

Spa and Traditional Thai Massage: Local Policies and Promotional Measures for Long-Stay Japanese Retirees in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Abstract

Roles of local authorities are deemed regulative and supportive of local long-stay tourism. This study thus investigates local authorities' local policies and promotional measures concerning spa and traditional Thai massage services serving long-stay Japanese retirees in Chiang Mai. The study adopts the qualitative descriptive approach based on information obtained from printed and electronic documents and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Using purposive sampling, the participants consisted of seven representatives working at the policy level from three local authorities in Chiang Mai. The findings reveal that local policies involve reference to the Medical Hub policy and related law, as well as policy and budget adoption from multiple streams, with no separate tasks for long-stay Japanese retirees and law enforcement to control the service standards of spa and traditional Thai massage services. Promotional measures include an award system to develop service standards and adherence to regulations, a coaching system among entrepreneurs, long-stay activities, and the adoption of the local culture and Lanna wisdom in service provision. However, several specific promotional measures are targeted at long-stay Japanese retirees. Separate tasks and a cross-sectional network of local authorities should be established to strengthen their roles in serving the long-stay Japanese retirees.

Keywords: Local policy, Promotional measure, Spa, Traditional massage, Long-stay tourism

Introduction

Long-stay tourism has been popular for many years. Nowadays, emerging regions like Southeast Asia have significantly increased their share of the long-stay market. Many long-stay visitors, particularly retirees with secure economic status and substantial purchasing power, have second homes in host countries. There is a growing global socio-demographic trend in older-age populations from many developed countries, such as Japan, traveling abroad to stay in other countries, especially during retirement. In host countries, long-stay tourists are

essential for encouraging economic growth in the tourism industry since the benefits can extend to various parts of tourist attractions, accommodations, shopping malls, hospitals, medical and wellness-related services, etc. (Phiromyoo, 2011). In Thailand, the promotion of long-stay visitors has become more prevalent following the establishment in 2001 of a national committee in cooperation with the Tourism Authority of Thailand and other related government bodies such as the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The objectives of the national committee include enhancing the country's potential as a destination for long-stay tourists with high purchasing power, strengthening the economy through the inflow of foreign revenue, generating employment in related industries and services to support economic growth, diversifying the tourism market to attract different types of tourists, and extending tourist activities to other areas of the country (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (2006) analyzed the strategic advantages of long-stay visitors. One such advantage was identified as the active promotion of medical and wellness tourism under the Medical Hub policy led by the Ministry of Public Health with other government agencies, including the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. The Medical Hub policy fosters medical tourism under the "Medical Hub of Asia (2004-2008)"; a strategic plan initiated in 2004 to promote Thailand as the center of medical tourism in Asia, focusing on the promotion of three areas, namely medical services, health services, and health products and herbs. The Thai government continues to promote the Medical Hub policy under the more recent strategic plan "Thailand as a World Class Health Care Provider (2010-2014)" instigated to upgrade the status of the country as a world-class destination for medical tourism by focusing on Thai medical services and alternative medicine in addition to the three areas from the first strategic plan. The Medical Hub policy thus continues to promote four areas: medical services, wellness, academic, and product development with the implementation of the ten-year "Strategic Plan to become a Medical Hub (2017-2026)". The spa and traditional Thai massage have become increasingly popular under the wellness sector of the Medical Hub policy, attracting tourists worldwide (Veerada, 2014). According to Smith and Puczkó (2009), spa tourism is considered the most prestigious and is often interchangeable with health-oriented wellness tourism (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). As reported by Puczkó and Bachvarov (2006), spa providers in Asia focus on traditional massage, hot spring and water-related treatments, and therapies. Asian countries, including Thailand, are ranked as global leaders in medical and wellness tourism because of their natural resources with beautiful historical attractions and landscapes. Moreover, the cost-effectiveness of healthcare packages tends to attract medical and wellness tourists to travel to Asian countries (Zhao, 2016).

Thailand has been at the forefront in promoting long-stay visitors such as foreign retirees due to its concrete policies and active support from the government. As one of the vital promotion areas under the Medical Hub policy, medical and wellness tourism attracts long-stay visitors to the country. Thailand is one of the preferred host countries for senior Japanese long-stay visitors. Its reasonable cost of living, good quality of life, the hospitality of the Thai people, and good relations between Japan and Thailand are the main influential factors for Japanese visitors wishing to spend part of their retirement in Thailand (Japan External Trade

Organization, 2002). Japanese people are encouraged to stay in Thailand long-term with support from the Japanese government and the “Japan and Thailand International Relations Organization” (JTIRO) (Phiromyoo, 2011). In 2018, approximately 72,754 Japanese residents in Thailand, many of whom were long-stay visitors. This figure has increased by more than 16,000 since 2013 (Statista Research Department, 2019). As a pilot area for the promotion of long-stay visitors, Chiang Mai is a popular destination for Japanese retirees, ranked in third place with 2,489 registered residents in 2018 (Embassy of Japan in Thailand, 2018). However, it is estimated that there could be over 10,000 Japanese in Chiang Mai if unregistered people are included (Chamchan & Soparat, 2012).

Located in the northern region of Thailand, the province of Chiang Mai has great potential because it has everything Japanese retirees are searching for. Hongsraragon (2006) reported that its accessibility, accommodation options, and tourist attractions-including the local Lanna culture and other activities contributed to its popularity as a long-stay destination. An essential part of the Lanna culture in Chiang Mai’s long history of spa treatments and traditional Thai massage contributes to its cultural identity and local economy (Thakanun & Huanprapai, 2018). The medical and wellness business has experienced continued growth because of tourist activities, transportation, and accommodation for long-stay tourists in the province (Chaoprayoon et al., 2016).

There have been several previous studies on Japanese people living in Chiang Mai in the long term. Chamchan and Soparat (2012) revealed that the determining factors in the decision-making process of long-stay Japanese visitors to Chiang Mai included the friendliness and generosity of local people, quality of the tourist attractions, food, culture, and language. In terms of health, there were prior studies on the quality of life and mental health status among retired Japanese elderly residing in Chiang Mai (Yamaki et al., 2020; Yoda et al., 2021). Japanese retirees’ use of medical services in Chiang Mai has also been the focus of previous studies (Fukahori et al., 2011; Miyashita et al., 2017). However, no specific studies focus on spa and traditional Thai massage services for long-stay Japanese retirees. While Apivantanaporn and Walsh (2012) investigated the dynamic of service innovation and the capitalization of the cultural identity of the spa industry in Chiang Mai, they only focused on government policies targeting general tourists. More pertinent research concerns a study on the behavior of Japanese tourists in Chiang Mai regarding the selection of spa services for health purposes (Mahachai, 2001). Nonetheless, this study only concentrated on general Japanese tourists and did not include any research from the policy perspective. Although Ashton and Scott (2017) investigated the perceptions of Thai stakeholders toward facilities and service provision in catering for Japanese retirees in Chiang Mai on the policy side, they did not specifically address the issue of local policies and promotional measures at the local level. A research gap, therefore, exists, reflecting the lack of sufficient knowledge in previous research, prompting an in-depth investigation of local policies and the promotional measures adopted by local authorities on spa and traditional Thai massage services for long-stay Japanese retirees in Chiang Mai as the objective of this study.

Roles of the government and local authorities in medical and wellness tourism

In recent years, medical and wellness tourism has become entwined (Schweder & Hunziker, 2020). While medical tourism mainly involves people traveling to other countries to receive surgery or treatment for diseases, wellness tourism may encourage them to pursue activities for improving their well-being following treatment (Johnston et al., 2011). The promotion of medical and wellness tourism can be sorted into policy roles, including economic, immigration, social, and cultural aspects. In the economic aspect, as medical and wellness tourism has been adopted as a national policy, the government is the key actor in supporting, regulating, arranging, promoting, and ensuring its growth (Kamassi et al., 2020). The governments of host countries act as facilitators and regulators in medical and wellness tourism since it is regarded as a significant contributory factor in increasing the gross domestic product and enhancing employment. Host countries may therefore improve the stock of medical and wellness facilities and their management with a view to achieving these objectives (Connell, 2013). They may also provide subsidies and tax incentives to hospitals, hotels, transportation companies, and other related sectors to support medical and wellness businesses (Paffhausen et al., 2010). Governments may also assist medical and wellness service providers in promotional campaigns to attract more foreigners to receive services at internationally accredited hospitals, hotels, and other related establishments. In the immigration and social aspects, another major role of the government is to develop a long-term strategy to ensure the sustainability of medical and wellness tourism (Ashton & Scott, 2017). Government policy should support conventional short-term tourists and also long-term visitors, for instance, by shortening the visa application process and allowing tourists to extend their visas at their nearest immigration office (Abdul-Aziz et al., 2015). In addition to the role played by the government, in the cultural aspects, local authorities could develop high-ranking medical and wellness facilities and promote well-known cultural products such as spa treatments and traditional Thai massage and any other related services or resources to attract foreign visitors to specific areas to support local tourism activities and local economies (Ormond & Mainil, 2015). To ease immigration procedures, local authorities could coordinate with the national government to relax visa regulations and legal frameworks to encourage international visitors to local tourist promotion zones. Local authorities could also work with related local organizations to ensure the continuity of local medical and wellness tourism (Maastricht University, 2013). Among the three aspects, for Thailand, the most cogent government policy role in the medical and wellness tourism promotion lies in economic interests (NaRanong & NaRanong, 2011; Noree, 2015; Kanittinsuttitong, 2018). Nonetheless, policy initiatives and the promotion of medical and wellness tourism rely not only on a single command but also on agreements involving other sectors, such as the cross-sectoral policy network among local authorities. The network aims is to bring local authorities together to foster a streamlined bureaucratic process for policy initiatives and promotional measures on medical and wellness tourism in local areas (Ormond & Mainil, 2015).

The magnetism of spa and traditional Thai massage services in Thailand

Thai spas tend to attract foreign customers because the service quality is generally perceived to be high. Regarding its attractiveness, Srisakun et al. (2019) proposed that Thailand's spa sector shows a positive sign in four dimensions. Firstly, its brand identity sends a message of high value, enhancing the confidence of international service users. Secondly, the variety of prices and menus or packages offers foreign tourists the freedom to switch from one provider to another. Thirdly, there is plenty of information available, enhancing the bargaining power of foreign service users searching for the best fit. Finally, Thailand's rich resources in terms of nature and herbs provide service diversity for tourists. Besides, the level of active service, perceived value, and customer satisfaction from Thai spa service were often higher than foreign customers had expected (Chieochankitkan, 2013). Therefore, service users, foreigners, and local Thai people had positive attitudes toward Thai spa service provision and strongly intended to revisit it (Zhao, 2016; Panadis & Phongvivat, 2011). In terms of traditional Thai massage, Kogiso (2012) discussed the historical process of tourism acculturation concerning traditional Thai massage, especially from the social-cultural formation. Traditional Thai massage has been acculturated into its current form mainly through government policy and the influence of the Thai people. In the beginning, Thai massage was considered to have an "exotic" value due to the unique Thai culture and the natural movement and environment-oriented background. With time, the Thai massage became devalued, developing an "erotic" negative image with the opening of an increasing number of "massage parlors" for tourists to understand the correct meaning of traditional Thai massage, the Thai government has developed policies to regulate traditional Thai massage services by adopting various aspects of traditional Thai medicine. Moreover, the high-quality services provided by Thai people have also helped to change tourists' attitudes toward traditional Thai massage, creating the positive form it is today.

The characteristics of spa and traditional Thai massage services vary by the different regions of Thailand, diverse cultures, natural environments, and availability of human resources. The identity of spa and traditional Thai massage, based on different cultures and regions, is why Thailand has become one of the first-class medical and wellness tourism destinations in the world (Junead et al., 2018). Kanittinsuttitong (2018) reported that the differences in each region have contributed to the country's high service potential. The northern region focuses on peace and spiritual therapy, whereas the central region concentrates on local cultural experiences and traditional Thai medicine and services. Bangkok pays particular attention to health care, while the South focuses on medical tourism combined with sporting activities. However, weaknesses remain, including a lack of connection in the supply chain, the inability to meet the needs of tourists by adopting new trends, and the lack of an adequate number of available providers in the country.

Method

This research adopts the qualitative descriptive approach as the methodology for investigating local policies and the promotional measures adopted by local authorities

concerning spa and traditional Thai massage services for retired Japanese long-stay visitors in Chiang Mai. As Lambert and Lambert (2012) put it, a thorough summarization of understanding of specific issues endured by individuals or groups of people is the aim of a qualitative descriptive study. Focusing on unraveling the specific issue's essence, minimal to moderate open-ended qualitative data collection by interviewing related informants is involved. The data collection procedure is two-fold. Secondary data sources were collected to review the related printed and electronic documents from relevant institutions' websites and Facebook pages. The primary data source involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with related informants in Chiang Mai. Based on purposive sampling, these informants included seven representatives working at the policy level from the three local authorities most directly responsible for the issue of spa and traditional Thai massage, that is, three from a public agency responsible for public health (CM-PH), two from a public agency dealing with tourism and sports (CM-TS), and two from a professional union of spa, traditional Thai massage, and medicine (CM-SM). A semi-structured interview guideline was used for the in-depth interviews with informants. Discussions were conducted in the Thai language, and participants gave their informed consent prior to the in-depth interview process. All collected data were analyzed based on conventional content analysis without pre-coding. Sound recordings from the interviews were transcribed and then analyzed based on inductive category development to reveal the themes. This research has been certified with a research ethics clearance from the Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences) of Mahidol University numbered MUSSIRB No.: 2020/177 (B2).

Findings

Organizational profiles

The organizational profiles of the three local authorities in Chiang Mai: a public agency responsible for public health (CM-PH), a public agency dealing with tourism and sports (CM-TS), and a professional union of spa, traditional massage, and medicine (CM-SM), were revealed in the related documents and through the semi-structured in-depth interviews with the three representatives, summarized as follows:

The public agency responsible for public health (CM-PH)

The CM-PH is a provincial authority under the administration of the public health ministry. The authority's vision is to develop the health business, including spa and traditional Thai massage services in Chiang Mai, and achieve the international standard to provide a worthy alternative for consumers. The primary mission of the CM-PH is to promote the knowledge and capacity development of personnel in Chiang Mai's health business to equip them with outstanding professional standards, including research and development support for the application of local knowledge and wisdom on health make a difference to the local health business. Besides, the CM-PH is also responsible for consumer protection, issuing licenses and permits for spa and traditional Thai massage businesses in Chiang Mai,

“... Our first responsibility is licensing, and the second is promotion and development. Consumer protection involves the licensing and registration of spa, massage, food, and medical businesses. We are responsible for providing licenses and permits for spa and massage entrepreneurs in Chiang Mai” (CM-PH-1).

The public agency dealing with tourism and sports (CM-TS)

The CM-TS is a provincial authority administered by the tourism and sports ministry. The vision of CM-TS is to promote, support, and develop tourism and sports in Chiang Mai to achieve sustainable quality and standards, helping to raise the income of local people while encouraging physical exercise. Promoting sports and physical exercises includes organizing sports events such as cycling, football, marathon, and running and supporting aerobic exercises for the public. In terms of tourism, the authority also promotes spa and traditional Thai massage services as part of medical and wellness tourism,

“... Our office is responsible for the strategic planning of tourism promotion, including spa and traditional Thai massage. We are also responsible for sports and recreation promotion in accordance with the ministerial mission” (CM-TS-1).

The professional union of spa, traditional Thai massage and medicine (CM-SM)

The CM-SM is a branch of the national professional union registered as an association in 1997, in affiliation with the public health ministry. After that, branches were established all over the country, including Chiang Mai, resulting in the formation of the CM-SM. The main objective of the CM-SM is to disseminate and support spa, traditional Thai massage, and medicine, including the learning in Chiang Mai,

“... The national union was first registered as an association long before the establishment of this union in Chiang Mai when I trained as a traditional Thai massage instructor at the public health ministry. Then, I became a member of the Chiang Mai union” (CM-SM-1).

Local policies concerning spa and traditional Thai massage services

Reference to the Medical Hub policy and related law

Regarding policy adoption concerning spa and traditional Thai massage services by the government, one of the informants mentioned the Medical Hub policy initiated in 2004. Since then, spa and traditional Thai massage services have been vital in promoting three consecutive strategic plans under the Medical Hub policy. These plans consist of the “Medical Hub of Asia (2004-2008)”, “Thailand as a World Class Health Care Provider (2010-2014)”, and “The Strategic Plan to Become a Medical Hub (2017-2026)”. To directly facilitate and regulate spa and traditional Thai massage services in Chiang Mai, the “Health Establishment Act B.E.2559 (2016)” has been implemented under the Department of Health Service Support of the Ministry of Public Health. Drafted in 2006, it took 10 years for the Act to become law, requiring spa and

traditional Thai massage services to be registered with permits and certificates needed to run these businesses. The law was claimed to be an initiative from the Ministry of Public Health as a method of obtaining more revenue from general foreign tourists, passing the responsibility of spa and traditional Thai massage businesses to the relevant local authority,

“... The public health ministry has used this law to obtain more money from tourists. Therefore, we are responsible for supervising more spa and massage businesses” (CM-PH-1).

Policy and budget adoption from multiple streams

During the interviews, participants reported policy and budget adoption from multiple streams, the first of which concerns the ministerial policies and budgets provided by the government. Generally, provincial bureaus were established under the administration of specific ministries, with administrative branches having direct responsibility for the main ministerial tasks in specific provinces, such as tourism-related to a spa and traditional Thai massage services in Chiang Mai. Another stream involves the provincial policies and budgets administrated by the Ministry of the Interior through the governor. The Ministry of the Interior also assigns the implementation of long-stay policies and budgets to the local authorities in Chiang Mai and surrounding areas,

“... We receive policies and budgets from two sources. Firstly, we are responsible for policies and budgets to support direct tourism connected with spa and massage businesses under the tourism and sports ministry. Secondly, regarding the long-stay visitors, we receive provincial policies and budgets from the Ministry of the Interior through the Chiang Mai governor to manage Chiang Mai and the upper northern provincial group” (CM-TS-2).

No separate tasks for long-stay Japanese retirees

However, no mention was made by participants of separate tasks for dealing directly with long-stay Japanese retirees regarding the spa and traditional Thai massage services. Long-stay Japanese retirees appear to be treated the same as other foreign tourists,

“... We receive a lot of foreign customers for massage services who are Japanese and Chinese, although the number is lower than for Thais. We have foreigners from many countries, and we treat them all the same... Every month, we have foreigners from Japan, China, Korea, Laos - as well as other countries” (CM-SM-2).

“... We are responsible for all tourists, rather than specific nation. No division has particular responsibility for the Japanese group” (CM-TS-1).

Law enforcement to control service standards

The participants reported the existence of law enforcement to control the standards of spa and traditional Thai massage businesses serving general international tourists. If entrepreneurs do not abide by the rules and regulations governed by the “Health Establishment Act B.E.2559 (2016)”, they will be prosecuted under the law, such as imposing penalties, imprisonment, or closure. The government has regularly publicized law enforcement. For instance, in June 2017, the public health authority of Chiang Mai Province warned spa and traditional Thai massage entrepreneurs who had already passed 60-hour training courses from public training institutes must apply for business registration certificates by the end of the month. The law aims to guarantee service standards of spa and traditional Thai massage businesses in Chiang Mai,

“... If they (spa and traditional Thai massage entrepreneurs) do not respect the law, they will be punished. They will be fined, imprisoned, or forced to close. We have always publicized the law, so no one can say they do not know about it... The law sets legal minimum requirements for spa and massage establishments to guarantee the standards of the venue, equipment, tools, services, and personnel for foreign tourists” (CM-PH-3).

Promotional measures for spa and traditional Thai massage services***Award system for developing service standards higher than those required under the law***

One interview participant delineated that service standards higher than those required by law could be encouraged through an award system to promote the spa and traditional Thai massage services to foreign tourists. The initial standard organized at the national level by the Ministry of Public Health concerns the campaign “Thai World Class Spa,” categorizing awards into three levels: Platinum, Gold, and Silver, for spa entrepreneurs who meet the required standards. The rating system is designed to promote spa entrepreneurs with high standards to foreign customers. This way of promotion has proven to be successful, with some local spa entrepreneurs in Chiang Mai receiving the Platinum award,

“... Entrepreneurs in this business have developed their expertise to upgrade the services they provide for tourists as well... The Thai World Class Spa rating has successfully been adopted in Chiang Mai. Its standards are higher than those required under law. Two entrepreneurs have won the Platinum award. The entrepreneurs in Chiang Mai have received the most benefits from this rating” (CM-PH-2).

In addition, at the local level, the “Chiang Mai Spa Award” has been established under a proposal from the governor of Chiang Mai Province to be granted to spa entrepreneurs from Chiang Mai and Thailand generally also in other parts of the world. Spa establishments adopting the Lanna identity as a part of their services are eligible for this award. Several spa

businesses from overseas have been interested in joining the “Chiang Mai Spa Award” and attached the Lanna identity to their services as they value its uniqueness and use it to attract customers. They have also been granted this award,

“... The Chiang Mai governor once asked whether it would be possible to give awards to spa entrepreneurs who adopted the identity of Lanna. So we established the Chiang Mai Spa Award. Spa entrepreneurs from European countries such as Switzerland and Germany, and Asian countries like China, Japan, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia joined our project last year. The award winners have come from Switzerland, China, and Japan. We are proud that this spa award originated in Chiang Mai” (CM-PH-3).

A “Thai Premium Massage” award has also been initiated for the traditional Thai massage business to upgrade the quality standards further. This scheme was implemented under the Ministry of Public Health policy to award traditional Thai massage entrepreneurs who adopted the Thai identity and uniqueness. In Chiang Mai, more than ten entrepreneurs have been encouraged to join this scheme each year, accounting for the most significant number in the country. The Chiang Mai entrepreneurs won the most awards, attesting to their high service quality which has attracted many long-stay foreign tourists,

“... There has also been a development in the massage business to upgrade the service quality... Massage businesses have been encouraged to apply for the Premium Thai Massage awarded by the Ministry of Public Health. At least ten massage businesses from Chiang Mai have joined this program each year since its inception, the largest number in Thailand. Chiang Mai has the highest number of award winners, guaranteeing the provision of upgraded services for foreign guests” (CM-PH-2).

Coaching system among entrepreneurs

A coaching system for entrepreneurs has been created. Traditional Thai massage entrepreneurs are encouraged to organize coaching programs for each other. The coaching scheme is called “3Gs Coaching” and includes three components, the first of which is “Good Image Practice,” for personality development, while the second is “Good Massage Practice” promoting safe massage involving no danger or obscenity. The third component is “Good Service Practice” which includes sanitary massage and the application of 5s practice for organizing spaces and an environment adopted from the Japanese. The 5s practice comprises “sort” or “*seiri*” (tidiness), “set in order” or “*seiton*” (orderliness), “shine” or “*seiso*” (cleanliness), “standardize” or “*seiketsu*” (standardization) and “sustain” or “*shitsuke*” (discipline). The application of 5s practice ensures sanitary massage with a regulated standard that guarantees hygienic services. Originated in Japan, this has attracted more retired Japanese long-stayers in Chiang Mai to use the services as it serves the Japanese preference. Therefore, the “3Gs Coaching” scheme is proving beneficial for entrepreneurs, with more and more

joining the program, making a considerable difference to traditional Thai massage services and thus attracting an increasing number of retired Japanese long-stayers,

“... Entrepreneurs are encouraged to arrange coaching programs for each other because they use the same language. We call it the “3Gs Coaching” scheme and it includes “Good Image Practice” to acquire a good personality, “Good Massage Practice” for safety, ensuring no danger or obscene postures as part of a cultural style, and “Good Service Practice” which involves arranging beds and rooms with sanitation facilities. Thai entrepreneurs also use the 5S practice, adopted from the Japanese, which makes a difference to their business as more and more Japanese long-stayers are interested in it... In the first year, 20 massage parlors joined the coaching programs with another 20 parlors joining in the second year, and a further 20 in the third year” (CM-PH-1).

Activities for promoting long-stay visits and local culture

One of the participants expressed that activities are being organized for both entrepreneurs and general foreign long-stayers to promote long-stay visits and local culture, including spa and traditional Thai massage services. Personnel development activities for entrepreneurs are being organized to develop their service and language skills and marketing promotion and management. A “Long-Stay Fair” was also organized for entrepreneurs from all over the country to visit Chiang Mai and exchange ideas on long-stay business development. In cooperation with other provinces in the upper northern region cultural promotion activities have been held for general long-stay foreign visitors to learn more about the Lanna culture. The cultural promotion activities were also linked with quality spas and traditional Thai massage services,

“... Long-stay entrepreneurs are trained to develop the skills of their staff in services, language, and marketing promotion management. In Chiang Mai, the Long Stay Fair is arranged to gather Thai entrepreneurs from other regions to exchange ideas on how to develop the spa and massage business... We also cooperate with other provinces in the upper northern region like Lamphun, Lampang, and Mae Hong Son to organize cultural promotion activities to enable long-stay foreigners to learn about the Lanna culture. Quality spa and Thai massage services are also promoted because they are part of our culture” (CM-TS-1).

Adoption of Lanna wisdom into services

Spa and traditional Thai massage businesses have been encouraged to adopt Lanna’s wisdom to build uniqueness into their services since 2012. According to one of the participants, the Chiang Mai governor has supported this initiative with a budget of millions in Thai baht currency. A spa development potential center has also been established to encourage spa services in Chiang Mai to adopt the Lanna identity, integrated with the Lanna culture.

Therefore, five senses reflecting the Lanna culture have been adopted in the spa services: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch to generate more income from long-stay Japanese retirees.

Sight: The design of Lanna's architecture is employed, along with clothing and materials in Lanna's style.

Hearing: Lanna music is played in spa establishments during service delivery. An entire course of spa treatments lasts approximately 50 minutes. Lanna music has been tested on the human brain and proven to be an effective relaxation method by the Faculty of Medicine at Chiang Mai University.

Smell: "Sukhontha" aromatherapy developed by the Faculty of Pharmacy at Chiang Mai University is used in spa treatments. This Chiang Mai-style therapy involves the application of fragrant oil made from a mixture of local perfume and flowers during the massage process, rather than fragrant foreign oil.

Taste: A beverage made from local herbs is provided to customers, consisting of bael fruit juice, safflower juice, and butterfly pea juice. These juices are unique to the Thai culture and are often served after a spa treatment. This beverage could contribute to the marketing of local herbs for personal consumption.

Touch: The Lanna massage has its style with a unique rhythm and ritual which differs from that used in other parts of Thailand. Spa entrepreneurs are encouraged to preserve massage postures called "Lanna Exotic" when giving massages. Massage instructors are trained on these postures in cooperation with the Faculty of Nursing at Chiang Mai University to teach other masseurs under the "3Gs Coaching" scheme. The oil made from the "Wan Sao Long" plant (*Amonum biflorum Jack*), a kind of Chiang Mai local herb, is also used in the "Lanna Exotic" along with Lanna music for added value. The use of Lanna massage posture and herbal oil under the "Lanna Exotic" concept conforms to the exotic values of the naturalistic movement and the background of the environment of traditional Thai massage.

A representative from the CM-PH offered that,

"... Since 2012, we have been applying Lanna wisdom to create uniqueness in spa and massage services. Over the past few years, the Chiang Mai governor has allocated a budget of several million baht. A budget of 55 million baht was provided to build a spa development potential center for spa services wishing to adopt the Lanna identity. We have integrated our culture into spa services because Chiang Mai is a world-famous cultural city, and we use the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch... Normally, we charge Japanese long-stayers about 200–300 baht for one hour. By applying a combination of all five senses, we can charge them 1,500 baht per hour" (CM-PH-2).

The findings on local policies concerning spa and traditional Thai massage services and promotional measures for spa and traditional Thai massage services are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Summary of findings on local policies and promotional measures

Local policies and promotional measures	Details
Local policies concerning spa and traditional Thai massage services	Reference to the Medical Hub policy and related law Policy and budget adoption from multiple streams No separate tasks for long-stay Japanese retirees Law enforcement to control service standards
Promotional measures for spa and traditional Thai massage services	Award system for developing service standards higher than those required under the law Coaching system among entrepreneurs Activities for promoting long-stay visits and local culture Adoption of Lanna wisdom into services

Conclusion and discussions

Notwithstanding the specific study objective of spa and traditional Thai massage services serving long-stay Japanese retirees, local authorities' related policies in Chiang Mai were revealed to be efficacious for international long-stay tourists generally, rather than specifically for retired Japanese long-stayers. The Medical Hub policy directed at fostering medical and wellness tourism in Thailand has been embraced by traditional Thai massage services since its initiation in 2004. Following the implementation of previous strategic plans, namely the "Medical Hub of Asia (2004-2008)" and "Thailand as a World Class Health Care Provider (2010-2014)", the "Health Establishment Act B.E.2559 (2016)" was subsequently put into full effect with "The Strategic Plan to become a Medical Hub (2017-2026)" to facilitate and regulate spa and traditional Thai massage services. This law was enacted as a medium for generating more revenue from foreign tourists receiving services from the registered spa and traditional Thai massage businesses in Chiang Mai. Under the B.E.2559, spa and traditional Thai massage entrepreneurs must to become registered and obtain permits to ensure the provision of standardized services guaranteed by the government. In addition, local authorities responsible for medical and wellness tourism are subject to policy directions and budgets from multiple sources such as the tourism and sports ministry and the Ministry of the Interior in the administration of spa and traditional Thai massage and other businesses targeting long-stay visitors in Chiang Mai.

Spa and traditional Thai massage services in Chiang Mai also adopt promotional measures to attract long-stay foreign tourists. Claimed to provide higher service standards than those required under the law, award systems initiated through promotional campaigns such as the "Thai World Class Spa" and "Thai Premium Massage" initiated by the Ministry of Public Health along with the "Chiang Mai Spa Award" supported by the Chiang Mai governor at the local level, have been employed to encourage spa and traditional Thai massage entrepreneurs in Chiang Mai to improve the quality of their services. Furthermore, local authorities have

organized activities to promote long-stay visits and the Lanna culture, including spa and traditional Thai massage, not only for foreign long-stayers but to encourage entrepreneurs. For long-stay foreign tourists, such activities include the cultural promotion of spa and traditional Thai massage as part of the Lanna culture while, personnel development and the “Long-Stay Fair” activities are directed at entrepreneurs.

Although promotional measures are generally targeted at long-stay foreign tourists in Chiang Mai, specific marketing campaigns directed at retired Japanese long-stayers have been revealed. For instance, the “3Gs Coaching” system is regarded as a specific measure for upgrading the quality of massage services. Spa and traditional Thai massage entrepreneurs are encouraged to participate in this coaching system to be trained in “Good Image Practice”, “Good Massage Practice”, and “Good Service Practice” while also adopting the Japanese 5s practice of organizing spaces and the environment. Spa and traditional Thai massage businesses in Chiang Mai are encouraged to adopt Lanna’s wisdom by applying five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, to the massage process. This approach is used to add value to massage services to generate more income from long-stay Japanese retirees.

Although local authorities in Chiang Mai perform the roles of facilitators, regulators, and promoters of spa and traditional Thai massage services as part of medical and wellness tourism, it is noticeable that a loophole exists in local policies and promotional measures. With a couple of specific promotional measures targeted at retired Japanese long-stayers, the findings of this study indicate that general long-stay foreign tourists appear to be the leading target group, with no separate tasks directed specifically at long-stay Japanese retirees being the reason for their dwindling numbers. To strengthen local policies and promotional measures for spa and traditional Thai massage services to attract the retired Japanese long-stay group, it is recommended that local authorities in Chiang Mai establish separate tasks or sections to take responsibility for this group due to the significant numbers involved. Furthermore, a cross-sectoral policy network should be introduced to build cooperation among local authorities to encourage the development and improvement of spa and traditional Thai massage businesses to generate more revenue at the local level. For further studies, policy adoption from local authorities and operations of spa and traditional Thai massage businesses as well as experiences and impressions of spa and traditional Thai massage services of the retired Japanese long-stayers in Chiang Mai are recommended to understand a comprehensive picture of spa and traditional Thai massage services on the policy, entrepreneur and customer side.

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