

# Cultural Identities and Tourism Appeal of Chaoshan Culinary Arts

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## Abstract

This study explores the cultural characteristics and tourism appeal of Chaoshan cuisine, focusing on the distinctive culinary identifiers and techniques that contribute to the development of cultural tourism in the region. The main objectives were to identify key cultural elements that enhance Chaoshan cuisine's attractiveness to tourists and examine the role of these culinary features in creating meaningful artistic experiences.

A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining structured field observations and quantitative surveys to comprehensively assess tourists' perceptions and motivations regarding Chaoshan culinary experiences. Research was conducted at popular restaurants in Shantou and Chaozhou, focusing on visual appeal, renowned dining atmospheres, and service quality. A total of 303 survey responses were collected, supplemented by systematic observations at selected sites. Results indicated that visual aesthetics and high-quality service significantly increase tourist engagement, while culinary narratives deepen cultural immersion.

Practical recommendations for destination managers include integrating traditional culinary elements into immersive experiences and promoting regional cooperation to achieve sustainable tourism. The findings suggest that preserving and promoting these culinary features not only supports local economic growth but also strengthens Chaoshan's cultural identity as a premier culinary tourism destination. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of memorable culinary experiences in enhancing the overall tourist experience, offering valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders on incorporating culinary heritage into sustainable tourism development.

**Keywords:** Culinary Arts; Cultural Tourism; Visitor Experience; Culinary Tourism

## Introduction

With globalization accelerating cross-cultural exchanges, culinary tourism has become an increasingly popular trend, driven by the growing curiosity toward diverse culinary traditions. Culinary tourism immerses travellers in local food traditions, offering a multi-sensory journey that combines social interaction with leisure activities to create unique and unforgettable experiences (Stone et al., 2022:797). This form of tourism primarily attracts individuals seeking cultural richness and distinct experiences, thereby strengthening the connection between tourists and their chosen destinations.

In 2023, the Chaoshan region, located along the southeastern coast of Guangdong Province, which includes Chaozhou, Shantou, and Jieyang, was designated as a "City of Gastronomy" by UNESCO. This designation has significantly elevated the international profile of Chaozhou, boosting the region's global reputation and driving growth in cultural tourism. Chaoshan cuisine, deeply embedded in the region's rich historical and cultural heritage, has become a major draw for both domestic and international tourists. Recognizing the UNESCO

title's influence on global awareness is critical to exploring how Chaoshan's culinary traditions align with the growing trend of gastronomic tourism (Park & Widyanta, 2022). Given UNESCO's global prestige, the title has been pivotal in enhancing the visibility and credibility of destinations, making it a vital factor in tourism promotion efforts.

According to the Chaozhou Municipal Government (2023), the region's cultural tourism market has expanded significantly, with tourism-related tax revenues reaching RMB 17.65 million, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 50.6%. This underscores the importance of understanding how Chaoshan cuisine contributes to attracting tourists and its impact on local economic development and cultural preservation. Previous studies have demonstrated that traditional dishes and regional culinary techniques are powerful motivators for tourists, exerting a substantial influence on local economies (Di-Clemente et al., 2020:25). Iconic dishes not only symbolize a destination's identity but also evoke emotional connections, create lasting memories, and foster tourists' intentions to revisit (Anton Martin et al., 2021).

The visual appeal, cooking techniques, and cultural narratives of Chaoshan cuisine represent the essence of its culinary art. This study employs Tourism Motivation Theory to systematically analyze the relationship between culinary experiences and tourism motivation, identifying key factors that enhance the appeal of Chaoshan cuisine. By linking sensory and cultural motivations with tourists' behaviour, the study offers fresh insights into how culinary traditions drive tourism engagement and destination loyalty. Achieving a balance between Chaoshan cuisine and cultural tourism involves carefully integrating traditional culinary heritage into tourism strategies. This approach seeks to preserve the authenticity of Chaoshan's culinary practices while adapting to the evolving demands of cultural tourism, ensuring that its rich heritage remains intact amidst modern influences.

Despite the growing recognition of Chaoshan cuisine, there remains a gap in understanding how to leverage its unique culinary attributes to enhance tourism motivation effectively. This research addresses this gap by investigating how Chaoshan culinary experiences impact tourist motivation, examining ways to integrate these experiences with cultural heritage and economic growth to enhance the region's attractiveness as a culinary tourism destination. The research also explores the influence of cultural narratives and immersive dining environments on tourist perceptions and intentions to revisit areas that have yet to be fully explored in the literature.

The findings of this study provide practical recommendations for destination managers and policymakers to develop targeted marketing strategies, enhance tourism appeal, and encourage repeat visits to Chaoshan's culinary attractions. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of collaboration between food enterprises and local governments, as well as the synergy between key attractions like speciality restaurants and their surrounding environments (Daries et al., 2021:195). This research aims to offer data-driven strategic recommendations to support sustainable tourism growth in the Chaoshan region while safeguarding its unique intangible cultural heritage. By emphasizing the relationship between culinary identity and tourist motivation, this paper seeks to foster deeper engagement with Chaoshan's culinary traditions. It provides both theoretical and practical support for advancing cultural tourism initiatives.

Conclude the research problems

## Research Objectives

1. To explore the impact of the visual appeal of Chaoshan cuisine on its attractiveness as a cultural tourism destination.
2. To assess the relationship between tourists' perceived quality of Chaoshan cuisine and their willingness to revisit.
3. To propose strategies to enhance the attractiveness of Chaoshan cuisine based on its unique culinary characteristics.

## Literature Review

### Culinary Arts

Culinary art goes beyond the mere preparation of food and represents a fusion of visual design and cooking techniques that elevate food presentation to an art form. Globally, a unique aesthetic relationship exists between chefs, their creations, and diners. Lee (2022) emphasizes the self-expression inherent in culinary art and notes that diners interact with chefs' artistry not only through the sense of taste but also through visual and cultural dimensions. This art form greatly influences food tourists seeking the unique taste experiences fostered by the global culinary landscape (Koufadakakis & Manola, 2020:81).

The long tradition of professional culinary education forms the foundation of the modern culinary arts, and Dalton (2020:195) discusses how the institutionalization of (Ueda & Poulain, 2021) mainly through the standardization of skills and the transfer of knowledge, which in turn raised global culinary standards and fostered innovation. Mastering the culinary arts involves not just understanding ingredients, but also the finesse of knife skills, the precision of temperature control, and the artistry of seasoning. Integrating the culinary arts with tourism can effectively preserve and promote this cultural art form and increase the appreciation of culture and art among tourists. This integration is particularly Gastronomic tourism evident in destinations known for their culinary specialties (Galati et al., 2023:647).

In the context of Chaoshan cuisine, the culinary arts are deeply rooted in traditional techniques and cultural expressions. Chaoshan cuisine is known for its meticulous preparation methods and focuses on preserving ingredients' natural flavors. This cuisine is characterized by various cooking techniques, such as slow braising, marinating, and precise knife work, which require skill and artistry. Signature dishes such as Chaoshan Beef Hot Pot, Marinated Goose, and Handmade Beef Balls exemplify the region's culinary craftsmanship. For example, preparing a Chaoshan beef hotpot requires precise control over the beef slices' thickness and the broth's clarity, highlighting the chef's mastery of knife work and balance of flavors (Chen et al., 2023:70).

The aesthetic presentation of Chaoshan dishes also plays a crucial role in enhancing the dining experience. The visual appeal of dishes, such as the intricate plating of seafood platters or the delicate carving of vegetables, reflects a high artistic creativity. Additionally, the integration of the Kung Fu Tea Ceremony, a traditional Chinese tea preparation ritual emphasizing skillful brewing and presentation with the dining experience reflects a holistic approach to Teochew culinary culture, where the art of tea brewing complements the focusing on unique technotes culinary arts require a deepiques and visual presentations in cultural tourism can significantly enhance the visitor experience and destination appeal (Huang & Hemchua, 2023:3045).

Cuisine is a sensory enjoyment and an intellectual, spiritual, community, and socio-cultural activity. Ueda and Poulain (2021) emphasized that the culinary experience significantly affects tourist satisfaction and loyalty to a destination. Integrating culinary arts into tourism can address sustainability challenges while shaping expectations and trends in gastronomic tourism. The focus on unique techniques and visual presentations of culinary arts in cultural tourism highlights how these elements can influence the visitor experience and destination appeal.

In economic terms, the culinary industry plays a pivotal role. For example, in Indonesia, the culinary industry is one of 17 critical creative industries, contributing 41% of the GDP of the creative economy (Putra et al., 2022:21). This economic impact is also evident in the Chaoshan region, where Chaoshan cuisine's unique flavors and cooking techniques attract many tourists. As an essential part of Chinese culinary culture, Chaoshan cuisine provides a unique culinary experience for tourists with its distinctive cooking style and diverse combination of ingredients. This uniqueness increases the satisfaction and attraction of tourists and contributes to local tourism development.

Chaoshan cuisine focuses on the intrinsic flavor of ingredients and the excellence of cooking techniques, reflecting a unique culinary philosophy. The dishes are well-made and show the traditional flavors of Chaoshan cooking and visual and cultural arts. This combination of art and technique makes Chaoshan cuisine an essential part of the region's cultural heritage and a highlight of culinary tourism.

### **Cultural Tourism**

Integrating culture with tourism is essential to creating rich and sustainable tourism experiences. Integrating culture into tourism is essential for preserving cultural heritage and uniqueness, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing the visitor experience. Studies have shown that integrating culture and tourism contributes to the preservation of historic buildings, fosters economic development, provides educational benefits, promotes sustainable tourism, improves international relations, and enhances creativity and innovation. This integration not only preserves historic sites' customs, language, and character but also creates jobs and supports local businesses through arts and crafts, hotels, and guided tours. The benefits of cultural tourism for the economy, education, and historic preservation were emphasized. It promotes regional development by encouraging creativity, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering people-to-people cooperation. These studies emphasize the dynamic relationship between tourism and culture, balancing conservation and development.

The rich tradition of Chaoshan cuisine, with its refined cooking methods and emphasis on the natural flavors of fresh ingredients, is a critical element of the region's cultural identity. Gastronomic tourism allows tourists to be exposed to the local culture through food, tasting Chaoshan cuisine, and learning about Chaoshan's history, values, and traditions. In the case of Chaoshan, integrating culinary traditions into the tourism experience can significantly contribute to cultural tourism, especially since Chaoshan has been designated as the "Capital of Gastronomy." Chaoshan cuisine's unique flavors and cooking techniques provide an immersive culinary experience that enhances the appeal of cultural tourism and promotes deeper cultural understanding. Incorporating culinary tourism into the Chaoshan cultural strategy can provide tourists with a well-rounded experience contributing to regional economic growth and cultural preservation.

Incorporating the culinary arts of Chaoshan into cultural tourism strengthens the ties between tourists and local communities. Tourists can actively participate in activities such as cooking classes, food festivals, and guided food tours and contribute to preserving Chaoshan's cultural heritage. This interactive approach helps deepen understanding of the region's unique cultural assets and enhances the tourism experience. As a result, Chaoshan's culinary tourism strategy enhances the region's attractiveness as a tourist destination and contributes to culturally sustainable development and economic growth.

### **Visitor experience**

Tourism motivation theory explores the multiple motivations that drive individuals to travel and explore new destinations. Tourists are motivated by a variety of factors including cultural experiences, social influences, relaxation, adventure, and exploration (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020:73). Classic models such as Dann's Push-Pull Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs reveal why tourists choose destinations such as Chaoshan.

Tourism experience is a multidimensional concept involving interactions between tourists and destinations at the sensory, emotional and cognitive levels. These interactions play a crucial role in shaping tourists' satisfaction, loyalty and their overall perception of the destination. Research has shown that the tourist experience is influenced by a variety of factors such as the quality of the attraction, the level of service, the ambience and the cultural interactions. In the context of cultural tourism, tourists' authentic interactions with local culture, traditions and cuisine are important factors in enhancing their travel experience. Food consumption plays an important role in enhancing tourists' satisfaction and influencing their experience of the destination.

Tourism motivation not only influences tourists' behavior (Sinambela, 2021:25), but also has a significant impact on their consumption intentions (Vujičić et al., 2020). Research has shown that quality of experience, perceived value, visitor satisfaction and motivation are decisive for loyalty to creative attractions (Suhartanto et al., 2020:867). Understanding these motivations can help to formulate cultural tourism development strategies specific to the Chaoshan region to enhance its attractiveness and competitiveness by satisfying different tourism motivations.

Tourists who participate in cultural activities and taste local cuisine are more likely to positively identify with the destination and show a higher willingness to revisit. The visual appeal of the food, the aroma of the dishes and the texture of the ingredients play a key role in creating a memorable dining experience, which in turn increases tourist satisfaction. In the case of Chaoshan cuisine, exquisite visual presentations, such as the unique plating of seafood dishes and the meticulous brewing of Kung Fu tea, add artistry to the dining experience, making it more attractive to food tourists.

In food tourism, experiencing local dishes and participating in culinary traditions can trigger strong emotional resonance. The cultural stories embedded in Chaoshan cuisine, such as the origins of traditional dishes and the symbolism of the tea ceremony, provide a rich cognitive experience that deepens tourists' understanding of local culture. This dual engagement of emotion and cognition helps to enhance tourists' overall satisfaction and loyalty to the destination. The unique flavors, culinary techniques, and cultural significance of Chaoshan cuisine together with their significance behind them can leave a lasting impression on food tourists, inspiring them to revisit the region and share their experiences with others.

In conclusion, incorporating key elements of visitor experience into destination management and marketing strategies is essential to attracting and retaining tourists. For the Chaoshan region, capitalizing on its unique culinary culture and rich cultural resources can create attractive tourism experiences and promote sustainable tourism development.

### **Culinary tourism**

Culinary tourism has become valuable in enhancing the attractiveness of destinations by offering unique and exclusive culinary offerings (Liberato et al., 2020:517). The use of gastronomy as the main focus of the travel experience has become an integral part of the tourism industry. According to a survey by the China Tourism Academy, 92.3% of respondents researched food options before or during their trip, and 93.1% cited local cuisine as a critical factor in their travel decisions. In addition, 76.8% of business travelers explore local cuisine outside of business activities, highlighting the importance of culinary experiences in travel.

Gastronomic tourism significantly impacts the local economy, society, and culture, influencing daily life and economic roles (Vuksanović et al., 2024:130). In Spain, iconic food symbolizes the destination, motivates tourists, and increases their perceived value of the travel experience, influencing their willingness to revisit. In addition, experiencing local gastronomy influences tourists' willingness to recommend these destinations. In France, the relationship between gastronomy and tourism has been symbiotic for centuries, shaping both the culinary landscape and tourism (Туракуловна, 2024:146). For example, French haute cuisine emphasizes the enjoyment of food through multiple senses, including touch, sight, and sound. Gastronomic tourism is culturally significant and artistically appealing, enhances the prestige of cities, contributes to economic growth, and plays a crucial role in cultural exchange through food and wine.

Iconic cuisines not only represent and identify destinations but also attract tourists. In Chaoshan, dishes such as beef hotpot, braised goose, and handmade beef meatballs showcase the region's rich natural resources and unique culinary techniques, emphasizing the importance of freshness and quality. The food experience in Chaoshan enhances visitors' perceived value of the region, influencing their likelihood of revisiting and recommending it to others. Critical motivations for culinary tourists include seeking education, knowledge, and sensory and physical experiences .

Attractions are the foundation of tourism. The diversity of attractions within a region dramatically enhances its ability to attract visitors, benefiting both the attraction and the region (Khairi & Darmawan, 2021:39). Understanding how these attractions influence the visitor experience is critical to developing successful tourism strategies (Shen et al., 2020:). Increasingly, tourists are visiting destinations for reasons beyond traditional attractions, such as experiencing local culinary culture and attending food festivals. Events such as Chaoshan food festivals and kung fu tea culture experiences attract many participants and have become important tourist attractions (Demir & Dalgiç, 2022:412). Food consumption is essential for achieving tourist satisfaction and shaping their perception of the destination.

Food tourism enhances the destination's attractiveness in many ways in the Chaoshan region. The key attractions are the Kung Fu tea culture, exquisite seafood dishes, and diverse cooking techniques. These elements demonstrate the rich cultural heritage of Chaoshan and provide visitors with a profound cultural experience.

## **Research Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating Tourism Motivation Theory within the context of culinary tourism. By combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, the research aims to address its objectives comprehensively. Ethical measures are implemented to ensure transparency and integrity throughout the research process. Following data collection, a theoretical review refines the methodology, incorporating key theoretical elements to enhance the study's depth and the relevance and accuracy of data analysis.

### **Research Design**

The research design includes quantitative surveys, qualitative case studies, and field observations to explore the unique culinary characteristics of Chaoshan cuisine and its impact on tourism. The quantitative aspect involves statistical analysis to provide objective evidence and support for the research findings. This approach aligns with Rajasinghe et al., (2021:866) , who emphasize that quantitative analysis offers objective evidence and solutions. Quantitative data analysis is supported by appropriate statistical tools to generate data-driven insights and accurate conclusions.

**Quantitative Surveys:** Structured questionnaires are used to collect numerical data, which forms the basis for analysis and hypothesis testing.

**Qualitative Case Studies:** In-depth interviews and observations are conducted to gain a deeper understanding of Chaoshan cuisine's cultural and culinary aspects.

**Field Observations:** Observations are carried out in representative restaurants in Shantou and Chaozhou, focusing on operational dynamics, customer behavior, and peak dining periods to gather firsthand information on the dynamics of culinary tourism.

### **Data Collection**

A structured questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data from tourists who have experienced Chaoshan cuisine. The survey aimed to collect tourists' perceptions of Chaoshan cuisine's visual appeal and quality of their willingness to revisit and recommend the destination. Data collection occurred from May to June 2024, with 303 respondents participating through an online survey using simple random sampling. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, consent procedures, voluntary participation, and confidentiality before the survey. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

### **Field Observations**

Field observations were conducted at selected representative restaurants in Shantou, Chaozhou, and Jieyang. These observations focused on critical aspects such as customer interactions, service quality, peak dining times, and dishes' visual and aesthetic presentation. This approach provided insights into how stakeholders can leverage their culinary assets to promote local economic development and extend tourists' stays through optimized itineraries (Priatmoko et al., 2021). Objectivity was maintained throughout the observation to minimize personal bias and ensure natural data collection. The collected data were then analyzed and integrated.



Figure 1 Fuyuan Restaurant, in Shantou



Figure 2 Caide Hao Restaurant, in Chaozhou

## Data Analysis Methods

### Quantitative Analysis

Statistical methods, including regression and correlation analysis, were employed to analyze the quantitative data. This analysis explored the relationship between the visual appeal and perceived quality of Chaoshan cuisine and their impact on tourist attraction and revisit intentions. The findings were used to test research hypotheses and determine the statistical significance of the results.

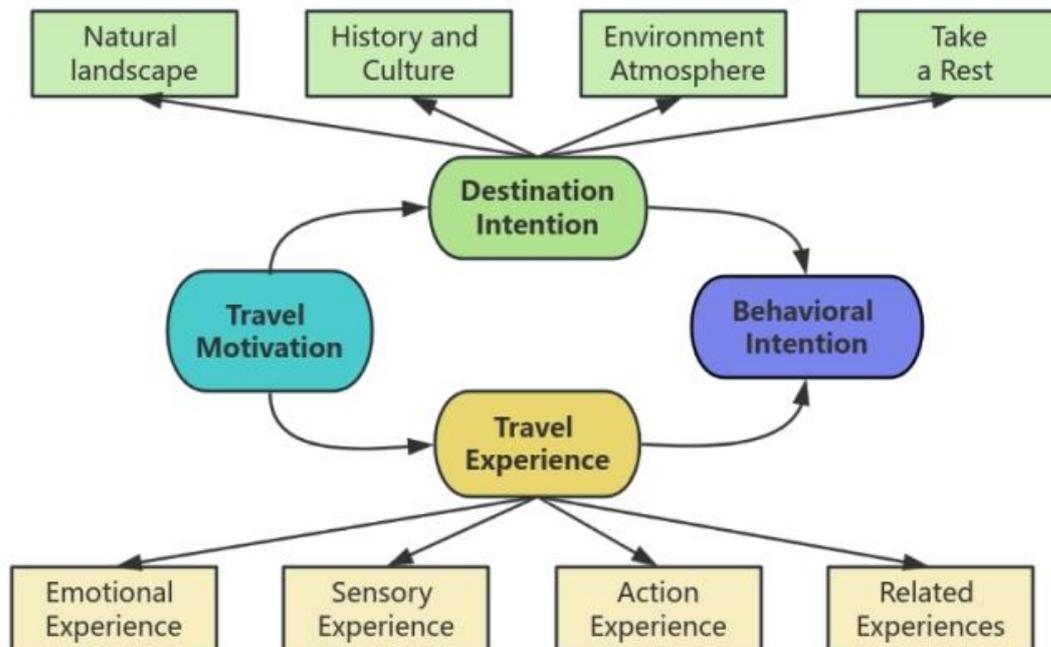
### Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data obtained from field observations and interviews. This method identified recurring themes and patterns related to the culinary appeal of Chaoshan cuisine and factors that enhance the tourist experience. The qualitative insights complemented the quantitative findings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the tourist experience.

### Mixed-Methods Approach

The mixed-method approach is employed for its ability to capture the complexity of human experiences and perceptions in tourism and cultural studies. This approach offers a holistic understanding of the research problem by integrating qualitative and quantitative insights. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select research participants, ensuring a balanced representation of diverse perspectives and providing valuable information to enhance the appeal of Chaoshan culinary tourism.

This research method allows for a thorough exploration of Chaoshan cuisine's cultural identity and tourism appeal, offering insights that can inform targeted culinary tourism development strategies in the future.



**Figure 3** Explore Tourism Motivation Theory in Chaoshan Culinary

## Research Results

### Demographic Overview

The survey sampled 303 respondents, with 51.82% male and 48.18% female. The majority of participants were aged 26-35 (33.33%), followed by those aged 36-45 (23.43%).

### Visual Aesthetics and Tourism Attraction

A regression analysis tested the hypothesis that "the visual appeal of Chaoshan cuisine significantly enhances tourism attraction." Independent variables included food presentation, color coordination, and dining ambiance, with tourism attraction as the dependent variable.

**Table 1** Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Intercept	2.15	0.35	6.14	<0.01
Food Presentation	0.28	0.08	3.50	<0.01
Color Coordination	0.32	0.09	3.56	<0.01
Dining Ambiance	0.41	0.07	5.86	<0.01

The results indicate that all three aspects of visual aesthetics significantly contribute to tourism attraction, with dining ambiance having the greatest impact (coefficient = 0.41,  $p < 0.01$ ). This supports the hypothesis that visual aesthetics play a crucial role in attracting tourists to Chaoshan cuisine.

### Perceived Quality and Revisit Intentions

To test the hypothesis that "the perceived quality of Chaoshan cuisine is positively correlated with tourists' revisit intentions," we performed a correlation analysis. Perceived quality was measured using variables such as taste, freshness, and overall satisfaction, while revisit intentions were assessed using a Likert scale.

**Table 2** The Results of Correlation Analysis

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	p-Value
Taste	0.58	<0.01
Freshness	0.62	<0.01
Overall Satisfaction	0.65	<0.01

The analysis shows a strong positive correlation between perceived quality and revisit intentions, with overall satisfaction having the highest correlation ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This confirms the hypothesis that higher perceived quality of Chaoshan cuisine significantly increases the likelihood of tourists' revisit intentions.

### Hypothesis Testing

Visual Appeal Enhances Tourism Attraction: Regression analysis confirmed that visual aesthetics, particularly dining ambiance, significantly enhance the attractiveness of Chaoshan cuisine.

Perceived Quality and Revisit Intentions: Correlation analysis supported the hypothesis that higher perceived quality of Chaoshan cuisine increases tourists' likelihood to revisit.

### **Summary of Field Observations**

Culinary arts are not only essential for sustenance but also serve as a powerful medium for cultural expression and preservation (Zainal Abidin et al., 2020). Local cuisines showcase cultural diversity and the unique heritage of a nation. The culinary traditions of Chaozhou, Shantou, and Jieyang are integral to these cities' cultural identities, reflecting their history, social values, and economic development.

Chaozhou cuisine, recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage, is a gem of Chinese Kung Fu Teaculture, renowned for its sophisticated culinary techniques and historical significance. Known for its light, healthy dishes that emphasize natural flavors, Chaozhou cuisine reflects the local focus on health and well-being. The culinary techniques used are sophisticated, with an emphasis on precision in knife work and presentation. Signature dishes like braised shark fin and stewed eel demonstrate the respect for ingredients and a deep love for culinary arts. The city's designation as a "World Gastronomy City" has further promoted the preservation and development of its culinary traditions, reinforcing Chaozhou's cultural and economic vibrancy.

Shantou's culinary culture is equally rich, with Chaoshan cuisine being a hallmark of this overseas Chinese community. The unique flavors and preparation methods of Shantou's cuisine make it a significant draw for tourists. The Shantou government actively promotes the high-quality development of the Chaoshan food industry by telling compelling stories about local cuisine and enhancing the city's food brand.

Jieyang's food culture reflects the characteristics of Lingnan cuisine, with careful selection of ingredients and meticulous preparation. Jieyang is particularly known for its seafood dishes, such as steamed lobster, crab in egg yolk, and braised shark fin, all prepared with fresh, flavorful marine products. Additionally, the city is famous for its traditional snacks like Ping Pong cakes, Hepo tea, and Puning tofu, which are celebrated for their unique taste, fine craftsmanship, and strong local flavor.

The culinary cultures of Chaozhou, Shantou, and Jieyang each represent the unique cultural identity and historical heritage of these cities. While Chaozhou emphasizes culinary artistry and cultural preservation, Shantou focuses on promoting its unique flavors to a global audience, and Jieyang highlights its diverse and accessible food traditions. Together, these culinary practices not only contribute to local economic development but also offer rich material for cultural tourism and heritage preservation.

## **Discussion**

### **Attractiveness of Chaoshan Culinary Arts**

The findings of this study support both the Tourism Motivation Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The results underscore taste, social interaction, and cultural experience as core drivers in attracting visitors to Chaoshan as a culinary tourism destination. Sensory and artistic elements, particularly visual appeal, authentic flavours, and rich cultural narratives within Chaoshan cuisine, play a pivotal role in boosting visitor satisfaction and fostering loyalty, which aligns with established research. The strong positive correlation between perceived quality and revisit intentions reinforces the role of sensory experiences in enhancing visitor loyalty, validating the importance of sensory and cultural engagement as primary motivators in tourism attraction.

Additionally, the role of digital media in modern tourism strategies is critical, particularly for younger audiences. Digital platforms like TikTok and Instagram are not only information sources but also key motivators for travel. Research by van Nuenen and Scarles (2021:119) indicates that visual content on social media can significantly boost the dissemination of cultural heritage. This underscores the influence of digital strategies on enhancing the appeal of Chaoshan culinary tourism, especially in attracting cross-cultural audiences.

This study also highlights the value of interactive experiences—such as food festivals and traditional handicraft workshops—which can significantly increase visitor engagement. Integrating unique elements of Chaoshan's tea culture and storytelling into more interactive events allows for deeper cultural experiences, transforming the culinary journey into a richly educational and entertaining cultural encounter. Such strategies not only promote Chaoshan culinary culture in modern tourism but also provide visitors with immersive experiences that blend entertainment with cultural enrichment.

### **Cultural Appeal**

This study confirms that Chaoshan's iconic dishes—such as rice noodles, teochew cake, and glutinous rice with pork intestines—significantly enhance the region's appeal as a tourist destination by offering rich, culturally immersive experiences. Chaoshan cuisine not only symbolizes regional identity but also serves as a vessel for cultural transmission, allowing visitors to connect with Chaoshan's historical and cultural values through its unique flavours and refined techniques. These findings align with tourism motivation theory, underscoring the power of visual and sensory attributes as key "pull" factors in attracting tourists. The complex culinary techniques of Chaoshan cuisine, such as precise knife skills and careful ingredient preservation, provide both visual and sensory enrichment, deepening tourists' sense of cultural belonging and identity. This fusion of sensory and cultural elements allows visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the traditions and stories behind Chaoshan cuisine, transforming their experiences into long-lasting and impactful cultural journeys.

Additionally, the results support Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly at the level of self-actualization, fulfilling tourists' desire for profound cultural engagement. Cultural rituals unique to Chaoshan, such as the Kung Fu tea ceremony, evoke an emotional resonance in visitors, satisfying their aspirations for meaningful experiences and aligning with the concept of self-fulfilment. This immersion transforms a simple culinary experience into an enriching cultural journey, strengthening tourists' loyalty and engagement with Chaoshan's unique heritage and enhancing its international appeal.

### **Comparison with existing Tourism Motivation Theories**

The findings largely support established tourism motivation theories, which suggest that intrinsic factors like taste, cultural interaction, and sensory immersion are core drivers of tourist behaviour. This study, however, reveals an intriguing contrast between the appeal of traditional and modern culinary elements. While conventional techniques and cultural attributes strongly attract tourists, integrating modern culinary innovations may further enhance the region's appeal, especially to younger and international audiences. This insight offers a valuable direction for future research on balancing tradition with innovation in culinary tourism, as such equilibrium may be crucial in attracting diverse tourist segments and broadening market reach in an increasingly varied tourism landscape.

### **Practical Implications**

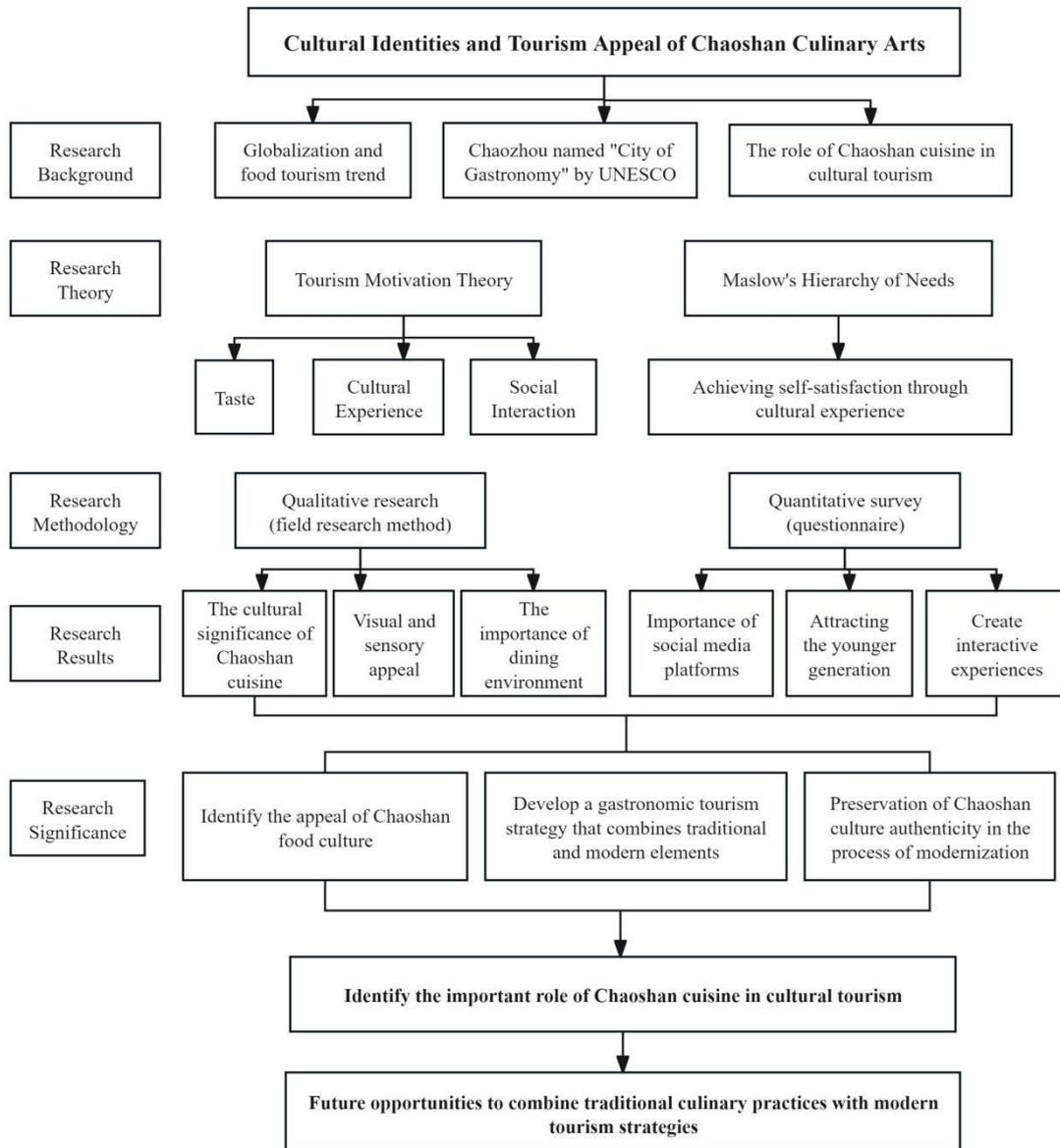
The findings provide destination managers and policymakers with valuable insights for developing effective tourism strategies. By employing targeted marketing strategies that highlight both traditional and modern elements of Chaoshan cuisine, a broader audience may be attracted to the region. Additionally, digital platforms play a crucial role in enhancing the appeal of Chaoshan culinary tourism. Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are not only tools for sharing cultural content but also create interactive experiences that heighten visitor anticipation and engagement. Survey results indicate that most tourists prefer to access cultural information about destinations through social media, allowing them to connect with the destination emotionally in advance and providing innovative pathways for cultural tourism marketing.

Furthermore, collaboration between local culinary businesses and government agencies is essential for sustaining Chaoshan's culinary heritage while promoting economic growth. Strategically showcasing unique activities, like the Kung Fu tea ceremony, on digital platforms allows for maximum cultural reach and brand promotion. The application of digital platforms also provides opportunities for creating cultural content and interactive activities, such as livestreams and short video challenges, expanding the reach of Chaoshan culinary culture to a broader international audience.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

While this study provides a solid framework for understanding tourists' culinary motivations, the limited diversity in the sample suggests that future research should include a broader demographic to ensure more representative findings. Furthermore, examining the long-term effects of integrating traditional and modern culinary elements is crucial, especially in understanding how this integration attracts specific tourist segments and enhances visitor loyalty. A longitudinal approach could offer deeper insights, tracking tourists' long-term responses to these integrated strategies.

Future research should also apply the current framework to other cultural tourism contexts to explore its universality. Analyzing the preferences of different tourist groups regarding traditional and innovative elements and their behavioural responses would provide valuable references for global culinary tourism. Such a study could guide cultural destinations worldwide in effectively balancing tradition and innovation, thereby enhancing their appeal across diverse tourism markets.



**Figure 4** Mind map of overall findings from the research  
 Synthesize the overall finding as the mind mapping

## **Recommendations**

### **Theoretical Recommendations**

Future research should delve into the interplay between culinary tourism and other forms of cultural tourism, such as heritage and festival tourism, to systematically understand how diverse cultural elements work together to shape visitor experiences. An integrated research approach could reveal the relative influence of various cultural activities on tourism motivations and decision-making processes. Expanding the theoretical framework to incorporate psychological and behavioural models can further explain the nuanced decision-making processes of tourists navigating between culinary and cultural experiences. This approach will deepen insights into culinary tourists' motivations, behavioural tendencies, and the complexity of decision-making, helping to establish a more predictive and explanatory tourism theory.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Policymakers should prioritize preserving traditional culinary practices while encouraging innovation that aligns with Chaoshan's cultural identity. Chaoshan cuisine, as an intangible cultural heritage, requires a protective framework to retain its authenticity while gaining renewed appeal in a modern context. Comprehensive policies should be enacted to balance tourism growth with resource conservation, supporting sustainable cultural tourism. Additionally, incentives could be introduced to encourage businesses to actively participate in cultural preservation and contribute to the innovative development of tourism products that incorporate traditional culinary techniques.

### **Engaging Younger Generations**

Attracting and empowering younger generations is essential to the sustainable development of Chaoshan cultural tourism. Research indicates that younger generations hold immense potential in heritage preservation and tourism promotion. By fostering a deep connection and appreciation for their cultural heritage among young locals, they can serve as effective ambassadors of Chaoshan culture. Youth can actively participate in cultural events and workshops and engage with tourists through performances and creative showcases. This approach will help ensure the vitality and appeal of Chaoshan culture in the evolving tourism market.

### **Practical Recommendations**

To enhance the appeal of Chaoshan cuisine, it is recommended that destination managers incorporate traditional and modern elements into food presentation and dining environments to create a more immersive visual and sensory experience. Custom culinary tourism packages, such as food discovery tours, cooking workshops, and themed dining events, will allow visitors to engage deeply with Chaoshan's culinary heritage, strengthening their emotional connection to the destination. Collaborations with local businesses to create unique, region-specific culinary experiences will enrich visitors' cultural interactions and support sustainable tourism development.

### **Leveraging Digital Technology**

The innovative use of digital technology is crucial in modern cultural tourism. Findings suggest that travellers increasingly value virtual reality, augmented reality, and interactive experiences on social media. Therefore, the tourism sector should focus on developing short-form video content for platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and WeChat to elevate Chaoshan cuisine's global visibility. These platforms can quickly showcase Chaoshan's culinary culture through engaging formats, offering potential visitors a

preliminary experience and likely attracting younger audiences to Chaoshan's cultural allure. This digital outreach strategy will serve as a vital tool for promoting Chaoshan's culinary heritage and expanding its market reach.

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