

COMPLETION REPORT

Research Summary

Globalization of Japanese Food : Media and Localization in Thailand

The objectives of this research are to study the following: 1) business operation, media message design, and localization of Japanese restaurants in Thailand. 2) The role of organizations that support Japanese business and localization of Japanese food in Thailand.

The research is qualitative in nature as data collection is completed through the following methodologies: document research, content analysis, and in-depth interview. Case studies of three Japanese restaurants were also carried out which includes Fuji, Oishi and Nanohana Osaka Cuisine while two Japanese organizations – JETRO and JERO – were also interviewed.

The research has these findings:

1) The use of media in localization of Japanese food product differs in the three restaurants studied. Large-scale restaurant chains like Fuji and Oishi tend to use media generally to popularize Japanese food, using a combination of both Thai and Japanese cultural elements. Fuji, although founded by a Japanese entrepreneur, now operates under a joint venture shareholding between Japanese and Thai entrepreneurs. The design of their media messages clearly shows a globalization character. On the other hand, Oishi restaurant, despite its Japanese name, is founded and managed by Thai conglomerates. Accordingly, their media strategies reflect a viable trend towards localization. As for small-scale and authentic Japanese restaurant like Nanohana Osaka Cuisine, their media message shows clear signs of globalization as content in restaurant ads and websites are genuinely Japanese and have not been adapted to suit the local taste. It can thus be concluded that ownership and size of restaurant tend to influence the pattern of media use and the degree of localization in media messages. The more authentic and the smaller the restaurant, the fewer elements of localization will be found in media strategies and food products.

2) Both Japanese trade support organizations in Thailand (JETRO and JRO) contribute to the process of localization in terms of localization of information as seen in their business advice services as well as in the localization of business networking and knowledge about the local market. Both organizations are found to be consistently providing Japanese entrepreneurs including restaurant owners knowledge about Thai consumption patterns and values of Thai consumers. This is so that the Japanese entrepreneurs could model their communication strategies to appeal to the local customers. As for localization of food products, it is found that the first two restaurant chains – Fuji and Oishi have ventured to change their menus to appeal to the palate of Thai customers. With respect to resource allocation – both raw materials and human resource, all the studied restaurants tend to draw upon resources in the local communities while trying to maintain the Japanese look and feel in the costume, gesture, and corporate expression of the local staff. Several activities have been carried out by Fuji and Oishi to disseminate Japanese cultural messages to the public at large. Some of these activities have been aptly integrated with the restaurant's many festivities throughout the year as well. However, in terms of the localization of relationship with customers or potential customers, the role of both JETRO and JERO is not quite evident since their role is limited mainly to help and support only entrepreneurs.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)
Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)
Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)