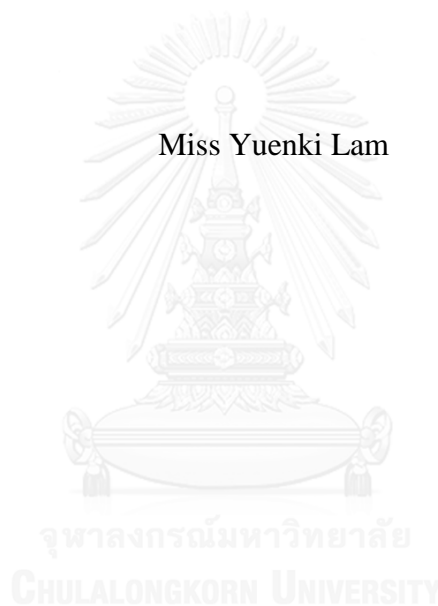


CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION AND TOURISM IN THAILAND: A CASE  
STUDY OF ASIATIQUE THE RIVERFRONT

Miss Yuenki Lam



บทคัดย่อและแฟ้มข้อมูลฉบับเต็มของวิทยานิพนธ์ตั้งแต่ปีการศึกษา 2554 ที่ให้บริการในคลังปัญญาจุฬาฯ (CUIR)  
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การแปลงวัฒนธรรมเป็นสินค้า กับการท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทย กรณีศึกษาเอเชียติก เดอะ รีเวอร์ฟ  
ร้อนท์



วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต  
สาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา (สหสาขาวิชา)  
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By	Miss Yuenki Lam
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เขินกี ลาม : การแปลงวัฒนธรรมเป็นสินค้า กับการท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทย กรณีศึกษา เอเชียทีค เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ (CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION AND TOURISM IN THAILAND: A CASE STUDY OF ASIATIQUE THE RIVERFRONT) อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: รศ. ดร.มนธิรา ราโท, 126 หน้า.

การท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมได้กลายเป็นเป้าหมายของการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทยในช่วงหลายปีที่ผ่านมา เนื่องจากนักท่องเที่ยวจำนวนมากแสวงหาประสบการณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมจากการเดินทางของพวกเขา รูปแบบใหม่ของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมให้ความสำคัญกับความสัมพันธ์ของการผลิตและการบริโภค ดังนั้น กระบวนการแปลงวัฒนธรรมให้เป็นสินค้าจึงมีโอกาสแยกออกจากอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวได้

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มุ่งศึกษารูปแบบของการแปลงวัฒนธรรมให้เป็นสินค้าในสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย ทั้งสำหรับนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติและคนในท้องถิ่น นอกจากนี้ ยังพยายามศึกษาและเปรียบเทียบมุมมองของคนในท้องถิ่นและชาวต่างชาติต่อรูปแบบของการแปลงวัฒนธรรมให้เป็นสินค้า ด้วยข้อจำกัดทางด้านทรัพยากรและเวลา ผู้วิจัยจึงเลือก เอเชียทีค เดอะริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ ซึ่งเป็นสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวที่มีชื่อเสียงแห่งหนึ่งของกรุงเทพมหานคร เป็นกรณีศึกษา เพราะเข้าถึงได้ง่ายและมีความหลากหลายของสินค้าเชิงวัฒนธรรม

ผลการวิจัยพบว่าสินค้าเชิงวัฒนธรรมถูกแบ่งออกเป็นสองชุดสำหรับนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติและคนในท้องถิ่นตามลำดับ ภูมิสถาปัตยกรรมที่มีนัยทางประวัติศาสตร์ของเอเชียทีค เดอะริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ สามารถดึงดูดความสนใจของผู้คนในท้องถิ่นให้มาเยี่ยมชม และในขณะที่เดียวกัน วิถีชีวิตของคนในท้องถิ่นก็ถูกแปลงให้เป็นสินค้าเพื่อดึงดูดความสนใจของนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติ การแปลงวัฒนธรรมให้เป็นสินค้าสำหรับนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติแบ่งออกเป็น 4 รูปแบบ ได้แก่ การปรับวัฒนธรรมต่างชาติให้เป็นท้องถิ่น การหยิบยืมวัฒนธรรมต่างชาติ การประยุกต์วัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่น และการใช้สัญลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมบนสินค้าของที่ระลึก ผลการวิเคราะห์แสดงให้เห็นว่า แม้สินค้าเชิงวัฒนธรรมจะสามารถดึงดูดความสนใจของนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติและคนในท้องถิ่นได้ในระดับที่แตกต่างกัน แต่ก็อาจกล่าวได้ว่า สินค้าเชิงวัฒนธรรมเป็นอีกปัจจัยหนึ่งที่สามารถดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวไปยังสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวต่างๆ ได้

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ลายมือชื่อนิติกร .....

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YUENKI LAM: CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION AND TOURISM IN  
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ADVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. MONTIRA RATO, Ph.D., 126 pp.

Cultural tourism becomes the direction of tourism development in Thailand in recent years because more and more tourists look for cultural experience during their trip. It is believed that new form of cultural tourism focused on the integration of production and consumption; therefore, process of cultural commodification exist inevitably in tourism industry.

This thesis attempts to study the pattern of cultural commodification, in contemporary Thailand, which target foreign tourists and local people. It also attempt to study and compare perceptions of local people and foreigners on the pattern of cultural commodification. Due to the limitation of resource and time, Asiatique the Riverfront, one of the famous tourist attractions of Bangkok is chosen to be the case study because it is accessible and well-integrated.

Result shows that there are two sets of commodified culture aim at foreign tourists and local people respectively. Historical landscape architecture of Asiatique the Riverfront is commodified to attract the local people; while lifestyle of the local people is commodified to attract foreign tourists. Cultural commodification which targets foreign tourists are summarized as four patterns, including localization of foreign culture, borrowing of foreign culture, adaptation of local culture and cultural symbolization used on souvenir products. Although findings show that commodified culture is attractive to both foreign tourists and local people to different extent, it can be said that commodified culture is another factor drawing flow of people to tourist attractions.

Field of Study: Southeast Asian Studies Student's Signature .....

Academic Year: 2016

Advisor's Signature .....

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## 1. Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1. Rationale/Background of the study

Mass tourism became popular in the 1950s and began to develop as an industry in Thailand in the late 1950s. Truong (1990) and Miller (1995) suggested that because of the agreement between Thailand and the US Department of Defense —where Thailand agreed to provide “Rest and Recreation” to the US soldiers during the Vietnam War — the sex industry and sex tourism began to develop in Thailand. According to Nuttavuthisit (2007), the government of Thailand recognizes the negative image of sex tourism, and thus initiated the Branding Thailand Project in 2001. The project aims at determining Thailand’s brand equity from the perceptions of prospective consumers towards Thailand, which focus mainly on cuisine, fashion and tourism (Maesincee, Nuttavuthisit, Ayawongs, & Phasukvanich, 2003). The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) strategically allocated the general theme of tourism in Thailand as cultural tourism.

In order to respond to the need of the tourism industry, many tourist attractions have been developed all over Thailand under the branding of experiencing Thai culture. Asiatique the Riverfront is one example; a large open-air entertainment complex in Bangkok that opened in 2012 which targets both foreign tourists and local people. In the website of the tourism authority of Thailand (<http://na.tourismthailand.org/Shopping/Asiatique-The-Riverfront--3636>, retrieved August 17, 2016), Asiatique is described as “a shopping place combining the elements of the Thai history and the modern lifestyle in a fabulous way under the concept of Festival Market and Living Museum.” It is listed as #30 of 471 things to do in Bangkok on the website of TripAdvisor. (<https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g293916-Activities-Bangkok.html>, retrieved August 17, 2016) It has also been selected as “*the best shopping area in Thailand*” in “2016 People’s Choice Awards Thailand”. (<http://www.tatnews.org/tat-revealed-the-17-mostfavourites-of->

[the-2016-peoples-choice-awards-thailand-voted-by-chinese-tourists/](#),  
retrieved August 17, 2016)

Apart from serving as a tourist attraction for foreign tourists, Asiatique the Riverfront also aimed at attracting local visitors when it opened in 2012, providing an alternative choice after Suan Lum Night Bazaar was closed in 2011. As Asiatique the Riverfront is located in the former docks of a Denmark-based East Asiatic Company that was founded in 1897, it bares historical importance to local people; it resembles the old Bangkok atmosphere in the reign of King Rama V when trading between the Kingdom of Siam and the Europeans flourished by offering a shopping experience next to the pier. (<http://travel.cnn.com/bangkok/play/asiatique-bangkok-tourist-trap-even-locals-can-love-191995/>, retrieved September 10, 2016)

Jovicic (2016) pointed out that new cultural tourism focused on the integration of production and consumption. Therefore, it is believed that process of cultural commodification exists. However, no further study has been done on cultural commodification in the context of tourism in Thailand. This thesis attempts to study the pattern of cultural commodification in modern Thailand targeting foreign tourists and the local people. Moreover, their expectation and satisfaction of the commodified culture will also be studied. Due to limited resources and time, Asiatique the Riverfront is selected as the case study since it is accessible and well-integrated.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

- 1) What is the original purpose of Asiatique the Riverfront?
- 2) How is Thai culture being represented and reinterpreted at Asiatique the Riverfront?
- 3) What do foreigners and local people think of Asiatique the Riverfront?

### **1.3. Objectives**

- 1) To examine the pattern of cultural commodification in Asiatique the Riverfront;
- 2) To study and compare the perception of local people and foreigners on the pattern of cultural commodification at Asiatique the Riverfront.

### **1.4. Hypotheses**

- 1) There are two sets of accessible consuming culture in Asiatique the Riverfront, targeting foreigners and local people. The historical atmosphere of the colonial era and the unique shopping and dining experiences are attractive to the local people. At the same time, Thai culture is also represented and reinterpreted in souvenirs, shows, events and architectural landscape which fulfill the image of Thailand from the tourist perspective;
- 2) Local people and tourists share different views on the commodified culture in Asiatique the Riverfront. As Asiatique the Riverfront became more tourist-oriented, the local people started to turn to other places to spend their leisure time. Meanwhile, more and more tourists enjoy Asiatique the Riverfront because in their perspective, it is an entertainment complex that represents different aspects of the Thai culture.

### **1.5. Keywords**

*Cultural commodification, cultural tourism, tourism in Thailand, Asiatique the Riverfront*

### **1.6. Scope of the research**

This thesis aims at studying the situation of cultural commodification in Thailand and the visitors' satisfaction regarding the commodified culture. There will be three major parts in this research: the origin of, the study of the



pattern of cultural commodification at, and the visitors' perception about Asiatique the Riverfront.

The research starts by studying the origin and architectural landscape of Asiatique the Riverfront in order to understand its objectives when it was built. The historical importance of its location will be studied, too, followed by its original purpose of renovation and whether the developer aimed at targeting foreign tourists or the local people by looking into the distribution of shops, entertainment facilities and shows operated in Asiatique the Riverfront.

Secondly, the pattern of cultural commodification at Asiatique the Riverfront will be studied. Apart from reviewing the distribution of shops, entertainment facilities and shows, shop owners will be interviewed regarding their choice of products, their major customers and similarities and differences between Asiatique and other night markets.

Lastly, the foreign tourists' and local people's perception on Asiatique the Riverfront will be analyzed through interviews and questionnaires; starting with their motivation to visit Asiatique, and followed by their satisfaction towards its commodified culture. This thesis aims at studying what foreign tourists and local people think about Asiatique the Riverfront.

### **1.7. Research methodology**

This is a qualitative study based on both qualitative and quantitative research methods, including field observation in Asiatique the Riverfront, distribution of questionnaires and interviews.

Firstly, observation and research of historical documents will be done to understand the origin of Asiatique the Riverfront. The way that Asiatique the Riverfront combines historical ambiance with modern retail theme will be studied through observing the decoration and architectural landscape in order

to understand how it attempts to attract local people. Shops and shows will be studied to analysis how Asiatique the Riverfront attracts foreign tourists and local people respectively. The pattern of cultural commodification will be summarized to understand what product providers think foreign tourists and local people are interested in.

Secondly, approximately one hundred copies of questionnaires will be distributed to foreigners and the local people in Asiatique the Riverfront. This research follows McKercher, Cros, and McKercher (2002) suggestions that all tourists are actually cultural tourists because they always have cultural contact during their visit. Therefore, questionnaires will be randomly distributed to individual tourists regardless of their travel motivation. The same questionnaires —which are designed to study the motivation to visit Asiatique the Riverfront and the satisfaction towards its entertainment facilities, shops and shows — will be distributed to foreign tourists and local visitors. Data collected from distributed questionnaires will be shown in pie charts and listed in tables.

Apart from field observation and distribution of questionnaires, interviews will also be done. Service providers will be interviewed to study the objectives of Asiatique the Riverfront and to determine who are their major customers; equally, service receivers —both foreign tourists and locals — will be interviewed to understand what they think of Asiatique the Riverfront. However, interview is not the primary methodology in this research; it is only done to provide further explanation of the questionnaire results.

### **1.8. Significance of the research**

- 1) The findings from this research can be used as guidelines for the local people who would like to delve into the tourism industry.
- 2) Outputs from this thesis can provide suggestions to Asiatique the Riverfront for future planning.

## **1.9. Literature Review**

### **1.9.1. Tourism in Thailand**

Mass tourism became popular in the 1950s and tourism began to develop as an industry in Thailand in the late 1950s. Thailand has been struggling to find out the most suitable and sustainable form of tourism since the 1950s and this shows in other academic research.

Because of the influence from the Second World War, the sex industry and sex tourism began to flourish in Thailand in the 1970s. Scholars researched the phenomenon and reasons why sex tourism became popular in Thailand (Miller, 1995; Ryan & Kinder, 1996; Truong, 1990). They also studied the influence of sex tourism in Thailand, especially in regard to the economic aspect (Bishop & Robinson, 1998; Leheny, 1995), sociological aspect (Clift & Carter, 2000; Jeffreys, 1999; Li, 1995) and health (E. Cohen, 1988; Ford & Koetsawang, 1991). Negative images that associated tourism in Thailand with the sex industry were therefore created. Apart from works focusing on sex tourism in Thailand, there are also studies focused on medical tourism (E. C. E. Cohen, 2008; NaRanong & NaRanong, 2011; A. Wilson, 2011), volunteer tourism (Broad, 2003) and government policies of tourism in Thailand (Brickshawana, 2003; Chaisawat, 2006; Kontogeorgopoulos, 1998; Krutwaysho & Bramwell, 2010; I. A. Morrison, Moufakkir, & Reisinger, 2013).

As suggested by the United Nations Environmental Program (as cited in Henkel, Henkel, Agrusa, Agrusa, and Tanner (2006), in order to develop sustainable tourism, the needs of the present tourists and host regions must be met while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Therefore, research on tourist perception of Thailand were done. Previous research shows that there are both positive and negative

perceptions of Thailand from foreign tourists. Positive perceptions include inexpensive shopping, exotic culture, friendly people, richness of natural and historical sites (R. Davies, 2003; Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Brown, 2001; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000); while the negative perception is mainly towards the sex industry (Prideaux\*, Agrusa, Donlon, & Curran, 2004; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). The government realised the need to eliminate the image of sex tourism from Thailand. Therefore, the Branding Thailand Project was initiated to reshape its image (Nuttavuthisit, 2007). There are works on the changing focus of tourism policy making in Thailand (Kaosa-ard, 1998; Krutwayscho & Bramwell, 2010; I. A. Morrison et al., 2013). The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) launched several marketing campaigns in response to the new image of tourism since 2010, including the “*Amazing Thailand*” campaign, the “*Discover Thainess*” campaign and more recently the “*Quality Leisure Destination through Thainess*” campaign. (<http://www.tatnews.org/history/>, retrieved July 08, 2016)

In the research conducted by Sapsanguanboon (2014), it is suggested that Bangkok has a strong potential for cultural tourism, however, it needs the cooperation between different shareholders in the tourism industry to achieve its goals. Nonetheless, research on cultural tourism in Thailand is limited; the earliest publication on the subject is *The Development of Cultural Tourism: Thailand* that was published by UNESCO (Jr., 1968), followed by *Thailand's Guidebook for Cultural and Heritage Tourism* that was published by the Ministry of Culture of Thailand in 2006. The latter provides a list of major cultural and historical tourist attractions. Case studies of cultural tourism have also been done by some scholars, including those regarding the management of Amphawa Waterfront Community (Sakdiyakorn & Sivarak, 2016); temples in Bangkok (Nasing, Rodhetbhai, & Keeratiburana, 2014); ancient monuments of lower central Thailand (Lerkplien, Rodhetbhai, & Keeratiboarana, 2013); and the local festival in Nong Khai Province

(Maneenetr & Tran, 2014). Nevertheless, these works focus mainly on the management of tourist attractions with significant historical elements. The present research could fill in the gap of information on newly developed tourist attractions which emphasize cultural experience.

### **1.9.2. Tourism Studies and Cultural Tourism Studies**

In order to fulfill the growing demand of cultural experience, cultural tourism has become the aim of tourism development in many host countries, including Thailand. Cultural tourism studies reinforce the discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of tourism to the local culture and they are closely related to the studies of the sociology of tourism which became popular among scholars in the 1980s. Cultural tourism is the alternative form of tourism that has replaced mass tourism since the beginning of the 1990s, since it suits the needs of the new generation. However, definitions of cultural tourism and cultural tourists are still debatable in the present. According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (1976), cultural tourism is the form of tourism which has the objective to discover and learn more about monuments and places of historical and artistic interest. However, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (1976) stated that this definition is only applicable to tangible heritage. (<http://www.univeur.org/cuebc/downloads/PDF%20carte/51.%20Cultural%20tourism.PDF>, retrieved April 26, 2017) Among scholars who work on cultural tourism, Richards' definition is the most widely accepted one. According to Richards (2001), cultural tourism is "not just the consumption of the cultural production of the past, but also of contemporary culture or the way of life of a people or region." Regardless, some scholars have argued that tourists who have contact with culture could be seen as cultural tourists, no matter if they are actively looking for a cultural experience or not. Since culture could be defined as the way of life of

people, all tourism could be defined as cultural tourism and all tourists could be viewed as cultural tourists in the modern society. McKercher et al. (2002) therefore categorized cultural tourism from both a motivational and experiential perspective. According to McKercher and Cros' theory, tourists could be identified as five types of cultural tourists, including the purposeful, the sightseeing, the serendipitous, the casual and the incidental cultural tourist.

There are many different areas in cultural tourism studies; however, this thesis would mainly focus on cultural commodification. Previous research on cultural commodification could be divided into two main parts: studies of the theoretical concept of cultural commodification and tourism, and case studies.

Studies of the concept of cultural commodification and tourism began in the early 1990s. *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture, and Commodification* (Gottdiener, 2000) attempts to examine the new forms of consumption in different cultural contexts. The collection provides theoretical concepts and case studies related to cultural consumption. The book aims at being listed as the main reference on future studies of cultural consumption. Although *New Forms of Consumption* only provide general knowledge about new forms of consumption, it does not focus on the discussion between tourism and cultural consumption. *Tourism, Consumption & Representation* —edited by Meethan, Anderson, and Miles (2006)— shows new approaches to tourism analysis focusing on the interplay between the production and consumption of tourist spaces. The book reflects important shifts that have occurred in contemporary society and the tourism studies field that was caused by globalization. In *Cultural Commodification and Tourism: A Very Special Relationship* (Macleod, 2006), the author considers culture as a commodity and discusses how culture is used to sell in some destinations in order to understand the

phenomenon of cultural globalization. According to Fiaus (2010), cultural commodification in tourism refers to the action of selling local culture and cultural artifacts to make profit and support the local economy. Some scholars believe that cultural commodification has a negative influence on tourism because it forbids tourists access to an authentic cultural experience and introduces a false culture to them. Fainstein (2007); Greenwood and Smith (1989); Taylor (2001) argued that commoditization of culture would lead to the loss of meaning and violation of the people's cultural rights; while some scholars believed that cultural commodification could benefit the local people (Cole, 2007).

Apart from the theoretical studies on cultural tourism, case studies on cultural tourism and cultural commodification have been done. In Greenwood's publication (1989), *Culture by the Pound: An Anthropological Perspective on Tourism as Cultural Commoditization*, the negative influence of cultural commoditization on traditional events in Fuenterrabia have been discussed. Case studies of cultural commodification in different aspects have been studied. For example, religious aspects in Burma (Philp & Mercer, 1999), Land of Israel (Shoval, 2000) and Lhasa (Adams, 1996); indigenous culture in America (Lippard, 1999) and Chicago (Hinsley, 1991); heritage in Sydney (Wirth & Freestone, 2003) and Eco-tourism (King & Stewart, 1996).

Studies focused particularly on cultural consumption and souvenirs have been done since the 2000s. Swanson and Horridge (2004) published a research titled *a Structural Model for Souvenir Consumption, Travel Activities, and Tourist Demographics* in 2004 which discussed the relationships between souvenir consumption and travel motivation, including travel activities and travel demographics. Results suggested that there is positive effect between travel activities and souvenir consumption. A thesis titled *Cultural Imagination and*

*Cultural Production in Cultural Tourism: A Case Study of Woodcrafts and Paintings as Tourist Arts in the Old Town of Lijiang* (Zhou, 2013) examines cultural construction and cultural imagination in cultural tourism. Brennan and Savage (2012) published a research to propose guidelines for business enterprises engaging with indigenous communities to protect their intellectual property right.

However, cultural commodification in Southeast Asia has not yet been studied. Cultural differences exist between different countries and relates to their historical background; thus, the pattern of cultural commodification will be different in the case of each country. Despite being one of the most successfully tourist destinations in the twentieth century, Thailand has not been properly studied; hence, this thesis could fill in the gap in the research by studying the pattern of cultural commodification in one of the most famous tourist attractions, and compare it to that of the government which provides guidelines for future tourism industry development.

### 1.9.2. Previous Study on Asiatique the Riverfront

Since Asiatique the Riverfront is a new entertainment complex that opened in 2012, research on the site is limited. There is only one research by Leepairat (2015) titled *Influence of Lifestyle and Expectation of Asiatique the Riverfront on the Decision to Use the Service among Consumers in Bangkok* (วิถีชีวิตและความคาดหวังของผู้บริโภคต่อเอเชียทีค เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ ที่ส่งผลต่อการตัดสินใจใช้บริการของประชาชนในเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร), which was written in Thai language.

In Leepairat's research, she aimed at studying the lifestyle and expectation of consumers in Bangkok who visited Asiatique the Riverfront and comparing the influence that lifestyle and expectations among consumers had on their decision to use the services at Asiatique



the Riverfront. Although Leepairat's study is not directly relevant to this research, some of the statistics that were collected could be used as a reference. Four-hundred sets of questionnaires were distributed at Asiatique the Riverfront and Leepairat concluded that consumers' expectations of the venue had a higher influence than their lifestyle did on their decision to visit the complex.

In Leepairat's research, consumers at Asiatique the Riverfront had three major expectations; firstly, they expected Asiatique the Riverfront to be a large, airy and not a crowded attraction; secondly, they expected the site to be a place with a pleasant atmosphere; and finally, they expected restaurants at Asiatique the Riverfront to be clean.

However, no further research on Asiatique the Riverfront —nor other newly developed tourist attraction — has been done in the context of cultural commodification. Therefore, this thesis could be a useful reference for future planning of tourist attraction targeting towards both, foreign tourists and local people.

### **1.10. Conceptual framework**

A number of concepts need to be mastered in order to grasp the pattern of cultural commodification in Thailand. Firstly, the definition of *culture* needs to be understood in order to comprehend what is being commodified. Moreover, *authenticity* is important to cultural tourism because cultural tourists always look for *it* during their travels; however, people involved in the travel industry realize that *authenticity* is difficult to be presented and less attractive, culture is more or less commodified by the government and local people participating in the industry, which comes to the concept of *cultural commodification*.

### 1.10.1. Definition of Culture and Cultural Tourism

The word *culture* had more than one hundred and sixty-four different definitions by the early 1990s (Spencer-Oatey & FRANKLIN, 2012). As cited by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, Avruch (1998) pointed out that there were three major approaches to define *culture* in the nineteenth century, some of which are still used in modern society. One of the approaches refers to culture as a special intellectual activity which only belongs to a small group of people; another approach views culture as a complex whole which includes nearly everything in everyday life, such as knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and whatever else is acquired by man as a member of society. The third approach emphasizes the uniqueness of the many varied cultures of different societies and reinforces one should never differentiate between high and low culture.

UNESCO's definition of *culture* in 2001 is the most widely accepted one in contemporary cultural discussion. According to UNESCO publication in 2006, culture is defined as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs." This research follows the definition of UNESCO that culture means everything in society or among people in a social group.

As culture refers to distinctive features in society, cultural diversity exists between different societies. Tourism is important for cultural diversity in the sense that all cultures could be expressed in the tourism industry and thus, achieve a form of intercultural dialogue leading to peace and facilitating sustainable development. (UNESCO, 2004)

### 1.10.2. Concept of Authenticity

In order to understand the concept of cultural commodification, it is important to understand that of authenticity. “Authenticity” is a philosophical concept that was first mentioned in the 1970s and it has been borrowed by the cultural tourism studies. E. Cohen (1988) suggested that people in modern society are in a quest for authenticity, but nothing outside can be relied upon to give weight to the individual’s sense of reality; therefore, they have to go out and search for authenticity. Cultural tourism is one of the ways they use to search for it. The alienated modern tourists search for authenticity, which is absent from their own world, in other places (MacCannell, 1976). Schouten (2007) suggested that it is necessary to distinguish between authenticity in the eye of the tourists and the local perspective. Authenticity in the eyes of a tourist has to do with the image of the past and the romanticized view of the tourist destination; while authenticity as self-perception has to do with the original meaning and value behind the cultures involved. The difference between authenticity from the tourist perspective and local perspective leads to another concept, staged authenticity. MacCannell (1973) suggested that staging could be seen as the way that local people guarantee the value of the tourism product, while at the same time safeguarding their private lives. It is said that staged authenticity is degrading the original cultures and it will diminish the cultural values. McKercher et al. (2002) also suggested that tourists do not look for true authenticity, but look for what they are happy to accept to be the authenticity of the place.

### 1.10.3. Concept of Cultural Commodification

It is clear that in the view of cultural tourists, the more authentic the experience could be, the better it is. However, commodification is an inevitable process in cultural tourism. The root of the word *commodification* is *commodity*, which means a kind of thing for use or

sale, an article of commerce or an object of trade. (Oxford English Dictionary) Commodification is a concept which first appeared in the 1848 Communist Manifesto (Marx & Engels, 1967) and which is used to explain Marx and Engels' view on the development of capitalism. According to Marx and Engels (1967), everything could become a commodity in a modern, industrial and capitalistic society. The word *commodification* was not in use until the 1970s; it refers to the process by which something that was not for sale gains economic value replacing their social value and being sold in the market (Polanyi & MacIver, 1957). Discussion on commodification in tourism got more attention in recent years because of the changing focus in the travel industry. According to Fiaus (2010), cultural commodification refers to the action of selling local culture and the cultural artifacts to make profit and support the local economy. Some scholars believe that cultural commodification has a negative influence on tourism because it denies tourists an authentic cultural experience and introduces a false culture to them (Fainstein, 2007; Taylor, 2001); while some scholars believe that cultural commodification could benefit the locals (Cole, 2007).

There are two terms that could be easily confused with *commodification*: *commoditization* and *commercialization*. *Commoditization* is used when a commodity loses its initial uniqueness and products become more similar from the buyers' point of view (Merriam-Webster); while *commodification* emphasizes the new economic value attached to the commodity by the market. *Commercialization* is a process to introduce new products to the market in order to earn money (Merriam-Webster). However, when talking about commodification, objects of trade are not restricted to the goods bare economic value itself, but anything intended for exchange.

In the content of tourism studies, cultural commodification is viewed as a negative process in which it transforms the culture of the tourist destination unavoidably. Critics on cultural commodification are based on two reasons: firstly, elements that are important to the community might be invisible or not attractive to tourist; secondly, process of re-contextualization and re-signification of culture might happen (UNESCO, 2006). However, in this research, cultural commodification is viewed as a natural process used to attract visitors to tourist attractions.

#### 1.10.4. Concept of Destination Branding

Destination branding is often used by governments in tourism planning and development. Literature on the concept appeared in the 2000s. According to A. Morrison and Anderson (2002), destination branding is a way to communicate a destination's unique identity through differentiating a destination from similar places. Destination branding could be done through emphasizing both tangible attributes and intangible elements (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Some scholars argued that destination branding is used to correct the existing negative image by placing emphasis on positive characteristics (Nuttavuthisit, 2007). Scholars attributed the success of destination branding to two elements, namely destination identity and destination image (Cai, 2002; Nandan, 2005). Destination identity is created by stakeholders of the tourism industry including the government and the locals; while destination image is the image in the tourists' minds. Destination identity and destination image correlate with each other, in that former creates a positive image for marketers to follow and tourists to perceive, while the latter also influences marketers' decision to establish and enhance the image of the destination.

Regarding the case of Thailand, as there is a negative image which associated tourism with sex industry (Hantrakul, 1988; Miller, 1995; Ryan & Kinder, 1996; Truong, 1990), the local government initiated the Branding Thailand project in 2001 (Nuttavuthisit, 2007). The major objectives of the project were to correct the negative image of sex tourism and develop new brand quality based on cuisine, fashion and tourism. Marketing campaigns on tourism have been launched by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) since 1997 in order to create a new destination identity. In 2010, the concept of Thainess was generated by TAT to promote the uniqueness of Thailand. (<http://www.tatnews.org/history/>, retrieved July 08, 2016)

#### 1.10.5. Concept of Thainess

*Thainess*, which is translated from the Thai word *khwaam pen thai* (ความเป็นไทย), means being Thai or the essence of being Thai. It is believed that *Thainess* is a concept created by intellectuals in the reign of King Rama V with the purpose of justifying the political structure that was facing challenges from the spread of Western culture. *Thainess* was constructed by giving new meaning to royal ceremonies and reconstructing the status of the king. It was defined as “the nation, religion and kingship” (Sattayanurak, 2008). After the Siamese Revolution in 1932, intellectuals defined *Thainess* differently because of the changing political structure. They started to include Thai culture and society as part of *Thainess*.” (Sattayanurak, 2008). In 2014, Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha stressed that the core values of Thai people should be clearly defined to build a strong nation. Therefore, he proposed twelve core values that could also be perceived as *Thainess*. (<http://www.thaigov.go.th/index.php/th/news1/item/84708-id84708>, retrieved August 24, 2016)

However, there is still lack of a widely accepted definition of *Thainess* in academic research. Metaveevinij (2014) pointed out that when intellectuals construct *Thainess*, it is necessary to construct “others” to emphasize the national bond among Thais. In other words, it is the difference between Thais and non-Thais that give the meaning of “being Thai” or *Thainess*. Therefore, it is difficult to define the meaning of *Thainess*.

This thesis does not attempt to define the meaning of *Thainess*; the concept will only be used in the context related to Thai culture from the perspective of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

#### 1.10.6. Concept of Symbolic Consumption

Symbolic consumption is a concept related to souvenir consumption and it becomes important in cultural tourism studies. Gordon (1986) suggested that tourists bring souvenirs from the destination to help them keep memories. Thus, they tend to look for symbolic souvenirs that make the intangible experience tangible. Swanson and Horridge (2004) categorized souvenirs into the following groups: mass-produced items and figurines, arts and crafts, gemstones, jewelry, leather goods, housewares, objects that depict wildlife and nature, markers depicting by word and picture or symbol the place represented by the souvenir, antiques, collectibles, clothing, postcards and local products. Lee, Brennan, and Savage (2012) pointed out that cultural tourists tend to look for authentic and quality souvenirs; accordingly, many souvenirs are based on presenting images of what is iconic or indigenous to the host country or region.

## 2. Chapter 2 Origin and development of Asiatique the Riverfront

This chapter presents the origin and development of Asiatique the Riverfront focusing on the renovation and reconstruction of the place where the complex is located, followed by the purposes of renovation, target visitors, management of Asiatique the Riverfront and its future plan. Asiatique the Riverfront aims at becoming an entertainment complex which caters both foreign tourists and local people. Nonetheless, results of the research show that the entertainment site has become more tourist oriented because of its management and future plan.

### 2.1. Basic background information of Asiatique the Riverfront

Asiatique the Riverfront is a large open-air entertainment complex in Bangkok that opened in 2012. It is located on Charoēn Krung Road (ถนนเจริญกรุง) in Bang Khō Lāem District (บางคอแหลม), facing the Chao Phraya River. (Photo1) As suggested in the Asiatique Thailand Official Channel on YouTube, tourists can enjoy “extraordinary activities all year round in the historical ambiance of this very special property”. It is also states that “the prosperity of the past as a game being rejuvenated here at Asiatique the Riverfront.”([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVopxb\\_LQmI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVopxb_LQmI), retrieved 17 September, 2016) From marketing materials obtained from Asiatique the Riverfront and the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the complex is advertised under a retail theme with a historic architectural landscape in which visitors can experience the old Bangkok atmosphere next to the Chao Phraya River while enjoy shopping and a dining experience.

Asiatique the Riverfront bears historical importance because of its location; it is situated in the former docks of a Denmark-based East Asiatic Company which was one of the first Western firms conducting trade with Siam at that time. The historical building was kept until 2011 when the TCC Land Company Limited announced its plans to renovate and develop the site into Asiatique the Riverfront. The old warehouse and waterfront properties



were renovated as shops, boutiques and restaurants in order to fulfill the needs of visitors.

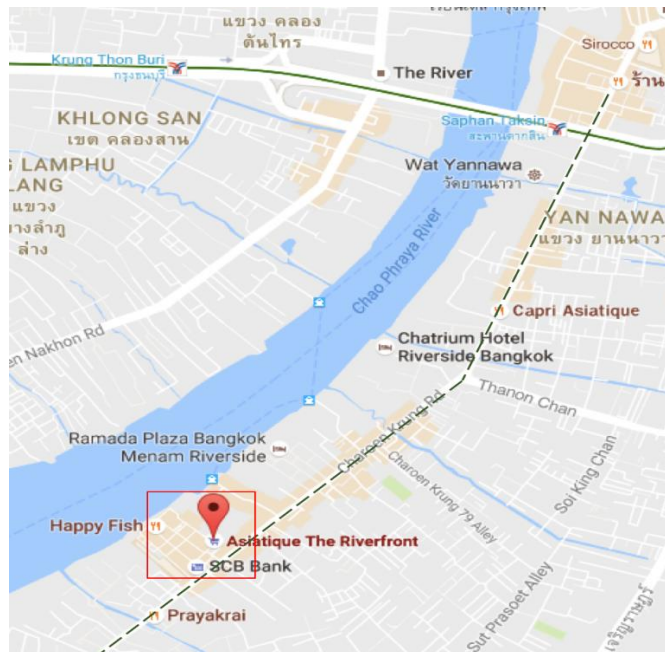


Figure 1. Location of Asiatique the Riverfront  
(Source: Google Map)

## 2.2. History of Charoēn Krung Road

Trading between foreign countries and Siam began to flourish in the late nineteenth century. Bangkok became the trading and economic centre of Siam and people used to rely on water transportation, however, there were only few roads in Bangkok which were near the palace and they were used for palace and religious purposes. Thus, there was a need to develop a better infrastructure system in Bangkok.

Three new roads were built under the command of the King Mongkut in 1860, namely Charoēn Krung Road (ถนนเจริญกรุง), Bamrung Mueang Road (ถนนบำรุงเมือง) and Fūang Nakhon Road (ถนนเฟื่องนคร). The three roads are connected and located in Phra Nakhon districts of Bangkok. They are the first group of roads which were built to purposely benefit the people. After the roads were built, the area became the most important commercial area in

the reign of the King Rama V and this could be seen from the varieties of shops in it. There were shopping centers and shops owned by Europeans, Persians and Chinese along the roads; there were also religious buildings, pawnshops, printing shops and many more (Preyawanit, 2014).

Charoen Krung Road was the longest and most important road developed at that time among all three of them. After it was finished, King Mongkut rearranged houses along the road as commercial buildings and arranged them as row houses. Commercial buildings were offered for rent and most of the tenants were Chinese and other non-Asian foreigners; hence, there were houses with Western influence and boutiques which sold Western clothing, hats and shoes. Before Charoen Krung Road was built, there were only few tenants there during the reign of the king Rama IV. Real estate projects along Charoen Krung Road under the instruction of King Mongkut were the first—and also considered the most successful ones—in Bangkok (Kraipakorn, 2013, pp. 7-9).

### 2.3. Trading between Siam and foreign countries

Commerce relations between foreign countries and Siam began to develop in the nineteenth century during the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V. Winichakul (2000) suggested that Siam had to conceptualize itself in relation to the rest of the world at that time because the elites realized that Siam needed to be *siwilai* in order to maintain its power. Before the British and Siam signed the Bowring Treaty in 1855, which could also be called Treaty of Friendship and Commerce, foreign trade already existed in Siam and it was one of the major tax incomes. Before signing the Bowring Treaty, trading in Siam was mostly transacted with Indians, Chinese and Portuguese from Macao rather than Westerners. Notwithstanding, only after the British and Siam signed the Bowring Treaty in 1855, foreign trading began to be liberalized in Siam (C. M. Wilson, 1989). Trading in Siam was officially opened up in April 1856. Thus, more and more foreign merchants and businessmen decided to settle there (Wannamethee, 1990, pp. 156-189).

The British and other foreign investment firms were interested in making investments in the teak forest in Northern Siam immediately after the treaty was signed. According to Barton and Bennett (2010, p. 65), after the British companies Borneo Company Ltd and the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation Ltd (BBTC) entered the Siam teak market in the 1880s, a new page in British-Siamese relations in the northern Siam began. The BBTC, the Foreign Office and the Government of India monopolized northern Siam between the 1880s and 1890s. It is believed that the monarchy strategically allowed the British to occupy the forest in northern Siam in order to centralize the local people in northern Siam and also as a measure against French invasion in the early 1900s. In return, British merchants held a virtual monopoly on teak leases.

By 1905, there were six European companies working on the teak forests after they opened up, including four British companies, one Danish company and one French company. The East Asiatic Company, formerly located at what is today Asiatique the Riverfront, was one of them (Barton & Bennett, 2010, p. 205). As forestry was an important foreign policy between Siam and Western countries in nineteenth century, The East Asiatic Company witnessed the opening of Siam to the West; thus giving the site a certain significance in the history of Thailand.

#### 2.4. Before Asiatique the Riverfront: The East Asiatic Company LTD

The East Asiatic Company was the only Danish company which participated in teak related business in Siam in the late nineteenth centuries. It was a Danish shipping and trading firm, and it was also the largest single private foreign capital investor in Thailand by 1954.

Before it became Asiatique the Riverfront, the place belonged to the East Asiatic Company—a teak trading company owned by the Danish. Founded

in January 1897, it was one of the teak exporters that gained concessions to log some of the most abundant forests in Siam. East Asiatic Co Ltd was the first company to ship teak and other commodities from Siam to Europe by steamship. The headquarters of East Asiatic Company is located next to Oriental Hotel on the banks of the Chao Phraya River and the building is still in fair condition; while the place where Asiatique the Riverfront is today was a series of warehouses with different processing functions.

## 2.5. Importance of the location of Asiatique the Riverfront

Location is crucial to the marketing orientation of Asiatique the Riverfront because of two major reasons, including the symbol of modernization and historical significance.

Firstly, the location of Asiatique the Riverfront is a symbol of modernization since it is located at Charoen Krung Road, which was one of the first important roads built in the reign of King Rama V. It marks the beginning of a process of modernization in Siam as they previously used to rely on water before a land transportation system was developed. Moreover, the location that Asiatique the Riverfront was the site of the East Asiatic Company. Although the East Asiatic Company was not a British company, it still marks the opening of Siam in the late nineteenth century, a crucial step in the modernization process of Thailand. It was because the monarchy decided to open the country for foreign investment that the modernization process of Siam could take Western countries as reference. Meanwhile, some scholars believed that it was because of the modernization process that foreign intervention into Siam was reduced.

Secondly, the location of Asiatique the Riverfront has a historical significance; it is situated next to the Chao Phraya River —the major waterway in Thailand. In the old days, the Chao Phraya River was a large-scale transportation road to travel between cities and transfer goods. For example, elephants were used to haul the logs from forest to the river;

afterwards, logs were floated individually down the Chao Phraya River and exported to foreign countries. Moreover, there are cities along the Chao Phraya River and many of those — such as Ayutthaya, Nonthaburi and Bangkok — are of historic significance.

## 2.6. From warehouse of the East Asiatic Co. Ltd to Asiatique the Riverfront

Davies published a dissertation titled *Industrial Heritage Buildings and Sites in Thailand from The 1850's-1960s: the Relationship of the Architecture, Communities and Narratives*. She showed the recording and documentation of some industrial heritage sites in one of the chapters and the warehouses of East Asiatic Company were one of the subjects (J. J. Davies, 2008, pp. 132-146). As there is lack of comprehensive research or documentation on the structure of the warehouses of the East Asiatic Company, Davies' dissertation provided an important source for the comparison between the original structure of the warehouses and Asiatique the Riverfront.

In Davies' dissertation, she describes that the central warehouses facing the Chao Phraya River are comprised by five concrete framed arched brick structures. Among these, the middle arch was slightly smaller than the others. A photo taken by Davies in 2008, shows that the name of the company was printed on the middle of the arch. Moreover, there were steel trusses and decorative concrete framing around the brickwork. Davies suggested that the East Asiatic Co. Ltd intended to reflect the European identity of the company through the construction material and style of the architecture. Different from the five concrete framed arched brick warehouses facing the Chao Phraya River, the other warehouses were rectangular sheds. Davies described the structure of the rectangular shed warehouses as “a mixture of concrete columns, timber member and corrugated metal panels with some reinforced steel at the column bases.”

Apart from the warehouses, there was a residential house which was believed to be the house of the manager of the East Asiatic Company. According to Davies, the residential house was built similar to other European houses built in Asia around the same period. However, the residential house was in bad condition and needed sensitive conservation to retain its original status.

Before the place was renovated as Asiatique the Riverfront, the warehouses were used only for storage purposes but not for manufacturing anymore. Davies believed that the owner of the warehouses of the East Asiatic Company was aware of the historical importance of the place and hoped to bring a new chapter to this historical site.

The warehouses of the East Asiatic Company were renovated and developed into Asiatique the Riverfront and opened to the public in 2012. Compared to the research done by Davies that was mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is believed that the developer of Asiatique the Riverfront tried to keep the style and structure of the original warehouses while improving some of the features to suit the new usage of the place and better introduce history of the place to visitors.

There are a number of similarities between the structure of Asiatique the Riverfront and the warehouses of the East Asiatic Company. Based on the observations at the present site, the five concrete framed arched brick structures facing the Chao Phraya River remain in their original condition. The structures have been kept and renovated as restaurants and bars. (Photo 2) The middle arch is slightly smaller than the others with the name of the company "*The East Asiatic Company Limited*" repainted on it. (Photo 3 and 4) Steel trusses and decorative concrete are still kept in some warehouses. (Photo 5) Moreover, other warehouses have a rectangular shed which is similar to the original structure. (Photo 6 and 7) Regarding the residential house that was believed to be that of the manager of the company, it is

situated at its original position and is still in sensitive condition. (Photo 8)  
 Under the management of Asiatique the Riverfront, the residential house is  
 railed and not open to the public. (Photo 9) Asiatique the Riverfront put a  
 sign in front of the residential house in order to explain its historical  
 significance and stated that it will be open soon. (Photo 10)



Figure 2. Five Concrete Framed Arched Brick Structures Renovated as Bars and Restaurants

(Source: Photo taken by author)



Figure 3. Middle arch Maintaining the Original Style



Figure 4. Repainted Name of the Company

(Source: Photo taken by author)

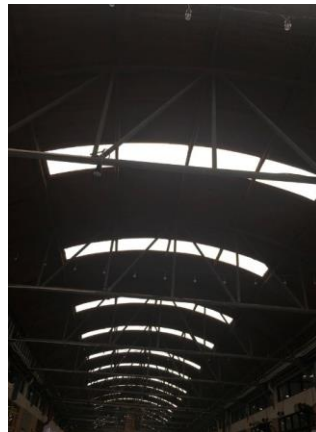


Figure 5. Steel Trusses and Decorative Concrete Kept in the Warehouses  
*(Source: Photo taken by author)*



Figure 6. Rectangular Shed Warehouse



Figure 7. Rectangular Shed Warehouse 2

*(Source: Photo taken by author)*



Figure 8. Residential House



Figure 9. Residential House 2

*(Source: Photo taken by author)*





Figure 10. Sign in front of the Residential House

*(Source: Photo taken by author)*

It is believed that Asiatique the Riverfront has tried to keep the original structure of the warehouses of the East Asiatic Company. However, since it emphasizes the historical atmosphere during the reign of King Rama V it might not be familiar to both the foreign and young generations in Thailand. Asiatique the Riverfront recreates and re-emphasizes its historical ambiance in various ways:

Firstly, structures and decorations added by Asiatique the Riverfront reproduce the historical atmosphere of the place. Symbolic structures and decorations are used to re-emphasize the close relations between Western countries and Siam at that time, such as the directory board (Photo 11) and European flags hanged near the pier. (Photo 12) European flags reflect the historical relation between European countries and the area where Asiatique the Riverfront is nowadays. Apart from Western style structures and decorations, local style is also added to reproduce the historical scenes. Flags of Siam are used to decorate the drop off point of shuttle boats offered by Asiatique the Riverfront. (Photo13) The flag of Siam (ธงช้างเผือก) is the image of a white elephant facing to the hoist with a red background. It was used between 1855 and 1916, the period when trading between Siam and foreign countries became important. It was also the period when the warehouses of

the East Asiatic Company were built. (<http://www.siamflag.org>, retrieved October 7, 2016) Furthermore, the entrance to the market was built based on typical King Chulalongkorn architecture. (Photo 14)

Secondly, in order to introduce the origin and development of Asiatique the Riverfront to visitors who lack in background knowledge of the place, information boards were set near two main entrances, including the promenade along the Chao Phraya River and the entrance from Charoen Krung Road. (Photo 15) According to the introduction on the information boards, the land where Asiatique the Riverfront is located was not only that of a royal temple, but also Siam's earliest sawmills, trading port with the world and the Japanese army's base and arms depot during World War II. Hence, the land that Asiatique the Riverfront occupies witnessed the transformation of Thailand from "Venice of the East" to "Siamese Metropolis". The port of the East Asiatic Company is described as the symbol of Siamese globalization because the company had grown into one of the world's largest trading giants at that time. Heavy machinery, equipment and exotic goods from Europe entered Siam through its port.

Thirdly, bronze statues are used to reproduce the maritime activity of the place that once was the most important trading port in Siam. A statue of an anchor is displayed on the promenade located in front of the middle warehouse and facing the Chao Phraya River. (Photo 16) Anchors are used as the symbols of trading ports because they are used to prevent vessels from drifting. There are also statues of merchants on the harbor which are talking to each other and looking into the distance. From the appearance and clothing of the merchants, the three statues represent a Chinese, a Thai and a European merchant respectively. (Photo 17) These statues mark the trading relationship between different powers during the reign of Rama V, which emphasize the importance of the place where Asiatique the Riverfront is located. There are statues of porters moving wares along the Chao Phraya River. (Photo 18) There is also a statue of a Chinese rickshaw and its driver with a descriptive

plaque located in the public area near Charoen Krung Road. (Photo 19) Rickshaws were brought to Siam by rich people as their private forms of transportation. After that, Chinese companies saw the opportunity to develop rickshaws as public transport making them quite popular in Siam by the end of the nineteenth century. Rickshaw service provided by the Chinese was the preferred mode of transportation until it was banned by the government and replaced by other transportation systems. (Photo 20) The auto rickshaw was then developed into the Thai style *tuk tuk* in a later period.



Figure 11. Directory Board



Figure 12. European Flags Hanging along the Pier

(Source: Photo taken by author)



Figure 13. Flag of Siam



Figure 14. Entrance to the Market

(Source: Photo taken by author)



Figure 15. Information Boards  
(Source: Photo taken by author)

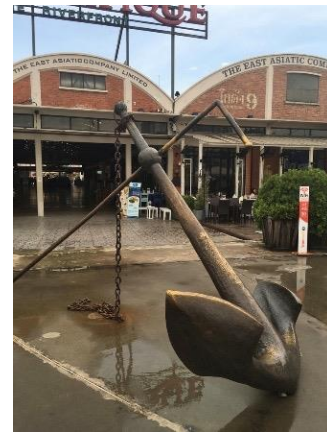


Figure 16. Statue of an Anchor  
(Source: Photo taken by author)



Figure 17. Statues of Chinese, Thai and European Merchants  
(Source: Photo taken by author)



Figure 18. Statue of Porters



Figure 19. Statue of Chinese Rickshaw and its Driver



Figure 20. Descriptive Plaque of Chinese Rickshaw and its Driver

(Source: Photo taken by author)

## 2.7. Original Purpose of the Renovation and Outcome

### 2.7.1. Renovation and opening of Asiatique the Riverfront

In the interview that Davies (2008) conducted with the owner of the warehouses of the East Asiatic Company, the latter expressed his awareness of the historical significance of the place. Additionally, he expressed his intention to take the warehouses and residential unit into a new chapter. It is difficult to know if the idea of a festival market with a historical atmosphere had been born at that time, but the owner's awareness and intention were probably one of the crucial reason that lead to the renovation of the place.

Asiatique the Riverfront was officially open to the public on April 27, 2012. In a news article by *The Nation* on May 13, 2012, the site was described as a new star in Bangkok's western horizon. It is described as "another complex of shops, pubs, movie theaters that had sprung up in almost every city district that was claimed to be different as it was the only riverside attraction with Western or American style." (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/life/aec/30181818>, retrieved October 19, 2016).

Napat Charoenkul, project director of Asiatique the Riverfront, responded in *the Nation's* article that they wanted to build a festival market and a living museum. Therefore, they kept the original warehouse structures and rebuilt some of the wooden houses to suit the new usage of the place. Napat Charoenkul also pointed out that the four districts at Asiatique the Riverfront were inspired by major trading centers in the old days in Siam. *Charoenkrung* district features local products to attract tourists; *Town Square* is where Thais and Westerners meet; *The Factory district* features local designers' products and

international brands; and the *Waterfront* is a three-hundred meter riverside promenade.

The warehouse of the East Asiatic Company is a seventy-two rai site. *Rai* (ไร่) is a measurement for land in Thailand, which equals to 1600 m<sup>2</sup> or about 0.4 of an acre. After renovation, Asiatique the Riverfront comprises a 23.47 acre entertainment complex. The company spent about one billion Thai Baht on renovations and transformation. The warehouse of the East Asiatic Company is now replaced by one thousand five hundred shops, forty-five restaurants, shows and other entertainment facilities.

#### 2.7.2. Targeted customers and number of visitors

According to the interview with Napat in *The Nation's* article, Asiatique the Riverfront aimed at being a *must see* venue for foreign tourists as well as attracting shoppers from Bangkok and around. In an article on *CNN Travel*, Asiatique the Riverfront is described as “a riverside tourist trap even the locals can love”. The idea of the site is believed to be inspired by the trade days along the Chao Phraya River during the Bangkok period; and its renovation as a shopping and entertainment complex gives local people a reason to visit the area again (<http://travel.cnn.com/bangkok/play/asiatique-bangkok-tourist-trap-even-locals-can-love-191995/>, retrieved October 19, 2016). Dhwat Sommanobhat, head of marketing and public relations of Riverside Masterplan Co, revealed in an article published on *The Nation* on August 03, 2013 that Asiatique the Riverfront catered to customers with high purchasing power (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/business/property/30211769>, retrieved October 21, 2016). Therefore, it could be concluded that target customers for Asiatique the Riverfront are high to middle income people, including both foreigners and locals.

In the first two years, the ration of Thai and foreign visitors was achieved. According to data provided to The Nation and published in 2013, the ratio of Thai and foreign visitors is 50:50. Likewise, about thirty to forty-thousand tourists visited Asiatique the Riverfront per day in 2013, which generated an annual cash flow of three billion baht. According to a report by The *Bangkok Post*, there were ten million visitors in 2013 and the top three foreign markets were Hong Kong, Japan and China. It is also reported that foreign tourists spent ฿3,000 to ฿5,000 per visit per head; while Thais spent around ฿2,000. In the first two months of 2014, total number of visitors dropped by 25% while Hong Kong and Chinese tourists dropped by 95%. Mr. Dhwat believed that the number of visitors dropped because of political demonstrations and political upheaval. (<http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/399409/>, retrieved October 19, 2016). According to the data provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of Thailand (Thailand, 2016), the number of visitors in February and March 2014 dropped by 12.33% and 13.10% compared to same months in 2013. Among all nationalities, the number of tourists from China and Hong Kong dropped the most, with 22.57% and 62.42% respectively. Thus, it is believed that Mr. Dhwat's interpretation was correct.

Statistics show that Asiatique the Riverfront attracted both local people and foreign tourists successfully when it was first open. Notwithstanding, the number of visitors dropped in the first quarter of 2014. Although no further statistics on the number of visitors and the visitors' nationalities has been revealed since 2014, based on observations done Asiatique the Riverfront, there is a tendency showing that the ratio between locals and foreigners has changed. There are more foreign tourists than local visitors, and Asians —particularly tourists from Hong Kong, mainland China and Korea — still compose the majority of the visitors of Asiatique the Riverfront.

## 2.8. Management of Asiatique the Riverfront

Management of an entertainment complex or tourist attraction is crucial to the marketing orientation and development of the place. The management company may select their target visitors by selecting shops and restaurants. Therefore, the marketing orientation of Asiatique the Riverfront could be studied by studying its management.

### 2.8.1. Vendors at Asiatique the Riverfront

In 2013, Mr. Dhwat Sommanobhat, head of marketing and public relations of Riverside Masterplan Co, said that the occupancy rate at Asiatique the Riverfront was one hundred percent. At the same time, there were more than two thousand people on waiting list that would have liked to be tenants. Accordingly, Asiatique the Riverfront planned to increase the rental fee at the end of each three-year contract. Mr. Dhwat said that rental fee was important to the operation of the complex as it represent sixty to seventy percent of the site's revenue.

Based on the discussion on *Pantip.com* —and interviews with vendors at Asiatique the Riverfront — information on the criteria to choose the new vendors, and the actual difficulties that vendors-to-be needed to tackle were summarized. *Pantip.com* is a popular discussion forum in Thai language, which allows discussions on variety of topics. In order to register as members of *Pantip.com*, visitors have to provide their Thai National ID number or passport number. Consequently, it is believed that members take responsibility for their positions and opinions. At the same time, and as stated before, since Asiatique the Riverfront rejected the request for an interview the studies are based solely on the vendors' perception.



It is true that the occupancy rate at Asiatique the Riverfront is still one hundred percent and there are many people on the waiting list since it opened to the public. If they are interested in renting a booth and contact offices of the site, Asiatique the Riverfront would ask them to leave personal information to contact them later in the event that a booth becomes available. However, the probability of securing a booth is almost impossible. Furthermore, based on the observations, one hundred percent occupancy rate does not mean that all booths are being operated regularly. A number of shops —especially those located at warehouse one to four — are closed and have put a notice for transfer of rental. Vendors at Asiatique the Riverfront stated that it was actually a violation of the rules to transfer the booth to other vendors without notifying the management. If Asiatique the Riverfront finds out, the contract would be terminated and the booth has to be vacated.

People who are interested in renting a booth at Asiatique the Riverfront found out that the company was strict in choosing new vendors. It is difficult for people without experience to rent a booth because Asiatique the Riverfront would like to maintain the standard of the market in order to attract more visitors. Moreover, there is a selection method based on the vendor's products; if there are plenty of shops selling similar merchandise in the area, Asiatique the Riverfront prefers looking for variety in order to maintain a positive competition among vendors and give tourists more choice. Some merchants also believed that without personal connection to Asiatique the Riverfront, it is nearly impossible to rent a booth because there are too many people on the waiting list at this point in time.

When Asiatique the Riverfront first opened in 2012, rental fees were much cheaper than they are now (as in 2016). According to the discussion on Pantip.com, the rental fee for a nine square meter booth was between ₱15,000 to ₱30,000 per month. The rental fee was cheaper

than that of a shopping mall, but considering Asiatique the Riverfront only operates at night—and there is no air conditioner—the rental fee was reasonable. However, Asiatique the Riverfront increased 60% of the rental fee in 2015 and vendors complained that it was unaffordable for them. Vendors who talked to Asiatique the Riverfront said that the reason given for the increase was that they realized that there were cases of transfer of rental, which set the fee higher than the original price. Therefore, Asiatique the Riverfront decided to take the initiative to avoid such misbehavior. One of the vendors revealed that the rental fee for his nine square meter booth was increased to ฿43,200 from ฿27,000. Vendors were thus dissatisfied that Asiatique the Riverfront did not care about their livelihood. As Asiatique the Riverfront increased the rental fee, it is normal that some of the vendors could not afford anymore and have had to move out since. Meanwhile, as new vendors need to pay for a higher rental fee, merchandise at Asiatique the Riverfront has become more expensive and therefore, products and services in general have increased in cost through the complex. One of the vendors suggested that the easiest way for them to survive was to target foreign tourists as they have higher purchasing power compared to local people.

#### 2.8.2. Dual and standard price at Asiatique the Riverfront

When Asiatique the Riverfront was open in 2012, there was a scandal about dual-standard prices of *Asiatique Sky*, the Ferris Wheel located in site. In 2012, Asiatique the Riverfront posted on their official Facebook page in Thai what could be translated as: children ฿150, adults ฿200 and foreigners ฿250. Richard Barrow, a well-known blogger in Thailand, aware of the situation commented on the Facebook page asking for an explanation. Asiatique the Riverfront did not respond immediately; instead, they blocked the blogger from their Facebook page and distanced themselves from the owner of *Asiatique*

*Sky*. Nevertheless, *Asiatique the Riverfront* failed to cover up the scandal and was boycotted by both foreigners and Thais. At the end, *Asiatique Sky* announced that both foreign tourists and local people would share the same standard price tickets, which is ฿250 per ride.

As Richard Barrow was disappointed on *Asiatique the Riverfront*, he published an article on his blog (<http://www.richardbarrow.com/2012/12/why-asiatique-the-riverfront-has-banned-me-from-theirfacebook-page/>, retrieved October 23, 2016 ) titled *Why Asiatique the Riverfront has banned me from their Facebook page*. More than one hundred people shared their thoughts on the dual-standard prices of *Asiatique Sky*. They argued that *Asiatique the Riverfront* targeted middle to high income local people, so a ฿50 discount would not be the factor that would influence their decision making; it was simply because dual-standard prices are common practice in Thailand and they tend to charge foreign tourists more.

Although *Asiatique Sky* (<http://asiatiquesky.com/>, retrieved April 24, 2017) announced a standard price policy after the scandal in 2012, dual-standard prices still exist. In October 2015, ticket per adult costed ฿300 —written clearly on the ticket booth in English. However, based on the researcher's experience, when people who speak Thai language walk pass the ticket booth, the staff at *Asiatique Sky* offer them each ticket at ฿250. It is undeniable that dual-standard prices still exist and *Asiatique the Riverfront* does not want foreign tourists to know about their policy. It reflects that the management companies of *Asiatique Sky* and *Asiatique the Riverfront* are not serious about the dual-standard prices situation. As a famous tourist attraction in Thailand, this practice reflects that tourism service providers believe in a higher purchasing power of foreign tourists compared to that of the local people.

## 2.9. Future plans of Asiatique the Riverfront

Asiatique the Riverfront achieved great success as community mall along the Chao Phraya River and it becomes new form of cultural tourism in Thailand, in which tourist could enjoy historical atmosphere, gain cultural experience and shopping at the same time. Therefore, TCC Land group, the developer of Asiatique the Riverfront, saw a business opportunity and decided to expand the area.

According to an article on *Destination Thailand News*<sup>1</sup> in December 2014, TCC Land Asset World have planned the second phase of Asiatique the Riverfront which will be located next to current site of Asiatique the Riverfront. Mr. Napat pointed out that second phase would be designed to better cater to the needs of both foreign tourists and local people. Consequently, there will be family restaurants, fashions stores, designer products and branded goods in the second phase of Asiatique the Riverfront. Added to that, there will also be a hotel to serve the needs of MICE market (meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition). TCC Land Asset World announced the detailed plan for the phase two of Asiatique the Riverfront at the end of 2016. According to an article on *The Nation* published on September 2016, TCC Land Asset World had planned to spend ten billion Thai baht on developing the second phase of the entertainment complex. Construction of the new phase of Asiatique the Riverfront will begin in 2018 and is expected to be finished in 2020. There will be a five-star hotel, three thousand square meters of convention facilities and ten thousand square meters of shopping arcades. The major attraction of the new phase of Asiatique the Riverfront will be a special design floating fine-dining restaurant inspired by a

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<sup>1</sup> Destination Thailand News. 2014. "TCC land announces development plans for 3 projects of retail group in 2015, designates the Asiatique team to lead future success, as well as move forward with Asiatique phase 2." December 8. <http://destinationthailandnews.com/tourism/attractions/tcc-land-announces-development-plans-for-3-projects-of-the-retail-group-in-2015-designates-the-asiatique-team-to-lead-future-success-as-well-as-move-forward-with-asiatique-phase-2.html>, accessed October 24, 2016

royal vessel from the reign of King Rama V, which is consistent with the historical atmosphere being emphasized in the current Asiatique the Riverfront. Based on field research done at Asiatique the Riverfront, there are plenty of fashion stores, designer products and branded goods located between warehouses five and nine. Therefore, apart from the floating fine-dining restaurant, the second phase of Asiatique the Riverfront does not creative enough to attract foreign tourists and local people (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/business/EconomyAndTourism/30289330>, retrieved September 27, 2016).

Asiatique the Riverfront has, once again, brought back prosperity to the Chao Phraya River, hence, more and more retail and hospitality businesses are being developed around the area. Apart from the second phase of Asiatique the Riverfront, TCC Land Group also owns a forty rai (64,000 m<sup>2</sup>) site in Thonburi district, which is the opposite bank of Asiatique the Riverfront. Moreover, the Public Warehouse Organization Ministry of Commerce Thailand planned to open bidding for the land “*Thon Buri Warehouse*” and suggested that there were old warehouses that could be renovated and constructed as a community mall similar to Asiatique the Riverfront (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/business/macroeconomics/30289330>, retrieved October 27, 2016). There are also other new malls and property developments along the Chao Phraya River including *Tha Maharaj*, *Yodpiman River Walk*, *Icon Siam*, etcetera.

#### 2.10. Analysis on the origin and development of Asiatique the Riverfront

Asiatique the Riverfront aimed at attracting both foreign tourists and local people when it was opened in 2012. In its future plan, it still aims at attracting both high to middle income foreigners and locals. However, the development and management of Asiatique the Riverfront might not be able to respond to its purposes in the future.

The atmosphere of Asiatique the Riverfront could be used to attract both foreign tourists and locals to visit the place. Foreign tourists and local visitors consume at Asiatique the Riverfront in different ways; the atmosphere of festival market may attract foreigners to visit and purchase souvenir products at the place; while the Chao Phraya River and Western atmospheres attract local people to relax at bars and restaurants or take photos at Asiatique the Riverfront.

Nonetheless, Asiatique the Riverfront has become more tourist oriented because of the management of the place. Due to the increasing rental fee, more and more vendors have turned to sell mass-produced souvenirs to foreign tourists as it results more cost-effective. Meanwhile, products with more particular characteristics or hand-made products are much less cost-effective. As mass-produced souvenirs are attractive to foreign tourists but not to local people, more and more of the former visit the place while less of the latter consume at Asiatique the Riverfront.

Moreover, the future plans for Asiatique the Riverfront and the adjacent area will also lead the complex to become a foreign tourist oriented attraction. As there will be more retail and hospitality businesses —together with a hotel in the area — it will definitely attract more foreigners and customers from the MICE market.

### **3. Chapter 3 Pattern of cultural commodification at Asiatique the Riverfront**

As mentioned before, Asiatique the Riverfront describes itself as an entertainment complex which seeks to provide most of the elements that both foreign tourists and local people look for, and this is the major reason that lead to the fast growth of Asiatique the Riverfront in past years. Based on the researcher's observations, there are two sets of cultural commodification at Asiatique the Riverfront targeting foreign tourists and local people respectively. In this chapter, facilities and landscape of the place are studied first, followed by a discussion on the pattern of cultural commodification at Asiatique the Riverfront and how the site responds to different visitors' needs.

#### **3.1. Concept of authenticity**

The academic concept of authenticity has been discussed in section 1.10.2 of the present thesis. It is suggested by Schouten (2007) that it is necessary to distinguish between authenticity in the eyes of tourists and the local perspective. Thus, before analyzing the pattern of cultural commodification at Asiatique the Riverfront, it is important to clarify the concept of authenticity between the two groups addressed in this chapter.

Authenticity of a destination from a tourist's perspective has to do with the stereotype of the place, which comes from images of the past, as well as the tourist's imagination of what the site is —possibly from advertisements and the experience of others. Authentic Thai culture in the eyes of foreign tourists could be summarized by the concept of *Thainess* promoted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) since 2015, which includes Thai food, traditions, religion, folklore, natural resources, traditional medicine, festivals etcetera. Authentic Thai culture in the eyes of foreign tourists also includes negative images which the government wants to correct, such as the image of sex tourism and transgender culture. At the same time, authentic Thai culture from the local perspective is more abstract. It has to do with the original

meaning and value behind cultural products, for example, unique character of the people, their way of life, teaching of religions and folklore, etcetera. Therefore, we can establish there is a gap between authenticity in the eyes of foreigners and locals.

### 3.2. Basic information of Asiatique the Riverfront

#### 3.2.1. Landscape of Asiatique the Riverfront

There are four major districts in Asiatique the Riverfront, namely Charoenkrung District, Factory District, Town Square District and Waterfront District as shown in the map, which have more than one thousand five-hundred shops in total and each district has its own theme and focus. (Photo 21)

Charoenkrung District is the largest district at Asiatique the Riverfront. It includes four warehouses and the area next to Charoenkrung Road; there are theaters, restaurants and more than a thousand shops selling home decorative items and souvenirs. Charoenkrung District is more tourist oriented compared to the other districts. The second largest is Factory District, which is decorated to show the working-class lifestyle of the past. There are over five-hundred fashion shops, a hip zone, pubs and restaurants in this district. Town Square District follows in size having only two warehouses: one of which is a fashion zone and the other one is a food circus that sells both international and Thai food. Last but not least, Waterfront District is the area along the promenade facing the Chao Phraya River. This district is the longest riverfront pathway in Thailand stretching for over three-hundred meters. There are only six restaurants in this district and visitors can enjoy the atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River while having dinner and drinks.



Apart from the shopping and dining experience, there are also cultural shows at Asiatique the Riverfront. Muay Thai Live and Calypso Bangkok are two cultural shows that perform every night at Asiatique the Riverfront. Both of them are located at the Charoenkrung District. Moreover, a traditional Thai puppet show is performed at Joe Louis Puppet Theater, which is one of the most famous restaurants and attractions in Thailand. Also, there are some entertainment facilities that both children and adults can enjoy together, including the *Asiatique Sky* (<http://asiatiquesky.com/>, retrieved 24th April, 2017), the YMAX 4D Cinema and other amusement rides.



Figure 21. Map of Asiatique the Riverfront

### 3.2.1. Transportation and opening hours

In terms of transportation, there are two main entrances located at two different sides of Asiatique the Riverfront. Visitors can reach the complex by boat and get off at the Asiatique the Riverfront pier. A free shuttle boat is operated every fifteen minutes from 16:00 to 23:30 between BTS Saphan Taksin station and Asiatique the Riverfront. While taking the free shuttle boat, visitors can enjoy the atmosphere of life along the Chao Phraya River in the old days. They can observe the lives of the local community located on the Thonburi side and temples around the area, such as *Wat Worachanyawas* (วัดวรจักรรยยาวาส) and *Wat Yannava* (วัดยานนาวา). Visitors can also reach Asiatique the Riverfront by land transportation from Charoenkrung Road; since this road is one of the important historical areas in Bangkok, visitors can experience the prosperity of the past by enjoying the scenery along the way. Asiatique the Riverfront has a parking lot that with capacity for two thousand cars. Furthermore, there is a taxi stop managed by Asiatique the Riverfront, which provides metered taxi services; a necessary solution to the problem of misconduct by taxi drivers around tourist attractions which makes tourists feel comfortable, convenient and secure to visit Asiatique the Riverfront.

### 3.2.2. Special events and festival celebrations

There are special events and festival celebrations organized by Asiatique the Riverfront all year round. According to the information shown on their official page, Asiatique the Riverfront organized special events in 2015 for Chinese New Year, Valentine's day, Songkran festival, Mother's day, the Vegetarian Festival, Loy Krathong and New Year's Count Down. During festival celebrations, there are temporary markets near *Asiatique Sky* which sell local festival products and food. Additionally, locals and foreigners can also have a cultural experience by performing rituals. For example, during the *Loy Krathong*

celebration of 2015, Asiatique the Riverfront joint hands with another six spots along the Chao Phraya River in a program named *River Festival 2015*. Local people and foreign tourists could float *krathongs* at Asiatique the Riverfront and enjoy traditional Thai dance performances.

### 3.3. Cultural commodification targeting the local people

Asiatique the Riverfront emphasizes mostly on the historical feeling and the atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River to attract local people to visit the place. The commodified culture that was presented to the locals could be classified as heritage tourism.

#### 3.3.1. Heritage tourism at Asiatique the Riverfront

According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, heritage tourism is defined as travel to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past, which includes cultural, historic and natural resources. (<https://savingplaces.org/stories/preservation-glossary-todays-word-heritage-tourism#.WJMxqqNh1AY>, retrieved September 23, 2016 ) Heritage tourism is one of the most popular branches of cultural tourism. Researchers believed that heritage tourism requires previous knowledge of a particular place or personal connections to a certain part of history so that visitors could easily identify with the heritage site that they visited.

In the case of Asiatique the Riverfront, heritage tourism is used as the theme to attract the local people who has the ideology that Siam became a developing country because of trading with foreign countries. However, the historical atmosphere does not share equal significance to foreign tourists as they might not have knowledge of this period of the history of Siam.

### 3.3.2. Pattern of cultural commodification which targets local people

Asiatique the Riverfront is packaged as a festival market with colonial atmosphere to attract local people to visit the place. Culture is commodified in three major ways including the use of historical architectural landscape; a relaxing atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River; and localization of foreign culture and festivals at Asiatique the Riverfront.

#### 3.3.2.1. Definition of Landscape architecture

According to Newton (1971, p. xxi), landscape architecture means “the art —or the science, if preferred — of arranging land, together with the spaces and objects upon it, for sale, efficient, healthful, pleasant human use.” According to ASLA American Society of Landscape Architects (<https://www.asla.org/aboutlandscapearchitecture.aspx>, retrieved April 7, 2017), landscape architecture is a multi-disciplinary field which includes the process of analysis, planning, design, management and stewardship of the natural and built environment. The ultimate goal of landscape architecture is to help defining a place or a community. There are different types of projects in the field of landscape architecture, including streetscapes and public spaces, hospitality and historical preservation and restoration. From the above definitions, Asiatique the Riverfront could be considered as one of the landscape architecture projects at Bangkok, Thailand.

Landscape architecture at Asiatique the Riverfront is commodified in four ways, including the location of Asiatique the Riverfront, maintenance of the original structures of warehouses of the East Asiatic Company, reproduction of

historical scenes (see section 2.5) and combination of modern festival marketing with colonial structure.

### 3.3.2.2. Reasons why local visitors are attracted to the historical landscape architecture

Commodified landscape of Asiatique the Riverfront could attract visitors who have the notion that Siam became a modernized country in the late nineteenth century because of trading with foreign countries. Asiatique the Riverfront provides a chance for visitors to experience the prosperity of the past.

When warehouses of the East Asiatic Company were renovated as Asiatique the Riverfront, the company tried to maintain its original style and structure so that the prosperity of the area's past could be rejuvenated at the refurbished site to attract locals who have knowledge of the colonial history of Southeast Asian countries during nineteenth century. External structure of warehouses, such as the arch shed warehouses, rectangular shed structure, the steel trusses and decorative concrete, remain unchanged as mentioned in section 2.6. However, the usage of warehouses changed from processing and storage to entertainment, which includes retail shops, restaurants and bars.

Asiatique the Riverfront imitates the old Siamese atmosphere during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, especially the prosperity in the second half of the nineteenth century. The second half of the nineteenth century is believed to be the critical period of the beginning of modernization in Thailand. As written by Stengs (2009, p. 35), the spread of colonial power and modernization were two sides of the same coin at

that period. It is necessary for developing countries to be modernized to maintain their sovereignty, while colonial power also helps to quickly introduce modern technologies to developing countries. The beginning of trading between Siam and the Europeans was believed to be one of the most important modernization processes in the reign of Rama V. Therefore, visitors could enjoy the historical atmosphere at the place.

Apart from the architectural structure of warehouses at Asiatique the Riverfront which maintain their original style, there are bronze statues to rejuvenate the remnants of a thriving past. A replica tram (Photo 22), an ancient tram track (Photo 23) and a tram stop (Photo 24) were not part of the structure of the East Asiatic Company nor the Japanese army's base during World War II. Before the coming of Western power, Thailand was a water-based city and people mostly relied on water-transportation. In response to the modernization process and the arrival of foreigners, King Chulalongkorn employed foreign engineers and technicians to build the first tram system of Siam. The one at Asiatique the Riverfront replicates the tram model of the end of nineteenth century. Visitors can take a short tram ride and experience the atmosphere of the past that can rarely be found in contemporary Bangkok.

Moreover, Asiatique the Riverfront is built next to the Chao Phraya River which was an important waterway for trading in Thailand. Visitors may take photos and enjoy the atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River along the promenade while imagining life of the past.

All in all, it could be said that Asiatique the Riverfront was aware of the historical importance of the place and it, therefore, seeks to imitate the trading activity that once took place at the site. Local people can enjoy the historical atmosphere of the prosperous past in a twenty-first century mall while imagining the life of the Siamese during the nineteenth century.



Figure 22. Replica tram



Figure 23. Replica tram track



Figure 24. Tram stop at Asiatique the Riverfront  
(Source: Photo taken by author)

### 3.3.2.3. Localization of foreign Culture and festival celebrations

As Asiatique the Riverfront targets at both local people and foreign tourists, and local people might not be interested in exploring local culture as foreign tourists do. Therefore, process of localization and borrowing of foreign culture happens at Asiatique the Riverfront inevitably to attract the local people. In the case of cultural tourism studies, localization could be defined as the process of adjusting a product's function or characteristics to accommodate the cultural differences of Thailand and Thai market.

Process of localization and borrowing of foreign culture happens at Asiatique the Riverfront in several aspects. For example, the *Juliet Love Garden* located between the warehouses of Asiatique the Riverfront borrows the idea of the old *Passerelle des Arts* of Paris, in which couples used to attach a padlock to a monument and throw the keys into the river to declare their undying love. Bronze statues of Juliet Capulet are being put in the *Juliet Love Garden* to represent true love.

However, because of the influence of globalization, services and products sold in different parts of the world become similar and difficult to identify if they have been localized. On the other hand, the process of localization that happens on festival celebrations and the catering industry are easier to be observed at Asiatique the Riverfront, and many other places in Thailand.

Foreign festivals, including Chinese New Year, Valentines' Day, Christmas and New Year Count Down, are celebrated at Asiatique the Riverfront through the organization of special



events. As Thailand has never been colonized by a foreign county, foreign festivals are not significant to Thai people traditionally and they do not become government holidays in Thailand, either. In recent years, the young generation celebrates foreign festivals because of the influence of foreign culture. Businessmen have also realized that it represents an opportunity to earn money. Consequently, celebration of foreign festivals has become popular in Thailand and therefore in famous tourist attractions and shopping centers. During the above mentioned festival seasons Asiatique the Riverfront holds festival markets to attract local people. Festival celebrations at Asiatique the Riverfront follow the pattern of having a themed backdrop for photo shooting and the place will be decorated according to the festival's theme. There will also be a festival market. Notwithstanding, products and food sold in the festival market do not necessarily reflect the subject of the festivals. Instead, most of the products and food available remain similar regardless to the theme, including local food, local handicrafts and desserts. Foreign festivals are an example of localization at Asiatique the Riverfront in which these celebrations become a gimmick to attract local people to visit the place; however, the locals are not able to experience the authentic festival atmosphere. Furthermore, foreign festival celebrations at Asiatique the Riverfront are more likely an excuse or opportunity for vendors to sell their products and local visitors to gather together and consume products.

Furthermore, it is possible to define the process of localization at Asiatique the Riverfront through the catering services offered. There are more than forty restaurants which sell Thai, Japanese, Chinese, Italian and other kinds of food at Asiatique the Riverfront, since the complex intentionally

chooses a variety of restaurants to provide different choices for the local people.

### 3.3.3. Products aimed for sale to local people

According to the map, shops and restaurants that are not targeting foreign tourists are mostly located in warehouses five to nine. Warehouses five, seven, eight and nine focuses on stylish or cheap products to attract mainly the locals. In the late 2015, Asiatique the Riverfront renovated the four warehouses mentioned above into a lifestyle shopping zone which is called *Urbano*. *Urbano* is promoted under the concept of “new ear of urbanista”. It is decorated in a Scandinavian style which is a design emphasizing simplicity, minimalism and functionality and which emerged in the 1950s. The *Urbano* zone sells mostly fashion products including jewelry, DIY leather products, clothes, IT products, sports products and many more. There are some famous local brands in warehouse five, seven, eight and nine, such as *MADE by Delibodi* which sells natural soups and skin care products; *Motta* that sells jewelry made from gems; and *Qualy* that sells house-ware products in special design, etcetera. Apart from local brands and stylish products, there are also shops selling clothes in wholesale prices to attract customers. Unlike warehouses one to four, there are no tourist products being sold in this area. Accordingly, it is ideal for local people who look for high quality local products to spend their time at the *Urbano* zone when they visit Asiatique the Riverfront.

Based on the researcher’s observations at the site, products aimed at the local people could be summarized into two categories: mass-produced goods that may be used in daily life, and stylish products. Mass-produced products sold at Asiatique the Riverfront include wooden tableware, clothes, accessories, small electronic appliances, etcetera. Mass-produced merchandise rarely shows its own characteristics; thus, they are not attractive to foreign tourists because

they could be easily find elsewhere. Instead, local people are more interested in the above mentioned products because they are cheap and practical. Also, stylish products are mainly sold to local people with higher income who look for special and quality products, for example home decorations, works of art, house-ware products with new design, leather goods, etcetera. It might be due to the local people's expectations of Asiatique the Riverfront that the complex offers high quality products.

#### 3.4. Cultural commodification targeting foreign tourists

Asiatique the Riverfront emphasizes more on lifestyle tourism when targeting foreign tourists; it promotes cultural shows, souvenirs with Thai characteristics and other cultural activities —such as local festival celebrations — to attract foreign tourists to visit the place.

##### 3.4.1. Lifestyle tourism at Asiatique the Riverfront

It is believed that tourists in modern society search for authenticity and traveling to foreign countries is one of the ways for them to do this. So, with the development of the tourism industry, more and more people travel in the hope of experiencing others' culture.

Asiatique the Riverfront responds to foreign tourists' needs to experience the lifestyle of the local people including traditions, folklore, local food and other experiences that are typical to Thailand, such as tolerant attitude to transgender people. In this sense, cultural activities, local food, traditions and folklore become commodities used to attract foreign tourists.

##### 3.4.2. Distribution of shops, restaurants and entertainment facilities

As marked in the directory at Asiatique the Riverfront, tourist shops are mainly located between warehouses one and four, which are

marked in red color in the map shown below. (Photo 25) Shops that are marked in purple color are restaurants and bars that target mainly foreign tourists. On the other hand, entertainment facilities are located next to *Asiatique Sky* and near the Town Square area.



Figure 25. Location of shops targeting foreign tourists  
(Source: Photo taken by author)

Shops at Asiatique the Riverfront can be divided into two categories: shops owned by local retail chains and shops owned by individuals. The former follow the path that they are developed from local brands which are not aimed at tourist markets. However, as there are local elements in the products and the price is affordable for tourists, such local brands become successful in tourist markets. The most representative local retail chains at Asiatique the Riverfront include *NaRaYa*, *BKK Original* and *Kiss Me Doll*. *NaRaYa*, a retail brand that has twenty-one shops in tourist spots all over Thailand, opened its branch at Asiatique the Riverfront in 2012. The branding position of *NaRaYa* is premium quality bags with affordable prices.

Most of the products of *NaRaYa* have Thai patterns printed on them, such as motives of elephants and flowers in Thailand. It has become one of the most popular tourist brands since it was founded in 1989. *BKK Original* is a local brand which promotes itself as “the bags that everyone can buy”. Recently, *BKK Original* presented a new collection focusing on traditional Thai elements to attract tourists and, at the same time, it aims at supporting local economies. Another famous tourist shop is *Kiss Me Doll* which sells scarfs made from Thai silk with Japanese and Korean patterns. The process of commodification on souvenir products among foreign tourists is analyzed in a later chapter.

Apart from tourist products, there are also some famous tourist brands that form part of the catering industry at Asiatique the Riverfront. Restaurants can be divided into two groups targeting visitors with different needs: the first group of restaurants are those that cater to high-end customers, and which provide high quality food and good atmosphere at the same time; the second group serves general customers, providing affordable food. Popular high-end restaurants among tourists include *Baan Khanitha* and *Joe Louis Restaurant*. *Baan Khanitha* advertises itself as authentic Thai cuisine made from fresh products and served in Thai style. *Joe Louis Restaurant* is a puppet theatre-authentic Thai restaurant. The predecessor of *Joe Louis Restaurant* was the *Joe Louis Puppet Theater* at Suan Lum Night Bazaar. There is performance in the restaurant every night at 7:30 p.m. except on Mondays. *Joe Louis Restaurant* emphasized that their puppet show is true Thai heritage that used to be performed for Kings’ and Queens’ at national ceremonies. Their performance won the “best traditional performance award” at the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Puppet Art. At the same time, if tourists prefer enjoying the atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River with drinks and Western food, there are restaurants located between R01 and R08. In order to cater to the needs of different tourists, there are some local

chain restaurants offering affordable food such as *MK Restaurant*, *The Pizza Company*, *Shabuda* and *Yamsaap*. There are also shops selling desserts made from seasonal fruits in Thailand, including *Mango Tango* and a booth privately owned which sell mango and durian desserts.

There is a variety of entertainment facilities at Asiatique the Riverfront, and despite not being part of commodified culture which may represent local characteristics, their existence reflects the effort of Asiatique the Riverfront in creating a Western atmosphere. Likewise, it shows the effort to change the place from shopping paradise to family friendly entertainment complex which suits both children and adults' needs.

*Asiatique Sky* opened in 2012 immediately following the opening of Asiatique the Riverfront. It became the landmark of the complex and also of the Chao Phraya River, from tourist perspective. It is the tallest Ferris wheel in Bangkok which is sixty meters or two hundred feet height. Apart from *Asiatique Sky*, other entertainment facilities have been introduced to tourists since 2015. There are eight entertainment facilities offered in the Future Zone in total, including *Thunder*, *Mr. Robot*, *Bubble Bump*, *Drift Cart*, *Sky Yoyo*, *9 DVR* (Photo 26), *Carousel* (Photo 27), and *Happy Car* (Photo 28). The average price of entertainment facilities is around ฿250. Although entertainment facilities are suitable for both foreign tourists and local people with children, the latter responded that it was not worth for them to spend the amount of money required on a single ride.



Figure 26. DVR



Figure 27. Carousel

*(Source: Photo taken by author)*



Figure 28. Happy Car

*(Source: Photo taken by author)*

### 3.4.3. Pattern of cultural commodification targeting foreign tourists

According to Gordon (1986), the purpose for tourists to bring souvenirs from the destination is to help them preserve memories of their journeys. Tourists tend to look for symbolic souvenirs to make the intangible experience tangible. In other words, souvenirs that tourists buy represent the destination culture and images in their mind. As souvenirs need to respond to the needs of the market, they need to fulfill the tourists' perception of local culture. At the same time, souvenirs available on the market also reflect what local images the cultural beholder would like to sell to tourists. The same theory could be applied to cultural shows —tourists tend to look for symbolic elements in them regardless of the historical or social value behind the performance.

Both foreign and local culture is commodified, represented and reinterpreted at Asiatique the Riverfront to encourage consumption behavior. Although commodified culture might be inauthentic in the sense of local people, it is unique to foreign tourists. Cultural commodification targeting foreign tourists is summarized in four patterns, namely localization of foreign products, borrowing of foreign culture, adaptation of local culture and symbolization used in souvenir products.

It has to be clarified that products or situations that used to be examples in the following paragraphs are not typical to Asiatique the Riverfront. Indeed, some of them are popular in other tourist attractions in Thailand as well. However, it is believed that vendors at Asiatique the Riverfront chose the products intentionally because they believe them to be attractive to foreign tourists and suit the theme of the complex. Hence, pattern of cultural commodification which targets foreign tourists is summarized based on the case of Asiatique the Riverfront, yet it may also be able to be used as reference to the situation in other tourist attractions in Thailand.

#### 3.4.3.1. Localization of foreign products

Process of localization happens on products available at Asiatique the Riverfront. As there is great cultural diversity in Thailand, especially in Bangkok, foreign products can easily access the Thai market. Foreign products are localized with regional elements to suit the interest of Thai people. Meanwhile, because Thailand is a popular tourist destination, localized foreign products become representative local products from a tourist perspective.



Process of localization mainly appears on snacks and food sold at tourist attractions. There are quite a number of shops selling snacks at Asiatique the Riverfront, three of them belong to a leading manufacturer and distributor in Thailand, and the rest of them are owned by private individuals. Some of the snacks that are popular among foreign tourists are not made in Thailand. Japanese snacks from Japanese companies with Thai elements are popular, for example, *Pretz* in Tom Yum Kung and Thai spicy salad flavor, *Glco Pocky* in mango and banana flavor with a marker of Thailand printed on the packages. Moreover, there are also some local companies using popular products of other countries as reference and using them as local brands. *Siam Banana* is one example. *Siam Banana* is similar to *Tokyo Banana* —a famous Japanese souvenir being sold since 1991 — in terms of both packaging and taste. *Siam Banana* borrowed the concept of *Tokyo Banana* and reproduced the products with local elements. The company of *Siam Banana* has invented new flavors to suit the taste of local people and attract foreign tourists, such as durian and mango flavors. Another example is pork snacks which are originally made by Chinese immigrants and have now become famous local souvenirs when foreign tourists visiting Thailand.

#### 3.4.3.2. Borrowing of foreign Culture

Borrowing of foreign culture at Asiatique the Riverfront happens in two aspects which are cultural shows and the architectural landscape of Asiatique the Riverfront.

There are two cultural shows performed at Asiatique the Riverfront, one of which —*Calypso Bangkok* — has borrowed foreign culture and inserted Thai elements to attract tourists. *Calypso Bangkok* was established in 1988 and it was performed

at Asia Hotel for more than twenty years before moving to warehouse three at Asiatique the Riverfront. As written on *Calypso Bangkok*'s official website, the show describes itself as a live stage for transgender artists and performers to express their minds, thoughts, their feelings in a highly professional way. Unlike other transgender shows in Thailand, *Calypso Bangkok* is appropriate for audiences of all ages and nationalities because there are no sexually suggestive scenes in the show. The show highlights the beauty and vitality of transgender in a Hollywood style performance. In order to attract foreign tourists, foreign culture is used in the show. It starts with a grand opening in which artists dress up in foreign styles, such as Marliyn and Korea Arirang. Visitors may also listen to Chinese love songs and Japanese songs and watch Japanese dancing throughout the show.

*Calypso Bangkok* is categorized as both theatre and cultural attraction on the website of the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Although *Calypso Bangkok* is categorized as a cultural attraction, it includes very limited local culture in the show. The most significant local element in the performance is the diversified gender identities in Thailand. Most Thai people are open-minded towards diversified gender identities, which is the major reason why there are many gender or sex-related entertainment shows in Thailand. Therefore, when foreign tourists visit Thailand, they like to look for this style of entertainment shows as they can hardly find them in their countries of origin. *Calypso Bangkok* is an entertainment show that hires a transgender group as performers; however, the show itself has a Western style with the use of Asian songs and dance. Thus, it can be seen as an example of borrowing of foreign culture.

#### 3.4.3.3. Adaptation of local Culture

Adaptation of local culture is the most common way to commodify culture in tourist attractions, including Asiatique the Riverfront. Adaptation of local culture happens on cultural shows and souvenir products.

*Muay Thai Live: The Legend Lives* is a cultural show performed at Asiatique the Riverfront. In Thai culture, Thai boxing is a healthy historical activity which requires various techniques. Thai boxing fighters need to follow rules and practices regularly to acquire the techniques. According to an interview conducted by TAT (2003), the show is designed to present the beauty and traditions of the ancient sport which they believed to be an inherent and living part of Thai culture. Nevertheless, as the fighting part of Thai boxing is not attractive enough for people without previous knowledge of the sport, the show at Asiatique the Riverfront combines Thai boxing with story plots. Viwan Karnasut, executive producer of the show, clarified that the show aimed at fostering the love and pride of Thai boxing among local visitors. Audiences of the show do not need to have prior knowledge of Thai boxing because the show is designed for audiences of any age, sex and origin. (<http://www.tatnews.org/muay-thai-live-the-legend-lives/>, retrieved October 23, 2016) The performance shows the changes of Thai boxing from the early period of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya to the modern day. Although there is real stage fighting between boxers, it takes only little time of the full show. Therefore, it is no doubt an entertainment show instead of real stage fighting.

Adaptation of local culture also appears on products for foreign tourists such as snacks, clothing and bags, spa products, medicines, etcetera.

As Thailand is famous for its agricultural products, snacks available in the market are made of different ingredients. Some leading snack manufacturers and distributors in Thailand are famous for products made from particular ingredients, for example, peanut and nuts or seaweed; while others sell a variety of products that foreign tourists are interested in. Based on observations at Asiatique the Riverfront, snacks targeting foreign tourists include herbal tea, instant noodles, banana cake, milk tablets, dried fruit, fried seaweed, peanut and nuts, dried cuttlefish and products from royal projects.

In terms of clothing, there are two types of clothing that target tourists: modernized local costumes and clothes printed with symbolic images. The former include costumes of hill-tribe people and farmers, and also national costumes. (Photo 29) Although the local costumes sold at Asiatique the Riverfront keep the pattern and form of the traditional costumes, they are modified in a way that customers can easily wear them. In terms of usage, Thai people only wear traditional costumes on auspicious occasions or festivals. However, some of the tourists wear them during their visit in Thailand for fun and keep them as a memory when they return to their home country. Thailand is also famous for both man-made leather and real leather products. Hence, there are leather bags targeted towards foreign tourists who look for quality bags with reasonable price.



Figure 29. Modified local costumes

(Source: Photo taken by author)

In the eyes of foreign tourists, Thailand is famous for spa services as they believe that spa products in Thailand are natural. There are a number of shops which sell spa products at Asiatique the Riverfront, including massage oil, soap, essential oils, home fragrances, shower gel, body lotion, scrubs and accessories such as oil burners. Spa products at Asiatique the Riverfront are generally cheaper than those of famous brands. Nonetheless, the quality of spa products is not guaranteed — foreign tourists' consumption behavior on spa products at tourist market simply reflects their belief that spa products in Thailand are natural.

Surprisingly, there are few shops which sell only health care products at Asiatique the Riverfront, some of which label themselves as pharmacies or drug shops while others are decorated as groceries stores. (Photo 30) As there are foreign language introductions in health care product shops, it is believed that they are targeting foreign tourists. As promoted by TAT, traditional medicine is one of the elements of *Thainess*. From the popularity of health care products at Asiatique the

Riverfront, it is believed that health care products in Thailand are attractive to foreign tourists. There are a few types of medicines typically popular among foreign tourists including mosquito repellent, liquid medication for inhaling, topical balms and herbal medicines for different usages. Most of the shops which sell medicines also sell skin care and other health care products. There are number of whitening products and sunscreens from local brands available at Asiatique the Riverfront. Latex pillows that claim to be made from 100% natural emulsions are also popular among foreign tourists who believe that products in Thailand are natural; thus, they are confident in the various health care products and traditional medicines.



Figure 30. Example of a shop selling medicine, skin care and other health care products

*(Source: Photo taken by author)*

#### 3.4.3.4. Symbolization used on souvenir products

Many souvenir products available at Asiatique the Riverfront are mass-produced. Mass production involves the process of making large quantity of products quickly at a low cost. As mass-produced merchandise is standardized in quality

and it is easy to produce it with a low cost, it is the most common way to produce souvenirs for the tourist industry. Yet, it is also criticized that mass-production merchandise lacks its own characteristics.

There are varieties of mass-produced commodities available at Asiatique the Riverfront, including clothing for foreign tourists, postcards, refrigerator magnets, household items, photos, decorative items, etcetera. The average price for mass-produced products available at Asiatique the Riverfront is between ₱100 and ₱300. Mass-produced items lack their own characteristics since they are products which could be easily found at tourist attractions all over the world. Therefore, symbolization is applied on mass-produced merchandise to make the products unique and representative to the place.

Symbolic patterns are used on mass produced items. Popular intangible culture becomes symbolic in images which are printed on souvenirs, including images representing Thai culture and symbolic images or words representing the destination. Popular symbolic images include elephants, *tuktuks*, *Muay Thai* gloves, landmarks of the city, and traditional Thai patterns which are mostly printed on textile products. Apart from symbolic patterns representing local culture, vendors at Asiatique the Riverfront also try to use emblematic patterns representing the countries of origin of foreign tourists to encourage their consumption. One of the vendors at Asiatique the Riverfront who sells leather carvings said that she use to make many dragon-pattern leather carvings as she believed Chinese tourists would like them. In time, she realized tourists were more interested in elephant and Thai flower prints. It comes to show that foreign tourists are more

interested in motifs from the destination's culture instead of elements that they are familiar with.

Apart from symbolic patterns that are intangible, symbolization also appears on materials used to make mass-produced souvenirs. A variety of materials are significant to Thai culture in the eyes of foreign tourists. For example, coconut shells, wood, silk and latex. Foreigners view Thailand as a successful agricultural country, thus, they are interested in mass-produced items made from agricultural materials.

### 3.5. Negotiation between authentic and commodified culture at Asiatique the Riverfront

Both tangible and intangible culture are commodified at Asiatique the Riverfront to attract local people and foreign tourists. However, process of cultural commodification is also criticized as a negative process which would eventually transform the culture of the destination. Most importantly, local culture needs to be commodified to attract visitors yet remain authentic to fulfill the tourists' need to experience authenticity in a foreign country. Therefore, negotiation between authentic and commodified culture happens at Asiatique the Riverfront for both locals' and foreigners'.

In terms of heritage tourism which is mainly used to attract local people, the warehouses of the East Asiatic Company and the history of the place become commodities. Asiatique the Riverfront has attempted to keep the original structure of the warehouses in order to display their authenticity, such as the arch shed warehouses, rectangular shed structure, the steel trusses and decorative concrete. However, since Asiatique the Riverfront aims at attracting visitors from different demographics, other elements are added to clearly rejuvenate the history of Thailand. Certain decorative items and the addition of a Ferris wheel are scattered around Asiatique the Riverfront to create the



Western atmosphere of the place — such is the case of the bronze statues, train model and foreign flags. Although introduction boards are displayed near the entrances and by the bronze statues —to explain the historical background of the place — visitors seldom pay attention to them. Instead, they are more interested in taking photos with the warehouses and the Ferris wheel because of the Western atmosphere.

Similar to the case of lifestyle tourism used to attract foreign tourists, negotiation between authenticity and commodified culture happens. Asiatique the Riverfront tries to present different dimensions of local culture to foreign tourists including traditional festivals, historical activities —*Muay Thai* and puppet shows. Vendors at Asiatique the Riverfront also choose products which reflect different cultural elements, including folklore, local beliefs, popular culture, Thai pattern, etcetera. Nevertheless, and inevitably, cultural commodification continues to take place. As the rental fee at Asiatique the Riverfront is higher in comparison to other markets, vendors turn to mass-produced merchandise in order to earn more profit. As mass-produced items need to keep down their cost to maintain their advantages over other products, they tend to use symbolic images reflecting the local culture. Then, souvenir products at Asiatique the Riverfront become similar to each other and to those being sold at other night markets in Bangkok.

In short, negotiation between authentic and commodified culture happens for both local people and foreign tourists. Commodified culture becomes dominant at Asiatique the Riverfront because it is easy for visitors from different demographics to consume it, and it is simply more affordable for people in general.

### 3.6. Chapter summary

The planning of Asiatique the Riverfront is comprehensive enough to cater to the needs of both foreign tourists and the local people. Asiatique the Riverfront uses different strategies to attract the two groups of people

mentioned above —strategies supported by two sets of commodified culture. Both tangible and intangible culture becomes commodified and simplified for easy consumption. Commodified culture becomes dominant and is well-received at Asiatique the Riverfront; although foreigners and locals do not necessarily understand the semantics behind commodified culture, they still perceive it as the representation of Thai culture and enjoy their visit at Asiatique the Riverfront.



#### **4. Chapter 4 Visitors' expectations and satisfaction of Asiatique the Riverfront: Questionnaires and Interview Results**

This chapter aims at studying visitors' expectations and satisfaction of Asiatique the Riverfront by distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews on site with both local people and foreign tourists. Questionnaire and interview results are used to analyze if the techniques of cultural commodification employed at Asiatique the Riverfront work. In this chapter, details of research methodology are introduced first, followed by the analysis supported by the questionnaire results.

##### **4.1. Research Methodology**

Questionnaires were distributed at Asiatique the Riverfront from November 21 and 28, 2016, between 19:00 to 22:00. As target respondents of the research were individual guests who had finished their visit and were ready to leave Asiatique the Riverfront, the researcher selected respondents among people waiting to ride the free shuttle boat from the pier to the BTS station. Different from visitors who come with group tours, individual guests decided to visit the place intentionally—they visit Asiatique the Riverfront with reasons and motivations. Therefore, their expectations and satisfaction of Asiatique the Riverfront is meaningful for this study.

Respondents were chosen from different as many different backgrounds as possible. An English version of the questionnaire was distributed to foreign tourists despite their nationalities, while a Thai version was distributed to the local people. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire by responding to questions in the presence of the researcher to make sure that they understood the questionnaire thoroughly, regardless of the language barrier. The total number of collected questionnaires is one hundred thirty-eight and thirty-eight of them have been invalidated for reasons such as incomplete questionnaires, questionnaires answered at random and those which were not done according to the instructions. There

are one hundred valid questionnaires and the effective response rate is 72.46%.

Interviews were done to elaborate and further explain the questionnaire results on tourist expectations and satisfaction of Asiatique the Riverfront. It has to be clarified that questionnaires are the main methodology for this research; while interviews are only used to explain individual thoughts and differences. Individual interviews were done in a casual setting since they were conducted with visitors at Asiatique the Riverfront who were enjoying vacation time with friends and family—a casual setting shows respect to the respondents leisure time. Interviews were also conducted with local people who have never been to or are not interested in visiting Asiatique the Riverfront again. The aim is to understand the reasons behind their disappointment regarding Asiatique the Riverfront. Ten interviews were done in total and each of the interviews took approximately five minutes.

#### 4.2. Questionnaire Design

There is one set of questionnaires divided into five parts containing ten questions in total; namely background, motivation to visit Asiatique the Riverfront, tourists experience in site, tourist satisfaction of Asiatique the Riverfront and their attitude and perception towards the complex after visiting the place. The questionnaire was designed in English and translated into Thai language to avoid inaccuracy due to language barriers as Thai people in general have a limited knowledge of English. (Appendix 1 Questionnaire in English & Appendix 2 Questionnaire in Thai)

Part 1 of the questionnaire asks about personal background information, including gender, age and nationality. As the research is a cultural study, and it is believed that respondents' cultural background influences their view on the destination, it is important to know their nationality. It also helps to determine if cross-cultural differences exist in the tourism industry of Thailand.

Part 2 of the questionnaire addresses the tourist's motivation to visit Asiatique the Riverfront. There are three questions in this part which concern the channels through which they learned about the place, the frequency of their visits and their major reasons to visit the site. In question six, respondents were asked to rank from one to seven for their major reasons to visit the place. However, respondents were not clear about the instructions and they preferred not to complete the ranking, the question was modified to ask respondents to choose three out of seven major reasons that drive them to visit the place. The seven choices that are given in question six are based on the distinguished service and experience that Asiatique the Riverfront promoted on their websites to attract tourists.

In part three, researchers aim at studying tourist experiences at Asiatique the Riverfront. Therefore, products and activities available at Asiatique the Riverfront are listed in the questionnaire for tourists to choose.

Part four of the questionnaire is a list of activities or experiences offered at Asiatique the Riverfront. Respondents need to rank their satisfaction level regarding the activities in which they participated. There are ten activities on the list and respondents do not need to rank activities in which they did not participate.

Last but not least, part five of the questionnaire is used to study tourists attitudes and perceptions towards Asiatique the Riverfront after visiting the place. There are nine statements in total and respondents need to indicate if they agree with them and to what extent. Statements can be divided into three aspects including cultural, shopping and dining experience when analyzing data.

#### 4.3. Respondents' Background

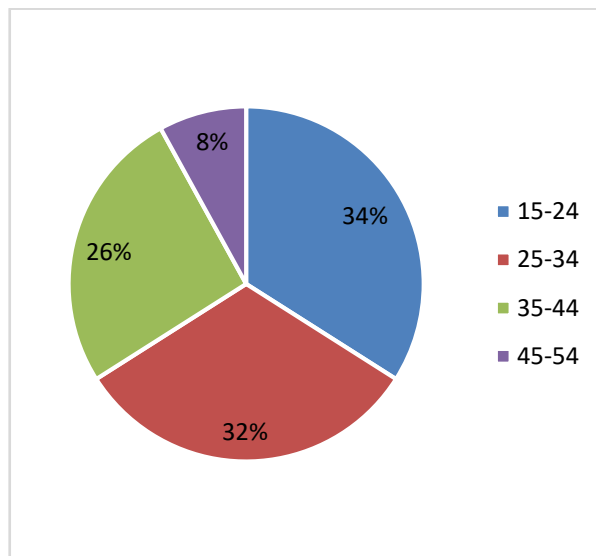
The total number of valid questionnaires is one hundred sets, which includes fifty sets filled in by foreign tourists and fifty which were filled in by the local people. Respondents' geographies are summarized as follow.

Regarding the foreign respondents, there are thirty-three Asian respondents and seventeen Westerners in total. It shows that Asiatique the Riverfront is more attractive to Asian visitors than Westerners. Among all Asian respondents, Chinese tourists (including citizens of Hong Kong) share the highest proportion; which could be indicate that the Chinese represent the majority of tourists visiting the complex. On the other hand, distribution of Westerners is more even and diversified, including tourists from Germany, Russia, America, Poland, Britain, Norway, etcetera.

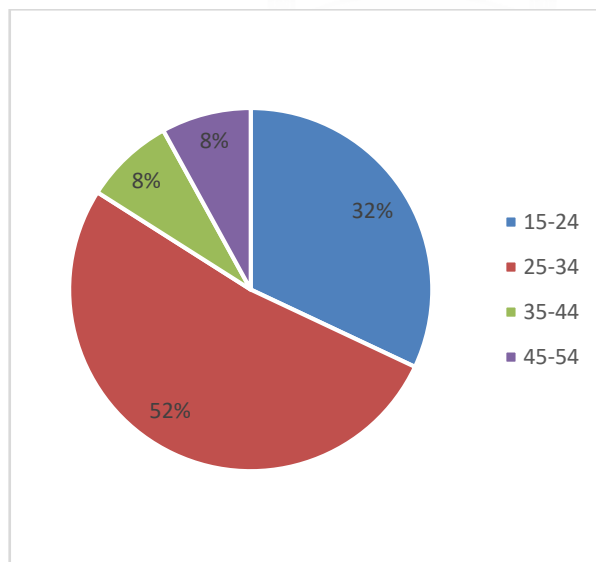
Table 1. Foreign Tourist Respondents' Nationalities and Geographical Background

Asian		Asian (ASEAN)		Westerners	
Chinese	8	Vietnamese	2	German	3
Hong Kong	4	Indonesian	4	Portuguese	1
Taiwanese	2	Malaysian	3	American	2
South Korean	3	Filipino	1	Russian	3
Japanese	3	Singaporean	2	Italian	2
				Polish	2
				British	2
				Norwegian	2
<b>Total</b>			<b>33</b>		<b>17</b>

Adults aged between twenty-five and thirty-four are the major group of visitors at Asiatique the Riverfront, followed by teenagers aged between fifteen and twenty-four. (See graphs 1 and 2) It reflects that Asiatique the Riverfront is more attractive to the younger generation. It might also be due to the fact that younger generations can access the Internet more easily, thus, it is easier for them to access information related to Asiatique the Riverfront compared to other groups.



Graph 1. Age of Foreign Respondents



Graph 2. Age of Local Respondents

Interviews were done with random visitors at Asiatique the Riverfront and local people who had never been to the complex in order to provide a possible explanation to the questionnaire results. As the names of informants are not important to the research, they are withheld in the analysis and labels are used to refer to interviewees. Data of informants is listed (table 2) in the chart below.

Table 2. Background Information of Interview Respondents

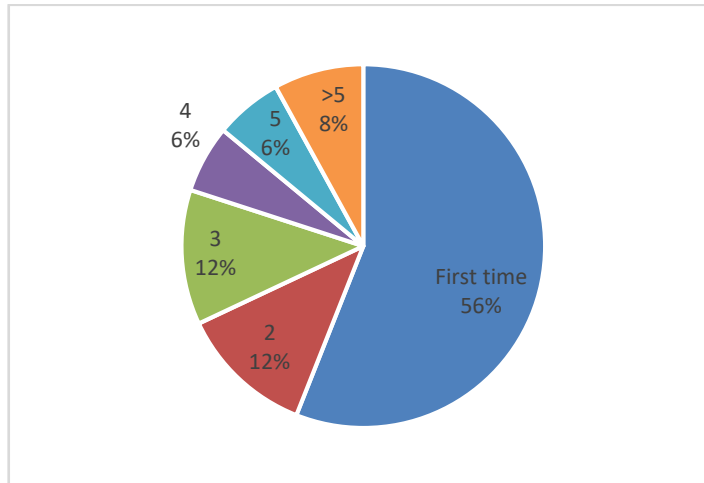
	Nationality	Gender	Age	Number of visit to Asiatique the Riverfront
Informant 1	Hong Kong	M	15-24	3
Informant 2	Hong Kong	F	25-34	2
Informant 3	Chinese	M	15-24	1
Informant 4	Italian	M	45-54	1
Informant 5	Indonesian	F	15-24	1
Informant 6	Thai	F	15-24	1
Informant 7	Thai	M	25-34	3
Informant 8	Thai	F	25-34	4
Informant 9	Thai	M	25-34	2
Informant 10	Thai	M	25-34	0

#### 4.4. Visitors' motivation to stop at Asiatique the Riverfront

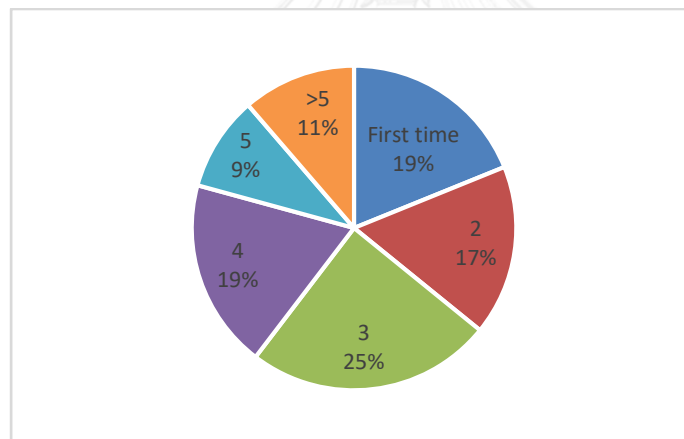
According to questionnaire results, Asiatique the Riverfront is a place where both foreign tourists and local people are willing to return. Data shows that 44% of foreigner respondents visited the site more than once; while the number of visits of local respondents is nearly evenly distributed. (Graphs 3



and 4) Result shows that Asiatique the Riverfront is attractive to both foreign tourists and local customers to a certain extent so they are willing to revisit.



Graph 3. Number of Visit Foreign Respondents Had

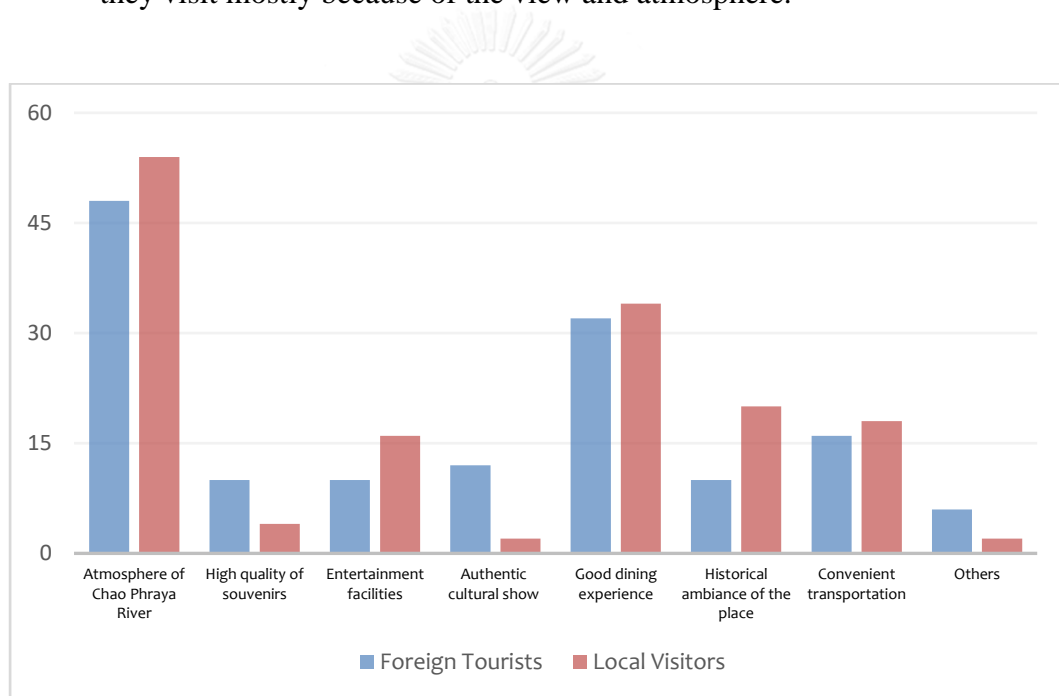


Graph 4. Number of Visit Local Respondents Had

Both foreign tourists and the local people visit Asiatique the Riverfront because of the recommendation from their relatives and friends, and/or information on the Internet related to the site. None of the foreign tourists visited Asiatique the Riverfront as a result of the complex's marketing campaign nor those of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, while few local people do. It shows that Asiatique the Riverfront has a good reputation among visitors who stopped by the place before and they are willing to recommend it to their friends and family. However, it also shows that the

marketing campaigns launched by Asiatique the Riverfront were not very successful at the time when the research was conducted.

Visitors go to Asiatique the Riverfront because of various reasons. Two of the most common —and important — ones for both groups of customers to visit Asiatique the Riverfront include enjoying the atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River and to having a good dining experience. (Graph 5) We can conclude that foreign tourists and local people do not have many expectations regarding cultural elements at Asiatique the Riverfront. Instead, they visit mostly because of the view and atmosphere.



Graph 5. Major Reasons for Foreign Tourists and Local People to Visit Asiatique the Riverfront

According to interviews conducted with local people, most do not refuse to visit Asiatique the Riverfront; nonetheless, they do not have big expectations. As responded by informants six and seven, local visitors do not look for particular products at Asiatique the Riverfront as they can find the same items in a cheaper price elsewhere. Instead, they visit the place because they would like to enjoy the atmosphere since there are good bars and restaurants next to the Chao Phraya River. Informant eight said that local

people tends to visit Asiatique the Riverfront when their foreign friends visit Bangkok because it is a reputable tourist attraction and it is easy to reach. On the other hand, foreign tourists' expectations of Asiatique the Riverfront are mostly influenced by information on the Internet and other touristic marketing materials, in which photos of the warehouses and the Ferris Wheel taken from the promenade are widely used. Accordingly, foreign tourists' first impression of Asiatique the Riverfront is about the view and atmosphere.

#### 4.5. Visitors' experience at Asiatique the Riverfront

Visitors' experience at Asiatique the Riverfront is discussed in two aspects which relate to the products they purchased and the activities they took part in during their visit at the site. Result of their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront is used to analyze popular products and activities among foreign tourists and local people; thus, understanding the different needs and expectations between foreign tourists and local people.

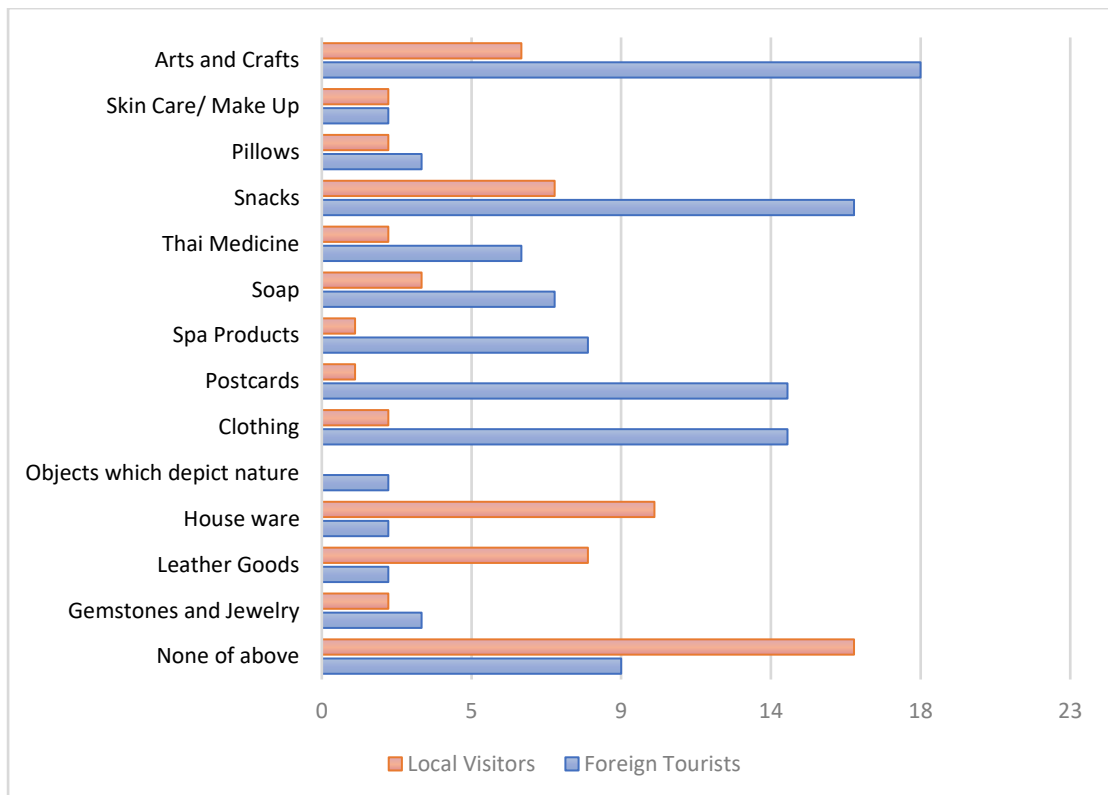
##### 4.5.1. Products that visitors purchased at Asiatique the Riverfront

It is believed that products available at Asiatique the Riverfront fulfill the need of most of the foreign tourists as 82% of foreign respondents purchased products during their visit. In comparison, the products available are not as attractive to the local people; only 68% of local respondents purchased products at Asiatique the Riverfront.

Products that foreign tourists and local people choose are different. The number of items are significantly more popular among foreign tourists than among local people, including arts and crafts, snacks, Thai medicine, soap, spa products, postcards and clothing. On the other hand, local customers are more interested in house-ware and leather goods. Popular products among foreign tourists are products that they believe to be representative to Thai culture. Arts and crafts, postcards and clothing are items with symbolic images; while snacks, Thai medicine and other

health care products are believed to be natural in the eyes of tourists. Therefore, foreigners purchase the above mentioned items as souvenirs. Yet, it does not mean that other products at Asiatique the Riverfront are not attractive or useful to local people, they just seem to have less motivation to purchase mass-produced merchandise on site because they can easily find the same things at a cheaper price in other places.

Cultural differences are reflected in foreign tourist choices on products available at Asiatique the Riverfront. Asian tourists' choices are more varied than those of Western respondents. Results indicate that 48.4% of Asian tourist respondents bought skin care or make up, pillows, snacks and Thai medicine at Asiatique the Riverfront; meanwhile only 29.4% of Western respondents bought the above-mentioned products. On the other hand, 52.9% of Western tourist respondents bought arts and crafts products while only 24.2% of Asian tourist bought the same items. In other words, Asian tourists tend to buy daily essentials and Western tourists tend to buy decorations. This is because culture in Thailand and other Asian countries has more similarities compared to that of Western countries. Therefore, daily essentials are more useful and attractive to Asian tourists while Westerners tend to preserve memories by collecting arts and crafts.



Graph 6. Products that Respondents Bought at Asiatique the Riverfront

#### 4.5.2. Activities that visitors participated in at Asiatique the Riverfront

In terms of activities respondents participated in at Asiatique the Riverfront, both local visitors and foreign tourists show both similarities and differences on their preferences.

First of all, there are similarities between the activities that foreign tourists and local visitors participated in. The number of foreign and local respondents who had a dining experience at Asiatique the Riverfront are the highest among all available choices listed on the questionnaires. Both foreign tourists and local people prefer Thai food over international food. Relaxing at the bar is the third most popular activity among foreign tourists and local people. Therefore, it is believed that dining is the most popular activity at Asiatique the Riverfront, which matches the expectations of visitors as shown in section 4.4. The

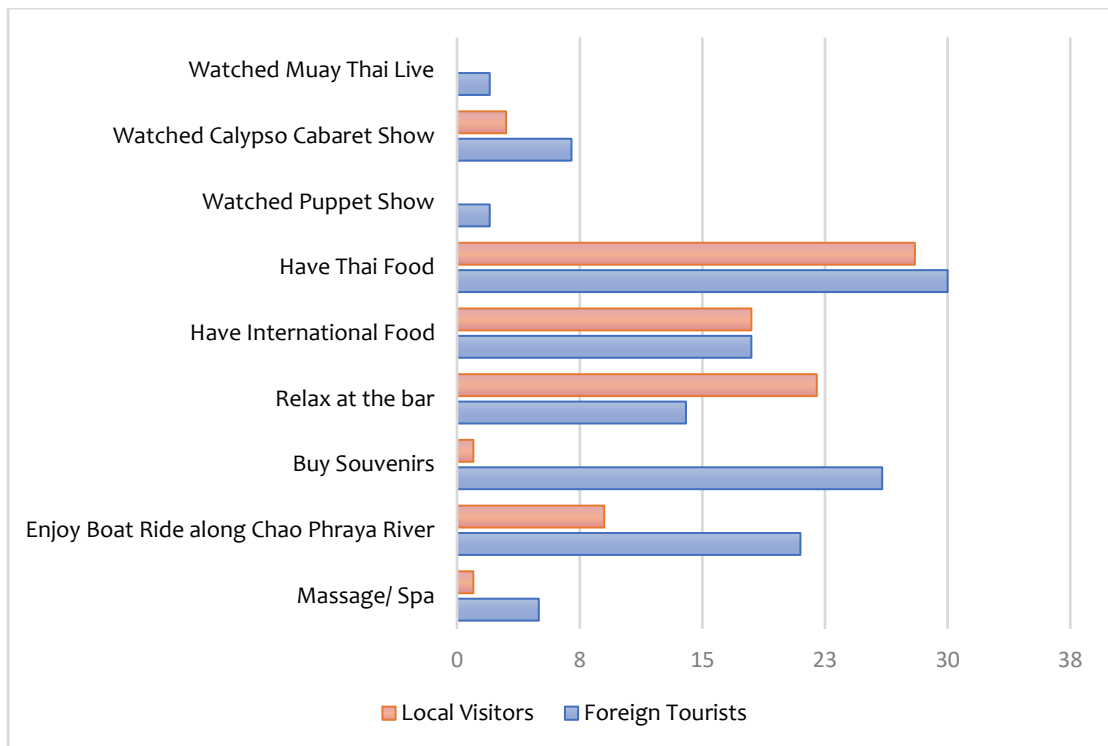
popularity of a dining experience at Asiatique the Riverfront is also related to the atmosphere of the place since there are restaurants and bars along the promenade next to the Chao Phraya River; visitors enjoy having dinner or drinks with their family and friends in a relaxing atmosphere. Thus, both foreign tourists and local visitors choose to have dinner at Asiatique the Riverfront in special occasions.

Secondly, foreign tourists are obviously more interested in participating in cultural related activities at Asiatique the Riverfront compared to local people. Cultural activities that are more popular among foreigners include watching cultural shows, buying souvenirs and taking boat rides along the Chao Phraya River. Results show that 52% of foreign respondents bought souvenirs at Asiatique the Riverfront and 42% took a boat ride along the Chao Phraya River; while there are only 2% and 18% of local people who participated in the above mentioned activities respectively. At the same time, 4% of foreign tourists attended a *Muay Thai Live Show*, 14% watched the *Calypso Cabaret show* and 4% joined the puppet show. Although the number of foreign tourists who watched cultural shows during their visit at Asiatique the Riverfront is low, it is higher than that of the local people. Results show that convenient transportation motivates foreign tourists to visit Asiatique the Riverfront as most of them took a boat ride from BTS Saphan Taksin station to the pier. Moreover, it also shows that when foreign tourists visit Asiatique the Riverfront, they are more willing to pay for products and services. It could also be interpreted that merchandise at Asiatique the Riverfront is attractive and affordable to foreign tourists.

On the other hand, local respondents generally participate in less activities than foreign tourists do at Asiatique the Riverfront since they are less interested in cultural activities and products. The only activity that had more local people than foreign tourists participating at Asiatique the Riverfront is relaxing at a bar. Instead of an entertainment complex

as claimed by Asiatique the Riverfront itself, the site is more likely a place for local people to relax and gather with friends and family.

The differences in consuming behaviors and activities in which foreigners and local visitors participated in at Asiatique the Riverfront are explainable. It could be concluded that the former are more interested in the cultural experience while the latter are more focused on the unique elements limited to Asiatique the Riverfront. Cultural experience at Asiatique the Riverfront is attractive to foreign tourists because they are looking for things that are not available in their countries of origin. Thus, products and activities at Asiatique the Riverfront attract them to visit the place. Notwithstanding, it is not the case for the local people; cultural activities at Asiatique the Riverfront were not special for them as local culture presented on site is available in their everyday lives. Informant nine said that a boat ride along the Chao Phraya Riverfront was one form of public transportation, therefore, he or she would not go to Asiatique the Riverfront just to experience the atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River. Regarding *Muay Thai Shows*, local people have no reason to pay for a Thai boxing performance when they can enjoy professional stage fighting at the other places at a lower cost.



Graph 7. Activities that Visitors Took Part in at Asiatique the Riverfront

#### 4.6. Visitors' satisfaction level on their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront

Visitors were asked to rank their satisfaction level on the activities that they took part in at Asiatique the Riverfront. Ten activities that are listed for visitors to rank include *Muay Thai Live Show*, *Calypso Cabaret show*, Thai Puppet show, street performances, dining experience, boat ride along the Chao Phraya River, shopping experience, historical ambiance of the past, massage or spa, and transportation, facilities and service. Foreign tourists are generally more satisfied with their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront; while local people tend to be more neutral.

##### 4.6.1. Foreign tourists' opinions about their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront

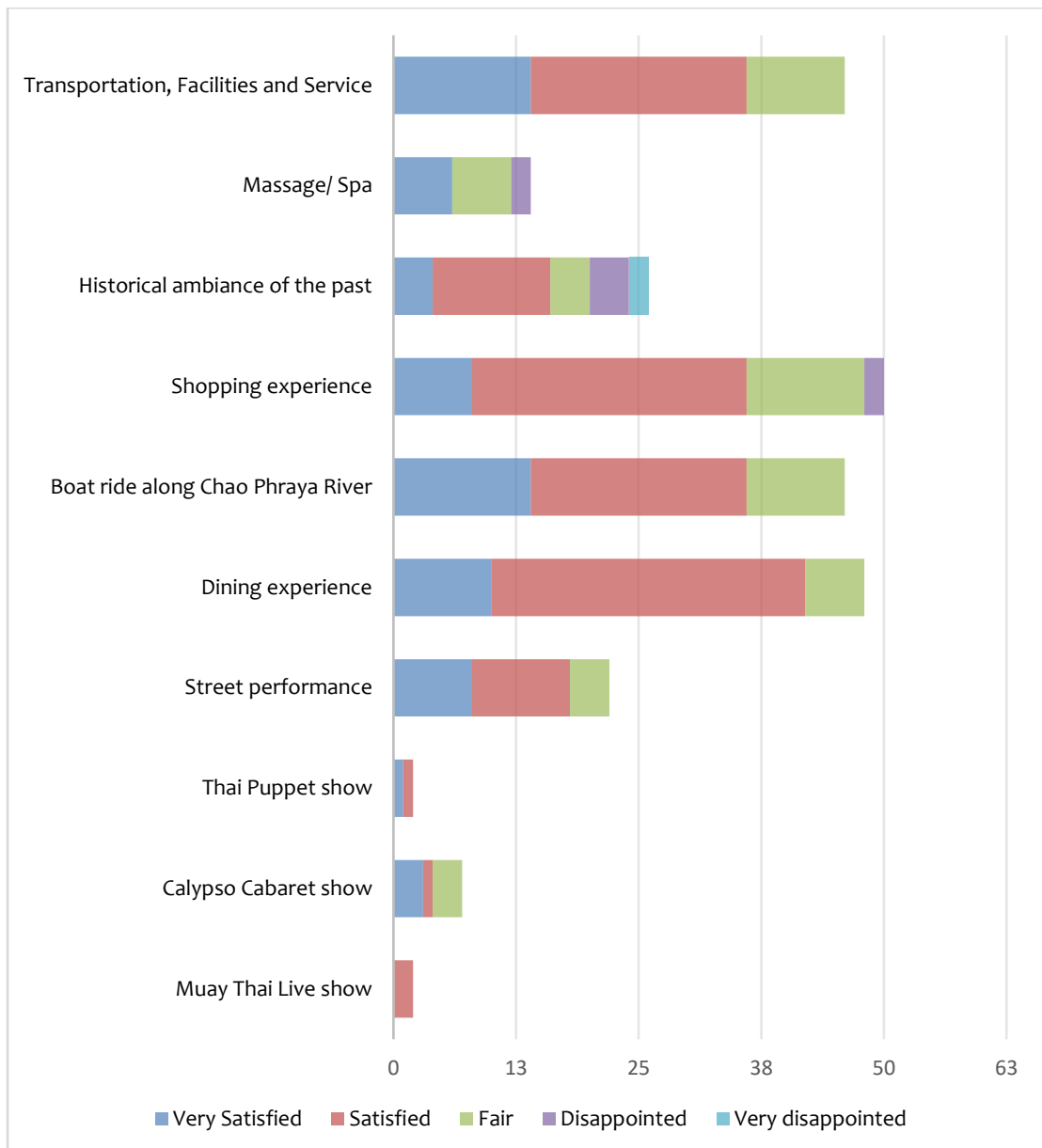
Among all the activities that foreign tourists participated in at Asiatique the Riverfront, they are mostly satisfied with the dining



experience followed by a boat ride along the Chao Phraya River, transportation, facilities and service, and shopping experience. At the same time, foreign tourists who have watched street performances and the three cultural shows —*Muay Thai Live*, *Calypso Cabaret* and Thai Puppet show — at Asiatique the Riverfront are generally satisfied with them. (Graph 8)

On the other hand, foreign tourists' opinions regarding the historical ambiance of the past are more diverse. Among foreign respondents 52% ranked their satisfaction level on the historical ambiance of the past; while 23% of them are “disappointed” or “very disappointed” about it. This is probably because foreign tourists do not have previous knowledge of the history of Thailand nor that of Southeast Asia, and they can hardly identify with the historical atmosphere. Moreover, as foreign tourists travel to experience local culture, they expect Asiatique the Riverfront will create the atmosphere of traditional culture; therefore, they are disappointed.

Results reveal that foreigners are more satisfied with consumption activities at Asiatique the Riverfront, including shopping and dining. They also enjoy the atmosphere of Asiatique the Riverfront and are happy with the service. Although foreign respondents are not satisfied with the historical ambiance, this does not have much influence on the tourist's decision on whether they would like to revisit the place or not. This is because foreign tourists are more interested in discovering the atmosphere of the place and the lifestyle of local people instead of recalling memories of the old Siam. Therefore, they are mostly satisfied with their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront and, thus, tend to recommend Asiatique the Riverfront to their friends and family, which results in a flow of people to the place.



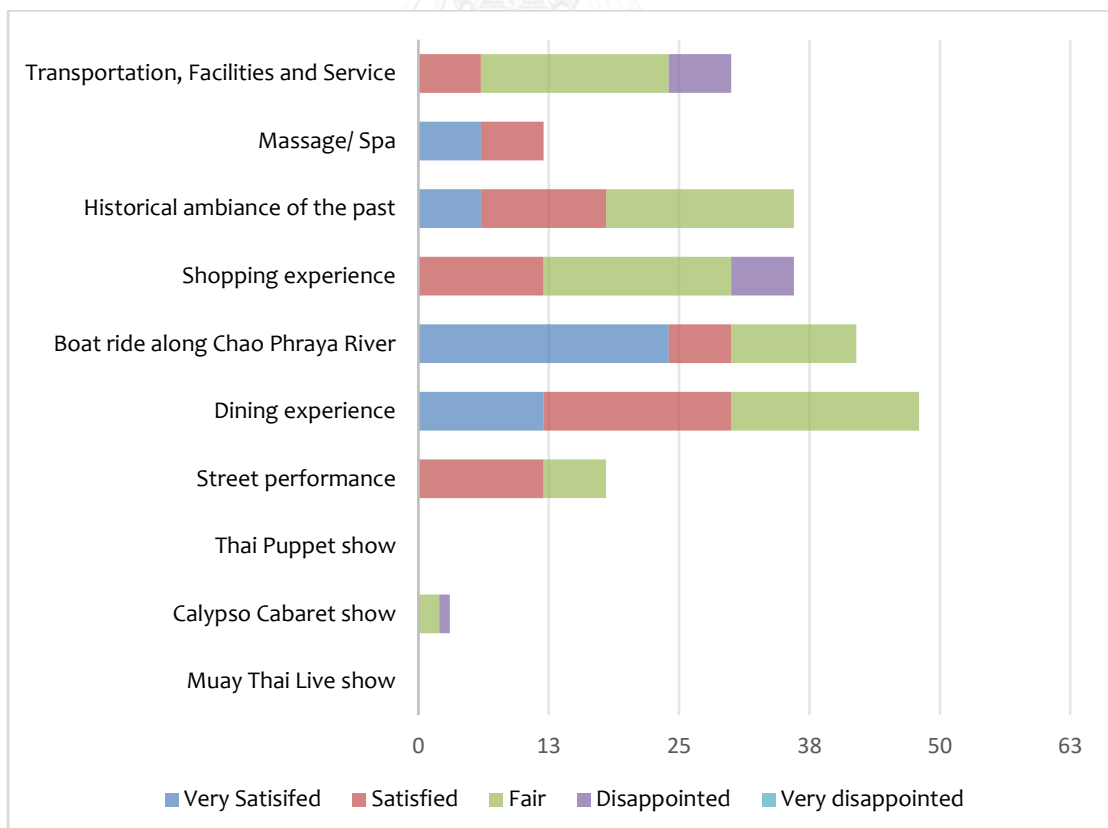
Graph 8. Foreign Tourists' Satisfaction Level towards their Experience at Asiatique the Riverfront

#### 4.6.2. Local people's opinions about their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront

Local respondents' opinions about their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront are more neutral compared to those of foreign tourists. The most satisfying activities among local people include boat rides along

the Chao Phraya River and dining experiences, which are similar to those of foreign tourists. There are 60% of local visitors who voted “very satisfied” and “satisfied” for the above mentioned activities respectively. (Graph 9)

On the other hand, some locals are dissatisfied with the shopping experience and transportation, facilities and service at Asiatique the Riverfront. Among local respondents who had a shopping experience at Asiatique the Riverfront, 50% are neutral to their experience, while 16.7% are disappointed. This is because shops at Asiatique the Riverfront mostly target foreign tourists and thus, local people hardly find products that they are interested in. Furthermore, the price of merchandise at Asiatique the Riverfront is generally higher than that of other markets in Bangkok, hence, the shopping experience at Asiatique the Riverfront proved to be very dissatisfying to them.



Graph 9. Local People's Satisfaction Level Towards their Experience at Asiatique the Riverfront

When comparing the satisfaction level between foreign tourists and local visitors, foreign respondents are generally more satisfied with their experience. Among all activities, both groups are mostly satisfied with the boat ride along the Chao Phraya River and the dining experience at Asiatique the Riverfront. It shows that the location of Asiatique the Riverfront is important to attract all kinds of visitors who enjoy the atmosphere of the place. Likewise, as there are various restaurants and bars for visitors to choose from, both foreign tourists and local visitors can find the one which is suitable for them. Therefore, they are satisfied.

Foreign tourists are more satisfied with their consumption experience at Asiatique the Riverfront as there are different types of touristic products available. However, it also means that local people can hardly find products that are unique to them as they may easily find similar products for a cheaper price elsewhere. Foreign tourists are also more satisfied with transportation, facilities and service compared to local people. As most foreign tourists rely on the BTS as their mode of transportation during their visit to Bangkok, it is convenient for them to arrive to Asiatique the Riverfront by boat from BTS Saphan Taksin station. However, as local people rely on different transportation methods, the shuttle boat is not the major transportation mode for them to arrive to Asiatique the Riverfront. Therefore, they might not be as satisfied as foreign tourists in terms of transportation, facilities and service.

#### 4.7. Visitors' attitude and perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront after their visit

Visitors' overall attitude and perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront is studied by asking respondents to rank if they agree or disagree with statements listed on the questionnaire, and to what degree. There are nine

statements listed on the questionnaire in total, which refer to their opinions on culture presented at Asiatique the Riverfront, dining and shopping experience. (Table 3) All respondents were required to respond to all nine statements; therefore, each statement has fifty votes in total.

Table 3. Statements on Questionnaire about Visitors' Attitude and Perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront

No.	Statement	Aspect
1	Thai culture is well represented at Asiatique the Riverfront	Culture
2	We can enjoy good dining experience here	Dining experience
3	There is good quality of local products here	Shopping experience
4	There is good quality of souvenirs at Asiatique the Riverfront	Shopping experience
5	History of Thailand is well integrated at Asiatique the Riverfront	Culture
6	Products are within reasonable price	Shopping experience
7	Restaurants are within reasonable price	Dining experience
8	After travelling to Asiatique the Riverfront, you understand more about Thai culture	Culture
9	If given the opportunity, you will visit Asiatique the Riverfront again	Overall

#### 4.7.1. Foreign tourists' attitude and perception

Foreign tourists' attitude and perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront is diversified. There are both positive and negative answers to the statements listed on the questionnaire in different aspects, especially cultural aspect and shopping experience. (Graph 10) Generally, foreign tourists are more positive to dining and shopping experiences at Asiatique the Riverfront, although some of them think

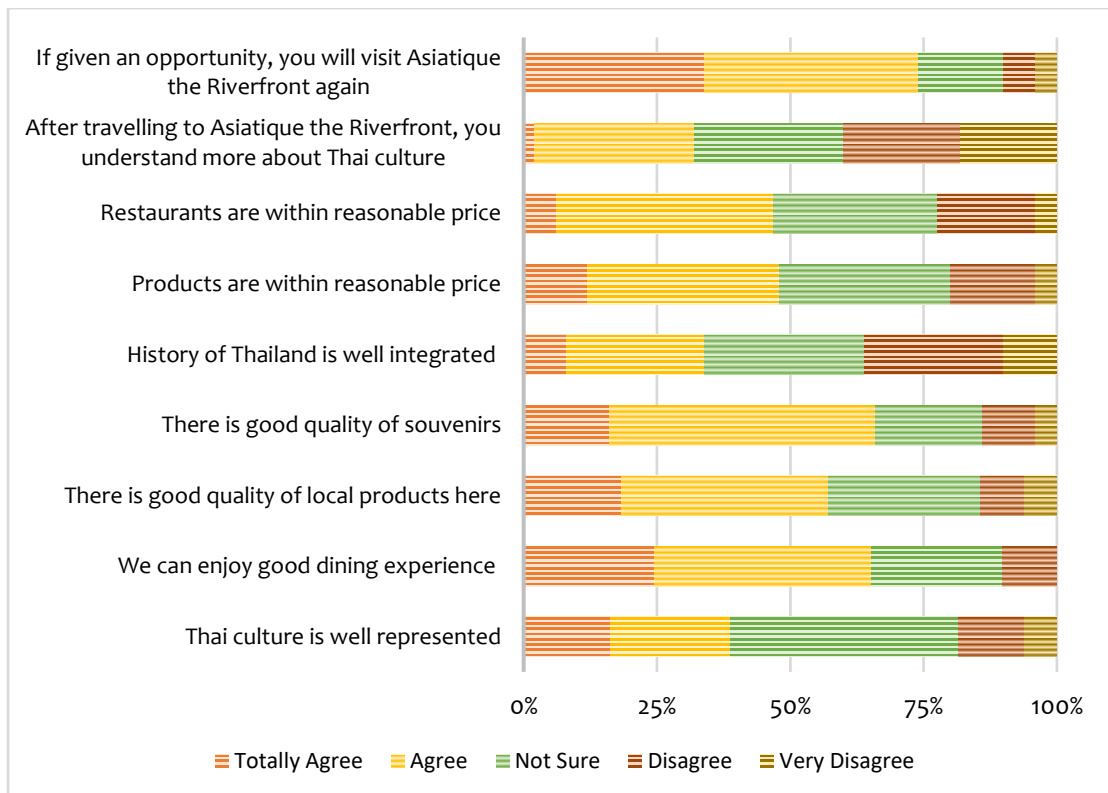
that the price is unreasonable. Foreign tourists are less positive to cultural elements at Asiatique the Riverfront. Despite foreign tourists' perception and attitude to their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront, they are willing to visit Asiatique the Riverfront again if they have chance.

In terms of foreign tourists' shopping experience at Asiatique the Riverfront, 66% of respondents are positive to the statement that there are good quality souvenirs and 56% of them are positive to the statement that there is good quality of local products here. Moreover, 48% agreed that products are within reasonable price while 20% of them disagreed with the statement. Foreign tourists' attitude to dining experience at Asiatique the Riverfront is similar to that of shopping experience; 64% of the respondents are positive that they could enjoy a good dining experience and 46% believed that restaurants are within reasonable price.

However, foreign tourists' attitudes to cultural experience at Asiatique the Riverfront are more negative; only 36% of them are positive to the statement that Thai culture is well presented at Asiatique the Riverfront and 34% agreed that history of Thailand is well integrated at Asiatique the Riverfront. Moreover, 40% of foreign respondents do not agree that they could understand more about Thai culture by visiting the place.

Therefore, it could be concluded that foreign respondents' attitude towards Asiatique the Riverfront is extreme and this might be because their expectations of the complex are different in the first place. Some of the foreign tourists look for exotic and local experiences while some of them look for relaxing atmosphere and organized shopping experience within an affordable price. Interviewees two and three shared the same expectations of Asiatique the Riverfront stating it was

an entertainment complex where they could find souvenirs, dining experience and exotic but organized shopping experience at the same time. Some of the other local markets in Bangkok, such as *Chatuchak Market* or *Train Night Market Ratchada*, were chaotic in the eyes of some foreign tourists. Asiatique the Riverfront provides an alternative choice for foreign tourists, which brings a clean and organized shopping environment; hence, they were satisfied with their experience at Asiatique the Riverfront. Nevertheless, some foreign tourists have different expectations of Asiatique the Riverfront. Interviewee four expressed his dissatisfaction to Asiatique the Riverfront as he expected the complex to be a local market where they could see authentic Thai way of life instead of an artificial building structure which imitates the past. He expected to find local food and local products within reasonable price; however, food and products available at Asiatique the Riverfront are more expensive than other night markets despite having the same quality.



Graph 10. Foreign Tourists' Attitude and Perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront after Having Visited the Place

#### 4.7.2. Local people's attitude and perception

Local people's attitude and perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront were more positive and neutral compared to those of foreign tourists. (Graph 11) Locals tend to vote for "not sure" when they do not have positive opinion to the statement; this might be due to the fact that in Thai values it is important to be considerate of other's feelings and to avoid public criticism.

In all statements provided in the questionnaire, "We can enjoy a good dining experience" was selected by the highest number of local people as "totally agree" and "agree," which represents 96% of the local respondents. However, only 14% of the same group agreed that restaurants were within reasonable price. Similarly regarding

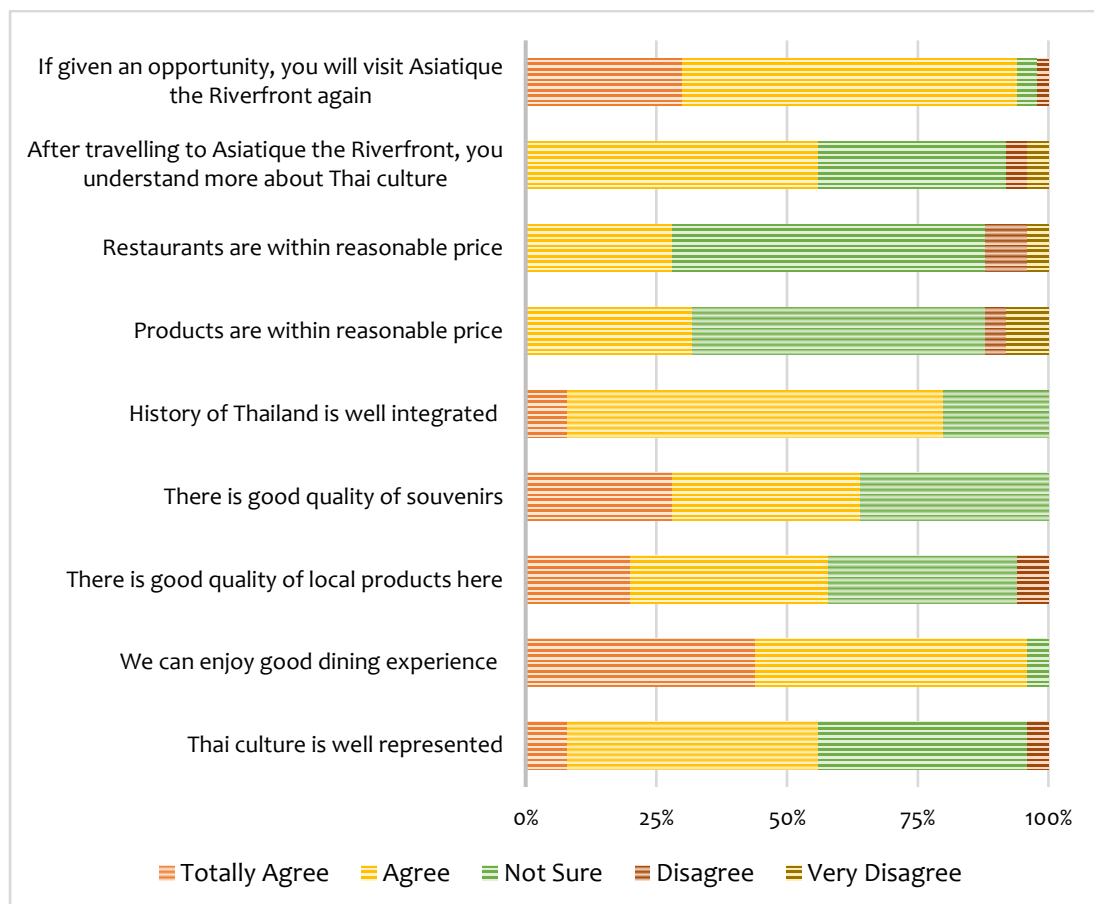


shopping experience, 64% of local respondents were positive that there were good quality souvenirs and 58% were positive that they could find good quality local products. However, only 32% agreed that products were within reasonable price. There were 12% of local respondents who thought that products and restaurants at Asiatique the Riverfront were too expensive.

Local people were more positive about their cultural experience at Asiatique the Riverfront compared to foreign tourists; 80% of local respondents were positive about the statement that history of Thailand was well integrated; and 48% of them thought that Thai cultural is well represented at Asiatique the Riverfront. Meanwhile, 56% of local respondents agreed that they understood more about Thai culture after they travelled to Asiatique the Riverfront. The difference in the attitude and perception of the cultural experience at Asiatique the Riverfront between foreign tourists and local people can be explained; in the eyes of foreigners Thai culture is about Thai food, traditions, religion, folklore, natural resources, traditional medicine, festivals, etcetera, hence, they expect to see more of the above-mentioned elements at Asiatique the Riverfront. Yet, from the perspective of foreign tourists, the architectural landscape of the place is based on a Western style and not Thai culture. On the other hand, as local people have previous knowledge of the history of Thailand, the architecture landscape of Asiatique the Riverfront could remind them of the past; thus, they agreed that history of Thailand is well integrated.

Although the majority of the local people thought that price of restaurants and products at Asiatique the Riverfront is not very reasonable, 94% of them are still positive to the statement that they would like to visit the place again. However, they do not have many expectations of Asiatique the Riverfront. It is believed that when most

locals visit the site, they do not look for particular products since items available there were not attractive enough to them. Instead, they visit Asiatique the Riverfront because they would like to enjoy the atmosphere of the place. There are some local people who had never been to Asiatique the Riverfront and are not interested to pay a visit either. Informant ten responded that Asiatique the Riverfront was too artificial and there were many other night markets in Bangkok that could fulfill his needs.



Graph 11. Local People's Attitude and Perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront after Visiting the Place

#### 4.8. Chapter Summary

It could be concluded that both foreign tourists and local people visit Asiatique the Riverfront because of its atmosphere and dining experience.

However, other activities and their opinions on Asiatique the Riverfront are different. Foreign tourists tend to have more consumption behavior at Asiatique the Riverfront because they are more interested in products available there and the price is affordable to them. Local people are less motivated to consume at Asiatique the Riverfront; instead, they are more concerned about the atmosphere of the place. Local people look for elements that are different from their everyday life and the foreign atmosphere is one of those. Therefore, patterns of cultural commodification mentioned in chapter three work because both foreign tourists and local people can find elements that they are interested in at Asiatique the Riverfront.



## 5. Chapter 5 Conclusion

This thesis aims at examining the pattern of cultural commodification at Asiatique the Riverfront; and studying and comparing the perception of local people and foreign tourists on the pattern of culture commodification on site. Asiatique the Riverfront is an entertainment complex in Bangkok that was developed under the theme of culture tourism. Therefore, commodified culture in the tourism industry in modern Thailand could be understood by studying the case of Asiatique the Riverfront. This thesis examined the origins and development of Asiatique the Riverfront, patterns of cultural commodification which target foreign tourists and local people respectively, and lastly, foreign tourists' and local people's expectations and satisfaction towards Asiatique the Riverfront.

Location of Asiatique the Riverfront is crucial to the origin and development of the complex. It is a symbol of modernization and it also bares historical significance. Asiatique the Riverfront is built based on the warehouses of the East Asiatic Company located on Charoen Krung Road. The East Asiatic Company was a Danish company which participated in teak-related business in the nineteenth century. Structure of the warehouses of the East Asiatic Company was renovated to reproduce the prosperity of the past; while decorations, information boards and bronze statues are used to duplicate and introduce the history of the place to visitors without previous knowledge to Thailand in nineteenth century. Furthermore, Asiatique the Riverfront is located next to the Chao Phraya River which was the major water transportation route in the old days; therefore, visitors can experience the atmosphere of the past when they visit Asiatique the Riverfront.

Asiatique the Riverfront aimed at attracting both foreign tourists and local people when it was opened in 2012, and it still aims at attracting various groups of visitors in the future. Since Asiatique the Riverfront opened in 2012, the process of cultural commodification at Asiatique the Riverfront seeks to attract both

foreign tourists and local people. This thesis hypothesizes that there were two sets of commodified culture at Asiatique the Riverfront.

It is believed that two sets of commodified culture at Asiatique the Riverfront are designed to target local people and foreign tourists respectively. Firstly, the historical landscape architecture of Asiatique the Riverfront is commodified to attract the local people, especially those who have knowledge of the history of Thailand in nineteenth century. Asiatique the Riverfront is packaged as a festival market with Western atmosphere of the nineteenth century. Apart from the historical architectural landscape, the relaxing atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River and localization of foreign culture and festivals are also presented at Asiatique the Riverfront to attract local people. Nonetheless, products aimed for sale to the local people are not culturally related, rather they are daily commodities or stylish designer products. Secondly, lifestyle tourism is the major theme to attract foreign tourists to visit Asiatique the Riverfront. Cultural shows, including Muay Thai and transgender shows, souvenirs with Thai characteristics and other cultural activities are promoted at Asiatique the Riverfront to attract foreign tourists. Cultural commodification which targets foreigners are summarized as four patterns, including localization of foreign culture, borrowing of foreign culture, adaptation of local culture and symbolization used on souvenir products.

Field work research is done in order to understand foreign tourists' and local people's views on commodified culture at Asiatique the Riverfront. There are both similarities and differences between foreign tourists' and local people's expectations and satisfaction regarding Asiatique the Riverfront.

Firstly, major motivations for foreign tourists and local people include the atmosphere of the Chao Phraya River and to enjoy a good dining experience. However, both foreign tourists and local people did not have many expectations on cultural elements of Asiatique the Riverfront before they had visited the site. This is to be expected because most of the marketing materials used to promote

Asiatique the Riverfront emphasize the atmosphere of the complex instead of shows and products sold on site. Most foreign tourists and more than half of the local people purchased products when they visit the place. Foreign tourists and local people show different preferences on product choices. The former are more interested in cultural products while the latter look for cheap or stylish products at Asiatique the Riverfront. Secondly, similar trends appear on activities that foreign tourists and local people participated in during their visit at Asiatique the Riverfront. The most popular activities among both foreign tourists and local people are to have a dining experience or relaxing at the bar at Asiatique the Riverfront. Meanwhile, foreigners are obviously more interested in cultural activities compared to locals. Thirdly, both foreign tourists and local people are mostly satisfied with the dining experience, transportation, facilities and service. Compared to local people, foreign tourists are more satisfied with consumption activities at Asiatique the Riverfront while local people can hardly find products that are unique to them at Asiatique the Riverfront.

Generally, foreign tourists' attitude and perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront is diversified and more extreme. This is because their expectations towards Asiatique the Riverfront are different in the first place. On the other hand, local people's attitude and perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront were more positive and neutral. The most obvious difference between foreign tourists' and local people's perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront is about historical and cultural elements shown on site. As most of the foreign tourists lack previous knowledge on the history of Thailand, their understanding is limited to symbolic historical patterns on souvenirs or historical shows. Therefore, it is normal that they are less satisfied with the historical atmosphere at Asiatique the Riverfront because the complex focuses on the trading history with European countries. At the same time, local people look for elements that are different from their daily experience; thus, Western atmosphere at Asiatique the Riverfront suits their needs.

In conclusion, the integration of culture into the tourism industry in contemporary Thailand could be understood through the case of Asiatique the

Riverfront. Firstly, it shows that it is necessary for tourist attractions to develop a unique theme to stand out from other tourist attractions in Bangkok. Abstract culture elements may be commodified to attract visitors, for example, historical landscape is commodified as the theme of Asiatique the Riverfront to attract visitors. Secondly, it demonstrates that both foreign tourists and local people look for elements that are different from their daily experience. The former would like to experience the culture of destination countries; while the latter would like to experience a foreign atmosphere. In order to attract both foreign tourists and local people, tourist attractions need to be able to create an exotic atmosphere for both groups, thus, the need exists for two sets of commodified culture at tourist attractions. Thirdly, the case of Asiatique the Riverfront also reveals that foreign tourists are more likely to be consumers at tourist attractions when compared to local people. As it is easier for service providers to earn profit from foreign tourists, they tend to aim at selling to foreigners instead of locals — consequently, tourist attractions will become foreign tourist oriented as time goes by. In order to attract a steady flow of local people and encourage their consumption on site, owners of tourist attractions need to organize celebrations and special activities regularly.

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## Appendix 1. Questionnaire in English



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CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION AND TOURISM IN THAILAND:  
A CASE STUDY OF ASIATIQUE THE RIVERFRONT

Dear Participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study entitled: *cultural commodification and tourism in Thailand: a case study of Asiatique the Riverfront*. The purpose of the research is to determine the pattern of cultural commodification in Thailand. There will be 5 parts in the questionnaire and it will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

**Part 1 Background**

Q1. Gender:  Female  Male

Q2. Age:  15-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55 or above

Q3. Nationalities:

- Thai  Chinese  Taiwan  Hong Kong  Japan  
 United Kingdom  United States of America  Russia  South Korean  
 ASEAN (be specify: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Others (be specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Part 2 Motivation to Asiatique**

Q4. How do you know about Asiatique the Riverfront? (can choose more than one option)

- Official marketing channel of Asiatique (including Facebook page, website)  
 Tripadvisor  Internet  Tourist guide book  Tourist agency  
 Recommended by friends/ relatives  Tourism Authority of Thailand

Q5. How many times have you visited Asiatique the Riverfront?

- First time  2  3  4  5  >5



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Q6. Please rank your major reasons to visit Asiatique the Riverfront.

(1=most important reason, 7= least important reason)

- Enjoy the atmosphere of Chao Praya River
- High quality of souvenirs
- Entertainment Facilities (i.e. Ferris wheel)
- Authentic Cultural Shows (i.e. Muay Thai, Calypso Cabaret, Thai Puppet show)
- Good dining experience
- Experience the historical ambiance of Asiatique
- Convenient transportation
- Others (be specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

**Part 3 Tourists Experience in Asiatique the Riverfront**

Q7. What products did you buy in Asiatique the Riverfront?

(can choose more than one option)

- Arts and crafts       Gemstones and jewelry       Leather goods
- Housewares       Objects that depict wildlife and nature
- Clothing       Postcards
- Spa products       Soap       Thai medicine
- Snack       Pillow       Skin care/ make up
- Others (be specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )
- None of above

Q8. Which activities did you take part in Asiatique the Riverfront?

(can choose more than one)

- Muay Thai Live show       Calypso Cabaret show       Traditional Thai Puppet show
- Thai food       international food       Bar
- Buying souvenirs       To take the boat ride along Chaopraya River
- Massage/ Spa       Others (be specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )



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**Part 4 Tourist Satisfaction in Asiatique the Riverfront**

Q9. Rank your satisfaction to activities that you participated at Asiatique the Riverfront?

(Please ✓ into the box that best fits your opinion)

Activities	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Fair	Disappointed	Very Disappointed
Muay Thai Live Show					
Calypso Cabaret Show					
Thai puppet Show					
Street Performance					
Dining Experience					
Boat Ride along Chao Praya River					
Shopping Experience					
Historical ambiance of the past					
Massage/ Spa					
Transportation, Facilities and Service					

**Part 5 Attitude and Perception towards Asiatique the Riverfront after visiting the place**

Q10. Please ✓ the box that best fits your opinion

Statement	Totally Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Very Disagree
Thai culture is well represented at Asiatique the Riverfront.					
We can enjoy good dining experience here.					
There is good quality of local products here					





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There is good quality of souvenirs at Asiatique the Riverfront.					
History of Thailand is well integrated at Asiatique the Riverfront					
Products are in reasonable price.					
Restaurants are in reasonable price.					
After travelling to Asiatique, you understand more about Thai culture					
If given an opportunity, you will visit Asiatique the Riverfront again					

END

*Thank you very much for your help.  
Wish you have a good day.*

## Appendix 2. Questionnaire in Thai language



การแปลงวัฒนธรรมเป็นสินค้า กับการท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทย

กรณีศึกษาเอเชียทีก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟร้อนท์

คำชี้แจง แบบประเมินนี้ใช้เป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับความคิดเห็นของคนไทยที่เคยรับบริการของเอเชียทีก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟร้อนท์ แบบประเมินมีทั้งหมดมี ๔ ตอน ใช้เวลาในการตอบประมาณ ๑๐ นาที ขอความกรุณาผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามตอบตามความเป็นจริงโดยเขียนเครื่องหมาย ✓ ลงในแต่ละช่อง

ตอนที่ 1 ข้อมูลทั่วไปของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม

Q1. เพศ  หญิง  ชาย  อื่นๆ

Q2. อายุ  15-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  < 55

ตอนที่ 2 แรงจูงใจในการเยี่ยมชมเอเชียทีก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟร้อนท์

Q3. คุณรับรู้ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับเอเชียทีก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟร้อนท์จากช่องทางอะไรบ้าง

- ช่องทางการตลาดของเอเชียทีก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟร้อนท์ (เช่น เฟซบุ๊กหรือเว็บไซต์ของเอเชียทีก)
- เว็บไซต์ tripadvisor  อินเทอร์เน็ต  หนังสือท่องเที่ยว  บริษัททัวร์
- แนะนำโดยเพื่อนหรือญาติพี่น้อง  โฆษณาของการท่องเที่ยวแห่งประเทศไทย

Q4. คุณมาเที่ยวเอเชียทีก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟร้อนท์มากี่ครั้งแล้ว

- ครั้งแรก  ครั้งที่สอง  ครั้งที่สาม  ครั้งที่สี่  ครั้งที่ห้า  มากกว่าห้าครั้ง



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Q5. กรุณาเรียงลำดับความสำคัญของเหตุผลที่ทำให้คุณตัดสินใจที่จะไปเที่ยวเอเชียติก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์

(เรียงลำดับจากมากไปน้อย 7 ลำดับ)

- ได้เพลิดเพลินกับบรรยากาศริมแม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา
- มีของฝากที่มีคุณภาพดี
- มีเครื่องเล่นต่างๆ (เช่น ชิงช้าสวรรค์)
- การแสดงศิลปวัฒนธรรมไทย(เช่น มวยไทย การแสดงคาบาริ่ หุ่นละครเล็ก โง่หลุยส์)
- ประสบการณ์การรับประทานอาหารที่ดี
- ได้สัมผัสกับบรรยากาศทางประวัติศาสตร์
- มีการขนส่งที่สะดวก
- อื่นๆ \_\_\_\_\_

ตอนที่ 3 ประสพการณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยวที่เอเชียติก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์

Q6. คุณได้ซื้อสินค้าอะไรบ้างที่เอเชียติก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ (สามารถเลือกได้มากกว่าหนึ่งคำตอบ)

- สินค้าศิลปะและงานฝีมือ  เครื่องเพชรพลอย  สินค้าที่ทำด้วยหนัง
- ของใช้ในบ้าน  สินค้าที่พรรณนาสัตว์ป่าและธรรมชาติ
- เสื้อผ้า  โปสการ์ด  ผลิตภัณฑ์สปา  สบู่  ยาไทย
- ขนม  หมอน  ผลิตภัณฑ์ดูแลผิวหรือเครื่องสำอาง
- อื่นๆ \_\_\_\_\_



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Q7. คุณได้ร่วมกิจกรรมอะไรบ้างที่เอเชียติก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ (สามารถเลือกได้มากกว่าหนึ่งคำตอบ)

- การแสดงมวยไทย    การแสดงคาบาเร่    การแสดงหุ่นละครเล็ก โจหลุยส์
- ทานอาหารไทย    ทานอาหารนานาชาติ    บาร์
- ซั้วของฝาก    นั่งเรือข้ามแม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา    นวด สปา/
- อื่นๆ \_\_\_\_\_

ตอนที่ 4 ความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวเอเชียติก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์

Q8. ขอประเมินตามความพึงพอใจกับประสบการณ์ที่เอเชียติก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์

(ประเมินเฉพาะกิจกรรมที่เคยร่วม)

กิจกรรม	พอใจมาก	พอใจ	ปานกลาง	ไม่ค่อยพอใจ	ไม่พอใจมาก
การแสดงมวยไทย					
การแสดงคาบาเร่					
การแสดงหุ่นละครเล็ก ของ โจหลุยส์					
การแสดงริมทางเดิน					
ประสบการณ์การรับประทานอาหาร					
ประสบการณ์นั่งเรือริมแม่น้ำ เจ้าพระยา					
ซอปปี้ง					
บรรยากาศทางประวัติศาสตร์					
นวดสปา/					
การขนส่ง บริการ และ สิ่ง อำนวยความสะดวกต่างๆ					



ตอนที่ 5 ทศนคติดักกับเวหนาที่มีต่อเอเชียทิก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ หลังจากเยี่ยมชมโครงการนี้

Q9. ขอประเมินตามความคิดเห็นที่แท้จริง

ข้อ	เห็นด้วย อย่างมาก	เห็นด้วย	ไม่แน่ใจ	ไม่เห็น ด้วย	ไม่เป็นด้วย อย่างมาก
เอเชียทิก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์สะท้อนถึงวัฒนธรรมไทยได้เป็นอย่างดี					
ผู้ที่มาเที่ยวสามารถมีประสบการณ์การรับประทานอาหารที่มีน้ำประทับใจ					
เอเชียทิก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์มีสินค้าไทยที่มีคุณภาพ					
เอเชียทิก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ขายของฝากที่มีคุณภาพ					
บรรยากาศทางประวัติศาสตร์ของไทยได้ถูกนำเสนอที่เอเชียทิก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์อย่างดี					
ราคาสินค้าที่ราคาสมเหตุสมผล					
ราคาร้านอาหารสมเหตุสมผล					
หลังจากที่มาเที่ยวเอเชียทิก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์ คุณได้เข้าใจถึงวัฒนธรรมไทยมากขึ้น					
ถ้ามีโอกาส คุณจะมาเที่ยว เอเชียทิก เดอะ ริเวอร์ฟรอนท์อีก					

ขอขอบคุณที่สละเวลาในการ

ตอบแบบสอบถามนี้

## VITA

YuenKi Lam received her B.A. degree in linguistics and Thai language at the University of Hong Kong in 2015. She continues her M.A. degree in Southeast Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University immediate after graduating from bachelor degree. As a foreigner who lives in Thailand and able to access Thai language, her research mainly focus on social, political and cultural aspects of Thailand.

