

Executive Summary

As an international metropolis, Hong Kong has enjoyed a worldwide reputation as a culinary capital. Hong Kong's food culture is not only based on its traditional Chinese heritage but is also deeply influenced by various global cultures, forming a unique mix of East and West. The interplay between food and tourism, one of the four pillar industries, showcases Hong Kong's attraction while supporting important economic and social development.

However, maintaining Hong Kong's reputation in this aspect is increasingly challenging as many nearby Asian cities have rapidly enhanced their attractiveness by developing and promoting their food cultures. South Korea has successfully introduced "Korean Food" to the world. In addition, since the establishment of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2004, a total of 57 cities have been designated as "Cities of Gastronomy", including several cities in Mainland China. Since 2017 Macau, after being selected as a "City of Gastronomy", has emphasised "tourism + gastronomy" development. Just north of Hong Kong, Shenzhen is constantly innovating its diversity of dishes, that attracts many Hong Kong consumers to venture northward. Strategies are urgently needed to consolidate Hong Kong's advantages as the culinary capital and elevate its cultural strength.

The local catering industry has long-endured various challenges, such as high rents, rising food costs, labour shortages, and a lack of younger generation interest. The preservation of unique food cultures is also a concern as traditional dishes gradually disappear, weakening Hong Kong's reputation as a food capital and further undermining its competitiveness.

Recently, there have been many discussions to promote Hong Kong's economic revival and restoring the city's appeal. The Government, industry, and the public are actively seeking new paths for Hong Kong. The Director of Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of State Council, Xia Baolong, has proposed the concept of "Tourism is everywhere in Hong Kong". The HKSAR Government is determined to revive the tourism industry by actively promoting in-depth travel, specialty tourism, and urban tourism, where Hong Kong's time-honoured food culture holds great potential for development.

With the repositioning of the tourism industry, new opportunities arise to reinstate Hong Kong's reputation. What is the way forward for food development in Hong Kong? What are the solutions for its internal and external challenges? Based on this scenario this research aims to explore how to reinstate Hong Kong's culinary status; understand the city's advantages; challenges; new opportunities; provide feasible recommendations to enhance its cultural strengths.

This study collected data between February and May 2024, by reviewing literature, conducting onsite surveys with 520 Hong Kong youths aged 18-34, 13 young practitioners in the catering industry, and interviewing six subject-matter experts and academics.

Main Findings

1. Hong Kong has an advantage as a culinary capital.

Hong Kong has integrated Chinese and Western food cultures, with a diversity of ingredients, enriching both its core and alternate dining options, to form a unique food profile.

2. Surrounding areas have, in recent years, made rapid progress in developing their food and cuisine.

At the same time, Hong Kong's catering industry has experienced various challenges, such as the rise in food costs, increasingly expensive rents, and labour shortages.

3. In recent years, the dining industry has emphasised personalised dining experiences.

This has included the types of restaurants, service quality, food innovation and catering to the needs of different customer groups.

4. Food tourism has economic potential.

Embracing emerging food cultures, sustainable development and healthy eating practises, will enable Hong Kong to seize the

opportunities to accelerate the consolidation and expansion of its position as a gastronomic destination.

5. Promoting and shaping of distinctive cultures.

This can have a significant impact on consolidating Hong Kong's culinary status.

6. Hong Kong's food industry has a structural problem of insufficient new talent.

However, with the introduction of technology and the diversification of the food industry, coupled with the further development of vocational education, it can help to broaden the imagination of the new generation towards the industry and establish a positive image.

Recommendations

Regarding the above research findings and key discussion points to help consolidate Hong Kong's position and strength as the culinary capital, we believe that the following suggestions are worth considering:

- 1. The HKSAR Government should set up a "Hong Kong Food Development Task Force". This would coordinate Hong Kong's food and culinary development strategy, liaise with the industry, facilitate talent development, promote the integration of "tourism + gastronomy", and be responsible for overseeing the publicity and promotion plans for various signature food or dishes in Hong Kong.**

Currently, the promotion and development of food and cuisine in Hong Kong involves multiple departments and organisations, such as the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and the Hong Kong Tourism Board responsible for Hong Kong's tourism development and launching a series of promotions for Hong Kong and its great food

respectively. In addition, the annual Food Expo is organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council under the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau. As such the policies and measures are fragmented and lack synergy. To consolidate Hong Kong's reputation as the culinary capital and to compete with neighbouring cities and their cuisines, a more proactive, multi-faceted planning strategy is required. This would include tourism promotion, catering industry development, integration of technology and R&D, talent cultivation, and marketing signature food products/dishes, which require higher-level supervision and coordination.

Learning from the experience of the "Korean Food Promotion Institute" established by the South Korean Government, which is responsible for the development and promotion of local traditional food, it is recommended to set up a "Hong Kong Food Development Task Force", with the main functions including: (1) Formulate the overall strategy and positioning for the development of Hong Kong's food: Deepening the well-established diverse food culture, Hong Kong's own unique food style, and the cultural heritage of the eight major Chinese cuisines. (2) Promote the creative development of "tourism + gastronomy" through integration of cultural tourism and food cultures. (3) Assist the high-quality development of the industry. This could be in the form of obtaining place of origin certifications from authoritative institutions for those restaurants serving authentic cuisine; promoting the catering industry to introduce technology to address talent shortages and optimising the customer experience. (4) Plan the publicity and promotion of signature events and innovative food products: such as holding international chef competitions, production of local food maps, and promoting the integration of in-depth tourism and traditional Hong Kong food, such as Poon Choi (盤菜).

- 2. Launch a "Hong Kong Food Heritage Campaign", produce local food tourism maps, and combine with consumption vouchers to promote local dining experiences.**

Currently, Hong Kong holds the annual "Food Expo Pro" and "Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival" as well-known events to attract overseas and local visitors. In addition to diverse local and foreign dishes, the culture of Hong Kong-style street food, dai pai dong (大牌檔), and cha chaan teng (茶餐廳) are also very popular among local residents and tourists. It is recommended that the Hong Kong Tourism Board should launch a "Hong Kong Food Heritage Campaign". In conjunction with the Government's current promotion of "tourism anywhere": where citizens and youths can recommend local specialty stores; the most representative egg tarts, pineapple buns, and milk tea; people can explore the history behind the related food, and compile a food map of the 18 districts, with translations in multiple languages. This can be combined with dedicated consumption vouchers to promote tourists' experience of Hong Kong-style food, passing on the warmth and stories behind local food and connecting with the youth and small businesses to showcase Hong Kong's hospitality.

- 3. Promote the "Diverse Dining Friendly Label Scheme", that would include adding labels for different customer groups: low-carbon, vegetarian, halal, and special dietary needs.**

The research results show that customers increasingly emphasise personalised experiences, and striving for restaurants to improve their service quality. Hong Kong has already launched an Eat Smart campaign to encourage the catering industry to participate in promoting healthy dishes. The Government can refer to the relevant experience to formulate friendly labels for different customer groups, covering low-carbon, vegetarian, halal, and special dietary needs (such as allergies/ intolerances). The scheme should also provide incentives, such as

increased visibility for restaurants participating in the scheme, to encourage the catering industry to enhance the customer experience.

An example would be that if a restaurant has dishes meeting the dietary needs of low-carbon and vegetarian customers, it can be awarded the "Diverse Dining Friendly" label, with the menu indicating those dishes that meet the relevant standards. To further optimise the "Diverse Dining Friendly Label Scheme", menu items can highlight the ingredients that pertain to allergies or religious dietary restrictions. This would help to showcase Hong Kong as an international metropolis keeping up with the dining trends with a culture of diverse and friendly dining, allowing domestic and overseas travellers to eat with comfort and confidence.