



Trajectory of Innovation and Transformation on Yum Cha Culture (Dim Sum): Perspectives of Chinese Restaurants – An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

This book chapter attempts to scrutinize the impacts of innovation and transformation on sustainability of yum cha culture from industry perspective. The book chapter serves as an exploratory study to explore insights from industry on magic of innovation and transformation on yum cha culture. Representatives of two selected restaurants in Hong Kong are invited to share their insights on yum cha culture and innovation. The chapter envisions the practical and theoretical realm. For the practical implication, the study provides insights to senior management and policy makers on formulation of appropriate strategy on culture sustainability. It provides directions to tourism service providers on tourist engagement. For the theoretical implication, the book chapter facilitates the latitude and longitude of the academic paradigm. The chapter ends with limitation, future research directions, and conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Food is part of our life and a source of energy. 开门七件事 柴米油盐酱醋茶 (kāi mén qī jiàn shì chái mǐ yóu yán jiàng cù chá) – Chinese proverb which is referred to wood, rice, oil, salt, soy-bean sauce, vinegar and tea are necessary in daily life. Is it simply the meaning of food? Food is a mirror of a cultural nostalgia and is a reflection of a living culture. Indeed, sustainability of the intangible culture heritage is always a spotlight in the academic world. Timothy (2016) suggested that food is related to sustainability, authenticity, identity, environment, and tourism. Previous studies suggested that food motivated tourists to visit a destination (Everett, 2016). Food reflects regional culture and identity (Everett, 2016; Ramshaw, 2016). Traditional local food facilitates tourists to connect themselves to different cultures. (Sims, 2009).

Yum Cha and Dim Sum: History

Yum Cha and Dim Sum, while often used interchangeably, have distinct historical and cultural backgrounds. Various regions exhibit distinct Yum Cha cultures, each characterized by unique elements. For instance, tea houses in Chengdu feature Sichuan opera performances (Australian Consulate-General Chengdu, China, 2019). Additionally, Yum Cha traditions, typified by the enjoyment of dim sum alongside pots of tea, are prevalent in Cantonese-speaking areas, encompassing locales such as Hong Kong, Macau, and nine municipalities within Guangdong Province (Greater Bay Area, 2018).

In 2022, Yum Cha culture (Inventory Code: 37, X-82) was recognized as the eighth batch of provincial intangible cultural heritage in Guangdong Province by the People's Government of Guangdong Province (People's Government of Guangdong Province, 2022). Additionally, according to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office (2014), the Chinese Dim Sum Making Technique (Inventory Code: 5.29) is recognized as part of the intangible cultural heritage in Hong Kong.

Yum Cha Culture: Before and Today

Historically, individuals across various age groups and socioeconomic strata would convene at tea houses to partake in morning tea rituals. However, changes in lifestyle have altered the primary consumers of morning tea, with younger individuals often unable to participate due to work pressures, while middle-aged and elderly individuals remain the main participants in Cantonese morning tea culture (Guo et al., 2023). Especially, Yum Cha serves as a customary practice among elders, providing them with an opportunity to partake in morning activities such as Tai Chi or leisurely walks, followed by communal tea sessions (Zhang & Long, 2014).

Tea is served alongside an assortment of traditional Cantonese delicacies such as dim sum, congee, soups, and vegetables, as well as various other dishes meticulously prepared in accordance with Cantonese culinary techniques, typically presented in small plates, bowls, and bamboo steamers (Klein, 2007). Innovation is vital for the continued relevance and sustainability of culinary traditions like Yum Cha. By incorporating fusion cuisine that blends Southeast Asian and Western ingredients, modern Yum Cha establishments can attract younger adults and appeal to evolving tastes and preferences.

The development of dim sum and Yum Cha culture has been shaped by a range of influences, such as technological progress and cultural assimilation. Meng et al.,(2023) and Kedhar and Kedhar (2020) emphasized the significance of technology and cultural diversity in influencing contemporary Chinese

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