AN ANALYSIS OF MARKET ENTRY STRATEGY FOR ZHENGXIN CHICKEN STEAK IN THAILAND USING SWOT FRAMEWORK

DONG ZINING
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AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
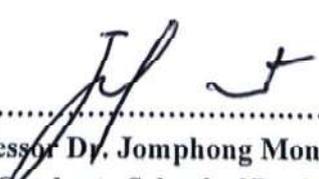**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS**
SIAM UNIVERSITY
2025

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This Independent Study Has Been Approved as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Business Administration

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Title: An Analysis of Market Entry Strategy for Zhengxin Chicken Steak in Thailand Using Swot Framework

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Degree: Master of Business Administration

Major: International Business Management

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.... 9 .... 10 .... 2025 ....

ABSTRACT

In recent years, Chinese food and beverage (F&B) brands have increasingly expanded into Southeast Asian markets, yet many face challenges in achieving cultural fit, operational flexibility, and sustainable competitiveness. Zhengxin Chicken Steak, a popular Chinese fast-food chain, has entered the Thai market with ambitions for international growth. However, the brand's limited recognition, rigid operational model, and unclear positioning raise strategic concerns about the effectiveness of its market entry.

This study aimd to explore how Thai consumers perceive Zhengxin Chicken Steak's brand and products, to identify the company's internal strengths and weaknesses using the Resource-Based View (RBV), and to examine external market opportunities and threats using the SWOT Analysis.

A qualitative case study method was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, including Thai consumers, franchise store staff, and food delivery users. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling in Bangkok and nearby urban areas. The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed around the study's theoretical framework. Thematic content analysis was used to interpret the transcripts, and key findings were organized using SWOT and RBV frameworks.

The findings revealed that Zhengxin had operational strengths such as standardized kitchen procedures, efficient service, and hygienic packaging. However, these strengths were offset by low cultural adaptation, weak brand recognition, and inflexible franchise operations. From an RBV perspective, the company's resources were valuable and partially non-substitutable but lacked rarity and inimitability in the

Thai context. External threats included intense local competition and price sensitivity, while digital delivery channels and the youth market presented growth opportunities.

　　　　This study concludes that while Zhengxin possesses a strong operational foundation, its current strategy does not align well with the Thai consumer market. Strategic success requires stronger adaptation to local consumer expectations and more flexible franchise operations.

Keywords: market entry strategy, SWOT Analysis, resource-based view, franchise management

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor for his invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout my Independent Study. His insightful comments and constructive criticism have significantly improved the quality of my work.

Additionally, I am grateful to Associate Professor Dr. Jomphong Mongkhonvanit, Dean, Graduate School of Business, for his support and encouragement throughout my studies. His dedication to the graduate program and commitment to excellence have inspired me to strive for academic excellence.

Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to all the faculty members and staff of Siam University who have contributed to my growth and development as a student. Their unwavering support and encouragement have been a source of inspiration and motivation to me.
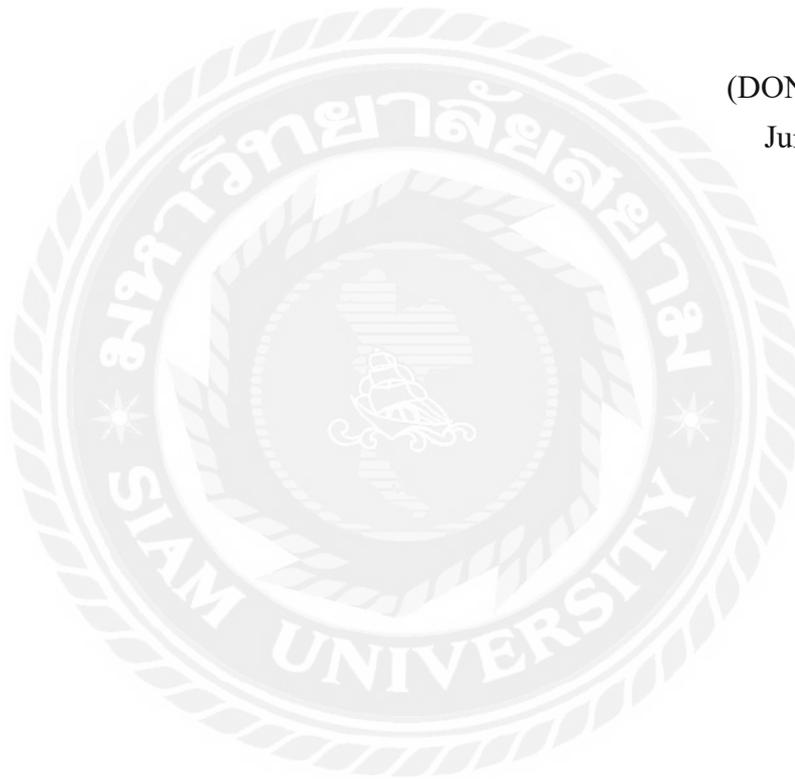
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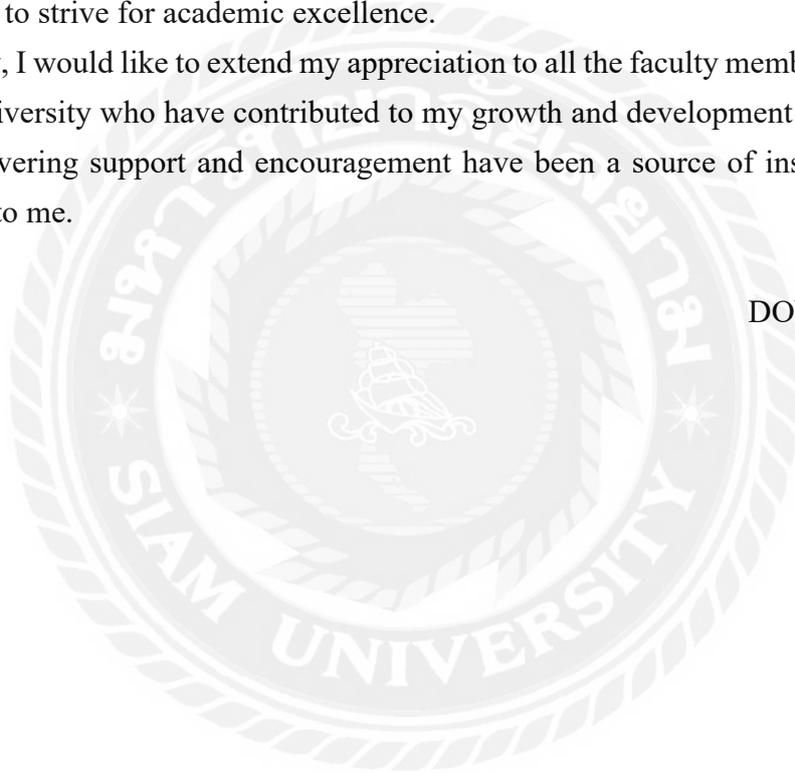
DECLARATION

I, DONG ZINING, hereby declare that this Independent Study entitled "An Analysis of Market Entry Strategy for Zhengxin Chicken Steak in Thailand Using SWOT Framework" is an original work and has never been submitted to any academic institution for a degree.
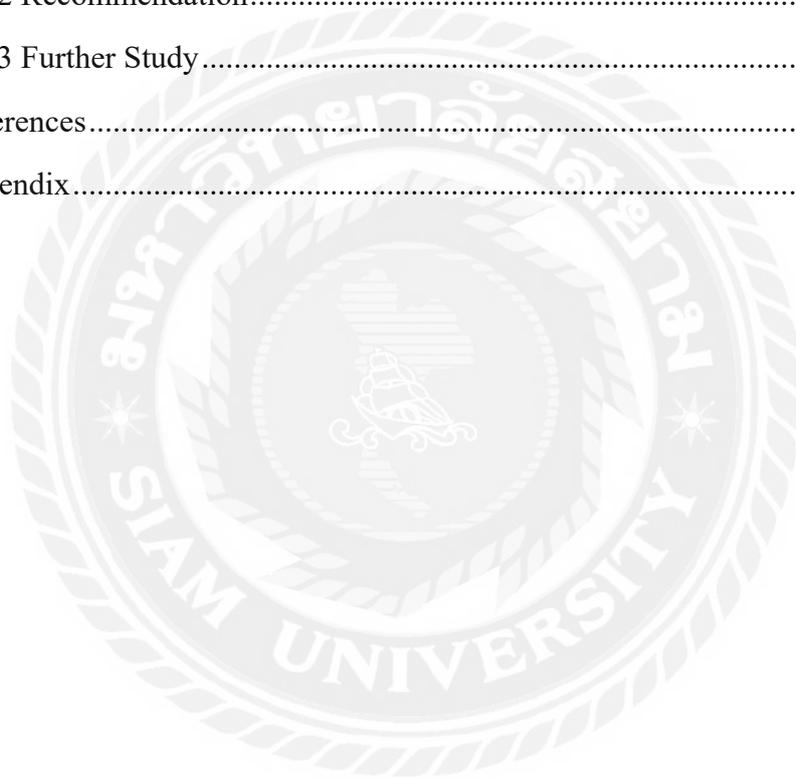
(DONG ZINING)

June 27, 2025

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, Chinese fast-food brands have increasingly sought to expand their presence in international markets, particularly in Southeast Asia, due to cultural proximity, regional trade ties, and growing demand for diversified dining experiences (Li & Wang, 2021). Among these emerging brands, Zhengxin Chicken Steak has gained significant attention for its rapid expansion and standardized franchise model. Known for its deep-fried chicken steak and affordable pricing, Zhengxin has built a strong domestic network in China and is now exploring foreign markets as part of its globalization strategy.

Thailand, as one of the largest economies in ASEAN, offers a dynamic and promising environment for foreign food and beverage (F&B) brands. With a growing young population, a thriving tourism industry, and rising urbanization, the Thai foodservice market is increasingly open to international fast-food brands (Chan & Lertpimolpong, 2019). At the same time, the success of Chinese brands in Thailand hinges not only on product adaptation but also on understanding local consumer behavior, competitive landscape, and distribution channels (Zhang & Chen, 2022).

A key challenge for market entrants like Zhengxin is the formulation of an effective market entry strategy that aligns internal capabilities with external market conditions. While various frameworks exist to guide internationalization decisions, the SWOT Analysis remains a widely used tool to assess internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats (Gürel & Tat, 2017). However, SWOT alone may not provide a sufficient theoretical explanation for sustainable advantage. Therefore, the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm is adopted in this study to interpret how Zhengxin's internal resources—such as brand recognition, operational know-how, and supply chain management—can translate into competitive advantage in the Thai market (Barney, 1991; Wang & Liu, 2020).

In addition, franchising has become a preferred entry mode for many Chinese F&B brands entering Southeast Asia due to its scalability and relatively low risk. However, franchise performance depends heavily on localization, franchisee capability, and operational support (Xie & Huang, 2019). For Zhengxin, understanding these

factors is critical to its success in Thailand, where competition from established Western and regional fast-food brands remains strong.

This study aims to explore the market entry of Zhengxin Chicken Steak into Thailand using a qualitative case study approach. By integrating the SWOT Analysis with the RBV framework and drawing on both secondary data and interviews with local stakeholders, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for Chinese F&B brands aiming to expand into similar emerging markets.

1.2 Questions of the Study

As Zhengxin Chicken Steak attempts to expand into the Thai market, several challenges have emerged that threaten the success of its market entry strategy. Although the brand has seen rapid growth in China due to its low-cost, standardized offerings and strong brand image, its internationalization efforts reveal a lack of localized market understanding, inconsistent franchise performance, and uncertain brand positioning in culturally distinct markets such as Thailand (Liu & Zhao, 2021). Local consumer preferences, regulatory frameworks, and competition from both Western fast-food chains and Thai-style fried chicken vendors present additional complexities. Recent reports show that some Chinese food brands have struggled with adapting their menu and service model to local expectations, resulting in brand dilution or operational inefficiency (Chen, 2020).

Moreover, early feedback from Thai customers and franchise staff indicates mixed perceptions regarding product authenticity, service quality, and store ambiance. These concerns highlight a gap between Zhengxin's internal resources and the external demands of the Thai market. From the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV), this misalignment suggests that while the brand may possess certain competitive resources—such as standardized production systems, cost efficiency, and brand equity—these resources alone may not be sufficient to sustain competitive advantage unless they are adapted to the local context and effectively leveraged through strategic decision-making (Barney, 1991; Zhang & Wang, 2022). Therefore, examining how Zhengxin's internal capabilities interact with external conditions becomes crucial for informing a more responsive and context-sensitive entry strategy.

Given this background, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do local Thai consumers perceive the value and appeal of Zhengxin Chicken Steak's product and brand image?

2. What internal resources and capabilities of Zhengxin can be identified as strengths or weaknesses in the context of its expansion into Thailand?

3. What external factors, including market trends, competition, and customer expectations, pose opportunities or threats to Zhengxin's market entry, and how can these insights inform its strategic decisions?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To explore Thai consumers' perceptions of Zhengxin Chicken Steak's products and brand image.

2. To identify Zhengxin's internal strengths and weaknesses using the Resource-Based View.

3. To analyze external opportunities and threats in the Thai market using the SWOT Analysis.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the market entry strategy of Zhengxin Chicken Steak into the Thai food and beverage industry, with particular emphasis on the analysis of internal capabilities and external market conditions. The research was limited to the context of Thailand and does not seek to generalize findings to other international markets where Zhengxin may be operating or planning to expand. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, the study concentrated on collecting and analyzing data from both secondary sources—such as company reports, industry publications, and news articles—and primary sources, including semi-structured interviews with local Thai consumers, franchise staff, and food delivery users.

The analysis is grounded in the integration of two frameworks: SWOT Analysis is used to classify internal and external factors affecting Zhengxin's market performance, while the Resource-Based View (RBV) serves as the theoretical lens for evaluating the firm's internal strengths and weaknesses in relation to sustainable competitive advantage. The scope does not extend to financial forecasting, supply chain optimization in other regions, or macroeconomic policy impacts beyond Thailand's immediate market environment. Additionally, the interview data reflect the perceptions and experiences of a selected group of participants and may not represent the views of the broader Thai population.

By defining these parameters, the study aims to deliver in-depth, context-specific insights that can inform Zhengxin's strategic decisions and contribute to the broader understanding of Chinese F&B brands' internationalization in Southeast Asia.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds both practical and theoretical significance in the context of international business strategy and the globalization of Chinese food and beverage brands. From a practical perspective, the research offers actionable insights for Zhengxin Chicken Steak and similar Chinese enterprises seeking to enter or expand within the Thai market. By identifying how local consumers perceive the brand, and by analyzing internal capabilities alongside external challenges, the findings can support more informed strategic decisions in areas such as localization, franchise operations, branding, and competitive positioning. The results may also assist franchise partners, consultants, and policymakers in understanding the key drivers and barriers affecting the success of Chinese fast-food brands in Thailand.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the academic discourse by applying and integrating the SWOT framework with the Resource-Based View (RBV) in an international market entry context. While SWOT Analysis is widely used in strategic planning, combining it with RBV provides a deeper understanding of how internal resources translate into sustainable competitive advantages when aligned with external conditions. This integration enriches the existing literature on strategic management and internationalization, particularly in the under-researched area of Chinese F&B brands expanding into Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the qualitative case study approach adopted in this research adds empirical depth to theoretical models by capturing context-specific insights through real stakeholder experiences and perceptions.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Market Entry

In this study, market entry refers to the strategic process through which Zhengxin Chicken Steak attempts to establish its presence in the Thai fast-food market. It includes entry mode (e.g., franchising), brand positioning, localization efforts, and competitive adaptation.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis is an analytical tool used in this study to categorize Zhengxin's internal and external environment into four dimensions: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. It serves as the primary framework for organizing qualitative data collected from interviews and secondary sources.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

Resource-Based View is a theoretical framework used to assess Zhengxin's internal resources and capabilities in terms of their potential to generate sustained competitive advantage. In this study, it is applied to evaluate brand reputation, operational systems, and franchise model in the Thai context.

Franchising

Franchising in this study refers to the business model adopted by Zhengxin Chicken Steak in which local Thai franchisees operate outlets under the Zhengxin brand, following standardized operational procedures, product offerings, and marketing strategies set by the parent company.

Consumer Perception

Consumer perception refers to how Thai customers interpret and evaluate Zhengxin's brand image, product quality, pricing, and overall value. These perceptions are captured through semi-structured interviews and serve as indicators of cultural fit and market acceptance.

Competitive Advantage

In the context of this study, competitive advantage refers to Zhengxin's ability to deliver value in the Thai market more effectively than its competitors, based on its internal resources and market strategy.

External Factors

External factors include conditions in the Thai market that are outside Zhengxin's direct control, such as consumer trends, existing competitors, local regulations, and macroeconomic conditions. These are analyzed to determine opportunities and threats.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews relevant literature to provide a theoretical and conceptual foundation for the study. It is organized around four key themes derived from the research objectives and questions: Market Entry, SWOT Analysis, Resource-Based View, and Franchising. Each section presents existing theories, models, and prior research findings to contextualize Zhengxin Chicken Steak's expansion into the Thai market. The review aims to support the development of the study framework and guide the analysis in subsequent chapters.

2.1 Market Entry

Market entry strategy is a critical component of international business development, especially for companies aiming to expand into culturally and economically diverse regions. The choice of entry strategy affects not only the firm's initial positioning but also its long-term competitiveness and adaptability. According to Zhao and Liu (2019), market entry is not merely a logistical decision, but a strategic process that involves evaluating political, cultural, and consumer landscapes in the host country. For food and beverage (F&B) companies, the challenge often lies in balancing brand consistency with local adaptation.

Chinese enterprises have increasingly turned their attention to Southeast Asia, driven by geographic proximity, the Belt and Road Initiative, and rising demand for Asian cuisine. Wang and Chen (2020) argue that cultural familiarity and growing economic ties have made countries like Thailand attractive destinations for Chinese F&B brands. However, market entry failures are not uncommon, particularly when firms adopt standardized approaches without adequately considering local consumer behavior and operational norms. A study by Li and Zhang (2021) shows that successful Chinese brands in Southeast Asia typically employ a hybrid strategy, combining centralized branding with localized marketing and menu design.

In the context of fast-food expansion, entry strategies may include wholly owned subsidiaries, joint ventures, or franchising. Among these, franchising has become increasingly popular due to its lower capital requirement and faster scalability (Huang & Xu, 2018). However, Yang (2020) emphasizes that franchising alone is not a guarantee of success; firms must provide adequate training, support, and brand control

mechanisms to maintain consistency and protect reputation. In cases where the local partners lack experience or cultural fit, brand image can be quickly eroded.

Foreign scholars have also contributed to the understanding of market entry dynamics. Root (2018) highlighted the importance of selecting an entry mode based on the firm's resources, risk tolerance, and control needs. Similarly, Ghemawat (2020) introduced the concept of "CAGE distance"—cultural, administrative, geographic, and economic factors—that influence market entry decisions. These frameworks have been applied by many Chinese researchers to evaluate the strategic fit between Chinese brands and ASEAN markets.

Recent studies in China have focused on the role of digital platforms in facilitating market entry. According to Zhang and Luo (2022), mobile delivery services and online branding offer alternative paths for entry that bypass traditional retail infrastructure, especially in countries with high smartphone penetration. This is particularly relevant in Thailand, where food delivery platforms have become a dominant distribution channel in urban areas.

The literature suggests that a successful market entry strategy requires a thorough understanding of the host country's environment, alignment of internal resources with external opportunities, and flexibility in business model adaptation. For Zhengxin Chicken Steak, entering the Thai market entails not only choosing the right entry mode but also developing localized strategies that resonate with Thai consumers while maintaining core brand identity.

2.2 SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning tool widely used to evaluate an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. It helps firms gain a comprehensive understanding of their current position and informs strategic decision-making in both domestic and international contexts. Originally developed as a simple matrix model, SWOT has since been adapted into more dynamic and analytical frameworks in recent years (Pan & Li, 2020).

In the context of market entry, SWOT Analysis provides a foundation for assessing the fit between a firm's internal capabilities and the external environment of the host country. Chinese scholars have increasingly adopted this tool to guide

international expansion strategies, particularly for food and beverage enterprises seeking to enter ASEAN markets. According to Zhang and Xu (2019), the application of SWOT allows firms to map critical success factors, mitigate potential risks, and identify areas requiring adaptation. For Zhengxin Chicken Steak, SWOT Analysis serves as a practical framework to examine internal resources—such as brand equity, operational systems, and cost efficiency—alongside external variables consumer preferences, regulatory barriers, and local competition.

While SWOT is often criticized for its simplicity, it remains valuable when combined with other theoretical models. Lin (2018) suggested that SWOT Analysis gains greater explanatory power when integrated with the Resource-Based View (RBV), allowing for a deeper evaluation of how internal strengths can be transformed into sustainable competitive advantages. This combination is particularly useful in analyzing the international performance of brands that rely on standardized offerings, such as Zhengxin, which must adapt while retaining its core identity.

Foreign literature also acknowledges the continued relevance of SWOT Analysis in strategic planning. According to Hill and Westbrook (2019), SWOT remains one of the most used frameworks in management practice due to its flexibility and clarity. However, they caution that its effectiveness depends on the quality of input data and the ability of decision-makers to act upon the insights generated. This highlights the importance of pairing SWOT with qualitative data sources—such as interviews and local market research—which this study incorporates to ensure the reliability of its findings.

Recent studies have applied SWOT in cross-cultural and franchise contexts, emphasizing its role in identifying localization gaps. Chen and Wang (2021) applied SWOT to evaluate Chinese catering brands in Thailand and found that strengths such as operational efficiency were often undermined by weaknesses in cultural communication and brand perception. Similarly, opportunities such as rising demand for Asian street food could be offset by threats from established local brands and price-sensitive consumers.

In this study, SWOT Analysis serves not just as a static categorization tool but as a dynamic method for interpreting both qualitative interview data and secondary sources. This helps generate a nuanced understanding of Zhengxin's strategic position

and provide recommendations grounded in both internal assessment and external realities.

2.3 Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) is a widely accepted theoretical framework in strategic management that emphasizes the role of internal firm resources in achieving and sustaining competitive advantage. Unlike external-environment-focused models, RBV argues that a company's unique bundle of resources and capabilities—if they are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN)—can serve as the foundation for long-term success in competitive markets (Barney, 1991). In the context of international expansion, RBV is particularly useful in assessing whether a firm possesses the necessary internal strengths to succeed in foreign markets.

In recent years, Chinese scholars have increasingly applied RBV to study the internationalization of domestic brands, especially in the food and beverage sector. According to Liu and Zhao (2019), Chinese fast-food chains seeking to enter Southeast Asian markets must first evaluate whether their brand equity, operational efficiency, and supply chain control can translate effectively across cultural and institutional boundaries. These internal resources must be adaptable and transferrable to generate value in a foreign context. Zhengxin Chicken Steak, for example, may benefit from its streamlined production system and established franchise model, but these advantages require alignment with local operational conditions and consumer expectations to remain effective.

Zhang and Chen (2020) argued that for Chinese enterprises expanding abroad, RBV offers a structured way to diagnose internal readiness and resource applicability. They emphasize that resources such as managerial expertise, standardized training systems, and digital ordering platforms are not inherently advantageous unless they can be localized and exploited in a way that creates differentiation in the host market. In Thailand, where food culture and consumption behavior differ significantly from China, Zhengxin's ability to adapt its resource configuration will determine the outcome of its market entry efforts.

Foreign literature supports the view that RBV is a powerful tool for evaluating strategic fit. Grant (2019) noted that companies with a clear understanding of their core competencies are better positioned to exploit international opportunities and defend

against local competition. However, RBV alone is often insufficient unless combined with external market analysis tools such as SWOT, which together provide a holistic perspective of internal capability and environmental opportunity (Newbert, 2020). This integrated approach is particularly relevant for firms operating in dynamic consumer markets like Thailand's F&B sector, where success depends on both internal strength and market responsiveness.

In this study, RBV is used as the primary theoretical lens to evaluate Zhengxin Chicken Steak's internal resources, with a specific focus on determining whether these resources meet the VRIN criteria in the Thai context. This evaluation forms the basis for understanding whether Zhengxin can develop a sustainable competitive advantage in Thailand and how its internal strengths align, or misalign, with external conditions identified through SWOT Analysis.

2.4 Franchising

Franchising has become one of the most favored international expansion models for food and beverage enterprises, especially those aiming to scale quickly while maintaining brand control. It involves a contractual relationship where the franchisor provides brand identity, operational systems, and managerial support, while the franchisee assumes the responsibility for daily operations and market responsiveness. For Chinese fast-food brands like Zhengxin Chicken Steak, franchising offers a relatively low-risk, asset-light pathway to enter foreign markets and tap into local consumer demand (Luo & Qian, 2019).

In the Chinese context, franchising has evolved rapidly over the past two decades, with many domestic brands gaining experience in replicable systems, training, and centralized supply chains. According to He and Zhang (2020), the maturity of China's domestic franchise ecosystem has provided a strategic foundation for brands to internationalize. However, when entering markets like Thailand, franchising requires localization not only in menu and design, but also in franchise partner selection, staff training, and quality assurance mechanisms.

Recent studies have shown that the success of international franchise operations depends on more than just a strong brand or standardized system. Wang and Li (2021) found that local adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and responsiveness to consumer feedback are critical factors influencing franchise performance in Southeast Asia.

Inadequate localization often leads to operational inefficiencies, brand inconsistency, and franchisee dissatisfaction. For Zhengxin, selecting capable local partners who understand both the operational model and local market dynamics will be essential to sustaining performance.

International literature echoes these concerns. Alon and McKee (2018) emphasized that cross-border franchising introduces significant complexity due to institutional, cultural, and infrastructural differences. They argue that franchisees in host countries need more than procedural manuals. They require strategic guidance, marketing support, and flexibility in implementation. Moreover, franchise agreements must balance control and autonomy, allowing adaptation without compromising brand integrity.

In recent years, digital transformation has added a new layer of complexity and opportunity to franchising. According to Liu and Tang (2022), many Chinese F&B franchises now use digital dashboards, centralized ordering systems, and online delivery platforms to maintain control while allowing local flexibility. This is especially relevant in Thailand's urban areas, where food delivery plays a dominant role in consumer behavior. For Zhengxin, integrating digital tools into its franchise management system could enhance consistency, monitor performance, and ensure customer satisfaction across locations.

In this study, franchising is not only viewed as an entry mode but as a dynamic organizational strategy that connects the brand's internal resources with the host market's operational realities. Evaluating how Zhengxin applies its franchise model in Thailand will provide valuable insights into the practical challenges and success factors involved in international franchising.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the integration of two core theoretical approaches: SWOT Analysis and Resource-Based View (RBV). These frameworks complement each other in capturing both the internal and external dimensions of strategic decision-making for Zhengxin Chicken Steak's entry into the Thai market. SWOT Analysis enables the classification of key internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, based on qualitative data gathered from local interviews and secondary sources. The RBV, on the other hand, provides a lens to evaluate whether

Zhengxin's internal resources—brand recognition, operational know-how, and supply chain efficiency—can be considered as sources of sustainable competitive advantage in the Thai context.

The theoretical framework illustrated below serves as the foundation for data collection and interpretation. Internal factors identified through SWOT are interpreted using the VRIN criteria of the RBV to assess whether they offer strategic value. External factors are analyzed to understand the extent to which they support or constrain Zhengxin's market positioning and adaptation strategy. This integrated model allows for a more nuanced exploration of how internal resources interact with external conditions, ultimately informing the formulation of context-specific recommendations for international expansion.

Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This conceptual model aligns with the approaches of Li and Xu (2020), who proposed combining SWOT and RBV in evaluating Chinese brands' competitiveness abroad. Similarly, Chen and Huang (2019) emphasized that while SWOT provides surface-level diagnosis, RBV adds explanatory power regarding why certain strengths matter more in foreign markets. Foreign scholars such as Grant (2019) and Wernerfelt (2021) also noted that the RBV becomes most effective when used alongside environmental scanning tools. In this study, this combined framework enables a structured analysis of how Zhengxin Chicken Steak can leverage its internal capabilities while adapting to external challenges in the Thai market.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design based on a single-case study approach to explore the market entry strategy of Zhengxin Chicken Steak in the context of its expansion into Thailand. The qualitative methodology was selected to enable an in-depth, context-sensitive investigation of strategic behavior, internal capabilities, and market perceptions, which could not be effectively captured through numerical data alone. A case study was considered appropriate as it allowed for a comprehensive examination of a real-life business phenomenon within its actual context, aligning with the objectives of exploring perceptions, internal resource dynamics, and external market factors.

To gather meaningful data, the study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provided both consistency across respondents and the flexibility to explore emerging themes in depth. This method were particularly suitable for capturing nuanced opinions from different stakeholders, including local Thai consumers, franchise staff, and food delivery users familiar with the Zhengxin brand or similar fast-food offerings. The interview guide was designed based on the study's research questions and theoretical framework, particularly focusing on dimensions relevant to SWOT and the Resource-Based View.

In addition to interviews, secondary data were incorporated to strengthen the triangulation of findings and provide a broader understanding of the external environment. These sources included company reports, industry publications, market research documents, news articles, and official websites. The integration of primary and secondary data allowed the study to cross-validate insights and enhance the reliability and richness of the analysis.

The choice of qualitative case study, supported by semi-structured interviews and document analysis, was guided by the exploratory nature of the research. Since the aim was to interpret rather than quantify phenomena—such as consumer perceptions and resource alignment—a flexible and interpretive approach was deemed most

suitable for producing findings that were both contextually grounded and strategically relevant.

3.2 Population and Sample

This study targeted three key stakeholder groups relevant to Zhengxin Chicken Steak's market entry into Thailand: local Thai consumers, franchise store staff, and food delivery users. These groups were selected because they represented direct or indirect participants in the brand's operation and consumption process, and their perceptions and experiences provided valuable insights into both internal capabilities and external challenges faced by the company.

The population of interest consisted of individuals residing in Bangkok and other urban areas where Zhengxin outlets had already opened or were in preparation. Since the objective was to obtain in-depth, context-rich data rather than achieve statistical generalization, a non-probability sampling technique—specifically purposive sampling—was employed. Participants were intentionally selected based on their familiarity with Zhengxin Chicken Steak or their involvement in related consumption or operational contexts. In addition, snowball sampling was also used in some cases to identify additional relevant participants through referrals.

The final sample included 6 Thai consumers who had tried or heard of Zhengxin Chicken Steak, 4 franchise staff members including one store manager, and 5 regular food delivery users who had either ordered from or browsed Zhengxin on delivery platforms. This sample size was considered adequate for thematic saturation in a qualitative study of this scope. Participants were diverse in terms of gender, age, and occupation, allowing the study to capture varied perspectives across different demographic and consumer behavior profiles.

By selecting individuals with direct experiences or informed views about Zhengxin's products, services, or operations, the sample ensured that the collected data were both relevant and reflective of the strategic dimensions addressed in the study. The composition of the sample also supported triangulation of data across different stakeholder types, contributing to the credibility and depth of the qualitative analysis.

3.3 Research Instrument

This study employed a semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument for data collection. The choice of semi-structured interviews was based on the study's qualitative nature and its objective to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations related to Zhengxin Chicken Steak's entry into the Thai market. This format allowed the researcher to maintain a consistent line of inquiry while providing flexibility to probe further into relevant topics emerging during the conversation.

The interview instrument was structured around three core thematic areas derived from the theoretical framework: consumer perception, internal capabilities (as evaluated through the Resource-Based View), and external market factors (as categorized through SWOT Analysis). These thematic areas served as observable constructs representing the variables of interest in this study.

The first variable—consumer perception—was supported by market entry and branding literature and was observable through participants' descriptions of product evaluation, brand familiarity, cultural fit, and value assessment. The second variable—internal capabilities—reflected the core principles of the Resource-Based View (RBV), particularly in assessing resources such as brand reputation, training systems, and supply chain efficiency in terms of their value, rarity, inimitability, and non-substitutability. The third variable—external market factors—captured perceptions related to local competition, consumer expectations, and environmental challenges, aligning with the opportunities and threats elements of SWOT Analysis.

The structure of the interview instrument included three parts: warm-up questions to establish rapport and context, core questions aligned with the research objectives and variables, and open-ended closing questions that invited broader reflections. Each set of questions was slightly adapted to the respondent group—Thai consumers, franchise staff, or delivery app users—while maintaining conceptual consistency across themes.

The responses were recorded through descriptive notes and audio recordings, with the consent of participants. Transcripts were generated for analysis. The responses were not captured through fixed rating scales or checklists, as the nature of the study

required rich, open-ended narratives rather than standardized metrics. Measurement items had been designed to elicit narrative data reflecting the observable dimensions of the constructs; for example, questions such as "How do you perceive the value and quality of Zhengxin Chicken Steak's products?" or "What strengths do you see in the company's operational system?" allowed participants to express views that could later be coded and analyzed thematically.

This instrument design ensured that the collected data were directly linked to the conceptual framework and research questions, while remaining flexible enough to capture unexpected yet relevant insights from real-world stakeholders.

3.4 Reliability and Validity Analysis of the Scale

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study conducted a thorough reliability and validity assessment of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the data collection and coding process, while validity focuses on whether the instrument and interpretation accurately reflect the phenomena being studied.

Reliability was established using a pre-tested interview guide, consistency in interviewer conduct, and a systematic coding process. A pilot interview was conducted with two participants—one Thai consumer and one franchise employee—to refine the phrasing and sequence of questions. Based on the pilot results, minor adjustments were made to improve clarity and contextual relevance. The same interviewer conducted all interviews to minimize variability in delivery. Additionally, intercoder reliability was assessed through a double-coding procedure in which two independent coders analyzed a subset of three transcripts to compare the consistency of theme identification. The level of agreement between the coders reached 87.5%, indicating high coding reliability for thematic analysis.

Table 3.1 Intercoder Reliability Assessment

ranscript No.	Coder A Assigned Codes	Coder B Assigned Codes	Overlapping Codes	Agreement (%)
Transcript 1	12	13	11	84.6%
Transcript 2	15	15	14	93.3%
Transcript 3	14	13	12	85.7%
Average	—	—	—	87.5%

As shown in Table 3.1, the coding consistency across the three transcripts was relatively high, with all agreement percentages above the generally accepted threshold of 80%. This indicated that the coding framework was clear and replicable, supporting the dependability of the data analysis.

Validity was addressed through triangulation, member checking, and saturation. The use of multiple data sources, including Thai consumers, franchise employees, and food delivery users, allowed the study to triangulate findings across different perspectives. Thematic saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged in the final interviews, which confirmed that the sample size was sufficient to capture the range of relevant issues. Furthermore, to enhance credibility, selected participants were contacted after the interviews and provided with summarized interpretations of their responses for confirmation. Out of the 8 participants contacted, 7 agreed that the summarized interpretations accurately reflected their views, and one requested minor clarification, which was incorporated into the final analysis.

Table 3.2 Member Checking Confirmation Feedback (n = 8)

Participant Type	Number Contacted	Confirmed Accuracy	Requested Revisions
Thai Consumers	3	3	0
Franchise Staff	3	2	1
Delivery App Users	2	2	0
Total	8	7	1

The high level of participant confirmation in Table 3.2 demonstrated strong content validity, reinforcing the accuracy of interpretation and representation of respondent views.

The study's instrument and analytic procedures demonstrated strong reliability and validity for qualitative research. The careful design of the interview guide, the systematic coding process, the triangulation of sources, and post-interview verification with participants collectively ensured that the findings were dependable, credible, and aligned with the realities of the market context being studied.

3.5 Data Collection

This study collected data through semi-structured interviews and the review of secondary documents over a period of six weeks, from May 10 to June 20, 2024. The semi-structured interview guide was prepared in both English and Thai to ensure clarity and accessibility for participants. Prior to the official data collection, the interview guide was pilot-tested with two participants to confirm its appropriateness and relevance. Based on feedback, minor adjustments were made to ensure questions were culturally suitable and easy to understand.

Participants were contacted through a combination of in-person recruitment at Zhengxin Chicken Steak outlets in Bangkok and online communication via LINE and Facebook groups. The interview invitations explained the purpose of the study, guaranteed confidentiality, and requested consent for participation. For food delivery users, recruitment was conducted via targeted messages on popular platforms such as GrabFood and Foodpanda user communities.

The interviews were conducted either face-to-face at the restaurant locations or online via Zoom and LINE voice calls, depending on the participant's preference and availability. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Audio recordings were made with the participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. In total, 15 invitations were sent out, and 12 valid interviews were completed, achieving an 80% valid response rate. No participant withdrew from the study once the interview began.

Table 3.3 Interview Schedule Summary

Participant Group	Invitations Sent	Interviews Completed	Valid Responses	Mode of Interview	Date Range
Thai Consumers	6	5	5	In-person & Zoom	May 12 – May 25
Franchise Staff	5	4	4	In-person (on-site)	May 18 – June 5
Food Delivery Users	4	3	3	LINE calls & Online Zoom	June 1 – June 20
Total	15	12	12	—	May 10 – June 20

As shown in Table 3.3, data collection involved participants across three groups to ensure triangulation and richness of perspectives. Five Thai consumers with direct experience of Zhengxin products were interviewed, four franchise staff provided operational and management insights, and three food delivery users shared their experiences with ordering and evaluating Zhengxin Chicken Steak online. This composition ensured that the study captured viewpoints from both the demand and supply sides of the market.

The collected data were stored securely in digital format and labeled using anonymous participant codes (e.g., C1 for consumers, S1 for staff, D1 for delivery users). All data were backed up on encrypted drives, and transcripts were reviewed immediately after each session to ensure completeness and accuracy.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which is one of the most widely used methods in qualitative research for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within textual data. This method was chosen due to its suitability for examining perceptions, experiences, and contextual factors as expressed through open-ended interview responses. Thematic content analysis allowed the study to systematically derive insights from participant narratives and link them directly to the study's conceptual framework—namely, SWOT Analysis and the Resource-Based View (RBV).

The analysis process began with the transcription of all twelve interviews, followed by repeated reading of the transcripts to gain familiarity with the data. After initial familiarization, meaningful units of text were highlighted and coded manually using a hybrid approach that combined deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were developed based on the study's theoretical constructs such as "brand perception," "operational capability," and "market threats," while inductive codes emerged from recurring ideas and expressions in the interview data, such as "confusion about the brand," or "expectation of spicy taste."

Following initial coding, similar codes were grouped into broader themes and sub-themes, aligned with the study's three research questions. For example, themes such as "cultural misalignment," "training gap," and "digital ordering behavior" were been organized under the broader categories of external threats, internal weaknesses, or

consumer perception. A cross-case comparison was then conducted to examine how different participant groups—consumers, staff, and delivery users—converged or diverged in their views.

To enhance the depth of interpretation, the identified themes were mapped onto the SWOT framework for strategic categorization, while internal factors were further interpreted through the VRIN criteria from the RBV model. This dual-framework mapping enabled the study to go beyond surface-level description and assess which internal resources were strategically valuable, and how they interacted with the external market environment.

All coding and analysis were conducted using a structured matrix, and theme frequency and distribution were noted to ensure reliability. Although the emphasis was not on quantifying results, the recurrence of themes across different participants was used as an indicator of relevance and credibility. Throughout the process, reflexive notes were also maintained to record analytical decisions and interpretations, thereby supporting the transparency and trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis.

Thematic content analysis provided a flexible yet rigorous approach to interpreting the rich qualitative data collected in this study. By integrating participant narratives with established strategic frameworks, the analysis process yielded insights that were both empirically grounded and theoretically informed.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

A total of 12 participants were interviewed for this study, representing three key stakeholder groups: local Thai consumers (n = 5), franchise store staff (n = 4), and food delivery platform users (n = 3). Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods and were based in Bangkok and surrounding urban areas. Among the participants, 7 were female and 5 were male. The age range of participants varied from 22 to 47 years old, with the majority being working professionals or university students.

Table 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant Code	Role	Gender	Age	Mode of Interview	Experience with Zhengxin
C1	Thai Consumer	Female	25	Zoom	Ordered once from delivery app
C2	Thai Consumer	Male	31	In-person	Regular customer
C3	Thai Consumer	Female	22	Zoom	Tried during promotion
C4	Thai Consumer	Female	28	In-person	One-time dine-in
C5	Thai Consumer	Male	35	In-person	No direct purchase but aware
S1	Franchise Staff	Female	29	In-person	Cashier, 1 year experience
S2	Franchise Manager	Male	40	In-person	Store operator, 2+ years experience
S3	Franchise Kitchen Staff	Male	26	In-person	Food preparation staff
S4	Franchise Assistant	Female	23	In-person	Trainee, 6 months experience
D1	Delivery App User	Female	34	LINE call	Uses Grab regularly
D2	Delivery App User	Male	30	Zoom	Uses Foodpanda, familiar with brand
D3	Delivery App User	Female	47	LINE call	Ordered once, unsatisfied

A total of twelve participants were interviewed, comprising five Thai consumers, four franchise staff members, and three food delivery users. The demographic distribution reflected a balanced representation across gender, with seven female and five male respondents, as well as a range of ages between 22 and 47 years old. This diversity provided a multidimensional perspective on how different groups perceive and interact with Zhengxin Chicken Steak in Thailand.

The younger participants, particularly university students and early-career professionals in their twenties, tended to be more experimental with food choices and were more likely to engage with brands through digital delivery platforms. Their feedback highlighted packaging appeal and convenience but also stressed the importance of taste customization and promotional pricing. By contrast, participants in their thirties and forties, many of whom were working professionals or family consumers, expressed a stronger concern for value-for-money and consistency in product quality. These differences underscore how age-related consumption patterns influence expectations of a foreign fast-food brand.

From an occupational perspective, franchise staff offered insights from an operational and managerial standpoint, drawing attention to the strengths of standardized procedures but also the rigidity of the franchise model. Their perspectives contrasted with those of consumers, who focused on taste, brand recognition, and cultural alignment. Delivery users provided a distinct lens, emphasizing the importance of digital visibility, ease of ordering, and reliability of service. Together, these three participant groups offered complementary insights, ensuring that both demand-side and supply-side dynamics were captured in the analysis.

The variation in levels of prior familiarity with Zhengxin proved important for assessing brand penetration. Some consumers had never directly purchased but had encountered the brand through advertisements or delivery apps, while others had tried it multiple times. This difference revealed a gap between brand visibility and actual market adoption. Such heterogeneity in demographic characteristics added robustness to the findings by ensuring that the study did not rely on a narrow consumer segment but instead reflected a broader cross-section of the Thai fast-food ecosystem.

4.1.2 Perceptions of Brand Value and Market Fit

The interviews revealed that Zhengxin Chicken Steak's brand presence in Thailand remained ambiguous and inconsistent, with participants expressing both appreciation and criticism. Several consumers described the product as "crispy and filling," indicating that the company had succeeded in maintaining its standardized food quality. One delivery user (D1) emphasized that "the packaging looked professional and clean," which suggests that hygiene and presentation—critical concerns for Thai consumers in the post-COVID era—are a relative strength. However, these positive remarks were frequently counterbalanced by comments that the product lacked distinctive flavor and was "not spicy enough" to align with local taste norms. As another participant (C3) noted, "It feels like something I can find anywhere, but with a higher price," reflecting both flavor dissatisfaction and sensitivity to value-for-money.

Brand recognition also emerged as a central challenge. While a few younger participants had seen Zhengxin on food delivery apps, several admitted uncertainty about whether the chain was a local start-up or a foreign import. This confusion not only weakened brand differentiation but also limited consumers' willingness to try the product repeatedly. For instance, one consumer (C5) remarked, "I only noticed it because of a promotion; otherwise, I wouldn't have recognized the name." Such findings highlight how Zhengxin's entry lacked the cultural storytelling and localized branding that Thai consumers often associate with trust and authenticity, as emphasized by Li and Zhang (2021). Without such symbolic positioning, the company struggles to translate operational visibility into consumer loyalty.

Another theme concerned the mismatch between portion size, price point, and consumer expectations. Younger consumers in their twenties expressed that they were willing to try foreign fast-food brands but only if pricing matched perceived value. In contrast, older participants were more cautious, with one middle-aged delivery user (D3) stating, "It looks neat, but for this price I'd rather buy from a local fried chicken stall that feels more authentic." This indicates that Zhengxin is positioned in a competitive tension between local street vendors who compete on price and authenticity, and global fast-food chains who compete on strong brand equity and international credibility. In SWOT terms, while standardization and packaging quality serve as identifiable strengths, they are overshadowed by weaknesses in cultural adaptation, brand awareness, and pricing strategy. These findings echo earlier studies (Zhang & Chen, 2020; Wang & Liu, 2020) that stress how failure to localize both flavor and

communication strategy often undermines the internationalization efforts of Chinese fast-food brands.

4.1.3 Internal Capabilities and External Market Factors

From the perspective of internal operations, franchise staff highlighted several organizational strengths. Participants S1 and S2 emphasized the efficiency of Zhengxin's kitchen workflow, and the "clear, standardized SOPs" provided from headquarters. Staff training was considered generally sufficient but somewhat rigid. For example, S3 stated that "local adjustments to the menu are not allowed," which limited their ability to respond to customer feedback in real time. This revealed a potential misalignment between operational consistency and local responsiveness.

Using the Resource-Based View (RBV), key internal resources—standardized operations, fast service, and brand support infrastructure—could be categorized as valuable and non-substitutable, but not always rare or inimitable in the Thai market context. As shown in Table 4.2, when mapped against VRIN criteria, Zhengxin's internal strengths lacked competitive exclusivity and required localization to achieve sustainable advantage.

Table 4.2 Internal Capabilities Evaluated by VRIN Criteria

Internal Resource	Valuable	Rare	Inimitable	Non-substitutable	Strategic Implication
Standardized SOPs	Yes	No	No	Yes	Needs localization flexibility
Fast food preparation	Yes	No	No	No	Common in market, not a unique advantage
Packaging and branding	Yes	No	No	No	Not distinctive enough to attract loyalty
Franchise training system	Yes	No	No	Yes	Needs adaptation to Thai service culture

Externally, participants consistently highlighted the highly competitive nature of the Thai fried chicken market. Consumers reported that well-established local brands

offered flavors better aligned with Thai culinary expectations. As one respondent (C2) remarked, "People here like something spicy or with dipping sauces—Zhengxin tastes a bit plain compared to Thai stalls." Such feedback underscores that flavor authenticity and local adaptation are key differentiators in this segment. In line with Chen and Wang (2021), who emphasized that localization in taste and pricing strongly influences foreign F&B acceptance in Thailand, Zhengxin's lack of customization emerges as a significant strategic weakness when compared to culturally embedded competitors.

Price sensitivity also emerged as a recurrent theme across interviews. Younger delivery users expressed that promotions and bundle deals often determined their choices, with D1 stating, "I usually pick the shop that gives free delivery or bigger portions for the same price." Older respondents, however, linked value-for-money more closely with trust and familiarity, suggesting that Zhengxin not only competes on price but also against the perceived authenticity of local street food. This resonates with Zhang and Xu (2019), who observed that Chinese chains often face a dual challenge in ASEAN markets: they are priced above local vendors but lack the prestige of global fast-food giants like KFC or McDonald's.

At the same time, several participants acknowledged new opportunities emerging from structural shifts in consumer behavior. The growing prevalence of food delivery platforms after COVID-19 has expanded digital visibility for new entrants. As D3 explained, "I first noticed Zhengxin on Grab, not in a shopping mall," indicating that online platforms serve as gateways for brand discovery. Literature also supports this finding: Liu and Tang (2022) argued that Chinese F&B firms leveraging digital ecosystems gain faster market penetration in Southeast Asia. However, visibility alone is insufficient; as delivery users noted, competitors often design more appealing promotions, combo sets, or "Thai-style twists," leaving Zhengxin at a disadvantage in digital competition.

In SWOT terms, these conditions represent a serious external threat in terms of differentiation, given strong brand loyalty to local options and intense price competition. Yet, they simultaneously provide an opportunity if Zhengxin can innovate through localized menus and digitally driven engagement strategies. Thus, the external environment highlights the necessity for Zhengxin to reconfigure its brand positioning not simply as a standardized Chinese fast-food chain, but as a hybrid offering that can resonate with the cultural tastes and digital consumption patterns of Thai consumers.

By synthesizing these findings within the SWOT framework, Table 4.3 summarizes the major insights derived from the interview data.

Table 4.3 SWOT Summary Based on Thematic Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Efficient kitchen SOPs	Low cultural fit in menu/flavor
Attractive packaging and hygiene	Limited brand recognition in Thai market
Quick food preparation	Lack of flexibility in local operations
Opportunities	**Threats**
Expansion via food delivery platforms	Strong competition from localized fast food
Rising interest in Asian fusion foods	Price sensitivity among Thai consumers
Youth market open to new brands	Consumer loyalty to familiar local options

The thematic analysis revealed that Zhengxin Chicken Steak's internal strengths primarily revolve around its standardized kitchen operations, hygienic packaging, and speed of food preparation. These elements create operational reliability and appeal to consumers who value efficiency and cleanliness, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Several interviewees noted that "the food looks neat and comes quickly," indicating that Zhengxin's SOPs function effectively in delivering consistent service. From the Resource-Based View (RBV), these strengths are valuable in maintaining a baseline of service quality; however, because such capabilities are common among established fast-food chains, they are not rare or inimitable within the Thai market. This explains why operational competence, while necessary, has not translated into strong brand competitiveness.

The weaknesses identified through the interviews emphasize the brand's struggles with cultural adaptation and market recognition. Participants frequently highlighted the lack of spice and local flavors, with one respondent commenting, "It doesn't taste Thai enough, so I would not choose it over local stalls." This points to a cultural gap that undermines consumer resonance. Furthermore, the limited visibility of Zhengxin's brand in Thailand reduces its differentiation. Delivery users in particular noted that they often mistook Zhengxin for a local start-up rather than a Chinese chain, which indicates that its branding strategies have not effectively communicated its identity. These weaknesses are closely tied to the RBV assessment: while Zhengxin's

internal resources are structured and standardized, they are not sufficiently adapted to the host environment, thereby limiting their effectiveness as strategic assets.

In terms of external opportunities, the findings suggest that digital delivery platforms represent a crucial growth channel. Many participants reported that their first encounter with Zhengxin occurred via Grab or Foodpanda, showing how online ecosystems are becoming primary discovery mechanisms for new food brands. Younger consumers also expressed openness to trying unfamiliar or foreign chains, provided that products are affordable and culturally appealing. In addition, the increasing popularity of Asian fusion cuisine creates a space for Zhengxin to experiment with menu adaptation. These opportunities highlight that, although the current market entry strategy is underperforming, avenues for repositioning and innovation remain accessible.

The external threats are, however, substantial. Thailand's fast-food sector is highly competitive, with both international giants and local vendors commanding strong consumer loyalty. Local brands maintain an advantage by embedding Thai flavors and cultural familiarity into their offerings, while global players leverage powerful brand equity and promotional budgets. Consumers also demonstrated acute price sensitivity, with several participants stating they would choose local stalls for cheaper portions. This dual pressure on both taste and pricing creates significant barriers for Zhengxin to establish itself without meaningful adaptation. As one consumer succinctly put it, "If I want fried chicken, I already have my favorite local shop; why should I pay more for something less tasty?"

The SWOT findings confirm that Zhengxin's internal resources provide a stable operational base but lack the uniqueness or cultural embeddedness needed for competitive advantage in Thailand. The opportunities identified, particularly in digital platforms and youth markets, can only be captured if weaknesses in localization and branding are addressed. Conversely, the threats posed by strong competitors and cultural preferences will continue to limit Zhengxin's growth if its strategy remains rigid. Thus, the combined SWOT-RBV analysis demonstrates that sustainable success in Thailand requires not merely operational efficiency but a fundamental alignment of internal resources with the external cultural and competitive environment.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Consumer Perception and Cultural Fit

The findings of this study revealed that while Zhengxin Chicken Steak had established a baseline presence in the Thai fast-food market, its brand identity and product appeal remained unclear to many consumers. This aligns with Zhang and Chen (2020), who noted that Chinese F&B brands often face cultural adaptation challenges in Southeast Asia due to differences in taste preferences, eating habits, and brand expectations. In particular, the lack of spiciness and limited menu customization in Zhengxin's offerings were perceived as a misalignment with Thai consumer preferences, which tend to favor bold flavors and value-oriented combinations.

From a strategic standpoint, these findings indicate that cultural fit is not merely a peripheral concern but a core element of perceived value and competitive positioning. Although Zhengxin had introduced standardized processes and maintained hygienic food preparation—attributes that are generally appreciated—it had not yet achieved emotional or cultural resonance with Thai consumers. This echoes the findings of Li and Xu (2020), who argued that market entry success for Chinese fast-food brands depends largely on localizing taste, presentation, and brand communication while preserving core operational strengths.

In SWOT terms, while operational strengths such as fast preparation and clean packaging are evident, they are insufficient to offset the weaknesses in localization and the threat posed by highly competitive local alternatives. Thus, achieving cultural embeddedness should be prioritized in Zhengxin's future strategic adaptation, especially if it aims to increase customer loyalty and brand equity in the Thai market.

4.2.2 Internal Capabilities, RBV, and Strategic Adaptability

Applying the Resource-Based View (RBV) framework to Zhengxin's internal capabilities allowed the study to assess whether the company's resources could be converted into sustained competitive advantage. While some core assets including standardized SOPs and franchise training systems were found to be valuable and non-substitutable, they did not meet the criteria of rarity or inimitability within the Thai market context. This finding supports the argument by Grant (2019) that in international expansion, resource value is not absolute but contingent on the local environment.

Moreover, the study observed that although Zhengxin had a relatively mature franchise system in China, its application in Thailand remained inflexible. The inability of local franchise staff to make small menu or service adjustments in response to customer feedback reflected a weakness in operational adaptability. This rigidity constrained the local partners' ability to engage effectively with the host market, undermining the potential competitive advantage of franchising. Similar conclusions were reached by Liu and Zhao (2019), who emphasized the importance of adaptive franchising models in cross-border F&B expansion.

The mismatch between the company's internal structure and the expectations of the local environment underscores the strategic need to recalibrate resource deployment. In RBV terms, resources must not only be internally efficient but externally exploitable. In Zhengxin's case, the current resource configuration provides a foundation for operational control but limits responsiveness—particularly in a market like Thailand, where consumer tastes are dynamic and highly localized.

Finally, the SWOT Analysis illuminated clear external opportunities—especially in the growing delivery platform market and among younger consumers open to experimenting with new Asian brands. However, these opportunities can only be captured if internal systems allow for agile adaptation. This aligns with Barney's (1991) assertion that sustainable advantage arises when resources are not only VRIN but also strategically mobilized in changing environments.

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that Zhengxin Chicken Steak's entry into Thailand is challenged not by a lack of internal resources, but by the strategic misalignment between its resource configuration and external demands. To bridge this gap, the company must enhance its localization strategies, empower local franchisees with greater flexibility, and reposition its brand to align with the cultural logic of the Thai fast-food consumer.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the strategic dynamics of Zhengxin Chicken Steak's entry into the Thai market, with particular focus on how the company's internal resources and external conditions influence its ability to compete and grow in a culturally distinct environment. The core problem addressed in this research was the observable gap between Zhengxin's standardized operational model—developed in the Chinese domestic context—and the localized expectations of Thai consumers and market conditions. This gap manifested in low brand recognition, inconsistent customer engagement, and operational inflexibility, raising questions about the sustainability of the company's current market entry strategy.

To investigate this issue, the study adopted a qualitative research design based on a single-case study approach. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Thai consumers, franchise staff, and food delivery users, while secondary data were gathered from company reports, market publications, and related literature. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, guided by the SWOT framework and the Resource-Based View (RBV). This dual-framework approach allowed the study to assess Zhengxin's internal capabilities in relation to market opportunities and threats, while also evaluating whether its resources met the criteria for sustainable competitive advantage.

The key findings of the study revealed that Zhengxin possessed certain operational strengths, including standardized food preparation procedures, efficient kitchen workflows, and consistent product hygiene. However, these strengths were not sufficient to overcome the brand's limited cultural adaptation and low visibility in the Thai market. Consumers generally perceived the food as average and lacking distinctive Thai elements, while franchise staff expressed constraints in adapting to local customer preferences due to rigid centralized policies. From an RBV perspective, Zhengxin's internal resources were found to be valuable but neither rare nor difficult to imitate in the local context, limiting their potential to create long-term advantage.

In response to the first research question, the study found that Thai consumers mixed perceptions of Zhengxin's value and appeal, primarily due to weak cultural alignment and insufficient brand differentiation. Regarding the second question, the

internal capabilities of Zhengxin, while operationally sound, did not translate effectively into competitive advantages without localized flexibility. For the third question, several external threats were identified, including strong local competition and price sensitivity, although new opportunities were also evident in digital food delivery and evolving youth preferences.

The study concluded that Zhengxin's market entry strategy requires a strategic shift toward greater localization, both in customer-facing offerings and in franchise-level autonomy. While the company has a stable internal foundation, its future success in Thailand will depend on how effectively it can bridge the gap between standardized resource deployment and culturally responsive market adaptation.

5.2 Recommendation

The findings of this study indicate that Zhengxin Chicken Steak must address weaknesses in localization and brand differentiation if it wishes to establish a sustainable position in the Thai fast-food market. First, the company should prioritize localization in branding and menu development. Consumers frequently highlighted the lack of Thai-specific flavors and portion value, suggesting that the introduction of localized menu options, such as spicier flavor profiles, Thai-style dipping sauces, or combo meals tailored to local eating habits, would increase relevance and repeat patronage. Branding campaigns should also emphasize Zhengxin's distinct identity as a modern Asian brand rather than leaving its origins ambiguous, which currently undermines brand recognition.

Second, the study suggests that pricing and value perception require recalibration. Thai consumers are highly price-sensitive, often comparing Zhengxin not only to international fast-food chains but also to local street vendors. Offering flexible price points through promotions, bundle deals, or loyalty programs on delivery platforms could strengthen Zhengxin's ability to compete, particularly among younger consumers who are open to trying new brands but make decisions based on affordability and convenience.

Third, the company should empower local franchisees with greater operational flexibility. While standardized procedures provide efficiency and hygiene, the rigidity of current franchise rules limits responsiveness to customer feedback. Allowing franchisees to make minor adjustments, such as introducing seasonal items, testing new

flavors, or customizing marketing campaigns, would enhance adaptability without compromising brand standards. This empowerment would also strengthen the partnership between headquarters and local operators, ensuring that the franchise system is better aligned with host market conditions.

Finally, Zhengxin should leverage the growth of food delivery platforms as a strategic opportunity. Many participants reported that they first discovered the brand through Grab or Foodpanda, demonstrating that online visibility is a key driver of awareness. The company should therefore design platform-specific marketing campaigns, optimize menu listings for digital appeal, and actively use customer feedback from these platforms to guide continuous improvement. By strengthening its digital presence while adapting to local cultural expectations, Zhengxin can transform its current operational base into a more competitive and culturally embedded market position.

5.3 Further Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the market entry strategy of Zhengxin Chicken Steak in the Thai context, there remain several areas that future research may explore to build on these findings. First, future studies may consider expanding the geographic scope beyond Thailand to include comparative cases in other Southeast Asian markets such as Vietnam, Malaysia, or Indonesia. Doing so may help uncover regional similarities and differences in consumer behavior, regulatory environments, and cultural preferences, which could influence the effectiveness of Chinese F&B internationalization strategies.

Second, researchers could examine the role of digital transformation and platform-based branding in greater depth. Since food delivery and online brand visibility play an increasingly central role in consumer decision-making, future studies should investigate how digital strategies—such as localized social media marketing, influencer collaboration, or app-based loyalty programs—may enhance or hinder foreign brand penetration in host markets.

Third, future research may benefit from exploring the franchisor-franchisee relationship more explicitly, particularly in terms of power dynamics, communication flow, and local autonomy. A multi-perspective approach that includes headquarter executives, local franchise operators, and even regulatory stakeholders could offer a

more comprehensive understanding of how internal strategic intent aligns—or misaligns—with front-line market execution.

Additionally, further studies should consider employing a longitudinal approach to track how market strategies evolve over time, especially as a brand responds to ongoing cultural, economic, or competitive changes. This would allow researchers to better understand strategic learning processes and adaptive mechanisms in real-world internationalization scenarios.

Finally, scholars may explore integrating additional theoretical lenses—such as institutional theory, consumer acculturation, or cross-cultural communication frameworks—to further enrich the analysis of international brand adaptation. These perspectives could deepen the understanding of how firms not only enter but embed themselves in culturally complex markets.

Future research should continue to examine the intersection of internal resource strategies and external cultural realities, using both expanded data sets and interdisciplinary perspectives to inform more dynamic and context-aware models of market entry.
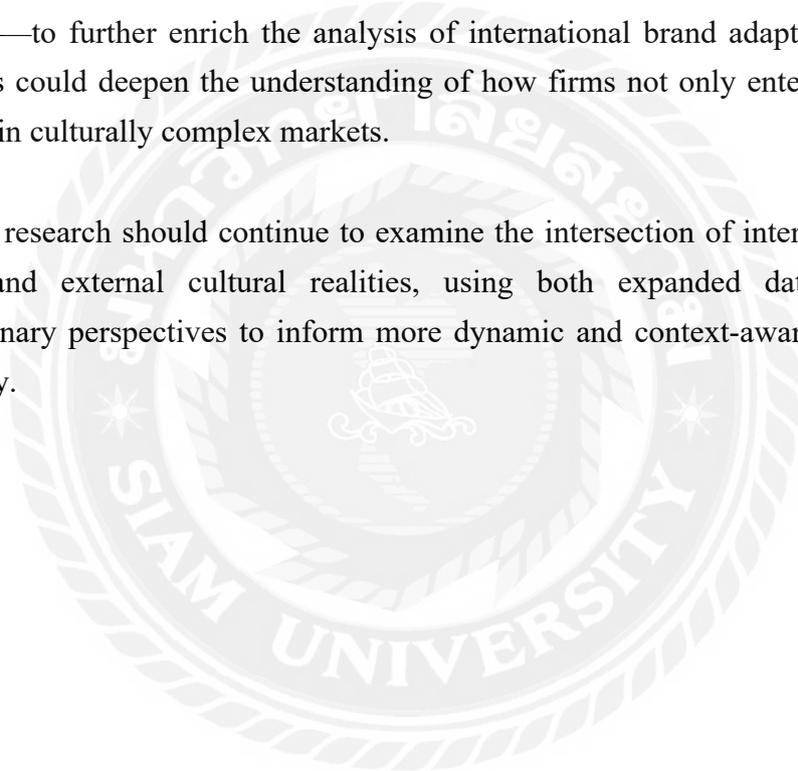
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Appendix

Interview Guide

An Analysis of Market Entry Strategy for Zhengxin Chicken Steak in Thailand Using SWOT Framework

Interview Questions

Part 1: Thai Consumers

1. Have you ever tried Zhengxin Chicken Steak or heard of the brand before?
2. What are your usual preferences when it comes to fast-food or street food?

Perception of Brand and Products

3. How would you describe your impression of Zhengxin Chicken Steak's brand image?

4. How do you feel about the quality, taste, and pricing of their products?

5. In your opinion, what makes a foreign food brand successful in Thailand?

6. Are there any aspects of Zhengxin Chicken Steak that feel unfamiliar or not localized?

Competitive Landscape & Preferences

7. What are the main reasons you would choose or not choose Zhengxin over other fast-food brands (local or international)?

8. What types of promotions or features would make you more interested in trying or revisiting Zhengxin Chicken Steak?

Part 2: Franchise Staff

Operational Insights

1. How long have you been working at Zhengxin Chicken Steak in Thailand?

2. What do you see as the key strengths of the brand from an operational or management perspective?

3. What challenges have you faced in maintaining product quality, service consistency, or customer satisfaction?

4. How well do you feel the training and support from headquarters in China have prepared you to run the store locally?

5. In your opinion, what internal capabilities give Zhengxin an advantage—or disadvantage—compared to other fast-food chains?

Franchise Performance & Adaptation

6. Are there any aspects of the business model or menu that you think should be adapted to better suit Thai customers?

7. How is customer feedback collected and addressed in your location?

Part 3: Food Delivery App Users

Usage Behavior & Brand Awareness

1. Have you ever ordered Zhengxin Chicken Steak from food delivery apps?

2. What influences your decision when choosing food from delivery platforms (e.g., price, photos, reviews, delivery time)?

3. How would you rate your experience ordering from Zhengxin Chicken Steak?

4. Are there any issues with the packaging, delivery, or food quality that you've noticed?

Brand Differentiation & Recommendations

5. What do you think sets Zhengxin apart from other similar brands on food delivery apps, if anything?

6. What improvements or changes would you suggest for Zhengxin Chicken Steak to become more attractive to Thai consumers?