Resilience to crises of Thai MICE stakeholders: A longitudinal study of the destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak has changed rapidly the business operation and travel behavior of global communities and calls for research on resilience. This study aims to identify the changing destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination during crises and examine the resilience of Thai MICE stakeholders. A mixed method of qualitative and quantitative design was employed using interviews, observations and questionnaire surveys. A longitudinal study of Thai MICE stakeholders during 14 years revealed that the Buddhist concepts of resilience and Thainess contribute to psychological resilience. Buddhism and Thainess cultivate the concept of crisis concierge. Surveys showed unchanged image of exhibition facilities during the political instability. Thailand's incentive travel benefits from the availability of bleisure (a combination of business and leisure) attractions. Good value for money, Thai hospitality, bleisure attractions, and international standard venues are key resilient factors.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has changed rapidly the business operation and travel behavior of global communities and calls for research on resilience. While completing this manuscript (April–May 2020), Thailand's inbound and domestic tourism in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were temporarily closed (Chinanurakchart, 2020). Cancellation and postponing were immediate responses to public fear during crises (Chansate, 2020), especially when the governments of tourist originating countries issued travel advisories which resulted in the suspension of travel insurance (Causevic & Lynch, 2012; Yoo & Chon, 2010). According to Prayag (2018, p. 133), there is a need to shift from crisis management to resilience building to improve adaptive learning. He notes that a crisis management approach is insufficient to advance knowledge on how tourism communities cope with and recover from the disruptive changes. Resilience is the system's ability to self-organize, learn, and adapt to disturbances while maintaining its identity and core values (Holling, 1973) and evolve during incremental and cumulative changes (Prayag, 2018, p. 133).

While Thailand can withstand adversities, many destinations struggle with resilience (Prayag, 2018). Thus, this study aims to provide insights on destination resilience and psychological resilience for other destinations to learn from the best practices of Thailand. Resilience requires the involvement of stakeholders (Luthe & Wyss, 2014), to mitigate the extent of the crisis and facilitates destination recovery. This paper reports on longitudinal studies and cross-sectional studies over a 14-year-period with interviews, surveys and participant observations with stakeholders from the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions/Events (MICE). Our MICE stakeholders included the supply side of the MICE sector (MICE suppliers) and the demand side of the MICE sector as suggested by Sangpikul and Kim (2009). However, the adaptation and transformation process of resilience are under-researched (Prayag, 2018). Specifically, research gaps exist regarding the resilience of MICE industry towards adversity. An increasingly volatile geopolitical environment (Laing, 2018; Pennington-Gray, 2018) and slow recovery period of suffered destinations (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009) call for study on the resilience of the MICE industry and the change in destination image assists MICE stakeholders to find strategies to cope with the disruptive society. Understanding how a system copes with any scale of adversity is necessary for destination

sustainability (Prayag, 2018, p. 133). Taken together this underlines the need for a study on destination image and resilience for the MICE industry before, during, and after crises.

Since resilience is the adaptive process towards incremental change, analysis of change in destination image before, during, and after crisis provides insights about resilience building (Prayag, 2018). According to Sheppard & Williams (2016, p.21), the prerequisite of resilience is the ability to adapt to change, learn from the disturbance and move forward. What factors contribute to the resilience of Thai MICE stakeholders during crises? What is the change of destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination perceived by MICE suppliers and participants over the 14-year period? This study aims to answer these research questions.

2. Literature reviews

According to Pennington-Gray (2018) and Prayag (2018), the uncontrollable nature of political instability requires not only crisis management, but resilience. The ability of individuals, organizations and destinations to maintain their identity and successfully recover from repeated crises is an ongoing process (Prayag, 2018, p. 135). Resilience is based on systems analysis (Von Bertalanffy, 1968), and the idea of bounded rationality (Simon, 1972). Resilience assumes that a system has the capability to create foresight and to respond adaptively (Haimes, 2009). At micro system scale, individual resilience is built on psychological resilience which is an individuals' behavior, thoughts, and actions learned and developed during bouncing back and adapting to adversity, threats or stress from difficult experience (American Psychological Association, 2016). Buddha's teaching on positive thinking has fundamental similarities to resilience building.

2.1. Resilience through Buddhism

Buddhism cultivates resilience through the law of karma. Karma is the scientific natural order of *Dhamma* or reality and the totality of natural conditions which interconnect all aspects of reality in which ill-intended actions will inevitably return to inflict adverse effects on the originator (Daniels, 2005). The law of karma explains the cause and effect that a person is, to a great extent, responsible for the suffering that occurs in his or her life such as the desire for existence (power), and desire for non-existence (loss of power) (Rittichainuwat, 2018). Under the Buddhist concept of *Tri Laksana* (three marks states of existence) all beings shares three common characteristics: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and no self (*anatta*) (Sandage, 2001). Consequently, one's benefit merit must be earned in ways that do not deprive or exploit people or harm life (Daniels, 2005). Buddha's teaching on kindness, compassion, tolerance, simplicity and non-violence with respect to humans and the natural world reinforces the importance of right livelihood (Daniels, 2005) which strengthens the individual's psychological resilience and is the foundation of Thai hospitality.

Thai hospitality with the sensitivity to help others in times of crises is the feminine aspect of Thai culture (Rittichainuwat, 2008). The willingness to help also reflects the influence of Buddhism to accumulate merits, enhancing present and future life (Rittichainuwat, 2008). This cultural value is composed of *Hai Kiad*-treating people gently and courteously and avoiding confrontation and criticism (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1997), *Sam Ruam*-self-control towards the avoidance of negative displays of emotion which might cause people upset or loss of face (Tungtakanpoung & Wyatt, 2013), *Kreng Jai*-a considerate concern for addressing others' feelings with humility and politeness (Tungtakanpoung & Wyatt, 2013), *Hen Jai*-a willingness to listen sympathetically, actively, and intuitively, with affectionate concern, and expressing empathy (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1997), and *Nam Jai*-showing love and kindness in a purely generous way (Tungtakanpoung & Wyatt, 2013). The combination of these cultural values as embedded

from Buddhism is an integral part in psychological resilience in confronting various crises. While crisis management is a single response to an adversity, Buddhism promotes positive thinking in enduring disturbance. Such positive thinking is a behavioral process of resilience building (Prayag, 2018) and enhances destination image of Thailand (Rittichainuwat, 2008).

2.2. Threat's to Thailand tourism and MICE sector

Thailand is an appropriate place to study MICE resilience because Thailand has encountered different crises over the past decades. Table 1 and Fig. 1 show the drop of MICE visitors during and after civilian protests in 2008, 2009, 2010 and two coups d'états in 2006 and 2014. Despite the softening of Thai Baht, favorable gains from foreign currency exchange for international MICE travelers, the marketing strategy in 2006, and being the host of ASEAN leader summit, riots and coup d'etat did not favor the MICE industry. Surprisingly, the Thai MICE industry still thrives. In 2018, Thailand was among one of the top four host countries in Asia, hosting the most international meetings while Bangkok was ranked as the top 10th convention city in the world (ICCA, 2018).

Thailand has an image of a variety of leisure and business (bleisure) attractions, good value for money, friendly people, easy access, availability of standard venues, and a safe place to travel (Jurakanit & Taweepornpatomkul, 2019; Promsivapallop & Kannaovakun, 2019; Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Brown, 2001). Yet, political instability tarnishes its destination image. Destination image affects travel intention (Prayag, 2009; Yi, Fu, Jin, & Okumus, 2018). Positive destination image is related to familiarization with a destination (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Brown, 2001). "Image of place possesses a hierarchy of themes" (Ryan & Cave, 2005, p. 149). In the MICE industry, major destination image attributes during site selection are: accessibility (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Crouch, Chiappa, & Perdue, 2019), convenience (Comas & Moscardo, 2005), overall affordability (Rittichainuwat, Beck, & Lalopa, 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2010), ease of local transportation (Crouch et al., 2019; Oppermann 1996), meeting room facilities (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Rittichainuwat, 2020), service quality (Wei & Lin, 2014), sales promotions (Rodriguez, Reina, & Sevilla, 2014) and safety and security (Crouch et al., 2019; Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Brown, 2001) in which political instability shapes risk perception.

2.3. Perceptions of risks in Thailand's tourism and MICE sectors

Risk perception is destination specific and associated with tourist infrastructures (Seabra, Dolnicar, Abrantes, & Kastenholz, 2013, p. 508.). Frequent crises create negative destination images (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Liu, Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, & Farajat, 2016) and reductions in tourist arrivals (Cahyanto, Wiblishauser, Pennington-Gray, & Schroeder, 2016; Saha & Yap, 2013). The MICE industry is extremely vulnerable to political instability (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Live broadcasting on international TV of violent and bloody rioting during the 2009 ASEAN summit tarnished the image of Thailand as a desirable MICE destination (Ingram, Grieve, Ingram, Tabari, & Watthanakhomprathip, 2013). The riot turned the opportunities presented by the ASEAN summit into a crisis for the Thai tourism and MICE industries, becoming a geopolitical incident exacerbated by international media exposure (Pennington-Gray, 2018). Perceived political instability threatened Thai bids to host future MICE events.

A successful MICE sector depends on trust and commitment (International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA, 2018). The decision-making process of business travel is complex and different from leisure market (Rittichainuwat & Mair, 2012). Although MICE is not identical to tourism, it shares hospitality and travel resources with the leisure market. MICE events are often scheduled to increase tourist confidence and speed up the destination recovery (Rittichainuwat, 2006; Schroeder & Pennington-Gray, 2014) and soften the negative

Table 1
Historical Background of crises on Thailand's tourism and MICE sectors.

Year	Number of Tourists Arrivals	Number of MICE Arrivals	Notable crisis events	Exchange Rate (1 US dollar/Baht)	Tourism Promotion/Adversity
1980	1,858,801	Data is not available	Oil crisis	20.48	1st Visit Thailand Year
1981	2,015,615			20.82	
1982	2,218,429			23.00	
1983	2,191,003		World economic recession	23.00	
1984	2,346,709			23.64	
1985	2,438,270			27.16	
1986	2,818,092			26.30	
1987	3,482,958		Devaluation of Thai Baht	25.74	Visit Thailand Year
1988	4,230,737			25.29	Thailand Arts and Craft Year
1989	4,809,508			25.70	Thailand Arts and Craft Year
1990	5,298,860			25.59	
1991	5,086,899		Gulf War	25.52	
1992	5,136,443			25.40	Women's Visit Thailand Year
1993	5,760,553			25.32	
1994	6,166,496			25.15	
1995	6,951,566			24.92	Sea Games
1996	7,192,145			25.34	
1997	7,221,345		Asian Financial Crisis, Devaluation of Thai Baht	31.37	Amazing Thailand Year Asian Games
1998	7,764,930		Asian Financial Crisis	41.37	Amazing Thailand Year
1999	8,651,260		Asian Financial Crisis	37.84	Celebrate the Amazing River of the Kings
2000	9,578,826		Asian Financial Crisis	40.11	
2001	10,132,509		911 event, violence in the South	44.33	
2002	10,872,976		violence in the South	42.96	
2003	10,082,109		SARS, violence in the South	41.49	
2004	11,737,413		Bird flu, tsunami, violence in the South (bomb blast in Had Yai)	40.22	Happiness on Earth
2005	11,516,936		violence in the South	40.22	Happiness on Earth Thailand
2006	13,821,802	901,825	Coup d'etat	37.88	Grand Invitation 2006
2007	14,464,228	744,101		32.21	
2008	14,584,220	821,892	Occupation of Bangkok's Airports	33.31	
2009	14,149,841	686,609	Occupation of the ASEAN+6 Summit venue in Pattaya	34.29	
2010	15,936,400	679,585	Street clashes between red shirts and armed troop	31.69	
2011	19,230,470	840,054	Mega Flood	30.49	
2012	22,353,903	895,224		31.08	
2013	26,546,725	1,013,502	Street mobs	30.73	
2014	24,809,683	1,036,300	Coup d'etat	32.48	
2015	29,923,185	1,095,995	Bomb blasts in BKK	34.25	ICAO issued Thailand red flag
2016	32,529,588	1,001,083	Thai constitutional referendum & Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej death	35.28	
2017	35,591,978	1,047,959		33.94	ICAO lifted Thailand's red-flag, Open to the New Shades
2018	38,178,194	1,255,985		32.31	Passport Privileges & Amazing Thailand MARATHON BANGKOK 2018
2019	39,797,406	1,273,981	Election & Bomb blasts in BKK	30.16	Thailand passed ICAO inspections**
2020	6,691,574 (as of 21/04/2020)		COVID-19	32.14 (as of 13/05/2020)	

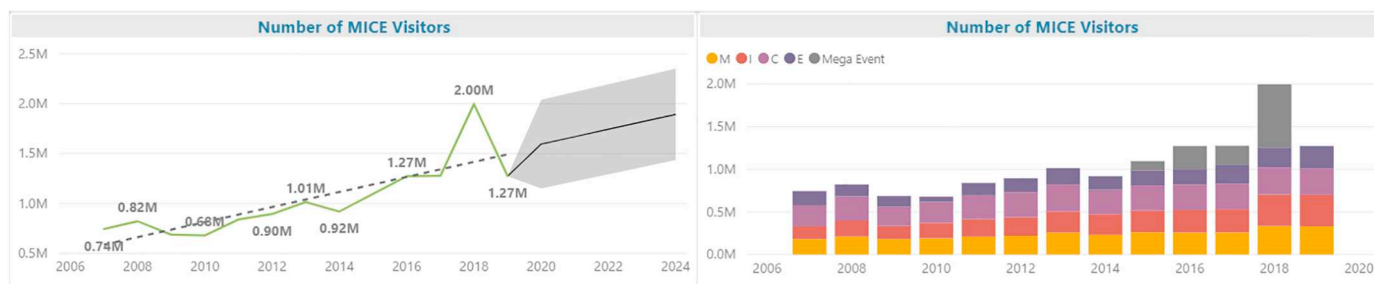Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2005–2019, TCEB 2006–2019, and the Bank of Thailand, 2005–2020.

3

Fig. 1. MICE Statistics.
Source: Thailand MICE Intelligence Center (2019).

Table 2
Research Design.

Research design	Objectives
Before crisis • Qualitative & Quantitative Design • Semi-structured interviews • Participant observations at MICE events • Questionnaire survey	• Explore the destination image and the impact of political instability on the MICE industry (2006–2008) • Measurement development (2006)
During crisis • Qualitative & Quantitative Design • Semi-structured interviews • Participant observations at MICE events • Questionnaire survey	• Explore issues not covered in the qualitative design (survey in 2006) • Validate results of the first survey, the interviews and observations (surveys in 2009 and 2015).
After crisis • Qualitative & Quantitative Design • Semi-structured interviews • Participant observations at MICE events • Longitudinal study (interviews & observations of ten same informants for 14 years) • Questionnaire survey	• Explore the resilience to political instability of Thai MICE stakeholders (interviews in 2019) • Validate results from the interviews, observations and surveys (2006–2020)

image of a destination (Rittichainuwat, 2006). Corporate and associations perceive MICE events as corporate social responsibility (Chubchuwong, 2019). The characteristics of MICE events may render them less resilient than the leisure market due to long lead times (Campiranon & Arcodia, 2008) and complex decision process and the status of participants (Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Brown, 2001).

However, risk perception does not remain in people's memory as time goes by (Otoo & Kim, 2018; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). Although most events disruptive to tourism are relatively localized and short term, they are often highly influential in disrupting general travel intentions to a particular destination (Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, Kaplanidou, & Zhan, 2013). Yet, a crisis can be turned to an opportunity (Rittichainuwat, 2013). Due to a ripple effect, a crisis in one destination can increase demand in neighboring destinations (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). The 2006 coup d'état in Thailand discouraged international tourists, who chose Malaysia instead of Thailand (Ghaderi, Som, & Henderson, 2012). Commercialization of disaster-hit-sites into a tourist attraction can be done at some point in the future to avoid sensitivity of victims' relatives (Rittichainuwat, 2008, p. 431). Since risk-tolerant tourists do not forgo all travel even during crises (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009), service providers can turn a crisis into an opportunity with resilience building to restore negative image (Liu & Pratt, 2017) and rebuild tourist confidence (Liu, Pennington-Gray, & Klemmer, 2014).

Crisis management alleviates the outcomes of disasters (Faulkner, 2001) and can be used as a marketing tool to attract and retain tourists (Rittichainuwat, 2013). Crisis management includes risk acceptance, risk transfer, risk reduction, and risk avoidance (Wilks & Davis, 2000). Rittichainuwat (2020) notes that venues can protect themselves by not

only including indemnification clauses in their contracts, but should also buy premium level insurance to cover themselves by transferring risk. Meanwhile, she notes that risk acceptance can be used in responding to perceived risks by not cancelling or postponing the MICE events. Conversely, risk avoidance of event cancellation and postponement must be implemented when actual risks would harm participants (Rittichainuwat, 2020), such as in a serious *COVID-19* outbreak, which is rampant while this manuscript was being completed. Risk reduction should be implemented by integrating crisis concierge methods (Pennington-Gray, 2018).

Meanwhile, resilience needs natural and cultural resources, economic resources, and competencies of stakeholders for self-organizing to make business available for service again (Sheppard & Williams, 2016). More importantly, financial resilience requires overall affordability (Prayag, Chowdhury, Spector, & Orchiston, 2018). Discounts and nationalism have been used to stimulate domestic travel during crises (Ghaderi et al., 2012; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). Yet, good value for money instead of cheapness is a key for destination recovery (Rittichainuwat, 2006). Instead of offering discounts associated with negative connotation, good value for money conveys positive meanings (Plog, 2006). In the current world economic situation, it is evident that pricing is one of the main concerns (Ghaderi et al., 2012; Ingram et al., 2013). Finally, promoting recovering destinations for MICE corporate social responsibility satisfies organizational buyers (Rittichainuwat, 2006). Yet, meeting planners placed importance on the safety of their employees both as a human responsibility and due to the potential liability if sending them to risky destinations (Rittichainuwat, 2013).

3. Method

3.1. Research design

As Prayag (2018) notes resilience is an ongoing behavioral process, thus, this study presents the change of Thai MICE destination image and resilience to crises of Thai MICE stakeholders before, during, and after the political crisis. The destination image complexity requires the quantitative and qualitative approach (Pan, 2011) in unveiling the change in destination image (Tasci, Hahm, & Breiter, 2020). Accordingly, a mixed research method of qualitative and quantitative design was employed in this research using semi-structured interviews, participant observations and questionnaire surveys (Khoo-Lattimore, Mura, & Yung, 2019).

Table 2 shows the detail of the research design. Table 3 shows the research timeline, sampling, and research procedure from 2006 to 2020. The survey data collection was conducted in three phases (before, during, after the political crises).

Purposive sampling was used to invite interviewees and respondents. According to Creswell (1994, p. 148), the objective of "qualitative research is to purposefully select interviewees that will best answer the research questions". Although the survey samples were not the same throughout the three cross-sectional studies, the samples

Table 3
Research timeline.

Data Collection Procedure	2006	2008	2009	2010	2015	2018	2019-May 2020
Semi-structured Interview	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Self-completion questionnaire Survey	✓		✓		✓		
Participant Observation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Key Research questions	What is the impact of political instability on your organization? What is the destination image of Thai MICE industry during the political instability?	What is the impact of political instability on your organization? What is the destination image of Thai MICE industry during the political instability?	What is the impact of political instability on your organization? What is the destination image of Thai MICE industry during the political instability? What is the change on destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination?	What is the impact of political instability on your organization? What is the destination image of Thai MICE industry during the political instability?	What is the impact of political instability on your organization? What is the destination image of Thai MICE industry during the political instability? What is the change on destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination?	What is the change on destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination?	What is the change on destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination? What is the MICE resilience during political instability?
Rationale	Specification of the questionnaire items, Generation of a pool of items, Purification of the items, Expert's review and comments on the result of the survey.	Expert's comment on the result of the survey.	Assessment of reliability & Validity, Expert's comment on the result of the survey.	Assessment of reliability & Validity, Expert's comment on the result of the survey.	Assessment of reliability & Validity	Assessment of reliability & Validity	Assessment of reliability & Validity
Objectives	Exploratory	Exploratory	Validation	Validation	Validation	Validation	Exploratory on Resilience & Validation of Destination image
Literature Reviews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Measurement	Research questions, questionnaire	Research questions	Research questions, questionnaire	Research questions	questionnaire	Research questions	Research questions
Research settings	Thailand	Thailand	Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore	Thailand	Thailand	Thailand	Thailand
Sampling	Purposive sampling (interviews), (Pilot test, survey)	Purposive sampling	Purposive sampling	Purposive sampling	Purposive sampling	Purposive sampling	Purposive sampling

Table 4

Summary of Experts' Profile.

Interviewee profile	2006	2008	2009	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020
1. 60+, female, Thai, director, CVB	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
2. 70+, male, Thai, GM, PEO	Interview	Interview	–	–	Interview	–	–	
3. 50+, male, Thai, GM, PCO	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
4. 70+ male, Thai, Convention Hotel owner	Interview	–	–	–	–	–	–	
5. 70+ male, Thai, GM, DMC	Interview	Interview	–	–	Interview	–	–	
6. 40 + male, German, GM, Venue	–	Interview	–	–	Interview	–	–	
7. 60 + female, Thai, Vice president, Venue	Interview	Interview	–	–	Interview	–	–	
8. 50+ female, Thai, PCO, GM	Interview	Interview	Interview		Interview	Interview		
9. 60+, male, Thai, GM, exhibition Contractor, venue	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview
10. 70 + male, Dutch, GM, MICE consultant	Interview	Interview	–	–	Interview	Interview	–	
11. 50+ female, Thai, convention chair, healthcare	–	–	Interview	–	–	Interview	–	
12. 50+ male, Thai, freight forwarder	Interview	–	–	–	–	–	–	Interview
13. 40+, male, Thai, GM, limousine	–	–	–	Interview	–	–	Interview	
14. 40+ Female, Thai, Director, CVB	–	–	Interview	Interview	–	Interview	interview	
15. 40+ Female, Thai, Director, CVB	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
16. 50 + male, Indian, travel Editor,	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
17. 30 + Female, Thai, Director of Marketing, Convention Hotel	–	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
18. 30 + female, Thai, Director of Sales, Exhibition Centre	–	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
19. 30 + female, Thai, senior manager, convention hotel	–	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
20. 60 + male, Thai, president, academic association	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
21. 50+, female, Thai, director, tourist bureau	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview
22. 50 + female, Thai, director, CVB	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
23. 50+ male, Thai, board member, DMC, incentive travel	–	–	Interview	Interview	–	Interview	Interview	
24. 60+, male, Thai, board member, GM, meetings & conventions	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
25. 60 + female, Thai, GM, DMC, incentive travel	Interview	Interview	Interview	–	Interview	Interview	–	
26. 60+ female, Thai, PCO, meetings and conventions	Interview	Interview	–	–	Interview	–	–	Interview
27. 50 + female, Thai, venue, owner	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	–	–	–	
28. 40+ male, American, GM, convention hotel	–	–	Interview	–	Interview	Interview	Interview	
29. Anonymous	–	–	Interview	Interview	Interview	–	Interview	
30. 50+ male, Thai, DMC, GM				Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	
31. 20+, male, Thai, freelance tour guide, PCO staff						–	–	Interview
32. 30+ male, Thai, PCO staff					Interview	Interview	–	–
33. 70+, German, MICE consultant					Interview	Interview	–	–
34. 30+ Thai, female, manager, CVB					Interview	Interview	–	–
35. 30+ Thai, female, senior manager, CVB					Interview	Interview	Interview	
36. 70+, Thai, female, venue owner				Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview
37. 40+ Thai, male, GM, DMC	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	

Note: ten interviewees, representing 27% of the informants are part of the longitudinal sample (2006 to 2020).

Table 5

Source of measurement development.

Destination image attributes	Literature reviews	Interviews
1. Ease of air access	Crouch & Ritchie (1998), Comas & Moscardo, 2005	√
2. Ease of local transportation	Crouch & Ritchie (1998)	√
3. Overall affordability	Oppermann (1996), Baloglu and Love (2005)	√
4. Market opportunity	–	√
5. Customs & Immigration procedures	–	√
6. Foreign language proficiency	–	√
7. Meeting room facilities	Balogu & Love (2005), Crouch & Ritchie (1998)	√
8. Exhibition facilities	–	√
9. Safety & security	Baloglu and Love (2005), Crouch & Ritchie (1998),	√
10. Availability of support service for successful event	Baloglu and Love (2005), Crouch & Ritchie (1998)	√

include domestic and international; visitors and non-visitors; MICE demand side sector and MICE supply side sector, to get holistic views of the MICE stakeholders' perception.

From 2006 to 2020 a total of 37 interviewees were interviewed about their perception towards Thailand as a MICE destination (see Table 4). With 37 experts, this study meets Creswell's (1994) guideline of 5–25 interviewees to achieve an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study. Meanwhile, a longitudinal study about the change of the destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination was conducted with the same ten MICE stakeholders using semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The first and fourth authors registered as participants in MICE events to conduct participant observation about MICE resilience. We observed that during the Coup d'etat, international

conventions already scheduled on the 19 September 2006 still went ahead but with fewer participants. During the violent mobs in Bangkok downtown, our international convention at a beach resort (220 Kilometers from Bangkok) went on but delegates extended their stay at the beach rather than going to downtown Bangkok. As for the coup d'etat in May 2014, some international convention participants worried but did not cancel their flights to Thailand. As for Thai delegates who attended an international convention in Hong Kong most shortened their overseas trip.

The benefit of a longitudinal study is that it generates data directly usable for observing the effects of unexpected events at different times (Gerike & Gosselin, 2014). Ten interviewees were the MICE stakeholders who participated in the measurement development in 2006 and

cross-validated the results of the three phrases. They are MICE suppliers from private sectors and the MICE demand side (non-profit-organizations and associations). They acted as advisors for government in establishing MICE policy because of their neutral roles. They have been active in the MICE industry and have served on a MICE committee appointed by different governmental authorities. These experts had experienced different crises from 2006 to 2020 and worked with governments from different political orientations, hence, their input is valuable to this research in understanding resilience and cross validation of the destination. The first and the fourth authors conducted face-to-face and telephone semi-structured interviews and participant observations at social and business events which the MICE stakeholders attended. Regarding the resilience in 2020 on COVID-19, telephone semi-structure and *Zoom* interviews were conducted between the residences of the authors and the interviewees to comply with social distancing requirements. The interviewees were asked the following research questions: what aspects of Thailand's MICE image are the most resilient during political instability and why?, what are the social and economic outcomes of political instability as well as their impact on tourism?, what is the destination image perception of Thailand at different times/stages during a political crisis?, what is the impact of the political instability on destination image?, what is the impact of the political crises on Thai MICE sector? And what are the current realities of the MICE sector in Thailand? See Appendix A.

3.1.1. Before crisis phase (semi-structured interviews, observations, and surveys)

The first self-administered questionnaire survey occurred in July 2006 (before the coup d' etat in September that year) at an international academic convention in Bangkok, Thailand. During the exploratory phrase (2006–2008), a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews and participant observation was conducted with 10 MICE stakeholders to explore the image of Thailand as an international MICE destination. The result of the first stage helped develop the measurement instrument.

3.1.1.1. Measurement development. This study uses free elicitation to identify MICE destination image attributes. Free elicitation enables interviewees with different levels of familiarity with destination image to retrieve their cognition from memory (Lopez & Balabanis, 2019). First, 30 to 60 min interviews were conducted in Thai and English depending on the preference of the interviewee. The results of these interviews were the basis for development of a self-administered questionnaire (Churchill & Brown, 2006). Free elicitation in-depth-interviews with MICE experts resulted in the following attributes: exhibition facilities; market opportunity; immigration and customs procedures, staff foreign language skills; and 'availability of support services for a successful convention'. Analysis of the interviews revealed that in countries where successive governments come from different political parties, change in policy and support in hosting events can happen and result in support or lack of support for a successful convention. The measurement image attributes derived from the literature reviews were overall affordability, meeting room facilities, and safety and security. Accessibility was divided into ease of local transportation and ease of air access. These were adopted as questionnaire items. The questionnaire items were limited to only 10 attributes on the advice of the organizer who considered that high senior governmental and board of trade association officials would not answer a long survey. Thus, a self-completed questionnaire with only 10 items was used as the survey instrument. The self-administered questionnaire, written in English, was pilot tested on a purposive sample of ten MICE stakeholders and slightly modified in the light of respondents' comments to remove language issues. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement about the image of Thailand as a MICE destination with each of the 10 image attributes on a 5-point semantic differential scale that ranged from 1 (below

international standard), 3 (average), to 5 (the top market leader). The survey also asked for standard demographic information (age, gender, and level of education). Table 5 reports the measurement attributes which were identified in the literature reviews and from the personal interviews. The measurement was used for the first, second, and third data collection.

3.1.2. During crisis-phase (semi-structured interviews, observations, and surveys)

The second data collection took place in 2009 during street protests, and one month after the riot at the ASEAN + 6 Summit venue in Pattaya, at four international conventions in Thailand and abroad: one MICE conference in Hong Kong and a hospitality and tourism convention in Singapore in May 2009, one travel convention in Thailand in June 2009 and one MICE convention in Thailand in October 2009. Being registered as convention participant, the first author could observe the outcome of the political crisis to the MICE industry. The result of the data collection in the second phrase was used to cross-validate the result of the first stage.

3.1.3. After crisis-phase (semi-structured interviews, observations, and surveys)

Then, the qualitative design was used again during 2018–2020 to cross-validate the results of the earlier surveys on destination image, and to explore the resilience to political instability of Thai MICE stakeholders. The third survey and set of interviews were conducted 16 months after the 2014 coup d'etat at a hotel seminar held in Bangkok in June 2014 and at a MICE trade fair in Bangkok in September 2014. The result of this stage cross-validated the result of the first and second stage on the change of the destination image. This stage is used to explore factors contributing to Thai MICE resilience.

3.2. Data analysis

The quantitative data were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) V.21. The first step in the data analysis was to run descriptive statistics to determine frequency distribution. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run to identify differences in the

Table 6
Demographic Profile.

Demographic profile	Frequency	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	223	52
	Female	207	48
	Total	430	100
Age group	20–29 years old	85	19.6
	30–39 years old	116	27
	40–49 years old	97	23
	50–59 years old	94	22
	60 years and over	36	8.4
	Total	428	100
Educational level	Primary/Middle School or below	3	0.6
	Secondary/High School	6	1.4
	College/University	189	44
	Graduate/Postgraduate	231	54
	Total	429	100
MICE demand/supply sectors (role at the event)	Education (academic administrators, hosts, convention owners)	215	66.2
	Government	15	4.6
	Industry	47	14.4
	Association	28	8.6
	Student	20	6.2
	Total	325	100
Political instability phrase	Before	162	36.4
	During	179	40.2
	After Coup d'état	104	23.4
	Total	445	100

Table 7
Destination Image of Thailand during Political Instability.

Thailand MICE image attributes (Post Hoc Games-Howell test)		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Safety and Security	Before	162	4.2	0.7	0.1	4.1	4.3
$F = 51.5, \rho < 0.000$	During	179	3.2	1.0	0.1	3.1	3.4
BF > DU, DU < AF, BF > AF	After	104	3.6	0.8	0.1	3.5	3.8
	Total	445	3.7	1.0	0.0	3.6	3.8
Market opportunity	Before	162	4.2	0.7	0.1	4.1	4.3
$F = 7.2, \rho < 0.001$	During	174	3.8	1.0	0.1	3.7	4.0
BF > DU	After	104	4.0	0.8	0.1	3.9	4.2
	Total	440	4.0	0.8	0.0	3.9	4.1
Overall Affordability	Before	162	4.1	0.7	0.1	4.0	4.3
$F = 12.5, \rho < 0.000$	During	172	4.2	0.8	0.1	4.1	4.3
BF > AF, DU > AF	After	103	3.7	0.8	0.1	3.6	3.9
	Total	437	4.1	0.8	0.0	4.0	4.2
Support Services for a Successful Convention	Before	162	4.2	0.7	0.1	4.1	4.3
$F = 14.4, \rho < 0.000$	During	155	3.7	0.9	0.1	3.6	3.8
BF > DU, DU < AF	After	104	3.9	1.0	0.1	3.7	4.1
	Total	421	3.9	0.9	0.0	3.9	4.0
Ease of Air Access	Before	162	4.0	0.9	0.1	3.9	4.2
$F = 3.6, \rho < 0.03$	During	174	4.0	0.9	0.1	3.9	4.1
BF > AF, DU > AF	After	104	3.8	0.8	0.1	3.6	3.9
	Total	440	4.0	0.9	0.0	3.9	4.0
Efficiency of Local Transportation	Before	162	3.9	0.9	0.1	3.7	4.0
$F = 4.2, \rho = 0.02$	During	70	3.5	0.9	0.1	3.3	3.8
BF > DU	After	103	3.6	0.9	0.1	3.5	3.8
	Total	335	3.7	0.9	0.0	3.6	3.8
Thai Foreign Language Skills	Before	162	3.6	0.9	0.1	3.5	3.7
$F = 8.1, \rho < 0.000$	During	169	3.8	0.9	0.1	3.7	3.9
DU > AF	After	104	3.3	1.0	0.1	3.1	3.5
	Total	435	3.6	0.9	0.0	3.5	3.7
Exhibition Facilities (n/s)*	Before	162	4.2	0.7	0.1	4.1	4.3
$F = 1.8, \rho = 0.17$	During	173	4.0	1.0	0.1	3.9	4.2
	After	104	4.0	0.8	0.1	3.8	4.1
	Total	439	4.1	0.8	0.0	4.0	4.1
Meeting Facilities	Before	162	4.2	0.7	0.1	4.1	4.3
$F = 3.8, \rho = 0.05$	During	172	4.0	0.9	0.1	3.9	4.1
BF > DU, BF > AF	After	104	4.0	0.8	0.1	3.9	4.2
	Total	438	4.1	0.8	0.0	4.0	4.2
Immigration and Customs Procedures	Before	162	4.0	0.9	0.1	3.8	4.1
$F = 11.7, \rho < 0.000$	During	166	3.5	1.0	0.1	3.3	3.6
BF > DU, DU < AF	After	104	3.8	0.8	0.1	3.7	4.0
	Total	432	3.7	0.9	0.0	3.7	3.8

Table 8
Independent Sample Mean t-test result.

Significant variables		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Thailand Safety and Security	Equal variances assumed	0.341	0.559	3.681	320	0.000
Thailand Ease of Local Transportation	Equal variances assumed	0.037	0.847	2.322	230	0.021
Thailand People's Foreign Language Skills	Equal variances assumed	2.466	0.117	−2.607	311	0.010
Thailand Customs Procedure	Equal variances not assumed	5.144	0.024	3.678	128.856	0.000

Note: All except Thailand customs procedure did not violate homogeneity of variances. Hence, Equal variances not assumed was used for this variable.

image of Thailand attributes across three timings to determine changing perceptions among the three groups. The respondents in the 2006 sample were coded as *before (before crisis sample)* whereas the 2009 sample were labelled *during (during crisis sample)* and the 2014 respondents were coded *after (after crisis sample)*. Then, Independent Sample Mean *t*-test was used to identify any differences in the perception towards the destination image of Thailand between MICE demand side sector and MICE-supply-side-sector samples.

4. Results and discussion

The demographic profile of the survey samples was shown in Table 6. A total of 445 returned and completed questionnaires were included in this study. During the first stage in 2006, out of 300 distributed questionnaires, 162 completed responses were received, yielding a response rate of 54%. During the second stage in 2009, out of 300 further questionnaires distributed, a total of 179 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 57%. A total of 104 out of 200 questionnaires was included in the 2014 survey, yielding a response rate of 52%. Our response rates are consistent with the average response rates conducted at the individual level in refereed journals which was 52.7% (Baruch & Holtom, 2008).

The sample of the first data collection mainly comprised of demand-side-MICE-sector (academic administrators, governmental authorities from education and non-profit-organizations). The respondents in the last two samples were academic participants and MICE suppliers including professional convention organizers, destination management companies, incentive travel houses, professional exhibition organizers,

Table 9
Perceived Destination Image between MICE demand side & MICE supply side sectors.

MICE destination Image Attributes	MICE demand side & MICE supply side	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Thailand Safety and Security	*MICE demand side*	*234*	*3.8*	*1.0*	*0.1*
	MICE supply side	*88*	*3.3*	*0.9*	*0.1*
Thailand market opportunity	MICE demand side	232	4.0	0.8	0.1
	MICE supply side	87	4.0	0.9	0.1
Thailand Overall Affordability	MICE demand side	231	4.1	0.8	0.1
	MICE supply side	85	4.3	0.7	0.1
Thailand Availability of Support Services for a Successful Convention	MICE demand side	223	4.0	0.8	0.1
	MICE supply side	77	3.9	0.9	0.1
Thailand Ease of Air Access	MICE demand side	232	4.0	0.9	0.1
	MICE supply side	87	4.0	1.0	0.1
Thailand Ease of Local Transportation	*MICE demand side*	*200*	*3.8*	*0.9*	*0.1*
	MICE supply side	*32*	*3.4*	*0.8*	*0.1*
Thailand People's Foreign Language Skills	*MICE demand side*	*228*	*3.6*	*0.9*	*0.1*
	MICE supply side	*85*	*3.9*	*0.9*	*0.1*
Thailand Exhibition Facilities	MICE demand side	231	4.0	0.8	0.1
	MICE supply side	87	4.2	0.9	0.1
Thailand Meeting Room Facilities	MICE demand side	230	4.1	0.7	0.0
	MICE supply side	86	4.1	0.9	0.1
Thailand Customs Procedure	*MICE demand side*	*228*	*3.8*	*0.9*	*0.1*
	MICE supply side	*82*	*3.4*	*1.0*	*0.1*

freight forwarders, service provider contractors, venues, incentive travel organizers, destination management companies, staff of a convention and visitor bureau, university lecturers teaching MICE and expatriate managers of convention hotels.

In the ANOVA analysis, significant differences were found in nine out of ten attributes. All except exhibition facilities were significantly different at $\rho < 0.01$ and $\rho < 0.05$ (see Table 7). *Before crisis* (BF) MICE stakeholders perceived more favorable destination image than during crisis (DU) and *after crisis* (AF). The Independent Sample mean *t*-test found significant difference between MICE demand side and MICE supply side samples in safety and security, ease of local transportation, customs and immigration procedure, and Thai foreign language skills. Table 8 reports the t-test result. Except for Thai people's foreign language skills, the MICE demand side sample had a higher destination image perception than the MICE supply side sample. Table 9 describes the mean of the destination image attributes between the MICE-demand-side-sector and the MICE-supply-side-sector.

4.1.1. The most resilient destination image of Thailand: Exhibition facilities

The Thai exhibition facilities were the only aspect of destination image which was not significantly different across the three MICE stakeholders nor between the MICE demand side sector and MICE-supply-side-sector samples. Regardless of political instability, Thai and international MICE stakeholders perceived Thai exhibition facilities as good

facilities. The suburban location of major Bangkok exhibition facilities (IMPACT and BITEC) saved them from the downtown protests. The 2009 ASEAN leader summit was held at *PEACH* in a seaside resort of Pattaya (see Fig. 2) while the *35th ASEAN Leader summit* and its related summits were hosted at *IMPACT* (see Fig. 3). Both venues were awarded Thailand MICE venue standard for service excellence and quality. Unfortunately, the *2009 ASEAN leader summit* was interrupted by a riot which damaged the property of *PEACH* as the official venue. Mobs invaded the venue and broke its glass-wall. According to the owner of this venue, without the coverage of insurance on riots, the venue owner paid for the repairs to the damage. The lesson learned from this incident enabled her to insist on the inclusion of acts of God in subsequent insurance contracts. Buying premium insurance was adaptive resilience to transfer financial risk to the insurance companies in the event of future incidents.

4.1.2. Safety & security

Better safety and security before the political instability was perceived than the average during the crisis and a slightly above average after the crisis. Likewise, the t-test found a significant difference in the perceived image of Thailand on safety and security. MICE demand side sector perceived slightly better safety and security than the MICE-supply-side-sector sample. As compared to other ASEAN destinations, Thailand was still viewed as safe. There were fewer criminal problems such as pick pockets, robbery, or hit and run incidents in Thailand. Yet, there was fear among first-time convention owners and organizers that

Fig. 2. The exhibition venue hosting the ASEAN Leader Summit in 2009, by Ruchika Longani, Pattaya Exhibition and Convention Hall.

Fig. 3. The exhibition venue hosting the ASEAN Leader Summit in 2019, courtesy by Somchai Chansate, IMPACT Exhibition & Convention Center.

political protests would escalate to and disrupted their convention. Although MICE owners and organizers were unlikely to cancel or postpone the conventions due to business liability, risk-sensitive convention travelers canceled their trips during political crises. Conversely, corporate buyers managed to divert incentive travelers to other unaffected areas of Thailand including resorts and the cultural centers of the north. Apart from Bangkok, Thailand has world class venues for incentive travels in Phuket and Chiangmai. These destinations were used as alternative or optional destinations during the crisis for incentive travels.

4.1.3. Market opportunities

Better market opportunity was perceived before the political crisis than during the crises. While the political crises decreased the overall market opportunities of Thailand, some MICE-suppliers seized opportunity from the crisis. One destination management company reported that during the political demonstration of the 2013 mobs, some conventioneers requested tour guides to take them to see and take photos with the peaceful mobs at Lumpini Park in Silom, downtown Bangkok where there were sales of protest products (wristbands, head ribbons) and concerts from some celebrities. Likewise, during the COVID-19 (May 2020), while many upscale hotels temporary closed, some hotels opened 30–40 rooms for extended – stay individual guests who did not want to travel back to their country because they perceived Thailand safer in combating the COVID-19.

4.1.4. Overall affordability

More overall affordability was perceived before and during the political crises than after the political crises. *Thailand Grand invitation 2006* marketing campaign in celebrating the 60th anniversary of former His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's accession to the throne in 2006 was launched in the same month as the *Amazing Thailand Grand sales* which promoted Thailand's image on overall affordability for leisure and bleisure travelers. Surprisingly, during the political crises in 2009, the overall affordability of Thailand still remained high because of discounts during destination recovery. More importantly, during the world economic recession in 2009–2010, Thailand was voted as *the World best value destination by Lonely Planet* because of its overall affordability. However, the overall affordability image decreased after the political crisis. The economic crisis in Russia in 2014 and the Chinese stock market crash of 2014 made Thailand less affordable for MICE travelers from these countries. Yet, Thailand has offered good

value for money, which is one of the resilient attributes regardless of crises. Compared to other destinations, a variety of tourist attractions for bleisure at affordable price was an important advantage of Thailand's destination resilience. Yet, suppliers stress that value for money does not mean low prices. Thailand is not positioned as a cheap destination but as offering quality service at reasonable prices.

4.1.5. Support services for successful conventions

Perceived lower support services for successful conventions was found during the political crises than before and after the crises. Instead of in-cash sponsorship for successful conventions, Thai authorities preferred in-kind sponsorship such as facilitating services and hospitality. Conversely, MICE suppliers perceive the financial incentives critical for their cost reduction and survival during the crises. Since Thai governments regardless of political parties perceive the importance of tourism in boosting economy, they supported services for successful conventions. Conversely, the mega projects initiated by rival political parties such as the bid to host the *World Expo 2020* did not get support from the subsequently appointed opposing government. While there were different opinions regarding the support of governments from different political orientation, there was a consistent message on the hospitality of the MICE stakeholders in assisting MICE participants during the closures of the Bangkok airports. The interviews revealed that all stakeholders had an empathy with visitors and worked in harmony in sending home the affected MICE travelers.

4.1.6. Ease of air access

Since the *after-crisis*-survey was administered one month after the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) had issued a red flag to Thai aviation in June 2014 for failing to adequately deal with significant safety concerns, this incident might affect the perceived destination image resulting in lower rating on the ease of air access in 2014 than in 2006 and 2009. Yet, most MICE stakeholders acknowledged the role of the military government in restoring the safety standard of the Thai aviation industry. In 2017, ICAO lifted the red-flag and Thailand regained its safety standard in 2019. This enabled more direct flights by Thai airlines to more destinations which facilitated the ease of air access. Unfortunately, suppliers now perceive the threats of airline bankruptcy due to the COVID-19. The closure of airports has deterred air-freights and disrupted the mobility of MICE tourism.

4.1.7. Ease of local transportation

Regardless of political situation, the image of ease of local

Fig. 4. Service-mind and Thai smiles distinguish Thai MICE personnel from other nations.

transportation was average. The major concern of the destination image of Thailand on ease of local transportation was not the temporary blockage of roads by mobs but the safety of local vehicles and inefficient mass transportation infrastructure in major MICE cities such as Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Pattaya.

4.1.8. Thai people's foreign language skills

There was average perception towards the Thai people's foreign language skills. While the MICE demand side sector sample perceived lower language skills, the MICE supply sector sample perceived better foreign language proficiency of the Thai workforce when recruiting employees. The new generation of the Thai MICE workforce had better language proficiency as compared to the past. However, the effective birth rate control policy of Thailand in the past 20 years resulted in the shortage of Thai workforce and consequent employment of immigrants from Southeast Asian countries, despite of better foreign language skills but less service-mind. Interviewee # 37 summed up the views of many in stating

As Thailand's economy continues to grow, locals no longer take positions such as shop assistant, restaurant staff, street food vendors, these are increasingly taken by immigrants from neighboring countries such as Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. The new employees have different service characteristics, standards and mentality, if not trained in service, they can cause dissatisfaction for foreign visitors. Although Thai, (like many other Asian countries), are poor in teamwork skills, other special characteristics replace this weakness such as the willingness to help each other. This is one of the reasons why problems are resolved quickly and operation can resume almost immediately. Suppliers are willing to help to resolve the problem with the MICE organizers through promotion, special value added, and authorities providing assistance.

4.1.9. Meeting facilities

Although the image of meeting facilities before the crisis was slightly higher than that during and after the crisis, the overall rating of Thai meeting facilities was good. Most of the meeting facilities of Thailand match international standards. More importantly, the MICE stakeholders perceived that the meeting facilities also include friendly

and professional personnel of the venues in enhancing guest satisfaction. Thainess and Buddhism cultivate the service-mind of Thai MICE personnel. Fig. 4 shows the Thai-MICE-personnel with service-minded-attitude.

4.1.10. Immigration and customs procedure

Surveys showed before crisis sample had better image on this attribute than during and after the crisis samples. Even in 2020, exhibition suppliers have not perceived change on the regulations of immigration and customs procedure and call for one-stop-service-customs clearance from different authorities to facilitate the imports/exports of demonstrated products. Some exhibitors still had experienced difficulties when importing technical equipment to be demonstrated at conventions and exhibitions, and specialty items to be distributed as gifts were subject to customs fee. Conversely, MICE demand side sector had higher perception on customs procedure than the MICE supply side sector.

4.1.11. Application of Buddhism and Thainess in building psychological resilience

Most MICE stakeholders ($n = 32$) follow Buddhism on the law of Karma (action consequences) in maintaining the right livelihood. Ten Thai MICE leaders also applied *Tri Laksana* percepts (perceiving undesirable circumstances as impermanent, eliminating the cause of suffering, and adopting no-self attachment), in dealing with political crises. Buddhism shapes their positive thinking and fostered psychological resilience. They agreed that Buddhism and Thainess enabled them in gaining trust and remaining in the MICE industry regardless of governmental changes. Ten Thai MICE stakeholders joined social networks such as merit-making-groups, temple-meditation or Buddhist pilgrimage in sharing information and assisting each other during political instability. About half of the interviewees ($n = 22$) believed in the law of Karma (action consequences). While they sometimes applied the concept of *anicca* (impermanence) to console themselves while confronting undesirable outcomes, they could not attain the concept of *anatta* (no-self).

4.1.12. Integrating Thainess to encourage crisis concierge

All MICE leaders agree that the factors contributing to their resilience were the Thainess trait of *Hai Kiad (courtesy), Sam Ruam (self-control), Kreng Jai (considerate concerns for others), Hen Jai* (empathy) and *Nam Jai* (hospitality). Instead of claiming credits from their help, most Thai MICE stakeholders in this study did virtuous things, not because of return on investment but for return on happiness. This Thainess concept is similar to the crisis concierge proposed by Pennington-Gray (2018) in which hospitality and service-mind extended beyond on-duty to off-duty to help guests in difficult times.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to identify the factors contributing to the resilience of Thai MICE stakeholders during crises and assess the change of destination image of Thailand as a MICE destination perceived by MICE suppliers and participants over the 14-year period. According to Prayag et al. (2018), experience from adversity resulted in adaptive resilience. This study found innovative MICE products (mob tours and extended MICE stay) as market opportunities Thai MICE supply sector responded to the request of the demand side sector. Market opportunity can be achieved with product and customer diversification (Becken, 2013). Similar to the crisis-concierge concept proposed by Pennington-Gray (2018), such incidental products were the result of Thai hospitality on willingness to help. Similar to destination recovery strategies suggested by Rittichainuwat (2006), Thai MICE industry has recovered fast because of the speed of suppliers in bringing back business into operation and their marketing strategies to boost tourist confidence. As Prayag (2018) notes, risk management is a preventative measure before a crisis occurs whereas resilience covers before, during, and after the crisis remedies when organizations and societies respond quickly to mitigate the crisis; thus, resilience is part of the crisis management cycle (Becken, 2013; Liu, Reed, & Girard, 2017; Orchiston, Prayag, & Brown, 2016; Pennington-Gray 2018, Pursiainen, 2018).

Unlike Alvarez and Campo (2014), Cahyanto et al. (2016), Causevic and Lynch (2012), Pennington-Gray (2018) and Cohen and Neal (2010), the geopolitics did not create social division among MICE travelers to avoid traveling to areas dominated by opposing political parties. Supawan Teerarat (2020), senior vice president of Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau notes "MICE is a business where buyers and sellers meet face-to-face or virtually to conduct business." Thai MICE suppliers applied adaptive resilience by using lessons learned from the political crises in hosting the MICE events at alternative destinations instead of the affected areas.

5.1. Theoretical contribution

This is the first study to integrate religion and cultural value in explaining psychological resilience in the MICE industry. Buddhist beliefs frame the ethical standards of Thai MICE stakeholders in gaining trust and respect from MICE industry members. Experience, the practice of Buddhism and Thainess contribute to individual psychological resilience. First, experience to political crises over a decade (street protests, coup d'etat, riots) immune Thai MICE stakeholders' resilience. Second, Buddhism on *impermanence* (failure is not the permanent condition) encouraged failed MICE stakeholders to bounce back from the crisis, boosting their motivations to keep running the business during the hard time and waiting for the better time which would come similar to the wheel of karma. The concept of impermanence is adopted when

faced with trouble, a misfortune, or a dispute (Panpothong & Phakdeephasook, 2014, p. 105).

Similar to Sandage (2001), the Buddhist law of karma helped individuals overcome vulnerable times with mindfulness on stress reduction and mental wellness. Meanwhile, joining social networks such as Buddhist pilgrimage and meditation group strengthen psychological resilience. Third, Thainess such as *Hen-Jai* (empathy) and *Nam-Jai* (hospitality) consoled MICE stakeholders through a social network disseminating information and identifying sources of help. Similar to Pennington-Gray, London, Cahyanto, and Klages (2011), Liu et al. (2016) and Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2014), social media is the preferred source of crisis-communication and used as merit making channel in this study. As Hoffmann and Muttarak (2016) and Prayag (2018) note, individuals with greater social capital have better access to information, expertise, and material resources for crisis preparedness.

More importantly, good value for money is a key for destination recovery (Rittichainuwat, 2006). Similar to Prayag et al. (2018), financial resilience requires overall affordability in attracting international MICE travelers. Pricing is a strategy for destination competitiveness (Ghaderi et al., 2012; Ingram et al., 2013), but price quality must be considered realistically and explained to overseas operators.

The success factors of MICE destination resilience require the availability of standard venues, good value for money, professionalism of MICE personnel, and availability of bleisure attractions. Bleisure factors are a sound basis for the resilience of the Thai MICE industry that do not change even during crises. As Sheppard and Williams (2016) note, destination resilience is the result of drawing upon existing natural and cultural resources, economic resources, and competencies of stakeholders for self-organizing to make business available for service again.

Unlike other cultures in which the concept of a crisis-concierge must be taught (Pennington-Gray & Schroeder, 2018), crisis-concierge has been embedded in Thai MICE stakeholders since childhood. Thus, Thainess should be taught as part of the crisis management curriculum to balance safety and security with considerate concern for others. Additionally, Buddhist beliefs are relevant to understanding the consequences of actions and in discouraging suicide (Rittichainuwat, 2018) while promoting a growth mindset during the crisis. Thainess and Buddhism is the foundation in maintaining safety and security in empathetic ways.

This study bridges the gap of longitudinal study by using the same sample over the span of time. This study addressed the call for research on resilience towards political instability through longitudinal study (Laing, 2018; Pennington-Gray, 2018) by combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Luthe & Wyss, 2014) to advance resilience studies (Becken, 2013). Since resilience is the adaptive process towards incremental change, analysis of change in destination image before, during, and after crisis provides insights about resilience building (Prayag, 2018). This study accomplished the aim in assessing change of the destination image and the resilience of MICE stakeholders in the MICE industry before, during, and after crises. The nature of small-to-medium-enterprise in the MICE industry enables the longitudinal study in retaining the same group of interviewees to assess change from the impact of political instability on the MICE industry. Additionally, the triangulation of the mixed research method through the use of quantitative and qualitative designs in explaining complex situations provides better insights about the psychological resilience which needs behavioral observations of the same interviewees over times (Flick, 2004).

5.2. Practical implications

From the resilient perspective, crises benefits stakeholders from adapting to demand as some product innovations emerge during crises, as evidenced in this study. This study suggests that rather than immediately launching discounts to lure travelers back during the unsafe period, tourism suppliers must be patient until the situation is really safe. Similar to Plog (2006), our finding showed that it took three to six months for destination recovery after a crisis. Then, endorsements from trusted organizations such as ICCA, Meeting Professional International (MPI), indicating that the situation is under control is the trigger to begin marketing promotion. Frequently update the stage of destination recovery to domestic and international communities to create destination awareness. Consistent with Plog (2006)'s suggestion during the destination recovery, our study recommends MICE stakeholders to consider targeting long-haul markets with affluent and experienced travelers who spend more money on upscale facilities, stay longer and have venturesome spirit.

Although the ASEAN mobility act enabling registered ASEAN workers to work in any ASEAN community (Kaur, 2018) resulting in the employment of front desk and guest service relation officers from Myanmar and the Philippines whose English proficiency enabled them to work in convention hotels as frontline agents, Thai MICE stakeholders need to train these ASEAN workers about Thainess which differentiates Thai people from other nations. Still, the increasing proportion of ASEAN workers can be a threat or an opportunity for the Thai MICE industry. Since most people from Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand share similar religion (Theravada Buddhism), Thainess can be cultivated in Thai international schools and universities where Myanmar and Laotian students enroll as full-time-students to learn Thainess through formal education and vocational courses. These ASEAN graduates can effectively supplement the shortage of Thai workers in the MICE industry. Crises can be opportunities initiating abrupt change to destination rejuvenation and new tourist product development and also offer individuals breaks for life contemplation in building spirituality well-being.

5.3. Limitation and future research

The limitation of our cross-sectional surveys was supplemented by the longitudinal study with insights from the same interviewees. Buddhism can only apply to Buddhist MICE countries, but MICE is also important in Western and Muslim countries. Future research may explore the impact of other religions and value systems on resilience and crisis-concierge approaches. Although the MICE industry has special characteristics which differ from tourism, it shares many resources with the tourism industry and it is therefore necessary to consider both together.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100704.

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