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GHOSTS

A travel barrier to tourism recovery

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Abstract: This study aims to assess whether or not beliefs in ghosts really deter tourists from traveling to disaster-hit destinations. To many it may appear that cultural differences do play a role in travel decision making between Asian and Western tourists. However, it is vital to provide empirical evidence of the impact of cultural differences in beliefs through a case study of the tsunami-hit destinations. Thus, this study aims to examine tourist barriers associated with tsunami-hit destinations, and also to assess cultural differences regarding such beliefs between Asians tourists from China and Thailand and Western tourists from Britain, Germany, and the United States and also across demographic profile. **Keywords:** destination recovery, travel barrier, Thai culture, cross culture, Thai and Chinese tourists and Thai tourism. © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have found that perceived risks cause more damage to destinations than actual risks (Beirman, 2006; Hall, 1989; Mitchell & Vasso, 1997; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Tarlow, 2006), as can be seen in the reactions to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Chien & Law, 2003; Henderson, 2004; McKercher & Chon, 2004; Rittichaiuwat & Chakarborty, 2009; Tse, So, & Sin, 2006), foot and mouth disease (Page, Yeoman, Munro, Connell, & Walker, 2006), terrorism (Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray, & Thapa, 2003; Reichel, Fuchs, & Uriely, 2007; Sönmez, 1998; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998), and tsunami (Rittichaiuwat, 2006). This is because a crisis creates a ripple effect to non-affected destinations causing them to also be perceived as risky (Cavlek, 2002). Hence, it is suggested that tourism bureaus must dissociate an unaffected destination from a problematic destination (Mansfeld, 2006) by promoting safer alternative destinations (Pizam, 2002).

It is of interest to note that, in some cases, a destination can be physically safe, but still perceived as unsafe psychologically, as in the case of the tsunami-hit beaches of Phuket, Khao Lak, and Phi Phi

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Island in the south of Thailand. Many Chinese tourists cancelled their new year's trips to those places not only due to these sites being under reconstruction but partly because of the association of ghosts and bad luck with them (Thai Press Reports., 2005). According to Rittichainuwat (2006), many inbound Chinese and Thai tourists substituted their original travel itineraries to tsunami-affected areas with trips to other beach resorts due to perceived risks affiliated with ghosts and uncomfortable feelings about enjoying themselves at a resort where a lot of people had been killed, because the place was thought to be too sorrowful and inappropriate to celebrate the Chinese New Year. In contrast, it is almost a given that Westerners would not consider the issue of ghosts important in deciding whether to visit such places. In fact, the natural beauty and relaxing atmosphere of the tsunami-hit beaches, which some Asian tourists avoid for fear of ghosts, have motivated Scandinavian tourists (Rittichainuwat, 2008).

In light of these independent findings and report, it is important to assess whether or not beliefs in ghosts really deter tourists from traveling to disaster-hit destinations and more especially, whether or not there are differences between Asian and Western tourists. To many it may appear that cultural differences do play a role in travel decision making between Asian and Western tourists. However, it is vital to provide empirical evidence of the impact of cultural differences in beliefs. Thus, this study aims to examine travel barriers associated with tsunami-hit destinations, and also to assess cultural differences regarding such beliefs between Asians tourists from China and Thailand and Western tourists from Britain, Germany, and the United States and also across different demographic variables.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination Recovery

Previous studies have shed some light on destination recovery after a disaster (Ahmed, 1991; Barton, 1994; Faulkner, 2001; Pizam, 2002). Durocher (1994) notes that destination recovery depends on the efficiency of tourism partners in bringing their facilities back to a pre-disaster level, and an effective marketing message that clearly communicates that the destination is once again open and ready for business. However, misinformation is one of the biggest obstacles to destination recovery (Beirman, 2006; Henderson, 1999; Tarlow, 2006). Specifically, an image of a destination still in the process of recovery and under reconstruction persists when some hotels continue to remain closed, either due to physical damage, insurance claims, change of ownership, or the renegotiation of land leases (Durocher, 1994).

Hence, it is important to restore confidence in the destination and to control the extent of the damage caused by misperception (Beirman, 2006; Henderson, 2003). Though giving incentives such as discounts and value-added extras are frequently used to stimulate demand for travel to recovering destinations (Henderson, 1999; Huan, Beaman,

& Shelby, 2004; Huang & Min, 2002; Pizam, 2002), such incentives are unable to motivate tourists unless destinations are perceived as safe, as most tourists would not trade off their safety for discounts (Henderson, 1999, 2007; Rittichainuwat & Chakarborty, 2009; Sönmez, 1998; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998).

Additionally, news reports sometimes exaggerate the situation and negatively affect the travel intentions of tourists by creating an image that the entire destination has been damaged (Henderson, 1999; Huang & Min, 2002; Milo & Yoder, 1991). Since media coverage of catastrophes increases ratings and circulation, news organizations may use the crisis to respond to the demands of their audience (Milo & Yoder, 1991). Due to geographic distance, non-tourists and potential inbound tourists rely on media coverage as their information source to keep them aware of occurrences in distance places and to evaluate perceived risks associated with destinations (Castelltort & Mäder, in press). The larger the viewer audience of local television stations and the larger the media circulation of newspapers, the greater possibility of negative news affecting potential consumers (Castelltort, in press). Such news frightens away potential tourists who do not thoroughly evaluate the validity of the message and this can delay the speed of destination recovery (Henderson, 2005; Huang & Min, 2002; Mansfeld, 2006; Milo & Yoder, 1991).

Therefore, during destination recovery, marketers must minimize any inaccurate images of the entire destination as having been devastated (Henderson, 2005; Huang & Min, 2002; Rittichainuwat, 2006; Sönmez, 1998). Positive media coverage of special events can counter balance the negative news and enhance a positive image of the destination and its recovery (Ahmed, 1991; Castelltort, in press). To eliminate the image of “under-construction”, it is also necessary to make certain that the information given by operators matches the actual recovery reality (Durocher, 1994). The best way to eliminate the image of a destination still under construction is by bringing travel agencies, meeting planners, and news reporters to a destination to witness for themselves the extent of the recovery and thus help overcome reluctance to book business (Durocher, 1994; Henderson, 2007). Moreover, opinion leaders play a key role in minimizing perceived risks at a destination (Milo & Yoder, 1991). Lacking information from a more credible source, the mass media, for one, may fulfill the role of opinion leader (Milo & Yoder, 1991).

Thus, the speed of the destination recovery does not only depend on the effectiveness and efficiency of authorities and local operators to bring infrastructure and business back to normal as soon as possible but also on marketing communication plans that have been integrated into disaster management strategies (Beirman, 2006; Durocher, 1994; Faulkner, 2001; Henderson, 2005; Mansfeld, 2006; Tarlow, 2006). Unfortunately, even when a positive image of destination recovery has been promoted and the destination is physically safe, it may still be perceived by some tourists as unsafe due to culturally-held beliefs regarding ghost.

Ghosts

In different cultures, such as those found in Africa, North America, Latin America, Europe, and Asia, people describe and perceive the presence of ghosts in a variety of shapes and kinds (Jacobi, 2003). In Christianity, both ghost and spirit not only refer to the Third in the Holy Trinity but also refer to the soul of a dead person (Oxford dictionary, 1988). *Ghost* and *spirit* are used interchangeably to refer to the soul of a deceased person (Comaroff, 2007; Formoso, 2001; Freed & Freed, 1990; Yang, Huang, Janes, Lin & Lu, 2008). While spirit is also defined as a disembodied soul *thought of* as separate from the body; ghost refers to the spirit of a dead person appearing to somebody still living (Oxford dictionary, 1988). In the Thai context, spirit is more often used than *ghost* to refer to the soul of a deceased person (Cohen, 1990, 1991; Komin, 1991; Tambiah, 1970, 1984; Terwiel, 1994). However, ghost is a generic term used in many cultures, of which spirit is one of its categories used in describing the soul of a dead person. Thus, this study uses ghost instead of spirit because it is a generic term widely recognized by most people.

Ghosts can be divided into two categories; one includes incorporeal ghosts, which are either transparent or are lifelike apparitions of their former selves, whereas the second is corporeal ghosts, which are horribly gaunt, such as those with empty faces, devoid of eyes and lips (Jacobi, 2003). In Thai culture, a ghost is pictured as an after-death, human phenomena with differing dominant characteristics, ranging from benevolence, with prestige given by the living and with responsible power, such as ancestors and guardian ghosts, to malevolence, of notoriety and caprice, which are either free-floating, localized ghosts in the world of human beings or those condemned to hell (Crowder, 2003; Tambiah, 1970). This study defines ghosts as disembodied and restless spirits of deceased individuals that cannot be touched, nor can they physically touch the living because they are incorporeal and do not have a material form (Jacobi, 2003).

Cultural Differences in Religion, Norms and Beliefs in Ghosts

Cultural differences between Asians and Westerns may be explained by distinct religious philosophies (Reisinger, 2003). Specifically, Christianity promises transformation of the body in preparation for life *in heaven or hell*, whereas Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism believe in the transmigration of a soul, which leaves the body at death in order to enter a new form via the cycle of rebirth, though in certain circumstances some souls continue to roam *on earth* in the form of ghosts (Davies, 2010; Harvey, 2009). Such beliefs have taken root based on animism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism, which teaches that souls of the dead are capable of existing after the death and dissolution of the body (Cano & Mysyk, 2004; Freed & Freed, 1990; Kaneko, 1990).

Additionally, such beliefs are embedded early in life in the form of social rituals such as ancestor worship and ghost stories (Crowder,

2003; Terwiel, 1994). For example, Thai children are taught about and are made well aware of the existence of ghosts and their potential dangers, and are taught to chant protective spells and to wear small Buddha amulets around their necks to ward off ghosts (Komin, 1991; Terwiel, 1994). Likewise, Chinese children are taught to avoid proximity to dead bodies as they are believed to bring bad luck (Chan & Lai Cecilla., 2009). The fear of ghosts is instilled in children very early and continues into adult life. Though such beliefs among young people today and the educated may be weakening, on the whole they remain strong and influential (Chan & Lai, 2009), as education does not necessarily eradicate culturally-held beliefs in ghosts (Burnard, Naiyapatana, & Lloyd 2006; Lindeman & Aarnio 2007). For example, Komin (1991) finds that even Thai scientists admit that they believe in the existence of certain kinds of ghosts.

More importantly, beliefs in ghosts are not individual but are socially shared beliefs. According to the Chinese, the main components of the universe are gods, saints, guardian ghosts, ghosts, ancestors, and the living (Formoso, 2001). While ancestors and guardian ghosts protect the descendants and inhabitants who worship them, other ghosts can harass the living. Likewise, Singaporean Chinese believe that to end one's life and be buried without proper rituals is highly undignified and causes the victim to suffer as a restless ghost, to wander without peace and to harass the living (Comaroff, 2007). Similarly, Taiwanese believe that wandering ghosts of those who have drowned bring with them a higher risk of accidents for the living, especially during the "ghost month", when it is believed wandering ghosts are temporarily released from hell (Yang et al., 2008).

According to Thai beliefs, death also brings about a dramatic change when a soul transforms into a ghost (Tambiah, 1970). More especially, those who die "abnormally," without having completed their natural life cycle and the orderly succession of status, their unfulfilled and clinging interests in and attachment to life in this world causes them to be malevolent, and to seek a substitute soul of a living person to exchange places with them because they are removed from the channels of rebirth (Tambiah, 1970). However, only a small number of Thai Buddhists understand the Buddha's teachings that deny the existence of an eternal soul (Cohen, 1991) and, most Thais integrate a belief in ghosts and Buddhism into Thai culture and form social value and norms (Cohen, 1991; Mulder, 2000).

Ghost Beliefs and Tourism Decision Making

Beliefs in ghosts affect people in daily life and in their decision making. For example, Taiwanese who adhere to beliefs regarding ghost month might either decrease their exposure to water-related activities or involve themselves in less risky behaviors, as a kind of risk compensation, consequently resulting in a reduction in the number of potential drowning deaths (Yang et al., 2008). Although some people might not consciously believe in the existence of ghosts, they may continue to

adhere to collective norms by postponing some outdoor recreational activities, especially water-related activities such as playing on the beach, swimming, boating, fishing, and barbecuing on the bank of a river, to reduce exposure to water and the possibility of death by drowning (Summala, 1996; Yang et al., 2008).

Belief in ghosts has been a travel barrier for tourists from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore who did not go to the tsunami-affected beach resorts immediately after the 2004 tsunami for fear of bringing bad luck, such as ‘ghost illness,’ home with them, since a place where a lot of people have been killed is considered a ‘bad luck location’ (Huang, Chuang, & Lin, 2008; Rittichainuwat, 2006). Thus, it is not surprising that the tsunami-hit destinations are perceived as ghost-haunted destinations, and thus suffer from a decrease in the number of tourists. According to Thai and Chinese beliefs, restless ghosts can cause misfortune to the living, such as illness (fever, choking or difficulty breathing) and possession (mental disorder) (Burnard et al., 2006; Cohen, 1990, 1991; Freed & Freed, 1990). Also, possession in the form of sickness diagnosed as ghost malaise is often found in those who have visited haunted places (Comaroff, 2007). Hence, an uninhabited place is carefully avoided, especially if there is a suspected high concentration of restless ghosts constituting a threat to the living (Formoso, 2001).

Beliefs in ghosts also persist in Western cultures, though it is considered more strongly held in Asian cultures than in Western cultures. For instance, a Gallup poll shows that 37% of Americans believe in haunted houses (Musella, 2005), and a poll of British adults shows that 40% believe in ghosts, and of these, 37% claim to have personally experienced the presence of a ghost (MORI, 1998). Also, a study by Wiseman, Watt, Greening, Stevens, and O’Keeffe (2002) conducted at Hampton Court Palace in Britain finds that ghost-believers interpret unusual experiences as being caused by ghosts (such as an unusual change in temperature, a sense of another’s presence, a strange noise, a sense of dizziness, headaches, sickness, shortness of breath, or intense emotional feelings).

Similar to the Chinese and Thai cultures, historically in the West, there have also been malevolent ghosts, which have also been associated with water-related death. English and American sailors in the 15th and 16th century believed that people who had died violently and/or in an accident and had not received proper burial, were not able to rest peacefully and so became restless ghosts who returned to trouble the living at sea, which is perceived as a threshold from which the dead can sometimes return (Stewart, 2005). Since the sea allows the horizontal movement of ghosts across its surface, the permeable nature of water makes the sea conducive to vertical connections between the upper-world on the surface and the underworld in the depths; thus, the sea is perceived as a threshold rather than a barrier that links the living and the dead (Stewart, 2005). Moreover, a ‘‘watery grave’’ does not allow for the comforting solidity offered by the earth (Stewart, 2005).



Figure 1. The Map Shows the Tsunami-affected Areas. Source: Thailand Ministry of Culture (2007).

Beliefs in ghosts in Western cultures finds support in Christian theology, which recognizes the existence of ghosts in the New Testament (Cohen, 1990, 1991), though, the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the demythologizing theologies of contemporary Protestantism seem to have done much to weaken such beliefs (Long, 1987: 286 cited in Cohen, 1990). Because of these influences, a belief in ghosts is considered irrational (Jones, 2005), deviant and dangerous, as superstitious people rely on unsubstantiated external forces rather than on

their own actions (National Science Foundation., 2000). This weakening of beliefs is also the result of the process of secularization in the modern Western world, where a smaller percentage of the population has maintained its traditional Christian beliefs (Sjödín, 1995). A modern scientific outlook on the world, especially from the perspective of materialistic naturalism in the sciences with its emphasis on proven validity, gives a better understanding of the cause-effect relationships that explain our world, which in turn make superstition (such as belief in ghosts) an obstacle to understanding reality and gaining knowledge of ourselves and the world (Sjödín, 1995). Consequently, superstition no longer has a strong foothold on the norms of a Western culture that values rational science (Reisinger, 2003).

Based on the literature, it can be concluded that beliefs in ghosts are more strongly held in Asian (Chinese and Thai) cultures than Western (American and British) cultures because of cultural differences. Whereas the Chinese and Thais believe in the existence of ghosts in the human world and consider the challenge to such supernatural power as unintelligent action, such beliefs have been substantially weakened in Western culture because of scientific rationalism, secularization and demythologizing theologies of contemporary Protestantism (Cohen, 1990, 1991; Inglis & Holmes, 2003; Long, 1987, p. 286 cited in Cohen, 1990; Sjödín, 1995). Hence, this study hypothesizes that while belief in the existence ghosts is a travel barrier for Asian (Thai and Chinese) tourists, it would not deter Western (American, British, and German) tourists from visiting the tsunami-affected areas.

Regarding demographic profile, the National Science Foundation (2000) reports that beliefs in ghosts are higher among women than men. However, Freed and Freed (1990) found that beliefs in ghosts can be found in children and adults of both genders as well as in all age ranges. Moreover, education does not eradicate culturally-held beliefs in ghosts (Burnard et al., 2006; Lindeman & Aarnio, 2007). Thus, this study hypothesized that there is no significant difference regarding beliefs in ghosts across respondents of different gender, age, and education.

STUDY METHODS

The research settings of this paper were Phuket, Khao Lak (a beach resort in Phang Nga province), and Phi Phi Island (a beach resort in Krabi province) in the south of Thailand, where more than 5000 local residents and foreign tourists were killed by the tsunami on December 26, 2004 (See Figure 1 for location). This study used a triangulation of data collection (interviews, content analysis and survey). In the first stage, items in the questionnaire were derived from in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of one German news reporter, one Thai travel writer and one general manager of a Chinese inbound tour company at a press conference, as well as eight tourists (one German, one Belgian, two Mainland Chinese, and four Thais) who survived the 2004 tsunami. The interviewees were asked, with an open-end question, to identify

travel barriers which would deter them and the people they knew from visiting the tsunami-affected beach resorts. The researcher recorded the responses from the interviews and selected the most frequent key words and used them to develop the questionnaire items. The items in the questionnaire were also the results of the content analysis of news reports about the 2004 tsunami on Thai tourism. The interviews and content analysis resulted in 14 travel barrier attributes which are listed in Table 2.

The instrument of this study was a self-administered survey questionnaire used to determine travel barriers associated with the tsunami-hit destinations. The questionnaire was written in three languages: English, simplified Chinese, and Thai. The questionnaire contained three sections: tourist behavior, travel barriers, and demographic profile. Regarding the travel barriers, the respondents were asked: What would deter/discourage you from traveling to the disaster (tsunami) affected areas? The respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement with each of the 14 travel barrier attributes on a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). A pilot test was given to 40 local residents and tourists in August 2005 to check understanding of the wording in the questionnaire. A panel of experts in the field of tourism checked the content validity of the instrument.

The target populations were domestic and international tourists who were checking in for departure flights to destinations other than the three tsunami-hit provinces of Phuket, Krabi, and Phang Nga, at Bangkok International Airport in September 2005. In order to exclude residents and tourists to the tsunami-hit destinations from the study, two screening questions were included in the survey (Are you a resident of Phuket, Krabi, and Phang Nga? and Did you visit those places during this trip?). A single stage cluster sampling was used to randomly select domestic flights for which 500 passengers were waiting at departure gates, who were approached by five Thai and Chinese research assistants to participate in the survey. A field editing was conducted to check for the completeness of the questionnaires.

The first step in the data analysis was to run descriptive statistics to determine frequency distribution. Secondly, an exploratory factor analysis was used to identify the underlying dimensions of the travel barriers associated with the tsunami-hit destinations. It was also used to construct summated scale scores for subsequent analysis. Finally, Multivariate Analysis of Variance was employed to determine how travel barriers vary between Asian and Western tourists and different demographic variables.

Follow-Up Interviews

In addition, follow-up interviews with six Thai, Chinese, Belgian, and German tourists were undertaken at Cha-Am and Hua Hin beach resorts, (which were the substituted destinations for the tsunami-hit destinations) from December 30, 2009 to January 4, 2010, to offer a better

insight into travel barriers associated with disaster-hit destinations. Respondents were asked about their perception towards the travel barriers with the following questions: What would deter you from traveling to the tsunami-hit areas? Does fear of ghosts deter you from traveling to a disaster-hit destination? Do you believe that places where people have been killed under tragic circumstances such as a natural disaster are haunted by ghosts? How long does it take for a place to be free from ghosts?

RESULTS

Out of the 500 tourists approached, 413 tourists participated in the survey, yielding a response rate of 82%. There was an equal distribution between male and female. Regarding age distribution, the majority of tourists (80%) were between 20 and 39 years old, followed by 11% who were between 40 and 49 years old. As for marital status, slightly more

Table 1. Perceived Travel Barriers across Country of Residence

Travel Barrier Attributes	Country of Residence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ghosts	China	42	3.24	1.01
	UK	46	2.02	1.09
	Germany	22	2.32	1.09
	USA	23	2.30	1.15
	Thailand	280	3.44	1.20
Bad luck (being in a place where people were killed)	China	42	3.29	1.02
	UK	46	2.11	1.16
	Germany	22	2.55	1.06
	USA	23	2.35	1.03
	Thailand	279	3.22	1.20
Undiscovered corpse	China	42	3.40	0.91
	UK	46	2.70	1.21
	Germany	22	2.45	1.14
	USA	23	2.43	0.84
	Thailand	279	3.30	1.09
Hotels and resorts are under construction	China	42	3.79	1.00
	UK	46	3.04	1.15
	Germany	22	3.36	1.05
	USA	23	3.09	0.90
	Thailand	279	3.54	0.97
Infrastructure under construction	China	42	3.62	1.03
	UK	46	2.89	1.27
	Germany	22	3.05	1.21
	USA	23	2.78	1.00
	Thailand	279	3.58	0.98
Uncomfortable feeling of enjoying ourselves in the places where local people are mourning	China	42	3.33	1.12
	UK	46	2.52	1.22
	Germany	22	2.95	0.90
	USA	23	2.83	0.72
	Thailand	279	3.53	0.99

Table 2. Underlying Dimensions of Travel Barriers

Attributes	1	2	3	4	CM ^a	Means
Factor 1: Image of under Reconstruction						
Hotels and resorts are under reconstruction	.885				.69	3.48
Inconvenient access	.802				.60	3.38
Image of wreckage/debris at the destination	.670				.53	3.38
Infrastructure is under reconstruction	.643				.57	3.44
Little information indicating that the destinations are now recovered	.635				.53	3.35
Factor 2: Beliefs in ghosts						
Ghosts		.880			.73	3.14
Bad luck (being in a place where people were killed)		.861			.79	3.01
Undiscovered corpse		.670			.63	3.15
Factor 3: Unsafe Destination						
Lack of safety warning from a national disaster warning center			.880		.69	3.49
Unusual natural phenomenon (earthquake)			.709		.62	3.36
Incomplete tsunami warning system			.689		.61	3.43
Another tsunami occurrence			.651		.62	3.42
Factor 4: Uncomfortable Feelings						
Uncomfortable feelings of enjoying one's self at places where local people are mourning				.955	.908	3.33
Trauma of losing someone in the tsunami				.932	.909	3.05
Eigenvalue	5.63	1.53	1.17	1.09		
Variance (%)	40.2	10.94	8.98	7.75		
Reliability (%)	.814	.810	.75	.83^b		
Cumulative Variance (%)	40.2	51.15	59.53	67.3		
Number of Factors	5	3	4	2		

^a CM refers to communality; ^b Pearson correlation.

than half of the respondents (58%) were single, followed by 35% of married couples. In education, most tourists were highly educated, with 85% having college or graduate degrees, followed by 11% with secondary or high school diplomas. Regarding occupation, more than a quarter were sales and office workers (37%), followed by students (19%), entrepreneurs and managers (16%), government officers (8%), housewives and retirees (6%), and teachers (5%). More than half were Thai residents (68%), whereas major inbound tourists came from the United Kingdom (11%), China (10%), the United States (6%), and Germany (5%). When asked whether the respondents had plans to visit tsunami-affected beach resorts after the disaster, about 38% were undecided, 37% said they had plans to do so, and 25% had no plans to visit such resorts.

Travel Barriers at Tsunami-Hit-Destinations

As can be seen in [Table 1](#), the survey reveals that Thais and Chinese held stronger images of infrastructure and hotels under reconstruction than American, British, and German tourists. [Table 1](#) also shows that the means on ghosts, bad luck, undiscovered corpses, and uncomfortable feelings about being in disaster-hit destinations of the Thais and Chinese are higher than those of the American, British, and German tourists. Then, the exploratory factor analysis (via principal component analysis) with oblique rotation, scree-plot, and the latent root criterion reduced the 14 travel barrier attributes to four underlying factors. The Bartlett test of Sphericity in this study was significant at the level of 0.000, indicating that a non-zero correlation exists among variables. The Measure of Sampling Adequacy of 0.85 exceeds the necessary threshold of sampling adequacy, which requires a minimum of 0.50 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998) (See [Table 2](#)).

Beliefs in Ghosts and Demographic Profile

The results of the Multivariate Analysis of Variance show no significant difference on main effects nor interaction effects on travel barriers across age, gender, marital status, education, or occupation. Thus, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference on beliefs in ghosts across respondents with different age, gender, and education seems valid. Unlike the report by the National Science Foundation (2000), this study supports the study by Freed and Freed (1990), which found that beliefs in ghosts can be found in both genders and in a range of ages. This result also supports previous studies indicating that education does not necessarily cause belief in ghosts to disappear (Burnard et al., 2006; Lindeman & Aarnio, 2007). Particularly, education has not necessarily affected cultural beliefs in ghosts among the Thais, who have acquired such beliefs from childhood (Burnard et al., 2006; Komin, 1991; Terwiel, 1994). Yet, there is a significant difference on such beliefs across country of residence at the multivariate level on all dimensions of travel barriers considered together (Wilk's Lambda = 0.75, $F = 7.6$, $p\text{-value} < 0.01$). Please see [Table 3](#).

The post-hoc Bonferroni test indicated that these four travel barrier factors were significantly different (at the 5% level of significance) between Asian (Chinese and Thai) and Western (American, British and German) tourists. Chinese and Thai tourists perceived higher risks due to beliefs in ghosts, unsafe destinations, images of site under reconstruction and uncomfortable feelings than did American, British and German tourists. The Bonferroni test only found a significant difference on the uncomfortable feeling factor between Thai tourists and German tourists, the British and the American, and between Chinese and British. Thai tourists perceived higher risks due to uncomfortable feelings than did their Western counterparts, whereas Chinese tourists had stronger uncomfortable feelings than the British.

Table 3. Perceived Risks at the Tsunami-Hit Destinations across Country of Residence

Travel Barrier Dimensions	Country of Residence	N	Mean ^a	Standard Deviation
Images of site under reconstruction	China	42	3.64	0.81
	UK	46	2.98	0.99
	Germany	22	3.13	0.96
	USA	23	2.92	0.68
	Thailand	278	3.50	0.72
	Total	411	3.40	0.80
Beliefs in ghosts	China	42	3.31	0.86
	UK	46	2.28	0.94
	Germany	22	2.44	1.02
	USA	23	2.36	0.87
	Thailand	279	3.32	0.96
	Total	412	3.10	1.03
Unsafe destination	China	42	3.64	0.77
	UK	46	2.68	1.03
	Germany	22	2.84	0.98
	USA	23	2.95	0.83
	Thailand	277	3.60	0.68
	Total	410	3.42	0.83
Uncomfortable Feelings	China	42	3.13	0.99
	UK	46	2.39	1.07
	Germany	22	2.68	0.80
	USA	23	2.63	0.68
	Thailand	279	3.41	0.94
	Total	412	3.19	1.00

^a $p < 0.05$.

Discussion

Images of Site under Reconstruction and Destination Safety. It was found that Chinese and Thai non-tourists had stronger pre-conceived images of a site under reconstruction than Western tourists. Conversations with some respondents revealed that most of them knew of the 2004 tsunami occurrence but were unaware of the destination recovery reported by international headlines news or their local televisions and newspapers. Due to geographic distance, people rely on media as their information source to keep them aware of occurrences in distance places (Castelltort, in press). However, international headline news rarely reports updates on destination recovery. Hence, non-tourists are unaware of the recovery.

In addition, most international news, from sources like CNN and BBC, are in English and a language barrier for people who do not understand English, and thus have little or no access to reports on the progress of the recovery. In contrast, Americans and British have more access to news from such agencies and to reports on the Internet as they are in English. Consequently, reports on destination recovery reach more Western than Asian markets, which is of significance to this study. This calls for destination marketers to increase frequency of

news reports about the physical and psychological safety of the destinations to correct negative images, especially among Chinese and Thai markets.

Uncomfortable Feelings. As the findings suggest, Thai respondents tend to have a more significant traumatic response to having lost someone in the tsunami, due to the fact that the tsunami occurred in Thailand, making Thai tourists more ‘emotionally attached’ to the tragedy than inbound tourists. Most Thai respondents in this study said they knew at least one person who had been killed by the tsunami. One Thai participant responded: “My family and I will never go to Phuket because it reminds us of the loss of our family’s friend in the tsunami even through five years have passed.”

Beliefs in Ghosts. Both the survey and interview reveal that belief in ghosts is a travel barrier primarily among Chinese and Thai tourists, but is not dominant with American, British, and German tourists. Similar to previous studies by Deridder, Hendriks, and Zani (1995) and Pepitone and Saffiotti (1997), this finding supports the hypothesis that beliefs in ghosts are more strongly held in Asian (Chinese and Thai) cultures than in Western (American, British, and German) cultures. Likewise, informal conversations with Thai and Chinese tourists who participated in the survey revealed that people who hold such beliefs tend to avoid traveling, especially during the New Year’s holidays, to places where someone has been killed, due to the belief that ghosts and bad luck would haunt them throughout the New Year.

Interviews with one Thai respondent also revealed that: “I fear another tsunami, which could occur because several corpses have not been discovered.” Another said that: “The souls of undiscovered corpses could cause another tsunami or earthquake because they had been deprived of rebirth and thus are malevolent ghosts.” Similar to the studies by Comaroff (2007), Formoso (2001), Freed and Freed (1990), Huang et al. (2008), Rittichainuwat (2006), Tambiah (1970), Tambiah (1984), Terwiel (1994) and Yang et al. (2008) Thai and Chinese respondents in this study believe malevolent ghosts prey on the living and affect tourist decision making. Such belief adheres to the collective Thai and Chinese norm to avoid traveling to places where death occurs.

In contrast, informal conversations with some American tourists revealed that they would visit the place once the destination has physically recovered. Also, one commented: “I am not concerned about the occurrence of another tsunami on the assumption that the disaster would probably not repeat itself at the same place.” According to one German news reporter:

Some Germans have returned to Phuket six months after the disaster. These tourists are repeat tourists and have friends or relatives living at the tsunami-hit destinations. Hence, they have a better understanding of the extent of the damage. Most of them also have searched for more information about tourist destinations by chatting with returned tourists on the Internet.

Hence, repeat tourists may act as unpaid sales people who can influence potential tourists to visit discovering destinations.

Additionally, it is important to note that some Thai and Chinese tourists interviewed indicated that they were neutral toward considering ghosts as their travel barrier in visiting the tsunami-hit-destinations but do not deny the existence of ghosts. Those who were neutral said “there is no objection to organizing religious ceremonies to dispel ghosts at disaster-hit destinations, as such activities relieve ghost fear.” Another commended that “if ghosts really exist, such religious ceremonies, it is felt, would make the place safe from ghosts.” When asked how long it takes before the destination is safe from ghosts, most respondents perceived that “it would take two to three years, depending on the crowding of the destination.” Others believed: “As the destination becomes more crowded, ghosts no longer haunt the destination. Hence, it is safe to travel there again.” However, several inbound Chinese tourists interviewed were reluctant to share their beliefs in ghosts, saying that “during Chinese New Year, people must only talk about good things to ensure good luck throughout the year.” It could be extrapolated from this that they, in fact, simply didn’t want to talk about ghosts for fear of bringing bad luck.

While most of the Thai and Chinese respondents in a 2005 survey (Rittichainuwat, 2006) perceived that Phuket, Khoa Lak, and Phang Nga were haunted by ghosts during the first year of the destination recovery, the 2010 interviews reported in this paper show that, with the passage of five years, most Thai tourists were no longer worried about ghosts at those places. However, while ghosts had mysteriously “disappeared” when these destinations became crowded, most Thai tourists interviewed indicated that they continue to believe in the existence and potential presence of ghosts and that for those who are killed under tragic circumstances and thus unprepared for death, their souls remain or haunt the place where they died, causing problems to tourists at night, such as bothering them while sleeping.

Ghost Beliefs as a Travel Barrier. Many people from Thai and Chinese cultures, have a strong belief in ghosts and so perceived the tsunami-hit destinations as haunted by ghosts during the early stages of destination recovery. Moreover, news reports on ghost stories strengthen the perceived risks of ghosts at the tsunami-hit destinations. Hence, once a ‘ghost story’ becomes widely known, it dissuades people from visiting such places (Comaroff, 2007). Ghost stories surrounding the tsunami-hit destinations may be the community’s mechanism for coping with the traumatic effects of a natural disaster. As Cashman and Cronin (2008) stated, individuals tend to explain the phenomena by integrating it with supernatural beliefs to make sense of the disaster. Moreover, news attention to catastrophes and negative stories make ghost stories hot discussion issues for both news reports and for rumor (Milo & Yoder, 1991). Although in the modern world belief in ghosts is gradually vanishing, it has not completely disappeared. It still serves as a mean to manage individuals’ anxiety and stress caused by uncertainty

(Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; Kim, 1999; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Schütte & Ciarlante, 1998).

Cultural Differences on Beliefs in Ghosts. Similar to studies by Cohen (1990, 1991), Inglis and Holmes (2003), Long (1987), Reisinger (2003), Reisinger and Turner (2002), and Sjödin (1995), secularization in Christianity, norms and values toward scientific rationalism encourage disbelief in ghosts among Westerners. While American and British people separate the physical and the spiritual world and believe in a reality that can be objectively tested, instead of accepting unproven superstitious “evidence,” (Reisinger, 2003), the Chinese and Thai live in cultures where most people hold strong beliefs in ghosts, which conform to collective norms (Formoso, 2001; Komin, 1991; Summala, 1996; Tambiah, 1970, 1984; Terwiel 1994; Yang et al., 2008). Such beliefs continue to be strongly held in Chinese and Thai cultures even in modern times. More importantly, beliefs in ghosts are not only individually held but also socially shared.

Additionally, while American, British and German tourists consider the progress of destination recovery, Thai and Chinese tourists focus on the past tragedy at the destinations: whether or not the place is haunted. As Reisinger (2003) and Reisinger and Turner (2002) note, Western cultures are future time oriented while Asian cultures are past oriented. Hence, when Asian tourists visit with the assumption that the destination is safe, service providers should not cause them worry by informing their guests about a past tragedy at the site (Tarlow & Santana, 2002). This is because Asian tourists tend to be sensitive to negative messages, which might be exaggerated and lead to negative repercussions (Kim & Wong, 2006).

Furthermore, while the Asian (Thai and Chinese) tourists are concerned about both physical and psychological safety, most Western (American, British, and German) tourists pay more attention to the physical recovery. Hence, Western tourists should be the primary target markets of the destinations that suffer from ghost panic by Asian tourists. Once the destinations are crowded with Western tourists, it will be perceived as physically and psychologically safe for Chinese and Thai tourists to visit those places. Nevertheless, an efficient warning system must be installed at the destinations to ensure physical safety, which is the major concern of both Western and Asian tourists (Rittichainuwat, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Ghost Beliefs and Tourism Decision Making

This study highlights the fact that cultural beliefs and norms should be understood as essential considerations in crisis management and destination recovery so that marketers integrate such beliefs and norms in effectively planning marketing communication after a disaster. According to Thai and Chinese norms, religious ceremonies can be

seen as a means of transforming malevolent ghosts into the benevolent dead so that they can take rebirth and dispel ghosts from possessed people (Burnard et al., 2006; Cohen, 1990, 1991; Formoso, 2001; Tambiah, 1970, 1984; Terwiel, 1994). To assure psychological safety, it is necessary to organize ceremonies by various religions to dispel ghosts and to allow potential tourists who hold such beliefs to feel at ease and restore their confidence in visiting such places.

Additionally, country leaders and politicians are important opinion leaders who can influence the modification of the image by being at special events such as an assembly of religious leaders of different religions to give auspice to newly disaster-recovered destinations. Moreover, newsletters on religious ceremonies to dispel ghosts at the disaster-hit destinations should not be treated as irrational. Furthermore, in the aftermath of a disaster, such messages should be released frequently with a focus on Chinese and Thai markets during the early destination recovery period. However, rather than calling such ceremonies ‘dispelling ghost ceremonies,’ they should be called ‘auspicious ceremonies’ to highlight the positive aspect of the place and eliminate the negative word ‘ghost’. It can be seen that, the fear of ghosts at a particular destination can result in a short-term ‘ghost panic’ impact on the recovering destination. However, once the destination has become crowded, such fear disappears, especially if tragedy does not repeat itself at the same place, as confirmed by Beirman (2006), Pizam (2002), Mansfeld (1999, 2006) and Tarlow (2006).

Destination Recovery

According to the studies by Durocher (1994), Faulkner (2001), Henderson (2005), Huang and Min (2002), and Rittichainuwat (2006), a destination takes more than a year to fully recover from natural disaster. Hence, promotional messages should highlight the recovery progress that has been made at the destinations. During the early stage of destination recovery, the beauty of nature can be used to motivate tourists in visiting the tsunami hit-destinations by highlighting the quality of the sea water, the beaches, and the improvements in landscape and infrastructure (Henderson, 2005; Ichinosawa, 2006; Rittichainuwat 2006; Rittichainuwat 2008). In addition, since tourist-generating tour operators would not promote a destination unless it is safe due to liability for their customer safety (Cavlek, 2002; Wilks & Page, 2003), destination marketers must boost safety confidence not only with potential tourists but also with tour operators.

Additionally, since repeat tourists are the first group of customers to return to a destination after recovery (Beirman, 2006; Mansfeld, 2006), special promotions should focus on this market, in order to encourage them to visit the destination so that they can spread positive word-of-mouth news about the destination recovery. Moreover, travel writers (who tend to report positive news about destinations) and international news reporters, whose reports are often on catastrophes (Castelltort, *in press*), should be invited to join familiarization trips

to witness destination recovery. Likewise, marketing communications should focus not only on international English news agencies but also on local television stations and newspapers, as they report in local languages and focus on local circulation, making them more accessible to local markets.

Finally, once a natural disaster has occurred, it leaves behind not only physical damage but also psychological damage. Thus, destination recovery requires more than physical recovery. It also requires psychological recovery, which has lagged behind and has slowed down destination recovery. Nevertheless, ‘ghost panic’ is a short-term effect. Once a destination becomes crowded, it is no longer perceived as haunted by ghosts. However, for people who hold strong beliefs in ghosts or have experienced trauma, the destination continues to be a place of mourning unless all corpses are discovered and properly buried, and appropriate religion ceremonies have been held.

Hence, marketing communications on destination recovery should highlight the fact that the destination is psychologically safe. When strong beliefs in ghosts become a major travel barrier, local authorities and service providers must ask for media assistance to discourage reports of ghosts in order to assist the local people in recovering from the consequences of ‘ghost panic’. Furthermore, the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami called for governments of host destinations to find a counterbalance between tourism income and tourist safety (Kivela, 2006; Plog, 2006). Specially, there is a demand for safety measures such as tsunami warning systems at the tsunami-hit tourist destinations (Rittichainuwat, 2006), which is regarded as one component of a crisis management system to establish confidence and prevent tragedy.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the theoretical development in tourist decision making on the importance of culturally-held beliefs in ghosts. While previous destination recovery studies suggest destination marketers communicate the extent of the physical recovery, this study suggests that such efforts should be made simultaneously with messages confirming that the destination is also psychologically safe. In other words, while most marketing efforts during destination recovery deliver messages about physical recovery of infrastructure and hotels and offer incentives to stimulate tourist arrivals, they fail to create confidence that would ensure the psychological safety of the destinations. Destination marketers can not deny the fact that psychologically perceived risk regarding ghosts is another real factor that delays destination recovery. More importantly, the travel barriers revolving around collective beliefs takes more time to overcome than physical risks from wreckage and debris. Thus, although significant discounts might interest those who do not believe in ghosts, it would not attract those who do.

Limitation of the Study

Since belief in ghosts is a sensitive issue, some participants might not have shown their true attitudes in order to avoid being considered strange or uneducated. Because of this, it can take time to elicit from some respondents their beliefs in ghosts. To illustrate, some respondents initially answered that they did not believe in ghost, but the content of their responses indicated that they were not certain. Similar responses were found among Northern Hindu Indian respondents in a study by Freed and Freed (1990) and a study by Burnard et al. (2006), where some respondents give indirect responses to questions about beliefs in ghosts: denying the beliefs at the beginning but then acknowledging such beliefs. As Bloom, Venard, Harden, and Seetharaman (2007) and Peltzer and Renner (2003) note, although superstition has continued to be a topic of interest for researchers for nearly 60 years, it is difficult to capture actual attitudes due to participants' tendency to answer in a socially desirable way that may, in fact, appear to contradict their superstitious beliefs.

Future studies on this issue would be beneficial to tourism literature. Moreover, due to the small sample size of less than 100 subjects from Asian and Western tourists from China, UK, USA, and Germany, the findings may not be generalized to the general population of these samples. In addition, as all Western and Asian cultural groups do not necessarily share the same cultural dimensions, the analysis in this study is not generalized to other Western and Asian cultural groups. As Reisinger and Crofts (2010) note, due to personality and socioeconomic differences, subcultural differences also exist in these cultures. **A**

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