

Understanding the Perceptions' of Local Thai Cuisine of Chinese and European Tourists in Thailand

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Abstract *This study explores the dimensions of local cuisine images viewed by foreign tourists by examining the impact of the perceived image of local Thai cuisine based on the satisfaction of eating Thai food, its impact on satisfaction when traveling in Thailand, and future behavioral intention. It also examines whether there are differences in perceptions of local cuisine images between European and Chinese tourists. To do so, data were collected from Chinese and European tourists travelling in Thailand. The statistics processed for this study included factor analysis, one-way analysis of variance, and multiple regression analysis. The results revealed five food image dimensions: "affective food image," "food quality," "attractiveness of food," "health promotion" and "cultural heritage." Differences in the perceptions of food images between Chinese and European tourists were found. Further still, the food dimensions varied in how they affected tourist satisfaction and behavioral intention. "Affective food image" had the highest impact on satisfaction from travelling to Thailand, eating Thai cuisine and related behavioral intention. This study thus helps stakeholders comprehensively understand tourists' local food perceptions, marketers can then formulate appropriate strategies to respond to tourist demand, and tourism-related agencies can use the information to promote tourism.*

Keywords: *Behavioral Intention, Chinese Tourists, European Tourists, Food Image*

INTRODUCTION

Food is not only an indispensable tourist need, but also a vital component of the entire travel experience (Kline et al., 2018; Sthapit et al., 2019). Food experience is also an activity that tourists perform for fun (Choe & Kim, 2018; Guan & Jones, 2015) and helps tourists to understand local culture (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Sthapit et al., 2019; Suntikul et al., 2020). Tourist food consumption expenditure represents more than one-third of a destination's tourism income (Mynttinen et al., 2015). Thus, food consumption of tourists fosters local cultivation and local businesses (Mynttinen et al., 2015; Rachão et al., 2019).

Thailand is similar to other countries such as France, Japan, Italy in promoting its cuisine as a priority tourist attraction (Kaushal & Yadav, 2019; Lai et al., 2019). An increasing number of studies report that tourists visit a destination many

times because of the food image (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Chi et al., 2013; Seo et al., 2017). Therefore, understanding how tourists perceive Thai cuisine will help tourism-related agencies determine the best marketing strategies to respond to these tourist perceptions. Therefore, this study intends to unearth foreign tourists' perceived local cuisine image of foreign tourists and, its impacts on tourist eating satisfaction, behavioral intention, and its impact on satisfaction with travelling in Thailand.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Destination Food Image, Tourist Food Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intention

Food image is the visual and psychology senses of foods symbolizing the cultural uniqueness of a society (Seo et al., 2013). Previous research has substantiated that local

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food image is created by both the cognitive image of food and its affective image (Peštek & Činjarević, 2014; Seo et al., 2017). The cognitive image of food is the consumer's assessment of a particular food's tangible features, such as taste, price, promotion of health, hygienic, (Seo et al., 2017). The affective image of food consists of the emotions, sentiments, and feelings of consumers while consuming the food, such as pleasure, thrill, and happiness (Desmet & Schifferstein, 2008; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018).

Previous research has mentioned that consuming a destination's local food image significantly impacts overall tourist satisfaction with that destination. For example, Chi et al. (2013) shed light on how Malaysian cuisine's positive image can generate foreign tourists' food satisfaction. Lisewise, Toudert and Bringas-Rábago (2019) reported the favorable impact of a positive image toward American food on tourists' food satisfaction. Generally, it is known that consumption of a destination's local cuisine significantly impacts tourist satisfaction (Hendijani, 2016; Zhang et al., 2019). In addition, prior studies (Ji et al., 2016; Toudert & Brings-Rábago, 2019) noted the connection between food satisfaction and tourist behavioral intention, including word of mouth (WOM) and revisit intention.

Earlier studies (e.g., Ab Karim et al., 2011; Peštek & Činjarević, 2014) also reported that the individual components of local cuisine can produce tourists' overall satisfaction with a location and their satisfaction with the food there differently. For example, Yasami et al. (2020) reported that "food tastiness and popularity" was the most dominant dimension for Chinese tourists' food satisfaction., followed by "food safety and health," and "restaurant service". Mohamed et al. (2020), using samples of foreign visitors to Cairo, Egypt, reported that sensory, affective and behavioral components of destination food experiences illuminated tourists' food satisfaction and destination revisit intention.

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Individual dimensions of local cuisine image vary in how they influence tourist satisfaction when travelling in Thailand.

H2: Individual dimensions of local cuisine image vary in how they influence tourist satisfaction when eating Thai cuisine.

H3: Individual dimensions of a local cuisine image vary in how they influence behavioral intentions of tourists in Thailand.

Cultural Factor and Trip Patterns

Prior research revealed that differences in perceived images of local cuisines can be affected by cultural factors (Choe

& Kim, 2018 ; Promsivapallop & Kannaovakun, 2019). For example, Peštek and Činjarević (2014) found that travelers from Western Europe and Eastern Europe were satisfied inversely regarding food quality and price dimension, and food uniqueness and cultural heritage dimension. Previous research (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Beerli & Martin, 2004; McCartney, 2008) discovered that the length of stay and the number of visits to a destination shape destination image. For instance, Wan and Choi (2020) found that tourists who visited Macao once or twice had a significantly lower image perception of Portuguese and Macanese cuisines than tourists who visited Macao 10 times or more. Alonso and Krajsic (2016) who found that length of stay is a significant factor that appeared to impact the respondents' perceptions of typical Australian dishes.

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Local cuisine image perceptions differ between European tourists and Chinese tourists.

H5: Local cuisine image perceptions differ for tourists who have made different numbers of trips to Thailand.

H6: Local cuisine image perceptions differ for tourists who have stayed in Thailand for different lengths of time.

METHODS

Sample and Data Collection

The data in this study were collected from 195 outbound European tourists and 195 outbound Chinese tourists in Thailand at the Suvarnabhumi Airport in Thailand between January and May of 2018. Participants met the selection conditions that the respondents had sampled local Thai cuisine while travelling in Thailand. The data were collected through a questionnaire that consisted of four sections. The first section asked about tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and trip-related characteristics. The second section asked about tourists' perceptions of images of Thai cuisine using 28 image items based on related literature (Peštek & Činjarević, 2014; Seo et al., 2017; Seo & Yun, 2015; Verbeke & Lopez, 2005;). The third section measured behavioral intention using 4 items: "I would gladly recommend Thai cuisine to friends," "I will say positive things about Thai cuisine," "When I eat again, I will consider Thai food," and "I will eat Thai food again in the near future." The measurement of tourist perceptions of the images of food and individual tourist behavioral intentions was assessed using a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The fourth section gauges tourists' food eating satisfaction and overall satisfaction with the destination. Food satisfaction was assessed by one question: "Are you satisfied with Thai

food?” Travelling satisfaction was also assessed by one question: “Are you satisfied with your Thailand visit?” The satisfaction level for both questions ranged from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Data Analysis

The demographic profiles of the respondents were identified through frequency analyses. χ^2 test was used to discover whether significant differences in the frequency of the socio-demographic profiles between Chinese and European tourist groups exist. This research applied factor analysis to determine dimensions of Thai food image perceived by the respondents. After the factor analysis technique screened significant dimensions of food image, multiple linear regression was performed to identify which food dimension explained satisfaction with travelling in Thailand, satisfaction eating Thai cuisine, and behavioral intention. Further, T-tests and a one-way Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) test were employed to check whether there were any significant differences between nationalities and any trip-related variables regarding tourists' perceptions of Thai food.

RESULTS

Demographic and Behavior Profiles of Tourists Visiting Thailand

The results shown in Table 1 demonstrate that females accounted for 57.7 % of respondents while males accounted for the remaining (42.3%). For European tourists, there were more males than females while in the Chinese group, there were more females than

males. More than half of respondents were aged 21-30 years old (53.1%), and married (68.0%). Respondents had earned Bachelor's degrees (49.0 %), were company employees (30.5 %) and had a monthly income US\$ 1,001-1,500 as the highest percentage group (27.6%). European tourists on average had monthly incomes of \geq USD3,000 while Chinese tourists averaged a monthly income of USD1,001-1,500. First-time tourists to Thailand constituted the highest percentage group (49.8%), followed by second-time tourists (21.8%), and lastly tourists to Thailand more than three times (19.7%). Tourists staying in Thailand 4-7 days constituted the biggest group (33.6%).

Cross-tabulations were employed to demonstrate socio-demographic characteristics of Chinese and European tourist groups. There are statistically different frequencies between the groups in terms of gender, education level, age, monthly income, occupation, and length of stay (see Table 1).

From the Thai food images that were evaluated by the tourists, the first five food image items' agreement rankings as perceived by Chinese and European tourists are as follows: European tourists perceiving Thai food as tasty ranked the highest (mean = 4.08, SD = 1.00), followed by Thai cuisine being authentic (mean = 4.07, SD = .98). The third ranking was of Thai cuisine being perceived as inexpensive (mean = 4.06, SD = .97); the fourth ranking was that Thai cuisine is popular (mean = 4.05, SD = .88), and the fifth ranking indicates that Thai cuisine is often shared with others at the table (mean = 4.05, SD =1.01). For Chinese tourists, the highest-ranking perception was that Thai cuisine is unique/original (mean = 4.21, SD = .59); the second-highest ranking perception was that Thai cuisine uses fresh, quality ingredients (mean = 4.07, SD = .58); followed by the perception that Thai cuisine offers a variety of menu items (mean = 4.05, SD = .61); Thai cuisine is spicy (mean = 4.04, SD =.59); and Thai cuisine is inexpensive (mean = 4.02, SD = .67), respectively.

Table 1: Profiles of the Tourists Visiting Thailand

Items	European	Chinese	Total	χ^2 -	P-value
Gender				17.7	0.000***
Female	92 (23.6%)	133 (34.1%)	225 (57.7%)		
Male	103 (26.4%)	62 (15.9%)	165 (42.3%)		
Age				18.8	0.002***
≤ 20	11 (2.8%)	29 (7.4%)	40 (10.2%)		
21-30	100 (25.7%)	107 (27.4%)	207(53.1%)		
31-40	59 (15.1%)	35 (9.0%)	94 (24.1%)		
41 up	25 (6.4%)	24 (6.2%)	49 (12.6%)		
Marital status				0.9	0.11
Single	62 (15.9 %)	59 (15.1%)	121(31.0%)		
Married	131 (33.6 %)	134 (34.4 %)	265(68.0%)		
Widow/divorce	2 (0.5%)	2 (0.5%)	4 (1.0%)		

Items	European	Chinese	Total	χ ² -	P-value
Education level				23.2	0.000**
Lower or equal to high school	19 (4.9 %)	17 (4.3%)	36 (9.2%)		
Technical or vocational school	24 (6.2%)	37 (9.5%)	61(15.7%)		
Bachelor’s degree	81 (20.8%)	110 (28.2%)	191(49.0%)		
Master’s degree	59 (15.1%)	27 (6.9%)	86 (22.0 %)		
Doctorate/professional degree	12 (3.1%)	4 (1.0%)	16 (4.1%)		
Monthly income				169.15	0.000***
≤ US 1,000	23 (5.9%)	76 (19.5%)	99 (25.4%)		
1,001-1,500	22 (5.6%)	86 (22.0%)	108 (27.6%)		
1,501-3,000	51 (13.1%)	33 (8.5%)	84 (21.6%)		
≥3,000	99 (25.4%)	0 (0.00%)	99 (25.4%)		
Occupation				41.20	0.000**
Company employees	52 (13.3%)	67 (17.2%)	119 (30.5%)		
Students	28 (7.2 %)	11 (2.8%)	39 (10.0%)		
Retired	50 (12.8%)	21 (5.4%)	71 (18.2%)		
freelance	42 (10.8%)	67 (17.2%)	109 (28.0%)		
Housewife and others	23 (5.9%)	29 (7.4%)	52 (13.3%)		
Number of trips				3.84	0.32
1	92 (23.6%)	102 (26.2%)	194 (49.8%)		
2	43 (11.0%)	42 (10.8%)	85 (21.8%)		
3	22 (5.6%)	12 (3.1%)	34 (8.7%)		
≥3	38 (9.7%)	39 (10.0%)	77 (19.7%)		
Length of stay (days)				101.02	0.000**
1-3	16 (4.1%)	46 (11.8%)	62 (15.9%)		
4-7	32 (8.2%)	99 (25.4%)	131 (33.6%)		
8-14	56 (14.4%)	27 (6.9%)	83 (21.3%)		
15-21	32 (8.2%)	12 (3.1%)	44 (11.3%)		
22-30	20 (5.1%)	3 (0.8%)	23 (5.9%)		
>30 days	39 (10.0%)	8 (2.0%)	47 (12.0%)		

p *<0.05 , ** p<0.01

Underlying Dimensions of Local Thai Food Image

Table 2 shows that a principal component analysis (PCA) using varimax rotation was performed to label the crux dimensions of local Thai foods image. The factorability assumption was also checked. Barlett’s test of sphericity divulged that the correlation matrix was commonly significant ($\chi^2 = 4,853.15, p < 0.000$). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin matrix (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, utilized to gauge the strength of the relationship among food image, was 0.897, which is higher than the acceptable threshold score of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2010). To avoid cross-loadings, only the factors with eigenvalues higher than 1.0 were included. The results

of the PCA converged after seven iterations, retaining 25 of the 28 variables.

Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was utilized to check the reliability of each variable. Table 2 shows that the factor analyses led to a 5-factor solution that explained 61.59% of the total variance. Each factor was then identified as follows: (1) affective image of food, (2) food quality, (3) attractiveness of food, (4) health promotion and (5) cultural heritage.

The reliability of the five dimensions of perception of Thai food ranged from 0.803 to 0.881, a satisfactory result. Of the five perceived images of Thai food, “affective image of food,” “cultural heritage,” and “attractiveness of food” were the three most significant perceived images, as shown by the mean scores of 3.29, 3.12, & 2.90 respectively.

Table 2: Principal Component Analysis of Food Image Dimensions

Perception Categories	Number	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Mean	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>1. Affective Image of Food</i>	5		8.94	35.78	3.29	.881
Thai cuisine was stimulated		.766			3.00	
Thai cuisine was fulfilled		.821			3.18	
Thai cuisine was enjoyable		.862			3.51	
Thai cuisine was exciting		.851			3.47	
Thai cuisine was pleasant		.818			3.31	
<i>2. Food Quality</i>	6		2.42	9.66 %	2.75	.821
Thai cuisine is healthy		.717			2.73	
Thai cuisine is fresh		.685			2.67	
Thai cuisine is aesthetically pleasing		.716			2.68	
Thai cuisine is organic		.778			2.97	
Thai cuisine is easily digestible		.754			2.83	
Thai cuisine is hygienic		.708			2.64	
<i>3. Attractiveness of food</i>	6		1.67	6.67%	2.90	.822
Thai cuisine is popular.		.695			2.78	
Thai cuisine is tasty.		.731			2.92	
Thai cuisine is inexpensive		.677			2.03	
Thai cuisine overall is good value for money		.801			2.40	
Thai cuisine is aromatic		.703			2.11	
Thai cuisine is attractive		.755			2.26	
<i>4. Health Promotion</i>	4		1.27	5.08%	2.87	.832
Thai cuisine can prevent cancer		.827			2.84	
Thai cuisine can prevent diseases such as Flu		.878			3.10	
Thai cuisine is good for immunity		.772			2.78	
Thai cuisine is medicinal		.788			2.77	
<i>5. Cultural Heritage</i>	4		1.01	4.40%	3.12	.803
Thai cuisine is part of cultural heritage.		.833			3.26	
Thai cuisine is authentic		.822			3.24	
Thai cuisine is recognizable		.821			3.20	
Thai cuisine is unique/original		.688			2.77	
Total				61.59 %		

Results from the T-tests and ANOVA test shown in Table 3 find that significant differences of food image dimensions exist across nationality, number of trips and length of stay in Thailand. Therefore, H4, H5, and H6 are supported. For ANOVAs, examination of Scheffe post-hoc test was implemented when a significant difference was exposed so as to further identify the marked differences among groups. Based on respondents' nationalities, results from the T-test (see Table 3) show that Chinese tourists agree more than European tourists regarding every dimension of food image except for "attractiveness of food" (here, the two groups were not statistically different). For number of trips, the outcome reveal statistically significant differences between respondents regarding "attractiveness of food" and "cultural

heritage." Tourists who visited Thailand four times perceive "attractiveness of food" higher than tourists who visited Thailand one time or three times. Tourists who visited Thailand four times agree with "cultural heritage" higher than tourists who visited less than four times.

Based on the respondents' length of stay, the results of this study demonstrate that tourists who stayed in Thailand more than 14 days had a higher "affective food image," "attractiveness of food," and higher "cultural heritage" than tourists who stayed fewer than 14 days. However, tourists who stayed in Thailand more than 14 days expressed less agreement regarding "health promotion" than did those tourists who stayed there fewer than 14 days.

Table 3: Comparing Means in Perceptions of Thai Food Image by Demographic Characteristics and Trip Patterns

Variables	Affective Food Image	Food Quality	Attractiveness of Food	Health Promotion	Cultural Heritage
Nation	t = 3.36**	t = 4.48**	t = 0.93	t = 5.08**	t = 2.46*
Chinese	3.40	2.85	2.92	3.01	3.19
European	3.19	2.66	2.88	2.73	3.05
Number of trips	F = 3.40* ^M	F = 1.43	F = 4.84** d > a, c	F = 1.21	F = 6.22** d > a, b,c
1 (a)	3.24	2.75	2.85	2.92	3.09
2 (b)	3.34	2.76	2.94	2.86	3.05
3 (c)	3.13	2.62	2.78	2.71	2.94
4 (d)	3.46	2.80	3.04	2.84	3.34
Length of stay	t = 1.99*	t = 1.63	t = 6.32**	t = -2.65*	t = 6.99**
1-14 days	3.25	2.73	2.81	2.92	3.00
> 14 days	3.39	2.81	3.11	2.76	3.40

Notes: ^MScheffe post-hoc test showed no statistical difference from the group means.

p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Influence of Local Cuisine Image on Satisfaction When Travelling in Thailand

The regression equation investigating influence of local cuisine image on satisfaction when travelling in Thailand was found to be significant (F = 32.35, p < 0.01), with 29.6% of the total variance being explainable (see Table 4). The significant variables are “affective food image,” “food quality,” and “health promotion.” Thus, these findings support H1. Between the three significant independent factors, “affective food image” was identified as having the most influence predicting satisfaction with travelling in Thailand. The results show that “health promotion” led to reduced satisfaction with travelling in Thailand.

Table 4: Results of Regression Analysis: Influence Of Local Cuisine Image on Satisfaction When Travelling in Thailand

Factors	B	T-Value	P-Value
Constant	1.50	5.70	.000**
Affective food image	0.41	5.67	.000**
Food quality	0.34	3.11	.002**
Attractiveness of food	0.22	1.87	.062
Health promotion	-0.26	-3.96	.000**
Cultural Heritage	0.15	1.831	.068
R ² = 0.296, F = 32.35, Sig = .000**			

p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Influence of Local Cuisine Image on Satisfaction with Eating Thai Cuisine and Behavioral Intention

The regression equation testing influence of local cuisine image on satisfaction with eating Thai cuisine was found to be significant (F = 52.28, p < 0.01), with 40.6% of the total variance being explainable (see Table 5). Satisfaction with eating Thai cuisine is affected by “affective food image,” “attractiveness of food,” and “food quality.” ; Thus, these findings support H2. Between the three significant independent factors, affective food image was revealed to have the most impact on satisfaction with eating Thai cuisine.

The regression equation investigating influence of local cuisine image on behavioral intention was found to be significant (F = 42.21, p < 0.01), with 35.5% of the total variance being explainable (see Table 6). Behavioral intention is influenced by the “affective food image,” “attractiveness of food,” “food quality,” and “cultural heritage”. Thus, these findings support H3.

Table 5: Results of Regression Analysis: Influence of Local Cuisine Image on Satisfaction with Eating Thai Cuisine

Factors	B	T-Value	P-Value
Constant	0.61	2.49	0.013*
Affective food image	0.50	7.32	0.000**
Food quality	0.34	3.32	0.001**
Attractiveness of food	0.42	3.94	0.000**
Health promotion	-0.07	-1.07	0.29
Cultural heritage	-0.05	-0.66	0.51
R ² = 0.406, F = 52.58, Sig = .000**			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Table 6: Results of Regression Analysis: Influence of Local Cuisine Image on Behavioral Intention

Factors	B	T-Value	P-Value
Constant	1.37	7.25	0.000**
Affective food image	0.29	5.47	0.000**
Food quality	0.20	2.58	0.010**
Attractiveness of food	0.26	3.17	0.002**
Health promotion	-0.09	-1.86	0.063
Cultural Heritage	0.13	2.18	0.030*
R ² = 0.355, F = 42.21, Sig = .000**			

: * p< 0.05, ** p< 0.01

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that there are five dimensions of food image perceived by tourists: “affective food image,” “food quality,” “attractiveness of food,” “health promotion” and “cultural heritage.” These results are similar to the study by Gupta et al. (2020) who identified our dimensions of local cuisine in Delhi, India: “food authenticity and culture,” “emotional food image,” “freshness & taste” and “nutritional value & digestibility.” The current study is also congruent with the study by Peštek and Činjarević (2014) on tourists’ perceived image of Bosnian cuisine. It included “uniqueness and cultural heritage,” “food quality and price,” “nutrition and health benefits of food,” and “affective image of food” as its food dimensions

The current study found that three factors influence tourist satisfaction when eating Thai cuisine are “affective food image,” “attractiveness of food” and “food quality”, respectively. The four elements that influenced the behavioral intention to eat Thai cuisine or recommend Thai cuisine to others were “affective food image,” “attractiveness of food,” “food quality” and “cultural heritage”. These results confirm the research of Yasami et al. (2020) who found there are relationships between perceived destination food image, food satisfaction, and loyalty intentions. The current results showed that “cultural heritage image” did not impact satisfaction when eating Thai cuisine, but it did help increase behavioral intention.

Affective image” had the highest impact on satisfaction with travelling to Thailand, eating Thai cuisine and related behavioral intention. These results confirm the findings of Mohamed et al. (2020) that revealed that the affective dimension of a destination food experience significantly influences the entire food-experience and its satisfaction. The results also support the study by Sthapit et al. (2017) who found that sentiments provoked by eating destination cuisine significantly will sway tourists’ reminiscences, place connection and their behavioral intentions. The current study also echoes the study by Seo and Yun (2015) who reported

that tourists were eager to pursue positive fulfillment, enjoyment, and pleasure at the destination.

“Affective food image” and “food quality” positively influenced satisfaction when travelling to Thailand, whereas “health promotion” negatively influenced satisfaction when travelling there; tourists’ perception of Thai food as health promotion reduced tourist satisfaction when travelling in Thailand. The reason may be that while travelling, tourists want to have fun and seeking exciting new experiences as mentioned in the previous research (Ahmad et al., 2020). Therefore, if tourists perceive that the local cuisine image means they are eating to prevent disease or increase immunity, they will feel depressed, unpleasant, and even bored. Most of the respondents surveyed (63%) were less than 30 years in age and thus were more likely to eat food for its tastiness and their own enjoyment. During a vacation, aspects like sensory appeal and the qualities of the destination cuisine being consumed are more crucial when promoting an enjoyable opinion about consuming the local cuisine (Ahmad et al., 2020). Indeed, Ahmad et al. (2020) found that the health aspects of the food consumed did not influence the intention to eat local cuisine.

This outcome also demonstrated that significantly different perceptions of food do exist based on nationality. This outcome echoes the prior research that found that tourist nationality impacts the destination food image (Gupta et al., 2020; Promsivapallop & Kannaovakun, 2019; Seo & Yun, 2015). The current study further found that Chinese tourists agree more than European tourists do on every dimension of food image except for the “attractiveness of food dimension”. The results support the notion that Chinese tourists are more familiar with Thai cuisine, which is also considered as Asian food. It echoes the findings of Telfer and Wall (2000) who revealed that during tourist visits to Indonesia, local Asian foods are more likely to be eaten by Asian tourists, while international dishes are more in demand by European tourists.

Highlight the study by Wan and Choi (2020) who reported that significant differences in different food image dimensions exist for the numbers of trips. The results of this study found that tourists who visited Thailand more than three times perceived the “attractiveness of food image” and “cultural heritage image” higher than did those tourists who had visited Thailand fewer than three times.

Tourists who stayed in Thailand a longer time had stronger perceptions of “affective food image,” “attractiveness of food,” and “cultural heritage” but weaker perceptions of “health promotion” than tourists who stayed in Thailand for a shorter time. This finding may be because tourists who stayed in Thailand a longer time had more time to learn about the linkage of Thai culture and Thai cuisine. When they stayed in Thailand longer, they also had more

opportunities to taste a variety of Thai cuisine from different restaurants and recognize that Thai food is tasty, attractive and a good value for the money. Thus, they felt that Thai food was pleasant, stimulating, and exciting. That is perhaps why they agreed less that Thai cuisine is medicinal or increases immunity. These results are similar to those of Alonso and Krajsic (2016) who found that length of stay is a significant factor that appeared to impact the respondents' perceptions of typical Australian dishes.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

To promote tourism in Thailand, destination tourism agencies should highlight those tourists who have visited Thailand many times and/or for a long time and were impressed with Thai cuisine for its quality, tastiness, and reasonable prices. Publicity campaigns can emphasize how dining on local food can generate fun, pleasure, and happiness. Satisfied tourists can also share their Thai culinary experiences through videos and pictures, as suggested by Mohamed et al. (2020). This kind of advertising can also be promoted by the Ministry of Tourism, different restaurants, and hotel websites, brochures, videos, online social networks, and other key venues. Relevant tourism agencies should organize food-related events and festivals, so more tourists can experience the Thai culture. In addition, they should recommend special itineraries that incorporate local food destinations as an extra offering.

Local cuisine providers, such as restaurants, should highlight the relationship of their food to the Thai cultural heritage. Restaurants should emphasize food authenticity and include local cultural components on their menus. They can provide pictures of each food item and cultural facts about it on the restaurant wall or in their brochures or menus. Further still, restaurants and hotels can offer cooking classes to demonstrate Thai food and Thai culture. Restaurants might organize open kitchens where tourists will see safe and hygienic preparation of the food they will be eating. This "extra" will help tourists learn about Thai cooking and gain more confidence when eating it. Restaurants can offer tourists local food sample before ordering, so that tourists can feel assured that they will have an enjoyable eating experience, as recommended by González et al. (2020). This "extra" will lead to greater consumer satisfaction that will further enhance local businesses (González et al., 2020).

Destination marketers should also encourage food providers to improve their culinary skills and consistently use fresh and natural ingredients. Restaurants may offer options for tourists such as dishes with mild, medium or strong levels of spiciness or other factors to suit their tastes, according to whether they are European or Asian.

This study found that "health promotion" negatively impacted satisfaction when travelling in Thailand.

Therefore, destination marketers and local food providers should emphasize that eating Thai cuisine means enjoyment, greater cultural awareness, and tastiness, and not as much that it is "healthy eating"

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research studied only Chinese tourists and European tourists. Future research should include greater differentiation and include tourists from different European countries. In addition, future research should examine tourists from other countries such as Canada and South Africa. Also, a quantitative study can be conducted to provide deeper insights into the food image and its impact on eating satisfaction and satisfaction with travelling in Thailand.

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