The Behavior and Perception of Tourists Regarding to Gastronomy Tourism in Xi'an, The People's Republic of China

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Abstract

This research is a quantitative research that aimed to investigate the behavior and perception of tourists regarding gastronomic tourism in Xi'an and to develop suggestions for gastronomy tourism in Xi'an based on the behavior and perception of tourists. 390 questionnaires were utilized for data collection, conducted both online and face-to-face in Xi'an. The research results are as follows:

The study revealed that the majority of respondents were women (51.0%), aged 26-35 (33.6%), with bachelor's degrees (36.9%), earning ¥4001-6000 (51.3%), and employed (48.5%), primarily from Northwest China (42.8%). Most traveled with family (53.3%), used trains to reach Xi'an (64.1%), and relied on public transportation within the city (55.4%). They typically spent ¥2501-3500 on travel (46.4%) and ¥501-1000 on food (44.4%), preferred visiting in spring (50%), stayed for 3-4 days (69.5%), and 51.0% had previously visited Xi'an. Gastronomy tourism was highly popular, with 93.8% intending to engage in it, 81.8% having visited for it, and 18.9% specifically visiting Yongxingfang. Overall satisfaction and consumer behavior were rated as strongly agree, with means of 4.43 and 4.40, respectively. The study suggests enhancing gastronomy tourism through innovative culinary offerings, cultural activities, culinary museums, food festivals, improved transportation, parking, hygiene regulations, and service standards.

Keywords: Behavior, Perception, Gastronomy Tourism, Xi'an, The People's Republic of China

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Introduction

The rapid development of the world economy has significant changes in people's consumption demands. Their lives are confined to basic needs but have evolved to encompass a pursuit of quality and spiritual aspects. The global tourism industry has undergone stages of initial development, mass tourism, maturity, and diversification. Form the 1990s to the present day, tourism has diversified, giving rise to various new forms such as cultural tourism, eco-tourism, leisure tourism, health tourism, culinary tourism, and more (World Tourism Organization, 2008). As one of the six elements of tourism, food plays a pivotal role in the development of the tourism industry. With both material and social attributes, it satisfies the body's needs and serves as a window to understand a destination's unique culinary culture and rich history (Cohen & Avieli, 2004).

Gastronomic tourism is a key factor for many destinations and become one of the fundamental elements in the choice of a tourist destination (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Gastronomy tourism as a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor's experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling (World Tourism Organization, 2023a). China's research on gastronomy tourism is both urgent and necessary for several reasons. It aids in preservation and inheritance of traditional culture, promotes local economic development, meets consumer demands, facilitates cultural exchange, and addresses health and nutrition concerns.

Xi'an, located in northwest China, is steeped in history and culture. With over 7,000 years of civilization, more than 3,100 years of urban development, and over 1,100 years as a capital city, Xi'an stands as a key birthplace of Chinese civilization. It is recognized as a "World Historical City" by UNESCO and is known as the "World Capital of Cuisine" and one of China's thirteen ancient capitals. Xi'an stands out as a prime tourist destination with rich cultural and natural resources (Song, 2003). Designated by UNESCO in, Xi'an is one of the important birthplace of the Chinese civilization and the Chinese nation, and the starting point of the Silk Road (Jiang, 2019). Xi'an received 240 million domestic tourists in 2021 (Xi'an Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2022). In 2022, under the influence of the epidemic, the number of tourists reached 200 million (Xi'an Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2023), and in 2023, Xi'an welcomed 400 million domestic tourists (Liu, 2023). The significant rise in the number of tourists confirms that Xi'an is a popular destination, especially among Chinese tourists. from the huge number of tourists can confirmed that Xi'an is the popular destination among tourists, especially among Chinese tourists. Xi'an has gained recognition as a significant cultural city, particularly renowned for its diverse culinary offerings and gastronomy, contributing to its significance in the realm of cultural enrichment. This has transformed Xi'an into a prominent destination for gastronomy tourism, attracting both international and domestic tourists.

This study adopts a visitor behavior and perception perspective and employs questionnaire surveys to systematically analyze Xi'an's gastronomy tourism. By evaluating the significance of factors influencing gastronomy tourism and exploring of visitor behavior and perception, this study narrows the gap between expectations and perceptions, stimulates tourists' intention to visit, and contributes to the research of gastronomy tourism.

This study employs both theory and data analysis to achieve its objectives, focusing on understanding how tourists in Xi'an perceive and experience the local food, examining whether tourists' food experiences relate to their overall satisfaction with gastronomy tourism in Xi'an, and exploring if different groups of tourists hold varying opinions on gastronomy tourism in the city. The importance of this research lies in its potential to bridge the gap between tourist expectations and actual experiences, thereby enhancing tourist satisfaction and promoting sustainable tourism development. The source of the problem addressed in this research includes a lack of detailed understanding of how different tourist groups perceive and experience gastronomy tourism in Xi'an, and how these perceptions influence their overall satisfaction and future travel intentions. By investigating these aspects, we aim to assist local governments, tourism departments, and food businesses in Xi'an to gain a better understanding of tourist behaviors. This understanding can contribute to the development of gastronomic tourism in the Xi'an area, The People's Republic of China.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the behavior and perception of tourists regarding gastronomic tourism in Xi'an.

2. To develop suggestions for gastronomy tourism in Xi'an based on the behavior and perception of tourists.

Scope of the Study

1. Study area

This research will study in Lian Hu District, Xin Cheng District and Bei Lin District are the core areas of Xi'an. In this study will collecting data from Xin Cheng District, Lian Hu District Bei Lin District in Xi'an, The People's Republic of China.

2.Study population sample

This study collected data from 390 tourists who traveled to Xi'an between December 2022 and April 2024. The data collection will involve a balanced approach, utilizing 50% online surveys and 50% on-site face-to-face questionnaire surveys.

3.Study time

This study will collect data through on-site face-to-face questionnaire surveys and online surveys between February and April 2024.

Literature Review

Gastronomy tourism

In international literature, gastronomy tourism m is often defined through the lenses of resources and experiences. Scholars like Boniface (2017),define gastronomy tourism as an activity that integrates local cuisine, cultural heritage, and lifestyle. Others, like Hall et al. (2004), view it as dedicated visits to the origin or processing sites of local food products, participation in food festivals, and patronizing food streets or restaurants.

Promsivapallop and Kannaovakun (2019) Perception of Gastronomy Tourists should be concerned about 5 elements including:

1. Restaurant Service Emphasizes the significance of high-quality service in gastronomic tourism.

2. Food Taste Highlights the crucial role of taste in shaping tourists' gastronomic experiences.

3. Health and Hygiene Recognizes the importance of maintaining health and hygiene standards in gastronomic tourism.

4. Variety and Table Manner Stresses the value of diverse food options and proper table manners in enhancing tourists' gastronomic enjoyment.

5. Unique Cultural Experience Acknowledges the cultural dimension of gastronomy tourism, proposing that the uniqueness of cultural experiences associated with local cuisine plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' perceptions.

The theory identifies key factors, emphasizing the pivotal role of restaurant service quality, food taste, health, and hygiene standards, variety, and adherence to table manners. Additionally, it underscores the unique cultural experiences woven into gastronomic tourism, highlighting how the fusion of local culture and cuisine significantly contributes to tourists' overall perceptions.

Xi'an Area

Xi'an is also known for its colorful cuisine, here are some highlights of gastronomy tourism in Xi'an: local cuisine, Muslim quarter, dumpling feast, food market, cooking classes, historical background, cultural insights, food festival, farm-to-table experience (Hu, 2023).

In conclusion, the study of gastronomy tourism has evolved into a multifaceted field exploring motivations, classifications, and development strategy. Both international and domestic research contribute valuable insights, forming a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between food and tourism.

Tourist Behavior

Consumer behavior is explained by Blackwell et al. (2012), who identify four key elements Consumer beliefs, Consumer feeling, Consumer attitudes, Consumer intentions

1. Consumer beliefs pertain to the beliefs of consumers regarding gastronomy tourism in Xi'an.

2. Consumer feelings involve the sentiments of consumers about gastronomy tourism in Xi'an, influencing consumer behavior.

3. Consumer attitudes encompass the attitudes of customers toward gastronomy tourism in Xi'an.

4. Consumer intentions involve the intentions of consumers or tourists to travel for gastronomy tourism in Xi'an.

The factors mentioned can influence consumer behavior and contribute to understanding the behavior of gastronomy tourists in Xi'an.

Methodology

Populations

The population of Chinese tourists that visited Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, in 2023 was about 400 million domestic tourists recorded (Liu, 2023). However, the specific number of gastronomy tourists remains unknown.

Samples

The number of gastronomy tourists in Xi'an is unknown. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the unknown population size by Using Cochran's sample size formula, with a confidence level of 95% and an acceptable margin of error of 5%, the required sample size (N) is calculated to be 384.16. Therefore, the sample size for this research is determined to be 385 people (Cochran,1977) this research needs at least 385 tourists as samples, in this research 390 questionnaires was collected.

Data Collection

Through a questionnaire survey, 390 questionnaires were distributed to Chinese tourists who traveled for gastronomy tourism in Xi'an between December 2022 and April 2024. The participants were selected using probability sampling with accidental sampling through the WJX.cn application for 195 questionnaires and on-site face-to-face interactions for 195 questionnaires. Specific questions were designed to examine participants who engaged in gastronomy tourism in Xi'an during the specified period (December 2022 to April 2024), and the collected data were gathered through the completed questionnaires.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was utilized as a research instrument for this research, with quality checked using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) by three tourism experts. The IOC value of this questionnaire is 0.871. After the IOC assessment, the questionnaire was tested with 30 non-sample tourists for reliability

analysis using Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in a coefficient of 0.981. The questionnaire can be divided into 4 parts; (1) Demographic Information. (2) Specific behavior of tourists in Xi'an. (3) Perception of Xi'an Cuisine. (4) Consumer's behavior of gastronomy tourism in Xi'an.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire data is being analyzed using statistical software. The dataset is examined and interpreted based on various statistical measures, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

Results and Discussion

According to the results of the survey data analysis in this paper, the average value of unique cultural experience among the perceived factors of tourists in Xi'an for gastronomy tourism is higher, and the highest value of Xi'an's food culture is rich in stories and legends is 4.61, which is because Xi'an is located in northwest China. With rich ingredients, a variety of special dishes and unique cooking skills, its food culture has a strong local characteristic, a long history and profound cultural heritage, many traditional foods are inextricably linked with famous people or events in history, tasting these foods, tourists can not only satisfy the enjoyment of taste buds, it is also in the experience of historical inheritance and cultural edification, feel the integration and collision of various ethnic food cultures. The study of Kuhn et al. (2023) is to improve the tourist destination through unique food experience, which is consistent with the conclusion of this paper. Therefore, Xi'an should continue to retain, extend and increase local characteristics in the future gastronomy tourism, so as to improve the authenticity perception of Xi'an by food tourists and further improve the overall satisfaction of the experience. As Xi'an is famous for its famous historical sites, Xi'an's unique cuisine can also be used as an aspect to attract tourists, integrating food as a Chinese cultural identity into the local tourism marketing. This view is the same as that of Jerez (2023). In terms of restaurant service factors, the average is low, and the comfortable dining environment of is the lowest value of 3.85. Therefore, Xi'an gourmet tourism should pay attention to the improvement of dining environment and improve service level in the future. Berbel-Pineda et al(2019) studied food experience as a factor of tourism motivation. The data in this paper show that the perception of food tourists affects the overall satisfaction, and the overall satisfaction directly affects the choice of tourism destination. This indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between tourists' experience of gastronomy tourism and overall satisfaction of gastronomy tourism in Xi'an, which is consistent with the study of Berbel-Pineda et al. (2019). In terms of consumers' post-consumption behaviors, the average value of gastronomy tourism experience is the highest at 4.48, indicating that overall satisfaction is high and tourists are more likely to recommend and re-visit. Therefore, gastronomy tourism in Xi'an can be regarded as a form of overall tourism in Xi'an, which is consistent with Kumar (2019) opinion on gastronomy

tourism. Among consumers' post-consumption behaviors, the lowest value is consumers' feelings, among which the lowest value of I am satisfied with the interaction of my food making experience is 3.76. It is suggested to increase cultural experience activities in the future, organize tourists to make food interactive exchanges on site, and display cooking techniques, etc., so as to integrate tourists into the local food space and facilitate the expansion of local food. This result corroborates Park, E., & Widyanta, A. (2022) research to explore emerging gastronomic destinations through interactive, customized and co-produced models.

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of respondents assigned by basic information of respondent.

Basic information of respondent	Frequency	Percentage	Basic information of respondent	Frequency	Percentage
1.Sex			**2.age**		
1. Male	191	49	1. 18-25 years old	102	26.2
2. Female	199	51	2. 26-35 years old	131	33.6
			3. 36-45 years old	71	18.2
			4. 46-55 years old	45	11.5
			5. Over 55 years old	41	10.5
Cumulative	390	100	**Cumulative**	390	100
3.education			**4.income**		
1. Secondary school or lower	117	30	1. ¥2000 or below	25	6.4
2. Junior college	105	26.9	2. ¥2001-4000	120	30.8
3. Undergraduate course	144	36.9	3. ¥4001-6000	200	51.3
4. Postgraduate or above	24	6.2	4. ¥6001-8000	39	10
			5. ¥8001-10000	4	1
			6. More than ¥10000	2	0.5
Cumulative	390	100	**Cumulative**	390	100
5.Occupation			**6.Part of china**		
1. Public official	93	23.8	1. Northeast China	53	13.6
2. Employee	189	48.5	2. North China	63	16.2
3. Agriculture/ Farmer	16	4.1	3. East China	20	5.1

Basic information of respondent	Frequency	Percentage	Basic information of respondent	Frequency	Percentage
4. Student	28	7.2	4. Central China	25	6.4
5. Business Owner	19	4.9	5. South China	41	10.5
6. Retirement	45	11.5	6. Northwest China	167	42.8
7. Other	0	0	7. Southwest China	21	5.4
Cumulative	390	100	Cumulative	390	100

The data analysis of the inquiries of 390 responders has adopted the general data of the responder to distribute the frequency and the Percentage to the data analysis.

In terms of gender, it was determined that most of the survey respondents were 199 women, accounting for 51.0%. In terms of age, the majority of respondents to the questionnaire were aged between 26 and 35, with 131 people, accounting for 33.6%. In terms of education, it can be concluded that 144 respondents have bachelor's degree, accounting for 36.9%. In terms of income, most of the respondents' income ranges from ¥4001-6000, of which 200 people account for 51.3%. In terms of occupation, the occupation of most respondents is employee, with 189 employees, accounting for 48.5%. In terms of part of China, the majority of respondents are from Northwest China with 167 people, accounting for 42.8%.

Table 2 shows the number and percentage of respondents assigned by specific behavior of tourists in Xi'an.

Specific behaviour of tourists in Xi'an	Frequency	Percentage	Specific behaviour of tourists in Xi'an	Frequency	Percentage
1. Who do you always travel with?			2. How do you travel to Xi'an?		
1. With family	208	53.3	1. By plane	139	35.6
2. With friends	103	26.4	2. By train	250	64.1
3. With a tour group	38	9.7	3. By boat	0	0
4. Alone	41	10.5	4. Road trip	1	0.3
5. Other	0	0	5. Other	0	0
Cumulative	390	100	Cumulative	390	100
3. How do you travel in Xi'an?			4. How much you spend for tourism in Xi'an per trip?		
1. Public transportation	216	55.4	1. ¥2500 or below	61	15.6
2. Subway	130	33.3	2. ¥2501-3500	181	46.4
3. Self-driving	39	10	3. ¥3501-4500	110	28.2
4. On foot	5	1.3	4. ¥4501-5500	30	7.7
5. Other	0	0	5. ¥5501-6500	6	1.5
			6. More than ¥6500	2	0.5
Cumulative	390	100	Cumulative	390	100
5. What is the average food cost of a trip to Xi'an per person?			6. When do you like to come to Xi'an?		
1. ¥500 or below	43	11	1. Spring	195	50
2. ¥501-1000	173	44.4	2. Summer	20	5.1
3. ¥1001-1500	141	36.2	3. Autumn	166	42.6

Specific behaviour of tourists in Xi'an	Frequency	Percentage	Specific behaviour of tourists in Xi'an	Frequency	Percentage
4. ¥1501-2000	31	7.9	4. Winter	9	2.3
5. More than ¥2000	2	0.5			
Cumulative	390	100	Cumulative	390	100
7. How many days do you usually stay in Xi'an?			8. How many times have you been to Xi'an?		
1. 1-2 days	76	19.5	1. Once	199	51
2. 3-4 days	271	69.5	2. Twice	128	32.8
3. 5-6 days	37	9.5	3. Three times	49	12.6
4. More than 6 days	6	1.5	4. More than 3 times	14	3.6
Cumulative	390	100	Cumulative	390	100
9. Do you intend to engage in gastronomy tourism in Xi'an?			10. What is the main purpose of your visit to Xi'an?		
1. Yes	336	93.8	1. Gastronomy tourism	319	81.8
2. No	1	0.3	2. Leisure	47	12.1
3. Not sure	23	5.9	3. Meetings	10	2.6
			4. Academic activities	10	2.6
			5. Visit relatives and friends	4	1
			6. Other	0	0
Cumulative	390	100	Cumulative	390	100
11. Which areas in Xi'an have you ever visited?			12. Which areas have you ever visited for gastronomy tourism?		
1. Terracotta Warriors and Horses	337	14.7	1. Hui Min Street	330	18.2

Specific behaviour of tourists in Xi'an	Frequency	Percentage	Specific behaviour of tourists in Xi'an	Frequency	Percentage
2. Shaanxi History Museum	312	13.6	2. Da Pi Yard	331	18.3
3. Big Wild Goose Pagoda	369	16.1	3. Yong Xing Fang	342	18.9
4. Tang Furong Garden	341	14.9	4. Dong Xin Street Night Market	331	18.3
5. Daming Palace National Heritage Park	289	12.6	5. Shun Cheng Lane	242	13.4
6. Xi'an City Wall	309	13.5	6. Da Che Jia Lane	232	12.8
7. Hui Min Street	324	14.1	7. Other	2	0.1
8. Other	7	0.3			
Cumulative	2288*	100	Cumulative	1810*	100

Analysis of data on the behavior of respondents analyzed the arithmetic frequency and the Percentage's standard deviation as the data analysis.

The most respondents travel with their families with frequency of 208 samples for 53.3%. In terms of transportation to get to Xi'an most of the respondents went to Xi'an by train with frequency of 250 samples for 64.1%. In terms of the means of transportation used for tourism in Xi'an most of the samples travel in Xi'an by Public transportation with 216 samples for 55.4%. In terms of travel costs in Xi'an most respondents spent ¥2501-3500 on traveling in Xi'an with the amount frequency of 181 samples accounted for 46.4%. In terms of food cost in Xi'an most respondents spent ¥501-1000 on food in Xi'an with 173 samples for 44.4%. For the season to travel to Xi'an most of the respondents travel in spring with 195 samples for 50%. In Xi'an tourist stay time 271 samples for 69.5% stay in Xi'an for 3-4 days. Most of the respondents have visited Xi'an once with 199 samples for51.0%. In terms of places to visit 369 samples with 16.1% have visited Big Wild Goose Pagoda. In terms of whether in Xi'an gastronomy tourism most of the respondents indicated that they intend to have a food tour in Xi'an for 366 samples with 93.8%. In terms of the purpose of traveling to Xi'an most of the respondents said that they went to Xi'an for gastronomy tourism with 319 respondents accounted for 81.8%. In terms of places to eat 342 samples with 18.9% have been to Yongxingfang for gastronomy tourism.

Table 3 shows the mean and S.D. standard deviation of respondents assigned by tourists' perception of gastronomy tourism in Xi'an.

Tourists' perception	Mean	S.D.	Requirements
1. Service of Restaurant	4.05	0.679	Agree
2. Food Taste	4.26	0.736	Strongly agree
3. Health and Hygiene	4.38	0.629	Strongly agree
4. Variety and Table Manner	4.41	0.602	Strongly agree
5. Unique Cultural Experience	4.59	0.445	Strongly agree
Total mean	4.34	0.557	Strongly agree

The researchers analyzed the data on the responder's responses to the systematic arithmetic mean and S.D. standard deviation of the data is the data analysis.

In terms of tourists' perception, the overall mean is in strongly agree level (mean=4.43, S.D.= 0.557), for tourist's perception can be devised into 5 perceptions. Service of restaurant is in agree level (mean=4.05, S.D.= 0.679).

Table 4 shows the mean and S.D. standard deviation of respondents assigned by consumer's behavior of gastronomy tourism in Xi'an

Consumer's behavior	Mean	S.D.	Requirements
1. Consumer beliefs	4.36	0.670	Strongly agree
2. Consumer feeling	4.26	0.765	Strongly agree
3. Consumer attitudes	4.47	0.685	Strongly agree
4. Consumer intentions	4.38	0.672	Strongly agree
5. Gastronomy Tourism Experience	4.48	0.611	Strongly agree
Total mean	**4.4**	**0.639**	**Strongly agree**

The researchers analyzed the data on the responder's responses to the systematic arithmetic mean and S.D. standard deviation of the data is the data analysis.

In terms of Consumer's behavior the overall mean is in strongly agree level (mean=4.40, S.D.= 0.639), for Consumer's behavior can be de devised into 5 perceptions, the Gastronomy Tourism Experience is in strongly agree level (mean=4.48, S.D.= 0.611).

Conclusions and Suggestion

summary

The study on the Behavior and Perception of Tourists Regarding Gastronomy Tourism in Xi'an, The People's Republic of China, revealed that tourists' satisfaction with Xi'an's gastronomy tourism is currently quite high, and it should strive to sustain its advantages in the future. Internally, Xi'an cuisine, as a distinctive product, enjoys significant recognition and satisfaction among tourists, indicating strong competitiveness in the gastronomy tourism market. Externally, Xi'an, as a tourist city, excels in urban traffic infrastructure, price levels, market management, and other aspects. However, upon comparison, it's evident that there remains a discernible gap in perception importance, leaving room for improvement. Given the overall high satisfaction level, the tourism management department need not overly pursue extensive investments and improvements. Rather, it should focus on maintaining the current level of performance to meet tourists' needs adequately, thereby avoiding unnecessary expenditure of funds, resources, and manpower.

Suggestion

This research can demonstrate that Xi'an has the potential for gastronomy tourism, and its uniqueness can attract both local and international tourists. Therefore, the development of gastronomy tourism in Xi'an could be suggested as follows:

1. Innovate Culinary Offerings: On the basis of maintaining the advantage encourage food establishments to innovate on traditional dishes (Wang,2023), ensuring freshness and longevity of products to continually attract visitors.

2. Cultural Experience Activities: The DIY food-making experience should consist of organized interactive performances and demonstrations of culinary craftsmanship. This will allow visitors to immerse themselves in the culinary characteristics and lifestyle of Xi'an (Xu,2023), thereby enhancing the cultural function of food districts.

3. Establish Culinary Museums: Set up culinary museums (Wang,2023) in food districts to showcase the rich culinary history and culture of Xi'an, inviting visitors to delve deeper into the local culinary heritage.

4. Host Culinary Festivals: In terms of gastronomy tourism experience, Xi'an should host special culinary competitions, festivals, and events (Huang,2020) in food districts to elevate their profile and promote the distinctive food culture of Xi'an.

5. Enhance Transportation Infrastructure: Strengthen cooperation between municipal construction departments and transportation authorities to improve accessibility and convenience by planning subway and bus routes, providing efficient transportation services for visitors.

6. Improve Parking Facilities: Enhance municipal parking planning in popular food districts and tourist areas, devise contingency plans for peak parking demand during holidays, ensuring sufficient parking spaces for visitors.

7. Strengthen Hygiene Regulations: The restaurant service should increase supervision of hygiene standards in restaurants, ensuring compliance with health regulations in kitchen operations to safeguard the health and safety of visitors.

8. Elevate Service Standards: For good service by food suppliers the restaurant should train staff to enhance their professionalism and service quality, fostering a more friendly and patient attitude towards guests, and implementing efficient queue management, creating a more personalized and professional dining environment (Pan,2023).

Acknowledgements

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