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## Beyond Local Food consumption: The Impact of Local Food Consumption Experience on Cultural Competence, Eudaimonia and Behavioral Intention

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# Beyond local food consumption: the impact of local food consumption experience on cultural competence, eudaimonia and behavioral intention

Beyond local  
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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to explore the relationships among local food consumption experience, cultural competence, eudaimonia, and behavioral intention. Building upon acculturation theory, need hierarchy theory and self-determination theory, the current study develops a conceptual model of local food consumption as international tourists' acculturation process.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study collects data from 305 Chinese outbound tourists and uses partial least squares-structural equation modeling to examine the developed model.

**Findings** – The findings reveal a significant effect of the local food consumption experience, consisting of novel, authentic, sensory and social dimensions, on cultural competence, which subsequently evokes eudaimonia and behavioral response toward local food. The mediating effect of cultural competence is also confirmed.

**Practical implications** – Destination marketers and restaurant managers should recognize local food consumption as a meaningful tool that contributes to tourists' cultural competence and eudaimonic well-being during travel. They should strive to craft an indigenous consumption setting and provide employee training on the history and culture of local food, helping tourists understand local food customs and embrace different food cultures.

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**Originality/value** – To the best of the authors' knowledge, very few studies have attempted to examine the meaningful consequences of local food consumption through the theoretical lens of acculturation. This study dives into international tourists' local food consumption and pioneers a conceptual model to capture how local food consumption experience provokes their eudaimonia and behavioral desires through the mechanism of cultural competence.

**Keywords** Local food, Local food consumption experience, Cultural competence, Eudaimonia, Acculturation, International tourists

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Beyond a basic necessity in a destination, local food consumption is social and cultural in nature by symbolically representing local rules, processes, traditions and rituals (Sims, 2009). In the travel context, consuming local food is one of the most contextual ways to optimize tourist learning (Choe and Kim, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2020). When dining out at local food establishments, international tourists can appreciate the restaurant, enjoy the food, interact with both their ingroup and new people and observe others (Kim *et al.*, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2018). Such engagement helps tourists learn about local food and, more importantly, the culture from which it originates (e.g. customs and history) (Mak *et al.*, 2012). In light of tourist learning, this study draws upon the concept of cultural competence to understand the value of local food consumption. Cultural competence is defined as the ability to quickly learn about different cultures and convert this knowledge into action (Lin *et al.*, 2021). Cultural competence can be developed and improved when an individual learns from, observes, and reflects on a specific event (Tsaor and Tu, 2019), whereas local food consumption can be a contextual approach to developing and achieving it.

Despite myriad research on local food consumption, such as tourist satisfaction and destination image (Badu-Baiden *et al.*, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Mohamed *et al.*, 2020), two research gaps have remained unfulfilled. First, the local food consumption experience is underexamined from the theoretical perspective of tourist learning. Tourist learning derived from consuming local food signals that tourists may enhance their cultural competence in food consumption practices (Scarinci and Pearce, 2012). However, existing literature lacks empirical evidence of how local food consumption experience affects cultural competence, creating difficulties in understanding the value of local food consumption. Second, past research has not yet detected how tourists derive personal well-being from dining on local food (Chang *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2018). Among the very few attempts, Wang *et al.* (2019) propose that tourists' encounters with exotic local food could foster their sense of competence and personal growth using a qualitative approach. However, Wang *et al.* (2019) neither quantitatively validated this proposition nor considered the role of personal competence in affecting tourist behavior. Thus, the influence of tourists' cultural competence on eudaimonia and behavioral decisions warrants further consideration through quantitative assessment of statistical models.

To fulfill the above-mentioned gaps, this study aims to investigate international tourists' cultural competence as well as its antecedents and consequences in the food consumption environment. Building upon *acculturation theory* (Redfield *et al.*, 1936), along with *need hierarchy theory* (Wahba and Bridwell, 1976) and *self-determination theory* (Deci and Ryan, 2008), the present study posits local food consumption as an acculturation process that shapes international tourists' cultural competence, leading to psychological and behavioral responses. With the increasing interest in the travel dining occasion (Badu-Baiden *et al.*, 2022), this study endeavors to address the following research question: "How does

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international tourists' local food consumption experience lead to their cultural, psychological, and behavioral outcomes?" Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- to examine the impact of local food consumption experience on cultural competence;
- to explore the impact of cultural competence on eudaimonia and behavioral intention; and
- to test the mediating role of cultural competence.

To the authors' knowledge, this research is among the first to go beyond the traditional contour to study local food consumption by investigating cultural competence, together with its antecedents and outcomes, in the travel dining context. Theoretically, the findings of this study can uncover how the local food consumption experience acts as a crucial catalyst of cultural competence in the cross-cultural environment, thus, bridging food research and hospitality and tourism literature. Practically, this study can assist restaurant managers and destination marketers in marketing local food and capturing tourist traffic.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Cultural competence

Cultural competence denotes "the ability to rapidly learn different cultures and convert this knowledge into action and to draw in his/her cultural knowledge to effectively interact with people of different cultural backgrounds" (Tsauro and Tu, 2019, p. 10). This term is coined to reflect a developmental process through which people can identify, accept and integrate cultural differences with their cultural intelligence and develop or enhance their capabilities to adjust their social behaviors (Lin *et al.*, 2021). Aligned with personal competence, which is adaptable to new information, learning and experience (Blume, 2013), cultural competence may be improved as people accumulate cross-cultural experiences.

Psychology and health care literature have disclosed the significance of cultural competence in helping health service providers understand and appreciate cultural differences across nations, regions and communities while providing transcultural nursing and health care to patients (Purnell, 2002). The notion of cultural competence has seen a growth in discussions in the hospitality and tourism field that emphasize the cultural flows and exchanges between tourists and hosts (Lin *et al.*, 2021; Tsauro and Tu, 2019; Ye *et al.*, 2013). For example, Ye *et al.* (2013) disclosed the moderating effect of intercultural competence on how perceived cultural distance affected anticipated discrimination from a socio-cultural adaption perspective. Tsauro and Tu (2019) found that tour leaders' cultural competence positively evokes their job satisfaction. Fan *et al.* (2020) manifested the role of cultural competence in stimulating tourists to participate in tourism activities. These studies, however, did not examine the antecedents of cultural competence, which lacks nuanced insights into its dynamic nature in the travel process. Thus, a contextual examination of how tourist experience affects cultural competence is much needed.

### 2.2 Local food consumption experience as an antecedent of cultural competence

2.2.1 *Local food consumption experience and acculturation theory.* Previous hospitality and tourism research has identified local food consumption in travel settings as a multidimensional experience (Adongo *et al.*, 2015; Mohamed *et al.*, 2020). Chang *et al.* (2011) suggested several attributes, such as authentic and experiential factors and service encounters, when evaluating local food experiences on travel occasions. Stone *et al.* (2018) extended the understanding of local gastronomy experience by identifying five elements, namely, food/drink consumed, location/setting, social interaction, dining occasion and

touristic elements (e.g. novelty and authenticity). Kim *et al.* (2020) examined the local food consumption experience within the five domains of authenticity, socialization, restaurant quality, learning experience and menus/food quality. From a tourist perspective, these studies revealed that the local food consumption experience is multifaceted, going beyond mere physiological satisfaction.

*Acculturation theory*, proposed by Redfield *et al.* (1936) in the field of anthropology, defines acculturation as an interactive process in which individuals come into contact with different cultures. Recent work reveals the direct relevance of acculturation to hospitality and tourism and deals with the investigation of international tourists' reactions when they are in contact with host cultures during travel (Weber *et al.*, 2016). The process of interaction with a host culture involves changes to an individual's attitudes, behaviors and cognitions (Rasmi *et al.*, 2014). *Acculturation theory* suggests that cultural contact in the consumptive environment affects personal competence and consumption continuity (Blume, 2013; Gentry *et al.*, 1995). When it comes to consuming local food in a foreign destination, people tend to be culturally sensitive and more likely to cross over the cultural boundary between nations, making local food consumption dynamic acculturation for international tourists (Hwang *et al.*, 2018; Weber *et al.*, 2016).

Acculturation consists of attitudinal and behavioral domains (Blume, 2013; Gentry *et al.*, 1995). First, attitudinal acculturation primarily occurs when an individual is oriented to find his/her cultural identification with the traditional/new culture (Jun *et al.*, 1993). It involves a cognitive examination of the references and meanings of the host culture in a comparative and reflective way. Local food consumption is imbued with perceived "locality" and "sincerity" as a result of comparing food in the destination and home country and capturing their cultural differences (Ji *et al.*, 2016). It opposes the sense of everyday life and presents the "backstage" of the local life (Özdemir and Seyitoğlu, 2017; Sims, 2009). The novel and authentic dimensions derived from consuming local food can help tourists learn about local food and shape their attitudes toward local culture (Bojanic and Xu, 2006). Thus, the current study identified novel and authentic experiences as two important aspects of attitudinal acculturation when consuming local food.

Second, behavioral acculturation denotes the extent to which an individual engages in activities common to a given culture (e.g. food choice and eating and social relations) (Warren *et al.*, 2009). It varies across the situational influence of consumption activities (Gentry *et al.*, 1995). Behavioral acculturation is more likely to arise when the consumption is highly visible and interactive (Gentry *et al.*, 1995; Jun *et al.*, 1993). The process of consuming local food usually consists of critical "moments of truth" achieved through sensory appreciation and social encounters (Chang *et al.*, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Stone *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, sensory and social experiences are recognized as two essential elements of behavioral acculturation in food practice. Considering acculturation literature and hospitality and tourism studies, the present study conceptualizes four dimensions to measure local food consumption experience: novel, authentic, sensory and social experiences.

*2.2.2 Novel experience.* Novel experience refers to the extent to which the food experience intensifies daily life experience by offering unique and original features (Stone *et al.*, 2018). Local food consumption triggers a conscious or unconscious identification of cultural characteristics that tourists are not familiar with in everyday life (Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2013). Novel aspects of local food consumption, ranging from food attributes to local eating habits, extend individuals' understanding of food culture to a deeper grasp of local culture (Mak *et al.*, 2012). Local food consumption as a novel experience implies features of strangeness and otherness, which improve one's cultural comprehension and appreciation

(Blomstervik *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, novelty is found to influence tourists' cultural consciousness (Chang *et al.*, 2010; Ji *et al.*, 2016) and prompt them to participate in cultural activities (Kim and Eves, 2012; Özdemir and Seyitoğlu, 2017). This study proposes that when international tourists receive a novel food consumption experience, they could be more culturally competent in recognizing local customs and interacting with different cultures, as shown in *H1*:

*H1.* Novel experience has a positive effect on cultural competence.

*2.2.3 Authentic experience.* Authenticity generally denotes the quality of being genuine given the traditions and time-honored techniques communicated (Liu *et al.*, 2018). It usually links to reality, history, traditions and locality, all of which can manifest the destination culture (Chang *et al.*, 2011). Trying local food during travel represents a quest for an authentic experience, during which one learns how local culture is represented by local food (Adongo *et al.*, 2015). Authentic experience of local food consumption possesses two aspects: the authenticity of the restaurant (e.g. decoration, menus and service) and the authenticity of its food (e.g. taste and cooking methods), both leading to cultural outcomes (Kim and Eves, 2012; Özdemir and Seyitoğlu, 2017). Chang *et al.* (2011) and Liu *et al.* (2018) found that food authenticity and environment authenticity can increase cultural familiarity and accrue cultural capital. Therefore, tourists may become competent in understanding local eating habits and respecting local culture if they believe their local food experience is authentically local, as shown in *H2*:

*H2.* Authentic experience has a positive effect on cultural competence.

*2.2.4 Sensory experience.* Sensory experience refers to bodily experience based on specific senses such as touch, smell and taste (Mohamed *et al.*, 2020; Wu *et al.*, 2016). Tourists interpret the cultural characteristics of local food (e.g. unique ingredients and traditional flavors) from sensory interactions with local food (Höjlund, 2015). These cultural features include food rules, historical eating patterns and local lifestyle, signifying a particular region's culture (Choe and Kim, 2018; Chang *et al.*, 2010). Past studies have hinted at the relationship between sensory experience and cultural competence (Kim *et al.*, 2013). Ahn *et al.* (2019) showed that sensory experience at a resort satisfies consumers' competence needs (e.g. golfing and swimming). Sensory quality, a key feature of food practices, can enhance a cross-cultural understanding among Indians, Chinese and Malaysians (Reddy and van Dam, 2020). Dining out for local food is, therefore, a sensory way of making tourists culturally competent in learning, accepting and appreciating local eating habits and local culture, as proposed below:

*H3.* Sensory experience has a positive effect on cultural competence.

*2.2.5 Social experience.* Social experience refers to the social dimension of customer experience, implying social interaction in the presence of others during the customer journey (Rehman *et al.*, 2021; Stone *et al.*, 2018). Eating in nature is a human activity in which tourists can easily be stimulated to discuss and refer to food and culture (Ji *et al.*, 2016; Wu *et al.*, 2016). As one of the most distinctive dimensions of local food consumption, social experience is found to strongly influence tourists' perceptions and behaviors (Kim and Eves, 2012; Kim *et al.*, 2020). According to *social learning theory* (Bandura, 1986), social interaction allows tourists to observe and communicate with others (e.g. restaurant employees and other customers), which performs as a social learning process. This can enrich their cultural knowledge and adjust behavioral responses toward a host culture (Kim *et al.*, 2020). For



example, [Weber et al. \(2016\)](#) found that the social presence of restaurant employees and family/friends encourages Chinese tourists to embrace different cultural values to cope with service failures. Likewise, social experience embedded in local food consumption may make international tourists culturally competent in incorporating different cultures into their social actions, as shown in the following hypothesis:

*H4. Social experience has a positive effect on cultural competence.*

### *2.3 Eudaimonia and behavioral intention as a result of cultural competence*

*Need hierarchy theory* and *self-determination theory* are used as the theoretical underpinning of the relationship between cultural competence, eudaimonia and behavioral intention. *Need hierarchy theory* articulates that the satisfaction of deficiency needs precedes the pursuit of growth needs, which may direct an individual's behavior ([Wahba and Bridwell, 1976](#)). This theoretical standpoint suggests that personal capabilities, which are shaped via consumption activities, may influence psychological well-being and behavioral outcomes ([Sirgy, 2019](#)). According to *self-determination theory*, the satisfaction of competence needs can account for consumer behavior and promote personal well-being ([Ahn et al., 2019](#); [Deci and Ryan, 2008](#)). Grounded in *need hierarchy theory* and *self-determination theory*, the authors postulate that cultural competence could amplify eudaimonic well-being and activate behavioral desires. When tourists become more culturally competent via their consumption of local food, they tend to feel accomplished and revisit the destination to explore diverse local food.

Eudaimonia is postulated by Aristotle, who claimed that individuals should ultimately pursue their lives by fulfilling human potential and growth ([Smith and Diekmann, 2017](#)). Eudaimonic perceptions can result from people's engagement in their lives in beneficial ways ([Chen and Li, 2018](#)). Scholars have concluded that competence is a significant antecedent of psychological well-being ([Ahn et al., 2019](#); [Buzinde, 2020](#)). Per [Chiu et al. \(2013\)](#), cultural competence as a soft skill is greatly valued for potential realization and personal growth in consumption practices; thus, cultural competence adds eudaimonic meanings to local food consumption. Culturally competent individuals can build better life meanings and feel accomplished in their lives. Therefore, we hypothesize that cultural competence improved via consuming local food can foster tourists' eudaimonia, as shown below:

*H5. Cultural competence has a positive effect on eudaimonia.*

Prior research has testified to the relationship between competence and behavioral intention ([Ahn and Back, 2019](#); [Fan et al., 2020](#)). Surveying 200 employees from upscale hotels in Korea, [Meng and Han \(2014\)](#) reported that employees' personal competence influences their turnover intention. The recent work of [Ahn \(2020\)](#) suggested how hotel customers' feelings of competence encourage them to check hotels' online reviews and spread positive word of mouth about the hotels in which they stayed. In the tourism context, [Fan et al. \(2020\)](#) found that tourists' intercultural competence is associated with their participation in cultural activities. These empirical findings indicate a direct relationship between cultural competence and behavioral outcomes in the local food consumption setting. When individuals perceive an improvement in their cultural competence derived from consuming local food in a destination, their intentions to recommend this destination and the dined food are likely to increase. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*H6. Cultural competence has a positive effect on behavioral intention.*

Consumer behavior literature has documented that tourists' psychological well-being determines much of their post-consumption behaviors, including revisit intention, recommendation and positive word of mouth (Lin, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2018). Echoing these empirical findings, we propose eudaimonia as an important predictor of behavioral intention. In the case of local food dining, when tourists derive happiness and meaningfulness from their local food consumption, they are more likely to revisit the destination to further explore local food and recommend the destination and its food to others. Accordingly, we put forward the following hypothesis:

*H7.* Eudaimonia has a positive effect on behavioral intention.

#### *2.4 Mediating role of cultural competence*

*Self-determination theory* serves as the theoretical lens through which to examine the mediating role of cultural competence. According to *self-determination theory*, competence is supported by enriching an individual's experience and knowledge, such as participating in tourism activities (Ahn *et al.*, 2019). Besides, well-being can be attained if an individual can fulfill his/her competence needs by engaging in tourism consumption activities (Buzinde, 2020). This rationale illuminates how competence performs as a mediator that affects the linkage between consumption experience and personal well-being. Given the impact of competence needs on human actions, this also applies to the mediating effect of competence on the relationship between consumption experience and behavioral decisions (Ahn, 2020). When tourists address their competence needs through consumptive engagement, they tend to become self-determined in making behavioral decisions.

According to *self-determination theory* and existing research, an individual's cultural competence—a cross-cultural understanding and appreciation resulting from cultural engagement—informs his/her well-being and decision-making (Ahn and Back, 2019; Blume, 2013). Wang *et al.* (2019) argued that the sense of competence triggered by touristic encounters with local food might contribute to personal growth. These studies justify the intervening role of cultural competence, which is proposed as a mediator between local food consumption experience and eudaimonic well-being and behavioral intention. Eating out for local food may allow tourists to achieve a higher level of cultural competence that, in turn, affects their sense of accomplishment and prompts them to recommend the destination and its food to their families and friends. Therefore, we propose the following set of hypotheses:

*H8.* Cultural competence mediates the relationship between (a) novel experience, (b) authentic experience, (c) sensory experience and (d) social experience and eudaimonia.

*H9.* Cultural competence mediates the relationship between (a) novel experience, (b) authentic experience, (c) sensory experience and (d) social experience and behavioral intention.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model and the main hypotheses.

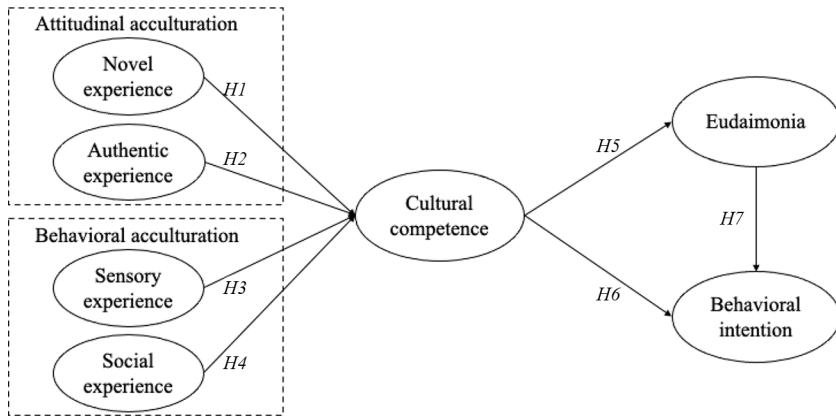
### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Sample and data collection*

To test the effects of local food consumption experience on cultural competence, eudaimonia and behavioral intention, the current study adopted a quantitative approach. The sample consisted of Chinese tourists who visited an international destination, dined for local food at



Figure 1.  
Conceptual model



a local restaurant in the past 12 months and were at least 18 years old. Local food is defined as the signature cuisines that “symbolize the place and culture of the destination” (e.g. traditional cooking methods and local ingredients) in the current study (Sims, 2009, p. 321). This definition was provided on the cover page of the questionnaire and incorporated as notes across the questionnaire. This helped avoid misunderstandings and ensure the validity of the responses.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the Chinese government executed quarantine and social distancing policies in 2020, making it difficult to distribute questionnaires in physical locations in China (Kupferschmidt and Cohen, 2020). Therefore, an online survey approach was adopted using Sojump ([www.sojump.com](http://www.sojump.com)) for data collection in April–August 2020, along with self-selection sampling and convenience sampling methods. Sojump is a professional online survey platform used by millions of Chinese respondents from diverse backgrounds and is increasingly favored by hospitality and tourism academics (Sun *et al.*, 2020). To control the response quality, this study applied several steps:

- explaining the research purposes, survey procedures and definition of local food;
- imposing screening questions to identify qualified participants;
- requesting information about the dining event, which helped participants recall details of the local food consumption;
- incorporating several attention check questions in the questionnaire; and
- examining the survey completion time.

### 3.2 Questionnaire design

All measures for assessing the studied constructs were adopted from previous research (Appendix). Specifically, we used three items from Chang (2017) to measure novel experience and six items from Liu *et al.* (2018) to measure authentic experience. Three items assessing sensory experience were adopted from Kim *et al.* (2013). Five items from Kim *et al.* (2013) and Kim and Eves (2012) were adapted to evaluate the social experience. Cultural competence was measured by adapting five items from Tsauro and Tu (2019). Four items were adopted to measure eudaimonia (Chen and Li, 2018). A four-item scale was used to assess behavioral intention (Choe and Kim, 2018). A seven-point Likert-type scale (Strongly disagree = 1,

Strongly agree = 7) was used to assess all items. The questionnaire, including demographic information, was initially developed in English. By using a back-translation method (Brislin, 1970), the authors translated the questionnaire into Chinese and then back-translated it into English with the help of two bilingual researchers to ensure validity and accuracy.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Following Anderson and Gerbing (1992), partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was adopted to estimate the measurement model and the structural model. PLS-SEM is advantageous in testing theory and provides a high level of statistical power (do Valle and Assaker, 2016). Given the input (effect size  $f^2 = 0.03$ , latent variables = 7, observed variables = 30,  $p < 0.05$ ), the minimum sample size for this study was calculated as 90 (Soper, 2014). A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, and 329 respondents participated in the study, representing a response rate of 94%. After eliminating 24 respondents who either did not complete the survey or failed the screening questions and attention checks, 305 samples were retained for data analysis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Sample profile

According to Table 1, the sample included approximately 63.3% females, with 61% between the ages 18 and 29, 24.9% between the ages 30 and 39 and 8.2% between the ages 40 and 49. The percentage of single participants was 61%, whereas 32.1% were married. With respect to education, 44.6% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, and 47.9% had a master's degree or above. The majority of the respondents were working (60%), with 38% of respondents being students. Among the respondents, 45.5% earned an annual income of \$22,500 or above. The visited destinations included Asian countries (e.g. Japan [16.4%], Thailand [11.8%]), European countries (e.g. UK [7.9%], Russia [6.9%]) and North American countries (e.g. USA [7.2%]). The variety of these tourism destinations suggests opportunities for Chinese respondents to interact with different cultures in local food consumption environments. Thus, this data set was useful for assessing the proposed relationships in the current study. According to the 2019 Outbound Tourism Report (China Tourism Academy, 2020), the demographic information in the current study shows common characteristics with the Chinese outbound tourists, such as a higher percentage of female tourists. A demographic difference between the study sample and the overall Chinese outbound tourists, however, was that the average Chinese outbound tourists have a higher annual income of \$35,000 or above.

### 4.2 Data normality and common method variance

Before examining the model, data normality and common method variance were tested. The current study conducted the tests of data normality, namely, skewness, kurtosis and Mahalanobis distance statistics, for all constructs (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). As shown in Table 2, the distribution of skewness, ranging from  $-0.085$  to  $1.402$ , and kurtosis, ranging from  $-0.065$  to  $4.902$ , were acceptable given the cutoff value (skewness  $< 3.0$ , kurtosis  $< 10.0$ ) (Kline, 2011). Then, the Mahalanobis distance was tested to determine extreme outliers. No extreme value was found ( $p < 0.001$ ) in the study. Therefore, the assumption of normal distribution was confirmed.

Harman's one-factor test was performed through an exploratory factor analysis with an unrotated principal components factor analysis. This test extracts one factor and examines whether the merged factor accounts for less than 50% of the variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The results showed that a single factor accounted for 35.88% of the total variance explained. Besides, multicollinearity was assessed through the variance inflation factor

Characteristics	Frequency	(%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	193	63.3
Male	112	36.7
<i>Age</i>		
18–29	186	61.0
30–39	76	24.9
40–49	25	8.2
50–59	14	4.6
60 or above	4	1.3
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	186	61.0
Married with kid(s)	76	24.9
Married without kid	22	7.2
Prefer not to answer	21	6.9
<i>Education</i>		
Less than high school	1	0.2
High school graduate	6	2.0
Diploma/Certificate	10	3.3
Bachelor degree	136	44.6
Master degree or above	146	47.9
Prefer not to answer	6	2.0
<i>Annual income (USD)</i>		
0–14,999	51	16.7
15,000–22,499	45	14.8
22,500–29,999	44	14.4
30,000–37,499	16	5.2
37,500 or above	79	25.9
Prefer not to answer	70	23.0
<i>Occupation</i>		
Managers and administrators	60	19.7
Professionals	60	19.6
Service workers and shop sales workers	8	2.6
Clerks	32	10.5
Elementary occupations	2	0.7
Retired	6	2.0
Students	116	38.0
Prefer not to answer	21	6.9
<i>Destinations</i>		
Japan	50	16.4
Thailand	36	11.8
United Kingdom	24	7.9
United States	22	7.2
Russia	21	6.9
South Korea	12	3.9
Malaysia	10	3.3
France	9	3.0
Vietnam	7	2.3
United Arab Emirates	6	2.0
Australia	6	2.0
Others	102	33.3

**Table 1.**  
Demographic profile

Construct/item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	FL	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
<i>Novel experience</i>						0.759	0.861	0.675
NE1	4.170	0.825	-1.280	2.549	0.799			
NE2	4.290	0.693	-1.402	4.902	0.840			
NE3	4.300	0.721	-1.372	4.062	0.825			
<i>Authentic experience</i>						0.853	0.890	0.575
AE1	4.040	0.791	-0.998	1.983	0.760			
AE2	3.990	0.797	-0.768	1.136	0.779			
AE3	4.010	0.774	-0.924	1.996	0.773			
AE4	3.730	0.846	-0.580	0.804	0.747			
AE5	3.690	0.831	-0.291	-0.065	0.745			
AE6	3.890	0.778	-0.730	1.209	0.747			
<i>Sensory experience</i>						0.842	0.904	0.759
SeE1	3.990	0.772	-0.632	0.809	0.863			
SeE2	3.790	0.796	-0.433	0.508	0.881			
SeE3	3.780	0.811	-0.257	-0.220	0.870			
<i>Social experience</i>						0.796	0.853	0.538
SoE1	4.280	0.733	-1.094	2.436	0.739			
SoE2	4.000	0.843	-0.829	1.037	0.772			
SoE3	3.670	0.906	-0.552	0.012	0.728			
SoE4	3.370	0.965	-0.093	-0.510	0.726			
SoE5	3.320	0.932	-0.085	-0.301	0.701			
<i>Cultural competence</i>						0.820	0.874	0.582
CC1	4.050	0.719	-0.869	2.304	0.765			
CC2	4.060	0.683	-0.889	2.968	0.748			
CC3	4.240	0.668	-0.984	3.016	0.739			
CC4	4.330	0.668	-1.098	3.094	0.788			
CC5	4.240	0.738	-0.808	0.806	0.773			
<i>Eudaimonia</i>						0.820	0.874	0.582
Eu1	4.280	0.696	-1.028	2.475	0.825			
Eu2	4.050	0.766	-0.393	-0.152	0.780			
Eu3	4.280	0.696	-0.852	1.331	0.892			
Eu4	4.310	0.716	-1.143	2.462	0.862			
<i>Behavioral intention</i>						0.841	0.893	0.676
BI1	4.100	0.854	-0.866	0.759	0.813			
BI2	4.070	0.804	-0.629	0.188	0.816			
BI3	4.220	0.723	-0.944	1.614	0.833			
BI4	4.090	0.794	-0.828	1.222	0.827			

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics and results of the measurement model assessment

**Notes:** SD: standard deviation; FL: factor loadings;  $\alpha$ : Cronbach's alpha; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted

(VIF). Every item's VIF, ranging from 1.422 to 2.849, was under 3.0 (Hair et al., 2011). Therefore, common method variance was not a major issue.

#### 4.3 Assessment of the measurement model

The measurement model was assessed for the reliability and validity of the constructs. All factor loadings exceeded 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) scores were all

higher than the accepted threshold of 0.50, thereby showing sufficient convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above 0.70, whereas composite reliability scores were higher than 0.80, suggesting high internal consistency for all constructs. All the square roots of the AVE values were larger than the correlations among latent variables (Table 3) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was examined with all values below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2016). These results demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability of all constructs for subsequent analysis.

4.4 Assessment of the structural model

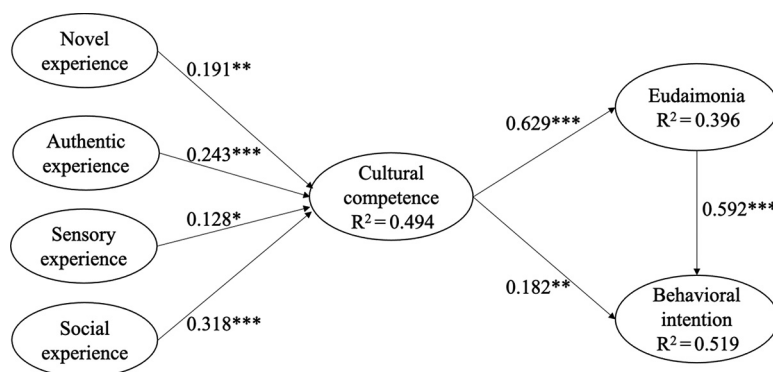
This study evaluated the proposed structural model by using a set of standard assessment criteria, including the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), predictive relevance  $Q^2$  and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The  $R^2$  values of latent variables were all above 0.20 (Figure 2), ranging from 0.396 to 0.519, demonstrating that a moderate amount of variance was explained by predictor constructs in the model (Hair et al., 2011). Additionally, the  $Q^2$  values in this study were larger than zero for all endogenous constructs, ranging from 0.273 to 0.342, which indicated the high predictive accuracy of the structural model. The SRMR value was 0.077, which was less than the recommended threshold of 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2016).

The significance of hypothesized relationships between constructs was evaluated by applying a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 subsamples. The results (Table 4) suggested that novel experience ( $\beta = 0.191, t = 2.948, p < 0.01$ ), authentic experience ( $\beta = 0.243, t = 3.857, p < 0.001$ ), sensory experience ( $\beta = 0.128, t = 2.384, p < 0.05$ ) and social experience ( $\beta = 0.318, t = 6.982, p < 0.001$ ) exhibited significant positive effects on cultural competence. Therefore, H1, H2, H3 and H4 were supported. The effects of cultural competence on eudaimonia ( $\beta = 0.629, t = 11.530, p < 0.001$ ) and behavioral intention ( $\beta = 0.182, t = 3.051, p < 0.01$ ) were both significant, thus, supporting H5 and H6. H7 was also supported, given

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Fornell-Larcker criterion</i>							
1. NE	0.821						
2. AE	0.618	0.759					
3. SeE	0.511	0.549	0.871				
4. SoE	0.463	0.460	0.444	0.734			
5. CC	0.554	0.578	0.501	0.576	0.763		
6. Eu	0.422	0.369	0.347	0.448	0.629	0.841	
7. BI	0.465	0.368	0.470	0.461	0.555	0.707	0.822
<i>Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. NE	–						
2. AE	0.761	–					
3. SeE	0.637	0.638	–				
4. SoE	0.559	0.524	0.524	–			
5. CC	0.701	0.687	0.600	0.673	–		
6. Eu	0.519	0.426	0.404	0.500	0.747	–	
7. BI	0.580	0.424	0.560	0.521	0.658	0.824	–

**Table 3.** Assessment of discriminant validity

**Notes:** NE: novel experience; AE: authentic experience; SeE: sensory experience; SoE: social experience; CC: cultural competence; Eu: eudaimonia; BI: behavioral intention



Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

Figure 2. Study results

Hypotheses				$\beta$	$t$	$P$	Supported
H1	NE	→	CC	0.191	2.948	0.003	Yes
H2	AE	→	CC	0.243	3.857	0.000	Yes
H3	SeE	→	CC	0.128	2.384	0.017	Yes
H4	SoE	→	CC	0.318	6.982	0.000	Yes
H5	CC	→	Eu	0.629	11.530	0.000	Yes
H6	CC	→	BI	0.182	3.051	0.002	Yes
H7	Eu	→	BI	0.592	10.307	0.000	Yes

Table 4. Coefficients and significance of pathways within the specified model

Notes: NE: novel experience; AE: authentic experience; SeE: sensory experience; SoE: social experience; CC: cultural competence; Eu: eudaimonia; BI: behavioral intention

the significant positive effect of eudaimonia on behavioral intention ( $\beta = 0.592$ ,  $t = 10.307$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

#### 4.5 Mediation analysis

The mediating role of cultural competence was assessed by applying the bootstrap methods, where significance is determined through a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The results (Table 5) demonstrated that all indirect effects were significant, except the indirect effects of novel experience ( $\beta = 0.035$ ,  $t = 1.855$ ,  $p = 0.064$ ) and sensory experience ( $\beta = 0.023$ ,  $t = 1.702$ ,  $p = 0.089$ ) on behavioral intention. Thus, H9a and H9c were not supported. As none of the direct effects on eudaimonia were significant, cultural competence displayed the full mediation effect on the relationships between a novel experience ( $\beta = 0.120$ ,  $t = 2.672$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), authentic experience ( $\beta = 0.153$ ,  $t = 3.784$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), sensory experience ( $\beta = 0.081$ ,  $t = 2.291$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), social experience ( $\beta = 0.200$ ,  $t = 5.600$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and eudaimonia. As a result, H8a, H8b, H8c and H8d were supported. Additionally, given the insignificant direct effects of authentic and social experiences on behavioral intention, the effects of authentic experience ( $\beta = 0.044$ ,  $t = 2.562$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and social experience ( $\beta = 0.058$ ,  $t = 2.700$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) on behavioral intention were fully mediated by cultural competence, respectively, thus, supporting H9b and H9d.



Hypotheses						Mediation			Results	Supported
						$\beta$	$t$	$P$		
<i>H8a</i>	NE	→	CC	→	Eu	0.120	2.672	0.008	Full	Yes
<i>H8b</i>	AE	→	CC	→	Eu	0.153	3.784	0.000	Full	Yes
<i>H8c</i>	SeE	→	CC	→	Eu	0.081	2.291	0.022	Full	Yes
<i>H8d</i>	SoE	→	CC	→	Eu	0.200	5.600	0.000	Full	Yes
<i>H9a</i>	NE	→	CC	→	BI	0.035	1.855	0.064	\	No
<i>H9b</i>	AE	→	CC	→	BI	0.044	2.562	0.009	Full	Yes
<i>H9c</i>	SeE	→	CC	→	BI	0.023	1.702	0.089	\	No
<i>H9d</i>	SoE	→	CC	→	BI	0.058	2.700	0.007	Full	Yes

**Table 5.**  
Mediation results

**Notes:** NE: novel experience; AE: authentic experience; SeE: sensory experience; SoE: social experience; CC: cultural competence; Eu: eudaimonia; BI: behavioral intention

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

### 5.1 Conclusions

To explore the cultural, psychological and behavioral outcomes of the local food consumption experience, this study developed and tested a conceptual model to detect how international tourists' local food consumption experience evokes their eudaimonia and behavioral desires through the function of cultural competence. The results revealed that the experience derived from local food consumption affects international tourists' cultural competence, which, in turn, provokes their psychological and behavioral outcomes. The findings of this study address the identified research gaps and reveal interesting insights that have not yet been obtained from prior studies, thus, yielding significant theoretical and practical implications.

First, in view of international tourists' attitudinal and behavioral acculturation, the novel, authentic, sensory and social aspects of local food consumption experience were direct precursors of cultural competence. The current study uncovered that dining on local food allows a multidimensional experience to enrich cultural understanding and influence future social behaviors. This is because local food consumption symbolically represents local rules, processes, traditions and rituals, acting as dynamic acculturation to improve personal competence. Compared to [Chiu et al. \(2013\)](#), who found that personality traits and demographic factors are the antecedents of cultural competence, this study demonstrated that the experience of consuming local food is capable of enhancing tourists' cultural competence. Authentic and social experiences were the strongest drivers among these factors, implying that authenticity and sociality predominantly shape people's cultural competence attitudinally and behaviorally. Such findings distinguish the relative importance of each dimension in driving cultural competence in food consumption settings. Therefore, this study addresses the research gap that local food consumption experiences remained underexplored ([Choe and Kim, 2018](#); [Mohamed et al., 2020](#)) from the theoretical perspective of tourist learning.

Second, the effects of cultural competence on eudaimonia and behavioral intention were confirmed. Beyond the current scholarly discussion on cultural competence ([Lin et al., 2021](#); [Tsaour and Tu, 2019](#)), these findings further our understanding of how cultural competence contributes to eudaimonic well-being. Cultural competence improved by consuming local food helps international tourists build better life meanings and feel more accomplished. Meanwhile, in contrast to [Ma et al.'s \(2021\)](#) finding that hotel employees' competence fails to affect their behavioral responses toward their organizations, the current study uncovered

that tourists' behavioral decisions about local food are affected by their improved cultural competence, a finding that remains scant in the current literature.

Third, this study recognized the positive effect of eudaimonia on behavioral intention. That is, when tourists derive meaningfulness and accomplishment from local food consumption, they are likely to revisit the destination to enjoy the local food and recommend it to their social networks. This outcome corroborates the findings of [Lin \(2014\)](#) and [Wang et al. \(2018\)](#) that psychological well-being stimulates people's desire for destination revisitation and positive word of mouth. Fourth, this study confirmed the mediating effect of cultural competence. Going beyond [Wang et al.'s \(2019\)](#) proposition about the relationship between local food experience and well-being, the current research uncovered the intervening nature of cultural competence by illustrating how local food consumption experience influences eudaimonia and behavioral intention via the function of cultural competence. Therefore, this study not only fills the void of how tourists derive personal well-being from consuming local food but also adds to the existing research on cultural competence ([Fan et al., 2020](#); [Ye et al., 2013](#)) with new evidence. Dining out for local food stimulates international tourists' eudaimonic senses and behavioral interests when they learn, respect and enjoy the local culture.

### 5.2 Theoretical implications

The current study makes theoretical contributions to the hospitality and tourism literature in several ways. First, this study extends the *acculturation theory* by testing a conceptual model of local food consumption as international tourists' acculturation ([Redfield et al., 1936](#)). Although existing studies emphasize four acculturation strategies in the hospitality and tourism context ([Rasmi et al., 2014](#); [Weber et al., 2016](#)), this study pioneers the understanding of acculturation by illuminating how local food consumption constitutes an acculturation process from attitudinal and behavioral perspectives. The findings reveal that novel, authentic, sensory and social experiences are the essential elements of attitudinal and behavioral acculturation in the food practice, which lends empirical support to the dimensionality of acculturation. Additionally, the current research deciphers how individuals enhance their cultural competence through their encounters with local food, extending the understanding of *acculturation theory*. This research also advances knowledge about *need hierarchy theory* ([Wahba and Bridwell, 1976](#)) and *self-determination theory* ([Deci and Ryan, 2008](#)) by embodying the link between low-order and high-order needs in the food consumption setting. Specifically, it testifies that need hierarchy and self-determination help explain personal development underpinned by satisfying different levels of needs, moving from food consumption to personal competence.

Second, this research adds important insights to the food literature and tourism research by conceptualizing the local food consumption experience and unveiling its contribution to cultural competence. The findings provide an insightful lens through which to identify the underlying dimensions of local food consumption experience (i.e. novel, authentic, sensory and social), particularly in the hospitality and tourism context. This may serve as a benchmark to evaluate attitudinal and behavioral acculturation in a cross-cultural consumption environment. Moreover, this study makes a pioneering effort to dissect the influence of local food consumption experience on cultural competence. Such findings advance the understanding of tourist learning by identifying how tourists' local food consumption experience yields meaningful outcomes ([Scarinci and Pearce, 2012](#)).

Third, the findings shed light on cultural competence through which to explore the power of cultural competence developed in the hospitality and tourism setting and its consequences – a claim that has been under-explored in the current literature ([Lin et al., 2021](#)). The present

study quantitatively validated Wang *et al.*'s (2019) proposition and extended their study scope by recognizing the importance of cultural competence and testing its role in evoking eudaimonia and behavioral intention. Such a quantitative inquiry supplements the existing qualitative findings. These findings reveal that the development of cultural competence as a result of local food consumption helps achieve eudaimonic well-being, adding insightful knowledge to the existing literature that primarily considered the direct linkage between food experience and well-being (Ahn *et al.*, 2019). Considering personal growth in touristic consumption, these findings may open new avenues for well-being research.

Finally, the study unveils the theoretical connection between local food consumption experience and eudaimonia and behavioral intention by testing the mediating role of cultural competence. This is the first attempt to examine the mediation effect of cultural competence in the travel dining setting. In contrast to prior research that directly links local food consumption to tourist well-being and behaviors (Chang *et al.*, 2020; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Mohamed *et al.*, 2020), the findings of this study augment the literature by showing that tourists' cultural competence alters their eudaimonic well-being and behavioral desires, which are derived from consuming local food in a destination.

### *5.3 Practical implications*

This research generates practical insights into restaurant and destination marketing. First, this research informs destination marketers and restaurant managers that the local food consumption experience can be used as a means of improving tourists' cultural competence. According to the findings, novel, authentic, sensory and social food experiences at destination restaurants can shape tourists' cultural competence. The unique characteristics of the local food consumption experience offer important references to industry practitioners when designing the local food consumption experience. Restaurant managers should invest considerable efforts in designing and delivering indigenous consumption settings by taking the novel and authentic aspects into account. It is recommended to stimulate a sense of exoticness by serving food in an indigenous presentation style with the appropriate plates and table placemats. Restaurants can also use signature menus as a valuable tool to communicate the cultures behind the local cuisines, such as presenting the local ingredients, cooking method and unique eating procedures on the menus. Additionally, atmospheric cues, such as idiomatic decorations and local music that represent the culture of the destination, can be incorporated to showcase an exotic environment for consumers. Special lighting and localized greetings can be used to capture tourists' attention.

Besides, restaurant businesses should be pushing for sensory appeal and social interactions in the local food consumption experience. Restaurant managers should prioritize food aesthetics, scent and taste to woo tourists. Business practitioners should be cognizant of the importance of social interaction. To facilitate intimate communication between tourists and their companions, restaurant managers should consider the restaurant design and seating strategy (seating distance within one's party, background music control). In addition, restaurants are encouraged to provide professional training to their employees, which helps educate them about the history and culture of the local food and improve their communication skills. In this way, employees can become restaurant ambassadors who help tourists understand local food customs and embrace different food cultures. For example, frontline employees should master foreign languages, especially the terminologies used to describe the local food. Such endeavors are useful to break down language barriers and help tourists enjoy communicating with employees and obtaining information about signature cuisines and their cultures.

Second, given the connection between tourists' cultural competence and eudaimonia when consuming local food, destination marketers should consider improving cultural competence as an important spotlight for promoting the destination and its local food. By publicizing the influential benefits of consuming local food, potential tourists could be stimulated by local cuisines that make them culturally competent for personal well-being. For instance, a promotional video featuring a narrative story of local food from a first-person perspective could be used to showcase how tourists derive happiness and meaningfulness from growing their cultural competence during local food consumption.

Finally, this study found that enhanced cultural competence and eudaimonia can trigger tourists' intentions to revisit destinations and recommend the local food to others, which can be used as a selling engine in marketing the destination and its local food. Destinations can draw upon these findings to better communicate the benefits of engaging in local food to sustain long-term visit intention. Marketing campaigns can be designed to help tourists recognize that they could become more culturally competent and feel accomplished after encountering local food. For instance, marketers can launch a social media campaign (e.g. "Local Food Makes My Trip Worthwhile!") to encourage tourists to post their food stories and share their meaningful experiences of local food consumption with hashtags of the destination and the food name. Some incentives (e.g. coupons) from local restaurants could be provided to tourists to activate their revisit intention.

#### 5.4 Limitations and future research

This research is not free of limitations. First, the varying degrees of familiarity with local food may affect tourists' cultural competence. Future studies should delineate the influence of prior experience on consuming local food. Second, this research was conducted with a Chinese population using the convenience sampling method. In light of [Ferraris et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Sharma et al. \(2022\)](#), the cross-cultural comparison and validation of these findings can be conducted in future research by gathering evidence from other cultural contexts and considering different cultural characteristics. Third, the study sample primarily consisted of travelers under 40 years old. Although consistent with the age distribution suggested by the 2019 Outbound Tourism Report ([China Tourism Academy, 2020](#)), future research should pursue a more diverse demographic sample and test variances in the understanding of local food consumption and cultural competence. Fourth, since the data pertained to situations before the COVID-19 outbreak, future studies should validate the findings to see how local food consumption may contribute to a deep sense of cultural engagement and cultural competence after the COVID-19 pandemic. Last but not least, the current study primarily considered the multifaceted nature of the local food consumption experience in a positive sense. Future investigations should delineate the impact of positive, neutral and negative local food consumption experiences on cultural competence.

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## Appendix. Measurement

### Construct/item

#### *Novel experience*

- I enjoyed the signature cuisines which are prepared with local cooking methods.
- I enjoyed the signature cuisines which are local indigenous.
- I experienced local eating habits/behavior.

#### *Authentic experience*

- The exterior appearance of the restaurant was authentically local.
- The interior design and decoration of the restaurant were authentically local.
- The menus of the restaurant were authentically local.
- The service of the restaurant was authentically local.
- The presentation of the signature cuisines was authentically local.
- The taste of the signature cuisines was authentically local.

#### *Sensory experience*

- The signature cuisines looked nice.
- The signature cuisines smelt nice.
- The signature cuisines tasted good.

*Social experience*

- I talked to my travel companions when consuming the signature cuisines.
- I enhanced friendship/kindship with my travel companions when consuming the signature cuisines.
- I got advice about the signature cuisines from other people (e.g. restaurant employees, companions).
- I enjoyed interacting with other people (e.g. restaurant employees, companions) when consuming the signature cuisines.
- I met new people with similar food interests when consuming the signature cuisines.

*Cultural competence*

- I know the local food customs.
- I know the local eating habits.
- I pay attention to my cultural etiquette when dining.
- I am able to respect local food culture.
- I enjoy coming into contact with different food cultures.

*Eudaimonia*

- The signature cuisine consumption in this trip has brought happiness in my life.
- The signature cuisine consumption in this trip has brought accomplishment in my life.
- The signature cuisine consumption in this trip has been meaningful in my life.
- The signature cuisine consumption in this trip has been worthwhile in my life.

*Behavioral intention*

- I would like to revisit the destination to enjoy the signature cuisines in future.
- I would like to revisit the destination to explore diverse signature cuisines in future.
- I would say positive things about this destination and its signature cuisines to other people.
- I would recommend this destination and its signature cuisines to other people.

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