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The Making of Top Fine-dining Chinese Restaurants: Evidence from Domestic and International Customers in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines critical factors for the success of Chinese fine-dining restaurants overseas. Using visualized analysis method of customers' comments, the study found that high-quality food, overall experience (good ambience, attentive staff, appropriate pricing), and good business management are among the top critical success factors, although domestic and international customers perceive restaurant experience differently. The study makes an important contribution to ethnic fine-dining restaurant literature by identifying critical success factors for fine-dining Chinese restaurants overseas and by enriching the concept of food authenticity.

Abstract

This study examines critical factors for the success of Chinese fine-dining restaurants overseas. Using visualized analysis method of customers' comments, the study found that high-quality food, overall experience (good ambience, attentive staff, appropriate pricing), and good business management are among the top critical success factors, although domestic and international customers perceive restaurant experience differently. The study makes an important contribution to ethnic fine-dining restaurant literature by identifying critical success factors for fine-dining Chinese restaurants overseas and by enriching the concept of food authenticity.

Keywords: Ethnic Fine-dining Restaurants; Sydney; Text Mining; Critical Success Factors

Introduction

A recent report from *Australian Food News* ("Australian's rank Chinese cuisine as their favorite," 2016) shows that Chinese food is Australia's favorite ethnic cuisine. In 2016, 73.6% of Australians said that they liked Chinese food the most, and Chinese food is popular among all generations in Australia. Over the years, people in the West seem to have developed a taste for ethnic cuisines as alternatives to their traditional cuisines (Josiam & Monteiro, 2004). Ethnic foods are foods that a particular ethnic or cultural group favors (Clemes, Gan, & Sriwongrat, 2013). Despite the popularity of Chinese cuisine, Australia and other Western countries have experienced a shortage of high-end Chinese restaurants (Chan, 2017). For example, a quick search on TripAdvisor showed that 60% of Chinese restaurants in Sydney are categorized as "cheap eats," about one-third are characterized as mid-range restaurants, and only 3% are categorized as fine dining, suggesting great room for growth in the fine-dining sector.

Fine-dining restaurants provide a unique theme, high-quality expensive food, exceptional service, and a formal ambience (Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010; Harden, 2007). Traditionally, fine dining was associated only with French cuisines. However, over time, more ethnic cuisines such as Spanish and Japanese cuisines, joined the fine-dining segment. Presently Japan has the largest number of Michelin three-star restaurants and some Chinese restaurants in Hong Kong and Singapore also appear in the Michelin guide. However, when Chinese food was first introduced in Western countries, it was considered inexpensive ethnic fare (Liu, 2015). As a result, over the years Chinese gastronomy has suffered from a stereotypical image that includes "cheapness" (Wang, 2016), which has little to do with fine dining. This view partially explains the absence of Chinese restaurants in fine-dining segments and has also negatively affected Chinese cuisines' image and positioning.

Over the last several decades, immigrants from Asian-Pacific countries have brought various changes to the demographic profiles of Australia. Since 1945, Australia has accepted about 6.5 million immigrants, not only shaping modern Australia as a culturally diverse nation but also influencing Australian cuisines and people's dining habits. Asian cuisines in particular have gained high popularity, and the presence of new migrants from Asian-Pacific countries provides opportunities for Chinese restaurants to step into the fine-dining segment. At present, Australia has only a handful of Chinese fine-dining restaurants, and they have set examples for fellow restaurants.

Parsa et al. (2005; 2015) conducted a number of studies on why restaurants fail, providing important theoretical and empirical implications for restaurant researchers and operators. We believe it is also important to investigate critical success factors for restaurants. The purpose of the study is to identify the key ingredients of successful Chinese fine-dining restaurants. Using top-rated Chinese fine-dining restaurants in Australia, the study aims to 1) identify the key factors of successful fine-dining Chinese restaurants in Australia and 2) identify if perceptions differ between domestic and international customers.

The study makes important contributions to both theory and practice. Given the importance of Chinese tourists to the world's travel industry (Smith, 2018) and growing the popularity of Chinese cuisines worldwide (e.g. Australian Food News, 2016; Chen, 2017), we believe such a study is necessary and significant. The findings of the study thus not only enrich literature on fine-dining restaurants, particularly in the ethnic fine-dining restaurant category, but also provide practical operational implications for Chinese restaurants' future strategies. This study also provide evidence on critical success factors of fine-dining restaurants, echoing Parsa et al.'s studies (2005; 2015) on why restaurants fail.

Literature review

Chinese restaurants and the fine-dining sector in Australia

Chinese food became part of Australia's culinary tradition during the Australian Gold Rush when, in 1855, 11,493 Chinese migrants arrived in Australia, bringing with them various Chinese cuisines, which quickly became popular throughout the country. By 1890, about one-third of restaurant cooks in Australia were Chinese (Reeves & Mountford, 2011). Beginning in 1934, local Chinese-owned businesses (including restaurants) were allowed to bring in employees from China, which further contributed to the growth of Chinese restaurants in Australia (Reeves & Mountford, 2011). By the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese restaurants were present in every major city and many towns. Although most dishes were altered to accommodate local preferences by adapting ingredients and marrying them with unique Australian ingredients, many typical ingredients of Chinese food, such as tofu, began to appear in Australian kitchens (Metro South Health, 2015).

Today, Chinese gastronomy is an active component of Australia's food culture and is an established part of Australian people's daily life. A recent survey shows that Chinese food is the most popular ethnic fare for Australian people, outperforming Italian, Thai, Indian, Japanese, and other ethnic cuisines (Roy Morgan Research, 2016) (Figure 1).

Despite Chinese restaurants' popularity in Australia, only a handful can be classified as fine-dining restaurants. For example, TripAdvisor (2017) lists only about 3% of Chinese restaurants as fine-dining. In line with this listing, among the top-10 rated Chinese restaurants in Sydney, three were fine-dining restaurants (TripAdvisor, 2016), suggesting an apparent competitive advantage of fine-dining over other categories of Chinese restaurants. Notably, the three restaurants depart from the conventional image of Chinese restaurants in terms of location, interior design, and atmosphere as well as regarding menus, prices, and authenticity.

Despite the growing importance of Chinese cuisines and Chinese restaurants, research on this sector by the academic and the industry is limited (Ma et al., 2014). Information is missing with respect to facts such as total number of Chinese restaurants, types of operations, total employment, and contributions to the nation's economy. Further, ambiguity persists as to what makes Chinese fine-dining restaurants successful and how customers perceive their dining experiences.

Customer experience with fine-dining restaurants

Fine-dining restaurants offer customers upscale foods and beverages provided by celebrity chefs, full table service by highly trained professional servers, and sophisticated and contemporary décor and ambiance (Miller, Tlapa, & Washington, 2011). In addition, fine dining restaurants create unique concepts to gain a competitive advantage (Ma et al., 2014). As a result of these characteristics, customers visiting dining restaurants often have high expectations, and according to the expectancy–disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1980), can be difficult to satisfy.

Customer satisfaction is critically important for the success of a fine-dining restaurant, because it is the starting point of customer loyalty. Therefore, identifying and assessing the key features of a fine-dining experience is of great significance. Researchers generally agree that the main factors that affect customers' dining experience are the quality of the physical environment (e.g., W. G. Kim & Moon, 2009), the menu (e.g., Fotouhinia-Yepes, 2013), food quality (e.g., Ha & Jang, 2010), and employee service (e.g., Tu, Lin, & Chang, 2011). In addition, the aesthetic image of fine-dining restaurants is important (Emily Ma, QU, & Eliwa, 2014).

In restaurants, the servicescape comprises the physical surroundings of the restaurant (Bitner, 1992). Researchers generally agree that the physical environment includes ambient conditions, spatial layout, seating comfort, and facility aesthetics (Hwang & Ok, 2013). The

servicescape is important to customers' satisfaction and loyalty because it can inspire emotional responses, such as excitement and pleasure (W. G. Kim & Moon, 2009; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Physical attributes are particularly important for fine-dining restaurants. For example, the spatial layout of tables can ensure that customers have a comfortable space between them, and artwork, such as paintings, helps to set a mood. Architecture, landscaping, and a view from windows are also important components of a nice servicescape (Elitetraveler, 2017).

The importance of the restaurant's menu cannot be over emphasized. A restaurant should establish a good selection of menu items and design the menu itself well before the restaurant starts operation. The menu is the glue that holds together the restaurant's spatial layout, design, and service style—and, importantly, establishes the customer's perception of the restaurant. The menu's layout and design, sequence of food items, and level of detail can all affect customers' assessment of the restaurant and their expenditure in the restaurant (Schjøll & Alfnes, 2017). For example, more complex menu descriptions can increase customers' perceptions of the quality of food and liking of the items as well as their price expectation (McCall and Lynn, (2008). Including descriptive labels such as “succulent Asian seafood filet” can improve restaurant sales and evaluations (Wansink, Ittersum, & Painter, 2004).

While the menu of a fine-dining restaurant does not need to be extensive, the food must be of high quality. Food quality is often determined by the choice of ingredients, the creativity in cooking methods, the presentation of food items, and the taste. Many fine-dining restaurants are proud supporters of local products, using ingredients from local fishermen and farmers. This local patronage not only ensures the freshness of ingredients, it is also a greener option that can contribute to a restaurant's image of being socially and environmentally responsible.

Successful restaurant operations rely on responsible, hard-working, skilled, and service-oriented employees. Fine-dining restaurant employees need to be skilled at serving customers but also knowledgeable about the menu items so they are able to offer suggestions about food choices as well as food and wine pairing (Mealey, 2015). Fine-dining servers must be attentive to details and willing to go beyond both job requirements and customers' expectations to create memorable experiences for customers (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2011).

An important influence on customers' perception of the restaurant experience is their place of origin and cultural background. An examination of culture's role in customer service experience and satisfaction in a Chinese restaurant found that culture (Asian and American) influenced the relationship between restaurant employees' service and customers' overall satisfaction (Ma, Qu, Njite, & Chen, 2011). Specifically, when the level of employee service is consistent, Asian customers tend to have a higher level of satisfaction than customers from America. A partial explanation may be that Asian customers are more familiar with Chinese food and are also influenced by the Confucian culture of harmony, and therefore are less likely to express dissatisfaction.

Many customers visiting ethnic-themed restaurants are seeking to experience authentic ethnic cuisines and culture, and a positive correlation exists between customer satisfaction and restaurant authenticity (Tsai & Lu, 2012). Groves (2001) defined the authenticity of food as a genuine version of a product in relation to a specific place, region, or country, and authentic food can allow an immediately authentic relationship with a culture or tradition (Heldke, 2003). Importantly, as an authentic dining experience is an effective indicator of customer repurchase intention, ethnic restaurants should make efforts to create a more authentic dining experience from the perspective of servicescape, food, and employee service (Ryu, Lee, & Gon Kim, 2012). Particularly for overseas Chinese customers who have

had many authentic Chinese food experiences, standards for the authentic taste of food items would be higher than for other attributes.

To summarize, the servicescape, the menu and food quality, authenticity of food, and employee service are critical factors that shape customer experiences with fine-dining restaurants. Creating great customer experience is the very important first step for restaurants' success. Other factors, both internal and external, can also contribute to the success (or failure) of a fine-dining restaurant.

Critical success/failure factors of fine-dining restaurants

In a milestone study, Parsa et al. (2005) found that about one-third of restaurants fail within the first year of operation. Economic downturns, poor controls, poor locations, failure to adapt to changing demographics, failure to gain market share, restaurant owners' loss of motivation, and failure to cope with technological innovations can all contribute to restaurants' failure (Parsa, van der Rest, Smith, Parsa, & Bujisic, 2015). However, successful restaurants also share some common characteristics, and efforts have been made to identify and categorize these critical success factors (e.g. Parsa et al., 2015; Jacobs and Klosse, (2016). Table 1 summarizes studies that touch on critical success factors of restaurants. Notably, only a handful of studies were in full-service or fine-dining restaurants contexts (e.g., Antun & Gustafson, 2005; Arora & Singer, 2006; Jin, 2015; Mhlanga & Tichaawa, 2016), suggesting a research gap that needs to be addressed.

The most important success factors for restaurants is starting with a clear concept. The concept should be distinct enough to stand out in the market (Camillo, Connolly, & Kim, 2008), and should be supported with good quality food and value created for customers. Restaurant managers should know their specific competitors and view competition strategically, perhaps using competitors' performance to measure self-performance, along the lines of Steve Travel Research's Competitive Set, where hotels compare their own

performance with a set of identified competing hotels. As creating loyal customers is essential for the success of restaurants (W. G. Kim & Moon, 2009), a restaurant should make a strong effort at relationship marketing. Researchers and restaurant operators have also emphasized the importance of location, which includes not only accessibility but also the infrastructure, policies, parking and traffic conditions, and neighborhood (Budhwar, 2004).

In addition, capital investment, business models, restaurant size, and the owner's or manager's characteristics are all critical factors that contribute to restaurants' success or failure. Restaurants need managers who can handle fast-paced daily operations and who are equipped with knowledge, capabilities, and appropriate personality traits, such as conscientiousness and self-efficacy (Torres & Watson, 2013). Managers need to travel and visit units in person and practice effective leadership and human relations (Dipietro et al., (2007). Restaurants should also have effective human resources policies and benefits, as well as policies supporting work-life balance of managers (Lee, Khan, & Ko, 2008).

Research design

Using TripAdvisor data

Online platforms such TripAdvisor, Yelp, Facebook, Expedia, and Priceline provide hundreds of customer reviews on restaurants, hotels, and other hospitality and tourism service providers, which are important references for new customers. The reviews are also important channels for service providers to access customer feedbacks for their service performance. Hospitality and tourism research has commonly used customer online reviews, and TripAdvisor is one of the most popular platforms (Ma, Cheng, & Hsiao, 2018). TripAdvisor has become the top travel website in the US, with more than 460 million reviews, and in Australia, TripAdvisor has accumulated more than 7,600,000 reviews of hotels, attractions,

and restaurants (TripAdvisor, 2018). Hence, we have relied on TripAdvisor for online data for our study.

We selected Sydney's Chinese fine-dining restaurants for study as Sydney has the largest number of Chinese immigrants in Australia and is also the top destination city for both domestic and international travelers (Australian Sky, 2018). A search of Sydney restaurants on TripAdvisor using the terms "Chinese" and "fine-dining" returned 14 restaurants. Among them, three had been awarded TripAdvisor's Certificate of Excellence. In addition to being recognized by TripAdvisor, we further verified the fine-dining status of Chinese restaurants by checking if they have won at least one chef hat. The Chef Hat rating system is an Australian equivalent of the Michelin star-rating system which was found in 1977. It is today known as the "Australian Good Food & Travel Guide". The quality of a 2-Chef-Hat restaurant is considered equivalent to a 2-Michelin-star restaurant.

Using this selection criteria, three restaurants stand out with two been awarded two chef hats and one been awarded one chef hat (Good Food, 2017). Therefore, the three restaurants were retained for the study. To protect the identities of these restaurants, pseudonyms were used (CD, ST, MW). Table 2 included description of each restaurant, including seating capacities, total number of comments generated, and period covered.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using Leximancer and SPSS through three stages. First, we conducted text mining of the review comments to identify the key attributes of consumers' fine-dining experience. We then performed a series of analyses of key attributes and reviewers' place of origin. Finally, we undertook some quantifiable measures to assess the influence of reviewers' place of origin and their satisfaction ratings. We performed the first two stages using the qualitative analysis software Leximancer (Edition 4) to identify the key success factors, and to perform the third stage we used SPSS for a cross-tabulation analysis to

compare customers' place of origin with their satisfaction rating. Leximancer is high-level natural language-processing software that transforms "lexical co-occurrence information from natural language into semantic patterns in an unsupervised manner" through "two stages of extraction – semantic and relational" (Smith & Humphreys, 2006, p. 262). The outcome of the Leximancer analysis is a heat map, in which the brightness of a circle reflects the importance of a theme and closely mapped concepts have strong semantic meanings (Campbell, Pitt, Parent, & Berthon, 2011; Rooney, 2005). It has been widely employed in hospitality and tourism literature to analyze review comments (Wu, Wall, & Pearce, 2014), as well as in academic literature (Cheng, 2016b), blogs (Sun, Zhang, & Ryan, 2015; Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015), and newspaper articles (Cheng, 2016a).

Findings

Ingredients of fine-dining restaurant experience

Figure 2 shows the conceptual map of the text mining presenting three broad areas: (1) high-quality food, (2) overall experience (good ambience, attentive staff, the price factor), and (3) good business management. The analysis yielded 52 concepts, which are grouped into themes under each area. The diversity of themes and concepts in each area reflects the various key attributes of fine-dining restaurants.

Not surprisingly, as Figure 2 shows the most dominant area is high-quality food (Area 1). The themed dishes and menu indicate the variety of food the restaurants offer. Importantly, however, these restaurants offer not only Chinese-specific food but also cocktails and wine, which are usually associated with Western dining restaurants. A fairly extensive wine list is considered important, as well as the way the food is served. For example, customers commented,

Four of us dined here so we were able to try a range of dishes – all were fantastic – waygu beef shin, pork belly, duck and we had three entrees from the dim sum

menu. The flavours melted in your mouth and the food was crunchy fresh. (CD, Australia, rating 5)

Wine list is fairly extensive – and we all ate really well for only \$100 per person. Amazing! (ST, Australia, Rating 5)

Customers were also very appreciative that these fine-dining restaurants customized the food upon request.

If you like really well done, spicy, Asian food, this place is it. Actually, it doesn't need to be spicy if you don't like your food that way. That's just what I'd choose. And it is SENSATIONAL! (ST, Australia, Rating 5)

Location also appears as a concept that has a direct connection with the concept of food, reflecting the fact that customers use location to infer the quality of the food. For instance,

The location is cool in a back alley in the basement of an old building. The interior suits the food and creates a great atmosphere, especially sitting near one of the kitchen stations. (MW, Australia, Rating 5)

The restaurant itself is the second dominant area (Area 2), and includes attentive staff, a friendly and busy atmosphere, value for the price, and the restaurant's view of Sydney. In particular, value for money is important: if consumers have chosen a fine-dining restaurant, price might not be a vital consideration, but because these restaurants are fine-dining, consumers look for reasons to justify their spending. For example,

The outstanding service at this excellent restaurant starts at the front door and continues right until you leave. We were greeted, seated and had drinks ordered efficiently with a friendly smile and by then we had seen three wait staff. (MW, Australia, rating 5)

My guest and I paid \$400 for two people and got the "joy" of watching the wait staff clean around us no doubt so they could knock off early.... There are many restaurants in Sydney that do excellent Asian food and have excellent service. This is not one of them. (ST, USA, Rating 1)

The third area is good business management (Area 3), which includes the layout and flow of the restaurant, reservation and waiting-time management, and how staff and managers cope with busy hours and large groups. For example,

We walked in and were greeted by a gorgeous host – with no booking... we chose to sit at the bar ...instead of wait two hours for a table! Perfect outcome! We had the BEST evening. (MW, Australia 5)

However, when the business management is perceived as ineffective, such as being unable to cater to the needs of the customers and failing to manage waiting time and customer privacy, the result is customer disappointment and erosion of the customer's perception of value for money. This reaction makes service recovery in a fine-dining restaurant difficult.

For instance,

Cannot tell you how disappointed we were. The tables were situated so close that we were privy to all personal conversations. The ambiance was dull, uninviting, bland and requiring a make-over. The food was ordinary, the pork belly was deep fried and tasteless, the duck pancakes were dry and lacked flavor and the Maron sauce I replicate easily out of a bottle. For 1 entree, 2 mains, 1 bottle of wine it cost \$300. Never again. (CD, Australia, rating 1)

[In] the 1 hour 45 mins there we received our starter, the main never arrived in the 50 min gap after we finished the entree, and another drink we ordered didn't either. The mood was ruined and nothing was going to repair it. The manageress came to me as I left and waived the bill but that's not the point – restaurants please note – TIME, EFFORT AND EXPECTATIONS CANNOT BE REPLACED – WHEN AN EXPERIENCE IS BAD IT'S BAD ON SO MANY LEVELS (ST, Australia, Rating 1)

One important area within the theme is management of privacy. Privacy was frequently mentioned by both international and domestic customers. For example,

Excellent food and great service. Not ideal for a formal meal (noise level high and little privacy) but great for an informal business dinner (ST, International, Rating 5).

While Leximancer provides an aerial view of the semantic and relational insights of the textual data, researchers may need to map complex themes and concepts to higher theoretical knowledge (Cheng & Edwards, 2017). Drawing on the literature, we established a framework linking various attributes to provide an understanding of how customers evaluate a satisfactory experience in fine-dining restaurants. Regardless of its ethnicities, any fine-dining restaurant needs to have the core attributes of excellent food quality, exceptional service, attentive staff, unique decoration, and a nice view. However, beyond the core attributes, fine dining restaurants also need to have good management skills, be quiet enough to allow private conversation, and serve reasonably sized portions, as when the amount of food is more than they can eat, customers can perceive this as a waste of their money. Finally,

fine-dining restaurants often offer a “little surprise” for their customers, such as free desert or accommodation of special requests, such as accepting more guests than expected from the booking. Some representative comments are presented below.

We enjoyed a fabulous meal here. I am vegetarian and there was plenty of food to choose from. It was beautifully cooked. The setting is beautiful. I will go again when I go back to Sydney that's for sure. It does come at a price. Our meal was A\$280 for three of us – we didn't have a sweet but we were given a free one at the end of the night which was rice pudding! (CD, International, Rating 5)

Went here for birthday lunch in April 2017. Friends of ours arrived early, no record of the booking. Our friends thought it was only five of us, not realising there were eight guests. When I arrived, I talked to the staff. Despite the small mistake, can't emphasise enough how helpful and accommodating the team were. Got us a great table outside, were extremely attentive to us, and gave us an after dinner drink to make up for the mix up. Great food, lovely setting, will gladly go back. (CD, Australia, Rating 5)

Customers' place of origin on fine-dining restaurant experience and rating

To discern whether customers' places of origin would influence their perceived experiences, we relied on likelihood scores. Table 3 presents the likelihood scores of all the concepts of international and domestic consumers. The likelihood score is the indication of conditional probability of a concept in a category (Leximancer, 2011). For example, the likelihood score for the concept banquet (72%) indicates that 72% of the text segments with domestic guests also contain banquet. The 20 concepts with top likelihood scores are highlighted in yellow. A zero-order bivariate-correlation analysis on the likelihood scores between international and domestic guests indicates a strong negative correlation ($r = -.764, p < 0.01$), suggesting that domestic and international customers talked about the key attributes of their restaurant experience differently. While both talked about food, domestic guests tended to talk about the details of the food, whereas international tourists tended to emphasize the overall experience with the restaurants.

This research provides some quantifiable and qualitative measures that assess the influence of reviewers' place of origin on their satisfaction ratings. Using SPSS, we

performed cross-tabulation analyses between domestic versus international comments.

Customer satisfaction ratings are categorized into two categories: average or below (ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 2 = a bit dissatisfied) and above average (ranging from 3 = satisfied to 5 = very satisfied). The results suggested that Australian consumers tended to rate their fine-dining experience more positively than international consumers ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.956, p < .05$). These results may reflect the influence of consumers' previous experience on the evaluation of ethnic restaurants, as international tourists have more chances to experience different kinds of restaurants than domestic customers. Customers' comments support this point. For example:

Went here for a business dinner and we had what they said was a nice set menu. I have lived in Asia for a long time so was hoping for some nice Asian flavours but none of the dishes were a standout. They were all OK...but just not the level of quality or flavour I would expect from a top [restaurant].... (ST, International 3)

Notably,,this research indicates that international customers are more critical and demanding than domestic consumers with regard to the attribute of authenticity. This finding opens a window for future discussions in the area.

Discussion and implications

This study identified critical ingredients for the success of Chinese fine-dining restaurants, making an important contribution to the restaurant literature. The findings reveal some common elements for restaurants' success, particularly high-quality food and good management.

This research has also demonstrated the current trend and opinions from both domestic and international guests relating to fine-dining Chinese restaurant experiences in Australia. Importantly, domestic guests were more likely to mention the details and quality of food in the reviews. These characteristics are the main reason domestic guests rate the restaurant highly, although the specific details and perception of the quality of food vary with

the individual. Certain customers refer to excellent taste and the use of fresh ingredients cooked at the right temperature, whereas other customers refer to the chef's special recipes or food plating techniques. International guests were more likely consider the overall experience as important. Generally, customers visit fine-dining restaurants because they seek quality and variety/innovative experience (Harrington, Ottenbacher, and Kendall (2011).

This study also contributes to the debate of authenticity in the restaurant literature. Previous literature on ethnic restaurants consistently suggests that restaurant authenticity crucially influences customer satisfaction and loyalty (Jane, 2012). The results of this study verified that dining environment and authenticity of food play a significant role in prompting more positive reviews from international customers than from domestic guests. International customers are more critical and demanding than domestic consumers in terms of the authenticity of Chinese restaurants. However, a closer examination of the review comments in our research shows that patrons of these restaurants are not limited to nationals of Australia but are a mixture of domestic and international tourists. Thus, experiences of fine dining are formed by the images of past experience and knowledge of customers from various backgrounds with both "insider" and "outsider" perspectives. Customers tend to use various cues to assign authenticity to the food to "validate, educate, miseducate, contradict and interrogate themselves" (Mkono, 2012), such as the use of "Australian Chinese food," supporting the notion that what constitutes an "authentic" Chinese restaurant experience in a fine-dining context is extremely fluid and non-linear.

This study has important managerial implications for restaurants in Sydney and other cities. Local restaurant operators and managers in Sydney, especially those in the fine-dining restaurant segments, can consider the specific findings in this study in tackling their management strategy to improve business performance. More specifically, they can direct particular attention to the creation of a truly superior service climate. Patrons of Sydney's

upscale restaurants repeatedly mentioned the helpfulness and professionalism of service staff, which is directly linked to how customers perceive the management of the restaurants. More importantly, the management staff in fine-dining restaurants should emphasize professionalism and skills in managing the restaurant in front of the customers, particularly in dealing with crowdedness and unexpected customer requests. As this study shows, customers generally perceived that good management is a reflection of good quality in a fine-dining restaurant.

Conclusion, limitations, and future research

Using TripAdvisor customer comments on three top fine-dining Chinese restaurants, this study identified key attributes of customers' restaurant experience and uncovered differences between domestic and international customers. The study provided meaningful findings on the segment of ethnic fine-dining restaurants and made important contributions for restaurant operators catering to this market segment.

Despite the significant conclusions arising from the findings, some characteristics of the research settings may limit the generalizability of the study's findings. First, this study used only English-language reviews. Opinions and experiences of international travelers who do not necessarily write fluent English may not have been captured. It seems that international respondents who are able to comment in English are more likely to be experienced travelers. Consequently, they may have different standards for aesthetics and fine-dining Chinese restaurants. Future research might group customer comments on the basis of demographics, such as domestic customers and international travelers and international English-speaking respondents and international non-English-speaking respondents.

Second, this study relied on reviews of only three fine-dining Chinese restaurants in Sydney. Thus, generalizations of the findings to other forms of ethnic cuisines, such as other Asian or European cuisines, are limited. However, Chinese cuisine has been reported as the most popular ethnic cuisine for Australians (Roy Morgan Research, 2015), suggesting that other cuisines are not as ingrained in Australian culture as Chinese cuisine. Results from study of other cuisines might present different magnitudes and significance for the relationships among the constructs. Thus, future studies should explore the impact of variables such culture and ethnicity on significant performance attributes of authentic fine-dining restaurants and compare the critical features so as to better tailor them to each ethnic fine-dining restaurant. Additionally, to validate the results of this study, future research could undertake similar studies with diverse ethnic restaurants in other cities to reflect different restaurant segments.

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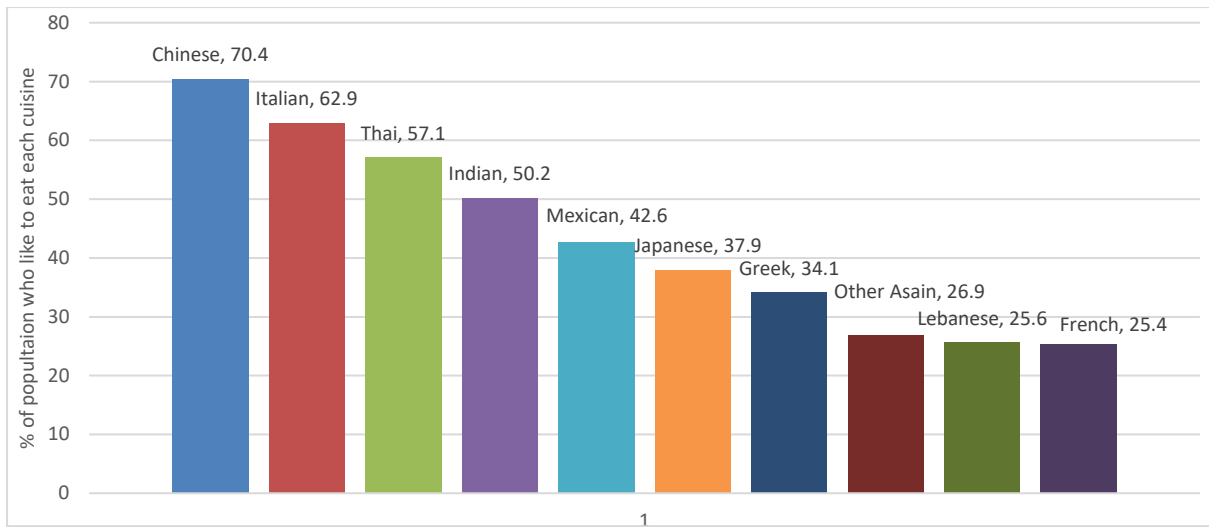


Figure 1. Cuisine liked by Australian customers (adapted from Roy Morgan Research, 2016)

Table 1. Critical Success Factors for Restaurants

Author /Year	Cuisine Ethnicity	Restaurant Type	Critical Success Factors	Research Method
(Mhlanga, 2018)	Western	Airport context in Africa	<i>Reliability</i> and <i>empathy</i> were the most important attributes for customers' restaurant experiences. <i>Responsiveness</i> and <i>empathy</i> significantly affected intention to return. Restauranteurs need to use <i>social and/or economic rewards</i> .	Mixed-methods design. Interviews with airport and restauranteur managers; questionnaire survey of 602 customers.
(Liu, Li, DiPietro, & Levitt, 2018)	Italian	Full-service restaurant	Make sure the <i>dining environment reflects the ethnic culture</i> . Pay attention to <i>cuisine name, presentation, atmosphere, ambience, the restaurant interior and exterior</i> , as well as interpretation or storytelling of the ethnic culture and history of cuisines.	Questionnaire survey of 417 customers of an independent, full-service Italian restaurant in south-eastern US.
(Huang, 2017)	Chinese	Chain-operated restaurant in Beijing	Restauranteurs should provide local cuisine to both local and foreign customers. Domestic customers care about <i>value for money</i> while international visitors are interested in <i>historical and ritualistic</i> aspects of the culinary arts.	990 randomly selected online customer reviews of domestic and international visitors.
(Thienhirun & Chung, 2017)	Japanese and Thai	Casual dining	Thai customers like Japanese restaurants offering <i>socialization atmosphere</i> ; Japanese customers are attracted by <i>unique dishes, enjoyment-filled experience and socialized atmosphere</i> in Thai restaurants.	On-line and a paper-based questionnaire surveys (N=345)
(Song & Qu, 2017)	Asian restaurants	Casual dining	Restaurant should provide products and services that <i>meet customers' expectations</i> , e.g. develop varieties of <i>spicy menu items</i> , establish	Questionnaire survey of 449 American frequent travelers.

			<p><i>promotion</i> strategies, and focus on <i>functional benefits</i> of new menus.</p> <p>American customers perceive higher hedonic value when exposed to <i>exotic or cultural atmosphere</i>.</p>	
(Mhlanga & Tichaawa, 2016)	Africa	Formal full-service restaurants	Customer experiences for food, beverage, service and ambience are <i>influenced by social media</i> . Restaurant should <i>promote on social media</i> , particularly on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.	Questionnaire survey with customers in selected formal full-service restaurants
(Ramanathan, Di, & Ramanathan, 2016)	Chinese	Buffet restaurant	Restaurant should allocate resources on the basis of factors' importance to customer satisfaction. <i>Food</i> is most important, followed by <i>price, ambience, and service</i> . Male customers value ambience while female and older customers value price.	Questionnaire survey with 204 restaurant customers.
(Jin, 2015)	Western	Full-service restaurant	For <i>senior customers</i> , high level of <i>relationship quality</i> leads to high level of behavioral loyalty. <i>Atmosphere</i> strengthens revisiting intention when customers' satisfaction and trust are low.	Web-based questionnaire of senior diners aged 55 years or older.
(Chien & Lin, 2015)	Fast-food restaurant in Taiwan	Fast-food	<i>Restaurant design</i> influences customers' emotion and purchase. Fast-food restaurant should improve the experience of waiting customers via design and reduce perceived wait. Train staff to <i>respond</i> to waiting customers' <i>emotional needs</i> .	Questionnaire survey of leading fast-food chain restaurant in Taiwan
(Gikonyo, Berndt, & Wadawi, 2015)	Africa	Franchise restaurants	<i>Brand power/concept</i> , competitive <i>environment</i> , government <i>policies</i> , distance management, culture appeal, excellent <i>selection</i> of franchises, good site/ <i>location</i> , good <i>relationship</i> with franchisees and proper <i>contract management</i> .	Qualitative study using three interviews with franchisors operating in the Kenyan market.
(Agarwal & Dahm, 2015)	Indian, Italian, Greek, Thai, Mexican, French, Chinese,	Casual dining	<i>College education</i> and <i>prior business experience</i> are important for successful business ventures. <i>Loyal patrons</i> was ranked third among the success factors of ethnic restaurants.	Questionnaire survey of 10 ethnic restaurants.

	Japanese, Turkish			
(Marinkovic, Senic, & Mimovic, 2015)	Ethnic restaurant sector	Casual dining	To promote national cuisine, ethnic restaurants in Serbia should pay attention to <i>food, prices and interior design</i> because they are the most important elements that customers consider when choosing a particular ethnic restaurant.	Two studies (N=120; N=254) using questionnaire survey of customers.
(H. E. Lee, 2015)	Western	Casual dining	Servers should develop <i>intercultural intelligence</i> to respond and communicate effectively in service encounters. American customers prefer <i>attentive service</i> as reflected by frequent check-backs, which influence tips. Japanese customers have no particular preference on the frequency of check-backs.	Questionnaire survey of 975 university students, including American, Japanese students and students of other ethnicities.
(Kawasaki et al., 2015)	Japanese	Fine-dining	Important factors are “ <i>utilization of main ingredient flavor</i> ” and “ <i>cuisine more Japanese in style.</i> ”	Questionnaire survey of 19 chefs
(Wang & Wu, 2014)	Western	Casual dining	MenuPad can improve restaurants’ operations, margins, and efficiencies and allow customers to perceive <i>enjoyment</i> and novelty when using MenuPad, which contributes to value creation.	Questionnaire survey (online) with 399 responses
(Czarniecka-Skubina & Nowak, 2014)	Japanese	Casual dining	For Japanese restaurateurs in Poland, <i>sushi</i> made important contributions to the spreading of Japanese cuisine in Poland. Polish consumers declared <i>interest in Japanese culture and traditions</i> and were inclined to taste the dishes of this region.	Questionnaire survey of 642 randomly selected Japanese restaurant customers in Poland
(J. Kim, Christodoulidou, & Choo, 2013)	Western	Quick-service restaurants	<i>Kiosks</i> help to <i>differentiate</i> service, increase <i>flexibility</i> of operations and increase revenue for quick service restaurants and provide <i>convenience</i> to customers. Restaurants to <i>price</i> , online <i>demos</i> to encourage customers’ use of kiosks.	Online survey of 614 customers

(Heung & Gu, 2012)	Japanese, Chinese fusion, authentic Vietnamese, Western	Mid- and upscale full-service restaurants in HK	<i>Attractive atmosphere</i> helps create customer satisfaction and loyalty. Reducing seat capacity can create a <i>private</i> and comfortable dining space. <i>View from a window</i> was important for customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.	Questionnaires survey of 118 restaurant customers in HK.
(Su, 2011)	Japanese, Thai, Southeast Asian, Korean, Russian, Indian, French, Italian, German, American	Casual dining	Restaurant should emphasize the <i>exotic atmosphere and culture of ethnic cuisines</i> through the <i>design, equipment, music and color</i> . Music, equipment, light and color have significant influences on feelings of customers.	Questionnaire survey of 322 customers regarding 10 types of ethnic restaurants.
(Camillo et al., 2008)	Western	Independent restaurants	<i>Differentiation</i> strategies; good <i>customer relations</i> ; <i>honest</i> , dedicated and determined <i>leadership</i> and restaurant <i>management</i> .	Mixed-method: Interview and questionnaire surveys of 18 restaurants in San Francisco.
(K. Lee, Khan, & Ko, 2008)	Outback Steakhouse in Korea	Casual dining	<i>Effective human resource practices</i> , e.g. careful employee hiring and generous employee benefits. <i>Best hospitality and value to customers</i> , e.g. serving complimentary chicken wings to waiting customers.	Interviews of executives and managers of the Outback Steakhouse in Korea
(Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007)	Thai	Fast food, buffet and table service	Food being <i>authentic in flavor</i> is more important than the overall atmosphere being authentic. Emphasize the <i>cultural authenticity</i> via Thai style uniforms, menu using Thai language, traditional Thai greetings, Thai style tableware/silverware, authentic Thai music and exterior and interior design.	Questionnaire survey of 250 customers.
Arora & Singer, 2006	American	Fine-dining restaurants	Restaurant's <i>overall performance</i> , particularly on <i>food quality</i> and <i>exceptional service</i> , help improve satisfaction. <i>Ambience</i> influences restaurant choices and values but not satisfaction. <i>Value</i> can be enhanced by improving performance and by reducing prices. Value	Questionnaire survey of 226 fine-dining restaurants' customers.

(Antun & Gustafson, 2005)	NA	Fine-dining and private clubs	satisfaction and post-visit attitude affect intention to visit the restaurant. Menu designs should reflect the demographic components of customers; Emphasize health concerns.	Menu analysis of menus from 36 restaurants
(Andersson, Mossberg, Restaurang- och hotellhögskolan - Grythytt, & Örebro, 2004)	Western	Casual dining	Evening restaurants must provide services beyond customers' physiological needs. Restaurants need to provide an environment that has nice interior design, quality services and presence of other customers so customers can socialize .	Interviews of 310 customers of 14 restaurants in Sweden.

Table 2. Profiles of restaurants in the study

Fine-dining Restaurant	Seating Capacity	Number of Reviews	Period
CD	Main dining 60 seats Private dining 40 seats	730	2015/09/25- 2017/04/09
ST	Main dining 50 seats Private dining 12 seats	1,410	2012/08/13- 2017/04/10
MW	Main dining 240 seats	480	2013/07/31- 2017/04/09

Table 3. Leximancer likelihood scores of domestic and international consumers

Concept	Domestic	International
Banquet	72%	12%
Chicken	72%	16%
Dining	72%	16%
Door	72%	21%
Duck	72%	19%
Dumplings	72%	14%
Friends	72%	14%
Group	72%	19%
Lunch	72%	18%
Menu	72%	21%
Night	72%	16%
People	72%	18%
Quality	72%	18%
Service	72%	18%
Special	72%	16%
Times	72%	17%
Visit	72%	17%
Waiter	72%	23%
Wine	72%	18%
Wonderful	72%	21%
Booking	63%	16%
List	63%	21%
Lovely	63%	20%
Ordered	63%	22%
Atmosphere	62%	19%
Dishes	62%	18%
Fried	62%	20%
Pork	62%	17%
Amazing	61%	18%
Food	61%	23%
Time	61%	20%
Excellent	60%	29%
Experience	60%	18%
Friendly	60%	22%
Nice	60%	26%
Restaurant	59%	26%
Staff	59%	22%
Cocktails	57%	21%
Dinner	57%	27%
Table	57%	28%
Busy	56%	27%
Down	56%	25%
Bar	55%	29%
Delicious	55%	24%
Place	55%	25%
Wait	55%	22%
Location	54%	29%
Meal	53%	24%
Dim	51%	31%
Worth	50%	31%
Best	49%	29%