

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE MEDICAL TOURISTS' SATISFACTION  
WITH MEDICAL SERVICES IN THAILAND



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ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพชาวจีนต่อบริการทางการแพทย์ใน  
ประเทศไทย



นางสาวชัชชวน เฉา

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา (สหสาขาวิชา)

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การท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพเป็นตลาดใหม่เฉพาะด้านที่ขยายตัวกว้างขวางทั่วโลก อันเป็นตลาดที่สร้างผลประโยชน์ด้านเศรษฐกิจอย่างชัดเจน นักท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพชาวจีนเป็กลุ่มผู้บริโภคโลกสำคัญในอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพซึ่งประเทศต่างๆ ได้เริ่มให้ความสนใจ งานวิจัยเรื่องนี้มุ่งหมายที่จะศึกษาปัจจัยที่สร้างแรงจูงใจให้นักท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพชาวจีนจากแผ่นดินใหญ่ให้มาใช้บริการด้านสุขภาพในประเทศไทย และประเมินความพึงพอใจในบริการทางการแพทย์ที่คนเหล่านี้ได้รับในประเทศไทย งานวิจัยเรื่องนี้ใช้วิธีการศึกษาทั้งเชิงคุณภาพและเชิงปริมาณ ผลการศึกษาชี้ว่าปัจจัยหลักที่สร้างแรงจูงใจให้นักท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพจากแผ่นดินใหญ่ให้เดินทางมาประเทศไทยเพื่อรับบริการด้านการแพทย์ประกอบด้วย คำแนะนำและโฆษณาจากสื่อ นโยบายรัฐ การเข้าถึงบริการ การไม่ต้องรอรับบริการเป็นเวลานาน และคุณภาพด้านการแพทย์ระดับสูง โดยรวมแล้วนักท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพชาวจีนพึงพอใจต่อประสบการณ์ด้านการแพทย์ที่ได้รับในประเทศไทย ปัจจัยที่มีผลในการสร้างความพึงพอใจดังกล่าว ได้แก่ คุณภาพด้านการแพทย์ บริการด้านการดูแลคนไข้ สภาพแวดล้อมด้านการรักษาพยาบาล และค่าใช้จ่าย ข้อค้นพบหลักของการศึกษาเรื่องนี้คาดหวังได้ว่า จะช่วยให้ผู้ประกอบการด้านการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพและผู้ให้บริการด้านการแพทย์ในประเทศไทยเข้าใจอุปสงค์และความตั้งใจของนักท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพชาวจีน และจะช่วยให้ผู้ประกอบการและผู้ให้บริการเหล่านี้เสริมสร้างข้อได้เปรียบด้านการแข่งขันในอุตสาหกรรมท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพ.

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Medical tourism is a new worldwide niche market, which generates apparent economic benefits. Chinese medical tourists are a significant consumer group in the medical tourism industry that many countries have begun to explore. This research aims to study the factors motivating mainland Chinese medical tourists to seek healthcare in Thailand and to assess their satisfaction with the medical services they received in this country. This research adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings indicate that the key factors motivating mainland Chinese medical tourists to travel to Thailand to receive in medical services include recommendations and media advertisements, national policies, access, not long waiting list, and high medical quality. Overall, most of the Chinese medical tourists were satisfied with their medical experiences in Thailand. The determinants influencing Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction include medical quality, care services, the therapeutic environment, and costs. The key findings of this study are anticipated to help operators of medical tourism and medical service providers in Thailand to understand the demand and intentions of Chinese medical tourists and to strengthen competitive advantages in the medical tourism industry.



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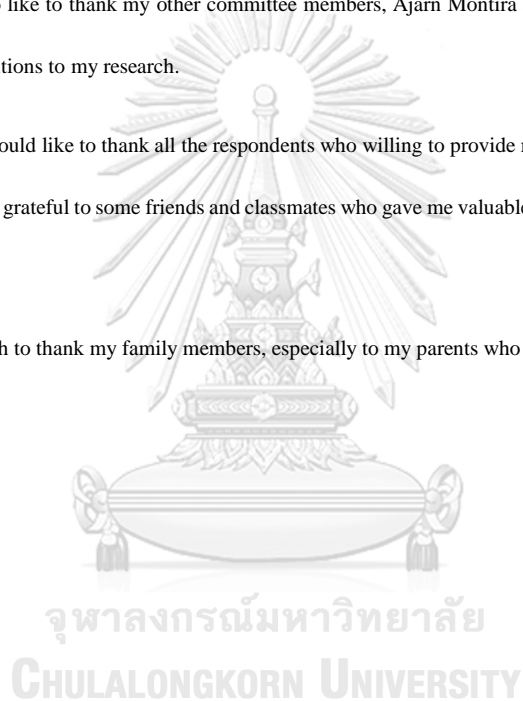
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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

This chapter gives related information regarding the term of medical tourism and the general situation of the medical tourism industry. The research background focuses on the concept of medical tourism, the evolution of medical tourism, the overview of global and Thai medical tourism industry, medical tourists and their satisfaction with medical tourism. What is more, the problem statement, research objectives, research questions and the significance of the study are introduced in this chapter as well.

#### **1.1 Research background**

Medical tourism is loosely defined as a form of tourism that combines the pursuit of health with the enjoyment of tourism services (Ramírez de Arellano, 2011, p. 290). Up to now, there is no agreed definition of medical tourism Kelley (2013). According to Kelley (2013), the medical tourism is a phenomenon that medical tourists travel across international borders to seek medical treatments.

For the purpose of this research, medical tourism means a form of tourism that people travel to other countries to seek healthcare, and may usually include a holiday, or those people receive treatment in the process of a vacation (Cohen, 2008).

On the surface, the term of medical tourism contains two different and independent concepts. Medicine and tourism are generally regarded as entirely separate fields (Cohen, 2008). Tourism implies healthy and pleasurable experience, but medicine has the meaning of unpleasant experience (Botterill, Pennings, & Mainil, 2013).

Medical tourism is related to health tourism. According to Liu and Zhang (2016), the concept of health tourism is more extensive than medical tourism, because health tourism contains all health-related projects, medical tourism refers to some programs that related to professional treatments or physical examination.

Even though the term of medical tourism is recent, the phenomenon exists for a long time (Cohen, 2008). The early medical tourism was derived from health tourism (Song & Wang, 2011). Health-related tourism which has a long history of taking the water to relieve some physical symptoms or get psychological pleasure (Ramírez de Arellano, 2011). Since ancient times, some people travelled abroad searching healthcare, like the Roman Empire (Lunt, Smith, & Exworthy, 2011; Sonpiam, 2015). The 18th century in Europe, some wealthy people traveled to “take the water” of spa or cure in resorts (Botterill et al., 2013; Lunt et al., 2011; Sonpiam, 2015). In the 19th century, the number of tourists who look for health care increased and the medical tourism service object shifted from the elite upper class to the working class (Liu & Zhang, 2016). Until the 20th century, many wealthy people who came from less developed countries go to developed countries to obtain high-quality healthcare.

Nowadays, medical tourism is a developing trend of international travel (Ramírez de Arellano, 2011, p. 290). Medical tourism has already been a worldwide industry which generates US\$60 billion a year and will be growing by 20% each year (MacReady, 2007).

There are more than 50 countries have regarded medical tourism as a national industry (Rad, Som, & Zainuddin, 2010). In the past, plenty of people travel to some developed countries to find advanced medical technology (Horowitz, Rosensweig, & Jones, 2007), but nowadays opposite trend gradually came into being in the world (Cohen, 2008). Those people who come from developed countries begin to seek diversified medical services in less-developed countries (Horowitz et al., 2007). There are some reasons regarding this changing trend: Firstly, in plenty of developed countries, medical services become unaffordable with higher costs. Then those medical services are unable to satisfy the increasing medical demand for treatments. Many people have to wait for long lists. Moreover, some procedures are not included in national medical services due to the high costs (Cohen, 2008).

Many Asian countries develop medical tourism industry to attract more medical tourists. Thailand not only has popular tourism in the world, but also one of the major medical tourism destinations (MyMEDHoliday). Thailand, as a major medical tourism destination, attracts approximately 15 million inbound tourists each year recently (Cohen, 2008). It has become a major medical tourism destination since the 1970s (Connell, 2006), because the increasing demands for some treatments that are not contained in health insurance in Western countries, and some medical treatments become accessible with affordable prices in Thailand and the scale of medical tourism industry become larger in Thailand. Nowadays especially the cosmetic surgery is gradually becoming very popular for medical tourists in Thailand (Wilson, 2011).

The reason for the success of medical tourism industry in Thailand based on it is a very popular tourist destination (Finch, 2014). The development of medical tourism industry in Thailand due to the regional and global economic growth and diplomatic factor. Thailand's medical quality has an excellent reputation in the Middle East countries. After 9/11 tragedy happened in the US, increasing medical tourists who come from the Middle East hunt healthcare in Thailand, because of the issue of visa and discrimination in North American and European countries (Cohen, 2008; Finch, 2014).

When talking about medical tourists, medical tourists refers to those people who travel to other countries to seek medical attention with vacation (Cohen, 2008). However, the term of medical tourism has not been identified in the statistical reports so that caused exaggeration of medical tourism scope. Hence, according to Cohen (2008) the typology of medical tourists are categorized. Table 1.1 shows the five type of medical tourists that based on the tourist motivation: Mere tourists, Medicated tourists, Medical tourists proper, Vacationing patient, and Mere patient (Cohen, 2008).



Table 1. 1: The characteristics of five typology medical tourists

1. Mere Tourists	2. Medicated tourists	3. Medical tourists proper	4. Vacationing patient	5. Mere patient
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Source: Cohen (2008)

Type 1: Mere tourist refers to people who does not receive any treatment when they have a vacation in the destinations country.

Type 2: Medicated tourists can be defined as those tourists who have urgent health issues so that receive treatment incidentally during their vacation in the destination country.

Type 3: Medical tourists proper, people travel to other country with purpose of both treatment and vacationing.

Type 4: Vacationing patient, means a person visit the destination country mainly for medical treatment but incidentally have vacationing in the process of their treatment and recovery.

Type 5: Mere patient can apply to an individual travel to the host country only for treatment without any vacationing.

By the definition which used in this research, in this study, the medical tourists are the type of medicated tourists, medical tourists proper, vacationing patient, mere patient. These people have several characteristics: travel to other countries; make use of treatment; may include vacationing in the whole process.

## 1.2 Statement of the purpose

The medical tourism industry becomes a mainstream. In addition to this, it has enormous competitive pressures (Goel, 2012, p. 15). According to Goel (2012, p. 16), there are more than 60 countries compete in the medical tourism industry, and there is an intense competition of services among over 40,000 medical service providers who

attempt to explore and expand medical tourism market. However, with the continuous development of medical tourism in many countries, Thailand would be confronted with stronger competition from local enterprises and overseas healthcare market in the future. In this situation, medical tourism providers begin to pay more attention to patients' satisfaction.

Patients' satisfaction can be considered as customer satisfaction in the literature (Rad et al., 2010). According to Pivac, Blesic, Stamenkovic, and Besermenji (2011), tourist satisfaction is defined as a function of prior tourism expectation and post-tourism experiences. Patients' satisfaction can be regarded as customer satisfaction (Rad et al., 2010). In Ford, Bach, and Fottler (1997), medical tourist satisfaction can become a very significant way to measure the quality of medical tourism. If tourists have a good perception of medical quality, it will have a positive influence on tourists overall satisfaction, behavioral intentions and tourists' willingness for consumption again or recommend to other people.

Medical tourists' satisfaction is very significant for service providers of medical tourism because it can measure the quality of medical service (Yellen E, David GC, & R, 2002). It attracts more international medical tourists so that increasing the competitiveness in this industry (Rad et al., 2010).

Hence, there are some driving factors to do this research. Firstly, medical tourism is a relatively new field, which is limited to get research attention (Pham, 2015), especially in medical tourists' satisfaction aspect. Current researches much more focus on the motivation of tourists, tourists' preference, and tourists' behavior and so on. Secondly, medical tourism not only becomes an important industry to provide more revenue for Thailand but also enhances the competitive advantages of Thailand's tourism industry. Thirdly, Chinese medical tourists have become a significant consumer group of medical tourism in Thailand. Studying Chinese medical tourist satisfaction is an effective way for medical tourism managers to attract more Chinese patients,

improve healthcare services and competitiveness of medical tourism in Thailand.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To study the factors motivating Chinese medical tourists to seek healthcare in Thailand.
2. To assess the Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction with the medical services they receive.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The title of the research is Factors Influencing Chinese Medical Tourists' Satisfaction in Medical services in Thailand. So the research questions are as follows:

1. What are the dominant factors motivating Chinese medical tourists come to Thailand to look for healthcare?
2. How Chinese medical tourists assess their medical treatments in medical tourism in Thailand? What are the critical factors that influence Chinese tourists' satisfaction in the medical tourism industry in Thailand?

### **1.5 Hypotheses**

Firstly, push and pull factors motivate Chinese tourists to come to Thailand for medical attention. Push factors: Lack of treatment in the home country; Recommendation and media advertisements; Desire for privacy protection and Policy in the home country. Pull factors: Low cost; High medical quality; No long waiting time. Secondly, three aspects that have correlations with the level of Chinese tourists' satisfaction: The medical quality; medical care services (professionalism, prompt service); the cost of the medical services.

## 1.6 Research Methodology

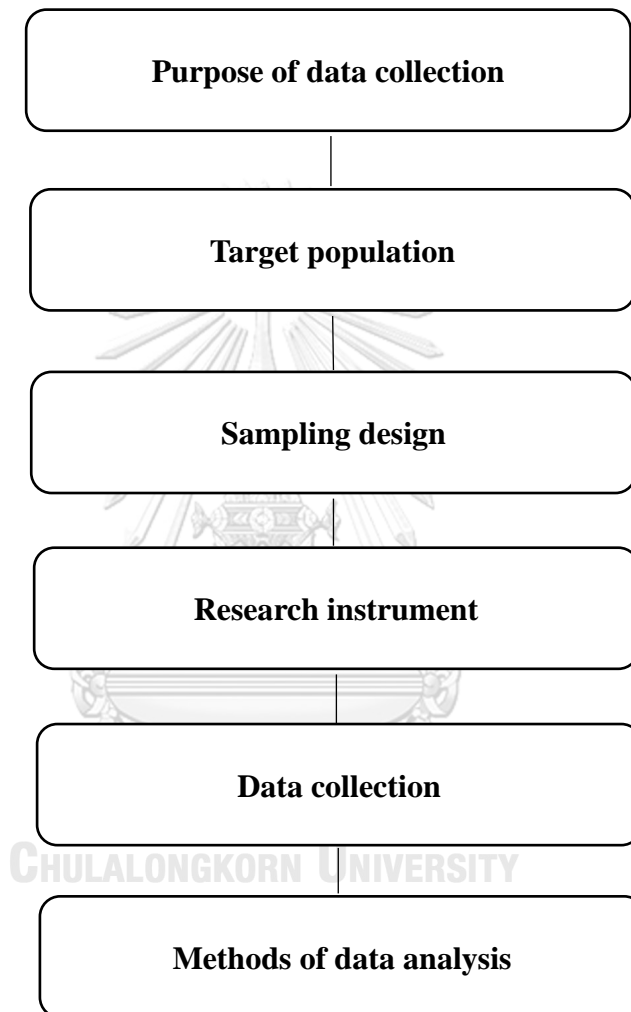
The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative approach. Quantitative research aims to explain a specific phenomenon through numerical data. Qualitative research was a method which aimed to understand underlying reasons, motivation, perspectives in some aspects of social life (Bricki & Green, 2007). The qualitative method could better reflect participants' subjective perspectives and experiences (Pan & Chen, 2014). It can help the researcher study deeply regarding different and individual experiences, opinions and assessment from medical tourists. In order to collect more comprehensive data, collecting data mainly through the semi-structured interview, telephone interview and internet were adopted as well. The data sampling provided a definite interview scope and sample population to the researcher. The semi-structured interview was good at exploring participants' opinions, attitudes motivate and so on. Some predetermined questions can help the researcher focus on the key questions during the process of interviews, but the order and question words can be changed based on the different situation of interviews. Also, some research limitations which affected the research findings were explained.

### 1.6.1 Research design

The research design consisted of six sections. Firstly, the objectives of data collection: 1) To study the factors motivating Chinese medical tourists to seek healthcare in this country. 2) To assess the Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction with the healthcare services they received. Secondly, the target population: mainland Chinese medical tourists who sought health care in Thailand and the age of participants were at least 18 years old. Thirdly, sampling design. This section included sample selecting, sampling size and sampling method. Fourthly, the research instrument. This section emphasized the researcher as the instrument. Fifthly, the method of data collection mainly via semi-structured interview. Telephone interview and internet were

used for data collection as well. Sixth, the method of data analysis. Figure 1.1 showed the general research methodology framework.

Figure 1. 1: The general research methodology framework



#### 1.6.2 Sample design

Selecting the research sample was a significant step for any research due to it was difficult to research the whole populations practically and efficiently (Marshall, 1996).

In this study, the research sample consisted of 25 mainland Chinese medical tourists who received treatment in Thailand. For the sample size of collecting data, this

research was mainly concentrated on detailed information. Creswell (1998) recommended a range of 15 to 25 participants to reach thematic saturation. Hence, 25 participants were picked in this study. Then the criteria of selection for all of the participants was type2, type 3, type4, type 5 medical tourists, which was based on the division of medical tourists of Cohen (2008). The ages of the interviewees were at least 18 years old. To research their motivation of pursuit of healthcare in Thailand and to assess their satisfaction through their expectation and perception in the whole process of medical treatments. Also, the determinants influencing their satisfaction should be explored.

The sampling method was purposive sampling, which was usually used in qualitative research (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). The participants were selected in the light of the research purpose that they can offer individual and valuable information to the study (Suen et al., 2014).

#### 1.6.3 Research instrument

To understand the research deeply the researcher was not only the data collector but also the people who explain the meaning of data. Notebook, pen, phone and recording pen were used in the process of interview. The internet was also a research instrument to collect data.

#### 1.6.4 Data collection procedure

Firstly, in this research, in-depth interviews were mainly used for primary data collection. Other methods of collecting data were adopted as well, like telephone interviews and internet.

Some Chinese medical tourists had already finished their treatments and came back to China, so the telephone interview was an effective way to collect data from these people. This way can make participants feel more relaxed during the interview.

Also, it can reveal some sensitive information possibly (Teijlingen, 2014). According to Teijlingen (2014), the telephone interviews should be relatively short to avoid people feeling compelled. However, telephone interviews may lead to a lack of non-verbal data due to the visual information cannot be gained. So telephone interviews were considered as a secondary method of data collection.

Face-to-face interviews were mainly adopted for this study. In-depth interviews were divided into three types: structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview. The semi-structured interview was selected for this study. Semi-structured interview meant that some key questions can be predetermined, but the words and order of questions can be changed according to the different situation of interviews. Semi-structured interviews were suitable for exploring perspectives, attitudes, motives, beliefs in some sensitive aspects (Teijlingen, 2014).

Firstly, interviewed some related medical managers or staffs by asking several specific questions in some representative hospitals and clinics in Bangkok, including F Clinic, Smile Signature Dental Clinic, BNH Hospital, Piyavate International Hospital, and one intermediary company named U Thai Health was interviewed as well. (See Appendix 1). There were 63 JCI-accredited organizations in Thailand, of which 34 organizations in Bangkok (Joint Commission International). Bangkok was the capital of Thailand, and the primary medical tourism destination, many hospitals and clinics in Bangkok provide more advanced medical services, so the site of the interview was selected in Bangkok. This step aimed to get general information regarding medical services and Chinese medical tourists. It can help the researcher to understand the condition of the medical tourism industry in Thailand from the supply side, like the particular medical services that those hospitals or clinics provide for Chinese patients.

Secondly, interviewed mainland Chinese medical tourists who sought medical treatments in Thailand. After some general information was obtained from some

representative hospitals and clinics in Bangkok, 25 Chinese medical tourists were interviewed and surveyed. The in-depth interview can obtain more information and deeply understand concerning Chinese medical tourists' expectation, individual experiences and evaluation of medical services. Semi-structured interviews were used by asking participants some specific questions. The order and form of questions can be flexible (See Appendix 2).

During the process of interviews a large amount of data generated, so the data can be mainly collected by taking field handwritten notes and sound-recording.

There were some issues should solve during interviews. Some patients had defensive attitudes when they were interviewed, because they were particularly concerned about their privacy, especially for those Chinese patients who had received cosmetic procedures or other sensitive medical procedures. Hospitals and clinics also protected their internal information and patients' privacy prudently. These issues may result in data collect incompletely. In the hospitals or clinics, the patients were interviewed through observation and ask whether they were Chinese firstly, but in this case, some patients felt more defensive. The researcher can interview those patients as a medical tourist who wanted to receive the same procedure. This way can let patients' defense down and have relatively relaxing conversations. Contacting some staff who worked in hospitals and clinics or some middlemen to assist during the interview.

Secondly, secondary data was gained from some previous studies which provide for the later researchers to use (Pham, 2015). This study included some published and unpublished information as secondary data. Some information and data gathered from official websites or reports of relevant organizations.

#### 1.6.5 Data analysis

After collecting data from interviews, the data were analyzed. Analyzing should



be faithful to the information from the interviewees (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The first step was an interpretation of the data. Interpreting data should understand the theoretical standpoint to ensure the narratives from interviewees' perspectives not the researcher's viewpoints (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The objectives and research questions in this study: what factors motivating Chinese medical tourists to seek healthcare in Thailand; An assessment for Chinese medical tourists regarding satisfaction of healthcare services in Thailand and which are determinants affect their satisfaction. Then the second step was to transcribe data. Translating verbal information into text information was an essential process for gathering data. Themes can be identified, and the data were categorized during this process. After finishing data transcription, coding was the step three. Coding meant the similarities, differences, issues could be identified through the interviewees' description and the interpretation of the researcher (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Lastly, the transcription which combined codes were presented as findings by theming.

### **1.7 Limitations of the research**

There were some limitations to the research. The interview scope mainly focused on some reputable private hospitals and clinics in Bangkok. Many medical tourists prefer to seek healthcare in the Bangkok than other places in Thailand. Furthermore, it was not an easy process for the researcher to interview Chinese medical tourists, because it may involve privacy during the conversation. In addition, limited information could be collected from managers or staffs in hospitals or intermediaries, because they paid more attention to protecting patients' privacy and did not allow to disturb patients.

### **1.8 Significance of the study**

This research will provide useful information for the development of medical tourism in Thailand. The findings could be helpful for operators of medical tourism, as well as providers of medical services in Thailand. The medical service providers could

use the findings to improve their services, whereas medical tourism operators can understand the demand and intentions of the Chinese medical tourists better. All this will result in the enhancement of the reputation of Thailand as a major medical hub.

### 1.9 Definition of key terms

“Medical Tourism”	Medical tourism refers to a form of tourism that people travel to other countries to seek treatment, and may usually include a holiday, or those people receive treatment in the process of a vacation (Cohen, 2008).
“Wellness Tourism”	Refers to the people travel to other places to maintain their well-being and health by pursuit some experiences of healthy treatments (Fernandes & Fernandes, 2013).
“Health Tourism”	Means patients proactively travel outside to maintain or enhance their personal physical and mental health (Lunt et al., 2011).
“Medical Tourists”	The patients travel to other countries to seek treatment purposely, or the people receive healthcare with vacationing in other countries (Connell, 2006).
“Tourist Satisfaction”	Tourist satisfaction is defined as a function of prior tourism expectation and post-tourism experiences (Pivac et al., 2011).
“JCI accreditation”	JCI is entirely a non-profit organization to help hospitals improve medical quality and ensure patients’ safety by consulting services, international certification and so on (Joint Commission International).

### **1.10 Outline of the research**

Chapter 1 presents the introduction. This chapter provides a summary of the research, including research background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, hypotheses, and the significance of the study and the structure of this research.

Chapter 2 provides a relevant literature review of medical tourism. Different definitions of the term of medical tourism and other related terms are introduced in this chapter. This chapter also shows the evolution of medical tourism and the current situation of this industry in the world, particularly in Thailand. Then the determinants which influenced the development of medical tourism are discussed. Besides, the positive and negative effects are mentioned in the literature review. It provides an overview of outbound medical tourism of China, including the growth of the Chinese outbound market, the Chinese medical tourists, Chinese medical tourists' motivation and selection. Finally, the satisfaction of medical tourists and the Expectation Confirmation Theory are explained.

Chapter 3 This chapter indicates the research methodology. On the basis of the literature review, this chapter provides the population sampling, the survey instruments, and the questions chart of the semi-structured interview. It also explains the data collection method, data analysis and the techniques which are used in this study. Limitations of the research method are mentioned as well.

Chapter 4 This chapter provides the findings of research. The chapter includes six sections: Introduction; The profile of the respondents; The main findings of the participants' motivations; The key results of the participants' overall satisfaction and dominant factors influencing their satisfaction; Some recommendations from the participants are also mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 5 This is the last chapter. This chapter provides the research outcomes from research questions. It summarizes the key research findings, discussions, implications and the limitations of this research. Also, some recommendations and contribution of the medical tourism industry are mentioned in this chapter.



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of medical tourism, including the definition of medical tourism, medical tourism industry and the general situation of medical tourism in Thailand. Some determinants which affect the development of medical tourism are mentioned as well. A general evaluation of medical tourism is explained. In addition, this chapter provides the situation of Chinese outbound medical tourism and Chinese medical tourists followed by medical tourists' satisfaction in medical services.

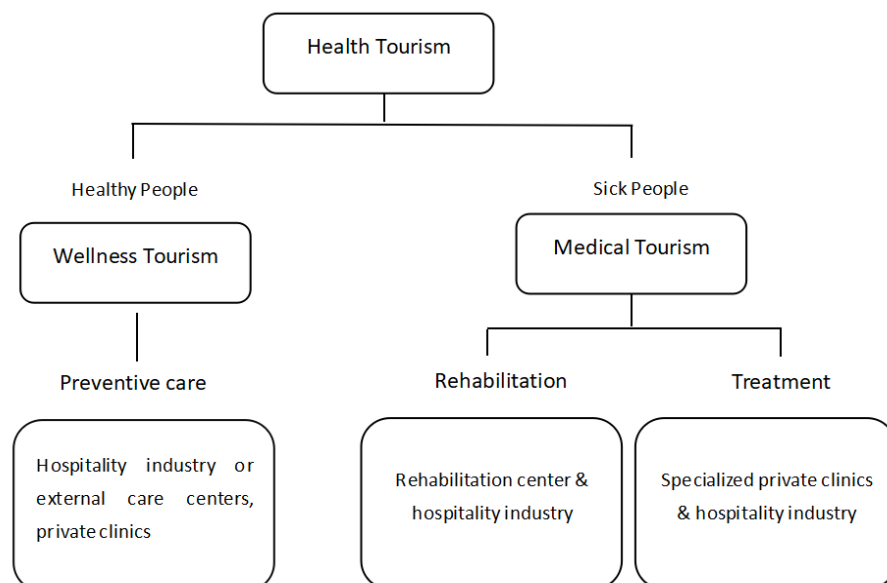
#### 2.2 The definition and background of medical tourism

The term of medical tourism contains two different and independent concepts in general consciousness (Botterill et al., 2013). Medicine and tourism are generally regarded as completely different fields (Cohen, 2008). Tourism implies healthy and pleasurable experience, but medicine has the meaning of unpleasant experience (Botterill et al., 2013). However, nowadays with the development of social economy, transportation, and media technologies, medical treatment and tourism can be combined.

It is significant to define what the 'medical tourism' is first. Up to now, there is no agreed definition of medical tourism (Kelley, 2013). Diverse perspectives generate different interpretations of medical tourism. For example, according to Kelley (2013), "The medical tourism is defined as medical tourists travel across international borders to seek medical treatments." Some definition focus on intention, for instance, based on Johnston, Crooks, Snyder, and Kingsbury (2010) medical tourism refers to patients go aboard to seek medical non-urgent treatment intentionally.

As for the term of health tourism, wellness tourism and medical tourism, according to Liu and Zhang (2016), the concept of health tourism is more extensive than medical tourism, because health tourism contains all health-related projects, like leisure tourism, health activities (adventure tourism, wellness tourism), spa tourism, medical tourism (Hall, 2011). The wellness tourism and medical tourism can be regarded as two distinct parts of health tourism (Botterill et al., 2013). As Botterill et al. (2013) mentioned, there is no consensus of the concepts of health tourism, medical tourism, and wellness tourism, but the authors consider that there are differences between medical tourism and wellness tourism fundamentally. According to Brown et al. (2017, p. 237), the term of health tourism and medical tourism can usually be conflated, but most of the consensus consider that medical tourism has some differences with health tourism. Based on Botterill et al. (2013), the wellness tourism and medical tourism can be regarded as two distinct parts of health tourism. Figure 2.1 shows differences among health tourism, wellness tourism, and medical tourism.

Figure 2. 1: The differences among health tourism, wellness tourism and medical tourism



Source: Sonpiam (2015, p. 9).

However, in this paper, both wellness tourism and medical tourism belong to the health tourism. The term of medical tourism has overlaps with health tourism. Medical tourism includes some programs that related to professional treatments or physical examination.

Medical tourism, defined as a form of tourism that combines the pursuit of health with the enjoyment of tourism services, is a trend of international tourism development (Ramírez de Arellano, 2011, p. 290). The early medical tourism was derived from health tourism (Song & Wang, 2011). According to Medical Tourism Magazine (2016), the origin of medical tourism was traced back to the third millennium B.C, because some evidence shows Mesopotamians traveled to treat eye disease in some goddess temple at Tell Brak. Health-Related tourism which has a long history of taking the water to relieve some physical symptoms or get psychological pleasure (Ramírez de Arellano, 2011, p. 290). In the Roman Empire time and after the Renaissance, the antecedents of ‘taking the water’ can be linked to the grand tour (Botterill et al., 2013). In the eighteen century, ‘taking the water’ had an ordinary trend when some form of tourism existed for adding well-being in many European countries and areas. The modern medical tourism of the West was derived from the 18th century (Brown et al., 2017). Those people who mostly come from the upper and upper-middle classes traveled to some countryside to escape some worse issues like pollution and noise in their city (Brown et al., 2017, p. 235). In this period, the services of medical tourism which mainly service for European upper-class was limited to a spa. Then there was a great development of the spa in the nineteenth century. The services of medical tourism were transformed from the elite class to the middle class (Liu & Zhang, 2016). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the well-off people who came from the less developed countries began to seek healthcare in some developed countries. Until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most obvious difference is that the flow of medical tourism started to shift from developed nations to developing

countries (Lunt et al., 2011).

According to Lunt et al. (2011), the main characteristics of medical tourism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are below:

- A plenty of people travel to receive treatments. According to *Patients Beyond Borders* (2017), there were 14-16 million patients traveled abroad to seek treatments in 2017. There are over a million people travel to Thailand for healthcare every year with the packages of medical travel (Wilson, 2011).

- The patients who come from wealthy and developed countries travel to less developed countries to seek healthcare. For example, as Mattoo and Rathindran (2006) mentioned, there are 350,000 people looked for medical service from developed countries to developing countries in 2003.

- Medical tourism is driven by affordable treatments, low-cost flights, accessible travel and available information from the internet. *Patients Beyond Borders* (2017) indicated that the average range of cost saving of medical procedures for some major Asian destinations through comparing US costs: India: 65-90%; Malaysia: 65-80%; Singapore: 25-40%; South Korea: 30-45%; Thailand: 50-75%. Furthermore, the lower prices of the flights are attracted more international patients as well. For instance, according to the Ctrip 携程 (2018), a Chinese major tourism website shows, the cheapest flight from Beijing to Bangkok costs around 3,000 THB, but the cheapest flight from Beijing to New York was about 20,000 THB. Also, many Thai private hospitals have their own official websites, such as BNH hospital, Bumrungrad International Hospital, Bangkok Hospital. Many of these official websites have different language vision.

- The development of the medical tourism industry: medical tourism, as a profitable and potential industry, are promoted by both private enterprises and



governments. In the light of Thailand Investment Review (2016), the Thai government pay more attention to the healthcare market and plans to become the medical hub in Asia.

## **2.3 Medical Tourism industry**

### **2.3.1 Global Situation**

Before 1997, some wealthy people from less developed countries traveled to the USA and Europe to seek healthcare (MacReady, 2007). However, the opposite trend gradually came into being in the world. The citizens who come from the developed countries begin to seek diversified medical services in less developed countries (Horowitz et al., 2007). According to Horowitz et al. (2007), from 1997 to 2001, many people from Asia were unable to pay for treatments abroad due to the economic crisis (MacReady, 2007). Furthermore, after 9/11 tragedy happened in 2001 in the US, increasing medical tourists who come from the Middle East sought healthcare in Thailand, because of the issue of visa and discrimination in North American and European countries (Cohen, 2008; Finch, 2014). For example, according to the data from MacReady (2007), there were 5000 Arab patients in the Bumrungrad International Hospital in 2001, and then the number of patients who came from Arab countries had increased to 93000 until 2006.

### **2.3.2 Medical tourism market**

Based on Horowitz et al. (2007), the population of medical tourists has no definitive statistics, because it is a laborious process to calculate scales of medical tourism.

In fact, the reason for difficult evaluation of the medical tourism market scale is that estimates and forecasts very different among many researchers (Patients Beyond

Borders, 2017). This is caused by no agreed definition of medical tourism and lack of nationally available data (Patients Beyond Borders, 2017). According to Patients Beyond Borders' editors, they consider that there were 14-16 million patients traveled abroad to seek treatments, which the data based on the definition that medical patients across the international borders healthcare (Patients Beyond Borders, 2017). From the data of the Global Wellness Institute (2014), wellness-based tourism industry generated approximately 494 billion dollars in the whole world. In 2016, the worldwide medical tourism market was worth \$61,172 million, and it is projected to value at \$165,345 million by 2023 (Research and Markets, 2017). The report from Market Data Forecast (2017), the CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) will be estimated to be increasing at 18.8% by 2021 (USD 46.6 billion). There are 152 million medical tourism trips every year in the Asia Pacific region, and 32 million trips are increasing each year (Kim, Chiang, & Tang, 2017).

### 2.3.3 Medical tourism treatment type

The medical tourism market can be divided on the basis of the treatment type. It can consist of cardiovascular treatment, orthopedic treatment, neurological treatment, cancer treatment, fertility treatment, and others (Research and Markets, 2017). The medical treatments have a wide range of medical tourists, some major procedures are as below (Lunt et al., 2011; Patients Beyond Borders, 2017):

Table 2. 1: Major medical procedures of medical tourism

Cosmetic surgery (breast, face, liposuction)
Dentistry (cosmetic, reconstruction)
Cardiac surgery (by-pass, valve replacement)

Orthopedic surgery (hip replacement, knee replacement, joint surgery)
Bariatric surgery (gastric bypass, gastric banding)
Reproductive (IVF, gender reassignment, women' s health)
Organ, cell and tissue transplantation (organ transplantation; stem cell)
Eye surgery
Diagnostics and check-ups

Source: Lunt, N., et al., (2011)

## 2.4 Overview of the medical tourism destination: Thailand

Thailand is not only one of the most popular countries for tourism in the world, but also one of the leading medical tourism destinations (MyMEDHoliday). There are some popular medical tourism destinations in Thailand like Bangkok, Pattaya, Hua Hin, Phuket, Chiang Mai, Koh Samui (Vasudevan, 2015).

### 2.4.1 The evolution of medical tourism in Thailand

Thailand has become a medical tourism destination since the 1970s due to the transsexual operation and cosmetic surgery (Connell, 2006). Before 1997, the area of healthcare hub was the USA and Europe. People often travel to those developed countries for high-end medical attention (Schroeder, 2007). At that time, Singapore was the medical center in Asia (Schroeder, 2007).

The transition period is from 1997 to 2001. The Asian economic crisis broke out in 1997, the economic decline led to personal spending in healthcare was decreased in

Thailand (Harryono, Huang, Miyazawa, & Sethaput, 2006). Hence, private hospitals began to explore the foreign market to recover losses of the domestic market (Harryono et al., 2006). Moreover, the financial consideration became a new factor that influenced medical tourism industry (Schroeder, 2007).

From 2001 to 2006, the medical tourism emerged in India and Thailand (Schroeder, 2007). Increasing demands of some treatments that are not contained in health insurance in Western countries, medical treatments become more accessible with affordable prices in Thailand and the scale of the medical tourism industry become larger in Thailand. Also, Thailand's medical quality has an excellent reputation in the Middle East countries (Schroeder, 2007). After 9/11 tragedy happened in the US, increasing medical tourists who come from the Middle East hunt healthcare in Thailand, because of the issue of visa and discrimination in North American and European countries (Cohen, 2008; Finch, 2014). Nowadays many medical procedures are gradually becoming very popular for medical tourists in Thailand, especially the cosmetic surgery (Wilson, 2011).

#### 2.4.2 Medical tourism market in Thailand

On the basis of Cohen (2008), medical tourism in Thailand, from the macroscopic perspective, there are two key factors influence the development of medical tourism. One is commodification. Medical tourism will not develop rapidly if health care has not been commodified (Cohen, 2008). The other one is globalization, the extension of globalization had a significant impact on medical tourism (Cohen, 2008).

In the recent years, Thai medical services have gained an international reputation in the world, but the Thai medical tourism market has to face intense competition. The primary competitors are Singapore, Malaysia, Korea and the like. The medical tourism is driven mainly by private hospitals (Health-tourism.com.). There are more than 1,000

hospitals in Thailand including over 470 private hospitals (Health-tourism.com.).

Due to the lack of classification, the valid data about the number of medical tourists travel to Southeast Asia cannot be calculated (Whittaker, 2008). According to Cohen (2008), primary factors which attract many overseas patients came to Thailand are high medical quality and affordable medical services. As Wilson (2011) mentioned, there are over a million people travel to Thailand for healthcare every year with the packages of medical travel. Especially the cosmetic surgery is prevalent for medical tourists in Thailand. Most medical patients who find treatments in Thailand come from Asia, Pacific and Europe, only a small number patients from other parts of the world in 2002 (Harryono et al., 2006). The representative was Japanese medical tourists, but the number of ASEAN countries and the Middle East countries grew rapidly (Harryono et al., 2006).

The medical tourism industry which is known for high-quality and affordable health care is booming in Thailand (Thailand Investment Review, 2016). Thailand plans to become the medical hub in Asia. So the government attaches importance to the healthcare market, the healthcare expenditure of the Thai government is 14% of its entire budget that can be regarded as the highest expenditure on the healthcare industry in ASEAN (Thailand Investment Review, 2016).

## **2.5 The determinants affecting the development of medical tourism**

There are various factors affect the emergence and development of medical tourism. Many medical tourists want to look for better medical service from the outside, such as higher quality, lower cost, no long time to wait (Chuang, Liu, Lu, & Lee, 2014). Furthermore, some people pursue those services which are unavailable in their home countries (Ramírez de Arellano, 2011). Generally, the key causes of attracting patients across to other countries are as below:

In the first place, one of the principal factors is the price. For those patients who come from developed countries are attracted by low cost in developing countries (Horowitz et al., 2007). One of the characteristics of medical tourism is the high-quality healthcare with low cost (Liu & Zhang, 2016).

In the second place, long waiting times for elective surgery in the public hospital is a general and severe issue in developed countries (Duckett, 2005). To avoid waiting a long time in their home country, people traveled to other countries (Connell, 2006).

Thirdly, medical quality is also a significant factor. According to Jadhav, Yeravdekar, and Kulkarni (2014), medical quality is one of the leading factors to affect the development of international medical tourism.

Fourthly, medical tourism resources are regarded as an important factor. As the paper of Ramírez de Arellano (2011) said, some people find some medical resources which are unavailable in their countries. For instance, Pre-Castro Cuba aims to satisfy the demand of abortion for American women (Ramírez de Arellano, 2011). The advantage of tourism is an important factor to influence the medical tourism industry in Thailand, because people could enjoy abundant tourism resources while they are receiving healthcare. Based on high-quality tourism infrastructure and services, many foreigners are willing to seek healthcare in Thailand as well (Health-tourism.com.).

Next, medical tourism marketing has become an important factor affecting the development of medical tourism under the background of globalization (Liu & Zhang, 2016).

In addition, there are other factors affect the development of medical tourism. Distance can give patients privacy protection. For example, the patients who received gender surgery or cosmetic surgery probably prefer to recovery in an unfamiliar environment (Connell, 2006). Moreover, different medical service demands of medical

tourists also become an effective factor.

#### 2.5.1 Economic factor

As Burkett (2007) stated, nowadays, medical tourism which can offer low-cost and non-emergency health care has become a niche market. In this article Burkett (2007), for the cost aspect, noticeable gap between the United States and other medical markets leads to the emergence and development of medical tourism. Due to patients' home countries have high medical expenses, they choose health care in foreign countries. Hence, one characteristic of medical tourism is high-quality and low-cost health care (Liu & Zhang, 2016).

What is more, the cost of medical products is a significant factor affecting the development of medical tourism. Some medical tourism destinations like India, Malaysia and Thailand could provide the same advanced products as the medical tourist source destinations in the case of low health care cost, cheap labor force, as well as lower travel expenses for inbound medical tourists (Bookman, 2007). Besides, the financial and tax system also belong to the economic factor (Liu & Zhang, 2016). According to Turner (2007), there are many policies to reduce medical expenses and promote medical tourism, like the preferential tax system, insurance of employees (Liu & Zhang, 2016).

Some data from MedicalTourism.com. (2015) showed cost comparisons of some medical procedures as of 2016 in the USA and some Asian countries (See Table 2.2). The cost had advantages in India, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Patients Beyond Borders (2017) indicated that the average range of cost saving of medical procedures for some major Asian destinations through comparing US costs: India: 65-90%; Malaysia: 65-80%; Singapore: 25-40%; South Korea: 30-45%; Thailand: 50-75%.

Table 2. 2: The cost comparisons of some medical procedures as of 2016 in the USA and some Asian countries

Medical procedure	USA	India	S. Korea	Thailand	Malaysia	Singapore
Heart Bypass	\$123,000	\$7,900	\$26,000	\$15,000	\$12,100	\$17,200
Angioplasty	\$28,200	\$5,700	\$17,700	\$4,200	\$8,000	\$13,400
Heart Valve Replacement	\$170,000	\$9,500	\$39,900	\$17,200	\$13,500	\$16,900
Hip Replacement	\$40,364	\$7,200	\$21,000	\$17,000	\$8,000	\$13,900
Knee Replacement	\$35,000	\$6,600	\$17,500	\$14,000	\$7,700	\$16,000
Dental Implant	\$2,500	\$900	\$1,350	\$1,720	\$1,500	\$2,700
Gastric Bypass	\$25,000	\$7,000	\$10,900	\$16,800	\$9,900	\$13,700
Breast Implants	\$6,400	\$3,000	\$3,800	\$3,500	\$3,800	\$8,400
Face Lift	\$11,000	\$3,500	\$6,000	\$3,950	\$3,550	\$440
Liposuction	\$5,500	\$2,800	\$2,900	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,900
Lasik (both eyes)	\$4,000	\$1,000	\$1,700	\$2,310	\$3,450	\$3,800
Cataract surgery (per eye)	\$3,500	\$1,500		\$1,800	\$3,000	\$3,250
In Vitro Fertilization	\$12,400	\$2,500	\$7,900	\$4,100	\$6,900	\$14,900

Source: (MedicalTourism.com., 2015)

### 2.5.2 Waiting time

Based on the World Health Organization, patients' waiting time for medical services is a key indicator to measure healthcare system. Long waiting time is considered as an underlying cause of patients' dissatisfaction (Sun et al., 2017). As Sonpam (2015) mentioned, patients in many developed countries have to wait for healthcare for a long time, so they seek healthcare in other countries to avoid long



waiting lists. Hence, waiting time is one of the significant factors affect the development of medical tourism. There are two issues of the long waiting time in the Chinese health system (Sun et al., 2017). Firstly, there are no reservation services in many Chinese hospitals, patients have to waste much time to registration (Sun et al., 2017). Secondly, many Chinese patients are unsatisfied with waiting long times to have a consultation with doctors (Sun et al., 2017).

### 2.5.3 Medical tourism quality

When talking about service quality, some accreditation institutions must be mentioned. In the paper of Hopkins, Labonté, Runnels, and Packer (2010), those brokerages of medical tourism emphasize service level, so they need to have license and accreditation by Joint Commission International (JCI) or Joint Commission on Accreditation for Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO).

In the international healthcare field, JCI is entirely a non-profit organization which could identify, measure and lead some medical organizations (Joint Commission International). It also can help other hospitals practice and improve medical quality and ensure patients' safety.

The number of JCI accredited medical institutions are related to the development degree of regional medical tourism (Liu & Zhang, 2016). JCI is regarded as the gold standard in the international healthcare. Take Bumrungrad Hospital as an example. It is a professional and comprehensive hospital which accredited by JCI. For the basic information of this hospital, it is located in the center of Bangkok of Thailand. Bumrungrad Hospital, as one of the largest hospitals in Southeast Asia, was established in 1980, with 580 beds and some specific medical qualities (Investor Presentation, 2013). According to some data, Bumrungrad Hospital attracts 1.1 million patients annually, including 520,000 international patients (Investor Presentation, 2013). This

hospital has high-quality medical services and technologies. This is a well-known private hospital which attracts many Chinese medical tourists as well.

Apart from this, medical tourism facilitators play a vital role in medical tourism. They are regarded as moderators between medical tourists and medical facilities in the world (Mohamad, Omar, & Haron, 2012). In this article Mohamad et al. (2012), the significance of medical travel facilitators are mentioned, as increasing medical patients, the medical tourism organizers become one of the essential standards to evaluate medical tourism service level.

#### 2.5.4 Medical tourism resources

According to Liu and Zhang (2016), unavailable and inaccessible treatment lead to the development of medical tourism (Turner, 2007). In the article by Liu and Zhang (2016), as regard research on medical tourism resources, some scholars focus on special tourism resources in one country or specific medical items in one regional hospital. Some specific medical operation or advantageous service projects are concentrated in Asia, Eastern Europe, and American. For instance, bariatric surgery in Canada, SPA and body health in some Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Malaysia (Bookman, 2007; Sheppard, Lester, Karmali, de Gara, & Birch, 2014; Turner, 2007). According to Liu and Zhang (2016), some specific surgeries are provided based on existing medical resources in Southeast Asia and South American area. For example, some tourists are attracted to have some medical procedures, like beauty body, cosmetic procedures by experiencing foreign customs and tango package in Argentina (Viladrich & Baron-Faust, 2014). Besides, the medical equipment and technology of tourism destinations reached an advanced level through the government's support, like preferential tax policy for national medical cooperation agreements. These measures could increase domestic medical service standards, also provide more effective medical resources and good medical environment for patients (Liu & Zhang, 2016).

### 2.5.5 Medical tourism marketing ways

The advertisements as a marketing method play a very significant role in medical tourism marketing model. The internet is a significant way for medical tourists to gain some information regarding medical tourism (Hohm & Snyder, 2015). According to the research of Nassab et al. (2010), in the investigation of British medical cosmetic tourism, the data shows that there are 70% patients get information from the internet. Besides, word-of-mouth is a vital way for medical tourists to gain information about medical tourism (Crooks, Kingsbury, Snyder, & Johnston, 2010). Medical tourists usually share their medical experiences with other people (Crooks et al., 2010). Getting successful cases of medical tourism experiences through the online or word-of-mouth recommendation can motivate more potential medical tourists (Kangas, 2007). Moreover, medical packages also become one of the significant marketing methods. For instance, in order to cater foreign women who want to induce abortion, the medical tourism package of the “Havana weekend” contains airfare, accommodation, healthcare (Liu & Zhang, 2016; Ramírez de Arellano, 2011).

### 2.5.6 Other factors

As some researches mentioned, tourists have diversified requirements in medical tourism (Liu & Zhang, 2016). According to Yu and Ko (2012), the differences in choosing medical items among Chinese tourists, Korean tourists, and Japanese tourists. Chinese medical tourists usually pay more attention to the minor operations, services of health care or aesthetic, medical information insurance and the like (Yu & Ko, 2012). For the Japanese, their demands focus on tourism-based experience, rehabilitation service, even major surgery (Yu & Ko, 2012). Also, Korean medical tourists need tourism-based experience, medical insurance, aesthetic or health care service (Yu & Ko, 2012).

## 2.6 General evaluation of medical tourism

From Song and Wang (2011), tourist effect is a vital part of researching tourism. Medical tourism effects mainly reflect on economic effect and social effect.

### 2.6.1 Economic benefit

According to Song and Wang (2011), nowadays, international medical tourism trend has shifted from developed countries to developing countries. This phenomenon brings considerable economic income to medical tourism. Also, healthcare can attract many inbound tourists and then increase local tourism revenue (Page, 2009). For instance, medical tourism is a massive business for India and medical tourists substantially increase in India (Sengupta, 2011). The healthcare industry is boosted by medical tourism that will be growing by 30% every year (Swain & Sahu, 2008). The medical tourism revenues are very substantial in Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and India, because the lower cost in treatment and medical infrastructure, as well as the abundant workforce (Jadhav et al., 2014).

### 2.6.2 Social benefit

Medical tourism is beneficial to the development of society. According to De Arellano (2007), the increased revenues from medical tourism can be provided back to public health care, thereby promoting economy and facilities of health care, and then benefit more population.

Besides, medical tourism is beneficial to slowing down or preventing brain drain. It can reverse or reduce to health-care professionals migrate to developed countries (Hopkins et al., 2010). Also, medical tourism provides opportunities for developing countries to maintain and subsidize medical technology and low-demand medical sub-specialties (Hopkins et al., 2010). Some medical tourism destinations, like Thailand, India and Indonesia encourage to improve the commercial health sector through foreign

direct investment (Cortez, 2008).

### 2.6.3 The negative effects

Medical tourism leads to some ethics risks. The ethics issues of medical tourism gradually arouse more concerns. Nowadays, the medical industry is in its infancy so that there are many issues, especially the problems with the quality of healthcare and medical liability (MacReady, 2007).

There are many ethical problems should be paid more attention. For example, the medical patients probably ignorant of medical risks, because risk communications are lacking. In the process of treatment, the individual health problems of patients are negatively affected by medical tourism, like complications (Crooks et al., 2013). One of the main issues of medical tourism is that medical patients have no protection from the legal system in medical tourism destinations when they have something wrong with medical treatment (Crooks et al., 2013; Snyder, Adams, Crooks, Whitehurst, & Vallee, 2014). Moreover, medical patients may have life risks when they seek health care abroad because they are lack of insurance or government management (Sarwar, David, Sarif, & Nikhshemi, 2016).

At the same time, the ethical issue of medical tourism is reflected in the global health equity. On the grounds of Connell (2011), all forms of medical tourism give rise to some issues regarding the inappropriate use of medical staff, distribution of financial resources and health care. According to Gupta (2008), the policies which ensure medical tourism revenues can be reinvested into public healthcare are uncovered or unimplemented. In addition to this, some unique medical service probably results in social issues, because of national law and ethical differences. For the research of Adams, Snyder, Crooks, and Johnston (2013), some public media have critical attitudes towards medical tourism of procreation, like Germany and Israel. And another example, some countries like India and China were charged with organ trafficking in 2007 (Vasudevan,

2015).

## **2.7 The situation of outbound medical tourism in China**

### **2.7.1 The growth of China's overseas medical tourism market**

Medical tourism has become a popular phenomenon. It is regarded as a promising industry in China (Xinjingbao, 2015). At present, the medical tourism market in China has entered into a development stage. In the original exploration period, a few patients pursuit medical tourism outsides (Gia, 2017). Then from 2011 to 2014, oversea medical agencies which service for high-end consumer and a few domestic medical institutions lead the medical tourism market in China (Gia, 2017). After 2014, with the advanced internet technology, the domestic and foreign medical market exchanged more frequently, the middle-class people began to seek healthcare abroad (Jiang, 2016). The history of medical tourism in China is not long, about ten years. It has developed rapidly in the last three to four years, and then it has a blowout trend from 2014 to 2015(Xinjingbao, 2015).

### **2.7.2 Chinese medical tourists**

In the recent year, outbound Chinese medical tourism has grown rapidly (Thibaud, 2017). The number of Chinese medical tourists is increasing whether they are wealthy or not (Read, 2016.a.). There were above 483,000 medical tourists traveled abroad for medical treatments in 2005 (Read, 2016.a.). Chinese medical tourism market is profitable for the medical tourism industry in many regions, like Europe, Southeast Asia (Global Growth MARKET, 2018). According to the Global Growth MARKET (2018), until 2016, more than half a million Chinese traveled to other countries to find better treatments a year. The number of outbound Chinese medical tourists increased by 30% since 2012, and the number will be projected to continue to grow to over 800,000 by 2020 (Paul, 2017).

Around 12.2 million Chinese tourists traveled to Thailand as the most significant tourist source in 2016 (Ye & Assenov, 2017), out of which more than 480,000 Chinese tourists traveled to Thailand for medical tourism in the same year (Paul, 2017). Especially in 2017, more Chinese tourists sought healthcare in Thailand because of the visa-free policy of the Thai government for Chinese (Ye & Assenov, 2017).

The scale of Chinese medical tourism market should be noted, in 2015, Chinese medical tourism market was valued \$9.7 billion, including the expenditures of treatment were \$6.3 billion, \$3.4 was spent on travel and accommodation (Read, 2016.a.; Thibaud, 2017).

Some statistics show that 134 million urban households will be regarded as medium level or above in 250 million households of China (Read, 2016.a.). It means that over 400 million people will have the ability to pay for the essential treatments for medical tourism, and 195 million people will be likely to become medical tourists (Read, 2016.a.). From the other article of (Read, 2016.b.), the potential of the Chinese medical tourism market will become more huge. The report of Southeast Asia nations indicated that medical tourists increased rapidly because of Chinese medical tourists (Read, 2016.b.). So Chinese medical tourism market is also a profitable market for other countries. Medical tourism providers need to enhance medical services, like Mandarin-speaking staff and payment method (Paul, 2017; Read, 2016.b.).

### 2.7.3 Motivation of Chinese medical tourists

There are various models to classify motivation, but the push-pull factor model is commonly accepted (John & Larke, 2016; Mohammad & Som, 2010).

Push factors refer to socio-psychological demands that stimulate individuals to travel to other countries (Lajevardi, 2016). Pull factor, external factors attract people to a specific destination (Lajevardi, 2016). According to John and Larke (2016), push factors affect the outflow of medical tourists and pull factors impacts on medical

tourists' inflow. In the context of medical tourism, push factors contain sociodemographic, like gender, age, and education (John & Larke, 2016). It also includes health-related aspects, such as health situation and insurance status (John & Larke, 2016).

On the one hand, some push factors of China are listed. In the context of China's domestic background, five significant factors motivate Chinese to seek treatments in Thailand.

Firstly, with the rapid growth of China's economy, the number of wealthy Chinese people is increasing. According to Knight Frank (2016), 654,000 Chinese worth millionaires (\$1m+) each in 2015 and the number is expected to 1144,500 by 2025. There were 30,500 Chinese were regarded as multi-millionaires (each person value US\$10m+) in 2015, then the number will be projected to increase to 53,380 by 2025 (Knight Frank, 2016).

Secondly, demographic changes brought the rapid growth of the ageing population and the urban population, the demands of medical services increased as well. The data from Wang (2012) is projected that China's population over the age of 60 will be reached about 240 million by 2020 and 360 million by 2030.

This phenomenon means the demand in healthcare filed had been increasing. Healthcare system reform becomes a formidable challenge (Wang, 2012). The government make efforts to increase the expenditure on healthcare, but according to the international standards, the health expenditure is still low (Juwai, 2016). Shortage supply of medical services in China led to Chinese patients hunt healthcare in other countries. There are some issues regarding health care system in China: large population leads to a huge gap between urban and rural medical resources and services; overcrowded hospital; high cost of treatment and inadequate service facilities and so on



(Medical Tourism Magazine, 2015).

Thirdly, in the case of more serious health problems for Chinese citizens, their healthcare awareness enhanced. China now has to face a new challenge: more Chinese citizens begin to suffer from “lifestyle” diseases like obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers (Medical Tourism Magazine, 2015). From the report of cancer by WTO, there are above 2.2 million Chinese death from cancer, about 26.9% of the world’s cancer deaths (Medical Tourism Magazine, 2015). Besides, according to the data from WTO, there are around 110 million diabetic patients in China (WHO-Western Pacific Region, 2016). With the increasing wealth and aging population, more Chinese pay attention to their health, so they seek healthcare abroad when domestic medical services cannot meet their demands.

Fourthly, the publicity has an obvious effect on attracting Chinese medical tourists. Many Chinese medical tourists are motivated by recommendation and media advertisement. However, there are limited ways to promote medical tourism products for Chinese medical tourists, mostly through word of mouth and recommendations (Xinjingbao, 2015).

The China National Tourism Administration indicated that increasing traditional travel agencies offer high-end medical tourism services (Xinjingbao, 2015). For example, Caissa touristic (Group) AG provides checkups in the American or early screening of cancer procedure in Japan for Chinese residents (Xinjingbao, 2015).

Traditional travel agencies are more willing to provide low-risk health and recuperation programs, such as anti-aging, micro-cosmetic surgery and checkup (Xinjingbao, 2015). Although many traditional travel agencies can get high-quality resources from the overseas medical supplier, these middlemen choose specific corporation with cautious, and the external publicity is conservative (Xinjingbao, 2015).

For instance, at present, there is no promotion regarding micro-plastic procedure and checkup in the official website of CITS (Xinjingbao, 2015).

Finally, national policies affect the motivation of Chinese medical tourists as well. Take In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) as an example. In China, there are more than 12 million infertile couple (ZHENGHE EXHIBITION & Event, 2018). The one-child policy is out-of-date, and two-child policy has been carrying out, a large number of Chinese have strong demands for a child, especially many elderly couples want a second child (ZHENGHE EXHIBITION & Event, 2017). These wealthy Chinese couples travel to other countries for IVF, such as the United States, Russia, Thailand (ZHENGHE EXHIBITION & Event, 2017).

According to Jourdan (2015), some reasons motivate Chinese to seek in-vitro fertilization abroad, like the two-child policy, choosing gender, avoiding long waiting list, advanced technology, and strict approval checking process in China.

The price of assisted reproductive technology increased because the price of medical healthcare was reformed and adjusted in public hospitals (ZHENGHE EXHIBITION & Event, 2018). The rising number of patients who want to undergo IVF lead to overburdened IVF hospitals in China (ZHENGHE EXHIBITION & Event, 2017). Hence, Chinese couples have to find this medical procedure in other countries, and then the Chinese IVF is becoming a huge market that many countries want to seize (ZHENGHE EXHIBITION & Event, 2017).

On the other hand, the pull factors of Thailand. Firstly, it is evident that the government play a dominant role in the marketing of medical tourism industry, particularly in the Southeast Asian region, like Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore (Pocock & Phua, 2011).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) started to promote medical tourism in

2004 (Eden, 2012). It provided a detailed website including many popular medical procedures for those potential medical tourists (Eden, 2012). Also, TAT had a corporation with the national bank of Krungthai Bank so that tourists can get a debit card which called Miracle Thailand Card (Eden, 2012).

To the strategic plan of becoming a medical hub from 2017 to 2026, the cabinet opens gates for medical tourism. 19 potential medical tourist source countries are allowed to extend the permission to stay (The Nation, 2017). The policy which is announced by the Interior Ministry, the citizens come from China and CLMV countries who seek treatment in Thailand can get 90 days visa-free (The Nation, 2017). At the same time, this policy states that these Chinese citizens can enter Thailand for medical treatments with accompanying person, no more than four people totally including patient (Wei, 2017). The accompanying person included the father, mother, child or adopted child who has the same nationality as the patient (Wei, 2017). This policy would raise inflows of medical tourists and then increase national revenue for Thailand.

Secondly, high-quality service is a significant motive. Thailand is known as the “country of smiles”, patients can receive superior services in this country. The environment of hospitals is different from hospitals in China. The hospitals like a high-end hotel, the patients can enjoy the clean and private room, translation services, room order services (The official website of the National Tourism Administration of Thailand, 2015). Take Bangkok Hospital as an example, it offers a language translation services of 32 countries (YunnanRibao, 2017). Different treatment plans are adopted for patients from different countries (YunnanRibao, 2017). The private hospitals in Thailand have some marketing ways to attract medical tourists such as websites, brochures (Vasudevan, 2015). Moreover, intermediaries often provide related services to patients. For instance, they assist patients in booking or selecting hospitals and surgeries (Vasudevan, 2015). Furthermore, many hospitals are located in famous tourist cities,

like Phuket, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, so patients can receive treatments while vacationing conveniently (YunnanRibao, 2017).

Thirdly, Thailand had world-class healthcare. There are over 470 private hospitals and clinics in Thailand, many doctors had overseas training experiences, and they were certified by advanced medical institutions in the United States, Europe or other western countries (The official website of the National Tourism Administration of Thailand, 2015). In order to obtain international accreditation, these private hospitals adopted the most advanced medical devices and equipment to ensure medical facilities up to the international standard (The official website of the National Tourism Administration of Thailand, 2015). Western certification is one of vital parts for the medical tourism industry. JCI is considered as a worldwide gold standard of medical services suppliers. The Bumrungrad International Hospital and Samitivej Hospital Bangkok were the first beneficiaries which were accredited by JCI (Eden, 2012).

Fourthly, financial consideration influencing medical tourists' choices of destinations. The foreign exchange rate fluctuations can affect patients' destination choices (Vasudevan, 2015). Also, Thailand has advantages relatively in the cost of high-quality healthcare in private hospitals. The cost of medical treatments is lower than many countries in the world. The cost of medical treatments in Thailand can save around 50% to 75% compared to the US (Sutherland, 2017).

#### 2.7.4 The selection of medical tourism for Chinese medical tourists

Currently, Chinese become the biggest consumption group for outbound travel in the world, and their spending extends to healthcare (Juwai, 2016). From the perspective of different consumer groups, medical tourism is a new way for the wealthy Chinese to keep healthy (HURUNREPORT & ILTM Asia, 2015). Also, an increasing number of Chinese middle-class people focus on their health and pursuit more high-quality health experience (Xinjingbao, 2015).

In the report of (HURUNREPORT & ILTM Asia, 2015), there are 60% wealthy Chinese people had medical tourism experiences, of which the male focus on the physical examination of medical tourism, while the female attaches importance to beauty function.

These Chinese well-off people still tend to choose checkup in hospitals in China (70%) rather than overseas hospitals (30%), but concerning medical treatments, the proportion which they seek treatments in overseas hospitals has reached 40% (HURUNREPORT & ILTM Asia, 2015). There are approximately 60% of Chinese billionaires prefer overseas hospitals (HURUNREPORT & ILTM Asia, 2015). According to the report of Alex (2017) (see the Table 2.3), the top 5 the purpose of medical tourism of wealthy Chinese people as below:

Table 2. 3: The top 5 the purpose of medical tourism of wealthy Chinese people

Ranking	Purpose	Proportion
Top 1	Recuperation	54.1%
Top 2	Checkup	22.1%
Top 3	Beautify the features	18.9%
Top 4	Anti-aging	10.2%
Top 5	Plastic surgery	4.9%

Source: *HURUNREPORT and ILTM Asia (2015)*

There are some major medical tourism destinations for Chinese medical tourists. From the table 2.4, Japan ranked first due to its advantages of geographical location, medical tourism packages and type of medical services (Alex, 2017). Thailand ranked nine, so it can be seen that Chinese medical tourism is a potential market that worth

exploring for Thailand.

Table 2. 4: The top 10 medical tourism destinations for Chinese medical tourists

Top 1	Japan
Top 2	Korea
Top 3	U.S.
Top 4	Taiwan
Top 5	Germany
Top 6	Singapore
Top 7	Malaysia
Top 8	Sweden
Top 9	Thailand
Top 10	India

Source: Alex (2017)

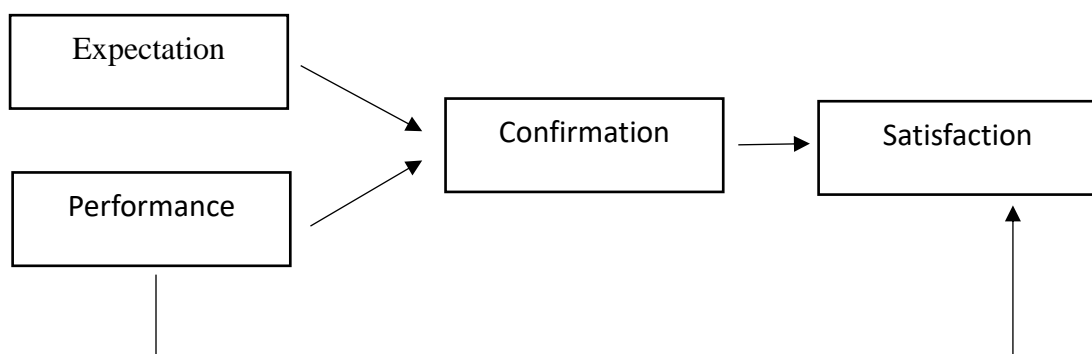
## 2.8 Medical tourists' satisfaction

According to W. Zhang, Tao, and Cai (2013), in the research field of medical tourism, scholars' researches more focus on the definition of medical tourism, the influences of medical tourism, the motivation of tourists, tourists' behavior and so on, but only a few of studies involving medical tourists' satisfaction. For the definition of satisfaction, it refers to perceived differences between expectation and experiences after

consumption (Chen & Chen, 2010; Oliver, 1980). According to Pivac et al. (2011), tourist satisfaction is defined as a function of prior tourism expectation and post-tourism experiences. Patients' satisfaction can generally be regarded as customer satisfaction (Rad et al., 2010). Medical tourist satisfaction can become a very significant method to measure the quality of medical tourism (Ford et al., 1997). Varzi et al. (2016) had a similar perspective that patients' satisfaction with medical services is an important indicator to measure the quality of care. If tourists have a good perception of medical quality, it will have positive influences on tourists overall satisfaction, behavioral intentions and tourists' willingness of consumption again or publicity to other people.

The Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) was proposed by Oliver (1980). The theory is consist of four elements: expectation, perceived performance, confirmation, and satisfaction (Oliver, 1980). Figure 2.2 showed the model of expectation-confirmation theory. For the central concept of researching consumer satisfaction, consumers can get a comparison confirmation between expectation before consume (Expectation) and after purchase performance (Perceived performance) to determine whether they satisfied with the product or service (Satisfaction), then the satisfaction will influence repurchase intention.

Figure 2. 2: The Model of Expectation-Confirmation Theory



Source: Oliver (1980)

## Chapter 3

### Findings

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the findings of research. Firstly, the participants' profile is presented. Secondly, the findings are presented through tables, figures and transcribed information. The results contain three themes: motivations for participating in medical tourism, their satisfaction and comments.

#### 3.2 The profile of the respondent

Table 4.1 provided the profile of 25 mainland Chinese medical tourists. The data collection period was from February 20, 2018, to April 15, 2018. It can be seen from the data the most popular medical procedures were IVF, then Beauty and cosmetic surgery.

Table 4. 1: The profile of the Chinese medical tourists

Respondents	Gender	Age	Occupation	Place of residence	Number of times participation in medical tourism in Thailand	The hospitals or clinics the respondents sought treatments	Type of medical procedure received
A	Female	30	Housewife	Sichuan Province	2	BNH Hospital	IVF
B	Male	38	Individual business	Guangdong Province	2	BNH Hospital	IVF
C	Female	35	Civil servant	Jiangsu Province	1	Bumrungrad Hospital	IVF
D	Female	32	Freelancer	Zhejiang Province	1	Jetanin Hospital	IVF



E	Female	21	Student	Shanghai	1	Dermcare Clinic	Diet pills
F	Female	23	Student	Yunnan Province	1	Dermcare Clinic	Diet pills
G	Male	60	Retired Teacher	Hubei Province	1	BNH Hospital	Cardiac Check up
H	Female	44	Civil Servant	Yunnan Province	1	Bangkok Hospital Samui	Outpatient (fever)
I	Female	42	Freelancer	Beijing Province	1	Piyavate International Hospital	IVF
J	Male	26	Student	Shenzhen	1	The Bangkok Christian Hospital	Gastroenterology
K	Female	35	Civil Servant	Haerbin	1	Yanhee Hospital	Diet pills
L	Female	28	Elementary school teacher	Fujian Province	1	Jetanin Hospital	IVF
M	Female	40	Housewife	Guizhou Province	1	Jetanin Hospital	IVF
N	Female	25	Student	Guangxi Province	1	King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital	Dermatology
O	Male	32	Accountant	Kunming	2	Patong Hospital and Police General Hospital	Surgical treatment
P	Male	42	Insurance industry	Zhuhai	1	Bangkok Hospital	Regular Health Checkup
Q	Female	22	Student	Shanghai	1	Smile Signature Dental Clinic	Dentistry (scaling)
R	Female	39	Individual business	Shandong	2	Piyavate International Hospital	IVF
S	Female	46	Manager in a bank	Shanghai	1	F Clinic	Face tightening
T	Female	25	Tourism industry	Shenzhen	1	LA GRACE Clinic	Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (hair removal)
U	Female	34	Individual business	Guizhou	1	Superior A.R.T.Clinic	IVF
V	Female	28	Private enterprise employee	Kunming	1	Yanhee Hospital	Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (breast implant)

W	Male	27	Staff in financial company	Xinjiang	1	Krabi Hospital	Surgical treatment
X	Female	26	Service industry	Hunan	1	Yanhee Hospital	Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (eyelid surgery)
Y	Female	37	Teacher	Jiangsu Province	1	Jatanin Hospital	IVF

The table 4.2 showed the interviewees who worked in hospitals or clinic in Bangkok. 2 managers, 3 translators and 1 middleman were interviewed in this study.

Table 4. 2: The profile of some participants worked in medical service in Bangkok

Respondent 1	Female	F Clinic	Manager
Respondent 2	Female	BNH Hospital	Translator
Respondent 3	Male	Smile Signature Dental Clinic	Manager
Respondent 4	Male	U Thai Health	Middleman
Respondent 5	Female	Piyavate International Hospital	Translator
Respondent 6	Male	Piyavate International Hospital	Translator

By the data, 72% of respondents had a plan ahead before they sought health care in Thailand, 20% of the participants received treatment for an emergency, and 8% made a sudden decision. According to Cohen (2008), the typology of medical tourists, the largest proportion 44% of respondents was type 5 Mere patient. Then 24 % participants were both type 2 Medicated patient and type 3 Medical Tourist proper. The proportion of Type 4 Vacationing patient were 8%. No type 1 respondent. Besides, most of the participants (84%) received medical treatment in Thailand for the first time, and the other respondents (16%) had twice medical experiences in Thailand.

Table 4.3 showed the age of the participants ranged from 18 to 60. The age group more concentrated on 18 to 39. 10 respondents were ranged from 18 to 29, 30 to 39 (9

respondents), 40 to 49 (5 participants). One participant was 60 years old.

Table 4. 3: The age range of the Chinese medical tourists

Age range	Number of the participants
18 ~ 29	10
30 ~ 39	9
40 ~ 49	5
50 ~ 59	0
$\geq 60$	1

### 3.3 Motivations of Chinese medical tourists in medical tourism in Thailand

According to the collected data, five major motives were identified in this study. Recommendation and media advertisements; Policy in the home country; Lack of medical procedures in the home country; No long waiting list; high medical quality.

Firstly, many participants 72% of the respondents were motivated by recommendations or media advertisements. These medical tourists obtained information from the internet, intermediary agency and other people. For example, there were 10 participants received IVF procedure, of which 9 people gained information from intermediaries or recommended by their friends and relatives. "Some information regarding IVF can be found on the internet. A few of the intermediary agencies had their websites so that I can consult the relevant information. The reason why I choose the intermediary agency is that I can save much time and reduce worries. They provided many services, such as visa application assistance, air-ticket booking, accommodation and translation. Receiving treatment alone was not an easy thing for me. I cannot speak Thai and English. And I was unfamiliar with this city and the medical process," said Respondent C. Many of the participants were recommended by

their relatives or friends to seek medical treatments in private hospitals or clinics in Thailand. As Respondent D said, “One of my friends had received IVF successfully. She strongly recommended this private hospital to me.” Some medical tourists obtained information through the internet, like Respondent X, “I browsed some web forums regarding cosmetic surgery. Some people who were satisfied with their eyelid surgery in the Yanhee Hospital and then left some good comments, so I consulted and booked the eyelid surgery online before I came to Thailand.”

Secondly, some national policies affected the motivation of Chinese medical tourists. With the two-child policy implemented, a lot of Chinese had strong demands for a child, and especially many elderly couples wanted a second child. In this study, there were 10 participants sought IVF in Bangkok, of which 7 respondents aimed to have a second child. For instance, Respondent B “We came to Thailand mainly aimed to have a second child. This was the second time that my wife and I received IVF. The last time my wife and I thought that we did not pregnancy successfully, but actually did. Then inappropriate diet led to abortion.” Also, the respondent I said that she wanted a second child because she thought the only child maybe feel lonely in the family.

The third dominant motive was that some medical procedures were lacked or prohibited in China. This motive mainly referred to the IVF procedure. 8 of 10 IVF respondents travelled to Thailand for IVF, because they wanted to choose the gender of the child. In China, choosing gender was forbidden. According to the Respondent 4, a middleman, said, “Around 80% of Chinese couples received IVF in Thailand due to choosing boys. Especially in the Southeast coastal areas of China, many people preferred sons to daughters.” For instance, Respondent R, a 39-year-old woman, came to Thailand with her husband, said, “This was the second time that we received IVF in the Piyavate International Hospital. We had a daughter now, but we wanted to have a son to inherit and run our family businesses.” There were another cases, for example, Respondent E and F bought weight-loss medicine in a clinic in Bangkok, because it

cannot find in China.

Next, no long waiting time was one of the key motives for mainland Chinese medical tourists. According to Respondent 3, a manager of the dental clinic, “Every customer needed to make an appointment in advance, this way can avoid waiting for a long time. Some customers felt impatient when they waited for a long time, then they may reduce their satisfaction with our services”. Some of the participants had unpleasant experiences in Chinese hospitals due to long waiting time. For instance, Respondent G and his wife said, “This hospital was different from many hospitals in China. In China, public hospitals were crowded every day, you had to waste much time until saw a doctor. However, this hospital was not crowded, maybe because it was a private hospital, you can get treatment as soon as possible.”

Fifthly, high medical quality is another primary factor that motivates mainland Chinese medical tourists to come to Thailand. According to Respondent 4, “Although some hospital in China claimed that they could provide the Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), the technology actually was not guaranteed. The technology of Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) in Thailand was advanced.” Many participants received IVF in Thailand because the success rate was much higher than in China. “The rate in Thailand was around 50% to 60%, but just 20% to 30% in China,” said Respondent 6. Respondent 1 and Respondent 3 also said they not only adopted advanced medical equipment and products from American, but also the doctors were very professional in their clinics.

There were other factors affected mainland Chinese medical tourists’ motivation. Some Chinese medical tourists came to Thailand owing to superior care services. For instance, Respondent P came to Thailand for a regular checkup. “I heard that private hospitals in Thailand had excellent services, this time I travelled to Bangkok for a vacationing while experiencing a check-up in hospital.”

Some mainland Chinese medical tourists especially celebrities, they sought

healthcare abroad to protect their privacy. According to the Respondent 4, “Our company had a few representative cases. For example, one Chinese sports star got IVF procedure in Bangkok. They can not only choose gender but also protect their privacy better because of the geographic factor.”

For the price factor. Many people from European and American countries came to Thailand for healthcare because the prices in Thailand were very cheaper than in their home countries. However, the cost of medical tourism for mainland Chinese medical tourists was not the principal motive. Respondent B, C, M, and V considered that their treatments in Bangkok were not cheap. Some respondents even considered the cost was expensive, like Respondent A and Respondent H. In spite of this, some medical procedures still had a price advantage for Chinese medical tourists in Thailand. As Respondent 4 mentioned, “The price of third-generation IVF: Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) in Thailand was much lower than in developed countries.” Respondent 3 said, “Some dental procedures in Thailand were cheaper around 20% than in big cities of China on the basis of similar technology level.” For example, according to L. Zhang (2016), in China, there was a wide range of prices in dentistry in public hospital and dental clinic, especially in the procedure of crown of a tooth. The price of a crown of a tooth in one public hospital in Beijing was about 5,000 to 40,000 THB, but the official website of the Smile Signature Dental Clinic showed that the price of the same procedure in the was 9,000 to 25,000 THB.

The proximity destination, convenient visa and abundant tourism resources were motives as well. As Respondent I mentioned that China was not far away from Thailand, the air ticket was cheap, and people can save much time on the road. Respondent X said, “Many people ask me why I choose cosmetic surgery in Thailand rather than Korea. Firstly, it was cheaper to go to Thailand than South Korea. Also, many application documents should be prepared before you go to South Korea, but when I went to Thailand, I just needed to apply for the visa on arrival. Furthermore, living costs

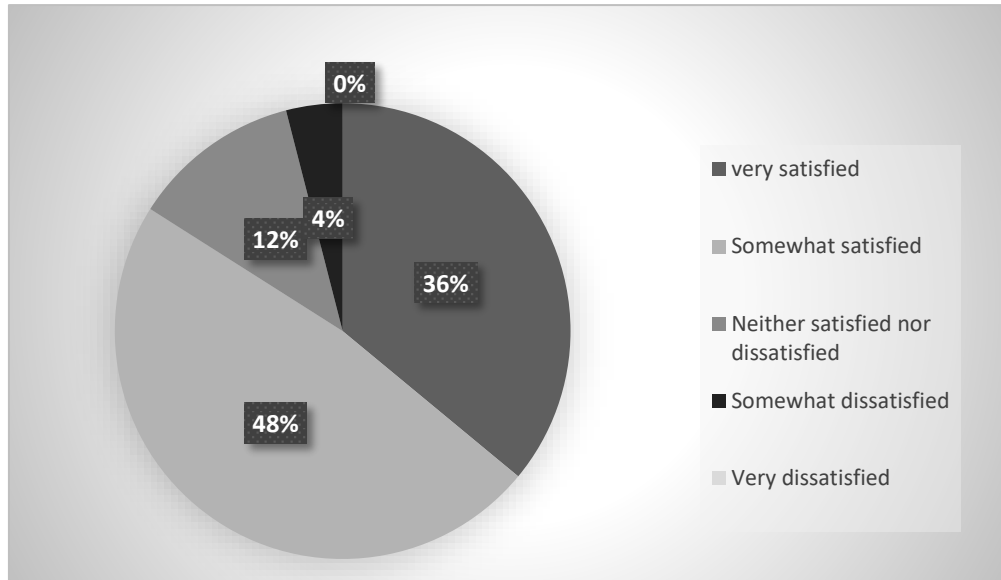
in Thailand relatively cheaper than in South Korea.”

For other Chinese medical tourists, they had other various reasons to come to Thailand for healthcare. Some people had to seek urgent treatments during their vacationing in Thailand. Most of them choose public hospitals in this study because some public hospitals were very close to hotels which they stayed. Also, many Chinese people had misunderstandings regarding the private hospitals, because, in China, public hospitals occupied a dominant position in the medical supply side, and some irregular private hospitals had fraudulent activities, some Chinese had bad experiences in these private hospitals. So they did not want to seek treatment in the private hospitals. And other medical tourists passed by the clinics and saw the advertisements or promotion, and then they decided to get healthcare suddenly (According to Respondent 1). Many of the situations happened to those medical tourists who seek beauty in the clinics.

### **3.4 Satisfaction of the participants**

The overall satisfaction was divided into five levels to evaluate participants' satisfaction in this study through the semi-structured interview (Appendix 2 question 11). From data, Figure 4.1 shows the proportion of overall satisfaction of participants with five level. There were totally 25 respondents in this study. 9 medical tourists were very satisfied with their medical services in Thailand. The number of participants accounted for 36% of the total. 48% of the participants were relatively satisfied. 12% participants felt neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 4% of the participants was somewhat dissatisfied with the medical experience. What should be mentioned is that no respondents gave a very unsatisfied evaluation.

Figure 4. 1: The proportion of overall satisfaction of the Chinese medical tourists



On the whole, most of the participants (84%) were satisfied with their medical experiences in Thailand, including very satisfied and somewhat satisfied level. According to The Expectation Confirmation Theory, medical tourists' expectation and perceived performance influenced their satisfaction. Many respondents heard of high medical quality and excellent services in Thailand through internet, middlemen or friends, many of them had a good expectation before they travelled to Thailand. Then after they had received treatments, the better-perceived performance they had, the higher overall satisfaction they got. For example, Respondent M, a female who received IVF in Thailand for the first time and finally got a baby, "I knew the information about the advanced technology of the Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) in Thailand through a domestic intermediary agency, and I can get a baby successfully, I appreciated this hospital." Respondent T was very satisfied with her beauty experience, "I heard from some friends that travelling to Thailand for beauty is very popular for Chinese, so I tried it during my vacationing in Thailand. Actually, the excellent services exceeded my expectation." However, the rest of participants (16%) had intermediate or somewhat



unsatisfied evaluation due to some factors, such as environment, prices, and services.

Comparison of mainland Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction among public hospitals, private hospitals and clinics: The respondents have received medical treatments in 4 public hospitals, 7 private hospitals and 5 clinics in this study. Table 4.4 shows the overall satisfaction of the 25 participants who received medical treatment in public hospitals, private hospitals or clinics.

Table 4. 4: The overall satisfaction of the Chinese medical tourists in public hospitals, private hospitals or clinics

Overall Satisfaction The number of participants	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	very satisfied
Public Hospital		1	2	1	
Private Hospital			1	9	5
Clinics				2	4

According to the data, there were 4 medical tourists received treatments in public hospitals, 15 respondents in the private hospitals, and 6 people in the clinics. For the participants in the public hospital, 1 respondent somewhat satisfied with the medical services in Thailand, 1 somewhat dissatisfied and 2 considered neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with medical services in Thailand. Most of the participants who sought healthcare in private hospitals were somewhat or very satisfied with their medical services in Thailand, respectively 9 and 5 people, 1 person got an intermediate evaluation. Clinics got relatively high satisfaction as well, respondents felt somewhat satisfaction, and 4 respondents had an evaluation of very satisfaction.

Thus it can be seen that there was a gap between the mainland Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction of public hospitals and private hospitals in Thailand. Chinese

medical tourists received treatments in private hospitals, the proportion of satisfaction was approximately 93%, but the proportion of satisfaction was 25% of the participants who sought health care in public hospitals.

Some medical tourists choose public hospitals since they had to find the nearest hospital to receive emergency treatment or some of them were lack of understanding of foreign private hospitals. In China, public hospitals occupied a dominant position in the medical supply side, and some irregular private hospitals had fraudulent activities, some Chinese had bad experiences in these private hospitals. So they did not want to seek treatment in the private hospitals. Respondent N and Respondent W, both of them got injured when they ride a motorcycle on the islands in Thailand, so they sought treatment in the nearby hospitals which were public. Respondent W was somewhat dissatisfied with medical experience in Thailand, “When I entered the hospital, my leg was bleeding, but no one cares about that. I waited a long time to see a doctor. They cannot speak Chinese. It was tough for us to communicate. The nurse deal with my wound hastily. ”

The overall satisfaction based on various medical procedures. Table 4.5 indicated 25 mainland Chinese medical tourists’ satisfaction with different medical procedures.

Table 4. 5: The 25 Chinese medical tourists’ satisfaction with different medical procedures

Overall Satisfaction	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
The number of participants					
IVF			1	4	5
Beauty/cosmetic surgery				5	2
Dental					1
Check up				1	1
Others		1	2	2	

According to the table 4.4, IVF, Beauty and cosmetic surgery are two popular medical procedures for mainland Chinese medical tourists. Both of the two procedures had high satisfaction. Dental and checkup items that medical tourists also felt satisfied. For other medical procedures, like some emergency treatments had a relatively low evaluation.

### **3.5 Determinants influencing Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction in medical services in Thailand**

Due to different perspectives of medical tourists, the effect factors of medical tourists' satisfaction were varied. Despite this, some major factors were mentioned by many respondents. According to the data from the 25 participants, four major factors correlated with the level of mainland Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction: medical quality, medical care services, medical environment, and Costs. Other factors also affected participants' satisfaction, such as waiting time, culture in the host country.

#### **3.5.1 Medical quality**

The finding showed that the hypothesis 2, 1) "Medical quality including medical equipment and facilities" is valid. Medical quality had a positive correlation with Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction.

One of the most significant factors influencing mainland Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction is medical quality, including medical equipment, facilities and technology. Thailand had high-level medical quality, such as advanced facilities, high-end equipment, and professional technology. Almost all respondents who got healthcare in private hospitals were satisfied with the medical quality. "Although I had experiences in beauty procedures for many times in China, the equipment in this clinic looked more advanced. The business license and medical license were displayed, the cosmetologist had the skillful technology," Respondent S said. Respondents F was recommended by

her friends that diet pill in Thailand was very effective, “The medicine regulation was strict in Thailand, and this weight-loss medicine was imported from New Zealand, so I trusted this medicine.” Actually, medical quality was regarded as the most important factor influencing Chinese medical tourists’ satisfaction in IVF procedures. As Respondent L said, “The Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) was advanced in Thailand, the success rate was higher than in China. I got a baby finally. I was very satisfied with their medical quality.” For the medical managers, many of them were confident in their medical quality. Respondent 1 stated, “Our equipment and products were imported from American. The doctors were foreign-trained experiences.” Respondent 3 said, “Our dental clinic was top-notch in Bangkok. Customers were satisfied with our technology because doctors in our clinic were professional, their operations were gentler than others, and some people had bad experiences in dental treatment.” Moreover, a few patients felt very satisfied, if doctors were very professional and responsible. “I stayed in this hospital for three days, there were no accurate results about my cardiac check-up, but the doctor never gives you medicine curtly. It was not the same as some doctors in China” Respondent G. Respondent X held the same view, “The doctor would give some professional advice for me based on my intention. They really care about patients.” However, a few of patient had a relative negative comment, “ Although I know the IVF technology in Thailand was better than in China, the price of IVF was expensive, and I failed in the first time, and I felt a little worried this time. ”

### 3.5.2 Medical care services

The result from data was consistent with the prior hypothesis 2, 2) “The medical care services (professionalism, prompt service) as a key factor that had a correlation with satisfaction.” The medical care services had a positive correlation with the level of Chinese medical tourists’ satisfaction. The better care services lead to the higher

satisfaction in medical services.

Concerning the experiences with medical care services, the respondents received treatments in private hospitals or clinics were satisfied with it. Nevertheless, the participants in public hospitals had lower satisfaction than private hospitals.

Many respondents gave high ratings to medical services in private hospitals and clinic. Eight respondents mentioned that healthcare service was a most satisfying part of their whole process of medical experiences. “The services was outstanding. When I got off the car, someone helped me open the door, and took me to the information desk. This hospital provided translation services, and a Chinese translator answered my many questions patiently. Every staff in this hospitals are friendly,” Respondent C said. Some prompt services also can improve medical tourists’ satisfaction. For instance, Respondent S said, “It was very convenient to pay through Alipay.” Some private hospitals and clinics provided Chinese translation service, like the Bumrungrad International Hospital, BNH hospital, and Smile Signature Dental Clinic.

However, the services in Thai public hospitals had lower satisfaction than private hospitals. This is a significant factor leading to relatively low satisfaction with medical services in public hospitals. For example, Respondent O was somewhat dissatisfied with services in a public hospital in Phuket. He thought that the doctors and nurses were not responsible for patients. The language was also an issue in public hospitals. This problem that Respondent W mentioned that communication problem led to delayed treatment.

### 3.5.3 Cost

According to the prior hypothesis 2 3) the cost of medical services had a correlation with Chinese medical tourists’ satisfaction. From the data, costs had a negative correlation with the level of Chinese medical tourists’ satisfaction. The high medical costs had a relatively adverse effect on their satisfaction.

In many Chinese medical tourists' perspectives, the costs were not cheap in private hospitals or clinic in Thailand. Around 52% of the participants mentioned a high expenditure on medical treatments and intermediary fee. Taking the IVF procedure as an example, from the data of HengJia international, an intermediary agency of China, the price of IVF procedure was around 250,000 to 300,000 THB, but the cost of the same procedure was 750, 000 to 1,000,000 THB including round-trip flight tickets, food, accommodation, translation and other services in Thailand (HengJia international, 2016). Moreover, seeing a doctor treat some slight illnesses in private hospital in Thailand was also expensive. "I spent about 5,000 THB in this hospital, just had a fever," Respondent H said. Respondent E figured that the price of loss-weight medicine was a little bit high for a student. Even though many respondents considered the price was costly, the high quality and superior service could make up for the negative impact of satisfaction in price. For example, Respondent G stated, "The price was high, I stayed in this hospital for three days, it cost me 100,000 THB. However, I was very willing to pay it, because the hospital had the good environment and excellent services."

#### 3.5.4 Medical environment

From the data, the medical environment was identified as a significant indicator for Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction. Many participants had positive comments about the medical environment. It is obvious that a clean and comfortable environment could improve the level of satisfaction. For example, Respondent B, C, G, P, V had high praise of the medical environment in private hospitals in Thailand, "The environment in Thailand was different from China. Many private hospitals and clinics had a comfortable medical environment, but in China, most of the hospitals were so crowded and noisy. " "This hospital was like a five-star hotel". It can be seen that good medical environment can promote Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction.

### 3.4.5 Other factors

There were other factors that the participants mentioned, such as waiting time, culture in the host country. According to the collected data, the long waiting list had an adverse effect on Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction. Respondent O mentioned that he needed emergency treatment, but he waited for a doctor for a long time. This is what he felt dissatisfied. Different culture could present some difficulties for Chinese medical tourists. They travelled to Thailand might face language barriers, unfamiliar foreign traditions. Misunderstandings and different notions influence medical tourists' satisfaction. As Respondent 3 stated, "Some Chinese patients had the misunderstanding in dental procedures. I needed to explain to them sometimes. They did not pay enough attention to the teeth problem. They thought some symptoms like a toothache could relieve through traditional Chinese medicine. So they confused why the price and procedure should be necessary." Nonetheless, some aspects of Thai culture that many respondents satisfied. As Respondent G said, "People were very kind and friendly in Thailand. I can feel a harmonious atmosphere here. I like this place."

### 3.6 The participants' comments and advice

Some Chinese medical tourists shared their comments and suggestions to improve medical services in Thailand. A few of medical staffs also put forward their perspectives about the development measures of medical tourism.

In the aspect of publicity, some Chinese medical tourists recommended the medical tourism providers to provide more accesses to gain detailed information. For example, one respondent said, "Provide information through some popular Chinese app, like WeChat, MicroBlog or any other app, and we can browse more details." Some managers held the same suggestion, "Explore some new ways for publicity." "Improve information for Chinese patients on the website." One manager emphasized the

significance of word of mouth, “The most significant thing was doing our job better. Good reputation should be based on public praise rather than advertising hype. Many Chinese they did not believe advertisement on the internet.”

Some comments were related to service aspect. For example, some participants mentioned the payment. One respondent recommended, “The payment can be more convenient for Chinese patients, like Alipay or UnionPay.” Furthermore, the translation service should be improved. “Providing more Chinese translators in the hospital. Sometimes one Chinese translator had to work for several patients at the same time.” Some advice was proposed by a few staffs or managers to improve their medical service. For example, one translator said, “Although overall services in private hospital were good, there were still some small issues. For example, forgot patients’ reservation or delivery wrong check report. So the medical providers should pay more attention to these small issues otherwise these issues would influence patients’ satisfaction.”

Besides, some respondents had recommendations regarding the cost of medical treatment. “If the procedure had promotion would be nice.” “Medical tourism intermediary agencies should be normalized, some middlemen ask a high service charge for patients.”

In addition, one manager mentioned the cultural difference would affect Chinese medical tourists’ satisfaction. “Some Chinese had traditional notions. For example, some of them thought public hospitals were more reliable than private hospitals because, in China, some private hospitals cheat their patients to make a profit. So it was necessary for managers to clean up misunderstandings by providing more information and knowledge.”



## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is consist of six sections. It includes the summary of results, discussion, and conclusion. Recommendations, limitations and contributions of this study are also explained in this chapter.

#### 4.2 Summary of major results

Based on the collected data, 72% of the respondents had a plan ahead before they sought healthcare in Thailand, 20% of the participants received treatment for an emergency, and 8% was a sudden decision. Moreover, most of the participants 84% received medical treatment in Thailand for the first time, and the other respondents had twice medical experiences in Thailand. From the findings, the most popular procedure was IVF accounted for 40% of the total, followed by beauty and cosmetic surgery (28%).

According to the research findings, five significant factors motivating mainland Chinese medical tourists to seek healthcare in Thailand were identified in this study. Firstly, many participants (72%) were motivated by recommendations or media advertisements. Secondly, policy in the home country. With the two-child policy has been implemented, 10 participants sought IVF in Bangkok, of which 7 respondents aimed to have a second child. Thirdly, lack of medical procedures in the home country. Some medical procedures and medical products were unavailable in China. Most (8 of 10 IVF medical tourists) of Chinese couples travelled to Thailand for choosing gender, mostly choose a boy. Three medical tourists sought weight-loss medicine in clinics in Bangkok, because those medicines were unavailable in China. Then no long waiting

list. Many Chinese medical tourists explained that they had unpleasant experiences in Chinese hospitals due to long waiting time. Booking services can save much of their time to receive treatment. Lastly, high medical quality is another primary factor. The medical facilities and technology were provided in many private hospitals and clinic in Thailand. All respondents sought IVF procedure in Thailand due to the advanced the Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD).

Regarding the satisfaction of mainland Chinese medical tourists. Most of the participants (84%) were satisfied with their medical experiences in Thailand. The participants' satisfaction in private hospitals was different from the public hospitals in Thailand. For the comparison of mainland Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction between public hospitals and private hospitals, 15 Chinese medical tourists received treatments in private hospitals, the proportion of satisfaction was approximately 93%, but the percentage of satisfaction was 25% of the participants who sought health care in public hospitals.

From the findings, four determinants influencing mainland Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction in medical services in Thailand: medical care services, medial quality, medical environment and cost. Other factors also affected participates' satisfaction, such as waiting time and culture in the host country.

### **4.3 Discussion**

4.3.1 To study the factors motivating Chinese medical tourists to seek healthcare in Thailand.

This study tries to explore the motives of Chinese medical tourists to hunt for healthcare in Thailand. The hypotheses were based on the push-pull factor model. Main push factors related to four aspects: Recommendation and media advertisements; Policy in the home country; Lack of treatment in the home country and Desire for privacy

protection. Three key pull factors: Low cost; High medical quality; No long waiting time.

From the collected data, 72% of respondents had a plan in advance before they sought medical treatment in Thailand, 20% of the participants received treatment due to an emergency problem, and 8% of the respondents made a sudden decision to get healthcare during their vacation. According to Read (2016.b.), the potential of the Chinese medical tourism market will become more huge. The results of this study show the different selection of Chinese medical tourists, of which the most famous medical procedures was IVF. What is more, cosmetic surgery was popular in Thailand (Wilson, 2011). The report of HURUNREPORT and ILTM Asia (2015) mentioned, most wealthy female Chinese medical tourists focus on beauty function. Although many Chinese medical tourists decided in advance, there was still a part of potential Chinese medical tourists could be explored. So the medical tourism providers could consider the way to motivate other Chinese tourists to become medical tourists. For example, medical tourism providers could provide promotions for booking medical procedures in advance or coupons for the second medical services.

For the push factors. Many participants (72%) were motivated by recommendations or media advertisements (Xinjingbao, 2015). This factor was consistent with the hypothesis. These medical tourists obtained information from a brochure, internet, intermediary agency and other people. For the 9 participants who received IVF procedures in Thailand through the intermediary agencies, relatives and friends. Other medical tourists sought procedures like cosmetic surgery or beauty through friends' recommendation as well. This was supported by Crooks et al. (2010), word-of-mouth was also a vital way for medical tourists to gain information about medical tourism because medical tourists usually share their medical experiences with other people. Hohm and Snyder (2015) indicated that the internet is also a significant

way for medical tourists to search for some related information. Hence, it can be seen that medical tourism providers could promote their medical tourism products through word-of-mouth and internet, for example, they could set up comment part on the website, some successful cases or praise can be shown on this section.

Some information from the interviews demonstrated the hypothesis that national policies in mainland China also affects the motivation of Chinese medical tourists. ZHENGHE EXHIBITION and Event (2017) mentioned that with the two-child policy has been implemented, a large number of Chinese have strong demands for a child, and especially many elderly couples want a second child. The rising number of patients who want to undergo IVF leads to overburdened IVF hospitals in China (ZHENGHE EXHIBITION & Event, 2017). There were 10 participants received IVF procedure in Thailand from the collected data, 40% of the total participants. Medical tourism brokers could continually pay attention to Chinese national policies to explore the new direction of the medical tourism market.

Another critical motive was lacking or prohibitive medical procedures in China. As Ramírez de Arellano (2011) mentioned some people pursue those services which are unavailable in their home countries. This motive was especially evident in the IVF procedure. Most of the Chinese couples travelled to Thailand for choosing the gender of the child especially selecting male baby, because choosing gender was forbidden in China. Some medical tourists sought some loss-weight pills which were not provided in China.

Based on the hypotheses, privacy protection was one of the factors motivating Chinese medical tourists pursued treatment in Thailand, but it was not the vital factor. Some Chinese medical patients particularly celebrities, they sought more personal medical items abroad to protect their privacy. It was supported by the article of Connell (2006), a distance can give patients privacy protection. Besides, the proximity of

destination also affected mainland Chinese medical tourists' motivation, because some patients considered that the air ticket to Thailand was relatively cheap and they can save much time on the road.

Next, for the pull factors, three main motives were put forward in the hypotheses: low cost; High medical quality; No long waiting time. In the light of data, waiting time and the medical quality were both key pull factors for Chinese medical tourists. The price factor was not the key motives as the hypotheses mentioned.

No long waiting time is one of the major motives (De Arellano, 2007). To avoid waiting a long time in their home country, people travelled to other countries (Connell, 2006). According to the data, many of participants had unpleasant experiences in hospitals in China, because hospitals were crowded in China most of the time. It supported by (Duckett, 2005), long waiting times for elective surgery in the public hospital is a general and severe issue in developed countries.

High medical quality is another dominant motive. The Thai private hospitals adopted the most advanced medical devices and equipment to ensure medical facilities up to the international standard, and to obtain international accreditation (The official website of the National Tourism Administration of Thailand, 2015). Many participants had heard the medical technology and facilities were advanced in Thailand before they made a decision, especially in the aspect of IVF, the third-generation technology led to the success rate was much higher than in China. Based on one manager of IVF stated that the success rate was around 50% to 60%, but just 20% to 30% in China.

Even though the cost had more advantage for European and American medical tourists (Horowitz et al., 2007; Liu & Zhang, 2016; Patients Beyond Borders, 2017), it was not the primary motive for Chinese patients. However, some medical procedures still had a price advantage for Chinese medical tourists in Thailand. One manager stated

that some dental procedures in Thailand were cheaper around 20% than in big cities of China on the similar technology level.

What is more, there were other pull factors, such as superior care services, the proximity of destination, the policies of the destination and abundant tourism resources. As Ye and Assenov (2017) mentioned that more Chinese tourists sought healthcare in Thailand because of the visa-free policy of the Thai government for Chinese. These Chinese medical tourists considered that the 90-day free visa was convenient and it can save their time. Also, Thailand was a famous tourism country and a popular medical tourism destination (MyMEDHoliday). Some Chinese medical tourists plan to receive healthcare and vacation at the same time, abundant tourism resources in Thailand were regarded as a factor. For the other Chinese medical tourists, they were identified to the Medicated tourists who sought treatment during their vacation owing to urgent medical problems (Cohen, 2008).

4.3.2 To assess the Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction with the healthcare services they receive.

This research tries to study Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction in medical services in Thailand. The hypotheses were connected to three main aspects: 1) The medical quality and 2) medical care services (professionalism, prompt service); 3) The cost of the medical services.

The 25 respondents evaluated their satisfaction in medical services in Thailand. According to the interviews, the overall satisfaction was divided into five levels in this study. On the whole, most of the participants (84%) were satisfied with their medical experiences in Thailand, 36% of the participants were very satisfied with their medical services in Thailand, and 48% of the respondents felt relatively satisfied. 12% participants felt somewhat dissatisfied, and the proportion of relatively dissatisfied

evaluation was 4%. No respondents gave a very unsatisfied evaluation.

Based on Oliver (1980), the Expectation Confirmation Theory refers to consumers can get a comparison confirmation between expectation before consume (Expectation) and after purchase performance (Perceived performance), and then they could determine whether they satisfied with the product or service (Satisfaction). Finally, the satisfaction will influence repurchase intention. Many respondents got information regarding good expectation, high medical quality, and good services in Thailand before they travelled to Thailand. Then the better-perceived performance they had after received treatments, the higher satisfaction they evaluated. However, the high rate of satisfaction was more concentrate on private hospitals or clinics. The mainland Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction in the public hospitals was lower than the private hospitals in Thailand.

In the light of the collected data, four major factors correlated with the level of mainland Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction: medical care services, medical quality, medical environment and Costs. Waiting time and culture in the host country also influenced participates' satisfaction, but both of the two factors were not the determinants.

Firstly, medical quality was the most significant factors that influenced medical tourists' satisfaction. This factor was proposed in the previous hypotheses. This result was consistent with the hypothesis: "Medical quality including medical equipment and facilities". This finding was confirmed by the previous study by Jadhav et al. (2014). According to the data, the medical quality had a positive correlation with Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction. The higher medical quality could improve Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction.

Almost all of the respondents who received health care in private hospitals gave high-level satisfaction in medical quality. There were more than 479 private hospitals in Thailand, and these private hospitals improved the reputation of medical tourism in

Thailand (Health-tourism.com.). Obtaining international accreditation was a vital way for medical tourism providers to prove their medical quality (Hopkins et al., 2010). According to Thailand Investment Review (2016), Thailand had 53 hospitals were the first accredited by JCI in Asia. Although many respondents in this study did not pay more attention to whether the hospitals had an international accreditation, this way could improve patients' trust in medical quality. High-level medical quality attracts foreign patients to travel to Thailand (Cohen, 2008). Most of the respondents trusted the technology in which they received treatment in Thailand because medical tourism managers emphasis on improving the medical facilities, equipment and accreditation in Thailand. From some medical tourism providers' interviews, they were confident with their equipment and medical products which were imported from developed countries. As some participants mentioned that some medical procedures were more advanced in Thailand than in China.

Secondly, the finding of this research was consistent with the prior hypothesis that the high costs had a negative influence on the level of Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction. Some respondents considered the price was more expensive in Thailand than in China. Moreover, some respondents were unsatisfied with the costs of intermediary. Mohamad et al. (2012) proposed that medical tourism facilitators play an important role in medical services. Hence, the medical providers could have more promotions for medical tourists. Besides, the price of intermediary services in Thailand became an issue should be paid more attention because these intermediary agencies did not have a uniform price standard. Even so, in some respondents' perspectives, if they wanted to choose advanced medical procedures abroad, the price was much lower in Thailand than in developed countries. It was supported by the previous study of Sutherland (2017), the costs of medical treatments in Thailand can saving around 50% to 75% compared to the US.

Thirdly, the factor of medical care services was also proposed by the hypothesis



before. According to the finding of this study, many respondents gave high ratings to medical services in private hospitals and clinic. Also, eight respondents considered that care service was the most satisfying section in their whole process of medical experiences. Many private hospitals and clinics provided superior services, such as Chinese translation services, room order services, reservations (The official website of the National Tourism Administration of Thailand, 2015). It can be seen that care services were a determinant influencing Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction. So medical tourism managers could provide more prompt services for Chinese medical tourists, like prompt payment.

Next, the medical environment was one of the significant indicators for Chinese medical tourists to assess their satisfaction with medical services in Thailand. This factor was not considered in the previous hypotheses. Many respondents were satisfied with the environment of private hospitals and clinics. The medical environment had a positive correlation with Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction. The better medical environment could promote the higher satisfaction of Chinese medical tourists. It was supported by The official website of the National Tourism Administration of Thailand (2015), the environment of hospitals are different from hospitals in China, the private hospitals in Thailand like a high-end hotel, and the patients can enjoy the clean and private room.

Other matters, some apparent factors affected Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction as well. Based on the findings of this study, long waiting lists had negative effects on medical tourists' satisfaction. The culture of the host country also influenced Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction, because they may have to deal with some barriers or misunderstandings in the different culture. Most of the participants felt relaxed in the Thai culture because Thai people were friendly to foreigners, and the staff of medical tourism provided services patiently.

#### 4.4 Limitations of the study

Firstly, the scope of interviews was mainly concentrated in hospitals and clinics in Bangkok. Also, some Chinese medical tourists had received medical treatment and came back to China, so the data collected through the telephone interview, but telephone interviews may lead to a lack of non-verbal data and the visual information cannot be gained.

Secondly, it was difficult to gain more information from the medical tourism providers and patients, because the medical tourism providers protect their internal information carefully. They do not allow disturb patients and they guard their patients' privacy carefully.

Thirdly, this study mainly focused on the demand side. This research explored more information through Chinese medical tourists, and the information may not sufficient from the supply side.

#### 4.5 Recommendations

According to the findings of this study, some recommendations are proposed for medical services providers and future research.

##### 4.5.1 The development of medical products

Concerning the medical products, medical service providers should pay more attention to the design and quality of products. As some researches mentioned, medical tourists have diversified requirements in medical tourism (Liu & Zhang, 2016). Creating some specific products for Chinese medical tourists is an effective way to expand Chinese medical tourism market. Medical services providers could design different medical products for different consumer groups. For example, many wealthy people have demands for customized products, so the medical products should be

designed based on their requirements. For middle-class medical tourists, service providers should concentrate on the balance between price and quality of products. Besides, many Chinese medical tourists were accompanied by their relatives or friends to seek healthcare in Thailand so that medical tourism providers could create more tourism packages for medical tourists and their companions. For instance, providing a short trip for medical tourists during their recovery.

#### 4.5.2 Service improvement

On the ground of the findings, medical services in the private hospitals or clinics in Thailand had higher satisfaction than public hospitals for Chinese medical tourists. For the public hospitals, the medical services should be improved in many aspects, such as less waiting time, medical environment, translation services. Although the services in many private hospitals and clinics were excellent, some small mistakes happened as well, like confusion appointment time, delivery wrong check-up sheets. Medical service providers also should pay attention to a few details in services.

Chinese translation service is significant for Chinese medical tourists. Even though many private hospitals and clinics have translators, sometimes those translators have to services for a few patients at the same time. This may lead to medical tourists cannot get comprehensive translation services all the time. Hence, medical service providers should provide sufficient translators to ensure each patient could receive the same service.

Moreover, medical service providers should create more prompt services for medical tourists. Mobile payment is very common in China, and many Chinese get used paying by their phone. Medical service providers could provide some prompt payment, like Alipay, UnionPay card payment. Also, online consultation can be used on the website. Medical tourists could ask questions or finish their booking services conveniently.

#### 4.5.3 Price

Up to now, increasingly wealthy and middle-class Chinese choose healthcare in Thailand, medical service providers should establish price positioning clearly with different consumer groups. From the findings of the study, many respondents considered the high healthcare price affects their satisfaction, especially for middle-class patients. Hence, medical service providers could provide promotions in medical procedures with medical tourism packages. Also, providing coupons after medical tourists consumed is a way to motivate them to seek health care for the next time.

#### 4.5.4 Advertising strategies

According to the findings of this study, recommendations and media advertisements are very significant factors motivating Chinese medical tourists to seek healthcare in Thailand. Medical tourism providers are able to create a Chinese website to provide more information about their medical products. One section could show medical tourists' comments and successful cases on the website. Moreover, from the results of this study, the way of publicity was limited in China, many Chinese medical tourists gain information mainly through intermediary and recommendation from their relatives or friends. So service providers should pay more attention to the word-of-mouth factor. Ensuring high-quality medical service was an essential way to gain praise, then the medical tourists are willing to recommend to others.

#### 4.5.5 Management aspect

The results of this study show that the medical quality is the most significant factor influencing Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction. Hence, at the management level, the medical managers should continuously improve the quality of medical products and services. The managers could set up a reward system to encourage more doctors, and related medical staff receive professional training and gain international certification.

The government and private medical sectors should establish an organization to strengthen communication and supervision of the medical tourism industry.

#### 4.5.6 Recommendations for future research

This research provides a general situation concerning Chinese medical tourists' overall satisfaction in Thailand. Future studies could do further research in details regarding Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction in different medical procedures. Also, future researches could explore the prospects of the Chinese medical market for Thai medical tourism industry. Moreover, the future work could pay more attention to the supply side of medical tourism.

### 4.6 Contributions

#### 4.6.1 Theoretical contributions

This study provides some contributions to academic terms. Firstly, this research could provide information regarding the situation of Chinese medical tourists and medical tourism in Thailand in the literature. Also, it can be used to enrich the research of medical tourists' satisfaction in medical services. Lastly, the findings of this study can be conducive to further understanding of medical tourism industry of Thailand.

#### 4.6.2 Practical contributions

Nowadays, the medical tourism industry has intense competition, Thailand also has to confront with competition from local or overseas medical tourism market. Thailand is one of the famous medical tourism destinations in the world, and the medical tourism providers in Thailand should expand their perspectives and explore the new medical tourism market continually to enhance competitiveness.

Firstly, this study could provide more knowledge concerning Chinese medical tourists' perspectives of decision-making for medical tourism providers, healthcare

organizations, and policymakers. This research identifies some major motives of Chinese medical tourists seeking healthcare in Thailand to help the local medical tourism managers find the Chinese market direction and improve their market strategies.

Secondly, this research mainly aims to explore the determinants of influencing Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction in medical services in Thailand. By focusing on Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction, medical tourism managers are able to recognize the significance of China's medical tourism market. The results of this study could deepen understanding of Chinese medical tourists' expense intentions and overall satisfaction for medical tourism providers. The managers could try to remedy the deficiencies, and then improve more high-quality medical service to satisfy the Chinese medical tourists' demands.

Finally, from the interviews of this research, the medical tourism managers will benefit from some comments and recommendations which are proposed by the participants of this research. It will help the managers to generate specific market plans and attract more Chinese medical tourists.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This research has studied the motives and satisfaction of Chinese medical tourists to received healthcare in Thailand. The outcomes of this study show that five key factors motivating Chinese medical tourists to seek healthcare in Thailand: Recommendation and media advertisements; Policy in the home country; Lack of medical procedures in the home country; No long waiting list; high medical quality. From the findings of this research, four factors affect Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction: medical care services, medical quality, medical environment and Costs. And the medical quality is the most significant factor.

As the medical tourism industry has enormous competitive pressures, the medical providers have to deal with the stronger competition from local enterprises and overseas

healthcare market in the future. Medical tourists' satisfaction has become a vital factor to influence the medical tourism industry because it decides whether medical tourists consume for the next time and drives their positive recommendations. Hence, the medical service providers and managers could gain some information regarding the factors which affect the satisfaction of Chinese medical tourists in Thailand, and then formulate effective strategies to improve market competition ability.



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## Appendix 1

Interview some related medical managers or staffs by asking some predetermined questions in some representative hospitals in Bangkok. The key questions are as below:

1. What major medical procedures that they provide for mainland Chinese medical tourists?
2. Which types of medical procedures are most popular for Chinese medical tourists?
3. What medical services this hospital or clinic offers to Chinese medical tourists?  
Are any prompt services provided for Chinese medical tourists?
4. How Chinese medical tourists know and choose their hospitals or clinics to seek healthcare?
5. What you think are the determinants that influence Chinese medical tourists' satisfaction during they received medical treatments in your hospitals or clinics?
6. How to evaluate medical facilities and services of in their own hospitals or clinics?
7. Could you give some suggestions about how to improve medical tourists' satisfaction in this hospitals or clinics?

All above interview questions can provides a general information regarding Chinese medical tourists in medical services in Thailand.



## Appendix 2

Interview Chinese medical tourists who had received medical treatments in Thailand: Semi-structured in-depth interviews was used through asking participants some specific questions. The form of questions can become flexible. The key questions are as below:

1. How many times you have been Thailand for medical tourism?
2. What medical treatment you have received in Thailand?
3. Why you choose the medical treatment in Thailand?
4. Which hospital or clinics you choose? Why?
5. How do you get the information about Thai medical tourism? Whether through middlemen or by yourself?
6. How do you feel the whole process of your medical tourism? (Before receive treatments; during treatments; after treatments)
7. How important of the medical services quality in the hospital which you sought healthcare?
8. How do you think of the medical facilities like technology, infrastructure in that hospital?
9. Do you think environment like geographical position, culture, government policy supporting also affect your satisfaction of medical tourism?
10. Which is the most vital factor affects your satisfaction in the medical tourism?
11. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the medical tourism?  
There are five levels: Very dissatisfied; Somewhat dissatisfied; Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; Somewhat satisfied; very satisfied.
12. Would you like recommend other people to receive medical treatments in Thailand?
13. Could you give the medical tourism providers some suggestions to improve medical tourists' satisfaction in medical services in Thailand?

## VITA

XIYUAN ZHAO, a graduate student at Chulalongkorn University, major in Southeast Asian Studies. She comes from China. She did her undergraduate degree in Tourism Management at Yunnan Nationalities University. She was interested in researching the tourism field. A diverse range of hobbies in her daily life, like playing the violin, singing, exercise.

