

Marketing Strategies for Chinese Food in Khon Kaen, Thailand, From the Perspective of Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract: With the acceleration of globalisation, the Thai market is diversifying, and consumers are growing to enjoy Chinese food. As economic development and cultural ties deepen in Khon Kaen, Thailand, the Chinese culinary business has significant growth potential. The demand characteristics of Khon Kaen consumers differ from those in other Thai cities, presenting unique problems and opportunities for Chinese food manufacturers' marketing strategies. This article examines customer demand for Chinese food in Khon Kaen, Thailand, and its effects on marketing techniques based on a literature analysis. Khon Kaen consumers' preferences for Chinese food and decision-making processes are examined through questionnaires and interviews. Different age groups and cultures have different preferences for Chinese food. SWOT analysis is used to assess Chinese food firms' competitive advantages and problems in Khon Kaen, and "4P" marketing strategies are suggested. This paper analyses the current situation and challenges of Chinese food in the Khon Kaen market in Thailand, explores regional marketing strategies, and helps Chinese restaurants improve market performance and long-term development, promoting cross-cultural exchanges and diversified food culture between China and Thailand.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour; Thai Market; Overseas Chinese Food; Marketing Strategy; SWOT Analysis; Decision Making; Cross-Cultural Exchanges; Marketing Techniques.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, as China's domestic Chinese food market has gradually reached saturation, many Chinese catering brands have shifted their focus towards Southeast Asia, fueling a wave of overseas expansion. Countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia have become key markets for these brands, spanning sectors including tea beverages, coffee, hotpot, traditional Chinese meals, and snacks. Among these, Thailand stands out as a prominent tourism and commercial hub in Southeast Asia, attracting numerous international tourists, students, and expatriates. Consequently, Thailand's culinary landscape has become increasingly diverse, with Chinese cuisine emerging as a popular and influential segment [2]. Khon Kaen, an essential urban centre in northeastern Thailand, serves as a significant cultural and educational hub. The city's ongoing economic growth and

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increasing internationalisation have attracted considerable external investment and tourism. As local and international residents increasingly seek diverse culinary experiences, Chinese cuisine has ample room for growth. However, Khon Kaen differs notably from major Thai cities, such as Bangkok, particularly in cultural backgrounds, consumption habits, and lifestyle patterns. These distinctions have resulted in unique consumer preferences toward Chinese food, shaped significantly by local Thai dietary traditions, the region's economic and social development, and evolving consumer attitudes toward dining experiences [6]. Within this specific context, Chinese food brands operating in Khon Kaen face considerable challenges. Key questions include how best to cater to local consumer preferences and how to establish competitive differentiation in an increasingly crowded food market. Although many Chinese brands have successfully established themselves in Thailand, comprehensive, systematic research into tailored marketing strategies for Khon Kaen remains scarce. Hence, accurately understanding shifts in consumer behaviour and preferences and developing effective marketing strategies accordingly has become a crucial determinant of the success of Chinese food businesses in this market [16].

The core research questions guiding this study are as follows: What is the current state of Chinese cuisine's development in Khon Kaen, Thailand? How can Chinese restaurants in Khon Kaen formulate market-specific marketing strategies that meet local consumer demands? This study aims to analyse the development status of the Chinese restaurant market in Khon Kaen from a consumer behaviour perspective, thereby proposing marketing strategies tailored to local consumer demands and promoting the sustainable growth of Chinese cuisine in Khon Kaen and, potentially, in other Thai cities. Ultimately, the goal is to provide Chinese food businesses in Khon Kaen with practical, evidence-based marketing strategy recommendations, enabling these enterprises to secure a robust position in Thailand's highly competitive food industry. From a theoretical standpoint, this study enriches existing consumer behaviour theories, particularly by exploring their applications in cross-cultural restaurant markets, thus addressing the research gap concerning secondary urban areas in Thailand. Unlike major cities such as Bangkok or Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen's Chinese food market remains relatively under-explored academically. By conducting empirical investigations into local consumer habits, demands, and marketing practices, this study broadens the regional perspectives on the internationalisation of Chinese cuisine. Practically, the findings are expected to enhance the competitiveness of Khon Kaen's Chinese restaurants by providing targeted marketing recommendations based on the classical 4P framework—product, price, place, and promotion. Furthermore, given Thailand's influential role in regional culinary trends, insights derived from this research not only apply to Khon Kaen but could also serve as valuable references for other Southeast Asian markets, ultimately supporting the global expansion of Chinese food brands [18].

2. Literature Review

With the accelerating pace of globalisation, the internationalisation of Chinese cuisine has become a significant trend in the global food and beverage industry. Thailand, as a key market in Southeast Asia, presents unique cultural contexts and consumer behaviours that pose new challenges for the localisation and development of Chinese cuisine. In this scenario, consumer behaviour theories offer critical theoretical insights into understanding consumer needs and decision-making processes in Khon Kaen's Chinese food market. At the same time, the 4P marketing framework provides practical guidance for developing targeted marketing strategies. Thus, this literature review will focus on three core areas—overseas Chinese cuisine, consumer behaviour theories, and marketing strategies—to establish a comprehensive theoretical foundation for subsequent research on the marketing strategies of Chinese food businesses in Khon Kaen, Thailand.

2.1. Overseas Chinese Cuisine

2.1.1. Concept of Overseas Chinese Cuisine

Overseas Chinese cuisine generally refers to the expansion and dissemination of traditional Chinese culinary styles and dining practices in international markets, rooted in Chinese food culture. It encompasses not only the export and operation of Chinese food products but also the cross-border movement and adaptation of Chinese culinary culture. As such, it represents a cross-cultural gastronomic phenomenon shaped by the forces of economic globalisation [5]. In recent years, with the implementation of national strategies such as the “Belt and Road Initiative,” the role of overseas Chinese cuisine in international cultural exchange has become increasingly prominent. Han [5] emphasises that the development of overseas Chinese cuisine is essentially a process of interaction and integration between Chinese food brands, culinary culture, and the local market and social environment. This development reflects not only globalisation at the economic level but also localisation through cultural adaptation, highlighting the practical need for intercultural communication and mutual understanding.

2.1.2. Overseas Chinese Food Classification

Overseas Chinese restaurants can be divided into traditional Chinese restaurants in Chinatown and modern chain Chinese restaurants based on their business models. Traditional Chinese restaurants are mostly family-run, with dishes mainly based on hometown cuisine, and their main clientele is Chinese communities, forming a so-called “cultural enclave” settlement [21].

Relatively speaking, modern Chinese restaurant chains (such as Panda Express and Haidilao's overseas stores) pay more attention to catering to mainstream consumer groups, choosing locations in bustling commercial areas, and providing standardised services to enhance brand image and attract local customers [13]. By cuisine and product type, it can be subdivided into formal Chinese restaurants (offering dishes from major cuisines), fast-food and snack Chinese restaurants (such as fried rice, noodles, and other fast food), and hot pot and speciality restaurants (hot pot, dim sum, etc.). According to a survey, among the overseas Chinese food categories, hot pot and Chinese fast food are growing rapidly and occupy a high market share. This classification reflects the diversity of overseas Chinese food across different markets: some restaurants maintain traditional flavours and evoke Chinese nostalgia, while others integrate innovation and enter the mainstream market. Therefore, the classification of overseas Chinese food reflects not only geographical and cultural differences, but also different business strategies and positioning. The common point across all categories is that they shoulder the mission of spreading Chinese food culture. Still, they have made certain adjustments to dish tastes and marketing methods to reflect consumers' preferences in the country [15]. By sorting out the classification of overseas Chinese food, we can provide a background basis for the subsequent research on the market positioning and strategy of Chinese food in Khon Kaen, Thailand.

2.2. Concepts and Classification of Consumer Behaviour Theories

2.2.1. Theoretical Concepts

Consumer behaviour was first proposed by American marketing scholar Bettman in 1979. Its core connotation refers to a series of psychological, emotional, and behavioural reactions shown by consumers during the process of purchasing, using, and handling products or services. Yue [19] noted that consumer behaviour research is a core area of marketing, aiming to reveal the internal laws and influencing factors of consumer behaviour. Its theoretical source can be traced back to the field of psychology. Early research focused on issues such as attitudes, communication, and persuasion. Subsequently, the rise of social psychology promoted the study of cognitive processes such as memory, information processing, and decision-making [8]. Before the mid-20th century, the economics school regarded consumers as rational decision-makers, while the psychology school introduced psychological factors such as motivation, learning, and emotion. In general, consumer behaviour theory has evolved from the “rational economic man” hypothesis to the “social-psychological man” perspective, giving rise to multiple theoretical schools, including motivation, drive, behavioural learning, cognitive decision-making, and emotional response.

2.3. Theoretical Classification

As an important theoretical tool for understanding the consumer market and consumer psychology, consumer behaviour theory covers multiple levels of psychology, society, and culture. Among them, psychology-related theories focus on studying consumer motivation and internal driving forces, such as Maslow's need theory and Herzberg's two-factor theory, emphasising that consumer behaviour is a comprehensive expression of internal needs and motivational factors. In contrast, cognitive learning-related theories focus on how consumers gradually form stable consumption preferences and purchasing habits through their own experience and information contact. At the same time, emotion- and attitude-related theories further argue that consumer behaviour is not entirely rational, and consumers' emotions and brand attitudes often play a key role in purchasing decisions. The theory, from a sociological perspective, starts with the external environment and explores the direct impact of reference groups, social identity, and herd mentality on consumers. The decision-making process theory explains the complexity of consumer decision-making in the dynamic processes of information search, evaluation, and selection from a comprehensive perspective. Finally, the cultural and environmental influence theory emphasises the profound shaping of consumers' values, consumption habits, and brand preferences by different cultural backgrounds, subcultural groups, and social classes [4]. These theories jointly constitute a multi-faceted framework for comprehensive analysis of consumer behaviour from different perspectives, providing theoretical support for the formulation of marketing strategies. This study will use the three theories of consumer behaviour, namely motivation theory, cognitive learning theory, and affective response theory, to analyse and study consumer behaviour in the Khon Kaen Chinese food market.

2.3.1. Motivation Theory

Motivation theory focuses on consumers' internal needs and purchasing motivations. Motivation is defined as the internal driving force that prompts individuals to take action to meet needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is a classic motivational model that divides human needs into five levels: physiological, safety, social, and self-realisation [12]. In the context of consumption, motivation is the driving force behind consumers' efforts to meet certain needs. When a need is aroused, it drives individuals to take action to meet it. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is widely used in marketing to analyse the hierarchy of needs underlying consumers' purchase decisions. In addition to the hierarchy of needs theory, motivation theory also includes the two-factor theory, achievement motivation theory, and others. These theories together explain the deep reasons why consumers want and why they act. In short, research on motivation theory categories provides theoretical support for understanding consumer behaviour and helps marketers gain insight into consumers' internal needs.

2.3.2. Cognitive Learning Theory

Cognitive and learning theory focuses on how consumers acquire information and experience through cognitive processes, thereby influencing their purchasing behaviour. Unlike behaviourist learning theory, which emphasises stimulus-response, cognitive learning theory holds that consumers engage in active information processing and problem-solving during the learning process. This view was laid by the research of psychologists such as Tolman and was subsequently applied in the field of consumer behaviour [1]. Specifically, when consumers encounter products or brands, they engage cognitive processes such as information acquisition, comprehension, memory, and retrieval, and use the knowledge they have acquired to evaluate and choose. In marketing practice, applying cognitive learning theory means that companies should focus on providing clear, useful information to help consumers understand the value of products and strengthen consumers' positive perceptions of brands through experience and feedback.

2.3.3. Affective Response Theory

Emotional theory focuses on the influence of emotions and feelings on consumer decision-making. The emotional marketing theory in consumer psychology holds that consumers' purchasing decisions are not solely based on rational analysis but are also significantly influenced by emotional reactions; positive emotional experiences can enhance purchasing intentions and encourage consumers to prefer brands or products that stimulate their positive emotions [9]. Emotional response theory emphasises the role of emotions in consumer information processing. Emotions not only directly affect current purchase decisions but also indirectly influence future behaviours by shaping memory and cognitive evaluation. In terms of marketing strategy, this means that companies can create positive emotional resonance among customers by creating a good consumer experience, and emotionally appealing advertisements and services, thereby establishing brand loyalty [11]. The study of emotional response theory can prompt marketers to realise that consumers are not purely rational decision-makers and that their emotional experiences are key factors in purchasing behaviour. Understanding and effectively leveraging consumers' emotional reactions can help formulate more contagious marketing strategies and improve consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

2.4. Marketing Strategy

2.4.1. Marketing Strategy Concept

A marketing strategy is a series of integrated action plans an enterprise takes to achieve its marketing goals [10]. It starts with meeting consumer needs and, through the positioning and selection of target markets, formulates a combination of products, prices, channels, etc. to achieve the enterprise's competitive advantage. The classic definition of marketing strategy is a process in which an enterprise organises various business activities in a planned manner, based on market research, to create value for customers and meet their needs through a coordinated marketing mix, thereby achieving corporate goals. In short, marketing strategy is the overall roadmap for an enterprise to deliver value to a specific market and generate returns, encompassing market segmentation, target market selection, market positioning, and corresponding marketing mix decisions [14].

2.4.2. Classification of Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategy is also commonly referred to as the marketing mix. Its purpose is to achieve the company's marketing goals, meet customer needs, and gain a competitive advantage. The main marketing strategies include the traditional 4P marketing strategy, the 7P service marketing strategy, and the customer-centric 4C marketing strategy.

2.4.3. 4P Marketing Strategy

The 4P marketing strategy, proposed by McCarthy, includes product, price, channel, and promotion, and is used to formulate corporate marketing strategies. Products emphasise meeting consumer needs; prices must take into account market competition and consumer affordability; channels determine product distribution methods; and promotions enhance brand influence through advertising, public relations, and other means. Related research focuses on applying the 4P model across different markets. It explores its adjustment strategies in cross-cultural marketing, such as localised product design, differentiated pricing, and diversified promotion methods, to enhance brand competitiveness [20].

2.4.4. 7P Marketing Strategy

The 7P strategy of service marketing is built on the 4P, which emphasises the particularities of service industry marketing activities. In addition to the traditional four elements of product, price, channel, and promotion, 7P adds three additional dimensions: people, process, and physical evidence to meet the characteristics of the service industry. The personnel strategy emphasizes the quality and service attitude of service personnel, improves service quality through training, and brings good

experience to consumers; the process strategy focuses on service process design, such as reducing waiting time or providing humanized service process to improve consumers' overall satisfaction with the service; the physical evidence involves the visual presentation of service scenes, environmental layout, and service facilities, so that consumers can enhance their trust in service quality through actual perception [7].

2.4.5. 4C Marketing Strategy

The 4C marketing strategy focuses more on the consumer perspective, emphasising that corporate marketing activities should revolve around customer needs, costs, convenience, and communication. Customer needs (Customer Needs and Wants) emphasise that companies need to deeply understand the consumer preferences and actual needs of the target market, and develop products that are more in line with actual needs through consumer feedback and market research; Cost to Customer focuses on the overall cost consumers pay when obtaining products, including monetary costs, time costs, and energy input. Companies should reduce these hidden costs as much as possible to enhance consumer perceived value; Convenience (Convenience) strategy requires companies to enhance consumer convenience in terms of product purchase channels, payment methods, after-sales services, etc., such as optimizing the convenience of online platform operations or adding convenient delivery services; Communication (Communication) strategy highlights the two-way interaction and communication between companies and consumers, and maintains close contact with consumers through social media interactions, online community operations and other forms to establish good customer relationships [3].

2.4.6. SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a method that objectively and accurately analyses an enterprise's actual situation and provides a development direction. SWOT analysis mainly conducts a comprehensive analysis of the enterprise through four aspects: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to obtain the enterprise's future strategic alternatives. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, such as brand influence and product quality, while opportunities and threats are external factors, such as market demand and competitive pressure. By using the SWOT analysis method, the strengths and weaknesses are combined with opportunities and challenges, enabling enterprises to more clearly leverage their advantages, overcome their weaknesses, seize opportunities, avoid risks, and formulate more practical strategic plans. Wang [17] noted that research mainly explores the application of SWOT in market positioning, strategic planning, and competitive analysis, emphasising leveraging strengths to seize opportunities and mitigating weaknesses to address threats, thereby improving the adaptability and competitiveness of enterprises across different markets. This paper uses the SWOT analysis to examine the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and threats facing Chinese food in Khon Kaen's development, and to select the most suitable marketing strategy for Chinese restaurants in Khon Kaen.

3. Research Method

This study adopts qualitative research methods, comprehensively applies consumer behaviour theory and SWOT analysis to explore the development status of the Chinese food market in Khon Kaen, and proposes a targeted 4P marketing strategy. First, based on motivation theory, cognitive learning theory, and emotional response theory, the study designs a multivariate data analysis framework that includes field observations and in-depth interviews. Secondly, by collecting and analysing local catering industry reports, relevant statistical data, and academic literature, the overall development status and trends of the Chinese food market in Khon Kaen are preliminarily clarified. Subsequently, a non-interventional observation of local Chinese restaurant consumer behaviour was conducted, and consumers' dining reactions, service satisfaction, and other responses were recorded in detail to better understand their actual consumption behaviour. This study conducted in-depth interviews with different consumer groups of Chinese restaurants in Khon Kaen, focusing on consumers' purchasing motivations, cognitive preferences, and emotional experiences, and summarising and analysing the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and challenges of Chinese food brand marketing in Khon Kaen.

Finally, using the content analysis method, the observation and interview data were sorted, and the SWOT framework was used for inductive analysis to clarify the market's advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and threats. In combination with consumer behaviour characteristics, targeted products, prices, channels, and promotion strategies were proposed for the Chinese food market to promote the sustainable development of Chinese food brands in Khon Kaen. In the consumer interview part of this study, we selected representative samples from different consumer groups to ensure data diversity and representativeness. The Chinese food market in Khon Kaen comprises multiple consumer groups. Consumers from different backgrounds differ in their dining motivations, consumer behaviours, and other factors. Therefore, to fully understand the market characteristics and formulate targeted marketing strategies for the main consumer groups in the Chinese food market in Khon Kaen, the interviewees were divided into four categories: local Thai consumers, overseas Chinese, foreign students, and merchants or related staff. Finally, a total of 30 valid interview data points were collected. The specific distribution is as follows:

Local Thai Consumers (10 People): To fully reflect the real needs and behavioural characteristics of local consumers in Khon Kaen for the Chinese food market, this study selected 10 local Thai consumers aged 18-45 with stable consumption capacity and multiple experiences with Chinese food for interviews. These interviewees include local students, company employees, and other workers, representing different income levels, educational backgrounds, and consumption habits. This multidimensional selection can ensure that the interview data are broadly representative of local consumers' dietary preferences, consumption motivations, price sensitivity, and acceptance of Chinese food, thereby providing a scientific basis for formulating more accurate marketing strategies.

Overseas Chinese (8 People): Overseas Chinese groups have long been the most important support for the overseas Chinese food market. This study specifically selected eight overseas Chinese groups who have lived in Khon Kaen for more than 1 year, are aged 20-50, and have frequent experience with Chinese food. These interviewees include Chinese businesspeople, long-term immigrants, and Chinese students studying at local universities, thereby providing a more comprehensive view of the performance of Chinese restaurants in terms of taste authenticity, cultural belonging, and brand loyalty. In addition, by interviewing the Chinese community who have lived in Thailand for a long time and frequently visited Chinese restaurants, the balance strategy of Chinese restaurant companies between maintaining traditional cultural characteristics and achieving localised operations can be further clarified.

International Students and Tourists (7 People): To study the international market's adaptability and cross-cultural promotion strategy for Chinese food in Khon Kaen, this study selected seven international students and tourists aged 18-35 from other Southeast Asian countries who have studied or travelled in Khon Kaen for more than 3 months. These respondents must have tasted food from many countries, have a high acceptance of diverse catering cultures, and have at least one experience with Chinese food. The setting of this limiting condition ensures that respondents can provide more objective and rich feedback on the Chinese dining experience and a deeper understanding of the adaptability and appeal of Chinese food culture.

Chinese Restaurant-Related Staff (5 People): The interviewees include restaurant managers, chefs, marketing personnel, servers, and purchasing managers. They have been working in Chinese restaurants in Khon Kaen for more than 1 year and have a deep understanding of the local market and business management conditions. The purpose of setting these limiting conditions is to understand the actual operating conditions, challenges, and strategies of Chinese restaurants from multiple perspectives, such as business management, menu development, marketing promotion, customer service, and raw material supply chain, to better combine consumer feedback with the actual operation of restaurants and provide more realistic and operational strategic suggestions for Chinese restaurant companies. The distribution of this interview sample ensures that the research covers different consumer groups and analyses from multiple dimensions, such as local market demand, cultural adaptability, and international development, thereby comprehensively reflecting the consumer behaviour characteristics of the Khon Kaen Chinese restaurant market and their impact on marketing strategies.

4. Research Result

4.1. Overview of the Chinese Food Market in Khon Kaen

Khon Kaen is in the northeast of Thailand and is an important commercial, educational, and cultural centre. In recent years, as cultural and economic exchanges between China and Thailand have deepened, the Chinese food market has shown significant growth momentum. Khon Kaen brings together local Thais, international students, Chinese groups, and foreign tourists, and has a high demand for Chinese food. At present, the types of Chinese restaurants in Khon Kaen mainly include traditional Chinese restaurants (Sichuan and Hunan cuisines), hot pot restaurants, and fusion cuisines (modified Cantonese cuisine and morning tea). The Khon Kaen area has a large number of overseas Chinese, Chinese students, and local consumers who are increasingly interested in Chinese food, providing a stable, diverse customer base for expanding the market for Chinese food. In addition, the flavours of some cuisines, such as Cantonese and Sichuan, are more in line with the eating habits of local Thai consumers. In addition, the deepening of Sino-Thai cooperation, driven by the "Belt and Road" initiative, has enabled Chinese food brands to build a strong development foundation and a favourable policy environment in Khon Kaen.

However, cultural differences make it difficult for some traditional Chinese dishes to be widely accepted by the local market, and some Chinese restaurants lack standardised brand building and operation management, which affects the brand's market image and competitiveness. The high procurement costs of Chinese food ingredients, especially specialised ingredients, also increase enterprises' operating burdens. From the external environment, market competition in Khon Kaen is fierce; local Thai food holds a dominant position, while other international restaurants, such as Japanese, Western, and Korean, are also constantly encroaching on market share. In addition, changes in the external policy environment, such as Thailand's food safety regulations and tax policies, have introduced uncertainty into the sustainable development of Chinese food companies. Nevertheless, Khon Kaen's economic growth, the development of online food delivery platforms, and the evolving attitudes of local consumers towards international catering culture have also created important market opportunities for Chinese food. Suppose Chinese

food brands can effectively grasp market demand through reasonable product improvements, price strategy adjustments, channel optimisation, and promotion. In that case, they will not be able to achieve long-term development in the Khon Kaen market.

4.1.1. Analysis of Consumer Behaviour in Chinese Restaurants

Consumer behaviour theory is a core component of marketing that explores the psychological, emotional, social, and cultural factors of individuals or groups in the process of purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products or services. In the Chinese food market in Khon Kaen, Thailand, applying consumer behaviour theory is particularly critical because it can help brands better understand the needs and preferences of target consumers, thereby formulating more effective marketing strategies.

4.1.2. Motivation Theory

From the perspective of motivation theory in consumer behaviour theory, consumers in Khon Kaen, Thailand, can be divided into three main groups: overseas Chinese, local Thais, and overseas students. When choosing Chinese food, they are mainly motivated by physiological, psychological, and social factors. First, physiological needs are the basic driving factor. Overseas Chinese and Chinese students choose Chinese food to meet their basic dietary needs because they depend on food from their hometowns. Due to the hot climate in Khon Kaen, Thailand, local consumers prefer sour, spicy, and refreshing flavours, and Chinese food, such as Sichuan and Cantonese cuisines, can meet this physiological need and stimulate appetite. At the same time, psychological motivation also plays an important role. Chinese restaurants not only serve delicious food but also offer exotic cultural experiences, satisfying the freshness and exoticism sought by some local consumers. This psychological satisfaction prompts them to be willing to consume Chinese food. Secondly, social needs are the key factor in promoting consumption. In Thailand, business banquets and social gatherings usually take place at more formal or distinctive restaurants, and Chinese restaurants have become the preferred venues for business meetings and friend gatherings, thanks to their rich dishes, banquet culture, and shared dining model. Festive consumption is also an important reflection of social needs. During traditional Chinese festivals such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival, consumers are more inclined to choose Chinese food to enhance social relationships.

‘My friends and I always choose Chinese restaurants when we have dinner together. Chinese food offers a wide variety of dishes and many choices. The environment and atmosphere are also suitable for chatting with friends.’

—Thai Chinese, male, 26 years old

‘I will make an appointment with friends to eat Chinese food during the Spring Festival or some traditional Chinese holidays. Chinese restaurants can bring a sense of home to us international students.’

—Chinese international student, male, 20 years old

‘The decoration of the Chinese restaurant is very unique, and it makes us feel the strong Chinese cultural atmosphere.’

—Indonesian international student, female, 28 years old

‘Our main customers were Chinese and international students at first, but now there are more and more local customers.’

—La Miao Restaurant Manager, female, 38 years old

4.1.3. Cognitive Learning Theory

From the perspective of cognitive learning theory, in the Khon Kaen Chinese food market, the consumer learning process can be divided into three aspects: direct experience, indirect learning, and brand learning. Direct experience is the core of consumers' brand cognition. When consumers try a Chinese restaurant for the first time, they will form a preliminary impression based on factors such as taste, service, and environment. If the experience is positive, consumers may form brand loyalty and exhibit repeat purchase behaviour. Indirect learning plays an important role in shaping consumer cognition. The rise of social media has made information acquisition more convenient, and the promotion of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok can quickly increase brand awareness. Finally, brand learning also plays an important role in the consumer cognition process. The market performance of Chinese food brands is affected by the rankings of food delivery platforms (such as Grab Food and LINEMAN), and restaurants with high rankings are more likely to be tried by new customers.

I tried this Chinese restaurant for the first time last week. The food was good, and the servers were very friendly. I will come again next time.’

—Thai student, female, 20 years old

'I saw a lot of people recommending this Chinese restaurant on TikTok, so I came here with my friends to try it.'
—Khon Kaen local, male, 35 years old

4.1.4. Affective Response Theory

From the perspective of emotional response theory, consumers' Chinese food consumption behaviour in Khon Kaen is deeply influenced by the emotional experiences generated during meals. Positive emotions can enhance consumers' brand loyalty. When consumers experience pleasure during the meal, such as the taste of the dishes exceeding expectations, the service being meticulous and thoughtful, the price-performance ratio being high, and the environment being comfortable and warm, they are prone to positive emotional reactions. This positive emotion can inspire consumers to make secondary purchases and be willing to recommend it to friends. On the contrary, negative emotions may lead to consumer loss. Once consumers have a bad experience and negative emotions, such as poor service, poor-tasting dishes, or an untidy environment, they will show resistance. They may even post negative comments on social media.

'I think I will recommend this nice restaurant to my friends.'
—Thai local, male, 40 years old

'I had high hopes for this restaurant, but the waiter was very cold and indifferent. I probably won't come here again.'
—Thai student, male, 21 years old

'I have the most contact with local guests, and I find that they prefer menus with pictures and text, as well as packages or promotions with more transparent prices. Young Thai guests in particular care a lot about the restaurant environment and service attitude, and often share their dining experience through social media, which has a great impact on the restaurant's reputation.'
—La Miao waiter, female, 28 years old

4.2. SWOT Analysis of the Current Development of Chinese Food in Khon Kaen

To comprehensively evaluate the development environment and market potential of Chinese food in Khon Kaen, Thailand, this paper combines empirical research with market conditions. It uses SWOT analysis to systematically analyse the current operating status of Chinese food across four dimensions: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

4.2.1. Strengths

As an important city in northeastern Thailand, Khon Kaen has a stable and diverse group of Chinese food consumers, including a considerable number of overseas Chinese, Chinese students, and local Chinese food enthusiasts, providing a solid customer base for the Chinese food industry. At the same time, Chinese food itself features a wide variety of dishes, diverse cooking methods, and complex flavour profiles. In particular, the sour, spicy flavours in Cantonese and Sichuan cuisines are highly consistent with the dietary preferences of residents in Khon Kaen, Thailand, thereby improving the acceptance of Chinese food in the local area. With the advancement of the "Belt and Road" initiative, China-Thailand economic, trade, and cultural exchanges continue to deepen, bringing policy dividends and cultural support to the development of Chinese food in the Thai market. For example, China and Thailand have increasingly frequent cooperation in chef exchanges, food customs clearance, and catering education, creating favourable conditions for the professionalisation and internationalisation of Chinese restaurants.

4.2.2. Weaknesses

Although Chinese food has a certain market foundation in Khon Kaen, its development still faces many challenges. First, due to differences in cultural cognition and taste adaptation issues, some traditional Chinese dishes are difficult to gain widespread recognition among local consumers. Secondly, many Chinese restaurants have not yet established a mature brand system and face problems such as outdated management practices, inconsistent dishes, and uneven service levels, which weaken overall market competitiveness. At the same time, the operating costs of Chinese food are relatively high, especially because some core ingredients and condiments need to be imported from China, such as Chongqing Xiaomian's alkaline noodles, special hot pot bases, and local flavour seasonings. These import links not only increase operating costs but also complicate inventory management and food compliance.

4.2.3. Opportunities

At present, Thailand's tourism industry is recovering, and the consumer market is diversifying, creating new opportunities for the development of Chinese food. As an important education and medical city in Thailand, Khon Kaen has attracted large numbers of domestic and foreign residents, making local consumers more tolerant of foreign food culture. Due to its cultural symbolism and ritual significance, Chinese food has gradually been incorporated into local festival culture. For example, traditional Chinese festivals such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival have become part of the festival activities in some cities in Thailand, further expanding the cultural influence of Chinese food. In addition, with the popularisation of food delivery platforms and the rise of digital consumption, Chinese food companies can use platforms such as GrabFood and LINE MAN to expand online sales channels, reduce the space limitations of physical stores, and improve service coverage. The characteristics of Chinese food that are suitable for sharing and packaging are also more in line with takeout consumption habits, providing effective support for its further expansion in the local market.

4.2.4. Threats

Although Chinese food has considerable development potential in Khon Kaen, its development also faces certain external threats. First, as a mainstream local food culture, Thai food has a strong price advantage and cultural identity, and it occupies a dominant position in market competition. Secondly, Japanese, Korean, and some Western fast-food chain brands have expanded rapidly in Khon Kaen in recent years. Their unified brand management, cost-effective products, and youthful marketing methods have had a direct impact on the Chinese food market. In addition, Thailand's policy environment may also constitute an uncertainty factor. Changes in food safety supervision, catering licenses, labour laws, and tax systems may increase the compliance costs and operational pressures of Chinese restaurants. Most small and medium-sized Chinese restaurants cannot cope with policy risks and may face survival pressures amid fierce competition and changing external conditions (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of SWOT

Strengths(S)	Weaknesses(W)
S1: Clear market positioning	W1: Ingredient procurement challenges
S2: Stable and diverse target consumer groups	W2: Inefficient operations management
S3: Diversity of cuisines and flavours	W3: High cost of raw materials
S4: Some dishes are in line with Thai tastes	W4: Food taste and cultural adaptation barriers
Opportunities(O)	Threats(T)
O1: Good economic environment	T1: Cultural differences
O2: A large number of overseas Chinese	T2: Local food has obvious price advantages
O3: Growing online food delivery market	T3: Other international food brands
O4: Adapting Chinese food to Thai flavours	T4: Potential regulatory risks

4.3. 4P Marketing Strategy

After clarifying the characteristics of consumer behaviour in the Chinese food market in Khon Kaen and systematically analysing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats using the SWOT analysis, the key is to translate the theoretical research results into effective market actions. Therefore, this study will be based on the 4P marketing theory framework, targeting the specific needs and market status of consumers in Khon Kaen, combining strengths and opportunities to take the initiative, and combining weaknesses and threats to deal with problems and propose targeted marketing strategies to help Chinese food brands more accurately grasp market opportunities and respond to potential challenges, thereby improving market competitiveness and promoting the sustainable development of Chinese food in Khon Kaen.

4.3.1. Product

In terms of product strategy, combining S2 (“some Chinese dishes cater to local tastes”) with the motivational drive of consumers in motivation theory, Chinese restaurants should adopt a dual-line product development approach. On the one hand, preserve the original flavours of representative dishes (such as Sichuan and Cantonese cuisines) to meet the cultural belonging needs of overseas Chinese and Chinese students. According to psychological motivation theory, these groups choose Chinese food not only for its taste but also for their psychological needs for emotional connection and identity recognition. On the other hand, for local Thai consumers, the localisation and improvement of dishes should be strengthened. For example, reduce the amount of oil and salt, use spices more effectively, and develop “Thai-style Chinese cuisine” that adapts to local tastes. This not only meets customers' physiological needs but also stimulates the motivation to try new things and expands the potential

consumer base. At the same time, given that direct experience is the core of brand cognition in cognitive learning theory, companies should focus on ingredient freshness, dish stability, and menu graphic design to ensure customers have a positive experience on their first try, thereby promoting subsequent repurchase behaviour.

4.3.2. Price

Given that Chinese food W3 has “higher raw material costs” and T2 has “obvious price advantages for local food,” a flexible, differentiated pricing strategy should be adopted. Implement tiered pricing for different consumer groups. For Chinese and high-frequency consumer groups, price mechanisms such as package discounts, recharge rebates, and membership systems are introduced to address consumers' motivation to combine long-term consumption with emotional connections and to enhance price recognition and brand loyalty. For Thai local consumers or other consumers trying Chinese food for the first time, short-term promotions such as tasting packages, holiday discounts, and free drinks with full orders can be set up to lower the threshold for their first try and help them establish consumption habits. At the same time, customers' emotional perceptions should be taken into account. Excessively high or complex pricing can easily trigger negative emotions and affect overall satisfaction. Transparent, reasonable, and friendly price tags, along with simple ordering logic, can help foster positive consumer emotions, thereby improving consumer comfort.

4.3.3. Place

Against the backdrop of O3's “rapid development of food delivery platform”, Chinese restaurants should promote an integrated online and offline channel strategy. Offline, priority should be given to core living circles such as colleges and universities, densely populated areas, and large business districts to ensure stable customer flow. Given the characteristics of “observational learning” in cognitive learning theory, the store's design should focus on the brand logo, an open kitchen, and food display to attract passing consumers and form a preliminary brand impression. Online, the menu structure should be optimised based on platforms such as Grab and LINE MAN, the quality of food pictures and descriptions should be improved, and the click-through conversion rate should be enhanced. Combined with consumers' motivations for consumption, measures such as rationalising the minimum delivery threshold and simplifying the menu structure should be implemented to ensure a smooth customer experience. In addition, it is also possible to maintain customer stickiness by operating communities such as LINE communities and Facebook communities, pushing discount information to high-frequency customers, and inviting new product tasting activities, thereby building a long-term customer interaction mechanism and enhancing brand memory.

4.3.4. Promotion

In terms of promotional strategies, amid the cognitive pressure posed by T2's “rapid expansion of Western, Japanese and Korean catering brands”, Chinese catering companies need to strengthen their brand presence and consumer interaction, and improve communication effectiveness through strategies that emphasise both sensibility and rationality. First, given the theory's emotion-driven nature, attention should be paid to the atmosphere shaping the restaurant and the customer interaction experience. During holidays, cultural promotional activities such as “Spring Festival Theme Dinner” and “Mid-Autumn Festival Reunion Night” can be held to stimulate customers' positive emotions. Secondly, combined with Thai consumers' sensitivity to visual communication, the focus can be placed on social media content-based advertising, including short videos, customer reviews, cooking live broadcasts, etc., to shape the brand image while enhancing consumers' perceived value. Finally, to lower the threshold for customers' first attempts, a promotional mechanism combining free forwarding for tasting, newcomer discounts, and points exchange should be adopted to create a closed-loop path of consumption, evaluation, and recommendation, and to drive the brand's natural spread (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of 4 P's

4P Elements	Key Strategy
Product	Original and localised dual-line menu design
	Optimise the first-meal experience and the graphic menu.
Price	Membership benefits combined with promotions
	Psychological pricing rationalisation
Place	Combining online and offline channels
	Using social platforms to maintain customer stickiness
Promotion	Hosting festivals
	Increase community interaction
	Content-based social media communication

5. Conclusion

Based on consumer behaviour theory, this study systematically analysed the Chinese food market in Khon Kaen, Thailand, through in-depth investigations and interviews, and proposed practical marketing strategies tailored to the current market situation. The study found that the Chinese food consumer groups in Khon Kaen mainly include overseas Chinese, local Thai residents, and international students and tourists. There are obvious differences in consumption motivation and purchasing behaviour among these three groups. Therefore, Chinese restaurants need to implement differentiated marketing strategies tailored to the demand characteristics of different customer groups to enhance brand competitiveness. The main advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and threats faced by Chinese food companies in Khon Kaen were identified through SWOT analysis. The study found that the competitive advantage of the Chinese food market in Khon Kaen stems mainly from the Chinese community and the alignment of some dishes' tastes with local consumers' preferences. At the same time, cultural differences, low operational efficiency, and difficulties in purchasing raw materials are the main disadvantages. In addition, the strong economic environment, the rapid growth of the online takeaway market, and the localisation of tastes offer significant development opportunities for Chinese food companies.

At the same time, competition from local Thai and other international catering brands poses a potential threat. Based on the above analysis, this study uses the 4P marketing theory to propose specific strategic suggestions, including product differentiation and localisation design, a flexible pricing strategy, multi-channel expansion, innovative social media marketing, and localised promotional activities. Implementing these strategies will help Chinese food brands in Khon Kaen better meet the needs of different consumer segments, thereby expanding market share and brand influence. Looking to the future, Chinese food companies in Khon Kaen need to continue to monitor dynamic changes in consumer demand, actively optimise product and service quality, and continuously improve brand operations and management. At the same time, they should explore new marketing models that integrate online and offline more deeply and actively participate in local community and cultural exchange activities to enhance brand affinity and market penetration. Finally, this study hopes that the proposed marketing strategies will not only improve the market performance of Chinese food companies in Khon Kaen but also serve as a useful reference for the successful expansion of Chinese catering brands in Southeast Asia and beyond, including the global market.

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