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# **A Cross Cultural Comparison of Food Preferences Employing Risk Perception and Novelty Seeking Influences**

This thesis examines how behavioral characteristics and culture influences the decision making process of tourists' travel arrangements and food consumption.

Thesis submitted by

Shu-yun Chang

April 2007

In fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
from the School of Business,  
James Cook University, Townsville.

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27<sup>th</sup> April 2007

# Declaration

I, Shu-yun Chang, declare this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text with references given.

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Shu-yun Chang

27<sup>th</sup> April 2007

## **Declaration on Ethics**

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999), the Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (1997), the James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics. Standard Practices and Guidelines (2001), and the James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee with approval numbers H1943 and H2181.

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Shu-yun Chang

27<sup>th</sup> April 2007

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*I have study'd the advancement and encrease of knowledge for those that read, and shall be as glad to make them wise, as to make them merry; yet I hope they will not find the story so ill told, or so dull as to tyre them too soon, or so barren as to put them to sleep over it.*

Daniel Defoe (1727)<sup>1</sup>

*Ditto!*

Shu-yun Chang (2007)

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<sup>1</sup> Defoe, D. (1727) *A tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (G.D. Cole ed. 1968) Kelly Publishers, New York.

# **Abstract**

The food experience plays an indispensable role in all the phases of a tourists' journey, but very few researchers have emphasized the importance of tourists' food experiences and preferences while holidaying. The thesis incorporated the concepts of novelty seeking and risk perceptions to examine how they influence people's dining intentions when they travel to another country. Additionally, the study attempted to differentiate between dining markets based on the International Tourism Role (ITR) scale and the Food Activity Preference (FAP) scale.

Valid market segmentation helps tourism management to better match service provisions with that of market demand. One of the aims of this research was to develop a better understanding of food preferences and predictions for the different food service groups. A cultural comparison was employed to examine whether any differences existed in dining preferences and decisions between Australians and Chinese tourists.

The thesis supports the concept that there are distinct customer groups within the tourism market. This was done by analysing the differences in terms of the degree of novelty seeking and risk perception behavioural characteristics related to the selection processes involved in making food decisions. Distinct dining groups were identified from both Australian and Chinese respondents. The tourism industry can improve the



dining experience by being aware of the differences between cultures and that tourism management should appreciate the cultural influence and cater to those market needs.

The thesis involved three different surveys both in Australia and China with in-and-out-bound tourists. The survey questions combined concepts of risk taking and novelty seeking behaviour to understand what factors influence consumer's food choices and preferences while they are travelling. A cross cultural comparison was formulated from the data.

The first study used the post-experience survey method (a semi-structured questionnaire) to identify the major attributes which affect tourists' dining satisfaction. Based on these findings, two more structured questionnaires were developed to further investigate respondents' pre-experience food expectations and preferences. The surveys were conducted on the potential Australian outbound tourist market to China and with the Chinese inbound market to Australia.

Study one focused on the inbound market to Australia to examine tourists' best, worst and ideal food experiences. The survey was carried out in Cairns, Australia by using a predominately open-ended questionnaire. This approach identified the major attributes that were likely to influence people's level of food satisfaction while travelling in another country. Respondents were categorised into three groups based on their attitudes towards food. Low-involvement diners (LID) regard food as not so important and generally only ate food that was familiar to them. Middle-involvement diners

(MID) enjoyed trying different food, and High-involvement diners (HID) tried new foods and regarded dining as an important part of the travel experience.

The second and third studies mainly examined how risk perceptions and novelty seeking behaviour influenced people's food choices when they travelled in another country. The second study investigated potential Chinese tourists to Australia (the Australia inbound market), hence the survey was conducted in China. The third study also employed the same survey format for Australian respondents (the Australia outbound market) when considering travel to China.

The questionnaires incorporated visual techniques to simulate different cultural food settings and situations. The survey questionnaire presented different dining situations ranging in price and varying risk levels from basic take-a-way through to high-quality international hotels. In each scenario, there were 6 images of the restaurant and a brief description of the restaurant and menu. The survey sought to identify the degree of novelty seeking behaviour and the perceived risk associated with each scenario. Respondents rated the appeal of each restaurant on eight attributes and were asked to rate the likelihood of dining in each type of restaurant.

Data was collected from students by means of snow-ball sampling. The aim was to target a group of respondents who were likely to vary on the International Tourism Role (ITR) scale because of diverse age, education and travel backgrounds. The second and third study classified respondents (based on their travel style and food preferences) into distinct tourist groups. Significant differences existed on

demographic variables across clusters with respect to travel party composition, trip planning and arrangements, risk perception and restaurant preferences.

The final study contributed to a body of knowledge by making a cross-cultural comparison between Chinese and Australian respondents. This was done in order to examine whether or not there was any distinct differences in food preference between cultures. The results indicated that significant differences existed between the two nationalities in demography, past and future travel patterns, food preferences in different restaurant scenarios, and risk perceptions.

The thesis found that food consumption is an essential element for a satisfactory travel experience, but it has been underestimated in tourism by both academia and industry.

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# Abbreviations

ANOVA	One-way analysis of variance test
AUD	Australian dollar
DOD	Destination-Oriented Dimension
E	Explorers
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro (the currency)
FAP scale	Food Activity Preference scale
FSG	Familiarity Seeking Generalists
GB	Great Britain
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ITR scale	International Tourism Role scale
OCS	Organized Comfort Seeker
RMB	Reminbi ~ Chinese currency
SCD	Social Contact Dimension
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SRD	Social Risk Dimension
TSD	Travel Services Dimension
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
USD	US dollar
WTO	World Tourism Organization