

Tipping Practices of Chinese Tourists in U.S. Restaurants: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Tipping behavior and practice vary between cultures and countries. Restaurant tipping is considered as a social norm in the U.S.A. Restaurant patrons, especially foreign tourists, experience social pressure to add a gratuity to the restaurant bill while dining in the U.S.A. Survey was adopted in this study to examine the tipping practices and reasons of tipping of mainland Chinese tourists. Tourists from mainland China who visit America are aware of the tipping practices at local restaurants, although tipping is not a custom when dining in China. Mainland Chinese tourists tip because of the social norms as well as the service/food, but the tipping percentage is far less than the expected fifteen to twenty percent. Service is one of the factors that affect tip size. The total restaurant bill is another tipping predictor. The food and restaurant, menu price, and peer influence affect the tips as well. Practical implications are recommended.

Keywords: Tipping, Chinese tourists, social norm, service, restaurants

1. Introduction

Tipping has been a practice since Roman times, and the rules change as we travel to different locations (Templeton, 1996).

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Most guide books give recommendations on tipping etiquette in different countries and cultures around the world. Tourists may want to fit in by tipping according to local standards (Dewald, 2001).

Restaurant tipping is considered a social norm in the United States (Lynn, 2001), and it makes up over half of many restaurant workers' income (Azar & Tobol, 2008). Customers leave voluntary payments of money (called "tips") to restaurant service providers. Because tips are a voluntary expense that customers are free to avoid, tipping is a unique behavior that many economists consider "irrational" or "mysterious" (Lynn, 2015). Furthermore, tipping behavior and practice vary between cultures and countries (Van Baaren, 2005) as well as different races (Lynn, 2004), and tourists carry these views with them when traveling abroad (Casey, 2001). According to restaurant servers, foreign guests are low tippers (McCall & Lynn, 2009). Fernandez (2004) elaborates on the consequences: "As a result of poor tips, wait staff may begin to give lesser quality service to those individuals and groups whom they perceive as being poor tippers. Poor service discourages guests from returning to the restaurant, which can negatively affect profitability. It is for precisely this reason that tipping behavior by different groups of people needs to be fully understood so that an appropriate remedy can be pursued" (p. 49).

Tipping is not a Chinese custom, but this practice is influenced by American culture (Shrestha, 2010). Rewarding good service without causing anyone to "*lose face*" in Asia can be difficult. The individuals paying the bill may "*lose face*" in front of their fellow guests if they leave no tip, though the Chinese have traditionally been encouraged to save money (Tse, 1996). Dewald (2001) found that mainland Chinese tourists visiting Hong Kong tipped, but at the lowest amount among tourists from different nations. According to Fernandez (2004), social norms such as tipping are behaviors learned from family, friends, and strangers.

Tipping is an important global trend and accounts for approximately \$47 billion a year in the USA food service industry alone (Azar, 2011). However, questions remain: when, why, how much, and do foreign tourists participate? One issue that has not been addressed in the current literature is the tipping practice of tourists from mainland China. Evidence shows that tourists from mainland China bring significant income to different countries such as the United States of America, and in 2014, the United States of America ranked second among their aspirational long-haul destinations.

Two million tourists visited America from China in 2014, for an increase of 21% over 2013. The average Chinese visitor spends between \$6,000 and \$7,200 per trip to the U.S. (Fuller, 2015). According to the U.S. Commercial Service Global Travel and Tourism Team 2014 report "The top three activities for Chinese tourists while in the U.S. are shopping, sightseeing and fine dining, while visits to small towns, national parks and amusement parks also rank highly. Chinese were the sixth biggest international spenders in the United States, racking up US\$8.8 billion in travel related consumption in 2012" (p.21).

This group of Chinese tourists can be well educated about social norms, such as tipping, in the United States; at the same time, American service employees need to understand the practice and/or behavior of such tourist groups. This gap in the literature deserves investigation.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To examine the tipping practices of tourists from China in restaurants in the United States of America.
2. To investigate whether social norms are the reason for tipping from Chinese tourists' perspectives.
3. To examine the factors underlying the tipping practices of Chinese tourists.

2. Literature Review

2.1 History of tipping

The history of tipping is as clouded in mystery as the tacit rules that currently govern it. Some evidence suggests that tipping had its roots in the Roman Empire (Templeton, 1996). An often repeated story is that tipping became common in the coffeehouses, also known as "penny universities," of 16th century England (May, 1980). Another explanation is that horse-bound feudal lords threw "tips" of gold to the unsavory peasants in the streets as payment for safe passage. English etymology would support this theory in its suggestion that the word was originally medieval street talk for "hand it over" (Templeton, 1996).

Although the English term "to tip" is believed to stand for "To Insure Promptness," the French "*pourboire*" and the German "*trinkgeld*" mean money given "for a drink." The idea is the same behind the Russian "*chayeviyе*", literally "for tea" (Danilova, 2003). Hospitality patrons around the world must decide daily how much to tip their server to provide him or her with a drink.

According to Segrave (1998), "Industrial capitalism brought with it an increase in commercial eating and drinking establishments, hotels, and mass transportation, wherein those who received tips –maids, valets, waiters and so forth, were found in large numbers" (p. 5). Although tipping made vast inroads, it has not always been universally approved and has sometimes been met with hostility. One historical example occurred in the United States of America. From 1905 to 1919, a group of more than 100,000 salesmen travelling the US organized the Anti-Tipping Society of America and managed to have tipping abolished in seven states (in Fullen, 2005). This proved short-lived, as these anti-tipping laws were later found to be unconstitutional in 1919.

The act of tipping is a common occurrence in restaurants. Wages are adjusted in all but seven American states for tipped employees. According to the United States Department of Labor (2016) nineteen states have lower hourly wages for tipped employees; a minimum cash payment of US\$2.13 is the same as that required under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act. Twenty-one states require employers to pay tipped employees above federal minimum wage, but lower than the full state minimum wage. Seven states, such as California, require employers to pay tipped employees full state minimum wage before tips, in addition to gratuities. Most restaurant patrons in America do not know the exact tip amount to leave, but most conform and leave a gratuity. According to Segrave (1998), over half a century ago, trade magazines recommended that restaurant servers be tipped fifteen to twenty percent, which stands today.

Crespi was the first university professor who explored tipping and whether it should or should not be eliminated in his 1947 article, "The implications of tipping in America". Crespi (1947) studied the reasons for tipping and found that one third of the respondents tipped as an incentive and reward, and another one third tipped for fear of disapproval. Much research has been performed since then regarding consumer tipping behavior.

2.2 Quality of service, food, and likelihood of return

Research findings show that gratuities can be influenced by service quality, food quality, and likelihood of return (Azar, 2005; 2007; Bodvarsson & Gibson, 1999; Liu, 2008; Lynn, 2003; Mok & Hansen, 1999; Parrett, 2006). In theory, customers reward good service with money: the perceived quality of service received by the guest should be a reasonable prediction of the decision to tip and the amount. According to Azar (2004a), "the main justification for tipping is that it promotes better service by giving the workers an incentive to do their best to satisfy the customer's needs" (p. 761). Therefore, tipping serves as an instrument for restaurant guests to reward service quality. Bodvarsson, Luksetich, and McDermott (2003) found that "service quality significantly affects tip size and when servers expect higher tips, customers rank service higher" (p. 1659). Restaurant guests leave a gratuity based on their impression of the level of service quality. However, because it is an intangible concept, customers have different interpretations of service quality.

Past research shows that many controllable and uncontrollable attributes affect the tip size in restaurants. In the controllable category, some factors seem to be related to service quality, such as servers introducing themselves to guests by name, smiling at guests, and repeating the food order (Lynn, 1996).

Although the contribution of the following encounters to service quality is questionable, they still resulted in increased tips. Casually touching guests not only resulted in better tips but also increased the customer's overall impression of the restaurant. The cultural aspect of touching is important here; the physical act of touch would offend Chinese customers. Squatting at the table by servers resulted in larger tips. Credit-card insignia on tip trays increased tips even when paying cash and writing "Thank You" on checks also resulted in larger tips (in Lynn, 1996).

Some actions are gender-specific. Waitress's tips increased by drawing a happy face on checks but did the opposite for waiters; flowers in a waitress's hair increased her tips, and good-looking waiters made more tips (in Lynn, 1996). Studies relating tipping to cultural values using Hofstede's (1983) Dimensions of Cultural Divergence (Lynn, 1997) found that tipping is more common in countries with higher Power Distance, lower Uncertainty Avoidance, lower Individualism, and higher Masculinity.

What servers think of the customers' tipping behavior has been studied as well (Gatta, 2009; Lin & Namasivayam, 2011; Liu, 2008; McCall & Lynn, 2009). According to a study based on 1,189 surveys completed by United States restaurant servers, foreign customers were deemed to tip the least after teenagers, whereas whites were the biggest tippers (McCall & Lynn, 2009). Similarly, Asians, Hispanics and African Americans were considered poor tippers, according to American restaurant servers and the food and beverage industry (Lynn, 2004; Lynn & Thomas-Haysbert, 2003).

Predictors of restaurant tip size in Hong Kong include the friendliness of the server (Dewald, 2003), and Liu (2008) and Chung and Heung (2007) emphasized the food quality as a significant predictors of the tip size in upscale Chinese Restaurants in Hong Kong.

According to Rose (2013), tipping is viewed as an insult by older Chinese workers but is accepted by youngsters, who have been influenced by social media. Many luxury hotel chains in Hong Kong and China add a ten percent service charge to the total hotel bill.

Researchers have found that restaurant patrons truly believe they use service received as a tipping guideline. However, Lynn's (2001, 2003) research found little correlation between tip size and service quality. A meta-analysis study showed that tip amounts increased with quality of service; "however, the correlation between tips and evaluations of the service or dining experience has a mean of only .11" (Lynn, 2001, p. 18). Additionally, "consumers will leave 5 percent (or less) and tips of 20 percent or more at any level of service" according to Lynn (2001, p. 18).

2.3 Social Norms

In the United States of America, restaurant tipping is a common occurrence. Although many Americans do not know the exact amount to tip, most participate by leaving a gratuity. Restaurant patrons have the unique ability to reward or punish the service provider. There is a pressure to conform to social norms in restaurant tipping in the United States of America (Azar, 2005; 2006; 2007; Boyles, Mounts, & Sowell, 2006; Conlin, Lynn, & O'Donoghue, 2003; Lynn, 2001). The social norm in North America is to leave a gratuity of fifteen percent of the restaurant checks (Azar, 2007; Gatta, 2009; Lynn, 2001; 2007).

However, "etiquette books report that the figure is moving toward 20 percent for excellent service in upscale restaurants, and that in buffet or smorgasbord restaurants it is only 10 percent" (Azar, 2004a, p. 752). Furthermore, "many have suggested informally that tipping and the size of the tip as a percentage of the bill size is a social rule simply to be followed without much thought" (Bodvarsson & Gibson, 1999, p. 139), which results in restaurant guests conforming to social norms by voluntarily leaving additional money.

Not giving a gratuity is a social faux pas, causing the person paying the bill to "lose face" in front of their fellow guest(s) and service provider(s). Videback (2004) speculates that "the most widely supported theory states that people tip simply to avoid the considerable stigma that accompanies 'stiffing' (not leaving a tip) - a kind of selfish economic agent with feelings" (p. 39).

According to Lin and Namasisvayam (2011), "If an individual does not give a tip, he or she will be viewed as demonstrating improper etiquette or seen as being rude due to social norms; thus, restaurant tipping can be considered either as a necessary evil or as a voluntary activity in that customers pay extra in exchange for the services they experience when dining at a restaurant" (p. 925). Azar's (2004b) research on how tipping is evolving states that "when a norm is costly to follow and people do not derive benefits from following it other than avoiding social disapproval, the norm erodes over time" (p. 49). However, this is not true with tipping because gratuities have increased from fifteen to twenty percent over the years, according to both Segrave (1998) and Azar (2004b).

Restaurant patrons, especially foreign tourists, experience social pressure to add a gratuity to the restaurant bill while dining in the United States of America. Tipping etiquette varies across the world, occupations and industries (Azar, 2007). Azar's (2004a) study, which hypothesizes that social norms influence tipping behavior, explains that "when a norm is costly to follow and people do not derive benefits from following it other than social disapproval, the norm erodes over time" (p. 749). Unexpectedly, tipping defies this logic. Videback's (2004) study suggests that "customers may tip in order to experience the positive feelings that come from showing compassion for the low income workers" (p. 39).

Consumers' decisions about whom and how to tip are largely determined by tradition. However, service industry executives and managers need not passively accept the dictates of custom. They can encourage tipping by allowing employees to accept tips, placing tip jars in visible locations, and posting messages such as "Gratuities appreciated" on menus, table tents, checks and/or public signs. Conversely, they can discourage tipping by prohibiting employees from accepting tips, adding automatic service charges to bills, and posting messages such as "Tipping not necessary" on menus, table tents, checks and/or public signs.

In fact, many cruise lines (Engle, 2004), resorts (Evans & Dinesh, 1999), and private clubs (Club Managers Association of America, 1996), as well as some hotels (Richards & Rosato, 1995) and restaurants (Ortega, 1998), have used these or similar practices to actively manage the tipping behavior at their establishments. In 2004, for example, chef/owner Thomas Keller replaced tipping with an automatic 20 percent service charge at Per Se – a highly regarded French restaurant in New York City (Shaw, 2005). The year before that, Holland America Line abandoned its decades-old tipping policy in favor of daily service charges (Engle, 2004). Danny Meyer, the man whose name is synonymous with the Union Square Hospitality Group, is eliminating all tipping at his restaurants and significantly raising prices to make up the difference, a move that will raise wages, save the hospitality industry, and forever change how diners dine (Sutton, 2015). Worldwide studies on tipping have identified many variables that affect restaurant tip size. Bill size seems to be the prominent variable affecting the tip amount left by the customer; according to numerous North American studies, not the quality of the service or food, but the amount of the restaurant checks dictates the amount (Lynn, 2001). According to Lynn (2003), "a recent review of research on tipping found that check size was twice as powerful as all other factors combined in determining the size of tips left by different dining parties" (p. 145). As a consequence, the better salesperson will make more money, which equates the gratuity to a commission for restaurants servers in the United States of America.

3. Methodology

3.1 Instrument

A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from the study sample, and the population of this study was Chinese tourists visiting the United States.

Questions were developed from two sources: Shrestha (2010) and Chandrasekher (2013). The validity of the survey instrument was underpinned by a focus group of five Chinese individuals who evaluated the language of the questionnaire. Modifications of statements and wording changes were made following suggestions from them to ensure that the questions were understandable by the Chinese tourists.

A pilot survey was then conducted and facilitated by the researcher with 15 Chinese individuals, both tourists and U.S. residents, to obtain feedback on the validity and appropriateness of the statements. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire was further amended. The questionnaire had two sections. In Part A, there were 13 questions regarding tipping practices, reasons of tipping, and the rating scales of dining experiences, all of which were adopted from Shrestha (2010) and Chandrasekher (2013). There were 23 statements in Question 13 about tipping that the respondents had to answer. Five-point Likert scale was adopted in the questionnaire. Part B included 7 questions asking about demographic details of the respondents.

3.2 Data collection

The population of this study was the tourists from mainland China visiting restaurants in the United States while the sample was the tourists dining in the restaurants in Los Angeles. A survey facilitator, who was fluent in both English and Mandarin, was employed to conduct the survey in different areas of Los Angeles where Chinese tourists visited and dined in restaurants. He approached the respondents outside the restaurants after identifying them as tourists from mainland China. He identified the participants by asking if they were tourists and if they came from mainland China. He then explained the reason for the survey and, if the respondents agreed to join the survey, conducted the survey by reading the statements in Mandarin. The survey was voluntary.

Three hundred and fourteen tourists were approached, and 211 valid responses were collected. The response rate is 67.20%. Descriptive statistics and factor analysis were adopted in this research for designed questions, and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized.

4. Findings

Three hundred fourteen tourists from China were approached, and 211 successful responses were received, representing a 67.20 percent response rate. Each questionnaire was checked by the researcher, and all data were subsequently inputted manually by the researcher into the SPSS computer program.

4.1 Objective One: To examine the tipping practices of tourists from China in restaurants in U.S.

Respondents rated their overall satisfaction with their dining experience as 3.79. Satisfaction with food (Table 1) was 3.83, whereas satisfaction with service (Table 2) was 3.73.

Table 1: Satisfaction from food

	Mean(1 – extremely poor and 5 – excellent)	Standard Deviation
Taste	3.96	.841
Appearance	3.91	.779
Portion	3.90	.844
Temperature	3.90	.861
Price	3.46	.829

Table 2: Satisfaction from service

	Mean(1 – extremely poor and 5 – excellent)	Standard Deviation
Knowledge of Menu	3.94	.857
Friendliness	3.85	.911
Speed of Service	3.75	.861
Appearance	3.56	.822
Attentiveness	3.56	.915

The Chinese tourists were asked about the total amount of bill (without tip) in their most recent dining experiences and the amount of the tip paid. Among 211 respondents, 93.4% of respondents claimed that they tipped most of the time when dining at restaurants in the United States, and the average tip percentage was 5.30%.

Although there is no tipping tradition in China, Chinese tourists tipped most of the time when dining in the U.S. However, they tipped less than 6% in the restaurants, which was far less than the expected 15% to 20% norm.

4.2 Objective Two: To investigate whether social norms are the reason for tipping from the Chinese tourists' perspectives

The Chinese tourists stated that the reason for tipping was because of social norms on the one hand, but on the other hand, it was also because of the service they received and the food. Social norms as the reason of tipping accounted for 46.4%, whereas 48.4% of the respondents claimed that they tipped because of the quality of service and/or food. However, when they were asked how they would act if the social norm did not exist, only 19% of the respondents mentioned that they were very (and extremely) likely to tip.

Table 3: Social norm as the reason of tipping

	Percentage
Extremely Likely	8.10
Very Likely	10.90
Moderately Likely	22.70
Slightly Likely	32.20
Not at all Likely	26.10

Therefore, the social norm is the main reason why they tipped in the restaurants in the United States. If social norms were not considered, most of the tourists would not leave a gratuity.

4.3 Objective Three: To examine the factors underlying the tipping practice of Chinese tourists

Among the 23 factors influencing the tipping practices of the Chinese tourists (in Table 4), only one factor has a mean below 3.00: 'Where I am seated tends to influence my tip amount' (mean=2.95). This implies that the amount of the tips given by the participants is not affected by where they are seated in restaurants. Meanwhile, service is a key factor in both the decision to tip and the amount (see table 4).

The factor 'A server's attitude influences my tip amount' has the highest mean among all of the factors (mean=4.48). Hence, the participants agree that the server's attitude affects the tip amount. The second most strongly agreed-upon factor is 'Poor service influences my tip amount' (mean=4.38), whereas 'A server's friendliness affects my tip amount' is the third highest factor (mean=4.36). The fourth highest factor is 'The service received influences my tip amount' (mean=4.34), and the fifth highest factor is 'Timeliness of service influences my tip amount' (mean=4.04).

Table 4: Factors influencing tipping practice

		Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	A server's attitude influences my tip amount	4.48	.620
2.	Poor service influences my tip amount	4.38	.703
3.	A server's friendliness affects my tip amount	4.36	.635
4.	The service received influences my tip amount	4.34	.687
5.	Timeliness of service influences my tip amount	4.04	.869
6.	Taste of food influence my tip amount	3.83	.971
7.	If the pricing of the meal is high, I pay high tip amount	3.63	.892
8.	Appearance of food affects my tip amount	3.55	.921
9.	Overall restaurant cleanliness affects my tip amount	3.55	.890
10.	Price of the meal influences my tip amount	3.49	1.011
11.	A server's body language influences my tip amount	3.47	1.057
12.	I feel more obligated to tip when dining with friends and/or family	3.47	1.079
13.	If the pricing of the meal is low, I pay less tip amount	3.44	1.010
14.	I feel regret if I do not leave a tip	3.43	.999
15.	I feel embarrassed when others in my party do not tip	3.43	1.023
16.	Direct eye contact with a server influences my tip amount	3.35	1.047
17.	Temperature of food influence my tip amount	3.34	.929
18.	A server's menu knowledge affects my tip amount	3.31	1.021
19.	Light, music and décor of the restaurant influence my tip amount	3.27	.913
20.	I feel obligated to tip even when the service is bad	3.25	1.068
21.	A server's ability to sell the menu influences my tip amount	3.22	.996
22.	I leave a larger tip when others I have dined with do not tip	3.06	1.056
23.	Where I am seated tends to influence my tip amount	2.95	1.070

In Table 5, four factors identified from the factor analysis are as follows: 1) Service; 2) Price of meal; 3) Peer influence; and 4) Food and restaurant. Factor 2, 'Price of meal', is most agreed upon by the respondents. It implies that apart from the service, the price of the meal is the key factor affecting their tipping practice.

The second important factor is the food itself and the restaurant, whereas the third is peer influence.

Table 5: Factors influencing tipping practice

	Factor Name (Factor Mean)	Eigen- value	% of Variance	Cumulative Variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1	Service (3.34)	4.34	24.12	24.12	.839
Factor 2	Price of meal (4.39)	2.99	16.60	40.72	.758
Factor 3	Peer influence (3.35)	1.97	10.92	51.64	.767
Factor 4	Food & restaurant (3.52)	1.51	8.36	60.00	.786

5. Discussions

Chinese tourists rated their dining experience as “satisfactory” in the restaurants in United States. The satisfaction was from not only the service but also the food. Lynn and Sturman (2010) highlighted the effect of service on tip size, whereas Liu (2008) and Chung and Heung (2007) emphasized the food quality as a significant predictors of the tip size.

Although tipping is not a social norm in the food service industry in China (Dewald, 2003), more than 90% of Chinese tourists would tip according to the social norm in U.S. However, the tipping percentage is arguably low: 5.30%. Both Casey (2001) and Shrestha (2010) explain that foreign tourists tip less than domestic customers because of the tipping norms in their home countries. When asked whether they were aware of the social tipping norm and if the social norm was the reason they left a gratuity, half of the respondents stated that they tipped because of the quality of food and/or service. The remaining half admitted to leaving a gratuity because of this American social norm.

Tipping practices are largely driven by social norms, and such norms can be different across different nations or even sub-cultural groups within nations (Lynn, 2006; Lynn & Williams, 2012). After reaffirming that tipping is a social norm in the food service industry in U.S., the researcher examined whether the Chinese tourists would tip if such social norms did not exist.

Less than 20% of the respondents would tip under these circumstances. This argument supports Azar (2011): social norms play a significant key role in tipping. Service is still the key reason for tipping from the Chinese tourists' viewpoints. Yesiltas, Zorlu, Sop, and Beydilli (2014) confirmed service quality as an important determiner of tipping. In contrast, the price of the meal also influences the tip size. The more expensive the menu items, the higher the tip amount they would leave. This echoed Dewald's (2003) study stating that the tip size and percentage were positively related to the bill size, which is directly related to the price of the menu items.

Furthermore, the quality of food and the ambiance of the restaurants affected the way Chinese Tourists tipped. Last but not least, peer influence is also a factor in tipping practices. For example, respondents feel more obligated to tip when dining with friends and/or family. They feel embarrassed if others in the party do not tip. Not leaving a gratuity may be perceived as improper etiquette or being rude because of social norms. Thus, restaurants patrons experience the social pressure to leave a gratuity (Lin & Namasivayam, 2011).

6. Conclusion and Implications

Tourists from mainland China are aware of the restaurant tipping social norms in America. If the restaurant tipping norm did not exist, tipping would be less likely to occur. However, although the Chinese tourists are aware of the tipping custom, they need to be educated about the expected percentage of restaurant tipping for service and food quality or any other factors. Service is still the key reason Chinese tourists tip. They tip more when they dine in high-end restaurants, where the menu prices are higher. Peer pressure does affect the way they tip because of the fear of "losing face" in Chinese culture (Dewald, 2003). They tip because of their obligation when dining with friends and /or family, or if others in the same party do not tip enough. The first practical implication is for the tourists. Understanding that they do not want to "lose face" in front of their friends and/or relatives because of Chinese culture, it is reasonable to reinforce the concept of tipping further by referencing the meaning of a certain percentage.

For example, 15% is a minimum to show appreciation of service, 18% is to praise for great service and 20% is to reward excellent service. Restaurants should inform guests, especially tourists, if a 15-20% service charge will be added to the bill for larger parties.

Furthermore, from the survey, many respondents were confused about why the tip is based on the total amount after tax, instead of total check before tax. They believe the tip amount is unreasonably higher if tax is considered into the gratuity, as tax is not counted as part of the service. The second practical implication is for the service employees at restaurants in the United States of America. Service employees in the American restaurant industry should better understand the existence of different cultures and tipping practices across the world.

In Asia, tipping is not a common practice, and a 10% service charge is often added to the check in finer hotels and restaurant. Therefore, a guideline for tipping on the check, possibly in Chinese, is recommended to educate Chinese restaurant customers who are visiting the United States of America.

Due to the time and financial limitations, the samples in this study only included tourists in the Los Angeles area. A larger sample size from different areas would generate a more comprehensive comparison. Moreover, casual dining restaurants were the focus of this research, and greater variety in dining venues could be considered in the future to explore whether tipping practices and percentages differ for other restaurant styles. In addition, future research involving in-depth interviews could be conducted to explore the rationale behind the low tipping percentage and misunderstanding and/or confusion about the American tipping system. Last but not the least, sympathy can be considered in the future study because servers are paid with the minimum wage and customers may feel obligated to help them make enough for living. Therefore, apart from the social norm, customers may tip because of sympathy.

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