

Special Seminar

Empowering Women with the Power of Tourism: Case of the Massage Center by Female Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners in Chiang Mai, Thailand



Guest Speaker:

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ILAS Lecturer

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0:00p.m.-1:30p.m

Place : Tonantei (Inamori 2nd floor north end)

Abstract :

A person having served a sentence in prison often finds it difficult to reintegrate into society. This is especially evident in the case of female ex-prisoners where their gender is used against them. Additional hurdles are unfairly imposed on them to prove that they have earned their place in the community outside of prison. The social stigma attached to them due to their criminal past gradually swallows their own individuality to the point of becoming their new identity. The public refuses to see them beyond their criminal past. Not only is the public assumption against them, but the law is also hardly on their side. Female ex-prisoners cannot own a business nor employed as public servant. Their career options are limited to odd jobs or labor works which barely pay the minimum wage. They could not earn an adequate income for their household. These obstacles contribute to the high rate of recidivism or aggravated crimes among female ex-prisoners.

Tourism has the power to break this cycle. The success of the Women's Massage Center by Ex-Prisoners in Chiang Mai has aptly demonstrated this. It took advantage of the skilled ex-prisoners who were trained during their incarceration and marketed their social stigma as a unique brand to attract tourists to the massage center. In return, the female ex-prisoners gain a stable employment and therefore slowly reintegrated with social life as another citizen.

This presentation will demonstrate how tourism has the power to empower female ex-prisoner's identity and repackage it for the benefit of tourism industry. At the same time, tourism has the power to provide these female ex-prisoners with new career opportunities that previously were not made available to them. However, the power of tourism is limited inside the tourism industry, especially with foreign tourists. The changes provided does not extend towards better acceptance from the local community.

Keywords: female prisoner, ex-prisoner, massage, social stigma, tourism, commercialization



Ploysri Porananond is an exceptional researcher in tourism studies in Thailand. At present, she is a senior research fellow at the Knowledge and Innovation Center, College of Arts, Media and Technology, Chiang Mai University. She is the founder of the Asian Journal of Tourism Research (AJTR), the international journal in tourism research in Thailand. Her interest focuses on the relation between tourism and culture in Thailand and Her publications include "Modernity and Evolution of a Festive Tourism Tradition: The Songkran Festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand" (2008), Rethinking Asian Tourism: Culture, Encounters and Local Response (edited with Victor T. King) (2014), "Tourism and Political Agendas in the Dum Hua Procession in the Songkran Festival" (2014), "Tourism and the Transformation of Ritual Practice with Sand Pagoda in Chiang Mai, Thailand" (2015), "Khun Tok Dinner: The Transformation of a Lanna Eating Style into a Tourist Attraction in Chiang Mai, Thailand" (2015), Tourism and Monarchy in Southeast Asia (edited with Victor T. King) (2016), "The Monarch, the Elephant, and Tourism in Chiang Mai, Thailand" (2016). "Tourist Demand and the Transformation of Kimono in Kyoto" (2019).