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# RESTAURANT CHAINS IN CHINA

THE DILEMMA  
OF STANDARDISATION  
VERSUS AUTHENTICITY



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The Dilemma of Standardisation versus Authenticity

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# ABSTRACT

## PURPOSE

Restaurant customers demand not only personal and innovative products and services, but also cost-effective ones. Enterprises have the option to meet the former demand by offering authentic products and services. For achieving cost-effectiveness, they can use standardization. So they may want to use both concepts but these seem to contradict each other: does not standardization affect authenticity? So suppliers face an authenticity-standardization dilemma. Or is it a paradox? This book aims to identify and discuss the authenticity-standardization dilemma for restaurants against the background of translocality.

## DESIGN

The case study method is adopted for this study. Empirical data come from China, a country with an increasing number of inner immigrants. Four restaurants have been selected to exhibit four extreme combinations of authenticity and standardization. Another two cases have been chosen to explore the paradoxical combination of high levels of both authenticity and standardization. Semi-structured interviews with both producers and consumers are used.

## FINDINGS

Findings show that authenticity and standardization do not exclude each other but the two may be combined in a coordinated way. The resulting expansion strategies of restaurant groups are classified into four extreme categories: Heterogeneity, Standardized Chains, Authentic Alliance, and Standardized Authenticity. The core competence of restaurant groups with the most challenging strategy ‘standardized authenticity’ is to standardize the core set of authentic elements. Our case studies reveal that authenticity is a dynamic concept. The staging of authenticity in a recomposed format to accommodate variety leads to objective authenticity, standardized authenticity, and symbolic authenticity which can be adopted by local restaurants, restaurant groups, and translocal restaurants, respectively. Findings are informative for other service industries as well, such as hotel groups, hospitals, and airlines.

## ORIGINALITY

The study constructs an authenticity-standardization framework as a new way to reconcile the tension between the two concepts and to understand the strategic choices in the restaurant industry under translocality. Restaurant groups can innovatively match different categories of consumer groups to develop their expansion strategies. The authenticity-standardization paradox challenges the existing methodologies that are constrained by limiting binaries, such as authentic-fake and back-front for instance.

## RESEARCH IMPLICATION/LIMITATIONS

This research advances the understanding of the relationship between authenticity and standardization. However, due to the limitation related to the limited number of cases in this present study, future research should include a greater diversity of restaurant groups in order to increase external validity of findings. A next step could be survey research: more systematic and comprehensive sampling would contribute to higher reliability and validity of the examination. A consumer-based approach that is currently neglected in most research of restaurants should be given more attention. Future researchers can put our analysis further and learn more from the perspective of customers.



### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The authenticity-standardization framework can be applied to underpin decision-making in the complex context of restaurant group expansion, that is, subsidiaries of restaurant groups, and be related to different growth stages. The conclusions are also helpful for restaurant groups to reconsider their service concept and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

### KEYWORDS

Authenticity, China, Restaurants, Standardization, Translocality

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# Introduction

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION: WHY RESEARCH THE AUTHENTICITY–STANDARDIZATION PARADOX?

Business and consumption are subject to the influences of globalization, and this applies to food consumption as well (Symons 1993; Torres 2002). There exists a concern that cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1991) and McDonaldization (Ritzer 1996) may lead to homogenization that, in turn, can result in a ‘global palate’ as well as a ‘global cuisine’ (Ritzer 1996; Symons 1993; Mak et al. 2012). The homogenizing force of globalization is often viewed as a threat to the authenticity of food (Leitch 2009). However, the preliminary evidence suggests that globalization can provide an impetus for reinventing local gastronomic products and identity as well (Torres 2002; Mak et al. 2012). For example, Appadurai (1996) holds that increased global and local interactions can result in a heterogenization process. This tension between homogenization and authenticity forms the context of this book, in which we will focus on restaurants, a key part of the hospitality industry.

### 1.1.1 *Consumers and Producers in the Hospitality Industry*

The tourism market is highly fragmented, because vendors, intermediaries, and customers are geographically distributed and vary significantly in terms of economic scale and scope (Go and Appelman 2001). The actors along the value chain include an oligopoly of large tour operators (TOs),



hotel chains, and numerous small and medium enterprises (SMEs). During the past decades, the international tourism sector has been subjected to the effects of key economic drivers, such as deregulation, globalization, and the advances of information and communication technology (ICT), which are key enablers of a flexible response to evolving patterns of tourist behavior. The strategic position of tourism groups has been influenced by several major drivers which are inextricably connected: internationalization, ICT (Go et al. 2003), mobility, and the rising of middle class (Zeng and Go 2013), in many countries.

On the demand side, potential tourists have a significant degree of discretion to either assemble the elements of a tourist product (e.g., transportation, information, entertainment, accommodation, insurance, etc.) themselves or select an organized tour instead. Many tourists are in search of attractive, personalized tourism products and services, and expect intelligent and proactive access to relevant high-quality information services, anytime, anywhere, in a mobile context. At the same time, they hope that they can get tourism products for an affordable price. On the supply side, the subsidiaries of tourism groups may use standardization in an effort to achieve consistency in terms of service quality and image at low cost due to economies of scale. However, from a demand perspective, customers are in search for reliable, up-to-date, and accessible services.

For example, the subsidiaries of restaurant groups pursue a standardization strategy through the implementation of uniform service quality and a company image projected in a consistent way but they also see the need for differentiation to meet individual needs of customers. On the one hand, the application of a standardization strategy facilitates the implementation of routines in service production, which, in turn, facilitates the expansion of restaurant groups, in the sense of opening more restaurants. On the other hand, authenticity also plays an important role in new product development, market introduction, and expansion. However, authenticity and standardization represent contradictory forces and, therefore, might pose a managerial paradox. In particular, establishing a sense of uniqueness while simultaneously possessing characteristics that are common among the individual members of a restaurant group can easily lead to such a paradox. In this regard, attempts to combine authenticity and standardization may be likened to mixing water and oil; opposites that fail to blend. However, the large number of restaurants that provide authentic, standardized, or heterogeneous products for their customers suggests

that different profiles can succeed in market exposure and scale expansion. Apparently, in terms of the operation performance, neither a standardization strategy nor an authenticity strategy serves as a pre-condition for the success of a restaurant.

In the age of globalization, spaces are subject to a process of continuous reconfiguration and translocality formations. Translocality describes the ways in which people have loyalties of one place but are residing elsewhere, and the promotion of the place through image-building and physical/social infrastructural enhancements (Smart and Lin 2007). Suppliers need to deal with the paradox of pursuing ‘perceived geographic authenticity’ (e.g., Waitt 2000) or catering to customers’ needs in the translocal context. This implies that, first, service providers experience market pressure to pursue differentiation and meet the individual customers’ requirements; second, face the challenge to meet critical success factors, including packaging services appropriately and narrowcasting information where appropriate.

This study aims to investigate the authenticity–standardization paradox. Then, what is decisive for the success of restaurant groups against the background of translocality? How can restaurant chains deal with the authenticity–standardization paradox? What authentic products do the restaurant chains provide for their customers? To answer these questions, we explore the phenomenon of translocal expansion in the restaurant chain industry.

### *1.1.2 Authenticity–Standardization Paradox*

Businesses can benefit from being authentic. Forces such as globalization, pollution, and climate change have caused public anxiety, tourists’ desire for ‘safe havens’, and the growing demand for authentic goods and services (Barsamian and Hammar 2008). Authenticity is acknowledged as a universal value and an essential driving force that motivates tourists (Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1973; Naoi 2004; Kolar and Zabkar 2010). The quest for authentic experiences is considered one of the key tourism trends. Accordingly, authenticity is crucially important for tourism firms. Many consumers demand transparency in transactions, so that they are able to check the genuine source of products. Increasingly, they reject fake offerings (Pine and Gilmore 2000). An entity which projects an aura of an authentic experience can create customer satisfaction (Govers and Go

2004) and benefit businesses. Many businesses want to be perceived by the public as authentic. But their failure to change their business practice accordingly results in inauthentic perceptions, instead.

On the other hand, standardization is another strategy a restaurant group can apply. Standardization may be defined as the ‘activity of establishing and recording a limited set of solutions to actual or potential matching problems, directed at benefits for the party or parties involved, balancing their needs and intending and expecting that these solutions will be repeatedly or continuously used, during a certain period, by a substantial number of parties for whom they are meant’ (De Vries 1997). There are specific benefits for the standardization of services. Services are defined as the result of at least one activity, necessarily performed at the interface between suppliers and customers, which is generally intangible. From a user point of view, the first benefit is the building of customer confidence. This is done by assuring safety, security, quality, durability, and ease of use. The second benefit is that accurate and appropriate information is supplied and user requirements are taken into account. The third benefit is that the development of choice and access to a wide range of users is supported. The fourth benefit is that consumers can purchase goods/services at affordable prices as a result of the effects of economies of scale and more price competition, thanks to better transparency. Furthermore, appropriate and fair forms of redress are provided where necessary (ISO/IEC 2006).

For restaurant groups, producing high customer satisfaction by keeping authenticity increases production cost. At the same time, it would decrease the cost for restaurant groups to apply standardization, but this may lead to lower customer satisfaction. So there is an authenticity and standardization paradox as indicated in Fig. 1.1.

The concepts of authenticity and standardization seem to contradict. However, de Vries and Go (2017) suggest that by standardizing a set of essential common characteristics, a group of restaurants might benefit

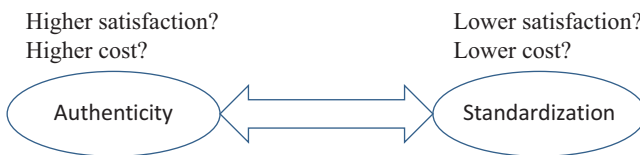
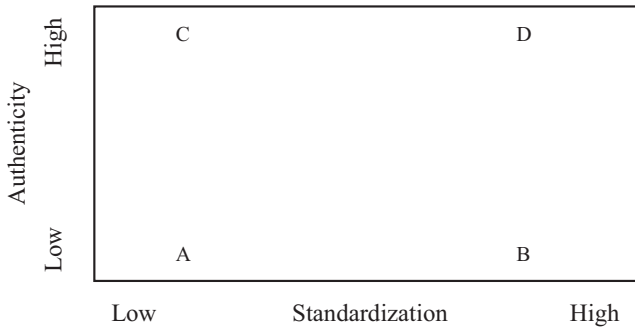


Fig. 1.1 Authenticity–standardization paradox



**Fig. 1.2** Analytical framework for studying authenticity and standardization of restaurant groups (with possible extreme combinations)

from one or more of the above standardization benefits while maintaining authenticity. The standards should give performance requirements for those features that are essential for authenticity. In this way, the members of a restaurant group remain to a large extent different, but share the capability to meet selected standards, jointly agreed upon. These core elements can differ in characteristics per restaurant within this group, but should meet a minimum level of quality. This level should be standardized only for the essential characteristics of restaurant authenticity. The extent of integration of authenticity and standardization can be used to form an analytical framework for investigating restaurant groups (Fig. 1.2). The dimension of authenticity positions service characteristics of restaurant groups, and the dimension of standardization includes the shared features, requirements, and certification criteria, if any, of restaurant groups.

Based on this analytical framework, we can combine authenticity and standardization into four possible extreme categories: First, there are restaurant groups that neither maintain authenticity nor pursue standardization (A). Second, some restaurant groups have standardized their activities and abstain from using the concept of authenticity (B). Third, some restaurant groups emphasize the authenticity dimension, instead of focusing on standardization in their expansion process, but do not focus on standardization (C). Fourth, some restaurant groups retain both a high degree of standardization and authenticity (D). This book is going to investigate such authenticity–standardization combinations against the background of translocality.

## 1.2 A GAP IN THE LITERATURE

Translocality is a common phenomenon around the world. It is not only related to globalization (movement of people between countries) but in particular to the movement of people between different regions of the same country. Standardization in relation to authenticity under the background of translocality is a promising area of research, as an increasing number of companies are utilizing standards in a global and translocal expansion environment and at the same time are adopting translocal authenticity. So far, the management practice of balancing the authenticity–standardization paradox is evolving primarily on an ad hoc basis. Scholars like Briley (2009), Craig and Douglas (2006), Nakata (2003), Yaprak (2008), Nakata (2009), Go and Govers (2011), and Govers and Go (2009) called for closer consideration of the impact of cultural and contextual factors and their implications on the conduct of companies and consumer behavior. Also, within this framework, the analysis of the paradox has received only scant attention in the literature, with the exception of De Mooij (2013), Osland and Bird (2000), and de Vries and Go (2017). Therefore, this study seeks to uncover and theorize the authenticity–standardization paradox advocating the potential benefits of a ‘translocality’ approach to meet the challenges in managing restaurant chains.

Several potential benefits can be associated with the coordination of authenticity and standardization. First, such a practice creates an expectation that restaurant groups involved in translocality will enjoy traditional benefits related to standardization, such as lower operation costs and shorter time-to-market (De Vries 1999). Second, globalization of cultures promises to solve problems associated with authenticity (Wang 1999). In this respect, the coordination of authenticity and standardization opens an opportunity to solve the restaurants’ authenticity–standardization paradox. There are variables that can be applied to balance the tensions that exist between authenticity and standardization. These are interventions designed to improve product quality, reduce the operational cost, and increase brand recognition against the background of translocality (Smart and Lin 2007). Achieving the true balance potential of authenticity and standardization is rather challenging in the context of translocality. Restaurant groups or translocal restaurants may face the above-mentioned and additional challenges (caused by geographical, operational, and cultural differences) when adopting the balance practice of authenticity and standardization. This may apply to both the developed and developing countries, and to the countries in transition.

Klare (2002) argues that the growing impact of resource scarcity, as a consequence of the rapid ascendancy of developing countries coupled with the issue of ‘cultural homogenization’, creates the need for sustainable development and more collaboration at customer and producer levels in the translocal expansion process of restaurant groups. In turn, it challenges researchers to investigate the opportunities and pitfalls that are part of the process of implementation of standards in the context of the developing countries, vis-à-vis developments in industrialized countries in the knowledge domain of standardization against the background of globalization (Go and Christensen 1989; Go et al. 1994) and translocality.

Restaurant groups in different kinds of contexts and in different stages of their expansion process depend on customer groups and operation locations, especially in a translocal context. From the 1970s, more and more studies found that consumers’ characteristics could not explain all consumer behaviors, and the consumption context is becoming a research focus of consumer behavior research (Mason et al. 2007). It is, therefore, necessary to consider the individual and contextual characteristics in studying consumer behavior (Engel et al. 1982). In some situations, the contextual characteristics are more important than the individual characteristics (Ward and Robertson 1973). There are several kinds of operation contexts in restaurant chains. Restaurant groups should adjust their strategies to respond to the demands of the customers in different kinds of contexts. This study constructs an analytical framework to reveal how the producers may respond to the evolution of consumption contexts.

So far, researchers in the hospitality field have studied only limited aspects of the phenomenon of the authenticity–standardization paradox. Some have focused on the impact of globalization on the authenticity of tourism products (Wang 1999; Pine and Gilmore 2000), while others have focused on the management of standardization in hospitality industries (Ritzer 1993; Go and Christensen 1989). Research on the management of authenticity–standardization paradox that combines these two streams is just emerging and is still in its early stages. The paper by Millenaar et al. (2010) was the first one to address the binary by studying the transformation of a heterogeneous alliance of top restaurants and the implications for its members (de Vries and Go 2017). At present, there is a dearth in the literature to suggest how to organize and manage the authenticity–standardization paradox successfully. This research aims to fill the present gap.

### 1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND CENTRAL QUESTION

This book is going to investigate the authenticity–standardization paradox applied in restaurant groups in a translocal context. The research objective is to explore the relationship between authenticity and standardization in restaurant groups. To achieve this target, the following questions need to be answered:

First, what kinds of authenticity–standardization relationships are included in the operation processes of restaurant groups or translocal restaurants?

Second, how can restaurant chains get a semblance of balance between authenticity and standardization to meet the customers' need for authentic culture products and to reduce operation costs?

Third, to which extent is it possible and desirable for restaurant groups to combine authenticity and standardization in a manner which takes into account the needs and expectations of different kinds of customers (local residents, immigrants, and tourists) in a translocal context?

This book first tries to answer these questions by combining the authenticity and standardization concepts into a strategic framework. And next, this book tries to find the best solution for the most challenging combination of high levels of authenticity and standardization by analyzing case studies. Furthermore, managerial practices are presented that describe how restaurants can organize and manage the authenticity–standardization paradox in the translocality context.

We focus on the translocality phenomenon for the following two reasons. First, translocality is a common phenomenon around the world. People move between countries as well as between different regions of the same country. Both have a similar influence on four consumer categories of translocal restaurants: local residents, immigrants, tourists from the original culture, and tourists from other regions. For local residents, a translocal restaurant is a space to experience the exotic culture. For migrants (who move from peripheral areas to cities elsewhere) in the country, the translocal restaurant is a substitute of home. For tourists from the original (in this book Chinese) culture, the translocal restaurant can be taken as a space to meet people from their homeland or simply to meet their physical demand to eat the food their stomach is accustomed to. And for the tourists from other regions or from abroad, a translocal restaurant may be viewed as a space to enjoy another kind of cuisine.

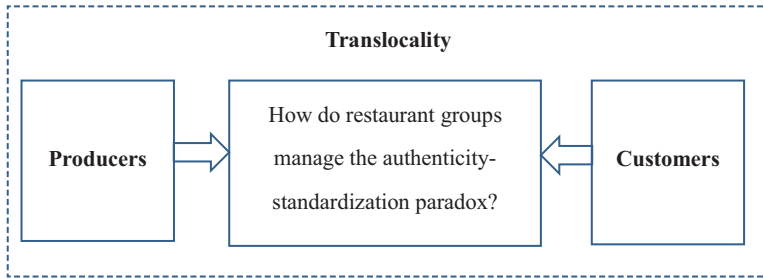


Fig. 1.3 Research focus

To conclude, the focus of this research is on the management and coordination of the authenticity–standardization paradox in restaurant groups or translocal restaurants, as described in Fig. 1.3. Based on the context of translocality, a theoretical basis for studying the phenomenon of restaurant groups and translocal restaurants draws upon both authenticity and standardization literature, both with a focus on restaurant chains.

## 1.4 RESEARCH APPROACH AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

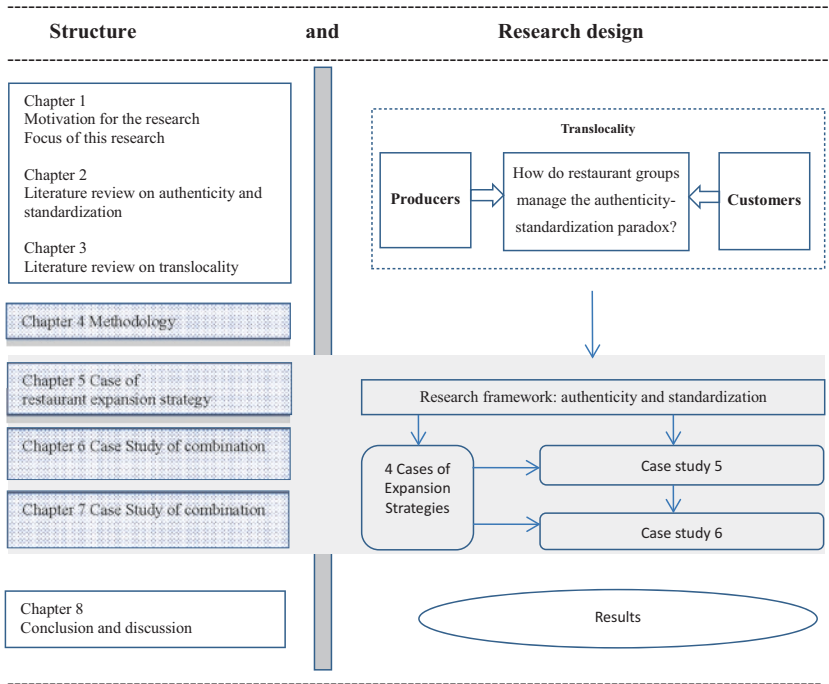
### 1.4.1 *Research Method*

Because the topic of this research is new and there is lack of existing theory, a case study approach is useful (Eisenhardt 1989, pp. 548–549). We introduce the specific research methods and processes in Chap. 4. A series of restaurants have been selected as cases to study the authenticity–standardization paradox from the perspectives of both customers and producers. Four extreme situations may apply: standardization without authenticity, authenticity without standardization, a combination of authenticity and standardization, and neither standardization nor authenticity. For each of these extremes we select a case. The combination of standardization and authenticity is the most challenging option among the four kinds of strategies. Therefore, we use extra cases to investigate this combination in more depth.

### 1.4.2 *Outline of the Book*

This book consists of eight chapters (see Fig. 1.4). Chapter 2 is a literature review about the paradox of standardization and authenticity. It results in





**Fig. 1.4** Book structure and research design

a research framework between standardization and authenticity. Despite these huge differences, each combination of authenticity and standardization may be considered as a possible strategy for expansion. Chapter 3 adds the phenomenon of translocality. Chapter 4 describes the research methodology. The next three chapters describe empirical cases. Chapter 5 shows four extreme cases: standardization without authenticity, authenticity without standardization, a combination of authenticity and standardization, and neither standardization nor authenticity. Chapters 6 and 7 show extra cases of the combination of authenticity and standardization in the context of translocality. Chapter 8 concludes with a cross-case analysis, implications limitations, and recommendations for future research. Figure 1.4 provides an overview.

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# Authenticity Versus Standardization

## 2.1 AUTHENTICITY

### 2.1.1 *Concept of Authenticity*

The tourism literature most commonly describes the concept of authenticity as a form of reality, that is, a sense of genuineness and sincerity (Sharpley 1994; Wang 1999; MacCannell 1973). It implies a corporate culture anchored in a ‘staying true to oneself’ philosophy at the core of every aspect of the business context. Importantly, authenticity refers to the ‘real thing’ and serves as a label that attaches a particular identity to an object, subject, or person.

Authenticity is acknowledged as a universal value and an essential driving force that motivates tourists (Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1973; Naoi 2004; Kolar and Zabkar 2010). An entity which projects an aura of an authentic experience can create customer satisfaction (Govers and Go 2004) and benefit business. Consumer perception of authenticity impacts brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality, and influences brand loyalty and, finally, brand choice intention (Lu et al. 2015).

Although the topic of authenticity has been extensively studied, questions remain concerning what authenticity means at the conceptual scale, and particularly what its specific attributes are (Reisinger and Steiner 2006). This finding is rather surprising since Parsa, Self, Njite, and King (2005) identified lack of authenticity as one of the reasons why restaurants, hotels, and other tourism firms are unsuccessful. An ability to

understand and interpret the concept of authenticity and its potential role in organizational value-adding is, therefore, a prerequisite for implementing it in practice.

Based on the earlier work that focused on the relationship between object and experience, Jamal and Hill (2004) identify three dimensions of authenticity: objective, constructive, and personal. These dimensions differ in terms of temporal and spatial aspects. The objective dimension refers to historical fact and to what MacCannell (1989) calls the backstage, or genuine and uncontrived authenticity. This dimension is to a large degree consistent with Wang's (1999) objective form of authenticity, which refers to an object's origin. Wang (1999) distinguishes three basic forms of authenticity, based on two separate issues, namely tourist experiences and toured objects. Objective authenticity refers to the authenticity of originals. Constructive authenticity, in turn, refers to authenticity that is projected on toured objects by tourists or tourism producers, and this form of authenticity is also called symbolic authenticity (Wang 1999). The constructive dimension of authenticity is largely substantive, staged, and negotiated (Cohen 1988, 1989). This dimension is in line with the constructive and the postmodern approach to authenticity (Wang 1999; Eco 1986), because in the theories known to us, authenticity is both staged and constructed. The personal dimension includes both a resident's and a visitor's temporal feature, concerns the experience of the visitor, and largely coincides with the existential authenticity (Wang 1999; Steiner and Reisinger 2006). The concept of constructive authenticity is seen as encapsulating the subjective nature of authenticity evaluations in tourism experiences. Pernecky (2012) explains what constructionism is and how it can be utilized in the study of tourism. However, very few studies discuss the latter in the context of cultural entertainment (Mkono 2012).

Grayson and Martinec (2004) distinguish between 'indexical authenticity' and 'iconic authenticity'. Indexical authenticity views authenticity as something that is thought not to be a copy or an imitation. Iconic authenticity corresponds to Wang's (1999) objective authenticity. Indexical authenticity also views behaviors or expressions as authentic when they reflect who a person really is (Grayson and Martinec 2004). This corresponds to Wang's (1999) existential authenticity typology. Also, actions or expressions may be interpreted as authentic when they are not imitated to adhere to either social or commercial conventions (Grayson and Martinec 2004). Spectators can perceive an experience as indexically authentic when they possess knowledge about a particular object or experience to which

they can refer (Grayson and Martinec 2004). Over time, the center of gravity regarding the debate on authenticity has shifted from ‘what is authenticity’ to ‘who needs authenticity, why’ and ‘how has authenticity been used’ (Rickly-Boyd 2012).

Authenticity theory provides, among others, insightful information on the diversity in consumer perception (Boutrolle et al. 2009). The contemporary discursive field in tourism research in relation to the concept of authenticity mainly consists of Cohen’s phenomenology of tourist experiences (Lau 2010). An important finding by Grayson and Martinec (2004) is that the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic can be socially or personally constructed. That is to say, authenticity is a psychographic segmentation variable (Sedmak and Mihalic 2008). This view corresponds to the postmodern concept of hyperreality of Baudrillard (1983). It also corresponds to the locally constructed folk idea of Lu and Fine (1995), which means that authenticity is in the eyes of the beholder. Consequently, differences exist in how individual customers view authenticity. The findings of Muñoz et al. (2010) support the study of Lu and Fine (1995). So, authenticity is not hidden in an object or person or performance (Grayson and Martinec 2004), but rather a claim made by or for someone, something or performance, and can be either accepted or rejected by relevant others (Peterson 2005).

Mkono’s (2012) findings demonstrate that ‘tourists are concerned about authenticity of cultural representations in (restaurant) experiences, although their constructions of what constitutes real culture are extremely fluid’. However, perceived authenticity conjures up certain expectations, which influence the experience tourists undergo and this relation, therefore, plays a very important role in achieving satisfaction.

Edvardsson et al. (2005) use the concept of hyperreality as a means of creating a service experience through a simulated reality. The term hyperreality is closely associated with Baudrillard (1994), who suggests that the world can be viewed as being constructed through simulations and simulacra (places for simulation). Baudrillard (1994) describes four evolutionary phases of reality and experience; the first is engaging in direct experience of reality, the second is working with experiences and representations of reality, the third is consuming images of reality, and the fourth is accepting images themselves as reality. The fourth phase is labeled hyperreality (Edvardsson et al. 2005) or the age of simulacra (Baudrillard 1994). According to Baudrillard (1994), consumption consists of the exchange of signs and images. Signs and images supersede materiality and value in use,

and functionality is treated as a sign. We thus live in a simulated or hyper-real environment where realities are constructed and consumed (Venkatesh 1999). Symbolic language and cultural representation, particularly cultural misrepresentation in the theoretical context of ‘contemporary culture that relies on displacing economic notions of cultural production with notions of cultural expenditure’ (Baudrillard 1994), justify the research of symbolic authenticity.

Authenticity research benefits from the distinction between front and back regions. Service providers and guests tend to encounter one another in the front region. In contrast, they relax and prepare their services in the back region (Goffman 1959). The notion of mystification can occur in the back region and discredit the performance in the front region. To generate a sense of genuine reality, mystification should be announced and revealed (MacCannell 1973). The existence of back regions is relevant, especially in those cases where guests gain access to back regions, and subsequently get a feeling of ‘belonging’. Those are the moments that the experience will feel more real to them. To avoid mystification, it makes sense to share life behind the scenes in a manner which expresses feelings of truth and intimacy.

In the knowledge domains of tourism management and marketing, authenticity is not seen as antithetical to commercial endeavors. On the contrary, it is regarded as a much-warranted element of tourist offerings (Apostolakis 2003; Yeoman et al. 2007; Kolar and Zabkar 2010). Several studies have argued that business interests and authenticity can be mutually beneficial (Kolar and Zabkar 2010). From a managerial standpoint, the dynamic nature of authenticity along with the process of its fabrication and verification is particularly important.

Despite its indisputable role, to date researchers have been unable to detect, for application within the restaurant business, common criteria for authenticity assessment purposes (Sedmak and Mihalic 2008). The concepts of constructive authenticity (Cohen 1989; Wang 1999; Jamal and Hill 2004; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Mkono 2012), negotiated authenticity (Cohen 1988, 1989; Lau 2010; Mkono 2012), customized authenticity (Wang 2007), emergent authenticity (Cohen 1988; Robinson and Clifford 2007), replicable authenticity (Robinson and Clifford 2012), and learned authenticity (Prentice 2001) are seen as encapsulating the subjective nature of authenticity evaluations in restaurant experiences. Based on Grayson and Martinec’s (2004) distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic as socially or personally constructed, authenticity is



a psychographic segmentation variable (Sedmak and Mihalic 2008). In this approach, there is no unique real world that pre-exists independently of human mental activity and human symbolic language (Hollinshead 2006; Ryan and Gu 2010; Mkono 2012). Thus reality is best viewed under this framework as pluralistic and plastic; as the result of varying versions of human interpretation and construction; in simpler terms, as the result of perspective (Mkono 2012). Pernecky (2012) explains constructivism as a paradigm or worldview which posits that learning is an active, constructive process, which encourages students to use active techniques, including experiences and real-world problem solving, to generate knowledge and subsequently reflect on their experiences, particularly how what they have engaged in has altered their understanding. Constructivism lends itself for application in tourism and hospitality studies. However, very few studies discuss this notion in the context of cultural entertainment (Mkono 2012).

### 2.1.2 *Restaurant Group Authenticity*

The concept of authenticity is considered an important factor in attracting customers by restaurant management (Boyle 2003). It is generally agreed that food cultures do not remain static but are continually evolving and changing in response to different internal and external stimuli (Molz 2004). Hence, it is difficult, if not impossible, to define authenticity in food cultures. From the perspective of Abarca (2004) and Robinson and Cliord (2012), food authenticity can be reduced to two determinants: the authenticity of the cook and the authenticity of the process. However, the environment and atmosphere have not been included in their research. Applying a dualistic authenticity framework, Robinson and Clifford (2012) design a scale to measure various authenticity dimensions of food service and reveal 'significant differences between overall visitor-perceived event authenticity and the food service and event services cape and hygiene factors and found associations between perceived authenticity and re-visitation intentions'.

Many researchers suggest that regions should use locally cultivated foods as a central tenet in the promotion directed to attracting tourists. For instance, Hashimoto and Telfer (2006) demonstrate how high-quality cuisine offerings and distinctive local food products may be ways of achieving this end. Local foods are particularly popular with tourists because they often represent the identity of a region (Du Rand et al., 2003).

Tourism marketing draws on country-of-origin theory to add value by ‘enveloping’ food products within a tourism experience (Quan and Wang 2004). Furthermore, authentic restaurants and hotels may serve as a tourist’s sole or primary contact with a regional culture. Put differently, a restaurant which offers an authentic food service experience functions as a cultural disseminator because it provides tourists with an initial exposure to and a means to evaluate the regional food and people. Modern tourists do not just purchase food, but are also likely to consume the attributes which are ingrained in a particular food and, in turn, exert significant influence on the consumption process (Nam and Lee 2011).

Other studies highlight the negotiated aspects of food and authenticity. Heldke (2003) identifies three key definitions of food authenticity. First, the most common usage concern is that food is simply ‘different’, or novel. This refers to the food experience, which is distinct from ‘native’ authenticity, is produced by a specific culture. Second, and contrarily, ‘replicable’ authenticity is an effort made by the cook who produces some food as it is experienced somewhere else, or sometime else (Robinson and Clifford 2012). Third, it is important to learn which dimensions of the process of preparation, presentation, and consumption of food are in the eyes of tourists diacritical indicators of the ‘authenticity’ (Cohen 1988) of the local cuisine, and which can be safely filtered out without impairing that apparent authenticity (Cohen and Avieli 2004).

The literature indicates that, besides food, other aspects of a restaurant such as decoration, music, costumes, and service significantly contribute to its perceived authenticity (Ebster and Guist 2005). Sukalakamala and Boyce (2007) report that customers tend to be more concerned about the authenticity of the food than about the establishment’s overall atmosphere. Furthermore, customers who want to learn about different cultures tend to patronize ethnic restaurants to gain access to inter-cultural learning opportunities (Tsai and Lu 2012). Customers are increasingly in search of authenticity in the hope of expanding their cultural knowledge as opposed to being limited to undergoing an ethnic food experience (Ebster and Guist 2005; Lu and Fine 1995; Sukalakamala and Boyce 2007).

Scholars who study the restaurant field have failed to generate a clearly defined concept of authenticity. The restaurant experience involves the human senses ranging from seeing, hearing, smelling, and touching of three main characteristics that dominate the consumers’ dining process: dishes, service, and environment. For example, using the cases of 63

restaurants in Toronto, Alex and Edwin (2000) found that restaurant features (such as decoration and background music) affect the revenue of restaurant. Mattila (2001) concluded that loyal customers of restaurants evaluate the food and atmosphere very highly. Haeckel et al. (2003) pointed out that a lot of elements such as ‘look and taste of food’, ‘environmental noise, indoor smell, cleaning speed, table shape’, and ‘skills, attitude, body language, tone, response, apparel, service speed of waiter’ can have a negative, neutral, or positive impact on emotions of customers.

The World Heritage List has adopted four indicators of authenticity: design, materials, technology, and environment (Droste and Bertilsson 1995). The representatives of authenticity are form and design, materials and substance, use and function, tradition and technology, location and environment, spirit and feelings, and other internal and external factors (Droste and Bertilsson 1995). Wang and Mattila (2015) mention physical setting, service providers, and other customers. With a case study on Dutch restaurant industry, de Vries and Go (2017) found that the performance of the restaurants’ authenticity elements can be divided into traditional recipes, local ingredients, personal attention, well-behaved employees, regular changes to menu, good food quality, presenting food as art, restaurant name, external façade, surroundings, and homely feeling.

We now focus on three core elements: dishes, environment, and service. Dishes represent the core product of restaurants and feature high on the list of diners’ interests. Ingredients are the core components that make a dish what it is, besides the preparation process. Restaurant dishes, which present a unique flavor, mainly through the color, smell, taste, shape, tableware, quality, and appearance, have a magnetic effect on visitors. Particularly if the dishes are surrounded by a customer-centric environment which integrates the various sight, smell, taste, and touch experiences. Carmin and Norkus (1990) pointed out that the dish choice of customers depends on the menu prices, and menu prices signal consumers the value and quality of dishes. In addition, the quantity and price of dishes will also influence the customers’ perception of authenticity.

Second, the environmental atmospherics are also one of the most critical restaurant success factors. These include the external environment such as garden and architecture and internal environment such as furniture and music. Bitner (1992) stated that every customer interacts with the physical

environment, which may affect customers' judgment of a restaurant's authenticity. The internal atmosphere of restaurants, such as lighting, colors, music, smells, would provide sensory experiences of visual, auditory, and olfactory aspects. These all thereby influence the customers' perception of restaurant authenticity. In this regard, Caldwell and Hibbert (2002) explored the impacts of background music's rhythm and type of restaurant on customer behavior.

The third element concerns service and value. The dress, language, facial expressions, attitude, and speed of service personnel bring a dynamic approach to customer perception of authenticity. Homik (1992) found that the service exposure in the restaurant positively influences the consumer service experience. As a result, service personnel will also receive a higher appraisal after contact with customers. Other scholars, such as Lynn (2001) and Dutta et al. (2007), have similar conclusions.

From MacCannell's (1973) staged authenticity perspective, the question is, how restaurateurs can improve their offerings through 'self-disclosure', that is, by positioning their corporate culture in the customers' minds in a manner that distinguishes them from their rivals. Chaney and Ryan (2011) identify factors that have made the Singapore World Gourmet Summit a successful product. These factors include the need to coordinate stakeholders, who differ in terms of background, goals, and agenda, and the ability of the event organization to reinvent itself each year while building upon a growing image of prestige. Tsai and Lu (2012) examine the relationship between importance and performance of perceptions of authentic dining experiences on repurchase intention in ethnic theme restaurants. Their study results show that authentic dining experiences provide an effective indication of customer repurchase intention.

## 2.2 STANDARDIZATION

### 2.2.1 *Concept of Standardization*

Standardization may be defined as the 'activity of establishing and recording a limited set of solutions to actual or potential matching problems, directed at benefits for the party or parties involved, balancing their needs and intending and expecting that these solutions will be repeatedly or continuously used, during a certain period, by a substantial number of parties for whom they are meant' (De Vries 1999). Standardization can be applied in services strategies, so as to benefit from the specific advantages

(De Vries and Wiegmann 2017). Services are defined as the result of at least one activity, necessarily performed at the interface between suppliers and customers, which is generally intangible. From a user point of view, the first benefit is building customer confidence. This is done by assuring safety, security, quality, durability, and ease of use. The second benefit is that accurate and appropriate information is supplied and user requirements are taken into account. The third benefit is that the development of choice and access to a wide range of users is supported. Furthermore, appropriate and fair forms of redress are provided where necessary (ISO/IEC 2006).

Services can be improved through standardizing both the tasks and procedures. It also means that there should be a division of labor and that some of the tasks of service personnel can be substituted by technology (Lockwood and Jones 2000). In this way, tourism firms can achieve efficient, low-cost production of customer-satisfying experiences (Bowen and Youngdahl 1998). One form of standardization is the improvement in working methods, known as soft technology (Lockwood and Jones 2000). Tourism firms could apply the latter by standardizing working methods like preparing meals and training employees, for example, in the franchise business of McDonald's. From a process perspective, a particular enterprise group can be managed according to certifiable standards to raise the levels of productivity, quality, flexibility, and sustainability.

Standardization as a business practice has proven advantages for both tourists and service providers. Standardization facilitates the decision-making process of the former, who know prior to departure what to expect and whose confidence is strengthened by way of, for instance, worldwide trusted branded reservation and payment systems. International chains have applied similar international marketing strategies at the global scale. The adaptation of proprietary service standards for international service delivery put potential investors' minds at ease, because standardized service concepts that are newly introduced in one location but have already proven financially successful in another one, render such standardized business operations less vulnerable to risk than launching a totally new business formula.

However, some authors see the phenomenon of standardization as a threat to local identity, resulting in an erosion of the diversity of tourist experiences (MacCannell 1976). Authenticity and commodification are central to academic debates in tourism (Cole 2007). The commercializa-

tion of local identities leads to negative consequences (Cole 2007). Standardization may affect individuality and lead to conformity, and this may impact (existential) authenticity (Stener and Reisinger 2006). Consumer quest for authenticity may lead to a service offer that becomes a commodity that is packed and sold to people, resulting in a loss of authenticity (Zhou et al. 2015).

An enterprise strategy that is supported by an appropriate integration of organizational and technology infrastructures enables enterprises to take advantage of strategic opportunities, by the flexible matching of supply to the preferences of specific tourists. Flexible production has gained in significance due to the acceleration of market trends. But this doesn't imply that it renders standardization obsolete; on the contrary, standardization in the form of modularization or a theme-based approach of space, goods, or services enables flexibility (De Vries and Wiegmann 2017).

### 2.2.2 *Restaurant Group Standardization*

The restaurant industry is becoming highly competitive and is subject to globalization. This includes the penetration of international restaurants in national markets. McDonald's is a benchmark in this sense (Ritzer 1996). International restaurant chains use standardization to enable franchising (Go and Christensen 1989). McDonald's applies standard working methods such as meal preparation and staff training. McDonald's international marketing strategy is very successful. Whether tourists visit McDonald's in London or Lahore, they know what to expect in terms of product and service delivery. The standardization of the production and marketing system significantly facilitates the consumer's decision-making process. It is attractive for investors to standardize new product concepts that have proven financially successful, because the standardization of the operation's outputs renders them less vulnerable to risk than launching new business formulas. Many organizations aim to improve their profitability by focusing on their core capabilities.

Intense rivalry in the international arena justifies the formation of referral alliances to build the capacity in domestic markets to compete. The formation of referral alliances shifts the competition from the micro scale to one in which SMEs cooperate within the framework of a network alliance which contests other such alliances. While independent entrepreneurs may collaborate through network alliances and chains, they often remain autonomous players. In turn, this places a premium on the issue of

trust. Only when members of alliances trust each other, can they hope to counter the power of franchise chains (Go and Appelman 2001).

Some authors view standardization as a threat to identity resulting in the erosion of the diversity of tourist experiences (MacCannell 1976). Cohen and Avieli (2004) argue that ‘local food becomes acceptable only if it is to some extent transformed’. This transformation is related to the standardization process. At the positive side, this standardization can also augment customer satisfaction. Anyhow, standardization is a process embedded in an economic logic. It enables enterprises to achieve economic growth over ever greater geographic distances by penetrating new markets and reducing the cycle time of capital and service production.

Quester and Conduit (1996) conclude that standardization is usually consistent across products and services within any one firm and, more surprisingly, that standardization and centralization are not correlated at the firm level. An enterprise strategy that is supported by an appropriate integration of organizational and technology infrastructures enables enterprises to take advantage of strategic opportunities by the flexible matching of supply to the preferences of specific tourists. Flexible production has gained in significance due to the acceleration of market trends. However, this does not imply that it renders standardization obsolete. On the contrary, due to modularization or a theme-based approach of space, goods, or services, standardization has undergone a metamorphosis.

## 2.3 AUTHENTICITY: STANDARDIZATION PARADOX

### 2.3.1 *Introduction of the Paradox*

In tourism marketing, authenticity is considered a much-warranted element of tourist offerings as opposed to and antithetical to commercial endeavors (Apostolakis 2003; Yeoman et al. 2007; Kolar and Zabkar 2010). Rather than mutual exclusivity, the practice and theory in the tourism management fields emphasize the need for compatibility and convergence of authenticity in relation to marketing management. Several authors have argued that business interests and authenticity can be mutually beneficial (Kolar and Zabkar 2010). From the managerial standpoint, the dynamic nature of authenticity along with the process of its fabrication and verification is particularly important. A standardization approach can be used to integrate both.

The debate on the extent to which the subsidiaries of hospitality groups can pursue a standardization strategy has been addressed by Alexander and Lockwood (1996) and Crawford-Welch (1991), among others. A standardization strategy facilitates the implementation of routines in service production, which, in turn, influences the ease of expansion of hospitality groups. In contrast, an authenticity strategy is seen as a motivational force for tourists (e.g., Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1973; Naoi 2004; Kolar and Zabkar 2010) and can, therefore, play an important role in new product development, market introduction, and restaurant expansion strategy formulation, implementation, and monitoring. However, authenticity and standardization represent contradictory forces and might, therefore, pose a managerial paradox. In particular, establishing a sense of uniqueness while simultaneously possessing criteria that are common among the individual members of a restaurant group can easily lead to such a paradox. In this regard, attempts to combine authenticity and standardization may be likened to mixing water and oil; opposites that fail to blend.

Tourists are mobile; they move to other regions and countries. In this motility context, many customers are in search of attractive, personalized tourism products and services, and tend to reject inauthentic products developed for mass tourism and resist the globalizing and homogenizing effect of modernity in favor of goods and services, which project an indigenous heritage or original image (Sedmak and Mihalic 2008). At the same time, however, customers are on the lookout for restaurants that feature affordable menu prices enabled by standardization that, in turn, yields economies of scale. As a response, restaurants must be able to respond to changing market demand conditions by meeting individual customer needs, particularly reliable, up-to-date, and accessible service. This leads to a standardization–authenticity paradox. It appears that establishing a delicate balance between standardization and authenticity has become one of the essential tasks on which the future success of restaurants will depend.

### 2.3.2 *Authenticity: Standardization Paradox of Restaurants*

Authenticity can distinguish a company from others. Also, customer satisfaction correlates with authenticity (Ebster and Guist 2005; Sukalakamala and Boyce 2007), and authentic dining experiences influence customer repurchase intention (Tsai and Lu 2012). Authenticity can make customers more satisfied with a superior service offer. Subsidiaries of restaurant groups need to differentiate to avoid failure (Parsa et al. 2005). Restaurant



authenticity can lead to the creation of a distinctive identity and, in turn, a differential competitive advantage compared to the competitors who opt to commoditize their service delivery process (Hughes 1995; Weber et al. 2008). A restaurant group that chooses to differentiate on authenticity needs to communicate a sense of uniqueness. The authenticity of a restaurant group can be measured by assessing factors such as the name of the restaurant, names of dishes, appearance of employees, employees speaking in dialect, the interior design, the external facade, music, use of home-grown products, and use of traditional recipes (Millenaar et al. 2010).

At the same time, members of the restaurant group need to have certain common characteristics, so that customers can associate each subsidiary as a member of the group. Accordingly, members of the group have to meet some minimum criteria. To achieve this, there is a need for a standard which specifies the selected criteria.

Nowadays, many companies operate according to a selected set of standards. Inability and unwillingness to create and apply operational standards can lead to the failure of restaurants or hotels (Parsa et al. 2005). However, MacCannell (1976) argues that standardization is not conducive to maintaining a unique corporate image, and is likely to erode the differential advantage of a spontaneous tourist experience. Mass-customizing may increase the perceived value by hotel or restaurant guests (Gilmore and Pine 2000) and raises an important question: How can restaurant groups offer authentic service to customers within the context of a standardized production system? The pursuit of standardization for production efficiency contrasts starkly with the corporate aim to boost authenticity for customer satisfaction purposes. In turn, this creates a paradox. However, the subsidiaries of restaurant groups capable of perceiving the attributes of authenticity and standardization on a sliding continuum that may be relevant to the nature of their activities, can derive benefits from configuring the interrelationships of various attributes, for instance, the characteristics and interactions of authenticity in relation to notions of cost and the process of standardization and customer orientation. This approach which combines a certain extent of authenticity with a certain extent of standardization contrasts to applying a strategy which draws strictly on either extreme of the continuum. The challenge for restaurant groups is to create and sustain a competitive advantage by placing emphasis on maximizing the effectiveness of authenticity to optimize customer satisfaction while simultaneously pursuing a standardization strategy.

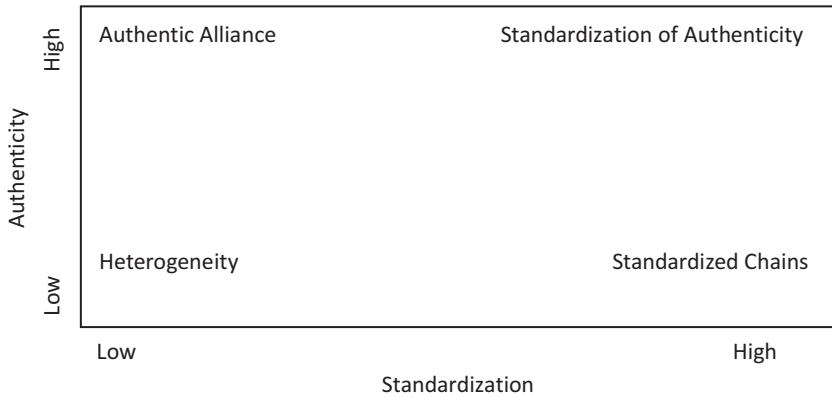


Fig. 2.1 Four strategies of restaurant groups

By standardizing a part of the authentic image and by determining a set of essential common characteristics into a collective image of the restaurants, members of an alliance of restaurants might benefit from one or more of the above standardization benefits. In this way, subsidiaries may not all have to be physically identical, but could share certain core elements and the capability to meet selected standards, jointly agreed upon. These core elements can differ in characteristics per subsidiary within the association, but should meet a minimum level of quality. At this level, only the essential characteristics of restaurant authenticity should be standardized (De Vries and Go 2017).

The integration of authenticity and standardization can be extended to form the analytical framework of restaurant groups (Fig. 2.1). The dimension of authenticity examines service characteristics of restaurant groups, and the dimension of standardization includes the shared features, requirements and certification criteria, if any, of restaurant groups.

Based on this analytical framework, we can divide strategies of restaurant groups into four categories: First, some subsidiaries of restaurant groups retain both a high degree of standardization as well as authenticity, which can be referred to as the ‘Standardization of Authenticity’. Second, some restaurant groups emphasize the authenticity in their expansion process, but do not focus on the standardization of identification between different subsidiaries and, therefore, are considered an ‘Authentic Alliance’. Third, some restaurant groups have standardized their activities and

abstain from using the concept of authenticity. We call restaurant groups in this category ‘Standardized Chains’. Fourth, restaurant groups that apply a ‘Heterogeneity’ mode maintain neither an authenticity strategy nor pursue standardization. Due to their ambiguous nature, such restaurant groups typically operate in a market which is hard to define.

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# Translocality

## 3.1 CONCEPT OF TRANSLOCALITY

Processes of globalization, economic restructuring, and continuing urbanization have introduced new forms of spatial mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006). Both international migrants and migrants within the country contribute not only to a younger population structure of certain places but also to a qualitative transformation of spaces. These places are changing through their connections to regional, national, and global processes (Bell and Osti 2010; Woods 2007). Rather than being passive receivers of national and regional transfers, they may be involved and connected also (Hedberg and do Carmo 2012). In other words, in the age of globalization, spaces are subject to a process of continuous reconfiguration and translocality formations.

Translocality describes the ways in which people have loyalties of one place but are residing elsewhere, and the promotion of the place through image-building and physical social infrastructure enhancements (Smart and Lin 2007). The emergence of a new translocal imagery (Goodman 2006) has contributed to reformation of the local scale, particularly the contested meaning of place, and, in its wake, the reconstruction of regional identities and the reframing of symbolic identities. This reconstruction is influenced by an emergent spatial network of ideas (Goodman 2006).

Advances in mass media and transportation have increased movement of people, ideas, and capital and thrust us toward a new 'world culture' (Govers and Go 2004). Cultural differentiation, cultural convergence, and



cultural hybridization have so far been predominantly Western attempts to turn the rest of the world into a market for their products and services. In addition, marketing textbooks predicted the convergence of lifestyles and values, such as, ‘The development in communications will bring convergence in consumer markets’ (Bradley 1991: 384) and ‘With technological advancement also comes cultural convergence’ (Czinkota and Ronkainen 1993: 167). Many texts used in tourism and hospitality schools emphasize the economic, as opposed to the non-economic, thereby strengthening the belief among graduates in the global homogenization of consumer behavior.

However, a counter movement can be observed as well. Translocality is based on a relational space perceived not only contradictory in terms of depopulation and aging, processes of modernization, or reinventing traditions and of marginalization, but also as a temporal space for functional reconfigurations. Therefore, customers in multicultural societies have diverse wants based on their cultural backgrounds. However, immigrants and long-term residents must also adapt to a different culture (Seo et al. 2012).

### 3.2 AUTHENTICITY OF TRANSLOCAL RESTAURANTS

Translocality also leads to regional cuisine. Hall and Mitchell (2002) distinguish three major periods of rapid change to regional cuisine: the first wave was the period of European mercantilism from the late 1400s to the 1800s; the second wave was the influence of large-scale migrations from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century; and the third wave is the current period of globalization of cuisine promoted by advances in communication and transport technology. While food culture has always been an exponent of globalization, its third wave is characterized by advances in communication and logistics, which render the sourcing of ‘exotic’ foods from around the world and enable ‘fusions’ between different types of cuisine, increasingly binding the planet by a chain of dependence and consequence.

The movement of food—or its containment within a geographic space—cannot be viewed in isolation from the movement of people (Valiente-Neighbours 2012) and the internationalization of companies. From this mobility perspective, the authenticity of translocal restaurants may become an important criterion influencing the choice of local residents, immigrants, and tourists on where to dine out. Indeed, while the

ongoing process of globalization and spatial mobility has brought about profound transformations in food production and consumption (Oosterveer 2006; Wilhelmina et al. 2010; Mak et al. 2012), a number of studies suggest that food consumption in tourism is also subject to the influences of globalization (Symons 1993; Torres 2002). For instance, there is a concern that cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1991) and McDonaldisation (Ritzer 1996) may lead to homogenization that can result in a 'global palate' as well as a 'global cuisine' (Ritzer 1996; Symons 1993; Mak et al. 2012). The homogenizing force of globalization is often viewed as a threat to the authenticity of food, because the authentic dining experiences effectively indicate customer repurchase intention (Tsai and Lu 2012). In turn, this kind of experience would impact on the operation of translocal restaurants.

Fields (2002) analyzes the different motivational factors underlying the growth in gastronomy tourism, including physical motivators, cultural motivators, interpersonal motivators, as well as status and prestige motivators. Attitudes toward motivations for holidays and interactions with service providers would affect the quality of the tourist experience (Ryan 2002). Um and Crompton (1990) suggest that attitude operationalized as the difference between perceived inhibitors and perceived facilitators is influential in determining whether a potential destination is selected as part of the evoked set and in selecting a final destination.

Globalization is popularly perceived to pose a threat to local gastronomic identity and image. But, there is preliminary evidence of an opposite influence, suggesting that globalization can provide an impetus for reinventing local gastronomic products and identity (Torres 2002; Mak et al. 2012). For example, world culture theory provides a contrasting 'two-way' perspective (Ram 2004), which holds that increased global and local interactions can result in a process of heterogenisation (Appadurai 1996). Authenticity tourism can serve to achieve a two-pronged goal, first, by preserving and presenting local cultural identity to visitors and, thereby, second, arresting the force of modernization and by extension mitigating its negative impact upon the surviving buildings from the past and local traditions (Wang 1997).

Authenticity research involves different theoretical perspectives. For example, social scientists have acknowledged that authenticity has a universal value and serves as an essential driving force that motivates tourists (Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1999; Naoi 2004; Kolar and Zabkar 2010). Geographers consider the quest for authentic experiences in the translocal

restaurant context one of the key trends (Goodman 2006; Oakes and Schein 2006); accordingly authenticity has come to be seen as an important asset for business growth. From a socio-cultural perspective, people's longing for 'safe havens' is mentioned, which caused the demand for authentic goods and services to grow (Barsamian and Hammar 2008). This in turn benefited businesses, which enacts authenticity to develop positive senses of identity among consumers. These consumers increasingly demand transparency in transactions. For instance, they may reject fake offerings (Pine and Gilmore 2000) and want to be able to check the genuine source of products.

Thus, the role of authenticity for purposes of advocating the translocal restaurant theme is closely entangled with the psychological dimensions of food-induced positive emotions and higher perceived value. In this regard two dimensions are salient: first, the important positive relationship between authentic environmental factors and positive emotions (Jang et al. 2012) and second, how businesses could harness authentic experiences to create customer satisfaction (Govers and Go 2004).

Promoting high-quality cuisine or distinctive local food products is a way to promote food as a central tourist attraction (Hashimoto and Telfer 2006). Local foods may be particularly popular with tourists, because they are considered authentic in capturing the typical nature of a particular place (Gerrie et al. 2003). Translocal food products are an important means of promoting the identity and culture of a destination and enable food producers to add value to their products by creating a tourism experience around the raw materials (Quan and Wang 2004). Furthermore, authentic restaurants may serve as a primary contact with a regional culture. A translocal authentic restaurant functions as a cultural disseminator, providing an initial exposure to and means of evaluating the regional food and people. Modern consumers do not just purchase food, but also probably attributes the food possesses. These food characteristics exert great influence on consumption (Nam and Lee 2011).

However, adverse opinions remain in the literature about the authenticity of translocal food. Translocal restaurants representing other ethnic cuisines can be found mainly in metropolitan centers and are often expensive, remaining an exotic treat for the few rather than a familiar experience for a broad circle of customers (Cohen and Avieli 2004). Desoucey (2010) challenges conceptions of the homogenizing globalization forces of food by analyzing the ways in food production, distribution, and consumption.

Recreational customers, in search of relaxation and enjoyment with the 'aid' of a liminal, often playful mood, care little for authenticity (Cohen and Avieli 2004). To date, studies have failed to emphasize the importance of authenticity with respect to translocal restaurants.

Food is expressive of the region, community, and its culture or a place remote in time (Kim et al. 2009; Robinson and Clifford 2012). As an identity marker of a geographic area and/or as a means of promoting farm products, gastronomy meets the specific needs of consumers, local producers, and other actors in tourism (Bessièrè 1998; Okumus et al. 2007). It is, therefore, laden by the authenticity of the experience and the ability to convey prestige and status and to create groups by inclusion or exclusion (Moscardo 2000; Beer 2008; Chaney and Ryan 2011). Translocal restaurants enable an experience of 'tourism at home' (van den Berghe 1984). If correct, this poses the question whether and to what extent the 'out-of-place' presence of translocal restaurants in the tourists' original regions are prepared to deal with the 'in-place' (local) culinary situation at the destination. Customers are concerned about authenticity of cultural representations in restaurant experiences, although their social constructions of what constitutes real locality or culture are extremely fluid (Mkono 2012). The use of restaurant authenticity leads to a distinctive identity, thereby creating a competitive advantage over competitors who sell service as a commodity (Hughes 1995; Weber et al. 2008). It is important for a translocal restaurant to distinguish itself as unique from its local counterparts. However, it may be necessary to make some adjustments in response to the taste of local customers. This raises a question of import, namely: What characteristics are considered essential for preserving the authenticity of both the operational and marketing aspects of a translocal restaurant? A potential operator of the translocal cuisine has to meet some minimum criteria. To achieve this, there is a need for identifying those criteria which are seen to be essential specifications for including in the formation of a common standard.

Interestingly, beyond the global-local nexus, there exists another perspective, which holds that local gastronomic identities present a 'window' for the reinvention of local gastronomic products and identities (Ooi 2002; Mak et al. 2012). The latter assumes that the global-local nexus serves as enabler for providing flexible responses to the evolving, increasingly translocal patterns of consumer behavior and preferences.

### 3.3 STANDARDIZATION OF TRANSLOCAL RESTAURANTS

Translocality challenges the habits common to a certain geographic area. These habits may be related to written or unwritten standards common in that geographic area. Several studies have used visitor norms to formulate standards, whereas the norms of other stakeholders have received less empirical attention. Needham and Rollins (2005) examined the standards of several groups regarding indicators of tourism and found that standards for each indicator differed among the groups. Cohen and Avieli (2004) departed from the general tension between the attraction and repulsion of novelty in food, to analyze the paradox faced by tourists in unfamiliar culinary situations at their destinations. However, the translocal restaurant would not provide similar food and services in the place out of their own cultural circles to the original restaurant. Also, within the translocal context, due to the distance that food stuffs may have to travel, health and hygiene standards should be taken into consideration anyhow in tourism authenticity (Duke 2003; Cohen and Avieli 2004). The main standardization issue for our study, however, is to which extent it is feasible to copy a restaurant concept to another geographic location, to meet market requirements related to translocality.

### 3.4 PARADOX OF STANDARDIZATION AND AUTHENTICITY OF TRANSLOCAL RESTAURANTS

Globalization comprises a complex interplay between homogeneity and heterogeneity. Adopting the principle of world culture theory, Robertson (1995) articulates the theory of 'glocalization' to encapsulate the essence of this difference-within-sameness. Based on the postulation of this theory, globalization can be viewed as a dialectical process, one which is simultaneously 'the universalization of the particular and the particularisation of the universal' (Robertson 1995: 25). Such theory recognizes that globalization features the critical reconstruction and reinvention of local cultures in relation to other cultural entities. When combined with the world culture theory, the theory of 'glocalization' can be used to 'analyse the ways in which social actors construct meanings, identities and institutional forms within the sociological context to globalization, conceived in multidimensional terms' (Giulianotti and Robertson 2006: 171). This concept is essential in understanding the tension between homogenization and heterogenization based on the concepts of global consciousness and local consciousness.

Tourists travel in quest of novelty and strangeness, but most need a degree of familiarity to enjoy their experience (Cohen 1972). Wang (2007) argued that customized authenticity, even in an overtly staged or socially constructed context, can be highly pursued and embraced by tourists. For example, customized authenticity is produced in Lijiang's guest houses (Wang 2007). The imperatives of modernity and imperialism transformed Japanese cuisine, gradually creating a national homogeneity of taste for Japanese ingredients or dishes, while incorporating food practices from the West or colonized territories (Cwiertka 2006: 240). Cohen and Avieli (2004) described the various ways in which culinary establishments mediate between the tourists and the local cuisine. The authenticity of dishes in such establishments and the varieties of culinary experience are also considered. Interestingly, Chang et al. (2010) also found that for tourists who are enthusiastic to sample local food, their core food preference may still be dominant, reflecting again the tourist's paradox between the simultaneous desire to seek satisfaction from both novelty and familiarity.

Gilmore and Pine (1999) hold that mass-customization of goods and services increases the value added to guests. But how can the translocal restaurants offer authentic food service for their local customers with a standardized production? For one, by preserving and presenting authenticity as a carrier to satisfy customers; through the pursuit of standardization for production efficiency, translocal restaurants can benefit from both authenticity and standardization. However, the same implies that translocal restaurants must explore the particular authenticity characteristics which form the essential core and can be considered for the standardization of dedicated service-offers against an affordable price. Authenticity as a means for the growth of translocal restaurants is a rather recent phenomenon and not frequently reported within the tourism literature.

### 3.5 SYMBOLIC AUTHENTICITY IN TRANSLOCAL RESTAURANTS

Authentic restaurants may serve as a primary contact with a regional culture. A translocal authentic restaurant functions as a cultural disseminator, providing an initial exposure to and means of evaluating the regional food and people (Quan and Wang 2004). Thus, food consumption as portrayed provides a potential carrier which affords citizens and tourists alike to connect to the identity of a particular regional culture. Modern con-

sumers purchase not just food, but also the attributes of the food. These food characteristics exert great influence on consumption (Nam and Lee 2011). Tourists are concerned about the authenticity of cultural representations in restaurant experiences, although their social constructions of what constitutes, for example, 'real' African culture is extremely fluid (Mkono 2012).

Adverse opinions remain in the literature about the authenticity of translocal food. For example, Cohen and Avieli (2004) as well as Desoucey (2010) challenge conceptions of the homogenizing globalization forces of food by analyzing the processes of food production, distribution, and consumption. Recreational customers, in search of relaxation and enjoyment with the 'aid' of a liminal, often playful mood, display little, if any, interest in the subject of authenticity. In particular, postmodernists argue that authenticity is a redundant concept which does not concern tourists any longer (Beer 2008; Belhassen et al. 2008; Kim and Jamal 2007; Lau 2010; Reisinger and Steiner 2006; Wang 1999). In the American market, Chinese restaurant food became thoroughly Americanized Chinese cuisine. The dynamic interaction between Chinese food and American customers served as an interesting process of cultural negotiation (Liu and Lin 2009).

The authenticity and culinary identity of Chinese food in America often rested on its real or imagined Chinese roots while its popularity depended on how well Chinese restaurant proprietors adapted the flavors, ingredients, and cooking methods of Chinese cuisine to the tastes and markets of local American communities (Liu 2009). The dynamic interaction between Chinese food and American customers functioned as a complex cultural negotiation (Liu 2009). In this process, the transference of material objects and the practices associated with meanings, images, and symbolism have been explained as a process of deterritorialization, that is, the severing of 'original' identities, signs, and meanings from traditional locations (Short et al. 2001). Commodification and the symbolic and material practices and spaces of consumption are seen as part of a globalizing process, including the remaking of landscapes which, in turn, causes the transformation of local cultures (Mansvelt 2005: 5).

Food is one of the most tangible cultural forms representing a particular regional group. Within this setting, translocal restaurants can play an important role in that they provide immigrants with a sense of home. It is not only possible but also increasingly preferred by many immigrants to maintain their Chinese ethnicity while becoming American (Yan 2004). As

a result, Chinese restaurants in the USA represent a contested site of negotiated symbols of ethnicity. Standards of authenticity are often used to judge a Chinese restaurant's quality, but notions of authenticity about culture contain essentialist and static assumptions about what is traditional (Yan 2004). However, evaluating a restaurant's authenticity requires more than just an appraisal of a restaurant menu, recipes, or ingredients (Gaytán 2008). Specifically, a restaurant's atmosphere is vital to an assessment of authenticity. As research pointed out, some dining factors, such as service quality, food quality, and dining environments have an impact on customers' behaviors through their emotional and cognitive responses in a restaurant setting (Jang et al. 2012).

Under 'the march of monoculture', Norberg-Hodge (1999: 194) reports that social diversity and difference have been erased. Consumption is constituted in contexts which are connected to other practices, processes, and peoples (Mansvelt 2005: 1). Veblen (1975) accentuated the symbolic and vicarious nature (rather than the utilitarian or value-based exchange) of commodities. In modern and postmodern societies, consumption is essentially the consumption of signs and symbols. This is especially true for the exchange process which characterizes food service.

Authenticity and commodification are central to academic debates in tourism, in part because commercialization of local identities can lead to negative consequences (Cole 2007). People interact with an information space that captures and represents to get the projected tourism destination image (Govers and Go 2004). That is to say, people's perceptions of places, without prior visits, will be based on what they've seen on television, in virtual representations online; read in magazines, brochures, and travel guides; seen in museums through the arts; read in literature; or experienced in the movies (Govers and Go 2004). In the field of tourism management and marketing, authenticity is regarded as a much-warranted element of tourist offerings (Apostolakis 2003; Yeoman et al. 2007; Kolar and Zabkar 2010). From a managerial standpoint, the dynamic nature of authenticity along with the process of its social construction and verification is particularly important.

The translocal restaurants exemplify two aspects of postmodern consumer culture. It is flexible, artisan-focused, and context-dependent enough to offer a high degree of customization (Peacock 1992). Thus it can provide an ultimately short-lived fashion product in a highly simulated environment: typical criteria of postmodernism (Jameson 1984). At the same time, the translocal restaurants have seen the most blatant operation-



alisation of service, which Ritzer (1996) coined the McDonaldization phenomenon. Hence, the translocal restaurants have selectively maintained some of their native cultural traditions such as food. The authentic can be perceived as a sign of consumption and tourism, by extension, as a quest (Culler 1990). The tourist seldom likes those which he typically considers as an unintelligible product of a foreign culture and prefers his own provincial expectations instead (Culler 1990). Interestingly, Chang et al. (2010) also found that tourists, who claim to be local food aficionados, display paradoxically a desire for food service, including both novel and familiar characteristics in order to satisfy their demands. Images of place are routinely used in the symbolic location of products and services (Urry 1995: 28). The city is the repository of people's memories and of the past; and it also functions as a receptacle of cultural symbols (Urry 1995: 24). In making places as symbolic constructs, food is 'deployed in the discursive construction of various imaginative geographies' (Cook and Crang 1996: 140). According to Smith (2005), the selective cultural traditions or signs of consumption represent symbolic authenticity. Just as New York's skyline, San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, or the French Quarter in New Orleans, all of them identify cities and become the source of people's synecdoche with the city (Smith 2005). For example, Morris (1990) suggests that Sydney Tower is one of Australia's cultural symbols. Similarly, foods and restaurants radiate a cultural symbolism in the marketplace.

The imageability of food initiatives may allow cuisines to develop new symbolic images, in which a part comes to represent the whole, and the development of such representation is a crucial part of reimagining. The size and complexity of food spaces mean that individuals and cultures use memorable features to make them legible to the human imagination. The use of unconventional burrito ingredients symbolizes a departure from traditional food preparation (Gaytán 2008). The introduction of a standardized authenticity is increasingly demanded in the context of the knowledge-based economy, wherein networks enhance the extensity, intensity, and velocity of processes and simultaneously the human need to determine how to reduce uncertainty.

Most customers' judgments are primarily based on some aspects or dimensions which metonymically stand for the authenticity of the object as a whole: the origins of the producer, the production techniques, the materials used, the designs or colors of the object, or even the locality where the object has been purchased (Littrell et al. 1993). Heldke (2003) identifies three key definitions of symbolic food authenticity. These refer

to, first, the most common usage concerns about food that it is simply ‘different’, or novel, which is distinct from ‘native’ authenticity—that is a food experience produced by a specific culture. Second, and contrarily, ‘replicable’ authenticity is an effort made by the cook to produce food as it is experienced somewhere else, or sometime else (Robinson and Clifford 2012). Third, it is important to learn which dimensions of the process of preparation, presentation, and consumption of food are in the eyes of tourists diacritical indicators of the ‘authenticity’ (Cohen 1988) of the local cuisine, and which can be safely filtered out without impairing that apparent authenticity (Cohen and Avieli 2004).

The customers may be indifferent to other aspects of the restaurants. Thus, some translocal restaurants may undergo a degree of transformation to keep some symbolic dishes while making the food appear more acceptable to their customers. However, few, if any studies, examine specific sites in comparison to the concept of multiculturalism (Phua et al. 2012), especially in the setting of translocal restaurants. What representative foods can be the symbolic authenticity of one kind of cuisine, and what characteristics should these symbolic foods have? The studies show a dynamic and dialectic relationship between the local and translocal communities.

To conclude, food is expressive of a regional community, and its spatial-temporal characteristics (Robinson and Clifford 2012). In particular, it can serve as a novel carrier for understanding and explaining some of the pointed paradoxes of multiculturalism (Brayton and Millington 2011). That is, local food has the potential to connect consumers to the region’s perceived culture and heritage, thereby enhancing the visitor experience (Sims 2009). Food consumption is a way for encountering and experiencing other food traditions and cultures (Chang et al. 2010; Molz 2007), and sometimes bears ‘symbolic’ significance (Chang et al. 2010; Kim et al. 2009). Furthermore, gastronomy has the ability to convey a sense of the host community heritage and cultural identity. It is, therefore, laden with the authenticity of the experience and the ability to convey prestige and status and to create groups by inclusion or exclusion (Getz 1998; Moscardo 2000; Beer 2008; Chaney and Ryan 2011).

As a measure of symbolic ethnicity (Gans 1979), authenticity contributes to the process, performance, and preservation of culture (Gaytán 2008). Authenticity is also an important measure in determining the quality of a dining experience (Gaytán 2008). A Chinese study shows that even in the transnational context, the notions of authenticity are still maintained to describe the meaning of ‘good’ Chinese food (Yan 2004).

This chapter may seem somewhat confusing and in that sense it reflects the literature that so far neither addresses authenticity of translocal restaurants in a systematic way nor relates these concepts to standardization. This is partly because authenticity can be seen from different perspectives, but also because visitors are not a homogeneous group—translocal restaurants may have different meanings to citizens who come from the same geographic ‘home’ area as the restaurant than to local citizens or citizens from elsewhere. Also the meanings to tourists may differ and here a distinction between national and foreign tourists can be made. Within these categories, the appreciation of authenticity may differ, and the willingness to pay for it may also differ. Standardization may reduce the cost of authenticity. We will first explore these issues empirically before we come back to them in the final chapter.

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# Methodology

## 4.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

Our research aims to investigate the paradox of authenticity and standardization in the context of translocality. Because this topic is new, we need explorative research. We have to study restaurant practices in depth. Then a case study approach is appropriate as the research focuses on contemporary situations and does not require control over behavioral events (Yin 2008). In the description of Eisenhardt (1989), the process of case study is highly iterative and tightly linked to data. Eisenhardt (1989: 548–549) argues that a case study is particularly well suited to new areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate. This type of work is highly complementary to incremental theory building from ‘normal’ scientific research. Rowley (2002) stated that one of the strengths of the case study is its strong contextualization within ‘real life’. The researchers have no control over the behaviors of, in our research, both consumers and restaurants, so experiments are not feasible. Therefore, the case study method is appropriate for this study. Case studies link with the disciplines involved in qualitative research methodologies (Chaney and Ryan 2011).

Because translocality plays a major role in the People’s Republic of China while foreign tourism is relatively limited, we decided to get our cases in China (see Sect. 4.2). This had a practical advantage as well: We could make optimal use of the business contacts of the first author and his

colleagues at the School of Tourism Management of the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China. The first author has direct living experience of the case companies over several years and knows several of the actors. He did the empirical work together with research assistants. Visual approaches have been used to improve traditional written approaches in our chapter. Photography helps researchers overcome the typically fleeting nature of observation and allows to record behavior in its situational context (Basil 2011). Further, it can sometimes better represent the facts under investigation and may reduce response burden (e.g., Manning et al. 1999). This book shows just a small subset of the dozens of pictures taken. In addition, secondary sets of data have been gathered from websites and publicity materials, and commentaries written by individuals and organizations.

Although it has been claimed that researchers attempt to disassociate themselves as much as possible from the research process (Winter 2000), qualitative researchers have come to embrace their involvement and role within the research and ‘the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research’ (Golafshani 2003). The notions of validity and reliability are the quality concepts in qualitative research which are ‘to be solved in order to claim a study as part of proper research’ (Stenbacka 2001). The reliability is a consequence of the validity in a study. Therefore, researchers should test or maximize the validity and as a result the reliability of a qualitative study (Golafshani 2003). Triangulation is typically a strategy (test) for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings (Golafshani 2003).

To improve the analysis and understanding, triangulation is a step taken by researchers to involve several investigators or peer researchers’ interpretation of the data at different times or locations. In a related way, the first author and the research assistants were involved in our research by member checks and investigator triangulation, during the process and post hoc. We collected and analyzed the data concurrently to form a mutual interaction between what was known and what we wanted to know, so that we could attain as more clear facts as possible. Closeness to primary qualitative research data, observation over time, and focused research team discussion can all lead to greater agreement and convergence at the level of descriptive coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Sandiford and Seymour (2007) emphasize the need for broad reporting and discussion of data analysis in hospitality research.

## 4.2 COUNTRY SELECTION: CHINA

The identities and other ties in contemporary China have not been simply uprooted from their localized cultural foundations to float free in the rapidly urbanizing reform era. Rather, many Chinese people and institutions have become translocal, that is, they belong to more than one locality simultaneously (Oakes and Schein 2006). More specific in the context of China, literature highlights the diversity within what China classifies as racial/ethnic communities (Goodman 2006). With the background of domestic migration, the Chinese people and institutions have come to be translocal, that is, these developments have given rise to new types of ‘nomadic’ people and communities who belong to more than one locality simultaneously (Oakes and Schein 2006).

In order to avoid possible confusion in terms of the level of analysis between the ‘global’ scale and ‘translocal’ scale, we limited the analysis of cases situated in but one country with a low percentage of foreigners but a high level of internal translocality of its relatively homogeneous population: China. China had 28.13 million foreign visitors (2% of the population) in 2016, and less than one million foreigners are habituated in Mainland China. However, there are 4.4 billion inner tourists (318% of the population) and 292 million inner migrants with census register (18% of the population) in China Mainland<sup>1</sup> and probably similar inner migrants without census register. Registered inner migrants tend to have a better level of education and a higher salary than the non-registered citizens—the latter are often people from the countryside finding work in big cities. They keep their registration in another part of the country but have moved to cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou. The enormous scale of migration and tourism within the country in comparison to the size of immigration and tourism from abroad make China very appropriate to study the concept of translocality.

With the development of society and economy, China’s restaurant industry has been developing rapidly in recent years, reaching a turnover of 851 billion Yuan in 2015, up by 4.4% compared to 2014.<sup>2</sup> Among these, there are a lot of translocal restaurants, and translocal expansion has become a trend of restaurant industry development. People’s attention on

<sup>1</sup> Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China. Please see: [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201702/t20170228\\_1467424.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201702/t20170228_1467424.html), February 28, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> China Statistics Yearbook 2016.

diet has increased. Food programs on television have seized people's attention. A 'Bite of China' not only brings people a visual feast, but also has sparked a lively discussion on food.

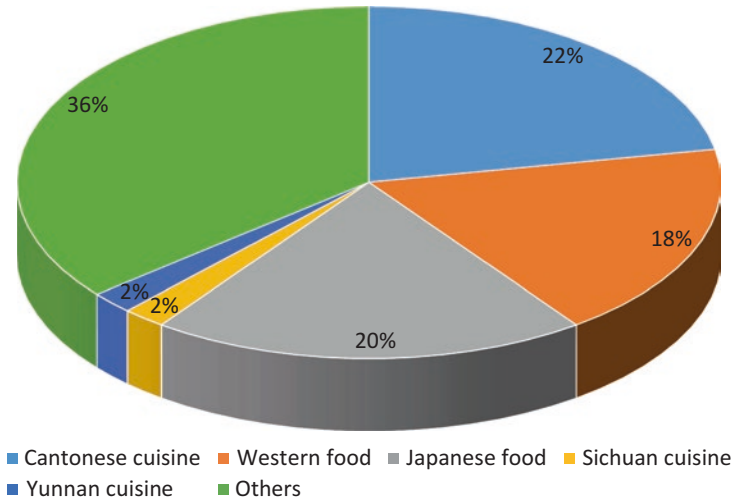
Within China, we focus on the city of Guangzhou. Guangzhou has always been a pluralistic place, and also a place where various diet cultures interacted and blended together. Nowadays, Guangzhou is one of the biggest cities in China, with more than 13 million people. It is located in China's most developed region, the Pearl River Delta in South China. Guangzhou is a typical migration city. It has nearly 14.04 million permanent inhabitants and 5.34 million non-residents (people not registered in Guangzhou but in most cases registered somewhere else in China).<sup>3</sup> More than 60% of the permanent inhabitants are from other provinces outside of Canton. So this city is extremely suitable for the purpose of our study.

Although North China is famous for its noodles, pancakes, dumpling, and pasta, and South China is known for rice, there are many restaurant outlets in Guangzhou that specialize in one of China's eight distinct regional cuisines and food recipes: Cantonese food, Shandong Cuisine, Fujian cuisine, Sichuan cuisine, Hunan cuisine, Anhui cuisine, Zhejiang cuisine, and Jiangsu cuisine. Cantonese cuisine is the most dominantly represented cuisine, accounting for 9668 out of Guangzhou's total Chinese restaurant stock of 14,969 restaurants,<sup>4</sup> but for the purpose of our study, the other ones are more interesting: those that serve food and may have other characteristics that refer to another Chinese province.

Guangzhou-based consumers not only like Guangdong food. They are also drawn to the consumption of foods which originate from other parts of the world, particularly from Western countries and Japan, and from other provinces in China. Many people in Guangzhou think Cantonese food, Western food, and Japanese food have the best taste. They like the food from abroad and they tend to see Western food as the best one.

<sup>3</sup> Statistical Communique on the 2016 national economic and social development of Guangzhou. Please see: <http://www.gzstats.gov.cn/tjgb/qstjgb/201703/P020170331374787225515.doc>, March 19, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> [Dianping.com](http://Dianping.com) is a website providing rankings and comments of restaurants and other shops. It is China's leading local life information and trading platform. [Dianping.com](http://Dianping.com) not only is for the net friend to provide business information, reviews, and consumption preferential information services, but also offers deals, electronic card, and restaurant reservation and some other O2O (Online To Offline) transaction services. So the website provides a lot of data. We obtained data in this section on November 14, 2014. There are more than 45,000 restaurants recorded, and about 14,969 are Chinese food restaurants which can be distinguished from different cuisines.



**Fig. 4.1** Composition of top 50 best taste restaurants in Guangzhou. (Source: [Dianping.com](http://Dianping.com))

Figure 4.1 shows the classification of the top 50 best taste restaurants in Guangzhou based on the statistics of comments on the [Dianping.com](http://Dianping.com). The results show that the Cantonese cuisine accounted for 22%, the Japanese cuisine 20%, and Western food 18%. Taste has become one of the most important factors affecting people's food consumption decisions. By analyzing the comments people made on [dianping.com](http://dianping.com),<sup>5</sup> we infer that authenticity has become a key aspect when consumers evaluate a restaurant. Thus, the authenticity of translocal restaurants does concern more and more consumers.

To conclude, Guangzhou is a very appropriate place to study the authenticity–standardization paradox in the background of translocality.

### 4.3 CASE SELECTION

The past experience of the first author plays an important role in the case selection. He has lived in Guangzhou for more than 15 years and understands the dietary habit of Cantonese and restaurant distribution very

<sup>5</sup>[www.dianping.com](http://www.dianping.com), February 20, 2017.

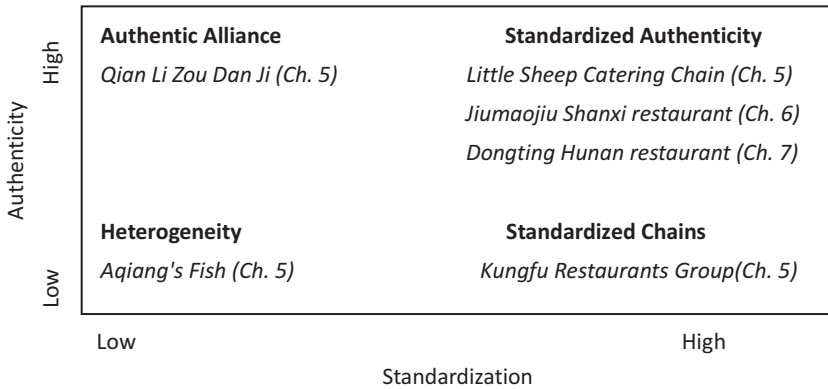
**Table 4.1** Overview of case companies

<i>Cases</i>	<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Targets</i>
Little Sheep Catering Chain	5	To exhibit the strategic framework
Qian Li Zou Dan Ji	5	
Kungfu Restaurants Group	5	
Aqiang's Fish	5	
Jiumaojiu Shanxi Restaurant	6	To further investigate how high levels of authenticity and standardization can be combined
Dongting Hunan Restaurant	7	Ibid., with even more focus on translocality

well. But he comes from the Hunan Province of China. He is a staff member in the Department of Hospitality Management of the Sun Yat-sen University with several researchers in this field. This author and his direct colleagues maintain professional relationships with the managers and chefs in the restaurant industry in Guangzhou. This provided the opportunity to select cases based on an expectation about their characteristics in terms of the three main concepts, authenticity, translocality, and standardization.

A series of cases have been studied to explore the coordination of authenticity and standardization in a translocality context, see Table 4.1.

Two of these concepts, authenticity and standardization, constitute the axes of the theoretical model presented in Sect. 2.3.2. In this model, the expansion strategies of restaurant groups are classified into four extremes: hardly any authenticity and standardization (Heterogeneity), a low level of authenticity and a high amount of standardization (Standardized Chain), a high level of authenticity with little standardization (Authentic Alliance), and a high level of both authenticity and standardization (Standardized Authenticity). Initially, one case was studied per category and then two other cases of the most challenging combination, standardized authenticity, were investigated (see Fig. 4.2). Each combination of authenticity and standardization can lead to expansion of restaurant chains locally and translocally, and the latter adds the third concept, translocality, which should be included, in particular, in cases showing the combination of authenticity and standardization. Regarding the research purpose, the results exemplify how authenticity and standardization can be examined in a managerially relevant manner in restaurant groups, and how important



**Fig. 4.2** Strategic position of the case companies

these two dimensions are for understanding the success of restaurant groups. Expansion across cultural-geographical borders adds the translocality dimension.

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# Authenticity–Standardization Paradox: Case Study of Expansion Strategies of Restaurant Groups in China

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

As described in Chap. 2, the relationship between authenticity and standardization is delicate. This chapter explores it. From a business perspective, authenticity is attractive because it may satisfy customer needs, whereas standardization is attractive because it may reduce cost. However, authenticity may be costly, whereas standardization may be at the cost of customer satisfaction. Restaurant groups, for purposes of expansion, can effectively grasp the delicate relationship between standardization and authenticity to be more successful. Based on the two-dimensional framework of standardization and authenticity developed in Chap. 2, this chapter examines restaurant group expansion strategy, including both dedicated restaurant groups and those that represent a subsidiary of a diversified restaurant company.

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the question: What is the relationship, if any, between authenticity and standardization? More specifically, it addresses how the authenticity–standardization paradox can be managed successfully. In an effort to protect authenticity in response to local market conditions, restaurant groups can select a series of standard procedures in

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Based on: Zeng Guojun, Frank Go, Henk J. de Vries. Paradox of Authenticity versus Standardization: Expansion Strategies of Restaurant Groups in China. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. 2012, 31(4), 1090–1100.

their service offering and delivery to counter the sense of uniformity and to profit from economies of scale. Based on the authenticity versus standardization framework, this study analyzes the validity of available strategies by introducing four cases in the restaurant sector. This chapter first details the research method and process. Second, it presents four case studies. Finally, the cases are discussed and conclusions and managerial implications of the results are given.

## 5.2 DATA COLLECTION

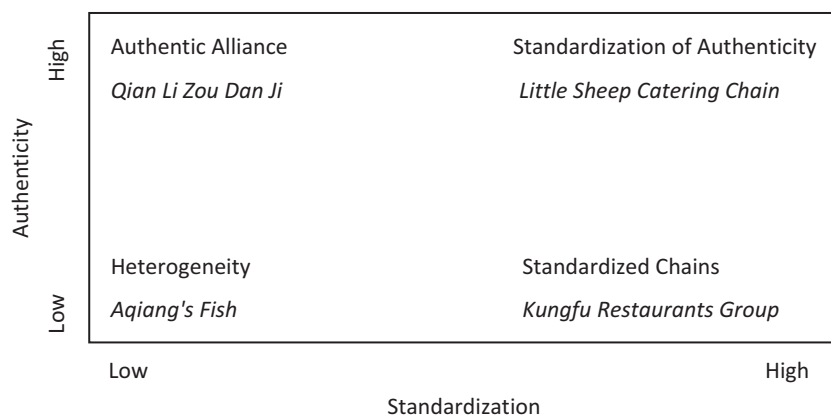
To investigate the four ‘extreme’ strategies presented in Fig. 4.2, we selected four cases, one for each ‘extreme’ in the combination of the axes ‘Authenticity’ (low or high) and ‘Standardization’ (low or high). Optimal selection requires measuring the amount of standardization and authenticity in advance. In this regard, Millenaar et al. (2010) assessed the following factors: name of the restaurant, names of dishes, appearance of employees, employees speaking in dialect, interior design, external facade, music, use of home-grown products, and use of traditional recipes. Their approach has implications for measuring authenticity, in particular with regard to rating the extent to which each of these factors applies (e.g., on a scale from 1 to 9) and also, in terms of the need to give each factor a weighting. In China, ‘food’ would be the most important. Here three perspectives are possible: the supplier’s, the customer’s, and the expert’s perspective (the researchers and/or other experts). By opting to limit our research to the latter, we face a difficulty—namely that measuring in advance can only be based on a first impression—the ‘real’ investigation is done later in the investigative process. Therefore, the restaurants had to be chosen from a sample selected by the first author who is based in China and familiar with the domestic field of hospitality management. Lastly, for clarity purposes, it is important to indicate that public data which refer to these two axes are unavailable.

This research focuses on four cases located in China. In China, more than 400 restaurant groups had sales revenues of over 100,000,000 RMB after 2008 (Table 5.1). Additionally, there are still a large number of small restaurants. Because we relate authenticity and standardization to expansion strategies, we intended to select the four restaurant groups from the group of 415 large restaurant groups (data 2010). However, within this group we could not find cases characterized by a low level of

**Table 5.1** Size and number of Chinese restaurant groups

<i>Year</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>
Groups	300	349	358	453	426	415
Restaurants	9748	11,360	12,743	12,561	13,739	15,333
Employees (thousands)	501	557	626	661	652	706
Business area (in thousands of m <sup>2</sup> )	4781	5882	6293	6519	6916	7427
Seats (thousands)	2458	2748	2801	2531	2489	2638
Turnover (billions of RMB)	45.436	56.375	64.000	80.691	87.932	95.542
Purchases (billions of RMB)	17.150	20.120	27.491	27.159	36.200	45.583
Unified delivery purchases (billions of RMB)	10.910	12.750	16.880	19.252	23.984	29.876

Source: China State Statistical Bureau (2011)

**Fig. 5.1** Strategic position of the case companies

standardization (Authentic Alliance and Heterogeneity). Accordingly, this study presents two cases, each in the ‘big restaurant group’ category (Kungfu Restaurant Group and Little Sheep Catering Chain Co. Ltd) and two in the ‘small restaurant’ group category (Qian Li Zou Dan Ji, and Aqiang’s).

We selected these four cases to illustrate the corresponding expansion strategies (Fig. 5.1). Three of the four cases were conducted in Guangzhou (Canton Province). Canton is one of China’s main gateway cities. Its

culinary culture, better known as the Cantonese cuisine, is world famous. The fourth case, a family inn group named ‘Qian Li Zou Dan Ji’, was conducted in Lijiang (Yunnan Province). Lijiang is one of the most popular resorts in South China, famed for its cluster of family inns. In three of these cases, all restaurants are owned by the same owner, in the case of Qian Li Zou Dan Ji, some restaurants are franchised.

For each case, we first had interviews with the professionals of Restaurant and Hotel Associations and Tourist Administrations in Canton and Lijiang. These professionals have market expertise and fine-grained knowledge about both corporations and industries. Second, interviews were held with customers and citizens who had lived in the neighborhood of the selected case companies for at least five years. For Chinese customers of restaurants, food is the most important element when describing authenticity and standardization of restaurants, and therefore we focus on food and the way it is prepared. Additionally, we will mention some other elements of the service package. Third, the restaurant owners, managers, and employees of the four case companies were interviewed. The total number of interviewees was 43: nine professionals in governments and associations, 22 customers and citizens, and 12 people inside these restaurant groups. The customer gender share was dominated by females, whereas the number of male customers was substantially higher in the professional customer segment, which included associations, governments, and corporations.

The questions for these interviews were based on the factors referred to by Millenaar et al. (2010) and subsequently applied for purposes of measuring the dimensions of authenticity and standardization of four restaurant groups within the context of the Chinese food service market. It is important to note that the scores on the measurement scale were assigned by the first author and one of his colleagues, a Chinese professor in the hotel management field. Their selection was based, first, on the interviews with the professionals, customers, and citizens, as well as owners, managers, and employees of the restaurant groups; second, on their assumption that the evaluation process should be inter-subjective in nature, that is, in order to be reliable, these scores should reflect multiple points of view, including those of authors, experts, customers, and managers (Table 5.2). The weights reflect the Chinese emphasis on food—the three food-related factors constitute 50% of the measured value (names of dishes: 5%, use of home-grown products: 25%, use of traditional recipes: 20%).

**Table 5.2** Measurements of authenticity and standardization of four cases

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Qian Li Zou Dan Li</i>			<i>Little Sheep</i>			<i>Aqiang's Fish</i>			<i>Kungfu</i>		
	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>Standardization</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>Standardization</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>Standardization</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>Standardization</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>Standardization</i>
Name of restaurant	0.10	7	6	7	9	4	4	6	3	3	9	9
Names of dishes	0.05	7	2	7	8	4	4	3	3	3	9	9
Appearance of employees	0.05	5	4	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	6	6
Employees speaking in dialect	0.10	5	4	5	7	3	3	5	4	4	5	5
Interior design	0.10	6	3	6	8	3	3	3	4	4	8	8
External façade	0.10	7	3	7	8	2	2	2	4	4	8	8
Music	0.05	8	2	6	6	3	3	2	3	3	8	8
Use of home-grown products	0.25	9	3	9	8	2	2	3	3	3	8	8
Use of traditional recipes	0.20	9	3	9	8	3	3	4	1	1	7	7
Sum	1.00	7.55	3.35	7.45	7.80	2.90	2.90	3.65	3.00	3.00	7.55	7.55

## 5.3 RESTAURANT GROUPS' EXPANSION STRATEGIES IN CHINA

### 5.3.1 *Standardized Chain*

When a restaurant group develops a standardization strategy, headquarter staff typically develop criteria which aim to push its subsidiary outlets to implement centrally coordinated standards, thereby drastically reducing the potential influence of any format of authenticity on restaurant operations. The restaurant market is heterogeneous and includes a customer segment with a preference for highly standardized service. For example, customers demonstrate loyal patronage to the Kungfu restaurant group, because of its standardized food service which reduces the risk which many customers fear, notably to be unpleasantly surprised.

Kungfu Catering Management Co., Ltd., was founded by Cai Dabiao and Pan Yuhai in 1994 in Dongguan, Guangdong province. Steamed rice and stews are core products and represent a differential competitive advantage. Kungfu has opened more than 400 branches in Guangzhou, Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, and Suzhou (Fig. 5.2). All of its subsidiaries are owned and operated by the Kungfu restaurant group, and headquarters prescribes almost everything (Fig. 5.3). Among Chinese fast food restaurant groups, Kungfu may be considered as a benchmark: it exemplifies the standardization of food service. It is also the first restaurant group in the Chinese fast food industry to standardize its management systems,

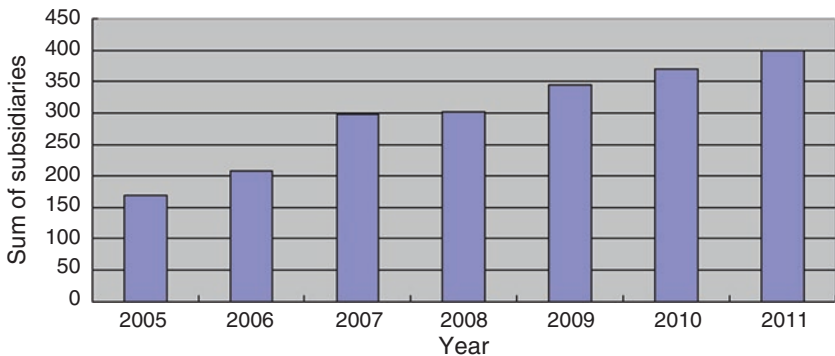


Fig. 5.2 Number of Kungfu subsidiaries between 2005 and 2011. (Source: Interview with the managers of Kungfu restaurant group)

## 元气人参鸡

以上等长白山人参，入水封焗，肉质紧实，药力十足，传承东北秘方，滋补元气，实为冬日里的暖饮一味。

**新口味**

**单品价 ¥16**



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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>香汁排骨飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥19.00 原價 ¥6.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>香汁排骨飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥15.50 原價 ¥4.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>香汁排骨飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥16.00 原價 ¥2.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>香汁排骨飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥19.00 原價 ¥6.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>冬菇焗雞肉飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥14.00 原價 ¥4.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>冬菇焗雞肉飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥14.00 原價 ¥4.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>冬菇焗雞肉飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥14.00 原價 ¥2.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>冬菇焗雞肉飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥14.00 原價 ¥4.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>冬菇焗排骨飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥14.00 原價 ¥4.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>冬菇焗排骨飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥14.00 原價 ¥4.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>冬菇焗排骨飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥15.00 原價 ¥3.50</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>冬菇焗排骨飯</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+12安士白飯</p> <p style="text-align: center;">¥14.00 原價 ¥4.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">新品</p>

Fig. 5.3 Advertisement and menu in Kungfu subsidiaries. (Source: Kungfu's advertisement)

cooking equipment, and service provision. In other words, the group has applied its standardization strategy on different levels of operation. In 2006, Kungfu obtained HACCP (food safety management) and ISO 9001 (quality management) certification, and in 2008, the group received the ISO 22000 certification (food safety management).

The stewing process is an example of the standardization of the cooking methods. In 1997, Kungfu invented the Computer Program Control Steam Cabinet, which assured that food was prepared according to a standardized stewing process under the same conditions. The selected food ingredients do not depend on the chefs' craft, but rather on the production of the waiters, that is, qualified waiters who are competent at programming the steam cabinet and are able to turn out identical menu items.

Kungfu has set up standardized processes for logistics, cooking, and restaurant operations and has completely integrated quality, service, and sanitation aspects. In 2009, Kungfu set up an information management system to effectively control all its branch restaurants. It standardized rules for each restaurant outlet, laid down in an operation manual. If waiters provide services according to the operation manual's standards, guests should get their orders in 60 seconds.

In summary, Kungfu has standardized its methods and techniques to streamline purchasing, food processing, and service delivery via an assembly approach based on appropriate equipment, tools, and management systems. This standardization strategy yields economies of scale. Kungfu has advanced equipment and a standardization strategy geared for rapid expansion. However, it has failed to differentiate itself from other Guangdong restaurant groups, which provide similar offerings. The latter raises an important question: To what extent can a lack of authenticity undermine the competitive position of highly standardized restaurant chains?

### 5.3.2 *Authentic Alliance*

The second case is an alliance which combines a relatively high level of authenticity with a low level of standardization. We chose the restaurant and family inn group 'Qian Li Zou Dan Ji' in Lijiang, Yunnan Province. In this city, family inns, restaurants, and bars are relatively well developed. By the end of 2008, the region's hospitality industry numbered 570 medium-sized and small firms. Together they formed a restaurant and family inn cluster in and around Lijiang's Old Town. A comparison of



modern and traditional restaurants in Lijiang shows that the former tend to have more modern and cleaner facilities, whereas the latter are more oriented toward providing heritage and cultural experiences. The restaurant units of family inns provide personalized service. The restaurants, bars, and family inns in Lijiang are scattered and difficult to imitate. There is no standardization strategy and the expansion of family restaurants, if any, is characterized by and subject to the ‘whims’ and ‘wisdom’ of independent entrepreneurship.

The Qian Li Zou Dan Ji outlets are very popular in Lijiang (Figs. 5.4 and 5.5). It has restaurants, bars, and family inns. ‘Qian Li Zou Dan Ji’ in Chinese means ‘Riding alone for thousands of miles’. It is from the historical allusion from the Three Kingdoms Period more than 2000 years ago. This allusion tells about Guan Yu, a big hero, who rescued the families of his two brothers through five mountain passes. This restaurant group disseminates the tradition and nature of Chinese culture.



Fig. 5.4 Restaurant at Qian Li Zou Dan Ji headquarters. (Source: First author)



Fig. 5.5 Qian Li Zou Dan Ji (Dream Lijiang). (Source: First author)

The headquarters of Qian Li Zou Dan Ji comprises several ancient courtyards and is a display of China's cultural heritage. It has a restaurant and more than 100 guestrooms with unique layouts, which reflect the Naxi ethnic group culture. One of the subsidiaries named Qian Li Zou Dan Ji (Dream Lijiang) operates a bar business in the old town center where customers can enjoy Lijiang's ethnic music. Another subsidiary, Qian Li Zou Dan Ji (Shaofu) offers Yunnan cuisine food. In keeping with the headquarters' tenet, it projects an image which is consistent with the headquarters' architectural appearance, decoration, furniture style, and the waiters' costume, but without applying a strict standardization regime. The group's restaurant subsidiaries vary from its headquarters in their structural building appearances and their interior decoration, and menus and drink lists vary from one location to the next.

Even though the restaurants and family inns in Lijiang reflect the authentic ethnic culture of the Naxi, the family-management approach has restricted their expansion significantly. In this sense, this firm is unable to compete with the restaurant groups that apply a high level of standardization. Apparently, an authenticity strategy implies a strength–weakness paradox. On the one hand, the group's strategy of authenticity may be seen as a particular strength in the form of a core capability, which has enabled it to attract consumers and achieve a satisfactory performance. On the other hand, its main weakness in the form of resources, marketing, delivery capacity, and scale constraints have impeded its expansion prospects.

### 5.3.3 *Standardization of Authenticity*

When a restaurant group develops and expands in a mode of standardization of authenticity, the level of both standardization and authenticity is rather high. The Little Sheep Catering Chain Co. Ltd. (hereafter referred to as Little Sheep) was set up in Baotou in Inner Mongolia in August 1999, specializing in special chafing dish and franchise business. The first restaurant was less than 400 square meters, had 30 chairs, and more than 50 staff. The franchise restaurants of Little Sheep have spread all over China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada, and the United States (Table 5.3).

Little Sheep has won several awards including 'Famous Trademark of China', 'Annual Franchise Award' (conferred by FLA), 'Top 100 National Name Cards of China', and 'Top 25 Model Brands'. Moreover, in 2010, World Brand Lab released the ranking list of '2010 Top 500 Chinese

Valuable Brands'. This ranking was based on the analysis of three attributes: financial status, consumer behavior, and brand strength. With a brand value of 8.887 billion yuan, Little Sheep ranked 97th on the list. Zhang Gang, the founder of Little Sheep, stated that the philosophy of Little Sheep's operational management combined Inner Mongolian resources and the global chain concept. Lu Wenbing, the CEO of Little Sheep, attributed the success of the company to a quality guarantee at the national scale, in particular, a consistent taste of a special chafing dish. After more than 10 years, Little Sheep is a great corporate achievement, and has set a new benchmark for the standardization of Chinese specialty catering.

The concept of authenticity has played an important role in the expansion of Little Sheep (Fig. 5.6). For example, every chef needs to undergo a training program at the corporate headquarters in Baotou prior to being assigned to one of the branch stores. This training program is a precondition for mastering Little Sheep's secret formula for authentic hotpot soup blend. Besides the hotpot basic soup and sauce, Little Sheep has added several regional ingredients, and more than a dozen corroborant spices to its standard menu. The corporate training program teaches chefs

**Table 5.3** Kinds of Little Sheep subsidiaries

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Self-owned property	90	127	161	184
Franchisee	257	248	293	296



**Fig. 5.6** Hotpot soup and mutton at Little Sheep. (Source: First author)

how to prepare mutton, a central feature on Little Sheep's menu, in a way so that it remains tasty and tender with a pleasant aftertaste, even after a long boiling process. The dishes are nutritious and are considered to nurture beauty and improve particular body organs. The mutton comes from sheep reared the Xilinguole grasslands, which is internationally reputed for its fine natural pastures. The farmers breed Wuzhumuqin sheep and apply an advanced form of mutton production technology, which, in turn, results in a source for excellent mutton for the creation of Little Sheep's specialty dishes. The authenticity of Little Sheep is primarily embodied in human resources, food sourcing, and the food preparation processes. Its authentic approach in the operational kitchen department gives Little Sheep its character which, in turn, gives the restaurant group a differential competitive advantage in the marketplace.

In summary, Little Sheep may be described as a modern production enterprise which has a standardized management approach to attain a competitive advantage. In particular, it has developed its standardization capacity along three dimensions. First, the Little Sheep concept is based on co-creation, that is, customers use the facilities its restaurants provide to co-produce food dishes. Although the ingredients in the Chinese food-cooking process may be standardized, the chef's approach or variation of processing procedures can result in a range of different taste sensations and in this way create customer loyalty. In contrast, one of the characteristics of hotpot cooking is that it engages customers in the cooking process of chafing dishes, based on selected standards. Thereby, it renders the chefs' skills superfluous, while reducing operational costs, simultaneously. Second, Little Sheep has invested in the establishment of its own central kitchen facilities, which draws on the use of a unified purchasing and delivery system to benefit from the effect of economies of scale. Raw materials and ingredients can be produced in an industrial way, which reduces production costs but also guarantees a specific consistency in the quality of central kitchen output. The systematic industrial production facilities form the basis for further developments. These include a Little Sheep meat base and seasonings base in addition to the hotpot base offered in the group's restaurants. Furthermore, Little Sheep has boosted the line which produces the soup materials in chafing dishes and the mutton meat products. The group's logistics center has applied a sophisticated database system to manage the group's daily operations and is among the most advanced of such centers in China. The database system enables Little Sheep headquarters to record centrally all its transactions,

ranging from the purchasing of raw materials to the sales of menu items to customers, the effective control of branch store performance and the monitoring of the food supplies. This central control system allows headquarters to provide the necessary support to individual chain stores, but also to assess their business performance. For example, central management can check whether chefs control the weight for every plate of mutton according to set standards, whether employees have the required competencies, whether the dishes are authentic, and whether the chains offer consistent service quality.

#### 5.3.4 *Heterogeneity*

The last case, Aqiang's Fish, is typified by a strategy of heterogeneity, that is, this restaurant group scores lowly on the attributes of both standardization and authenticity. Compared to the three types of restaurant group strategies that were discussed above, the heterogeneity strategy appears to yield less competitive advantage. However, the question arises whether or not a restaurant group understands how to seize the opportunities presented on the standardization–authenticity continuum in an appropriate way so as to achieve successful expansion. At present, most restaurant operators in China pursue a heterogeneity strategy. These restaurant operators may lack the resources, the necessary expertise and the technical equipment to monitor their performance, which, in turn, is needed to decide whether standardization or authenticity might be an appropriate expansion strategy worth pursuing. Instead, restaurant groups which opt for a heterogeneity strategy aim for business continuity and profit generation where possible. Our case company, the restaurant group called 'Aqiang's fish with pickled leaf mustard' fits this profile (Fig. 5.7). It started more than 10 years ago near a university dormitory with more than 40,000 students of the Sun Yat-sen University in Canton. The first restaurant had only 32 seats. Aqiang's set up the second branch in 2007 and the third one in 2010. The three subsidiaries differ in terms of their interior decoration and style.

The cooking and flavor of Sichuan cuisine varies across restaurants; so in that sense, there is no standardization. It is also difficult to adopt an authenticity strategy because the group's main food staple is fish with pickled leaf mustard. The company, run by a private owner, lacks features which distinguish it from other restaurants in terms of decorations, restaurant layout, and its service delivery approach. It lacks a data management



**Fig. 5.7** Different image and service in two subsidiaries of Aqiang's. (Source: First author)

system; so there is no centralized control or standardized regime. The chefs of the individual restaurants prepare the core dish based on their own specialties and each has its own service rules. One customer, who was interviewed by the researchers stated: 'The taste of the dishes is inconsistent. Moreover, the different branches of Aqiang's charge different prices for the same dish'. In spite of these deficiencies, the Aqiang's restaurant group has been successful, largely due to three reasons: First, its proximity to the university; second, its rather 'loose' operational format in which restaurant managers have the freedom to serve their customers in the way they think is best; and third, its fit to the lifestyle and demands of the student market.

#### 5.4 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study proposed a two-dimensional analysis framework of authenticity and standardization, meant to serve as a tool to study and support the decision-making process surrounding the restaurant group expansion strategy. The framework was used to identify four 'extreme' cases to test whether profiling on a high or low level of standardization and/or authenticity could aid restaurant group expansion. The four cases show how authenticity and standardization can be examined from a managerial perspective. This is relevant for restaurant groups so that they can gain insight into the importance of these two dimensions for boosting their performance. Our findings confirm that restaurant groups can adopt four expansion strategies: the standardization of authenticity, standardized chain,

authentic alliance, and heterogeneity, and each of these can result in success.

Our discussion about ‘standardization and authenticity strategy’ in restaurant groups, and the extent to which these strategies are adopted, was set in the rapidly evolving Chinese food service market. Our cases show that large restaurant groups all apply a certain level of standardization. Apparently, a large chain of restaurants cannot be managed without standardization. However, this does not imply that restaurant chains with hardly any standardization cannot be successful. The vast majority of restaurant businesses in China apply neither standardization nor authenticity in a structured way. They share the advantage of serving the customer without being hindered by a central command and control system, and their success depends on the ability of staff to satisfy local customers. This strategy, therefore, allows space for the creation of a climate, which promotes customer appreciation of a non-standardized service orientation. Accordingly, restaurant groups which embrace the heterogeneity strategy can offer a level of service quality which is in keeping with customer expectations in a specific geographic trading area. Restaurant businesses which adopt a relatively high level of authenticity and a low level of standardization (authentic alliance) are restricted in their expansion because they typically draw on core competencies designed for the preservation of the authenticity of their subsidiaries but lack thorough management to control and support their outlets. Restaurant businesses with a high level of standardization (standardized chains) seem to be able to expand quickly because the same concept is copied time and again, consumers know what they can expect, and the company profits from economies of scale. However, a salient threat is that it is relatively easy for competitors to copy this concept. Typically, such chains target the ‘mass consumer market’. Restaurant groups that combine a high level of standardization and a high level of authenticity (standardization of authenticity) standardize the core elements of authenticity and select those non-core elements that lead to heightening the perceived differentiated food service offerings. Through the strict adherence to this strategy, restaurant groups can benefit from the generation of scale economies embedded in a strict standardization regime. Though our cases show that standardization makes expansion easier, we cannot conclude that one strategy is better than another. If properly executed, each of the four strategies can result in successful restaurant group expansion.

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## Case Study of Authentic Shanxi Cuisine in Guangzhou

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Out of the four extremes in our analysis framework, the combination of a high level of authenticity and a high level of standardization is the most intriguing one. The case of Little Sheep (See Sect. 5.3.3) showed that and how authenticity and standardization can be combined in a successful way. Actually, that case also relates to translocality because the service concepts stem from Inner Mongolia but the restaurants can be found in other Chinese provinces as well. In this chapter, we explore another case that combines authenticity and standardization in a context of translocality in depth.

In the Little Sheep case, an authentic service concept is replicated to create a chain of similar authentic restaurants. The dimension of authenticity shapes the service characteristics of a restaurant's local provenance, while the dimension of standardization concerns the shared features, requirements, and certification criteria, if any, of translocal restaurants. However, this summary fails to clarify which authenticity characteristics should be standardized, first, to meet the customers' requirements for providing 'authentic' genuine service resulting in customer satisfaction. Second, at the managerial level such insight is required to attract investors and owner-operators of translocal restaurants. Third, it is also significant in that it has a bearing on the identity of place. Therefore, the clarification of a common standard of authenticity characteristics would also represent a most helpful tool for local/regional communities

and authorities interested in the conservation of the local heritage as a lever for developing, among others, regional culinary culture.

The social science literature has a dearth of food tourism publications and those that address this topic focus on the aspect of attraction (Hjalager and Richards 2002). However, Hashimoto and Telfer (2006) believe that each region should promote food as a central tourist attraction. While their emphasis on the promotion of places with specific food qualities is commendable and can serve as a lever, for example, in the competition between different locations, their approach appears, however, to ignore economic realities. Restaurateurs face steep investment costs and operational expenses and, therefore, need knowledge which affords them to replicate selected authentic features so as to reduce their expenses and increase income. Therefore, they must find ways to bridge the tension between authenticity features, which emphasize ‘value-in-use’, and standards designed to streamline processes for deriving ‘value-in-exchange’. The present chapter examines the standardized authenticity strategy in a company case. To the best of our knowledge, the present case represents the first in-depth study to examine the standardized authenticity paradox in the context of translocal restaurants in China.

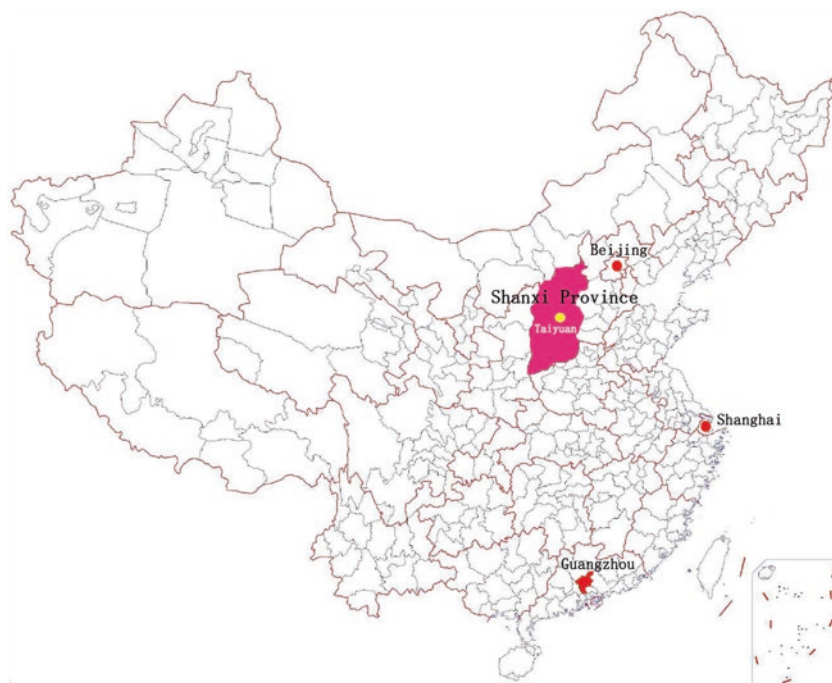
This chapter is organized as follows. First, the case company and methodology are described. Then the case study examines the symbiotic nature of authenticity and standardization in a Shanxi restaurant in Guangzhou (Jiumaojiu) (Sect. 6.3). Section 6.4 discusses the findings and provides conclusions and implications.

## 6.2 DATA COLLECTION

### 6.2.1 *Case Company*

The Jiumaojiu restaurant, originated from Shanxi Province, has been taken as a case to study the elements and process of standardized authenticity from the customers’ perspective. Shanxi, situated in Northern China (Fig. 6.1), has been important to the People’s Republic of China for its agriculture and industry. Northern China is among the most densely populated areas of China. Shanxi benefits from the River Fen’s fertile valleys for agriculture. The most important crop is wheat (Fig. 6.1). Shanxi’s eateries and restaurants emerged in Guangzhou during a period of great economic success in China in the 1990s (Goodman 2006).

Shanxi cuisine, named after the province, is famous for its noodles, pancakes, and pasta (Goodman 2006). A lot of new enterprises in all shapes and sizes came during the 1990s to exploit this cuisine: *Shanxi Jiumaojiu*, *Shanxi Noodle King*, *Shanxi Pasta World*, *Shanxi Noodles*, and so on. This phenomenon was all the more remarkable because while the territory of Shanxi had long been famous for its noodles, pancakes, and flour-based food, they had not previously been marketed with specific reference to the name of the province. On the contrary, such food was more likely to have place descriptors, where these existed at all, to more limited territories, such as towns and counties. For example, the Linfen shuaibing (a very large and thin, flat pancake, cooked and folded in layers) or Wenshui jubing (a deep fried doughy ball with a sweet filling) and then only because they had become known (largely through sales) outside their area of origin.



**Fig. 6.1** Location of Shanxi and Guangzhou in China. (Source: First author)

A Chinese saying goes ‘Chinese pasta in Shanxi’, which tells the position of Shanxi noodles in China. The emergence of Shanxi noodles (and indeed a provincial cuisine of any kind) in the 1990s was part of the deliberate construction of a provincial identity by the party-state, designed primarily to stimulate economic development. Shanxi was being identified as a new local imagery that would help mobilize the enthusiasm, productivity, and even the resources of its inhabitants. Indeed, because the social construction of a specifically Shanxi identity emphasizes the networks that bind its inhabitants, this result is perhaps better described as the emergence of a translocal imagery. In this process of identity formation, the idea of the local was effectively reformed by the party-state in two further regards: locality openly articulated and becoming politically respectable, and the province highlighted as the prime scale of identification (Goodman 2006). Jiumaojiu group set up its first subsidiary in 1995. In 2012, there were 17 subsidiaries in Guangzhou, Foshan in Canton Province, and Haikou of Hainan Province (Fig. 6.2). All of these subsidiaries are located in South China, far from Shanxi Province, the provenance of this cuisine. Jiumaojiu in Chinese means 99 cents which means the last one cent is also very important for people in Shanxi. The name of this restaurant deliberately demonstrates regional culture characteristics of traditional Shanxi.

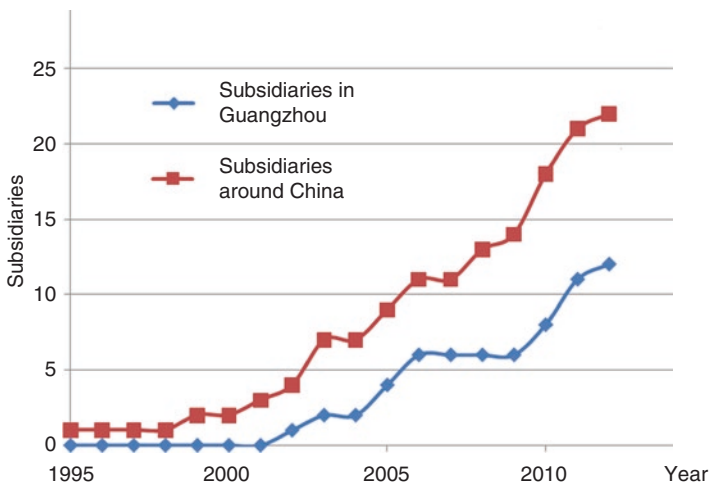


Fig. 6.2 Subsidiaries of Jiumaojiu from 1995 to 2012. (Source: Interview with the managers of Jiumaojiu)



**Fig. 6.3** Jiangnanxi shop and Zhongshansi shop of Jiumaojiu in Guangzhou. (Source: First author)

Since ancient times, Shanxi has been famous across China for its commercial culture and its domestic residents are known for their mercantile characteristics and penchant for saving. The Jiumaojiu restaurant group won the top best restaurant award in Guangzhou in 2006. Three years later, Jiumaojiu got the excellent contribution award of Shanxi diet culture dissemination in 2009. The restaurant group's efforts for more than 10 years have not only culminated in great business achievements, but also set a practical example which is valuable and relevant for the study of the potential integration of standardization and authenticity of Chinese catering.

Jiumaojiu offers authentic Shanxi noodles. All 17 subsidiaries offer standardized food for their customers, and the customers can enjoy the similar food and watch a similar cooking show in all 17 subsidiaries in Jiumaojiu. The main food of Cantonese is rice. However, Cantonese customers occasionally dine in Jiumaojiu of Guangzhou. The two photos of Fig. 6.3 illustrate that customers often need to wait for dining. This shows that Jiumaojiu gets high customer recognition and satisfaction. Therefore, the case of Jiumaojiu perfectly fits the exploration of the operational standardization and cultural authenticity paradox in translocal restaurants with the background of globalization.

### 6.2.2 *Investigation Process*

The desk research has been conducted for more than two months in order to create a strong foundation for the field investigation. Based on literature

(Millenaar et al. 2010), the interview outline has been designed. Four main questions for customer respondents are included in the interview outline. First, what can be the representatives of the standardized attributes of food authenticity in Jiumaojiu? Second, what can be the representatives of the standardized attributes of environment and atmosphere authenticity in Jiumaojiu? Third, what can be the representatives of the standardized attributes of service and value authenticity in Jiumaojiu? Fourth, can Jiumaojiu be the representative of Shanxi Cuisine, and why? In addition, similar four questions have been designed to understand the judgment of Jiumaojiu restaurant from the producer's perspective. All of the attributes in the third main question were determined after canvassing the literature (Carmin and Norkus 1990; Bitner 1992; Caldwell and Hibbert 2002; Lynn 2001; Dutta et al. 2007). During the interviews, the respondents were asked to give as many examples as possible.

The past experience of the first author plays an important role in the case selection and investigation communication. He has taken an overt observation before and after the investigation of the customers and taken 68 photos with the permission of the customers and managers in different situations. The first author has had dining in different dining times for the purpose of observing different groups of customers. The pretest has been conducted from October 1, 2011, to February 25, 2012. During this period, three managers (in Zhongshansi subsidiary), seven servants (in Zhongshansi and Jiangnanxi subsidiary), and nine customers (in Zhongshansi and Jiangnanxi subsidiary) have been interviewed. The distance between the two subsidiaries is about four kilometers. Both of them are located in the city center and the main customer groups of both of them are the shopping young people. The Zhongshansi subsidiary is the regional headquarter of Jiumaojiu in Guangzhou. We investigated the managers only in the Zhongshansi subsidiary. Interviews were normally one hour long.

During the period from March 12, 2012, to April 10, 2012, the first author and the three research assistants observed, investigated, ate out, and took photos in Jiumaojiu' Jiangnanxi as well as Zhongshansi subsidiaries. The three research assistants were graduate students majoring in tourism management. One of them is from Shanxi Province, one is from Hunan, and the other one is from Canton. Three research assistants from home province, host province, and one other province benefit the research process. The first author and three research assistants have done the investiga-

tion together and the comparative results have been developed after each first did an independent analysis.

During this second period, we used a convenience sample of 21 customers for individual interviews. Only three of these originated from the Shanxi Province. The 18 other respondents were from outside Shanxi, most of them from North China. We interviewed 8 men and 13 women. Additionally, two more managers and two chiefs in Zhongshansi subsidiary had been interviewed, following the recommendation of the manager, in the pretest period. After the interview rounds, a supplementary investigation was performed to get some additional information from the managers in Zhongshansi subsidiary on April 28, 2012.

### 6.3 STANDARDIZED AUTHENTICITY OF JIUMAOJIU

The restaurant consumption process includes the structure of the meal (as chosen by the tourists and recommended by the service staff), the taste of the food, the level of service coordination as expressed in terms of style and tonality, and the spatial organization and decoration of the establishment (Cohen and Avieli 2004). Our case study combines a supplier perspective and a customer perspective. First, the policies, procedures, and measurements of the Jiumaojiu's managers are illuminated, so as to explain how the translocal restaurants shape and coordinate authenticity and standardization. Second, the perception of authentic elements and standardization by the customers is studied. As mentioned in Sect. 2.1.2, the concept of standardized authenticity was assessed by examining three service elements in particular: dishes, environment and atmosphere, and service and value.

#### 6.3.1 *Dishes*

Ingredients are an important, though problematic, marker of authenticity for customers. Jiumaojiu tries to use authentic Shanxi spices such as vinegar and pepper. However, this restaurant pays more attention to the customers' perception. For example, Cantonese customers do not like too much vinegar but the typical Shanxi food uses much more vinegar. 'It is better to let us put it ourselves. Some people maybe dislike it although I prefer more vinegar', a Cantonese middle age woman narrates. Therefore, Jiumaojiu does not put the vinegar into the food directly but puts the vinegar on the dining table. Another example is the ingredients of Beef



**Fig. 6.4** Braised beef noodles and beef noodles with prime soup in Jiumaojiu. (Source: First author's own collection of Jiumaojiu's advertisements)

Noodle with Soup. The photos in Fig. 6.4 show different noodles with the same price, and the customers can select different spices as they want. In short, Jiumaojiu customizes its dishes in accordance with customer preferences. Although Shanxi noodles are changed to meet the diverse needs of customers' tastes, the food authenticity has been caught from the perspective of customers' tastes in Guangzhou. For many customers, the authenticity of a dish depends on the use of authentic ingredients (Cohen and Avieli 2004). However, most customers are at the same time reluctant to eat, or are repulsed by some ingredients inedible in their own culture (Cohen and Avieli 2004). The substitution for these by ingredients more acceptable to customers would usually not impair the authenticity of the food in their eyes (Fischler 1988), while making it more acceptable.

The main food in Jiumaojiu is Shanxi handmade noodles. Eight kinds of handmade noodles are popular in Shanxi: Daoxiaomian (刀削面), Yigenmian (一根面), Tijian (剔尖), Daobamian (刀拨面), Shouganmian (手擀面), Maoerdo (猫耳朵), Jiupian (揪片), and Jiandaomian (剪刀面). Some restaurants select industrially manufactured noodles, and some other restaurants use concentrated juice to prepare soups. The restaurants can expand their production scale quickly. However, 'Jiumaojiu adheres to boiled soup with bones, bucket after bucket, to make noodles by hand, bowl after bowl, and to establish subsidiaries one by one as snail'.<sup>1</sup> Figure 6.5 shows the eight kinds of standardized noodles, hand-produced in Jiumaojiu.

All kinds of noodles, except Yigenmian (一根面), are made with traditional crafts. Every kind of noodles has unique formulas and process time

<sup>1</sup><http://www.jiumaojiu.com/>





Fig. 6.5 Eight kinds of handmade noodles in Jiumaojiu. (Source: Jiumaojiu's advertisements)

conforming to the authentic food-making method of Shanxi. Yigenmian deviates obviously. This kind of noodle consists of a single strand noodle in a bowl featuring a single, continuous noodle, three meters long, made only occasionally by Shanxi's residents. For obvious reasons they rarely prepare Yigenmian according to its conventional standard criterion of length. In Jiumaojiu, there is a staged process of Yigenmian, that is, 'to throw the noodle into the pot'. There are completely different requirements compared to the traditional processing. 'We need to keep the authentic noodles in our restaurant. However, we have to adapt something to the cooking show', the general manager of the Zhongshansi subsidiary tells. Through innovation of traditional formula and processing by adding salt and sugar, this kind of noodle can be taken for the food preparation show.

The process of food preparation is generally conducted in the backstage of the restaurants, away from and often inaccessible to the tourist gaze (Urry 1990). The use of modern technologies, such as electric appliances,

instead of traditional food preparation methods, to improve the sanitary conditions and expedite the preparation of big quantities of food supplied to large groups of customers, does not generally impair the dish's authenticity. Jiumaojiu exhibits its kitchen and production process without modern technologies at the front of customers. In the instance that the kitchen can be observed and/or accessed by customers, a phenomenon known as the staged back region (MacCannell 1976: 99), the preparation of food becomes a performance for customers, and as such a criterion for their judgment of the food's authenticity.

The translocal restaurant's presentation stage of the dishes is by definition in the customers' frontal view and consists of the display, advertisement, and explanation of the dishes. It signals a 'moment of truth' in service by which prospective customers are likely to judge the authenticity of the food on display. The menu can guide the customers through the fare on offer.

The menu serves as the principal means of mediation between the restaurant's offerings and the preferences of prospective customers. From a culinary ethno-type-classification perspective, however, the menu gains both a wider and deeper significance understood as a vehicle to preserve and present culinary place memories, organized around a typology divided into sections and sub-sections, respectively. In this regard, the menu's task of the translocal restaurant goes well beyond its function as a selling device. On a deeper level, importantly, it can act like a carrier to provide guidance to the territory not only to outsiders but also to locals on its specific places, their traditions and features associated with a specific regional cuisine. Thus conceived, the menu can be a systematic list of dishes offered, reflecting a wider system of culinary traditions of Shanxi, according to the principal types of meals, and classes of dishes within each type.

The menu's structure and content of a typical local Chinese restaurant are meaningless for customers who are unfamiliar with translocal restaurants (Cohen and Avieli 2004). Even if they are desirous of tasting local food, they will be at a loss, however, when attempting to put an order (Cohen and Avieli 2004), so to speak to the 'maddness' they encounter on the menu. It is also very difficult to transliterate the translocal culinary terms into a written language (Cohen and Avieli 2004). Even if translated, such names often mean little to one unfamiliar with the local cuisine. Jiumaojiu utilizes a slightly more elaborate mode by adding brief descriptions and photos to the transliterated names for dishes in Guangzhou to standardize authenticity. In addition to pasta, Jiumaojiu provides mutton,

beef, cold vegetables, grains juice, soup, barley tea, and so on for customers. The Shanxi cuisine is the main food in this restaurant, but it also offers other kinds of cuisines, particularly the Cantonese one. ‘Jiumaojiu augments some Cantonese dishes into its menus, which does not impact the authenticity of this restaurant’, one of the interviewees confided.

The company uses a lot of standards for materials, purchasing, food making, and service. Flour is purchased in Guangzhou. But the coins and ormosia, for example, are bought in Shanxi and transported to Guangzhou. As far as the dish-making is concerned, the chef must prepare the materials according to the recipe in the morning of everyday. Every waiter is responsible for three tables during dining time and four other waiters are responsible for the temporary tasks for the whole restaurant. The meal ordering can be accomplished with the help of an information system around the restaurant. Each dish has a number. The waiter would enter the dish number into the order system and send the order information to the kitchen. If the system displays ‘no stock’, the waiter tells the customers that this kind of dish has sold out.

Because the dishes in Jiumaojiu are handmade, it is very difficult for the restaurant to ensure consistency of the products’ quality, they have to rely on the chefs’ expertise and work experience. Every chef follows his or her own unique personal development path. Jiumaojiu controls the quality of dish-making through chef training. A chef can typically progress along a career path consisting of four stages: Apprentice, Chef, Senior Chef, and Executive Chef.

These practices confirm the standardization of authenticity in Jiumaojiu. One of the Executive Chefs argued that ‘there are five key factors involved in food preparation in Jiumaojiu: materials, image, technology, additional value and cost-effectiveness respectively’. The literature on food consumption indicates that each cuisine tends to be marked by a distinctive taste (Fischler 1988). Therefore, it can be assumed that taste serves as the principal standard by which customers judge the authenticity of translocal restaurants. However, an important marker of authenticity, the taste of local food, may not be agreeable to outsiders. For example, the tourist’s palate may consider it too hot, too smelly, too oily, or too salty. Translocal restaurants tend to mitigate the taste of translocal food to suit the local customers, but leave enough of it that metonymically impresses the customers as the authentic thing. The degree of change of the food production is crucial. If it is too great, the customers may reject the food; if too limited, the dish may lose its attractiveness. Jiumaojiu seeks to resolve that problem by offering choices with various grades of intensity of local taste.

### 6.3.2 *Environment and Atmosphere*

The spatial organization and decoration of the eating place contribute many important authenticity markers. Translocal restaurants are tempted to stage their authenticity, overtly or covertly, while, at the same time, safeguarding the customers' comfort (Cohen and Avieli 2004). The decoration of the public space of the establishment, matching with the style of food served, provides the appropriate ambience for a 'total restaurant experience', enhancing the customers' sense of authenticity, even though this kind of authenticity is often staged authenticity or constructive authenticity. Jiumaojiu has been decorated with a variety of markers of Shanxi culture by giving the restaurants a Shanxi courtyard style: gray eaves, brick structure, marble wall, red lanterns, exquisite wood carving, droplight with grain pattern, glittering and translucent glass, and typical Shanxi murals and paintings (see Fig. 6.6). The general manager tells us, 'We need to catch as much attributes of Shanxi architecture and culture as possible'. Inside the restaurant, there are a lot of photos about Shanxi traditional building (Qiao's Courtyard). This makes Jiumaojiu restaurants look like a traditional Shanxi courtyard.

The decorations applied in all of Jiumaojiu's subsidiaries are standardized. Therefore, it is easy for customers to recognize the Jiumaojiu restaurant brand at a crowded shopping center location. 'We believe that the similar appearance is necessary. We can find it easily by its appearance', one Cantonese couple narrates. The Jiumaojiu (in Chinese) signage put on the facade are similar in each of its restaurant locations.

The kitchens in all Jiumaojiu restaurants are designed to be open so that the customers can enjoy the food preparation process. The left-side



**Fig. 6.6** Decorations of Saimachang restaurant of Jiumaojiu. (Source: First author)



**Fig. 6.7** The kitchens of Jiangnanxi and Zhongshansi restaurants of Jiumaojiu. (Source: First author)

photo of Fig. 6.7 shows two chefs preparing noodles, and the right-side side of Fig. 6.7 shows customers staying around the open kitchen for the cooking show. The cooking utensils, tableware, menus, and safety equipment are all standardized. For example, the big bowl of birthday noodles is used in every restaurant and this kind of bowl is specially customized by Jiumaojiu, and sealed within Chinese characters, ‘A Long Life (万寿无疆)’. Black cloth shoes, black leisure trousers, and green jacket are the general dress for common waiters. ‘We designed the tableware and staff uniforms ourselves in 1996. We use selected traditional elements of Shanxi in these things. As you know, we set up our first subsidiary in 1995. So we paid close attention to standardization early’, the general manager narrated.

The food of Jiumaojiu inherits the traditional dishes and cultures of Shanxi. Jiumaojiu’s decoration exhibits the traditional Shanxi courtyards and culture. Most of the cookers hail from Shanxi Province and aim to preserving and presenting their home territory’s authenticity within the bounds of Jiumaojiu’s different subsidiaries. At the same time, Jiumaojiu applies standardization of its menu, preparation process, service delivery, staff dress, and restaurant decoration in an effort to, first, increase its efficiency in operational performance, and second, improve its corporate reputational image. In terms of product content, Jiumaojiu sources a significant proportion of the materials and foods used in preparation locally. Within China, different styles and culinary traditions have developed in response to the local climate, terrain, and varying resources. With regard to these criteria, the variations between north and south are rather significant, which necessitate Jiumaojiu to adjust selected authentic features to form a common standard. This serves as a pre-condition to meeting the

Cantonese customers' preferences. However, most of the customers in our interview consider that Jiumaojiu is an authentic Shanxi restaurant in Guangzhou. Apparently, standardized authenticity is easily accepted by local customers of these translocal restaurants, despite some adaptations.

### 6.3.3 *Standardized Authenticity: Service and Value*

Other elements that customers care about are the service and value afforded by translocal restaurants. 'The servers would be the most important determinants' for the authenticity. When Jiumaojiu set up its first restaurant in 1995, the founder recruited a lot of cookers as well as servers from the Shanxi Province. When the company expanded by rolling out new subsidiaries, the present CEO, Mr. Yihong Wang, would travel to Shanxi for the recruitment of employees. The general manager stressed, 'in the beginning, nearly all of the staff members hailed from Shanxi had an accent, a temperament typical for Shanxi and, most important, were intimately familiar with its noodle culture'. Accordingly, customers originating from the Shanxi Province who visited Jiumaojiu would undergo a sense as if they were consuming restaurant dishes in their hometown.

With the vast expansion of its subsidiaries, Jiumaojiu needs more and more cookers and servers. It is not so easy for Jiumaojiu to recruit more staff from Shanxi. The chef told the first author that 'nowadays 70% of the servers and 27% of the cookers are from outside Shanxi. Most of the cookers are Shanxi aborigines, which can keep the authenticity of dishes'. However, most of the servers are Cantonese or from other provinces of China. Thanks to this mix, the company can offer more local services for different kinds of customers. The staff members who hail from Shanxi can share their indigenous knowledge with colleagues whose origins lay in China's other regions, while the old servers from Guangzhou can explain the dishes in Cantonese for natives. Jiumaojiu trains food preparation and service staff members.

All of the subsidiaries of Jiumaojiu offer the same products for similar prices. The headquarters roll out gift cards as well as rewards cards. These cards can be used in all restaurants of Jiumaojiu. All apply to policies and procedures that are standardized for all restaurants and set by the Jiumaojiu headquarters. For example, each restaurant needs to provide seats, tea, popcorn, or sunflower seeds for free when customers need to wait in line to eat. If the waiting time exceeds 10 minutes, the customers get 5% discount, which is increased to 10% in case the waiting time exceeds 20 minutes.

An important auxiliary role at the stage of presentation, which amplifies the menu or may serve as a substitute, is that of various ‘culinary brokers’ who mediate between the customers and translocal restaurants, such as the Jiumaojiu outlet in Guangzhou. They include waiters, guides, and local friends or hosts who explain the dishes on the menu and make recommendations. According to the authors’ experience, customers rarely care if the selection of dishes and their sequence corresponds to local custom, and tend to order dishes and their sequence corresponding to local custom, according to their personal preference. Translocal ways of serving and eating, if they diverge considerably from local ones, may be perceived as irritating, rather than as a marker of authenticity.

#### 6.4 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter has departed from the general tension between the standardization and authenticity faced by customers of translocal restaurants in unfamiliar restaurant situations by presenting a case of a company that copies the authentic features of its restaurants to each of its outlets. The food’s localization, environment’s reconstruction, and services’ consistency of Jiumaojiu show that in this way the two concepts can be combined to meet the need of Cantonese customers in the translocal expansion process of a restaurant rooted in Shanxi culture. Most of the customers in our interviews in Guangzhou consider Jiumaojiu to be an authentic Shanxi restaurant. This suggests that in China standardized authenticity is easily accepted by local customers of translocal restaurants such as Jiumaojiu. When a translocal restaurant develops and expands in a mode of standardization of authenticity, the level of both standardization and authenticity of the translocal restaurant is rather high. So this case company can indeed be taken as an example of one of the four important expansion modes, standardization of authenticity, in our analysis framework.

Although the restaurant set the requirements to achieve a level of authenticity, this kind of authenticity relies mainly on the perception of customers. In the consumer’s perception of authenticity, the materials and food preparation process of Jiumaojiu play important roles. The food preparation process can be characterized as staged authenticity. The company employs native cooks from Shanxi or cooks trained in Shanxi. To preserve and present authenticity in a sustainable manner, it is necessary to deliberately build Shanxi atmospherics in an ‘out-of-place’ situation. Although the servers were also very important in the beginning phase of

the Jiumaojiu restaurant group, the customers are not concerned about the authenticity of service. From the perspective of sustainable service production and consumption, standardized authenticity can be socially constructed primarily by food preparation and service process, as well as the environment and atmosphere in the translocal restaurants. In this way, translocal cuisines become, like localized cuisines, a representation of the mediocre and the common; that which is easy to market and easy to understand by the customers. Then the concept of translocal restaurant is a negotiated reality based on the needs of the stronger partner(s); in this case the company.

Obviously the company goes to some length to maintain what it can of the cuisine, such as importing ‘cookers’ to maintain the cooking style and palate, servers who can communicate the menu and style to the customers, and the design of the restaurant mirrors the ambience of a traditional restaurant, thereby maintaining a close resemblance of its true character. The foreground of the ‘experience’ gives a good feeling of authenticity but the modifications made in the cuisine itself are questionable as to whether authenticity has been maintained. It is a form of ‘quality fade’ which is being applied to the cuisine as it, little by little, becomes a more commercialized product encompassed by a fantasy world projected by the restaurant staff and ambience. But do commercial reality and ease of productivity really provide a correct (real) representation of that which sets the cuisine apart from others? The standardized authenticity is surely a form of ‘McDonaldization’, although it brings the cuisine to the mind of the guest, in a way they understand and can afford. Adaptation of cuisines to suit business concepts alters the reality and authenticity as key features are subjugated, deleted, or altered to match the business model. Subjugating a cuisine’s reality does not preserve it; it creates something else from it which vaguely represents the parent.

Profiting from standardization, Jiumaojiu is a modern production enterprise with standardized ingredients, equipment, processes, procedures, and management. Its standardization processes in particular follow three specific pathways of development. First, the food preparation processes are standardized. Although the ingredients are the same in each restaurant, different processing procedures of chefs will result in different senses of taste. So, food preparation of Chinese catering excessively depends on the chefs’ craftsmanship. Therefore, a new subsidiary of a restaurant chain is often unpopular to the customers. Eventually, the development progress of Chinese restaurants’ standardization is obstructed. One of the important characteristics of Jiumaojiu’s food preparation is its



staged process. All of the chefs are trained and examined to ensure that their competencies comply with the standards set for their crafts. The compliance to set standards is necessary to raise the likelihood that customers will enjoy a foodservice experience according to an established quality level. A second standardization area is that every restaurant is guided from outside image to inside decoration by its headquarters from beginning to end, to make sure that the service package is maintained. These measures aim to establish and maintain the standardized environment and atmosphere of Jiumaojiu. Lastly, Jiumaojiu set up a lot of policies and procedures to establish its service standards and service pattern. All of these standardization processes of activities are utilized to articulate and repeat the authenticity in relation to translocal restaurants. Jiumaojiu intensively makes efforts to control and support the chain stores.

There are some differences in authenticity perceptions between customers and producers. First, prospective customers are likely to judge the authenticity of the food on display by the ‘moment of truth’. The menu can guide the customers through the fare on offer. However, the producer stresses the production process. Second, the customers need authenticity but sometimes cannot distinguish between the authentic and the inauthentic. At the same time, the producer understands the authenticity well but cannot offer totally authentic products and services because of the acceptability of customers, cost, transportation, and preservation. Third, although the producer focuses on the authenticity as the customers want, he or she needs to consider the purchasing and producing cost carefully. Therefore, the standardized authenticity model becomes the strategic choice of the translocal restaurants. As a result, customers are actually seeking a type of authenticity that combines a preoccupied imagery of ‘otherness’ (which is basically object-related and largely informed by mass media, literature and guidebooks, and so on) with an inherent pursuit of a sense of home (which is the cultural baggage every visitor takes along). Such a combination creates customized authenticity (Wang 2007), but then the concept is being copied and evolves in standardized authenticity.

Globalization and mobility can be the impetus to reconstruct or reinvent local gastronomic traditions and particularities (Mak et al. 2012). And our case confirms that this applies to translocality within one country as well. Research on the cross-cultural differential impact on local and translocal communities in the standardized authenticity context can reveal knowledge which ingredients to source, in our case, in the Guangzhou region and which in Shanxi, thereby a first step can be set to bridge the tourism development gap which might contribute toward global sustain-

ability (Go et al. 2003). The authenticity of translocal restaurants is perceived and judged by the contextual characteristics of other regions. The translocal restaurants keep standardization through either management practices or training. The results of the case study confirm the assumed relatedness of the two dimensions, authenticity, and standardization, with the expansion strategies of translocal restaurants in China. The study results exemplify how authenticity and standardization can be examined in a managerially relevant manner in translocal restaurants, and how important these two dimensions are for understanding the success of translocal restaurants. With the strategy ‘standardization of authenticity’, the translocal restaurant group cannot only keep the authenticity of translocal restaurants and in this way attract many customers, but also profit from economies of scale from standardization.

Although many regional cuisines are recognized as typical of a destination’s authenticity, it is the association with the context that assists in confirming authenticity and it is the way it is consumed in that context that creates a unique experience. These are special factors which cannot be replicated in different environments successfully. However, the standardized authenticity can bring the perception of authenticity for the translocal customers. The translocal restaurants are representations of the cuisine the company maintains but are often far from truly representing the cuisine as it is practiced at home.

This study leverages the notion of translocality in discussing the issue of the ‘authenticity – standardization paradox’ against the backdrop of an increasingly mobile Chinese society. Our cases company, Shanxi Jiumaojiu has been examined from the perspectives of both the producer and the customer. The case shows how Cantonese consumers understand their restaurant suppliers (Shanxi cultures). So the consumer’s perception of authenticity is decisive, it even allowed the case company to also offer Cantonese dishes. This finding provides managers with the opportunity to play with the combination of authenticity and standardization for a successful expansion strategy.

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# Case Study of Authentic Hunan Cuisine in Guangzhou

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides another case of the combination of authenticity and standardization and delves deeper in its relation to translocality. Translocal restaurants typically exhibit some necessary authentic characteristics to their customers. The use of standardization may make the prices affordable. While an authentic food culture concept is replicated in translocality, it may be unclear what characteristics should be captured to vouch for their authenticity. Finally, it is important to note that in the literature on authenticity, studies from cultural and philosophical perspectives prevail. There is a dearth of business studies which present both the producer's and customer's perspectives on authenticity.

Therefore, two questions emerge. First, how can translocal restaurants provide authentic food for their local customers when they leave their original cultural environment and place? Second, what attributes should be included in the authenticity reproduction of translocal restaurants? That is to say, what attributes are considered essential for preserving the authenticity of a translocal cuisine? In this chapter, we will consider the authenticity concept as a potential reference for designing and implementing new food service concepts. In doing so, we will focus on the translocal restaurant phenomenon and its characteristics and attributes. Again we take a Chinese case.

Restaurateurs face steep investment costs and operational costs and therefore need knowledge which affords them a mechanism for planning

operational change. That includes the selection of authentic attributes, for which translocal networks of supporters are needed to convert the organization toward a translocal approach, aimed at increasing revenues and reducing expenses. Accordingly, they must find ways to bridge the tension between authenticity features, which emphasize ‘value-in-use’ and translocality. This chapter focuses, first, on this paradox in the context of China’s translocalization; second, how to manage the preservation and presentation of translocal restaurants, by focusing on the salient characteristics of the authenticity of translocal cuisine; and third, to examine the validity of the authenticity of a company case.

This chapter is organized as follows. It describes first the methodology. Subsequently the case study examines whether and to which extent the case company provides empirical evidence of preserving and presenting the authenticity of translocal cuisine. The chapter concludes with a discussion, conclusions, and managerial implications.

## 7.2 DATA COLLECTION

### 7.2.1 *Case Company*

The Dongting Hunan Restaurant, originating from Hunan Province and operating in Canton, is taken as a case to study the authenticity from the perspectives of the producer as well as the customer. Hunan is situated in Central-South China (see Fig. 7.1). It is important to the People’s Republic of China for its agriculture and industry. The most important crop is rice. Hunan is among the most densely populated areas of China. Both Hunan and Cantonese cuisines belong to the eight famous Chinese regional cuisines. Hunan cuisine is famous for its hot pepper, cured meat, Chinese sauerkraut, and so on. Hunan cuisine includes more than 800 different dishes. Because Hunan is an interior province, its cuisine has been influenced by foreign diets relatively less than, for instance, Cantonese cuisine. Cantonese cuisine (in Guangzhou) is famous for its cooking style of sea foods. However, the raw materials of Cantonese cuisine are much more diversified including all kinds of food stuff from around the world. For example, the Cantonese cuisine accounts for more than 5000 kinds of species. During the past 30 years the combined impact of both the open door policy and altered customers’ tastes has caused the Cantonese cuisine to change gradually.

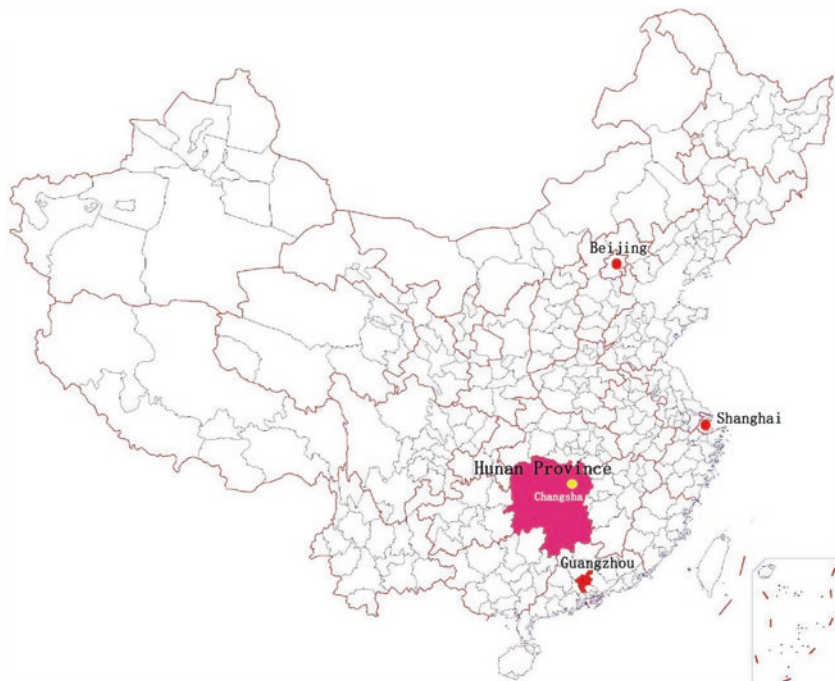


Fig. 7.1 Location of Hunan and Guangzhou in China. (Source: First author)

### 7.2.2 *Investigation Process*

The desk research has been conducted for more than two months in order to create a strong foundation for the field investigation, and included some phone calls to the company management to prepare for the field research. Based on earlier research (Millenaar et al. 2010), the interview outline was designed to understand the producers' viewpoint concerning the authenticity of a translocal restaurant. Several questions have been included in the interview outline. First, what are the most important characteristics of Hunan cuisine (please give three examples)? Second, what foods can represent the authenticity of Hunan cuisine, and what foods can be regarded as the typical dishes of Hunan Cuisine for Cantonese? Third, is eating authentic Hunan food important to you? If so, how can you tell if this Hunan restaurant is more authentic than another? Fourth, some

dishes are being presented as Hunanese, but actually do not exist in the Hunan Province. What is your opinion about these dishes? Similar questions were designed to understand the judgment of customers. During the whole interview process, the respondents were asked to give as many examples as possible.

The past experience of the first author plays an important role in the case selection and investigation communication. He comes from Hunan and is very familiar with the Hunan Cuisine. At the same time, he has lived in Guangzhou for more than 12 years and understands the dietary habit of Cantonese and restaurant distribution very well. The interviews have been conducted from September 1 to December 25 in 2012. During this period, the author and three research assistants observed, investigated, sampled/tested the Hunan Cuisine (ate out), and took photos in the Dongting Hunan Restaurant. After that, a supplementary investigation was performed to obtain additional and detailed information from the managers on January 28, 2013.

### 7.3 THE DONGTING HUNAN RESTAURANT CASE

Our case study combines both a supplier perspective and a customer perspective. First, the policies, procedures, and measurements of the Dongting Hunan Restaurant's managers are illuminated, so as to explain how the translocal restaurants shape authenticity. Second, the perception of authentic elements by the customers is studied. As mentioned earlier, the concept of authenticity was assessed by examining three criteria in particular: dishes, environment and atmosphere, and service and value. Thirty-three customers as well as six managers have been interviewed during the study process. Among the 33 customer respondents, 16 customers originated from Hunan. Either their (grand) parents or they moved and settled themselves in Guangzhou. Four other respondents we interviewed were visitors from Hunan. The other 13 respondents all hailed from outside Hunan, seven Cantonese and six from regions other than Hunan and Guangdong.

#### 7.3.1 *Producer's Perspective*

For the first question 'What are the most important characteristics of Hunan cuisine?', the general manager of the restaurant group, a 45-year-old man from Yueyang City in the Hunan Province, emphasizes three

characteristics: first, the comparatively lower cost of raw materials in comparison to Cantonese food; second, the proximity of local, fresh food material and various season-specific ingredients such as chili and purple perilla; and third, the cooking process, in particular, the duration and degree of heating. The chef of the subsidiary explained that the foods of Hunan cuisine often are bright in color and smell delicious. However, he also conveyed that they are more likely to turn out fattish and unhealthy if the cooking process is not properly controlled.

The second question is ‘What foods can represent the authenticity of Hunan cuisine?’ ‘It depends on the observers and perspectives,’ the general manager of this restaurant group tells. ‘For this restaurant group, we believe that the most representative foods are Braise in Soy Sauce Meat, Sautéed Preserved Pork with Dried Tofu Slices and Hunan Flowering Cabbage in Garlic (Fig. 7.2).’ First, the Braise in Soy Sauce Meat is the most typical food of Hunan cuisine because it is daily food of common people in Hunan. It has become famous due to Chairman Mao, the founder of the People’s Republic of China, who came from Hunan Province. He liked this dish. It has also been named Mao’s Braise in Soy Sauce Meat. Second, both Sautéed Preserved Pork and Dried Tofu Slices can exhibit the special cooking process of Hunan cuisine, not to mention the Sautéed Preserved Pork with Dried Tofu Slices which put the most special cooking process together. Although the Cantonese customers do not always appreciate this dish, they typically enjoy the cooking process and the way in which it is presented. Third, because the customers, both Cantonese and those from Hunan who presently reside in Guangzhou share the concern about the nutritional value and authenticity of food ingredients, these customers consider the Hunan Flowering Cabbage in Garlic to be the most distinctive, authentic dish in Hunan cuisine. From



**Fig. 7.2** Three typical dishes of Hunan cuisine from the producers’ perspective. (Source: First author)



the producers' perspective, the culture underpinning the food creates the emotional appeal, which in turn shapes the customers' experience.

When the researchers pose the question: 'Do you think the Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers is a typical Hunan food?', the general manager responds in a surprising way. He says that the ordinary people in Hunan do not eat fish head in this way. The Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers has been created in Guangdong, but almost all people in Canton believe Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers originates from Hunan. We enquire how this stereotype has been shaped in Cantonese society. The general manager explains that this stereotype may be anchored in features that can become readily familiar such as 'convenient to cook' while its very beautiful cooking style resembles an exotic quality.

To the third question 'Is the authentic Hunan food important to the customers?', the general manager gives a very affirmative answer.

Why not? They come here for Hunan cuisine, not for Cantonese cuisine. The customers from Hunan know what the authentic foods in our restaurant consist of. And the customers from Canton regularly order some classic Hunan food in their imagination, such as Sautéed Preserved Pork with Dried Tofu Slices and Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers. However, the customers from Canton cannot know what exactly constitutes real Hunan cuisine. They got the knowledge of Hunan cuisine from the newspaper, TV program and reputation spread.

However, the chef of this restaurant opposes the viewpoint that the customers do not mind what the authenticity is, and that they only care about the taste, atmosphere, and service. Customers expect to experience Hunan cuisine. Therefore, the restaurant should create a Hunan restaurant's atmosphere.

The fourth question to the producers is 'Some dishes are being presented as Hunanese, but actually do not exist in the Hunan Province. What is your opinion about these dishes?' The chef explains. 'In fact, many dishes in our restaurant are newly developed in response to the preferences of our customers, especially for Cantonese. As you know, Cantonese cuisine and Hunan cuisine have totally different season-specific ingredients, food materials, and cooking processes. For example, people in Hunan seldom cook seafood, while Cantonese customers desire seafood. Therefore, almost all Hunan restaurants in Canton prepare seafood for their customers using Hunan culinary techniques (Fig. 7.3).'



**Fig. 7.3** Three created dishes of Hunan Cuisine in Canton. (Source: First author)

### 7.3.2 *Consumers' Perspective*

As to the first question ‘What are the most important characteristics of Hunan cuisine?’, all 33 consumers interviewed emphasize the spiciness characteristic. In fact, ‘peppery’ is the most important trait of Hunan cuisine, which is recognized by all respondents. The characteristics mentioned most frequently are spicy, oily, salty, bright in color, and savory. However, there is some difference between the respondents from Hunan and those from outside of Hunan. For example, all of the Cantonese customers believe that saltiness is an important characteristic whereas none of the respondents from Hunan shares this viewpoint.

For the second question ‘What foods can represent the authenticity of Hunan cuisine?’, the Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers is mentioned most frequently. Among the respondents from Hunan, in response to the typical dishes of Hunan Cuisine, 26 choose the Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers, 20 emphasize the Shredded Pork with Vegetables, and 13 mention the Sautéed Preserved Pork with Dried Tofu Slices. The respondents who originated from outside Hunan revealed similar results. In particular, 30 choose the Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers, 15 emphasize the Shredded Pork with Vegetables, and about 15 mentioned the Sautéed Preserved Pork with Dried Tofu Slices. There is no significant difference between the respondents from Hunan and those outside of Hunan in choosing the typical dishes of Hunan Cuisine. However, it should be pointed out that some Cantonese customers think the Shredded cabbage and Braised Pork, Mao’s Family Style, are typical dishes of Hunan Cuisine, but none of the respondents from Hunan mention these two dishes.

Third, in response to the question, ‘Is eating authentic Hunan food important to you, and how can you tell if a Hunan restaurant is authentic?’,

several people gave affirmative answers. 'Authentic food is better prepared than fast food,' one local customer in the Dongting Hunan Restaurant declares. However, this man admits that he does not know how to differentiate authentic food of Hunan cuisine because 'I am neither born in Hunan, nor have any life experience in Hunan'. And he claims, 'I just think it tastes better.' A college student from Jiangsu Province said, 'I prefer more authentic foods. The more authentic foods are characterized by greater freshness and diversity of the items.' A Hunan customer, who has been living in Guangzhou for more than 20 years, claims that 'authenticity is good taste with hot pepper and original food materials from Hunan'. Yet another customer, who came from Hunan just three months ago, asserts that he had not eaten in any restaurants in Guangzhou that could produce authentic Hunan cuisine, although he had visited more than ten so-called Hunan restaurants in last three months. Among the respondents from Hunan, about 60% declared that the authenticity of Hunan food is very important; and they point out that the Dongting Hunan Restaurant is more authentic than other restaurants, for it serves food that is as spicy as the fare served in Hunan. However, among the respondents outside of Hunan, about 70% think eating authentic Hunan food is not important to them; the most important aspect is to cater to local customers' tastes.

Underlying the desire for authenticity is the belief that authenticity is not easily accessible, which perhaps increases its desirability. Perceived authentic Hunan food is per definition not standard fare and therefore considered by many to fit the realm of the foreign and exotic. Authenticity is a desirable quality simply because it is not familiar or common, which in effect raises its value or cultural capital. In this way, for the customers in Dongting Hunan Restaurant, Hunan cuisine maintains authenticity through exoticism, and authenticity becomes a commodity.

Most humans use a consistent culture-specific set of flavor combinations for their food; although these components of the Hunan cuisine make up a very small percentage of the total food intake, their distinctive flavor and repeated use endow them with a major role in the identification of any 'dish' as being a typical production of a particular cuisine. For customers from Hunan, authenticity may represent a sort of nostalgia for cultural heritage, the roots of their province, and their interpretation of the past. In the context of Canton, the Hunan food culture becomes symbolically marked and categorized, which implies that it does not meet the original standards that are offered in the province of Hunan.

Our proposition, prior to conducting the interviews, was that most customers would express interest in the authenticity of the Hunan food.

However, much to our surprise, over half of the interviewees stated that authenticity did not matter. Several stated that it was not authenticity that mattered to them, but whether the food they consumed tasted good. 'I do not worry so much about food being authentic, as long as it tastes good for me,' says a Cantonese female. 'Taste is more important than authenticity, though I would assume that authentic food tastes better,' an elder male customer from Hunan agrees. 'I would like to think that what I am eating is authentic, but if I found out it wasn't, I would still eat it,' declares one Cantonese male despite his admission that he has no way of judging authenticity. For these respondents, authenticity is seemingly of little concern when eating Hunan food.

As to the last question 'Some dishes are being presented as Hunanese, but actually do not exist in the Hunan Province. What is your opinion about these dishes?', only a few considered this an issue. In fact, most of the respondents don't pay attention to this issue. Most of the Cantonese respondents did not express any concern. They did not know whether the authentic dishes they eat are commonly perceived as popular by the residents in Hunan Province. For example, some Cantonese customers point out that the Shredded cabbage is the typical Hunan Cuisine; however, the Shredded cabbage is not popular in Hunan Province. Among the 33 respondents, the answers of 16 immigrants appear more suitable. They mention that the Taste shrimp, Braised Pork, Mao's Family Style, Spicy chicken, Beef with cumin, Braised pork, and some dishes in Iron Wok which are unpopular in Hunan, are welcomed by Cantonese customers. And more specifically, some of them point out the Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers, which is regarded as the most typical Hunan Cuisine, is rarely offered by the local Hunan restaurants, though it is quite popular for Cantonese customers. Although most of the respondents from Hunan or outside of Hunan haven't paid attention to this problem, they actually have a strong sense that the dishes created in Canton are not as spicy as the ones in Hunan; some of them are even aware that there is an obvious trend that the Hunan Cuisine is meeting the tastes of Cantonese. For example, 'The Hunan Cuisine flavor is gradually combined with Cantonese Cuisine,' one local customer declares.

#### 7.4 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In our case, the producers and the customers have distinct viewpoints with regard to what constitutes authentic Hunan cuisine. While restaurateurs emphasize the material authenticity and its impact on purchasing cost, the

consumers express more concern about the food taste and the service process. In contrast, the chef and Cantonese respondents opine that symbolic authenticity derives from catering to local customers' tastes. The producer's perspective indicates that authenticity is anchored in both the culture behind the food, and the customers' experience. The study's findings reveal that the overlap of the forces of mobility, migration, and production results in a synthesis, and their convergence results in substantial innovative translocal dish creations. In this way, the ongoing process of cultural integration becomes manifest in translocal food production.

Remarkably, many interviewees expressed that authenticity does not matter. However, between the lines of their responses, it was clear that authenticity still figured in their consciousness and influenced their preference for this restaurant. In the previous statements, authenticity was in the realm of the less accessible, located on the menu that referred to neither the 'common foods' nor the exotic fare.

They have little, if any, idea of what authentic Hunan food might mean; nor would they display any care whether Hunan food is categorized as specifically Hunan or generically as food. Perhaps for respondents, 'Hunan cuisine' is just another category of food like breakfast cereal, soup, dairy product, or dessert, devoid of locality. However, for them the notion of authenticity still carries some weight in the process of determining the quality of food. Might this be understood as an indication that authenticity after all matters even among those who express their nonchalance on the subject?

In summary, defining what constitutes Hunan food and its boundaries of authenticity in the perception of customers is a complicated task. In part, because the forces of mobility and translocal migration challenge the traditions of Hunan cuisine. Moreover, transport and media technologies make ever greater inroads in the lives of Chinese consumers. The customers must adapt to new influences and are influenced by relationships with others whose cultural backgrounds and life world may differ markedly. Markets too are becoming more global in nature, affecting the tastes of customers in Guangzhou, who, in turn, may redefine what constitutes Hunan cuisine. Thus, the authenticity of Hunan cuisine may be compromised even before it makes its way to the Hunan restaurants in Guangzhou. To ascribe the authenticity of Hunan food would be to deny its freedom to redefine itself in relation to changing circumstances. Though restaurants may adapt the expression of their food to suit different customers' preferences, such adjustments may not make their product less authentic,

instead, position it as a temporal incarnation on the continuum of Hunan cuisine as it develops across time.

For two decades, social scientists have noted that authentic and inauthentic are terms ‘inappropriate when applied to social phenomena, which never exist apart from our interpretations of them’ (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 288). The issue of authenticity should be examined ‘beyond such limiting binaries as authentic-inauthentic, true-false, real-show, back-front’ (Bruner 2005: 5; Wang 2007), especially in the context of translocality. Along these lines, this case questions not only the authenticity of the food culture but also in some ways the concept of authenticity itself. While this study demonstrates how the authenticity of translocal restaurants was socially constructed in the translocal space, it also suggests that the powerful mythology of authenticity will endure, particularly in translocal restaurants. Wang (2007) suggests that customers not only demand an exotic place that provides difference, uniqueness, or artistic enjoyment, but also, maybe more significantly, hope to find comfort, privacy, home-likeness, familiarity, ‘true self’, or even sometimes self-reversals or inversions. As a result, customers are actually seeking a type of authenticity that combines, first, a preoccupied imagery of ‘otherness’, and second, an inherent pursuit of a sense of home. Such a combination creates customized authenticity (Wang 2007), and this concept can be copied and evolves in symbolic authenticity. Our customers do not use Wang’s terms, but it is clear that they really seek authenticity, though many of them also say it does not matter to them—this is another paradox within the consumer group.

Our case shows that translocality can be the impetus to reconstruct or reinvent local gastronomic traditions and particularities (Mak et al. 2012). Entrepreneurs use their creativity to transform the traditional culture (Robinson and Clifford 2012). Research on the cross-cultural differential impact on local and translocal communities in the symbolic authenticity context can reveal the knowledge which ingredients to source, in our case, in the Guangzhou region and which in Hunan, thereby a first step can be set to bridge the tourism development gap which might contribute toward global sustainability (Go et al. 2003). The authenticity of translocal restaurants is perceived and judged by the contextual characteristics of other regions.

This exploratory study leverages the notion of the translocality in discussing the issue of symbolic authenticity against the backdrop of an increasingly mobile Chinese society. And the argument of symbolic authenticity confirms the viewpoint of DeSoucey (2010) who challenged

the ideas of the homogenizing forces of globalism. The case of translocal Dongting Hunan Restaurant has been examined from the perspectives of both the producer and the customer. This case shows how consumers in Canton understand their restaurant. So the consumer perception is decisive to authenticity, it even allowed the case company to also offer Cantonese dishes and to modify Hunanese dishes or even invent new ones. This conclusion provides suggestions that can be applied in the translocal restaurant practice context to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

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## Conclusion and Discussion

### 8.1 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSIONS

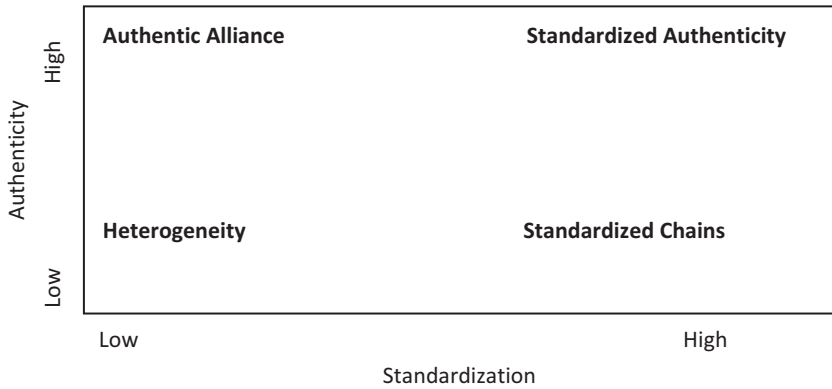
#### *8.1.1 Authenticity and Standardization*

A theoretical model has been constructed to analyze the relationship between standardization and authenticity. Then the expansion strategies of restaurant groups can be classified into four extremes: hardly any authenticity and standardization (Heterogeneity), a low level of authenticity and a high amount of standardization (Standardized Chain), a high level of authenticity with little standardization (Authentic Alliance), and a high level of both authenticity and standardization (Standardized Authenticity), see Fig. 8.1. Initially, one case was studied per category and then two other cases of the most challenging combination, standardized authenticity, were investigated.

The case studies show that each combination of authenticity and standardization can lead to expansion of restaurant chains locally and translocally, so there is not necessarily one ‘best’ combination. The results exemplify how authenticity and standardization can be examined in a managerially relevant manner in restaurant groups, and how important these two dimensions are for understanding the success of restaurant groups.

How can authenticity and standardization be combined? First, restaurant groups that apply a ‘Heterogeneity’ mode neither maintain an authenticity





**Fig. 8.1** Strategic position of the case companies

strategy nor pursue standardization. Each restaurant in such a chain is different without a common concept. Second, restaurant groups with the strategy of standardized chains have standardized their activities to a large extent and abstain from using the concept of authenticity, so they are consistent in what they offer in each restaurant and in how they offer this. Third, some restaurant groups are considered as authentic alliance by emphasizing the authenticity of food and service in their expansion process, however, not focusing on standardization among different subsidiaries. And fourth, some subsidiaries of restaurant groups with the strategy of standardized authenticity (standardization of authenticity) retain both a high degree of standardization and authenticity. Standardized authenticity examines the service characteristics of shared features, requirements, and certification criteria of restaurant groups, no matter they are translocal or not. In this kind of strategy, the headquarters of the restaurant group should keep authenticity of core elements and characteristics, while allowing the subsidiary to deal with other elements or characteristics. However, each of the combinations can be an expansion strategy. In-between options are possible as well. But we did not investigate such cases.

Literature distinguishes different kinds of authenticity and our study puts some of these in a new perspective. The concept of objective authenticity, what MacCannell (1989) calls the backstage, or genuine authenticity, is taken into consideration when we discuss the extremes in the strategic framework. This concept is to a large degree consistent with Wang's

(1999) objective form of authenticity, which refers to an object's origin. In our case in Chap. 7, customers from the local resident category can distinguish the differences between the authentic and the inauthentic (Grayson and Martinec 2004) very well. Therefore, objective authenticity can be utilized for this category of customers. The concept of standardized authenticity, keeping necessary authentic characteristics for the customers, is given when we discuss the authenticity in restaurant groups from the producer's perspective. This means that an authentic service concept is replicated to create a chain of similar authentic restaurants. The third kind of authenticity in this book is symbolic authenticity by which the producers introduce signs or symbols expected to be perceived by the consumers as authentic, and making them perceive the entire service offer as authentic. Although the standardized authenticity and symbolic authenticity are considered from the perspective of producers, to some extent, they are related to the experience of the consumers and largely coincide with what Wang (1999) calls existential authenticity, that is, the experience reflecting the self. It turns out that not only the perspectives of producers and consumers differ but that in a translocal context different consumer groups should be distinguished: local residents, (im)migrants (in our case: from other provinces), and tourists. We did not have foreign tourists in our sample, all were national, but interestingly also some people visited the restaurant originating from another province, either from the province connected to the restaurant image or from another province. Apparently, also during holidays, there may be a desire to experience something from home. This may be an existential longing or simply the need of their stomach to get the food it is accustomed to. Anyhow, this category is probably able to assess authenticity and may prefer objective authenticity.

Neither standardization nor authenticity is decisive for the success of the restaurant groups or translocal restaurants. A large variety of restaurants, which provide authentic, standardized, or heterogeneous products and services for their customers, can succeed in market exposure and scale expansion. Different kinds of restaurants have totally different core competencies leading to different consumer targets and strategies. Restaurant groups with the strategy of heterogeneity can understand the market demand and customer orientation accurately per subsidiary without being 'hindered' by any requirement from the headquarters of the group. This strategy gives maximal freedom to the leadership of each subsidiary which as such can be an incentive to perform. The core competencies of restaurant groups with the strategy of 'standardized chains' originate from their

ability to copy the restaurant concept, and then to profit from economies of scale by maintaining standardization. In this way, the subsidiaries of a restaurant group get a similar image and consistent corporate reputation. The core competencies of restaurant groups with the strategy ‘authentic alliance’ frequently come from the preservation of subsidiary authenticity. In this kind of strategy, each subsidiary would keep the authenticity well, which enhances consumers’ purchasing and repurchasing intentions. The core competencies of restaurant groups with the strategy ‘standardization of authenticity’ are to standardize and then copy the core processes, which allows to have consistent quality and provides economies of scale related to for instance cheaper purchasing and more flexible staff allocation. Moreover, by copying also the service concept, a common image is being created and economies of scale in marketing can be achieved. This guarantees that each subsidiary maintains the authenticity characteristics while profiting from economies of scale thanks to standardization.

We found that there are some differences of the authenticity preferences between customers and the producers. First, prospective customers are likely to judge the authenticity of the food on display by the ‘moment of truth’. The menu can guide the customers through the fare on offer. However, the producers stress the production process. Second, the customers need authenticity but sometimes cannot distinguish between the authentic and the inauthentic. At the same time, the producer understands the authenticity well but cannot offer totally authentic products and services because of the acceptability of customers, cost, transportation, and preservation. Third, although the producers focus on the authenticity as the customers want it, they need to consider the purchasing and producing cost carefully. The strategy of standardized authenticity provides the opportunity to meet these different needs simultaneously. The company has the choice of whether or not to give its restaurants an authentic profile. Anyhow, consumers appreciate authenticity either because they have knowledge about the local situation or because they value the opportunity to experience an ‘exotic’ situation.

### *8.1.2 Authenticity as a Dynamic Concept Under Different Consumption Contexts*

Our case studies reveal that authenticity is a dynamic concept under different consumption contexts: local business, expansion of groups, and translocal expansion (see Fig. 8.2). It is offered by producers but it evolves

because of the interaction with consumers. In that sense, it is constructed both by producers and consumers and the producers' dynamic responses under the different consumption contexts. First, when a restaurant business seeks to draw local consumers, creating and maintaining an objective authenticity strategy makes sense. A local business that targets local people, like the Guangzhou restaurant, may be very popular among local citizens for the reason that it transmits local culture and meets the demands of local consumers' pursue of objective authenticity in food, environment, atmosphere, and service. In such a company, it is extremely significant to keep objective authenticity operating for local customers. Also, tourists may appreciate this but they probably lack the knowledge to assess if it is really authentic.

A single restaurant may profit from standardization to offer its products and services in a consistent way at a certain level of quality. The more new restaurants are opened, the more it can profit from standardization via economies of scale and maybe also by means of a common image for the customers. If the restaurant is authentic, it becomes even more challenging in this growth phase to combine authenticity with standardization but our cases show that it is feasible. The degrees of standardization and authenticity in the subsidiaries of a restaurant group using the expansion model of standardized authenticity are high. The restaurant group makes every effort to standardize its dishes, the environment and atmosphere and the service, which not only creates a standardized and strong-replicability vertical integration but also keeps its unique authenticity on

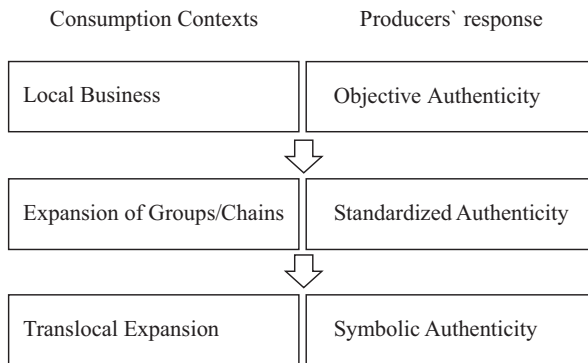


Fig. 8.2 Evolution from objective authenticity to symbolic authenticity

the basis of standardization, as in the case of the Jiumaojiu Shanxi restaurant, and also in the cases of Little Sheep and Dongting. Adopting standardized authenticity not only makes each subsidiary of the restaurant group keep authentic but also lets them obtain scale advantages and speed advantages of standardized expansion. This improves production efficiency and increases customers' brand identification and recognition enhancing the corporate reputation furthermore. This can lead to success in the group operation or even translocal operation.

Third, if the restaurant group promotes a geographical diversification strategy to extend across many places, the restaurant group needs to use symbolic authenticity. Most consumers are not able to really assess objective authenticity and thus do not pursue objective authenticity but rather symbolic authenticity constructed by the producers. Restaurant groups then can characterize authenticity primary according to the characteristics of customers' perception of authenticity. From the translocal expansion case of Hunan cuisine in Guangzhou we can learn that operators can use food, service, decor, atmosphere, and other symbols to reflect the authenticity based on customer perceived authenticity and then customers identify them and form their perception of authenticity in the restaurant's environment. Symbolic authenticity not only highlights the local food culture in the process of translocal expansion significantly, but also can provide the translocal restaurant group with sustainable competitive advantages by allowing the group to offer services consumers appreciate against acceptable cost.

### 8.1.3 *Translocality and Authenticity*

Globalization, economic restructuring, and continuing urbanization have introduced network-centric formations of spatial mobility across the planet. These developments have led to pronounced, translocal flows of trade, capital, ideas, and practices. One of the spatial mobility's consequences has been the emergence of translocal restaurants. In essence, an 'outside place' phenomenon, the translocal restaurant concept, simultaneously, gives affordance to a new type of space to connect 'in-place' local residents with unfamiliar food cultures.

In a global society the place does not change geographically but often the society does, due to the influx of migrants and outflows of traditional ethnic groups, and due to the expansion of companies in a geographical sense. The historical positioning of a cuisine at a time and place sets the

context of the development leading to the establishment of that cuisine and as such defines it through its ingredients, cooking methods, style of service, etc. Dilution of the population base, through immigration, and the loss of knowledge and skills, through emigration, can result in subjugation and dilution of the cuisine over time resulting in a population of knowledgeable people powerless to preserve authenticity. Therefore, the society that exists now at that place and time often does not mirror that of the society responsible for the development of its cuisine. Time often leaves a cuisine behind, located in a certain spot, as both the environment and society have changed; this is often seen in the changes made to certain dishes over time.

Authenticity is often linked to context (environment) and a social group (ethnic group). If neither is present, how can a restaurant then justify itself as being authentic? This requires customer demand and the ability to produce. Moreover, the price consumers are willing to pay for the service offer should be balanced against the cost for producing it, leaving a profit for the company. Standardization engages the company in a 'pick-n-mix' operation of selecting those ingredients, dishes, service factors, etc. that meet the needs of the company and are most acceptable to the potential guest thereby 'leveling' the cuisine to its basic ingredients and removing many of the most distinctive factors in an attempt to create products with wide customer appeal, ease of production and highest profit.

People from the traditional location of the cuisine may see wide differences and conclude that does not form a true representation; whereas those with little or no experience of the cuisine may not perceive any differences and accept the reference points offered as being typical and therefore authentic. For when the concept does not maintain the relationship with place ('terroir') and the meaning or practice of the society that created and maintains the cuisine, it becomes something else; more like McDonald's in nature, being both standardized and commodified.

For two decades, social scientists have noted that authentic and inauthentic are terms 'inappropriate when applied to social phenomena, which never exist apart from our interpretations of them' (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 288). The issue of authenticity should be examined 'beyond such limiting binaries as authentic-inauthentic, true-false, real-show, back-front' (Bruner 2005: 5; Wang 2007), especially in the context of translocality. Along these lines, this study aimed to question not only the authenticity of a culture/people/site, but also in some ways the concept of authenticity itself. Partly, the authenticity of translocal restaurants

turned out to be socially constructed as a paradoxical fusion of ‘the authentic’ and ‘the standardized’ at once in the translocal space. And increasingly the powerful mythology of authenticity will endure, particularly in translocal restaurants. Customers not only demand an exotic place that provides difference, uniqueness, or artistic enjoyment, but also, maybe more significantly, hope to find comfort, privacy, home-likeness, familiarity, ‘true self’, or even sometimes self-reversals or inversions (Wang 2007). However, our empirical findings do not fully confirm this. They do show that consumers appreciate authenticity, but also that many of them do not care. Or they care about some elements but do not see other elements as constituting authenticity. Here we may also refer to Zeng, Li, Liu, and Lu (2014) who found that perceived value and customers’ satisfaction were positively influenced by authenticity of environment and service, but authenticity of food had no impact, they rather were interested in the general quality of the service package. This provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to construct authenticity in a way that some objectively authentic elements are in place but others can be modified or even fully fake.

## 8.2 CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research is of relevance to authenticity and standardization research and to management practice. It provides the following theoretical and managerial contributions.

### 8.2.1 *Theoretical Contributions*

The first contribution of this study is the two-dimensional analysis framework of authenticity and standardization. This strategic framework can be used as an analysis tool for studying the expansion strategy of any restaurant group all around the world. Subsidiary strategies of restaurant groups get relatively little attention in literature (Zeng and Li 2008). Our study can be considered as an exploratory exercise in this field. In this study, a managerial standpoint is used based on the framework that combines authenticity and standardization. At the same time, from an academic perspective, an approach which seeks to reconcile the authenticity–standardization paradox challenges the conflict between the two concepts.

Although some scholars have investigated cultural food production (Oosterveer 2006; Wilhelmina et al. 2010; Mak et al. 2012), there is a lack

of theory to analyze producers and consumers' negotiation about authenticity in the process of food culture production facing different consumer groups. This book shows that consumer groups may differ in the extent and categories of authenticity they prefer. Moreover, the development of authenticity is a dynamic process. The book discusses the evolution of authenticity constructed by both producers and consumers. Our findings confirm the conclusion by Mak, Lumbers, and Eves (2012) that migration and mobility can be the impetus to reconstruct or reinvent local gastro-nomic traditions and particularities.

While this study demonstrates how the authenticity of translocal restaurants can be socially constructed as a paradoxical fusion of symbolic authenticity at once in the translocal space, it also suggests that the powerful mythology of authenticity will endure, particularly in translocal restaurants. Customers are actually seeking a type of authenticity that combines, first, a preoccupied imagery of 'otherness', and second, an inherent pursuit of a sense of home. Such a combination creates customized authenticity (Wang 2007), and this concept can be copied and evolves in symbolic authenticity. In contrast, however, we also saw quite some customers who did not really care about authenticity but just about an attractive service offer.

In this book, the concepts of standardized authenticity and symbolic authenticity are treated in an effort to explain the negotiation about authenticity between producers and consumers. The concepts of constructive authenticity (Cohen 1989; Wang 1999; Jamal and Hill 2004; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Mkono 2012), negotiated authenticity (Cohen 1988, 1989; Lau 2010; Mkono 2012), customized authenticity (Wang 2007), emergent authenticity (Cohen 1988; Robinson and Clifford 2007), replicable authenticity (Robinson and Clifford 2012), and learned authenticity (Prentice 2001) are seen as encapsulating the subjective nature of authenticity evaluations in customer experiences. This study confirms this subjectivity but shows that consumer groups that have more knowledge about the cultural heritage have more need to experience objective authenticity. In our cases, this knowledge stems from the personal background (born and educated) but it might also be learnt at a later phase in life, for instance by means of television programs or even courses, as in the case of wine (Maas and De Vries 2015). The concepts of standardized authenticity and symbolic authenticity as used in this book extend the concept of replicable authenticity by Robinson and Clifford (2012) who focused on the reproduction of festivals, which are once-only



events whereas restaurant services are permanent. Our empirical data may suggest that entrepreneurs may 'fool' customers by constructing authenticity, but once they would discover it this may have a boomerang effect probably.

Researching the authenticity–standardization paradox challenges the existing methodologies that are constrained by limiting binaries, including authentic-fake, true-false, real-show, back-front (Bruner 2005: 5; Wang 2007; Goffman 1959; MacCannell 1973) in the context of translocal food cultures and restaurants. In our analytical framework, there are more options for producers. For example, a restaurant would provide authentic food for customers on front, however, inauthentic production processes on back stage. What the restaurant should do is to give customers enough confidence that it is entirely authentic. In the case of Little Sheep, the restaurant group prepares some ingredients of its dishes in a factory. However, the Canton customers believe Little Sheep is an authentic restaurant from Inner Mongolia. In the case of the Dongting Hunan restaurant, the tastes of consumers in Guangzhou as well as in Hunan are changing, which, in turn, may redefine what constitutes Hunan cuisine. At the same time, customers rarely have knowledge of what is the authenticity because they only get the knowledge of Hunan cuisine from the newspaper, TV program and reputation spread. Thus, the authenticity of Hunan cuisine may be compromised even before it makes its way to the Hunan restaurants in Guangzhou. In the case of the Jiumaojiu Shanxi restaurant, all of the chefs are trained and examined to ensure that their competences comply with the standards set for their crafts. The compliance to set standards is necessary to raise the likelihood that customers will enjoy a food service experience according to an established quality level. However, it cannot simply be judged as authentic or fake.

Most standardization literature concerns, explicitly or implicitly, the context of Western countries and to a lesser extent the countries in other parts of the world. The latter studies often address developing countries and many if not the majority of these originate from international organizations that aim to support developing countries, such as the World Trade Organization, The World Bank and UNCTAD, and concern the use of standards in world trade and its impact on developing countries. Several studies (e.g., Holmes et al. 2006; Otsuki et al. 2000, 2001, 2006; Swinnen 1992; Wilson and Abiola 2003; Wilson and Otsuki 2004; WTO 2005) pay attention to the need for developing countries to comply with international standards, in particular in the field of food. The attention for the

implementation of these standards is limited, however. Therefore, this book makes a practical contribution by studying such implementation in China, a country in transition. The findings are expected to be relevant both for developed and for developing countries.

Although the analysis framework of authenticity versus standardization is based on the restaurant industry, it is probably possible to also apply it to hotel groups, medical tourism,<sup>1</sup> airlines, and other service corporations, and to products for which authenticity is important such as wine (Maas and De Vries 2015). In those business sectors, many customers claim they want authentic products and services while they usually also hope the producers make some change according to their consumption habit. In other words, this research is expected to be informative for other industries within or similar to the hospitality industry (Pine and Gilmore 2000).

Finally, the authenticity–standardization paradox calls for re-assessing the theory that has been used for example to measure the authentic attitude of insider residents (Zerva 2015) to a place as common sense and its assumptions as taken for granted. Recent years have seen an explosion of research and media coverage which considers the role of place in the production of cultural outsiders, that is, people who are judged to be outsiders. For example, anti-globalization protestors often target McDonald's as a symbol of global capital and as a target for exclusion from a particular place. In contrast in our research, the expansion of China's middle-class market, involving migratory behavior coupled with the Chinese penchant for food reminds them of their home region's cuisine. This mix of developments has increased the demand for translocal, authentic restaurants in China. Due to the scale, distances in terms of geography, infrastructure, and cultures, the assembly of restaurant service depends on the important building block of standardization.

### 8.2.2 *Implications*

The analytical framework to handle the authenticity–standardization paradox and, in particular, the concept of standardized authenticity are primarily relevant for management, strategy, and marketing of restaurant groups or translocal restaurants. The two-dimensional analysis framework of authenticity and standardization may serve as a tool to study and support

<sup>1</sup>Rao has written a paper in the field of Chinese traditional medical organizations based on the framework of authenticity–standardization.

the strategic decision-making process about restaurant group expansion. This could be applied to underpin decision-making in the complex context of restaurant group expansion, that is, extra subsidiaries of restaurant groups.

Second, the expansion strategies of restaurant groups are classified into four categories: heterogeneity, standardized chains, authentic alliance, and standardization of authenticity. Our cases show that large restaurant groups all apply a certain level of standardization. Apparently, a large chain of restaurants cannot be managed without standardization. However, this does not imply that restaurant chains with hardly any standardization cannot be successful. The vast majority of restaurant businesses in China apply neither standardization nor authenticity in a structured way. They share the advantage of serving the customer without being hindered by a central command and control system, and their success depends on the ability of staff to satisfy local customers.

Third, apparently, restaurants can make a decision on the authenticity–standardization paradox based on their growth stage. When the restaurant starts, it is unnecessary to keep authenticity if the consumer market does not pursue it. However, it is fruitful for a restaurant group to keep some kind of authenticity if it grows up. If it expands locally as a big group/chain, the best way is to keep some kind of standardized authenticity. If expanding translocally, the restaurant can take the concept of symbolic authenticity so to keep the necessary characteristics for their special market.

Fourth, authenticity and standardization are strategic determinants of restaurant groups. Both dimensions relate to the corporate image and reputation from the consumers' perspective. From the consumer standpoint, clarity about authenticity and standardization contributes to a better understanding of restaurant groups.

Fifth, authenticity may be related to a high quality aimed at a great customer experience. The companies may include all elements distinguished by ISO/IEC (2006) in the standard because these all can be used to improve service quality with the aim of enhancing customer satisfaction. Kim and Jang (2016) found this applies in particular to marketing communications: highlighting authenticity in advertisements is effective in delivering authentic experiences.

Sixth, managers in hospitality or other service industries can learn from the experiences of our companies to deal with the authenticity–standardization paradox. Other companies for which the concepts of authenticity and standardization are relevant could also learn from our findings how to

organize and manage the authenticity–standardization paradox in their organizations.

### 8.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this research contributes to the understanding of expansion strategies of restaurant groups, it is important to point out that this study is exploratory in nature. Several limitations remain which may need consideration when interpreting the findings. And these probably indicate future improvements and directions for research.

A first limitation relates to the number of cases. Replication studies are needed to test findings (Dul and Hak 2008). Future research should include a greater diversity of restaurant groups in order to increase external validity of findings. Chang, Kivela, and Mak (2010) elucidate the influence of Chinese food culture on participants' dining behavior and find that there are disparities in dining behavioral patterns between the participants in terms of their dining. Therefore, future research should include a greater diversity of translocal restaurants around and outside China in order to increase the external validity of findings. Moreover, the empirical evidence in this book is limited to the restaurant industry. Future research can analyze the translocal phenomenon in the broader context of the fascinating dialectics between authenticity and standardization. A next step could be to use survey research among a larger number of restaurant chains and a larger number of consumers. Millenaar et al. (2010) use an online community of consumers for the latter. Thus, more systematic and comprehensive sampling would contribute to higher reliability and validity of the examination.

Second, de Vries and Go (2017) show that more elements of restaurant authenticity may apply than those used in this study, and these may also be candidates for standardization. These can be included in future research.

Third, their study is not about expansion of one company but about an alliance of different companies that share a common profile of authenticity and the common standard provides performance criteria for quality rather than prescribing solutions that can be replicated. Actually, the distinction between solution-describing standards and performance standards is not made in this book, and can be a topic for further research. It creates an opportunity for an additional expansion strategy: not by replicating the same concept at other locations but by diversifying restaurants while maintaining common performance standards.

Fourth, both authenticity and standardization are strategic determinants of translocal restaurants groups that influence the corporate image (reputation) from a supply-side perspective. From a demand-side perspective, these dimensions relate to the corporate image (reputation) perceived by consumers. These two perspectives should be followed in future research. First, from a supplier perspective, research should focus on what aspects of objective authenticity in translocal restaurant chains can be replicated. Second, from a demand perspective, the tourist-as-a-consumer standpoint, a discussion of the similarities between authenticity and satisfaction in the context of consumer customization will make a contribution to the restaurant's authenticity. The pragmatic, experiential, and above all, a consumer-based approach that is currently neglected in the study of restaurants should be given more attention.

Fifth, this book proposed four expansion strategies of restaurant groups based on the framework of authenticity and standardization. Our findings suggest that restaurant groups with anyone of the four strategies can succeed if the parent and subsidiary companies can coordinate well. However, the financial performance of these four expansion strategies has not been examined in this present study. This is probably the most important concern of restaurants' managers. Therefore, the financial performance of the four kinds of restaurant groups should be studied in further research.

Sixth, this book considers the socio-cultural influences on restaurants by presenting scientific research and evidence of characteristics at the national scale that drive differences in consumer behavior. Cultural differences in translocality form a dilemma for tourism research: mobility not only enables the increase of economic means, but also confronts people with 'personal' losses, including alleged displacement alienation (Johnston and Longhurst 2012) and disenchantment (Hanegraaff 2003). As a result of these perceived 'losses', people may seek authenticity in, for example, authentic places, and in this case 'niche' hospitality experiences such as translocal restaurants. Though our cases provide little evidence of such a quest for authenticity, this may be different in other cases. Then, examining the authenticity–standardization paradox applied in the context of the restaurant sector through additional critical studies would probably allow to not only identify an important deficiency of conventional analytics that researchers apply, but also offer a model which transcends earlier approaches in tourism and hospitality research, for example, rural–urban (McGranahan and Wo 2007) and center–periphery (Breinlich 2006) dichotomies.

Seventh, the strategy decisions related to the authenticity–standardization paradox depend on the growth stage of the restaurant groups. For

example, McDonalds' had a standardization strategy around the world and changed its strategy to glocalization by offering some special recipes for different regions. In our case, the Aqiang's Fish restaurant has changed its strategy from heterogeneity to standardized authenticity. However, we have not done historical case research. In the future, historical or longitudinal studies can be utilized to investigate the relationship of the strategies, authenticity categories and growth stages.

Eighth, advancing our understanding of the patterns in the management of restaurant group, service improvement and market positioning and their impact on restaurant group performance represents a priority theme for future research. Restaurant group managers depend on an array of tools to gauge successful performance. It can, therefore, be argued that measurements should not be limited to financial performance but that a balanced set of measures is needed. It remains to be seen whether or not the Balanced Scorecard Approach developed by Kaplan and Norton (1996) might provide an appropriate research perspective and solution.

Ninth, the customers in our cases do not care about the objective characteristics of a restaurant's authenticity. At the same time, they do care about the constructive authenticity. Or in other words, the perceived authenticity is the most important characteristic for translocal restaurants' customers. However, what is the relationship between consumers' perception and objective characteristics? This should be studied further. The decision over whether a cuisine maintains authenticity resides with the original people and practitioners. It is important to compare the perceptions of different customer groups in a further study. Typically, the current study needs replication by studying other cases. Next, an inventory of a larger number of restaurant chains might add quantitative data.

Tenth, while recognized as important to authenticity debates, a related area which has rarely been examined is cultural authority/authorization. Who has the right to judge authenticity? Is this institutionalized such as in the case of the French wine industry (Maas and de Vries 2015)? Do customers have right to pass judgment about the authenticity of restaurant? How do these rights arise? Are they qualified to pass their judgment on restaurant authenticity? Reflecting on these questions is likely to yield multivocal perspectives (Weick 1995) which reflect the different priorities and quests of diverse restaurant players. It would also be interesting for researchers to present cultural commodities as an opportunity to respond to customers' implicit appropriation of cultural authority.

Finally, our book is about market choices related to authenticity and standardization. Producers decide, and balance customer preferences and

cost, and choose for a form of authenticity. Our study confirms findings by de Vries and Go (2017) that perceptions of authenticity may differ between producers and consumers. They propose to bring them together, to co-develop a common standard for authentic restaurants. It may be argued that even more stakeholders might get involved—there is also the more general stake of preserving cultural heritage. Governments or NGOs may take care of such an interest. Then the location may be central rather than a single company. This is what De Vries, Go, and Alpe (2018) propose in their study that links authentic local food to the image of a city. Anyhow, the topic of authenticity and standardization deserves to get more attention in future research.

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