

A proposal For a Study on the Thai Traditional Food Market in Chinese

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Abstract: *Thailand is a famous tourist country, where the local cuisine is very characteristic of Southeast Asia, and some of the traditional foods made from local ingredients are low in oil and salt, which are healthy foods with outstanding nutritional value. In today's society, Thailand's healthy traditional food has received a lot of attention and many tourists say that it has left a deep impression on them and that Thai traditional food will be one of the important factors for them to return to Thailand again. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the theoretical basis related to Thailand's healthy food tourism market, and to provide some reference suggestions for the future research direction of Thailand's traditional food tourism market. Provide some reference suggestions.*

Keywords: Proposal; Thai Tourism; Traditional Food; Marketing

Introduction

Rapid urbanization coupled with intensive production and consumption systems and rapid lifestyle changes has led to an increase in non-communicable chronic diseases, the re-emergence of infectious diseases, environmental degradation, and lifestyle changes (Chalip, Green & Hill, 2003). There are also increasing reports of unhealthy dietary patterns, high saturated fat, high salt intake, high-calorie diets, and low fiber, leading to different health problems in different regions (Castro, Armario & Ruiz, 2007). Access to adequate nutritious food is an essential element of good health and a major challenge in the face of the global trend towards dietary simplification. The shift in diet structure has crossed all parts of society, as evidenced by the reliance on street food and fast food increasing the globalized food chain (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Liao, Thi & Nophea, 2022). These have led to various health and public health system challenges. This requires us to revisit healthy traditional foods and localized production and consumption systems.

Thailand is one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the world (Byon & Zhang, 2010). In addition to beaches and shopping activities, the Thai government is now promoting the country as the “kitchen of the world”. A Thai proverb is “fish in the water, rice in the field” (Leelayouthayotin, 2004). Thailand is an agricultural country that produces agricultural products throughout the year due to favorable climatic conditions. It is known for its food production and is recognized as an important food exporter (Botha, Crompton & Ki, 1999; Bigne, Sanchez & Sanjez, 2001). In addition, Thailand's many fruit varieties continue to attract the interest of individuals from many countries around the world. Thai food is an attractive and delicious delicacy (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Some traditional foods made from local ingredients are even more lower in oil and salt. Their

delicate presentation combined with high nutritional value can be described as healthy traditional foods with distinct, delicious, and unique flavors that can impress as an exotic culinary art (Kosulwat, 2002).

Regarding the application of tourism, the role of food can be to enhance the destination's marketing. Different types of food being consumed and associated with a specific location can be a way to promote and market the destination—marketing destinations (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Asia represents great geographic, socioeconomic, biological, and cultural diversity. This is also reflected in the dietary diversity of traditional foods (Jermnak, Yurayart, Poapolathep, Imsilp & Tanhan et al. 2020). Traditional foods have been cultivated, maintained, and promoted since ancient times. They have been biogeographically diverse and often community-specific since ancient times. They are part of food cultures preserved and practiced in their original forms, flavors, and expressions. They are a direct reflection of the community's heritage, history/civilization and culture. A rich resource is preserved for local social, economic, cultural and agricultural reasons (Kumthip, Khamrin, Yodmeeklin & Maneekarn, 2020). They are considered positive health effects due to dynamic adaptation to the local cultural context and refinement through empirical observation over generations. This health-related cultural knowledge may be associated with specific agricultural practices (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Jansuwan & Zander, 2021).

Literature review

Eating is one of the physiological needs of human beings. Food and beverage expenditures account for one-third of tourism expenditures (Meler & Cerovic, 2003). Since a country's food is conditioned by environmental factors and influenced by social, cultural, and religious backgrounds (McIntost, 1995; Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012), Thai food is a mixture of Eastern and Western food, incorporating some Thai Buddhist principles (Banwell et al., 2013). A survey conducted by the Research Center of Bangkok University revealed that the rich appearance, aroma, color and taste of Thai traditional food is one of the most attractive aspects of Thailand for foreign tourists. 63.3% of international tourists are attracted mainly by Thai food (Public Relations, 2011).

A destination is a tourism product and service that provides a holistic experience and cultural context (Funchs & Weiermair, 2003). Destination managers should enhance the attractiveness and its development direction. One of the key elements of successful destination marketing is creating visitor satisfaction. It influences tourists' choice of destination and decision to revisit (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Food tourism has been defined as "visits to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals visit primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations to taste food and experience specialty food attributes (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Food is an attraction, a product component, an experience, and a cultural phenomenon (Tikkanen, 2007). According to data that has been studied, more than sixty percent (63%) of leisure travelers and 85% of culinary travelers prefer to try new restaurants most nights of their trip (Stewart, Bramble & Ziraldo, 2008). Eating habits help tourists understand the differences between their own culture and the culture of their destination (Hegarty & O'Mahoney, 2001). The diet of a group of people can help them understand the social and economic lifestyle of a destination or a country (Etchner & Ritchie, 1991; Department of Tourism,

2010). Travelers are always looking for something different and authentic. For example, China has a wide variety of food, and Japan has a unique type of food and a unique style of service (Chi & Qu, 2008). Most travelers revisit a destination for its cuisine, and food is one factor contributing to overall traveler satisfaction ((Dwyer, 2003; Choi & Chu, 2001). In addition, local food habits and table manners also influence tourists' perceptions of a destination (Cohen & Avleli, 2004; Phadungjit & Pimdee, 2020), and providing reliable and responsive service can increase a destination's competitive advantage. The destination's competitive advantage as a marketing tool (Dwyer, 2003). Poor quality and service failures can negatively impact health, disrupt travel, and damage a destination's reputation (Pendergast, 2006). In addition, money spent on food at events directly correlates with satisfaction and willingness to revisit (Fuchs & Weiermair, 2003; Lee, 2021).

Interview Date

Today, Thai restaurants and Thai food can be found almost everywhere in the world. This is especially true in large cities like Bangkok. Food quality may be one factor that motivates tourists to return to a destination, and tourists' intention to revisit can be explained and predicted by the perceived value and satisfaction of the food (Kim et al., 2011). The authors selected a total of 20 tourists from the United States, Laos, Cambodia, China, and Vietnam, all of whom had stayed in Thailand for 7-30 days. Through face-to-face or telephone interviews, three Thai eco-healthy foods were selected as the favorite traditional foods of these 20 tourists: papaya salad, vegetable rolls, and coconut chicken soup. These three foods are theoretically healthy because they are fresh, low-calorie, and prepared in a low oil and low salt way.

a. Papaya Salad(Som Tum)

Spicy papaya salad (Som tum) is made from green papaya, a diamond-shaped tropical fruit usually in shades of orange-red, yellow-green and yellow-orange, with a rich orange flesh. It is a popular dish in northeastern Thailand, and its combination of spicy, sour and sweet flavors makes it a classic dish. The ingredients are green papaya, bird's eye chili, palm sugar, garlic, lime, tomato, fish sauce, roasted peanuts, dried shrimp, salted crab, praline (fermented fish), yard long beans, and shrimp paste.

New recipes with various fruits are now also popular among the younger generation. The main health benefit is that it is rich in dietary fiber, which contributes to digestive health. This dish is useful for people who do not like to eat individual vegetables.

b. Vegetable rolls

Vegetable rolls are easy to make with fresh ingredients. To make them, flour is added to eggs, milk and salt and beaten into a thin batter, and then the beaten batter is made into a rice skin. Carrots, lettuce, cucumber and bean sprouts are then shredded and rolled in the prepared rice crust. With less oil and salt, vegetable rolls are known for their low calorie content, making them one of the more famous low-calorie snacks in Thailand.

c. Chicken soup with coconut milk

Delicious and nutritious chicken soup with coconut milk is an authentic Thai dish. Coconut milk is a common ingredient in Thailand. Chicken stewed in coconut milk is used as the base of the soup, with mushrooms, tomatoes and other side dishes to add freshness and flavor, and ingredients such as southern ginger, lemongrass, coriander, morning glory, fish sauce and lime juice to soften the sweetness.

Objectives and Methodology

The primary data was obtained by searching 24 articles on Google Scholar related to Chinese tourists' impressions and consumption experiences of Thai traditional foods. The secondary data were based on in-depth interviews with eight Chinese tourists who had been to Thailand more than once based on key words such as "impressions", "consumption experience", "nutritional value" and "food color and flavor".

Through the recipes mentioned in the literature and the consumption experiences of Chinese tourists who have visited Thailand, three most popular recipes were selected: papaya salad, vegetable rolls and chicken soup with coconut milk. And the information obtained from the literature review and interviews were collected and organized to establish a SWOT analysis of the Thai traditional food tourism market and to provide a feasible research framework for future research on the Thai traditional food tourism market.

SWOT Analysis for the traditional food market

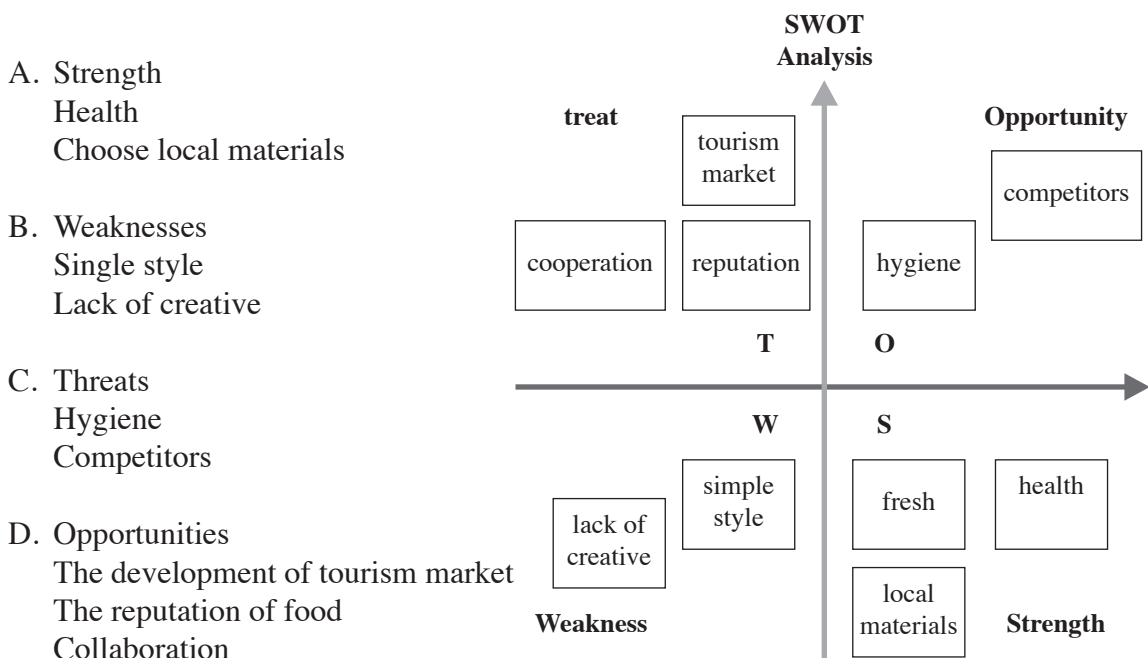


Figure 1: Thai traditional food market SWOT analysis

a. Strength

Health: Most Thai traditional foods are cooked with less oil and salt, and long-term use of less oil and salt provides better cardiovascular protection (Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012), so Thai traditional foods are healthier in terms of cooking methods.

Freshness: Traditional Thai foods are unique, combining various flavors, and are known for their richness and passionate use of fresh herbs and spices (Suklaew, Han, Chusak, Lin, Wu & Wang, et al., 2022). Traditionally, Thai food uses seasonal vegetables, such as carrots and lettuce in vegetable rolls, so the ingredients are chosen fresh.

Choose local materials: In Thailand, intricacy, attention to detail, texture, color, and flavor, and the use of ingredients with medicinal value and good flavor are key to the

culinary tradition. Thai food has become widely known and has gained more international recognition (Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanjez, 2001). Since Thai traditional food is a harmonious combination of flavors and medicinal values, the flavors are unique and diverse with the extensive use of locally produced herbs and spices.

b. Weaknesses

Single style: Because Thai traditional snacks have a relatively long history and have been passed down from generation to generation in terms of preparation methods and cooking styles, they are relatively homogeneous in form (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Even the most delicious food, if eaten repeatedly and frequently, can cause boredom and a sense of indifference.

Lack of creativity: While traditional Thai snacks are prepared relatively homogeneous and thus tend to bore long-time visitors, most long-established Thai restaurants innovate only in the form of service but still use more traditional cooking and preparation methods (Choi & Chu, 2001). However, it remains to be seen whether this is due to the fact that traditional flavors are more popular.

c. Threats

Hygiene: Food tourism is a very customer-oriented activity and therefore food safety remains the most issue, but since Thailand is still a developing country in Southeast Asia, there are still some problems in food hygiene regulation and sometimes more attention and improved hygiene management is needed (Hui & Wan, 2003).

Competitors: Due to the geography of Southeast Asia, the food habits in Southeast Asia are relatively similar, and Thailand is only one country in Southeast Asia and cannot be entirely unique if it relies only on traditional foods to attract tourists (Hjalager & Richards, 2002), so Thailand also needs to pay attention to its competitors in neighboring countries, such as Laos, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Therefore, Thailand needs to pay attention to which have similar food habits to find more competitive food characteristics.

d. Opportunities

The development of the tourism market: The Kingdom of Thailand consists of 76 provinces, covers an area of 513,120 square kilometers and has a population of over 68 million, making it a world-renowned tourist mecca. It can be said that the development of tourism has also led to the development of traditional Thai food (Huang, 2012).

The reputation of food: Thai food appeals to the eye, the nose and the palate. Thai cooking can be defined as an art and an essential part of Thailand's cultural heritage. Thai chefs pay close attention to detail in every step of food preparation, which is why Thai cooking is an important part of the country's cultural heritage, with a long history and worldwide fame (Goodwin, Wiwattanapantuwong, Tuicomepee, Suttiwan & Ben-Ezra, 2021).

Collaboration: traditional Thai food is made from mainly vegetables and herbs such as lemongrass, galangal, basil, and garlic. What makes Thai food special is its ability to embody three fundamental values: nutrition, culture, and medicinal food. Thai traditional food uses fresh ingredients as well as extensive use of herbs and spices with trained cooking methods and presentation techniques, (Chalip, Green & Hill, 2003). Thus, food marketers can establish business partnerships with local vegetable and herb merchants, creating a win-win situation for industry-to-industry cooperation.

Discussion

Thai traditional food not only owns nutritious and healthy characteristics, but also brings economic development to the country. Respondents' feedback indicated that health, adventure, natural resources, and cultural factors were the main reasons for visiting the destination and trying local traditional foods.

The results of this study show that tourists consider the image of Thai traditional food to be at a high level. Most of them indicated they would like to visit Thailand again and try traditional Thai food again (Choi & Chu, 2001). The physical need for food is one of the motivations for food tourism, and tourists and travellers worldwide are interested in food. Food can be seen as a tourist attraction in the places they visit (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Destination managers must understand the importance of developing a positioning strategy for a tourism destination. The positioning strategy for a tourism destination is to identify and exploit new opportunities that are attractive, economical, and sustainable (Ibrahim & Gill, 2005). Understanding visitors' perceptions of a destination's image and designing activities to serve the needs and satisfy the target market can lead to a competitive advantage. Some researchers state that a destination's image should be an attribute-based component that identifies the destination's relative strengths and weaknesses and helps to develop potential niche markets because destination image positively impacts visitors (Bigne et al., 2001). Increased tourist satisfaction is a good predictor of willingness to repurchase, ultimately benefiting the destination (Baker & Crompton, 2000).

In summary, the Thai traditional food tourism market has great potential. Still, since there are relatively few previous studies, the author proposes research directions affecting Thai traditional food tourism, as shown in Figure 5, hoping to make some suggestions for the future of Thai traditional food tourism or Thai tourism.

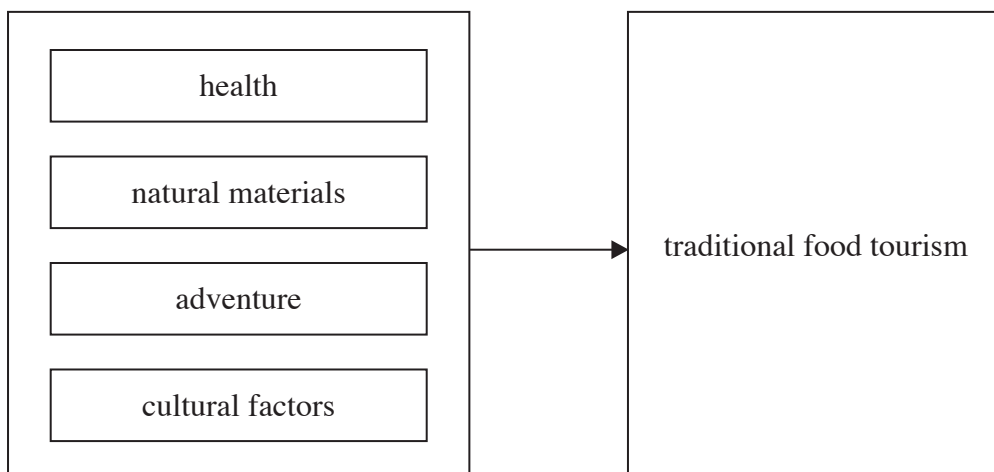


Figure 2: Factors affecting traditional food tourism

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