

**THE IMPACT OF PERCEIVED QUALITY ON CHINESE CONSUMERS'
ACCEPTANCE OF THAI SPECIALTY COFFEE: THE MEDIATING ROLE
OF BRAND TRUST AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF CULTURAL
FAMILIARITY**

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Abstract: This study examines the factors influencing Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee, with a focus on perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity. A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze survey data from 395 respondents. Findings indicate that perceived quality plays a critical role in consumer acceptance, significantly impacting purchasing decisions. Brand trust, while positively correlated with perceived quality, was not found to directly influence consumer acceptance. Additionally, cultural familiarity was identified as a moderating factor that enhances the relationship between perceived quality and acceptance. The study suggests that Thai specialty coffee brands entering the Chinese market should prioritize improving product quality, enhancing brand storytelling, and increasing consumer familiarity with Thai culture. The results provide practical insights for cross-cultural marketing strategies and highlight the need for businesses to emphasize quality perception over brand reliance in emerging markets.

Keywords: Perceived Quality, Consumer Acceptance, Brand Trust, Cultural Familiarity, Thai Specialty Coffee, Cross-Cultural Marketing

Introduction

The specialty coffee market has witnessed significant growth over the past two decades, driven by increasing consumer demand for high-quality, sustainably sourced, and unique coffee experiences (International Coffee Organization, 2021). Unlike conventional coffee, specialty coffee is distinguished by its emphasis on superior flavor profiles, meticulous processing methods, and ethical production standards (Daviron & Ponte, 2018). As consumers become more knowledgeable about coffee, they seek products that align with their preferences for authenticity, sustainability, and artisanal craftsmanship.

Traditionally, specialty coffee has been associated with Western markets, where third-wave coffee movements have reshaped consumer expectations regarding quality and origin transparency (Ponte, 2020). However, emerging economies, particularly in Asia, have exhibited a rapid increase in specialty coffee consumption. China, in particular, has become one of the fastest-growing markets for coffee, fueled by urbanization, rising disposable incomes, and shifting cultural attitudes toward Western-style beverages (Zhang, Liu, & Sun, 2022).

China, historically a tea-drinking nation, has undergone a substantial transformation in its coffee consumption habits. While instant coffee previously dominated the Chinese market, the rising middle class and increased exposure to international trends have led to a growing preference for freshly brewed, high-quality coffee (Chen, Zhao, & Li, 2021). According to market reports, China's specialty coffee market has maintained an annual growth rate of approximately 15%, making it a key expansion target for both domestic and international coffee brands (Zhang et al., 2022).

The rapid urbanization process in China has played a crucial role in this shift. Major metropolitan areas such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen have become hubs for specialty coffee culture, where consumers actively seek out premium coffee experiences in high-end cafés (Wang & Lin, 2023). The growing café culture has been further fueled by social media, where influencers and coffee enthusiasts share their experiences, further shaping consumer preferences (Shin, Choi, & Kim, 2022).

Moreover, changing consumer lifestyles have contributed to the increased demand for specialty coffee. Younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, have shown a preference for premium, ethically sourced products that align with their values of sustainability and quality (Kim & Shin, 2022). This demographic shift has created a lucrative market for specialty coffee brands that emphasize direct trade, organic certification, and unique flavor profiles.

Despite the impressive growth of specialty coffee in China, much of the market is still dominated by major international players such as Starbucks, Blue Bottle, and local chains like Luckin Coffee (Chen et al., 2021). While Western specialty coffee brands have successfully established themselves, there is still room for emerging producers, such as Thailand, to enter and capture market share. However, given that Chinese consumers are still developing their knowledge and preferences regarding specialty coffee, factors such as perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity play

significant roles in determining the success of foreign specialty coffee brands in China.

Thailand has been gaining recognition as an emerging producer of high-quality specialty coffee. Historically, the Thai coffee industry focused on Robusta production for export and instant coffee manufacturing. However, in recent decades, there has been a notable shift toward Arabica cultivation, particularly in the northern regions such as Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, where high-altitude farms provide optimal growing conditions for specialty coffee (Rerkasem, Tangtham, & Piyaphongkul, 2020).

The specialty coffee movement in Thailand has been supported by government initiatives and non-governmental organizations that promote sustainable agricultural practices, fair trade, and quality improvement programs (Li & Pan, 2020). Thai farmers have adopted modern processing techniques, including washed, honey, and natural processes, to enhance flavor complexity and appeal to specialty coffee consumers. As a result, Thai specialty coffee has gained international recognition, with its unique flavor profiles, including floral and fruity notes, attracting coffee enthusiasts worldwide (Rerkasem et al., 2020).

Thailand's increasing presence in the global specialty coffee market has created opportunities for Thai coffee brands to expand into international markets, including China. However, despite its potential, Thai specialty coffee faces significant challenges in establishing brand recognition and consumer trust among Chinese coffee drinkers, who are more familiar with Western specialty coffee brands.

Given the rapid expansion of China's specialty coffee market, Thailand's specialty coffee industry is well-positioned to benefit from growing consumer demand. However, several factors influence the successful adoption of Thai specialty coffee in China, including perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity.

Perceived quality plays a crucial role in consumer decision-making, especially in markets where consumers are unfamiliar with the origin or brand of a product (Zeithaml, 1988). In the case of Thai specialty coffee, Chinese consumers may lack prior knowledge of Thai coffee-growing regions and processing methods, potentially affecting their perceptions of quality. In contrast, brands with established reputations, such as Blue Bottle and Starbucks Reserve, have successfully positioned themselves as premium coffee providers through marketing, storytelling, and brand equity (Kotler & Keller, 2020).

Brand trust is another key factor influencing consumer behavior. Trust in a brand reduces consumer uncertainty and enhances purchase confidence (Morgan & Hunt, 2020). Since Thai specialty coffee brands are relatively new to the Chinese market, building consumer trust requires strategic efforts, including transparent sourcing practices, third-party certifications (such as Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance), and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Luo & Liu, 2022).

Cultural familiarity also plays a moderating role in consumer acceptance of foreign products (Shin et al., 2022). Chinese consumers who have previously traveled to Thailand or are familiar with

Thai culture may exhibit higher acceptance of Thai specialty coffee. This aligns with previous research indicating that familiarity with a product's cultural background enhances consumer trust and willingness to try new products (Kim & Shin, 2022). However, for consumers with limited exposure to Thai culture, specialty coffee brands must engage in targeted marketing strategies that emphasize the unique attributes of Thai coffee while aligning with local consumer preferences.

While the global specialty coffee industry has been extensively studied, limited research has focused on the role of emerging specialty coffee producers, such as Thailand, in penetrating new markets like China (Wang & Lin, 2023). Most existing studies have explored Western specialty coffee brands' market strategies and consumer behavior in developed economies (Daviron & Ponte, 2018), leaving a gap in understanding how emerging specialty coffee brands can establish themselves in competitive markets.

Moreover, while perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity have been widely studied in consumer behavior literature, their specific application to the specialty coffee industry in a cross-cultural context remains underexplored. Given that Chinese consumers have distinct preferences and purchasing behaviors influenced by both traditional tea culture and modern coffee trends, it is necessary to investigate how these factors interact in the case of Thai specialty coffee.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of perceived quality on Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee. Additionally, it investigates the mediating role of brand trust and the moderating role of cultural familiarity to provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making in this market. The findings will contribute to both academic research and practical strategies for Thai coffee brands looking to expand into China.

The specialty coffee market in China presents significant opportunities for emerging producers like Thailand. However, the successful adoption of Thai specialty coffee depends on key factors such as perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity. Given the growing demand for high-quality coffee in China, it is crucial to explore consumer perceptions and market strategies that can enhance the acceptance of Thai specialty coffee. This study seeks to provide valuable insights into these dynamics, offering practical recommendations for market entry strategies and brand positioning in China's competitive coffee industry.

Research Objective (s)

Objective One:

To evaluate the perceived quality of Thai specialty coffee among Chinese consumers, focusing on its dimensions of flavor, freshness, and sustainability.

Objective Two:

To examine the influence of perceived quality on consumer acceptance of Thai specialty coffee, including willingness to purchase, recommend, and repeatedly consume.

Objective Three:

To analyze the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance, based on the dimensions of reliability, credibility, and reputation.

Objective Four:

To investigate the moderating effect of cultural familiarity on the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance, assessing how familiarity with Thai culture influences this relationship.

Literature Review

As global coffee consumption patterns continue to evolve, specialty coffee has gained significant prominence within the industry. Defined by its high-quality production standards, distinctive flavor profiles, and emphasis on ethical and sustainable sourcing practices, specialty coffee has created a niche market that caters to discerning consumers who seek a superior coffee experience (International Coffee Organization, 2021). Unlike mass-produced coffee, specialty coffee is often associated with direct trade relationships, fair wages for farmers, and environmentally friendly cultivation methods, further increasing its appeal among socially conscious consumers.

While specialty coffee consumption has historically been concentrated in Western markets such as the United States, Canada, and Europe, emerging economies have increasingly contributed to the industry's expansion. China, in particular, has witnessed remarkable growth in specialty coffee consumption, driven by a rising middle class, urbanization, and a growing appreciation for premium coffee experiences (Zhang, Liu, & Sun, 2022). The shift in consumer preferences from instant coffee to high-quality, artisanal brews has fueled the demand for specialty coffee shops, single-origin beans, and innovative brewing methods.

As Chinese consumers become more sophisticated in their coffee choices, it is essential to examine the factors influencing their acceptance of specialty coffee from emerging coffee-producing countries, such as Thailand. Thailand's specialty coffee sector has been growing steadily, with its unique microclimates producing high-quality Arabica beans. However, its recognition in the Chinese market remains limited compared to more established producers like Ethiopia, Colombia, or Brazil. Understanding consumer attitudes, perceived quality, and market positioning strategies will be crucial in determining how Thai specialty coffee can expand its presence and appeal to the rapidly growing Chinese coffee culture.

This literature review critically examines existing studies on four key factors that influence consumer behavior in cross-cultural specialty coffee markets: perceived quality, consumer acceptance, brand trust, and cultural familiarity. These factors play a crucial role in shaping purchasing decisions, particularly in emerging markets like China, where coffee consumption is rapidly evolving from traditional instant coffee to high-quality, specialty brews. By analyzing these dimensions, this review

aims to provide a deeper understanding of how Chinese consumers evaluate and accept specialty coffee from emerging producers such as Thailand.

Perceived quality is a fundamental determinant of consumer preference, as specialty coffee is often judged by its taste, aroma, processing methods, and origin. Consumer acceptance, on the other hand, reflects how willing individuals are to incorporate specialty coffee into their daily consumption habits, influenced by personal preferences, health considerations, and social trends. Brand trust is another critical factor, as consumers tend to be more receptive to products from brands they perceive as reliable, ethical, and transparent in their sourcing and production processes. Finally, cultural familiarity affects consumer openness to foreign coffee origins, as familiarity with a country's food and beverage culture can impact purchasing decisions.

This section examines both theoretical foundations and empirical findings related to these four factors, exploring their interrelationships and how they collectively shape consumer behavior. By synthesizing prior research, this review establishes a comprehensive framework for understanding Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee. The insights gained from this review will provide valuable guidance for coffee producers, marketers, and retailers looking to expand their reach in China's growing specialty coffee market.

Perceived quality is a fundamental concept in consumer behavior research, representing a consumer's subjective evaluation of a product's overall excellence or superiority rather than an objective measurement of its attributes (Zeithaml, 1988). It is a psychological construct shaped by individual expectations, prior experiences, and market perceptions, making it a crucial determinant in purchasing decisions across various industries. Unlike quantifiable indicators such as product specifications or certifications, perceived quality is inherently influenced by external factors such as brand reputation, peer recommendations, and marketing communications (Kotler & Keller, 2020).

In the specialty coffee market, perceived quality is particularly significant, as consumers often rely on sensory experiences, storytelling, and brand positioning to assess the value of a coffee product. Multiple dimensions contribute to this perception, including flavor complexity, freshness, roasting techniques, and brewing methods. Additionally, non-sensory factors such as sustainability practices, direct trade relationships, and ethical sourcing play an essential role in shaping consumer judgments. Research by Zhou, Wang, and Zhao (2021) highlights that modern specialty coffee consumers are increasingly concerned with transparency in supply chains, organic certifications, and fair compensation for farmers, which all contribute to their perceived quality of a brand or product.

As specialty coffee continues to gain popularity in global markets, including China, understanding the drivers of perceived quality is essential for producers and marketers aiming to enhance consumer satisfaction and loyalty. By addressing both sensory and ethical aspects of quality perception, coffee brands can position themselves more effectively to appeal to discerning consumers who prioritize excellence in their purchasing decisions.

Flavor and Aroma: The sensory characteristics of specialty coffee, such as taste, acidity, and aroma, play a critical role in perceived quality (Nguyen & Pham, 2019).

Freshness: Freshly roasted coffee beans retain their flavors and aromas more effectively, influencing consumers' perceptions of quality (Zhang et al., 2022).

Sustainability and Ethical Sourcing: Many specialty coffee consumers consider sustainability certifications (e.g., Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance) as indicators of high quality (Chen & Zhang, 2023).

Extensive research has demonstrated that perceived quality plays a crucial role in shaping consumer acceptance, as it directly influences purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. Consumers tend to evaluate a product's quality based on their expectations, experiences, and the information available to them, which ultimately determines their willingness to adopt and repurchase a product (Morgan & Hunt, 2020). When consumers perceive a product as high quality—whether through taste, packaging, branding, or ethical sourcing—they are more likely to accept it, incorporate it into their consumption habits, and recommend it to others.

In markets where consumers have limited familiarity with a brand or product's origin, perceived quality becomes an even more significant factor in decision-making (Kotler & Keller, 2020). Without prior knowledge or direct experience, consumers rely heavily on external cues such as branding, expert reviews, third-party certifications, and word-of-mouth recommendations to assess whether a product meets their expectations. This is particularly relevant in the case of Thai specialty coffee, as Chinese consumers may not yet have widespread awareness of Thailand's coffee-growing regions, processing techniques, or the unique flavor profiles associated with Thai coffee.

Given the increasing demand for specialty coffee in China, understanding how perceived quality influences consumer acceptance is essential for Thai coffee producers and marketers looking to expand their reach in this competitive market. By effectively communicating quality indicators—such as organic certifications, direct trade practices, and sensory attributes—Thai coffee brands can build trust and encourage trial consumption among Chinese coffee enthusiasts. Additionally, strategic branding efforts, including storytelling and educational marketing, can further enhance consumer perception and facilitate the successful entry of Thai specialty coffee into China's growing coffee culture.

Empirical research consistently supports the idea that higher perceived quality positively influences consumer purchase intention, as individuals are more inclined to buy products they believe offer superior value and satisfaction. When consumers perceive a product to be of high quality, they develop a stronger sense of trust and confidence in the brand, making them more likely to make an initial purchase and continue buying from the same company in the future (Kim & Shin, 2022). This relationship is particularly evident in premium and specialty markets, where consumers place a high emphasis on product excellence and differentiation.

A recent study on the Chinese specialty coffee market further reinforces this notion, showing

that Chinese consumers are more willing to explore new coffee brands when they perceive them to have superior flavor, high-quality ingredients, and exceptional brewing techniques (Zhang et al., 2022). As specialty coffee consumption grows in China, perceived quality plays a central role in influencing consumer decisions, especially for brands entering the market from lesser-known coffee-producing countries such as Thailand.

Beyond purchase intention, perceived quality has also been linked to brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Satisfied consumers who perceive a brand's coffee as high quality are more likely to repurchase from the same company and share their experiences with others, either through personal recommendations or online reviews (Chen & Zhao, 2021). This highlights the long-term impact of perceived quality on market success, as brands that consistently deliver exceptional quality can benefit from stronger customer retention and organic brand advocacy. For Thai specialty coffee producers aiming to expand into China, establishing a strong perception of quality through marketing, education, and product experience will be essential for building consumer trust and fostering long-term market growth.

Consumer acceptance refers to the extent to which individuals recognize, adopt, and express a willingness to purchase and incorporate a product into their consumption habits (Davis, 1989). It is a critical factor in market success, as even high-quality products may struggle to gain traction if consumers are not willing to accept them. In the specialty coffee industry, consumer acceptance is influenced by multiple factors, including brand awareness, perceived quality, cultural familiarity, and social influence (Lee & Park, 2020). Consumers are more likely to try a new coffee brand if they recognize it, perceive it as superior in quality, and feel that it aligns with their cultural preferences or social environment.

As coffee consumption becomes increasingly globalized, researchers have sought to understand the acceptance of foreign specialty coffee brands in different markets. Studies have shown that consumer openness to trying coffee from emerging coffee-producing regions depends on a combination of sensory appeal, ethical sourcing, and effective branding (Shin, Choi, & Kim, 2022). For instance, well-established coffee-growing countries such as Ethiopia and Colombia benefit from strong global reputations, making their specialty coffee more readily accepted in international markets. However, for lesser-known producers like Thailand, consumer acceptance may require greater marketing efforts to build brand recognition and educate potential buyers about the quality and uniqueness of their coffee.

As Chinese coffee culture continues to evolve, consumer acceptance of new specialty coffee origins, such as Thai coffee, will likely depend on how well these brands position themselves in terms of perceived quality, storytelling, and alignment with local preferences. Understanding the drivers of consumer acceptance can provide valuable insights for Thai coffee producers looking to successfully enter the growing Chinese specialty coffee market.

Brand Awareness: Consumers are more likely to accept a coffee brand if it has strong market

recognition and credibility (Morgan & Hunt, 2020).

Cultural Adaptation: Products that align with consumers' taste preferences, brewing habits, and cultural expectations have higher acceptance rates (Kim & Shin, 2022).

Social Influence: Word-of-mouth recommendations, online reviews, and social media discussions significantly impact consumer decisions (Huang & Tan, 2021).

Although China's specialty coffee market is expanding, consumer acceptance of Thai specialty coffee remains relatively unexplored. Most studies on foreign coffee brands in China have focused on well-established Western brands (Daviron & Ponte, 2018), with limited research on how emerging producers, such as Thailand, can enter the market successfully.

Existing research indicates that consumers in emerging markets, such as China, may exhibit hesitation when trying new specialty coffee brands from unfamiliar origins. This reluctance is often due to a lack of awareness, limited exposure, and uncertainty regarding the quality and authenticity of the product (Zhang et al., 2022). Unlike well-established coffee-producing countries such as Colombia, Ethiopia, or Brazil, which have long-standing reputations in the global coffee industry, emerging producers like Thailand may face challenges in gaining immediate consumer trust and recognition.

However, prior studies have demonstrated that strategic marketing efforts, consumer education, and effective product positioning can significantly enhance consumer acceptance of new specialty coffee brands (Chen et al., 2021). By providing detailed information about the origin, processing methods, and unique flavor profiles of Thai specialty coffee, brands can build credibility and encourage trial consumption among Chinese consumers. Educational initiatives such as coffee tastings, workshops, and digital storytelling can also play a vital role in bridging the knowledge gap and fostering appreciation for Thai coffee.

For Thai coffee brands seeking to enter the Chinese market, emphasizing perceived quality and sustainability can further strengthen consumer acceptance. Highlighting attributes such as organic farming practices, fair trade certification, and ethical sourcing can appeal to environmentally conscious consumers who prioritize sustainability in their purchasing decisions. Additionally, addressing cultural familiarity—such as drawing connections between Thai and Chinese tea cultures or leveraging Thai coffee's unique flavor profiles that align with Chinese taste preferences—can help make Thai specialty coffee more appealing and accessible. By combining these strategies, Thai coffee producers can improve market penetration and establish a strong foothold in China's growing specialty coffee industry.

Brand trust is defined as a consumer's confidence in a brand's reliability, integrity, and consistency (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust reduces perceived risk in purchasing decisions, particularly in cross-cultural markets where consumers are unfamiliar with a product or brand (Luo & Liu, 2022). Research indicates that consumers with high brand trust are more likely to exhibit loyalty, repeat purchases, and advocacy behaviors (Kotler & Keller, 2020).

Brand trust is particularly important in the specialty coffee industry, where product authenticity and ethical sourcing play significant roles in consumer perceptions (Chen & Zhang, 2023). Brands that demonstrate transparent supply chains, sustainable practices, and high-quality production standards tend to build stronger consumer trust.

Studies have explored the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance. While some scholars argue that brand trust strengthens consumer loyalty and willingness to purchase (Luo & Liu, 2022), others suggest that perceived quality may outweigh brand trust in certain product categories (Nguyen & Pham, 2019).

In the context of Thai specialty coffee, brand trust may be a key factor in encouraging trial purchases, particularly if Chinese consumers lack familiarity with Thai coffee. However, empirical evidence is needed to determine whether brand trust directly influences consumer acceptance or if perceived quality remains the dominant factor.

Cultural familiarity refers to the extent to which a consumer is knowledgeable about and comfortable with a foreign culture (Shin et al., 2022). It plays a critical role in cross-cultural marketing, influencing brand perceptions, product evaluations, and purchase behaviors (Kim & Shin, 2022). Research has identified several key dimensions of cultural familiarity:

Cultural Knowledge: Awareness of a culture's traditions, cuisine, and lifestyle (Halkias, Davvetas, & Diamantopoulos, 2019).

Cultural Experience: Direct exposure through travel, study, or interaction with products from that culture (López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya, & Warlop, 2021).

Cultural Identification: The extent to which consumers feel connected to a foreign culture (Zhang et al., 2022).

Cultural familiarity has been found to moderate the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance (Kim & Shin, 2022). Chinese consumers who are familiar with Thai cuisine, tourism, and cultural elements may be more willing to accept Thai specialty coffee. Conversely, consumers with low cultural familiarity may be hesitant to try Thai coffee due to a lack of knowledge or perceived cultural distance.

This literature review has highlighted the critical factors influencing consumer acceptance of Thai specialty coffee in China. Perceived quality plays a fundamental role in shaping consumer attitudes, while brand trust and cultural familiarity act as mediating and moderating factors, respectively. While previous research has explored these variables in general consumer behavior studies, their application to Thai specialty coffee in the Chinese market remains limited. This study seeks to address these gaps by empirically investigating how these factors interact to influence consumer acceptance.

Methodology

This study aims to investigate the factors influencing Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee, focusing on perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity. To achieve this, a quantitative research approach was adopted, employing survey-based data collection and structural equation modeling (SEM) for data analysis. This chapter outlines the research design, measurement scales, sampling methods, data collection techniques, and the statistical tools used to analyze the data.

A quantitative research design was chosen as it provides measurable and statistically testable data, allowing for a structured analysis of consumer behavior patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). This study utilizes structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the relationships between perceived quality, consumer acceptance, brand trust, and cultural familiarity. The hypothetical model developed is based on prior research in cross-cultural consumer behavior and specialty coffee markets (Kim & Shin, 2022; Luo & Liu, 2022).

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Perceived quality has a positive impact on Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee.

H2: Perceived quality has a positive impact on Chinese consumers' trust in Thai specialty coffee brands.

H3: Brand trust has a positive impact on Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee.

H4: Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance.

H5: Cultural familiarity moderates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance.

These hypotheses will be tested using survey data and statistical modeling.

The key variables in this study were measured using a Likert 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The measurement items were adapted from validated scales used in previous consumer behavior studies (Kotler & Keller, 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 2020).

Perceived quality is a critical determinant of consumer decision-making, particularly in specialty coffee markets. This study adopts a four-dimensional approach to measuring perceived quality, including flavor, freshness, sustainability, and brand reputation (Zeithaml, 1988; Zhou, Wang, & Zhao, 2021).

Consumer acceptance refers to the extent to which consumers are willing to purchase and recommend a product (Davis, 1989). It is measured through three dimensions: purchase intention, recommendation intention, and repurchase intention (Chen & Zhang, 2023; Zhang, Liu, & Sun, 2022).

Brand trust plays a key role in reducing consumer uncertainty and increasing loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Luo & Liu, 2022). It is measured using three components: brand reliability, integrity, and reputation (Nguyen & Pham, 2019).

Cultural familiarity is defined as the consumer's knowledge and experience with a foreign

culture (Shin, Choi, & Kim, 2022). Higher cultural familiarity has been linked to increased acceptance of foreign products (Kim & Shin, 2022).

The target population for this study consists of Chinese consumers aged 18 and above who have prior experience with specialty coffee. A cluster sampling technique was used to ensure representation across different demographics, including age, income, and city tier classifications (Hair et al., 2021).

The sample was drawn from major Chinese cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu, where specialty coffee culture is well-developed. To ensure a robust sample size for SEM analysis, the study aimed to collect at least 400 responses, following recommendations from Kline (2020).

Both online and offline surveys were employed to maximize response rates. The online survey was distributed via WeChat, Weibo, and Wenjuanxing (a Chinese survey platform), while offline surveys were conducted in cafés, shopping malls, and universities (Nguyen & Pham, 2019).

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, with 395 valid responses received, resulting in a 98.75% response rate.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics, including gender, age, income level, and location (Field, 2018).

To ensure the reliability of the measurement scales, Cronbach's alpha (α) was calculated, with $\alpha > 0.70$ indicating acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2021).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess construct validity, ensuring that measurement items adequately represented the theoretical constructs (Byrne, 2020).

SEM was used to test the hypotheses and examine relationships between perceived quality, brand trust, cultural familiarity, and consumer acceptance (Kline, 2020). This method was chosen due to its ability to analyze complex relationships among multiple variables simultaneously.

Key steps in the SEM analysis included:

Model Fit Assessment – Goodness-of-fit indices such as CFI (Comparative Fit Index), RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), and SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) were used to evaluate model fitness.

Path Analysis – Regression coefficients were analyzed to test hypotheses.

Mediation and Moderation Analysis – The mediating effect of brand trust and moderating effect of cultural familiarity were assessed using bootstrapping techniques (Zhang et al., 2022).

The study adhered to ethical research guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Data was anonymized and used solely for academic purposes.

This chapter outlined the research methodology used to investigate Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee. A quantitative approach using survey data and SEM analysis was employed to examine the roles of perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity. The next

chapter presents the results and findings derived from data analysis.

Results

This chapter presents the results of the study, focusing on the impact of perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity on Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee. The findings are based on quantitative analysis, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM). These statistical techniques were used to test the research hypotheses and determine the relationships between the study variables.

A total of 395 valid responses were collected from the survey, ensuring a representative sample for statistical analysis.

Gender Distribution: The sample was 51.6% male (n=204) and 48.4% female (n=191), indicating a fairly balanced gender representation.

Age Distribution: The majority of respondents were aged 18–25 (57.7%), followed by 26–35 (30.9%), and those aged 36 and above (11.4%). This reflects the dominance of younger consumers in China's specialty coffee market.

Income Levels: The largest income group was 5,000–9,999 RMB/month (24.1%), followed by less than 5,000 RMB/month (23.5%) and 15,000–19,999 RMB/month (26.8%).

Location: Most respondents were from second-tier cities (40.0%) and third-tier cities (41.0%), with only 19.0% residing in first-tier cities.

The demographic distribution indicates that the majority of specialty coffee consumers in China are young, urban professionals with moderate disposable incomes, aligning with previous research on emerging coffee culture in China (Zhang, Liu, & Sun, 2022).

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between perceived quality, brand trust, cultural familiarity, and consumer acceptance.

Perceived Quality and Consumer Acceptance: $r=0.963$, $p<0.01$, $r = 0.963$, $p < 0.01$, $r=0.963$, $p<0.01$, indicating a strong relationship between quality perception and willingness to purchase Thai specialty coffee.

Perceived Quality and Brand Trust: $r=0.952$, $p<0.01$, $r = 0.952$, $p < 0.01$, $r=0.952$, $p<0.01$, suggesting that high-quality perceptions enhance consumer trust.

Consumer Acceptance and Brand Trust: $r=0.923$, $p<0.01$, $r = 0.923$, $p < 0.01$, $r=0.923$, $p<0.01$, highlighting a significant connection between brand reliability and acceptance.

Cultural Familiarity and Consumer Acceptance: $r=0.836$, $p<0.01$, $r = 0.836$, $p < 0.01$, $r=0.836$, $p<0.01$, showing that familiarity with Thai culture positively influences coffee adoption.

These findings suggest that perceived quality is the strongest predictor of consumer acceptance, supporting previous research that quality perception is critical in specialty coffee markets (Kotler & Keller, 2020; Zeithaml, 1988).

To further explore the predictive power of perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Perceived Quality ($\beta=0.857$, $p<0.01$ | $\beta=0.857$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.857$, $p<0.01$) has a strong positive impact on consumer acceptance, confirming H1.

Brand Trust ($\beta=0.061$, $p=0.159$ | $\beta=0.061$, $p = 0.159$, $\beta=0.061$, $p=0.159$) does not significantly affect consumer acceptance, leading to the rejection of H3.

Cultural Familiarity ($\beta=0.196$, $p<0.01$ | $\beta=0.196$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.196$, $p<0.01$) positively influences consumer acceptance, supporting H5.

The R^2 value of 0.928 indicates that 92.8% of the variance in consumer acceptance can be explained by perceived quality, cultural familiarity, and brand trust.

A mediation analysis was performed to test whether brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance.

The direct effect of perceived quality on consumer acceptance ($\beta=0.804$, $p<0.01$ | $\beta=0.804$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.804$, $p<0.01$) remains significant even after controlling for brand trust.

The indirect effect of perceived quality through brand trust ($\beta=0.052$, $p=0.159$ | $\beta=0.052$, $p = 0.159$, $\beta=0.052$, $p=0.159$) is not significant, suggesting that brand trust does not mediate this relationship.

Thus, H4 is rejected, meaning perceived quality directly drives consumer acceptance without requiring brand trust as an intermediary factor.

A moderation analysis was conducted to determine whether cultural familiarity strengthens the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance. The interaction effect was significant ($\beta=0.195$, $p<0.01$ | $\beta=0.195$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.195$, $p<0.01$), confirming H5. This finding indicates that:

Consumers with higher cultural familiarity perceive Thai specialty coffee more favorably.

For consumers with low cultural familiarity, the influence of perceived quality on acceptance is weaker.

This aligns with previous research indicating that cultural familiarity enhances consumer openness to foreign products (Shin, Choi, & Kim, 2022; Kim & Shin, 2022).

Table 1: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Findings
Perceived quality positively influences consumer acceptance.	Supported
Perceived quality positively influences brand trust.	Supported
Brand trust positively influences consumer acceptance.	Not Supported
Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance.	Not Supported

Cultural familiarity moderates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance.

Supported

The results reveal several important insights:

Perceived Quality as the Primary Driver of Consumer Acceptance

The strongest predictor of consumer acceptance is perceived quality ($\beta=0.857$, $p<0.01$, $\beta=0.857$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.857$, $p<0.01$), confirming previous research that quality perception significantly affects purchasing decisions in specialty coffee markets (Zeithaml, 1988; Zhang et al., 2022).

Brand Trust Does Not Directly Influence Consumer Acceptance

Contrary to expectations, brand trust did not significantly impact consumer acceptance ($\beta=0.061$, $p=0.159$, $\beta=0.061$, $p = 0.159$, $\beta=0.061$, $p=0.159$). This suggests that Chinese consumers prioritize coffee quality over brand reputation when evaluating foreign specialty coffee brands (Morgan & Hunt, 2020; Nguyen & Pham, 2019).

Cultural Familiarity Strengthens Consumer Acceptance

The significant moderation effect of cultural familiarity ($\beta=0.195$, $p<0.01$, $\beta = 0.195$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.195$, $p<0.01$) suggests that consumers with more knowledge of Thai culture are more open to Thai specialty coffee, aligning with cross-cultural consumer behavior theories (Shin et al., 2022; Kim & Shin, 2022).

This chapter presented the findings of the study, demonstrating that perceived quality is the dominant factor in consumer acceptance, while brand trust does not play a mediating role. Additionally, cultural familiarity enhances consumer willingness to adopt Thai specialty coffee. These insights provide valuable implications for Thai coffee brands seeking entry into the Chinese market.

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the existing literature. The results demonstrated that perceived quality is the strongest predictor of consumer acceptance of Thai specialty coffee in China, while brand trust does not have a direct effect on consumer acceptance. Additionally, cultural familiarity moderates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance, suggesting that consumers who are more familiar with Thai culture are more likely to accept Thai specialty coffee. The findings provide important theoretical and practical implications for cross-cultural marketing and the specialty coffee industry.

The results confirm that perceived quality has a significant positive effect on consumer acceptance ($\beta=0.857$, $p<0.01$, $\beta = 0.857$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.857$, $p<0.01$). This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of quality perception in consumer decision-making (Zeithaml, 1988; Kotler & Keller, 2020). In specialty coffee markets, consumers evaluate products based on flavor, freshness, and sustainability, which directly impact their willingness to purchase and

recommend a brand (Nguyen & Pham, 2019; Zhou, Wang, & Zhao, 2021).

The finding that perceived quality outweighs brand trust in influencing consumer acceptance suggests that Chinese consumers prioritize tangible product attributes over brand reputation when evaluating foreign specialty coffee brands. This is consistent with previous studies that indicate quality perception is a more immediate driver of purchase intention than brand-related factors in emerging coffee markets (Zhang, Liu, & Sun, 2022).

Contrary to expectations, brand trust did not have a significant direct effect on consumer acceptance ($\beta=0.061$, $p=0.159$ | $\beta = 0.061$, $p = 0.159$, $\beta=0.061$, $p=0.159$). This result contradicts research that has emphasized the role of brand trust in reducing perceived risk and increasing purchase confidence (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Luo & Liu, 2022). One possible explanation is that brand trust is more influential in markets where consumers rely on established brand reputations due to lack of product familiarity. However, in the specialty coffee segment, perceived quality takes precedence over trust in the brand itself, as consumers focus more on the sensory and experiential attributes of the coffee rather than the brand name (Chen & Zhang, 2023).

This finding also suggests that trust-building initiatives alone may not be sufficient to drive consumer acceptance in the Chinese specialty coffee market. Instead, Thai specialty coffee brands should focus on quality improvement and consumer education, as quality perception has a more direct influence on purchase intention.

The study found that cultural familiarity significantly moderates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance ($\beta=0.195$, $p<0.01$ | $\beta = 0.195$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.195$, $p<0.01$). This indicates that consumers who are more familiar with Thai culture are more likely to accept Thai specialty coffee. This finding supports previous research suggesting that cultural familiarity reduces psychological distance and increases willingness to adopt foreign products (Shin, Choi, & Kim, 2022; Kim & Shin, 2022).

For consumers with low cultural familiarity, perceived quality still influences acceptance but to a lesser extent. This suggests that marketing strategies aimed at increasing cultural exposure—such as incorporating Thai cultural elements into branding and storytelling—can help improve consumer acceptance of Thai specialty coffee in China. This aligns with studies emphasizing the role of cultural adaptation in international marketing success (Halkias, Davvetas, & Diamantopoulos, 2019).

Given that perceived quality is the strongest driver of consumer acceptance, Thai specialty coffee brands should prioritize quality enhancement strategies, such as:

Sourcing high-quality beans from premium Thai coffee-growing regions (e.g., Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai). Highlighting sustainable production practices (e.g., organic certifications, direct trade initiatives). Educating consumers about the unique attributes of Thai coffee, such as its floral and fruity flavor profiles.

Since Chinese consumers prioritize flavor, freshness, and sustainability, Thai coffee brands

should emphasize these aspects in marketing materials and product packaging to enhance perceived quality.

As brand trust does not significantly impact consumer acceptance, Thai specialty coffee brands should not over-rely on branding efforts. Instead, they should build trust indirectly through transparency and product authenticity, including:

Providing detailed sourcing and processing information to assure consumers of product credibility. Using third-party certifications (e.g., Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance) to enhance brand credibility. Leveraging consumer reviews and testimonials to build a positive reputation.

Since brand trust may develop over time, Thai brands should initially focus on delivering high-quality experiences to establish credibility among Chinese consumers.

Since cultural familiarity enhances consumer willingness to accept Thai specialty coffee, brands should adopt culturally adaptive marketing strategies, such as: Integrating Thai cultural elements into branding and packaging, such as using Thai motifs or symbols. Collaborating with Chinese influencers and key opinion leaders (KOLs) to introduce Thai specialty coffee in a culturally relevant way. Organizing Thai coffee tasting events and cultural festivals to increase exposure. These strategies can help Thai specialty coffee brands establish a stronger emotional connection with Chinese consumers, ultimately increasing market acceptance.

While this study provides valuable insights into Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee, there are some limitations: Cross-sectional study design – The data was collected at a single point in time, which limits the ability to capture changes in consumer preferences over time. Geographical limitations – The sample was primarily drawn from urban areas, meaning that the findings may not be fully generalizable to consumers in rural regions. Limited focus on pricing factors – This study did not consider price sensitivity, which could be an important determinant of consumer acceptance.

To build on the findings of this study, future research should: Conduct longitudinal studies to analyze how consumer preferences evolve over time, particularly as Thai specialty coffee brands gain more recognition in China. Examine regional differences by studying consumer behavior in both urban and rural areas, as specialty coffee trends may vary based on location. Explore the role of pricing strategies, as price positioning may affect perceived quality and acceptance among Chinese consumers. Investigate the impact of social influence and digital marketing, given the growing importance of e-commerce and influencer-driven marketing in China's coffee industry.

This study contributes to consumer behavior research in cross-cultural specialty coffee markets by demonstrating that perceived quality is the dominant factor influencing Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee. The findings challenge conventional assumptions about brand trust and emphasize the importance of cultural familiarity in shaping consumer preferences.

For Thai specialty coffee brands seeking to enter the Chinese market, the key takeaway is to

focus on quality-driven strategies and cultural adaptation rather than relying solely on brand trust. By enhancing product quality, leveraging cultural familiarity, and strategically positioning Thai specialty coffee in China, brands can successfully tap into the country's growing demand for premium coffee experiences.

Conclusions

This study examined the factors influencing Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee, with a particular focus on perceived quality, brand trust, and cultural familiarity. Using quantitative research methods and structural equation modeling (SEM), the study tested the relationships between these variables to determine their impact on consumer behavior. The findings revealed that perceived quality is the strongest determinant of consumer acceptance, while brand trust does not have a direct impact on consumer acceptance. Additionally, cultural familiarity moderates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance, highlighting the importance of cultural adaptation in cross-border marketing strategies.

This concluding chapter summarizes the key findings, discusses their implications, acknowledges study limitations, and offers recommendations for future research.

The study found that perceived quality significantly influences consumer acceptance of Thai specialty coffee in China ($\beta=0.857, p<0.01$, $\beta=0.857, p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.857, p<0.01$). This confirms the critical role of sensory attributes, freshness, and sustainability in consumer decision-making (Zeithaml, 1988; Kotler & Keller, 2020). Given the growing demand for high-quality, ethically sourced coffee, brands that emphasize flavor, freshness, and sustainability certifications are more likely to attract Chinese specialty coffee consumers (Nguyen & Pham, 2019; Zhang, Liu, & Sun, 2022).

Contrary to expectations, brand trust did not have a significant direct impact on consumer acceptance ($\beta=0.061, p=0.159$, $\beta=0.061, p = 0.159$, $\beta=0.061, p=0.159$). This challenges prior research suggesting that trust reduces perceived risk and enhances purchase confidence (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Luo & Liu, 2022). Instead, the findings indicate that Chinese specialty coffee consumers prioritize the intrinsic quality of coffee over brand reputation. While brand trust remains important for long-term customer loyalty, it does not play a decisive role in initial purchase decisions for foreign specialty coffee brands (Chen & Zhang, 2023).

The study confirmed that cultural familiarity moderates the relationship between perceived quality and consumer acceptance ($\beta=0.195, p<0.01$, $\beta=0.195, p < 0.01$, $\beta=0.195, p<0.01$). This suggests that Chinese consumers with greater familiarity with Thai culture are more receptive to Thai specialty coffee. Previous studies have highlighted how cultural exposure enhances product trust and consumer engagement (Shin, Choi, & Kim, 2022; Kim & Shin, 2022). The findings suggest that brands can improve consumer acceptance by integrating Thai cultural elements into branding, storytelling, and promotional strategies.

This study contributes to the academic literature in three key areas:

Perceived Quality and Consumer Acceptance

The study confirms that perceived quality is the most influential factor in consumer acceptance, extending prior research on quality-driven decision-making in the specialty coffee industry (Zeithaml, 1988; Zhang et al., 2022).

Brand Trust in Emerging Markets

Unlike Western markets where brand trust strongly influences consumer behavior (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), this study suggests that Chinese specialty coffee consumers prioritize quality over brand reputation. This finding adds to existing literature on emerging markets and consumer trust dynamics (Luo & Liu, 2022).

Cultural Familiarity as a Moderator

The moderating effect of cultural familiarity suggests that cross-border brands must adapt to local cultural preferences (Shin et al., 2022). This study contributes to cross-cultural marketing theories by demonstrating how cultural knowledge enhances foreign product acceptance (Kim & Shin, 2022).

Given the findings, Thai specialty coffee brands seeking to enter the Chinese market should adopt the following strategies:

Emphasize Product Quality. Since perceived quality is the most critical factor influencing consumer acceptance, Thai coffee brands should focus on: Sourcing high-quality beans from premium Thai coffee regions. Highlighting freshness and sustainability certifications (e.g., Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance). Providing sensory and quality assurance details on packaging and advertisements.

Build Brand Trust Indirectly Through Transparency. While brand trust does not directly impact consumer acceptance, it remains essential for long-term loyalty. Brands can build trust through: Transparent supply chain information, showcasing ethical sourcing. Consumer reviews and testimonials, increasing credibility. Third-party certifications and collaborations with reputable organizations.

Leverage Cultural Familiarity to Enhance Consumer Engagement. Since cultural familiarity enhances consumer acceptance, Thai specialty coffee brands should: Incorporate Thai cultural elements into branding, such as traditional Thai coffee preparation methods. Use cultural storytelling in marketing campaigns, linking Thai coffee to travel, cuisine, and heritage. Collaborate with Chinese influencers and food bloggers to introduce Thai coffee to local audiences.

Expand Market Education Initiatives. Many Chinese consumers lack awareness of Thai specialty coffee. Thai brands should: Offer tasting events and pop-up stores in major Chinese cities. Educate consumers about Thai coffee production methods and unique flavor profiles. Leverage digital marketing strategies (e.g., social media campaigns on WeChat and Douyin).

While this study provides valuable insights, it has several limitations:

Cross-Sectional Design

The study was conducted at a single point in time, limiting the ability to observe changes in consumer behavior over time. A longitudinal study would provide deeper insights into evolving preferences.

Geographic Scope

The sample focused on urban consumers in major Chinese cities. Future research should explore rural areas and regional differences in specialty coffee consumption.

Price Sensitivity Not Considered

The study did not investigate the role of pricing in consumer acceptance. Future studies should examine how price positioning affects perceived quality and brand trust.

Role of Social Influence

The study focused on individual consumer perceptions. Given the importance of social media and peer recommendations in China, future research should examine the role of social influence and online word-of-mouth in specialty coffee adoption.

To expand on this study's findings, future research should consider the following areas:

Longitudinal Studies on Changing Consumer Preferences

Examining how consumer acceptance of Thai specialty coffee evolves over time.

Exploring Regional Differences

Investigating how geographic and demographic factors influence coffee preferences in China.

The Role of Pricing in Consumer Decision-Making

Analyzing how price perception interacts with perceived quality and brand trust.

Digital Marketing and Social Media Influence

Studying how social media campaigns and influencer marketing impact consumer acceptance of foreign specialty coffee brands.

This study provides important insights into the factors influencing Chinese consumers' acceptance of Thai specialty coffee. The findings highlight that perceived quality is the dominant factor, while brand trust does not directly impact consumer acceptance. Additionally, cultural familiarity enhances consumer willingness to adopt Thai specialty coffee. These insights offer practical recommendations for Thai coffee brands looking to enter the Chinese market, emphasizing the need for quality-focused strategies, cultural adaptation, and market education.

By implementing these strategies, Thai specialty coffee brands can successfully position themselves in China's rapidly growing specialty coffee sector, catering to a new generation of coffee consumers who value quality, sustainability, and unique cultural experiences.

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