

A Comparative Study of Travel Motivations between Asian and European Tourists to Thailand

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Abstract : During the past decade there is an increasing of studies relating to international tourists to Thailand such as tourist behaviors, travel patterns and trip characteristics. However, the literature review indicates that most studies seem to focus on examining international tourists based on one particular country or culture rather than exploring them in terms of comparative studies. This study thus aims to examine and compare travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand between Asian and European tourists. The results indicated that travel motives of Asian and European respondents seemed to be similar in that most of them were more likely to be motivated by 'novelty seeking' when traveling overseas. However, there were some differences regarding the perceptions of destination attractions drawing them to Thailand. Most of Asian respondents were more likely to be attracted by 'a variety of tourist attractions and activities' while the European respondents appeared to view 'cultural and historical attractions' as the key factor to visit Thailand. The results of the study provide practical implications that can be helpful for both policy makers and industry practitioners to develop appropriate marketing strategies and tourism products for the Asian and European travel markets.

Keywords: travel motivations, international tourists, Thailand

Research Background

It is generally argued that the tourism industry is one of the largest and most important sectors for Thailand economy. During the past decade, the tourism industry has significantly expanded and contributed to the overall economic growth of Thailand. Each year millions of international visitors come to Thailand to experience the uniqueness of Thai culture and the beauty of natural resources. According to the statistical reports by the Tourism Authority of Thailand or TAT (2008), the number of international tourists visiting Thailand has been increasing over the past 10 years, from 7.76 millions in 1998 to 14.46 million arrivals in 2007 (TAT 2008). Overseas tourists visiting Thailand come from different parts of the world. Major markets include Asia, Europe, North America and Australia (TAT 2007).

Although the tourism industry in Thailand has been growing during the past decade, the market competition within the region should not be overlooked. In recent years there has been an increasing market competition in the region from major competitors such as Malaysia and Singapore as well as emerging destinations like Vietnam and Cambodia. In particular, major competitors like Malaysia, with 17 million tourist arrivals a year, and Singapore, with 10 million tourist arrivals a year, (World Tourism Organization 2007), they have allocated a lot of budgets for promoting tourism in their countries each year with the aim to be the tourism hub of the region (World Tourism Organization 2007). Their aggressive marketing strategies, for example, can be evidently seen from various media coverage (e.g. TV, newspapers, magazines) aiming to promote Malaysia or Singapore as the leading tourist destination. Since the tourism industry is a major economic driver and a powerful revenue-generating activity in many countries, it is anticipated that the tourism competition is more likely to be more intensified and competitive within the region. With the expected trend and current competitive tourism market, increasing the number of international tourists to Thailand and targeting Thailand as the tourism hub of the region seem to be the challenges for Thailand's tourism industry to compete with key competitors and emerging destinations.

Given the importance of the tourism industry to the Thailand's economy and the intensive market competition, it is essential for Thai tourism marketers to develop effective marketing strategies to attract more international tourists to the country as well as to develop tourism products responding to the needs of the target tourists. In order to be successful in global tourism, according to the literature, tourism marketers should understand travel needs and behaviors of the target markets (Yoon & Uysal 2005; Jang & Wu 2006). One of the useful approaches to understand travel needs and tourists' travel-related behaviors is to examine 'travel motivations' (Crompton 1979; Cha, McCleary & Uysal 1995; Yoon & Uysal 2005). Understanding travel motivations could be regarded as a starting point for the success of the tourism marketing programs (Cha et al. 1995; Jang & Wu 2006). This is because travel motivations help explain tourists' internal needs to travel and what motivates them to a particular-destination, and they are also associated with tourists' destination choice (Dann 1977; Compton 1979). Thus, the knowledge of travel motivations would enable

tourism marketers to better satisfy travelers' needs and wants, and then develop appropriate marketing programs serving the needs of the target markets (Jang & Cai 2001; Andreu, Kozak, Avci, & Ciffer 2006).

One of the common and useful approaches to examine travel motivations is based on the theory of push and pull motivations or often called theory of push and pull factors (Dann 1977; Crompton 1979; Yoon & Uysal 2005). A review of literature indicates that examining travel motivations based on the theory of push and pull motivations has been widely accepted in the tourism literature (Pearce & Caltabiano 1983; Yuan & McDonald 1990). This is because the theory helps explain why people travel and where they go; providing clues for holiday decisions. According to the theory, push factors are related to travel motives (why people travel) while pull factors are associated with tourism attractions (what attracts people to visit a destination). When considered together, push and pull factors are believed to be related to tourists' travel decision making and destination choices. With this regard, the theory of push and pull motivations seems to provide a useful framework to examine different forces motivating a person to take a holiday, and also helps identify the factors attracting that person to choose a particular destination. In order to understand travel needs of international tourists, and to develop effective marketing programs, this study aims to employ the theory of push and pull motivations to investigate travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand. More specifically, the study will compare travel motivations between Asian and European tourists. Asian and European travel markets are the top inbound markets for Thailand's tourism industry (TAT 2008), and both are worth for further investigations to better understand their travel characteristics. The literature, in Thai context, reveals that most studies on tourist-related behaviors are primarily focused on one single market (one country) rather than examining or comparing tourist groups from different countries or regions. Moreover, previous research indicates that tourists from the same region such as Asia or Europe may have some similarities on travel related-behaviors such as travel motivations and/or travel preferences because they may share some commonalities with the core culture either Asian cultures (Asian tourists) or Western cultures (European tourists), and this may be worth for further studies (Lee 2000; Kim & Prideaux 2005). It is hoped that the findings of the study will provide policy markers and destination marketers a better

understanding of travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand and assist them in formulating appropriate tourism policies and strategies to effectively target the international tourist markets.

Literature Review

Concept of the Theory of Push and Pull Motivations

The theory of push and pull motivations, developed by Dann (1977), is one of the useful theories widely used to examine tourist motivations (Crompton 1979; Pearce & Caltabiano 1983; Yuan & McDonald 1990; Jang, Bai, Hu, & Wu 2004). Dann (1977) made a significant contribution in suggesting two factors motivating people to travel and to go to a particular destination. The two factors are called push and pull factors. The concept of the theory describes that people are pushed to travel by internal motives (called push factors) and pulled to a destination by destination attributes/attractions (called pull factors) when making their travel decisions (Lam & Hsu, 2004). Thus, the concept is classified into two forces/factors (push and pull factors) indicating that people travel because they are pushed and pulled to do so by some forces or factors. Push factors (internal motives) are mainly considered to be associated with socio-psychological motives that predispose people to travel (e.g. novelty/knowledge seeking, rest/relaxation, socialization) while pull factors (destination attributes) are those that attract people to choose a particular destination such as culture, natural attractions, food, local people (Lam & Hsu 2004). These two factors are related to people's decision making for travel and leisure purposes. It is argued that findings from the research examining tourists' motivations by using push and pull factors provide useful insight into the target markets and help tourism marketers in planning effective marketing strategies such as product development and advertisement (Jang & Cai 2002; Jang & Wu 2006)

Studies Related to Push and Pull Motivations

Several studies (e.g. Yavuz, Uysal, & Baloglu 1998; Zhang & Lam 1999; Jang & Cai 2002; Jang & Wu 2006) have been conducted using the push and pull motivations theory to investigate travel motivations and tourist behaviors. These studies provide useful implications to tourism marketers

in formulating appropriate strategies to attract a target market. Some of them have been reviewed, for example, Zhang and Lam (1999) investigated Mainland Chinese visitors' motivations to visit Hong Kong and disclosed that the most important push factors influencing the Mainland Chinese people to visit Hong Kong were 'knowledge', 'prestige', and 'enhancement of human relationship' motives. The most important pull factors or attractions of Hong Kong were 'hi-tech image', 'expenditure, and 'accessibility'. This study implied that the Mainland Chinese travelers perceived Hong Kong as a unique, modernized, friendly, and convenient place for holidays, and therefore suggested that concerned parties should build Hong Kong's image as a high-tech multinational city in the world to Chinese people via various accessible media. Another study by Jang and Cai (2002) reported that 'knowledge seeking', 'escape', and 'family togetherness' were the most important factors to motivate the British to travel abroad. However, 'cleanliness & safety', 'easy-to-access', and 'economical deal' were considered the most important pull factors attracting them to an overseas destination. The findings from comparing the push and pull factors across seven international destinations (USA, Canada, South America, Caribbean, Africa, Oceania, and Asia) as perceived by the British travelers indicated that each region had its own strengths and weaknesses in terms of its position in the minds of British travelers. The authors suggested that knowledge of people's motivations and its associations with their destination selection is critical to predict their future travel patterns, and the findings could be used for destination product development and formation of marketing strategies.

Kim, Lee and Klenosky (2003) examined the travel motivations of visitors to visit Korean national parks. They found that the most important push factors influencing Korean people to visit the national parks were 'appreciating natural resources and health', followed by 'adventure and building friendship', 'family togetherness and study', and 'escaping from everyday routine' respectively, while the most attractions of the national parks (pull factors) were 'accessibility and transportation', 'information and convenience of facilities', and 'key tourist resources'. The authors suggested that the park administrators should recognize the needs of different groups of visitors (students, families, and older people), and develop the products responding to each group. Another study focusing on domestic tourism conducted by Zhang, Yue and Qu (2004) found that 'prestige' and 'novelty'

were regarded as the top two important push factors of domestic tourists, while 'urban amenity' and 'service attitude and quality' were the most important pull factors of Shanghai appealing to domestic tourists. One important finding from the study indicated that the pull factors like 'service attitude and quality', 'urban amenity', 'expenditure' and 'hi-tech image' may influence the tourists' likelihood to recommend Shanghai to their relatives and friends. In order to promote Shanghai, the authors recommended positioning Shanghai as a city of unique cultural and economic image as well as improve the service quality in Shanghai in order to attract the domestic tourists.

In relation to Thai context, a review of literature indicates a few studies have examined travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand. Among them, Varma (2003), for instance, examined push and pull factors between U.S. and Indian tourists. The study disclosed that U.S. and Indian tourists had differences in relation to push and pull factors. When traveling, the U.S. tourists were more likely to be motivated by exciting experiences while the Indian tourists were primarily stimulated by relaxation motives. The study also revealed that both groups had differences in the perceptions of destination attractiveness (pull factors) such as cultural activities, inexpensive environment, leisure activities, cuisine and safety. Different marketing strategies were suggested for each market. Cheewarunroj (2005) investigated travel motivations of ASEAN tourists to Thailand. The results indicated that some demographic variables, such as age, income, travel experience, had impacts to travel motivations (push and pull factors) among ASEAN tourists. For instance, ASEAN tourists aged 46 or above were more likely to be motivated to travel by relaxation motive than other groups, and tourists with different income level also revealed differences in travel motives and destination attractions. The study reported that first-time visitors perceived knowledge seeking as a major motivation while repeat visitors placed novelty experience as major motivations, and they also had differences in the perceptions of sightseeing variety in Thailand. A recent study by Sangpikul (2008) revealed an interesting result regarding travel motivations of Korean travelers to Thailand. The finding indicated that many Korean travelers were primarily motivated to travel by 'fun & relaxation motives' while the 'attraction variety & costs of travel' were perceived as major

attraction drawing them to Thailand. To attract Korean travelers, marketing themes relating to the relaxation motivations and a variety of tourism programs were suggested.

In sum, the literature has shown that previous studies focusing on the push and pull motivations provide a useful and practical approach for understanding travel needs and wants of people as well as where they desire to go for holiday. The results of these studies imply that the conceptual framework of push and pull factors can be applied to examine travel motivations of different groups of tourists (domestic and international tourists). Although there are a number of travel motivation studies in international context (suggesting the importance of travel motivation studies), few studies have been conducted in relation to Thai context. Given the need for tourism business to satisfy travelers' needs and expectations in a competitive global tourism, more research in this area (travel motivations of international tourists) is needed, particularly the studies comparing travel motivations of different target markets visiting a particular destination (e.g. Thailand).

Methodologies

The samples in this study were Asian and European tourists aged 20 years older and over. A pilot test was conducted with 50 respondents to obtain feedback and comments on the clarity and appropriateness of the research questions about push and pull travel motivations. Based on the pilot test, some modifications were made to ensure respondents could better understand the questions and choose appropriate answers. This study used a convenience sampling method, and data were collected at major tourist attractions in Bangkok through a closed-ended, self-administered questionnaire. The target samples were approached, and asked for voluntary participation. Once they agreed, they received small souvenirs for their participation. To ensure a high return and usable rate, questionnaires were collected onsite and checked for completeness. Four hundred questionnaires were collected and used for data analysis. Among them, there were 220 Europeans from 9 countries, i.e. UK (38), German (35), France (33), Switzerland (28), Italy (25), Sweden (23), Denmark (16), Spain (12) and Netherlands (10), and 180 Asians from 7 countries, i.e. Malaysia (40),

Singapore (36), Hong Kong (29), South Korea (22), China (19), Japan (16), India (10) and Taiwan (8).

The questionnaire was developed from a review of previous studies focusing on push and pull motivations (Cha et al., 1995; Kim & Lee, 2000; Klenosky, 2002; Jang & Cai, 2002; Jang & Wu, 2006). The items for each set of push and pull factors that were used to measure travel motivations for visiting Thailand were selected from motivation items identified in previous studies as well as suggestions from a group of experts (tourism professors). Based on the review, 13 motivational items were generated for each set of push and pull factors and converted into a closed questionnaire style using five-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was divided into two sections: general information and travel motivations. The sample question for push factors was, for instance, "Do you think you travel abroad because you want to see something new and exciting". For pull factor, the respondents were asked "Do you think Thai culture is an important factor for you to come to Thailand".

Data were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program, and they were performed through three steps. Firstly, descriptive statistics (i.e. mean, frequency, percentage) were used to describe general information of the respondents. Secondly, descriptive statistics (i.e. mean and standard deviation) were also employed to rank the push and pull factors in terms of individual item to determine which items served as major push and pull factors. Then, each push and pull factor was ranked in terms of the importance from the most important factor (highest mean) to the least important one (lowest mean). Thirdly, the push and pull factors were then grouped by using factor analysis to find the push and pull factor dimensions (or similar factor groupings) that may emerge among the respondents. Factor analysis was chosen because it is a statistical approach used to analyze interrelationships among a large number of variables and to explain the variables in terms of their common underlying dimensions or similar groupings (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black 2006). It should be noted that a 0.05 level of significance was employed in all of the statistical assessments in this study.

Findings

Respondent's Profile

Table 1: Profile of research respondents

Characteristics	Descriptions	Number (n=400)	Percent (100%)
Gender	Male	232	58.0%
	Female	168	42.0%
Age	20 - 30 years	128	32.0%
	31 - 45 years	160	40.0%
	46 - 55 years	72	18.0%
	56 years or older	40	10.0%
Marital status	Single	216	54.0%
	Married	152	38.0%
	Divorced/Separated/Widowed	32	8.0%
Education	High school or lower	72	18.0%
	Bachelor degree	236	59.0%
	Master degree or higher	92	23.0%
Occupation	Company employee	140	35.0%
	Government officer	72	18.0%
	Student	60	15.0%
	Business owner	36	9.0%
	Independent/self-employed	32	8.0%
	Unemployment	24	6.0%
	Housewife	12	3.0%
	Retired	20	5.0%
	Others	4	1.0%
Monthly Income	US\$ 1,000 or lower	48	12.0%
	US\$ 1,001 – 2,500	104	29.0%
	US\$ 2,501 – 3,500	132	33.0%
	US\$ 3,501 – or higher	116	26.0%
Regional base	Asia	180	45.0%
	Europe	220	55.0%

From table 1, the samples were 58% males and 42% were females. Most of them were in the age group of 31 - 45 years (40%) and 20 - 30 years old (32%). More than half were singles (54%), and most of them (59%) had education at the college level (bachelor degree). The respondents came from different occupations, for example, 35% were company employees, 18% were government officers, 15% were students, and 9% were business owner. Approximately 29% of the respondents had monthly

income in the range of US\$ 1,000 - 2,500, 33% had income in the range of US\$ 2,501 - 3,500, and 26% earned approximately US\$ 3,501 or higher. Among 400 respondents, there were 180 Asian respondents and 220 European respondents.

Comparison of Pull Factors (Individual Pull Factor)

Table 2: Comparison of push factors between Asian and European Tourists

Push motivational items	Asians	Europeans	t-value	Sig.
1. I want to travel to a country I have not visited before.	3.53	4.19	4.19	0.00*
2. I want to experience cultures that are different from mine.	3.84	4.29	3.65	0.00*
3. I want to learn new things from a foreign country.	3.79	4.15	2.98	0.03*
4. I want to see something new and exciting.	3.81	4.27	3.82	0.00*
5. I want to seek fun or adventure.	3.75	3.98	1.96	0.53
6. I want to fulfill my dream of visiting a new country.	3.72	3.94	1.95	0.51
7. I want to spend more time with my couple or family members while traveling	3.67	3.39	-2.74	0.00*
8. I want to see and meet different groups of people.	3.53	3.78	3.25	0.75
9. I want to escape from busy job or stressful work.	3.68	3.84	1.07	0.28
10. I want to escape from routine or ordinary environment.	3.86	3.81	0.34	0.74
11. I want to rest and relax.	3.89	3.99	0.62	0.53
12. I want to improve my health and well-being.	3.71	3.49	-2.77	0.00*
13. I can talk to everybody about my trips when I get home.	3.80	3.55	-2.60	0.01*
Overall mean score	3.81	4.02		

* p<0.05

Table 2 shows the mean ranking of push factor (by individual factor). There were some significant differences of travel motives (push factors) between Asian and European tourists. The results indicated that European tourists were more likely to rate motives relating to novelty or excitement experiences such item 1, 2, 3, and 4 higher than its counterparts (Asian tourists). These push factor were scored above 4.0 as rated by European tourists while the Asian tourists rated them less than 4.0. This suggests that European tourists tended to be motivated by novelty motives. Other differences were found in item 7 (spending time with family members), item 12 (improving health), and item 13 (talking about the trip). Asian tourists seemed to rate these items higher than European tourists. Based on the

results, this may provide important implications to understand the differences of travel motives (reasons/desires to travel) between Asian and European tourists.

Comparison of Pull Factors (Individual Pull Factor)

Table 3: Comparison of pull factors between Asian and European Tourists

Pull motivational items	Asians	Europeans	T-value	Sig.
1. Seaside/beaches	3.75	4.25	1.94	0.00*
2. Natural attractions	3.83	4.11	3.50	0.45
3. Thai culture	3.71	4.37	2.52	0.00*
4. Thai food	3.83	3.90	0.53	0.59
5. Cultural/historical attractions	3.76	4.24	1.37	0.00*
6. A variety of tourist attractions	3.92	3.74	-0.30	0.76
7. Low cost of living	3.81	3.82	-0.49	0.61
8. Travel costs to Thailand	3.84	3.69	-1.84	0.67
9. Travel information	3.66	3.55	-0.78	0.41
10. A variety of shopping places	3.88	3.80	-1.97	0.04*
11. Leisure activities and entertainment	3.80	3.47	-2.64	0.00*
12. Safety and security	3.73	3.82	0.66	0.50
13. Hygiene and cleanliness	3.65	3.46	-1.40	0.16
Overall mean score	3.79	3.98		

Table 3 presents the mean ranking of pull factors (individual items). Like the push factors, there were some significant differences found in the perceptions of pull factors (destination attractions) between Asian and European tourists. In generally, it seems that European tourists (M=3.98) were more likely to perceive Thailand as more attractive destination than Asian tourists (M=3.79) due to the higher overall mean score. When considered in details, it was found that European tourists rated higher score (significant differences) on the attractions of 'seasides/beaches', 'Thai culture', and 'cultural/historical attractions' than Asian tourists. Meanwhile, Asian tourists perceived and rated 'a variety of shopping places' and 'leisure activities and entertainment' as more important factors than European tourists.

Factor Analysis of Push Factors

Table 4: Factor analysis of push factors (Asian tourists)

Push factor dimensions (<i>reliability alpha</i>)	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained	Factor mean
Factor 1: Novelty seeking (<i>alpha</i> = 0.82)		7.12	34.89%	3.87*
I want to see something new and exciting	0.72			
I want to learn new things from a foreign country.	0.71			
I want to experience culture that is different from mine.	0.68			
I want to seek fun and adventure.	0.65			
I want to fulfill my dream of visiting a new country.	0.59			
I want to travel to a country I have not visited before.	0.54			
I want to rest and relax.	0.54			
I want to improve my health and well-being.	0.50			
Factor 2: Escape (<i>alpha</i> = 0.79)		2.34	10.28%	3.72
I want to escape from busy job or stressful work.	0.67			
I want to escape from routine or ordinary environment.	0.65			
Factor 3: Socialization (<i>alpha</i> = 0.69)		1.78	8.57%	3.45
I want to spend time with my family members while traveling.	0.65			
I can talk to everybody about my trips when I get home.	0.62			
I want to see and meet different groups of people.	0.59			
Total variance explained			60.35%	

* the most important factor

As shown in table 4, three push factor dimensions were derived from the factor analysis, and they were categorized into 3 groups: (1) 'novelty seeking', (2) 'escape', and (3) 'socialization'. Each factor dimension was named based on the common characteristics of the variables it included. The three push factor dimensions explained 60.35% of the total variance. Among them, 'novelty seeking' (factor mean=3.87) and 'escape' (factor mean=3.72) emerged as the major push factors motivating the respondents to travel abroad.

According to table 5, similarly to Asian tourists, three push factor dimensions were derived from the factor analysis, and they were categorized into 3 groups: (1) 'novelty seeking', (2) 'escape & relaxation', and (3) 'socialization'. Each factor dimension was named based on the common

characteristics of the variables it included. The three push factor dimensions explained 61.28% of the total variance. Among them, 'novelty seeking' (factor mean=4.10) and 'escape & relaxation' (factor mean=3.89) emerged as the major push factors motivating the respondents to travel abroad. It should be noted that, in general, factor analysis of push factors between Asians and Europeans were relatively similar.

Table 5: Factor analysis of push factors (European tourists)

Push factor dimensions (reliability alpha)	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained	Factor mean
Factor 1: Novelty seeking (alpha = 0.83)		7.45	38.78%	4.10*
I want to see something new and exciting	0.85			
I want to experience culture that is different from mine.	0.78			
I want to learn new things from a foreign country.	0.76			
I want to travel to a country I have not visited before.	0.75			
I want to seek fun and adventure.	0.71			
I want to fulfill my dream of visiting a new country.	0.70			
Factor 2: Escape and relaxation (alpha = 0.79)		2.47	12.38%	3.89
I want to escape from routine or ordinary environment.	0.66			
I want to escape from busy job or stressful work.	0.64			
I want to rest and relax.	0.61			
I want to improve my health and well-being.	0.60			
Factor 3: Socialization (alpha = 0.76)		1.55	8.55%	3.55
I want to see and meet different groups of people.	0.72			
I can talk to everybody about my trips when I get home.	0.70			
I want to spend time with my family members while traveling	0.65			
Total variance explained			61.28%	

* the most important factor

With regard to pull factors (table 6), factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to group the pull factors. According to table 6, three pull factor dimensions were derived from the factor analysis, and they were named: (1) 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities', (2) 'travel costs', and (3) 'safety & cleanliness'. These three factor dimensions explained 60.15% of the total variance. Based on the result, 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' (mean factor=3.83) and 'travel costs' (mean

factor=3.58) were regarded as the major pull factors attracting the respondents to Thailand.

Factor Analysis of Pull Factors

Table 6: Factor analysis of pull factors (Asian tourists)

Pull factor dimensions (<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>)	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained	Factor Mean
Factor 1: A variety of tourist attractions & activities (<i>alpha</i> = 0.85)		7.47	35.81%	3.83*
A variety of tourist attractions	0.88			
Cultural/historical attractions	0.85			
Thai culture	0.83			
Thai food	0.80			
A variety of shopping place	0.78			
Natural attractions	0.70			
Beach/seaside	0.69			
A variety of leisure activities and entertainment	0.66			
Travel information	0.62			
Factor 2: Travel costs (<i>alpha</i> = 0.80)		2.30	10.88%	3.58
Low cost of living	0.78			
Travel costs to Thailand	0.75			
Factor 3: Safety and cleanliness (<i>alpha</i> = 0.75)		1.45	8.23%	3.24
Hygiene and cleanliness	0.68			
Safety and security	0.61			
Total variance explained			60.15%	

* the most important factor

For European tourists, a similar factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to group the pull factors. As shown in table 7, two pull factor dimensions were derived from the factor analysis, and they were named: (1) 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' and (2) 'cultural and historical attractions'. These two factor dimensions explained 59.25% of the total variance. With relatively high score of factor mean, 'cultural and historical attractions' (factor mean=4.15) and 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' (factor mean=3.89) was considered as the key pull factors attracting the respondents to Thailand.

Table 7: Factor analysis of pull factors (European tourists)

Pull factor dimensions (Cronbach's alpha)	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained	Factor Mean
Factor 1: A variety of tourist attractions & activities (alpha = 0.82)		7.05	35.81%	3.89
A variety of tourist attractions	0.89			
Beach/seaside	0.81			
Natural attractions	0.79			
A variety of shopping place	0.75			
Low cost of living	0.73			
A variety of leisure activities and entertainment	0.71			
Travel cost to Thailand	0.70			
Travel information	0.68			
Hygiene and cleanliness	0.54			
Safety and security	0.51			
Factor 2: Cultural and historical attractions (alpha = 0.87)		1.58	10.88%	4.15*
Thai culture	0.78			
Cultural and historical places	0.75			
Thai food	0.70			
Total variance explained			59.25%	

* the most important factor

Discussion of Travel Motivations

According to push factor analysis (table 4), it was found that 'novelty seeking' was regarded as the most important push factor stimulating Asian respondents to travel abroad. Likewise, the study (table 5) revealed similar results indicating that 'novelty seeking' was regarded as the most important push factors motivating European respondents to travel overseas. In overall, the results of push factors analysis (motives to travel) of the two markets were quite similar, though there are minor or slight differences in other motives (e.g. escape and socialization motives). Generally, the current findings are similar to previous studies revealing that novelty seeking is the major motive for many tourist groups to travel to overseas destinations. For example, Lee (2000) revealed that novelty experience was the major push factor

among international tourists visiting South Korea. Cha et al. (1995) and Jang & Wu (2006) also found that novelty and knowledge seeking was the key push factor for Japanese and Taiwanese to travel abroad. This suggests that, in international tourism, novelty seeking or the motive to experience something new, exciting or different from people's usual environment seems to be the major motive stimulating people to travel to different parts of the world in order to seek something that they can't obtain in their usual environment. Thus, it is not surprising with the current findings revealing that both Asian and European tourists were motivated by novelty motive to travel to a particular destination if they wish to experience something that is different from their own cultures or surroundings.

With regard to pull factor analysis (table 6 and 7), it seemed that the results of pull factors between Asian and European tourists were different. In case of Asian tourists, 'a variety of tourist attractions and activities' was regarded as the most important factor attracting them to Thailand while European tourists perceived 'cultural & historical attractions' as the most important factor drawing them to Thailand. Basically, it should be noted the result of pull factors (destination attractions) could be viewed differently by country to country or market to market (i.e. Asians and Europeans) depending on the image and perception of travelers toward a particular destination (Kozak 2002). In the current study, it could be possible that Asian tourists, with similar cultures and distance closure to Thailand, they may perceive Thai culture not much different from their cultures or Asian subcultures. Instead, they may be attracted to Thailand due to a variety of tourism products and services being offered or marketed to the mass market by Thai tourism businesses/operators. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand's reports (TAT 2006; TAT 2009), Thailand is marketing a variety of tourism products to the Asian markets including cultural tourism, health tourism, natural-based tourism, special interest tourism. Furthermore, there are several studies indicating that many Asian tourists come to Thailand because of a variety of tourist attractions such as culture, historical sites, beach tourism, shopping, night life or city entertainment (Nuchailak 1998; Tanapanich 1999; Soda 2001). With the country's image of tourism product varieties among Asian markets and the above arguments, it could be possible that many Asian respondents may perceive Thailand as one of the destinations with

the variety of tourism attractions, and this could be the major attraction drawing them to Thailand.

In the case of European tourists, it seemed that they were more likely to appreciate Thai cultural and historical attractions as the major pull factors drawing them to Thailand. The current finding is somewhat similar to other studies examining travel motivations of European tourists (e.g. Yavuz et al. 1998; You & O'Leary 2000). Those studies indicated that cultural and/or historical attractions are common destination attractions drawing European tourists to visit a particular destination. For example, Yavuz et al. (1998) disclosed that European travelers perceived cultural attractions of Cyprus as more important factor for them than any attractions. Furthermore, You and O'Leary (2000) argued that culture and heritage attractions have strong appeals among many international tourists when visiting overseas destinations. This type of attraction could be ranked among the top destination attributes attracting European travelers to overseas destinations. In case of European tourists to Thailand, it could be possible that European respondents may perceive Thailand differently from Asian respondents. European respondents may appreciate Thailand as the distinct country in Asia with old history and unique culture (e.g. Thainess). There are several studies reporting that many European tourists perceived Thai cultural/historical attractions as the most important factor for visiting Thailand such as Prasertwong (2001) and Zhang, Fang, and Sirassamee (2004). Another argument could be that Thailand is one of the few countries in the world that has never been colonized by any western power. This phenomenon affects the nature of the land, culture, history, and Thai people to this day. Previous research has shown that many international tourists come to Thailand because of the attractiveness of Thai unique culture and historical backgrounds (Prasertwong 2001; Zhang et al. 2004). Moreover, Prasertwong (2001) argued that Thailand is usually perceived to be a destination that is rich in historical and cultural attractions; making it different/distinct from other Asian countries and attractive to many international tourists. In addition to previous studies' support, it seems that the influences of marketing campaigns by the Tourism Authority of Thailand also have the impacts on Thailand's cultural image among European tourists. The campaigns in European markets can be found and supported by various types of activities

using Thai cultural, historical and/or heritage themes as the key marketing tools attracting European tourists to Thailand (TAT 2007; TAT 2009). These marketing tools have been widely recognized and succeeded in the European markets (TAT 2007). Based on the above arguments, it is not surprising why many international tourists including European tourists visit Thailand because of the Thai cultural/historical attractions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Using the theory of push and pull factors as a conceptual framework, this study has the objectives to examine and compare travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand based on geographical regions (i.e. between Asian and European tourists). As noted, the study was done on the assumption and previous studies' support in that tourists from the same region (Asia or Europe) may share some similarities or commonalities on travel related-behaviors such as travel motivations and travel preferences.

According to the current study, the results revealed that travel motives (push factors) and the perception of Thailand's destination attractions (pull factors) differed between Asian and European tourists. For Asian tourists, the study identified three push and three pull factor dimensions associated with Asian tourists' travel motivations. The three push factors were named as (1) 'novelty seeking', (2) 'escape', and (3) 'socialization', while the three pull factors included: (1) 'a variety of tourists' attractions & activities', (2) 'travel costs', and (3) 'safety & cleanliness'. Among them, 'novelty seeking' and 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' were viewed as the most important push and pull factors for Asian tourists. With regard to European tourists, the study identified three push and two pull factor dimensions related to European tourists' travel motivations. The three push factors were named as (1) 'novelty seeking', (2) 'escape & relaxation', and (3) 'socialization', while the two pull factors included: (1) 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' and (2) 'cultural & historical attractions'. Among them, 'novelty seeking' and 'cultural & historical attractions' were regarded as the most important push and pull factors for European tourists. It is hoped that the current findings would add to the tourism literature in travel motivations subject, particularly in Thai context, by providing a better understanding of travel motivations differences of international tourists to Thailand.

Since this study examined and compared travel motivations between Asian and European tourists, the recommendations will be proposed based on the results of each group. It is hoped that the recommendations would be useful for destination tourism marketers and travel business operators to develop appropriate marketing strategies, policies and products corresponding to the needs of the target markets.

Asian Tourists

According to the literature, knowing the importance of push and pull factors perceived by the tourists can help destination marketers develop the marketing programs to meet the desired needs of the target market (Jang & Wu 2006). This implication could be applied to the current study to develop the products and services to attract the international tourists to Thailand. Based on the current findings, 'novelty seeking' was found to be the most important motive stimulating Asian respondents to travel abroad, and 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' was regarded as the major destination attraction drawing them to Thailand. Based on these results, tourism marketers should realize the importance of push factor 'novelty seeking' which are related to the needs to see something new, exciting or different from travelers' usual environment. These motives are regarded as driving forces for Asian tourists to travel abroad. At the same time, destination marketers should realize that 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' is perceived as the major destination attraction (pull factor) drawing them to Thailand. According to You, O'Leary, Morrison, and Hong (2000), tourism marketers need to tie the motivational drives (motives) with the activities that the destination can offer (attractions) and then package them to better satisfy the targets' needs. This suggestion could be applied to the case of Asian tourists who are mainly motivated to travel abroad by 'novelty seeking' and attracted to Thailand by 'a variety of tourist attraction & activities'. Thus, it is important for destination marketers to develop marketing programs (e.g. advertising, communications) by stimulating the needs of the targets (novelty seeking) and satisfy those needs with Thailand's destination attractions (a variety of tourist attractions & activities). This can be done by designing appropriate marketing programs or advertisements (e.g. TV ads, travel guides/books, brochures) by matching what they need and what we can offer. One of the possible ways is to create a marketing or tourism theme specially targeted for the Asian markets, for example, "Explore

Thailand: Discover and Experience the Land of Exotic and Variety". The theme might help stimulate the needs of novelty seeking (something new, different or exciting), at the same time, attract or persuade them to discover those things in Thailand by offering a unique and a variety of tourism products reflecting the theme. The products may include cultural tourism, natural tourism (e.g. beaches and islands), spa/health tourism, and shopping/entertainment programs. It should be noted that, this is the suggested idea for destination marketers to develop further/future marketing plans and strategies based on their decisions.

European Tourists

The recommendations for European tourists would apply the same concept of those discussed in Asian tourists (matching the results of push and pull factors). However, the strategies need to be modified to cater to the needs of European tourists. The findings derived from European respondents indicated that 'novelty seeking' and 'cultural & historical attractions' were regarded as the major push and pull factors. Thus, destination marketers need to tie the motives (push factor) with the activities that the destination can offer (pull factor) and then package them to better satisfy the targets' needs. Like the Asian tourists, destination marketers may develop marketing programs (e.g. advertising, communications) by stimulating the needs of novelty seeking and satisfy those needs with Thailand's cultural and historical attractions. This can be done by designing appropriate marketing programs or advertisements (e.g. TV ads, travel guides/books, brochures). Like the Asian market, one of the possible marketing or tourism themes developed for the European market could be, for example, "Explore Thailand: Discover and Experience the Treasure of Southeast Asia" or "Discover the Kingdom of Thailand: the Land of Exotic and Unique Culture". The themes might help stimulate the needs of novelty seeking (something new, different or exciting), at the same time, attract or persuade them to discover and experience the cultural heritage of Thailand such as Thai culture and local ways of life in different sub-regions, historical places, ancient capitals or cities, traditional Thai food or local food, and Thai traditional performances. It is hoped that the suggestions here could be helpful for the industry practitioners to get some ideas of how to develop or design the marketing plans/strategies for the European markets.

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