Food Preferences of Chinese Tourists

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike other forms of travel activities and attractions, tourism dining is an art form that gratifies all of the five human senses – vision, tactile, auditory, taste, and olfaction (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). With such an idiosyncratic nature, tourism dining is often considered a sensory pleasure activity that fulfills the experiential part of a holiday experience (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). In addition, food is an essential aspect in understanding the culture of a society, and an important medium for cultural expression (Fieldhouse, 1986). Thus, food comprises a substantial part of the appeal a destination offers. Scarpato (2002) further contends that food satisfies all the conventional requirements of cultural tourism products. Hence, tourism dining has increasingly become a major conduit for tourists to appreciate the local culture of a destination (Kivela & Crotts, 2006).

While it is a widely held belief that food in tourism is a significant "attraction" (Hjalager & Richards, 2002), Cohen and Avieli (2004) however stress that local food at a destination could be an "impediment" under certain circumstances. They point out that local food might become acceptable to tourists only if it is modified to the tourists' palate, and that the confrontation with "strange" and "unfamiliar" local cuisine might present a considerable challenge for some tourists. Indeed, some tourists may suffer from "food neophobia," a concept which refers to human's natural tendency to dislike or suspect new and unfamiliar foods (Pliner & Salvy, 2006). Similarly, Lepp and Gibson (2003) identified "strange food" as one of the seven risk factors perceived by tourists. Hence, destination marketers, hospitality businesses, and tour operators are faced with the challenge of how to appropriately portray

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and present their local cuisine as an attraction and to mitigate the risk that it will be interpreted as an impediment. Such an endeavor requires an in-depth understanding of tourists' different food preferences and dining behaviors (Quan & Wang, 2004).

Nonetheless, despite the central role of dining in the holiday experience, the interface between food and tourism has received scant research attention. Cohen and Avieli (2004, p. 757) underscore that eating and drinking remain "virtually unexplored in the sociological and anthropological study of tourism, notwithstanding their obvious centrality in the experience." Although there is a growing interest in research into food experiences in tourism, Kim, Eves and Scarles (2009) indicate that research on tourist food consumption is at its infancy, and is still establishing its basic tenets. In addition, most of the existing research focus on Western tourists; studies based on non-Western and Asian tourists are scarce. To date, there is no empirical study examining the food preferences and dining behaviors of Chinese tourists, thereby revealing a knowledge gap in understanding this important market segment. Consequently, this study aims to fill part of this gap by investigating Chinese tourists' food preferences while they are holidaying in Australia. The specific objectives of the study include: to explore Chinese tourists' food preferences and the motivational factors underlying such preferences, to develop a typology describing Chinese tourists' tourism dining behaviors, to examine the influences of Chinese food culture on tourists' dining behaviors, and to identify any intergroup disparities in dining behavioral patterns among the Chinese tourists.

TOURIST FOOD PREFERENCE AND DINING BEHAVIOR

Definition of food preference and local food

Food preference in general refers to the selection of one food item over the other (P. Rozin & Vollmecke, 1986). In the context of this study, the term "food preference" is defined as tourists' expressed choice between two or more food items available in the destination. Local food can be defined as food and drink that is produced or grown in the local area or local specialty food that has a local identity (Nummedal & Hall, 2006). It can be differentiated from non-local products in terms of distinct product characteristics, social features and ecological features (Sage, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the term "local food" encompasses the indigenous food in Australia (e.g., kangaroo meat and crocodile meat), food that is locally produced or grown locally, and local specialty food that has a local identity.

Tourist food preference

Various attempts have been made to examine the factors that affect food preference in the general context (Khan, 1981; Randall & Sanjur, 1981; Wright, Nancarrow, & Kwok, 2001). Among the various factors affecting food preference, cultural influence is recognized as a major determinant of food preference (Khan, 1981; Longue, 1991). Culture is an integral part of a people's value system, and thus provides one of the strongest determinants of what and how we eat (Finkelstein, 1998; P. Rozin, 1996). The effects of culture determine which foods and food qualities are acceptable in terms of their sensory properties (Prescott, Young, O'Neill, Yau, & Stevens, 2002). This process is manifested in the existence of culturally-specific "flavor principles" (E. Rozin & Rozin, 1981). According to Rozin and Rozin (1981), basic foods, cooking techniques, and flavor principles are three major factors that differentiate a cuisine, and "flavor principles" refer to the distinctive seasoning combinations which characterize many cuisines. Hence, culture defines how food is coded into the "acceptable," "exotic," "edible," and "palatable" categories in a particular cultural group (Long, 2004; Mäkelä, 2000).

In the context of tourism dining, culture's influence on tourists' food preferences has been supported by a number of studies. For instance, Pizam and Sussmann (1995) found that Japanese, French, and Italians tourists were perceived to avoid local food in the host destination, whereas Americans tourists were perceived to have a slight preference for local food. Although this finding was based on the perceptions of a group of British tour-guides instead of being measured directly from the tourists, it provides tentative evidence that culture can be an influential factor affecting tourists' food preferences. Telfer and Wall (2000) suggest that Asian tourists visiting Indonesia may consume more local dishes whereas Europeans tourists may demand more foreign foods. Torres (2002) states that tourist nationality is a key variable that influences the level of local food consumed by tourists. Cohen and Avieli (2004, p. 775) state that "Asians abroad tend to be less disposed than Westerners to partake of the food of 'others', and are more dependent than the later on establishments providing their own national cuisines." Tse and Crotts (2005) found that national culture is one of the four factors associated with tourists' culinary choice in Hong Kong. Their findings suggest that respondents from low uncertainty avoidance countries (G. Hofstede, 2001) patronized a greater number and diversity of culinary offers when compared to respondents from high

uncertainty avoidance countries.

Tourism dining behavior

The foregoing discussion suggests that there are important differences in tourist dining behavior. In addition to cultural influence, motivational factors are important dimensions in affecting tourists' dining behaviors and food preferences (Fields, 2002). Based on the typology of motivators proposed by McIntosh, Goeldner, and Ritchie (1995), namely, physical, cultural, interpersonal, and status and prestige motivators, Fields (2002) describes how gastronomy can be a motivator within each of these categories. First, it can be a physical motivator as the act of eating is predominately physical in nature involving tourists' sensory perceptions to appreciate the food. Second, gastronomy can also be a cultural motivator because when tourists are experiencing new local cuisines, they are concomitantly experiencing a new culture. Third, it might serve as an interpersonal motivator as meals taken on a holiday have a social function including building new social relations and strengthening social bonds, and the leisurely way tourists eat on holiday is likely to facilitate the interpersonal aspect of dining. Finally, local delicacies can also be a status and prestige motivator for tourists can build their knowledge of the local cuisine by eating as the locals do, and exploring new cuisines and food that they or their friends are not likely to encounter at home.

Tourism dining experience, as one constituent of the overall tourist experience, can be interpreted and understood by its relationship to the daily experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). Accordingly, concepts like "novelty" vs. "familiarity", "unusual" vs. "routine", and "extraordinary" vs. "ordinary" are vital in elucidating the differences between dining behavioral patterns. For instance, Hjalager (2003) posits a phenomenological model distinguishing tourists' desire for experiencing novelty and familiarity in food into four modes, namely, recreational, diversionary, existential, and experimental tourists. While Hjalager's (2003) model offers theoretical insights into the various attitudes and preferences for food, it is conceptual in nature and requires empirical examination.

On the other hand, Quan and Wang (2004) developed a conceptual model explaining how tourism dining experience can be distinguished into "peak touristic experience" and "supporting consumer experience." The authors explicate that the two experiences can be differentiated based on their respective relationships to the daily experience under three dimensions: contrast, intensification, and extension. Generally, the peak touristic experience is in sharp "contrast" to the daily experience, whereas the supporting consumer experience is mainly characterized by "extension" and "intensification" of the daily experience. Accordingly, when food consumption in tourism is to meet the basic need of the body, or to get a sense of the "ontological comfort of home", it can be regarded as the supporting consumer experience. Alternatively, when food consumption in tourism becomes a major, or one of the major motivations for travel, it can turn to be a peak touristic experience. Quan and Wang's (2004) model illuminates that motivation and the relationship to daily experience are important concepts in understanding tourism dining behavior.

The food neophobia concept has also been adopted to explain the differences in tourism dining behavior. From the sociological perspective, Fischler (1988) draws the distinction between the ''neophobic'' and ''neophilic'' tendencies in taste, suggesting that a human has a natural tendency to dislike or suspect new and unfamiliar foods (neophobic), and yet, also has a tendency to search for novel foods (neophilic). Typically, tourists on a trip may be eager or more willing to engage in "novel" or "unusual" dining experiences. As such, the trip may provide contextual factor to enhance their food neophilic tendency, motivating them to display a more adventurous dining behavior. Yet, Cohen and Avieli (2004) argue that as eating involves actual ingestion of unfamiliar food in the destination, the food neophobic tendency of tourists might become more prominent. Likewise, Torres (2002) cites that many studies suggest that tourists in general prefer foods to which they are accustomed and resist trying local varieties.

Conversely, Bélisle (1984) suggests that it is possible to shift tourist tastes to local varieties. Food habits are recognized as learned behavior, and they are likely to be ongoing and resistant to change once established (Fieldhouse, 1986). Nonetheless, Long (2004) contends that tourists' attitude towards local food in destination could be cultivated through a "socialization process". In other words, tourists might "socialize" or "adapt" **into** a new eating behavior when they travel to a new cultural environment. Yet, to what extent will tourists

adapt to the new eating behavior remains unanswered, and is one of the key issues to be addressed in this study.

Chinese food culture

The norms and values governing food preferences in China are recognized to be rather different from those in the West (Dewald, 2002; Eves & Cheng, 2007). Chinese food culture in general is known for its diversity, flexibility, and adaptability (Chang, 1977). It encourages "intrepidness" in the pursuit of "edible" food items, and plays host to almost all animals and plants as food. Hence, Chinese cuisine is well-known with its non-monolithic nature with a high degree of variation and sophistication (Newman, 2004). A "proper meal" in Chinese culture consists of appropriate amount of *fan* (rice and other starch foods such as noodles) and *ts'ai* (vegetable and meat dishes) (Chang, 1977). In other words, *fan* is considered the "core" ingredient of a proper meal, whereas *ts'ai* are regarded as "peripheral". The "flavor principles" that distinguish Chinese cuisine include soy sauce, rice wine, and ginger mixture (E. Rozin, 1983).

While globalization is impacting on food systems and influencing consumer food preferences and consumption patterns around the world (Kennedy, Nantel, & Shetty, 2004; Wright et al., 2001), it is starting to play an increasingly important role in changing consumer food preferences in China (Bhandari & Smith, 2000). For instance, the increasing availability of ethnic restaurants in major cities (CNTO, 2009), the widely accessible information about foreign cuisines on the Internet and other forms of media (E. Cohen & Avieli, 2004), and the increased mobility of tourists resulted from the relaxation of travel restrictions (Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009) have contributed to an increased exposure to foreign cuisines for Chinese consumers. Thus, it has become fashionable and desirable for the Chinese consumers to prefer and demand food that is different in taste, culture and quality (Eves & Cheng, 2007).

Study Method

A qualitative research approach was adopted as this exploratory study attempts to uncover new theoretical insights into tourists' dining experiences (Silverman, 2000). More specifically, on-site participant observations and focus group interviews were employed to obtain in-depth

context-specific information about tourists' food preferences and tourism dining behaviors. The sample of this study comprised tourists originating from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Tourists from these three regions predominantly share the same Chinese food culture, allowing the examination of the influence of Chinese food culture on their food preferences and tourism dining behaviors. On the other hand, they are believed to have different levels of exposure to Western cuisines, either accumulated through previous travel experiences or acquired from their home settings. Accordingly, this would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the various food preferences and dining behaviors of tourists with varying degrees of exposure to Western food.

The reason for choosing Australia as the destination of this study is threefold. First, Tourism Australia is one of the destination marketers in the vanguard of gastronomy tourism (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Cuisine-related tourism has become a key component of Australia's marketing strategies in the international market recently (Hall & Mitchell, 2002). Second, Australian cuisine, arguably, is a global cuisine; it thus provides a plethora of gastronomic opportunities for Chinese tourists to experience cuisines that are different from those in their home settings. Third, Australia has been actively attracting visitors from Asia, particularly China. For example, Australia was one of the first Western countries to be granted an approved destination status by the Chinese government in 1999. This means that Chinese tourists are permitted to undertake leisure travel in groups to Australia, thereby providing Australia an opportunity to engage with the Chinese tourist market on a larger scale (Wen & Laws, 2001).

Considering the practical difficulties in identifying individual tourists for interview and observation of their dining behaviors in Australia, the study focused its attention on tourists who joined all-inclusive package tours. However, deliberate attempts had been made to select tours with "free choice dining activities" in addition to meals pre-arranged by the tour operators. It is increasingly common for tour operators to schedule "free choice dining activities" in all-inclusive package tours to allow tourists certain degree of "freedom" and flexibility to choose the dining experience they prefer. As such, the examination of tourists' food preferences and tourism dining behaviors can be made possible even in group settings. Furthermore, many studies have indicated that joining tour groups is the preferred mode of outbound travel for most Mainland Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese tourists when taking

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overseas vacations (Wen & Laws, 2001; Wong & Lau, 2001). This means that tour groups cannot be overlooked when studying the Chinese tourist market.

Since the purpose of this study is to generate understanding rather than to generalize findings to a large population, a purposive sampling method was adopted (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2000). The researchers approached tour operators to identify suitable all-inclusive package tours fulfilling the following criteria: (1) size of tour group members equaled to or larger than 12 (to ensure enough participants for focus group interview), (2) tour groups had similar itinerary, (3) tour groups had similar pre-arranged meals (e.g., had arranged both Chinese and local cuisines, and tour group members were informed of the arrangements), (4) "free choice dining activity" opportunities were available, and (5) the duration of the tours were similar. The details of the tour features are outlined in Table 1.

* please insert Table 1 here

Focus group interviews were held after each day's dining activities starting from either the fourth or fifth day of the trip so that the participants had accumulated sufficient dining experiences to discuss upon. Considering the fact that data from focus groups are often broader in scope compared with in-depth interviews (Finch & Lewis, 2003), the small group discussion approach (3-5 tourists) was adopted to ensure rich narratives. A total of seven interviews were held with 25 participants among the three tour groups. Interviews were digitally-recorded with the participants' consent for later analysis. Participant observations were carried out from the first day until the last day of each trip. Each meal was observed including breakfast. An observation diary was used to note down details and unanticipated phenomena (Maxwell, 1996). The profiles of the focus group participants are depicted in Table 2.

* please insert Table 2 here

A total of 127 pages of transcribed data were content analyzed. The Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing (NUD*IST) computerized tool was used to fragment the data into discrete units and to construct a tree structure portraying the themes and categories. Narrative analysis was utilized for the purpose of contextualizing the connections between themes and categories (Riessman, 1993). From a narratological perspective, the participants were the central characters (the narrators) in this study, sharing their dining experiences in Australia in the first person.

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Research Findings

The findings are arranged into four sections: (1) food preferences and underlying motivations, (2) a typology of the Chinese tourists' tourism dining behavior, (3) the influence of Chinese food culture, and (4) intergroup disparities. Quotes are identified by participant numbers, as shown in Table 2.

Food preferences and underlying motivations

Three distinct food preference themes were identified, namely, "Chinese food," "local food," and "non-fastidious about food selection." The underlying motivational factors for favoring each preference are presented in Figure 1.

* please insert Figure 1 here

Chinese Food

Some participants were not accustomed to the new eating experience and expressed their inclination towards Chinese food. Motivational factors identified under this preference include: core eating behavior, appetizing assurance and familiar flavor.

Core eating behavior: Some participants showed signs of adversity towards the new eating experience in Australia and revealed a persistent preference towards partaking of Chinese food. Interestingly, even for some participants who were enthusiastic to sample local food, Chinese food was found to be dominant as the "core" preference. The utterance of a Hong Kong participant best exemplified such a claim:

> *"...I won't miss the chance to try it [Australian local food] out...but soon, I'll miss Chinese food again. 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)

Although many of the participants were eager to try local food, they explicitly stated that it was impossible for them to consume local food at every meal. This indicates that the participants perceived the intake of local food as a "peak touristic experience", yet, it did not match up to the criteria of a "proper meal" (Chang, 1977) in their dietary habits. Tasting local food could satisfy the experiential needs of the participants, but might not be enough to satiate

their physiological needs. As such, the participants' "core eating behavior" had led to their preference on Chinese food during most of the trip. This corroborates Fieldhouse's (1986) proposition that food habits are likely ongoing and resistant to change once established. Similarly, Quan and Wang (2004, p. 301) cite that "although tourists seek various and novel experience, they often 'bring' their habits and preferences formed at home with them." This is because no matter how "peripheral" ingredients change, "core" ingredients tend to remain central to the tourist.

Appetizing assurance: Appetizing assurance was found to be a key factor supporting the preference of Chinese food. A Taiwanese participant described how Chinese food offered assuring satisfaction after her disagreeable encounter with the local Australian food:

> *"⋯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…thus, I felt most satisfied with the Chinese food we had at dinner."* (TW-P3)

From the above statement, it is obvious that the participant was not satisfied with the taste of the local Australian food. In this circumstance, Chinese food comparatively became a more reliable way for the participant to obtain gustatory pleasure. This is because Chinese food was familiar to her, hence offering her a sense of "appetizing assurance." Research has recognized that across cultures and regardless of socio-demographic differences, people generally prefer foods that are familiar to them (Pliner, Pelchat, & Grabski, 1993). This finding supports such a contention, and further reveals that familiarity breeds a sense of "appetizing assurance" among the Chinese participants. As the participants were familiar with the sensory properties of Chinese food, they knew that they would very likely accept and like the taste of it. In other words, by having Chinese food, the meal's "acceptability" and "palatability" (Long, 2004; Mäkelä, 2000) were thus assured and concomitantly, the cultural shocks in their encounter with the local food could be mitigated.

Familiar flavor: The other factor that instigated a preference for Chinese food was found to be "familiar flavor." Specifically, the term does not merely denote familiar taste but also encompasses a broader connotation including "familiar food items" and "familiar cooking methods." Two participants' comments exemplified this:

> *"I hope I can have soy sauce. Then, even if I can't stand the food, I can add some soy sauce to go with the rice. Soy sauce and pickled vegetables, they go well with the rice, especially when the dishes aren't delicious..."* (CH-P5)

> *"...mud crab is the specialty of Australia, but it was cooked the Chinese way. We all took it quite well..."* (HK-P1)

The Chinese participant considered that the addition of familiar food items (i.e., soy sauce and pickled vegetables) could help mitigate the unfamiliar taste of the local food. On the other hand, the Hong Kong participant conveyed that she was satisfied with the local specialty (i.e., mud crab) which was cooked in the Chinese style. Thus, the provision of "familiar flavor", either in terms of familiar food items or familiar cooking methods, served as an effective a means to enhance the local food's acceptability and palatability for the Chinese participants. Cohen and Avieli (2004) state that tourists often worry about sampling local food because they are cautious about the unfamiliar or strange ingredients used and the manner of preparation involved; this has induced tourists to eat familiar food while traveling. However, the findings from this study put forth another perspective that the participants' inclination towards Chinese food was due to their desire to seek "familiar flavor" from the food that could concomitantly offer them a sense of "appetizing assurance."

Local Food

Many of the participants expressed enthusiasm in trying local food in Australia. The motivational factors identified include: explore local culture, authentic travel experience, learning/education opportunity, prestige and status, reference group influence, and subjective perception.

Explore local culture: Many participants articulated that they would be interested in anything that could represent the Australian culture, including food culture. As such, many participants perceived trying local food as an opportunity to encounter the various facets of the local culture. A Hong Kong participant's utterance corroborated this contention:

> *"I think eating local food helps you get a better idea of the local culture. What do local people eat, how do they prepare their food, and how does the food taste? All these are clues to understanding the local culture..."* (HK-P1)

The desire to explore culture has been identified as an important motivation for tourist food consumption by a number of researchers (Fields, 2002; Kim et al., 2009; Kivela & Johns, 2003). Scarpato (2002) points out that food can be a contemporary cultural resource as it satisfies all the conventional requirements of cultural tourism products. Fields (2002) states that when tourists are experiencing new local cuisines, they are concomitantly experiencing a new culture. Since food reflects human cultures (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997), various aspects of the local food such as the way the local people eat, the food preparation process, and the taste of the local food provide "clues" that are critical for discerning the local culture. Accordingly, this explained one of the underlying reasons why many of the participants were enthusiastic in trying local Australian food.

Authentic travel experience: Another important reason for the participants to partake of local food was the desire for an "authentic travel experience." There is an old saying that says, "*When in Rome, do as the Romans do*"; and the Chinese people generally believe that when visiting a foreign country, one should follow the customs of those who live in it in order to show respect to and blend with the local people. This belief was epitomized in the following comment:

> *"In my opinion, you should eat local food and drink local beer while traveling. That's what we call 'genuine' travel. If you take us to have a Chinese meal, it's not like traveling but like returning to China instead (sic)."* (CH-P2)

For the participants who held this belief, they considered food to have a greater value on the cultural and intellectual aspects than on physical pleasure, and they sought for culinary experiences that were unique and original when they travel. Hence, they felt that they were being brought closer to Australia when they were totally immersed in the authentic local eating experience (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Indeed, authenticity-seeking has long been recognized as a key motivator in tourism experiences (E. Cohen, 1988; Cole, 2007; Hughes, 1995; Wang, 1999), it has also been identified as one of the motivators influencing local food consumption in destinations (Kim et al., 2009).

Learning/education opportunity: Some of the participants related tasting local food as a "learning/education" opportunity. They considered that eating local food would enable them to acquire new food knowledge so that they could have the capacity to discuss and evaluate Australian food. Hence, the participants could enrich their "cultural capital", a term which

denotes the knowledge that enables an individual to interpret various cultural codes (Bourdieu, 1984). Indeed, learning or education opportunity is widely accepted as a significant tourist motivation (Lee & Crompton, 1992; Warde & Martens, 2000). Moreover, Chinese people generally believe in the saying that "it is better to travel far than to read voluminously". This coincides with the findings that the participants regarded partaking of local food as an effectual learning experience that could enrich their cultural capital.

Prestige and status: Some of the participants indicated that they were motivated to engage in special and memorable local dining experiences so that they could share such experiences with their friends when they returned home. Accordingly, tasting local food has become analogous to a "take-home memento", serving as evidence of "having been to" the destination. In the past, the outbound travels of Chinese residents were restricted due to economic constraints, tight political control, and visa restrictions. Even with today's increased disposable income, the ability to travel abroad still symbolizes social status and prestige in China (Zhang, Pine, & Lam, 2005). Fields (2002) contends that status-conscious tourists like to explore new cuisines and food that they and their friends are not likely to eat at home. Likewise, Kivela and Johns (2003) suggest that dining out and travel are often used by people to assert social status. Kim et al. (2009) also identified prestige as one of the motivational factors for consuming local food. Thus, to a certain extent, the ability to travel abroad and taste local food are akin to "conspicuous consumption" for the Chinese participants. When the participants shared their gastronomic experience with friends, they could assert their social status as they possessed more cultural capital to appreciate and enjoy foreign food.

Reference group influence: Some participants were interested in trying various local foods that were recommended to them by their "reference groups," such as their friends and the Internet. The enthusiasm to pursue those recommendations made by their reference groups reflected that the participants were motivated by group interests instead of their individual interests. This was comprehensible as the participants were under the influence of the Chinese collectivist culture which emphasizes group interaction and consensus judgment (G Hofstede, 1991). In addition, as the participants were interested in the kinds of food recommended by their reference groups, they were in pursuit of what is in "fashion." This coincides with Finkelstein's (1998) contention that tourists in quest of foreign gastronomic experience could have been motivated by the pursuit of "fashionability."

Subjective perception: Another factor that triggered the participants to taste local food was the "subjective perception" that the Chinese food in Australia would not be authentic. For example, one of the participants stated that:

> *"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)

It was observed that most of the participants held the assumption that the Chinese food in Australia would not be as good as those in their home countries. Therefore, they were unlikely to eat Chinese food after flying thousands of miles from home to Australia. As the participants presumably depreciated the Chinese food in Australia, they were more inclined to try local food or different types of foreign food. Thus, for these participants, their reason to partake of local food was affected by their subjective perception that the Chinese food in Australia would not meet their standard of palatability.

Non-fastidious about food selection

The findings further reveal a third type of participants who were not fastidious about partaking of either Chinese food or local food. The participants who held this attitude seemed to have very little interest in food, viewing it simply as mere sustenance rather than a source of pleasure. Specific factors underlying such an attitude include: *group harmony, compromise in supporting experience* and *prejudiced advocacy.*

Group harmony: Some of the participants expressed that they would not mind to eat local or non-local cuisine as long as group harmony could be preserved. Responding to this group-oriented food preference, the participants conveyed that food selection was not their main concern; and they were willing to accommodate to their family and friends' food preferences when travelling. Bond (1986) states that under the influence of collectivism, Chinese people place great importance on group harmony and interdependence. Dewald (2002) points out that the Chinese eating manner is different to the West in that dishes are ordered for everyone to share and not for particular individual. Hence, a final combination of menu items is the result of group consensus in order to assure everyone's satisfaction. This "group harmony" orientation towards food selection had been duly reflected in the participants' tourism dining

behavior.

Compromise in supporting experience: A number of participants who displayed a non-fastidious attitude towards food selection opined that they were prepared to compromise with the dining experiences in Australia. For instance, a Taiwanese participant expressed that:

> *"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)

The findings suggest that some participants had a preconceived negative idea about tourism dining experiences. They related food and accommodation as "supporting consumer experiences" which were mere "extensions" of the daily routine experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004). Moreover, they assumed that these experiences would not match up to "ontological comfort of home". In this respect, they were prepared for the compromise and lowered their expectation on these "supporting consumer experiences."

Prejudiced advocacy: It was also found that the tour leader's "prejudiced advocacy" had also influenced some participants to form a preconception that dining experience was relatively unimportant compared to other "peak touristic experiences". The utterance from a Chinese participant exemplified this:

> *"...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)

It was found that some of the participants gladly accepted the tour leader's suggestion and merely paid attention to the satisfaction they could derive from the traditional "peak touristic experiences." The participants who held this attitude mostly belonged to the elderly generation group. They were relatively intransigent and would remain steadfast in their ingrained eating behavior. In addition to the tour leader's advocacy, they also had a preconceived negative opinion that the food in Australia could not match up to "ontological comfort of home." On the other hand, these elderly participants were largely the risk-avoidance type of tourists. When traveling to a foreign country, they were particularly cautious about safety and security issues. Moreover, as they were not proficient in English, they tended to avoid any adventurous activities, including trying different types of local food

during the trip.

A typology of the Chinese tourists' tourism dining behavior

Based on the foregoing discussions and observations, a typology is developed to describe the various tourism dining behaviors of the Chinese participants under three dimensions: food consumption motivation, attitude towards tourism dining experience, and tourism dining behavior. The typology distinguishes three types of tourist: observer, browser, and participator (Table 3).

* please insert Table 3 here

The observers are generally interested in trying local food as they regard tourism dining experiences as a "learning/education opportunity" and a means to "explore the local culture". However, they are sentimentally attached to Chinese food and cannot be completely withdrawn from their "core eating behavior" when traveling. They also dread of being unaccustomed to the local food and need to seek certain aspects of "familiarity" from the Chinese food culture to increase the "palatability" (based on the Chinese food culture value) of the local food. Therefore, "appetizing assurance" and "familiar flavor" are important factors influencing their food preferences. In this respect, they prefer to have the fusion of the Chinese food and local food to experience the "otherness" (Long, 2004) of the host culture. In short, the observers perceive tourism dining experience as "peak touristic experiences" (Quan & Wang, 2004); however, they prefer to "observe", or "discern" the local food culture, rather than totally immerse in it. Thus, their "learning" of the local culture through partaking of local food can be described as "learning by observing".

The browsers regard tourism dining experiences in a casual way, and are not fastidious about food selection when traveling. For this type of tourists, food is not a major concern in gauging the level of satisfaction for the holiday, and they are prepared to compromise their food preferences in order to preserve group harmony. They relate tourism dining as "supporting consumer experiences" which are "extensions" of their daily routine experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004). In addition, they tend to assume that tourism dining experiences will not match up to "ontological comfort of home." Accordingly, they turn their attention to the more tradition "peak touristic experiences" such as sight-seeing and touring regional attractions.

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The participators are those who have great interests in local food. Similar to the observers, they also regard tourism dining experiences as a "learning/education opportunity" and an effective way to "explore the local culture". Furthermore, they consider that the intake of local food as an indispensable part of an "authentic travel experience", one that not only enrich their culinary knowledge, but also increase their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Hence, quality, memorability, and fashionability (Finkelstein, 1998) are prime concerns for the participators since dining experiences with these qualities can symbolize their lifestyle, prestige, and status. In contrast to the observers and browsers who might have reservation towards local food, the participators are overtly willing to savor the unique local gastronomy. Even though the intake of local food might confront with their own food culture values, the participators are more likely to temporarily disregard their ingrained dining behavior in order to pursue a genuine contact with the local food culture.

The influence of Chinese food culture

The findings suggest that the Chinese food culture exerted considerable influence over the Chinese participants' tourism dining behaviors. First, Chinese food was found to be remained as the dominant "core" preference for many of the participants despite that they were in a new cultural environment. This did not only apply to the participants who were not accustomed to the new eating culture in Australia, but also to those who were keen to sample local food. Both types of participants were not able to withdraw from their ingrain eating behavior completely. Even for the participants who were eager to try out various local delicacies expressed that they could not continuously partake of local food because it could not satisfy their physiological needs. This corroborates Fieldhouse's (1986) proposition that food habits are a learned behavior which are likely to be ongoing and resistant to change once established.

Second, "appetizing assurance" and "familiar flavor" were found to be two important motivational factors influencing the Chinese participants' food preferences. Many participants sought for "familiar flavor" (e.g., familiar flavor and cooking techniques) in their encounter with the local Australian food and welcomed the fusion of Chinese and Australian food. Furthermore, the inclusion of Chinese "flavor principles" was found to have enhanced the "acceptability" and "palatability" of unfamiliar local food for the participants. According to

Rozin and Rozin (1981), the addition of familiar "flavor principles" can help facilitate the acceptance of "unfamiliar" or novel food items. The findings support this contention, and provide evidence to suggest that Chinese "flavor principles" tended to dominate even when the Chinese participants were expecting or actively intending to partake of novel food in a culturally different context.

Third, Chinese food cultural values were found to have influenced the participants' attitude and judgment towards their encounter with local Australia food. For instance, for the participants who were eager in trying local food, despite their different motives, they often compared the "palatability" of Australian food with Chinese food. This means that their attitudes towards "palatability" were guided by their food cultural values albeit they were in a culturally different environment. This finding supports that culture defines how food is coded into the "acceptable," "exotic," "edible," and "palatable" categories in a particular cultural group (Long, 2004; Mäkelä, 2000); it further suggests that contextual factors exerted relatively little influence on these classifications for the Chinese participants.

Finally, traditional Chinese cultural values were manifested in the Chinese participants' tourism dining behavior. For instance, some participants placed great emphasis on group harmony in their food preferences. While this "group-orientedness" can be explained by the traditional Chinese food habits that dishes are ordered for everyone to share and not for a particular individual (Dewald, 2002), it is also attributable to the Chinese collectivist culture which emphasizes group interaction and consensus judgment (G Hofstede, 1991). In addition, Chinese culture places great importance on food and encourages "intrepidness" in the pursuit of "edible" food items (Chang, 1977; Newman, 2004). Correspondingly, the Chinese participants were generally found to be enthusiastic in broadening their culinary knowledge; and a majority of them related tourism dining as a "peak touristic experience" and an indispensable element of an "authentic" travel experience.

Intergroup disparities

The findings further reveal that although the participants from the three regions were predominantly influenced by the Chinese food culture, there were disparities with respect to their dining behaviors in Australia. The disparities were found to be associated with the level

of exposure to Western cuisines, which had led to different motivational factors and attitude towards tourism dining experience. For instance, the Mainland Chinese participants had relatively less exposure to Western cuisines, including Australian cuisine, as Mainland China has only begun to feel the input of Western food culture in recent years (Pine, 2002). Furthermore, despite the fact that many of them had previous travel experiences, their travel experiences to Western countries were relatively limited. This was due to the fact that Australia was the first Western country to obtain an approval destination status by the Chinese government (Wen & Laws, 2001). Hence, the Mainland Chinese participants were motivated to engage in dining experiences that served as a means to explore the Australian culture, as an opportunity for them to "learn" about Western culinary knowledge, and also as a reminiscence of their holiday experience in a Western destination. To them, tourism dining experiences were regarded more as "conspicuous consumption" which could assert their prestige and status. Accordingly, they had sought for dining experiences that was distinctively different from their previous exposure. In other words, they sought for a sharp "contrast" from their daily experience in their dining experiences in Australia.

Comparatively, the Hong Kong participants had the highest exposure to Western cuisine. As a former British colony, Hong Kong food culture has been heavily influenced by Western culture. As the "culinary capital of Asia," Hong Kong is known as the place where the eating cultures of East and West meet (HKTB, 2009). There are an abundance of foreign restaurants in Hong Kong, offering various Western and international cuisines such as American, French, Italian, Australian, German and Russian (HKTB, 2009). Not only were the Hong Kong participants used to eating out in various ethnic restaurants in their home setting, they were also found to have relatively more travel experiences to other Western destinations than the other two groups of participants. Accordingly, the Hong Kong participants on the whole possessed a wide variety of gastronomic knowledge and experiences. They were motivated to engage in dining experiences that could further enrich their repertories of culinary knowledge. They tended to seek for a more diversified and enlightening dining experiences for themselves to indulge in. Hence, it can be said that they sought for "intensification" from their daily experience in their tourism dining experiences.

The Taiwanese participants were found to have medium exposure to Western cuisines among the three groups. They were motivated to seek dining experiences that reflected their

pre-existing eating habits. For instance, they were interested in the Australian snack foods as they were accustomed to eating snack foods in night markets in their home setting (Hsieh & Chang, 2006). They also preferred local food to be blended with their "familiar flavor". It was found that they had the highest propensity to regard tourism dining experiences as "supporting consumer experiences" and they were more willing to compromise in it in order to preserve group harmony or to make room for other "peak touristic experiences". On the whole, they sought for dining experiences that was an "extension" of their daily experience.

While the above discussion articulates the major differences in the dining behaviors among the participants from the three regions, it should be note that the descriptions are not definitive, for there can be individual differences based on other socio-cultural factors such as gender, age, education and income. However, as the main focus of this study is to address the influences of Chinese food culture on tourists' dining behaviors, therefore, a detailed investigation of these socio-cultural factors are outside the scope of the current study.

CONCLUSION

Given the scarcity of research on tourist food preference, this study is a first attempt to generate in-depth understanding of Chinese tourists' food preferences in a culturally different environment. It provides a detailed analysis of the motivational factors underlying the Chinese participants' food preferences when holidaying in Australia, and also proposes a typology that describes and contrasts the participants' tourism dining attitudes, motivations and behaviors. Furthermore, this study elucidates the influence of Chinese food culture on the participants' tourism dining behaviors and explores the disparities between the participants from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, in terms of their tourism dining motivations and the way they related tourism dining experiences to their daily routine experiences.

The findings of this study provide useful information for destination marketers and hospitality businesses in developing their gastronomic products and ensuring that food used in catering are congruent with tourists food culture and dining habits (E. Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Quan & Wang, 2004). Moreover, tour operators are afforded ideas in facilitating optimal meal arrangements for group tourists.

On the other hand, the findings of this study contribute to the sociological and anthropological dimensions of food in tourism in the following ways. First, the findings advance the understanding of tourists' food preference and the underlying motivational factors from the Chinese perspective, thereby providing theoretical groundwork for further studies on this important market segment. Second, the findings reveal that Chinese food culture exerted significant influence on the dining behaviors of the Chinese participants, supporting that cultural influence is a key determinant affecting tourist food preferences. Third, following on the conceptual model of the tourist experience posited by Quan and Wang (2004), the findings of this study corroborate that the intergroup disparities in dining behavior among the participants from the three regions was related to whether they seek "contrast", "extension" or "intensification" of their daily experiences from the tourism dining experiences, thereby substantiating the applicability of the conceptual model in the analysis of tourism dining behavior. Finally, the typology proposed offers theoretical insights as well as empirical evidence into the distinctive tourism dining behaviors of the Chinese participants, which is believed to provide a useful starting point for future investigation.

It is germane to point out that since this study is of an exploratory nature with no intention to generalize findings, a purposive sample was adopted. Due to practical considerations, tourists who joined all-inclusive package tours were selected instead of individual tourists. While deliberate attempt was made to select those tours with "free choice dining activities", individual tourists might provide different insights. As such, future research may consider including individual tourists in the investigation. In addition, this study focused on Australian as the only destination in the investigation due to resource constraints. Future research might be directed at examining Chinese tourists' eating behavior in other Western destinations in order to enhance the generalizability of the results.

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Table 1. Details of tour features and focus group interviews held

| Tour Features	Mainland China Group	Hong Kong Group	Taiwan Group
No. of tour group members	12	15	14
Duration of tour	8 days	10 days	8 days
Tour itinerary	Sydney → Gold Coast → Brisbane → Cairns	Cairns → Gold Coast → Brisbane → Sydney → Melbourne	Brisbane → Sydney → Melbourne → Gold Coast → Brisbane
Summary of pre-arranged meals	• Chinese restaurants were the venues for 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 dining activities	• Chinese restaurants were the venues for most of the meals • Australian BBQ restaurants • Australian seafood buffet • Italian restaurant
Availability of "free choice dining activities"	• Yes	• Yes	• Yes

Table 2. Profile of the participants

No	Group	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Occupation	Travel Experience
CH-P1	China	Female	Married	Late 20s	Civil servant	Experienced traveler
CH-P2	China	Female	Single	Mid-30s	Civil servant	Experienced traveler
CH-P3	China	Female	Single	Late 20s	Civil servant	Experienced traveler
CH-P4	China	Female	Single	Late 20s	Civil servant	First-time traveler
CH-P5	China	Male	Married	Over 60	Retired doctor	Experienced traveler
HK-P1	Hong Kong	Female	Single	Early 30s	Administrative clerk	Experienced traveler
HK-P2	Hong Kong	Female	Single	Late 20s	High school teacher	Experienced traveler
HK-P3	Hong Kong	Female	Single	Late 20s	High school teacher	Experienced traveler
HK-P4	Hong Kong	Male	Married	Early 40s	Civil servant	Experienced traveler
HK-P5	Hong Kong	Female	Married	Early 40s	Civil servant	Experienced traveler
HK-P6	Hong Kong	Male	Married	Mid-40s	Self-employed	Experienced traveler
HK-P7	Hong Kong	Female	Married	Mid-40s	Housewife	Experienced traveler
HK-P8	Hong Kong	Male	Single	Early 30s	Administrative clerk	Experienced traveler
HK-P9	Hong Kong	Female	Single	Early 30s	Administrative clerk	Experienced traveler
TW-P1	Taiwan	Female	Single	Mid-20s	Primary school teacher	Experienced traveler
TW-P2	Taiwan	Female	Single	Mid-20s	Primary school teacher	First-time traveler
TW-P3	Taiwan	Female	Single	Early 20s	Student	Experienced traveler
TW-P4	Taiwan	Female	Single	Mid-20s	Primary school teacher	Experienced traveler
TW-P5	Taiwan	Female	Married	Mid-30s	Housewife	Experienced traveler
TW-P6	Taiwan	Female	Married	Over 60	Self-employed	Experienced traveler
TW-P7	Taiwan	Female	Married	Over 60	Housewife	Experienced traveler

	Taiwan	Female	Married	Early 40s	Primary school teacher	Experienced traveler
TW-P8	Taiwan	Female	Married	Early 40s	Primary school teacher	Experienced traveler
TW-P9	Taiwan	Male	Married	Mid-40s	Primary school teacher	Experienced traveler
TW-P10	Taiwan	Female	Widowed	Mid-50s	Nurse	Experienced traveler
TW-P11	Taiwan	Female	Single	Mid-30s	High school teacher	First-time traveler

Table 3. A typology of the Chinese tourists' dining behavior

	Observer	Browser	Participator
Food consumption motivation	- Explore local culture - Learning/educational opportunity - Appetizing assurance - Familiar flavor	- Group harmony - Compromise in supporting experience	- Explore local culture - Learning/education opportunity - Authentic travel experience - Prestige and status
Attitude towards tourism dining experience	- Tourism dining experience is a learning experience - Learning by observing. - Peak touristic experience	- Tourism dining experience is not the main concern of overall travel experience - Supporting consumer experience	- Tourism dining experience is a learning experience - Learning by participating - Peak touristic experience
Tourism dining behavior	- Seek familiar foods/familiar flavor/appetizing assurance - Dominated by core eating behavior - Prefer fusion food	- Not fastidious about food selection - Pay less attention to dining (safety and security is the main concern)	- Seek quality/ memorability/ fashionability - Likely to temporarily disregard their core eating behavior - Actively pursue new dining experiences
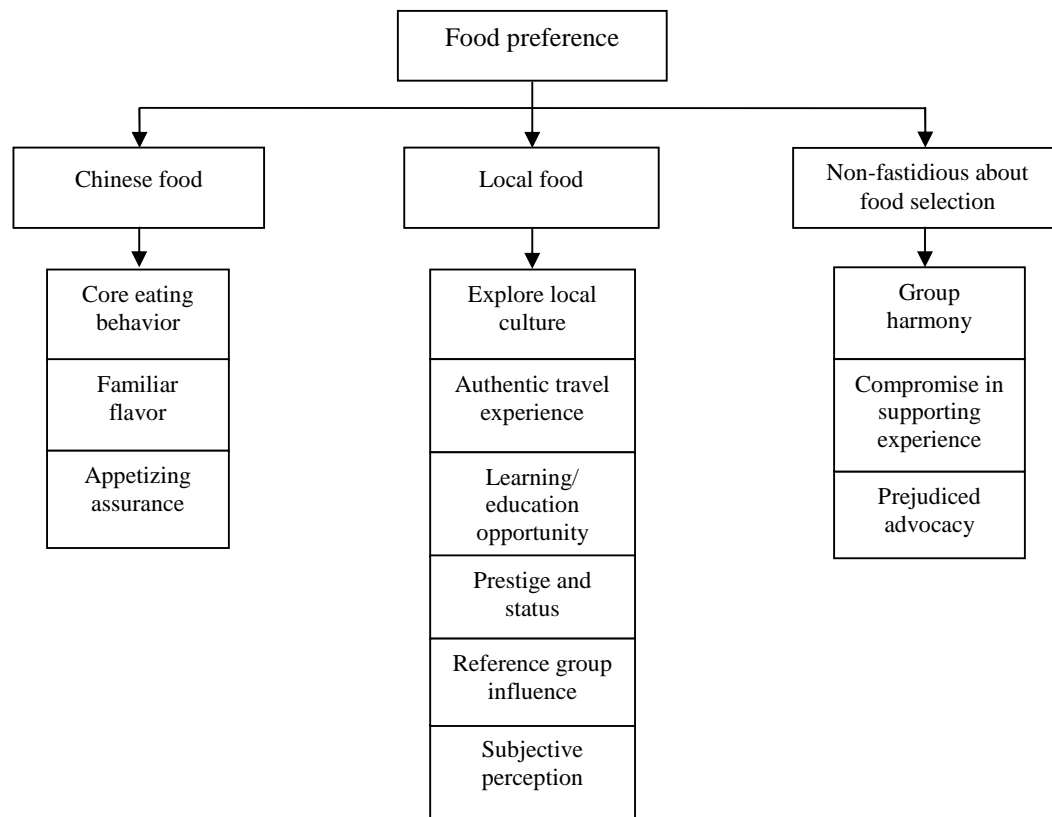
Figure 1. A model of Chinese tourists' food preference