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Factors Affecting Purchase Intention and Distribution of Chinese Identity Food in Southern Thailand

Seksan WERASUK¹, Samaporn NUALSUT², Waraporn KANJANAKLOD³, Sujinda PROMKUM⁴,
Wikanda KACHATHONG⁵

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to develop a structural equation model (SEM) identifying the factors influencing the purchase intention of Chinese identity food. The model comprises five key variables: food quality, food identity, perceived value, social norms, and attitude toward purchasing. **Research design, data, and methodology:** Data were collected from 400 working-age consumers (aged 15-59) in four selected areas of Southern Thailand: Nabon and Thung Song districts in Nakhon Si Thammarat province, and Huai Yot and Mueang districts in Trang province. The respondents who expressed interest in consuming Chinese identity food were selected using quota sampling. A questionnaire was used as a research instrument, and data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling with AMOS software. **Results:** The developed structural equation model exhibited a good fit with empirical data. The model explained 51.6% of the variance in purchase intention for Chinese identity food. Purchase intention was significantly influenced by food identity, social norms, and attitudes toward purchasing. Additionally, food identity and social norms had an indirect effect on purchase intention through attitude toward purchasing. **Conclusion:** These findings provide insights into consumer behavior regarding Chinese identity food and offer practical implications for businesses and policymakers seeking to enhance marketing strategies and promote Chinese identity food in the region. The study also highlights the importance of effective distribution strategies both online and offline in supporting consumer engagement and improving accessibility to Chinese identity food in culturally diverse markets.

Keywords : Purchase Intention, Chinese Identity Food, Distribution

JEL Classification Code : D11, D30, D70, M10, M31

1. Introduction

Food is a part of culture, reflecting the heritage and

identity of ethnic groups (Raddy & Dam, 2020).

In Thailand's pluralistic society, various ethnic cuisines have been assimilated and adapted to the local, becoming an

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1 First Author and Corresponding. Lecturer, Faculty of Management Science, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand. Email: seksan_wer@nstru.ac.th.

2 Second Author. Lecturer, Faculty of Management Science, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand. Email: samaporn_nua@nstru.ac.th.

3 Third Author. Lecturer, Faculty of Management Science, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand. Email: waraporn_wic@nstru.ac.th.

4 Fourth Author. Lecturer, Faculty of Management Science, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand.

Email: sujinda_pro@nstru.ac.th

5 Lecturer, Faculty of Management Science, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand. Email: wikanda_kac@nstru.ac.th

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essential part of Thai people's daily lives. In particular, Chinese identity food has been significantly influenced by the longstanding settlement of Thai-Chinese communities, who have played a crucial role in Thai society. Chinese migrants who arrived in Thailand in ancient times brought their culinary traditions with them. As they integrated into Thai society over time, certain Chinese dishes gained wide popularity among the Thai people (Tang et al., 2020; Chaopreecha et al., 2022).

Southern Thailand, especially in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Trang provinces, is a region where Chinese people have settled for a long time. Most Chinese people in these areas migrated to work in trade, mining, and agriculture, which is a factor that led to permanent settlement and cultural integration with the local communities. The food culture of the Chinese in the South is, therefore, a combination of traditional Chinese food and local ingredients, resulting in a unique food identity that is different from Chinese food in other regions (Chaopreecha et al., 2022). These foods are referred to as "Chinese identity food." When considering the definition and characteristics of Chinese identity food in Southern Thailand, it refers to food that originates from Chinese culture and traditions, which has been adapted and integrated with local Southern ingredients. It is not only delicious but also reflects the cultural identity of the Chinese people in this region, such as dim sum, dumplings, and bak kut teh (herbal pork rib soup). These foods are often consumed during Chinese festivals or religious ceremonies and have a special meaning that reflects the beliefs and traditions of the Chinese people. The difference between Chinese identity food in Southern Thailand and Chinese food in other regions is the combination of ingredients and flavors that are adapted to local culture and tastes, such as the use of spices and herbs found only in the South, as well as the presentation of food in a unique way that can create a cultural experience distinct from traditional Chinese food in China or other parts of the world (Jainan et al., 2021). The Chinese identity food in these areas is not only a part of the cultural heritage but also a potential product for economic and tourism development within local communities.

Additionally, Chinese identity food has strong distribution potential, both in terms of product availability and market reach. This is particularly relevant in secondary cities with limited resources. Key distribution channels, such as physical stores, souvenir shops, cultural markets, festivals, and online platforms, help effectively connect these products with target consumers both locally and beyond. Expanding these distribution networks supports the growth of local markets to regional levels while promoting sustainable community-based trade. Thus, distribution plays a crucial role in transforming Chinese identity food from a local cultural product into an economic asset with value in both consumption and tourism.

Although Chinese identity food in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Trang is well known among local communities, there remains a lack of systematic research on the factors influencing consumer purchase intention. Contemporary shifts in consumer behavior have necessitated adjustments in the marketing strategies of the food industry to align with customer demands. This is particularly relevant for the working-age population, defined as individuals aged 15–59 years who possess high purchasing power and play a vital role in driving the food market (Yin et al., 2018; Siaba, 2019). Understanding the factors affecting this demographic's purchase intention regarding Chinese identity food is crucial for enhancing marketing strategies and business development. Additionally, this understanding can inform more targeted distribution strategies by selecting channels that align with consumer purchasing behaviors. For instance, if the target group prioritizes convenience and modernity, online platforms or delivery services may be the most effective distribution channels. Conversely, consumers who value cultural experiences may respond better to physical stores, souvenir shops, or events tied to local festivals. Integrating consumer behavior insights with distribution strategies can enhance customer reach and foster long-term brand loyalty.

Factors that may influence consumer purchase intention toward Chinese identity food include food quality, food identity, perceived value, social norms, and consumer attitudes toward food purchase. Among these factors, food quality is a primary concern for consumers. It has a direct impact on consumption satisfaction. Consumers generally evaluate cleanliness, freshness, taste, variety, and safety as key attributes in their purchasing decisions (Yrjölä et al., 2019; Yasami et al., 2022; Sangkaew et al., 2023). However, in the case of Chinese identity food, food identity may play a more significant role than quality, as these dishes are often associated with cultural traditions and community beliefs, including their use in religious ceremonies and symbolic meanings during important festivals (Cengiz & Cengiz, 2023; Gupta & Sharma, 2024; Jin et al., 2025).

Perceived value is another critical factor influencing consumer purchase intention, particularly in terms of nutritional, social, and emotional value. Some consumers perceive Chinese identity food as more than just sustenance; rather, they view it as a cultural symbol and a means of social connection (Chen, 2022; Hasan, 2022; Dong & Li, 2025). Additionally, social norms significantly affect consumer behavior, particularly among individuals who value the opinions of family members, friends, or respected figures. Purchase intention toward Chinese identity food may be shaped by recommendations from reference groups or prevailing social trends (Ajzen, 2012; Wang & Chu, 2021; Lopez-Sintas et al., 2024). Furthermore, consumer attitudes toward food purchases also play a crucial role.

Individuals with a positive attitude toward Chinese identity food—such as perceiving it as culturally valuable or delicious—are more likely to make purchasing decisions compared to those who do not emphasize food identity (Wang & Chu, 2021; Khan et al., 2023; Dong & Li, 2025).

However, although there have been some studies on the influence of Chinese culture on food consumption in Thai society, most of these are qualitative studies or use research methods that cannot provide reliable quantitative data, such as interviews or surveys that link Chinese culture to food consumption behavior in Thailand. These studies do not focus on the various variables that influence the purchase intention of Chinese identity food, resulting in limitations in explaining the factors that influence Chinese food purchasing decisions in complex contexts (Jainan et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2020). Moreover, while there are studies on Chinese food in various regions of Thailand (Chaopreecha et al., 2022), there is still a lack of quantitative research that focuses on analyzing multiple factors influencing the purchase intention of Chinese identity food, especially among the working-age group, which has food consumption patterns that differ from other groups, placing importance on consuming food with a unique cultural identity that can create experiences reflecting their own identity.

Therefore, this research is distinct from previous studies. It focuses on using quantitative research methods, employing a structural equation model to analyze the relationships of various factors influencing the purchase intention of Chinese identity food among the working-age group (aged 15-59 years), including food quality, food identity, perceived value, social norms, and attitudes toward food purchasing, in order to develop effective marketing strategies and distribution strategies, based on an understanding of consumer behavior and purchase intention. This study provides more reliable data and clearly identifies which variables influence the decision to purchase Chinese identity food within this specific demographic. The study areas are Nabon and Thung Song districts in Nakhon Si Thammarat province, and Huai Yot and Mueang districts in Trang province. These areas have a long history of Chinese communities, particularly from the era of international trade and settlement in Southern Thailand. These communities have influenced the local economy, especially in trade and agriculture. Chinese people in these areas also preserve and maintain Chinese traditions and culture through unique local foods, such as the use of local ingredients combined with traditional Chinese cooking techniques. This combination has created Chinese identity food that is distinct from Chinese food in other regions. Studying these areas can meaningfully reflect Chinese identity food consumption behavior and its clear connection to cultural identity.

The results of this research are expected to be used to

develop marketing strategies and distribution strategies by leveraging an understanding of consumer behavior and purchase intention. This knowledge will help determine the most suitable distribution channels for target consumer groups, enabling Chinese ethnic cuisine businesses to achieve broader market reach and gain a competitive advantage, as well as to promote community economy and cultural tourism in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Trang provinces for long-term benefits. In addition, it can be used as a guideline to promote and conserve Chinese identity food culture to continue to exist in Thai society sustainably.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Food Quality

Food quality refers to the performance, capability, or functional utility of food presented to the market (Mofokeng, 2021). Generally, consumers evaluate food quality based on multiple factors, including cleanliness, freshness, taste, variety, and safety. These attributes play a crucial role in determining food quality and significantly influence purchasing decisions (Yrjölä et al., 2019; Yasami et al., 2022; Sangkaew et al., 2023). The quality of food can be assessed through external characteristics (such as size, shape, color, gloss, and uniformity), internal attributes (including chemical, physical, and microbiological compositions), as well as texture and flavor (Zhong & Wang, 2019).

2.1.1. The Influence of Food Quality on Purchase Intention

Food quality is a fundamental factor influencing purchase intention, especially in the context of Chinese identity food, which can be seen in key characteristics such as the freshness of ingredients, cleanliness, and safety for consumption. Fresh ingredients, such as vegetables, meats, or seafood, not only enhance the taste and texture of Chinese food but also build consumer confidence. In the post-COVID-19 context, consumers place greater emphasis on food hygiene, particularly the safety of production and distribution processes. This can be explained by the Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), which suggests that consumers tend to avoid the risk of loss rather than seek profit. In other words, even if it costs more, consumers are willing to choose safe and high-quality food to reduce the risk of unclean or potentially harmful food. Therefore, confidence in food quality, especially cleanliness, freshness, and safety, is a key motivator that increases consumers' purchase intention, even if it means higher costs in some cases. This aligns with research by Kitja (2023) and Niewczas-Dobrowolska et al. (2024), which indicates that

consumers in the post-COVID-19 era prioritize purchasing high-quality and safe food. A study by Chen et al. (2020) highlights that food quality significantly affects consumer purchase intention for culturally distinctive cuisine. Such a study corresponds with other studies supporting a positive relationship between food quality and purchase intention (Yrjölä et al., 2019; Yasami et al., 2022; Sangkaew et al., 2023). These lead to the following research hypothesis:

H1: Food quality influences the purchase intention of Chinese identity food.

2.1.2. The Influence of food quality on attitude toward food purchase

Food quality is one of the primary factors determining consumers' perceptions of food products. High-quality food is generally more accepted by consumers and can foster a positive attitude toward food purchases (Kotler et al., 2021). In the context of Chinese identity food, which differs from mainstream food in terms of taste, distinctive ingredients, and traditional cooking methods and clean, safe, and hygienic cooking processes, consumers who perceive this cuisine as high quality—characterized by fresh ingredients, proper cooking techniques, and food safety—are more likely to develop a favorable attitude toward it. This positive perception may, in turn, lead to a higher purchase intention.

A study by Pivarski et al. (2024) supports this assertion, demonstrating that in Serbia, food quality has a significant influence on consumer attitudes. This finding aligns with the majority of research indicating that food quality positively affects attitudes toward food purchases (Grujic & Grujic, 2017; Arfiandi & Sukresna, 2018; Martinho, 2021; Maalouf et al., 2025) and post-COVID-19 studies by Farah et al. (2024) found that consumers often consider food quality in terms of safety and cleanliness. When they have a positive attitude towards food quality, they are more likely to make a purchase decision. Based on these insights, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Food quality influences attitudes toward purchasing Chinese identity food.

2.2. Food Identity

The identity of food is a distinctive characteristic that makes a particular cuisine stand out and differentiates it from others, contributing to its recognition and value (Li, 2021). Food identity can reflect the culture, history, and way of life of people in different regions. Various tangible and intangible factors contribute to the uniqueness of a cuisine. These factors include the ingredients used in food preparation (e.g., the incorporation of local or rare ingredients), unique cooking methods (e.g., fermentation,

stewing, and the use of specialized spices), and the distinctive combination of flavor characteristics (spicy, sweet, rich, and salty) of each regional cuisine. Additionally, dining practices and advancements in technology also play a role. Together, these elements shape a distinct culinary identity and enhance the overall value of food (Raddy & Dam, 2020; Chaopreecha et al., 2022). However, it can be seen that the factors of ingredients used and cooking methods can reflect both food identity and food quality. But the two factors are different. Food quality focuses on maintaining the freshness and safety standards of ingredients, as well as precise cooking processes to achieve the best taste and texture. Meanwhile, food identity focuses on cultural attributes, such as the use of specific ingredients that reflect ethnic traditions and history, as well as cooking methods with symbolic meaning, such as the use of spices that have significance in festivals or rituals, etc.

2.2.1. The Influence of food Identity on Purchase Intention

Food identity influences consumers' feelings, especially Chinese identity foods that reflect their culture and heritage. Consumers who feel a connection to Chinese culture or value their cultural roots are more likely to purchase Chinese foods (Jin et al., 2025). This is because they view these foods as not just foods but also symbols of their identity and way of life. The use of traditional ingredients, unique cooking methods, and symbolic meanings during important festivals stimulates purchase intentions among consumers who want to maintain and express their cultural identity (Dong & Li, 2025). Li's study (2021) supports that in a cross-cultural dining context, focusing on Finnish consumers who eat Chinese food, food identities, including sensory identity and cultural identity, have a significant influence on purchase intentions and the study by Li (2024) states that Chinese food in Thailand is increasingly accepted by consumers who see these foods not only as consumption but also as a reflection of cultural identity. The unique flavors and cooking processes that convey Chinese cultural roots all influence purchase intention in the Thai social context. Furthermore, the incorporation of local ingredients adds interest and makes Chinese food in Thailand even more unique. This is consistent with most research, which found that food identity has a positive influence on food purchase intention (Chen et al., 2020; Cengiz & Cengiz, 2023; Gupta & Sharma, 2024; Dong & Li, 2025). These lead to the research hypothesis as follows:

H3: Food identity influences the purchase intention of Chinese identity food.

2.2.2. The influence of Food Identity on Food Purchasing Attitudes

Food identity plays an important role in determining

consumers' attitudes toward purchasing a particular food. Consumers tend to have positive attitudes and are more likely to purchase foods with characteristics that reflect their culture, history, or identity (Zhang et al., 2022). Li's study (2021) supports that food identity influences positive attitudes toward purchasing foods, especially foods that are culturally relevant, such as Chinese identity foods. This is consistent with most studies that found that food identity has a positive influence on attitudes toward food purchase (Aprile et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2022; Pivarski et al., 2024). Considering the context of Thailand, the consumption of Chinese food integrated with Thai culture, such as eating dim sum during Chinese New Year or buying bak kut teh for family gatherings or celebrations, reflects that Chinese food is not just food for consumption but also a symbol of social and cultural connection (Sangkaew et al., 2023). Research by Jainan et al. (2021) and Teanmahasatid and Bruce (2025) also indicates that Chinese food in Thailand is recognized as a cultural marker, promoting positive consumer attitudes, especially among those who value cultural roots and traditions. Therefore, this research hypothesizes that:

H4: Food identity influences attitudes toward purchasing Chinese identity food.

2.3. Perceived Value

Perceived value is the difference between the values customers receive from owning and purchasing a product compared to the total cost involved in owning it (Santosa, 2015; Kotler et al., 2021). Sweeney & Soutar (2001) developed a measure of value from the consumer's perspective. In their study, perceived value was divided into four types: emotional, social, monetary, and quality/efficiency values. Emotional value is the benefit of feelings or emotional states received from the product. Social value is the benefit received from the product's ability to affect the consumer's self-concept. Monetary value is the benefit received from the product related to reducing costs in both the short and long terms. Quality/efficiency value is the benefit received from the perception of the quality and efficiency expected from the product.

2.3.1. The Influence of Perceived Value on Purchase Intention

Perceived value is a fundamental concept in marketing that explains how consumers assess the worth of a product relative to the cost they must pay. In the context of consumer behavior, perceived value can enhance customer satisfaction, trust, and purchase intention (Salehzadeh & Pool, 2017; Dam, 2020; Liu, 2021). This can be explained by the perceived value theory (Zeithaml, 1988), which states that consumers evaluate the value of a product by comparing

what they receive (e.g., quality, experience) with what they pay (e.g., price, effort, or time). If the benefits received outweigh the costs paid, there is a higher tendency to make a purchase decision. In addition, the social value theory (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001) suggests that consumers often choose products that reflect their social image and status, which aligns with the value of Chinese identity food, providing both cultural value and social connection, such as consumption with family or during festivals. This concept is also related to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2012), which states that consumer purchase intention occurs when they evaluate that the action (e.g., buying food) provides beneficial or valuable outcomes. Especially when consumers perceive that the food reflects their identity and provides value beyond general consumption, it further increases the likelihood of a purchase decision. A study by Chen (2022) found that the perceived value of Chinese food, especially its cultural value, has a statistically significant impact on purchasing decisions. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that perceived value positively influences food purchase intentions (Chen et al., 2020; Hasan, 2022; Thio et al., 2024). Accordingly, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Perceived value influences the purchase intention of Chinese identity food.

2.3.2. The Influence of Perceived Value on Attitudes Toward Purchasing Food

In the context of Chinese identity food, consumers tend to consider perceived value in many dimensions, including cultural value (food that reflects cultural roots), social value (food that reflects social status or acceptance in a social group), and emotional value (food that creates special experiences, happiness, and memories of culture). When customers perceive food as having value in one or more aspects, they tend to develop positive attitudes toward food, leading to increased purchase intentions (Choe & Kim, 2018; Chen, 2022). The study of Thio et al. (2024) supports that the value of food consumption positively influences consumers' attitudes toward food purchasing in Indonesia. This is consistent with most research (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019; Bazhan et al., 2024; Leyva-Hernández et al., 2025). Therefore, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Perceived value influences attitudes toward purchasing Chinese identity food.

2.4. Social Norms

A social norm is an individual's perception of whether other people who are important to him/her (reference group) have done a certain behavior or whether those people want

or do not want him/her to do that behavior. If an individual perceives that someone important to him/her has done that behavior or wants him/her to do that behavior, he/she is more likely to conform and do it (Ajzen, 2012). Reference groups can be divided into primary and secondary groups. Primary groups are groups that interact and communicate face-to-face regularly. These group members have very similar beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, they have the most influence on consumers' thoughts and behaviors. Secondary groups are groups that have occasional contact. Hence, they have relatively little influence on individual behavior (Wang & Chu, 2021).

2.4.1. The Influence of Social Norms on Purchase Intension

In the context of Chinese identity food, social norms play a crucial role in shaping perception, acceptance, and purchase intention. This is particularly evident when food is linked to traditions, beliefs, or social situations, such as having dim sum with family or purchasing mooncakes during significant festivals. Consumers who perceive that their reference group behaves in a way that supports this type of food are more likely to purchase and consume this type of food accordingly (Chaopreecha et al., 2022).

The study by Wang & Chu (2021) supports that social norms significantly influence consumer intentions to purchase specific types of foods, such as certified healthy foods. Similarly, studies confirmed the positive effect of reference group influence on consumer purchase intention (Kumar & Smith, 2018; Bazhan et al., 2024; Lopez-Sintas et al., 2024). Based on these findings, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H7: Social norms influence the purchase intention of Chinese identity food.

2.4.2. The influence of Social Norms on Purchase Intension

Social norms have a significant influence on consumer attitudes toward purchasing products. When individuals perceive and accept the values, ideas, or behaviors of reference groups that they value, such as family, friends, or respected individuals, they tend to adjust their attitudes to be consistent with those groups, resulting in positive attitudes toward products that the reference group supports (Ajzen, 2012). In the study of Bazhan et al. (2024), in the context of purchasing unique foods such as organic foods, the factor of social norms has a significant influence on attitudes toward purchasing that food, especially in developing countries. Similarly, other research confirms that social norms positively affect consumer attitudes toward food purchases (Kumar & Smith, 2018; Wang & Chu, 2021; Lopez-Sintas et al., 2024). Based on these findings, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H8: Social norms influence attitudes toward purchasing Chinese identity food.

2.5. Attitudes Toward Food Purchasing

Attitude toward food purchasing is a person's beliefs or feelings toward purchasing food. It is expressed in the form of an evaluation, which may be accepted or rejected, which tends to lead to a certain behavior (Kotler et al., 2021). Attitude is closely related to intention. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), humans are rational. Human behavior, therefore, does not occur without prior consideration. If people believe that performing a behavior will have positive results, they tend to have a positive attitude toward that behavior and have more intention to do that behavior (Ajzen, 2012). In the context of purchasing Chinese identity food, when food buyers believe that buying such food will have positive results, they will have a positive attitude toward the purchase and have more intention to purchase. Furthermore, according to the TRA theory, attitude toward an action can act as a mediator linking social norms with the intention to perform any behavior. In the context of purchasing Chinese identity food, when consumers receive information or values from reference groups, such as family or friends who prefer Chinese food, and perceive that Chinese food has value, such as cultural value, these perceptions positively influence consumer attitudes, leading to a higher intention to purchase Chinese food. Therefore, attitude toward an action can be studied as a mediator in this research, as it is a variable that connects social norms (which influence perceptions and beliefs) with consumer intention to purchase Chinese food. A study by Khan et al. (2023), which studied the intention to purchase unique foods such as organic food, found that consumers' positive attitudes toward purchasing food, such as viewing organic food as healthy and safe from chemicals, have a significant influence on their intention to purchase that food. Consistent with most studies, it was found that attitudes toward food purchase have a positive influence on food purchase intention (Masoud & Masoumeh, 2016; Wang & Chu, 2021; Bazhan et al., 2024; Maalouf et al., 2025). Therefore, the research hypothesis is set as follows:

H9: Attitudes toward food purchase influence purchase intention of Chinese identity food.

2.6. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the possibility that consumers will buy products or services of a brand shortly. It is expressed in the form of the desire to buy, interest in buying, effort to buy, planning to buy, and referring others to buy (Masoud & Masoumeh, 2016). Purchase intention is a step between the evaluation of alternatives and the actual purchase decision. It is part of the consumer's purchase decision

process, which starts from the recognition of needs, information seeking, and evaluation of alternatives. When the evaluation of various alternatives is complete, consumers will receive the branded product that best meets their needs and intentions to buy. That is, consumers will have purchase intention (Kotler et al., 2021). However, when the time comes for consumers to buy, there may be other factors that affect consumers' purchase decisions. These factors include social factors (e.g., the influence of reference groups and social and cultural trends) and situational factors related to the purchase (anticipated situation factors) (e.g., convenience and accessibility of products, as well as emotions and feelings during the purchase) (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2014).

These factors affecting purchase intention may change depending on the social context of each period, especially in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, where consumer behavior has changed significantly. Consumers place greater importance on food quality and safety, as research by Farah et al. (2024) found that consumers tend to buy food from restaurants with high safety measures and avoid crowded places by using online food purchasing services more. In addition, convenience in purchasing has become another highly influential factor on purchase intention, especially in the post-COVID-19 era, where online purchasing and delivery systems have become a major consumer behavior. Research by Niewczas-Dobrowolska et al. (2024) also indicates that convenience in ordering and delivery is an important factor that stimulates purchase intention in an era where consumers prioritize saving time and reducing the risk of contact in public areas.

3. Research Methods and Materials

3.1. Population

The population in this study included working-age consumers (aged 15-59) who are interested in consuming Chinese identity food in 4 areas of the southern region of Thailand: Na Bon and Thung Song districts in Nakhon Si Thammarat province and Huai Yot and Mueang districts in Trang province.

3.2. Samples

The sample size for the structural equation model (SEM) analysis was determined using the criteria of Comrey & Lee (1992). According to their guidelines, the sample sizes of 200, 300, and 400 samples were considered fair, good, and excellent, respectively. Therefore, to ensure that the research is reliable, this research employed a sample size of 400 samples. Based on the power analysis calculated using

the G*Power program with a medium effect size (Cohen, 1988), an alpha level of 0.05, and a statistical power of 0.80, the calculation results show that a sample size of 400 people is sufficient to support hypothesis testing in the SEM model. It can detect true effects up to 80% if those effects exist. However, the power analysis calculation found that the minimum suitable sample size for testing the SEM is 92 people, which makes the sample size of 400 people used in this research still appropriate and sufficient for this quantitative research.

The sampling process utilized the quota sampling method to select 400 participants, with 100 participants from each of the following four districts: Na Bon district and Thung Song district in Nakhon Si Thammarat province, as well as Huai Yot district and Mueang district in Trang province. Subsequently, participants in each area were selected through convenience sampling, a method aimed at obtaining the required sample size by including any accessible individuals who met the study's criteria (Etikan & Bala, 2017). However, although quota and convenience sampling methods facilitate rapid and efficient data collection and access to specific target groups, they have limitations in terms of representativeness. Since these methods do not rely on probability, the resulting sample may not fully reflect the characteristics of the entire population. This is particularly true when data collection is conducted online, such as via Facebook, which may limit access to population groups lacking the ability or opportunity to use technology. Consequently, generalizability may be limited. Nevertheless, the obtained sample can still provide valuable information and comprehensively reflect the opinions of consumers in the digital age to a certain extent.

3.3. Measurement

This study utilized questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," assigning weight scores from 1 to 5. The questionnaires consisted of six sections corresponding to the latent variables under investigation. The food quality questionnaire was adapted from Mofokeng (2021), whereas the food identity questionnaire was based on Li (2021). The perceived value questionnaire was derived from Özgen & Reyhan (2020). The social norms and purchase intention questionnaires were adapted from Bagher et al. (2018). The attitudes toward the food purchase questionnaire were adapted from Yadav & Pathak (2016). To ensure validity, all questionnaire sections underwent content validity assessment, with an index of item objective congruence (IOC) exceeding 0.50 for all items. A try-out was conducted with 30 working-age consumers (aged 15–59 years) from a non-sample population within the study areas. The reliability analysis, measured by Cronbach's α coefficient, confirmed strong internal consistency across all variables, with

coefficients of 0.928 for food quality, 0.813 for food identity, 0.949 for perceived value, 0.907 for social norms, 0.933 for attitudes toward food purchase, and 0.888 for purchase intention, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70.

3.4. Sample Collection Method

The online questionnaire was created using Google Forms, specifying the screening questions for the sample group, which was working-age consumers aged 15-59 years in 4 areas (Na Bon and Thung Song districts in Nakhon Si Thammarat province and Huai Yot and Mueang districts in Trang province), who were interested in consuming Chinese identity food. After that, the researcher announced the questionnaire link via the researcher's Facebook channel and asked for cooperation from Facebook users who met the specified criteria to help answer the questionnaires and help publicize the questionnaires to their friends' networks. Then, the researcher collected the questionnaires from the respondents and separated the unusable questionnaires, such as questionnaires that did not answer all questions, answered multiple questions in one question, or answered the same question in every question. The complete questionnaires were scored according to the specified criteria, and the data was statistically analyzed.

Although online data collection via Google Forms has limitations, particularly regarding sampling bias, which may arise from distributing questionnaires mainly through Facebook, resulting in the inability to comprehensively reach population groups that do not use technology or social media, the questionnaire respondents may not reflect the full diversity of the population, especially among the working-age group with limited access to technology. However, the careful selection of samples from 4 areas in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Trang provinces helps to obtain data that appropriately reflects the specific local context. At the same time, Facebook remains a widely accessible channel for the working-age group, and the questionnaire respondents were appropriately screened for qualifications to ensure accurate and reliable data for analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Analysis of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Group

The demographic characteristics of the sample group were analyzed in terms of gender, age, marital status, educational level, occupation, and monthly income. Frequency and percentage values were calculated to clearly understand the structure of the sample group.

3.5.2. Preliminary Variable Assumption Testing

The preliminary assumption testing for variables in SEM

included two key assessments: the normality of variable distribution and the multicollinearity. The normality of variable distribution was examined by analyzing skewness and kurtosis values. The presence of multicollinearity was determined by evaluating the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to determine whether there are high correlations among variables that may indicate multicollinearity issues.

3.5.3. Structural Equation Model Testing

The SEM testing included two main evaluations:

1) The assessment of construct validity of the measurement model using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to evaluate the quality of the latent variable measurement model in the model. This process tested convergent validity by assessing standardized factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to confirm that the measurement instruments accurately reflect the intended variables, and tested discriminant validity by assessing the square root of the AVE compared to the correlation coefficients between variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) to confirm that each latent variable is clearly distinct. In addition, the reliability of the latent variables was assessed by calculating Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient and Composite Reliability (CR) to test the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement model in this research.

2) Examination of the goodness of fit of the hypothesized structural equation model with the empirical data using the goodness of fit indices in Table 1.

Table 1: Indices for the Measurement Model (Hair et al., 2018).

Fit Indices	Acceptable Rate
χ^2	$p > 0.05$
χ^2/df	< 3
Goodness of fit index (GFI)	≥ 0.90
Adjust goodness of fit index (AGFI)	≥ 0.80
Normed fit index (NFI)	≥ 0.90
Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)	≥ 0.90
Comparative fit index (CFI)	≥ 0.90
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	≤ 0.08
Standard root mean square residual (SRMR)	≤ 0.08

3) Analysis of the influence paths between latent variables in the SEM, both the path from the exogenous variable that shows the effects on the endogenous variable (γ line) and the path from the endogenous variable that shows the effects on the endogenous variable (β line), to examine whether the analysis results support the research hypothesis.

4) Analysis of mediated effects by analyzing the direct, indirect, and total effects between the latent variables in the

SEM and then testing the significance of the indirect effect using the bootstrapping method. If the test results are statistically significant, it indicates that the variable has an influence as a mediating variable.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Research Project Number REC No. 031/67, and was conducted in accordance with research ethics principles. Consent was obtained from all research participants before they answered the questionnaire by providing complete information about the purpose of the research, data collection, and the use of the collected data solely for research purposes. All data will be strictly protected and stored, with no disclosure of the personal information of the questionnaire respondents in any research reports or documents, and the data will be handled in an anonymized format, in accordance with the personal data protection measures prescribed by relevant laws.

4. Results

4.1. Results of the Analysis of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Group

The majority of the respondents were female, accounting for 61.00%. Most were aged between 21 and 30 years, representing 28.25%. In terms of marital status, 63.50% were single. Regarding educational attainment, 52.75% held a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. The largest occupational group was students, comprising 35.50% of the sample. Additionally, 48.75% of the respondents reported a monthly income of less than or equal to 15,000 baht.

4.2. Results of Preliminary Variable Hypothesis Testing

The results of the normal distribution examination of variables are shown in Table 2. When considering the skewness value, it was found that the observed variables were distributed in a left-skewed manner ($SK < 0$), indicating that the data of all variables had scores higher than the mean, with skewness values between -1.476 and -0.019. When considering the kurtosis value, all the observed variables had a kurtosis value lower than normal (platykurtic), with the calculated value being less than 3 ($KU < 3$). This indicates that the data of the observed variables were distributed in a relatively flat manner, with a

high spread of data, with kurtosis values between -1.078 and 0.956. When considering the skewness and kurtosis values, it was found that they were slightly different from zero. Hence, it is considered that the observed variables were distributed in a normal curve.

For the analysis of the Pearson correlation coefficient (Table 3), the 6 latent variables demonstrated a relationship between all 15 pairs of variables. All pairs of latent variables were positively related with a statistically significant level of 0.01, with the magnitude of the relationship or the correlation coefficient between 0.17 and 0.638. These values are less than 0.85, indicating that the latent variables have a low level of relationship. Hence, there are no multicollinearity issues. All latent variables are, therefore, suitable for structural equation model analysis (Hair et al., 2018).

Table 2: Normality of Observed Variables.

Variables	Item	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Food quality (FQU)	FQU1	4.65	0.56	-1.331	0.804
	FQU2	4.63	0.63	-1.476	0.956
	FQU3	4.64	0.59	-1.398	0.919
	FQU4	4.46	0.69	-0.996	0.104
	FQU5	4.41	0.73	-0.927	-0.114
Food identity (FID)	FID1	4.08	0.76	-0.200	-1.046
	FID2	4.13	0.73	-0.361	-0.569
	FID3	4.33	0.73	-0.636	-0.723
	FID4	4.20	0.76	-0.481	-0.715
	FID5	4.13	0.81	-0.581	-0.384
Perceived value (PVA)	PVA1	4.41	0.68	-0.781	-0.362
	PVA2	4.39	0.68	-0.760	-0.168
	PVA3	4.45	0.70	-0.984	-0.004
	PVA4	4.29	0.69	-0.505	-0.659
	PVA5	4.33	0.76	-0.746	-0.562
Social norm (SNO)	SNO1	4.20	0.84	-0.551	-0.929
	SNO2	3.98	0.87	-0.330	-0.834
	SNO3	3.68	0.99	-0.089	-1.078
	SNO4	3.92	0.81	-0.221	-0.716
	SNO5	3.79	0.92	-0.223	-0.850
Attitude (ATT)	ATT1	4.16	0.92	-0.784	-0.396
	ATT2	3.97	1.00	-0.619	-0.694
	ATT3	4.06	0.91	-0.574	-0.656
	ATT4	4.06	0.89	-0.524	-0.701
	ATT5	4.00	0.97	-0.625	-0.636
Purchase intention (PIN)	PIN1	3.64	0.84	-0.200	-0.796
	PIN2	3.76	0.82	-0.169	-0.977
	PIN3	3.75	0.84	-0.171	-1.016
	PIN4	3.51	0.91	-0.237	-0.819
	PIN5	3.72	0.95	-0.019	-1.078

Table 3: Pearson's Product-moment Correlation Coefficient of Latent Variables

Variables	Mean	S.D.	FQU	FID	PVA	SNO	ATT	PIN
Food quality (FQU)	4.56	0.52	1					
Food identity (FID)	4.17	0.61	0.471**	1				
Perceived value (PVA)	4.37	0.56	0.638**	0.596**	1			
Social norm (SNO)	3.91	0.70	0.250**	0.521**	0.385**	1		
Attitude (ATT)	4.05	0.83	0.173**	0.472**	0.333**	0.382**	1	
Purchase intention (PIN)	3.68	0.75	0.214**	0.580**	0.362**	0.483**	0.499**	1

Significance level: ** $p < 0.01$

Note: FQU = food quality, FID = food identity, PVA = perceived value, SNO = social norm, ATT = attitude, PIN = purchase intention.

4.3. Results of Structural Equation Model Testing

4.3.1. Validity and reliability of the measurement model

Prior to the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the construct validity and goodness of fit of the measurement model (Model Fit). The analysis results showed that the measurement model had acceptable fit indices, including Chi-square = 9.709, Relative Chi-square = 1.941, $p = 0.084$, GFI = 0.992, AGFI = 0.967, NFI = 0.989, TLI = 0.984, CFI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.049, and SRMR = 0.012, indicating that the model was consistent with the empirical data (Hair et al., 2018). Therefore, the Structural Equation Modeling analysis could proceed with confidence.

The results of the construct validity test from the CFA analysis revealed that the measurement model had a satisfactory level of convergent validity. Each latent variable had Standardized Factor Loadings higher than the acceptable criterion (≥ 0.50) and an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) greater than 0.50, demonstrating that each variable could effectively explain the variance of its indicators (Table 4). For discriminant validity, it was found that the square root of the AVE of every latent variable was greater than the correlation coefficient between the variables, indicating that each latent variable was distinct or independent (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and thus suitable for Structural Equation Modeling analysis (Table 5). Regarding the reliability test results from Cronbach's α coefficient and composite reliability, the values were greater than 0.70, showing that the latent variables used to develop the structural equation model in this research, as well as the questionnaire items used to measure the observed variables, were appropriate, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Convergent Validity and Reliability of Measurement Model.

Variables	Item	Loading	Cron-bach's α	C.R.	AVE
Food quality (FQU)	FQU1	0.794	0.869	0.872	0.580
	FQU2	0.831			
	FQU3	0.823			
	FQU4	0.699			
	FQU5	0.641			

Variables	Item	Loading	Cron-bach's α	C.R.	AVE
Food identity (FID)	FID1	0.683	0.868	0.854	0.541
	FID2	0.672			
	FID3	0.769			
	FID4	0.771			
	FID5	0.774			
Perceived value (PVA)	PVA1	0.740	0.857	0.876	0.587
	PVA2	0.720			
	PVA3	0.811			
	PVA4	0.729			
	PVA5	0.824			
Social norm (SNO)	SNO1	0.506	0.845	0.829	0.503
	SNO2	0.574			
	SNO3	0.794			
	SNO4	0.720			
	SNO5	0.883			
Attitude (ATT)	ATT1	0.734	0.928	0.922	0.703
	ATT2	0.804			
	ATT3	0.911			
	ATT4	0.869			
	ATT5	0.862			
Purchase intention (PIN)	PIN1	0.835	0.909	0.914	0.680
	PIN2	0.830			
	PIN3	0.808			
	PIN4	0.817			
	PIN5	0.832			

Table 5: Discriminant Validity of Measurement Model

Variables	FQU	FID	PVA	SNO	ATT	PIN
FQU	0.762					
FID	0.471**	0.736				
PVA	0.638**	0.596**	0.766			
SNO	0.250**	0.521**	0.385**	0.709		
ATT	0.173**	0.472**	0.333**	0.382**	0.838	
PIN	0.214**	0.580**	0.362**	0.483**	0.499**	0.825

Significance levels: ** $p < 0.01$

Note: The values on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVE, while the off-diagonal values are the correlation coefficients between constructs. FQU = Food Quality, FID = Food Identity, PVA = Perceived Value, SNO = Social Norms, ATT = Attitude, PIN = Purchase Intention

4.3.2. Consistency of the Structural Equation Model

The structural equation model of the groups of variables influencing the purchase intention of Chinese identity food, including food quality, food identity, perceived value, social norm, and attitude toward food purchase, is consistent with the empirical data ($\chi^2 = 350.973$; $df = 268$; $\chi^2/df = 1.142$; $p = 0.055$; $GFI = 0.949$; $AGFI = 0.912$, $NFI = 0.964$, $TLI = 0.992$, $CFI = 0.995$; $RMSEA = 0.019$, $SRMR = 0.035$), as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of Goodness Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model.

Fit indices	Acceptable rate (Hair et al., 2018)	Values of structural equation model
χ^2	$p > 0.05$	0.055
χ^2/df	< 3	1.142
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.949
AGFI	≥ 0.80	0.912
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.964
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.992
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.995
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.019
SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.035

Note: Acceptable rate from Hair et al. (2018).

4.3.3. Path Analysis of Latent Variable in the Structural Equation Model

As shown in Table 6 and Figure 1, the path coefficient of influence (causal influence) of the exogenous variables that affect the endogenous variables (Gamma: γ) had 8 paths. The 6 paths shown as solid lines indicate that the endogenous variables have a statistically significant influence on the endogenous variables as follows: 1) Food quality has a direct influence on attitude toward food purchase ($\gamma = 0.163$). 2) Food identity has a direct influence on purchase intention ($\gamma = 0.460$). 3) Food identity has a direct influence on attitude toward food purchase ($\gamma = 0.392$). 4) Perceived value has a direct influence on attitude toward food purchase ($\gamma = 0.167$). 5) Social norms have a direct influence on purchase intention ($\gamma = 0.181$). 6) Social norms have a direct influence on attitudes toward food purchases ($\gamma = 0.196$). The other 2 paths, shown as dashed lines, mean that the endogenous variables have no influence on the endogenous variables. That is, food quality and perceived value have no influence on the intention to purchase Chinese identity food. For the coefficient of the causal influence path of the endogenous latent variables that affect the endogenous latent variables together (Beta: β), there

is one path, shown as a solid line. That is, attitude toward food purchase has a statistically significant direct influence on the intention to purchase Chinese identity food ($\beta = 0.259$), in Figure 1.

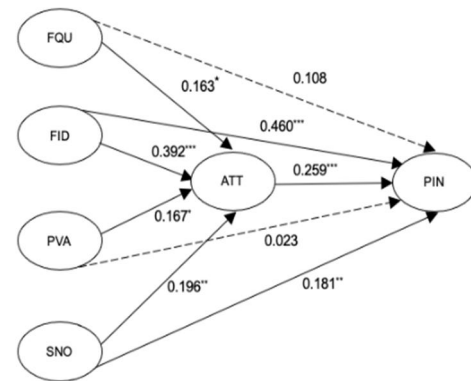


Figure 1: Path Coefficients for Structural Equation Model.

When comparing the influence of various latent variables on the purchase intention of Chinese identity food in the structural equation model, it was found that the variables affecting purchase intention were food identity, social norms, and attitude toward purchasing. Considering the total effect (TE), which combines both direct and indirect influences of each variable, it was found that food identity had the greatest influence on determining the purchase intention of Chinese identity food, with the highest TE (TE = 0.562), reflecting the significant role of food identity in stimulating purchase intention. Attitude toward purchasing (ATT) had the second highest total effect (TE = 0.259), and social norms (SNO) had a TE of 0.232, respectively, indicating the influence of having a positive attitude and listening to opinions from reference groups in stimulating purchase intention. The variables that did not affect purchase intention were perceived value and food quality. The variables in the model could explain the variance of Chinese identity food purchase intention at a moderate level of 51.60% ($R^2 = 0.516$). The remaining 48.40% of Chinese identity food purchase intention is still due to other factors not included in this model, which may include social, economic, or other personal factors that may influence food purchase intention, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Path Coefficients and Causal Influence in Structural Model

Path diagram	DE	IE	TE	Ranking of causal influence
FQU → ATT → PIN	0.108	0.042	0.150	4
FID → ATT → PIN	0.460***	0.102***	0.562***	1
PVA → ATT → PIN	0.023	0.043	0.066	5
SNO → ATT → PIN	0.181**	0.051**	0.232**	3
ATT → PIN	0.259***	-	0.259***	2

$R^2 = 0.516$, Significance levels: ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: FQU = Food Quality, FID = Food Identity, PVA = Perceived Value, SNO = Social Norms, ATT = Attitude, PIN = Purchase Intention, DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, TE = Total Effect

From the study results, it can be seen that food identity has the highest influence on the purchase intention of Chinese identity food. Therefore, this research analyzed the influence of each sub-dimension of food identity by considering the path coefficient of the relationships between variables in the Structural Equation Model (SEM). The analysis results showed that food novelty had the highest indirect influence on the purchase intention of Chinese identity food through food identity, with the highest indirect effect value of 0.356, followed by unique taste, which had a similar indirect effect value of 0.354. Distinctive aroma, cultural uniqueness, and national identity also had significant effects, although lower than food novelty and unique taste (Table 8). From this analysis, it can be concluded that unique food novelty and unique and distinctive taste play the most important roles in stimulating the purchase intention of Chinese identity food, highlighting the importance of developing novel menus to better meet consumer demand.

Table 8: Causal Effects of Food Identity Sub-components on Purchase Intention

Sub-components of food identity	Path coefficients from sub-components to food identity	Path coefficients from food identity to purchase intention	Indirect effect
Cultural uniqueness	0.683***	0.460***	0.314***
National identity	0.672***	0.460***	0.309***
Unique taste	0.769***	0.460***	0.354***
Distinctive aroma	0.711***	0.460***	0.327***
Novelty	0.774***	0.460***	0.356***

Significance levels: *** $p < 0.001$

4.2.4. Path Analysis of Latent Variable in the Structural Equation Model

When considering the indirect influence of food quality, food identity, perceived value, and social norms on the purchase intention of Chinese identity food through attitude toward purchasing, it was found that food identity (IE = 0.102) and social norms (IE = 0.051) had a statistically significant indirect influence on the purchase intention of Chinese identity food through attitude toward purchasing. And because the variables food identity and social norms still have a direct influence on purchase intention, this results in attitude toward purchasing having only a partial mediating influence (Partial Mediation) (Table 7).

5. Discussion

From the development of the structural equation model of the variables influencing the intention to purchase

Chinese identity food, it was found that the intention to purchase Chinese identity food was directly influenced by food identity, social norms, and attitudes toward food purchase. This outcome is consistent with previous studies that found that food identity affects consumers' feelings, especially Chinese identity food that reflects culture and traditional heritage. Consumers who feel connected to Chinese culture or value their cultural roots tend to buy more Chinese food (Jin et al., 2025) because they see these foods as not just food but also as symbols of identity and way of life, which helps stimulate purchase intention among consumers who want to maintain and express their cultural identity (Dong & Li, 2025). This is consistent with most research that found that food identity has a positive influence on food purchase intention (Chen et al., 2020; Li, 2021; Cengiz & Cengiz, 2023; Gupta & Sharma, 2024; Dong & Li, 2025). Social norms are also a factor that significantly influences individuals' purchase intentions. In the context of Chinese identity food, social norms play an important role in shaping the awareness, acceptance, and purchase intention of this type of food, especially if the food is related to traditions, beliefs, or social situations. Consumers who perceive that their reference group behaves in a way that supports this type of food are more likely to purchase and consume it accordingly (Chaopreecha et al., 2022). This is consistent with most research finding that social norms have a positive influence on consumers' food purchase intention (Kumar & Smith, 2018; Wang & Chu, 2021; Bazhan et al., 2024; Lopez-Sintas et al., 2024).

As for the attitude toward food purchases, it is a factor that is closely related to the intention. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), humans are rational. Therefore, human behavior does not occur without prior consideration. If people believe that doing a behavior will have positive results, they are more likely to have a positive attitude toward that behavior and have more intention to do that behavior (Ajzen, 2012). Considering the context of purchasing Chinese identity food, when food buyers believe that buying such food will have a positive effect, they will have a positive attitude toward buying and will have more intention to buy it. This is consistent with previous research demonstrating that attitude toward buying food has a positive influence on the intention to buy that food (Masoud & Masoumeh, 2016; Wang & Chu, 2021; Khan et al., 2023; Bazhan et al., 2024; Maalouf et al., 2025).

The study revealed an interesting finding that food quality and perceived value do not directly influence the purchase intention of Chinese identity food. This contradicts general marketing concepts that often expect food quality (e.g., freshness, cleanliness, or taste) and perceived value (e.g., value for money or efficiency) to play a significant role in purchasing decisions. However, the results reflect that, in the context of identity food with cultural significance,

consumers prioritize other dimensions, especially "authenticity," cultural connection, and the influence of reference groups such as family or community, which are factors that affect attitudes and food purchasing behavior. Furthermore, the perceived value of food among this consumer group may not focus on economic dimensions or price comparisons but rather emphasize social and emotional values, such as pride in cultural roots or a sense of belonging. In many cases, consumers choose to consume identity food during auspicious festivals or community events rather than purchasing it for daily value (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Wang & Chu, 2021; Mohammad et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be explained that purchase intention in this case is driven by a sense of connection to culture and society, rather than solely by the physical attributes or economic benefits of the food. Additionally, the study found that attitude toward purchasing has a significant influence on purchase intention and can act as a powerful internal driver. The fact that food quality and perceived value do not directly affect purchase intention may depend on the level of consumer attitude. That is, even if consumers perceive that the food is of good quality or has various dimensions of value, if they do not have a positive attitude toward that food, such as not feeling connected, not seeing cultural significance, or not having personal motivation, direct purchase intention may not occur. This shows that attitude may act as a filter or important condition that allows food characteristics to effectively translate into purchase intention. In other words, food quality and value will have an influence only when consumers have a sufficiently positive attitude.

This research also found that the intention to purchase Chinese identity food is indirectly partially influenced by food identity and social norms through attitudes toward food purchase. This shows that consumers' perception of food identity and social norms affects their attitudes toward food purchases, resulting in higher purchase intentions. This is consistent with previous studies that found that food identity plays an important role in determining consumers' attitudes toward purchasing that food when the food has characteristics that reflect its culture, history, or uniqueness. Consumers tend to have positive attitudes and are more likely to purchase such foods (Aprile et al., 2016; Li, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022; Pivarski et al., 2024). Social norms also have a significant influence on consumers' attitudes toward food purchases. When individuals perceive and accept the values, ideas, or behaviors of a reference group that they value, they tend to adjust their attitudes to align with that group, resulting in positive attitudes toward foods that the reference group supports (Ajzen, 2012). This is consistent with the study of Bazhan et al. (2024) that in the context of purchasing foods with specific characteristics such as organic foods, social norms have a significant influence on

attitudes toward purchasing such foods, especially in developing countries. This is consistent with most previous research that found that social norms have a positive influence on attitudes toward purchasing food (Kumar & Smith, 2018; Wang & Chu, 2021; Lopez-Sintas et al., 2024).

Regarding the distribution of Chinese identity food, the research findings revealed that the variables directly affecting the purchase intention of Chinese identity food are food identity and social norms, while food quality and perceived value, which are often fundamental factors in marketing, do not have a direct effect in this context. This reflects that consumer motivation stems from cultural incentives and support from reference groups, rather than the functional attributes of the product. From the analysis of the research results, it can be inferred that the current distribution channels of Chinese identity food do not fully meet these motivations. Although entrepreneurs use traditional channels such as restaurants or souvenir shops that reflect Chinese culture, there is a lack of design to create shared experiences with reference groups, such as cultural activities, creating spaces for consumer participation, or connecting with social contexts in daily life. At the same time, even with the use of online channels, most still focus on providing information or direct sales, rather than using reference groups to communicate the value of the product, such as reviews, sharing, or using credible individuals in the community as intermediaries in communication. Therefore, the fact that consumers are still more influenced by reference groups than by current distribution channels reflects that the distribution structure has not been able to fully utilize social and cultural potential, which represents an opportunity to develop new distribution strategies that emphasize connecting products with reference groups and cultural experiences through both online and offline distribution channels in a systematic manner.

6. Conclusions

The structural equation model of the group of variables influencing the intention to purchase Chinese identity food consists of food quality, food identity, perceived value, social norm, and attitude toward food purchase. These findings are consistent with the empirical data. The variables in the model can explain 51.60 percent of the variance in the intention to purchase Chinese identity food. The intention to purchase Chinese identity food is directly influenced by food identity, social norms, and attitudes toward food purchase with statistical significance. It is also partially indirectly influenced by food identity and social norms through attitudes toward food purchase.

This study can be used for theoretical implications by contributing to the expansion and development of

theoretical concepts in several areas, particularly Consumer Behavior Theory, which has broadened the original framework from considering external factors such as price or promotion to considering internal factors related to food identity that reflect the cultural meanings and values of consumers. It also expands Social Identity Theory by focusing on food consumption that reflects the consumer's identity, and Social Norms Theory, which emphasizes the role of reference groups in food purchasing decisions. The expansion of the theoretical scope in this research provides a new perspective in the study of consumer behavior with cultural significance, which can be used as a conceptual framework for future research, especially in studies on the consumption behavior of identity food.

For the application of research results to practical implications, the findings of this research can be applied in various ways, especially in developing marketing strategies for businesses in secondary or cultural provinces, and in preserving Chinese food culture at the community level. In terms of developing marketing strategies for secondary areas such as Nakhon Si Thammarat and Trang provinces, which have strong cultural dimensions, the study indicates that food identity and social norms are factors that directly affect purchase intention, reflecting that consumers in these types of areas prioritize social and cultural contexts over functional factors. Therefore, entrepreneurs should design strategies that emphasize identity, such as developing menus with unique local novelty that blends local ingredients with traditional Chinese recipes, and communicating through community members or organizing events in conjunction with cultural festivals to strengthen connections with consumers. Regarding the preservation of Chinese food culture, the finding that food identity influences purchase intention shows that preserving the specific characteristics of Chinese food in the area, such as traditional recipes, cooking methods, and cultural beliefs related to food, is still something that consumers truly value. Applying this information can lead to various forms of practical cultural preservation, whether it is promoting traditional menus that have connections to Chinese traditions, transmitting food wisdom through community activities, or integrating knowledge about Chinese food into the activities of schools and local organizations, to instill pride and encourage participation in preserving these identities among the younger generation in a sustainable way.

Regarding the benefits in terms of distribution channel development, the research findings reflect that current distribution channels for Chinese food in Southern Thailand still focus on creating cultural experiences, such as selling through restaurants decorated in Chinese style or presenting traditional menus. However, these channels lack systematic design that connects with consumer reference groups, even though reference groups play a significant role in purchasing

decisions. Therefore, Chinese restaurants can develop participatory distribution strategies, using online channels such as social media and various platforms to encourage the sharing of experiences from friends or family, as well as using community influencers to promote products. In the offline aspect, they may organize events related to cultural festivals or increase Chinese food distribution points in community shops and tourist attractions that are truly accessible to consumers. This is consistent with the behavior of consumers in Southern Thailand who increasingly use social media and online platforms to search for and purchase food products, especially the working-age group. At the same time, offline purchasing behavior, such as buying food from famous restaurants in the community and consignment shops in tourist areas, remains popular among consumers in these areas, especially among consumers who want direct experience with the product and trust in quality from seeing or trying it before making a purchase decision. These strategies are therefore highly feasible in practice and can be developed into a Cultural-based Distribution Model that sustainably connects the community economy with niche consumption.

The limitations of this research are that the post-COVID-19 pandemic context is a period in which consumer behavior has changed significantly, especially in terms of expectations for hygiene, food safety, and online access. This may have influenced responses to the questionnaire in some areas. Respondents may have placed more emphasis on the aspects of identity food related to health or feelings of safety than on taste or cultural factors during the pre-pandemic period. Therefore, the data obtained may reflect consumer behavior during the post-COVID-19 transition rather than general long-term behavior. There are also limitations in the research methodology, which used convenience sampling, which may not reflect the characteristics of the entire population or may lead to sample bias, potentially affecting the generalization of results. The use of self-reported bias questionnaires may cause the data received to deviate from reality. For example, respondents may provide answers that they think society expects or provide overly positive information to appear better. Meanwhile, some factors, such as economic and social changes or the impact of digital technology, may not have been fully considered in this research. Another limitation is that this research did not analyze the differences in research results based on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, and income level, which may result in a lack of insight into the diversity of responses from consumers with different backgrounds. Neglecting this issue may limit the depth and accuracy of the findings in comprehensively explaining consumer behavior.

Recommendations for future research: Based on the research results that reflect that the main drivers of

consumer behavior in purchasing Chinese food are cultural and social factors, rather than the direct attributes of the product, future research should conduct in-depth studies on distribution channel strategies that can link cultural incentives and reference groups with the purchasing experience, such as comparing the effectiveness of online and offline channels in conveying food identity, or studying which platforms can generate the most engagement from reference groups. In addition, the same model should be tested in areas with different social, economic, and cultural characteristics to assess whether the importance of social and cultural factors on purchase intention remains constant or changes depending on the context, and to identify distribution strategies that are specifically appropriate for each area with greater accuracy. Based on the limitations of this research, future research can make improvements by studying long-term consumption behavior to observe changes in behavior over time or external factors that may have an impact. Using a more diverse sample and using a sampling method that can reflect the entire population will help to make the research results more accurate. In addition, studying the differences in consumer behavior in each population group will provide a better understanding of the differences in responses to Chinese identity food, which may lead to the development of more appropriate marketing strategies for different groups.

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