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*Smart City and Cultural Diplomacy:
Transnational Connectivity in Innovation Services*

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SMART CITY AND CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY IN INNOVATION SERVICES

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Abstract

This paper argues that the initiatives for developing smart city and cultural diplomacy can converge through innovation services of transnational connectivity in tourism. By way of contextualization, Chiang Mai city is a designated geographical site by the Thai government for development as a smart city. It is also the largest and most culturally significant city in Northern Thailand. Besides, tourism has been listed as one of the key growth engines for Thai economy whereby People's Republic of China (PRC) has inadvertently been targeted as a mammoth market of tourists owing to their growing affluence. Hence, in light of these prevailing factors, this paper adopts a qualitative approach involving both PRC and Thai representatives to explore the feasibility of such a multi-disciplinary connectivity. In essence, this paper audaciously proposes a parsimonious approach to facilitate cultural diplomacy through smart initiatives pertaining to tourism industry. Significantly, this paper seeks to offer socio-economic, cultural, technological and academic contributions.

Keywords

Smart city, Cultural diplomacy, Innovation services and Tourism

1. Introduction

This paper argues that the initiatives for developing smart city and cultural diplomacy can converge through innovation services of transnational connectivity in tourism.

Conceptually, this paper seeks to explore the interrelation between smart city, cultural diplomacy and innovative business services. Chiang Mai city is a designated geographical site by the Thai government for development as a smart city. It is the largest and most culturally significant city in Northern Thailand. Over the past decade, Chiang Mai city continues to develop socio-economically and has since become a tourist destination. Statistically, Chiang Mai stood at number 2 on World's Best Awards survey, Travel and Leisure 2016 list of "Top 15 cities." The number of tourists from People's Republic of China (PRC) has also witnessed a phenomenal rise especially after the Chinese film "Lost in Thailand," where more than 80% of the film was shot in Chiang Mai, was screened in PRC in December 2012. Incidentally, tourism has also been listed as one of the key growth engines for Thai economy whereby PRC has inadvertently been targeted as a mammoth market of tourists in light of their growing affluence. However, there remains a dearth of research that critically examines on digital innovation that can provide comprehensive infrastructural and rich cultural heritage information that can service Thai-Sino cultural diplomacy to attract PRC tourists to Chiang Mai.

Hence, this paper attempts to study the feasibility of an interventional action-based approach to facilitate cultural diplomacy through smart initiatives in tourism industry. Through a qualitative approach, this research actively engages dialogue between both PRC and Thai representatives. The findings of this research are enlightening. In terms of IT application, in spite of the phenomenal growth of smart devices used by PRC tourists, there has not been any significant development in Thai IT initiatives in commensurable scale. Hence, there is a need to develop application software to service PRC tourists by the host city, Chiang Mai. Further, the available software applications are too general, which lack focus on specific target of PRC tourists. In mitigation, there is a need to provide customized local knowledge

in the areas of people, products and places, which are richly embedded in Lanna culture. These aspects are the primary source of attraction for the PRC tourists. From the cultural diplomacy perspective, this research promotes the understanding of Thai unique strengths that go beyond economic benefits.

The significance of this paper lies in the audacious and parsimonious approach to integrate the multiple concepts of smart city, cultural diplomacy and innovation service in the context of e-tourism. As an overview, this paper covers (1) Introduction; (2) Literature Review; (3) Conceptual Approach; (4) Methodology; (5) Research Findings; (6) Discussion; (7) Policy Recommendations; and (8) Conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Problematizing Smart City Studies

Smart city researches have often emphasized the usage of digital technologies to enhance city infrastructures and communication venues. For instance, Batty et al. (2012) study seven smart cities project in Europe with a focus on issues such as land use, transportation, and participatory platforms for urban planning. Most works linking participation and smart cities have focused on the IT aspect of the data collection and analysis using sensors and Internet of Things (see such as Cardone et al. 2013; Jin et al. 2014; Kitchin 2014; Perera et al. 2014). In a similar vein, many scholars dwell in the field of urban planning and geographers (see such as Hancke et al. 2013). While scholars have made efforts to clarify the definition, scope, and desired direction of the concept of smart city, some have identified critical factors of smart city initiatives that includes, in addition to technology, management and organization, governance, and policy context (Chourabi et al. 2012). In other words, there is an over-emphasis on merely attaching technological dimension with regards to smart city studies. While a handful of studies have begun to determine the importance of the human aspect or social infrastructure of smart cities including ideas related to creative city, learning city, humane city and knowledge city (Nam & Pardo 2011), there is still a lack of incorporating the “softer” aspects through cultural diplomacy. Further, this

particular research situates in an Asian city as many scholars have focused on European cities (Caragliu et al. 2011; Batty et al. 2012; Lazaroiu & Roscia 2012). Finally, contra to predominant smart city literature that delve mainly on those who are living in the city, this paper uniquely looks at visitors of the city.

2.2 Problematizing Smart City and Tourism Studies

Tourism has played a substantial role in the economies of cities and countries through employment, foreign exchange, investments and regional development, which warrants the development of ubiquitous applications (Borrego-Jaraba et al. 2010). Naturally, scholars researching in smart city and tourism have focused on the indispensability of the integration of intelligent systems in patrimony tourism (Benfares et al. 2016). In the same vein, scholars largely fixate in exploring the need to make effective smart tourism adaptive to meet users' different requirements at different stages of visit over time (D'Amico et al. 2013). Nonetheless, the focus still lies in the technological component in innovation of touristic sector. Not surprisingly, scholars pervasively gravitate on the significance of Internet-of-Things (IoT) and big data as critical to smart tourism (Nitti et al. 2017; Sun et al. 2016). However, the key of intelligent tourism is to focus on people (Lijing et al. 2014). Yet, there is a dearth of literature that attempts to examine the intricate and transforming needs of people within the wider context of enhancing understanding of cultures of people, products and places.

2.3 Problematizing Smart City, Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy Studies

Scholars have largely fallen into the dichotomy trap of separating governmental intervention in support of national interests from the natural and organic growth of transfer of networks, tourism, migration, media access, book circulations and movement of artists without governmental intervention (Arndt 2006). In the same vein, scholars, such as Joan Channick (2005), have distinguished a two-fold definition of cultural diplomacy where there is a relegation of culture to the background with artists' understanding, exploring and exchanging ideas in cross-cultural contexts as secondary. However, such dualism fails to

capture the support of non-governmental actors (Gienow-Hecht 2010) without merely treating them as accessory of state's foreign policy-making process (Jorgensen 1990). Hence, this current project endeavors to bridge the gap through an actor-oriented approach to empower and accentuate smart tour artistry in cultural proliferation. This paper seeks to provide a breakthrough in promoting cultural diplomacy through smart city and tourism that will have long-term positive impact to the social, economic, cultural and political landscapes. Further, amidst the existing US-centered research with studies on Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Middle East (Gienow-Hecht 2010: 3-4), this research seeks to fill the gap from an intra-Asian perspective.

3. *Conceptual Approach*

3.1 *Triadic Space as Beyond Dualism*

The Cartesian dualism, which has long beset social science, has not spared its pervasive infusion in the perception of space. Traditionally, space is enraptured as either a mental conception or a material construction. It has entered into a deadlock opposition without the slightest clue for reconciliation. In response, Lefebvre develops his triadic model of the social production of space in order to undermine the dichotomies of structure and agency, discourse and practice (Ronneberger 2008: 137). In elaboration, Lefebvre's triadic model is formulated as perceived space, conceived space and lived space. According to Zhang (2006: 220-221), Lefebvre offers lived space as a bridging concept so as to evade falling in either conceived space (purely idealism) or perceived space (pure materialism). As a third dimension, lived space can be understood as balancing carefully between the poles of conceived space and perceived space (Zhang 2006: 220-221). Such notion of the lived space is also a state of "realized abstraction" which is a balanced struck between idealism and materialism (Elden 2004: 189-190). Hence, human space is never and neither entirely nature nor abstraction. As a result, the processes in the production of space are different kinds of spatialisation taking place between "mental" and "real" space (Haslum 2008: 62). In essence, Lefebvre's view of the society requires a conceptual formulation that

encapsulates a movement toward a certain concrete possible object. It is a clear departure from either idealism or positivism as posited in dualism.

At the core of the theory, there is an emerging three-dimensional dialectic moments of production: material production, the production of knowledge, and the production of meaning, which are interconnected (Schmid 2008: 33, 41). In Lefebvre's triadic formulation, "perceived space" refers to the production and reproduction of spatial relations between objects and products. It ensures both continuity and cohesion, to some degree. He puts it as "in terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance (Lefebvre 1991: 33)." In gist, this space takes a physical form which is generated and used (Elden 2001: 815).

Next, Lefebvre's representations of space or "conceived space" can be understood as "tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations (Lefebvre 1991: 33)." They are also referred to "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanist, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived (Lefebvre 1991: 38)." It can also be understood as a space of knowledge and logic, of maps and mathematics, and of an instrumental space of social engineers and urban planners (Elden 2001: 815).

Finally, Lefebvre's representational spaces refer to spaces "lived" directly "through its associated images and symbols and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'... (Lefebvre 1991: 39)." It is a lived social space produced and modified through its use over time. It is thus invested with symbolism, meaning, and less formal or more local forms of knowledge (Elden 2001: 816). In essence, lived space is a space of lived experiences that emerge as a result of the dialectical relation between spatial practice and representations of spaces. This dialectical relation is shifting in perspectives; it is analogous to three cameras projecting simultaneously onto any event in such a way that lived space overlaps instead of juxtaposes with conceived space and perceived space (Zhang 2006: 222). Hence, lived space is "first,

a balanced and balancing element of Lefebvre's triad model, consisting of subjective spatial experiences, and second, an integrated moment of social space, derived through a particular spatial perspective (Zhang 2006: 222)."

3.2 Conceptualizing Smart City, Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy in Space Matrix

To escape the dichotomy trap, this current project has chosen to employ Lefebvre's triadic formulation of space for analytic purposes. This multi-dimensional spatial lens provides a clearer picture of the convergence of the triple fields of Smart City, Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy in dynamic motion and interrelation. In addition, the lucidity of the spatial conceptualization is aided with a further delineation between Chinese and Thai perspectives towards "people," "products" and "places." Hence, this research analysis has taken the form of an analytical matrix to unravel the material, ideological and practical dimensions embedded in people, products and places pertaining to the feasibility of software application to facilitate smart tourism and cultural diplomacy.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Objective

The main objective of this research project is to establish the feasibility of software application to facilitate smart tourism and cultural diplomacy. In specific, the objectives can be further sub-divided as follows:

- To explore the Thai and PRC Chinese perspectives towards the appreciation of material aspects in Chiang Mai city by PRC tourists;
- To explore the Thai and PRC Chinese perspectives towards the conceptualization of ideological notions of Chiang Mai city by PRC tourists;
- To explore the Thai and PRC Chinese perspectives towards the practical considerations in relation to the smart application and Thai-Sino cultural diplomacy.

4.2 Research Method

This research is primarily qualitative in nature. It comprises salient features including natural setting, researcher as key instrument, multiple methods, complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic, participants' meanings, emergent design, reflexivity, and holistic account (Creswell 2013: 45). Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, this qualitative research provides a multi-dimensional and in-depth lens to understand the process involved. Besides, this research reviews and analyzes qualitative data collected, repeated ideas and concepts that are categorized before establishing basis for policy recommendations. In addition, the researcher engages document research on existing literature and social media to collect data.

4.3 Research Site

This research is set within the geographic locality of Chiang Mai city. As the capital of Chiang Mai Province, the city is the largest and most culturally significant city in Northern Thailand. According to record, Chiang Mai city spans an area of 152.4 square kilometers with a total population of 234,244 and a density of 1,594.3 per square kilometer (Mueang Chiang Mai District 2015). Since the 1990s, condos and hotels are going up at a phenomenal rate (Hill 1998: 12). Over the past two decades, Chiang Mai city continues to develop socio-economically and has become a famous tourist destination. Thus, it is not surprising that Chiang Mai has become a hot spot with the global flows of people, capital and information. Further, much changes in city planning and urban space development continue to take place in a rapid fashion. Increasingly, the city has developed into an eclectic environment that is conducive and attractive to urban middle class migrants of PRC tourists entering into the foray of tourism and other transnational business, education and lifestyle activities.

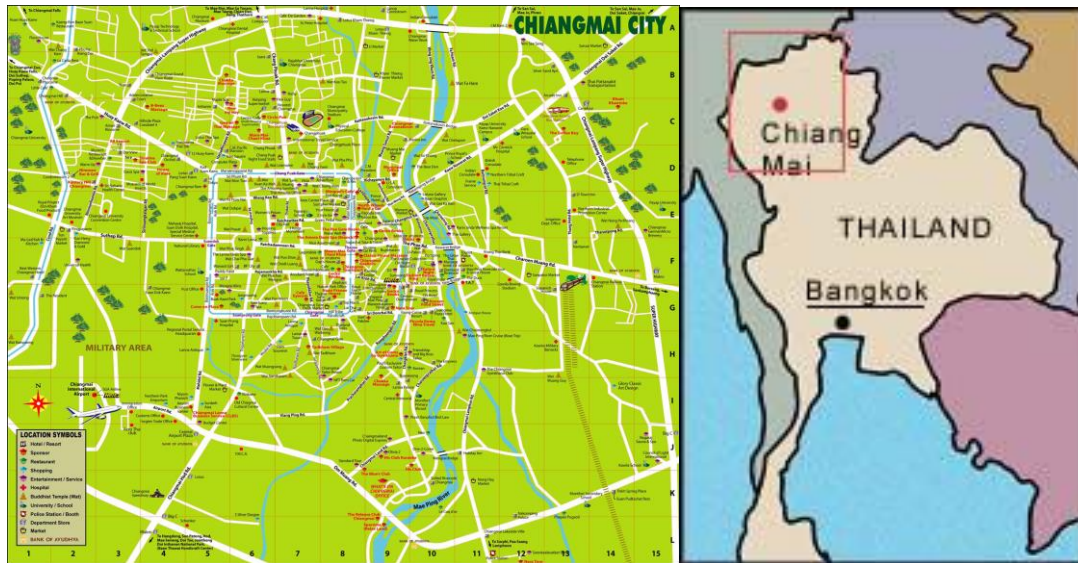


Figure 1 Left Map of Chiang Mai City (MapOfThailand.org 2013) and Right Map of Thailand (Chiang Mai in Action Tour and Travel Services 2008)

4.4 Research Scope

Primarily, the respondents of this project comprises both PRC tour operators as well as Thai authority representatives in Chiang Mai. The selection of these iconic personnel is aimed at capturing a holistic yet contrasting perspectives of the transforming dynamic PRC tourism landscape in Chiang Mai city. The specific characteristics are highlighted below:

Table 1 Characteristics of PRC Study Group

Name	Company	Services	Years of Experience
Mr. Ronnie Yue Zhao Kai (from Yunnan Province)	Snail Season Tourism Company	Package tours with tour guides, transportation services, hospitality services	6 months as company owner
Mr. Li Yun Hao (from Yunnan Province)	Unnamed	Booking services for restaurants, hotels and tourist attractions; renowned blogger	3 years between the period 2012-2015

Mr. Huang Shi (from Guangzhe Province)	C.C.T. Express Co. Ltd. (CCT Group)	Tour operations; travel agents; booking services for restaurants and hotels, transportation; and event organization	6 years as General Manager Chiang Mai Tour Group
Mr. Li Chun Yao (but known as LC and from Guangdong Province)	Onion Travel Tourism Company	Booking services for flight tickets and accommodation; Customized itinerary for individuals and small groups	25 years' experience but became CEO for this company for 3 years

Table 2 Characteristics of Thai Study Group

Name	Position	Organization Affiliation	Expertise
Mr. Thanin Supasaeng	Former Chiang Mai Governor	Chiang Mai Provincial Office	More than 35 years' experience working as a government officer
Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang	Professor in Politics and Local Administration	Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration Chiang Mai University	More than 40 years as a Professor in Politics and Local Administration
Ms. Jumriang Chaiwong	Former Director of Chiang Mai OTOP Center	San – Kamphaeng District, Chiang Mai	More than 20 years' experience in producing local product

5. Research Findings

5.1 Triadic Perspectives from Chinese Respondents

5.1.1 Pragmatism, transforming landscapes and geopolitics behind material consumption

The key PRC respondents in this study have expressed their views concerning PRC tourists' appreciation of material aspects of Chiang Mai city. In summary, according to them, PRC tourists enjoyed the Chiang Mai's environment, climate, festivities, traditional tourist sites as well as unconventional or customized packages. These are conceptualized as pragmatism, transforming landscapes and geopolitics accordingly.

5.1.1.1 Pragmatism

When establishing material interest amongst PRC tourists, the most obvious response would be the traditional sites, such as "*Wat Doi Suthep, Doi Inthanon National Park, which is the highest mountain in Thailand, Elephant Nature Park, Night Safari, Walking Street, Night Bazaar, delicious street food and shopping malls* (Mr. Ronnie Yue Zhao Kai; Interview; March 5, 2017)." Mr. Li Chun Yao (Interview; April 16, 2017) also highlighted "*museums and shops for arts and crafts, ancient jewelry, pottery, dyeing textile and umbrella design*" as attractive to PRC tourists. Beyond static physical locations, festivals such as Songkran, the Thai New Year, are particularly attractive. A respondent shared, "*Thais have a different way of celebrating their New Year, particularly in Chiang Mai. I saw marvelous pandemonium, revelers gathering in the streets with their water guns, splashing water everywhere, playing with lanterns and fireworks, raising funds for charity work, drinking and eating during Songkran Festival.* (Mr. Li Chun Yao; Interview; April 16, 2017)."

However, the respondents in this research also surfaced the pragmatic motivation spanning environmental and climate factors. The following are some of their quotes:

“Environmentally speaking, Chinese from big cities in China like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou travel to Chiang Mai for its blue skies and fresh air. They come here for ‘pulmonary therapy’ because they are from cities with high air pollution. Moreover, Chiang Mai’s temperature is cozy and less contending throughout the year. During winter season, senior citizens from China travel to Chiang Mai for a week or two to avoid the coldest period which can be as low as minus five degrees (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017).”

“Geographically, Chiang Mai is one of the closest tour destinations in Asia for PRC tourists. In the past, Hainan Province was the targeted destination for those who like to avoid winter season, which consequentially elevating the cost of living there. Hence, Chiang Mai becomes an alternative especially with direct flights making travelling more convenient (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017).”

“If we observe more carefully, Chinese tourists who tour Chiang Mai are mainly from delta areas like Guangzhou, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Macau. They prefer to visit mountainous areas because rivers and lakes are common to them (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017).”

In other words, Chiang Mai’s relatively pollution-free atmosphere, warmer climate and mountainous terrain have aptly answered to the PRC tourists’ pragmatic needs of pulmonary treatment, basic comfort and scenic enjoyment.

5.1.1.2 Transforming landscapes

Tourism is a dynamic industry situated in several simultaneously transforming landscapes. In particular, with the changing domestic policies and medical advancements occasioned by PRC’s phenomenal economic growth, there is a concomitant shift in demographic and spending patterns that bear significant implications to tourism. Respondents from our study

have insightfully highlighted that there is a need to address PRC tourists' growing tangible needs for elderly and children attractions in Chiang Mai. In addition, respondents have also detected a changing tourism style from the traditional stereotypical large-group setting to the customized genres that cater to unconventional and underrated attractions in Chiang Mai. The following quotes are snippets from their sharing:

“To attract the medium and higher income group tourists, Chiang Mai tourism industry could build ‘rest and recreation’ spots with translation services provided. This is beneficial for senior citizens from PRC. If Thai government could give them one-month tourist visa, they would choose to be in Chiang Mai to avoid the coolest days of winter in PRC. Another suggestion for creative tourist attraction is to have children playgrounds or amusement parks for toddlers and pre-school children. This is because when PRC changed the policy for each family to have 2 children from 2016 onwards, we must anticipate the proliferated influx of children by 2018 (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017).”

“According to statistics, PRC has 17.6 percent population above 65 years old this year. By year 2020, it will reach 25 percent. Therefore, we are planning and strategizing to enable more Chinese senior citizens to tour Chiang Mai. This year, Suzhou tourism companies have started organizing tours mainly for senior citizens. They tend to charge higher rates because they have incorporated better medical services and insurance coverage (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017).”

“The trend of tourism has morphed from large tourist group to the latest trend of tourism that is travelling with some friends who have the same purpose and liking about places and activities. This is known as ‘individualistic tourism approach,’ which is taking over ‘traditional tourism approach.’ Nowadays, tourists no longer enjoy touring in big group. They prefer smaller groups such as with a few friends or family

members. From there, they make choices about places to visit and how to make their time together meaningful and enjoyable. For example, some came here to practice yoga and they chose to stay in villas outside the city center (Mr. Li Chun Yao; Interview; April 16, 2017)."

5.1.1.3 Geopolitics

Finally, the material aspects of PRC tourism in Chiang Mai are rooted in the geopolitical dimension taking place between PRC and other countries and regions. In a perceptive manner, respondents explained the dynamic impact of geopolitics:

"We will have more Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai this year because of the following reasons: Firstly, it is because the rancor between PRC and Korea has yet to reach a quick rapprochement. Secondly, the trend of touring Malaysia has been dissipating after Malaysian Airlines MH 370 tragedy. Thirdly, Japan is not so stable and safe as compared to Chiang Mai. And lastly, Chinese tourists would not prefer to tour Europe and Middle East due to fear of terrorism (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017)."

5.1.2 Nostalgia, cultural quest and connectedness behind ideological consumption

Beyond examining the façade of material consumption, this research takes a further step to explore PRC tourists' underlying ideological constructions in coming to Chiang Mai. In particular, this research has unraveled celebrity nostalgia, quest of cultural consumption and existential connectedness as inner motivations for ideological consumption.

5.1.2.1 Celebrity nostalgia

The nostalgic attachment to celebrities explains PRC tourists' ideological attraction towards Chiang Mai. The stellar iconic Teresa Teng who stayed and passed away in Chiang Mai as well as Xu Zheng who is a popular PRC movie star, have generated a huge psychological

impetus for many PRC tourists to visit Chiang Mai. This is captured by a respondent's sharing as follows:

“Chiang Mai is well-known in PRC because of 2 superstars- Teresa Teng and Xu Zheng. The death of Teresa Teng on 8 May 1995 at Chiang Mai Mae Ping Hotel, Room 1502 has made the name ‘Chiang Mai’ unforgettable in PRC. Xu Zheng is a movie star from China who has directed, co-written and co-produced the popular movie entitled ‘Lost in Thailand’ in which Chiang Mai was chosen as the main shooting site. I am clear about the entire production process because I was Xu Zheng’s translator then. After the screening of the movie in Dec 2012, there was an astounding proliferation of Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai. They travelled to Chiang Mai because it was an in-thing to visit places where the superstars had been including the Thai food and cosmopolitan eateries in Nimman Road, which were their favorite (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017)”.

5.1.2.2 Quest for cultural consumption

Many PRC tourists crave for the consumption of cultural elements found in Chiang Mai. Instead of pursuing material satisfaction, PRC tourists enjoyed Chiang Mai because *“it has the legacy and heritage of Lanna culture, folk traditions, customs, arts and music (Mr. Ronnie Yue Zhao Kai; Interview; March 5, 2017).”* According to another respondent, the attractive quality of Chiang Mai lies in the intrinsic characteristics of inclusiveness, politeness and friendliness as described below:

“It is obvious that Chiang Mai does not have the best mountains in the world or distinctive tourism spots such as Niagara Falls, Canada. Nevertheless, the grace and charm of Lanna culture enables Chiang Mai to provide the highest quality of service. This makes PRC tourists feel at home here. They are attracted by the inner beauty of Chiang Mai, which has the

characteristics of inclusiveness, politeness and friendliness (Mr. Li Yun Hao; Interview; March 15, 2017)."

Hence, most respondents would suggest that the move forward is not rapid urbanization in touristification. On the contrary, it is to preserve its cultural distinctiveness as illustrated as follows: *"Instead of creating more man-made tourist attractions, Thai policy makers in Chiang Mai tourism industry need to continue preserving its distinctive culture in the form of arts, festivals, ethnics and religious traditions (Mr. Li Yun Hao; Interview; March 15, 2017)."* It would have been wiser if Chiang Mai adopts creativity in cultural preservation and impartation through different expressions. For instance, a respondent provided the following suggestions:

"Creative tourist attraction includes Thai cooking class, Thai traditional medicine, Thai therapy and medical treatment. In addition, there can be educational trip packages such as English language class; Lanna art and craft sessions for PRC school children; Sports events like cycling race; and marriage preparation, enrichment and counseling seminars which are quite attractive to PRC tourists (Mr. Ronnie Yue Zhao Kai; Interview; March 5, 2017)."

5.1.2.3 Existential connectedness

At a deeper level, the quest for cultural consumption reveals a desire for constructing an existential self. Since the cultural revolution and the recent meteoric rise of urban development in PRC, many Chinese lamented the deprivation of traditional ethics and values. Against this backdrop, Chiang Mai presented a counter-intuitive yet attractive model of cultural distinction. A respondent described it as follows:

"When Chinese tourists come to a place like Chiang Mai, they find that the Thais are relaxed, easy-going and contented with the little they have. That is why Thai smiles are very attractive to the Chinese tourists. On the other

hand, the PRC Chinese young adults in this generation are under a lot of pressure and they work very hard so that they could become billionaires. The worldview of PRC Chinese and the Thais are different. This is seen on TV advertisements. TV advertisements in Thailand are artistic, expressive and touching. They also take a longer time to bring the messages across and are less commercialized in contrast to the TV advertisements in PRC (Mr. Li Chun Yao; Interview; April 16, 2017)."

Such culture touches the human core and provides a metaphorical haven for recuperation of the weary Chinese souls while reestablishing their sense of being. A respondent depicted this as follows:

"Culturally, Chiang Mai is unique. Vehicles give priority to pedestrians and 'songtaew' drivers are soft spoken. The policemen are gentle in re-directing smokers from non-smoking areas without issuing summons. The people here are friendly and polite, therefore, I personally choose to stay in Chiang Mai for long term. Besides, Chiang Mai does not have speed camera traps or CCTV cameras everywhere. The gentle look of Chiang Mai relaxes a person and its inner beauty touches human souls. Teresa Teng, through her singing, depicted Chiang Mai as 'sounds like a song when we hear and a drawing when we see it.' It is proven true because PRC tourists choose Chiang Mai as a place to recuperate during their annual leave. Personally, I have chosen to stay here because I could have a sense of existence as I walk along the streets (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017)".

While Chiang Mai was extolled as culturally significant, the PRC tourists did not regard it as rural and undeveloped. As a matter of fact, Chiang Mai affords the comfort of modern living without compromising cultural uniqueness. As a result, Chiang Mai posits an interesting case, which encourages artistic and creative expressions within an international

accessibility while being rooted in rich religious worldviews. These are captured by a respondent as follows:

“The Lanna culture and the good weather make Chiang Mai special. This could be the reasons why Teresa Teng liked Chiang Mai. It is different from Bangkok City, which is too urbanized and the roads are jam-packed with people and heavy traffic. To the PRC Chinese, Chiang Mai city resembles an intersection between a city and a village. Chiang Mai has no tall buildings or wide roads. It resembles a district area in PRC, modern though not very developed. Chiang Mai city is unique because it is not too large. You can easily ride a motorbike or drive a car to go round the entire city. But to find good coffee shops, art and crafts stalls or good studios, you need to stay a while longer in Chiang Mai. I would like to use eight Chinese words to describe Chiang Mai, ‘城而不华, 县而不土’ which means ‘City-like yet not too urbanized; Country-like yet not backward.’ Many Chinese want to make Chiang Mai their second home because it is self-contained and has facilities like international schools and an international airport (Mr. Li Chun Yao; Interview; April 16, 2017).”

“In my opinion, Chiang Mai is a good place to gain new ideas, freedom and creativity in arts and literature because of the existing space available for artistic expressions. Thailand is a religious country and Buddhism is the main religion in Thailand. Christianity, Islam and folk religions are also found in Thailand. However, in PRC, money is their ‘god.’ From European history, we learn that arts and culture, literature and architecture are related to the people’s religion and worldview. It is the same in Thailand where Thai religious sites are related to the arts and culture, literature and architecture of the Thais and vice versa (Mr. Li Chun Yao; Interview; April 16, 2017).”

5.1.3 Professionalizing, de-commercializing and personalizing mobile app for functional feasibility

At the lived experiential dimension, this section looks at the functional feasibility of establishing a smart app that will adequately address the needs of PRC tourists while promoting Thai cultural diplomacy. From the PRC respondents' perspectives, the PRC tourists should have a mobile app that will be professional, de-commercialized as well as personal for the practicality, credibility and acceptability.

5.1.3.1 Professionalizing for practicality

“We need to have accurate information with regards to people, places and products and utilize professional people in creating this app. If the information is not accurate then the PRC tourists might be disappointed and they would spread the negative sentiments online through any PRC tourism website. This will jeopardize the reputation of Chiang Mai tourism industry. On the contrary, if it is a good application then it will make Chiang Mai smart city a reality (Mr. Ronnie Yue Zhao Kai; Interview; March 5, 2017).”

The above quote aptly summarized the importance of professionalizing the mobile app. A smart app created by the professionals will provide accurate information, which will safeguard the reputation of Chiang Mai while facilitating it to become a smart city. In terms of function, a respondent has highlighted that *“this app can have the function that renders information about museums, festive celebrations, arts and cultural galleries in Chiang Mai (Mr. Li Yun Hao; Interview; March 15, 2017).”* He also suggested the crucial need for transportation when he opined that *“an app to improve public transportation services in Chiang Mai is essential; for example, Chinese tourists can log into this app and contact ‘tuk-tuk’ and ‘songtaew’ drivers who will give good services with a standard transportation fee (Mr. Li Yun Hao; Interview; March 15, 2017).”* Another respondent highlighted the need for translation services in order to promote communication as follows: *“This app*

should provide translation from Mandarin to Thai language as a good service for the PRC tourists. It certainly bridges communications when the public transport providers could communicate with the PRC tourists and send them to their desired destinations accurately (Mr. Ronnie Yue Zhao Kai; Interview; March 5, 2017)." Further, another respondent gave practical recommendations to address contingencies faced by PRC tourists as such: *"From what I see, the main information Chinese tourists needed most are such as: 1) Place to make a report if they lost their passport; 2) Rules and regulations in the temples; 3) Proper attire and acceptable behaviors in public places; and 4) Contact numbers of government offices (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017)."* Based on these examples, a smart mobile app must be professionally done to meet the diverse practical needs of the PRC tourists.

5.1.3.2 De-commercializing for credibility

Saturated with many existing mobile apps in PRC social media, our respondents unanimously advised us in de-commercializing the app and so distinguishing it as an official and credible source. This approach will aid collaboration while removing any potential and contentious rivalries between different service providers. The following quotes from different respondents all pointed at de-commercialization as key:

"In order to have a reliable app that can service PRC tourists, it has to be commercial free and a non-profits making app. Only then, PRC tourists will be able to get accurate and concise information about tourism in Chiang Mai. From what I see, a tourism app that is produced by non-profit organizations or non-business entities which are fully endorsed by Thai government is far more cogent (Mr. Li Yun Hao; Interview; March 15, 2017)."

"Actually, apps are common in PRC and they are essential artifact for younger generations born in 1980s onwards. In my opinion, Chinese tourists who travel to Chiang Mai need to know the public welfare and official news in Chiang Mai and Thailand. It is best if this app is non-

commercial and does not advertise products, shops or tourist spots. Anyway, logos of products followed by two of three lines of write-ups about the products are still considered bearable (Mr. Huang Shi; Interview; March 21, 2017)."

"We are aware that current apps for Chinese tourism contain specific information or functions. I believe that all these apps need a platform to integrate those information and functions. Thai officials can create an app which become a platform for those existing apps to integrate and to link up because it is a non-commercial app. This will help to reduce time, effort or costs from all parties, the app users and the app inventors. Furthermore, business companies will not feel threaten because this platform will not jeopardize their business. By creating a platform for the existing apps through this official app, we will have a good artifact that has personal touch-though official and yet in touch with reality (Mr. Li Chun Yao; Interview; April 16, 2017)."

5.1.3.3 Personalizing for acceptability

In the course of professionalizing the mobile app, one of the PRC respondents raised the need of ensuring personal touch: *"Though an app that is provided and endorsed by Thai government official to serve Chinese tourists is reliable, it may not have personal touch. (Mr. Li Chun Yao; Interview; April 16, 2017)."* Apart from providing practical information, a mobile app with a personal touch seeks to educate the mind and heart of the users. This will facilitate better acceptability and appreciation of the people, places and products. For instance, a respondent offered an additional function of abating boisterous ethnocentrism and egoism through an eye-opening illustration as follows:

"A good app should provide a brief introduction on the historical background of the Kingdom of Thailand, the current economic growth and the living standard and lifestyle of Thais. This will abate ethnocentrism and

egoism, which is based on the natural tendency of cultural assumptions of superiority of Chinese towards the Thai people. When I first came to Chiang Mai several years ago, I realized that the Thai standard of living is higher than many Chinese in China. This aberrant perspective can be an eye-opener to boisterous Chinese when they could observe Thais still embracing gentle characteristics of Thai Lanna culture though Thailand is in a strong economic era (Mr. Ronnie Yue Zhao Kai; Interview; March 5, 2017)."

Finally, from the Thai-Sino relations perspective, PRC respondents suggested that this mobile app requires the collaborative efforts from both Thai policy-makers and Chiang Mai tourism industry agencies in materializing a professional, official and personal app for the purpose of cultural diplomacy. It was noted:

"Therefore, we need an app that can help Chiang Mai tourism industry to move to another higher level. It will be tool that will ultimately bring about the purpose of cultural diplomacy. It is essential that Thai policy-makers and Chiang Mai tourism industry players to join effort so as to materialize the app (Mr. Li Yun Hao; Interview; March 15, 2017)."

5.2 Triadic Perspectives from Thai Respondents

5.2.1 Uniqueness, health and modernity as basis for material consumption

Chiang Mai city, the largest city in northern Thailand, became one of the top tourist destinations in Thailand with great attributes, such as natural environment and rich culture, that cannot be found elsewhere. Traditional Lanna culture still exists and is blended with modernity through local music, food, and products. Hence, Chiang Mai city is well positioned for "smart" preparation in order to receive a growing number of PRC tourists. Beyond merely "saving" traditional Lanna culture, this initiative is crucial in developing the city to move forward while enhancing Thai-Sino cultural diplomacy. From the material

consumption perspectives, this research captures Thai respondents' conceptualization of uniqueness, health and modernity as essential services and facilities for PRC tourists.

5.2.1.1 Uniqueness

The first aspect is uniqueness. Visitors seek to experience the unique character found in food, festivals and other cultural attractions. PRC tourists in Chiang Mai must never miss popular local Lanna recipes that are only served in Northern Thailand. According to a Thai respondent, *“Lan Na food is based on the local... The popular local recipes are red chili pork paste (Nam Prik Ong), green chili pork paste (Nam Prik Moo), local pork BBQ and northern Thai sausage (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).”*

Apart from food, PRC tourists can also enjoy unique festivals like making pilgrimages to Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, a religious place on the second highest mountain of Thailand on Visakabucha Day to celebrate the birth, enlightenment and nirvana of the Buddha. Moreover, the most appealing cultural expressions are found in the performances at traditional dinner and ceremonies. For instance, “Fon” or Lanna dance can trigger tourists' interest in Lanna culture. Its unique characteristic is articulated as follows: *“Lan Na style dancing, which is called ‘Fon’ is not like any other traditional dancing in the country (Mr. Thanin Supasaeng; Interview; January 5, 2017).”* Another Thai respondent reiterates this point as follows: *“Thai dancing pops up first when talking about the culture and tradition. For Chiang Mai, it must be Lan Na dancing (Ms. Jumriang Chaiwong; Interview; January 27, 2017).”*

In addition, PRC tourists often purchase local handicrafts or OTOP, which stands for “One Tambon (sub-district) One Product,” products as souvenirs that are perfect choices to represent local identification. These Chiang Mai cultural products are outstanding merchandises, which are uniquely distinct from goods in other provinces. The following quotes further provide examples through other cultural symbols and forms: (1) *“They can be goods and souvenirs such as small purses, which have an elephant on them. They are anything which has Thai elephants: an elephant's head or any others (Ms. Jumriang*

Chaiwong; Interview; January 27, 2017).” (2) *“There should be elephants, local flutes and drawings. The food must be the preserved ones, such as Northern Thai bacon (Khab Moo), pork floss (Moo Yong) and preserved fruits, as they can be kept for a long time (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).”* (3) *“Umbrellas have been products of San Kamphaeng ever since the district started to prosper as a tourist site and we have been weaving for even longer than that. Moreover, we inherited craftsmanship of metal chases, silver wares and lacquer ware and traditional stencil flags, which are the latest craft introduced in the site (Ms. Jumriang Chaiwong; Interview; January 27, 2017).”*

Fundamentally, such uniqueness provides a sense of contrast, which is found in places, people and products. PRC tourists can enjoy their holidays through appreciating new cultures, tasting different cuisine, meeting new people, visiting different places and learning history. These experiences are precious as they stand in stark contrast from Chinese experiences. In closing, a Thai respondent elaborated this point with historical details:

“First, Wat Chiang Man is the oldest temple in Chiang Mai. Second, Wat Chedi Luang and Wat Phra Singh are both supported by the government with many historical buildings. Third, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, a landmark of Chiang Mai, is located high on the mountain with beautiful scenery. Although the temple is not very old, it reveals a model of a modern nice temple, which has lack of Lan Na style, when it was formerly renovated. Fourth, Wat Ton Kwen is the site which collects the most ancient objects, traced back to the last couple of centuries. If you visit the place, you will see the difference between the temples in the last centuries, which are very rare, and the latest ones (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).”

5.2.1.2 Health

According to the Thai respondents, the next material captivating aspect is health-related. Chiang Mai city is surrounded by a natural environment, which promotes health. In specific,

the prevalent folk cuisine culture reveals a consciousness for a healthy lifestyle. The varieties of herbs and fresh ingredients in local food are beneficial for the physical wellbeing. Hence, it is crucial to attract PRC tourists through the presentation of health benefits in Chiang Mai cuisine culture and other activities and attractions. In this vein of thought, a Thai respondent highlighted, *“For example, it should demonstrate nutrition, such as vitamins, in local fruits like Ba Muen and Ba Kok, and indicate their health benefits such as nourishing eyes. Then, it tells the users how to cook them with elaborate details like how many minutes it takes* (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).”

5.2.1.3 Modernity

The final aspect of the material consumption is modernity. The main idea behind this aspect is that Chiang Mai is not merely a traditional place but also affords a modern lifestyle which is similar to other big cities. To the Thai respondents, PRC tourists can shop for the latest brand names including Louis Vuitton, Prada, or Chanel at sleek and modern shopping malls, such as MAYA and Central Festival. As PRC tourists need comfort of modernity, new shopping centers that have been recently built in Chiang Mai will be able to serve this need. For instance, it was reported that *“Tourists also want to shop before they go home. Then, good shopping centers must be provided for them to shop quality goods, both OTOP ones and those with branded names* (Mr. Thanin Supasaeng; Interview; January 5, 2017).” Moreover, the modernity aspect extends the provision of food from local cuisine to exquisite gourmet. For instance, PRC tourists are greeted with plentiful Chinese restaurants where professional chefs are even employed to serve, just as Mr. Thanin Supasaeng (Interview; January 5, 2017) has shared, *“It must be awesome if a restaurant can boast that it has a professional chef.”*

5.2.2 Nice characteristics and good fortune as basis for ideological craving

At the ideological level, this section delves deeper to surface the Thai conceptualization of PRC tourists' inner motivations for visiting Chiang Mai. In particular, nice characteristics of Chiang Mai residents as well opportunities to acquire good fortune are salient.

5.2.2.1 Nice characteristics

The first aspect of conceived space through ideological fantasy lies on the nice characteristics of Thai people, particularly, Chiang Mai residents. First of all, it has long been established that the heartwarming Thai smile is symbolic of the nation. As far as PRC tourists are concerned, the nice “Lanna” characteristics include kindness, cheerfulness and friendliness, which are very welcoming. A Thai respondent succinctly put it this way, *“They like Chiang Mai folks as they are nice and are always smiling (Mr. Thanin Supasaeng; Interview; January 5, 2017).”*

5.2.2.2 Good fortune

In terms of faith, Lanna people have largely inherited the ancient belief of fortune from their ancestors. Over the many years, their Elders have inculcated in them with the traditional belief of seeking luck in everything. It has inadvertently become a vital part across all facets of life including their work, marriage and even cuisine. Hence, in the same fashion, the Thai respondents opined that such seeking of good fortune might also meet the ideological cravings of PRC tourists. In other words, as PRC tourists consume the food, they are also ingesting fortune. According to a Thai interviewee,

“‘Lab’ (Northern Thai meat blood paste) is holy food, which is served exclusively in important ceremonies. People believe that ‘Lab’ will bring good fortune to people who taste it because the word ‘Lab’ in Lanna is a homophone with another word which means luck. Moreover, local slow cooked pork (Hung Le) can be counted a local legacy when the city was a Burmese colony (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).”

5.2.3 Cross-cultural communication and professional quality as vital for application

Having surveyed the material and ideological dimensions, this section examines the “lived” dimension of mobile application in terms of its preferred emphases. Summarily, Thai

respondents emphasize on cross-cultural communication and professional quality as key considerations in setting up with the mobile application for PRC tourists.

5.2.3.1 Cross-cultural communication

In the course of interviews, it has been observed that Thai respondents tend to focus on cross-cultural communication issues with regards to the feasibility of mobile app. For instance, Thai respondents strongly advocated for the inclusion of “Do’s and Don’ts” in the mobile app. As a case in point, a Thai interviewee highlighted the need for the PRC tourists to understand and respect Thai cultural norms, which will greatly reduce cultural conflicts. He shared, *“They should know what Sattaphan, which is a traditional seven-candlestick, is and why is it located in front of the Buddha image while there isn’t any in central Thai temples? Another point is why must women in northern Thailand keep a distance to the Buddha’s relics and the chapel? They should learn the reasons for these* (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).” In addition, the interviewee elaborated the issues of cultural awareness as crucial for cross-cultural connectivity as follows:

“Difference between Lanna (northern Thailand) and Siam (central Thailand) should be considered. For example, when visiting temples, the visitors are expected to identify the difference between the local ones and the others by using the application. It should indicate buildings and important objects in the site... The tourists should know differences between Chinese and Thai temples... Moreover, such as do’s and don’ts and its benefit or background. The application will have real function to make visitors appreciate culture in this point (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).”

In the same vein of thought in cross-cultural communication, language is an important factor of consideration in developing mobile app for PRC tourists. There should be Mandarin, Thai and English versions to facilitate the users. Its significance is expressed by Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang (Interview; January 21, 2017) as follows: *“Both Thai and foreigners*

are in the common state, which is uninformed.” Taking it further, Northern Thai dialect should also be featured as it reflects the peculiarity of Chiang Mai folks. As such, PRC tourists should also learn basic vocabulary words pertaining to greetings and other exceptional verbal expressions. For instance, implying the necessity for a dialect vocabulary function, a Thai respondent highlighted, *“Evidently, Chiang Mai people show meekness via their expressions. I bet whoever is getting angry will cool down after hearing ‘I’m sorry’ in Lanna dialect (Ms. Jumriang Chaiwong; Interview; January 27, 2017).”*

5.2.3.2 Professional quality

In developing the application, appropriate information should be professionally studied before being added. Sightseeing places, general information of the province, maps and events, for example, will appear in the application to present a comprehensive image of Chiang Mai. General information about Chiang Mai, which is beneficial for PRC tourists should be selected to appear in the application. A Thai respondent gave the following suggestion,

“For example, the historical fact that Chiang Mai is an ancient city with its 700 years of age. It had been a capital of Lanna Kingdom before it became a colony of Siam. This can be a basic introduction occupying a short page. Other facts could cover changes of the city, their causes, and the period it became a colony through the concept of centralization. Nevertheless, it still preserves its ancient art and culture (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).”

Apart from general information in sightseeing, there should be a calendar in the application to show PRC tourists interesting events. This will further enrich their experience with their participation of authentic activities with the locals. The interviewee added, *“They will know that there is a religious ceremony here at 1600hrs, for example, and they will be able to manage time to join other activities afterwards like a temple fair at 1930hrs, in which they*

can enjoy the local festival and dancing, for instance (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017). ”

The professional quality criterion is accentuated further through his following elaboration: *“For temples, when you touch the screen, you find them. Let’s say you find Wat Phra Singh. The application will tell you what to see and where they are. They will tell you if you should turn left or right or where to see signs around the site (Prof. Dr. Thanet Charoenmuang; Interview; January 21, 2017).”* Similarly, another respondent emphasized professionalism through the ease of download: *“The application should be easy to download. If you plan to go to Chiang Mai next month, you download it and you can see it right there (Mr. Thanin Supasaeng; Interview; January 5, 2017). ”*

6. Discussion

Table 3 Dialectic Perspectives of Chinese and Thai Respondents

Perceived Space (Material)		Conceived Space (Ideological)		Lived Space (App Feasibility)	
Chinese	Thai	Chinese	Thai	Chinese	Thai
Pragmatism	Uniqueness	Nostalgia	Nice characteristics	Professionalizing	Cross-cultural communication
Transforming landscapes	Health	Connectedness	Good fortune	De-commercializing	Professional quality
Geopolitics	Modernity	Cultural quest		Personalizing	

6.1 Appreciating Similarities and Differences

6.1.1 Similarities

There are similarities across the three spaces. To begin with, the material dimension between both Thai and Chinese respondents share a certain degree of mutual understanding where practical benefits, such as environmental and health aspects, are procured. In terms of ideological space, the common thread that runs through them involves the appreciation of Lanna cultural attributes. Thai gentleness and other attractive mannerisms stood out distinctively from both perspectives. Finally, in terms of lived space where the feasibility of the mobile app is examined, it has been observed that both sides purport professionalism as significant. This professionalism involves accessibility in various functions.

6.1.2 Differences

The dialectic nature of this research further illumines the differences between both Chinese and Thai respondents' perspectives. For example, the Thai perspective seems to weigh heavy on the emphasis on PRC tourists' material consumption. In other words, the Thai respondents have the impression that PRC tourists visit Chiang Mai to consume material enjoyment. Within this material dimension, one distinct contrast lies in the consumption of modernity. Thai respondents might unwittingly over-emphasize urban development to cater to modern consumption without realizing that this is not the key interest of the PRC tourists.

The other alarming difference is found in the analysis of ideological construction. It seems that Thai respondents have not yet fully grasped the deep inner motivation of PRC tourists in coming to Chiang Mai. They failed to realize that the Chinese are seeking for a sense of celebrity nostalgia through the re-enactment in ideological construction. Besides, there is a presumable lack of understanding of the existential connectedness craved by PRC tourists. The Thai respondents perhaps have failed to understand the sense of social detachment arising from PRC's phenomenal transformation as urban jungle. In other words, the PRC

tourists are attracted to Chiang Mai not due to superficial consumption but an innate desire to reconstruct their self-identities.

Finally, at the lived space delving at the feasibility of the mobile app, this study has surfaced another distinct difference. The Thai side has placed much concerns with cross-cultural communication while the Chinese side is more concerned with legitimacy and accuracy of information. This shows that the Chinese side might not realize the significant value of cultural awareness and respect that is intricately attached to Thais.

6.2 *Unravelling the Gap in Cultural Diplomacy*

The preceding discussion calls for the appreciation of dialectic perspectives of similarities and differences. However, it also serves to unravel the gap of cultural diplomacy across the three spaces. In especial, the differences in perspective span across material, ideological and lived dimensions. It raises the clarion call to offer deeper mutual understanding while further advocating the crucial need for cultural diplomacy.

6.2 *Elucidating Smart City Construction through the Lens of Human Dimensions*

In the final part of discussion, this study seeks to examine the “soul” of smart city construction, which is the major focus of this research project. What is a smart city? How should a smart city be constructed? Is it merely an attempt for full digitalization or a metaphorical muscular flex of technological prowess? The research has shown that we have to look and understand the triadic human dimensions in order to make a city smart. This is because a smart city is not just about information technology to be incorporated into the existing system but the understanding of the differences of conceptualization pertaining to material consumption, ideological notions and applicational feasibility. This research argues for a holistic approach towards a truly smart city.

7. *Policy Recommendations*

This paper has highlighted the need to pay attention to the human-side of becoming a smart city. Smart city is a type of place-based policy, as opposed to problem-based policy or sectorial-based policy. As a place-based policy, traditionally there is strong emphasis on the geospatial community, where mapping and imageries are emphasized. More recently, in this era of big data analytics, the data scientist community has also grown in importance. Thus in practice, many smart city projects focus only on the technology and the generation of data that is required to make the city smarter. For instance many city governments have appointed chief data scientists, in addition to setting entirely new units to implement smart city initiatives. Examples of initiatives are such as energy saving solar panels, automated traffic systems, and smart buildings. Large-scale data sets of human behavior, such as mobility patterns, consumption, and preferences related to daily living, are used more prevalently by advanced cities to help make decisions. The missing component, as illustrated in this paper, is the incorporation of in-depth, qualitative study of the people in relation to the place or the city.

In 2016, the Thai government designated two cities in Thailand to be the first smart cities of the nation: Phuket and Chiang Mai. Phuket launched its smart city program early in 2017. Chiang Mai is in its preparation stage and aims to launch the full-scale program in 2018. The Thai government has mandated the brand new Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES) to look after this initiative. The key partners include the government-linked Software Industry Promotion Agency (SIPA), the National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre (NECTEC), in addition to the Phuket Provincial Office. In its first year, Phuket's smart city direction has focused on research and innovation centers by offering special treatment from the Board of Investment (BOI) for foreign and local software companies. It also includes installing CCTVs with facial recognition around the designated city areas, vessel tracking management systems, and free public Wi-Fi points. Phuket city has a population of about 378,000 people, whereas the number of tourists exceeds 10 million per year, the majority of which are foreigners. It is yet to be seen, how the smart city

initiative will have an impact on the lives of residents and tourists in Phuket. What is evident is the fact that the key actors in this smart city initiative are dominantly focused on technology for the goal of economic development. Lacking are participation of and perspectives from other communities and actors that can help foster the 'soul' of a smart city.

As Chiang Mai is in its early stages of formulating projects and programs to materialize the smart city idea, it is of vital importance to take into account the human-side early in the process. Currently the smart city committee has been setup at the provincial level and SIPA Chiang Mai is heavily involved in the drafting process of the master plan. In order to avoid pitfalls that have occurred elsewhere, including in Phuket, it is recommended for the Chiang Mai Provincial Office to expand key partnerships to other groups and organizations beyond those that focus on technology. They are such as the Creative Chiang Mai Network, the modern arts and designers group, the tourism association groups, the education sector, the cultural and traditional artisans, and the group that is pushing for Chiang Mai city to become a living UNESCO World Heritage Site. More diverse actors will help shape the notion of Chiang Mai smart city to be more holistic with a focus on the people (both visitors and residents), and not only on technology. Lastly, while big data analytics has its benefits, it is also as important to conduct in-depth qualitative analyses of people's views, perceptions, and needs thoroughly before investing in technology because people, products, and place are always interconnected. As shown in this research, without proper understanding of the users, in this case the Chinese PRC tourists, of their perceived, conceived, and lived spaces, the Thai government and the Chiang Mai province might fail to set the right direction for the smart city initiative. In other words, despite the advanced apps and technologies installed, the 'soul' of the smart city is never enhanced.

Conclusion

This paper argues that it is not only feasible but crucial in integrating smart city initiatives and cultural diplomacy within the context of smart PRC tourism in Chiang Mai city. This

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audacious and parsimonious project significantly provides social, economic, cultural and political contributions.

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