




Article

An Interpretive Study on Sustainability in the Link between Agriculture and Tourism: Tourist-Stakeholder Satisfaction in Tiantangzhai, China

Guosheng Han ¹, Armigon Akhmedov ², Hui Li ³, Jingjing Yu ^{1,*} and William Cannon Hunter ^{4,*}

¹ College of Business, Shandong University, Weihai 264209, China; hanguosheng@sdu.edu.cn

² Department of Hotel Management, Graduate School, Kyung Hee University, Seoul 02447, Korea; armigon@khu.ac.kr

³ School of Economics and Management, Harbin Institute of Technology, Weihai 264209, China; lihui@hit.edu.cn

⁴ Department of Convention Management, College of Hotel and Tourism, Kyung Hee University, Seoul 02447, Korea

* Correspondence: yjj@sdu.edu.cn (J.Y.); Hunter@khu.ac.kr (W.C.H.)

Received: 7 December 2019; Accepted: 8 January 2020; Published: 12 January 2020



Abstract: Tourism and agriculture can contribute to destination sustainability by increasing tourist-stakeholder satisfaction. Grown agriculture is an important component of a rural destination attraction. Nonetheless, tourists' satisfaction with locally grown agricultural food has been unexplored when it comes to linking tourism with agriculture. The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the links between demand for locally grown agricultural products at the destination and the levels of satisfaction among visitors. Theoretical views concerning tourist consumption of local agricultural products and its effects were reviewed. Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted onsite in Tiantangzhai to investigate the relationship between tourism and agriculture with visitor satisfaction. The sample of respondents consisted of 71 participants who shared their views on the relationship between agriculture and tourism at the destination. Findings were presented in a two-level analysis including the industry focus and a soft-laddering technique that revealed deeper insights. Findings indicate that tourist-stakeholders present a demand-driven economy that can be exploited by local agricultural producers and the tourism economy itself. Theoretical implications point to a more sustainable destination image and practical implications highlight the demand-driven implications of tourist expectations and experience satisfaction.

Keywords: agriculture; China; sustainability; tourist-stakeholder; satisfaction; Tiantangzhai

1. Introduction

Tourism and agriculture work together to maintain a sustainable economy, creating new job opportunities, increasing the receipt of foreign currency, and improving the living standards of local residents at the destination [1,2]. Increasingly, economic and environmental sustainability in rural development is linked to local agricultural products. Gastronomy plays a role in enhancing destination attractiveness, reinforcing destination brand identity, and building community pride related to food and local culture [3]. It is estimated that approximately one-third of all tourist expenditure goes into food consumption [4]. Gastronomy and consumption of locally grown agricultural products can create economic benefits and contribute to the sustainable competitiveness of the tourist destination and

hotels operating in the local area. The development of tourism and tourists' consumption of the local agricultural products can establish a potential market for agricultural products of the destination. Nevertheless, despite the importance of gastronomy and agricultural product consumption as a significant form of tourist consumption, it has been neglected in previous hospitality and tourism literature [5]. Such neglect can be explained by the traditional notion that food supplements an appeal of the destination to tourists [6] by being a merely "supportive resource" [7]. However, recently researchers are beginning to pay more and more attention to the topic as an increasing number of destinations attempt to take advantage of their culinary resources to promote and differentiate themselves from other destinations [6]. For instance, Australia and New Zealand are making use of gastronomical and agricultural product resources to promote and differentiate themselves from other destinations [8]. In spite of the recent growth of interest concerning the topic among researchers, there is still much research to be done in this area.

To ensure the success and development of the local economy and agriculture of the destination, it is highly important to improve the linkages between tourist satisfaction and agricultural products at the destination. More specifically, tourist satisfaction with agricultural products can affect not only tourist food consumption activities at the destination but also the food consumption behavior at their homes after returning from the destination. Furthermore, tourists' positive experience with the agricultural products available at the destination increases their likelihood of visiting and revisiting the destination in the future. Yet, at the moment there is a lack of research that has systematically and comprehensively explored views from tourist-stakeholder with local agricultural products. In addition, little is known about the conceptual relationship between tourism destination and agriculture from the perspective of tourists from China, currently the largest outbound tourism country in the world. Therefore, this research strives to fill this existing gap in the literature. Specifically, this study aims to:

- Explore tourist-stakeholder satisfaction on destination food products from the perspective of Chinese tourists;
- Employ interpretive research in the form of interviews to analyze the conceptual relationship of destination agriculture with tourism;
- Identify the relationship between different concepts related to the evaluation of tourist satisfaction and develop a qualitative conceptual framework that explains the linkages between tourism and agriculture;
- Provide policy implications for developing a sustainable link between agriculture and tourism in Tiantangzhai.

To achieve the aims of the study, the paper is structured after this introduction in the second section where an extensive review of the literature is made to reveal gaps in the previous research; the third section refers to the description of the geographical area, methodology, data collection, and socio-demographic characteristics of participants; the fourth section presents tourists' satisfaction views on agricultural products and a qualitative conceptual framework explaining the linkages between tourism and agriculture; while the fifth section presents the discussion of the results. Finally, the last section ends with the conclusion, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainable Linkages between Tourism and Agriculture

Tourism and agriculture are connected over the competition for land, labor, and capital [4]. This relationship is concerned with three factors including supply and production, marketing/intermediaries, and demand [9]. Supply and production-related factors include a number of factors including locally produced food; quality of production; high prices; local farming economies of scale; various growing conditions; farming systems; lack of capital and investment, and labor deficit in farming related to the tourism sector. Marketing problems have been associated with the problem of local food promotion,

transportation, and information linkages between or among agricultural producers. Other issues have been concerned with mistrust and corruption in the value chain. The industry is also burdened with an infrastructure that is dominated by high-end hotels and their dependence on processed foods driven by tourist preferences and food and beverage department concerns over food product hygiene. However, previous research has failed to consider tourist satisfaction with local agricultural products as a relevant factor [10]. It is an important issue that needs to be considered due to the fact that tourists with high satisfaction with locally grown food may be inclined to recommend the experience to friends or to hold a high intention to revisit and repurchase [11]. In addition, tourist satisfaction can contribute to sustaining the linkages between tourism and agriculture of the destination.

2.2. Tourist Food Consumption and Satisfaction

Existing studies on tourism and its relationship with locally grown agricultural products have been related to consumer behavior, especially with regard to issues in choice [6]. Consumers are concerned with “dining pleasure” [12], and variety [13]. Food or dining choice is concerned with the moment of point of purchase [14]. The decision process associated with food consumption is a complex behavioral process with various factors that can influence it, and that includes sensory acceptance, cultural, social, and psychological factors [15]. Previous studies on tourist food consumption have investigated the tourists’ consumption of local food [16], tourist food preferences and choice [17], and food service [18]. However, much of the previous research has failed to explore the even deeper tourist consumption of local agri-food. Thus, the research is necessary due to the great impact of such type of consumption on the agricultural prosperity and sustainability of the destination. Understanding tourist consumption can help to minimize existing constraints between tourism and agriculture of the destination and support its future development.

Satisfaction in terms of the tourist-consumer is based on the expectation versus the experience of dining at a destination [19]. In addition, the travel experience is largely or partially based on the fulfillment of desire and the meeting of certain anticipated needs [20]. Quality of offered services, ecological conditions, natural landscapes, and secure facilities available at the destination tend to have either positive or negative effects on tourist satisfaction with the trip [21]. Importantly, positive experiences derived from tasting local food help to increase the attractiveness of the destination, along with tourist satisfaction and revisit intention [3]. It is evident that there is a lack of research, which has systematically and comprehensively explored factors affecting tourist satisfaction with local food at the destination. Therefore, this study works to develop a systematic evaluation of tourist satisfaction at the destination from the perspective of Chinese tourists. As China becomes the largest market in outbound tourism, developing the systematic evaluation model of Chinese tourist satisfaction with destination-based agriculture can create linkages with tourism to support sustainable development. Hence, in this research authors focus on Chinese tourists to provide new insights into their satisfaction with locally grown agricultural products.

3. Methodology

3.1. Description of the Geographical Area

The Tiantangzhai Tourist Area is located at the Tiantangzhai Town, southwest of Jinzhai County, Lu'an City, Anhui Province. It belongs to the core area of the Dabieshan Mountain Area in Central China where it borders Anhui, Hubei, and Henan provinces. It is an emerging green and red destination. “Green” refers to the fact that Tiantangzhai, as a brand national forest park, is always called the last pristine forest of East China where it, as the ridge of Dabieshan mountain, is a high altitude area with dense forests, and clear and unpolluted air. Many communist advance cadres had their summer vacation there in the 1960s. “Red” refers to its famous red tourist sites where Jinzhai is one of the biggest red tourism destinations in China. Many generals were born there and started many famous

battles there. Tiantangzhai was a former national forest factory and began to develop tourism in the 1990s last century and gradually developed into a red and green nature-based tourist destination.

3.2. Research Motivations

This research was motivated by the need to investigate potential linkages between agriculture and tourism from the perspective of various stakeholders—particularly, the tourist—at the Tiantangzhai tourist destination [22]. The research was aimed at identifying the potential of agriculture to contribute to the local tourism industry from the perspective of the tourist stakeholder experience and satisfaction with locally grown food. Despite an abundance of locally produced agriculture, much of the food served in the tourism sector is imported [23]. There are many reasons for the reliance on imported agriculture products. Availability, price, consistency, quality of local products, lack of technology, infrastructure, and finance are some of the most cited [24]. These issues are found in the literature and are part of the practical knowledge shared by professional food service workers in international resorts and hotels [25]. Very little feedback has been derived from tourists, especially those who have experienced locally grown agri-food, despite the fact that tasting locally produced food, is an important part of the tourist experience, this area has eluded attention from researchers in tourism literature [26].

3.3. Sampling and Interview Procedure

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on their stakeholder identity and proximity to the tourism and agriculture intersection in the Tiantangzhai destination. The respondents were asked a variety of questions based on a soft laddering technique where their initial responses were pursued with follow-up questions. This semi-structured in-depth interview technique pursued problems evident in the tourism and agriculture nexus at the destination. In particular, the questioning pursued topics such as inquiring as “how to strengthen the tourism and agriculture economy,” their degree of satisfaction with locally grown food, and which factors might affect their satisfaction with the destination experience. In addition, respondents were asked to describe their basic social demographic profiles.

Sampling was complicated by the nearby earthquake which just happened when the interview methods were implemented. Some tourists refused to participate and others were unavailable due to the disaster even though the study took place during peak season. Nevertheless, out of 74 targeted participants, 71 completed the interview. The interviews were carried out in the local hotels and restaurants while tourists were having their meals. Interview participants who agreed to participate in the interview were given a handmade organic soap as a gift. Each interview took approximately 30 min and was recorded.

3.4. Respondent Socio-Demographic Characteristics

There were 71 interested participants in the interviews as shown in Table 1 below, identified as tourist-stakeholders involved in the consumption of dining experiences in Tiantangzhai, during the peak season. They also presented a mature knowledge of local dining or food experience and its connection with the tourism economy. The respondents' socio-demographic characteristics are as follows: male (53.5%), 25–44 years old (77.4%), well-educated with secondary and college degree or above (77.5%), and arriving from Anhui province (where the tourist area is located) and Jiangsu province, both located in the highly urbanized Yangtze River delta. Most tourists participated in group package tours (56.3%) but a large portion were independent travelers (43.7%). The socio-demographics indicate that the visitors to Tiantangzhai are well-educated young travelers that come from neighboring urbanized areas. They are interested in the confluence of tourism and agriculture at this nature-based destination. They are interested in experiencing local green, natural, and unpolluted agricultural products.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of research participants (n = 71).

| Variable | Type | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 38 | 53.5 |
| | Female | 33 | 46.5 |
| Age | 35–44 | 29 | 40.8 |
| | 25–34 | 26 | 36.6 |
| | 18–24 | 8 | 11.3 |
| | 45 or above | 8 | 11.3 |
| | | | |
| Education | Secondary and College | 35 | 49.3 |
| | Undergraduate or above | 20 | 28.2 |
| | High School | 10 | 14.1 |
| | Middle school or under | 6 | 8.5 |
| Origin Provinces | Anhui | 34 | 47.9 |
| | Jiangsu | 25 | 35.2 |
| | Shanghai | 5 | 7.0 |
| | Hubei | 3 | 4.2 |
| | Beijing | 2 | 2.8 |
| | Fujian | 1 | 1.4 |
| | Zhejiang | 1 | 1.4 |
| | | | |
| Tour Style | Group | 40 | 56.3 |
| | Independent | 31 | 43.7 |

3.5. Interpretation

The respondents' interviews were interpreted using a process including three stages: data description, categorization, and observation of relevance [27]. These three stages were repeated and correlated during the entire process in this research. The data description process was encoded and evaluated based on the authenticity and completeness of the original tourist-stakeholder data. Categorization was based on the real data with the essential factors of evaluation that gradually emerged during the data process. The primary concerns of the tourist-stakeholder include typical tourism destination features such as price and the functional requirements of food products, the relevance of local agricultural products, the authenticity of local agricultural-based foods, and suggestions for future development. The categorization of such concerns was based at least in part on the previous stage of data description, offering an integrated interpretation of the response information, yielding a two-level hierarchy. The clustering of categories is internally connected within the data set with a view to mutually exhaustive and exclusive response-types.

The observation of relevance seeks to identify similarities or differences between typologies and the building up connections between different identified concepts. Through this process, a framework that describes the conjunction between the tourism food industry and local agriculture emerges. This method builds connectivity with a view to explain a theoretical position but evidence outside the data set also adds to this consideration based on the number of times a certain topic is referred to by respondents [28]. The three-tier process allows researchers to move from a strictly descriptive point of view to its categorization (a direct extraction from the data of tourist-stakeholder comments) to a final semantic clustering based on the interview scripts from Chinese tourists-respondents.

4. Results

4.1. Developing the Tourists' Food Service Evaluation System in the Tiantangzhai Tourist Area

Food service at the destination is a junction of tourism and the local agricultural industry. Two levels of analysis reveal respondents' tourism-stakeholder perspectives. Results are described as level "A" and level "B" according to respondents' comments. In the respondents' views, key elements of the industry in Tiantangzhai should focus on agricultural production, features, prices, and hygiene [29]. A key point exposed through the interviews was the issue of development. Tourist-stakeholders suggested that tourists stay at the destination for a short time and have little information about the details of local food services. At the same time, they pay attention to the industry as a whole including agriculture, tourism, transportation, and infrastructure development. This indicates that indirect services, ancillary services, and supplementary services are integrated parts of the perceived food service quality that influence food service evaluation [30]. It could be claimed that this view is based on a tourist-etic perspective that is based on a big-picture view regarding the industry.

Level "A" findings suggest that food consumption experience is an integrated and successive experience, which includes many relevant services that also produce an important impact on their tourist experience. Another interesting finding is the emphasis on the authenticity of products due to the tourist-stakeholder pursuit of authentic experiences at the destination. This means the scenic spot hotels and restaurants are different from city hotels in that the latter have much wider food purchasing channels and emphasize on both food experiences and social experiences as well as business functions. In addition, hygiene proves to be one of the most common psychological concerns of tourists when dining in an unfamiliar environment [31]. Although it may be related to the development stage of the food industry in the Tiantangzhai tourist area, where the food industry started flourishing only after the year 2000 with small-scale businesses as the main force. The underdevelopment of local agriculture in Lu'an is largely a problem of its high altitude climate, which influences low production in opposition to the goal of self-sufficiency in sustainability. There is a very low possibility that tourists can taste authentic food. Most local hotels and restaurants use imported ingredients to minimize cost. Due to the fact that Tiantangzhai is a high altitude locality in the core area of the Dabieshan Mountains and that the yearly climate is more hostile to agricultural production than plain areas, most food made from imported ingredients offered in hotels and restaurants must be imported from the outside. This presents a negative impression to tourists, making them concerned about hygiene and authenticity.

Level "B" findings contribute to level "A" findings in the sense that in terms of more experienced-based comments uncovered from the in-depth interviews. The preferences of the tourist-stakeholder were disclosed in the interview process. The respondents focused on the discussion of local food service at the destination and their comments point to various issues for policy. The key issues suggested by respondents focused on the authenticity of locally produced agricultural ingredients and the provision of such ingredients to tourist consumers. This two-point viewpoint to the enhancement of a destination image that projects the conjunction of tourism and agriculture as the main selling point for Tiantangzhai. Level "A" and level "B" findings are summarized in Tables 2 and 3, below. They indicate a level of agreement with the Reuland Model that explores physical product elements in food production, including quality, types, taste, texture, flavor and color, appearance, price, availability, and environment elements referring to hygiene, atmosphere, friendly attitude of service suppliers, and professional service skills [29]. Results indicate that the localization of destination food products and the authenticity of food ingredients affect the perspective of the tourist-stakeholder [32]. These results point to the problem of destination tourism and agriculture in a relationship with the tourist-stakeholder [33,34].

Table 2. Level A clustering factors and weights.

| Level A Factors | Relevant Data Sets | Total Data Sets | Weights |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Agri-food production | 32 | 128 | 0.250 |
| Agri-food development | 28 | 128 | 0.219 |
| Agri-food's local uniqueness | 22 | 128 | 0.172 |
| Agri-food's linkage potentials | 16 | 128 | 0.133 |
| Price of agri-food | 14 | 128 | 0.109 |
| Authenticity of agri-food | 9 | 128 | 0.070 |
| Hygiene of agri-food | 6 | 128 | 0.047 |

Table 3. Tourists' evaluation of food at the destination.

| Level A Factors | Level B Factors | Weights | Clustering or Summary of Supportive Scripts |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------|--|
| Agri-food production | Raw materials | 0.343 | Mountainous pollution-free green food; local chicken and pork; wild herbs or vegetables. |
| | Food types | 0.343 | Local dishes; fresh vegetables; special staple food; <i>Shi Da Wan</i> (ten bowls of local dishes). |
| | Food production | 0.314 | Varieties; taste; seasoning. |
| Agri-food development | Strategy | 0.400 | Catering industry alliance development; strengthening agricultural linkages; fostering local food culture; government support policy. |
| | Operation | 0.333 | Local service quality; food and beverage management; administrative management; layout of the local agri-food industry |
| | Marketing | 0.133 | Market positioning; tourist taste. |
| | Brand | 0.134 | Local agricultural products; key food brand; fine vegetables. |
| Local uniqueness | Localization | 0.727 | Local food culture; develop local dishes based on wild herbs; peasant family dishes; local staple food. |
| | Negative reviews | 0.273 | Not enough local food. |
| Price of agri-food | High prices | 0.929 | The prices of local dishes and products are too high and not stable. |
| | Inconsistent prices | 0.071 | The same local dishes have sharply different prices. |
| Agri-food's linkage potentials | Linkage to agriculture | 0.750 | Organic mountainous herbs and vegetables should be developed and sold to tourists as souvenirs; farm stay should be developed to activate local agriculture. |
| | Linkage to tourism | 0.250 | Lower scenic area tickets to attract tourists; toilets should be cleaner; scattered scenic sites should be improved. |
| Authenticity of agri-food | Raw ingredients | 0.667 | Authentic local vegetables, herbs, chicken, and pork should be used in tourist food products. |
| | Finished products | 0.333 | Local popular dishes should be cooked for tourists. |
| Hygiene | Negative comments | 1 | Hygiene of local agri-foods is not good and should be improved. |

4.2. Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Tourism Industry and Local Agriculture

The key driver of this study is to build, inductively, a ground-up disclosure of respondent-driven data based on the in-depth interviews. As a result, this study presents the interconnectivity between certain topics described by the respondents which through the interpretive analysis can offer a conceptual framework. It can be said that the tourist-stakeholder might perceive the linkage between the tourism industry and local agricultural infrastructure as offering a structured model as illustrated in Figure 1, below. From here, five key findings can be identified. First, the tourism experience itself

should offer valuable local agriculture products that contribute to the destination industry value chain [10]. Second, the branding and development of local dishes as presented in menus at restaurants can help to enhance the tourist experience by developing a local sense of food culture to enhance the touristic experience in terms of an attractive price and an authentic destination atmosphere [8,9]. Third, local agricultural development can enhance tourists' perceived local destination experience accompanied by food service through a supply of local ingredients [35]. Moreover, local agricultural products, their unique qualities and the farmers' catering of service products all together enhance the tourist experience [11,36]. The fourth finding is that when visitors experience quality experiences in agriculturally-based tourism experiences, they will use word of mouth or opinion-leading behavior to extend visitation to the area [3]. Finally, the fifth result of this study indicates that respondents will trigger growth in agricultural production in terms of local food materials, promotion of local food cultures, and cooking traditions through their recommendations to friends, families, and acquaintances [21], promoting local tourism organically through their stated preferences.

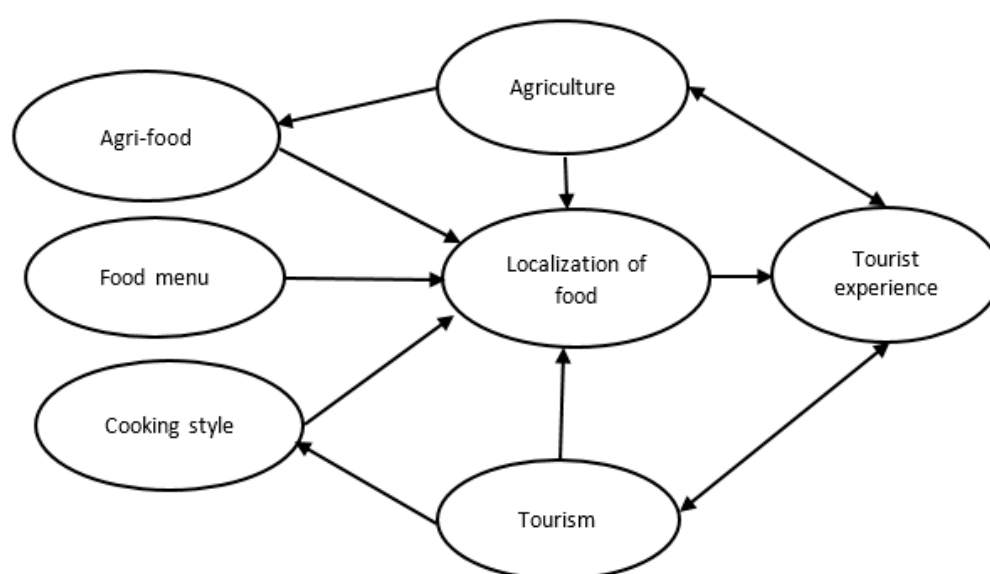


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of linkages between tourism and agriculture.

5. Discussion

There are two different perspectives regarding the potential for strengthening the connection between agriculture and tourism: the chefs' voice represented restaurants and food suppliers and the tourist-stakeholder (the main representative sampling this study) stood for the consumption of locally grown agricultural products [34]. Findings confirmed that the producers' viewpoint was that a linkage between agriculture and tourism is not yet mature at the Tiantangzhai destination [29]. Concerns exist regarding poor growing conditions, inadequate quality, higher prices, and poor hygiene. Findings show that such views do not coincide with tourist-stakeholder preference for imported foods [26]. Instead, tourists showed a strong interest in tasting local food and offered many attractive and prospective ingredients such as local fresh vegetables, herbs, poultry and folklore dishes (*Shi Da Wan*) which might not have been offered and promoted by local hotels and restaurants.

Key findings emerged in this study, including the observation that the localization of food emerged as the key concept repeatedly reported by tourist-stakeholders and they even proposed suggestions such as making the best of local unpolluted herbs, nourishing fine brand local dishes and so on. The other question is that they perceived a problem in the commodification of local food for the local restaurant and hotel industry sector [5]. Essentially, local food is a critical point for such a nature-based tourism destination as Tiantangzhai. However, the key strength may be lost if locals cherish and

promote it. Another one is that tourist-stakeholders discerned linkages between agriculture and tourism and proposed many of the insights shown in Table 3.

The connection between tourism and the agricultural economy suggests that the tourist-stakeholders' view has been under-represented in the tourism literature [31] in that other views including chefs, food suppliers, farmers, ejido comisariados, and even urban immigrants have been investigated. It is the conclusion of this research that there is an important link between tourism and agriculture that have been under-represented by the tourist-stakeholder view and that the localization of food culture is crucial to emerging destinations such as Tiantangzhai. It is constructed through tourism and agriculture individually and through the menu at restaurants and through the art of cooking.

6. Conclusions

This study was motivated by the lack of research on tourist-stakeholder satisfaction with local agriculturally produced food and related ingredients. It contributes to the existing literature by identifying the linkages between tourism and destination agriculture. To accomplish the goals of the study, it was necessary to develop tourist-stakeholder perspectives on the production of agricultural products at the destination from the perspective of Chinese tourists. It was also necessary to disclose the perceived connection between tourism and agriculture from the tourists' point of view. Third, the relationship between different concepts related to the evaluation of tourists' satisfaction was described and explained in terms of the linkages between tourism and agriculture, producing practical and theoretical implications regarding the development of policies from the tourists' perspective to strengthen the economic linkages between rural tourism, local hospitality businesses, and the local agricultural industry.

The tourist-stakeholder perceives the destination linkage between tourism and agriculture to be a problem of the dining experience [6,36]. Previous studies have focused on the production of agricultural ingredients rather than the tourist consumption experience. During the interviews, the respondents ($n = 71$) offered comments regarding the tourism experience itself (in relation to agriculture), destination branding, development, destination promotion via word of mouth and destination social and economic growth. These valuable insights, generated through an inductive interpretive process contribute to the view on the intersection of tourism and agriculture. In detail, tourist-stakeholders take notice of agricultural products in terms of local uniqueness, price, linkage potentials, authenticity, and hygiene. Chinese tourists pay attention to raw materials, contents, and specific requirements and are susceptible to the strategy, operation, marketing, and brand concerns related to destination image projection. Moreover, Chinese tourists think that the uniqueness of local agri-food is important, yet restaurants are better when it comes to cooking local food. As for the price of local dining, they think that the price is too expensive and inconsistent. Chinese tourists evaluate food authenticity based on ingredients and finished products. They have a negative perception of food hygiene at the destination and believe that it is one of the most important factors.

Second, the factors tourists evaluate local food at the destination have two levels. On the macrolevel, geographical and climate conditions, local agriculture, and customs affect what tourists think in which way foods should be offered and prepared at the destinations. Vegetables, herbs, and some domesticated animals in higher mountainous areas are thought of as more "authentic" local food due to the geographical location of the destination. However, on the microlevel, tourist development and management, related food services, and tourists as temporary visitors affect what is more important when it comes to the evaluation of food. Since tourists are visiting the destination temporarily, they keep comparing the food with other places and consider higher prices and hygiene as important factors. Third, local food for visitors is a core interlock tightly linking agriculture and tourism. Raw ingredients, special dishes, menus, and cooking styles all contribute to the localization of food and affect tourist food experience. Tourists' food experience contributes to agriculture and tourism, and further promotes the improvement of local food services. Only localization of food and

corresponding food tourism experience can sustain the linkage between agriculture and tourism, and contribute to the sustainable development of both industries.

6.1. Implications

Theoretical implications include establishing an empirical linkage between tourism and agriculture from the tourist-stakeholder point of view. In addition, the research suggests that locally produced agricultural products might contribute to a more sustainable destination image in rural localities such as the Tiantangzhai community from this study [10]. Moreover, it was found that other voices, such as the local agriculture producers and dining service providers might have other views on the link between agriculture and the tourism industry. Demand related factors are also critical to the sustainability of local agriculture in the tourism industry [9]. Furthermore, it was considered that the problem of a distinction between conscious and unconscious choices by the purchaser might influence the consumption of local agricultural products in the dining experience [14].

Practical implications are concerned with the presence of a demand economy as evidenced by the responses by the 71 interviewees. Their views tend to overturn concerns held by intermediaries that express problems in infrastructure and mistrust in the supply chain [10]. The tourist-stakeholder in the Tiantangzhai destination seems to seek dining experiences based on locally produced agricultural ingredients as part of their seeking novel experiences of discovery. They demand local dining experiences that include local vegetables, herbs, and poultry that will give them an impression of experiencing a real locality and further stimulate them to “taste” an authentic locality. The realization of such experiences may directly lead to tourist satisfaction, intent to re-visit, and the promotion of tourism through word of mouth or online visitor reviews. However, policymakers and destination managers must consider, based on the findings in this study, that the tourist-stakeholder may harbor some adverse impressions regarding agricultural products originating from the Tiantangzhai destination [3].

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

Research on the connection between local destination agriculture and tourism has under-represented in the literature. In this study the tourist-stakeholder view on that linkage has been explored in 71 in-depth interviews, exposing a number of views on the critical importance of that relationship. Visitors value authentic dining experiences. The limitations of this research are fundamentally linked to the methodology. First, the sample focuses on the voices and viewpoints of the tourist-stakeholder. In future research, the soft-laddering technique in in-depth interpretive research using the interview approach can be used to explore other stakeholders' views including the so-called “chef” or other dining experience providers. The agricultural producers should also be allowed to voice their concerns regarding food production in relation to the tourism industry (specifically from a supply side-driven economy). This can inform destination-based managers and concerned policymakers in determining what agricultural products are most sustainable and positioned to influence or define the Tiantangzhai destination image. In addition, more deductive approaches such as a survey questionnaire can be deployed to form a more structural understanding of the link between local destination agriculture and tourism. Various methodological approaches can be employed to examine the effect of localized agricultural products on the tourism dining industry sector.

Author Contributions: Writing—original draft preparation, G.H.; writing—review and editing, W.C.H. and A.A.; visualization, A.A.; project administration, H.L.; funding acquisition, J.Y.; investigation, G.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the KFAS/CIAS International Scholar Exchange Fellowship program, 2018–2019; Science Foundation of Ministry of Education of China (17YJCZH197); Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea: [grant number NRF-2016S1A3A2925146].

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Gabriel, B.; Condruța, A.B.; Nicoleta, A.N.; Dana, B.; Ovidiu, M.T.; Anca, M. Approaching the Sustainable Development Practices in Mountain Tourism in the Romanian Carpathians. *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 2051. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Villanueva-Álvarez, J.-J.; Mondéjar-Jiménez, J.; Sáez-Martínez, F.-J. Rural Tourism: Development, Management and Sustainability in Rural Establishments. *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 818. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Zhang, T.; Chen, J.; Hu, B. Authenticity, Quality, and Loyalty: Local Food and Sustainable Tourism Experience. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 3437. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Telfer, D.J.; Wall, G. Linkages between tourism and food production. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **1996**, *23*, 635–653. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Cohen, E.; Avieli, N. Food in tourism: Attraction and impediment. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2004**, *31*, 755–778. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mak, A.H.; Lumbers, M.; Eves, A.; Chang, R.C. Factors influencing tourist food consumption. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2012**, *31*, 928–936. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Godfrey, K.; Clarke, J. *The Tourism Development Handbook: A practical Approach to Planning and Marketing*; Cassell & Co: London, UK, 2000; pp. 123–127.
- Hall, M.; Mitchell, R. *The Changing Nature of the Relationship between Cuisine and Tourism in Australia and New Zealand: From Fusion Cuisine to Food Networks*. *Tourism and Gastronomy*; Routledge: London, UK, 2003; pp. 200–220.
- Torres, R.; Momsen, J.H. Challenges and potential for linking tourism and agriculture to achieve pro-poor tourism objectives. *Prog. Dev. Stud.* **2004**, *4*, 294–318. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Jiménez-Beltrán, F.; López-Guzmán, T.; González Santa Cruz, F. Analysis of the relationship between tourism and food culture. *Sustainability* **2016**, *8*, 418. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kim, M.J.; Jung, T.; Kim, W.G.; Fountoulaki, P. Factors affecting British revisit intention to Crete, Greece: High vs. low spending tourists. *Tour. Geogr.* **2015**, *17*, 815–841. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Giesen, J.C.; Havermans, R.C.; Douven, A.; Tekelenburg, M.; Jansen, A. Will work for snack food: The Association of BMI and Snack Reinforcement. *Obesity* **2000**, *18*, 966–970. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rozin, P.; Vollmecke, T.A. Food likes and dislikes. *Ann. Rev. Nutr.* **1986**, *6*, 433–456. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Herne, S. Research on Food Choice and Nutritional Status in Elderly People: A Review. *Br. Food J.* **1995**, *97*, 12–29. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Köster, E.P. Diversity in the determinants of food choice: A psychological perspective. *Food Qual. Prefer.* **2009**, *20*, 70–82. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kim, Y.G.; Eves, A.; Scarles, C. Building a model of local food consumption on trips and holidays: A grounded theory approach. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2009**, *28*, 423–431. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chang, R.C.Y.; Kivela, J.; Mak, A.H.N. Food preferences of Chinese tourists. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2010**, *37*, 989–1011. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Nield, K.; Kozak, M.; LeGrys, G. The role of food service in tourist satisfaction. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2000**, *19*, 375–384. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Johnson, M.D.; Anderson, E.W.; Fornell, C. Rational and Adaptive Performance Expectations in a Customer Satisfaction Framework. *J. Consum. Res.* **1995**, *21*, 695–707. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chen, C.F.; Tsai, D.C. How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioral intentions? *Tour. Manag.* **2007**, *28*, 1115–1122. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Whisman, S.; Hollenhorst, S. A path model of whitewater boating satisfaction on the Cheat River of West Virginia. *Environ. Manag.* **1998**, *22*, 109–117. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Han, G.; Wu, P.; Huang, Y.; Yang, Z. Tourism development and the disempowerment of host residents: Types and formative mechanisms. *Tour. Geogr.* **2014**, *16*, 717–740. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Scheyvens, R.; Laeis, G. Linkages between tourist resorts, local food production and the sustainable development goals. *Tourism. Geogr.* **2019**, 1–23. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Thomas-Francois, K.; Joppe, M.; von Massow, M. Improving linkages through a service-oriented Local farmers–hotel supply chain—An Explanatory case in Grenada. *Tour. Plan. Dev.* **2018**, *15*, 398–418. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ford, J.R.; Dorodnykh, E. Developing Food Value Chains to meet Tourism Demand in the Caribbean: Case Studies of St. Kitts Nevis and St. Lucia. *Farm and Business. J. Carib. Agro-Econ. Soc.* **2016**, *8*, 31–70.

26. Berno, T. Sustainability on a plate: Linking agriculture and food in the Fiji Islands tourism industry. In *Tourism and Agriculture: New Geographies of Consumption, Production and Rural Restructuring*; Routledge: London, UK, 2011; pp. 87–103.
27. Dey, I. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A User Friendly Guide for Social Scientists*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA; London, UK, 2003.
28. Hay, I. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 1st ed.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2005.
29. Reuland, R.; Choudry, J.; Fagel, A. Research in the field of hospitality. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **1985**, *4*, 141–146. [[CrossRef](#)]
30. Davis, B.; Lockwood, A.; Stone, S. *Food and Beverage Management*, 6th ed.; Butterworth-Heinemann: Oxford, UK, 2018.
31. Torres, R. Linkages between tourism and agriculture in Mexico. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2003**, *30*, 546–566. [[CrossRef](#)]
32. Riley, R.W.; Love, L.L. The state of qualitative tourism research. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2000**, *27*, 164–187. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Buhalis, D. Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tour. Manag.* **2000**, *21*, 97–116. [[CrossRef](#)]
34. Rogerson, M.C. Tourism-agriculture linkages in rural South Africa: Evidence from the accommodation sector. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2011**, *20*, 477–495. [[CrossRef](#)]
35. Santich, B. Hospitality and gastronomy: Natural Allies. In *Hospitality: A Social Lens*; Routledge: London, UK, 2007; pp. 61–74. [[CrossRef](#)]
36. Montella, M.M. Wine tourism and sustainability: A review. *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 113. [[CrossRef](#)]



© 2020 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).