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# Hunger for learning or tasting? An exploratory study of food tourist motivations visiting food museum restaurants

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates an underexplored area of research: the motivations of food tourists to visit a food museum and its respective restaurants as an emerging food tourism attraction. Using qualitative in-depth interviews with domestic Chinese food tourists at the Hangzhou Cuisine Museum and its restaurants, the findings suggest that their motivations are revealed at the individual, social, and institutional level resulting from behaviour displayed during the actual visit. At the individual level, the most dominant motivation derives from seeking education and knowledge alongside sensorial and embodied experience and transformative escapism. The motivation at the social level highlights the significance of social togetherness and kinship, whereas motivations at the institutional level constitute food authenticity and media exposure. This study contributes to a more complete understanding of the dynamics and diversities of the food tourism and food tourist motivation literature.

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Gastronomy; food culture; education; multi-sensorial; domestic; authenticity

## Introduction



The prominence of food tourism can be witnessed by exponential growth in academic and commercial activities and interests. A variety of research approaches, concepts and contexts have been explored (Ellis et al., 2018; Everett, 2019; Henderson, 2009; Lee & Scott, 2015; Park et al., 2019). The consensus is that food is no longer an auxiliary experience but the primary motivator for particular travellers (Kivela & Crofts, 2006), so-called food tourists or foodies, who purposely seek memorable, extraordinary and/or authentic food-focused experiences (Goolaup et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Stone et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2019).

Following Fields' (2003) earlier theoretical proposition, previous empirical studies have examined tourist motivations of food selection and consumption on holiday (Chang et al., 2010; Ji et al., 2016; Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim et al., 2009, 2013; Kim et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2016). Greater interest has been geared towards experiential and attitudinal aspects of tourists regarding regionally, locally identified foods and signature dishes (Ellis et al., 2018). Motivations of food tourists as a special interest tourism segment have not fully received researchers' attention, with a few exceptions (e.g. Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Kim et al.,

2010, 2019; Su et al., 2020) regardless of the non-homogenous market characteristics of food tourists (Ignatov & Smith, 2006) and their increasing demand on production of specialised food tourism experiences (Hall & Sharples, 2003). Herein, a critical research gap can be identified, namely, that tourist motivations relating to holiday food consumption do not explicitly refer to the food tourist motivations.

Moreover, as Everett and Slocum (2013) highlight, the existing literature on food tourism is broad and inclusive in its coverage being both diverse and eclectic in nature, embracing many different types of food tourism attractions and destinations, yet paying little attention to a refined analysis and discussion. Research which includes high-end fine-dining or food museums, however, is sparse (Moscardo et al., 2015). What motivates tourists to visit one type of food tourism attractions over another is yet to be explored.

Therefore, it is timely to tackle these critical research gaps to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and diversities of food tourism motivations, given that a continuing growth in studies considering the cultural, social, geographical and political significance of food in various tourism and research contexts is anticipated (Ellis et al., 2018).

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This study aims to examine which motivational dimensions are foremost in the mind of food tourists who visit food museums and restaurants as emerging food tourism attractions in the Chinese context.

Cultural experiences have become an increasingly important part of Chinese domestic tourism. In the first half of 2019, over 80% of domestic tourists participated in cultural experiences during their trips, and around 30% of tourists have been to museums and art galleries (Mafengwo and China Tourism Academy, 2020). Also, more and more domestic tourists are placing emphasis on local food experiences as part of the tourism experience. As shown in the 2019 report on independent travel and customised tourism trends in China, almost 50% of travellers valued culinary experiences during their trips (Mafengwo and China Tourism Academy, 2020).

With these key domestic tourism trends, the rise of food-themed cultural museums across China in the past decade is noteworthy. Food museums area genre of museums specialising in food (items) and foodways (Mihalache, 2016), being the site for one type of food tourism (Everett & Slocum, 2013). While very few food museums existed in China before 2000, the Zigong Salt History Museum in Sichuan province was the first food-related museum founded in 1959 (Liu, 2017). An unprecedented number of food museums has been established since 2000, and over 143 food museums are now open to the public as of 2018. They include diverse exhibitions showcasing local cuisines and gastronomies, including specialty food and famous dishes, condiments, catering equipment, and raw materials (Zhou, 2018).

The research will contribute to the theoretical understanding of food tourism motivations by revealing the often subtle and nuanced desires and inclinations of food tourists' motivations. The findings also provide practical implications for tourism and museum practitioners in terms of potential tourism product developments associated with food in a museum setting and beyond.

## Literature review

### *Tourist motivations in food tourism and theoretical approaches*

The significance of tourist motivations associated with food selection and consumption at destinations is well documented and is one of the five most examined research areas within the scope of food tourism (Ellis et al., 2018). Previous studies mainly endeavoured to examine food choice as a metaphor for one's motivation to taste local food, and predominantly collected primary

data amongst leisure tourists in the broader context of dining experiences whilst on holiday (Chang et al., 2010; Hsu et al., 2018; Ji et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2009, 2013; Kim & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2013, 2017; Wu & Wall, 2017).

Although different research frameworks and contexts are taken into consideration, tourist motivations to consume local food can be conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct comprising seven dimensions identified in the previous literature: exciting and/or authentic experience; escape from routine; sensory appeal and pleasure; health concern; cultural experience (for example, knowledge acquisition); togetherness such as socialisation; and prestige and status including traditional food appeal (Fields, 2003; Kim et al., 2009, 2013, 2019; Kim & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2012, 2017; Su et al., 2020).

Having loosely applied the push-pull theory of motivation, the above dimensions of tourist motivation can be categorised into intrinsic and extrinsic values (Su et al., 2020), which can be further divided into sub-categories such as symbolic, physical, cultural, interpersonal and obligatory (Mak et al., 2017). Further attempts have been made to identify immediate antecedents of tourist motivations to food consumption or the mediating role of other constructs such as personality traits, past experience, personal taste preference and expectations in holiday food consumption (Hsu et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2013; Kim & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2012, 2013, 2017). However, tourist motivations for general holiday food consumption do not convincingly indicate food tourist motivations.

It is worth noting that previous studies on tourist's food consumption made a significant contribution to our understanding of the wider concepts of motivation in food tourism, referring to 'tourist and visitor activity that is primarily motivated by an interest in food. This definition of food tourism is from a mixed perspective that intersects between the motivation-based and activity-based approaches commonly appeared in the relevant food tourism literature (Ellis et al., 2018). Nevertheless, critiques of the reckless use of food tourism labelling to demonstrate its wider economic benefits and broader practical implications for relevant stakeholders also exist (McKercher et al., 2008). This has led to the socialised myth that the increasingly close relationship between food and tourism should not be considered negligible amongst key stakeholders in the context of hospitality and tourism. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2019) postulate that the current amalgamation of general leisure tourists and those purposeful (food) tourists travelling primarily for food experiences is a major obstacle to developing a more complete and refined understanding of what truly motivates people to become food tourists and to visit specific food related attractions.

A few empirical studies on food tourist's motivations reported escapism, cultural and interpersonal motivations, and togetherness or socialisation (Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Kim et al., 2010, 2019; Su et al., 2020), which is similar to those of general holiday tourist's local food consumption. An interesting finding of this research is that socially orientated motivations of food tourists tend to restrict the relationships to family and friends. Meanwhile, Kim et al.'s (2019) research on food tourist's motivation at the domestic level reported more insightful findings. Their study of Japanese domestic noodle tourists revealed a greater influence of media on motivations, especially a TV documentary, along with food-specific stimuli such as reminiscence and memory of the toured food in one's ordinary life, sensory appeal and textual seduction of a particular local speciality, appreciation of culinary heritage and foodways of the toured region, and self-enhancement via escapism and prestige. Domestic tourists' knowledge and culture are not same as those of international, so complex and greater depth of motivations were reported. In addition, the motivations of purposeful food tourists showed a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic values with some less well-defined motivations between the two values (Su et al., 2020). As such, the complexity of tourist motivation in food tourism has not yet been fully understood. It is still fragmented, and Robinson et al. (2018) even insist that this area remains under-theorised.

An interpretative-inductive, phenomenological approach is, therefore, suggested in order to undertake more nuanced analysis of food tourists' accounts of lived experiences and their underlying motivations (Goolaup et al., 2018), given the rapid, unprecedented transition from 'food for tourism' to 'tourism for food' (Park et al., 2019, p. 11). It also requires an integrated approach, taking into consideration the ever more fragmented and diversified contemporary tourism markets (Yoo et al., 2018). The predominance of an intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomy of motivation is almost insufficient to explore the multi-layered nature of tourist motivations, especially in the context of food tourism in which unique social and cultural practices, values, meanings and/or identities around food production and consumption are inherently and inevitably embedded.

### *Food, museums, and museum dining*

Whilst tourist motivations in the context of food tourism is discussed earlier, it is important to pay particular attention to the museum setting. Research focussing on museum visitors has provided useful insights into the motivations for visiting a museum in general.

Although there has been little consensus on how to categorise museum visitor's motivations, 'learning' or 'education' is regarded an intrinsic motivation to visit (Falk, 2016). Scholars have postulated that visitors go to museums to learn and to have fun, seeking 'a learning-oriented entertainment experience' (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Falk et al., 1998). On a deeper level, the public embraces museums as free-choice learning settings (Falk, 2016; Falk & Dierking, 2000), and today's multisensory museums facilitate the engagement of all sensory stimuli to provide an immersive learning environment for the visitor.

The flexibility of food as multidisciplinary subject area enables wide ranging opportunities for use within museum practices, whilst the complex meaning of food can be extensively communicated through museum programmes which meet the museum's strategies for institutional mandates and visitor engagement (Levent & Mihalache, 2016). Thus, the increased attention to food for museum programming is extended to the establishment of food-specialised museums. Around the world, food museums, (for instance, the Dutch Cheese Museum in Alkmaar, Netherlands; the Kimchi Museum in Seoul, Korea; Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum in Yokohama, Japan, and Southern Food and Beverage Museum in New Orleans, USA) have attracted an eclectic mix of visitors, not least 'foodies'. This term is often used to refer to individuals who differentiate themselves from others by way of a foodies intense interest in all aspects of food, including the acquisition of food knowledge, what they eat, and the way they eat and talk (Johnston & Baumann, 2010). In tourism terms, this is the equivalent of food tourists or gastronomic tourists. Food museums, therefore, have a role to play in evoking the senses, identity, meaning, history, and memory of food through the tangible artefact (Williams, 2013).

Previous studies explored the complex relationship between food and museums, mainly focusing on a museum's collections and exhibitions of food (and foodways); the relationship between food and art; food and audience engagement, and food consumption in museums (Levent & Mihalache, 2016). It is noted that 'in situ' food and drink museums (as opposed to travelling food exhibitions for example, at festivals) have been much neglected in the food and drink literature (Everett, 2016), despite their multiple roles which satisfactorily meet the needs of the special-interest food tourists. More precisely, research on food, museum and tourism has paid insufficient attention to the tourist's motivation underlying museum dining and the true meaning of multisensory engagement with food during a museum dining experience, despite food consumption in museums having a long history.

Modern restaurants in museums are positioned in parallel with the museum in terms of their design and operation. Museum restaurants act as a social institution advocating the importance of sourcing of local produce, showcasing national staples and/or cuisines associated with particular places or regions and relating these to the content and design of the exhibitions (Clintberg, 2016). The gastronomic selection on offer in museum restaurants is not independent from, but rather a crucial part of the cultural conversation in museum practice. The interdisciplinary approach to the study of food and museums, and food tourism and museum restaurants is warranted to examine the multisensory experience of food in the food specialised museum context. By focusing on food tourist's motivations to visit food museum restaurants, this study expects to make a unique and significant contribution to the enhancement of knowledge in this subject area and provides meaningful discussion for research that embraces food studies, museum studies, visitor studies and food tourism studies.

### Research context

This study takes place at Hangzhou Cuisine Museum and the restaurants therein (hereafter HCM and HCMRs, respectively) primarily because the restaurant is extremely popular, generating a high number of reviews on *Dianping*, China's largest restaurant review platform, far in excess of other food museums in China. The HCM opened to the public in 2012. Covering 12,470 square metres, the HCM traces thousands of years of Hangzhou cuisine, and displays over 110 dietary artefacts and 300 tempting replicas of dishes. Run by Hangzhou Cuisine Museum Cuisine Culture Co. Ltd., the museum consists of exhibition space, a large experiential space and dining space with 1500 seats for visitors. Tourists can not only enjoy the wonderful surroundings of the place and experience the culinary culture of Hangzhou in the museum but also sample iconic Hangzhou dishes in the museum restaurants. Hangzhou as the capital of Zhejiang Province in East China, is one of China's 'new first-tier cities' and a hugely popular tourist destination attracting over 202 million tourists from home and abroad in 2019 (Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism, 2020). It also represents one of the 'Eight Major Schools of Cuisine' in China, where local food has been identified as a major attraction and sustainable marketing tool (Chen & Huang, 2018).

### Research methods

This study adopted qualitative interviews to explore the subjective motivations of Chinese domestic tourists.

Previous studies have investigated the motivations to taste local food and beverage amongst general leisure tourists in various contexts including food events and festivals (Chang & Yuan, 2011; Kim et al., 2009, 2010, 2013; Kim & Eves, 2012; Park et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2010; Yuan et al., 2005), and yet the research on food tourists' motivations in the context of food museums, especially for those equipped with in-house speciality food restaurant(s) remains scarce. Therefore, this exploratory qualitative approach enabled us to investigate this understudied phenomenon in a more nuanced manner and provided a point of departure for future studies on food museums as an important channel of food tourism. Moreover, given the recent dramatic increase of domestic tourists' interests in cultural experiences in general, and culinary experiences in particular, necessitates that more studies on domestic food tourists could offer timely implications for the cultural sector and the heritage sector, including museums.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken for gathering textual, narrative data with specific examples of tourists' subjective perceptions (Jordan & Gibson, 2004). The open-ended questions that guided the interviews revolved around three aspects: (1) motivations to visit the HCM, (2) motivations to dine at the HCMRs and (3) expectations for the museum and museum restaurant experiences. During the interviews, follow-up questions were also posed whenever necessary for clarification and probing relevant details.

The respondents were approached at the HCM from September to December in 2018. This study ensured that the respondents were self-defined (purposeful) food tourists so that their motivations to visit the HCM and HCMRs could fit the food tourism definition. Twenty domestic food tourists participated in this research with their informed consent. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, the native language of all respondents, and lasted from 30 to 60 min. Information saturation was confirmed when the last few interviews provided similar feedback (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Table 1 shows the respondents' demographics using pseudonyms for anonymity, with equal numbers of men and women ranging from 20 to 62 years old. Half of the respondents travelled from the neighbouring cities and provinces of Hangzhou, while the others travelled from far North, West and South China. All respondents were first-time to the HCM, and almost half of them were first-time tourists to Hangzhou as a tourism destination.

The analysis of the interviews was inductive and data driven. After verbatim transcription of the interviews, we performed thematic analysis, categorising and grouping the data to identify the key themes (Ayres, 2008). We first familiarised ourselves with the transcripts by reading



**Table 1.** Profile of respondents ( $n = 20$ )

No.	Name (Pseudonym)	Gender*	Age	Occupation	Residential area	Accompaniers	Times of visit to Hangzhou
1	Xiaolei Zhang	M	46	Engineer	Taiyuan, Shanxi Province	Wife	More than 4 times
2	Haiyue Qiu	F	20	Student	Ningbo, Zhejiang Province	Classmate	4
3	Wenxiang Jiang	M	28	Doctor	Beijing Municipality	Colleague	1
4	Dandie Xie	F	51	Employee	Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province	Husband	More than 4 times
5	Yi Miao	F	28	Teacher	Huzhou, Zhejiang Province	Boyfriend	More than 4 times
6	Zou Wang	M	40	Employee	Shandong Province	Friends	4
7	Xiangdong Weng	F	32	Businessman	Quanzhou, Fujian Province	Friends	3
8	Yao Yang	F	24	Student	Wuhan, Hubei Province	Mother	1
9	Bo Wang	M	28	Staff	Shanxi Province	Wife	1
10	Ruohong Su	F	22	Student	Nanning, Guangxi Province	Alone	3
11	Yeqing Wang	F	25	Student	Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province	Boyfriend	More than 4 times
12	Guogang Yao	M	34	Staff	Chengdu, Sichuan Province	Colleague	1
13	Daixia Gao	M	24	Doctor	Shandong Province	Colleague	1
14	Lin Yu	M	47	Public servant	Beijing Municipality	Friends	More than 4 times
15	Lin Dong	M	28	Staff	Changzhou, Jiangsu Province	Alone	3
16	Wenyu Liu	M	34	Businessman	Shenzhen, Guangdong Province	Alone	1
17	Hua Liu	F	62	Lawyer	Dalian, Shenyang Province	Husband	1
18	Wenjing Jin	F	24	Student	Jilin Province	Parents	1
19	Haoyi Cao	M	24	Student	Yiwu, Zhejiang Province	Friends	More than 4 times
20	Yi Wei	F	26	Staff	Shanxi Province	Friends	1

\*Note: F = female; M = male.

and reviewing repeatedly. Meaningful statements were highlighted, as the codes were generated to be aligned with the research questions. At the next stage of theme development, the codes were re-read and considered in order to identify broader patterns of meaning which addressed the food tourists' motivations and expectations. After the preliminary analysis, the themes were aggregated and further refined into key themes.

## Findings and discussions

The data driven findings of Chinese domestic food tourism motivations were classified at three levels: 'individual', 'social', and 'institutional'. At the individual level, motivations included education and knowledge, sensorial and embodied experience, and transformative escapism. The motivation at a social level contained family togetherness and kinship, while institutional motivations consisted of food authenticity and media exposure. Direct quotes are identified by the pseudonyms of respondents, as presented in Table 1. Underlying sub-dimensions of each motivation identified at the individual, social and institutional level are presented with relevant direct quotes of the interviewees in Table 2.

### Education and knowledge

The traditional role of museums in enhancing one's learning and educational opportunity in a leisurely, social and cultural setting, compared to other types of tourism attractions, was the predominant motivator for respondents to visit to the HCM and HCMRs. This is well exemplified by Wenyu's quote in particular:

When I passed by this area three days ago, I saw the HCM on the map. I like museums, because I can learn a lot. Knowledge is concentrated in museums. Many museums have a great number of valuable things, and some are even priceless and cannot be seen anywhere else. (Interviewee #16)

Previous studies have identified education as one of the dominant motivations of the museum visit (Andre et al., 2017; Ji et al., 2014; Sterry & Beaumont, 2006), given that museums have long been embraced for their role in safeguarding, representing, and producing culture in informal learning settings (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Kurin, 2004). Similarly, the motivation for education and knowledge is the focus for food tourism as well, with learning and self-development experienced through food consumption have been highlighted in various contexts of food tourism (Kim et al., 2009, 2019; Kim & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2017; Moscardo et al., 2015). This is described as nurturing and improving our cultural capital (Goolaup et al., 2018). The education and knowledge in this study is presented in three dimensions: (1) the history and characteristics of local cuisine and foodways including key ingredients, cooking methods, and iconic signature dishes; (2) the authentic discourses associated with the Hangzhou cuisine and foods; and (3) the regional dietary habits and concern for nutrition. Yi Wei best exemplifies these pillars of the educational motivation:

An old saying is that "there is a paradise in Heaven. On earth, there is Suzhou and Hangzhou." Chinese people particularly value food, so I would like to come here (HCM) to see the food and foodways in this paradise. [I] was motivated to see some well-known Hangzhou dishes, such as *Dongpo Pork*. I wanted to educate myself about their historical backgrounds, interesting

**Table 2.** Six food tourism motivations at three levels with interviewees' quotes.

Levels	Motivations	Sub-dimensions	Supportive quotes
Individual	Education and knowledge	History and characteristics of local cuisine and foodways	'A way to differentiate a city from another is food, as many dishes are handed down for many years. Nowadays many ancient buildings have been demolished. But the inheritance of food and cuisine is more deeply rooted in our society and locality than anything else. (Interviewee #9)'
		Authentic discourses associated with local cuisine and foods	'As cuisines and regional special dishes have been handed down for many generations, they are not only special but also represent the region's history and culture. For instance, <i>Beggar's Chicken</i> in Hangzhou was coined from the Song dynasty, which has a long history. At the HCM, I have a chance to learn many interesting stories about the famous dishes like <i>Beggar's Chicken</i> during that period of time, which I have never known about. (Interviewee #6)'
		Regional dietary habits and nutritious practices	'I wanted to educate myself about their historical backgrounds, interesting stories associated with those dishes and ancestor's wisdom on dietary and nutritious habits, and to see if they are similar to my imagination that fulfils my [own] curiosity. (Interviewee #20)'
	Sensorial and embodied experience	Multisensorial engagement in a setting	'I hoped to see an interactive area where visitors can have hands-on/ multi-sensory experiences. [...] this would just create a little aroma (of food and/or ingredients) in the exhibition. [...] (Interviewee #14)'
		Degustation of iconic signature dishes	'The staff don't need to cook from start to finish; instead, demonstrate several simple cooking steps. Take <i>Gui Hua Tang Ou</i> , for example, how to fill the lotus root with glutinous rice? [...] (Interviewee #14)'
	Transformative escapism	Escape from routine	'... the cuisines in the past may be quite different from what we eat at home or in the restaurants. I would like to see how the people in the past ate, and what the differences are, compared to the dishes we eat today. (Interviewee #15)'
Active reflection on the meaning behind preparing and consuming food		'In comparison to other attractions, the food museum is expected to make us more personally on the scene to feel the things closely related to our own lives, bringing us a sense of going back to the past. In this way, we can feel that what we experience every day is more meaningful and culturally rich, especially around food we consume. (Interviewee #11)'	
Social	Social togetherness and kinship	Togetherness within an inner circle of acquaintance	'my colleague in Hangzhou told me that HCM shows all kinds of Hangzhou dishes. We can visit the museum and eat in the HCMR, so I took my boyfriend here. (Interviewee #5)'
Institutional	Food authenticity	Perceived belief in the institution for food experience and food service	'I expected to taste truly authentic Hangzhou dishes in the restaurant. We would forgive the ordinary restaurants if they did not cook Hangzhou dishes in an authentic way. But I thought the museum restaurant should be the most authentic, and thus will be unacceptable if they did not cook well. (Interviewee #13)'
		Exclusiveness and novelty	'I felt that I must eat here after visiting the museum. Otherwise I would feel regrettable once I get back home. I should try the iconic dishes here (Interviewee #4)'
	Media exposure	Trustworthiness in media programme	'A CCTV (China Central Television) programme has been here to record the production process of Hangzhou cuisine. I have also seen the museum on other CCTV television programmes introducing local food in each city, such as <i>Across China</i> and <i>A Bite of China</i> . (Interviewee #12)'
		Image creation of the food of destination	'Since it (the HCM) was chosen as a [media] shooting location, I thought it must be an authentic place for Hangzhou cuisine [with credible food images of the destination]. (Interviewee #12)'

stories associated with those dishes and ancestor's wisdom on dietary and nutritious habits, and to see if they are similar to my imagination that fulfils my [own] curiosity. (Interviewee #20)

Related to the above, many respondents considered local food to be 'a local, cultural resource and reference', as Gyimóthy and Mykletun (2009, p. 260) postulate that food is a 'sensory window ... into the culture, history and people of a place'. In this study, the displayed dishes and their stories in the museum served as the focal point of knowledge acquisition about the destination and its local culture and history, as Zou commented:

As cuisines and regional special dishes have been handed down for many generations, they are not only

special but also represent the region's history and culture. For instance, *Beggar's Chicken* in Hangzhou was coined from the Song dynasty, which has a long history. At the HCM, I have a chance to learn many interesting stories about the famous dishes like *Beggar's Chicken* during that period of time, which I have never known about. (Interviewee #6)

In a similar vein, Bo emphasised that people can understand the cultural development and history through food and foodways as a 'principle resource' (Smith & Costello, 2009) and as a 'marker of social and cultural belonging' (Mihalache, 2016, p. 318). Below is what motivated Bo to visit the HCM:

Science, technology, architecture, urban appearance, and people's dressing styles are constantly changing.



The pace of life in modern society is very fast. A way to differentiate a city from another is food, as many dishes are handed down for many years. Nowadays many ancient buildings have been demolished. But the inheritance of food and cuisine is more deeply rooted in our society and locality than anything else. (Interviewee #9)

Likewise, cuisine is a significant marker of cultural heritage and tourism (Kim & Iwashita, 2016; Timothy & Ron, 2013), and scholars have intensively discussed food and foodways as a form of destination identity and a key representation of place (Cianflone et al., 2013; Kim & Ellis, 2015; Lin et al., 2011) as well as 'geography of taste' (Ellis et al., 2018; Montanari, 2009). Local food heritage, indeed, can reflect the identity construction and characteristics of the place and its cuisine (Kim & Iwashita, 2016). Similar to the Japanese food tourists consuming noodles and associating the noodle production regions with a strong sense of place (Kim et al., 2019), the respondents in this study were largely motivated to visit the HCM, expecting to connect the local cuisine to Hangzhou and its culture, history and place identity.

Furthermore, some participants considered the dining experience at the HCMRs as the pinnacle of the learning experience and was a key motivator. For them, the visit to the HCM as a food tourism attraction would be incomplete without tasting the food in HCMRs. In particular, the tasting *in situ* can help the food tourists gain a deeper understanding of Hangzhou cuisine than what they learnt from the museum. For Wenjing, the tasting served as 'immediate feedback' of the museum experience:

For the entire visit with the two experiences [visiting the HCM and dining at the HCMRs] can be complementary to each other. Dining is a deeper experience that enhances my knowledge acquired by the museum visiting. Education and knowledge acquisition at the museum certainly help to make the dining [in the museum restaurants] more special and meaningful. The experience and knowledge will be richer and more profound. (Interviewee #18)

Wenjing's quote perfectly exemplifies tourists' educational needs in the context of a food museum, which can also potentially explain their quest for food authenticity at an institutional level regarding food motivation as discussed later. The respondents expected that the museum restaurant could keep the authentic taste of Hangzhou cuisine in order to 'let the visitors know what Hangzhou cuisine truly means and taste' (Haoyi – Interviewee #19). In this regard, the tasting experiences the food tourists were interested in can be termed 'the educational tasting', in which the educational component played an essential role.

### Sensorial and embodied experience

Respondents further highlighted the importance of sensorial experiences and the gastronomical dimension of local food experiences such as multisensory engagement with the exhibition and cooking demonstrations, considering it as their second most important motivation at the individual level. Below is an example from Lin Yu:

I hoped to see an interactive area where visitors can have hands-on/multi-sensory experiences. [...] this would just create a little aroma (of food and/or ingredients) in the exhibition. [...] The staff don't need to cook from start to finish; instead, demonstrate several simple cooking steps. Take *Gui Hua Tang Ou*, for example, how to fill the lotus root with glutinous rice? [...] Through these practices, visitors can learn the cooking methods, and therefore have a deeper understanding of the Hangzhou cuisine. This is something I was motivated by. (Interviewee #14)

Although people have various methods of learning cooking, such as books, videos, the internet and social media, the respondents in this study greatly valued the idea of 'live shows' of food preparation and cooking and the opportunity to sample signature dishes *in situ*. This is consistent with previous studies in Japan (Kim et al., 2019; Kim & Iwashita, 2016). For instance, Haiyue was somewhat disappointed that there was neither food demonstration nor tasting in the HCM, though the sensorial and embodied food experience was fulfilled at the HCMRs immediately after the respondents' visitation to the HCM.

The preferred hands-on food experiences and tasting in the exhibition, in addition to the multi-sensory engagement in the exhibition setting, are good examples of sensual and bodily immersion into the museum setting, given that it helps create a connect between the museum and the tourists; establishing the museum not only as an interactive and engaging space but also as 'the multisensory museum' (Levent & Pascual-Leone, 2014). Food tourism is an exemplar of an embodied form of tourism, where there are a plethora of multi-sensory experiences (Everett, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020), but the realisation within the museum setting may require more innovative approaches. Embodied food-related activities such as exhibitions which engage the five senses, a demonstration and tasting area which the respondents expected to experience, can be an important motivators, though on this visit it was not satisfactorily achieved.

### Transformative escapism: from escapism to activism

... the cuisines in the past may be quite different from what we eat at home or in the restaurants. I would like

to see how the people in the past ate, and what the differences are, compared to the dishes we eat today. (Lin Dong – Interviewee #15)

As commented by Lin Dong, the above suggests that visiting the HCM on its own is considered an authentic leisure activity which differs from one's everyday practice. It is a recognised 'escape from routine' as an altered or different condition of everyday life, that is consistent with previous empirical studies on food tourism motivations examining authenticity experience (Kim et al., 2009, 2013, 2019; Kim & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2012). However, another layer of escapism in this context is an alternative, proactive way of activism looking for multi-layered meanings of food normally consumed in one's everyday life, because we seldom consciously attempt to apply meaning to daily food consumption with the exception of the physiological fulfilment of sustenance. Below is a remark from Yeqing:

In comparison to other attractions, the food museum is expected to make us more personally on the scene to feel the things closely related to our own lives, bringing us a sense of going back to the past. In this way, we can feel that what we experience every day is more meaningful and culturally rich, especially around food we consume. (Interviewee #11)

The above viewpoint of Yeqing importantly highlights a transformative escapism motivation. A tourist learns and develops a deep appreciation of one's everyday life regarding food in a social context which is explored through self-reflection whilst being removed from everyday life. This new form of escapist motivation is different from what previous studies identified, that is, our desire to escape from routine dining and eating habits (Davidson, 2002; Fields, 2003; Kim et al., 2009; Kim & Eves, 2012) and from the burden of learning cooking techniques and one's cooking in the home environment (Kim et al., 2019).

### *Social togetherness and kinship*

Some participants decided to visit the HCM and HCMRs for the purpose of being together with socially important people such as families and friends. Indeed, a museum experience is a social practice, in that visitors engage socially with their peers (Coffee, 2007; Stephen, 2001). This socially oriented value as motivation has long been recognised (Fields, 2003; Warde & Martens, 2000). Similarly, tourists appreciate socialisation with new people 'from beyond the normal circle of acquaintance' (Kim et al., 2013, p. 488), or family togetherness while travelling for local food, as togetherness and/or kinship enrich their travel experiences and make the experiences even more memorable (Ignatov

& Smith, 2006; Kim et al., 2009, 2013). Furthermore, Su et al. (2020) revealed a new aspect of socialisation as an important intrinsic motivation of potential food tourists, that is, social interaction with other food tourists and food experts such as local food producers and celebrity chefs or locally renowned chefs.

In this study, however, the concept of social togetherness and kinship is not so much about interacting with others. It is more about togetherness and kinship with intimate people, which is also partially supported by the visitors' travel patterns, that is, about 85% of the respondents visited the HCM and HCMRs with family members, friends, colleagues, or classmates. Yi Miao explained why she wanted to visit the museum with her boyfriend, 'my colleague in Hangzhou told me that HCM shows all kinds of Hangzhou dishes. We can visit the museum and eat in the HCMR, so I took him here (Interviewee #5). The respondents like Yi Miao support that the enjoyable experiences of visiting a museum and tasting the food is naturally considered a worthwhile activity with a close partner. This finding confirms the initial discoveries of Ignatov and Smith's (2006) food tourist motivation research, that motivations of being with family, friends and intimacy and romance greatly contributed to food tourism experience.

### *Food authenticity*

Alongside education and knowledge motivation, every respondent in this study decided to sample the original and authentic tastes of iconic dishes of Hangzhou at the HCMRs. The respondents collectively had high expectations of food authenticity, and some even seriously expected the HCMRs to provide the most authentic Hangzhou cuisine in China from an objective authenticity perspective (Wang, 1999). Such high expectation and subsequent motivation were largely cultivated by two equally important regards – (1) people's general belief in museums as trusted social, cultural institutions; and (2) exclusiveness and novelty. The former is conclusively explained by Daixia below:

I expected to taste truly authentic Hangzhou dishes in the restaurant. We would forgive the ordinary restaurants if they did not cook Hangzhou dishes in an authentic way. But I thought the museum restaurant should be the most authentic, and thus will be unacceptable if they did not cook well. (Interviewee #13)

As Daixia's quote exemplifies, since the food tourists assumed the museum restaurants (i.e. HCMRs) to be more authentic than ordinary restaurants on a typical high street, they held a strong, primary motivation to sample the perceived authentic tastes of iconic dishes

at the HCMRs. Furthermore, several respondents were even motivated to taste and validate the signature dishes showcased in the HCM. For example, as Yeqing described, 'I wanted to know whether it [Hangzhou cuisine] was as delicious, refined and beautiful as what the museum showcased (Interviewee #11)'.

In relation to the exclusiveness and novelty, it was a must-have for them as if it were a *rite of passage*, as Dandie suggested 'I felt that I must eat here after visiting the museum. Otherwise I would feel regrettable once I get back home. I should try the iconic dishes here (Interviewee #4)'. Also, respondents had a variety of expectations. Some expected the museum restaurant should specialise in Hangzhou cuisine exclusively, without offering other regional cuisines, whereas others anticipated the HCMRs ought to offer certain Hangzhou dishes unavailable elsewhere. This is consistent with the study of Kim et al. (2019) on Japanese tourists' rush to noodle villages, whereas it is discrepant from the findings of Hsu et al. (2018) that Caucasian inbound tourists travelling in Taiwan were less likely to sample traditional Taiwanese food when expressing high food neophobia and low familiarity with traditional food *in situ*.

### Media exposure

The appearance of the food museum in the media enhanced the credibility and authenticity of the museum, and as acknowledged by Guogang, that different media programmes serve to verify the quality and authentic representation of the museum which was reflected in the decision-making process for his visit:

A CCTV (China Central Television) programme has been here to record the production process of Hangzhou cuisine. I have also seen the museum on other CCTV television programmes introducing local food in each city, such as *Across China* and *A Bite of China*. Since it (the HCM) was chosen as a shooting location, I thought it must be an authentic place for Hangzhou cuisine. (Interviewee #12)

Previous studies have identified that media representations, as autonomous agents (Gartner, 1994), have a powerful impact on one's perception (Hudson et al., 2011; Skinner, 2016). Viewers can become more familiar with attractions of a destination featured in the media (Bolan & Williams, 2008; Croy, 2010), and even become motivated to visit the destination (Lee & Bai, 2016). In food tourism research, media exposure of the food-related attractions also positively influences food tourists' motivations to visit them (Kim et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020). In the Chinese context in particular, a broadcast channel with a good reputation, such as China

Central Television, plays an important role in building credible food images of destinations, thereby viewers are more motivated to visit the portrayed destinations (Xu et al., 2020).

## Implications, limitations, and conclusion

### Theoretical and practical implications

Important theoretical and practical implications emanate from this research. Firstly, the finding showed that 'education and knowledge' was the predominant motivation. This study further identified three sub-dimensions including 'history and characteristics of Hangzhou cuisine', 'authentic stories associated with local cuisine and foods', and 'knowledge of regional dietary habits and nutritious practices'. It is not surprising, that lifelong and self-regulated informal learning, such as in a museum or through a media programme in the context of tourism has become more prominent in recent years (Ji et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2019; Park et al., 2019). Furthermore, as suggested by Goolaup et al. (2018), this kind of education and knowledge motivation and its subsequent knowledge acquisition plays a crucial role in enhancing one's cultural capital related to local food and food culture.

Whilst previous studies suggested the cultural experience as a combined motivator for 'knowledge' and 'authentic experience' regarding food as a medium of learning about and exploring authentic, unique local cultures (Kim et al., 2013; Kim & Eves, 2012), the current study does not support this stance. This may reflect the specifications of domestic food tourist's familiarity with their culturally, socially owned and/or shared foods, and different expectations of authentic experiences. These expectations are strongly related to the quest for originality at an acceptable level by the domestic tourists, which is different to the study of Hsu et al. (2018) on international tourists' traditional food consumption behaviour in Taiwan. Thus, further empirical studies are invited to clarify a refined structure of food tourism motivations in conjunction with further (re)development and refinement of dimensions and scales in both domestic and international contexts.

Health concerns was not a stand-alone motivation but was a sub-dimension of the education and knowledge motivation at the individual level. Unlike the prior studies (Kim et al., 2009, 2013; Kim & Eves, 2012), the current study reveals that health concerns are more about the quest for knowledge regarding an ancestor's wisdom and dietary or nutritious practices around food production and consumption which are rooted in the studied region(s). This has a deeper meaning to the culturally familiar domestic tourists.

This finding differs from the widely known food health benefits (for example, nutrition) and safety considerations regarding eating and tasting certain local dishes in food tourism destinations. These findings will surely encourage further research within the existent food tourism literature where refinement of definitions of constructs and scale items of food tourist motivations is lacking. Furthermore, the additional divergent findings clearly call for further studies in this area from a range of perspectives.

Secondly, this study identified 'sensorial and embodied experience', which was created by combining two nominated sub-dimensions, 'multi-sensorial engagement in a setting' and 'degustation of iconic signature dishes'. One of the novel findings of this study is the mixed motivation of an intrinsic and extrinsic aspect. This includes a need for the multisensorial experience of food which was particularly sought from the museum setting factor; and multisensorial engagement in the food exhibition through knowledge delivery, achieved in the form of an experiential activity in the museum. Meanwhile, for tasting experiences, although this study categorised the sensorial food taste as the motivation of sensorial and embodied experience, it is not clearly defined because it is situated somewhere between 'education and knowledge' and the 'sensorial and embodied experience'. This can be interpreted through the multi-sensorial and embodied nature of food tourism in particular, which highlights that tasting is the highest end of food experience and is considered the ultimate learning situation in authentic settings (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014; Ellis et al., 2018; Goolaup et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Moscardo et al., 2015; Su et al., 2020). The current study empirically supports this buffer zone existing between the 'education and knowledge' motivation and 'multi-sensorial and embodied food experience' motivation. It is also supported by the fact that for those food tourists, the museum restaurant is considered 'an interdisciplinary space of informal learning', offering 'multisensorial "lessons" in history and culture' (Mihalache, 2016, p. 319).

Thirdly, in this study, 'escapism' was established as a stand-alone motivation, (whereas previous studies suggested a combination of 'exciting and thrilling experience' and 'escape from routine'), highlighting the interconnectedness or symbiotic relationship between the two (Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim et al., 2013). However, it is noteworthy that the 'escapism' motivation of this study not only refers to escape from our routine and boredom but also constitutes creating meaning around our daily food consumption. This is noteworthy especially as food as a special interest tourism acts as a

medium for tourist's learning and developing changes in attitudes allowing escapism to transform to activism in creating meaning regarding food consumption in a wider social context.

Fourthly, 'social togetherness and kinship' at the social level in this study, reinforced the importance of spending time with family and friends. It is interesting to note that social interaction with new people is not meant to mean social togetherness in this study. Rather, it is more about quality time with family members (and friends). This can be interpreted in two ways at least. First, young Chinese tourists tend to travel in small friendship or family groups (Song et al., 2018). In particular, family togetherness has long been identified as a motivation among Chinese tourists (Huang & Hsu, 2005) and Chinese museum visitors (Wu & Wall, 2017). Second, Goolaup et al. (2018) also support the notion that for food tourists in particular, discussing with families and friends who share similar interests, learning from each other, and further developing their knowledge were important in influencing one's own food experience and nurtured food's cultural capital.

Fifthly, at the institutional level, both 'food authenticity' and 'media exposure' were recognised to be significant motivators. The former can be explained by the general public's belief in museums as trusted social, cultural institutions, and the exclusivity and novelty of food (that is, iconic signature dishes) to be served at the museum restaurants. This is differentiated from authentic experiences in the wider food tourism context, that is, tourists' quest for 'otherness' by tasting local cuisine on their trips to new destinations (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Fox, 2003; Kim & Ellis, 2015; Kim & Iwashita, 2016). The concept of food authenticity in this study is more related to objective authenticity which refers to an absolute and objective criterion used to measure genuineness (Wang, 1999). This can be interpreted, in the research context as the museum thematically representing the food and food culture of a region.

The media exposure was identified as a key motivator in this study, mainly driven by credible sources such as documentary and reputable national broadcast channels that efficiently create the destination's food image. This finding is consistent with, and confirmation of, the significant role of media in regional food tourism, as previously reported in the findings of Japanese domestic tourists visiting a food tourism region (Kim et al., 2019). It is thus recommended that the influence of media and new media such as social media on food travel motivation is yet to be (re)confirmed by future studies (Su et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020).



Finally, practitioners involved in destination development and tourism management should refer to the key findings of this study. Greater clarity in understanding a tourist's more subtle, sophisticated motivations will assist a destination to successfully position itself and allow for skillfully tailored marketing plans (for example, the demarketing and/or diversification of existing products) and the emergence of new product developments such as food museums, that appropriately target preferred market segments.

Though it is beyond the scope of the current study, it is pertinent to note that this research is published amid the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, from which our business and normal life has been greatly changed. Understandably, challenges and implications of the current research, especially for the practical side may exist. The COVID-19 pandemic substantially challenges and even changes humanity's relation with food production and consumption. A museum's relationship with both people and food are no different from other institutions. It is witnessed that both restaurants and museums implement key strategies of their operations not only for economic survival, but for the continuation of its roles and functions within society. Restaurants implement social distancing upon the measure of hygiene and disease control, and overall, the change to food supply systems and production methods to sustainable ways will directly influence food service management and operations (Gössling et al., 2020). Meanwhile, museums have sought digital responses to the crisis and implemented short-term strategies to fulfil their responsibility as a social space (Ou, 2020), whilst enabling longer-term strategies to make the collection richer and more widely accessible to greater audiences in order that museums fulfil the role of informative, entertaining knowledge repositories within society (Kahn, 2020).

However, digitised experiences of food in digital museum setting, will not satisfy the desire of food tourists in the longer term. Food-related facilities in tourism venues will not be able to avoid the physical presence required and the actual consumption of food. Visitor management that enables a more prompt and meticulous response will be required. This may include capacity management with decreased capacity of the facility and maintaining strict social distancing rules; demand management by limiting group numbers and the use of real-time reservation systems, and marketing and promotion relating to visitor's health protection (Ou, 2020). Such practices will likely enhance visitor satisfaction and the quality of food experiences at museum restaurants because of due regard for diner's time and space requirements. Visitors will view the museum

dining experience as an enriching experience relevant to the food they saw in the exhibitions which is concurrent with the current study.

Public and personal health concerns are no longer a factor influencing people's travel plans. However, they are now a precondition as evidenced by the World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC, n.d.) launch of 'Safe Travels' and the World Tourism Organisation's Technical Assistance Package for tourism recovery (UNWTO, n.d.). These policies provide global standardised hygiene protocols and action plans for health and safety in a wide range of tourism sectors. Health risk controls and practices will become the new norm in response to COVID-19. Consequently, the food component in all aspects of tourism and the food experience will be highly driven by trust displayed in highly recognised institutions like food museums. Global changes wrought by the current COVID-19 crisis may expose hidden opportunities for food museums and restaurants.

### *Conclusion and limitations*

This study is a first attempt to provide insight into what motivates food tourists to visit a food museum and its associated restaurants as an emerging food tourism attraction, using an exploratory, qualitative study of Hangzhou Cuisine Museum in China. Through an inductive approach, adopting qualitative interviews, this study identified six key motivations (that is, education and knowledge; sensorial and embodied experience; transformative escapism; social togetherness and kinship; food authenticity; and media exposure) at three levels (that is, individual, social, and institutional). It also aimed to provide a more complete understanding of the dynamics and diversities of food tourism through the provision of more subtle and nuanced food tourists' accounts of their motivations and to suggest a motivational model of food tourists as shown in [Table 2](#).

The current study confirms the multidimensional aspect of food tourist motivations and makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by adding both convergent and divergent findings in food tourism. A few limitations of this study, however, need to be mentioned as a marker for future studies. The study focuses on Chinese domestic food tourists rather than international food tourists, given that previous studies on food tourism amongst Chinese tourists predominantly dealt with local food consumption of Chinese outbound tourists (Chang et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2016). Thus, broader samples including an international perspective are welcomed to allow conclusions to be more widely interpreted and comprehensive. Other food museum destinations in

other regions are needed for further investigations. Also, comparative studies on more than two different types of food tourism attractions (for example, food museum, cooking school, and high-end fine dining) at the same destination will bring another layer of evidence of the dynamics and diversities of food tourism motivations. To achieve this, future studies would benefit from an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary perspective, which positions food studies, museum studies and tourism and leisure studies in a wider social context.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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