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Ancestral Homeland Attachment: An Investigation of First-and Second-Generation Thai Migrants' Diaspora Tourism Experiences

Abstract

This study examined how ancestral homeland journeys affected a sense of attachment to Thailand among first- and second-generation Thai diasporas residing in Western countries as well as how these two generations differed in their place attachment. The four dimensions of place attachment (place identity, place dependence, social bonding, and affective attachment) were used as a framework for the investigation. A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. Twenty-two Thai migrants currently living in Western countries who had visited Thailand were interviewed. The findings showed that diaspora tourism experiences helped these migrants reflect upon their sense of belonging to their ancestral homeland, leading them to feel more connected to the country. The first-generation tourists demonstrated a higher level of place attachment to Thailand than the second generation in all four dimensions of place attachment.

Keywords: diaspora tourism experiences, Thai migrants, place attachment, ancestral homeland

1. Introduction

People have always migrated from their country of origin to live permanently in another out of choice or necessity (United Nations, 2021). According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDES, 2020), the number of international migrants worldwide has increased significantly in the past two decades, from 173 million in 2000 to around 281 million in mid-2020. The majority of migrants came from Asia, with India having the largest number of migrants living abroad (UNDES, 2020). Nearly two-thirds of international migrants moved to high-income countries, with Europe being the largest host region (UNDES, 2020).

Geographical and cultural distances between the migrants' ancestral homeland and their host countries cause these migrants to often struggle to assimilate themselves into the host society (King & Christou, 2010; Pearce, 2012). These people are also generally culturally and emotionally attached to their country of origin (Huang et al., 2018) and desire to reconcile with it (Marschall, 2017; Minoo & Eliassi, 2014; Otoo et al., 2021; Pearce, 2012). Huang and Chen (2021) point out that migrants living overseas engage in various forms of transnational activities in order to maintain ties with their country of origin. Among these activities, home return travel represents an important means for them to have actual contact with their ancestral homeland and its people. Such trips are usually known as 'diaspora tourism' in tourism literature (e.g., Etemaddar & Duncan, 2016; Huang et al., 2018; Otoo et al., 2021).

Diaspora tourists have become a significant niche market segment for the tourism industry in many countries (Huang et al., 2018; Otoo et al., 2021; Vong et al., 2017). Their pattern of traveling back home usually does not depend on tourism seasonality (Seraphin et al., 2020). These tourists tend to make frequent visits to their home country and often stay for long periods (Corsale & Vuytsyk, 2015; Huang et al., 2018; Otoo

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et al., 2021). They also spread information about tourist attractions, invest in building new tourist facilities and improving the existing ones in their ancestral countries (Vong et al., 2017). In addition, unlike other international tourists who tend to visit major cities or well-known tourist attractions, these tourists usually visit their hometowns across the country (Huang et al., 2018; Pérez-López, 2007; Seraphin et al., 2020). They also tend to support and contribute to local economies due to their strong emotional connection to their homes (Corsale & Vuytsyk, 2015; Iorio & Corsale, 2013). For these reasons, diaspora tourists are likely to make a more regular and sustainable economic contribution to and stimulate domestic tourism within the ancestral home country (Corsale & Vuytsyk, 2015; Mortley, 2011; Zou et al., 2021).

Thai diasporas have a relatively short migration history compared to other diasporic communities, such as Jews, Chinese, Indian, and African emigrants, which have a longer history of immigration (Boonyopakorn, 2014). The major movement of Thai diasporas out of the country began during the 1970s (Foundation for Women, 2009), most of which were professionals who sought employment in the United States (Boonyopakorn, 2014). The migration of Thai nationals increased rapidly between the 1980s and the early 1990s, and the trend of movement changed to the oil-producing countries in the Middle East region, especially Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, as a result of the oil boom (Global Migration Data Portal, 2021; Huguet & Punpuing, 2005). The majority of these migrant workers were from the northeastern region of Thailand, where households were relatively poor compared to those in other regions (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2012). However, since 1995 the number of Thai people traveling for employment in the Middle East has fluctuated and declined because Thai workers have faced wage competition from other Asian labor-supplying countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Therefore, the main destinations of Thai emigrants who sought overseas employment changed to newly industrialized countries in East Asia and Southeast Asia (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005).

Since the 2000s, the migration of Thai people has increased and become more diversified due to many factors, including globalization, the availability of more modern transportation, and the increased education level of people (Global Migration Data Portal, 2021). However, the main purpose of overseas migration of Thai nationals during the early 2000s was still employment (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005). Although countries in Asia still remained the main destinations of Thai migrants, there were more migrants moving to European countries and North America. According to Foundation for Women (2009), the four main channels used by Thai migrants to gain employment in European countries were private labour recruitment agencies, overseas employers, self-arrangement and companies for outbound migration.

Apart from seeking employment abroad, many Thai people leave the country because of marriage and studying (Boonyopakorn, 2014). In 2010, the top six countries in which Thai people married local residents were Germany, France, the USA, Australia, the UK, and Sweden, all of which were Western countries (Boonyopakorn, 2014). However, the number of Thai emigrants leaving the country for the purpose of studying has not been reported by any Thai government agencies (Boonyopakorn, 2014). According to the Department of Consular Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021), in 2021, around 1.4 million Thai people are residing abroad. Western countries, including the United States, Germany, and Australia, have been major destinations for Thai migrants (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2021). According to Statham et al. (2020), around 80%-90% of Thai emigrants to Europe and North America during the past few decades have been women, and to a much lesser extent, gay men, who have a relationship with their Western male partners through marriage or civil partnership.

Similar to other diaspora communities, Thai diasporas have connections to their ancestral homeland by sending remittances and making regular trips to Thailand (ILO, 2012). However, little is known about the phenomenon of homecoming visits made by Thai diasporas. The majority of research on diaspora tourists has predominantly focused on other ethnic groups, such as Chinese diasporas (e.g., Huang & Chen, 2021; Li & Mckercher, 2016a; Maruyama & Stronza, 2010; Zou et al., 2021) and African migrants (e.g., Lelo & Jamal 2013; Marschall, 2017; Mowatt & Chancellor 2011; Otoo et al., 2021).

This study, therefore, aimed to broaden the literature on diaspora tourism experiences and ancestral homeland attachment by providing empirical evidence from Thai migrants living in Western countries, including the USA, Australia, and other European countries (i.e., Germany, Sweden, and France). Specifically, this study employed the qualitative research approach to examine how experiences gained from ancestral homeland visits reflected and shaped a sense of belonging or place attachment of the first- and second-generation Thai diasporas and how diaspora tourists in these two generations differ in their sense of ancestral homeland attachment. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data from the first- and second-generation Thai migrants who had experiences of visiting Thailand. The four-dimensional framework of place attachment (place identity, place dependence, social bonding and affective attachment) was used in this study. The rationale behind this lies in its ability to capture the multidimensional, dynamic, and complex nature of the concept of place attachment as this framework encompasses the key aspects of place attachment which consists of cognition (knowledge and beliefs), affection (feeling), and action (Brown et al., 2016; Han et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2017; Kyle et al., 2005; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

2. Literature review

2.1. Diaspora tourism and diaspora tourists

Diaspora tourism is generally conceptualized as a trip made by overseas migrants to their ancestral homeland (Huang et al., 2018; Iorio & Corsale, 2013; Li & McKercher, 2016a; Otoo et al., 2021). This type of tourism tends to be family-oriented (Graf, 2017; Marschall, 2015a; 2015b) and can serve as a means to connect diasporic communities residing in foreign countries with the immigrant ancestral homeland (Coles & Timothy, 2004; Hughes & Allen, 2010; Li, 2019). Dillette (2020) also argues that diaspora tourism can also serve as a means of fostering a sense of social justice among travelers by driving them to take action on issues of inequality and social justice, as this type of tourism allows these overseas migrants to gain a sense of rootedness in their home country and become more acutely aware of their privileged position in their host country.

Diaspora tourism is argued to be a subset of cultural tourism (Weaver et al., 2017). It also intersects with other forms of tourism, including pilgrimage tourism (i.e., a trip of Jewish diaspora tourists to Israel) (Cohen 2016; Kelner 2010; Otoo et al., 2021), dark tourism (i.e., a visit of African diaspora tourists to slavery-related sites in African countries) (Lelo & Jamal 2013; Mowatt & Chancellor 2011; Otoo et al., 2021), battlefield tourism (i.e., a journey to a battlefield related to a particular era or event in history and/or sense of national identity) (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2013) and VFR tourism (i.e., migrants who return to their ancestral homeland to keep in touch with friends and relatives) (Corsale & Vuytsyk, 2016; Iorio & Corsale, 2013; Marschall, 2015a; 2015b; Pearce, 2012).

Migrants who visit their ancestral homeland are referred to as 'diaspora tourists', 'homecoming tourists' (e.g., King & Christou, 2010; Li & McKercher, 2016a; Zou et al., 2021), and 'root travelers' (Dillette, 2020) in tourism literature. They can be classified based on generations. Huang et al. (2018) explain that first-generation diaspora tourists are those born in their ancestral home country who then emigrated. The second generation refers to individuals born in a new country who have at least one parent that migrated to that country. The third generation consists of people who have at least one foreign-born grandparent, and finally, other younger generations are individuals whose grandparents were born in a new country (Huang et al., 2018).

In addition to generational classification, Li and McKercher (2016a) classify diaspora tourists into five groups (i.e., reaffirmative, questing, reconnected, distanced, and detached) based on their migration backgrounds and post-travel impact on their place attachment. Prior research (Corsale & Vuytsyk, 2015; Huang & Chen, 2021; Li & McKercher, 2016a; Zou et al., 2021) notes that different groups of diaspora tourists tend to be different in their motivations for ancestral homeland visits, experiences, and place attachments.

Previous studies (e.g., Huang et al., 2016; Li & McKercher, 2016a; Li et al., 2020; Otoo et al., 2021) examined the motivations of the diaspora tourists and similarly argued that their motivations to make a visit to the ancestral homeland are multidimensional. The key motivations include seeking homeland connection and a sense of belonging (Dillette, 2020; Huang et al., 2016; Li & McKercher, 2016a; Otoo et al., 2021); self-discovery and personal fulfillment (Li et al., 2020); family reunion (Huang et al., 2016; Li & McKercher, 2016a); seeking memorable experience (Otoo et al., 2021); achieving a sense of pride and learning (Otoo et al., 2021) and search for social justice (Dillette, 2020).

2.2. Concepts of the ancestral homeland

A notion of ancestral homeland is closely associated with diaspora tourism and is usually defined as a place where diaspora tourists generally have sentimental and material links and a desire to visit (Marschall, 2017; Maruyama & Stronza, 2010; Weingrod & Levy, 2006). This concept is often viewed as a 'physical' place or a country of birth for diaspora tourists themselves or their parents/grandparents. However, researchers (Dickinson, 2014; Hall, 1997; Lewicka, 2011; Minoos & Eliassi, 2014) argue that the concept of the ancestral homeland has both territorial and symbolic senses, and therefore it should not only be viewed as a static place but should also be looked at as perceptions held by diasporic people of their ancestral homeland and their continuous relationships with it. This symbolic sense of ancestral homeland is more applicable to groups of diaspora tourists who cannot legally claim a specific country as their ancestral homeland, such as the Jewish diaspora (Levitt & Water, 2002).

Maruyama and Stronza (2010) state that diasporas tend to have multiple and changing relationships with their ancestral homeland and therefore need to renegotiate their perceptions during an actual visit. Other scholars (Clifford, 1994; Mitchell, 1997) argue that perceptions of an ancestral homeland depend on individuals' current conditions as well as the cultural, economic, and social conditions of their ancestral homeland and their country of residence. Hughes and Allen (2010) add that the concept of ancestral homeland also links with the presence of family. Prior research (Corsale & Vuysyk, 2015; Huang & Chen, 2021; Huang et al., 2018; King & Christou, 2010; Tie et al., 2015; Zou et al., 2021) notes that diaspora tourists in each generation demonstrate significant variances in their perceptions of and connection with ancestral homelands, with the former tending to have clear perceptions and stronger connection and the latter having vague, multilayered perceptions.

2.3. Place attachment

Place attachment is a concept in psychology denoting a positive bond between individuals and a particular place and their meaningful perceptions of and feelings towards that place (Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Li & Mckercher, 2016b; Patwardhan et al., 2020). Previous studies suggest that people develop an attachment to places where they have lived before (Anton & Lawrence, 2016) and or visited during a holiday (Hosany et al., 2017). In diaspora tourism research, this concept has been defined as diaspora tourists' attachment or connection to their ancestral homeland. Various terms have been used to describe the phenomenon of diaspora tourists' place attachment, such as 'home ties' (Li & Mckercher, 2016b), 'sentimental and material links' (Maruyama & Stronza, 2010), 'sense of belonging' (Li & Mckercher, 2016b), 'sense of solidarity' (Maruyama & Stronza, 2010), and 'sense of place' (Qi et al., 2020).

Place attachment has been portrayed as an important factor shaping migrants' cognition and affection for their ancestral home (Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Hosany et al., 2017), as well as a way these migrants identify or value their ancestral home country based on their personal and social interactions within that country (Zou et al., 2021). A number of factors have been found to influence diaspora tourists' attachment to their home country, including migrants' context of leaving their home country (Huang & Chen, 2021), family migration history (Li & Mckercher, 2016b), generation (Li & Mckercher, 2016b), and emotional experiences, including nostalgic memory and affective arousal (Zou et al., 2021).

Existing literature uniformly agrees that place attachment is a multidimensional, dynamic, and complex concept, representing the interplay between cognition (knowledge and beliefs), affection (feeling), and action (Brown et al., 2016; Kyle et al., 2005; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). In early environmental psychology and tourism literature (e.g., Anderson & Fulton, 2008; Williams & Vaske, 2003; Yuksel et al., 2010), place attachment was considered a two-dimensional concept consisting of place identity and place dependence. In this framework, place identity represents a cognitive evaluation of the place (Rose, 1995), whereas place dependence serves as a functional connection (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983). The social and emotional aspects of the people-place relationship are overlooked in this framework (Kyle et al., 2005). More recent studies (Kyle et al., 2005; Zou et al., 2021) realize the important roles of social bonding and affective attachment in this relationship and add these two aspects as the key dimensions of place attachment. In this four-dimensional framework, place attachment consists of (1) place identity, (2) place dependence, (3) social bonding, and (4) affective attachment.

Place identity denotes diaspora tourists' psychological or symbolic attachment to their homeland (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Zou et al., 2021). This dimension reflects the symbolic importance of a homeland that can, in turn, give meaning to and support one's self (Jiang et al., 2015; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015) as well as foster a sense of belonging within that country (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). This dimension of place attachment can be formed through perception and imagination (Huang et al., 2018) and through an individual's accumulated experience with a homeland (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015).

Place dependence represents a functional dimension of place attachment (Zou et al., 2021). It describes how well an ancestral country's unique physical features and conditions can satisfy diasporas' functional needs and goals (Suntikul & Jachna, 2016; Zou et al., 2021). Therefore, the evaluation of place dependence is usually based on the suitability of the physical attributes and conditions of the country (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Place identity and place dependence are also characterized by the importance of place-based activities such as economic activities and religious practices (Blondin, 2021) and are generally constructed through personal experience (Huang et al., 2018).

Social bonding represents the social dimension of places where social interactions occur (Blondin, 2021). This aspect of place attachment occurs as a result of social interactions, relationships, and shared experiences which are cultivated between diaspora tourists and people in their homeland (e.g., family, friends, and other locals) (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Previous studies (Huang et al., 2018; Li, 2019; Li & McKercher, 2016a, 2016b; Zou et al., 2021) show that assistance from relatives and other residents as well as positive interactions and relationships between diaspora tourists and local people during the homeland trips help diaspora tourists in developing/renewing bonding ties with these people, which in turn create homeland attachment. Blondin (2021) argues that social bonding is also determined by a strong sense of community and collective responsibility.

Finally, affective attachment or place affect represents an emotional dimension of place attachment (Zou et al., 2021) which feelings of diaspora tourists towards their ancestral home, its people, and other attributes of the country (Debenedetti et al., 2014). Such feelings can be either positive or negative (Manzo, 2005). Blondin (2021) argues that individuals who are emotionally attached to a certain place tend to increase their adaptive capacity and raise their tolerance of staying in that place.

3. Methodology

This study examined ancestral homeland attachment of Thai diasporas residing in Western countries, including the USA, Australia, and other European countries (i.e., Germany, Sweden, and France). These countries can represent a good case study because they have sizeable Thai diaspora communities (IOM, 2021). This

study employed an interpretive paradigm utilizing a qualitative research approach rather than a quantitative methodology because it does not seek to identify causal relationships (Durdella, 2019). On the other hand, it aimed to gain a rich and in-depth understanding of *how* and *why* these individuals gave meaning to their attachment to Thailand based on their diaspora tourism experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In addition, the issues of this study were complex and dynamic. Therefore, the qualitative research approach was deemed suitable for enabling the researcher to capture the multiple and complex realities of the issue (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Li & Chan, 2018; Li & McKercher, 2016b). Furthermore, Lewicka (2011) argues that the concept of places cannot be sufficiently described by quantitative measures. In line with this, Cresswell (2007) states that quantitative measures of place attachment might not enable the researcher to gain a richness of the meanings of place attachment.

In keeping with the qualitative nature of this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data (Carey, 2013). The respondents were Thai migrants living permanently in Western countries and were either first- or second-generation. Before conducting the main fieldwork, a pilot study was undertaken to test the effectiveness of the semi-structured interview guide in capturing the data needed to fulfill the research objectives (Jennings, 2011). The pilot study was useful in recruiting the respondents for the study because the researcher could access additional respondents through snowball sampling by asking the purposefully selected respondents in the pilot study to recommend their acquaintances (Emmel, 2013). This approach was effective because it enhanced the researcher's credibility (Emmel, 2013).

The main study was conducted between January and March 2020. A total of 22 respondents were interviewed: fourteen first-generation migrants and eight second-generations. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to identify and access the respondents. Criteria for selecting respondents included: (1) being Thai migrants, either first- or second-generation, who have already obtained permanent residency or citizenship in a Western country; (2) traveling back to Thailand at least twice in the last five years; and (3) being over eighteen for ethical reasons.

Purposive sampling was first used to identify the first set of respondents whose qualifications met the criteria. This sampling technique enabled the researcher to gain access to the information-rich individuals with direct experiences that yielded valuable insights for the research questions (Patton, 2014). This first group of respondents consisted of four persons, all of which were first-generations. Then, snowball sampling was employed to identify the other respondents. This sampling technique helped the researcher to take advantage of the social networks of identified respondents, which could create a multiplier effect in which one person introduced two or more additional respondents (Emmel, 2013; Li & McKercher, 2016b). Specifically, the researcher asked the first set of respondents to nominate other individuals whose qualifications met the criteria and who might be willing to be interviewed. These individuals were then asked to take part in the research and also to recommend others (Emmel, 2013). The researcher continued collecting the data through interviews and analyzing the data until data saturation was achieved, which was when the new themes stopped emerging from the data (Jennings, 2011; Li & Chan, 2018). In this study, the saturation point was achieved after the researcher had conducted interviews with 22 respondents.

The interviews with the first-generation respondents were conducted in Thai, whereas those with second-generation respondents were conducted in either Thai or English based on the respondents' convenience. Most of the interviews were conducted online through Line, and four interviews were carried out face-to-face because the respondents were visiting Thailand while the research was being conducted. All the interviews were video-recorded upon obtaining written consent from the respondents. Each interview lasted 50-75 minutes. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents' information (FG is used for first-generation respondents and SG for second-generation respondents).

Interviews centered around the respondents' motivations and experiences of visits to Thailand and how these experiences impacted their perceptions of, feelings towards, and connection to Thailand. The researcher encouraged the respondents to freely express their opinions and share their positive and negative stories. The respondents were aged around 18-52 years. Out of 22, 13 were female. The majority reside in the US and Germany (six people from each country), with the rest living in Sweden (four), Australia (three), the UK (two), and France (one). Most of them regularly visit Thailand approximately once or twice a year and stay around one to two months each time. Tables 1 and 2 below summarize the demographic profiles of the respondents.

Table 1
Profiles of the first-generation respondents

Name	Gender	Age	Host country
FG1	Female	39	USA
FG2	Female	41	UK
FG3	Female	45	Germany
FG4	Male	44	USA
FG5	Male	54	Sweden
FG6	Male	46	UK
FG7	Female	45	Germany
FG8	Female	62	USA
FG9	Female	47	USA
FG10	Male	54	Sweden
FG11	Female	53	Australia
FG12	Female	41	France
FG13	Male	63	Germany
FG14	Female	55	Germany

Table 2
Profiles of the second-generation respondents

Name	Gender	Age	Host country
SG1	Female	18	USA
SG2	Female	18	USA
SG3	Female	19	Germany
SG4	Male	18	Sweden
SG5	Male	23	Germany
SG6	Female	22	Australia
SG7	Male	18	Sweden
SG8	Male	25	Australia

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and manually analyzed using thematic analysis. First, the researcher read and reread the transcription in order to be familiar with the data, then interpreted and developed codes and searched for patterns in order to generate themes consistent with the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Findings

The findings presented in this section are categorized based on the four dimensions of place attachment (place identity, place dependence, social bonding, and affective attachment). Comments made by the respondents are also presented where appropriate to reflect their voices. The summary of the findings is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
Summary of the findings

Dimensions of place attachment	First-generations	Second-generations
Place identity	They always considered Thailand as their homeland, and they were always members of the country	They did not view Thailand as their homeland but considered their current country of residence as their homeland. However, Thailand was still a very special and meaningful place for their parent(s) and themselves
Place dependence	Visiting Thailand represented a way to perform certain activities which could not be done easily or at all elsewhere	Trips to Thailand were perceived as a holiday on which they could rest and relax after studying or working or a place where they could escape from their routine life.
Social bonding	Visiting Thailand allowed them to have face-to-face meetings and socialize with family and/or friends in familiar environments, which evoked a sense of nostalgia and helped strengthen relationships with these people	Their social bonding was limited to a group of relatives. Interactions with relatives during the homeland trips helped enhance relationships as well as represented a means for cultural exchanges.
Affective attachment	Changes in emotions: beginning with feeling excited, warm, and joyful, then gradually changed to being indifferent and sometimes feeling frustrated, bored, and tired, then changed to being sad and guilty just a short time before departing Thailand.	Changes in emotion: beginning with feeling excited, warm, and joyful, then gradually changed to being indifferent and sometimes feeling frustrated, bored, and tired.

4.1. Place identity

For the respondents in the first generation, the notion of 'being a true member of society' was largely shared. Most of these respondents mentioned that they felt much more relaxed and free from worries when in Thailand due to experiences in their host countries, such as the language barrier, physical differences, cultural differences, and racial bullying. They also added that they felt like 'outsiders' in their host country despite living there for many years and could never feel fully assimilated because of cultural and physical differences. Visiting Thailand helped them gain a sense of 'true' belonging and boosted their confidence and sense of honor as members of society and humans. In addition, for them, Thailand was always their homeland, and they were always members of the country, despite living elsewhere. FG2 illustrates that point:

I have been in the UK for almost ten years, but I've never felt like I actually belonged to that country. ... Our look and culture are the main reasons making me feel like I am always an outsider there. ... For me, visiting Thailand means a lot to me. It reminds me of who I am and where I actually belong.

For those in the second generation, many said that they felt connected to Thailand from their first visit, whereas other respondents said that the feeling of connection to Thailand took longer after having more experiences of and familiarity with the country and its culture, as well as establishing deeper relationships with relatives. The data analysis revealed that respondents in the former group were already fluent in Thai when they first visited the country, allowing them to communicate with their relatives easily. In addition, some also said that they were already familiar with Thai culture because their parent(s) taught them these and reminded them that they were Thai people. Second-generation respondents in the latter group further explained that during the first visit, they did not perceive a sense of belonging to Thailand. They mentioned obstacles and differences causing such perceptions, including language barrier (because they were not fluent in the Thai language),

a lack of understanding of Thai culture, especially manners in the seniority-based culture of Thailand, and differences in the surrounding environments (i.e., architecture and weather). These respondents also gave reasons that made them feel more connected to Thailand later, which included regular visits to Thailand, a warm welcome from and sincere love and care shown by relatives, being surrounded by people of the same race, more familiarity with the environment, and more understanding of Thai language and culture. All of these factors not only provided a sense of belonging but also created a feeling of relaxation and confidence. For example, SG2 and SG6 noted that:

I am more relaxed and confident to be surrounded by people of the same race...In the USA, I feel different sometimes because of my Asian looks...Besides, because my parents take me to Thailand every year, that helps me get to know the country, the culture, and the language, and my knowledge on these things gets better every time I visit the country. (SG2)

I visit Thailand every year. Each time, it makes me more familiar with everything there, so I felt more connected to this country... My knowledge on Thai culture and Thai language improves every time I visit the country...I also feel relaxed and warm because of the love and hospitality shown by my relatives. (SG6)

The first time I came to Thailand was when I was eight years old. At that time, my Thai language and knowledge on Thai culture was very limited. I still remember that I did not have any sense of belonging nor feel connected with my relatives in Thailand because I didn't understand the language, and people laughed at me when I behaved differently from them...Later my mum took me to Thailand every year, and that helped me feel more connected with the country and my relatives. (SG7)

However, all the respondents in the second generation did not view Thailand as their homeland but as their country of residence because it is where they were born and raised. Nevertheless, in their opinion, Thailand was still a very special and meaningful place for their parent(s) and themselves.

4.2. Place dependence

In terms of place dependence, visits to Thailand were perceived by all first-generation respondents as a way to perform certain activities which could not be done easily or at all elsewhere. Three main activities were mentioned: real Thai food, buying certain items and receiving certain types of medical treatment. All the respondents mentioned food in this group and explained that although they regularly cooked and ate Thai food in their host country, the taste was different from that in Thailand, mainly due to the lack of certain ingredients and techniques. Some ingredients could not be found in their host country, and some were very expensive. Therefore, they needed to adapt the ingredients, which changed the flavor. Moreover, they needed to adapt the way of cooking some kinds of food because they could not find the right utensils in the host country. Similar problems existed when they went to Thai restaurants in their host country. FG3 stated that:

Eating Thai food in Thailand made me realize how much I missed the real taste of Thai food...you can never find the same taste of Thai food elsewhere. Although you can eat Thai food at Thai restaurants in Germany, the taste is so different. I think because the ingredients are not as fresh as those in Thailand.

Buying certain items such as medicines, clothes, ingredients, and household appliances to take back to the host country was another important activity mentioned by more than half of the first-generation respondents. They mentioned the high prices of some items and difficulties in finding them in their host country, noting that visits to Thailand helped them buy such items easily at much lower prices. The last activity mentioned by these respondents was certain types of medical treatment. Five respondents stated that they preferred to have dental care in Thailand because it was a lot cheaper than in their host country, whereas the other three respondents said that they felt more comfortable having medical treatment or an operation in Thailand because

they could communicate in their own language with Thai doctors and nurses without any worries about the language barrier. For example, FG9 stated that:

I feel more comfortable to have a medical checkup in Thailand because I don't have any language barrier when communicating with a doctor or a nurse. Although I can speak good English, I still find it hard to understand what the doctor in America says.

For the second generation, trips to Thailand were perceived as a holiday to rest and relax after studying or working. Some stated that such trips helped them escape from their routine life. All of the respondents said that they enjoyed many attractions in Thailand, especially the beaches and the seas. Additionally, the perception that Thailand was a place where one could taste authentic Thai food was also shared by some respondents in this group.

4.3. Social bonding

For first-generation respondents, visiting Thailand allowed them to have face-to-face meetings and socialize with family and/or friends in familiar environments such as the house where they were born and raised and restaurants or other important places. Face-to-face interactions in such places evoked a sense of nostalgia and were more meaningful, and helped strengthen relationships because these practices allowed them to feel more connected to the country and people. In their opinions, these were 'real' conversations, reading the body language and facial expressions of those they were talking to. The respondents pointed out that although nowadays they could talk to these people via the latest mobile applications or virtual platforms, but the feelings and atmosphere were totally different because they still felt that there were barriers to conversations.

In addition, the first-generation respondents with children not only regarded a visit to Thailand as a means for them to retain ties with their acquaintances, but also as a way to foster connections between their children and their family members so that their children would still feel part of the extended family in Thailand. Moreover, they also used such visits to help their children get familiar with Thai culture and values. For example, FG4 noted that:

My wife and I always want our kids to know who their grandparents and other relatives are... We also want them to feel that they are always Thai people, and they are part of our family in Thailand. This is why we always take them to visit Thailand. We also believe that this can help our kids understand Thai culture and remember that they are Thai people, not American people.

For the second generation, their social bonding was limited to a group of relatives. Many of them explained that visits to Thailand enhanced these relationships. SG4, SG7, and SG8 similarly said that they enjoyed being surrounded by their relatives who shared cultural and social identities with them because it made them feel secure. Some respondents stated that for them, a visit to Thailand is a means of cultural exchange in which they could improve their Thai language and gain a better understanding of Thai culture from their relatives, and at the same time, they could teach foreign languages and share the culture of their country of residence.

4.4. Affective attachment

The data analysis detected changes in the emotions of the respondents towards Thailand at different stages of their stay in Thailand. Two changing patterns of emotions were identified. The first pattern began with positive emotions, which occurred early on (i.e., feeling excited, warm, relaxed, and joyful), then gradually changed to indifference and sometimes became negative ones after a long stay (i.e., feeling frustrated, bored, and tired). These negative emotions were mainly the result of geographical and/or cultural differences as well as differences between Thailand and its host country. This pattern was found among some second-generation respondents who experienced an extended stay in Thailand during their trips.

The second changing pattern of emotions is similar to the first but adds another change in emotion before the respondents departed the country. This pattern was found only among first-generation respondents. A short time before leaving Thailand, these respondents mentioned that they were sad to leave people they knew and longed to return. Many first-generation respondents also added that they felt guilty at being unable to take care of their family in Thailand, and had to leave them behind.

5. Discussions

This study supports prior studies (Huang et al., 2013; Marschall, 2017; Zou et al., 2021), which argue that diaspora tourism experiences increase individuals' attachment to their ancestral homeland. It also confirms the findings of other studies (Corsale & Vuytsyk, 2015; Huang & Chen, 2021; Huang et al., 2018; King & Christou, 2010; Tie et al., 2015; Zou et al., 2021), which report that diaspora tourists in different generations tend to differ in their attachment to their ancestral homeland, with the first generation tending to demonstrate a significantly higher level of attachment than those in other generations. Similar findings were found in this study, as the first generation demonstrated a higher level of place attachment to Thailand than the second generation in all four dimensions of place attachment.

Although the sense of place attachment of the second-generation group was lower than the first-generation group, data analysis revealed that these diaspora tourists had quite a strong connection to Thailand, and their sense of connection increased each time they visited the country. These findings were in contrast to other studies (e.g., Espiritu & Tran, 2002; Kibria, 2003; Louie, 2004; Maruyama & Stronza, 2010), which reported that these second-generation diaspora tourists tend to feel less connected to their ancestral homeland after visits, due to their first-hand witnessing of economic, cultural, and/or geographical differences and language barriers between their ancestral homeland and their country of residence. The current study identified factors that played a role in such positive changes in the attachment (discussed below). Changes in the perceptions of second-generation tourists towards the ancestral homeland reflect multiple and changing relationships between diaspora tourists and their ancestral homeland, and continuous renegotiation of their perceptions during visits, as suggested by Maruyama and Stronza (2010), and the fluid and complex nature of place attachment in existing literature (Brown et al., 2016; Kyle et al., 2005; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

6. Conclusion

This study argues that diaspora tourism experiences enhance a sense of attachment to Thailand among both first- and second-generation Thai migrants residing in Western countries because they represent a process allowing diaspora tourists to (re)construct, (re)define, and/or (re)negotiate their social and cultural identities. However, the first-generation migrants demonstrated a higher level of attachment to Thailand than the second generation in all four dimensions of place attachment. The stronger attachment to Thailand of the first-generation tourists was demonstrated through four main factors; including the notion of Thailand always being their homeland (whereas the second generations regarded their country of residence as their homeland), the suitability of Thailand in fulfilling the needs of these respondents, their interactions with wider social groups in the country. Also, their specific feelings reflect deeper emotional attachment to the country (i.e., sadness and guilt at leaving the country and a longing to return).

6.1. Implications

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study not only validates but also extends existing literature in diaspora tourism. It identified important factors affecting the degree and changes of attachment to ancestral homeland among diasporic tourists. The first factor is a sense of familiarity, as argued by previous studies

(Clarke & Bowen, 2021; Huang et al., 2015; Styliadis et al., 2020), as important in enhancing the bond between people and place. In this study, familiarity with people, culture, geography, and other attributes of Thailand was found as a key factor leading the first-generation diaspora tourists to feel a sense of being a true member of society, which they had never obtained in their host country due to differences in physical features, race, and culture. Such a sense was seen as significant, boosting confidence and as a sense of honor in these respondents. In addition, familiarity, which resulted from regular visits to Thailand, was also found to enable the second-generation diaspora tourists to feel more relaxed and gain a better understanding of many aspects of the country, which in turn enhanced their attachment to Thailand.

The second factor is perceptions of sameness between the respondents themselves and people in their ancestral homeland. Maruyama (2017) points out that diaspora tourists generally engage in a series of comparisons between their home country and their country of residence during their homeland trips, leading them to renegotiate their sense of belonging. This study extends this argument by revealing that diaspora tourists also compare their social and cultural identities with people in their home country. In this study, the notion of sameness was largely shared by the respondents, especially those in the second generation. This notion of sameness mentioned by the respondents encompasses physical features (i.e., color of hair and skin, size and shape of eyes, nose, and lips), race, language, culture, and values. Some of these are natural aspects (i.e., physical features and race). In contrast, some are socially constructed and can be enhanced through a process of learning and cultural exchange (i.e., language, culture and values). The first group of aspects was found to create a feeling of relaxation, which in turn fostered ancestral homeland attachment among the first generation tourists and some in the second generation when they visited Thailand and were surrounded by people who shared their physical features and race. The latter group of sameness was found to enable the second generations to gain a greater sense of place attachment. The more they acquire this sense of sameness, the greater the place attachment.

The next factor involves how diaspora people were treated by acquaintances in their ancestral homeland. This study agrees with Marschall (2017) that the hospitality of friends and family in an ancestral home country enhances a sense of belonging among diaspora tourists. In the current study, the respondents received a warm welcome, love, and sincere care from family and/or friends, which positively impacted their sense of belonging, creating feelings of relaxation, safety, and security, all closely associated with the concept of being 'at home'. The final factor is face-to-face interactions with acquaintances. This was found to help enhance homeland attachment among first-generation respondents, who viewed such interactions as 'true conversations', free from any kind of limitations and allowing them to be more joyful and meaningful than interacting through social media or virtual platforms. These respondents felt that meaningful interactions required 'physical settings' of their homeland and therefore could occur only in Thailand.

In terms of practical implication, the findings of this study have practical importance as they provide insight to the stakeholders in Thailand involved in destination management and marketing on how to create, sustain and enhance place attachment to Thailand through diaspora tourism experiences. Based on the findings of this study, certain factors are identified as having an influence on the degree of place attachment. The frequency of visits is one of these factors, which suggests that national and local stakeholders should actively promote such trips by designing marketing campaigns specifically targeting members of Thai diasporic communities living abroad, encouraging them to make more frequent visits. The findings also indicate that the company and warm welcome of family is important in fostering a sense of belonging among Thai diasporas. This suggests that marketing efforts should focus on social gatherings and bonding between diaspora tourists and their relatives. In addition, the creation and promotion of family-oriented events, as well as family tour packages, are recommended. Such activities can help reinforce and nurture place attachment. Finally, the findings reveal that Thai language ability and local cultural understanding are important factors, fostering a sense of belonging for second-generation tourists while also hindering connection for those who lack them. These factors can be enhanced through the creation of learning experiences in the form of short courses or camps focusing

on improving these skills and knowledge for diaspora tourists in the second generation and beyond. All the above-mentioned efforts not only help promote place attachment among Thai diaspora tourists but can also generate additional income for the country.

6.2. Limitations and directions for future research

Two main limitations were identified. The first lies in the nature of the qualitative research approach used in this study in terms of its generalizability. In order to deal with this limitation, this study adopted a concept of transferability as an alternative approach to warrant the trustworthiness of the findings. In this study, empirical evidence, including how interviews were conducted and the data were analyzed, the respondents' profiles and the number and length of the interviews were provided to ensure that the findings can be transferable to other situations that have a similar context. The second limitation involves the respondents of this study, who are only from the first and second generations. This is because Thai immigration is relatively new, leading to a small number of people in other generations, most of whom are still minors.

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of Thai diasporas is under-researched despite their potential for the economic and social development of the country, and many areas are unexamined. Therefore, future research should consider exploring the motivations for home return visits of these tourists, their constraints for traveling back home, and their post-trip experiences. In addition, further studies on Thai people residing in other geographical contexts, such as the Middle East and other Asian countries, which represent major Thai migrant-receiving destinations, would provide a better understanding of this phenomenon. Lastly, as mentioned above, this study has a limitation in terms of the generalizability of the findings. Future studies can overcome this limitation by collecting data from a larger sample and incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods.

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