CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN RESTAURANT BUSINESS MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THAI RESTAURANTS IN SWEDEN
ความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมในการบริหารจัดการธุรกิจร้านอาหาร: กรณีศึกษา ร้านอาหารไทยในประเทศสวีเดน

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Abstracts

The research was the cultural diversity in restaurant business management. A case study of Thai restaurant in Sweden was the qualitative research that the aims were to study the barrier in cross culture to run Thai restaurant business in Sweden in the context of customs and culture. The researcher collected primary data from interview Thai entrepreneur who do Thai restaurant business in many cities in Sweden. Sampling group in this research was Thai entrepreneur doing Thai restaurant business in many cities in Sweden in different place at 8 areas by data analysis from interview, observing and recording

Research result found that running Thai restaurant business in Sweden was seen that it was the opportunity for Thai entrepreneur because this trend to be successful in business operation and there were many advantages in term of investment support; however, the barrier of cross culture caused business failure therefore Thai entrepreneur had to adjust norm and some Thai culture to optimize for maintaining Thai unique in competitive advantage in Thai restaurant business in Sweden and Thai entrepreneur should aware the important feature among Thais and Swede this the key to success of business for new entrepreneur to invest Thai restaurant business in Sweden.

Keywords: Cultural differences; Restaurant business management; Thai Restaurants in Sweden.

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัย เรื่องความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมในการบริหารจัดการธุรกิจร้านอาหาร: กรณีศึกษาร้านอาหาร
ไทยในประเทศสวีเดน เป็นงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อศึกษาอุปสรรคข้ามวัฒนธรรมในการดำเนิน
ธุรกิจร้านอาหารไทยในประเทศสวีเดนในบริบทของขนบธรรมเนียมและวัฒนธรรม โดยผู้วิจัยทำการเก็บข้อมูล
ปฐมภูมิจากการทำการสัมภาษณ์ ผู้ประกอบการสัญชาติไทยที่ทำธุรกิจร้านอาหารไทยในเมืองต่างๆในประเทศ
สวีเดน กลุ่มตัวอย่างในงานวิจัยนี้ คือ ผู้ประกอบการสัญชาติไทยที่ทำธุรกิจร้านอาหารไทยในเมืองต่างๆในประเทศ
สวีเดนในสถานที่แตกต่างกัน จำนวน 8 แห่ง โดยการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์ การสังเกต และการจด
บันทึก

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ในการดำเนินธุรกิจร้านอาหารไทยในประเทศสวีเดนถูกมองว่าเป็นโอกาสของ
ผู้ประกอบการไทย เนื่องจากมีแนวโน้มที่จะนำไปสู่การประสบความสำเร็จในการดำเนินธุรกิจ และมีข้อได้เปรียบ
หลายอย่างที่สนับสนุนการลงทุน อย่างไรก็ตามอุปสรรคข้ามวัฒนธรรมสามารถเป็นสาเหตุให้ธุรกิจประสบความ
ล้มเหลวได้ ดังนั้นผู้ประกอบการไทยต้องทำการปรับบรรทัดฐานและวัฒนธรรมของไทยบางอย่างตามความ
เหมาะสม เพื่อรักษาเอกลักษณ์ความเป็นไทยในการใช้เป็นข้อได้เปรียบทางการแข่งขันในธุรกิจร้านอาหารไทยใน
ตลาดสวีเดน และผู้ประกอบการไทยควรตระหนักถึงคุณลักษณะสำคัญระหว่างคนไทย และคนสวีเดนเสมือนเป็น
กุญแจสู่ความสำเร็จของธุรกิจสำหรับของผู้ประกอบการใหม่ๆที่ต้องการลงทุนธุรกิจร้านอาหารไทยในประเทศ
สวีเดน.

คำสำคัญ: ความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรม: การบริหารจัดการธุรกิจร้านอาหาร; ร้านอาหารไทยในสวีเดน

INTRODUCTION

Thai foods is unique and accepted by consumers worldwide because they are tasty and include healthy ingredients. Currently, more than 15,000 Thai restaurants are distributed worldwide (Choklamlers, 2016). Thai foods are also very popular in Sweden. However, some Thai restaurants conducting in Sweden failed. According to the statement " the single greatest barrier to business success is the one erected by culture" (Edward & Mildred, 1987, p. 54). The researcher supposes that lack of clear understanding about the different cross-cultural factors make these restaurants cannot overcome the barriers causing unsuccessful business. Thus, the researcher recognizes that the entrepreneurs have to consider the difference in cross cultural factors affecting their businesses when entering to the new international market.

The main purpose of this research is to understand and explain the cross cultural barriers in doing Thai restaurant business in Sweden in the context of cultures embedded in both Thailand and Sweden. The foundation of this research is based on the case study of Thai food restaurants in Sweden which this case study used as an empirical case the researcher have investigate cross cultural management by successful entrepreneurs. This case study has provided us with the principle to study the cultural differences between Thailand and Sweden and has certainly helped us in evaluating the cross cultural barriers for doing the Thai food restaurant business in Sweden. The researcher expects that the outcome of this research will give the useful information and practical recommendations in the future to the Thai entrepreneurs in Thailand, who are interesting in doing business in Sweden in order to seeking new opportunity or avoiding high competitive situation in Thailand today, and so on. They can understand the barriers and develop business plan to appropriate to Swedish culture for surviving their business in the Swedish market. Also, Thai government sector, Thailand Board of Investment (BOI) can use beneficial information apply to Thai Food industry.

The scope of this research has been limited within the boundary at the factors concerned for doing business in Sweden. The type of business that the researcher have chosen is the Thai restaurant business, which possessed by Thai owner. This has allowed the researcher to exactly measure the cultural differences between Thailand and

Sweden, so providing us with a neutral reflection of the whole culture seemed to be the significant barriers.

To answer the research question, the restaurant businesses as well as the Thai restaurants are focused as they are the research topic. Since this research is aimed to study Swedish and Thai culture, other national cultures than the group are excluded.

To further confine the study, the researcher could have only considered primary information retrieved from Thai restaurants locating in eight cities in Sweden consisting of Stockholm, Västerås, Eskiltuna, Uppsala, Goteborg, Malmo, Karlstad, and Umeo.

Thai Restaurant Business

Variety type of restaurants can be found easily in Thailand. Some restaurants opened 24 hours located in each downtown. The mostly found is street restaurants which is very popular and unique. Street- side restaurant appears everywhere in Thailand, especially in Bangkok, from the day till the night. Food stall and a number of tables are placed on the sidewalk. Noodle soups, Seafood and Thai fast food are popular dishes. In the evening, many drinks are served including beer and whisky. The price is cheaper due to the lower in the location's cost. The other types of restaurant are indoor air condition, royal Thai cooking, Thai fusion cuisine and artistic restaurant (Bangkok, Food city in Thailand, 2008).

Swedish Market

Sweden is an interesting country in the eyes of foreign investors nowadays. Due to the competitive *business cost, high labor quality, and high standard of infrastructures, many businessmen decide to* start their business in Swedish market. The lowest corporate income tax comparing to other EU countries is a good implement to attract the foreigner as well. The number tends to increase in every year. Sweden is ranked in 10th out of 43 countries in Europe and ranked in 21st out of 133 countries around the world where there are the most freedom in economic. (Index of economic freedom ranked by the Heritage Foundation Wall Street Journal, 2010) With an open attitude toward foreign investor, this score can obtain not difficultly.

Cross Cultural Management

Investments in the countries where there are the difference in national culture create the prominent opportunity to the firm. On the other hand, business failure can be also easily caused, if they neglect to understand. Culture cannot be ignored even it does not affect directly to the organization. Different in culture and environment reflects people to perform different in the interpretation process of repose in the similar situation (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

Culture contains of value and belief. First, value refer to "how the thing ought to be", the learning process usually take place in the childhood. For this reason, it is ingrained, slowly changed and affects directly to the social performance. By the way, how the things are in perception refer to the belief. Belief is used for little to forecast the behavior on the future (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

Culture involves how people understand their humanity and make sense of it. Cultural differences should be thought as a source of competitive advantage, they should not be thought as an obstacle in international managements (Hoecklin, 1994). Not understanding cultural differences can be important barriers to the implementation and success of a business project (Lane, Distefano & Maznevski, 1995).

The conceptual framework was based on existing knowledge and theoretical perspectives from critical literature review. The conceptual framework has been developed to explain cross-cultural barriers that might occur in doing Thai restaurant business in Sweden, including the solutions that could overcome these cross-cultural barriers. Accordingly, the researcher have used primary data to test the validity and to support the conceptual framework in answering the research problem.

The differences in national culture in the organization have 6 main dimensions namely power distance, individualism versus collectivism, Masculinity and femininity, the avoidance of uncertainty and long vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2011). This study, however focuses only five dimension according to Hofstede's work in year 2001

Power distance

In situation of large power distance, the role of the subordinate and superior is considered unequal by tall hierarchical system. Subordinate's duties about what to do are structured. Organization does not decentralize the authority to the employee. Decision making power is finally at the upper. The wide range in the salary between top management and the bottom usually happen. Boss represents visible sign in the

place where this system is popular such as France. The relationship between the higher ups and lower downs intensively consists of emotion (Hofstede, 1991).

Conversely, subordinate and superior consider equal in small power distance circumstances. The flat hierarchical set up for the convenience to divide work. The roles are changeable, positions are fluctuated. Decentralization is most particles. Also, there is small range in the salary system. Superior can be accessible easily. For making the decision, ideas from everybody are brainstorm in order to have the best solution (Hofstede, 1991).

Individualism and Collectivism

Individualism and Collectivism refer to the perspective of people when they distinguish themselves, also including having a relationship with others in society which reflects to the business perception (Hill, 2007).

In collectivist cultures people are probable to have more collectivist cognitive elements when they give importance to social situations; in individualistic culture people are probable to have more personal constructs (Triandis, 1995).

Masculinity and femininity

These values concern the difference between male and female in many aspects. Male socialization has a greater emphasis on work goals, achievement motivation and self-reliance, as contrasting to socialization of women emphasizes nurturance and responsibility which involve personal goals including friendly atmosphere, good relationship with boss and other workers (Hoecklin, 1994).

Uncertainty avoidance

In high uncertainty avoidance society people have the lack of tolerance for ambiguity and the requirement for formal rules. This measurement evaluates the level that people in a society feel threatened by and attempt to avoid ambiguous circumstances. They may set up more formal rules, reject unusual ideas and behavior, and accept the opportunity of absolute truths and the accomplishment of unchallengeable knowledge (Hoecklin, 1994).

Long vs. Short-term orientation

Hofstede (2001) suggested that In Long-term orientation society, the people is based on persistence, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, thrift, having a sense of shame. Whereas, In Short-term orientation society the people are based on the steadiness and stability, protecting your face, respect or tradition, and reciprocation of greeting, favors and gifts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Samples and data collection

Participants in this study were 8 Thai individuals running Thai restaurant businesses in eight cities in Sweden consisting of Stockholm, Västerås, Eskiltuna, Uppsala, Goteborg, Malmo, Karlstad, and Umeo in 2016. The data collected through this method was non- numerical and unquantified. The researcher have started by directly asking respondents to attend a focus group interview. After the researcher have scheduled a focus group interview, the respondents have been asked the questions, in that way allowing them to prepare themselves. The reasons that the researcher have chosen focus group interviews are caused by the descriptive nature of problem of this study and the researcher would like to endow an inclusive overview of the present circumstance. Also focus group interviews are not time- consuming and able to collect data collection quickly. Nevertheless, there is a drawback in conducting focus group interviews which occasionally could not collect sensitive and critical information.

Quality of Research Material

The main portion of this research is on the foundation of the research work of Hofstede, who is still famous along with the scholarly figures belong to his field. His research work is consist of a combination of analysis and holds findings totally supported by the evidence gathering from a large scale survey. The well- known articles has been retrieved to support his arguments, therefore this research has been enhanced a quality element.

Research Validity

The researcher have designed interview questions to persuade respondents to feel convenient while answering interview questions. The researcher have expected a descriptive answer from respondents, so open-ended questions have been used. The interview questions have not been used the closed-ended questions. For the reason that different respondents may have different ideas, the semi-structured interview allows the researchers to adjust questions consequently to develop the quality of interview data.

Although this study is based on a small-sample size, so it does not expresses

the opinions from other entrepreneurs entering same industry. Nevertheless, in this study the researcher have attempted to give the reader inclusive information about the research problem, so it help them determine about transferability themselves.

CONCLUSION

Power distance at Thai restaurants in Sweden

According to the interview, three respondents expressed that each their restaurant had their own manager. These managers cannot make the decision by themselves in the essential issue; they have to wait for the approval from the owner, for example, in case of employment, the managers cannot decide to hire employees by themselves (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). In this case, they refers that the order is transmit in hierarchical flowchart. They have their roles as final authority. As the Swedish employees are not accustomed with this system which they are controlled by their manager and owner, they may perform against the hierarchical role in the restaurant and then make the owner upset, for example, in case that when they perform without waiting approval from the owner etc. They can be punished by the owner such as in case of cutting their bonus etc. So, it can make them unpleased.

Furthermore, according to the interview, three respondents expressed that the employees in their restaurants had an equal authority. Swedish employees could make the decision by themselves, for example, in the case that the customer ordered the foods or drinks which was not in Menu, they could provide it and also think about the suitable price immediately. Although Thai employees could do the same way like those Swedish employees', Thai employees, however, fear to make a decision without approval (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). In this case these respondents apply equality at workplace.

Moreover, according to the interview, two respondents expressed that most of successful marketing strategies were created by their own idea because they supposed that employee working at restaurant did not have the knowledge and only needed the ideas arose from the owners. Swedish employees, however, sometimes attempt to suggest their marketing strategy (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). For this case, it represents that Thai owners desire social esteem and admiration from their employees, so they quite adopt their ideas.

Individualism and Collectivism at Thai restaurants in Sweden

According to the interview, four respondents expressed that although there were people who had better profiles, she

preferred to position the family's members to be the employee (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). In this case, its recruitment gives the explanation of the unimportant of specialized knowledge that employees bring in Thai society. It is contradictory with the Swedish value or it means all employees are not open to superior position.

According to the interview, two said that the mangers of her restaurants are appointed through the polls of employees. The most senior workers are often to be considered first by Thai employees (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). In this case, it reflects the decision based on group custom.

Moreover, according to the interview, two respondents expressed that they did not prefer to expand their branch or change current restaurant. However, if their family wanted to change anything, they will change (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). In this case, about approach to change, it reflects that the change in Thai restaurant is not based on individual benefits but change is not originated by group's benefits.

Masculine and feminine at Thai restaurants in Sweden

According to the interview, four respondents expressed that in recruitment process she emphasized a skill, working experience and status but she cared about gender in some case, for example, there were both Swedish males and females who wanted to apply for the driver position at the restaurant but she preferred to require males rather than females (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). For this case, the job like driver is perceived as male job in Thai society, whereas it is not perceived like that in Sweden. It represents that those Thais owners still hold their cultural perspective in the inequality between male and female, even though they are running business in the country that has the equality in genders like Sweden.

Uncertainty avoidance at Thai restaurants in Sweden

Formal rules

According to the interview, the five respondents express that they have told their Swedish employees that customer's payment has not been needed to be rigid all the time. For example case, the customer have to pay the food price which is 65 SEK but he has only 63 SEK, Thai cashiers have no problem for paying without full amount. However, in the similar case Swedish cashiers often assert to require the accurate payment from customers. Moreover, they also supposed that Thai customers often negotiated the food price. Moreover, she had told her employees that if her friends or parents came to her restaurants, they had to give the special service and price discount

them. Thai employees tried to serve specially them but Swedish employees still serviced them as other customers (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). For these cases, it illustrates that Swedish employees strictly hold the formal rule of payment but Thai employees hold the less formal rule.

Furthermore, according to the interview, three respondents expressed that Thai employees often were willing to do over time work rather than Swedish employees. After working hours, Swedish employees preferred to go out and enjoy themselves. The management conflict offer occurred when they assigns the additional roles of employees, Thai employees always accepted those roles but Swedish employees often refused those roles. (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). For this case, it reflects that Swedish employees work based on the job descriptions and working hours whereas Thai employees do not.

Punctuality

According to interview, all respondents expressed that Thai employees always arrived late to work rather than new Swedish employees. However, Swedish employees who work at the restaurant in the long time, they also always arrive late to work. She observed that Swedes simulate Thais behavior as employees who are late do not be heavily blinded over heavily. In spite of she actually expects all employees to work at punctual time equally (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). For this case, it refers to time and priorities of Thais and Swedes. The punctuality of two cultures is different. In Thai culture if Thais arrive on time within the hour, they have no reason to apologize but in Swedish attitude it is not just they are very late, but they do not even have the courtesy to apologize.

Long vs. Short-term orientation at Thai restaurants in Sweden

According to the interview, the all respondents supposed that when there was the discussion within the group and they did not accept some idea of her employee because they thought such idea was useless and hopeless, however, she still praised such idea but Swedes always said directly what they thought, so it made others not bold to offer their ideas or not confident themselves. Moreover, three respondents expressed that Swedish employees disrespect Thai owners and coworkers (Personal communication, March 16, 2016). For this case, it represents short- term orientation in Thai society but long-term orientation in Swedish society. It is the good manner to protect others embarrassment in Thai culture. Conversely, in Swedish culture it represents that Thais are dishonest and insincere.

DISCUSSION

The researcher have possibly written results relating to research problem based on this research. As aforementioned, the research problem was to study the cross cultural barriers for successfully running restaurant business in Sweden. This study can easily explain the difference between Thai and Swedish cultural characteristic as very significant by using Hofstede's cultural dimension theory.

There are many differences in national norm between Thailand and Sweden beginning form national greetings. Language is the primary barrier that every firm faced off. Swedes sometimes do not understand facial expressions and body language of Thai while conducting business. While Thai owners will need to learn Swedish language in order to communicate efficiently with Swedes. Swede's eating habits reflects to the meal's adaptation in each Thai restaurant. Thai entrepreneurs adapt not too much in order to sustain Thai uniqueness. Furthermore, different religions believed shape different national holidays which Thai entrepreneurs running business in Sweden have to follow. The Swede's unique characteristics which are personal space needed, tipping and gift given culture are different with Thai's but they are not the barriers in doing business.

As mentioned by Lane, Distefano and Maznevski (1995), not understanding cultural differences can be important barriers to the implementation and success of a business project. The culture and tradition can shape the national value and belief. Culture violation sometimes becomes the severe fault which causes the unaccepted and deprivation from the society so the entrepreneurs need to be conscious that there are many strict rules of etiquette. Especially, Thais who do business in Sweden should have more precision and punctuality, maintain their tolerance and change collective behavior. The only similarity between them is the value of masculine and feminine at Thai restaurant in Sweden where culture incorporate is based on some integration between the people and impacted by the national culture so, it affects Thai entrepreneurs in Sweden have more feministic characteristics more than in Thailand.

The knowledge in all dissimilarities between Thailand and Sweden helps Thai entrepreneurs to understand more on the nature of Swedish market and also have high

capacity to compete the rivals in the international market as well.

The researcher recommends that to guarantee successful management Thai entrepreneurs should carefully study and also follow Swedish cultures concerning doing restaurant business. They should understand difference national cultures and norms between Swede and Thai in order to maintain some and adapt some to suit Swedish environment as mentioned before. Maintaining the uniqueness of Thai cultures and norms should be based on the recognition that Thai restaurants in foreign country can play a role as the representative and hub in presenting what Thai norms and cultures are. For adaptation of Thai cultures and norms should be based on consideration point of tolerance in other national cultures and norms. Last but not least, the researcher recommend that all entrepreneurs should realize that the capital investment is not only the most important thing that should be considered but also the people from different cultural backgrounds should be considerate and thoughtful each other.

As the researcher can interview only eight respondents, therefore this research was very difficult for us to draw general conclusions from the few views. Further research covering more respondents or interviewees can make the authors more general and valid in drawing conclusion. Moreover, the research can be conducted based on various other cases from different backgrounds and can be added sixth cultural dimension in the analysis, therefore getting a more general and valid estimation. In addition, the researcher believe that there is some requirement to study the performance measures of the cross-cultural cooperation as there are no general variables that can be used to evaluate its correct performance. The study will certainly need a lot of quantitative analysis and measures, in other words, mixed method analysis, so it needs time-consuming and demands a lot of resources.

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