



Gastronomic experience as a community development driver: the study of Amphawa Floating Market as community-based culinary tourism destination

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Abstract: This paper investigates the connection between culinary tourism and community development through a case study of Amphawa Floating Market, a touristic evening market in Samutsongkram, Thailand, that has been developed in an economically depressed historic trade community. It aims to examine the role of gastronomic experiences offered in the market as a means of improving the well-being of local residents, and critically discuss the potential for the market to become a viable community-based culinary tourism destination. The research involved a number of field trips to Amphawa Floating Market during 2012–2014, during which venue observation was undertaken and semi-structured interviews conducted with local stakeholders, including members of the management unit, food traders and visitors. The paper reveals that gastronomic experiences in which the locals actively take part in the construction and promotion, have positive economic, social and cultural impacts on Amphawa District. Nevertheless, the commodification of food as a tourism offering has negative impacts on the host community and can, to an extent, threaten the quality of experiences, and these shortcomings need to be addressed to assure the long-term commercial viability of the attraction. The research found that Amphawa Floating Market could benefit from the significance of food as a primary tourist experience, the quality of locally-available culinary resources, the strong embeddedness of food in the context of domestic leisure, and the emerging significance of food in the promotional strategy of Thai tourism. Nevertheless, factors that impede the market's positioning as gastronomic attraction should be addressed.

Keywords: culinary tourism, gastronomic tourism, community based tourism, community development, rural regeneration, floating market

Introduction

This article aims to explore the extent to which gastronomic experiences can be utilized as a market positioning strategy of community-based tourism attractions, where local involvement in tourism and local benefits are the central focus, by studying Amphawa Floating Market, an evening touristic market located in the central region of Thailand within 70 kilometres of Bangkok. In this paper, the way in which the locals participate in delivering gastronomic experiences and the impacts of gastronomic experiences on local well-being will be discussed, and the potential of Amphawa Floating Market to become gastronomic attraction, in which gastronomic serves as a prime tourism experience, will be explored. The discussion also casts light on how the relationship between tradition and modernity is negotiated in the construction and presentation of gastronomic experiences offered in the traditional market (Gvion 2009; Frost and Laing 2016).

Amphawa Floating Market is one of the touristic traditional markets that have proliferated across the country since the end of the 20th century (Cohen 2016; Pongajarn, van der Duim and Peters 2016), in which traditional cultural practices function as the overarching theme of the experiences offered. The centrality of this theme is exemplified by the emphasis on aspects such as old-fashioned products (cosmetics, food, herbs, utensils, toys, gift) and services (traditional massage), and activities purported to allow visitors to experience and learn about the local culture (cooking workshops, boat excursions to less modernized places), and similar offerings. Some of these markets are based on the revival of ancient marketplaces, where elements of local history and tradition are converted into products. Others are attractions in which experiences are newly constructed from various elements stereotypically representing the image of the regional or the national culture. A significant visual element that many traditional markets have in common is rural and natural scenery, which serves as an attractor to tourists, evoking a sense of nostalgia while they engage in tourism experiences. These traditional markets can be entirely land-based, or on the water, where trade is carried out on boats (TAT Contact Center- Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2009). Nevertheless, it is found that many traditional markets where only a portion of the trade area is on the river, and the rest on land, have labelled themselves 'floating markets' with the intention of attracting visitors (Cohen 2016). In many

instances, traditional markets have demonstrated success in promoting community-based tourism, and they are hence widely adopted as a tourism model in rural communities that desire to stimulate economic and social vibrancy (Petprayoon et al. 2002).

Community-based tourism CBT is an alternative way to regenerate decline areas in which residents directly take part in the process and that the local benefits are placed at the centre of the tourism operation (Kayat 2014). CBT is recognized for its ability to alleviate poverty in the area (Harrison and Schipani 2007). Okazaki (2008) points out that CBT is a measure to gradually empower the locals to actively take part in community development initiatives. CBT is widely implemented in numerous localities in Asia (Pawson, D'Arcy and Richardson 2017) and is known for its positive contributions on local living conditions, as well as addressing local social problems (Gelbman and Laven 2016). As indicated in the study conducted by Park et al. (2016), locals have positive attitudes to tourism due to the success of CBT in improving different aspects of local well-being, which also enhances the sense of local pride (Pawson, D'Arcy and Richardson 2017). CBT can encourage local preservation of cultures and tradition through the incorporation of local resources into tourism offerings. According to the study conducted by (Harris 2009), tourists' appreciation of local culture does not only bring financial gains to the locals but also results in positive perceptions among the locals towards their own culture (see also Suntikul and Droji 2016, in a case study of CBT in Bhutan). However, successful operation CBT is not easy to achieve. Under certain circumstances, the operation of CBT fails to be an approach to address problems brought by mass tourism (Novelli, Klatte and Dolezal 2017). Unfavorable social condition of the host region can impede the goal of CBT to promote equal distribution of tourism benefits among the locals (Phommavong and Sorensson 2014). In addition, the lack of effective planning and management is an issue for many CBT initiatives in Asia (Moscardo 2008). Besides inadequate funding (Novelli, Klatte and Dolezal 2017), the operation of CBT can be hindered by the lack of local expertise in tourism operation and the absence of concrete development plans (Pawson, D'Arcy and Richardson 2017).

Food has increasingly become a significant element in tourism development. Culinary, or gastronomic, tourism is a category of tourism that aims to cater for tourist interests in food and culinary-related elements. Among the factors

promoting the growth of culinary tourism are the emergence of food as a niche tourism interest and the growing recognition of gastronomy in the public sphere – evidenced by the popularity of cookery TV shows, culinary books, and magazines, as well as the growing number of food blogs and celebrities chefs and food stylists (Scarpato 2002; Yeoman et al. 2015) – and the introduction of new types of cuisine and culinary techniques (Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman 2014). Long (2004) pointed out that culinary tourism deals with ‘foodways’, defined as cultural practices connected with food production and consumption. In this view, food is not only a complementary element in tourism destinations, but can function as a point of attraction in its own right (Quan and Wang 2004). The diverse functions of food in tourists experiences (see Fields 2002; Kim et al. 2009) gives numerous possibilities for destinations to promote their gastronomic experiences. Tourism destinations can establish their gastronomic positioning through the association of food with numerous elements: culture (farm tours, culinary museums), art (cookery workshops and food decoration courses), relaxation (meal experience with local scene), socialization (shared food experience), and luxury (e.g. wine tours, fine dining experiences). Certain tourism destinations with well-established gastronomic reputations, such as France and Italy (Karim and Chi 2010; Fortis and Sartori 2016), benefit from their gastronomic identity as a point to attract tourists’ visits and spending. On the other hand, in some destinations, adaptation and marketing strategies are needed to stimulate visitors’ engagements in the local cuisine (Fox 2007; Karim and Chi 2010; Avieli 2013). ‘Gastronomy’ can be overlooked for the sake of other elements in some destinations possessing rich culture and history (Okumus et al. 2007). The lack of cooperation from stakeholders in the destination is an obstacle in the development of local cuisine (Ministry of Tourism and Sports 2016; Prachachat 2016). Moreover, the failure of the destination to deliver a quality gastronomic tourism experience, in which hygiene standards and taste play a significant role, can degrade the destination’s gastronomic image (MacLaurin 2002; Pendergast 2006).

Gastronomic experiences in tourism destinations can have a positive impact on the local community in many aspects. Tourism stimulates the local economy through increased production and sales of locally-produced products brought by the tourists’ demand for food, which benefits residents via revenue generated from food sales (Bessièrè 2013). Tourism can

rejuvenate old-fashioned foodways that may have declined, and consolidate the local identity through the promotion of culinary specialties (Du Rand, Heath and Alberts 2003; Telfer and Hashimoto 2003); as well as promoting creativity, through culinary invention, among local residents. Moreover, the destination's initiatives to promote its gastronomic experiences lead directly to the improvement of tourism surroundings, since a pleasant environment forms an important part of the mealtime experience (Ilín and Gaztelumendi, 2012). Nevertheless, not all tourism circumstances can benefit positively from food tourism. For example, it is difficult for tourism locations with food shortages to promote their gastronomy (Belisle 1983), and in areas with conflicting cultural ideologies gastronomic identity becomes a thorny issue (Hillel, Belhassen and Shani 2013).

This paper aims to address the following gaps in the study of food experience in the tourism context. By using the case study research design, it attempts to elucidate the relationship between culinary tourism and community development in the Thai context. Among Thailand's national tourism policymakers, the food experience is acknowledged for its ability to generate contributions to local prosperity, but the scholarly exploration of the role of gastronomy in local well-being is limited, in particular in the traditional markets. Also, the paper contributes to the understanding of the situation of gastronomy in the context of Thai tourism. Thailand is internationally known for its gastronomy, as illustrated in the number of Thai restaurants overseas (Sunanta 2005), the wide popularity of Thai dishes (CNNGo staff 2011), and the interest of international tourists to experience Thai food while visiting the country (McDowall and Wang 2009), but there are few academic discussions about Thailand in terms of gastronomic attraction. Food is in general acknowledged as a primary experience offered in touristic traditional markets and is among tourists' motivations to visit (Ketkaew et al. 2003; Siri-umpai 2012; Wattanacharoensil and Sakdiyakorn 2015), for it is usually seen as a culinary hub of the region, with a variety of locally-made sweet and savoury dishes and food items representing the regional specialties. However, very few studies explore this issue. Amphawa Floating Market is one of most popular attractions of this kind. There is much research on Amphawa Floating Market (e.g. Chuechawat 2010; Suntikul 2013; Vajirakachorn & Nepal 2014), some of which discuss gastronomic products (Silapacharanan 2007), but the floating market is yet to be discussed as a culinary attraction.

This research constitutes short-term field study that involved several day trips to Amphawa Floating Market. By adopting an ethnographic approach, the research aimed to discern what attitudes towards gastronomic experiences are expressed by tourism stakeholders, including members of the management unit, food traders, and visitors in the traditional market, and solicit their views on how food produces development in the community. Ethnography is a research design commonly used in tourism studies to achieve an in-depth understanding of tourism scenarios through the narrative formulated from the worldviews of different types of stakeholders (O'Rourke 1989; Wang 2007). It has been employed in a number of studies dedicated to studying the relationship between local food and tourism development in a given context (Avieli 2013; Teixeira and Rebeiro 2013). Flexibility in data collection is a key strength of this research design; the researcher is able to choose the most appropriate research method to approach targeted participants (Frohlick and Harrison 2008) as well as to incorporate more than one method to collect information on the site (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008). Love (2007), in her ethnographic study of rural Japan, achieved the understanding of regional food heritage promotional campaign through diverse forms of encounters with locals. In the study conducted by Avieli (2013) on local food in Hoi An, Vietnam, the fact that the researcher is familiar with the locality enabled him to identify the proper ways to collect the data.

In this research project, semi-structured interviews, qualitative questionnaires and observation were used in collecting data in the field. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three representatives of the management unit of the traditional market (two from the municipality of Amphawa and one from the Amphawachaipattananurak project), and ten food traders from the Amphawa municipality's section and the Amphawachaipattananurak project section. A qualitative questionnaire was used to acquire insights from 27 visitors. The venue observation was conducted on the same day the interviews were carried out, aiming to record the plan and structure of the traditional market, food stalls and food traders, touristic activities, and the behaviour of visitors.

The field research was divided into two periods: from December 2012 to March 2013, and January 2014. In both rounds, the management officers, food traders and visitors were approached and observation was conducted.

The second period of the field research was conducted to confirm the information collected during the first round of field research and record any relevant changes (if any).



Figure 1. The scenery of Amphawa Floating Market, located on the both sides of Mae Klong River. Source: the author.

‘Amphawa Floating Market’ is a floating market that was established in 2001 by the municipality of Amphawa, Samut Songkhram for the purpose of boosting the community’s declining economic situation by using tourism as a business opportunity for local traders and to conserve the local way of life in the region. Located in a municipal area spanning the Mae Klong River, the market is a revival of a waterborne marketplace that was prosperous from the 17th century to mid-20th century, which declined due to the expansion of in-land trade resulting from the construction of road infrastructure (Vajirakachorn and Nepal 2014). In 2008, Chaipattana Foundation, a non-benefit development foundation founded in 1988 by King Bhumibhol, established a community developmental project in Amphawa community, the ‘Amphawa Chaipattananurak’ project, with the goal of encouraging local usage of local natural and cultural resources, by turning them into commodities, to improve the area’s well-being. Open from 3pm to 9pm from Fridays to Sundays and on public holidays, Amphawa Floating Market is a popular tourist destination receiving on average 5,000 visitors each operating day and up to 20,000 a day during long holiday periods (Officer of Amphawa Chaipattananurak Project – interview dated 31 December 2012).¹ A large proportion of these tourists are Bangkok

residents who stop at the market in the middle of their journey to/from southern beaches. The market is divided into two sections: the ‘municipality section’ comprises a series of food shops and cafés located in traditional buildings, traders selling food from boats, and stand-alone food stalls located on both sides of the river; and the ‘Amphawachapattananurak section’ is located in an enclosed area, with traders located in both ground stalls and on boats.²

Gastronomic Offerings in Amphawa Floating Market

Gastronomic offerings in Amphawa Floating Market reflect the local stakeholders playing an active role in turning locally-available natural and cultural resources and individual know-how into tourism experiences. The various ways this can be discerned are discussed below.

Agriculture

A portion of food commodities and gastronomic-related activities offered on site are influenced by local farming activities. Approximately 80%–90% of residents living on the bank of MaeKlong River are farmers. The area where Amphawa Floating Market is located was previously known as Bang Chang, historically an agricultural area known for the production of fruits and vegetables, namely pomelo, coconut, lime, tamarind, orange, lychee and maprieng,³ renowned for a sweetness contributed by the brackish soil. The community sits on the bank of MaeKlong River, which connects Chao Phraya River to the Gulf of Thailand and is home to a variety of brackish-water seafood, especially mackerel. There is a portion of traders selling locally-grown fruits and condiments made from local ingredients, in particular coconut sugar made from locally-grown coconut, steamed mackerel (usually packaged in round bamboo basket) and kapi, or fermented seafood paste, made from locally sourced krill. A handful of traders sell assorted grilled seafood (shrimp, squid, and crab). Farm tours are organized on a private basis, with visitors required to contact the Amphawachapattananurak project to arrange them.

Amphawa is known as a large coconut producer and reputed for the superior quality of coconut-based products, especially coconut sugar and coconut milk used for making old-fashioned desserts. The Amphawachapattananurak project has made a specific effort to promote

pure coconut sugar. Diverse forms of coconut sugar products (powder, chunks, syrup, grains) are sold under the brand “Patrapat”. Additionally, there are regular demonstrations of coconut sugar making, where the sap from the coconut flower is simmered in a large pot to obtain concentrated and crystalized sugar content, to stimulate visitors’ awareness of the value of locally-made pure coconut sugar relative to mixed coconut sugar, in which white granulated sugar or glucose syrup is added to reduce the production cost. The pure coconut sugar is soft and dark mustard-coloured, has a strong aroma of coconut and uses white meranti as a natural preservative, whereas the mixed sugar, when compared to the pure one, appears to be more solid and lighter coloured, has a lighter coconut aroma and uses synthetic preservatives. The coconut sugar obtained from culinary demonstrations is poured into small pans made from banana leaves and bundled in coconut leaf baskets supplied by a group of local crafters.

Tradition

The community’s cultural richness is reflected in the gastronomic experiences offered in Amphawa Floating Market. Traditional houses along Maeklong River, old local businesses, and orchards form a part of the historic image of the traditional market. The existence of touristic traditional markets enables some long-established food businesses, such as Samarn Garnka coffeehouse, to be recognized as part of the community’s heritage. It promotes the longevity and revives the popularity of local food purveyers such as Hengee, a family-run Chinese patisserie that has been operating for four generations.

Amphawa gastronomic heritage is expressed in the sale of old-fashioned food items that are on the verge of disappearance. In particular, Gaeng-som-bai-chakram, spicy and sour soup with chakram leaves (scientific name: *suaeda maritime*), a salty-tasting herb that is commonly found in the local area, and ‘gaeng gala’, or softshell-crab coconut curry are among the dishes consumed within the community – and available from a number of savoury food traders in the market – but which are less common elsewhere. Old-fashioned food that is less common in large cities can also be found, such as tian-salad-nga (pyramid-shaped sticky rice cake coated with white sesame), sam-pan-nee (steamed tapioca cake made in assorted colours and shapes), ja-mong-kut (mung bean-based sticky cake topped with watermelon seeds), kai-nai-rang (egg white threads in syrup), and sanae-chan (nutmeg flavoured small rice cake). In many stalls, Thai sweets are packaged in traditional-

style clay pots to be sold as tourist souvenirs. Some food stalls intentionally prepare food on site to ensure the commodities' freshness, and some invite visitors to participate in certain cooking processes. The municipality of Amphawa established a Thai dessert museum, located in King Buddha Loet La Nabhalai Memorial Historic Park, to preserve the knowledge of Thai sweets by showcasing replicas of a variety of them, many of which are available from on-site food traders.



Figure 2. Trader are making noodle to be used in rerai, a Thai sweet, and visitors by using old-fashioned noodle machine. Source: the author.

Local Know-How

In addition, knowledge and expertise possessed by the individual local residents is reflected in culinary experiences. A portion of food items offered in the markets come from family recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. Wanna, a trader renting a stall in the office of Amphawachaipattananurak project, Amphawa Floating Marketing, learned how to make tian-salad-nga from her mother, who in turn learnt from her mother, who was a cook in a royal residence (interview 2013). Many traders revealed that they acquired culinary knowledge and through trial and error, relying on the opinions of their peers and customers as the basis for improvement. Many culinary items sold in the market are the

outcomes of experiment, in which locals are adventurous in offering gastronomic experiences by giving a modern twist to traditional food recipes by diversifying the flavour and appearance of old-fashioned food. Suansaithong stall, selling meekorp (seasoned crispy noodle snack), modifies the flavour of the snack with natural ingredients and provides a diversity of flavours and colours. Some traders have developed a gastronomic novelty by incorporating locally sourced vegetables, fruits and herbs or old-fashioned condiments as ingredients to modify contemporary-style food items. Amphawa-based entrepreneurs developed the ice-cream brand Sri-Mala by using local fruits, flowers and old-fashioned condiments as flavouring ingredients. A trader in Amphawachaipattananurak project in Amphawa Floating Market has created a range of new dishes using mackerel, a locally sourced fish, such as mackerel omelette, mackerel green curry, and mackerel in Tom Yum soup.

Gastronomic Experience in Amphawa Floating Market as Community Development Driver

Local participation in the construction and presentation of gastronomic experiences offered in the traditional market contributes economically, socially and culturally to the local community. However, it also causes challenges derived from negative impacts generated by tourism, to be discussed below.

Economic Contributions

The research found that the operation of food stalls in Amphawa Floating Market stimulates job creation within the community. That is, food trade has become both a primary and secondary source of income for local residents. A number of food traders do a full-time job on weekdays and work in the market stalls over the weekend to gain extra money. The owner of Baan Karn's stall (interview 2013) is an officer in a state-owned enterprise who runs the stall on the weekend. It is also found that Amphawa Floating Market stimulates the development of local SMEs. The commercial success of the traditional market has made setting up food stalls a lucrative undertaking for certain locals. A number of stalls are operated as family businesses, with each family member taking part in producing and selling food at the stall. The market has given birth to local food trademarks that can be successfully developed as successful food enterprises: 'Sri-Mala' ice

cream, ‘Samniang’ flower-infused water, and ‘Eng Chang’ dipping sauces made from local fruits. Moreover, the market stimulates the existing food industry, such as old-fashioned sweets produced by local housewife groups and community-based old food businesses.



Figure 3. The charcoal kiln in the office of Amphawachaipattananurak project, where coconut sap is processed to make sugar. Source: the author.

The trade opportunity provided by the traditional market has also supported local agriculture. A portion of stall operators are Samutsongkram-based farmers who bring agricultural products from their farms for sale on the weekend. The management unit also plays an active role in distributing farm products made by producers. Amphawachaipattananurak project dedicates a section in the project’s office to sell farm products made by the local who experience difficulties in selling the products by themselves. For example, some lack expertise in the operation of a business and hence have a hard time to work independently to generate profits from the sale of their products.

Besides distribution support, it is found that the market also plays a part in supporting the processing of local farming products on the basis of the concept of fair trade, a business ideology to ensure that local producers benefits from commercial activities (Nicholls 2015). This can be seen from the Amphawachaipattananurak's policy to advocate the traditionally processed coconut sugar by gathering residents with the knowledge of coconut sugar making to build a charcoal kiln within the office area and buying coconut sap from local coconut farms at reasonable prices to have them processed on the site. The price of coconut sugar products is intentionally set higher than coconut sugar sold by other traders to enhance the perceived value of pure coconut sugar in terms of quality. Also, high pricing is also aimed to give more trade opportunities for local farmers wishing to sell identical products within the market area. The project also pays reasonable wages for residents who take part in the production of coconut sugar on the site.

The promotion of coconut sugar is found to indirectly support coconut farming, which accounts for 70% of the agricultural activities represented in Amphawa Floating Market (interview 2014). Traditional processed coconut products are attractive to community-conscious visitors, a niche group of tourists who in their buying choices prioritise products and services made by the locals. At the time of the field research, the project sold on average 100 kilograms of sugar to local restaurants per month.

Efforts have been made to restrict the financial gain provided by the market to locally-based residents, and thus prevent financial leakage. The market section that is operated by the Amphawachaipattananurak project reserves vending stalls for residents of Samutsongkram, and those with stalls here are strongly encouraged to sell old-fashioned food based on locally sourced ingredients. The project's café, Chanchala café, aims to help adjacent food stalls by allowing visitors to bring food from outside and inspire the locals about gastronomic ideas by using the café to sell old-fashioned dishes that are not common in the traditional markets. The project uses roasted coffee bean from Samarn Garnka café to support local entrepreneurship.

It is more difficult to control financial leakage in the market section belonging to the municipality of Amphawa, which comprises individually owned lands and stalls, thus limiting the municipality's ability to control the land usage and property ownership. This opens up opportunities for food traders from outside the town to rent spaces from local landowners or

purchase commercial houses from the locals to use for business. The vending area is being expanded to accommodate external traders. This expansion means that the locals benefit less from tourism and it may threaten local livelihoods. Certain food shops in the market have closed because the owner of the premises chose to rent out the venue to other traders, since Amphawa community has seen an increase in property value and rates of rent. In the same vein, some agricultural lands in Amphawa community have gradually been converted into housing estates or tourists' facilities (accommodation and parking spaces) because local farm owners sold their property to external investors.

Tourism operation can result in inflation, explained by the heightened cost of living in areas that are successfully promoted as tourism attraction (Akis, Peristianis and Warner 1996). The increasing demand in food and drinks in Amphawa Community generated by the arrival of tourist partially encourages local traders to increase food prices (up to twofold) so as to earn the maximum financial benefit from tourism. Besides, the heightened food price is attributed by the increase in the stall rental fee, as a consequence of the increased land value generated by the expansion of economic opportunities. Traders from outside the community are likely to be charged higher prices than the locals.

It is found that tourism accelerates food resource depletion (Mensah and Mensah 2013). The rapid growth of tourists' demand for food and drinks makes it necessary to bring food from outside the region when there are not enough food resources to accommodate the growing food demand brought by tourist arrivals (Belisle 1983). The inadequacy of seafood resource for local consumption had been a problem of the Amphawa waterfront community before tourism arrived and importation of seafood products from the Burmese sea was not uncommon at that time. Tourists' desire for certain kind of seafood such as mackerel and crustaceans, only exacerbates this issue and may lead to increase financial leakage rather than tapping into the economic potential of local food.

Social Contributions

The gastronomic experiences developed and delivered by the locals have provided social benefits to the local community. The living condition of

local residents has been improved through the operation of food stalls. As reported by an interviewed officer of the municipality, a number of community residents have been able to pay off their debts and some of them have even been able to afford a certain amount of luxury through purchasing cars and properties. It is found that the traditional market offers job opportunities for people in disadvantaged conditions. A number of interviewed traders in the market were unemployed elderly residents (60+ years old) who revealed that they would have a hard time finding jobs other than selling food in the market. Nuchnart, a trader in Amphawa Floating Market, said that the income generated from selling seafood dishes supported her employees, some of whom are physically impaired and would have trouble finding jobs elsewhere if they could not work in the market stalls (Tianxin- interview 2 March 2013).

The success of the revival of a local public space into a tourism attraction has led many younger locals to return to their hometown. A number of stalls are owned by young local residents (aged 20-40) who previously worked or studied in Bangkok and have now decided to return to the community to start up businesses. It is found that some of them came to assist their parents in running stalls. This group of people bring not only culinary innovations but also entrepreneurship skills to optimize the financial gain, as evidenced by traders using social media as a means to enhance their communication with customers and the availability of international dishes brought by traders who have been acquainted with the metropolitan food scene, characterised by the mixture of diverse culinary influences. Moreover, the younger generation of traders also introduce new technologies to improve the quality of the production of old-fashioned items.

Nevertheless, it is found that the arrival of tourism in Amphawa imposes threats to the rural community. Namely, it leads to the propagation of a business mindset among the locals. As commented by an officer from the municipality of Amphawa (interview 31 December 2012), the fact that Amphawa community has been promoted as a touristic traditional market has made the locals come to see each other as business competitors rather than friends.

Despite the natural and cultural scenery functioning as an important selling point of Amphawa Floating Market, tourist arrivals at an unexpected level leads to degradation of Amphawa community's surroundings. Local authorities are experiencing problems in maintaining the environmental

landscape of the market that is subject to the intensive usage by tourists. Garbage has increasingly become a problem in the market due to the inability of the community to deal with food waste. According to an interviewed tourist, Nirat (2014), the market still lacks effective measures to manage waste. In a way, failure to maintain the landscape is attributed by the absence of concrete policy to deal with the market's surrounding and the limited authority of Amphawa Municipality over privately owned lands and properties within the market area.

Cultural Contributions

The local transformation of gastronomic resources into commodities for sale in the traditional markets reflects the contributions of the traditional market to the cultural dimension of the society. The traditional market has enabled aspects of local gastronomic heritage to be preserved. A variety of dishes that form a part of the local diets are sold by a number of traders. Certain traders intentionally prefer old-fashioned cooking methods to modern ones in preparing food, for the superior taste afforded, as evidenced by a trader using traditional equipment for milling glutinous rice flour to make a Thai dessert. The operation of food stalls entices the locals to revive family heritage by incorporating family recipes into food commodities, evidenced by food traders using recipes they learnt from family members in producing food items. The traditional markets also stimulate the local interest in old-fashioned gastronomy. A number of traders reveal that they intentionally set out to acquire knowledge and skills related to making old-fashioned dishes to be sold in the traditional market. In addition, the local interest in traditional gastronomy accounts for the construction of selling points. The owner of Lek Arunee dessert shop in Amphawa Floating Market did some research on the history of Thai sweets to promote food commodities based on cultural significance (Tianxin – interview 2 March 2013).

The fact that the market reflects the ability of the community to conserve the peasant way of life influences visitors' impressions of their visit: some view that Amphawa Floating Market can potentially promote the longevity of old-fashioned food and enable younger generations of people to learn about the local cuisine. In some cases, it is found that visitors use food to make sense of the local identity, as affirmed by an interviewed visitor:

‘Food here is authentically traditional and genuinely reflect the local palate. If I have a chance to travel to distant places, I’d love to try dishes that form part of the local identity, especially the ones that taste good (Tianxin – interview 2 March 2013).

As mentioned above, one of the Amphawachaipattananurak project’s missions is to encourage the locals to use local gastronomy as a source of income generation. It has been a pioneer in introducing old-fashioned food and edible items that are part of local diets to give to the locals ideas about how to transfer local food knowledge into communities. At the time the research was conducted, the project was planning to conduct an in-depth survey to gather knowledge about traditional culinary know-how that exists in the community by talking to residents of older generations, and providing cooking workshops for the locals to learn how to make food. The project also promotes a new mix of traditional herbal drinks as a speciality of the café, as can be seen from ‘nam-muan-chuen’ – a butterfly pea drink that is made from combining butterfly pea flower water, lemongrass extract, lime juice and balm mint. The drink’s recipe was devised by Princess Sirindhorn. Also, the project’s initiatives to promote pure coconut sugar supports the perpetuation of the profession of coconut sugar maker, which has gradually disappeared from the community because it is a dangerous job, requiring farmers to climb up to the top of a coconut tree to gather sap from coconut flowers, with the income generated from the sales of coconut sugar being too low to provide adequate compensation for this risk. The project also plans to create a communal stove that residents in the community can use to crystalize the sap.

Economic opportunity generated by tourism acts as cultural contributor that inspires innovative delivery of local food experiences among local food traders. Amphawa Floating Market has given birth to gastronomic creativity developed by local residents. One aspect of this can be seen from the manipulation of traditional culture. Traditional recipes are modified to meet the modern taste or the incorporation of local ingredients into contemporary-styled culinary items. In addition, gastronomic novelties in the traditional market are generated from the intersection of a variety of culinary preferences. ‘Kaikalok’, or omelette rice ball, was created by combining the influence of Japanese cuisine (omu rice) with Thai cuisine (kow-kai-jjew, or rice topped with deep-fried egg).



Figure 4. Ingredients used in making nam-muen-chen, a herbal drink created by princess Sirindhorn. Source: the author.

In this context, creativity is not a distortion of tradition but rather should be valued from its being instrumental to generate positive consequences in the contemporary time. As justified by the officer of Amphawachaipattananurak project, the value traditional culture resides in commercial viability that can boost the economy of the locality

‘From my point of view, culture can never be static. Stopping culture to evolve will only destroy it. That is, culture is dynamic. We should let it change through time. By the same token, we should consider which traditional culture is worth to be preserved, like tradition that can stimulate jobs in the local area (Officer of Amphawachaipattananurak Project – interview 31 December 2012).

Creativity should be seen from the ability of the locals to extend the value of tradition, which also bring pride to locals. As explained by a trader of Sri-Mala ice-cream (interview 2013), Sri Mala ice cream represents the genuine identity of Amphawa because it is made from locally sourced fruits and herbs.

Besides, it is found that tourism is influential in determining food experiences offered in Amphawa Floating Market (Mak, Lumbers and Eves

2012). It can be said that the market's provision of both old-fashioned food and contemporary-styled dishes responds to a variety of visitors' desire to engage in local food (Sengel et al. 2015). As explained by the municipality of Amphawa (interview 2012), younger visitors are less willing to try traditional food products. Some of them, as affirmed by Bukori (interview 2013), consider the authenticity of traditional food to be less important than its flavour and quality: 'When I choose food to eat, I mainly consider the food taste. I will never crave for bad-tasting food even it manifests the character of traditional culture'. The flavour and quality of food items accounts for the visitors' perceived value of food experiences more than cultural attributes.

As noted by the member of the Amphawachai pattananurak project interviewed in 2013, it is important for Amphawa Floating Market to open itself to a variety of cuisines to attract tourists sharing different culinary interests. Certain old-fashioned items will not be popular in contemporary society due to changes in the palate preference over time and the loss of culinary talents. Thai market culture is open to the diversity of commodities generated and desired by foreign traders, and this allows it to adapt and develop.

Amphawa Floating Market as Community-led Culinary Destination

It can be concluded that Amphawa Floating Market can potentially be promoted as a community-based gastronomic destination due to a number of factors. Amphawa Floating Market is well acknowledged as a gastronomic hub of Samut Songkhram, with tourists coming to buy food as souvenirs to take back home and to enjoy meals at the site. The majority of interviewed visitors claimed that food is the main purpose for their visit. Among the most highlighted tourist activities in the traditional market is eating grilled seafood by the river. Food experiences can act as both primary and secondary experiences for tourists (Quan and Wang 2004) and can cater for a variety of tourists' interests: food can cater for tourists' interest in learning about local culture (farm visits, the dessert museum, culinary demonstrations, old-fashioned culinary items sold by traders in the traditional market), as well as tourists' desire to eat well (food with good taste and high quality). In addition, food performs a complementary role in supporting other purposes of travel, evidenced by visitors eating food while contemplating the rural scenery and local hosts providing local food for

guests in homestay accommodation within the vicinity of Amphawa Floating Market. As stated by Siriluck (interview 2014), food is considered more attractive when it is sold from the boat. This helps show that the environment of the market is a principle element of tourists' motivation to visit the traditional market and can enhance visitors' food experiences (Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman 2014).

As illustrated earlier, Amphawa community possesses a rich amount of resources, both natural and cultural resources as well as culinary knowledge and skills possessed by local residents that can be used in the development and presentation of gastronomic experience of its traditional market. The community benefits from the freshness of local food ingredients in delivering quality eating experiences. Gastronomic offerings are not limited to eating experiences but also appear in the forms of other activities that serve to enhance visitors' knowledge about the local gastronomy. In addition, gastronomic experiences offered in the traditional market play a role in the events organized by the community, as seen from the food events organized by the municipality and cultural events that incorporate old-fashioned food items sold by the market's traders as part of the community's cultural image (Hall and Sharples 2008). Besides, the community's cultural prosperity not only diversifies food offerings but also contributes to enhancing the authentic image of the gastronomic experiences (Sims 2009; Blakey 2012; Ram, Björk and Weidenfeld 2016). A seafood restaurant 'Kampan' labels itself an 'authentic restaurant', where dishes sold represent the culinary identity of Amphawa community. A number of interviewed visitors perceive cultural experiences in Amphawa Floating Market as more authentic than those in many other traditional markets, especially those which are intentionally geared to attracting tourists, because Amphawa Floating Market was developed from the area's history as an ancient waterborne community. For certain visitors, old-fashioned experiences are perceived to be authentic thanks to the community's possession of a genuine local way of life. As postulated by Ekkapan (interview 2013), the traditional market's food items are genuinely authentic because they were made by elderly residents. In some cases, authenticity is built on the perceived difference between the past and the present. Nongree (interview 2013) linked the value of traditional gastronomy to scarcity, choosing items that are difficult to find in Bangkok.

It should be remarked that gastronomic offerings in the traditional markets correspond with current socio-cultural trends in Thailand. To an extent, traditional touristic markets meet the desire of modern urban residents for leisure spaces that mark an alternative to increasingly modernized department stores. A large portion of visitors to Amphawa Floating Market are city dwellers who seek a temporary escape from their working lives through another mode of life. The old-fashioned Thai way of life is seen as a desirable alternative to the unpleasant way of life in the city. Bukori (interview 2013) stated that he visited the market with the purpose of fleeing the working environment by buying fresh seafood to have cooked and eaten on the riverside, along with strolling along the traditional houses sitting on the riverbank and observing the local way of life. There are a number of restaurants located on the riverside (for example, 'Baanthongboran'), serving both Thai and international dishes and drinks to attract visitors who want to dine with a view of the river.

For Thais, food apparently plays an important role in their leisure. The search for good food was often counted in the purpose of their going-out experiences. A number of interviewed tourists reported that they did some research on the market's food stalls on the internet prior to visiting Amphawa Floating Market. Domestic tourists tends to engage in food experiences more extensively than non-Thai visitors, whose food engagement can be limited by taste preference, unfamiliarity with the local cuisine, and concerns regarding hygiene standards (see Cohen and Avieli 2004; OECD 2012). Moreover, many of the tourists who came on a guided tour were unable to explore the food scene at will. According to some food traders, non-Thai visitors are reluctant to purchase food in the market for fear of being cheated. The gastronomic experiences provided in Amphawa Floating Market fit into the growth of nostalgic consumption in the community. The presence of a variety of old-fashioned food items and activities that enable visitors to learn about the local cuisine can potentially respond to young visitors' curiosity to learn about traditional cuisine, and allow older visitor desire to rediscover their past.

Moreover, Amphawa Floating Market can benefit from the heightened significance of food in Thai tourism by positioning itself as a gastronomic attraction. Food is regarded as an important income generator and can be used as a tool to promote community-based tourism destinations through integrating locals as food experience developers (Prachachat 2016).

Apparently, efforts have been made to promote tourism as a means of distributing locally-produced food items from the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) scheme, launched by the Thai government to stimulate the economy of the district level. In a way, gastronomic experiences in the traditional markets can possibly be integrated as part of the 'creative economy', in which gastronomy is treated as an innovation to create a unique character in products and services (Kaewsanga and Chamnongsri 2012; Singsomboon 2014). Local culinary knowledge is used as a basis for the development of experiences in numerous locations in Thailand, where storytelling has been used to enhance the value of commodities.

Food in the traditional market is able to stimulate international tourists' engagement in Thai food. It is reported that, in 2015, international tourists in Thailand spent 4.56 hundred thousand baht on food, one-fifth of the total receipt from international tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sports 2016; Prachachat 2016). Although the majority of visitors in Amphawa Floating Market are Thai, the market has seen an increase in the number of non-Thai tourists (notably those coming from Asian countries), accounting for 7%–10% of the total number of visitors in the market,⁴ especially during weekdays. A large portion of visitors come from Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China. Gastronomic offerings in Amphawa Floating Market can potentially respond to the national policy to increase the recognition of Thai food at the international level by providing a gastronomic scene for visitors interested in discovering authentic Thai food. In particular, Thailand benefits from its strong reputation for street food, which attracts visitors to explore the local food scene (Forbes 2013).

However, Amphawa Floating Market also faces certain obstacles in its promotion of culinary experiences in the traditional market. Although visitors took into account the significance of local gastronomy by purchasing old-fashioned edible items based on their relationship with the community's traditional way of life, they were rarely aware of gastronomic-led activities that are operated on site. Some activities, such as farm visits, are open on a private basis, where interested visitors are required to contact the Amphawachai pattananurak project to arrange the visit. Inadequate funding allocated by the municipality of Amphawa to organize cultural activities in the attraction can affect the continuity in the operation of culinary-related activities. This has been the case for the market's Thai

dessert museum, which was temporarily closed due to financial shortage and location issues, not it has been relocated to King Rama II memorial park.

Lack of variety among the culinary items sold, or excessive representation of some specific items, can be an impediment for the traditional market to position itself as a gastronomic attraction. The local attempt to secure financial gain from the touristic traditional market resulted has to some extent resulted in the homogenization of culinary offerings in the traditional market, which some interviewed visitors regard negatively as reflecting a manipulative, inauthentic tendency (Mak, Lumbers and Eves 2012). Many traders choose to sell certain kinds of food that are renowned among visitors as a mean of guaranteeing steady income, rather than introducing new varieties to the market food scene. Certain food items that are specialties of Samutsongkram (such as grilled seafood, boat noodles or noodles in pork blood broth) are sold at a great many stalls. The municipality of Amphawa admitted that it has become difficult for them to ensure the diversity of culinary products in the market as the number of stalls has risen (interview 2012). Although homogenization has not yet impacted the local pride, it can be implied that the growing sameness of culinary products is seen to threaten the prestige of local food culture, devaluing of culinary experiences in terms of uniqueness.

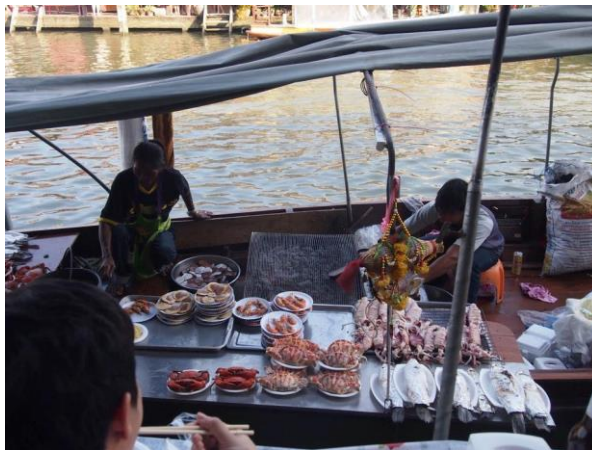


Figure 5. Grilled seafood sold from the boat. Source: the author.

This limitation in the culinary experiences offered to some extent results from the fact that the community's gastronomic heritage is largely taken for granted in the destination marketing strategy. An officer representing the

municipality of Amphawa (interview 2012), when asked about the character of gastronomic experiences offered, stated that the gastronomic items sold in the traditional market were regarded as being representative of central Thai cuisine, which are available elsewhere in Samutsongkram and other towns and cities in the central region of Thailand. That is, the main focus of the municipality of Amphawa is the overall image of an old-fashioned waterborne community scene, rather than working on a specific category of cultural products. The promotion of culinary experiences is done in a passive manner by prioritizing food items that have established popularity among local residents. Some interviewed visitors are aware of the relationships between gastronomic items and the historical image of the traditional market, but perceived them to be the same as those available in other traditional markets and other touristic locations in the same region. Additionally, the identification of gastronomic items as part of the regional cuisine prevents other aspects of the market's food experiences from being established as a unique component of gastronomic experiences of the traditional market: the quality of the food, the traders' hospitality, and the mealtime experience are all to some extent side-lined, where they could play a central role. Increasingly, touristic traditional markets are a competitive business (Cohen 2016). It is important for Amphawa Floating Market to intensify the local gastronomic identity to maintain long-term popularity, otherwise the market risks declining if a similar type of attraction is opened nearby.

The findings also revealed that certain elements of tourist experiences in the traditional market are substandard and as such need to be addressed. Insufficient tourist facilities are one of the issues. A number of tourists complained that there are not enough seating areas where visitors can eat food on site, and found that some eateries in the traditional markets are too small to accommodate visitors. Moreover, inadequate parking space is seen as a problem for tourists visiting the traditional market, despite the increased parking spaces operated by private landowners. Also, health safety of edible commodities should be improved to enhance the marketability of the markets' gastronomic products. As reported by an interviewed market officer (interview 2012), international visitors have experienced allergies from dishes containing horseshoe crabs and food poisoning from eating undercooked seafood. Some domestic visitors state that inadequate food hygiene, seen from the traders' usage of unclean food containers and insect

flying around food, is an impediment to on-site food consumption. It is important for local stakeholders to make sure that food products are sufficiently clean for consumption. Food safety is to some extent more emphasised by western visitors, who consider food safety a primary criterion in experiencing local food in tourism destinations. Many foreign visitors choose not to consume food items in traditional markets for fear of inadequate safety measure (Cohen and Avieli 2004).

In fact, food safety is an important issue for the municipality of Amphawa. With the collaboration from Samut Songkram public health office, talks and workshops have been regularly organized to educate local traders about safe food handling. They were instructed to prepare food to the same quality as the food they eat at home. Nevertheless, food safety monitoring is carried out randomly and there is no food hygiene accreditation system that visitors can refer to for reassurance. Often the process is passively operated, relying on complaints submitted by visitors. Some food sellers did not take food hygiene as a serious matter and are less careful in the cleanliness of food containers.

Discussion and Conclusion

Through the case study of Amphawa Floating Market, it can be concluded that the locals can use food as a catalyst to engender community-based tourism initiatives, in which locals plays an active role in converting locally-based natural and cultural resources as well as expertise into gastronomic experiences. By using gastronomy as a point of departure, the paper illustrates economic, social and cultural contributions derived from tourism to the betterment of the community through improved well-being of individual residents, socio-economic conditions, and the preservation and perpetuation of traditional rural Thai culture. This can be read as an innovative approach to rural culture that results in pride among the locals by intensifying the sense of place among the locals. The paper shows that Amphawa Floating Market has attributes that will strongly allow it to be promoted as a gastronomic attraction – primarily, rich culinary resources and favourable socio-economic conditions – but that its unique gastronomic selling proposition remains to be optimized, and adequate quality control is also required.

Nevertheless, threats hindering local development are mentioned throughout this paper. Rapid tourism development generates several negative

consequences financial leakage, resource deprivation, inflation, hostility among local residents fighting over the financial interest, and the degradation of landscape, all of which needs to be address in order to make the locals genuinely benefit from tourism. Besides, it is important for the destination to address challenges in terms of the quality of tourism experiences and the provision of tourist facilities, as well as ensure the variation of food scene (against the influence of homogenization brought by the local terms to secure commercial benefits by selling only hits items) to ensure the positive image of the attraction, an important factor that attracts financial benefits to the community.

The paper also shows that the success of the promotion of gastronomic experiences depends not on the strong attachment to the past but rather the negotiations between the past and the present. The old-fashioned way of life presented in Amphawa Floating Market does not demonstrate strict fidelity to the past, but should rather be seen as demonstrating how the old way of life makes sense in the contemporary consuming culture. As has been shown, only certain elements of the old-fashioned way of life are used to represent the traditional image of the markets, where others are intentionally neglected because they fail to meet the preferences of the contemporary society (Rabinovitch 2011). While it is important for the traditional market to present an authentic cultural scene, tourists are not, in general, hostile to the presence of non-local food elements, but rather appreciate these as a factor contributing to the liveliness of the attraction.

The maintenance of long-term commercial viability is crucial for sustainable development. The ability of the traditional market to promote a unique culinary selling proposition and deliver quality gastronomic experiences that are perceived to offer value for money can be means to provide consistent financial gain to the community. However, there is a need to prevent excessive growth of tourism in the community, as it may threaten the living conditions of residents. It is important to balance tourism with the market's carrying capacity to ensure the longevity of local contributions.

Notes

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1. Information as of 2014.
2. No exact data could be provided by the management team of the market, who stated that the number of stalls changed constantly and the market was continuously expanding its space, allowing more traders to come into the market.
3. Maprieng (scientific name: *Cynometra cauliflora*) is alternatively known as Amphawa because the locals once believed that it was a rare species that could be found only in the region, and consequently it has been promoted as the fruit of the region. In fact, it is a fruit that is common to Malaysia, where it is known as namnam, and southern Thailand. It tastes like mango.
4. Information as of 2013, according to an interviewed officer of the Amphawachaipattananurak project.

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