

Local Food and Tourism: The Case of Pineapple Cake

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Abstract: Almost every Chinese tourist come to Taiwan would take pineapple as a souvenir when they are going home. In order to understand the reasons that drive them to rush for buying pineapple in Taiwan, the present study employed qualitative method and conducted interviews to fulfill the research. 22 respondents who had taken pineapple cake as souvenir were invited to take part in the interviews. The results indicated that pineapple cake owns several irreplaceable features that are attractive for the tourists.

Keywords: Local food, pineapple cake, Chinese tourists.

INTRODUCTION

Of the numerous souvenirs in Taiwan, no one predicted that a small piece of pineapple cake could become tourists', especially the Chinese favorite one. Based on the report published by Tourism Bureau in Taiwan, pineapple cake has been the top one of the best souvenir in Taiwan for many years. It's not only a hot property of the group-buying group but also the favorite of Chinese tourists in the recent years. Practitioners therefore invested hundreds of millions of New Taiwan dollars in constructing tourist factories for seeing the boundless business opportunities [1]. Based on the contents reported by Table 1, the percentage of Chinese tourists in Taiwan significantly increased in recent five years, which is evident that the Chinese tourists have brought the most important influence on tourism in Taiwan.

Pineapple cake has doubtlessly become the most representative souvenir in Taiwan. It is noteworthy that what drives the Chinese tourists to buy pineapple cakes in Taiwan in such a generous manner.

This drove the researcher to conduct the study, the objective of the study is therefore to understand the reasons that make the Chinese tourists to hold such a manner toward pineapple cake in Taiwan.

Table-1: Number of visitor arrivals in recent years

Year	Chinese visitors (1)	Total visitors (2)	(1)/(2)%
2008	329,204	3,834,187	8.6%
2009	972,123	4,395,004	22.1%
2010	1,630,735	5,567,277	29.3%
2011	1,784,185	6,087,484	29.3%
2012	2,586,428	7,311,470	35.4%

Source: Tourism Bureau, Republic of China

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local food and tourism

Local food is simply defined as the ones that are produced in the local area [2] or a local specialty food that holds significant prestige locally [3]. Past research has documented that food doe's impact on trips and holidays [4]. In the mean time, local food tasting plays a key role in the tourism because it is not only a part of cultural activity but also a delighting experience [5]. A research conducted by Sims [6] indicated that over 50% of the interviewed tourists expressed that they had bought or would certainly take food and drink souvenirs during their holidays. More specifically, foods or drinks are good examples for tourists to take a

dip into the local human customs [7]. Consequently, buying the regional specialties usually become a "must" for tourists and bring them with values or feelings that are beyond description. For example: most of the tourists will take local foods like almond cakes or Portuguese egg tart when they leave Macau; many tourists in Korea select Kimchi (a kind a pickled vegetable) to be their souvenir, Kimchi-making or -tasting becomes an important part of the tourism in Korea in past years [8].

In Taiwan, take the pineapple as an example; the annual production of pineapple cake has generated NT\$ 25 billion (US\$845 million) revenue in 2011 [9].

The exciting consequence brought both high popularity in tourism and local development. Therefore, it is not surprising that researchers supported that local food is the point for increasing economic revenue and local development [10]. In recent years, district government in Taiwan (such as Taipei City) even spent efforts to promote pineapple cake to tourists by way of holding pineapple cake festival [1] to promote city tourism or develop local economic development. The results have proven that the related activities not only received good revenue on tourism but also construct images for the country. On the other hand, the pineapple cake tourism factories that build for attracting tourists have brought amazing business opportunities, crowd stream flows without stopping everyday, which was originally beyond the practitioners' imagination. Evidently, the pineapple cake industry has generated significant peripheral effects.

Research design

In order to deeply understand the reasons that drove Chinese tourists rush for buying pineapple cake in Taiwan, the study employed qualitative method and conducted interviews to fulfill the research. The details of the method are described as follows:

Item development

The item development is described as the following: The researcher firstly went to interview several tourists (including Chinese ones and the ones from other countries) who were from different travel groups at the international airport to understand the reasons for them to take pineapple cakes in Taiwan. The Chinese tourists were encouraged to freely express their reasons as much and divergent as possible during the thirty-minute chatting-like interview. For example: one of the interviewees stressed that it is easy to carry and store. The researcher then kept their reasons down on the note and roughly classified them into the four categories as the following: motivation a, product features B, social souvenir C, food and tourism D, and E. Several reasons were forced to be eliminated because they are relatively petty.

Sequentially, the interview items were developed based on the constructs emerged from the above-stated categories.

Interview items formation

Based on the contents collected from the prior noted stage, the interview items were formed and the constructs were integrated to be three parts as the following: Part A focused on motivations of interviewees' coming to Taiwan? (e.g. What drove you to come to Taiwan? What do you think about Taiwan? How many times have you come to Taiwan?) Part B centered on the key points for the interviewees to select

souvenirs or local products (e.g. what kind of souvenirs do you like the most in Taiwan? Why you take cartons/cases of pineapple cake? What are your criteria to select souvenirs? What drives you to buy pineapple cake?)

Data collection and analysis

The researcher went to the two airports which located in the north and south in Taiwan and pineapple cake souvenir stores near famous scenic spots to interview those tourists who have pineapple cake in their hand carries. Two reasons for us to select Chinese tourists as our interview target are: first, the interviewers have the same native language as the Chinese; this helped remove all the possible difficulties caused by language barriers. Second, as noted previously, Chinese tourists account for the highest percentage on in-bound tourists in Taiwan. Therefore, knowing why Chinese tourists like pineapple cake so much would be the most representative and persuasive evidence to better understand the connection of souvenir and tourism as well as the legend of pineapple cake in Taiwan.

A total of 22 Chinese tourists were successfully interviewed and their demographic data is presented in Table 2. As the data collection task was conducted in different times and places, the interview time varied from 25 to 40 minutes approximately.

The instruments used in the interviews were developed based on the results derived from the pilot interviews, which have been described in the last section. On the other hand, the open-ended questions encouraged the interviewees to freely and greatly express their comments or opinions. Some of the interviewees firstly felt confused when they were suddenly asked about their motivation to buy pineapple cake, but they all presented friendly after the researchers explained the reasons to disturb them. In generally, the process went smoothly and naturally. The interview contents were digitally recorded after notifying the participants and transcribed verbatim for analysis after the process finished.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the interviews were grouped into the following three categories: affection cognitive factors, product features, and demographic factors. Affection cognitive factors covered curiosity, affection, reputation, and situational factors. Product features comprised easy to store/carry and unique taste. Demographic factors included age, occupation, and income. The points emerged from the interviews are sorted out and presented as follows:

Table-2: Outline of interviewees

No.	Marital Status	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education	Region in China
1	Single	F	45-55	service industry	university	South
2	Married	M	45-55	service industry	primary school	South
3	Single	F	55-65	service industry	university	South
4	Married	F	55-65	manufacturing industry industry	primary school	East
5	Married	F	Under 35	freelancer	primary school	East
6	Single	M	Under 35	freelancer	university	East
7	Married	F	Above 65	retired	high school II	Northeast
8	Married	M	Above 65	retired	primary school	Northeast
9	Married	F	Above 65	retired	primary school	Northeast
10	Married	F	55-65	retired	high school	Northeast
11	Married	M	55-65	retired	primary school	South
12	Married	F	55-65	housewife	primary school	South
13	Single	M	Under 35	service industry	university	South
14	Married	F	35-45	service industry	university	South
15	Married	F	35-45	housewife	primary school	North
16	Married	F	45-55	housewife	primary school	North
17	Single	M	45-55	service industry	university	North
18	Single	M	35-45	service industry	university	North
19	Married	F	35-45	housewife	high school	North
20	Married	M	45-55	freelancer	high school	East
21	Married	M	45-55	freelancer	high school	East
22	Married	M	45-55	freelancer	high school	East

Curiosity

Although the tourism between mainland China and Taiwan has been lifted for a period of time, many of the Chinese tourists are first-comers. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they were desirous to come to Taiwan and curious about everything in Taiwan

Yes, I had planned to come to Taiwan for a long time and, certainly, I have to taste the most famous food souvenir that I've ever heard in Taiwan, pineapple cake (No. 12 interviewee).

My friends told me that pineapple cake is really tasty. They urged me that it's a must-try in Taiwan so I have to hit it (No. 19 interviewee)!

We are coming out to spend money and buy something special. So, take it! Ha! Ha (No. 22 interviewee)!

Based on the effects obtained from the interviews, the respondents expressed that they had heard about "pineapple cake in Taiwan", they were curious that how is it and why many of the Chinese took a lot when they went home. So when they got the opportunity to come, they surely have to hit it!

Personal affection

Several interviewees expressed that personal affection/preference in taste or emotion toward food sometimes dominated their buying decision.

Yes, my brother brought me a case of pineapple cake several years ago, the taste is really good (No. 6 interviewee)!

I live in the south of China, we have a lot of pineapple, too, but we don't have this kind of dessert. And I just love the sweet-and-sour taste (No. 3 interviewee)!

Reputation

People sometimes rush for one thing because of its word-of-mouth or reputation. As pineapple cake has become one of the most representative souvenirs in Taiwan, tourists usually learn its reputation from friends' recommendation or the product's positive word-of-mouth.

Many of my friends or relatives come to Taiwan bought pineapple cake for gifts. It's good and popular (No.8 interviewee)!

I've heard that pineapple cake is a famous local specialty in Taiwan. When you come out for fun, you always need to take something for families or friends, don't you (No.13 interviewee)?

You know what? My friends had told me that pineapple cake in Taiwan is good and tasty, so, surely, I have to taste it and buy some (No.21 interviewee).

According to the interviewees' opinions, many of them had known that pineapple cake is a famous

souvenir in Taiwan; this reflected that the reputation of the related food souvenir has been constructed. Meanwhile, the goodwill of a store is generally known as intangible asset, which is quite valuable and immeasurable. As the pineapple industry competes sharply in Taiwan, both of the product quality and services are of peak importance, this therefore builds up good reputation for the product.

Situational factors

Consumers sometimes make buying decisions not because of self-determined decision but because of other-driven factors. Several interviewees in the interview process considered that situational factors have important influence on their buying. For example:

It's interesting! The guide took us to a pineapple cake tourist factory to see how the products are made and we can taste a lot there for free, the feeling was not bad, so I bought a lot, see (No.1 interviewee)!

The store we went was big and good, the clerk persuaded us to buy and I saw my partners bought many. So I bought, too. Surely, it's good (No.16 interviewee)!

Early in the 50's, researcher [11] had noted that behavior is the function of individual and environment. This reflected that consumer's buying behavior is to be influenced by the situational factors of stores or shops. For example: people like to get into a crowded restaurant while rush dining hour to see if there still has any vacancy rather than go to an empty

Practically, managers of service industry like to use crowding as a tool to help customers to confirm that their decision is correct [12], so the earliest restaurant customer will usually be lead to the seats that is near the windows. For example, one may doubt if his/her judgment is right when s/he walks into a souvenir shop or store without even a customer inside. On the other hand, a certain level of crowding in a shop or store may make the latter customers feel easier because people tend to make sure that their choice is correct by following the herd, this is the so-called "herd behavior". Therefore, the present study argues that situational factors are influential on tourists' souvenir buying behavior.

Easy to store/carry

For the interviewees were all air flight travelers, whether the souvenirs are easy to carry or store would be a key point for them to make a buying decision.

As I need to take a long trip to go home, certainly if the gift is easy to carry would be the point for me to decide whether to buy it or not. See, the practitioner packed

the thing considerately, which is very important for me (No.10 interviewee).

I heard that the product quality is good; you can even store it in room temperature. For I still have to stay in Taiwan for several days to finish my trip, the character "easy to store" is really important (No.17 interviewee)!

As prior research noted [13], one of the most important attributes for tourists to make souvenir buying decision is its portability. For most of the international tourists are air flight travelers, if the gift/souvenir is easily portable is of peak importance.

Unique taste

People sometimes are fascinated with specific foods or things, which is not explainable. Though pineapple is only a kind of ordinary tropical fruit, many people love the juicy and sweet-and-sour taste. In the interviews, some of the participants expressed their opinions as follows:

The taste of pineapple cake is very special! I like the sticky style and the taste is good (No.20 interviewee)!

The store owner generously send some [pineapple cake] for us to taste, I think is quite good. In my hometown, we have popular desserts, too. But the flavor of pineapple cake is unique, which is not replaceable by the products elsewhere (No.15 interviewee).

Age

From the standpoint of food and tourism, during the process of the interviewees, the researcher found that no matter what the respondents' age is, they all expressed that they like pineapple cake very much, they also revealed:

The taste is just good! A little sour and a little sweet, which makes you, would like to take another one (No. 22 interviewee) no matter how old you are!

I am middle aged, I like it so much! And I think young people will like it evens more (No.19 interviewee)!

The results showed that a tasty dessert attracts all people without reference to age.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of tourists' (especially the Chinese ones) buying pineapple with great exertion has lasted for several years without less well at all. The reason for the study to select Chinese tourists as interview objects is because they account for the highest ratio of visitors in Taiwan in the recent years. Actually, based on the researcher's understanding, some people from the west love the taste so much because they don't see such a tropical fruit/fruit very often. The interview

results indicated that pineapple cake in Taiwan does have its own unique glamor.

The results provide evidences for the government to make policies in promoting tourism business in the future. In addition, it would also be beneficial for the practitioners to conduct promotion strategies in the highly competitive market.

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