

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Expectations and Satisfaction of Chinese Tourists Toward Thailand Tourism Management

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Abstract Since the main goal of tourism is to run a business responding to customer needs, tourist expectations and satisfaction are deemed two main components measuring the quality of tourism. This study compares the expectations and satisfaction of Chinese tourists toward tourism services in Thailand. The subjects of the study are two groups of Chinese tourists categorized by their income. These are labelled throughout this paper as “general” (denoting lower-income Chinese tourists) and “quality” (denoting higher-income Chinese tourists). A survey study methodology was used to collect data using a questionnaire completed by 435 general tourists and 413 quality tourists. Importance–Performance Analysis was applied to examine the expectations and satisfaction of the tourists toward seven attributes of Thailand tourist destinations. The findings reveal that the majority of the general Chinese tourists travel with their tour operators while most of the quality Chinese tourists plan their trips and travel by themselves. The quality tourists usually face difficulties with immigration and access to tourist attractions. However, both tourist groups are satisfied with the beauty of the attractions and their hotels. The study suggests some guidelines which may be useful to the government of Thailand or the tourism business owners to help develop tourism which meets the demands of the target tourist groups.

Keywords tourism management, Thai tourism, satisfaction, expectation, Chinese tourists, importance–performance analysis

The tourism industry has become a significant industry for the world economy and has rapidly developed to become a major product in international trade. Almost all countries in the world have been focusing on the tourism industry, and in many countries, the tourism industry is ranked among their most important industries. This is certainly true for Thailand. The Thailand tourism industry is crucial to the development, economy, and social stability of the

country. Foreign tourists have played a major role in the development of the Thai economy. The number of foreign tourists has increased by 91.41% from 1997 to 2006, generating 118.49% more revenue for the country (Office of Tourism Development [OTD], 2008). The government of Thailand consistently had a policy to promote tourism because it has become the most significant source of foreign currency. The tourism industry around the world has been targeting Chinese

tourists. This is due to the fact that the number of Chinese tourists travelling to many different countries are very high as a result of the Chinese government's policy to promote tourism among its citizens. In the past, the Chinese government was very strict with its people regarding overseas travel. However, in the past two decades, the Chinese government has started to allow its citizens to travel outside the country. In 1983, the Chinese government started to initiate and launch a policy called Approved Destination Status (ADS). ADS is a scheme to allow Chinese citizens to travel abroad to destinations approved by the government. In the early stages of the policy launch, there were not many countries in the approved list. Subsequently, more countries have been included in the list (CNTA, 2008). This policy aims to encourage Chinese people to visit their relatives in nearby countries, to take pleasure trips to escape from their boring routines, to enhance their experiences, to gain new knowledge from travelling, as well as to promote a quality lifestyle among its new wealthy generation (UNWTO, 2013a). In addition, the increasing number of Chinese tourists is due to the continuous economic growth. There is a rise in middle class that can afford to consume more. According to the statistical data evidence reported in China Internet Watch (Fu, 2014), the number of Chinese tourists travelling overseas rose from 10 million in 2000 to 97 million in 2013 and 100 million in 2014. Mainland China has suddenly become the world's biggest tourism market. Moreover, Chinese tourists are well known as high potential buyers. They are on the top list of world shoppers. It was found that Chinese tourists had spent up to US\$102 billion in 2012 on shopping in foreign countries (UNWTO, 2013b).

Thailand is the travel destination that a large number of Chinese tourists like to visit because the country is located in a similar time zone to their country and flight times are short. Furthermore, Thailand has a shared historical and cultural background with Mainland China. In the past, many Chinese people immigrated to Thailand. The most influential source of information for decision-making when choosing a foreign destination is word of mouth among relatives and friends (Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013). Considering the number of tourists visiting Thailand, it can be concluded that the Chinese tourist market was growing

rapidly in the second half of 2009 and continued to grow quickly during 2010–2012 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013). While countries in Europe and the Americas are facing financial crises, the economic situation in China has been improving continuously. This is a great opportunity and challenge for Thailand tourism to aim at expanding the Chinese tourist market to compensate for the reduction in the European and American tourist markets.

The very large numbers of Chinese tourists coming to visit Thailand has generated increased revenue from Chinese tourists, which will help the economy in Thailand to recover faster. There are two kinds of Chinese tourists: general (denoting lower-income Chinese tourists) and quality (denoting higher-income Chinese tourists). According to the Tourism Authority, a large number of Chinese tourists coming to Thailand are the general Chinese tourists. However, although the general Chinese tourists are large in number they are less powerful in terms of spending, so they are not taken seriously. More attention is paid to adjusting marketing strategies to target high-end tourists (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013). Moreover, the level of income affects the demands to travel for both urban and rural residents. According to Yang, Liu, and Qi (2014), people who have a higher income will have higher demands to travel than people with lower incomes. The strategic plan of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, therefore, emphasizes high-end tourists, or quality Chinese tourists, to increase spending per trip by promoting tourism directly to the target group.

Since the Thai government has appointed Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) as the key agencies promoting Bangkok's tourism industry, it is necessary for them to have a thorough understanding of the needs of Chinese tourists while at the same time ensure that quality tourism products and services are available; that prices are reasonable; and that any marketing and communication initiative is efficient. The key to the perpetuation of Bangkok as a tourist destination is the quality of travel experience as evaluated from the satisfaction of the tourists themselves. Under this premise, the study examines the differences in expectations and satisfaction toward tourism services in Thailand between the two groups

of Chinese tourists. The findings from this research can be developed into a guideline for promoting tourism in Thailand among Chinese tourists in ways that meet their demands.

Customer Expectations in Tourism

According to the concept of products and services, Olson and Dover (1979) thought that customer expectations are an important driving motivation to generate quality services and customer satisfaction. Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, and Zeithaml (1993) believed that customers will form normative expectations about products and services that are of interest to them prior to their purchase or before using the services. They then evaluate whether the products and services meet their overall expectations by comparing the actual services they received with the expected services. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) clarified that customer expectations are variable but the quality of services is static. This means that the higher the expectations of service quality the customers have, the more they would feel that the quality of the services is lower than expected. Expectancy Disconfirmation Paradigm (EDP), a widely accepted concept about customer satisfaction, explains that customer satisfaction depends on disconfirmation between expectations before using the services/products and the actual efficiency of the performance outcome of the services/products. If the consumers make the comparison and see that the actual outcomes of services/products turn out to be better than what they expected, they will then feel satisfied with the services/products. Conversely, if the actual outcomes are lower than their expectations, they will feel dissatisfied (Weber, 1997). Therefore, if tourists have high expectations of tourism quality, they tend to lower the evaluation of the quality of the tourism. As reviewed earlier, it seems that expectations and motivation could be indicators for measuring the quality of tourism. Tourist expectations have a negative effect on perception of the tourism quality, whereas motivation has a positive effect. Consequently, tourism quality results from coherence between tourist expectations and the environment settings of the tour, provided via activities accommodating the needs of the tourists (Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011).

Customer Satisfaction in Tourism

The concept of customer satisfaction has received attention from business owners and marketers in various types of industry including tourism and service industries. This is due to the fact that tourist satisfaction is essential for gaining competitive advantage. It can promote customer loyalty towards the products and services and automatically generates word-of-mouth advertising in the future. Moreover, satisfaction assessment allows business owners to find out about issues causing tourists' dissatisfaction leading them to not revisit the destination (Duman & Kozak, 2009). Gaining tourists' satisfaction is not only beneficial for business owners but also favourable to government regulators and private investors who are interested in investing and developing high-quality tourism infrastructure (Song, Li, van der Veen, & Chen, 2011). Lee (2009) defined tourist satisfaction as the perception or positive feelings of a tourist toward participating in leisure activities and identifies a level of pleasure derived from those experiences. He also added that tourist satisfaction helps attract the same group of tourists to revisit or persuade a new group of tourists to choose to pay a visit. Smith, Costello, and Muenchen (2010) pointed out that tourist satisfaction is considered a criterion to assess business performance and outcome achievement as well.

Tourism products, including tourist attractions, tourism activities, and tour programmes, create tourist satisfaction which helps expand the market by encouraging tourists to provide a word-of-mouth recommendation. It will also stimulate more tourism spending and attract tourists to repurchase and reuse the services in the future (Oom do Valle, Correia, & Rebelo, 2008; Lee, 2009; Smith et al., 2010). Sotiriadis and van Zyl (2013) explained that word of mouth plays a crucial role in the tourism industry. Positive word-of-mouth comments will create tourist satisfaction and affect the decision-making process and tourist behaviour as well. Based on their study, indicators used to identify a level of satisfaction by which tourists may revisit include various attributes of a destination such as natural environment, local culture, services and facilities in the attraction, hotel services, and food services (Naidoo, Ramseook-Munhurrin, & Ladsawut, 2010).

Destination Attributes

“Destination” is a complicated term to define. Leiper (1995) primarily defined destination as a place where people pay a visit and stay for a while to experience the attributes of the place. However, Buhalis (2000) added that destination refers to a combination of tourism products and services that give various experiences to tourists. Nevertheless, the word destination is not used with places only. It also implies some other things. For example, cruises can also be a destination. It can then be concluded that a destination consists of various unique attributes.

Characteristics of attributes combined to be a destination are called “destination attributes.” Destination attributes can attract tourists in making a decision to visit and it is considered very important for marketing and advertising to generate popularity in the tourism market. Kim (2014) discussed the importance of examining destination attributes and stated that they are crucial factors in the decision-making process when comparing tourist attractions, and it is important to decide which of the destination attributes will complement the tourists’ needs and be beneficial to them. Destination attributes are important for image-building before and after their visit. Positive attributes in response to tourists’ needs will certainly create a favourable and memorable experience for the tourists. It will lead to a positive image of the destination and attract tourists to revisit or, as a result of word-of-mouth recommendations, invite new tourists to visit.

As tourism is a part of human behaviour, which includes using resources and having social interaction, involving the economy and the environment, its main goal is to conduct a business responding to tourist needs (Daugeliene & Brunndza, 2009). For that reason, developing destinations to make them attractive requires several components recognized as good attributes of a destination. Tourism destination is an integral part of the facilities and services in the tourism industry. It is similar to products and services in other industries with various dimensions of attributes (Hu & Ritchie, 1993).

In conclusion, destination attributes that satisfied tourists can stimulate more spending and attract the tourists to repurchase and reuse the services in the future (Oom do Valle et al., 2008). Meanwhile, tourist expectations are taken into account since they have a great impact on the evaluation of service quality in tourism. Therefore, the three variables comprising expectations, satisfaction, and destination attributes are the main focus in this study.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed the Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) developed by Martilla and James (1977) to analyse the data. This tool is used for marketing purposes to analyse product attributes for evaluating the performance of the product and the importance level of each attribute of the product, based on customers’ points of view. The analysis can be used for effective marketing development. A benefit of IPA is that it is an assessment tool which does not require complicated calculations, provides easy-to-understand analysis, and generates in-depth data in terms of marketing mix. The results of the analysis are useful for projecting the performance outcome for further development to be able to compete with others (Oh, 2001). The results of IPA analysis enable business owners to focus on areas in need of improvement or to identify areas in which budgets are overspent. Up to now, IPA has widespread acceptance in the hospitality and tourism research (Azzopardi & Nash, 2013; Deng, 2007; Murdy & Pike, 2012; Lai & Hitchcock, 2015). The methodology of IPA requires a two-dimensional graph representing customers’ expectations/priorities on the product, and consumer feedback about the performance of each attribute of the product. The quadrants are formed based on the grand mean. The results show a four-quadrant graph illustrating the value of each of the attributes. An example of the IPA matrix is presented in Figure 1.

| | | |
|------------|---|--|
| Importance | QUADRANT II <i>"Concentrate here"</i> High importance Low performance | QUADRANT I <i>"Keep up the good work"</i> High importance High performance |
| | QUADRANT III <i>"Low priority"</i> Low importance Low performance | QUADRANT IV <i>"Possible overkill"</i> Low importance High performance |
| | Performance | |

Figure 1. *Quadrants used in an Importance–Performance Analysis*

Source: Martilla and James (1977)

The attributes in each quadrant can be interpreted as follows:

Quadrant 1: “Keep up the good work” means that the business owner can respond to the needs of the consumers very well. The attributes in this quadrant are very important to consumers and they are considered to be major strengths for the business owner, offering a business advantage. The attributes in this quadrant are performing very well and it is encouraged to either keep up the good work or improve to achieve a better performance.

Quadrant 2: “Concentrate here” means that attributes in this quadrant are important to consumers but the business owner doesn’t respond quite sufficiently enough to the needs of the consumers. Therefore, urgent improvement is required. Any attributes in this quadrant are considered major weaknesses.

Quadrant 3: “Low priority” means services provided with respect to the attributes in this quadrant are not quite good enough and are not yet able to satisfy the consumers. However, the consumers do not give much importance to these attributes. The business owner can delay the service improvement of these attributes. Any attributes in this quadrant are considered minor weaknesses.

Quadrant 4: “Possible overkill” means too many resources are unnecessarily invested in the attributes in this quadrant. Consumers do not give importance

to these attributes. Any attribute in this quadrant is considered a minor strength of the business owner.

In this study, IPA is applied to analyse the expectations and satisfaction of the Chinese general and quality tourists toward Thai destination attributes.

Sample

The study employed a target sample of Chinese tourists during their visit to Thailand in February 2013. Chinese New Year is in February; it is when Chinese people have a long holiday. So, they like to travel abroad, and many of them choose to visit Thailand. The sample size of 820 was calculated based on Cochran formula since the number of population was not known and the satisfaction variable was quantitative (Cochran, 1963). However, questionnaires were distributed more than the calculated sample at 870. Using purposive sampling, 870 general and quality Chinese tourist groups were selected from five cities: Shanghai, Beijing, Kunming, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. The reason to select tourists from these five cities was because the Tourism Authority of Thailand has set up offices there to promote tourism in Thailand to Chinese people, and the majority of the tourists come from these five cities. It is hoped that the findings from the study will be very useful for those offices in setting up a plan to motivate the travel of Chinese tourists to Thailand.

To identify the criteria used to divide Chinese tourists into two groups, I referred to Mao, Hsieh, Hu, and Jiang (2000) and Gale and Huang (2007), who classified Chinese people based on their income in their economic research reports concerning revenue policy. Both of the reports indicate that the low-income Chinese population are those who earn less than 10,000 yuan per month, and those who earn a medium level of income are those who earn 10,000 yuan or higher per month. To make it consistent with the literature above, this study used 10,000 yuan per month as a cut-off criterion to categorize the Chinese tourists into two groups. Those tourists who have an average income of less than 10,000 yuan per month were classified as general tourists and those who have average income of 10,000 yuan or more per month were grouped as quality tourists.

Measures

I constructed the questionnaire based on a review of literature about destination attributes and Chinese tourist behaviours found in many countries. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part contains questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists (such as gender, age, education, and income), and their travel behaviour characteristics (such as travelling methods, number of visits, duration of each stay, information channels, and number of accompanied people). The second part contains questions about their priorities and satisfaction with the Thai tourism industry. There are 35 questions in total divided into five categories which include six about attraction, six about amenities, five about accommodation, five about activities, five about accessibility, four about aesthetics, and four about acceptability. Respondents were asked to indicate their answers ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

I first created the questionnaire in Thai. Five experts in tourism were asked to use the index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) to validate the content of the questionnaire. Their feedback was then calculated. The results of the IOC for each of the questions were between 0.70–1.00, which indicates that the questionnaire contains content validity. Next, a pilot test was conducted with 50 Chinese tourists at Suwannaphum Airport to test the reliability of the questionnaire. The data from the pilot test was analysed based on Cronbach's alpha coefficients using SPSS 16.0; Cronbach's alpha values for each dimension of tourism attribute resulted in a range from 0.79 to 0.91. This indicated that the scale of the questionnaire has considerable reliability (Cronbach's alpha value for each dimension was greater than 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). Having found the reliability of both versions in the acceptable range, the questionnaire was subsequently put to actual use. The questionnaire was then translated into Chinese. To ensure that the translation was correct, a back translation was conducted by one Chinese university teacher.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted in February 2013 at the departure gates for flights from Bangkok to the five main cities of China (Shanghai, Beijing, Kunming, Guangzhou, and Chengdu) at the Suvarnabhumi Airport. Five students who can communicate well in Chinese were hired to help as interviewers under my supervision. Data collection was conducted during both the days and nights according to the flight schedules which were available for seven days a week. To ensure that the data was collected from every group of Chinese tourists, the objectives of the study were explained to the tourists before interviewing them. All respondents were recruited on a voluntary and anonymous basis. Respondents were given a small gift of appreciation from Thailand to thank them for their cooperation. Finally, 870 questionnaire copies in total were collected. After checking each of the obtained questionnaire copies, only 848 copies, equal to 97.5%, were completed and useable.

Results

Respondents' Profile

All of the 848 completed questionnaire copies were analysed using SPSS 16.0 Descriptive Statistics. The demographic profiles of the Chinese tourists are as follows: the respondent sample included 41.5% males and 58.5% females. The largest age group was 21–30 years and represented 38.3% of the respondents. The second largest age group was 31–40 years and presented 33.4% of the respondents. Most of the respondents (65.1%) had a college or university level education. Most of the respondents (65.1%) were married. When asked about their occupation, 26.9% of the respondents indicated that they were business owners and 26.7% selected "employees," 14.3% were government officials, while the rest were students. Similar numbers of tourists came from each of the five main cities in China (Shanghai, Beijing, Kunming, Guangzhou, and Chengdu). 435 tourists (51.3%) were identified as general Chinese tourists while 413 tourists (48.7%) were classified as quality Chinese tourists.

When a comparison was made between the travel behaviour characteristics of the general Chinese tourists and the quality Chinese tourists, it was found that 50% of the general Chinese tourists were visiting Thailand for the first time. More than 60% of the quality Chinese tourists had visited Thailand more than once. Of the general Chinese tourists, 46.2% would stay in Thailand for 1–3 days, while 50% of the quality Chinese tourists would stay in Thailand for 4–6 days. The majority of the general Chinese tourists (66.7%) came to Thailand by joining a tour organized by a travel agency while 50% of the quality Chinese tourists also came to Thailand by joining a tour organized by a travel agency, and the other 50% were independent tourists who travelled to Thailand by themselves.

Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA)

This study aims to find out the expectations (priorities) and satisfaction toward performance

of tourism management in Thailand by comparing opinions of the general Chinese tourists and the quality Chinese tourists. IPA was applied to analyse the data. The analysis is as follows:

a. Importance–Performance Analysis of the General Chinese Tourists’ Opinions

The results of the expectations (priorities) and satisfaction toward performance of all of the 35 tourism attributes collected from the 435 tourists were calculated to find the mean scores of Importance and Performance as presented in Table 1, with the grand mean score of importance equal to 4.22 and the grand mean score of performance equal to 4.03. The analysis of IPA of the general Chinese tourists is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Levels of Importance of the Tourism Attributes in Thailand and Opinions on the Actual Performance of the General Chinese Tourists

| | Attributes | Importance | | Performance | | Evaluation |
|-----------------------|--|------------|------|-------------|------|---------------------------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | |
| (1) Attraction | | | | | | |
| 1. | Beautiful scenery | 4.40 | 0.89 | 4.13 | 0.97 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 2. | Different weather conditions from their home country | 4.14 | 0.96 | 3.91 | 1.03 | Q3: Low priority |
| 3. | Cleanliness | 4.26 | 0.85 | 4.02 | 0.90 | Q2: Concentrate here |
| 4. | Quality services | 4.23 | 0.86 | 4.04 | 0.89 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 5. | Cultural value | 4.13 | 0.93 | 4.05 | 0.93 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 6. | Interesting community lifestyles | 4.17 | 0.93 | 4.07 | 0.91 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| (2) Amenities | | | | | | |
| 7. | Convenient immigration process | 4.29 | 0.90 | 4.04 | 0.98 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 8. | Adequate infrastructure standards | 4.16 | 0.90 | 3.97 | 0.96 | Q3: Low priority |
| 9. | Convenient transport connections | 4.15 | 0.90 | 3.91 | 0.99 | Q3: Low priority |
| 10. | Safety | 4.19 | 0.89 | 4.04 | 0.90 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 11. | Sufficient information centers | 4.12 | 0.92 | 3.98 | 0.90 | Q3: Low priority |

Table 1 continued...

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------|------|------|------|---------------------------|
| 12. | Sufficient healthcare services | 4.17 | 0.91 | 4.03 | 0.93 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| (3) Accommodation | | | | | | |
| 13. | Safe | 4.35 | 0.87 | 4.14 | 0.86 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 14. | Clean | 4.26 | 0.85 | 4.11 | 0.86 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 15. | Convenient | 4.14 | 0.93 | 4.01 | 0.94 | Q3: Low priority |
| 16. | Good services | 4.16 | 0.95 | 4.03 | 0.92 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 17. | Worth the money | 4.16 | 0.97 | 4.06 | 0.97 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| (4) Activities | | | | | | |
| 18. | Reflect Thainess | 4.34 | 0.86 | 4.11 | 0.86 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 19. | Exotic | 4.13 | 0.95 | 3.97 | 0.92 | Q3: Low priority |
| 20. | Variety | 4.17 | 0.91 | 3.98 | 0.94 | Q3: Low priority |
| 21. | Worth the money | 4.11 | 0.98 | 3.97 | 0.98 | Q3: Low priority |
| 22. | Provide unique experience from others | 4.16 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 1.04 | Q3: Low priority |
| (5) Accessibility | | | | | | |
| 23. | Easy access to attractions | 4.37 | 0.90 | 4.06 | 0.91 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 24. | Safe and convenient transport | 4.33 | 0.83 | 4.06 | 0.87 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 25. | Sufficient and convenient parking | 4.20 | 0.89 | 4.01 | 0.94 | Q3: Low priority |
| 26. | Smooth flowing traffic | 4.20 | 0.88 | 3.92 | 0.92 | Q3: Low priority |
| 27. | Clear road signs | 4.18 | 0.87 | 3.92 | 0.95 | Q3: Low priority |
| (6) Aesthetics | | | | | | |
| 28. | Unique tourism resources | 4.28 | 0.82 | 4.11 | 0.81 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 29. | Unblemished and natural tourism resources | 4.23 | 0.85 | 4.05 | 0.86 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 30. | Reflect Thainess | 4.20 | 0.84 | 4.09 | 0.85 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 31. | Portray different lifestyles | 4.19 | 0.89 | 4.07 | 0.87 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| (7) Acceptability | | | | | | |
| 32. | Local people are friendly. | 4.35 | 0.84 | 4.14 | 0.86 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 33. | Local people are helpful. | 4.21 | 0.86 | 4.03 | 0.87 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 34. | Local service staffs are welcoming. | 4.19 | 0.87 | 4.00 | 0.93 | Q3: Low priority |
| 35. | Local tourism service sectors welcome tourists. | 4.21 | 0.91 | 4.06 | 0.99 | Q4: Possible overkill |

To interpret the findings of the IPA matrix, most of the researchers put more focus on attributes in Q1 and Q2 than Q3 and Q4 because they are attributes that tourists give more importance to respectively (Murdy & Pike, 2012). The evaluation results of the IPA of tourism in Thailand according to the opinions

of the general Chinese tourists show that there are 11 attributes in Q1 and only one attribute is found in Q2. The 11 attributes found in Q1 are as follows: beautiful scenery of attraction, good services of attraction, convenient immigration process, safe accommodation, clean accommodation, unique activities, conveniently

accessible tourist attractions, safe/quick/convenient transportation, unique tourism resources, unblemished tourism resources, and friendly local people. The only attribute found in Q2 is clean attraction. To conclude, the general Chinese tourists focus on attractions, and they are satisfied with beautiful attractions in Thailand, unique natural tourism resources, and clean and safe hotels. The weakness is cleanliness of the attractions, which needs improvement.

The IPA evaluation graph of the general tourist group is presented in Figure 2.

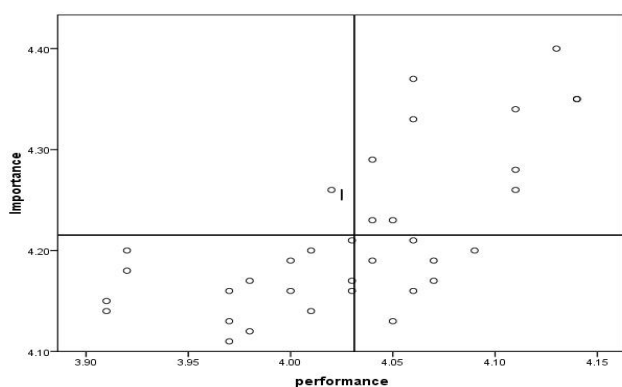


Figure 2. IPA toward tourism attributes due to the general Chinese tourists' opinions.

b. Importance–Performance Analysis of the Quality Chinese Tourists' Opinions

According to the data collected from 413 tourists, the mean scores of the IPA of the 35 attributes are presented in Table 2. The grand mean of the importance analysis is 4.02 and the grand mean of the performance analysis is 3.88. The analysis of IPA of the quality Chinese tourists is presented in Table 2.

The evaluation results of the IPA according to the opinions of the quality Chinese tourists show that there are 14 attributes in Q1 and there are five attributes in Q2. The details are as follows:

Q1 contains 14 attributes. The only attribute concerning attractions is about beautiful scenery. Five attributes are about accommodation (safe, clean and convenient hotels, good service, and being worth the money). Two attributes are about activities (unique tourism activities and being worth the money). Three attributes under the aesthetics category are unique tourism resources, authenticity, and “Thai-ness.” Three attributes belong to the acceptability category and include friendly local people, good services from tourism business sectors, and local staff. To sum up, the quality that the Chinese tourists put emphasis on

Table 2

Levels of Importance of the Tourism Attributes in Thailand and Opinions on the Actual Performance of the Quality Chinese Tourists

| Attributes | Importance | | Performance | | Evaluation |
|---|------------|------|-------------|------|---------------------------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | |
| (1) Attraction | | | | | |
| 1. Beautiful scenery | 4.10 | 1.04 | 3.92 | 1.11 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 2. Different weather conditions from their home country | 3.92 | 1.02 | 3.80 | 1.01 | Q3: Low priority |
| 3. Cleanliness | 3.93 | 1.05 | 3.85 | 1.01 | Q3: Low priority |
| 4. Quality services | 3.99 | 1.06 | 3.92 | 1.01 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 5. Cultural value | 4.00 | 1.04 | 3.97 | 1.00 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 6. Interesting community lifestyles | 4.01 | 1.05 | 3.96 | 1.00 | Q4: Possible overkill |
| (2) Amenities | | | | | |
| 7. Convenient immigration process | 3.97 | 1.08 | 3.85 | 1.04 | Q3: Low priority |
| 8. Adequate infrastructure standards | 3.89 | 1.02 | 3.74 | 1.01 | Q3: Low priority |

Table 2 continued...

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------|-------|------|------|---------------------------|
| 9. | Convenient transport connections | 3.89 | 1.04 | 3.76 | 1.01 | Q3: Low priority |
| 10. | Safety | 3.95 | 1.04 | 3.85 | 1.01 | Q3: Low priority |
| 11. | Sufficient information centers | 3.95 | 1.01 | 3.82 | 1.03 | Q3: Low priority |
| 12. | Sufficient healthcare services | 3.99 | 1.02 | 3.85 | 1.01 | Q3: Low priority |
| (3) Accommodation | | | | | | |
| 13. | Safe | 4.11 | 1.02 | 3.95 | 1.00 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 14. | Clean | 4.10 | 0.97 | 3.98 | 0.96 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 15. | Convenient | 4.12 | 0.99 | 4.04 | 0.96 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 16. | Good services | 4.12 | 0.99 | 3.98 | 0.99 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 17. | Worth the money | 4.07 | 1.03 | 4.00 | 1.02 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| (4) Activities | | | | | | |
| 18. | Reflect Thainess | 4.07 | 1.05 | 3.93 | 1.03 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 19. | Exotic | 4.01 | 0.97 | 3.79 | 1.03 | Q3: Low priority |
| 20. | Variety | 4.02 | 1.01 | 3.85 | 1.01 | Q2: Concentrate here |
| 21. | Worth the money | 4.03 | 1.03 | 3.92 | 1.03 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 22. | Provide unique experience from others | 4.05 | 1.00 | 3.88 | 1.01 | Q2: Concentrate here |
| (5) Accessibility | | | | | | |
| 23. | Easy access to attractions | 4.02 | 1.05 | 3.86 | 1.05 | Q2: Concentrate here |
| 24. | Safe and convenient transport | 4.00 | 1.03 | 3.81 | 1.02 | Q3: Low priority |
| 25. | Sufficient and convenient parking | 3.89 | 1.08 | 3.76 | 1.08 | Q3: Low priority |
| 26. | Smooth flowing traffic | 3.96 | 1.02 | 3.78 | 1.07 | Q3: Low priority |
| 27. | Clear road signs | 3.96 | 1.02 | 3.84 | 1.02 | Q3: Low priority |
| (6) Aesthetics | | | | | | |
| 28. | Unique tourism resources | 4.09 | 1.03 | 3.92 | 1.03 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 29. | Unblemished and natural tourism resources | 4.04 | 1.03 | 3.92 | 1.02 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 30. | Reflect Thainess | 4.05 | 1.05 | 3.90 | 1.01 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 31. | Portray different lifestyles | 4.08 | 1.01 | 3.88 | 1.01 | Q2: Concentrate here |
| (7) Acceptability | | | | | | |
| 32. | Local people are friendly. | 4.05 | 1.08 | 3.93 | 1.04 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 33. | Local people are helpful. | 4.03 | 1.001 | 3.82 | 1.04 | Q2: Concentrate here |
| 34. | Local service staff are welcoming. | 4.08 | 1.01 | 3.91 | 1.03 | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 35. | Local tourism service sectors welcome tourists. | 4.09 | 1.07 | 3.93 | 1.08 | Q1: Keep up the good work |

is accommodation. They were satisfied with good hotel services in Thailand, which were well worth the money. Moreover, they were also happy with beautiful attractions and natural unique tourism resources. Yet, there was still room for improvement in terms of the variety and uniqueness of activities. The graph showing the evaluation results of the IPA from the quality Chinese tourists is presented in Figure 3.

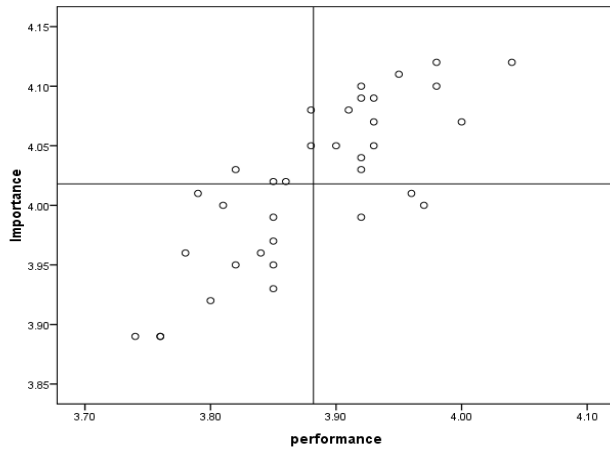


Figure 3. The IPA tourism attributes due to the opinions of the quality Chinese tourists.

c. Comparing the Importance–Performance Analysis Between the General and Quality Chinese Tourists

Table 3 presents the results of the IPA of tourism attributes in Thailand comparing the general Chinese tourists and the quality Chinese tourists, which reveal both similarities and differences of opinion.

Regarding attraction, both tourist groups emphasize scenery of the attractions and show satisfaction toward beautiful scenery of attractions in Thailand. Neither of the groups focuses on cultural value. Both of the groups agree that the attractions are not clean. The general Chinese tourists give importance to cleanliness of the attractions while the quality Chinese tourists do not.

For amenities, both tourist groups are not quite satisfied with amenities in Thailand, but they do not

give much importance to this attribute. A difference of opinion lies in convenience in immigration process. The general Chinese tourists think that it is convenient whereas the quality Chinese tourists think that it is not quite as convenient as it should be.

In addition, the quality Chinese tourists put a premium on accommodation and think that accommodation in Thailand is safe, clean, provides good services, and is worth the money. However, they do not give much importance to services provided in accommodation.

The results concerning activities show that both tourist groups emphasize uniqueness of the tourism activities and both are satisfied with the uniqueness of the tourism activities in Thailand. The general Chinese tourists do not give much importance to tourism activities while the quality Chinese tourists do the opposite. They think that the activities lack variety and do not create new unique experiences.

Regarding accessibility, both tourist groups do not quite focus on parking, road signs, and the standards of traffic routes. They put emphasis on convenient accessibility of attractions. The general Chinese tourists think that accessibility of attractions in Thailand is convenient whereas the quality Chinese tourists think that the accessibility of the attractions should be improved.

In terms of aesthetics, both tourist groups are satisfied with the Thai uniqueness (Thai-ness) and authenticity of the attractions. The quality Chinese tourists give importance to aesthetic aspects of the attractions, and they are satisfied with them. However, while the quality Chinese tourists think that Thailand is still lacking tourism reflecting unique Thai lifestyles, the general Chinese tourists do not give much importance to this attribute.

For acceptability of the local people, both of the tourist groups think that the local people are friendly, but they still do not provide enough assistance to tourists. The quality Chinese tourists give importance to the welcome of the local service staff and local tourism service sectors, while the general Chinese tourists do not give priority to these attributes.

Table 3
Comparing IPA Between General and Quality Chinese Tourists

| Attribute | General Chinese Tourist | Quality Chinese Tourist |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (1) Attraction | | |
| 1. Beautiful scenery | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 2. Different weather conditions from their home country | Q3: Low priority | Q3: Low priority |
| 3. Cleanliness | Q2: Concentrate here | Q3: Low priority |
| 4. Quality services | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 5. Cultural value | Q4: Possible overkill | Q4: Possible overkill |
| 6. Interesting community lifestyles | Q4: Possible overkill | Q4: Possible overkill |
| (2) Amenities | | |
| 7. Convenient immigration process | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q3: Low priority |
| 8. Adequate infrastructure standards | Q3: Low priority | Q3: Low priority |
| 9. Convenient transport connections | Q3: Low priority | Q3: Low priority |
| 10. Safety | Q4: Possible overkill | Q3: Low priority |
| 11. Sufficient information centers | Q3: Low priority | Q3: Low priority |
| 12. Sufficient healthcare services | Q4: Possible overkill | Q3: Low priority |
| (3) Accommodation | | |
| 13. Safe | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 14. Clean | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 15. Convenient | Q3: Low priority | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 16. Good services | Q4: Possible overkill | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 17. Worth the money | Q4: Possible overkill | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| (4) Activities | | |
| 18. Reflect Thainess | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 19. Exotic | Q3: Low priority | Q3: Low priority |
| 20. Variety | Q3: Low priority | Q2: Concentrate here |
| 21. Worth the money | Q3: Low priority | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 22. Provide unique experience from others | Q3: Low priority | Q2: Concentrate here |
| (5) Accessibility | | |
| 23. Easy access to attractions | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q2: Concentrate here |
| 24. Safe and convenient transport | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q3: Low priority |
| 25. Sufficient and convenient parking | Q3: Low priority | Q3: Low priority |
| 26. Smooth flowing traffic | Q3: Low priority | Q3: Low priority |
| 27. Clear road signs | Q3: Low priority | Q3: Low priority |
| (6) Aesthetics | | |
| 28. Unique tourism resources | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 29. Unblemished and natural tourism resources | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 30. Reflect Thainess | Q4: Possible overkill | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 31. Portray different lifestyles | Q4: Possible overkill | Q2: Concentrate here |

Table 3 continued...

| (7) Acceptability | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 32. | Local people are friendly. | Q1: Keep up the good work | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 33. | Local people are helpful. | Q4: Possible overkill | Q2: Concentrate here |
| 34. | Local service staff are welcoming. | Q3: Low priority | Q1: Keep up the good work |
| 35. | Local tourism service sectors welcome tourists. | Q4: Possible overkill | Q1: Keep up the good work |

Discussion

The main focus of the study is to compare the expectations and satisfaction of the two groups of Chinese tourists (general Chinese tourists and quality Chinese tourists) toward tourism products and services in Thailand. Therefore, the findings will be discussed by comparing their opinions toward Thai destination attributes.

Concerning convenience of immigration process, the general Chinese tourists think that the immigration process is already good enough. Their opinions are in contrast to the opinions of the quality Chinese tourists. The reason behind the difference in opinions is that the general Chinese tourists used a travel agency. The staff of the travel agencies assisted them during the process of immigration. On the contrary, most of the quality Chinese tourists had made their own arrangements, facing difficulty during the process of immigration due to communication obstacles. Therefore, the Tourism Authority of Thailand should improve facilitation of the immigration process for tourists who visit the country by themselves, by providing officials who can speak Chinese well and are polite with a service-orientated mind to assist the tourists. Providing good services to tourists during their trips will attract more groups of tourists (Bryant & Walker, 2011).

Regarding accommodation, the quality Chinese tourists emphasize accommodation and are satisfied with the accommodation in Thailand, while the general Chinese tourists do not give much importance to the accommodation. This is probably because most of the quality Chinese tourists came to visit Thailand independently. They tended to select high-standard hotels as their accommodation. On the other hand, the general Chinese tourists using travel agencies did not put much expectation on services and worthiness

because their accommodation had already been included in the price of the travel programme of the travel agencies. In this regard, attention should be paid to the quality Chinese tourists to make them feel more satisfied with the accommodation. In conclusion, Thailand should maintain the standard of accommodation since satisfaction is a key factor that attracts tourists to revisit Thailand (Oom do Valle et al., 2008; Lee, 2009; Smith et al., 2010).

The quality Chinese tourists give importance to tourism activities. They think that tourism activities in Thailand still lack variety and do not quite provide new unique experiences. A reason might be that this type of tourist has visited Thailand at least once before. That is a reason why they want more different activities from the ones they experienced before. These findings are found to be in accordance with what Andriotis, Agiomirgianakis, and Mihiotis (2007) stated, in that activities should provide a new experience different from daily life routines. Moreover, another finding reveals that the quality Chinese tourists think that Thailand is still lacking tourism that presents local Thai unique lifestyles. This may be because they want to experience a different lifestyle from what they are accustomed to. According to Kim (2014), tourism activities should be beneficial to both the body and mind of the tourists. Therefore, providing more variety of tourism activities by focusing on activities based on Thai local lifestyles is deemed important. This suggestion can be supported by Jang and Feng (2007), who studied the goals of trips to revisit destinations by comparing short, medium, and long revisiting trips. They found out that satisfaction with previous trips creates an impression and is a crucial factor in generating a short revisiting trip only. On the

other hand, it is novelty-seeking or seeking of new experiences that are prime factors driving people to make medium-length revisiting trips.

In terms of accessibility, the general Chinese tourists think that accessibility of attractions in Thailand is convenient while the quality Chinese tourists disagree. This is probably because most of the general Chinese tourists came with tour agencies who took them to the attractions. In contrast, the quality Chinese tourists coming to visit Thailand by themselves always found it difficult to access the attractions. They faced difficulty in finding transport and in understanding road signs. The finding suggests that road signs, brochures, and public relations magazines should be written in Chinese language or local means of transportation to tourism destinations should be developed. In addition, they may have higher expectations for tourism services. These should be very carefully considered since these expectations have an effect on their perceived quality of tourism (Lee et al., 2011), and satisfaction is used as a criterion to assess the success of business (Smith et al., 2010). Getting feedback from the tourists is very important for people concerned in terms of service improvement. It is a key competitive advantage over rival destinations.

The next discussion is focused on hospitality. With respect to acceptability of the local people, both of the tourist groups agree that the local people are friendly; nevertheless, they still do not provide enough assistance to tourists. This is probably due to the language barrier: local Thai people cannot speak Chinese or English and do not understand what tourists want although they are willing to assist them. To improve the quality of tourism attractions, residents in each area are deemed one of the key components; they play an active role in giving services. Moreover, the tourists may have high expectations of using services. As Weber (1997) suggests, when the actual outcomes are lower than their expectations, they will feel dissatisfied. In other words, normative expectations about services are formed prior to using the services (Boulding et al., 1993). Expectations and satisfaction could be indicators for measuring the quality of tourism of Thailand. They are also influential upon foreign tourists' decision to revisit and recommend Thailand to others.

Conclusion

The main finding indicated that the two groups of Chinese tourists, classified based on their income, had different travel characteristics and opinions. For instance, Chinese tourists with higher income preferred to arrange their own travel and stay in high-standard hotels, so they had high expectations about the service they would get. This group required a more variety of tourism activities. As such, there are more chances for this group to have less satisfaction. Based on the findings, several implications can be discussed as follows. Firstly, regarding the implications to the tourism industry in general, there should be more cooperation among countries in ASEAN in terms of doing PR about tourist attractions or providing information on holidays or long weekends. Secondly, concerning the implications to the tourism management of Thailand, income of the tourists is one factor to consider when preparing guidelines for promoting tourism in Thailand. This is because the two groups of Chinese tourists were different in their expectation and satisfaction. Setting up a policy and plan to manage tourism services should depend on demands of the tourists. For instance, if Thailand wants to gain more quality tourists, government organizations and business owners should always be developing and providing a greater variety of tourism activities by focusing on activities based on Thai local lifestyles. Also, it is important for government organizations and business owners to provide staff who can communicate in Chinese to offer assistance to tourists. In addition, to facilitate the Chinese tourists, who are increasing more and more in numbers, Thailand should provide signs at tourist attractions and leaflets advising how to travel to attractions written in Chinese language.

As shown in my data collection procedure, data were collected from Chinese tourists from only five cities, that is, Shanghai, Beijing, Kunming, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. This indicates that the study did not include all relevant respondents and this limits the generalizability of the findings. The tourists who came from other cities and were not considered in this study might have different expectations and satisfaction levels toward Thai destination attributes.

There are several limitations in the study. The first limitation concerns the destination attributes that were used to compare the tourists' expectations and satisfaction, which included seven categories: attraction, amenities, accommodation, activities, accessibility, aesthetics, and acceptability. It may be a good idea to include more categories related to tourism, such as food and beverages or shopping. Another limitation is that the current research employed income as a criterion to classify the types of tourists. The tourists who have average income of less than 10,000 yuan per month were classified as the general Chinese tourists and those with average income of 10,000 yuan or more per month were classified as the quality Chinese tourists. Therefore, in future studies, it is possible to use other factors such as age to separate two groups since teenaged Chinese tourists differ from elderly Chinese tourists in terms of tourism behaviours. Teenagers have more ability in using social networking media, so they can find more information using the Internet. As a result, they tend to manage their own travel, such as reserving accommodation online, and find new destinations from sources such as blogs. Lastly, the method used to collect data was limited to only quantitative method. To gain more detail and assure the demand in tourism, an interview should be further conducted with the group of quality Chinese tourists.

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