



อิทธิพลของชาวเวียดนามที่มีต่อการท่องเที่ยวโบสถ์คริสต์ในจังหวัดจันทบุรี ประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ผลกระทบของชุมชนชาวเวียดนามที่มีต่อการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาในจังหวัดจันทบุรี โดยเฉพาะบริเวณอาสนวิหารพระนางมารีอาปฏิสนธินิรมล ซึ่งเป็นศูนย์กลางของชุมชนคริสต์นิกายโรมันคาทอลิกเชื้อสายเวียดนามที่อพยพมาตั้งถิ่นฐานตั้งแต่ปลายศตวรรษที่ 17 การตั้งถิ่นฐานของชาวเวียดนามได้นำวัฒนธรรม ความเชื่อ และศิลปกรรมแบบตะวันตกเข้ามาผสมผสานกับวิถีไทย จนเกิดเป็นอัตลักษณ์ท้องถิ่นที่โดดเด่น ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาในพื้นที่ส่งผลกระทบต่อหลายกลุ่ม ทั้งในเชิงบวกและเชิงทำลาย ได้แก่ ชุมชนท้องถิ่นที่ได้รับประโยชน์จากเศรษฐกิจชุมชนผ่านธุรกิจที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการท่องเที่ยว นักท่องเที่ยวทั่วไปที่ได้รับประสบการณ์เชิงวัฒนธรรมและจิตวิญญาณ ตลอดจนบทบาทของนักบวชชาวเวียดนามในการสืบสานประเพณีศาสนา ทั้งนี้ยังมีความท้าทายด้านการบริหารจัดการจำนวนนักท่องเที่ยวและการรักษาความสมดุลของวัฒนธรรมดั้งเดิม การศึกษานี้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงความสัมพันธ์เชิงบูรณาการระหว่างประวัติศาสตร์ วัฒนธรรม ศาสนา และการพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจท้องถิ่น และเสนอแนวทางการส่งเสริมเส้นทางท่องเที่ยววัฒนธรรมคริสต์ไทย-เวียดนามอย่างยั่งยืน

คำสำคัญ: ชาวคริสต์เชื้อสายเวียดนาม จันทบุรี การท่องเที่ยวโบสถ์คริสต์ อาสนวิหารพระนางมารีอาปฏิสนธินิรมล



Vietnamese Influence on Christian Church Tourism in Chanthaburi, Thailand

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of the Vietnamese Catholic community on religious tourism in Chanthaburi Province, with a particular focus on sites related to Christianity. Central to this exploration is the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, which serves as the heart of the Roman Catholic Vietnamese community that settled in the area in the late 17th century, following religious persecution in Vietnam. Their settlement introduced distinctive cultural, religious, and artistic influences that blended with Thai ways of life, resulting in a unique local identity. Findings reveal that religious tourism in the area affects multiple groups both positively and with challenges. Local communities benefit economically through businesses linked to tourism such as accommodations, restaurants, and religious souvenir shops. General tourists gain cultural and spiritual experiences, while Vietnamese clergy play a vital role in preserving traditions and rituals, including the use of the Vietnamese language and hymns in religious ceremonies. However, issues such as overcrowding during peak pilgrimage periods and the pressure on preserving local heritage present ongoing challenges. This study highlights the interconnectedness of history, culture, religion, and local economic development, and suggests the need for sustainable promotion of Christian cultural tourism routes linking Thailand and Vietnam.

Keyword: Vietnamese Christians, Chanthaburi, Christian Church Tourism, Cathedral of the Immaculate.

1. Introduction

Chanthaburi Province is home to a unique form of religious tourism that centers around the Christian churches built and maintained by the Vietnamese Catholic community [1]. Among these, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception stands out not only as a place of worship but also as an architectural and cultural landmark. The cathedral's striking Gothic and colonial design—heavily influenced by France's Notre Dame—combined with its spiritual atmosphere and historical significance, makes it a key attraction for heritage tourists and pilgrims alike [2]. Exploring church-based tourism in this context is especially meaningful due to the layers of history, culture, and religious identity embedded in these sacred spaces. Visitors are not only offered visual and architectural beauty but also an immersive experience into the rituals, languages, and musical traditions preserved by the Vietnamese Catholic clergy. These elements

contribute to the development of heritage tourism, where the goal is not merely recreation but education and cultural appreciation.

Understanding and examining this form of tourism is essential for shaping sustainable regional tourism strategies. It highlights how faith-based sites can become hubs for cultural exchange, economic development, and intercommunity dialogue. With increasing interest in meaningful, experience-driven travel, Vietnamese-influenced Christian churches in Chanthaburi present an opportunity to develop well-curated religious and heritage tourism routes, connecting local history with wider regional planning efforts that could eventually link Thailand with Vietnam and beyond.

Therefore, in-depth study of church tourism in Chanthaburi is not only valuable for historical or cultural purposes but also plays a crucial role in preparing for future tourism trends that emphasize authenticity, preservation, and cross-cultural understanding.

2. Literature review

2.1 The Migration History of Vietnamese People and the Spread of Christianity

The first migration of Vietnamese Catholics occurred due to the prolonged civil war in Vietnam, coupled with the involvement of trade and missionary powers. A group of about 130 Vietnamese Catholic missionaries who were persecuted religiously fled from Vietnam and settled in Chanthaburi since 1699. These Vietnamese Catholics came to Siam voluntarily, escaping the heat and seeking coolness. In addition to the push factor of immigrants “escaping the heat” from the policy of persecuting Catholics of the Tru Dynasty, the attracting factor of these immigrants was the decision to come to Siam “to seek coolness” because of the policy of granting religious freedom of King Narai the Great. The migration of Vietnamese people to Chanthaburi occurred towards the end of the reign of King Narai the Great. King Narai had a policy of promoting trade with foreign countries by establishing friendly relations with many countries. He allowed everyone to have the freedom to live as they wished, as Father de Choisy said, “Whoever wants to trade, trade; whoever wants to sell, sell.” Whoever wants to worship any god can worship it.” His Majesty performed his duty as a protector of peace and ensured the safety of all. And because he granted religious freedom to both Siamese and foreigners who came to live there, it was the reason that many foreigners came to live in Siam. As the saying goes, “There were few foreigners, they immigrated from various countries and rushed into Siam because of the legitimacy, they were free to trade as they pleased. It is said that the metropolis is comfortable with foreigners who come to seek refuge under his royal patronage, making a living in as many as 40 languages.” [3],[4]

The goal of King Narai the Great's program was to open the nation and establish cordial ties with other nations. His policies included granting religious freedom to both Siamese and foreign residents of Ayutthaya, as well as encouraging trade with other nations. Additionally, he gave land to individuals of many ethnicities so they might live outside the capital. Furthermore, King Narai the Great recognized the value of foreigners residing in Ayutthaya at the time as a source of labor for the advancement of the country. Western priests arrived in Ayutthaya to propagate Christianity thanks to this religious freedom, and the Vietnamese followed. The promotion of connections with King Louis XIV of France, a European force



at the time and someone the Dutch and English dreaded, was a result of granting religious freedom to Western clerics, particularly the French. Therefore, maintaining cordial ties with France helped to balance the influence with other European nations vying for dominance in Southeast Asia at the time. However, many Vietnamese left Ayutthaya in 1688 due to a mutiny to take the throne that followed King Narai's rule. [5]

The coup d'état occurred while King Narai was seriously ill and died after the bloody coup had ended. The officials led by Okya Sorasak or King Suea were the ones who pushed for the invitation of King Phetracha to ascend to the throne in 2232 B.E. when he was 56 years old and established a new dynasty, the Ban Phlu Luang Dynasty, named Phra Bat Somdet Phra Mahaburut Wisutthidet Udom. When King Phetracha ascended to the throne, he drove the French army out of Ayutthaya, cutting off the French as the first country to do so. Relations have been severed ever since, followed by the English. As for Japan and Portugal, their roles have been lost since the early era of King Narai. The only Western country that could continue to exist was the Dutch, as they helped King Phetracha eliminate the French.

Although religious persecution in Siam declined towards the end of King Phetracha's reign, the peaceful environment that Vietnamese Catholics had once experienced during King Narai's rule no longer existed. This was partly due to the Vietnamese associating themselves with the French, a nation that the Thai ruling class viewed with suspicion and considered a potential threat to Siam.

Chanthaburi Province holds literal significance as a crucial inland harborage megacity in the eastern region of Siam. Archaeological substantiation — similar as earthen mounds, megacity walls, gullies, ancient spots, and vestiges indicates that Chanthaburi has long been a endless and prosperous agreement. also, the fiefdom formerly played an executive part over other littoral municipalities in the region [6].(During the Ayutthaya period, Chanthaburi was not a central seat of power but played a strategic role as a border town. Its location made it a refuge for displaced groups, such as the Vietnamese fleeing religious and political persecution. Ayutthaya's openness to religious diversity and use of such border towns for expanding influence reflected the kingdom's broader power strategy [4]. Because of its marginal status, Chanthaburi became a place of frequent migration, where people from diverse backgrounds settled and moved in and out. Over time, this contributed to the city's cultural diversity, shaped by political integration Geographically, Chanthaburi was situated on elevated land along the southern bank of the Chanthaburi River, with a gradual slope from Khao Ploi Waen towards the sea to the west. Its proximity to the river made it an important hub for water transportation, contributing to economic prosperity. This accessibility also made it a convenient escape route for those fleeing from Siam to Cambodia. A French missionary once noted that Chanthaburi and coastal towns provided suitable routes for easy escape to other places.

The moment wave of Vietnamese Catholic movement to Chanthaburi happened between 1833-1834. The fundamental reason was that the Vietnamese government issued an declaration forbidding Vietnamese from getting to be Catholics and rebuffing Vietnamese Christians in different ways. The mistreatment of Catholics was the result of the illustrious court's approach of closing the nation. The Nguyen Tradition did not exchange with outside nations, particularly Western nations. This arrangement caused the government to have in reverse considering and stand up to change. Sovereign Minh Mang of the Nguyen



Line instep advanced the consider of Confucianism to offer assistance back the framework of government. John K. Whitmore criticized this approach, saying that the consider of Confucianism in Vietnam was not philosophical as it was in China, Japan, or Korea. Instep, Confucianism was frequently examined for the advantage of government organization and to decide the parts and obligations of individuals in society Emperor Minh Mang was a incredible devotee in Confucianism and respected Chinese culture. He considered Confucianism to set the rules and controls for his government work. Vitally, he did not acknowledge the translation of Confucianism from the northern researchers, which was ruled by the Trinh line, but chose to consider Confucianism specifically from the majestic court. At the same time, he was anxious that Christianity, which was a modern philosophy for Vietnamese Catholics, would be a danger to the soundness of the state by supplanting Confucian philosophy, specifically The ideological strife between Christianity and Confucianism reflects the course of action of the relationship between people and the state. The Confucian first class seen Christianity as educating people to act agreeing to their possess inner voice. Hence, it was an act that damaged the Confucian standards that Vietnamese society followed to and would annihilate the ethical establishment of Confucianism. In expansion, Christian lessons were imported from overseas. In this manner, the soul of Vietnamese Christians appeared to have gotten orders from overseas. In brief, the Vietnamese first class who ruled Vietnam accepted that Christianity was not as it were shameless but too pointed to weaken the government's control.

In the eyes of Vietnamese history specialists, Marxists have pointed out the inadequacies of the Nguyen Line. The endeavor to resuscitate Confucianism in Vietnam was basically an endeavor to keep up the control of the primitive gather. One of the necessities of borrowing the Chinese administration show and Confucianism in the organization of Vietnam was to bind together Vietnam, which had been isolated for centuries. In spite of the fact that beneath the run the show of the Nguyen Tradition, there was a delicacy of political steadiness and social structure. However, the Vietnamese government amid Sovereign Minh Mang's rule restored the approach of abusing Catholics. Indeed in spite of the fact that Head Yalong, Sovereign Minh Mang's father, had requested that the another ruler of Vietnam would not oppress those who practiced the three religions in his realm: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity, Sovereign Minh Mang anticipated the development of Christianity by requesting the Catholic fathers to remain in the royal residence in Tint, claiming that they required the fathers' dialect and other capacities. In any case, when the fathers denied to comply, he issued a law denying the fathers from entering Vietnam and removing the evangelists from the nation. The authorities dissented against Ruler Minh Mang's arrangements, which were against his father's orders. Numerous authorities were once companions with Minister Pinho de Behan. Ong Tacun, the representative of South Vietnam, who was already the chief eunuch in Head Gia Long's royal residence, composed a letter of challenge to Sovereign Minh Mang, saying, "In our mouths there is still the rice that Father gave us when we were hungry." The dissent was brief. Head Minh Mang stopped the abuse of Catholics in the six southern territories of Vietnam. Be that as it may, when Ong Tacun kicked the bucket in 1833 the taking after year, he started to issue a declare to resuscitate the mistreatment of Christians. Indeed Ong Tacun's tomb was freely shown at the Emperor's arrange. Such brutal acts driven to the foundation of a law in Ya Dinh, which was brutally smothered and numerous friars were executed.

Thus, Religious administrator Tabard and two or three teachers, along with twenty amateurs and a number of Catholics, fled from the political mistreatment in Vietnam amid the rule of Head Minh Mang and moved to Siam. Amid the rule of Lord Nangklaio, Minister Tabard was welcomed to Bangkok to learn approximately the devout abuse and the rebellion against Sovereign Minh Mang in Vietnam. He permitted the cleric and evangelists to remain.

Considering the data obtained, the author is of the opinion that The Vietnamese Catholics who moved to Chanthaburi amid this period initially lived in Tone City in northern Vietnam. Their pioneers were respectable families, specifically the Nguyen and Le families. Be that as it may, Tone City was ruled by the Trin family since the Nguyen family was effective in southern Vietnam, whereas the Le family had control as it were in title. In this manner, these nobles brought the Catholics from Tone by vessel to elude the Trin family's chase and live in Cambodia for a whereas. They had to camouflage themselves as Khmers, as we can see from the truth that the Vietnamese in the Roman Catholic community of Chanthaburi in the past still wore "Ao Komen" clothing, which was a ensemble worn to camouflage themselves from the Trin family who were chasing them

2.2 Immaculate Conception Cathedral, Chanthaburi: A Hub of Faith and Catholic Culture

Chanthaburi's Cathedral of the Faultless Conception is the biggest Catholic building in Thailand. With its two towers, it got to be the image of the city. It is the the fifth church built there and is a prominent representation of the Catholic community in the eastern region. Besides its impressive Gothic Colonial architecture, it profoundly reflects the deep faith, beliefs, and culture of the local population. [7]



Figure 1 Cathedral, Chanthaburi [8]

2.2.1 Devout beliefs

1) Roman Catholicism

This cathedral serves as the otherworldly heart of the Catholic community in Chanthaburi. Concurring to the lessons of the Roman Catholic Church, which is the crucial bunch of Catholics around the world, it is the central put for basic sincere ceremonies such as Mass, Brilliant Communion and Christmas celebrations, where the steadfast amass to express their commitment and certainty in God. [9]



Figure 2 Roman Catholicism [10]

2) Immaculate Conception

This cathedral was built to honor the Virgin Mary, emphasizing the belief in the “Immaculate Conception,” which means that the Virgin Mary was born without original sin, was considered innocent from the beginning, and thus suitable to be the mother of Jesus [11]. Inside the cathedral, there is a statue of the Virgin Mary, decorated with gems, reflecting the deep reverence and faith that people have for her.

3) Supplications and Blessings

Both Catholics and visitors habitually come to the cathedral to supplicate and ask for favors. Tolerating that the Virgin Mary gives security and can favor them with rapture and security, various see for her favors for their families, livelihoods, and prosperity, outlining their accept in her kindness and God's sensitivity.

2.2.2 Cultural Significance and Role

1) Spiritual Center

This cathedral acts as the spiritual focal point for Catholics in Chanthaburi. Each year, it hosts major events such as the Christmas Festival and large Mass ceremonies, drawing many believers from within and outside the province. These religious occasions help reinforce the unity and connection within the community.



Figure 3 Spiritual Center [12]

2) Belief in Protection

The local Catholic community holds the belief that the Virgin Mary can shield and protect both families and the broader community from harm and misfortune. The statue of the Virgin Mary, decorated with precious gems, serves as a symbol of faith and love, regarded as a powerful protector against adversity.

3) Symbol of Faith

The decoration of the Virgin Mary's statue with valuable gemstones is not just a beautiful sight but also a powerful expression of deep respect and devotion. Local residents believe that visiting and worshipping at the cathedral brings God's protection and blessings.

2.2.3 Belief in Harmony

1) Community Cohesion

In addition to its religious significance, the cathedral serves as a gathering point for both Catholic and other diverse cultural communities, including both Thai and Vietnamese Catholics who have settled in Chanthaburi. This creates an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence.

2) Mutual Assistance

The cathedral is also a venue for the community to come together for social activities such as aiding the needy, organizing charitable fundraising, and supporting educational initiatives. These actions align with Christian values of generosity and helping one another.

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Chanthaburi Province is an important place of spiritual and cultural significance for the Catholic community in the eastern part of Thailand. In addition to its role as a place of religious ceremonies, The cathedral is also a symbol of deep faith, community unity and compassion. Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, who is believed to have been free from original sin, it is a place where both locals and tourists come to pray and seek blessings. The Cathedral also promotes unity by bringing together people from diverse cultural backgrounds and actively supports charitable activities and educational programs that reflect the core values of Christianity Generosity and caring for one another.

2.3 The Role of Vietnamese Priests and Clergy At The Immaculate Conception Cathedral of Mary

At the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in Chanthaburi, Vietnamese priests and clergy play a vital role in supporting both the spiritual life and cultural identity of the Vietnamese Catholic community. Since their arrival in the region, these religious leaders have contributed significantly not only in providing spiritual guidance but also in preserving the cultural traditions of the Vietnamese community.

1) Spiritual Guidance

Vietnamese priests are key figures in leading religious services, providing pastoral care, and administering sacraments. Their ability to speak the Vietnamese language ensures that the community can engage with the teachings of the faith more personally and meaningfully.

2) Cultural Preservation

In addition to their religious duties, Vietnamese clergy help maintain the Vietnamese language and cultural practices in church services. By incorporating traditional prayers and hymns in Vietnamese, they help the community stay connected to its cultural heritage while practicing their faith.

3) Religious Celebrations

Vietnamese priests are also in charge of organizing and leading significant religious festivals and celebrations that have Vietnamese origins. These include the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and other important occasions, where Vietnamese clergy ensure the customs and practices are upheld according to both the faith and cultural traditions. Through their leadership and efforts, Vietnamese priests and clergy help ensure that the Vietnamese Catholic community in Chanthaburi continues to thrive spiritually, while also honoring their cultural traditions within the framework of Catholic teachings. [13]

2.4 Architecture and Art Inspired by Vietnam

The history of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception is deeply intertwined with the Vietnamese Catholic community. In the 19th century, many Vietnamese Catholics faced religious persecution under the Nguyễn dynasty, prompting some to flee to Thailand. The Thai government at that time permitted them to settle in Chanthaburi, an area recognized for its fertile land and suitability for living.

Construction of the cathedral began in 1901 (BE 2444) and concluded in 1909 (BE 2452), driven by the collaborative efforts of the Vietnamese Catholic community. The architecture showcases a blend of local craftsmanship and European influences, particularly French, as Vietnam was under French colonial rule during that period. Consequently, the cathedral's design prominently features the French colonial Gothic style.

2.5 Architectural and Artistic Influences from Vietnam

1) Colonial Gothic Architecture

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception showcases Gothic architectural features that were influenced by French colonialism in Vietnam [14]. It is constructed from brick and wood, materials commonly found in Gothic cathedrals. The church's exterior is adorned with intricate fretwork. There are windows with pointed arches. The main structure is designed like a cathedral, featuring a lengthy central hall flanked by columns. The central entrance has a gabled roof with exquisite windows and decorative elements. The lofty vaulted ceiling gives the interior a grand and sophisticated appearance. Inside, stained glass windows depict biblical narratives, reflecting the commitment to creating a space that acts both as a sacred environment and a spiritual refuge.

2) Gem-Embellished Virgin Mary Statue

[14] A focal point within the cathedral is the Gem-Embellished Over 20,000 carats Virgin Mary Statue, displayed at the altar. Representing purity and the steadfast faith of the Catholic community, the statue is crafted from high-quality materials and adorned with an array of gemstones. It is believed that local Catholics and Vietnamese immigrants contributed to its creation through donations.

The use of gemstones reflects the intricate craftsmanship influenced by Vietnamese traditions, where beautiful and valuable materials are commonly used to decorate sacred objects.

3) Cultural Integration of Thai and Vietnamese Traditions

The cathedral is not only an architectural blend of Eastern and Western influences but also a testament to the harmonious coexistence of Thai and Vietnamese cultures. Some religious ceremonies continue to preserve Vietnamese traditions, including prayer recitations in Vietnamese during certain events. Historical records show that many Vietnamese Catholics migrated to Chanthaburi during the 18th and 19th centuries due to religious persecution in Vietnam—particularly during periods of political instability and anti-Christian sentiment. This migration significantly shaped the local religious landscape, as Vietnamese settlers brought their Catholic traditions, language, and cultural values with them (CPAMedia, 2023; Le Duc, 2024). [15], [16] Major celebrations, such as the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, bring together both Thai and Vietnamese communities in joint religious observances. The combination of traditional attire and cuisine at these events highlights the integration of both cultures, with participants donning Vietnamese clothing and sharing dishes that reflect a mix of Thai and Vietnamese culinary influences. Some religious events at the cathedral still incorporate Vietnamese elements. For example, during special Masses, prayers are sometimes recited in Vietnamese, and on significant occasions such as the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, both Thai and Vietnamese communities come together to worship. Participants often wear traditional Vietnamese attire (áo dài) and share meals that include both Thai and Vietnamese dishes.

These cultural expressions reflect not only a shared Catholic faith but also enhance the tourism experience, offering visitors a deeper, more authentic understanding of the multicultural identity of Chanthaburi's Catholic community (Thamai.net, 2011; Bangkok Post, 2022). [17], [18]

2.6 Ceremonies and Festivals Reflecting Vietnamese Culture

The use of Vietnamese Language in Religious Ceremonies at the Cathedral of the Immaculate conception. Located in Chanthaburi Province, serves as a vital religious center for the local Catholic community. With a rich history and a deep connection to the Vietnamese community that settled in the area during the late 19th century, it stands as a symbol of cultural preservation and faith. One of the key aspects reflecting Vietnamese heritage within the cathedral is the incorporation of the Vietnamese language during religious ceremonies. This is especially evident during significant events and religious festivals, where prayers and sacred hymns are performed in Vietnamese. This practice not only preserves the traditions of the Vietnamese Catholic community in Thailand but also upholds their cultural identity. Moreover, using the Vietnamese language during worship is a way to pay tribute to ancestors and maintain a link to their cultural roots. Local religious leaders and community members actively encourage younger generations to learn Vietnamese to keep the language and traditions alive. Incorporating Vietnamese into religious practices not only showcases the community's strong faith but also highlights the seamless integration of Thai and Vietnamese cultures. As a result, the cathedral has become both a spiritual haven and a unifying symbol for the Vietnamese Catholic community in Chanthaburi.



1) Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

This is the most significant annual celebration at the cathedral, featuring Mass, prayers, sacred hymns, and a procession with the statue of the Virgin Mary. The event expresses profound devotion and respect for the Virgin Mary. The celebration shares many similarities with those held in Catholic churches in Vietnam, where processions and prayers in Vietnamese are commonly observed.

2) Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

This event includes prayers, hymns of praise, and rituals primarily conducted in Vietnamese, emphasizing the cultural connection of the Vietnamese Catholic community. The celebration also features various activities reflecting the traditional customs and lifestyle of the Vietnamese people.

3) Other Religious Festivals.

In addition to the main events, the cathedral hosts other religious festivals with elements that highlight the Vietnamese cultural heritage. These include special prayers, processions around the cathedral, and ceremonies incorporating sacred hymns in Vietnamese.

2.7 Christian Church Tourism in Chanthaburi and Business Opportunities

The Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Cathedral, located in Chanthaburi Province, is a prominent religious landmark for the Catholic community in Thailand. It plays a vital role in attracting both local and international visitors, especially those interested in religious tourism. The cathedral draws various types of tourists, including:

2.7.1 Types of Visitors to the Cathedral

1) Pilgrims

A significant number of pilgrims visit the cathedral, particularly during important Christian celebrations like the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Pilgrims from Catholic communities in Thailand and beyond come to honor the Virgin Mary and offer prayers for peace and well-being.

2) Catholic Students

Catholic students from local schools and institutions in other regions often visit the cathedral for educational purposes, including studying the religion, history, and architecture. These visits also allow them to engage with local religious customs through organized activities within the church.

3) General Tourists

General tourists, who may not necessarily follow the Christian faith, visit the cathedral to admire its distinctive Gothic architecture and the integration of Vietnamese art. They are also intrigued by the history of the Vietnamese Catholic community in the region.

4) International

Tourists The cathedral also attracts foreign visitors, particularly from Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries, as well as from Europe and the Americas. These tourists are drawn by the church's religious significance and local cultural heritage.

2.7.2 Comparison with Other Religious Tourist Sites in ASEAN

When compared to other religious sites in the ASEAN region, the Cathedral of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception stands out for its unique blend of historical and cultural significance, attracting a broad range of visitors. Here are some comparisons:



Figure 4 Spiritual Center [12]

The Church of the Immaculate Conception, also known as the Catholic Church of Chanthaburi, is located in Chanthanimit Subdistrict, Mueang District, Chanthaburi Province, directly opposite the historic Chantaboon Riverside Community. The cathedral faces the Chanthaburi River and provides spacious and convenient parking. The current structure is the fifth iteration of the cathedral, with an age of approximately 116 years. However, if counted from the original small chapel built centuries ago, its religious significance has spanned over 300 years, serving as a spiritual center for the Christian community in Chanthaburi.

The building features Western-style Gothic architecture, with its most prominent elements being two tall, pointed towers that serve as bell towers and house a large clock visible from a distance. Inside, the cathedral is beautifully adorned with a crucifix, statues of various saints, and a statue of the Virgin Mary. In front of the cathedral is an open courtyard with a remarkable statue of the Virgin Mary, elaborately decorated with over 200,000 gemstones (around 20,000 carats). The base is crafted from pure silver and adorned with gold and various precious stones, reflecting both the community's deep faith and the exquisite artistry of the church. [14]



Figure 5 Notre-Dame Cathedral in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) [19]

Ho Chi Minh City's Notre-Dame Cathedral in Vietnam, and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Chanthaburi, Thailand, are both significant religious landmarks renowned for their architectural, cultural, and spiritual importance. Influenced by French Gothic architecture, both cathedrals feature iconic twin bell towers, pointed arches, and beautiful stained-glass windows. The Ho Chi Minh Cathedral is grand in scale, constructed entirely with imported materials from France, and serves as a religious symbol in Vietnam's economic capital. In contrast, the Chanthaburi Cathedral, though more modest, embodies deep devotion and was built by Vietnamese migrants who settled in Thailand around 300 years ago. Its highlight is the statue of the Virgin Mary adorned with over 200,000 gemstones. [20]

These cathedrals are not only places of worship but also key cultural tourism destinations, reflecting the harmonious blend of faith, art, and history passed down through generations. They also stand as testaments to the role of the Vietnamese Christian community in shaping the cultural diversity and identity of Southeast Asia, showcasing how religious heritage can contribute to meaningful cultural preservation and tourism.



Figure 6 St. Joseph's Cathedral (Hanoi, Vietnam) [21]

St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hanoi and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Chanthaburi share striking similarities in their architectural styles, reflecting French Gothic influences. Both cathedrals feature twin bell towers, pointed arches, and intricate stained-glass windows, which are hallmarks of the Gothic Revival architecture that became prevalent during the French colonial period in Southeast Asia.

St. Joseph's Cathedral, completed in 1886, is a significant landmark in Hanoi, Vietnam. It stands as a symbol of the city's Roman Catholic heritage and serves as the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Hanoi. The cathedral is well-known for its striking twin towers, which rise over 30 meters in height, and its grand interior adorned with stained-glass windows depicting biblical scenes. It continues to be an important religious and cultural center for the local Catholic community, as well as a popular tourist destination [22]. Similarly, Chanthaburi's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Thailand, was completed in 1909 and is the largest Catholic church in the country. Built by the Vietnamese Catholic community that settled in Thailand in the late 19th century, the cathedral reflects their cultural and religious heritage. The church's Gothic architecture includes twin towers and an intricately designed interior. The most notable feature is a statue of the Virgin Mary, adorned with over 200,000 gemstones. This

cathedral holds deep significance for the Vietnamese community in Thailand, serving not only as a religious space but also as a symbol of their history and cultural identity [23].

Both cathedrals are more than just places of worship; they are symbols of the cultural exchange between Vietnam and Thailand, reflecting the influence of French colonial architecture while also embodying the religious and cultural ties of the Vietnamese Catholic community in both countries. These cathedrals stand as testaments to the enduring legacy of migration, faith, and architecture in Southeast Asia.

3. Economic Impact and Business Opportunities at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception in Chanthaburi plays a vital role in the local economy, especially with the rising number of religious visitors. Below are the key business opportunities and economic impacts related to this religious site:

3.1 Related Businesses

3.1.1 Hotels

The increase in religious tourists has positively impacted the local hotel industry, boosting demand for accommodation options such as hotels, guesthouses, and resorts. Particularly during religious events and festivals, some hotels cater specifically to pilgrims and religious tourists by offering amenities suited to their needs.

3.2.2 Restaurants

As the number of visitors grows, local restaurants, particularly those offering Thai and Vietnamese dishes, also thrive. Some eateries may customize their menus to cater to Christian or Vietnamese tourists, offering special meals during religious holidays or feast days to meet their cultural preferences.

3.3.3 Religious Goods and Souvenirs

Retail businesses selling religious items like rosaries, statues, prayer books, and other sacred artifacts benefit from the tourists' interest in purchasing souvenirs. These products are significant for both pilgrims and regular visitors, providing a tangible connection to their faith and memories of their visit. he primary items of this gift , other than offering circular neck T-shirts and key chains, one of the popular items of Chanthaburi Territory is "Adornments sets from genuine Chanthaburi jewels". The adornments set incorporates rings, accessories, and bracelets. There are moreover gold-framed special necklace pendants, which are Christian special necklace pendants, such as Jesus pendants, Mother Mary pendants, blessed messenger pendants, and different holy person pendants, as well as numerous Catholic devout things. In expansion, there are moreover peppers, dried Chanthaburi noodles, and other celebrated trinkets of Chanthaburi Area [24].



Figure 7 Catholic devout things [25]

4. Developing Tour Packages Connecting Christian Churches in Thailand and Vietnam

The increasing popularity of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception presents an opportunity to create tour packages linking Christian churches in both Thailand and Vietnam, promoting religious tourism across the region.

4.1 Enhancing Cross-Border Religious Tourism

Building on the rich historical and cultural connections between Thailand and Vietnam, tour operators have a significant opportunity to design cross-border pilgrimage programs. These itineraries could guide tourists through important Christian landmarks in both countries, highlighting their historical, cultural, and architectural significance. By focusing on shared religious practices, visitors can explore the Catholic faith in diverse settings, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of its presence across the region. Such initiatives would not only provide economic benefits to the tourism industry but also foster greater cultural and religious exchange within the ASEAN region, strengthening the bond between the Catholic communities of both nations.

A compelling example of such an offering is the proposed tour package: "Traces of Catholic Culture and Colonial Architecture." Inspired by iconic sites like the Notre-Dame Basilica in Ho Chi Minh City and St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hanoi, this tour would take visitors on a captivating journey. The concept behind this package is to explore the unique fusion of colonial Gothic architecture and Catholic heritage, particularly as it manifests in Chanthaburi, Thailand. It would delve into the rich history of Vietnamese Catholics who settled in the area, showcasing their enduring cultural and spiritual legacy.

4.2 Chanthaburi: A Journey Through Faith, Culture, and Gems

Chanthaburi offers a unique itinerary that blends spiritual enrichment, cultural immersion, and local craftsmanship, highlighting the deep historical ties between Thailand and Vietnam. The journey begins at the

4.3 Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, a magnificent example of French colonial Gothic architecture built in 1909. Its twin spires, pointed arch windows, and French-imported stained glass are testament to its grandeur. Inside, the high vaulted ceiling and the prominent [25]

4.4 Gem-Embellished Virgin Mary Statue reflect both artistic dedication and the spiritual devotion of its community. The cathedral also tells a compelling story of Vietnamese Catholic migration during the Nguyễn dynasty persecution, when many sought religious freedom in Chanthaburi. This community not only contributed significantly to the cathedral's construction but also played a vital role in preserving their faith and cultural traditions, with Vietnamese priests continuing to provide spiritual guidance and maintain cultural heritage

The exploration continues into the **Vietnamese Catholic Community** neighborhood, an area rich in cultural heritage. Here, visitors can experience a vibrant blend of Vietnamese and Thai cultural practices, evident in religious ceremonies, traditional music, and local customs. Engaging, hands-on activities are available, such as workshops led by community members where participants can learn traditional craft-making or Vietnamese cooking. The culinary experience is particularly noteworthy, with opportunities to savor authentic Vietnamese dishes like Phở, Bánh mì, and Chè, while learning about their cultural significance and the generational transmission of recipes. This direct engagement fosters a deeper understanding of the community's efforts to preserve its distinct identity within a new cultural setting.

The Chanthaburi experience is a visit to the **Chanthaburi Gemstone Market**, solidifying the city's reputation as Thailand's gemstone hub. Here, the bustling market showcases the intricate craftsmanship of artisans creating gemstone jewelry and decorative items, reflecting a rich history of gemstone trading that has profoundly shaped the local economy. The journey uniquely circles back to the cathedral to admire the **Gem-Embellished Virgin Mary Statue** once more, recognizing its symbolic importance to the community's faith and artistic dedication, forged through the collaborative efforts of local Catholics and Vietnamese immigrants. Beyond local exploration, the potential for **Cross-Border Pilgrimages** between Thailand and Vietnam presents an exciting opportunity for cultural and religious exchange within the ASEAN region, strengthening the bond between Catholic communities and offering significant economic benefits to the tourism industry.

5. Conclusion

The Vietnamese Catholic community in Chanthaburi has played a vital role in shaping the region's unique religious and cultural identity. The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception stands as a central symbol of faith, heritage, and community life. Its architecture, traditions, and religious practices not only reflect deep-rooted cultural integration but also serve as a significant attraction for both domestic and international tourists. Therefore, examining church-based tourism in this context is essential for understanding how religious heritage can support sustainable local development. It highlights the potential to promote Christian cultural tourism routes linking Thailand and Vietnam, which would benefit cultural preservation, community-based economies, and broader regional tourism strategies.

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