

การส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงอาหาร: โอกาสและความท้าทายของอาหารริมทางในภูเก็ต

Yan Yee Lee

นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี

คณะวิเทศศึกษา

มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตภูเก็ต

mansonlee.91@hotmail.com

รับบทความ: 23 มกราคม 2564

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ตอบรับบทความ: 15 มิถุนายน 2564

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเข้าใจความคาดหวังของเทศบาลในการจัดกิจกรรมส่งเสริมอาหารริมทางและผลกระทบของกิจกรรมการส่งเสริมอาหารริมทางในภูเก็ต ภูเก็ตได้รับการยอมรับจากองค์การการศึกษาวิทยาศาสตร์และวัฒนธรรมแห่งสหประชาชาติ (UNESCO) ในฐานะ "เมืองสร้างสรรค์ด้านวิทยาการอาหาร" ตั้งแต่ปีพ.ศ. 2558 หน่วยงานท้องถิ่นจัดกิจกรรมดังกล่าวเพื่อส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมอาหารและสนับสนุน การดำรงชีวิตของพ่อค้าแม่ค้า งานวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีศึกษาทางชาติพันธุ์วรรณาโดยการสังเกตอย่างมีส่วนร่วม การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก และการศึกษาจากกรณีศึกษา ผู้ให้ข้อมูลได้แก่พ่อค้าแม่ค้าริมทางจากตลาดนัดหรือถนนคนเดินในจังหวัดภูเก็ต

และตัวแทนจากหน่วยงานราชการของจังหวัดภูเก็ต ข้อมูลที่รวบรวมได้รับการตรวจสอบโดยการวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมและการวิเคราะห์เฉพาะเรื่อง ผลการวิจัยพบว่าเทศบาลภูเก็ตคาดว่าจะดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวด้วยการแนะนำเส้นทางการกินเกี่ยวกับอาหารท้องถิ่นของภูเก็ต แต่ให้ความสำคัญกับอาหารริมทางน้อยมาก นอกจากนี้พ่อค้าแม่ค้าไม่สามารถได้รับประโยชน์จากกิจกรรมการส่งเสริมการตลาดท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมอาหาร เนื่องจากมีเพียงบางกลุ่มที่ได้รับความนิยมหรือมีเงินทุนเท่านั้นที่ได้รับการคัดเลือกจากเทศบาลภูเก็ตให้เข้าร่วมกิจกรรมได้ อย่างไรก็ตามเทศบาลภูเก็ตมีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะใช้นโยบายสุขอนามัยอาหารเพื่อรักษาคุณภาพและความปลอดภัยของอาหารริมทางต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: อาหารริมทาง, การการตลาดท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมอาหาร, ภูเก็ต

Gastronomy Tourism Promotion: Opportunities and Challenges of Street Food in Phuket

Yan Yee Lee

Undergraduate student

Faculty of International Studies,

Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus

mansonlee.91@hotmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the expectations of government's promotional campaign of street food and impacts of the campaign on street food vendors in Phuket. Phuket is recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as "Creative City of Gastronomy" since 2015. The local government organises campaigns to promote street food in order to boost gastronomy tourism and also helps on livelihoods of street food vendors. This research is

conducted by ethnographic methods of participant observation, in-depth interview, and case studies examination. The informants included street food vendors from night markets or walking street in Phuket, and the representatives from the official authority of Phuket. Data collected was examined by discourse analysis and thematic analysis. The results reveal that the Phuket government expects to attract visitors by introducing a gastronomic route of Phuket local food with less attentive to street food. Besides, the street food vendors could not get advantages from the gastronomy tourism promotional campaigns due to the fact that participated vendors are selected by the Phuket government according to popularity and capital availability. However, the Phuket government intends to implement food hygiene and sanitation policies to maintain the quality and safety of street food.

Keywords: Street food, Gastronomy tourism, Phuket

Introduction

Phuket is the largest island of Thailand, which is located at the southern part of Thailand. It was wealthy with the natural resources of tin in the past, while now it becomes the top ten most visited destinations in the world and the only city of ASEAN that recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a “City of Gastronomy” since 2015 (UNESCO, 2019). The “City of Gastronomy” is defined as the city that engages in activities associated with “conservation, inheritance, and development of traditional culture, creation, and improvement of the gastronomic culture, various cultural festivals related to food” (UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, 2017, p. 4). The branding effort of UNESCO have brought Phuket a positive image of the city, able to protect and encourage place identity, as well as to support the food industry (Berg & Sevon, 2014).

Street food is interrelated with gastronomy tourism due to the fact of the close relationship between food, culture and tourism. Street food in Thailand represents the uniqueness of Thai culture which have attracted both locals and tourists to experience in exploring affordable food any places at one’s convenience. According to Wassana (2019), the government is

joining with the public and private sector¹ to organise the campaign of “Thailand Street Food Festival 2020”, while Phuket will be part of the festival by 30th and 31st May 2020. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (hereafter TAT) also added that, this campaign could boost gastronomy tourism, while also helps on the living of street food vendors. The promotional campaign of street food could improve the tourism sector as “food is the fourth component for attracting tourists and to increase their demand to travel apart from climate, accommodations, and scenery” (Hu & Ritchie, 1993). However, it is uncertain that if the promotional campaigns of street food that organized by the government would provide benefits and to support the livelihood of street food vendors. Therefore, it is evident to find out in-depth about the impacts of the related promotional campaigns of street food on the street food vendors in Phuket.

¹ Government Savings Bank (GSB): a state-owned bank, Wp Energy Plc: a Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET)- listed liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) trader, R-Haan Restaurants: two Thai restaurants which became the country's first two-Michelin-starred eateries in 2020, & Thailand Professional Qualification Institute: a public organization that develop workforce with professional qualification systems.

Research Objectives

This study was scrutinized to deal with the opportunities and challenges of street food in Phuket during gastronomy tourism promotion organised by the Phuket government. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 2.1 To understand the expectations of government’s promotional campaign of street food in Phuket,
- 2.2 To examine the impacts of promotional campaign of street food launched by the government in Phuket.

Literature Review

1. The Characteristics of Informal Sector

Even though the informal sector is crucial in most developing countries, such as Thailand, the activities are unmeasurable in the economy sector (Bank of Thailand, 2019). Chen (2012, p. 2) defined the informal sector as “small scale and unregistered economic activities”. According to Chalamwong and Meepien (2013, p. 7), “the informal sector is the largest and main economic sector in Thailand, generates approximately 70 percent of Gross Domestic Product”.

However, the informal workers lack of social protection and insecurity, if there is crisis happened or economic slowdown, the government is not able to provide benefits or protection to the informal sector as the informal workers are beyond the

protection, recognition and regulation of the government. The informal workers include of those who work on the streets or open areas, in the small shops, as well as the self-employed and home-based workers are part of the informal sector. Chen (2012) added that jobs in the informal sector likely increased during economic crisis based on Asian economic crisis during 1990s as it seemed like the only substitution for unemployment.

Sasiwimon (2011) states that the workers of informal sector increased due to the bias development of Thailand by focusing the policy of development in the main city and important provinces, such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen, which leads to the prevalence of informal sector. This leads to a gap between rural and urban areas in economic development, which induced people migrate to the regional centre province. In addition, Sasiwimon (2011) also mentions that those who work in the informal sector are normally uneducated and unqualified which caused them difficulty to work in formal sector. However, it might differ on each individual's labour market experiences and decisions, such as jobs security, wages, age composition, balance of responsibilities, physical and mental factors (Franck, 2016). The most visible informal workers in Thailand are street food vendors as street food becomes more prominent in Thai society nowadays. According to Khongtong et al. (2015), Thailand is ranked as one of the highest numbers of street vendors in Asia,

approximately 100,000 street vendors included the unauthorised areas (Bhowmik, 2005).

2. The Relationship between Street Food and Gastronomy

The main concern of this study is to explore the impacts of street food encountered in Phuket during gastronomy tourism promotion organized by the Phuket government. Hence, the concepts of street food and gastronomy are explained for a clearer understanding in this study.

Tinker (1997) defines street food as everyone can sell street food from day to night, and it is prepared partially or entirely in a quick mode with a unique style and type of street food depending on the cultures, landscape and climate. According to Makanukhrao (n.d.), Thailand is known as a country that can eat all the time for 24 hours, which the tourists are able to find and experience different food from day to night. Therefore, street food could be understood as food that can be consumed easily and conveniently right after the purchase, not necessarily to eat in a restaurant, it could be as simple as fried chicken, fried noodles, chicken rice, drinks like sugar cane juice, orange juice and etc.

Lilholt (2015, p. 4) mentions that “gastronomy involves discovering, tasting, experiencing, researching, understanding and writing about food preparation and the sensory qualities of human nutrition as a whole.” Nowadays, street food has become a new

trend as a necessity for the new generation of tourists or locals to seek for affordable dishes, discovering new places and approaching new tastes experiences which the activities mentioned are part of gastronomy (Privitera & Nesci, 2015). The factors that lead Phuket for the recognition of “City of Gastronomy” by UNESCO are “the city’s multi-cultural aspect, food act as major part of rituals and people’s lifestyles, unique cuisine and recipes that are passed on from generation to another” according to Phuket city mayor, Somjai Suwansupana (The Luxury Signature, 2016). Therefore, the connection between food, place and exploration actually offers a genuine gastronomic experience (Privitera & Nesci, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

1. Informal Business and Economic Growth

In regard in respect of informal economy, there are four different perspectives of theories that developed by scholars, which includes modernisation, dependency, neoliberalism, and structuralism (Yusuff, 2011).

Figure 1: Yusuff's (2021) perspective in informal economy



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Modernisation theory defines informal sector as “a remnant of traditional, pre-capitalist modes of production and subsistence strategies common to isolated rural people”. It could be understood as informal sectors are underdeveloped because they lack proper education, skills, and value-orientations, so it acquires modernisation to gear towards achievement.

The neoliberalism theory is described by De Soto (1989) that the informal sector could generate wealth and reduce costs, as well as potentially offering aids to developing countries. Meager et al. (1998) explains that informal sector is an important medium to sustain the livelihoods such as daily necessities. Weiss (1987) also describes that the development of informality would be required for the society which is not only existing during the emergence of crisis.

Informal sector has gradually become evident and one of the growing features of global economy. Even though informal economy is unregistered under the government, but it links naturally with the formal sector, as mentioned by Chen (2004), the informal economy is being identified progressively that it promotes economic growth and/or reduces poverty. Neoliberalism theory is applied in this study due to the fact that the contribution of street food in informal economy promotes the economic growth of Thailand corresponding to the Thai government expects the promotion of street food in Phuket could boost Gastronomy

Tourism, while at the same time creates an opportunity for the street food vendors to sustain their livelihood in order to support daily needs.

Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research which have been conducted since 20th December 2019 until 24th June 2020 in Phuket. The informants included street food vendors from night markets or walking street in Phuket, such as Chaofa Variety Weekend Market, Chillva Night Market, Sunday Walking Street and food market in front of female dormitory Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus. Representatives from the official authority of Phuket were also interviewed in order to understand the expectations or ideas of government side. This research mainly used the following ethnography methodology:

1. There were ten case studies conducted in this study which casual conversation and semi-structured interview were applied during data collection with the street food vendors. The informants of case studies were selected randomly during the data collection process. They were named under the pseudonym due to the confidential reason.
2. There were three in-depth interviews conducted in this study with the government officials from the Department of

Technical and Planning, Department of Public Health and Environment of Phuket City Municipality, Department of Marketing from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Phuket Office, and Department of Religious, Art and Cultural Promotion from Phuket Provincial Cultural Office. The government officials were selected deliberately for semi-structured interview in order to further understand the perspectives of government officials in Phuket during data collection.

Field notes were taken and voice recorder was used during the interview in both Thai language and English. All recorded data were transcript and translated from Thai language into English after the interviews. The data was analysed by discourse analysis method as it is used to analyse the social context in the communication during interview process while also examined the informants' day-to-day environment. Besides, thematic analysis was used to interpret the data in both explicit and implicit meaning from interview transcripts of all informants.

Results

1. Expectation of Government's Promotional Campaign of Street Food in Phuket

The officials from different departments of government in Phuket have a similar understanding towards Phuket gastronomy

that refers to the combination of food cultures that started since tin mining period are passed down through generations until now then becomes unique food culture which are distinctive as compared to other regions of Thailand.

The Phuket Provincial Cultural Office mainly supports campaigns or events by sharing local food knowledges and cooking demonstrations. The Phuket City Municipality mentioned that the promotional campaigns are able to create opportunity for the visitors, both Thai and foreigners to experience different kinds of street food. Vendors are selected to participate in the campaign or events based on the recognition of Michelin Guide rated restaurants in Phuket and popular food reviews by the public. Street food is included as part of the tourism promotional activity, but the usual street food vendors whom are certified for food quality and hygiene standard will not be able to participate the event without popularity and good reputation.

While the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Phuket Office shares that it mainly promotes tourism as a whole, does not emphasize on street food promotion only. However, the Phuket City Municipality shares that gastronomy tourism promotional campaign is supporting the livelihood of participated street food vendors, as narrated:

“The events held by the government has no charges, so the street food vendors do not need to pay for booth

rental. We might not know how much the vendors earn during the event, but as long as they finish selling their products, then it means that they do well in sales. At the same time, it means they get sufficient income to cover expenses, pay debt, pay house instalments and others. When their financial situation is good, then their quality of life gets better which actually helps their livelihood too.”

In the future, the Phuket City Municipality is going to develop Phuket gastronomic route and collaborate with the local community of Old Town Phuket in promoting Phuket gastronomy tourism, but street food is not included in the plan. However, the Phuket City Municipality aims to improve the street food hygiene and safety in the future for better food quality to the consumers. It is supposed that gastronomy tourism promotion shall include street food in the future plan owing to the fact that street food consumption in Phuket is part of the gastronomic experience.

2. Impacts of Gastronomy Tourism Promotion on Street Food Vendors

This research hypothesize that all street food vendors are poor and have little literacy due to the fact of low investment and little knowledge needed for street food vending. However, more than half of the informants are highly educated and graduated

with university degree. Some informants conduct street food vending as an additional income, while some informants operate street food business as primary income to have a better financial life. The investments of street food vendors differ according to their personal financial background. The popularity of street food vendors also distinct according to reviews of customers on social networks and within social groups. Therefore, each vendor in Phuket would have different point of views towards the issues of street food business.

The street food vendors in Phuket encounter issues such as competition, decline in sales and climate concern. Ms. Kelly who is selling fried food at Weekend Night Market, Phuket explains that competition occurs when consumers are able to order food online, as stated:

“We are selling fried chicken and fried potato chips, but now we have to compete with other foods that can be ordered online through Food Panda or Grab Food.”

This shows that other than more food options for the consumer at the selling area, there is additional competition between online food seller and street food vendors, because the advancement of technology eases people to order food from their location online.

The decline in sales might affect street food vendors being hard to sustain their livelihood. One of the street food

vendors shares that decline in sales due to reduced numbers of tourists and increase of ingredient price. Furthermore, Phuket has two main seasons, that are hot and rainy season which hot weather can cause a problem on food storage and rainy weather is a nuisance for selling street food outdoor.

Promotional campaigns of gastronomy tourism are perceived as unbeneficial, it is not accessible for every vendor as there are limited or selected vendors that can participate the events. Ms. Coco shares her opinion about the promotional campaign is ineffective to the street food vendors, as stated:

“Based on my selling experience, the promotional campaign could not help every street food vendor because only those well-known vendors that are recognised for high popularity by the public can join, but not for those usual street food vendors along the street or mobile vendors on tricycle, it is hard for them to join. I don’t think it helps because not every street food vendor gets benefits, maybe only Patong or Old Town Phuket, but other places could not join. Even if they can join, the fee for a booth is not worth when compare to the profit, for example, Phuket Old Town Festival, about 3 days and the fee for one booth is about 2,500 THB, so one day is about 800 THB, then the sales that could get, already paid for the rental fee.”

This shows that even there is promotional campaign, not all street food vendors are able to get benefit as there are limited vendors that can participate the events and some of the vendors might not be able to afford additional investment on booth rental cost. Besides, street food vendors assume that the promotional campaign cannot help them if the consumers reduce their expenses to save more on necessary options.

Furthermore, the future plan of street food vendors does not expect to include any assistance from the government which is assumed that they are able to survive by themselves. Mr. Roy shares his future plan of business expansion, as narrated:

“I would like to expand my business, because now I have family, so I have more burden. Other than Sunday Walking Street, I will also hire more people to sell at different locations.”

Mr. Roy has a plan to expand his street food business in order to gain more profits. Then the surplus is believed to help alleviating the burden of family expenses. It is assumed that the street food vendors do not need support from the government for a sustainable livelihood and financial security.

Conclusion

The relationship between street food and Phuket gastronomy is closely related. Street food is a cultural resource that has been

developed for gastronomy tourism. However, this study reveals that gastronomy tourism promotional campaigns are organised in a short period of time, which is not able to sustain livelihood of participated street food vendors. It appears that the Phuket government has an intention to modernise the street food vending sector by transforming it into formal sector that is monitored by the government with rules and regulations. However, the future plan of Phuket government is to set up a gastronomic route for the visitors to learn and gain experience from local food cooking process which does not include street food.

In this 21st century, neoliberalism emphasises the value of freedom and individual's view. The findings revealed that most of the street food vendors are university graduates and chose to work in street food vending as an alternative income or prefer to be self-employed due to flexibility of working time. Based on the findings, street food vendors in Phuket perceive that gastronomy tourism promotional campaigns do not benefit them as a result of limited opportunity of participation in the campaigns. Furthermore, the findings identified that street food vendors in Phuket strive to sustain their livelihood by themselves through street food business expansion without pursuing assistance from the Phuket government.

As a conclusion, the Phuket government derives benefit from the street food vendors to boost gastronomy tourism. Those who participate in the promotional campaigns are able to promote their food, which indicates a win-win situation for both government and limited street food vendors only. However, not all street food vendors in Phuket are beneficial through gastronomy promotional campaigns.

Lastly, the result of this study provides an insight for the government officials to make adjustment on conducting a better strategy to provide assistance to the street food vendors and promoting street food in gastronomy tourism promotional campaigns in the future. On the other hand, this study provides a new perspective towards street food vendors in informal sector which the vendors are no longer uneducated or poor but engaged in street food vending for flexibility and as an alternative income in neoliberalism during this 21st century.

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