

Promoting Sri Lankan cuisine to the world: lessons from Thailand

Amalini Fernando

Department of International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya
amalinifernando@gmail.com

Intangible cultural heritage plays a major role in cultural public diplomacy and nation branding. In recent years, gastro diplomacy has emerged as a particularly successful public diplomacy initiative, not only because food and drink are a central part of human life, but also because the concept of gastro diplomacy encompasses culture, tradition, authenticity and sustainability. By promoting one's national culinary heritage, countries raise national brand awareness, encourage economic investment and trade, and engage in a cultural and personal level with the public. While many countries have initiated state-sponsored gastro diplomacy campaigns, Thailand's success remains unmatched. The strategies implemented by the Thai government were manifold and involved many national institutes including state ministries, media and advertising organizations, finance and educational institutes. This research advances the argument that as a matter of public diplomacy policy, Sri Lanka should establish its gastro diplomacy campaign drawing on the successful Thai model to market its distinct food culture. By doing so Sri Lanka can attain immense cultural and economic benefits; foster cultural diplomacy, boost tourism and generate export revenue. Having an exotic cuisine, Sri Lanka has an unexplored potential to become a leader in gastro diplomacy. However, like most of the countries, Sri Lanka has overlooked the role of food in foreign policy even though food and cuisine are ideal elements to promote through cultural diplomacy. This research surveys the different approaches made by Thailand in its gastro diplomacy campaign and Sri Lanka's potential to follow Thailand's footsteps in branding Sri Lankan cuisine globally. It also outlines policy recommendations to increase brand recognition, increase diplomatic efforts, and engage the private and state sector enterprises to promote a new Sri Lankan national brand identity based on cuisine.

Keywords: *Gastrodiplomacy, Sri Lankan cuisine, Public diplomacy, Thailand*