Heritage Sites as the Negotiation between Tradition and Modernity: Case Studies of Chinese Diasporic Heritage Sites in Thailand

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Abstract

This paper studies how the existence of cultural heritage sites can be read as outcomes of the negotiation between the past and the present. When cultural heritage sites travel through time, many of them are changed or modified in line to the need of the current society. To establish their existence in the current society, traditional functions and values are made to compromise with the modern society. To illustrate this point, Chinese diasporic heritage sites is used as case studies. Based on the findings, the past-present negotiation results in the classification of the Chinese diasporic heritage sites into working heritage sites, documentary heritage sites, representative historical sites, and heritage sites under adaptive re-use. Also, it is possible to witness the process of the localization of diasporic culture, which occurs as the result of the cultural exchange between the Chinese and the Thai. Modifications of historic sites, both in terms of physical characteristics and functions, do not always signify the deterioration of tradition but rather a concomitant phenomenon of culture. It can be concluded that heritage sites can establish its existence not only due to its original and modified activities, but also the representative of the site. Heritage sites are witnesses of the past legacy that have been passed down to the present and the future generation.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Sites, Chinese Diaspora, Cultural Heritage Conservation

Introduction

This article explores the heritage sites created and used by Chinese diaspora, defined by migrants who, or whose ancestors, move away from their place of origin but still maintain cultural connection with their motherland (Safran, 1991).

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It argues that the diasporic heritage does not only reflects the ability of the Chinese diasporas to adapt their culture to the new home, but also the ability to negotiate their past with the present. Heritage sites that are related to Chinese diaspora have undergone certain changes when traveling through time. During the process, sites gradually embrace the current social need while attempting to maintain the traditional values. Cultural heritage sites that exist today are resulted from the synchronization between past and present elements.

Chinese is the world's fourth largest diaspora population, after India, Mexico and Russia (Theatlas, 2015). Thailand is an important hub of Chinese diaspora or overseas Chinese population. There are approximately 7.5 million Chinese diaspora, or overseas Chinese population in the country, accounting for 18.6 % of the total Chinese population across the world (Poston & Wong, 2016). In large cities, such as Bangkok and Phuket, the population of Chinese migrants reaches 70% of the total city's population (Callahan, 2003).

The history of Chinese migration to Thailand can be traced back to 13th century (Skinner, 1957). The majority Chinese diaspora migrated to Thailand in search for a better economic opportunity in Thailand (Bunnag, 2006). Some settled down in Thailand to flee from communism in mid-20th century (Siriphon, 2016). The more recent Chinese migration to Thailand took place in late 20th century. Well educated, these newcomers are found to work in tourism and education field or operate business in Thailand.

There exists evidence of reciprocal cultural interaction between Chinese diaspora and Thai people. Chinese migrants attempted to preserve their tradition when coming to Thailand (especially those concerning family, superstitious beliefs, and gastronomy). At the same time, they embraced Thai culture as part of their own, including Thai language (Bun & Tong, 2004), Thai names (Kanokpongchai, 2011), matriarchal culture (Bisalputra, 2003), and Thai religious belief (Pattranupravat, 2007), and also adopted culture of other ethnic group in Thailand-e.g. the conversion of Chinese diaspora in Taladnoi and Kudee Chin into Catholicism (Putimahtama, 2015). Some elements of Chinese diasporic culture enter the Thai society, including artistic expression (Dilokmanich, 1985), literature (Dilokmanich, 1985), food (Kanokpongchai, 2011; Sukhonratmethee, 2018), festivals-e.g. Chinese New Year, Chinese mid-autumn festival, Moon festival and Vegetarian festival widely celebrated in Thailand (Dinfa, 2014; Hua & Leepiyachart, 2016; Phetvaroon, 2016), customs-e.g. 'Hong bao' gift (Auethavornpipat, 2011). Overseas Chinese in Thailand developed

their unique identity by synthesizing both the motherland and the local culture. (Wonglaksanaphan, Tandikul, & Inpuntung, 2019). Moreover, Chinese migration contributes to the formation of unique cultural identity of Chinese diaspora, as witnessed in the way of life in Sino-Thai communities across the country.

There are historical sites that witness the history of Chinese settlement in Thailand. Since Thailand is a melting pot society, the use of these sites is not only confined among overseas Chinese but also the local Thai and other ethnic groups. For example, Chinese shrines become the moral comforter for residents in the community, regardless of their ethnic group. Chinese business venues in Chinatown are visited by both the diaspora and the locals. Chinese heritage sites can be classified according to the following characteristics:

1) Structure: This refers to building associated with the settlement of Chinese diaspora, for example, Chinese religious sites (such as shrines and temples) and residences (houses or townhouses), and commercial properties (serving as the business venue of Chinese diaspora). Most of these structures are designed according to traditional Chinese style.

2) Cultural Space: This refers to the area with the overseas Chinese settlement. They can be divided into 'Chinese quarters' - communities where overseas Chinese population predominates. 'Sino-Thai communities' are communities where Chinese diaspora live harmoniously with the Thais, which can either located in rural areas or urban area.

Several Chinese heritage sites form an integral part of the national heritage. A number of Chinese historical sites, such as Canton Shrine, Old buildings such as Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Bangkok Bank Sampeng branch in Bangkok, Tang Toh Kang goldsmith shop, etc. are listed by the Department of Fine Arts, Thailand's Ministry of Culture as national archeological sites (Poomsuthikul, 2012). There are Chinese heritage buildings that received the Architectural Conservation Awards from the Association of Siamese Architects (ASA), such as Wanglee House, Bangkok (1984); Hongyok House, Phuket (1987); the building of Peranakannitat Museum (old Standard Chartered Bank), Phuket (1989); Tang Toh Kang goldsmith shop, Bangkok (2000); A.Seng Gongsi grocery, Bangkok (2017), etc. The National Museum of Songkhla, located in a Sino-colonial manor (built in late 19th century), is now listed as the national archaeological site.

This paper discerns diasporic cultural heritage sites under the context of the negotiation between the past and the present. This will be an addition to the

academic literature on Chinese diaspora in Thailand. Despite a significant number of academic works focusing on Sino-Thai culture, little research has been conducted on historical sites related to this diasporic group from the operational perspective.

Literature Review: Cultural Heritage in terms of the Negotiation between Tradition and Modernity

UNESCO (2019) defines heritage as the 'legacy that we receive from the past, that we experience in the present and that we will pass on to future generations (Hewison, 1989). In this view, heritage is not merely about the revival of the past, in other words, the collection of the past memories, but rather the contemporary engagement with the past (Hems, 2006; Herbert, 1995). Many of what we perceive as the cultural legacy today are resulted from the adaptation of the past to suit the contemporary context (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). As Lowenthal (1998) postulates, heritage denotes the contemporary attempt to make sense of the past in order to appropriate them in the modern context. The term 'invention of tradition' coined by Hobsbawn & Ranger (1983) describes social phenomena in which past traditions are invented to serve a particular function in the present. This can be education, commercialization, social welfare, identification. In light of this, it can be said that heritage sites that exist today are resulted from the management of historical sites in order to compromise the past legacy with demands and needs in the present time.

The past-present relationship is reflected in the conceptualization of heritage conservation. Heritage conservation approaches vary according to the degree in which the past is conserved in the present time. In this view, measures to preserve heritage range from the preservation of the original condition of heritage condition and the adaptation of heritage for the contemporary use. Larkham (1995) points out heritage conservation can be divided into 'preservation'- the attempt to maintain the original stage of heritage sites and objects, 'conservation'- the adaptation of old buildings and sites for modern use, and 'exploitation'- the attempt to develop and recreate historical sites. Butcher-Younghans (1996) classifies historic houses according to conservation treatment: 'documentary historic houses'- houses being used to narrate the history of life in the community through available artefacts, 'representative historic house'- historic sites being modified to narrate the history in a particular period, and the 'aesthetic historic house'- houses being adapted to serve functions other than the original function. Similarly, Janssen et al. (2017) classifies

heritage conservation strategies in the context of public policy into 'preservation approach' - heritage reflecting the government's policy to maintain cultural heritage in the original version, 'conservation approach'- heritage being preserved to meet the objectives predefined in the public policy, and 'heritage approach'- heritage being preserved to generate sustainable development. With regards to intangible heritage conservation, Laing & Frost (2017) classifies the conservation of royal events into 'preservation'- the reproduction of the original rituals and traditions, 'adaptation'- the modification of tradition to suit the modern need.

Based on the studies stated above, the present condition of cultural heritage sites varies according to the degree in which they are oriented towards the past or the degree in which they are oriented towards the present. Some cultural heritage sites are more oriented to the past context such as historic sites that maintain its original physical appearance together with its traditional function, while others are oriented to the modern context such as cultural heritage sites whose function are completely modified to serve contemporary uses.

Research Methodology

This paper constitutes a document research. Using a variety of secondary sources, including academic journal articles, books, and online contents, it identifies conditions of Chinese diasporic heritage sites situated across Thailand and analyses them under the concept of the negotiation between the tradition and modernity.

To ensure the reliability of the secondary sources, journal articles, books and online contents used in this paper are those produced by well-known authors, publishers, and sites.

Findings: Heritage Sites as the Negotiation between Tradition and Modernity

There are many Chinese historic sites that survive in the present time. Being the representation of diasporic heritage, they do not only represent the historical past but also marks the continuity of the past in the present time. They serve as the identity marker for overseas Chinese people as well as form and integral part of the multicultural Thai society (Van Roy, 2017).

The investigation of Chinese diasporic heritage sites enables us to see that the condition of the sites can be shaped by how the site negotiate tradition with the demands in the contemporary society. The degree of presence of traditional elements and contemporary elements on the site plays an important part in defining

the function. Therefore, Chinese heritage sites can be divided into 1) working heritage sites, 2) documentary historic sites 3) representative historical sites, 4) heritage sites under adaptive reuse

Table 1 Classification of Heritage sites according to Tradition-Modernity tradition.

Type	Past-Present Negotiation	Description
1. Working Historic Sites	oriented towards the past	Historic sites that maintain the same function as in the past.
2. Documentary Heritage Sites	oriented towards the past/ compromise with the present usage	Historic sites that witness the past legacy. They are converted into museums where people can learn history by visiting the site.
3. Representative Historical Sites	Oriented towards the present	Sites that are turned into museums to narrate the history. The historical context presented in the premises is not necessary related to the site.
4. Heritage Sites under Adaptive Re-Use	Oriented towards the present	Sites that acquire a new function that are different from the original one.

1. Working Heritage Sites: There are many Chinese diasporic heritage sites that preserve the traditional function in the contemporary time. Among these are religious establishments, for example shrines and temples that are still active in the present time. Some Chinese shrines date back to Ayudhaya period, e. g. Leng Ju Kiang shrine in Patani (since 1574), Leng Buai Ia shrine in Bangkok (since 1658) and Gong Wu shrine in Bangkok (since 1736). Chinese shrines serve as moral comforter for Chinese migrants (Meepaan, 2006; Wongboonchainant, 2016). It is a venue where Chinese religious ceremonies are performed: god worship (Masathianwong, 2016), death-related rituals (Meepaan, 2006), blessing and fortune telling (Saelim & Wongkitrungruang, 2017), and shamanic rituals (Saelim & Wongkitrungruang, 2017).

There are Chinese manors that remain the family home, such as the traditional Chinese-style Wanglee House, Bangkok (constructed in 1881), Chinpracha House, Phuket (constructed in 1903), and Hongyok House, Phuket (constructed in 1930). In addition, there are several Chinese diasporic business establishments and foundations whose activities still continue in the present time, such as Tang Toh Kang goldsmith shop, Bangkok (since 1868), On Lok Yun café, Bangkok (since mid-20th century), Nguan Sun Zhong Herb shop, Phuket (since early 20th century). These historic commercial venues are not only recognized for its merchandise, but also for its historicity. They witness the preservation of traditional knowhow and the long history of Chinese diasporas' settlement of in Thailand.

Nevertheless, several working historical sites undergoes changes over time. Previously, shrines were the quasi-centers of Chinese diasporic community through being multifunctional space. They responded to different needs of Chinese diasporas including social function (social gathering venue, social welfare provider, education provider), cultural function (artistic expression venues) and economic function (trade area for street vendors). Modernization that started to occur in 1960s has diverted Chinese diaspora away from the site since they rather gather at shopping venues instead. At present, shrines mainly serve religious purposes and become touristic venues attended by tourists.

A number of Chinese manors, though remaining the family's private properties, are no longer inhabited by family members but became venues used for family gathering, as exemplified by Wanglee House (see Kwanmuang, 2017) and Hongyok House (Kaewkrajang, 2016).

2. Documentary Heritage Sites: They include overseas Chinese houses that are transformed into museums narrating the lives of people living in the premises. This can be exemplified by family homes that are no longer inhibited by people and hence the transformed into museums. 'Eng-Hok-Tok', a 200-year old Teochew-Hokkian house located near 'Chou-Sue-Kong' shrine (Taladnoi, Bangkok) that previously belonged to Tantiwechakul family was transformed into the museums enabling the public to learn about local lives (Springnews, 2017).

A number of Sino-Protuguese houses in Phuket are family homes. Once the size of family become bigger, members relocated from the property to a new home. Then, the houses were transformed into living museums narrating the lives of Hokkien Chinese in the city. For example, Hongyok House is turned into a museum attracting people interested in learning about the local lives (Hong Yok

House, 2007). 'Chinpracha House', a century old Sino-Portuguese house belonging to 'Tantiwanich' family (Chinese surname: Tan), narrates the history of overseas Chinese through utensils, photos, painting, architectural design and décor. The Sino-colonial House 'No. 88 on Krabi Road, Phuket', owned by traditional Ah-Pong dessert maker showcases the way of live of people living in the house through kitchen utensils (Strolling Along Ancient Quarter and Tell the Story of Muang Thong Kha, 2017). 'i46 Old Tow'n in Phuket, a house of Khun Nithes Jeenarak constructed in 1939, has been transformed into Peranakan house museum and café featuring Peranakan food and drink.

There are cultural landscapes that are promoted as living museum, defined by Naumova (2015) as historical sites which are made to look as if it is inhabited by people in the historical period. Many living museums related to Chinese diaspora are operated by residents in the community who turned run-down community into historically significant venues. This can be exemplified by Samchuk Hundred-Year Market (Suphanburi), Kao Hong Market (Suphanburi), Sak Ngaew Museum (Chonburi), Baan Chin Museum (Tak) which are now developed as museums that showcases the community history through people's way of life. Particularly, Samchuk Hundred-Year Market, comprising of a group of historic houses narrating the community through old utensils, received recognition from UNESCO in recognition of cultural heritage conservation.

3. Representative Historical Sites: Sites under these categories are museums narrating the lives of overseas Chinese. Usually, museums of this type are located in the structure or building within Chinese diasporic communities. They portrayed the history of the Chinese ethnic group, rather than information specific to the building where they are located. For example, 'Yaowaraj Heritage Centre' at Wat Trai Mit, is an establishment to narrate the settlement of Chinese descendants in Bangkok. 'Dragon Descendant Museum' in Suphanburi was constructed in 1996 to commemorate 20th anniversary of Thailand-China diplomatic relations, and showcases the history of Chinese migrations to Thailand alongside with the history of Mainland China (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020). 'Phuket Glass Plate Museum' in Phuket showcases the history of Phuket through photo plates owned by Lian-Ew studio founded by a Chinese photographer in 1933. 'Chinese-Thai Cultural Centre' in Udon Thani showcases the history of Chinese settlement in Udon Thani and Chinese art through its landscape architecture (Thailand Tourism Directory, 2020).

Several representative historical sites are old buildings that are transformed into community museums showcasing the way of life Chinese communities in general. 'Peranakannitat Museum Phuket Town' (founded in 2012) is located in a 20th century Sino-Portuguese building which once served as a branch of Standard Chartered Bank. The museum narrates the culture and tradition of Baba Nyonya people in Phuket. 'Phuket Taihua Museum', located in a building that was once a Hokkien Chinese school, is a museum showcasing the lives of Chinese migrants in Phuket and the history of Chinese education. 'Bang Neaw Museum', located in an old building Bang Neaw School, narrates the history of Chinese diaspora in Bang Neaw community, whose settlement can be traced back to 19th century.

There are open-air art galleries in Sino-Thai communities comprising murals that narrate the community's history. They can be exemplified by murals in Phuket downtown (Street Art Phuket 2016) and Talad Noi (Wichitnetisard & Jomwong, 2019). The street art, besides communicating the community history, embellishes the landscape of old community (Wichitnetisard & Jomwong, 2019). They follow the footstep of the street art project in Georgetown Penang, known for its success to rejuvenate the community (Sadatiseyedmahalleh et al., 2015).

Additionally, representative historical sites occur in the form of temporary exhibition. Sri Mahasamut Floating Museum (Bangkok) was a temporary exhibition (running between 15 November 2018-13 January 2019 at ICONSIAM shopping complex) narrating the history of Chino-Thai community in Thonburi district and the life of King Taksin the Great, a Sino-Thai King who relocated Thailand's capital city from Ayuthaya to Thonburi in 1767.

4. Heritage Sites under Adaptive Re-Use: There are Chinese historic sites that overtime acquire a function instead of the original one. Adaptive reuse is a conservation strategy enabling historical sites to survive by performing a new role which is completely different from the original one (Henderson, 2013).

The adaptive reuse in Chinese historical sites occurs in numerous forms, as follow:

4.1 Art Spaces: This refers to Chinese historical sites were transformed into artistic establishments. For example, Chinese-style building have been converted into contemporary art galleries, e. g. Phuket art and gallery, which is located in Phuket traditional Sino Portuguese building. Also, Chinese historical sites and Chinese cultural landscapes become filming locations for retro-film and drama depicting the lives of Chinese migrants, such as Kao Hong Market in Suphanburi

(Tourism Treasure, 2019).

4.2 Shopping Venues Developed from Chinese Historical Sites: Some shopping venues are developed from the renovation of overseas Chinese buildings. These historic business venues being converted into themed community malls such as Lhong 1919, a Chinese-themed shopping venue converted from the 19th century port and warehouse belonging to 'Wanglee' family. As a mixed-use development project, the centre comprises of functional spaces, many of which reflect the building's legacy such as Rong Si by The River, a Thai restaurant recreating the atmosphere of old warehouse, Ki Len Tech Heng Yoo, a traditional Chinese medicine museum showcasing the traditional Chinese know-how and the Osotspa Tech Heng Yoo (a pharmaceutical company dating back to 19th century) and Mazu shrine, which is originally the spiritual home of Wanglee warehouse and now become the main tourist spot.

In addition, there are shopping districts developed from Chinese community areas. Several Chinese quarters are turned into tourist walking streets, where tourists can explore local food prepared by overseas Chinese migrants. Some car lanes on Yaowaraj road (Bangkok's Chinatown) are closed in the evening, enabling tourists to explore local eats on foot. From December 2019 onwards, the entire area will be turned into a pedestrian area from 5pm until midnight. This initiative is part of Bangkok Municipality's policy to promote tourism in the city's historic area (Crowding in Yaowarat Walking Street, 2019).

4.3 Hospitality Venues Developed from Chinese Historical Sites: There are Chinese historical sites that are converted into hospitality venues where the Chinese identity is used as the selling point. There are eateries that are developed from historical buildings in Chinese quarters and Sino-Thai communities. 'Sou-Heng-Tai' is a 250-year-old manor (Taladnoi, Bangkok) which is transformed into Chinese-themed café and diving school. A-Né, a restaurant selling Thai Chinese food, is in an old town house in Talad Noi, Bangkok. Taiguan café is a modern Chinese café located in Chinese-style house constructed in 19th century by a Chinese trader. The building's history is expressed through the décor and the creation of on-site food and drink that integrates Chinese gastronomy with contemporary food items (Sitthika, 2019). There is also 'Jade Old Town', located in a building in Bangkok's Chinatown that was previously a hotel operated by a Chinese business entrepreneur (Jadeoldtown, 2019).

There are also eateries in Chinese communities in southern part of Thailand, which focus on portraying Peranakan culture through visual art and culinary products. Among these are 92 Coffs & Burge Café, which is renovated from Peranakan Chinese house on Thalang Road, Phuket ("Nan" Natdaporn Paramataphon Baba Girls, 2018). China Inn Café and restaurant was located in the building where Chinese bank once located (Thaihiam & Chaiyasit Dankittikul, 2016).

The emergence of Chinese themed eateries is in line with the nostalgic consumption that permeates the Thai society. As can be seen, traditional-themed cafés have become a fashion in Thailand, and form part of contemporary lifestyle (Kapook Travel, 2019; Ryoii, 2018; Tripgether, 2019). For many, going to the café is about appreciating the architectural beauty and expressing their own self in addition to satisfying their appetite. Also, there are accommodations located in historic Chinese buildings, in which traditional culture is used as the selling point. This is exemplified by Chinese-themed hotels in Chinese district. In Bangkok's Chinatown, Ama Hotel (Bangkok), Urby Hostel are those Chinese-themed accommodation located in historic Chinese house in Chinatown Bangkok.

4.4 Creative District Developed from Chinese Historical Sites: The significance of traditional culture as economic assets leads to the regeneration of diasporic quarters in the country. This includes the revival of historic Chinese quarters into creative spaces combining both historical and economic significance. They become an area gathering creative business inspired by Chinese diasporic heritage.

An apparent example of this is the promotion of Chinese quarters in Bangkok such as Taladnoi to become a creative district. Besides being a hub of street food, the area is known as a cluster of Chinese-themed hospitality-related businesses, including but not limited to food and drink and accommodation sector business that are inspired by Chinese diasporic legacy. This is contributed by the festival 'Bangkok Design Week' by Creative Economy Agency (CEA). Held in in numerous locations in Bangkok's town centre, this is an annual artistic festival gathering a variety of art and design-related activities including exhibitions, talks and workshops, the creative market, art, and music events. Especially, the Bangkok Design Week aims to promote Charoenkrung and Talad Noi to become creative district rooted in the presence of Chinese legacy. The festival show visitors the possibility to marry cultural heritage with creativity.

Efforts have been made to promote Chinese communities to become a cluster of street art. This is contributed by Bukruk Festival, a street art festival

in Bangkok in 2016 that invite artists from different nationalities to create murals and graffitis in Charoenkrung area. Also, in 2020, the CEA's project 'Colour of Charoenkrung' helped embellish the Chinese quarter by introducing 30 new street artworks in Charoenkrung that reflects the marriage between the contemporary creativity with the local tradition (Chanakarn 2020).

Discussion and Conclusion

The long history of Chinese diaspora settlement in Thailand results in the existence of Chinese heritage sites across the country, especially in urban areas where Chinese people established their business that become the backbone of the local economy. Chinese heritage sites are recognized either as individual establishment, possessing its unique history or as a cluster, where individual structures form an integral part of Chinese diaspora's way of life.

From the findings, it is possible to conclude that Chinese heritage sites that exist in Thailand are resulted from the negotiation between the past and the present. The condition of Chinese heritage sites in today's time vary according to the degree in which the site is oriented to the tradition or to the need of the presents. This range from those which retain its original functions (Category 1: Working Historic Sites) to those that acquire new functions that are completely different from the original one (Category 4: Historical Sites under Adaptive Reuse) or sites that witnesses the past (Category 2: Documentary Historical Site). The increased significance of Chinese diaspora leads to the development of new sites that narrate the history of the past (Category 3: Representative Historical Sites). It is also found that some heritage sites may fit in more than one category, as exemplified by 'Tang Toh Kang' goldsmith shop fit into both category 1 and category 2 given the fact that the venue is still an active business venue and that it has a mini museum section showcasing the history of its business respectively.

Besides demonstrating the dynamic character of heritage sites (Chang, 2017), the findings demonstrate the role of the present in determining the existence of past heritage. People living in the contemporary society is the gatekeeper of the memories. In other words, they play a part to decide whether to maintain the origin, or modify it to contemporary context, or to leave it completely forgotten. Understanding the current condition of Chinese historical buildings leads us to conclude that heritage is never static but alternates according to the temporal and spatial context. Changes or modifications made to heritage sites should be

perceived as natural. This is the process to make the past beneficial for people living in the present time.

It can be implied from the findings that public engagement is crucial to the survival of heritage sites. Education is necessary to make the public aware of the heritage sites, especially the younger generations to appreciate the history. This is especially the case for touristic sites that showcases the history of Chinese diaspora, where appropriate narrative strategies are needed to connect visitors with heritage. Chinese heritage sites can enhance its value by incorporating the location's history in its promotional message.

The findings in this paper constitute a preliminary investigation of the condition of cultural heritage sites in Thailand. Further research such as fieldwork should be conducted to gain more detailed information regarding this matter.

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