



# CHINESE HERITAGE RESTAURANTS IN SINGAPORE

Our knowledge partner:





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The Future of Chinese Heritage Restaurants in Singapore

# Foreword

In the past, many Chinese immigrants travelled a long way to seek a new life in Singapore. They didn't bring along much with them; a shirt on their back, perhaps a family heirloom or two. One of the most understated skills they brought along was the culinary practices from their hometowns and dialect groups e.g. Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, amongst others. Each group had their own unique cooking methods, flavours and ingredients. Gathering together, forming clans, and eating traditional dishes of their hometown were some of the best ways for the immigrants to get over their homesickness, and to preserve their culture and customs.

Singapore, being a melting pot of multiple races and cultures, saw the birth of many "new" types of street food, like the popular Hainanese Chicken Rice, Laksa and Popiah to name a few. They were a result of food evolution and modification of traditional dishes, and over the years, slowly defining the unique flavours of the local culinary landscape.

Fast forward to recent years, we see younger Singaporeans associating heritage cuisines and traditional Chinese restaurants with a place reserved only for special occasions like Chinese New Year, or an elderly's birthday celebration. In addition, consumers are spoilt for choice when it comes to dining out due to the influx of international cuisines and modernization of local fares. These factors contribute to poor growth in the Chinese heritage restaurants and food trades, and many struggle to sustain their businesses in this competitive environment.

Local Chinese heritage restaurant businesses today have mostly been handed down to the next generation of owners. More than ever, we are facing great pressure from both the market and our families to hold on to these businesses. As second generation owners, we are constantly wondering how we can change consumers' behaviour and regain their interest in traditional food. Most importantly, we want to reintroduce our brands to the younger generation of consumers and elevate our brands to create a level playing field in the market.

Modelling after our forefathers, second generation F&B owners started FoodGen2, a network of over 40 local F&B family businesses, as a form of support to weather the storm and carry on the names of our family businesses today. Together, we aspire to keep our heritage alive and gain wider acceptance of our brands.



## BERNARD TAY

Chairman & Founder  
FoodGen2

[fb.com/foodgen2](https://fb.com/foodgen2)



# Overview

Singapore brims with a decorated history of Chinese cuisine, founded upon a concoction of rich cultural heritages. From Moi Lum, Spring Court, and Fatty Weng to other modern chain concepts of today - Jumbo, Tung Lok, Soup Restaurant, Crystal Jade, Paradise Inn and Diao Xiao Er - and international brands such as Din Tai Fung and Hai Di Lao, the Chinese restaurant landscape has transformed tremendously within the last century.

As most of these heritage brands are transitioning to the next generation, they are at the crossroads of either passing on the baton or exiting the industry altogether. These owners constantly face the concerns of succession planning, business life cycle and brand continuity.

Over the past few decades, many heritage brands had to reluctantly exit the industry. However, BDO Consultants has also seen others successfully transcending generations. These owners took deliberate steps to identify the inherent values within their brands and leverage on them to remain relevant to the modern consumer.

This special report seeks to highlight the transformation of Chinese heritage restaurants in Singapore and the challenges they encounter to build enduring brands. A special feature also showcases how three local heritage restaurants have succeeded in multi-generational transitions through effective brand refresh strategies.

Many owners are beginning to realise that branding plays a vital role in today's F&B scene. With the support of industry partners, they are now more prepared and equipped with professional advice to relay the essence that has always defined Singapore's food heritage.

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## ROGER LOO

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### ABOUT THE SPECIAL REPORT

BDO consultants conducted a market study on the Chinese heritage restaurant industry in Singapore the third quarter of 2015. A general public survey was conducted with 397 respondents to better understand the consumer behaviour, preferences and perceptions of Chinese restaurant diners. Observation studies were also conducted across several chain Chinese restaurants and local heritage restaurants. For the purpose of the study, Chinese heritage restaurants in Singapore is defined as independent<sup>1</sup>, casual dining Chinese restaurants in Singapore that have been established for at least 25 years.

<sup>1</sup> Independent definition: Refers to local Chinese restaurants with a distribution of 1-2 outlets. This excludes chain Chinese restaurants.



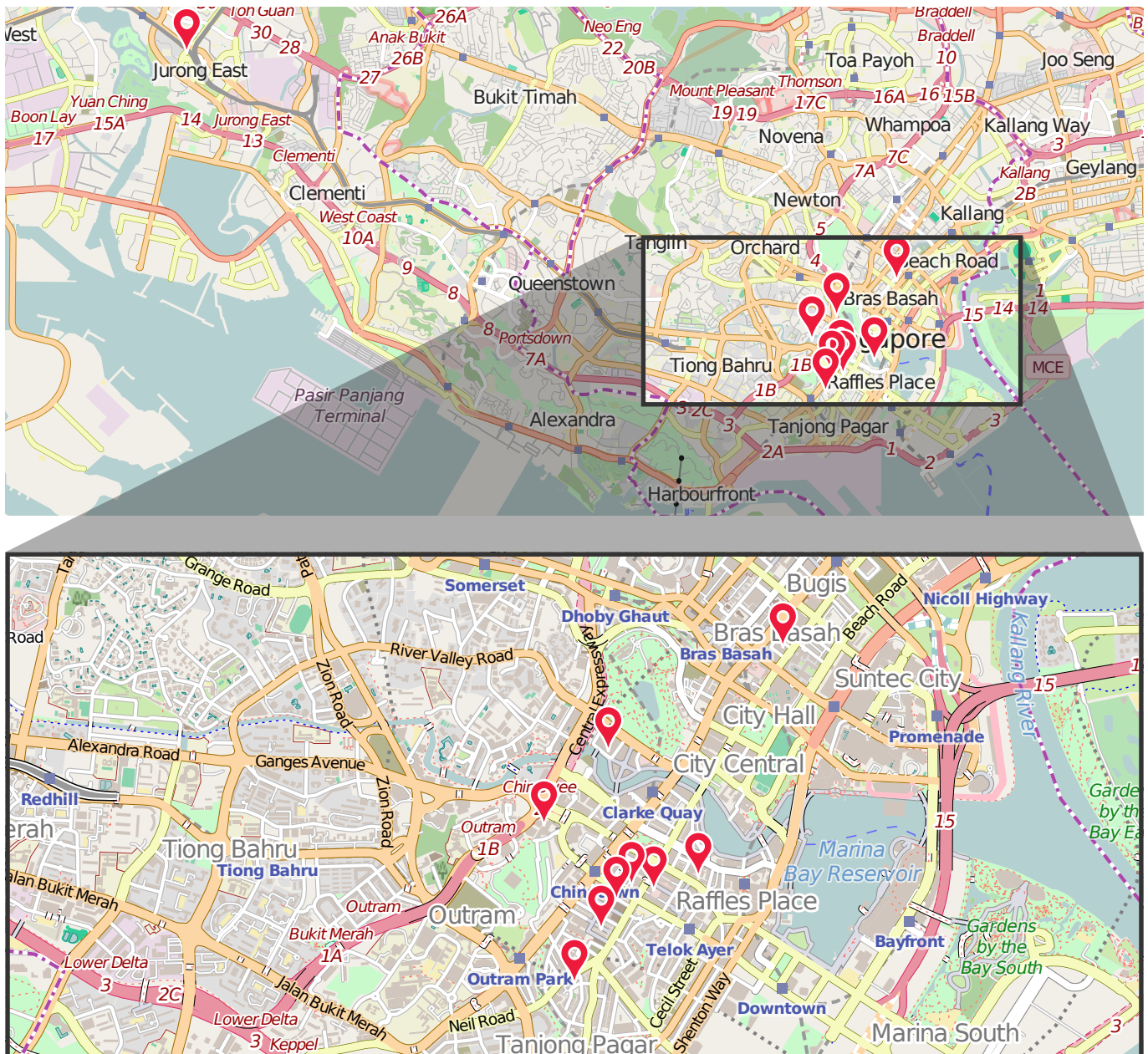
# Industry Snapshot

## Singapore's Chinese Heritage Restaurant Scene

With a diverse range of cuisine types to suit every palate, Singapore is known as a culinary heaven. Despite this, Chinese cuisine still remains as the top choice of cuisine for locals, and it is no wonder that there are various types of Chinese restaurants that prevail in Singapore's restaurant scene. For this report, we will be focusing on the independent and casual Chinese heritage

restaurants in Singapore. Of the 10 restaurants listed below, most of them offer a specialized cuisine type, for example, Cantonese or Hokkien cuisine, in a traditional ambience. However, some of the restaurants have modernized certain elements in the traditional Chinese style of food and ambience.

Figure 1: Locations of top 10 Chinese heritage restaurants



# Industry Snapshot

## Top 10 Chinese Heritage Restaurants in Singapore

### Moi Lum

since 1920s

A family-run casual dining Cantonese restaurant, Moi Lum has modernised its offerings over the years offering Cantonese cuisine in a traditional setting.



### Spring Court

since 1929

An established local brand that resides in a 4-storey heritage shop house in Chinatown, Spring Court is a Chinese restaurant that has transcended 3 generations.

### Beng Thin Hoon Kee

since 1949

Uniquely located at an open car park space, Beng Thin Hoon Kee is a traditional restaurant that offers value-for-money and authentic Hokkien cuisine in a comfortable ambience.



### Dragon Phoenix

since 1962

A traditional Chinese restaurant founded by one of the four culinary heavenly kings of Singaporean Cantonese cuisine, Dragon Phoenix is well-known for its fine Cantonese food and iconic dishes such as its deep-fried yam basket and phoenix spring chicken.

### Fatty Weng

since 1967

A popular zi-char<sup>2</sup> stall turned restaurant, Fatty Weng is a Cantonese restaurant that is conveniently located at the heart of Chinatown.



### Red Star

since 1974

A famous dim sum restaurant founded by one of Singapore's four culinary heavenly kings of the 1960s and the 1970s, Red Star is known for its traditional dim sum trolleys.

### Beng Hiang

since 1978

Offering Value-for-money and authentic Hokkien cuisine with a casual and warm ambience, Beng Hiang is well-awarded and recognised by the media.



### Asia Grand

since 1985

A premium brand that offers quality and innovative food, Asia Grand Restaurant is known for its dim sum and well-designed ambience for guests.

### Mouth

since 1989

Known for its innovative and high quality Cantonese dishes, Mouth restaurant is also one of the first Cantonese teahouse established in Singapore.



### Yan Palace

since 1990s

A traditional Cantonese restaurant with a wide variety of products and services, including buffet and catering functions.

<sup>1</sup> Zi-char is a term used to describe a meal of wallet-friendly, home-style cuisine from a Chinese stall, which serves a variety of ala-carte dishes in a casual setting. Many homegrown Chinese restaurants start out as zi-char stalls, and as their popularity grows, they become fully-serviced restaurants.



# Industry Snapshot

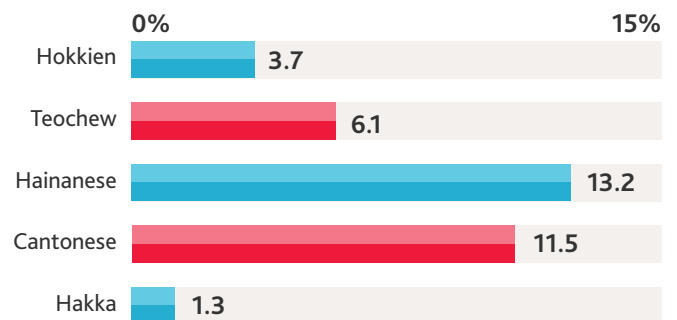
## Defining Singapore's Food Heritage

The overall dining experience at a restaurant consists of a combination of factors, including food, customer service, price and ambience. Of which, all restaurants on the list above mainly focuses on communicating about food and heritage as their key strengths.

Since food and heritage are key aspects of the Chinese heritage restaurant scene in Singapore, it is essential to define what constitutes Singapore's food heritage. Singapore food is linked to a common culture – the unabashed love for food, especially street food, and a shared culinary history amongst Singaporeans. Tracing back to the origins of food in Singapore, street food was a common sight enjoyed by all locals in Singapore. Elements of street food such as sounds, tastes, packaging, and other traditional icons like push carts and baskets contribute to a common food scene in Singapore in the early times. It is the mixture of preserving root culinary cuisines as well as intermingling new cuisines to create new dishes and flavours that birthed fusion local cuisines such as Peranakan food as well as the famed Singapore Chilli Crab.

Thus, Singaporean Chinese cuisine, a key ingredient of Singapore's food heritage, is inevitably linked to the various local dialects in Singapore. A 2015 research study on restaurant listings in Singapore shows that the top 3 cuisines by dialect in Singapore are Hainanese (13.2%) and Cantonese (11.5%), followed by Teochew (6.1%).

### CHINESE CUISINES IN SINGAPORE



**SOURCE:** BDO research



# Heritage Insights

## Relation between Heritage and Cuisine Type

Insights from research findings suggest a possible relation between a specific cuisine type and heritage. One such example is Cantonese cuisine.

When the question "Please list the Chinese restaurants in Singapore that you are aware of" was asked, research findings showed that there was no specific link to heritage when it came to Chinese restaurants as a whole, as most of the responses were generally chain restaurants of various cuisine types that experienced higher recall as top-of-mind restaurants. A few examples of such restaurants are Crystal Jade Restaurant, Din Tai Fung, Imperial Treasure and Pu Tien. However when a specific cuisine type was mentioned, research findings showed that there might be a possible link between this popular cuisine and heritage. When the question

"Which restaurants come to mind when you think of Cantonese food in Singapore?" was asked, most of the mentions were of independent (consisting of five outlets or less), heritage restaurants such as Red Star Restaurant, Yan Palace, Dragon Phoenix, Fatty Weng Restaurant and Spring Court Restaurant.

As much effort has been done to preserve its recipes and authenticity, the Cantonese cuisine has been prevalent in Singapore. There are many who are still guarding the integrity and heritage of this popular dialect cuisine, thereby making a meal at a restaurant serving Cantonese cuisine a digestion of Singapore's food heritage. As a result, this highlights the likelihood of a specific cuisine being linked to heritage.

## Heritage Food as a Contemporary Concept

In some cultures, heritage food is seen as a concept that is linked to contemporary trends such as music and fashion. Just as how music and fashion have the power to influence consumers' tastes and preferences, food is also an influential aspect of any culture. In Singapore, food is an essential part of the lifestyle of a Singaporean. This is evident from the prevalence and accessibility of different dining formats – hawker stalls, food courts and restaurants – to the variety of cuisine types influenced by race, dialect and country of origin. Since heritage is seen as a contemporary concept, then what type of consumer group does it appeal more to?

There are many different types of consumers, ranging from local residents to tourists, and even culture-oriented or urban consumers. Research on food marketing and local and regional food culture indicates that an association to an origin in a local or regional

food culture can attract the urban consumer's interest. Studies also revealed that there is a particular group of culture-oriented consumers that go to heritage restaurants seeking a different cultural experience from their own. This group tends to attach more importance to authenticity.

This is in line with observation studies conducted in Singapore. Increasingly, it is observed that it is the corporates and tourists that dine more frequently at Chinese restaurants, as compared to locals. Locals tend to dine at Chinese restaurants only on occasions such as family gatherings, birthdays and festive periods. Hence, heritage Chinese restaurants in Singapore should focus on creating an authentic cultural experience for urban and culture-oriented consumers.



# Understanding the Modern Consumer

## Consumer Demographics & Psychographics

Families, corporates and tourists are key consumer groups that commonly dine at a Chinese heritage restaurant in Singapore. Traditionally, families across generations have dined at Chinese restaurants to commemorate special occasions. However, during weekdays, the corporate crowd can be seen frequenting Chinese restaurants. They tend to dine in groups of 4-6 people. Set meals and a quick turnaround time can appeal to this time-starved group that values convenience.

A deeper level of understanding of consumer profiles can be derived by grouping consumers according to their traits. In-depth research<sup>3</sup> on Chinese heritage restaurants reveals that there are 3 main groups of consumers in terms of psychographics:

<sup>3</sup> In-depth research includes a review of communications material, food listings, online review websites and store observations of the top 10 Chinese heritage restaurants in Singapore.



### THE ENTHUSIASTIC FOODIE

- Has a refined interest for good quality food
- Willing to pay and travel for special cuisines
- Actively searches for new places to dine at



### THE CONVENIENCE SEEKER

- Leads a hectic and fast-paced lifestyle
- Values accessibility of location and timely service
- Only visits restaurants if they are convenient



### THE NOSTALGIA EXPLORER

- Loves traditional old school décor and dining ambience
- Willing to travel to experience interesting dining concepts
- Appreciates culture

The modern consumer is often a combination of several of the above traits. Consumers under 30 form a majority of the combined population in Southeast Asia. With young local consumers drawn to exciting dining experiences, varied menus, strong branding and innovative technology, coupled with the growing affluence across Asia, modern consumers are not

only spoilt for choice but also granted more power to influence restaurant trends. Restaurateurs need to use new and innovative ways to increase their appeal to the modern consumer and create a unique dining experience that meets their needs in a competitive dining landscape.

# Understanding the Modern Consumer

## Consumer Behaviour and Preferences

### What are the key factors that influence purchase decisions?

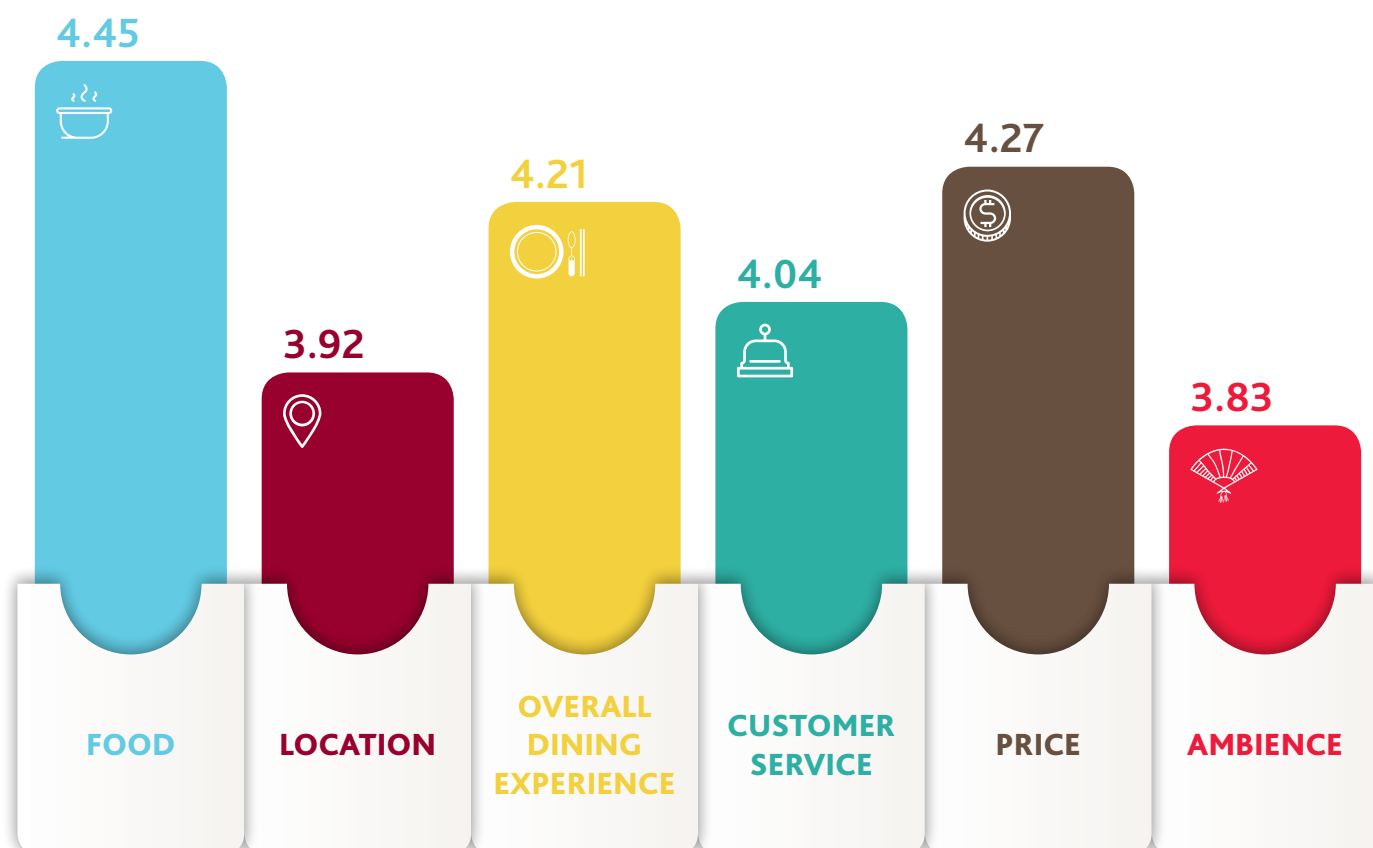
When choosing a Chinese restaurant to dine in Singapore, the top three consideration factors revealed through the study were food, price and overall dining experience.

With a wide range of information available online, consumers can easily compare prices on the various Chinese restaurants and are therefore much more discerning with their spending. Nonetheless, Chinese heritage restaurants can maximise their value through modernity with a touch of heritage, such as adapting and tweaking flavours to suit the taste palates of

modern consumers, while at the same time keeping their traditional roots.

In addition, when choosing a restaurant at which to dine, consumers are very active and diligent in doing online research through crowd-sourced review sites and social media such as TripAdvisor and Facebook. Consequently, restaurants should focus more on online channels and social media to better engage consumers and monitor complaints. Ultimately, before seeking to expand into communicating an experiential or symbolic brand appeal, fundamental functional needs still form the foundation of a brand's appeal, and should be consistently delivered and communicated.

### KEY INFLUENCING FACTORS



SOURCE: BDO research

# Understanding the Modern Consumer

## Consumer Behaviour and Preferences (cont'd)

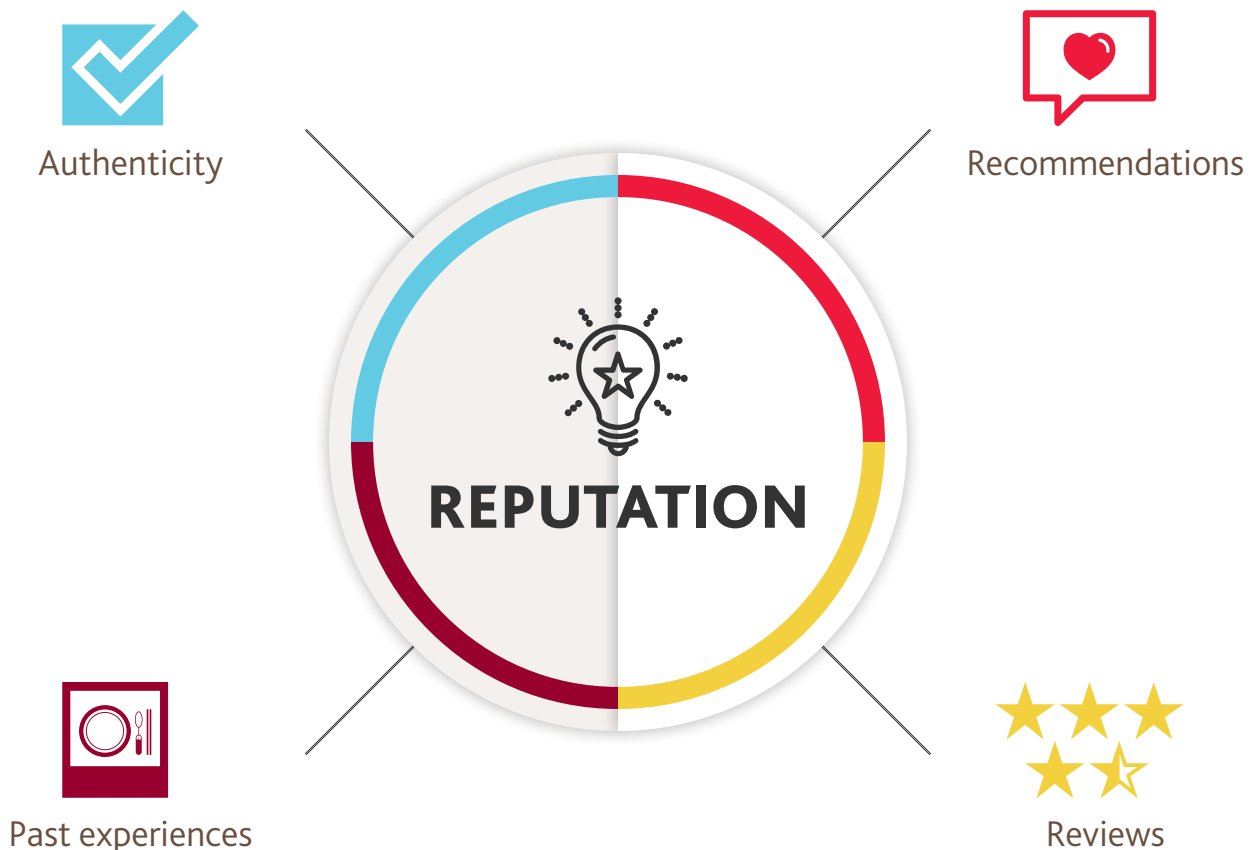
Other than the key influencing factors stated earlier, consumers also highlighted that a restaurant's reputation and authenticity could likewise contribute to their decision to dine at a Chinese restaurant.

A restaurant's reputation is highly regarded by consumers. Consumers tend to think positively of a restaurant when they receive many recommendations from friends or family. Alternatively other than recommendations from their personal network, they would consider reviews like, for example, HungryGoWhere or other online food directories. Similarly, a consumer's past experience at a particular restaurant also contributes to the restaurant's reputation. If a consumer had dined at a restaurant

before and had a good experience, he or she would think that it contributes to the reputation of the brand.

Authenticity is another factor that influences a consumer's decision to dine at a Chinese restaurant. Although this may seem subjective, it can also be cultivated. A restaurant's food offerings, authentic ambience, heritage and brand story are some examples that could help to build up its authenticity.

Hence, Chinese restaurants could take these factors that consumers have mentioned into consideration, so as to increase the reputation of the brand and the likelihood of consumers dining at their restaurant.



# Understanding the Modern Consumer

## Consumer Behaviour and Preferences (cont'd)

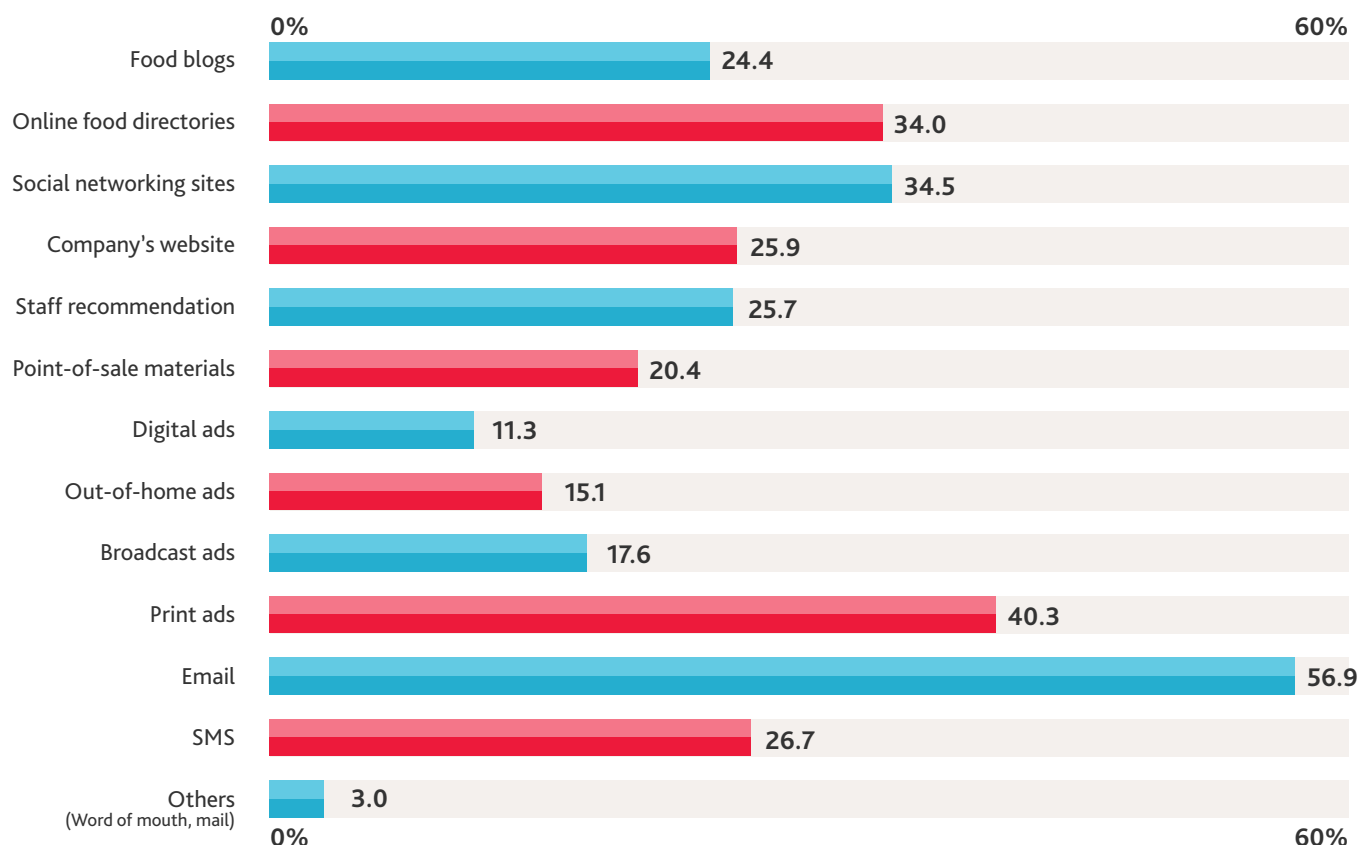
### What are the key sources of information for consumers?

When asked about their preferred information sources, findings from the study show that consumers prefer to find out information about Chinese restaurants in Singapore from email (56.9%), followed by print ads (40.3%) and social networking sites (34.5%).

As email is the most popular channel for consumers, restaurants can consider collating a customer database to send marketing emails to its customers to keep them updated on restaurant promotions, new dishes or special events. This will help to maintain and strengthen relationships with their existing customers, as well as keep them engaged.

In general, online sources of information such as online food directories, company's website and food blogs, are gaining popularity, as opposed to the conventional information channels like advertising materials. The study also found that email and social networking sites are top information sources across all age groups. Consumers aged 34 and below preferred online mediums when sourcing for information, whilst those aged 35 and above included other sources such as staff recommendations, print advertisements and point of sale materials. Depending on the target audience that restaurant owners intend to attract, restaurants can streamline their information channels in order to reach their target consumers and manage relationships more effectively.

### KEY SOURCES OF INFORMATION



SOURCE: BDO research



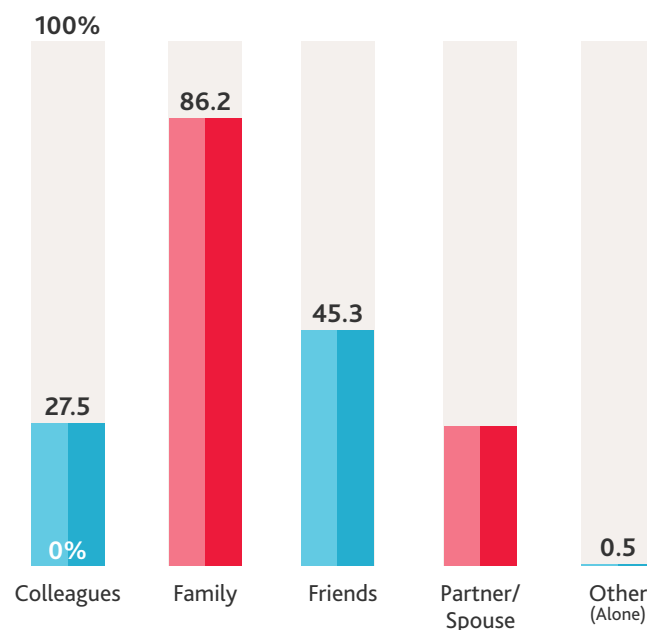
# Understanding the Modern Consumer

## Consumer Behaviour and Preferences (cont'd)

### When are consumers most likely to dine at Chinese restaurants?

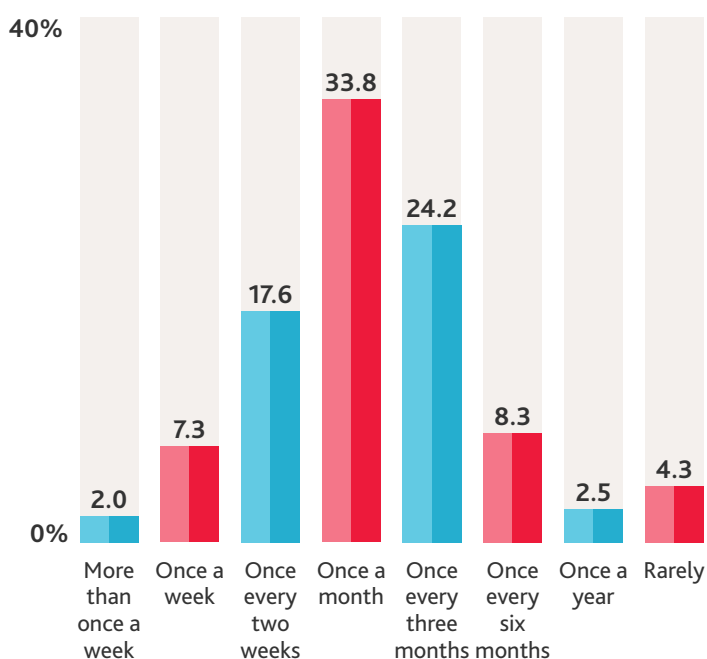
In general, consumers are most likely to choose Chinese restaurants when dining with family. Unlike in their Western counterparts where dining alone might seem common, getting together is important for consumers when dining at Chinese restaurants. The social interactions, a hearty meal, and a comfortable and familiar ambience form the basis of what consumers look for when they dine at Chinese restaurants. Hence it is all the more essential for restaurants to identify the customer profile of their target audience, so as to better appeal with targeted offerings tailored to their unique needs.

### PREFERRED DINING COMPANION



SOURCE: BDO research

### PREFERRED FREQUENCY OF DINING



SOURCE: BDO research

### How often do consumers dine at a Chinese restaurant in Singapore?

Consumers tend to dine at Chinese restaurants once every two weeks to once every three months, with the top selected option being once a month. Restaurant owners should think of ways that would not only best suit their positioning, but also capture and retain their customers. Past examples of ways that Chinese restaurants have implemented to attract more diners include having a seasonal menu and introducing new dishes for a limited period of time. Through these findings, Chinese heritage restaurant owners can also think about ideal times to carry out promotional activities and discounts, so as to attract more customers to dine at their restaurants, especially during non-peak periods.

# Understanding the Modern Consumer

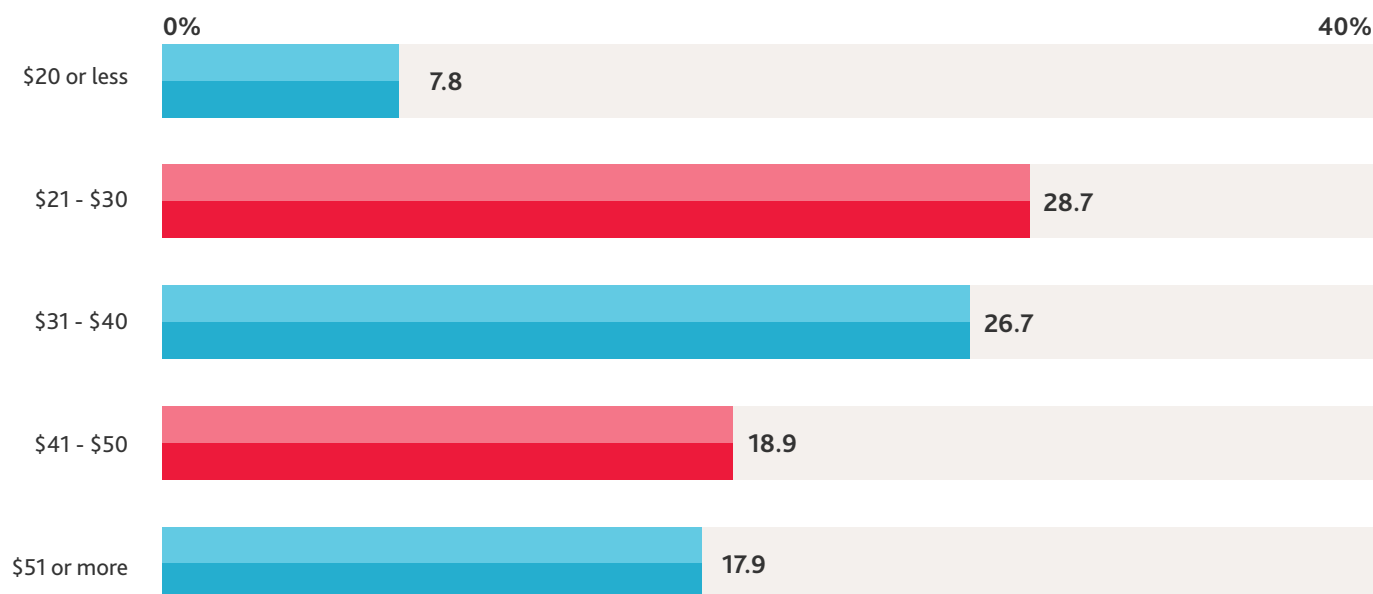
## Consumer Behaviour and Preferences (cont'd)

### How much are customers willing to pay?

Understanding the spending behaviour of consumer groups allows Chinese heritage restaurant owners to better determine their pricing strategy and target the most compatible group of consumers. When asked for the maximum they were willing to pay for a meal in a Chinese restaurant in Singapore, 55.4% gave a maximum budget of between \$21 and \$40 per person.

As consumers usually dine at Chinese restaurants once a month to once every three months for casual gatherings, Chinese heritage restaurants could relook at their pricing and promotional strategies to attract their targeted group of audience. For restaurants which are intending to mark up prices on menu items, they should take consumers' preferred price range into account and keep in mind that with higher price points come higher expectations on the overall dining experience.

### AVERAGE WILLINGNESS TO PAY PER PAX



**SOURCE:** BDO research



## **SPECIAL FEATURES:**

How Chinese heritage restaurant  
brands evolve over time



**SPRING COURT RESTAURANT**  
**FATTY WENG RESTAURANT**  
**MOI LUM RESTAURANT**

# Spring Court Restaurant

## Background

Established since 1929, Spring Court (formerly known as Wing Choon Yuen) is Singapore's oldest family-run restaurant and a true heritage brand that prides itself in its good quality Chinese dishes and a dedication in making every meal a relaxing, enjoyable and homely experience for its diners.

For 86 years, Spring Court has been the choice location for generations of families to celebrate their cherished occasions such as weddings, birthdays, reunions and festive occasions. Spring Court's long-standing

history has seen it through the different ages and even throughout the developmental stages of Singapore since the colonial times. From its original location at Great World Amusement Park – a famous amusement park in Singapore in the early 1920s – 1970s – Spring Court has moved to several locations, and is currently located at a four-storey heritage building at Upper Cross Street in Chinatown. The restaurant was featured in the movie "It's A Great Great World" produced by Raintree Pictures in 2011 where Spring Court's most memorable years at the Great World was captured.

Spring Court over the years: (Clockwise from top left)

- Spring Court (Wing Choon Yuen) at Great World (1929 - 1978)
- Dinner banquet in a private room at Spring Court Great World in 1950s
- Spring Court at China Town (1978 - 1990)
- Founder Ho Loke Yee (1978)





# Spring Court Restaurant

## Beyond an ordinary dining experience

Since 1929 till today, customers have found Spring Court to be a time-honoured traditional Chinese restaurant that consistently offers authentic and good quality Chinese food in a warm and welcoming ambience. This is attested by their loyal following of families across several generations that continue to patronise the heritage restaurant despite the several moves it has made over the years.

In fact, Spring Court was one of the first to serve some of the popular local dishes such as the suckling pig and popiah with unique family-owned recipes that have been handed down through the generations. At Spring Court, one can experience a comfortable dining environment that allows one to feel at home. The restaurant owner and an iconic figure in the dining scene at Spring Court, Madam Soon Puay Keow, makes

it her personal mission to ensure that food and service standards are unparalleled. She is dedicated in sourcing for food suppliers overseas and personally sees to it that the chefs prepare authentic food and wait staff provide good service that will leave each customer satisfied with their experience at Spring Court.

Despite the traditional image of the brand, Spring Court's modern interiors that are tastefully decorated with touches of oriental and historic elements and the singular focus of the restaurant in providing authentic local Singaporean food successfully appeals to every consumer – from the retiree to the modern consumer; locals and tourists alike. The full suite of facilities offered including VIP rooms for private dining, karaoke facilities, and all-day valet parking services completes the holistic dining experience at Spring Court.

Spring Court's owners, Mdm Soon and her son Mike



# Spring Court Restaurant

## Challenges Faced

As Singapore's dining landscape evolves, restaurants are following world-wide trends and continually innovate to offer different dining concepts as well as a variety of cuisine types to meet the changing needs of consumers. In view of this, Spring Court as a heritage brand faces several challenges in the following areas:

- The diverse and competitive nature of the food-service industry in Singapore means that Spring Court is operating in the same competitive space as restaurants of different formats – not just independent Chinese restaurants but also chain Chinese restaurants that enjoy higher top-of-mind awareness.
- The volatility and lack of attractiveness of the food-service industry in Singapore has resulted in difficulty in attracting and retaining talents such as skilled chefs, capable management personnel to run operations and service staff.
- In a dining landscape where consumers are often spoilt for choice due to the buffet of dining options and international cuisines in Singapore, it is difficult for Spring Court as a Chinese restaurant offering Singaporean Chinese cuisine to remain at the forefront of consumers' minds. Modern consumers, in particular, are hard to attract as they are often drawn to newer and more creative dining concepts and cuisines.

## Transformation of the Logo



*Old logo*



SPRING COURT

*New logo*



SPRING COURT

*Refreshed logo  
(as of 2016)*

# Spring Court Restaurant

## Future Considerations

Despite this, Spring Court is well-poised to face these challenges head on and convert them into areas of opportunity for the brand. As a well-established Singapore restaurant with deeply entrenched roots that can be traced back to Singapore's early colonial times, Spring Court has earned its right as a heritage brand and a formidable player in the market.

With authentic local food and good service as the core of the business, and the proven successes that Spring Court has enjoyed over the years, Spring Court needs to continually preserve and provide the high standards of food and service. Additionally, to enjoy continual success in the market, it needs to take into consideration the following areas:

- Elevating the brand to the next level by focusing on its unique positioning as a classic Singapore Chinese restaurant that offers variety of cuisine types i.e. Singaporean Chinese cuisine with Hokkien and Cantonese influences
- Consistently creating a unique cultural dining experience that allows every diner to embrace local traditions and rediscover a fascination for a shared culture
- Focusing its efforts and resources on crafting and executing targeted marketing activities to appeal to their desired target audiences

Spring Court's entrance





# Fatty Weng Restaurant

## Background

Fatty Weng Restaurant embodies the heart of zi-char and the drive of Singapore's food entrepreneurs. Established in 1967, it has been serving authentic Cantonese food that carries its zi-char roots with pride. Using quality ingredients and secret recipes, its signature dishes, such as Deep fried Soon Hock fish, Honey Pork Ribs, and Chilli Crab, have delighted generations of diners and has been enjoyed by both local and global food enthusiasts.

Starting from a modest roadside stall on Albert Street, having streams of customers was a common sight at the roadside stall as many kept coming back for the delicious, hearty meals prepared by him. It was at his modest stall in Albert Street where stories of his famous opeh-leaf takeaway originated from.

To cater to the growing customer base, Fatty Weng moved into a 500-seater restaurant in the Singapore Badminton Hall at Guillemard Road. For the next 20 years, from the 1980s to 2007, Fatty Weng had a permanent home, and quickly became an institution for the Singapore dining landscape in the 1980s. Many

could recall having a birthday, wedding or corporate meal at Fatty Weng's, or having a takeaway opeh-packed meal from the restaurant. In 2007, Fatty Weng had to shut down its operations in the Singapore Badminton Hall premises as the building was taken back by the Singapore Land Authority.

In 2014 after a seven year hiatus, Fatty Weng reopened under its original brand name, the Fatty Weng Restaurant, at its new location in Chinatown's Smith Street. It is now under the directorship of Fatty Weng's second generation, Derek Lai. Exposed to the family business as a child, Derek is knowledgeable about the food and beverage (F&B) industry and in managing the restaurant's operations. Aside from bringing out exceptional satisfaction to their guests, he also constantly looks for new ways to further improve the business. He has been an instrument in the innovation of new dishes which pays homage to classic Cantonese dishes. With his leadership, Fatty Weng is able to stay relevant in the highly competitive dining scene.

Fatty Weng's owner, Derek, his wife Ruth and his father, Lai Foo Weng





# Fatty Weng Restaurant

## The Face Behind The Brand

Fatty Weng is the lifework of renowned chef Lai Foo Weng, whose popular nickname became the restaurant's name. Lai was passionate about cooking and believed in the importance of offering authentic and delicious home-style Cantonese dishes. As there were no culinary schools during his time, he proved himself in the streets and built a large following with his self-taught skills. He was always perfecting his craft, innovating and adapting to diners' tastes. Lai was the driving force for the success of the Fatty Weng brand. His ever-growing motivation and sincerity to bring delicious food for his customers is one of the main reasons why the restaurant has managed to capture and maintain a large group of loyal followers for more than four decades.

Founder Lai Foo Weng and the original restaurant at Guillemard Road



## Challenges Faced

Over the years, Singapore's dining landscape has changed in many ways from accelerated growth in the number of new entrants to the methods that consumers source for information on restaurants. This has led to Fatty Weng facing challenges in the following areas:

- Located in the heart of Chinatown's food street, Fatty Weng is surrounded by many F&B businesses which may compete with it for business. At the same time since Chinatown is known as a tourist location, it may have to put in extra efforts to attract locals to the area.
- The prevalent labour shortage in the market that is caused by the perception that locals have of having to work long irregular hours with low wages.
- With the shortage of manpower, there are minimal resources devoted to marketing and communications.
- With the growing number of food options and new concepts in the market, attracting the younger generation of diners may be challenging as Chinese restaurants, especially those of heritage, are usually the go-to place when dining with family.

# Fatty Weng Restaurant

## Transformation of the Logo



## Future Considerations

Despite the challenges, Fatty Weng remains a strong brand in the market with its well-developed and traditional recipes that have stood the test of time, as well as constant positive word-of-mouth. However to achieve the same level of success they previously had at the past Guillemard location, Fatty Weng would need to refresh its brand to appeal to modern day consumers, yet at the same time not losing its roots. Additionally, it would need to consider the following areas:

- Aggressive marketing activities might not be suitable as Fatty Weng should consider cost-effective yet efficient ways for its marketing and communications to attract and engage customers due to manpower shortage.
- Fatty Weng should try to be active on social media as most Singaporeans, especially the younger generation, turn to online platforms in search of good bargains and latest food trends. This would help it to introduce Fatty Weng to the younger generation of customers and encourage them to experience their re-brand.

Fatty Weng Restaurant today at Chinatown



# Moi Lum Restaurant

## Background

Moi Lum Restaurant was founded in the 1920s by founder Mr. Khong Yu Lum. The restaurant has been selling their legendary Crispy Fried Chicken 金牌脆皮烧鸡 and Golden Coin Beancurd 金钱豆腐 for the past 80 years. The restaurant started out by renting a shop space in a little coffee shop eatery selling and producing wonton noodles along Tanjong Pagar Road. When the coffee shop owners, Cheong Hou Coffee Shop, offered to sell the premises to Mr. Khong, Mr. Khong seized the opportunity as a young entrepreneur and started the restaurant with his peers from Guangdong, all of whom had exceptional culinary skills.

The restaurant business expanded rapidly. During the 1930s, Moi Lum Restaurant started providing catering services to shops and businesses that needed

a convenient way to feed their staff. Subsequently, the restaurant expanded their catering arm to serve large associations as well as a multitude of events for the rich and famous elite.

Today, with the help of loyal customers and a strong family backing, Moi Lum Restaurant has expanded into a popular dining destination serving a wide variety of Cantonese cuisine with an emphasis on fusion dishes, such as Salted Egg Spring Rolls and Wasabi Salad Prawns with Mango Salsa, through the introduction of Western and modern influences in their traditional Cantonese cuisine.

Moi Lum then and now: *(Clockwise from top left)*

- Moi Lum Restaurant at Singapore's very first Food Festival (1960s)
- Moi Lum's first kitchen
- Moi Lum Restaurant now at Maxwell Road
- Private dining room at Moi Lum Restaurant now





# Moi Lum Restaurant

## Challenges Faced

Since its inception until today, Moi Lum has successfully established a solid groundwork, surviving through its first and second generations and is currently operated by the third generation. Over the years, Moi Lum has created a strong brand name and presence in the local market with the power of word-of-mouth, thereby becoming a “destination drive” for today’s consumers.

In order to bring forth the family business to the next phases of development, the current generation is dedicated to bring Moi Lum to the international business arena. However, this brings a set of challenges in the following areas:

- As the operations are currently only based in Singapore, Moi Lum has yet to obtain brand recognition outside of Singapore. There is a need to differentiate itself from its competitors due to relatively low barriers to entry in the F&B industry.
- The vision of growing the business internationally calls for a need to increase market knowledge not only in Singapore, but also regionally.

## Transformation of the Logo



*Old logo*



*New logo*



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## Future Considerations

Similar to most other Chinese heritage restaurants, a shift in consumers' perception resulted in consumers perceiving Moi Lum as a Chinese restaurant with no distinctive concept and lacking in compelling brand characteristics that is memorable in the minds of consumers. In order to connect and appeal to modern consumers, Moi Lum needs to take into consideration the following areas:

- With the new generation of diners being savvy when it comes to food-hunting, Moi Lum can improve the speed of its response to customer feedback through online platforms. It can educate consumers on the origin and modernisation of its dishes as well as on the food preparation methods behind the dish. This can help market the dishes and generate positive word-of-mouth.
- By taking into consideration its customers' preference for down-to-earth homely food, as well as modern consumers seeking for taste they remember from their childhood, Moi Lum can communicate the welcoming and homely image it wishes to portray by managing consumer expectations and showcasing its competencies, thereby building customers' confidence in the brand.

Moi Lum's current owners (*from left to right*): Mdm Kit Khong, Chef Kwang Mang Tuck and Mr. Andrew Kong



# The Future of Chinese Heritage Restaurants in Singapore

The key challenge faced by many Chinese heritage restaurants in Singapore today is the ability to carve a niche and differentiate themselves from the intense competition in the industry. As seen from the heritage restaurant brands that have evolved over time to meet consumer and market needs, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but rather, it is through the concerted effort on the part of the business owner to uncover the secrets behind the success of the business, and focus on growing its brand, to ensure that the brand remains in the forefront of consumers' minds.

With the appearance of new cuisine types and restaurant concepts to cater to the shifting preferences of consumers, Chinese heritage restaurants will have to elevate itself to the next level, beyond being bounded by the past. The future of Chinese heritage restaurants will depend on their ability to move forward and respond to the demands of modern diners.

Chinese cuisine is one of the most diverse and intriguing cooking styles in the world, yet many diners are, through no fault of their own, limited in their experiences.

Hence in order to thrive in this competitive landscape and offer diners with an immersive dining experience, authentic cooking should be exciting, not comfortably uninspiring. At the same time, Chinese heritage restaurants should understand that consumers will come to expect functional benefits such as food and service quality as a given, and seek emotional benefits such as capturing memories as a key criteria when making dining decisions.

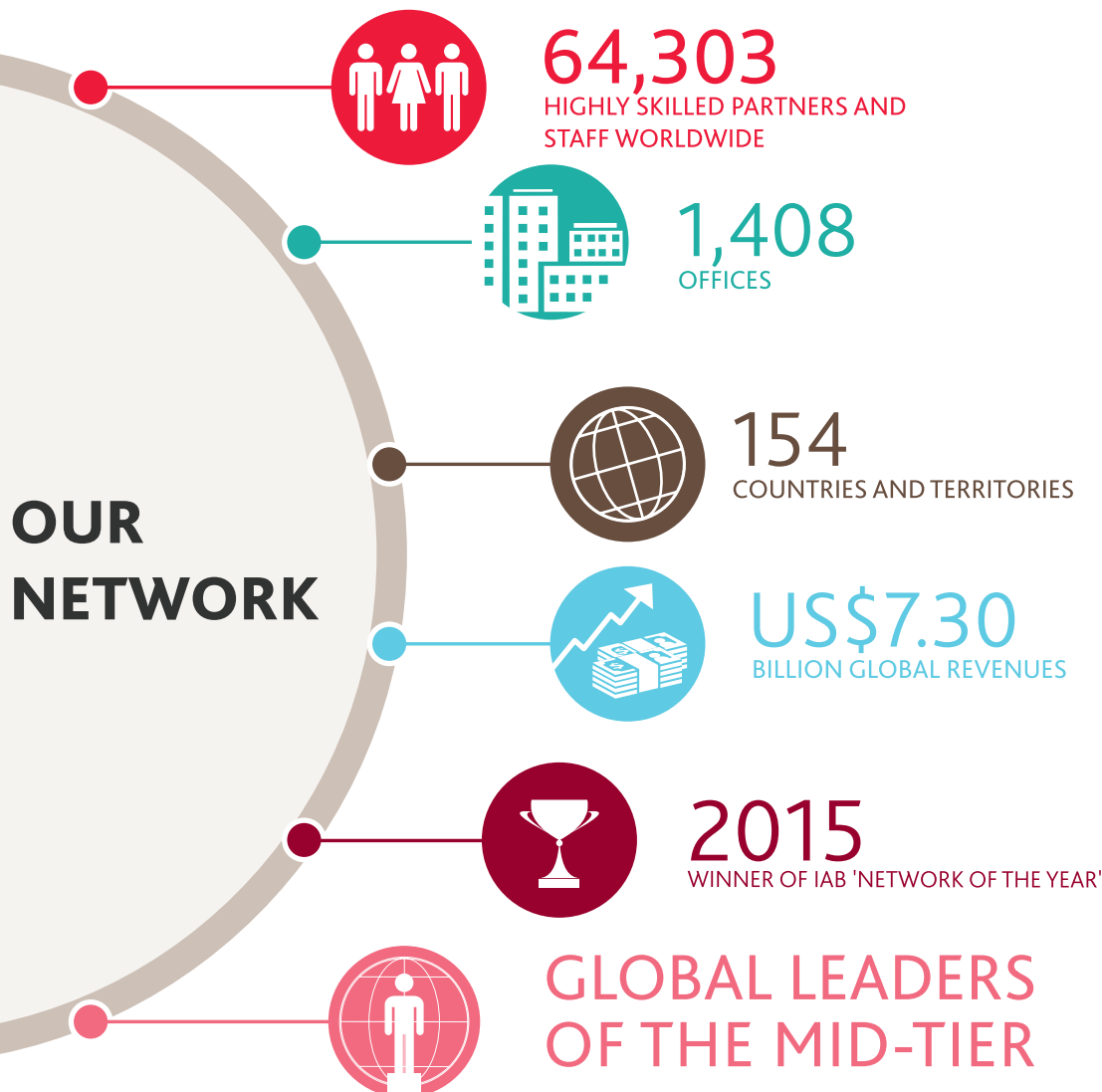
With movements to preserve Singapore's cultural heritage, such as the Singapore Memory Project and Singapore Restaurant Month in 2015 that highlighted the culinary creations of local heritage restaurants, the new generation of diners will soon be enticed by the growing old-school appeal, charm and influence that Chinese heritage restaurants have upon others in the local F&B landscape.



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