Tourism Experience Comparisons between China and Thailand: Empirical Evidence from Young Generation Chinese Respondents

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Abstract: This research aims to study the satisfaction of traveling experienced between time in China and Thailand from the full-time bachelor degree Chinese students by using the normality and nonparametric 1 sample sign test. This study, therefore, examines the young generation, Chinese respondents, regarding their experiences of traveling in Thailand to gain a better understanding of Chinese tourist behavior and identify motivational factors that significantly influence their satisfaction. This research has compared and measured customer satisfaction for both experience in China against experience in Thailand in six variables, namely *Cost of traveling, Weather, Taste of local food, Interesting places, long-distance public transportation* and *quality of life*. To collect the relevant quantitative and qualitative data, questionnaires were given to the respondents with Chinese language translation. The findings show that Chinese students are highly satisfied with their time in Thailand because of favorable weather, the taste of local food, interesting places, and better quality of life. However, the costs of traveling and long-distance public transportation for Thailand are doubtful in Chinese students perception.

Keywords: Tourism experience, traveling experience, traveling in Thailand, traveling in China, customer satisfaction, travel logistic, young generation Chinese

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the nature of tourism and its relationship with society have changed significantly owing to major changes in dramatic historical events and technological innovations and far-reaching social media (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Rebollo, 2018; Saarinen, n.d.). China has been the leading tourism source in the world with the spending of 129 billion U.S. dollars on international tourism from with almost up to 50% of this expenditure directed to shopping (Lim & Wang, 2008). In 2017, the top 10 favorite outbound destinations for Chinese travelers were Thailand, Hong Kong, Macau, South Korea, Taiwan, the United States, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. According to

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Y. Wang and Davidson (2009), the Chinese government has been given easy tourism policies to overseas destinations' liberalization of visa-issuing procedures for Chinese citizens. This helps to contribute significantly to this growth. Consequently, the number of Chinese tourists to Thailand has expanded over the past year. Initially, Chinese Tourism was mostly limited to Bangkok and some in big cities in Thailand. As outbound tourism from China expanded, the growing number of Chinese students in Bangkok are also increasing despite a minimal decline of Chinese tourists in the year 2018. The significance of Chinese tourists can be noticed in several places in Thailand, such as Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang Airports, where there are a lot of Chinese script and signs. Besides, there are Chinese interpreters and salespeople who are able to speak Chinese in several stores. This is because the Chinese tourists praise and admire shopping assistants who can speak Chinese very well (Banterng, 2017).

Despite the upsides and positive factors on globalization, several problems have gradually emerged in South East Asia in terms of bad economy and health concerns (Dayley, 2018). In 1997, the financial crisis paved the way and became setbacks for the region. There were also wide avian influenza outbreaks and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), creating doubt and anxiety for visitors. On top of that, the unfortunate tsunami disaster in 2004 destroyed many lives and properties in Thailand and Indonesia (Tatiyanantakul, 2017; Zhang, 2005). Phuket Island located in the South of Thailand when the Phoenix tour boat crashed into the sea and cost the lives of 47 Chinese tourists. Later, the police reported that the cause of the tragedy was recklessness, poor safety measure and heavy storm. According to Worrachaddejchai (2019) the number of Chinese tourists to Thailand has been continuously reduced compared to the previous year from February to May by 11.3, 1.87, 8.89 and 8.85 percent respectively reported by the Tourism and Sports Industry of Thailand.

Regardless of those problems, Southeast Asia is still one of the most popular destinations supported by the proximity, cost, presence of natural beauty and congruence with the Chinese Culture as reasons (Kim, Guo, & Agrusa, 2005; Jin & Wang, 2015). And in accordance with the use of wide web 2.0, widespread usage of Social Media, with images of Chinese tourists presented in an undesirable aspect, it was continually improved by the government. According to Chow and Bai (2011), the government of China had several implemented policies to create a positive image of their citizens, for instance in education, urban development, technological, health and economic development. It believed that the policy communication at an international level could influence the world population and successfully distribute the Chinese value and culture (Banterng, 2017).

Apart from the short time visit Chinese tourists who enter the country on tour group and their own, one more group, also considered as tourists cannot be ignored by private tourism companies and the Thai tourism governmental department. This specific group is the foreign students from China who choose Thailand as a country to study a bachelor's degree. Due to the fact that they have to stay in cities in Thailand for at least four years or more, they are probably the high potential group to boost up the tourism industry. According to a study by Songsathaphorn, Chen, and Ruangkanjanases (2014), rapid economic growth in China has been the main cause of the growth of trade education as Asian countries, Thailand, for example, have proved the importance of education in accelerating economic growth. Sending a child to study abroad is a popular trend for Chinese families.

According to a report from Wongcha-um (2019), a survey conducted by Office of the Higher Education Commission in 2009, there were more than 19,000 international students from 124 countries scattering in 103 Thai higher education institutions. The highest number of international students studying in Thailand was Chinese students, with approximately 8,993 students or almost half of the total.

Therefore, researchers in tourism and business in this field, especially Thailand as a part of South East Asia, should thoroughly understand the behaviors of this unavoidable, powerful, and high-spending young generation Chinese consumers. As products of the one child policy of the Chinese governments are experience-oriented, demand uniqueness, and value lifestyle upgrade. Their consumption patterns are compulsive and different from the older Chinese consumers. Thus, an understanding of their tourism behaviors is necessary (Luangsa-Art, 2016; Luo et al., 2018). This research proposes to start with the high potential full-time Chinese students in a public university in Thailand. In addition, with all these variable tests and results, the main research objective is attempted to predict the future routes of Chinese tourists in terms of logistics of young generation Chinese tourists from 4 out of 6 variables; the cost of traveling, weather, interesting places and long-distance public transportation which would eventually become the vital in terms of travel logistics. The second but also important objective is to find out the comparison of the taste of local food between the two countries and finally to sum up the last variable, which is the overall quality of life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the escalation of Chinese tourist arrivals no longer only in Thailand, but also in many places around the world (Huang & Wei, 2018; Rerkklang, 2017), their satisfaction toward Thailand is very important. Rittichainuwat, Qu, and Mongknonvanit (2002) examined the impact of tourist satisfaction on tourist who visits Thailand more than one time, and they found different satisfaction between the first time and repeat tourists. Their study finding revealed a significant difference in travel satisfaction between the first time and repeated travelers by testing travelers with different demographics. The positive impacts of travel satisfaction on the likelihood of travelers would result in revisiting Thailand (Allameh, Pool, Jaberi, Salehzadeh, & Asadi, 2015). Apparently, the first thing tourists would have to consider is the cost of traveling. It is the initial factor that customers would usually consider before deciding to take a trip to the destination. According to the study of Mburu, Zyl, and Cullen (2013) the price value has a strong relationship direct impact on customer satisfaction in many industries. Horsu and Yeboah (2015) tested 6 variables on customer satisfaction on taxi service and their multiple regression analysis presented that affordability or price has a significant influence on their customers. Likewise, the research completed by Khairani and Hati (2017) shows the perceived value of money for service quality has a positive and heavy impact on customer satisfaction. Since different weather conditions such as sunshine, rainfall and temperature can lead to significant changes in tourism demand (Becken, 2013), it is one of the important tourist factors for scholars. Becken (2013) also points out the several studies find that good weather conditions in a destination lead to higher domestic overnight stays in a given season. Molz (2007) later defined food tourism as a sense of knowing or experiencing another culture, as well as performing adventure, adaptability, and openness to any other culture which basically Thailand possess to offer. Adomaitienė and Seyidov (2017) conducted a research on the analysis of the essence in tourist behavior and found good service, natural beauty and transportation are the reasons for consumers to choose the destination. However, the government should be the one in charge to facilitate those factors (Mei, Arcodia, & Ruhanen, 2013).

As the numbers of Chinese tourists increase, the outbound tourists are moving toward significant changes in behaviors, travel preferences and spending patterns; young Chinese travelers provide more value to the industry as they have a longer lifetime ahead of them and more time to increase their income. More importantly, the young generation will have more diversified needs for uniquely customized destination and products (Dichter, Chen, Saxon, Yu, & Suo, 2018; Sirikudta, Archarungroj, & Sirisuthikul, 2019).

Recently, with improved, innovative technology and low-cost airlines (Wang, Tsui, Liang, & Fu, 2017), tourists are able to visit more than just one specific city. The development of transportation infrastructure in one area is also an important factor in tourism activity (Brida, Deidda, & Pulina, 2014). Furthermore, Wen, Lan, and Cheng (2005) have conducted research on transportation service and their finding shows that passengers will be satisfied when the service meets their expectations. To combine all the important factors above for tourists and how they feel about the tourist destinations, quality of life is one specific factor that can be formed and perceived to them. It could be difficult for tour groups and short visit tourists due to time limit but for full-time students who are mandatory to stay in Bangkok for long time have enough information and experience to compare between time here and back home. Hanqin and Lam (1999) explored influent pull factors motivated Chinese tourists for Hong Kong visits are internationally state-of-the-art cosmopolitan city with a high-speed train on their research making it convenient for trans-port. Recently, Thailand is more similar to city like Hong Kong and the solider government has been trying to improve the city transportation including the fast intercity train. Few sky train lines within the city of Bangkok are complete leaving the rest unfinished. Undoubtedly, the biggest project of the Thai government is the intercity or long distance train which is ongoing and being built at the moment.

Lai and Vinh (2012) have classified and categorized the 4 elements for attributes of Thailand. The first two are human resources and tourism facilities. Interestingly, the other two of those are natural and historical resources, such as places to visit and cultural resources such as food.

Bowen and Clarke (2009) state that any tourists without choice are no longer relevant and do not return to where they have been dissatisfied in terms of transportations, accommodations, attractions, tour operators or travel agents, web site or even destination organizers. Therefore, the different categories and variables are considerably tempted in this research.

Walsh (2007) conducted research on the experiences and satisfaction of the Chinese tourists in Thailand based on quantitative 250 surveys from respondents. Their significant findings were Chinese tourists who travel with colleagues or friends have significantly less satisfaction compared to travel with the tour company with a guide. These respondents

who have no interest in Thai food and shopping would be less likely to be satisfied with overall satisfaction. In addition, if they are not interested in other factors such as night life and Thai spa massage, the overall satisfaction would be less significant. This research also presents that Chinese tourist is no longer considered as 'zero-dollar tourism 'who purchased a tour from China at much lower cost. Instead, they substantially spend and purchase many expensive products, shows and services when they are in Thailand during the period. However, existing problems and dissatisfactions are included in the findings. Walsh (2007) suggest and encourage more comparative studies on measuring the behavior of Chinese tourists and opinions with the closer supervision of the tourist guide system in hope of being structured which may lead to more beneficial for the government of Thailand and Chinese tourists themselves. Specifically, methods of marketing and designing products for them are critically vital for sustainable tourism. Amonhaemanon and Amornhaymanon (2015) conducted quantitative research on 155 Chinese tourists to understand their motivation for coming to Thailand by spending 4 months period on data collection. Motivation factors with the high ranks are natural beautiful beach attractions, interesting cultural events and good value for the money.

Rodyu and Wetprasit (2018) conducted research testing on the comparative advantage of Chinese tourists on Thai and directly compared to ASEAN plus 6 countries (South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and India). Seemingly, the other 5 countries have different tourism comparative advantages with the Chinese tourists but depend on their laws, strategy and situation in each country. However, Rodyu and Wetprasit (2018) put a conclusion that Thai tourism had a significant competitive advantage with Chinese tourists from 2000 to 2015 compared to other countries and was able to predict the trend of Chinese tourists visiting Thailand will rise in the future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research chooses both the quantitative and qualitative way of collecting data, the mixed methods approach. Both quantitative and qualitative methods receive higher and lower weights respectively developed into each part of the analysis and interpretation of the data fairly similar to the method adopted by McGrady and Cottrell (2018). But, their recent research has the same weight on both data. To gain a flawless understanding of 6 variables about the traveling experience between China and Thailand. According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2018), calculating the reliability, normality and final statistical test between 6 variables using numerical data is one of the characteristics of a quantitative method. Primary data were collected from 100 Chinese nationality students of Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Bangkok, Thailand by passing the questionnaire survey. The questionnaire givers were selected to help this research due to the fact that they are fluent in English and Chinese and were able to facilitate both respondents and researcher. Originally, the language used in the questionnaire was English and later was translated into the Chinese language by the Chinese staff in the University since 100% of respondents are Chinese. Some of the student respondents had little experience in answering academic questionnaires and were required assistance from the native Chinese speaking givers in completing the questionnaires. Most respondents had no difficulty in reading the questionnaire in their own language. Careful checking of questionnaires by the researchers was obligatory to make sure that high-quality data was collected.

With all the attempts to avoid mistakes, 22 incomplete questionnaires were carefully taken out, leaving 78 available from 100 for this research. During the process, the student respondents can participate in this study when they are convenient to fill up the questionnaire outside class and the questionnaire was also pass out during random classrooms which is easier and faster for student assistants and researchers to collect information.

In total, 6 items were categorized into 2 separate boxes to put in the score, first is the traveling experience in China and second in Thailand. Each column of the questionnaire represents the Cost of traveling, Weather for traveling, Taste of local food, interesting places to visit, long-distance public transportation, and Quality of life. To collect up-to-date data, the time frame of this research was designed for 3 months duration from 1st October to 28th December 2018 within working university days.

According to Likert (1932), the scorecard in the questionnaire was set based on five Likert scale measurements, for example, strongly satisfied, satisfied, neither, unsatisfied and strongly unsatisfied as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Normally, it takes only five to ten minutes for respondents to fill up the short questionnaires designed by the researcher.

Simultaneously, another way of effective research methodology is included in this chapter. The qualitative data can be gathered and collected by interviews in the form of written data (Robson, 2011). For another type of data, comments obtained during the qualitative research can be written on the questionnaire as a free text to express their feelings. This way the research expects the qualitative data to support the calculated quantitative data result or else explain why

they do or do not like such testing factors. To protect the research from getting biased qualitative information, the respondents were interviewed and written by the Chinese speaking research assistants about their feelings toward each of the 6 variables. Additional relevant comments were also able to inform at this last part of the data collection.

Hypothesis of Normality Test

H0: *The collected data is normally distributed.*

H1: *The collected data is not normally distributed.*

Hypothesis of the Final Research Testing
Null hypothesis

H0: *Variable in Thailand is not better than in China in each variable.*

6 Alternative hypothesis

H1: *Tourism experience in Thailand is better than in China in terms of the cost of traveling.*

H2: *Tourism experience in Thailand is better than in China in terms of weather for traveling.*

H3: *Tourism experience in Thailand is better than in China in terms of the taste of local food.*

H4: *Tourism experience in Thailand is better than in China in terms of the interesting places.*

H5: *Tourism experience in Thailand is better than in China in terms of long-distance public transportation.*

H6: *Tourism experience in Thailand is better than in China in terms of quality of life.*
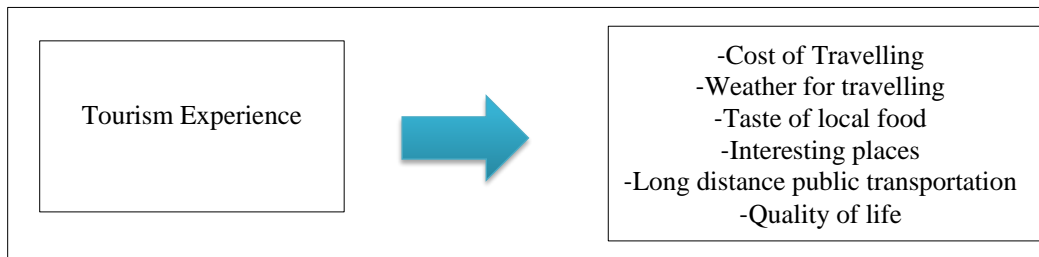

Figure 1 *Conceptual Model*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 *Descriptive Data*

Category	Group	Students	%	Total
Gender	Male	38	48.71	100%
	Female	40	51.28	
Year in University	Year 1	30	38.46	100%
	Year 2	19	24.35	
	Year 3	20	25.64	
	Year 4	9	11.53	
Faculty	Business	50	64.10	100%
	Tourism	28	35.90	
Income	Less than 5,000	10	12.82	100%
	5,000 to 10,000	46	58.97	
	More than 10,000	32	41.02	

Table 2 *Normality Tests by SPSS*

Dependent Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	*df*	Sig.	Statistic	*df*	Sig.
Cost of traveling - H1	.186	77	.000	.904	77	.000
Weather - H2	.211	77	.000	.900	77	.000
Taste of local food - H3	.204	77	.000	.906	77	.000
Interesting places - H4	.279	77	.000	.875	77	.000
long-distance public transportation - H5	.183	77	.000	.899	77	.000
Quality of life - H6	.218	77	.000	.930	77	.000

After running the 2 separate normality tests, our result showed from Table 2 that all 6 variables, H1 to H6 are less than the significant level at 0.05 and can be indicated as they are not normally distributed. All of the variables are not even near the score of normally distributed at more than 0.05. Therefore, every category stays at a significant level. After testing and ensuring the normality of the collected data, there is a strong academic reason why this research would proceed with the non-parametric test rather than the statistical test. As a result, the 1 sample sign test from Minitab version 18 is preferred as it is a similar test to the one-sample *t*-test of statistic test.

Null hypothesis $H0 : \eta = 0$

Alternative hypothesis $H1 : \eta > 0$

Table 3 *Normality Tests by SPSS*

Dependent Variable	Number < 0	Number $= 0$	Number > 0	*p*-Value
Cost of traveling H1	23	24	30	0.205
Weather H2	18	19	40	0.003
Taste of local food H3	26	10	41	0.044
Interesting places H4	17	16	44	0.000
Long-distance public transportation H5	28	16	33	0.304
Quality of life H6	11	9	57	0.000

The result of the nonparametric tests from the table above shows 4 variables (H2, H3, H4, H6) with *p*-value less than 0.05 and 2 variables (H1, H5) with *p*-value more than 0.05. For variables H2, H3, H4 and H6 the scores are 0.003, 0.044, 0.000 and 0.000 respectively. Since they are less than 0.05, it is considered rejecting the hypothesis, H0. Therefore, respondents imply traveling experience in Thailand is better and more favorable than their time in China in terms of weather, the taste of local food, interesting places and quality of life.

However, the variables H1 and H5, the scores are 0.205 and 0.304, respectively. They do not have enough evidence to reject the H0 since they are more than 0.05. Therefore, respondents imply they do not have better experience in Thailand than China in terms of the cost of traveling and long-distance public transportation.

The qualitative data in written details are also provided by most of the 78 Chinese students. Approximately, one-third of the whole population did not give any comments. As the results from quantitative non-parametric with 4 variables (weather, the taste of local food, interesting places and quality of life) above, the respondents indicate that their satisfaction in Thailand is better than China. Since China has many season changes during one year, for example, winter makes it more difficult to travel and requires them to wear warmer clothes. However, Thailand is considered hot all year and doe not require them to change as much. Majorities of the respondents love the taste of Thai food and love to visit Pattaya, Phuket and Chiangmai as their top destinations. Those findings would eventually make the quality of life in Thailand better than China where they have to follow many strict rules and customs from parents and the Chinese government. In contrast, the price or the cost of traveling for the respondent shows no significance on the quantitative findings above (see Table 3). The respondents informed that when they were in their hometowns in

China, they stayed at home with parents and had no need to pay rent. After choosing Thailand for a bachelor's degree, staying in University dormitory or renting elsewhere are the only options. Such a burden is included in their budgets and reduces their spending power. They are aware that being foreigners in Thailand means taxi and other services are shamefully charging higher prices than Thai customers. In terms of commuting between cities, the public train in Thailand is not an easy way. Because the current intercity train in the country monopolized by the State Railway of Thailand (SRT) does not offer acceptable quality and safety, they feel that China is better in terms of long distant public transportation as the Chinese trains are very modern and have been supported with substantial capital and infrastructure investment (Yang, Dobruszkes, Wang, Dijst, & Witte, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research is attempted to study the satisfaction of traveling experienced between time in China and Thailand for the current Chinese students in Bangkok, Thailand. From the analysis, the research found the tourism experience of Thailand has outstandingly higher satisfaction in variables such as the weather for traveling, the taste of local food, the places to visit, which lead to a better quality of life when being compared to the traveling experience in China. Thailand is always hot but China tourism has to suffer from the cold winter. Hence, they travel to Thailand in the winter time enable them to taste the Thai local food and seeing many interesting places making them very impressed. Due to these upsides, they predominantly agree that the quality of life in Thailand outshines China as well.

In spite of Thailand as a preferred destination for them, 2 variables were not satisfied by the Chinese respondents. The cost of traveling in Thailand is more expensive than in China in their minds since most of Chinese cannot speak the local language and cannot bargain with taxi drivers and more. Intentionally, the Thai seller and businesses have tagged difference prices to offer the Chinese tourists and other foreigners as well. It cannot be compared to experience at home where these students do not have to pay for rent expense and travel as local people. Furthermore, it is difficult when traveling to other cities in Thailand due to the fact that Thailand does not have comfortable and reliable high-speed intercity trains which can directly prevent other transporting service overcharging tourists. Thailand is an internationally friendly country and heavily relied on tourists. Currently, the economy can be described as recession and cannot be afforded to be deficit in tourist industry. These 6 variables are factors that needs to be taken into account by marketers, private tour businesses, local government and policy makers in order to sustain the Chinese tourists and predict their future logistics travel routes as the global economy today is no longer guarantee and highly unpredictable.

Research Limitations and Suggestions

To conduct research that includes different age level, professions, and a larger area of the samples can be extremely costly despite the fact that Chinese is the largest minorities in Thailand as of 2019. Therefore, the respondents were strictly limited to Chinese university students. Similar to this research, Amonhaemanon and Amornhaymanon (2015) had only 4 months to collect data. The longer time frame for data collection should also be extended in order to gather the significantly larger size of samples due to the fact that Chinese tourists are the largest numbers for source of tourism income for Thailand and the number of tourists is not likely to decrease at any time soon.

The future research should also include the modified qualitative data collecting method since it can reveal more and find out about the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of any service businesses. Instead of putting free text on the paper, it is recommended to have reasons on the list for the respondents to put a check-mark in the empty box in front of them. Even though the quantitative data is gathered correctly with a carefully designed questionnaire, the researcher cannot force the respondents to follow quickly, think and provide the qualitative data during the process. Besides knowing their satisfaction with Thailand for more interesting places to visit, the travel logistic routes of the Chinese are highly interesting to predict and next on the list to be ready for more businesses in a considerable economic slowdown.

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