

The Relationship between Gastronomy and Community Development: a case study of culinary experiences offered in Bang Nampheung Floating Market, Prapadaeng District, Samut Prakarn*

ความเชื่อมโยงระหว่างท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหารกับการท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชนในประเทศไทย
จากกรณีศึกษาประสบการณ์อาหารในตลาดน้ำบางน้ำผึ้ง อำเภอพระประแดง
จังหวัดสมุทรปราการ

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Abstract

This article examines the role of food experiences in generating development in community tourism initiatives in Thailand by studying Bang Nampheung Floating Market, located in Prapadaeng district, Samut Prakarn. It aims to discern how locals participate in shaping gastronomic experiences in the traditional markets and discuss the impacts of gastronomic offerings on rural development. Comprising a series of field trips to Bang Nampheung Floating Market, this research project interviewed local residents who were responsible for the delivery of culinary experiences in the traditional markets, as well as venue observations. The research findings revealed that local active participation is a key factor enabling food experiences to drive development outcomes. Culinary-related experiences were determined to be the outcomes of residents converting locally available natural and cultural resources, as well as utilizing individual knowledge and skills to create tourism commodities. Thus, the local production and promotion of gastronomic experiences in the traditional markets generated positive improvements within the communities, economically, socially and culturally, whilst it is important to address problems that come out of negative consequences on tourism. The research concludes by suggesting that community-based traditional markets can achieve sustainable development if the connection between the financial gains from tourism and local well-being is sustained in the long term.

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Keywords: historic markets, ancient markets, floating markets, touristic traditional markets, gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism, food tourism, community-based tourism, community development, local participation

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ศึกษาวิเคราะห์ประสบการณ์ทางอาหารในบริบทของการจัดการท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชนของประเทศไทยโดยมุ่งเน้นศึกษาตลาดน้ำบางน้ำผึ้งที่จัดตั้งและดำเนินงานโดยประชากรในชุมชนบทความมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อทำความเข้าใจบทบาทของชุมชนในการสร้างประสบการณ์อาหารในตลาดโบราณและอภิปรายบทบาทของประสบการณ์อาหารในการพัฒนาชุมชนชนบท ที่มาของบทความนี้มาจากงานวิจัยภาคสนามในตลาดน้ำบางน้ำผึ้ง ตั้งอยู่ที่อำเภอพระประแดง จังหวัดสมุทรปราการ โดยเก็บข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์ประชากรในตลาดที่มีส่วนร่วมในการสร้างสรรค์และส่งเสริมประสบการณ์อาหารและการสังเกตสถานที่ ผลการวิจัยสรุปได้ว่าการมีส่วนร่วมของคนในชุมชนโดยยึดผลประโยชน์ของชุมชนเป็นที่ตั้งเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญที่ผลักดันประสบการณ์อาหารเป็นตัวขับเคลื่อนการพัฒนาชุมชน ทั้งนี้ประสบการณ์อาหารในตลาดสะท้อนถึงการที่ประชากรในชุมชนนำทรัพยากรทางธรรมชาติและทางวัฒนธรรมในท้องถิ่น ตลอดจนความรู้และประสบการณ์ส่วนบุคคลมาพัฒนาสร้างสรรค์สินค้าทางการท่องเที่ยว บทบาทของคนในชุมชนในการผลิตและผลักดันสินค้าประสบการณ์อาหารเป็นบ่อเกิดการพัฒนาชุมชนทั้งในบริบททางด้านเศรษฐกิจ สังคมและวัฒนธรรม แต่ในขณะเดียวกันสามารถก่อให้เกิดผลกระทบในแง่ลบอันเนื่องมาจากการที่คนในชุมชนรับการท่องเที่ยวมาเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของชุมชน บทความนี้ได้เสนอแนะทั้งที่ว่าการดำเนินงานตลาดโบราณสามารถกลายเป็นการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนได้หากรายได้จากการท่องเที่ยวสามารถก่อให้เกิดผลดีต่อคุณภาพชีวิตของคนในชุมชนในระยะยาว

คำสำคัญ: ตลาดโบราณ, ตลาดน้ำ, ตลาดบก, ตลาดโบราณเพื่อการท่องเที่ยว, การท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหาร, การท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชน, การพัฒนาชนบท, การมีส่วนร่วมของคนในชุมชน

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the connection between gastronomic offerings at tourism destinations and the operations of community-based tourism. This study will examine this issue in the context of Thailand by focusing on food experiences offered in Bang Namphueng Floating Market—this market has been developed and promoted as a tourism destination by local residents. Additionally, this paper will also examine the role of local residents (from both the perspective of management team members and food traders) with regards to the creation and delivery of gastronomic experiences, as well as the extent to which these culinary-related offerings impact on the economic and social well-being of local residents. It should be noted that culinary or gastronomic experiences readily available in touristic traditional markets are not only limited to on-site purchases and consumption of

gastronomic items, but also involve activities that allow visitors to learn about local gastronomy.

Traditional markets or a nostalgic-themed market has been gaining popularity in Thailand, which is evident by the rapid growth of these types of establishment across the country within the last century (Cohen, 2016). Traditional markets are described as touristic shopping destinations inspired by the Thai trade culture and the way of life communities. Alternatively referred as ‘historic market’ or ‘old market’ (Buasorn, 2011), (TAT Contact Center-Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2009) categorises the traditional markets into two forms: the ground market or ‘talard bok’, where the market area is located on the ground, or a ‘floating market’ and ‘talard nam’, where the market is located on water—this is the more popular form of traditional markets (Batra, 2014). However, touristic traditional markets that exist in Thailand today did not only originate from the revival of ancient local markets or from the rebranding of old trade communities. Touristic traditional markets also developed as a result of the combination of different aspects of the ‘old-fashioned’ way of life with the desire to form an overarching theme determining tourist experiences in new market spaces.

The existence of touristic traditional markets in the 21st century is not an entirely new tourism trend in Thailand. In the 1960’s the Thai government promoted the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market as an attraction targeting outbound tourists wishing to experience a rural water-based trade community. However, the rise in popularity of traditional markets in the late 20th century was mainly driven by the growing nostalgic sensation among the Thai public, as evident by the growing range of businesses that incorporated aspects of the Thai ‘old-fashioned’ way of life into life. Thus, traditional markets appeared to satiate the domestic tourist demands to experience ‘good old times’ (Cohen, 2016; Suntikul, 2013). In addition, the traditional markets were being recognized as a driver for rural development (Phromkaewtor, 2010; Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2015; Wattanacharoensil & Sakdiyakorn, 2016). The contributions made by local residents has resulted in the transformation of a notable number of deserted trade areas into vibrant tourism-induced economic districts, for example, Samchuk district where Samchuk 100-Year Market is located, and Amphawa district, home to the Amphawa Floating Market.

There exists a firm connection between food and community development exists. The promotion of local gastronomy can successfully make positive economic contributions to the region (Scarpato, 2002; Sidali, Kastenholz, & Bianchi, 2013; Sims, 2009). As such, culinary tourism has been intentionally used as a tool to instigate development in a number of community-based tourism initiatives (Boyne, Williams, & Hall, 2002; Mulcahy, 2015). Culinary

tourism or gastronomic tourism can be defined as a category of tourism activities driven by tourists' interest in food and drinks (see Long 2004) or those which enable visitors to engage in local gastronomy (see Long 2004; Hall & Mitchell 2005). Culinary tourism is not only focused on food consumption but also embraces non-edible activities enabling tourists to learn local culture through food products, including but not limited to: visits to local food outlets, local-based eateries, culinary museums, food production premises, and gastronomy-related festivals, and active participations in gastronomic workshops. In some cases, culinary tourism adopts a theme, which entails grouping a series of gastronomic-related activities that catered for those tourists who are interested in discovering gastronomy in the local area, for example a food trail (Boyne et al., 2002).

Traditional markets are regarded as hubs of local and traditional cuisine, where one can find clusters of local-based culinary talents. For most of the touristic traditional markets located in Thailand, food stalls are the most predominant. Thus, sampling local cuisine has become the principal purpose of tourists' visits. In addition to purchasing food products, tourists often venture to traditional market to partake in meals thus, spending mealtime on site. In some traditional markets, certain activities, such as visits to fruits and vegetable orchards, visits to gastronomic villages, cooking workshops, and culinary demonstrations, are offered in an attempt to encourage visitors to learn more about the local cuisine. Therefore, culinary experiences generate a significant amount of economic activities in traditional markets. As such, in the case of community-based touristic traditional markets, culinary experiences can be considered to be catalyst generating betterment to the local area both socially and economically. What this means is that local residents in degenerated areas can earn an income by selling food items in traditional markets thus, enabling them to afford a better quality of life. Additionally, traditional markets can benefit from the presence of old-fashioned or local-based gastronomic items in preserving the local heritage at the community-level. While there are a number of academic studies investigating the role of touristic traditional markets in Thailand and community development (Peerapun, 2012), the connection between food experiences in the traditional markets and community development is still an area of research yet to be explored. It should be noted that food experiences in the traditional markets is rarely given academic attention, although food has been acknowledged as playing an important role in tourist experiences (Wattanacharoensil & Sakdiyakorn, 2016).

Therefore, in light of the foregoing, this paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining the role of food in generating community development in the context of tourism. Despite the growing interest in community-based tourism in Thailand over the last century

(Pookaiyudom, 2013), food experience is rarely an object of study in the context of community-based tourism. Rather, it is discussed in conjunction with other types of tourism experiences (Jewcharoensakul, 2013; Khaokhrueamuang, 2014) or seen as a complementary experience in the attraction (Karim & Chi, 2010; Sompong & Rampai, 2015). This paper discusses community-based tourism in the traditional markets by with the main emphasis being placed on local engagement in culinary resources.

2. Methodology

The research conducted for this paper employs a qualitative method for it attempts to understand a social phenomenon through the worldviews of different agents. It operates on the interpretivist epistemology which postulates that the social reality is constructed by human interpretations.

Adopting the ethnographical approach in the site, the research comprises a series of field trips to Bang Nampheung Floating Market during 2013-2014. The research period is divided into two phases (The first phase- February 2013 and the second phase- February 2014). The second round of the field research was intended to record changes that had occurred from the first round as well as gaining additional information from the field.

Both interview and observation were conducted on the premises. Semi-structured interview were used to interview two people from the administrative section, including the manager of the market and a vice-president of Bang Nampheung sub district, where they were asked about the history of the establishment, the current situation and future perspective of the market, culinary promotional strategy as well as their attitudes towards the performance of traditional culture. Eight traders were approached for interview to obtain information on how they viewed the construction and promotion of culinary products, with a focus on the process of transforming culture into commodities. In choosing participants, purposive sampling was used in selecting administrative officers for they possess specific information that was relevant to the study. As for traders, convenient sampling was used to approach food traders given limited amount of time allocated for the research project. Observation was made on the same day as the interview, aimed to obtain the usage of the market space, including the characteristics of culinary products sold (in relation to other types of culinary products), and the behaviour of food sellers. The data was recorded by either note-taking or photos.

Data acquired from both the interview and observation was transferred to the digital format and analysed in themes to address research questions including how involving agents contributes to the development of culinary experiences and the relationship between the production and sales of culinary experiences and the economic, social and cultural dimension of the local community.

According to Ritchie & Lewis (2003), It is difficult to demonstrates validity and reliability issues for research operating on interpretivist paradigm, for it is regarded that social actions cannot be comprehended under the same logic as the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012). Moreover the identity of the researcher is influential in generating results from the qualitative research (Okely, 1992). Nevertheless, the following measures were operated to ensure the credibility of the research outcome. The findings of the researcher were an outcome of data triangulation- data from interviews were used in conjunction with those of observation in producing results. When choosing participants, snowball sampling - the researcher identifying the participants from the recommendations of previous respondents. - was used to reduce the degree of bias. The obtained data was reread continuously when analysing data. Data obtained from the second round of the field researcher was used to compare with the themes generated from the first one.

3. Findings: The role of local communities in developing and delivering gastronomic experiences

Bang Nampheung Floating Market, is a touristic day floating market that was founded by Bang Nampheung Sub District Office in 2004. Its main purpose is to provide economic support for local residents, as well as Samut Prakarn and its vicinity by providing them trade opportunities to distribute locally grown fruits and vegetable corps. Bang Nampheung is situated in Prapadaeng district, where the waterborne market ‘Pak Klong Khet Rua Bin’ once existed. With a two-kilometre walkway, the market is located at the heart of Bang Nampheung sub-district. Some stalls are located on the bank of the Bang Nampheung canal, while others are located on the ground amongst the group of buildings of the sub-district office and traditional houses[†], and comprises of a total of 235 food stalls[‡]. Opened from 7am-3pm, the market receives up to 16,000 visitors every weekend[§].

[†] At the time when the research was conducted (2013-2014), there was no trader selling items from the boat due to the renovation of canal that was taken at that time.

[‡] Information as of 2014 (source: personal communication with the manager of Bang Nampheung Floating Market)

[§] Information as of 2014 (source: personal communication with the manager of Bang Nampheung Floating Market)

Gastronomic offerings in Bang Namphung Floating Market reflect the characteristics of community-based tourism, that is, outcomes of local active involvement throughout the gastronomic products value chains (Sims, 2009). What this means is that the management team and food traders work together in designing, producing and presenting gastronomic offerings, as well as manipulating other elements to complement visitors' food experiences in the traditional markets (Fox, 2007). Turning local markets into tourism destinations entice the locals to bring out a wide range of local resources available in the area, be it natural and cultural ones, as well as their own know-how in developing commodities and experiences for tourist visiting their market.

Local Agriculture

Agriculture has made a significant contribution in forming culinary experiences in Bang Namphung Floating Market. The market is located in Prapadaeng district, where fertile farmlands are abundant, yielding high-quality locally grown fruits and vegetables. Many traders utilize the term 'locally grown' to communicate to stall visitors the superior quality of local agricultural crops in terms of taste and freshness. Ready-to-eat food traders also highlight the taste of food items by referring to the quality of locally grown herbs that are used as ingredients in the preparation the dishes.

A strong linkage between local agriculture and food experiences is visible in the initiative of the touristic market, where gastronomic offerings are predicated within the community's endeavour to support local farming. According to interviews with both the two officers in Bang Namphung sub-district office, the market was initially founded to become a distribution channel for the community's agricultural surplus of farm products. Local residents were encouraged by the sub-district office to sell items produced from their farms at the market. While the sub-district office does not allow more than three traders selling identical prepared dishes, the same restriction does not apply to local fruits and vegetable, where traders are free to sell any type of produce.

It was found that healthy eating constitutes an important value in the promotional of agricultural products. This is confirmed by the manager of the market (2013, interview): 'heathy food items such as miengkam are our bestsellers... food products made from local herbs found in this area is the gastronomic highlight of the market'. Many traders deliberately labelled fruits and vegetables they sold as organic to capture the attention of health-crazed visitors, as well as inform them about the health-conscious cultivation processes employed to ensure that the fruits and vegetables were safer to eat in comparison to non-organic ones. In

addition, the medicinal quality of local agricultural products was used by some traders as part of their marketing strategy to convince visitors to purchase their products. A number of traders advertise the value of culinary items on the basis of medicinal substances contained in locally sourced ingredients. For example, Paitoon (personal communication 2014) identified his gac fruit juice as having cancer prevention properties.

Moreover, agricultural scenery is an attribute that intensifies visitors' culinary experiences. According to the manager (2013, interview), the presence of nature, derived from intensive farming and vast green space along waterways, is one of the most important selling points of the markets. Farm landscape is an environmental factor that can potentially create a pleasant ambience for those visitors who eat on site, as well as enhances the relationship between food and the local peasant way of life.

Local Way of Life

It was found that gastronomic experiences offered in Bang Nampheung Floating Market are to an extent influenced by the local way of life. Bang Nampheung Floating Market is part of the historic community of Prapadaeng, where certain aspects of the traditional way of life are still practiced among the older generations of the local residents. Certain parts of the market are located in a series of traditional Thai wooden houses along Bang Nampheung canal. There are a variety of old-fashioned desserts that were commonly consumed by people living in the central region of Thailand, some of which are lesser known among the younger generations. Moreover, Prapadaeng is known for the settlement of the Mons, an ethnic group originating from the southern part of Burma, who migrated to the Siamese territories during the 14th to 18th century, due to their conflict with the Burmese. Although most of the Mons settlers residing in the community no longer use Mon language and much of their culture has been assimilated with the Thais, certain aspects of Mon heritage can be traced, for example, the celebrations of Mon's New Year and 'takbatr-nampeung' ceremony, where the Mons worship monks by offering them honey. Additionally, Mon gastronomic culture is evident in the traditional markets. Mon-influenced dishes are sold by local traders and Mon festive food can be found during the New Year's festival and the 10th lunar calendar festivals.

Bang Nampheung sub-district office, aware of the presence of old-fashioned dishes in the traditional markets, sees the market as a hub of traditional gastronomy, featuring rare culinary products prepared by the locals. The market also, on an occasional basis, attracts media attention in terms of culinary diversity. As confirmed by the manager and some food

trader, some TV shows made visit certain food stalls to learn about the lesser known Thai sweets and traditional methods used in making those Thai desserts.

Local Know-How

It was found that local know-how, or knowledge and expertise possessed by local residents was reflected in the culinary offerings in Bang Nampheung Floating Market. A portion of food items offered in the markets came from family recipes that were passed down from generation to generation, as confirmed by a trader selling ‘platutomkem’ or sweet and salty grilled fish mackerel:

‘I learned the recipe from my granny and my mum when I was little. Everyone worked together. My granny was the chef and others were there to help. (Arpa, 2013, interview)’

Business opportunities provided by the traditional market also motivate the locals to develop culinary expertise in preparing traditional food. Some traders reported that they acquired culinary skills from attending culinary cooking classes. Trial and error is also a common method used among traders to develop their culinary skills and constantly improve the quality of food items to meet customers’ preferences. A number of traders stated that it took them a certain period of time to develop the right food recipes. Moreover, culinary experiences in the market are the result of local innovations. There are many variations of traditional dishes in the market. For instance, Baansuan stall in Bang Nampheung Floating Market use local herbs, such as kaffir lime, cilantro and pumpkin to add varieties to thongmuan or crispy egg pancake.

The management team of Bang Nampheung Floating Market has a policy to advocate local skills and expertise in developing food experiences by offering incentives to successful local traders. Bang Nampheung sub-district office work to promote certain culinary items in the traditional markets as specialities of the region by selecting certain food items sold by local traders as representatives of OTOP (One Tambon One Product Project)—an economic scheme established by the Thai government to stimulate the economy of at the regional scale by encouraging residents in each tambon (equivalent to district) across the country to produce commodities for sale based on locally available resources.

4. Findings: The contributions of culinary experiences on community development

The research found that local involvement in the traditional markets by participating in development and creation of culinary experiences generates positive economic, social and cultural contributions to the community.

Economic Contributions

The research demonstrated that community-based tourism initiatives could drive financial gains into the community, owing to the hands of local residents who act as food traders and members of the administration team of the site. Food experiences in Bang Nampheung Floating Market economically impacted local residents by becoming the community's alternative source of income (Iorio & Corsale, 2014). Many traders who did full-time job on weekdays, worked in the market stalls during the weekend as a supplemental form of income. Gastronomic experiences offered in the traditional markets also fostered improvements in the agricultural sector of the region (Veeck, Hallett IV, Che, & Veeck, 2016), as evident by the fact that Bang Nampheung Floating Market became a distribution channel for locally sourced farm products, as well as a platform for locals to communicate the value of agricultural products.

The traditional market also seeks to ensure that that locals are the genuine benefactors of tourism (Telfer & Wall, 2000). Policies and regulations were imposed by the sub-district office to secure the economic gain of the community. Only residents from Prapadaeng districts are allowed to rent stalls in the market. Traders are only permitted to sell food they prepared themselves using locally sourced ingredients. They are also required to attend regular meetings organised by the management team every fortnight to discuss managerial matters.

Nevertheless, the success of Bang Nampheung as a tourist attraction results in the imbalance between supply and demand of food commodities (Dwyer, 1989; Timms, 2006). Although this is not encouraged by the sub-district office, on an occasional basis, local traders are obliged to import food items because locally available food is not sufficient to meet growing tourist demands. At the time of the field research, the traditional market had in place a policy of not increasing the number of vending stalls, to avoid overcrowding. The sub-district office has a long waiting list of those traders wishing to take part in the market.

Social contributions

It was found that the sales of gastronomic items and activities positively contributed to the social aspects of the community (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Saleh, Hermawan, & Chozin, 2014). Local residents in the traditional markets can afford a better living thanks to the income generated from their food stalls. This is expressed by the following comment made by a trader.

‘By selling jaenglon^{**}, I got one house I can support one of my children till he finished the undergraduate level. The profit is satisfiable. I don’t know if my food is popular but it should be fine. Sometimes I give extra sticks to customers. Well, I don’t really care whether I will be at the top of the market... (Jarinee, 2013, interview)’

In addition, the traditional market provides pleasant working condition for the locals. For a number of elderly food traders interviewed, touristic traditional markets are opportunities for them to work not far from home and enable them to socialize with their peers.

Cultural Contributions

It was found that the food experiences in Bang Nampheung Floating Market contributed to the conservation of the traditional gastronomy of the community (Lowitt, 2012; Lyon, 2013). It advocated the preservation of traditional diets in the local area by means of commodification. The operation of food stalls in the traditional markets afforded an opportunity for local residents to sustain their family heritage by converting family recipes into food items for sale (Montanari & Staniscia, 2009). Also, thanks to tourism, young locals begin taking an interest in learning their family diets and the community’s gastronomy. It should be noted that gastronomic offerings in the traditional markets are not only about preserving old-fashioned gastronomy but rather about reviving old culinary traditions and combining them with contemporary trends (Kim, 2015).

Gastronomic experiences and activities available in Bang Nampheung Floating Market also contributed to the enhancement of communication regarding the gastronomic identity of the region (Sims, 2009). The availability of organic fruits and vegetables in the market corresponded with the initiatives of Bang Nampheung sub-district office to identify their gastronomic character with locally grown agricultural products. Besides, certain products in the market were assigned as culinary specialties of the region.

^{**} grilled fish curry cake

5. Discussion & conclusion

In summary, gastronomy is a contributing factor to the success of community-based tourism initiatives in the context of Bang Namphueung Floating Market. The locals play a part as tourism operators, experience developers and primary benefactors. The local takes a leading role in transforming locally available culinary resources into tourism assets with the intention of improving the livelihood of the community (Chaisaengprateep, 2013). Food is symbolic to the rise of local power in tourism development initiatives and indicative of their efforts to define cultural heritage by themselves (Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, & Chute, 2010).

The sales and presentation of gastronomic offerings resulted in positive economic, social and cultural contributions to the community. Nevertheless, the rapid success in tourism operation leads to the deprivation of local resources, resulting in the importation of commodities from outside to satisfy the unexpected rise in tourist demand. To promote sustainable development, it is of crucial importance that the host can compromise financial gain with local benefits in the long term, whilst simultaneously being able to address any shortcomings derived from the practice of tourism.

Although the research conducted in the paper contains a series of short-term field trips within a certain period and is mainly based on the perspective of the researcher, it provides both tourism academics and practitioners with insights regarding understanding the extent to which culinary tourism is a driver of community development in the context of Thai tourism, since it focuses on local active involvement in culinary experiences. Further insights on the role of food and community development and the connection between gastronomic experiences and sustainable tourism development can be acquired by exploring tourists' assessment of food experiences in the traditional markets.

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