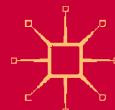


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RESTAURANT CHAINS IN CHINA

THE DILEMMA
OF STANDARDISATION
VERSUS AUTHENTICITY



Restaurant Chains in China

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Frank M. Go

Restaurant Chains in China

The Dilemma of Standardisation versus Authenticity

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Guangzhou
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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

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
1.1	<i>Introduction: Why Research the Authenticity–Standardization Paradox?</i>	1
1.1.1	<i>Consumers and Producers in the Hospitality Industry</i>	1
1.1.2	<i>Authenticity–Standardization Paradox</i>	3
1.2	<i>A Gap in the Literature</i>	6
1.3	<i>Research Objective and Central Question</i>	8
1.4	<i>Research Approach and Outline of the Book</i>	9
1.4.1	<i>Research Method</i>	9
1.4.2	<i>Outline of the Book</i>	9
	<i>References</i>	11
2	Authenticity Versus Standardization	15
2.1	<i>Authenticity</i>	15
2.1.1	<i>Concept of Authenticity</i>	15
2.1.2	<i>Restaurant Group Authenticity</i>	19
2.2	<i>Standardization</i>	22
2.2.1	<i>Concept of Standardization</i>	22
2.2.2	<i>Restaurant Group Standardization</i>	24

2.3	<i>Authenticity: Standardization Paradox</i>	25
2.3.1	<i>Introduction of the Paradox</i>	25
2.3.2	<i>Authenticity: Standardization Paradox of Restaurants</i>	26
	<i>References</i>	29
3	Translocality	35
3.1	<i>Concept of Translocality</i>	35
3.2	<i>Authenticity of Translocal Restaurants</i>	36
3.3	<i>Standardization of Translocal Restaurants</i>	40
3.4	<i>Paradox of Standardization and Authenticity of Translocal Restaurants</i>	40
3.5	<i>Symbolic Authenticity in Translocal Restaurants</i>	41
	<i>References</i>	46
4	Methodology	53
4.1	<i>Research Approach</i>	53
4.2	<i>Country Selection: China</i>	55
4.3	<i>Case Selection</i>	57
	<i>References</i>	59
5	Authenticity–Standardization Paradox: Case Study of Expansion Strategies of Restaurant Groups in China	61
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	61
5.2	<i>Data Collection</i>	62
5.3	<i>Restaurant Groups' Expansion Strategies in China</i>	66
5.3.1	<i>Standardized Chain</i>	66
5.3.2	<i>Authentic Alliance</i>	68
5.3.3	<i>Standardization of Authenticity</i>	70
5.3.4	<i>Heterogeneity</i>	73
5.4	<i>Conclusions and Implications</i>	74
	<i>Reference</i>	76
6	Case Study of Authentic Shanxi Cuisine in Guangzhou	77
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	77
6.2	<i>Data Collection</i>	78

6.2.1	<i>Case Company</i>	78
6.2.2	<i>Investigation Process</i>	81
6.3	<i>Standardized Authenticity of Jiumaojiu</i>	83
6.3.1	<i>Dishes</i>	83
6.3.2	<i>Environment and Atmosphere</i>	88
6.3.3	<i>Standardized Authenticity: Service and Value</i>	90
6.4	<i>Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications</i>	91
	<i>References</i>	94
7	Case Study of Authentic Hunan Cuisine in Guangzhou	97
7.1	<i>Introduction</i>	97
7.2	<i>Data Collection</i>	98
7.2.1	<i>Case Company</i>	98
7.2.2	<i>Investigation Process</i>	99
7.3	<i>The Dongting Hunan Restaurant Case</i>	100
7.3.1	<i>Producer's Perspective</i>	100
7.3.2	<i>Consumers' Perspective</i>	103
7.4	<i>Conclusions and Implications</i>	105
	<i>References</i>	108
8	Conclusion and Discussion	109
8.1	<i>Cross-Case Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusions</i>	109
8.1.1	<i>Authenticity and Standardization</i>	109
8.1.2	<i>Authenticity as a Dynamic Concept Under Different Consumption Contexts</i>	112
8.1.3	<i>Translocality and Authenticity</i>	114
8.2	<i>Contributions and Recommendations</i>	116
8.2.1	<i>Theoretical Contributions</i>	116
8.2.2	<i>Implications</i>	119
8.3	<i>Limitations and Future Research</i>	121
	<i>References</i>	124

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	Authenticity–standardization paradox	4
Fig. 1.2	Analytical framework for studying authenticity and standardization of restaurant groups (with possible extreme combinations)	5
Fig. 1.3	Research focus	9
Fig. 1.4	Book structure and research design	10
Fig. 2.1	Four strategies of restaurant groups	28
Fig. 4.1	Composition of top 50 best taste restaurants in Guangzhou. (Source: Dianping.com)	57
Fig. 4.2	Strategic position of the case companies	59
Fig. 5.1	Strategic position of the case companies	63
Fig. 5.2	Number of Kungfu subsidiaries between 2005 and 2011. (Source: Interview with the managers of Kungfu restaurant group)	66
Fig. 5.3	Advertisement and menu in Kungfu subsidiaries. (Source: Kungfu's advertisement)	67
Fig. 5.4	Restaurant at Qian Li Zou Dan Ji headquarters. (Source: First author)	69
Fig. 5.5	Qian Li Zou Dan Ji (Dream Lijiang). (Source: First author)	69
Fig. 5.6	Hotpot soup and mutton at Little Sheep. (Source: First author)	71
Fig. 5.7	Different image and service in two subsidiaries of Aqiang's. (Source: First author)	74
Fig. 6.1	Location of Shanxi and Guangzhou in China. (Source: First author)	79
Fig. 6.2	Subsidiaries of Jiumaojiu from 1995 to 2012. (Source: Interview with the managers of Jiumaojiu)	80

Fig. 6.3	Jiangnanxi shop and Zhongshansi shop of Jiumaojiu in Guangzhou. (Source: First author)	81
Fig. 6.4	Braised beef noodles and beef noodles with prime soup in Jiumaojiu. (Source: First author's own collection of Jiumaojiu's advertisements)	84
Fig. 6.5	Eight kinds of handmade noodles in Jiumaojiu. (Source: Jiumaojiu's advertisements)	85
Fig. 6.6	Decorations of Saimachang restaurant of Jiumaojiu. (Source: First author)	88
Fig. 6.7	The kitchens of Jiangnanxi and Zhongshansi restaurants of Jiumaojiu. (Source: First author)	89
Fig. 7.1	Location of Hunan and Guangzhou in China. (Source: First author)	99
Fig. 7.2	Three typical dishes of Hunan cuisine from the producers' perspective. (Source: First author)	101
Fig. 7.3	Three created dishes of Hunan Cuisine in Canton. (Source: First author)	103
Fig. 8.1	Strategic position of the case companies	110
Fig. 8.2	Evolution from objective authenticity to symbolic authenticity	113