＆撮影場所まとめ！【有村架純ら目撃情報】- ドラマ・映画・テレビ.com - Page 11 (xn--ddkf5a4b0cua7ha8553j-4t5a.com) '*Diary dek matthayom ton: Khomun ruam kiaokap sathanthi thai lae jut thai lakhon rueang ni!* (In Thai) [The diary of a middle-school student: information about shooting locations for this series]

[4]   *Insta-bae* is equivalent to "Instagrammable," which means that the photos are uploaded to the photo-and-video-sharing social networking service. These photos get noticed, and gain likes and praise from followers (Koga, 2020: 317).

Revisiting Authenticity

Authenticity has received significant scholarly attention; yet some people question whether it is a dated concept, or whether tourists care about it. Boorstin states that the "tourist seldom likes the authentic products of the foreign culture; he prefers his own provincial expectations" (Boorstin, 1964: 106, cited in Wang, 1999: 352). What is presented to tourists can satisfy them if it meets their expectations. If we take it that searching for authenticity did not seem to matter to tourists in the past, what then would have attracted them to visit places? Generally speaking, destinations use authenticity in many ways as a selling point to attract tourists, by employing slogans such as "Malaysia Truly Asia" and "The Real Italy" (Li and Li, 2022: 1). Although much work has already been done on authenticity, there are three issues that I would like to point out.

First, much of the literature sees authenticity as "something out there," awaiting discovery. Authenticity may be obtained from the social interaction between tourists and a local host. In studying tourist settings, MacCannell (1973: 589) focuses on sightseeing as a form of ritual respect for society, which the search for authenticity everywhere manifests in our society. For him, authenticity is not an overarching social structure imposed on people; instead, structure and consciousness become intertwined. Although consciousness seems to be created internally, it, to some extent, is shaped according to social structure. MacCannell (1973: 101-102) considers this point by developing Goffman's concept (1959) regarding front and back stage from a dichotomy into a continuum, with social interaction between tourists, and hosts creating different degrees of authenticity in tourist establishments. Although tourists, seeing back regions as representing intimacy and closeness, can enter the back-stage area, this may not be a real authentic experience, but rather "staged authenticity" to accommodate tourists' desires (MacCannell, 1973). Tourists' consciousness of authenticity is subject to the structure of interaction.

Following MacCannell, Wang (1999) proposed three typologies of authenticity: attributes of objects in museums (object authenticity), different interpretations and perceptions by tourists of objects and places (constructive authenticity), and a third category activated by tourist activities (existential authenticity). These three types are external to tourists and are encountered by them on visiting a place. Wang (1999: 352, 361) argues for existential authenticity, or rather activity-related authenticity, as an alternative concept in tourism, with this idea pertaining to the two dimensions of intra-personal and inter-personal authenticity. The former is a bodily feeling consisting of sensual pleasure and personal identity activated by engaging in a tourist activity, while the latter derives from touristic communitas, in which the sense of authenticity is activated by pleasure in seeing sights in the company of others (Wang, 1999: 361-365). Although Wang posits MacCannell's authenticity as an objectivist conception relating to a museum-linked usage, MacCannell's approach seems to interweave both objective and constructive stances. Social settings are inextricably linked to perceptions and belief of authenticity.

Cohen also writes, "[C]onstructive authenticity may combine elements of both objective and existential authenticity, and objective conditions may involve tourist activity (existential authenticity), while the subjective conditions for the perception of a site, event and object could be objectively authenticity" (Cohen, 2007: 76). Different interpretations of authenticity may depend as much on toured objects as on tourist activity. What is regarded as an authentic toured object sometimes requires tourist participation, for example, tourists dressing up in traditional Thai costumes in a museum. However, there is no universal perception or experience of authenticity; it varies across tourist groupings and contexts of tourism. As stated in Li and Li's findings (2022: 11), Chinese tourists value both nature and culture

authenticity, and perceived authenticity positively affects destination image and tourists' satisfaction, while Guichard-Anguis and Moon (2009) found that Japanese tourists are subject to authenticity differently in different contexts.

The second issue is that the existing literature does not form a clear connection between authenticity and tourist photography. Rather, it sees photography as an embodied practice. Larsen (2005: 417) maintains that tourist photography is performed rather than preformed, and he sees tourist photographers as framing as much as being framed. For Larsen, this photography is very much an unscripted performance and subject to tourist action. It can produce and reproduce both meanings and sense of place. In producing photography of the tourist place, Crawshaw and Urry (1997: 194) state,

> the travel photographer and the tourist seem to engage in a mutually reinforcing social process of constructing and altering images of places and experiences, for instance, in the case of the Lake District, they collude in the transformation of the physical environment into a resource for recreation, personal enjoyment, good health and happiness.

Tourist photography is not static, but rather pertains to the roles of travel photographer and tourist in producing and reproducing images of a place. It may, more or less, connect to constructive and existential authenticity, showing how tourists interpret a place, make sense of that place and participate in activity there. Further to this, Taylor (2010: 33-34) proposes that "photogenic authenticity pertains to photographic images produced consciously according to reified aesthetic conventions, especially relating to ideals of cultural authenticity." Tourists travel to faraway places to take photographs, and they tend to do so following normative practices of photography published in tourism-related media. In this way, tourist photography relates to authenticity. However, further study of photogenic authenticity is needed to examine how it is constituted in different contexts.

In addition to these two issues, authenticity is likely to be grounded in binary oppositions. In the context of Orientalism, "marketed images of indigenous people tend to portray predominantly what Westerners have historically imagined the other to be like" (Silver 1993: 303), and "authenticity for Western tourists exists in other times and in other places" (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003: 183). According to Olsen (2002: 162), "the past, the other or another place is the counter-concept to modernity and is inscribed with the authenticity for which tourists search." What has become "the other" is opposed to the modern. Authenticity seems to produce the binary opposition of the Western and the Oriental/the other. Authenticity is reduced to a one-sided take on Western tourists.

However, authenticity is not limited to the Western tourist experience. Japanese tourists generally regard Southeast Asia as a nostalgic place, or *natsukashii*, where they can find what they have lost in Japan's modernization (Yamashita, 2009: 201). Authenticity is found in other places and times. Furthermore, Japanese tourists' interpretations of the temple could possibly be subject to certain value and meaning systems they use when assigning meaning and value to temples. Their specific values may historically relate to the notion of "play." The perception of *tabi* (moving, journey, trip) centers on both oneself and on looking for play (Guichard-Anguis 2009: 6, 10). Japanese visitors aim to discover things and to simultaneously enjoy themselves, while they are away from home. Additionally, in making a journey to a distant place, Japanese tourists embed the idea of "photogenic authenticity" introduced by Taylor (2010), as previously mentioned. Photogenic authenticity, especially *Insta-bae* culture, seems to be unique to Japanese people, as this relates back to *purikura* culture: "The practice of taking and

uploading photographs using Instagram's filters and effects can be viewed as an extension of *purikura* culture which refers to photo booths that allow users to take photographs, edit the photographs using a stylus and touch screen, and receive instant prints of these photographs" (Hassel, 2023: 119). What characterizes Instagram use among Japanese people, especially *Insta-bae* culture among girls and young women, is the extent of the historical and ongoing forms of gendered socialities (Hassel, 2023: 125). Unlike Hassel's work, my article examines *Insta-bae* culture among Japanese tourists visiting Wat Paknam in Thailand regardless of gender.

Bringing Baudrillard Back

Baudrillard discusses authenticity directly in "the system of objects" viewing it as a non-functional object whereby "the quest for authenticity (being-founded-on-itself) is therefore very precisely a quest for an alibi (being-elsewhere)" (Baudrillard, 2005: 81). The status of authentic object derives from other sources of value in another context. However, I argue that authenticity does not have to be located in the non-functional, or antique, object. Baudrillard's concept of the functional object can also be used extensively to conceptualize authenticity, and even to address authenticity for non-Western tourists, particularly Japanese tourists in the context of tourism in Thailand. In other words, both functional and non-functional objects can be employed to study authenticity.

Using the concept of functional objects does not create inherent authenticity, nor does being functional make places and objects inherently authentic. Rather, authenticity is socially constructed through the interaction between objects and tourists. As stated earlier, what is functional for Baudrillard (2005: 13) is interior design and atmosphere. With the former,

> the arrangement of furniture used to offer a faithful image of the familial and social structures of a period. The typical bourgeois interior is patriarchal…Within this private space each piece of furniture in turn, and each room, internalizes its own particular function and takes on the symbolic dignity pertaining to it.

Baudrillard (2005: 15-16) goes on to say that in the modern environment,
> the style of furniture changes as the individual's relationships to family and society change… There is progress, nevertheless: between the individual and these objects, which are now more supple in their uses and have ceased to exercise or symbolize moral constraint, there is a much more liberal relationship, and in particular the individual is no longer strictly defined through them relative to his family.

In terms of functional objects, interior design has undergone a transition from traditional to modern. Interior design is not restricted to any specific function, meaning, or form of social relationship; instead, these functions, meanings, and relationships are subject to different combinations of arranging and producing space: "Today objects have no individual presence, yet merely an overall coherence attained by virtue of their simplification as components of a code and the way their relationships are calculated" (Baudrillard, 2005: 23). Objects are dependent upon one another, with the presence of each providing interrelated meanings of the place. "Today, at last, these objects emerge absolutely clear about the purposes they serve. They are thus indeed free as *functional objects*–that is, they have the freedom to

function…*Now, just so long as the object is liberated only in its function, man equally is liberated only as user of that object*" (Baudrillard, 2005: 16-17, emphasis in original). The existence of objects does not depend on their absolute value, or on what exactly they are used for. Rather, function may be reassigned and redefined, regardless of whether the object is an original or a reproduction. Peoples' usage of the object is redefined according to this change.

Atmosphere has witnessed similar changes to those in interior design, particularly regarding colors. For instance, in "structures of atmosphere" we seem to witness a shift from traditional color to functional color:

> In the traditional system colours have psychological and moral overtones…Above all [colour] remains circumscribed by form; it does not seek contact with other colours, and it is not a free value. Tradition confines colours to its own parochial meanings and draws the strictest of boundary-lines about them (Baudrillard, 2005: 30).

> For functional colour, colour is liberated from its own traditional realm:
> 'free' colours means that they are at least able to play an active role…In the fully fledged system of atmosphere, by contrast, colours obey no principle but that of their own interaction; no longer constrained in any way, whether by ethical considerations or by nature, they answer to one imperative only–the gauging of atmosphere (Baudrillard, 2005: 35).

Colors that traditionally had fixed meanings have become liberated in modern life. They are used freely, combining with one another to produce and reproduce atmosphere.

According to Baudrillard, "atmosphere is dependent upon a calculated balance between hot and cold tones…and these two tones are required to interact, in each ensemble, with structure and form…; therefore, functional warmth does not come from a warm substance, yet signifies warmth, with the absence of any source" (Baudrillard, 2005: 37). What assigns functionality to atmosphere is hot and cold tones. These do not relate, however, to the origins of the hot or cold substance; rather, functional warmth and cold are mere signifieds. As we will see in relation to Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen, interior design and atmosphere (colors) can connote authenticity for Japanese tourists.

Research Method

I employed a qualitative method, using a documentary research technique. Here, "document" refers to a variety of material, including visual sources such as photographs, video and film (Morgan, 2022: 64). I researched Japanese tourists' posts on Instagram and Tripadvisor, from which those with the hashtags *#watto pakkunamu* and *#watto pakunamu*–the name of the temple in Japanese–were selected. Japanese people tend to use Instagram for sharing photographs with short captions. Data collection was undertaken from June to September 2020, amid widespread Covid-19. I studied a total of 200 posts, 50 from the "most recent" category and 50 from the top category on Instagram, and 100 recent posts on Tripadvisor. Data from the Tripadvisor posts were examined to confirm the findings from Instagram, and to find similar elements in the photographs and similar keywords/ideas in the captions and posts. Prominent features of the photographs posted on both platforms were the emerald-green glass the painted ceiling above the *chedi* (a Thai word corresponding to pagoda), the large gold Buddha image and the white *wihan*

(a Thai word corresponding to chapel). The captions and comments were used to reflect on the posters' interpretations of the temple. After having collected 100 posts on each platform, the data were saturated and repeated keywords and ideas emerged.

I asked a Japanese friend who is fluent in Thai to help me translate posts. I then further translated them into English. Next, I coded all the data to examine the extent of their similarities and differences. Following Clarke and Braun (2014), I then conducted thematic analysis, which is not only used to describe/ summarize key patterns in data but also to present an interpretative story about the data in relation to a research question. The themes of interior design and atmosphere were extracted from Baudrillard's theory of functional objects. Codes that fell into each theme were categorized, and used to elaborate on that theme. This was to help connect the theory with the data, and vice versa.

Regarding ethics, Morgan (2022: 69) advises, "when making ethical decisions concerning the use of online content, researchers need to remember that the greater the chance the content is considered public, the less need there is to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the individuals who created it." Japanese tourists' posts are public; therefore, accessing and retrieving these data was ethically feasible. However, I did not click on these to view the account details, or indeed to look at any other of their photographs. Also, I numbered the data items so as to keep all information confidential. What follows are the research findings.

Insta-bae Interior Design

It is important to note that the temple was not built for tourism.[5] Maha Chedi Ratchamongkol, has been a symbolic site for Thai Buddhists since it was constructed in 2011.[6] Its primary function as a religious place is not what renders Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen a popular tourist spot and an authentic place; rather, its secondary tourism-related function, as *Insta-bae* and photogenic is what does so. In the top and recent Instagram posts and recent Tripadvisor posts, Japanese tourists said that they visited the temple because it was a popular photography location and was *Insta-bae*. For instance, a tourist viewed the place as

> photogenic: we join the group tour to visit the temple. During our journey, we pass in front of local shops. We go there in the morning, so it's quiet inside. We visit this temple without checking any information. Apart from us, most tourists come here to take Instagram photographs (author's translation) (Yoichi, 2019).

They were able to take beautiful, colorful photographs of themselves with the *chedi* in the background, and of the *chedi* with its ceiling (Figure 1).

---

[5]   According to TakeMeTour, the place "is a royal temple, located in Phasi Charoen district, Bangkok [and] belongs to the Maha Nikai monastic order, built around 400 years ago, the temple became widely known because of the meditation master Luang Pu Sodh Candasaro" (2020). Retrieved on January 20, 2023, from https://www.takemetour.com/article/wat-paknam-phasi-charoen-temple
[6]   PostToday (2011). *Wat Paknam neung diaw thi mi chedi kaew.* (In Thai) [Pra Mahachedi Ratchamongkol Watpaknam: The only place with a glass *chedi*]. Retrieved on January 20, 2021, from https://www.posttoday.com/lifestyle/91597
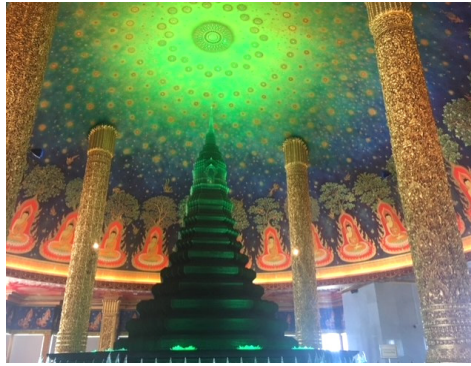
Figure 1 Emerald-green glass *chedi* demonstrating *Insta-bae*
Source: Author

According to data obtained from tourists' images on Instagram, the *chedi* and the painted ceiling are the most popular photography subjects. Among the top Instagram posts, 20 out of 50 photographs are of the photographers themselves with the green *chedi*, while 11 out of the 50 top posts capture just the *chedi*. There are seven photographs with tourists in a praying pose in front of the *chedi*. Among recent Instagram posts, most photographs show the painting on the green ceiling along with the green glass *chedi*. Most tourists said that viewing these was a great experience, and some of them even knew that the painting was related to the historical figure of the Buddha and to Buddhism. A *chedi* and a Buddha-related painting are generally important components of Thai temples, but the organization of the interior design in this temple differs from that in others, in that the emerald-green glass chedi is located inside rather than outside the *wihan*.

> As you reach the top, the green *chedi* appears, which is really attractive, and we are told to be quiet as this was a Thai temple, and on the ground floor lies a museum (author's translation) (709yoko, 2020).

In this temple, the *chedi* is not enclosed in the traditional way; rather it has a new quality to it, that of the functionality of being photograph-worthy or *Insta-bae*.

The large gold Buddha image (Figure 2) outside the building also tends to attract Japanese tourists.

Figure 2 The large gold Buddha image
Source: Author

This, again, differs from the design of other Thai temples, where statues or images of the Buddha are situated inside the *wihan.* Top Instagram posts numbers 8 and 50 suggest four positions from which to take the most attractive photographs of the Buddha statue. In the context of tourism, the functionality of this statue serves as the most popular scenic spot. Furthermore, the white *wihan* is also a form of interior design that functions both as tourist spot and religious site. A visitor recounts that,

> The chapel with hallway, constructed in 2012, has recently and suddenly become a tourist attraction, without intending to. Still, it's a typically religious place. This hallway shows the world of Buddhism by using modern technology. I understand that it's *Insta-bae*, but actually this is a religious place. There're many monks coming to pray to [the] Buddha (author's translation) (Wander822872, 2020, para 1).

The data show that the context of tourism can co-exist with the local context of a Buddhist place. The temple itself connotes differential functionality for the tourists while retaining the primary function of being a Buddhist temple. The white *wihan* enables the functionality of the religious site to freely combine with *Insta-bae.* A form of interior design that relates to Buddhism and seems to be of interest to those Japanese tourists who recount their experiences on Tripadvisor, rather than those who post on Instagram, is the museum situated inside the *wihan* (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Museum inside the *wihan*
Source: Author

> The fifth floor of the *wihan* is the attractive spot… We can see the construction of the big Buddha, but we go straight towards the green *chedi*. No admission fees. Most visitors are Japanese. The painting on the ceiling on the fifth floor is not as great as expected. We can experience a special ambience. The museum across the first to the fourth floors is enjoyable for people who are keen on Buddha or Buddhist monk-Related objects. Other buildings are very much like religious places for local people (author's translation) (weda2018, 2019).

The museum is there because of the Buddhist monks, but only some Japanese tourists realize this. Its presence is organized as part of the interior design, as the decoration of the *wihan.* As discussed above regarding Baudrillard, with changes in the social relationship between people and interior design,

differential codes of functionality emerge, in which objects are liberated from their primary function and assigned a new one. In this case, the interior design of the chapel, including the *chedi,* the painting, the large statue and the museum, is not confined to the traditional and religious realms. The organizational value of the objects is more open to tourism-related functionality, and this draws in Japanese tourists. Alongside the interior design, the atmosphere constructs Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen as an authentic tourist attraction; it is a "must-see" *Insta-bae*.

Insta-bae Atmosphere

Atmosphere is also a functional object. I suggest that the atmosphere of the place assists Japanese tourists in having an authentic experience. One of the most important authentic *Insta-bae* components is the emerald-green glass *chedi* and its colorful ceiling (Figure 4), which connotes the differential functionality of atmosphere.

Figure 4 The green glass *chedi* with the painting on the ceiling
Source: Author

The *chedi* produces a sense of a dream universe, with mystery, as expressed in Instagram and Tripadvisor.

> Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen, is breathtakingly beautiful and situated in the area like a dream world, a universe or planetarium. Though it's inconvenient to get there, we get there by boat. it's the recommended place to visit (author's translation) (karenokajima0318, 2019).

> The place that is popular among Japanese tourists as *Insta-bae*, and when I get to the 5th floor, I found myself being attracted into the emerald-green painting on the ceiling, and the green glass *chedi* that is hardly found elsewhere gives the image of a mysterious universe (author's translation) (taro2025, 2020).

Additionally, some tourists regard the painting and the *chedi* as a "power spot." Some tourists have their photographs taken in front of it, posing as if receiving power from it. Top Instagram post no. 23, for instance, comments that "people who like Thailand must know the place, and I really like the temple where I can receive power from the power spot, and the place offers a special atmosphere of

purifying the mind." The green color means that it is not confined to the traditional realm and that it corresponds to the natural environment (or real nature). It is not, therefore, simply green; it is emerald, a shade of green that allows different codes of functionality to emerge, especially the *Insta-bae* of a dream world. An interesting point is that in the traditional and religious realms white is used to denote moral purity. In the contemporary era, however, the color can freely combine with others without opposition and, in this case, the relationship between white and emerald-green can produce a new form of atmospheric value, such as mystery.

In Baudrillard, colors respond only to their own interaction and to the gauging of atmosphere. Functional warmth and cold do not emanate from warm or cold substances; rather, the combining and contrasting of tones generates the idea of warmth or cold, that is, colors can suggest warmth or lack of it. Japanese tourists refer to the emerald-green *chedi* as "warm and chillaxing," while considering the colorful painting a "mysterious place." With these differential functionalities and connotations, the combinations of these colors enable the temple to exist as both a tourist attraction and authentic *Insta-bae*. Interior design and atmosphere are functional objects that make the temple functional in the context of tourism. In other words, they help demystify Buddhism, and thus enable Japanese tourists to access socially-constructed functionality. Although Baudrillard's functional objects shed light on authentic experience for Japanese tourists in Thailand, some points remain unclear. These will be discussed below.

Discussion

Baudrillard's functional objects may help readers address the question of authenticity for Japanese tourists. Authenticity is constructed socially and vividly for these tourists. Baudrillard's theory is consistent with the existing Thai literature on temples. With its recently elevated position as a tourist attraction based on its religious properties, we witness a modification of the temple's purpose in the context of tourism without sacrificing its original appearance or function (Ruttanavisanon and Agmapisarn, 2022: 15). Although Baudrillard discusses these changes to interior design and atmosphere in modern times, what exactly caused this transition remains unclear. An important consideration here is capitalism. Capitalism, together with mass production, liberates interior design and atmosphere from the traditional realm. They are subject to differential combinations with one another. Their functionality can be deconstructed, reconstructed, and assigned within a changing social context. Baudrillard's work, thus, more or less implies the legacy of capitalism; still, he does not address its influence in detail.

Japanese tourists are able to perform an important role in assigning a new functionality of interior design and colors (atmosphere). Some data indicate that the performance of these tourists' photography, especially its choreography, is important in the construction of authentic *Insta-bae*, such as tourists posing with their arms crossed in order to receive power from the *chedi*, and using Photoshop to add a star to the front of it. At the same time, the temple has appeared on the tourist stage as *Insta-bae* that follows the notion of play and normative practices of photography, and resonates with *purikura* culture, due to the presence of functional objects in the context of tourism.

Regarding the limitations of this article, it considers only the social construction of authentic experience for Japanese tourists. If the context of the study changed, it would lead to different conclusions and stories. As Surman (2009: 193) points out, "There are of course peculiar habits and stereotypes for all, but Japanese tourists, like most, are in search of a pleasurable experience, encompassing the unusual

and alternative while remaining predominantly with their comfort zone." Authentic experience varies across different tourist groupings visiting different places. This may relate to Urry and Larsen's tourist gaze (2011: 2), which is framed by gender, nationality, age, education and social class. In addition to Wat Paknam, Wat Samphran, in Nakhon Pathom province, also appeals to Japanese tourists, but they do not refer to it as *Insta-bae*. How the interpretation and experience of authenticity are created among non-Western tourists in different contexts is perhaps of interest to future research.

Conclusion

This article examines the idea of authenticity for Japanese tourists in Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen, Thailand–a "must-see" location. By employing Baudrillard's functional objects, I suggest that authenticity matters for Japanese tourists. Japanese tourists derive an idea of it from the existing components of the place, in this case the emerald-green glass *chedi*, the colorful painting, the white *wihan* and the large gold Buddha image. These are forms of interior design and atmosphere that belong to the temple, which not only serve as primary places for prayer for followers of Buddhism but also hold new functionality, that of *Insta-bae*, connoting new meanings for the temple, a place regarded as a "mystery, dream world, little universe, warmth and power spot." With *Insta-bae* and Japanese tourist arrivals, Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen has become authentic, and is thus situated simultaneously in the contexts of both tourism and Buddhism.

Acknowledgements

References

Baudrillard, J. (2005). **The system of objects** (J. Benedict, Trans.). London: Verso. (Original work published 1968).

Boorstin, D. J. (1964). **The image: A guide to pseudo-events in America**. New York: Atheneum.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2014). Thematic analysis. In A. C. Michalos (Ed.). **Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research**. (pp. 6626-6628). Prince George: Springer.

Cohen, E. (2007). "Authenticity" in tourism studies: Après la lutte. **Tourism Recreation Research, 32**(2), 75-82.

Cohen, E. (2016). The permutations of Thailand's "floating markets." **Asian Journal of Tourism Research, 1**(1), 59-98.

Crawshaw, C. and Urry, J. (1997). Tourism and the photographic eye. In C. Rojek and J. Urry (Eds.). **Touring cultures: Transformations of travel and theory**. (pp. 176-196). Oxon: Routledge.

Goffman, E. (1959). **The presentation of self in everyday life**. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Guichard-Anguis, S. (2009). Introduction: The culture of travel (*tabi no bunka*) and Japanese tourism. In S. Guichard-Anguis and O. Moon (Eds.). **Japanese tourism and travel culture**. (pp. 1-19).

Guichard-Anguis, S. and Moon, O. (2009). **Japanese tourism and travel culture**. Oxon: Routledge.

Hassel, K. (2023). The world as photo booth: Women's digital practices from print club to Instagram in Japan. **Mechademia, 16**(1), 119-143.

Hongsranagon, P. (2006). Japanese senior tourists—An untapped potential in Thailand's tourism industry. **The Journal of Behavioural Science**, **1**(1), 55-61.

Kellner, D. (1989). **Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to postmodernism and beyond**. Cambridge: Stanford University Press.

Koga, H. (2020). Social materiality of Smartphone game apps. **14th IFIP International Conference on Human Choice and Computers (HCC)**, 315-322.

Kontogeorgopoulos, N. (2003). Keeping up with the Joneses: Tourists, travellers, and the quest for cultural authenticity in Southern Thailand. **Tourist Studies, 3**(2), 171-203.

Larsen, J. (2005). Families seen sightseeing: Performativity of tourist photography. **Space and Culture, 8**(4), 416-434.

Li, L. and Li, S. (2022). Do tourists really care about authenticity? A study on tourists' perceptions of nature and culture authenticity. **Sustainability, 14**(5), 1-15.

MacCannell, D. (1973). **The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class**. Oakland: University of California Press.

Morgan, H. (2022). Conducting a qualitative document analysis. **The Qualitative Report, 27**(1), 64-77.

Olsen, K. (2002). Authenticity as a concept in tourism research: The social organization of the experience of authenticity. **Tourist Studies, 2**(2), 159-182.

Ruttanavisanon, W. and Agmapisarn, C. (2022). Religious tourism in Thailand—A review of Thai literature from 2012-2021. **Social Science Asia, 8**(1), 12-25.

Silver, I. (1993). Marketing authenticity in third world countries. **Annals of Tourism Research, 20**(2), 302-318.

Surman, B. (2009). The search for the real thing: Japanese tourism to Britain. In S. Guichard-Anguis and O. Moon (Eds.). **Japanese tourism and travel culture**. (pp. 193-203).

Taylor, J. P. (2010). Photogenic authenticity and the spectacular in tourism: Experiencing the Pentecost Gol. **La Ricerca Folklorica, 61**, 33-40.

Urry, J. and Larsen, J. (2011). **The tourist gaze 3.0**. London: Sage.

Wang, N. (1999). Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience. **Annals of Tourism Research 26**(2), 349-370.

Yamashita, S. (2009). Southeast Asian tourism from a Japanese perspective. In M. Hitchcock, V. T. King, and M. Parnwell. (pp. 189-205). **Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and new directions**. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Websites

Chibi Anngle. (2020, March 7). ***Wat Paknam yod hit nai mu nak thong thiao yipun: Khao tidjai arai kan na***. (in Thai) [Wat Paknam popular among Japanese tourists: What attracts them?]. Retrieved April 30, 2020, from https://th.anngle.org/jinth/watpaknam.html

karenokajima0318. (2019, September 23). ワットパクナム✨綺麗すぎました🤤. (in Japanese) [Wat Paknam is breathtakingly beautiful]. [Instagram]. Retrieved August 7, 2020, from https://www.instagram.com/p/B2wT2jpg7xW/?igshid=1c183amz4jxtj

709yoko. (2020, January 12). フォトジェニック. (in Japanese) [Photogenic place]. Tripadvisor. Retrieved April 8, 2020, from https://www.tripadvisor.jp/ShowUserReviews-g293916-d7913913-r738659530-Wat_Pak_Nam-Bangkok.html?m=19905

Siamrath. (2023). ***Thai hae thiao yipun lang poed prathet pen thangan 'to to to' tham khaempen dungdut jong jai tiew nai prathet***. (in Thai) [Thais visiting Japan after the official launch of the country's "TAT" campaigns to motivate domestic tourism]. Retrieved July 24, 2023, from https://siamrath.co.th/n/394273

taro2015. (2020, April 19). 美しい天井画. (in Japanese) [Beautiful ceiling painting]. [Tripadvisor]. Retrieved April 8, 2020, from https://www.tripadvisor.jp/ShowUserReviews-g293916-d7913913-r752742681-Wat_Pak_Nam-Bangkok.html

Wander822872. (2020, February 11). 住宅街にある「インスタ映え」スポット。ただしあくまで宗教施設. (in Japanese) [This spot is for "Insta-bae" located in a community, but in fact it is a religious place]. [Tripadvisor]. Retrieved April 8, 2020, from https://www.tripadvisor.jp/ShowUserReviews-g293916-d7913913-r734359827-Wat_Pak_Nam-Bangkok.html?m=19905

Watthai. (2023). ***Watpaknam Japan. Wat Paknam Yipun–Samatcha khong Thai nai yipun***. (in Thai) [Japanese branch of Wat Paknam–The community of Thai monks in Japan]. Retrieved July 24, 2023, from https://watthai.jp/watpaknamjp/

weda2018. (2019, December 24). 仏塔五階が見所. (in Japanese) [The fifth floor of the phrachedi is the attractive spot]. [Tripadvisor]. Retrieved April 8, 2020, from https://www.tripadvisor.jp/ShowUserReviews-g293916-d7913913-r734359827-Wat_Pak_Nam-Bangkok.html?m=19905

Yoichi, A. [@Yoichi_A_74]. (2019, December 31). フォトジェニックとしては. (in Japanese) [As a photogenic place]. Tripadvisor. Retrieved August 04 , 2020, from https://www.tripadvisor.jp/ShowUserReviews-g293916-d7913913-r735868321-Wat_Pak_Nam-Bangkok.html?m=19905