Attitudes and Perception of Thai Consumers in Bangkok Metropolitan Towards Made-in-China Products

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บทคัดย่อ

สินค้าจากประเทศจีน มีแนวโน้มเป็นคู่แข่งทางการค้าที่สำคัญและต้องจับตาศึกษาเป็นอย่างยิ่งสำหรับนักการตลาดไทย โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งเมื่อรัฐบาลเริ่มนโยบายเปิดเสรีทางการค้ากับจีน งานวิจัยเรื่อง "ทัศนคติและการรับรู้ของผู้บริโภคไทยในกรุงเทพมหานครต่อสินค้าที่ผลิตในประเทศจีน**" (Attitude and Perception of Thai Consumers in Bangkok Metropolitan towards Made-in China Products)" นี้จัดทำขึ้นเพื่อศึกษาทัศนคติและการยอมรับของผู้บริโภคไทย ต่อสินค้าที่ผลิตในประเทศจีน ประเภทต่างๆ เพื่อประโยชน์ในการพัฒนากลยุทธ์ เพื่อเตรียมรับกับการแข่งขันทางการตลาดสำหรับผู้ประกอบการไทย ในธุรกิจประเภทและระดับต่างๆ การวิจัยทำโดย เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล 2 ส่วน คือ การเก็บข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถามจำนวน 300 ตัวอย่าง และ ส่วนที่ 2 เป็นการวิจัยโดยสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มย่อยแบบเจาะลึก (Focus Group Interview) 2 กลุ่ม รวม 15 คน ผลที่ได้จากการศึกษา

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** งานวิจัยนี้ได้รับคัดเลือกจากสำนักงานคณะกรรมการวิจัยแห่งชาติ ให้นำเสนอในการประชุมทางวิชาการระดับชาติสาขาสังคมวิทยา ครั้งที่ 3 เรื่อง **ความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมและการพัฒนาภูมิภาคนานาชาติ** กลุ่มงานวิจัย **"พหุลักษณ์ของพลังรัฐ ทุน และชาติพันธุ์"** ณ โรงแรมมิราเคิลแกรนด์ กรุงเทพฯ เมื่อ 15-16 ธันวาคม 2549 โดยสำนักงานคณะกรรมการวิจัยแห่งชาติได้รวบรวมบทความวิจัยนี้ภาคภาษาไทย เผยแพร่แก่ผู้ที่เข้าร่วมประชุม (Proceeding) และผู้สนใจทั่วไป ในรูปซีดีรอมแล้ว

วิจัยคือทัศนคติและการรับรู้ของผู้บริโภคแบบเหมารวม (Stereotype Perception) ต่อสินค้าที่ประเทศจีนเป็นผู้ผลิต (Country-of-Origin) ทั้งในภาพรวมและแยกรายประเภทสินค้า ระดับความรักเผ่าพันธุ์ในกลุ่มประชากรเชื้อสายจีนที่อยู่ในประเทศไทย (Ethnocen-trism) ที่มีผลต่อทัศนคติในการใช้สินค้าที่ผลิตในประเทศจีน ผลกระทบของประเภทสินค้า และ ตรายี่ห้อที่มีต่อทัศนคติและการยอมรับสินค้าที่ผลิตในประเทศจีน ตลอดจนโอกาสการเปลี่ยนแปลงทัศนคติและการยอมรับในสินค้าที่ผลิตในประเทศจีนของผู้บริโภคไทยนี้ ซึ่งผลที่ได้จากการศึกษาวิจัยข้างต้น สามารถนำมาสรุปเป็นองค์ความรู้ทางการตลาด เพื่อสร้างความเข้มแข็งทางเศรษฐกิจ สามารถใช้ประกอบการพัฒนากลยุทธ์การแข่งขันสำหรับผู้ประกอบการไทยในธุรกิจต่างๆ

Abstract

Chinese-made products have been emerging as key competitors and should be kept under watchful eyes of Thai marketers, especially after the government began to pursue a free trade policy with China. This research project titled “Attitudes and Perception of Thai Consumers in Bangkok Metropolitan towards Made-in-China Products” was conducted to study Thai consumers’ attitudes and perception towards products originated from China in order to contribute to Thai businessmen’s strategic formulation and readiness to compete in various product categories at different levels. In this study, data collection is divided into two parts, that is, questionnaire survey (300 samples) and focus group interview (two groups, totaling 15 respondents). The study findings reveal stereotype attitudes and perceptions of consumers towards products where China is the country of origin, in terms of overall products and individual product categories, degree of ethnocentrism’s influence on usage attitudes towards Made-in-China products among ethnic Chinese population in Thailand, and impacts of product category and branding on Thai consumers’ attitudes and acceptance of Made-in-China products as well as opportunities for transforming Thai consumers’ attitudes and acceptance of Made-in-China products. Furthermore, such findings can also be summed up as a body of marketing knowledge which can help bolster our economic strength and support formulation of competitive strategies of various businesses for Thai entrepreneurs.

1. Introduction

Essence and background of the study

Currently, China is the country which has achieved the highest level of economic development and investment in the world. In 2003 and 2004, its GDP growth was recorded at 8.5% and 9.5% respectively. Over the past ten years, huge investment has been streaming in production and service sectors in China from state-owned enterprises and foreign investment. Now China is reckoned as a major global manufacturing base of consumer products and the quality of its production technology has been improving gradually through technology transfer directives under its Open Door policy. In addition, China also holds an edge in terms of low production costs, attributed by extremely low wages compared to other countries.

Therefore, it is likely Chinese products will become major competitors in the global trade and their advent requires constant vigilance by Thai marketers, especially after the government began to pursue a free trade policy with China. In the meantime, China has also been laying the ground-work for its export hubs and the first export hub in Shanghai was finally opened in mid-April 2004. Particularly, this export hub will become an export base of high-tech products of which export volume is expected to rise by 70% in 2005.

The objective of this study is to examine stereotype attitudes and perception of Thai consumers towards Chinese products where China is the country of origin. The study findings will lead to Thai businessmen's assessment of imminent opportunities and threats affecting marketing competition in different industries, attributed to burgeoning export markets and competition from the influx of Chinese products sold here in Thailand.

Research objectives

1) To study Thai consumer's attitudes and perception towards Made-in-China products.

2) To study consumer attitudes and acceptance level towards Made-in-China products, based on classification of product category defined by the Ministry of Commerce.

3) To examine impacts of branding of Chinese-made products on consumer attitudes and acceptance.

4) To explore opportunities for transformation of consumer attitudes and perception towards Made-in-China products in case further development of these products in terms of their forms, quality, or prices will occur, in contrast with present consumer perception.

Literature Review

After reviewing past studies in the national research archive and overseas electronic database, no evidence of marketing study on consumer attitudes and perception towards Chinese-made products was found, with exception of the research study titled "Perception and Decision Making Behavior Towards International Brand Products: A Comparative Study Between Thai and Chinese

Consumers" (2000) by Assoc. Prof. Guntalee Ruenrom and Asst. Prof. Sawika Unahanandh. This study examines open-mindedness, acceptance, appreciation of foreign-branded products among Chinese consumers, consumerism in China, especially major economic development zones. Based on study findings, Thai and Chinese consumers perceive that quality and price of international brand products is generally higher than their domestic brands. Also, in both countries, consuming international brand products reflect "modernity" and "good taste" in consumers' perception. Interestingly, this research also points out differences in decision-making behavior between Thai and Chinese consumers. For Thai consumers, "quality" has higher impacts than "price." While "price" is the most important factor in Chinese's purchase decision. The researchers anticipated that such findings might eventually induce rapid learning and development in terms of consumer tastes and production standards and processes among Chinese manufacturers and consumers

Therefore, this study is aimed at implanting a body of knowledge for further development of competitive potential in different businesses for Thai businessmen so that they can recognize potential threats or utilize study findings for formulation of competitive strategies and capitalize on suitable marketing opportunities for their own businesses.

2. Research methodology

Types of data and data collection

1. Secondary data: Pertinent secondary data obtained from different sources constitute rudimentary data for the research design of in-depth interview and interpretation of study findings which will yield greater clarity, accuracy, insight, and comprehensiveness. Such secondary data include foreign trade law, foreign direct investment law, contract law, etc., China's latest export policies, China's export/import statistics by product categories, Thailandี่s import statistics of Chinese products by product categories as defined by the Ministry of Commerce, the book titled "The Haier Way: The Making of a Chinese Business Leader and a Global Brand" by Jeannie Jinsheng Yi, Ph.D (2004), selected data from "Supermarket Chain Stores in China" publication from China's Chain Stores Association, and the article titled "Can Chinese Brands make it aboard" from McKinsey Quarterly as well as marketing articles and news concerning Chinese products and so forth.

2. Primary data: Data collection in this study is divided into two parts.

Part 1: **Questionnaire survey**

In this part, a questionnaire is used as an interview guide. The questions in this part address Objective 1-3 of the research project.

Part 2: **Focus group interview**

This part is an in-depth interview of a small pre-screened sample population. To conduct the interview, the researcher will prepare a question guide which is primarily consistent with Objective 4 of the research project.

Population and samples

Questionnaire survey: Sample population comprises consumers residing in Bangkok Metropolitan.

- 300 samples from random sampling; respondents are 15 years and over.
- Conduct quota sampling to attain distribution ratio of 1:2:1 for high/ medium/low family income earners, consistent with the proportion of estimated household incomes of the population in Bangkok Metropolitan.

Note: High household income = > 50,000 baht per month
Medium household income = 20,000 - 50,000 baht per month
Low household income = < 20,000 baht per month

Focus group interview: Sample population comprises 15 respondents selected from those who complete the questionnaire in Part 1.

- Sample population is chosen by the researcher during questionnaire interview in Part 1. Respondents appointed to focus group interview are screened from those who have interesting responses during questionnaire interview in Part 1, that is, expressing rather extreme attitudes and acceptance, whether positive or negative, compared to typical respondents so as to share viewpoints and reasons.
- In in-depth interview, respondents are split into two small groups and there are 7-8 respondents in each group. The composition of respondents in each group is varied based on demographic criteria and attitudes. The same set of questions is addressed to both groups.

Data analysis

- The questionnaire survey is conducted for data compilation and SPSS software is used to study statistical correlations.
- The focus group interview provides qualitative compilation of opinions and attitudes.

Scope of the study

This research project is conducted under the scope of the study below:

1. Sample population is limited to consumers in Bangkok Metropolitan.

2. The product categories encompassing a huge assortment of products are based on the criteria set forth by the Ministry of Commerce (to facilitate comparative study and further probe study findings with official data). The presentation of findings is not product-by-product basis.

3. The study findings reveal only overall attitudes and acceptance of consumers towards products from the country of origin or product categories. The findings are not brand-specific, which rather depends on varied brand strength.

3. Research findings

3.1 Overall images and consumer perception towards Made-in-China products

In this part, the researcher would like to examine consumers' perception or feeling towards Made-in-China products and what comes to their minds when thinking of Made-in-China products. Respondents can choose more than one response.

In Table 1, it is found that when Made-in-China products are mentioned, the top-of-mind perception is low price/cost (229 or 76.3%), followed by counterfeit/imitated products (176 or 58.6%) and poor quality/sub-standard/ unsafe products (122 or 40.7%) which all seem to be negative and undesirable perception. The perception "finely crafted products" is chosen by the least number of respondents (20).

Table 1: Frequency values and percentages of perception associating with key attributes of Made-in-China products

What comes to your mind when Made-in-China products are mentioned.	Number of those choosing the response		Number of those not choosing the response		%
	Total	%	Total	%	
Products with good quality and standards	40	13.3	260	86.7	300
Poor quality/sub-standard/unsafe products	122	40.7	178	59.3	300
Low-priced/low-cost products	229	76.3	71	23.7	300
Reasonably priced products	94	31.3	206	68.7	300
Counterfeit/imitated products	176	58.6	124	41.4	300
Undifferentiated/ similar products compared to products made in other countries	62	20.6	238	79.4	300
Finely crafted products	20	6.6	280	93.4	300
Constantly improved products	31	10.	269	89.7	300
High-tech products	23	7.6	277	92.4	300
Today most products sold in the world are produced in China.	89	29.6	211	70.4	300
Novel products/ products with modern design	32	10.6	268	89.4	300

3.2 Attitudes and perception towards quality of different categories of Made-in-China products

To study attitudes and perception towards each category of Made-in-China products, the researcher asks the respondents to respond to the level of attitudes and acceptance corresponding to how they really feel about each product category. The results are shown below:

In Table 2, it is observed that herbs and spices, agricultural products, fruits and vegetables are respective product categories of Chinese-made products where the respondents have the highest regard in terms of attitudes and perception towards quality, followed by the product categories, in order of significance, that is, toys and textile/ready-made garment and so forth. On average, automobiles/parts and accessories and cosmetics attain the lowest attitudes and perception towards quality among all product categories.

Table 2: Attitudes and perception towards quality of various Made-in-China products

Chinese-made products	Attitudes and perception towards quality of Chinese-made products		
Product category	Average	S.D.	Level
Agricultural products/fruits & vegetables	3.63	.79	High
Frozen, processed, ready-to-eat food	3.11	.71	Medium
Toys	3.27	.94	Medium
Textile/ready-made garment	3.25	.76	Medium
Leather goods/shoes	3.04	.74	Medium
Electrical appliances/equipment	2.89	.97	Medium
Electronics: computer/mobile phone	2.73	.85	Medium
Automobiles/parts and accessories	2.71	.70	Medium
Medical supplies, medicines, and medical equipment	3.17	.89	Medium
Herbs/spices	4.07	.84	High
Construction materials/equipment	2.85	.69	Medium
Cosmetics	2.71	.84	Medium
Overall attitudes towards all categories of Chinese-made products	3.03	.64	Medium

Table 3: Correlations between Chinese ethnicity and stereotype attitudes towards all categories of Made-in-China products

Ethnicity / Attitude	Ethnic Chinese		Non-Ethnic Chinese		Total
	Total	%	Total	%	
Very good	1	0.6	-	-	**1**
Good	21	12.7	35	26.1	**56**
Average	119	71.7	83	61.9	**202**
Low	20	12.0	14	10.4	**34**
Very low	5	3.0	2	1.5	**7**
Total	**166**	**100**	**134**	**134**	**300**

When cross tabulation of ethnic Chinese and non-ethnic Chinese attributes of the respondents is analyzed to probe correlations between overall attitudes and stereotype attitudes towards all categories of Chinese-made products, it is observed that 0.6% of ethnic Chinese population or 1 out of a total of 166 ethnic Chinese respondents have a very good stereotype attitudes and perception towards Chinese-made products.

As it turns out, at the good level, 26.1% of non-ethnic Chinese however have good attitudes and perception towards product quality. Such proportion is higher than that of ethnic Chinese (12.7%). At the medium level, 71.7% and 61.9% of ethnic Chinese and non-ethnic Chinese choose this response.

Among ethnic Chinese respondents, low and very low level responses on attitudes and perception towards product quality are higher than those of non-ethnic Chinese respondents, that is, 12.0% and 3.0% of ethnic Chinese have low and very low attitudes and perception towards product quality as compared to 10.4% and 1.5% of non-ethnic Chinese respectively.

3.3 Purchase behavior and reasons to buy various categories of Made-in-China products

In Question 5 of the questionnaire, respondents are asked to reveal whether they used to purchase/never purchased different categories of Made-in-China products and to describe "reasons to buy" of such product categories in order to examine which categories of Chinese products are often bought by Thai consumers and associated reasons to buy. The findings are presented in the table below:

When respondents are asked whether they used to purchase or have never purchased various categories of Chinese-made products, it is found that toy is the most prevalent product category which respondents used to purchase in the past

Table 4: Number and percentages of respondents who used to purchase/never purchased various categories of Made-in-China products

Product category	Never		Used to	
	Total	%	Total	%
Agricultural products/ fruits & vegetables	89	29.7	211	70.3
Frozen, processed, ready-to-eat food	194	64.7	106	45.3
Toys	76	25.3	224	74.7
Textile/ready-made garment	133	44.3	167	55.7
Leather goods/shoes	197	65.7	103	34.3
Electrical appliances/equipment	96	32.0	204	68.0
Electronics: computer/mobile phone	225	75.0	75	25.0
Automobiles/parts and accessories	273	91.0	27	9.0
Medical supplies, medicines, and medical equipment	186	62.0	114	38.0
Herbs/spices	84	28.0	216	72.0
Construction materials/equipment	273	91.0	27	9.0
Cosmetics	242	80.7	58	19.3

(224 or 74.7%), followed by herbs/spices (216 or 72.0%), agricultural products/fruits & vegetables (211 or 70.3%), electrical appliances/equipment (204 or 68.0%) and the fifth-ranked category is Textile/ready-made garment. When asked about product categories which they have never purchased, it is found that automobiles/parts and accessories and construction materials/ equipment receive the highest responses. Out of 300 respondents, an equal number of respondents, that is, 273 or 91.0% responds that they have never purchased both product categories, followed by cosmetics (242 or 80.7%).

3.4 "Reasons to buy" when purchasing Made-in-China products

In Question 5, respondents are asked to specify what motivates them to purchase each product category. The tabulated results are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Frequency values of "reasons to buy" for various products categories

Product category	Reasons to buy					
	Low price	Good quality	Design	Unique-ness	Widely available	Reputed brand
Agricultural products/fruits& Vegetables	78	136	2	23	68	1
Frozen, processed, ready-to-eat food	30	51	5	13	42	2
Toys	150	42	50	19	102	5
Textile/ready-made garments	95	40	33	38	52	7
Leather goods/shoes	61	20	25	14	24	-
Electrical appliance/equipment	160	32	22	12	84	7
Electronics: computer/mobile phone	48	17	8	4	26	7
Automobiles/parts and accessories	17	7	2	-	9	1
Medical supplies, medicines, and medical equipment	22	97	-	20	28	5
Herbs/spices	32	190	1	48	61	6
Construction materials/equipment	14	6	5	4	11	2
Cosmetics	26	25	4	4	20	5
Grand total	**733**	**663**	**157**	**199**	**527**	**48**

To examine reasons why respondents purchase Chinese-made products and probe what the primary motivating factors in a decision to purchase each product category are, in Question 5 respondents can choose more than one reason for each product category as shown in the table above. Overall, the most prevalent reason when deciding to purchase different categories of Chinese-made products is low price (733), followed by "good quality" (663) and the third one is "widely available" (527). It is noted that "reputed brand" receive the lowest number of response (only 48).

When taking a closer look at "reasons to buy" of each category of Chinese-made products to examine motivating factors influencing purchase decision of respondents, the findings are as follows:

- **Agricultural products/fruits & vegetables:** The top "reason to buy" is good quality (136), followed by low price (78) and widely available (68). In addition, respondents also comment that they purchased agricultural products/fruits & vegetables because they wanted to try out products.

- **Frozen, processed, ready-to-eat food:** The most prevalent "reason to buy" is "good quality" (51), followed by widely available (42) and low price (30). In addition, respondents also comment that they purchased frozen, processed, ready-to-eat food for good taste, and they don't buy this product category because products may not be fresh and contain preservatives.

- **Toys:** The top "reason to buy" influencing purchases of this product category is low price (150), followed by widely available (102) and design (50). In addition, respondents also comment that "want to try out" and "reasonable price" are primary motivating factors in this product category, and those never purchased cite that Chinese toys don't last long.

- **Textile/ready-made garment:** The most prevalent "reason to buy" in this category is low price (95), followed by widely available (52) and good quality (40). Moreover, respondents also remark that "want to try out" and "elaborately crafted embroidery" are primary motivating factors in the textile/ready-made garment category, and those never purchased cite inferior standard production standard as a reason.

- **Leather goods/shoes:** The most prevalent "reason to buy" in this category is low price (61), followed by design (25) and widely available (24). Moreover, respondents also cite "value for money" as a primary motivating factor when purchasing leather goods/shoes.

- **Electrical appliances/equipment:** The top "reason to buy" is low price (160), followed by widely available (84) and good quality (32). Moreover, respondents also cite "imitation resembles genuine product" as additional "reason to buy" in the electrical appliances/equipment category.

- **Electronics: Computer/mobile phone:** The most prevalent "reason to buy" is low price (48), followed by widely available (26) and good quality (17). Moreover, respondents also cite "imitation resembles genuine product" as additional "reason to buy", and those who don't purchase this type of products are concerned that products don't last long and are unsafe.

- **Automobile/parts and accessories:** The most prevalent "reason to buy" is low price (17), followed by widely available (9) and good quality (7).

- **Medical supplies, medicine, and medical equipment:** The most prevalent "reason to buy" is good quality (97), followed by widely available (28) and low price (22).

- **Herbs/spices:** The top "reason to buy" is good quality (190), followed by widely available (61) and uniqueness (48). In addition, respondents also cite "being trustworthy over a thousand of years" as a primary motivating factor when deciding to purchase herbs/spices while those donิt purchase these products reason that Thailand can produce better products.

- Construction materials/equipment: The most prevalent "reason to buy" is low price (14), followed by widely available (11) and good quality (6). Moreover, respondents also add that they donิt buy this type of products manufactured in China because sometimes Chinese products are of low quality and they tend not to purchase Made-in-China products.

4. Impacts of branding of Made-in-China products on consumer attitudes and acceptance

This part examines level of confidence, value and acceptance of luxury brands known all over the world, reputed and widely distributed global brands, Thai brands originating from Thailand, and Chinese brands originating from China. In addition, impacts on level of confidence in luxury brands, global brands, Thai brands if production base is moved to China are also studied. The evaluation is based on 1-5 rating scale (5 = highest, 1 = lowest).

4.1 Level of confidence and acceptance of products resorting to branding strategies combined with country of origin

Table 6: Level of confidence, value, and acceptance of various brands

Level of confidence, value, and acceptance of various brands	Mean score	Level of significance
Luxury brands	4.34	High
Luxury brands made in China	2.94	Medium
Global brands	4.14	High
Global brands made in China	3.04	Medium
Thai brands made in Thailand	3.91	High
Thai brands made in China	2.99	Medium
Chinese brands made in China	2.76	Medium

In Table 6, it can be concluded that the sample group shows a high level of confidence and acceptance of luxury brand (mean score = 4.34). However, if high-end luxury brands specify China as the country of origin, the level of confidence in value and acceptance towards such brands averages 2.49.

As for reputed and widely distributed global brand, the sample group shows the level of confidence in value and acceptance averaging at 4.14. However, if global brands are manufactured in China, respondents express a medium level of confidence in value and acceptance (mean score = 3.04).

As for Thai brands made in Thailand, the level of confidence and acceptance towards such brands is rather high (mean score = 3.91). However, if Thai brands are made in China instead, the level of confidence and acceptance is at medium level (mean score = 2.99).

Chinese brands made in China show a medium level of confidence and acceptance, yielding the lowest mean score of 2.76 when compared to the level of confidence and acceptance of other brands which are and are not manufactured in China.

Table 7: Correlations between Chinese ethnicity and the level of confidence in value and acceptance of Chinese brands made in China

Chinese ethnicity / Level of confidence	Ethnic Chinese		Non-ethnic Chinese		Total
	Total	%	Total	%	
Very high	5	3.0	3	2.2	8
High	34	20.5	41	30.6	75
Medium	85	51.2	58	43.3	143
Low	31	18.7	24	17.9	55
Very low	11	6.6	8	6.0	19
Grand total	166	100	134	100	300

When scrutinizing the level of confidence in value and acceptance of Chinese products made in China in terms of Chinese ethnicity of the sample group as in Table 7, it is found that 3.0% of ethnic Chinese population show a very high level of confidence and acceptance of Chinese products made in China while 2.2% of non-ethnic Chinese have the same response.

It is noted that 30.6% of non-ethnic Chinese population express a high level of confidence and acceptance while 20.5% of ethnic Chinese has a high level of confidence. Most respondents, both ethnic (51.2%) and non-ethnic (43.3%) Chinese, assert a medium level of confidence and acceptance. Meanwhile, 18.7% and 17.9% of ethnic and non-ethnic Chinese have a low level of confidence and acceptance, and 6.6% and 6.0% of ethnic and non-ethnic Chinese have a very low level of confidence and acceptance.

According to the table above, attitudes among ethnic and non-Chinese are rather different at the very high and high level of confidence in brands. As of the level of confidence in Chinese brands made in China, it is observed that non-ethnic Chinese are proportionally higher than ethnic Chinese. Therefore, such findings are used in hypothesis testing whilst the hypothesis is there is no difference in the level of confidence in value and acceptance of Chinese brands made in China among ethnic and non-ethnic Chinese population. In the hypothesis testing, t-test is chosen while SPSS software is used for computation purpose. Table 8 shows the results below.

Table 8: Hypothesis testing with t-test statistics

Ethnicity/level of confidence in Chinese brands made in China	**t**	**Sig = .05**
	-2.376	.018

The results shown in Table 8 reject the main hypothesis and it can be concluded that the level of confidence in value and acceptance of Chinese brands made in China differs among ethnic and non-ethnic Chinese as t = -2.376, Sig. = .018 at 0.05 level of significance.

5. Qualitative findings from focus group interview

The focus group interview is an in-depth study of Thai consumers' attitudes and reasons to buy towards Chinese products and this comparative study examines different levels of confidence associated with Made-in-China brands and brands made in other countries; to explore opportunities for transforming Thai consumers' attitudes and acceptance of Chinese-made brands whereas such products may be further improved in terms of forms, quality, or pricing, in contrast with current consumer perception; and to have a more profound understanding of Thai consumers' attitudes and perception towards Chinese products.

In this part of the study, the focus group interview involves two small sample groups. There are seven and eight respondents in each group, totaling 15 respondents, and all respondents are asked the same set of questions. These respondents are screened based on demographic criteria as described in the foregoing introduction. The findings from the focus group interview can be summarized as follows:

Opportunities for transforming Thai consumers' attitudes and acceptance of Made-in-China products, provided that they are improved in terms of forms, quality, or pricing, in contrast with present consumer perception

- Typical Chinese-made products that respondents think of include vegetables/fruits, toys, copycat products, clothing, Chinese herbal medicines, low-quality Chinese products, cheap toys, cheap batteries, lamps, cheap/low-quality household utensils sold at flea markets (outdoor bazaars). However, when referring to high-quality Chinese products, respondents mention fruits, herbal products, Chinese medicine, tea leaves, herbs like tang kui, kao ki, piang kia ei and so forth.

- The researcher exhibits some consumer products originated from China in the interview room. These products differ from what respondents have in mind earlier while filling out the questionnaire. The respondents never thought that Chinese products have become much more modernized, product and packaging design features also resemble Japanese products to a great extent. Most of them agree that Chinese products are more modern than Thai products. Compared to Thai SME products, even local Chinese products look much better and more inviting and attractive and their packaging designs and standards have more universal appeal. Still, some respondents are not convinced with their quality. However, if these products are imported and sold in Thailand, such packaging features can induce trial, provided that they are reasonably priced.

- In response to products labeled Made in China and Made in Hong Kong, even though both come from China, most respondents have different feelings or attitudes towards these products because Hong Kong is a more modern city at an international scale compared to China as a whole. Regarding this issue, the researcher believes China is well aware of this shortcoming. Thus, export products, particularly fashionable products, manufactured in mainland China are more inclined to have an office registered in Hong Kong so that Made in Hong Kong can appear on their packages and labels, for instance, Baleno, G2000, and Giordano as well as some electrical appliance and mobile phone brands and so forth.

- The respondents express different level of confidence and attitudes towards Made in Taiwan and Made in China products. Most of them are more confident in Taiwanese products because they feel Taiwan's technology is more advanced.

For instance, they feel electrical appliances from Taiwan are of better quality and are more confident in quality. This sentiment is clearly exhibited when products from both countries are compared head-to-head. Moreover, the respondents also feel the image of Taiwanese products is better than that of Chinese products.

- As for Chinese-made products like electrical appliances, computer, and mobile phone which can be found abundantly today, most respondents still respond they won't buy these products because they are not confident with safety standards and technology. Moreover, some respondents also had direct experiences with safety failure of Chinese electrical appliances such as electrical shock and leakage. Furthermore, Chinese products are not accredited by any product safety institution. Nonetheless, with China's fast-paced development, electrical appliances originated in China have been gaining greater acceptance.

- If global brands like P&G, Nestle, Marks&Spencer, Nike, Nine West and so on declare China as the country of origin, most respondents are still not 100% confident because hearing the word "China" makes them apprehensive that these might be fake products. They think China is often a copycat, so they're unsure about authenticity. Moreover, China still suffers from inferior production standards and favors mass production and reduced quality so as to keep prices low.

Some respondents think production site is not a key issue for global brands. For instance, Nike's high quality is consistent and this issue is merely a relocation of production site. They are confident in the brand and assured that the parent company has quality control procedures that can maintain product standards.

- As for well-known Thai brands manufactured in Thailand such as Singha beer, Tangmo T-shirt, AIIZ as well as leather goods under brand names like St.James, Thames, Jacob, and Bata etc., assuming if their manufacturing bases were moved to China, the respondents think product quality would not be different because they are convinced reputed companies will not commit suicide but rather pay close attention to controlling of manufacturing standards. Moreover, Thai brands don't have huge markets all over the world which might cause failure in quality control.

- When referring to Chinese brands perceived to have high quality and/or be upscale, the respondents mention "Shanghai Tang", a Chinese boutique brand which sells boutique clothing, Chinese Cheongsam or "Qipao" (traditional Chinese dress), jewelry, and handbag. Shanghai Tang products are known for strong Chinese identity, premium pricing, and good quality, and considered a very expensive, well-known Chinese brand, in contrast with typical Chinese products.

As for electrical appliances and electronic products, only a few brands e.g. TCL, Haier, etc. have earned reputation and trust in western countries.

6. Conclusion & Discussion

The research project titled "Attitudes and Perception of Thai Consumers in Bangkok Metropolitan towards Made-in-China Products," is conducted with a sample size of 300 respondents; most of which are women (193 or 64.3%) and the rest are men (107 or 35.7%). The majority of the respondents (42.3%) are in 31-45 age range. Most respondents (52.3%) work as employees in private companies. In terms of educational background, 62.3% obtained undergraduate degree. The income distribution of the population conforms to the pre-determined ratio of 1:2:1 (high: medium: low). In terms of ethnicity, 55.3% are ethnic Chinese.

In summary, the findings indicate that 48.3% of the respondents habitually take notice of country of origin while 49.2% of women and 46.7% of men saying they pay attention to country of origin. The age group with the highest percentage of those noticing country of origin is 31-45 (55.9%). Those with at least graduate degree are most active in terms of paying attention to country of origin (58.9%). It is noted that the low-income group pays less attention to country of origin, compared to higher income groups. Moreover, ethnic Chinese pay more attention to country of origin than non-ethnic Chinese while such statistical difference is considered significant.

Furthermore, 73.3% of the respondents think that country of origin influences purchase decision while the percentage of men having such notion (78.5%) is higher than women. The followings are sub-populations that have a notion that country of origin influences purchase decision - 88.9% of those aged 46-60, 84.6% of unemployed, 85.7% of those obtaining a minimum of graduate degree, 86.7% of those earning more than 50,001 baht, 80.1% of ethnic Chinese.

When Made-in-China products are mentioned, it is observed that the top-of-mind attribute of Chinese products is low price/low cost, followed by counterfeit goods, copycat products, low quality, and inferior standard. Aside from that, some respondents also comment that Chinese products remind them of healthy products, lack of product liabilities, offering more product varieties than other countries, production for their poor domestic market, and product quality depending on product category.

Regarding attitudes/perception towards each category of Chinese-made products, it is observed that the respondents have the highest regard for herbs/spices, with the highest mean score of 4.07, followed by agricultural products/fruits & vegetables (3.63) and toys (3.27). As for automobile/parts and accessories and cosmetics, both categories equally obtain the lowest mean score of 2.71.

Regarding reasons to buy Chinese-made products, overall it is found that most respondents purchase Chinese products because of low price, widely available, and good quality. For herbs/spices, the most prevalent reason to buy is good quality.

In the focus group interview sessions which are conducted to collect more robust information and examine opportunities for attitudinal transformation and acceptance of Made-in-China products, it is found that consumers have opportunities to transform their attitudes towards Made-in-China products. However, if products are related to safety issues e.g. medicine, herbal products, elevator, etc., respondents are not confident of Chinese productsี่ safety and quality.

Recommendations for follow-up research projects in the future

- This study examines attitudes and perception towards Made-in-China products, particularly in Bangkok Metropolitan. Follow-up studies might be extended to reach a wider population in order to improve representation of sample population.

- Regarding the issue of confidence and acceptance of various types of made-in- China product branding, this study observes that confidence and acceptance would be lower, but with different proportions. Luxury brands, global brands, and

Thai brands pose interesting issues worth exploring in follow-up studies to delve into influencing factors which are input in formulation of marketing strategies of such brand type for Thai businessmen.

- Impacts of ethnocentrism or "Chinese ethnicity" on Thai consumer's attitudes, perception, and confidence towards Chinese-made products as well as decisions to buy/not buy Chinese brands or products manufactured in China are also worth further exploring for better understanding. This is due to the fact that the study findings clearly contradict anticipated outcomes or hypotheses prescribed by the researcher.

According to the findings, ethnic Chinese respondents, that are anticipated to be more confident, faithful, protective, or supportive of products made in the country of their ethnicity than ethnic Thai, do not have more favorable attitudes towards and are less confident with quality of Chinese-made products, compared to non-ethnic Chinese. Overall, such findings indicate a rather low degree of patriotism and ethnocentrism among ethnic Chinese consumers in Bangkok Metropolitan. Therefore, ethnic Chinese might not be potential customers for Chinese brands or products manufactured in China in the Thai market.

Policy-level recommendations

- In this study, it is found that Thai consumers' acceptance of each category of Chinese-made products is greatly diverse. When each product category is examined in detail, these findings differ from overall findings. These issues are interesting and it may be worthwhile to conduct an in-depth study of each strategic product category of China, particularly high-growth products imported by Thailand.

- It is important that we actively formulate Thailandís trade strategies and development programs to safeguard Thai producers cost-wise and quality-wise. This study indicates that even though consumers feel rather badly about Chinese products due to past experiences, after realizing that nowadays Chinese products are more exquisite and modern, such negative attitude can be transformed to improve acceptance level and this conversion will occur soon.

- Detailed conditions of the FTA agreement should be reviewed and modified as deemed appropriate. For Chinese products which have gained consumers' positive attitude or acceptance and cause problems for local manufacturers and/or our trade balance, the flow of Chinese imports might be temporarily restricted first.

- As part of export strategies of products exported to China, it is suggested that Chinese consumers' attitudes towards Made-in-Thailand products should also be studied in order to develop differentiated product strength which can satisfy consumer demand.

- Explore differentiated positions of Made-in-Thailand products in global market for different product categories or divert attention to the service sector which is neglected by China.

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