

**A Bite of *YouDunZi*: A netnography analysis of Shanghai Street Food**

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2020

Faculty of Culture and Society

A dissertation submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Gastronomy

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## **Abstract**

Street food is a symbol of local culture but it is often neglected by gastronomy studies. This research examines the street food culture in Shanghai, to analyse why *YouDunZi* (a deep-fried turnip cake), a local street food, is declining along with Shanghai's street food culture. Studying Shanghai traditional street food from the perspectives of culture, heritage and place, this dissertation aims to analyse the complex relationship between Shanghainese, tourists and the street food culture. This research drew on a qualitative methodology, using netnography and content analysis, to examine the value of street food to the Shanghainese and the reason why Shanghai street food is declining, and aims to address the sustainability of Shanghai's street food scene. Netnography tends to dig deeper into the content behind the individual, conversation, posting and experiences. It focuses more on meaning than on precision. China's social media, such as WeChat, DaZhongDianPing, and Weibo, were the primary source of secondary data used to further analyse people's thoughts and emotions on street food. This research has found that most Shanghainese and tourists who come to Shanghai are unwilling to let go of local street food in Shanghai. It is also argued that the local specialty street food belongs to the local intangible cultural heritage. The issues related to food safety and sanitation when resolved, would translate into a more sustainable future for Shanghai's street food culture. The relocation of some street food business to ancient towns around Shanghai also creates new lease of life for the street food vendors who have been displaced. Street food in Shanghai has gone from maintaining the livelihood of the operators to giving local residents a story to remember from their childhood. While the disappearance of a generation of traditional snacks means sacrificing part of their stories, it also represents the transformation of a developed city.

## **Acknowledgements**

The completion of this dissertation meant that my study career in New Zealand is completed. Formally stepping into society, I hope this dissertation will not be the end of academic thinking, and I hope that the previous sentence is not just hope.

First of all, I want to thank my lovely mentor, Dr Sandra Goh. Her seriousness and responsibility make me admire her greatly. She has profound knowledge, a rigorous academic attitude and lofty professionalism, and is broad minded. Thank you for choosing my subject. I feel very lucky to meet such a good mentor.

Secondly, I would like to thank my second mentor and programme leader, Christine Hall, for all the help and advice Christine has given me from the beginning of enrolment. Christine has been taking care of me like a family member in New Zealand. Thanks to her for her tireless efforts in arranging various activities and enriching my after-school life, from being a slow cook volunteer at the French Festival to helping to promote the gastronomy major in the French Festival. In the past two years, I have learned a lot of knowledge and broadened my horizons. I am very happy to have chosen gastronomy as a major, and it felt like fate has brought the discipline to me. I met a group of friends who would rather die than not be discovering food and the story behind the food as their research project.

Third, I must mention the boon and bane caused by COVID-19. On one hand, because of the spread of COVID-19 in China, I was denied entry to New Zealand during the Chinese New Year. I had to transit to another country for 15 days. During this period, I was overwhelmed with mental pressure. Fortunately, my mentors and parents have been caring about me and giving me advice constantly. On the other hand, lockdown gave me plenty of time to think about the structure and content of the dissertation during the quarantine.

Above all, I would like to express my sincere respect and blessings to my supervisors! I really appreciated the help.

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### **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 27/08/20

## Chapter 1 Introduction

*For the native Shanghainese, street food in Shanghai is also one of the thousands of reasons for loving Shanghai. The egg rolls that came out of the pot in the farm market, the steaming soup dumplings in the well-established shops and the freshly fried tofu and youdunzi on the street tempted everyone who passed by. Although there are fewer and fewer street foods with the needs of urban development, you can still find these traditional delicacies in the corners of Shanghai, each of which is proudly loved by Shanghainese. (Member 25)*

Street food not only reflects the identity of the local history and culture of a place, but also fosters relationships between families, their communities and societies (Greenspan, 2018). Greenspan (2018) also cautioned that Shanghai street food is slowly disappearing from the street.

### 1.1 Research questions

This dissertation aims mainly to analyse and study the current situation of Shanghai's disappearing street food. Netnography has been used to investigate the comments of netizens to find out what impact this situation has on the lives of Shanghai people and the traditions of Shanghai and to ask "What influence does street food culture have?" This topic is important because it is often mentioned by people in Shanghai, but no one has conducted research into it. Everyone is very sad about the situation but no actual action has been taken. This dissertation can provide a reference for and advice to policy makers, so as to prevent the further demise of Shanghai street food, preserve the traditional culture, and ensure the cleanliness of the city environment. It also allows everyone to have the opportunity to reminisce about childhood.

The key areas of research are to discover the reason why the street food is declining, and what influence does it have on Shanghainese and tourists:

- Why is Shanghai street food declining?
- What does street food mean to Shanghainese and tourists?
- Why is it important to keep street food vending in Shanghai?

## 1.2 Introducing *YouDunZi* (油墩子)

In China, from south to north, deep-fried foods are an essential part of Chinese cuisine. It is a regular street food snack. Knowing the taste of *YouDunZi* (deep fried turnip cake) proves that one belongs to 1970s, 80s, and 90s in Shanghai, China. For me, these deep-fried snacks are reminiscent of the flavours from my childhood. Friends and I used to visit the street vendors after school, and although I knew it is not a healthy diet, occasionally I would still enjoy some old-time favourites. The chunky deep-fried radish cakes known as *YouDunZi* (油墩子) are a classic snack. They are made by frying flour batter and finely shredded white radish with river shrimps. 油 (You) refers to oil, 墩子 (Dunzi) means thick, solid and round, which describes the shape of You Dun Zi.

“The thick, round shape of *YouDunZi* is formed by a special round cooking utensil to which the vendor first adds a few spoons of batter before layering the radish filling and another scoop of batter to cover it. They are then put into the hot oil to deep-fry for several minutes until the cake turns gold and crispy on the outside”(Wu & Cheung, 2002, P.16).



Figure 1. A picture of *YouDunZi* (Wechat, 2017).

Although it is an unhealthy snack, because of the deep-fried cooking method, which contains the whole day's fat intake (45g) (Niu, 2014). *YouDunZi* remains popular among young and old, as the Chinese believe the memory of good food resides in the stomach.

According to in the period from 1959 to 1961, which has also been called three hard years, China encountered serious economic difficulties, a proportion of the national economy was damaged, agricultural production was greatly reduced, and the market supply was tight. People did not have enough food. Meat was a rare product that could be bought with limited tickets. Oil was a luxury that people could not even think of. Everyone was scrambling for food. The appearance of the deep-fried turnip cake brought comfort and gathered the local people together. It was always visible in the streets and lanes of Shanghai and is still a common sight to see, as the aroma and fresh taste attracts the customers. Street food vendors would be surrounded by dozens of customers. In winter,

*YouDunZi* becomes a food tradition that symbolises the warmth, satisfaction and happiness in life.

In 1955 the socialist transformation began, and all the individual vendors were not allowed to operate their businesses (Wilkinson, 2000). At the beginning of the 1956, the public-private partnership of individual enterprises turned over all the means of production to the state, which was also known as joint state-private enterprise. Public-private partnerships have caused many traditional companies and brands to disappear. The brands that have survived to this day are held by governments at all levels of the People's Republic of China and have lost their family heritage. As a consequence, many street food stalls are owned by the government. The stall owners began to lose their management rights, which led to a decrease in profits. With the reform and China's open doors to the world, the street market management was gradually loosened, and some people with poor living conditions began to run small businesses to support their families.

According to Niu (2014, p. 23), "urbanization has taken away a lot of the street snacks and finding *YouDunZi* can take some time, as it is usually sold on street-side food stalls". Recently, new shops specialising in *YouDunZi* and Shanghai-style scallion pancakes have opened in downtown Shanghai, and the lines are long. "Aunt Jiang's *YouDunZi* (江阿姨油墩子) is one of the more popular *YouDunZi* shops in Shanghai that often sees long waiting lines. The price is four yuan (US\$1) per cake" (Li, 2008 p. 9).

### 1.3 The background of Shanghai street food



Figure 2. Shanghai street food in Qing Dynasty, (WeChat, 2018a).

Shanghai's street food culture has been recorded since the Southern Song Dynasty (Leong-Salobir, 2019). Subsequently, with the increasing prosperity of Shanghai's commerce, the variety of food became abundant, and the production became sophisticated. Wu (2014) also mentioned that at the end of the Qing dynasty (the last imperial dynasty of China from 1644 to 1912) was an important turning point in the development of food in Shanghai.



**Figure 3. Qing Dynasty food stalls, (WeChat, 2018b).**

As early as 1260, during the Southern Song Dynasty, Shanghai already had a restaurant opened by locals. From the Yuan Dynasty to the 28th year (1291), after the establishment of the county-level government in Shanghai, the economy gradually developed into a trading port and a grain transportation centre, and the population increased to more than 200,000. There was already a presence of street food stalls in the Ming Dynasty. In the Ming Dynasty, many restaurants were opened in the market areas north of Suzhou River and Xujiahui.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, the number of restaurants and stalls operating meals and snacks in Chenghuang Temple and Shiliupu<sup>2</sup> increased to more than 100 households.

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**Figure 4. Shanghai street food in 1843, (WeChat, 2018c).**

In 1843, Shanghai was forced to open after the Opium War. Imperialists scrambled to establish concessions in Shanghai, and foreign nationals flooded into China. With the trade, Shanghai became increasingly prosperous and gradually became the commercial centre of China (Zhou, 2013).



**Figure 5. Benbang dishes (Weibo, 2019a).**

Merchants and dignitaries gathered in Shanghai from all over the world. People from other cities also flocked to Shanghai because Shanghai had a more stable political situation. Migrants from different places also brought different local diets and tastes to Shanghai. Besides the original braising with soy sauce and stir-frying, the Shanghai diet also absorbed the characteristics from Wuxi, Suzhou, Ningbo and other local dishes, as well as the cooking methods of western dishes and pastry, so

<sup>1</sup> Xujiahui is the centre of Shanghai.

<sup>2</sup> ShiLiupu: *Shiliupu* became the city's largest ferry port in the 1980s.

that the variety of dishes has been greatly developed (Wang, 2011). The characteristics of Shanghai “Benbang”<sup>3</sup> dishes and local snacks are shown in figure 5.

#### 1.4 The plight of street food in Shanghai

Street food is considered to be a symbol of Shanghai culture. It is also a window into the local culture (Hanser, 2016). The unique Shanghai-style street food culture gathered and integrated the essence of street food from around the country (Swislocki, 2008). For Shanghai natives, Shanghai’s street food snacks are also one of the thousands of reasons to love Shanghai (Hawkins, 1980).

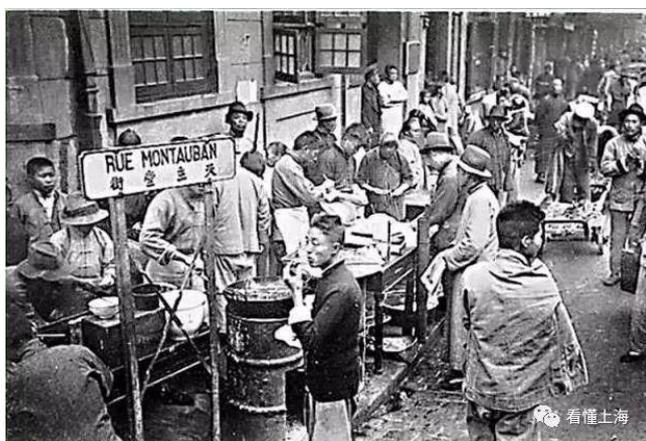


Figure 6. Morning market in Shanghai, (WeChat, 2018d).

The urban development of Shanghai and modernisation have a role to play in creating a nostalgic past for Shanghai’s street food culture (Swislocki, 2008). Although street food is becoming a declining trade as the city develops, people can still find these traditional delicacies in the corners of Shanghai – and each one is deeply loved by the Shanghainese (Swislocki, 2008).

Earlier signs of the declining of the trade were evident during the staging of the Shanghai World Expo<sup>4</sup> in 2010. A series of renovations were launched during the preparation period of the Shanghai World Expo to manage street food and led to the rapid disappearance of street food from the street. Shanghai street food culture was threatened. According to Greenspan (2014), “Shanghai viewed 2010 World Expo as an opportunity to show the best image to the world” (p. 6). Greenspan (2018) described mess, disorder, and unhygienic nature of street food as “uncivilized” against which the modern, clean, tidy Shanghai is imagined. In Shanghai, Chen (2012) wrote, “an estimated 150,000 people scratched out a living by selling goods and services on the streets and in makeshift stalls all over the city” (p. 17). He also said that the street food centre had instead been replaced

<sup>3</sup> BenBang: Benbang dishes are the abbreviation for the Benbang local dishes in Shanghai.

<sup>4</sup> Expo Shanghai 2010, officially in full the World Exposition 2010 Shanghai China, also called Expo 2010, was a world exposition in [Shanghai, China](#), that ran between May 1 and October 31, 2010. One of the largest world fairs or expositions ever mounted, it also was the most heavily attended of any such events.

by international fast-food chains such as McDonalds, KFC, and Subway. The city has witnessed dramatic changes that are clearing the street food vendors off the streets (Maglumtong and Fukushima, 2020). Greenspan (2018) pointed out that Shanghai has adopted a linear model of growth that considers street food, street markets, and street life as a thing of the past.

Today, street food has found a new home in retail shops and shopping malls. Urban planners and municipal officials have adopted a view of modern progress conceptualised as “Pushcart Evil,” “as a passage in which the ‘backwards’ chaos of ‘traditional’ urban markets give way to the more ‘advanced,’ clean and well-ordered commercial sector such as specialty shops, retail arcades, department stores and shopping malls“ (Li & Orum, 2018, p. 12). On one hand, for a safe and tidy image of Shanghai, the government has shut down 90% of hawkers on the street. On the other hand, for tourists, the desire to taste local street food may overcome the fear of being sick (Chavarria & Phakdee-auksorn, 2017).

## **1.5 Overview of Dissertation**

The dissertation consists of five chapters, structured as follows. Chapter 1, the present chapter, has introduced contextual information, which included the background, and overview of this study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on street food culture, the value of street food in Asia, and street food safety and regulation and its challenges. A conceptual framework of sustaining Shanghai’s street food culture is constructed from the literature review. Chapter 3 presents the design of the study using netnography. It is used to study cultural patterns and beliefs. Chapter 4 presents the findings, and the analysed comments from social media. The final chapter discusses the participants’ comments and experiences along with the literature review.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Asia's street food culture and current trends

Street food is defined by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (1997) as “ready-to-eat food and beverage prepared and/or sold by hawkers or vendors especially in the street and other similar places” (para. 1). Over 2.5 billion people around the world consume street food each day (Fellows & Hilmi, 2011). Street food is the best way to get to know a city and a window on the local culture, especially for international tourists (Alfiero, Bonadonna, Cane, & Lo Giudice, 2019; Hanser, 2016). Yu and Zhou (2004) noted that Taiwanese and international tourists made special travel plans just to visit the Taiwan night market. Greenspan (2018) noted that “the importance of Shanghai to be a model for twenty-first-century urbanism rests not only on its high-speed trains and super-tall skyscrapers, but also, on its BBQ vendors and baozi<sup>5</sup> stands” (p. 2). For Shanghai natives, Shanghai's street food snacks are also one of the thousands of reasons to love Shanghai (Hawkins, 1980). Street food is considered to be a symbol of Shanghai culture. However, Alderslade, Talmadge, and Freeman (2006) have argued that urban development in developing countries is incompatible with street peddlers.

People at all social levels in Asia love visiting, eating, and socialising with friends at street food markets. Field surveys by Dai, Zhong, and Scott, (2019) showed that street food consumers include a variety of interpersonal relationships including family, friends, couples, colleagues and so on. Visitors also have a variety of purposes, such as tasting food, shopping, socialising with friends, spending time with family, and sightseeing (Lin, 2014). To the locals, the night market in Taiwan is full of life, and down to earth (Chang, Kim, & Kim, 2018). According to Lin (2014), the Taiwanese Government opened cross-strait tourism in 2008 (unfortunately, the border has been closed to self-guided tours from mainland China since 2019), and a large number of mainland visitors suddenly poured in. Taiwan's unique night market culture has certainly become one of the popular items on travel itineraries, making the night market business prosperous. Atadil, Sirakaya-Turk, Meng, and Decrop (2018) noted that the night market is a place with free stalls and a high flow of people. Therefore, many vendors have entered the night market to find their own stage, which has also opened up the diversified development direction of the night market, adding a diversified appeal which also enhances the overall quality. According to Calloni

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<sup>5</sup> Baozi: 包子 steamed stuffed bun.

(2013), street food vendors have become cultural icons and tourist attractions. Street food all over the world shares some common features: (Henderson, 2017; Gupta, Khanna & Gupta, 2018)

- 1) it is simple, portable and convenient to eat while walking,
- 2) it uses common and fresh materials,
- 3) it distributes disorderly in the streets, and may not appear in the mall
- 4) Affordable and inexpensive to customers

## **2.2 Street food promotes small and local businesses and supports local produce**

Street food provides entrepreneurship opportunities that allow people to start a business from scratch with small amount of investment (Cardoso, Companion & Marras, 2014). Perseverance in informal work not only “helps meet the needs of poor consumers by providing low-priced goods and services, it also provides significant job and income generation for the newly urbanized” (Becker, 2004, p. 4). According to Bhowmik (2012) and Tinker (1997), street food plays a significant role in decreasing the unemployment rate, especially for families that earn an income below the national average. Street food is also a convenient food source for the public which is not about just feeding just one person, but feeding everyone, both customers and vendors. Street foods are many people’s only income, according to Calloni, (2013), with 12 to 24% of people depending on street vending for a livelihood in sub-Saharan Africa; in India, street vending makes up 11% of total urban employment; and some Latin American cities also have a high concentrations of street vendors. However, many cities experience cycles in which local authorities tolerate, then regulate, and then evict street vendors in accordance with economic trends, election cycles and other urban management pressures (Privitera, 2015).

Henderson (2017) considered vendors and their special dishes stand for local identity and difference, representing current societies and cultures. From an environmentally friendly perspective, street food usually creates the lowest carbon emissions, and mostly offers zero carbon distance, as fresh and locally made fruit, vegetables and other raw material are used to make street food (Cardoso, Companion & Marras, 2014). By doing so, vendors support local economies and play a vital role in moving towards food sovereignty, food security and a rural-urban sustainable food chain (Marras, 2014). As a result, the high socioeconomic value (Alfiero et al., 2019), also gives rise to sustainable tourism because it uses local materials, enhances the local economy, and preserves local gastronomic heritage (Handayani, Seraphin, Korstanje, & Pilato, 2019).

Especially in Asian countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia, street food can be viewed as a basis for a livelihood and the main source of income for many people (Handayani et al., 2019) although some experts may not deem it to be a great boost to the economy (Lin, 2014). According to these experts, although Taiwan's night market vendors are not very helpful to economic growth, they have an important role in reducing the number of unemployed people and maintaining the survival of small businesses (Lin, 2014). This effect is particularly evident during economic downturns. In Taiwan, one of the main reasons for the work of many individual vendors is that night market vendors have no employment threshold, and their income is better than the general market income. From a certain perspective, the night market street vendor occupation provides many people with opportunities for self-employment. Thus, street food contributes food security to the poor and the lower middle-class in the developing urban societies of regions such as Asia (Privitera, 2012).

### 2.3 Authentic taste and place

Our memory of a place lies within the stomach. To be connected to a place, we have to experience it with your mouth. The memory of the food we consume will remind us of the tastes we shared with other people (Montanari, 2006). Street food also provides tourists with an authentic experience of local residents' lives and promotes traditional local cultures (Tsai & Wang, 2017). Tourists and local foodies alike search for authenticity in their choice of travel destination (Getz, & Robinson, 2014). Privitera (2012) suggested street food as an alternative to globalisation – one that brings about social interactions between people and food, and business activities.



**Figure 7. Chan Hon Meng's Chicken Rice and Noodle Stall, (Wechat, 2018e).**

Calloni (2013) considered street food to be a dynamic symbol that transcends into the contemporary world of the social media community. There are millions of blogs, WeChat posts and Instagram posts about people's favourite street food. The online community has also introduced Michelin star accreditation for Singapore hawker stalls

(Henderson, 2017). Hawker stalls in Singapore are the equivalent of the street food business. According to Tarulevicz (2018), hawker stalls are normally sheltered and often

audited for their hygiene in Singapore. Michelin produces best-sellers food guides with a serious and unique approach. The guide now rates over 30,000 establishments in over 30 territories across three continents, and more than 30 million Michelin Guides have been sold worldwide (Michelin, 2020). When Chan Hon Meng (see Figure 7) won his first Michelin star in 2016 for his Liao Fan Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice and Noodle Stall, it made him the first street-food establishment ever to be recognised by the prestigious guide. This earned Chan Hon Meng's stall the additional honour of being the cheapest Michelin starred meal in the world, as a portion of soya chicken rice costs roughly US\$1.42) (Heller, 2018). Undoubtedly, the Michelin award has also played an indelible role in the promotion of street food in Asia.

## **2.4 Current trends**

Today, street food stores have given way to a more advanced, clean and well-ordered commercial sector made up of specialty shops, retail arcades, department stores and shopping malls (Greenspan, 2018; Li & Orum, 2018). Wasserstrom (1991) describes street food stores as "Pushcart Evil" in his essay about the backward chaos of traditional urban markets. Shanghai has adopted a linear model of growth that considers street food, street markets, and street life as a thing of the past (Greenspan, 2018). Urban planners castigated or criminalised street vendors "as sources of social service burdens, unfair competition, sidewalk litter, lost tax revenue or public health concern" (Alderslade et al., 2006, p. 1). China's *ChengGuan ZhiFa* (城管执法), which stands for Urban Management Law Enforcement, a para-police agency tasked with enforcing non-criminal urban administrative regulations, has earned a reputation for excessive force and impunity. "The ChengGuan left negative impact among some Chinese citizens with arbitrary and thuggish behavior including assaults on suspected administrative law violators (some of which lead to serious injury or death), illegal detention, and abuses accompanying forceful confiscation of property" (Watch, 2012, p. 1).

Street food vendors are also finding their ways into food festivals and events. This step is also observed as being encouraged by the government, as a street food renaissance begins with Chinese Government reinforcing regulations in street food trade (Smith-Bedford, 2011). Food events and festivals attracts visitors (Alfiero et al., 2019; Lee, Sung, Suh, & Zhao, 2017) and is a good marketing tool for a destination. As noted by Sandybayev (2018), festival tourism has become one of the important forms of food culture tourism development. As gastronomic food tourism develops, the development of local food

festivals can greatly enrich the variety of food attractions for visitors (Kim, Duncan, & Chung, 2015).

Some street food businesses enjoy a good reputation with repeat customers, but some vendors who are disqualified from operating because of “non-standard operation” can only be forced to close their shops (Dai, Zhong, & Scott, 2019, p. 8 ). Gao (2015) argued that some of the street food has been sponsored, with a standardised facade, obtained legal business qualifications, and once again re-emerged. Calloni (2013) considered street food is a dynamic which is absorbing ideas from the contemporary world, as millions of users of blogs, Tiktok and ins post their favourite street food online. Popular street food has gone viral on social media, which has brought them not only customers but Michelin stars.

The way to promote street food has also undergone significant changes with the development of technology. Applications like Yelp, OpenTable, TripAdvisor and Zomato are designed to promote and facilitate the sharing of information regarding street food vending around the world. They are designed as a showcase for street food chefs and an interactive guide for consumers. Consumers can find a specific street food business, its location, schedule, menu, and description through search and filter functions (Privitera, 2015). This study seeks to examine the conversations around street food consumers on WeChat, Weibo and DaZhongDianPing.

Food channels on various media platforms also helped to promote the presence of popular street food cultures around the world, including: Netflix’s *Street Food: Asia*; CCTV’s *A Bite of China*; and also *Eat Street* and *The Great Food Truck Race*. These are examples of food channels that increase local demand for street food (Newman & Burnett, 2013). Sadly, in mainland China, it seems that street food is no longer prevalent, and people cannot find their favourite street food at every corner. For some, it has disappeared from the historical stage and streetscape.

Accordingly, the small food stalls and worldly atmosphere in the gourmet capital of Chengdu have won widespread praise from netizens. Chengdu has introduced a policy that permits shop merchants to occupy roads in certain areas. To meet the requirements of not getting together and maintaining distance under the normal prevention and control rules of COVID-19 situation, outdoor operations obviously have advantages over indoor

operations. Moreover, it is a pragmatic measure from the perspectives of resuming business and resuming the market after the pandemic, ensuring employment and promoting employment, and even supporting the masses, allowing the hawker economy to return within a certain range such as a safety and healthy environment, responding to people's livelihood concerns, and a embodying people-oriented policy.

## **2.5 Street food consumers**

With the rapid development of urbanisation and globalisation, street vendors are facing unprecedented challenges along with cultural changes. In Shanghai, street food consumers are predominantly the locals and domestic tourists (Greenspan, 2018). The changing eating habits of people and the faster pace of life sees them leaning towards fast food than traditional dishes (Nicolas et al., 2007). The cleanliness of fast food and the standardisation of products give people a sense of peace of mind. Fast food is taking over from street food.

According to Hjalager and Richards (2003), visitors interested in gastronomy could learn about a destination's culture and food knowledge by consuming local or regional food and beverages and, by doing so, they show respect to and admiration for the culture. Kivela and Crotts (2006) noted that existential foodies are trying to avoid "manufactured" dining-out environments, which are frequently offered by expensive restaurants that offer extravagant decoration and service.

A foodie is a person who is very interested in food. Foodies are the ones talking about food in any gathering – salivating over restaurants, recipes, radicchio. They don't think they are being trivial – Foodies consider food to be an art, on a level with painting or opera. (Barr & Levy, 1984, p. 6)

Wallace (2018) described them as the foodie generation. According to Wu (2002), foodies will seek out the destination's fresh ingredients and new ways of eating and preparing food and, by tasting street food, understand the history of the place – like gastronomy tourists, they want to escape from mundanity. According to the Kivela and Crotts (2006), Intrepid Travel Agency (2004) offers gourmet travel package to Asia, including China, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Japan, street stalls are a popular attraction on their itinerary for the intrepid new gourmet travellers, apart from elaborate banquets and frantic kitchens. It is one way of getting in touch with the local lives and appetites.

A survey conducted in Australia (2014), showed that foodies were generally younger, affluent and highly educated people who were more likely to accept a destination's environmental and indigenous culture (Getz & Robinson, 2014). Zhang and Hitchcock (2017) also discovered those tourists with a focus on their expenditures were young, more often females than males, and predominantly locals rather than international tourists. Mason and Paggiaro (2009) pointed out that tourists could be brought closer to the host culture by experiencing the authentic and unique food and beverages. However, Molz (2007) argued that consuming food presents as material symbols which affects and transgress tourist's origin culture's norms" (p. 13).

You are what you tweet, according to Rousseau (2012). Rousseau also claimed that social media have opened up new ways to discuss food, and virtual communities have blossomed in a very short time through sharing recipes, comments and stories across traditional boundaries of place and profession. Thus, the foodie plays an important role in promoting food culture on social media. It is crucial to understand who the consumers for street food are. They may be the source of a deeper understanding of why Shanghai street food is declining. People's sensory perceptions play a significant role when they are tasting and making comments about food on social media.

## **2.6 Street food safety and regulation**

Although the demand for street food remains high and is still growing, especially in Asia (Gupta, Khanna & Gupta, 2018), it faces issues of health and safety. The street food industry is facing critical pressure from various circumstances of globalisation and from hygiene issues. Selling food on the streets causes overcrowding and health problems (Henderson, 2019). "Pavement users may be forced onto roads where they could be in danger and vehicle movements are interrupted. Noise and litter inevitably ensue, and there are serious issues of safety surrounding food" (Alimi, 2016, p. 13). Street food may lose the indigenous flavour after the raw materials have been exposed to the air for a long time. vendors may lose certification by not following the regulations; besides street food may increase the risk of food safety problems. Many studies have indicated that most Asian governments have not paid enough attention to food hygiene and safety (Atadil et al., 2018; Zhou, Qu, & Li, 2016).

When street food is discussed, food safety, health hazards and food hygiene in food vending is frequently mentioned (Handayani et al., 2019). Street food vendors are usually

located on the highly crowded streets in locations such as train stations, fairs, shopping centres and tourist areas (Okumus & Sonmez, 2019). Due to the mobility of vendors, street food does not meet all the food hygiene and safety requirements (Choudhury et al., 2011). The Shanghai street food underwent a major renovation in 2010, just before holding Shanghai World Expo (Greenspan, 2018). The formerly messy, old and unhygienic street food has been replaced by fast food chains. Some of the street food vendors relocated and gathered in a new block. The Shanghai Government was trying to provide a clean, tidy and well-ordered image for the rest of the world coming to the Expo. Compared to Taiwan, mainland China do not have clear regulations for street hawkers. According to Yu and Zhou (2004), in Taiwan, the term ‘street vendors’ refers to those who sell goods or provide services in outdoor public places or on public and private land. All parts of Taiwan have relevant regulations formulated by the competent authorities for street vendors, called “Street Vendor Management Measures“ or Street Vendor Management Autonomy Regulations. Yu and Zhou (2014) argues that this act of sanitising the street is a threat to the authenticity of Shanghai’s street food culture, as it may force food providers to move into shopping malls or ancient towns where the unique features of street food culture will be lost.

The most difficult issue in street hawking regulations is that vendors are not aware of or unwilling to do a test or follow safety practices (Kothe, Schild, Tondo, & Malheiros, 2016). Street vendors should apply for business licences from the relevant departments and follow and implement various regulations after obtaining the permits. For example:

New Taipei City’s street vendor business should abide by the following regulations: street vendors should operate on their own or jointly with their spouses and immediate blood relatives, and must not transfer, lend, sublease, or entrust others to operate on their behalf; they must not operate outside the permitted time and place or without authorization Change business items; stalls (tables) placed on roads shall not be fixed on the ground, and shall be moved away from the current site after daily closure, but the permitted location is not limited to roads (Lin, 2014).

The business equipment and the goods sold should be neatly arranged and the environment kept clean; the business place and the surrounding area should be cleaned

by special personnel, and the ground, water ditches, toilets should be cleaned, and the cost is borne by the vendors. A study by Al Mamun et al. (2013) showed that poor food handling practices and lack of food safety knowledge related to bacterial or hepatitis A virus (HAV) contamination leads to foodborne transmission.

According to Zhang (2003), in Shanghai, street food stalls refer to operators who do not have business licences and do not buy or sell in fixed buildings unless permitted by law. The operating place is on the roadside, or in an alley or public place. Stalls are a phenomenon that exists in every city and is a problem in city management. In 2012, the competition between roadside stalls and urban management was particularly fierce, and it constantly appeared in Shanghai local media and news, becoming a social issue.

The management of the night market in Xuzhou (a major city in Jiangsu Province, which is close to Shanghai) is relatively disordered, mainly reflected in poor health quality, malicious competition from street vendors, and lack of autonomy in the street market. According to the study by Liu and Yu (2017), the use rate of degradable tableware by Xuzhou night market snack vendors is low, garbage can be seen everywhere, the vendors lack a sense of service, and the food operation is unhygienic. Neighbouring street vendors operate in the same way, causing malicious price competition and noise. The overall quality of street vendors in Xuzhou night market needs to be improved, as there is a lack of effective supervision by the departments, and no self-management associations have been formed in the night market (Gupta et al., 2018). Air pollution, and poor environment in public areas have always existed in such markets. According to Omemu and Aderoju (2008), a lack of running water and electricity is also another major problem. Local and national organisations have not monitored the vendors properly (Liu et al., 2014) and this is critical to the sustainability of street vendors.

The intervention of the Shanghai authorities is critical to a well-managed system under which the street vendors can continue their operation. The intervention of the authorities in regulating night markets affects the composition of individual night markets and the entire market system (Chang et al., 2018). In the Taipei area, where state intervention is more serious, the origin and function of the spontaneous night market hawker organisation is mainly to cope with police interventions, rather than the need to manage the internal affairs of the night market. In recent years, the schedule and location of mobile

night markets in the city centre have had to be adjusted due to increasingly strict state regulations. Mobile night markets are gradually being moved to more remote areas.

As the street food markets developed, the regulations around street food vending business has now become more stringent and commercialised. First, the government has improved the relevant legal provisions and clarified relevant regulations, because the prerequisite for administration by law is the improvement of the legal system. Second, the government has improved management methods. However, food safety risks are still high, even though some vendors have certificates and regular inspection (Okumus & Sonmez, 2019). Especially in Singapore, Japan and USA, governments realise the importance of the rules and regulations of street food operations (Henderson, 2017). It is not difficult to see that the urban management experience of some developed countries gives vendors a legal identity. In street food in developed cities, the areas where stalls are prohibited are measured by a series of criteria, such as whether the road is wide or narrow, whether this area is needed to avoid congestion, how the traffic flows, or whether there a government building to which special attention needs to be paid. There are some good examples closer to home. According to Wang (2015), the Standing Committee of the Shaanxi Provincial People's Congress held a legislative hearing to discuss the "Regulations on the Management of Small Food and Beverages and Food Vendors in the Food Production and Processing Workshop of Shaanxi Province" and to debate with representatives from all walks of life on the key content and controversial issues involved in the draft regulations. At the hearing, the delegates proposed that food vendors should be managed in a centralised manner, choose places according to the requirements of the scientific plan, support the masses, strengthen supervision by establishing convenient food markets, convenient dining areas, implementing integrity management, and signpost waste management systems to ensure food safety.

The regulations under which the night market operates remain a grey area. However, tourist night market law redefines the night market and has started to shed some light on the regulations (Liu, 2016). Liu (2016) noted that becoming a legal tourist street food market is also the goal of many street vendors to protect themselves so that they can do business safely, instead of having to push the stall cart to avoid the police. Residents and vendors cooperate with each other for mutual benefit. The vendors provide the residents with tasty food, and the residents support the establishment of the night market so that the vendors can set up their stalls at specified times (Liu, 2016). This means the right to use the street will be returned to the public once the time is up. This ensures the continuity of

the street vendors' businesses and the convenience of bringing food closer to the community.

## **2.7 Sustainability of street food culture**

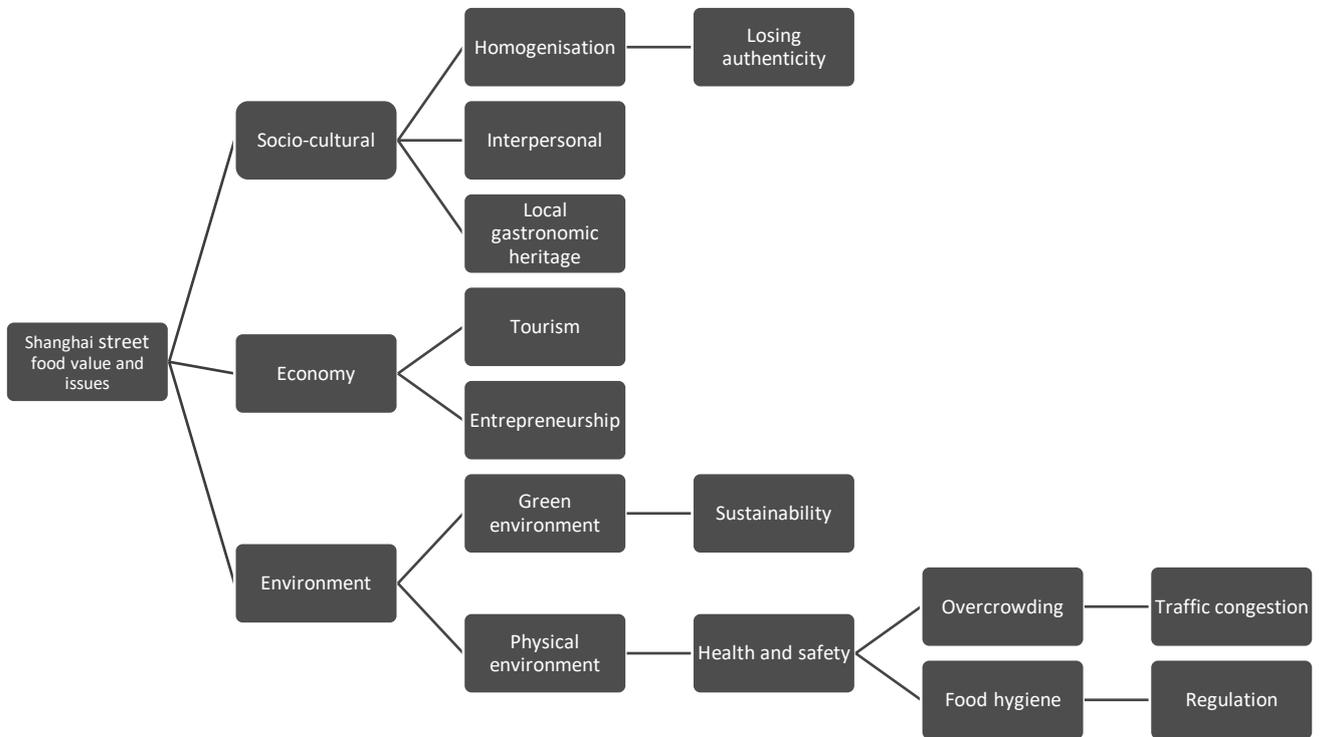
Street food has the potential to contribute to the sustainable tourism development of Southeast Asia (Handayani et al., 2019). For tourists, local specialty snacks are a symbol of local gastronomy. Slaper and Hall (2011) referred to gastronomy to a revival force that sustains culture and tradition, a healthy lifestyle, authenticity, and experience. As was reviewed in section 2.2, to the locals, street food is indispensable to their culture and routines. Therefore, this dissertation argues that it is critical to retain the street food culture in Shanghai.

The triple bottom line (TBL) framework has been used as a tool to evaluate the sustainability and success of tourism projects (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012). The TBL measures the impact of an organisation's operations in terms of their economic, social-cultural and environmental capital (Elkington, 1994). According to Slaper and Hall (2011), TBL reflects the potential impact on the land in terms of land cover, solid and toxic waste, air and water quality – all of which are also related to the operations of hawker stalls. The flexibility of the TBL allows organisations to apply the concept in a manner suitable to their specific needs beyond three main aspects that are people, planet and profits. The TBL framework could help to minimise the potential negative impacts of tourism development and maximise its benefits, leading to community development and greater support for tourism (Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013). Styliadis, Biran, Sit, and Szivas (2014) used the TBL approach to measure residents' perceptions of the economic, social-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism. Their findings provided a deeper understanding of the relationship between residents' support for and the positive impact of tourism development. The street food industry also requires the strong support of local residents for their existence. This study uses the TBL concept to evaluate the sustainability of Shanghai's street food life.

## **2.8 Conceptual framework for sustainability of Shanghai street food**

A conceptual framework is, “bringing ideas together in new ways that have never previously been linked together” (Xin, Tribe, and Chambers (2013, p. 79). The conceptual

framework in Figure 8 brings together the literature on the benefits (values) of street food, to foster debate regarding the issues threatening the fate of Shanghai Street food future.



**Figure 8: Conceptual framework of Shanghai street foods**

The framework consists of three interrelated components: (social-cultural, economy and environment). The first column takes after Elkington’s (1994) TBL and aims to address the first research question: Why is Shanghai Street Foods declining? These components will be discussed separately in section 5.1.

Each component has a distinctive function in the framework and has an impact on social well-being: (e.g. interpersonal, a local gastronomic heritage, overcrowding, hygiene, tourism, entrepreneurship and sustainability).

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology and method this study used to answer the research questions. The following sections outline the research paradigm, research design. The conceptual framework set out in Figure 8, section 2.8, is also used as the analytical framework for this study.

### **3.1 Research question**

The key areas of research are to discover the reason why the street foods are declining, and the underlying research questions are:

- Why is Shanghai street foods declining?
- What does street foods mean to Shanghainese and tourists?
- Why is it important to keep street foods vending in Shanghai?

### **3.2 Research paradigms**

A research paradigm encompasses the ontology, epistemology and methodology used to support research into specific problems and particular questions by articulating specific theoretical and methodological beliefs (Grant & Giddings, 2002). This research draws on constructivism and interpretivism to examine the phenomena behind the declining Shanghai street foods culture. Ontology is the metaphysical study of the nature of being and existence. Choosing the right ontology and epistemology assists researchers to determine what they will be studying, how they will collect data and analyse the results (Bryman, 2016). Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It provides an understanding of the origin of knowledge (Gray, 2013). Epistemologically, there are differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences, and meanings are therefore subjective (Bryman, 2016) between individuals. Interpretivism reflects the belief that there are multiple realities. Constructivism is inspired by the constructivist theory that individual learners construct mental models to understand the world around them. Meanings are constructed, not found (Crotty, 1998). Thus, differing perspectives in terms of ontology and epistemology establish a different methodology and method in research (Gray, 2013).

Given the paradigm in which this study is situated, a qualitative approach is deemed more suited to gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000) of a declining street foods scene in Shanghai. The reason for using secondary data is that there are already pre-existing interactions and debates by netizens on the social media about

the researched topic. Netnography tends to dig deeper into the content behind the individual, conversation, posting and experience, as it focuses more on meaning than on precision (Whalen, 2018). For this reason, netnography was selected, and this methodology is elaborated upon further in the next section.

### **3.3 Netnography**

Kozinets and Kedzior (2009) defined netnography as a form of ethnography that examines online cultures and social activities. Netnography is a specific type of research methodology adapted to exploring and understanding a new form of social interaction and relationship gathering that happens and is observed in an online environment (Kozinets, & Kedzior, 2009). Netnography includes social media, communications and connections. Whalen (2018) considered netnography to be a prevalent research method used in hospitality and tourism research because both of them have an experiential and service base. It provides an in-depth and meaningful insights into the interaction of customers in their community. An example is food products – food offers a variety of choices to its consumers, which leads to complexity in decision-making. Xu and Wu, (2018) revealed that consumers spend a lot of time reviewing restaurants and vendors' information online before making the final decision. Whalen (2018) stated that a

qualitative method like netnography is a powerful tool to not only see trends but also understand where the trends came from, why they exist, how they are integrated in the minds of the consumer and what organizations and brands can do to co-create value both digitally and physically. (p. 23)

Netnography offers a way into the social world of netizens. Applications for foodies provide avenues for them to chat and provide feedback and reviews about food hygiene, price, taste and environment after visiting street foods hawkers. Zhang and Hitchcock (2017) also supported the view that netnography could gather data from many online sources, and

is a powerful method for examining customer experience, because customers usually write their reviews after their stay ends and thus the Internet allows users to interact via uploading text, videos and pictures,

making them a rich source of highly personal exchanges occurring on a global scale. (p. 7)

Taking the opposite view, Kozinets (2014) argued that the researcher has no access to personal information.

For the purpose of this study, online social media platforms were used which are popular among the Chinese. For example, it included data from WeChat (an app for everything because of its wide range of function), Weibo (an app usually known as the Chinese version of Twitter; in Chinese 微博 (Weibo) means microblogging), and DaZhongDianPing (an app which includes a series of functions that are similar to Yelp, Tasty, Airbnb, Fandango, and Expedia). The Chinese media giant Tencent (2018) reported that, by March 2018, the number of active monthly WeChat users had passed 1 billion. Social media and the Internet are already widely recognised for changing politics, business and social life, so there is little to be gained in belabouring the point that the study of social media is widespread, important and worthy of research attention. It is especially suitable for some researchers who may have difficulty reaching out to the populations (Mkono, 2013; Wu & Pearce, 2014).

As online communities continue to grow, methods to monitor and gain insight into the experience of customers in these communities are especially important for the experiential services and goods that the hospitality and travel industries provide. Organisations need to extract the information that helps create value for the consumer, and netnography provides a means to accomplish that. The potential of this research methodology is recognised by hospitality and tourism researchers (Tung & Law, 2017) for its rich, in-depth and meaningful secondary data (Gray, 2018).

### **3.4 Content analysis**

In order to ensure valid analysis, Kozinets (2014) provided information on the symbolism, meanings, and consumption patterns of online consumer groups. This study used media content analysis to examine the data collected from WeChat, Weibo and DaZhongDianPing. The form of media content utilised in this study is online posts and comments. Media content analysis was introduced as a systematic method to study mass media by Macnamara (2005). Media content analysis provides a valuable cultural and historical insights. It reveals the meaning between people, symbols, textual matter, messages, information and social media. According to Macnamara (2005), in the early

20<sup>th</sup> century Max Weber asserted that media content analysis can monitor the cultural temperature of society through examining cultural patterns and beliefs.

### **3.5 Research design**

The full research design has six parts: planning, entrée, data collection, analysis, research representation, and evolution. In order to maintain ethical standards these steps must be followed at all times. A clear sequence of phases is intended to address many of the ethical, procedural and methodological issues that can arise, especially for online research.

#### **3.5.1 Research criteria**

The selected posts were collected from three main Chinese social media, WeChat, Weibo and DaZhongDianPing, over the six months from December 1, 2019 to June 1, 2020. During the search process #Street Foods #Shanghai Street Foods # Shanghai Street Foods Culture and #YouDunZi tags were used.

#### **3.5.2 Data collection**

Data were collected from popular Chinese social media, Weibo, WeChat, and DaZhongDianPing, using certain keywords such as street foods and *YouDunZi* to search comments and posts.

To gather reviews on *YouDunZi*, nostalgia, food and safety and Shanghai street foods culture, information on individuals' experiences and values were gathered on the Internet, for example, what *YouDunZi* reminds the consumer of and what they think about when they eat *YouDunZi*, or whether local and tourists like or dislike traditional Shanghai street foods. The answers to my research questions are dependent on the varied interpretations by the online community, and leads to a constructivist epistemology. In other words, consumers constructed the meaning of *YouDunZi*. Online trends or popularity remain vulnerable and today's trend can be broken by negative human experience and interaction. In my opinion, the world is a dynamic place, and the online community might provide clue to the declining of Shanghai street foods culture.

#### **3.5.3 Weibo**

Weibo is one of the largest social networking sites (SNS), providing a significant impact on interpersonal communication and social interaction in China (Chen, Hu, Shu, & Chen,

2019). Users share their feelings, images, profiles, and thoughts on Weibo. Thus, Weibo was chosen for this study. This free blog site, with more than 550 million individual bloggers saw nearly 100,000 million individual blog posts up until May 2020 and provided a venue for individual blogger comments, recommendations and discussion. In consideration of its size and activity, Weibo proved to be a rich source of material. Moreover, it was relatively easy to find data using the research criteria that are the focus of this study. Large-scale user-generated data provide new perspectives for analysing human interaction patterns, communication dynamics and attitudes towards social events. Feng and Wu (2018) examined a pool of Weibo tweets and responses employed in discussing an Internet anti-corruption event and found that exposed information would be repetitively circulated, amplified and reinforced, and eventually shaped into an online public event. Borge-Holthoefer, Baños, González-Bailón, and Moreno (2013) also argued that, among all the user behaviours on SNSs, reposting and leaving comments is the most influential method of reflecting users' thoughts on events. It is also the fastest way to accelerate information diffusion which may influence the development of public events to some extent (Borge-Holthoefer et al., 2013). For this reason, it was most effective when gathering information about the post-event experience of the street foods consumers.

#### **3.5.4 WeChat (*WeiXin*)**

As China is moving rapidly away from foreign social media, Instagram, Facebook, twitter, and YouTube (all blocked by the Chinese firewall), China's own social media application WeChat (the equivalent of Twitter, a mobile micro-messaging application) was launched in 2011 by China's Tencent Communications (Harwit, 2019). According to Lien and Cao (2014), WeChat (*WeiXin* in Chinese) is a real-time free-to-install platform for creating, sharing and chatting which has become a most widely used social media platform in China. Users send free text messages, share photographs and subscribe to the "public account", a service that enables users, no matter whether they are individual or institutional, to post or repost news stories or longer articles in a multimedia format with audio and pictures. Millions of Chinese people now read news and information from these new digital sources on WeChat rather than the state newspaper or television channel (Harwit, 2019). According to Tencent's (2015) report, 70,000 articles were posted by WeChat public accounts every day, and the number of public accounts reached eight million. Wei, Huang and Zheng (2018) noted that WeChat is a globally popular mobile social media application, based in China, that has become a digital source of news and information. It enables a user to engage in diverse activities at different levels of

interaction and communication. Therefore, this study mainly focused on examining the use of WeChat public accounts to post street foods related content and the comments from other users. Several studies have found that WeChat communication caused local policy changes, such as the relocation of a chemical plant (Liu, 2016). WeChat has another function called “Moments” which encourages users to forward public account articles and to engage in public discussions of the posted articles by allowing sharing, liking, and comments (Wei et al., 2018).

### **3.5.5 DaZhongDianPing (大众点评)**

DaZhongDianPing (which, in English, means ‘everybody comments’) was established in Shanghai in 2003. According to Xia (2019), the original intention was to provide consumers with better dining options. Dianping first created a user review model in China, the earliest and largest local food search and booking application in China. After more than ten years of development, Dianping has now become a local life information and trading platform that integrates eating, drinking, and entertaining (Dong, 2018).

Dianping uses mobile Internet, combined with geographic location and users’ personalised consumption needs, to provide a personalised service, offers and reviews in the areas of catering, leisure and entertainment, and the opportunity to participate in content production and browse the food text, pictures and videos posted by different users in the Dianping community (Dong, 2018). Dianping not only satisfies the user’s most basic service needs, but also establishes and deepens the user’s social relationship through continuous revision and upgrading. In this virtual space, food users can find “friends” with similar tastes, get the number of views and praise when they post their own experiences; they can participate in various food online activities and get more experience of food life; they can meet unfamiliar netizens in different communities and cities. Users have become a community due to their hobby of food.

### **3.5.6 Data analysis**

The data was analysed according to qualitative and netnographic thematic content analysis techniques. There are three main themes: socio-culture, economy and environment. This was combined with the content analysis method to discover and understand the deeper meaning behind the comments and posts. An inductive approach better addresses qualitative data, and thematic content analysis is considered to be a good way to conduct a textual inquiry (Whitlock, Eckenrode, & Silverman, 2006). According

to Kozinets (2015), thematic content analysis uses coding and categorising of textual information.

### **3.6 Ethics consideration**

This study followed Kozinets's (2002) four recommendations for ethical research procedures when using netnography. These are: (1) Researchers should ensure confidentiality and anonymity of informants; (2) All the data are from public communications and therefore ethics is not required. According to Eysenbach and Till (2001), the ethnical procedures of netnography, permission to use the texts found in these public social media was requested by posting messages in the commenting section of blogs directly from these bloggers. In addition, the bloggers' preferences for being cited in this study were asked for permissions as well; none of them want to show their real personal information and therefore all of the cited texts remain antonymous even if the texts are public. The identity of the netizens have been replaced with numbers.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### 4.1 Overview of findings

This chapter presents the research findings within four main topics and their subcategories from my conceptual framework: socio-cultural, health and safety, economy and environment (see Figure 8 in section 2.8). Smythe (2012) claimed that interpretive methodology is “where the researcher wishes to hear the voices of people, analyse the themes and present a thoughtful overview of results” (p. 5). The secondary data are collected from three main Chinese social media, WeChat, Weibo and DaZhongDianPing over the last six months from December 1, 2019, to June 1, 2020. This information is individual experiences and values, which can be found on the Internet. The following comments have been translated into English from Simplified Chinese. Both group and individually created content refers to open access data.

**Table 1. The sources of the data**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Creator</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Online sources</b>
<b>Socio-culture</b>	Homogenisation	Individual	15	WeChat
	Feeling nostalgia	Individual	35	Weibo, WeChat
	Interpersonal a childhood delicacy	Group	10	DianPing, Weibo
	Local gastronomic	Group/Individual Single	47	DianPing, WeChat
<b>Health and safety</b>	Traffic congestion	Group/Individual	30	Weibo, WeChat
	Regulation	Group	40	Weibo, WeChat
	Food hygiene	Group/Individual	50	Weibo, DianPing, WeChat
<b>Economy</b>	Tourism	Group/Individual	20	Weibo, WeChat
	Entrepreneurship	Group	30	Weibo, WeChat
<b>Environment</b>	Sustainability	Group/Individual	15	Weibo, WeChat
<b>Total</b>			292	

## 4.2 Socio-cultural



**Figure 9.** YouDunZi stall, (DaZhongDianPing, 2020a).

Twenty posts illustrated that *YouDunZi* was a popular street foods and it was easy to find in the past. Those views stressed the importance of *YouDunZi* within Shanghai socio-culture. About 47 comments gathered for this section show that it is a pity that street foods is disappearing. One of the members expressed the view that they are worried about the cooking skills are not being passed on to the next generation, as the older generation are seen operating the existing business:

*YouDunZi was a delicacy when you were a child. In the past, there was always a stall besides the gate of the school or the entrance of community. Try to eat when it still hot that taste is the memory of childhood. Now*

*Shanghai is changing too fast, and the varieties of food are rich. It's hard to see the stall selling the YouDunZi right now. Granny was frying the YouDunZi. The grandpa helps to collect money and put the YouDunZi in traditional oil paper. The cost was four yuan (US\$0.60). It has a golden crispy outside and inside is filled with shredded radish. It is not easy for the two elderlies to keep this small stall by their own hard work. (Member 1)*

*The street foods attracts customers with the taste, and the fancy restaurants only use the environment and services. The scene is shown to others, and the taste is real. (Member 2)*

With urban development, the sight of street foods stalls is getting more and more rare, removing it from most people's daily routines. As member 3 wrote:

*In order to improve the appearance of the city, most of the street foods have disappeared. I don't know where to buy breakfast in the morning. (Member 3)*

In recent years in Shanghai, one would find that the stores that used to line the streets near the residential buildings are now blocked by cement walls. The hawkers around the schools and residential areas are closed unless their licences are complete.

About 20 members expressed that when they are eating street foods, they feel they are back to their childhood. There is no soul in a city without street foods. Our ancestors faced the lack of food; they ate whatever they had and wherever they went. Perhaps the nature of consuming fast and accessible street foods go deep into our past and our DNA.



Figure 10. Grandma’s YouDunZi stall (DaZhongDianPing, 2020b).

*When you were a kid, you could buy tasty YouDunZi in the alley. Nowadays, it is difficult to find traces of it, and sometimes it loses the authentic flavour. I saw this stall on Weibo and learned that the reason why Granny and grandpa are still out selling YouDunZi on the street. They was going to pay the debts of their son. (Member 4)*

Shanghai street foods have slowly evolved to look more like fusion food and to be duplicable. When traditional craftsmanship is not being valued enough, that is a threat to Shanghainese flavour. There is an ongoing debate about the continuity of hawker culture in Shanghai because a lot of these first-generation hawkers are retiring without anyone to take over the business. On the other hand, the hawkers themselves do not want their children to take over the business. The first generations have worked so hard so that their next generations do not have to. Social pressure and food safety issues happen all the time.

#### 4.2.1 Homogenisation

There are three night markets in Shanghai. Anyi Night Market is one of them. Anyi Night Market, which is close to Jing’an Kerry Centre, which is located in the business district of Nanjing West Road in Shanghai, may be a copy of Shilin Night Market in Taiwan or the locomotive night market in Bangkok. The night market in Shanghai lacks local characteristics and hints at the replication of European markets. Copying successful cases directly is easier than creating new street foods model. It is to give consumers a false illusion of having a more noble and tasteful life. Some Shanghainese revere everything

foreign and pander to overseas powers. Most of the foods sold on the market are from all over the world, including German sausages, German beer, American pizza, burgers, French fries, and Spanish churros.



**Figure 11. Fish and chips stall (WeChat, 2020a).**

*The real special street snacks are gone, and the chain stores in the mall taste the same, lacking a sense of surprise. (Member 5)*

From my memory, when I found a stall selling *YouDunZi* on the roadside after school and ate one when I was hungry, that kind of surprise and satisfaction never appeared again after I went to high school. The same thought was expressed by member 5.

Member 6 and member 7 also expressed the view that there were more varieties back then, as compared to the present times when one has to travel to the suburbs or old town Shanghai to experience the authentic flavours of the street.

*Everyone has different tastes, there were many stalls on the street more options to choose. (Member 6)*

Ten years ago, there were a lot of street foods so competition was fierce. Everyone tried their best to improve their own recipes and ensured to keep their regular customers.

*Now if you want to eat authentic snacks, you have to go to the suburbs or ancient towns of Shanghai. (Member 7)*

In the process of rapid development with urbanisation, most historical and cultural villages and towns are faced with problems such as labour outflow, and a serious imbalance of population structure. Therefore, combining the history and food culture of the town, the development of ancient towns and human life has become a new trend in the transformation and development of historical and cultural villages and towns.

In the suburbs, people will see a lot of traditional breakfasts and street hawkers on the street while, in the urban areas, most practitioners have been relocated to other areas, returned to their hometowns, or have gone to other cities to resume their hawker business. The remaining hawkers rent commercial shops or enter into business with the food courts of large shopping malls.

#### 4.2.2 Interpersonal

Humans are social beings and throughout human history people have needed to rely upon others for their ultimate survival (Bloom, 2013). The night market is the most popular place in every city, where people go to eat street foods, drink beer with friends, and have fun with each other. Street foods carry many good memories of childhood friends. It just like when you hear the music from the ice-cream car. You will smile unconsciously. Ten years ago, the relationship between stall owners and customers was unique. They knew each other very well. The stall owner knew every regular customer's taste preferences. Customers knew the time when stall owner would appear. As member 8 expressed:

*Since I was young, I always ate YouDunZi after school on my way home. As soon as I walked over, grandma would know what do I want. Our relationship goes beyond customers and owner. (Member 8)*



Figure 12. Beer stall at Shanghai AnYi Night Market.(WeChat, 2020b)

Today's night market in Shanghai seems to be surrounded by an elite culture. The night market has been transferred to move more upmarket. People walked into the night market and still wear a suit. If the night market excludes most of the general public, then our society must become more indifferent. Night markets should be accessible and welcome everyone.

#### 4.2.3 Local gastronomic heritage

Cultural heritage is a symbol of cultural identity. The findings reveal that keeping the heritage of the street foods business is threatened due to the lack of interest of the younger generation in inheriting the trade. If you ask young people now, what is your ambition, no one will dream of inheriting the Chinese food culture. If young people work at a

hundred year old food shop, nine out of ten are just there to make a living. The food industry itself is very hard. If a person does not have enough interest to support them, they will usually choose a job that is easier and more profitable. The origin of a local street food is closely related to the local history and culture. For example, in cities like Shanghai, most of the people are immigrants and do not understand Shanghai culture and heritage. It is therefore difficult for someone who lacks local experience and the cultural understanding to prepare the authentic *YouDunZi*.

Even when it is available in the city, the authentic test of the street snack is whether it is like the original taste. This is expressed by member 9:

*Most of the traditional stalls in Shanghai are now chain stores, and the taste is not authentic. (Member 9)*

Many authentic Shanghai street foods hawkers have been relocated to the ancient town or Shanghai suburban areas. The Shanghai Government is trying to retain the local street foods culture and enrich the cultural level of the ancient town's tourism resources and form an ancient town that integrates many elements of commerce, leisure, catering and culture. In the meantime, it is using old town street foods to attract tourists. Qibao is one of the ancient towns in the urban area of Shanghai. It has rich cultural heritage from the Song Dynasty. In recent years, the Qibao Ancient Town Management Committee Office has actively explored and tried to adjust the format and upgrade the industry, continuously promoting the optimisation of the cultural industry of Qibao Ancient Town, improving the efficiency of cultural services, driving regional development, and promoting the cultural consumption and street foods consumption of the ancient town (Ben & Xiao, 2011).

### **4.3 Health and safety**

The topic of health and safety is by far the most debated issue regarding street foods among the tourists and the locals on the social media network.

#### **4.3.1 Food hygiene**

The street foods industry is facing critical pressure from various circumstances of globalisation and from hygiene issues. About 50 members made similar comments about the hygiene problems of street foods vendors. For example, they see people selling food

in an open area, with no dust-proof and fly-proof facilities, no distinction between raw and cooked food, and serious cross-contamination issues. Food vendors often set up stalls at the roadside or in front of a school. The facilities are relatively simple. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain sufficient drinking water sources and sewage facilities. The hygiene issues and noise impact were quite serious, as a member describes:

对于小龙虾这类街边生产的美食，我们总是心情复杂：不取缔？扰民又破坏环境；取缔？少了些城市烟火气。



寿宁路作为“沪上最早兴起的小龙虾一条街”，每到小龙虾上市整条街热闹非凡。随之而来的是满地的垃圾狼藉，空气中烧烤气味熏得人睁不开眼睛。



**Figure 13. Crayfish shop on the ShouNing Road Night Market, (Weibo, 2018)**

*YouDunZi, scallion pancake, stinky tofu, crayfish, and barbecue stalls are the most common stalls in Shanghai. People are always in a complex mood: should all the street foods be banned? If not, those stalls disturb the people's life and destroy the quiet environment. If all the stalls were banned, city will lose its local heritage. Shouning Road, as the most popular food street in Shanghai, the whole street is lively every summer when the crayfish goes on the market. Along with the garbage on the street, is the smell of barbecue in the air". (Member 10)*

Another member in the thread also commented: *It's a fact that street foods is delicious, and it's a fact that health is worrying. (Member 11)*

Others were hopeful about the future of Shanghai street foods, seeing the plan for a specific area dedicated to keep the streets clean and hygienic, to ensure their continuous support.

*As long as the designated area is planned and the sanitation is done well, I think it is a good place to hang out. (Member 12)*

The garbage accumulated from the street foods vendors encourages the breeding of germs and produces odors, which will increase the workload of the cleaning staff, unless a proper management of waste is in place. A member expressed the following view:

*As you can see in other cities, once the individual stalls are opened, all the stalls will come out and return to dirty mess overnight. The garbage of the stalls needs to be*

*processed for three days. Shanghai is promoting garbage classification right now. How to deal with those garbage will be a huge problem. (Member 13)*

#### **4.3.2 Unknown sources of raw materials in the preparation of street foods**

In order to reduce the cost of raw materials, food vendors may have compromised on the quality of their food supplies and ingredients, and some produce are not certified, which may lead to hidden dangers of food poisoning. As one member disclosed: *“Oil used for frying was used repeatedly, as it looks very dark”*. (Member 14)

Driven by economic interests, some businesses often disregard national regulations and use food additives in violation of regulations, such as excessive addition of nitrite as a colouring agent for meat products, so that the nitrite content of meat products exceeds the standard (Lues, Rasephei, Venter, & Theron, 2006).

#### **4.3.3 Traffic congestion**

Supporters of street foods hawkers also expressed concerns about the physical environmental issues but at the same time acknowledged that it is important to retain the physical existence of street foods vendors. Street foods stalls take up space on the sidewalks, which not only cause safety hazards but also traffic jams. A concerned member of the public wrote:

*It is possible to set up stalls again [referring to the street foods vendors], hopefully operator can control the hygiene problems strictly. Don't let the white cloud turn into black smoke [an expression in Chinese referring to polluting the air]. (Member 15)*

Another member expressed the hope that street foods could return as long as everyone follows the hygiene procedure. To develop the hawker economy, site selection is very important. In order not to aggravate the pressure of urban traffic and environmental sanitation, the government should take into account the development of the stall economy, and make sure it does not interfere with the daily lives of residents. It is recommended that, through big data and heat flow maps of people, areas with both human flow and development space be found, and by delimiting fixed areas and time-limited investment, urban planners can reduce the impact on urban traffic and residents' lives, and at the same time allow the orderly development of the street foods economy.

胡阿婆为了给生意失败欠债的儿子还钱，与老伴蜗居在蒙自路430弄内废弃门卫室内，靠在弄堂口设摊卖油炸食品维生与还债。不过，因为经营场所不合法，胡阿婆的小摊一直无法办理营业执照和食品许可证，存在一定安全隐患，她自己提心吊胆；终日露天摆摊、风吹日晒，也让年近80岁的胡阿婆时常感到力不从心。



胡阿婆曾经的油墩子小摊。

黄浦区市场监管局与五里桥市场监管所在大调研中了解到胡阿婆的实际困难，同时考虑到小店受居民欢迎，觉得并不能简单地对这一无证照小摊进行取缔。

区市场监管局与五里桥市场监管所实地走访辖区20多处可开展餐饮经营的场地，为胡阿婆寻找新

**Figure 14. YouDunZi stall by Grandma Hu, (Weibo, 2019b).**

*lookout for the authorities causing her anxieties during opening. (Member 15)*

The Huangpu District Market Supervision Bureau and Wuliqiao Market Supervision Office have learned about the actual difficulties of operators like Grandma Hu in the survey (Gao, 2015). Given the popularity of the store with the local residents, it would be a challenge to ban this unlicensed stall.

#### 4.3.4 Regulation

区市场监管局与五里桥市场监管所实地走访辖区20多处可开展餐饮经营的场地，为胡阿婆寻找新的合法经营场所，与经营者、房东等不断沟通，并陪同胡阿婆前往查看，最终在五里桥街道、城管等部门配合下，选定了餐饮相关证照齐全的局门路406号外侧门面作为胡阿婆新的经营场所。

一番努力后，多方都觉得非常满意，油墩子合法合规地开张了，生意也更好。



**Figure 15. Grandma Hu, (Weibo, 2019c).**

The quote in Figure 14 describes the location of this small food stall as illegal. The location is at an abandoned guardhouse which has hidden safety hazards.

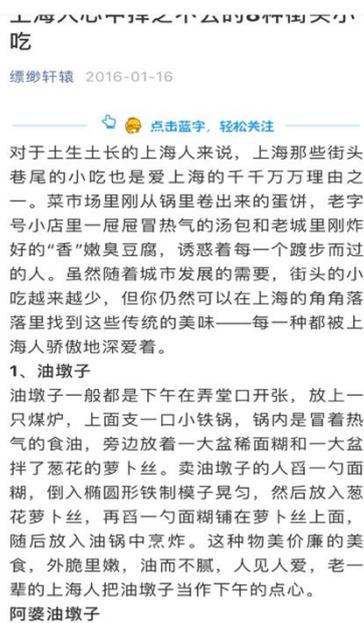
*In order to repay the debt for her son's business failure, grandma Hu and her husband set up a stall selling fried food in an abandoned doorman's room at the entrance of 430 Mengzi Road, to maintain their livelihood. Business premises are not legal, grandma Hu's stall has been unable to apply for business licenses and food permits. There are certain security risks. She has to constantly be on the*

The role of the District Market Supervision Bureau is to help those small food stalls to get a food licence. I was surprised to see that during the process of data collection, that the bureau (*ChengGuan*) cared about the local residents and operators and looked for a legal business location for hawkers. Previously, the media had unilaterally reported the unlawful side of the city management's excessive enforcement (Tang, 2019). However, a member wrote about grandma Hu:

*After much effort, all the people felt satisfied. Grandma Hu's YouDunZi business opened legally and compliantly, and the business was better than before. (Member 16)*

In addition, according to the posts from the District Market Supervision Bureau, the bureau and the Wuliqiao Market Supervision Office visited more than 20 places for Grandma Hu to find a new legal business location. In maintaining communication with a street vendor like Grandma Hu and other potential stakeholders on Wuliqiao Street, the municipal urban management and other departments, 406 Jumen Road was selected as the new street foods business location.

It is problematic to still find many street foods vendors without licence, although they add to the decorated life on the streets. A member wrote:



”Jiuli Food Shop“ on Yandang Road, a small street food stall selling dumpling. It is neat, clean, and affordable. The authentic taste attracts surrounding residents. The inspection found that this wonton hawker don't have food business licence. “Jiuli Food Store“ is not the only case around the Huaihai Road commercial district. There are also many exquisitely decorated milk tea shops on the back street of Huaihai Road operate without licence. They are not only beautiful scenery, but also necessary for tourists and surrounding residents. (Member 17)

**Figure 16. Pictures posted on Weibo 2016**

In this next post, a member was describing Huangpu district operation to find those food stalls running without a licence. They inspected and offered some advice to the stall owner.

*Road Market Supervision Officials visited the streets and neighborhood committees and learned that the surrounding residents support this store. Therefore, on the premise of not affecting the lives of residents, will grant for a food permit for this small shop priority. (Member 18)*

On a more positive note, some street foods businesses have found non-residential business premises an ideal location to apply for permits and licences, while catering to the needs of the commuters in the area. This could be due to the view that they are not affected by environmental nuisance, petition complaints, or public safety issues. There

were also efforts at the district level to educate the street foods vendors on food safety. As one member wrote:

根据《黄浦区关于疏导办理注册许可的工作意见（试行）》，瑞金二路市场监管所走访街道、居委会，了解到周边居民对这一店铺支持态度。于是，在不影响居民生活的前提下，先行先试为这家小店办理了食品许可证。

如今一批现存的不涉及环保扰民、信访投诉、公共安全隐患等问题的非居住用途经营场所、无证照的小面馆、馄饨店、饮品店都申办出证照，得以合法合规经营，满足与丰富了周围老百姓的生活需求。



Figure 17. Stalls, (Weibo, 2019d).

*Putuo District integrates the temporary registration of stalls with the management of unlicensed food operations. It strengthens the food safety education of small catering practitioners [street foods vendors], regulates the daily operating behavior of operators, and limits the type of business. (Member 19)*

At the same time, through guidance on the spot, urging catering establishments to rectify problems to meet the standards, the functional departments of Putuo District strengthen the post-regulation of small catering operations, check the record books and import and shipment records, and conduct spot checks for road occupation operations such as restaurant establishments and cross-door operations .

“怀旧小吃”的还原度还蛮高的，要的就是这种油纸包装的范儿。

怕被举报、一直和城管打“游击战”的（无名）油墩子摊



Figure 18. Fried food stall (Weibo, 2019b).

There appears to be different practices in different streets and not all food streets are regulated. Another member wrote:

*The stall (Figure 18) has been around for 10 years, and there has been no signboard. The price of YouDunZi has always been 2 yuan (USD\$0.3). In fact, at the beginning, the owner do not like being photographed. After asking the reason, I*

*learned that the auntie was afraid that someone would report it. The owner said “I couldn’t remember how many times I have been chased by the city management (ChengGuan) in recent years. It has always been like a guerrilla warfare. When the city management comes, I change places. This is why I can’t directly tell you the address of the booth this time”. (Member 20)*

## **4.4 Economy**

### **4.4.1 Tourism**

The Shanghai night market not only has restaurants, bars, but also hand-made workshops, even 'lucky dip' machines, and mini golf – different types of business forms and lifestyles are scattered on this small road. Anyi Night Market is only open for weekend and public holiday. There are total of nine night markets in Shanghai: (ChangLi, YuNanNan Road, ZaPu, HongQuan, ZhaoZhou, WuJiang, Anyi, XinTianDi, and YuYuan)<sup>6</sup>. In the YuYuan<sup>6</sup> 6:30 Night Market, the street foods, night show, night tour and night shopping are all in place (Greenspan, 2019). Every night the water boat show, traditional dance show and Guochao show<sup>7</sup> attract many tourists to stop and watch. In addition, cultural and creative shows are also available to citizens and tourists.

Of all the night markets, Anyi Night Alley is the most famous. Shanghai Tourism Office wanted to make Anyi Night Alley a centre of the city's culture. just as Bryant Park is to New York and Covent Garden to London, and hoped to open up more possibilities for urban public space. Anyi Night Alley is cultural, natural and artistic, a new window for world exchanges (Xi, 2020). A member wrote:

*We hope that every consumer who comes to Anyi Night Alley will not only enjoy the food, drink, and shows, but also find a source of inspiration for a better life here. (Member 21)*

The success of the night economy is a testimony to the fine management and government of the city.

### **4.4.2 Entrepreneurship**

In the past, setting up a street food stall was the best way to maintain livelihood for many families. The low cost of stalls makes them suitable for people who start from scratch. Market traders and street vendors are making a comeback across China, and this time they find themselves equipped with a new set of digital skills essential to navigating the vast consumer market. A member wrote:

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<sup>6</sup> YuYuan is an extensive Chinese garden located beside the City God Temple in the northeast of the Old City of Shanghai at Huangpu Qu.

<sup>7</sup> Chinese traditional dance show.

*On the morning of June 1, 2020, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited Yantai, Shandong, said that the stall economy and the small shop economy are important sources of jobs, is the vitality of China. Under this background, the street business economy is thoroughly popular, and the general public, funds, and enterprises have all taken action.*

*With the rise of the street business economy, many citizens of Zhengzhou came to set up stalls in private cars. A female stall owner said that she was an office worker and had always liked to visit the night market. Now she used her free time to set-up stalls to make extra income for herself. The daily turnover is almost 1,000 yuan. (Member 22)*

To revitalise street foods in a move aimed at spurring domestic spending and stabilising employment, the country is offering services from inventory support to accessible financing and technology development.

*Street foods can solve employment problems and provide convenience to citizens.*

*Markets, enterprises and individual merchants will be given full play and full government support in Yantai, Shandong province. (Member 23)*

It is interesting to also find the leader encouraging the start-up of ‘couple stores’ as business start-ups by couples are commonly known, to help generate employment. A member wrote:

*The string of moves comes as Premier Li Keqiang has called for developing markets and couple stores, saying that they serve as important vehicles to create employment and inject vitality into China’s growth. (Member 24)*

Meanwhile, e-commerce major JD.com has pledged to secure quality merchandise worth over 50 billion yuan (USD\$7.5 billion) and is offering each stall keeper up to 100,000 yuan (USD\$14,285) worth of interest-free loans for the purpose of replenishing their stock (Chen, Hu, Shu, & Chen, 2019).

*Shanghai’s night market is dead (posted on WeChat public account) (Member 25)*



Figure 19. Anyi Night Market, (WeChat, 2020c).

As a native of Shanghai, the concept of a night market is very clear. A typical night market is Linfen Road and Qipu Road; during the most glorious period of the former, buses had to detour. These two roads are the most lively night market in Shanghai, and there were many night markets that imitated these two roads in the past. Looking at today's Shanghai night market, which

is politically correct, legal, and compliant, but without passion. It is ordinary, without soul, and that is why night market in Shanghai is dead.

Night markets in Shanghai were an integral part of the way of life for Shanghainese, where people from different places gathered to dine and bond with street foods. Many of the hawker dishes originated from different people who came from different provinces and settled in Shanghai. Over time, those dishes have evolved to become the distinctive local dishes that Shanghainese love, and form a significant part of Shanghai food heritage.

#### 4.4.3 The stall economy may cause a chain reaction in commercial real estate

I am surprised to discover that that the stall economy may cause a chain reaction in commercial real estate. Several members expressed this view in their posts:

*The stall economy is absolutely tremendously destructive to commercial real estate. ... although the stall economy can have some positive effects in promoting employment and consumption, and thus promoting economic recovery, it will also impact commercial real estate. (Member 26)*

The street vendors are said to be taking business away from the commercial stalls in the bigger complexes in the area due to their economical prices:

*since the stall vendors do not need to pay various fees, they can keep the price low, but this may take away the flow of shop operators. And these shop operators are often more formal, they have applied for business licences, and paid taxes. (Member 27)*

On the one hand, regular operators may not be able to repay bank loans in a timely manner due to operational problems, which will cause banks to face the problem of non-performing loans; on the other hand, once the regular operators withdraw from the market due to operational problems, and shops and office buildings may face idleness. For the decline in rent, which in turn affects commercial real estate developers. A concerned member wrote:

*Developers' enthusiasm for land acquisition is likely to be affected. For local governments, commercial land use rights may be difficult to sell, which will also affect land taxation. (Member 28)*

Therefore, the data presented in this chapter indicates that the development of the stall economy must first improve the relevant systems, regulations and legal requirements. Only by gradually improving the overall framework and then gradually promoting it, will there not be an impact on legally compliant operators, and not too much impact on commercial real estate and the local financial system.

#### **4.5 Sustainability**

In the last 10 years, the street foods stall economy has not been random individual stalls, but a tasteful, cultural and distinctive cultural tourism economy under the leadership of the government. It has now become an expression of cultural and creative business. It requires organisation and collaboration. It forms an orderly social activity and temporary commercial network. A member observed the ease of street foods operation but cautioned about avoiding past mistakes:

*It is now easy to call for the reopening of street foods, but how to avoid repeating the same mistakes and continue to develop street food? (Member 29)*

The core of the future street foods stall economy is essentially a cultural economy, which not only satisfies the local residents' needs for multiculturalism, but also meets the expectations of foreign tourists for the experience of traditional food in the city. When foreign tourists find that difference between cities, they are willing to explore more places, which increases accommodation and consumption. At the same time, in the future, the hawker economy can provide a large number of jobs, which is an effective supplement to and interaction with the online economy, injecting experiential vitality into the city.

Tourism products that are rich in local characteristics and can show local cultures are definitely not formed by copying and imitating other convenient ways of doing things, and they are definitely not bred by fast-tracking. They need not only the accumulation of time, but also the self-innovation of local culture and folk customs, and the sublimation and creation of local culture based on the traditional spirit and essence. In this process, inheritance is as important as innovation, and the latter is especially dependent on the former. In this process, the participation of local indigenous groups cannot be ruled out, and the spiritual core of the local original ecological culture and folk customs must be respected. Otherwise, the so-called localisation is just pseudo-localisation, and the so-called features are just pseudo-features (Chang, & Yuan, 2011).

The disadvantages of the homogenisation of tourism products are not only unfavorable to the tourism products, nor are they not only affecting the sustainable development of tourism, but they are also gradually squeezing out the living space of local characteristics and local culture. The dilution of local culture is likely to cause future challenges in regaining or recreating the authentic local atmosphere.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion**

This research aimed to answer the following research questions:

- Why is Shanghai street foods declining?
- What does street foods mean to Shanghainese and tourists?
- Why is it important to keep street foods vending in Shanghai?

This chapter presents the discussion of the findings, obtained using netnography and content analysis, and the literature review.

### **5.1 Why is Shanghai street foods declining?**

#### **5.1.1 No successors and a lack of succession planning**

Street foods have slowly evolved to look more like fusion food and to be duplicable. When traditional craftsmanship is not being valued enough, that is a threat to Shanghainese flavour. There is an ongoing debate about the continuity of street foods culture in Shanghai because a lot of these first-generation street foods vendors are retiring without anyone to take over the business (see Section 4.2). On the other hand, the street foods vendors themselves do not want their children to take over the business. The first generations have worked so hard so that their next generations do not have to. Social pressure is the main reason for this.

The overall perception of comments reviewed is that they are hopeful about Shanghai street foods. There were over 100 posts made in the social cultural section (see Section 4.2). Most of them have expressed nostalgia. They claimed that shutting all the street foods vendors down will mean Shanghai loses its street foods culture. The food stall is a hidden taste located in different streets and it cannot be copied and replaced. There are some street foods businesses that are exclusive to the road. Some dishes originate from the streets of the city. If the place is changed, the taste of food will change. Each long-lasting stall is a small private restaurant, and each stall owner is a master of a folk cuisine that has been around for many years. Each stall has a different, unique taste and a secret recipe. It is a shame that homogenisation and regulation leads to the loss of authenticity (see Section 4.2.1). According to Carr (2020), the homogeneity of street foods is essentially a lack of local cultural representation. It is manifested in the opening of many similar stores on the same street, so that even the signs are surprisingly similar, and there

is neither the display of the characteristics nor the representation of local cultures and customs. Street foods, on the other hand, is all-encompassing of the local culture and it is uniquely local in its own way.

Street foods stalls are part of the traditional food culture, which belongs to the intangible cultural heritage and they should be preserved. Due to differences in culture, social stratification and history, the traditional way of creating and operating a family street foods business varies from region to region around the world. For example, few women in Bangladesh become street vendors, but women dominate the street foods industry in Nigeria and Thailand. In some cultures, such as Japanese or Swahili culture, walking on the street while eating is considered rude, although it is acceptable for children (Claudia, 2018).

Street foods should be given the same importance as Chinese cuisine. Many netizens are feeling gastronomic heritage is a symbol of cultural identity (See section 4.2.3). Once the culture loses diversity, the city will become monotonous. Taste is difficult to pass on, unlike words that can be recorded and written down. It is difficult for someone who lacks local experience and the cultural understanding to prepare the authentic *YouDunZi*. There are differences in individual experiences in the sensory experience of food. If the entity is not retained, the essence cannot be retained in textual records and images. Although craftsmanship can be handed down from generation to generation, there will be faults and forgetting during the transmission process.

### **5.1.2 Food hygiene, safety issues and regulations**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the topic of health and safety regarding street foods are by far the most debated issue among tourists and locals on the social media networks. This is in line with Henderson's (2019) study that the street foods industry is facing critical pressures from the impact of globalisation and hygiene issues. There were many negative comments by the Chinese netizens about the health and safety of Shanghai street foods. This is in line with several comments in previous studies about legislative issues to curb the problem on health and safety (Atadil et al., 2018; Zhou, Qu, & Li, 2016). Most people considered the food safety issues and regulations of Shanghai street foods are also significant for developing street foods. There are unlicensed operations, non-standard operations, food being exposed on the street and breeding bacteria, and sometimes problems such as noise, environmental pollution and road congestion impacting nearby

residents. China has not yet promulgated relevant laws and regulations on the management of roadside stalls. It is not easy for vendors to make a living from stalls and at the same time to maintain the neat appearance of the city. Without comprehensive laws and regulations, *ChengGuan* can punish illegal vendors and to shut them down. Some members suggested that the best way is to create a fixed area near the relatively concentrated stalls, correctly guide the operation, reduce the rent, sign a food safety and hygiene commitment, and manage the area in a unified way.

Chinese netizens have commented that nothing can be accomplished without rules. The management of street vendors should start from establishing a long-term plan. The stalls have helped the economy prosper, and the absence of stalls shows that the economy is developing and the level of urban management has improved. Many negative comments were received complaining that the food stalls in Shanghai have been regarded as representative of the “dirty mess” which is directly linked to the city’s image. Street foods vendors will occupy the road anywhere, disturb people’s life at night, and leave litter everywhere on the ground. It is not difficult to understand that city managers have introduced prohibitive and restrictive measures. However, people are not opposed to the street foods business economy itself, but to its disordered and chaotic environment.

### **5.1.3 Developing the city by integrating and not sacrificing local authenticity**

Street foods stalls are not unique to China; they are also widespread abroad. Singapore’s “neighbourhood centre model” provides services close to the needs of the community, which is a “hawker economy” (Claudia, 2018). The stalls do not conflict with the image of the city, but are integrated into people’s familiar flavours of the city. CNN has also selected the list of the 23 best roadside stalls in the world, not to mention the fascinating Chang’an East-West City in the Tang Dynasty and the Qingming River in the Song Dynasty which had a fantastic night market (Congcong, 2014). However, the pursuit of the cleanliness of the environment on the street has sacrificed many small shops and blocked people’s livelihoods. Such cities are prone to lose their identity.

The Central Civilization Office has stated that 2020’s national evaluation index of civilised cities does not requires the inclusion of road management, road markets, and mobile vendors in the evaluation of civilised cities (Qiao, Sun, Jiang, & Wang, 2020). This is a pragmatic move to respond to the concerns of the masses. However, this loosening of the street food economy cannot only be carried out in the context of

responding to the impact of the COVID-19 and accelerating recovery and stabilising employment. It must also improve the capabilities of refined, scientific, and humanised urban governance. The control of land stalls cannot be done in a simple way by “banning” and ignoring the street food economy. It needs the cooperation of *ChengGuan*, relevant measures and the improvement of management services. For example, Chengdu clearly stipulates for the occupation of roads. At 10 pm, all kinds of food stalls are responsible for ensuring safety, not occupying or disabling roads and fire escapes, and must obey all the procedure in epidemic prevention.

## **5.2 What does street food mean to Shanghainese and tourists?**

Street food culture is the way to get to know Shanghainese (see Section 2.8.1). If Shanghai street food were to disappear, Shanghainese would lose their identity and connection to history. If we do not start identifying things that are important to our culture, and that we want to keep, then we will lose them forever. The voices of the netizens in this research echoed what Cardoso (2014) wrote about street food – it is who we are, our heritage, our culture and what roots us together. The production of food culture lies in the unique culture developed by the geographical environment and living habits. Nowadays, rapid economic development has also brought a new style to the food culture of local people, from the food that symbolises the local culture in the past, to the development of beautiful colours and fragrances. The pursuit of gorgeous store decoration and the integration of cuisines from all over the world up to now reflect the changes in local food culture and quality of life. This is largely due to the migration of people from other regions and foreign countries (Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Pamer, & Probert, 2015).

The findings reveal the common language of food through the dialogue among the members of the three social media channels, WeChat, Weibo, and DaZhongDianPing. Food and drink are national symbols and the inheritance of traditional culture. For the locals, street food creates tangible stories about their childhood. The netizens’ comments are representative of their knowledge and the values they hold about history, culture, and their childhood memories in relation to family and food.

### **5.2.1 Nostalgia, familiarity and solidarity among the locals and visitors**

Shanghai street food plays a significant role in Shanghai socio-culture in presenting Shanghai’s local gastronomic heritage and culture. Street food improves the relationship

between friends, family and colleagues. Shanghai is my hometown, where tradition meets modern living. When the outside world hears about China, they think of Shanghai because it is such a busy and international city. Shanghai has been influenced by foreign culture. Street food presents the authentic side of Shanghai not many people see. So the traditional street food truly represents the real Shanghai.

With modernisation and globalisation, the vendors in Shanghai are constantly disappearing from the street because there is so much competition. It is much harder to find the old traditional food in Shanghai because people do not want to put the time or effort into making it. The findings also show that with urban development, street food stall is a rare sight. The only place you can find these foods are the traditional markets or old town like QiBao<sup>8</sup> or Zhujiajiao<sup>9</sup>. Ten years ago, selling street food was a way to make a living. But today it has become the place where people recollect the memories of their childhood.

Like most netizens, I feel sad that, like other childhood delicacies, *YouDunZi* is gradually disappearing from the street. I know that these stalls may be illegal constructions, that they occupy roads, have hygiene issues, and may even affect the lives of surrounding residents. It is right for law enforcement departments to dismantle and close them. But I also want to know that the livelihoods of these families, the food memories of a generation, providing customers with a moment of joy, should have a place in this increasingly modern and beautiful city.

### **5.3 Why is it important to keep street food vending in Shanghai?**

According to Wang (2019), Shanghai is a charming and inclusive city with unique “East meets West” culture around each corner. The Shanghai Master Plan (2017-2035) aims to plan a Shanghai where residents of all ages may enjoy their lives and lead a healthy lifestyle. It is my hope that Shanghai in 2035 will be a city where buildings are enlightening, streets are friendly for strolling along, and parks are enjoyable. However, this may pose a threat to most street vendors, moving them into shopping malls or ancient towns.

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<sup>8</sup> Qibao (七宝) is an old water town located about 20 kilometres from downtown Shanghai which has a very popular food street.

<sup>9</sup> Zhujiajiao Water Town is a paradise for street food fanatics, with an unending variety of traditional Chinese snacks spilling out of the densely-packed storefronts.

The study reveals that authorised hygiene and standards, when put in place, could help to overcome the problems to ensure the longevity of street food vending in Shanghai.

According to the findings, the main reason for the declining of Shanghai street food is the terrible hygiene and safety problem. Addressing the food safety issues through the regulation of Shanghai street food is also important for developing street food. Unlicensed operations, non-standard operations, food exposed on the street breeding bacteria lead to problems such as noise, environmental pollution and road congestion affecting nearby residents. However, street food can also provide a lot of jobs and promote tourism in Shanghai.

Shutting all the street food vendors down will make Shanghai loses its street food culture. The food stall is a hidden taste located in different streets which cannot be copied and replaced. There are some foods that are exclusive to the road. Some dishes originally belonged to the streets of the city. If the place is changed, the taste of the food will change. The findings also support the notion that there is no soul in a city without street food (see Section 4.2). Each long-lasting stall is a small private restaurant, and each stall owner is a master of a folk cuisine that has been around for many years. Each stall has a different and unique taste and a secret recipe. And the various stalls have many differences and cannot be generalised. There are differences between urban and rural stalls, Shanghai and foreign stalls, stalls using idle sites and purpose-built stalls.

When the street food business has been under proper management and control, it is possible that these businesses could last. During the process of collecting information I was surprised to see that the market supervision (*ChengGuan*) actually cared about the local residents and operators and looked for a legal business location for hawkers. Previously, the media had unilaterally reported the unlawful side of the city management's excessive enforcement.

In order to sustain Shanghai's street food culture, the measures set out in the following sub-sections should be in place.

### **5.3.1 Tightening health and safety regulations**

The findings on health and safety reveal that proper regulations should be in place to secure the future of Shanghai street food. Most issues such as overcrowding and traffic

congestion can be solved by health and safety regulations. The flow of people in the area where the stalls are placed should be controlled before the stalls are opened, and *ChengGuan* departments should make a good management plan. Simple measures could include, for example, limiting and informing people of the capacity in real time via a WeChat public account or an outdoor display screen to prevent crowding and the consequences that follow.

Regular and irregular spot checks should be carried out by the food and safety department to ensure food safety and hygiene. If a store is found to violate food safety regulations, a warning, fines, and the disqualification of food license should follow.

### **5.3.2 Standard operation procedures for all street vendors (health and safety and operation hours)**

The findings also reveal inconsistency in the management and regulation of street food stalls in different locations (see section 4.3.4). Although it is called street food, the regulations of the stall businesses, and their locations and standard operating procedures, means requiring a central manager to enforce consistency in the running of the day-to-day business. This would include the organisation of street food stores and waste management, since a lot of garbage is inevitably generated, in order to protect the surrounding environment and avoid excessive impact on residents. The stalls would be required to strictly follow the operating hours, coordinate with the sanitation department, and clean and disinfect the stalls regularly.

First of all, the municipal government should step up in the formulation of the city's provisional regulations on the management of street food vendors to ensure the orderly development of the city's stalls from the legal perspective. At present, there is no complete set of street vendor management regulations, and the relevant supervision functions are mainly scattered in the departments of street towns, urban management, market supervision, city appearance and greening. According to Lu, Li, Sheng, Xia, & Gao (2009), only the Shanghai Municipal Food and Drug Administration has implemented the "Shanghai Food Stall Management Measures", a more complete management method. At present, the Shanghai Municipal Market Supervision Administration is seeking comments on the newly revised "Administrative Measures for Food Vendors in Shanghai (Draft)". However, the draft is only aimed at food vendors, and cannot meet the current overall needs of the city's market stall economy.

Secondly, the government food safety and quality department and the Market Supervision Administration should stick to the bottom line, which is provide a tidy and clean environment for residents and tourists, clarify the responsibilities of all departments, and guide the orderly, healthy and sustainable development of the street food economy.

After the central government released the new policy for stalls, many places in other provinces and cities experienced a renaissance in the operation of unauthorised stalls, and a surge in complaints and reports from neighbouring residents. This is not only contrary to the original intention of developing a street food economy for the convenience of the people, but also a serious risk in terms of food safety.

At the same time, according to the actual situation of the territories, each street and town should develop a designated area for the use of the market for the whole day or part of the time (such as the night market) on the basis of not disturbing people and affecting the normal order of the life of the society. And in the implementation process, the law, discipline, and party discipline must be tightened, and any form of distribution of leasing indicators to the functional departments should be strictly prohibited. In actual operation, we can draw on the mature market economic management of the city (such as Jinjiang Paradise Night Market), with the purpose of public welfare management, adopting a combination of corporate trusteeship, industry autonomy and government service guidance to ensure the orderly development of the market economy.

#### **5.4 Theoretical contribution**

Each component of the findings has a distinctive function in the framework and incorporates social well-being. The TBL has been incorporated into the analysis to evaluate the sustainability of street food industries. Government could identify issues and make policies by applying the TBL framework to the street food district. These policies might be critical for maintaining proper regulations to ensure the sustainability of street food hawking.

#### **5.5 Research limitations and future research direction**

All data collection took place within a period of months (from December 1, 2019, to June 1, 2020). Online postings from 2019 to 2020 were sought, and may not have included a

holistic representation of the sentiments of the netizens during different stages of the development of Shanghai's street food culture. Furthermore, this period also included the lockdown period during the COVID-19 pandemic; it is to be expected that people's emotions fluctuated greatly during this period as street food may not have been accessible to them.

Also the case I selected does not represent all situations. If the next study on this topic has more time to analyse the case in depth, this topic can be completed more fully. As a native of Shanghai, I acknowledge that some bias and personal emotions have also been brought into the study. However, in netnography, the role of the researcher is also important in interpreting the narratives of the netizens. The conceptual framework has also helped to provide direction during data analysis, and to remove any partiality on my account.

I'm surprised not to find a lot of findings on tourism. It is probably because the sources I used are predominantly used by the local customers. Limited literature can be found about Shanghai street food scene as well. Although netnography gives rise to the opportunity to work with big data, online interviews or forums could have been used to help to understand the research questions in this dissertation.

Finally, the voices of the tourists remained low key in this research, probably due to the social media networks used being primarily in Chinese. Future research should also consider incorporating English language social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TripAdvisor, and even a dedicated food website like Zomato.

There are street food markets all over the world. Future research could compare the governance experience of other developed countries such as Singapore, South Korea, and France, to provide directions for the sustainable development of Shanghai street food.

Future research could also follow a thread of conversation surrounding specific issues and topics to analyse the data. Given ample time, the researcher could also join the online community and initiate dialogue about the research topic.

## **5.6 Researcher's reflection**

I am fortunate to use my own identity as a food culture researcher to record the food of my hometown. Taste is actually very difficult to pass on, unlike language that can be recorded and words that can be written down. There are individual differences in the sensory experience of gourmet food. If the entity is not retained, the essence of the image cannot be retained in the text. I want to use this research to let everyone know the facts of Shanghai's street food, and not let the craftsman skills be lost. I hope that more people in mainland China can promote traditional Chinese street food and contribute to the inheritance of the food culture. I hope that, one day, roadside stalls are no longer synonymous with messiness, but are a way to express the characteristics of the place they coexist with.

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