

On-site Education of Practical Languages for Area Studies Report in 2008

— Thai, Thammasat University, Thailand, (6 Dec. 2008 – 11 Mar. 2009) —

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Graduate School of Asian and African Areas Studies

Fumi Saji

On My research theme

My thesis research is a study on a local tourist spot in Rachaburi prefecture which is located in the southwest of Bangkok, Thailand. This area is a famous tourist destination because of its “floating market” for both domestic and foreign people.

The purpose of my research is, by focusing on the “floating market”, to reveal the social and cultural process of how local people have taken the phenomenon of tourism, and how they are going to direct it as for their way, using Anthropological approach.

Since 1970s, international tourism has grown up as one of the chief industries of Thailand which attracts a lot of foreign currency. After the establishment of The Tourist Authority of Thailand in 1979, their tourism policy has been changing into which promotes their “culture” and the “remains” (Sunaga, 2006, pp.115-116).

At the same time, there has been a change observed in the situation of water side living environment or floating market. In Bangkok, it was canals that were very important as main trade and traffic routes as well as for drain or defense. There, some strategic locations such as river or the confluence point of canals have been chosen to be market location, since the age of Ayutthaya. Peddlers managed their boats to gather in the market, and had dealings over daily necessities, vegetables, and fruits in the water.

However, the canals have been filled in and became roads since 1960s. Now, the traffic jam is known as the synonyms for Bangkok (Suehiro, 1993, p.2). Along with the change, the number of floating market in Bangkok has declined, too.

On the other hand, as its original role decreased, the new aspect of floating market has gathered much attention, that is, as a tourist destination where people can experience the tradition and culture of Thai society. So, it has now been restructured as a tourist spot. My research subject is one of the heralds of floating markets.

As briefly reviewed above, floating market has attracted much attention as a tourist destination by accepting changes in social and economical situations as well as national policies of Thailand. Therefore, my research aim is to reveal how the local people treat the changes, by chasing their negotiating processes with other community members, the government, and travel agents or tourists.

Features of the Language

In a narrow definition, Thai is the official language of Thailand which uses original Thai letters. It consists of consonants and vowels as well as phonetic symbols and numbers. It is a tone language which has five tones, so a word is realized always by syllables and tones connected together. Also, it has relatively many borrowing words from foreign languages such as Sanskrit Pali or English.

Contents of the Course

For the program, two students including me were sent to Thammasat University in Bangkok, where we attended same classes. Those classes were newly established for our ITP program, and teachers from the department of Thai taught for us. There were six teachers in total who taught us in turn. Lecture style was a private lesson, and the classes were held at a lecture room in the building of the faculty of general education. We studied there for three months. Basically, classes were held four times in a week, and it lasts for three hours (9:00~12:00) at a time. During the first half of the term, we learned general Thai letters, basic grammar, and pronunciation using a textbook for beginners. In the latter half, reading comprehension and conversation became the main theme of the class, so we tried more practical activities such as watching films or reading short stories or news papers and expressing our impression about them in Thai. Teachers' explanation was solely done in Thai or English.

Generally speaking, classes started by talking about what happened the previous day, followed with a brief review of the preceding lesson, and finally went on to the main topic of the day. If we had any questions, teachers accepted them at any time within and outside the classes. For the last week, we had more applied classes connected with our research interests. In my case, I learned some names of commodities in markets as well as terms about waterside space using Power Point. In addition, after the classes, we actually visited a proposed place for our own research and had a interview there. In all, all the teachers had contact with each other enough to organize well-planned classes altogether.

Overall Impression of the course

One of the most impressive experiences was that I joined field trips with thirty Thai people whose major was Thai language, two times. I had opportunities to visit some prefectures nearby Bangkok and see temples and museums. Through these experiences, I was able to make friends with people of same generation. They taught me Thai and took me out to visit so many places during my stay there.

In addition, it was very good experience for me to get along with my neighbors. My apartment was in the other bank of Thammasat University located in a district called "Bangkok noi" where people from children to oldies lived close together. It was a warm world which I would not have experienced if I did not live there: greeting with others on my way to and from university, figures and voices of merchants, and joining neighboring events, etc.. Most of the people whom I encountered during the period took care of us, who had come from Japan, and helped us every time when we got in trouble.

Self-assessment of the extent of achievement

Through this program, I have learned most of the Thai basic grammar and my ability to read references in Thai has improved, as well. Also, since I got more Thai friends with same generation, I have gained much opportunity to use Thai, for sure. Yet, my conversation skill is still not enough to conduct interviews fluently in the language, so I am going to brush up the skill more, needless to say increasing vocabularies.

Before attending the program, I had planned to choose suitable field for my thesis research using spare time, but I could hardly carry out it because it took me much time than I had expected to study Thai and to get used to go out freely without hesitation. Anyways, I am still on my way to master Thai, so I will keep studying it hard from now on, too.

For the last of my report, I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart for the ITP teachers, staffs, teachers from Thai major, and friends, for giving this wonderful chance for me.
Thank you very much!



picture1: At Wat Phrakeaw with my teacher.

picture2: At a lunch with teachers from Thai department and Mr. Tanaka who also attended the program in a Thai restaurant.



picture3: Thammasat University(Tha phrachan campus),
the view from the Chao phraya River.

References

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- Suehiro, A. (1993). *Tai: Kaihatsu to minsyu syugi*. [Thai: development and democracy], Tokyo: Iwanami.
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