

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

Although Thailand is a small country, it is one of the world's leading tourism destinations (McDowall and Wang, 2009). With convenient transportation, tourism has been becoming an increasingly popular business in these three decades. In particular, with the launch of airplane, it provides great welfare to the tourism business. Nowadays, airport plays a significant role in the development of modern society.

Suvarnabhumi International Airport (SIA), officially started to be used on September 28, 2006, and reached the annually total capacity up to forty-five million. According to the data collected by Immigration Bureau (2011) there were 1,368,983 tourists globally coming to Thailand in May 2011, 64.97% or 889,434 tourists used Suvarnabhumi International Airport as their gateway to enter Thailand. In August 2011, 1,721,119 nationwide tourists arrived at Thailand, 1,108,610 or 64.41% out of them came into by SIA. The figures presented the strategic position of SIA to Thailand's tourism development.

Suvarnabhumi International Airport is under the operation of Thailand Public Company Limited, which is determined to promote Suvarnabhumi International Airport to be transport hub in Asia.

At present, with the economic development in China, an increasing number of Chinese people prefer to travel to escape from the pressure of work. It can be said, to some extent, China is one of the largest markets of generating outbound tourists in Asia. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2010) reported that the total number of visitors from China in 2009 was 777,508; the figure increased considerably to 1,127,559 in 2010. According to the latest data, the total number of Chinese tourists to Thailand reached at 975,770 in the first six months of 2011, which was listed at rank two, just following at Malaysia. The figure increased by 73.65% comparing with the

same period of year 2010. Consequently, Chinese tourists' evaluation is of significance toward Suvarnabhumi International Airport.

Table 1 Top five tourist markets to Thailand in Jan-July 2011

Rank	Country	Number of Tourists	Increased by (compared with the same period of 2010)
1	Malaysia	1,385,042	12.39%
2	China	975,770	73.65%
3	Japan	664,066	21.39%
4	Korean	598,672	34.30%
5	Russia	578,532	77.82%

Source: International Public Relations Division of the Tourism Authority of Thailand.
September 9, 2011

Due to the important strategic position of Suvarnabhumi International Airport and the profound impact of Chinese tourists, collecting and analyzing evaluations on Suvarnabhumi International Airport made by Chinese tourists would be beneficial to the further development of Suvarnabhumi International Airport.

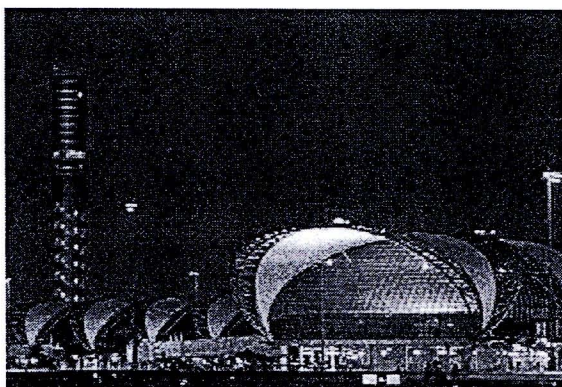


Figure 1 The passenger terminal and concourse of SIA

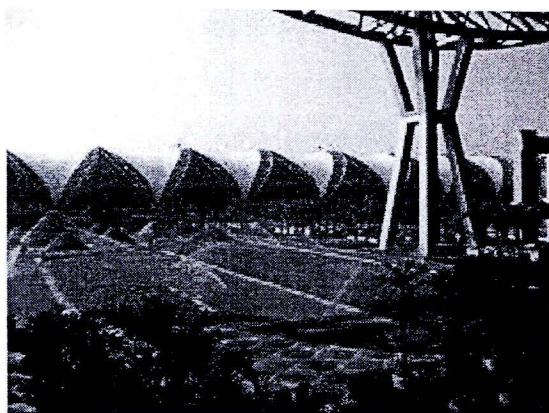


Figure 2 The inner courtyard of SIA

Problem Statement

Innes and Doucet (1990) suggested that the level-of-service would affect passengers' airport-choice decision. Therefore, the evaluation of service quality and satisfaction levels of service users is of great significance. Particularly, Thailand is committed to develop tourism industries nowadays; Suvarnabhumi International Airport that is known as the national gateway at Thailand in working as a vital transport hub between Thailand and other countries including Asia and Europe.

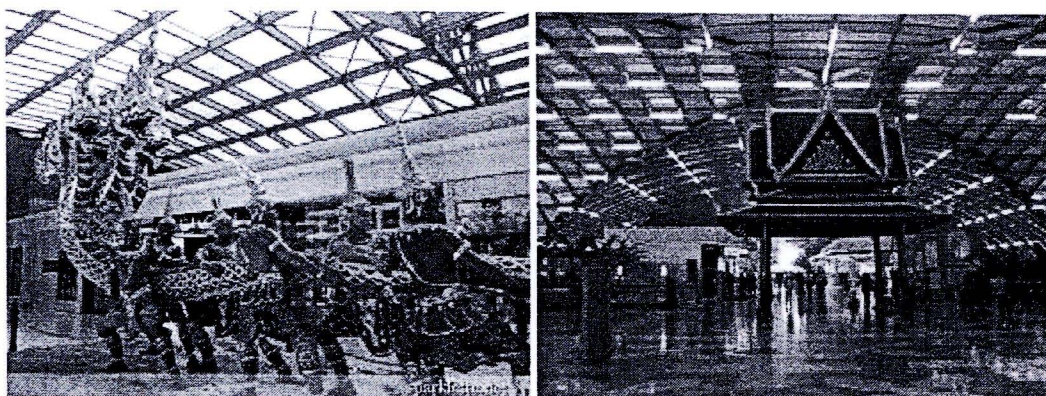


Figure 3 Sculptures with typical Thai features

However, because of the difference on cultures, different people have different evaluation criteria. Even facing the same objects or issue, people can get different impressions from different perspective. Additionally, Suvarnabhumi

International Airport is such a big building that contains many parts, such as, moving sidewalks, food centers, medical centers, Immigration, duty-free shops and so on. Hence, it is hard to manage it perfectly to some extent. Complaints toward Suvarnabhumi International Airport physical environments have arisen since it started operation in 2006.

The design of an airport provides the first impression to its service users and passengers. "Airport design and airport operation are closely related and influence each other (Kazda and Caves, 2007)". An airport with good and convenient design can save expense effectively. Conversely, more cost would be invested to make up for the poor design. Noobanjong (2009) put forward some dissatisfaction as well: although the design within Suvarnabhumi International Airport was up-to-date and good-looking, there are still some potential dangers to unconscious passengers.

This research, therefore, aims to explore Chinese tourists' expectations of the service quality and satisfaction level in Suvarnabhumi International Airport. The contents that how do Chinese tourists make their overall evaluation of the service quality in SIA; how many percent Chinese tourists are satisfied or dissatisfied with SIA and what the gap between Chinese tourists' expectations before arriving at SIA and their satisfaction levels after arriving would be surveyed in this research.

Research Questions

1. How do Chinese tourists expect toward SIA before arriving?
2. Whether Chinese tourists are satisfied with SIA or not after arriving?
3. What the gap between Chinese tourists' expectations before arriving at SIA and their satisfaction levels after arriving?

Objectives of Study

1. To explore the expectations from Chinese tourists to SIA before arriving.
2. To survey the satisfaction levels of Chinese tourist with SIA after arriving.
3. To conclude the gaps between expectations before arriving and satisfaction level after arriving of Chinese tourists.
4. To come up with some recommendations to SIA for the long-term development.

Conceptual Framework



Figure 4 Conceptual Framework

Scope of Study

Content

This research focuses on the evaluation of the service quality and satisfaction levels of Chinese tourists to SIA. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2010) released that the number of Chinese tourists in 2009 was 777,508; the figure increased to 1,127,559 in 2010, which contributed China market to be the second biggest supplier to Thailand tourism business in the nationwide. Surprisingly, just in the first six months of 2011, the number of Chinese tourist to Thailand reached at 975,770; most of them came through Thailand's national gateway: Suvarnabhumi International Airport.

Hence, collecting Chinese tourists' evaluations is so important that can be analyzed and utilized to improve the current condition, which is good for Suvarnabhumi International Airport's long-term development.

Sample Size

According to the Taro Yamane formula (1967) which is an Equation for Determining Final Sample Size, the process of calculating would be shown as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Note n = Sample Size

 N = Population Size

 e = the Error of Sampling

Due to the total number of Chinese tourists who experienced SIA's services in 2010 was more than 100,000, with a 95% confidence level and a +/- 5% margin of error, four hundred Chinese tourists would be enquired in this research.

Study Area

This research targets at Chinese tourists who have had such experiences as having used Suvarnabhumi International Airport service. So Suvarnabhumi International Airport would be the ideal place to carry out this research where the researcher can get most direct information. While, most of the passengers who stay at the airport are probably in a hurry; no cooperation from them is possible. Considering with this situation, conducting this survey at hotels would be more convenient for both interviewees and researcher. Consequently, a part of the questionnaires will be distributed at hotels as well.

Assumptions

Complaints toward Suvarnabhumi International Airport have emerged for several years. Bad estimations on facilities and services at SIA have provided a motivation for this research. Results can assist SIA management with future opportunities.

Definition of Terms

Evaluation is the attitude possessed by Chinese tourists toward SIA.

Service Quality is a measurement of how well a delivered service provided by SIA is in accordance with the Chinese tourists' expectations.

Satisfaction Level is customers' estimation, which comes from the comparison between the feelings generated from the experience of service at SIA and these Chinese tourists' expectations.

Chinese Tourists are all of the tourists whose nationality is Chinese who have used SIA service or arrived at SIA at least once. Those tourists include both male and female with different occupation. To enhance the reliability, Chinese tourists who participate in this research are required to be more than 20 years old.

Suvarnabhumi International Airport (SIA) is an international airport established at Bangkok, Thailand. It is owned and operated by Airport of Thailand Public Company Limited (AOT).

Limitations

As the researcher works during the week days and studies at weekends, there is just limited time to do the research. In addition, collecting data during such a rainy season with flooding can be troublesome. Most importantly, lack of cooperation from Chinese tourists due to their hurry would be also a limitation for collecting adequate information.

Human Ethics Consideration

The main ethics issues that would be considered in this research are listed as follows:

1. To get academic approval from our university to conduct this research.
2. Be confidential to these Chinese tourists' private information making sure their information would be kept safely.
3. Be sincere to the information that gets from these Chinese tourists ensuring that this information would be academic research use only.

Practical Significance

This research is of great importance. The results of this research can be used effectively. With this identified problem, related and similar organizations and institutions can learn from the experience. The three primary stakeholders would be Suvarnabhumi International Airport, passengers who use Suvarnabhumi International Airport service and other airports. Detailed analyses on the issue what these three stakeholders can get from this identified research are as follows:

1. Suvarnabhumi International Airport

Suvarnabhumi International Airport is the most direct benefit taker. By knowing evaluations from this one of the biggest customer groups, Suvarnabhumi International Airport can learn about the existing disadvantages and problems systematically at present, which is beneficial to solve problems as soon as possible. This is an effective way to retain the source of customers and attract more new customers. With the high efficiency of the capacity of solving problems, Suvarnabhumi International Airport can present strong impression to the international market and attract more international cooperative partners, which would be favorable for SIA's long-term development.

2. Passengers who use Suvarnabhumi International Airport

The earlier problems can be put forward and solved, the better service can be provided in the future. Passengers who use Suvarnabhumi International Airport service would be the most direct beneficiaries in Suvarnabhumi International Airport can handle with all this proposed challenges. Evaluations of the service quality and satisfaction level from Chinese tourists would be collected in the research; Suvarnabhumi International Airport would be able to start out to come up with strategic solutions. This can result in better service of high quality. Then other passengers can enjoy more convenience.

3. Other airports

Suvarnabhumi International Airport is known as an importance transport hub in Asia. Its activities and campaigns always attract and impress other airports. This research can provide other airports with a lesson on Suvarnabhumi International Airport. Other airports can learn from this research and Suvarnabhumi International Airport's experience, which would provide them with good examples and prevent these airports away from the same problems and situations.

Background Information

Due to the sub-standard design work, there are many drawbacks in Suvarnabhumi International Airport, which include the passenger terminal, the building structure and some other elements. There are some problems with official mismanagement as well (Noobanjong, 2006). This research investigated how one cultural group, the Chinese, evaluated their experience at this place.