

RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN THAILAND- A REVIEW OF THAI LITERATURE FROM 2012-2021

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Abstract

Religious tourism is recognised as one of the earliest and oldest types of tourism, helping to create a tourism industry that is one of the most significant economic contributors globally. Religious travel is among the most important sectors in the market, expanding quickly with many tourists travelling internationally. The United Nations World Tourism Organization estimates that the number of tourists travelling to the world's major religious sites is between 300 and 330 million each year. Religious tourism therefore makes significant contributions to the socioeconomic growth and long-term sustainability of local communities in Thailand. Whilst not new, research relating to Thailand's religious tourism has been under considered. This research investigated 38 research articles on religious tourism published between 2012 and 2021. The study used meta-analysis to classify papers according to the methodology used throughout the research, religious affiliation, the geographical region under study, disciplinary classifications, and the context of the study. Consequently, the study of religious tourism from the perspective of Thailand is very significant and the findings may help to determine whether and what elements of religious tourism could be developed as well as providing a basis for future studies.

Keywords: Religious Tourism, Tourism, Buddhism, Thailand

Introduction

Religious tourism is recognised as the earliest and oldest type of tourism (Álvarez-García, Rama, & Gómez-Ullate, 2018). Religion related travel has driven some of the oldest patterns of mobility and is now a major tourism sector (Rashid, 2018). The World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2014) has estimated that 600 million religious journeys are undertaken each year worldwide, with 300–330 million people visiting the world's most important religious sites. Tourism is a significant economic and social driver for the host countries and has been a driver for Thailand's development. Promotion of

religious tourism leads to the dispersion of tourists around the country, resulting in the creation of occupations and employment directly in the tourism industry as well as indirectly through various allied industries. This leads to an increase in revenue distribution to communities and municipalities, thereby fostering economic development and maintaining the country's economic stability (Butthipsakul & Soontayatron, 2017; Detmit, 2020; Pompai, Yupas, & Phosing, 2020). In several places around the country, including Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phuket (Demit, 2020; Schedneck, 2017), religious sites are a key focus for various groups of tourists.

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Religious tourism is based around sacred sites and/or religious places, which can be encountered all over the world, including Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish locations. These destinations are extremely important to the local communities in which they are located, which in turn has a significant impact on the development of this type of tourism. The widespread religious tourism in Thailand is Buddhist tourism. Buddhism is the official religion of Thailand and has a powerful impact on the nation's daily life. Of the country's overall population, more than 95% are Buddhist. Thus Buddhist tourism is deeply rooted in the domestic tourist industry and makes significant contributions to the socioeconomic growth and long-term sustainability of local communities (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Thailand's religious tourism industry, which is extremely important because of the country's deep religious roots, continues to be a significant contributor to economic growth.

Religious tourism in Thailand encompasses a wide range of tourism associated with religion, including traditional festivals and various religious activities. Tourists must consider various aspects when choosing religious destinations, including accessibility and mobility, the choice of food and beverage outlets, and the variety of accommodation options on offer. As a result, the business of producing tourist services and associated products provides local economies with economic opportunities, including hospitality businesses, accommodation, food and beverage, souvenir manufacturing and trade, vehicle rental services, parking facilities, and more. These businesses continue to grow in popularity and are intensely competitive, generating employment and serving as a critical mechanism for economic growth and prosperity in the region (Neeyakorn, Sawaddichevin, & Sritan, 2020).

It is meaningful for academics to recognize the opportunities derived from tourists and there are many articles and research papers which have been written on the topic of religious tourism in Thailand.

However, none of these papers presents a review of the literature in this area. This study provides a knowledge map and meta-analysis reflecting pivotal areas of academic insight into the religious tourism nexus. This meta-analysis covering a 10-year retrospective study of religious tourism aims to determine whether religious tourism in Thailand has been studied from any perspective or orientation that could be useful as a guideline for further research in the future, such that it can be utilized to advance the development of religious tourism, potentially generating tremendous revenues for the country and its people.

Literature Review

The Definition of Religious Tourism

Religious tourism has existed for a long period of time and is distinct from other forms of tourism (Zhong, 2015). Religious tourism can be defined as a contemporary trend of travel to religiously significant places or pilgrimage sites for religious and recreational purposes (Rashid, 2018). As a result, religious tourism has the potential to have a positive impact on the economic growth and cultural development of destinations that feature a religious component in their respective tourist offerings (Kim, Kim, & King, 2020).

The Dictionary of Travel, Tourism and Hospitality (Medik, 2003) defines 'religious tourism' as referring to journeys and tours with the main objective of attaining religious experience, such as pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Lourdes, and Mecca. Journeys and trips primarily motivated by religious heritage, such as visiting churches and cathedrals, are common among the general public.

The precise definition of 'religious tourism', has not been well defined (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). Indeed, the term 'religious tourism' has ambivalent connotations, and the terms 'religious', 'faith', 'spiritual' and 'pilgrimage' can all be applied interchangeably to imply 'religious tourism'. Many religious sites, monuments and destinations attract people who are interested

in cultural heritage, regardless of whether they are religiously affiliated (Smith, MacLeod, & Robertson, 2010).

In a Thai context Pichphandaycha (2019) classifies religious tourism into two categories. First, a tourist travels to pray for spiritual benefit, which is a kind of leisure tourism. Finding personal comfort does not take much time and travel. The second aspect is traveling to practice the path to enlightenment due to a belief in Buddhism or a religious conviction that the tourists admire. Tourists may also be familiar with the architecture of ruins or archaeological sites. At least once a month, this type of tourist may take a trip and will frequently travel at least four times a year. This type of tourism may be called a pilgrimage.

Religious Tourism in Thailand

At the beginning of recorded history, Thailand enabled individuals to openly select their own religion. In ancient periods, individuals lived as animists, engaging in spiritual or supernatural rites and rituals. Later, approximately 200 years before the beginning of the Christian era and following the third revision of the Tripitaka, there is evidence that King Ashoka the Great dispatched Buddhist emissaries to broadcast Buddhism throughout the nine regions, including Suvarnabhumi, which is believed to be the area of Southeast Asia that accommodates current Thailand. There is evidence that clearly indicates that the founding of Buddhism in the Kingdom, dates back to the Dvaravati era, and continues to be the predominant religion today. This finding demonstrates that Brahmin-Hinduism was disseminated and thrived in the same period as Buddhism, and that it was contemporaneous with Buddhism. Its ancient beliefs were merged into the Buddhist religion. Other religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism later came and have been maintained and practiced by a number of people in Thailand until the present day (Ministry of Culture, 2019).

In the past, many people in the highest

social class travelled explicitly for religious motives, stratified with “pleasure seeking and cultural” activities. More recently tourism has become widespread with a niche market, growing quickly with numerous people travelling internationally and domestically (Rashid, 2018). Religious tourism has now risen in popularity among Thai and international tourists, with a particular emphasis on religious sites, historic sites, and meditation destinations, among others. Cultural heritage has developed for a long time based on the concept of pilgrimages to sacred places, the performance of merit, the donation of alms, and the practice of offerings, which would bring prosperity to the lives and families of people who come to worship. Making a wish may also help to strengthen the mind, allowing for more events to occur and keep the mind clean. Religious places may also be tourist attractions that display civilisation and the vestiges of the traditional way of life, forming a harmonious relationship between the local people, the religious site itself, and the surrounding environment. A religious site also serves as a source of knowledge about the history, art and architecture, and a means of connecting the history of the culture and community settlements over time (Puchthonglang, Janjaroensuk, & Puchthonglang, 2017; Sermsri, 2017).

Thai tourism encompasses a wide range of different types of experiences. Tourists who travel for religious reasons, for the most part, are looking to fulfil religious needs. Thai tourism includes religious sites, such as temples, churches, and other similar structures, that entice visitors from inside and outside the nation to travel. This tourism also includes the collection of works of art from diverse sectors, including architecture, sculpture and murals, and paintings. Buddhist tourism is the most popular class of religious tourism in Thailand. (Chitpakdee, Dokbua, & Anothai, 2020).

In the past Thailand was a society founded on a wide range of beliefs, systems, and religious cults. Without organized religion, people turned to ghosts for guidance,

but when Brahmanism and Buddhism arrived, the situation changed. This had a significant impact on Thai arts and culture and developed into the characteristics of religious beliefs widespread in Thai society. In this fusion, religions and beliefs are melded together. From the past to the present, religious tourism has been inspired by the worship of ‘Phi, Brahman and Buddha’ (Wangnhok & Wannajun, 2019).

Recently, temples and other religious places have become very popular as tourist attractions that people are becoming increasingly interested in. As a result, some temples or places of worship have expanded their functions beyond those that were previously limited to places of worship and local religious ceremonies or as a gathering place for the mutual benefit of people in the community surrounding the temple. They have often evolved into a destination for visitors from outside the neighbourhood. Considering that the temple has increased its position as a tourist attraction based on the properties of religion, it has become more popular in recent years. This includes the modification of the temple’s purpose in the context of tourism without sacrificing its original appearance or function (Jullasikkee, 2019; Laophaungsak, 2016). In addition to this, The National Tourism Development Plan 2017–2021 emphasized the promotion of religious tourism (Siriphat & Woraphatthirakul, 2021).

Methodology

The analysis of the key aspects of ‘religious tourism’ was conducted in four stages, as shown in Figure 1, using quantitative and qualitative methodologies (meta-analysis).

The first stage of the study involved utilisation of the Thai-Journal Citation Index Centre (TCI) (<https://tci-thailand.org/>) as a database for reviewing journals published in Thailand, including those from science and technology, and those from humanities social sciences. Specifically, this database is used to search for quality information or indicators of the quality of articles and journals, such as information on Thai academic journals, a list of journals in the TCI database and the Thai Journal Impact Factors, among other features. Using the TCI database, the existing literature was searched using key words associated with ‘religious tourism’.

Second, a TCI database search was undertaken to better understand the field’s content between 2012 and 2021. The choice of time period from 2012 to 2021 was initiated by the importance of providing a comprehensive overview of the most recent advancements in the field. The purpose of this study was not to investigate the development of knowledge in the field over the last decade but rather to provide the most recent research and thinking on the issue.

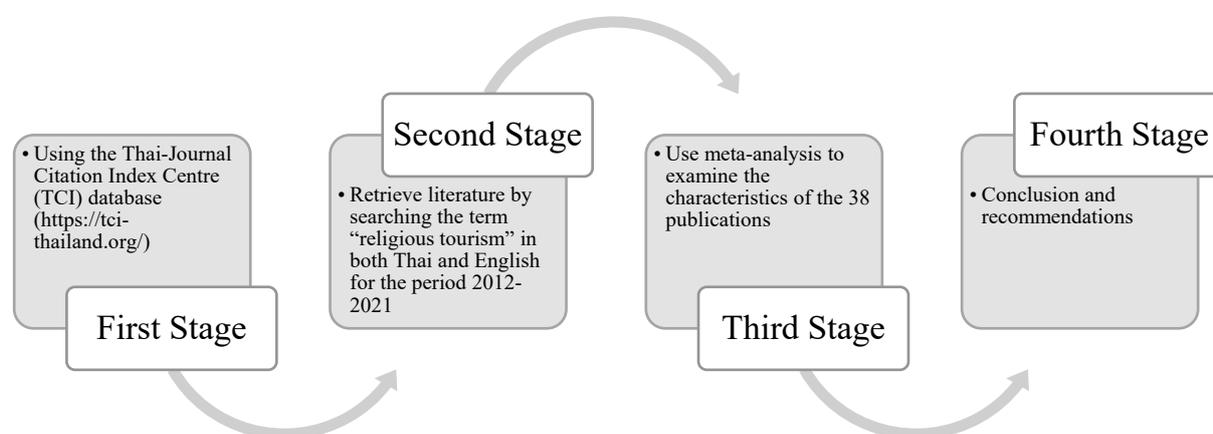


Figure 1 Methodology

The selection criteria for the articles included use of the term ‘religious tourism’ in both Thai and English, revealing a total of 38 articles published between 2012–2021 in Thai, which were subsequently selected and used in the analysis for this study. The results included an examination of all tourism-related articles, focusing on various religions, published in various categories, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic.

The third stage involved conducting a quantitative and qualitative analysis (meta-analysis) of the 38 publications. At this stage, the characteristics of the publications were examined individually in accordance with a variety of criteria, including (but not limited to) the year of publication, the journal of publication, the research methodology, the religious affiliation, the geographical region, and the disciplinary classification.

Finally, the fourth stage of the research involved forming the conclusions of the study, which are presented at the end of this article along with recommendations for further research.

Results and Discussion

Classification by year of publication

Articles were categorised based on when they were published, as shown in Figure 2. It

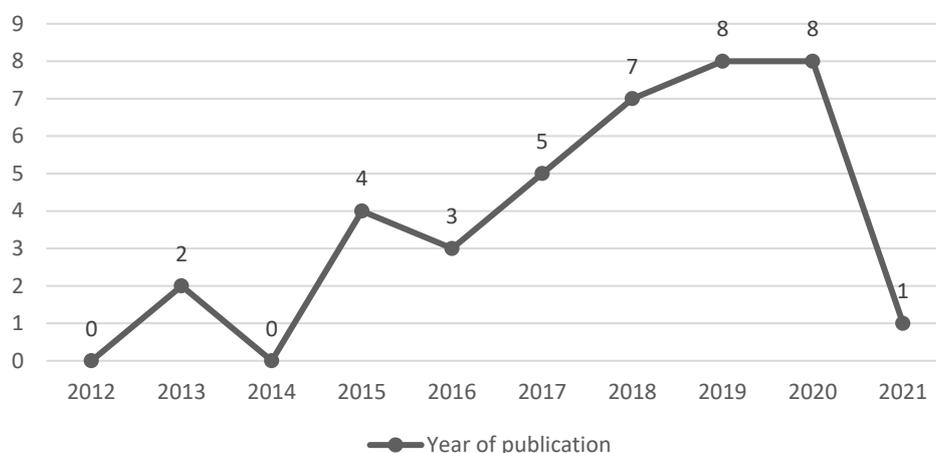


Figure 2 Journal articles on religious tourism by year of publication

was found that there were no existing articles on religious tourism, published in 2012. Two articles were published in 2013 (Naipinit, Maneenetr, Sakolnakorn, and Kroeksakul, 2013; and Prompanyo, 2013). None were published in 2014, but since then, the number of publications on religious tourism has increased each year, with the most significant surge occurring in 2015, and eight publications on religious tourism being published in the year of 2019 and 2020. At this time, it appears that religious tourism became an increasingly attractive research area for academics. Given the impact of COVID-19, collecting data, and undertaking field research has become challenging. Collecting data and getting access to research destinations has become difficult. As a precaution, a large majority of religious places have been forced to shut down. A direct outcome of this is a decrease in the number of articles on religious tourism, with only one appearing in 2021.

Classification by number of articles

In the field of religious tourism, the journal with the most publications is the Journal of Social Science and Buddhist Anthropology, with four articles published (Chitpakdee et al., 2020; Horaraung, Chanreang, and Punthiya, 2020; Pompai et al., 2020; and Siriphat and Woraphatthirakul, 2021), followed by the Journal of Graduate

School, Pitchayat, Ubon Ratchathani, Rajabhat University (Neeyakorn et al., 2020; and Wangnhok and Wannajun, 2019)KKU International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (Boonprajong, Phanchan, and Meethaisong, 2019; and Buddalerd, 2018), Panyapiwat Journal (Boonkheereerut and Jaritthai, 2020; and Naipinit et al., 2013) and the Veridian E-Journal, Silpakorn University (Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts) (Autthawuttikul, Sungrugsa, and Lakananulak, 2017; and Sermsri, 2017), with two articles each (Figure 3).

Classifications by research methods

According to the analysis of the publications, a qualitative approach was the most often used research methodology, with 18 articles (47%) (Figure 4). The reason seems to be that the majority of the information was collected from monks, tour

operators, municipal authorities, travel agencies, tour guides, or local residents. The methods most often used to collect information included document research, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations and participatory action research. Descriptive and content analysis were the techniques that yielded the most data analysis. SWOT analysis was also used in several publications.

A total of 15 articles (40%) were based on mixed method research, defined as research using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to find knowledge of the truth over a period of time or at multiple phases. The outcomes of each method are concluded separately or together. This results in a more thorough understanding of the subject being studied.

Finally, five articles (13%) were found to use quantitative methods, although descriptive statistics were performed in the majority



Figure 3 Publications with articles on religious tourism

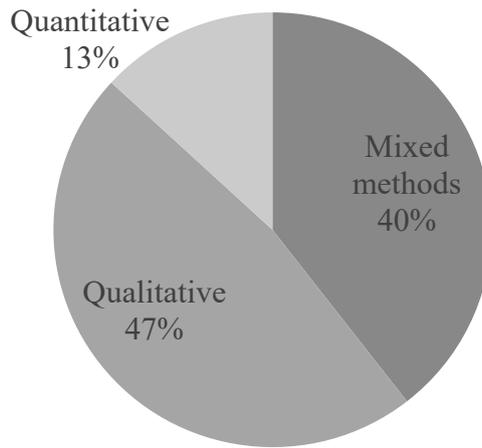


Figure 4 Classification by Research Methodology

of the publications. Those categorised as quantitative used regression analysis, Chi-Square, one-way ANOVA, Structural Equation Modelling or Partial Least Squares amongst other statistical techniques.

Classification by religion

There are 33 articles about religious tourism that have appeared in Thailand and are linked to Buddhism, and one article by Boonprajong et al. (2019) related to Hinduism. The remaining five articles, namely, Boonkheereerut and Jaritthai (2020); Charoensri, Phueakbuakhao, Paksee, and Sithtithai (2019); Dhamabuttra (2018); Jatupoj (2020); and Siriphath and Woraphatthirakul (2021), are not explicitly linked to any religion or identified as such.

Classification by region

Categorising the articles according to the geographical region of study, yielded a total of 35 articles relating specifically to Thailand. Of these, four articles were separated into one category as being concerned with the whole of Thailand, while the others were divided by region. The north-eastern region had 10 relevant articles, followed by the central, northern, southern, and western regions. Chiang Mai was the area with the highest number of religious tourism studies. Moreover, three of the researched articles were based on other countries: Pichphandaycha (2019); and Zhong (2015) in China, and Hermawan, Salim, Rohman, and Rahayu (2016) in Indonesia.

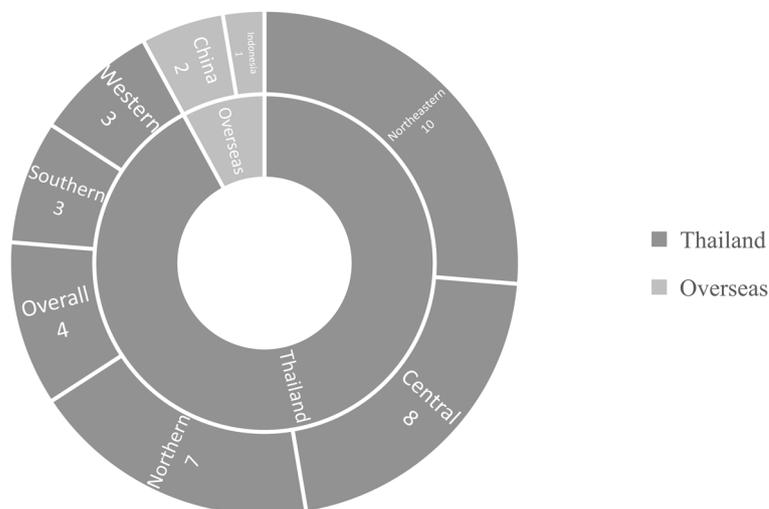


Figure 5 Geographical region of the studies

Disciplinary Classifications and Religious Tourism Contexts

Considering the broadly acknowledged perception that the tourism phenomenon is multifaceted, religious tourism has also been highlighted as a field worthy of examination by scholars from various disciplines. According to the research findings, the themes of tourism management (Jullasikkee, 2019; Rittem, 2015; Wangnhok and Wannajun, 2019; and Yomkerd, 2015), tourist behaviour (Butthipsakul and Soontayatron, 2017; Chuamuangphan et al., 2018; and Naipinit et al., 2013), tourism impact (Asawachai, 2018; Buddalerd, 2018; and Sermsri, 2017), development (Chitpakdee et al., 2020; Chuamuangphan and Mulmit, 2018; Puchthonglang et al., 2017; and Vijanpreech and Sisabai, 2019), potential (Detmit, 2020; Jatupoj, 2020; Neeyakorn et al., 2020; and Theepathammo and Ruangsanka, 2016), destination image (Hermawan et al., 2016), loyalty (Zhong, 2015), the marketing mix (Koikitcharoen, 2019; and Laophaungsak, 2016), and promotion (Boonprajong et al., 2019; Phanchan, 2018; Pompai et al., 2020; and Puchthonglang, Prasitbureerak, and Puchthonglang, 2018) as well as others are generally relevant in the study of religious tourism.

Various contexts of religious tourism have been proposed and investigated, including Buddhist tourism (Autthawuttikul

et al., 2017; Butthipsakul and Soontayatron, 2017; Chitpakdee et al., 2020; Detmit, 2020; Horaraung et al., 2020; Jullasikkee, 2019; Koikitcharoen, 2019; Laophaungsak, 2016; Masunthia, 2020; Naipinit et al., 2013; Pichphandaycha, 2019; Pompai et al., 2020; Prompanyo, 2013; Tepsing and Boonprakarn, 2019; Yomkerd, 2015; and Zhong, 2015), which the study found was the context which received the greatest attention, totalling 16 articles. As Buddhism is the official religion of Thailand, tourism is primarily focused on that element of the culture, followed by cultural tourism (Charoensri et al., 2019; Rittem, 2015; Sritharet, 2017; Theepathammo and Ruangsanka, 2016; and Wangnhok and Wannajun, 2019), pilgrimage tourism (Hermawan et al., 2016), spiritual tourism (Puchthonglang et al., 2017; Puchthonglang et al., 2018), meditation tourism (Phanchan, 2018), sacred tourism (Boonprajong et al., 2019), heritage tourism (Buddalerd, 2018; and Puchthonglang, 2015), urban tourism (Sermsri, 2017), sustainable tourism (Asawachai, 2018; and Dhamabuttra, 2018), community-based tourism (Vijanpreech and Sisabai, 2019), revisit tourism (Chuamuangphan and Mulmit, 2018; and Chuamuangphan et al., 2018), eco and cultural tourism (Jatupoj, 2020), and historical and cultural tourism (Siriphat and Woraphatthirakul, 2021) as well as others not included in this research.

Table 1 Classification of the articles

<i>Author (Year)</i>	<i>Religious affiliation</i>	<i>Geographical region</i>	<i>Disciplinary classifications</i>	<i>Contexts</i>
<i>Naipinit et al. (2013)</i>	Buddhism	Roi Et, KhonKaen, Mahasarakkham and Kalasin	Potential, Tourist behaviour	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Prompanyo (2013)</i>	Buddhism	Ubon Ratchathani	Demand, Potential, Management	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Puchthonglang (2015)</i>	Buddhism	Chiangmai	Potential, Development	Heritage Tourism
<i>Rittem (2015)</i>	Buddhism	Northern Thailand	Tourism management	Cultural Tourism
<i>Yomkerd (2015)</i>	Buddhism	Chiangmai	Potential, Tourism management	Buddhist Tourism

<i>Author (Year)</i>	<i>Religious affiliation</i>	<i>Geographical region</i>	<i>Disciplinary classifications</i>	<i>Contexts</i>
<i>Zhong (2015)</i>	Buddhism	Shanghai, China	Motivation, Tourism image, Satisfaction, Loyalty	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Hermawan et al. (2016)</i>	Buddhism	Indonesia	Destination image, Visit intention	Pilgrimage Tourism
<i>Laophaungsak (2016)</i>	Buddhism	Kanchanaburi	Development, Marketing mix	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Theepathammo and Ruangsanka (2016)</i>	Buddhism	Thailand	Potential, Sustainability, Cultural, Learning	Cultural Tourism
<i>Autthawuttikul et al. (2017)</i>	Buddhism	Ratchaburi	Potential, Tourism management, Development	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Butthipsakul and Soontayatron (2017)</i>	Buddhism	Nan	Tourist behaviour	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Puchthonglang et al. (2017)</i>	Buddhism	Chiang Mai	Development	Spiritual Tourism
<i>Sermsri (2017)</i>	Buddhism	Bangkok	Stakeholder perspectives, Sustainability, Tourism impacts	Urban Tourism
<i>Sritharet (2017)</i>	Buddhism	Ubon Ratchathani	Potential, Promotion	Cultural Tourism
<i>Asawachai (2018)</i>	Buddhism	Ang Thong	Tourism impact, Tourism management	Sustainable Tourism
<i>Buddalerd (2018)</i>	Buddhism	Thailand	Tourism impact	Heritage Tourism
<i>Chuamuangphan and Mulmit (2018)</i>	Buddhism	Nakhon Pathom	Potential, Development	Revisit Tourism
<i>Chuamuangphan et al. (2018)</i>	Buddhism	Nakhon Pathom	Tourism demand, Tourist behaviour, Revisit, Development	Revisit Tourism
<i>Dhamabuttra (2018)</i>	NA	Bangkok	Integrated tourism development, Sustainability, Strategic plan, Potential	Sustainable Integrated Tourism
<i>Puchthonglang et al. (2018)</i>	Buddhism	Chiang Mai	Potential, Development	Spiritual Tourism
<i>Phanchan (2018)</i>	Buddhism	KhonKaen and Mahasarakkham	Potential, Development	Meditation Tourism
<i>Boonprajong et al. (2019)</i>	Buddhism /Hinduism	Buriram	Potential, Promotion	Sacred Tourism
<i>Charoensri et al. (2019)</i>	NA	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Development strategy	Cultural Tourism
<i>Jullasikkee (2019)</i>	Buddhism	Bangkok	Tourism management	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Koikitcharoen (2019)</i>	Buddhism	Phuket	Tourist behavior, Marketing mix	Buddhist Tourism

<i>Author (Year)</i>	<i>Religious affiliation</i>	<i>Geographical region</i>	<i>Disciplinary classifications</i>	<i>Contexts</i>
<i>Pichphandaycha (2019)</i>	Buddhism	Hong Kong, China	Tourist behavior, Tourist motivation, Tourism component, Promotion	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Tepsing and Boonprakarn (2019)</i>	Buddhism	Songkhla	Destination management	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Vijanpreech and Sisabai (2019)</i>	Buddhism	Singburi	Development	Community-Based Tourism
<i>Wangnhok and Wannajun (2019)</i>	Buddhism	Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram and Surin	Tourism management	Cultural Tourism
<i>Boonkheereerut and Jaritthai (2020)</i>	NA	Thailand	Information technology, Digital world, Tourism style	Alternative Tourism
<i>Chitpakdee et al. (2020)</i>	Buddhism	Songkhla	Development	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Detmit (2020)</i>	Buddhism	Thailand	Potential, Development	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Horaraung et al. (2020)</i>	Buddhism	Lampang, Chiang Mai and Lamphun	Tourism activity, Tourism management	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Jatupoj (2020)</i>	NA	Ubon Ratchathani	Potential, Tourism management, Tourism activity, Tourism route	Eco and Cultural Tourism
<i>Masunthia (2020)</i>	Buddhism	Bangkok	Strategy, Promote value, Tourism activity	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Neeyakorn et al. (2020)</i>	Buddhism	Maharakham	Potential, Development, Tourist behavior, Service quality	NA
<i>Pompai et al. (2020)</i>	Buddhism	North-Eastern Thailand	Potential, Promotion	Buddhist Tourism
<i>Siriphath and Woraphatthirakul (2021)</i>	NA	Nakhon Phanom	Promotion, Public and private partnership cooperation, Development	Historical and Culture Tourism

Conclusion and Recommendations

A total of 38 papers were published in Thai journals between 2012 and 2021 on the theme of religious tourism, with the highest numbers of articles published in the years 2019 and 2020 (a total of 8 articles per year). The most common journal for the publication of these religious tourism articles (with four articles) was the Journal of Social Science and Buddhistic Anthropology, which is the most widely read of all the journals. Most of the

publications that were discovered tended to rely on qualitative research. The study of religious tourism in Thailand is mostly conducted in the context of Buddhist tourism, which is mentioned in as many as 33 papers of the 38 papers included in the study. Regarding the tourist destinations, the northeastern region of Thailand was the most popular study destination.

In accordance with the findings of the meta-analysis, many different types of tourists, and not just religious tourists, are

motivated by the desire to travel to traditional religious or spiritual destinations for spiritual well-being, enlightenment, knowledge, and social bonds as well as various other reasons. The secular tourism paradigm has been established to highlight travel to sacred destinations that are not religiously motivated. These perspectives have developed and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the linkages between tourism and religion or spirituality through a more holistic perspective (Collins-Kreiner, 2020).

As previously demonstrated, the field of study of religion and tourism has encountered tremendous growth in recent years, as evidenced by the increase in the number of published articles. This case is also evidenced by the expansion of the geographical regions and the variety of disciplines in which studies including the religious tourism context are conducted. Notably, this growth has occurred throughout the 21st century, at a time when secular influences may have been anticipated to play a more significant role.

Future research on religious tourism studies in Thailand could explore in more depth religions other than Buddhism, including Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. Additionally, a comparative study of Buddhist tourism between Buddhist tourism in Thailand and Buddhist tourism in other countries may be conducted to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and advantages in planning, management, marketing strategies and promotion, including adaptations of religious tourism following the COVID-19 crisis, to further develop religious tourism in Thailand in the future. More research might be conducted on risk perceptions, crisis-related tourism management, or even the relationship between tourists and the communities surrounding religious tourism destinations.

Finally, religious tourism is a form of tourism that generates a significant amount of revenue for Thailand whilst also assisting in distributing income to the local community. Therefore, the study of religious tourism should be expanded in terms of the number of

research studies conducted, the diversity of geographic areas or clusters of studies performed, the variety of research methodologies applied, and the multiplicity of contexts in which they are investigated.

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