

Chinese restaurant owners/ managers perceptions of healthy menu items

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Summary

The present study is based on the findings of a Master's student's study, Danqian Cai. In that study, the Nutrition Environment Measures Survey (NEMS) was used to evaluate the nutrition environment of a growing Asian population in Champaign-Urbana, specifically measuring healthfulness of the Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai) restaurants and grocery stores. The study found that sit-down restaurants (n=36) had higher healthy scores than fast food restaurants (n=5); in addition, there was no significant score differences among the cuisine type of Asian restaurants, although most were Chinese (21 of 41 restaurants), except for the sub-score of healthy entrée (p<0.001) which consisted of menu-identified healthy entrée and vegetarian option availability. Furthermore, the study found that most Asian restaurants were lacking low-sodium foods, low-fat dairy, as well as fruit options and 100% juice. Slightly over half (56.1%) offered non-fried vegetables and few offered smaller portions (26.8%). These food options could be implemented into the menus that would help increase the healthfulness of Asian restaurants. Restaurants are often blamed for contributing to the obesity epidemic, and many restaurants try to change menu offerings so that those wanting a healthy option may order those. Another opinion is that eating out is a treat, and less healthy options are part of a treat, not to be eaten everyday. However, very few research projects have considered the people who develop the menus, and their perceptions. Indeed, it is important to consider the owners or managers, as these are the people who may change the menus. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the attitudes and perceptions of Asian restaurant managers/owners towards healthy menu items. The results will expand the current research findings from the customer and public health perspective towards the owner/manager perspective. This is important in discussions of policy concerning restaurant menu choices.

Objective

To determine the attitudes and perceptions of Chinese restaurant managers/ owners towards healthy menu items.

Methods

- Develop interview content based on the results from Danqian Cai's study
- Design interview phrases based on reviews of publications addressing healthy menu/ eating.
- Develop interview agreement consent form.
- Obtain certificate of translation.
- Translate interview script and consent form.
- Obtain IRB approval.



Materials

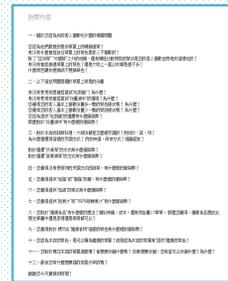
Interview Materials



Certificate of Translation



Recorder, Pencil, Paper



Interview script design and translation



Consent form and translation



http://www.thebestsingapore.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/cherry-garden-chinese-restaurant.jpg

Results

Customers' favorite menu item	American: General Tso's Chicken Chinese: Spicy foods
Try new menu items	6 did not; 1 had seasonal promotional items; 4 tried new items but only 2 added new items into menu.
Portion size	10 felt customers wanted large portions 3 felt customers wanted smaller portions 4 offered smaller portion (Lunch, Kids menu, Customer's preferences)
Vegetables	All offered stir-fried 5 offered steamed ; 6 thought steamed were healthier but "goes bad" more quickly, taste worse than stir-fried, or too time consuming to prepare.
Low-fat dairy	3 offered 2% milk 0 offered skim milk 3 felt was not "Chinese" or "only for kids"
Low sodium options	8 said they offered; 5 thought healthier 3 thought lack of flavor
100% fresh juice	1 served fresh juice from bubble tea, 1 served fresh watermelon juice Most dis not feel should be on menu, 1 said fresh juice does not have consistent quality
"Healthy food"	7 felt hard to define; 2 said balanced diet; 2 said might not taste as good; 2 said less oil and salt
Serving "healthy food"	2 said should be at home; 6 said could be served at home and at restaurants

Results (Continued)

- 11 restaurants of 26 agreed to interview; 2 are no longer in business.
- 8 felt their menus were **healthy**
- 2 were "**all you can eat**" style
- 3 felt **eating habit** varied via nationality: Chinese customers ordered different menu items each time, American customers ordered the same item(s) each time
- 5 offered **2 sets of menu**: Americans customers and International Chinese students customers
- 3 claimed Chinese food was healthier than Japanese food in regards of fried vegetable options

Conclusions

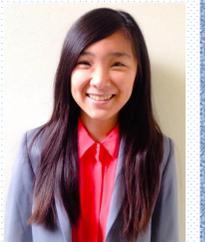
- No clear definition on "healthy food", but most felt their menus were healthy
- Larger portions were perceived as something the customer wanted
- Juice and dairy beverages were not perceived as something the customer would want or that they should be offering
- All stir-fried and felt tasted best, best color, best aroma and healthy
- Favorite menu items or willingness to try new items perceived to depend on customer's nationality

Limitation

- May have answered differently if did not know interviewer was a Nutrition major
- Fewer than half agreed to be interviewed; a larger sample would support broader conclusions
- Amount of oil used to stir fry not known
- Customers mainly college students, owners/ managers opinion on portion size varied depends on customer type.

Student Bio

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- Update listing of Chinese restaurants in Champaign-Urbana.
- Contact managers or owners for willingness to participate.
- Conduct interview with Chinese restaurant owners or managers
- Record the interview and take notes during the interview.
- Transcript recording and translate interview conversation into English.
- Analyze and compare owners'/ managers' responses for major themes.
- Analyze data for "negative cases" or unique responses.

