Dining Trajectories of The Chinese Tourists in Australia

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Outline

- Introduction
- Literature review
  - Tourist food preference
  - Factors affecting tourists’ food choice
  - Chinese food culture
- Methodology
- Research findings
  - Chinese tourists’ food preferences
  - Attributes in evaluating dining experiences
  - Typology of Chinese tourists dining behavior
- Implications and recommendations
Development of gastronomic experience in tourism

- Dining opportunity is a chance to get to know local food and people (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2011).

- Travel dining experience can be interpreted as a ‘peak touristic’ experience, instead of merely being a ‘supporting’ experience (Quan & Wang, 2004).

- Travel dining experience and local gastronomy have been promoted as a combined “attractions” (Mak, et al, 2013).
Tourism Australia is one of the destination marketer in the vanguard of gastronomy tourism (Kivela & Crotts, 2006).

“There’s nothing like Australia”: highlight Australia’s authentic local food and wine experience.
The significance of Chinese tourists market to Australia tourism

- China was Australia’s second largest inbound market for visitor arrivals and the largest market for total visitor expenditure and visitor nights (Tourism Australia, 2015).
- Nearly half of Chinese tourists consider Australian food and wine as top Australian attraction (46%) and most preferred Australian experiences (42%).
Local food can be an ‘impediment’ if it violates with tourists’ palate (Cohen & Avieli, 2004).

Challenge of how to present local cuisine as an attraction.

The awareness of Chinese tourists’ thinking and behaviour thus become vital
- Different food preferences and dining behaviour
- Evaluate local food and travel dining experience.
Tourist food preference

- **Flavour principles:** determine which foods and food qualities are acceptable in terms of their sensory properties (Prescott, Young, O’Neil, Yau & Stevens, 2002).

- Culture defines how food is coded into the “acceptable”, “exotic”, “edible”, and “palatable” categories in a particular cultural group (Long, 2004).

- Cultural influence is recognized as a major determinant of food preference (Khan, 1981; Longue, 1991).
Factors affecting tourists’ food choice

- **Motivational factors**
  - Novelty vs. familiarity
  - Food neophobia and neophilic tendencies (Fischler, 1988).

- **Marketing communication**
  - Gastronomic image: influence on tourists’ expectations on what food should be eaten in a destination.
Chinese food culture

- China is a large country with great regional diversity, its food culture has become extremely diverse.
- The degree of exposure to Western culture varies among the regions.
General characteristic of Chinese food culture (1/2)

- “Have you eaten yet?” – Greeting each other
- Proper meal – ‘fan’ (rice and other starch foods) and ‘ts’ai’ (vegetable and meat dishes).

I love the Chinese words for greeting: not strictly ‘Hello’ but ‘Have you eaten yet?’ — Rick Stein —
**General characteristic of Chinese food culture (2/2)**

- **Medicinal values of Chinese food**
  - ‘*yin*’ and ‘*yang*’ balance.
  - The concept of *yin* and *yang* is often referred in the selection of dishes in order to maintain one’s ‘*chi*’ balance.

- **Symbolic meanings of Chinese food**
  - the word for ‘fish’ refers to ‘surplus’
  - the symbolic meaning of food plays an auspicious role when served on special occasions and celebrations.
Eating out in Chinese culture

- An essential part of building informal and formal relationships

- ‘Face’: the Chinese will choose restaurant according to guest’s status

- A round table with a revolving stand in the centre ensuring that guests are able to take a selection of foods as they please.

- Freshness of food and food temperature are the key quality attributes
Methodology
Methodology

- Ethnographic approach
- Data collection methods
  - Focus group interview
    - a small group discussion approach (3-5 tourists).
  - On-site participant observation
    - Carried out from the commencements of the trip and ended until the last day of the trip.
    - Each meal was observed including the breakfast.
# Sample selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mainland China Group</th>
<th>Hong Kong Group</th>
<th>Taiwan Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of participants</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration of the tour</strong></td>
<td>8 days</td>
<td>10 days</td>
<td>8 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel itinerary</strong></td>
<td>Sydney→Gold Coast→Brisbane→Cairns</td>
<td>Cairns→Gold Coast→Brisbane→Sydney→Melbourne</td>
<td>Brisbane→Sydney→Melbourne→Gold Coast→Brisbane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Meal arrangement**      | • Chinese restaurants occupied most of the meals  
                          • Two meals in Western buffet style  
                          • Sydney Fishery Market | • Two meals in Chinese restaurants  
                          • Australian BBQ restaurants  
                          • Western buffet  
                          • Sydney Fishery Market  
                          • Free choice dining activities | • Chinese restaurants occupied most of the meals  
                          • Australian BBQ restaurants  
                          • Australian seafood buffet  
                          • Italian restaurant |
Research Findings
Chinese tourists’ food preferences

- Chinese food
- Local food
- Non-fastidious on food selection
Chinese food

□ Core eating behaviour

‘. . .I won’t miss the chance to try it [Australian local food] out. . . It’s a long trip. How could I eat local food every day? I’ll definitely be drawn back to my original dietary habit (sic). . ..’” (HK-P2)

□ Appetizing assurance

‘. . .I didn’t know the name of the pasta we had [at lunch], but anyway, it was awful. At that moment, all of a sudden I started to miss the food in Taiwan.” (TW-P3)

□ Familiar flavour
Local food

- Explore local culture
- Authentic travel experience
  - ‘In my opinion, you should eat local food and drink local beer while traveling. That’s what we call ‘genuine’ travel.’ (CH-P2)
- Learning opportunity
- Prestige and status
  - “having been to” the destination
- Reference group influence
- Subjective perception
  - ‘Why do we eat Chinese food again while traveling abroad? We have had enough of it at home. Besides, Chinese cuisine here is not authentic at all. . .’ (CH-P3)
Non-fastidious on food selection

- **Group harmony**
- **Compromise in supporting experience**
  - ‘You can never find a home away from home, where you can have a good sleep and a good meal. . .Therefore, what I’m concerned is not the meals but the quality of the tour.” (TW-P6)
- **Prejudiced advocacy**
  - ‘. . .the tour leader always emphasized that, ‘traveling is to climb the mountain and to enjoy the scenery (sic). You don’t have to be too picky about meals and accommodation,’ but actually, he wanted to convince us that we should lower our expectations on meals and accommodation.” (CH-P2)
Attributes in evaluating of dining experience

- Tourists’ own food culture
- Contextual factor
- Variety and diversity of food
- Perception of the destination
- Service encounter
- Tour guide’s performance
Tourists’ own food culture

- **Flavour**
  - “.Yes, such as kangaroo meat. I was not quite used to it, because I had hardly eaten them before, and it was smelly.” (HK-P4)
  - Participant lacks of knowledge of the local food made it difficult to assess the food quality.

- **Cooking method**
Contextual factor

- **Authenticity**
  - “...I also think it was not as delicious as I've expected, but it was quite an interesting experience.... And I was prepared for the possibility that it might taste bad. Anyway, it reflected the local characteristics. So I wouldn't care much about its taste, I'd just treated it as a new experience.” (HK-P2)

- **Experiential factor**
Variety and diversity of food

- **Variety of dishes**
  - Chinese people place *emphasis on the hospitality spirit and generosity* to others, it is a common practice for them to order many dishes when they dine out with friends or else they would feel a “loss of face” (Wright, Nancarrow, & Kwok, 2001).

- **Diversity of meal arrangement**
  - *Broaden culinary experience*
  - *Increase cultural capital*
Perception of the destination

- **Gastronomic identity**
  - “It is a pity that we didn't have lamb (in our meals)! *In a country with a lot of sheep, how could you believe that there isn't any lamb in our meal arrangements?*” (TW-P8)
  - Whether or not the participant's personal judgment is right or wrong, participants would most likely consume food with a strong gastronomic identity at a destination.

- **Expected service level**
  - “…Being in a modernized country, *I would have higher expectations* on dining and accommodation.” (CH-P2)
Service encounter

- **The pleasure of being served**
  - “Though I am not too concerned with food quality, I will pay special attention to service attitude.” (TW-P6)

- **Communication**
  - It was observed that most of the participants tolerated the communication barrier.

- **The influence of “role script”**
  - “…but I did not appreciate him taking away the dish so soon. For example, while I was waiting for others after I finished my meals, he took away the dishes. It made me felt he was driving us out (of the restaurant) (sic).” (TW-P1)

- **Service speed**
  - Participants did not spend too much time on their meals in Chinese restaurants, yet, they did not mind to spend a longer time in a western restaurant.
Tour guide’s performance

- **Interpretation**
  - “..A good tour guide should be able to give a clear interpretation of everything, not only about tourist attractions, but also about the local food. But the tour guide we had this time was rather uninformed. I really don't know why we ate these foods (sic).” (HK-P6)

- **Culinary broker**
  - Tour guide's recommendations of local delicacies

- **Facilitation**
  - Facilitate the dining experience and to act as a translator if they could not communicate with the service staff.
Attributes in evaluating dining experience

- Tourists’ own food culture
  - Flavour
  - Cooking method
- Contextual factors
  - Authenticity
  - Experiential factor
- Variety and diversity of the food
  - Variety of dishes
  - Diversity of meal arrangement
- Perception of the destination
  - Gastronomic identity
  - Expected service level
  - Pleasure of being served
  - Communication
  - Influence of ‘role script’
  - Service speed
- Service encounter
- Tour guide’s performance
  - Interpretation
  - Culinary broker
  - Facilitation
Typology of Chinese tourists dining behavior

- Browser
- Observer
- Participator
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food consumption motives</th>
<th>- Food choice depends on group’s consensus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude towards dining experience</strong></td>
<td>- Dining experience is not the main concern of travel experience.</td>
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<td>Dining behaviour</td>
<td>- Safety and security are the main concern</td>
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<td>- Prefer to stay under tour guide’s ‘shelter’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation on dining experience</td>
<td>- Passively accept pre-arranged meals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Service attitude</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Tour guide’s performance on facilitating the dining experience</td>
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<td><strong>Role of dining experience to travel experience</strong></td>
<td>Supporting experience</td>
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## Observer

| Food consumption motives          | - Appetizing assurance  
|                                  | - Familiar flavour      |
| Attitude towards dining experience | - Dining experience is a learning experience.  
|                                  | - Learning by observing. |
| Dining behaviour                 | - Look for familiar foods.  
|                                  | - Remain core eating behaviour  
|                                  | - Passively accept pre-arranged meals  
|                                  | - Prefer fusion food      |
| Evaluation on dining experience   | - Food quality  
|                                  | - Sumptuousness  
|                                  | - Dining ambience  
|                                  | - Tour guide’s performance on facilitating the dining experience  
| Role of dining experience to travel experience | Peak touristic experience  |
**Participator**

| **Food consumption motives** | - Explore local culture  
|                            | - Broaden culinary experience  
|                            | - Display prestige  
| **Attitude towards dining experience** | - Dining experience is a learning experience.  
|                             | - Learning by participating.  
| **Dining behaviour** | - Novelty-seeking  
|                           | - Disregard pre-existing dining behaviour  
|                           | - Actively pursue new dining experience  
| **Evaluation on dining experience** | - Variety of food selection  
|                               | - Dining ambience  
|                               | - Correspondence of expectation and perceived meals  
|                               | - Tour guide’s performance on the interpretation of the indigenous food.  
| **Role of dining experience to travel experience** | Peak touristic experience  

Implications and recommendations (1/2)

- **Gastronomic image – iconic dishes**
  - Many Chinese tourists possess initial perceptions toward a destination and its gastronomy. However, the gastronomic image of Australia was not clear to them.
  - Chinese tourists would love to know the iconic dishes.

- **Balance between novelty and familiarity**
  - Most of the Chinese tourists indicated that they preferred to partake of fusion foods between Chinese and indigenous food.

- **Participating experience**
  - Chinese tourists have stated that participation in the dining activities was the most memorable part of their travel dining experience.
Implications and recommendations (2/2)

- Cultural distance
  - Chinese tourists may lack knowledge about Australian food culture which made it difficult for them to savour the authenticity of Australian food.
  - Destination marketers are urged to provide training for the service staff to cater for tourists from different cultural backgrounds.
Thank You!

Q&A

Any questions?