

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

## EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THAI GASTRONOMY ON REVISITING INTENTION VIA THAI SOFT POWER: THE MODERATING ROLE OF EXPLORER TOURISTS

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### —Abstract—

To align with the Thai government's soft power policy, which aims to strengthen Thai tourism, this study investigates the relationship between gastronomy tourism and revisiting intentions through the lens of soft power, with a specific focus on Thai cuisine. Thai food, recognised as one of the 11 dimensions of the soft power policy, is particularly popular among foreign tourists. The research also explores the moderating role of explorer tourists in the relationship between gastronomy tourism and soft power in Thai cuisine. Data were collected from 400 foreign tourists in Songkhla, Thailand. The findings revealed that, while gastronomy tourism did not have a significant direct effect on revisiting intention, it did exhibit a substantial indirect relationship via soft power in Thai food. Furthermore, the moderating analysis indicated that tourists with lower explorer tendencies exerted a stronger influence on the link between gastronomy tourism and soft power in Thai cuisine. These findings underscore the potential of Thai cuisine as a cultural diplomacy tool, enhancing its global image and contributing to the Thai government's efforts to attract foreign tourists and boost tourism revenue. From a practical perspective, the study highlights how gastronomy tourism can effectively expand the reach of the soft power policy. For future research, the author recommends examining other dimensions of soft power and suggests employing longitudinal research designs or growth curve models to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of soft power in tourism.

**Keywords:** Gastronomy Tourism, Soft Power, Thai Food, Explorer Tourists, Revisiting Intention

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## INTRODUCTION

### Soft Power

In 1990, Joseph Nye, a renowned political scientist, introduced the concept of soft power, which describes a country's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or force. Unlike hard power, which relies on military or economic pressure, soft power is rooted in culture, values, and policies (Nye, 2005). By fostering positive perceptions of its culture, traditions, values, lifestyle, and contributions in areas such as art, science, and entertainment, a nation can enhance its global reputation and status (Nye, 2021). Thailand's "5F Soft Power" initiative exemplifies this approach, employing a cultural strategy to strengthen the country's global presence by focusing on five cultural pillars: Food, Film, Fashion, Fighting, and Festivals (Liang-Pholsena, 2023). This initiative underscores Thailand's rich heritage and modern creativity on the international stage. For instance, Thai cuisine, exemplified by iconic dishes such as pad Thai and green curry, is promoted through campaigns like the "Year of Thai Gastronomy" and international food festivals. The Thai film industry is similarly highlighted, with prominent filming locations made accessible to tourists. Fashion, encompassing both traditional and contemporary designs, showcases Thailand as a hub of creativity. The "Fighting" component is represented by Muay Thai, celebrated globally through events such as the Amazing Muay Thai Festival. Additionally, cultural festivals like Songkran and Loy Krathong offer visitors an immersive experience of Thai traditions. Collectively, the 5F strategy bolsters Thailand's soft power, enhancing its international acclaim while driving economic growth through tourism and cultural exports (Agency, 2022; Nation, 2023).

In this context, food has emerged as a powerful instrument of cultural diplomacy, enabling nations to enhance their global reputation and cultivate meaningful international relationships. Thailand, celebrated for its distinctive culinary heritage characterised by a harmonious blend of sweet, sour, salty, and spicy flavours, exemplifies the use of cuisine as an effective soft power tool (Lane, 2011). Thailand utilises food as a vehicle for soft power through initiatives such as the "Global Thai" policy, which seeks to increase the global presence of Thai restaurants while showcasing Thai culture and identity on the international stage (Pornpongmetta, 2019). These initiatives facilitate cross-cultural exchange and contribute to tourism and economic growth. The Thai government projects that these efforts will generate 4 trillion baht in revenue and create 20 million jobs over the next four years (Bangprapa, 2024).

### Gastronomy

The term "gastronomy" originates from the Greek words "gaster" (stomach) and "nomas" (law). However, its significance extends beyond its literal meaning to

encompass broader concepts and practice. Although gastronomy is often referred to as the art of eating and drinking, it is, in essence, a multidisciplinary field that bridges the realms of art and science. It intersects with numerous disciplines, including chemistry, literature, biology, geology, history, music, philosophy, psychology, sociology, medicine, nutrition, and agriculture (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). By focusing on eating and drinking, gastronomy addresses diverse topics such as nutritional science, the physiology of taste, wine production, the role of nutrients in the human body, the selection of high-quality ingredients, and the development of production methods that adhere to hygiene and sanitation standards to mitigate physical, chemical, and biological food spoilage (Shenoy, 2005). Gastronomy emphasises the importance of optimal nutrition for sustaining human health while simultaneously enhancing the enjoyment of life and culinary experiences. It also encompasses the hygienic production of food and beverages, ensuring they are prepared in a manner that is both visually appealing and satisfying to the palate.

### Questions and Objectives

The study addressed the research question of how gastronomy tourism and soft power in Thai food influence revisiting intentions. Additionally, it investigated the relationships among gastronomy tourism, soft power in Thai food, and revisiting intention. The proposed theoretical framework is presented in Figure 1.

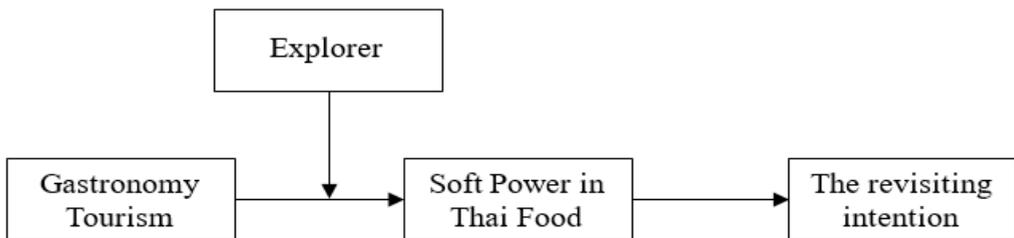


Figure 1: Theoretical Model

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Community Based Tourism (CBT)

CBT represents a sustainable tourism approach that empowers local communities to plan, manage, and equitably share the benefits of tourism. Recognised as an alternative form of tourism, CBT prioritises community empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability (Scheyvens, 1999). CBT aligns with foundational theories such as sustainable development, empowerment, and resilience. Sustainable development theory seeks to balance economic, social, and environmental objectives, ensuring benefits for the local population while safeguarding natural and cultural resources (Mensah, 2019). Empowerment theory focuses on enhancing economic and social capacities, enabling local communities to actively engage in and promote tourism

(Aquino et al., 2018). Resilience theory highlights the capacity of local communities to adapt to external pressures, such as environmental changes, ensuring their long-term sustainability (Scordato & Gulbrandsen, 2024).

Past research on CBT has utilised methodologies such as case studies, ethnography, and mixed methods. Case studies offer detailed insights, while mixed methods integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess socioeconomic and environmental impacts. Ethnographic and longitudinal studies provide deeper, long-term perspectives on cultural and economic transformations (Blackstock, 2005). Key themes in CBT literature include community empowerment, economic opportunities, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. For instance, CBT fosters job creation and business development (Spenceley and Meyer (2012) while addressing concerns about cultural degradation caused by tourism (George et al., 2009) and promoting eco-friendly practices to minimise environmental harm (Dodds et al., 2010).

While CBT holds significant potential, it faces challenges such as limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and varying levels of community preparedness. Dependence on tourism can also expose communities to economic volatility (Vundla, 2014). Many communities lack the skills required for effective CBT, highlighting the need for training and education (Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012). Successful examples, such as in Thailand, Peru, and Kenya, demonstrate the importance of community training and environmental tourism policies (Zapata & Hall, 2012). However, comparative and longitudinal studies on CBT remain scarce, leaving gaps in understanding its long-term cultural and economic impacts. To maximise its benefits, CBT requires tailored strategies and sustained governmental support to ensure positive outcomes for local communities.

## **Gastronomy Tourism**

Tourism is one of the most prominent economic sectors in the contemporary world, functioning as both a major leisure activity and a key driver of economic growth. Its substantial multiplier effect stimulates numerous associated sub-sectors, positioning it as an ideal tool for development (Çağlı, 2012). Tourism contributes to societal progress by generating income for service providers, as travellers spend to satisfy their needs. This increased demand, in turn, drives the production and supply of goods and services, thereby fostering community investment, production, and income (Akgöz, 2003). Furthermore, tourism promotes international relationships and integrates cultural, heritage, economic, and environmental dimensions, highlighting the importance of its development, coordination, and regulation (Çağlı, 2012).

Although terms such as "culinary tourism," "gastronomy tourism," "gastro-tourism," "wine tourism," "food tourism," and "gourmet tourism" are used in the literature, "gastronomy tourism" is most commonly defined as the pursuit of distinctive culinary

experiences. This form of tourism centres on the uniqueness of dishes and their cultural connections to a particular place, region, or country, encompassing areas such as traditional cuisines and wine tourism (Çağlı, 2012; Green & Dougherty, 2008; Groves, 2001). Gastronomy tourism includes visiting food producers, attending food festivals, dining in specialty restaurants, and observing the preparation of iconic dishes. It also involves immersing oneself in local cuisines, sometimes prepared by renowned chefs or in traditional settings (Hall & Sharples, 2004). Rather than merely consuming meals in restaurants, tourists often travel specifically to explore local food and beverage traditions (Akgöl, 2012). The gastronomic tourism industry encompasses more than just food guides and restaurants; it also includes cooking schools, specialty shops, gastronomy tour operators, media outlets, and producers such as winemakers and brewers (Akgöl, 2012). A crucial factor in the success of gastronomic tourism is the preservation of regional products and traditions by local communities. Key stakeholders in this sector include grape growers, hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and local businesses (Alonso & Liu, 2011).

Cultural exploration plays a central role in gastronomic tourism, driven by people's desire to experience different traditions. Gastronomy tourists often act as cultural tourists, learning about the distinctive characteristics of a destination through its local cuisine (Akgöl, 2012; Kozak, 2001). Gastronomic tours highlight regional dishes and culinary heritage, which significantly shape tourists' experiences (Zrnić, 2024). Research indicates that exploring Turkish cuisine ranks highly among foreign tourists' motivations for visiting Turkey, with its dishes regarded as delicious, unique, and flavourful (Şanlıer, 2005). Gastronomy tourism, a growing sector, links food and drink with various arts and sciences, enhancing the travel experience and destination reputation (Thayansin, 2003). It provides significant economic benefits through employment and revenue generation. Marketing efforts should emphasise regional cultural integration and unique food experiences, focusing on when, where, and how tourists dine (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010). Efforts to protect regional culinary traditions, such as Portugal's Barrosa beef industry, highlight quality and provide a competitive edge (Çalişkan, 2013). In conclusion, a strong gastronomic identity can attract high-quality tourists, promote cultural preservation, and drive socio-economic development, making gastronomy tourism vital for sustainable growth (Sorcaru, 2019).

### **Soft Power in Thai Food**

Thai cuisine enjoys global acclaim, with dishes like Massaman, Tom Yum Goong, and Papaya Salad regularly listed among the top 50 foods worldwide by CNN Travel. The widespread appreciation of Thai food can be attributed to the significant Thai diaspora, which has played a pivotal role in spreading the cuisine. Thai food's international popularity is also integral to Thailand's cultural diplomacy, using food as a tool to promote the nation's culture abroad. The Thai government has strategically promoted

food exports to enhance its global image, with initiatives like the "Global Thai" program, which aims to increase the presence of Thai restaurants globally and strengthen the country's cultural influence (Lertputtarak, 2012; Praditsilp, 2019).

The export and consumption of Thai cuisine not only provide economic benefits but also enhance Thailand's global standing. Lipscomb (2019) highlights that the increasing popularity of Thai food has bolstered the country's economic influence through the expansion of restaurants, tourism, and related sectors. Thai cuisine is frequently viewed as a gateway to experiencing broader elements of Thai culture, thereby promoting international tourism and fostering cross-cultural exchanges. This approach aligns with Solleh (2015) concept of "gastronomic diplomacy," wherein nations use their culinary traditions to cultivate international goodwill and strengthen economic ties. Thai cuisine serves as more than just an economic asset; it facilitates people-to-people interactions and fosters cultural connections. Suntikul (2017) asserts that soft power is achieved when individuals from other nations form positive views of a country through direct engagement. Thai food plays a crucial role in shaping these perceptions. Thai restaurants abroad are regarded as cultural hubs, introducing traditions, customs, and values to foreign audiences, thus enhancing Thailand's soft power (Suntikul, 2017). In this context, Thai cuisine is integral to the Thai government's soft power strategy, which aims to promote cultural learning, economic growth, and a favourable international image. Thai restaurants worldwide are popular among local populations, underscoring the role of Thai culture and culinary traditions in extending Thailand's soft power and improving international relations.

### **The Moderating Role of Explorer Tourist Type**

Explorer tourists are characterised by their desire for novelty and authentic experiences. Unlike other tourist groups, they seek to immerse themselves in local cultures, traditions, and environments, exploring new adventures and food experiences. This section will examine the characteristics, motivations, and impacts of explorer tourists. Explorer tourists are often described as independent, curious, and adventurous. In terms of tourist classification, they fall between organised tourists and drifters (Cohen, 1972). While some may seek convenience and safety in accommodations, they are also willing to take risks and explore unfamiliar areas (Cohen, 1972). According to Plog (1974), explorer tourists are seasoned travellers, often referred to as "venturers," who have substantial experience and a strong desire to learn about new cultures, traditions, and values. Explorer tourists are motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. According to Goeldner et al. (2000), they seek authenticity and meaningful cultural experiences. Dann (1977) identified push factors, such as the desire to escape routine, and pull factors, including cultural attractions and nature. (Pearce, 2005) noted that explorer tourists often aim to shape their self-identity as adventurous, reflecting Maslow's self-actualisation needs. Explorer tourists can have both positive and negative impacts on

local communities. They foster cross-cultural understanding and build long-term connections with locals (Wearing & Neil, 1999), while also supporting community-based tourism and local economies as a sustainable alternative to mass tourism.

Exploratory tourism, however, can present challenges for local communities. Smith (2015) raised concerns about cultural disruption and environmental degradation caused by such tourism. While explorer tourists seek authentic experiences, their actions may lead to unintended consequences, including cultural alterations or damage to fragile environments. Explorer tourists are distinctive in their pursuit of cultural engagement, genuine experiences, and self-fulfilment. Their motivations, behaviours, and outcomes reflect the complex dynamics of contemporary tourism. A deeper understanding of explorer tourists can inform the development of tourism strategies, such as sustainable tourism approaches, that promote tourist satisfaction while yielding positive outcomes for local communities.

### **Hypotheses Development**

Gastronomy tourism, soft power in Thai food, and the explorer tourist type are interlinked through the influence of international cultural exchange, tourism dynamics, and national reputation. This study explores the impact of food-based tourism on revisiting intentions, specifically focusing on Thai cuisine as a tool of soft power and the characteristics of explorer tourists seeking authentic culinary experiences. Gastronomy tourism highlights food and culinary experiences as central to travel. Hall and Sharples (2004) define gastronomic tourism as activities where food and drink serve as primary attractions, with travellers seeking unique, memorable, and authentic experiences. Culinary tourism fosters a deeper engagement with a destination's culture, history, and traditions. Richards (2012) posits that the global growth of food tourism reflects a traveller's desire to connect with local heritage through cuisine, thereby supporting both the economic and cultural sustainability of a destination.

In the context of Thai cuisine, gastronomy tourism plays a crucial role in positioning Thailand as a prominent destination. The distinctive flavours, preparation techniques, and cultural significance of Thai food have made it a key attraction in international tourism. Lertputtarak (2012) highlights that the appeal of Thai cuisine lies in its unique combination of taste and cultural narrative, making it a central component of food tourism. The concept of soft power emphasises a nation's ability to influence others through cultural appeal rather than coercion (Nye, 2005). Thai cuisine has become a strategic tool in Thailand's soft power, enhancing the country's global image. Praditsilp (2019) explains that the Thai government's Global Thai initiative promotes Thai food internationally, increasing the country's visibility and soft power. Thai culinary diplomacy is further evidenced by the global spread of Thai restaurants, which serve as cultural outposts that introduce Thai culture to diverse audiences (Suntikul, 2017).

Food plays a vital role in fostering international goodwill and cultural exchange. Solleh (2015) emphasises that culinary branding and incorporating national dishes into diplomatic efforts can shape perceptions, facilitate positive engagement, and enhance mutual understanding. For explorer tourists, the authenticity of Thai food is a significant motivator in their travel experiences. Explorer tourists, driven by a desire for authenticity, cultural immersion, and novelty, represent a key demographic in gastronomy tourism. Cohen (1972) characterises the "explorer" as a traveller seeking novel experiences and cultural interactions while maintaining some comfort. Thai cuisine aligns with these motivations, offering authentic experiences that connect tourists with local customs.

The motivations of explorer tourists often focus on cultural learning, self-expression, and personal growth. Goeldner et al. (2000) suggest that these tourists seek unique, memorable experiences that align with their self-concept, using food and culture as tools for identity exploration and transformation. As such, explorer tourists are particularly attracted to food-related activities like cooking classes, market tours, and immersive culinary trails. The intersection of gastronomy tourism, Thai cuisine as soft power, and the motivations of explorer tourists highlights the potential of culinary experiences as a form of cultural diplomacy and personal transformation. For Thailand, promoting its cuisine through food tourism not only strengthens national identity but also appeals to explorer tourists seeking authentic cultural encounters. Wearing and Neil (1999) stress that explorer tourists contribute significantly to cultural exchange, as they are more likely to engage deeply with local communities and foster mutual understanding. However, challenges persist, including the risk of cultural commodification and pressure on local resources (Smith, 2015). Responsible tourism practices are crucial to balancing the needs of both explorer tourists and host communities for sustainable cultural exchange. The author posits that soft power in Thai food mediates the relationship between gastronomy tourism and tourists' revisitation intentions. Furthermore, explorer tourists are expected to moderate the relationship between gastronomy tourism and Thai food's soft power. These insights inform the development of the study's hypotheses.

**H1:** *Gastronomy tourism is positively related to the revisiting intention.*

**H2:** *Soft power in Thai food mediates the relationship between gastronomy tourism and revisiting intention.*

**H3:** *Explorer tourist type moderates the relationship between gastronomy tourism and soft power in Thai food.*

**Table 1: Demographic Data**

		Number	Percentage
Country	Malaysia	185	46.3
	Singapore	97	24.3
	China	102	15.5
	Other	16	4.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Generation	Baby Boomer	26	6.5
	Gen X	83	20.8
	Gen Y	128	32.0
	Gen Z	163	40.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Frequency	First Time	85	21.3
	Second Time	178	44.5
	Third Time	120	30.0
	Over Third Time	17	4.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Media	Online Media	273	68.3
	Word of Mouth	117	29.3
	Publish Media	8	2.0
	Tour Agency	2	0.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Transportation	Airplane	225	56.3
	Train	51	12.8
	Bus	24	6.0
	Personal Vehicle	100	25.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Travel With	Alone	42	10.5
	Friends	107	26.8
	Partner / Spouse	93	23.3
	Family / Relatives	139	34.8
	Collages / Co-workers	19	4.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Money Spending	0-5000 Baht	15	3.8
	5001-10000 Baht	61	15.3
	10000-15000 Baht	93	23.3
	15001-20000 Baht	93	23.3
	Over 20000 Baht	138	34.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Tourist Attractions	Songkhla Old Town	155	38.8
	Chalatat Beach	128	32.0
	Koh Yor	39	9.8
	Hat Yai Municipality Park	26	6.5
	Songkhla National Museum	22	5.5
	Kim Yong Market	10	2.5
	Asian Cultural Village (Dan Nok)	5	1.3
	Hat Yai City	15	3.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: n = 400

## METHODOLOGY

### Samples and Data Collection Procedures

The author collected survey data from international tourists in Songkhla province, Thailand, to test the study's hypotheses. Paper questionnaires were distributed at various tourist attractions using a non-probability sampling method (convenience sampling). Given the unknown population size, the author adhered to the minimum sample size guidelines for structural equation modelling analysis, which suggest a sample size between 200 and 400 participants (Hair et al., 2020). Consequently, responses were obtained from 400 international tourists at different tourist sites in Songkhla province. As detailed in Table 1, the majority of respondents were from Malaysia (46.3%). Most tourists were from Generation Z (40.8%) and had visited Songkhla twice (44.5%). The majority sought trip information online (68.3%). The most common mode of transport to Songkhla was by airplane (56.3%), with many tourists visiting with family (34.8%). A notable proportion spent over 20,000 Baht during their trip (34.5%). The most frequently visited tourist site was Songkhla Old Town (38.8%).

### Measurement

All measurements were based on Likert scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Perceived soft power in Thai food (Cronbach's alpha = .762) was assessed using three items adapted from (Jhee & Lee, 2011). Perceived gastronomy tourism in Songkhla (Cronbach's alpha = .850) was measured with five items adapted from Hsu et al. (2022). The explorer tourist type was evaluated using three items adapted from (Kusumawardhana et al., 2023) (Cronbach's alpha = .733).

### Analytic Procedures

The author conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs. The hypothesised model was tested using multiple regression (mediated moderation model), with fit indices including Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), analysed in Mplus Version 7.2 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Muthén & Muthén, 2012). The mediated moderation test examined the relationship between perceived gastronomy tourism and soft power in Thai food (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Analyses were performed using SPSS version 23.

### Bivariate Correlations

Table 2 demonstrates that perceived gastronomy tourism in Songkhla exhibited a positive correlation with perceived soft power in Thai cuisine ( $r = .652, p < .01$ ) and with the explorer tourist archetype ( $r = .539, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, the perceived soft

power of Thai cuisine was positively connected with the explorer tourist demographic ( $r = .530, p < .01$ ). The bivariate correlations among all variables were within an acceptable range ( $r < .70$ ), indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue.

**Table 2: Correlation, Means, and Standard Deviation**

Variables	Means	S.D.	GAS	PSP	REV	EXP
Gastronomy Tourism of Songkhla	4.38	.52	(.850)			
Perceived Soft Power in Thai Food	4.39	.53	.652**	(.762)		
Revisiting Intention	1.51	.61	-.024	-.089	-	
Explorer Tourist Type	4.26	.59	.593**	.530**	-.118*	(.733)

Note:  $n = 400$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; Cronbach's Alphas Reported in Parentheses

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Table 3 demonstrates that the CFA results confirmed a strong fit for the suggested three-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 86.558, p < .01, CFI = .981, TLI = .975, RMSEA = .041, \text{ and } SRMR = .035$ ) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Moreover, each item exhibited substantial loadings on its own construct ( $p < .001$ ), with all factor loadings surpassing 0.60. The average variance extracted (AVE) for the variables varied between 0.488 and 0.531, exceeding the suggested threshold of 0.50, while the CR ranged from 0.739 to 0.850 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2020). These results corroborate the reliability and validity of the constructs.

**Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Index, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**

$\chi^2$	df	p-Value	$\chi^2 / df$	RMSEA	90% CI of RMSEA		CFI	TLI	SRMR
					Lower	Upper			
86.558	52	.01	1.66	.041	.025	.056	.981	.975	.035
Factor Loading									
Latent Constructs and Manifest Indicators							Standardized Loading	AVE	CR
<b>Gastronomy Tourism of Songkhla</b>								.531	.850
1. You believe that the location and surroundings of a local food tourism site are a reflection of its distinctive character.							.768***		
2. Through traditional cuisine, you can better understand the local people's customs and values.							.725***		
3. You believe that Songkhla's local cuisine utilizes traditional ingredients, flavours, and cooking techniques, thereby reflecting the distinctive character of the Songkhla community.							.702***		
4. You consider Songkhla's local cuisine to be high quality, sanitary, and nutritionally beneficial.							.747***		
5. You believe that participating in activities related to local food and food tourism routes enhances your understanding of Songkhla's unique cultural identity.							.699***		

**Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Index, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (Cont...)**

Perceived Soft Power in Thai food		.522	.765
1. You are interested in trying the distinctive dishes of Songkhla province	.739***		
2. You are excited to sample the various local dishes when you visit Songkhla province.	.671***		
3. You find the food culture of Songkhla province to be fascinating.	.754***		
Explorer Tourist Type		.488	.739
1. You have typically planned your trip.	.603***		
2. I enjoy getting off the beaten track and exploring lesser-known areas.	.745***		
3. You engage with the local community during your travels.	.738***		

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## FINDINGS AND RESULTS

### Hypotheses Testing (Mediation Results)

Table 4 (Model 1) demonstrates that culinary tourism exerted a non-significant influence on the intention to revisit ( $b = .0510$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Nonetheless, soft power in Thai cuisine exerted a negative and substantial influence on the desire to revisit ( $b = -.1537$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 4: Mediation and Moderation Results**

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Revisiting Intention		Soft Power		Soft Power	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
<b>Control</b>						
Constant	1.9427***	.3240	1.3406***	.2061	-1.0802	.9391
Frequency	-.1015**	.0379	.0106	.0254	.0185	.0246
Generation	.0154	.0328	.0122	.0219	.0173	.0212
Spending	.0323	.0269	.0117	.0180	.0051	.0175
Country	.0450	.0350	.0138	.0234	.0180	.0227
<b>Main Variables</b>						
Gastronomy Tourism	.0501	.0779	.6666***	.0399	1.0447***	.2235
Explorer Tourist Type	-	-	-	-	.7341**	.2322
<b>Mediator</b>						
Soft Power in Thai Food	-.1537*	.0753	-	-	-	-
<b>Interaction Term</b>						
Gastronomy Tourism x Explorer Tourist Type	-	-	-	-	-.1263***	.0539
F-test	2.7741*		58.7601***		48.9661***	
R-Square	.0406		.4272		.4665	

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The number of visits had a negative correlation with the intention to revisit ( $b = -.1015$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that visitors who have previously visited may not intend to return in the near future or may only do so after an extended interval. This result does not corroborate Hypothesis 1. Conversely, the results of Model 2 indicated that gastronomy tourism had a favourable effect on soft power in Thai cuisine ( $b = .6666$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The comprehensive F-test for the model was highly significant ( $F = 58.7601$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the model accounted for 42.72% of the variance ( $R\text{-square} = .4272$ ). A mediation effect was identified ( $b = -.1024$ ,  $SE = .0490$ , 95% CI  $[-.2021, -.0110]$ ), corroborating Hypothesis 2.

### Hypotheses Testing (Moderation Results)

Model 3 revealed that gastronomy tourism ( $b = 1.0447$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the explorer tourist type ( $b = .7341$ ,  $p < .01$ ) exhibited a positive and substantial correlation with soft power in Thai cuisine. The interaction between gourmet tourism and the explorer tourist type exhibited a negative and significant effect ( $b = -.1263$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as expected. Figure 2 basic slope test further illustrated that gastronomy tourism significantly impacted the soft power of Thai cuisine. These results corroborate Hypothesis 3.

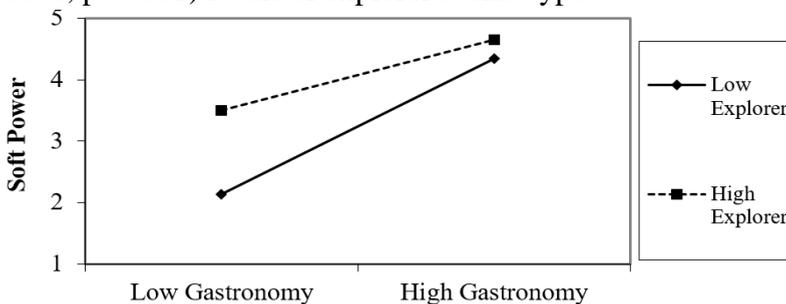
**Table 5: Conditional Indirect Effect (Moderated Mediation)**

Explorer Tourist Type	Indirect Effect			Bootstrapped (95% CI)	
	Coefficients	SE	P-Value	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCL
Low-Level	.5817***	.0518	.000	.4800	.6835
Mid-Level	.4976***	.0498	.000	.3996	.5955
High-Level	.4134***	.0698	.000	.2761	.5506

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### Hypotheses Testing (Moderated Mediation Result)

Table 5 illustrates that the moderated mediation results, derived from the bootstrapping method with 5,000 iterations, indicated that the impact of gastronomy on revisiting intention, mediated by soft power in Thai cuisine, was more pronounced at low ( $b = .5817$ ,  $SE = .0518$ ,  $p < .001$ ), medium ( $b = .4976$ ,  $SE = .0498$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and high ( $b = .4134$ ,  $SE = .0698$ ,  $p < .001$ ) levels of explorer tourist type.



**Figure 2: Interaction Effect of Gastronomy Tourism on Soft Power in Thai Food**

## CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals complex relationships between revisiting intention, soft power, gastronomy tourism, and tourist type. Soft power in Thai food significantly mediated the link between gastronomy tourism and revisiting intention, highlighting the influence of Thai cuisine on tourists' return intentions. Although gastronomy tourism did not directly impact revisiting intention, it had an indirect effect through soft power in Thai food. Additionally, gastronomy tourism was positively related to soft power in Thai food, enhancing cultural values and heritage. Explorer tourists moderated the relationship between gastronomy tourism and soft power, with their unique expectations affecting their perceptions of Thai food's soft power. Overall, gastronomy tourism and tourist characteristics shape perceptions of soft power and revisiting intentions, strengthening international cultural ties.

## IMPLICATIONS

### Theoretical Implications

This study enhances our understanding of CBT by illustrating how gastronomy tourism can act as a significant cultural driver influencing revisiting intention through soft power in Thai cuisine. Previous studies on CBT have highlighted the importance of experiences that prioritise community engagement and cultural preservation (Goodwin, 2009). This research demonstrates that gastronomy tourism offers local communities opportunities to enhance their economic and cultural sustainability. Thai cuisine, rooted in local traditions and recipes, can be a valuable cultural asset, providing a platform for meaningful tourist experiences and promoting cultural exchange that reflects the community's heritage. Gastronomy tourism was found to have an indirect effect on revisiting intention via soft power in Thai food, underscoring the potential of CBT to utilise culinary traditions as a form of cultural diplomacy. This study supports a theoretical model in which community engagement through food tourism extends beyond economic benefits to include fostering cross-cultural understanding (Cukier, 2002). Additionally, the moderating role of explorer tourists suggests that local communities should offer diverse tourism experiences to enhance cultural engagement and openness (Tosun, 2006).

### Practical Implications

The study also holds practical implications for the Thai government's soft power strategy, positioning Thai cuisine as a global cultural asset. The Thai government should promote national identity and values to international tourists by strengthening gastronomy tourism and incorporating it into Thailand's cultural diplomacy efforts. The mediating role of soft power in this study indicates that the Thai government can use this strategy to improve global perceptions of Thai cuisine, encouraging tourists to

revisit and fostering cross-cultural exchange (Nye, 2021). To further strengthen the soft power of Thai cuisine, the Thai government should collaborate with local communities to offer traditional Thai cuisine alongside cultural performances in various regions. This approach would stimulate local tourism, support community economies, and preserve cultural heritage. Additionally, strategies such as international food festivals, Thai cooking workshops, and food-themed tourism could enhance Thailand's soft power globally, solidifying its success in the cultural tourism market (Henderson, 2019). Focusing on providing authentic experiences tailored to different tourist types can enhance Thailand's appeal as a culturally rich and welcoming destination (Hjalager, 2002).

## LIMITATIONS

Despite the valuable findings, this study has several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, the sample was drawn from a single province, which may restrict the generalisability of the results. Secondly, the use of a cross-sectional design, as with much prior research on revisiting intention, means that it cannot provide conclusive evidence regarding the long-term effects of the variables. A longitudinal design in future studies could offer deeper insights into the causality of the relationships. Thirdly, the focus on tourists' intentions, rather than actual behaviours, is a limitation. While intentions can be a strong predictor of behaviour, future research could explore actual tourist actions for a more comprehensive understanding. Fourthly, one variable was measured using a single-item scale, which may affect both reliability and variance. Future research should consider using established multi-item scales to improve measurement accuracy. In conclusion, this study affirms that gastronomy tourism indirectly influences revisiting intention through the soft power of Thai cuisine. It also reveals that the explorer tourist type moderates the relationship between gastronomy tourism and soft power in Thai food. Further research is necessary to assess the generalisability of these findings to other contexts and populations. The author hopes this study will contribute to the advancement of research in this field.

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