

ANALYSIS OF THE CUSTOMERS' PREFERENCES IN DETERMINING A SUITABLE MENU: A CASE STUDY OF RIVER SIDE ORIENTAL CUISINE RESTAURANT

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Abstract: Customers' preferences play an important role in determining a menu. A menu will not be a good means to increase the profitability if the foods in it do not reflect the customers' wants and needs. River Side Oriental Cuisine restaurant in Laren, the Netherlands is a new restaurant that will be combining Thai, Malaysian Chinese, and Japanese cuisine. By distributing questionnaires and doing an observation, the customers' preferences analyzed to determine a suitable menu, considering the factors, i.e. food habits and preferences, nutritional requirements, and food characteristics.

Keywords: menu, menu planning, nutritional requirement, food characteristics, food habits and preferences, customer's wants and needs.

The restaurant industry has grown fantastically over the last few years. There are many factors that influence any food service establishment in order to survive in the high competition and the menu is one of the important aspects that lead to a restaurant's success. In a study of Cichy & Wise (2000), it is believed that from the point of view of the guests, menu is much more than a list of available foods. A menu communicates the restaurant operations' image. It helps to build interest and it does make contribution to the overall guests' dining experiences. For managers, menu is not only a sales tool that directs and persuades the customers at what to buy, but it is also an important control tool that tells them what food and beverage must be purchased, the types of equipments they need to have, the numbers and the skills of the personnel that they must hire. Due to this fact, a menu serves as a plan for the entire food service system.

In determining a menu particularly for a new restaurant, it is important to consider the factors from the customer's point of view or the customers' preferences. The customers' preferences are always changed. They include the food habits and preferences, the nutritional requirements and the food characteristics. Every customer has different food habits and food preferences. No matter how sophisticated the preparation methods are or how attractively foods are served, a menu is of a little practical value if the foods in it are not liked by the consumers. Commonly, the customers' preferences help the manager to know who their customers are, what their customer needs are, and the kind of taste of the food that they will offer. The different likes and

needs of the customers, however, call for various modifications to the menus. Once the menu has carefully been planned, consumer satisfaction, the profitability and the success of the business can be easily achieved.

River Side Oriental Cuisine restaurant, in this respect, will be the research object of the writers. It is a new restaurant concept in Laren, the Netherlands that will be combining Thai, Malaysian Chinese, and Japanese cuisine in the coming year. The business is going to be focused on old, young, married, unmarried, single, couple and modern people (excluding children) who have a strong buying power and high level of economy, either in- or outside Laren. The study will be done at Golden River restaurant, of which owner is the same with the River Side, and of which target market can represent those of the River Side. Golden River restaurant is a matter of fact a Chinese specialty restaurant where its unused dining part at the back of the restaurant will be redeveloped to be the River Side Oriental Cuisine restaurant.

There are several reasons why the owner prefers to focus the business on this target market. Firstly, the owner would like to create a real fine dining restaurant for River Side restaurant that provides a high quality of food and professional services with an elegant atmosphere. Secondly, the owner finds a good opportunity to establish River Side Oriental Cuisine in Laren since most of the residents in the town are businessmen and rich people who do not mind spending more for a good restaurant and service. The target markets are also suitable with the new kitchen concept of the restaurant, that is an open kitchen, terrace dining, and sushi bar, which will be another competitive advantage of the restaurant.

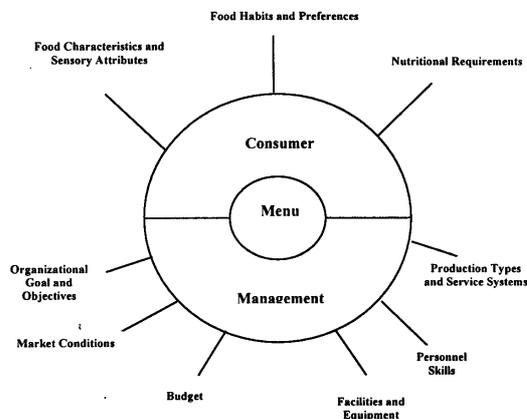
The principal objective of the research is to determine a suitable menu for the restaurant based on the analysis of the collected preferences data of the target market. In addition, the analysis can be used for the manager to know the customers better, and as an input and a consideration to develop a marketable and profitable menu planning for the restaurant itself.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Menu Planning in the Food Service Operation

According to Cousins, Foskett, and Gillespie (2002), menu is a means of communication, informing the customers of what the establishment has to offer. The menu is a central management document that directs and controls the foodservice operation. It establishes what is going to be purchased, the cost, what staff, and other resources are required, and the types of service needed. Khan (1991) simply stated that a menu is a list of food items served by any foodservice establishment, primarily based on customer needs and/or demands and designed to achieve organizational objectives.

Menu planning is the process by which menus are planned, taking into consideration all aspects of a foodservice system. It revolves around selecting food and beverage items that are acceptable from the point of view of both management and consumers, as shown in figure 1.



Source: Khan (1991)

Figure 1. Factors to be considered in menu planning for foodservice operation

Customers' food preferences involve three main areas of concern: the nutritional requirements, the food habits and preferences, and the food characteristics, which will be explained below:

1. Nutritional Requirements

Many customers are nowadays concerned about the nutritional value of food and carefully consider dining alternatives relative to nutritious option

available on the menu. Demand for healthier chicken and fish items is increasing. Among the trends restaurant operators reported in a recent National Restaurant study are an increase in customer interest in lower-fat menu items and that of forty percent of table-service restaurants feature or promote certain menu items because of specific or unique nutritional benefits. In fact, two-third of all seafood is eaten in restaurants. Compared with other protein foods, fish and shellfish have far less fat, rich in the highly polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids, which may prevent heart attacks; in addition, seafood is lower in cholesterol and sodium. Greater public awareness of healthy food and individual wellness has prompted operators to change some cooking methods – for example, they are broiling, poaching, steaming, casseroles, or preparing rotisserie chicken instead of frying. In the food operation, managers should concern about offering nutrition menu choices because of the competitive advantage this may offer. Inclusion of salads, fruits, and vegetables provides for nutritious meals as well as for making meal more appealing. Since nutrition is a key concern of today's dining patrons, many restaurateurs are interested in incorporating "healthy fare" into their menus, like placing a heart sign next to menu items that are recommended for guests with special low-fat dietary needs and few restaurants put the number of calories beside each item on the menu. This information attracts the undecided and leads to greater consumer satisfaction

When planning menus, managers can also implement a wide range of strategies that recognize the nutritional concerns:

- Reduce fat and cholesterol in menu items by offering lean fish, chicken, turkey and veal alternatives. Most fish and shell fish are low-cholesterol choices.
- Reduce sodium by reducing the use of salt in recipes (guest who desire salt can add it at the table), offer sauce and marinades in low-sodium varieties.
- Use strategies to reduce sugar by reducing in baked items without sacrificing taste and offering fruit desserts instead of sweet desserts, providing sugar-free beverages.
- Use strategies to reduce calories by reducing portion and the amount of fat and sugar used in menu items and offer more low-fat and low-sugar fruits and vegetables.

2. Food Habits and Preferences

In menu planning, food preferences and habits play an important role. "A person prefers to eat

what she/he likes and likes to prefer what he/she eats" summarizes the complex nature of food preferences. Managers in the hospitality industry should recognize that all consumers have a great deal of previous knowledge and experience of food (no matter how limited that may be), which makes them highly critical of food as compared to other services or products.

Food habits are defined as the way in which individuals - in response to social and cultural pressures - select, consume, and utilize portions of the available food supply. Food preferences are defined as the selection of food items from choices available among acceptable foods. The most important factors that influence customer food preferences and that should be taken into consideration while planning menus are categorized as follows:

- a. Intrinsic Factors; include certain influence directly associated with food, such as appearance, color, odor, texture, temperature, flavor, and quality. The manner in which food is presented, the way food is arranged on the plate, and the temperature at which it is served all have an impact on food preferences.
- b. Extrinsic Factors; include direct external factors that can affect food preferences, such as: the environment where it is served (e.g.: homes, restaurants, and clubs), situational expectation (e.g.: social, ritual, or religion occasions), advertising (as to attract customers), time and seasonal variations (temperature and the availability of certain foods).
Food selections appear to be somewhat immune to the influence of certain natural phenomena such as seasonal variations, outdoor temperatures, and the day of the week. However, the availability of certain foods particularly fruits and vegetables, affect their selections. For example, watermelons are generally preferred during the hot summer months. On the other hand, hot chocolate is not a summer favorite. Other factors, such as the hours of meal service and the length of the meal times, may also have an effect on food preferences.
- c. Biological, Physiological, and Psychological Factors; include the changing of the appreciation, perception, or appetite toward food, that are often associated with physical well-being, age and sex. A good example of this is the higher acceptance and preference of "fast foods" by the younger generation.
- d. Personal Factors; include: level of expectation

and personal satisfaction towards the food, priority over why the food is served, familiarity of the food, the influence of other persons (friends, relatives, and family members), personal appetites, moods, and emotions, family unit - where a young family usually is more concerned with economizing than a middle-aged couple, who may be primarily concerned with reducing calories, cholesterol, and salt in their diet -, educational status and nutritional knowledge.

- e. Socioeconomic Factors (income, health condition, and the customer buying power)
 - f. Cultural and Religious Factors
Recognizing various population groups and their food preferences can be observed among cultures in all parts of the world. Food preferences have to be considered very carefully to avoid individual bias. Informal observations in the dining room, customer comment, what is left over, and the extent of food waste provide valuable information on food likes and dislikes.
3. Food Characteristics
The characteristics of food itself, which include their sensory properties, play an important role in their acceptance.
- a. Color
Planning and arranging food so that there is a good color combination on a plate is an important aspect of menu planning. Colors have a psychological impact on customers. They emphasize the variety available of the selection and serve as an eye appeal and appetite stimulator. Natural food colors as found in the foods and vegetables are generally preferred. Garnishing, plate decorations, and attractive color displays add color and should also be considered in menu planning.
 - b. Texture and shape
The texture and shape of foods also effect customers' preferences. "Soft", "hard", "crispy", "crunchy", "chewy", "smooth", "brittle", and "granny" are some of the adjectives used to describe food texture. Foods in different shapes or vegetable and fruit carving add to the attraction of the menu as well as to create an eye appeal when the foods are served.
 - c. Consistency
Consistency refers to the degree of viscosity or density of a product. Like texture, consistency provides for variety among menu items. "Runny", "gelatinous", "pasty", "thin",

“thick”, “sticky”, and “gummy” are the most common adjectives used to describe consistency. As a rule, items that have a hard texture should be complemented by items having a thin consistency.

d. Flavor

A desirable blend of flavors is essential for creating variety in the menu. Foods can have sweet, sour, bitter, or salty flavors, which can be present alone or in combination. However, a combination of strong- and mild-flavored is desirable in menus.

e. Method of preparation

Food can be prepared in many ways (frying, baking, broiling, boiling, steaming, grilling, braising, or a combination of these methods). It is advisable to group by method of preparation all the recipes offered by a foodservice operation. This makes it easier to select items for preparation and to avoid items that are similar in preparation. From the management point of view, it is essential that there be a uniform of distribution of the methods selected for food preparation to facilitate optimal use of employee skills and equipment. Also, from the nutritional point of view, many customers dislike fatty foods and/or may prefer steamed items. A balance in the methods of food preparation is therefore desirable so that a variety is provided.

f. Serving temperature

Food temperatures preferred by individuals vary with age and other personal factors. Both hot and cold foods are desirable on the menu.

g. Presentation

The final appearance of food—whether on a plate, cafeteria counter, serving tray, buffet table, or in a display case or take-out package—is an important factor in the final selection of the item. A combination of tall, flat, and variously shaped items arranged in a symmetrical pattern, is eye-appealing and should be considered when planning menus.

Customer's Wants and Needs

A human need is a state of felt deprivation including the need of the food, clothing, warmth, and safety. Wants refers to how people communicate their needs. Menu planning is a complex process, but it can be successful when the focus, first and foremost, is on the needs and wants of the guests – not those of the chef, the director or the manager. Knowing how well customer's demands and needs are met will lead to the guest satisfaction, as the overall goal of food service management.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

For the research of the study, there are two research designs that are used to obtain all the information needed for determining a suitable menu for River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant:

1. Descriptive research. Descriptive research is a set of methods and procedures that describes data about the population being studied. In this case, the writers would like to learn how the customers' preferences influence the decision to determine a suitable menu for River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant.
2. Exploratory research. Exploratory research is a type of research that is conducted because a problem has not been clearly defined. The exploratory research aims to find out how to develop a good and suitable menu for River Side Oriental Cuisine restaurant in consideration with the data that has been collected through questionnaires and a field observation in Golden River restaurant.

Data Collection Methods

In accessing the data, the writers will use the primary data and the secondary data. The primary data is gathered by conducting an interview with the owner of Golden River Restaurant, a survey through questionnaires as the research instrument, where respondents are asked a set of structured questions and their completed questionnaires are analyzed with the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software database, and by doing a field observation in order to get a general sense of what is happening in the market. The source of the secondary data is a literature study that the writers do by accessing the libraries and the internet.

1. Interview

An interview is presented orally by an interviewer. The writers will have an informal personal interview with the owner of Golden River Restaurant regarding his plan to run the River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant.

2. Observation

The writers will do a direct observation to recognize the customers' buying behavior and the meal consumption behavior in Golden River Restaurant, of which the customers are the target market of River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant (excluding children). Direct observation is useful in determining and measuring behavior and describing the situation in which the observer is physically present and personally monitors what takes place in the restaurant.

3. Questionnaire

In designing a market research questionnaire, the writers will use closed-ended questions and open-ended questions.

Close-ended questions let the respondents choose from possible answers on the questionnaire. They include: dichotomous questions which offer respondents the ability to answer "yes" or "no", multiple choice questions where they may choose from a list of several answer choices, and likert scale questions that range from "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree" and "Indifferent/neutral" to "Agree" and "Strongly Agree".

The writers will use dichotomous questions to ask their vegetarian status, whereas multiple choice questions are used to investigate their reason to eat at an Asian cuisine restaurants, their food preferences (e.g.: their favorite taste, favorite cuisine, favorite meat, etc.), their type of menu preference, their gender and age status, and how they define a healthy eating. By using likert scale questions, respondents will measure their answers at a particular point on a scale to show their agreement or disagreement regarding the Golden River's food choice, price, food presentation, and food portion.

Open-ended questions let the respondents answer questions in their own words. The writers will use completely unstructured questions to let respondents answer any way they choose. Types of the questions include some questions asking the guest's frequency of dining experience in an Asian restaurant, and their personal average food and beverage consumption per month

The population of this research is the residents of Laren whereas the sample is both the regular and non-regular guests of Golden River restaurant that are selected randomly. This is known as convenient random sampling where every element in the population has an equal chance to be selected for the sample. There are 50 questionnaires that will be distributed to the respondents in person due to the time constraint that the writers are limited to. Afterwards the data will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software database. The findings from the questionnaires will be used as a basic determination to select menu items that is suitable for River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant.

The selection of the menu will be taken from various sources, i.e.: recipes from books, magazines, cookbooks, and websites. The menu items and selection will reflect on the customers' viewpoint that can be used as valuable information and suggestion to the managers to finalize the River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant menu.

FINDINGS

The questionnaires are the primary research instrument that the writers use to find out what kind of food the target market likes as well as to recognize their level of expectation regarding the food. Table 1 presents the information on the 50 respondents.

Table 1. Customers' preferences

	Frequency (%)
Frequency of Dining at An Asian Cuisine Restaurant	
> once in a month	68%
others (less than once in a month)	32%
Reason to Dine at an Asian Restaurant	
Variety of Menu Choices	44%
Service	22%
Food	14%
Atmosphere	14%
Agreements with Golden River Food Choices	
Food Choices	90%
Price	78%
Well Portioned	81%
Well Presented	83%
Dining Interest at River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant	
Yes	88%
No	12%
Most Favorite Cuisine (among 3 cuisine)	
Malaysian Chinese	52%
Japanese	36%
Thai	12%
Menu Type Preference	
A la carte and Table d'Hote	48%
A la carte	34%
Table d'Hote	10%
Table d'Hote with Wine Arrangement	8%
Meat Preference	
Chicken	34%
Seafood	26%
Beef	20%
Pork	10%
Lamb	6%
Vegetarian	4%
Taste Preference	
Sweet Sour	34%
Spicy	30%
Plain	14%
Spicy Hot	10%
Salty	8%
Sour	4%
Most Influencing Factor in Choosing a Dish	
Ingredients	86%
Nutritional Value	8%
Price	4%
Others	2%
Definition of Healthy Eating	
More Vegetables and Fruits	52%
Less Fat and Cholesterol	42%
High Fiber and Nutrients	4%
Gender	
Male	42%
Female	58%
Age	
19-30	16%
31-40	16%

41-50	26%
> 50	42%
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Vegetarians	
Yes	82%
Sometimes	18%
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Personal Average Expense (per Month)	
Food	€ 160
Beverage	€ 62

source: questionnaire, analysed

1. Nutritional Requirements

Based on the research findings, ingredients is the most influencing factor that determines most of the respondents in choosing a dish, followed by the nutritional value as the second factor. Nevertheless, they realize how important nutrition is for them. They defined a healthy eating as eating more vegetables and fruits (52%) and eating less fat and cholesterol (42%). Reducing fat and cholesterol, as well as serving low portion, calories, sugar, and sodium is a reflection of their preferences. It is proven that chicken and fish is believed to be healthier and preferable to the respondents. Their meal preferences are ranked as follows: chicken, seafood, beef, pork, lamb, and vegetarian dish, lastly. Vegetarian dish is the least preferable. This is probably because almost of the respondents being surveyed (82%) are not vegetarians and a small group of them (18%) are sometimes vegetarians. However, even though most of the respondents are not pure vegetarians, it can be seen that they still concern about the nutritional aspect of what they eat. It is also supported by the fact that most of the guests of Golden River restaurant, where the target market of River Side Oriental Cuisine restaurant are taken, are people above 50 years old who do take care for the nutritional aspect in their food.

2. Food Habits and Preferences

The collected data showed that 68% of the respondents visit an Asian Cuisine restaurant at least once in a month. Variety of menu choices and the service are found to be the first and second most influencing factors to dine at such restaurants. 88% of the total respondents are interested in the River Side due to the fact that there are not many theme restaurants in the Netherlands with this kind of three cuisine concept. Malaysian Chinese is found to be their most favorite cuisine among the three with Thai as the least favorite one. This is because they are not very much familiar with this cuisine. From the category of meat choice, chicken and seafood are liked by 34% and 26% of the respondents while beef is the third most preferable meat to them. Many guests prefer to have a combination of à la carte and table d'hôte menu

which is the same with the Golden River restaurant menu type. A table d'hôte menu is a restricted set menu that offers a small number of courses, usually three or four where there is a limited choice within each of course and the set price is fixed for whatever the customer chooses. An à la carte menu lists all of the dishes that are being prepared to order and each dish is separately priced. Compared to a table d'hôte menu, an à la carte menu offers a greater choice.

Some relevant questions about Golden River menu were asked in the beginning of the questionnaire aiming to give the writers view of what kind of expectation and opinion that most of the respondents have regarding a good menu. The findings show that in overall, Golden River restaurant has a variety of food choice, well portioned and good presentation. The majority of them also agreed that the menu selections are reasonably priced. This indicated that Golden River food items have been served in standard portion and quality that is reasonable with the price.

Golden River guests are believed to have a strong buying power. They have high level income and do not mind spending more on food consumption. The average personal food spending (per guest) is about € 160 in a month whereas € 62 is the average of the beverage expense per month. Nevertheless, these findings are very useful to be a basic consideration for a menu planner and the owner.

3. Food Characteristics

From the food aspect, Dutch people can accept the taste of Asian cuisine, of which most of the dishes are hot, sweet, sour, and spicy. Sweet - sour and spicy is among the most preferable taste of the 34% and 30% of the respondents.

Warm and fresh dishes are more liked by most of the respondent. It can be seen from their comments regarding the Golden River menu choices, that they like Chinese cuisine because the foods are always served warm and fresh. The presentation of Golden River food items is also liked by them with the attractive gamish and a good combination of color and ingredients.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Before determining a menu, it is very important to understand the characteristic and the food culture of the cuisine that is going to be offered. In Malaysian-Chinese cuisine, the use of soy sauce, hoi sin sauce, spring rolls, and stir fries and is particularly strong as it combines the Chinese emphasis on texture and

balance of taste with the Malaysian predilection for curries and chili dishes. Malaysian cuisine is a healthy cuisine. Chicken is the most widely eaten meat. With a large Muslim population and significant number of Hindus, pork and beef are not used to any great extent. Besides, the climate is not conducive to rearing livestock for eating. Fish and seafood are plentiful and widely eaten. Rice is the staple food, while noodles are also used to bulk out meat dishes, to thicken soup and generally add substance to the diet. Both rice and noodles are also popular as snacks. Desserts are light and refreshing, with coconut milk as a predominant ingredient.

In Japanese cuisine, eating raw fish is considered the best as a way to appreciate the real flavor of fish. Sashimi (prepared raw fish) has pride of place in a Japanese meal. Another Japanese specialty is sushi, based on boiled rice, flavored with rice vinegar mixture. Japan is still largely a nation of fish and vegetable eaters. In Japanese cuisine there is more emphasis on vegetable quality foods than animal foods. When meat is used, it is sliced thickly and normally cooked with vegetables. Also, there is less emphasis on main courses and sweet desserts. As a result, Japanese cooking is naturally healthy.

In Thai cuisine, the dishes are characterized by citrus limes, lemon grass, coriander, galangal, coconut milk, garlic, and chili. A fresh sweet sour taste from tamarind and palm sugar is also typically Thai. Thai curries are searingly hot, though they are cooked quickly and do not have the rich heaviness that results from long, slow simmering. Coconut milk is used to soften the pungency of the spices and combines flavors. In Thailand, meat is considered more of luxury and is often combined with vegetables, rice, noodles, fish, or plenty of coconut-based sauce. Chicken is abundant, and duck is popular particularly for special occasions. Dairy products are not used. Vegetables are important but they are often combined with meat, poultry or fish, eaten as salad.

The writers will then analyze the collected preferences data using the three important factors that have been previously discussed. This is the basic consideration to determine which kind of menu items that is suitable for both à la carte and table d'hôte menu of River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant:

1. Nutritional Requirements

In Malaysian Chinese, Japanese, and Thai cuisine, the most-commonly-used methods of cooking are stir frying, deep frying, sautéing, roasting, and simmering like in curry dishes. These frying methods are not very liked by those who have great health awareness.

However, the writers will use strategies that recognize the nutrition concerns by:

- a. Selecting menu items that is low in cholesterol, like offering fish and chicken more, and offering some vegetarian dishes as an alternative choice.
- b. Reducing the use of sodium in the recipe, as well as sugar, fat, and calories in a proportional serving portion.
- c. Offering salad, fruits, vegetables, and fresh vegetables in each menu.

2. Food Habits and Preferences

Offering three types of cuisine will be a unique characteristic of River Side. The writers will suggest variety of choices in ingredients in the menu to give wider option to the guests. Chicken and fish or seafood will be dominant among beef or pork and vegetarian dishes will be included.

The writers found that the target market can adapt to the taste of Asian cuisine especially Malaysian Chinese and Thai food (which is mostly sweet sour and spicy) while plain, salty, and sweet is a common taste of Japanese foods. Some food tests will be needed to adjust the food according to the taste of Dutch people. More importantly, offering fresh and varied ingredients will be of a major concern.

It is felt necessary to introduce traditional food items to the guests, such as Nonya Rojak in Malaysian cuisine; sushi, tempura, and teriyaki in Japanese cuisine; Tom Yum Goong and Gaeng Penang Gai in Thai cuisine. The menu itself will be presented as an à la carte and a table d'hôte menu since most of the respondents prefer to have.

3. Food Characteristics

The overall appearance of the menu items plays a major role. Different shaped items or colored items serve as an eye appeal by using fruits and vegetables, a garnish, plate decorations, and attractive counter displays.

Based on the above discussion, the writers would like to give a view of a suggested à la carte menu of Thai cuisine (the following example) that the writers find suitable for River Side Oriental Cuisine restaurant. In choosing the food items, however, the writers considered these principal factors:

- a. Variation in the texture of the food items (soft or hard texture, crispy or crunchy items) that will give variations within each starter, soup, main course, and dessert.
- b. Variation in the consistency of the food items (thin, thick, and sticky or not). This can be seen from the soup items, and dessert items.
- c. Variation in the flavor (sweet, sour, hot, spicy, sharp, salty flavors, etc.).

THAI CUISINE MENU	
<p>❖ APPETIZER AND SALAD</p> <p>Taud Man Pla (Fish Cakes with Cucumber Relish) <i>Curried fish patty deep-fried and served with cucumber salad topped with ground peanut</i></p> <p>Popia Tod (Vegetarian Spring Roll) <i>Bean noodle, shredded cabbage, carrot, and celery wrapped with rice skins, deep-fried golden brown, and served with sweet & sour sauce.</i></p> <p>Goong and Pak Tod (Shrimp and Vegetable Tempura) <i>Battered shrimps, broccoli, sweet potato, eggplants, zucchini, and pineapple served with sweet & sour sauce</i></p> <p>Spinach Wrap <i>Seasoned ground pork, shrimp with fried vegetables stuffed into egg-roll skins. Deep fried to golden brown</i></p> <p>Num-Nua (Thai Beef Salad) <i>A hearty salad of beef, laced with a chili and lime dressing</i></p> <p>Yum Talay (Seafood Salad) <i>Seafood seasoned with red onion, cilantro, lemongrass, lime juice, and roast chili paste</i></p> <p>Larb-Gai ("Larb" Chicken) <i>Seamed minced chicken, onions, cilantro, mint and lime leaves mixed in a lime juice dressing, garnished with green lettuce, cucumber and tomato</i></p> <p>Yum Pak (Vegetarian Thai Salad) <i>Thai spicy mixed vegetable salad in a dressing of lime juice, chilies and fresh coriander</i></p> <p>❖ SOUP</p> <p>Tom Yum Goong (Hot and Sour Shrimp Soup with Lemon Grass) <i>Shrimp soup with mushroom, onion, and green pepper seasoned with lemon grass, kaffir lime leave, galanga, chili and lime juice</i></p> <p>Pad Gaprao Moo <i>Spicy and aromatic, minced pork with fresh chilies, lime leaves and Thai basil</i></p> <p>Pad Hoay Shell <i>Stir fried scallops with fresh asparagus in oyster sauce, sprinkled with black pepper</i></p> <p>Ped Makahm <i>Slices of marinated duck grilled and served on a bed of lettuce, topped with exotic sweet and sour tamarind sauce and garnished with deep-fried crispy shallots and dried chilies</i></p> <p>Chuu Chii Pla <i>An elegant curry dish of deep fried fillet of cod coated with dried red curry and kaffir lime leaves. (Medium hot and spicy)</i></p> <p>Gaeng Penang Gai <i>A rich, aromatic chicken curry made from coconut cream flavoured with lime leaves and peanuts</i></p> <p>Bangkok Jarn Ron <i>Marinated mixed vegetables, with garlic, black pepper, mushrooms and coriander, served on a sizzling hot plate</i></p> <p>Pad Thai <i>Traditional Thai stir-fried noodles with shrimp, vegetables and beans sprouts, garnished with ground peanuts, lemon wedge and fresh coriander</i></p> <p>Thai Fried Rice <i>Thai Fried rice with basil leaves, green pepper, chili, garlic, onion & egg</i></p>	<p>Tom Kha-Gai (Chicken Coconut Milk Soup) <i>Coconut milk soup with sliced chicken, mushroom, onion, and green pepper seasoned with galanga, lemon grass, kaffir lime leave, and lime juice</i></p> <p>Poh Tae (Thai Seafood Soup) <i>Seafood soup with mushroom, onion, and green pepper flavored with lemon grass, kaffir lime leave, galanga, and lime juice</i></p> <p>Tom Jerdt Luk Cheen <i>A mild soup pork meat balls, bean sprouts, spring onion and coriander</i></p> <p>Tofu Soup <i>A thick soup consist of glass noodles, tofu, mushrooms, and spinach</i></p> <p>❖ MAIN COURSE</p> <p>Gang Kiew Warn Goong (Prawn with Curry and Coconut Milk) <i>Famous Thai green curry with prawn, coconut milk, bamboo shoots and green chilies</i></p> <p>Mor Din Talay (Seafood Pot) <i>Shrimp, scallop, squid, crabmeat & green mussel simmered in a clay pot with bean noodle, celery, napa cabbage, onion, bell pepper, fresh ginger, and scallion</i></p> <p>Gang Gari <i>An aromatic mild curry with chicken, pineapple and baby potatoes in coconut milk, sprinkled with deep-fried shallots</i></p> <p>Ped Panaeng (Duck Panaeng Curry) <i>Delectable duck topped with Panaeng curry sauce and bell pepper and sprinkled with finely shredded kaffir lime leave</i></p> <p>Gaeng Keuwan Nua (Bief in Thai Green Curry) <i>Classic Thai green curry with pieces of beef and Thai aubergines cooked in coconut milk flavoured with basil and lime leaves</i></p> <p>Kra Tiem Prig Thai (Whole Red Snapper Fish in Garlic and Pepper Sauce) <i>Whole Red Snapper in garlic and black pepper sauce served with a combination of stir-fried vegetables</i></p> <p>❖ DESSERTS</p> <p>Thai Coconut Cream Custard <i>Egg custard set with puréed mung beans and coconut milk</i></p> <p>Deep Fried Ice Cream <i>A shaped ball of soft bread filled with an ice cream centre, coated with coconut flakes and deep-fried, served with syrup</i></p> <p>Tapioca Pudding <i>Pudding made from large pearl tapioca and coconut milk, served warm with lychees and tropical fruits, decorated with lime zest strips and coconut shavings</i></p> <p>Baked Rice Pudding, Thai Style <i>Black glutinous rice cooked with brown sugar, coconut milk, and egg. It can serve warm or cold</i></p>

Figure 2. Suggested Thai menu (à la carte)

- d. Variation in the methods of cooking (frying, steaming, boiling, roasting, simmering, or grilling)
- e. Variation in the serving temperature, by offering salads and cold dessert in addition to warm dishes.
- f. Variation in the ingredients in different dishes, i.e.: variety of meat (chicken, fish or seafood, pork, or beef), variety of vegetables and fruits, and variety of sauce (black pepper sauce, lime sauce, sweet and sour sauce, etc.).

For the table d'hote menu, the writers will use the sequence of a four-course meal that is explained as follows:

- a. Appetizer is the first course at a multicourse meal that is light; served to stimulate the appetite.
- b. Soup is a liquid food, either thick or clear soup, which can be from water, stock, or coconut milk with some additions of vegetables, meat, etc. It is served after the appetizer to neutralize the taste before entering the main course.
- c. Main Course is a substantial course consisting of a combination of hot cooked foods, such as roast meat surrounded by seasonal vegetables, a starch, and garnish. It is served to satisfy the appetite.
- d. Dessert is a simple sweet course served to cap the appetite and close the course. At a multicourse meal, a heavy menu is complimented by a light dessert with a soft texture, while at a simple meal an attractive rich dessert caps the appetite.

The following are the suggested set menus for River Side Oriental Cuisine Restaurant that the writers have determined. All of the considerations, that have been discussed above, with a primary concern in customers' preferences have influence the writers' decision in selecting the food items in each cuisine.



Figure 3. Suggested Malaysian-Chinese cuisine set menu

As an example, the writers would like to explain the reason to choose the items in the following suggested Malaysian Chinese cuisine set menu. The menu is a set menu of four courses, where chicken satay is the starter as the appetite stimulator, followed by soup. Ordering two optional soups will give some freedom to the guests to choose whether they would prefer hot clear vegetable soup or a spicy thick fish-chicken soup. The guests may also choose between two main courses: creamy curry chicken with coconut rice or pasty spicy prawn with steamed rice. Fresh Coconut Pudding is a light cold dessert that closes the course and will give the balance in the menu.

These food characteristic is also considered by the writers in deciding the menu for Japanese, Thai cuisine, and the combined set menu of them.



Figure 4. Suggested Japanese cuisine set menu



Figure 5. Suggested Thai cuisine set menu

<p style="text-align: center;">Nyonya Rojak <i>Nyonya famous fruit salad served with shrimp paste sauce</i> or Yakitori <i>Skewered grilled chicken with leeks</i> or Num Nua (Thai Beef Salad) <i>A hearty salad of beef, laced with a chili and lime dressing</i> ****</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Laksa Lemak <i>Shanghai noodles with strips of chicken, prawns, bean sprouts, tofu and Chinese greens in a spicy coconut curry soup ~ served with sambal belachan</i> or Ramen Soup <i>Chicken noodle soup topped with vegetables and roast pork</i> or Tofu Soup <i>A thick soup consist of glass noodles, tofu, mushrooms, and spinach</i> ****</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rendang Daging with Steamed Rice <i>Medallions of beef flavored with aromatic lemon grass, mild chili, and coconut milk ~ served with rice, purple cabbage, and keropok (crackers)</i> or Yakisoba <i>Sauteed ramen noodles with cabbage, mushrooms, scallion, onions, bean sprouts (with chicken/ roast pork/ shrimp/ vegetables only</i> or Gaeng Penang Gai <i>A rich, aromatic chicken curry made from coconut cream flavored with lime leaves and peanuts</i> ****</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ice Kacang <i>Shared ice with red beans, corn, palm seeds, lotus jelly, red rose syrup, peanut and coconut milk</i> or Sakura Mochi <i>Pink sweet sticky rice cake</i> or Thai Coconut Cream Custard <i>Egg custard set with pureed mung beans and coconut milk</i></p>

Figure 6. Suggested combination of Malaysian Chinese, Japanese, and Thai cuisine set menu

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, customers' preferences are very influential in determining a menu. By doing a research through observation and direct survey, every manager and a menu planner is able to know more about the customers: who they are, what their needs are, and what kind of food taste they prefer. Today's guests are demanding value. The perception of value is always changed that urges every manager to be sensitive to any change in the customer's behavior. Knowing customers' preferences is not enough. There is no guarantee that a menu that only reflects on the customers' preferences will be a profitable one and lead to the success of the business unless it is also based on the managerial factors. This management point of view covers the following considerations, that:

- The menu should reflect the purpose of the organization, whether the goal of the foodservice is institutional or commercial.
- The menu should consider the budget. The food cost percentage is a valuable tool in determining budgets. Pre-costed standardized recipes, when

updated from time to time, help in calculation of costs to be used in the formulation of budgets.

- Menu have to be planned with a consideration of the seasonal availability of the food products, the location of the foodservice operation and its accessibility to the market.
- Menu planning requires a careful assessment of the equipment available, as well as its capability and performance.
- The menu should consider the employees' capability and availability.
- The items on the menu should correspond to the types of food production and the delivery system.

However, customers' preferences data serve as a very essential base in the menu planning and should not be neglected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are some recommendations the writers would like to give regarding the River Side Oriental Cuisine menu:

- The owner must concern more about the food choices on the menu (variety of meats and ingredients in particular) in determining the menu and about the service quality of River Side Oriental Cuisine restaurant because the variety of food choices and service quality are the two major reasons for the most of the customers to dine at an Asian Cuisine restaurant.
- The owner must concern about the vegetarian menu for each cuisine because even though most of the guests are not referred as vegetarian but they still concern about the nutritional value of the food they eat.
- Offering a special menu or some additional menu items in some periods of time is also recommended. This will give variations and alternatives for the guests due to the fact that many customers are very enthusiastic about having something new.
- The use of the open kitchen in River Side Oriental Cuisine restaurant should be run well as this concept gives such attraction to the guests and lets the guests know that the foods being served are always made fresh.
- Since the customers' preferences, needs and demands will always change, the manager or the owner should keep conducting a market research, do some market observations, or re-evaluate the menu in order to know what the customers' preferences are from time to time.

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