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Strangers in Their Homeland: Reverse Culture Shock Experiences of First-Generation Diaspora Thai Tourists

Abstract

This study explored reverse culture shock faced by the first-generation Thai diasporas residing in Western countries upon visiting Thailand. A qualitative research approach guided it. Semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain data from 21 respondents. Thematic analysis revealed that all Thai diaspora tourists experienced reverse culture shock, which could be categorized into five main aspects: cultural, interpersonal, emotional, moral, and environmental. Further, the study suggested that reverse culture shock did not always result from the elements in a home country that caused difficulties, discomfort or unpleasant feelings but could also come from the attributes which tourists sought but could not find in their current country of residence and the realization of the significance of things in their home country that were previously overlooked.

Keywords: reverse culture shock, Thai diaspora tourists, first-generation, home country, Western countries

1. Introduction

Migrant travelers, so-called diaspora tourists, have become a fast-growing and essential niche segment in the tourism industry (Huang et al., 2018; Otoo et al., 2021; Tomczewska-Popowycz & Taras, 2022). These individuals often feel connected to their home country culturally and emotionally (Huang et al., 2013; 2018) and seek to maintain close contact with it (Marschall, 2017; Otoo et al., 2021). They make a sustainable economic contribution (Li et al., 2020; Tomczewska-Popowycz & Taras, 2022) and have a positive, long-lasting socio-cultural impact on the destination countries (Ferrari et al., 2022). Diaspora tourists tend to have unique travelling patterns of immense benefit to their home country. First, the decision to make a homeland trip does not depend on seasonality (Ferrari et al., 2022; Seraphin et al., 2020), and therefore, they are likely to make more regular trips and stay longer than other tourists (Ferrari et al., 2022; Otoo et al., 2021). Second, they tend to visit their hometowns across the country, which are likely to be small cities, rather than visiting significant cities or famous tourist sites (Ferrari et al., 2022) and therefore, their visits can boost economies at a local level as they are likely to spend money in local businesses (Panibratov & Rysakova, 2020). Finally, as diaspora tourists are generally passionate about their motherland, have strong ties to and an appreciation of the local culture and lifestyle, and seek to engage in authentic interactions with local communities, these behaviors can lead to mutual and sustainable benefits for all concerned (Ferrari et al., 2022).

The history of the Thai diaspora is relatively short compared to groups of international migrants such as Jews, African, Chinese, and Indian migrants with a very long history of displacement and migration. A significant movement of Thai migrants began in the 1970s (Boonyopakorn, 2014), and their primary destination was the USA (Boonyopakorn, 2014; Foundation for Women, 2009). The primary reason for relocating was to seek better employment opportunities (Boonyopakorn, 2014). Since the 2000s, due to globalization, technological development in transportation and the increased level of education, the number of Thai migrants has risen and become more diverse (Global Migration Data Portal, 2021). While many Thai people still leave the country to seek better employment abroad, others relocate to study or to marry (Boonyopakorn, 2014). The destinations for relocating are more diverse, including countries in Asia, Europe, North America, and

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Australia (Boonyopakorn, 2014; Huguet & Punpuing, 2005). According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA, 2020), the total number of Thai people living overseas at mid-year 2020 was around 3.6 million, and the five leading countries of residence were the USA, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, and the UK.

Like other ethnic groups residing overseas, the Thai diaspora desires to keep in touch with people and culture and regularly visit Thailand (Proyrungroj, 2022). Although the phenomenon of diaspora tourism has attracted the interest of many scholars and researchers during the past few years (Ferrari et al., 2022), many existing studies attend to significant groups of diaspora communities such as Chinese migrants (e.g. Huang et al., 2018; Tie et al., 2015) and African migrants (e.g. Otoo et al., 2021; Pinho, 2008). The study of the Thai diaspora is still neglected. This study, therefore, sought to fill a gap in the literature on the reverse culture shock experienced by first-generation Thai migrants residing in Western countries upon visiting their homeland. First-generation migrants were selected as the focus of this study because these individuals were born and raised in a country of origin, giving them a strong personal connection with the culture and people of that country (Huang et al., 2018). Studying reverse culture shock experiences in this group would, therefore, provide an interesting insight into the phenomenon of reverse culture shock.

2. Literature review

2.1. Diaspora tourists

Diaspora tourists refer to the migrants who visit their country of origin (Otoo et al., 2021). This type of tourist encompasses migrants who were born in their country of origin and migrated to another country and their descendants born and raised in a new country (Huang et al., 2018; Marschall, 2017). The sense of displacement and the absence of a sense of belonging and acceptance is usually found among these tourists. They tend to compensate for these negative psychological states by making a homeland journey to search for and maintain a connection with their ancestral root, identity, and heritage (Dillette, 2020; Ferrari et al., 2022). Many other motivations are found to drive diaspora tourists to visit their ancestral homeland, such as visiting family members/friends (Tomczewska-Popowycz &Taras, 2022), nostalgia (Ray & McCain, 2012), exploring places familiar from stories shared by immigrant parents or found in books and promotional material (Tomczewska-Popowycz &Taras, 2022); family obligation (Tomczewska-Popowycz &Taras, 2022); and self-discovery (Li et al., 2020).

2.2. Culture shock and reverse culture shock

When people migrate to a new country, they usually encounter psychological difficulties during the initial settlement period while trying to assimilate into a new country's cultural and social norms (Hakak & Anton, 2020). This psychological challenge is known as 'culture shock' (Adler, 1975; Oberg, 1960).

As culture shock is standard for people who relocate to a new place (Adler, 1975), this psychological tension is often found among international migrants or people in diasporic communities (Hack-Polay, 2012). Existing literature highlights various symptoms of culture shock faced by these diasporas, such as homesickness (Hack-Polay, 2012), feeling alienated (Lindencrona et al., 2008), and feeling ongoing sadness, stress, and anxiety (Schweitzer et al., 2006).

When these international migrants return home after many years abroad, they usually encounter an emotional and psychological state known as 'reverse culture shock' or 'reentry shock' (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). This phenomenon was defined by Gaw (2000, p. 1) as "the process of readjusting, re-acculturating, and re-assimilating into one's own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period". Reverse culture shock is also often described by many scholars as a feeling of not belonging to one's own native culture

(Fanari et al., 2021) or a sense that "a place once lived becomes uncomfortable and sometimes unacceptable as a place to be in" (Adeniyi & Onyeukwu, 2021, p. 34).

Reverse and culture shock are related phenomena (Akhtar et al., 2018). Cross-border traveller first encounters culture shock when they arrive in a new country and try to adjust to the culture there; they then face another cycle of emotional and psychological shock, so-called reverse culture shock, when they return to their country of original (Sreeleakha, 2014). Although a sense of losing familiar cues characterizes both culture shock and reverse culture shock, they are also argued to be different in that culture shock is the shock of newness and unfamiliarity of a new country. In contrast, reverse culture shock is the shock of returning to an oldness and 'used to be' familiar environment and culture of a home country (Sreeleakha, 2014).

Many scholars similarly argue that the effects of reverse culture shock are more challenging than those of culture shock (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Young, 2014). The severe impacts of reverse culture shock on returning visitors are argued to mainly result from the differences in culture between a new country and a home country (Pitts, 2016) and changes in identities and worldviews within the returning visitors because of living in a new culture (Le & LaCost, 2017). Other factors are also found to contribute to the problematic experiences for returning visitors. First, returnees are already accustomed to the culture and environment of a new country and find the home country jarring (Adeniyi & Onyeukwu, 2021). Second, returning individuals are usually unprepared for the challenges they may experience in their home country (Mooradian, 2004). Third, these people may also believe that things and people in their home country remained unchanged while they were away when many changes might occur (Mooradian, 2004). Finally, the returning visitors' need for support from family and friends during their re-adjustment process may not be met (Mooradian, 2004). For example, Fanari et al. (2021) revealed that returnees encountered unpleasant feelings when their loved ones showed little or no interest in their life stories overseas.

Although there is little evidence of reverse culture shock faced by diaspora tourists in the existing literature, some studies on diaspora tourists' homeland journey experiences provide clues to the challenges these tourists encounter during their homeland visits. For example, Huang et al. (2013) found that diaspora tourism experiences may not always be positive, as diaspora tourists may not find what they hope for. While some diaspora tourists feel welcomed and feel a sense of belonging, others may become alienated from their homeland (Huang et al., 2013). In line with this, some scholars (Horst, 2007) argue that frequent contact with a home country may alienate diasporas because such communication can reveal more differences than similarities between themselves and those living in the home country.

This study used the four aspects of Fray's (1988) Homecomer Cultural Shock Scales (HCSS) to understand first-generation Thai diaspora tourists' reverse culture shock experiences upon visiting Thailand. The first dimension of this model is cultural distance, which can be conceptualized as "the distance or dissonance that a person feels between him/herself and the values, beliefs, and customs of society in general" (Fray, 1988, p.27). It includes distance regarding lifestyle, social norms, and religious standards (Fray, 1988). The second dimension is the interpersonal distance, which was conceptualized by Fray (1988) as "feelings of not 'fitting in' and 'social alienation, loneliness, and a lack of acceptance or identification with a smaller group of significant others'" (p. 27). This aspect of reverse culture shock is associated with returning sojourners' disconnection from people in their original networks (i.e. family, friends, romantic partners) in their home country. The next aspect is grief, explained by Fray (1988) as missing the way of life in one's home country. Various unpleasant feelings such as sadness, loss, loneliness, disappointment (Le & LaCost, 2017; Mooradian, 2004), frustration (Le & LaCost, 2017), homesickness (Nielsen, 2022) and anxiety (Akhtar et al., 2022) are found among returning individuals upon returning to their home country. The last aspect is moral distance, which concerns difficulties adjusting to an individual's home country's dominant values or ethical aspects (e.g., appropriate behaviors, local customs, ways of thinking and social taboos) (Fray, 1988).

3. Methodology

This study aimed to understand how first-generation Thai migrants residing in Western countries constructed the meanings of their reverse culture shock experiences upon visiting their home country. An interpretive paradigm and a qualitative research methodology were employed to fulfil this research objective.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The respondents in this study were 21 first-generation Thai migrants who were currently permanent residents in Western countries. The data saturation point defined the number of respondents when the respondents' answers became repetitive, and no new categories or themes emerged from the data (Patten & Newhart, 2018). These respondents were identified and accessed through purposive and snowball sampling techniques based on pre-determined criteria: (a) being first-generation Thai migrants currently residing in Western countries and (b) making a trip to Thailand at least once a year. Of 21 participants, 12 were female, and nine were male, aged between 40 and 59. Seven people resided in the USA, six in Germany, five in Sweden and three in the UK. Their demographic profiles are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Demographic profiles of the respondents

ID	Gender	Age	Host country
D1	Female	40	USA
D2	Female	41	UK
D3	Female	45	Germany
D4	Male	44	USA
D5	Female	55	Sweden
D6	Male	46	Sweden
D7	Male	45	Germany
D8	Female	51	Sweden
D9	Female	47	USA
D10	Male	54	Sweden
D11	Female	46	Sweden
D12	Male	59	Germany
D13	Female	53	UK
D14	Male	47	USA
D15	Female	42	Germany
D16	Female	49	Germany
D17	Male	50	UK
D18	Female	41	USA
D19	Male	52	USA
D20	Female	53	USA
D21	Male	46	Germany

The interview guide was developed based on the literature review and was used as a framework to ensure that all the important topics were discussed (Carey, 2013). The interview guide consisted of questions about the participants' home return travel experiences, changes from living abroad, and positive and negative experiences they encountered upon visiting their home country.

Before undertaking the main study, a pilot study was conducted with five respondents to ensure that the interview guide could capture the data needed to achieve the research objective (Jennings, 2011). The primary study was conducted between March and June 2021. All the interviews were conducted in Thai via Zoom or Line Application and were video recorded upon receiving consent from the participants. Each interview lasted around 45-80 minutes. All the respondents were ensured of the anonymity and

confidentiality of their information by using pseudonyms in publications. The researcher transcribed and translated the interviews into English. Thematic analysis was adopted for the data analysis. Stages of the study, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), were followed, including becoming familiar with the data by transcribing it manually and reading the transcription thoroughly; creating codes based on the main ideas derived from the data; developing themes by reviewing the generated codes and grouping them; and reviewing the articles to ensure that they not only represented the whole story shared by the respondents but could also fulfil the research objective.

4. Findings

Thematic analysis revealed that all respondents experienced some shock or faced difficulties and discomfort during a visit to their home country. The notion of being a stranger in Thailand, not belonging to their home country, and the home country no longer being a comfortable place to live were noted by many respondents. However, all the respondents felt they were not severely affected by reverse culture shock. Although they faced difficulties and discomfort, these experiences were not considered significant once they realized that these were temporary problems, troubling them on short, temporary visits to Thailand only and that they could return to the culture and environment of a host country they preferred.

Although the four aspects of Fray's (1988) HCSS were used to guide the data analysis, the thematic analysis allowed the researcher to capture another aspect of reverse culture shock not included in the original model. Specifically, five main aspects of reverse culture shock were identified from the data analysis. The data also showed that the wonders of visiting the home country experienced by the respondents were not always harmful or problematic but also created positive feelings or made them realize good things about their motherland that they had previously overlooked. Therefore, the researcher believed that the original terms of Fray's (1988) model could not appropriately capture the essence of the data. As a result, the researcher renamed the four aspects as cultural, interpersonal, emotional, and moral aspects, adding a fifth aspect labelled 'environmental aspects. This final fifth category was the most frequently cited by the respondents, whereas the least cited was the category of moral aspects. These aspects of the reverse culture shock are now discussed in turn.

4.1. Cultural aspects

Five main cultural-related attributes causing reverse culture shock to first-generation Thai diaspora tourists upon visiting their homeland were identified: lack of queuing for services, lack of punctuality, infringements of human rights, Thai food, and the care and generosity of Thai people towards others. The first three aspects reflected gaps between cultural or social norms in the respondents' current country of residence and those in Thailand, which caused difficulties, discomfort and/or frustration to the respondents. In contrast, the last two aspects represented the attributes in Thailand that caused them to feel impressed or proud of and which they had not found in their country of residence.

Regarding lack of queuing for services, lack of punctuality, and infringements of human rights, these were mentioned by more than half the respondents. The respondents found these issues commonplace in Thailand but unacceptable practices in their host country. Some respondents added that before leaving Thailand to settle in a new country, they had not paid much attention to these issues or viewed them as usual. However, after integrating into a new country, they found that these behaviors to be essential and were shocked and frustrated upon encountering these issues while visiting Thailand:

> I was waiting for a bus with my son to go to a shopping mall. When a bus came, I was stunned to see that people did not queue to get on the bus. They just tried to fight their way up onto the bus. So, my son and I were the last ones to get on the bus, and we had no empty seats left. (D3)

> I had an appointment with my old friends at a café. I went there around ten minutes before the meeting, but I had to wait around half an hour until the first friend came and almost one hour later until the last one arrived. That was unacceptable, but my friends didn't feel guilty about their tardiness at al. (D4)

However, some respondents noted that they began to be accustomed to these issues after making frequent visits to Thailand and felt that these issues had little or no impact on their lives while staying in Thailand.

Concerning Thai food, seven respondents stated that they were surprised at how delicious Thai food cooked in Thailand was and that before relocating to their current country of residence, they were aware that Thai food was delicious but did not admire it much because they ate it every day. While overseas, they also had Thai food almost every day, but the taste was different due to the lack of some ingredients or freshness compared to those in Thailand. Therefore, when they ate Thai food in Thailand, they were impressed by the authentic taste and curious as to why they had never realized how excellent Thai food was. As for the care and generosity of Thai people towards others, this was mentioned by two respondents, who both stated that they might have overlooked these aspects of Thai culture and were accustomed to the ways of life in their host country, where people seemed not to intervene in other people's lives. For example, D19 told of a visit to Thailand where he tried to find his way by looking at a map on his mobile phone. A man approached and asked him whether he needed any help. He was shocked because he did not ask for help and felt that people in the USA would not behave like this. The man then directed him to the place, and he appreciated his kindness.

4.2. Interpersonal aspects

Concerning the reverse culture shock about relationships between the respondents and people in Thailand, three groups of people were mentioned: parents, other relatives, and friends. Many respondents stated that their primary motivation for visiting Thailand was to see these people and felt obliged to maintain a connection with them.

Ten respondents said that they did not find any shock or difficulty related to their relationships with people in Thailand because they had been able to talk to these people frequently via Line Application, which allowed them to make video calls free of charge. Therefore, they did not find that their relocation to a new country created any distance from people in Thailand. However, five respondents mentioned feeling some distance between themselves and their relatives. D2 and D10 stated that this distance occurred because they had changed their personality, maturity, and worldview, causing conflict between them and their relatives. They also added that their parents/relatives did not expect them to change. D11 also found some distance from her parents, which she felt mainly came from her parents' lack of interest in her life in Sweden, which made her feel lonely and resentful. She added that she was very excited to share her stories with her parents before visiting Thailand. However, they did not care when she did and changed the conversation. She said,

> Whenever I talked about my life in Sweden, they never paid attention. Then, they changed the topic to discuss my nieces or other things…They also never asked me what my life was like over there [in Sweden] or whether I had a problem living in Sweden.

However, six respondents shared the opposite experiences concerning the relationship with parents/relatives. They said that homeland visits made them closer to and enhanced their relationships with these people. Visits helped them realize how much they missed their families and how much these people loved and cared for them. For example, D14 noted, *"When I first saw my aunt and sisters at the airport, I cried like anything and realized how much I missed them."*

Regarding relationships with friends, two respondents mentioned the distance they felt from friends in Thailand and shared similar feelings that being away had created a big gap between themselves and their friends because they had missed many shared experiences.

4.3. Emotional aspects

The respondents revealed both pleasant and unpleasant feelings when talking about their reverse culture shock upon visiting Thailand. These feelings were closely linked with other aspects (i.e. cultural, interpersonal, moral and environmental aspects) because they were mainly expressed when the respondents talked about one or more of these aspects, such as being amazed by the deliciousness of Thai food in Thailand, being frustrated by a lack of punctuality in other people and feeling lonely when no one was interested in their life abroad and so on. In other words, the respondents' feelings depended on how they perceived issues, things, or people in Thailand upon visiting the country.

Feelings of excitement and happiness were also primarily shared by many respondents when they first arrived in Thailand and were welcomed by their parents/relatives at the airport, at home or when they met long-time friends for the first time. However, the duration of these feelings varied among the respondents. For some people, these feelings lasted for many days, whereas others had these feelings for only one or two days.

4.4. Moral aspects

Only three respondents addressed this theme. The moral aspects that shocked the respondents were social problems, such as corruption and domestic violence. Three respondents mentioned sin, while domestic violence was noted by one respondent only. The respondents realized that these two moral issues had been occurring in Thailand for a long time, but before relocating to a new country, they were young and had not paid much attention to these issues. Once living in a host country, they did not follow the news from home because they were busy studying or working. Therefore, when they visited Thailand and saw the announcement of corruption and/or domestic violence, they were shocked that these issues seemed not to be treated as seriously as in their country of residence and that those around them in Thailand seemed to think that these issues were widespread in Thai society. All the respondents similarly related these issues to their current country of residence, where they are considered severe crimes:

> One time, I saw the news about one school which had installed many fans in a meeting room. There were too many fans in one room. It was a kind of corruption because the school's management team used the budget for inappropriate things. I shared this story with my friends with the expectation that they would think this issue was serious, but they just said that it was widespread, and they heard the news about corruption almost daily. That made me shocked. (D12)

4.5. Environmental aspects

Two main environment-related aspects were found to cause reverse culture shock in the respondents: the climate and the physical appearance of the country. Shock was expressed in terms of 'difficulties and 'discomfort', and interestingly, both these aspects were addressed by all the respondents and represented their first response when asked about reverse culture shock. About the climate, all the respondents mentioned hot and humid weather and a lot of rain in Thailand. Many of the respondents added that, although they had lived almost all of their lives in Thailand and had lived in a host country for a relatively shorter period, they were still not accustomed to the weather in Thailand because it seemed more extreme each time they visited Thailand. For example, D17 and D1 said that,

I was very shocked when I came out of the airport. The weather in Thailand was so hot…I will never get used to the scorching weather and heavy rain in Thailand…The weather seems to be a lot hotter than before I left for Germany. (D7)

I had to stay in an air-conditioned room almost all the time while visiting Thailand. I can't stand this kind of weather. It is very hot, and it rains almost every day…One day, when I went to a local market with my sister, I was sweating and dizzy. (D1)

All the respondents were currently living in Western countries where the weather was colder, and the rains were shorter and not as heavy as those in Thailand, and they all stated that they much preferred the weather in their host country.

As for the physical appearance of the country, traffic congestion in Thailand, differences in architectural styles, and the cleanliness and tidiness of the cities between their host country and Thailand were causes of the reverse culture shock among the respondents. Traffic congestion in Thailand was mentioned by all respondents and was found to cause a lot of frustration for them while staying in Thailand. Many respondents stated that this caused reverse culture shock and made them reluctant to revisit Thailand. Further, many respondents found it very disappointing to see buildings in Thailand looking dull, ugly, and outdated, while those in their host country were beautiful, gorgeous, and modern. Many respondents also mentioned the dirtiness of the cities and streets in Thailand, adding that although they had seen these buildings and the dirtiness and untidiness of cities in Thailand for their entire life before moving to a new country, previously, they had thought these things were every day. However, after living in a Western country for some time and being accustomed to the beauty of the architecture and the clean and tidy cities, they were shocked upon returning home.   Like the discussion of cultural aspects during which respondents said that they adjusted after frequent visits, some respondents stated that their shock at the weather and/or the physical appearance of Thailand decreased each time they visited home as they began to get used to and/or anticipate it before visiting Thailand.

5. Discussions and conclusion

Revisiting a home country after relocating led the first-generation Thai diaspora tourists to experience reverse culture. This study identified five main aspects of the reverse culture shock encountered by these Thai tourists: cultural, interpersonal, emotional, moral, and environmental. These findings did not support the dimensions of reverse culture shock in Fray's (1988) HCSS. Firstly, in contrast to the model, which argues that the reverse culture shock only causes distance between returning individuals and their home country as well as negative feelings, the findings of this study showed that the shocks faced by the Thai diaspora tourists during their homeland trip did not always create a sense of disconnection or loss. For some tourists, the shock could also make them feel closer to people in Thailand, such as their parents and relatives, leading them to realize and appreciate significant things they had previously overlooked in their home country. As a result, the term 'distance' was not used to label the categories of reverse culture shock in this study. Secondly, this study found a new aspect of reverse culture shock not included in Fray's (1988) model. This aspect is labelled 'environment aspects' and encompasses the climate and physical attributes of the country of origin. Thirdly, as the findings revealed that the Thai diaspora tourists in this study not only suffered unpleasant feelings but also experienced pleasant feelings (i.e. excitement, impression, amazement, and happiness), the original 'grief' dimension was renamed 'emotional dimension' to represent the reverse culture shock experiences of tourists more accurately.

Concerning the findings on the improved relationship between the tourists and their parents and their realization of the significance of things that had been previously overlooked, as mentioned above, these findings were consistent with existing studies (Le & LaCost, 2017; Talawanich et al., 2019) which also observed that residing in another country helped develop a relationship between the returning

individuals and their parents and could also lead them to appreciate things they had previously ignored. Furthermore, the essence of reverse culture shock detected in this study supports the arguments of other researchers (Le & LaCost, 2017; Sreeleakha, 2014), who describe reverse culture shock as the shock of returning to oldness, familiar, and routine things in a home country that creates feelings of not belonging to one's own native culture. The findings showed that the respondents were shocked by something they perceived as usual before relocating to a new country, including social norms environmental or moral issues, and they viewed these attributes in a new way, leading them to have a sense of not fitting into the country.

In addition, the findings of this study also suggested that, for some respondents, their shock did not always result from things they did not like or that caused difficulties and discomfort, as argued by other studies (Akhtar et al., 2018; Young, 2014). Instead, they could also come from things for which they longed and could not find in their current country of residence (i.e. authentic Thai food and the care and generosity of Thai people) and necessary things they have overlooked or never realized before (i.e., their love for and from parents/relatives). Therefore, based on the findings of this study, reverse culture shock may sometimes cause difficulties/discomfort for the diaspora tourists and sometimes lead them to have memorable or impressive experiences.

The findings of this study carry a significant theoretical contribution. Firstly, this study fills the gap in the literature in the context of reverse culture shock among diaspora tourists, which researchers have neglected. As mentioned, reverse culture shock has primarily been studied in other groups of cross-border sojourners, especially overseas students. Still, minimal studies were made of groups of diaspora tourists who regularly make cross-border trips. Secondly, this study is the first to examine reverse culture shock faced by first-generation Thai diaspora tourists residing in Western countries. Therefore, it can serve as a starting point for future researchers interested in this issue in the context of the Thai diaspora. Thirdly, this study provides additional empirical evidence regarding factors that could lessen the degree of reverse culture shock among Thai diaspora tourists. Specifically, this study observed that advancements in communication technology, frequent visits and temporary short-term stays all led the diaspora tourists in this study to encounter no or relatively low impacts of reverse culture shock. Advancements in communication technology overcame spatial barriers, enabling interactions between diaspora tourists and people in Thailand. Frequent visits helped tourists to have realistic expectations. They assisted them in becoming accustomed to attributes or issues that might have caused difficulty or discomfort. In contrast, short stays helped tourists remember that their problems would be short-lived.

This study also has important practical implications. First, the findings can help diaspora tourists who intend to visit a homeland and people in Thailand who await their arrival (i.e. parents, relatives, and friends), making everyone more aware of the shocks likely to occur during a visit. This knowledge can assist all concerned in preparing to deal with these shocks effectively, which might lead to more enjoyable experiences during a homeland trip. Secondly, the findings of this study revealed that reverse culture shock caused by some aspects (e.g. lack of queuing for services, lack of punctuality, infringements of human rights, hot weather and the physical appearance of cities) had little or no impacts on some respondents as a result of more frequent visits to Thailand, national and local stakeholders involved in destination management and marketing should actively promote homeland trips among Thai diaspora communities by developing marketing campaigns explicitly targeting these tourists and encouraging them to make more frequent visits. Finally, national, and local stakeholders should focus marketing campaigns on the aspects that create 'positive shocks' in Thai diaspora tourists. For example, in this study, authentic Thai food and the care and generosity of Thai people were found to amaze and impress tourists. Therefore, these should be utilized to reinforce the positive shocks to the tourists. This action could create enjoyable and memorable return home experiences for diaspora tourists and their families.

Acknowledging a limitation inherent in this study, which arises from using a qualitative research methodology, is essential. The findings were based on respondents selected via non-probability sampling, so they could not be generalized to other diaspora tourists. However, the main aim of this study was not to achieve generalizable findings but to obtain rich insight into the phenomenon of reverse culture shock among diasporic tourists.

Future studies should consider investigating Thai diaspora tourists of other generations or those residing in other regions, such as the Middle East, East Asia, or Southeast Asia, as well as significant host countries of Thai diasporas. In addition, although the findings of this study revealed some factors causing reverse culture shock among diaspora tourists, further exploration is needed.

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