

# Comparison for the effects of Chinese and Western tourists' perceived images of food tourism facilities on destination selection: Case of Thailand's food tourism

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**Abstract**—This research aims to examine a research problem of which how tourist's perceived image of Thai street food and/or street-food shop affect foreign tourist's destination selection. In particular, the tourist's perceptions are relevant to cleanness, safety, physical characteristics, and social circumstances, cultural identify manner, touristy, and value of money. Quantitative research method was conducted by collecting questionnaires from Chinese and Western tourists at the tourism attraction locations, especially for walking street in the tourism places. Eighty nine Chinese and one hundred and twenty one Western tourists participated in this research. The research results statistically support theoretical aspects and previous research in terms of four perceived factors; cleanness, physical characteristics, social circumstances, and touristy, affecting the tourist's destination selection. However, the hypothesis tests compared between the Chinese and Western tourist groups are different. Specifically, Chinese tourists focus on cleanness, physical characteristics, and touristy meanwhile Western tourists focus on cleanness, social circumstance, and touristy. As a result, there may be a need of different strategies and activities for each tourist groups to develop and enhance the Thai's Gastronomic tourism of street food. Future research should investigate in details why these factors are statistically significant for tourist's destination selection. Researchers may expand their research area to include other kinds of destination rather than walking streets, for example general street foods. For market practitioners, food sellers, local administrators, and tourism supporters can apply the research results to enhance the key perceived images of tourism destination to attract and recruit tourists for selecting the target tourism destination sustainably.

**Keywords**— tourism, gastronomic tourism, food tourism, street food, perceived image, destination selection, Thailand

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## I. Introduction

Tourism industry is important for Thailand's economic and quality-of-life developments. Incomes from tourism of Thailand were annually expanded on average at 14.32% during 2007-2013 (Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, 2014). For this growth

record, it was found that there were 27 million foreign tourists from whom these tourists contributed Thailand's income of tourism businesses about US\$ 40 trillion in 2013. Thus, Thai government and relevant private tourism organizations have focused on tourism industry as the leading priority for economic development, particularly in the current economic recession.

Cohen and Avieli (2004) point out that local food can attract tourists to select travelling destination. With respect to experience economy concept, gastronomic or food tourism contributes tourists in terms of learning, entertainment, aesthetic, new experiences (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development-OECD, 2012). Hsieh and Chang (2006) concluded that the most popular activity for tourists at the night market in Taiwan was a having local food for which tourists could learn local cultures beyond a tasty and low price attributes. Furthermore, Boyne, Williams and Hall's (2002) research displays a statistics that tourists spend at most 40% of their budget for buying food per trip. Meanwhile, OECD (2012) reported at least 30% of tourist's spending was local food. Therefore, it can be inferred that food tourism, particularly for the street food tourism as a general pattern of food sellers in tourism destinations of Thailand, is the crucial part of Thailand's tourism industry which has remarkable impact on its economy and social development. In other words, food tourism is an important industry for developing countries for that Thailand is a major representative in terms of the food tourism destination.

Nevertheless, street food sellers are not accounted as a major party in Thailand's food tourism because these sellers have not realized their roles in terms of the party who can reflect and transfer local cultural values and social lifestyle, and persuade foreign tourists to select tourism destination (Henderson et al., 2012). In addition, there is few of studies examining associations between tourist's perceived images of food tourism facilities and destination selection, especially for Thailand's food tourism industry or the developing countries'. As a result, this research aims to fill the gaps by investigating the relationships between the perceptions of foreign tourists toward Thailand's food tourism facilities particularly in terms of the media for tourist's cultural learning from the tourism destination and the tourist's destination selection.

## II. Literature review

### A. *Gastronomic tourism*

The International Culinary Tourism Association (2011) defined 'gastronomic tourism' as 'the food is the attraction,' for which local food is an attraction for tourism. In other words, tourists select tourism destination by local food as an important factor (Bertella, 2011). Local food consumption is a new experience for which tourist can learn the local cultural identity. Thus, tourist possibly selects tourism destination with respect to learned local cultural experiences (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Previous research found many countries; Italy, France, Singapore, Korea, and Thailand, using local food as cultural-identity communicating media to persuade tourists (e.g. du Rand, Health & Alberts, 2003; Henderson et al, 2012; Lertputtarak, 2012).

### B. *Street food*

Street food regularly means ready-to-eat food that is sold in an open-air environment (Kraig & Sen, 2013). In particular, patterns of street-food shop are generally a portable stall which can be deviate or different as different regions or cultures. For this research, the authors focused on the street food sold in a walking street of the tourism destination. Since, the street food is regular format of local food sold in the tourism destination.

### C. *Perceived cleanness and safety images*

Although street food can attract tourists by its cultural identity reflection, the patterns of shop are in an open-air, temporary installed, and weaken managing operation, for which there is a high risk of unhealthy environment exposures (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010). For example, if there is no any third party such as health control organization of government testing and controlling street food's quality in terms of cleanness and safety, there is a possibility that tourist shall not select the tourism destination because tourist perceives an inferior image of the destination's cleanness and safety (Henderson, 2009). Thus, this research proposed the hypothesis as

Hypothesis 1: Tourist's perceived cleanness image of street food at tourism destination has relationship with the tourist's destination selection.

Hypothesis 2: Tourist's perceived safety image of street food at tourism destination has relationship with the tourist's destination selection.

### D. *Perceived physical characteristic and social circumstance images*

As the characteristics of street food at the tourism destination, foods are likely to expose to open-air environments. Furthermore, food containers and cooking devices are likely to be under an inappropriate management, resulted in perceived unhealthy foods (Henderson et al 2012). Thus, tourists may or may not select the destination with respect to their perceived physical characteristics of street-food shop. Meanwhile, an exposure to social

circumstances of tourists when the tourists consume street food at the destination, they can learn local lifestyle and cultures. Therefore, tourists may use a perceived image of social circumstances to make tourism destination selection. Hypotheses are provided as

Hypothesis 3: Tourist's perceived physical characteristic of street food at tourism destination has relationship with the tourist's destination selection.

Hypothesis 4: Tourist's perceived social circumstance of street food at tourism destination has relationship with the tourist's destination selection.

### E. *Perceived cultural identity, touristy, and value of money images*

Previous research identifies three major reasons of which tourists use for selecting destination; shopping, visiting to famous places, and learning social and cultural aspects of the tourism destination (Ab karim & Chi, 2010; Henderson et al, 2012; Lertputtarak, 2012). In particular, Henderson et al (2012) point out that tourists prefer authentic cultures to touristy cultures. Moreover, when street foods and street-food shops can create unique identity especially reflecting local cultural characteristics, tourist is likely to be satisfied and select the destination by less consideration on a value of money. Thus, this research proposes hypotheses as

Hypothesis 5: Tourist's perceived unique cultural characteristic of street food at tourism destination has relationship with the tourist's destination selection.

Hypothesis 6: Tourist's perceived touristy image of street food at tourism destination has relationship with the tourist's destination selection.

Hypothesis 7: Tourist's perceived value of money of street food at tourism destination has relationship with the tourist's destination selection.

## III. Methods

This research conducted empirical study by using questionnaire as data collection instrument. Populations of research are foreign tourists which compose of Chinese and Western tourist groups travelling in the targeted tourism destinations. This study collected questionnaires from 4 walking streets in 4 provinces as tourism destinations of Thailand; Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Songkhla, and Bangkok (Yoawaraj or Chinese market in Bangkok). All targeted destinations have valid and robust characteristics of street foods which are attractive tourism activities.

Measures of variables are developed by mostly adopted items from previous research. For example, measurement items for perceived unique cultural identity are adopted from Kim, Eves and Scarles (2009). Five likert scales were developed, ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Questionnaires were prepared in 2 versions; Chinese and English, for which translation and back-translation approach was conducted. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis including reliability tests were used to verify measurement items of variables. Multiple regression models were occupied to analyze research results with confidential level at 95%.

#### iv. Research findings

Descriptive reports show that quantitative data respondents compose of 89 Chinese and 121 Western tourists (Table 1.). In particular, Western tourist group is distributed into six subgroups; 28 American, 14 British, 12 Canadian, 10 Australian, 4 New Zealand, and 53 other Europeans.

Table 1. Descriptive profiles of respondents

Nations	Amount	percentage
Chinese	89	42.4
Western	121	57.6
Total	210	100

To verify measurement items for each variable, this research found all relevant measurement items achieved the criteria of initial eigenvalue >1.0, factor loading>0.6, and reliability test by Cronbach alpha>0.7. Table 2 presents the results of total samples in which specific Chinese samples' and specific Western samples' factor analyses and reliability are not different.

Table 2. Verification of measurement items for each variable of total samples

Variable	Initial eigenvalue	Cronbach alpha
Perceived cleanness image	2.379	0.720
Perceived safety image	2.125	0.793
Perceived physical characteristic	2.859	0.812
Perceived social circumstance	2.964	0.826
Perceived cultural identity	3.905	0.868
Perceived touristy image	3.658	0.908
Perceived value of money	3.183	0.821
Destination selection	1.610	0.758

Notes: Eigenvalue cutoff level is over 1.0 and all items' factor loadings are over 0.6. Cronbach alpha is over 0.7.

Hypothesis tests by regression analyses present the statistically significant results that the hypotheses 1 and 6 are supported for two tourist groups. In particular, Chinese tourists are concerned cleanness of street food and street-food shop for selecting their tourism destination at standardized coefficient 0.384 (p-value = 0.006), meanwhile Western tourists consider this factor at standardized coefficient 0.267 (p-value = 0.012). Both Chinese and Western tourists also use perceived touristy image of street food and street-food shop at tourism destination to be a factor for selecting their destination.

However, there are different results of hypothesis tests for these two groups. The result from Chinese tourist supports the hypothesis 3 of which tourist's perceived physical characteristic has relationship with tourist's destination selection. Meanwhile, the result from Western tourist supports the hypothesis 4 of which tourist's perceived social circumstance has relationship with tourist's destination selection. As a result, it can be interpreted that

Chinese tourist considers physical aspect of street food and street-food shop, such as food containers, dining area. If these physical characteristics of any destination are appropriate, there is a tendency that Chinese tourist would select that place for tourism. However, Western tourist consider a chance to expose local social activities.

Table 3. Regression analyses compared between Chinese and Western tourist groups

Independent variable	Chinese tourists	Western tourists
Perceived cleanness image	0.384 *** (0.006)	0.267 ** (0.012)
Perceived safety image	-0.059 (0.646)	-0.073 (0.490)
Perceived physical characteristic	-0.282 ** (0.023)	-0.064 (0.476)
Perceived social circumstance	-0.017 (0.911)	0.210 ** (0.0441)
Perceived cultural identity	0.017 (0.904)	-0.076 (0.441)
Perceived touristy image	-0.346 *** (0.004)	-0.160 * (0.081)
Perceived value of money	-0.141 (0.332)	0.063 (0.540)

Notes: Dependent variable is destination selection. The data show standardized coefficient and p-value in parenthesis.

\*\*\* = significant at 0.01, \*\* = significant at 0.05, \* = significant at 0.1

#### v. Conclusions

With respect to the hypothesis test results, it can be concluded that market practitioners in food tourism particularly for the street food market should focus on the cleanness of foods and shop to satisfy tourists in terms of the tourists' confidence of street food quality. There may be a need to have third party organization testing and monitoring cleanness of street food continuously. Furthermore, general tourists prefer having authentic experiences with street food as local food that can communicate local lifestyles and cultures to having faked presentations of street foods at the tourism destination.

However, when the market practitioners in food tourism would persuade Chinese and Western tourists to select the tourism destination, the different strategies may be occupied such as a promotion of chance for local society exposures for the Western tourist and an excellent management of dining area and dining stuffs for the Chinese tourist.

Incremental information and knowledge from this research contributing to theory development and management implication are a market communication with target customers. There is a need to be concerned how to develop perception of customers in various dimensions of tourism destination from that these perceptions will affect destination selection. Thus, there is a need to understand concept and mechanism of perception creation, and communication to build the perception.

Future research should investigate in details why these factors are statistically significant for tourist's destination selection. Researchers may expand their research area to include other kinds of destination rather than walking streets, for example general street foods.

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