

## Factors Influencing Tourist Behavioral Intentions at Southeast Asian Specialty Restaurants in Xinglong, Hainan, China

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### Abstract

This study examines how different customer groups perceive the authenticity of Southeast Asian restaurants in Xinglong, Hainan, and how these perceptions affect satisfaction and recommendation intention. Using a sequential mixed-methods design, the research first conducted in-depth interviews with 30 participants including restaurant owners, chefs, overseas Chinese, and local residents to explore authenticity across food, environment, and service. Insights from this phase guided a structured questionnaire distributed to restaurant patrons.

A total of 466 valid responses were collected from four groups: tourists (127), returned overseas Chinese (43), local residents (112), and students (184). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to assess relationships between authenticity perceptions, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intention. Results show that food authenticity has the strongest positive influence on perceived value, satisfaction, and recommendation intention, followed by service and environmental authenticity. Group differences emerged: tourists and students respond more to environmental ambiance and service hospitality, while local residents and overseas Chinese emphasize traditional food flavor and preparation.

This research contributes to cross-regional food cultural production by underscoring the role of authentic service and culinary integrity in shaping consumer experience. Practically, it supports Xinglong's shift from sightseeing to culturally immersive tourism, suggesting that strengthening food and service authenticity can deepen visitor engagement and cultural identity. The findings offer guidance for local government, restaurant operators, and tourism developers aiming to preserve culinary heritage while meeting diverse customer expectations.

**Keywords:** Authenticity, Satisfaction, Behavioral Intention

## Introduction

Grounded in the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) model and value-perception theory, recent tourism studies emphasize how food, ambiance, and service function as cognitive stimuli that shape tourists' internal evaluations and behavioral responses. In culinary tourism, perceived authenticity across these three dimensions is increasingly recognized as central to enhancing satisfaction, generating perceived value, and influencing behavioral intentions such as willingness to recommend.

Authenticity perception is commonly categorized into food authenticity (traditional ingredients and preparation methods), environmental authenticity (décor, ambiance, sensory alignment), and service authenticity (staff behavior and cultural fluency). Although scholars have debated the relationship between “staged” and perceived authenticity and refined authenticity into these specific dimensions, prior research often examines them holistically. As a result, questions remain regarding which dimensions serve as key motivators, which function as basic expectations, and how each uniquely contributes to perceived value and satisfaction.

Despite the growing popularity of Southeast Asian specialty cuisine in China and globally particularly in multicultural destinations like Xinglong the mechanisms through which perceived authenticity shapes satisfaction and behavioral intentions remain insufficiently understood. It is still unclear how food, environment, and service authenticity differentially influence perceived value, satisfaction, and recommendation intention. Building on the SOR framework, this study therefore investigates how these authenticity dimensions affect perceived value especially cultural value and how these relationships vary between overseas Chinese residents and tourists.

Perceived value, including emotional, functional, and cultural value, has been shown to mediate the relationship between authenticity and satisfaction. Cultural value is especially important in multicultural tourism contexts where overseas Chinese seek identity and belonging, whereas tourists unfamiliar with the culture may evaluate authenticity through symbolic novelty and immersive experiences. These contrasting expectations shape how authenticity influences satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

To address these gaps, this study adopts a sequential mixed-methods approach. Qualitative interviews explore how authenticity is experienced across food, environment, and service among different consumer groups, followed by structural equation modeling (SEM) to test relationships among perceived authenticity, perceived value including cultural value satisfaction, and recommendation intention, with consumer group as a moderating factor.

Xinglong Town in Wanning, Hainan, provides an ideal empirical context. Since the 1950s, its overseas Chinese community from Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia has shaped a distinctive culinary heritage that now serves both tourists and returned migrants. This dual-consumer

landscape enables comparative analysis of authenticity perception, evaluation, satisfaction, and loyalty. The study contributes to refining the theoretical understanding of food authenticity in tourism and offers practical insights for enhancing perceived value and supporting sustainable culinary tourism in multicultural destinations like Xinglong.

### Research Objective

1. To investigate how food authenticity, environmental authenticity, and service authenticity contribute to the perceived value and satisfaction of consumers.
2. To analyze the influence of perceived value and satisfaction on consumers' behavioral intentions in the context of Southeast Asian specialty restaurants in Xinglong.
3. To propose practical suggestions for enhancing the cultural and experiential authenticity of Southeast Asian cuisine in tourism-focused communities.

### Literature Review

This section introduces the core theories and concepts that underpin this study and support its research objectives and conceptual framework, drawing on a multidisciplinary set of perspectives to examine the relationships among authenticity dimensions, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in Southeast Asian specialty restaurants in Xinglong, Hainan. The Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) theory explains how external stimuli such as food, environment, and service authenticity influence consumers' internal evaluations and behavioral responses, while the Theory of Food Culture Originality highlights how the preservation and transmission of traditional culinary practices contribute to authenticity perceptions. Cultural Geography Theory contextualizes authenticity within spatial and cultural settings through place identity and cultural landscapes, and the Theory of Local Dietary Symbols addresses how food-related symbols and practices convey cultural meaning and shape consumer experiences. Methodologically, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) provides the primary quantitative approach for testing hypothesized relationships, and NVivo-based qualitative analysis enables systematic coding and interpretation of interview data to enrich and validate the quantitative findings. Together, these theories and analytical tools establish a robust conceptual and methodological foundation that ensures both theoretical grounding and empirical rigor.

1. The Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) model has evolved from its origins in classical and operant conditioning established by Watson and Skinner to explain how external stimuli shape behavioral responses into a comprehensive framework integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes. With contributions from cognitive psychology in the 1960s–1970s, including Neisser's emphasis on internal evaluations and Simon's decision-making and information-

processing concepts, the model expanded beyond simple conditioning. By the 1980s–1990s, scholars such as Petty and Cacioppo adapted the SOR framework to consumer behavior, applying it to examine how advertising and environmental factors influence perceptions, emotions, and purchase decisions, leading to later developments by researchers like Berry and Schmitt, who emphasized experiential and emotional determinants of satisfaction and loyalty. Recent applications extend to digital environments, where online stimuli shape consumer psychology. In the context of gourmet and specialty restaurants, the SOR model explains how food authenticity (taste, presentation, freshness), service authenticity (staff behavior, responsiveness, professionalism), and environmental cues (ambiance, décor, lighting, cleanliness) function as stimuli that shape internal states such as perceived value, customer satisfaction, and emotional responses including pleasure or frustration. These internal evaluations subsequently drive behavioral intentions, such as willingness to recommend, revisit, or engage in positive word of mouth. Illustratively, high-quality ingredients and presentation, a refined dining environment, and attentive service may enhance perceived value and satisfaction, generating emotional responses like delight and contentment, which in turn increase the likelihood of loyalty, repeat patronage, and recommendations.

2. The Theory of Food Culture Originality examines how food practices preserve cultural identity while adapting to social change, highlighting regional characteristics, historical continuity, and evolving influences (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2021; Chen, 2017; Coveney, 2022; Ming Li, 2020; Liu, 2021). Key concepts such as historical, cultural, and constructed authenticity (MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1988), experience staging (Pine & Gilmore), and service experience management (Kwortnik & Thompson) show how tourists evaluate local cuisine through sensory engagement, cultural representation, and both hedonic and utilitarian value. This literature emphasizes that local food restaurants serve as cultural sites where authenticity shapes tourists' perceptions, satisfaction, and overall cultural tourism experiences.

3. Cultural Geography Theory examines how food practices are shaped by and shape geographical and cultural contexts, emphasizing the interplay between place, identity, and cultural meaning (Anderson, 2021; Blumberg et al., 2020; RhysTaylor, 2020; Lane & Mansvelt, 2020; Pamukçu et al., 2021). It highlights how local foods, alternative food networks, and geographical indicators influence spatial practices, multicultural identities, tourism, and regional development. This perspective underscores that food is both a marker and producer of cultural landscapes, where consumption patterns and sensory experiences contribute to placemaking, cultural heritage, and economic and social significance.

4. The Theory of Local Dietary Symbols explores how food functions as a marker of cultural identity, heritage, and place, while reflecting social, political, and historical narratives

(Belasco, 2015; Mintz, 2016). Research highlights the effects of globalization and glocalization on local food practices, showing how dietary symbols are both preserved and transformed (Kearney, 2017; Steger, 2018). Food also serves as a tool for social and political activism, promoting sustainability, food justice, and community-centered practices (Forth, 2019; Ericksen, 2021). Culinary tourism and digital media further influence the representation, commodification, and dissemination of local dietary symbols, while ethnographic and case study approaches provide in-depth insights into how specific foods express regional diversity and reinforce cultural continuity (Timothy, 2016; Richards, 2020; Leitch, 2018; Vargo, 2022; Smith, 2020; Garcia, 2022).

5. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a comprehensive statistical technique for testing and estimating complex relationships between observed and latent variables, combining factor analysis and regression analysis (Liu et al., 2022; Wang & Hu, 2023). SEM includes Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess how well observed variables measure latent constructs, and path analysis to examine direct and indirect relationships among variables such as Service Authenticity, customer satisfaction, perceived value, and loyalty. It provides rigorous model fit indices (e.g., CFI, TLI, RMSEA) to validate theoretical models and hypotheses, enabling researchers to understand how food, service, and environmental factors interact to influence customer perceptions and behaviors (Lee et al., 2023; Brown & Davis, 2022; Chen & Zhang, 2023). SEM offers a nuanced and empirically robust framework for analyzing customer behavior and optimizing service delivery in catering and restaurant contexts.

6. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software widely used to manage, code, and analyze diverse qualitative data, including text, audio, video, and social media content (Sage & Griffiths, 2018; Smith & Thompson, 2020). It facilitates the identification of themes, patterns, and relationships in qualitative research, supporting theory development, refinement, and testing across various domains such as consumer behavior, organizational change, educational settings, healthcare innovation, digital wellbeing, identity construction, and service experience in hospitality (Jones & Patel, 2019; Miller & Lee, 2021; Wang & Kim, 2022; Johnson & Martinez, 2023; Brown & Ellis, 2024; Taylor & White, 2023; Lee & Lee, 2022; Martinez & Sanchez, 2021). NVivo's flexible coding and visualization capabilities allow researchers to integrate multiple theoretical perspectives, assess complex constructs, and generate empirical insights, making it an essential tool for exploring the nuances of qualitative data and advancing theoretical understanding.

### Research Methodology

This study employs a multiple-case study design to investigate food authenticity and cultural reconstruction in real-life contexts. The focus is on three Southeast Asian specialty restaurants in Xinglong: Southeast Asia Flavor Restaurant, Niangyaqiao Taste Restaurant, and South

China Treasure Restaurant. These cases were selected based on their cultural significance, popularity among tourists, and diversity of culinary traditions. Grounded in a pragmatist paradigm, the study integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to generate both in-depth insights and practical, actionable outcomes.

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observations and analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed the identification of key constructs and relationships relevant to food authenticity and cultural reconstruction. The quantitative phase applied Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine hypothesized relationships among latent variables. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of constructs, ensuring convergent validity with an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) above 0.50 and composite reliability (CR) above 0.70. The structural model tested the significance and strength of relationships between constructs, and model fit was evaluated using  $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, TLI, and RMSEA, while discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. To ensure robustness, cross-validation was performed by splitting the dataset into calibration and holdout samples, confirming the stability and generalizability of the results.

Finally, insights from the qualitative phase were integrated with the quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of food authenticity and cultural reconstruction processes within the selected restaurants, highlighting both theoretical and practical implications.

The study adopts a sequential mixed-methods design grounded in a pragmatist paradigm, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate food authenticity and cultural reconstruction in restaurant settings.

The qualitative phase (Study 1) involves semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including restaurant owners, chefs, and tourists. This phase aims to explore the processes of cultural reconstruction employed by food producers and to capture tourists' perceptions of authenticity in their dining experiences. Thematic analysis is used to identify key constructs and relationships, which inform the operationalization of variables and the development of the survey instrument for the quantitative phase. Cultural reconstruction is defined as a dynamic, iterative process through which culinary traditions are consciously adapted, reinvented, or recontextualized to maintain relevance for new audiences, markets, or social contexts. This includes adaptation of form, negotiation of meaning, and institutionalization, encompassing modifications of dishes, reassignment of cultural significance, and embedding adapted practices into socio-economic contexts such as menu design and restaurant aesthetics.

The quantitative phase (Study 2) uses a structured questionnaire derived from qualitative findings and is administered to tourists who have dined at the selected restaurants. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) tests hypothesized relationships between food authenticity, perceived

value, satisfaction, and behavioral intention, validating the conceptual model and quantifying the influence of authenticity dimensions on tourist perceptions and behaviors. The two phases are integrated sequentially, with qualitative insights guiding instrument design and quantitative results interpreted in light of qualitative findings. This approach captures the complexity of cultural authenticity in food tourism while providing evidence-based recommendations for restaurant operators and tourism stakeholders. Pragmatism underpins the methodology, supporting methodological pluralism and the practical application of findings by combining contextual richness with statistical rigor.

## Research Results

Qualitative research is essential for studying complex, context-dependent phenomena in tourism, particularly the subjectively interpreted construct of authenticity (Creswell, 2014; Cohen & Cohen, 2011).

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm using qualitative methods to explore tourists' perceptions of authenticity across food, environment, and service in Southeast Asian restaurants in Xinglong, Hainan. The goal was to understand how these perceptions influence behavioral intentions through perceived value and satisfaction.

Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with 30 tourists, focusing on their experiences and evaluations of authenticity in the three dimensions. Key themes were identified through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), revealing the significance of traditional techniques and staff authenticity. NVivo software was utilized for systematic coding and analysis to ensure reliability, helping to map the relationships between authenticity dimensions and core concepts like perceived value and satisfaction.

The quantitative phase of the study employs a structured approach and statistical modeling techniques to test the hypothesized relationships among variables. Rigorous assessments of measurement reliability and validity are foundational; construct reliability is evaluated using internal consistency indicators like Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability, while validity is assessed using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for convergence, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio for discrimination. Following validation, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is utilized to simultaneously test the direct, indirect (mediated), and moderated effects between variables. Model fit is determined using indices such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR, and the model's explanatory and predictive relevance are evaluated by examining  $R^2$  values and  $Q^2$  statistics, respectively. This phase aims to empirically test the conceptual framework derived from the qualitative findings by using structured survey data to examine the direct and indirect effects of authenticity dimensions (food, environment, service) on

behavioral intentions, with perceived value and satisfaction acting as mediating variables, ultimately providing a robust understanding of the mechanisms driving culinary tourism behavior.

#### Summary of the Quantitative study

This section primarily employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to empirically test the proposed hypotheses and evaluate the theoretical framework.

1. A pilot study was initially conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement items. Based on the results, all constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. Following the pilot, a formal survey was carried out to collect empirical data. During this phase, rigorous data screening was conducted to identify and address any missing values, suspicious patterns, or outliers. The results of the normality tests indicated that all items satisfied the assumptions of univariate normality. Furthermore, the structural model passed the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) assessment, indicating no multicollinearity issues. The evaluation of Common Method Bias (CMB) confirmed that the data were free from significant bias.

2. The study then assessed the measurement model and structural model based on the conceptual framework. The measurement model evaluation confirmed strong reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. For the structural model, the study examined the significance and strength of the path coefficients, tested for mediating and moderating effects, and assessed both explanatory power (via  $R^2$  and  $f^2$ ) and predictive power (via  $Q^2$  and  $PLSpredict$ ). The results support the overall robustness and applicability of the proposed model.

#### Conclusion

This study provides strong empirical support that authenticity particularly food and service authenticity is a decisive factor in shaping perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention in the context of Southeast Asian specialty restaurants in Xinglong. Among the authenticity dimensions, food authenticity demonstrated the strongest and most consistent effects on perceived value and behavioral intention, confirming that authentic culinary experiences serve as the primary driver of customer engagement. Service authenticity also significantly influenced perceived value and behavioral intention, emphasizing the importance of culturally resonant interpersonal interactions and storytelling. In contrast, environmental authenticity had a significant effect on perceived value but a weaker direct influence on behavioral intention, indicating that environmental cues enhance cognitive evaluations but cannot independently drive advocacy behaviors without the reinforcement of food and service authenticity.

Perceived value emerged as the strongest predictor of behavioral intention, surpassing customer satisfaction, and acted as a key mediator linking authenticity dimensions to both

satisfaction and behavioral intention. Satisfaction, while significant, played a secondary role by providing emotional reinforcement to cognitive evaluations. These findings support the hierarchical pathway suggested by the S-O-R framework: food authenticity anchors perceived value and directly affects behavioral intention; service authenticity enhances both perceived value and recommendation behavior; and environmental authenticity supports perceived value but does not directly influence advocacy.

The study also offers practical and policy implications. Restaurants should preserve traditional culinary practices, train staff to deliver culturally authentic service, and use environmental cues strategically to reinforce cultural identity. At the regional level, developing gastronomic branding can strengthen the positioning of Xinglong's Southeast Asian cuisine as a cultural and tourism resource, aligning with broader tourism and economic development strategies.

Limitations and future research include the study's focus on a single city and cuisine type, which may limit the generalizability of findings. Future studies could explore other regional contexts, additional moderating factors such as price perception or accessibility, and comparative analyses across multiple ethnic cuisines to deepen understanding of authenticity's role in culinary tourism.

In summary, authenticity especially in food and service plays a central role in enhancing perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intention. Perceived value functions as the primary cognitive driver of recommendation behavior, while satisfaction provides emotional reinforcement. Integrating both evaluative and affective pathways is essential for theoretical models and managerial strategies in culinary tourism.

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