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Food consumption when travelling abroad: Young Chinese sojourners' food consumption in the UK

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the everyday food choices of 21 Chinese sojourners living in two different localities in the UK. Findings from a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews reveal how participants adopt a food consumption pattern, negotiating between ordinary and extraordinary food choices, including home-made Chinese food, Chinese restaurant food, global brands, British food, to “foods of the world”. Their zooming in and out of different food consumption choices reflects the transformative identity of the sojourners, between their student role during the week and becoming tourists at the weekends, meshing work and tourism during their sojourning in the UK. Theoretically this paper extends the limited understanding of sojourners, showing how their complex food choices reflect their swift transformative identity. Findings also illustrate how consumption patterns adopted by sojourners living in rural areas differ from the ones living in an urban setting.

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1. Introduction

Food consumption is essential for international travellers, to sustain their well-being and to experience and understand the culture of a society (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). Whilst existing literature has attempted to explore tourist food preferences in culturally different environments, providing detailed account of the motivation factors that explain tourists' food preferences during their travel (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline, & Wang, 2011; Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010), there is limited research attention on sojourners' food consumption leaving it a challenge to destination marketers, hospitality businesses, tour operators and policy makers (Brown, 2009b; Brown, Edwards, & Hartwell, 2010). This paper contributes to the scant literature on sojourners' food consumption in relation to their identity.

Not all travellers are short-term tourists; in recent years,

international students' studying abroad has emerged as a new tourism market (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017). Different from immigrants, international students are sojourners who have a clear home orientation as their sojourning is temporary (albeit relatively long-term) and linked to specific purposes, for example, pursuing a higher education degree (Brown, 2009a). Often ‘international sojourner’ refers to a temporary between-society contact of between 6 months and 5 years (Hottola, 2004; Jandt, 2001). Unlike short-stay tourists, who are not really committed to their new locations during their visit, a sojourner typically lives in a country for a longer period of time, with a specific and goal-oriented purpose, and is usually inclined to adjust to some extent to local cultural norms (Gudykunst, 1998), displaying the hallmarks of openness, flexibility and tolerance (Brown, 2009a; Brown et al., 2010; O'Reilly, 2006).

Sojourners may be seen as immigrants, performing daily mundane tasks, for example, going to work and/or schools during the week; other studies suggest that sojourners have a more complex identity than immigrants because they also share similar identity traits to tourists (Pocock & McIntosh, 2013; Williams & Hall, 2002). Their food consumption behaviour cannot be explained using tourists' motivation alone, as food consumption itself becomes an important medium for their cultural expression

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(Brown, 2009b; Fieldhouse, 2013) and an enactment of their cultural identity during their sojourn (Cappellini & Yen, 2013; Shankar et al., 2009).

Contemporary sojourners, such as international students travelling abroad for higher education purposes, represent a growing number of tourists temporarily leaving their home country (Brown et al., 2010). The 4.3 million international students who travel to other countries for education purposes annually (OECD, 2013) are a sizeable consumer segment that requires further research attention, as existing works on immigrants or short-term tourists cannot be applied to fully explain their consumption choices abroad (Brown, 2009a, 2009b). In the UK, Chinese students represent the group with the strongest presence, reaching 91,215 in 2015/2016 and exceeding any other nationality (UKCISA 2017). As avid consumers of global consumer culture and keen shoppers of global brands (Wang, 2009), they represent a major source of economy income, having a significant impact on local tourism and the hospitality sector (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017). However, research on these sojourners' consumption patterns remains limited (Chung, Holdsworth, Li, & Fam, 2009), revealing a knowledge gap in understanding this important market segment.

To address this research gap, this paper aims to investigate a group of Chinese international students' food consumption behaviours and the identity that underlay such consumption patterns during their sojourning in the UK. Specifically, the research objectives include: 1) to explore young Chinese sojourners' food consumption behaviour in relation to their sojourner identity and 2) to illustrate how the locality context shapes their food consumption in the UK.

2. Literature review

2.1. Identity on the move

A sojourner is a short-term visitor staying temporarily in a host country for specific reasons, including work or studies (Berry & Sam, 1997). They differ from short-term tourists due to their intention to make a living in the country of their visit during their relatively long-term travel by "meshing work with tourism, routine with novelty, and familiarity with strangeness" (Pocock & McIntosh, 2013, p. 404). Nevertheless, sojourners are also dissimilar from immigrants because they have the intention to return home at some stage in the future, thus all the adjustment made during their sojourns may be reversed upon their return home.

Food consumption, which many sojourners describe as one of the most problematic aspects of their stay in a new environment, is an emblematic example of the difficulties faced during the initial phases of their stay (Cappellini & Yen, 2013). Edwards, Hartwell, and Brown (2010) highlight how reshaping food consumption patterns in the new environment is a source of anxiety, since what international students eat has great significance both physically and emotionally. At the initial readjusting stage, characterised by instabilities and stress, many students "made many changes in their lives, except in the area of eating habits and practices" (Brown, 2009a, p. 52). If sojourners are prepared to adjust their everyday routine, food can remain an area in which continuity with the home culture is desirable. Therefore, initially sojourners share similar traits to some short-term tourists who prefer to stick to their familiar food and global brands for safety and reassurance (Bengtsson, Bardhi, & Venkatraman, 2010; Chang et al., 2010; Osman, Johns, & Lugosi, 2014) because food from home represents a symbol of security, a healthy lifestyle and the maintenance of social relationships with fellow sojourners (Bardhi, Ostberg, & Bengtsson, 2010). Consequently, foods considered alien are tried sporadically and not included in the daily routine (Bengtsson et al.,

2010).

If the above studies show how sojourners are not very inclined to change their food habits at the initial stage, other studies, focusing on the post cultural shock phase, have shown how sojourners change their food patterns and habits over time (see for example, Brosius, 2012; Tirelli & Martinez-Ruiz, 2014). Perez-Cueto, Verbeke, Lachat, and Remau-DE Winter (2009) show how international students sojourning in Belgium changed their diets after their arrival (85% of the sample), having increased the amount of some food items (vegetables and fruits) and decreased the consumption of others (confectionary). Others have highlighted how sojourners introduce new food items typical of the new cultural environment to their diets, lamenting gaining weight and shifts in food habits (Hartwell, John, Edwards, & Brown, 2011; McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

Considering the scarcity of research on sojourners and their food choices, this study attempts to answer Brown's (2009a) call for more research attention on sojourners by investigating how food choices are linked to their identity negotiation.

2.2. Chinese consumers and food

The Chinese culture is food centred (Simmons, 1991). Food forms part of the Chinese collective and individual identity, and sharing food is considered a way of strengthening familial and cultural bonds (Veeck & Burns, 2005). Given such a centrality of food, it is not surprising to know that when travelling abroad, Chinese consumers have a stronger ethnic retention compared to other nationalities (Chung, 2000). Vieregge, Lin, Drakopoulos, and Bruggmann (2009) show that second and even third generation of Chinese immigrants living in Switzerland consume daily Chinese food at home and choose Chinese restaurants as their favourite eating out option. Li et al. (2011) report that when Chinese tourists travel outside Asia, they prefer to have Chinese food at least once a day, either as a lunch or dinner option.

Despite such a strong attachment to the so-called 'traditional' Chinese food, studies have shown that global food brands are considered very popular options amongst young Chinese consumers. Works investigating the success of McDonald's and KFC in China during the 1980s and 1990s (Watson, 2000; Yan, 2000) demonstrate how the consumption experience attached to global food brands attracts enthusiastic young consumers, in particular children and teenagers. Eckhardt and Houston (2002) reveal how for many young Chinese consumers McDonald's is a part of their everyday lives, suitable for informal gatherings, lunch breaks, romantic dates and children's parties. Venkatraman and Nelson (2008) note how Chinese young adults enjoy the atmosphere evoked by the Starbucks brand, although they do not like the taste of its coffee. The consumption experience of Starbucks was considered exotic but also familiar and reassuring, since it bridges the local culture with a more Westernised and globalised one.

Considering the spread of global food brands in young consumers' everyday lives, there is a need to understand how such consumption is incorporated into their travels and sojourns. For example, in their study of American tourists travelling to China, Bengtsson et al. (2010) reveal how global brands such as McDonald's through its use of English language, standardised menu and service, offers tourists the perceived consistency, predictability and familiarity, thus providing a sense of home and safety in an unknown and challenging context. Osman et al. (2014) adds that McDonald's is also consumed by European tourists abroad to their broader touristic endeavours, to reconstruct their transformative identity, to engage with the destination, and to assess globalisation and with authenticity. However, as sojourners differ from short-term tourists in that they do plan to stay and making a living in

the country of their sojourn for a much longer period of time, it remains unclear if they are inclined to take similar refuge in global brands after their initial arrival (Cappellini & Yen, 2013; Osman et al., 2014).

3. Study methods

This interpretivist study explores 21 young Chinese international students' accounts of their overall food consumption experience during their sojourning in the UK. Purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants doing a one-year study course from three different universities based in two UK localities. Given the limited number of participants, this paper does not pretend to provide an analysis that is representative of all Chinese students in the UK, but simply provides an "in depth analysis of the life stories expressed by a relatively small number of participants" (Thompson, 1996, p. 392), who are enthusiastic consumers of food and are willing to speak about their food preference, habits and behaviour during their sojourn.

The sample consists of 13 females and 8 males, aged from 22 to 26 years old, and who have lived in the UK for various periods of time due to their previous study experiences. Their sojourning experiences ranged from 5 months to 7 years; hence none of the participants are considered as new sojourners and so have established certain food consumption patterns (Edwards et al., 2010). The heterogeneous sample was employed to reflect the educational tourism market, wherein some Chinese students are sent by their parents to study A levels, and/or language courses, prior to higher education degree(s) in the UK before their returning to China. In line with similar studies on the topic, we consider sojourning and long term-travelling 'not by discrete timeframes, but rather by hopes or intentions (Pocock & McIntosh, 2013, p. 404), and as such the status of being a student abroad willing to go back to China, regardless of the length of the stay, was considered the main recruitment criteria.

Of the 21 participants interviewed, 9 are based in urban and 12 in rural areas (see Table 1). The two localities differ in population size, geography and social-cultural environment. The urban locality is one of the largest and most visited cities in the UK (over 19 million in 2016) (VisitBritain, 2017). Its population is cosmopolitan and has a great selection of all different kinds of food offerings in the marketplace. The rural locality is a small city situated in the

midlands, with journey time of approximately one hour (car/train) to larger cities in the neighbouring area. Its population is predominately white English and it received around 51,000 visitors in 2016 (VisitBritain, 2017). Its local market offering is relatively limited and has a less rich selection of different varieties of food. The adoption of this multi-site fieldwork enriches the analysis of the intergroup disparities, since the two locations provide different access to ethnic supermarkets, Chinese restaurants, global brand outlets, other world cuisines, as well as varying exposure to cosmopolitanism.

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Topics of discussion centred on participants' food consumption patterns, feelings and ideas, including their daily consumption choices and routines, motivation during the week and at the weekend, as well as their experience of different food in relation to their identities. Participants were encouraged to bring pictures of their latest consumption experience and retell the story associated with such consumption. In describing their pictures, participants' feelings, ideas, identity, associated meanings and understanding surrounding their consumption of food were investigated. On average, each participant was interviewed three times, and each interview lasted from 30 to 60 min. The different length of our interviews reflects a common practice in qualitative research (Silverman, 2006).

With the participants' consent, the authors recorded all the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English, although participants often used some Mandarin Chinese phrases to indicate dishes or ingredients, which the first author, who speaks Mandarin Chinese fluently, interpreted. The gathered data were analysed thematically (Silverman, 2006), following a hermeneutic approach (Thompson, 1996) to understand participants' food consumption patterns during their sojourn in relation to their identity enactment. The authors adopted a continuous interaction between data and literature as a crucial part of the hermeneutical process of understanding the consumption practices under investigation (Silverman, 2006).

4. Findings

In mapping participants' patterns of food consumption during the period of their stay, two main categories emerged, namely *ordinary* (often associated with their consumption during the week)

Table 1
Participant profile.

Participants' Identification	Age	Sex	City of origin	UK location	Duration of sojourning experience in the UK
Participant A	26	Male	Xinjiang	Urban	2 years
Participant B	24	Male	Beijing	Urban	2 years 6 months
Participant C	23	Female	Nanjing	Urban	7 months
Participant D	22	Female	Shenzhen	Urban	5 years
Participant E	25	Male	Nanjing	Urban	2 years
Participant F	24	Male	Shenzhen	Urban	5 months
Participant G	23	Female	Beijing	Urban	2 years
Participant H	22	Male	Shenzhen	Urban	7 years
Participant I	23	Female	Beijing	Urban	5 months
Participant J	21	Female	Beijing	Rural area	5 months
Participant K	21	Female	Chongqing	Rural area	5 months
Participant L	22	Female	Beijing	Rural area	1 year 6 month
Participant M	21	Female	Chongqing	Rural area	8 months
Participant N	21	Female	Chongqing	Rural area	8 months
Participant O	21	Female	Suzhou	Rural area	8 months
Participant P	22	Female	Shenzhen	Rural area	5 months
Participant Q	22	Female	Dalian	Rural area	5 months
Participant R	22	Female	Shenzhen	Rural area	5 months
Participant S	22	Male	Liouzhou	Rural area	7 months
Participant T	21	Male	Nanjing	Rural area	5 months
Participant U	22	Male	Jining	Rural area	1 year

and *extraordinary* food consumption (mainly during weekends and on special celebratory occasions). Gronow & Warde (2001) define ordinary consumption as the sets of routinised, taken-for granted and daily practices, while extraordinary consumption consists of practices that are not carried out frequently and thus they interrupt the routinised behaviour. Often extraordinary consumption practices are celebratory and extravagant, and as such require an extra investment of time, energy and money. The observed inter-group disparities between participants living in urban versus rural areas are also explored. Table 2 provides a summary, illustrating such differences.

4.1. Ordinary consumption

Ordinary consumption tends to coincide, albeit not completely, with meals and snacks consumed during the weekdays. Inserted in the schedules of attending classes and other extra curriculum activities, meals are consumed in a routinised way, often following a

well-established pattern of planning, shopping, storing, preparing and eating food. Three different alternatives of meals considered ordinary by our participants have been found, namely *home-made Chinese food*, *Global brands* and *British food*.

4.1.1. Home-made Chinese food

Regarding daily food consumption, participants affirm eating their 'home' food remains their favourite option, echoing previous findings of Chung (2000) and Li et al. (2011), who suggest that Chinese consumers are particularly keen to keep the consumption of their ethnic food during travel. Regardless of being in rural or urban areas, consuming daily Chinese meals involves cooking, since the local Chinese take-away and restaurants are considered too expensive, poor quality, or lacking in authenticity for being regarded as a routinised option (Vieregge et al., 2009). If urban participants enjoy relatively easy access to those Chinese restaurants that are considered 'authentic' and 'good', their daily teaching schedule may make this option impractical. For sojourners in rural areas, the

Table 2
Young Chinese sojourners food preference in the UK.

	Chinese Food	Global Brands	British Food	Other World Food
Ordinary Meals: Mostly Weekday Meals	Home-made Chinese food is regularly consumed for safety, familiarity, reassurance and maintenance.	Fast food chains are consumed as lunch time options for their convenience, familiarity and reassurance.	They only have limited encounters with British food through canteen options.	Such food is not really consumed by participants during the week.
Practice for urban sojourners:	They tend to cook less and are more used to cooking and consuming home-made Chinese food on their own.	They enjoy a greater variety of global food brands, e.g. Subways, Dominos, Pret-a-manger, Starbucks, Costa Coffee, etc., and thus consume more global brands in general.	They tried but disliked such food due to its taste, ingredients and often price. Hence British food is often ignored and avoided as there are many other better options available.	Overall, there is little difference observed between urban and rural sojourners.
Practice for rural sojourners:	They tend to cook more because local options are often considered not acceptable. Often they gather as a group to cook more dishes and consume the food together.	They tend to have limited global brands available. Hence McDonald's and KFC are often the most referred to options.	Overall, there is little difference observed between urban and rural sojourners.	
Extraordinary Meals: Celebratory and Weekend Meals	Chinese restaurant food is consumed for pleasure at special occasions and weekend celebrations. They hold a very critical opinion when evaluating Chinese restaurants and authenticity is highly appreciated.	Global brands are consumed as social markers, they are considered as suitable outlets to celebrate the global youth membership with fellow international students.	British food is sampled at the initial stage for curiosity and variety-seeking, but it is generally regarded as the less preferred option due to its strangeness and disliked flavour/taste.	Very much welcomed and engaged by participants. They are sampled for their novelty and new experiences.
Practice for urban sojourners:	They have quickly developed specific knowledge regarding where to find good and appropriate Chinese offerings.	New global brands are encountered and appreciated, e.g. Nandos, Yo!Sushi.	Overall, there is little difference observed between urban and rural sojourners.	Participants happily follow online reviews to seek new world food experiences by visiting and sampling different food offerings.
Practice for rural sojourners:	They have managed to identify dishes that are considered more authentic, hence appropriate, by studying the local Chinese restaurants' menus.	Familiar global brands, e.g. Starbucks, Pizza Hut are employed as common terrain.		Urban sojourners may enjoy more variety than rural sojourners due to their advantageous locality. However, since sojourners travel during weekends, there is little difference observed between them.

limited local availability of restaurants considered 'good and authentic' makes cooking in their own kitchens within student accommodation the only alternative for having Chinese food during weekdays.

The acquisition of ingredients, initially considered problematic, was quickly solved, as sojourners learnt where to buy products and brands, although those living in rural areas may have to travel further afield to obtain some of the more specific ingredients from larger and better supplied Chinese supermarkets in cities. However, regardless of their location, the limited supply of the required ingredients from local mainstream supermarkets (the main source of food acquisition), makes participants improvise their original recipes with new ingredients, reflecting the inter-cultural adaptation work of [Hottola \(2004\)](#) and [Tookes \(2015\)](#). For example, whilst Chinese lamian noodles are not always accessible, spaghetti is employed together with pickled vegetables and pork into the creation of stir-fried "chao-mien".

The planning of the meal, initially a problematic practice, becomes a taken-for-granted task for most of them. Participants affirm having around a dozen dishes prepared on a regular basis, since they patronise the entire preparation process (from acquisition to disposal). However, preparing everyday meals often conflicts with other practices, including attending classes and studying in the libraries. As such, participants had to 'find time' to prepare and eat their meals. A surprising amount of effort, time and energy are dedicated to the preparation and cooking of Chinese food. Participant N exemplified her commitment to Chinese food.

"I like my own Chinese food ... because we have lectures at 9 o'clock, I often have to get up really early to prepare and cook my food first thing in the morning so that during lunch time I can just come back to the accommodation and reheat the food, eat it and then go back to university! It is a rush, but I'd rather eat my own food than the canteen food!" (Participant N)

If the literature highlights how an ordinary meal is considered convenient as it does not require a substantial management of time and domestic work ([Cappellini & Yen, 2013](#); [Marshall, 2005](#)), Participant N's description shows how Chinese sojourners' mundane lunches require extra effort, including getting up earlier and rushing back home for lunch, and how they negotiate their time amongst competing practices ([Gronow & Warde, 2001](#)), accommodating the contrasting demands of studying and cooking a Chinese meal.

"In the first term, we [a group of Chinese international students] tended to cook together a lot and eat together. But now we are in the second term we are all very busy and have different schedules so we cook on our own and eat on our own. [...] we all keep cooking our Chinese food, we are used to this. It is our culture, our way to live. I cannot cope without my Chinese food". (Participant M)

As this quote highlights, sharing a Chinese meal is considered a symbolic way for strengthening bonds with fellow Chinese students and maintaining cultural norms and food habits ([Kleine, 1993](#); [Cappellini & Yen, 2013](#)). The collective aspect of the practice of eating Chinese food becomes less relevant after the first term, when the even more demanding practice of studying was prioritised. However, cooking and eating familiar Chinese food remains part of a coping strategy of navigating the uncertainties and anxieties of being in a new environment ([Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2012b](#)) and maintaining the cultural identity in the new cultural environment ([Brown, 2009b](#)).

4.1.2. Global brands

Some participants admit consuming regularly food offered at global brand outlets such as Starbucks, Costa Coffee, Café Nero, McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Subway and Dominos. As some of these chains are within the university campus or in walking distance from the university campus and accommodation, some opt for these outlets for their lunches and snacks for their convenience, compared to the preparation and making of their own food.

"Monday to Friday I have Subway as my lunch when I'm on campus. I eat it at least 4 days a week. I have no choice you see! Canteen food is worse ... I tried there about 10 times before I gave up. If I want enough food, I would have to spend at least £10 to feel full [in the canteen]. And this is not really proper filling. It is just feeling not really hungry. It costs a lot less in SUBWAY. About £5 only, I could get a foot-long sandwich. Sometimes £6 for a different flavour". (Participant A)

"I eat McDonald's for lunch quite a bit. I cannot be bothered to walk back [to the accommodation] just to cook my lunch and come back to university again later. I'm happy with McDonald's ... I know what to expect and I can eat such food". (Participant U)

Having tried the campus' offerings, participants rely on the offers of global brands, which are considered as better options. The food's quality, quantity and price were not the only motives driving students to opt for global brands in their daily food choices ([McLachlan & Justice, 2009](#)). The symbolic aspect represented by these brands is also very prominent. As Participant U highlights, a brand like McDonald's is a reassuring choice, since its standardised offerings and service are seen as 'risk-free' choices ([Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012a](#); [Osman et al., 2014](#)) that do not require the sojourners to learn how to order and consume the food. The familiarity with such global brands acquired before their arrival in the UK, makes their selection a safe and reassuring experience. Furthermore, there is also another crucial symbolic aspect underpinning this option.

"When you are there [McDonald's], it is like being at home. You know how to order, what to order. It is the same as in China. You know what to do. You are relaxed and you do not have any bad surprises like ordering something you do not like. The atmosphere is the same; you chill out with your friends as you were doing in China. That's why it is my favourite place ...". (Participant E)

For Participant E, a global brand such as McDonald's is not only a reassuring option, it is also a place connected with home, echoing the findings of [Osman et al. \(2014\)](#), wherein European tourists travelling abroad find reassuring comfort of home in McDonald's familiar brandscape. In our findings, the perceived standardised atmosphere makes McDonald's a place enabling sojourners to maintain their pre-sojourn food habits, to resume some of their consumption practices established in China, to establish some reassuring connections with the new marketplace, and to acquire a temporary resting space before going back to the hard work of studying in a new cultural environment. As unpacked further in the discussion, this is a surprising finding, showing how the role of global brands, which has been overlooked by the literature on sojourners, is indeed central for understanding their experiences in the new context, providing shelter for those participants unwilling to engage with the host British culture during their daily consumption.

4.1.3. British food

In describing the everyday and mundane encounters with the

host food culture, participants refer to British food as food available at the university canteen, including “fish and chips”, “sausage and mash” and “jacket potatoes”. Many participants declared having tried the food offered at the canteen, but they have been unable to appreciate it.

“I don't really eat at the canteen ... I don't like the style. I don't like the pie, the noodles ... I don't like the rice with curry ... The rice is different from Chinese rice! They don't taste the same”. (Participant C)

Descriptions of the food as bland, unappetising and overcooked echo previous works highlighting how the cultural distance between the host and home cultures is a crucial factor in predicting tourist and sojourners' consumption of the food of the host culture (Brown, 2009b; McLachlan & Justice, 2009). Considered too alien and different to the everyday food consumed in China, many students ended up avoiding consuming any food offered in campus canteens (see also, Chang et al., 2010), with the exception of some Chinese snacks stocked at the university's shops. However, there are some students that visit the canteen sporadically, with the purpose of consuming specific dishes.

“Hmmm ... I don't really like the canteen food. I don't like jacket potatoes that much. In China, we don't really eat jacket potatoes! ... I only like Yorkshire puddings; they taste like our pancakes in China ...” (Participant Q)

“I go there every Friday to have fish and chips. It is the only thing I can eat there”. (Participant S)

The above examples show for some, certain British foods are considered as acceptable to be included in their weekly routine. Fish and chips and Yorkshire puddings do not represent a risky option, like other food at the canteen, but rather a ‘tame’ option. Although such food has a novelty character, participants do not attach any symbolic meanings to its consumption; they see it as a convenient option, echoing previous works highlighting the obligatory nature of eating (Mak et al., 2012b; Richards, 2002).

4.2. Extraordinary food consumption

Extraordinary food consumption coincides, albeit not completely, with meals and snacks consumed during the weekend and special occasions, including birthdays, anniversaries and other celebrations. Positioned outside the everyday studying schedule, these meals and snacks deviate from the mundane and routinised organisation of food, and as such they are more adventurous, explorative and repertoire-expansive (Mak et al., 2012b), reflecting the characteristics of tourists' quest for novelty by sampling new food, thus heightening their “peak touristic experience” (Chang et al., 2010; Quan & Wang, 2004). Global brands, Food from around the world and Chinese food at restaurants have been identified as extraordinary meal alternatives.

4.2.1. Global brands

Global brands, included in the weekly diet, are also consumed at the weekends and special occasions for their association with the global youth identity and for their enactment of global youth membership (Belk, 1988; Shankar et al., 2009), being highly appreciated and willingly celebrated by our participants in companionship with other international students. If such global youth identity was previously imagined and admired by participants prior to their sojourn, now this global youth identity is materialised and co-constructed as a new notion of self through

such consumption (Bond & Falk, 2013; Cohen, 2010).

“I just submitted my assignment earlier today; I worked really hard on this. Today I feel I deserve some nice food [big smile] ... I am going to go out to celebrate it with my British and German classmates this evening. We go to Nandos. It is cheap and the food is good ... You could have some chicken wings, legs, which are nice. Have a beer; we are all happy there ...” (Participant B)

“At the weekend, I would sometimes go out with my British friends. We would go to the cinema together, followed by having a drink at Café Nero ... I like this experience. There are so many different people of various ethnicities. Yet we are all having our coffee and enjoying ourselves at Café Nero together ...”. (Participant S)

Selected for their familiar environment, good price and quality, these global brands seem to accommodate the tastes of international students from different parts of the world, willing to share weekends and celebratory meals. The sharing aspect is particularly revealing, as global brands represent an appropriate alternative, accommodating different cultural backgrounds (Osman et al., 2014). This echoes previous studies showing how sharing global brands allows young consumers to connect with other “like-minded people” (Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004, p. 71), enacting a newly developed transformative identity (Shankar et al., 2009; Osman et al., 2014). Such a connection is particularly relevant for sojourners, as consuming global brands in a new cultural environment becomes a common terrain, wherein cultural diversities are set aside and shared understanding of food practices take place (Osman et al., 2014). Furthermore, global brands provide participants the space to co-create, reconstruct and celebrate a new global youth identity together with fellow international students.

4.2.2. Food from around the world

This category of food represents food that eludes existing categorisation since it includes what participants refer to as Western Food, but also Asian Food and sometimes “good” British food, all of which are suitable for celebratory purposes. With more time and a willingness to travel to different places during weekends, these sojourners engage in adventurous, new and demanding culinary experiences, which are often chosen following the word-of-mouth advice from friends and online advice. For example, Red Scarf (Honglingjin) – a very popular lifestyle blog that publishes UK tourism information with recommended food outlets, written in Chinese by Chinese alumni graduated from UK universities for current Chinese students in the UK – was mentioned as a key reference point, which together with other informal word-of-mouth recommendations, represents a guide for more extravagant eating out experiences (Miguéns, Baggio, & Costa, 2008). Interestingly, British pubs are also sampled as part of the weekend adventure, reflecting tourists' desire to encounter local culture and sample authenticity during their travels (Kim et al., 2009).

“We went to a pub last weekend. It was very different from what I had imagined when I was in China. I thought it would be full of young and trendy people, but instead many old people were in the pub, drinking and chatting. They were friendly to us. It was a very interesting experience!” (Participant P)

“I go to London with my friends to somewhere cool and interesting. We like a cocktail bar in Earl's court, and the Thai restaurant which is nearby. Thai food is so delicious! ... In Earl's Court, the atmosphere is so nice. Very quiet and peaceful, but with lots of cool and young people and tourists. It is just fun!” (Participant D)

So, when my friends gather us to “eat somewhere nice”, we would go for one of those restaurants, having steaks or lobsters. (Participant B)

Eating out with other international friends represents an occasion to experience cosmopolitan places in which other sojourners, tourists and young consumers are present. Away from the everyday and locally available global brands, the selected restaurants and bars represent somewhere “nice”, “different”, “extraordinary”, and sometimes according to participants, “extravagant”, where you “dress with smart clothes, you are at your best”, and you eat “steaks or lobsters”. Such extraordinary consumption experiences are often celebrated and shared with other fellow international students who have similar cultural and culinary capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and the same desire to sample, travel and experience the new cultural environment in addition to their studies (Brown, 2009a). Emerging from more adventurous and extravagant experiences, this consumption is regarded as a sign of being ‘open-minded’ and multi-cultural (Brown, 2009a) and sharing a similar lifestyle with other sojourners.

“I hang out with James and Felix [fellow British and German students], it is not just because of the language that I can talk to them, but also because I’m learning from them. I know to respect their cultures and like their things and they do the same with me ... In a way, we have grown together during this year ...” (Participant B)

Interestingly such a developed culinary knowledge and globalised lifestyle is the result of the participants’ sojourning in the UK, a country where, “you can find many types of food” (Participant B) and “mingle with friends coming from different parts of the world” (Participant A). In a way, similar to global brands, food from around the world is also consumed by participants to connect with other “like-minded” fellow international students (Holt et al., 2004). However, they provide participants the opportunities to sample the unfamiliar together, and to acquire shared novelty experiences with fellow international students from other parts of the world and therefore to co-negotiate their sojourner identity together. These findings highlight the importance of acknowledging the significance of others and their influence in shaping tourists’ experiences and identities during travel (Pocock, Cockburn-Wooten, & McIntosh, 2013).

4.3. Chinese food at restaurants

Participants also mention Chinese restaurant food as a weekend alternative. However, our findings echo previous works, showing how sojourners, like tourists, maintain a very critical view of their own cuisine available in the host country (Chang et al., 2010). In fact, the marketplace options locally available near the participants’ universities (especially in the rural area) face heavy criticism for their inauthentic flavouring and poor taste.

“In my view, the Chinese food here [a very small city in a rural area of the UK] is not really traditional Chinese food, they are more like Chinese food made for English people ... “. (Participant R)

Given the reduced availability of Chinese restaurants considered authentic, participants in rural areas cook more often than those living in areas in which the marketplace offering of Chinese food is considered more ‘authentic’ (Mak et al., 2012b). Sojourners in rural areas ended up planning trips to the local big cities, e.g. London and Birmingham, during which experiencing a ‘good and authentic’ Chinese meal is included in their visit.

“I know there are some really good Chinese restaurants in Birmingham and London and we plan to visit them during our next trip there. Hopefully they are better than the ones here”. (Participant M)

For participants living in urban areas, finding appropriate Chinese eating outlets during weekend relaxation and exploration represents an easier task. Equally critical of some of the Chinese restaurants experienced in the UK, these sojourners have developed a very good knowledge of outlets specialising in various types of meals and snacks, and as such they are able to access a richer offering for various occasions.

“Last week we went for bubble tea, it is a very cool thing to try. ... I do know a nice place where you can have dim sum. I tend to go there with friends after having done a bit of shopping in the weekends”. (Participant G)

“We [Participant B and his Chinese friends] have found a very nice place where we can have hot pot. Food is quite authentic and the price is not too bad. We have also found a place where we can do karaoke. It is more expensive and the food is not as good, but we like it [because we can sing our karaoke]!” (Participant B)

Such meals and snacks are not always considered suitable options to be shared with other fellow international students, who, according to the participants, might not understand the norms surrounding some Chinese food.

“Well ... you know I think I’m very similar to James and Felix [fellow British and German students] in the way we think and the way we behave. We are open-minded and all want to enjoy our lives ... But in other ways, for example, the way we eat, maybe I’m closer to my parents than to them ... For example, my all-time favourite is Chinese hot pot. I only eat this when I’m celebrating something together with other Chinese students. James and Felix like Chinese food, but I’m not sure they would like the hot pot ... Hot pot is a different kind of eating ... You will have to share the pot with others and it is also very spicy. Maybe they don’t like such spicy food or the concept of sharing food in the Chinese way?” (Participant B)

Certain Chinese meals, with specific norms and tastes, are considered a risky option to be shared with fellow international students, instead global brands and foods from the world are evaluated as more appropriate options during weekend celebrations. The findings further reveal how the significant others are taken into account in sojourners’ identity negotiation and planning of their consumption behaviour (Pocock et al., 2013).

5. Conclusion

Responding to the research gap on sojourners’ food consumption (Brown, 2009a), this study provides an in-depth understanding of young Chinese students’ food habits in the UK. Since none of the sojourners were considered new sojourners in the UK, they have all established some routinised practices and have overcome their early anxiety and stress, typical of the initial cultural shock (Hottola, 2004). This echoes the work of Thompson and Tambyah (1999) that the emotional work sojourners undertake during their initial stage of their stay will become less prominent once consumption practices become routinised and do not require a high investment of energy, time and effort to be accomplished.

During the week, their diet includes home-made Chinese food, global food brands and British food consumed at the university

canteen; the first being the most prominent choice and the latter occurring only in a few cases. Extraordinary food consumption, during weekends and special celebrations, is less predictable and consists of global food brands, foods of the world and Chinese food at restaurants. They are consumed for celebrating and actualising their global youth membership, experiencing variety, new flavours and authenticity, as well as pleasure and quality, depending on the occasions and the presence of other sojourners (Pocock et al., 2013). Whilst their ordinary consumption differs greatly from their extraordinary consumption, the findings illustrate that, as sojourners, Chinese students oscillate between two very different patterns of consumption behaviours, reflected in ordinary (immigrants) and extraordinary (tourists) categories.

The findings illuminate the unique characteristic of sojourners, who are neither immigrants nor simply tourists, as they often engage in both work and tourism during their sojourn. Over time during their sojourn, they may have experienced cultural shift, transformative changes, thus a reshape of their consumption practices (Brown, 2009b; Cushner & Karim, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006); this does not mean that they will stop engaging in tourist behaviour, experimenting in the everyday mundane with extraordinary new experiences whilst they “switch off from being a student to being a tourist” (Participant L). This sojourner characteristic somehow coincides with McCracken's (2008) notion of swift self, a short-term identity transformation, exercised by individuals capable of extraordinary mobility. According to McCracken (2008), those who possess such swift self are not shy of expressing their willingness to be released from domestic, social and other constraints imposed by culture and history, such as gender, ethnicity, class or formality. They have the ability to zoom in and out, as if their identity is constantly in motion, ready to be temporarily adapted, reconstructed or, in effect, transformed to help them to achieve a specific purpose.

Different from McCracken's finding derived from the US workplace, our findings show that the possibility of such a mobile identity is also permanent in the area of consumption by young Chinese sojourners. Similar to McCracken's findings, our participants are not shy of removing themselves from the pressure of studying hard during the week; instead readily engaging themselves in exciting tourist sightseeing in the weekends, in celebration with the significant others (fellow international students) (Pocock et al., 2013). They demonstrate the ability to zoom in and out from various consumption practices and food options both during the week and at the weekends, as if their identity is constantly in motion, ready to be temporarily adapted, reconstructed and transformed, depending on their motives for each of the consumption occasion. They freely mesh work and tourism when readapting their identity to a new sociocultural environment (Pocock & McIntosh, 2013) and celebrate their identity swiftness through a variety of food options. Nevertheless, the location of the sojourn influences the selection of alternatives: participants in rural areas are more inclined to cook Chinese food and rely on familiar global food brands, while those in urban areas exhibit a broader consumption pattern with a greater variety of choices.

Theoretically, this paper yields three contributions. By empirically illustrating sojourners' identity swiftness through food consumption choices, this paper extends previous understanding of sojourners and their differences from immigrants or short-term tourists. If McCracken (2008) conceptualises the swift self as a calculative suspension of the actual self, for sojourners such identity is an existential condition. Such a capacity of zooming in and out and being able to readapt to the situation of consumption deemed appropriate, seems typical of this group of middle class young sojourners. Swift identity facilitates its adaptability and transferability across contexts, explaining why participants are

competent consumers of global brands, symbolising a passport to express global citizenship (Strizhakova, Coulter & Price, 2008).

Secondly, the findings reveal that global food brands have a crucial influence in the reshaping of sojourners' diets. If the previous studies emphasise how international students tend to maintain their home food culture, adopting a “mononational eating plan” (Brown, 2009b, p. 37), our study shows more complex food patterns, in which the consumption of global brands is very present in both ordinary and extraordinary occasions. Such consumption is adopted to maintain a pre-sojourn diet, to resist the host culinary culture and to establish and consolidate relationships with fellow international students, participating to a desired global youth community (Osman et al., 2014). As Berry (2008, p. 323) posits, consuming symbols of global consumer culture, such as global brands, represents a “starting point of acculturation” to other cultures, which in this case are represented by cultures of other fellow students and the urban marketplace offering of global food.

Finally, this study shows the importance of understanding the local culinary context in which sojourners live. The centrality of understanding local cultures and subcultures, has been highlighted in studies on acculturation (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006) and tourism (Sims, 2009), but has been overlooked in works on sojourners and food consumption. In showing how the host food culture is diversified, rather than a monolithic and homogenous entity, this study demonstrates how the local marketplace's offerings shape sojourners' ordinary and extraordinary food consumption. By illustrating the consumption pattern differences, such as the intergroup disparities between participants living in urban versus rural areas, this paper sheds new light on the explanation of tourist food consumption in the UK.

As this study is of an exploratory nature, findings should be interpreted with caution, considering also the sample represents a relatively well-to-do group of avid and enthusiastic young Chinese sojourners with high social economic status and extraordinary mobility. Not all sojourners have the opportunity to sample different restaurant foods and engage in new experiences on a weekly basis. Future research is advised to consider studying other sojourning groups, such as foreign expats and their accompanying family members, to explore the concept of sojourning experiences in different cultural contexts and countries beyond the UK. Given that this paper investigates sojourners' food consumption only; there is also a need to investigate other areas of consumption in relation to tourism and hospitality. Finally, whilst this qualitative study depicts how locality affects the consumption choice and behaviour of young Chinese sojourners, future studies are encouraged to further investigate the effect of locality and other aspects such as sojourning length on consumption behaviour quantitatively for generalisation.

Despite such limitations, the findings of this study provide insightful information for tourism marketers and hospitality businesses in developing their gastronomic products and services, targeting young Chinese sojourners. Several marketing implications are listed. Firstly, since global food is considered as a much more preferred option than local British food, hospitality suppliers on campus or at university towns should take care in designing their menus and choosing their product offerings when serving Chinese tourists and sojourners. Secondly, since foods of the world and global food brands are not only consumed for their familiarity and reassurance during the week, but also for celebrating sojourners belonging to a global youth community, this offers clear implications for food suppliers in their designing of the service-scape. Thirdly, as sojourners desire to maintain their ethnic identity and engage in food preparation and consumption, food suppliers and retailers should accommodate such a demand.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2017.11.097>.

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