

AN INVESTIGATION ON CULTURAL CUISINE OF MAINLAND CHINA. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS FOR RESTAURANT OPERATORS

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Historical records show that food has always played an important role in the cultural evolution of mankind. Eating culture, rituals, and food preferences based on environmental and social conditions emerged steadily over time. Italian food culture based on traditional Italian cooking has evolved into one of the worlds most prevalent. Since China opened the doors to international trade, Chinese consumers have been exposed to both Italian cuisine and Italian food and beverage products. In this scenario, the aim of this study is to investigate factors contributing to the popularity of Italian cuisine in mainland China and identify implications for restaurant operators. Specifically the study identifies those factors that may or may not contribute to the expansion and sustainability of Italian cuisine in mainland China. This study will help understand how the Chinese perceive foreign cuisines such as Italian and, in turn, attempts to identify the determinants that make this cuisine popular now with potential for growth in the future.

Keywords: *Cultural factors, eating culture, consumer behavior, restaurant operators, managerial implications.*

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*



INTRODUCTION

Historical records show that food has always played an important role in the cultural evolution of mankind (Camillo et al., 2005). Eating culture, rituals, and food preferences based on environmental and social conditions emerged steadily over time (Camillo et al., 2005). Societies, in turn, adopted specific food preferences according to taste, environment, and local economy. Foods and drinks have become culturally symbolic and eating habits have evolved to reflect people's own tastes and preferences (Camillo et al., 2008).

Italian food culture based on traditional Italian cooking has evolved into one of the world's most prevalent. Italian cuisine, with its adaptability in preparation, has become the most popular cuisine in the world. Despite rapid changes in international trade and profound lifestyle changes, Italy remains unsurpassed in its culinary traditions and accomplishments.

Since China opened the doors to international trade, Chinese consumers have been exposed to both Italian cuisine and Italian food and beverage products. With the onset of mercantilism, restaurants have gained popularity across Asia. Although the concept of globalization was non-existent centuries ago, many indigenous foods and cooking styles, such as Italian were exported from one country to another by merchants (Gernet, 1962; Wang, 1982; West, 1997).

Clearly such historical trends have significantly affected people's eating habits. Since the late 1980s a large number of Italian restaurants have opened across mainland China. Italian food and beverage exports to China tripled in just a few years. From 2008 to 2009 alone exports in this sector increased by 18.26% (ISTAT, 2008). This is despite total exports declining by -5% due to the recent global economic downturn (ICE-Istituto del Commercio Estero, 2010).

This paper analyzes the popularity of Italian cuisine in mainland China and proposes useful recommendations for hospitality operators and future restaurateurs regarding ethnic cuisine trends and the evolution of Italian cuisine in mainland China.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of Italian cuisine

Italian cuisine, as it is known today, is the result of the culinary evolution born of centuries of cultural, social and political changes. Significant change occurred with the discovery of the New World which helped shape much of what is known as Italian cuisine today with the introduction of items such as potatoes, tomatoes, bell pepper and maize; all central parts of Italian cuisine which were not introduced in scale until the 18th century (Del Conte, 2004). From England and to South America, to Australia and anywhere where Italians emigrated, Italian cuisine eventually became an integral part of the host nations' diet.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Italian restaurants emerged throughout Europe, the United States, South America and Oceania. Large numbers of Italians had immigrated to these regions following the economic downturn World War II had left behind in Italy. As U.S. hotel chains expanded around the world, operators benchmarked their success on Italian restaurants and began to integrate Italian style restaurants into their own operations. Chefs from around the world also began to capitalize on the success of Italian cuisine by using local ingredients to promote dishes that did not even exist in Italy. One of the most revolutionary new dishes, "Pasta Primavera," designed for vegetarians, was created at the Italian restaurant Le Cirque in New York; it had no red sauce topping and no meat balls (Maccioni, 2002).

The very first Italian restaurant operated outside Italy was Fior D' Italia, which opened on May 1, 1886 in San Francisco and reopened on the same site after a fire in 2007. This was followed by Tortorici's in 1900 in New Orleans. The first U.S. pizzeria in 1905 New York, Barbetta's restaurant was opened in 1906 in New York City and Frank Grisanti restaurant in Memphis in 1908.

The last three decades has seen tremendous changes in food culture, and Italian cuisine has been at centre stage. This has prompted many entrepreneurs around the world to pursue a career in culinary arts and to venture into operating "Italian style" restaurants. Credit must be given to the Americans who have created large restaurant chains such as Pizza Hut and Olive Garden that have been the pioneers in propagating the popularity of Italian cuisine around the world.

At what point in time Italian cuisine was introduced to mainland China is not known. However until the late eighties western style

restaurants in general were featured mainly in expensive international hotels. Therefore, Italian cuisine in China may have debuted with the establishment of the first international hotels probably in the largest commercial cities. Barolo Ristorante at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and Prego Ristorante at the Westin Hotel in Beijing are two such examples (The Ritz – Carlton, 2009; The Westin Beijing, 2009).

An exact date as to when the first Italian restaurant may have opened in China could also not be established however, an analysis of food-related literature revealed that some of the first free-standing Italian restaurants in mainland China were: Da Marco Ristorante and Pasta Fresca Ristorante both opened in Shanghai in 1990 and 1993 respectively (Da Marco, 2009; Pasta Fresca Da Salvatore, 2009). A number of Italian restaurants opened in locations where Italian ex - patriots would gather which in turn attracted Chinese patrons as well.

In the late 1990s when dining out became increasingly popular, many Chinese began to try novelty cuisines and Italian cuisine became increasingly popular among consumers. During the same period Italian-American restaurants like Pizza Hut also debuted in China. This fast evolution encouraged Asian entrepreneurs to benchmark American restaurant success strategies and to begin to open their own Italian-style restaurants across mainland China. One such originator was a Burger King distributor in Taiwan who opened Gino's Pasta-Cappuccino in Beijing specializing in Italian-style cuisine, premium coffee drinks, and desserts (Capatti and Montanari, 2003; Gino's Pasta, 2009).

The popularity of Italian cuisine in china

Published literature suggests that Italian cuisine has a strong relationship with China's food resources since many spices used in Italian cooking culture were imported to Italy by Marco Polo (Burgan, 2002; Otfinoski, 2003; Yule and Cordier, 1923). However, one cannot infer that this is a contributing factor to the popularity of Italian cuisine in mainland China. Italian cuisine is now becoming more popular in China through marketing sponsored by the Italian Government and organized exporters. E.g.: in an effort to structurally promote Italian cuisine and food products in China, the China-Italy Chamber of Commerce (CICC) was established. The "iFood" initiative is a project of the CICC that informs about current trends in Italian culinary arts in China through interviews, market research, and in-depth analysis. IFood is published quarterly in both the Chinese and Italian languages and is distributed electronically to

interested parties. In addition, it is available to all internets for free download (CICC, 2009).

Media promotional activities and articles in trade magazines reveal that over the past decade Italian food has become increasingly popular in China and Italian style restaurants operate in most hotels across China. Also, Italian food ingredients are now available in most major shopping centres in mainland China (Phau and Leng, 2008).

The 13th International Exhibition for the Food, Drink, Hospitality, Foodservice, Bakery and Retail Industries took place in Shanghai from 18-20 November 2009 at the Shanghai New International Expo Centre. Organizers scheduled special events that further support the increased popularity of Italian gastronomic representation (FHC China, 2009). Similarly special events were organized during the 20th Shanghai International Hospitality Equipment and Supply Expo which took place from March 29 to April 1st, 2011 (Hotelexpo, 2011). These annually re-occurring events include: The International Culinary Arts Competition, The China Pizza Championship, The Barista Competition, Olive Oil China, and The Great Italian Chefs of Shanghai Gala Lunches. On average, over ninety Italian food and beverage exporters participate in the events and conduct special seminars on pasta, olive oil, cheese, espresso coffee, wine and other beverages, and desserts.

As the popularity of Italian cuisine increases and new restaurant venture opportunities present themselves, China has now become home to many chefs who own or manage some of the best restaurants in the world. This trend, among others, has been a precursor to demand for experienced chefs, and contributed to the opening of hundreds of culinary schools worldwide. Many culinary schools now integrate Italian cuisine classes into their curriculum (Culinary Institute of America, 2009). These series of evolutionary events, with the support of mass media campaigns, television cooking shows, and social media networks has strengthened the popularity of Italian cuisine.

New trends, such as the “Slow Food” movement which aims mainly at preserving Italian food culture, further support the popularity of Italian cuisine in China (Petrini and Padovani, 2005; Petrini, 2011). Slow Food is a non-profit, eco-gastronomic member-supported organization that was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people’s dwindling interest in the food they eat where it comes from, how it tastes and how food choices affect the rest of the world. Its scope is to bring together pleasure, environmental sustainability and responsibility and make them inseparable in the

public's mind. The Slow Food movement has over 100,000 members in 132 countries including Japan, South Korea and China (Slowfood, 2011).

Factors of the popularity of Italian cuisine in China

A large number of factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, may determine the popularity of Italian cuisine in mainland China (Camillo et al., 2005; Camillo et al., 2008). There is scope for further growth in China, as there is still a Chinese market yet to experience Italian cuisine. There is replete literature published explaining customer behavior and attributes impacting cuisine and restaurant choice (Kolpan et al., 2001).

According to *The Consumer Psychology in Behavioural Perspective*, the most widely-accepted and influential models of consumer behavior derive in large part from cognitive psychology. As a result, consumer choice is usually understood as a problem-solving and decision-making sequence of activities, the outcome of which is determined principally by the buyer's intellectual functioning and processing of information (Foxall, 1990; Huliyeti et al., 2008). Consumer's choice becomes more critical in emerging markets which are usually inundated with novelty products such as ethnic cuisines. Studies on consumer attitude toward specific foods in emerging markets show that traditional consumption patterns can be altered by the availability of new choices (Veeck and Burns, 2005). In terms of selecting a restaurant by cuisine the consumer is faced with several decisions based on the knowledge acquired about the particular restaurant such as category, cuisines, service, price, and atmosphere.

Studies about Italian cuisine conducted outside China suggest that it is the taste of the ingredients put together and simplicity in which the dishes are prepared, while others argue that the overall cuisine is incomparable to any other.

Besides these extrinsic factors many intrinsic factors will affect the consumers' choice in selecting a restaurant. As economic prosperity gives rise to greater purchasing power for a great number of Chinese citizens, along with an increasing number of women working full-time, the propensity to eat meals outside homes becomes greater. If the extrinsic factors mediate the effect Italian cuisine has on the consumer in China, Italian cuisine will eventually mature. It will no longer be an exotic novelty, but simply another choice of cuisine.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The aim of this study is to investigate factors contributing to the popularity of Italian cuisine in mainland China and identify implications for restaurant operators. Specifically the authors wanted to identify those factors that may or may not contribute to the expansion and sustainability of Italian cuisine in mainland China.

With the evolution of globalization original ingredients can easily be exported from Italy thus preserving the authenticity of Italian restaurants based in overseas markets. It is important to note that all authentic Italian dishes vary by region; however, there are many significant regional dishes that have become both national dishes as well. Different variations for once regionally specific dishes have proliferated across Italy. The traditional meal accompaniments of cheese and wine are also play different roles both regionally and nationally with their many variations and Denominazione di origine controllata (DOC) (regulated appellation) laws.

Table 1. Factors that will influence Italian cuisine in the future, ranked in order of importance

| Factors |
|---|
| 1. Taste |
| 2. Simplicity |
| 3. Variety of Italian cuisine, North South |
| 4. Italian style quality ingredients are readily available |
| 5. Italian cuisine is not viewed as exotic, it is no longer a novelty |
| 6. Classic Italian cuisine |
| 7. Expectation of young diners on price, service, quality, convenience |
| 8. Fusion into other cuisines |
| 9. Specialized local food cuisines (e.g. Neapolitan, Piedmontes, Sicilian) |
| 10. Italian “regional” cuisine concept development, e.g. North, Central, Southern |

Camillo et al., (2006)

Several researchers maintain that the knowledge of a product’s country of origin has a direct influence on product perception (Chambers et al., 2007; Guerrero et al., 2009; Pieniak et al., 2009). Accordingly, many studies show that consumers’ perception of the country of origin

influences their perception of quality, their attitude and their subsequent purchasing intention (Aiello et al., 2008; Teas and Agarwal, 2000).

Because of the perish ability of specific market fresh products such as fish, seafood and meats, local Chinese ingredients may substitute those used by local chefs in Italy. This exploratory study analyzes if the phenomenon which makes this cuisine appealing to almost anyone can be generalized to include Chinese consumers, regardless of demographic characteristics such as age, ethnicity, education, and gender.

Table 1 below shows the results of a previous study conducted in the U.S. which revealed that the top three factors contributing to Italian cuisine popularity are: taste, simplicity, and variety (Camillo et al., 2008).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Research pertaining to the popularity of certain cuisines is becoming of wide-ranging academic interest. In eating, humans integrate natural products into culture through cooking practices and eating habits (Meigs, 1997).

The scope of this research is to understand how Italian cuisine is becoming popular in China and if it can sustain its popularity. Changes and shifts in eating habits are spearheaded by new modes of communication, improvements in infrastructure, and new technologies in food production and preparation and distribution channels. Because of globalization many ethnic foods are now available in almost any country and during any season. These evolutionary changes have enabled people to become more educated in developing food consumption preferences according to their cultural identities and social networks (Harris and Ross, 1987).

This study will help understand how the Chinese perceive foreign cuisines such as Italian and, in turn, attempts to identify the determinants that make this cuisine popular now with potential for growth in the future. This research is, therefore, intended to assist future entrepreneurs and current hospitality operators in their marketing and investing in mainland China.

METHODOLOGY

The basic research design for conducting the analysis was primarily an online survey distributed to Chinese consumers. Owing to the exploratory character of the study and certain resource constraints, a non-

probability, convenience sampling method to draw samples was adopted. The following section addresses the methodology used in the data analysis. This study applied qualitative and quantitative methods using an online survey with a self-administered, electronic questionnaire and face-to-face interviews conducted on location during the month of June, 2012.

SAMPLE

For the online survey a convenience sample included subjects selected on the basis of specific characteristics or qualities (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). Specifically, the sample includes the people who live in mainland China who have internet access and are members of interest groups under the category of “news, entertainment, lifestyle, cuisine, and sport” in <http://www.qq.cn> - <http://im.qq.com> , www.Yahoo.cn and www.Google.cn search engines. This convenience sample is chosen with the understanding that it might represent a specific portion of the population. The sample size is 5,000 and it is made – up of individual group sizes of between 10 and 1,000 members with public access and free membership (see appendix A). The sample for the face-to-face interviews was chosen randomly on location in the cities of Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen.

INSTRUMENTS

The questionnaire used in the online survey was designed to collect information on demographic variables (e.g.: age, education) and consumers’ preference of Italian foods and attitude toward Italian cuisine.

About 324 responses were received from the online survey. About 184, or 56.8%, of the respondents were male and 140, or 43.2%, were female. About 42.9% had a high school degree, 49.7% had an undergraduate degree, and 7.4% had a master’s degree. Their age ranged from <25 to 65, (see table 2). The Postal Codes provided by respondents indicated that participants’ responses came from about 30 different cities.

There were 22 questions in the questionnaire, including yes or no, scaled, multiple choices, closed-ended and open-ended questions. To distribute the web-based questionnaire an online survey website in Chinese languages was set up. The link to the survey was emailed to the recipients in the sample. To administer the online survey the researcher sent an electronic invitation letter to potential participants one week before the survey was launched. The survey was conducted over a 30 day

period during the month of June of 2012. The data was collected through a survey website based in the UK.

Table 2. Respondents' demographics

| Age Range | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| <25 | 72 | 22.2 |
| 26-35 | 126 | 38.9 |
| 36-45 | 90 | 27.8 |
| 46-55 | 24 | 7.4 |
| 56-65 | 12 | 3.7 |
| Total | 324 | 100.0 |

| Gender | | |
|---------------|------------|--------------|
| Male | 184 | 56.8 |
| Female | 140 | 43.2 |
| Total | 324 | 100.0 |

| Education | | |
|------------------|------------|--------------|
| High school | 139 | 42.9 |
| BA or BS | 161 | 49.7 |
| Masters degree | 24 | 7.4 |
| Others | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 324 | 100.0 |

The questionnaire for the face-to-face interviews included questions such as: do you like Italian cuisine and why? What is your opinion about Italian cuisine in respect to authenticity? What dishes do you like most, and what dishes do you dislike? Will you continue to eat Italian cuisine in the future?

SURVEY

The estimated target population for the online survey was 5.000. Due to the vast population and a high number of internet users, we expected a high response rate. However, possible constraint factors were considered. We chose not to provide incentives to encourage participation. We considered that if the response rate were to be high it would have been greatly beneficial to the study, however, if the response rate were to be too low we would follow Armstrong and Overton's (1997)

recommendation to test non-response bias by comparing the socio-demographic characteristics of the first 10% of early respondents and the last 10% of late respondents (Reynolds, 2007).

DATA ANALYSIS

Literature review was analyzed by applying content analysis techniques such as coding, frequencies, trends, and patterns analysis. Coding was used to identify meaning and significance in relationship to the study.

Quantitative data obtained from the online survey was statistically analyzed using SPSS 17.5 software to determine how the underlying demographic characteristics affect the consumption behaviours and attitudes toward Italian cuisine.

Qualitative data collected from face-to-face interviews was summarized and synthesized to identify and extrapolate the significant factors that have influence on the Chinese consumer.

RESULTS

A Cronbach's alpha reliability test was performed to assess if the survey results yielded the same measure results on repeated trials. Table 3 below shows that the items measured Cronbach's alphas of .731 which were above recommended .70 thresholds. Overall, the measures are internally consistent.

Table 4 below shows the ranking of the factors that influence the popularity of Italian cuisine presented in order of importance, measured on a scale of 1 to 5; 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree. The results show that taste, health related benefits, and accessibility are the top contributing factors to the popularity of Italian cuisine. Factor number 10 is related to the price level of Italian dishes and ranks last as Italian cuisine in mainland China is expensive.

Table 5 presents the summarized results from the literature review and qualitative survey data, in order to understand key differences

Published literature does not provide an exact timeline about how, where, and when the Italian cuisine may have arrived in mainland China and how different factors promote the popularity Italian foods in China today. However, the Italian Government and organized exporters as well as the Chinese-Italian Chamber of Commerce play an important role in the propagation and dissemination of Italian culinary knowledge today.

Table 3. Cronbach's test of reliability

| Items | Mean | Std. Deviation | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|--------|----------------|------------------|
| Multi item scale | | | .731 |
| Italian cuisine popularity factors | | | |
| 1. "taste" | 3.9259 | .69099 | .715 |
| 2. "simplicity" | 2.9074 | .70210 | .738 |
| 3. "freshness of products used" | 3.5926 | .65417 | .737 |
| 4. "portion size" | 3.2778 | .82717 | .732 |
| 5. "speed of service" | 3.6296 | .91013 | .706 |
| 6. "health related benefits" | 3.3704 | .75385 | .713 |
| 7. "not expensive" | 2.8519 | 1.00907 | .732 |
| 8. "available in every city" | 3.6667 | .84017 | .711 |
| 9. " served in non-Italian restaurants" | 3.3704 | .88949 | .732 |
| 10. "advertising and television shows" | 3.2963 | .85398 | .707 |

Cultural differences, eating habits and taste preferences are important factors that affect the choice to dine at ethnic restaurants. Due to the amount of food products recently introduced to China, it is difficult for Chinese consumers to distinguish between authentic foods and foods not produced in their country of origin i.e. pizza and pasta items imported from the U.S. Also, Italian exporters to China and restaurant owners in China fail to translate all Italian products and dish names, making purchasing and ordering difficult for the Chinese consumer.

A major distinction is found in the eating habits and eating behavior of Chinese consumers in restaurants. Italians like to consume food slowly with ample breaks between courses. Chinese customers, on the other hand, usually eat different dishes together family style and do not occupy a restaurant table for a long period of time. Chinese consumers, who have travelled abroad and have been to Italy, identify some Italian food sold in China as being of lower quality. Also, there is evidence of product substitution from other countries, and misrepresentation of food

preparation. Many dishes served are not authentic and the ingredients do not come from Italy.

Table 4. Factors that will influence the decision to appreciate Italian cuisine in the future, ranked in order of importance; N=324

| Rank | Mean and ranking of popularity factors | |
|------|--|--|
| | Mean | Factor |
| 1 | 3.9259 | Taste |
| 2 | 3.7037 | Health Related Benefits |
| 3 | 3.6667 | Available In Every City |
| 4 | 3.5925 | Fresh Ingredients |
| 5 | 3.3703 | Non Italian Restaurants Serve Italian Food |
| 6 | 3.3570 | Varied-Everyone Likes It |
| 7 | 3.2962 | Media Exposure |
| 8 | 3.2777 | Portion Size |
| 9 | 2.9074 | Simplicity |
| 10 | 2.5185 | Not Expensive |

Many owner operators of several Italian themed restaurants are Chinese entrepreneurs thus; the theory of “Country of Origin” and the perception of authenticity are significant to the Chinese consumer. Restaurants with a chef from Italy were considered authentic by Chinese patrons. Table 5 highlights some important factors which concern Chinese consumers. There is a perception that Italian food sold in Italian restaurants in China is very expensive and that it is not authentic.

Table 5. Summarized results from literature review and qualitative survey data

| Summarized results from literature review and the qualitative survey data | |
|--|---|
| From the literature review | From the face-to-face interviews |
| Italian cuisine was first made popular to non-Italians by Italian immigrants settling abroad | Italian restaurants in China are not really Italian |
| Italian cuisines satisfies everyone’s palate | Italian food is more American than Italian |

| | |
|---|--|
| International hotel chains may have been the first to introduce Italian cuisine in China | Many dishes are served with lot of tomato sauce, it is not authentic |
| Culinary schools now integrate Italian cooking classes into their curriculum | The food is very varied just like Chinese food |
| Movements, such as “Slow Food” aim at preserving Italian food culture around the world | Italian food in hotel restaurants is very expensive |
| Marketing efforts by Italian Government facilitate the dissemination of knowledge about Italian cuisine | Italian menu items, especially wines, are very expensive |
| New means of communication such as “iFood”, help promote Italian cuisine in China | The most delicious dishes are the antipasti and desserts |
| Italian food ingredients are readily available in retail food outlets in China | Italian food is very simple, but tastes very good |
| Educational seminars and culinary competition in China spread the knowledge about Italian cuisine | Italian restaurants are authentic because the chefs are Italian |
| Young curious and adventurous Chinese consumers like to try Italian cuisine | Italian cuisine is very similar to Chinese cuisine |

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Significant factors impact Chinese consumers when selecting an Italian restaurant and appreciating Italian cuisine. There are cultural eating differences and Chinese consumers, do have their own tastes and preferences. Although the Chinese share the same appreciation for fresh food ingredients, Italian dishes are prepared differently. Traditionally, Chinese households don't have the same cooking equipment, and lack baking and roasting ovens and grills. Therefore Italian-specific cooking methods are not easily understood by the Chinese consumer. Some Italian dishes are consequently perceived with scepticism especially when consumed for the first time.

A significant finding is that Chinese consumers are not familiar with all Italian raw products such as those for antipasti items and find it hard to

distinguish quality products and expensive products from lower quality. This is especially true for those wishing to buy wine to pair with Italian dishes. The authors' visits to several Italian restaurants revealed that many antipasto items are substituted with those from other countries e.g.: Mortadella is substituted with Balloni from the U.S. and prosciutto is substituted with smoked Bavarian ham from Germany. Even though it is not always customary, the Chinese tend to eat everything family style, with all dishes brought to the table at the same time. Italians typically eat food in individually served courses.

A concern expressed by consumers during face-to-face interviews was that existing Italian restaurants in China do not translate everything on the menu and this makes it harder for patrons to order. The theory of "Country of Origin" and the perception of authenticity play an important role for the Chinese restaurant consumer. Until the Italian cuisine in mainland China has matured and Chinese consumers are well-educated about Italian food, the scepticism among consumers will continue to persist.

There are specific differences in consumption habits between Italians and Chinese; Italians eat slowly and spend lot of time seated at a restaurant. For the traditional Italian restaurant there is no seat turnover contributing to ample time at the table and long conversations. At the traditional Chinese restaurant, customers like to eat quickly and don't like to wait long for food to be served. Compared to the cost of a Chinese meal, consumers in China perceive Italian food to be expensive. Therefore the neophobic Chinese consumers still prefer Chinese cuisine, but younger, adventurous Chinese can appreciate Italian styles and tastes. The most enjoyed Italian food products are wine, pasta, olive oil and chocolate. Cold meat such as salami and ham also seem to growing in popularity. This study attempts to identify the factors that influence Chinese consumers' decisions to sample new cuisines such as Italian. The preservation of traditional cuisines such as the Italian and its propagation in foreign countries is obviously dependent on positive consumer reviews (Perdrini and Padovani, 2005).

LIMITATION

There were several constraints in conducting this study. Constraints included the geographical distance, the lack of permanent physical presence of investigators in China, and the logistics involved in conducting such a study with the authors' limited stay in China. The

online survey had to be designed in English and then translated in Chinese. However the online survey proved to be, to a certain extent, time-saving, but also cost effective with easy data collection. In terms of quantity it is also more effective than face-to-face interviews which required the authors to be on location for an extended period of time. The face-to-face interviews provided to be a very fruitful source of insight, however. The authors were not proficient in any of Chinese languages such as Mandarin or Cantonese and they relied on an Interpreter.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study provide stakeholders such as Italian restaurant owners and operators, importers, exporters, and marketers, with useful insights as to why Chinese consumers may or may not appreciate Italian cuisine. Moreover, the results should benefit new restaurant entrepreneurs in their strategy formulation for the opening and operating of an Italian restaurant in mainland China. The results of this study will also support future research about the popularity of Italian cuisine in China and in other countries and should encourage the research of other popular ethnic cuisines around the world.

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APPENDIX

1. Sample target group characteristics

Sample target group |

Group Name: [chinanews](#): News in Chinese.
Membership: free
Category: Chinese news group
Language: Chinese
Founded: June 3, 2002
Members: 1978
Latest Activity: 7 hours ago
Created: 7 years ago
Archive: Membership required
Moderated: Yes



GROUPS [Join This Group](#)

Chinanews
Search for other groups...

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2. Sample source for target groups: www.google.cn

Google groups [Advanced Groups Search](#)
[Preferences](#)

What can you do with groups? [Take the tour >](#)

 Discuss online or over email

 Create rich, custom pages

 Customize your look and graphics

Create a group in 3 steps

- 1 Create an account
- 2 Setup your group
- 3 Invite people





























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| Society & Humanities Groups | Browse group categories... |

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3. Sample source for target groups: www.Yahoo.cn

4. Sample source for target groups on www.QQ.com
<http://group.imqq.com/shanghai/>

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
|  Business in ID:130930197 Join Now |  Study Abroad ID:102464200 Join Now |  PAKISTANI IN ID:105523080 Join Now |  English Chat ID:105523079 Join Now |  <p>This small eatery has a great selection of dumplin...</p> |
|  Rediscover ID:82961583 Join Now |  Turks in China ID:102464188 Join Now |  Photography ID:102464197 Join Now |  Connecting ID:102464196 Join Now |  Southern Barbarian You can't go wrong with Yunnanese classics like ch... |
| Latest Groups ↕ | | Hottest Groups ↕ | | |
|  Just Twitter ID:102464201 Join Now |  World Peace ID:145862526 Join Now |  China Sports ID:77255468 Join Now |  chat and chat ID:79181728 Join Now |  Madison Headed up by chef Austin Hu, formerly of New York!... |
|  Chinese ID:145850436 Join Now |  changing life ID:140578896 Join Now |  International ID:102252310 Join Now |  International ID:108909604 Join Now |  <p>How to expand your social relations in China?</p> <p>It's QQ Group!</p> |
|  Francais en ID:100035034 Join Now |  Deutsch in ID:100035046 Join Now |  Petz Korner ID:102464134 Join Now |  Global ID:93758895 Join Now | |
| Most Active Groups ↕ | | Most Popular Groups ↕ | | |
|  Travelling in ID:106339830 Join Now |  Entertainment ID:106339831 Join Now |  Just Twitter ID:102464201 Join Now |  Happy English ID:103088029 Join Now | |