

A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE MOTIVATION, FAMILIARITY, CONSTRAINTS, IMAGE, AND TRAVEL INTENTION OF CHINESE NON-VISITORS TO THAILAND

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Abstract: *This research aims to investigate the relationship of travel motivation, familiarity, travel constraints, image with the travel intention of Chinese non-visitors to Thailand. A survey questionnaire and a non-probability convenience sampling were used as the research instrument and research technique. A total of 410 respondents, all Chinese non-visitors to Thailand, were selected on the Golden Horse Lane, one the busiest shopping and business sections of Kunming City, which is located in the Yunnan Province, China. The findings indicate that the cognitive and affective images of Thailand held by Chinese non-visitors are good, which means that they have high intention to visit Thailand. There is a significant relationship between travel motivations and travel intention, travel constraint and travel intention, familiarity and cognitive image, familiarity and affective image, cognitive image and travel intention, and affective image and travel intention. The findings also reveal that Chinese non-visitors visit Thailand for relaxation. Familiarity, developed through both cognitive images and effective images is the most powerful factor influencing travel intention. Chinese non-visitors think that Thailand is exotic, beautiful, and mystic. They rated transsexuals, religion, beaches, the sunshine and gastronomy as most attractive and well-known attributes of Thailand. They see Thailand as synonymous with happiness, passion, and easy-goingness and regard Thai people as friendly and well mannered.*

Key word: *Thailand image, Chinese non-visitors, travel intention, travel motivation, familiarity, travel constraints.*

1. Introduction

A destination image does not stand still. It changes all the time. Thailand is no exception. Its image has changed from just a typical place to visit to a tourism resort destination and it will continue to change in the future. It is the responsibility of both the Thai government and tourist office to make sure the change in Thailand's destination image is for the better. This is especially critical since tourism destination products and services cannot be tested prior to purchase. Consumers build their own images and then make their purchase decision based on the destination images. Whether the image is an accurate portrayal of what the respective destination is really like is not as important as the mere existence of the image in the minds of non-visitors. Because images play an essential role in destination choice, the ultimate goal of any destination is to influence possible tourists' travel-related decision making. As aforementioned, how to influence the image of Thailand to non-visitors thus becomes the duty of Thailand's tourism organizations and governmental offices.

In the past, the image of Thailand among Chinese tourists was unclear. Few studies attempted to understand the Chinese image of Thailand. Few have since.

This study is an attempt to describe the tourism image of Thailand to Chinese non-visitors and explore the source of the Chinese tourism image. Since, as previous studies have shown (e.g., Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Beerli & Martin, 2004), tourism images significantly influence tourist action, this study will also examine the influence of the tourism image of Thailand on Chinese tourist's destination choice.

It has been 20 years since the first Chinese tourist traveled to Thailand. While the number of Chinese travelling to Thailand has greatly increased (it has jumped from 1.45% percent in 1991 to 9.19% percent in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011), the total number of inbound tourists from China has not even reached 1% of the total population of China which is 1.4 billion; meaning that 99% of Chinese have never been to Thailand. In addition, as the Chinese economy continues to prosper, many Chinese can now afford to travel abroad.

The problem for Thailand as a destination is that it competes with many other Asian destinations like Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong

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