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## Interpretation of shared culture of Baba and Nyonya for tourism linkage of four countries in the ASEAN community

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## ABSTRACT

The article presents: (1) a comparative study of interpretation types of Baba and Nyonya tourism and evaluates the interpretation results in four countries, (2) the development of the self-guiding interpretations of Baba and Nyonya tourism that present the shared culture in the four countries and, (3) the results of tests on the effectiveness and satisfaction of volunteers from the development of the self-guiding interpretation of Baba and Nyonya tourism. The research methodologies were: (1) a field survey of 18 Baba and Nyonya tourism destinations in the four countries—Phuket, Thailand, Penang and Malacca, Malaysia, Singapore, and the north coast of Java Island, Indonesia—together with in-depth interviews with 20 interpreters and five voluntary tourists and (2) the development of 10 self-guiding postcards for the interpretation of the shared cultures of Baba and Nyonya for tourism linkage among the four countries in the ASEAN community. The 10 postcards were tested and the information knowledge of 30 voluntary treatment tourists was compared with 30 voluntary control tourists; the former group was asked about the effectiveness of the postcards and their satisfaction. The test results were analyzed using a t-test and the effectiveness and satisfaction were analyzed using percentages.

The results showed that there were personal and non-personal interpretations providing differences in the Baba and Nyonya tourism areas. The results from the t-test between the treatment and controlled groups found that before the treatment group had read the 10 postcards, their knowledge was minimal; however, after they had read the 10 postcards for self-guiding interpretation, their knowledge after was significantly different at .05. Moreover, the treatment group recorded “satisfied” gradings for the 10 postcards overall with a score of 4.49 out of 5 using a Likert scale; while the highest satisfaction was with the quality of printing (4.80), but the lowest satisfaction was increased Southeast Asia culture concern and awareness (4.07).

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### Introduction

Interpretation is an effective communication tool where the interpreters are telling stories to tourists while traveling. This is, moreover, meaningful in society, because

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it is a way of presenting knowledge to the tourists regarding the long-term, cultural and historical heritage (Knudson, Cable, & Beck, 1999). This is similar in Phuket, Penang, Malacca, Singapore, and Indonesia where there are the well-known destinations for Baba and Nyonya tourists in Southeast Asian countries. The stories represent the roots of the history and culture of the people in these areas. Knudson et al. (1999) mentioned that visitors like to visit historical places for many reasons, such as finding out real personal backgrounds in the historical areas, searching for information on their own ancestors that was triggered by a historical class or movie, and finally, visiting historical places to increase their understanding.

However, each country presents and promotes the Baba and Nyonya tourism in its own country, but not for the whole Southeast Asian region. Consequently, now is the right time to study how well these four countries have prepared themselves for ASEAN tourism promotion. Therefore, this article presents the research results of, first, a comparative study of an interpretation type and the evaluation results of that interpretation in the four countries of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia; second, the results of postcards that present the shared culture in the four countries; and third, the test results, in addition to the effectiveness and satisfaction results of the volunteers regarding the developed postcards.

## Literature Review

### *ASEAN Community (AEC)*

The AEC is an organization established on 8 August 1967 initially made up of five countries—Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. AEC now comprises 10 countries, with the latter five being Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia (ASEAN Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003). After joining, the members agreed that they would initiate and expand agreements on economics, society, cultures, and security, initially at the end of 2015 (Rhoopanitchkij, 2011). This policy urged the peoples of the member countries to be ready for this upcoming AEC event. Similar to broader tourism in this region, there was a projected increase of 26 percent for AEC tourists and 20 percent for non-AEC tourists when the AEC began. Hence, the AEC members had to prepare themselves well regarding their combined identity and the languages for this change (Anonymous, 2013). This policy is thus concordant with the research objectives to investigate the effectiveness of the interpretation, especially on Baba and Nyonya tourism in the four countries.

### *Generation of the Baba and Nyonya Culture*

Baba and Nyonya describe the children who were Straits-born—the Melaka Straits—that include Sumatra, the Riau Archipelago, Singapore, North Coastal Java (Cheah, 2009), Malaysia, Phuket, and the Philippines (Tantiwit, 2006). The male is called Baba, while the female is called Nyonya (Chai, 2011; Kim, 2009). Baba and Nyonya also have the same meaning as “Peranakan”—a person born in the country, but of a foreign race (Tantiwit, 2006). Peranakan is used for

people of mixed birth, not merely the immigrating Chinese people and the locals, but also the people immigrating from India, Indonesia, and European countries (Chai, 2011). Therefore, the Peranakan can be divided into many mixed races between the locals and the foreigners, such as Indian-Hindu Peranakan, Eurasian Peranakan, Jawi Peranakan, and Chinese Peranakan (Kim, 2009). Chinese Peranakan is the most direct word and has the same meaning as Baba and Nyonya in this article. This is in accordance with Tantiwit (2006, quoted from Khoo Yoo Ee, n.d.) stating that “Baba is Peranakan, but not all Peranakans are Babas”.

Baba and Nyonya or Chinese Peranakan are the people of mixed births during the 15th–19th centuries as a result of interbreeding between the immigrating Chinese people and the local people in Southeast Asian countries, such as the southern part of Thailand in Phuket province, and the Penang and Malacca States in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. The Baba and Nyonya culture or Chinese Peranakan culture is the mixture of the Chinese culture brought from China and the local culture in the Southeast Asian countries where the Chinese people settled, in addition to the influence of cultures from the European countries during colonization. For example, the Chinese believe in the restrictions of ancestors' respect and respect for God. The Nyonya girl usually wears a “Sarong”, which is made in the Batik fashion and is popular with ladies in Southeast Asian countries. The food cooked and eaten is influenced by the local spices; the Chinese wares and decorations were influenced mainly by China. The stories about their lives and their cultures then become most charming and popular for tourists eager to know and learn. For example, many countries have promoted this kind of tourism recently in Phuket province, Thailand, in the Penang and Malacca States in Malaysia, and in Singapore after the Singaporean movie, “the Little Nyonya” was broadcast. However, rarely is information distributed from Indonesia within the AEC while there is a “Peranakan Convention” occurring almost every year in Indonesia.

### *History of Regional Political Patterns Forming the Baba and Nyonya Culture*

The Baba and Nyonya culture is a variety of mixtures, receiving influences from trading and migration from China and colonization from European countries, all mixed with the local Straits' cultures. It was found that Captain “Zheng Ho” from China brought together the history and cultures of the region. He first received an order from the Emperor of the Chinese Dynasty to survey the world of the many the Chinese migrations, early in the Ayutthaya Kingdom period in Thailand. From the records, Zheng Ho's influence helped solve the conflict between the Ayutthaya Kingdom and Malacca in 1407–1409. Later, he became very famous and respected by the people in Thailand; and finally, in remembrance, the Thai people used his name for the Toe Buddha in a temple in Ayutthaya province, Thailand (Pheungpracha, 2008). In addition, Kasetsiri (2013) mentioned the influences of the European countries on Southeast Asian countries during the following periods.

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