



**THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THAILAND'S
GASTRODIPLOMACY**

BY

MISS NICHAPORN RAKSARAT

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE
IN POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2022
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ENTITLED

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was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Political Science in Politics and International Relations

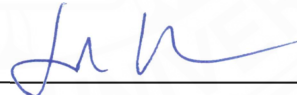
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ABSTRACT

Apart from serving as one of the most fundamental elements for survival and satisfaction, food can be used as a diplomatic tool for projecting a country's unique culture and identity to the foreign audiences to create better brand recognition and extend its soft power abroad. This is known as gastrodiploamacy. There are currently only a few studies on Thailand's gastrodiploamacy, none of which theoretically mentions the key factors influencing Thailand to initiate this foreign policy and how it has been developed over the years. To address the existing gaps in academic literature, this research aims to examine Thailand's gastrodiploamacy, namely "Thailand: Kitchen of the World" and "Global Thai." Specifically, it seeks to answer the two research questions: "What factors influenced Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy?" and "How has the policy been implemented under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha?" A qualitative method is applied in this research based on documentary analysis. To construct a theoretical framework, constructivism is employed as an approach to analyzing the key puzzles behind Thailand's gastrodiploamacy and the development of the policy. In this paper, the beginning period of policy implementation under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the present period under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha are explored.

Keywords: Thailand, Gastrodiploamacy, Thailand: Kitchen of the World

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Miss Nichaporn Raksarat

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Gastrodiplomacy is the act of winning hearts and minds through stomachs.”

Paul S. Rockower

1.1 General Statement of Problem

Food has played a crucial role in people's daily lives, serving their basic needs for survival and satisfaction. Therefore, most people tend to overlook the role of food, simply perceiving it as a meal to fulfill their empty stomachs and serve their needs. In fact, the power of food not only lies in the realm of fundamental elements for survival but also in international relations. Food can be employed as a diplomatic instrument by a state to reinforce international relations and achieve certain goals. Chapple-Sokol (2013) mentions that when food is transformed through the lens of international relations, culture, and national identity, it plays a significant role in strengthening bilateral ties among states, serving as a form of cultural engagement across language barriers, and projecting a country's unique identity. Hence, food is more than just a tangible resource for human survival; it also represents the unique culture and identity of a country, allowing it to distinguish itself from others and create better brand recognition at the international level.

National cuisine can be manifested in the unique culture, identity, and geographical background of a country. The cooking styles, dining customs, recipes, and choice of ingredients, inherited from generation to generation, are entirely associated with a particular country's culture, identity, and geographical background. A country can use national cuisine to project its distinctive culture and identity to the foreign public in order to stand out from the crowd and brand itself the way it desires (Zhang, 2015; Mennell, 1995). For instance, when foreigners mention Tom Yum Goong, a Thai-style spicy shrimp soup, they definitely think about Thailand, a country surrounded by an abundance of seafood and renowned for the distinctive spicy flavors of its national cuisine. While they experience Thai food through their senses (sight, touch, smell, and

taste), they experience the country's culture and identity embedded in Thai cuisine at the same time. In this context, food is served as a non-verbal communication, generating cultural understanding and engagement across language barriers. Thai cuisine is not just a meal to fulfill an empty stomach but also a medium for sharing and expressing the Thai culinary heritage transmitted for generations to the foreign audiences. According to Brillat-Savarin (2011), the author of a book entitled "*The physiology of taste*," the distinctiveness and uniqueness of national cuisine can define the identity of a particular country which helps that country to globally promote itself and stand out from the crowd. Branding a country through its national cuisine is one of the most powerful and easiest ways to gain a positive image, a better reputation, and international recognition (Ichijo & Ranta, 2018).

Rockower (2012), the author of "*Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy*," suggests that food is considered to be a diplomatic instrument for communicating a country's unique culture and identity to the foreign audiences to gain a better reputation and positive image of the country as well as increase international recognition by winning hearts and minds of the foreign public. This is referred to as "gastrodiplomacy." It should be noted that the way food plays an important role in international relations is not new, and many types of diplomacy are related to food. However, the term of gastrodiplomacy is relatively new in the field of diplomacy. As Forman and Sonenshine (2014) note, mixed with the unique culture and identity of a country, food is considered to be a powerful ingredient in diplomacy and international relations.

Chapple-Sokol (2013) also mentions that food is a kind of soft power tools for the state to potentially influence foreign actors in the simplest way to achieve positive long-term results. In the age of globalization, people tend to be learn and influenced by what they see and experience. It is simple for a country to influence a wider foreign audience by utilizing its national cuisine as a soft power. With the distinctive flavors of a country's national cuisine, gastrodiplomacy allows the state to influence the foreign public, stand out from the crowd, create a recognizable image, and gain international recognition. Therefore, the study of gastrodiplomacy is very interesting because it highlights the importance of food from the diplomatic perspective with a modern form of public diplomacy, and significantly only a few research works

have been carried out on this topic. It also tends to be overlooked in the field of political science.

Nowadays, many countries around the world have been employing gastrodiploamacy in their foreign policy as a means of standing out from the crowd through the promotion of their national cuisine. Thailand is one such country and has discovered its potential for using Thai cuisine as a soft power, introducing it into the international arena in 2002. With the mix of indigenous food and Indian and Chinese culinary influence, Thai cuisine is fairly unique, exclusive and different from other countries. The country has decided to use Thai food as a soft power tool in marketing and promoting its nation brand. Surprisingly, Thailand is recognized as the first country in the world that officially pursues gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy, subsequently inspiring other countries in the region to jump on the bandwagon. In 2002, the Thai government established its first gastrodiploamacy program called “Global Thai” with the aim of spreading the number of overseas Thai restaurants. Afterwards, a second project named “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” was launched with the aim of educating both Thais and foreigners about the unique Thai culinary culture and its history. Nowadays, Thailand is well-known for its success in the field of gastrodiploamacy. Thai food has increasingly gained popularity in the eyes of foreigners. Nevertheless, there are only a few studies on the topic in the context of Thailand, and especially the key factors influencing the country to initiate gastrodiploamacy in the first place. Therefore, due to a lack of up-to-date data in the existing literature, this current research aims to shed light on the key factors behind Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy by looking at the origins of the policy and exploring how the policy has been developed from the past to the present.

1.2 Research Questions

The research will investigate two main research questions: (1) What factors influenced Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy? and (2) How has the policy been implemented under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha?

1.3 Hypothesis

Three main factors influenced Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy, namely the narratives of nation branding, a negative image of sex tourism, and an economic policy. Despite the government changes between Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, a continuity still exists in terms of pursuing and implementing gastrodiploamacy due to the existence of collective ideas among policymakers. Despite the two governments coming from different political parties and regimes, they still decided to pursue and promote gastrodiploamacy. Therefore, the political regime may not be the main factor driving Thailand's gastrodiploamacy, but the collective ideas shared among the government and key policymakers within the network. As long as the three factors behind Thailand's gastrodiploamacy still exist and the ideas of some key policymakers, such as Somkid Jatusripitak, continue to play a significant role, the policy implemented during the two periods is being promoted in a similar way.

1.4 Research Objectives

This research aims to study the role of Thai food as a diplomatic function in projecting Thai culture and identity to the foreign public and enhancing its nation branding under the concept of gastrodiploamacy. Also, the research seeks to analyze the key factors influencing Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in the first place by placing a huge emphasis on the origins of the policy. Finally, the research aims to explore how the policies "Global Thai" and "Thailand: Kitchen of the World" have been implemented and developed from the past to the present by specifically looking at the beginning period under former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and present period under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

1.5 Definition of Terms

Nation branding

A strategic approach created to promote a country's positive image and reputation as well as gain international recognition.

Public diplomacy

A type of diplomacy used by the government in an attempt to communicate its policy, culture and values by targeting the foreign public.

Gastrodiplomacy

A kind of public diplomacy used by a state to communicate and project its culture and identity to the foreign public through national cuisines with the aim of creating better brand recognition and extending its soft power abroad.

Collective ideas

Shared collective understandings and beliefs about certain issues among a group of people.

State identity

The self-understanding and expectation of a state in relation to others.

A new sense of identity

A new sense of self that one believes or expects to exist in the process of identifying who one is.

1.6 Research Methodology

The qualitative method is applied in this research to investigate factors influencing Thailand to initiate gastrodiplomacy in the first place and how the policies have been developed between the two periods under the governments of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. For this research, documentary analysis is used as the main research method. The facts and data from both primary and secondary sources are systematically collected and analyzed. Examples of primary sources include the government's official statements and speeches, as well as the press releases on the website of the Royal Thai Government and involved ministries such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, and Office of the Prime Minister. In addition, this research uses a variety of secondary sources such as academic journals, books, research papers, newspapers, and magazine articles to obtain important data and specific details relating to gastrodiplomacy in the context of Thailand. The research also refers to the works of many well-known scholars in the realm of international relations and public diplomacy, such as Joseph S. Nye,

who developed the soft power theory; Alexander Wendt, an American political scientist and a famous social constructivist; and Paul Rockower, a renowned scholar who coined the term of gastrodiploamacy, in discussing the concept of constructivism and gastrodiploamacy.

To clarify, this research covers the period from 1989 to 2019 when Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha were in power. The time period begins in 1989 (the post-Cold War period) to allow the researcher to investigate the situation before Thailand initiated gastrodiploamacy in order to see the potential dynamics influencing Thailand to pursue gastrodiploamacy in the first place. To explore the development of the policy from the past to the present, only the beginning period under former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra from 2001 to 2006, and the present period under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha from 2014 to 2019 (a pre-election period), are analyzed in this study due to time constraints. Moreover, Thailand is selected as a case study for this research because it is considered as the global pioneer country in the field of gastrodiploamacy. It is recognized as the first country to formally and successfully initiates gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy, subsequently inspiring inspires other nations to follow the same path. Since the researcher's mother tongue is Thai and English is her second language, the majority of data are not only in English but also in Thai. Consequently, the researcher has easier access to the relavant data, which will be greatly helpful for the research in terms of collecting and translating important research findings in both Thai and English. In addition, there are academic gaps in the existing literature in the context of Thailand. The existing literature only emphasizes the overall policy in terms of objectives and implementation. None of them theoretically mentions the key factors influencing Thailand to initiate this policy in the first place. There is also a lack of up-to-date information on how the policy has been developed from past to present by only focusing on the overall projects. Therefore, the researcher thoroughly examines the key variables influencing Thailand to pursue this policy in the first place and explores how the policy has been implemented between the two periods by analyzing the development of the policy using both primary and secondary sources.

1.7 Literature Review

Four main articles have been reviewed for this research. All the existing literature systematically explains how Thailand has conducted and implemented gastrodiplomacy in its foreign policy using Thai cuisine as a soft power resource. The four articles generally look at the diplomatic role of Thai food under gastrodiplomacy campaigns, the key objectives of Thailand's gastrodiplomacy, and the policy implementation. Nevertheless, none of the works theoretically mentions the key factors influencing Thailand to initiate this foreign policy in the first place. They only emphasize the overall projects and the country's main objectives in pursuing this policy. Moreover, no previous research explores how Thailand's gastrodiplomacy has developed from the past to the present by heavily focusing on the beginning period. Therefore, the existing literature highlights two main problems. Firstly, previous research largely centers on the policy objectives and implementation without considering the key factors behind Thailand's gastrodiplomacy. Secondly, the existing studies lack up-to-date information on how the policy has been developed from the past to the present.

Consequently, this research aims to fill the academic gaps in the existing literatures by (1) emphasizing the origins of the policy to investigate what factors influenced Thailand to engage with gastrodiplomacy in the first place and (2) focusing on the development of the policy by specifically looking at the beginning period under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the present period under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha to obtain up-to-date information and produce a comprehensive study. To clarify, the four existing articles in the context of Thailand are separately reviewed. After that, the researcher discusses how they are related to each other and how they can be categorized in the following section.

1.7.1 Gastrodiplomacy in tourism

Suntikul (2017), in her article "*Gastrodiplomacy in Tourism*," described how the national cuisine of many countries around the world, including Thailand, has played a significant role in public diplomacy. As a part of public diplomacy, food can be considered one of the most powerful instruments for the

countries to enhance their nation branding and soft power abroad. Gastrodiplomacy allows such countries to win the hearts and minds of the foreign public by creating a positive cultural engagement without traveling abroad, thereby raising global awareness of their own culture and gaining international recognition. In the case of Thailand, two projects have been launched by the government: “Global Thai” and “Thailand: Kitchen of the World.” Under the “Global Thai” program, the Thai government aims to enlarge the number of Thai restaurants around the world in order to promote Thai food, as one of its reputable cultures, to be known globally and create better brand recognition. The “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” was subsequently launched with the aim of informing both the domestic and foreign public about Thai cuisine and its long history. Apart from enhancing nation branding, the two projects aim to stimulate Thailand’s tourism sector. This is because when foreigners experience Thai food overseas, they tend to visit Thailand to taste Thai food directly. According to a survey on the ability of national cuisine to influence the public perception of a nation’s image, half the respondents agreed that their perceptions of a country changed when they tasted the national food, while almost all respondents agreed that traveling abroad depends on the national food of the destination country’s national food. Under these two projects, Thai restaurants abroad have become tourist information centers and sites of gastrodiplomacy, positively impacting the foreigners’ impression of Thailand and its image.

1.7.2 The globalization of Thai cuisine

Sunanta (2005) published an article, “*The Globalization of Thai Cuisine*,” which also mentions the case of Thailand. The author describes how Thai cuisine has become globalized and internationally promoted by the Thai government through the gastrodiplomacy project, the Kitchen of the World. The author notes that Thai food is actually a combination of indigenous food and the influence of Indian and Chinese culinary culture as a result of transnational interactions over centuries, even though most Thai people believe in the uniqueness of authentic Thai cuisine. In the past, Thai cuisine was not widely known outside of the country. It had become well-known among foreigners since the Vietnam War when U.S. military bases were settled in Thailand. Since then, Thai cuisine has gradually gained popularity among foreigners

and has been promoted by the Thai government. Under the gastrodiploamacy project, the Thai government aims to increase the numbers of overseas Thai restaurants by encouraging both Thai investors and businessmen to invest in overseas Thai restaurants, training Thai chef to work abroad, and providing financial assistance to restaurant owners. This is how Thai cuisine has been globalized and internationally promoted by the Thai government. Sunanta (2005) also notes that the government has pursued gastrodiploamacy because it hopes that the project will generate foreign income from the export of food and agricultural products, thus contributing to the country's economy. Moreover, the author believes that the internationalization of Thai food and Thai tourism are interrelated because Thai food has played a crucial role in promoting the country's tourism. The slogan, "Amazing Thailand," part of the Thai tourism campaign in 1998, suggests that eating Thai food overseas offers the same experience as visiting Thailand. By globalizing Thai cuisine under the gastrodiploamacy project, the Thai government and business sectors continue to play an active role in shaping the way Thai cuisine is promoted in the international arena. This process is then market-driven by selling Thai culinary culture to foreigners, positively helping the country's economy and stimulating the tourism sector as a consequence.

1.7.3 Food tourism in Asia

Park, Kim, and Yeoman (2019), in their book *"Food tourism in Asia,"* also mention the diplomatic role of Thai food in enhancing nation branding and the key objectives in pursuing gastrodiploamacy. The authors note that Thailand has successfully implemented gastrodiploamacy by making Thai food well-known globally. The country has engaged in gastrodiploamacy because it desires to enhance its nation branding and promote national culinary culture internationally. The two projects, "Global Thai" and "Thai Kitchen to the World," have been established to communicate Thai culinary value and raise awareness of unique Thai culture among foreigners, enhance nation branding, and make Thailand a leading food export country by increasing the global demand for Thai food products. Moreover, these projects stimulate foreigners to experience Thai food directly in Thailand. In terms of tourism, overseas Thai restaurants have participated in the campaign by serving as tourist information centers. This contribution plays a significant role in attracting an increasing

number of tourists to visit Thailand. The government has pursued the policies in a way that promotes Thai food internationally to enhance the economic contribution of food exports and brand Thailand as a food-centric destination.

1.7.4 Food, national identity and nationalism from everyday to global politics

Like the previous articles, Ichijo and Ranta (2018), in their book *“Food, National Identity and Nationalism: From Everyday to Global Politics,”* also point out how national cuisine plays a crucial role in international relations under the concept of gastrodiploamacy. They mention that nowadays, national food is commonly employed as a diplomatic tool by many states to raise global awareness of their culinary culture and pursue other diplomatic goals. How states promote their national cuisine internationally is considered a kind of soft power. In this context, the national food is transformed into a soft power resource which allows those states to influence and attract foreign actors through their culinary culture. As a pioneering country, Thailand is considered to be the first country to implement gastrodiploamacy in 2002 with the goal of enhancing nation branding, extending its soft power abroad, and attracting foreigners to visit the country. Under gastrodiploamacy projects, the Thai government aims to increase the number of overseas Thai restaurants by providing loans and creating a business link between overseas Thai restaurants and the domestic food industry. The government has also established Thai cooking schools to train Thai chefs to work abroad. Moreover, according to the authors, Thai food policy is an important idea behind Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy because the Thai government needs to connect the promotion of Thailand and its culture with the expansion of the Thai food industry.

1.7.5 The categorization of existing literature

These four articles can be categorized into two groups. The first article is in the first group, and the remaining three are in the second group. They all largely pay attention to the role of Thai food in terms of the diplomatic function, key objectives of Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy, and policy implementation. Both groups agree that Thai cuisine is used as a diplomatic tool by the Thai government to internationally promote Thai culinary culture among the foreign public and enhance nation branding at the international level. They also agree that the promotion of tourism

is one of the country's main objectives in pursuing gastrodiploamacy because Thai food and Thai tourism are interrelated. However, the second group adds that actually, the promotion of the Thai food policy is a key idea behind the implementation of gastrodiploamacy. This is because the Thai government wants to connect the promotion of Thailand and its culture with the expansion of the Thai food industry in order to improve the Thai food process and enhance the economic contribution of Thai food exports by making Thailand a well-known food exporter and food-centric destination.

Since the existing literature only focuses on the key objectives and policy implementation, this current research aims to fill the gaps by looking at the key factors influencing Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in the first place. To clarify, this research will provide three important factors based on constructivism that potentially causing Thailand to pursue gastrodiploamacy in the first place: (1) the narratives of nation branding, (2) a negative image of sex tourism, and (3) an economic policy. Even though the two existing studies mention that Thai food policy is a crucial idea behind gastrodiploamacy, this research argues that the economic factor alone is insufficient. Rather than purely on the economic factor, the three factors combined are the key factors behind Thailand's gastrodiploamacy. As the existing literature still lacks up-to-date information on the policy development of policy from the past to the present, this current research seeks to fill the gap by placing an emphasis on the policy development, specifically by looking at the beginning period under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the present period under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

In order to build a theoretical framework, this research applies the constructivism approach to analyze the key factors influencing Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy and explains how the policy has been developed between the two periods. Various theories provide different ideas, frameworks, perspectives, and assumptions on specific issues. Although constructivism does not focus much on the key problems in international relations and give any solutions like other IR theories, it still provides an alternative understanding of certain core issues in international relations, such as the role of norms, the significance of ideas, and the

relationship between state identity and interest which can powerfully impact on state behavior including foreign policy. Some of these issues are overlooked by the other mainstream IR theories, constructivists then problematize the neglected aspects and provide an alternative framework to make sense of the complex world, including foreign policy. Therefore, constructivism is considerably useful and suitable for this research because it places a huge emphasize on the ideas, norms, identity and interests which could be considered as significant factors influencing a state to conduct a certain type of foreign policy.

According to constructivism, the world is socially constructed. It cannot be understood only through material factors but also the ideational ones. The objectivity of material factors is acknowledged, but it only becomes meaningful through shared ideas and knowledge among actors. Consequently, constructivists pay greater attention to non-material factors like ideas, beliefs, identity, norms, and culture in the context of intersubjective or shared collective understandings and beliefs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). For the constructivists, the international system exists in a meaningful and interconnected way through shared ideas and knowledge as well as interactions between states. Rather than material factors, the international system is a product of the distribution of shared ideas and knowledge. The distribution of collective ideas and knowledge is the key factor allowing the international system to exist and function in a meaningful way (Meng, 2020). As narrated by Alexander Wendt (1992), an American political scientist and a well-known constructivist scholar, shared ideas are significant because they are the main factor determining and constructing state identity and interests, which later shape how the state acts and performs. In other words, the identities and interests of actors are not pre-given by nature but socially constructed by shared ideas, knowledge, common expectations and collective understandings through social interaction with the international community (Meng, 2020). The state identity constructed by shared ideas will imply the state interests, and the state interests will inform the choice of actions. Therefore, state interests are not something to be discovered but determined in the process of defining situations and shaped by the state identity, which is subject to change during the process of social interaction. It should also be noted that in order to understand the constitution of state identity and interests, it is necessary not only to look at how states act in international relations but also the

historical, cultural, and social contexts. These factors play an important role in forming state identity in the first place (Wendt, 1992).

In addition to the relations between state identity and state interest, constructivists also shed light on relations between national image and state identity in a similar way. Through the constructivist lens, as a reflection of state identity, the national image is not a pre-given entity waiting to be discovered but mutual understandings and identification between states that is gradually constructed and developed through their interactions (Meng, 2020). Four main characteristics of the national image can be observed through constructivism. Firstly, the national image is not an inherent or pre-existing entity but socially constructed through the process of interaction between one state (subject) and another (object) in the international system. Secondly, the national image is intersubjective, involving the state's self-perceptions and those of others resulting from their shared ideas and understanding. To put it simply, the national image is built by both the self and others. Thirdly, the national image is collective because it represents the overall perception and evaluation of a state by the majority of people rather than one individual. Fourthly, the national image is changeable; it can be built and modified. However, it remains relatively stable because of the fixed mindset and stereotyping based on interstate interaction. When mindsets and perceptions of the object toward the subject are already set, those images are unlikely to change significantly overnight. In summary, the process of constructing a national image starts with interstate interactions and communication. Through this process, they have shared ideas and understandings. Once a mutual understanding of the national identity and image has been reached, it is shaped and constructed by sharing ideas through interstate interaction. Negative interactions generate negative identification, leading to negative or misinterpreted images. Conversely, positive interactions encourage the sharing of ideas and knowledge, resulting in positive identification and images. Therefore, if a state seeks to improve its reputation abroad, it must start by changing its interaction with other countries to form new shared ideas and knowledge to create a positive image (Meng, 2020).

Moreover, the constructivists emphasize the relationship between agents and structure as a mutual constitution. While the structure shapes identity and interests of actors, the actors' action also influences the structure. As an ideational structure, the

global norms or the global trends constrain and constitute the state's identity, interests, and actions. The ideational structure will impact how the state thinks it should act, what the limitations are, and what strategies are available for it to achieve certain goals it desires. The state will follow the norm or trend related to its identity by considering whether such action is appropriate. On the other hand, the state can influence the structure through actions and practices because the structure would not exist if not for the practices of the actors (Flockhart, 2016).

In terms of the actors, constructivists believe that states are not unitary actors. They also accept the role of other actors, such as states' agencies and elite individuals. According to constructivism, the government, state officials, and elite individuals are the most significant actors. Their ideas and identities tend to shape and influence how the state performs in the international system. Consequently, it is very important to pay sufficient attention to what leaders and state officials think and believe. The interaction of state officials, elites, and the networks they operate within is highly important in creating and strengthening their shared ideas and beliefs, ultimately impacting the conduct of the state's foreign policy. Through the process of interaction and communication, the government, state officials, and elites are likely to generate shared understanding and collective world views that later shape how the state interests are defined and achieved, as well as how the state performs in the international system, including foreign policy formulation (Grieco et al., 2014).

For the theoretical framework, this research will focus on the role of global trend, significance of ideas, national image, as well as state identity and interests, and how these ideational factors influenced Thailand to conduct gastrodiploacy in its foreign policy. Derived from the constructivist perspectives, the research provides three main factors that may influence Thailand to pursue gastrodiploacy in its foreign policy: (1) the narratives of nation branding; (2) a negative image of sex tourism; and (3) economic policy, all of which will be explored respectively as follows.

Firstly, constructivists believe that the ideational structure such as the global trend can shape the state identity and its performances, including the conduct of foreign policy, while the state performances in the international arena may influence the ideational structure. This study then investigates the global trend before Thailand initiated gastrodiploacy in 2002. According to the findings, during the 1990s, the

narratives of nation branding as the ideational structure were considered popular and gained much attention among academics and practitioners. The trend of nation branding first appeared in the United Kingdom with a British campaign called “Cool Britannia,” a project aimed at repairing and rebranding the country’s image following the damage caused by the outbreak of Mad Cow disease and its backwardness by branding the nation with positive British features like arts and music. As a result, more British and international observers realized the significance of branding or marketing the nation. Since then, the trend of nation branding has been practiced and has become a routine policy for national governments in many countries worldwide (Viktorin et al., 2018). This global trend has influenced other countries, including Thailand, to have some collective ideas about self-perception and the others’ perceptions towards the country’s image and identity by looking at itself and how it is seen by the others, then rebranding the way it desires. This leads to the second factor, namely a negative image of sex tourism.

Secondly, constructivists believe that historical contexts and ideas play a significant role in the formation of state identity and national image, which in turn shape state actions, including the conduct of foreign policy. The study then explores the historical context and collective ideas existing before Thailand decided to initiate this policy in 2002. The findings reveal that since the settlement of US military bases in Thailand during the Vietnam War, the country’s image has been negatively associated with a sex tourism destination in the eyes of foreigners, creating a negative stereotype of the country. Thailand has been commonly perceived by foreigners as being notorious for sex tourism and prostitution for a long time. Consequently, the country has started to look at itself, the position it possesses, and how it is seen by others. The Thai government and other policymakers then shared their collective understanding of the issue, realizing that serious actions were required to correct this negative image by rebranding the country with positive features like Thai food to create positive image and new senses of identity as “the Kitchen of the World” and “a food leading export country” rather than a sex tourism destination. This leads to the third factor, namely an economic policy.

Thirdly, the constructivists believe that the state identity informs the state interests and, in turn, its actions. Since the new senses of identity that Thailand desires

to create and project are “the Kitchen of the World” and “a food leading export country,” the state interests are formed within this context. The state interests then shape the economic policy of the country to heavily promote Thai food exports. The economic policy then impacts the state behavior to initiate gastrodiploamacy as one of the methods to globally promote Thai food, raise the global demand for Thai food products, and expand the channel for Thai food exports so that Thailand will become “the Kitchen of the World” and “a leading food export country.” Gastrodiploamacy was launched to facilitate and promote Thailand’s economic policy and state interests. Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy not only helps to facilitate its economic policy but also promotes national interests, strengthens the new senses of state identities, and maintains the global trend of nation branding while creating a new global trend named gastrodiploamacy, subsequently inspiring other countries to follow the same path. Therefore, it could be observed that all these factors are mutually constructed and interrelated. They are not one-way communication channels but two-way since they are mutually constitutive and shape each other, which is the core idea of constructivism.

To answer the second question on how the policy has been implemented between the two periods, this study also uses the constructivism approach to explain the continuity of policy implementation between the two governments rather than the domestic politics approach. Even though Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha come from different political parties and regimes, they still decided to pursue and promote gastrodiploamacy. This means that the political regime may not be the main factor driving Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy, but the collective ideas shared among policymakers within government agencies. From the constructivist perspective, the collective ideas among policymakers matter significantly in conducting and continuing foreign policy. Regardless of a change in government, if the three factors behind Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy remain and key policymakers, such as Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, who served in both governments, still play a significant role, there will be a continuation of policy implementation. The ideas of policymakers have played an important role in driving and shaping Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy. To clarify, the Thai government is not the only actor in driving Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy. Other key policymakers in the government agency have also played a significant role in implementing the policy. It is not merely the personal

ideas of the Thai government that drive and keep this foreign policy going, but the collective ideas shared among key policymakers and the government within the network. Through the process of interaction and communication, they tend to generate the collective or shared understandings and beliefs, subsequently shaping how the state performs, including the conduct of its foreign policy.



CHAPTER 2

GASTRODIPLOMACY

This chapter will shed light on the concept of gastrodiploamacy by investigating definitions of the term and its functions provided by various scholars to gain a comprehensive understanding of what gastrodiploamacy is and how it differs from other types of diplomacy related to food. In this part, four main countries conducting gastrodiploamacy in their foreign policy are observed as case studies to demonstrate how this kind of public diplomacy has been implemented in practice.

2.1 The Concept of Gastrodiploamacy

Since this research aims to study Thailand's gastrodiploamacy, it is necessary to examine the concept so as to have a clear understanding of what gastrodiploamacy actually is and how it differs from the other kinds of diplomacy related to food. Before thoroughly investigating definitions of the term and its functions, it should be clarified that in order to minimize any confusion in the future, gastrodiploamacy is not the only form of diplomacy related to the use of food. There are many types of diplomacy relevant to food, namely culinary diplomacy, food diplomacy and gastrodiploamacy. Rockover (2012) believes that even though all of these types of diplomacy are related to the use of food as a diplomatic tool, they are different in terms of purposes and implementation. To illustrate, food diplomacy refers to using food aid at times of crisis or disaster to diminish global hunger rather than aiming at communicating and promoting the culinary culture of a country. In contrast, culinary diplomacy refers to how a state uses its national cuisine and dining experiences as a diplomatic instrument to strengthen bilateral ties and formal diplomacy at the government-to-government level, such as visits among heads of state and ambassadors for diplomatic achievements. For example, French President Jacques Chirac strengthened France's bilateral relationship with Japan by serving his own country's national cuisine, leading to a common understanding of shared tastes and values (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). In contrast, gastrodiploamacy is a form of public diplomacy

employed by a state, in collaboration with non-state actors such as private companies, to communicate and project its own culinary culture to the wider foreign public, including individuals or at people-to-people level rather than high-level elites with the aim of enhancing its nation branding and raising global awareness of its culture through the promotion of culinary heritage (Rockower, 2012). For Rockower, a well-known scholar in the field of public diplomacy and founder of gastrodiploamacy, these types of diplomacy are different in terms of target, purpose, and function, while some scholars, like Chapple-Sokol from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, believe that the terms gastrodiploamacy and culinary diplomacy are similar and can be used interchangeably.

The term “gastrodiploamacy” is quite new in the field of diplomacy and international relations. It first emerged as a term in “The Economist,” an international weekly newspaper publishing various articles digitally, which reported on Thailand introducing Thai cuisine to the world as a strategy for promoting tourism and deepening international relations with other countries (“Thailand’s Gastro-Diploamacy,” 2002). However, the term was first coined and conceptualized academically by Rockower. According to Rockower (2012), gastrodiploamacy is defined as a form of public diplomacy used by the state to win the hearts and minds of the foreign public through the promotion of its national cuisine. The culinary delights of a country can be used as a powerful instrument to conduct public diplomacy to achieve the goals it pursues. By introducing and promoting its national cuisine to the world, the country can raise global awareness of its own distinctive culture, enhance nation branding, and expand its cultural influence abroad, thereby amplifying its soft power. Solleh (2015) adds that in addition to enhancing nation branding and extending soft power, gastrodiploamacy can also generate the potential economic and political gains such as trade growth and economic contributions. Nirwandy and Awang (2014), in their article entitled *“Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy Social Convention Culinary: Engaging Gastro Diplomacy Warfare for Economic Branding,”* similarly define gastrodiploamacy as a subfield of public diplomacy where soft power becomes a powerful tool in diplomacy. Food in this context then seems like the gravy for diplomacy’s rice. It provides a platform for the state to engage more with the foreign public and enjoy the international reputation of its own culinary culture while constructing a desirable image and

increasing brand recognition at the global level, thereby enhancing its nation branding (Nirwandy & Awang, 2014). Ruddy (2014) also provides a definition for gastrodiploamacy as a branch of public cultural diplomacy in which the state uses its unique cuisines to change public perception to improve the national image and promote itself on the world stage. The term gastrodiploamacy came into existence in 2002 and has been popularly used as a soft power tool by many countries for increasing international recognition and improving their image.

Like the successful use of other cultural assets such as arts and music, food or cuisine has the capability to generate emotional and cultural engagement through gastrodiploamacy, which can be felt across language barriers as a non-verbal form of communication. In this context, food is transformed into a medium for the state to project its culinary culture and create cultural engagement with foreign audiences, which in turn can positively change public perception toward that country and its image at the international level. Unlike traditional public diplomacy that seeks to influence foreign opinion directly, gastrodiploamacy is a modern form of public diplomacy that uses national cuisine to create emotional engagement across language barriers and increase the international appeal of its own culture indirectly (Rockower, 2012). As mentioned by Rockower (2014) in his article entitled "*The State of Gastrodiploamacy*," "it is the way to win hearts and minds of the foreign public through indirect emotional connect, rather than rational information." Wilson (2011) also mentions this emotional connection, stating that when people experience or consume a national food of one country through their senses like smell and taste, they attach some emotion to the food they eat, the sense they feel, and also the perception toward that country's image. When people eat food, it is not just about eating but also about experiencing the newfound culture embedded in the food of one's country. Food reflects both the history and way of life of one's country per se.

According to Mennell (1995) and Zhang (2015), everything on the table can give a deep insight into one's country. The national cuisine of one's country can provide a clearer picture of that country and its culture. The culture of one's country can be implied through unique cooking styles, serving, table-setting, dining etiquette, and the ingredients. When foreigners consume the national cuisine of a country, they inevitably and indirectly learn about its way of life, which they may never have

experienced before, thereby serving as cross-cultural and emotional engagement. By experiencing a sense of foreignness, the process of familiarization begins, leading to a greater understanding of shared tastes and values. This process then gives foreign audiences a newfound respect for the cuisine, culture, and, finally, the country itself (Chapple-Sokol, 2013; Alhinnawi, 2011). When foreigners experience a country's culture, they are likely to have bias, a positive perception, and a sense of familiarity toward that country. They tend to buy goods from that country rather than one with which they are less familiar. Thus, gastrodiploamacy is a diplomatic instrument of a country to win the hearts and minds of the foreign public through emotional and cultural engagement rather than being influenced by logic or reasoning. Rockower (2014) states in his article, "To taste us is to love us." The more people taste the cuisine of a country, the more the country's culinary culture will become known and desired. Thus, it can be seen that food no longer merely functions to serve the empty stomach but can be utilized by the state as a non-threatening method to make a connection with the wider foreign public so as to gain international favor and raise the desirability of its own culture among foreign audiences.

Within this context, food is seen as a kind of soft power resource to create better brand recognition for a nation and extend its soft power abroad. Therefore, the issue of soft power should also be noted to gain a better understanding and a clearer picture of how food can be utilized as a kind of soft power through gastrodiploamacy. According to Nye (2012), the term "soft power" is defined as the ability of a state to attract and influence foreign actors through its attractive values, ideologies, and cultures. In other words, soft power can be called "the power of attraction" because it influences people without using carrots and sticks. The way it attracts foreign actors allows the state to gain international acceptance or recognition at the international level. The assets that generate soft power are called "soft power resources," and these mostly come from the country's culture. Since food is a foundational component of culture, it is then considered a soft power resource. Rockower (2012) also mentions that this soft power can have impacts on such goals the state pursues, such as gaining international recognition and creating a better image of the country. Wilson (2011) notes that, unlike hard power, food functions as a soft, non-threatening way of gaining international favor among foreign audiences. The more attractive the country's culture in the eyes of

foreigners, the more it can amplify its soft power abroad. Chapple-Sokol (2013) agrees that instead of using news headlines to promote military exercises, recognizable topics like arts and music can give the country a positive image and greater popularity among foreign audiences.

Nowadays, gastrodiploamacy is an increasingly famous strategy employed by many countries around the world, especially the middle powers attempting to create better brand recognition and exercise greater influence in the international arena (Rockower, 2012). To clarify, the middle powers are not great powers and small states but are positioned in the middle with less military, political, and economic strength while still having a presence and influence on the world stage. Therefore, they face several challenges in terms of their visibility in the international arena. The foreign public may either be unaware of them or have a negative perception of them. Middle powers are therefore required to make a serious effort to grasp international attention and make other countries recognize them in a positive way. Since the middle powers have limited resources, they must distinguish themselves from others by utilizing their attractive features like national cuisine. They use the distinctive flavors of national cuisine to distinguish themselves from the crowd, create their own nation brand, and improve the public perceptions of the country's image (Rockower, 2014). Hence, the strategy of gastrodiploamacy allows them to increase their international visibility and expand their influence abroad by using the unique and attractive flavor of national cuisine (Lipscomb, 2019). In other words, gastrodiploamacy not only provides the middle powers with the ability to highlight their uniqueness and raise global awareness of their culture but also increases national brand recognition. Ruddy (2014) notes that middle powers, without a recognizable image, tend to gain the most from this kind of diplomacy. The unique flavors of their cuisine would allow such states to create their uniqueness, promote themselves on the world stage, and increase their visibility in the international arena (Rockower, 2012).

National cuisine reflects and highlights the unique identity and culture of a particular country. According to a famous quote mentioned by Brillat-Savarin (2011), "tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are." The national cuisine can reflect the identity of a country; for example, Tom Yam is Thai, and Thai is Tom Yam (Solleh, 2015). Gastrodiploamacy allows a state to use its distinctive features to stand out from

the crowd and not be overshadowed by neighboring countries. For instance, South Korea would not be confused with Japan. Thailand would not be conflated with Vietnam. Therefore, the use of culinary culture through gastrodiploacy provides a huge potential for states, especially the middle powers, to strengthen their nation brand, increase global awareness of their culture, enhance soft power, and even gain the possible economic or political goals they desire (Rockower, 2012). According to the findings from the work of Ruddy (2014), food can powerfully change public perception toward a country and its national image. More than half of the respondents agreed that their perception and attitude toward a country's image has changed based on the national cuisine and decided to visit a country based on its food. As a result, food acts as a gateway to convincing the foreign public to experience other positive features of a country, such as tourist attractions (Ruddy, 2014). Currently, several middle powers like South Korea and Malaysia are pursuing gastrodiploacy in their foreign policy to increase global awareness of their culture, further the nation brand status and expand their soft power overseas. The national governments of many countries have conducted and implemented gastrodiploacy projects in collaboration with non-state actors in various ways. For example, the government may provide financial support to stimulate people to open overseas restaurants. A government may assign its overseas embassy to hold food exhibitions to promote its national cuisine to make it known and desired globally. However, gastrodiploacy is not only limited to the sphere of state-to-public relations but also expands to people-to-people engagement or citizen diplomacy in the age of globalization, where people can go anywhere easily, and everything can freely spread to the rest of the world. Whenever cuisine becomes a medium for emotional connection and cultural engagement at the people-to-people level, it can also be included as a part of gastrodiploacy (Rockower, 2012). Hence, the power of food and cuisine goes beyond being seen as an essential component for survival and satisfaction but can be used as a diplomatic means by the state to pursue its goals through the lens of international relations, culture, and national identity. To reiterate the quote given to The New York Times by Hillary Clinton when she was the First Lady of the United States *"Showcasing favorite cuisines, ceremonies, and values is an often overlooked and powerful tool of diplomacy."* To reiterate the quote given to The New York Times by Hillary Clinton when she was the First Lady of the United States *"Showcasing*

favorite cuisines, ceremonies, and values is an often overlooked and powerful tool of diplomacy”(Burros, 2012):

2.2 Case Studies on the Implementation of Gastrodiplomacy

Since the concept of gastrodiplomacy has been thoroughly examined previously in this paper, this section is dedicated to the case studies to observe how gastrodiplomacy has been implemented in practice. To clarify, four main countries are exemplified here as case studies: Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan. These four countries are selected as case studies due to their geographical location and middle power status. Firstly, they are all in Asia. As mentioned earlier, Thailand is recognized as being the first country to formally pursue gastrodiplomacy in its foreign policy. Due to Thailand's success in this field, its neighbors and other countries in the same region, such as Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan, have rapidly followed the same path by applying similar projects. Since all are located in Asia, where gastrodiplomacy first emerged, these four countries are selected as the case studies to clearly demonstrate how gastrodiplomacy has been initially carried out in practice. Secondly, they are all considered to be middle power¹. As mentioned in the previous section, gastrodiplomacy is a famous diplomatic tool mostly employed by middle powers which have limited resources and face several challenges in terms of international visibility and recognition on the world stage. These four countries demonstrate how middle powers have attempted to create better brand recognition and move past their status to become more politically and economically powerful on the global stage through gastrodiplomacy. To clarify, each case study starts with an explanation of the background of the country and the potential factors influencing the introduction of gastrodiplomacy in their foreign policy. The study then demonstrates how the government of each country has pursued and implemented gastrodiplomacy in practice. However, the key factors influencing Thailand to initiate gastrodiplomacy will be abandoned in this section since the following chapter, showing the key findings of the research, will be in charge of this puzzle.

¹ In this paper, Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan are considered to be middle powers.

2.2.1 Thailand

With its long history of unique flavors, Thai cuisine has the potential to be utilized as a soft power tool to enhance nation branding and achieve other goals. Thailand is recognized as the first successful country to formally pursue gastrodiploamacy in 2002 (Bestor, 2014). As an emerging middle power, the country has attempted to gain higher international recognition and increase its presence on the world stage by promoting the unique flavors of Thai cuisine to the world. In 2002, under former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Thailand launched two gastrodiploamacy projects: “Global Thai” and “Thailand: Kitchen of the World.” For the first project, the “Global Thai” program was established with the aim of increasing the number of overseas Thai restaurants to increase the global demand for Thai food products and brand the country with Thai cuisine (Ichijo & Ranta, 2018). This campaign provided an opportunity for Thailand to internationally promote Thai food and the country itself, as well as export more Thai food products due to higher global demand (Rockower, 2012). The government then launched the second project: “Thailand: Kitchen of the World,” with the aim of educating or informing both domestic and foreign audiences about Thai cuisine and its history as a means of raising global awareness of its culinary culture. Under these gastrodiploamacy projects, the Thai government encouraged Thai investors to participate in overseas Thai restaurants by establishing a seminar and providing a significant budget for the projects. Moreover, it provided financial loans to overseas Thai restaurants, created a business link between them and the domestic food industry, and built Thai cooking schools to train Thai chefs to work abroad (Sunanta, 2005). Since the establishment of these gastrodiploamacy campaigns, the number of overseas Thai restaurants has increased from 5,500 in 2001 to 13,000 in 2008 (Park et al., 2019). Nowadays, Thailand is seen as a successful and well-known country in the field of gastrodiploamacy. Thai food has gained popularity among the foreign public, subsequently inspiring other countries to jump on this bandwagon.

2.2.2 South Korea

South Korea is one of the prominent countries in Asia implementing gastrodiploamacy. As a middle power in the region, South Korea has attempted to increase its international visibility on the world stage and create better brand

recognition by using its soft power. Thanks to Thailand's success in implementing gastrodiploamacy, South Korea has taken the opportunity to adopt diplomacy and jump on the same bandwagon by looking at Thailand as the desired model. Despite South Korea being considered the middle power, its image and reputation were previously mismatched with its status. The country's image was outdated, underestimated, and negatively associated with North Korea and the Korean War in the eyes of foreigners (Pham, 2013). Therefore, since 2009 the government has been implementing gastrodiploamacy in the hope of creating a positive image, improving the country's reputation, and strengthening its role as a middle power.

In the case of South Korea, a key factor influencing the country to pursue gastrodiploamacy was its weak competitive identity compared to the neighboring countries. In spite of rapid economic growth and technological advancement, the South Korean government did not invest in improving the country's image and its brand during the past years. Due to the strong identity of regional powers like China and Japan, South Korea's identity was overshadowed by those countries. For instance, South Korean brands like Samsung are often misunderstood as being Japanese by foreigners. According to research conducted by the Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency in 2009, Western people were unaware of Korean companies, with only 36% of Americans and 54% of Europeans recognizing Samsung as a Korean brand (Ongkowidjojo & Hikam, 2015). The government then realized it needed to create a stronger competitive identity by distinguishing itself from neighboring countries while protecting its image and reputation as a middle power. To achieve this goal, gastrodiploamacy was adopted into the country's foreign policy so as to strengthen its competitive identity and create a recognizable image. The government decided to name its gastrodiploamacy policy the "Hansik campaign," using its unique culinary heritage to promote a stronger identity. To illustrate, "Hansik" is not only a traditional Korean food but also the root of the country's philosophy, traditional culture, and Korean history. Under the campaign, the government selected the Royal Court Cuisine from the Joseon Dynasty as being representative of Korean food to be promoted abroad thanks to its historical importance in bypassing the dark period in its history and promoting a positive image of the country (Ongkowidjojo & Hikam, 2015). By promoting recognizable Korean food, the Hansik campaign has enabled South Korea

to boost its international profile and increase its soft power abroad (Ongkowidjojo & Hikam, 2015).

In 2009, “Korean Cuisine to the World,” also known as the “Hansik campaign” or the so-called “Kimchi Diplomacy,” was introduced with the aim of increasing the number of overseas Korean restaurants worldwide, making Korean food one of the top five ranking internationally favorite cuisines by 2017, enlarging the Korean food industry as well as significantly improving the status Korean culinary schools worldwide (Zhang, 2015). It was the first attempt by the South Korean government to formally introduce and internationally promote its culinary culture to foreign audiences. Under this campaign, the South Korean government established the Korean Food Foundation (KFF) to supervise the campaign and support the overseas Korean restaurants participating in the project. The government also created the Hansik Development Globalization Agency and provided a budget for the campaign of approximately \$77 million. A food company in the CJ Group, one of South Korea’s chaebols, like Bibigo, also received financial support from the government to participate in the campaign. The CJ Group used bibimbap, a unique Korean food where people normally need to mix the ingredients on a plate before eating, to create its slogan “Bibigo” with the caption “Taste of Korea.” This is because bibimbap can reflect the Korean identity of a collective lifestyle in terms of intermingling and bonding, hence promoting the Korean identity and values to the world through traditional Korean cuisine (Zhang, 2015).

Moreover, the government hosted numerous exhibitions and events abroad to promote Korean cuisine globally. For example, there were booths at the Korea Brand and Entertainment Expo in London and the Bibigo food truck supported by the KFF in Los Angeles to serve traditional Korean food. Also, the government catered traditional Korean food at the M.net Asian Music Awards event in Singapore and Hong Kong (Zhang, 2015). Under this gastrodiploamacy campaign, overseas Korean restaurants have become informal cultural ambassadors by promoting the culinary culture of Korea abroad. Before the establishment of gastrodiploamacy, Korean restaurants abroad were exclusive and only targeted Korean people living overseas by serving purely traditional food that may not suit the tastes of non-Koreans. After the government established the Hansik campaign, overseas Korean restaurants adjusted to

cater to foreign tastes. The names of some Korean food were changed to sound more familiar and acceptable to foreigners. For example, the name “soondae” or blood sausage, was changed to “Korean black pudding” in the United Kingdom (Zhang, 2015). Hence, this demonstrates the country’s attempts to adjust its traditional food to meet foreign tastes, promote its recognizable image, and create a better reputation. Nowadays, Korean food has become increasingly popular around the world (Ongkowidjojo & Hikam, 2015).

2.2.3 Malaysia

In similarity to South Korea, Malaysia has faced several challenges as an emerging middle power in terms of its visibility in the international arena. The international community did not pay it much attention. Some people might not even be aware of the country. At the time, Thailand was fairly successful in promoting itself through gastrodiploacy, helping the country and its cuisine to become recognized globally. By following the same path as Thailand, Malaysia would have a huge opportunity to brand and internationally promote itself in a positive way, gain greater international recognition, and reinforce its presence on the world stage through the promotion of national cuisine. In the case of Malaysia, two significant factors may have influenced the country to pursue gastrodiploacy: its weak competitive identity and its ambition to be positioned as the halal hub of the Muslim world.

Firstly, Malaysia had a weak competitive identity. Despite growing economically since gaining independence, its neighboring countries like Thailand were also growing rapidly and employing culinary diplomacy to extend their soft power abroad. Malaysia has a tendency to be overshadowed by its neighbors, which have stronger competitive identities and better brand recognition (Ongkowidjojo & Hikam, 2015). The government then realized it needed to create a stronger competitive identity and recognizable image by using positive features like Malaysian cuisine to gain more international recognition and strengthen its international visibility. With a unique combination of cultural diversity and the mixed flavors of Malay, Chinese, and Indian food, Malaysia realized the significance of using its unique traditional cuisine as a soft power tool to create a stronger competitive identity. Therefore, the country came up with a project under the slogan “Malaysia Truly Asia,” which reflects its significance

in the whole continent of Asia through a multicultural combination, helping it to stand out from the crowd with a distinctive identity (Nirwandy & Awang, 2014).

Secondly, another factor influencing Malaysia to adopt gastrodiplomacy is its ambition to position itself as the halal hub of the Muslim world. Since Malaysia is a Muslim country under the religion of Islam, it has attempted to promote halal food. By adhering to the concept of halalness under the gastrodiplomacy project, Malaysia is allowed to win the hearts and minds of Muslim consumers worldwide, making the country a travel destination for Muslims, thus enabling it to become the halal hub of the Muslim world. The adoption of gastrodiplomacy linked with the concept of halal food provides Malaysia with the opportunity to increase its international presence, particularly in Muslim countries, by constructing its image as a Muslim-friendly country in a non-Muslim world with a recognizable image (Rockower, 2011).

In 2006, the Malaysian government decided to launch the gastrodiplomacy project entitled “Malaysia Kitchen Program” (MKP) in an effort to brand Malaysia as the central hub of halal food in the Muslim world. It then introduced a second project called “Malaysian Kitchen for the World” in 2010 to increase global awareness of Malaysia and its culinary culture (Rockower, 2012). Under this gastrodiplomacy campaign, the government has promoted the national cuisine worldwide, specifically targeting five countries: the UK, the US, Australia, China, and New Zealand due to their huge populations and significant market opportunities. Under the project, overseas Malaysian restaurateurs received financial support from the government to open and improve their restaurants abroad. Nevertheless, they must meet the requirements set by the government and serve traditional Malaysian food, as in the case of Thailand. The government also brought professional Malaysian chefs and key influencers to both domestic and international food festivals held by government agencies to promote its national cuisine to the world. Moreover, the Malaysian government has established “Malaysian Night Markets,” a popular Malaysian culture, in major cities like London and New York. These night markets allow Malaysian restaurants to sell their food and promote Malaysian culinary heritage to foreign audiences. It also held “Taste of Malaysia” and “Christmas Ala Malaysia” events in Australia to promote Malaysian food and create higher demand for Malaysian food

products. In addition, the country participated in “Fine Food Australia,” an event that brings leading producers and suppliers globally every year by spearheading Malaysian exhibitors to the event, making Malaysia the fourth largest exporter of processed food in Australia (Nahar et al., 2018). As a result, these gastrodiploamacy actions have helped Malaysian cuisine to be recognized globally, marking the country as a prominent gastrodiploamacy practitioner (Solleh, 2015). Nowadays, Malaysian restaurants can be found in many countries around the world, such as Canada, Germany, China, and the Philippines. Moreover, the government has also promoted its national cuisine through the MKP website, which provides Malaysian food recipes and a list of its restaurants abroad to capture the attention of many American, British, and Chinese foodies. The government also initiated the “Go ASEAN” channel on TV, promoting ASEAN countries as food paradises and travel destinations for foreigners while also broadcasting information on halal food through various projects. It also uses famous food writers and bloggers to promote Malaysian cuisine recipes and reviews (Nahar et al., 2018).

2.2.4 Taiwan

As in the previous cases, Taiwan or the Republic of China (ROC) is also considered an emerging middle power in Asia (Swielande et al., 2018). As such, Taiwan has attempted to gain more recognition from the international community and increase its presence on the global stage. Rather than employing hard power, it pays significant attention to soft power, using its culinary culture as a means of achieving the desired goals. The adoption of gastrodiploamacy, following the case of Thailand, allows Taiwan to increase its cultural influence abroad to create a positive image and reputation for the island as well as strengthen its visibility in the international arena. The key factor influencing Taiwan to pursue gastrodiploamacy relates to its historical conflict with the People’s Republic of China, leaving Taiwan with a lack of formal diplomatic relations and recognition from the international community. With the lack of access to the means of conventional relations, Taiwan has adopted non-traditional approaches such as the use of Taiwanese cuisine through gastrodiploamacy. Taiwan relies heavily on this type of diplomacy to bypass its diplomatic isolation and increase its cultural influence overseas. Gastrodiploamacy allows Taiwan to distinguish itself from Mainland China to ensure the world understands the difference between Taiwan

and China by informing foreign audiences about the unique Taiwanese culinary culture, thereby increasing its name recognition on the world stage (Rockower, 2014).

In 2010, Taiwan started its gastrodiploamacy program with the aim of promoting Taiwanese cuisine to the world under the campaign “All in Good Taste: Savor the Flavors of Taiwan” or the so-called “Dim Sum Diplomacy” (Booth, 2010). This campaign has been promoted and implemented as a top priority by the Taiwanese government. According to The ASEAN Post, the government has spent a significant US\$34.2 million on promoting Taiwanese food internationally under the program (Thomas, 2019). As part of the campaign, the government has hosted and arranged many international events and festivals, enabling Taiwanese chefs to demonstrate their skills to the foreign public. It has also sent chefs to compete in international culinary competitions as a channel for introducing and promoting Taiwanese cuisine to the world (Solleh, 2015). The government has also provided training courses for Taiwanese chefs and sponsored them to work in overseas Taiwanese restaurants. To promote the globalization of Taiwanese cuisine, the government has incentivized Taiwanese restaurant owners to open restaurants overseas and convince shopping centers or food department stores in major cities of other countries to stock Taiwanese food brands. The government also has a plan to create a translation system for the Taiwanese menu and dishes to make them accessible to foreigners. For example, it launched a multi-language website to promote its national cuisine internationally (Rockower, 2012).

Furthermore, the government has created a Taiwanese food foundation responsible for the promotion of Taiwanese cuisine. As a culinary think tank, the foundation helps and supports overseas Taiwanese restaurant owners and coffee shops. One of the Taiwanese brands promoted under gastrodiploamacy is the coffee store 85 °C, which is dubbed “the Starbucks of Asia” (Rockower, 2012). In the coffee shop, the iced sea salt latte, a Taiwanese taste drink, is promoted to raise global awareness of Taiwanese culinary culture among foreigners. The coffee chain has spread to many parts of the world, such as Southeast Asia, California, and Australia. Another Taiwanese drink advocated under gastrodiploamacy is pearl milk tea or the so-called “bubble tea.” This menu has been introduced around the world and reached considerable popularity among foreigners in Thailand. Apart from Asia and Australia, the menu is also available in Europe and the Middle East. When people consume the

drink, they remember the menu and the feeling it gives them. This positively influences foreigners' impressions of Taiwan and its cuisine, thereby raising global awareness of Taiwanese culture and its visibility in the international arena. In addition, the government sent a popular Taiwanese chef who won the 2011 Taipei International Beef Noodle, one of the menu items actively promoted by the island, to give a cooking demonstration in San Francisco, California (Rockower, 2012). To increase its recognition and globalize Taiwanese cuisine, the government created the hashtag #timefortaiwan, providing prizes for anyone taking a photo of Taiwanese food or drink and posting it on Instagram with the hashtag. As a result, global awareness of Taiwanese culture and the tourism sector on the island has grown considerably (Lipscomb, 2019).

Table 2.1

A Comparison of Gastrodiplomacy in Four Countries: Campaign Slogans and Logos

Country	Slogan	Logo
Thailand	“Thailand: Kitchen of The World”	 The logo for Thailand's campaign features a colorful bowl of fruit at the top, with the text "Thailand KITCHEN OF THE WORLD" below it.
South Korea	“Bibigo: Hot stone”; “Taste of Korea”	 The logo for Bibigo features the brand name "bibigo" in a stylized green font, with "HOT STONE" written in smaller letters below it.
Malaysia	“Malaysian Kitchen for the World”	 The logo for Malaysia's campaign includes a stylized flame icon and the text "MALAYSIA KITCHEN for the World" in a mix of red and blue fonts.
Taiwan	“All in Good Taste: Savor the Flavours of Taiwan”; “Food culture in Taiwan”	 The logo for Taiwan's campaign features the Chinese characters "食在臺灣" (Food Culture in Taiwan) in a large, bold font, with the English text "Food Culture in TAIWAN" and "美食文化網" (Food Culture Network) integrated into the design.

CHAPTER 3

THE KEY FACTORS BEHIND THAILAND'S GASTRODIPLOMACY

As mentioned in the first chapter, the aim of this research is to answer two research questions: “What factors influenced Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy?” and “How has the policy been implemented under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha?”. The first question is answered in this chapter by investigating the key factors influencing Thailand to engage in gastrodiploamacy in the first place. The chapter is divided into three subsections. Since Thailand began its gastrodiploamacy campaign in 2002, this study first focuses on the global trend before then and the influence it may have had on the country’s decision to pursue this kind of diplomacy. The narratives of nation branding occurred during the 1990s are examined. Second, the research will investigate the relationship between the country’s negative image as a sex tourism destination and its decision to initiate gastrodiploamacy. Third, Thailand’s economic policy in the late 1990s is explored to ascertain how it may have influenced the Thai government to launch gastrodiploamacy projects. All these factors are analyzed in detail as follows.

3.1 The Narratives of Nation Branding

Since the ideational structure can influence the state identity and its performances in the international arena, including the conduct of foreign policy, the global trend that happened before Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy should be taken into account. During the late 1990s, there was an increasing level of interest in the narratives of nation branding among academics, especially in the field of marketing and communication, and practitioners such as policymakers. The concept of “nation branding” has grown in popularity, with a significant increase in publications, studies, and consultancy projects. For example, Simon Anholt, who coined the term “nation branding,” has published widely on the topic and advised other countries around the world, especially those facing economic downturns, on how to professionally develop

their respective nation brands and strengthen their competitiveness in the international arena (Viktorin et al., 2018). Like commercial brands, a nation's image can be rebuilt, manipulated, and communicated by using marketing techniques and brand management. Nation branding has become a strategy a country can adopt to manage the image and reputation it projects to the world (Fan, 2006). As a relatively new area of interest, the study of nation branding can be traced to four different sources: place or destination branding, country of origin, public diplomacy, and national identity. While studies on the country of origin and place branding emphasize the promotion of specific economic interests like investment and exports, nation branding concerns a country's image at the international level in terms of political, economic, and cultural dimensions (Fan, 2006).

Since 2000, many institutions have started to dedicate themselves to promoting nation branding and publications on the subject. There has been a flood of academic research projects on the concept of nation branding. For example, several European and US think tanks and academic institutes, like the German research center "nation branding" at the Hochschule RheinMain in Wiesbaden, have published many studies and conducted consultation projects (Viktorin et al., 2018). However, there is a lack of progress in developing the concept of nation branding to move the subject forward. As an emerging new area of interest in the academic field, the concept of nation branding is in its infancy. In theory and practice, the term has not yet been conceptualized into a consensus among scholars. To some scholars, it is just another term for the country of origin or place branding (Kotler & Gertner, 2002), while others refer to it as a national brand strategy for determining the country's competitive strategic vision and ensuring that vision is promoted and strengthened by communication between the country and foreign audiences (Anholt, 1998). There is no single definition of the term "nation branding." To illustrate, the term "nation branding" was first coined in 1996 by Simon Anholt, a British policy advisor (Viktorin et al., 2018). Anholt (2007) defined the term "nation branding" as a strategic and policy-making approach that allows the state to build on its strengths to achieve a better reputation and positive image. Subsequently, he rebranded the concept as "competitive identity," describing it as a new model for enhancing national competitiveness by applying brand management and public diplomacy. Gudjonsson (2005), an Icelandic

brand practitioner, similarly defined the term as a branding tool for the state to positively change the attitudes, behaviors, identity, or image of a nation, with the national government considered as the initiator of the process. Fan (2006) defined the term as a process for building, manipulating, and monitoring a nation's image to improve its international reputation among foreign audiences by applying branding and marketing communications. To put it simply, Fan (2006) concluded that the way for a state to gain a better reputation is to communicate how good they are to the foreign audiences; this process is called "nation branding." Therefore, nation branding is concerned with image promotion. However, some scholars, such as Rendon (2003) and Szondi (2007), believe that the main aim of nation branding is to promote both the economic and political interests of a state at home and abroad. Aronczyk (2008) adds that nation branding not only allows states to manage and control the image they project to the world but also attracts trade, investment, and tourism. Dinnie (2008) also points out that the branding process requires long-term ambitions over several years to obtain the required results. Moreover, the notion of nation branding remains ambiguous; there are still unsettled debates on the existence of nation branding among scholars. Some scholars like Fan (2006) argue that a nation already has a brand image with or without nation branding techniques, either weak or strong, whereas others believe states need to be branded (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Anholt, 2007). These are some examples of the narratives of nation branding provided by scholars in the academic field. It could be said that the concept has not yet reached a consensus, and several scholars have attempted to provide a definition and conceptualize the term. The narratives of nation branding have grasped not only the attention of academics but also practitioners like policymakers and national governments.

In the age of globalization, where a country's image can easily be built, reversed, monitored, and projected through mass media and communication, many national governments in both developed and developing countries have started to pay attention to the significance of nation branding. The trend of nation branding was first practiced in the United Kingdom with the British campaign called "Cool Britannia" during the late 1980s and 1990s (Viktorin et al., 2018). In the 1990s, the Labour Party, under Tony Blair, sought to win back the trust of British voters following the long premiership of Conservative Party politicians Margaret Thatcher and John Major.

Contrasting with the previous leftwing or rightwing patterns, Tony Blair introduced a new orientation as part of his rebranding campaign. At that time, the party was named New Labour which represented New Britain. Professional designers developed communication strategies and created a logo to promote the campaign and rebrand the party. The incorporation of marketing and public relations played a significant role in regaining the confidence of British voters toward the Labour Party. In 1997, the British electorate voted Tony Blair in as prime minister. The Labour Party continued to promote its rebranding campaign. During that period, the UK's image abroad was unfavorable, having been damaged by the outbreak of mad cow disease and the backwardness of the country, with British products being seen as low-tech and low quality. The majority of British people no longer had pride in their nation. To eliminate this negative reputation and repair the country's image, Tony Blair extended the rebranding campaign originally established for the Labour Party to include the United Kingdom. The British government gave marketing experts and policymakers the task of rebranding the country's image, aiming at both domestic and foreign audiences. As a result, the branding campaign "Cool Britannia" was launched to improve the country's image and reputation by internationally promoting Britain's positive features, especially in the world of arts, media, and music, such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, famous British rock brands (Viktorin et al., 2018). In this process, British brand consultants and policymakers were the main advocates of nation branding, paving the way for other countries to follow the same path. The British public and international observers and policymakers started paying attention to nation branding. Since then, the trend of nation branding has become a routine policy for governments in many countries around the world, such as France, the United States, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Poland (Ham, 2001). Like companies, nations build their brands through marketing techniques to promote the country on the world stage and manage its international reputation. Many states, especially those associated with negative images, have become increasingly interested in practicing nation branding as a means of improving their image and enhancing their soft power abroad. Several governments have invested a huge amount of their budget into branding agencies in the hope that the investment will bring about appreciable benefits. For instance, they have started to hire public relations companies for consulting, developing, and launching branding projects aimed at

attracting foreign investment as well as improving the country's image and overall geopolitical influence (Nirwandy & Awang, 2014).

The trend of nation branding is seen as an unavoidable phenomenon for any country in the globalization era to stand out from the crowd and promote themselves in the way they desire. Globalization has put pressure on states to develop, manage and distinguish their nation brands. Like companies, assertive branding is very important for states to distinguish themselves and stand out from the crowd since they tend to have similar products (Dinnie, 2008). Most states realize they have similar features like territory, educated people, and infrastructure. Therefore, nation branding is essential to help them stand out from the crowd (Ham, 2001). As stated by Anholt, in the world of competing identities, it would be a mistake for a country not to jump on this bandwagon (Viktorin et al., 2018). Thailand is one of the countries influenced by the narratives of nation branding. The trend of nation branding has influenced countries to have some collective ideas about self-perception and others' perceptions by looking at themselves, who they are, what position they possess, and how they are seen by others, and then rebranding themselves the way they desire. Derived from constructivism, the shared ideas and beliefs of governments and state officials are significant to the direction and conduct of foreign policy (Grieco et al., 2014). Influenced by the narratives of nation branding and the successful case of the UK, the Thai government and policymakers shared collective ideas and understanding about branding a nation as a means of improving the country's image and creating better brand recognition. Somkid Jatusripitak, an economic tsar of the Thai government and a key policymaker in Thai foreign policy, also wrote a book entitled *"The Marketing of Nations"* in 1997, which elaborated on his ideas on using marketing techniques to brand a nation. Hence, this could demonstrate that the direction of Thai foreign policy had already been influenced by the idea of nation branding, with marketing techniques used to brand the nation. Thailand decided to jump on this bandwagon in the early 2000s. In 2001, a branding project was launched by the Thai government in collaboration with two business schools, namely the Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration at Chulalongkorn University and the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. The project aimed to evaluate Thailand's brand equity based on consumers' perceptions of the country and discover both the strengths and weaknesses of the nation

to have a better understanding of Thailand's brand positioning (Nuttavuthisit, 2007). In this case, Thai cuisine was found to be one of the most important strengths of the country. With the unique flavors of Thai food, the Thai government launched gastrodiploamacy in 2002 under the slogan "Thailand: Kitchen of the World" by combining the Thai identity embedded in national cuisine during the process, thereby distinguishing its nation brand and helping it to stand out from the crowd. Since Thai cuisine represents and reflects Thai identity, gastrodiploamacy allows Thailand to project its unique culture and identity to the foreign public and distinguish its nation brand to avoid being overshadowed by other countries. By pursuing gastrodiploamacy, the country has positively changed the public perception of the country and its image through the promotion of national cuisine. When foreigners experience Thai food, they should have a newfound respect for Thai cuisine, culture, and, hopefully, the country, resulting in better brand recognition. Nowadays, many countries worldwide, including Thailand, use marketing techniques and brand management to improve their international reputations and create a recognizable image or "nation brand" through the promotion of national cuisine.

3.2 A Negative Image of Sex Tourism

According to constructivists, historical contexts and ideas play a crucial role in the formation of state identity and national image, which in turn influence state actions, including the conduct of foreign policy. This research, therefore, focuses on the historical context and collective ideas that existed before Thailand decided to initiate gastrodiploamacy policy in 2002. Before examining the historical context and collective ideas, it should be noted that the issue of image and reputation is significant when one analyzes a state's performance in the international arena. The images and reputations of a country can both positively and negatively affect its international visibility and position on the world stage. A country with a positive image and outstanding reputation tends to gain more opportunities to participate in the global marketplace and play a leading role in the international arena, while a country with a poor image and bad reputation may face several challenges to effectively access the global market place, tends to be overshadowed by other countries, and may even find

it difficult to improve its position on the world stage. Therefore, it is not surprising that states are currently increasing their level of interest in improving their images and reputations at the international level through various kinds of instrument, such as soft power, which can easily be used to influence people's daily lives and create long-term results. Soft power such as national cuisine, arts, music, literature, and other cultural assets have been popularly employed by many states to stand out from the crowd and promote themselves internationally in the way they desire.

Many countries around the world have made numerous efforts to protect their images and reputations and ensure they keep pace with economic growth. Countries with poor images and bad reputations tend to invest a huge amount of their budgets in correcting and diminishing the negative aspects, perceived by them as obstacles to progress and prosperity, by emphasizing the promotion of positive features like arts and national cuisine in the international arena. The greater the positive image and reputation of a country, the more likely it can improve its position on the world stage and effectively participate in the global marketplace. More of the national budget is then spent on managing the country's image through various kinds of projects. For example, the South Korean government spent approximately \$77 million on the Hansik campaign to globally promote Korean cuisine to diminish the country's backward image associated with the Korean War and distinguish itself from its neighbors like Japan and China (Zhang, 2015). In the same context, the United Kingdom suffered from an unfavorable image due to its backwardness and the outbreak of mad cow disease. Thanks to its undesirable image, the UK government has made several attempts to repair the country's image by advocating its positive features, especially in the world of arts and music to improve the British image and reputation in the eyes of the foreign public and extend its soft power abroad (Viktorin et al., 2018).

Similarly, Thailand's reputation has been damaged by the negative image of sex tourism over a long period of time. Thailand, well-known for its beautiful beaches, exquisite temples, and smiling people, has also been negatively perceived by foreigners as being notorious for sex tourism and prostitution over the past six decades. According to the Branding Thailand Project, conducted by the Thai government in 2001 with the aim of discovering the country's strengths and weaknesses based on public perceptions, one of the most significant issues placing Thailand at a huge disadvantage

is the negative image of sex tourism (Nuttavuthisit, 2007). If someone searches on the internet for the world's top ten sex tourism destinations, Thailand will be negatively mentioned on many websites. For example, on a website named "Tourism News Live," travel news launched by the Association of Tourism Trade Organization India, Thailand is ranked as one of the top ten sex tourism destinations in the world. The country is mentioned on the website as one of the most notorious destinations in Asia for nightlife and the sex trade industry. Due to its affordable prices, Thailand has drawn a large number of international tourists to the country to travel and enjoy its naughty side (Sex Tourism, 2021). According to the Association for the Prevention, Reintegration, and Care of Prostituted Women, Thailand is among the top three countries with the highest rates of child prostitution in the world. In 2004, 800,000 children under the age of sixteen were involved in prostitution, and sex tourism is considered the main contributory factor in the sexual exploitation of young people. Many foreigners travel to Thailand with the specific intention of paying for sex with young girls and boys (Iaccino, 2014). As reported by Al Jazeera, approximately 5,000 teenagers are the victims of sex trafficking in the northern city of Chiang Mai, a northern city of Thailand. Most of them are impoverished, uneducated, and vulnerable, lured by traffickers to work in seedy bars and massage parlors with the promise of a salary to fulfill their needs. In reality, they are often faced with physical torture, mental cruelty, sexual exploitation, and even forced to go home with Western tourists with the intention of visiting touristy areas to buy sex with children and teenagers (Wiley, 2017). Therefore, this kind of image is not what Thailand wants to project and promote among foreign audiences. In fact, prostitution is illegal in Thailand and often linked to the issue of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, thereby intensifying the negative perception of the country as a sex tourism destination.

Moreover, the context of prostitution seems to contrast with the conservative ideal in Thai society. According to the conservative ideal, Thai women are expected to be reserved, and this behavior is supported by the state through educational mechanisms and transmitted from generation to generation. To illustrate, Thai women are taught by their parents at a young age to be very reserved in order to become good women. Even in schools, a textbook on sex education for teenagers refers to the reservation of Thai women, mentioning that they should be reserved, dress

modestly, do a good job with the housework, keep their virginity to be good girls, and not drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, or openly express their sexual behavior. The role of women in Thai society is determined and supported by the state as the main actor delivering and cultivating this conceptual framework and ideal through educational institutions (Teppanich, 2016). In this context, the values and dignity of Thai women are determined and linked to their reserved behavior. Therefore, women who are prostitutes or do not exhibit reserved behavior tend to be seen and condemned negatively by people in society. Although prostitution is still unacceptable among Thai people who subscribe to conservative thinking, the issue seems to be gaining more acceptance recently among the younger generation as a career. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Thai government seeks to eliminate the negative image of sex tourism. The issue of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, including children and young women, intensifies the negative perception of the sex trade in Thai society. This kind of negative image is not only recognized by Thai people but also by foreigners.

For over six decades, the image of Thailand as a sex tourism destination has created a negative stereotype. Whenever foreigners think about Thailand, they are reminded of the sex industry and prostitution. When foreigners hear about Thailand, they tend to think of Pattaya, a coastal city surrounded by beautiful beaches with crystal clear water, numerous brothels, and red-light districts. Those who have never been to Thailand hear about the country's notorious sex industry on social media and television, giving them a negative impression. Several reputable travel guidebooks mention Thailand's red-light districts (Kusy, 1991). The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture also mentions Bangkok as the capital city of Thailand, notorious for prostitution (Chon et al., 1993). Furthermore, many advertisements promote Thailand's sex tourism in Europe, such as the "Thailand Express Sex Tour," which names Thailand as a "big brothel" (Hantrakul, 1988). These negative perceptions toward the country have damaged and jeopardized the country's image over a long period of time. The Thai government has recognized the problem and attempted to improve the country's image. However, it is difficult to deal with because Thailand has suffered from the negative image of sex tourism for over six decades. It will therefore take time and require a serious amount of effort to effectively solve the problem.

The image of sex tourism began in Thailand after the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. When the U.S. military base was settled in Thailand during Rest and Recuperation (R&R), it not only brought modernization and westernization in terms of hospitality and food but also caused a boom in the sex trade, subsequently creating an unfavorable image of Thailand (Ichijo & Ranta, 2018; Nuttavuthisit, 2007). At that time, American soldiers visited Thailand and started crowding the walking streets and go-go bars in search of companionship, to experience the nightlife, and to enjoy the country's naughty side. Many poor and vulnerable women in rural areas, most underprivileged and uneducated, saw an opportunity to earn a living and provide for their families by working in the sex trade. Due to a lack of work, low wages, and the high population rate in local areas, people had to choose their path between working in low-paying jobs or entering the sex trade for a higher income. Many of them chose the latter themselves, while others were pushed and forced by their family to work in this field to earn more money to send home for improving their financial status and fulfilling their needs, such as by buying houses and other material possessions. Sex tourism then suddenly started to explode in Thailand, making the country a well-known sex tourism destination among the foreign public. In 1989, the number of female prostitutes reached about 80,000, most of whom worked in one of the 6,095 commercial sex places, especially brothels, for US\$ 10.60 per sex act. However, the boom in sex tourism resulted in a rapid growth in sex trafficking. Due to the high demand for sex, many criminal gangs and mafia groups profited by luring vulnerable young women and men into bars and massage parlors with a promise of genuine jobs and salaries. In reality, they faced mental and physical cruelty and were trapped in the vicious cycle of violence and debt. There were several cases of teenagers being kidnapped in rural areas, especially in northeastern Thailand. Indirect commercial sex venues such as massage parlors and restaurants became popular among foreigners, with the price for this service increasing to US\$16.30 (Hananberg & Rojanapithayakorn, 1998). As estimated in the 2015 US Department of State Human Rights Report, the number of sex workers in Thailand had reached over 200,000. Touristy places like the walking streets in Pattaya, Nana Plaza, and Soi Cowboy in the capital city are now famous among foreigners and Thais for sex entertainment.

In order to correct the negative image of sex tourism, the Thai government has made attempts to address the problem by launching laws and regulations against prostitution while internationally promoting the positive features of the country, such as its natural beauty and Thai cuisine, as a means of suppressing the unfavorable one. It should be noted that prostitution is illegal in Thailand. According to the 1996 Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act, sex workers are subject to fines for loitering in public and imprisonment if they advertise their services or gather at prostitution venues to participate in the sex trade (Napatanapong & Saowakhon, 2022). Unfortunately, the laws are ambiguous and not effectively enforced, allowing commercial sex establishments to thrive and profit. All stakeholders, such as the government, local people, and business organizations, need to be more active, responsible, and willing to tackle the issue seriously to successfully deal with the problem and eliminate the negative image of sex tourism (Wiley, 2017; Nuttavuthisit, 2007).

Rockover (2008) states that the national image can be built, manipulated, and even changed through marketing techniques. The negative stereotype of the country is not pre-existing but evolving and can be changed into a positive one by using the branding strategy. As a result, gastrodiploamacy was launched by the Thai government with the intention of eliminating the negative image of sex tourism and rebranding the country using positive features like Thai cuisine, one of its reputable cultures. Rebranding the country with Thai cuisine under the gastrodiploamacy project has allowed Thailand to create a positive image and a new sense of identity as “the Kitchen of the World” and “a food leading export country” rather than a sex tourism destination. By promoting Thai cuisine to the world, Thailand can raise global awareness of its culture and create a recognizable image and better reputation while increasing its international recognition. Although Thailand possesses several positive features like natural beauty, beautiful beaches, elegant temples, and friendly people, one of the most outstanding positive features is Thai cuisine. According to a survey on the influence of national cuisine on the public perception of a nation’s image, half the respondents agreed that their perceptions of a country changed when they tasted the national food. Provided with the rich history and unique flavors of Thai cuisine, gastrodiploamacy has allowed Thailand to positively change the public perception of its image and create

better brand recognition at the international level. In summary, the negative image of sex tourism is one of the key issues behind Thailand's gastrodiploamacy. The Thai government initiated gastrodiploamacy to replace and diminish the negative image it has suffered over six decades by replacing it with a positive one, like Thai cuisine. Nowadays, Thailand is seen as a successful and well-known country in the field of gastrodiploamacy. Thai food has gained significant popularity among the foreign public. The number of overseas Thai restaurants has increased from 5,500 in 2001 to 13,000 in 2008 (Park et al., 2019). Under the gastrodiploamacy project, Thai restaurants abroad have become tourist information centers and sites of gastrodiploamacy, positively impacting the impression of foreigners toward Thailand and its image (Suntikul, 2017).

3.3 An Economic Policy

Since economic policy shaped by state interest can influence a state's performance, including the conduct of foreign policy, the economic factor is emphasized in this section. When the Asian financial crisis exploded in 1997, the Thai economy became extremely vulnerable, resulting in the collapse of the Thai baht. All stock markets, currency exchange rates, and prices of real estate plunged significantly, and the foreign reserves of the country were in crisis (Ba, 2022). Almost all foreign reserves were spent on protecting the value of the Thai baht, finally forcing the country to float its currency. Thailand's public debts also substantially increased from around 170 billion baht in 1997 to over 900 billion baht in 1999 (Suthiwart-Narueput & Pradittatsanee, 1999). During the crisis, the country's GDP dropped sharply, reaching a peak in 1998 (World Bank, n.d.). In the first quarter of 2001, the economy grew by only 1.7% while the value of exports fell by 1.3%. The number of unemployed people also reached 1.2 million, and poor people reached 8.9 million (Royal Thai Government, n.d.).

To revive the Thai economy as a result of the financial crisis, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra publicly announced the goal of the country to eradicate poverty and recover from the economic recession by launching a strategic economic policy to strengthen the domestic economy and enhance the country's international competitiveness in the global market. In this case, the Thai government aimed to

stimulate the Thai economy from the grassroots level upwards to increase people's income and the employment rate, as well as support the productive and service sectors heavily reliant on the use of domestic resources to make them more competitive in the global market. Important areas such as the export of Thai products, foreign direct investment, and tourism were also promoted and emphasized by the government. (Intarakumnerd, 2011). At that time, The Thai government prioritized five strategic sectors, namely food, tourism, fashion, software, and automotive, to revive the Thai economy. These five sectors were assigned the task of achieving the selected goals: Kitchen of the World (food), Tourism Capital of Asia (tourism), Tropical Fashion of Asia (fashion), World Graphic Design and Animation Center (software), and Detroit of Asia (automotive) (Intarakumnerd, 2011). Therefore, it can be observed that the ultimate goal of the government was to make Thailand "the Kitchen of the World" which apparently links to the introduction of Thailand's gastrodiploamacy. In this case, the government prioritized the export of Thai food and agricultural products.

According to a policy statement by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra delivered to the national assembly in 2001, the aim of the government was to concentrate on the acceleration of exports at all levels and create a worldwide marketing network to improve the overall economy and elevate international trade. The goal of the government was to support and strengthen the areas in the country with a comparative advantage in terms of natural resources and skills potential. Since Thailand is a country surrounded by an abundance of natural resources for food and agriculture, the government then prioritized the food and agricultural sector by launching a project entitled "One Village, One Product" to support this sector in developing its potential and creating added-value products to export and compete in the world market. The government also helped the sector to develop and improve the standards, quality, and packaging of its products. In addition, the government sought to promote mutually beneficial linkages between such entrepreneurs and large-scale enterprises and provide them with access to both domestic and overseas markets to increase the income of Thai people. The private sector, including small and medium-sized businesses, was supported by the government in terms of preparedness and financial assistance to enable them to adapt and compete in the international trade arena. For example, Bangkok Metropolitan Bank and the Export-Import Bank of Thailand approved loans to 1,041

entrepreneurs in the amount of 6,000 million baht to help small and medium enterprises to operate effectively and export their products. The government also gave financial loans to underprivileged people without a collateral requirement through the People's Bank. Moreover, the government aimed to elevate the country to become a top regional center for trade in goods and services as well as international exhibitions. Lastly, the government helped Thai businesses and entrepreneurs to gain intellectual property and carry out their duties in the promotion of exports through marketing approaches so that they could effectively participate in the international trade arena (Ministry of Energy, 2016). These economic policies promoted by the Thai government during that period have helped to make Thailand "a leading food export country" and "the Kitchen of the World."

To facilitate the economic policy in terms of the promotion of exports and serve the state interests, namely as "a leading food export country" and "the Kitchen of the World," two gastrodiploacy projects, "Global Thai" and "Thailand: Kitchen of the World," were launched by the Thai government in 2002. In other words, the economic policy with the aim of promoting state interests during that time was the key idea behind Thailand's gastrodiploacy. It should be noted that gastrodiploacy is not only created to raise global awareness of Thai culinary culture and improve the country's image but also to facilitate economic policy in terms of exporting Thai products and serving state interests. Since gastrodiploacy promotes Thai food globally, it will increase the global demand for Thai food products and position Thailand to become "a leading food export country" and "the Kitchen of the World." Under such projects, the government has created a business link and provided financial loans for the private sector to invest in overseas Thai restaurants, resulting in a growing number of Thai restaurants abroad and increasing the export of Thai food products. The government has pursued these policies in a way that promotes Thai food internationally with the aim of enhancing the economic contributions of food exports and branding Thailand as a food-centric destination. This process is market-driven by selling Thai culinary culture to foreigners, thereby helping to increase the export of Thai food products and enhancing their economic contribution to the country. By increasing the number of overseas Thai restaurants, the government has been able to expand the channels for exporting more Thai food and agricultural products, making Thailand "a

leading food export country” and “the Kitchen of the World” (Zhang, 2015). In other words, Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy was intentionally established by the Thai government as one of the instruments to promote the exports of Thai food products and make Thailand “a leading food export country” and “the Kitchen of the World.” Since the government has implemented gastrodiploamacy, the Thai economy has gradually recovered while the number of exports has increased significantly. In the first quarter of 2001, the value of Thai goods exports declined by 1.3%. Following the implementation of gastrodiploamacy and the negotiation of free trade agreements with several countries, the country’s exports grew by 23% in 2004. The Thai economy also increased by 6.9 and 6.1% in 2003 and 2004, respectively (Royal Thai Government, n.d.).

3.4 A Synthesis of the Research Findings

Rather than focusing purely on the economic factors discussed in the existing literature, this research argues that a combination of three key factors influenced the government of Thailand to initiate the gastrodiploamacy policy in the first place. This section synthesizes and elaborates on how the findings are developed and led to the conduct of gastrodiploamacy through the lens of constructivism. First, constructivists believe that the ideational structure, like the global norm or trend, can shape state identity and its actions, while the state’s performance in the international arena can influence the ideational structure (Flockhart, 2016). The research then investigates the global trend before Thailand initiated gastrodiploamacy in 2002. The findings reveal that during the 1990s, the narratives of nation branding as an ideational structure gained considerable attention among academics and national governments. The trend of nation branding first began in the UK with the “Cool Britannia” campaign, a project aimed at repairing and improving the damage to the British image caused by its backwardness and the outbreak of mad cow disease by branding the nation with positive British features like arts and music (Viktorin et al., 2018). Since then, the trend of nation branding has become a routine policy for the governments of many countries, including Thailand. Thailand decided to jump on this bandwagon in the early 2000s. In 2001, the Thai government launched a branding Thailand project by discovering both

its strengths and weaknesses to gain a better understanding of the country's brand positioning. Accordingly, Thai cuisine was found to be one of the most outstanding strengths of the country. Influenced by the trend of nation branding, the Thai government launched the gastrodiploamacy project to brand the country by using Thai cuisine, one of its positive features, under the slogan "Thailand: Kitchen of the World," to create better brand recognition and a positive image of the country.

Secondly, constructivists believe that historical contexts and ideas play a significant role in the formation of state identity and national image, which in turn shape state actions, including the conduct of foreign policy. The research then explores the historical context and collective ideas that existed before Thailand decided to initiate this policy in 2002. According to the results, since the settlement of US military bases in Thailand during the Vietnam War, the country's image has been negatively associated with sex tourism in the eyes of foreigners, creating a negative stereotype. Thailand has been commonly perceived by foreigners as being notorious for sex tourism and prostitution for a long time. The country started to look at itself, the position it holds, and how it is seen by others. The Thai government and other policymakers then shared their collective ideas and understanding of the issue, concluding that serious actions were required in order to correct this negative image. Therefore, gastrodiploamacy was launched by the Thai government with the aim of rebranding the country with positive features like Thai food to create a positive image and new sense of identity as "the Kitchen of the World" and "a food leading export country" instead of a sex tourism destination.

Thirdly, constructivists believe that state identity informs the state interests and, consequently, influence its actions. Since the new senses of identity that Thailand desires to create and project are "the Kitchen of the World" and "a food leading export country," the state interests are formed within this context. The interests then shape the economic policy of the country to heavily promote Thai food exports. The economic policy then impacts state action to initiate gastrodiploamacy as one of the tools to globally promote Thai food, raise the global demand for Thai food products, and expand the channel for Thai food exports, enabling Thailand to become "the Kitchen of the World" and "a leading food export country." In other words, gastrodiploamacy was launched in order to facilitate the economic policy and serve the state interests at that

time. Hence, gastrodiploamacy not only facilitates the economic policy of the country but also promotes national interests, strengthens the new sense of state identity, and maintains the global trend of nation branding while creating a new trend called “gastrodiploamacy,” subsequently inspiring other countries like South Korea and Malaysia to follow the same path. It could be observed that these three factors are actually interrelated. They are mutually constitutive, which is the core idea of constructivism.



CHAPTER 4

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THAILAND'S GASTRODIPLOMACY

Since the previous chapter is dedicated to answering the first research question, “What factors influenced Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy?” by looking at the origins of the policy, the second research question, “How has the policy been implemented under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha?” is addressed in this chapter. It is divided into two subsections. The first one begins with the background of Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy, in which the two gastrodiploamacy projects, namely “Global Thai” and “Thailand: Kitchen of the World,” are thoroughly examined. The second one explores the development of Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy, specifically looking at the beginning period under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the present period under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. Moreover, the research will provide a comparison of policy implementation between the periods of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha to examine how the policy has been developed and promoted from the past to the present.

4.1 Background of Thailand’s Gastrodiploamacy

With the mix of indigenous food and Indian and Chinese’ culinary influence as a product of long history, Thai cuisine is fairly unique, exclusive and different from other countries (Sunanta, 2005). Ichijo and Ranta (2018) also note that Thai culinary heritage passed down through the generations has a distinctive charm and character, of which most Thai people are proud and believe to be second to none. Thai cuisine and the Thai style of cooking represent and reflect Thai wisdom and culture. In the past, Thai cuisine was not widely known outside the country. It first became well-known among foreigners during the Vietnam War with the settlement of US military bases in Thailand. When American soldiers came to Thailand for Rest and Recuperation, they also experienced Thai food, helping to promote it globally and making Thailand a remarkable tourist destination. The increasing popularity of Thai

cuisine has led to the expansion of the country's agricultural food industry. Thailand has abundant natural resources, including food and agricultural products, and almost all Thai food is cooked with fresh ingredients such as vegetables, chilies, black pepper, ginger, pork, seafood, and beef. The Thai diet is seen as healthy and slimming since there are a variety of ingredients in the dishes (Murray, 2007). In addition to its distinctive flavors and rich nutritional value, the delicate arrangement of Thai food on the plate makes it fascinating and appealing (Ichijo & Ranta, 2018). Many people see Thai food as one of the best cuisines in the world. During the 1960s, overseas Thai restaurants only served Thai immigrants in New York and London. There were only four Thai restaurants in London, but nowadays, this number has reached over 200 (Murray, 2007). Thai food has rapidly gained international popularity; today, there are more than 12,000 overseas Thai restaurants, 49% in the US and Canada, 20% in Europe, and 31% in the rest of the world. According to a survey on the public perception of Thai cuisine conducted by the Kellogg School of Management of the US, Thai food is ranked fourth in the world after Italian, French, and Chinese in terms of ethnic cuisine while ranked sixth in answer to the question, "What is your favorite cuisine?" Today, most Thai restaurants in Bangkok also serve many foreign customers, especially Westerners (Sunanta, 2005). With its unique flavors of Thai cuisine and its cultural heritage, the Thai government discovered the potential of Thai cuisine for use as a soft power tool in nation branding and promoting Thailand's international culinary reputation on the world stage. Before examining the policy implementation between the periods of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, this section provides a background of Thailand's gastrodiploamacy projects, namely "Global Thai" and "Thailand: Kitchen of the World," respectively.

4.1.1 Global Thai Program

Gastrodiploamacy was first practiced and introduced by Thailand under former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Thailand is recognized as a global pioneer in the field of gastrodiploamacy, inspiring other countries in the region to jump on the bandwagon. Due to the growing popularity of Thai food among the foreign public, the Thai government launched its first gastrodiploamacy project called the "Global Thai" in 2002 (Rockower, 2012). The aim of this project was to internationalize

Thai cuisine, raise revenue in terms of exports and tourism, strengthen its prominence on the world stage, and increase the number of overseas Thai restaurants from 5,000 to 20,000 by 2008 (Karp, 2018; Ichijo & Ranta, 2018). In order to boost the rapid growth of overseas Thai restaurants, the Thai government provided a huge amount of financial assistance, supervised the establishment of Thai restaurants abroad, and established Thai cooking schools to train Thai chefs to open restaurants and work abroad. Thai chefs were supported by special visa arrangements, making it easy to work abroad. For instance, New Zealand provided a special visa specifically for Thai chefs. Thai citizens who are qualified Thai chefs can apply for a “Thai Chefs Work Visa” to work in New Zealand for three years with a one-year extension (Lipscomb, 2019). The government’s efforts have supported Thai chefs training in the culinary program to work overseas and helped internationalize Thai cuisine (Lipscomb, 2019). The government also created business links between overseas Thai restaurants and the Thai food industry (Sunanta, 2005). For example, the Thai government helped Thai restaurants abroad to hire Thai chefs, import Thai food products and ingredients more easily, and have access to soft loans (Chapple-Sokol, 2013).

The Economist (“Thailand’s Gastro-Diplomacy,” 2002) reported that the Thai government hoped that the boom in overseas Thai restaurants would not only introduce Thai cuisine to the world and attract more foreigners to visit the country but also help to strengthen its relations with other countries through cultural engagement. The Thai government also sought to use overseas Thai restaurants to promote a positive image of the country. The restaurants were encouraged to meet the standard and quality of authentic Thai cuisine indicated by the Thai government (Sunanta, 2005). Furthermore, existing Thai restaurants abroad were expected and encouraged to present and promote a particular image of Thai culture through an atmosphere of traditional Thai dress for waiting staff, Thai style decoration, music, and sculptures. This is because the government desired to create a unique and attractive image of the Thai people, its culture, its identity and the country (Ichijo & Ranta, 2018). Nowadays, many Thai restaurants abroad are decorated in Thai style, highlighting Thai culture and creating a Thai atmosphere. For example, they display Thai paintings, silk curtains, Buddha sculptures, and pictures of Thai people in their restaurants. Most Thai restaurants also play Thai classical music and serve Thai dishes in blue and white wares;

some serve Thai food in wooden bowls and use banana leaves to decorate the menu (Murray, 2007). The “Global Thai” success resulted in the rapid increase of Thai restaurants globally and the growing popularity of Thai cuisine among foreign audiences. From 2002 to 2006, the number of overseas Thai restaurants reached over 9,900 and increased by more than 13,000 in 2009 (Rockower, 2012). Thai restaurants can be found everywhere in the US, with the number increasing from 2,000 to more than 5,000 (Karp, 2018). Booth (2010) also mentioned that the program succeeded in making Pad Thai and Tom Yum do for Thailand what the hamburger did for America. The “Global Thai” has also become a model for other countries in Asia using their cuisine to improve the nation brand.

4.1.2 Thailand: Kitchen of the World

Following the first program, “Global Thai,” the Thai government launched a second project named “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” in the same year (Rockower, 2012). Run by the Foreign Office of the Government Public Relations Department, the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project was established with the aim of educating both Thai and foreign audiences on Thai cuisine and its history, promoting Thai cuisine in the international arena, and granting a special “Thailand’s Brand” certificate to overseas Thai restaurants that meet the criteria set by the Ministry of Commerce (Suntikul, 2017). An e-book has been created that presents and promotes the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” campaign on the website of the Government Public Relations Department. On the home page, it provides a brief history of Thai agriculture, Thai people’s way of life, the quality and standard of Thai food products such as Thai Hom Mali rice, characteristics of Thai people’s diet, and lists of Thai cooking schools offering training courses for Thais and foreigners. Moreover, the e-book also contains recipes for famous Thai dishes such as Tom Yum Kung and Pad Thai to educate both domestic and foreign audiences about Thai cuisine and Thai wisdom (the Government Public Relations Department [PDR], n.d.). Under this project, the government has also encouraged Thai investors to participate in overseas Thai restaurants and provided support to restaurant owners in terms of loans and information. By globalizing Thai food, the government hoped that the project would generate foreign revenue from the export of Thai agricultural products, the key sector of the Thai economy (Sunanta, 2005). Under the campaign, the Thai government aims to ensure

that Thai food products' safety and hygiene standards meet international rules (Sunanta, 2005).

Figure 4.1

Thailand's Brand: "Thai SELECT"



Note. From “การสมัคร Thai SELECT สำหรับร้านอาหารไทยในสหราชอาณาจักร [Application of Thai SELECT for Thai restaurants in the United Kingdom],” by Department of International Trade Promotion, n.d. <https://www.thaitradelondon.com/การสมัครขอรับประกาศนียบัตร#:~:text=สำนักงานส่งเสริมการค้าใน,74935749%20หรือ%20คาวนั้โหลดใบสมัคร>

To maintain the quality and standard of Thai cuisine globally, the government has awarded “Thailand’s Brand” certificates to overseas Thai restaurants that meet the standards and criteria set by the Ministry of Commerce. The award is called “Thai SELECT” and is used to certify Thai restaurants as authentic Thai cuisine. The “Thai SELECT” awards fall into three main categories. The first is called “Thai SELECT Premium,” which requires Thai restaurants to gain at least 90 evaluation points. The second category is called “Thai SELECT,” which requires the restaurants to gain 75 to 89 evaluation points. Last but not least, the third category is called “Thai SELECT Unique,” which requires the same evaluation points as “Thai SELECT” but also specifically serves traditional Thai cuisine (Department of Business Development [DBD], 2020). The Department of International Trade Promotion sets the following criteria under the Ministry of Commerce: 1) genuine taste 30 points; 2) ingredients 20 points; 3) food safety or hygiene 20 points; 4) menu 10 points; 5) Thai style decoration of restaurants 10 points; and 6) services 10 points. In order to receive the “Thai

SELECT” award overseas Thai restaurants must have been open for at least one year, operate at least five days per week, and use raw materials imported from Thailand in appropriate proportions. In addition, the restaurants must hire Thai chefs with at least one year’s experience who have participated in Thai cooking training. To accommodate foreign customers, restaurants are required to be certified by credit card companies like Visa (DBD, 2020). They must also adhere to Thai food’s hygiene, safety, quality, and standards and present a particular image of Thailand (Lipscomb, 2019). Overseas Thai restaurants are also required to provide six typical Thai dishes in their menus as indicated in the application form, such as Green Curry, Pad Thai, Tom Yum, Som Tam, Pad Kra-Prao, and Tom Kha Kai (Sunanta, 2005).

Figure 4.2

Three Categories of Thai SELECT Awards



Note. From “สัญลักษณ์ ‘Thai SELECT’ เขาคัดเลือกกันอย่างไร? [‘Thai SELECT’ label. How do they select?],” by S. Sitthika, 2018, The Momentum. <https://themomentum.co/what-is-thai-select/>

In 2004, the Ministry of Commerce granted awards to almost 700 Thai restaurants abroad (DBD, 2020). In 2017, the number of overseas Thai restaurants in the US receiving “Thailand’s Brand” certificates reached over 400 (Karp, 2018). Today, more than 1,400 Thai restaurants in America, Europe, Asia, and Africa are in receipt of awards from the Ministry of Commerce, such as Nahm Thai Cuisine, Chat Thai, and Blue Elephant. Domestic Thai restaurants can also receive “Thai SELECT” awards provided they meet the criteria. In Thailand, over 700 Thai restaurants are in

receipt of the “Thai SELECT” award. The certificates under the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project allow the Thai government to control the national image it aims to project to the world and maintain the quality and standards of Thai cuisine overseas. As the number of certified Thai restaurants abroad increases, so will the exports of Thai food and agricultural products, strengthening the competitiveness of the Thai food industry in the global market (Lipscomb, 2019; Zhang, 2015). Sunanta (2005) notes that the campaign not only aims to elevate Thailand’s position to become the world’s leading food exporter but also increases the export of Thai food products to support the “One Village, One Product.”

According to Chapple-Sokol (2013), Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy is a multilayered nation branding campaign. The two projects, “Global Thai” and “Thailand: Kitchen of the World,” have been established with the similar goal of creating a recognizable nation brand, improving the country’s image, and elevating Thailand’s position on the global stage. Nowadays, the “Global Thai” program has been taken over by the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project. The Thai government and other state officials rarely mention the “Global Thai program” anymore, only “Thailand: Kitchen of the World.” Even though the two projects had different goals initially, the policies and goals overlap. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the Thai government and the media only mention the most recent project, “Thailand: Kitchen of the World.”

Figure 4.3

Thailand: Kitchen of the World Logo



Note. From *Kitchen of the World: Thailand*, n.d. (<https://www.facebook.com/thailandkitchenoftheworld/>).

Under the two projects, many public and private actors have significantly driven and promoted Thailand's gastrodiploamacy. Although the two projects are a part of public diploamacy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not only the actor running Thailand's gastrodiploamacy. The Ministry of Commerce, the Government Public Relations Department under the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, and the Ministry of Labor have also played a crucial role in implementing and promoting Thailand's gastrodiploamacy. To illustrate, the Government Public Relations Department (PRD) is the sector that launched the "Global Thai" program. The PRD also created an e-book, "Thailand: Kitchen of the World," on its website to internationally promote Thai food and educate both Thais and foreigners on Thai cuisine and its history.

In terms of granting "Thailand's Brand" certificates, the Department of Export Promotion under the Ministry of Commerce has established three "Thai SELECT" categories to guarantee the authenticity and quality of overseas Thai restaurants, held meetings between Thai investors and foreign businessmen, and conducted market research on the foreign tastes worldwide (Thomas, 2019; Karp, 2018). The Department has also sent Thai representatives from overseas Thai cooking schools to train chefs at foreign restaurants and worked with Thai embassies abroad to inspect the quality of overseas Thai restaurants. The certification expires within three years, at which time the restaurants are required to renew (Karp, 2019). The Ministry of Commerce has also worked with the Thai Chamber of Commerce to promote the "Thailand: Kitchen of the World" project. The Department of Business Development under the Ministry of Commerce has collaborated with private sectors like Wongnai, Grab Food, and Suan Dusit International Culinary School in promoting certified Thai restaurants to improve their recognition among the general public (DBD, 2020).

Concerning quality and safety, Thailand's gastrodiploamacy has been promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture, which monitors the quality and safety of Thai food and agricultural products and provides advanced technology for the production process, ensuring they meet international standards and are competitive in the global market. Like the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Industry has worked to maintain the quality of Thai food products through the domestic food industry (Sunanta,

2005). Furthermore, the Ministry of Labor established guidelines to train Thai chefs and provided knowledge on the process of purchasing Thai food ingredients and raw materials (Zhang, 2015). The Ministry of Public Health has also played a role by launching a book in 2002 entitled “*A Manual for Thai Chefs Going Abroad*,” providing information on recruitment and foreign tastes (Thomas, 2019; Karp, 2018). Moreover, the Ministry of Tourism and Sport established the Michelin Guide Bangkok to promote Thai cuisine through its website (Sunanta, 2005).

In addition, the Export-Import Bank of Thailand and the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Bank of Thailand have promoted gastrodiploacy by providing loans to Thai people wishing to open Thai restaurants abroad (Thomas, 2019). For example, the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Bank of Thailand established an infrastructure for loans of up to \$3 million for businesses in the food industry, including overseas Thai restaurants (Karp, 2018). The Tourism Authority of Thailand and Thai Airways International have also played some roles in the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project, choosing qualified Thai restaurants abroad eligible for the “Thai SELECT” award. To ensure the freshness of Thai food products, Thai Airways International is responsible for transporting Thai food and agricultural products to overseas Thai restaurants in the destination countries (Sunanta, 2005).

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also played an important role in promoting the gastrodiploacy projects. To illustrate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided an annual budget of around US\$1 million to promote Thai food and agricultural products internationally (Sunanta, 2005). Since the Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs a substantial budget to promote the campaign, it has been working with the Tourism Authority of Thailand to organize and establish food exhibitions abroad, including cooking demonstrations by Thai chefs. The Ministry has also utilized food events to internationally promote Thai culture, such as Thai dance. To make the food exhibitions more fascinating, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has invited local chefs in the host countries to participate in the events and experience Thai cooking (Sunanta, 2005).

Apart from public actors, private sectors like overseas Thai restaurants and Thai cooking institutes have also promoted the globalization of Thai cuisine. This is because overseas Thai restaurants serve as an unofficial embassy, a

tourist information center, and the site of Thailand's gastrodiploamacy, where the foreigners' impressions of Thailand and its image are influenced. Through cultural and emotional interaction, overseas Thai restaurants have the ability to increase foreigners' satisfaction with Thai food and Thailand (Lipscomb, 2019). The Thai cooking institutes, such as Dusit Thani College and Rajamangala Institute of Technology Phra Nakhon, are also the important actors in promoting and globalizing Thai cuisine by providing cooking courses for Thais and foreigners. For instance, the Oriental Thai Cooking School offers cooking courses to train Thai chefs who want to work in overseas Thai restaurants (Zhang, 2015).

4.2 The Comparison of Policy Implementation between Two Governments

To demonstrate how Thailand's gastrodiploamacy has been implemented under the two periods, this section begins with the beginning period under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. It then provides policy implementation under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha (the present period). Finally, the policy implementation between the two governments is compared to examine how Thailand's gastrodiploamacy has been developed from the past to the present.

4.2.1 Policy Implementation under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

Thanks to the increasing popularity of Thai food among foreigners and the country's abundant natural resources, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra launched two gastrodiploamacy projects in 2002, namely "Global Thai" and "Thailand: Kitchen of the World." The policies were aimed at promoting Thai cuisine in the international arena, increasing the export of Thai food products with the intention of elevating Thailand as one of the world's top five food exporters, and supporting Thai restaurants around the globe. The government sought to promote Thailand and its culture with expansion of Thai agricultural and food industry (Murrey, 2007). The projects were not only established to accelerate Thailand's position to become the world's leading food exporter but also to spearhead the export of products from "One Village, One Product" scheme promoted by the Thai government (Arunmas, 2018).

To facilitate the “Kitchen of the World” project, in 2003, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra established the Thai Food Development and Kitchen to the World Committee, with Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak serving as chairman. The Deputy Prime Minister was assigned by the government to determine strategy and policies to realize the “Kitchen of the World” project. However, many government and private agencies also collaborated on this project. The Thai Food Development and Kitchen to the World Center was established by the government to support the work of the committee and facilitate the coordination between the government and private agencies regarding the project. In this process, the Thai Food Development and Kitchen to the World Center provided recommendations and consulted with Thai investors and interested people to open restaurants abroad and invest in the Thai food industry. It also organized many activities to promote Thai cuisine and the Kitchen of the World project. In 2005, for example, it opened a cooking class to demonstrate how to cook Pad Thai, a popular menu among Thais and foreigners, where those interested could participate free of charge at the Impact Muang Thong Thani in Bangkok to promote Thai cuisine (Department of International Trade Promotion [DITP], 2005).

As dictated by government policy, the Department of International Trade Promotion under the Commerce Ministry organized many activities to promote the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project. For example, the Department established a cooking competition at THAIFEX 2005 to promote Thai cuisine and demonstrate the potential of Thai chefs by inviting representatives from the Culinary Institute of America. It also granted PM Awards (Best Service Provider) to overseas Thai restaurants. Moreover, the Department provided marketing and public relations assistance to overseas Thai restaurants certified under Thailand’s brand. To enlarge the number of overseas Thai restaurants, one of the stated goals of the Commerce Ministry was to encourage restaurant owners to showcase their food products at food exhibitions abroad. The government also sent Thai chefs to demonstrate Thai cooking overseas. For instance, it held a food festival in collaboration with the Intercontinental Hotel in Saudi Arabia to promote Thai cuisine. It also collaborated with supermarkets and department stores in Hong Kong, such as Park and Shop and City Super, to promote and advertise Thai food products (DITP, 2005).

To promote authentic Thai cuisine as part of the project “Kitchen of the World,” Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra prioritized the standardization and quality of Thai food by granting “Thai SELECT” certificates to overseas Thai restaurants meeting the criteria set by the Ministry of Commerce. In 2005, more than 80 Thai restaurants overseas received the “Thai SELECT” award; 45 restaurants in the US, 20 in Australia, and the remainder in New Zealand. To receive the “Thai SELECT” award, overseas Thai restaurants must import food ingredients from Thailand. This led to an increase in the export of Thai food products, especially food seasoning and Hom Mali rice. Furthermore, the government encouraged Thai restaurants abroad to use uniform menus and decorate them in Thai style. The government also conducted market research on foreign tastes around the world while sending representatives from Thai cooking schools to train Thai chefs abroad, especially in Eastern Europe, the US, and Asia. The government also published a book named “A Manual for Thai Chefs Going Abroad,” providing information on training and foreigners’ tastes, enabling Thai chefs and restaurant owners to run their businesses and support the campaign more effectively (Sunanta, 2005).

In 2004, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra approved a budget of approximately 500 million baht to promote the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project. The government encouraged investors to participate in overseas Thai restaurants and boosted the potential of Thai players to become more competitive in the global market by holding several seminars and providing training, information, and financial loans. For instance, the government held a seminar in November 2004 at the Merchant Court Hotel in Bangkok for those interested in opening restaurants abroad and investing in the Thai food industry (Sunanta, 2005). In 2005, the government held a festival called AROY@Melbourne in Australia to promote Thai food abroad and support overseas Thai restaurants, attended by more than 20,000 participants. The festival included several Thai cooking demonstrations, the sale of Thai food products, and Thai cultural performances. The government sought to increase the number of overseas Thai restaurants from 5,000 to 20,000 by 2008. The project was expected to generate foreign income from the increased exports of food and agricultural products which have been the country’s leading exports (Sunanta, 2005).

4.2.2 Policy Implementation under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha

Under the period of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Thailand's gastrodiploacy campaign has also been implemented and supported by the Thai government. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha continues to promote and prioritize "The Kitchen of the World" campaign started in 2002. The government has rebooted the project with the aim of accelerating Thailand's position to become a major world food exporter, expanding Thai food startups, and supporting overseas Thai restaurants. The government also seeks to increase the contribution of Thai food exports to more than 6% of the country's GDP (Arunmas, 2018). It should be noted that food demand in the global market increases every year, and fortunately, Thailand can produce more food than is required for domestic consumption. Provided with this advantage, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha aims to make Thailand a leading global food exporter by promoting "the Kitchen of the World" program.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has promoted Thai cuisine as one of the government's priorities, stating that it is the pride of the nation and reflects the Thai identity passed on from generation to generation. It also reflects the abundance of the country's natural resources, such as spices and herbs. Accordingly, the government aims to promote Thai food overseas and the export of Thai food products. When visiting Samut Sakhon, Phetchaburi, and Prachuap Khiri Khan, Cabinet members decided to upgrade these areas as the "Kitchen of the World," with local workers, especially in the food industry, to meet market demand. Since the top export products of the country include rice, canned and processed seafood, processed chicken, as well as frozen and processed shrimp, the government is also focusing on the promotion of the seafood industry. For example, the blue swimmer crab is very popular and considered to be an important export. The government provides financial support for fishery communities to help them establish their own blue swimmer crab banks to raise local income and facilitate the project "Kitchen of the World." Nowadays, there are almost 200 swimmer crab banks along the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand (PDR, 2018).

In 2015, the government approved a draft of the "Thai Kitchen to the World Strategy 2016–2021" proposed by the Office of the National Economics and Social Development Council. The government acknowledged that the most important

mission of the project would be to ensure the quality of Thai food products and their export in accordance with international safety and hygiene standards. The government approved a budget allocation to support the “Thai Kitchen of the World Strategy 2016—2021.” The government has agreed to promote “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” under the framework “From Farm to Table,” covering the food value chain and other related sectors. Under the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” campaign, elevating Thailand as the world’s leading food exporter is a government priority (Department of Skill Development [DSD], n.d.).

Through “the Kitchen of the World” program, the Thai government also held several exhibitions to promote Thai cuisine to the world and encourage those interested in the Thai food industry. For instance, THAIFEX: World of Food Asia 2018, operated by the Ministry of Commerce, was established as a platform for investors and small entrepreneurs in the Thai food and beverage industry to negotiate and make a connection with businessmen and importers from other countries around the world. More than 2,500 exhibitors from 40 countries and regions participated in the THAIFEX exhibition. Under the theme “Thailand Creative Food,” the government seeks to promote Thai cuisine internationally and demonstrate the potential of the country as “the creative kitchen of the world.” At the exhibition, many Thai food products were selected by the Ministry of Commerce to demonstrate creativity, such as sparkling coconut water and dried butter beans. The Thai food industry is one of the government’s priorities because Thailand is ranked as the top third food exporter in Asia and fifteenth among world food exporters representing 2.3% of the world’s food market. According to the Director-General of the International Trade Promotion Department, Chantira Jimreivat, the government has designated the Commerce Ministry to focus on food innovation and creativity to elevate the country as one of the world’s creative kitchens (Arunmas, 2018).

At THAIFEX 2018, Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, who has played a significant role in promoting “the Kitchen of the World” project, suggested that in order to achieve the required international standards and increase the international competitiveness of Thai food products, the Thai food industry needs to emphasize on added value and develop all supply chains. His ideas are in line with those of the Minister of Commerce, Sontirat Sontijirawong, whose policy is to support

small entrepreneurs, especially in the agricultural and food sectors, to export the packaging and processing of food products. According to the Deputy Prime Minister, the government has already launched a policy to support innovation and technology investment in the Thai food industry by integrating digital technology with agriculture, food, and tourism to help the local economy become more competitive and gain higher income. However, the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned that, in order to reboot “the Kitchen of the World” project, the Ministry of Commerce must collaborate closely with the Thai Chamber of Commerce, while the government needs to provide more budget to support comprehensive food development, including food quality, the quality of chefs, technology, innovation, and startups to promote authentic Thai food and meet international standards. The Export-Import Bank of Thailand also needs to be more active in terms of facilitating Thai startups to open Thai restaurants around the world (Arunmas, 2018).

Another example of an exhibition to promote Thai food is the Amazing Thai Taste Festival. In 2017, the Tourism Authority of Thailand collaborated with more than 40 public and private organizations to hold the Amazing Thai Taste Festival in Bangkok. The festival showcased authentic Thai cuisine, promoted various aspects of Thai food, and encouraged Thais and foreigners to discover Thai tastes. There were not only booths by popular street food stalls and fine-dining restaurants but also many activities such as cooking demonstrations by Thai celebrity chefs and culinary competitions. Thai fresh food products were sold at the exhibition, including seasonal fruits and herbs. The festival helped generate income for food producers and Thai restaurants and promoted Thai cuisine to the world (Tourism Authority of Thailand Newsroom, 2017).

In terms of maintaining the standards of Thai food overseas, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has ordered the Ministry of Commerce to promote Thai food overseas and ensure it has the same taste and meets the required quality standards. To achieve the task established by the government, the Commerce Ministry has worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture and Cooperatives, Industries, and other agencies on promoting and globalizing Thai cuisine. The Ministry of Industry has identified 20,000 overseas Thai restaurants and launched a program to ensure the Thai food served abroad meets the same standards to maintain the authentic taste of Thai

cuisine (Thailand's gastro-diplomacy, 2016). Gen Adul Saengsingkaew, the Minister of Labor, commented to the press that he was assigned by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha to realize the "Kitchen of the World" project and create employment in the food and agricultural sector. He stated that Thailand was now becoming the Kitchen of the World. In 2017, the number of overseas Thai restaurants reached over 20,000 worldwide. More than 20 million Thai people are employed in the agricultural sector. More than 50 cruises employ Thai chefs. They earn approximately 40,000 to 90,000 monthly and send it back to the country. Nowadays, large markets like the US import many Thai food products, especially coconut milk and peanut sauce (Karp, 2018). In addition, the Thai government seeks to promote the presence of Thai cuisine in new regions, such as the Middle East. According to its five-year plan, the government aims to elevate Thailand as one of the top five exporters of halal food by 2020 (Karp, 2018).

4.2.3 A Comparison of Policy Implementation between the Two Governments

Between the periods of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, there is still a continuity in terms of pursuing and implementing gastrodiploamacy. According to the research findings, policy implementation between the two governments appears to be similar, and only a few differences can be observed. Firstly, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha had similar goals in the promotion of the "Thailand: Kitchen of the World" project, namely: (1) promoting Thai cuisine in the international arena; (2) creating better brand recognition for the nation; (3) elevating Thailand's position to become the world's top food leading exporter; (4) expanding the Thai food industry; and (5) supporting overseas Thai restaurants around the globe. The promotion of Thai cuisine abroad has been considered a priority by the two governments. Both governments have promoted Thailand and its culinary culture by expanding the Thai food and agriculture industry.

Secondly, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha have prioritized the standardization of Thai cuisine and the quality of Thai food products. The two governments have focused heavily on maintaining the same standards and quality of Thai cuisine abroad and promoting "Thai authenticity"

by granting “Thai SELECT” awards to overseas Thai restaurants meeting the criteria set by the Ministry of Commerce. The two governments have also encouraged Thai restaurants abroad to use uniform menus and decorate their restaurants in Thai style. Thirdly, the two governments have allocated a huge budget to promoting the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project and provided information and financial loans for Thai people interested in opening Thai restaurants abroad and investing in the Thai food industry. During the two periods, the governments assigned the Ministry of Commerce to provide recommendations to Thai investors and entrepreneurs and consult with them about running their restaurants overseas. Fourthly, under “the Kitchen of the World” program, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha held several exhibitions and seminars as platforms to promote Thai cuisine to the world and provide information to investors interested in the Thai food industry. They have also encouraged restaurant owners to showcase their food products at food festivals abroad. Moreover, both governments have supported Thai chefs working abroad by providing training programs and special visas.

Nevertheless, there are a few differences in policy implementation between the two governments. Firstly, under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the government aimed to promote Thailand as the “Kitchen of the World.” Under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, the idea has been extended slightly to make Thailand “the World’s Creative Kitchen” by highlighting the creativity of Thai cuisine. Secondly, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra promoted the “Kitchen of the World” project by focusing on Western countries such as the US, Europe, and Australia as the main targets in promoting Thai cuisine abroad. However, the current efforts under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha demonstrate that the government has already broadened the scope of its gastrodiploacy program beyond Western countries, expanding the promotion of Thai cuisine into new regions, specifically the Middle East. According to the governmental five-year plan, the government aims to elevate Thailand into one of the top five exporters of halal food by 2020 (Lipscomb, 2019).

Hence, it can be observed that the core policies between the two periods, under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, have been promoted in the same direction, with only a few differences regarding their development. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut

Chan-o-cha have promoted gastrodiploamacy similarly by encouraging the internationalization of Thai cuisine, promoting the export of Thai food products, and supporting overseas Thai restaurants. Public and private agencies have still played the same roles in promoting the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project. For example, the Ministry of Commerce has been assigned to grant “Thai SELECT” awards to overseas Thai restaurants. Due to the development of the policy, the scope of gastrodiploamacy under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has been slightly broadened in terms of extending the goal, theme, and target countries.

In this context, the collective ideas shared among the government and key policymakers could be considered the main factor driving and promoting Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy between the two periods. According to constructivists, the ideas of the government and state officials are very important since they tend to shape and influence how the state performs in the international system, including foreign policy formulation. In other words, the collective ideas of policymakers are significant in conducting and continuing foreign policy. Regardless of a change in the Thai government, if the core ideas on the three factors remain and the ideas of key policymakers, such as Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, who served in both governments, still play a significant role, there will be a continuation of policy implementation. The ideas of key policymakers have played an important role in driving and shaping Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy. To clarify, the Thai government is not the only actor involved in driving and implementing Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy. Other key policymakers in the government agency, such as Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, have also played a significant role in implementing the policy. It is not merely the personal ideas of the Thai government that drive and keep this foreign policy going, but the collective ideas shared among the key policymakers and the government within the network. Through the process of interaction and communication, they tend to generate the collective or shared understandings and beliefs, subsequently shaping Thailand’s implementation of gastrodiploamacy between the two periods. In this context, as long as the three factors behind Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy still exist and the ideas of some key policymakers, such as Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, continue to play a significant role, the policy under the two periods will continue to be implemented and promoted in a similar way.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

The power of food not only lies in the realm of fundamental elements for survival but also in international relations. Transforming into a diplomatic instrument, food can be used by the states to project their unique culture and identity to foreign audiences in order to create better brand recognition and extend their soft power abroad. As a form of public diplomacy, gastrodiploamacy refers to the way a state uses national cuisine as a medium to communicate and project its culinary culture to foreign audiences to gain a better reputation and a positive image at the international level. In the context of gastrodiploamacy, food or cuisine acts as a medium to generate an emotional engagement across language barriers, with the potential to positively change public perceptions toward that country and its image. When people consume the national food of a country, they attach emotions to the food they eat, the sense they feel, and their perceptions toward the country and its image. It is not merely about eating but also about experiencing the newfound culture and identity of a country through national cuisine. The cooking styles, table settings, dining etiquette, and everything on the table can give a deep insight into a country, providing a clearer picture of a country's culture and identity. With the distinctive flavors of national cuisine, gastrodiploamacy allows countries to utilize their own positive and distinctive features like national cuisine to stand out from the crowd, create a recognizable nation brand, and gain a better reputation by winning the hearts and minds of the foreign public through their stomachs. In the world of competing identities, gastrodiploamacy has become a crucial task for many countries worldwide in creating their nation brand to avoid being overshadowed by others (Chapple-Sokol, 2013; Alhinnawi, 2011).

Nowadays, many countries around the world have been employing gastrodiploamacy in their foreign policy as a means of standing out from the crowd and gaining international recognition by promoting their nation brand through national cuisine. Thailand discovered the potential of using Thai cuisine as a soft power tool and

introduced it to the international arena in 2002. Thailand is recognized as a global pioneer country in the field of gastrodiploamacy. In 2002, the Thai government established a program called “Global Thai” with the aim of spreading the number of overseas Thai restaurants to increase the global demand for Thai food products and internationalize Thai cuisine (Ichijo & Ranta, 2018). This campaign provided an opportunity for the country to internationally promote Thai food, create a recognizable nation brand, and expand its soft power abroad (Rockower, 2012). The Thai government subsequently launched a second project called “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” with the aim of educating both Thais and foreigners on Thai culinary culture and its history as a means of raising global awareness of Thai cuisine. With the unique flavors of Thai cuisine, gastrodiploamacy allows Thailand to distinguish itself from its neighboring countries and gain a positive perception from foreign audiences. Since the establishment of gastrodiploamacy campaigns, there has been an increase in the number of overseas Thai restaurants from 5,500 in 2001 to 13,000 in 2008 (Park et al., 2019). Today, Thailand is seen as a successful and well-known country in the field of gastrodiploamacy. Thai food has prominently gained popularity among foreigners, subsequently inspiring other countries to jump on the bandwagon.

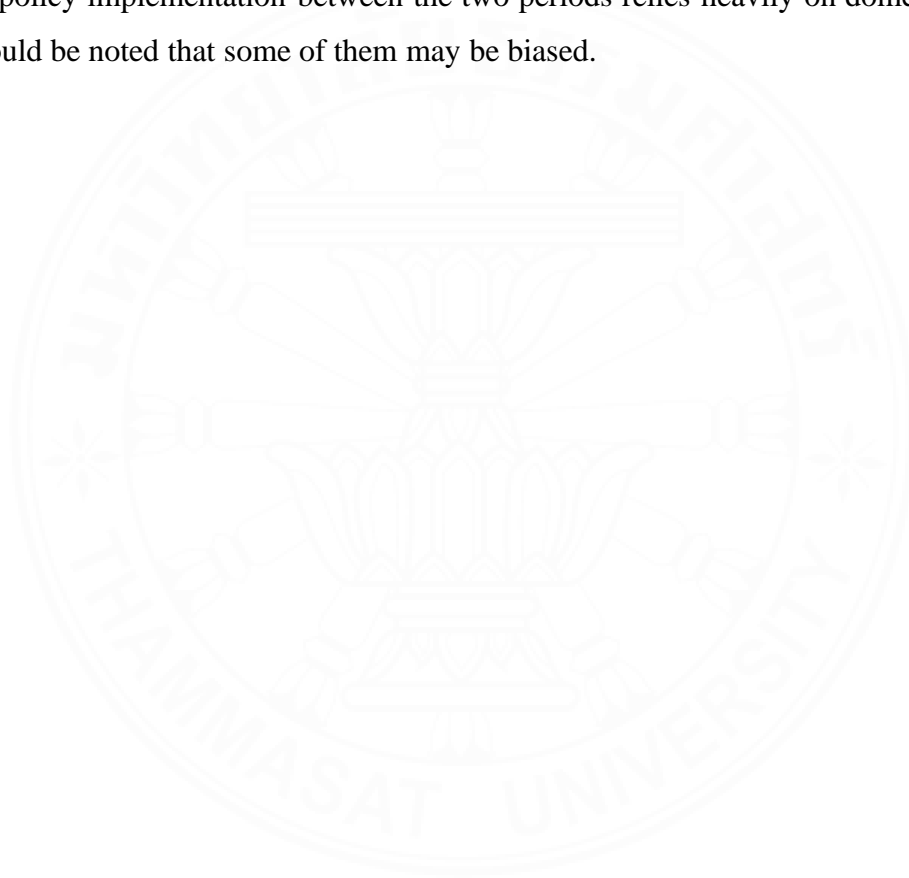
However, only a few studies exist on Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy, especially the key factors influencing the country to initiate gastrodiploamacy in the first place and how the policy has been developed from the past to the present. This research aims to fill the academic gaps by answering two research questions: (1) “What factors influenced Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in its foreign policy?” and (2) “How has the policy been implemented under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha?” According to the research findings, there are three main factors influenced Thailand to initiate gastrodiploamacy in the first place: (1) the narratives of nation branding; (2) a negative image of sex tourism; and (3) an economic policy. These three factors are the key puzzles behind Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy. As for the second question, between the periods of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, there is still a continuity in terms of pursuing and implementing gastrodiploamacy. The policy between the two periods has been promoted and implemented in a similar direction; only a few differences can be noticed due to the development of policy. Both Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Prime

Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha have similarly promoted gastrodiploamacy by encouraging the internationalization of Thai cuisine, promoting the export of Thai food products, and supporting the overseas Thai restaurants. The public and private agencies have continued to play the same roles in promoting the “Thailand: Kitchen of the World” project. For example, the Ministry of Commerce has been assigned the task of granting the “Thai SELECT” award to the overseas Thai restaurants. Thanks to the development of the policy, the scope of gastrodiploamacy under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has been slightly broadened in terms of extending goal, theme, and target countries. It can be observed that even though the two governments come from different political parties and regimes, they still decided to pursue and promote gastrodiploamacy. In this context, the political regime may not be the main factor driving Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy, but the collective ideas shared among the government and key policymakers within the network. As long as the three factors behind Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy exist and the ideas of some key policymakers, such as Somkid Jatusripitak, still play a significant role, the core policy implementation under the two periods tends to move in the same direction.

5.2 Research contribution and limitations

For research contribution, this research provides a clearer picture of how Thailand has implemented gastrodiploamacy by placing a huge emphasis on both the origins and development of the policy. The research also reflects how states, including Thailand, have utilized national culinary delights as a diplomatic means of improving their image and reputation in the international arena. Importantly, the research offers a new perspective in analyzing the key factors behind Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy and how the policy has been developed by specifically focusing on the beginning period under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and the present period under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, through the lens of constructivism, differentiating it from other papers and providing originality. Nevertheless, this research has certain limitations. Since the research specifically emphasizes on the beginning period under former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001 to 2006) and the present (pre-election) period under Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha (2014 to 2019), the policy implementation under

other periods is excluded from this research due to time constraints. Also, the research primarily looks at the case of Thailand, a global pioneer country in the field of gastrodipomacy; other countries' gastrodipomacy are not discussed thoroughly. Therefore, this paper cannot be regarded as a comparative paper. Last but not least, there are only a few existing literatures subtly mentioning Thailand's gastrodipomacy and some data generated by the government are not easily accessible. Despite the researcher's efforts to collect data from various international sources, most of the data on policy implementation between the two periods relies heavily on domestic ones. It should be noted that some of them may be biased.



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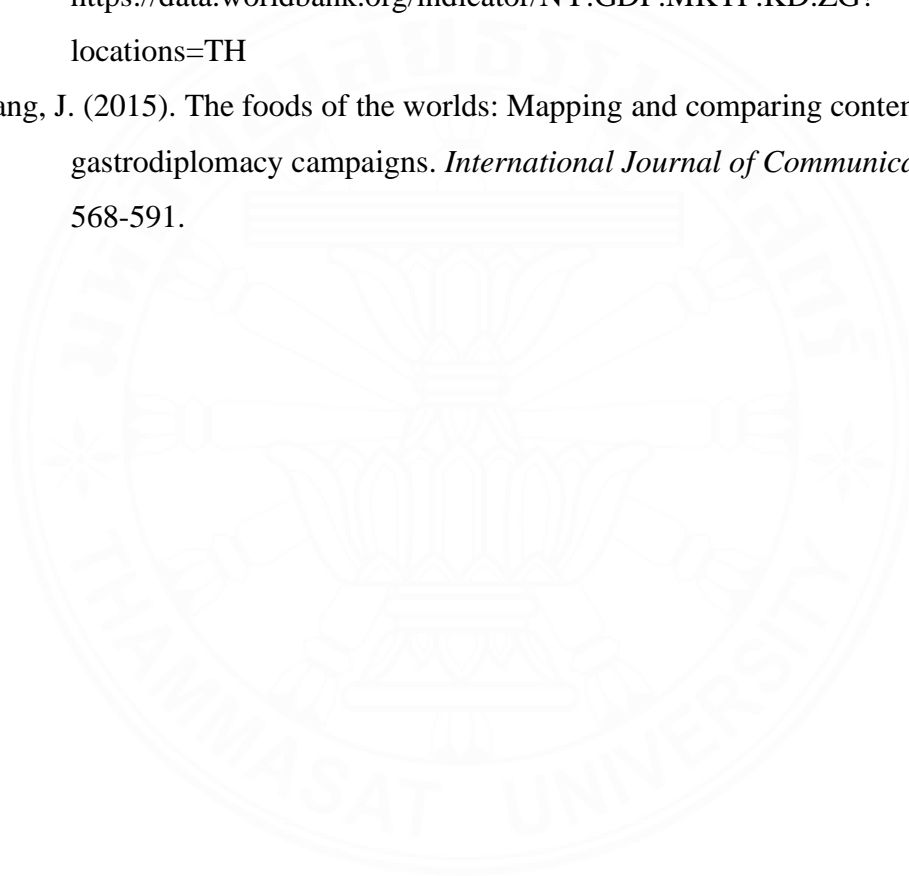
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