A Study on Chinese Tourists' Perception of Violence and Crime Risk in Thailand

Xinyan Li[1] and Adarsh Batra[2]

Abstract

Historically, China has consistently ranked among the top sources of international tourism population in Thailand. In early 2023, the Chinese government formulated new policies for personal and organized travel. After three years of silence, Chinese people are finally able to return to the Thai tourism market. Chinese tourists need to return to a safe Thailand because Thailand is a popular tourist destination for Chinese tourists. As a result, increased Chinese tourism activity will greatly help Thailand's tourism industry and economy. To explore the views of Chinese tourists on Thailand's security issues after the COVID-19 pandemic, the objective of this study is to examine the considerations of personal safety and risk among Chinese tourists when selecting international travel destinations. Additionally, it aims to analyze the factors that contribute to Chinese tourists' concerns regarding the risks of crime and violence, specifically in Thailand. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore potential strategies and measures to enhance the safety and protection of Chinese tourists while in Thailand. From February 24th, 2023, to March 9th, 2023, this study interviewed tourism industry practitioners and Chinese tourists. Findings from this study add specific detail to the currently limited information about on-site experiences, particularly the Chinese views of safety aspects in Thailand. The respondents discussed in detail the awareness of Chinese tourists about the risks of crime and violence in Thailand and proposed measures they believe can better protect the safety of Chinese tourists in Thailand. Although many factors make Chinese tourists worried about the risk of violence and crime in Thailand, they still believe that Thailand is a relatively safe tourist destination.

1. Introduction

According to Chon, Singh, and Mikula (1993), Tourism has been instrumental in the growth of Thailand's national economy from an agricultural-based economy to an industrial and service economy. Since 1981, the main trade between China and Thailand has changed from rice trade to tourism exchange. The Chinese market has had an undeniably acknowledged influence on the development of Thailand's tourism industry, but many Chinese tourists have become victims of crimes whilst travelling in Thailand.

A study by Demos (1992) showed that tourists are more vulnerable to criminal victimization than residents. Tourists are highly visible targets in that they are relatively easy to observe due to differences in dress and the locations they visit. They are also viewed as less likely to report a crime because of the inconvenience and time involved. If tourists do report a crime, they are probably less able to identify their assailant(s) because of unfamiliarity or racial differences or to return as a witness if the assailant is appreciated and brought to trial (Batra, 2008).

Altindag (2014) pointed out that violent crime is negatively correlated with international inbound tourists, and passengers will assess the risk of being violated when choosing a destination. In 2014, due to political instability in Thailand, terrorist incidents occurred in southern Thailand, which led to the generation of Thailand's negative tourism image.

Unlike the number of Chinese tourists which continued to rise in previous years, the number of Chinese tourists was 4.6 million, which was the same as the number of Chinese tourists in 2013. (www.tourismthailand.org) Crime and violence in destinations have caused tourists to worry about travel safety. To avoid putting themselves in a dangerous situation, tourists will avoid potential risk destinations.

Thailand Tourist Police is conducive to improving the safety environment of Thailand tourism and regional tourism and reduces tourism risks to a certain extent. (Wichasin & Doungphummes, 2012) However, frequent crimes and violent incidents not only threaten the personal and property safety of tourists, but also have a negative psychological impact on tourists, and even further affect the safety image of tourist destination countries (regions) and outbound tourism. healthy development (Morris and Nguyen, 2023).

Among the 39.8 million foreign tourists who entered Thailand in 2019, nearly 11 million were Chinese tourists, becoming the largest source of tourists in Thailand's tourism market. (www.tourismthailand.org)   But the number of Chinese tourists has been at a relatively low level in recent years due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Thailand received only 273,000 Chinese tourists in 2022(www.tourismthailand.org). In 2023, the Chinese government adjusted its citizens' entry and exit travel policies, and Chinese tourists have a strong desire to travel to Thailand https://www.thaiembassy.com/travel-to-thailand/travel-to-thailand-from-china.

Many Chinese tourists traditionally come to Thailand on group tours (Yeginsu and Scott, 2023). Since the Chinese market is very sensitive to adverse events, they are likely to avoid a destination they feel unsafe visiting （Parasakul, (2022). Heightened perceptions of risk and safety concerns significantly discourage people from visiting certain destinations, as security is a fundamental requirement in the decision-making process when choosing a travel destination. There are many studies on crime and violence risks in

tourism, but Chinese tourists have not become the research object to discuss their views on the potential crime and violence risks of travel. This study provides a new perspective on tourism safety and explores the relevant safety issues that Chinese tourists are concerned about when travelling to Thailand, to help the Thai government reduce the risk of crime and violence encountered by tourists during their travels.

2. Research Questions

RQ 1: Do Chinese tourists consider safety issues when travelling to international tourist destinations?
RQ 2: Do tourists worry about the risk of crime and violence before or during their trip to Thailand?
RQ 3: Does Thailand need to further improve the protection of tourist safety?

3. Research Objectives

RO 1: To explore Chinese tourists consider personal safety and risk when considering travelling to international destinations.
RO 2: To analyze the factors that cause Chinese tourists to worry about the risk of crime and violence in Thailand.
RO 3: To explore ways to better protect the safety of Chinese tourists in Thailand.

4. Literature review

Perception plays a crucial role that should be taken into consideration by both tourism researchers and managerial personnel. Tourists' thoughts and actions are shaped by their perception of reality rather than a comprehensive evaluation of the actual events. It is essential to focus on various aspects of perception before, during, and after tourists encounter crime risk or danger. Since the 1970s, the negative impact of tourism development has become prominent, whether in the scientific, professional, or public. Jud (1975) found a strong link between tourism and property crime (fraud, theft, and robbery). Many studies have attempted to classify and define tourism crimes, but Lisowska (2007) believes that categorizing crimes and violence in tourist

destinations may bring more problems, so tourism crimes can be described more succinctly and simply to define, namely crimes against tourists and visitors.

Non-violent and violent crimes also affect tourists differently, with violent crimes such as robbery, assault, rape, or homicide having a greater impact than property crimes against tourists, especially if the stolen goods are of lesser value (Holcomb and Pizam 2006).

Since the destination is unfamiliar and invisible, when tourists lack awareness of an event, the event will gradually show uncertainty. Research on tourism risk began in the 1990s, and relevant literature began to explore the relationship between risk perception and travel behaviour. Later research concluded that risk and tourism are inseparable, as the decision to travel itself entails risk and uncertainty, involving reaching new places and exposure to different societies and cultures (Chang, 2009). Tourism risk is defined as the uncertainty experienced by tourists in the process of purchasing and consuming travel services and destination choices (Seabra et al., 2013).

Adam (2015), by reviewing previous studies, believes that perceived risks are divided into two types, one is that risks related to tourism products include physical, financial, equipment, or functional and health risks, and the other is related to other types of tourism The risks include political instability risk, psychological risk, satisfaction risk, social risk, and terrorist attack risk. Different types of tourists have different perceptions of risk. George (2002) pointed out that there is a statistical relationship between tourists' safety perception and socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, number of destination visits, purpose of visit, and nationality.

Reisinger and Mavondo (2006) found that tourists from different countries (regions) have significant differences in their perceptions of risk, safety, and anxiety in their travel intentions. For example, tourists from the United States, Hong Kong, and Australia were found to feel more travel risk, insecurity, and anxiety, and were less willing to travel than those from the United Kingdom, Canada, and Greece.

A study conducted by Ajagunna (2006) examines how violent crime and harassment affect Jamaica's tourism and hospitality industries in the Jamaica region. From the perspective of local stakeholders' crimes are frequent and have a serious impact on the tourism industry. To ensure their own safety, tourists choose to stay in areas with special police patrols or all-inclusive resorts. However, to ensure the sustainable development of local tourism, the business community, government, and media need to change their attitudes, values, and practices, and obtain the cooperation of residents.

Likewise, Chaturuka, Duffett, and Haydam (2020) using Cape Town as the study site determined international leisure tourists' perceptions of crime by interviewing tourists on their crime-related perceptions. The research found attitudes among international leisure travellers to be positive, with the majority saying crime did not impede their activities, but less optimistic about safety messages during their visit. The study argues that a separate South African tourist police unit could be established to help circumvent crime in Cape Town.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study collects existing literature, books, and research reports related to the topic to provide an academic theoretical basis. Data are obtained through in-depth interviews with tourists and tourism practitioners related to the research topic and combined with theory for analysis and conclusion.

In this study, the authors interviewed both Chinese tourists visiting Thailand and tourism practitioners related to travel to Thailand. The interviewees with different identities did provide different answers and suggestions from different perspectives. During the interview, the authors asked a set of questions and ask more questions based on the responses of the interviewees. This was to dig deep into the views and opinions of the interviewer and to gain new perspectives and information through more

questions. The above method is to understand the Chinese tourists' perception of violence and crime risk in Thailand, find out the safety issues that Chinese tourists are most concerned about, and provide suggestions for ensuring the safety of Chinese tourists travelling to Thailand. This research design is suitable for understanding the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of the respondents. In addition, it provides detailed accounts of their views and opinions on the topic.

5.2 Sampling Procedure

The researchers used a purposive sampling method i.e., based on Teddlie & Yu, (2007), to specifically recruit participants with the relevant characteristics relevant to achieve the objectives of the research with the selection of 2 different tourism organizations operators and 9 tourists. There are no generally hard and fast rules for determining the appropriate sample size in qualitative research (Veal, 2017, p. 430). The sample size may be determined by the process of 'saturation', that is, the point at which further subjects stop producing new themes or theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006: 113). Put differently, our respondents are 'cases', or instances of states, rather than (just) individuals who are bearers of variables (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). The reliability and generalizability of the findings of qualitative research rely heavily on the information provided by the participants of the sample.

The interviews were conducted originally in Chinese language and after back translation changed to the English language from February 22, 2023, to March 9, 2023. Based on the research purpose, the selection criteria for tourists were: 1) Chinese nationality and 2) a visit to Thailand.

Table 1.1 Primary Data Collection Technique

Methodology	#of interviews and function	Location	Sampling frame	Key Respondent Characteristics	Quantity
Face-to-face in-depth interview with the manager of Dadi International Travel Agency	Manager	Shengdi building, Yubei District, Chongqing	Manager in Chongqing Dadi International Travel Co., LTD.	Chinese, a male, who has worked for 15 years	30 minutes
Face-to-face in-depth interview with tourist	Tourist	Beicheng 3rd Road, Chongqing	Tourists who have been to Thailand	Chinese, a male	30 minutes
Face-to-face in-depth interview with tourist	Tourist	Shin Kong Place, Chongqing	Tourists who have been to Thailand	Chinese, a female	30 minutes
Face-to-face in-depth interview with tourist	Tourist	Shin Kong Place, Chongqing	Tourists who have been to Thailand	Chinese, a male	30 minutes
Face-to-face in-depth interview with tourist	Tourist	Shin Kong Place, Chongqing	Tourists who have been to Thailand	Chinese, a female	30 minutes
Face-to-face in-depth interview with tourist	Tourist	Beicheng 4th Road, Chongqing	Tourists who have been to Thailand	Chinese, a female	30 minutes

Face-to-face in-depth interview with the manager of Chongqing Fangxiangpan Enterprise Management Consulting Co., LTD	Manager	Shengdi building, Yubei District, Chongqing	Manager in Chongqing Fangxiangpan Enterprise Management Consulting Co., LTD	Chinese, a female, who has worked for 8 years	30 minutes
Face-to-face in-depth interview with tourist	Tourist	Guanyin Bridge Road, Chongqing	Tourists who have been to Thailand	Chinese, a female	30 minutes Cont/d..
Face-to-face in-depth interview with tourist	Tourist	Xinpaifang 1 Road, Yubei District, Chongqing	Tourists who have been to Thailand	Chinese, a male	30 minutes
Face-to-face in-depth interview with tourist	Tourist	Xinpaifang 1 Road, Yubei District, Chongqing	Tourists who have been to Thailand	Chinese, a female	30 minutes

5.3 Data Analysis

The authors organized the interview materials into written records, classified them according to the purpose of the research and the type of interviewees, and then divided them into axial coding "categories are systematically developed and linked with subcategories"; and selective coding analysts are concerned with "the process of integrating and refining categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143). Clear themes and concepts emerged from the analysis and comparison, the authors can obtain important information from the interviews to understand Chinese tourists' perception of violence and crime risks in Thailand, as well as respondents' suggestions and opinions on the ways to better protect the safety of Chinese tourists in Thailand. In addition, the authors will also compare and summarize the interviewees' views on improving the safety of tourism in Thailand, to draw some suggestions and measures.

6. Results and Discussion

It is known from interviews with travel agency managers and tourism consulting managers that before Chinese tourists choose to travel abroad or travel to international destinations, most of them will ask them some questions about personal safety, Chinese tourists do consider the risk of personal safety when choosing the purpose of international travel. Although due to the stereotypes of Southeast Asia and the information received from media reports, Chinese tourists believe that there may be risks to personal safety when travelling in Thailand, in general, Chinese tourists' concerns about personal safety are not enough to affect their decision-making to travel to Thailand. Chinese tourists have a positive attitude towards safety in Thailand.

In terms of violence and risk perception in international destinations, Chinese tourists also have concerns and will ask travel staff about the crime rate and political situation in the destination country. In addition to adequate safety training for tourists and staff, Chinese travel agencies also have arrangements for managing emergencies, including seeking assistance from the local police and the Chinese embassy. Thailand's well-developed tourism industry does not bring all advantages, and the concentration of the population will also bring the risk of conflict between people. Chinese tourists believe

that Thailand is not only an international tourist country but also a place where people from different countries and races gather. Chinese tourists worry that different social cultures and social orders will bring risks of violence and crimes, such as human trafficking, organ trafficking, robbery, and theft. There is also sexual fraud from the porn industry, violence, and forced drug use from the drug industry (Ling, 2018).

While two tourism practitioners and nine Chinese tourists shared that their clients or themselves had not experienced crime and violence in Thailand, a few tourists did feel the need to remain aware of violent situations and crime risks during their travels in Thailand. Regarding how to better protect the safety of Chinese tourists travelling in Thailand, the interviewees stated that improving safety awareness and education is the most important. Whether it is Chinese tourists, the government, or the Thai authorities and the public, they all need to have sufficient awareness of the risks of violence and crimes, avoid the possibility of encountering risks, cooperate to reduce the occurrence of violence and crimes, and quickly help those who encounter violence and crimes against Chinese tourists.

6.1 Chinese Tourists' Views on personal safety and Risk when considering travelling to international destinations

No matter which country they travel to, Chinese tourists will consider personal safety and risk before travelling. Some tourists ask people in the tourism industry about their destinations and express their concerns, 'the most common question is whether tourism activities are safe?.' Other tourists will get information from relatives and friends, or search through the Internet. Chinese tourists' concerns about personal safety risks focus on violence and crime risks, tourism business risks, social and cultural risks, and natural disaster risks. But Thailand's tourism industry enjoys a great reputation among Chinese people. So, even though physical safety risks in Thailand are considered when considering international travel destinations, concerns about personal safety are not enough to influence tourists' travel decisions.

Figure 1.1

Tourists' Concerns about personal safety

Source by Authors

6.2 What causes Chinese tourists to worry about the risk of crime and violence in Thailand?

From the information given by the interviewees, it can be known that the most common concerns are property safety, sexual risks, drugs, and violence. Beware of theft and robbery are things people usually pay special attention to when travelling. Sexual risks include sexual fraud related to the porn industry, as well as sex-related safety concerns. The drug-related element is also something that worries tourists. These concerns come not only from stereotypes about Southeast Asian countries but also from the legalization of products containing marijuana in Thailand. Chinese tourists not only worry about drug dealers and addicts harming them but also worry about violating Chinese laws by accidentally ingesting drugs. 'I am also worried that I will encounter drug dealers or gangsters. Violent injuries include conflicts with others, being kidnapped and trafficked, and being attacked indiscriminately. But these factors did not affect tourists' overall impression of Thailand, so the interviewees all believe that Thailand is a relatively safe tourist destination.

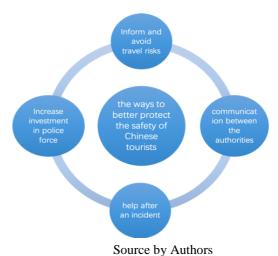**Figure 1.2**

Factors that make Tourists' Concerns

Source by Authors

Source by Authors

6.3 Ways to better protect the Safety of Chinese Tourists in Thailand

Increasing investment in police forces is undoubtedly an effective measure to protect tourists. However, it is also crucial to remind Chinese tourists to avoid risks. In the interview with the interviewees, the authors found that Thailand did not have enough publicity to inform Chinese tourists how to avoid travel risks. The respondent said, 'The first is to inform in tourism promotion.' At the same time, the authorities of China and Thailand should strengthen communication and update the information held by both sides at any time. The measures to protect the safety of tourists can not only be the prevention before the incident but also the way to deal with the incident after the incident. Tourists must seek help more quickly to recover the loss, including arranging for Chinese-speaking policemen in tourist gathering areas. and other measures,

Figure 1.3

Suggestions for protective measures

6.4 Findings

1. Chinese tourists prioritize personal safety when considering international travel destinations.

2. Chinese tourists perceive Thailand as a relatively safe destination for travel.

3. Both managers and tourists have identified property security, sexual risks, and incidents of drug and violence as concerns for Chinese tourists regarding crime and violence risks.

4. Tourists perceive the risk of violence and crime in Thailand not only from the locals but also from foreigners residing in Thailand.

5. Both managers and tourists believe that Thai authorities should increase efforts to raise awareness about safety precautions while traveling in Thailand.

6. Tourists are also advised to regulate their behavior to minimize the risk of encountering crime and violence.

7. Increasing investment in the police force is seen as a means to safeguard tourists, particularly by having police personnel who can communicate in Chinese.

8. Ensuring the safety of tourists requires not only policy support from the Chinese and Thai governments but also the cooperation of tourists and the general public.

6.5 Discussion

It was mentioned in the literature review that tourists' insistence on crime did not hinder their activities, nor was

it worse than they expected (Chaturuka et al., 2020). Through interviews and analysis, the authors agree with this point of view, Tourists learned about various types of crime and violence risks through information collection before departure, but they were not disturbed by crime and violence during the tour. In addition, as Jagunna (2006) opined, to ensure the sustainable development of local tourism, the business community, government, and media need to change their attitudes, values, and practices, and obtain the cooperation of residents. This point of view was also confirmed in this study. Chinese tourists believe that improving social security and national tourism image requires the cooperation of multiple parties. To better reduce the risk of violence and crime, tourists also need to participate and learn more about the destination to avoid risks.

6.5 Implications and Recommendations

Thailand is one of the most popular international travel destinations for Chinese tourists, and China was Thailand's largest source of foreign tourists in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to China's policy, many Chinese tourists were prevented from travelling during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, China re-simplified the process for individuals to travel abroad, making outbound travel easier. Although the respondents in this study were not at risk of encountering crime and crime while travelling in Thailand, they all identified multiple factors in Thailand as factors for their fear of encountering crime and violence. Therefore, the Thai authorities and the Chinese government must work together to introduce more countermeasures to ensure the safety of Chinese tourists so that more Chinese tourists can go to Thailand with peace of mind and promote exchanges and economic development between the two countries.

Regarding how to better protect the safety of Chinese tourists travelling to Thailand, based on the results of this study, the researchers have the following recommendations:

A. Before travelling to Thailand, both group and individual tourists should accept basic knowledge about the destination. The Thai government, the Chinese government, and travel agencies should all be the information providers.

B. The Thai government needs to crack down on illegal activities, especially those involving the illegal drug trade and sex trade.

C. The Thai authorities and the Chinese government need to ensure that Chinese tourists can get help from relevant people when they encounter crimes and violence.

6.6 Limitations

Due to the limitations of the interview sample and the academic level of the researcher in this study, the researchers believe that future research can use quantitative research methods to collect more data. In exploring Chinese tourists' perceptions of crime and violence risks in Thailand, it is further summarized.

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