FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE VISITORS' DINING EXPERIENCES WITH THAI CUISINE IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Abstract

For an increasing number of visitors, dining out at their destinations is an important part of their travel experience. With the rising trend in local cuisine, many destinations are focusing on food as their core tourism product. Therefore, food providers in tourist markets should understand how visitors respond to the dining experiences they offer, in order to better meet their needs and expectations. Thailand has the potential to be a top destination for culinary tourism. Visitors seek unforgettable experiences of exotic food and drink imbued with the essence of Thai culture. Nevertheless, there has been a lack of empirical study into the food experiences of Chinese visitors, with regard to the consumption of Thai food. Many studies involving tourists' food experiences have appeared in areas other than food tourism. The goal of this study was to explore factors influencing the satisfaction and behavioral intentions of Chinese visitors with regard to Thai food. The questionnaire was developed to include 38 potential factors influencing the dining experience, with respondents being asked to rate their perception of Thai cuisine. 400 questionnaires were sent to Chinese visitors in Bangkok. The results provide strong evidence that food image, cultural aspects of food, perceived price, and travel characteristics of the travel party, have significant influences on overall satisfaction. This study also confirms that overall satisfaction is strongly associated with behavioral intentions. This paper may serve as a guide for future studies in this area. It may also help TAT to develop a national culinary tourism strategy, and for practitioners in the food service sector to realize that certain customer expectations necessitate improvements in customer service.

Keywords: Chinese visitors, Food experiences, Thai cuisine, Bangkok Thailand

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INTRODUCTION

The general public, especially the new generation, have become more and more interested in food, resulting in the increased popularity of food tourism (GlobalData, 2018). Food tourism is dissimilar from common tourism in that it emphasizes the culinary experience, including foods and drinks that are authentic and locally produced. Tourists have begun travelling across the world to sample products and unfamiliar foods, rather than to do simple sightseeing (WFTA, 2018). For the tourists, food is now a primary motivation for picking out their destinations. Tourists are spending more time and money on unique food and drink experiences. Social media plays a role in driving interest in, and enthusiasm for food experiences. Guests are posting pictures of food and drink on social media and messaging their unique food experience rather than pictures of a new pair of shoes. Food tourism is extremely popular among millennials who desire to try new things. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are the tools they use to share their food experiences. This is vital, as, according to the World Food Travel Association (WFTA, 2018), food and beverage account for 15%-35% of the money spent by tourists. It is also beneficial for visitors to expand their world view by trying new local foods.

Furthermore, the culinary tourism industry is now a significant force in the global economy. In a survey by UNWTO in 2012, 88.2% of visitors agreed that food is a major component in their choice of vacation destination, as well as in their vacation activities. Recently, the WTTC's Economic Impact Report (2017) indicates that travel and tourism generate $2.3 trillion in the worldwide economy. This indicates the significance of the cash flow that culinary tourists can generate. According to a Hotels.com survey, food is particularly important in the Chinese demographic (Hallanan, 2018). Certain destinations have an advantage in attracting Chinese visitors because of the uniqueness of their local food. According to statistics from the China National Tourism Administration, over 100 million Chinese visitors are now going overseas every year. The number is estimated to hit 156 million by 2020 (Güler, 2019). In addition, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports permanent secretary, Pongpanu Svetarundra, Chinese tourists brought more than 520 billion Baht in revenue to Thailand in 2017 (Bianji, 2018). Using their drinking and eating preferences is a prime opportunity to welcome them, as there is a connection between food and tourism. For instance, Hall and Sharples (2003), and Croce and Perri (2010) focus on the connection between food and tourism in the context of the development of the new wine tourism industry reflecting the new but rapidly growing public interest in fine wines. This study will look at how food tourism encompasses food image, culture, and

history, and how it plays an essential part in the country's economic growth.

Bangkok is the most popular destination for Chinese tourists (Post Reporters, 2019). Their is growing attention for food as an area of interest in tourism, with food tourism recently becoming a trend in the tourism industry, as it allows tourists to explore local culture through their culinary experiences. Understanding the behaviors and motivation factors behind food tourism can help Thailand to create true culinary experiences for culinary tourists.

Food is becoming a major factor in attracting, entertaining, and satisfying tourists. Once this phenomenon is more widely understood, food will be considered a source of income as a product, rather than merely as a service which provides a nice vocation memory. Emotional connections with dishes or ingredients may be treated or managed through food exhibits for tourists. The definition of the industry is likely to emphasize the "exotic" quality of food that is necessary for tourism. Nielsen (2018) states that because many consumers today are excited about their food choices, food manufacturers and restaurants alike must be aware of the rising demand, and that the food presented should be unique, high quality and memorable.

The goal of this study is to explore factors influencing the satisfaction and behavioral intentions of Chinese tourists, with regard to their dining experiences. Much of the research investigating visitor dining experience has appeared in areas other than food tourism. Little research examines visitors' dining experiences with fine dining restaurants at tourist destinations. Additionally, very little is known about how Chinese tourists perceive their dining experiences. Most food tourism studies have been undertaken in Western countries, including Italy (Nilsson et al., 2011), South Africa (du Rand and Heath, 2006), Canada (Hashimoto and Telfer, 2006; Ignatov and Smith, 2006), the USA (Kim et al., 2009) and England (Everett and Aitchison, 2008). Recently, studies in the culinary tourism field have also been seen in Asia, including Hong Kong (Kivela and Crotts, 2005; McKercher et al., 2008; Okumus et al., 2007), Singapore (Chaney and Ryan, 2012; Henderson et al., 2012), and Taiwan (Horng et al., 2012). Principles and practices must be revised in light of findings from developed countries (Henderson, 2009). However, there has been a lack of empirical study investigating the food experiences of Chinese visitors, especially with regard to the consumption of Thai food in their destinations. This brings up the question of whether food genuinely plays an important role for Chinese visitors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food tourism research has been done in various disciplines including economics, marketing, regional development, nutrition, economics, tourism, anthropology, psychology, and other social sciences. Hence, it is difficult to define "food tourism".

As food tourism has become more popular, more researchers have begun dedicating time to the investigation of the relationship between food and a particular tourism destination, e.g. food tourism, culinary tourism, and gastronomy tourism.

According to the definition by Hall and Sharples (2003), food tourism is a collection of food-related establishments or experiences that can attract visitors to travel to a particular destination. Meanwhile, it was Long (2004) who first coined the term "culinary tourism" in 1998, to express the idea of experiencing other cultures through food and, incidentally, wine. Wolf (2002, p. 20) however, defines culinaria and gastronomy tourism as "travel in order to search for, and enjoy prepared food and drink . . . and unique and memorable gastronomic experiences". Culinary tourism refers to "any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional, or national cuisine, heritage, culture, traditions or culinary techniques" (OCTA, 2018, p. 8).

Food has always been an element of tourism and has actually gained recognition as an important aspect of the tourist experience, both in the social and cultural significance of food (Cook and Crang, 1996), and in the role of food in tourists' experiences (Hall and Sharples, 2003, pp. 1-2). Food and drink create lasting memories. Thus, it is a key element in terms of tourism marketing and in determining visitor satisfaction, as well as an important part of hospitality studies.

This study is conceptually based on Woodside and Dubelaar's (2002) theory of Tourism Consumption Systems (TCS). TCS is a set of related travel thoughts, decisions, and behaviors. The present framework is adapted from Cutler and Carmichael's (2010) and Yuan's (2009) models of influential external factors of visitor experiences, and Mak et al.'s (2012) model of influential factors of visitors' food consumption in tourism. Based on Woodside and Dubelaar's (2002) TCS, the framework acknowledges that the thoughts, emotions, and behavior of visitors emerge from one stage of the dining experience, and affect the thoughts, emotions, and behavior that evolve at subsequent dining stages. This study provides the outcomes of visitor experience in the post-dining stage. Hypotheses are proposed regarding food image, the cultural aspects of food, travel characteristics, perceived price, overall satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.

Furthermore, food is an integral part of tourism, and is considered as a tourism product provided at specific destinations. Prior studies in the field of tourism have been conducted on several food-related issues. According to Frochot (2003) and McKercher et al. (2008), the use of food imagery has been included in destination marketing.

The cultural aspects of food pertain to the visitor food culture and the prevailing food culture in the destination, such as cooking methods, food preparation and ways to eat food

(Mak et al., 2012). These also include the authenticity of the food, such as authentic taste, presentation, ways of eating, and the hygiene and freshness of ingredients used, as well as the decor (Batra, 2008; Choi and Zhao, 2010; Ha and Jang, 2010). Likewise, it has been argued that both food and the physical environment are cultural presentations and can influence the overall experience of the destination by creating a connection with the host culture (Sparks et al., 2003). Consuming food is a part of experiencing the local culture (du Rand et al., 2003; Quan and Wang, 2004; Tikkanen, 2007). However, prior research has indicated that for visitors who travel to a particular destination, aspects related to food culture and authenticity appear to be significant when they engage in local or traditional food dining experiences (Chang et al., 2011; Jalis et al., 2009; Karim & Chi, 2010; Karim et al., 2009). Therefore, Thai food is an essential part of the national culture.

Several previous studies have pointed out that the socio-demographic and travel characteristics of tourists play a significant role in shaping tourism dining experiences (Hong et al., 1996; Kim et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012; Mattila, 2000; Shenoy, 2005; Tse and Crotts, 2005). Attributes like the visitor's purpose of travel, frequency of visits, length of visits, and aspects of the travel party are used to measure travel characteristics.

Han and Ryu (2009) found that the effect of price perception on consumers' behavior, tends to have an impact in the restaurant industry as it is not identified by the customers' experiences.

According to Lee (2004), customer satisfaction is an essential indicator of customers' current and future needs, which must be met in order to improve customer retention. Customer loyalty and satisfaction can be affected by food. Customer satisfaction helps to develop tourism, as satisfied customers are more likely to revisit a destination.

Another important reason to study dining experiences is to be able to predict future market trends. The future behavior of a satisfied customer will include intentions to experience Thai food during future visits to the same destination. Also, there has been continued willingness to recommend Thai dining experiences to others. The above considerations from previous literature and TCS have led to the following research hypotheses.

H1: Food image will have a positive effect on overall satisfaction with Thai food consumption.

H2: The cultural aspects of food will have a positive effect on overall satisfaction with Thai food consumption.

H3: Travel characteristics will have a positive effect on overall satisfaction with Thai food consumption.

H4: Perceived price will have a positive effect on overall satisfaction with Thai food consumption.

H5: Overall satisfaction with Thai food consumption will

have a positive effect on visitors' future behavioral intentions.

H6: Food image will have a positive effect on visitors' future behavioral intentions.

H7: Cultural aspects of food will have a positive effect on visitors' future behavioral

intentions.

H8: Travel characteristics will have a positive effect on visitors' future behavioral intentions.

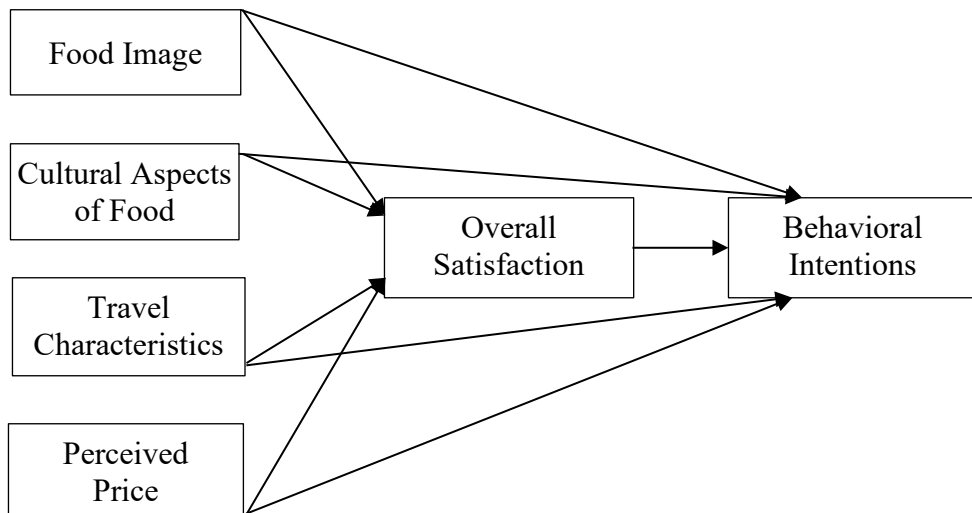**H9:** Perceived price will have a positive effect on visitors' future behavioral intentions.

Fig. 1: Research Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey was applied as the method for gathering data in order to achieve the objectives of the study. The population used in the research comprised of Chinese visitors from overseas who eat out at Thai fine dining restaurants, including both individuals and those travelling as part of a group tour. In an infinite (unknown) population, each number has no probability for an equal chance of being chosen. The number was

therefore selected by convenience sampling (Cavana et al., 2001). The simplified form of Cochran's (1977) sample size formula for an infinite population was taken into consideration during the study, and the necessary sample size was determined as 384 persons based on the Cochran formula. In order to obtain reliable data, the sample size was increased to 400 Chinese visitors in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Six variables were rated on a five-point Likert type scale

ranging from 1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23) was employed in the data analysis. The questionnaire was developed with expert opinion and guidance from related prior studies (e.g. Hanaysha, 2016; Wijaya, 2014; Yong et al., 2013). During content analysis, the questionnaire's measurement items were assessed by three experts, as well as being tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the factors that had been developed. In addition, regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses of the main effects.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to confirm the "construct validity" of each latent variable placed in the model. The results indicated that the measurement model provided a good fit to the data as per Hooper et al.'s 2008 guidelines (Table 1). The latent variables were tested for congruence with the empirical data, as well as composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), using CFA statistics, as shown in Table 2.

Internal consistency analysis was carried out to measure the reliability of the items under each scale using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.685 to 0.975. The minimum advisable alpha value for established scales is 0.70, although this can be reduced to 0.6 for new scales developed in exploratory research (Nunnally, 1978). Overall, the alpha values demonstrate that the constructs have relatively high reliability scores, as presented in Table 3.

Table 1: Fit indices for the measurement models

Indices	χ^2 /df	p-value	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	RMESA	RMR
Criteria	≤ 2.00	≥ 0.05	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≤ 0.05	≤ 0.05
Food Image	1.943	0.072	0.99	0.97	0.99	0.99	0.048	0.020
Cultural Aspects of Food	1.079	0.370	0.99	0.98	1.00	0.99	0.014	0.016
Perceived Price	1.331	0.089	0.98	0.99	1.00	0.99	0.029	0.004
Overall Satisfaction	1.167	0.320	1.00	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.020	0.003
Behavioral Intention	1.342	0.193	0.99	0.99	1.00	0.99	0.000	0.007

Table 2: Factor loadings, t-value, R^2, CR, and AVE of Food Image, Cultural Aspects of Food, Perceived Price, Overall Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions

Variables	B	SE	t-value	R^2	CR	AVE
Food Image					0.80	0.67
Thai restaurants have a welcoming environment and unique style of decoration.	0.59	-----	-----	0.34		
The staff at Thai restaurants are friendly towards guests.	0.62	0.10	9.47**	0.38		
Thai food has a unique image.	0.66	0.11	9.28**	0.44		
Thai food has a reputation for quality.	0.64	0.12	9.06**	0.40		
The staff at Thai restaurants always put guests first.	0.74	0.12	7.78**	0.29		
Thai cuisine is a healthy food choice.	0.72	0.13	9.32**	0.52		
Cultural Aspects of Food					0.81	0.62
The food has an original taste.	0.75	-----	-----	0.56		
Authentically spicy food.	0.70	0.07	12.49**	0.48		
Spiciness modified for usual taste.	0.55	0.07	10.21**	0.31		
The food appeared exotic (unique and different).	0.66	0.08	12.06**	0.43		
Food uses familiar ingredients.	0.64	0.07	11.77**	0.41		
Culturally unique way of cooking the food.	0.62	0.07	11.37**	0.38		
Culturally unique way of presenting the food.	0.68	0.09	10.87**	0.46		
Culturally unique way of eating the food.	0.67	0.07	11.38**	0.45		
Perceived Price					0.77	0.52
Happy with the price.	0.72	-----	-----	0.51		
Satisfied with the price.	0.66	0.08	12.10**	0.43		
Price is as expected.	0.60	0.08	11.08**	0.36		
Pleasantly surprised by the price.	0.64	0.04	11.79**	0.42		
Price is questionable.	0.61	0.07	10.18**	0.38		
Price is poor value for money.	0.63	0.07	11.72**	0.40		
Price is a rip-off.	0.56	0.08	10.32**	0.32		
Price feels right.	0.67	0.08	12.19**	0.45		
Price is justified.	0.66	0.07	12.24**	0.44		
Price is reasonable.	0.58	0.07	10.73**	0.34		
The food has a fair price.	0.58	0.08	10.08**	0.34		
Overall Satisfaction					0.78	0.55
The cuisine experienced in Thailand met my expectations.	0.78	—	—	0.61		

The cuisine experienced in Thailand was more authentic than that in other destinations.	0.82	0.06	16.87**	0.68		
The cuisine experienced in Thailand surpassed my expectations.	0.79	0.07	15.86**	0.63		
I would recommend others to visit Thailand to experience the cuisine.	0.78	0.06	15.90**	0.60		
I had a positive overall satisfaction with the cuisine in Thailand.	0.79	0.07	13.31**	0.63		
Behavioral Intentions					0.85	0.65
I have the intention to savor the same food at a Thai restaurant.	0.70	-----	-----	0.49		
I will recommend Thai cuisine to others.	0.74	0.08	12.39**	0.54		
I would like to try other types of Thai food.	0.75	0.07	11.74**	0.56		
I would consider going to a Thai restaurant as my first choice.	0.54	0.07	9.36**	0.29		
I would continue to come to this restaurant even if there is an increase in food prices.	0.68	0.07	11.92**	0.46		
I would encourage my family or friends to go to a Thai restaurant.	0.63	0.07	10.89**	0.39		
I would highly recommended Thai food to others.	0.67	0.07	10.36**	0.43		
My likelihood of visiting Thai restaurants in the future (based on my experience with the cuisine).	0.61	0.07	10.25**	0.38		

** P-value < 0.01 (t-value $\geq$ 2.58)

----- No report of SE and t-value due to a Fixed Parameter

Table 3: Reliability analysis

	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Food Image	0.690	6
Food Cultural-related Aspect	0.774	8
Perceived Price	0.685	11
Overall Satisfaction	0.975	5
Behavioral Intention	0.814	8

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Demographics of Participants in This Study

400 questionnaires were handed out to Chinese visitors in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Of the 400 responses, 53.8% (215) of the respondents were male and 46.2% (185) were female. Their ages ranged from 20 to 65 years old. 45% (180) of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 34, followed by 30%

(120) aged between 35 and 44, 10.2% (41) aged 20 years and under, 8% (32) aged 45 to 54, 6% (24) aged between 55 and 64, and 0.8% (3) aged 65 years or above. Educational background of the respondents ranged from secondary school to master's level, with the majority (62%, 248) of respondents having a Bachelor's degree, and approximately only 3.5% (14) having only a high school diploma. Regarding employment status, the largest proportion of respondents were employed (45.2%, 181), followed by self-employed (24.5%, 98), students (23%, 92), retired (6.8%, 27) and unemployed (0.5%, 2). Table 2 presents the correlation matrix and descriptive statistics of the measures.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables. The mean and SD scores of the variables are arranged in descending order (highest to lowest) as follows: overall satisfaction (M = 4.00, SD = 0.915), food image (M = 3.83, SD = 0.606), cultural aspects of food (M = 3.70, SD = 0. 614), behavioral intentions (M = 3.64, SD = 0.670), and perceived price (M = 3.63, SD = 0.483). The Pearson product moment correlation method was applied to evaluate the relationships. The results of the correlation among drivers ranged from 0.336 to 0.596, as shown in Table 4. This indicates that many of the variables have a low correlation with each other. Furthermore, the issue of multicollinearity does not arise when the correlations between the independent variables are less than 0.8 (Gujarati and Porter, 2008; Maddala, 1988).

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses of the study. Multiple regression analyses were utilized to examine the influence

Table 4: Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation matrix of the study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. FM	3.83	0.606	1				
2. FC	3.70	0.614	0.596^{**}	1			
3. PR	3.63	0.483	0.336^{**}	0.354^{**}	1		
4. OS	4.00	0.915	0.394^{**}	0.339^{**}	0.367^{**}	1	
5. BI	3.64	0.670	0.516^{**}	0.498^{**}	0.467^{**}	0.486^{**}	1

Notes: * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
   ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
   FM= Food Image; FC= Cultural Aspects of Food; PR= Perceived Price; OS= Overall Satisfaction; BI= Behavioral Intentions.

on overall satisfaction. Table 5 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to test the four factors in respect of overall satisfaction. The results indicated that among the four factors, food image (β = 0.337, p< 0.01), the cultural aspects of food (β = 0.185, p< 0.05), perceived price (β = 0.489, p< 0.01), and the travel characteristics (categorical) of the travel party (p< 0.05), including 'main purpose', 'frequency of visit to Thailand', 'length of current visit', and 'travel party', were all significant predictors of overall satisfaction, thereby supporting H1, H2, H3, and H4. All independent variables had a significant effect on the prediction of overall satisfaction. The R squared value indicates that 28.7 percent of the variation in Chinese visitors' overall satisfaction with Thai food can be explained by the four factors. The one-way ANOVA indicates that the model is useful for future prediction (F = 10.281; p < 0.01), thus, fitness of the model was confirmed. Food image, the cultural aspects of food, perceived price and the travel characteristics of the travel party have influence over Chinese visitors' overall satisfaction with Thai food

Table 5: Results of Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4

Variable	β	*t*-value	*p*-value
FM	0.337	3.868	0.000**
FC	0.185	2.171	0.031*
M1	0.029	0.086	0.931
M2	-0.221	-0.622	0.535
M3	-0.031	-0.087	0.931
M4	-0.021	-0.056	0.955
F1	-0.109	-0.715	0.475
F2	0.051	0.360	0.719
L1	0.637	3.615	0.000**
L2	0.240	1.799	0.073
L3	0.468	3.071	0.002**
T1	-0.309	-1.995	0.047*
T2	-0.335	-2.300	0.022*
T3	-0.394	-2.471	0.014*
PR	0.489	5.301	0.000**

Notes: R = 0.535; $R^2 = 0.287$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.259$
　　　　Significant levels at *p< 0.05 and **p< 0.01
FM = Food Image; FC = Cultural Aspects of Food; M1 = Holiday, M2 = Business, M3 = Visit friends/relatives, M4 = Educational/cultural exchange, F1 = First time visiting Thailand, F2 = 2-3 Previous visits, L1 = Less than 3 days, L2 = 4-7 days, L3 = 1-2 weeks, T1 = Alone, T2 = Couple, T3 = Family; PR = Perceived Price.

consumption

It is noted that, as shown in Table 6, there is a strong association between overall satisfaction and behavioral intentions (p< 0.01). The results of the data analysis showed that customer satisfaction has a significant impact on behavioral intentions (β = 0.356, p< 0.01). The evidence from Table 4 supports H5; the higher the Chinese visitors' overall satisfaction with Thai food consumption, the higher their likeliness to have the intention to revisit the same destination, and the higher their willingness to recommend it to others.

As presented in Table 7, a Chinese visitor's perception of the four factors influences their likeliness to have a behavioral intension for Thai food (p < 0.01). The predictive factors that drive behavioral intentions are food image (β = 0.278, p< 0.01), the cultural aspects of food (β = 0.231, p< 0.01), and perceived price (β = 0.453, p< 0.01); this supports H6, H7, and H9.

Table 6: Results of Hypothesis 5

Variable	β	*t*-value	*p*-value
OS	0.356	11.083	0.000**

Notes: R = 0.486; R^2 = 0.236; Adjusted R^2 = 0.234
 Significant levels at *p*< 0.05 and **p*< 0.01

Table 7: Results of Hypotheses H6, H7, H8, and H9

Variable	β	*t*-value	*p*-value
FM	0.278	4.915	0.000**
FC	0.231	4.172	0.000**
M1	-0.061	-0.275	0.783
M2	0.014	0.062	0.951
M3	-0.156	-0.682	0.496
M4	-0.006	-0.023	0.981
F1	-0.239	-2.397	0.017*
F2	-0.066	-0.719	0.472
L1	-0.027	-0.233	0.816
L2	-0.032	-0.374	0.708
L3	-0.063	-0.637	0.525
T1	-0.256	-2.538	0.012*
T2	-0.181	-1.902	0.058
T3	-0.106	-1.021	0.308
PR	0.453	7.540	0.000**

Notes: R = 0.660; R^2 = 0.436; Adjusted R^2 = 0.414
 Significant levels at *p*< 0.05 and **p*< 0.01

DISCUSSION

Findings regarding Chinese visitors' perceptions indicate that food image, the cultural aspects of food, perceived price, and the travel characteristics of the travel party, all have a positive relationship with the overall satisfaction of visitors with Thai restaurants. This is aligned with the findings of Gagić et al. (2013), Hanaysha (2016), Herrmann et al. (2007), and Kaura (2012), which indicated that price fairness has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction, while Rahman et al. (2012) also found that high prices correlate with negative feelings. Hence, Thai food providers and restaurateurs should pay attention to food image, the cultural aspects of the food they serve, and prices, as these features will influence the satisfaction of Chinese visitors. Overall satisfaction with Thai restaurants also influences consumers' behavioral intentions. This is consistent with prior findings (e.g. Weiss, 2003) that overall satisfaction with a restaurant predicts a consumer's behavioral intentions in terms of revisiting. In another study in the service industry, a guest's intention to revisit was found to be a positive function of satisfaction (Han et al., 2009).

Moreover, the results suggest that when it comes to influencing behavioral intentions, food image, the cultural aspects of food, and perceived price, are major factors. Nowadays, changes in customer expectations and customer satisfaction are very important. Managers should measure

customer satisfaction on a regular basis in order to adjust practices, when needed, and ensure a better experience for customers. A high level of customer satisfaction leads to high levels of repeat support from current customers (Yüksel and Yüksel, 2002).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has recognized the increasing importance of studying visitors' dining experiences with local food. Food experiences help tourists to connect with their travel destinations. Famous local restaurants have a history, legends, and stories which make tourists feel that they have arrived at a place of significance, and that they can be a part of it. Visitor perception is an important factor affecting travel decisions and travel revisit intentions. Therefore, this study has both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to tourism marketing literature by providing a holistic view of the perceptions of Chinese tourists' Thai cuisine experiences. Given the current lack of studies on the visitor dining experience, the research has enhanced the conceptualization of dining experience and included influencing factors that shape the dining experience, particularly with regard to Chinese visitors and Thai cuisine. The results suggest that food image, the cultural aspects of food, perceived price, and the travel characteristics of the travel party are important variables influencing

Chinese visitors' dining experiences. Therefore, the local government should pay more attention to its cultural characteristics as it may help to promote cross-cultural awareness and understanding between Thai people and Chinese tourists in a food tourism context.

These findings have a number of practical implications. This research is intended to help local governments, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), restaurant managers, and restauranteurs to define marketing strategies to identify, protect, and sufficiently promote aspects of food tourism in Thailand. Marketers and food service providers should capitalize on food image, the cultural aspects of food, perceived price, and the travel characteristics of the travel party in promoting a destination, as well as their respective culinary establishments, through the use of Thai cuisine. It is important for the food service industry to maintain food image, the cultural aspects of the food, their prices, and to consider the travel characteristics of the travel party to create high destination satisfaction in the experiences of tourists.

As local food is increasingly important in differentiating and positioning destinations (Horng and Tsai, 2010), destinations could use local cuisine as their unique brand image, affecting tourists' future behavioral intentions (Horng et al., 2012). Also, local cuisine can play an important role in influencing the visitors' long-term relationship with the destination. Thailand has a wide range of culinary offerings with rich natural resources and a great potential for growth of this niche in the tourism industry. The government can work with TAT and the food service industry to develop a national culinary tourism strategy. Strategies to create competitive advantages for Thai culinary tourism which relate to this study, are creating food image to increase tourist loyalty and keep ahead of Thai food trends among foreign tourists, promoting the cultural aspects of food allowing tourists to realize the importance of unique local culture, focusing more on the travel characteristics of the travel party, and improving the perceived price for tourist purchases as the low cost in Thailand is compared to the quality of products and services. This national strategy can then capitalize on the rising trend of food tourism (especially among millennials) and generate new and additional commercial and domestic opportunities.

An in-depth understanding of the factors influencing Chinese visitors' dining experiences is, thus, extremely beneficial to the tourism industry in providing the appropriate tourism dining experiences for tourists that can lead to tourists' overall satisfaction and behavioral intentions. This value extends to TAT or to the food service industry in developing and promoting food and drink, and associated events or activities. This study can also encourage the exploration of new food tourist markets and perhaps even the promotion of each region of Thailand through its own culinary tradition. As

such, destinations would be able to diversify their unique restaurant food offerings and raise the number of long-term visitors, as well as raising tourism revenue in the destination.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that the study has the following limitations. Firstly, the data were gathered from Chinese visitors in Bangkok only. Thus, the findings may not generalize to other provinces. Future studies can research different tourism destinations with a different sample or population, no doubt with varied results. Secondly, another limitation of the study is that the results cannot be utilized in all services sectors. It is focused only on Thai dining restaurants. Future research should replicate this study for other types of restaurants. Additionally, future research that includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches should also be carried out.

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